Conference program

CBIM 2024 International Conference

June 12–14, 2024

KARL-FRANZENS-UNIVERSITY GRAZ

Wednesday, June 12th 2024		
20:00	**Get together** Kunsthauscafé, Südtirolerplatz 2, 8010 Graz	
Thursday, June 13th 2024		
starts at 8:00	**Registration** Unicorn, Schubertstraße 6a, 8010 Graz	
	Conference Deck	
8:30 – 8:45	**CBIM 2024 Welcome Address** Wesley J. Johnston, Georgia State University, USA Roberto Mora Cortez, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark Michael Ehret, University of Graz, Austria	
8:45 – 9:20	**Keynote:** ***AI in B2B marketing – Artificial Intelligence or real stupidity?*** Thomas Ritter, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark	
9:20 – 10:20	**Special Session JBIM** ***Roundtable: JBIM Emerging Topics – AI in B2B***, tba ***Bridging the academic-practitioner gap in B2B settings. Introducing a Novel Practitioner Format in JBIM***, Roberto Mora Cortez, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark ***JBIM: Current State and Future Outlook***, Wesley J.Johnston, Georgia State University, USA, Roberto Mora Cortez, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark, Michael Ehret, University of Graz, Austria	
10:20 – 10:40	Coffee Break	
	Conference Deck – Room 1	Conference Deck – Room 2
	Emerging B2B Markets Session Chair: Rotimi Olanyian, Nottingham Trent University, UK	Marketing Capabilities Session Chair: Stefan Wengler, Hochschule Hof, Germany
10:40 – 12:10	Financial Payment Services and the Institutionalization of Business Practices in an Emerging Market Context View Abstract Rotimi Olaniyan, Nottingham Trent University, UK Michael Ehret, University of Graz, Austria Transitioning into Formal Markets: An Empirical Study of Women Self-help Groups in Emerging Markets View Abstract Ankita Singh, University of Graz, Austria The Impact of Digital Marketing Practices on B2B Buying Centre Communications Dynamics' View Abstract Rotimi Olaniyan, Nottingham Trent University, UK	How Management Capabilities Influence Digitalization and the Organizational Environment in the Adoption of Social Networks' Data Analysis Practices View Abstract Leslier Valenzuela-Fernández, University of Chile, Chile Francisco Villegas Pinuer, Universidad Diego Portales, Chile Tomás Gabriel Bas, Universidad Católica del Norte, Chile Leveraging Dynamic Capabilities and Ambidexterity for Enhanced Supply Chain Management in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: An Empirical Study View Abstract Iñigo Ibañez, University of the Basque Country, Spain Jon Charterina, University of the Basque Country, Spain Avoiding Inadequate Solution Specifications in Business Market Value-Creation Processes: Fine-Tuning Customer-Centricity by Adopting an End-User-Centric Perspective View Abstract Stefan Wengler, Hochschule Hof, Germany Joachim Riedl, Hof University, Germany Marcin Czaban, Hof University, Germany Sarah Victoria Mohr, Hof University, Germany
12:10 – 12:30	We gather at 12:15 on the ground floor of the Unicorn building and walk to the AULA.	
12:30 – 13:15	**Honorary Doctorate awarded to Lisa Scheer** Peter Riedler, Rector of the University of Graz Thomas Foscht, Dean of the School of Business, Economics and Social Sciences Vishal Kashyap, Professor of Marketing, University of Graz	
13:15 – 13:45	Lunch at AULA	
13:45 – 14:00	We gather at 13:45 on the ground floor of the AULA building and walk back to the Unicorn Building.	

	Conference Deck – Room 1	Conference Deck – Room 2
	B2B Sales Research I Session Chair: tba	**Special Session "Value and Valuation in Business Markets"** Session Chair: Michael Kleinaltenkamp, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
14:00 – 16:00	Let me tell you about myself! Salesperson Orientations, Self-Presentation, and Pathways to Performance View Abstract Deva Rangarajan, IESEG School of Management, France Vishag Badrinarayanan, Texas State University, USA Omar Itani, University of Texas, Rio Grande, USA Rajesh Srivastava, Middle Tennessee State University, USA Geoffrey Stewart, University of Louisiana, USA Buyer-seller Relationships in One-to-one Social Media and Digital Channels: A Social Capital Perspective View Abstract Chiara Ancillai, Università Politecnica delle Marche, Italy Sara Bartolini, Università Politecnica delle Marche, Italy Frederica Pascucci, Università Politecnica delle Marche, Italy Artificial Intelligence or Human Employee in B2B interactions? Exploring Situational and Individual Factors Affecting Locus of Causality Attribution after Success or Failure View Abstract Piotr Gaczek, Poznań University of Economics and Business, Poland Grezgorz Leszczyński, Poznań University of Economics and Business, Poland The Evolution of the B2B Customer Journey: How Does Digitalization Change the Roles of Marketing and Sales in B2B Markets? View Abstract Vanessa Weber, Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria Thomas Werani, Johannes Kepler University Linz, Austria	Actors and Relationships in Value Cocreation Scenarios View Abstract Michaela Haase, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany The Social and Individual Value of Punctuality: The Dialogical Process of Time Synchronisation View Abstract Stefano Solari, Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche e Aziendali "Marco Fanno", Italy Customer Onboarding in Solution Business – The role of Value inUse during Onboarding View Abstract Iqbal Tasqeen, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany Corporate Service Agents and the Constitution of Business Markets View Abstract Michael Ehret, University of Graz, Austria
16:00 – 16:15	Coffee Break	
	B2B Sales Research II Session Chair: Bahar Ashnai, William Paterson University, USA	**B2B Entrepreneurship** Session Chair: Steven Pattinson, Northumbria University, UK
16:15 – 18:15	Does Business Still Need Relationships to do the Business? Integrative View on the Role of Relationships in Company Performance in the Digital Era. View Abstract Piotr Kwiatek, University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria, Austria Grzegorz Leszczynski, Poznań University of Economics and Business, Poland End of Relationship Marketing for B2B Digital Products? Shifting roles in the Buying Center with Product Led Growth (PLG) View Abstract Subrotu Roy, University of New Haven, USA Social Skills in Conflict?: Understanding the Impact of Political Skill and Collective Vision on B2B Sales Force Performance View Abstract Rony Castillo, University of Chile, Chile Leslier Valenzuela, University of Chile, Chile Bridging Sales and Philanthropy: Experiential Learning for Nonprofit Fundraising View Abstract Bahar Ashnai, William Paterson University, USA Saeed Shekari, William Paterson University, USA	Collective Effectuation: Turning Human Behaviour into Entrepreneurial Opportunity that Improves Firm Performance View Abstract Steven Pattinson, Northumbria University, UK A Typology of Business Bodel Emergence in the B2B Context: A Social Exchange Perspective View Abstract Susanne Gretzinger, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark Birgit Leick, University of Southeast Norway, Norway Anna Marie Dyhr Ulrich, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark Inessa Laur, University of Southeast Norway, Norway Unlocking the Potential of B2B Entrepreneurship in the Digital Economy: An approach to mobility-related business View Abstract Hugo Pérez-Moure, University of Vigo, Spain Pablo Cabalenas, University of Vigo, Spain Jesús F. Lampón, University of Vigo, Spain Velando-Rodríguez, University of Vigo, Spain Perception of Business Ethics among Economics Students View Abstrac View Abstract Noémi Piricz, Óbuda University, Hungary
20:00 – 23:00	**Gala Dinner at Hotel Weitzer** Grieskai 12/14, 8020 Graz	

Friday, June 14th 2024		
	Conference Deck	
8:45 – 9:30	**Keynote:** ***Researcher Bias in B2B Research*** Lisa Scheer, University of Missouri Trulaske College of Business, USA and University of Graz, Austria	
9:30 – 10:30	**Special Practitioner Focus: B2B Servitization** ***Marketing Complex Solutions: Implications for Organizations and Employees***, Olaf Plötner, European School of Management and Technology GmbH, Germany ***Servitization Business Models***, Marc-Alexander Winter, Servitize, Germany ***Implementation of Service Businesses***, Bernd Gatter, Siemens Austria Mobility, Austria	
10:30 – 10:50	Coffee Break	
	Conference Deck – Room 1	**Conference Deck – Room 2**
	B2B Services Session Chair: Dorian Laurentiu Florea, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, Peru	**AI and Machine Learning in B2B** Session Chair: Thomas Ritter, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
10:50 – 12:50	Digital Transformation and Servitization in SMEs: Two Cases Study View Abstract Cheng Mei Tung, Feng Chia University, Taiwan Mindfulness in B2B Sales: Navigating Stress and Performance View Abstract Bahar Ashnai, William Paterson University, USA Suda Mani, Monash University, Australia Raj Agnihotri, Iowa State University, USA Kashayar Afshar, University of Mississippi, USA Customer Education in Complex Business-to-Business Contexts View Abstract Dorian-Laurențiu Florea, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, Peru María Elena Raquel Nieto-Saucedo, Anáhuac University Mexico, Mexico Mesay Sata Shanka, International University of Rabat, Morocco Christian Nedu Osakwe, International University of Rabat, Morocco Deva Rangarajan, IÉSEG School of Management, France Towards Hybrid Channels – Revisiting the Criteria for Designing Marketing Channels: The Case of Automobile Marketing Channels View Abstract Anders Parment, Stockholm University, Sweden	The Engineering Agent-Based Social Simulation Framework: A Key to Unlocking Agent-Based Modelling in B2B Research? View Abstract Peer-Olaf Siebers, School of Computer Science, Nottingham University, UK The impact of AI on B2B Principal-Agent relationships in the Sales Function View Abstract Jon Charterina, University of the Basque Country, Spain Maite Ruiz-Roqueñi, University of the Basque Country, Spain Julián Pando-García, University of the Basque Country, Spain Avatar-Driven Business to Business Interaction Model (ADBIM): A Multidimensional Framework for Humanising Avatar-Assisted B2B Commerce View Abstract Hugh Pattinson, Western Sydney University, Australia Suresh Sood, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia AI Preparedness in B2B markets View Abstract Sadia Soltani, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark Anna Marie Dyhr Ulrich, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark
12:50 – 13:30	Lunch Break	
	B2B Networks and Ecosystems Session Chair: Satu Nätti, University of Oulu, Finland	**B2B Relationships** Session Chair: Vishal Kashyap, University of Graz, Austria
13:30 – 15:30	Ride-hailing Platforms' International Marketing Strategies. An Institutionalized Network Perspective View Abstract Che Wei Cheah, Shenzhen MSU-BIT University, China Resilience in Interorganizational Networks – In the Search for Future Research Directions View Abstract Satu Nätti, University of Oulu, Finland Data Governance in Service Ecosystems – The Case of Vehicle-Based Services View Abstract Michael Ehret, University of Graz, Austria Alexander Stocker, Virtual Vehicle Research, Austria Stefan Thalmann, University of Graz, Austria Orchestrating to Realize an Ecosystem Strategy: Evidence from an Entrepreneurial Firm Marketing Channels View Abstract Hsin-Hui Chou, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan	Impact of Technostress on B2B Buyer-seller Relationships and the Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence View Abstract Ralph Kauffman, University of Houston-Downtown, USA Lucille Pointer, University of Houston-Downtown, USA Exploring Gender Diversity in Key Account Management: A Comparative Global Perspective on Gender-Specific Roles and Competencies for Customer Success View Abstract Barbara Niersbach, RWU Ravensburg-Weingarten University of Applied Sciences, Germany Nayan Kadam, RWU Ravensburg-Weingarten University of Applied Sciences, Germany Alireza Ahmadi, RWU Ravensburg-Weingarten University of Applied Sciences, Germany Maria José Quero, University of Málaga, Spain Ngoc Nguyen, Ho Chi Minh, City University of Law, Vietnam Geneviève Winninger Lemarquis, University of Paris Pantheon Sorbonne, France Rodrigo Guesalaga, Universidad Finis Terrae, Chile Training Across Boundaries: The Role of Interfirm Customer Training in B2B Relationships View Abstract Kristina Schaffer, University of Graz, Austria Vishal Kashyap, University of Graz, Austria
15:30 – 16:00	Farewell	

Buyer-seller relationships in one-to-one social media and digital channels: a social capital perspective

Ancillai Chiara, Bartoloni Sara, Pascucci Federica, Università Politecnica delle Marche, Italy

Purpose of the study

Transformation in business markets profoundly characterizes the contemporary scenario (Corsaro & Maggioni, 2022). Digitalization represents a key trend that is deemed to influence buyer-seller relationships (Ahearne et al., 2022). Hence, the literature has been suggesting an enduring shift of interactions from offline toward digital tools (Marvasti et al., 2021; Rangarajan et al., 2021). Specifically, great attention has been devoted to the use of social media. Social media includes public social networks (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.) (Franck & Damperat, 2023) as well as instant messaging (IM) apps (e.g. WhatsApp, WeChat, etc.) (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020). The use of social media helps B2B salespeople to build thought leadership (Itani et al., 2023; Terho et al., 2022) and perform sales-related behaviors (e.g. information communication, adaptive selling, prospecting) (Bowen et al., 2021), ultimately affecting sales performance (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020). B2B buyers can use such tools to identify their purchasing needs, conduct online research about suppliers and their offerings, and select suppliers (Diba et al., 2019; Marvasti et al., 2021; Rangarajan et al., 2021). However, recent studies have shown the controversial nature of public social media which still seems to play a limited role to the advantage of one-to-one social media and digital channels (Ancillai et al., 2024; Lacoste, 2016). Such one-to-one channels allow to convey immediate information, ensure velocity of communications, and are more trustworthy (Ancillai et al., 2024). Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the role of these tools in buyer-seller relationships. Social capital serves as a valuable theoretical framework as extant literature has proven its relevance in understanding knowledge exchange in buyer-supplier relationships (Alghababsheh & Gallear, 2020).

Theoretical background

Social media and digital channels in B2B relationships

Studies highlight how social media can bring broad benefits on both the sales and purchasing sides. Social media is deemed to be helpful during different activities and various stages of the selling process (Rangarajan et al. 2021), particularly effective and beneficial in information gathering and exchange to support prospecting, opening relationships, qualifying prospects, and managing relationships (Ancillai et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2023; Lacoste, 2016). Hence, salespeople's social media use may positively influence customer acquisition performance (Terho et al., 2022), customer relationship performance (Ogilvie et al., 2018), customer trust and satisfaction (Ancillai et al., 2019). On the B2B customer side, social media-related information may empower the buyer who becomes less dependent on salespeople activities during the purchasing process by reducing information asymmetry, transaction times, and increase confidence in decision-making (Diba et al., 2019; Marvasti et al., 2021). Despite the much-praised advantages, studies highlight that public social media are used in the pre-relationship or initial stage, whereas they are quickly abandoned to nurture the relationships for other tools, such as video calls, emails, and IM apps (Lacoste, 2016; Luo et al., 2021).

Social capital

The social capital theory is based on the premise that the relational structure of a social group can provide benefits of social value to both individuals in the group and the group as a collective (Meek et al., 2019; Nahapiet & Ghoshla, 1998). Social capital is seen as "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relations possessed by an individual or social unit" (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243) and it is conceptualized through three distinct but related facets, namely relational capital, cognitive capital, and structural capital (Meek et al., 2019; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Study design/methodology

We applied a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews by purposefully selecting key informants with relevant knowledge among B2B salespeople and buyers (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). We used University relationships and further snowballing techniques to reach an adequate number of participants (Johnson, 2015). The sample was carefully elaborated to guarantee variety in terms of job role, industry, and company size. The sampling process ceased at saturation, as indicated by information redundancy

(Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Hence, we have so far conducted ten semi-structured interviews in total. Interview transcripts will be manually coded through an abductive approach between empirical data and theoretical background (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The researchers will regularly meet to cross-check the analysis at each step of the process.

Key contributions

This study contributes to the B2B personal selling and digital marketing research by providing new insights on the use of one-to-one digital channels in buyer-seller relationships. By doing so, the study contributes to recent calls on investigating informational and technological shifts on buyer–seller interactions (Ahearne et al., 2022). The article also contributes to the literature on social capital by employing this theory in novel context (i.e. one-to-one digital channels). While studies have highlighted the significance of social capital in buyer-seller relationships (Alghababsheh, & Gallear, 2020), none of these investigations have specifically explored its implications for digital-driven transformation.

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Mindfulness in B2B Sales: Navigating Stress and Performance

Ashnai Bahar, William Paterson University, USA, Mani Sudha, Monash University, Australia, Agnihotri Raj, Iowa State University, USA Afshar Khashayar, University of Mississippi, USA

Research Aim and Motivation

Addressing the prevalent mental health issues and emotional challenges faced by business-to-business (B2B) sales professionals, crucial for enhancing their well-being and resilience in the demanding sales environment, this study aims to understand the impact of salesperson mindfulness, particularly mindful non-reactivity and non-judging, on moderating the effects of adaptive selling and selling knowledge, on emotional exhaustion, and how mindful describing affects the relationship between salesperson emotional exhaustion and customer collaboration.

Research Questions and Objectives

In our study, we explore the impact of mindfulness on emotional exhaustion and its subsequent effect on collaboration in sales, addressing the following research questions: How does a salesperson's mindfulness alter the effects of adaptive selling and sales knowledge on emotional exhaustion? How does mindfulness help reduce the negative consequences of a salesperson's emotional exhaustion on their ability to collaborate with customers?

Theoretical Background

Mindfulness is a state of consciousness in which attention is focused on present-moment phenomena occurring both externally and internally (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Dane, 2011). We view mindfulness as a metacognitive process that enables people to adjust their cognitive resources according to the situation at hand (Kudesia, 2019). We develop a model involving mindfulness as a contingency factor while breaking down mindfulness into previously established dimensions (Baer et al., 2004). Mindful non-reactivity is noticing the inner experiences without reacting (Baer et al., 2006). It captures the extent to which people limit their habitual response to an experience (Boden and Thompson, 2015). Mindful describing is the person's ability to identify, describe, and communicate thoughts and feelings (Baer et al., 2006). It is the ability to find words to describe one's experiences. Those who can describe and label their emotions are better able to associate the negative affect with the cause, enabling adaptive acknowledgment and regulation (Carpenter et al., 2019).

Adaptive selling is a critical sales skill that improves sales performance by tailoring behavior to customer needs (Locander et al., 2020). However, it also increases cognitive and emotional demands on salespeople, leading to a higher likelihood of emotional exhaustion due to the intense self-regulation and information processing required.

H1: A salesperson's adaptive selling increases their emotional exhaustion.

Sales knowledge, encompassing a comprehensive understanding of sales situations and strategies (Leong et al., 1989; Verbeke et al., 2011), enhances sales professionals' information processing and reduces cognitive load, thereby aligning personal resources with job demands and ultimately decreasing emotional exhaustion.

H2: A salesperson's sales knowledge decreases their emotional exhaustion.

Adaptive selling, characterized by multitasking and enhanced information processing, can lead to mental fatigue and emotional exhaustion due to the demand for self-regulation and resource allocation; however, mindful non-reactivity can mitigate these effects by increasing cognitive control flexibility and improving self-regulation, thereby reducing emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, when combined with sales knowledge, mindful non-reactivity enhances information processing and decision-making, further decreasing the likelihood of emotional exhaustion.

H3(a&b): A salesperson's mindful non-reactivity moderates the effects of adaptive selling and sales knowledge on emotional exhaustion, weakening the positive impact of adaptive selling (a) and strengthening the negative impact of sales knowledge (b).

Mindful non-judging assists salespeople in managing stress and embracing positive emotions without self-blame, significantly reducing emotional exhaustion by facilitating a non-evaluative approach to stressors in adaptive selling and enhancing the efficiency of self-regulation, while also strengthening the negative relationship between sales knowledge and emotional exhaustion by improving the utilization of sales knowledge in handling challenging interactions.

H4(a&b): A salesperson's mindful non-judging moderates the effects of adaptive selling and sales knowledge on emotional exhaustion, weakening the positive impact of adaptive selling (a) and strengthening the negative impact of sales knowledge (b).

Exploring beyond emotional exhaustion, our study investigates an customer-facing outcome, hypothesizing that a salesperson's emotional exhaustion reduces customer collaboration by diminishing the salesperson's ability to engage in integrative problem-solving with customers and that mindful describing mitigates this negative impact by enabling better emotional regulation and maintenance of engagement despite exhaustion.

H5: A salesperson's emotional exhaustion decreases collaboration.

H6: A salesperson's mindful describing weakens the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and collaboration.

Research Design and Methodology

Our research utilized longitudinal data from B2B salespeople in the U.S., gathered through multi-stage online surveys targeting professionals with over two years of experience. We included 208 participants in a pilot study to refine the measurement model through Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. For the main study, we collected 593 responses initially and 115 follow-ups four weeks later, allowing us to test our hypotheses over time and address methodological concerns related to causality (Palmatier et al., 2007) and endogeneity (Zaefarian et al., 2017). We drew all the constructs' measures from prior literature on mindfulness and B2B sales. We tested and found no concerns regarding the measures' reliability and convergent and discriminant validity. We relied on an instrument-free approach, latent instrumental variable (LIV) method to account for the endogeneity of our hypothesized variables.

Findings and Contributions

Our research investigated the role of mindfulness in sales, focusing on how its dimensions—non-reactivity, non-judging, and describing—affect salesperson performance and mitigate the negative impacts of adaptive selling and emotional exhaustion. We discovered adaptive selling leads to emotional exhaustion, emphasizing the complex implications of this sales skill. Mindful non-reactivity softens the adverse effects of adaptive selling on exhaustion, while mindful describing alleviates emotional exhaustion's impact on collaboration. Furthermore, we found that sales knowledge lowers exhaustion, with mindfulness amplifying this positive outcome. This study underscores mindfulness's vital part in enhancing well-being and collaboration in sales environments, offering a strategic approach for improving employee health and tackling the broader societal challenges of workplace stress.

Selected References *(Complete List of References Available Upon Request)*

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Bridging Sales and Philanthropy: Experiential Learning for Nonprofit Fundraising (PDF)

Social skills in conflict?: Understanding the impact of political skill and collective vision on B2B sales force performance

Castillo Rony, Valenzuela Leslier, University of Chile, Chile

The past COVID-19 pandemic changed the performance of B2B firms, generating restrictions in the deployment of their businesses, a rethinking of their sales models and a strengthening of their relationships with customers (Gavin, Harrison, Plotkin, Spillecke, and Stanley, 2020). Recent studies indicate that this has resulted in the redoubling of resources of B2B firms aimed at strengthening the social skills of their salesforce with the main goal is to strengthen care strategies for their customers (Madgavkar, White, Krishnan, Mahajan, and Azcue, 2020).

This recognizes the pivotal role of B2B salespeople in this process due to their marked relational component, deployed through an empathetic understanding and greater adaptability to the needs of the market (Limbu, Jayachandran, Babin, and Peterson, 2016). Given this scenario, political skill can be considered central due to its potential for refining social influence, allowing B2B salespeople to “read” and interpret different sales contexts in their relationship with customers (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas, and Lux, 2007; 300).

Political skill is defined as the ability to effectively understand others in the work environment, utilizing said knowledge to influence and guide them to act in ways that are in accordance with the influencer’s personal or organizational objectives (Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas, and Frink, 2005).

In this line, Network Theory proposes that both political skill and the vision of the interdependent self-construal have the ability to integrate complementarily the interpersonal relationships from an agency perspective. This would operate through a motivational driving force that impels them to establish links that facilitate a common benefit (Ahuja, Soda, and

Zaheer, 2012). For example, Ferris *et al.* (2007) emphasize that through a group vision, political skill promotes a common organizational culture of its members and a better diagnosis of the competitive climate.

For its part, Interdependent self-construal is defined as a vision of the ‘flexible and collaborative Me’, which emphasizes public and external characteristics such as role, status, and relationships with the rest, creating a sensible communication and a sense of belonging. This ability contributes to creating a regulatory effect on conduct and attitude and emphasizes to mediate individual behavior for the benefit of collective actions (Singelis, 1984).

Past studies reports that political skill and interdependent self-construal shares common characteristics and dimensions with a strong potential to establish high-intensity relational links and social associations. While Ferris et al. (2005) rates political skill as a process that allows the “*ability to read and understand others to achieve organizational and personal objectives*” (Ferris et al., 2007; 300), Singelis (1984; 581) views it as a vision of the “Me” that emphasizes “*reading others´ minds”* within social interactions.

Specifically, Political skill has received newfound attention in this field (Kimura, 2015; Kalra, Agnihotri, Chaker Singh, and Das, 2017), being assessed in its individual tactical influence on intra-organizational performance (Kimura, Bande, and Fernandez-Ferrin, 2019), productivity (Blicke, John, Ferris, Momm, Liu, Haag, and Oerder, 2012), social life (Wang and Hall, 2019) and occupational environments (Ul Haq, Zainab, Jan; Anwar and Sharif, 2021; Bande, Jaramillo, Fernandez-Ferrin and Varela, 2019; Meurs, Gallagher, and Perrewé, 2010), among others.

However, previous studies have given little attention to possible aspects where this skill may show contrasting performances in its deployment and may even display a "dark side", with the potential to affect the performance of B2B salespeople with their customers.

For example, in accordance with *social capital theory* (Ferris *et al.*, 2007), Helfat and Winter (2011) note that when salespeople deploy their political skill together with a collective perspective, they promote greater regulation of their emotions, actions and cognitions in personal interactions and increase the effectiveness of their influencing actions with customers. However, previous research also indicates that political skill is highlighted by the pursuit of individual objectives (Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, and Thatcher, 2007), paradoxically in a contrary way to interdependent self-construal, which emphasizes the achievement of common objectives before self-interests (Singelis, 1984).

To our knowledge, marketing literature is extensive from the standpoint of positive effects of political skill and an interdependent vision on social performance, but is silent about the possible boundary conditions that may determine that these skills, considered complementary, could conflict in the specific performance of B2B salespeople.

Consequently, this research seeks to identify new insights capable of triggering a "behavioral frontier" in the deployment of political skill in actors of B2B sales processes, with the objective of contributes to the theory and practice of marketing by aiming to identify disparities in the collective composition of these skills and their consequence on sales performance of B2B firms.

From a theoretical standpoint, we suggest that political skill turns its own set of instrumental gears of individual and personal goals, which would reach their "*behavioral boundary*" when its faced with interdependent self-construal in their interaction with customers. For this, the present study is centrally based on *resource conservation theory* (COR) (Hobfoll, 2002), examining tactical resources of salespeople displayed in their social deployment with customers in the B2B sales process.

To empirically test the hypotheses, partial least squares structural equation models (PLS-SEM) were constructed using quantitative information from independent samples of 76 industrial salespersons and complementarily in 188 B2B customers of a hardware solutions company in Chile, plus a post hoc confirmatory implicit association test (IAT) to evaluate the strength of this collaborative bond.

The findings reveal (1) the existence of a cognitive-affective process in salespeople termed “Interdependent self-assessment bias”, capable of triggering a “political skill frontier” when it unfolds as an individual professional competence that is faced with their collective vision, and conversely (2) a positive relationship and complementary mediation in the case of B2B customers.

Thus, the aforementioned demonstrates the potential emergence of ambidextrous abilities in the B2B salesforce to assess and select social effectiveness resources to foster their relational confidence in the B2B sales process. This comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of individual and collective resources of salespeople allows for polishing of the conception of the “*political salesperson*” and contributes with new insights for refine their social effectiveness and professional performance (Ferris *et al*., 2007).

We discuss managerial implications for practice, limitations, opportunities and suggest directions for future research.

The impact of AI on B2B Principal-Agent relationships in the Sales Function

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is radically transforming the landscape of B2B type of business relationships between companies or brands and their sales representatives. This phenomenom raises interesting questions from the point of view of Agency theory. The aim of this study is to delve into the influence that AI exerts on Principal-Agent relationship dynamics for sales team contexts. We employ Agency Theory (Basu et al., 1985; Eisenhardt, 1985) as a conceptual framework.

This ongoing work focuses on investigating how AI embedded in platform-based business structures is affecting critical aspects of recruitment, control mechanisms, and sales force signalling and empowerment efforts with respect to the organisation. A first aspect we intend to analyse is the changes in the issue of adverse selection of salespeople during the recruitment process. For this stage, AI is a transformative tool, streamlining channel partner recruitment and personalising services in B2B sales channels (Chatterjee, Chaudhuri, Vrontis and Kadić-Maglajlić, 2023). This integration minimises information asymmetries, potentially mitigating adverse selection challenges faced by managers when hiring sales staff.

Likewise, in the case of hidden action problems, recent research is making progress in investigating the extent to which AI improves companies' control over the actions of sales agents, as part of the implementation of sales performance and control mechanisms. Assuming that the supplier-customer relationship evolves through stages of exploration, development, maturity and decline, the interaction between AI and human sales teams can be expected to be more intense in favour of one or the other at each stage (Chang, 2022). In the same vein, in customer journey management (Lemon and Verhoeff, 2016), AI tools allow companies to sift through large amounts of data, which otherwise could not be used to monitor the customer experience in industrial relationships (Rusthollkarhu et

al. 2022). Alongside this, it is clear that avenues are opening up to more comprehensively monitor the activity of commercial staff.

Our exploratory study also extends to the evaluation of signalling and framing efforts by agents in the context of AI implementation in the evaluation of salespeople's activity and performance. Precisely, sales enablement emerges as a strategic imperative for companies employing salespeople in B2B-type relationships (Rangarajan et al. 2023).

The initial empirical study consists of a total of eight in-depth interviews. Of these, four are targeted at AI service providers, experts and consultants in the case of the sales function, and another four at sales managers of companies that are supposed to be targeted, whether or not they are using AI tools. The study is currently in the phase of contacting interviewees and conducting interviews.

As a general aim, we intend to investigate the role of AI in assessing performance in sales activity. More specifically, we hope to answer whether AI reduces the risk of adverse selection, and what would be the key strategies on the part of the company, acting as the Principal, to ensure such risk reduction in the procurement process. In addition, we aim to shed light on how AI alters the customer buying process, i.e. whether it hinders or, on the contrary, reduces the problems of hidden action by the sales force at each stage of the customer relationship.

KEY WORDS: AI, Agency Theory, B2B Relationships, Salesforce

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Ride-hailing platforms’ international marketing strategies. An institutionalized network perspective

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Purpose:

This paper aims to explore Chinese private enterprises' internationalization strategies. Particularly, we examine (a) the antecedents of their international market expansion and (b) how they adapt to the *institutional distance* and *cultural differences* when expanding business in host countries. *Institutional distance* refers to the differences and variations in the formal and informal institutions that exist between two or more countries (Kostova et al., 2020; Kostova & Zaheer, 1999). Institutions encompass the rules, regulations, norms, and values that shape the behavior of individuals, organizations, and societies within a particular country. The *institutional distance* can be a critical factor in understanding and explaining the challenges and opportunities that arise when Chinese private enterprises conduct business across borders.

Barkema et al. (2015) mentioned that the cultural dissimilarities between the West and East led to cognitive paradoxes, indicating that Western theory and practice may fail to fully explain value creation in non-Western settings. Similarly, the Western theory also failed to explain why Chinese private enterprises have a mixed fortune when exploring Western and Emerging countries. Despite the wide recognition of cultural heterogeneity, its impacts on Chinese private enterprises' international market expansions have been understudied (Chin et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023).

