

# Emerging Trends In The Use Of Social Media In B2b Marketing: A Literature Review

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**Abstract :** Social media marketing has gained increased momentum in the digital marketing space in recent years due to the numerous benefits offered. Business to business companies, i.e. those companies that cater to other business organisations, have also started using social media marketing for undertaking several promotional activities such as product launches, deepening customer relations, and building transparency. The aim of this study was to review critical literature pertaining to the use of social media marketing in B2B businesses and identify their emerging trends. A systematic review method was applied for the purpose.

**Keywords:** b2b, social media marketing, customer relations, transparency, systematic review.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, Social media marketing (SMM) has emerged as the rapidly growing trend in the arena of marketing and brand promotion through which business are reaching the targeted customers easily. In simple words, social media marketing can be defined as the strategy of using the social media channels/apps / platforms to promote the company, its brands, and its products. Today, some of the most popular social media platforms, based on the number of subscribers, include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. Through the means of encouraging the users to spread the message regarding their purchase opinions to their personal contacts – friends, and relatives, social media marketing has injected a new exponential dimension of trust to mass communication as well as mass marketing (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard, 2013). In today's market environment where consumers are being constantly bombarded with the advertising messages in various forms and through various platforms, social media has created an opportunity for the companies to communicate and thus connect with the consumers at the higher level of mutual understanding. Social media marketing has enabled the companies to have much faster, clearer and personalized communication with the consumers. Further, the use of social media marketing has not only emerged as an effective promotional tool for the companies, it has also made the companies re-think and re-shape the focus of their marketing strategies back to the individual and the emotional needs of the consumers (Rani, 2014).

B2B (business to business) marketing is the one that concerns the marketing activities between the organizations, companies, government and the institutions. The primary characteristic of B2B marketing is that there are fewer customer relations but involves more stakeholders, more complex decision making. Thus, it can be said that business to business marketing associates the product marketing between the two businesses (Krivonos, 2018). Social media marketing has quite a significant role to play in the B2B framework, mainly for the purpose of lead generation and as a platform to engage with their followers. Most large-scale corporations have multiple blogs that help them exhibit their capabilities to other organizations thus helping expand their market and improve their brand image. They also provide a platform for publishing articles and stories in less formal ways and thus attract other businesses (Logman, 2018).

The aim of this study is to critically assess the findings of existing empirical studies on the use of social media marketing in business-to-business marketing.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous researches executed in this domain suggest that social media channels have been widely employed by firms that following the B2B framework for seamless communication, building trust and thus can eventually convert into substantial business deals. Further, the communication through these social media channels removes time as well as geographical barriers, thus enabling the business to aid from any location and at any point in time. This stage is crucial for B2B companies since it helps them in building relationships and thus establishing more interpersonal relationships (Fomicheva, 2015). Further (Erdoğan & Çiçek, 2012) mentioned that these social media marketing channels even help in building brand loyalty in the B2B framework. Furthermore, the brand awareness gets amplified, connect with other organizations and institutions and thus eventually leading to increased sales. (Kvick-nastaj & Pobleto, 2013) stated that social media marketing enables companies working in B2B framework to reduce their financial investments since it does not require substantial investment in training and deployment. Further it helps the B2B companies to inform their partners about their new products or the services launched, innovation thus maintain the existing relationship

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and attracts the new organizations which is essential for the survival of B2B companies. According to (Mehrtens, 2013) social media marketing enables companies operating in B2B framework to keep the track record of their competitors through their web pages and social networks. (Jussila, 2019) also supported the importance of seamless communication in the modern-day service delivery process and stated that using social media can let the company identify their partners' needs, support the process of sales and improve and maintain relationships with stakeholders while enabling their participation in the research and development process. (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008) emphasized the immense cost advantages stemming from the reduced communication infrastructure, and lowered risk of product failure due to their partners' involvement in the research and development process. Since the products are often personalized according to their demand, partners can easily adopt the innovations. Moreover, these social media platforms provide detailed information about their customers' needs, wants, and interests. The B2B companies by taking these considerations in the account can alter the products according to the consumer requirements and hence increasing their likelihood of buying the products. (Desouza et al., 2009) also mentioned another argument in the support of social media marketing in the B2B framework that is of around the clock option of availability and reachability. A flexible communication framework enables them to collect information about their own as well as the other markets and thus enabling the business to business firms to serve in different cultures and markets.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study used the approach of systemic review in order to access the use of social media marketing in the business to business framework. Although various studies have been conducted in this domain but almost all the studies adopted the quantitative approach. Thus, the present research paper opted for the systematic analysis that aided the researcher to identify, critique and analyze the pieces of evidence that correspond to the issue in the hand.

