

Innovation in Key account Management: Identification of Research Trends and Knowledge Gaps

by

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Abstract

Purpose

The present work is aimed 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.

Method

Bibliometric and content analyses have been performed. The identified scientific articles underwent into a quantitative and qualitative investigation to map the global research landscape and to measure the evolution of scientific domains and production within KAM.

Findings

The study highlights the significance of the corporate strategy, quality of the sales team and organizational framework for the evolution of KAM. Furthermore, the study identified 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.

Implications

This study offers a guide for researchers on the area of KAM providing information on scholarly work covering B-to-B marketing insights on innovation in KAM.

Originality

The conduction of a systematic review of the relevant literature allows us to understand better the intellectual structure of the field, to synthesize the findings of previous studies, and to identify expanding and emerging research areas. In addition, we identify the most influential publications and authors in the KAM field, providing guidance to researchers and practitioners when conducting research on this subject area.

Keywords: Key account management, B-to-B Marketing, Innovation, Bibliometric analysis, Content analysis, Cross-culture management, Digital Marketing, E-commerce.

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1. Introduction

Key account management (KAM) is a strategic direction for sales organisations, e.g. suppliers and vendors, to intensify the relationships between essential partners and clients in the Business to Business (B-to-B) markets. KAM describes a customer-focused business unit with the overall aim to establish a long-term, strategic and collaborative partnership with clients to gain more significant business opportunities and thus drive significantly higher revenue and turnover. KAM underlies a commercial approach to serve high-potential, multi-location accounts with complex needs requiring individual attention through a long-term and established relationships (Abratt and Kelly 2002). Thus, organizations add additional resources and proficiencies to their customer experience capabilities to implement an organizational environment for KAM to meet the individual requirements and needs of profitable customer accounts.

In the last 40 years, the concept of KAM became more and more popular in the industry and is nowadays an established commercial approach for sales organizations operating at an international or global level. With the beginning of the 1990s, KAM has found its ways in academic sciences of business management. Since there, KAM has been established as a distinct sub-discipline of industrial marketing and B-to-B marketing. In the last three decades, many studies and investigations about KAM have been successfully published. Therefore, the global research landscape of KAM is sharpened by various field-based studies regarding surveys and interviews, comprehensive reviews and economic theories.

The commercial interest for KAM is growing over last two decades as KAM is associated to drive significantly higher revenue and turnover by working closely with the most valuable customers. In the same context, research activities about KAM continued and generated a remarkable knowledge base about B-to-B marketing insights for innovation for growth in KAM.

Against this background, the present study is focusing on peer-reviewed research data to build a comprehensive overview of the growth areas for buyer-seller-relationship in KAM. More precisely, by using bibliometric and content analysis, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the value and significance of KAM research for B-to-B marketing?
2. Which are the most underlined topics in academic research of KAM and how vital are these findings for practitioners of KAM?
3. What are the current emerging research area for innovation in KAM?
4. Who are the key opinion leaders in the field of KAM, and what is/was their scientific impact on the research of KAM?

Overall, this study is aimed to investigate the global research landscape of KAM to evaluate growth and innovation areas for buyer-seller-relationship in KAM. Such an analysis

is particularly interesting as the issue of KAM is complex and broad, touching upon various disciplines (e.g. sales marketing, relationship marketing, international marketing), different organisational levels (e.g. individual salesperson, sales teams, top management, inter-firm level) and different methodologies. The conduction of systematic literature review allows us to understand better the intellectual structure of the field, to synthesize the findings of previous studies, and to identify expanding and emerging research area. In addition, we identify the most influential publications and authors in the KAM field, providing guidance to researchers and practitioners when conducting research on this subject area.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, we present an overview of the KAM research and a report of previous KAM review articles. Second, we present the methodology utilised in this paper, specifically the employment of bibliometric analysis and content analysis techniques. Third, we present the findings of the study. Fourth, we identify emerging areas for KAM evolution and we propose a research agenda. In closing, we present the conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2. The rationale of KAM

Back in the eighties, the term ‘National Account Management’ was used to describe the sales effort to deal with customers that generate or have the potential to generate, large sales volume and/or profits, e.g. (Shapiro and Moriarty 1984; Stevenson 1980). Essentially, the National Account Management was treated as a practical application of the sales management towards the ‘big’ or ‘major’ accounts, lacking enough theoretical background. However, during the years that followed many suppliers and researchers saw the potential to achieve several strategic objectives, not merely financial, such as access to know-how, reference value, etc., through the building of close, long-term relationships with customers of strategic importance.

Literature has widely recognized the importance of adopting a relationship marketing approach to managing customer relationships (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995). This is particularly relevant in B-to-B markets where customers tend to be few and powerful; markets are rather static and buyer-seller relationships are characterized by complexity, interdependence and long-term orientation (Heide and John 1992). The paradigm shift from transactional marketing to relationship marketing brought with it ‘a new management philosophy’, Key Account Management (KAM) (Abratt and Kelly 2002). Key accounts are not merely the ‘large’ accounts (Ivens and Pardo 2007). In fact, the size of a customer is just one criterion so as to be classified as a key account (Pardo 1999). The importance of a customer is determined by various criteria besides purely economic, such as status, know-how and location, e.g. (Boles, Johnston, and Gardner 1999; McDonald, Millman, and Rogers 1997; Pels 1992).

Suppliers engage in KAM relationships because of the anticipated long-term benefits of collaboration (Ryals and Humphries 2007). Usually, suppliers benefit from higher revenues and faster growth rates (Bolen and David 1997), whereas customers benefit from customized offerings, cooperation, and faster response (Sengupta, Krapfel, and Pusateri 1997). Both sides benefit in the longer-term from lower costs (Byrnes 2002), and improved performance (Galbreath 2002). However, this value co-creation is not automatic (Ryals and Humphries 2007). Suppliers or customers often use their bargaining power in order to get an advantage over the other party (Kalwani and Narayandas 1995). The management of KAM relationships appears, therefore, to be complex, and many factors must be taken into consideration to build and maintain successful KAM relationships. The increasing KAM complexity calls for a systematic review of the current state of KAM research (‘where we are’) and, at the same time, the identification of potential unexplored research opportunities in this area (‘where we want to be’).

