

Business-to-Business Marketing in the Light of the Evolution of the Business Environment

By

Nektarios Tzempelikos, PhD
Associate Professor in Marketing
School Research Lead
School of Management, Faculty of Business and Law
Anglia Ruskin University
SCI 708, East Road, Cambridge, CB1 1PT, UK
Tel: +44 (0)845 196 2664
E-mail: nektarios.tzempelikos@aru.ac.uk

1. Introduction and Overview of the Special Issue

Organisations are undergoing deep transformation pertaining to, financialization, globalization and digitalisation. In recent decades, “financial markets” shaped western societies and emerging markets. Besides, globalization has transformed economies and societies in distant parts of the world (Arnold and Sikka 2001). Transformation is also associated with digitalization. Indeed, significant and substantial data are exchanged instantly and continuously within and between organizations as well as individuals. In this context, new opportunities as well as threats, e.g. new markets, more efficient management strategy, stakeholders power balance, blurry organizational frontiers, constantly expose decision makers to new challenges.

These deep transformations influence the way organizations design, perform and monitor many of their activities, e.g. marketing management, internal marketing, digital marketing, social media marketing, information and knowledge management, business ethics etc. (Christen et al. 2019; Bouwman et al. 2018; Parviainen et al. 2017; Riedl et al. 2017).

Whilst a large number of organizations are adhering to this dynamic, many others are still lagging behind. In order to change, organizations need to implement creative solutions taking into account issues such as organizational structure, timeframe, expected outcome, their location/place/physical/digital environment, their ethical conduct among others. Such issues call for new insights into how organizations from different backgrounds are surfing such complex realities.

Against this background, the development of this special issue has been inspired by both the aforementioned advances and the 4th Edition of the LIGUE International Conference - in collaboration with Bournemouth University, the Academy of Marketing Business-to-Business Special Interest Group (UK), the Retailing and Digital Marketing Research Centre (Canada) and the Association for the Promotion of Innovation and Quality (APIQ-ISCAE, Tunisia) - addressing the theme of “Deep Transformation and the Future of Organisations”, in Tunis, 6 & 7 December 2019. This special issue “Business-to-Business Marketing in the Light of the Evolution of the Business Environment” was developed by Nektarios Tzempelikos (Anglia Ruskin University, School of Management) and brings together six superb articles discussing the latest thinking about recent

changes in the business environment and their implications for business-to-business marketing. The papers are positioned both in terms of the recent changes in the economic and business setting such as digital/ social media interaction between buyers and sellers and in terms of how business-to-business companies can utilise advancements on the information technology field such as digital transformation and social media applications to respond to the evolution of the complex business environment. We next elaborate on the specifics of the special issue and present the articles that are included in it. At this point, we would like to thank David Lichtenthal, Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing Editor-in-Chief, for welcoming our idea and for kindly allowing us to develop this special issue.

We begin with Kaouther Kooli, Nektarios Tzempelikos and Mhd Yassin Hammouda's article "*The influence of B to B firms use of multiple social media platforms on relationship sales performance: an institutional perspective*". To the best of our knowledge this study is one of the very first studies to address the influence of the competitive pressure on B to B (business-to-business) firms' use of multiple social media platforms, and the influence of organization and individual social media competences on relationship sales performance. It uncovers complex paths relationship between the competitive pressure and relationship sales performance. The results show that although the use of multiple social media platforms significantly mediates the relationship between competitive pressure and organisation social media competence, this relationship is rather weak and questions to an extent the investment made by firms to manage an increasing number of social media accounts. Therefore, rather than copying competitors practices, business-to-business firms must carefully choose a small of social media platforms as part of clear social media strategy.

This is followed by "*Reciprocating business model innovation – how client and supplier models interact*" by Merlin Stone, Eleni Aravopoulou, Ryan Stott, Brett Parnell, Jon Machtynger, Liz Machtynger, and Bryan Foss. The authors build on their strong experience in the information technology industry as well as on the grey literature, to shed the light on the changes of industry business model on the supplier side and changes in business model on the client side. This study is the first to uncover that the changes in the business model on the client side are contingent on the

products and services that emerge from the information and communications technology industry as it changes its business models. The findings of this study support client-side companies in formulating their business strategies in industries which are highly dependent on successful information management.

Sina Rhuland, Kaouther Kooli and Len Tiu Wright authored the third article entitled “*B to B Firms’ Motivation to Become Members of Digital Platforms: The case of Crowd UK*”. Taking a multi-stakeholders’ perspective, the authors explore the determinants leading to B to B firms’ motivations and subsequently to their intentions to become members of a new digital platform and map the factors that encourage the intention and actual registration of business-to-business players to use the particular digital platform. Stakeholders related to “This is Crowd Ltd”, a B to B firm from the creative industry, were interviewed. The study reveals that digitization is a change process at an organizational level, but it is often the drive independently from personal convictions that make managers join the particular digital platform or to contemplate joining others. The study also emphasises that B to B firms’ motivations to register on a digital engagement platform needs to be seen as a variable that changes over time with advancing digitization and new business opportunities.

