

Account-Based Marketing: A strategic approach in a B2B context

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Abstract

Account-based marketing (ABM) is becoming a key strategy in B2B marketing, yet it lacks extensive academic exploration. This study aims to clarify ABM's conceptualization, key activities, drivers, and impacts using a qualitative approach. Leveraging theories-in-use (TIU), we conduct interviews with B2B managers to gather insights. The expected contributions of this research are threefold: a comprehensive definition of ABM, an analysis of its unique influences and outcomes, and an exploration of its integration with sales for managing large accounts. These findings will establish a foundation for future research on ABM's role in B2B marketing strategy.

Keywords: Account-based Marketing, B2B marketing, Digital Marketing, Conceptualization

1. Introduction and background

ABM is gaining traction in B2B marketing, with over 90% of B2B leaders considering it crucial to success (Lillian, 2018). Industry sources report high ROI from ABM, yet academic attention is limited, and most current insights come from practitioner-driven reports (Burgess & Munn, 2021). This study aims to bridge this gap by offering a systematic exploration of ABM, distinguishing it from related frameworks like key account management and digital content marketing.

Using a TIU approach, we will conduct interviews with ABM managers across diverse industries. The study will contribute by defining ABM, understanding its key antecedents and outcomes, and examining its integration with sales to manage significant customer accounts. Our aim is to provide a robust conceptual framework and highlight ABM's role in modern B2B marketing practices.

2. Methods

This discovery-oriented study uses TIU to conceptualize ABM, aiming to develop grounded insights into this emerging approach (Zeithaml et al., 2020). The study involves reviewing practitioner literature to identify common definitions and themes, followed by interviews with managers directly involved in ABM. Interviews will be conducted with approximately 20 managers from international firms in various

industries, focusing on those actively implementing ABM. Data will be analyzed using qualitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to provide deeper insights into ABM's core components and practical applications.

4. Preliminary findings and expected contribution

Initial analysis suggests that ABM is a strategic, customer-centric approach emphasizing personalization and alignment between sales and marketing. Four characteristics define ABM: strategic intent, personalized engagement with accounts, collaboration between sales and marketing, and customer-focused outcomes like enhanced experiences and stronger relationships. While industry sources underscore these elements, they lack empirical validation, making this study critical for refining ABM's conceptual clarity and academic grounding.

This study aims to contribute to B2B marketing in three key areas. First, it provides a clear definition of ABM, a topic that has largely been discussed in practice but not rigorously studied academically. Second, it positions ABM within a broader marketing context, distinguishing it from similar concepts and identifying its unique drivers and outcomes. Lastly, it provides insights into the integration of ABM and sales, showing its impact on B2B marketing, especially in organizations managing large customer accounts.

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