Research Context

This study uses the Chinese ride-hailing platform as a research context. As of December 2022, the ride-hailing industry has attracted 222 local ride-hailing operators in China due to the low entry barrier (Analysys, 2021). To stay competitive, Chinese ride-hailing platforms, especially Didi, the biggest players in China, have consistently developed offerings that meet the passengers' expectations; Didi and its sister company, *Huaxiaozu*, have gained almost 80% of the Chinese ride-hailing market since December 2020. The commendable achievement granted Didi the opportunity to go public in the USA in June 2021. However, a month later, the Cyberspace Administration of China accused Didi of illegally collecting users' data and ordered its app to be removed from local app stores. Didi was not allowed to sign up new users (Kharpal, 2023). Such occurrence raises theoretical puzzles that need to be examined empirically. In essence, how does Didi deal with the institutional pressure within its home country and continuously legitimize its operation within China? How could it sustain its business growth in the Chinese market (*Study 1a*), and did China's strict regulation and stiff competition force it to explore abroad (*Study 1b*)? In fact, Didi's had mixed fortune in its foreign market expansion. For instance, even though Didi surpassed Uber to become the most dominant ride-hailing company in Mexico in 2022 and the Latin American markets in 2023. Didi faced some challenges in Kazakhstan, Russian and South African markets that led to its eventual service suspension in these markets (Jin, 2023). However, little is known about why and what causes such a mixed fortune.

Research Design

Combining Scott's and Kostova's conceptual model (see Fig 1), this project highlights the legitimation of the ride-hailing market within China and globally. Specifically, this study demonstrates how ignorance of the local consumer culture may cause a firm's failure and eventual exit in a particular market. Meanwhile, this project also aims to uncover how firms progress well when they adequately respond to the host country's institutional demands.

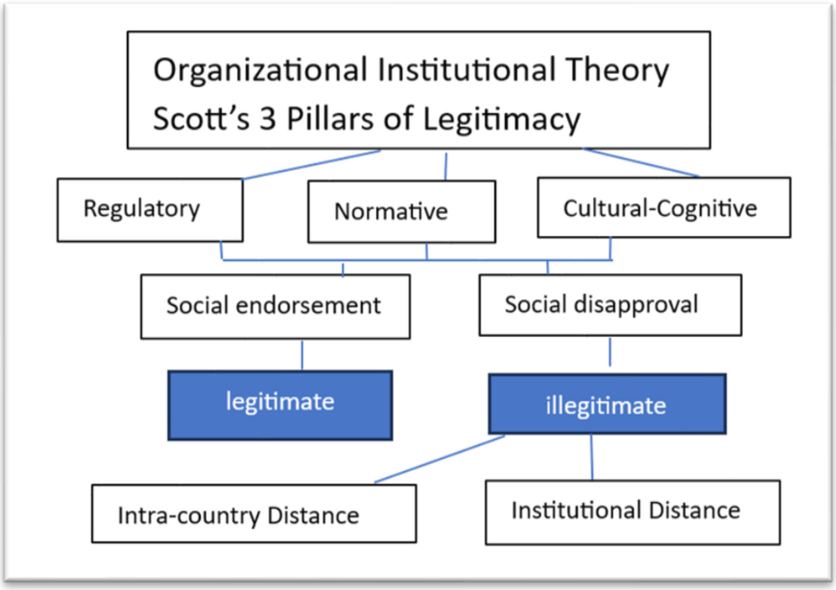

Fig 1: Theoretical Mind-map adapted from Scott (1995,2013) and Kostova.

This project adopts the relativism ontology and social constructivism epistemology. We view the market-as-network perspective (Cheah & Lee, 2022; Schepis et al., 2014) to unveil the complex interactions among various actors within the ride-hailing network. Therefore, meanings are socially constructed by these various actors.

The selection of participants follows *theoretical sampling* based on Scott's (2013) typology, encompassing five agents that collectively influence the ride-hailing market. These agents are (1) Nation-state (policymaker), (2) business operators (ride-hailing platforms and drivers), (3) professions (consultation companies, media opinion leaders), (4) association (ride-hailing and taxi drivers associations) and (5) marginal players (passengers, users). The interviews and online observations encompassed all five types of industry actors, providing the potential for comprehensive insights into the industry. However, in the questionnaire survey, we restricted respondents to ride-hailing users for two reasons. Firstly, the participant pool for the first four groups is limited, posing challenges in collecting sufficient survey questionnaire data. Secondly, concentrating on ride-hailing users (the fifth group) allows us to delve into how these individuals legitimize service offerings from the consumers' perspective, thereby influencing the success of Chinese ride-hailing platforms within specific contexts. Moreover, this focus facilitates data collection through Prolific.com across multiple countries, specifically Australia, Mexico, and South Africa.

Fig 2 shows the research design of this study.

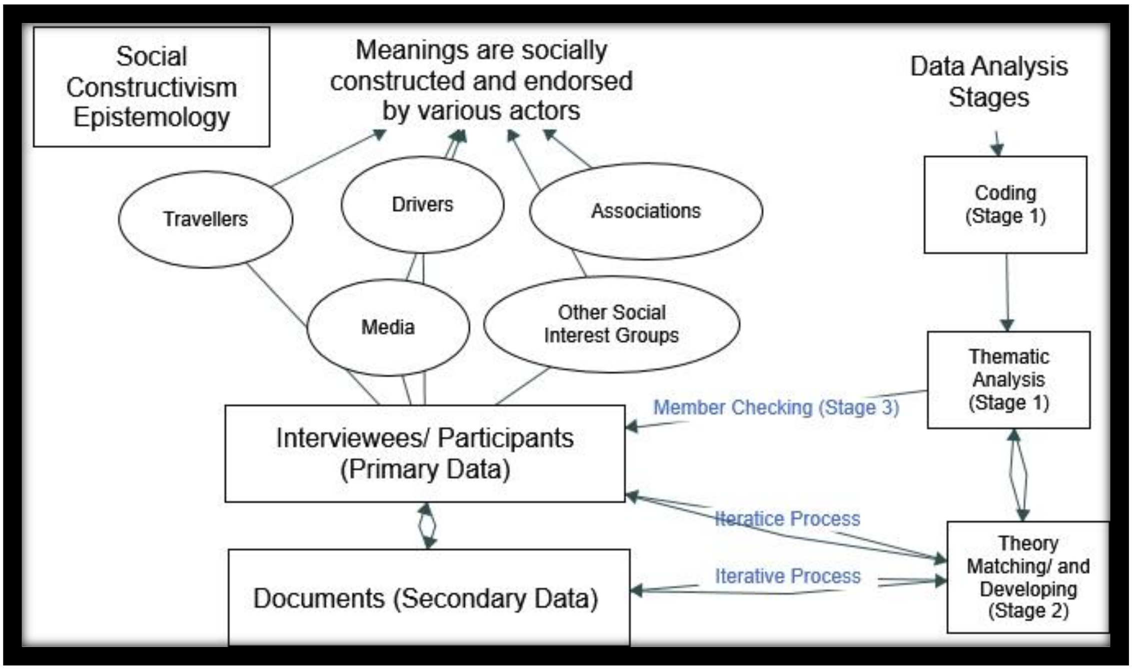

Figure 2: Research Design

Findings/Discussion/Conclusion

In Progress

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Abstract for CBIM 2024

Orchestrating to realize an ecosystem strategy: evidence from an entrepreneurial firm

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Motivation and research question

Ecosystems have emerged as a contemporary organizing structure featuring the collective actions of participants to create value (Jacobides, 2019; Ranjan & Read, 2021), and have been regarded as a strategic means for firms facing challenges from the blurred organization and industry boundaries, especially driven by the diverse applications of technology, including the Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The existing research attention is placed on ecosystem governance that looks at the alignment of activities performed by the hierarchically independent actors, based on which a coherent solution can be co-produced (Adner, 2017; Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, Möller, & Nätti, 2022). Within this domain, an important line of inquiry is to investigate the orchestration process (Autio, 2022; Tabas, Nätti, & Komulainen, 2023), in which the hub firm attempts to steer the participating parties whose contribution, e.g. the provision of complementary resources and capabilities, affects the viability, generativity, and prosperity of an ecosystem. Despite the abundant results concerning the orchestration in the network-like structure (Nambisan & Sawhney, 2011; Perks, Kowalkowski, Witell, & Gustafsson, 2017; Tabas et al., 2023), few efforts are made to advance the understanding of the orchestration process in entrepreneurial contexts, especially the condition that an entrepreneurial firm, facing the liability of newness (Zhang & White, 2016), strives to leverage the collectives to pursue business scale-up. Thus, this research aims to tackle the following research question: how does an entrepreneurial firm orchestrate other stakeholders to develop the ecosystem underpinning its venture business?

Theoretical background

This research is theoretically grounded in the literature on platforms and ecosystems (Adner, 2017; Jacobides, Cennamo, & Gawer, 2018), viewing that an ecosystem strategy needs to consider the interrelated elements of participant heterogeneity, coherent system-level solution, interdependence between actors, and governance of the relational structure (Autio, 2022). We further delve into the relevant literature to build our understanding of boundary-spanning orchestration, including its practices that involve network mobilization (Perks et al., 2017), its modes comprising dominant and consensus ones (Hurmelinna-Laukkanen et al., 2022), and the approaches that can be exercised either top-down or bottom-up (Autio, 2022). We have acknowledged from the literature review that o practices are forces driving the evolution if the ecosystem (Daymond, Knight, Rumyantseva, & Maguire, 2023; Thomas, Autio, & Gann, 2022).

Methodology and the case findings

We employed a qualitative case study, which collected and triangulated multiple sources of data, to empirically investigate our research question (Myers, 2009). Following a principle of theoretical sampling, we selected Xbed as the focal (hub) actor, which started its venture business of offering Internet-based and unmanned accommodation services from 2015 in Guangzhou, China. Till the present, Xbed has run this business in more than 45 cities across the country. Xbed run a business model of room-less accommodation service provider, in which it relied on cooperating with other stakeholders to acquire accommodation capacity, provide catering services, and perform room keeping and maintenance. Thus, Xbed had to mobilize their so-called "X-Hosts" who had idle properties, and "X-Keepers" who were freelancers capable of doing the cleaning job. Of course, attracting a sufficient amount of "X-Customers" to adopt their accommodation service was critical to Xbed's viability. To facilitate the alignment of the activities respectively performed by the distinctive groups of X-Hosts, X-Customers, and X-Keepers, Xbed developed three proprietary mobile device APPs accordingly. Moreover, Xbed kept enrolling new participants, such as interior designers, furniture and facilities manufacturers, and catering and tourism service providers, to add complementary resources to Xbed’s accommodation service, based on which the customer value was enhanced. As a result, these aligned actions of stakeholder collectives allowed the co-production of a coherent solution of accommodation service.

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Data Governance in Service Ecosystems –The Case of Vehicle-Based Services (PDF)

Customer Education in Complex Business-to-Business Contexts

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Current trends in business-to-business (B2B) services are increasingly bringing customer education (CEd) to the spotlight. However, despite the growing recognition of the benefits of CEd, understanding how CEd is organized and deployed in B2B firms remains a gap in academic literature. The study addresses this gap by advancing the following research question: "How do B2B product/solution providers organize for CEd?" We followed a qualitative, empirical approach to investigate how B2B firms organize for CEd using two samples with a total of 29 B2B firms involved in providing complex products and services to their customers. In the first round of data collection, we interviewed 25 professionals with diverse responsibilities related to CEd from 16 knowledge-intensive business service (KIBS) firms based in Mexico. In the second round of data collection, we broaden the empirical scope of our study by interviewing 12 professionals from B2B firms from countries around the world which provide of complex solutions.

Our grounded theory approach unveiled four aggregate dimensions. The first dimension tagged "Organizing for CEd" highlights how B2B solution providers go about educational needs and goals, customer-side constraints, human capital, resources allocation, and goal alignment. The second dimension focused on how B2B solution providers develop educational materials by creating educational content and selecting impactful and scalable educational formats. The third dimension deals with the deployment of CEd along the customer journey, including the pre-, during, and post-purchase stages. The last dimension focused on measuring, improving, and leveraging CEd.

Based on these findings, we proposed a conceptual framework drawn from the 3P framework (i.e., process, people, performance) on sales enablement proposed by Rangarajan et al. (2020). The results from our interviews suggest that CEd is actually an organization-wide activity requiring the involvement of multiple functions within the B2B firm. Furthermore, coordinating the different activities performed by different functions will necessitate firms to organize themselves in order to be effective. One of the main themes that emerged from our research was also the importance of generating relevant content to help ensure effectiveness of CEd initiatives, which again necessitates firms to coordinate the input from different functions. Another important concept that emerged from our research was the importance of having clear educational goals to ensure that the B2B firm can then organize its activities around these goals. It is evident that the activities involved in organizing for CEd and developing the right content is similar to the Process theme proposed by Rangarajan et al. (2020).

The findings from our research also suggests that given the complexity of CEd, task allocation and role specializations within the organization also becomes important. In addition, having the right people to execute the various tasks is also vital for the successful deployment of CEd initiatives. Furthermore, ensuring that the various activities associated with CEd are effective is vital to measure the business impact of CEd initiatives. Thus, we relate human capital and measuring CEd deployment as being similar to the People and Performance themes from the work of Rangarajan et al. (2020).

Additionally, our findings that the customer also has a vital role to play in the success of CEd initiatives would indicate that the level of customer involvement, capabilities, and willingness/receptivity to the efforts by the B2B firm is likely to have an impact on CEd initiatives. Similarly, it is vital that the B2B firms invest in CEd initiatives if they want to be successful. Another finding from our research was the important role played by technology in helping drive the success of CEd initiatives. And finally, our finding that the CEd initiatives play different roles in different stages of the customers' journey led us to identify it as a contextual factor that could drive how B2B firms need to approach CEd initiatives. Based on the findings of our research and the conceptual framework, we define CEd in a B2B context as an organizational-level initiative that aims at providing B2B customers with the relevant information to the relevant stakeholder at the relevant stage in their journey.

The primary contribution of our study is that we take a holistic approach to CEd and propose a conceptual framework that depicts CEd as a set of activities that a B2B firm organizes, coordinates, deploys, and measures their impact across different stages of the customers' journey. The second contribution consists in providing insights into specific ways in which B2B firms can develop and effectively tailor their educational content and materials to meet customer requirements to achieve the desired impact of its CEd initiatives. The third implication of this study is that it enables a better understanding of how B2B firms can measure the dynamic, ongoing impact of CEd on customer attitudes and take proactive, corrective actions while managing the challenges and/or tensions arising from CEd.

Our study has various implications for practitioners. Business leaders and executives are advised to understand the vital role played by CEd in ensuring desired business outcomes like loyalty and repeat business. Our study suggests that business leaders need to take a holistic, strategic approach to CEd rather than the more current ad-hoc, siloed approach to CEd. Managers also need to understand that CEd serves different stakeholders in different stages in the customers' journey and so measuring the impact of CEd should linked to the outcomes that a B2B firm wants to achieve in the different stages of the customer journey. For instance, in the pre-purchase stages, the focus of CEd might be to increase customer awareness or provide information to customers to facilitate their buying process. Consequently, the outcomes of CEd might have to do with how engaged the customers were with the content, how many leads are generated, how much user generate exposure can be created. Similarly, in the purchase stage, the focus of CEd might be either to help the customer directly make the right choice or the focus of CEd might be to provide salespeople with the right information, to the right customer, at the right stage in the buying process. Under these situations, the use of marketing collateral, length of sales cycle times for instance can be used as measures of CEd effectiveness. Similarly in the post-purchase stage, the level of customer engagement in CEd initiatives can be captured by how much they use the product/solution, the level of customer satisfaction, the value in use that the customer realizes.

The presence of multiple stakeholders in the customers' organization would indicate that B2B practitioners are advised to understand the diverse needs of the different stakeholders in the different stages of the customers' buying journey. This might be necessary in order to manage the educational goals and objectives of the different CEd initiatives that will need to be organized and deployed. Managers must also factor in customer involvement as well as the necessary skill levels needed from customers to adapt their CEd initiatives.

Our research also revealed that the complex nature of customer requirements will also necessitate B2B firms to coordinate inputs and tasks across different silos within their firms and managers must be able to have the necessary resources as well as should be empowered to deal with internal conflicts that might occur at any stage of the CEd process including content development, content deployment, and evaluating the effectiveness of the CEd initiatives. Furthermore, managers are also advised to understand that while various technologies are available today to help not only manage better inter- and intra-organizational communications, but also to deploy educational initiatives like marketing campaigns, hybrid training programs, certification initiatives, they have to constantly monitor if these technologies elevate or hinder the CEd experience for the customer.

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Artificial Intelligence or human employee in B2B interactions? Exploring situational and individual factors affecting locus of causality attribution after success or failure

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1. Introduction

Development of artificial intelligence systems (hereafter AI) allows companies to replace human customer agents with artificially intelligent ones. AI agents are starting to become used in business relationships between companies (e.g. in form of conversational bots, chatbots, voice bots) (Han et al., 2021). They can perform customer service processes, gather information about an order, schedule meetings, answer questions about a product or a service and enhance value creation in an organization (Paschen, Wilson, & Ferreira, 2020). This leads to obvious economic benefits, as automation saves human labour costs and can be easily scalable (Bughin et al., 2017). Although there are many benefits to organizations in introducing AI agents, their acceptance and willingness to use them is often limited by socio-psychological factors and by the individual characteristics of the managers who will work with them (Cao et al., 2021; Lichtenthaler, 2020).

Previous research on human responses to intelligent technologies suggests that the attribution of responsibility toward the AI might significantly affect their acceptance (Belanche et al., 2020; Hancock, Naaman, and Levy, 2020). According to Weiner's (1986) attribution theory there are three dimensions that individuals consider when making attributions: stability, controllability and locus of causality. Perceived locus of causality refers to an individual's perception of who or what is the main cause of success or failure. Locus of causality has attracted attention of scientists and practitioners as it helps explain how people tendency to engage in casual attributions shapes their evaluations and attitudes. Importantly, locus of causality has been also found to be particularly important in understanding B2B relationships (Eslami et al., 2020; Oflac et al., 2021). Recently, scholars employed this concept into research on human – AI interactions (Coeckelbergh, 2020; Hohenstein & Jung, 2020). Yet, the problem of limited acceptance of AI agents among managers has not been studied so far from such perspective (Table 1 showing previous studies on AI in B2B context).

The current study aims to fill this gap by investigating whether company managers' locus of attribution toward human (vs. AI) company representative depends on the outcome of the business interaction. Specifically, we study company manager's perception on whether the outcome of B2B interaction (success vs. failure) was caused by internal (i.e. company representative) or external (i.e. situational factors or coincidence) factors.

2. Theoretical framework

We build on the previous research on personnel decision making (Knouse, 1989; Tucker & Rowe, 1979), thus a research area in which scholars have used attribution theory since its very inception. Specifically, casual attributions can influence the formation of expectations about an employee and his or her future work performance (Carless & Waterworth, 2011). In the organizational field, casual attributions have been shown to be significant predictor of employee interference, hiring decisions and satisfaction from team member (Ashkanasy, 1995; Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015). For example, internal vs. external attributions may determine whether to punish or reward an employee (Taggar & Neubert, 2004), while internal (vs. external) attribution of success enhance positive assessment (Gyekye, 2010).

Attribution theory is also often used to explain people' resistance to new technologies (Martinko, Zmud, & Henry, 1996; Marakas, Johnson, & Palmer, 2000). In the 1990s, research focused mainly on assigning blame or credit to computers and information systems. Nowadays, the attribution theory has its application in explaining the reasons for resistance or acceptance of AI. For example, Leo and Huh (2020) observed that in the case of service firm failure, more blame is attributed to robots than people, as robots have less control over the service outcome. Similarly, Hohenstein and Jung (2020) demonstrated that more responsibility is attributed to AI (vs. human) only when the interaction with AI goes awry.

3. Research questions and method

We address our research questions through three vignette-based experimental studies and one a real-world human-AI interaction. Study 1 tests our RQ1 by investigating managers' causal attribution to

AI (vs. human) agent in successful (vs. unsuccessful) business performance. Study 2 extends the findings of Study 1 by examining whether perceived locus of causality mediates anticipated satisfaction with the service agent thus testing our RQ2. In Study 3 we test whether social (vs. technical) job responsibilities enhance external attribution of AI agent performance (RQ3), while Study 4 takes a different methodological perspective allowing us to test the role of locus of causality in a real-world business-to-business interaction using a real AI agent (RQ3).

RQ1: How do managers attribute the reasons for successful vs. unsuccessful business interaction when collaborating with AI vs. human?

RQ2: Does the perceived locus of causality mediate anticipated satisfaction with the service agent, so that external attribution of successful AI agent is associated with lesser anticipated satisfaction?

RQ3: Do managers attribute success of AI handling technical job tasks more internally compared to social job tasks?

4. Findings and contribution

Our findings provide several contributions to the existing literature on human responses to AI (Devenport et al., 2020; Wirtz et al., 2018). First, our research contributes to the literature on customer reactions to faulty service of autonomous technology (Choi et al., 2021; Jörling, Böhm, and Paluch, 2019; Lei and Rau, 2021; Leo and Huh, 2020) by examining how the outcome of the business interaction (success vs. failure) affects the company managers’ locus of attribution toward human (vs. AI) company rapresentative. Service failure and success of AI in B2C contexts has been well-researched (Belanche et al., 2020), what is not the case regarding AI in B2B relationships.

Second, we contribute to the growing body of literature that seeks to understand how individual attachment styles affect relationship behavior in variety of business settings (Paulseen, 2009). Recently, scholars have begun paying more attention to attachment styles, as it substantially affects the quality of B2B realtionships, including peoples’ attitudinal and behavioral responses to human employees (Mende et al., 2019) as well as to interactive technology (Konok, Gigler, Bereczky, & Miklósi, 2016; Oldmeadow, Quinn, & Kowert, 2013; Park, Shin, & Ju, 2019). Our results shed a light on the role played by attachment styles in the context of human-AI business interaction. Likewise, we show that our findings are specific to managers' causal attribution to AI (vs. human) agent in business interactions, which differentiates our work from the impact of attachment styles on Facebook use (Oldmeadow et al., 2013), adoption of social network sites (Park et al., 2019), advertising (David & Bearden, 2017) and romantic consumption (Mende al., 2019).

Finally, our research can offer practical implications for companies and managers considering whether and how to implement AI in their day-to-day business practices (to be elaborated upon in the General Discussion).

A typology of business model emergence in B2B contexts: A social exchange perspective

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Introduction*:* The *digitalization of global industries, which has currently reached the stage "industry 4.0", has created new opportunities for* new ventures with profiles focusing on innovative services and digital technology (Vinogradov et al., 2021). According to Tian et al. (2022), the market conjuncture created by thleveraginge "industry 4.0" lead towards transformation of the approaches to venture businesses and their business model innovations from the mere technology-oriented to service-driven and therefore customized take (Brenner & Drdla, 2023). Such transformation stretches the boundaries of ventures' exchanges and resource integration (Malmström & Johansson, 2015). Such jointness as shown became largely beneficial for enlarging product/service portfolios as well as opening new areas for resource acquisition through combination of capabilities and competencies among the large and small but specialized ventures. These components are known as central blocks of the business model (Frank, 2019; Jussen et al., 2021). To date, only limited insights are available regarding how mature and new ventures complement each other in the process of business models innovation (Baraldi et al., 2019; Slavik, 2019; La Rocca and Snehota; 2021). The previous research confirms that small or start-up ventures commonly lack resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2015), and therefore are dependent on relationships with similar and larger counterparts, also known as B2B relationships. A key assumption of this paper is therefore that the exchange within such B2B relationships is associated with different roles. For instance, firms taking a role as "complementor" are fulfilling supporting functions for their business partners, consequently improving joint relationships and business processes (Heikkinen et al, 2007). As a case in point, embedded in frequent interaction, a business partner may gain a more profound understanding of how the firm may complement the business development of partners in a meaningful way (Baraldi, 2012; Cook and Hahn, 2021). By doing so, they all gain more trust and a legitimate position within and outside of the business relationships (Heikkinen et al. 2007). Both new ventures and their exchange counterparts vary in the intensity, deepness and proactiveness, which might have a direct effect on tempo and scope of business model innovation. Focusing on both role-taking and role-making paradigm, this paper typifies the patterns of exchange among established SMEs and start-up ventures during the process of business model innovation. The following research questions are formulated for the study: How can the relationship among the established SMEs and start-up venture be typified regarding a) its structure of exchange, b) the inherent logic of role-taking and role-making c) its impact on business model innovation patterns.

Theoretical considerations: Conceptually, this paper is based on the theory of social and economic exchange (Cook & Emerson, 1987). We argue in line with Cook and Emerson (1987) that exchanges, both social and economic exchanges, are key activities within so-called “exchange networks” which are embedded in complex eco-systems (see also Cook and Hahn, 2021; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The key assumption is that relationship development can be explained through the lens of exchange theory. Exchange is impacted through the existing and emerging roles and rules of the game. Roles are inevitably inherent in exchange. They are always present, and they can be shaped proactively (Malmström & Johansson, 2015). In particular, social exchange provides possibilities of role-taking and role-making to the benefit of pro-active business partners and can be used to gain a better position in the game. The greater the impact of actors within business relationships through role-taking or role-making, the more likely these actors will have an impact on the resulting business model innovation (Brenner & Drdla, 2023).

Methodology: This contribution applies a qualitative approach (Bizzi and Langley, 2012). The unit of analysis is the dyadic relationships, organised around focal entrepreneurs active in digitalized and innovative technology businesses. This paper will present a typology of exchanges among business counterparts, the patterns of their exchange (social versus economic exchange), and roles, which symbiotically shaped the patterns of innovative business models applied in their joint work. Data collection is ongoing, using a three-step approach. In a first step, a sample consisting of nine (9) Danish start-up firms and established SMEs focusing on technical and/or digital innovation were interviewed in 2018-2019, based on a structured questionnaire, considered as introductory study step. As a second step, a similar sample of 20 Swedish and Norwegian firms, based on a semi-structured questionnaire, was used for conducting data in 2019-2020. The aim was to carry a deepening character on the study topic while boarding on the geographical areas and therefore opening new perspectives within the study. Finally, a third step contains a number of interviews with innovative technology and service firms (including start-ups and SMEs) located in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, which is in progress. The purpose of this data collection step is to specifically elaborate on role aspects and business model characteristics of the investigated relationships. For the analysis so far, a multiple-step coding concept in line with Saldaña (2016) was adopted that reflects grounded-theory thinking (Boeije, 2009).

Preliminary findings: The study results so far identify three (3) types of exchanges among the businesses including both social, economic and hybrid forms of relationships. Through an interpretation of the structure of exchange and the roles which have been shaped, we strive for explaining the pattern of business model innovation. First findings indicate for example, that an extensive form of social exchange within business relationships supports the development of "inhouse capabilities" on the sake of the most powerful business partner. Furthermore, this leads to reciprocity in the interaction process and a broad business model coverage (upstream and a solid back-up downstream). In contrary, extensive economic exchange is less dynamic regarding the emergence of new business model pattern. Through reflecting the way how role-taking and role-making can be initiated through exchange and how both together shape the emergence of new business model pattern this paper contributes with empirical findings and reflections to the contemporary discussion within business model development in B-to-B marketing.

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Leveraging Dynamic Capabilities and Ambidexterity for Enhanced Supply Chain Management in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: An Empirical Study

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Abstract:

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face unique challenges in navigating the complexities of supply chain management (SCM) tasks. This still ongoing empirical study investigates the potential for SMEs to outperform larger firms in SCM activities by mastering dynamic capabilities and, in particular, by developing ambidexterity in SCM.

The theoretical framework guiding this study is rooted in seminal works on dynamic capabilities (Teece 2007). Dynamic capabilities enable enterprises to adapt to changing market conditions and exploit emerging opportunities in SCM. For its part, ambidexterity is as of itself a set of dynamic capabilities that enable firms to simultaneously explore and exploit strengths from inside the firm, and opportunities from the environment, thus facilitating adaptation over time (O'Reilly III & Tushman 2008). Contextual organizational ambidexterity is characterized by a combination of stretch, discipline, support, and trust, facilitating both alignment and adaptability at the business-unit level (Gibson & Birkinshaw 2004).

The recent outbreak of COVID-2, together with the present-time geopolitical instability in the Middle East, pose challenges to manufacturing enterprises towards securing their provisioning of supply parts. In this context, we theorize that ambidexterity mediates the relationship between organizational features and performance, providing SMEs with a framework for achieving SCM excellence. Recent literature on B2B relationships and SCM is making important advancements into this context. Partanen et al. (2020) investigate the relationship between supply chain ambidexterity, network capabilities, and firm performance, shedding light on the moderating effects of network capabilities and strategic information flow. For their part, Clauss et al. (2020) delve into the impact of ambidexterity and strategic agility on competitive advantage, highlighting the need for firms to balance exploration and exploitation strategies.

There are avenues for innovativeness on performance via supply chain agility, and collaborative relationships (Al Humdan et al. 2022). SMEs can put in practice a series of resilience strategies (Annamalah et al. 2023) enabling them to adapt their operations to varying conditions and capitalize on emerging opportunities, leverage information technology to enhance organizational ambidexterity, resilience, and performance, emphasizing the potential impact of government support (Tieu et al. 2023). Building on this, Bouncken et al. (2023) emphasize the significance of supplier-buyer alliances for product innovation, stressing the importance of aligning creative inputs with overall solutions. Finally, Li et al. (2023) investigate the impact of sustainable sourcing on agility performance, revealing the moderating roles of organizational ambidexterity and supply chain disruption.

Based on this comprehensive literature review and a qualitative empirical analysis, this study aims to identify the specific challenges that SMEs encounter in SCM, examining how the adoption of dynamic and ambidexterity capabilities can enable them to overcome these challenges and achieve competitive advantage. Over the last months, we have conducted in-depth interviews with nine manufacturing SMEs headquartered in Northern Spain, aiming to uncover insights into their SCM practices.

We have been conducting in-depth interviews to Supply Chain managers of their respective companies, focusing on five realms of capabilities: (1) the presence of any exclusive partnership agreements with selected suppliers; (2) the possession of comparative sources of greater flexibility in supply management; (3) skills in the use of big data or information technology resources; (4) the application of different and more efficient processes of modularization of the product into modules or parts in order to protect intellectual property; and (5) any other source recognized by the firm's management team.

Provisional results of this research support the idea that sources of ambidexterity stem especially from greater flexibility in supply management, and in a few cases, exclusive partnerships with selected supplies. Nevertheless, these results are provisional, since completion of the interviewed sample and a more proper analysis of the interviews is still pending.

In conclusion, this congress paper seeks to contribute to the literature by offering empirical evidence on the challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in SCM. By leveraging dynamic capabilities and ambidexterity, SMEs can enhance their resilience, agility, and performance in today's competitive business landscape, ultimately achieving sustainable growth and success.

Keywords:

Dynamic Capabilities, Ambidexterity, SCM, SMEs

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Title: Impact of Technostress on B2B buyer-seller relationships and the moderating role of emotional intelligence

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Aim of research:

Explore how technostress may impact key B2B buyer-seller relationship variables and how emotional intelligence may moderate the effects of technostress.

Research questions:

1. Can technostress impact key B2B relationship variables?
2. How might emotional intelligence moderate effects of technostress?

Design/Methodology/Approach:

Review and analyze literature on technostress to determine its role and impact on formation and maintenance of B2B buyer-seller relationships. Review and analyze literature on emotional intelligence to determine its effects on technostress. Develop propositions and draw implications from the analyses.

Findings: Research Propositions:

P1. Technostress may negatively impact trust and commitment in the formation and maintenance of B2B buyer-supplier relationships

P2. Emotional intelligence can moderate the impact of technostress by providing enhanced coping and problem-solving ability

Literature Review, Theoretical Background, and Analysis:

B2B buyer-seller relationship variables

In 1994, Morgan and Hunt found two factors necessary for a successful relationship: trust and commitment. In 2004, Ryssel, et al. looked at how information technology could result in impersonalizing relationships and how that could affect trust, commitment and value creation.

Our focus is on these two key variables: trust and commitment.

Trust: Trust is the extent to which customers believe that the supplier is honest, benevolent and competent (Ryssel et al. 2004; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Commitment: Commitment is the intention to develop and sustain a relationship long term (Anderson and Weitz, 1992; Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ryssel, 2004).

