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Key account management in B2B marketing: A systematic literature review and research agenda

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of various approaches in relationship marketing has transformed business marketing practices in managing strategic clients. In this direction, firms have embraced Key Account Management (KAM) as a relationship marketing tool for profitably managing their strategic customers. The concept of KAM has evolved and gained importance in academic literature as a distinct sub-division of business-to-business (B2B) marketing. However, the current academic understanding is very diverse and disintegrated, posing a threat to domain expansion and challenges for better managerial practice. This study reviews the extant KAM literature with a systematic review approach and tries to address this void in the extant body of knowledge. 104 research papers published between 1990 and 2022 were systematically reviewed. The results suggest a synthesized framework integrating the characteristics of numerous KAM practices and antecedents. In addition, we provide directions for future research based on the synthesis of the extant literature grounded in theory, context, characteristics, and methodology.

1. Introduction

Business marketing firms manage a variety of customers with differing business prospects and opportunities (Shree, Singh, Paul, Hao, & Xu, 2021). In this market, building strong and deep-rooted relationships tackling specific customer needs with value-creation orientation plays a critical role in B2B marketing prospects. More importantly, the concept of relationship marketing has gained high acceptance as a technique to manage high-profile customers (Berry, 2002; Božič & Dimovski, 2019; Gronroos, 1997; Herhausen et al., 2020, 2022; Jackson, 1985; Kumar, Sharma, & Salo, 2019; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995; Weitz & Jap, 1995), by creating customer value (Guesalaga, Gabrielsson, Rogers, Ryals, & Cuevas, 2018; Holbrook, 2005; Murphy & Coughlan, 2018; Slater, 1997; Ulaga, 2003; Woodruff, 1997), satisfaction, and loyalty (Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013, 2015; Woodall, 2003). Accordingly, KAM has emerged as a strong relationship marketing tool for managing strategic customer relationships, and many B2B firms follow this mode of relationship orientation in some form (Millman, 1996; Napolitano, 1997; Pardo, 1999; Sharma, 1997).

The relationship marketing capability of KAM has facilitated B2B marketing firms in developing and intensifying long-term customer-centric business relationships. Similarly, social capital and relationship quality are those relational aspects important to KAM implementation (Badawi, Battor, & Badghish, 2022). KAM facilitates value creation in strategic relationships (Pardo et al., 2006; Salojarvi, Saarenketo, & Puumalainen, 2013; Sengupta, Krapfel, & Pusateri, 2000; Sharma, 2006; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995; Wengler, Ehret, & Saab, 2006), relational outcomes (Hakansson & Snehota, 1995; Richards & Jones, 2009; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015) and long-lasting business performance (Ivens & Pardo, 2007; Pardo, Ivens, & Wilson, 2014). Commercial approach of KAM is to serve high potential, geographically dispersed customers demanding individual attention due to their complex needs, through long-standing interdependent relationships (Abratt & Kelly, 2002). KAM focuses on value-creation (Murphy & Coughlan, 2018) in strategic relationships, offering profits and volume potential (Piercy & Lane, 2006; Weilbaker & Weeks, 1997).

KAM as a concept was evolved during the 1980s got more popularity during the 1990s. Ever since KAM has been established as a sub-discipline of B2B relationship marketing. Our review identified increasing number of research papers on KAM over the last three decades, primarily based on field-based studies (surveys and interviews). Consequently, academic research started generating noteworthy

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knowledge in the B2B context facilitating innovative ideas and insights into continuously improving the topics, concepts, and antecedents enhancing the KAM domain (Davies & Ryals, 2014; Guenzi et al., 2007; Guesalaga, 2014; Guesalaga et al., 2018; Herhausen et al., 2020, 2022; Homburg, Workman, & Jensen, 2002; Ivens, Pardo, Niersbach, & Leischnig, 2016; Jean, Sinkovics, Kim, & Lew, 2015; Kumar et al., 2019; McDonald, 2000; Millman, 1996; Natti & Palo, 2012; Ojasalo, 2004; Pardo et al., 2011, 2014; Ryals & Rogers, 2007; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013, 2015; Workman, Homburg, & Jensen, 2003). This contributed to the industry practice in creating and sustaining strong relationships with strategic customers, generating significant profits and revenues. An increasing focus on KAM reflects the commercial and academic interest in the domain. The domain expansion on KAM facilitates B2B firms to achieve their strategic goals of attracting, developing, and retaining high potential customers by offering customized features and specialized service.

The detailed analysis of the extant literature suggests that prior empirical research papers are fewer and lacked the integration of the relevant key account (KA) practices and antecedent drivers impacting KA performance. The existing evidence provides isolated insights on intra- and inter-organizational KA practices and antecedents impacting KA performance. That is, extant studies have focused on one or few of the KA practices and antecedents impacting KAM, which is insufficient for a complete and integrative understanding on the domain. Besides, most of the extant literature adopted either the supplier or customer perspective (Curasi, Boles, & Reynolds, 2018) rather than a dyadic supplier-customer approach. Primarily, the extant studies (empirical) are fewer and scattered across one or few of the performance antecedents (KAM actors, roles, activities, capabilities), and KA practices (strategy, structure, alignment, esprit de corps) offering limited knowledge on the domain.

Further, the detailed analysis reveals that prior studies were conducted in isolation with respect to the relevant aspects manifesting KAM. For example, the extant research conducted studies and expanded knowledge on various topics in KAM such as, KA performance, value-creation, global account management, KAM structure (Kumar et al., 2019), digital marketing capabilities, knowledge gap (Herhausen, Miočević, Morgan, & Kleijnen, 2020; Lautenschlager & Tzempelikos, 2021), intra- and inter-organizational identification (Peters, Ivens, & Pardo, 2020). Some studies focused on KAM configuration and determinants of KAM outcomes (Herhausen, Ivens, Spencer, & Weibel, 2022; Murphy & Li, 2015), role of account managers, relationship specific investments, cultural context (Alejandro, Souza, Boles, Ribeiro, & Monteiro, 2011), attitudes, behaviors of KA managers (Davies & Ryals, 2013). Studies were also conducted on firm capabilities and their effect on performance outcomes (Ivens, Leischnig, Pardo, & Niersbach, 2018), the role of knowledge, absorptive capacity (Hakanen, 2014), and practices explaining KA performance (Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015). Majority of the academic studies on KAM (58 %, Refer Table 2) were qualitative, and thus, we identified the deficiency of quantitative and mix-method research, integrating various themes in KAM.

Though studies reported various aspects of KAM, a detailed synthesis of this literature is lacking. This necessitated the classification of various KAM practices into intra-and inter-organizational context, and across the supplier-customer dyad creating meaningful knowledge. Also, an improved and synthesized knowledge on performance antecedents and moderating factors can contribute to the understanding of the industry practitioners, while designing and implementing KAM programs.

Therefore, this systematic literature review aims to synthesize the literature on the phenomenon of KAM to offer comprehensive and integrative knowledge by listing (meta-analysis) and defining various topics, antecedents, and practices that manifest KAM for better managerial practice. Thus, the study proposes a KAM framework aligning the listed KA practices (intra- and inter-organizational), antecedents, and their inter-relationships towards KAM outcomes. In addition, our endeavor is to drive academicians to conduct empirical research based on the proposed KAM framework. This can contribute to the body of knowledge on KAM, that drives further academic research and industry practice. In doing so, the study formulates the following specific questions:

RQ1. What is the significance of KAM as a sub-discipline of B2B relationship marketing?
RQ2. Which are the relevant topics in KAM that entered the academic research, and how important are those topics for academia and practitioners in improving the understanding of the domain?
RQ3. What are the key directions for imminent research in this domain while analyzing and synthesizing extant literature?

Thus, this study provides the following contributions to the body of knowledge on KAM. First, this review provides a synthesized overview of KAM that identifies various practices and other inducing factors relevant while designing and implementing effective KAM programs, lacking in the extant literature. Secondly, by conducting a more critical evaluation of the current understanding on the domain of KAM, we identify the research gaps that exist in the extant literature, and this in turn provides critical directions for the expansion of the domain knowledge. Thirdly, this review proposes managerial directions especially on the KAM design, implementation, actors, activities, strategy, structure, resources, and capabilities that help B2B marketing firms achieve KA effectiveness and performance. In summary, this systematic review guides both academicians and practitioners alike regarding the scope of the extant research. This review offers insights on the suitability of KAM as a relationship marketing approach, and what critical issues need to be investigated further.