3. Review articles in KAM research

In the last ten years, the scientific publishing in KAM is characterized by a low number of systematic literature reviews and studies. Most of the peer-reviewed publications investigated a specific area of interest, like top management, sales team etc. and provide a selective literature analysis mostly followed by primary research studies. A few studies have provided a review of the literature on KAM, as their key objective. In particular, Weilbaker and Weeks (1997) reviewed the evolution process of KAM. Jones et al. (2005) reviewed KAM literature focusing on the selling team dynamics. Guesalaga et al. (2018) reviewed KAM literature regarding the resources and capabilities which underpin a strategic KAM. However, these reviews focused only on these aspects of the KAM literature not covering the full breadth and depth of the KAM literature. In addition, McDonald (2000) identified key antecedents of KAM and KAM stages. Similarly, Zupancic (2008) identified key success factors in KAM for an integrated framework. Homburg, Workman, and Jensen (2002) grouped the KAM literature as research on key account managers, research on buyer-seller relationships, and research on KAM approaches and provided empirical analysis focusing mainly on KAM relationships. While these articles review a wider range of KAM literature, they do not provide a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the topic.

Guesalaga and Johnston (2010) conducted a first comprehensive review of the KAM literature using content analysis. However, the data that the analysis based upon were quite limited including 64 articles only. Recently, Kumar, Sharma and Salo (2019) extended the previous study by providing a bibliometric analysis including journals from various disciplines in the review and used a much larger number of articles (373 in total) comparing to the Guesalaga and Johnston (2010). While Kumar, Sharma, and Salo (2019) provide a wide-angle and rigorous analysis of the study, our study differentiates in that we present results of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Given the diversity of the KAM literature, such an

integrative research effort allows us to better understand the intellectual structure of the subject area. We believe therefore that the present study adds to the review studies in the area of KAM.

4. Methodology

The methodology of this study is based on a three-stage approach. First, the foundation of the review process was the establishment of a comprehensive scholarly database of proven and qualified articles about KAM. Second, the identified scientific articles had to undergo a quantitative and qualitative investigation to map the global research landscape and to measure the evolution of scientific domains and production within KAM. The last stage of the review process was the data interpretation and conclusion, whereas essential outcomes, and learnings were elucidated to provide the scientific community with an overview for upcoming research trends and a guide for unregarded research questions in KAM.

The analysis and identification of KAM research is undertaken through a quantitative approach based on a bibliometric analysis and qualitative approach based on a content analysis. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages and therefore must be seen as being ‘complementary’ in gaining a better understanding of a field of study (Coombes and Nicholson 2013). Arguably, a qualitative approach in isolation cannot adequately address how dynamically knowledge gets generated and evolves over time (Osareh 1996) nor adequately reveal the influential journal articles and authors driving a discipline throughout the years (Backhaus, Lugger, and Koch 2011).

4.1. First stage: Establishment of a database of proven articles about KAM

The first stage aims to generate a comprehensive scholarly database with a proven record of qualified scientific publications of KAM. Therefore, the approach is based on a five-step process to identify and assess all KAM-relevant articles in economic and business sciences:

- 1) These source words were included to cover the scientific environment of KAM in economic and business sciences: *key account management*, *KAM*, *strategic account management*, *global account management*, and *buyer-seller-relationship*.
- 2) These sources and databases of scientific contributions have been used to index scholarly KAM-literature in economic and business sciences: *Web-of-Sciences*, *Scopus*, *Microsoft Academic*, *ABI/INFORM*, *Business Source Premier* and *Google Scholar*. Also, the data sources from certain publishers with named economy journals have also been used, including *Taylor & Francis*, *Emerald*, *Elsevier*, and *Chapman & Hall*.
- 3) The search process within the literature databases was based on the usage of Boolean search operators, including *AND*, *OR* and *NOR*, to run source word queries within the abstracts, titles and keyword lists of the scholarly literature.
- 4) All identified scholarly literature was intensively reviewed and selected according to pre-defined inclusion criteria to create a comprehensive and proven database of KAM-related articles (see table 1).
- 5) The final database of scholarly articles was managed by a professional reference software to track updates from publishers and to provide simplified access to quantitative and qualitative analyses of scientific publishing in KAM.

Table 1: Inclusion criteria

No.	Topic	Criteria	Reason for inclusion
1	Scientific quality	Published under peer-review	Highest quality standards for scientific literature
2	Type of literature	Original research or literature review	These types of literature undergo an intensive peer-review process before publishing.
3	Scientific language	English	English is the primary scientific language for the global research community in economic and business sciences
4	Scientific responsibilities	Authors	The names of the authors could be identified and match with the listed affiliations

5	Scientific responsibilities	Affiliations	The affiliations of the authors could be identified and match with the listed names of authors.
6	Focus of research	Title	The content of the title is related to KAM research.
7	Focus of research	Abstract	The content of the abstract is related to KAM research.
8	Date of publication	Date	The time frame for publishing is between 1980 and 2018

4.2. Second stage: Quantitative and qualitative analyses of scientific publishing in KAM

The second stage is aimed to provide comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analyses of KAM-relevant scholarly articles:

4.2.1. Bibliometric analysis (quantitative investigation)

A bibliometric analysis consists of applying statistical methods to determine quantitative changes in a scientific research topic, establish the profile of publications in the field, and detect tendencies within a discipline (De Bakker, Groenewegen, and Den Hond 2005). Various indicators have been established to describe a particular research landscape based on published scientific contributions (Thonon et al. 2015). In detail, four different quantitative indicators have been selected to describe the scientific impact and producibility of researchers in the field of KAM:

- *Number of publications*: This indicator covers the number of peer-reviewed articles published by researchers in a certain period of time and can be understood as a metric for the evolution of scientific productivity.
- *Number of citations*: This indicator covers the counting of the number of citations received by researchers from published articles within a specified period of time and

can be understood as a quality criterion of publications regarding the acceptance and endorsement in the scientific community.

