
Which B2B thinker are you?

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Abstract: Despite its substantial economic contribution, the field of business-to-business (B2B) sales has been underrepresented in the academic sales and marketing (S&M) literature. Much of the published literature covers traditional, transaction-marketing-related topics. To identify recent trends in thinking, this descriptive study evaluated 201 contributions to the B2B S&M domain. A factor analysis revealed three dimensions across emerging themes: relationship selling, management of sales and tactical selling. The factor scores were then clustered into four schools of thought: transactionists, blue suiters, servants and partners. Such tandem clustering provides a generalisable approach for qualitatively exploring emerging themes through an iterative literature search and then quantitatively analysing theme patterns across authors to describe schools of thought in a taxonomy.

Keywords: personal selling; B2B marketing; B2B sales; tandem clustering.

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1 Introduction and brief literature overview

Considering the emergence of new concepts in business-to-business (B2B) sales and marketing (S&M), it is reasonable to ask whether this has led to theory development or other advancements in science or practice. This paper presents a review of the academic literature in B2B marketing, including textbooks as well as research publications in peer-reviewed journals. Previous academic reviews have addressed specific areas within business marketing, although most of them have focused on business buying behaviour. Some reviews discussed the contribution of specific journals, such as *Industrial Marketing Management* (LaPlaca, 1997), *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* (Johnson and Lewin, 1997), *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* (Lichtenthal et al., 1997), and *Advances in Business Marketing and Purchasing* (Plank, 1997). Other reviews of B2B marketing centred on branding (Leek and Christodoulides, 2011; Keränen et al., 2012), pricing (Formentini and Romano, 2016), social media (Pascucci et al., 2018) and B2B advertising (Swani et al., 2019). Each review provided useful insights but was limited by its focus on a specific B2B aspect or publication.

Thus, there remains a need for a more integrative and comprehensive academic review – although we wish to acknowledge the insights derived from several industry-based studies by CEB Gartner in the 2000s, which have been recognised in recent peer-reviewed publications (Toman et al., 2017).

Most firms have some involvement in B2B marketing. The practice of B2B marketing as a distinct subject matter has a long and wide history, going back to Copeland (1930) with the first case book on industrial marketing. Another early textbook on industrial marketing was published by Frederick (1934). However, academic research on the subject was relatively sparse until the 1970s. During 1970–1992, a few peer reviewed journals published about industrial and/or B2B marketing. In 1972, *Industrial Marketing Management* was formally launched by the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, followed by the *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing* in 1992.

Since then, marketing graduates from business schools often start their professional career in a B2B role. Business schools/universities now support both consumer and business marketing courses in their curriculums. Many sales management courses offered by the industry prepare practitioners for selling effectively in B2B situations. For example, Strategic Selling, Sales Performance International's Solution Selling, TAS Group's Target Account Selling or Sales MEDDIC Group's MEDDIC sales methodology. It is therefore important for academics, practitioners and researchers to understand emerging trends in B2B sales. In the academia, however, the differences between business and consumer marketing are often ignored when developing overall marketing concepts (Coviello and Brodie, 2001), despite the impact of globalisation, which has transformed B2B marketing practices substantially (Sarin, 2012).

Drilling down into specific areas of B2B S&M, many products are now so similar that customer care is one area where differentiation can be achieved. When this is implemented, sales management must be integrated with all functions and activities involving customer relationships, such as the order-to-remittance cycle. Webster (1994) goes as far as recommending defining the entire business as a service business regardless of the product. As a corollary of customer care, the relationship marketing literature

relates largely to the dangers of opening new accounts at the expense of existing ones. Long-term relationships with key accounts are therefore important (although even satisfied customers may defect). Relationship marketing can be viewed as the task of creating strong customer loyalty (Kotler et al., 1996). Some authors, such as McKenna (1991), and Davidow and Malone (1992) include the entire supply chain.

Industrial/B2B marketing communications are a mix of personal and impersonal communications, such as personal selling (as its principal component), catalogues, product literature, advertising, direct mail, trade shows, public relations and promotional gifts (Webster, 1991). An integrated approach has been advocated in the literature, because different modes of communication have specific advantages and interact with each other synergistically (Tynan, 1993; Webster, 1991). According to Hutt and Speh (1995), personal selling is particularly intertwined with advertising and sales promotion.

In B2B practice, marketing is frequently seen as an adjunct to the sales department (Webster, 1994). Leads generation, rather than customer orientation, profitability and integrated marketing, dominate the marketing function in most B2B companies. According to Cespedes (1995), marketing, sales and customer service interpret and articulate the voice of the customer in different ways. This is due to differences in the time horizons, key performance criteria and information flows. Hardy (1987) and Cespedes (1995) allocate marketing and sales responsibilities along a continuum of activities with the respective functions at its opposite poles. Market research, analysis, strategy, positioning and marketing communications activities predominantly fall with marketing. Customer contact, order management, account management, channel management and information feedback typically fall with sales (Cespedes, 1995). However, this varies between companies and industries (Hardy, 1987).

