

**CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: FINDING NEW TRACKS FOR THE
FIELD FROM A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

LUCAS LIMA MORENO

UNIVERSIDADE DE BRASÍLIA (UNB)

FERNANDA SCUSSEL

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA (UFSC)

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INTRODUCTION

Customer relationship management has been a topic of great interest in the academic field since the last decades of last century, when Berry (1995) has brought to light the need of going beyond buyer and seller transaction, developing a long-term relationship between them. This thought is translated in relationship marketing, a business philosophy that, unlike transactional marketing, focus not only in functional benefits, but emotional and relational benefits that arise from the development of a bond between organizations and their customers (Demo & Rozzett, 2013). In addition, the development of this relationship emerges from an increase of product quality, excellence in service and after sales strategies.

In this context, customer relationship management – CRM – has emerged as a convergence of relationship marketing and information technology, providing business intelligence that enables companies to develop stable and lucrative relationships with customers and other stakeholders (Payne & Frow, 2005), in a way there are relational benefits for both parties (Gronroos, 2009, 2017). According to Gordon (1998), the relational perspective concerns a continuous process of value creation with customers and benefits sharing in the long term.

Literature recognizes CRM as a paramount construct in business management studies, since the high level of competition and customer loyalty reduction impose companies the need of creating customer retention mechanisms (Garrido-Moreno, Lockett, & Garcia-Morales, 2015; Santouridis & Veraki, 2017). It is known that it is five times cheaper to retain clients than conquer new ones, besides, 70% of business profit arise from old customers (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). In this scenario, CRM helps companies to strategically respond to the changes in customer behavior, tracking shifts in their buying patterns and developing knowledge about their preferences, enabling the construction of a relationship between them (Gupta & Aggarwal, 2016; Mehta & Tajeddini, 2016).

Scholars have studied the progress of CRM literature, revealing a solid body of knowledge interested in business and marketing strategies, technological application, CRM implementation and competitive advantage creation (Ngai, 2005; Das, 2009). In face of this, we could consider the literature on CRM is already tracked. Nevertheless, along with the increase of customer demand level and their access to information (Mehta & Tajeddini, 2016), companies need to face online competition (Kleineberg & Boguñá, 2016), the revolution brought by social networks on the relationships dynamics (Mostafa, 2013) and the evolution of concepts such as value co-creation and customer experience (Scussel, 2018). This means companies need to rethink their strategies and, consequently, rethink the way they will manage customer relationships in this new, complex and unknown scenario.

Based on this, we wonder: what is new on CRM studies? What does the state of the art in CRM tell us about this construct positioning in the latest marketing knowledge? To answer these questions, we decided to analyze the scientific production on CRM between 2014 and 2018 in order to find new tracks for the development of this field. Hence, the purpose of this article is to propose a systematic review on CRM studies, providing an overview on recent publications on the theme, contributing to its empirical and theoretical progress by a research agenda proposition.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is an extension of the relationship marketing logic, which guides organizations to better results in the long term having the client

as the base of their strategies (Gupta & Aggarwal, 2016). Meanwhile relationship marketing concerns the strategic management of the relationships a firm establishes with customers and stakeholders, CRM comprises the strategic management of these relationships using information technology to create business intelligence (Frow & Payne, 2009).

Literature holds several concepts to the term CRM and all of them converge in the continuous administration of relationships with customers in order to enhance customer value in the long term through marketing practices (Gupta & Aggarwal, 2016; Madsen & Johanson, 2016). Hence, CRM denote a holistic organizational philosophy that seeks to attract, maintain and cultivate strong bonds and relationships with customers (Kashani & Shahmirzaloo, 2017; Reinartz, Krafft, & Hoyer, 2004; Wang, 2013).