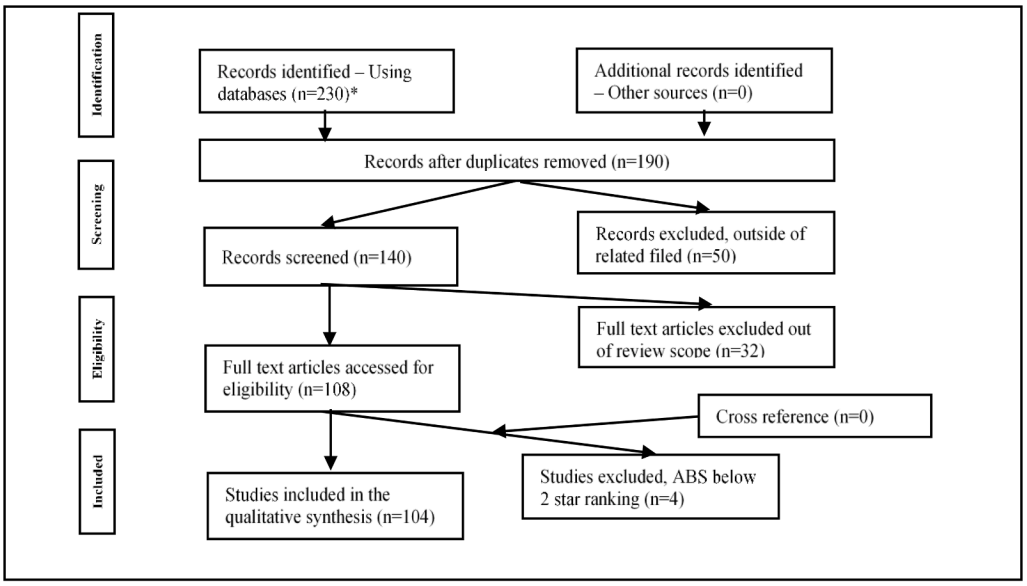
The remainder of the review paper is arranged as below: First, we elaborate on the approach used to conduct this literature review synthesis. We then present our review framework, which provides a foundation for analyzing and synthesizing the extant literature. Followed by this, we review the KAM literature and present a synthesized understanding of KA practices, performance drivers, KAM usages, outcomes, and the approaches adopted by the extant research. Finally, we deliberate on the theoretical inferences to outline the direction for future research and conclude with managerial implications and limitations.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Search strategy

In our endeavor to address the investigative questions (RQ1-RQ3), it was decided to carry out a systematic literature review to gather pertinent evidence following the extant literature review frameworks (e.g., Paul & Criado, 2020). This review followed two protocols, i). the preferred reporting items for the systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) approach (Moher et al., 2015; Paschou, Rapaccini, Adrodegari, & Saccani, 2020), ii) Scientific Procedures and Rationale for Systematic Literature Reviews-SPAR 4 SLR (Paul et al., 2021). As shown in Fig. 1, the PRISMA approach, an evidence-based demonstration of a four-stage process, embraces clarity, transparency, and legitimacy of data and reduces bias of occurrence. The research questions developed in the first phase prompted a few review questions (Paschou et al., 2020) to propel the investigation:

a) What is the status of the extant literature on KAM, and what are the approaches used in the extant studies?
b) What are the relevant themes and KA practices, and how are they commonly defined, classified, and characterized in KAM literature?
c) Which KA practices affect organizational and relational (people) factors, and how are results achieved in the intra- and inter-organizational settings?
d) What are those intervening (mediators) and conditional (moderators) factors influencing the relationship of antecedents and KA practices on KA effectiveness and performance in KAM?



* Databases used are: EBSCO, PROQUEST, EMERALD INSIGHT, JSTOR, SCIENCEDIRECT, WEB OF SCIENCE.

Fig. 1. Article selection for systematic literature review based on PRISMA.

e) What are the usages of implementing KAM, supported by the application of essential antecedents and KA practices?

2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Three sets of search keywords were driven by research questions. The first set of keywords were linked to manufacturers and suppliers in the business, relationship, and industrial marketing, as guided by the extant studies (Friend & Johnson, 2014; Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015). The second set of keywords were associated with KAM, strategic/national/global account management, and prior studies supported the same (Davies & Ryals, 2014; Guesalaga et al., 2018). The third set of keywords were related to KAM concepts such as KA effectiveness, practices, and performance fortified by prior studies (Storbacka, 2012; Sullivan, Peterson, & Krishnan, 2012).

The keywords search was not limited to the title and abstract. We used popular business management indexing and citation databases to select the published papers, such as *business source complete (EBSCO), Scopus, Jstor, ProQuest, ScienceDirect,* and *Web of Science* (Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca, 2020). A full article search approach was undertaken to capture all relevant articles on said keywords. In addition, to ensure that we did not miss relevant articles on B2B marketing, we conducted a journal website-based search by targeting B2B focused marketing journals such as *Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing,* and *Journal of Strategic Marketing*. The search results reported that KAM domain evinced academic interest, since the 1990′s. Thus, in this study, the search period was restricted to 1990–2022, focusing on recent articles in the area and performing analysis for an adequate time.

2.3. Data collection

Following prior classic reviews (Billore & Anisimova, 2021; Chakma, Paul, & Dhir, 2021: Khatoon & Rehman, 2021; Nanda & Banerjee, 2021; Södergren, 2021; Kajol, Singh, & Paul, 2022; Srivastava, Bharadhwaj, Maheswarappa, & Paul, 2022), steps were taken to identify the journal publications and apply practical screening. The selected databases provided academic work on business management and indexed a range of journals in the area. Specifically, in a systematic literature review, only journal publications are included. The papers published as conference papers, books and reports were excluded from the ambit of the study, as refereed journal articles are state-of-the-art output and of high impact (Paul & Criado, 2020; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Bachrach, & Podsakoff, 2005). This review approach is synchronous with earlier review papers where the scope of the study was limited to journal articles (e.g., Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015; Paschou et al., 2020). Besides, only journal articles in English-language were chosen for the review and analysis. A total of 230 articles were downloaded. The duplicates were excluded and moved 190 papers to the screening stage. Following prior reviews (Hao, Paul, Trott, Guo, & Wu, 2019; Jiang et al., 2020; Paschou et al., 2020), it was decided to include articles published in journals with either Q1 Rank in Web of Science or with a minimum 2-star rank and above in the United Kingdom- CABS ranking list. The titles and abstracts of the remaining 190 research papers were analyzed to identify their relevance to the study. This resulted in 108 articles. Lastly, during the filtering stage, we included 104 articles for review, all of them carrying

Table 1
Journals where articles on KAM published– Percentage – Impact Factor.

Journal	No. of articles	Percentage	Impact factor-2019*
Industrial Marketing Management	33	31.73%	4.695
Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	20	19.23%	2.497
Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management	12	11.54%	–
European Journal of Marketing	4	3.85%	2.135
Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing	4	3.85%	0.543
Journal of Marketing	4	3.85%	5.266
Journal of Strategic Marketing	4	3.85%	–
Journal of Marketing Management	3	2.88%	1.719
International Business Review	2	1.92%	3.953
Journal of Business Market Management	2	1.92%	–
Journal of Business Strategy	2	1.92%	–
Others	14	13.46%	–
Total	104	100%	–

*Source: Journal Citation Reports (Clarivate Analytics, 2020).

focus on KA practices and antecedents impacting KAM (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Table 1 provides the bibliographic details of the journal articles reviewed.

2.4. Data synthesis and analysis

Following the guiding article (Paul & Barari, 2022), all the relevant articles were analyzed, both descriptively and thematically. In the descriptive analysis, the focus was on the classification of papers according to the year and journal of publication and the methodology applied by adopting a deductive approach. Conversely, the thematic analysis adopted an inductive approach designed to characterize the phenomenon of KAM (Paschou et al., 2020). In particular, the study intends to conceptualize KAM by listing and analyzing the antecedent factors, and KA practices (intra- and inter-organizational) impacting performance. Following guiding articles (Paul & Criado, 2020; Paul, Lim, O'Cass, Hao, & Bresciani, 2021), we used the systematic review and meta-analysis technique to achieve our objective of identifying and listing the various topics in KAM under various categories and contexts. Also, the study comprehends the benefits of the KAM program, the role of moderators, and how structural mechanisms transform key aspects of relationship value and relational outcomes.

2.5. Temporal, Journal distribution of literature

The 104 papers selected were analyzed at this stage concerning the publication year, journal, field of study, and methodological approach to identify the trends pursued by prior researchers. KAM has found its way into the academia during the 1990s and peak level of publications were found to be in 1999, 2006, 2009 and 2014 (Lautenschlager & Tzempelikos, 2021). Of the shortlisted papers for review, 20 pertained to the 1990–2000 period, 37 belonged to the 2000–2010 period, and the balance of 47 belonged to the 2010–2022 period. Most of the journal papers reviewed were from *Industrial Marketing Management* (33), *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* (20), and *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* (12), constituting 63 per cent of reviewed articles.

Most papers used a single analytical approach: quantitative (n = 36) or qualitative (n = 60). Fewer (n = 8) studies applied a mixed research method (See Table 2). Quantitative research, as defined in the study, adopted an empirical approach based on numerical measurements, while qualitative methods employed text or other materials. The quantitative stream used the survey method for data collection, whereas the qualitative stream embraced in-depth semi-structured interviews, case studies, content analysis, and ethnographic studies. The mixed-method research utilized a combination of the above.

Table 2
Article type and methodology applied.

Paper type	Method	Total	Percentage
Qualitative	Interviews-structured/semi-structured	35	33.65%
	Concept development	7	6.73%
	Explanatory	6	5.77%
	Exploratory	4	3.85%
	Content analysis	3	2.88%
	Case study	2	1.92%
	Critique	1	0.96%
	Ethnography	1	0.96%
	Literature review	1	0.96%
	Sub Total	60	57.69%
Quantitative	Structured Questionnaire based Survey	36	34.62%
Mix-method	Survey, interview, conceptual articles	8	7.69%
	Total	104	100%

Source: Prepared by the author.

