The sales-marketing interface: A systematic literature review and directions for future research

Wim Biemans\textsuperscript{a,}*, Avinash Malshe\textsuperscript{b}, Jeff S. Johnson\textsuperscript{c}

\textsuperscript{a} Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Groningen, P.O. Box 800, 9700, AV, Groningen, the Netherlands
\textsuperscript{b} Opus College of Business, University of St Thomas, Mail #TMH443, 1000 LaSalle Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55403, United States of America
\textsuperscript{c} Henry W. Bloch School of Management, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 5110 Cherry Street, Kansas City, MO 64110, United States of America

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ABSTRACT

How sales and marketing come together in the pursuit of satisfying customers and achieving organizational objectives is of key concern to both academics and practitioners. Researchers have investigated many aspects of the sales-marketing interface (SMI). This paper provides a systematic literature review of the SMI domain. Based on a systematic assessment of more than 25 years of SMI research, the authors review the major themes discussed in the literature, identify and resolve inconsistencies and definitional ambiguities, and develop a comprehensive conceptual model that integrates and synthesizes the current body of knowledge about SMIs. In addition, they identify four directions for future research that will have a major impact on our understanding of the functioning and nature of SMIs: (1) the impact of digital technologies on SMIs, (2) the impact of national culture on SMIs, (3) SMIs in SMEs, and (4) the impact of changing roles of sales and marketing.

1. Introduction

In the traditional perspective on marketing and sales, both departments serve customers by performing complementary activities (Malshe & Biemans, 2014a; MatthysSENS & Johnston, 2006). Marketing primarily focuses on understanding markets and customers, devising compelling value propositions, developing marketing strategies for creating superior customer value, and providing sales support, and sales is entrusted with tasks such as executing marketing strategies, maintaining customer relationships, and closing the sale (Homburg, Workman Jr, & Krohmer, 1999; Rouzies et al., 2005). The creation of superior customer value is regarded as fundamental to a firm’s long-term survival and growth in business-to-business (B2B) markets (Alquist, Cleghorn, & Sherer, 2018; Anderson & Narus, 1998; Terho, Haas, Eggert, & Uлага, 2012).

To this effect, a firm’s marketing and sales departments must collaborate to understand customers (Hult, Morgeson, Morgan, Mithas, & Fornell, 2017), and develop and implement effective marketing strategies (Morgan, Whittler, Feng, & Chari, 2019) so the firm is able to deliver superior value to customers (Guenzi & Troilo, 2007; Hughes, Le Bon, & Malshe, 2012). For example, through their daily interactions with customers, salespeople may collect market intelligence, share it with marketing, participate in development of marketing strategy (Gonzalez & Claro, 2019; Gordon, Schoenbachler, Kaminski, & Brouckou, 1997; Judson, Schoenbachler, Gordon, Ridnour, & Wellbaker, 2006; Malshe & Sohi, 2009b) and implement the strategy in the field thereby helping firms deliver superior customer value (Blocker, Cannon, Panagopoulos, & Sager, 2012; Haas, Snehota, & Corsaro, 2012).

While these activities emphasize the need for close collaboration between sales and marketing, both departments have their own agendas and different perspectives often generate tensions between the two groups (Reverland, Steel, & Dapiran, 2006; Dawes & Massey, 2005; Dewsnap & Jobber, 2002). In B2B firms “Marketing people talk to … business end-users, while salespeople typically spend their time with distributors and purchasing agents. Marketers deal with market segments and specific product groups. Sales, however, sees the world account by account” (Donath, 2004, p. 5). As a result, the sales-marketing interface (SMI) is frequently characterized by miscommunication, conflict, and resentment, and senior managers “often describe the working relationship between Sales and Marketing as unsatisfactory”, concluding that these functions “undercommunicate, underperform, and overcomplain” (Kotler, Rakham, & Krishnaswamy, 2006, p. 78). An ineffective SMI decreases a firm’s performance through salespeople rejecting qualified leads, below-average conversion rates within the
sales funnel, and poor efforts to generate demand, capture revenue, and gain a competitive advantage (Hobbs, 2015; Sabnis, Chatterjee, Grewal, & Lilien, 2013). An ineffective SMI at a typical $1 billion B2B firm has been estimated to cost $14 million in sales and marketing expenses and $100 million in lost revenue opportunity (Gerard, 2013).

Even though the SMI, as a critical organizational interface, has received increasing attention from scholars, the growing literature on sales-marketing interface lacks a systematic review. While the findings from published studies provide a wealth of insight, it is not always clear how these findings are related and built on one another. It is a common practice, after a domain has evolved over a period of 20–30 years, to conduct a systematic literature review that assesses, analyzes, and synthesizes the current state of knowledge (Bolander et al., 2021; Lyngdoh, Choi, Hochstein, Britton, & Amyx, 2021; Williams & Plouffe, 2007).

With this article we fill this void within the SMI domain by conducting a systematic review of the extant SMI literature. We contribute to this literature stream in four major ways. First, we identify 73 articles about the SMI and provide an overview of the current state of knowledge about SMIs: how SMI research is usually conducted, how the field evolved, the main topics that have been addressed and the key insights from the extant literature. Second, we identify several inconsistencies and definitional ambiguities across studies and resolve them by developing a definition of the SMI that is grounded in the extant SMI literature. Third, we present a conceptual model that integrates and synthesizes the extant SMI knowledge and serves to explain how the key concepts and variables from existing studies are related to each other. Fourth, we identify gaps in the SMI literature, which are then used to derive several promising directions for future research that will help advance our understanding of SMIs. In the next section, we start by describing how we conducted our systematic literature review.

2. Research method: systematic literature review

We studied the scholarly body of knowledge about the SMI by conducting a systematic literature review – following a similar process as suggested by Bolander et al. (2021), Lyngdoh et al. (2021), and Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003) – which is a “rigorous and transparent approach of the review process that enhances replicability” (Bolander et al., 2021, p. 468). We began our systematic literature review with a discussion amongst the research team members to clarify the focus of our inquiry (Nguyen, de Leeuw, & Dullaert, 2018). We agreed that our goal was to provide a “critical evaluation of material that has already been published” (Bem, 1995, p. 172) about SMIs. More specifically, the objectives of our systematic literature review are to provide an overview of the current state of knowledge within the domain, resolve inconsistencies and definitional ambiguities across extant studies, develop a conceptual model to integrate and synthesize extant knowledge, highlight gaps in the body of extant research, and suggest avenues for future research that may help fill these gaps (Hulland & Houston, 2020; Palmatier, Houston, & Hulland, 2018).

