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Digital marketing capabilities in international firms: a relational perspective

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Abstract

Purpose

Differences in digital adoption between firms call for a clearer conceptualization of digital marketing capabilities (DMCs). The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to offer a conceptualization of DMCs from a relational dynamic capabilities perspective and (2) to explore performance outcomes of DMCs for international firms, taking into account firm size and entrepreneurial orientation.

Design/methodology/approach

A survey on a sample of 167 international firms is used and analyzed using hierarchical regression.

Findings

DMCs contribute positively to performance. Firms with greater entrepreneurial orientation leverage DMCs more effectively and have better performance. Small firms with strong digital capabilities perform as well as medium-sized firms. Large firms perform marginally better than small and medium-sized firms.

Research limitations/implications

This paper complements previous IB studies that only study customer-related or supplier- and channel-related IT adoption. It is based on a more holistic conceptualization of DMCs, and draws on market sensing, customer-linking, customer retention, supplier relationship and channel bonding capabilities. It offers new empirical evidence for the positive impact of DMCs on firm performance. It also contributes to small and medium-sized enterprise and digital entrepreneurship literature by comparing the performance outcomes of DMCs for different size firms with varying degrees of entrepreneurial orientation.

Practical implications

This study provides implementable measures of DMCs. The findings encourage firms to develop entrepreneurial orientation alongside DMCs.

Originality/value

This paper presents DMCs as relational dynamic capabilities and shows the moderating effect of entrepreneurial orientation and firm size on the DMCs–performance relationship.

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