Indirect channels are a frequent B2B go-to-market, because customers buy products and solutions made up of components manufactured by two or more different suppliers (Churchill et al., 1997). Nevertheless, most literature assumes that the selling company employs a direct sales force/channel (Hartley and Starkey, 1996). The nature and level of customer relationships are important issues, which need to be addressed at two levels in indirect channels: the first level are the services provided to the channel by the principal and the second level are those provided to the customer by the channel. Hartley and Starkey (1996) note that the relationship between the product principal and distribution channel should be built on trust. Marketing people are involved in developing and managing strategic relationships with resellers in the distribution channel, although the day-to-day operating details are typically in the hands of the sales organisation (Webster, 1994).

According to Rackham and Ruff (1991), many of the face-to-face selling skills taught in sales training courses are based on models developed in the 1920s by Strong, who introduced face-to-face selling ideas such as the use of open and closed questions, benefit selling, objection handling methods and closing techniques. In what is claimed to be the only research project of this kind, they found that these traditional selling techniques do not work in major sales, because major sales take place within the context of an ongoing relationship, can take many months (or even years) to complete, involve a buying centre in the decision making process and decisions involving higher levels of risk for the buyer,

which are often taken in the absence of the seller (Wilson, 1993). A major sales account represents a disproportionate share of the selling firm's total sales volume, according to Churchill et al. (1997). In order to close sales as well as develop long-term relationships in major sales accounts, various strategies can be implemented. For example, systems selling involves the design of well-integrated groups of interlocking products from multiple sources or the implementation of a system of production, inventory control, distribution and other services to address a customer's needs for a smooth-running operation. Systems sales bundle product, service and knowledge over a long period of time (Slywotzky, 1996). Computerised ordering is another example, which relates to logistical alliances with customers involving the development of joint information and reorder systems.

Buyer-seller relationships are far more prevalent for B2B situations than for business-to-consumers (B2C) (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). These relationships are more complex, balanced and of longer duration. The management of these relationships is on qualitative rather than quantitative aspects; and has a focus on major sales (Wilson, 1993), based on commercialised methodologies and processes (some of which are computer-aided). Sales teams consist of people from various functional departments and/or the management hierarchy of the selling company. The development of long-term relationships becomes a key goal as well as closing the current deal. Major customers' buying centres often consist of people from different functional areas with different viewpoints and concerns. Those concerns can often be most effectively addressed by a team of experts from equivalent functional departments in the selling company, or even from different divisions within the company. Sales teams are usually configured to win new accounts, but they are also used for servicing key accounts at the operations level, including cross-selling additional products and services (Churchill et al., 1997). In its simplest form, team selling involves two sales reps who need to coordinate their activities to complete a sale. This could be achieved, for example, by a commission sharing agreement so that both reps will work for the order (Dalrymple and Cron, 1995). A more complicated team selling scenario is multilevel selling whereby the team consists of personnel from various managerial levels who call on their counterparts in the buying organisation. Because each member of the selling team calls on a person with corresponding status and authority, this approach represents proper organisational etiquette (Churchill et al., 1997).

Computer-aided sales (CAS) cut across many of the themes discussed in this study: sales management, sales teams, integrated marketing and customer care. Cambridge Market Intelligence (1996) listed the following software for marketing and sales applications: contact management systems, sales force management systems, forecasting systems, direct marketing/database marketing systems, marketing planning systems, telemarketing/telesales systems and list management systems. Modern software deployed in sales relates to enterprise information systems, groupware, artificial intelligence, business intelligence and analytics. We observed that publications tend to be influenced by the author's background and the resulting perspective on CAS. In our research, we include the areas of sales force automation (SFA) and customer relationship management (CRM) under the term CAS. The arrival of SFA produced an initial productivity increase at the cost of amplifying the flaws of traditional models of motivation and training

(Siebel and Malone, 1996). For example, IT sales reps still learned from office veterans, but new automation tools produced a flood of information which was difficult to ‘digest’ for them. Another effect was a ‘big-brother’-type of accountability of sales representatives whereby tight activity management in major sales sometimes reduced their productivity (Rackham and Ruff, 1991).

2 Background of the study

Hartley and Starkey (1996) have arguably provided the broadest review of B2B S&M concepts to date and included relationship marketing, customer care, negotiation, major accounts, agents and distributors, telesales, trade shows, sales administration, and CAS. A recent review of sales rep performance in a B2B setting concluded that future research must focus on customer-centric activities, rather than using non-generalisable models (Singh and Koshy, 2010).

The purposes of this study are to:

- 1 Develop an inventory of emerging B2B sales themes from a broad cross-section of the body of literature in B2B marketing, sales and management.
- 2 Identify the basic factors underlying those emerging themes and develop a taxonomy of schools of thought, based on those dimensions.

