

The Impact of Social Media on International Marketing Strategies

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The purpose of this paper is to review critically the studies on the impacts of social media on international marketing strategies. Research gaps and future research directions were identified. A systematic review method was used. Authors reviewed 42 articles from high quality academic journal papers between 2009 and 2020. Eight existing research areas were grouped under macro, organisation and individual levels. Cross-cultural factors, international branding, social media international advertising, and other social media research on international marketing are four emerging research fields. Findings of social media effect on marketing outcome variables were presented. Specific future research questions were proposed for future research.

Keywords: *Future Research Agenda; International Marketing; Social Media*

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the existing research themes of the impacts of social media on international marketing and provide future research directions. Social media is defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, 61).

Social media enables individuals to approach people they know and send messages or information to them. It provides a platform to share content among organisations and individuals (Filo et al., 2015). It can be divided into two usual types. They are content community sites like YouTube and social networking sites like Twitter. Form of presentation like pictures, voice, body languages, feedback, language and personal focus are factors affecting the richness of the media (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Face to face meetings could perform better than virtual meetings (e.g. audio phone conversations). Facebook adds a broadcast function to provide live shows, which imitate real interaction.

In the past decade, there are more social media research articles relating to international marketing. There were two reviews on the scope of social media marketing around five years ago (Alves et al., 2016; Alalwan et al., 2017). No systematic review to date seems to have examined the relationship between international marketing and social media. It is a good time to have a review on them and suggest further avenues. Three research questions were proposed:

1. “What are the existing research areas on the topic?”
2. “What are the findings of social media effect on marketing outcome variables?”
3. “What are the emerging research fields?”

Next section is a methodology, which provides the steps on how to collect the relevant literature. It is followed by a descriptive and thematic analysis of academic journal papers. Discussion on the findings and future research fields are provided.

2. Methodology

There are several reasons for using a systematic literature review. First, the reliability and validity of a systematic review is better than a traditional narrative literature review. It is because a complete detail summary of literature has been presented (Tse et al., 2018). Second, a research framework was provided to give a structural overview of what has been done in the field. Finally, future research questions were provided with justifications on the impacts of social media on international marketing (Christofi et al., 2017).

2.1 Search protocol

2.1.1 Inclusion criteria

We set the search boundaries to electronic databases: Business Sources Complete, Scopus and ProQuest. The three databases were used based on their coverage in the business field (Dada, 2018). Also, we developed search terms with a very wide coverage and generated a high number of hits. Relevant entries were downloaded for further evaluation (Table 1).

All articles from 2009-2020 in high quality journals in the Chartered Association of Business Schools Journal Guide 2018 list (ranked 3, 4, and 4*) were included in the field of international business and marketing. The chosen period contains the academic papers on the topic. A full rigorous search on literature was using (marketing OR export OR price OR promotion OR product OR place OR global OR international OR multinational OR customer) AND (social media OR digital media OR Facebook OR Instagram OR twitter OR YouTube OR Snapchat OR TikTok OR Reddit OR Pinterest OR LinkedIn OR Weibo AND developed markets OR emerging markets). Only English peer-reviewed journals were included.

Table 1: Literature search results from the 3 databases

Keywords	Database	Filters Applied	Results
(marketing OR export OR price OR promotion OR product OR place OR global OR international OR multinational OR customer) AND (social media OR digital media OR Facebook OR Instagram OR twitter OR YouTube OR Snapchat OR TikTok OR Reddit OR Pinterest OR LinkedIn OR Weibo)	ABI/Inform (ProQuest Databases)	Academic journals, Peer-reviewed, Articles, 2009-2020, English	149,830
	Business Source Complete (via EBSCO host)	Academic journals, Peer-reviewed, Articles, 2009-2020, English	5,424
	Scopus	Peer-reviewed journals, English, 2009-2020, Article, English	147,213

(Source: Authors)

2.1.2 Exclusion criteria

We excluded non-academic journal articles including conference papers, book reviews, editorials, book chapters and commentaries. Also, non-English papers were excluded. Finally, duplicates were removed and 188 relevant papers were located for further evaluation. In addition, social media studies on a single country or area and marketing were excluded because they did not fit in the context of international marketing.

