

How do managers work with digital communication media in international business relationships?

Focus group results of managers' experiences of digital media use for relationship building.

Ellinor Torsein
PhD, senior lecturer
University West
Trollhättan, Sweden
ellinor.torsein@hv.se

Background

B2B marketing:

- Personal selling
- Business relationships

Relationships initiated, developed and maintained through communication

Background

A few years back:

"Emails can be a source of misunderstandings"

"Business deals happen because individuals have relationships to one another"

"No face, no business"

Since then: Tremendous development of ICT and digital media.
How is B2B marketing and relationship building affected by this development?

Focus Group

IUC Väst (Industry Development Centre West):
an organization belonging to a nation-wide Swedish network of
another 11 similar regional companies, working with development
projects and innovation in collaboration with small and medium
sized firms.

7 firm representatives and me!
(Area and sales managers)

Findings

Firm representatives welcome digital communication development!

...but they only use it when it supports traditional ways of B2B communication (personal meetings, telephone, email)

Findings

Literature: Social media brings so many opportunities for B2B marketing that are not taken advantage of!

Firm representatives: Social media can be used for image transferal

Findings

Literature: Do not bring up videoconferencing or text messages

Firm representatives: Videoconferencing is useless, but audio meetings on Skype are great

Text messages and smileys are used for informal business relations based on trust

For emails, messages are adapted to depth of relation, seniority and cultural background of the recipient

Findings

Digital communication media is useful for some types of activities and customers, such as monitoring, coordinating activities with distributors, and for maintaining existing relationships.

Findings

Digital communication media is considered inappropriate for initiating and building new relationships and for exchange of complex information.

For these activities, traditional B2B communication methods including physical meetings, personal interaction and selling were considered superior.

For relationship initiation and building, meeting physically is still a requirement.

Questions:

Should this be studied further?

If yes, how?