The study is based on a sample of 201 sources from 85 different authors published since 1985. Thirty leading journals were found contributing the field of study. Only literature with either a major personal selling component, because of its important role in B2B sales (Kotler et al., 1996), or a focus on any of the emerging themes were included. Adding other literature to our B2B S&M context would have put the reliability of our results at risk. Building on Hartley’s (1994) research, we compiled a list of additional emerging themes: sales/marketing link, sales teams and major sales. We also broadened Hartley’s (1994) negotiation category to include any face-to-face selling literature, because this used to be the mainstream of sales literature, and combined his telesales and trade show categories into integrated marketing.

3 Methodology

3.1 Database search

The ABI/INFORM library was searched in an iterative fashion. Only peer-reviewed journals were considered for the search and ABI/INFORM offers approximately 9,000 peer-reviewed titles. The first search iteration located articles by searching for Hartley’s (1994) and our added theme labels in the indexes of classification codes, subject headings, abstract and title. Additional searches were then run over these indexes as more information became available from each individual scan. This way, a theory of emerging themes was built directly from the data.

3.2 *Journals included*¹

- *Advances in Business Marketing and Purchasing*
- *Harvard Business Review*
- *Industrial Marketing & Purchasing*
- *Industrial Marketing Management*
- *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*
- *Journal of Business Strategy*
- *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*
- *Journal of Marketing Research*
- *Journal of Services Marketing*
- *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*

3.3 *Keywords*

Keywords used in our search specifically related to customer care (incl. quality and service marketing), relationship marketing (incl. loyalty and relationship life cycle), integrated marketing (incl. one-to-one marketing, telesales and trade shows), face-to-face selling (the mainstream body of sales literature, which we did not want to omit in new publications for validity reasons, incl. locating and qualifying prospects, preapproach planning, approach, presentation, objection handling, negotiation and closing, and follow-up), major sales (incl. buying processes and purchasing roles, methodologies for selling to a group of people, solution versus product selling and major account management), CAS (incl. contact management systems, SFA, direct marketing/database marketing systems, CRM), sales management (incl. sales force effectiveness, structure, motivation, compensation and coaching), indirect channels (incl. distributors, resellers, alliances and ecosystems), the S&M link (incl. systems thinking, diffusion-based linkages and organisational structure) and sales teams (incl. multilevel selling, roles, structure, compensation and motivation).

3.4 *Rating method*

Mentions of the themes were chosen over importance, because they are less evaluative than importance, and thus are better for descriptive purposes in a taxonomy (compare frequency in Moncrief, 1986). To accommodate differences in jargon between the authors from the sample, we used a set of decision rules for the authors' ratings. Table 1 explains the ratings applied.

The data analysis consisted of two steps. First, factor analysis was used to group related themes, based on their mentions in the sampled literature. These results were then cluster analysed to group authors into schools of thought from their factor scores.

Table 1 Rating method

Rating	Rationale
Zero	No mention of the respective theme could be found in a particular source.
0.2	The theme was not explicitly mentioned but a subset of it was discussed or it was discussed in a non-sales context, e.g., work teams scored 0.2 when discussed in a general management context.
0.5	The theme was not explicitly mentioned but some of its principles were discussed in a sales-related area, e.g., coop funds for indirect channels scored 0.5 in relationship marketing.
0.8	The theme was not explicitly mentioned but its core components were all referred to in an industrial marketing context but not in a personal selling context, e.g., relationship marketing.
1	The author explicitly mentioned the theme in question.

4 Results of the factor analysis

An R-type factor analysis was conducted under SPSS in principal components mode. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic was high with about 0.83, indicating large correlations among the variables and hence, the appropriateness of the factor model. Orthogonal (varimax) rotation achieved the best factor loadings.

In order to improve the factor loadings, we analysed references to sales management and face-to-face selling although they are rather traditional themes in the sales literature. Along the same vein, a dummy variable was introduced, 'marketing versus selling', which was 1 if an author's core focus was on the marketing mix. Otherwise, its value was 0, which would typically indicate a personal selling or services marketing focus. Table 2 shows that marketing-mix-oriented literature loads high (0.77597) on Factor 1 and is negatively correlated with the other two factors.

Additional, dummy variables were introduced for the latter cases, but they reduced the KMO statistic without changing the factor loadings significantly. They were therefore redundant data for the model. A scree test applied to the results suggested a three-factor solution as shown in Table 2.

The following meaning was attributed to the above factors:

- Factor 1 *Relationship selling* – Long-term relationships are seen as a means end and synonymous to profitability; the focus is on interactions with customers with a view to achieving close, long-term relationships. It will be discussed later that personal selling tends to be viewed here as a subset of the overall marketing mix.
- Factor 2 *Management of sales* – Building relationships are seen as a means to selling; the focus is on coordinating resources among all relationship stakeholders to win a sale. However, this may entail keeping a distant relationship with some customers to the point of short-term gain in the context of one or a few transactions. Personal selling literature, rather than marketing, loads heavily onto this factor.

