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 Using the Film Process for Sales Education: The Results of an EU project

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# Contents

# Using the Film Process for Sales Education: The Results of an EU project.

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*Abstract*

*In recent years, increasing innovative learning techniques have been applied to sales education (Whalen and Coker 2016, 2017; Labrecque et al. 2019; Spiller et al. 2019; Cummins et al. 2020). The mix of traditional and innovative teaching techniques is grounded on social learning theory, that demonstrated the efficacy and students' preference for practical instruction rather than theoretical lectures (Kelly, 2004), especially in skill-based disciplines such as sales (Lastner et al. 2016).*

*This work presents the results of the development and implementation of an innovative, active learning methodology based on edutainment, the "Movie education" (Conform 2019, as a part of the overall IN.K.A.M.S. Erasmus Plus project (International Key Account Management & Sales – cofounded by European Union in 2017), which consists in involving students in the application of storytelling techniques and the creation of short films related to the didactic topics covered, in order to give a more experiential approach to the course.*

*Movie education consists of student participation in Film process laboratories, to acquire storytelling techniques, act and make short films dedicated to tupical sales situations, based on the knowledge acquired in previous lessons. The integration of Movie education with other educational methods (lectures, discussions, video/film analysis, and tests), resulted in advanced knowledge elaboration and transfer, critical evaluation and development, memorization, behavioural response, with elevated student involvement and engagement.*

*This work presents the benefits and challenges of using Movie education through experimentation in five business university courses in five different EU universities, also providing contributions and suggestions for further implementation of this methodology.*

*Keywords: sales education, selling, active learning, blended learning, experiential learning.*

Introduction

A salesperson's job today is not the same as it was 15 or 20 years ago (Moncrief and Marshall 2006; Ballestra et al. 2017; Cardinali 2019) beacuse BtoB sales are becoming ever more strategic and value creating, due to increasing competition, globalization and technology (McDonnell and McNiff 2016; Cuevas 2018).

For years, sales positions have been among those most requested by companies at an international level (Manpower 2007, 2020). Companies are well aware of the growing challenges that salespeople have to face and have started looking for sales recruits especially among University graduates (Nielson and Cummins, 2019). There are two challenges: on the one hand, business students generally do not aspire to take up this profession, also based on the stereotypes associated with salespeople (Ballestra et al. 2017), on the other hand, Universities do not always prepare students for sales positions, due to the scarcity of University sales courses, especially in European contexts (Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy 2011).

Therefore, the recruitment of sales staff often takes place thanks to and within University contexts (Agnihotri et al. 2014), for the benefit of both companies, which find visibility and qualified personnel to hire, and students, who have the opportunity to better understand the skills necessary to carry out the work and can prepare for it, already at University, with huge savings of time and money (SEF, 2017).

Sales training and education has received little attention in the past in the marketing and business education literature (Cummins et al. 2020). With respect to sales education, research has already claimed its scarcity at an international and, above all, at a European level, including the limited application of active teaching methodologies (Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy 2011).

Although marketing educators and practitioners have debated on the prominence of knowledge vs. skills (Spiller et al. 2019), there is a clear consensus that sales education can help bridge the skills gap (Agnihotri et al. 2014), therefore, some authors have proposed blending theoretical knowledge and technical skills as the preferred approach within sales education (Schibrowsky et al., 2002).

More recently, innovative learning techniques have been applied to sales education (Whalen and Coker 2016, 2017), often taken from vocational training (Inks and Avila 2008; Cummins et al. 2020). These include competitions, role playing, scenarios, mentoring and other methodologies that are known for their effectiveness in stimulating students to receive active learning (Drake, 2012; Young and Hawes 2013; Labrecque et al. 2019). The mix of traditional and innovative teaching techniques is grounded on social learning theory, which has spread in recent years, after studies demonstrated that students prefer practical instruction rather than theoretical lectures that are devoid of practical implications (Kelly, 2004), especially in skill-based disciplines such as sales (Lastner et al. 2016).

This work's aim is to present the results of the experimentation of a new methodology in the context of University education: "Movie education" (Conform 2019).  The novelty of Movie education is that, following an active learning approach based on edutainment (Anikina and Yakimenko 2015), it has not only fostered the combination  of teaching and entertainment, but also provided many benefits of innovative teaching methodologies. Movie education allowed students to reflect on and elaborate  the knowledge acquired, using it as a starting point to build storytelling and group film work, interacting directly with sales situations with a high degree of cognitive and emotional involvement. Therefore, the integration of Movie education with other educational methods (lectures, discussions, video/film analysis, and tests), resulted in a high memorization and behavioural response, with elevated student involvement and engagement.

This Paper presents the experience of the IN.K.A.M.S. (International Key Account Management & Sales – cofounded by European Union in 2017 Erasmus Plus project) which was conceived and developed to allow the enrichment of business education with sales topics through traditional methodologies and active learning techniques, including the novel Movie education. The aim of the project is to allow students to interiorize concepts and to understand and relate to the real case scenarios (Alvarez et al. 2015), while stimulating skills and producing a cognitive and behavioural impact, in order to close the skill gap with the labour market demand (Agnihotri et al. 2014).

The Paper is structured as follow: state of the art of sales education methodologies, project description and its assessment and future recommendations and improvements.

Sales education methodology: an introduction

Trying to give an overview of the state of sales education in University contexts, a comprehensive literature review (Palmatier et al. 2017) allows to illustrate the diffusion of sales education and the various techniques adopted within University courses, together with traditional methodologies (Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy 2011).

It is worth stating that sales education and training (Baldauf and Lee 2011; Schrock et al. 2018; Bolander et al. 2020; Dugan et al. 2020) is one of the aspects that is least investigated and most worthy of attention in international sales.

Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy (2011) examined the state of sales education from a global perspective and found that only about 20% of the Universities in the sample (N=209) had courses or specializations in sales. Among the most cited reasons for including these courses in the University teaching offer, was the demand from businesses.

Further research has shown that the presence of courses is increasing in some contexts, especially introductory courses (Spiller et al. 2019) but there is still a lack of advanced courses such as sales analysis and sales technology courses.

Moreover, generally sales education is carried out mainly via traditional teaching methods, class and e-learning, as well as active learning methods: immersive, social and experiential (Inks and Avila 2008).

In general, previous research did not report extensive data on the most common teaching methods used in sales courses (Parker et al. 1996), but then it became increasingly clear that active learning strategies are more effective than traditional passive learning strategies, especially regarding behavioural skill development (Lastner et al. 2016). Active learning is a highly personalized form of learning, in which students seem to learn better as they fully participate through discussion, reflective thinking, problem solving, and/or other activities that require the learner to cognitively process the new information presented (Inks and Avila, 2008, Chapman et al., 2015; Gray et al., 2012; Wahlers et al., 2014).

Furthermore, active learning allows students to link new information to what they already know, and assumes that this knowledge is actively constructed by people rather than passively received (Labrecque et al. 2019). Therefore, by using a mix of instructional methods (lectures, discussions, video/film analysis, and tests), students are presented with sales techniques, processes, and concepts in both passive- and active-learning environments (Drake, 2012). Moreover, Multi-media education allows superior

memorization and knowledge at high level, whereas verbal-based education is perceived more as top-down and less realistic and involving, allowing limited assimilation of concepts and fewer real case applications (Alvarez, 2015). Active learning team-based activities seem to foster the increase of students' learning orientation and goal achievement (Michaelsen and Black 1994; Livingstone and Lynch 2002).

Among the most used and cited active learning methodologies in sales literature (Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy 2011; Spiller et al. 2019; Cummins et al. 2020), the most recurring are: role playing (Nelson, 2016), cases, simulations, guest speakers, in-class exercises, projects, student presentations, videos, written sales proposals, but also salesperson's shadowing (Hutto, 2016; Mullen et al. 2016), guest speakers (Agnihotri et al. 2014), and adaptive improvisation comedy or "improvisation" (Rocco and Whalen, 2014).

Some of these active learning methods are further examined as regards their usefulness and impact on personal skills in Table 1.

Table 1. Active learning methodologies overview

| METHOD | KEY TO SUCCESS | SKILLS |
|---|---|---|
| Sales presentations | −Suggested approach (eg. FEBA Feature, Evidence, Benefits, Approach)<br>−Specification of target audience<br>−Instructor and other students' feedback | Communication (Involving, Handling suggestions/objections, Incisivity, visual image, Improvisation/Adaptiveness) |
| Scenarios/roleplaying | −allowing the students to select skills on which they want to work<br>−varying the behaviours, needs, and concerns of the buyer<br>−providing critical feedback to the student(s) in the role-play and to any observers<br>−repetition | Organizing strategies and tactics<br>Teamwork<br>Problem solving<br>Negotiating<br>Communication and selling skills |
| Experiential assignments | −Selling experience (actual sale call)<br>−Planning a travel agenda<br>−Coaching | Organization<br>Budgeting<br>Interpersonal communication |
| Sales mentor (professional/practitioner) | −Observation and learning<br>−Analysis of KPA in the mentor industry/business<br>−Sales process and experience<br>−Role of technology (CRM etc) | Development of professional relationship/network<br>Observation<br>interpersonal communication<br>time management |

Source: Own elaborations on Inks and Avila (2008)

These techniques are important for developing hard and soft skills related to the salesperson's profession. As already stated, there are many ways to allow students to put the acquired knowledge into practice, also putting Universities and businesses in contact,

in various types of learning experiences, with targeted exercises that contain educational innovations (Rippé, 2016).

Speaking of innovation, Whalen and Coker (2016, 2017) showed many of the innovations in active learning applied to marketing and sales, including video infomercial exercises, online sales video-calls, sales theatre workshop and many others. To our knowledge, storytelling and movie making have never been used in sales education. The only examples of active learning applications connected with movies are video/film analysis (Alvarez 2015) or movie making experiences within communication and media studies (Kabaday 2012), social studies (Hofer and Owings Swan 2005) or technical education (Absi et al. 2018).

Furthermore, with reference to the  advanced or specific aspect of sales education, such as cross-cultural sales (Tuleja, 2014; Delpechitre and Baker, 2017; Herlache et al. 2018), some sales education programs are incorporating cross-cultural awareness and international selling skills, with cross-cultural roleplay (Cummins et al. 2013) or using web-based platforms and cultural assessment measures (Phelan 2019), improving students' chances to become successful international professionals. Finally, another absolutely relevant topic for contemporary sales is sales technology, which is, however, implemented and studied in a very limited way based on a review of the literature on innovative sales education (Cummins et al. 2020): some recommended methodologies are integration of sales technologies in roleplay and virtual reality exercises.

Project Description

The project described in this section illustrates the implementation of the proposed active methodology. The IN.K.A.M.S. Erasmus Plus project was co-funded by the European Union in 2017. It aimed to realize, pilot, disseminate and mainstream a new University learning course focused on International Sales & Key Account Management. The piloting of this new course was realized as an integrative project in five different University business courses: in Italy, Poland, Spain, Bulgaria and Slovenia. The integrative project was a half semester-long and it required students, as the final team-based assignment, to create short films dedicated to typical sales process situations. This assignment made up a significant portion of the students' grade.

Learning objectives

The key objective of this project was to allow students to acquire advanced knowledge and skills in the field of international Sales and Key Account Management and apply them in a lifelike experience. Sales strategy skills included formulating a sales strategy, monitoring sales results and performances, managing sales processes. Relationship selling and Key Account Management skills included identifying and managing the Key Account, negotiating, building customer relationships and understanding intercultural issues. Market analysis skills included conducting statistical analysis and using IT tools and interfaces on the field. Managing sales team skills included recruiting and training staff, designing a salesforce organization and coordinating the sales activity.

This project incorporated active learning by providing students with the opportunity to apply the sales concepts acquired in class and through the project educational material, to a lifelike situation and helped students to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Teams were required to attend lessons on storytelling, take inspiration from the lesson

topics and apply storytelling techniques ideating a storyboard. In this way students were required to rehearse old material, which improves retention (Anderson, 2000; Bacon and Stewart, 2006). For the final assignment they were asked to put into practice what they wrote in the storyboard, then shoot and make their short film.

Simulating what they are learning, students are challenged to think, talk, listen, read, write and reflect about the course content (Meyers, 1993).

Numerous benefits of active learning methodologies have been addressed in marketing and sales literature. For example, students involved in this approach developed a deeper conceptual under- standing of the material, and a greater appreciation for the discipline when compared with students involved in the same course taught with passive methods (Udovic et al. 2002). Moreover, the most effective active learning takes place in teams.

Method

At the beginning of the courses, the integrative project was presented, and students were asked to apply on a voluntary basis. The 221 students in the five University courses piloting this method were involved in all the project phases. It was divided into three steps (as described in the following Table 2): lectures, short experiential assignment, the Film process laboratories.

Participating students were asked to attend lectures both in the classroom and on the project e-learning platform on strategic sales management; coordination and management of sales relations, relationship selling and KAM (Key Account Management); market analysis, sales knowledge and ICT in sales; building, managing and leveraging a sales team salesforce management.

After that, students were involved in a short on-the-job training session in BtoB SMEs. This team-based experiential assignment consisted of understanding company business and environment, sales KPIs, activities and sales knowledge through interviews with the companies' representatives, delivering a final report for the company analysed with the findings and further recommendations. Benefits of the experiential learning in sales education were widely presented in literature (Alvarez et al., 2015; Chapman et al., 2015; Gray et al., 2012; Wahlers et al., 2014).

The aim of this phase was twofold: to add "a sense of realism that comes from having to prepare and present a report on a tight deadline" (Razzouk et al., 2003, p. 35); to give students a better understanding of selling and help them make better career choices enabling them to make good business contacts that could lead to future employment (Avila, 1991).

The third project phase regards  Movie education.

Movie education consists, as specified in the next paragraph, in the introduction of storytelling techniques by the professors in dedicated lectures, and in the making of short films by the students. These short films are conceived starting from the developed knowledge (class and e-learning) and experience (training on the job session). In this sense, Movie education differs from well-known techniques in sales education such as role playing and video taping, since students are not only encouraged to implement solutions for typical problems or a typical sales situation , but also to devise a story with a coherent

development. Compared to the mentioned techniques, Movie education shares the aims of further stimulating critical thinking, creativity and teamwork. Moreover, it is similar to the video modeling techniques, since short films can act as an educational moment both in the creation phase and in the viewing within different / subsequent classes or courses.

Implementation steps

At the beginning of the third part, students were asked to become familiar with the new methodology, the storytelling techniques, the storyboard, shooting and editing techniques, as described in Table 2. After presenting the storytelling methodology and techniques to the class, students were provided with the storyboard template to be used as a tool to develop their plot starting from the topic chosen among the course themes.
Then students were asked to form teams consisting of a number ranging from five to eight students.

Table 2. Project Development Guidelines

|  | Activity | Timing | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | Face to Face and E-learning lessons | Sessions of 34 hours (32h face to face + 2h of E-learning contents) | Traditional sales classroom lessons<br>E-learning lessons: 4 or 5 sales didactic modules divided into 12-16 units presented with short videos and additional materials as case studies or supplemental readings |
| II | Brief corporate experience | Short on- field experience of approx.one week | Workgroup analysis of companies' business processes carried out, data analysis, interview and produced a report |
| III | Film Process Laboratories |  |  |
|  | a) Presentation of the methodology | Session of 2-4 hours with 10 to 50 participants. | Introduction to movie education and presentation of the tool to be used as storyboard template to develop the didactic short-films |
|  | b) Improvement laboratories | Group session/s of 4-6 hours with 5-8 participants for each group and a group leader. It is recommended to have a moderator. | Starting from the topic chosen among the course themes, the participants have to consolidate the idea to develop the story, define the roles (actors, producers, video maker, scriptwriter) and the core elements of the story. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | c) Developing the storyboard | Group activity of 4-6 hours with 5-8 participants for each group and a group leader. | Put into play various dimensions (cognitive, valorial, emotional, relational) as a personal and professional development strategy; elaborate the narrative text and define the script. |
| | d) Shooting and editing | Group activity of 4-6 hours with 5-8 participants for each group and a group leader. | Application experience: the groups of students develop the storyboard by implementing the actual filmmaking, in full expressive and artistic freedom. There is no specific requirement on the quality of execution of the short films, only a check of the correctness of the sales content by the professor / coach, available for questions and clarifications. The members of the group set up the production and make the short film. |
| | e) Video presentation | "The première" lesson (depending on the number of groups in every class, circa 30 mins per group) | Introduction of the video in the classroom by the group leader, video sharing and evaluation: Within a dedicated lesson, the leading student of every team presents the short film developed within the group activity, introducing to the class the topic, the issues addressed and the development process (15 mins), and shows the short film to the professor/coach (assesment) and fellow students (peer review). |

Source: own elaboration based on IN.K.A.M.S. (2017)

It is generally accepted that active learning team-based activities allow students to become learning oriented and achieve their objectives (Michaelsen and Black 1994). In order to work on the storyboard, they have to consolidate? the idea in order to develop the story and define their roles as actors, producers, video makers, or scriptwriters; in this way they are introduced into a community of practice where people interact, share ideas and challenge each other (Forman 1994).