2.1. Search procedure

We limited the scope of our systematic review of the extant body of published research on SMIs to academic articles published during the years 1990–2021. We started our systematic search for relevant articles in 1990 because the first publications that explicitly discuss the relationship between sales and marketing appeared in the early 1990s. Articles published before 1990 typically imply the relationship between sales and marketing without explicitly discussing the interface between the two functions. For example, scholars have discussed how industrial salespeople may collect market intelligence (Grace & Pointon, 1980; Moss, 1979) without focusing on the role of the SMI in collecting, disseminating and using market information. Our selected time span of 1990–2021 has a sufficient range to study how SMI research has evolved over time, includes all seminal articles on the SMI (Lyngdoh et al., 2021), and is similar to the time frame used by other review articles in the domain of sales management (Bolander et al., 2021; Lyngdoh et al., 2021; Williams & Plouffe, 2007).

We used multiple approaches to identify relevant articles for our systematic literature review. First, we conducted a manual search of the major marketing and sales journals that we identified, based on the research team’s prior research in the SMI domain, as the most likely outlets for research about the SMI. To keep our search manageable, we identified a list of six journals that publish regularly about marketing and sales (Journal of Marketing, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing, Journal of Business Research, and Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management) and manually examined article titles, abstracts, keywords, and conceptual frameworks to identify relevant articles. This search resulted in a list of articles that is representative of the main body of research in this domain.

Second, to complement our initial list with articles published in other journals, we conducted a broad article search in online databases, including EBSCO’s Business Source Complete, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar, using many variations of SMI-related terms to maximize our reach, such as “sales-marketing interface”, “sales-marketing integration”, “sales-marketing collaboration”, “sales-marketing alignment”, and “sales and marketing”. Third, we expanded our article search by using forward- and backward-looking reference searches (Johnson & Jaramillo, 2017). For example, we identified SMI-related scale development articles and explored other articles that subsequently cited these articles. In addition, we analyzed articles that provided some aggregation of the SMI domain (e.g., Rouziès et al., 2005) to suggest potential articles for our review.

2.2. Inclusion criteria

All identified candidate articles for our review were evaluated based on two inclusion criteria. First, articles needed to focus on the interaction or relationship between a firm’s sales and marketing functions. Articles that focused on only sales or marketing or their interfaces with other parts of the organization (e.g., operations or R&D) were excluded. Second, articles had to be published in peer-reviewed academic journals, thus eliminating “articles from such outlets as, trade journals, conference proceedings, book chapters, editorials, extended abstracts, magazines, and newspapers” (Lyngdoh et al., 2021, p. 520). We also excluded dissertations from our literature search because of potential variations in quality of research that has yet to undergo the rigors of a blind, peer review process. Since the SMI is a relatively young domain and we wanted to assess how it evolved, we did not limit our search to high impact peer-reviewed journals only. Further, we decided to include two articles from non peer-reviewed journals because of their significant impact on the domain: one early study about the need for coordination between sales and marketing (Cespedes, 1994) and a seminal article about the war between marketing and sales (Kotler et al., 2006). While the emphasis of our literature review is on empirical studies, we also included a few conceptual articles that present conceptual frameworks detailing hypothesized relationships between key variables (e.g., Dewnap & Jobber, 2000).

All initial articles were scrutinized by members of the research team to ascertain whether they might be appropriate for our literature review. For all potential candidates, the research team conducted a full-text examination to determine the ultimate status of the articles. Only a few ambiguous cases were discussed by the research team and included or excluded depending on group consensus. This systematic search resulted in a final set of 73 articles that discuss the interface between sales and marketing functions and were considered appropriate for our study.
2.3. Article coding

The three members of the research team, all with extensive knowledge of the SMI domain, reviewed and coded all 73 articles’ firm size, products or services foci, geographical scope, theoretical grounding, methodology, and topical focus of the paper (see Table 1). We selected these three attributes because they are the key characteristics that (a) vary across SMI studies and therefore offer an opportunity to investigate SMI under diverse conditions, (b) have been suggested in the SMI literature as relevant factors that impact SMI functioning, and/or (c) were expected to result in interesting insights into how the SMI research domain evolved. For example, researchers have suggested firm size and geographical scope as important factors impacting the SMI (Biemans, Makovec Brenčič, & Malshe, 2010; Johnson & Boeing, 2016; Malshe & Al-Khatibi, 2017). Further, methodology and topical focus were expected to uncover insights into how the nature of the research questions and the research methods used to investigate them changed over time.

All three members of the research team agreed on and defined the key characteristics, and then reviewed and coded all 73 articles. Following established procedures to assess coding reliability, we calculated inter-rater reliability (IRR) for all key dimensions of the 73 articles, which measures the absolute consensus in scores furnished by multiple judges (Gisev, Bell, & Chen, 2013; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). The final IRRs varied from 93.6% for the article’s focus and firm size classification, to 95.4% for method use, to 100% for the rather objective dimensions (e.g., geography, theory use yes/no, and whether the focus was products or services). All ambiguous coding were discussed and resolved by the research team.

3. Findings

Our findings address the following key questions: (1) How has SMI research been conducted? (2) What are the major themes within the SMI literature?, and (3) How can we resolve inconsistencies and integrate the findings from extant SMI research?

3.1. How has SMI research been conducted?

The majority of SMI studies to date have been published in a limited set of journals (i.e., 72% of the articles were published in seven journals); with *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management* (17%) and *Industiral Marketing Management* (15%) being the most prominent journals. Our review of the SMI literature uncovered interesting insights regarding how SMI research has been carried out and how this changed over time. First, early SMI studies typically focus on relatively large, established firms with separate marketing and sales departments. For example, when Massey and Dawes (2007b) investigated sales-marketing exchanges, they noted that “the primary selection criterion for a firm’s inclusion was that it must have a separate and identifiable Marketing Manager … plus a Sales Manager” (p. 1123). Similarly, in selecting SBUs for their study of sales-marketing configurations, Homburg, Jensen, and Krohmer (2008) “verified that the SBU had both a marketing and a sales subunit”. Later SMI researchers tend to broaden their samples to include firms of various sizes – 31.5% of the articles use a sample that includes firms of mixed sizes – with a few studies explicitly discussing SMI in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Biemans et al., 2010; Gabor et al., 2019).

Second, the majority of articles (87.7%) studied SMI of product manufacturers or included both product manufacturers and service providers in their sample. Only one study focused exclusively on service providers (Gonzalez & Claro, 2019). The lack of studies about SMI in service firms is remarkable, considering that customers often participate in the delivery and co-creation of services (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakkola, 2012; Gustafsson, Kristensson, & Wittel, 2012), which will impact the SMI.

Third, SMI studies have traditionally been conducted in the United States/North America, Europe and Australia (Biemans et al., 2010; Dawes & Massey, 2005; Guenzi & Troilo, 2007; MatthysSENS & Johnston, 2006). However, more recent studies (12.3% of the articles) have explored SMI in non-Western countries like Brazil and Saudi Arabia (Enyinda, Opute, Fadahunsi, & Mbah, 2020; Johnson & Boeing, 2016; Malshe & Al-Khatibi, 2017; Malshe, Johnson, & Vio, 2017). It is noteworthy that as of today there are no studies that investigate SMI in fast-growing countries like China or India.

