

USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR CUSTOMER KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT IN DEVELOPING ECONOMIES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge Management (KM) research has theorized that KM activities lead to better firm performance. The current view that there is more external knowledge than exists within organizations has resulted in a preference for customer-centric approaches over traditional KM activities. Recent advances in technology has resulted in social media use as an avenue for knowledge creation from the social interaction between brands and their customers. Most research however explore social media's impact on organizational knowledge in developed economies with little attention to developing economies where KM could be conceptualized differently. In this research, we analyze the extent to which social media can support customer knowledge management (CKM) in developing economies. Using a systematic literature review, the current study captures literature containing keywords on social media and CKM published in relevant databases between January 2010 and December 2019. Finding from this study demonstrated that the strategies employed in developing economies largely depend on the type of social media and strategies can be made more effective through channel, engagement, and business intelligence management. It was also discovered that knowledge creation was the most important KM process for ensuring success while the systems that support this were a combination of Marketing, Sales, Customer Service, and Technology.

Keywords: customer knowledge management, social media, developing country, low-income economy

INTRODUCTION

The traditional factors of production – land, labor, capital – are no longer considered primary but have become secondary to the only meaningful resource of today: *knowledge* (Drucker, 1992). Rowley (2002) asserts that a part of this resource that remains an important asset to businesses is *customer knowledge (CK)*. Customer knowledge management requires leveraging three types of knowledge: *from*, *about*, and *for* potential customers, customer segments and individual customers (Desouza & Awazu, 2005; Rowley, 2002). Organizations that possess this kind of knowledge may achieve competitive advantage (García-Murillo & Annabi, 2002; Khodakarami & Chan, 2014; Winer, 2001).

Competitive advantage is realized by including customer views into the decision-making process which in turn reduces, as much as possible, uncertainty from business processes (Applegate et al., 2009). The world wide web, and in extension the Internet and social media, has created an avenue for businesses to manage this interaction with customers (Winer, 2001). Social media, especially, has become an integral part of a firm's strategy for knowledge creation as it allows seamless social interaction between brands and their customers. In fact, business decision makers and their consultants often seek ways in which social media platforms – Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. – can be used profitably (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The problem is that even with the myriad of options available, customers can have a difficult time communicating their needs and demands. Businesses are required to employ the most effective tools to ensure communication with customers remain optimum (Tseng & Wu, 2014). Dous et al. (2005) posits that successful implementation of CKM in practice involves four elements: strategy, processes, systems, and change management. Accordingly, this research investigates how literature has applied the first three elements to CKM using social media. The study leverages extant literature on the topic of CKM and social media from the perspective of developing economies with the aim of exploring how CKM could be conceptualized differently in a low-income economic country. Specifically, the present study systematically reviews and synthesizes the CKM-related studies in developing economies with the focus on social media by posing the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the strategies used for CKM in developing countries?

RQ2. Which CKM processes are most prevalent in studies for ensuring and promoting customer success?

RQ3. How are systems implemented to support social media for customer relationship management in developing countries?

The rest of this study is organized as follows: the ensuing section describes the background and theoretical framework for synthesizing literature in this review. This is followed by the research methodology and findings. Further, we present an in-depth discussion of the findings with respect to the proposed research questions and conclude with implications for research and practice.

BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Customer knowledge management (CKM)

Customer knowledge is viewed as a major resource for organizations as it is often sufficient for managing and supporting research and development of new products (Gibbert et al., 2002). Constant interaction with customers allows the organization to analyze and understand the customers' knowledge of the firm itself, and its products, services, suppliers, and markets. This knowledge is essential for making continuous improvements to the firms business model and services, and for new product development (García-Murillo & Annabi, 2002). Other types of customer knowledge that can be beneficial to a firm includes their knowledge of the firm's competitors and market trends which can be used as a feedback mechanism to deliver systematic improvements and innovation to products. Three customer knowledge types are discussed in the literature:

The first type of knowledge is the one for customers. Customer education is an essential part of CKM. By supplying customers with information on products, services, suppliers, distribution channels, prices, and even major developments within the firm, customers are afforded the requisite help for making the best purchasing decisions. Customer's perception of service quality is often affected by this type of knowledge (Desouza & Awazu, 2005). As such, it is vital to not only communicate product information, but also financial information, and even service and supply disruptions.

