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Article

Insights into How Vietnamese Retailers Utilize Social Media to Facilitate Knowledge Creation through the Process of Value Co-Creation

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Abstract: Social media usage is a direct result of Internet connectivity and is gaining increased prominence in business-to-consumer (B2C), business-to-business (B2B), and consumer-to-business (C2B) relationship building, which is allowing marketers to devise and implement digital marketing strategies that are perceived as enhancing a customer's well-being. Through the process of utilizing social media (SM) to share information with consumers, marketers are affording themselves with the concept of value co-creation and ensuring that the development of knowledge is given priority. To explain how this happens in an emerging economy, in-depth personal interviews were undertaken with the owners of five retail fashion companies in Vietnam. The findings indicate that fashion retail companies in Vietnam are deploying digital marketing strategies that deliver perceived enhanced value to consumers through the process of value co-creation. This highlights the advantage of using SM in relation to increasing retail staff's ability to convert information into usable resources such as intelligence and knowledge. By achieving knowledge conversion, retail staff fulfill the role of 'knowledge broker' and 'knowledge connector', and identify how organizational intervention, such as new operating structures, can help to deliver perceived enhanced value to customers.

Keywords: communications technology; digital platform; information; intelligence; knowledge; social media



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1. Introduction

The speed at which marketers analyze data, innovate, and bring new products onto the market are characteristics that can be associated with a firm's strategic capability and how marketing managers deal with the complexities of knowledge transfer through learning and implementing information gained from a potential target audience. Lacka and Chong [1] suggest that marketers are increasingly using social media (SM) sites to manage relationships with customers, and this can be interpreted from the stance of increasing a firm's strategic capability. Indeed, Studen and Tiberius [2] (p. 2) are of the view that SM will in the future allow people to: "interact on a platform using virtual and augmented reality, our somatosensory sense, and touch—and movement—based navigation. We will not be able to distinguish between other human users and AI-based entities. Social media platforms will massively extend their scope of activities, merge with the World Wide Web and advance the e-commerce, edu-tech, fintech, the automobile industry, and HR recruitment". Hence, communications technology can be viewed as providing an organization with enhanced network capability so that it adopts a proactive, innovative approach that accelerates the firm's capability building process [3,4] and achieves strategic continuity in the various markets in which it competes [5].

The increased use of SM has been attributed to the availability of various SM platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram that allow people to engage with others either socially and/or for business [6] (p. 80). The utilization of various SM platforms by company staff will enhance business-to-business (B2B) links by integrating business operations more fully (e.g., e-procurement facilitates a speedy customer service). The use of SM will, therefore, become more important in a business-to-consumer (B2C) context and a consumer-to-business (C2B) context whereby the interconnected relationships between a company and its customers, and a company and its suppliers, are managed to the benefit of all parties. In other words, B2B interactions will become increasingly driven by the consumer through the process of value co-creation.

Knowledge is known to have a direct influence on shaping an individual's attitude and behavior, and so do fear appeals [7], which are aimed at influencing perception. In terms of the use of various SM platforms for gaining market data and intelligence, the barriers marketers need to overcome are more than knowledge and skill deficiencies; they also include compatibility, privacy, and security. Additionally, in relation to knowledge and skill deficiencies, there is a psychological element involved because an individual may feel a sense of embarrassment if their deficiency is known by their peers [8–10]. In addition, marketers may face problems such as how to incorporate SM sites into their strategies [11], and how to understand the role that communications technology plays [12]. In terms of the issue of security and control, marketers may feel inhibited if they lack control vis à vis the type of information exchanged, especially regarding confidential information disclosure that impacts on business relations [13].

Puhakainen and Siponen [14] reiterated the point that some staff do not comply with the organization's information systems' security policy, and this is of concern to management because as Leonardi [15] (p. 747) indicates: "Social media technologies are beginning to proliferate across organizations as executives and managers attempt to leverage the power of the informal information economies of their companies". One of the key concerns of adopting SM is the possible leakage of confidential information and the impact it might have on the reputation and level of strategic risk the company is exposed to. Hence, there is a common view that the use of SM is not always appropriate for marketers [16].

Nevertheless, the analysis of data using artificial intelligence provides companies with an opportunity to utilize and improve marketing operations [17]. Marketing staff in emerging markets are increasingly being drawn to analyzing customer and market data that is gathered through Internet-based technology using analytical tools. The objective is to provide a bespoke customer service that deepens an end user's online experience [18]. This can be considered important and influential in terms of building and maintaining ongoing company-to-consumer (B2C) relationships. For example, continual monitoring and development of consumer insights that act as a catalyst for gathering usable intelligence aids the development of a sustainable competitive advantage that is enhanced by organizational learning. Organizational learning involves staff training and development, which represents organizational intervention. Organizational intervention is necessary because customer feedback and engagement (e.g., online reviews and the actions of online community groups) needs to be managed. Hence, the crowd sourcing approach is viewed as providing timely customer feedback and is representative of generating ideas for product innovation. The participation in crowd sourcing groups is likely to increase over time as young consumers are happy to share their views and increase their sense of self-esteem [19] through receiving rewards for their participation in online interactive exchanges.