Fourth, although only 30.1% of the articles explicitly mention the theory used, more recent studies increasingly mention their theoretical grounding. The most commonly mentioned theories are social identity, exchange, network, and interdependence theory.

Fifth, while the majority of the articles use either a qualitative research method (mostly interviews; 45.2%) or a survey (38.4%), our analysis indicates the SMI domain did not evolve according to the familiar pattern of initial studies using qualitative research methods to explore the phenomenon, followed by quantitative research testing hypotheses between key variables. Indeed, early researchers used surveys to test thought-world differences between sales and marketing and the effects of conflict and trust (Cross, Hartley, Rudelius, & Vassey, 2001; Strahle, Sprio, & Acito, 1996), while more recently scholars used qualitative methods to explore new topics such as sales-to-marketing job transitions (Johnson & Matthes, 2018) and the effects of digital transformation on sales-marketing collaboration (Hauer, Naumann, & Harte, 2021). The frequent occurrence of relatively isolated studies seems to suggest that the SMI research domain can be characterized as a “subject specialty” – i.e. a set of scientists engaging in research along similar lines – rather than an “invisible college”, which is more cohesive and has a few top-cited authors that perform bridging roles in a reasonably dense network of informal relations (Teixeira, 2011; Zuccala, 2006).

Sixth, almost half of the articles focus on sales-marketing interactions and perceptions (49.3%), while only a few studies’ primary foci are the impact of factors such as business context and firm characteristics on SMI’s (8.2%). Deeper analysis shows that SMI research seems to be moving away from merely examining SMI dynamics to exploring new factors impacting the SMI – such as organizational justice and national culture (Hulland, Nenkov, & Barclay, 2012; Johnson & Boeing, 2016; Le Meunier-FitzHugh, Cometto, & Johnson, 2021) – and the effects of SMI on key business processes, such as value creation and innovation (Hughes et al., 2012; Kessey & Biemans, 2016; Malshe & Biemans, 2014b).

3.2. What are the major themes within the SMI literature?

As an outcome of our systematic review of the SMI literature, we identified the major topics that have been studied by grouping the 73 articles into a limited number of categories. While it was not possible to assign all articles unequivocally to a single category, an iterative process of discovery resulted in five major themes: (1) different roles of sales and marketing, (2) interactions and perceptions between sales and marketing personnel, (3) structure of the SMI, (4) effects of the SMI, and (5) factors impacting the SMI and its effects (Table 2).

3.2.1. Different roles of sales and marketing

Early SMI studies emphasize that marketing and sales perform complementary tasks and that the sequential activities of product managers and the field sales force require sales-marketing coordination (Cespedes, 1993, 1994). SMI researchers were quick to observe that the different roles of sales and marketing often result in a disharmonious relationship (Cespedes, 1996; Kotler et al., 2006; Strahle et al., 1996). According to these scholars, the primary reason for disharmonious SMI are the thought-world differences between the two functions that represent pervasive subcultures (Beverland et al., 2006; Cespedes, 1996; Homburg & Jensen, 2007).

These differences often result in communication problems between marketing and sales, which in turn contribute to a lack of trust and
Table 1
SMI research.

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<th>Firm size (large or SME)</th>
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<th>Theory used</th>
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<td>SMI orientations and influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malshe et al.-Khatib (2017) – JPSSM</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Interactions and perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahshe et al. (2017) – JMM</td>
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<td>Both</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Interactions and perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claro &amp; Ramos (2018) – JPSSM</td>
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<td>Product</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Interactions and perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson and Matthes (2018) – JM</td>
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<td>Both</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep et al. (2018) – JPSSM</td>
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<td>Product</td>
<td>North America</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Interactions and perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banerjee and Bhardwaj (2019) – JBR</td>
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<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>SMI orientations and influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>SME</td>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>SMI orientations and influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonzalez and Claro (2019) – JAMS</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>United States and UK</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>SMI structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Both</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>SMI structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelemen-Erdös and Molnár (2019) – EC</td>
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<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Interactions and perceptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Le Meunier-FitzHugh and Massey (2019) – JMM</td>
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<td>Product</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dewsnap et al. (2020) – JIBM</td>
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<td>Enyinda et al. (2020) – JIBM</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>Interactions and perceptions</td>
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<td>Hetényi (2020) – JIEMS</td>
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<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Interactions and perceptions</td>
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<td>Malshe and Krush (2020) – JBIM</td>
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<td>Vaid et al. (2020) – IMM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arnett et al. (2021) – IMM</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Interactions and perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enyinda et al. (2021) – TIBR</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Africa and the Middle East</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Interactions and perceptions</td>
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<td>Hauer et al. (2021) – INMR</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Business context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al. (2021) – TIBR</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Business context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


To assess whether the article focused on large companies, SMEs, or a mix of both, we used the established definition of SMEs as companies with firm sizes less than 250 people and revenue less than $50 million. Instances where a very small percent of SMEs existed, but the rest were large firms, were coded large, those with a very small percent of large firms, but the rest SMEs, were coded SMEs.

* Articles were coded to assess if they focused on products, services, or a combination of both.

* The theory designation was based upon whether the author(s) explicitly referenced a specific theory as the basis for their research. No subjective judgements as to the extent of theoretical inclusion were made by the research team.
resentment (Strahle et al., 1996). Beverland et al. (2006) argue that different orientations drive sales and marketing apart and identify four cultural frames that hinder closer interaction between sales and marketing: (1) scope and focus of activity, (2) time horizon, (3) sources of knowledge, and (4) relationship to the environment. Similarly, Homburg and Jensen (2007) found significant differences between the thought-worlds of sales and marketing: sales tends to use a short-term orientation toward customers, whereas marketing is inclined to use a long-term orientation toward products.

In addition, sales and marketing differ in their relative amount of influence on key decision-making processes. SMI researchers have studied the relative influence of sales versus marketing by investigating the effects of variables such as the cross-functional dispersion of marketing activities (Harris & Ogbonna, 2003; Workman Jr., Homburg, & Gruner, 1996), relative power (Dawes & Massey, 2006), resource flexibility (Dewsnop, Micevski, Cadogan, & Kadic-Maglajlic, 2020), reward alignment (Arnett & Wittmann, 2011; Rouzies & Hulland, 2014), Sleep, Lam, & Hulland, 2018), and sales-marketing encroachment (Kesze & Biemans, 2016). For example, Troilo, De Luca, and Guenz (2009) found that dispersion of influence between sales and marketing increases collaboration between the two functions, without blurring their respective goals.