In organizations, CRM is presented in the strategic application of people, processes and technology in order to develop superior relationships with customers and, from this, improve profitability (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2015; Madsen & Johanson, 2016; Payne & Frow, 2005). In such equation, people concerns employees; technology regards the computational resources that facilitate collection, analysis and use of customer data, enabling the adequate comprehension of consumption patterns and behaviors; and processes reveal the procedures, practices and politics that put the focus on customers.

Although its benefits are long known, it is paramount to broaden the limited perception of CRM as a set of software and technological tools to manage customer knowledge (Payne, 2012). In this regard, the main purpose of CRM is to develop a deep comprehension of customers; selecting and keeping strategic clients; optimizing operations and marketing practices; and foreseeing customers' demands, needs, desires and trends (Bhat & Darzi, 2016; Kashani & Shahmirzaloo, 2017).

Under this perspective, CRM is as a source of competitive advantage for firms due to its influence on financial results increase (Cambra-Fierro, Centeno, Olavarria, & Vazquez-Carrasco, 2017; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2015; Gupta & Aggarwal, 2016; Kashani & Shahmirzaloo, 2017) and its impact on cost reduction (Gupta & Aggarwal, 2016). Its relevance also lies on the fact CRM decreases the chances of customers migrating to other competitors (Bahri-Ammari & Soliman, 2016; Bhat & Darzi, 2016; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2015; Kashani & Shahmirzaloo, 2017), which is related to the CRM ability of improving customer retention strategies (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2015; Gupta & Aggarwal, 2016; Kashani & Shahmirzaloo, 2017). CRM also increases customer engagement (Harrigan, Soutar, Choudhury, & Lowe, 2015) and customer satisfaction (Bahri-Ammari & Soliman, 2016; Bhat & Darzi, 2016; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2017; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2015). It is important to notice that these perspectives lead to higher customer loyalty (Oliver, 1999).

As proposed by Ngai (2005), CRM literature embraces five main categories: general CRM; marketing; sales; service and support and information technology. From this, we understand the strategic nature of CRM concept and its proximity with technological advances, characteristics of high relevance in competitive advantage development. A few years later, Das (2009) updated the scenario on CRM research, revealing five areas of interest, namely, CRM objectives, defining constructs, measurement instruments, CRM implications and managerial application. The author has brought to light the importance of defining CRM, a matter of critical importance to understand its objectives and for its effective implementation and use.

Similarly, the systematic review conducted by Mandi (2010) indicated that CRM articles follow two perspectives, strategic and technological, demanding an effort from literature to explore the difficulties and critical factors on CRM implementation. In addition to these studies, several researchers have monitored the progress of CRM literature, demonstrating the evolution of data mining and CRM systems (Desai & Kulkarni, 2013; Ngai, Xiu, & Chau, 2009; Pupovac, Zehetner, & Sudarevic, 2012) and the concerning with customer benefits (Khalafinezhad & Long, 2013; Mohammadhossein & Zakaria, 2012).

The analysis of these reviews indicates the bond of CRM with other marketing constructs such as organizational performance, financial outcomes, marketing strategy, customer engagement, customer experience, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, besides the generation of marketing intelligence and its power of enabling knowledge management. Hence, we foresee the connection between CRM and value creation, for companies and customers, which will create the relational benefits that, as proposed by Gronroos (2017), is what keeps the relationship between customer and firm alive.

Following the perspective above, it is known that the advance of information technology has created new ways of firm-customer interaction, leading us to understand the role of social media in such relationship (Harrigan et al., 2015; Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp, & Agnihotri, 2014). In this context, social networks engender an environment where companies interact with their public in a dynamic way, holding the opportunity of getting to know customers, communicate with them and develop new ways of reaching their attention (Rocha, Jansen, Lofti, & Fraga, 2013). Such reality has given customers an active role in their relationship with companies, using social media to filter ads, compare products and services, access reviews, connect with their favorite brands and share their experiences and perceptions.

Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege e Zhang (2013) introduced the term Social CRM as an evolution of this scenario. According to the authors, the rise of social media has facilitated the connection and communication between companies and customers, but it has also empowered customers and increased competition. This means the traditional acquisition, retention and relationship development strategies must be updated and, consequently, the nature of this relationship in this new configuration should receive academic attention.

Social CRM emerges to help companies to develop relationships with their customers in a context in which they can chose the advertisements they want to see, compare prices online and, at the same time, communicate with other competitors and select the best offer. In this sense, owning online profiles is not enough: social CRM strategies demand online presence and fast communication; technological tools to gather and analyze large amounts of data and skilled teams to transform data in useful information for strategy formulation.

Considering the above, the fast changing scenario in which marketing practices act and the progress of technological information lead us to believe that keeping track of the evolution of marketing constructs is mandatory to the development of its literature. That is the main motivation of this paper.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The main objective of this article was to examine the academic production on Customer Relationship Management – CRM – to develop an understanding of its evolution, current situation, theoretical and empirical gaps and future research trends. To pursue this purpose, we have conducted a systematic review, a method that helps scholars to address, organize and summarize information on a specific subject, as Kitchenham (2004) advises.

We have selected articles published in journals from 2014 to 2018 in order to visit the most recent results about CRM. We decided to start our review in 2014 considering the fact that, up to this date, CRM literature has been systematically analyzed (Das, 2009; Ngai, 2005; Mandi, 2010; Demo et al., 2015). Hence, we decided to investigate the latest developments in the field.

In December 2018, three databases were investigated: Web of Science, Scopus and Science Direct, using the keywords “Customer Relationship Management”, “CRM” and “Relationship Marketing”. The results were filtered by the Management and Business knowledge area. From Web of Science, we retrieved 306 papers; from Scopus, 359; and from Science Direct, 140, totalizing 805 studies. Since 239 papers were found in more than one database, the final article sample had 566 papers.

The data from the 566 selected articles were organized by author, year of publication, country of origin, source of publication (journal), number of citation and keywords. We have resorted to the bibliometric software VOSviewer, version 1.6.9, that aims to optimize the bibliographic analysis through the identification of associated publications (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010, 2017). To examine the way CRM is found in literature, we propose a bibliographic coupling, presented as a network diagram, revealing the connection between pairs of publications.

RESULTS

This section presents the synthesis of the results obtained from our systematic review data, which allows us to elaborate an analysis of the state of the art on Customer Relationship Management and reflect about the development of this scientific field, proposing a research agenda.

First, we have analyzed our article sample by the **year of publication**. Our findings indicate 2014 to 2018 as a productive period, with an average of 113 published papers by year. We do not see in Figure 1 an exponential year, for example, which suggests a solid construction of CRM knowledge: it has reached a mature position on marketing literature, but its relevance engenders a constant progress. Besides, the trend line drawn in Figure 1 also indicates a growth perspective. From this, we understand that CRM is a well known construct, but there is still a lot to explore, given the changes in market conditions and consumer behavior. This result confirms the importance of this marketing construct, reinforcing the need of understanding its role in the contemporaneous business and scientific scenario.