#### 3.1 Search strategy and selection process

The present study which is based on systematic review was conducted under the guidance of the PRISMA application. The following application guided the researcher on the criteria based on which studies are included for the systematic review. The study has encapsulated various other studies to gather the required information in the present context. Besides this, the search strategy was also opted in order to identify the approximate number of studies that exist in this context. For this purpose, the researcher has used various databases which included social work abstract, CINAHL Complete, MEDLINE, Psyc ARTICLES, PsycINFO, Academic search complete and the Ebook collections. In addition to this, the study also made use of the google scholar in order to identify, if there are any additional studies that have been missed from the other database. However, the researcher made sure that no published dissertations or theses are included in this

search. Further, the guidelines provided by the PRISMA along with this different terminology that relates to the present topic have been used while searching through the databases.

#### 3.2 Keywords

social media, B2B, role, communication, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, social media channel, suppliers, innovation, trust, market.

#### 3.3 Inclusion criteria

The studies included in the present research were based on the following criteria:

- The researcher included the studies for which the full access and the information were available.
- Studies that have published in the English language.
- Studies that included at least one of the keywords that were relevant according to the present study.
- Since the use of social media in marketing is the newer scenario, thus the researcher tried to involve the latest studies.
- Studies that focused on the relationship between social media and B2B marketing.
- Studies that presented the role of social media marketing in B2B framework.
- Studies that showed how social media is affecting the suppliers in the B2B framework.