3.2.2. Interactions and perceptions

Inspired by these disharmonious SMI, several researchers delved deeper into what occurs within the relationship between sales and marketing. Matthyssens and Johnston (2006) identify interaction areas during the marketing and sales management processes, while others describe more abstract linkages between both departments (Malshe, 2011; Oliva, 2006). Other researchers focus on how sales and marketing personnel interact and how these interactions affect how members of both departments perceive themselves, each other, and the effectiveness of their relationship. Generally, an effective SMI is characterized by positive attitudes, friendliness to the out-group, and absence of bias toward the in-group (Dewsnop & Jobber, 2002). Rouzies and Hulland (2014) measure the perceptions of sales and marketing personnel using the social capital construct, which encompasses tie strength, trust, cooperation and shared vision. Other variables used to capture the perceptions of sales and marketing employees include role clarity (Malshe, 2009; Troilo et al., 2009), personal rapport (Johnson & Boeing, 2016; Malshe & Biemans, 2014a), cohesion (Rouzies & Hulland, 2014), shared vision (Beverland et al., 2006), credibility (Malshe, 2010; Malshe & Sohi, 2009a), interpersonal trust (Massey & Dawes, 2007a), and functional and dysfunctional conflict (Dawes & Massey, 2005; Malshe et al., 2017).

Several studies emphasize the key role of communication, in terms of communication frequency, bidirectionality and quality, in enhancing trust and reducing conflict between sales and marketing (Dawes & Massey, 2005; Enyinda, Enyinda, Mbah, & Ogbuehi, 2021; Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Pickey, 2009, 2010; Massey & Dawes, 2007b). For example, bidirectional communication and communication quality were found to reduce dysfunctional conflict and increase functional conflict (Massey & Dawes, 2007b). Other studies point out the effects of cognition-based and affect-based trust on both functional and dysfunctional conflict between sales and marketing personnel (Dawes & Massey, 2006; Massey & Dawes, 2007a, 2007b). The quality of communication and amount of trust between sales and marketing were also found to enhance mutual understanding and tacit knowledge exchange between the two departments (Arnett & Wittmann, 2014; Arnett, Wittmann, & Hansen, 2021).

3.2.3. Sales-marketing structure

Firms use a range of structural configurations to organize their marketing and sales functions (Vaid, Ahearne, & Krause, 2020; Workman Jr. et al., 1998). Dewsnop and Jobber (2000) developed a conceptual model of the SMI and suggest that sales-marketing integration is influenced by structural characteristics, such as formalization, centralization, and physical proximity. Firms may use a range of integrative mechanisms that encourage cross-pollination between sales and marketing (Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Massey, 2019), such as cross-functional teams (Dawes & Massey, 2005; Rouzies et al., 2005), cross-functional training (Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy, 2009), job rotation (Johnson & Matthes, 2018), and liaison employees that function as integrators between both departments (Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy, 2007b; Rouzies et al., 2005).

Several researchers have taken a more integral perspective and investigated different sales-marketing configurations (Homburg et al., 2008, Kotler et al. (2006) identify four structural sales-marketing configurations: undefined (working independently from each other), defined (using processes and rules to prevent disputes), aligned (joint planning), and integrated (blurred boundaries). Others found similar stages, but also include small firms that are too small to have a separate marketing department (Biemans et al., 2010; Biemans & Makovec Brenčič, 2007). They argue that a firm’s SMI configuration may evolve with a firm’s life cycle, growth and scope of operations, and that a firm’s ideal configuration depends on a firm’s characteristics and its current circumstances.

3.2.4. Effects of the sales-marketing interface

Early SMI researchers investigated the impact of sales-marketing interactions and perceptions on SMI effectiveness (Dawes & Massey, 2006; Dewsnop & Jobber, 2002; Hulland, Nenkov, & Barclay, 2012), which is typically interpreted as the quality of cooperation between sales and marketing (Homburg et al., 2008). For example, Massey and Dawes (2007a) define “perceived sales-marketing relationship effectiveness” in terms of how worthwhile, equitable, productive and satisfying the marketing manager perceived his/her working relationship with the sales manager. A few studies explore the effects of marketing-sales alignment on employee satisfaction and motivation and show, for example, that misaligned goals and compensation strategies reduce commitment to the organization (Guenzi & Troilo, 2006; Ritz, Steward, Morgan, & Hair, 2018). SMI researchers also explored the effects of the SMI on business performance, which includes metrics such as revenue, market share, profit, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and customer retention (Homburg et al., 2008; Homburg & Jensen, 2007; Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Lane, 2009; Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2011; Rouzies & Hulland, 2014).

While many studies hypothesize a direct effect of the SMI on various outcome metrics related to the SMI or business performance, several researchers have started to investigate the underlying mechanisms by
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMI topics</th>
<th>Key articles</th>
<th>Key insights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roles of sales and</td>
<td>Beverland et al. (2006), Homburg and Jensen (2007), Strahle et al. (1996),</td>
<td>• Different roles of sales and marketing are accompanied by different orientations, which generally have a negative impact on sales-marketing collaboration and firm performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marketing</td>
<td>Troilo et al. (2009)</td>
<td>• The different orientations of sales and marketing tend to be quite pervasive and expressed as subcultures that influence interactions between the two departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Firms may increase/reduce these role differences by changing the relative influence of each department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• General trends (such as sales organizations becoming more strategic) also impact each department’s role and influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales-marketing</td>
<td>Dawes and Massey (2005), Le Meunier-FitzHugh and</td>
<td>• Sales and marketing interact during all stages of the marketing and sales management processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interactions and</td>
<td>Piercy (2009, 2010), Malshe et al. (2017), Massey and Dawes (2007a, 2007b),</td>
<td>• Communication (frequency, bidirectionality) is key in creating interpersonal trust and reducing conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceptions</td>
<td>MatthysSENS and Johnston (2006)</td>
<td>• Harmonious interaction is not always required; conflict can be both functional and dysfunctional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales-marketing</td>
<td>Biemans et al. (2010), Dewsnap and Jobber (2000), Homburg et al. (2008),</td>
<td>• Sales-marketing perceptions are expressed as cohesion, trust, personal rapport, conflict, and shared vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structure</td>
<td>Jenson, Homburg et al. (1999), Kotler et al. (2006)</td>
<td>• Firms use a variety of sales-marketing configurations with different roles of marketing and sales and different degrees of sales-marketing alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• SMI configurations represent positions on an evolutionary path, with full alignment as the final stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• A firm’s appropriate SMI configuration depends on the firm’s size and scope of operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• A variety of integrative mechanisms help to align sales and marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMI effects</td>
<td>Ernst et al. (2010), Guenzi and Troilo (2006), Homburg and</td>
<td>• Effective sales-marketing interactions have a positive effect on relationship effectiveness and employee satisfaction and retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jensen (2007), Kessey and Biemans (2016), Malshe and Sohi (2009a), Massey</td>
<td>• Effective SMI have a direct positive effect on business performance (revenues, profits, customer satisfaction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and Dawes (2007a), Ritz et al. (2018)</td>
<td>• Effective SMI contribute to business performance through their role in key business processes, such as value creation, innovation, and strategy development and implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors impacting the</td>
<td>Biemans et al. (2010), Dawes and Massey (2005), Le Meunier-FitzHugh and</td>
<td>• The SMI is influenced by a range of variables related to the firm’s business context, exploring the role and impact of the SMI on a firm’s core processes, such as value creation (Guenzi &amp; Troilo, 2006; Hughes et al., 2012; Krush, Malshe, Al-Khatib, Al-Jomaih, &amp; Katoun, 2014), innovation (Ernst, Hoyer, &amp; Riibsaamen, 2010; Kessey &amp; Biemans, 2016; La Rocca, Moscatelli, Perna, &amp; Snehota, 2016; Mal She &amp; Biemans, 2014b), and strategy development and implementation (Malshe, 2011; Malshe &amp; Sohi, 2009a, 2009b). For example, studies by Guenzi and Troilo (2007) and Troilo et al. (2009) show that effective sales-marketing relations have a positive impact on the firm’s creation of superior customer value, which improves market performance in terms of relative sales growth, market share and profitability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMI and its effects</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Firm characteristics, such as firm size, management support, and information systems, affect the nature and efficacy of the SMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual characteristics including level of education and previous work experience shape sales-marketing interactions and perceptions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.5. Factors impacting the sales-marketing interface