After having elaborated the script of the story, teams have to shoot and edit their story arriving at the most active part of the project. So, students move from the traditional passive learning approach to a more student-centered learning approach (Laverie, 2008; Labrecque et al. 2019).

Moreover, mirroring lifelike situations, applying team-based active learning, contributes to develop skills that are relevant and valuable in the workplace (Livingstone and Lynch 2002).

Project Assessment

Project benefits and challenges

The professors who conducted the course and guided the students in Movie education collected the student evaluation forms, which were structured on the following three different drivers: perception of learning approach, teamwork experience, competence acquired.

1.      Perception of learning approach: many respondents suggested that it enabled them to better understand the topics covered and increase their memorisation in a way that sales lessons do not allow; as a student highlighted "It was interesting to try something new, different, something that is not directly related to the standard learning style", "This part of the project was the most entertaining and creative".

2.      Teamwork experience: it emerges as a positive element in almost all the opinions of the interviewees who describe it as an enjoyable collaborative project activity "The film was the most enjoyable thing in the entire project, which we were happy to take part in and have fun at it.","It has given us the possibility to relate and to form a group also with the other colleagues of the University", "This was a fun task for everyone, and we got along very well with no arguments about the content of the video or anything like that.";

3.      Competencies acquired: students became familiar with storytelling and narratives as well as with the structure of scenarios. "It was useful, however, that we learned how to make a climax in movies and how to work in a video processing program.", "It was an occasion to deepen the storytelling.".

On the other hand, from a negative perspective, they asked for more instructions to shoot and edit videos and "pointed out that some of the participants in the project do not have the necessary equipment for recording and processing (i.e., suitable computers, programs etc.)."; moreover, someone suggested a final film competition "Perhaps students could evaluate the films of other groups and, thus, compete for the title of the best, which could be additional motivation."

Professors find the class interesting for students. Despite reporting initial hesitations due to the students' preceived increased workload, at the end they all agreed they were happy with the results. In the course of action, professors observed students' reactions, efforts and attempts to produce good results and noticed the students' satisfaction. The professors' evaluation of students' work was based on the results of the cognitive assessment demonstrated by the relevance and coherence between topics and story and video development, team work and student engagement. Tables 3 and 4 summarize students' and professors' impressions and quotations (Young and Hawes 2013).

13

### Table 3. Examples of Comments Provided by the Students

- This part of the project was the most entertaining and creative. The instructions from the mentor were clear. As a weakness, I would only point out that some of the participants in the project do not have the necessary equipment for recording and processing (i.e., sufficiently powerful computers, programs etc.).
- We really enjoyed filming the video. We had lots of laughs while doing it, we wanted to include some humour because our movie theme choice was alcoholism in the workspace, and we didn't want to make a gloomy video. This was a fun task for everyone, and we got along very well with no arguments about the content of the video or anything like that. I believe we did our job well, while we also followed the instructions on the video making.
- Making the video was fun, we did it once and we would do it again.
- We like this creative part of the project and it was an interesting way of studying. The biggest disadvantage was that educational videos took a long time before we prepared the video.
- The last part of the project or recording a video on a selected theme from the content that we learnt on the project, I find it very interesting. It was interesting to try something new, different, something that is not directly related to the standard learning style. We made that part together, as a team. Everyone had an individual job that he/she had to do in order to finally produce an appropriate video clip.
- The film was the most enjoyable thing in the entire project, which we were happy to make and have fun at it. I think that the focus of future projects should be somewhat more focused precisely in this way of working that attracts students. In addition, this was the only activity that really produced a final product that we can look at. Perhaps students could evaluate the films of other groups and thus compete for the title of the best, which could be an additional motivation. In any case, this will be one nice memory that will remain, and we will be able to look at it over the years; it will remind us of the times of student days that unfortunately expire…

Source: own elaborations on IN.K.A.M.S.

### Table 4. Examples of Comments Provided by the Professors

- Movie education was one of the most interesting and challenging experiences for the lecturers. Prepared as we are, we had to catch up with some areas and guidelines at the same time. It was educating for both sides in the process.
- Movie education class was well accepted by the students. This was a very mixed group of students, undergraduates, international students, Erasmus students and postgraduates. We had a special class-meeting and they immediately showed enthusiasm and interest. They got the idea and produced good videos seeing that for the majority this was their first experience of acting, writing the scenario etc. As a mentor, I was also in a learning process because this is not my specialty. When I evaluate the products-videos I think they are all good.

Source: own elaborations on IN.K.A.M.S.

Next, Table 5 illustrates the pros and cons of Movie education in sales, from the professors' perspective: the advantages include teamworking implementation, student engagement, creativity and learning by doing, whereas the disadvantages include limited time to implement the active learning tasks, the need for proper technical equipment.

Table 5. Identified (dis)advantages by professors

| Country | Plus (advantages) | Minus (disadvantages) |
|---|---|---|
| SLO | Students' motivation<br>Learning by doing approach - Different experience Group work<br>Different student-teacher relationship | Not necessarily for gaining new knowledge |
| IT | Learning by doing approach<br>Team Working<br>Creativity and collaboration | It takes considerable time to create the storyboard and video production. |
| ES | High commitment of the students. They were highly attracted by this new learning experience.<br>Students learn having fun. This increases the efficiency of the learning process.<br>Active participation of students during the learning process. | The Course should have a lecture on the narrative aspects of the audiovisual language<br>Basic treatment of the issues included in the video. A good story needs a lot of time.<br>Student lack of knowledge on technical aspects (ex., shooting with mobiles and/or editing a video with free software) |
| PL | Engaging, addictive process that brings joy.<br>Higher assimilation of knowledge due to direct and personal involvement.<br>Great opportunity to cooperate with the group. | Limited technical resources (necessity to train not only on storytelling, but also on technical aspects of recording)<br>Very hard to tell a good story in and advert of a few minutes.<br>To write a good story, you need much more experience. |
| BG | High level of interest and engagement of the students<br>Students learn and have a lot of fun at the same time. This increases engagement in the learning process.<br>Active participation of students during the learning process. | Students lack the knowledge of professional movie making and this left them with an impression that they were doing something but were not satisfied with the outcome.<br>A large part of the students refused to be actors. They did not want the video to be uploaded as a sample movie on the platform if they were the actors.<br>Studentsì lack knowledge on technical aspects (ex., shooting with mobiles and/or editing a video with free software). |

Source: own elaborations

Future Recommendations and Improvements

This case study seeks to contribute and respond to something that scholars and professionals have pointed out for years: the gap between the skills of today's sales

professionals and those of University students must be closed through active and innovative learning methodologies (Agnihotri et al. 2014).

The IN.K.A.M.S. project designed a learning framework to enrich and finalize knowledge on specific and targeted topics, such as those of the management of international sales and KAM. This, in itself, represents a novelty in the European University landscape, but above all the contribution of the classes, e-learning, the short company experiences and the film process laboratories served to propose a model that allows one to integrate passive and active learning methodologies to stimulate knowledge and skills.

In particular, from the point of view of hard skills, Movie education stimulates the ability to organise knowledge, planning, project management and communication, which are fundamental for sales professionals on the international scene (e.g. Delpechitre and Baker, 2017).

From the point of view of soft skills, on the other hand, teamwork skills, critical and lateral thinking, but also creativity and problem solving were certainly involved (e.g. Absi et al. 2018).

This methodology is unprecedented in sales education and could easily find space in both Universities and vocational training. In addition, this approach to communication and new technologies can serve as example material for further training, as an inspiration for the sales and marketing function in building new communication strategies, brand awareness and use of social media.

Other forms of contamination and collaboration of creative and artistic languages could, therefore, be considered to be applied in business University courses, to stimulate and involve students, such as graphic design, creative writing, theatrical representation, podcasts and much more.

Notes

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All the IN.K.A.M.S Project results may be found at https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2017-1-IT02-KA203-036707 .

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# Are networks a gateway to European funding? Considerations from a systematic literature review

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*Abstract*

*Internationalization is generally an intense and dynamic phenomenon that requires huge resources to be triggered and this is all the more evident for International New Ventures (INVs) because of the so-called liability of newness and liability of foreignness. In fact, INVs are more disadvantaged in the internationalization process due to the limited availability of resources such as human and financial capital. A systematic literature review of twenty-five articles, classified into four categories, was carried out to reveal the main mechanism by which INVs try to deal with the lack of resources through relational networks. This study seeks on the one hand to contribute to the literature on network theory in internationalization, focusing on one of the possible categorizations of networks - social and business networks - by interpreting and investigating the two-phase internationalization process (exploration and exploitation), from the point of view of the International New Ventures entrepreneurs; on the other hand, it allows to make the preliminary considerations of a broader project aimed at understanding if and how networks can be used in the internationalization process of INVs to access European funding.*

## Introduction

The issue of business internationalization represents a complex phenomenon that has received, in the last forty years, significant contributions from various areas, from economics to marketing and business strategy; in the last decade, the attention of scholars seems to have focused more on the theme of rapid internationalization. Internationalization is generally an intense and dynamic phenomenon that requires huge resources to trigger (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Hitt, et al., 2006;), this is all the more evident for International New Ventures (INVs) rather than for companies with gradual internationalization, due to the so-called liability of newness and liability of foreignness. In fact, INVs are more disadvantaged in the internationalization process due to the limited availability of resources such as human (Knight and Cavusgil, 2004) and financial (Weerawardena, et al. 2007) capital. According to the existing literature, the main mechanism through which INVs try to cope with the lack of resources is the use of networks (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994; Coviello 2006) and strategic alliances (Kale and Singh, 2009). Although there are several studies in the literature concerning the role of networks in internationalization, few refer to INVs, for this reason, it was decided to conduct a systematic literature review. The present study is part of a broader project, aimed at understanding if and how networks can be used in the internationalization process of INVs to access European funding. The intuition behind the combination of topics – funding and networks – lies in the fact that the scarcity of resources which characterizes the International New Ventures, could lead these companies to use both networks and European funding during the internationalization process precisely to compensate this lack. International New Ventures are considered as a subgroup of

international SMEs (M. Gabrielsson et al., 2008) for which the European Union provides various support tools, moreover they are associated with high-tech sectors (Oviatt e McDougall, 2005) for which the European Union provides various support tools and operate according to an "open innovation" model. These, in fact, tend to conduct innovation activities by "teaming up" (Chesbrough et al., 2006) or entering into strategic partnerships with other companies (Segers, 2013) in order to develop and absorb new knowledge and technologies so as to commercialize them through innovative products, thus creating networks between companies and large-scale institutions. The above considerations give rise to the need that is at the basis of this systematic review, namely, to seek a valid framework within which to position one's research activity (Kitchenham, 2004).

Methodology

A systematic review of the literature identifies, evaluates and analyzes past academic studies using a defined and structured methodology. In order to identify specific research questions. Among the reasons why a systematic review of the literature is undertaken, the most common are:to identify any gaps in current research in order to suggest further areas of investigation; to build a framework/background within which to appropriately place new research activities; to verify if the empirical evidence supports or contradicts the theoretical hypotheses, or if it is necessary to formulate new ones (Kitchenham, 2004).
A systematic review of the literature differs from the traditional review, or narrative, in the planning formality and in the execution methodology (Staples e Niazi, 2007): before conducting a review, the reviewer must define and document the protocol which he/she will use; describe the inclusion and exclusion criteria as part of the protocol; describe the revision and cross-checking processes (Kitchenham, 2004). A good systematic review of the literature should therefore be independently replicable. On the other hand, traditional, narrative review has the advantage of providing a general knowledge that covers an entire research topic.

In the present paper we have tried to conduct a rigorous and methodical review of the past literature, as close as possible to the standards of systematic methodology. In this regard, according to the guidelines provided by Tranfield, Denyer e Smart (2003), and to the subsequent comments by Kitchenham (2004), and Staples and Niazi (2007), the steps described below were carried out in the following order:
• Planning the review: the output of this phase is the review protocol, in which the purpose and procedures of the review are defined;
• Conducting the review: the main phase which leads to the listing of the selected publications and the extraction of data for each publication;
• Presentation of the results and discussion: once the studies to be examined for the review in question have been identified, and the relevant data extracted and summarized, the results are then described and interpreted by means of an initial descriptive analysis, also in tabular form, in which the author, year of publication, journal, research purpose and methodology used are indicated for the studies being analysed; and subsequently through a thematic analysis aimed at highlighting the key concepts and issues addressed by the examined authors.

Planning the review: identifying the purpose and developing the review protocol
The questions which we try to answer through this systematic review of the literature, are the following. Which studies have analysed the role of networks in the process of internationalization of the born globals? What are the characteristics of these studies and

what results have been achieved? What issues have been explored and what are the emerging gaps?

Once the purpose of the literature review had been identified, the relative, already existing, systematic reviews were selected (Jones et al.,2011; Bembom and Schwens, 2018).

As a basis for the development of the review protocol, the criteria of inclusion, exclusion and research process of the review by Bembom and Schwens (2018) were adapted to the present study as illustrated in the following table (Table 1).

In their review of the literature, Bembom e Schwens, starting in turn from the article by Jones (Jones et al., 2011) assembled a collection of 61 articles and divided them according to the main characteristics of network and on the basis of the two internationalization phases: pre and post internationalization.
Once the review protocol had been defined, in order to document the procedure followed and increase the reliability of the research, we proceeded to identify the articles of interest for this study.

The research was limited to articles published only in peer reviewed journals, accessible online and based on network theory, whose definitions of constructs reflected, respectively, for the networks the one given by Brass (Brass et al., 2004), and for International New Ventures, that of Oviatt and McDougall (1994), By network we therefore mean "a set of nodes and links that indicate the presence or absence of relationships between the nodes themselves. By nodes, we mean actors such as individuals, work units, organizations", and by INVs that kind of "business organization that, from inception, seeks to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries".

Definitions of INVs
Over the years, companies that begin the process of internationalization in their first years of life, have been named and defined in various ways by various authors.

INVs have been defined as "business organization that, from inception, seeks to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries" (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994, p. 49; McDougall et al., 1994, p. 470). A couple of years later, Knight and Cavusgil (1996, p. 11) called them "small, technology-oriented companies that operate in international markets from the earliest days of their establishment".

According to the definition of Madsen and Servais (1997), these are companies that do not follow the internationalization models in stages but look for opportunities in foreign markets already at their birth, taking advantage of the wealth of experience and knowledge of the entrepreneur himself and using already existing networks.

Rasmussen and Madsen (2002) focus their definition on foreign turnover defining them as companies "with an export percentage (compared to the total sale) of 25% or more, which have started exporting within three years after the firm's foundation".

Years after their first definition Knight and Cavusgil (2004), give a second one "young, entrepreneurial start-ups that initiate international business (typically exporting) soon after their inception".