Technostress and its impact on relationship trust and commitment

In recent years, Individuals have been confronted with increasingly high levels of digital technology (DT) in many forms. Digital technology has long been considered a major transformative technology especially with the introduction in 1999 of the concept of the Internet of Things (IoT) (Dataversity.net, 2022). In addition to older forms of DT, artificial intelligence (AI) adds another potential stressor to the mix (Cadieux, et al. 2021). The nonstop flow of information increases work stress levels within individuals (Atanasoff and Venable, 2017). Brod (1984) coined the term technology stress (technostress) to better distinguish this form of stress. He defined it as distress which is manifested by the body's inability to deal with technology demands. According to Tarafdar et al. (2017), technostressors are the information systems' stress creators which an individual perceives as threatening to survival. Research has shown that high technostress in an organization can often cause low job performance (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Jena 2015). Atanasoff and Venable (2017) discusses three predictors of technostress including technology demand, lack of technological resources and lack of personal resources. Due to increased use of DT, the level of personal interaction has decreased between members in B2B markets. In many cases, all interaction between partners is through DT. This impersonalization of interaction reduces opportunity to build trust and commitment through personal contact and relationship bonding. Technostress resulting from dependence on technology for interaction with partners, and lack of personal contact may increase uncertainty and incompetence. Tarafdar, et al. (2014) found technostress can adversely affect the technology-enabled performance of salespeople. Thus, increased use of DT leading to technostress may impair the ability to adequately perform job duties that build and maintain trust and/or commitment in the formation and maintenance of business relationships. This in turn may affect the trust and/or commitment of partners in B2B relationships, putting the relationship at risk. Thus, Proposition P1.

Emotional intelligence:

The performance behavior of individuals is to some extent affected by personal competencies such as intellectual abilities, interpersonal skills, sensitivity, and self-management. Several scholars have characterized these skills as emotional intelligence (EI) (e.g. Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been defined as “individual abilities to perceive, appraise, and express emotions; to access and/or generate feelings to facilitate the thought process to emotional knowledge, and to regulate emotions to promote intellectual growth” (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). A widely used view of emotional intelligence is that it is the aggregate of global capacity of the individual to act and think rationally when dealing with environmental influences (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Ramesar et al., 2009) . Although Huggins et al. (2016) found a direct effect of EI on sales associates job motivation and performance they also show that EI has an indirect effect on sales associates’ motivation and performance through affect-based trust.

Emotional Intelligence and Stress

When Satija and Khan (2013) investigated the relationship between EI and workplace stress among working professionals, they found a significant difference between job stress of those with high EI and those with low EI. They concluded that employees with higher EI were less affected by job stress than those with low EI. Jalees et al. (2021) found a moderating role of emotional intelligence on job stress and job performance. They concluded that emotionally intelligent employees can better deal with stressful job situation by controlling their emotions. Fteiha and Awwad (2020) found a strong positive correlation between EI and stress coping, particularly for problem-solving. Cordova, et al. (2023) found correct management of emotions in stressful situations could promote effective learning through enhanced attention and capacity to solve problems. Ramesar, et al. (2009) found that ability to cope with stress is a component of emotional intelligence. Leeuw and Joseph (2023) found that digital emotional intelligence positively impacts virtual collaboration, faster adoption of new technologies, better management of digital distractions, enhanced customer focus in digital channels, and improved data literacy. Rexvani and Khosravi (2019) found that emotional intelligence can facilitate cohesiveness and relationship development among team members and is essential to achievement of goals. Thus, Proposition P2.

Originality/value/contribution

There has been only limited research on the impact of technostress on formation and maintenance of B2B relationships and the moderating role of emotional intelligence.

Practical implications

Knowledge of technostresss and its potential impact on B2B relationships can help managements design and manage DT applications to minimize technostress and to help employees who use DT to minimize the personal stress they may experience in doing so. This can positively impact development of trust and commitment with partners in buyer-seller relationships. Knowledge of the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on technostress can also aid in employee selection and in designing training programs to increase the emotional intelligence of employees.

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Does business still need relationships to do the business? Integrative view on the role of relationships in company performance in the digital era.

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Business-to-business relationships (B2BR) are discussed in the management and economy literature as factors influencing companies' overall success. However, in the last decade, digitalization has affected B2BR deeply. It allowed for improved efficiency through automation and standardization, but it decreased the need for face-to-face human interactions. Are the B2BR we know from industrial network theory or relationship marketing concept the same relationships as we face today? Mixed findings concerning the influence of digitalization on B2B relationships indicate that this phenomenon is not well understood. We lack complementarity between well-established relational concepts and the role of relationships in the digital environment. There is a gap in the literature regarding resources, actors' competencies, skills, and abilities for managing business relationships harmonized with the digitalized world for company performance.

The key research question of the study is how the objects of business relationships relate to their properties in contemporary business. Regarding rich achievements in research on B2BR, we explore the possibilities of integrating different research streams into a comprehensive picture of the benefits obtained by companies due to B2BR. In essence, we take a step to deliver the ontology of contemporary B2BR by analyzing, classifying, and integrating the knowledge on them. This study is philosophically rooted in ontology and methodologically in meta-research. It applies artificial intelligence (AI) to review over 2000 studies published on B2BR so far.

B2B relationships are interdependencies between companies that link and transform actors, their resources, and activities (Håkansson and Snehota, 2017). Such relationships play a crucial role for companies. They provide a framework for decision-making and structure for the surrounding business network (Kaplan and Norton 2015). They can contribute to corporate survival, growth, and competitive advantage (Björkman and Kock 1995). Therefore, theoretical foundations for business relationships are well established in management literature by the commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), interactive/network approach (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995), customer relationships management concept (Payne and Frow, 2005), and the concept of ecosystems (Adner 2017), business models (Oesterwalder, *at al.* 2005), and international business (Johanson and Vahlne, 2015). There used to be no doubts about the role of B2B relationships in driving company performance. Most B2B marketing literature suggests products and services should be offered and co-created based on continuous, close seller–customer relationships (Ulaga and Kohli, 2018). According to Lambe *et al.* (2000), developing solid customer collaboration may strengthen relationship quality and enhance value for all parties. However, Kwiatek *et al.* (2020) prove that relationship quality affects both attitudinal and behavioral outcomes through distinct mechanisms. Studies indicated a positive link between good relationships based on trust (Jayashankar *et al.* 2018) and satisfaction (Lo and Campos, 2018) and the perceived value of products and services offered to customers. Good relationships with suppliers are usually presented as a way of alleviating uncertainty (Sharma *et al.*, 2015) and an essential requirement for a customer's acceptance of new, disruptive services (Falkenreck and Wagner 2017, 2021).

There are two general research streams in the literature on B2B relationships. The dominant one, also called the American school, focuses on the efficiency of business relationships and managing for the achievement of higher performance as the outcome of relationships. This school is normative in nature. In turn, researchers linked to the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group, called the European School, take the positivist approach. These research studies focus on understanding the substance of relationships and their influence on performance in the network context (Möller and Halinen 2022). Both schools paid attention to circumstances of relationships that influence company performance. These studies highlighted several factors related to the market (Varadarajan, 2020; Vesal *et al.*, 2021), the structure of relationships (Zaefarian *et al.*, 2017), companies and people involved (Lambert and Enz, 2012). Both schools agree that linking the substance of relationships with performance and management of relationships is still underdeveloped due to the complexity of connections between companies and the complexity of companies themselves. Thus, despite the long history of the studies, there is still a limited understanding of which elements and features of business relationships are particularly promising from the perspective of company performance.

Digital transformation is an organization's adoption and implementation of digital technologies to create new or modify existing products, services, and operations by translating business processes into a digital format (Vial, 2021). Digitalization has altered B2B companies. In total, 60% of industrial companies that have already undergone a digital transformation have created new business models to meet the challenges inherent in such a change. Approximately 30% of their revenues will relate to digital projects within ten years (Galvani and Bocconcelli, 2022).

Studies show the positive influence of digital technologies on several aspects of B2B companies and marketing performance. Companies benefit from basic digital capabilities, digital operation capabilities, and digital integration capabilities, which significantly and positively affect enterprise performance (Hadjikhani and Lindh 2021). Business model innovation, driven by digital capabilities, further enhances the positive impact on company performance (Matoušková 2022). In the marketing and sales domain, researchers point out increasing value for customers (Libai *et al.*, 2020), enhancing customers' loyalty (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2020), knowledge creation in organizations (Bag *et al.*, 2021), improved creative capabilities (Mikalef *et al.*, 2020), and increased efficiency, reliability, and routinization of organizations' marketing processes (Wamba-Taguimdje *et al.*, 2020). Hossain *et al.* (2022) show that thanks to these technologies, marketing analytics capability helps sense, seize, and reconfigure the market to gain a sustained competitive advantage.

Face-to-face meetings were still eagerly used to build and develop business relationships. Researchers indicated a positive impact of face-to-face communication on reaching better sales results, creating a positive atmosphere, and strengthening bonds, which lead to B2B relationship development (Biggemann and Buttle, 2009). Business relationships used to be fully embedded in social and interpersonal links. However, the socially embedded components, like commitment, uncertainty, and cooperation, were affected by digitalization (Lin *et al.*, 2023). Buyers use digital tools to search for suppliers, negotiate with them, and transact directly at auctions or on e-platforms. Purchasing teams adopted communication behavior and moved to digital contacts with suppliers (Guenzi and Habel 2020). Regarding B2B exchange, a survey conducted in 11 countries by McKinsey (2020) showed that B2B companies started to treat digital interactions as much more critical, and almost all contacts with suppliers moved to the digital world.

Most studies assume the importance of factors traditionally related to good business relationships: trust, satisfaction, and commitment. But when another set of factors was analyzed, relationships did not matter for a successful offering of technological products to business customers (Falcenreck *et al.*, 2023). For example, in the case of IoT, buyers are focused on their satisfaction with the manufacturer's security policy rather than on the history of the relationship (Sicari *et al.*, 2015). The reason for that might be an underestimation of the organizational and technological aspects of a customer's understanding of digital technologies in previous studies (Keegan *et al.*, 2022). Risk must also be considered because of increased connectivity and the transfer of sensitive data (Raddats *et al.*, 2019). If close relationships are considered the only factors for company performance, they are essential (Ventekatesh *et al.* 2012). However, if more concepts are confronted with business relationships, the importance of relationships cannot be confirmed. Digital technologies can even deteriorate good relationships. For example, uncertainty increases when technology impacts social interaction despite the quality of the preexisting relationship (Hadjikhani and Lindh, 2020).

In essence, business relationships, stem from social interactions among individuals. Nevertheless, in contemporary transactions, the key players are often algorithms, resources have shifted towards digital assets, and processes have become more intricate and digital. The impact of digitalization on B2B relationships differs if we take economic and social aspects, short or long-term, and an organizational or individual perspective. Companies cannot stop investments in digitalization but should not assume that it will not impact how business relationships affect company performance. Executives cannot assume that managers and employees will behave in digital interactions the same as they did in direct communication. Mixed findings concerning the influence of digitalization on B2B relationships indicate that this phenomenon is not well understood (Falckenreck *et al.*, 2023).

As the preliminary work, we conducted a systematic literature review. This work identified 2365 papers published in well-recognized international journals (Web of Science database, search keywords = business, b2b, business-to-business, relationships, relations; language = English; type = journal papers). Verification of each paper based on the title and the content of the abstract led us to limit the database to 2051 papers. Having that database, we used topic modeling following a domain-specific process (Kitanaka *et al.*, 2021) method for classification analyses based on the content of abstracts.

The analyzed papers take various perspectives on business relationships that can be grouped into three main research streams. The first stream contains studies on the content or features of business relationships. It comprises ten clusters focused on relationship quality, communication, satisfaction, trust, interactions, commitment, transactions, loyalty, information sharing, and relatedness. The second stream is related to company performance due to business relationships. We identified fourteen clusters in that stream focused on sales, technology adoption, innovativeness, value, brand, entering foreign markets, contracts, quality, new product development, pricing, supplier selection, sustainability, corporate social responsibility building, and resolving conflicts. The third stream focuses on how companies deal with relationship management. It also consists of various approaches; we identified eight clusters: b2b marketing strategy, customer relationships management, customer portfolio management, key account management, and franchise network management.

Even if the number of studies of business relationships is impressive, silos of knowledge remain disconnected from other silos, and a comprehensive view of business relationships cannot be developed. We identified several studies presenting how one aspect of business relationships' content (or features) affects one aspect of company performance, sometimes including one aspect of relationship management. These results show heterogeneity and fragmentation of knowledge that atomically develops in different directions without integrity. Accepting that way of developing academic knowledge, we perceive it as a factor limiting theoretical development and understanding of the role and significance of business relationships in the broader sense. Our preliminary study also indicated a new cluster of studies - 269 papers focused on digitalization. However, these studies are spread among all presented streams, and more in-depth analysis is needed to compare them with the rest of the studies.

We also analyzed the methodological approach of these papers. 1717 papers (out of 2051) are based on empirical data, while the rest (n=334) are conceptual papers. In the case of empirical papers, over 70% of the sample presents quantitative data (1216), and the rest qualitative (n=501). This result shows that with 16% of papers focused on conceptual studies, this literature is dominated by empirical studies. That constitutes a big sample of research results and should be analyzed to develop conclusions about B2B relationships. Otherwise, this knowledge will remain fragmented in hundreds of individual studies. We assume that both qualitative and quantitative data collected by the authors of these papers offer huge potential for meta-analysis to identify critical elements of relationships and their influence on company performance.

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The adoption and value- in-use of digital payment- An empirical study of small businesses in emerging markets

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Resilience in interorganizational networks – In the search for future research directions

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The concept 'resilience' has been used at the organizational level to describe the inherent characteristics of those organizations that are able to respond more quickly to radical changes or even crises, recover faster or develop more unusual ways of doing business under duress than others (e.g. Sutcliffe and Vogus 2003). In other words, it describes an organization's ability to respond and adapt quickly to disruptions or significant, unplanned changes that could threaten its operations, people, assets, brand, or reputation. Resilient organizations are thus able to adapt their operations in response to continuous change as well as unexpected major events.

Although discussion around resilient organizations and business networks is very topical (see e.g. Blessley and Mudambi 2022; Barasa et al., 2018; Bondeli and Havenvid 2022; Xie et al., 2022), it is still quite unclear what are the theoretical premises guiding future research of resilience in interorganizational networks. In other words, what are meaningful theoretical frameworks linked to investigating how radical shifts and crises impact networks, and how these entities can cope with transitions needed. More specifically, we assume that this can relate to questions like what are characteristics and resources that enable business networks to cope with unexpected change, or what kinds of strategies and practices allow business networks to transform management and operations to meet with turbulence, or how reconfiguration of varied competences takes place in resilient business networks – or in those that fail?

In the present situation, where varied research fields are participating in the theory development, categorization is needed to understand the entity of discussion in business research and individual themes involved in the business network literature.

Thus, this paper aims to conduct a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine how business network literature has approached the resilience domain (Mora Cortez, Clarke & Freytag, 2021) and answer the main research question: How is the discussion of resilience in interorganizational networks constructed? SLR is a technique used to identify, evaluate, and synthesise the existing literature on a particular research question or topic (Donthu et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2022). In this study, SLR is used to create a more comprehensive picture of discussion of resilience in interorganizational networks which can serve as a resource for future empirical studies. In the first phase, we will use a PRISMA flow chart (Moher et al., 2011) to extract literature (journal articles) from different databases (e.g. Web of Science, Scopus). The process consists of four stages: 1) identifying the keywords and searching them in the TOPIC (title, abstract and keywords) in the databases 2) screening the documents using filters; publication language, publication document, journal article, and category (business and management), 3) assessing eligibility based on inclusion and exclusion criteria by scanning article titles, abstracts and keywords, and 4) inclusion of journal articles that focus on literature streams.

It is clear that research in this theme is very multi-disciplinary, also based on the search. However, we wanted to focus our attention to the journals in business and organization research solely. In addition, we included journals at AJG levels 3 or 4 and/or Finnish JUFO ranked at levels 2 or 3. Thus, we included the following journals to our analysis: British Journal of Management, Business History, Business History Review, Business Strategy and the Environment, Decision Sciences, Decision Support Systems, Entrepreneurship and Regional Development, European Journal of Information Systems, Industrial Marketing Management, Industry and Innovation, Information Society, International Journal of Human Resource Management, International Journal of Operations and Production Management, Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Inquiry, Journal of Operations Management, Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management, Journal of Small Business Management, Journal of Supply Chain Management, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Journal of Travel Research, Manufacturing and Service Operations Management, Production and Operations Management, Public Administration Review, Small Business Economics, Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Technovation.

When analysing each individual article, we focused our attention to the following questions: 1) keywords, 2) research question(s) and aim of the study, 3) method used, 4) main findings of the study and 5) How this study relates to network discourse. In the end all together 85 articles were analysed and tabulated regarding these questions, forming the data of the study.

The analysis is now under construction and our aim is to present preliminary findings at the conference. The expected results of this study would provide not just an assessment of the state-of-the art of this emerging topic (Cabanelas, Mora Cortez & Charterina, 2023), but assist also in identifying potential gaps for further conceptualizations and theoretical advancements, pointing also to suitable future empirical research within resilience domain in interorganizational networks.

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"Exploring Gender Diversity in Key Account Management: A Comparative Global Perspective on Gender-Specific Roles and Competencies for Customer Success"

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Keywords

Key Account Management, Gender Diversity, Role and Competencies, Qualitative Study, Global Perspective

KAM has gained significant importance in the rapidly changing environment of global business. It is recognized as a crucial element for building enduring relationships with customers and achieving overall organizational success (Homburg, Workman, and Jensen 2002; Ivens and Pardo 2007). In this context, the importance of gender diversity in KAM has become a vital factor that contributes to improving organizational performance and strengthening customer engagement (Ivens 2023). This study aims to investigate the intricate relationship between gender diversity and KAM, with the goal of comprehending how gender-specific roles and skills impact Key Account (KA) dynamics and the effectiveness of KA strategies in different cultural contexts.

Existing research emphasizes the significance of gender diversity in business leadership, establishing a connection between gender diversity and enhanced financial results and organizational performance (Hunt, Layton, and Prince 2015; Noland and Moran 2016). Expanding upon this basis, our research especially examines the influence of gender diversity in KAM, a field that requires crucial strategic decision-making, successful relationship-building, and a customer-focused approach (Guesalaga et al. 2018). The research is driven by four fundamental Research Questions (RQ):

RQ1: What is the impact of gender disparities on the boundary-spanning responsibilities in KAM?

RQ2: In what ways are gender-specific competencies and roles manifested in KAM, and what are the gender-based variations in executing these competencies and roles?

RQ3: How do the distinct approaches of female and male KA managers integrate to enhance value within KAM teams?

RQ4: How can female and male KA managers leverage each of their abilities to enhance the overall success of their teams in KAM?

Germany, France, Spain, Hungary, India, Vietnam, Chile and Iran are among the countries where we conducted our initial research. The selection of these countries is based on their varied cultural and economic backgrounds, in order to offer a global outlook on the gender roles and competencies in KAM. The inclusion of this variety facilitates an in-depth examination of gender diversity in KAM, enabling an exploration of culturally and operationally specific characteristics (Hoogendoorn, Oosterbeek, and van Praag 2013). We aim to conduct a thorough analysis of this data in order to make insightful comparisons and gain an in-depth understanding of gender dynamics in KAM. This study enhances knowledge and provides practical guidance for KAM firms aiming to leverage gender diversity as a competitive advantage.

The core of KAM involves successfully managing a company's most important customers (Wengler, Ehret, and Saab 2006). As Ryals and Rogers (2007) suggested, this entails employing an optimized combination of strategic planning, comprehensive customer understanding, and robust relationship management. This strategy surpasses conventional sales strategies by emphasizing the development of enduring partnerships, in which KA managers serve as strategic collaborators (Hengstebeck, Kassemeier, and Wieseke 2022). KA managers link their company's objectives with the intricate requirements of their KAs. The effectiveness of KAM relies on KA managers successfully navigating intricate customer and cultural variables, acting as cultural intermediates that align business strategies with the complexities of global marketplaces (Georges and Eggert 2003; Kadam, Niersbach, and Ivens 2023).

The importance of gender diversity in KAM is being increasingly acknowledged as a crucial catalyst for innovation and enhanced corporate performance. Studies demonstrate the correlation between gender diversity and enhanced organizational performance. According to McKinsey & Company's survey underlined by Hunt, Layton, and Prince (2015), organizations that have diverse leadership teams have a 15 percent higher likelihood of achieving better financial performance compared to industry averages. Based on a study conducted by the Peterson Institute, companies with a minimum of 30 percent female leadership had a 15 percent rise in profitability (Noland and Moran 2016). Women make up only 31.2 percent of KA managers and 22.5 percent of KAM directors in the United States (Zippia Research 2023). Christiansen et al. (2016) argues that women occupied only 19 percent of corporate board seats and 14 percent of senior executive positions in the top 600 firms in Europe in 2014. Furthermore, the influence of gender diversity in KAM is not consistent across different cultures. Some cultures have more rigid gender conventions, which consequently affects how KA managers are perceived and how well they perform (Neculaesei 2015).

This study employs qualitative method based on Spiggle's (1994) approach and utilizes a case study strategy. Our goal is to develop a comprehensive understanding of gender-related nuances in KAM, focusing unique expertise rather than broad generalizations. We conducted so far 26 semi-structured interviews across eight countries. These countries are Germany, France, Spain, Hungary, India, Vietnam, Chile and Iran. The final plan is to conduct at least 15 interviews per country for reasons of validity. This selection was based on the diversity of these countries and their unique business practices, providing rich, contextual data.

We employ a purposive sampling technique, based on principles outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), with a particular emphasis on achieving gender diversity within KAM teams. We have chosen interviewees who represent a range of roles within these teams, encompassing KA managers, KA directors, and sales managers. We performed an in-depth data analysis of the interview data, complying with Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis, through an iterative coding approach. The process started with an initial phase of familiarization, during which we carefully reviewed the interview transcripts multiple times to acquire a comprehensive insight.

Subsequently, we proceeded to generate preliminary themes by identifying noteworthy concepts and recurring patterns. As a result, comparable codes were organized into potential themes.

This study's findings, presented as pilot studies, are divided into two major sections. Section A focuses on the codes and themes derived from our data analysis, while section B provides a country-specific overview based on interviews and literature. This study addresses the gender dynamics that exist in KAM and reveals unique findings in response to four research questions. Research Question 1 (RQ1) emphasizes the notable influence of gender disparities on boundary-spanning positions. Female KA managers in India and Vietnam demonstrate exceptional communication and emotional intelligence, whereas male managers are perceived as pragmatic. There is an evident correlation between gender and individual competencies (RQ2). For instance, Vietnamese male managers are recognized for their problem-solving capabilities (Homan et al. 2007), while Hungarian and French female managers are regarded for their empathic communication (RQ2). Regarding the value of integrating the distinct approaches of male and female KA managers, RQ3 emphasizes France's emphasis on competencies, which echoes Woolley et al. (2010) on collective intelligence, and Spain's competitive edge in gender diversity, as supported by Herring (2009). Finally, RQ4 demonstrates that the collaborative efforts of male and female KA managers, which encompass pragmatic negotiation and complementary analytical and communicative abilities, contribute to the success of the team.

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Financial Payment Services and the Institutionalization

of Business Practices in an Emerging Market Context

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Introduction & Aim

According to economic development and financial services research, financial technology platforms allow emerging economies to leapfrog existing payment infrastructures (Brezis et al. 1993; Teece, et al.1997; Burlamaqi & Kattel, 2016; Fontin & Lin, 2019). Policymakers and non-governmental organizations argue that access to fintech services provides a path to addressing the informality and subsistence issues faced by small and medium-sized businesses in emerging economies, as frequently identified by economic development research (Beck et al. 2018; Bonina et al. 2022). More broadly, service researchers have begun to investigate the contribution of service systems or service business models to economic growth (Chesbrough et al. 2006; Flores Letelier et al. 2003; Pels & Sheth, 2017). Institutional voids, including the prevalence of informal companies and subsistence economies, are a common difficulty noted in economic development studies. The goal of our research is to design and test a methodology for identifying and validating the role of payment technologies in the formalization and professionalization of such firms in emerging economies.

Research Question(s)

Our primary research question is: How do mobile payment platforms affect the institutionalization of commercial enterprises in emerging economies? The study locates within current arguments that suggest that access to technology-enabled business services aids in the creation of cognitive business institutions. The study extends the trajectory of institutional-based research by offering a cultural cognitive explanation for the impact of mobile payment technology and services (Ehret & Olaniyan 2023) on the formation of routines, dynamic marketing capabilities, and business model considerations by small and medium sized enterprises.

Theoretical Background

Effective institutions are regarded as critical components of emerging-market economic development (Abendroth & Pels, 2017; Khanna & Palepu, 2010; North, 1987, 1990). Current research in the field of mobile and fintech systems in emerging economies has focused on the ecosystem and institutional measures that promote the dissemination of these digital technologies. These institution-centric methods have had limitations in aiding the transition of informal economic actors to institutionalized commercial organizations. A rising number of scholars have proposed and provided evidence for economic leapfrogging, in which emerging economies adopt new technologies to develop technological and institutional infrastructures (Burlamaqui & Kattel, 2016; Sheth, 2011; Mahajan, 2022). Rather than limiting development policies to solving "institutional voids" (Khanna & Palepu, 2010), leapfrogging techniques may reveal disruptive innovation potential even in seemingly low-performing environments. While academic studies and the business press have highlighted the importance of mobile payment systems in economic development, there is currently no explanation and evidence for the micro-foundations of such leapfrogging approaches. The goal of this study is to provide a conceptualization and validation of the usefulness of mobile payment technology in the micro and small business setting. One major problem raised by studies of emerging economies is the restricted transformation of informal into institutionalized enterprises, as well as the resulting restrictions in professionalization, efficiency, and growth. Ellström et al. (2022) suggest that dynamic capabilities provide a consistent approach for studying digital transformation, given the powerful impact of digital technologies on business performance and the growing popularity of digital capabilities (Zhen et al. 2021). Dynamic capabilities refer to a set of high-order business activities that firms use to navigate their business model and adapt themselves for survival and benefit. (Teece, et al.1997; Warner & Wäger 2019). Research suggests that successful digital transformation requires organizations to have the necessary competencies to adapt their business models and organizational structures.

On a theory-level, we adopt a cognitive perspective on institutions (Deqech, 2003; Scott, 2014; Searle, 1995, 2017). We propose that cognitive institutions stimulate the formation of practices as alternatives to informal business activities (Pels, et al. 2022). From a lens of cognitive institutions, practices reflect professional rules embodying knowledge of business conduct e.g., in accounting, customer management, financial management or business citizenship. Furthermore, the study uses a dynamic capabilities lens to examine the rules and routines that promote mobile payment adoption and institutionalization (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, et al. 1997).

Methodology & Findings

We employ a mixed methods study of adopters of mobile payment technology amongst SME retailer enterprises operating in Nigeria, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, and survey questionnaires for data collection.

Our data analysis is led by both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and grounded on a triangulation of sources, investigator views, and methodology. (Denzin, 2017; D´zwigoł, 2018; Eisenhardt, 1989) Our theme analysis of the rich text is based on the confluence of Searle's (1995, 2017) constitutive norms and Teece's (1995) dynamic capabilities.

The study shows how mobile payment technologies affect small firm behavior by facilitating and stimulating the formation of business practices, in particular book-keeping, accounting, and Customer Relationship Management, Creating dynamic capabilities such as consumer information, resource management, and business re-organization. Mobile payment technologies promote business institutionalization in emerging economies and lead to the development of dynamic capability routines, according to preliminary findings. We show evidence that formal institutions, particularly reserve bank rules, significantly impact the uptake of mobile payment services, as well as the shared social action of these ecosystem actors.rs. We observe that the adoption of mobile payment services is still in an early stage, with a typical 20% percent share of mobile payment modes. We argue that governance approaches need to level up from pure regulative governance approaches (like property rights or transaction costs) to cognitive-cultural governance approaches (Scott, 2020)

Conclusions and implications for theory and practice.

In conclusion, our analysis reveals that digital mobile payment services can significantly impact the dynamic capabilities of SMEs by forming unique configurations of high-end routing. SMEs in Africa and other emerging economies rely on cultural practices and rules to adopt mobile payments. Understanding these configurations can help improve digital transformation processes and overcome institutional challenges. We offer the following contributions. (1) We offer a micro-foundation for determining the role of payment technologies in the establishment of business capabilities. (2) We uncover processes of how mobile payment technologies contribute to the establishment of dynamic capabilities (3) We uncover trends of mobile payment usage and their impact on business user practices

References are available upon request.

Towards Hybrid Channels – Revisiting the Criteria for Designing Marketing Channels: The Case of Automobile Marketing Channels

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Introduction

Recent changes in market structures and buyer behavior along with heightened competition, increased market transparency and digitalization have forced a transition in producers' criteria for designing their marketing channels. Traditional conceptualizations of marketing channels hold that direct channels provide a range of benefits for the producer, such as better control over product presentation, pricing, and customer processes. Meanwhile, indirect channels are more efficient and enable replication, hence creating a stronger market presence.

There seems to be a lack of knowledge about to what extent these assumptions hold in contemporary markets. While FMCG are increasingly being bought online, capital goods remain a large investment for buyers, and are still primarily sold in physical stores. Moreover, in many instances, these products must be available for demonstration and trial, should be kept in stock due to supply-demand imbalances, and may need maintenance from qualified service providers.

Our research deals with the design of marketing channels from the perspective of a car producer, The car industry is undergoing significant changes such as electrification, digitization and a transition towards car sharing and autonomous driving, although the latter seems to be difficult to realize in real-world applications. In addition, buyers' interest in cars is declining while urbanization and environmental concerns makes individual car ownership questioned by authorities and the general public. These challenges make it difficult for car producers to design and manage marketing channels for contemporary markets.

Hitherto, attempts by traditional car producers in moving to a more direct channel structure, hence taking control of the sales interface either through own physical outlets or online channels, have had limited success. Meanwhile, companies in other industries have been successful with their direct channels, e.g. H&M, Zara, and IKEA. In some instances, e.g. Apple, marketing channels rely on a hybrid of direct channels – online and physical stores –, and franchised dealers. Hybrid channels have recently been a common practice also in automobile marketing channels through the advent of agency sales models. These models include elements from both direct and indirect marketing channels.

Against this background of a shift in market conditions and marketing channel rationales compared to when the traditional conceptualizations of direct vs. indirect channels emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, the relation between contemporary markets and producers' criteria for designing marketing channels in contemporary markets appears to be an underexplored area. The aim of our research is to explore how car producers design their marketing channels to adapt to current markets by focusing on key control mechanisms

Theoretical framing

While early conceptualizations of marketing channels suggest that the primary role of the channels is to bring the goods to the buyer in an as efficient way as possible, such an approach is insufficient against the background of increased competition and a reorientation in society towards branding, marketing communications, and infusing all customer touchpoints with the company's brand values.

Our theoretical backdrop is grounded in the conceptual link between the car maker's need of control and consistency, and the various channel types that need to be managed within the agency sales model system. Our structural model focuses on revenue streams, cost structure, brand exposition, loose and tight control, and to what extent the channels deal with the trade-off between global efficiencies vs. local adaptation.

Method

In order to understand contemporary automobile marketing channels, we built cases of volume brands, premium brands, and brands that sale online solely, respectively, each containing, in addition to secondary data sources, in-depth interviews with car producers and their national sales offices to explore their way-of-thinking with respect to the design of their marketing channels. In addition to a dozen interviews, follow-up seminars were held to explore these themes and substantiate the findings.

Through applying the structuring model on a variety of brands such as Volvo, BMW and Mercedes-Benz (premium brands), and volume brands such as Volkswagen and BYD, we explored how car producers deal with various issues in designing their marketing channels. By comparing the current state of the models, including managers' perspective on the rationales behind, with earlier design of the channels, we identify patterns in the transition of rationales for designing marketing channels.