Organizational learning is viewed as providing knowledge that manifests in innovation [20]. Reflecting on the growing importance of SM and its influence, in this paper, we explain how retail companies in a collectivist emerging market such as Vietnam, utilize SM to turn consumer feedback into information, and then turn information into intelligence, and intelligence into knowledge. This is timely because retailers in Vietnam are increasingly relying on SM to gain information that can be used to improve their relationships

with their suppliers to provide end users with products of their choice. This is, we argue, important in terms of how an organization increases its marketing capability. We approach the topic from the perspective of how B2B marketers utilize Internet-based communications technology to build their marketing capability. The aim of the research was to utilize network theory to explain how Internet-based technologies such as SM aids the retailer's customer-centric approach and knowledge conversion process that results in enhanced sustainable relationships through value co-creation. The main research question we address is: how can retailers in an emerging country market use communications technology to convert their knowledge into marketable products and services that increases marketing capability? The reason why such research is timely is because media richness, adaptability, and flexibility of information vis à vis relevance and understanding consumers' emotions, helps organizational staff to build an emotional rapport with customers [21] that facilitates value co-creation. In the process, organizations become innovative and build trust through providing congruence in identity between the company's brand and the ambitions of the consumers identified in the targeted market segment [3].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Consumer Engagement through Social Media

The positive perception of value varies depending on whether the consumer wants to achieve a logic-based rational goal that relates quality of the offering to the value competences of the company; or warmth in the context of emotion, whereby the judgement relates to a firm's social and moral attributes [22]. The evaluation of competence affects consumer purchase decisions, whereas warmth/emotion affects consumer identification with the brand/company [22]. Hence, it is important that retailers identify consumer motivational needs (either hedonic or utilitarian) and evaluate behavior and link these with the brand identity and unique offerings such as product assortments, communication style, and a theme/story for the brand [23].

In terms of delivering unique value to a consumer, if retailers can identify how groups of consumers use specific language or cues and consumer preferences, they can relate to the consumer better vis à vis sense-making from the consumer perspective [24,25]. According to Moulard et al. [26], consumers make judgements based on their intrinsic or extrinsic motivations, and take cognizance of three factors: consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness. This brings to the fore the concept of rarity and association with SM influencers which equates to celebrity authenticity and the fulfilling of consumer emotional needs. Considering the fact that digital marketing strategists are concerned with truth in the context of SM dialogue, it is useful to note that Gavra et al. [27] point out that a methodological process can be used that enables algorithms to segment audiences and detect and diagnose support through utilizing relevant data/information that is conveyed via SM interactions. In terms of an in-depth understanding of how certain consumer group(s) function, it can be considered relevant to analyze both the level of feedback and the accounts of those engaged in the various forms of discourse.

In relation to consumer motivation in the context of using Internet-based technology for an information search vis à vis a purchase, according to Lee et al. [28], young consumers in a collectivist emerging market tend to use their knowledge capability that is gained through higher education to assess information from the stance of an independent thinker, which is different from the traditional view, and is especially evident in regard to high involvement products [29]. This suggests that information on a retailer's website must be current and accurate. Therefore, it is necessary that a process is in place to update the information on a regular basis, ensuring that engagement in terms of C2B knowledge development is ongoing. In regard to knowledge development, according to Nonaka and von Krogh [30], tacit and explicit knowledge are viewed as interacting along a continuum, and this needs to be borne in mind with regard to how knowledge conversion occurs. In other words, consumers internalize knowledge and reflect on it and, if necessary, seek further information to gain reassurance of how the brand will perform.

In relation to reassurance, it is useful to note that seeing a collection of responses (e.g., online reviews) is important for young consumers in a collectivist emerging market as this allows them to gain confidence, which leads them to express themselves cognitively [28]. The collated responses work as a source that helps them to achieve internalization of information based on their understanding of how they are perceived by others. This can be related with motivation and placed in the context of personal development and growth. According to Cheung et al. [31], when people interact online, they have a different purpose and understanding, which influences their willingness to engage and develop their cognitive learning skills. Understanding consumers' cognitive learning skills is important for marketers as they need to gauge how and why consumers search for and exchange information as well as how digital platforms can be utilized fully. On the other hand, it may be useful to note that Kumar [32] challenges existing assumptions regarding SM interactive marketing communications from the perspective of relationship building with customers and suggests that it has limited reach in emerging economies. This brings to attention issues such as suitability, a user's capability, and the benefits and potential risks associated with using communications technology in a relationship-oriented network marketing context. Nevertheless, various researchers such as Itani et al. [33] acknowledge that marketers have availed themselves of the benefits of SM and argue that they should invest further in utilizing SM technology as the benefits associated with using communications technology to collect competitive intelligence as well as to adapt sales approaches are well established.

Thus, senior management needs to pay attention to how to utilize a range of digital platforms to reduce barriers and increase information sharing and network capability and, at the same time, increase the usability of information. Lacka and Chong [1] applied Nielsen's (1993) model of attributes of system acceptability and argued that for a system to enhance relationship building, it must be effectively designed. This relates to the issue of how Internet-based communications technology contributes to the knowledge conversion process through the interplay of operant and operand resources that aid and increase the knowledge density of an organization. To understand the significance of this, Gawer [34] and Mukhopadhyay and Bouwman [35] point out that a technological architecture needs to be viewed as modular and structured around stable core components and variable peripheral components. This suggests that it is necessary to have structures and processes in place that facilitate information sharing at different levels of business-to-consumer (B2C), consumer-to-business (C2B), and business-to-business (B2B) interactions, if that is knowledge conversion is to be successful.

2.2. Enhancing Consumer Motivation

The growing tendency to utilize SM can be viewed from several perspectives. The consumer is driven to receive and divulge information that makes them feel important to the peer group they wish to be associated with [36]. At the same time, they receive information from their peers that helps promote a defined view of the company whose products they consume [37]. In relation to motivation and online community group(s) behavior, individuals provide either positive or negative narrations that allow an individual to gain self-importance. If an individual receives positive feedback from an online community group, they feel a higher level of satisfaction. In turn, company staff can identify how information is circulated and by whom and can monitor the actions of the main influencers on SM and various SM networking sites and engage with them, so that company–consumer relationships are enhanced through time.