3. Organizing framework

This systematic literature review is based on synthesizing scholarly articles whose findings are organized into a framework embracing topics encompassing KAM literature. To frame our research review, we relied on the following KAM studies. The conceptual model proposed by Tzempelikos and Gounaris (2015) proposes KAM practices at various levels: strategic, organizational, and tactical, that impact KA performance, as mediated through relational capabilities and relational outcomes. In summary, this model focuses on the organizational level of KA practices and lacks a portrayal of all the relevant intra- and inter-organizational practices and antecedents required to manifest a comprehensive model. Workman Jr et al. (2003) describes intra-organizational determinants of KAM effectiveness and proposed a conceptual model showing the intra-organizational antecedents (activities, actors, resources, and formalization) causing KA performance interceded through KA effectiveness. In summary, this model lacks insight into all the relevant inter-organizational KA practices—antecedents creating relationship value and relational outcomes manifesting KA performance—needed for a conclusive understanding.

Finally, the model by Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2013) proposed that KAM orientation has two dimensions: attitude and behavior. KAM orientation impacts financial and non-financial performance mediated through the constructs of relationship quality and relational capabilities. In summary, the model is limited to few of the relevant KA practices and antecedents manifesting KAM.

A bibliometric and content analyses by Lautenschlager and Tzempelikos (2021) was limited in scope listing corporate strategy, intra-firm co-operation, organizational structure, knowledge management, culture, performance management, internet marketing as relevant topics in KAM. They identified that prior research was largely on developed markets and rarely on developing markets, thus far behind the objectives of our review. Another bibliometric analysis by Kumar et al. (2019) focused on structure, collaboration, value-creation, KAM performance and suggested network-view of KAM structure as future research agenda, which is limited in scope, in our view. Another systematic review by Herhausen et al. (2020) focused on listing issues on digital marketing and suggesting future research limited to digitalization, fails to achieve objectives set in our review. The systematic literature review by Zeng (2022) focus on the Chinese context and topics limited to resource integration, organizational reforms, and KA manager training, used PRISMA method for the systematic search of articles, employed in our review.

Based on the above models, the following research priorities were proposed by prior researchers (Curasi et al., 2018; Ivens et al., 2016). Our synthesized review analyzed numerous KAM themes, antecedents, and practices in the supplier-customer dyadic relationship. Hence, as shown in Fig. 2, we organized the literature review into various categories: 1) intra-organizational KA practices, 2) inter-organizational KA practices, 3) KAM usages and benefits, 4) intervening factors (mediators), 5) conditional factors (moderators), and 6) performance outcomes. Relying on the above concepts, this study strives to uncover the research gaps in KAM and offers directions for future research.

4. Analysis and findings

Supplier firms adopt KAM as a relationship marketing tool, intending to create long-term profitable client relationships through value creation (Leone, Schiavone, & Simoni, 2021), and collaborative involvement towards performance outcomes (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013). The interplay between the two foci of organizational identification (internal) and KA identification (external) enables the KAM actors in mobilizing resources and capabilities (Peters et al., 2020). In KAM, the supplier firm creates an idiosyncratic structure encompassing designated actors, activities, resources, and capabilities into an interface of intra- and inter-organizational networks for managing

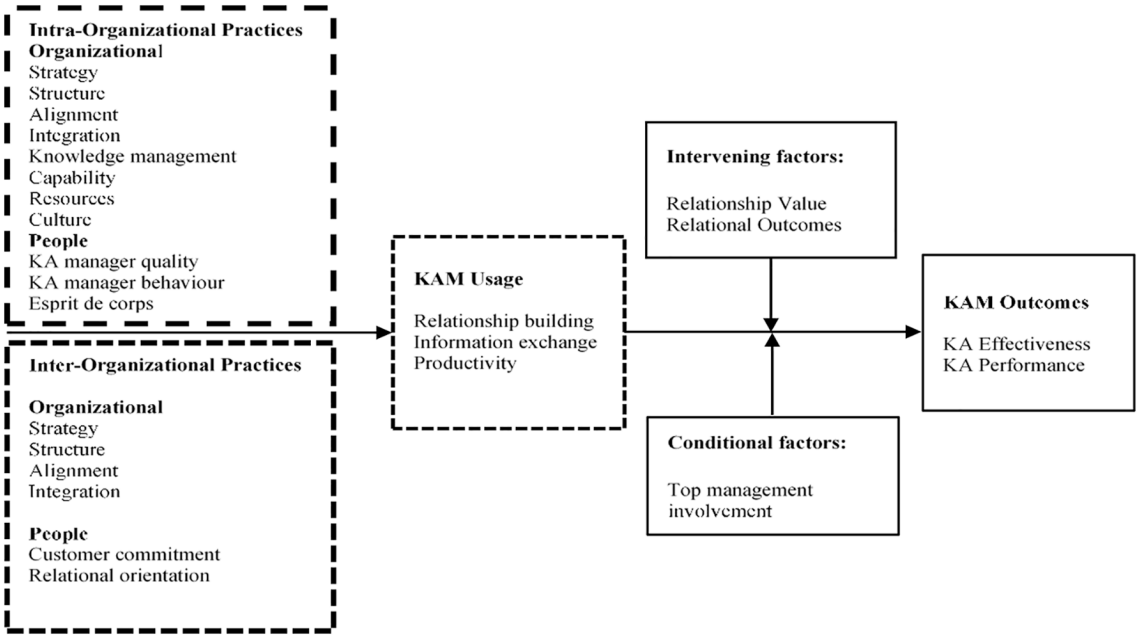


Fig. 2. Review framework used in the systematic literature review.

strategic relationships (Davies & Ryals, 2013; Fazli-Salehi, Torres, & Zúñiga, 2021; Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013; Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010; Richards & Jones, 2009). The extant literature advocates the notion that the configuration of KAM programs rests with the intra-organizational (Pardo et al., 2014; Speakman & Ryals, 2012; Storbacka, 2012) and inter-organizational KA practices driving collaborative behavior (Ivens & Pardo, 2007; Lambe & Spekman, 1997) across the supplier-customer dyadic context.

Intra-organizational factors are further classified into organizational and people factors. At the organizational level, organizational strategy (Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010; Homburg et al., 2002), internal structure that facilitates relational exchange, knowledge sharing, and cooperation toward meeting customer needs (Abratt & Kelly, 2002; Marcos-Cuevas, Nätti, Palo, & Ryals, 2014), internal alignment of actors, divisions (Millman & Wilson, 1995), integration of processes, structure, and information systems (Pardo et al., 2014) result in effective KAM implementation. In addition, resource allocation creates value sequels (Guesalaga et al., 2018), firm capabilities drive substantive capabilities in processing resources efficiently, and dynamic capabilities define the ability to respond to dynamic market conditions (Herhausen et al., 2022; Ivens et al., 2018), and digitalization (Herhausen et al., 2020) drives KAM performance.

At the people level, a collective culture that facilitates commitment, customer-orientation, and flexibility in approach (Storbacka, 2012), knowledge management (KM) encouraging alignment of internal capabilities (Hausman, Johnston, Hutt, & Walker, 2006) are key to co-creation and improved performance (Hakanen, 2014). People practices include KA manager' essential behaviors (Guenzi, Pardo, & Georges, 2007), KA manager qualities (truthfulness, interaction, knowledge, and negotiation skills) (McDonald, Millman, & Rogers, 1997); conflict management (Speakman & Ryals, 2012); teamwork skills (Guenzi, Georges, & Pardo, 2009), and esprit de corps establishing common goals (Ivens et al., 2016; Workman Jr et al., 2003).

Inter-organizational factors are also key to performance in the supplier-customer interface. At an inter-organizational level, strategy plays a key role in identifying KA customers with collaborative behaviors to leverage expertise (Lambe & Spekman, 1997). A balance in the intra- and inter-organizational alignment is a key consideration in designing KA selection process (Feste, Ivens, & Pardo, 2020). Jointly, inter-organizational structures facilitate people and process integration across divisions in the supplier-customer dyad (Millman, 1996). Inter-organizational fit or alignment is the compatibility of the strategy and structure of collaborating firms, built on trust and reciprocity (Toulan, Birkinshaw, & Arnold, 2006) and firm's environment (Ming-Huei & Wen-Chiung, 2011). Inter-organizational integration is the amalgamation of KAs, processes, and KA staff, allocating subsidiaries with KAs and systems integration with partnering vendors to meet customer needs (Millman, 1996). People practices in the inter-firm context include long-lasting customer-commitment (Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995) and relational orientation directed towards beneficial relational exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the following section, we elucidate the practices in detail.

4.1. *Intra-organizational practices*

4.1.1. *Organizational*

Strategy: Our literature synthesis attributed the role of firm strategy in identifying a subset of customers from the customer portfolio as strategically significant for long-lasting business outcomes (Ivens et al., 2018; Leone et al., 2021). Subsequently, supplier firms implement suitable strategies to develop performance capabilities that shape enduring lucrative relationships (Ojasalo, 2001, 2002). Analysis suggests that strategic customers offer exceptional growth prospects (Davies & Ryals, 2014; Homburg et al., 2002) through value co-creation (Hakanen, 2014; Leone et al., 2021) and mutual involvement (Ryals & Rogers, 2007), driving competitive advantage (Shi, Zou, White, McNally, & Cavusgil, 2005). The synthesis posits the strategic importance of KAs, as they contribute larger business volumes and profit (Millman, 1996). Hence, supplier firms adopt a proactive attitude, compelling capabilities, and bespoke processes to serve strategic customers (Millman & Wilson, 1999). Our analysis suggests that strategic decisions comprise the choice of product, market, functions, geographical, and organizational structure (Kempeners & Van der Hart, 1999).