Empirical findings

The car industry's slow adaptation to online sales – despite attempts, which have been going on since the late 1990s –, less than one percent of sales are online as of 2024, have encouraged car producers to find a solution that largely combines the advantages of different marketing channel models.

Through replacing franchise agreements, which encourage variations in customer experiences across channel outlets, with agency contracts, car producers attempt to achieve a number of advantages. Price negotiations disappear since agency models are based on fixed prices and fees to dealers(/agents), hence, dealers cannot give away some of their margin to receive a price advantage in the marketplace. Instead of the sales contract being between dealer and customer and dealers purchasing stock, the producer takes responsibility of the sale contract with the buyer. Dealers can't pre-register cars to cover up poor sales. All in all, the producer gets more control while the dealer loses freedom. A key rationale for the producer is that buyers receive the same, fixed price and an experience that lives up to the producer's standards.

Tesla's success with its no-frills direct sales channels, with limited opportunities for buyers to trade-in cars, haggle with the price, and get access to a dense network of repair shops, has contributed to pushing established car producers towards redesigning their marketing channels. Main criteria have been to reduce costs, increase control, and provide a more consistent brand experience across channels and locations. The transition has added to the existing tension between car producers and their franchised dealers.

While established car manufacturers' attempts to offset Tesla's cost advantages along with value-shaping advantages such as a dense charging infrastructure, well-functioning customer interfaces and OTA updates, and mobile service vehicles, have largely failed, relying on a dense dealer network provides many advantages, e.g. an outlet for selling cars when supply exceeds demand. Although the two models have converged, some intrinsic differences remain such as Tesla owners seldomly have to visit a specific physical location (such as a dealership) while agents work intensively on building relationships with their local customers.

Analysis and Conclusion

From the perspective of a car producer, characteristics of contemporary markets calls for new ways of designing marketing channels in a more integrated way. Marketing channels cannot be seen as a separate entity anymore, like it did in traditional conceptualizations, but rather as an integrated part of the producer's business model, hence encompassing the value proposition, brand strategy, revenue streams and cost structure in line with the manufacturer's ambitions. By its very nature, indirect channel members', i.e. car dealers', interests must be aligned with those of the manufacturer in order for indirect channels to prevail ahead.

Our preliminary results suggest that car producers attempt to standardize products and marketing channels for a number of reasons. First, to facilitate the reallocation of used cars across markets. Second, for manufacturing operations purposes in order to derive cost efficiencies. Third, to speed up the customer purchase decision process. Fourth, to make delivery faster – preconfigured vehicles could be made available immediately. The agency model may be a first but necessary step against integrated hybrid channels.

We found significant differences between volume brands, which experience fierce competition from emerging brands, hence focusing on market penetration and efficient marketing channels, and premium brands, for which marketing channels are used to differentiate the brand.

Avatar-Driven Business to Business Interaction Model (ADBIM): A Multidimensional Framework for Humanising Avatar-Assisted B2B Commerce

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Extended Abstract

The integration of avatars in Business-to-Business (B2B) interactions is emergent as a key driving force for Avatar-assisted B2B commerce. The Avatar-Driven Business Interaction Model (ADBIM) leverages the convergence of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and better, faster, cheaper computing to generate sophisticated avatars functioning as dynamic actors within B2B. ADBIM broadly encapsulates two types of avatars a "digital human" with a humanlike representation capable of mirroring expressions and gestures, potentially enhancing virtual B2B engagements (Miao et al., 2022) and synthetic avatars prioritizing simplicity, stylization, or brand-specific characteristics over photorealism of real people, although they may still embody humanoid features. AI driven avatars are capable of significantly enhancing major or key customer involvement and satisfaction in B2B settings（Huang and Rust, 2018) and liberates human salespeople and support staff to focus on critical thinking activities and new business development initiatives （Alves et al. 2016).

The development and maintenance cost challenges of the avatar driven paradigm no longer disadvantages smaller enterprises as AI is made available "as a service" (AIaaS; Yasar, n.d.) allowing individual organizations to experiment and deploy avatars without major upfront capital expenditure (Miao et al., 2022) requiring low to no code skills. Other challenges including the handling of personal data by avatars raises privacy and security concerns, with potential ramifications under regulations such as GDPR (GDPR.EU). An over-reliance on avatar-based interactions has potential to diminish the value of the human touch paramount to cultivating resilient business relationships（Davenport, 2018). On the other hand, high-profile businesses adopting AI-driven avatars for customer service and sales operations, achieve tangible benefits through enhancing engagement rates, sales conversion, and higher customer satisfaction scores （Riemer and Johnston, 2014).

ADBIM takes a strategic yet practically informed approach towards determining where and when in a customer journey to move away from a human only salesforce and use digital humans or fake avatar presenters. A 5-step approach enables experimentation and making decisions on optimal placement to use digital humans or fake avatars in the B2B website customer journey map. (Table 1).

Table 1: 5-Step ADBIM Framework Using Google Analytics
Step 1: Analyze Audience Information • ***Demographics and Interests:*** We start by examining the demographics (age, location, job roles) and interests (industrial focus, technology usage) of the B2B site visitors. Understanding the audience provides insights into which type of actor as spokesperson (digital human or synthetic avatar) might resonate. • ***Behaviour Patterns*****:** Looking at the behaviour patterns, such as the pages visited, session duration, and actions taken (e.g., downloads, cart interactions, completed forms and sign-ups) helps identify the content types engaging with prospects and customers providing clues for fake or digital human avatars at this stage
Step 2: Map the Customer Journey • ***Awareness Stage:*** Early in the journey, when the goal is to capture attention and generate interest, a real person is likely effective in humanizing the brand and establishing trust especially given the B2B context. • Consideration Stage: Here, we experiment with both digital humans and avatars. For highly technical or long form explanations, an avatar could provide a unique, memorable experience. A digital human or real person is well suited to share expert insights or testimonials. • ***Decision Stage:*** At this point of the customer journey, personal trust and credibility are essential. A digital human representing a real person or the real person themselves, especially a recognized B2B leader or expert from the organization, is likely persuasive in influencing final decisions.
Step 3: Use the Pathway Data to Inform Placement • ***High Engagement Points:*** Using Google Analytics data helps identify where visitors are most engaged or where drop-offs occur. For example, if a particular page has high engagement but low conversion, this might benefit from a personal touch with a real CEO message. • ***Experiment and Test:*** Set up A/B tests to compare the performance of pages featuring digital humans versus avatars. Not only focus on immediate metrics like page views or time on page, but also at downstream effects on conversion rates and customer satisfaction.
Step 4: Leverage Predictive Analysis • ***Predictive Modelling:*** You can use machine learning models to predict audience reactions based on historical data. Incorporate features like the type of content viewed, engagement levels with different formats (video, text, interactive tools), and conversion outcomes. • ***Content Optimization:*** Based on predictive modelling, tailor the content and spokesperson e.g., digital human or fake avatar to match the predicted audience preferences at different journey stages e.g. if data shows technical content with avatars performs well in the consideration stage among engineers, use this format at key points during the journey.
Step 5: Continuous Improvement • ***Feedback Loops:*** Implement mechanisms to collect direct feedback from the business audience on their preferences and reactions to different presentation styles with different hosts. • ***Analytics Review*****:** Regularly review the analytics and test outcomes to refine the understanding of what avatar type works best and where in the journey. Update the customer journey maps and content strategy accordingly.

Thus, humanizing B2B interactions within the ADBIM framework approach may lie in the hands of the salesforce or marketing, but a salesperson or their digital persona may not always be suitable to present messages or participate directly as a digital human. Alternatively, a more holistic approach to avatar assisted B2B commerce merits a new approach to sales, customer service and marketing with the creation of a new type of role. Blending elements of empathy, understanding customer needs, and generating targeted content or solutions is a powerful addition to a B2B organisation. Such a new role is consistent with "…in the future there will be a need for wise and empathetic, discipline independent individuals – empathizers…" (Susskind and Susskind, 2022, p.354) bridging gaps between traditional marketing, sales, customer experience, and product development teams. Building on ADBIM including the 5-step process, a new role/title – Emphatic B2B Engagement Strategist with potential responsibilities, and skills and capabilities is definable (See Table 2).

Table 2: Role/Title: Empathic B2B Engagement Strategist
Responsibilities: • ***Deep Audience Understanding:*** Use data analytics, direct feedback, and social listening tools to deeply understand the audience needs, preferences, challenges, and emotional drivers. • ***Empathic Content Creation:*** Lead the creation of content resonating on an emotional level with the target audience, ensuring tailoring to address specific needs, pain points, and aspirations. • *Customer Journey Personalization:* Map out and continuously refine the customer journey for different segments, focusing on creating personalized and empathetic touchpoints enhancing engagement and conversion. • ***Cross-Functional Transdisciplinary Collaboration***: Work across marketing, sales, product development, and customer service teams ensuring a unified, empathetic approach to customer interactions and product/service design. • ***Innovative Engagement Tactics:*** Experiment with and implement innovative engagement tactics leveraging the latest technologies and platforms e.g., AI driven avatars with a focus on "does this tech help us foster an authentic connection with the audience?" • ***Feedback Loop Integration:*** Establish and manage a continuous feedback loop, incorporating customer insights into all stages of product and content development ensuring the company is agile to customer needs. • ***Advocacy and Trust Building:*** Develop programs and initiatives turning satisfied customers into brand advocates, leveraging relationships to build trust with a wider audience.
Skills and Qualifications Required: ✓ Understand emotional and psychological aspects of customer interaction and decisions in a B2B context ✓ Develop empathy maps for key customer segments to visualize and share insights about customers' thoughts, feelings, challenges, and motivations with internal teams. ✓ Conduct qualitative and quantitative research to understand customer emotions, preferences, and feedback e.g. surveys, interviews, sentiment analysis, and social media monitoring. ✓ Excellent drama, communication and storytelling skills ✓ Track and report empathy-driven initiatives on customer satisfaction, loyalty, engagement, and business outcomes. ✓ Experience with UX design, or customer experience ✓ Hands on with Gen AI for B2B creative multimodal (voice, text and image) content creation ✓ Enhance engagement and learning with gamification strategies ✓ Knowledge of new technologies, martech and digital platforms to help build emotional customer connections ✓ Ability to influence and lead cross-functional projects and teams.

Future trends in empathy are influenced by the integration of virtual and augmented reality technologies to literally immerse team members in the customer's world, the progressive autonomy of AI language models in avatar development, and the utilization of blockchain for securing transactions and intellectual property associated with avatar models. Blockchain use is instrumental in promulgating a new business model for B2B salespeople or spokespersons to license their own representations across different B2B platforms using blockchain-as-a-service (Campbell and Kontzer, 2023). For B2B marketers and executives, strategic avatar deployment can catalyze more effective engagement strategies, refine customer experiences, and enhance operational efficiencies.

Recommendations include investments in avatar technologies, prioritizing data security, and training human teams to work efficiently with AI-driven avatars.

In conclusion, ADBIM represents a transformative force in B2B interactions, driving businesses towards a future where technology and human insight combine to create enriched, efficient, and secure business communications and transactions while mindful of customer interaction and engagement's emotional and psychological aspects. Knowing when to use a digital human, synthetic avatar, human salesperson, or combination is the outstanding question the newly emergent role of the Empathic B2B Engagement Strategist tackles on day one. Using a structured ADBIM approach to incorporating human elements into avatar-assisted interactions within the B2B sector preserves, enhances and scales the human touch, ensuring empathetic strategies in an AI-driven environment.

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Collective effectuation: Turning human behaviour into entrepreneurial opportunity that improves firm performance

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1. Introduction

Effectuation is an alternative decision-making logic (Zhang *et al.,* 2023) used by entrepreneurs in creating opportunities and improving firm performance, offering an alternative to more causal approaches (Sarasvathy, 2001). However, effectuation 'fails to theorise adequately the influence of social context' (Kitching and Rouse, 2020, p. 516). We therefore aim to go beyond the well-trodden argument that effectuation offers an alternative logic to more causal approaches by asking: *how can collective effectuation turn human behaviour into entrepreneurial opportunity that improves firm performance?* Our conceptualization repositions effectuation as a collective approach to opportunity creation and improved firm performance (Karami *et al.,* 2023; Zhang *et al.,* 2023).

2. Theoretical background

It is our view that collective effectuation has the potential to help organizations gain a more holistic understanding of opportunity creation (Pattinson *et al.,* 2020) and its impact on firm performance (Karami *et al.,* 2023; Zhang *et al.,* 2023). Opportunity creation has also been linked to effectual approaches to marketing (Sullivan Mort et al. 2012) and firm performance. Entrepreneurial marketing supports Sarasvathy's (2001) view that effective utilization of scarce resources includes an entrepreneurial focus in the form of who we are, who we know and what we know to create multiple pathways for new opportunities. By recognizing the influence of social context, entrepreneurs and firms can make sense of the motivations and challenges they face, and to improve firm performance (Karami *et al.,* 2023). Adopting sensemaking narratives helps illustrate lived experiences in context and support collective understanding (Pattinson *et *al.*, 2023). This understanding feeds into the collective process, allowing participants to draw upon past, present, and future (Weick et al., 2005) to co-create opportunities. We identify 6 elements of social context that are critical in helping entrepreneurs make sense of collective effectuation in the identification of opportunities that can be leveraged to improve firm performance (Table 1).

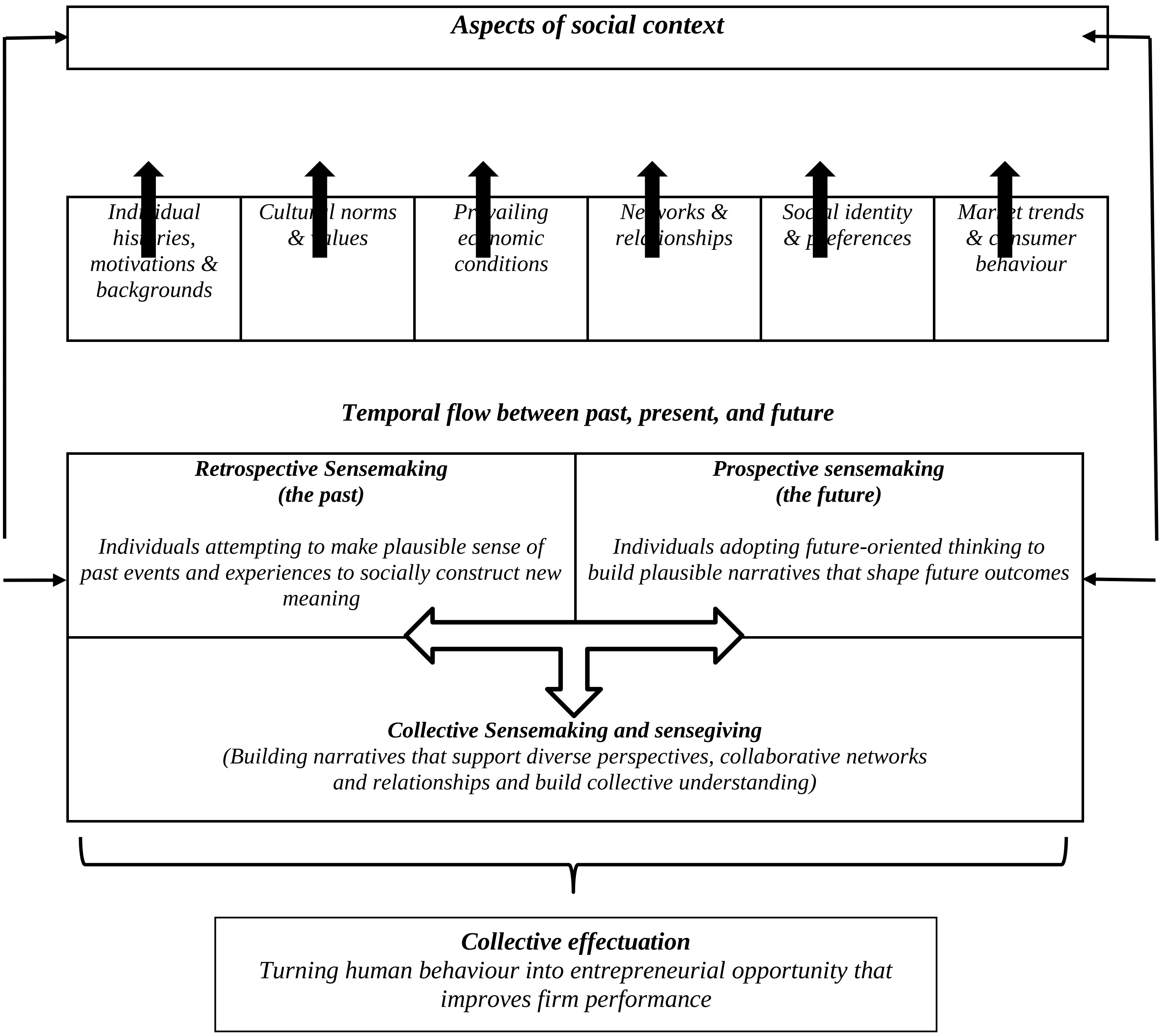
Table 1. Social context, sensemaking, and collective effectuation

Aspects of social context	Role of social context	Examples	Link to sensemaking	Link to collective effectuation
Individual histories, motivations and background	Influences how and why individuals become entrepreneurs, the paths they take.	Upbringing, education, personal experiences.	Understanding the underlying motivations and background that drive an entrepreneur's journey.	Taps into collective, shared motivations and backgrounds to collaboratively create opportunities.
Culture, norms and values	Shapes perceptions of success, failure, risk-taking, and ethics.	Attitudes toward failure, societal views on innovation.	Interpreting an entrepreneur's decisions within the cultural context that defines their values.	Leverages collective, shared cultural norms and values to shape opportunities
Prevailing economic conditions	Affects access to capital, market demand, and business viability.	Economic downturns, inflation rates, job market stability.	Understanding how economic conditions influence an entrepreneur's strategies and decisions.	Harnesses collective resources to navigate economic conditions and create new possibilities.
Networks and relationships	Determines access to mentors, investors, partners, and customers.	Networking events, industry connections.	Recognizing the role of social networks in influencing an entrepreneur's actions and outcomes.	Utilizes collective, shared networks to amplify collaboration and co-creation of opportunities.
Social identity and preferences	Impacts opportunities and challenges due to societal biases.	Minority entrepreneur experiences, glass ceiling effects.	Recognizing how an entrepreneur's identity shapes their experiences and decisions.	Draws on shared identities to drive collective entrepreneurial action in the creation of opportunities.
Market trends and consumer behaviour	Drives product/service development based on changing societal needs.	Technological advancements, societal shifts.	Understanding how market trends reflect evolving societal preferences and needs.	Seizes on market trends collaboratively, creating opportunities that align with shifting needs.

3. A conceptual framework for collective effectuation

Social context plays a crucial role in helping us understand how entrepreneurs make sense of co-create opportunities; it significantly influences entrepreneurs' behaviours, motivations, decisions, and the co-creation of opportunities that collective effectuation supports (see Figure 1). In other words, entrepreneurship is no longer perceived as an individual pursuit but rather as a collective effort that thrives on shared resources and networks (Karami *et al.*, 2023).

Figure 1. A conceptual framework for collective effectuation and opportunity creation



4. Summary

Our theorizing and conceptual model offers a theoretical contribution by showing how collective effectuation is inherently linked to social context and sensemaking. A key aspect of collective effectuation being that diverse perspectives are brought to the table when individuals from different backgrounds and viewpoints collaborate (Pattinson and Dawson, 2023). Such diversity enriches the spectrum of available ideas and perspectives through collaborative efforts, enabling the fusion of various skills and knowledge, which help turn human behaviour into entrepreneurial opportunity. If the study of effectuation is to flourish and move forward, we need a better understanding of how it acts as a generative force for turning human behaviour into entrepreneurial opportunity that can be leveraged to improve firm performance.

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Unlocking the Potential of B2B Entrepreneurship in the Digital Economy: An approach to mobility-related business

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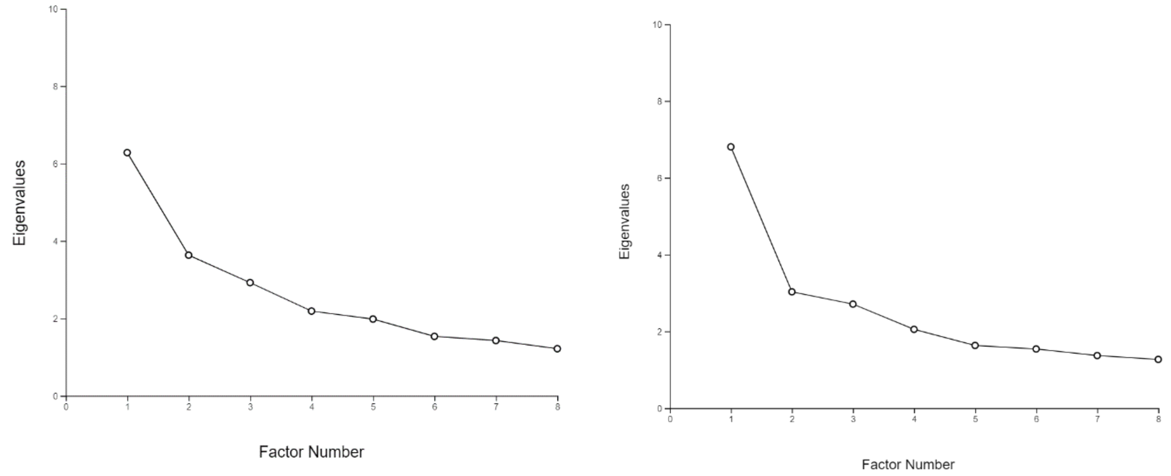
The increased digitization is driving companies towards a new industrial era (Loureiro, 2018; Turienzo et al., 2023), where data management is essential to generate value (Tsou and Cheng, 2018). Along with this, various tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data and Machine Learning have emerged, offering new options for business management and business development (Venturini, 2022). This digital change demands a continuously adaptation through innovation (Singh et al., 2020). This environment favors the creation of new innovative business models (Turienzo et al., 2023), aimed at improving organizational competitiveness and creating value for customers (Kim and Oh, 2022). To achieve this, business opportunities must be identified over time (Kim and Kim, 2021), developing an organizational culture that promotes observation of the environment, identification of resources and evaluation of ideas, in a process known as entrepreneurial alertness (Chavoushi et al., 2020; Kirzner, 1979). This process should be adopted by both established and emerging companies (Lanivich et al., 2022), and even extended through collaborative entrepreneurial ecosystems involving public and private institutions, with a digital approach (Cabanelas et al., 2023).

This becomes particularly relevant in the B2B domain where the challenges become more complex due to increased servitization, long-term relationships and close customer-supplier relationships (Dotzel and Shankar, 2019). These challenges are reflected in the literature where publications related to B2B service innovation continue to grow (De Jong et al., 2021). Therefore, the connection between B2B service innovation and entrepreneurship is a crucial and complex topic in the literature (Dotzel and Shankar, 2019). In an environment of high uncertainty and competition, fully developing entrepreneurial alertness is difficult due to the disruptive nature of new scenarios and the lack of previous experiences (Lanivich et al., 2022). It is essential to explore mechanisms that capitalize on the opportunities of the digital economy in B2B entrepreneurship, given its innovative nature and the current high degree of transformation in this field (Casidy et al., 2020).

This article has two aims. On the one hand, to investigate the opportunities that digitalization brings to entrepreneurship that foster innovation in B2B services. On the other, to explore new strategies to enhance entrepreneurship opportunities in B2B services within the digital economy, updating the concept of entrepreneurial alertness. However, this will focus on a very specific sector such as mobility for several reasons. First, mobility-related industry is a strategic sector for many countries that currently has great potential for growth and innovation (Athanasopoulou et al., 2019). Second, it is not operational to investigate all sectors in general because each sector requires has different needs, as digitization, entrepreneurship and innovation in B2B services are complex issues. Third, because the emergence of autonomous vehicles opens a new landscape to explore (Turienzo et al., 2023). Thus, two research questions are posed: "What are the areas that offer the most opportunities for entrepreneurship in mobility?", and "What are the factors that will condition the exploitation of entrepreneurship opportunities?".

Given the complexity of the questions, the article employs a wealth of literature along with a mixed methodology (Mingers, 2005) to answer them as realistically as possible. On one front, the study delves into prior literature pertaining to the evolutionary trajectory of business models, the nexus between entrepreneurship and digitization, and the theory of entrepreneurial alertness (Chavoushi et al., 2020; Kirzner, 1979). In terms of methodology, a fusion of qualitative approaches, such as four in-depth interviews (Legard et al., 2003), and a quantitative-qualitative methodology, exemplified by Q Methodology applied to 30 persons (Brown, 1980), were adroitly employed. This meticulous approach enabled the extraction of four distinct perspectives per query.

FIGURE 1. *Results of the Eigenvalues per factor for the first Q-survey (left) and second (right).*



Source: Own's elaboration in KADE.

Results provide some adjustments in the definition of the opportunity construct, as well as a new vision of entrepreneurial alertness. Those suggest that the business models that present the greatest opportunity in B2B are those related to artificial intelligence, data and resource management, and mobility sustainability. Companies should explore investing in these and limit them in business models such as car rental or cab booking apps. The results also point out that entrepreneurs must internalize entrepreneurial alertness through a process of constant innovation, enhancing creativity, collective learning, and adaptability to respond to changing market demands. To promote entrepreneurship and achieve a better performance of resources, the results suggest working in different areas such as the ability to take risks, the development of knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship, the capacity to manage and obtain financial resources, access to mentors and advisors, generate networks and contacts, and collaboration in business ecosystems. Public entities should play an indirect role, facilitating entrepreneurship through legal and fiscal measures.

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Perception of Business Ethics among Economics Students

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According to several researchers, academic ethics is worth researching because students' opinions and attitudes towards academic ethics can be used to predict the ethical standards and values they will follow in their professional or private lives as adults (e.g. Payan et al., 2010; Amigud et al., 2022). Business ethics is most often researched among practising managers (e.g. Goodarzi et al., 2018), and business education always includes business ethics, either in a separate course or as an important topic in another course, such as strategic planning.

Members of Generation Z were born between 1990 and 2010 (Oxford Learners' Dictionaries), so some of them are already working, even in decision-making positions, while younger members currently are at university.

The research question of our empirical study is: How do students in business master study think they would behave and decide in the face of different economic ethical dilemmas? The aim of our study is thus to gain a deeper understanding of younger Generation Z students' perceptions of business ethics. In our research, we used a mixed methodology where we looked at students' answers and options to ethical dilemmas through short questions in the form of classroom exercises where we also discussed ethical dilemmas.

Business ethics is an applied ethics which includes "rules, principles, and standards for deciding what are morally right or wrong when doing business" (Cambridge Dictionary). The main purpose of business ethics is to help companies and their employees and stakeholders to make a decision about an ethically questionable transaction and to guide business decisions in an ethically acceptable direction in accordance with their objectives (Ugoani, 2023). Business behaviour focused on ethical conduct is becoming more widespread around the world, with the practice of creating codes of ethics and incorporating them into the core operations of the company (Girisha et al., 2020). Ethical dilemmas bring us back to the almost eternal opposition between 'ought' (values, rules) and 'will' (self-interest, protection of our interests).

The reason for using a mixed methodology was the subject of our research. Research on ethics (academic, business or workplace ethics) requires great care because of its complexity and because its research is often based on self-assessment and self-judgement, for example in the case of questionnaires. This makes it difficult to build up an objective picture, which is why more researchers recommend more creative, indirect methods (e.g. Chankova, 2020). Amigud et al. (2022) focused their research on responses to ethical dilemmas. In fact, we have done the same.

The study involved 45 international students in their 20s, who are studying for a Master's degree in Economics and have encountered ethical dilemmas in the form of business ethics in a corporate strategy exercise. First, we discussed ethics and business ethics, presenting examples of good and bad corporate practices. Then, each person was given an ethical dilemma with simple questions about how they would make a decision and what factors influenced or made it difficult.

At the heart of the ethical dilemma was a Dutch manager responsible for running a mine in Africa that provides a livelihood for 1,000 families. There is no local work other than subsistence farming. The manager identified several safety problems, but the mine's engineer said the cost of modernising the mine would make it uneconomic. Closing the mine would cause a major political backlash and damage the reputation of the parent company. Keeping the mine open, on the other hand, would risk a major disaster (Johnson et al., 2008;160). That was all the information the students were given and they had to decide what they would have done if they had been in the manager's shoes. Some questions helped them answer, which also dealt with aspects of the decision; personal/family, corporate (parent and subsidiary) interests, as well as the interests of the local community and the African country. The questions were previously tested with Serbian students. We have been using these ethical dilemmas for years in this course and found that when there were no facilitating questions, students had a very difficult time deciding, and more of them had little to no idea what to do with the task. Now, it seems that the questions helped the students a lot, and most of them would have tried to find some kind of compromise, with the safety of the local workers being the most important aspect. After their answers were written down, we discussed the situation on a voluntary basis, during which the students were more active and courageous, and in this oral discussion, too, the search for compromise dominated, and they considered gathering more information as the most important thing to do.

The limitation of our research is the small number of students and the fact that it involved students present in the particular economic course of the given master study. One of the conclusions of the research is that ethical dilemmas are more conducive to students' development of business ethics and are more interesting and understanding to students. The aim of the research was not to find the only good decision, but to understand the complexity of business situations and problems, and to feel the need and pressure to make decisions. The more general lesson of the study is that decision-makers should not be left alone in a particularly difficult decision situation, but should be supported in some way. They should not be left in a critical situation where they feel they can only make the wrong decision, because they have to decide, and quickly. Rather, they need to be helped wisely to "get out of the box", to look around (gather information) and find the optimal compromise or other solution.

Our research contributes to the practice of more effective teaching methods in business ethics; shows how Generation Z students perceive certain issues in business ethics; and provides suggestions for solving difficult business dilemmas in general.

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Let me tell you about myself! Salesperson Orientations, Self-Presentation, and Pathways to Performance

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Introduction

Effective interpersonal communication is fundamental to establishing and maintaining successful business-to-business (B2B) buyer-seller relationships (Johlke and Duhan 2001; Schultz and Evans 2002). Although various informational elements assume importance during salespeople's interactions with customers (Wood et al. 2008), communicating relevant information on personal characteristics (e.g., experience, knowledge, and achievements) is critical for creating favorable initial impressions (Henthorne, LaTour, and Williams 1992), cultivating a favorable image amongst customers (Wiener, Flaherty, and Wiener 2022), and, ultimately, engendering salesperson selection (Krishnan, Niculescu, and Fredericks 2018). Yet, a review of extant research reveals a scarcity of studies on specific communication tactics that could be employed by salespeople to represent their personal attributes during customers encounters and the question of *should salespeople be authentic in describing themselves or should they embellish their qualities* remains unanswered.

Drawing from the literature on impression management (e.g., Bolino and Turnley 2003; Bolino et al. 2008; Gardner and Martinko 1988; Fisk and Grove 1996; Johnson, Sivadas, and Kashyap 2009) and self-presentation (Den Hartog, De Hoogh, Belschak 2020; Kim et al. 2022), this study develops and tests a theoretical framework (see figure 1) of the antecedents and consequences of salespeople's self-presentation tactics. Specifically, two research questions underscore the proposed framework: (1) what are the effects of self-presentation tactics on sales performance? (2) what are the effects of salesperson orientation on self-presentation tactics? Based on Kim et al. (2022), we focus on three self-presentation tactics, namely, (a) authentic self-expression, (b) authentic self-enhancement, and (c) exaggerated self-enhancement and propose differential effects on emotional exhaustion and customer satisfaction, which are critical pathways to sales performance. Further, we propose that salespeople's customer orientation and selling orientation have competing effects on self-presentation tactics such that customer (selling) orientation enhances (decreases) authentic self-expression and decreases (increases) both authentic self-enhancement and exaggerated self-enhancement.