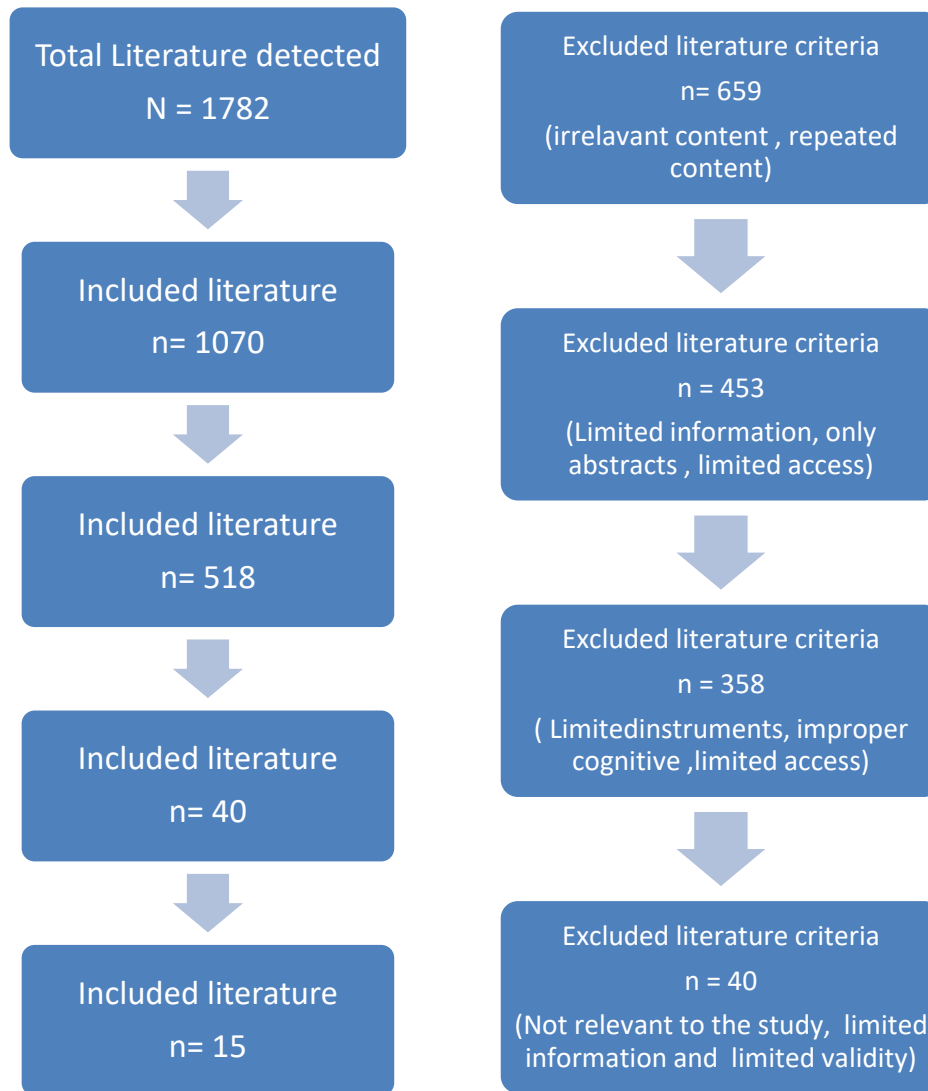
#### 3.4 Exclusion criteria

Considering the aim of the study the researcher developed certain eligibility criteria in order to segregate and filter out the studies that were important from the ones that were irrelevant or did not have the proper information. The exclusion criteria are presented below:

- Studies for which only the abstract and reviews were available or their restriction on reading.
- Studies that had very limited information concerning the topic of the study.
- Studies that were published in the foreign language and for whom the content was not available in the English language.
- Studies that were published before the year 2000.
- Studies that were not based on the business to business framework.

#### 3.5 Study selection

The researcher made use of various search databases to identify 1782 studies that were relevant to this research. After covidence removed the duplicate studies, i.e. studies on repetitive topics and content, 1070 studies were shortlisted for further screening. Further, files with restricted access were eliminated. During this process, the abstracts and keywords of the studies were also screened. This step eliminated 552 studies, due to incorrect cognitive representation. Further screening reduced the dataset to 40 studies, and finally, 15 studies were selected for the purpose of the review which sufficed the inclusion criteria.



**Figure 1:** PRISMA framework

In order to extract the data, the researcher first noted the following information from each of the study, this includes the date of publication, authors, region and what research design used in the study.

**Table 1: Details of Literature Review (In reverse chronological order)**

Authors	Date of Publication	Aim/Focus	Methods	Findings
Jussila	2019	The primary objective of the study was to understand the role of social media marketing (SMM) in B2B companies' innovation processes. The secondary objective was to understand and elaborate on the challenges, opportunities, benefits, and usage of social media marketing in B2B firms.	The paper adopted both the qualitative as well as quantitative approaches. The quantitative approach was used for the first aim while the qualitative approach was used to develop deep understanding.	The results indicated that the major crowdsourcing was done through the social media platforms or applications, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. These platforms helped in building connections and enabled better communication. Further, it was found that social media sites enabled B2B firms to undertake open innovation, activities, and experiments.
Brown	2018	The main objective of this paper was to compare the difference in social media marketing in B2B and B2C firms.	The research was based on the exploratory panel-based survey that included 449 respondents.	The results pointed out that social media usage was different in the B2B firms as compared to the B2C firms. B2B firms identified social media as an effective channel for marketing and building relationships.
Krivosos	2018	The main aim of the study was to compare the different marketing communication strategies for the B2B and thus discover the most effective out of them.	The following study used the statistical survey and the interview method.	The main finding of the study was that the marketers should focus on social media marketing as it proves to be the most cost-efficient Marketing strategy.
Williams	2017	The main aim of the paper was to find how the social media marketing impacts the human resource management in an organization.	The following paper adopted the survey approach.	According to the results, it was found that social media marketing positively impacts HRM especially when it comes to recruiting or hiring.
Werdiningsih & Pudjiarti	2016	The objective of the paper was to find if there is any relationship between the social media interactions with quality management.	The research was based on reviewing the past studies conducted on this topic.	It was found that this culture of social media marketing was capable of imparting knowledge in the organization.
Viswanadham	2015	The main objective of the paper was to understand the technology-based logistics in the B2B networks.	The research was based on reviewing the past studies conducted on this topic.	The main finding of the paper was the usage of social media in technology-based logistics can speed up the delivery process for the B2B firms. Thus, responding to the consumers demand and need immediately.
Scheiner	2014	To understand the changes that had come in the traditional marketing framework.	The research was based on reviewing the past studies conducted on this topic.	The main finding of the paper was that social media marketing has let the marketers to better explore the marketing strategies.
Pettersson, Aramo-Immonen, & Jussila	2014	The main objective of the paper was to understand the social media marketing	The research was based on the systematic review	The main finding of the paper was that social media marketing has