In relation to learning how to craft the communication engagement process, although SM can be used to provide a consumer with accessible product-oriented information [38], it is important for marketing staff to be aware of the benefits derived from dialogue between the company and the public. In regard to consumer engagement and a sense of fulfilment, it is useful to note that consumer engagement fulfilment at the cognitive level and the emotional level [37] manifests in increased well-being [39]. This is because engagement contributes to a sense of personal development, and this indicates that marketers need to

think of the process of communication being tailored to support customer post-purchase evaluations that embellish a brand's reputation and at the same time strengthen a customer's feelings towards it [40]. It should be noted that although the focus of co-creation is to develop sustainable relationships with end users for repeat purchases, it must be said that some end users seek a reward that goes beyond a regular repeat purchase. Indeed, it can be pointed out that those providing online reviews are driven by a psychological need to receive attention from an active community of interest.

Based on the analysis of consumer engagement behavior with a brand, marketers can gain insights into consumer expectations and motivations, which can be leveraged for further personalization [41]. A note of caution, however, is that although post-purchase comments can be linked to an end user's emotional attachment to a brand [42], which can be viewed as a positive or a negative occurrence depending upon how the relationship is managed between the end user and the company, what needs to be borne in mind is that an end user may be seeking some form of gratification for the comments offered. If they do not receive reassurance that their comments are valid or feel that they are respected, they may become anxious and uncooperative. Indeed, this raises a fundamental issue. Basically, orientation-to-engagement is fueled by a desire to achieve emotional well-being and satisfaction [43] and company staff need to be aware that SM provides an opportunity for a consumer to express their appreciation and receive in return a certain amount of appreciation from others [44].

By establishing and building an emotional rapport between the company and its customers, the company can build trust-based relationships that leverage a competitive advantage [45]. In the technology information management field, a great deal of attention has been given to communications technology acceptance and the utilization of SM from a user's perspective [1,46]. Thus, SM has value [47] and helps to convert information into a reward if customers feel that the information obtained via SM helps them to make an appropriate purchase decision that satisfies their inner desires. In other words, SM can be viewed as a facilitator of reciprocal relationships and an aid in organizational learning.

2.3. Knowledge Development and Utilization

To stimulate and guide consumers, retailers should be able to control when, how, and what is communicated with their target audience [48]. For this to happen, the use of digital analytics is beneficial to understand a consumer's lifestyle and preferences based on past purchase records, which includes shopper click analysis. Such intelligence helps retailers to learn about their target audience's actual and potential needs and how to personalize product web pages [41] to appeal congruently to them and build meaningful customer-based relationships. For example, Burberry and H&M are using the "see now, buy now" concept as it utilizes digital integration to speed up interactions accurately—involving designers, manufacturers, suppliers, retailers, and buyers [49]. Such an approach adds value from a consumer's perspective as they feel their engagement is appreciated.

The customer-centric approach, which emanates from the market orientation and market-based knowledge approach [50], utilizes Internet-based technology to facilitate marketing planning and strategy implementation that focuses on meeting customer demands through solving practical problems [51]. The resulting customer-centered learning approach [52], whereby B2C and C2B relationships are harvested to turn information into intelligence and intelligence into knowledge, becomes central to value co-creation. Hult et al. [53] (p. 542) recognize this and view learning as being representative of the "values and beliefs associated with the development of new knowledge that has potential to influence behavior". Hence, for strategy development, it is important to place emphasis on linking various learning activities [54,55] within the company and within partner organizations. This has many advantages including stimulating knowledge conversion through various forms of learning [56]. However, in terms of knowledge development within a shared and collectivist setting (e.g., company–supplier (B2B)), it should be noted that knowledge will emerge in the form of a group consensus [57] that is embraced by

company staff from the perspective of knowledge exchange that facilitates and reinforces the staff's commitment to learning [58,59]. This view is representative of how innovation(s) occur and is supported by Zuo et al. [20] (p. 1168) who state that: "Meaningfulness considers the extent to which innovation is useful to customers and important as an input for future innovations".

In terms of how knowledge influences behavior, it should be remembered that knowledge is produced through dialogue and consultation that aids the marketing planning and strategy process and consequently, new products and services emerge into the market that are considered to have value and provide customer satisfaction [49]. In other words, it can be said that innovation emerges from the process of the development of customer prioritization strategies, which means that customers are given priority in terms of their immediate and post purchase requirements [60,61].

With regard to knowledge transfer within and between organizations, appropriate organizational structures can be viewed in terms of systems (interconnected digital platforms), procedures (the protocols in place), and policies (information security guidance) that help to produce knowledge that is considered to have value [56]. Those involved in the production of knowledge should be aware that collaborative trust emerges at the personal level [61]. In addition, trust can be differentiated into economic exchange (trust and commitment) that is associated with a task being completed, and social exchange (the work situation and culture) [62,63], whereby the appropriate informal relationships are in place (social bonds) to facilitate knowledge conversion.

3. Research Method

3.1. In-Depth Personal Interviews

In order to address how retailers utilize Internet-based communications technology to aid the knowledge conversion process so that marketing capability is increased in a collectivist emerging market, five in-depth, face-to-face interviews [64] were undertaken with owners of fashion retail companies in Hanoi, all of whom had over 10 years of industry experience. One retailer was a manufacturer, had a multichannel operation of stores and was engaged in online selling, and had an annual turnover over USD 1 million. Two retailers, one with a turnover of less than USD 1 million and the other with a turnover of in excess of USD 1 million, had chains in a number of cities in Vietnam and were engaged in online selling. Two other retailers, both with an annual turnover of under USD 1 million, were only selling online. The retail companies were selected on the basis that they specialized in the high-end fashion market and served middle to high income earners. In addition, each company was established in the market, was known to provide quality products, used social media to exchange information with consumers, and was accessible to the researcher based in Vietnam who was responsible for collecting the data. Each owner was prepared to meet face to face with the researcher in Vietnam and answer the questions posed as they had been provided with relevant information about the interview process prior to the interviewed being undertaken.