2.2 Data collection

The review was conducted between September and December 2020. 188 academic papers published within the period were located. Only articles that fell in both categories of “social media” and “international marketing” were selected. For ambiguous cases, researchers looked for “international”, “global” or names of specific countries in the full text to determine relevance. Full text papers were downloaded for accessing eligibility and later retrieval. Papers on social media marketing in one specific area were excluded.

In the second stage of selection, we searched the two journals on international marketing: *International Marketing Review* and *Journal of International Marketing*. Three more papers on *International Marketing Review* and four more papers on *Journal of International Marketing* were selected. More papers were selected because our search formula was not wide enough to capture all the possible words. Sometimes, the titles, abstracts, and keywords might not have given us a conclusive picture. We then enlarged our search to other ABS ranking articles. Two papers from *Business Horizons* were found. The journal is ranked 2 in the ABS 2018 list. Two more papers are ranked 2, which is from *Thunderbird International Business Review* and *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*. Two highly relevant papers were included from *Journal of Marketing Communication*, and *Journal of Global*



Marketing. Three papers were from *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, listed in Scimago Journal of Country Rank, quarter 2. Two papers came from *Journal of Interactive Advertising* and one from *Journal of Global Information Management*. They are reasonably good journals. One paper listed as quarter 3 but the content is highly relevant, *Journal of Transnational Management*.

Finally, one more article in *Journal of Managerial Sciences* was included. The content was highly relevant but the journal is not listed in the Scimago Journal ranking list. This is a relatively new open access journal founded in 2014. It is multidisciplinary in nature and the scope covers management and information technology. In total, 42 papers were selected for further analysis.

3. Descriptive analysis of the literature

This is a review of journal articles related to social media and its impact on international marketing. We examined peer reviewed journals from the collected data, publication years, and authorship.

There are more papers published in the years since 2018, 27 out of 42 articles (64.3%) fall in this period (Figure 1). There are more empirical studies than theoretical, with only 7 (16.7%) classified as conceptual papers (Table 2). Among the 35 empirical papers, 3 adopted qualitative methodology, the remaining 32 are quantitative research. As shown in Table 2, 12 out of 18 are marketing related journals, published 33 (78.6%) of the papers selected.

Table 4 detailed authorship characteristics, showing over half (59.5%, n=25) the papers have three or more authors, followed by dual authors (26.2%, n=11), and single author (14.3%, n=6). In each article, half of the authors come from the same countries, while some 38.1% (n=16) belong to two countries, and 11.9% (n=5) from across three or more countries. For number of institutions, one paper was written by an author with no affiliation, 16 papers (38.1%) involve one institution, followed by 13 (31%) with three or more affiliations, and 12 (28.6%) articles by authors from two institutions. As listed in Figure 2, authors' geographical locations are diverse, across Oceania, Asia, Europe, North America and Africa. Interestingly, the first authors of 16 papers (38.1%) came from the USA. The first runner up is Spain, with 4 first authors. The second runner is South Korea, with 3 first authors.