Table 1. Review's protocol

| A. Inclusion criteria |
|---|
| 1. Studies based on network theory |
| 1. Relevant definitions and constructs:<br>    a. Network: "Set of nodes and bonds that indicate the presence or absence of relationships between the nodes themselves. By nodes, we mean actors such as: individuals, work units, organizations" (Brass et al.,2004).<br>    b. INVs: "Organizations that, from the moment of their establishment, seek to obtain a significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of products in various countries" Oviatt and McDougall (1994).<br>    c. Early internationalizer: "company that has not reached a stage of maturity and that is no more than 8 years old" (Morse, Fowler e Lawrence,2007). |
| a. Articles from peer reviewed Journals |
| a. Empirical, conceptual and review studies |
| a. Exclusion criteria: |
| a. Studies in which the main focus is on the nature of the company, or small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) |
| a. Studies that consider companies that internationalize after having reached an organizational status, i.e., the age of the companies is generally greater than 8 years from their establishment |
| a. Studies whose main focus is not international entrepreneurship |
| a. Studies whose main focus is domestic entrepreneurship, not to be confused with studies on national entrepreneurship with empirical evidence from a single country (case study), which are instead included in the research |
| a. Studies focusing on the cross-cultural variables of entrepreneurial orientation |
| a. Studies on transnational and / or immigrant entrepreneurship |
| a. Conference proceedings and curatorship |
| a. Commentaries and editorials |
| a. Studies focusing on International Entrepreneurship education or research techniques |
| a. Case studies for didactic purposes |
| a. Items not available electronically or by other reasonable means |
| a. Cross - country evaluations on entrepreneurial behavior |
| a. Research on comparative entrepreneurial internationalization |
| a. Articles that do not sufficiently define the type of network |
| a. Articles that use networks as a control variable |
| a. Selection process - I phase |
| a. Articles selected from the previous systematic review by Bembom and Schwens, 2018 |

> a.Articles from 1989 to 2019 conveyed by the first four journals according to the ranking according to the Academic Journal Guide 2018, for each of the following research areas:
>> a.International business and area studies: Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS); Journal of World Business (formerly Columbia JWB); African Affairs (AA); Asia Pacific Journal of Management (APJM)
>> b.General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility: Academy of Management Journal (AMJ); Academy of Management Review (AMR); Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ); Journal of Management (JM).
>
> a.Search by keywords:
>> a.Through: Scopus, Science Direct, Emerald
>> b.Keywords: "International entrepreneurship" and network, "Born globals" and network, "International new ventures" and network, "Early internationalization" and network
>
> a.Manual cross referencing
>
> a.Research process - Phase II:
>
> a.Examination of the articles in order to verify the presence / absence of the inclusion / exclusion criteria

Source: own elaboration

We excluded books, book chapters, presentations and conference proceedings in order to the maintain scientific rigour that peer-reviewed articles guarantee. Articles whose main focus was not international entrepreneurship were also excluded, therefore all studies addressing SMEs, empirical evidence of single state entrepreneurship and cross-cultural assessments.  Likewise, studies that do not define network typology and those using networks as control variable were also excluded.

Keyword research was carried out on three databases: first of all on Scopus, which makes it possible to narrow down the results according to one's own inclusion criteria and is considered as one of the  largest databases of abstracts and citations of peer-reviewed literature in the field of science, technology, medicine, social sciences and humanistic studies; secondly, on Science Direct and Emerald, even though research on the these last two databases did not lead to a significant extension of the results.

Conducting the review

The selection process, described in Table 1, included only articles from 1989 to 2019, drawn from the first four journals according to the ranking compiled by the Academic Journal Guide 2018, for the following research areas: International Business and area studies, General Management, Ethics, Gender and Social Responsibility.

From these results, after a first reading of the abstracts to identify compliance with the exclusion/inclusion criteria, we proceeded to read the whole article and the following macro-topics were identified: access and exchange of resources within the networks; market entry choices; network coordination mechanisms, network structure.

The category "access and exchange of resources within the networks", includes those articles which address the methods, objectives and characteristics through which the born globals use the networks to access tangible (physical and financial), intangible

(technologies, patents and copyrights, corporate reputation and culture) and human resources.

The category "market entry choices", includes articles that deal with the methods of selection and entry into the markets and how these are influenced or even determined by networks.

The macro-topic "network coordination mechanisms" includes articles that analyse tools such as trust, contracts and other social and reputational mechanisms in network governance.

Finally, among the selected articles, many concern the "network structure", that is, the influence of the type and size of the relational network, of the position and intensity of the link between the nodes, on the internationalization process of the INVs present in the network.

Social and Business Network

In the literature relational resources are traditionally distinguished based on the context of their relationship in social networks and business networks (also known as social and corporate networks or informal and formal relationships).

Social networks are defined as a set of connected links "developed by personal relationships" (Vasilchenko and Morrish, 2011, p. 90) in which the actors are informally connected to each other on a personal level (O'Donnell et al., 2001).

Business networks instead are defined as "a set of two or more connected business relationships, in which each exchange relationship is between business firms that are conceptualized as collective actors" such as competitors, suppliers, customers, administrations, government bodies and business partners (Anderson et al., 1994, p. 2; Kontinen and Ojala, 2011).

Primary and secondary networks

In their study of 2006, Mort and Weerawardena, define primary networks as the relationships already established by the entrepreneur and by the founders of born globals and which, when the company is founded, are inherited and used by it to identify and exploit the opportunities present in foreign markets. Secondary networks, instead, are built by the entrepreneur and by managers at a later stage and are used in the phase of opportunity exploitation to face competition on foreign markets.

Strong and weak ties

Strong or weak ties can be formed between the actors of the network. What is measured in this case is the degree of intensity or "a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services" (Granovetter, 1973) which characterize the tie between the two subjects in the network. According to this definition, weak ties imply disconnected relationships between firms, while strong ties imply more intense relationships (Sharma and Blomstermo, 2003). Contrary to what one might think, firms that have a larger number of weak ties, according to Sharma and Blomstermo, have an advantage over firms with

stronger ties. First of all, weaker relationships, by definition, make the structure of companies less rigid, allowing them greater autonomy and speed of adaptation even when conditions change and the relationship ends; moreover, maintaining closer ties involves a greater effort, also in terms of costs. Lastly, the knowledge exchanged within a weak relationship is more innovative or entirely new compared to what is exchanged in a strong relationship, as companies with strong ties tend to develop similar knowledge.

For the purposes of this study, the first macro-topic is particularly interesting, however, in order to have an overview of the literature as extensive and comprehensive as possible, it was decided to integrate the review process by key words, using the manual cross-referencing technique.

This research process allowed to identify 25 articles that address the issue of the role of networks in the rapid internationalization of INVs. The identified articles were then subjected to a descriptive and thematic analysis.

Results

The descriptive and thematic analysis of the articles identified by the systematic review is presented in the following pages.

Descriptive analysis of the results

The table below shows the results of the descriptive analysis of the results on the 25 identified articles. The articles were classified by author, year, research purpose and methodology used. Table 2. Overview of the studies included in the systematic review.

| n. | Author(s) | Year | Journal | Research aim | Methodology |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Coviello & Munro | 1995 | E J M | Examine how relational networks influence market development and marketing-related activities in international markets. | Qualitative |
| 2 | Coviello | 2006 | J I B S | Analyze the cases in which the INVs networks follow a linear evolution. Explore the dynamics of the network in terms of structure variation and interaction patterns in the various stages of evolution. | Qualitative |
| 3 | Coviello & Cox | 2006 | JIE | Analyze the dynamics of exchange and access to resources in INVs networks. More precisely, to study how the characteristics of the INVs network resources and the ways in which resources are exchanged vary in the different phases of evolution. | Qualitative |
| 4 | Han | 2006 | JIE | Examine the approach that startups use to achieve better internationalization performance through the establishment of share capital. | Conceptual |
| 5 | Mort & Weerawardena | 2006 | IMR | Studying the role that the ability to build relational networks has in the process of internationalization of Born Globals. | Qualitative |
| 6 | Wakkee | 2006 | JIE | Studying and mapping the development of international relational networks based on company emails. | Qualitative |

| 7 | Zhou, Wu and Luo | 2007 | JIBS | Provide an explanation of the influence of internationalization on corporate performance according to the logic of relational networks. | Quantitative |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Han | 2008 | JEC | Analyze how INVs create, manage and take advantage of relational bonds to increase their performance. | Conceptual |
| 9 | Kiss & Danis | 2008 | EMJ | Analyze the effects that the entrepreneur's personal networks have on the efforts that new companies make to internationalize in various national contexts. | Conceptual |
| 10 | Sasi & Arenius | 2008 | EMJ | Studying how the transformation of personal relationships into exchange relationships favors the early and rapid internationalization of INVs. | Qualitative |
| 11 | Freeman et al. | 2010 | IBR | Explain the interrelation between trust and inter-organizational co-dependence for the rapid generation of tacit knowledge and absorption capacity in the supply chains of smaller Born Globals. | Conceptual |
| 12 | Kiss & Danis | 2010 | JIE | Examine the role of relational networks in the internationalization process of INVs in the context of economies in transition. | Conceptual |
| 13 | Tolstoy | 2010 | E & RD | Explain the links between network development and knowledge creation in business relationships. | Quantitative |
| 14 | Ellis | 2011 | JIBS | Studying the ways in which entrepreneurs identify opportunities to establish exchange relationships in international contexts. | Quantitative |
| 15 | Evers & O'Gorman | 2011 | E & RD | Analyze how entrepreneurs identify foreign markets and customers. | Qualitative |
| 16 | Mainela and Puhakka | 2011 | IJEV | Studying how entrepreneurs use relationships to create the basis for creating forms of INVs. | Qualitative |
| 17 | O'Gorman & Evers | 2011 | IMR | Studying how, within a relational network, an intermediate node such as an export promotion organization, it can influence the internationalization of new enterprises located in peripheral regions. | Qualitative |
| 18 | Vasilchenko & Morrish | 2011 | JIM | Examine the role of social and business networks in the process internationalization of high-tech BGs. | Qualitative |
| 19 | Yu et al. | 2011 | SMJ | To study the role that relational networks have for INVs in accelerating sales in foreign markets. | Quantitative |
| 20 | Pettersen & Tobiassen | 2012 | JIE | Examine the role of networks in the various life stages of academic spin-offs, particularly in the first phase of the life cycle. | Qualitative |
| 21 | Sigfusson and Harris | 2013 | IBR | To analyze whether and how having an internal market can influence the portfolio of relationships developed by the entrepreneurs of software producing BGs. | Qualitative |

| 22 | Nowiński & Rialp | 2016 | JSB M | Emphasize the importance of networks in the gestation of new international initiatives, in particular through their impact on the perceptions of new entrepreneurs. | Qualitat ive |
| 23 | Veilleux et al. | 2018 | IJEI M | Explore the paths that are taken by new entrepreneurs to find opportunities in foreign markets. | Qualitat ive |
| 24 | Ripollès & Blesa | 2018 | C J AS | Investigate the types of links that contribute to the development of corporate network management activities. Check whether these activities improve the performance of the companies involved in these relationships. | Quantit ative |
| 25 | Ryan et al. | 2019 | IMR | Explain how some Born Globals exploit the rich social capital of their horizontal local network to accelerate the process of entry and growth in international markets. | Qualitat ive |

CJAS= Canadian Journal of Administrative Science, E&RD= Entrepreneurship & Regional Development, EJM= European Journal of Management, EMJ= European Management Journal, IBR= International Business Review, IJEIM=  International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management, IJEV= International Journal of Entreprenurial Venturing, IMR= International Marketing Review, JEC= Journal of Enterprise Culture,  JIBS= Journal of International Business Studies, JIE= Journal of International Entrepreneurship, JIM= Journal of International Marketing, JSBM= Journal of Small Business Management, SMJ= Strategic Management Journal.From the selection of the articles carried out, the first was published in 1995, even though 1989 was chosen as the starting year for the research, the year in which McDougall's first article on business internationalization was published.  From Coviello's first exploratory analysis (1995), about ten years pass before other researchers connect the rapid development of companies in foreign markets with networks. Particular attention is given to the subject in the years 2010-2011 (as shown in the graph below); years that immediately follow the publication of Johanson and Vahlne (2009) in which they correct the behavioural model, previously developed by them, in the light of other variables that they had not considered in the Seventies.

Figure 2.1: Number of articles per year of publication
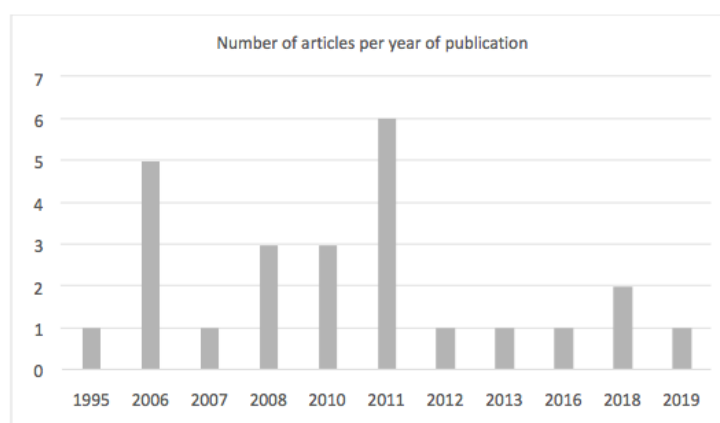


Source: own elaboration

Looking at the data related to the journals that published the articles covered in this study, one can see that most of them belong to International Entrepreneurship area. In detail, the selected papers were published in 14 different journals, presented by number of articles published in the following Figure. The journal that published the largest number of articles based on the review topic is the Journal of International Entrepreneurship, where five articles were published, followed by the International Marketing Review and Journal of International Business Studies where, in both cases three articles were published.

Figure 2.2: Distribution of articles per Journal
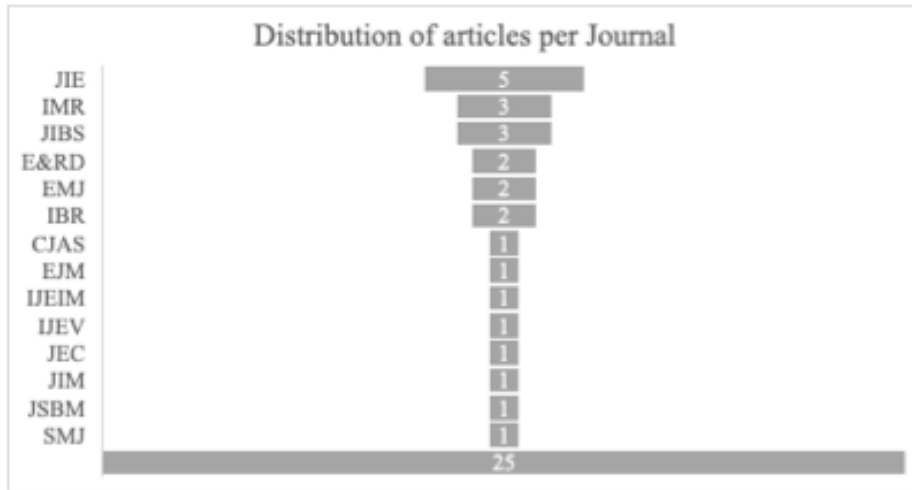


Source: own elaboration

A consideration should be made about the articles published in the Journal of International Entrepreneurship, where the highest density of conceptual articles is found. As can be seen in the following Figure, most of the selected papers use a qualitative methodological approach, and only in five of the twenty-five selected papers, is a quantitative methodology used.

Figure 2.3: Classification of articles by methodology
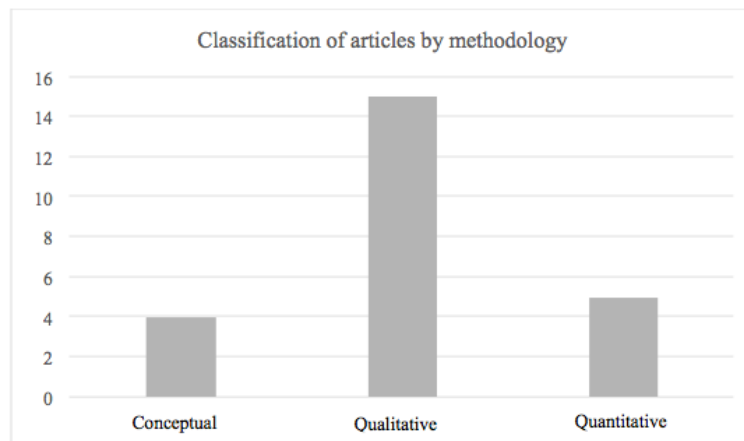


Source: own elaboration

Almost all the qualitative studies, with the exception of articles by Evers and O'Gorman (2011) in which the Critical Incident Method is used independently or in combination with the case study, adopt the case study as a methodology, mainly carried out through semi-structured interviews. The reason behind this choice could lie on the research purpose, as shown in Table 2, in fact, most of the selected articles aim to investigate the ways in which networks influence entry choices in foreign markets and the procurement of resources; and a question such as "how" can be best answered with qualitative research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003; Zou and Ghauri, 2010). Case studies are also often used to better understand a complex problem or phenomenon, in which hypotheses are difficult to identify and define before data collection.

Nevertheless, the choice of methodology could have been influenced by the recommendation to use the case study technique made by Rialp et al. (2005) in their literature review in International New Ventures.

According to Eisenhardt (1989), i.e. the exhortation to use more case studies, in particular from four to ten, in order to guarantee a reliable analysis process with a sufficient number of data without creating an overload during analysis; seven of the thirteen articles that used the case study as a qualitative technique are based on multiple case studies , in a number ranging from four to ten; only one article (Ryan et al., 2019) used more case studies (sixteen) and also only one article (Maninela and Puhakka) is based on the empirical evidence of a single case study. Multiple case studies give a greater understanding of the phenomenon and generate more detailed insights (Yin, 2003).