Factor 3 *Tactical selling* – Transactions are seen as units of selling effort, which is the mainstream body of literature on personal selling. It certainly is not an emerging theme and rather ‘more of the same as last century’ particularly, because face-to-face selling was the single theme loading heavily onto this factor. However, we did not want to omit capturing coverage of this persistent field even in new publications.

It appears that the explicit commitment to building long-term relationships increases from Factor 3 to Factor 1. The level of opportunism decreases from Factor 3 to Factor 1. The focus on long-term relationships is therefore a property of emerging themes. It must be emphasised that the factor dimensions do not reflect a weighting of their associated themes in terms of the authors’ intended importance. Rather, the dimensions should be viewed as a broad grouping of super-ordinate emerging themes in the literature sample.

Table 2 Scree test

<i>Literature theme</i>	<i>Factor 1</i>	<i>Factor 2</i>	<i>Factor 3</i>
Integrated marketing	.78451	.29662	.08823
<i>Marketing vs. selling</i>	.77597	–.13494	–.29521
Relationship marketing	.77047	.20833	.16156
Indirect channels	.68292	.37933	–.06232
Customer care	.55776	.36849	.28180
Sales teams	.14332	.82342	.09731
Sales management	–.11055	.73611	–.39385
Computer-aided selling	.33859	.68296	.00207
Major sales	.26594	.60456	.09430
Sales/marketing link	.44668	.58899	–.21371
Face-to-Face selling	–.00352	–.06176	.89234

5 Results of the cluster analysis

As discussed above, tactical selling is not an emerging theme, because the traditional mainstream of sales literature (face-to-face selling) is synonymous with this factor. As a decision rule, therefore, authors with factor scores of less than 0.5 on any of the first two factors, or high scores on Factor 3 as relative to the other two, were deemed not to be of interest for emerging themes and were excluded from the next phase. The resulting two-dimensional scatter plot² is shown in Figure 1.

Lassar and Kerr (1996, p.625) note that cluster analysis has been identified as more useful than other multivariate techniques in developing empirical taxonomies. A cluster analysis was therefore run over the factor scores established by the earlier factor analysis and four straightforward clusters were found. Seven schools-of-thought clusters were found when our literature ratings were used instead of the factor scores. But factor scores were chosen as they provided the best trade-off between parsimony and detail. Using factor scores for clustering, rather than the original data space, eliminates the noise in the data, producing a reliable four-cluster solution as shown in the dendrogram of Figure 2.³

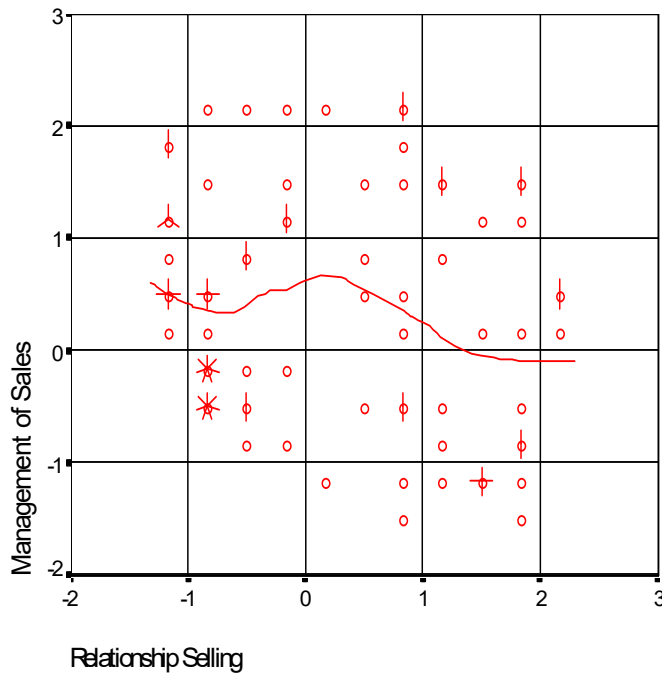
Figure 1 Scatter plot (see online version for colours)

Figure 3 shows the clusters' location overlayed on the factor dimensions in the scatter plot in order to depict factor-cluster relationships.

Ideally, an alignment of clusters with the four quadrants of Figure 3 would facilitate finding their names, because the factor dimensions could be used. However, this is not the case because of the way the furthest neighbour clustering method works: it defines the dissimilarity between clusters as the largest dissimilarity between their member authors. This avoids a chaining effect with many authors chained together in drawn-out clusters, some members of which are very far from each other. Furthest neighbour clusters tend to be very compact and have a relatively small diameter [Kaufman and Rousseeuw, (1990), p.48].

While every author of such a furthest neighbour cluster is close to every other member of the same cluster, the resulting clusters are not well separated and can overlap.⁴ This occurs, because all they need to be identified as separate clusters is at least one pair of too distant authors. We therefore took a descriptive view of the clusters without meaning to be dogmatic about the allocation of authors located close to cluster boundaries. Compare Everitt (1993, p.149) for a more general but similar view. Arabie et al. (1981) introduced the ADCLUS model, in which clusters can overlap or intersect in some way [in Beane and Ennis, (1987), p.32]. In such a type of research several schools of thought could be identified, each different and yet all sharing a common characteristic.