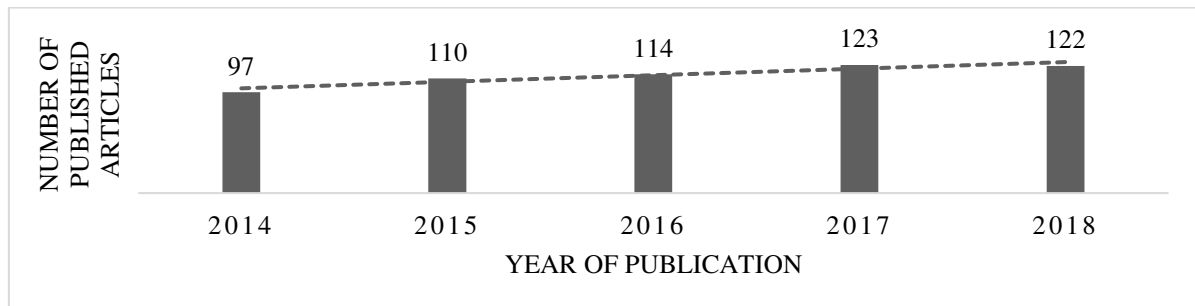


Figure 1. CRM studies by year of publication

Next, we analyzed the origin of the articles **by the country of publication**. This action has shown that 65 countries have contributed to the development of CRM scientific knowledge, revealing that the research on CRM is pulverized, as it is a topic of great interest of scholars in different nations. Table 1 presents the top 10 countries publishing articles about CRM, being responsible for 57% of the total production in the period.

Table 1

Number of publications by country

Country	Number of Publication	Percentage (%)
United States	127	22,5
England	54	9,5
India	25	4,5
Australia	23	4
Taiwan	22	4
China	21	3,5

Germany	19	3,5
Spain	18	3
Ira	16	3
France	15	2

As Table 1 indicates, United States is in the first place in our ranking, representing almost a quarter of the papers analyzed. This result converges with the fact that CRM was born in America and the competitive nature of their business practices (Kotorov, 2003). Besides, seminal CRM authors such as Leonard Berry, Terry Vavra and Regis McKenna teach in American universities and work as consultants in America. Additionally, United States holds a research agenda emphasizes businesses and competitive advantages development: the country receives researchers from all over the world for the American Marketing Association annual conference – there is the Relationship Marketing Special Interest Group, focused on discussing this topic and promoting its scientific progress.

As a center of international companies and global brands, England has the second position in the ranking. Payne (2000) has discussed the English collaboration in CRM academic research, side by side the American contribution, and the cooperation between European researches in developing CRM knowledge. According to the author, relationship marketing is an important theme in the agendas of marketing and management scholars in Europe. In third place there is India, an emerging economy with a growth perspective based on technology development and customer value creation processes (Mittal, Agarwal, & Selen, 2018; Singh & Koshy, 2011).

Based on Table 1 and the discussion above, it is reasonable to say that, although the supremacy of United States and the great volume produced by English authors, CRM studies are a matter of interest of scholars in regions all over the world, which reflects its potential of collaborating with business development and transforming economic value in emerging economies.

In the following, our analysis reveals that 288 business and management journals hold CRM studies in the analyzed period. The **top five journals publishing about CRM** were the *Industrial Marketing Management*, with 17 articles; the *Journal of Business Research*, with 16 articles; the *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, holding 14 articles; the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, presenting 12 articles; and the *Expert Systems with Applications*, with 10 articles.

As we can observe, the first three main sources of CRM articles are journals focused on business management, with a scope meeting industrial markets and business interests. Regarding CRM knowledge, articles from the *Industrial Marketing Management* promote marketing strategy and business relationships, with a strong organizational perspective, reinforcing the strategic nature of CRM developments.

With a broader scope, the *Journal of Business Research* encompass studies in the boundaries between CRM and finances, organizational behavior, consumer behavior, marketing and international business. Based on this, we must to mention the importance of the intersection between marketing and consumer behavior, since CRM works in this intersection, combining marketing activities and customer preferences and behaviors (Fickel, (1999)). Moreover, since CRM is considered a holistic approach (Frow & Payne, 2009), the convergence of different organizational departments and actors is paramount to its successful implementation.

The *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* and the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* are dedicated to marketing studies and, regarding CRM papers, they focus on the impact of CRM in organization performance and social CRM. Lastly, the *Expert Systems*

with Applications is an evidence of the technological part of CRM, an imperative element that enables the creation of customer knowledge. In summary, the convergence of strategy, consumer behavior, operational activities and technological advances allows CRM to work effectively in different segments.