The articles among those identified for this study that use the quantitative technique were carried out through the administration of a structured questionnaire to a large number of companies. Most quantitative studies have adopted the approach of structural equation models (SEM, Structural Equation Models), which represent a multivariate statistical analysis technique aimed at expressing in a simplified and formalized way the relationships between the constructs of a theory or parts of it, allowing to verify the consistency of the hypothesized model with empirical data.

The prevalent use of a qualitative methodology and the presence of conceptual studies can be considered representative of a relative thematic novelty.

Thematic analysis of the results

Some important recurring topics emerged from the reading of the twenty-five articles. The presentation of the results of the thematic analysis responds to the invitation Webster and Watson (2002) to write "concept centric" reviews. Therefore, rather than presenting the concepts of the individual authors, the thematic analysis presented in the next paragraph is structured by macro-topics.

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Table 3: Thematic Matrix

| n . Paper | Author(s) - Year | Access and exchange of resources within the networks | Market entry choices | Network coordination mechanisms | Network structure |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Coviello e Munro, 1995 | X | X | | |
| 2 | Coviello, 2006 | | | | X |
| 3 | Coviello e Cox, 2006 | X | | | |
| 4 | Han, 2006 | | | | X |
| 5 | Mort and Weerawardena, 2006 | X | | | |
| 6 | Wakkee,2006 | | | | X |
| 7 | Zhou, Wu e Luo, 2007 | | | X | |
| 8 | Han,2008 | | | | X |
| 9 | Kiss e Danis, 2008 | | | | X |
| 10 | Sasi e Arenius, 2008 | | | | X |
| 11 | Freeman et al., 2010 | | | X | |
| 12 | Kiss e Danis, 2010 | | | | X |
| 13 | Tolstoy, 2010 | X | | | |
| 14 | Ellis, 2011 | X | | | |
| 15 | Evers e O'Gorman, 2011 | X | | | |
| 16 | Mainela and Puhakka, 2011 | | X | | |
| 17 | O'Gorman e Evers, 2011 | | X | | |
| 18 | Vasilchenko e Morrish, 2011 | X | | | X |
| 19 | Yu et al., 2011 | X | | | X |
| 20 | Pettersen e Tobiassen, 2012 | | X | | |
| 21 | Sigfusson ed Harris, 2012 | | | X | |
| 22 | Nowiński e Rialp, 2016 | X | | | |

| 23 | Veilleux et al., 2018 | | X | | |
| 24 | Ripollès e Blesa, 2018 | | | | X |
| 25 | Ryan et al., 2019 | X | | | |

Access and exchange of resources within networks

This category includes all the articles that address the methods and objectives through which the International New Ventures use networks to access or exchange tangible, intangible or human resources.

Although there is no one reason why companies use networks to guarantee rapid internationalization, Coviello and Cox (2006) reveal that companies use networks specifically to exchange physical and financial resources during the establishment of the company, and in particular, they underline how the exchange of financial resources is more frequent in the early development phases of the company rather than in the following year, due to the desire to maintain a more independent status as the company progresses.

As with physical and financial resources, in the same way companies use the intangible resources of the networks to which they belong to start the internationalization process. In the discussion below, by intangible resources we mean knowledge, information and reputation. In particular, new companies require their network contacts to have knowledge of foreign markets and this occurs so that they can compensate for their lack of experience in international markets and, in turn, be able develop export capacity (O'Gorman and Evers, 2011); how long it takes for the results of this exchange of knowledge to be recognizable on foreign sales depends, however, on the type of knowledge exchanged (Yu et al., 2011): while the exchange of marketing knowledge produces and increase in foreign sales in the early stages of the internationalization process, technological knowledge has full effect on foreign sales only over time (Yu et al., 2011).

The results of the most recent study (Ryan et al., 2019) included in this literature review show how active adhesion to a local horizontal network can be exploited by the Born Globals to acquire knowledge of the international market and clients; this is due to the mutual benefit mechanism of sharing common information, within the network, on international clients.

Regarding access to information about the opportunities or exchange of information, several empirical studies have demonstrated that business contacts are the best mechanism for identifying opportunities in foreign markets (Coviello e Munro, 1995). In fact numerous studies have addressed how contacts of relational networks help new companies to evaluate and explore opportunities (e.g. Mort and Weerawardena, 2006; Vasilchenko & Morrish, 2011). However, some (Coviello & Munro, 1995) have not hesitated to point out that while the initial network of a company in the post-internationalization phase often acts as a catalyst for future opportunities to internationalize, in other cases the initial network can constitute a limit for the company's opportunities

Market entry choices

This topic includes articles dealing with methods of market selection and entry and how networks can influence or even determine them.

Starting from the first study identified in chronological order (Coviello & Munro, 1995), it was shown, in this case through multiple case studies supported by structured questionnaires, how the prevailing impact in the choice of the initial target country and of the entry methods, are to be attributed to the network of the main commercial partners of the company in question. In a subsequent study Vasilchenko & Morrish (2011) identified the entrepreneur's relational network as the main conditioning factor in making the choice. In the same yea, through an empirical study carried out using the critical incident technique, Evers and O'Gorman, (2011) demonstrated how the choice of the target country and the methods of market penetration are attributable to the entrepreneur's personal and commercial contacts.

Other studies show that Born Globals, in their pre-internationalization phase, use relational networks to gain credibility. In their study on academic spin-offs, Pettersen and Tobiassen (2012) show that the latter gain legitimacy from their academic network through publications and conferences. The same concept is reaffirmed in the following years, highlighting how for spin-offs the network of contacts of the incumbent operator can compensate for the lack of experience in the sector by acting as a source of transfer of opportunities and that, for this reason, contacts with the organization of origin, be it a university, laboratory or business incubator must be constantly fostered (Veilleux et al., 2018).

Mainela and Puhakka, (2011) and O'Gorman and Evers (2011), also show the positive influence of network contacts such as foreign promotion agencies and board members who have a good reputation at an international level. In this regard Mainela and Puhakka (2011) conduct a single case study in which they demonstrate that the Finnish software companies obtain credibility and legitimacy when their initial relational network includes board members with good international reputation.

Network coordination mechanisms

This category, in agreement with what was defined on the previous literature review on the subject. (Bembom and Schwens, 2016), includes studies that deal with trust, contracts and social and relational mechanisms as network governance tools.

The traditional coordination mechanisms for the exchange of resources are contracts, however these are particularly time-consuming and cost-intensive mechanisms, as the different laws and commercial practices of countries and the need to review these contracts increase the efforts required of the Born globals, especially in the early stages of their internationalization; therefore, the main mechanism that favours the exchange of resources between the actors of a relational network is trust.

Fiduciary relationships are based and developed over time, therefore in the very early stages of internationalization companies will carry out small exchanges of resources in order to minimize the error and, to be exact empirical evidence shows how INVs start their internationalization process thanks to the launch of small joint projects with potential commercial partners in order to test their reliability. Although it is difficult for Born globals to

quickly build trustworthy relationships with network partners, the literature highlights some factors that can promote their development; these include:

- the similarities between network partners (e.g. shared visions and common interests);
- the skills of the network partners (complementary skills and managerial competencies);
- external factors, in particular strong competition in the market, which unites network partners (Freeman et al, 2010).

Network structure

This last category comprises all those articles concerning the size of the network and the intensity of the tie that is established between the actors.

The structure of the network influences the quantity and diversity of the exchange of resources, typically the size of the network of the Born globals, records a value in terms of number of contracts, lower at the beginning but increasing over time (Coviello, 2006); in fact, the early stages of internationalization, efforts focus on the exploitation of existing links rather than on the search for new ones (Sasi & Arenius, 2008).

From studies that analyse the actor's position within the relational network, it clearly emerges that the assumption of a central position in the network generates substantial benefits, but it is also acknowledged that these benefits exist only under certain conditions and at a stage which is subsequent to that of internationalization.

In the early stages of internationalization, the Born globals generally benefit from their central location which allows them to have good communication with other members of the network; however, once they start to increase the number of international contacts, they risk losing their central position, also due to communication barriers; in this regard, the empirical evidence in Ellis's study (2011) on a sample of 230 companies, shows just communication barriers can hinder the exchange of resources through networks.

The increase in the number of contacts within the network during the internationalization process (Coviello, 2006), not only generates effects on communication, but could also affect the strength of the ties.

As far as the strength of the ties is concerned, strong ties are particularly important in foreign markets where Born globals are faced with institutional gaps (Kiss & Danis, 2008). In this regard, strong ties are associated with frequent communication and the transfer of tacit knowledge through intense cooperation. However, Han (2006) shows that negative implications can also be related to strong links as they are often associated with less innovative resources and high establishment costs.

On the other hand, weak ties provide a higher degree of differentiation of information for new companies (Kiss & Danis, 2008), they are in fact associated with new and innovative resources coming from a variety of network members and increase the speed of internationalization of new companies (Kiss & Danis, 2008).

Regarding the structural gaps Coviello (2006) notes that the exchanged resources are less diversified when the network is dense in the pre-internationalization phase, while Yu et al. (2011) highlight that technical knowledge exchanged in high-density networks is less

innovative than the knowledge exchanged in lower density networks, although in general, dense networks increase the positive effect of market knowledge.

Overall, it can be said that dense networks reduce the probability of structural holes and that, according to the results of the study by Yu et al. (2011), dense networks are considered unfavourable as regards the transfer of new knowledge, however the same study reveals that network cohesion appears to have a double value in the pre-internationalization phase:

- positive for the transfer of marketing knowledge,
- negative for the exchange of innovative technological knowledge.

Conclusions

From the results that emerged for the review of the literature, a first consideration concerns that small number of articles selected as they comply with the questions underlying the review; secondly, clear research gaps emerged from the thematic analysis, which are presented in the following paragraphs, for each identified macro-topic.

Regarding the category "Market entry choices", although several studies have shown that belonging to a network of actors with a good reputation positively influences the credibility of the Born Globals, there are no studies that concern the opposite phenomenon, that is the influence of a bad reputation (Mainela e Puhakka 2011).

Concerning the topic "network coordination mechanisms", since no subsequent studies were found, please refer to the gaps identified in the previous review (Bembom e Schwens, 2016, p.689).

Among the studies regarding "Network structure", although the topic is suitable for quantitative analysis, there are no studies that measure the intensity of ties and the density of the networks in order to determine their influence on the diversity of available resources available to companies during the internationalization process.

In the category "Access and exchange of resources within networks" two gaps are evident:

- even though most of the articles address the procurement or exchange resources, no articles were identified that examine how the exchange of human resources evolves through networks during the internationalization of companies;
- there are no studies on the ways in which financial capital is exchanged through the networks and how these ways evolve during the internationalization process.

In the previous review of the literature (Bembom and Schwens, 2016), it was suggested that future studies on the topic address the procurement of financial resources through crowdfunding, since the Born globals have difficulty in attracting financial capital from their home/local? environment, and crowdfunding could help to make the company internationally visible and increase the number of potential investors; in this regard, a recent study has shown that the entrepreneur's network influences the success of crowdfunding (Mollick, 2014).

Nevertheless, even though crowdfunding may be functional in the first phase of internationalization, it is not a suitable means for financing/raising finance during the later

stages; as companies at this stage avoid additional equity financing to maintain their independence, they will therefore be more likely to use forms of credit from financial institutions in their networks.

On the basis of the above observations, and of the ideas and recommendations that emerged from the studies analysed are identified the research gaps and the preliminary considerations regarding the use of networks as a gateway to access European finding. The first recommendation we refer to appeared in the previous literature review: "given the initial need of the Born Globals for financial capital as they internationalize, we recommend further research on these dynamic developments" (Bembom and Schwens, 2016). The second recommendation appeared in a review prior to that of Bembom and Schwens (2016), already in 2003, in the review by Hoang and Antoncic (2003) according to whom a more in-depth analysis was necessary in a process-oriented perspective. This affirmation is subsequently confirmed also in the study by Slotte-Kock and Coviello (2010).

A large part of the financing and co-financing instruments, directly or indirectly managed, made available by the European Union, are intended for internationalization projects, to support small and medium-sized enterprises and to support sectors with high technological value or high added value; for this reason, it is reasonable to ask if and how these tools had a role in the process of internationalization of INVs, and in particular, if and how they helped companies to overcome the typical disadvantages of the category. Previous studies, particularly the one conducted by Vasilchenko and Morrish (2011), had shown how relational networks helped INVs overcome some of the typical disadvantages, with particular reference to the exploration and exploitation phases of the internationalization process, and to informal contacts (social networks) and formal contacts (business networks), in the same way it could be investigated whether what was highlighted in the above-mentioned study, on the New Zealand sample belonging to the ICT sector, is also verified for INVs belonging to different sectors and whether and how the overcoming of the disadvantages typically borne by INVs could be overcome also thanks to European funding.

This study has several limitations. The first limitation is related to the first phase of the review, the protocol (inclusion / exclusion criteria and research process) was adapted to the present study, based on the previous review by Bembom and Schwens, 2018), rather than being reformed and even if it has some strengths, particularly in terms of the validation of the search process, makes the research lose an element of innovation. the second limitation refers to the thematic systematization by macro-categories which in turn could have been further deferred by internationalization phase (exploration and exploitation).

Finally, this study in addition to contributing to the academic literature it may provide managers awareness of the use they can make of networks and it is particularly evident from the results concerning the role of social mechanisms in fostering resource transfer between network partners.

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# Smart service quality and customer happiness: evidence from the UAE public sector organizations' customers' point of view

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*Abstract*

*The United Arab Emirates (UAE) government has invested substantially toward improving smart government services and increasing customer happiness in public sector organizations. Nevertheless, uncertainties remain concerning the impact of smart service quality on customer happiness. From a theoretical standpoint, evaluations of the impact of smart service quality on customer happiness in the Middle East are scarce. Hence, it is necessary to identify the element of smart service quality (i.e., security, authentication, and availability) with the greatest impact on customer happiness. This study examines the relationship between the quality of smart services of public sector organizations in the UAE and customer happiness. It analyzes quantitative data through a survey of 505 customers of UAE public sector organizations, who availed smart government services in the past 12 months. The questionnaire comprised two variables: 'smart service quality' and 'customer happiness'. Reliability, validity, and multiple regression tests show that of the three smart service quality variables, security exerted the greatest impact on customer happiness. These empirical findings provide valuable insights for decision-makers and public policymakers seeking to manage customer happiness through effective implementation of smart service quality elements as well as a theoretical foundation and recommendations for future research avenues.*

*Keywords: M-Government services; Smart service quality; Customer happiness; United Arab Emirates*

Introduction

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between smart service quality and customer happiness at an aggregate level (which considers all elements of smart service quality). However, knowledge of the relationships between individual elements of smart service quality and customer happiness remains limited (e.g., Al-Khouri, 2012; Alsaadi et al, 2018; Sharma 2018). This research offers new insights that can help bridge such gaps in the literature. It aims to assess the impact of smart service quality (overall and as individual elements) on customer happiness. Several studies (e.g., Parasuraman et al, 2005; Fassnacht and Koese, 2006) have argued that online service quality differs in several dimensions from traditional service quality because of distinct service patterns. In other words, these studies have highlighted the need to adopt a different service quality model in e-commerce contexts to ensure customer happiness. The significance of such an adoption is evident in the context of public sector organizations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Shareef et al (2014) conceptualized the service quality offered by the smart mobile platform mGov (mobile government). Almuraqab and Jasimuddin (2017) add

that the new mGov initiative accelerates government efforts toward the establishment of smart cities, which is a part of the global smart city initiative. Through this platform, the UAE government intends to provide customers with information on the use of smart devices, including information on high-speed wireless connections, high-quality smart services, and easily accessible information that is accurate (Almuraqab and Jasimuddin, 2017). This platform facilitates mobile-technology-enabled transactions between the government and its customers. This implies that the government requires an effective smart service structure to perform and operate efficiently. Hence, governments must invest in sophisticated information and communication technologies, such as high-quality web portals that promote the adoption of smart government services and increase customer happiness (Almuraqab and Jasimuddin, 2017).