Figure 1 Article frequency analysis by year

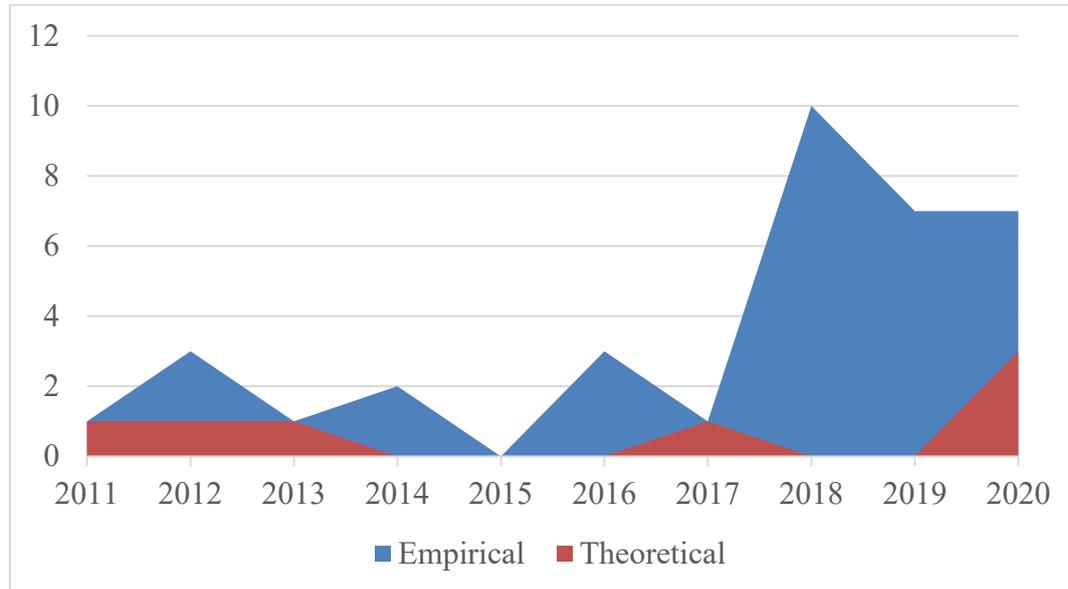


Table 2 Journals included in the sample

Publication outlet	ABS ranking	No. of articles	Weight (%)
Journal of International Marketing	3	7	16.7
International Marketing Review	3	5	11.9
Industrial Marketing Management	3	4	9.5
Journal of Advertising Research	3	4	9.5
Journal of International Consumer Marketing	n/a	3	7.1
International Business Review	3	3	7.1
Journal of Interactive Marketing	3	2	4.8
Journal of Marketing Communications	1	2	4.8
Business Horizons	2	2	4.8
Psychology and Marketing	3	2	4.8
International Journal of Research in Marketing	4	1	2.4
Journal of Interactive Advertising	3	1	2.4
Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing	2	1	2.4
Thunderbird International Business Review	2	1	2.4
Journal of Global Information Management	2	1	2.4
Journal of Transnational Management	1	1	2.4
Journal of Global Marketing	1	1	2.4
Journal of Managerial Sciences	n/a	1	2.4

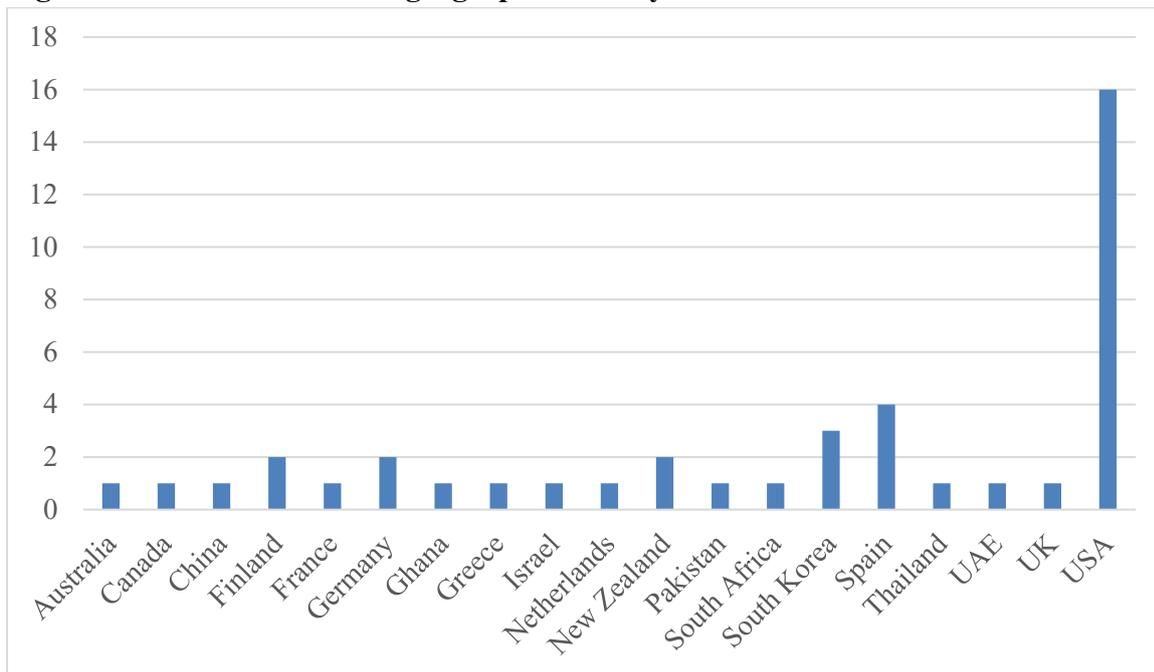
(Source: authors)