Salesperson self-presentation

Authentic self-expression refers to a salesperson's extent of "being genuine and transparently revealing all aspects of oneself, including weaknesses" (Kim et al. 2023, 948). Salespeople use authentic self-expression to reveal aspects of themselves including their weakness sincerely and truthfully. Such a display of honesty and transparency can increase trust and allow for more meaningful connections with customers.

Authentic self-enhancement refers to the extent to which a salesperson genuinely showcases accomplishments and highlights strengths and talents, thereby promoting positive attributes without revealing any weaknesses (Kim et al. 2023). While this kind of self-enhancement is authentic, it lacks complete transparency since it does not reveal the salesperson's weaknesses. As a means of self-enhancement, salespeople "blow their own horn" to make sure that customers are informed about their successes (Strutton, Pelton, and Lumpkin 1995, 38). Salespeople attempt to nourish an image that will be perceived favorably by customers (Strutton, Pelton, and Lumpkin 1995).

Exaggerated self-enhancement occurs when salespeople "present a false image of themselves by exaggerating how good they are, taking credit for things outside of their sphere of control, avoiding blame, or denying responsibility for failure" (Kim et al. 2023, 949). In this context, salespeople aim to portray themselves to customers in a more positive light than is justified by overstating their expertise and pretending to be better than reality. Such exaggeration may also involve shifting blame to others and denying responsibility for any failures. Exaggerated self-enhancement is a deceptive tactic wherein a salesperson attempts to present a false and misleading image to customers, undermining their trust in the process.

SOCO and salesperson self-presentation

Customer orientation and selling orientation impact the way salespeople approach customers and work with them (Saxe and Weitz 1982; Itani, Chonko, and Agnihotri 2022) and also how salespeople self-present themselves when with customers as such self-presentation could impact customer decision-making and experience.

Customer orientation is based on the principle of satisfying the needs of customers, which signifies high concern for others while selling orientation is about securing sales as it is associated with low concern for others and high concern for self (Saxe and Weitz 1982). Customer orientation implies valuing customers more than sales (Zablah et al. 2012) and requires salespeople to avoid interpersonal conduct that sacrifices the interests of customers to make a sale (Saxe and Weitz 1982). Selling orientation drives self-interest temptations (Bagozzi et al. 2012) allowing salespeople to carry out misleading activities such as stretching the truth and painting too rosy a picture of what they sell (Saxe and Weitz 1982). This could also extend to how salespeople stretch the truth about their accomplishments and skills. Contrary to customer orientation, selling orientation forgoes moral conduct in order not to scarify possible sales gain (Itani, Chonko, and Agnihotri 2022). Salesperson authenticity is found to be negatively correlated with extrinsic motivation (Beeler, Zablah, and Rapp 2021) suggesting that monetary or financial motive is not a driver of authentic salespeople, and that why customer orientation is more to be aligned with authentic self-expression and less with self-enhancement.

On the one hand, we expect that customer orientation should drive salespeople to present themselves genuinely and transparently, even revealing their weaknesses. This approach leads to increased customer satisfaction and reduced exhaustion. On the other hand, a sales orientation is less likely to motivate salespeople to be genuine in representing themselves, including acknowledging weaknesses. Instead, they are more inclined to emphasize accomplishments and strengths, sometimes exaggerating their abilities without revealing vulnerabilities. Formally,

H1a: Customer orientation will positively influence authentic self-expression.
H1b: Customer orientation will negatively influence authentic self-enhancement.
H1c: Customer orientation will negatively influence exaggerated self-enhancement.
H2a: Selling orientation will negatively influence authentic self-expression.
H2b: Selling orientation will positively influence authentic self-enhancement.
H2c: Selling orientation will negatively influence exaggerated self-enhancement.

Outcomes of salesperson self-presentation

Authentic self-expression can lead to favorable assessments from others as it boosts perceptions of integrity and mutual trust within a dyadic relationship (Burke and Stets 1999; Kim et al. 2023; Mayer and Gavin 2005). While authentic self-expression has a positive effect on employees' trust from coworkers, self-enhancement (i.e., authentic, and exaggerated) decreases such trust leading to lower job performance as perceived by their supervisors (Kim et al. 2023). Accordingly, we argue that the way a salesperson presents oneself can impact work- and customer-related outcomes (i.e., emotional exhaustion and customer satisfaction). As salesperson authenticity is negatively correlated with extrinsic motivation, in which the salesperson is motivated by monetary means and not by the selling job (Beeler, Zablah, and Rapp 2021), it is possible that self-presentation authenticity (i.e., authentic self-expression and authentic self-enhancement) is less likely to exhaust salespeople and more likely to increase customer satisfaction. Indeed, authenticity is more likely to be associated with positive emotions and emotional expression (e.g., Kim 2021; Yagil and Medler-Liraz 2014). For that, authenticity could decrease the level of experienced emotional exhaustion (e.g., Huppertz et al. 2020) and increase customer satisfaction (Grandey et al. 2005). Formally,

H3a(b): Authentic self-expression will negatively (positively) influence emotional exhaustion (customer satisfaction).

H4a(b): Authentic self-enhancement will negatively (positively) influence emotional exhaustion (customer satisfaction).

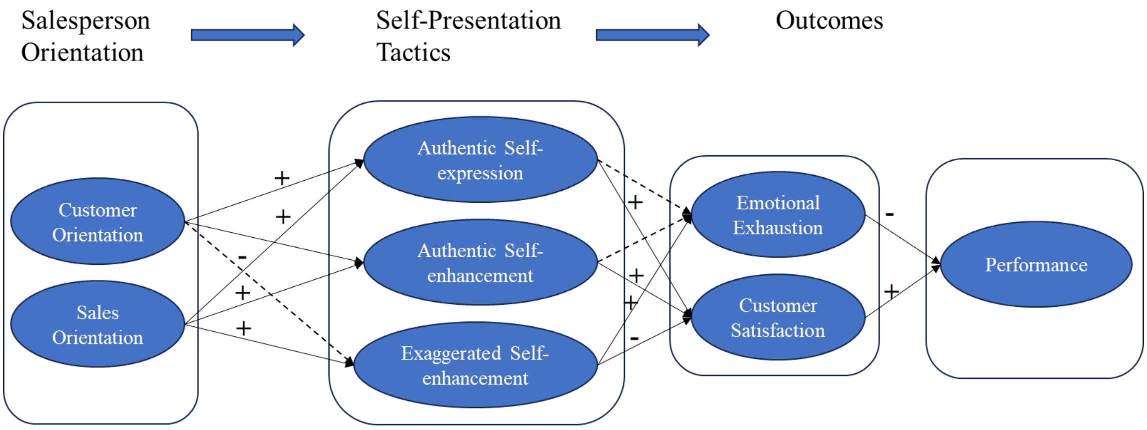
H5a(b): Exaggerated self-enhancement will positively (negatively) influence emotional exhaustion (customer satisfaction).

Emotional exhaustion is recognized for its detrimental impact on salespeople's performance, depleting their resources and diminishing motivation and resilience (e.g., Darrat, Atinc, and Babin 2016; Edmondson, Matthews, and Ambrose 2019). This state of exhaustion also leads to cognitive impairment, hindering their ability to think critically and make effective decisions (e.g., Brown, Locander, and Locander 2022; Kulikowski 2021). Conversely, customer satisfaction has been shown to bolster sales performance (e.g., Ahearne, Mathieu, and Rapp 2005). Satisfied customers are more inclined to make purchases from the salesperson, and heightened customer satisfaction contributes to the job satisfaction of salespeople (Zablah et al. 2016), thereby optimizing overall performance. Formally,

H6: Emotional exhaustion will negatively influence performance.

H7: Customer satisfaction will positively influence performance.

Framework



Note: + and – above solid arrows denote directions of significant relationships; dotted arrows denote non-significant relationships

Method

Using the services of a market research company that manages respondent panels, data was collected through an online survey of business-to-business (B2B) salespeople. In all, 303 respondents completed the survey of which 46% (54%) were male (female), about 54% had 2 or more years of college education, and approximately 45% (55%) were predominantly engaged in selling B2B products (services). Established scales (seven-point; 1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 7 = “Strongly Agee”) were used to measure all constructs included in the study.

Data analysis was performed using partial least squares – structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. Following prescribed protocols (Hair et al. 2019), individual item loadings were scrutinized for item reliabilities, which resulted in one item each for authentic self-expression and customer satisfaction being dropped for low loadings.

The path coefficients provide support for eleven (11) out of fourteen (14) hypotheses. Please see Table 1 for the results.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from our research indicate that the way B2B salespeople present themselves to their customers has an impact not just on customers' but also has an impact on the level of emotional exhaustion experienced by these salespeople. Furthermore, customer orientation of salespeople is likely to have a more positive impact on customer attitudes as well as on the emotional exhaustion experienced by salespeople. While this is a useful first step, future studies could look into continuing this research in a longitudinal setup where the frequency with which salespeople practice self-expression, self-enhancement might have long term consequences into how customer relationships are built over time. Furthermore, getting customer perspectives on how they actually perceive the self-expression and self-enhancement tactics by salespeople would make for some interesting reconciliation of the key findings of this research, which is based on the perceptions of salespeople.

Table 1: Results of Hypotheses Tests

Hypothesis	Coefficient	T stat	P values	Result
H1a: Cust. Orien. -> Auth. Self-Exp	0.43	6.13	0.00	Supported
H1b: Cust. Orien. -> Auth. Self-Enh	0.46	6.39	0.00	Supported
H1c: Cust. Orien. -> Exagg. Self-Enh	-0.04	0.62	0.27	Not Supported
H2a: Selling Orien -> Auth. Self-Exp	-0.15	2.45	0.01	Supported
H2b: Selling Orien. -> Auth. Self-Enh	0.12	2.02	0.02	Supported
H2c: Selling Orien. -> Exagg. Self-Enh	0.68	14.50	0.00	Supported
H3a: Auth. Self-Exp -> Emo Exhaustion	-0.08	1.08	0.14	Not Supported
H3b: Auth. Self-Exp -> Cust. Satisfaction	0.28	4.20	0.00	Supported
H4a: Auth. Self-Enh -> Emo Exhaustion	-0.08	1.04	0.15	Not Supported
H4b: Auth. Self-Enh -> Cust. Satisfaction	0.26	4.39	0.00	Supported
H5a: Exagg. Self-Enh -> Emo Exhaustion	0.18	2.60	0.01	Supported
H5b: Exagg. Self-Enh -> Cust. Satisfaction	-0.22	4.63	0.00	Supported
H6: Emo Exhaustion -> Performance	-0.14	2.32	0.01	Supported
H7: Cust. Satisfaction -> Performance	0.32	7.12	0.00	Supported

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End of Relationship Marketing for B2B Digital Products?

-Shifting roles in the Buying Center with Product Led Growth (PLG)-

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Abstract

Aim and Theoretical Background: Relationship marketing has long been considered a foundational strategy in B2B marketing for fostering customer loyalty and driving sales. Originating in industrial marketing, concepts like the buying center (Johnston and Bonoma, 1981, Webster and Wind 1972) and buy task (Bunn, 1993) provided frameworks for understanding the complex decision-making processes within organizations. Over time, the advent of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions, exemplified by platforms like Salesforce.com, revolutionized how businesses managed and nurtured these relationships, aiming to establish themselves as indispensable partners to their clients.

Traditional Buying Center Roles: To recap, the traditional buying center roles in industrial settings (as taught in marketing books following Johnston and Bonoma 1981) include an informal organization comprising of an initiator who initiates the buying process, the influencer who can be an outsider like a consultant, the gatekeeper who can be a secretary to the decision maker, the decision maker , the buyer who issues the purchase order and finally the user who will use the product. The user is traditionally considered as a weaker link in the buying center.

In contrast, Product Led Growth (PLG) puts the user at the center of B2B marketing without deploying the sales force to interact with the user.

Transition to Product Led Growth (PLG): PLG is led by engineers (nerds/techies) who are less comfortable selling and I speculate just decided to focus just on the user. del Palacio (2022) maintains that with the Covid-19 pandemic, traditional B2B marketing strategies were halted as everyone was working from home resulting in great growth in the PLG model. Thus, while, Zoom was founded in 2013 it had only 10 million daily meeting in 2019 which skyrocketed to 300 million meetings a day (Libert and Davenport 2022).

Characteristics of PLG: At the heart of PLG lies the notion of empowering users through self-service models and intuitive product design that provides an experience of “value first” before payment (Thorsten, 2023). Thus, companies embracing PLG, such as Zoom, prioritize user experience by offering

free trials, low individual use prices, and minimal reliance on customer IT support as the software is provided as a service (SaaS) based on the cloud. This user-centric approach not only streamlines the adoption process but also positions the end-user as the primary influencer within the buying center, thereby reshaping traditional decision-making dynamics.

Research Questions: Considering this paradigm shift, several research questions emerge:

1. Which B2B digital services are best suited to embrace the PLG model, which focuses on the user and circumvents traditional relationship marketing methods and the buying center?
2. How can B2B digital services differentiate between those that could thrive under PLG and those necessitating traditional relationship marketing strategies?
3. PLG models without the stickiness of B2B relationships allow for easy switching from one PLG supplier to another. How can PLG marketers build a moat around their business model?
4. PLG models with their focus on the user are able to get the job done (Herrmann 2022) with adoption right from the start unlike solutions with long adoption cycles (eg. traditional ERP systems). How do managements and investors view this potential advantage.
5. Is there untapped potential for applying a PLG approach in B2B markets traditionally associated with equipment, raw materials, and consumables?

Methodology: As a work in progress, I am open to different methodologies including experimentation, interviews, surveys and published company data.

Contribution: In conclusion, the shift towards Product-Led Growth represents a fundamental shift in how B2B companies approach marketing and sales. By prioritizing user experience and self-service capabilities, PLG offers a compelling alternative to traditional relationship marketing methodologies, enabling companies to drive customer acquisition and retention through user—and product-centric strategies. Exploring the research questions will help define the boundaries of the PLG approach, if any, in B2B relationship marketing.

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Extended Abstract

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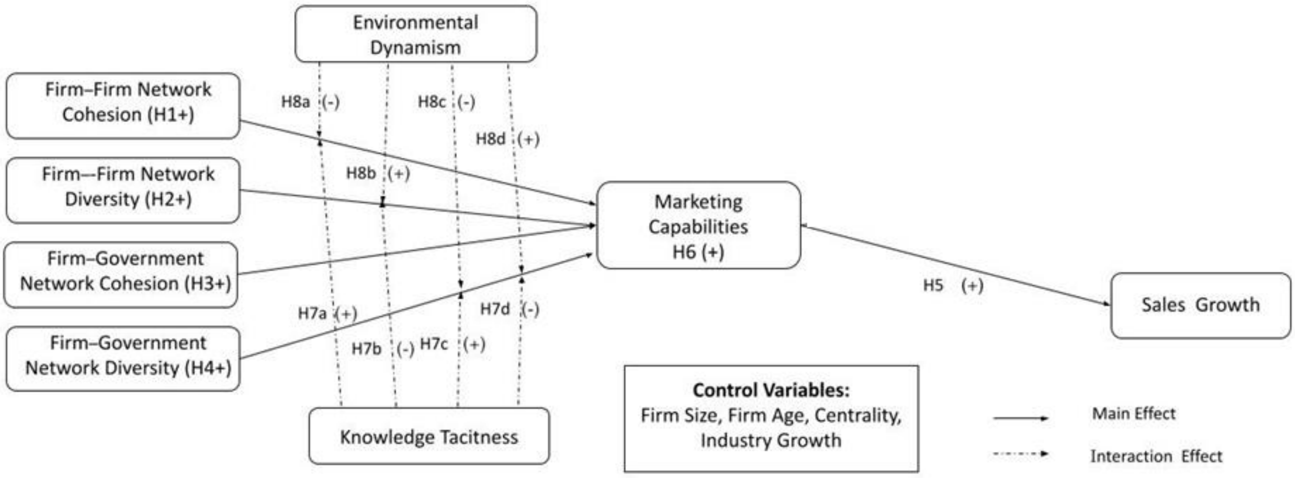
Introduction:

Marketing capabilities, defined as "the bundles of marketing skills and accumulated knowledge, exercised through organizational processes that enable a firm to carry out its marketing activities" (Moorman & Day, 2016, p. 11), have long been recognized as a source of competitive advantage. Extant marketing studies have highlighted the contribution of marketing capabilities to new product development, profitability, market share, sales revenue, and customer satisfaction (Orr et al., 2011; Saeed et al., 2016; Song et al., 2005; Wu, 2013).

Despite the importance marketing capabilities, there are few discussions in the literature on fostering the development of these capabilities (Morgan et al., 2018). While the CMO Survey (2018) indicated that external sources, such as network connections, contribute to the development of marketing capabilities but have received limited research attention. Studies based on social network theory have suggested that external network connections provide access to resources, information, knowledge and technology from outside the organization (Wang et al., 2017).

Drawing from resource-based theory, social network theory, and the contingency perspective, we assert that network connections facilitate marketing capabilities by accessing external knowledge resources not present within the organization (Kemper et al., 2011). Specifically, it focuses on the contribution of the firm–firm (i.e., network cohesion and diversity) and firm–government (i.e., network cohesion and diversity) networks to firm marketing capabilities. In addition, we contend that the contribution of networks to marketing capabilities would vary depending on the environmental conditions and the nature of knowledge. Moreover, we investigate the mediating effect of marketing capabilities in the relationship between firm–firm and firm–government networks and firm performance.

Figure 1. The conceptual model of the study.



Design/methodology/approach:

The unit of analysis was established at the firm level and the primary data was obtained from sample size of 186 B2B firm respondents. The network data encompasses both one-mode and two-mode network structures, where the one-mode data reflects the inter-firm relationships, and the bipartite network represents the relationships between firms and government actors.

Findings:

We found support for the positive main effect of firm–firm network cohesion on marketing capabilities (β = 0.25, p < 0.01). However, the results failed to support firm–government network cohesion on marketing capabilities (β = −0.05, p > 0.05). The results also provided support for both firm–firm network diversity and firm–government network diversity contribute to the development of marketing capabilities (β = 0.21, p < 0.05; β = 0.23, p < 0.05, respectively). Moreover, marketing capabilities had a strong effect on sales growth (β = 0.36, p < 0.01). The results demonstrated that marketing capabilities were a significant mediator in the effect of firm–firm network cohesion (β = 0.08, p < 0.05), firm–firm network diversity (β = 0.06, p < 0.05), and firm–government network diversity (β = 0.06, p < 0.05) on sales growth.

The moderating effect of knowledge tacitness in the relationship between firm–firm network cohesion and marketing capabilities was significant ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, knowledge tacitness positively moderated the effect of firm–government network cohesion on marketing capabilities ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$). The findings showed that the moderating effect of knowledge tacitness in the relationship between firm–firm network diversity and marketing capabilities was ultimately insignificant ($\beta = -0.10$, $p > 0.05$). Similarly, the moderating effect of knowledge tacitness in the relationship between firm–government network diversity and marketing capabilities was negative and insignificant ($\beta = -0.13$, $p > 0.05$).

Environmental dynamism negatively moderated the relationship between firm–firm network cohesion and marketing capabilities ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < 0.01$). However, the moderating effect of environmental dynamism in the relationship between firm–government network cohesion and marketing capabilities was negative but insignificant ($\beta = -0.12$, $p > 0.05$). The findings indicated that the moderating effect of environmental dynamism was positive and significant in the relationship between firm–firm network diversity and marketing capabilities ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$). However, the moderating effect of environmental dynamism was insignificant in the relationship between firm–government network diversity and marketing capabilities ($\beta = 0.06$, $p > 0.05$).

Conclusion:

The findings of this study have theoretical and practical significance. The study adds to the marketing literature by providing evidence of the contribution of external network partners to the development of marketing capabilities. It also highlights the value of marketing capabilities in translating external knowledge resources into a performance advantage. In addition, the study also provides a guide to marketing practitioners in building and managing their external network contacts. Moreover, it motivates firms to focus on cultivating their network partners to develop their capabilities, which most marketing departments often ignore.

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Fair or Unfair Play? Decoding (Un)Fairness Perceptions in Crowdsourcing

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Crowdsourcing involves inviting a diverse group of participants, including consumers and non-consumers, to engage in creative contests online (adapted from Howe, 2009). It offers cost-effective and time-efficient advantages (Shao et al., 2012), which explains why crowdsourcing is utilized by over 85% of top global consumer brands (Olenski, 2015). While crowdsourcing brings many benefits, it can also lead to negative fairness perceptions among participants (Djelassi and Cambier, 2022). These participants are not only potential innovators but can also become future customers (Karpukhina et al., 2023). Therefore, managing participants' reactions toward the brand in the crowdsourcing contest is important. Among all participants in such a contest, there is typically just one winner, while many others (failure) are left unrecognized by the brand. These overlooked participants warrant greater attention (Karpukhina et al., 2023; Vellera et al., 2023). Failures reactions toward the brand have received increased interest among scholars, with varying findings. On the one hand, Vellera et al. (2023) showed that being evaluated fail by the brand still has positive effects on the participant-brand relationship. On the other hand, Karpukhina et al. (2023) analyzed that if being evaluated fail, participants would temporarily disengage from the brand and has negative effects on their relationship with the brand. This situation could be worse when participants found out that the brand evaluated the winner they had voted for fail, they not only generated negative fairness perceptions but also angry reactions toward the brand. This discrepancy may be due to differences in participants' experiences during the crowdsourcing process, influencing their fairness perceptions and further reactions to brand.

Our study aims to better understand the contradictory research findings by investigating the role of different evaluator or participants' awareness of explicit selection rules during the crowdsourcing process affects their subsequent fairness perceptions and brand reactions. We analyze these relationships under the fairness theory angle. This theory explains that consumers generate counterfactual thoughts in which they compare the factual outcome with alternative outcomes to assess the extent to which the situation could/should/would have been better or worse (Nicklin, 2013). Counterfactual thoughts consequently lead to (un)fairness perceptions. This research therefore examines the conditions under which participants' counterfactual thoughts drive crowdsourcing (un)fairness perceptions and managerial consequences (i.e., willingness to participate again, brand attachment and word-of-mouth). We further investigate two potential strategies to avoid/recover from unfairness perceptions, namely the role of the evaluator (external experts, brand employees, or consumers) and the selection rule (i.e. precise or vague), by comparing losing to winning consumers' perceptions across two studies (see figure 1).

Our research includes two experiments (we just did fiest experiment about evaluator for now). The first experiment is a 2x3 between-subject design (winners or failures)*(participants are evaluated by external experts, employees, consumers). A total of 572 participants are randomly distributed into one of the six scenarios. Every participant was asked to attend a fictitious contest and then finish following survey. The constructs (counterfactual strength, fairness, WOM, brand attachment and willingness to participate again) were measured using validated scales (Ambrose and Schminke, 2009; Li et al., 2023; Nicklin et al., 2013; Lacoeuilhe, 2000; Wang, 2022). After discarding 149 participants that did not finish the survey yet, the final valid sample was comprised of 423 participants. Our manipulation check is good and $P<0.05$. The factor and reliability analysis were satisfactory. (cumulated variances > 75.591; $\alpha > 0.795$).

According to our result, surprisingly, whether win or lose does not moderate the relationship between counterfactual thinking and fairness perceptions ($p = 0.236$). When participants generate counterfactual thinking, participants win or lose does not affect whether to trigger fairness perceptions. However, findings show a significant moderation effect of the evaluator type on the relationship between counterfactual strength and fairness ($F(1,424)= 22.83$, $p =0.000$). When participants are evaluated by external experts, the relationship between counterfactual thinking and fairness perceptions is moderated (β = -,4423, p= 0.000), when participants are evaluated by external experts, the CT strength is stronger, it will have a higher negative impact on fairness perceptions. Compared to this situation, if participants are evaluated by employees, the CT strength will have a less negative impact on fairness perceptions (β = -,1778 p = 0.05). However, when the contest is evaluated by peer consumers, counterfactual thoughts – though generated – will not affect a contest's fairness perceptions (p = 0.224). Further, our result reveals that fairness perceptions fully mediate the relationship between counterfactual thinking and brand-related variables (ps = 0.00).

Previous research showed that when participants face negative context, counterfactual thinking triggers fairness perceptions (Nicklin et al., 2013). However, our results examined that it depends on the specific context, when participants are evaluated negatively (fail) by consumers, the generated counterfactual thinking will not trigger fairness perceptions. Past literature analyzed that participant voting for the winner positively affects fairness perceptions (Franke et al., 2013), our finding further contributed to crowdsourcing literature by showing when peer participants (consumers) act as evaluators in crowdsourcing contest, they will not moderate the relationship between counterfactual thinking and fairness perceptions. Additionally, our study contributes to past marketing literature (Karpukhina et al., 2023; Vellera et al., 2023) by showing how counterfactual thinking develops fairness perceptions and how it in turn affects the other related brand variables. From the managerial perspective, our expected results could help managers to identify which evaluator helps to decrease unfairness perceptions among failures which in turn will lead to a positive reaction to the brand and probably better transfer failures into potential customers in the future.

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AI preparedness in B2B markets

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1. Abstract

AI, short for Artificial Intelligence is a field of computer science that has been developed and advanced over several decades starting in the mid-20th century. One of the main purposes behind the development of AI was the intention of capturing and simulating human cognitive abilities (Muhlhoff, 2020) to support decision making of humans. With this notion in mind, also in other fields than computer science, many marketers started finding innovative ways to make their business more effective and led AI work faster and more efficient in several business processes both internal and external to organizations (Stone, et al., 2020). Today, AI is an integrated part of many businesses with its use in many marketing related activities, such as sales, distribution, and communication (Balakrishnan & Dwivedi, 2021; Huang & Rust 2021a; Xiao & Kumar 2021; Kushwaha, et al., 2021). In marketing the term AI has been defined as a technology- enabled system for evaluating real-time service scenarios using data collected from digital and/or physical sources to provide personalized recommendations, alternatives, and solutions (Xu, et al., 2020). The application of AI is relevant both for B2C and B2B, for instance to get better customer insights to better personalize offerings and for prediction purposes (Van Esch & Black, 2021). However, while AI research for the B2C sector is broad, such as on how to use AI for business purposes, the B2B level is still at its infancy. Only some contributions within the B2B sector lay the ground for research regarding AI's use, potentials, and applications within industrial markets (de Caigny et al., 2021; Huang and Rust 2021b; Chatterjee et al., 2021). B2C research on AI is only partly relevant for B2B markets because B2B managers face specific challenges when adopting AI due to the complexity of B2B interactions (Babdullah, et al., 2021), and the absent of theoretical knowledge makes the decision even more difficult and they tap into the field of AI, Machine Learning which is an application of AI and other smart technologies. The knowledge gap effects the preparedness of B2B actors to integrate AI technologies in their business. Being

prepared for a new technology is a process that companies need to go through even before implementation decisions. Especially, considering the rapidly evolving business landscape, the implementation of new technologies such as AI has become not just an option, but a necessity for companies striving to stay competitive (Ågerfalk, 2020; Divedi, et al., 2021). Failure to adapt to these innovative technologies can lead to significant disadvantages in the market, as rivals capitalize on the efficiency and capabilities provided by AI and other cutting-edge tools (Adamik & Nowicki, 2018). To ensure competitiveness and relevance in the marketplace, companies must prioritize preparedness for integrating new technologies into their operations. Preparedness extends beyond merely having the necessary resources, staff, and capabilities in place. It encompasses a broader perspective that passes through all hierarchical levels of the organization, including employees, management, and various business departments/functions and as well as the business networks (customers, partners, suppliers). Preparedness is a concept dominantly discussed in literature regarding crises and disaster management, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, geo-political conflicts, or natural disasters, and it is conceptually related to organizational readiness. While digitalization related research measure often quantitatively the readiness of entities, preparedness in this study is analyzed qualitatively and is not an index where an entity can be rated on. It is rather a framework that advises entities on how to be prepared for any types of new disruptive technologies in the future. The term readiness originally was defined as an individual's capacity to participate in a specific future behavior, that is situation specific and can be influenced over-time (Atkinson, 1964). In organizational management literature, the concept of organizational preparedness is defined as a firm's ability for "fast and efficient, after-the-fact responsiveness to sudden discontinuities" (Ansoff, 1975, p. 22). Drawing from extensive research on readiness in the context of digitalization (see e.g., Lavin & Renard, 2020; Issa, et al., 2022.; Holmström, 2022; Rahman, et al., 2023; Tehrani, et al. 2024), it becomes evident that readiness alone is insufficient. While readiness implies being equipped to handle specific technologies within defined time frames, preparedness transcends these limitations. It underscores the importance of cultivating an institutional logic within the organization—a mindset that fosters adaptability to innovative technologies at any given time. Preparedness, therefore, necessitates a holistic approach to organizational development. By prioritizing preparedness, companies not only position themselves to thrive in today's dynamic business environment but also future proof their operations against unforeseen challenges and disruptions. Even though, in our study we adapt to the concept of preparedness, as the concept of readiness is discussed dominantly within digitalization related marketing research, we rely on the discussions of readiness in research on the first place but extend this with our research to the realm of preparedness (in particular organizational preparedness) (Atkinson, 1964; Kumar, et al., 2023; Adamik & Nowicki, 2018). With this gap in mind, we aim to stretch the frontiers of B2B knowledge regarding preparedness to adapt technologies such as AI, and apply multiple case studies to investigate the preparedness of B2B companies for AI with the following research question: *how can B2B companies prepare for disruptive technologies such as AI*? Our findings will serve to provide valuable insights that go beyond mere AI adoption, offering a roadmap for B2B organizations to encourage their preparedness for any new technologies.

Research Methodology

Our study is currently at a very early stage. We adapt an abductive approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Borg & Young, 2018) and apply multiple case study research (Halinen & Törnroos, 2005; Easton, 2010). We will investigate various B2B companies to gain a comprehensive understanding of how these entities prepare disruptive technologies such as AI. For verifying data, triangulation will be performed across the methods of interviews, observations, workshops, and document analysis and seek to uncover insights (Denzin, 2011 in Miles, et al., 2020).

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How Management Capabilities Influence Digitalization and the Organizational Environment in the Adoption of Social Networks' Data Analysis Practices

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Social networks platforms are essential for setting marketing and sales strategies and strengthening ties with clients through carefully selected content that promotes sustainable commercial results over time (Aydin, Uray, and Silahtaroglu 2021). Recent studies in organizational management theory have highlighted the crucial importance of leadership in fostering an environment conducive to digital transformation and adopting advanced data analytics practices (Appio et al. 2021; Zhang, Long, and von Schaewen 2021). This approach offers a valuable theoretical contribution by demonstrating that the adoption of data analytics is more related to the managerial capacity to foster a favorable environment that allows digitalization and, consequently, facilitates the integration of analytical practices in the commercial area with customers to increase profitability (Wielgos, Homburg, and Kuehnl 2021).

Usually, for the business-to-business (B2B) context, the implementation of technology turns out to be a challenge in the sales process (Corsaro and Anzivino 2021) since companies primarily seek to capture and interact with customers, hence the common use of professional platforms like LinkedIn (Koch et al., 2018; Mičík & Mičudová, 2018). There is a clearer orientation toward an efficient construction of customer relationships, giving more attention to the management of complaints, purchase tracking, and post-sale services (Aydin et al. 2021; Fraccastoro, Gabrielsson, and Pullins 2021). Research in this field is modest, highlighting the need for deeper investigation into the role that managers play in promoting a favorable environment for the adoption of these technologies (Li 2020; Martínez-Caro, Cegarra-Navarro, and Alfonso-Ruiz 2020). Based on the mentioned above it addresses a significant gap in the literature, where there are not many studies focused on data analytics practices related to social networks from the perspective of sales and marketing management in B2B.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to examine the influence of management role on the organizational environment, digitalization, and the use of social networks analytical practices. This raises the need to understand how management and organizational culture can influence the adoption of social networks data analytics practices in companies, and how this, in turn, affects communication with consumers and business performance (Ahmad, Abu Bakar, and Ahmad 2019; Chatterjee et al. 2021). From this perspective, the purpose of this research is addressing the social networks analytics practices and these research question arises: RQ1: What is the role of managers in influencing the digital transformation process and fostering an organizational environment favorable for using social networks platforms? RQ2: How do these variables determine the application of social networks analytics practices in organizations?

