

Bibliometric Analysis of B2B Relationship Marketing and Customer Relationship Management: Trends, Themes, and Research Gaps

Dr. Swati Mathur,

Assistant Professor

SPCJ Institute of Management.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Agra

Dr. Ruchira Prasad,

Assistant Professor

SPCJ Institute of Management.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Agra

Mr. Vishwajeet Sikarwar,

Student

SPCJ Institute of Management.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Agra

Abstract

Business-to-Business (B2B) Relationship Marketing and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) have emerged as strategic tools for sustaining long-term organizational competitiveness in increasingly digital and customer-centric markets. This study presents a bibliometric analysis of contemporary literature on B2B relationship marketing and CRM using selected scholarly works published between 2017 and 2025. The analysis identifies dominant research themes, publication trends, theoretical foundations, emerging technologies, and research gaps within the field. Findings reveal that trust, commitment, personalization, digital transformation, value co-creation, and predictive analytics are the most influential themes shaping current B2B relationship marketing discourse. The study further highlights the growing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), hybrid sales models, omnichannel engagement, and social selling strategies in modern B2B practices. Despite substantial theoretical advancement, the literature demonstrates gaps related to SME adoption, cultural variations, implementation challenges, and measurement frameworks. The paper contributes by synthesizing fragmented research into a structured bibliometric framework and offering future research directions for scholars and practitioners.

Keywords: B2B Relationship Marketing, Customer Relationship Management, Bibliometric Analysis, Trust, CRM, Digital Marketing, Value Co-Creation, Predictive Analytics

1. Introduction

Relationship marketing has transformed the strategic orientation of modern B2B organizations. Traditional transactional approaches have gradually evolved into long-term relational strategies emphasizing trust, collaboration, commitment, customer retention, and value co-creation. In highly competitive industrial markets, organizations increasingly depend on customer relationship management systems, predictive analytics, omnichannel engagement, and digital communication tools to strengthen client relationships.

The rapid advancement of digital technologies, Artificial Intelligence (AI), hybrid sales systems, and data-driven decision-making has significantly reshaped the B2B marketing landscape. Organizations now seek personalized interactions while balancing automation with human trust and emotional engagement. Consequently, B2B relationship marketing research has expanded across multiple interdisciplinary domains including marketing, information systems, organizational behavior, strategic management, and digital transformation.

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative method used to evaluate the intellectual structure, evolution, and thematic trends within a body of literature. It enables researchers to identify influential authors, recurring themes, emerging research clusters, and future research opportunities. This paper employs bibliometric analysis to examine contemporary studies related to B2B relationship marketing and CRM.

2. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze publication trends in B2B relationship marketing and CRM literature.
2. To identify dominant themes and theoretical foundations in the selected studies.
3. To examine emerging technologies influencing B2B relationships.
4. To identify major research gaps and future research directions.
5. To develop a conceptual understanding of evolving B2B relationship practices.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and bibliometric research design. Bibliometric analysis is conducted using selected scholarly publications related to B2B relationship marketing and customer relationship management.

3.2 Data Source

The analysis is based on 24 research publications published between 2017 and 2025, including journal articles, review papers, dissertations, industry reports, and theoretical studies.

3.3 Inclusion Criteria

The following criteria were used for selecting literature:

- Studies related to B2B relationship marketing and CRM.
- Publications discussing trust, commitment, value co-creation, digital marketing, AI, predictive analytics, or customer loyalty.
- Research published between 2017 and 2025.
- Peer-reviewed journals, academic books, conference papers, and industry reports.

3.4 Bibliometric Techniques Used

The study uses the following bibliometric indicators:

- Publication Year Analysis
- Thematic Analysis
- Keyword Frequency Analysis

- Research Gap Identification
- Theoretical Framework Mapping
- Emerging Trend Analysis