- *H-index*: This indicator covers the number of articles with the number of papers with citation number $\geq h$ as a useful index to characterize the scientific output of a researcher to combine quantitative measure (number of articles) and qualitative (number of citations).

Furthermore, a second approach was used to focus on three different quantitative indicators to describe the scientific impact and producibility in the field of KAM without considering individual researchers:

- *Journal impact factor*: This indicator covers a ratio of number of citations to number of citable articles of a journal and can be understood as quality criteria for visibility of a journal in the scientific community.
- *Number of publications in the top-ranked journals*: This indicator covers the number of articles in the highest quality journal according to their impact factor and can be used to overcome the limitation of different citation practices in various disciplines.
- *Number of citations per publication*: This indicator covers the counting of the number of citations received by published articles within a specified period of time and can be understood as a quality criterion of publications regarding the acceptance and endorsement in the scientific community.

4.2.2. Content analysis (qualitative investigation)

The aim of the analysis was to gain deeper insights into the specific contents that the KAM-related publications provide. Consequently, we conducted an analysis of the content of all the identified articles. This approach was used to categorize, organize and elicit meanings from the

published scientific contents and to draw a realistic overview from it. Therefore, the analysis is based on a three-stage process to map the scientific publishing in KAM (Bengtsson 2016):

- *De-contextualization*: This approach was focused on the creation of a meaning unit for each article content to formulate a constellation of sentences or paragraphs containing significant aspects and research outcome. These meaning units were labelled with representative codes which were be understood in relation to the context. At first, the full text of articles was used to decontextualize the content. Afterwards, the formulated meaning units were cross-checked with the content from the title, abstract and keywords of the respective publication.
- *Categorisation*: This approach was focused on condensing the meaning units and transferring them into specific themes and categories of research. Therefore, the categorisation was based on the *STW Thesaurus for Economics* from the *Leibniz Information Centre for Economics* (Kiel, Germany) as a reference for specific themes, categories, and subcategories. In detail, the chosen type was rooted in the data from which they arise.
- *Compilation*: This approach was focused on formulating a comprehensive overview of discovered themes, categories, and sub-categories regarding overview tables and representative summaries. In conclusion, the compilation stage was aimed to find the underlying meaning of the content by drawing a sensible outcome of the scientific publishing.

4.3. Third stage: Data interpretation, outcome and learning

The third stage is aimed to interpret and outline the findings of the bibliometric investigations of KAM articles. In detail, essential outcomes and learnings have been elucidated in order to

provide the scientific community with an overview for previous research directions, future research trends and a guide for unregarded research questions in KAM.

5. Results

5.1. Results from the bibliometric analysis

5.1.1. Global publication trend in KAM research

This study has identified 122 peer-reviewed articles, which has been published between 1983 and 2018. All publications are characterized by KAM-relevant contents and the fulfilment of the pre-defined inclusion criteria. The present collection of publications contains circa 97% original research articles and 3% systematic reviews. The mean annual publication rate demonstrates a growth rate from 2 publications in the 1990s to 10-14 publications in the 2010s. The publication trend follows most widely a linear coherence. The publication trend doesn't show a steady and continues growth as significant publication peaks in 1999, 2006, 2009 and 2014 are clearly recognizable (see figure 1). In direct comparison, the overall publication trend in business and economic sciences follows most widely a logarithmic coherence with a couple of hundreds of articles per year in the early 1980s and over 8000 publications per year in 2017 (see figure 2). This circumstance concludes that the KAM research in the last 30 years was less active in terms of publishing articles compared to overall business and economic field. The share of KAM-relevant articles to the overall number of publications in economy and business is slightly declining and come up to 0.18%. This concludes that the global KAM research is under-represented in the academic field of business and economic research and finally needs additional scientific efforts to be more academic perceptible.

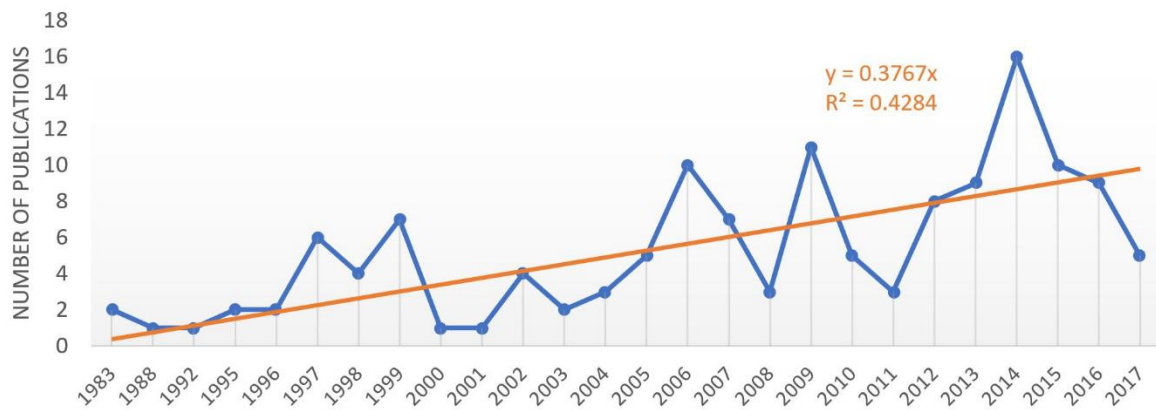


Figure 1: Global research trend in KAM between 1983 and 2017

The mean annual publication rate demonstrates a growth rate from 2 publications in the early 1990s to 10-14 publications in the late 2010s. The publication trend follows most widely a linear coherence. The publication trend doesn't show a steady and continues growth as significant publication peaks in 1999, 2006, 2009 and 2014 are clearly recognizable.