Several studies globally have focused on the importance of happiness in businesses and customers particularly, a constantly moving target that changes with place and time (Helliwell et al, 2019; Gong and Yi, 2018; Wu et al, 2017; Shaban Abdelmoteleb et al, 2017; Joshanloo and Weijers, 2014; Hellén and Sääksjärvi, 2011; Mathews, 2012; Pflug, 2009). For instance, Hellén and Sääksjärvi (2011) assert that hedonic services are associated with customer happiness and should be offered to enhance service experience and increase customers' positive feelings while perceiving service quality. Thus, customer happiness remains an interesting area of research for decision-makers in public sector organizations and academicians worldwide (Wolf et al, 2020). Customer (citizen) happiness is becoming a key success indicator of efficient governments globally in the context of government services, policies, and decision-making (Helliwell et al, 2019). From 2016 to 2018, happiness was evaluated worldwide by the Global Happiness and Well-being Policy Report and World Happiness Report, which provides insights about governments' performance regarding happiness and well-being. In the World Happiness Report 2018, for example, Finland is ranked first, Denmark second, and the UAE twenty-first among 156 participating countries; the UAE, nevertheless, ranks first among Arab countries. Such rankings give credibility to governments' performance toward happiness and simultaneously pressure them to maintain or increase happiness depending on their rankings (Helliwell et al, 2019). Furthermore, happiness is highly associated with substantial government services (such as education, police and security, water and electricity, road construction, housing, and health), which, because of their nature, are solely offered by public sector organizations and have a direct impact on customers' lives, perceptions, and expectations, and consequently their happiness and well-being (Helliwell et al, 2019; Hellén and Sääksjärvi, 2011). This is unlike private sector services, which can be substituted by other service providers at any time as per a customer's perceptions and expectations. Regionally, the UAE government has excelled in numerous happiness-related strategies, agendas, and initiatives. For instance, the UAE government announced the formation of the first Ministry of Happiness in the world, which aimed to regulate the happiness agenda within all public sector organizations of the UAE (Ahmed and Agarwal, 2018). This agenda revealed that the minister of state for happiness and the director general of the Prime Minister's Office directly report the happiness agenda to the prime minister, to emphasize customer happiness toward perceived government services through the Customer Happiness Formula/Charter. However, these government efforts are still undeveloped (they commenced in 2016), and further research is required in this context (Ahmed and Agarwal, 2018; D'raven and Pasha-Zaidi, 2015).

The aforementioned facts indicate a gap between the literature and practice. Although some studies indicate the successful deployment of smart government services in the UAE, the country needs to evolve in several areas of smart service quality (Al-Khouri 2012; Alsaadi et al, 2018) and assess its impact on customer happiness (Ahmed and Agarwal, 2018; Shaban Abdelmoteleb et al, 2017; D'raven and Pasha-Zaidi, 2015). There are concerns related to whether technology has a service delivery expertise pinpointed in the literature and whether the UAE government has employed the right application of the smart service quality framework and assessed its impact on customer happiness. Particularly, smart government service transformation strategies and customer happiness have become critical goals of the UAE government's national agenda.

These unresolved questions indicate that there are a limited number of studies exploring the impact of smart service quality on the happiness of the customers of public sector organizations in the UAE (Ahmed and Agarwal, 2018; Shaban Abdelmoteleb et al, 2017; Ministry of Happiness, 2017; D'raven and Pasha-Zaidi, 2015). This gap motivates this research on the public service organizations in the UAE that offer mobile-enabled public services. Given this context, this study examines the relationship between smart service quality and customer happiness. Studies (e.g., Alsaadi et al, 2018; Al-Khouri, 2012; Shaban Abdelmoteleb et al, 2017; Bishr, 2017; Ahmed and Agarwal, 2018; and D'raven and Pasha-Zaidi, 2015) indicate that the UAE government must fulfill customers' requirements and ensure their happiness to strengthen the smart service quality framework in the country. This is particularly significant considering the recent dramatic increase in the UAE government's attention (from 2016 to 2020) toward implementing smart government services and customer happiness. The aforementioned research gaps, which are related to the assessment of the relationship between smart service quality and customer happiness, were used to develop the objectives, questions, and hypotheses of this research.

Literature Review

Smart service quality refers to controlling the quality of smart services offered remotely through smart devices, without any physical interaction between the service providers and customers. It entails the online control of the contents of the smart services or the resolution of the feedback of the customers perceiving the quality (Shin, 2015). It is necessary to define smart service quality because it provides a basis for controlling services and informing consumers about their scope and use. Similarly, the information serves to guide consumers, thereby enhancing the smart service portal's functionality, navigability, and interactivity (Scholl and AlAwadhi, 2016).

Evolution of Smart Service Quality in Public Sector Organizations

Smart service quality is becoming a global phenomenon (Accenture, 2004); over 173 countries had developed government platforms and websites by 2003, according to a United Nations report (Curtin, 2006). For instance, Grant and Chau (2005) state that mobile government has become a technological phenomenon because of its transformative nature, affecting processes and technological aspects of life that require proper control. This change has compelled governments to adopt various visions and agendas to control the quality of mobile government (m-government)

services, where each government has its unique requirements and economic, political, and social factors. Some governments focus on a few key elements, such as service delivery channels and mobile (smart) service quality elements, whereas other governments will balance many other strategic objectives (Grant and Chau, 2005).

According to Wünderlich et al (2015), public service organizations agree that the technology dimension of business has been a major driving force behind the dramatic transformation in today's online government services provision. Meuter et al (2005) and Rust and Huang (2014) agree as they confirm the critical impact of technology on modern service organizations, which is governed by the mobile service quality (MS-QUAL) framework.

An automated service delivery method provides a unique opportunity to upsurge m-government services in public sector organizations (Castells, 2011). In cementing this assertion, Almarashdeh and Alsmadi (2016) outline some of the incentives of adopting online government services, which include improved accessibility to government services, more transparency on the government processes, and increasing government efficiency while delivering public services. Furthermore, Almarashdeh and Alsmadi (2016) emphasize the need for future studies to highlight the importance of outlining m-government services and the usefulness of these services from the customers' point of view.

Thus, digital government services are similar to smart government services in that the creation and distribution of information and government services occur through a wide range of information and communication technologies, such as laptops, desktop computers, and mobile phones (Gil-Garcia et al, 2016). It is worth noting that the terminologies of digital, online, and m-government services slightly differ in meaning, but their application in real life is almost the same, as they all revolve around the nature of information, online availability of services, the mode of distributing services, and accessing services by governments and citizens/customers (Gil-Garcia et al, 2016). Internet and information technology-based services control and shape the way information spreads from government to customers and vice versa (Mengistu et al, 2009).

Regionally, Alsaadi et al (2018) claim that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and the UAE have launched several strategies to lead smart government services offered to customers through mobile phones and link them to customer happiness; this requires further investigation.

In conclusion, governments worldwide have adopted different strategies to deliver online government services by utilizing different means of service delivery channels such as smart mobile phones. This notion has led governments to invest heavily in developing their government technology infrastructure (e.g., investing in developing digital platforms, portals, and secured government networks). However, studies have revealed that all forms of digital government services require definite smart service quality elements (e.g., security, authentication, and availability) to control and direct these government efforts toward increasing customer happiness (Gil-Garcia et al, 2016; Mengistu et al, 2009; Grant and Chau, 2005). The following section comprehensively discusses the elements of smart service quality.

Elements of Smart Service Quality

Numerous researchers have discussed smart service quality elements globally, and many have identified that governments should consider certain smart service quality elements in public sector organizations before adopting smart government services.

For example, Acco Tives Leão and Canedo (2018) recommend that all customers agree on smart government services in public sector organizations should be reliable, innovative, and easily accessible to add value to their lives. Additionally, implemented smart government services must start with the essentials and remain impactful on customers' lives to enable them to benefit from expedient, secure, and accessible government services, which will encourage them to further use these services (Acco Tives Leão and Canedo, 2018).

Furthermore, Bertot et al (2012) cited a study conducted by Akram and Malik (2012) on the essential elements to be evaluated in the implementation of quality digitized/smart services (e.g., infrastructure, capacity, ecosystems, partnerships, value, delivery channels, security, privacy, and authentication). Sharma (2018) identified eight elements of e-service quality in public service organizations such as website design (web portals for mobile phones), informativeness, ease of use, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, security, and system availability.

As Al-Khouri (2012) states in his study on the UAE e-government strategy, the system must log any user out after being inactive for a specific period. Security is a critical element of government services in assuring smart service quality, whereas most m-government services rely heavily on wireless networks that link customers to the portals of smart government services and any incident of the vulnerability of the system to attack by cyber hackers, pirates, and identity thieves can crash or disturb government service offerings. Hence, Al-Khouri (2012) explains that a critical element of service quality is the system's ability to enhance the privacy and confidentiality of customers' information, because all smart government services are exposed to cyberpiracy attacks. Personal identification information and the nature of requests should be unavailable to subsequent users to enhance the privacy and security of the personal profiles of users in the system.

Furthermore, Dwivedi et al (2014) propose four online service quality elements (i.e., connectivity, interactivity, understandability, and authenticity) as the formative elements of m-government service quality. Applying such online service quality elements helps public service organizations to better understand customers' needs and expectations, which will help increase customer happiness. Table 1 presents the elements of smart service quality, as discussed by several researchers.

Customer Happiness

Customer happiness depicts a scenario in which customers are completely content with the goods and services that a company offers; these customers do not find any issues in engaging with their service providers (Ball and Barnes, 2017). According to recent studies (e.g., Wirtz and Langer, 2017; Ball and Barnes, 2017; Shaban Abdelmoteleb et al, 2017; Edwards et al, 2009; and De Keyser and Lariviere, 2014), owing to their vague definitions, the terms happiness and satisfaction are often misperceived. These are measurable and explicit terms. In organizations, the idea of

happiness has become implicit, and it is used as an alternative but inaccurate term for satisfaction. In the literature, the term happiness covers quality assurance (Edwards et al, 2009) and the quality of government services (Helliwell et al, 2019).

However, Edwards et al (2009) identified that customer happiness is not considered a form of enjoyment that is achieved over a short-term period, but it reflects a long-term state of joy. The authors propose the profound happiness terminology, which differs from the evaluation of well-being based on a reflective and an accumulative lifecycle; it also differs from the desire for satisfaction and the explicit and normative directives of what is beneficial. The authors added that profound happiness is deeper and more comprehensive than satisfying basic needs or feeling good about one's life (Edwards et al, 2009).

As per Shaban Abdelmoteleb et al (2017), a happy person feels good or enjoys life's moments and is mentally and physically healthy. They further indicate that customer happiness exceeds customer expectations; this comprises companies that examine their customers' needs, attitudes, and behaviors and determines the best way to enthrall customers based on their profiles and segmentation.

In conclusion, happiness is beyond satisfaction; it lasts for a longer period with an increased state of joy in customers and adds value to customers' well-being.

The Relationship between Smart Service Quality and Customer Happiness

As a recent trend in smart service quality elements, engaging in developing m-government platforms has been associated with customer happiness (Drigas and Koukianakis, 2009). Several researchers have conducted comprehensive studies to assess the impact of smart service quality elements on customer happiness (Alsaadi et al, 2018; Almuraqab and Jasimuddin, 2017; Almarashdeh and Alsmadi, 2016; Mengistu et al, 2009; Lee et al, 2015). This study assesses the impact of smart service quality elements on customer happiness and the attention it has received from public sector organizations. Thus, the following section highlights the evolution of smart service quality elements and customer happiness in public sector organizations in the UAE. For instance, Tan et al (2013) add that adoption of smart service quality elements by governments has positive and significant effects on customer happiness, evaluating from a customer's perspective. Such an observation lends credibility to customer engagement while designing and delivering smart service quality elements, as neglecting customers' needs and expectations may negatively impact customer happiness regarding smart service quality elements while offering m-government services (Hung et al, 2013; Azeez and Lakulu, 2019). Moreover, Le et al (2017) specify that customer happiness should be linked to mobile service adoption, as it can be measured through customer happiness surveys.

Al Athmay (2015) further explains that aspects of fulfillment and reliability in smart service quality elements should be evident, where customers seeking the smart service quality elements are aware of how and when they will receive government services. This implies that customers who utilize smart service quality elements must be convinced by the usability of smart service quality elements to ensure they are aware beforehand of the time it takes to fulfill the requested government services and optimize the benefits of these services. It is also necessary for the service to provide prompt responses to various customer inquiries and have the ability to

redirect customers to the relevant government offices if the required facility is unavailable or the nature of the request exceeds the capabilities of m-government platforms (Al Athmay, 2015). This is in agreement with Akram and Malik (2012) findings, where customers were prepared to perceive electronic government services if their requirements were met and well addressed.

Furthermore, Bhattacharya et al (2012) highlight that the ability of the government to address or align smart service quality elements with customer expectations enhances the quality of the offered government services over mobile phones. Otherwise, it will affect customer happiness regarding smart service quality elements, and customers may not use these services.

Almuraqab and Jasimuddin (2017) specify that the designers of m-government systems must ensure that they address the characteristics of different populations to ensure customer usage and adoption of smart government services. There are differences in factors such as culture, education levels, and exposure to technological systems among the different demographic groups. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct surveys to determine the level of service expectations of these demographic groups regarding the design of smart service quality elements and to evaluate their usability to ensure successful government performance and increase customer happiness.

In short, smart service quality elements are a substantial part of any government service, which have a direct impact on customer happiness and should be effectively controlled. Thus, smart government services must articulate customers' needs and expectations through full-fledged m-government platforms that connect customers and public sector organizations. The notion of assessing the impact of smart service quality elements on customer happiness has actively contributed to the development of this research's conceptual framework and hypotheses.

Study Hypotheses

Linking customer happiness to the offered government services of UAE public sector organizations has been a critical goal of the government in past decades. However, the latest government objectives in 2016, toward implementing a broader happiness agenda (i.e., the Customer Happiness Charter) that covers all services of public sector organizations, including smart government services offered through mobile phones, have led to various studies that assess the relationship between smart service quality and customer happiness (Alsaadi et al, 2018; Al-Jenaibi, 2016; Ahmed and Agarwal, 2018; D'raven and Pasha-Zaidi, 2015; Al-Khouri, 2012).

Alsaadi et al (2018) tested elements of smart service quality and identified that the quality of smart services is the greatest determinant of customers' needs and requirements that lead to happiness. Gong and Yi (2018) consider the importance of establishing criteria for developing service quality and electronic service quality models focused on customer happiness and loyalty. Pantano et al (2018) demonstrated the importance of linking smart service quality to customer happiness. De Keyser and Lariviere (2014) argue that smart service quality has a direct relationship with customer happiness. Similarly, Dwivedi et al (2014) confirm that smart service quality should be implemented across m-government platforms; Hellén and Sääksjärvi (2011) further assert that hedonic services are linked to customer

happiness through enhanced service quality. Based on these arguments, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Smart service quality has a positive impact on customer happiness.

Security is highlighted as a critical smart service quality element and has an impact on customer happiness. Osmanbegović and Lugavić (2018) show that security plays a key role in encouraging customers to adopt smart government services. Tan et al (2013) stated that the government should consider the security dimension while implementing e-government and smart services to increase customer happiness. Kohlborn (2014) indicates that the security element is a critical success factor for smart portals designed to manage financial transactions and store customers' personal information, and proper management of these interactions and information can contribute toward customers' happiness. The security element was extensively discussed by Jiménez et al (2012), who demonstrated that security threats could delay or jeopardize e-government initiatives, which may upset customers if not properly addressed by governments. Almuraqab and Jasimuddin (2017) find that security elements significantly influence the factors associated with the adoption of m-government services. Al-Khouri (2012) adds that the security feature is one of the key inputs of the transformation strategies of the UAE's smart government; this is expected to contribute toward the happiness of the users of smart government platforms. Based on the above observations, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Security has a positive impact on customer happiness.

The availability of smart services is highlighted as a critical smart service quality element, and it has an impact on customer happiness. Dwivedi et al (2014) refer to system availability as the correct technical functioning of the portal within smart government portals. It is critical to enhancing the quality of smart services and customer happiness. Tan et al (2013) indicate that, in smart government platforms, service availability plays a crucial role in contributing toward the success of smart services and customer happiness. Awoleye et al (2014) emphasize the importance of all-around smart service availability to customers within the public sector and the role of availability in increasing customer happiness. Alenezi et al (2015) shows that the availability of smart services is critical to successful smart service quality implementation, and hence, customer happiness. Based on these findings, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Availability has a positive impact on customer happiness.

Authentication is highlighted as a critical smart service quality element and has an impact on customer happiness (Sharma, 2018). For instance, Akram and Malik (2012) show that seamless smart service authentication strengthens customers' readiness to embrace e-government and increases their happiness. According to Bertot et al (2012), authentication comprises strong and logical layers that authorize users to log in to their dedicated online accounts. Authentication is implemented across all smart public service platforms to validate the user's identification against their account details, thereby increasing their trust and happiness. In light of these arguments, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Authentication has a positive impact on customer happiness.