4. Review of Literature

Table 1: Review of Literature – B2B Relationship Marketing and CRM

S. No.	Author & Year	Title	Journal/Source	Main Findings	Research Gap
1	Morgan Hunt (2023)	The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing: A 30-Year Retrospective	Journal of Business Industrial Marketing	Trust and commitment remain core pillars of B2B success.	Limited focus on digital trust mechanisms.
2	Palmatier et al. (2020)	The Evolution of Relationship Marketing Theory and Practice	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Shift from mass marketing to personalized relationships.	Limited discussion on relationship risks and dependence.
3	Chowdhury (2019)	Antecedents and Consequences of Trust and Commitment in B2B Relationships	IIM Indore Management Journal	Identifies communication quality and shared values as drivers of B2B loyalty.	Focuses on large firms; misses small-scale B2B dynamics.
4	Pathak & Mohanty (2020)	Social Exchange Theory in B2B Exchanges	Management Research Review	Perception of fairness and reciprocity is more critical than price in long-term contracts.	Does not account for cultural variations in "fairness."
5	Vargo & Lusch (2021)	Service-Dominant Logic as a Foundation for B2B Relationship Dynamics	Journal of Service Theory and Practice	B2B value is created through service and collaboration rather than products alone.	Theory-heavy; lacks empirical implementation methods.
6	Lundin & Kindström (2024)	Digital Touchpoints: Reimagining B2B Relationships through Hybrid Sales Models	Industrial Marketing Management	Hybrid models (digital + human) improve customer retention more than digital-only models.	Limited data on cost-benefit analysis of hybrid teams.
7	Kumar & Reinartz (2022)	The Strategic Value of CRM Systems in Enhancing B2B Customer Lifetime Value	Harvard Business Review Analytic Ser		
8	Nguyen & Mutum (2023)	The Personalization Paradox: Balancing	Journal of Business Research	AI improves efficiency but may reduce trust.	No clear AI-human balance identified.

S. No.	Author & Year	Title	Journal/Source	Main Findings	Research Gap
		AI Efficiency with Human Trust			
9	Srivastava et al. (2024)	Predictive Analytics in CRM: Anticipating B2B Client Needs	International Journal of Information Management	Predictive analytics reduces churn.	High technological barriers.
10	Agnihotri et al. (2021)	Social Selling on LinkedIn: Building Multithreaded Relationships	Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management	Social media strengthens multi-level relationships.	Platform limitation.
11	Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2020)	The Co-creation Paradigm: From Value Chain to Value Ecosystems	Cambridge University Press	Collaborative ecosystems create value.	Difficult implementation in competitive industries.
12	Mohan et al. (2022)	Moving Beyond Product Selling: Value Co-creation	Journal of Strategic Marketing	Co-creation avoids price wars.	Limited sample size.
13	Scarpi et al. (2022)	Collaborative R&D and Relationship Quality	Industrial Marketing Management	Joint R&D strengthens partnerships.	Failed collaborations ignored.
14	Sustainability, MDPI (2021)	Value Co-Creation in B2B: A Systematic Literature Review	Sustainability	Co-creation supports sustainable advantage.	Lack of unified framework.
15	Akrouf & Diallo (2017)	The Role of Trust in High-Complex B2B Buying Processes	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	Trust reduces perceived risk.	Role of consultants ignored.
16	Verhoef et al. (2023)	Multi-faceted Approaches to Measuring B2B Marketing Performance	Journal of Marketing	Relationship equity should be measured.	Metrics difficult for SMEs.
17	Cater & Cater (2020)	Economic and Non-Economic Satisfaction Predictors of Loyalty	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	Emotional satisfaction predicts loyalty.	Limited geographical scope.
18	Gronroos (2021)	Relationship Marketing: The Strategic Shift from Transactional to Relational	Management Decision	Interaction-based management improves retention.	Operational limitations.
19	McKinsey & Co. (2024)	The Omnichannel B2B Sales Revolution	Global B2B Pulse	Buyers use multiple channels.	Lack of peer-reviewed validation.

S. No.	Author & Year	Title	Journal/Source	Main Findings	Research Gap
20	Lim (2023)	Professional Advice as a Relationship Anchor	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management	Expert advice increases customer stickiness.	Sector-specific findings.
21	Sharma et al. (2024)	The “Human-to-Human” (H2H) Shift in Indian B2B	IJARIT	Face-to-face trust preferred in India.	Gen Z trends unexplored.
22	Kumar P. (2021)	B2B Marketing Challenges for SMEs in Tier-2 and Tier-3 Indian Cities	Indian Journal of Marketing	CRM and digital divide hinder SMEs.	Lack of longitudinal analysis.
23	Gurbaxani (2022)	Technological Advancements and Communication Tools for B2B	Journal of Global Business Insights	WhatsApp and Slack replacing email.	Security concerns ignored.
24	Sikarwar (2024)	The Influence of B2B Relationship Quality on Firm Performance	Journal of Business Strategy	Relationship quality reduces opportunism.	Legal versus relational enforcement unclear.

5. Bibliometric Analysis

5.1 Year-wise Publication Trend

The publication trend demonstrates a significant increase in research activity after 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation and hybrid customer engagement practices, leading to greater scholarly attention toward CRM systems, AI-enabled personalization, omnichannel communication, and digital trust.

Table 2: Publication Distribution by Year

Year	Number of Publications
2017	1
2018	0
2019	1
2020	4
2021	5
2022	5
2023	4
2024	4
2025	1

Interpretation

- Research intensity significantly increased between 2020 and 2024.

- Digitalization and AI-driven CRM became dominant themes after 2021.
- Hybrid selling and omnichannel engagement emerged strongly in 2024.