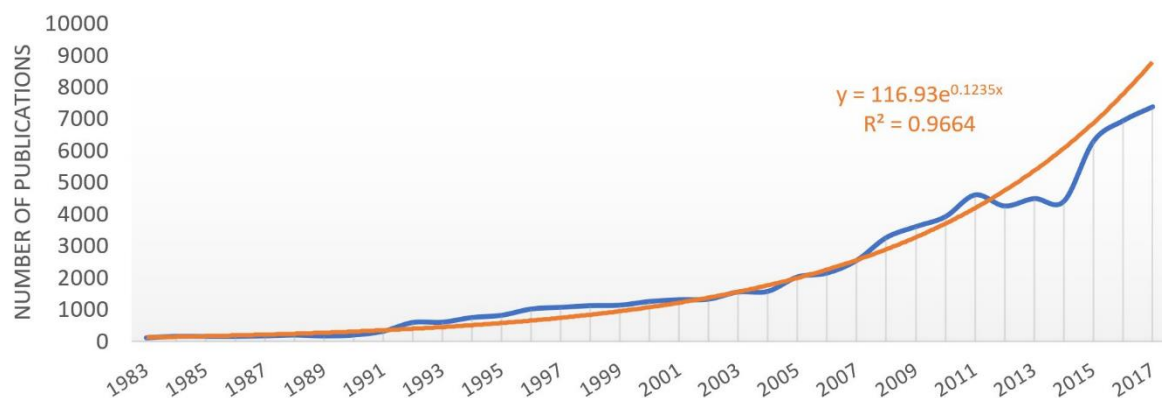


Figure 2: Global research trend in economic and business sciences between 1983 and 2017

The overall publication trend in business and economic sciences follows most widely a logarithmic coherence with a couple of hundreds of articles per year in the early 1980s and over 8000 publications per year in 2017.

5.1.2. Top-ranked peer-reviewed journals

This study has been identified in 55 different peer-reviewed journals, which have published various articles about KAM. Surprisingly, the top five journals with the highest number of articles represent around 52.4% of the overall publishing database. Around 23% of all articles have been published in *Industrial Marketing Management*, followed by *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* with 13%, *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* with 8.2%, *European Journal of Marketing* with 4.8%, and *Journal of Medical Marketing* with 3.4%. According to the ABS ranking (2018), none of these journals is considered as a 4 or 4* journal. Regarding SJR, only *Industrial Marketing Management* can demonstrate an SJR indicator of > 1 . All mentioned journals represent an appropriate publishing platform of KAM research as their scopes and aims cover all of marketing scholars and practitioners researching and working in industrial and business-to-business markets, including theories, concepts, tools, models or applications in sales and selling. Interestingly, the KAM share of the overall publishing rate in these journals is between 0.69% and 3.47% for the same period. This circumstance concludes that the global KAM research is under-represented in these journals of business and economic research and finally needs additional scientific efforts to be academic more perceptible.

5.1.3. Top-ranked researchers in KAM

For the identification of top-ranked researchers, the study focused on authors with the highest number of publications in the field of KAM. Between 1983 and 2018, around 217 researchers published their results and data in peer-reviewed articles as sole authors or in co-authorships. During this investigation, six authors have been identified as key opinion leaders (KOL) due to their highest number of publications in the field of KAM.

Catherine Pardo from the EMYLON Business School (FR) published in total 15 peer-reviewed articles about KAM. Around 39% of her scientific contributions belongs to the field of KAM. Furthermore, *Lynette J. Ryals* from the Cranfield University (UK) can demonstrate the second highest publication rate of 14 articles. Around 21% of her scientific contributions

belongs to the field of KAM. In comparison, *Björn Sven Ivens* from the Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg (DE) published 11 articles so far about KAM, which symbolize around 16% of his total number of published peer-reviewed articles. *Nektarios Tzempelikos* from the Anglia Ruskin University (UK), *Spiros Gounaris* from the University of Strathclyde (UK), and *Iain A. Davies* from the University of Bath (UK) published 8 articles, 7 articles and 6 articles with KAM-related contents, respectively. Especially, *Nektarios Tzempelikos* demonstrates an outstanding share of 73% of KAM literature compared to his total number of publications in business and economic sciences. All mentioned authors are working mainly in business-to-business and customer relationship management and publish on a regular term scientific literature about current topics and issues in KAM.

5.1.4. Research clusters and networks in KAM

Based on the publication analysis, the study has identified specific clusters and networks of research in the field of KAM. For this analysis, the study considered only scientists with a minimum of four publications in KAM to define clusters. On a time-resolved scale, *Tony Millman* (UK) has published in the mid/late-1990s significant scientific contributions in terms of KAM concepts and theories. Nowadays, we have three significant clusters of researchers, which build the current foundation of the global KAM research. *Catherine Pardo* (FR), *Bjorn Ivens* (DE), *Lynette Ryals* (UK) and *Nektarios Tzemplikos* (UK) together with *Spiros Gounaris* (UK) worked widely independent from each other in the research field of KAM. This circumstance concludes that significant knowledge producers are coming mainly from the UK, FR and DE in terms of publishing peer-reviewed articles (see figure 3).

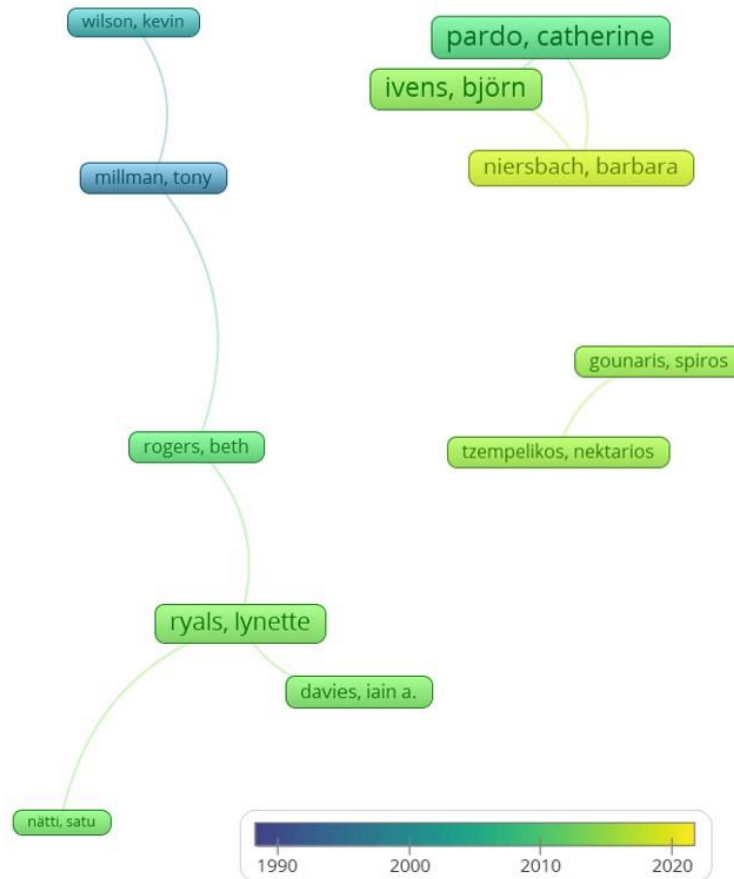


Figure 3: Authorship network of KAM publications (Figure generated by VOSviewer, NL)