		utilization in the B2B networks.	analysis.	provided support to the B2B firms in terms of knowledge management.
Lacka, Chan, & Chong	2013	The primary aim of this study was the access the usability, utility and perceived usefulness of the social media marketing in the B2B firm context.	An empirical investigation was conducted on a sample of 181 Chinese B2B companies.	It was found that the perception regarding the usefulness, usability, and utility played a significant role in the decision making in the B2B context.
Mehrtens	2013	This paper aimed to figure out the supportive role that social media play for the business to business organizations. The second aim was to investigate the role of social media in the innovation process, marketing and sales process.	The research was based on reviewing the past studies conducted on this topic.	The main findings of the paper were that it helps the firm with maintaining and improving the relationship with the customer. Secondly in the innovation stage social media can lead to customer involvement and collaboration thus reducing the chances of failure.
Brennan & Croft	2012	The main aim of the paper was to understand the role of social media marketing in the B2B firm and its branding.	The present study was based on exploratory analysis that used the content analysis as well as text mining.	The findings of the study presented that large companies were the main users of the social media sites for marketing. However, this was not universally applicable. The US-based B2B firms emerged as the main users.
Järvinen, Töllinen, Karjaluoto, & Jayawardhena	2012	The study aimed to provide an overview of the level of use, measurement, related practices and the barriers that surround the digital marketing in the B2B firms.	The following research used the survey approach that included 145 B2B firms.	The finding of the study indicated that recent advances in digital marketing still remain mainly unexploited and still the b2b firms lack the human resources that know how to make the best of the opportunity provided.
Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides,	2011	The study focused on the B2B SEMs and the social networking practices adopted by them. The second was to measure the usage, barriers, and effectiveness of social media marketing.	Mail Survey method was used for the present study.	The main findings show that a quarter of the UK based B2B SEMs use social media being used as a marketing tool. The major barrier was the absence of the perceived relevance for the particular sector.
Mangold & Faulds	2009	To see whether social media marketing is the hybrid element of the promotion mix.	The research was based on reviewing the past studies conducted on this topic.	The main finding of the study was that conversations, based on social media, amongst the consumers are beyond the manager's control. So, the managers should try to reshape the consumers' discussions in such a way that they leave a positive impact on the organization.
Koiso-Kanttila	2004	The main aim of the article was to review the existing	The research was based on reviewing the	The key findings that emerged from the

		knowledge base in terms of the usage of social media platforms/sites in marketing and the upcoming technologies.	past studies conducted on this topic.	present study are that firms were quite aware of the usage of the social media sites in marketing and also realized that social media usage establishes the accessibility, speed, reduces the marginal cost and increases interaction.
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#### 4 DISCUSSION