Structure: The synthesized review suggests the inevitability of KAM structure in unveiling opportunities for continuous process improvement and optimizing cost (Ellis & Iwasaki, 2018; Millman & Wilson, 1999; Shi, White, Zou, & Cavusgil, 2010). The extant research contribution posits that improved organizational structure (Pereira et al., 2019) facilitate resource utilization for value-creation (Ivens & Pardo, 2008; Marcos-Cuevas et al., 2014) and KAM performance (Wengler

et al., 2006). Structural re-alignment changes internal conditions, reduces conflicts (Guesalaga, 2014; Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010; Marcos-Cuevas et al., 2014; Zupancic, 2008), builds performance (Guenzi & Storbacka, 2015), and considers the revenue potential of KAs (Wang & Brennan, 2014).

Alignment: Alignment is about common goals, everyone being on the same page, team spirit, people involvement, and team selling (Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010). Internal alignment drives efficiency within the supplier side of KAM (Matthyssens, Gosselin, & Bauwen, 2006). The account fit is reflected by strategic, operational, and personal fit. Strategic fit refers to the degree of alignment of supplier and customer strategies; operational fit reflects the degree of alignment of the KA's requirements and supplier' capabilities; and personal fit denotes the degree of compatibility between people in both entities (Richards & Jones, 2009). Alignment among intra-firm actors and functions is necessary for effective coordination of resources to enhance value co-creation (Ivens et al., 2016; Pardo et al., 2014; Speakman & Ryals, 2012).

Integration: The findings from our analysis describe integration as the unity of efforts and inter-reliant functional units acting as a unified whole. We identified structural, and information systems integration important for successful KAM programs (Pardo et al., 2014; Wang & Brennan, 2014), whereas integration gaps impact the quality of relationships among KAM units (Leischnig, Ivens, Niersbach, & Pardo, 2018).

Knowledge management: Absorptive capacity drives customer-specific knowledge flows across intra- and inter-organizational functions such as R&D, production, sales, and purchases, resulting in value co-creation meeting customer needs (Hakanen, 2014; Salojarvi et al., 2013). We also identified top management involvement, the team-based approach (Salojarvi & Saarenketo, 2013), CRM technology, and formalization positively impact knowledge utilization effecting KAM performance (Salojarvi, Sainio, & Tarkiainen, 2010; Salojarvi & Sainio, 2015).

Capability: Our systematic review suggests that the capability-building (dynamic) mechanism focuses on market scanning in gathering information on the market and customers' changing needs, enhancing long-lasting market performance (Jean et al., 2015; Ojasalo, 2002). We identified substantive capabilities as a firm's ability to efficiently process resources in co-creating value, whereas dynamic capabilities comprehend new product development and respond to dynamic conditions (Ivens et al., 2018). We also identified competitive intelligence (Shi et al., 2005) and collaborative supply-chain (e.g., reliable, stable, creative, value-creating, and communicative) as firm capabilities (Ryals & Humphries, 2007).

Resources: Synthesis of the extant literature recognized the resource-based tactic encompassing resources and capabilities leading to value-creation, while skills and competencies drive operational and dynamic capabilities (Guesalaga et al., 2018; Storbacka, 2012). Firm capability leverages resources and marketer's relational assets towards driving competitive advantage and superior KA performance (Ivens et al., 2016; Sharma, 2006).

Culture: Our synthesis of KAM literature established the impact of cultural differences while operationalizing KAM programs (Al-Husan & Brennan, 2009). Hence, effective customer management necessitates the exclusion of cultural blocks (Ellis & Iwasaki, 2018; Millman & Wilson, 1999). We argue that top management assumes an important role in instituting an internal culture favorable to stakeholder co-operation and collaboration for KAM execution (Pereira et al., 2019). Increased cultural distance necessitates the commitment of more resources to building international KAM capability in a trusting relationship (Jean et al., 2015). We also identified the importance of acceptable behavior, as guided by standards and rules of conduct, and directed by ethical culture (Durif, Geay, & Graf, 2013).

4.1.2. People

KA manager qualities: Our finding highlights relevant KA manager qualities necessary for imparting different influences and evaluations on the relationship (Alejandro et al., 2011). We identified KA manager effectiveness as being manifested by strategic and intrapreneurial capability (Sengupta et al., 2000), absorptive capacity (Hakanen, 2014), ability to build strong relationship networks (Abratt & Kelly, 2002; Georges & Eggert, 2003; Hausman et al., 2006).

KA manager behavior: We observed that KA manager behavior is guided by knowledge and understanding of the KAs business, commitment, KA manager suitability, and trust (Abratt & Kelly, 2002); relational selling strategy (Davies & Ryals, 2013); and multi-cultural teamwork (Davies & Ryals, 2013; Millman, 1996), problem-solving skills (Boles & Barksdale, 1996); proactive behavior (Murphy & Coughlan, 2018; Speakman & Ryals, 2012) contributing sales effectiveness.

Esprit-de-corps: We recognized esprit-de-corps as the degree to which KAM actors follow common goals (Ivens et al., 2016; Workman Jr et al., 2003). Our synthesis observed that esprit-de-corps demonstrates shared responsibility (Salojarvi & Saarenketo, 2013), fosters information exchange and cohesion among people, builds cross-functional expertise, and positively impacts satisfaction, trust, commitment (Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015), and customer knowledge dissemination impacting performance (Salojarvi et al., 2013). We acknowledged esprit-de-corps as a strong team-to-firm relationship driver (Jones, Dixon, Chonko, & Cannon, 2005), fostering organizational citizenship behaviors (Guenzi et al., 2007) and contributing to internal alignment driving KAM performance (Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010).

4.2. Inter-organizational practices

4.2.1. Organizational

KAM program design requires dyadic focus, gathering information from suppliers, customers, and the downstream value chain (Salojarvi et al., 2013). Both intra- and inter-organizational factors impact KAM structure. Thus, we identified the inter-organizational practices as follows:

Strategy: We identified that corporate strategy drives the supplier-customer relationship (Spencer, 1999). KA strategy requires customer-orientation (Lai & Gelb, 2015) and a partnering mindset (Piercy & Lane, 2006) in the supplier-customer dyad while selecting the right partner (Feste et al., 2020; Napolitano, 1997) and ensuring supplier adaptation to customer needs (Sengupta, Krapfel, & Pusateri, 1997). Strategy drives KAM capability (Jean et al., 2015), knowledge management, integration of various cultures towards co-creation (Hakanen, 2014), long-term alliances, co-ordination, strategic synergies (Lambe & Spekman, 1997). A right strategy facilitates internal exchange, relational value in the inter-firm context (Henneberg, Pardo, Mouzas, & Naudé, 2009), innovation and value co-creation (Wießmeier, Thoma, and Senn, 2012).

Structure: We found that consistent strategy and structure drive inter-organizational fit, adaptability (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Toulan et al., 2006), networking competences in exchange relationships (Gupta, Kumar, Grewal, & Lilien, 2019; Henneberg et al., 2009), receptiveness to disrupting organization structure, and attitude to align with the customer needs (Millman & Wilson, 1999). We observed that a formalized KAM structure reduces flexibility and entrepreneurial spirit (Vanharanta, Gilchrist, Pressey, & Lenney, 2014) and causes cultural anxieties (Pressey et al., 2014; Zupancic & Mullner, 2008), hence flexible and collaborative structures are often conducive to KA effectiveness (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014; Spencer, 1999).

Alignment: We observed from our synthesis that alignment of supplier and customer strategies implies strategic fit (Ryals & Rogers, 2007), process and service signify operational fit, and individuals following similar goals indicate personal fit (Richards & Jones, 2009). Alignment of KAM networks (Gupta et al., 2019), consistent actions

(Ming-Huei & Wen-Chiung, 2011; Napolitano, 1997), common interests (Ryals & Davies, 2013), and business concerns (Storbacka, 2012) drive KA performance, influenced by top management involvement (Guesalaga, 2014).

Integration: We observed inter-firm integration in a supplier-customer relationship as driven by strong alignment—i.e., being in tune with customer objectives (Friend & Johnson, 2014) and supply-chain integration (Ryals & Humphries, 2007) that drives performance (Jones, Richards, Halstead, & Fu, 2009). Successful integration requires a strategic plan that defines accountability, authority, and responsibility (Napolitano, 1997), co-ordination across locations (Pardo, 1997), and adequacy of resource allocation (Ivens & Pardo, 2008). Organizational integration is key since it involves handling geographically spread KAs and KA staff, allocating subsidiaries with KAs, and systems integration by co-operating with partnering vendors to meet customer specifications (Millman, 1996; Pardo, Missirilian, Portier, & Salle, 2011).

4.2.2. People

Customer commitment: We noticed that customer commitment is important for a long-lasting valued relationship involving short sacrifices and confidence (Gundlach et al., 1995). Trust, satisfaction, adaptation, information exchange, consistency of interaction, reduced conflicts, shared values, and conducive organizational culture are precursors of customer commitment (Ojasalo, 2001). Business volumes from the KA is dependent on the present and anticipated commitment to the relationship, steered by goal congruence and commonality of interests (Ojasalo, 2001).