SMI researchers have investigated a wide range of factors that may impact the SMI and its effects, which can be grouped into variables related to the firm’s business context, firm characteristics, and individual characteristics. Suggested relevant aspects of the firm’s business context include market dynamics (Cespedes, 1994; Homburg et al., 2008), and national culture (Biemans et al., 2010; Johnson & Boeing, 2016; Malshe & Al-Khatib, 2017; Malshe, Al-Khatib, Al-Habib, & Ezzi, 2012).

Relevant firm characteristics encompass firm size (Biemans et al., 2010; Biemans & Makovec Brenčič, 2007), organizational culture (Biemans & Makovec Brenčič, 2007), organizational justice (Hulland et al., 2012), top management support of the SMI (Arnett & Wittmann, 2014; Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Lane, 2009; Le Meunier-FitzHugh, Massey, & Piercy, 2011; Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy, 2007a), and the firm’s communication and information systems (Matthyssens & Johnston, 2006). For example, researchers have suggested that senior management can help remove barriers between sales and marketing and reduce conflict by aligning goals (Beverland et al., 2006), aligning rewards (Arnett & Wittmann, 2014; Rouzies & Hulland, 2014; Sleep et al., 2018), and promoting organizational justice through a fair distribution of resources and procedures and high-quality interactions (Hulland et al., 2012). In addition, a commitment to organizational learning involves the development of a common language that facilitates communication and information sharing between sales and marketing and thus has a positive impact on sales-marketing collaboration (Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy, 2009, 2010).

Finally, several studies suggest that the functioning of SMIs is impacted by individual characteristics of sales and marketing personnel, such as their level of education and previous sales experience of marketing managers (Biemans & Makovec Brenčič, 2007; Massey & Dawes, 2007a). Especially in B2B firms, the quality of the SMI is improved when the marketing manager has previously worked in sales in the same company, which enhances mutual understanding, empathy and trust.

3.3. How can we resolve inconsistencies and integrate the findings from extant SMI research?

One of the key objectives of a systematic literature review is to
“resolve definitional ambiguities ... and provide an integrated, synthet-
sized overview of the current state of knowledge” (Palmatier et al., 2018, p. 2). To this effect, we learn that SMI researchers typically neglect
to clearly define what the SMI entails and just focus on certain aspects of
the relationship between sales and marketing departments. This has
resulted in inconsistencies across studies about an SMI’s key compo-
ments. For example, structural characteristics like formalization have
been used as a key component of an SMI (Homburg et al., 2008), but also
as an SMI antecedent (Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy, 2010; Rouziès
et al., 2005). Further, sales-marketing collaboration has been defined in
terms of activities that capture both departments working together and
sharing ideas (Dewsnap & Jobber, 2009), and it is also operationalized
in terms of the resulting perceptions such as team spirit, shared goals
and shared vision (Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Massey, 2019; Le Meunier-
FitzHugh & Piercy, 2009). In addition, authors use concepts like
collaboration (Dewsnap & Jobber, 2009; Klemen-Erdős & Mohár,
2019; Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy, 2010; Troilo et al., 2009), inte-
gration (Biemans et al., 2010; Dewsnap & Jobber, 2000; Rouziès et al.,
2005; Smith, Gopalakrishnan, & Chatterjee, 2006), and alignment
(Banerjee, 2005; Smith, Gopalakrishnan, & Chatterjee, 2006), and alignment
channels (that are established for interdepartmental activities
(Homburg et al., 2008) in that we reorganize these previously used concepts along with other key SMI variables such as trust and conflict (Daves & Massey, 2005; Enyinda et al., 2021; Malshe et al., 2017; Massey & Daves, 2007a)
within four conceptual domains to define the SMI as the structural link-
egages, role linkages, interactions, and perceptions between a firm’s sales
and marketing departments. These domains are foundational to the SMI and
each domain serves as a conceptual container for several related vari-
dables discussed within this stream of research. We further characterize
each domain as follows:

- **Structural linkages** refer to the “horizontal platforms or interaction
channels [that are established for interdepartmental activities”
(Homburg et al., 2008, p. 137) and function as coordination mech-
anisms (Dewsnap & Jobber, 2009; Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy,
2008; Workman Jr. et al., 1998). They encompass how sales and
marketing are configured (Dewsnap & Jobber, 2000; Homburg et al.,
2008; Workman Jr. et al., 1998), and integrative mechanisms used to
facilitate sales-marketing interactions (Johnson & Mathes, 2018; Le
Meunier-FitzHugh & Massey, 2019; Rouziès et al., 2005).
- **Role linkages** refer to the “interdependencies that exist between
marketing and [sales]” (Hutt & Speh, 1984, p. 53) in terms of ac-
tivities and decision-making roles (Matthyssens & Johnston, 2006).
They encompass interdependencies created by the different orien-
tations of sales and marketing (Beverland et al., 2006; Guenzi &
Troilo, 2006; Homburg & Jensen, 2007), and the relative influence of
sales and marketing in tasks and decision-making (Daves & Massey,
2006; Homburg et al., 2008; Troilo et al., 2009).
- **Interactions** include all variables that describe sales and marketing’s
behavior toward each other over time, such as communication,
knowledge sharing, and influence tactics (Arnett & Wittmann, 2014;
Daves & Massey, 2005, 2006; Homburg et al., 2008; Massey &
2007a).
- **Perceptions** include all variables that capture sales and marketing’s
attitudes about each other and their relationship at a specific point in
time, such as cohesion, shared vision, credibility, trust, conflict, and
personal rapport (Beverland et al., 2006; Daves & Massey, 2005;
Malshe, 2010; Rouziès & Hulland, 2014).