Besides, this study examines mediating role of variables such as digitalization and organizational environment in the relationship between management role and social networks analytical practices through the proposal of a conceptual model (see figure 1). This article reports how effective social networks management and adopting digital technologies are critical for business success and reputation in the digital age. The need for market-oriented management to maintain sustainable competitive advantages in a volatile and uncertain global environment is highlighted. The hypotheses are evaluated through a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach. The study was applied to 266 managers of companies in Santiago, Chile, through self-administered surveys using the Qualtrics platform.

The results of this empirical study show how that management role has a positive and significant effect on degree of digitalization (H1) and the organizational environment (H2). And in turn these variables positively affect the adoption of social networks analytics practices (H3) and (H4). However, management role has a positively and insignificant effect on the adoption of social networks analytics practices (H5) (see table 1). And the outcomes corroborate that the connection between management capabilities and the adoption of social networks data analytics practices is mediated through the degree of digitalization and the organizational environment, highlighting the importance of mediating role of these internal factors (see table 2). The findings also reveal that degree of digitalization is partially mediating the relationship between management role and social network analytical practices as indirect effects are statistically significant (β= 0,204, $p<0.05$). Furthermore, organizational environment is also a partial mediator between management role and social network analytical practices (β= 0,194, $p<0.05$). Based on these results, the hypotheses of this research are supported. Thus, this research provides empirical evidence by identifying the internal factors that influence the use and employment of social networks analytical practices in the marketing and sales area for B2B contexts. Furthermore, this study presents business implications regarding the importance of analyzing the data collected on social networks for greater customer knowledge and implementing efficient marketing and sales strategies that help increase business profitability.

Figure 1: Conceptual model and hypothesis

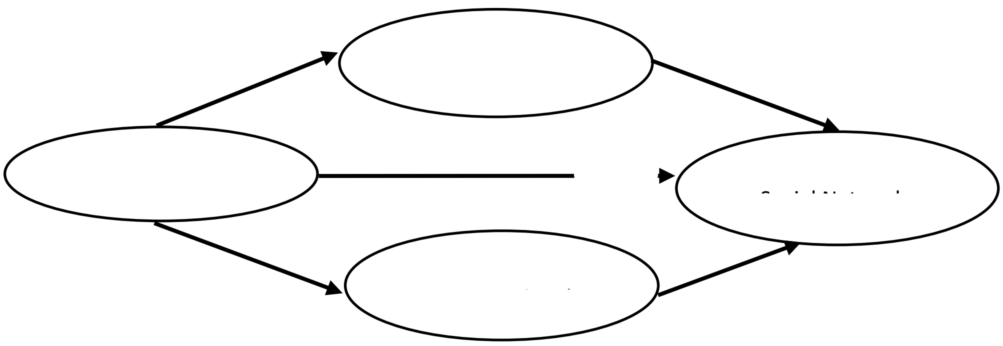

Table 1: Estimations of the hypothesis proposed using the SEM model.

Hypotheses	Structural path	Estimation	p-value	SE	CR	Decision
H1	MR → DD	0.595	***	0.065	9.129	Accepted
H2	MR → OE	0.419	***	0.057	7.376	Accepted
H3	DD → SMAP	0.205	***	0.054	3.79	Accepted
H4	OE → SNAP	0.276	***	0.075	3.654	Accepted
H5	MR → SNAP	0.013	0.829	0.058	0.216	Rejected

Table 2: Estimations of the hypothesis proposed using the SEM model.

Hypotheses	Structural path	Total effects	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Decision

H6	MR → DD → SNAP	0,324***	0,12	0,204***	Supported. Indirect effects are significant
H7	MR → OE → SNAP	0,32***	0,126	0,194***	Supported. Indirect effects are significant

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When advertising and intangible assets change the way that myopic marketing affects stock performance

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Drawing on Asymmetric Information, we propose that stakeholders react to the firm's information by reducing marketing investment (myopia) at the same time increasing capitalizing on advertising and intangible assets. Marketing myopia refers to "marketing actions motivated by immediate, tangible outcomes, such as growth in current earnings and stock prices, without regard to their longer-term implications" (Saboo, Chakravarty, & Grewal, 2016, p. 657). Marketing myopia practice indicates a reduction in marketing investment across specific periods, as firms drop the amount of investments in selling, general, and administrative (Mizik, 2010).

Advertising expenditure refers to the investment that firms allocate in promotions, advertising and propaganda (Srinivasan & Ramani, 2019). Advertising expenditure should be a relevant moderator as previous investigations showed that firms often engage in earnings practices to reduce advertising expenses (Kaur et al., 2021) and that these practices deteriorate company cash flows (Saboo et al. 2016). Intangible assets refer to the resources that are presented in the balance sheet but are immaterial when generating firm value (Haji, & Mohd Ghazali, 2018). Intangible assets would be a contextual moderator as previous research found interactions of it with inventory efficiency (Manikas et al., 2019) and ownership strategy (Contractor et al., 2016). We expand the rationality of these two contextual moderators toward changing the main effect of myopic marketing practices on stock performance.

Hypotheses. **H_1** Myopic marketing focuses on marketing strategies that prioritize immediate gains over keeping long-term competitive advantage. Managers should cut marketing expenses as a way to keep their jobs, save their reputation, increase their compensation (Jenter & Kannan, 2015), meet earnings expectations, and present a better balance sheet to investors. When managers implement a myopic orientation, they should be able – by cutting such spending – to "temporarily inflate earnings to meet or exceed investors' expectations" (Chung, & Low, 2017, p. 660). Therefore, in the short term, the main effect of myopic marketing on stock performance should be positive. The rationality for doing myopic practices in the balance sheet reflects 1) pressure from the financial market and 2) an intention from the "investors rely on current-term accounting measures to form expectations of future-term profits" (Mizik & Jacobson, 2007, p.361). In that sense, myopic practices should increase current profits and lead to enhanced current-term stock prices. Lehmann (2004, p. 74) suggests that this practice could be dangerous, as rationality "over concerns about short-term results".

H_2 As we are analyzing stock performance, myopic marketing indicates a reduction in marketing investment and R&D, which is opposite to a *high* investment in advertising. The opposite direction indicates an information asymmetry between these two financial decisions, as they are showing contradictory signals. Stakeholders might consider a lack of efficient firm resources when there are marketing investment cuts with high advertising allocation, leading to an undesirable stock decision (Eberhart et al. 2004). Therefore, the interactive combination of myopic marketing with a *high* investment on advertising should present an opposite signal to investors, reducing stock performance.

H_3 Stakeholders should be able to analyze the information asymmetry between low marketing investment and high intangible assets, reducing the value of stock performance because they walk in opposite directions when a firm decreases investments in innovation and R&D efforts (Bereskin et al., 2021; Chakravarty, & Grewal, 2011) -- restraining its capability to grow and drive future sales – it changes the way that marketing activities "affect intangible assets" in the long-term effects (Mizik, 2010, p. 595). Thus, a reduced marketing investment should be incongruent with a high value of intangible assets, generating a negative moderating role on stock performance, reducing it even more. While myopic marketing may still yield short-term stock outcomes, the long-term impact on performance is likely to be dampened when firms capitalize high levels of intangible assets. Figure 1 presents the model.

Method. We collect data from Compustat for firm data and use Center for Research in Security Prices (CRSP) when measuring stock performance. Our panel data ranges from 2014 to 2022, has 2,296 firms, generating 12,347 observations. Myopic marketing is a dummy variable, as 0 is the non-myopic firms (positioned in the intercept) and 1 is the myopic firms. To measure myopic marketing, we combine surprises in earnings, marketing intensity, and research and development intensity (Mizik & Jacobson, 2007a, Mizik, 2010). Earnings, measured as return-on-assets (ROA), is the ratio of operating income to total assets. Marketing intensity is the ratio of selling, general, and administrative expenses (SG&A) minus research and development (R&D) expenses to total assets and R&D intensity is the ratio of research and development expenses to total assets (Bendig et al., 2018, Currim et al., 2018). We used auto-regressive econometric models with fixed effects to identify surprises in ROA, marketing intensity, and R&D intensity following prior research (cf. Bendig et al. 2018; Mizik 2010).

Results. The initial findings suggest that when firms implement a myopic practice in the short term (vs. non-myopic practice), it increases the stock performance (b = .017, p<.01). The beta coefficient shows the difference across both groups is .017. Across the next four periods, this main effect becomes non-significant (b = .013, b = .013, b = .011 and b = .012, p=*ns*). The moderating role is significant and negative in the short-term (b = -.61, p<.001), and in the middle-term (b = -.49, b = -.49, p<.001). However, it does not work in the long term (b = -.06 b = -.12 p=*ns*). The third hypothesis deals with the moderating role of intangibility. The effect is significant and negative in the short- and middle-term (b = -.06 p<.001; b = -.049, p<.02 and ; b = -.045, p<.04).

Conclusions. Firms that invest in advertising and propaganda often prioritize immediate results such as brand awareness, sales, conversions, and demand. Firms are focusing on disseminating convincing communications through various media channels, in order to change and influence customers' attitudes. However, high investments in advertising and propaganda are not congruent with myopic practices as they present an opposite signal to investors. We call this problem an asymmetry of information (i.e. lack of sustainable growth), as investors can note this conflicting direction in the long term.

Intangible assets suggest that firms are investing in intellectual property, brand reputation, and customer relationships. A high value in these assets can lead to sustained competitive advantages, better market positioning, and revenues. We found that a high value in intangible assets with a marketing investment cutting causes damage to stock performance. Investors can see the information asymmetry between a high investment in intangible assets that leads to the development of new services, brand reputation, and processes that drive revenue growth, while at the same time noting the firm decision of cutting marketing expenses.

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Intangible assets, investments in marketing and market-to-book as drivers of innovation capacity in the medium and long term in Brazil (Emergent Market)

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The investigation of the association between investments in intangible assets and the respective returns from innovation has attracted the attention of professionals who seek to understand how companies are applying market strategies that involve different assets, such as marketing, intellectual property, brand, trademark and others (Magro, Silva, Padilha & Klann, 2016). The literature has shown that, in the long term, investments in intangible assets such as research, systems, and software generate real returns and company growth (Abreu et al., 2015). Other investments in intangible assets can be in the form of managing the firm's structure, systems, products, culture, climate and technology (Albuquerque-Filho, et al., 2020, Campos, Santos & Donadon, 2017) and creating new products and services (Abreu, Bruni, Gomes & Paixão, 2015). Although the literature is aware of investments in intangible assets as business growth strategies, little is known about how they explain business innovation capacity.

Recognizing that companies that stand out are those that have the ability to meet customer and market needs, that have innovation skills and that are able to coordinate internal and external resources in search of strategic advantage (Vincenzi & Cunha, 2019), it becomes if necessary, investigate which drivers drive innovation capacity. First, the literature suggests that intangible assets must be evaluated in order to understand their effects on the ability to innovate, especially regarding adaptation to the conditions imposed by the competitive environment (Ramos & Zilber, 2015). Despite the argument that intangible assets have a potential effect on innovation capacity, empirical evidence of this relationship has not yet been demonstrated (Gamayuni 2015). Second, the expansion of investments in marketing can be a second driver of innovation capacity by measuring the percentage change in advertising spending in year t in relation to the previous year (t-1). Increased investments in marketing are considered an intangible asset, as they are spent on advertising, communication, sales and others (Guilding & Pike, 1990). Third, a high market-to-book value reflects the investor's perception that the company has “extra” in terms of assets such as intellectual property, brand value, human capital and others (Hertzel & Li, 2010). These assets are not directly captured or measured in financial statements, but can be drivers of the company's capacity for innovation and future growth. Therefore, the authors position the market-to-book asset as a predictor of the firm's innovation.

Hypotheses

(H_1) We suggest in this study that there is a positive relationship between intangible assets and innovation capacity (H_1). Resource-Based Theory highlights the importance of an organization's intangible assets, such as goodwill, brand equity, intellectual property, strong organizational culture and relationships with customers and suppliers, as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Achimugu, Ike, Agbaeze & Isichei, 2021). The central idea of Resource-Based Theory is to have intangible assets -- such as an organizational culture focused on these elements -- that provide an innovative competitive advantage, given that these resources must be difficult for competitors to copy, which creates a situation in which the company can maintain its advantage for an extended period (Junior & Pereira, 2023). Therefore, intangible assets should increase investment levels in innovation because they are resources that provide more conditions for product experimentation, R&D, and new processes in the short term (Aguiar, Tortoli, Figari & Junior, 2021). **(H_2)** Marketing investment activities include market research and analysis, and understanding consumer needs, preferences and trends (Guilding & Pike, 1990). Investment in marketing is defined as the percentage change in advertising expenditure made by the firm (Seggie et al., 2007). Marketing investments help companies be more innovative in the medium term by positioning them as industry leaders, attracting customers who are willing to pay more (Hinterhuber & Liozu, 2017) and communicating the unique features and benefits of offerings (Fuglsang 2008), helping a company to stand out in a competitive market and attract customers. The positive association between marketing investments and innovation ($H2$) in the medium term occurs because it helps shape the perception of a premium product and innovative brand in the minds of consumers in the medium term (Henard, & Dacin, 2010).

Method. Aiming to understand these influences, the authors obtain data from 2015 to 2022 (panel data of 8 years) from Standard & Poors with 487 companies (n = 2,000 observations). We analyze the panel data with fixed effects regression models to test the hypotheses, evaluating effects on innovation in the a) short-term and b) medium-term. The 487 companies over a period of 8 years generated a number of short-term *observations* n = 2,247; in the medium term n = 1,806 and in the long-term n = 2,653. The dependent variable of the study is the increase in innovation capacity. The mediation of this variable occurred through the percentage change in R&D expenses in year t in relation to the previous year = t-1. **Results**. The research results indicate that the intangible assets rises the innovation capacity in the short and medium-term. Investments in intangible assets, such as brand equity, customer relationships and organizational culture, establish the foundations for innovation, promoting an environment conducive to creativity and new product development. Intangible assets increase innovation levels because they are resources that provide more conditions for product experimentation, R&D, and new processes in the short term (Aguiar, Tortoli, Figari & Junior, 2021). Second, investments in marketing increase innovation capacity only in the short term. Marketing investments can generate willingness to pay more (Hinterhuber & Liozu, 2017) and communicate the unique features and benefits of offerings (Fuglsang 2008), helping a company to stand out in a competitive market and attract customers. Marketing investments drive the initial adoption of the product/service, thus accelerating the innovation process and increasing market competitiveness. Finally, market-to-book (which reflects the investor's perspective on firms with human capital assets, brand, etc.) has a positive effect on innovation. H_1 in short and medium term ($\beta 1$ = .42, p< .05; $\beta 1$ = .67, p < .05) and H_2 in short term β_2 = .05, p< .01. In **conclusion**, the strategic allocation of resources to intangible assets, marketing and market-to-book initiatives have a significant impact on innovation capacity in the short term, but with unclear results in the long term. First, investments in intangible assets, such as brand equity, customer relationships and organizational culture, establish the foundations for innovation, promoting an environment conducive to creativity and new product development. Intangible assets increase innovation levels because they are resources that provide more conditions for product experimentation, R&D, and new processes in the short term (Aguiar, Tortoli, Figari & Junior, 2021). Furthermore, intangible assets serve as lasting sources of competitive advantage and are difficult to imitate, allowing companies to continually innovate, adapt to changes in market dynamics and maintain leadership positions in their industries (Gupta et al., 2008). Second, in the short term, marketing investments can generate willingness to pay more (Hinterhuber & Liozu, 2017) and communicate the unique features and benefits of offerings (Fuglsang 2008), helping a company stand out in a competitive market and attract customers.

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The evolution of the B2B customer journey:

How does digitalization change the roles of marketing and sales in B2B markets?

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Purpose

The digitalization drives changes in the way B2B buyers and sellers interact (Ahearne et al., 2021). In this context, the customer journey is "one of the most promising concepts in understanding business-to-business (B2B) buying and selling processes in modern digital environments" (Rusthollkarhu et al., 2021, p. 1). However, the necessary integration in the B2B field is missing, as existing studies focus to a large extent on the B2C market (Purmonen et al., 2023; Witell et al., 2020). This study aims to enhance the scarce existing literature on the impact of digitalization on the B2B customer journey from the customer and the supplier perspective (Abraham et al., 2023; Lundin & Kindström, 2023) by investigating the customer journey across various industries, differentiating between different buying situations, involving multiple buying center and selling center members and examining the impact of type of product (complex vs. non-complex) on the customer journey.

B2B marketing and sales are forced to transform in order to react to the altering customer journey, therefore the changing roles and tasks of marketing and sales are under investigation as part of the above mentioned customer journey analysis. Prior research has either investigated changes in B2B marketing (Saura et al., 2021; Setkute & Dibb, 2022) or sales (Corsaro & Maggioni, 2022; Oh, 2017; Wengler et al., 2021) against the backdrop of digitalization. This study enriches the literature by analysing the transformations in both functions.

Research objectives and research questions

The first research objective is to explore the customer journey against the background of digitalization from the customer and the supplier perspective. Secondly, crucial touchpoints along the customer journey shall be identified. Further research objectives are to integrate the buying and selling center perspective for conclusions and to investigate the changing roles and tasks of marketing and sales due to the digitalization.

The overarching research questions are:

RQ 1: How is the B2B customer journey evolving against the background of digitalization from the customer and the supplier perspective?

RQ 2: What are the consequences of the evolution of the B2B customer journey for marketing and sales?

Theoretical background

The interaction approach underscores the importance of interactions between buying and selling centers and is the frame of reference for the customer journey analysis. In B2B transactions between buyers and sellers cannot be seen as two separate, isolated processes, but as interrelation interactions between different actors from the buying and selling side (Backhaus & Voeth, 2014; Ford, 1980). Moreover, B2B buying and selling have a multi-personal characteristic, as B2B customers are not single, individual customers, but rather consist of multiple people involved in the buying process (Backhaus & Voeth, 2014; Webster & Wind, 1972). All members involved in the buying process, and therefore the customer journey, can be captured conceptually as the buying center (Robinson et al., 1967), which on the supplier side is mirrored by the multi-personal selling center (Hutt & Speh, 1995).

Methodology

Semi-structured interviews are the data collection method in order to explore the evolving customer journey by investigating changes of transformation in the buying and selling process against the background of digitalization (relates to RQ 1) and to examine the changes in the roles and tasks of marketing and sales due to the digitalization (relates to RQ 2). The sample consists of buying centers and their members (buyer, decider, user) and selling centers and their members (salespeople, marketer, customer service) of targeted US B2B companies across various industries (such as manufacturing, automotive, food, chemicals, steel, and technology) standing for complex and/or non-complex products.

The interview guidelines for the buying and selling centers consist of questions regarding touchpoints, digital technologies and the roles and tasks of marketing and sales, taking into account past to present and future.

Expected findings

Customer journey touchpoints are likely to undergo changes against the backdrop of digitalization, since customers change their behavior. Customers are expected to be empowered due to access to a multitude of online information, to reduce face-to-face communciation with the supplier and to favor technology-enabled interactions. At the same time suppliers might face a lack of touchpoint control. As a consequence, the customer journey is expected to become more customer-centric. Digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) are likely to transform the role of marketing and sales in B2B, possibly leading to a power shift from sales towards marketing as a coordinating function.

Key contributions

The study should enrich the scarce knowledge on the impact of digitalization on the B2B customer journey by collecting qualitative information from both customer and supplier side against the background of three buying situations (new task, modified rebuy, straight rebuy) and taking into account complex and non-complex products. The research approach to examine how the roles and tasks of marketing and sales are changing against the background of buying situations and product types is unique and allows a differentiated view on the customer journey compared to the existing literature.

"Avoiding inadequate solution specifications in business market value-creation processes: fine-tuning customer-centricity by adopting an end-user-centric perspective"

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Abstract

The concept of customer centricity enjoys substantial popularity in academia and business practice. In the realm of business markets, however, the concept poses the challenge of determining who the customer is given the multidimensionality of companies as well as value-creation processes, which span across multiple market-stages. The unawareness of the end-user's requirement and needs lead regularly to insufficient or exaggerated solution specifications, which result in inefficiencies (e.g. waste of resources) or ineffectiveness (e.g. slow-downed diffusion processes of or even failed innovations). The authors of this abstract therefore suggest fine-tuning customer-centricity by adopting an end-user-centric perspective in business market value-creation processes. They illustrate their proposition based on conceptual considerations as well as exploratory findings.

1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, marketing researchers have increasingly advocated for the adoption of more customer-centric approaches to value creation, both in consumer markets and business markets (Shah et al., 2006; Sheth et al., 2000). However, in the context of business markets, this presents a significant challenge for companies as determining who exactly constitutes "the customer" becomes complex due to the multitude of actors within corporate organizations. Consequently, there arises uncertainty regarding whose requirements and needs should be prioritized when developing solutions within customer-centric value-creation processes.

In this abstract, the authors propose, based on conceptual analysis and exploratory insights, that refining a company's customer-centricity by embracing an end-user-centric perspective is crucial. The conceptual and exploratory findings underscore that the farther apart the end user of a solution is from its co-creators, the less influence it has in defining the solution specifications – and thus the higher the danger of inadequate solution specifications upstream the supply chain.

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2 Literature Review

The concept of customer centricity has been a subject of academic discourse for several decades, but has only gained momentum since the 1990s when customer-related considerations became increasingly pivotal in business operations (Shah et al., 2006; Sheth et al., 2000). At its core, customer centricity aims at creating value for the customer as well as for the supplier (Boulding et al., 2005; Grönroos, 2011; Kumar & Reinartz, 2016), thus benefiting both alike (Ritter & Walter, 2012).

In contexts primarily focused on consumer affairs, customer centricity has spurred diverse and robust research avenues. Academics interchangeably employ the terms “customer” or “user” based on their disciplinary backgrounds (e.g., marketing, innovation, IT, engineering), though the essence remains similar. These research streams pertaining to customer/user centricity can be broadly categorized into the following three:

- *Business Models:* Within this realm of investigation, scholars delve into the development of customer-/user-centric business models, wherein the primary focus lies not on technology but on the customer/user (Chesbrough, 2007; Hienerth et al., 2011; Ritter & Pederson, 2020).
- *New Product/Innovation Development*: Originating from the concept of “user-centric innovation” through “lead users” (von Hippel, 1986), this area of study has evolved towards “open/user innovation” (Chesbrough, 2003; West & Bogers, 2014), where customers/users actively participate in a company's innovation process, influencing new product development and even inspiring innovations.
- *Interaction/Usage Processes:* Presently, much research concentrates on themes such as “customer experience” (Jain et al., 2017; Meyer & Schwager, 2007) or “user experience/design” (Hassenzahl, 2013). By employing tools like the “customer/user journey” (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Purmonen et al., 2023), companies strive to deliver seamless customer/user experiences and enhance the usability of their solutions.

In much of the research on “customer/user centricity”, there is an underlying assumption that suppliers and customers collaborate to co-create value (Grönroos, 2011). While this holds true in direct business relationships, it may not necessarily apply to complex value creation processes. Within business markets, these processes often extend across multiple market-stages (Anderson et al., 2008; Dahlquist & Griffith, 2014), encompassing various entities such as suppliers, original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), and end-users.

The significance of the end-user in determining solution specifications in business markets has long been recognized in the literature (Homburg et al., 2020; Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012; Wengler & Kolk, 2023). However, in practice, the fragmentation of the value chain often results in limited end-user influence throughout the value creation process. This limitation is likely due to a lack of awareness or understanding among preceding market-stages regarding the specific needs of subsequent stages. Consequently, OEMs may establish insufficient or exaggerated solution requirements during the value-creation process, which may not align with the genuine requirements of end-users. Such discrepancies can lead to inefficiencies and ineffectiveness within the value-creation process.

While the adoption of customer centricity is widely recognized as pivotal for ensuring a firm's long-term success (Shah et al., 2006), companies operating within business markets still grapple with the transformation into customer-centric organizations (Ulaga, 2018). Apart from the challenge of navigating across multiple market-stages, businesses typically exhibit a multidimensional structure, comprising various internal departments and individuals (Strikwerda & Stoelhorst, 2009). Concepts such as the “buying center” (Webster & Wind, 1972) or the “usage center” (Huber & Kleinaltenkamp, 2020) offer initial insights into the multifaceted nature of business customers. Consequently, identifying a singular “customer” becomes untenable, as business customers invariably comprise multiple actors.

Without a clear delineation of the customer, co-creators may struggle to accurately ascertain the customer's requirements and demands, thereby impeding their ability to devise appropriate solutions. Hence, the authors advocate for a primary focus on the end user of the solution as the most proximate representation of the customer. While acknowledging the significance of other stakeholders within the customer's organization in the value-creation process (Wengler & Kolk, 2023), an end-user-centric approach is posited to offer the most valuable insights into the necessary specifications of a solution.

3 Exploratory findings

To illustrate our conceptual considerations and advocate for a more end-user-centric perspective in business market value-creation processes, we present an example from the automobile industry: Automobile Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) commonly demand the highest precision from their suppliers of automated parking systems (APAS). These systems are expected to ensure precision within narrow parking tolerance margins, often allowing only up to a 1.5 cm deviation. Consequently, the APAS may frequently correct the car's parking position, sometimes up to 10 times, despite the fact that consumers may perceive the parking position as satisfactory after the first or second correction. As a result, the automated parking process can significantly prolong compared to manual parking procedures. Consequently, it's unsurprising that innovations like APAS encounter challenges in consumer acceptance and exhibit a slowed diffusion process. Beyond this example, numerous instances exist across industry value chains where end-user requirements are inadequately considered, leading to unintended frictions along the value-creation process or even resistance by the adopters.

4 Implications

Our research approach contributes to the literature in the following ways: Theoretically, the abstract identifies a research gap concerning the accurate determination of solution specifications within business market value-creation processes. It emphasizes placing the end user at the forefront of value creation in business markets, which are characterized by multiple actors operating across various market-stages. Consequently, co-creators such as suppliers and OEMs must broaden their perspective beyond their immediate business relationships and increasingly incorporate consumers as the end users of their solutions, thus blurring more and more the (artificial) lines between consumer and business marketing.

From a managerial standpoint, the abstract advocates for a more critical examination of specification criteria within complex value-creation processes. Given that many co-creators tend to focus solely on their direct customers or co-creators, they often overlook the need to derive or review specification criteria with regard to the end user. This oversight results in inadequate solution specifications, leading to significant inefficiencies, such as resource wastage, and ineffectiveness, including delays in the diffusion process or even the failure of innovations (Riedl & Wengler, 2024).

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Using Machine Learning Models for B2B Marketing Analytics:

An Empirical Evaluation of Competing Approaches

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Introduction and Background. There is no denying that the age of advanced marketing analytics is upon us! Both marketing academics and marketing executives often find themselves working in environments where terms such as *data science*, *digital marketing transformation*, *data-driven marketing*, *predictive analytics*, *big data*, *artificial intelligence*, *machine learning*, *web analytics*, and the *internet of things* are encountered on a regular basis. This advanced-analytics domain is often referred to as the 4th Industrial Revolution (Syam and Sharma, 2018; Petrescu et al., 2022) due to its massive impact on the business world and the global economy.

On the B2B side of marketing, many participants may consider these technologies to be too innovative, too complex, and too expensive. On the other hand, one prevalent view of today's B2B marketing world is that these high-tech approaches need to be evaluated and operationalized in ways that *encourage usage*. Marketing executives in B2B roles should realize that these new technologies can contribute to their work efficiency and enhance their firms' competitive success and business performance (e.g., Vesterinen et al., 2024). B2B academic researchers should note that authors such as Wedel and Kannan (2016) advocate for continuously expanding our analytics capabilities in data-rich environments and Lilien (2016) points to the need for filling what he identifies as the "B2B knowledge gap."

In particular, the popularity of *Machine Learning (ML) models* in marketing analytics has attracted quite a bit of attention, grown rapidly over the past few years, and promises to expand exponentially into the future (Ngai and Wu, 2022). Since machine learning is part of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the ML modeling approach is especially valid in AI applications where understanding B2B marketing data and accurately predicting future outcomes are critical (e.g., Wang et al, 2021). In this paper, we define ML as, "a type of AI that uses advanced computer-coding techniques to develop analytical procedures in which the performance of the model is continually improved within the various stages of the model itself." As such, ML models are constructed to yield accurate methods for processing complex datasets and find optimal solutions in areas such as pattern detection, problem solving, and prediction (see Thurber 2017).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions. In this study, we focus on evaluating the performance of ML modeling in B2B marketing research situations; and we fill a B2B knowledge gap in doing so. While software is available to investigate how ML models perform using B2B marketing data, *there is no published research that systematically compares the performance of alternative ML models*. In addressing this gap in the literature, we raise the following research questions and investigate them:

- In working with B2B marketing research data, how accurate is the performance of alternative ML models in making predictions in classification-modeling situations?
- How do the various ML models compare in their accuracy and usage to the traditional statistical approach for classification modeling?
- Can these ML classification models identify marketing variables that make a difference in B2B marketing outcomes and thus help make better decisions in the future?
- Are ML models challenged by the fact that, quite often, B2B research often has smaller sample sizes than in B2C marketing?
- Do trends in the evaluation of alternative ML models emerge? In other words, are there some models that are consistently superior when analyzing B2B marketing research data?

Conceptual Background. Although very little *empirical* work has been published on ML applications in the B2B literature, a number of conceptual frameworks and systematic literature reviews do appear in the B2B marketing and related journals and provide inspiration and guidance for the author's current empirical research. Due to space limitations, only a small subset of these articles can be included in this abstract.

An article by Wang and Wang (2020) highlights the scarcity of articles on big data analytics in B2B marketing; and they concur with Lilien (2016) that: (1) most existing marketing analytics applications focus on B2C issues rather than B2B issues, and (2) B2B companies tend to suffer from a lack of IT infrastructure to support marketing analytics and internal leadership for using analytics. Mikalef et al. (2021) conclude that, while AI is an enabler of marketing success, companies face the challenge of using it in ways that create business value.

However, several authors present strong arguments that ML technologies can impact firms' strategic decision making and performance in the marketplace. For example, Gnizy (2020) tests a conceptual model using a sample of B2B firms and finds that a focus on big data and advanced data analysis techniques provide unique insights for solving marketing problems and providing direction for future strategies. Ansari and Ghasemaghaei (2024) conducted a meta-analysis of 42 published studies and found that big data analytics capability has an overall positive impact on firm performance. Chen et al. (2022) conduct a thorough literature review focusing on the impact of AI on marketing activities and identify two key drivers of AI adoption. One interesting observation by Chen et al. is that there is a disconnect "…between marketers' enthusiasm for the potential of AI and their knowledge of how to use it" (p. 1026).

Methods, Results, and Key Contribution. In this study, empirical research is conducted that uses B2B data to evaluate a series of ML models. Classification models, where the dependent variable is dichotomous, are used in this test. An "apples-to-apples" research environment is created that tests a traditional logistic regression model against a series of four ML models using multiple B2B data sets. Using the philosophy that ML models need to be easy to access and simple to use in order to promote adoption, IBM SPSS Statistics version 29 software was chosen to conduct the research. The accuracy of the models is evaluated as well as a more subjective assessment of the ability of each model to identify variables (both marketing and non-marketing) that are helpful in making better decisions in the future. The results of the study indicate that the research objectives presented earlier can be addressed with definitive answers. The contribution of this project is that an empirical ML study (not often available in the B2B marketing journals) is conducted that leads to conclusions about which ML models to adopt and which ones to avoid. *The net impact of this paper is that it provides an empirical* *evaluation of the performance of ML models that hopefully will encourage B2B marketers to adopt ML approaches.*

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Conceptualising the Impact of Digital Marketing Practices on B2B Buying Centre Communications Dynamics in an Emerging Market Context.