Second, knowledge from customers is gathered based on customer behavior such as buying patterns. This leads to a deeper understanding of their motivations which can, in turn, be leveraged to improve customer service. In recent times, social media has provided an additional dimension to this type of knowledge collection as it permits segmentation through sales prospect profiling (Vijay & Srivastava, 2019). For example, Facebook can be leveraged for information on customer's age group and interests, Amazon for product choices, and LinkedIn for information on customer's professional interests. This allows firms to tailor marketing campaigns towards certain individuals and in some situations create different product lines for different segments.

Last, knowledge about customers requires conscious management of customers' knowledge which, in turn, allows firms to meet their customers' ever-changing needs through a continuous communication loop (Davenport et al., 2001). This is because CKM is a continuous cycle of acquiring and processing valuable customer information through various channels and sharing this processed information – customer knowledge – within the business. CKM creates strategic processes that change a firm's customer from a passive recipient of information to a partner whose adequate knowledge can be used to profit the business (Plessis & Boon, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

As shown in Figure 1, this systematic review discusses extant literature on the background of the types of CKM and elements of CKM implementation introduced by Dous et al. (2005). These elements, as mentioned in the earlier were introduced by the authors to alleviate the gap between the benefits in theory and successful practice. We discuss each of the types of knowledge mentioned above (from, to, and about customers) along the lines of the four elements:

- *Strategy*: It perceives CK as a valuable source of product innovation and process improvement.
- *Processes*: Are used to align knowledge management activities seamlessly with CRM processes.
- *Systems*: Create an integrated knowledge repository across organizational boundaries.
- *Change management*: to encourage relationship managers to capture and disseminate customer knowledge

However, for the purposes of this research, change management is not discussed as research into it has been lacking in the literature. Figure 1 presents a conceptual view of how the literature has been organized in this study.

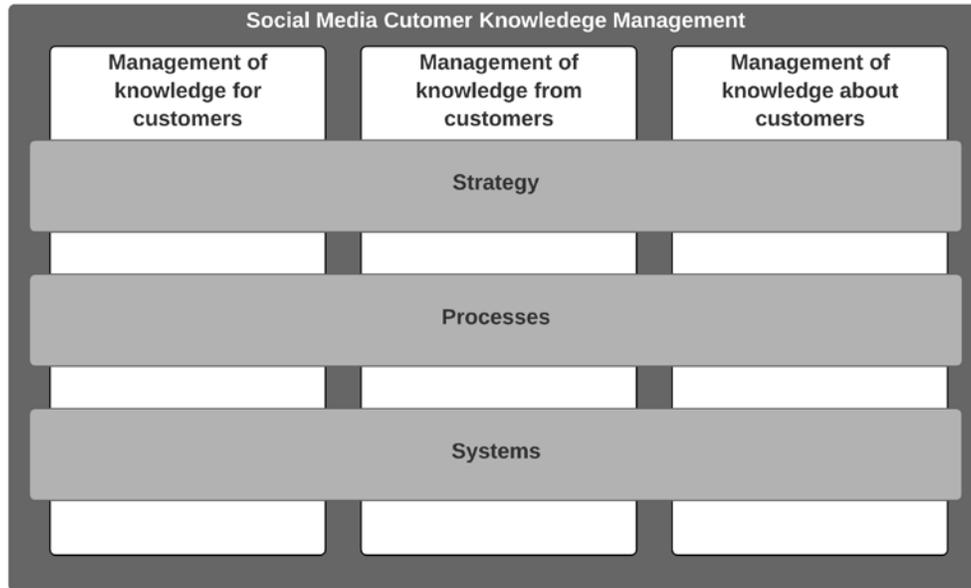


Figure 1. Social Media for Customer Knowledge Management in Practice

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines for conducting systematic reviews proposed by Liberati et al. (2009) was used to streamline the process for conducting this systematic review. The PRISMA guidelines consist of a 27-item checklist and a four-phase flow diagram that allows for transparent reporting of systematic reviews. By following this checklist, we ensured that other researchers could replicate the study.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