Relational orientation: Our synthesis of the literature posits the understanding that relationship marketing drives beneficial relational exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) in customer-centric firms (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2014). We noted that relationship behaviors (Ivens & Pardo, 2007) drive relationship quality as reflected by trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Bejou, Wray, & Ingram, 1996; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013). Our findings advocate that decision-makers involved in large purchases often possess the expertise to make technically informed decisions. Strong emotions also influence the cognitions and decisions of the purchase decision-makers (Curasi et al., 2018).

4.3. KAM usage

Relationship building: Firms utilize relational behavior to build long-standing KA relationships (Davies & Ryals, 2009; Guesalaga, 2014; Guesalaga et al., 2018; Ivens & Pardo, 2007; Speakman & Ryals, 2012; Workman Jr et al., 2003). Such relationship behaviors are characterized by customer-specific knowledge (Salojarvi & Saarenketo, 2013; Salojarvi & Sainio, 2015), collaborative involvement, value-creation, and performance outcomes (Sengupta et al., 2000; Sharma, 2006; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995), nurturing stable patterns of co-operation and interdependence (Hausman et al., 2006; Leischnig et al., 2018; Millman, 1996). This also facilitates enduring exchange relationships (Guesalaga, 2014; Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010; Ojasalo, 2002; Richards & Jones, 2009; Workman Jr et al., 2003), linking relationship quality with financial performance (Bradford, Challagalla, Hunter, & Moncrief, 2012; Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014; Richards & Jones, 2009; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013). We also observed that role integrity (Durif et al., 2013), trust, commitment (Ivens et al., 2016), knowledge-sharing (Jean et al., 2015), and relationship-level capabilities drive performance (Ivens et al., 2018).

Information exchange: Our findings establish that information exchange, a relational behavior, drives value-creation opportunities (Guesalaga et al., 2018; Hausman et al., 2006; Ivens & Pardo, 2007; Liu, Huang, & Fan, 2018; Millman, 1996; Natti & Palo, 2012; Ojasalo, 2002; Ryals & Humphries, 2007; Shi et al., 2005; Workman Jr et al., 2003), and integration impacting KA performance (Guesalaga, 2014; Gupta et al., 2019; Leischnig et al., 2018). Information systems and communication network facilitate KA managers in swiftly addressing customer issues (Boles, Johnston, & Gardner, 1999; Bradford et al., 2012).

Productivity: We establish that increased focus on productivity is an indispensable part of the corporate relationship—especially B2B relationships—to serve few, large, and profitable customers cost-effectively. Firms constantly re-evaluate their market presence on core competencies driving efficiency and effectiveness in managing strategic customers, employing a dedicated team of KA managers (Boles et al., 1999), and focusing on KAs profit and productivity goals (Abratt & Kelly, 2002). Organizational citizenship behaviors (Guenzi et al., 2007), special activities (Leischnig et al., 2018; McDonald et al., 1997), and proactive behavior demonstrated by KAM actors and leaders can increase the productivity and work outcomes of proactive employees (Yang, Yan, Fan, & Luo, 2017; Zhang, Wang, & Shi, 2012). We also noticed that productivity and time taken are measures of team performance whereas formalization fosters productive relationships (Jones et al., 2005).

4.4. Intervening factors (mediators)

Relationship Value: Comparing benefits and sacrifices measures value in a relationship (Zeithaml, 1988), which is also defined by superior product, technology, process, and value-pricing (Ulaga & Eggert, 2005). Thus, the relational exchange process between supplier and customer represents a value-creation opportunity (Jones et al., 2005). We noticed the role of KAM actors, activities, resources, and formalization in creating value (Leischnig et al., 2018). KAs are characterized by relationship value, i.e., value co-creation (Abratt & Kelly, 2002; Guesalaga et al., 2018; Hakanen, 2014; Ivens & Pardo, 2007), by utilizing resources, leveraging core competencies and capabilities in driving competitiveness (Barney, 1991), and developing trust to build dyadic relationships (Abratt & Kelly, 2002). Customer-specific knowledge (Salojarvi & Sainio, 2015), alignment, focus (Alejandro et al., 2011; Guenzi et al., 2007), communication and conflict resolution (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013) drive relational capabilities that derive sources of value.

Value-creation is impacted by relevant factors, such as business analytics and intelligence (Božič & Dimovski, 2019); collaborative innovation (Yeniyurt, Henke, & Yalcinkaya, 2014); strategic-supply-chain management (Ulaga, 2003); value-based pricing (Töytäri, Rajala, & Alejandro, 2015); flexibility (Zhang et al., 2002, 2003); agility (Abdelilah, El Korchi, & Balambo, 2018); service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1994; Zeithaml, 2000); customization (Ulkuniemi et al., 2011); interactive communication (Finne & Grönroos, 2017).

Relational Outcomes: We observed from the extant studies the cruciality of relationship quality in business relationships reflected by trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013; Richards & Jones, 2009; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015). These are indicators of customer behavioral intentions and the consequence of relationship building (Alejandro et al., 2011; Guesalaga, 2014; Ivens & Pardo, 2007; Workman Jr et al., 2003). Information sharing (Lai & Yang, 2017) and organizational citizenship behaviors impact relationship quality that intercedes the effect of KA practices on KA performance (Guenzi et al., 2007).

4.5. Conditional factors (moderators)

Top Management Involvement: Our findings suggest top managers deal with evaluating KA managers and team performance, creating an internal culture for engagement, and sharing knowledge, adjusting organizational conditions (Pereira et al., 2019). Top management interactions of partnering firms drive conducive business relationships, impacting KA effectiveness (Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010) and successful KAM programs (Abratt & Kelly, 2002; Guesalaga, 2014; Millman & Wilson, 1999). Top management involvement in KAM is grouped into direct involvement (strategic, tactical, and social customer contact) and

indirect involvement (decision-making, resource allocation) (Napolitano, 1997). We noticed that top management involvement is more ideal for building social contact, influencing firm alignment, and focusing on strategic decision-making concerning KAs (Guesalaga, 2014), helping KA managers in building and developing access to customer's top executives (Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010; Workman Jr et al., 2003).

4.6. KAM outcomes

KA Effectiveness: We noticed that KA effectiveness is the reflection of relationship effectiveness (Richards & Jones, 2009), manifesting superior relational outcomes for the KAs (Homburg et al., 2002), driven by its actors, activities, and resources (Ivens et al., 2016; Salojarvi et al., 2013), ensuing performance outcomes (Workman Jr et al., 2003). We noticed that supplier's adaptation on customers' needs, top management involvement, and inter-function co-operation ensure superior relationship exchange (Millman & Wilson, 1999; Ojasalo, 2001) in dyadic relationships (Ivens & Pardo, 2007; Richards & Jones, 2009). KA effectiveness is reflected by mutual trust, co-operation, and long-term commitment (Guesalaga, 2014; Homburg et al., 2002; Richards & Jones, 2009) and revenue growth from KAs (Davies & Ryals, 2014). We also noticed that 'effectiveness' and 'non-financial performance' are KAM program-level outcomes, whereas 'market performance' and 'financial performance' are organizational-level outcomes (Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013; Workman Jr et al., 2003).

Key account performance: KAM is the alignment of strategic capability and resources focused on creating relationship quality, driving KA effectiveness (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013, 2014; Richards & Jones, 2009; Storbacka, 2012; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013; Workman Jr et al., 2003). KA performance is reflected by financial outcomes (Richards & Jones, 2009) defined by sales volumes and profits (Bradford et al., 2012; Guesalaga, 2014; Shi et al., 2005) and long-term dyadic relationships (Sharma, 2006).

We observe that performance is reflected by better market outcomes than its competitors (Homburg et al., 2002) in terms of financial (Ivens & Pardo, 2007) and non-financial performance (Gounaris & Tzempelikos, 2013) and profitability (McDonald et al., 1997). Our analysis posits that KA effectiveness comprises both the relational (dyadic) and financial outcomes of KA performance (Guesalaga, 2014; Ivens et al., 2018; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013, 2015; Workman et al., 2003). We observed that market outcomes are reflected by customer value, customer satisfaction, customer growth, and retention (Homburg et al., 2002; Shi et al., 2005).

5. Review of Theories, Context, Characteristics, and methodology (TCCM by Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019)

Following the structure of some of the popular literature reviews (e.g., Billore & Anisimova, 2021; Gupta et al., 2019; Herhausen et al., 2020; Ivens et al., 2018; Khatoon & Rehman, 2021; Khatri, P., Duggal, H. K. Well-being of higher education consumers: A review and research agenda. International Journal of Consumer Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12783, 2022; Kumar et al., 2019; Lautenschlager & Tzempelikos, 2021; Leischnig et al., 2018; Pardo et al., 2014) we analyzed the extent literature on KAM based on TCCM (theory-context-characteristics-methodology) framework (See Table 3) as advocated by Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019).

5.1. Theory

The synthesis of the prior literature on KAM reveals the usage and meaningful linkage of various established theories. However, this review indicates that prior studies in the area of KAM applied very few theories (See Table 4), such as the social-exchange theory (Curasi et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018; Ming-Huei & Wen-Chiung, 2011; Murphy & Coughlan, 2018; Salojarvi et al., 2013), commitment-trust theory

Table 3
The Research Gaps, Research Agenda & Research Propositions.