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Introduction & Aim

This study investigates and conceptualises how digital marketing practices currently impact on B2B buying centre communications dynamics, within an emerging market context. Scholars recognise that B2B phenomena, such as the structure, and complexities of buying centres and broader ecosystem arrangements, are all impacted by environmental conditions (Voola et al., 2021; Cabanelas et al., 2023; Johnston, 2023; Ehret 2024,). However, extant research is limited in exploring the impact of various communications practices on the inner workings of the buying centre process. It is equally limited in exploring the emerging market context generally (Johnston 2023). By integrating across multiple theoretical perspectives, this study provides a better understanding of how B2B buying centre dynamics are shaped by the unique configurations of improvised innovation and adapted digital marketing practices, by which business development teams in 'uniquely configured institutional environments' target B2B buying centres. The paper further expatiates on the unique set of cognitive institutional realities within the emerging market context, within which B2B digital marketing communications must be operationalised. Potentially offering lessons to actors in other environments while also broadening the boundaries of the domain knowledge.

Theoretical Background

The literature would suggest that the importance of digital marketing practices, and their impact in defining B2B communications dynamics is still relatively under explored. (Michaelidou et al., 2011). By utilising the hierarchy of communications effects theory, digital marketing communications mix theory, communications network theory and the buying centre theory, the study addresses inherent gaps around the intersection of digital communication practices and

B2B buying centre communication network dynamics (contextualised for emerging markets). The study builds on established definitions of the B2B buying centre as, a *communications network*, composed of managers, relationships, and other dynamics who are involved in the buying process (Robinson et al., 1967), either in routine or non-routine purchase decisions (Webster Jr & Wind, 1972) and who are impacted by factors that are internal and external to the focal firm (Johnston & Bonoma, 1981)

Digital marketing communications refers to the “use of all digital media including internet, mobile and interactive channels to develop communications and exchanges with customers” (Pride & Ferrell, 2013). Though considered a relatively new practice, digital marketing has become a top priority marketing approach for marketers, (Angulo, 2016; Newman, 2015). As a marketing approach, it utilises an array of marketing methods which utilize digitized devices and processes that might leverage websites, search engines, blogs, social media, video, email, and similar channels to reach customers.

Scholars have diverging opinions about traditional and digital media. Several researchers however argue that unlike traditional marketing which is static and often referred to as “one-way” communication, digital marketing is a more dynamic marketing communications process with the inherent advantage that it provides an avenue for two-way communication between a business and its actual or prospective customers. (Rodriguez et al. 2014; 2016; McCready 2013). While others such as Cano et al. (2005) support face-to-face communication in B2B processes or Wymbs (2011) who argues for a media mix. However, within the B2B buying operations, relational business processes rather than one off transaction leads and opportunities tend to be prevalent. (Palmer et al. 2005; Macdonald et al. 2016). Consequently, this will have significant implications around the choice of suitable digital media channels to be deployed (Krings et al. 2021) and support the extensive adoption of digital media approaches within B2B. (McCready, 2013; and Rodriguez et al. 2016)

Research Questions & Objectives

By utilising expert interviews across a range of B2B cases, the study seeks to scaffold higher order conceptualisations that address three research questions:

1. What are the digital marketing communications practices (mix, routines, and technologies) used in marketing B2B firms and how are they deployed?

2. What is the impact of digital marketing communications campaigns on the communications network dynamics and capabilities of B2B buying centres?

3. How are emerging market (EM) institutional conditions influencing the choice of the digital marketing mix, routines and technologies used within B2B marketing.

Methodology & Findings

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing in-depth expert and practitioner interviews (Knott et al. 2022), thematic analysis with an abductive approach (Proudfoot, 2023), and purposive sampling (Etikan et al. 2016). Finally, conceptual synthesis was undertaken to provide a high-level integration across the multiple theories and streams of literature. (MacInnis, 2011). This provided a way of theorising that utilises narrative reasoning to unveil “big picture” patterns and connections rather than specific causal mechanisms (Delbridge & Fiss, 2013; Jaakkola, 2020).

Summary of findings

Theme	Findings
Digital media channels of choice for targeting B2B BCs	• A combination of Paid (Social, events, influencers, email); Owned (Own media assets), and Earned (Word of mouth) utilized across awareness, discovery, evaluation in the buying process • Intent and Purchase still predominantly done face2face.
Applications and Technologies used	• Increasing use and deployment of mobile based apps at reseller and processor B2Bs to digitize the sales process.
Key considerations influencing choice of digital media mix	• Power and influence of buying organization and BC member roles. • Cost of campaign driving efficiencies and effectiveness. • Organisational size and buying power of the target firm.
BC members targeted and reasons why	• All major BC roles targeted across organizational types, but with a clear bias for the decider as the critical network node across all stages of the buying process. • Long term strategic partnerships and value enhancements are the key recurring content messages targeted at the deciders
Digital Marketing (DM) Impact on buying firm communications capabilities	• Seen as ‘a mobile first decider’s market’ though growing rapidly, digital marketing still a compliment to offline face2face • SENSING-DM practices being used for sentiment sensing, informational purposes (Paid & earned) • SEIZING- DM being used to demonstrate that value can be enhanced, also helping to launch new products quicker based on online insights.

	• TRANSFORMING- DM being used to drive operational efficiencies and path to profitability
Institutional environment/arrangements (Social-Physical-Technology Interventions)	• A strong sense of shared goals amongst BC members, and B2B ecosystem actors across bigger firms (We see collective intentions such as collaborative backward integration, import substitution or drive towards ecosystem shared prosperity) less so amongst service provider firms in fragmented industries. • Prevalent factors inhibiting further digitization of the B2B coms space include low levels of education and tech/data awareness in the northern part of the country, insecurity, and civil strife • Poor culture of feedback loops which does not strengthen a collective digital service purpose or charter • Prevalent factors that are driving further digitization of the b2b communications space include fast growth in tech infrastructure, a young and tech savvy youth population in urban centres

Key Contributions

While still at exploratory stage, the authors argue that the study provides potential contributions in the following ways:

1. It offers a conceptual mapping of the configurations of digital marketing communications practices that are targeted at B2B Buying centres in Nigeria

2. It provides a useful conceptualisation of the B2B buying centre communications network response to digital marketing communications practices.

3. It provides further domain knowledge around how cognitive institutional arrangements drive the digital institutionalisation of the B2B buying ecosystem within emerging market conditions

In conclusion, this study provides a useful investigation into how business development teams operating within the unique set of cognitive institutional realities found within emerging markets target B2B buying centres and shape the BC dynamics with equally unique configurations of improvised innovation and adapted digital marketing practices.

References will be supplied upon request.

Transitioning into formal markets: An empirical study of women self-help groups in emerging markets

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Introduction

The study aims to investigate how women self-help groups (SHGs), supported by an intermediary organization (Non-Governmental Organization), engage in market-based activities in tribal villages in order to achieve the sustainable livelihood and empowerment in the region. The market entry of the actors from disadvantaged groups remains an understudied topic. The paper delves deeper into the subject by investigating the transition of women SHG members beginning as informal sellers and eventually graduating into formal market in an emerging economy.

The emerging markets are often characterized by weak or non-existent institutions that aid economic development. The research is embedded in a context that lacks institutional structures needed for the efficient functioning of the market that facilitates market participation of actors from disadvantaged sections of the society. The disadvantaged actors face barriers in the market (formal or informal) entry because of lack of skills and resources. They primarily start as informal sellers into subsistence market and face considerable challenges in transitioning to formal markets. The informal market is characterized with high opportunity cost and formalization is recommended for the economic growth.

Theoretical background:

Markets are institutions governed by rules. Extant studies with extensive focus on regulatory pillars of institutions are unable to explain socio-cultural aspects of market formalization. For example, why does formalization fail despite of strong government policies and intermediary support. The problem is even starker in emerging economies characterized by strong socio-cultural norms such as patriarchy along with widespread institutional deficiencies. Pels and colleagues (2022) urge to take a more cultural - cognitive approach to the problem and define it as an 'access challenge' that hinders the informal-formal market transition. The present study builds on that line of argument and presents empirical account of the market formalization in emerging market.

Methodology

The research context provides a unique opportunity to study the transition of non-market actors into formal markets. The study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the journey of women SHGs for the purpose. The primary source of data includes in-depth field interviews and field observations. Secondary data included information from archival sources, external and internal reports on women SHGs, and access to minutes of meetings of the NGO.

Findings and Contributions

Recent researches underscore that market transition requires the mastery of a set of practices often aided by an intermediary. The study presents empirical evidence of the microprocesses that supports the entry of individual actors into informal markets and finally transitioning into formal markets. The process is externally supported by an intermediary organization that eventually phases out of the scene once the formal organization becomes sustainable.

Our findings reveal how women SHG engage in market-based activities for sustainable livelihood. We highlight the challenges in the process of market transition such as community mobilization for capital accumulation, learning the ropes of business practices such as accounts keeping or negotiating with the local administration for resource access. Further the study illustrates how these market practices learned in SHG used for individual micro business prove to be critical for the development and sustenance of formal business organization. The study also highlights the critical role of external intermediary especially in weak institutional context of emerging markets. The introduction of market-based activities via SHG by an intermediary organization improves market literacy by bridging skill gap in creating and sustaining the formal business organization and building business ecosystem to nurture and extend formal market institutions.

In doing so the research contributes to the literature on institutional theory and formalization of informal markets. We also underscore the non-regulative aspects of institutions in the process. We show how individual actors draw upon both market and community practices simultaneously to strengthen the transition into formal markets. The formal market can bring about social and economic progress by enabling the market participation of disadvantaged families in chronically poor area. Thereby the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of micro processes in filling institutional void and enabling actors to engage effectively with the market. It shows how the formal markets are created, sustained and institutionalized in the emerging economies.

The Engineering Agent-Based Social Simulation Framework: A Key to Unlocking Agent-Based Modelling in B2B Research?

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Business models function as blueprints for a firm's operations, offering a representation of the value creation and capture processes (Osterwalder et al. 2005). Managers, policymakers, and academics use these models as they provide a structured approach to analysing a business, identifying opportunities, and guiding strategic decision-making. Despite the claims that business models are dynamic (e.g. Achtenhagen et al 2013), they only capture a snapshot of how a system works at a specific point in time, neglecting the dynamic nature of the competitive landscape and internal operations. Their inherent static nature presents a limitation.

One way of overcoming this limitation is by integrating business models with data analytics (Ochuba et al 2024). Data analytics empowers researchers and practitioners to identify patterns and relationships within historical data sets. By analysing the impact of past marketing budget allocations on sales figures, for instance, data analytics can inform predictions about the potential effects of future budget adjustments. However, data analytics is primarily suited for studying existing systems with readily available data, often functioning within the confines of input/output models.

Simulation as a tool addresses this limitation by incorporating the dynamic nature of complex systems over time (Siebers and Aickelin 2008). This allows researchers and practitioners to investigate how a business or an entire value chain might evolve over time in response to various scenarios and enables a more comprehensive understanding of a business model's strengths, weaknesses, and adaptability in a constantly evolving environment.

The aim of the research presented in this paper is to explore opportunities for the application of ABM in B2B studies and to test if the EABSS framework, designed for developing social simulation models can also be used for developing B2B simulation models.

Agent-Based Modelling (ABM) is a simulation modelling approach used in the Social Sciences, Economics, and Operations Research, amongst others. In ABM, a system is modelled as a collection of autonomous decision-making entities called agents. Each agent individually assesses its situation and makes decisions on the basis of a set of rules (Bonabeau 2002). In this context, the term 'agent' refers to an individual, household, firm, organisation, or institution. ABM is well suited to modelling systems with heterogeneous, autonomous and proactive actors, such as Business, Enterprise, and Marketing Systems.

In regard to Business-2-Business (B2B), ABM can be a powerful tool for strategic planning by simulating the complex interactions within a target market and an organisation (Onggo and Foramitti 2021). Following are some examples of how ABM can be applied to B2B value creation modelling: *Understanding Customer Behavior*: B2B customers are often complex entities with diverse needs and decision-making processes. ABM allows to create agent models representing different types of customer organisations. These agents can be programmed to consider factors like budget constraints, technical requirements, internal approval processes, and competitor offerings. By simulating their interactions with products, services, and marketing messages, ABM can help predict customer behaviour and optimise B2B strategies. *Evaluating Market Dynamics*: B2B markets are dynamic with competition, new technologies, and evolving customer needs. ABM can simulate these market forces. Agents representing competitors can be programmed with different pricing strategies, product features, and marketing tactics. By observing how these agents interact with your own and with potential customers, ABM can reveal emerging trends, potential threats, and opportunities for your B2B strategy. *Forecasting the Impact of Decisions*: B2B strategic decisions can have ripple effects across the market. ABM allows you to experiment with different strategies in a simulated environment. One can model the impact of changes like pricing adjustments, new product launches, or expanded distribution channels. This can help to predict the potential outcomes of your strategic decisions and identify the most effective course of action. *Optimising Sales and Marketing Strategies*: B2B sales cycles can be complex, often involving multiple decision-makers within customer organisations. ABM can simulate these internal dynamics. Agents representing different stakeholders within a customer organisation can be programmed with different priorities and budget constraints. By analysing how these agents interact with sales and marketing efforts, ABM can help identify the most effective targeting strategies and tailored messaging to win deals in B2B markets.

Despite the clear potential of ABM in B2B research and management, its adoption remains limited. Interest from colleagues is evident, but designing ABMs is perceived as a significant hurdle. To address these challenges, the Engineering Agent-Based Social Simulation (EABSS) framework by Siebers and Klügl (2017) offers a promising solution. This is a co-creation tool that was originally been developed for use in the Computational Social Science domain, but has been applied in many other domains vas well (Siebers 2023).

The EABSS framework leverages co-creation and Software Engineering principles to facilitate collaborative problem-solving. It incorporates elements from Kankainen's focus group approach for service design. Uniquely, the framework establishes ground rules for respectful listening and consideration of diverse viewpoints, like approaches used with children but often overlooked with adults. This aligns with De Bono's parallel thinking (De Bono 1985). To capture information in a structured way, the EABSS framework utilises pre-defined tables and UML (a graphical software engineering notation) to encourage and document contributions from all stakeholders during analysis and design phases. This combination of methods ensures the framework is accessible and fosters participation from everyone involved. The outcome of an EABSS session is a structured record of the key points of the focus group discussions. With a little effort, this can often be translated into an agent-based social simulation model, which can then be used as a "what-if" analysis tool.

While social simulation focuses on understanding emergent social behaviours from interactions between social entities, B2B applications leverage ABM to optimise business strategies. Here, agents represent B2B entities (e.g. customer organisations, competitors). Their decision-making processes are guided by economic factors and business logic.

To test if the EABSS framework can also be used for developing B2B ABMs both authors have jointly conducted a test run. The aim of the case study used for the test run is to better understand the dynamics of the adoption of the Paga banking system in Nigeria (Ehret and Olanyian 2023). Paga is a mobile payment platform based in Nigeria. It allows users to make payments, transfer money, and perform other financial transactions using their mobile devices. Paga serves as a digital wallet that enables individuals to link their bank accounts and make transactions without the need for physical cash. Users can access Paga services through a mobile app or by visiting authorised Paga agents.

The research described in this paper is still ongoing. Our finding, after a first round of using the EABSS framework for this test case, is that the EABSS can be used directly for co-creating B2B ABMs, without requiring adaptations for B2B use cases. Notably, it also aids in the development of a joint understanding of the test case, something vital when the co-creation participants are from different disciplines.

Our next step is to create a simulation model from the conceptual ABM we developed. As the EABSS output delivers clear guidance for the model implementation, our hypothesis is that the implementation should be straightforward. Future work includes the execution of further case studies and the use of Generative AI to automate conceptual ABM and implementation.

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to Michael Ehret, Institute for Marketing, Graz University, for his willingness to participate in the Paga EABSS trial presented in this paper.

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The Social and Individual Value of Punctuality:The Dialogical Process of Time Synchronisation

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The paper is based on a theoretical framework for the study of value based on phenomenology and pragmatism. The final part attempts an application of the analytical categories to the technological and institutional change that developed and assured time synchronisation in the last two centuries.

The first part is based on the presentation of the philosophical frameworks that proposed some interpretation of the phenomenon of value. In particular, phenomenology (Schütz, Gehlen) and pragmaticism (Dewey, Mead) have proposed some dialogical interpretation of subjective value and have emphasized the role ofthe social infrastructure that guide individual cognitive processes. A value judgmentis a judgment on goods and bads related to a specific course of action (Dewey, 1915). This framework will be contrasted with the notions of value adopted in political economy, as use value, subjective value, instrumental value, production value, market value and social value. Consequently, a bridge between the two frameworks will be structured to constitute an economic theoretical framework ableto understand inter-subjectivity and the various social elements that enter the process of valuation. Institutions serve to control individuals “who find in them theorganization of their own social responses” (Mead, 1925). The social infrastructure,made of broadly defined institutions, is not neutral relatively to individual evaluation and is not invariant with respect of changing criteria of individual valuation. Social valuation is an emerging property related to the polarisation of individual valuations or a governed process in case of structured social groups.

What is particularly interesting is the interplay between individual and socialvaluation in a context of changing institutions. Shared meanings and communication are a way of socializing values even before effective economic or social interaction. In the last part, the paper presents the case of the process of timesynchrnisation from the middle of the XIX century to the end of the XX. The adventof punctuality as an individual value has been preceded by the shared meaning of punctuality as a social value. Behind the technical problem of synchronisation lays the notion of automation and public infrastructure, which is seen as valuable in sightof industrial economic growth. Some leading actor as Charles Babbage and the astronomer of Greenwich George B. Airy have placed a good deal of effort to produce wide public expectations on time synchronisation and punctuality. In Germany Friedrich List spread the culture of public infrastructure in a compact space thanks to trains and mean time. Zimmerman (1997) argues that Babbage proposed a new *world-view*, a *technological enframing*. From this perspective, the development of industry was possible only by disciplining man by adopting a cultural *enframing* favourable to mechanisation. Werner Sombart highlighted this connection between the development and diffusion of clocks and the principle of measurement which have been part of the logic of calculating necessary to the development of capitalism (Sombart, 1913). Later, the anthropologist Arnold Gehlen(1957) in *Die Seele im technischen Zeitalter* and Georges Gurvitch (1964) in *The Spectrum of Social Time* emphasised the role of social coordination of clocks that allowed the cultural transformation of the image of time.

Having a watch, which is normally highly evaluated, is value-less if there is no public infrastructure (with a public value) able to synchronise such timepiece. Individual punctuality is worthless if others are not. Industry would not invest producing watches if individuals would not evaluate them well. Without a cultural enframing favourable to punctuality, watches have little value. But the culture should be complemented by concrete infrastructure for synchronisation. With synchronisation,time becomes a *structure of intersubjective meaning* (Löwe, 1935).

There is a strict relation between scientific progress, technological innovation, institutions and cultural frames. In an evolutionary perspective, no one of these processes of change is exogenous to the others. They are best understood as a coevolutionary process in which political economy is a central element. The progress in time measurement was not driven by individual interest, but for the sakeof improving the coordination of a complex society, meaning social value. Referenceto a super-time-structure was necessary to the self-understanding of man as a part of a complex coordinated system of production (although producing some difficulty,Gehlen, 1957). No economic change would have been produced by industrialisation without a change in the common sense in the direction of punctuality. In this dynamics, policies related to the politics of national building and collective action elaborating conventions have been fundamental to understand how the process of synchronisation and standardisation of time have been produced.

Actors and Relationships in Value Cocreation Scenarios

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My paper discusses the distinction between private and nonprivate value against the background of the distinction between transaction value and relationship value in B2B marketing. Using a service-dominant (S-D) perspective on value (co-)creation, Eggert, Kleinaltenkamp and Kashjap (2019) equate *value in use* with *transactional value* and *relational value* with the private value of relationships. Relational value can arise when a relationship leads to courses of action that would otherwise not be available. I argue that the understanding of these value categories depends on the conceptualization of the economy. It makes a difference whether one conceives of market action as being constituted by the encounter of monadic entities or as being embedded in social relations. The distinction between relational and transactional value originates in an ontology of things rather than an ontology of relations (Lucarelli and Giovanardi 2021). With reference to the distinction between organizationality and relationality (Emirbayer 1997; Haase 2022; Prandini 2015), the paper discusses whether or not it makes sense to distinguish between the two categories of values (**objective 1**).

For the understanding of relationship, I also refer to the sociology of the first half of the 19th century (von Wiese 1924). According to Leopold von Wiese (1876-1969), in addition to the *social process* and the *assemblage* (Gebilde), the *relationship* is a basic constituent of the social world. Von Wiese's (1924) understanding of the relationship, here translated based on Tönnies's (2012 [1932], p. 272) citation, is very much in line with those strands of marketingthat see relationships as more than a series of related transactions: A relationship is a processthat connects two or more entities in a way that maintains the separation of these entities, butalso causes them to change so that commonalities and community emerge in some aspects.
Social actors affirm the relationship on the basis of mutual commitments.

Mutual commitments expressed in value propositions and value assessments can be associatedwith what Tönnies calls the "affirmation" (Bejahung) of a relationship; this is to be distinguished from what Tönnies calls the approval (Gutheißen) of the relationship, which applies to the relationship per se. "*Gutheißen* of relationship" means that relationship is not anepiphenomenon of (monadic) economic actions that intersect at some point, but a social constituent of economic action, the recognition of which amounts to the social embeddedness of economic action and the view or experience that socially embedded economic action can have positive consequences for the parties involved in it. Since the words "affirmation" and "approval" themselves express valuations, they are both descriptive and normative.

The second aim of the paper (**objective 2**) is to discuss how relationship value fits into the distinction between private and nonprivate value. More specifically, I am interested in the role of relationships in the cocreation of nonprivate value. For the understanding of value and value cocreation, I refer to the definitions provided by the S-D logic. In the S-D logic, value cocreation is a critical concept that spans multiple levels of analysis.

(D [C]): "Value cocreation" is defined as "The process through which multiple actors, often unaware of each other, jointly contribute to an actor's well-being" (Glossary 2019a, p. 740).

Marketing has contributed to the understanding of value cocreation at several levels of analysis, including the dyadic, network, or systems levels. "Value cocreation" refers to practices that enable the change of entities (resources) or states of affairs that fall under the S-D concept of value:

(D [V]): “Value” is defined as “an emergent, positively or negatively valenced change in the well-being or viability of a particular system/actor” (Glossary 2019b, p. 740).

S-D logic assumes self-interested but cooperative actors, i.e. actors who exchange service fortheir own benefit *and* for the benefit of the other entity.

(D [S]): “Service” is defined as “the application of resources for the benefit of another actor or oneself” (Glossary 2019c, p. 740).

The benefits which both parties promise each other are determined through the valuations made by the entities involved in the service exchange. The values that emerge from these procedures are private values, that is the values determined by each party itself. While this does not preclude the emergence of nonprivate value, it cannot be determined by a private actor. There is no legitimized valuation procedure for this. Nor does the S-D require it. The normative channel is present but rather silent. In line with this judgment, (D [S]) and (D [C]) have a normative content that is limited to the involvement in the cocreation of private value. (D [C]) singles out “an” (= one) actor as beneficiary of value cocreation—a definition that hardly fits the understanding of the role of government agencies in public value research (Jørgensen and Bozeman 2007). In other words, a contribution to public value (a form of nonprivate value) is not included in (D [C]). (D [C]) is also not consistent with the discussion of collective needs (the needs of collective social entities such as communities) in public economics and beyond.

(D [V]) includes at least two concepts that are in need of definition (well-being and viability) or, depending on the understanding of the word “system,”[1] can extend the private sphere (system). In sum, normative content is present in all of the definitions listed above. It cannot be eliminated from words like “value,” “cocreation,” “viability,” or “wellbeing.” However, the meaning of these normative contents is unclear in S-D logic. This is highlighted by the distinction between private and non-private value, which is located at the intersection between the more descriptive and the more normative aspects of value cocreation.

If value creation is to be understood in terms of valuation, then value creation is currently better understood at the micro and meso levels than at the macro level. My paper aims to contribute to this discussion by distinguishing between private and nonprivate value. Private value is the value that actors (individuals and organizations) seek to achieve for themselves; “nonprivate value” stands for the valued benefits of nonhuman social and natural entities. In line with the S-D perspective on value creation, this paper assumes that value results from valuations. Thus, the relationship value emerges through valuation (or determination). It is economically assessed private value (PV) and falls into the same category as transactional value.

Striving for private value is not the only way relational value can be looked at. According to the cocreation canvas (Haase 2024), not only private value but also nonprivate value can be cocreated by the majority of actors. The qualification is added because it depends on the categorization of the concept of actor. In public management or public economics, it is excluded that government agencies engage in private value cocreation. However, they can engage in cocreation practices that lead to private value of other actors. The cocreation canvasidentifies different strategies that can undergird cocreation practices aimed at achieving private or public value. How does relationship value relate to this? With reference to the

[1] See Godsiff, Maull and Davies (2019, p. 222 ff.) for “explorations using systems thinking for S-D logic.”

cocreation canvas, this paper identifies and discusses three strategic orientations that actorscan take and analyzes their relevance for the achievement of relational value (**Objective 3**).

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Customer onboarding in solution business – The role of value in use during onboarding

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Introduction. As products and services become increasingly complex through technology-induced shifts, the nature of company-customer interactions also undergoes fundamental transformations often resulting in 'servitized' solution business models (Bell, Auh, and Eisingerich 2017). Such offerings often cause challenges among customers on how to use the solutions most effectively (Elgeti and Kleinaltenkamp 2022). To support customer readiness to embrace and use complex solutions, solution providers increasingly offer customer onboarding (CO), defined as the process of familiarizing the relevant employees of a customer firm with the supplier's offering (based on Voorhees et al. 2017, p. 247), especially in the realm of Customer Success Management (CSM). Given the nascent understanding of CO in solution business, we investigate (1) which activities solution providers offer as part of their onboarding processes, and (2) how these activities affect customer's readiness to use the offered solutions. We interviewed 21 professionals in CSM from different business-to-business (B2B) firms that provide solutions to customers. Our findings show that an onboarding process includes (1) incorporating training and education as essential learning components, (2) enabling first time value in use, and (3) ensuring good customer experience with the provided service by conducting onboarding. These objectives are strategically devised to enhance the first-time value experienced by the customer when using a solution. Our findings indicate that CO not only enhances customer capabilities but also positively influences their motivation, thereby augmenting their experienced value in use. Our framework contributes to the theoretical understanding of customer readiness especially in solution business, offering critical insights into the significance of CO and CSM in the context of servitized business models. In addition to this, our findings offer theoretical implications for understanding the role of expected and experienced value in use during customer onboarding.

Method. Given the lack of theoretical insights regarding customer onboarding, we use Grounded theory methodology to propose a conceptual framework for this study as it is particularly relevant for issues where only limited prior research exists. For this study we conducted 21 interviews with CS professionals (CS managers, CS leaders and CS coaches).

The average duration of the interviews was 55 minutes (see Appendix). All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded with MAXQDA following the guidelines of grounded theory methodology(Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013).

Findings.

1. Providing training and education

According to our findings a fundamental element of training and education is firstly designing an onboarding plan where the CS professionals articulate what they want to achieve during that onboarding. It is about defining onboarding success from customers perspective. According to the interviews the value-in-use that customers experience from the solution varies among customers depending on their business cases and therefore it is essential to define the value-in-use from customers perspective.

So how much are they actually using the system and how much do we expect them to use the system? There might be some customers that you know will get full value out of a system by using 50% of the functionality. It's not great, but it's, you know, that's the actual reality of it. There are other customers who can get full value based of, you know, just getting them to like 75% of the functionality is what they wanted at this stage. (#17)

Accordingly, it is important to understand how customers perceive and define value-in-use. In this regard solution providers articulate the requirements on the customer side in the onboarding plan and outline what learning format is appropriate for the respective value indicator that the customer defines as initial success during the usage of the solution. Accordingly, the training is designed and executed based on these value indicators defined by the customer. In this regard it needs to be mentioned that training is a huge component of onboarding where most of CSM design a training program according to the respective customer segment along with best practices and recommendations for the customer. This consists of sessions on how to use the tool/ offering or software where small education chunks are delivered to make the customer understand the features along with the system. In addition to this, the training program consists of knowledge chunks that are relevant to forward the learnings to other internal team members/ newcomers for example where customers can teach other team members on how to use the tool/ offering or software in the most efficient manner. In this regard several CSMs point out that there are different types of learners that also need to be considered during designing the training program.

"Not everyone is same learner. Not everyone is same way they're going to grasp the information that's been given out. Um, I'm not a fan of 1 to 1 learning because there is a lot of resources and a lot of time, and it doesn't work for your financials. Always one to many. And make sure the one to many is not too long of a session broken into small chunks. And these things are recorded. And after each session, I would normally recommend our training team to make sure there is some sort of a questionnaire or some sort of a takeaway, and for them to go and try to do it on themselves." (#6)

"It could be in product, it could be in person, it could be all virtual. It could be Tech Touch, where you'rejust guided through some learning. But you have to make sure to define this, like minimum amount of education someone needs in order to be successful with your tool." (#13)

Accordingly, CS professionals put effort in understanding the customer and identifying whether a one- to-many training approach with webinars or videos and a lot of tech touch might be appropriate or a one-to-one training approach. In this regard it is also essential for the CS professionals to assess whether the training was effective or not by considering a skill validation test and identifying which format of skill validation might be appropriate. All in all, the second order theme **training and education** addresses how to systematically understand customers value in use, design customer education and execute training.

2. Enabling first time value in use

The next second-order theme is **Enabling first time value in use**. "First time value" is a very prominentand established term in the practice. Most of the practitioners emphasize that the goal of onboarding is to enable this first-time value. It is the first experience of success during the usage process. Accordingly, the business customers have a first tasting of success and in terms of following the value-in use terminology it serves as a firstevidence piece of experiencing value in use. In this regard it needs to be mentioned that the onboarding plan is designed in a manner that the customer experiences the first-time value-in-use as early as possible in the customer journey. The first-time value-in-use is an early indicator of how the CS professionals are understanding the customers' needs, pains, and workflows. And represents how CS professionals are working towards ensuring success during the usage process. The first-time value-in-use gives the customer a confidence to open up and increases the trust towards providers solution. Several CS professionals point out that the first-time value-in-use is an indicator that the onboarding is complete.

"Um, and so that became our benchmark for time to first value and was sort of our indicator that, you know, onboarding is complete now." (Aaron.m4a, Pos. 10)

“I think onboarding ends when the customer starts getting value out of the product. And that is not necessarily that we've taught them how to use it. It is that they're actually starting to see the outcome or the results that they purchased the product for.” (#21)

“And the first value you present to the customer is what will make it or break it. I believe in there is no second chance in the first impression and this is exactly applies on the customer success. There is no chance to show the second value.” (#29)

Moreover, CS professionals are dedicated towards increasing the speed of achieve the first-time value in use fast. Because customer onboarding is seen as a process of helping a customer start using and gaining value from a product or service as soon as possible. CS professionals outline that the time to first value in use (TTV) is a key performance indicator (KPI) to measure how successful the onboarding was. Accordingly, it is necessary to consider the speed of the first-time value and decrease the time that it takes to make the customer experience the first-time value-in-use.

