



A framework analysis on key account management literature review: Key Account Practices in business marketing

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Abstract

The emerging approaches in business marketing for relationship management has transmuted the existing marketing practices, of strategic customers. B2B firms have adopted Key Account Management (KAM) approach, for managing key relationships, wherein the body of knowledge is fragmented and attracts further academic research. Hence, this review is an extension of extant research on KAM, in developing comprehensive understanding on the numerous practices and concepts affecting Key Account Performance (KAP). This review systematically analyzed and synthesized 104 papers published between 1990-2020 that conveyed several practices and concepts establishing KAP. This synthesise proposes that key account (KA) practices, concepts, and antecedent factors are vital in establishing the phenomena of KAM. We offer research agenda based on the systematic synthesis of prior literature around theory, context, characteristics, and methodology. In summary, this study is a pioneer effort integrating and clarifying the characteristics of several practices, concepts, and antecedents into an integrative systematic framework of KAM that offers evocative knowledge to practitioners. This systematic review and framework developed drives future research agenda and facilitates further research focus.

Keywords: Key Account Management, B2B marketing, business marketing, strategic relationships, literature review.

1. Introduction

Firms need to organize various intra-organizational and inter-organization factors dealing with customers and other stakeholders in the value chain. Customer is the most important stakeholder in the business marketing relationship and hence it is vital to service them distinctively to gain access to business opportunities. Firms exist to create value for others (Slater, 1997; Woodruff, 1997) where buyers cannot achieve the objective themselves; and an antecedent to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Woodall, 2003). There has been attempts to understand the intricacies of value creation (Holbrook, 2005; Ulaga, 2003; Woodall, 2003) but lacked consistency in approaches. Relationship Marketing (RM) has gained high acceptance in the area of marketing literature (Berry, 2002; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995; Gronroos, 1997; Jackson, 1985; Weitz & Jap, 1995). Value creation and Relational Marketing are critical to retain and grow key and strategic customers in business marketing. Key Account Management (KAM) is one of the relationship marketing approaches to manage strategic accounts (Wengler, 2006). KAM refers to the management of those customer relationships which are strategically important, to the firms' long-term performance (Ivens & Pardo, 2007; Pardo et al., 2014).

KAM approach is an emphasis on strategic or operational aspects is debatable, but we highlight the approach as strategic as it is related to firm's customer management strategy. Supplier-customer relationship befits strategic when rent generation is high for the stakeholders. Thus, rent generation is core objective and motive for the introduction of KAM programs (Gosselin & Gauwen, 2006). Extant research has contributed to the understanding of KAM, building blocks of KAM and how the program contributes to develop superior market positions of competitive advantage (Ivens et al, 2018). Gosselin & Gauwen (2006) suggested there is lack of academic literature on the strategic and organizational aspects of KAM. This review paper is expected to guide academicians and practitioners in their understanding of current state of research on KAM and the future directions. The objective of the study is to elicit the impact of intra-organizational and inter-

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organizational KAM practices, intervening and conditional factors on KA performance, in a conceptual framework.

2. Research Methodology

KAM by relationship marketers requires cross domain analysis of intra-organizational and inter-organizational facets of KA practices impacting KA performance. A concept-driven systematic review of extant review of KAM literature was adopted (Webster & Watson, 2002; Mortensen, 2012; Swani et al., 2019). Journal articles were reviewed to analyse the theories, research methods, constructs and frameworks used in KAM research by extant studies (Olanrewaju et al., 2020) and developed KA practices framework. The framework help organize to draw inter-relationships and causal relationships of antecedents to KA performance moderated and mediated by relevant constructs (Olanrewaju et al., 2020).

This review followed the preferred reporting items for the systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) approach (Moher et al., 2015). We used prominent business management databases to source literature on KAM and inputs for review and conceptual study: *Business Source Complete (EBSCO)* and *SCOPUS, Jstor, Proquest, ScienceDirect*, and *Web of Science* (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). The above databases provide academic work on business management and index a range of journals in the area. The search period was 1990 to 2020 based on the publishing date of the journal articles. The abstract of each article was analysed to identify the relevance to the study, else excluded. Finally, this led to a sample of 104 articles, reviewed in the study, focused on numerous practices and concepts impacting KA Performance (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). The selected research articles were analyzed, descriptively and thematically. Focus of descriptive analysis was in classifying of papers based on the year and journal of publication and methodology adopted using a deductive approach. Alternatively, thematic analysis was intended to define the characteristics of KAM, using inductive approach. An integrative framework was developed from this approach based on conceptual review to build meaningful insights in developing a framework for KAM, with conceptual understanding.

3. Organizing framework

This systematic literature review synthesized relevant scholarly articles by organizing the findings into a single framework of concepts and themes surrounding the phenomena of KAM. This synthesized review analyses various concepts, themes and practices demonstrating supplier-customer relationship in B2B marketing. Therefore, the literature review is organized into different clusters: 1) intra-firm KA practices 2) inter-firm KA practices 3) KAM usages and benefits 4) intervening factors 5) conditional factors, and 6) performance outcomes.

4. Discussion, Implications & Future Research Directions

a. Discussion

This study was based on systematic review of extant literature on KA practices in KAM and present where extant literature stands today and what is the future direction. A concept-based framework approach to review was adopted to categorise contributing variables into intra-organizational and inter-organizational factors. Intra-organizational KA practices are further classified into organizational: alignment, integration, strategy, structure, culture, resources, capabilities, knowledge management; and people aspects: KA manager quality, KA manager behaviour, esprit de corps, team practices, internal trust & commitment. Similarly, inter-organizational KA practices are classified into organizational (alignment, integration, strategy, structure, environment); and people aspects (KA actor understanding, KA commitment, personal fit, relationship-orientation).

b. Implications and opportunities for further research

The integrated framework to understand KA practices in KAM developed in the study manifests the importance of various KA practices internal and external to the firm in KA performance. This depiction helped the understanding of academia and practitioners in designing & implementing KAM.

For industry practitioners, the framework defines the individual KA practices leading to the usage of KAM and impact on KA performance. The insights from the study manifests guidelines for building

relationship marketing strategy, towards designing and implementing KAM program and improve understanding on the vital KAM practices and environment conducive to KAM adoption.

For the academia, the study insights develop further understanding of KA practices, value drivers, relational value, relational outcomes, KA effectiveness and KA performance in the supplier-customer dyadic relationship. The academic scholars can study each variable in KA practices, outcomes, drivers based on various research methods and established theories as appropriate to build future on business marketing clearer to future researchers for further advancing knowledge in the area.

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