Figure 2 Dendrogram

Dendrogram using complete linkage

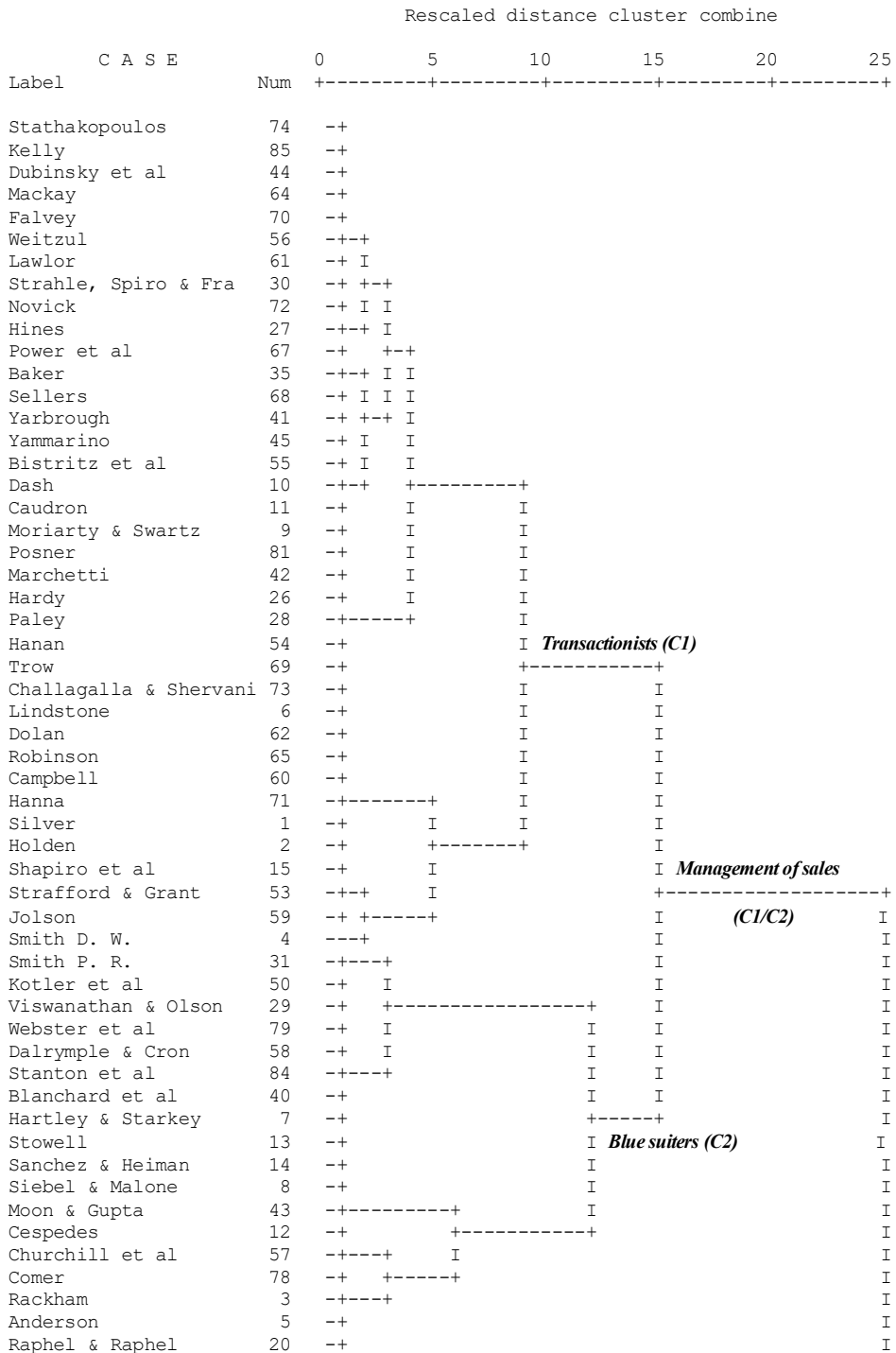
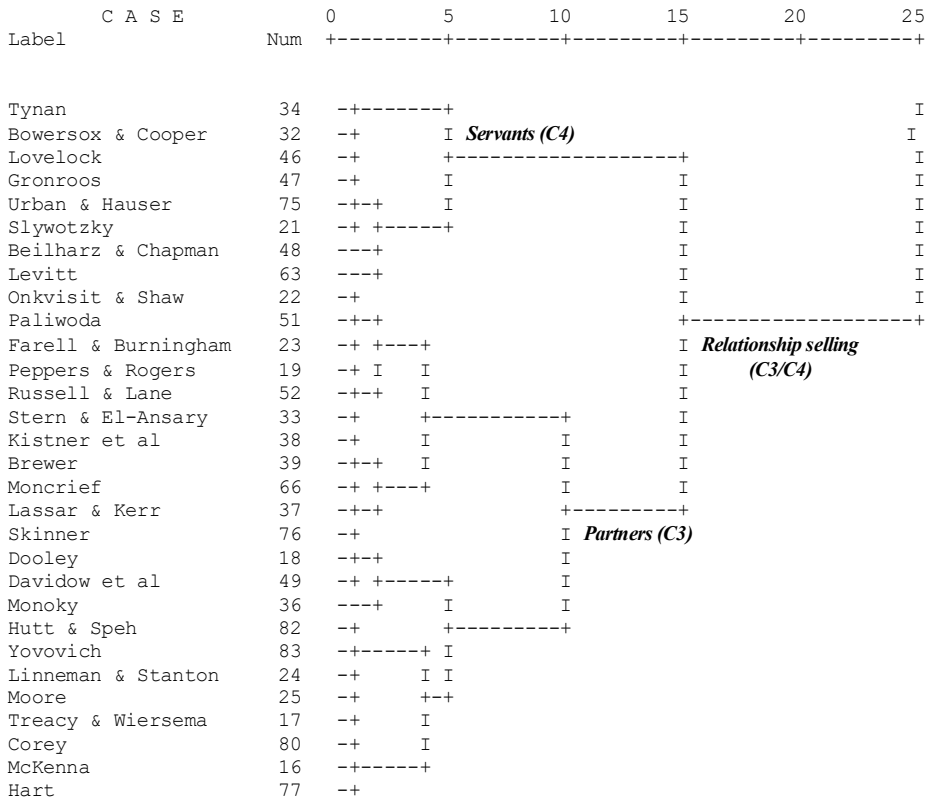
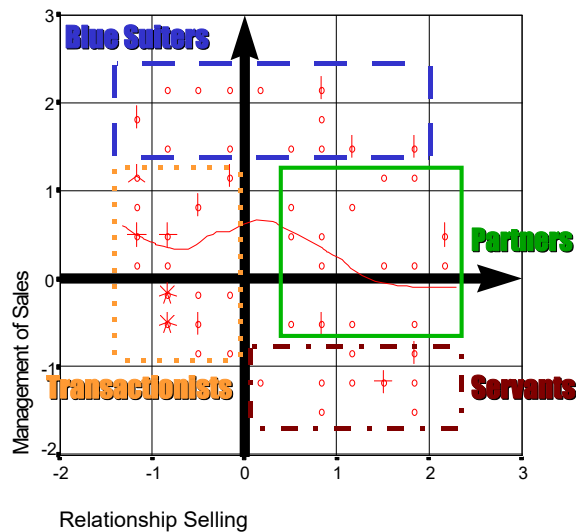