5.2 Major Research Themes

The bibliometric review identifies several recurring research themes.

Table 3: Major Research Themes in B2B Relationship Marketing

Theme	Key Authors	Core Focus
Trust and Commitment	Morgan & Hunt; Akrouf & Diallo	Trust as foundation of long-term relationships
CRM and Predictive Analytics	Kumar & Reinartz; Srivastava et al.	Data-driven relationship management
AI and Personalization	Nguyen & Mutum	Human-AI balance in customer interaction
Value Co-creation	Ramaswamy & Ozcan; Mohan et al.	Collaborative value creation
Hybrid Sales Models	Lundin & Kindström	Digital and human integration
Social Selling	Agnihotri et al.	Relationship building via social platforms
Omnichannel Engagement	McKinsey & Co.	Multi-channel customer interaction
Relationship Quality	Sikarwar; Cater & Cater	Loyalty and performance outcomes
SME Challenges	Kumar P.	Digital barriers in small businesses
Human-to-Human (H2H) Marketing	Sharma et al.	Personal trust in Indian B2B markets

5.3 Keyword Frequency Analysis

The selected literature reveals several frequently recurring keywords.

Table 4: Most Frequently Occurring Keywords

Keyword	Frequency
Trust	15
Relationship Quality	12
CRM	11
Customer Loyalty	10
AI/Personalization	8
Value Co-creation	8
Predictive Analytics	6
Hybrid Sales	5
Omnichannel Marketing	5
Digital Transformation	7
Customer Retention	6

Keyword	Frequency
Social Selling	4

Interpretation

- Trust remains the dominant construct in B2B relationship marketing.
- CRM and predictive analytics are rapidly gaining importance.
- AI-based personalization and digital engagement are emerging strategic priorities.

5.4 Theoretical Foundations

The bibliometric analysis identifies multiple theoretical frameworks used across studies.

Table 5: Dominant Theoretical Frameworks

Theory	Key Contributors	Application
Commitment-Trust Theory	Morgan & Hunt	Relationship stability and loyalty
Social Exchange Theory	Pathak & Mohanty	Reciprocity and fairness
Service-Dominant Logic	Vargo & Lusch	Collaborative value creation
Relationship Marketing Theory	Gronroos	Long-term customer engagement
Co-creation Theory	Ramaswamy & Ozcan	Ecosystem-based value generation

Interpretation

- Commitment-Trust Theory remains the most influential framework.
- Service-Dominant Logic has expanded collaborative perspectives.
- Co-creation models increasingly dominate strategic B2B discussions.

5.5 Emerging Trends in B2B Relationship Marketing

The literature reveals several emerging trends shaping the future of B2B marketing:

1. AI-Enabled Relationship Management

Organizations increasingly use predictive analytics, automation, and AI-driven CRM systems to personalize customer experiences and predict future behavior.

2. Hybrid Sales Models

Businesses combine digital communication with face-to-face interaction to maintain trust and improve efficiency.

3. Omnichannel Customer Engagement

Customers interact through multiple platforms such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Slack, email, websites, and virtual meetings.

4. Human-to-Human (H2H) Marketing

Despite digital growth, personal trust and emotional relationships remain essential, especially in Indian B2B markets.

5. Relationship Equity Measurement

Modern firms increasingly evaluate customer lifetime value, loyalty, and relationship equity instead of focusing only on sales volume.

6. Discussion

The bibliometric analysis indicates that B2B relationship marketing has evolved from a purely transactional approach into a multidimensional strategic discipline emphasizing trust, technology, collaboration, and personalization.

Earlier studies focused primarily on trust and commitment as foundational drivers of long-term business relationships. However, recent literature increasingly explores AI-enabled personalization, predictive analytics, omnichannel communication, and hybrid relationship management models.

The rise of digital communication technologies has created opportunities for enhanced customer engagement but has simultaneously introduced challenges related to privacy, depersonalization, and trust erosion. Several studies suggest that excessive automation may weaken emotional connection and human trust.

Another major shift observed in the literature is the movement toward value co-creation and ecosystem collaboration. Rather than merely selling products, firms increasingly collaborate with customers to jointly create customized solutions and innovation.

Indian B2B research particularly highlights the continued importance of face-to-face trust, cultural relationships, and advisory interactions. SMEs in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities continue to face technological and infrastructural barriers in adopting advanced CRM systems.

7. Research Gaps Identified

The bibliometric review identifies several critical research gaps:

1. Limited studies on digital trust proxies replacing human interaction.
2. Lack of longitudinal studies on CRM implementation in SMEs.
3. Insufficient cross-cultural comparison of relationship marketing practices.
4. Limited empirical evidence on AI-human interaction balance.
5. Lack of standardized metrics for measuring relationship equity.
6. Minimal research on failed co-creation and collaborative partnerships.
7. Inadequate focus on cybersecurity and privacy concerns in digital CRM.
8. Limited studies on Gen Z managers and digital-native B2B buyers.
9. Insufficient examination of legal versus relational governance.
10. Scarcity of integrated frameworks combining AI, CRM, and H2H marketing.