3.2. Questionnaire Development

A questionnaire, outlined in Exhibit 1, was developed from the literature review and was composed of 15 open-ended questions that covered the usage of SM (e.g., advantages and disadvantages, communication channels, information sharing, and future opportunities). When constructing the questionnaire, the researchers paid attention to the gaps identified and how the data collected would enable them to meet the aim of the research. In regard to the inclusion of questions, emphasis was placed on deriving the benefits of social media and also, the number of questions were reduced so that each interview would last about 60 min. The questionnaire was translated from English into Vietnamese by one of the researchers who is bilingual (a native speaker of Vietnamese that is fluent in English). Prior to the actual interviews with the owners of the fashion retail companies taking place, the researcher in Vietnam undertook pilot interviews

with staff in two other fashion retail companies (an owner and the head of marketing). Based on the results of the pilot interviews, the researchers amended the wording of the questions. The researcher in Vietnam, through a process of continual negotiation, was able to gain access to the participating companies, and interview the owner. All the owners had experience in building brands and using e-marketing through the use of established e-commerce platforms. A strict code of ethical practice was followed, which guaranteed anonymity to those interviewed.

Exhibit 1: In-depth interview questionnaire

1. What is the main advantage(s) of using social media to communicate with customers?
2. Which social media channels do you use to communicate with customers (such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp; LinkedIn twitter etc)?
3. Which social media channel is the most suitable/successful and why?
4. How is the data/information received through social media analysed?
5. Do you share the results of the data analysis with your suppliers? If yes, please explain:
6. Do you and your suppliers co-operate in terms of social media usage? If yes, please explain:
7. Which aspects of customer service does social media usage support?
8. When and at what time of the year is social media usage most effective?
9. When is it not appropriate to use social media?
10. How effective is the use of social media compared to other forms of communication?
11. Does social media usage require special training and support? If yes, please explain:
12. Do you use social media specialist companies to administer your social media activities (including social media site)? If yes, please explain:
13. Do you monitor how other retailers use social media? If yes, please explain:
14. Which aspects of supply chain management, does social media support and why?
15. In the future, how do you see the usage of social media being extended?

3.3. Data Collection

The deployment of an open-ended questionnaire was advantageous as it allowed the researcher to pose the questions in a consistent manner, and to probe when necessary. Each interview lasted approximately 70 min. The interviews were audio recorded and verbatim transcripts were produced and translated into English by the researcher based in Vietnam. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The inductive approach was utilized for analyzing the data and the relevant themes and categories were identified [64] (p. 390). The open coding, axial coding, and selective coding [65] processes allowed the researchers to develop a set of themes. The interviews were completed within a 21-day period and were undertaken at a time convenient to the interviewees. For example, the interviews were arranged during a lull in business activities, and this meant that the participants were both relaxed and fully committed to providing in-depth answers to the questions posed.

4. Data Analysis

Each interview transcript was analyzed using thematic analysis [65]. The researchers in the UK worked independently when carrying out the open-coding stage and then came together and compared and discussed their results. For axial coding, the researchers in the UK group worked together and identified the sub-themes emanating from the open-coding stage. Further analysis allowed the main themes to emerge from combining the similar sub-themes [65]. They then progressed to the final stage whereby the commonalities in the data were identified and this allowed them to relate the main themes to the subthemes and identify the prevailing characteristics.

The resulting themes were: “The effectiveness of social media”; “How social media supports marketing intelligence”; “How social media supports customer service”; and “The knowledge and skills needed for social media”. Please see Table 1 for the themes, sub-themes and characteristics associated with SM that retailers in Vietnam identified with. The analysis revealed that retailers need to consider their role as ‘knowledge broker’

and ‘knowledge connector’ because they play an integrating role between suppliers and consumers as opposed to the role of the middleman in terms of product transfer between the supplier and end user. Young consumers in Vietnam highly value the opportunity to display their knowledge, which they consider to be unique. By displaying their knowledge via SM, young consumers in Vietnam gain the advantage of raising their profile within their online social community.

Table 1. The themes, sub-themes, and characteristics associated with social media (SM).

Themes	Sub-Themes	Characteristics (1 = Most Cited and 5 = Least Cited)
The Effectiveness of Social Media	The way in which supply chain management is supported by SM	(1=) Accuracy of information to customers (1=) Accuracy of information to suppliers (3=) Searching for new customers (3=) Searching for new suppliers
	The main advantages of SM	(1) To monitor customer trends (2) To identify customer needs (3) To promote new products (4) To support supply chain management (5) Cost savings
	Frequently used SM channels	(1) Facebook (2) Instagram (3) Zalo (4=) Shoppe (5=) Lazado (5=) Tiki (5=) WhatsApp (5=) WeChat
How Social Media Supports Marketing Intelligence	The use of SM vis-a-vis supporting marketing intelligence	(1) Analyzing customers’ buying behavior (2=) Planning sales promotions (2=) Managing customer relationships
	Information sharing is used	(1) To meet customer specifications (2=) To aid product planning (2=) To meet seasonal demands
	The objective is seller–buyer cooperation	(1) To ensure the product meets the specification(s)
	Monitoring other retailers	(1) To gain marketing intelligence (2) To gain insights into social media usage (3) To gain insights into message construction
How Social Media Supports Customer Service	Effectiveness of SM compared with other forms of communication	(1) Provides wide geographical coverage (2) Integrated with supply chain management (e.g., checking information and stock levels) (3) Cost-effective customer targeting (4=) Ability to interact speedily with customers (4=) Ability to interact speedily with suppliers
	The timing of the usage of social media	Daily basis: (1) In the morning (6am–8am) (2) During lunch time (11am–12pm) (3) Night time—after dinner (8pm–9pm) Yearly basis: (1) During festivals (e.g., Lunar New Year) (2) At the beginning of each season (i.e., summer and winter) (3) When a big brand is launched