The next article is “*Innovation in Key account Management: Identification of Research Trends and Knowledge Gaps*” by Christian Lautenschlager and Nektarios Tzempelikos. The authors use bibliometric and content analyses to provide a comprehensive overview of the research landscape in Key Account Management (KAM) and to identify potential knowledge gaps and under studied research questions in the context of innovation in KAM. The study identifies key opinion leaders and current expanding research areas around KAM. Emerging areas for innovation for growth in KAM are cross-culture business management, digital marketing and e-commerce technologies. The study identifies the most influential publications and authors in the KAM field, providing guidance to researchers and practitioners when conducting research on the area of KAM.

The fifth article is “*The Impact of the Negotiators’ Personality and Socio-Demographic factors on their Perception of Unethical Negotiation Tactics*” by Hamida Skandrani, Lilia Fessi and Riadh Ladhari. The authors carried out a field study among middle manager employees and chief executive

officers (CEOs) directly involved in business negotiation activities for their organizations. The study findings show that the negotiator's personality traits have overall a large explanatory power of the dispositional propensity to endorse unethical negotiation tactics. The findings could help firms to identify the more suitable profiles in terms of socio-demographic variables and also personality traits for positions related to negotiation with their stakeholders, especially for those with more long-term orientations. Moreover, recognizing the potential of businesses to provide an important contribution to society and the large influence of business ethics in people's everyday lives, trigger a better grasp of the factors that help alleviate unethical practices and that nurture a business culture embedded in an increasing demand for business ethics worldwide.

The final article in this special issue is entitled “*Developments in B to B and B to C marketing and sales automation systems*” and is contributed by Merlin Stone and Neil Woodcock. The authors consider the impact of the latest developments in information and communications technology on the automation of and support for marketing and sales. The authors criticize academics' focus on specific aspects of marketing and sales automation rather than on the comprehensive approach followed by leading companies. They recommend to academics to keep up with these developments, by reading the professional literature, particularly that relating to comprehensive marketing and sales automation, and by becoming involved in projects with companies that are automating their approaches, focusing particularly on projects which aim to automate the entire marketing and sales process rather than individual parts of it.

2. Concluding remarks

A key theme underlying this set of articles is that the evolution of the business environment has substantially changed the nature of business relationships (Salo 2017). The business-to-business exchanges are characterized by an increasing role of digitalization and an increased complexity which can affect the nature and relative importance of the drivers of performance in business markets (Lichtenthal 2004; Tzempelikos 2020). Firms should adapt their marketing strategy and reallocate their marketing investments to respond to the evolving business environment, e.g. periods of recession (Srinivasan, Rangaswamy, and Lilien 2005). This reallocation includes a better integration between

marketing and other organisational functions and the shift from traditional marketing to online marketing, including a rise in the social media from business-to-business firms (Rollins, Nickell, and Ennis 2014). Looking forward, we would like to see more research in this area, focusing specifically on the role of digital content marketing and social media applications in helping firms competing in the marketplace.

In conclusion, we believe that the articles of this special issue contribute to a better understanding of the increasing role of digitalization in business-to-business exchanges and the increasing complexity of the business environment and offer insights on how the broader information technology can (and should) be utilized so that the business-to-business firms can respond to the changes in the economic and business setting. In addition, this special issue provides some directions for future research to explore more deeply and thus advance our field. We hope the readers will enjoy the reading.

3. References

- Arnold, P. J., and P. Sikka. 2001. Globalization and the state–profession relationship: the case the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 26(6): 475-499. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0361-3682\(01\)00009-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0361-3682(01)00009-5)
- Bouwman, H., S. Nikou, F. J. Molina-Castillo, and M. de Reuver. 2018. The impact of digitalization on business models. *Digital Policy, Regulation and Governance* 20 (2): 105-124. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/DPRG-07-2017-0039>
- Christen, M., H. Blumer, C. Hauser, and M. Huppenbauer. 2019. The Ethics of Big Data Applications in the Consumer Sector. In *Applied Data Science*, 161-180, Springer, Cham
- Lichtenthal, J. D. 2004. Internet integration in business markets. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* 11 (1/2): 3-8. doi: https://doi.org/10.1300/J033v11n01_02

- Parviainen, P., M. Tihinen, J. Kääriäinen, and S. Teppola. 2017. Tackling the digitalization challenge: How to benefit from digitalization in practice. *International Journal of Information Systems and Project Management* 5 (1): 63-77. doi: <https://doi.org/10.12821/ijispm050104>
- Riedl, R., A. Benlian, T. Hess, D. Stelzer, and H. Sikora. 2017. On the relationship between information management and digitalization. *Business & Information Systems Engineering* 59 (6): 475-482. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12599-017-0498-9>
- Rollins, M., D. Nickell, and J. Ennis. 2014. The impact of economic downturns on marketing. *Journal of Business Research* 67 (1): 2727-2731. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.03.022>
- Salo, J. 2017. Social media research in the industrial marketing field: Review of literature and future research directions. *Industrial Marketing Management* 66 (October): 115-129. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.07.013>
- Srinivasan, R., A. Rangaswamy, and G. L. Lilien. 2005. Turning adversity into advantage: does proactive marketing during a recession pay off?. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 22 (2): 109-125. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2004.05.002>
- Tzempelikos, N. 2020. Relationship value in business-to-business markets: a replication and extension of Ulaga and Eggert's (2006) study. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* 35 (7): 1273-1288. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-07-2019-0320>