Figure 2 Dendrogram (continued)

Rescaled distance cluster combine

**Figure 3** Factor-cluster relationships (see online version for colours)

6 Discussion of results

6.1 Transactionists

Cluster C1 in the dendrogram features few emerging relationship selling themes. In fact, relationships are not well-defined here with regard to the distance between seller and buyer nor are qualification criteria discussed for pursuing close relationships with chosen customers. Such literature is largely based on a transaction-oriented S&M context in terms of added value and the buyer's purchasing approach (Shapiro, 1992; Strafford and Grant, 1994; Hanna, 1997; Novick, 1995).

6.2 Blue suiters

Literature from cluster 2 deals with many of the emerging issues from the management of sales dimension and tends to involve coordinating corporate resources for either high volume transactions or major sales (Rackham and Ruff, 1991; Cespedes, 1995; Siebel, 1996; Webster, 1994). Relationship distances between customer and seller are situational and subject to customer profiling and qualification. The long-term profit potential of the relationship, rather than the sales potential, is prescribed for the seller's resource allocation and the relationship distance.

6.3 Partners

Authors from cluster 3 are 'partners', because they emphasise the strategic intent of the customer as well as the seller in the emerging relationship selling themes (Moore, 1995; McKenna, 1997; Davidow and Malone, 1992). They prescribe to target lost-for-good customers and then develop close relationships with them under almost all circumstances. Jackson (1985) argues that there are two kinds of customers, defined by attitude (Kotler et al., 1996): lost-for-good customers, who are either totally committed to the vendor or totally lost and committed to some other vendor. The other category are always-a-share customers, who hold little vendor loyalty and can be temporarily lost or regained at any time.

The primary task for partners is then to identify which members of the customer-base are lost-for-good customers and then do what it takes not to lose them. Trying to build enduring relationships with always-a-share customers would be a futile undertaking. Partners literature has a general or industrial marketing focus.