Table 1. *Cont.*

Themes	Sub-Themes	Characteristics (1 = Most Cited and 5 = Least Cited)
	Inappropriate timing of social media usage	(1) When customers are busy (e.g., during major sporting events)
	SM supports customer service	(1) To gain feedback regarding overall product quality (2) To gain feedback regarding improving the service provided (3) To gain additional business
	Extending social media applications	(1) Instagram will be used more vis à vis young customers
The Knowledge & Skill Needed for Social Media	Special training and support	(1) Content writing (2) Online marketing (3) Fan page design (4) Technical know-how
	Use of SM specialist companies	(1=) Launching promotions (1=) Online promotion

As can be noted from Table 1, retailers in Vietnam continuously monitor their customers as well as competitors, and interact with their suppliers to ensure that the information available to customers regarding brands/products is accurate. It should be noted that in order to personalize information based on a specific group’s needs, retailers in Vietnam utilize a fan page, whereby they personalize the appearance, message, and type of products so that it appeals congruently to specific groups. This is an important aspect in terms of motivating and encouraging customers to engage in dialogue with the retailer, and at the same time, retail staff modify their conversation style to illicit further information from the customer.

5. Discussion

In this study, we considered why young consumers in a collectivist emerging market engage with a retailer’s SM site and how they assess value vis à vis retailers utilizing SM to facilitate knowledge conversion to increase marketing capability. This study showed that for retail staff to turn data into intelligence and intelligence into knowledge through interactions with customers, retail staff’s ability to adapt and remain flexible is important in building a positive and trustworthy relationship through establishing an emotional rapport with customers [3,21]. Retail staff’s flexible and adaptive approach encourages customers to freely express their experiences, feelings, and views as well as to make requests for information about new products/services. This brings to the fore the issue of a retailer’s ability to utilize an operant resource in knowledge conversion. Knowledge conversion is an ability to translate knowledge interactions between tacit knowledge (i.e., intuition which is unarticulated and embedded within senses (e.g., rules of thumb)) and explicit knowledge (i.e., articulated knowledge that is documented) [30]. In other words, this research makes known the context within which retailers identify usable information based on their interaction with customers (e.g., the utilization of operant resources gained through personal interactions that is transformed into tacit knowledge). Perceived value relates to and stems from the use of innovative products/services and is associated with the second stage whereby an operand resource is utilized for an objective/purpose (e.g., physical interaction results in explicit knowledge). In order for retailers to adapt their digital marketing strategy successfully to be in line with changes in market-based intelligence, it can also be suggested that the knowledge conversion process needs to be managed at the firm level and also embrace salespeople’s networks as they are a boundary spanner and are considered influential as they embed themselves in wider social networks outside the organization and are in a position to develop market-based knowledge [66].

In relation to the use of Internet-based communications technology in a business relationship building context, from the interviews, it was clear that there are three main issues that senior managers need to address such as: (i) the design of the system and its operability in terms of being integrated into other various information platforms; (ii) how individual staff are motivated to use communications technology so that the organization gathers useful information in a short period of time/in real time; and (iii) how marketers share relevant information with staff in partner organizations in order to create sustainable value. These aspects can be reflected on and placed within the context of network theory and viewed in terms of how mechanisms and structures facilitate and/or interact with various processes that affect the way in which marketers share information and create trust-based sustainable relationships. This can be viewed from the perspective of how retailers build resource density through the internalization of knowledge at the organizational level (e.g., institutionalized knowledge) and share relevant institutionalized knowledge with selective partner organizations. Fully integrating knowledge throughout the network alliance so that all parties benefit is perceived as contributing to an organization's competitive advantage as it increases the marketing capability of each partner organization and focuses management's attention on ways in which to make continual improvements. This suggests that senior managers need to be aware of how communications technology links organizational partners and is used to enhance cooperation between staff. Enhanced cooperation between staff can be related to increasing the level of motivation of employees in terms of how they share information and knowledge to build and maintain internally focused B2B relationships and externally focused B2C and C2B relationships. The key is to understand how interactions influence and are influenced using communications technology, and how information is turned into knowledge that has value to all parties. It can be suggested, therefore, that marketers need to understand the psychological conditions relating to how a user of SM perceives the use of SM [1,46] and internalizes their thoughts so that they identify with a particular company's products and services and believe that they are being treated as a valuable knowledge provider as well as a customer. This highlights the issue of knowledge reciprocity which is seldom acknowledged by most researchers.

Reflecting on the emerging role of a retailer in terms of 'knowledge broker' and 'knowledge connector', it can be noted that delivering perceived enhanced value in a collectivist emerging market can be viewed as a direct benefit of the utilization of SM for knowledge conversion. Figure 1, which emanates from the interviews with five retail company owners in a collectivist emerging market, shows how perceived enhanced value is delivered to end users. Figure 1 makes clear that retailers in Vietnam use SM to facilitate knowledge conversion through various processes, which occurs through continuous interaction with customers. Indeed, the various refining processes include capturing usable operant resources known as "front door activities with consumers"; and knowledge utilization, which materializes through sharing institutionalized knowledge relating to innovative products/services. Knowledge utilization is deemed important as it represents the second stage (e.g., operand resource utilization) that is deemed necessary for producing enhanced perceived value and mutual benefits for all the parties concerned. Taking into account the view of Hult et al. [53] whereby new knowledge influences behavior, we maintain that the knowledge conversion process is a circular process and occurs: (i) during interaction with suppliers and (ii) during interaction with consumers.