Our characterization of the SMI as consisting of the four above-
mentioned domains (structural linkages, role linkages, interactions, and
perceptions) helps us integrate and synthesize the core themes we
identified within the SMI research (i.e., sales-marketing interactions,
sales-marketing perceptions, SMI structure, roles of sales and marketing,
and effects of the SMI) as well as explicate the key variables that fold
under these themes. To this end, we arranged the themes to represent
the key stages of an SMI design and management process (Fig. 1). We
also explicate a range of factors that may impact the SMI design and
management process.

### 4. Future research directions

Our systematic literature review not only serves to examine and
synthesize the current body of work on SMIs, but also provides a foun-
dation to derive future research directions (Hulland & Houston, 2020;
Palmatier et al., 2018). We juxtapose our proposed model of the SMI
with the big-picture conceptual questions and paradigm shifts that have
been recently discussed in the marketing literature to identify future
research directions for this domain. Specifically, a review of the recent
academic and practitioner marketing literature (e.g., Cuevas, 2018;
Kumar, 2018; Sriram & Fang, 2019) suggests three major changes
occurring in the world of sales and marketing: (1) a rapidly changing
 technological environment including big data’s impact on sales and
marketing practice, (2) the emergence of developing markets as strong
players in a globalized world, and (3) the changing roles of marketing
and sales in increasingly competitive business environments.

Given that sales and marketing are boundary spanning functions,
these paradigm shifts are likely to affect their roles and responsibilities,
and thereby the various linkages, interactions, and perceptions between
these two departments. Combining these emerging paradigm shifts with
the findings from our systematic literature review, we identify four di-
rections for future research that will have a major impact on our un-
derstanding of the functioning and nature of SMIs: (1) the impact of
digital technologies on SMIs, (2) the impact of national culture on SMIs,
(3) SMIs in SMEs, and (4) the impact of the evolving roles of sales and
marketing on SMIs. Below, we briefly discuss each avenue. Table 3
presents illustrative research questions for these four research avenues
and offers initial propositions that may serve as sources of research ideas
for SMI future scholars.

### 4.1. Impact of digital technologies

The increasing use of digital technologies, such as artificial intelli-
genue, cloud computing, and social and mobile platforms not only
change how salespeople interact with customers (Bharadwaj & Shipley,
2020; Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020), but may also affect sales-marketing in-
teractions. They are likely to enhance the formal, structured interactions
between the two departments (e.g., increased communication fre-
quency), but may also stimulate informal communications (e.g., through
intranet conversations, shared notes stored on sales enablement plat-
forms, informal chat WhatsApp groups) (Enyinda et al., 2020; Singh
et al., 2019). Such interactions may contribute to social and relational
capital and reduce conflict and perceptions of ‘us versus them’ between
sales and marketing personnel (Daves & Massey, 2005; Enyinda et al.,
2021; Massey & Daves, 2007b; Rouziès & Hulland, 2014). By increasing
informal communication, digital technologies stimulate informal net-
works (Kleinbaum & Tushman, 2008; Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993),
which diminishes the need for structural linkages and mitigates the
negative impact of siloed structures and rigid role definitions (Dewsnap
& Jobber, 2005; Hauer et al., 2021; Kiesler & Cummings, 2002; Kraut,
Fussell, Brennan, & Siegel, 2002).

On the other hand, digital technologies may be distracting and
deliberate to workplace performance (Aguenza & Som, 2012; Munene
& Nyaribo, 2013) and have a negative impact on SMI perceptions, which
are often sub-par to begin with (Daves & Massey, 2005; Malshe et al.,
2017). Further, firms may be faced with challenges such as integrating
or assessing the value of spontaneous, informal digital conversations in
the context of formal, shared data that firms possess. In addition, technology-enhanced interactions may result in groupthink, with sales and marketing personnel losing their unique voice and perspective (Biemans et al., 2010; Janis, 1971; Turner & Pratkanis, 1998), while the lack of face-to-face interactions may also negatively impact the quality of communications (Wilson, Santana, & Paharia, 2018). Future research should focus on untangling these positive and negative effects of digital tools on sales-marketing interactions and perceptions.

4.2. Impact of national culture

Most SMI research looks at firms in Western countries, such as the United States and United Kingdom, but findings from a few studies suggest that SMIs may be quite different in countries with different national cultures (Johnson & Boeing, 2016; Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al., 2021; Malshe et al., 2012; Malshe & Al-Khatib, 2017). Western cultures are low-context, individualistic cultures that emphasize individual accomplishments and goals, and use direct, transparent, and open communication. In contrast, many developing markets such as India and China are high-context, collectivist cultures that focus on group norms and values, and use complex, ambiguous, embedded, and indirect forms of communication (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2020).

Several studies suggest that national cultures influence organizational cultures (Adler & Gunderson, 2008; Calori, Steele, & Yoneyama, 1995; Van Oudenhoven, 2001) and thus are expected to impact how sales and marketing employees interact (Dunkel & Meierewert, 2004; Neyer & Harzing, 2008). For example, the embedded nature of high-context cultures will likely result in richer interactions, which will increase the inclination to affiliate (Hui & Villarreal, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and forge interpersonal connections (Kashima & Hardie, 2000), and thus reduce conflict and increase mutual trust and overall SMI effectiveness. National culture may also, in turn, reduce thought-world differences and thus the need for structural integrative mechanisms. On the other hand, more nuanced interactions may also hide underlying thought-world differences that are more visible in cultures that prefer direct, open communication.

National culture may as well impact how differences between hierarchical levels are perceived (Hofstede, 1980). While in Western economies candid conversations with superiors are often commonplace and dissenting opinions are freely shared, emerging economies are often characterized by significant power distances between superiors and subordinates that affect the nature of interactions and resulting perceptions across hierarchical levels (Hofstede, 2013; Tear, Reader, Shorrock, & Kirwan, 2020; Van Kleeck & Cheng, 2020). Future research could use multi-level analyses to investigate the effects of hierarchy on sales-marketing interactions and perceptions. For example, researchers can study relationships in which a lower level of data (salespeople) is nested in a higher level of data (sales managers) and account for variance at each level (Ahearne, Haumann, Kraus, & Wieseke, 2013; Malshe & Krush, 2020). Insights from research on the impact of national culture on SMIs will contribute to our understanding about SMIs in both developed and developing economies and help managers in multinational corporations to design and manage effective SMIs with representatives of different nationalities (Hetenyi, 2020).