TCCM Framework	Knowledge gaps & Research Directions	Research Propositions
Theory	Lacks synthesized overview of theories for the identification and validation of the critical concepts and its relationships. Some of the popular theories are rarely used and requires the identification of some of the relevant theories in enhancing the knowledge. Rarely new theoretical paradigms have developed in the domain, which restricts the domain knowledge expansion.	P1: A synthesized perspective of some valuable theories in the domain of KAM influences the domain expansion and identification of some critical relationships. P2: Innovative theoretical perspectives and models in the KAM literature influence the researchers in generating knowledge in the field of KAM.
Context	Studies on B2B KAM conducted mostly in developed economies context (e.g., America and Europe). It questions the external validity of the study findings. Hence, studies to be extended to emerging economies in the Asia-Pacific, Oceania, and Middle East. Empirical research on KAM predominantly focused on fewer industry segments. This drives the need to encompass empirical research to other industry sectors. Carry out empirical research, to extend broader perspective comparing firms across sectors through surveys, a move from anecdotal to comprehensive studies. Majority of the studies lacked dyadic approach, considering the perspectives of both supplier and customer. Studies that accommodate the dyadic perspective of supplier-customer relationship will provide a holistic view.	P3: Firms from emerging economies (vs. developed economies) carry differences in KAM practices and policies, and this differently influences performance outcomes.P4: An understanding from an integrative perspective of supplier and customer is likely to have a contrasting influence on KAM performance outcomes compared to studies that only cover individual actors (customer or supplier)
Characteristics	Fewer studies on various KA practices (e.g., strategy, structure, alignment, integration, knowledge management, culture, people aspects) often lacked holistic outlook and steered in isolation. Advocate individual studies on various KA practices to build comprehensive understanding. Research to be further extended to focus on KA practices inter-relatedness and impact on outcomes.	P5: Intra- and inter-organizational KA practices together will have a different degree of impact on the performance and relational outcomes. P6: Different combinations of KA practices will have contrasting influence on KAM outcomes.
Methodology	Studies are majorly conceptual, based on one or few case studies. Confirmatory and normative works are scantily available. Novel methodological approaches are required to capture insights from the KAM perspective. Insights on KAM and relationship building through digital platforms need to be collected and examined to generate better insights.	P7: Innovative methodological approaches capturing various relevant information related to KAM influence the identification of essential factors in KAM affecting KA outcomes. P8: Applying digital media for data collection and capturing responses in real time influences meaningful knowledge on KAM.

Table 4
Theories applied in KAM literature.

Social-exchange theory (7)	Curasi et al. (2018); Georges and Eggert (2003); Liu et al. (2018); Ming-Huei and Wen-Chiung (2011); Murphy and Coughlan (2018); Salojarvi et al. (2013); Wong (1998)
Commitment-trust theory (5)	Alejandro et al. (2011); Ivens et al. (2016); Jones et al. (2009); Morgan and Hunt (1994); Richards and Jones (2009)
Organization theory (4)	Guesalaga (2014); Homburg et al. (2002); Julkunen et al. (2015); Salojarvi et al. (2010)
Dynamic Capability theory (4)	Guesalaga et al. (2018); Ivens et al. (2018); Jean et al. (2015); Shi et al. (2005)
Resource-advantage theory (3)	Ivens et al. (2018); Ivens et al. (2016); Ivens and Pardo (2007)
Resource-dependence theory (3)	Ivens and Pardo (2008); Jean et al. (2015); Sengupta et al. (1997)
Attribution theory (2)	Friend and Johnson (2014); Lai and Yang (2017)
Contingency theory (2)	ALHussan et al. (2014); Toulan et al. (2006)
KAM theory (2)	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014); Tzempelikos and Gounaris (2013)
Market-orientation theory (2)	Brady (2004); Salojarvi et al. (2013)
Network theory (2)	Kempeners and Van der Hart (1999); Spencer (1999)
Power theory (2)	Ming-Huei and Wen-Chiung (2011); Piercy & Lane (2006)
Relationship-oriented theory (2)	Davies and Ryals (2013); Guenzi et al. (2007)
Relationship Marketing theory (2)	Sengupta et al. (2000); Tzempelikos and Gounaris (2013)
Social-network theory (2)	Gupta et al. (2019); Hausman et al. (2006)
Transaction-cost economy theory (2)	Matthyssens et al. (2006); Wengler (2007)
Upper Echelon theory (2)	ALHussan et al. (2017); Guesalaga (2014)
Capability-view theory (2)	Ivens et al. (2016); Ivens et al. (2018)
Complexity theory (1)	Geiger, Guenzi, Brehmer, and Rehme (2009)
Conflict Management theory (1)	Speakman and Ryals (2012)
Congruency theory (1)	Matthyssens et al. (2006)
Contract theory (1)	Ivens and Pardo (2007)
Customer-centric theory (1)	Bradford et al. (2012)
Customer-equity theory (1)	Jones et al. (2009)
Economic exchange (1)	Liu et al. (2018)
Economic Rent Generation theory (1)	Matthyssens et al. (2006)
Exchange or interactional theory (1)	Ryals and Davies (2013)
Frame-alignment theory (1)	Pardo et al. (2014)
Global marketing strategy theory (1)	Shi et al. (2010)
Institutional theory (1)	ALHussan et al. (2017)
Interdependency theory (1)	Reisel (2005)
Knowledge Management theory (1)	Hakanen (2014)
Motivation theory (1)	Friend and Johnson (2014)
Organizational-learning theory (1)	Hakanen (2014)
Portfolio theory (1)	Ryals (2006)
Relational-development model (1)	McDonald et al. (1997)
Relational-exchange theory (1)	Gundlach et al. (1995)
Resource-based theory (1)	Guesalaga et al. (2018)
Resource-based View (1)	Gounaris and Tzempelikos (2014)
Stress theory (1)	Reisel, Chia, and Maloles Iii (2005)
Substantive theory (1)	Friend, Curasi, Boles, and Bellenger (2014)
Transaction-cost analysis theory (1)	Ivens and Pardo (2008);

(Alejandro et al., 2011; Ivens et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2009; Richards & Jones, 2009), organization theory (Guesalaga, 2014; Homburg et al., 2002; Julkunen, Koponen, & Gabrielsson, 2015; Salojarvi et al., 2010), dynamic-capability theory (Guesalaga et al., 2018; Ivens et al., 2018; Jean et al., 2015; Shi et al., 2005), resource-advantage theory (Ivens et al., 2016, 2018), and resource-dependence theory (Ivens & Pardo, 2008; Jean et al., 2015).

There is also a deficiency in relating established theories (e.g., market orientation theory, power theory, relationship-oriented theory, relationship-marketing theory, conflict-management theory, customer-centric theory, network theory, social-network theory, frame-alignment theory, economic-exchange theory, economic-rent generation theory) to some of the relevant themes such as relationship building, alignment, structure, and performance. Also, findings reveal that future research should consider theory as a platform to examine various themes across the strategy, structure, alignment, culture, and relational aspects.

Further, prior studies on KAM predominantly explored established theories in an isolated manner. Therefore, there is a need for synthesized application of rarely explored theories (e.g., attribution theory, contingency theory, network theory, power theory, relationship-marketing theory, upper echelon theory, conflict-management theory, motivation theory, economic exchange theory, etc.) encircling KAM to inspire insights.

5.2. Context

The current analysis suggests that the KAM phenomenon has primarily been investigated in the developed economies of America and Europe since 1979, with 93 per cent being confined to North America & Europe and 5 per cent to Asia. The US/European approach does not fit well for the Asia-Pacific, Oceania, or Middle East contexts (Ellis & Iwasaki, 2018). More importantly, the growth of emerging economies in the Asia-Pacific, Oceania, and the Middle East region necessitates extending studies in these geographical locations to develop a holistic view (Murphy & Coughlan, 2018; So & Speece, 2000). Future studies may classify economies into clusters based on varying levels of sophistication (Alejandro et al., 2011).

Further, previous KAM studies focused on a few industry sectors (e.g., chemical, banking, electronics, pharma, telecom, insurance, auto, fast-moving-consumer goods, and food), albeit inadequately. In the interest of defining generalizability, it necessitates carrying out empirical studies across homogenous industry clusters, if not each industry separately (Davies & Ryals, 2013). Importantly, we also noted that it is inapt to generalize KAM for all industries together.

Fewer studies adopted simultaneous data collection from suppliers and customers (dyadic approach). Most studies confined the survey to either of the parties in the dyad. Firms interact with each other for value-creating activities (Pardo et al., 2014; Speakman & Ryals, 2012), substantiating the need for a dyadic perspective (Ivens et al., 2016). Furthermore, this review suggests that studies were limited in offering comprehensive information on the social environment manifesting culture, network, interaction protocols, information exchange, and collaboration. The need for an exhaustive evaluation of the social environments surrounding KAM offers avenues for future research.