6.4 Servants

Cluster 4 relates to specialised marketing literature focusing on services, product life cycle or product management (although sampled literature from the latter two areas had only a very small discussion of personal selling and may therefore be deemed insignificant for inclusion in a school of thought on sales). Its representatives focus mainly on quality to achieve satisfaction of all of the seller's customers. In a way, this school can be viewed from a paradigm of 'the customer is always right' and hence, the name servants (Gronroos, 1990; Beilharz and Chapman, 1994; Slywotzky, 1996, Lovelock, 1991).

7 Taxonomy refinement and triangulation with other research

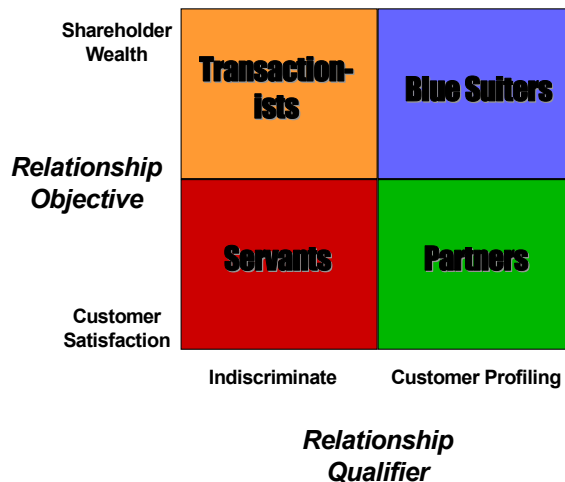
The factor loadings showed that the sales/marketing link loaded high on both relationship selling and management of sales, but the introduced nomenclature for the factors allows for accommodating it on both factor dimensions. We posit the main reason for this is a trend to continuous improvement on both factor dimensions. Quality is at its gravity-centre, based on previous research from Grant et al. (1994), who argue that the following two opposite poles of management paradigms were evolving.

The *economic model* has grown out of conventional management theory and standard microeconomics but has incorporated developments in agency theory, contract theory, shareholder value maximisation and transactions cost theory. The underlying objective is to maximise shareholder wealth which is legally sanctioned in the requirement that boards of directors operate public corporations in the interest of shareholders. The relationships between individuals are governed by contracts and their form is determined by cost efficiency.

Total quality management (TQM) is the other model. Conflict is axiomatic in the above economic model as everyone seeks to maximise their individual economic welfare. In TQM on the other hand, a convergence of the long-term interests of all stakeholders is envisaged. As such, TQM views long-term profitability as result of customer satisfaction rather than as a driving force. The shareholders' long-term interests are seen as convergent with quality goals: "What value is a 25% increase in the quarterly dividend to a company that is out of business five years from now?" [Grant et al., (1994), p.31]

Figure 4 depicts how each school of thought maps onto the two management paradigms and how customers (or distribution channels) are selected for long-term relationships by each orthodoxy. The latter is denoted 'relationship qualifier'.

Figure 4 Taxonomy refinement (see online version for colours)



The relationship qualifier denotes whether B2B customers are approached indiscriminately or whether they are meticulously profiled and progressed after they move from a sales rep's prospect/lead stage to a qualified prospect. One of the most novel approaches for profiling and progression of a sales opportunity has been presented by

Toman et al. (2017) from CEB Gartner under the term ‘prescriptive approach’ in contrast to the traditional ‘responsive approach’. The idea is to co-produce the most effective purchasing approach with a customer, based on a seamless S&M link. The approach has been backed up well by research and arguably requires more customer profiling than traditional approaches.

8 Validity and reliability

When the aim of factor analysis is the inclusion of values in subsequent analysis, such as cluster analysis⁵, then principal component analysis with an orthogonal rotation is the most appropriate method according to Mitchell (1994, p.8). He further asserts:

“Either surrogate variables or factor scores may be used for further analysis. The researcher can examine the factor matrix and choose the variable with the highest factor loading as a surrogate representation for a particular factor dimension. Alternatively, an entirely new set of a smaller number of composite variables called factor scores can be calculated to replace the original variables. The decision rule might be that, if the scale is well constructed, valid and reliable, the factor scores are probably the best alternative.”

Since the scales used in this study were well constructed, all ranging from 0 to 1 and being robust against rating changes of up to 50% in a sensitivity analysis, factor scores were used in the subsequent cluster analysis.

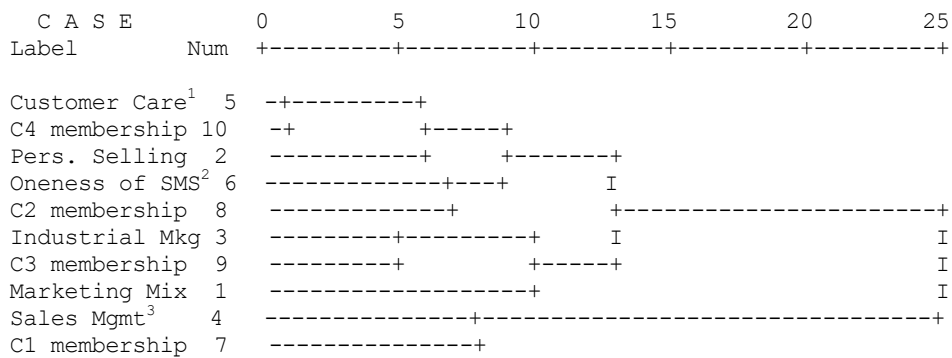
In order to check the nomological validity of the cluster names (schools of thought), we classified all of the literature into exactly one category of our interpretation of each author’s individual key focus: general marketing mix, industrial marketing mix, personal selling, sales management, customer care and the oneness of sales/marketing/service.

