

B2B Marketing—Social Marketing

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, business (B2B) marketing has been in debate, and marketers have been unable to agree on a B2B branding model. This paper is an analysis of the B2B marketing field and discusses current issues and dilemmas. Social marketing is explored, and theories and different areas are discussed. When exploring social marketing, the importance of reporting the effects of social marketing on B2B and other industries is emphasized. This paper includes documentation of the positive aspects of social marketing in B2B and other industries and highlights the limitations, future research, and future direction of social marketing in B2B.

Keywords

Business-Business-Marketing, Social Marketing, Marketing, Social Marketing, Social Branding, Social Media

1. Introduction

1.1. The Problem

Before the 1970s, business-to-business marketing (B2B) was practiced primarily in the business world rather than an interest to individuals in academia (Sheth & Sharma, 2006). Sheth and Sharma documented that researchers viewed B2B marketing as complex because business buyer behaviors involve several individuals in decision-making. Although B2B Marketing has evolved since the 1970s and many books, journals, magazines, and research have been conducted on B2B Marketing, several research opportunities still exist.

1.2. Importance of the Problem

Along with research opportunities, several issues are present in B2B marketing. According to Rossomme (2003), marketing researchers have used customer satisfaction measurements to determine the status of their relationship with their cus-

tomers. However, marketers' focus on customer satisfaction shifted to consumers, eliminating B2B customers. Branding is another area of opportunity in B2B Marketing. Kotler and Pfoertsch (2007) stated that many managers believe brand loyalty matters in the business-to-consumer market and is unnecessary in B2B. According to Kotler and Pfoertsch, managers in B2B are under the assumption that the B2B marketing is based on customer needs. Kotler and Pfoertsch's rationale are that customers in B2B already know about the products, and their purchasing decisions are based on price, benefits, service, and quality. Saeed (2011) suggested that branding is the most complex issue in B2B Marketing because business consumers usually purchase because of needs rather than emotional values. Another issue in B2B Marketing is that company leaders struggle to understand the financial and non-financial benefits of B2B branding (Saeed, 2011).

2. Method

This study is a systematic literature review. Systematic literature is a review summary and analysis that includes a corroboration of many studies and results (Xiao, & Watson, 2017). The search strategy includes searched studies in academic journals and books. Searches include keywords such as B2B Marketing, Social Marketing, issues in B2B Marketing, and Theories in Social Marketing. The criterion for source inclusion is peer-reviewed journals and scholarly sources. Any sources from magazines, blogs, and author opinions are excluded. The main objective of this study is to summarize, analyze, and classify existing research on marketing that affects the world and compare theories.

3. A Review of Academic Literature

Social Marketing

Social marketing has many definitions that stem from the original definition introduced by Kotler and Zaltman. The definition proposed by Kotler and Zaltman in 1971 was that social marketing is applying, planning, and directing programs to accept marketing strategies. According to Ghafar (2024), many nonbusiness entity leaders hired marketers to use social strategies to further their goals, such as gaining organization members or increasing monies for charities. When marketers started using marketing strategies for social issues, social marketing became a strategy for marketers. Social marketing appears in many forms (Farrukh et al., 2021). For example, social media, social branding, and corporate social responsibility are all forms of social marketing (Farruk). Social marketing involves many techniques and adopts concepts and theories from psychology, economics, and marketing (Aichner et al., 2021). Social Marketers seek to influence behaviors to benefit society and the target market (Aichner et al., 2021).

Social Marketing Theories

Social Marketing has a few theories and assumptions, although Hall (2022) stated that B2B marketing lacks theories. According to Ritter and Pedersen (2024), social marketing has two significant assumptions; the needs of business customers

differ, and these differences must be structured to improve business performance. Hall (2022) stated that the two assumptions are that behaviors are worth changing and can change for the good of society. Society is responsible for assisting individuals in making the appropriate choices for society (Owen et al., 2020). Andreasen's (1995) theory of social marketing states that social marketing is a process for creating social change. McDermott et al. (2005) stated that social marketing includes consumer research, customer targeting, segmentation, and the marketing mix. According to Aichner et al. (2021), social marketing depends on the effort of the marketer and the consumer because social marketing may require behavioral changes on the part of the consumer. One significant debate in social marketing is the belief that social marketing does not entail social responsibility, societal marketing, or non-profit marketing (Aichner et al., 2021). McDermott et al. argued that marketing researchers refer to social marketing as promotional. According to Takahashi (2009), in 1995, Andreasen argued that social marketing is different from social change because social marketing reflects voluntary changes in behaviors.