Nowadays, three significant clusters of researchers represent the current foundation of the global KAM research, including *Catherine Pardo* (FR), *Bjorn Ivens* (DE), *Lynette Ryals* (UK) and *Nektarios Tzemplikos* (UK) together with *Spiros Gounaris* (UK).

5.1.5. Most recognizable publications

This study identified the most recognizable peer-reviewed articles in the research field of KAM. The best indicator for this purpose is the number of citations, which clearly demonstrates the scientific impact and acceptance of each publication in the research community.

The most recognizable articles in the field of KAM are based on a research cluster of *Christian Homburg* from the University Mannheim (DE), *John Workman* from the Creighton University (US) and *Ove Jensen* from the Otto Beisheim School of Management (DE). In 2002, this authorship published a conceptual approach for KAM focusing on the importance of the organisational design in practice in terms of intra-organisational determinants like activities,

actors, resources and formalization (Homburg, Workman, and Jensen 2002). In detail, this article shows the highest number of citations of 477 and therefore is considered as one of the most recognizable articles in the field of KAM. In 2003, the same authorship published a primary research study about KAM effectiveness which underpins the previous organisational concept article from 2002. In detail, the authors focused on the selling effectiveness in team-selling situations under consideration of intra-organisational determinants like activities, actors, resources and formalization (Workman, Homburg, and Jensen 2003).

In the mid/late 1990s, *Tony Millman* from University of Buckingham (UK) and *Malcolm McDonald* from the Warwick Business School (UK) and *Kevin Wilson* from Southampton Business School (UK) build a research network to publish nameable concepts and articles about KAM. In 1997, *Malcolm McDonald* published a primary study on the understanding of the development of key account relationships focusing on the organisational formalizations and complexity (McDonald, Millman, and Rogers 1997). In 1995, *Tony Millman* published a review article about the nature of KAM, with particular reference to the definition of key accounts, receptivity to KAM among buyers, and a “needs” approach to strategic/operational fit. Furthermore, this article proposes a key account relational development model and examine the managerial implications for selling companies of progression from key account selling to key account management (Millman and Wilson 1995). Another highly recognizable article was published in 2002 by *Jim Blythe* from the University of Glamorgan Business School (UK). He was investigating the usage and benefit of trade fairs in KAM focusing on building corporate partnerships and establishing a shared culture of KAM. Furthermore, trade fairs are used to offer opportunities and inform customers about product and company updates (Blythe 2002).

5.2. Results from the content analysis

5.2.1. General overview on B-to-B marketing insights

The content analysis identified eleven areas of B-to-B marketing insights for growth areas in KAM. Around 18% of all articles focus on *Corporate strategy*, which involves the identification and execution of corporate decisions according to KAM to compete with competitors and face opportunities in the markets. Second, around 17% of all publications covered essential research questions about the *Team* in KAM in terms of structures, processes, and practices of individuals and groups of people. Furthermore, around 15% of all publications have a scientific background in *Organisational structure*, which mainly covers investigations of organizational structures, processes, and practices according to KAM. Around 12% of all articles focus on *Performance management*, which investigates the KAM performance in terms of success and failure of an organization, a department, employee etc.

Whereas, the field of *Organisational decision-making* and *Intrafirm cooperation* have been covered each by 9% of all publications. Organisational decision-making covers processes of making choices by identifying a decision, gathering information, and assessing alternative resolutions in terms of KAM. Intrafirm cooperation describes the harmonization and coordination process within an organisation according to KAM that supports firms to achieve their goals more effectively. Furthermore, around 7% of articles focus on *Knowledge management*, which describes the organisational strategy, behaviour and use of internal and external knowledge regarding KAM. Emerging research areas for KAM are *cross-culture management*, *digital marketing* and *e-commerce*, considering.

5.2.2. B-to-B marketing insights - Corporate strategy

Corporate strategy is a top management approach to define and implement the primary goals and initiatives of a company. The aim of strategic management is to allocate internal and external resources and plan activities to achieve corporate goals and compete for challenges in the respective markets. The idea of corporate strategy is based on analysing the current situation via internal and external metrics, followed by strategy formulation in terms of corporate goals and vision. Afterwards, the strategy will be implemented in terms of setting up directions, allocate efforts, clarify the organization, and provide consistency or guidance in response to the environment. In the context, KAM is considered an essential competitive advantage for companies to allocate internal and external resources to achieve corporate goals and compete for challenges in the market. Under KAM, organisations will develop the valuable capabilities, competencies and allocate business-relevant resources to work on the high level of relationship marketing (Gounaris and Tzempelikos 2014; Gosselin, Matthyssens, and Bauwen 2006).