The following section provides the discussion based on the studies reviewed in order to access the role of social media marketing in business to business framework. There have been various ways in which the social media marketing can create value for the companies operating in the B2B framework and as well for the company's customers and the suppliers. However, there are still many firms that struggle in the B2B environment that struggle with the implementation of the social media marketing in their businesses (Mehrtens, 2013). The companies operating in the B2B framework can incorporate social media marketing in their businesses for a number of reasons like in order to support and maintain the contact. Which in turn helps to improve the mutual trust also increases the possibility of detecting the potential selling partners in the market (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011). Further as stated by (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) through social media companies are better able to project their product, give more information about its usage, its characteristics, and features, the innovative ideas that have the capacity of attracting customers and also demonstrates transparency. Along with this it also enables the companies to search for the competitor information and follow the innovation and the changes they are bringing in their product and services in order to properly compete with them. (Lacka, Chan, & Chong, 2013) focused on the social media marketing's ability to build on the direct relationships with the customers and the suppliers by allowing the companies, customers or the suppliers to interact with one another. I also helped in and responding to each other questions, complaints, suggestions, or the customers can give their valuable feedback. As stated by (Michaelidou et al., 2011) with the expansion of the social media in terms of its number of users, it offers various opportunities to the companies since they can now reach a wide audience that can support brand awareness and the brand value. Moreover, the usage of social media makes it easier for companies, to compare their products with the competitors and thus negotiate with the consumers and suppliers based on their plus points. Thus, it is said that the more information the company has the better they are in the position to negotiate. Another plus point of the social media usage is that it reduces the transaction cost and also reduces the barrier to entry in the new markets since with the usage of the social environment is much more transparent now and the information is more easily available. (Pettersson, Aramo-Immonen, & Jussila, 2014) provided as to how the social media help in B2B processes. Social media along with marketing also helps in the primary product-related activities such as in inbound and outbound logistics that include operations and sales and marketing and sales of the products. For example, in

the inbound logistics where the activities are majorly concerned with receiving relevant inputs from the suppliers, transportation and the storing of the inputs. Social media can help the B2B firms in these processes as well as by giving a transparent overview of the inventory with the help of the intranets. Also making it possible to reach the wider pool of the possible suppliers by searching them through the possible social media networks. Social media can also be used in the operation stage as well. The operation stage basically includes development activities like testing, packaging, maintenance in order to transform the inputs into the final products. Under this stage, the social media can be used to take useful insights into the organizations that are the main customers in order to increase the likelihood of the product acceptance by them and thus reducing the chances of failure. At this stage, social media has a tremendous influence on open innovation, crowdsourcing, and customer co-creation. Along with this the social media marketing in this stage helps in the identification of the lead users, and they may be asked to test the given product and give their post usage feedback (Jussila, 2019). While in the service stage that deals with after-sale customer services, social media marketing can prove to be of immense help at this stage. For example, by interacting with consumers through conversations, companies can receive feedback and suggestions that are very valuable for further improvement. Moreover, this is helpful from the customer's point of view as well since they can easily reach the company website and ask their questions and queries, complain or exchange the product (Brown, 2018). Further concentrating on the outbound logistic stage dealing with the transfer of the final product to the consumer, social media can influence this stage by improving the just in time distribution of the products and services. Through the usage of social media, other organizations that are consumers can timely inform the supplier about what they need and when they need (Viswanadham, 2015). The final stage, which is marketing and sales, at this stage social media may have a huge impact and can add high value by promoting the product on various platforms and providing round the clock accessibility. Also, it helps to inform the consumer about the new product launches and the collection of the data on the consumer's perspective about them (Brennan & Croft, 2012). Additionally social media also helps in content marketing for the B2B firms, which is an important part because it is only through the social media marketing that the consumer seeks the information about the product and services offered by the company and thus inspires them to make the purchase decisions (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004). Through social media marketing, the marketers of the B2B firm can spread relevant and valuable information about the