Table 3 Authorship analysis

Authorship Characteristics	No.	%
<i>Number of Authors</i>		
One	6	14.3
Two	11	26.2
Three or more	25	59.5
<i>Number of Countries</i>		
One	21	50
Two	16	38.1
Three or more	5	11.9
<i>Number of Institutions</i>		
Zero (no affiliation)	1	2.4
One	16	38.1
Two	12	28.6
Three or more	13	31

(Source: authors)

Figure 2 First Author's geographical analysis



4. Thematic analysis of the literature

A multi-level framework of the existing themes is presented below (Table 4):

Table 4 Multi-level research themes

Macro level	<p><i>Cultural factors</i> (informal institution): Goodrich & De Mooij (2014); Han & Kim (2018); Hatzithomas (2016); Lin et al. (2017); Nam & Kannan (2020); Steenkamp (2020); Yoon & Lee (2019)</p> <p><i>Social and economic factors</i>: Nam & Kannan (2020)</p>
Firm level	<p><i>Export/Internationalisation</i>: Mahmoud et al. (2020); Eid et al. (2018); Glavas et al. (2019); Alarcon-del-Amo et al. (2018); Rialp-Criado & Rialp-Criado (2018); Rialp-Criado & Rialp-Criado (2020)</p> <p><i>Branding</i>: Christodoulides et al (2012); de Vries et al. (2012); Gao et al. (2018); Hutton & Fosdick (2011); Kim et al. (2019); Kwon & Sung (2011); Peres et al. (2020)</p> <p><i>Advertising</i>: Errmann et al. (2019); Feng et al. (2019). Gensler (2013); Johnston et al. (2018); Okazaki (2013)</p> <p><i>Business to business communication</i>: Muller (2018); Swani (2014); Juntunen et al. (2020)</p>
Individual level or person to person level (sales people and customers)	<p><i>Business to customer communication</i>: Lacoste (2016); Hammerschlag (2020)</p> <p><i>Consumer behaviour</i>: Khan (2019); Thoumrungroje (2018); Jiao et al. (2018)</p>
Cross level	<p>Tsai & Man (2017); Labrecque et al., 2020; Hudson et al. (2016); Lu (2018)</p> <p><i>Conceptual</i>: Sheth (2020); Singh et al. (2012); Goncalves & Smith (2018); Berthon et al. (2012).</p>

(Source: authors)

Eight research themes were grouped as macro level, firm level and individual or person to person levels. 33 papers can fit into the table except some conceptual papers. From the above table 4, there are cultural factors and social and economic factors under the marco level.



Cultural factors

Collectivists rely more on social media like Facebook than individualists (Goodrich & De Mooij, 2014). The result is reasonable since social media reinforces similar opinions by gathering people in echo chambers. China, Thailand, India are typical examples for using social media marketing. It was found that Chinese people perceived higher enjoyment when using Weibo. The influence of friends on social media sites are not significant since most of the friends on the sites are not close friends (Han & Kim, 2018).

Social and economic factors

Generation Z, people born between 1995 to 2010, are used to engaging in social media and other technologies as they have grown up with smartphones or other similar technology (Nam & Kannan, 2020). Thus, they are the targets of global digital marketing.

Exporting & Internationalisation; branding; advertising and business to business communication are under firm level.

Exporting and internationalisation

Social media is not associated with higher export performance directly. Instead it is associated with customers' opinions and comments, brand awareness, international business contacts and understanding competition affecting export performance (Eid et al., 2019). The usage of social media usage is positively associated with corporate performance (Alarcón-del-Amo et al., 2018).

The faster the use of social media in the operations and transaction of a multinational company, the faster they explore foreign markets (Rialp-Criado & Rialp-Criado, 2020).

Branding and social media

Brand community in social media becomes a dominant way for people, and official websites have been losing their audience (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011). Country brand popularity was affected by brand globalness, which is the degree of brand popularity in some countries (Kim et al., 2019). Customers and brand managers co-create the brand stories. Managers cannot fully control the messages posted by angry or happy customers in social media networking sites (Berthon et al., 2012). All managers can do is delete their comments or remove the entire postings. This is contrast to the traditional view of brand management. Brand is a corporate asset and is carefully built through coordinated marketing communications, with carefully designed brand stories distributed through advertising channels to reach target customers. Advertising is a so-called type of controlled message (Gensler et al., 2013).