Overall, the corporate strategy, including the top management level are crucial success factors for KAM in terms of an efficient customer portfolio management and corporate change management (Ojasalo 2001; Piila and Haapasalo 2009; Spencer 1999; Workman, Homburg, and Jensen 2003; Guesalaga 2014; Marcos-Cuevas et al. 2014; Tzempelikos 2015; Pereira et al. 2019). The corporate strategy includes the development of an understanding of the business approach to KAM, identifying what resources are available, developing a comprehensive strategic plan, implementing the plan, and evaluating and making any necessary adjustments (Davies and Ryals 2009; Kientop 2009; Ryals and Rogers 2007). It is highly essential that the corporate strategy on KAM fits with the planning and execution of KAM. Furthermore, the corporate strategy has to match also with buyer's business approach in order to establish a mutual and fruitful partnership for enhanced customer values (Ivens et al. 2009; Millman and

Wilson, 1995; Ming-Huei and Wen-Chiung 2011; Pardo 1999; Ryals and Davies 2013). But, the corporate strategy as can also be considered as a cause of KAM failure in terms of a misalignment of organisational processes, structures, and systems according to the KAM implementation (Friend et al. 2014; Wilson and Woodburn 2014; Leischnig et al. 2018). Furthermore, the top level management is aimed to support the relationship quality and the KAM effectiveness in terms of an inter-functional coordinator and setting-up clear goals in the KAM implementation process (Nätti and Palo 2012; Ivens and Pardo 2016; Wilson and Woodburn 2014). In the end, KAM provides access to a wealth of strategically important information for company competitiveness and business performance (Ivens and Pardo 2014). In the long-term, key accounts place a greater emphasis on the human interaction and unique treatment benefits instead of financial benefits (Yeh et al. 2017).

5.2.3. B-to-B marketing insights - Intrafirm cooperation

The implementation and execution of KAM require a comprehensive coordination and harmonization process between multiple offices and national key accounts in terms of inter-functional alignments and initiatives, social and professional interactions, and knowledge transfer across sites and countries (Sharma 1997; Brady 2004; Guesalaga and Johnston, 2010; Hughes et al. 2007; Piercy and Lane 2006). Especially global KAM is facing challenges in corporate coordination and harmonization of knowledge, attention to segmenting customer requirement and gaining access to different levels of commercial and technical problem-solving capabilities (Millman 1996). Therefore, an inadequate cooperate coordination and communication can be considered as a cause of KAM failure in terms of disconnected activities (either geographically or technically distinct, temporally dissociated) (Ivens and Pardo 2008; Pardo 1999). In conclusion, KAM requires a technologic innovation or tool that will facilitate team collaboration and corporate coordination and harmonization (Fleischer 2010).

5.2.4. B-to-B marketing insights - Knowledge management

The acquisition, transferring, usage and analysis of customer knowledge is a crucial business factor for KAM (Salojärvi and Sainio 2010). The involvement of top management and customer relationship management enhance the utilization of knowledge in the management of key account customers (Salojärvi, Sainio, and Tarkiainen 2010). In details, key account teams have a higher perceived level of customer-knowledge acquisition, dissemination and utilisation, and of supplier's key account performance compared to non-team groups, like top-level management (Salojärvi and Saarenketo 2013). Furthermore, the transfer of knowledge across nations and company site must be warranted to secure both a long-term success and organisational learning for KAM (McDonald, Millman, and Rogers 1997; Millman 1996; Smith, 2009). Furthermore, insufficient communication channels among experts and subgroups cause problems in relation to knowledge transfer in KAM in terms of the creation of innovative service concepts (Nätti, Halinen, and Hanttu 2006).

5.2.5. B-to-B marketing insights - Organisational decision-making for key account selection

KAM is supporting organisations in terms of identifying of their own significant accounts and organizing an effective relationship marketing in terms of the best prospects for long-term profit (Pels 1992; Piercy and Lane 2006; Wong 1998). From a strategic point of view, KAM will influence and replace the adversarial buyer-seller relationships with more robust alternatives to managing relationships and to provide access to a wealth of strategically important information regarding company competitiveness and business performance (Ivens and Pardo 2014; Ojasalo 2001; Piercy and Lane 2006). Companies aren't always aware of a strategic approach to select key accounts so that it might happen that firms work with "hidden key accounts" in relationship marketing (Piercy and Lane 2006). Furthermore, KAM underlies a continuous renewal process in terms of KAM capabilities related roles, skills and resources,

including key account selection and opportunity creation (Guesalaga et al. 2018; Kempeners and van der Hart 1999).

5.2.6. B-to-B marketing insights - Organisational structure

The success and implementation of KAM are apparently addicted to the organisational framework and individualized decision-making processes (Ivens et al. 2016; Marcos-Cuevas et al. 2014; Wengler 2007; Gounaris and Tzempelikos 2013b). Therefore, KAM requires organisational key factors to implement and develop a real strategic action plan for key accounts and to reduce barriers and resistance from all levels and functions within the organisation (Millman and Wilson 1999; Pressey, Gilchrist, and Lenney 2014). In detail, the KAM concept might base on organisational activities, actors, resources and formalization, which define the dimension of KAM in terms of strategy, solutions, people, management and screening (Homburg, Workman, and Jensen 2002; Zupancic 2008; Zupancic and Müllner 2008). Similar, the change management for KAM implementation focused mainly on tangible factors (strategy, structure and system) and intangible factors (skills, staff, style, and shared values) (Guenzi and Storbacka 2015). In detail, the KAM formalization as a integrative relationship function might facing challenges with internal structures and processes in terms of a “rush” or “muddling through” in defining of managerial competencies and parallel developments (e.g. purchasing and portfolio functions, supply management) (Hughes et al. 2007; Millman and Wilson 1996; Pardo et al. 2011). The corporate organisation and processes influence the strategic nature of KAM in terms of proactive programs (driven by sales opportunity), reactive programs (driven by customer demands), and the organisation-based programs (driven by the belief in customer-centric organisational units) (Brehmer, Geiger, and Rehme 2009; Davies and Ryals 2009). For example, the collaboration between KAM and R&D could also unlock synergies and value creation potential in terms of innovation and customer integration (Wießmeier, Thoma, and Senn 2012).

Furthermore, KAM success depends on different strategic approaches in terms of formal (prone to creeping bureaucracy), reflexive (between the extremes of formal and post-bureaucratic practices), and post-bureaucratic frameworks (liberating from organizational bureaucracy), whereas non-contractual governance mechanism in key account relationship, is more common (Vanharanta et al. 2014). Especially in financial sectors, KAM faces challenges in the regulatory environment, business sector size and diversity, the high degree of intermediation, product diversity and complexity, the uncertainty of product performance, and the problem of measuring profitability (Hughes et al. 2004).