4.3. SMIs in SMEs

The extant SMI literature strongly focuses on large firms with separate sales and marketing departments, each with their own identities and well-defined roles, which often result in suboptimal communication and coordination (Beverland et al., 2006; Homburg et al., 1999; Homburg & Jensen, 2007; Malshe et al., 2017). However, the business world is dominated by SMEs that employ fewer than 250 persons and have annual revenue not exceeding €50 million (European Commission, 2016). While these SMEs often lack a traditional marketing department, their CEOs or sales managers frequently function as part-time, 'hidden
Whicher, 2018), where product managers fail to identify with just one of the two functions (Biemans et al., 2010). Future researchers may use longitudinal research methods to investigate how sales and marketing drift apart over time and identify early warning signals or effective design parameters. The findings from such studies may not only contribute to our understanding of how SMIs evolve, but also help larger firms to replicate effective practices from SMEs.

4.4. Impact of changing roles of sales and marketing

Following the tradition of extant SMI research, we defined the SMI as the structural linkages, role linkages, interactions, and perceptions between a firm’s sales and marketing departments, each with its own distinct identity, role, and activities. However, scholarly literature suggests that the changing business landscape in a digital, data rich, and diverse world may render the traditional distinctions between sales and marketing less relevant for many firms (Sridhar & Fang, 2019).

On the one hand, several authors argue that the call for marketing accountability has reduced marketing’s strategic profile (McDonald, 2010; Stewart, 2009), and changed it from a separate management function into a set of business processes geared to creating and delivering customer value (Lusch & Webster Jr, 2011; Webster, Malter and Ganesan, 2005). Indeed, “[t]oday, marketing in many large companies is less of a department and more a diaspora of skills and capabilities spread across … the organization” (Webster, Malter and Ganesan, 2005, p. 36).

As an SME grows, the nature of the SMI evolves because ‘hidden marketers’ (Biemans et al., 2010; Harris & Ogbonna, 2003; Storey, 2016). Other SMIs combine their sales and marketing functions into a centralized “smartmarketing” department (Fatimi, 2016; Hughes, Gray, & Whitcher, 2018), where product managers fail to identify with just one of the two functions (Biemans & Makovec Brenčič, 2007). An SME’s focus on short-term survival often results in a sales orientation (Govindarajan, Lev, Srivastava, & Enache, 2019), which — enabled by physical proximity — facilitates frequent, direct interactions, improves collaboration with marketers within the firm, and reduces functional barriers (Dewsnup & Jobber, 2000; Kahn & McDonough III, 1997; Van den Bulte & Moenaert, 1998; Workman Jr. et al., 1998). This setup reduces thought-world differences and improving SMIs effectiveness (Dawes & Massey, 2005; Massey & Dawes, 2007b).

As an SME grows, the nature of the SMI evolves because ‘hidden marketers’ are replaced by a rudimentary marketing department as a spin-off from the sales department, which then evolves into a full-fledged marketing department with its own identity and role (Biemans et al., 2010). Future researchers may use longitudinal research methods to investigate how sales and marketing drift apart over time and identify the underlying variables that govern this evolution. Since these embryonic SMIs carry the seeds of the sales-marketing dis harmony that is often encountered in larger firms (Beverland et al., 2006; Homburg & Jensen, 2007; Kotler et al., 2006; Massey & Dawes, 2007a), detailed insight into the evolutionary paths of these budding SMIs might help identify early warning signals or effective design parameters. The findings from such studies may not only contribute to our understanding of how SMIs evolve, but also help larger firms to replicate effective practices from SMEs.

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**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future research direction</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Illustrative research questions</th>
<th>Illustrative propositions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact of digital technologies</td>
<td>Digital technologies impact how people interact and thus nature and effectiveness of SMIs</td>
<td>How do various digital technologies impact sales-marketing interactions and perceptions? When do technology-enhanced interactions result in both departments losing their distinct role and identity? How is the use of digital technologies related to informal social networks in SMIs? How do sales and marketing employees use informal, digital conversations in combination with planned, formal interactions?</td>
<td>SMIs in high-technology use contexts have (a) less dysfunctional conflict, (b) less functional conflict, (c) better communication, and (d) higher levels of trust than SMIs in low-technology use contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of national culture</td>
<td>Differences between national cultures result in different sales-marketing interactions and perceptions</td>
<td>How does national culture impact sales-marketing interactions and perceptions? Do more nuanced interactions in high-context cultures result in less thought-world differences? Or do they serve to hide underlying thought-world differences? How do cultural standards impact cross-cultural interactions in SMIs in multinational companies?</td>
<td>SMIs in high-context, collectivist countries have (a) less dysfunctional conflict, (b) less functional conflict, (c) better communication, and (d) higher levels of trust than SMIs in low-context, individualistic countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMIs in SMEs</td>
<td>SMIs in SMEs differ from SMIs in larger firms; more insight into the nature of these embryonic SMIs and how they evolve helps larger firms to improve their SMIs</td>
<td>Which SMI configurations are common in SMEs? How effective are they? What is the impact of SMI characteristics in SMEs on sales-marketing interactions and perceptions? How can SMIs transform from being sales-oriented to becoming marketing-oriented, without increasing thought-world differences and reducing SMI effectiveness? How can the benefits of physical proximity be maintained as the firm grows in size?</td>
<td>SMIs in SMEs have (a) less dysfunctional conflict, (b) more functional conflict, (c) better communication, and (d) higher levels of trust than SMIs in large companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing roles of sales and marketing</td>
<td>The roles of marketing and sales are changing, which blurs the traditional distinction between both departments and redefines the SMI</td>
<td>Which factors impact the changing roles of sales and marketing? How do the changing roles of sales and marketing impact sales-marketing interactions and perceptions? What are the advantages and disadvantages of blurred boundaries between sales and marketing? How should the SMI be redefined in the context of blurring boundaries between sales and marketing?</td>
<td>SMIs with blurred sales and marketing boundaries have (a) less dysfunctional conflict, (b) more functional conflict, (c) better communication, and (d) higher levels of trust than SMIs with rigid sales and marketing boundaries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rangarajan, Dugan, Rouziou, & Kunkle, 2020) results in sales encroaching on activities that are traditionally carried out by marketing (Keszey & Biemans, 2016). As a result, the boundaries between sales and marketing departments are becoming increasingly blurred and some firms may even start to merge the two departments into selling or demand centers that identify business opportunities, prioritize leads, and orchestrate customer outreach (Johnson, Matthes, & Friend, 2019; Shastri, Zoltners, Sinha, & Lorimer, 2021). Future research could explore how these changing roles of sales and marketing redefine the SMI and the challenges that firms face in implementing such changes.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Palmatier et al. (2018, p. 1) note that the value of a systematic literature review is to “carefully identify and synthesize relevant literature to evaluate a … substantive domain … and thereby provide readers with a state-of-the-art understanding of the research topic”. Based on what they consider the key benefits of review papers, we identify four major contributions of our literature review to the SMI research domain.