To make use of relevant information in the way of crowd sourcing ideas and feedback from customers, retailers in Vietnam identify appropriate SM channels that are popular among certain consumer groups. They also use social listening to gather insights into understanding a consumer's lifestyle and preferences. The knowledge gained helps a retailer to have granularity in segmentation, and control what is communicated to each group. It also allows them to determine the way in which the messages are communicated [48], which helps to establish and build a rapport with the members of each customer group. This is representative of the group-based personalized approach that helps the retailer to tailor and disseminate information about a product/service to a specific group and

meet their desires as well as to rapidly respond to changes in customer tastes [41,49]. By closely matching information with personality or lifestyle, customers feel comforted and joyful, which influences their attitude towards the company. In other words, it can be suggested that customers are made to feel that interaction involving SM provides them with a sense of social presence, which makes them feel confident and more likely to share their experience(s) online as well as develop a positive view of the company [67]. This reinforces the fact that customers assess the value of experience through psychological and emotional responses [22] and are motivated to converse more openly with retail staff. This suggests that customers that interact via communications technology are bonded in some way and do have commonality. By addressing this more fully, marketers can ascertain how an end user develops an understanding of what a trust-based B2C relationship is and also how it can be placed within an appropriate cultural [63] C2B context. This is important to note because it emphasizes the fact that marketers need to adopt a proactive approach to organizational intervention and ensure that B2B cooperation is based on the willingness to cooperate and achieve shared goals [52].

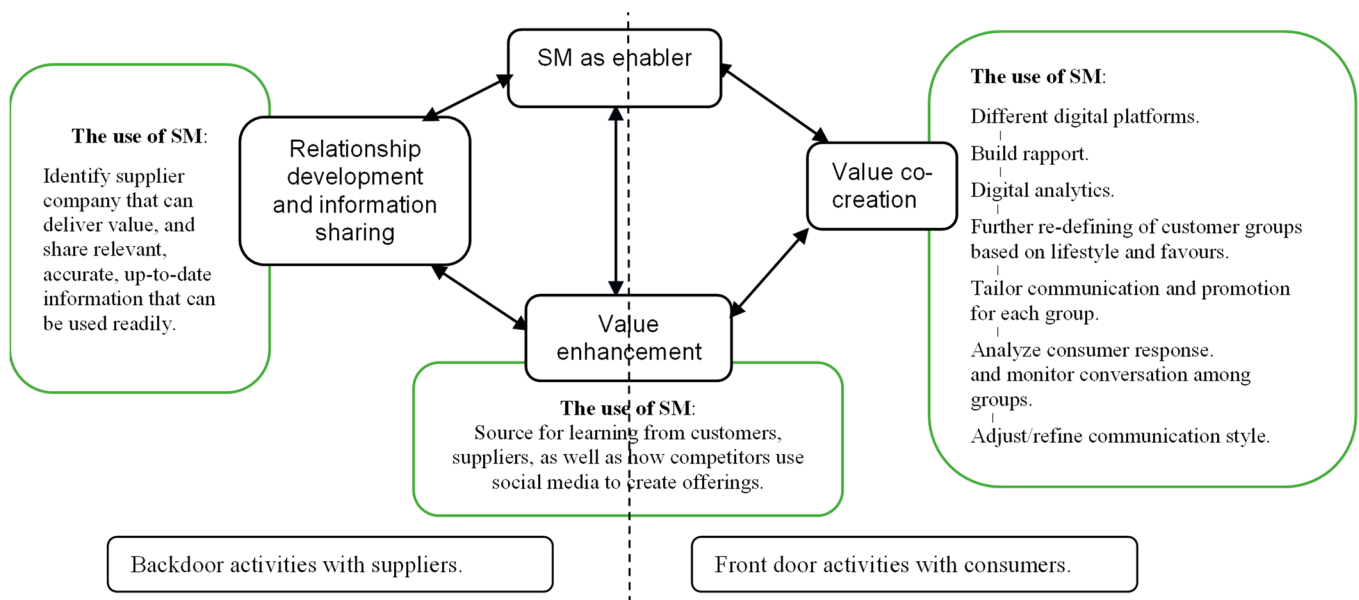


Figure 1. Knowledge conversion for perceived value enhancement: the role of social media (SM) as an enabler.

In relation to knowledge utilization for value co-creation, retailers in Vietnam share relevant information with suppliers bearing in mind that they need to reduce operational costs as well as increase the speed of delivery of new products/services and fine tune the marketing mix in a timely manner. In other words, it is necessary that retailers in Vietnam cooperate and coordinate their established supplier networks so that they can deliver value/offerings to customers [68] in quick succession. Hence, retailers in a collectivist emerging market use SM to enhance their supplier network as well as to source different types of knowledge from external vendors. This is to ensure that knowledge conversion occurs in real time.

On reflection, it can be suggested that it is possible to place the concept of knowledge conversion through SM-assisted technology in the context of organizational structures and mechanisms. This is important from the perspective of establishing online network provisions in relation to information integrity (e.g., trustworthy information provision), safety (e.g., people being protected when using computer systems and networks), and availability, which relates to continual and uninterrupted usage over a long period of time. In other words, an operand resource, such as a digital platform, is used to help convey messages between people and facilitate interactions that allow text and images relating to

a company's products to be forwarded to people/interested parties. Therefore, although issues of privacy and digital identity arise over time, SM usage can be viewed as efficacious for communication [69].

In relation to SM, there are various aspects that marketers can take into consideration such as: first, when an individual feels that they have high perceived psychological proximity (interpersonal closeness) between themselves and the receiver, they are more likely to share negative comments/experience to protect others, whereas low perceived interpersonal closeness, suggests that people tend to share positive information to retain positivity [70]. Second, SM offers an advantage for marketers as it enables them to develop networks and build relationships with industry-specific groups as well as overcome difficulties in regard to spatial issues. As Itani et al. [33] indicate, SM utilization can impact competitive intelligence, which influences how marketers adapt their selling approach to fit different market environments as well as to meet local customers' expectations vis à vis sales performance. However, the fact that retail organizations need to put in place appropriate structures so that the networks of systems that enable information sharing between parties and at the same time provide flexibility and fluidity in terms of information flow suggests that SM can be used for more than intelligence gathering alone.