5.2.7. B-to-B marketing insights - Performance management

Performance management is part of the corporate business intelligence and manages the organization's performance, according to key performance indicators such as revenue, return on investment, overhead, and operational costs. Therefore, performance management is the approach of managing and controlling the business's performance in the context of the business' strategy and towards organisational goals. In details, performance management might overlap in some aspects of organizational research and strategic management as they are all part of the firm's management and corporate planning concept. Regarding KAM, most of the academic research in performance management focuses on key drivers for success. Overall, KAM success is mainly based on the best strategic, operational, and personal fit between supplier and key accounts in order to invest more in relational assets, personal/social bonds, and satisfaction activities (Richards and Jones 2013; Sharma 2006). As a result, key accounts demonstrate superior performance compared to non-key accounts and stimulate repeat businesses and higher order volumes and thus facilitate the supplier's market performance (Jean et al. 2015; Sharma and Evanschitzky 2016; Gounaris and Tzempelikos 2013a; Tzempelikos and Gounaris 2015). Another important factor for KAM success is change management of terms of customization of the company's output according to the needs of key

accounts in terms of flexible organisational structure and framework (Rehme, Kowalkowski, and Nordigården 2013; Tzempelikos and Gounaris 2013; Gounaris and Tzempelikos 2013b). Furthermore, joint investments and substantial commitments over a number of years and an effective crisis communication between supplier and key accounts will create added-value solutions and thus are considered as the most important predictors for KAM success (Davies and Ryals 2014; Gounaris and Tzempelikos 2014; Ming-Huei and Wen-Chiung 2011; Nätti, Rahkolin, and Saraniemi 2014; Verbeke, Bagozzi, & Farris, 2006).

5.2.8. B-to-B marketing insights - Consumer behaviour & perception

Strategic partnerships and collaborations are always facing the challenge of different expectations and perception of how the partnership is aimed and in what the partnership duties and perception are. Therefore, the expectations and perceptions of key accounts according to their relationship with the supplier will influence the strategic and operational concept of KAM. In general, key accounts show a higher customer satisfaction and customer loyalty compared to non-key accounts due to the “value-creating-behaviour” of the supplier. For long-term success, it is essential that the suppliers and their associated key accounts have the same understanding and perception of a key account relationship. Both parties must have similar business behaviour and attitudes to support a fruitful relationship between partner. This includes the mutual support in sharing trust, delivering value, achieving commitments and esteeming each other’s (Daugherty, Ellinger, and Plair 1997; Pardo 1997).

5.2.9. B-to-B marketing insights - Cross-culture management

The institutionalization, establishment, practice and commercial success of KAM are affected by various cross-cultural factors in terms of education, language, law and politics, religion, material culture, values, attitudes, perceptions etc. In detail, these cross-cultural factors determine and define the framework for how people interact and do business with people from different cultures. Overall, cross-cultural factors have a significant impact on the process of

making decisions in the sales cycle and buying process (Harden and Zhang 2013). Especially, KAM in an international or global context will be affected by various cross-cultural determinants. Cultural mismatches between suppliers and key accounts create environmental uncertainties, including the risks of losing cooperative trust and brand awareness, aggravated customer communications and poorly understood customer experiences (Jones and McCleary 2016). Furthermore, cross-cultural factors can also impact the internal selling process in terms of the structure and responsibilities of the sales team (Alhussan, Al-Husan, and Alhesan 2017).

5.2.10. B-to-B marketing insights - Revenue management

Revenue management is a corporate strategy and tactic to maximize the revenue of a company due to selling the right product to the right customer at the right time to the right price and through the right channels (Cross 1997). This sophisticated approach is based on analysing all available data to predict consumer behaviour, optimize product portfolio including availability, and set-up an augmented marketing mix including pricing. Regarding KAM, revenue management might have a negative impact on the relationship and trust between key accounts and supplier whereas the supplier is stimulated to identify and analyse key account activities and to conduct contractual decision making with key accounts (Wang and Brennan 2014).

5.2.11. B-to-B marketing insights - Team

The outcome of KAM is heavily addicted to the performance and competences of the underlying sales team. In detail, the performance of key account manager can be influenced by various individual, organisational and environmental factors, which might influence the ability to implement, establish and improve relationships with new and current customers. Job insecurities and poorly managed salary compensation plans show clear evidence to provide a negative impact on the KAM sales team performance (Reisel, Chia, and Maloles Iii 2005; Tice 1997). Whereas special training and development programs for KAM sales members have an eminently positive effect in the success of KAM due to knowledge transfer about strategic key

account analysis, planning, segmentation and penetration (De Alwis and Rajaratne 2011; Kurzrock 1983). Furthermore, the decision-making process of key account managers will be influenced by emotional (Curasi, Boles, and Reynolds 2018) and rational thought pattern (Durif, Geay, and Graf 2013). Overall, the outcome of the KAM sales team performance is subject to the capabilities to perform collaborative relationships with strategic communication between supplier and key account to enhance the customer value and satisfaction (Georges 2006; Lai and Gelb 2015; Schultz and Evans 2002; Sengupta, Krapfel, and Pusateri 2000). Furthermore, the performance is also subject to the individual feasibilities of intra-organisational communication, location and activation of resources and personnel to support the relationship marketing to key accounts (Ivens, Niersbach, and Pardo 2015; Jones et al. 2005). In conclusion, key account managers own a unique commercial perception of strategic sales and demonstrate excellent capabilities in relationship marketing compared to non-key account managers. Although in crisis communication, key account managers can use their selling behaviours to overwhelm resistances and barriers within an organisation (Speakman, Bettis-Outland, and Ryals 2012). Understandably, key account managers might have similar management qualities compared to senior sales managers (Davies and Ryals 2013).

5.2.12. B-to-B marketing insights - Internet marketing (social media)

Social media is a strategic marketing tool in digital marketing that enables the sharing of information and data, including corporate advertisements and announcements etc., to the virtual community. Therefore, social media is considered to be a powerful instrument in digital marketing with substantial commercial potential for the future (Christy and Tracy 2015). Regarding KAM, social media could be gate entrance for creating and strengthen partnerships with new and long-time customers before personal (face-to-face) meeting happens. Thus, social media could assist key account managers to maintain and reconnect to their partnership network more efficiently. In the future, digital media, including social media etc., could be a

strategic business tool for KAM (Lacoste 2016). Furthermore, the age of digitalisation could revolutionize the workflow and cycle of KAM in terms of customer experience and engagement.