It is not possible to equate brand identity to brand image in the social media era. Brand is a kind of co-created intangible asset in which all stakeholders could be contributors. Customers are powerful stakeholders, because they can share their direct experience on products or services. Thus, electronic word-of-mouth has become a buzz word since the last decade. There is a correlation between brand stories and brand performance. Moderating variables include market characteristics like competition; and firm characteristics like organisational structure and consumer's brand attachment (Gensler et al., 2013). Brand building of political icons is using social media (Peres et al., 2020).

Advertising and social media

People using social media technology to exchange values with target customers was defined as social media marketing (Tuten & Soloman, 2015). It has been found that brand awareness is associated with social media marketing among international customers (Khan, 2019).

Social media advertising is immediate and interactive in nature (Johnston et al., 2018). "Network capability, image transferability and personal extensibility" are foundations in effective social media advertising (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013, 56). Individuals are visible globally (Oyedele & Firat, 2020). Thus, key opinion leaders could be the influencers (Akdevelioglu & Kara, 2020). Social media was used by marketers in order to engage with their customers (Berthon et al., 2012).

The effectiveness of social media advertising is captured by the feedback of social media users. There are positive and negative feedbacks and advertisers are well informed (Feng et al., 2019).

Business to business communication

More and more business to business marketers use Twitter. They tend to have higher functional appeals in Twitter communication and corporate brands appear frequently (Swani et al., 2014). It was reported that business to business communication in social media is uncommon in Europe (Müller et al., 2018).

Companies increasingly favour using social media for commercial purpose (Gao et al., 2018). Social media is a place where we could collect market updates and customer movement (Puthusserry et al., 2018). Business to customer communication and consumer behaviour are under individual level or person to person level.

Business to customer communication

Social media was first introduced in this century to link up personal friends. Social networking is defined as a way to contact and interact with people in order to establish some



sort of relationship (Filo et al., 2015). LinkedIn is an example of a global social network site geared toward business networking.

For internationalisation marketing strategies in emerging markets like Africa, relationship building is the most important thing. African countries are relation-based, thus sales people need to take time to know their prospective customers. Usually the first meeting with customers will be in face-to-face format. Then social media is heavily used after face-to-face meetings. Customers in rural areas can be reached at a lower cost with social media. In some Africa countries like Nigeria, spoken-persons are used to influence people on social media (Hammerschlag et al., 2020). Sometimes it is easy for sales to keep contact with customers by giving messages during festivals in the insurance industry.

Social media is one of the tools providing two-way communication channel between sales people and customers (Lacoste, 2016).

Consumer behaviour

The longer people use social media, the more likely they might be to be involved in credit overuse behaviour and conspicuous consumption behaviour. Credit overuse refers to difficulties in repaying loan using credit card or other instruments. Conspicuous consumption is showing off luxury goods to the others (Thoumrungrroje, 2018). Factors affecting customer engagement in brand social networking sites are “social media dependency, para-social interaction and community identification” (Tsai & Men, 2017, 2). Chinese customers obtain social value through participation in social media sites whereas individualists favour content value (Jiao et al., 2018).

Cross-levels studies

Possible cross level studies involve firm and external macro environments like culture influencing corporate brands (Tsai & Man, 2017). Customers could be easily affected by corporate social media advertising (Labrecque et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2016) consisting of firm and individual levels. Cultural differences also affect social media sites’ user engagement. For example, Chinese customers prefer sharing their brand-related information and seeking advice from others, whereas American customers tend to share their consumption experiences (Lu, 2018). There are some conceptual papers on this topic as well (Sheth, 2020; Singh et al., 2012; Goncalves & Smith, 2018; Berthon et al. 2012).

Furthermore, content analysis of articles shows the effects of social media and strategies on marketing outcome variables. Independent variables are social media marketing strategies; network capability; image transferability; social media resources and marketing capabilities. Mediating variables are functional appeal/corporate brand; relationship building; adaption speed of social media; social media usage, consumer comments, trust; commitment and brand

community. Dependent variables are export performance; brand popularity; brand equity; internationalisation; and brand awareness. Moderating variables are competition; organisational structure and customer brand attachment. Control variables are firm size, social media platform and experience in technologies (Table 5).