In regard to increasing an organization's resource capability through a network of alliances and business partnerships, it can be argued that senior B2B marketing managers need to be aware of how marketing staff access and use the organizational structures and systems that are in place to share information in real time to gain the maximum benefit from the available resources. This suggests that organizational intervention relating to the use of communications technology needs to take into account the skill level and capability of B2B marketers vis à vis personalizing information [71] for staff (based on role/task). In other words, in order for communications technology to be considered a resource tie enabler, it is necessary to consider how various types of information and institutionalized knowledge are sorted and made accessible. This is so that retail staff can establish the value of the information/knowledge shared in real time and rapidly implement decisions via a digital platform. This assumes that adequate attention has been given to how structural issues (e.g., vertical and horizontal information flows) are overcome and connectivity is maximized so that the networks of partner organizations are accessed in real time.

In regard to the knowledge conversion process, if retail staff can utilize multiple sources and multiple channels, they will be viewed as proactive in assisting and delivering perceived enhanced value. Additionally, the fact that retail staff are able to access and utilize relevant information in a timely manner, encourages staff to develop knowledge and social skills that give them distinctiveness and allow them to relate confidently to consumers. In doing so, it can be deduced that retailers utilize both operand resources (staff provide accurate and up-to-date information to customers) and operant resources (a user-friendly website and/or digital platform that facilitates interconnectivity). Figure 2 highlights the processes by which this occurs. The reader will note that by identifying the inputs, the processes, and the outputs, it is possible to show how increased marketing capability is achieved.

The reader will note from Figure 2 that there are several processes in place that have clearly defined structures and encompass various mechanisms. To maintain the set of outputs, it is important for senior management to recognize that a distinction has to be made between 'direct' knowledge conversation and 'indirect' knowledge conversion. For example, it is possible for retail staff to, in the case of 'direct' knowledge conversion, promote communication with customers through SM and ensure that a customer's response is dealt with in real time. In regard to 'indirect' knowledge conversion, whereby a retailer does not have direct contact with a customer but is able to tailor written information and/or learn from analyzing information derived from social listening, it is important for retail staff to have the capability to interact within a digital marketing planning framework that is integrated into the marketing planning system of suppliers. Should this be the case, the network alliance will be deemed highly functional because decisions made can

be implemented in real time. Thus, it can be argued that SM usage can be viewed as influential because it holds emotional value for customers vis-a-vis their psychological perception. Recognizing this means that knowledge conversion is viewed as enhancing marketing capability and at the same time, enhancing customer well-being, which translates into a win-win strategy for the company and the consumer, and results in a sustainable competitive advantage for the company.

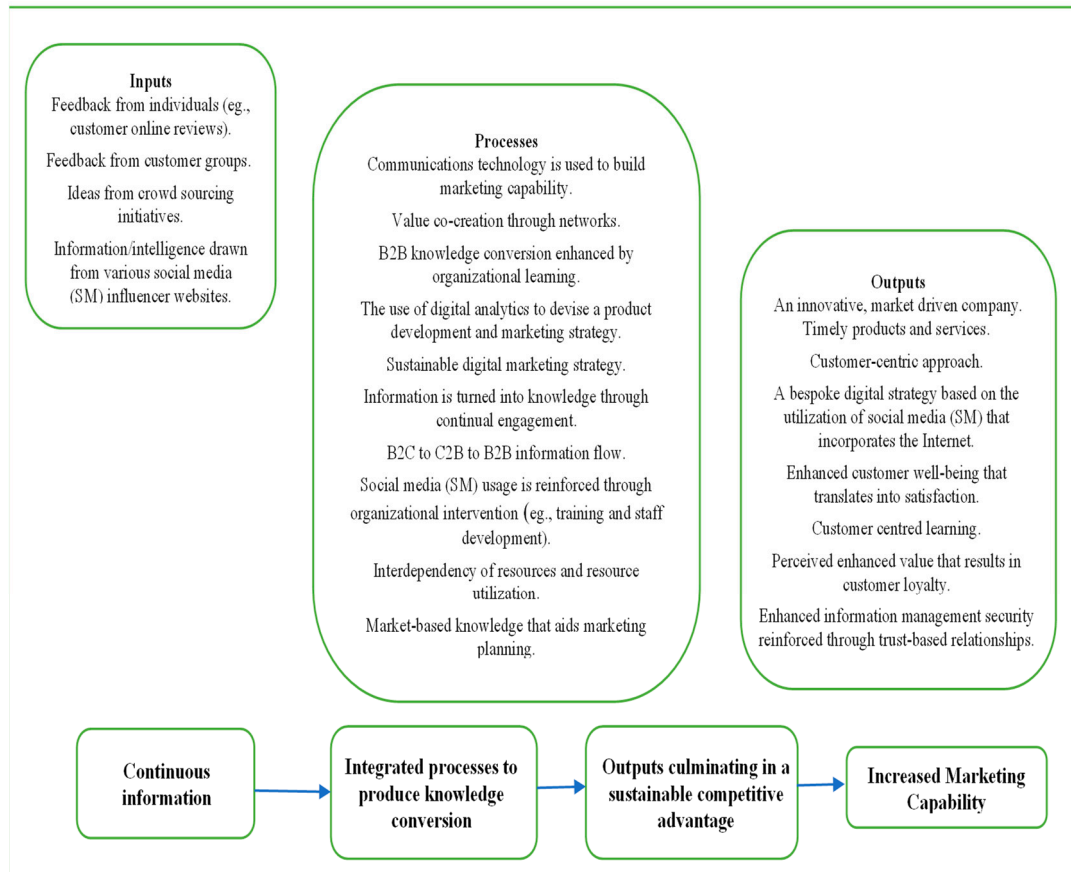


Figure 2. Social media (SM)-induced knowledge–market association that enhances marketing capability.