Finally, security has the greatest impact on customer happiness. Osmanbegović and Lugavić (2018) confirm that the security dimension significantly influences customers' choice to adopt smart government services when customers place their trust in smart services and their data are protected. Sharma (2018) also agrees that security plays a key role in promoting smart service adoption. Kohlborn (2014) adds that the security element is critical to the successful adoption of smart portals, which store and protect all financial transactions. Awoleye et al (2014) argue that security directly influences the successful implementation of smart service quality within government platforms and builds users' trust. Elmaghraby and Losavio (2014) focus on government efforts to safeguard customers' personal information while offering smart services to all citizens. In this regard, several studies (e.g., Jiménez et al, 2012; Akram and Malik, 2012; Zhou and Hu, 2008) show that security threats jeopardize smart government services and lead to customer dissatisfaction if not adequately managed by governments. Among other elements, the high importance attached to the security element leads to the following hypothesis:

H5: Security has the greatest positive impact on customer happiness.

The hypotheses are presented in Table 2:

An Illustration of Study Hypotheses

As an illustration of the study hypotheses (five hypotheses), this study successfully demonstrates the necessary elements of smart service quality that need to be considered by public sector organizations to increase customer happiness while transforming to mobile government services. Furthermore, this study deems that smart service quality as a whole (H1) along with security (H2), availability (H3) and authentication (H4) as individual elements of smart service quality are important elements that impact directly customer happiness. Thus, security element (solely) of smart service quality has the greatest impact among the other elements on customer happiness (H5).

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design, in which gathered data from a survey launched in the UAE in 2020 were considered as the primary source of data. The survey targeted the customers of public sector organizations in the UAE (e.g., the governments of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and federal ministries) who accepted an electronic ethical consent, as approved by Hamdan Bin Mohamed Smart University (HBMSU) ethical board, to participate in this survey. The survey gathered 505 valid and usable responses out of a total of 585 responses (over 75% completion rate), which were used to conduct several analyses (reliability, validity, correlation, and linear regression tests) using IBM SPSS 20. Furthermore, as Table 3 shows, this study extensively reviews the current literature on the impact of smart service quality elements on customer happiness (Creswell and Zhang, 2009).

## Results

This section analyzes the survey data we collected, along with the key findings. A statistical analysis tool (IBM SPSS, version 20) was used to produce data analysis reports, which comprised the results of the test determining the relationships between research variables, reliability and validity, factor analysis, variation inflation factor (VIF), and linear regression analysis.

This section presents a breakdown of the survey respondents' demographics and the generic survey questions and discusses the research findings and analysis.

### Respondents' Demographic Characteristics Analysis

This section analyzes the respondents' demographic characteristics (respondents' profiles), including age, gender, monthly income, educational level, and occupational status, as presented in Table 4.

### Analysis of Respondents' Profiles

Considering respondents' answers on their frequency of using mobile phones/smart tablets to obtain smart government services, 23.2% confirmed that they were using smart government platforms daily, 26.6% were using them weekly, and 36.8% were using them monthly. Meanwhile, 6.7% were using them bi-yearly, 4.6% were using them yearly, and 1.9% of respondents confirmed using these platforms only once.

Most respondents use smart government services monthly, which can be attributed to the monthly billing cycle of government services (such as water, electricity, and telecommunications' billing cycles) and the nature of the employment status of the respondents who receive their salaries monthly.

### Reliability, Validity, Factor Analysis, and Eigenvalues Tests

The researchers calculated Cronbach's alpha and conducted factor analysis tests; this study also applied an extraction of principal component analysis (PCA) and the varimax rotation methods (eigenvalue more than 1) to assess the reliability and validity of the scales used and to ensure the internal consistency of the variables. The factor loadings should be 0.4 or more (the cut-off point was set at $\geq +0.4$) as recommended by Hinton et al (2004), and the internal consistency (reliability) should be higher than 0.7 ($\alpha > 0.7$), which highlight the significance and retention of an item in a scale (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Neuman, 2011). The analysis results confirmed that all measures were valid and reliable, which support the use of variables to test the hypotheses (see Table 5).

As Table 5 shows, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which is a technique under factor analysis (utilizing PCA), was conducted to test construct validity. Furthermore, the sampling adequacy was tested by conducting a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity, as presented in Table 5. Finally, Table 5 summarizes the results of the eigenvalues test, the explained total variance of the extracted components, and factor loadings with the rotated component matrix.

Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested to generalize outcomes for this study. However, several tests must be conducted before testing the linear regression of the hypotheses, such as correlation tests and a VIF test. Thus, a test of variable correlation was conducted, with the significant level set at 0.01, because a two-tailed correlation was found between variables. A Pearson correlation test was performed to confirm the relationship between the variables. If there is no relationship between variables, it is inappropriate to conduct a factor analysis (Straub et al, 2004). A p-value with significance at the 0.01 level (Table 6) confirms a correlation between the constructs' questions; the constructs of the smart service quality (i.e., security, authentication, and availability) are positively correlated with customer happiness. For example, authentication has a correlation value of 0.236 with customer happiness, security has a correlation value of 0.576 with customer happiness, and availability has a correlation value of 0.232 with customer happiness. Thus, the correlation matrix confirms the correlation level among the variables of smart service quality (as presented in Table 6); the multicollinearity is low (Wiengarten et al, 2011). Hence, it is appropriate to conduct a VIF (Straub et al, 2004).

Variation Inflation Factor (VIF)

The independent variables must be centered to examine the VIF and solve the multicollinearity problem (Wiengarten et al, 2011; Gray and Kinnear, 2012). Therefore, the independent variables were centered to address any potential risk of variations without changing the correlation. This is because when high correlations between variables are considered, regression is less likely to crash (Gray and Kinnear, 2012). Finally, the VIF results confirm that all independent variables are less than 1.50 (security VIF = 1.00, authentication VIF = 1.00, and availability VIF = 1.00), indicating that multicollinearity is not an issue (Starkings, 2012). Hence, the assumption of conducting multiple regression analysis is valid.

Linear Regression Analysis

Table 7 presents the results of the regression analysis; simple regression was conducted to examine the elements of smart service quality (i.e., security, authentication, and availability) as independent variables, and the impacts of the elements on customer happiness as dependent variables, which were addressed by the research hypotheses (H1 to H5). The results of the simple linear regression supported all the research hypotheses (H1 to H5). The results of each smart service quality element, including the aggregated smart service quality, indicate that they positively impact customer happiness. The findings show a significant relationship between the independent variable (i.e., smart service quality) and the dependent variable (i.e., customer happiness). Smart service quality has a positive impact on customer happiness; thus, the regression results of security (Model 1) are significant at $\beta = 0.576$, t-value = 15.785, $R^2 = 0.331$, $p < 0.01$; availability (Model 2) at $\beta = 0.232$, t-value = 5.340, $R^2 = 0.054$, $p < 0.01$; authentication (Model 3) at $\beta = 0.236$, t-value = 5.440, $R^2 = 0.056$, $p < 0.01$; and smart service quality (Model 4) at security: $\beta = 0.576$, t-value = 17.222; availability: $\beta = 0.232$, t-value = 6.931; authentication: $\beta =$

0.236; t-value = 7.053); p < 0.01. In smart service quality (Model 4), it also confirms hypothesis H5, where security has the most significant impact on customer happiness (security: β = 0.576, t-value = 17.222, R² = 0.440). Therefore, all hypotheses have positive impacts on customer happiness (highlighted by H1 to H5; see Table 7).

An R-squared analysis was also conducted, which allowed the researchers to determine the overall fit of the models. Table 7 presents the multiple regression analysis of the three explanatory variables of smart service quality. While the aggregate proportion of smart service quality (Model 4 in Table 7) in customer happiness is statistically significant at 44%, the results of the multiple regression show the degree of significance of each smart service quality element. The analysis reveals that the elements of smart service quality varied among 33% (security, Model 1), 5.4% (availability, Model 2), and 5.6% (authentication, Model 3). The results support the findings of previous studies, which confirm the individual effect of smart service quality elements on customer happiness, and further indicate that overall smart service quality elements have a high level of significance compared to each element of smart service quality (see Table 7).

Finally, the purpose of conducting regression analysis was to test the hypotheses, and the results of the test are presented in Table 8.

Discussion

The previous section comprehensively presented the findings obtained from the survey, which was conducted to examine the impact of smart service quality on customer happiness in public sector organizations in the UAE. This section discusses the overall findings of this study under three headings.

Relationships between Smart Service Quality and Customer Happiness

Smart service quality and customer happiness variables were tested using a systematic approach. The results of the simple regression analysis confirm a positive linear relationship between the elements of smart service quality (i.e., security, authentication, and availability) and customer happiness (Tabachnik and Fidell, 2001).

The testing process revealed that smart service quality and customer happiness variables were valid, reliable, and stable. Furthermore, the results of the testing process were proven to address the research objectives, thereby expediting the study. Regarding testing the relationships between variables, the research variables, smart service quality (i.e., security, availability, and authentication), and customer happiness, were positively related.

In conclusion, to synthesize this relationship, the research proves that security has a positive relationship with customer happiness (security customer happiness). This finding adds a substantial assertion of the importance of security in increasing customer happiness in public sector organizations to the existing literature, as this finding increases trust in using smart government services.

The positive relationship between authentication and customer happiness variables matches the findings of Bertot et al (2012), Furnell and Karweni (1999), and Peng and Moghavvemi (2015). These studies confirm that authentication or the validation of the user's identification against the user's account details before and after any online business transaction increases customers' trust and happiness. In conclusion, to synthesize this relationship, this research shows that authentication has a positive relationship with customer happiness (authentication  customer happiness).

Subsequently, the positive relationship between availability and customer happiness confirms the findings of Tan et al (2013), who show that the availability of smart government services is crucial to promoting the adoption of smart services. The relationship between availability and customer happiness aligns with Awoleye et al (2014), who emphasize the importance of smart service availability to customers in public sector organizations and the influence of availability on customer happiness. Furthermore, Alenezi et al (2015) show that the availability of smart services is a critical criterion for the success of smart service quality implementation. In conclusion, to synthesize this relationship theoretically and empirically, the research shows that availability has a positive relationship with customer happiness (availability  customer happiness). This finding adds a substantial assertion of the importance of availability toward increasing customer happiness in public sector organizations to the existing literature, as this finding increases the adoption of smart government services by customers.

The analysis confirms that smart service quality (as a whole) has a positive relationship with customer happiness, which is in line with findings in the literature (Alsaadi et al, 2018; Gong and Yi, 2018; Pantano et al, 2018; De Keyser and Lariviere, 2014). Additionally, the analysis confirms that security has the most significant and positive relationship with customer happiness. The strong relationship between security and customer happiness aligns with previous studies (e.g., Osmanbegović and Lugavić, 2018; Sharma, 2018; Kohlborn, 2014; Awoleye et al, 2014; Elmaghraby and Losavio, 2014; Tan et al, 2012; Almuraqab and Jasimuddin, 2017; Akram and Malik, 2012; Tan et al, 2013; Zhou and Hu, 2008; and Al-Khouri, 2012). The key concerns of the smart service quality users were breach of privacy (i.e., their details and credit card information). In conclusion, security was identified as the element with the greatest impact on customer happiness.

In short, this research responds to numerous calls for studies on smart service quality evaluation in the context of UAE public sector organizations (Ahmed and Agarwal, 2018; Alsaadi et al, 2018; Al-Jenaibi, 2016; D'raven and Pasha-Zaidi, 2015; Al-Khouri, 2012). This study seeks to add new insights and expand the knowledge base available to regional and international researchers.

Theoretical Implications

Generally, the theoretical implications of this research assert that the service sector is not stable; it changes across countries over time. This implies a lack of stability in the case of smart service quality. Smart service quality can be further enhanced to incorporate utilized/implemented elements. This enhancement can be achieved by

highlighting security, authentication, and availability to meet customers' needs and expectations. This study's theoretical contribution include showing that smart service quality elements (e.g., security, availability, and authentication) are applicable across different public sector organizations. The findings regarding the elements of smart service quality also demonstrate the importance of establishing a standardized framework of smart service quality in public sector organizations to increase customer happiness in their experience of smart government services. Fundamentally, this research reaffirms the sequence of smart service quality elements as follows:

Smart service quality 'security, authentication, and availability' customer happiness

The aforementioned notation best reflects the causal relationship between smart service quality and customer happiness. It provides evidence of the relationships between the individual elements of smart service quality. For instance, although smart service quality increases the level of customer happiness, this research shows that not all elements of smart service quality contribute equally toward customer happiness. Security exerted the most significant impact on customer happiness, followed by authentication and availability. This study provides evidence regarding the effects of the elements of smart service quality on customer happiness. In other words, it shows that smart service quality directly affects customer happiness, as per the analysis of the data gathered in the survey of existing research, which narrows the gap in the literature. The findings of this research support existing proposals (Hellén and Sääksjärvi, 2011; Gong and Yi, 2018; Al-Khouri, 2012; Sharma, 2018; Alsaadi et al, 2018; Al-Jenaibi, 2016).

Practical Implications

This study provides important implications for both policymakers and public sector managers on managing smart service quality and customer happiness within public sector organizations; it presents insights for policymakers in the UAE, who recently launched government initiatives on smart service quality and customer happiness strategies (e.g., the UAE 2021 plan, Dubai 2020 plan, Abu Dhabi 2030 plan, and Customer Happiness Charter) and government excellence programs (i.e., the Dubai government excellence program, Abu Dhabi award for excellence in performance award, and Emirates government service excellence program). To be effective, public sector managers should appropriately utilize smart service quality before its implementation. The utilization of smart service quality must begin with the implementation of security, which is a critical element of smart government service users. Public sector managers may consider smart service quality elements by including them in all smart service quality strategies to ensure the highest level of customer acceptance and happiness. The implementation of smart service quality must be based on customers' needs and expectations to ensure customer happiness. Therefore, policymakers and public sector managers should find an ideal balance between the requirements of smart service quality implementation (regarding smart service platform requirements) and customers' needs and expectations to achieve customer happiness. These findings pave the way toward exploring the relationships between the elements of smart service quality and customer happiness, thus providing valuable insights to both policymakers and

public sector managers seeking to sustain customer happiness adequately by efficient utilization of the efforts and resources associated with smart service quality deployment.

Another remarkable contribution of this research is access to various customers' opinions from multiple business sectors (e.g., road and transportation, water and electricity, telecommunications, education, and public health services). This will provide policymakers and public sector managers a broader view of the current customers' evaluation of smart service quality and customer happiness and, in turn, enable them to develop a balanced instrument for deploying resources to increase the efficiency of smart government services and customer happiness.

An empirical investigation based on the concept of smart service quality can be conducted to provide new findings that can be compared across countries, sectors, and time; studies can also be appropriately customized to measure smart service quality. The findings of this research are also expected to contribute toward more efficient management of smart service platforms.

This research is also relevant when enhancing the adoption of smart services. For example, the security element has a significant relationship with customer happiness. This implies that the higher the deployment of security measures for smart government services, the higher the customers' adoption of these smart government services and trust in the facilitating organizations.

Finally, public sector managers must understand that customers' needs and expectations are not static. Such changes may affect the importance of smart service quality elements and reduce the effectiveness of the allocation of quality resources; hence, such changes should be sufficiently addressed. For example, this generation of customers differs from that in the 1990s in terms of needs and expectations. This can be attributed to technological evolution in businesses, which causes a tremendous shift in service offerings. Hence, public sector managers should frequently monitor changing needs and act accordingly.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

This research has several limitations and challenges that must be addressed in future studies. The first limitation pertains to this research's focus. This study focuses on the influence of smart service quality on customer happiness, in public sector organizations in the UAE. The majority of customers who completed the survey were from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and federal ministries. Hence, future studies should expand the research focus to include more customers and smart government platforms from other emirates. The second limitation of this research is its adoption of a quantitative research method to test the research hypotheses objectively. The aims and objectives can be achieved using a mixed research methodology (quantitative and qualitative methods). The third limitation is accessing databases of customers, which have alternatively targeted customers on social media accounts in the UAE (e.g., LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Instagram, and other online professional platforms). However, if the customer database could be sourced from several government organizations, this could increase the sample size and save time.

There are some suggestions for future research avenues and implementation that can benefit academia. First, more research should be conducted to assess the impact of smart service quality elements on customer happiness and link them to improving customers' quality of life and well-being. Second, challenges associated with the implementation of smart service quality elements should be collectively assessed and gathered through various studies. Third, more government-sponsored research should be conducted to assess the impact of COVID-19 on offering m-government services; such research should explore opportunities and potential threats of smart service quality element implementation.