5.3. Characteristics

The significant body of research on KAM was carried out based on the actors, activities, resources, capabilities, and structure (Guenzi & Storbacka, 2015; Guesalaga et al., 2018; Ivens et al., 2016, 2018). The findings from the synthesis of the extant literature reveals that, the adoption of the phenomenon of KAM is constrained by customer and competitive pressures (Millman, 1996; Weilbaker & Weeks, 1997). The analysis also highlights the presence of a variety of themes relating to the concept of KAM (e.g., KA practices, value antecedents, relationship value, relational outcomes, top-management involvement, KA effectiveness, and KA performance).

As empirical research on KAM antecedents is scarce, extensive research could only focus on one or a few elements. Hence, we propose the adoption of a holistic, consistent, and inter-linked approach to the KAM phenomena. Future empirical research should analyze how the identified characteristics of those themes impact KA performance, mutually reinforced in contributing to or conversely hindering the KAM

outcomes.

Further, there are few studies on KA practices, especially empirical studies, and their findings have often been reported in isolation. The extant research recognizes numerous KA practices as relevant to the supplier-customer dyadic relationship. However, most research lacked inclusive insights into the intra- and inter-organizational perspectives of KA practices and their influence on the dyadic atmosphere. Likewise, it would be useful for researchers to identify the relevant KA practices from a supplier-customer dyadic perspective to offer a potential contribution to the knowledge body on KAM.

Our analysis of the prior literature suggests that few studies offer insights into various antecedents and their characteristics that lead to relationship value and relational outcomes (Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015; Workman Jr et al., 2003), signaling the need for improving insights in the area. The impact of relationship value (Guesalaga et al., 2018; Hakanen, 2014; Leischnig et al., 2018) and relational outcomes (Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015) on the KAM outcomes are recognized by prior research but reflected in fewer empirical studies.

5.4. Methodology

As noted in Table 2, prior studies predominantly focused on quantitative or qualitative paradigms. In the quantitative research paradigm, most academic understandings were restricted to the survey-based data collection procedure. As observed, most of the qualitative studies were undertaken as case studies in one or a few firms, jeopardizing the generalizability of the findings. We assert that future research should undertake more mixed-method research paradigms while studying KAM's antecedents, determinants, and outcomes.

Future research directions in KAM suggest using interpretative research and additional descriptive models. Thus, more confirmatory research, testing the conceptual models and hypotheses based on inferential statistics is required. We also urge the need for engaging novel data collection techniques, employing digital platforms. Business marketing transactions of many firms have shifted to electronic platforms, which necessitates data collection on a real-time basis for accuracy and meaningfulness.

Future research efforts should focus on empirically testing the impact of various KA practices and performance antecedents through mediators and moderators manifesting KAM outcomes (Guesalaga, 2014; Guesalaga et al., 2018; Hakanen, 2014; Salojarvi & Sainio, 2015; Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2015). Adopting established theories in relationship marketing to build a meaningful understanding of KAM topics in establishing various constructs impacting KAM performance outcomes need special attention through future research. Most of the extant research on the KAM phenomenon was conducted in the developed economies of America and Europe. Hence, empirical studies should adopt survey methods in compiling data from across the globe or classify the markets based on homogeneities, and this again attract research avenues.

Further, most studies adopted a supplier perspective, whereas a meaningful understanding necessitates a dyadic approach in the supplier-customer context. Hence, future empirical studies shall compile survey data from the supplier and the customer side, that offer insights into whether the opinions are alike or divergent. Additionally, the extant studies were limited to a few industry sectors, which constrained the insights on convergence or divergence of the characteristics of different industry sectors. Further, this restricted the ability of extant literature to define generalizability of KAM across industries or clusters. Future empirical studies shall classify industries into homogenous clusters, towards building meaningful knowledge.

The identified characteristics of those relevant topics of KAM from this systematic literature review offer relevant insights into developing meaningful relationships toward performance outcomes in the KAM context. Most of the extant research on KAM used either quantitative or qualitative research methods. Future research may adopt mixed-method research that not only empirically tests the hypotheses on inter-relationships and their impact on outcomes but also offer broader knowledge based on respondent opinions, which are otherwise difficult to be compiled quantitatively.

6. Discussion

6.1. Theoretical implications and propositions

This systematic literature review reveals numerous insights for theory development, specifically regarding the relevant performance (variables) antecedents, practices, mediators, moderators leading to KA performance in the B2B marketing context. Based on the insights garnered from our literature synthesis, we endorse certain valuable theoretical propositions contributing useful directions to future research.

Our review of the extant literature reveals the opportunity for linking various established theories to KA practices and antecedent drivers encompassing KAM. We find that few prior studies link relevant theories to KAM concepts. The synthesized literature showed fewer analyses of KAM concepts through the lenses of social-exchange theory (Curasi et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018), commitment-trust theory (Ivens et al., 2016), dynamic-capability theory (Guesalaga et al., 2018; Ivens et al., 2018), resource-advantage theory (Ivens et al., 2018), and resource-dependence theory (Ivens & Pardo, 2008). However, most studies ignored linking established theories to the essential concepts of KAM. To build a meaningful understanding of various aspects relevant to KAM, researchers should adopt proven theories such as market orientation theory (Brady, 2004; Salojarvi et al., 2013), power theory (Ming-Huei & Wen-Chiung, 2011), relationship-oriented theory (Davies & Ryals, 2013), relationship-marketing theory (Tzempelikos & Gounaris, 2013), conflict-management theory (Speakman & Ryals, 2012), customer-centric theory (Bradford et al., 2012), network theory (Kempeners & Van der Hart, 1999; Spencer, 1999), social-network theory (Gupta et al., 2019), frame-alignment theory (Pardo et al., 2014), economic-exchange theory (Liu et al., 2018), and economic-rent generation theory (Matthyssens et al., 2006) on firm performance. Hence, we set forth the following propositions:

P1: A synthesized perspective of some valuable theories in the domain of KAM influences the domain expansion and identification of some critical relationships.

P2: Innovative theoretical perspectives and models in the KAM literature influence the researchers in generating knowledge in the field of KAM.

Business marketing firms have extended their business networks across the globe, as many of the KAs businesses are global. The literature synthesis revealed that studies are primarily conducted in developed economies. However, we feel that understanding of KAM will be limited by excluding the contexts of firms operating in developing economies. It will be interesting to observe the divergence and convergence in the developed vs developing economies context. Also, the studies should be extended to all industry sectors and consider the integrative dyadic perspective of customers and suppliers to create a meaningful understanding of the antecedents of KAM from diverse contexts. Identifying industrial clusters based on homogeneities and comparing the various clusters add more insights to the body of knowledge. Hence, we derive the following propositions:

P3: Firms from emerging economies (vs developed economies) carry differences in KAM practices and policies, and this differently influences the performance outcomes.

P4: An understanding from an integrative perspective of supplier and customer is likely to have a contrasting influence on KAM performance outcomes compared to studies that only cover individual actors (customer or supplier).

The synthesized literature offers significant insights into the various KA practices (intra- and inter-organizational) influencing the

configuration of KAM in the B2B marketing context. Numerous studies have explored several KA practices, at intra- and inter-organizational levels, that impact KAM outcomes (Bradford et al., 2012; Durif et al., 2013; Guenzi & Storbacka, 2015; Pardo et al., 2014; Pereira et al., 2019; Salojarvi & Sainio, 2015). However, an integrative perspective is lacking. Therefore, we suggest that future empirical research should identify KA practices and their impact on performance variables and relational outcomes resulting in KA performance. Hence, we posit the following propositions:

P5: Intra- and inter-organizational KA practices together will have a different degree of impact on the performance and relational outcomes
P6: Different combinations of KA practices will have a contrasting influence on KAM outcomes.

The synthesis of the prior KAM literature exposes that most studies have adopted interview techniques while employing qualitative methods. Studies have also adopted concept development, exploratory, explanatory, content analysis, and case study approaches to create knowledge on numerous facets of KAM, which offers little generalizability (Davies & Ryals, 2009). Quantitative research is less likely to use such conceptual approaches to additionally support KAM knowledge empirically. Business marketing firms' adoption of digital platforms has necessitated researchers to capture accurate real-time data from respondents to intertwine relevant data with empirical evidence (through quantitative studies) on the phenomenon of KAM. Therefore, we posit that:

P7: Innovative methodological approaches capturing various relevant information related to KAM influence the identification of essential factors in KAM affecting KA outcomes.
P8: Applying digital media for data collection and capturing responses in real-time influences meaningful knowledge on KAM.

The key contributions from the systematic literature review are as follows:

This study adopted an organized approach in identifying the relevant research papers and conducted meta-analysis to list and define the several KA practices, antecedents, mediators, moderators and further adopting descriptive and thematic techniques for systematic analysis. This review helped us identify the research gaps in suggesting future research directions, thereby achieving the review objectives.

Identification and classification of various KA practices in intra- and inter-organizational settings and their possible impact on the performance variables towards KAM outcomes open avenues for future research. Identification of performance variables, relational outcomes, and moderators impacting KA outcomes contributed to listing various topics in KAM, requires empirical and mixed-method research in improving the knowledge of academia and practitioners alike and advancing the concept of KAM.

Identification of the insufficient utilization of established theories in explaining the various topics of KAM offers additional insights to future researchers in the domain. Identification of the shortfall due to extant studies not considering all the relevant contexts in B2B marketing offers scope for more empirical, qualitative and mix-method research. Future studies should consider multiple contexts such as developed vs developing economies, supplier vs customer, and various homogenous industry clusters in improving the perspective on KAM. We suggest the adoption of more mixed-method research for meaningful results in improving the body of knowledge on KAM.