product via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or the blogs. This method not only reduces the cost that is involved in traditional marketing methods but also increases the reach of the company (Krivonos, 2018). With respect to the support activities in a B2B firm such as procurement, technology management, HR management, and the firm's infrastructure, social media can play an important role. For example, in the procurement stage that deals with the buying of raw material, it can help in identifying the best possible prices as well as the quality. Social media can help companies identify a wide range of suppliers and their offerings, comparison of their prices and the quality and reading the reviews about the other firm's product quality and services. This helps the organizations to deliver the best possible end product to the consumer that accounts for the quality and the price as well (Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto, & Jayawardhena, 2012). The technology management which involves the activities related to the value chain and is also related to R&D and process development. Social media use can simplify the research and development related factors like companies can benchmark with their competitors by monitoring their social media activities, along with how the consumers are reacting to their products and innovations. This helps the firms to differentiate their products and get to know what consumers actually seek (Scheiner, 2014). Human resources management is yet another dimension where the social media marketing can help a B2B firm. HRM is generally related to the achievement of specific company goals and business plans. Companies can use Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Xing firms to post their job advertisements and thus recruit the people from the wide professional pool. Thus, simplifying the hiring, recruiting, rewarding, training and the career planning processes in the organization. Further within the organization, this can help employees to share their ideas and the valuable information which encourages teamwork. Also, the company can keep posting about their different departments on their websites so that the employees can have collective information about what is happening in the organization (Williams, 2017). Another support activity that is the firm infrastructure that involves the firm's legal framework, financing, and quality management. Although the social media does have much impact on the firm's legal framework and the financing matter. However, it can affect the quality management of the firm. To help the firm in this aspect social media can enable the fast contacts with the suppliers and the customers gathers feedback from them on the new or the existing products or the services offered by the company and thus can manage their quality standards (Werdiningsih & Pudjiarti, 2016). Thus, as pointed out by the above discussion it is recognized that social media has a significant impact on almost all the activities of the business to a business firm. The usage of social media marketing not only adds value for the companies but for the customers as well. The critical findings of these studies have been represented in the tabular format below.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of the study was to critically assess the findings of existing empirical studies on the use of social media marketing in business-to-business marketing. In order to achieve this aim of the study, the paper adopted the systematic review approach. Under this approach, the past studies in the context of the present study were reviewed and the useful insights were gathered from these studies and were presented systematically in the paper. With the help of the past pieces of literature, the present study established the usage of the social media marketing in the business to business firms. The reviewed literature provided information regarding the possible benefits that an B2B firm has through the implementation of the social media marketing tool. The general benefits that imply for the B2B organization were that there is an increased possibility of maintaining and improving relationships and intermediations between the organizations and its customers. Along with this it also enabled the firms to gather the information regarding the possible customers and the competitor's market position thus changing their strategies in order to compete or to come at par with the competitor. These benefits provided by the social media marketing provides firms with immense competitive advantages. Another major benefit that was highlighted during the study was that use of the social media increases the involvement of the consumer in the production process thus the suppliers can get useful and new insights for their new products. This not only increases the mutual trust between the supplier and consumer but also enables the firms to bring innovation based on the customer's needs, wants and recommendations. The social media enabled the organizations to cooperate with the consumer as well as the supplier product modification demands. Moreover, the customer empowerment due to the presence of the social media did serve the business to business firms with ideas and the suggestion that helped them to tailor their products according to the consumer's needs. Thus, reducing the chances of failure while launching new products. Additionally, detected benefits were a reduction in the cost, increased brand awareness and the brand value. Further to gain the deeper knowledge on the topic and how the B2B organization can improve their working through the use of social media, the role of social media in the various activities within the organization such as inbound and outbound logistics, operations, services, sales & marketing, technology management, HR management, materials procurement, and firm infrastructure were analyzed. The findings based on the studies reviewed provide a piece of evidence that social media marketing thus had a positive impact on all the primary as well as secondary activities of the business to business firm. Although the present study through the usage of the systematic review well served the aim of the study, that is to access the role of the social media marketing in business-to-business marketing, the study was entirely based on the qualitative approach. Thus in order to further broaden the scope of the study the researcher can further include the quantitative aspect as well as conducting the survey or adopting the interview approach. There the researcher can directly take interviews of the employees in the B2B firms and can understand their perception regarding the role of the social media marketing in B2B firms. Further,, through the interview, the researcher

other than evaluating the role of the social media marketing can also try to comprehend the challenges and the barriers social media marketing creates for the B2B firms.

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