Ghafar (2024) stated that social marketers struggle to define meaning. According to Ghafar (2024), social marketers must understand individual perceptions and actions because social marketing is about changing behaviors. Social marketers must know how to attract different target audiences, so their marketing strategies are effective (McDermott et al., 2005). Technology has taken over marketing, and individuals of all ages use different devices, such as Smartphones, instead of the television and radio offered years ago. In addition, Smartphones are a popular means of technology, 98% of people in the United States own a mobile phone. Technology is why social marketing has changed drastically since it was first introduced in the 1980s (Appel et al., 2019).

CSR, Social Branding, and Social Media Theories

Technology provides social marketers with opportunities through social media, branding, and corporate social responsibility (Appel et al., 2019). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) implies respect for the community, people, environment, and ethics (Okafor et al., 2021). Four theories were generated for CSR: instrumental, political, integrative, and ethical (Mohammed, 2020). Instrumental theories suggest that corporations use CSR to create wealth opportunities and use social activities to accomplish economic results (Sun & Zhang, 2021). Political theories use CSR in politics, integrative theories focus on satisfying social demands, and ethical theories focus on the moral responsibilities of the corporation to society (Rhodes & Fleming, 2020). The opportunity for CSR in the B2B market is to focus on sustainable ventures between customers and suppliers within distribution and supply chain channels (Huang, Surface, & Zhang, 2022).

Social branding and social media are areas of social marketing that can work together. According to Wei (2022), a brand must already be established but can be strengthened through social media. Cassell (2020) suggested that leaders can relate messages to consumers through Twitter and Facebook, but the brand must already have some establishment time for consumers to know it exists. Some re-

searchers suggested that brand relationships are obsolete (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2021). In everyday marketing, leaders must communicate with customers to keep the brand strong on social media (Cassell, 2020).

Industries Impact

Individuals globally participate in online social networks. Facebook Users, Stats, Data, Trends, and More DataReportal Global Digital Insights (2024) reported that 2.989 billion individuals socialize on Facebook monthly. Social marketing has already impacted many industries. A significant industry that benefits from social marketing is the service industry. The service industry comprises many companies and organizations, such as hospitality, restaurants, and entertainment (Lahtinen et al., 2020). The B2B industry can benefit from social marketing. According to Bruce and Scanlon (2009), relationships are vital in B2B, and prominent levels of dissatisfaction exist in B2B relationships. Through social marketing, the relationships in B2B can improve, and better revenue results may be possible for the organizations and companies involved. To maximize the positive impact that social marketing has within industries, social marketers must consistently use daily marketing strategies and communications with customers.

4. Discussion

Several limitations and further research exist in B2B marketing and social marketing. B2B branding is controversial, and theory is limited in this area (Swaminathan et al., 2020). B2B marketing has yet to determine if branding is appropriate for all companies in B2B (Saeed). Swaminathan et al. (2020) documented limitations in research involving an organization's buying decision process and establishing a loyal customer base. Further research is necessary to determine if CSR is an effective social marketing strategy. The limitation exists in determining whether CSR affects the perceptions of a product or service in the customer buying process. Many organizational leaders do not know how to use social media to benefit their organization. Further research is necessary to determine corporate strategies for social media marketing to be effective in the B2B and B2C arena (Okafor et al., 2021).

Genovese and Pansera (2020) suggested that the world is entering a social revolution and that B2B marketers should be prepared. Social marketing strategies will be necessary for any organization to succeed if a social revolution occurs. Hassan (2019) suggested that learning and implementing effective social media and marketing strategies will provide an immediate return on investments for any company or organization. Research shows that many large U.S. companies use social media channels for B2B marketing. Rudi et al. (2024) suggest that social media is helping B2B marketers improve their communications with customers and encourage sales and customer loyalty.

5. Conclusion

B2B Marketing has limited theories and is viewed as problematic by many mar-

keters because of the number of individuals involved in the decision-making process in B2B sales. Many assumptions are present in B2B, and one assumption is that B2B customers know what they want, and purchase based on need rather than emotion, so customer service is not as much of a factor in B2B as in the B2C market. However, limited research on B2B marketing has documented that customer service is just as important in B2B as in the B2C market. Social marketing has evolved since the 1970s and continues to evolve, and technology continues to grow and enhance both the business and personal worlds. B2B marketers must focus on additional research in social marketing, especially in social media and technology, to be competitive and successful in their marketing practices and to see a return on investment in the social marketing arena.

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Dr. Delores Leonard is a Marketing Professor at Purdue Global University and a Leadership Professor at Western Governors University. Dr. Leonard has served as a mentor for undergraduate and graduate students and specializes in recruiting, enrollment, advising, and student retention. Dr. Leonard has been in the education field for over 18 years and is interested in Customer Service, Marketing, and Student Success.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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