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# The theoretical implications of the changing business environment for betting shops upon shop labour

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*Abstract*

*Previous work by Jones et al (2020) within the International Journal of Management Cases has examined the impact of the changing environment faced by betting shops due to the continuously evolving legislative and technological landscapes in which they are located. Drawing on the theoretical approach developed during the author's previous research, this paper explores the impact on betting shops brought by their digital transformation, specifically arguing that betting shops benefit from an omnichannel network of platforms (fixed odds betting terminals, self-service betting terminals, online gambling and over-the-counter betting) before examining how such a network may theoretically impact betting shop labour. The paper firstly outlines each of the digital platforms in turn before evaluating their synergistic network against the definitions of multichannel and omnichannel management. The theoretical impact upon shop labour is then explored through the potential outsourcing of shop labour to digital platforms as well as the co-ordination of labour towards platform maintenance. The paper finally evaluates how lockdowns associated with Covid-19 may detrimentally impact betting shop labour by facilitating further migration to digital channels. In doing so, the paper contributes to the debate around the evolution of betting shops, and the future of betting shop labour.*

*Key Words: Betting Shops; Omnichannel Management; Information and Communication Technology; Digital Transformation*

Introduction

The land-based betting industry in the United Kingdom (UK) has undergone significant, digital transformation within recent years. Licensed betting offices (LBOs) – most commonly known as betting shops - are now awash with technologies which increase the number of gambling opportunities for the customer. Whether through fixed odds betting terminals (FOBTs), self-service betting terminals (SSBTs), or the ability to access online accounts in-shop, the customer can seamlessly migrate between these channels and over-the-counter (OTC) betting. William Hill (2021) and Entain (2021) - the owner of Ladbrokes and Coral - both highlight the digitalisation as the future of the industry, with the latter having recently opened a 'shop of the future' (Entain, 2021, p 7). The digital transformation of the industry has altered the situational characteristics of gambling, making the industry more accessible, as well as altering the structural characteristics which encourage continuous spend.

Jones et al (2020) have previously highlighted within the International Journal of Management Cases the benefit of the strategy pursued by land-based operators towards their existence on the high street. The 'multi-channel' system of digital platforms, they argue, 'unifies the company's traditional retail and online offer which enables customers to use a single personal account across all platforms' (p 10). Although Jones et al (2020) acknowledge that the incorporation of platforms in such a way 'may effectively be contributing to their [betting shops'] own decline' (p 10), they

also argue that 'the leading betting shop companies are looking to develop new sustainable models that will be attuned to their new business environment' (p. 11). The development of sustainable models therefore implies that betting shop operators will seek to adapt to a new model of 'multi-channel' shops, thus ensuring their presence on the high street.

However, this argument is open to refinement. Firstly, the deployment of technologies within betting shops is analogous with an omnichannel network as opposed to a multichannel approach. An omnichannel approach – which concerns cross-channel management across touchpoints to produce a single brand experience (Verhoef et al, 2015) - is much closer to the approach described by Jones et al (2020) in their analysis of operators' single-wallet schemes. Secondly, whilst the digital transformation of the industry may ensure a sustainable future for shops' presence on the high street, it does not guarantee the future of betting shop labour. The omnichannel management of digital platforms theoretically - and simultaneously - co-ordinates and outsources shop labour, with employees tasked with maintaining and promoting the very platforms which may render their labour obsolete. Indeed, the outsourcing of labour is an affordance of data which are the key commodity of digital platforms (Srnicek, 2017). The aims of this paper – drawing on the author's previous research (Wheaton, 2021) – are therefore twofold. Firstly, the paper aims to demonstrate that the UK's betting shops adapt an omnichannel approach rather than a multi-channel approach. Secondly, the paper critically evaluates this network and its impact upon shop labour, exploring how shop employees are detrimentally impacted by the synergistic management of platforms. The paper carries out these aims by exploring the issues in turn. The paper firstly outlines the digital platforms which are now present within the UK's betting shops, namely FOBTs, SSBTs and online gambling. Secondly, the paper compares the terms omnichannel and multichannel, outlining how betting shops operate according to the former. Thirdly, the paper evaluates how the omnichannel network of gambling platforms outsources shop labour, before exploring how such platforms may also have grown in importance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The UK's betting shops

LBOs were legalised in 1961 when gambling was already widely prevalent. Whether through legal, credit-based coupon betting (Clapson, 1992; Huggins, 2015) or through illegal, off-course cash gambling facilitated by illegal bookmakers and their agents (Chinn, 2004; Huggins, 2013), gambling maintained a significant prevalence during the first part of the twentieth century, rendering the legalisation of licensed betting offices inevitable (Chinn, 2004). The Government thus - albeit 'begrudgingly' (Jones et al, 2000, p 223) – legalised LBOs through the Betting and Gaming Act 1960 with the intention of regulation and taxation. LBOs were not permitted to encourage loitering (Chinn, 2004), often employed boardmen to display the odds of horse races and were even prohibited from using televisions or portable devices to broadcast sporting events (Samuels, 2011). Fast forward from an era where LBOs were unappealing so as to discourage loitering, modern betting shops - governed by the Gambling Act 2005 (HM Government, 2005) which is currently under review - now present a multitude of gambling opportunities over a variety of digital platforms: FOBTs, online gambling, and SSBTs. Indeed, the UK's four most prevalent chains of betting shops - William Hill, Ladbrokes, Coral and Betfred (Gambling Commission, 2019) - all present such digital channels as part of their shop offering.

FOBTs

FOBTs – machines which offer casino- and slot-based games – first appeared in betting shops in 1999 but their numbers proliferated in the early 2000s when changes in taxation allowed operators to offer low-margin games such as roulette (Woodhouse, 2019). Importantly, the outcomes of each game or spin on FOBTs are settled by a random number generator, and the long-term profitability of each game is managed by a return to player percentage which is favourable to the operator. FOBTs have previously attracted criticism for their structural characteristics, labelled as the 'crack cocaine' of the UK's gambling industry (Chapman, 2019). Indeed, FOBTs 'possess inherent structural features that facilitate rapid and continuous play, as well as adopt variable ratio schedules of reinforcement that subject a player to addictive patterns of gambling behaviour' (Harris and Parke, 2016, p 598).

In response, the Government introduced a maximum stake per spin in April 2019, reducing the maximum stake from £100 to £2 per spin (Woodhouse, 2019). The profitability of betting shops was significantly impacted as a result, demonstrating their previous reliance on earnings from FOBTs. According to the Gambling Commission (2020a), the first full reporting year after the maximum stake implementation saw the annual gross gaming yield (GGY) of FOBTs drop from £1.8 billion to £1.1 billion per year. William Hill (2021) closed 713 shops between 2019 and 2020 whilst Entain (2021) closed 633 Ladbrokes and Coral shops during the same period. The most recently available data from Betfred indicate a closure of 72 shops between September 2018 and September 2019 due to the maximum stakes' implementation (Betfred Group Limited, 2020). Inevitably, shop closures would have made some detrimental impact on shop labour.

Online gambling

Each of the four main operators have enjoyed varied levels of success when launching their online arms. Cassidy (2020) outlines the struggles of William Hill's and Ladbrokes' development into the online space. The former launched its online sports betting product in 1998 but fell behind in the market until 2008 when it agreed to use Playtech (2021) as its third-party supplier, whilst the latter launched its own platform in 2000, only to see its online profits halved in 2012. Betfred (2020) launched its online platform in 2004, simultaneously growing its land and online businesses. Coral enjoyed some online presence as Coral Eurobet from 2002 (Samuels, 2011), but it was not until 2012 when it launched its present website. The ownership of each operator has also evolved with land-based brands merging or being bought out to compete with a proliferated online market. Whilst Betfred (2020) is still owned by its founder, Ladbrokes and Coral are now both owned by Entain (2021). William Hill, meanwhile, was taken over by Caesars International in April 2021, with the latter aiming to dispose of William Hill's betting shop estate to focus on its business in the US (Barber, 2021).

According to data from the Gambling Commission (2020a), the annual GGY taken online in the UK has grown from £632 million in 2010 to £5.6 billion in 2020, and online gambling now accounts for 39.95% of the industry's total GGY. Further data from the Gambling Commission (2021a) demonstrate the growth of prevalence in online gambling; 23.6% of respondents gambled online during the four weeks prior to being surveyed, whilst an increase in online gambling on sports, horse racing and casino products during 2020 was accompanied by a decrease in land-based gambling on the

same products. Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic may have impacted these trends, data from the Gambling Commission (2021a) indicate that these trends were already occurring before the pandemic struck in 2020. Online gambling facilitates an easier access to the industry by removing the spatio-temporal barriers associated with land-based gambling (Gariban et al, 2013).

Online gambling also offers structural characteristics designed to entice continuous spend. Betting and cashing out in-play are key characteristics of online betting (Killick and Griffiths, 2021), whilst the ability to quantify sporting events into microdata translates into more markets for the customer (Gainsbury et al., 2020). Online gaming contains the same structural features of FOBTs but are not subjected to maximum stake limits. Whilst the Gambling Commission (2021b) restricted the minimum spin time of games as well as removed autoplay from October 2021, the maximum stake is being reviewed as part of the review into the Gambling Act 2005 (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports, 2020). Although the migration to online channels again brings obvious implications to shop labour, the narrative currently surrounding online gambling is one of a need for stricter legislation. Studies by Muggleton et al. (2021) and Forrest and McHale (2021) – both of which draw upon samples of over 100,000 online gambling customers – highlight a relationship between online gambling and negative financial phenomena.

SSBTs

First seen in shops around 2013 (G3 Newswire, 2013), SSBTs are self-service termimals which offer a wider range of sports and betting opportunities than is generally available OTC. Although there appears to be a lack of extant research on SSBTs within betting shops, Jones et al (2020) highlight their role within the digital transformation of betting shops whilst Newall et al (2021) compare the structural characteristics of SSBTs to those of FOBTs. Data from the Gambling Commission (2020a) only include the GGY of SSBTs as part of OTC betting's GGY of £1.2 billion per year. However, SSBTs highlight the online arm of the shop operator by providing a window to the same structural features as online betting. William Hill (2021) and Entain (2020) also underline the growing importance of SSBTs with the former deploying an average of 2.5 SSBTs across its retail estate, whilst the latter planned to install a further 9,000 shops before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The role of SSBTs can be categorised within two arguments like the growth of self-service terminals within the wider retail industries. Firstly, they can be framed according to the benefits to customers who may prefer transaction over OTC interaction. To this end, self-service technology offers an alternative means of purchase for those with a degree of technology readiness (Doyle, 2006). This also allows the opportunity for terminal owners to reduce labour costs (Kimes and Collier, 2015), giving rise to the second argument, characterised by the replacement of the cashier within the production process by the customer themselves. This is an example of consumptive labour, defined by Koeber (2011) as a process which 'engages consumers… as participants in the labour process who contribute to the production of something' (p 207). SSBTs, according to this second view, contribute to the redundancy of shop labour due to their role in encouraging the customer into taking on the dual role of consumer and producer of risk.

Omnichannel or multichannel?

In describing the multichannel nature of the platforms, Jones et al (2020) cite the description given by Playtech (2021), a third-party supplier of software which manages the cross-channel integration for Coral shops through its 'Connect' programme. However, the use of the term multichannel to describe the single-wallet approach requires further analysis, particularly when 'online-to-retail integration' (Playtech, 2021, online) sees FOBTs, SSBTs, online and OTC gambling all accessible via a single wallet. Indeed, William Hill (2021) and Entain (2021) both specifically reference an omnichannel network within their shops. Therefore, the terms omnichannel and multichannel appear to be interchangeable, yet they refer to distinct forms of cross-channel management.

According to Montoya-Vass et al. (2003), a multichannel network allows service providers to 'reach customers using a mix of channel formats, including offices, online Web sites, direct mail, and kiosks' (p 448). Whilst this definition may highlight the choice available to the customer, it does not consider the customer migration which is facilitated between channels. Instead, channels are placed within 'independent silos' (Trenz et al, p 1226). A more accurate reflection is offered by an omnichannel network, defined by Verhoef et al (2015) as 'the synergetic management of the numerous available channels and customer touchpoints, in such a way that the customer experience across channels and the performance over channels is optimised' (p 176). Therefore, whilst both multichannel and omnichannel retailing consists of the deployment of numerous channels to generate revenue, only omnichannel retailing explicitly involves the overlapping of those channels to provide a consistent customer experience across channels.

Verhoef et al (2015) explore the differences between multichannel and omnichannel management in more detail, as demonstrated within Table One. Both can be explored within criteria according to channel focus and scope, the separation of channels, the focus between brand and channel, the management of channels, and the objectives emerging from channel activity. For example, multichannel management maintains interactive channels separately from store channels, thus promoting an approach which focuses on the relationship between the customer and the individual retail channels. Online and store channels therefore are segregated both in the measurement of their performance as well as their customer experience. Omnichannel management, on the other hand, encompasses the integration of interactive channels with mass communication which is deployed to promote the brand. Rather than being separated, channels are integrated as touchpoints or access points. The focus, therefore, is on the customer's relationship with the brand, and performance is measured according to customer recruitment to the brand.

| Table One: The aspects of multichannel and omnichannel management | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Multichannel | Omnichannel |
| Channel focus | Interactive channels only. | Interactive and mass-communication channels. |
| Channel scope | Retail channels: store, online and direct marketing (for example, catalogues). | Retail channels: store, online, and direct marketing, mobile channels (smart devices), social media. Customer touchpoints (including mass communication channels: TV, radio, etc). |
| Separation of channels | Separate channels with no overlap. | Integrated channels providing seamless customer experiences. |
| Brand-channel focus | Focus on relationship between customer and retail channel. | Focus on relationship between customer and the brand. |
| Channel management | Per channel. | Cross-channel. |

| Objectives | Channel objectives (e.g. sales and experience per channel). | Cross-channel objectives (overall customer experience, recruitment to brand). |
|---|---|---|
| Source: Verhoef et al (2015, p 176). | | |