Three databases – ABI/Inform, ACM Digital Library, and EBSCO – was searched for relevant literature in the current study. Our search strategy targeted studies published in English between January 2010 and January 2020. The study period was appropriate to capture the relevant literature given that while internet use in low-income countries hovered around 42% as at 2013, only 24% of adults owned a smartphone while 34% reported using social media (Pew Research Center, 2018). An independent search was also carried out on Google Scholar for *grey literature* that met the search criteria. The search query, in effect, captured studies on “*social media*” and “*knowledge management*” in relation to “*customers*”.

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were considered eligible if they met the following criteria: a) clear and understandable research objective b) research objective discusses CKM in the context of social media, c) primary data from the study is collected from one of the IMF emerging and developing economies (IMF, 2020), and d) at least one of the four elements of CKM implementation is discussed. Studies that discussed exclusively CKM without the social media component were excluded. Similarly, studies that discussed KM but not in the context of customer knowledge were also excluded.

Evaluation Criteria

As mentioned earlier, study evaluation of the selected studies were organized using the PRISMA methodology and the theoretical framework discussed in the previous section. An initial title and keyword review were conducted as a preliminary filtering mechanism, followed by an abstract review of the remaining papers. A final step studied the full text papers to answer our research questions on social media and CKM.

RESULTS

Study Selection

Figure 2 below depicts the workflow diagram which follows the PRISMA guidelines for the study selection based on the phases of this systematic review. The review includes all four phases of the guideline: study identification, screening, eligibility assessment and included articles. As illustrated, the search yielded 276 results from the targeted databases and 5 more records were added from targeted search on Google. (grey literature search). After duplicates were excluded, 263 unique records were retained to undergo title and abstract review. A careful title and abstract assessment eliminated 214 articles from the final set based on being: KM literature reviews (37), studies from developed countries (123); or completely unrelated to either KM or CKM (54). The 49 remaining articles underwent full text review out of which 16 records that met at least one of the areas of the conceptual framework were retained.