6. Conclusions

This study explains how a retailer can view their role in terms of ‘knowledge broker’ and ‘knowledge connector’ as opposed to being viewed as being ‘a middleman’ between suppliers and end-users. For retailers to be seen as a ‘knowledge broker’ and ‘knowledge connector’, we highlighted the importance of knowledge conversion vis à vis a retailer’s ability to be flexible and adaptable in assisting customers to achieve self-assurance and well-being. Hence, the findings make a unique contribution by explaining how retailers view interactions so that they can deliver perceived enhanced value through connecting information with intelligence and interpreting this from a knowledge conversation perspective. Retailers not only need to be proactive in identifying the interests of a particular consumer group, but they also need to be able to guide customers regarding current brand development and brand acceptance among different social groups, while informing them of the unique value and benefits provided by the company. This suggests that senior managers need to ensure that staff are aware of how to converse with consumers and develop tacit knowledge through the utilization of operant resources.

The structures and mechanisms of a digital platform, which takes into consideration governance and compliance, plays an important role in facilitating interactions among and between marketing staff and should result in the sharing of relevant and reliable data and information among partner organizations. The advantage of this is that the organization’s

network becomes more resilient and in addition, the digital platform(s) utilized provide a bridge between the world inhabited by marketers and the world inhabited by information management security specialists [72]. We argue that this will reduce barriers, increase the awareness of marketing staff towards safety and security, and raise the confidence level of staff. In turn, marketers will undertake higher level marketing tasks that have a strategic orientation and help to solidify communication between partner organizations [73].

It can be suggested that an individual that participates in a network arrangement can learn through the social tie resources that exist and this will result in knowledge sharing [74]. Hence, a digital platform not only allows data/information to be shared but provides staff with the confidence to look into the future and identify areas of shared vulnerability. So, a pro-active approach to organizational intervention can be viewed as reducing existing and potential barriers through appropriate risk management and increasing the organization's network and marketing capability through putting in place structures and mechanisms that enhance trust that is derived from data/information handling. Staff in potential and new partner organizations need to feel that they can increase the company's knowledge capability by controlling the flow of information by both direct and indirect means. Should this be the case, information sharing will be viewed from an intelligence perspective (e.g., identifying the needs of customers and the marketing tactics/strategies of competitors) and a knowledge building perspective, the objective of which is to deliver value to customers.

7. Managerial Implications

It is important for retailers to be open minded and provide the opportunity/tools for customers to contact them directly to verify information when necessary. This, we suggest, will help customer with sense making [28,75,76]. It can also be suggested that retailers need to learn to embrace the views of customers, and this can be done through social listening; however, staff need to pay attention to how to increase the perception of congruency [49] as well as the issue of consistency between information and offerings. This suggests that managers in the retail sector should adopt a pro-active approach to relationship building with staff in partner organizations so that supply chain operations provide a high level of customer service. Providing accurate information about brands/products in a timely manner can help the retailer to rapidly respond to online customer requests. Hence, it is the retailer's ability to match information with personality/lifestyle that makes customers feel that they are being respected. Managers should take note that the value of information provided translates into a perceived level of company–customer interaction that makes the customer feel that they have a sense of social presence [22,67]. In addition, customer's gain in confidence and sharing of their experience online with other customers can be viewed as positive electronic word-of-mouth and an essential element of reinforcing the level of customer service provided.

By retailers adapting communications technology and interactive processes to local needs and relating more to social contexts [77], consumers will be able to learn about the product/brand and derive perceived value [75] from B2C relations. It can be argued that this will prove advantageous as it will allow the consumer to learn to fully engage with retail staff and overcome the uncertainty associated with using a digital platform.

8. Future Research

In relation to the retailer's role as 'knowledge broker' and 'knowledge connector' to enhance service provision via SM, for this study, data were collected from a number of fashion retailers in a major commercial city in Vietnam. Therefore, there is scope to undertake a future study to explore how a digital marketing strategy, encompassing different retail sectors (e.g., banking, food, and consumer electronics) can be undertaken to address the issue of sustainability [78] as this would allow the knowledge conversion process to be placed in a wider, stakeholder relationship building context. This would have

value because it would make clear how knowledge conversion occurs between the retailer, its suppliers, and influential online brand communities.

At the heart of communications technology utilization is trust building between partners and this requires that attention is given to the accuracy and reliability of the data/information that is shared, which enhances organizational performance through the process of strategic alignment [79]. The approach we adopted is unique in the sense that we looked at the usefulness of SM and how it can be placed in the context of knowledge conversion. We believe our research outcome contributes to how senior marketing managers take cognizance of what Venkatesh and Bala [80] (p. 303) have said: “there is little or no scientific research aimed at identifying and linking interventions with specific determinations of IT adoption”. Bearing this in mind, additional research can be undertaken into network theory to deepen our understanding of how senior marketing managers use organizational intervention to increase marketing capability through communications technology and digital networks. Hence, there are three additional research projects that can be undertaken. First, research can be undertaken into how a company’s network can be expanded using communications technology, the focus of which is to provide evidence as to how B2B marketers can increase their self-control through gaining knowledge and information in real time. Second, research can be undertaken to establish how trust-based relationships between the parties in an existing network can be extended to include supplier-to-supplier relationships. Third, the topic of organizational learning can be explored so that communications technology usage is placed in the context of stakeholder resource ties and inter-organizational co-operation across borders.

Another area of potential research is cybercrime. Bearing in mind that cybercrime is expected to increase on SM platforms and that fake news is expected to remain problematic [2] (p. 4), it can be argued that more emphasis needs to be placed on establishing how cyber security awareness can ensure that those exchanging data and information via SM and fully engaging on digital platforms do not place themselves or the organization they work for, at risk.

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