In the below table, research findings in organisational levels were presented.

Table 5 Summary of research findings

Antecedents	Mediating variables	Consequences
<i>Organisation level</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Organisational level</i>
Social Media Marketing strategies (Tuten & Soloman, 2015)	Functional appeal/corporate brand (Swani et al., 2014)	Export performance (Mahmoud et al., 2020)
Network capability	Relationship building (Hammerschlag et al., 2020)	Brand popularity (Kim et al., 2019)
Image transferability (Okazaki and Taylor, 2013)	Adaption speed of social media (Rialp-Criado & Rialp-Criado, 2020).	Brand equity (Jiao et al., 2018)
Social Media resources	Social media usage (Alarcon-del-Amo et al., 2018).	Internationalisation (Rialp-Criado & Rialp-Criado, 2020).
Marketing capabilities (Mahmoud et al., 2020)	Consumer comments (Feng et al., 2019),	Brand awareness (Khan, 2019).
	Brand community (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011)	Trust
		Commitment (Mahmoud et al., 2020)
<i>Cultural level</i>	<i>Moderating variables</i>	<i>Control variables</i>
Collectivist/Individualist	Competition	Firm size
Uncertainty avoidance	Organisational structure	Social Media platform
Long term orientation	Customer brand attachment (Gensler et al., 2013).	Experience (Mahmoud et al., 2020)
Power distance		
Masculinity (Goodrich & De Mooij, 2014; Han & Kim 2018)		

(Source: authors)

5. Future Research Agenda

There are future research fields on the topic. They are international branding, social media international advertising, cross-cultural effects and other social media research on international marketing.

International branding

The use of first person pronouns like “I” on Facebook has a negative effect on Like, Comment and Share for utilitarian services brands. “We” has a positive effect on Like, Comment and Share engagements for utilitarian service brands on Facebook (Labrecque et al., 2020).

Social media international advertising

Social media marketing strategies (Tuten & Soloman, 2015); network capability, image capability and image transferability (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013); social media resources and marketing capabilities (Mahmoud et al., 2020) are factors affecting social media advertising. Mediators are adaption speed of social media (Rialp-Criado & Rialp-Criado, 2020) and social media usage (Alarcon-del-Amo et al., 2018). Moderating variables are competition, organisational structure and customer brand attachment (Gensler et al., 2013). Dependent variables are brand popularity (Kim et al., 2019), brand equity (Jiao et al., 2018) and internationalisation (Rialp-Criado & Rialp-Criado, 2020). Control variables are firm size, social media platform and experience (Mahmoud et al., 2020). Other social media platforms like Weibo could be considered. Multiple countries studies are required for comparison.

Cross-cultural effects

Korean people are affected by their friends’ recommendation and have positive effect on social media advertising. In contrast, people of the United States have a negative effect upon friends’ recommendation on social media advertising (Errmann et al., 2019).

Focus on consumer as a unique people is adapted in individualist cultures and focus on a consumer as member of a group is in collectivist cultures. Consumers identifying with a brand is emphasised in short-term oriented cultures and functional value is provided in long-term oriented cultures. Consumers who want to reduce risk and uncertainty have higher levels of uncertainty avoidance. Consumers who want to take risk have a lower level of uncertainty avoidance (Lin et al., 2017).

Other social media research on international marketing

There are two methods of social media research: passive method and active method. Passive method is to investigate what is posted on a social media platform. It is known as social listening. The advantage of doing research in social media is we can get some updated comments. Most of them are emotional and short though a few of them are analytical and rational (Malhotra et al., 2017). Many of them are customer complaints and corporations could know certain kind of experience from the international and local markets.

Regarding the active method, researchers may participate in the conversations on the platform, direct people to discuss specific questions so that the whole discussion is focused upon. There are some challenges for doing social media research. Data privacy is to be alerted. We cannot download social media data in bulk. We might use quasi-manual methods to search. However, the method is slow and might not get the full picture. Still, we might get some feedbacks from commercial posts by counting Like, Comment and Share for some open accounts (Wut & Yu, 2016).