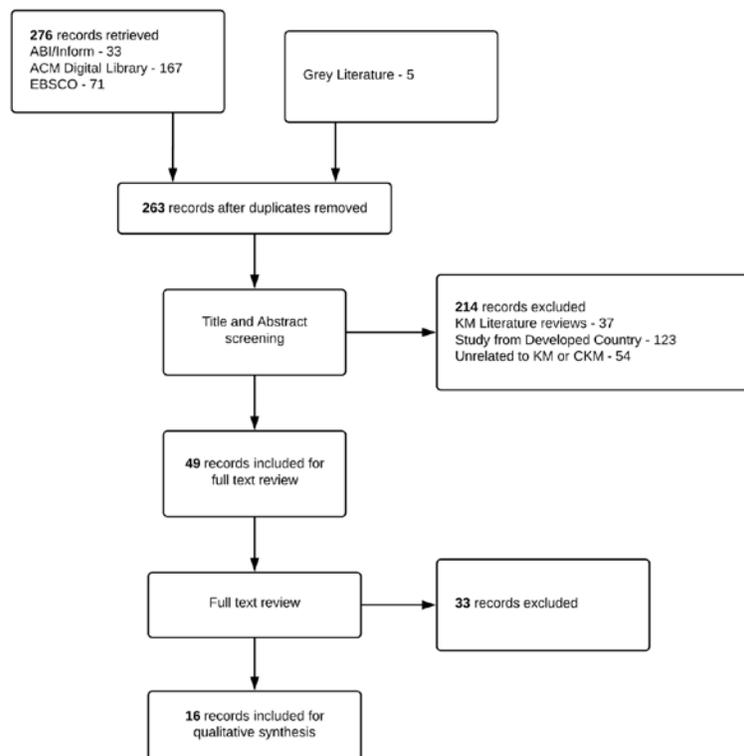


Figure 2. PRISMA flow chart for study selection

Research Trends

By examining the yearly distribution of studies on CKM (Figure 3), we identified that although several articles were published in 2017 than any other year, there was no clear publication trend by year as publications were randomly distributed. Table 1 also shows a similar distribution of publications by country and does not show a clear favorite in

the distribution of publication countries. It must however be noted that India, Iran, and Nigeria had 3, 3, and 2 publications, respectively. All other countries (Colombia, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, South Africa, and Thailand) included in this review had just 1 publication.

Of the studies included in this review 6 of them (Aghamirian et al., 2015; Kujur & Singh, 2017; Kumar et al., 2017; Nwokah & Irimagha, 2017; Ramachandran, 2013; Taherparvar et al., 2014) performed empirical research into CKM, a further 6 papers used a theoretical approach (Bello et al., 2017; Kaoud, 2017; Lak & Rezaenour, 2017; Picazo-Vela et al., 2011; Suzianti et al., 2019; Tabares et al., 2016). The remaining 4 papers (Boateng, 2016; Fashoro & Barnard, 2017; Soltysik-Piorunkiewicz, 2014; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018) used a case study design.

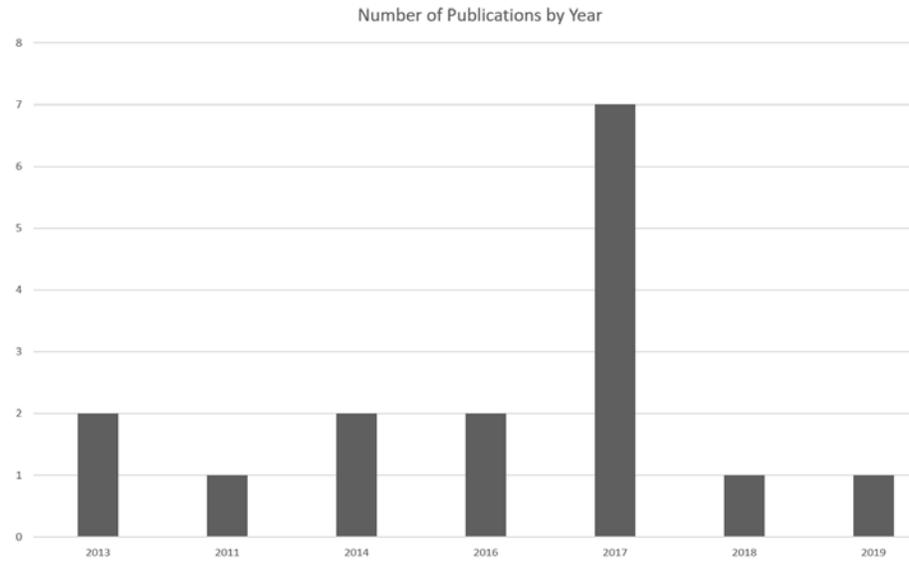


Figure 3. Publications by year

Exploring the Research Questions

To answer the research questions, the themes used in the studies were explored. It was discovered that 9 articles explored the strategies used by organizations to implement CKM in developing countries. Further, 7 papers discussed the CKM processes used to ensure customer success while 15 papers discussed various angles on how systems have been implemented. This result is also summarized in Table 1.