5.2.13. B-to-B marketing insights - Event marketing

Tradeshows and exhibitions are field-based marketing activities of a sales organisation. The aims of organising or attendance exhibitions are mainly brand awareness via non-selling activities and sales management via selling activities. Therefore, customer/partner meetings, market research, the announcement of company news etc. are considered as non-selling activities, whereas lead generation, finding new customers or partners, and closing deals are considered as selling activities. Regarding KAM, exhibitions might be advantageous for building and establishing partnerships between firms in a dyadic scenario (Sarmiento, Simões, and Farhangmehr 2015). Furthermore, exhibitions could occupy a pivotal position in KAM regarding the opportunity to have a direct communication channel for the identification of problems, finding solutions of mutual obligations and responsibilities. In summary, “the exhibition hall is the business equivalent of the dance hall. It is a place for chance encounters that may lead to romance, or it is a place to go to on a date” (Blythe 2002). It seems that event marketing has a crucial position in KAM, but more investigations are necessary to understand the impact of the performance and outcome of KAM.

6. Emerging areas for KAM evolution

The identified innovation areas for KAM evolution are based on three different categories: cross-cultural management (1), digital marketing (2) and e-commerce (3).

Due to the age of globalization (1), companies are facing challenges with cross-culture management, including relationship marketing and marketing communication. Due to regional

differences between supplier and key accounts in terms of language, religion, cultural behaviours and perceptions etc. new barriers and restrictions can occur and thus influence the operational and strategic concept of KAM (Matthews and Thakkar 2012).

The majority of research work has been done in countries of the western hemisphere, like United Kingdom (Speakman, Bettis-Outland, and Ryals 2012), Finland (Salojärvi and Saarenketo 2013), France (Pardo 1999) etc. In contrast, only a few investigations have been performed in other cultural markets, like China (Murphy and Li 2015), and Saudi Arabia (Alhussan, Al-Husan, and Alhesan 2017). According to the literature available, the impact of culture, including perceptions, behaviours, attitudes etc., on organizational structures, processes, and practices on KAM is not fully understood and inadequately investigated. Now, a systematic investigation in terms of a larger cross-culture study or meta-analysis is missing or not yet published. This circumstance raises some first questions:

- What is the impact of cross-culture on KAM in terms of management and business organisation of key accounts?
- Is there a difference in the failure or success rate of KAM between different cultures?
- Which cultures are more eligible to practice KAM and why others don't?
- What are the organisational requirements and challenges to implement and establish KAM in different cultures? Are there different barriers or resistance to KAM?

Due to the age of digitalisation, digital marketing (2) and e-commerce (3) play a strategic role in B-to-B management. In detail, digital marketing is one of the essential communication tools in business management to create, keep, and satisfy customer experiences in terms of brand awareness and loyalty, customer education and engagement, and product and service communication.

Nowadays, digital marketing in terms of internet, social media and email is considered as a high-value strategy in performance and revenue management. Digital marketing is a future technology for business management and is subject to constant innovations, like account-based marketing (Johnson, Matthes, and Friend 2019), social robots (Miklósi et al. 2017), and artificial intelligence (Sterne 2017). Now, the global research landscape in KAM is characterized by only one publication investigating the impact of social media on KAM. Therefore, more investigations and studies about digital marketing in the context of KAM are necessary. This circumstance raises some first questions:

- What are the benefits and risks of digital marketing for KAM?
- How will digital marketing change or revolutionize the concept of KAM?
- What kind of organisational framework is necessary for collaboration between digital marketing and KAM?
- Will replace digital marketing the strategic concept of KAM due to digital marketing innovations, like account-based marketing or artificial intelligence?

Nowadays, e-commerce is considered as a digital process for buying and selling of goods and services, or the transmitting of funds or data, over an electronic network, primarily the internet. These business transactions occur either as business-to-business, business-to-consumer, consumer-to-consumer or consumer-to-business. Therefore, e-commerce as a type of relationship marketing might have a direct impact on the customer-perceived values and customer relationship process of a company (Jiang, Jun, and Yang 2016). Now, the global research landscape in KAM isn't considering e-commerce as a research factor in the context of KAM. Therefore, more investigations and studies are necessary to explore the

relationship and commercial opportunities between e-commerce and KAM. This circumstance raises some first questions:

- Is there an evolutionary step of KAM in terms of relationship marketing when e-commerce will become a golden standard in trading and supplying products and services?
- Will e-commerce replace the concept of KAM due to instant customized product and service solutions?

7. Conclusions, limitations and suggestions for future research

This study aims to provide, through a systematic review of the relevant literature, a picture of B-to-B marketing insights for innovation for growth in KAM. It also provides a view of emerging area for KAM evolution. Furthermore, this study identified key opinion leaders, significant research clusters and the most-recognizable publications in KAM research. This study offers a guide to researchers and practitioners in KAM, providing information on scholarly work covering B-to-B marketing insights on innovation in KAM.

Whereas the findings offer valuable insights, the study also has several limitations. First, the assessment of citations in the bibliometric analysis is retrospective and so the influence of a paper and an author in the KAM discipline (as with any discipline) appear in the citation data only after some time has passed. A journal article must be exposed to the academic community for a certain period of time before it is cited by other authors (Backhaus, Lügger, and Koch 2011). Second, future research could apply more sophisticated bibliometric methodologies to analyze the citations (e.g., document co-citation analysis, co-word analysis, social network analysis). This could result in a more profound analysis of the topic. However, for the purpose of one of the few systematic review analyses in the field this would have overshot the mark. Third, even though the study covers a wide range of the KAM literature, it

may not encompass all existing papers that possibly cover the area of KAM. Future studies may consider using documents that are not articles, like reviews, conference proceedings, book reviews, and so forth.

8. References

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