These semantic categories were then clustered⁶ with the membership of the above schools of thought to see how well authors’ semantics matched. The dendrogram for the between-groups average method is shown in Figure 5. An additional SPSS run using the furthest neighbour method achieved very similar results.

Figure 5 evidently supports the nomological validity of all clusters. Personal selling was clustered with C4 because none of the C4 literature focuses on it. In other words, an author’s focus on personal selling is negatively related to customer care.

The earlier literature review section in this paper established that the identified emerging themes are compound constructs, which are comprised of a number of sub-themes that interact across their parent themes. The naming of the clusters was therefore difficult and required referring the qualitative discussion from the earlier literature review.

It is at this point where the step was made from flat quantitative data to interpreting cognitive maps of authors. However, we believe that the qualitative discussion provided in this research captures common denominators of authors sufficiently to group them as per the explanatory notes provided with the scatter plots of the individual clusters. We therefore believe that the only subjective part of the study is the choice of labels for the clusters.

Figure 5 Dendrogram for between-group average method

Notes: ¹Customer care is the identical semantic construct to the earlier literature theme. In this SPSS run, however, it denotes an author's area of focus.

²The earlier theme of sales/marketing link is only a subset of this construct, because of the addition of service into the linkage.

³Sales management is the identical semantic construct to the earlier literature theme. In this SPSS run, however, it denotes an author's area of focus.

9 Implications and scope for further research

Stowell (1997) conducted depth interviews in about 60 companies and a literature search on the best practices for improving S&M. He cites the following examples of S&M processes continuously improved by leading companies: Lead qualification, proposal preparation, contract preparation and approval, order entry, sales forecasting, recruiting and hiring, training, performance evaluation, S&M collateral development and collateral request fulfilment, trade show lead follow-up and tracking, advertising lead follow-up and tracking, product launch, direct mail (incl. electronic mailshots), advertising campaigns, complete sales cycle, and complete product development cycle (incl. delivery).

The embracement of TQM principles as a means to improve shareholder wealth may result in a convergence of management of sales and relationship selling. This could mean that the views held by today's transactionists and blue suiters will evolve to become more similar to servants and partners, respectively. Driven by advances in CAS, servants and transactionists might also move their views over time and shift more toward customer profiling. A transactionist's business model may still warrant an arm's length relationship with chosen customers, who have the same expectation. The reverse applies to blue suiters as they are looking to go into smaller deal sizes with small and medium-sized enterprises. CAS facilitates such a qualification process in a rapid and cost-effective way.

Further descriptive research might confirm this trend or contest it. But in any case, best-practice research should be considered in addition to peer-reviewed journals, because such research is the 'voice of the industry'. It provides large-scale empirical data, derived from industry membership. For example, the substantial and long-running research into best-practice sales management by CEB Gartner cannot be ignored when scientists or academics write about B2B S&M – whether it is descriptive, predictive or prescriptive. A proof-point is the success of the Profit Impact of Marketing Strategy

(PIMS) Project, going back to the 1960s (Buzzell and Gale, 1987). It continues to be updated and drawn upon by academics and industry today. The study of B2B S&M with a sales force at its sharp end requires a similar access to empirical data (financial resources permitting), because B2B selling is a ‘contact sport’ and all stakeholders deserve the best experience in that engagement and ensuing outcome

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Notes

- 1 The list only includes the journals contributing most to this research in alphabetical order.
- 2 The diagram is in so-called sunflower grouping format, so that each petal represents one case and each flower is positioned in the centre between the cases it groups. The curve on the chart is a best-fit lowess curve.
- 3 The process of naming the clusters will be explained subsequently. The reader is encouraged to focus on the demarcations of clusters on the scatter plot's factor dimensions.
- 4 In the scatter plot, the individual clusters are shown net of their overlaps in order to facilitate the location of the clusters on the factor dimensions.
- 5 Another usage of a two-phase research design with factor analysis in phase 1 can be found in Hagerty's (1985, pp.168–184) theory about the usage of *Q*-type factor analysis to improve the predictive power of conjoint analysis: he argues that *Q*-type factor analysis of the correlation matrix among the variables should be used in a first phase to optimally weight clusters of aggregated response data and then apply a standard conjoint method in a second phase to estimate the part-worths (p.182).
- 6 A factor analysis would not have been appropriate, because the correlation matrix was not positive definite.