DISCUSSION

RQ1. Strategies used for CKM

To ensure proper CKM in developing countries, the customer must be seen as a valuable resource whose knowledge leads to competitive advantage, that is, profitability in the short term and business sustainability in the long term (Aghamirian et al., 2015). The need for sound CKM strategies have been reiterated in the literature and transcends industries such as banking and insurance (Aghamirian et al., 2015; Kaoud, 2017), telecommunication (Boateng, 2016), and even governments (Fashoro & Barnard, 2017; Picazo-Vela et al., 2011). Strategy management is important to give direction to the company by defining the scope and goals of each platform.

The result here was in line with a case study by Chua & Banerjee (2013) on Starbucks where certain types of social media services were found to facilitate different strategies. Similarly, case studies of social media strategy in developing economies (Boateng, 2016; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018), found that certain types social media services were used strategically for different types of CKM. Table 2 is a summary of their findings based on case studies in different countries (Ghana and India).

Table 1. Summary of results

Author	Country	Study Objective	Study Type	Participants/Methods	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3
(Aghamirian et al., 2013)	Iran	Investigating the relationship and application of customer's knowledge management in gaining competitive advantages of organizations in E-commerce	Empirical	Samples (394) from banking and insurance companies in Iran	x	x	x
(Bello et al., 2017)	Nigeria	Exploring the possibility of interdependency and proposed a framework that integrates the concepts of social media (SM), customer relationship management (CRM) and knowledge management (KM) to make a case for the process framework for business organizations.	Theoretical	Experts (7) in the industry were identified and consulted via email and LinkedIn	x	x	x
(Boateng, 2016)	Ghana	Ascertaining the degree to which two multinational telecom companies operating in Ghana employ social media to assist in customer knowledge management.	Case Study	Netnography through mining of Ghanaian telecommunication companies' social media pages	x	x	x
(Fashoro & Barnard, 2017)	South Africa	explores the challenges in Social Media adoption in this municipality based on interviews with the Communications department who are responsible for both offline and online communications	Case Study	Five members of the team who directly interact with Social Media were interviewed	x		x
(Kaoud, 2017)	Egypt	Presenting an in-depth investigation of Customer Knowledge Management through the CRM business processes.	Theoretical	Semi-structured interviews and direct observation of Deraya Insurance Brokerage Firm in Egypt	x		x
(Kujur & Singh, 2017)	India	explore factors influencing consumer's online engagement in social networking sites (SNS)	Empirical	Questionnaires administered to respondents of different educational levels and diverse locations in India	x		x
(Kumar et al., 2017)	India	Empirically study the customer perception of 'customer knowledge management (CKM) translation into customer communication value and the impact on intention to purchase from Ecommerce firms in Indian context'.	Empirical	Structured survey questionnaire from 76 respondents from social media, colleagues, and undergraduate students			x
(Lak & Rezaeenour, 2017)	Iran	explores and discusses, through qualitative research, the risks that companies would face by using Facebook's engagement platform and related implications	Theoretical and Empirical	Managers and professionals and organizations providing electronic services in Iran			x
(Picazo-Vela et al., 2011)	Mexico	introduce some perceived risks and benefits from public managers from Mexico, but mainly, important strategic elements to include social media in e-government strategies	Theoretical	Five focus groups as part of symposium in Mexico City	x	x	x
(Nwokah & Irimagha, 2017)	Nigeria	empirically investigate how E-Marketing Orientation relates with Social Media Implementation in the Banking Industry in Nigeria	Empirical	Cross-sectional survey of 3121 staff listed in the Bankers Association of Nigeria			x
(Ramachandran, 2013)	Malaysia	aimed at gauging sector level capability, which is a culmination of organizational or firm level capability	Empirical	survey of 271 ICTS companies in Malaysia			x
(Sołtysik-Piorunkiewicz, 2014)	Thailand	compare selected blogs from telecommunication sector company operating in Poland and to evaluate them from user-centered perspective	Comparative	Observation of three companies from telecommunications industry in Poland	x	x	x
(Suzianti et al., 2019)	Indonesia	implementation of integrated knowledge management across sectors that will be involved in this concept of social innovation	Theoretical and Design Science	Secondary data, questionnaire research to target the civilian sector and in-depth interviews for the government and corporation sector and focus group discussions.		x	