Jones et al (2020), based on Playtech's (2021) self-description, argue that a multichannel solution is operated within Coral shops, facilitating the possible migration across in-shop channels (FOBTs, SSBTs, OTC) as well as online betting. This, however, indicates that the term multichannel has been used to label what is an omnichannel network. According to the analysis in Table One, platforms within betting shops would be managed separately. Figure One demonstrates how platforms would theoretically be managed as part of a multichannel network. FOBTs, SSBTs, OTC betting and online gambling would all exist within independent silos, and the Coral Connect scheme would therefore focus on rewarding the relationship between the customer and their preferred gambling channels.
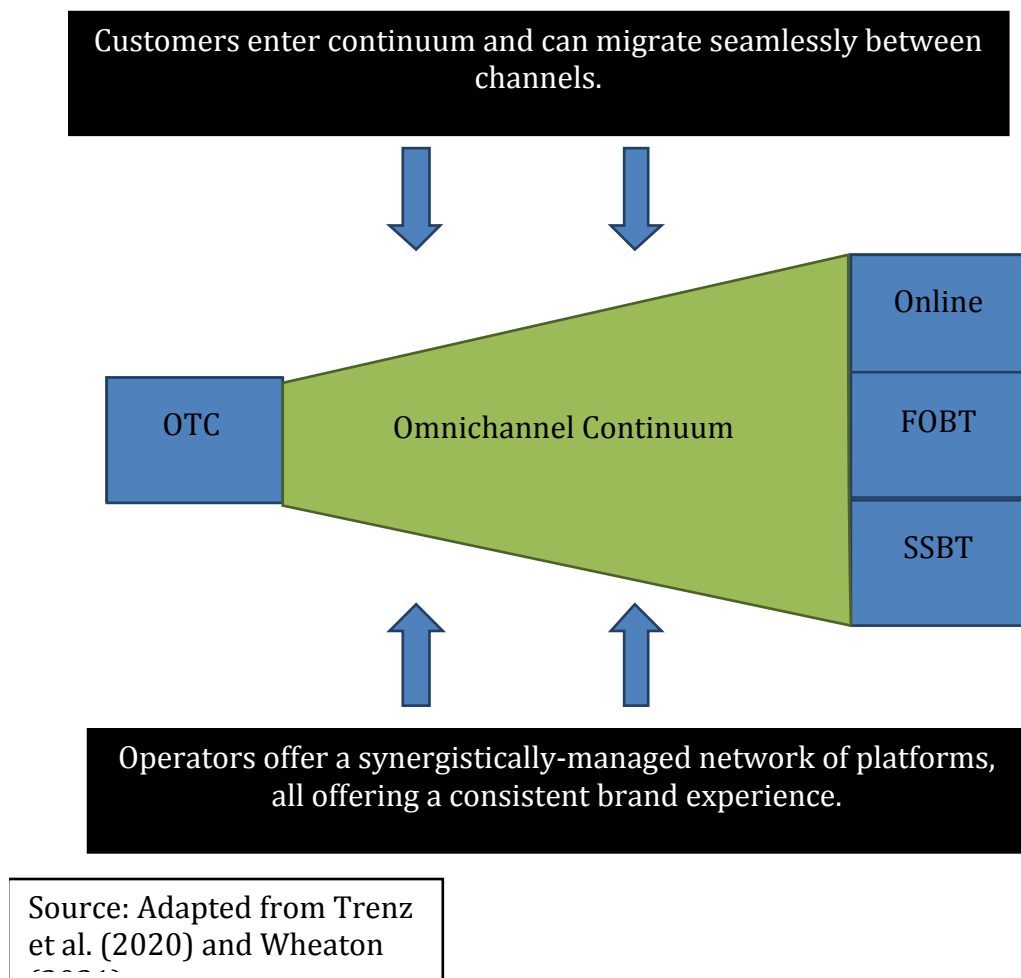
Figure One: Multichannel Management within Betting Shops
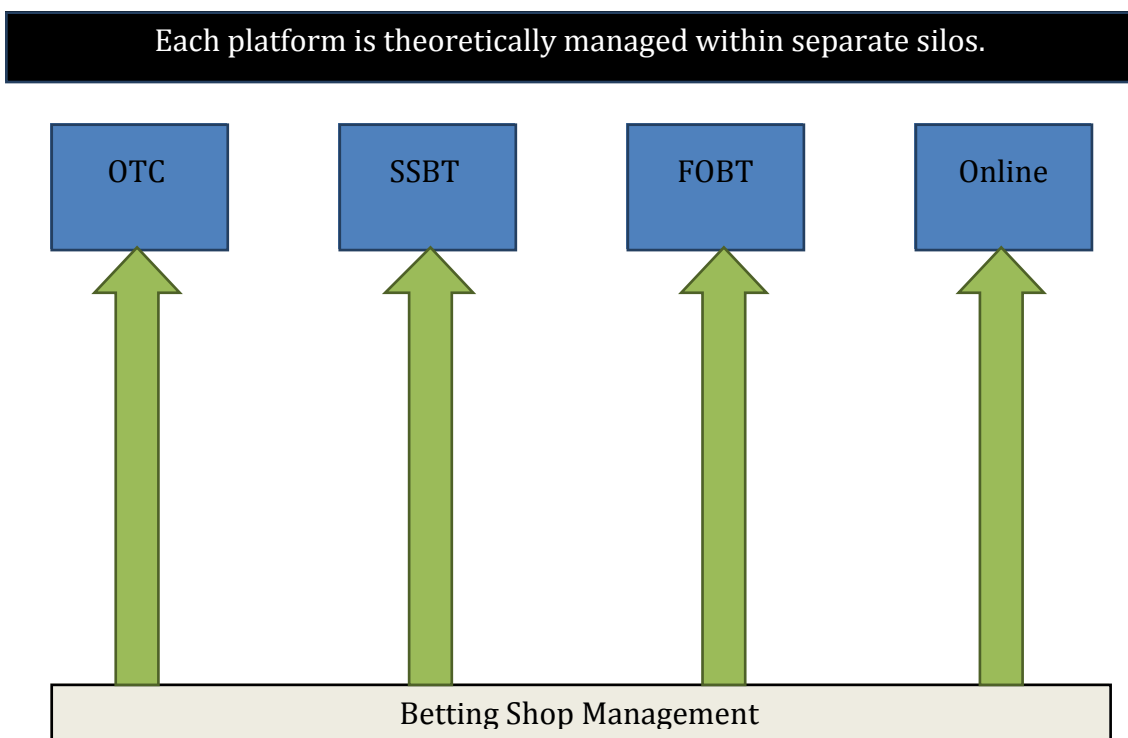


The example used by Jones et al (2020) highlights the deployment of an omnichannel network, where customers can use their single wallet to seamlessly migrate between

channels. Figure Two represents an omnichannel continuum resulting from the synergistic management of the digital platforms used for gambling. Inspired by Trenz et al (2020) and previously explored within Wheaton's (2021) study, the continuum demonstrates the seamless movement between platforms facilitated by the single-wallet approach. The continuum represents the diverse nature of gambling opportunities to the customer, and the channels implemented by operators to facilitate demand. The choices made by retailer and consumer, Trenz et al (2020) contend, characterise the very nature of the continuum. Therefore, the approach taken by betting shop operators, whether Coral through its Connect card, Ladbrokes through its Grid Card or William Hill through its Plus Card, is characteristic of an omnichannel network. However, such deployment of technology theoretically impacts shop labour, as explored by the following section.

Figure Two: The Omnichannel Continuum within Betting Shops



Customers enter continuum and can migrate seamlessly between channels.

OTC

Omnichannel Continuum

Online

FOBT

SSBT

Operators offer a synergistically-managed network of platforms, all offering a consistent brand experience.

Source: Adapted from Trenz et al. (2020) and Wheaton (2021)

## The outsourcing and co-ordination of betting shop labour

Importantly, the digital platforms detailed above all rely on data which - according to Srnicek (2017) - bring potentialities to platform owners. Indeed, data can refine platform algorithms thus rendering platforms more competitive, outsource and co-ordinate labour, facilitate the cross-subsidisation of platforms, reduce production costs, and produce further data through analysis. This paper is particularly concerned with the outsourcing and co-ordination of labour which may occur thanks to the synergistic management of platforms. As such, betting shop labour is both outsourced thanks to the

lack of interaction involved with the function of each platform, whilst betting shop employees are also co-ordinated towards the maintenance of such platforms (Wheaton, 2021).

The replacement of shop labour by digital functions

Whilst the digital outsourcing of labour can be understood according to Srnicek's (2017) affordances of data, the need for innovative, yet cheaper, production methods is highlighted by Marx (1973) as essential for survival within the capitalist economy. 'Capital employs machinery, rather, only to the extent that it enables the worker to work a larger part of his time for capital, to relate to a larger part of his time as time which does not belong to him, to work longer for another. Through this process, the amount of labour necessary for the production of a given object is indeed reduced to a minimum, but only in order to realize a maximum of labour in the maximum number of such objects. The first aspect is important, because capital here -- quite unintentionally -- reduces human labour, expenditure of energy, to a minimum' (Marx, 1973, p 701). Indeed, the development of advanced machinery improves productivity whilst simultaneously reducing production costs and expropriating the worker of their skill.

Betting shop employees see their skill expropriated through the growth of platforms which encourage migration away from OTC betting. Firstly, each digital platform negates employee-to-customer interaction. FOBTs deploy specific structural characteristics which encourage customer interaction with the machine without the need for an employee (Schüll, 2012; Harris and Parke, 2016), whilst SSBTs are a direct example of self-service technologies which encourage consumptive labour, as defined earlier by Koeber (2011). Meanwhile, online gambling removes the spatio-temporal barriers associated with betting in-shop (Gariban et al, 2013), whilst the asocial nature of online gambling is a further structural characteristic, encouraging continued spend (McCormack and Griffiths, 2012). In summary, the ease of access afforded by each digital platform outsources labour to the customer themselves.

Secondly, the synergistic network of these platforms also impacts labour as the omnichannel network houses the duties and responsibilities which are normally held by shop staff. For example, duties such as bet placement, customer monitoring and interactions, and promotions all occur in accordance with the data which are harvested from the very 'single wallet' which facilitates the seamless migration between channels. Such functions are offered by the interoperability of channels which is characteristic of the internet of things (see Geng, 2017). Indeed, similarly to automated factory production, sensors inserted into channels gather data from the customer's interaction with each platform. Such data are then used to generate further business decisions (Gubbi et al, 2013). Verhoef et al (2015) underline the numerous touchpoints presented by omnichannel networks, and indeed the more efficient the interoperability between touchpoints, the higher the level of productivity for industry owners. Approaches based on the gathering of data and the reliance upon different channels are also found in industries such as healthcare, energy and aviation (Bartlett, 2017).

Co-ordination of labour

Employees are also deployed towards the omnichannel network to facilitate the productivity of shops' digital platforms (Wheaton, 2021). Employees working for Entain's Ladbrokes and Coral shops have previously been judged against omnichannel -

specifically, online customer acquisition – targets to avoid redundancy (Wheaton, 2021). To this end, employees have been tasked with maintaining the very platforms which render their labour obsolete. Shop employees are theoretically improving the productivity of labour processes for industry owners. Such digital transformations not only reduce cost of production but also expropriate the worker of their skill, alienating them from their labour. Marx (2013) highlights the cost to the worker in Capital. 'Machinery is put to a wrong use, with the object of transforming the workman, from his very childhood, into a part of a detail-machine… Here, as everywhere else, we must distinguish between the increased productivity due to the development of the social process of production, and that due to the capitalist exploitation of that process. In handicrafts and manufacture, the workman makes use of a tool, in the factory, the machine makes use of him' (Marx, 2013, p 292, emphasis added). Contemporary analyses also highlight how the productivity of the worker is now overtaken by that of the machine. Varoufakis (2019) underlines how machines are not functioning 'for our benefit; at times it even seems like we're working furiously to maintain them' (p 113), whilst Dean (2018) also argues that 'things do it for us so that we don't have to' (pp 150-151). Betting shop labour is theoretically subjected to the same expropriation. Employees, due to the synergistic management of these platforms alongside OTC betting, may find themselves having to maintain the very platforms which 'do little to consolidate the role and place of the betting shop in the gambling mix' (Jones et al. 2020, p. 10).

The integration of OTC betting alongside digital platforms theoretically incorporates employees into a part of the brand experience which omnichannel management seeks to optimise. Zhang et al. (2010) outline the need for performance metrics to measure the recruitment performance to the omnichannel network. Within betting shops, this applies to the role of OTC betting and its role in recruitment to the brand's online channels above all (Wheaton, 2021). Hsia et al (2020) also underline the benefit in promoting cross-channel offers to further entice customer migration. The focus on the customer's relationship with the brand as demonstrated in Table One may lead employees into the advertising of cross-channel promotions. Secondly, platform maintenance also consists of training customers who do not possess the level of technology readiness to use self-service technologies. Hilton et al (2013) and Kimes and Collier (2015) all highlight how - despite the outsourcing of labour - employees are still required to train customers so the latter may freely access digital platforms. In this sense, employees are again co-ordinated towards the outsourcing of their own labour.

Covid-19

Betting shops in the UK have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Shops were closed as part of lockdown measures between March and June 2020, between November and December 2020 (depending on the region or tier of the UK), and again (all) between January 2021 and April 2021. Betting shops in England and Scotland were also required upon reopening in April 2021 to implement further restrictions, meaning that at least half of all shops' FOBTs were to remain switched off, no live sports were to be shown in-shop, and customers were restricted to two visits - lasting no more than 15 minutes - per day. It may be reasonable to assume that footfall would be impacted by the lasting restrictions, and that more longitudinal data are required post-restrictions to fully explore the impact of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns on the changes in omnichannel custom.

Other research has begun to explore the changes in gambling patterns with a focus on the change in products used to gamble. Research by Wardle et al (2021) conducted in July 2020 found that most sports bettors stopped participating in key sports betting activities during the first lockdown, whilst a small number migrated to other activities such as lotteries, virtual sports and so on. According to Gunstone et al (2020) on behalf of YouGov, 'Most gamblers said that compared to normal, they gambled about the same amount or less during lockdown' (p 54). Periodic data from the Gambling Commission (2021c), on the other hand, demonstrates a substantial increase in the number of bets placed on online slots made in February 2021 compared to the previous year, although this again could be attributed to the forced closure of shops.

Data gathered from the Gambling Commission (2020b) between September 2020 and October 2020 appeared to highlight a 49% increase in GGY from SSBTs as possibly indicative of a shift in attitudes towards transaction over interaction. Whilst this is only one piece of evidence, it may nonetheless demonstrate an example of the pandemic's ability to facilitate the movement of OTC customers into digital channels. Indeed, lockdowns (the most recent of which saw professional sport continue) and the lengthening of restrictions may have expedited this process, as Regulus Partners underlined in April 2021. 'The longer it takes for land based betting to offer its full suite of product (and its key USP: community and in-shop atmosphere), the likelihood of some customers' channel shift and/or changes to gambling behaviour becoming permanent increases' (Regulus Partners, 2021, online). Whilst arguments made elsewhere will highlight the consequent impact on gambling addiction, such permanent changes will also reduce the labour of those who would be best placed to identify gambling harm if conducted within the land-based industry.

Conclusion

This paper forms a theoretical response to Jones et al's (2020) article on the changing business environment for betting shops by arguing that betting shops form part of an omnichannel network deployed by operators as opposed to a multichannel approach. The difference is significant both for shop customers and employees alike. Extant research underlines the relationship between online gambling and financial harm (Forrest and McHale, 2021; Muggleton et al, 2021), whilst the omnichannel nature of the single wallet accounts which are sold in betting shops are driven towards a holistic brand experience which highlights online gambling above all. Betting shop labour may see its role protected within the new digital environment, but 'don't bet on it' (Jones et al, 2020, p 11). Despite the theoretical nature of this paper's contribution, there are practical and management implications as well as theoretical implications for other industries.

Management and practical implications

The very nature of omnichannel retailing means that performance is measured according to cross-channel objectives (Verhoef et al, 2015). Operators therefore will inevitably reshape their business objectives towards the recruitment and profitability across each omnichannel touchpoint (see Zhang et al, 2010). Larke et al (2018) underline the importance of internal restructuring in accordance with the change of customer behaviours. This again points to the co-ordination of shop labour towards the digital technologies or redundancy of staff altogether, as reflected within the author's original study (Wheaton, 2021). Although the implementation and optimisation of

omnichannel networks may safeguard the future of betting shops, it theoretically does not safeguard the future of shop labour with roles redeployed or rendered obsolete altogether.

The practical implications within betting shops were partly reflected through the author's initial study where betting shop staff felt compelled to prioritise targets related to omnichannel recruitment as opposed to the protection of vulnerable customers (Wheaton, 2021). Indeed, staff members (n = 19) reported to the author that whilst they were expected to carry out a multitude of responsibilities when working within shops, the focus on digital platforms meant that they often felt more pressure in relation to targets measuring omnichannel migration as opposed to the protection of customers. The original study also found that more experienced employees felt more comfortable in prioritising customer welfare over omnichannel targets.

Yet, the overarching practical implication of the growth of digital technologies within betting shops is the negation of current shop labour. With customers migrating particularly to online gambling, betting shop labour runs the risk of becoming obsolete and whilst betting shop staff during the original study may have felt that they were being tasked with too much responsibility, the combination of the reliance upon digital platforms as well as perceptions enacted by the Covid-19 pandemic may mean that betting shops will soon see a permanent reduction in footfall. Future, longitudinal data will fully explore the impact of lockdowns upon betting shop footfall and if shop customers have been lost to online gambling. Betting shop operators should therefore seek to encourage customers back into betting shops. However, with the ongoing review possibly restricting advertisements (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2020), operators could do this by matching their online sports betting proposition OTC whilst also ensuring that employees are also sufficiently trained and confident enough to recognise and interact with customers who may suffer from disordered gambling. The ability for employees to recognise gambling harm is important. Online gambling is an asocial activity (McCormack and Griffiths, 2012), so betting shops should theoretically facilitate a safer environment for customers. Yet, this requires operators to implement training which empowers employees to interact with customers who suffer from disordered gambling whether OTC, on SSBTs or FOBTs. This would also involve removing the requirement for employees to encourage migration to online gambling. Operators should also ensure that they provide a safe working environment according to perceptions of crowding which may have grown during the Covid-19 pandemic (see Chang, 2021).

Theoretical implications for wider retail
The current paper highlights the theoretical impact of digital transformation upon labour within a specific leisure industry. However, the theoretical impact can be expanded to other industries on the UK's high street, such as that of retail. Gap, a popular clothing brand which has maintained a presence on the UK's high street since 1987, will see its shops closes in the UK by the end of September 2021 instead opting to focus on its online arm (Gap Inc, 2021). Next, another clothes retailer, found an increased likelihood amongst its customers of repeat purchases after every online order; customers were 43% more likely to make another purchase online after their first order, 53% after their second, eventually rising to 84% after their tenth (Next PLC, 2021). Argos, meanwhile, another omnichannel retailer on the UK's high streets, reported that 90% of its sales were made online during 2020 (J Sainsbury PLC, 2020).

Indeed, digital transformation could theoretically combine with factors related to Covid-19 to ensure the redundancy of all shop staff, not just that of the betting shop workforce. Therefore, the theoretical implications highlighted here could therefore be expanded to the wider UK high street, with other large chains becoming reliant upon their digital touchpoints in order to generate further profitability.

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