Documentation of the key intervening factors such as relationship value (value-creation) manifesting the performance outcomes such as KA effectiveness and performance requires further research to improve the understanding of KAM. We have identified business intelligence and analytics, collaborative innovation, strategic-supply-chain management, value-based pricing, flexibility, agility, service quality, customization and interactive communication as value-creation antecedents that offer meaningful classification, step further to KAM factors suggested by Kumar et al. (2019). These value drivers require further empirical research, and the results will go a long way in developing KAM models relevant to industry practitioners and academia alike.

This study also offers key propositions based on the TCCM framework for guiding academicians on the future research directions. Most importantly, this study offers a better understanding by identifying, organizing, and classifying various KA practices into intra- and inter-organizational settings. The study also combines various antecedent drivers, mediators, moderators manifesting KAM outcomes, into a meaningful framework.

7. Managerial implications

COVID 19 has changed the way companies did their businesses before 2020 (Gordon-Wilson, 2021; Yap, Xu, & Tan, 2021; Rayburn, McGeorge, Anderson, & Sierra, 2021: Kursan Milaković, 2021; Nayal, Pandey, & Paul, 2021). For example, Pandemic has resulted in more and more customers preferring virtual meetings and online transactions (Arya, Paul, & Sethi, 2022; Chakraborty & Paul, 2022; Purohit, Arora, & Paul, 2022; Chopdar, Paul, & Prodanova, 2022). As an outcome, following prior authors (Basu, Paul, & Singh, 2022; Kajol et al., 2022) we concur with the need for developing new and novel theories, scales, methods, and typologies useful for carrying out feasibility studies and impact analysis exploring the new processes, patterns, and problems.

Further to its academic contribution, following prior reviews (Paul, 2019; Paul & Mas, 2020), this review provides valid practical implications for business marketing. The paper summarizes the knowledge gained from the synthesis, particularly on the various parameters and antecedent drivers impacting KA outcomes, while designing KAM programs. The KAM framework proposed in this review offers an overview of the KAM model (See Fig. 2), depicting the identified aspects manifesting KAM, saving valuable time in pursuing knowledge for managerial practice. The catalogue of discoveries from the systematic review demonstrates the a priori success of engaging various practices and themes. These findings should further drive managerial initiatives to analyze those essentials elements and identify their most effective combination to augment KAM outcomes. Our paper also summarizes the benefits of adopting KAM and its significant advantages in business marketing for customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders, which is crucial to practitioners (See Table 5). In addition, the study, from the managerial perspective, offers an improved understanding of the identified KAM concepts and elements impacting KA performance. This equips industry practitioners with relevant knowledge that facilitate to include the driving factors impacting successful KAM design.

Nonetheless, as highlighted in the findings, empirical studies examining the impact of KA practices and concepts are growing, but fewer. Notably, managers may find heterogeneity of perspectives in the current literature. This confirms that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach in KAM across industries and geographies, and experimentation may be appropriate.

8. Conclusion

Over the evolution of business marketing, KAM has gained relevance and academic interest due to the realization that relationship marketing approaches have transformed from transactional to interpersonal exchanges to satisfy customer's heterogeneous (customized) desires and demands. The existing academic knowledge in this domain also reported adequate progress, primarily through in-depth studies oriented towards introducing innovative practices and programs in KAM. For example, the provision of insights on various dimensions of KA effectiveness (e.g., KA practices, relationship value, and relational outcomes), the understanding of which is essential to arrive at a holistic view of KAM in B2B marketing. However, the studies in this domain provided findings in isolation and lacked a synthesized understanding. Despite the popularity of KAM as a practical approach for B2B practitioners and research paper

Table 5
Key areas & themes in key account management.

Themes	Beneficial Areas	Antecedent actions
Relationship building	■ Relationship drivers	Identify antecedent practices to drive client relationships.
	■ Relational behaviour	Practice relationship-oriented approach and interactions.
	■ Collaborative involvement	Build collaborative culture of co-creation to form reciprocal values.
	■ Customer satisfaction	Understand customer requirements and drive for improved efficiency and value-creation.
	■ Long-term approach	Long-lasting perspective of financial and non-financial rewards.
	■ Relationship quality	Focus on driving quality of products, service, process, network, and interactions.
	■ Trust & commitment	Drive activities oriented towards trust and commitment and enhanced continuous interactions.
Information exchange	■ Network ties	To disseminate information relevant to value-creating activities.
	■ Effectiveness in communication	Effective communication drives value-creation (efficiency and innovation).
	■ Ethical handling	Ethical behaviour enhances trust and commitment in business relationships.
	■ Information system	IT infrastructure drives processing of pertinent information relevant to the stake holders.
	■ Knowledge management	Focus on gathering, processing, storing, disseminating relevant knowledge in KAM drives customer-orientation.
Productivity	■ Focused dedicated	Productivity and efficiency drive value for KA customers.
	■ Goal-oriented	Developing and communicating goals key to strategic customer management.
	■ Collaborative innovation	Drives to optimize business operations.
	■ Substantive capability	Drives new product development.
	■ Proactive behaviour	Process efficiencies drives commitment.
	■ Special activities	Offers process efficiencies to improve value for the customers.
	■ Firm citizenship behaviours	Citizenship behaviour is conducive to responsible customer management
Relationship value	■ Commercial terms	Attractive commercial terms key to entice strategic customers.
	■ Value co-creation	Value co-creation activities for long-lasting customer relationships.
	■ Supplier competitiveness	Optimize costs and/or differentiating solutions to customer needs.
	■ Conflict resolution capability	Enhance seamless, productive interactions with customers.
	■ Alignment & Focus	Key to matching strategies and other internal capabilities.
Relational outcomes	■ Satisfaction, trust, commitment	Drive activities of mutual benefit.
	■ Performance	Drive activities to improve efficiency and effectiveness.
Key account effectiveness	■ Program level non-financial performance	Indicates program level non-financial outcomes.
	■ Profitability	Commercial benefit key to effectiveness.
	■ Revenue growth, customer spend	Competitive commercial terms drive sales volume and repeat purchase from KAs.
Key account performance	■ Financial performance	Indicated by sales volume and profitability, which are prime goals of KAM programs.
	■ Market outcomes	Reflected by customer value, customer satisfaction, and customer growth and retention.
	■ Non-financial performance	Indicated by market growth, entry to new markets, partner with large clients, and opportunity to partner with innovative firms.
Top management involvement	■ Internal culture	Internal environment of co-operation and collaboration.
	■ Direct involvement	Strategic level interactions and building social contacts in managing KAs.
	■ Indirect involvement	Strategic level decisions on the structure, resource allocation, alignment of the firm in driving KAM outcomes.

Source: Prepared by the author.

publications over the decades are on the rise, the research is still in an embryonic stage. The current knowledge is scattered and isolated across various themes encompassing the concepts of KAM. The existing studies predominantly offer anecdotal evidence based on single or minimal case studies limited to a few industries, primarily conducted in developed economies.

In this paper, we reviewed articles in the domain of KAM, primarily to describe the current state of the art and develop research agenda. From this synthesis of the qualitative and quantitative studies, this review improves the body of knowledge on the phenomenon of KAM. More importantly, it contributes to the existing literature by consolidating the prevailing knowledge, thereby conceptualizing, and offering superior insights into the elements manifesting KAM. Specifically, the descriptive and thematic analysis condenses the output into our findings regarding the themes of KAM classified as KA practices, KAM usages, KAM outcomes, intervening (mediators) and conditional (moderators) factors. The highlight of this review is characterized by the listing of the relevant topics and elements into meaningful category portrayed into a single framework. This study proposes further empirical research on the KA practices, antecedents of value-creation (performance variables), relational outcomes (soft variables) and moderators impacting outcome of KAM programs, with scientific evidence. This study exposed research gaps such as shortfall in linking theories to KAM concepts, considering the multiple contexts surrounding the practical situation, defining characteristics in relation to other related topics, methodologies adopted by numerous studies in the area (TCCM framework), highlighting numerous avenues for future research.

While this study comprises a detailed and comprehensive systematic

review, it is not free from limitations. Firstly, adopting a keyword-based search on journal papers would have resulted in the exclusion of related research papers containing different keywords. The rigor, methodology, and use of alternate keywords-based search in title and text also may have omitted relevant papers with critical implications to the study. Secondly, the systematic literature review identifies the key factors and elements essential to KAM, yet falls short of conducting an empirical investigation, which is the next logical step. We propose undertaking empirical (and mix-method) studies on the antecedents of value-creation and relational outcomes and their impact on KA performance. Thirdly, our study identifies the pluralism that exists due to diverse KAM scenarios (e.g., dispersed geographical, industry sectors) but lacks a mechanism for offering empirical evidence to define this diverse perspective. Hence, future studies could address why and how KAM practices and concepts impact performance differently in various levels and contexts of exchange. Finally, most extant studies focused on the supplier perspective, which influenced our ability to offer conclusive inferences on whether suppliers and customers have a convergent or divergent view on KAM; this needs further empirical investigation.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Sadasivan Pillai Sandesh: Writing – original draft, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **S. Sreejesh:** . **Justin Paul:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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