Table 1. Summary of results

Author	Country	Study Objective	Study Type	Participants/Methods	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3
(Tabares et al., 2016)	Colombia	proposes a way to integrate the knowledge management to the organizational strategy through the business processes management	Theoretical and Design Science	A survey in 40 Colombians' companies about the state of the practice in BPM, information management, and knowledge management			x
(Taherparvar et al., 2014)	Iran	examine the effect of customer knowledge management (CKM) on continuous innovation and firm performance in 35 private banks in Guilan (Iran).	Empirical	Data collected from 350 bank managers			x
(Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018)	India	proposes and validates a conceptual model that explicates customers' adoption intention toward co-creativity to develop new services in hotels	Case Study	Netnography through mining of Indian retailing company's social media pages	x	x	x

Additionally, regardless of strategy, Bello et al. (2017) posited that three CKM activities that have been greatly impacted by social media and could be effective for aligning strategy include: channel, engagement and intelligence interaction management.

- **Channel Management.** These refer to the activities done to ensure all the companies' channels are *in sync* with each other. Due to unpredictable nature of customers in developing economies as compared to those in developed countries, organizations will have to ensure that all other channels (radio, television, face-to-face etc.) are reiterating the same message being broadcast on social media. To instill confidence in information and to avoid conflict there should be information synchronization that is ideally authorized by a senior team member (Fashoro & Barnard, 2017).
- **Engagement Management.** This strategy requires that the organization perform a bidirectional rather than a unidirectional approach in any of its social media channels. To encourage participation culture and ensure improved decision making for sustainability and profitability, all channels should act as a platform to both disseminate and receive information (Aghamirian et al., 2015; Bello et al., 2017; Kujur & Singh, 2017; Picazo-Vela et al., 2011).
- **Intelligence Interaction Management.** The resurgence of artificial intelligence and natural language processing means now business can automate knowledge from customers by using business intelligence systems that measure key performance indicators of the company using social media posts. Just as researchers (Boateng, 2016; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018) were able to gather valuable information on how CKM is handled by organization, it would be relevant for the organization to also analyze the streams of data using automated tools that such as those inbuilt to the social media platforms (examples include Facebook Insights and Twitter Analytics) or external ones (such as Brandwatch Consumer Research and BuzzSumo) which specialize in this area by allowing organizations to monitor their social media platform in real-time and supplying different types of engagement metrics.

Table 2. Social media strategies

Social Media Network	Knowledge for Customers	Knowledge from Customer	Knowledge about Customer
<i>Social networking</i> Facebook	Information on current products, services, and service challenges	Solicit information on brand, product, and service quality such as location-based issues	Identify demographics, customer needs, and changing preferences
<i>Microblogging</i> Twitter	Detailed changes such as pricing information and product promotion	Insights on customer needs and preference, as well as competitor information	Identify demographics, customer needs, and changing preferences;
<i>Location aware</i> Foursquare	Location of stores, offers and other location-based services	Information on quality of products and services based on location	Location and ratings of stores most frequented by customers

Adapted from case studies by (Boateng, 2016; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018)

RQ2. CKM Processes for Ensuring and Promoting Customer Success

Since the focus is on organizational knowledge, the current study employs the Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization (SECI) model of KM proposed by Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) to explain the activities and processes for engaging customers. The importance of knowledge discovery is highlighted by the literature. The studies reviewed captured the following:

- **Socialization (Tacit to Tacit).** CKM originates from the socialization aspect of KM (Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018). Through social media channels, there is a bidirectional engagement that ensure that organizations share – or customers request for – information about products and services (Aghamirian et al., 2015; Boateng, 2016; Suzianti et al., 2019; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018). In other instances, request for get recommendations on products through their friends on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. The knowledge type created here includes all three: for, from, and about customers (Boateng, 2016; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018).
- **Externalization (Tacit to Explicit).** Advertisements, events, manuals, tutorials and general product information are often made available as daily posts on social media, blogs, or even in the about section of the organization’s website that are shared as knowledge for customers (Boateng, 2016; Soltysik-Piorunkiewicz, 2014; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018).
- **Combination (Explicit to Explicit).** This is often in the form of tracking customer engagement, disseminating and collating surveys on customer experience etc. Often this is the best way to gather information from customers (Boateng, 2016; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018).
- **Internalization (Explicit to Tacit).** A direct opposite to the externalization process, this is often where customers internalize (learn) about service and products information (Boateng, 2016; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018)

RQ3. Systems implementation to support Customer Relationship Management

The prevalent systems for creating a knowledge repository across the organization and ensuring success can be discussed by adapting the core functions of customer relationship management Marketing, Sales, Customer Service (Kaoud, 2017), with a core distinction being Technology due to its importance to the whole idea of CKM (Aghamirian et al., 2015). In effect, on the marketing front, the teams ensure customers are kept engaged through virtual events on social media, creative hashtags, and even post messages regarding the company’s internal culture. While knowledge from customers is often discussed in terms of customer complaints, these marketing campaigns allow the team to answer questions and queries on brand values and even the events themselves (knowledge for customers) while the feedback from engagement with these posts provide insight into how customers are reacting to their entire brand (knowledge from customers) (Boateng, 2016; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018). On the other hand, the Sales teams perform similar tasks but geared towards the organizations product rather than the brand as seen with the marketing departments (Kaoud, 2017).

The customer service and technical back office teams perform two interrelated but different tasks. While customer service performs qualitative tasks based on service management, complaint and opportunity management by answering queries (knowledge from customers), exploring complain trends (knowledge about customers) and placing loyalty and renewal calls (knowledge for customers), the technical team does this through empirical and quantitative means (Kaoud, 2017). This is sometimes in the form of exploring which communities are experiencing difficulties and reaching out to customers identified on social media directly (Boateng, 2016; Valacherry & Pakkeerappa, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Past research has posited that customers, through their use of a firm’s products and services, gain knowledge and experience which can be viewed as an important resource for the firm. By collecting and analyzing information from

customers and creating knowledge from them, businesses can obtain competitive advantage. The objective of this research was to analyze the extent to which social media supports customer knowledge management (CKM) in developing economies through the theoretical lens of social capital and resource exchange. The current study synthesized extant literature on social media and CKM. The findings in this study show that the strategies employed in developing economies were largely depends on the type of social media and strategies can be made effective through channel, engagement, and business intelligence. It was also discovered that knowledge creation was the most important KM process for ensuring success while the systems that support this were a combination of Marketing, Sales, Customer Service and Technology. The study found that there is a requirement for organizations, especially those in developing economies, to consider the importance of customer knowledge by creating repositories of customer knowledge to reduce uncertainty, align channels to communicate the same information across said channels. There is also an added requirement to pay attention to nascent technologies for monitoring customer trends in a bid to ensure innovation and creativeness.

This study is not without its limitations. The relevant literature was collected from only subscription databases with few more studies collected from Google Scholar. This may not be representative of the body of work in this field, given that authors in developing economies could publish in other lesser known or non-peer reviewed journals (Bentley, 2015). The authors recognize this limitation and recommend other studies of this nature to include non-peer reviewed sources.

While this study aimed to discuss KM on developing economies, further studies is required to compare and contrast the findings with developed economies in the context culture and engagement. Along the same line, a meta-analysis that uses quantitative techniques to determine which strategies work best based in previous studies may be considered. Further, future studies on the impact of customer knowledge on corporate product innovation and performance is also encouraged.

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