“Did you create value from the project and how fast did you create that value? Because remember we are not just obsessed with creating value. We are obsessed with, you know, the speed to that value.” (#11)

“Somehow measuring the time to value. How quickly the customer is achieving value from the product. Yeah. And by starting to measure that, you will find information about where your onboarding has failures.” (#16)

All in all, the aim of customer onboarding is understanding the value in use components of the customer. Providing the respective training to achieve the value in use indicators, tracking the value in use activities, and ensuring that customers had the first time-value in use at an early stage of their journey with the solution provider.

3. Ensuring good customer experience and conducting onboarding reviews

Lastly, we have in terms of providers activities during onboarding the second-order themes **ensuring good customer experience and conducting onboarding reviews.** If we talk about first time value in use it is also important to consider the experiential value as value is centered in the experience of customers. It is important to manage this experience and assess how customers are perceiving the onboarding. So, providers show proactive efforts to contribute to positive customer experience and assess the experience impact that they are creating. In this regard there are different onboarding measurement strategies like outcome progress assessment, where you measure how many items and milestones have already been achieved by the customer that were initially set during designing the onboarding plan. Secondly, Health score assessment which means how active is the customer with the solution like platform usage, login frequency.

"They do like a health score right after the training. So, after a few days, after the training, they measure this health score to check if this customer is using the platform, if he knows how to use, if he is logging in, how many users are in the platform. So, this is one of the strategies. And the other company they do like a quiz. So, they send a quiz for all the people that were in the training to make this quiz. And if the score is not good, they offer another training or another open office hours like with free session to ask more questions about the platform. So, which one company that I have worked we they have like different ways to to measure this success from the training from the onboarding." (#19)

A lot of practitioners conduct survey-based evaluations on how the customers perceived the onboarding based on pace, ease, and convenience. They measure satisfaction and conduct post learning quizzes to derive implications for improving future onboarding.

Now would be a good time to ask, how happy were you with your advancement during your onboarding? How did you perceive your learning? Was it fast enough? Was it easy enough? Was it convenient enough? Whatever it might be? Um, because the good thing is, when you start doing that during onboarding, you have something to compare yourself to, because that is the whole the whole beauty and voice of the customer is the development over time. (#20)

"But also speaking to the customer once you've onboarded them and then typically you do a review, understanding what went well, what went not so well, what needs to be improved going forward. Also gathering the feedback from the customer because it's one thing just to check off a list, but it is also vital to understand from the customer themselves. What is your experience with this onboarding? Yeah, and that is something that, uh, needs to be taken, uh, as feedback so that in future onboarding you can take that into account. Those are the lessons learned or best practices that you then have." (# 18)

Implications. Based on our findings we argue that the customer onboarding process offers the fundamental basis for understanding the customers perception of value in use and offering a teaser to the customer of how the provider firm ensures that the customer experiences the value in use that was promised initially. Moreover, the onboarding activities are designed to reduce the gap between expected and experienced value in use of the customer. In subscription-based business models the provider firm is dependent on the recurring revenue coming from the customer for which it is essential to guide the customer through the value in use phase in order to receive the continuance regarding the subscription from the customer side. Our findings undermine the aspect that value is cocreated through the usage process of customer in which providers and customer both exchange resources and activities which are executed through the customer onboarding.

Appendix

Expert ID	Years of experience	Position in firm	Firm's industry	Interview duration (min)
#1	8 Years 7 months	Vice President of CS	Software engineering	27:20
#2	2 Years 7 months	CSM	Trucking Industry	75:11
#3	2 Years 10 months	Vice President of CS	Business Consulting and Service	77:53
#4	1 Year 10 months	CSM	Cloud based CRM Solution	51:39
#5	2 Years 1 month	Global Head of CS	IT Services	59:58
#6	5 Years 7 months	Senior CSM	Software Engineering	60:26
#7	8 Years 7 months	CS Leader	Staff Compliance Platform	47:46
#8	16 Years 5 months	CS Leader	CS Consulting	70:33
#9	13 Years 6 months	Senior CSM	IT Services and IT Consulting	54:15
#10	2 Years 1 month	CSM	Open-Source Solution	82:32
#11	3 Years 1 month	CSM	Agra-tech	53:40
#12	7 Years 9 months	CS Lead	Healthcare	31:56
#13	7 Years 3 months	Vice President CS	Software Engineering	40:00
#14	8 Years 8 months	Director Global CS	IT	53:42
#15	10 Years 6 months	Senior CS	Software Engineering	53:48
#16	10 Years 8 months	Vice President of CS	IT Services and IT Consulting	61:14
#17	5 Years 6 months	Head of CS	IT Services and IT Consulting	52:55
#18	9 Years 4 months	Senior CS	Software Engineering	48:51
#19	11 Years 1 month	CSM	IT	69:17
#20	4 Years 4 months	CS Consultant	Software Engineering	32:30
#21	2 Years 5 months	CS Lead	Software Engineering	51:36

Corporate Service Agents and the Constitution of Business Markets

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One key concern of cocreation constructs of service research (Bitner et al. 2015, Negina et al., 2015; Vargo and Lusch, 2004) has been to move the focus from goods-for-money exchange towards service-to-service-exchange as the central framework of analysis. This echoes the aims of service scholars to consider actors beyond the boundary of the company as vital value co- creators, such as clients, partners, or other service stakeholders (Chesbrough, 2011; Fisher and Smith, 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The move to service-to-service exchange has removed the business corporation from the central stage of analysis and left its role ambiguous.

However, the rise of the service economy has rendered the role of the business far from irrelevant, neither as empirical phenomenon nor within conceptual reasoning. Following the rise of the service economy, new types of platform corporations dominate if not monopolize economic activity in terms of financial valuation, revenues, profits, innovation adoption and brand value (Chesbrough, 2011; Iansiti, 2020; McAfee, 2017; Parker, 2016). In the conceptual domain, service scholars have been re-discovering central concepts that require the explicit consideration of the business corporation, such as asymmetries (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, and Gruber; Grönroos & Voima, 2013) or institutional dimensions in service cocreation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). However, such an explicit elaboration of the role of the business corporation in service is largely absent.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a conceptual foundation for the role of business corporations in service cocreation, with a particular focus on its role in resource valuation on business markets. As an initial step, the paper elaborates the idea of corporate personality, that is central to corporate law (Hodgson, 2015; Pistor, 2019; Robé, 2011). One key challenge for a theory of the corporation in service concepts, is to identify conditions under which service cocreators consider a corporation as a viable contributor to cocreation: Corporations might have a plethora of different uses such as shells for tax-optimization, cost-shifting or accounting optimization. (Pistor, 2019). From a cultural-cognitive institutional perspective on institutions (Scott 2014; Searle, 1995), one key condition for viable role of the corporation are the collective intentions (Searle, 1995; Gilbert, 2019; Taillard et al., 2016) of stakeholders in value cocreation processes. Collective intentions are the basis for constitutive rules, physical symbol systems that represent collective intentionality in particular social contexts (Searle, 1995, 2011), such as value cocreation. Constitutive rules establish particular deontic powers, in particular rights, duties and responsibilities (Rawls, 1955; Searle 1995, 2011; Wittgenstein, 2011). Most fundamentally, business corporations act as the central contracting party for a diverse set of stakeholders engaged in value cocreation, most notably investors, clients, human resources, and resource providers. The constitutive rule of a corporate service agent establishes particular domains of valuation in cocreation contexts, most obviously financial valuation for shareholders, but also value-in-use for service clients, labor value for service-workers and resource value for upstream suppliers of service firms.

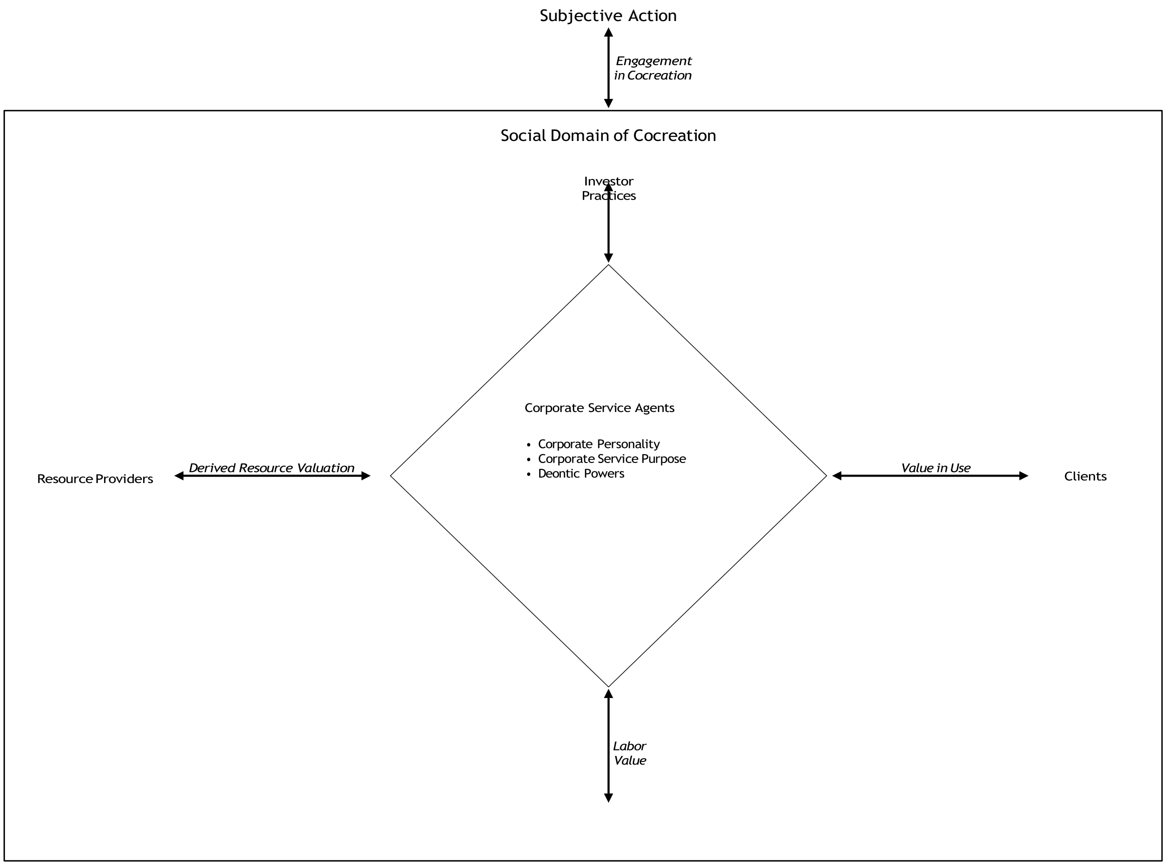

Fig.1: The corporate constitution of cocreation

The concept of the corporate service agent opens a path towards advancing theories of business markets. Scholars of the Austrian school of economics established a fundamental argument for the economic value of the business firm as an institutional tool for evaluating opportunity costs on resource markets (Hodgson, 2015; Keizer, 1989; Hayek, 1945). Corporate actors are vital institutional tools for economic specialization. This becomes particular prevalent looking at the rise of business services as drivers of the transformation from goods- dominant to service-drive economies, by mobilizing novel types of resources (Quinn, 1989; Wirtz, 2017)

In summary, corporate service actors are a special type of constitutive rules establishing social domains for value cocreation. Corporate service actors incorporate collective service purpose, constitute deontic powers for purpose-related rights and thereby stimulate the formation of stakeholder roles. Stakeholder roles stimulate the formation of cocreation practices, in particular those concerned with valuation, such as value-in-use, financial value-in- exchange, opportunity value and labor value. Service business offers a promising field to develop and employ cognitive institutions as concepts for valuation practices. Cognitive service institutions enable the institutionalization of cocreation practices and related valuation, in particular the corporation, money, contract, property and branding of market activities. One particular promising application of corporate service agent concepts is the explanation of the rise of service economies through increased levels of specialization in specific institutional domains of value cocreation.

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Digital transformation and Servitization in SMEs: Two cases study

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1. Introduction

The advancement of an enterprise's digital transformation directly impacts its service transformation capabilities and overall competitiveness(Gao et al., 2023). Digitalization is a significant driving force for enterprises to develop servitization and differentiate themselves from competitors(Coreynen et al., 2020).

As of 2022, Taiwan's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute 98% of all enterprises and contribute to 80% of the country's employment (MOEA, 2023). In 2023, Taiwan's textile industry is projected to reach a total output value of approximately NT$380 billion, indicating a 2% increase compared to 2022. In the face of international market demands and competition, the challenge lies in how companies can develop digital service capabilities and systems from the manufacturing perspective during this transformation. Qualitative research methods are employed to gain insights into the digital development of SMEs, referencing the research framework of Tronvoll et al. (2020) to understand how various factors influence the progress of digital transformation, servitization, and ecosystems in the manufacturing industry..

Digitalization is crucial in boosting product and service revenue by differentiating existing offerings and enhancing customer value (Gebauer et al., 2021). Focusing on servitization and collaboration is essential, transforming the cooperation network accordingly (Rapaccini et al., 2023). The success of establishing digital service relationships with customers relies on complementary digital capabilities, relationship-specific digital assets, digital knowledge sharing, and effective partnership governance (Kamalaldin et al., 2021). Digital servitization involves three interconnected transformational shifts (Gebauer et al., 2021; Tronvoll et al., 2020). Firstly, enterprises focus on exploring new operational approaches facilitated by technology, continuously strengthening internal systems, enhancing employees' digital capabilities, and fostering innovation (Gebauer et al., 2021). Secondly, digitization enables companies to access abundant data. Thirdly, enterprise digitalization breaks down organizational boundaries and promotes collaboration across departments during this transformation.

Research methods

This qualitative study utilized the case study method to explore digital transformation and servitization in the textile industry (Gomes et al., 2022; Yin, 2013). In-depth interviews with senior managers and responsible individuals were conducted, and secondary sources such as industry reports and publications were consulted. Cross-validation of primary and secondary data ensured accuracy and reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Results

This study examines the digital transformation strategies, service-oriented development of SMEs, and the establishment of industrial ecosystems. Two case studies, Case A and Case B, are analyzed to shed light on these processes.

(1). Digital transformation planning and innovation

The interviewees emphasized the importance of digital transformation in enhancing competitiveness. Factors like human resources, finance, and technology influence its implementation. Both companies have achieved notable results, including a reduction in workforce. Company B focuses on improving digital capabilities through training, while Company A collaborates with universities for talent acquisition.

(2). Discovery of evidence from data and participation of stakeholders

According to all interviewees, effective communication with employees is crucial for digital transformation. Implementation typically begins with one unit and expands gradually. Both companies recognize the value of data accumulation resulting from digital transformation. However, the full potential of the data has yet to be realized. Company B leverages data analysis to enhance production processes and quality, while Company A sends data to a monitoring center but has limited data analysis capabilities.

(3). Digital system capabilities and information security factors affect collaboration

Both companies prioritize data security and customer cooperation, choosing not to open their systems for direct customer connection. However, they actively collect customer information and strive to understand their needs. Opening their systems to external customers and suppliersis still under consideration. Company B is concerned about exposing production capacity and its impact on business information and income. The software used aligns with the ecosystem'sdevelopment and is authorized by equipment manufacturers. Company A has no specific actionsor plans yet. Factors like system openness, technology capabilities, and information security limit discovering innovative business opportunities through data.

5. Conclusion and suggestions

The textile industry has made significant progress in digital transformation, focusing on digitalizing internal production systems. Both companies recognize the importance of consolidating their internal digital efforts and rely on software tailored to their operations. Digital transformation enhances collaboration and communication across units and enables flexible adaptation to customer needs. However, there is room for further collaboration within the value chain, considering factors like data security and the enterprise's digitalization progress. Enterprises approach external collaboration ecosystems cautiously, seeking suitable operating methods and strategies. Further research is needed to explore digital servitization and ecosystem establishment in manufacturing.

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Bridging Sales and Philanthropy: Experiential Learning for Nonprofit Fundraising

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AIM AND MOTIVATION

Over 1.8 million IRS-recognized nonprofits operate across various sectors, such as education, health, and the environment (GuideStar 2022). In 2020, U.S. nonprofits raised over $470 billion, with corporations and foundations contributing 23% and individuals 69% (Browning 2021). Hence, nonprofits must optimize fundraising strategies and train staff in essential skills (Sullivan 2021). This study evaluates the training needs of fundraising personnel, focusing on experiential learning and skill development for success. By doing that, this research aims to offer insights into how adapting sales theories and practices to the nonprofit sector can improve nonprofit fundraising.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This research aims to bridge the gap between for-profit marketing and sales methodologies and nonprofit fundraising practices by employing the principles of business-to-business (B2B) marketing and sales to identify and address nonprofit organizations' training needs for enhancing their fundraising capabilities. Specifically, the research seeks to: (1) Determine the key competencies and skills nonprofit professionals require to achieve fundraising success, mirroring those found in professional sales, particularly in the business-to-business context. (2) Explore how nonprofit organizations can strategically implement experiential learning and training frameworks to cultivate these essential fundraising skills among their staff.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

Recent studies highlight the importance of donor relationship cultivation (Waters 2011) and strategic market orientation for nonprofits (Vázquez, Álvarez et al. 2002). Effective relationship management is crucial for securing donations (Hardy 2014). Messaging strategies that communicate value and appeal to donors' psyche are essential (Botner, Mishra, et al. 2015). The literature suggests adopting sales techniques and emphasizing interpersonal interactions for major donations to improve fundraising strategies (Sargeant 2001). Previous studies have highlighted the applicability of business-to-business sales skills in fundraising, employing analogies to integrate sales and philanthropy.

METHOD: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

We gathered primary data from a select group of executives and senior staff within nonprofit organizations across New Jersey and New York. The respondents predominantly occupied roles such as Director of Development, CEO/President, Founder, and other senior management positions. These individuals came from diverse sectors within the nonprofit realm, including but not limited to education, arts and culture, human and housing services, and health services. A total of 26 participants provided insights and perspectives on nonprofit training, focusing on sales training and skill development. They discussed the challenges and opportunities they face and the skills, competencies, and experiential learning approaches necessary for fundraising success. The responses were analyzed using content analysis.

MAIN FINDINGS

Our study pinpoints key fundraising skills, with Table 1 detailing the demand for experiential learning through role-play exercises, highlighting the frequency of mentions for various skills by participants. These include (1) The necessity of practicing initial fundraising steps like making initial contacts, approaching donors, and cold calling. (2) The role of effective questioning in grasping donors' interests, priorities, and motivations. (3) The critical need for active listening skills to establish strong donor relationships. (4) The importance of skills related to presenting/ demonstrating, such as presentation, upselling, and storytelling, especially emphasizing the recurrent mention of storytelling. (5) Skills for resolving issues, including objection handling, negotiation, and conflict management within fundraising activities. (6) The emphasis on closing skills, like securing commitments, was noted as most mentioned.

Our findings suggest that "upselling" (versus "cold calling") is the most (least) desired skill to develop through role-play exercises for niche fundraising expertise. Table 1 illustrates these essential fundraising skills, examining the context-specificity of role-play needs. Interestingly, our analysis reveals a uniform interest in role plays aimed at engaging with individual, corporate, and foundation donors. Additionally, there is a recognized need for role-play training designed for interactions with board members.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Previous research highlights the application of macro marketing concepts like branding in nonprofits and emphasizes data-driven decision-making for targeting. It covers stakeholder relationship management, including effective communication and persuasion strategies, and explores the use of technology, like social media and crowdfunding, suggesting best practices (Johlke 2006, Truter 2009).

Our study explores the overlap between marketing and sales strategies in for-profit sectors and their applicability to nonprofit fundraising and outreach. We aim to leverage sales and B2B marketing principles to enhance nonprofit fundraising training. Our approach includes a framework for experiential learning in fundraising, building on previous work integrating marketing into the nonprofit sector and introducing sales theories to this domain.

We identified crucial fundraising competencies parallel to professional sales skills: donor management, communication, asking and closing, prospecting, active listening, rejection handling, persuasion, and negotiation. Participants noted similarities between fundraising and sales, especially in B2B contexts, highlighting the similar challenges and opportunities faced in donor engagement and sales prospecting. They also expressed a strong interest in experiential learning exercises to refine skills such as closing, presentation, resolving issues, initiating contact, asking questions, and listening effectively, underscoring the demand for sales-inspired training in nonprofit fundraising. This research highlights the potential of applying for-profit sales strategies to enhance nonprofit fundraising efficacy.

Table 1 - Experiential Learning Needs Analysis

Role Play Scenarios Developing Critical Fundraising Skills	Components	# of times mentioned by respondents
Initiating	Initiating contact Approach the donor Cold calling	4

Questioning	Asking questions to understand what drives the donor	1
Effective Listening	Effective listening to build a relationship with the donor	1
Responding	Responding	12
	Presenting	
	Upselling (e.g., multiple-year commitment) Storytelling	
Resolving	Resolving	4
	Objection handling Negotiating Conflict resolution	
Closing	Closing	13
	Asking for commitment	
	Confirming commitment	

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Perception of Business Ethics among Economics Students

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According to several researchers, academic ethics is worth researching because students' opinions and attitudes towards academic ethics can be used to predict the ethical standards and values they will follow in their professional or private lives as adults (e.g. Payan et al., 2010; Amigud et al., 2022). Business ethics is most often researched among practising managers (e.g. Goodarzi et al., 2018), and business education always includes business ethics, either in a separate course or as an important topic in another course, such as strategic planning.

Members of Generation Z were born between 1990 and 2010 (Oxford Learners' Dictionaries), so some of them are already working, even in decision-making positions, while younger members currently are at university.

The research question of our empirical study is: How do students in business master study think they would behave and decide in the face of different economic ethical dilemmas? The aim of our study is thus to gain a deeper understanding of younger Generation Z students' perceptions of business ethics. In our research, we used a mixed methodology where we looked at students' answers and options to ethical dilemmas through short questions in the form of classroom exercises where we also discussed ethical dilemmas.

Business ethics is an applied ethics which includes "rules, principles, and standards for deciding what are morally right or wrong when doing business" (Cambridge Dictionary). The main purpose of business ethics is to help companies and their employees and stakeholders to make a decision about an ethically questionable transaction and to guide business decisions in an ethically acceptable direction in accordance with their objectives (Ugoani, 2023). Business behaviour focused on ethical conduct is becoming more widespread around the world, with the practice of creating codes of ethics and incorporating them into the core operations of the company (Girisha et al., 2020). Ethical dilemmas bring us back to the almost eternal opposition between 'ought' (values, rules) and 'will' (self-interest, protection of our interests).

The reason for using a mixed methodology was the subject of our research. Research on ethics (academic, business or workplace ethics) requires great care because of its complexity and because its research is often based on self-assessment and self-judgement, for example in the case of questionnaires. This makes it difficult to build up an objective picture, which is why more researchers recommend more creative, indirect methods (e.g. Chankova, 2020). Amigud et al. (2022) focused their research on responses to ethical dilemmas. In fact, we have done the same.

The study involved 45 international students in their 20s, who are studying for a Master's degree in Economics and have encountered ethical dilemmas in the form of business ethics in a corporate strategy exercise. First, we discussed ethics and business ethics, presenting examples of good and bad corporate practices. Then, each person was given an ethical dilemma with simple questions about how they would make a decision and what factors influenced or made it difficult.

At the heart of the ethical dilemma was a Dutch manager responsible for running a mine in Africa that provides a livelihood for 1,000 families. There is no local work other than subsistence farming. The manager identified several safety problems, but the mine's engineer said the cost of modernising the mine would make it uneconomic. Closing the mine would cause a major political backlash and damage the reputation of the parent company. Keeping the mine open, on the other hand, would risk a major disaster (Johnson et al., 2008;160). That was all the information the students were given and they had to decide what they would have done if they had been in the manager's shoes. Some questions helped them answer, which also dealt with aspects of the decision; personal/family, corporate (parent and subsidiary) interests, as well as the interests of the local community and the African country. The questions were previously tested with Serbian students. We have been using these ethical dilemmas for years in this course and found that when there were no facilitating questions, students had a very difficult time deciding, and more of them had little to no idea what to do with the task. Now, it seems that the questions helped the students a lot, and most of them would have tried to find some kind of compromise, with the safety of the local workers being the most important aspect. After their answers were written down, we discussed the situation on a voluntary basis, during which the students were more active and courageous, and in this oral discussion, too, the search for compromise dominated, and they considered gathering more information as the most important thing to do.

The limitation of our research is the small number of students and the fact that it involved students present in the particular economic course of the given master study. One of the conclusions of the research is that ethical dilemmas are more conducive to students' development of business ethics and are more interesting and understanding to students. The aim of the research was not to find the only good decision, but to understand the complexity of business situations and problems, and to feel the need and pressure to make decisions. The more general lesson of the study is that decision-makers should not be left alone in a particularly difficult decision situation, but should be supported in some way. They should not be left in a critical situation where they feel they can only make the wrong decision, because they have to decide, and quickly. Rather, they need to be helped wisely to "get out of the box", to look around (gather information) and find the optimal compromise or other solution.

Our research contributes to the practice of more effective teaching methods in business ethics; shows how Generation Z students perceive certain issues in business ethics; and provides suggestions for solving difficult business dilemmas in general.

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Digital transformation and Servitization in SMEs: Two cases study

Digital Transformation and Servitization in SMEs: Two Cases Study
Cheng Mei Tung, Feng Chia University, Taiwan

1. Introduction

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Data Governance in Service Ecosystems – The Case of Vehicle-Based Services

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„This research received funding from the European Commission under the PISTIS project, Grant Agreement 101093016."

Aim of the Study

The growth of ubiquitous information infrastructures (Weiser, 1991) stimulates the rise of service-centered modes of value creation (Badinelli et al., 2014; Barile et al., 2012; Ehret and Wirtz, 2017): Data facilitate the specification user requirements for resource use, flexibilize the resource base and connect users with provider processes. Internet-of-things technologies facilitate the development of service-business models on the base of sensors and data transfer technology. Notable examples are performance contracts for airplane engines (power-by-the-hour) or the servitization of industrial equipment such welding machines (pay per weld). One key characteristic of such service-business models is the inter-organizational data exchange, e.g. from the airline to the engine manufacturer or from the car manufacturer to the welding manufacturer, raising the issue of inter-organizational data-governance: Access to data defines scope, scale and performance of the service portfolio unlocked from the physical resource base. This makes inter-organizational data governance a central component of the design of service business models. While there is a decisive body of knowledge on the corporate and the macro (national and international) level of data governance, there are limited insights on the inter-organizational level. Inter-organizational data-governance faces particular challenges: Benefits, costs, and risks can be uneven distributed along ecosystem stakeholders. While investments into data technology and governance can be specified in the present, future returns are uncertain. The purpose of this study is to develop a framework for inter-organizational data-governance and explore its use for the systematic study of vehicle-based services.

Over the recent decades, OEM of automotive vehicles have built-in data-infrastructures into car-design, via the eCall system. OEM's use these data for key functionalities like analysis of vehicle use, material strain, implement predictive maintenance and the continuous improvement of technical performance and functionality. OEM's build on data for offering a service portfolio managed by apps, in particular access to information like mileage, fuel, state of windows or location, simple functions like locking, or heating, and not least value-added services and subscriptions like seat heating or driver assistance. OEM's have started to commercialize car data, while some data market-places are aggregating across manufacturers and offer them via API's. Such commercialized data are used by service providers like car-insurers, fleet-managers, repair and maintenance companies for their service offerings. This also rises also questions of privacy and misuse of data leading to broader ethical questions as recently discussed for data sharing with insurance companies in the media, see New York Times (2024)

Research Questions

In particular, we focus on the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the general components of a vehicle-based service ecosystems?

RQ 2: What are the main benefits, costs and risks associated with data-sharing for ecosystem services?

RQ 3: How do inter-organizational data-governance approaches condition performance, scale and scope of service portfolios?

Objectives/ Theoretical Background

The objective of the study is to offer a general inter-organizational data governance framework for the study of key components of data-governance in vehicle-based service ecosystems. For this endeavor, we adapt Ostrom's polycentric governance approach for identifying and representing key components of data governance in the service ecosystem. The Biophysical environment consists of the vehicle and its physical connections to information and traffic infrastructure, the ecosystems of OEM's, users, suppliers, partners and stakeholders constitutes the community, main types of rules are on the constitutional, managerial and operational level. The focus of the study is how changes in the constitutional level, for example by introducing an OEM-independent data-market-place, unlocks potential for new services by enhancing scale, scope and performance of services through access to vehicle data.

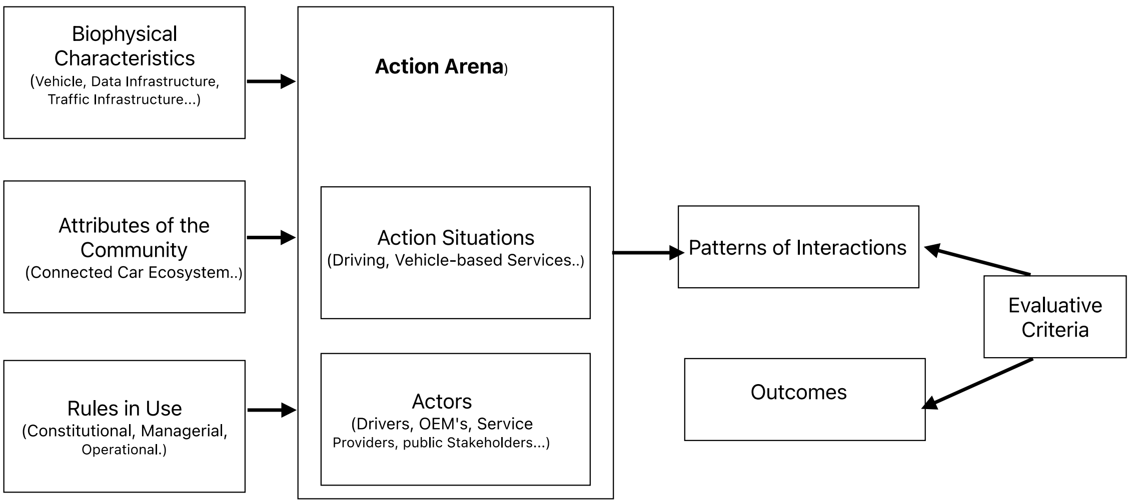

Fig.1: Polycentric governance of vehicle data

Design/ Methodology

Based on a literature review of the governance of data-driven services (Kaiser et al., 2021) we offer a governance framework for marketplaces of vehicle data. We use this framework for exploratory case study of the Caruso Data Marketplace (https://www.caruso-dataplace.com/).

The marketplace aggregates data across diverse OEM's and offers a joint API that enables data-driven services such as fleet-management, insurance or maintenance and repair. The case study offers a pioneering operationalization for the adapted Ostrom framework and identifies key aspects of the data-driven transformation of vehicle-related services.

Main Findings

The study offers a framework that identifies the role of data-governance, in particular the role constitutive rules like establishing a data-focused corporation for enhancing scope, scale and performance of vehicle-based services. It also highlights the interplay of technical components, like API's, and social components, such as constitutive rules and organizational structures in shaping data-driven services. Not least, the study identifies voids in data-governance and hidden potential for digital service innovation (Kowalkowski et al., 2024).

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Training Across Boundaries

The Role of Interfirm Customer Training in B2B Relationships

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The emergence of terms such as "buyer's university", "customer training center", or "skill center" point to the growing importance of supplier-led customer training initiatives in B2B firms that enable customers to gain the greatest possible value from the suppliers' offerings. The present research employs grounded theory and theories-in-use approaches, with 34 expert interviews, to forward a conceptual framework on interfirm customer training. Respondents view interfirm customer training as a structured and formal process that the supplier deploys to improve the customer's knowledge, skills, and abilities to use a supplier's offering and understand the suppliers' processes. The study reveals that customer training can lead to positive customer and supplier outcomes. However, the effectiveness of customer training depends on various factors such as employee reluctance, customer turnover, and fear of know-how loss. The study provides managers with important insights on their customer training initiatives and advances the literature on interfirm training.

Key Words: Customer Training, B2B Marketing, Customer Education, Interfirm Training