Facebook provides three engagement tools including Like, Comment and Share for the stakeholders to respond to organisational messages. Three levels of engagement can be measured so that the uniqueness of these functions can be captured (Cho et al., 2014). Like is known as the most commonly used button on Facebook for expressing pleasure, amusement or merely agreement with the post content. It is the lowest level of engagement, with absence of text or emoji expression. Whereas reacting to organisational messages by Comment requires more effort, so it is the highest level of engagement.

It is tempting for researchers to use quantitative method on social media research but challenges remain: participant anonymity; social media type of behaviour; biased sample; large volume of data; and informed consent (Goncalves & Smith, 2018). Researchers do not know the true identities of respondents and informed consent might not be obtained for passive methods involving large volume of data. People who speak up on platforms usually tend to belong to an extreme end of the spectrum. That is to say, few people post many comments and mostly people remain silent.

Specified research questions are prepared according to what has been done so far in the above areas and some others. They are categorised as cross-cultural factors; international branding; social media advertising; social networking and social and economic factors (Table 6).

Table 6 **Future Research Questions**

Future Topics	Possible Research Questions
<i>Cross-cultural factors</i>	<p>Is highly connected culture, that is high value in collectivism, can use social media to have greater connectedness? (Okazaki & Tayler, 2013)</p> <p>How do power distance and masculinity affect people in a social media brand community? (Jiao et al., 2018)</p> <p>“Do customers in high uncertainty avoidance cultures engage in more information searching than customers in low uncertainty avoidance cultures? Is the effect of brand credibility on product evaluation more pronounced in high uncertainty avoidance cultures than in low uncertainty avoidance cultures?” (Nam & Kannan, 2020, p.34-35)</p> <p>“Does the effect of information from social sources on product evaluation is more pronounced in high uncertainty avoidance cultures than in low uncertainty avoidance cultures?” (Nam & Kannan, 2020, p.34-35)</p>
<i>International branding</i>	<p>What response strategies are effective on brand stories generated by negative consumers? (van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010)</p> <p>Is keeping silent the best response since there are so many consumer comments worldwide?</p> <p>What is the impact of customers’ comments on international branding?</p> <p>How do you maintain a global social media site around the world in a consistent manner?</p> <p>Is it necessary for international brands to have multiple social media sites for each country?</p> <p>How does invited user-generated content and non-endorsed user-generated content affect brand equity? (Christodoulides et al., 2012)</p>
<i>Social Media advertising</i>	<p>How does customer feedback impact on brand equity through e-word of mouth? (Okazaki & Tayler, 2013)</p> <p>What is the interplay between uncertainty avoidance and the process time in consumers’ evaluation on social media advertising? (Johnston et al., 2018).</p> <p>What is the interaction effect between global social media types and cultural factors on the association between social media advertising and customer belief (Johnston et al., 2018).</p> <p>What is the timing of people using the like, comment and share functions of the advertising post? (de Vries et al., 2012).</p> <p>Is there any global e-WOM? (Steenkamp, 2020)</p> <p>How do social media communications create e-WOM and brand awareness? (Swani et al., 2014)</p>



<i>Social networking</i>	How do business to business companies engage with various stakeholders on social media? (Juntunen et al., 2020)
<i>Social and economic factors</i>	Is social shopping motivation higher in emerging markets than in mature markets?" (Nam & Kannan, 2020. 34-35)

(Source: Authors)

6. Conclusion

This study systematically reviewed international marketing management literature in the past decade. This work found that the earlier dates of last decade produced fewer articles. An increase of published papers was found thereafter. This study investigates high quality academic journals as publication platforms on the topic. This article further discussed the study locations and authorship. A systematic summary was presented.

This study is one of the first attempts to answer three research questions. Eight existing research themes were identified: cultural factors, social economic factors; branding; advertising; export and internationalisation; business to business communication; business to customer communication and consumer behaviour. There are five future topics: cross-cultural factors; international branding; social networking; advertising and social and economic factors. Specified research questions were presented for researchers.

There are several limitations are on this study. Using different combinations of keywords in literature search could generate more papers in this field. Employing different languages and including other non top tier journals could surely enrich the search results.

Conflict of Interest

We declare that there is no potential conflict of interest.

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