First, we critically evaluated the methodological approaches and theories commonly used by SMI researchers. We showed that SMI studies tend to be biased toward large companies with established sales and marketing departments in Western countries. In addition, less than one third of the SMI studies specify their theoretical grounding, with a strong emphasis on social identity, exchange, network, and interdependence theory. This finding suggests that future research may advance our understanding of SMI by investigating SMIs in different contexts and using other theories to explore new research questions. In addition, our systematic literature review provides an integrated, synthesized overview of the current body of knowledge about SMIs. We identified five key themes in the SMI literature: differences between the roles and perspectives of sales and marketing, sales-marketing interactions and perceptions, sales-marketing structure, SMI effects, and factors that impact the SMI. For all five themes, we summarized the key insights presented in the literature.

Second, the results from our systematic literature review uncovered several inconsistencies that illustrate the lack of a clear, commonly accepted definition of what the SMI entails. For example, aspects of a firm’s sales-marketing structure, such as the degree of formalization, have been used as both a key component as well as an antecedent of the SMI. And scholars have used similar, but different operationalizations of SMI collaboration, integration, and alignment. Following the approach used by Homburg et al. (2008), we resolved these definitional ambiguities and the lack of a generally accepted SMI definition by developing a comprehensive, yet parsimonious definition of the SMI, which (1) identifies four key conceptual domains that capture different aspects of SMIs, and (2) includes all key elements of the SMI identified in our literature review. Our definition both resolves definitional ambiguities and helps to advance our understanding of SMIs (Covin & Lumpkin, 2011).

Third, we used the key themes, insights, and variables from extant SMI research to develop a comprehensive conceptual model that has ‘conceptual grab’ (Glaser, 2002), reconciles past research, and synthesizes the key findings from the extant SMI literature. In addition, we ordered the key themes from the SMI literature into a process model that can be used by practitioners to design and manage effective SMIs.

Fourth, the findings from our systematic literature review and conceptual model provide researchers with a common starting point to further develop this domain and suggest numerous promising directions for future research that will broaden the scope of SMI research and advance our understanding of this critical interface. We presented four promising suggestions for future research that encourage scholars to investigate new research questions, explore new contexts, and use new theories to expand SMI research into new directions.

5.2. Managerial implications

Our systematic review and synthesis of the SMI research domain provide myriad insights that are relevant to sales and marketing practitioners. First, it answers the question “Why should I care about the SMI?” for sales and marketing executives. The current body of knowledge about SMIs demonstrates that an effective SMI contributes to both employee satisfaction and retention (Guenzi & Troilo, 2006; Ritz et al., 2018) and key business performance indicators, such as market share and profitability (Homburg et al., 2008; Homburg & Jensen, 2007; Rouzies & Hulland, 2014). In addition, it shows how these positive effects on business performance are realized through the SMI’s contributions to key business processes, such as value creation (Guenzi & Troilo, 2006; Hughes et al., 2012), innovation (Keszey & Biemans, 2016; La Rocca et al., 2016), and strategy development and implementation (Malshe, 2010; Malshe & Sohi, 2009a, 2009b). Accordingly, effective SMI design and management should be a priority for management as it can be an important lever in improving their top and bottom lines.

Second, the findings from our systematic literature review and conceptual model (Fig. 1) provide senior management with guidelines to address the question “How can we design and manage effective SMIs?”. This involves several key decisions.

5.2.1. How to structure the SMI?

The first decision concerns the SMI’s structure, which is subject to considerable variance; formal vs. informal, dispersed vs. centralized, etc. (e.g., Dewsnap & Jobber, 2000; Malshe et al., 2012). Managers should design an SMI structure that fits with the nature and scope of their organization (Biemans et al., 2010) and design and implement appropriate integrative mechanisms to improve the relationship between marketing and sales. Mechanisms such as cross-functional teams or cross-functional training (Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy, 2009; Rouzies et al., 2005) and job rotation (Johnson & Matthes, 2018) may be used to improve marketing and sales’ ability to comprehend and interact with their counterparts.

5.2.2. How to define the functional roles of sales and marketing?

Sales and marketing perform complementary activities, but the SMI literature emphasizes the potential harmful effects of thought-world differences between sales and marketing (Beverland et al., 2006; Cespedes, 1996; Homburg et al., 2008; Homburg & Jensen, 2007). For various key business processes, management must define the roles of both departments, their contributions to the processes, and their influence on decisions. Considering the fluid roles of sales and marketing. (Cuevas, 2018; Haas et al., 2012; Keszey & Biemans, 2016; Peterson et al., 2021), management should monitor the blurring lines between the two departments and use tools like reward alignment and resource flexibility to keep sales and marketing aligned toward corporate goals (Arnett & Wittmann, 2014; Dewsnap et al., 2020).

5.2.3. How to create effective sales-marketing interactions and perceptions?

The core of the SMI consists of positive perceptions of sales and marketing employees, such as trust, cohesion, and credibility (Malshe & Sohi, 2009a; Massey & Dawes, 2007a; Rouzies & Hulland, 2014), which are the result of positive interactions, such as frequent, bidirectional communication (Dawes & Massey, 2005; Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Lane, 2009; Le Meunier-FitzHugh & Piercy, 2010). Management should make every effort to remove barriers that may hinder effective interactions, emphasize and communicate a shared vision, and encourage personal rapport and trust between counterparts, for instance through informal interactions and social activities (Beverland et al., 2006; Johnson & Boeing, 2016; Kratter, Leenders, & Van Engelen, 2005; Massey & Dawes, 2007a).
5.2.4. How to create effective enablers of an effective SMI?

Finally, the articles reviewed suggest various factors that may impact the SMI, which may be used by managers to improve SMI interactions and effectiveness. For example, expatriate managers may account for the impact of national culture on the SMI and encourage SMI members in emerging economies to engage in constructive conflict (Johnson & Boeing, 2016; Malšhe et al., 2012). Further, they may provide management support and organizational justice to create an effective team environment (Arnett & Wittmann, 2014; Hulland et al., 2012), use individual characteristics to select the right marketing and sales employees for key roles in the SMI (Biemans & Makovec Brenčič, 2007; Massey & Dawes, 2007a), and provide them with dedicated communications sharing technology to improve interactions (Hauer et al., 2021; Matthysens & Johnston, 2006).

6. Conclusion

The functioning of a firm’s SMI is a key concern for both marketing scholars and executives. Over 30 years, research in this domain has generated many useful insights about the nature and importance of SMI. At the same time, the SMI literature lacks a clear, commonly accepted definition of the SMI and a synthesis of our current understanding of SMI. In this article we define the scope of the SMI, integrate and synthesize the extant SMI literature, and develop several promising directions for future research. Our suggested research directions will expand the scope of SMI research and investigate new research questions that will contribute to our understanding of how this critical interface can help shape superior experiences and outcomes for firms, employees, and customers.

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