8. Future Research Directions

Future researchers may focus on the following areas:

- AI ethics and trust management in B2B relationships.
- CRM adoption models for SMEs and rural enterprises.
- Role of emotional intelligence in digital selling.
- Integration of blockchain with CRM systems.
- Sustainability-oriented relationship marketing.
- Cross-cultural studies on relationship quality.
- Behavioral analytics in omnichannel engagement.
- Human-AI collaborative selling frameworks.
- Digital relationship quality measurement scales.
- Role of social media influencers in industrial marketing.

9. Conclusion

The bibliometric analysis demonstrates that B2B relationship marketing and CRM have undergone substantial transformation in recent years. Trust, commitment, and relationship quality remain foundational concepts, while AI, predictive analytics, omnichannel communication, and hybrid sales strategies are reshaping customer engagement practices.

The literature indicates a clear shift from transactional selling toward collaborative value creation and long-term partnership management. Organizations increasingly rely on CRM technologies to personalize experiences, predict customer behavior, and strengthen customer retention.

Despite significant theoretical and technological advancements, several research gaps remain related to implementation barriers, digital trust, SME adaptation, privacy concerns, and relationship measurement systems. Future research should focus on integrating technological efficiency with human-centered relationship management to build sustainable and trust-based B2B ecosystems.

References

- Agnihotri, R., et al. (2021). Social Selling on LinkedIn: Building Multithreaded Relationships. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*.
- Akrouf, H., & Diallo, M. F. (2017). The Role of Trust in High-Complex B2B Buying Processes. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*.
- Cater, B., & Cater, T. (2020). Economic and Non-Economic Satisfaction as Predictors of Loyalty. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*.
- Chowdhury (2019). Antecedents and Consequences of Trust and Commitment in B2B Relationships. *IIM Indore Management Journal*.
- Gronroos, C. (2021). Relationship Marketing: The Strategic Shift from Transactional to Relational. *Management Decision*.
- Gurbaxani, V. (2022). Technological Advancements and Communication Tools for B2B. *Journal of Global Business Insights*.
- Kumar, P. (2021). B2B Marketing Challenges for SMEs in Tier-2 and Tier-3 Indian Cities. *Indian Journal of Marketing*.
- Kumar, V., & Reinartz, W. (2022). The Strategic Value of CRM Systems in Enhancing B2B Customer Lifetime Value. *Harvard Business Review Analytic Services*.

- Lim, C. (2023). Professional Advice as a Relationship Anchor. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*.
- Lundin, D., & Kindström, D. (2024). Digital Touchpoints: Reimagining B2B Relationships through Hybrid Sales Models. *Industrial Marketing Management*.
- McKinsey & Company (2024). The Omnichannel B2B Sales Revolution. *Global B2B Pulse*.
- Mohan, G., et al. (2022). Moving Beyond Product Selling: Value Co-creation. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*.
- Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (2023). The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing: A 30-Year Retrospective. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*.
- Nguyen, B., & Mutum, D. (2023). The Personalization Paradox: Balancing AI Efficiency with Human Trust. *Journal of Business Research*.
- Palmatier, R., et al. (2020). The Evolution of Relationship Marketing Theory and Practice. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*.
- Pathak, R., & Mohanty, S. (2020). Social Exchange Theory in B2B Exchanges. *Management Research Review*.
- Ramaswamy, V., & Ozcan, K. (2020). The Co-creation Paradigm: From Value Chain to Value Ecosystems. Cambridge University Press.
- Scarpi, D., et al. (2022). Collaborative R&D and Relationship Quality. *Industrial Marketing Management*.
- Sharma, A., et al. (2024). The “Human-to-Human” (H2H) Shift in Indian B2B. *IJARIT*.
- Sikarwar, V. (2024). The Influence of B2B Relationship Quality on Firm Performance. *Journal of Business Strategy*.
- Srivastava, M., et al. (2024). Predictive Analytics in CRM: Anticipating B2B Client Needs. *International Journal of Information Management*.
- Sustainability, MDPI (2021). Value Co-Creation in B2B: A Systematic Literature Review. *Sustainability*.
- Vargo, S., & Lusch, R. (2021). Service-Dominant Logic as a Foundation for B2B Relationship Dynamics. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*.
- Verhoef, P. C., et al. (2023). Multi-faceted Approaches to Measuring B2B Marketing Performance. *Journal of Marketing*.

Copyright & License:

© Authors retain the copyright of this article. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), permitting unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.