We have also identified the **top five articles of this period**, following the criteria of number of citations. The top one paper, *Social media technology usage and customer relationship performance: A capabilities-based examination of social CRM*, Trainor et al. (2014) explore the combination of social media technology and a customer centric approach, developing CRM as a firm capability. Because CRM technologies do not perform alone, the scholars prove that these technologies must be interacting with other organizational resources in order to manage the relationship with the social customer, an empowered customer who is always connected and expects firms to answer them in the same pace they interact in the digital environment. According to them, firms must develop CRM capability, a competency that generates, integrates and interpret information retrieved from customer interactions in social media communications that will create customer value.

The next article, *From Social to Sale: The Effects of Firm-Generated Content in Social Media on Customer Behavior*, written by Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman and Kannan (2016), investigates the impact of firm-generated content in social media on three marketing constructs: spending, cross-buying and customer profitability. According to the authors, social media helps companies not only to sell more, but it also enhances the relationships between customers and firms, leading firms to better financial results and other relation outcomes. Besides, social media content works synergistically with other communication strategies such as television advertising and e-mail marketing, strengthening brand connections.

In third position, *Exploring the role of customer relationship management (CRM) systems in customer knowledge creation*, Khodakarami and Chan (2014) explore the way CRM systems contribute with the creation of customer knowledge based on the ideal that the ability to create and manage customer knowledge arises from different sources and demand several resources. In this sense, the authors indicate the analytical nature of CRM helps company in shaping processes, organizational structures and personal skills that will guide organization in relating with their customers.

The fourth most cited article was *The Service Revolution and the Transformation of Marketing Science*, from Rust, Huang and Ming-Hui (2014), the focus lies on the transformation brought by technology to business. The researchers indicate that customer empowerment, big data and the demand for personalized service have imposed a service factor in every marketing transaction, emphasizing the need of interacting and communication with customers in a close and fast way in order to create customer value.

Lastly, Kumar (2015) wrote *Evolution of Marketing as a Discipline: What Has Happened and What to Look Out For*. He discusses the evolution of marketing as a discipline, indicating we live a period of transition motivated by technology, the opening of new markets and news ways of doing business in the internet. According to him, we must contribute to literature with precise, rigorous and relevant studies to create useful knowledge for both academic interests and practice. Moreover, he advocates for an integrative approach, based on the changes in media usage patterns, focusing on marketing effectiveness and firm value through customer engagement.

From our point of view, these factors, the basis of marketing research future according to Kumar (2015), have strong bonds with relationship marketing and its interactive nature. Following this perspective, CRM becomes a matter of high importance in marketing future directions, since CRM uses technology to create customer knowledge and integrate it with firms' processes and resources to create customer value. This will improve companies

marketing effectiveness, enhance organizational performance and, consequently, generate sustainable competitive advantage.

The analysis of the top five articles indicates there is a movement in trying to understand the new and complex organizational context in which companies and customers interact through social media. This finding highlights the importance of informational technologies and the way they shape CRM, a construct in constant development that evolves in the same pace as the conditions of the market change. Additionally, the adoption of social media has become an imperative in strategy formulation. We observed a resolute interest in exploring social media and its relation with CRM as a business strategy. In this perspective, we have also noticed the adoption of CRM as a business philosophy, as not only a tool or a technologic solution: CRM permeates the organization as a whole, integrating processes, resources and people, and connecting this intern environment with customers in both physical and online contexts. From this, it is reasonable to say that the role of CRM is being understood in organizations, expanding the perception of CRM as a set of software limited to managing customer information, as Payne (2012) worries.

Next, in order to identify **the most discussed topics in CRM literature**, we analyzed the keywords from the articles of our sample using the online software Word It Out. Figure 2 illustrates the most frequent keywords (the word size is proportional to the number of citations of each word).



Figure 2. Most used keywords in CRM studies

Besides the central word of this analysis, CRM, we found the terms performance, competitive advantage, impact, innovation, capabilities, customer satisfaction and satisfaction. These expressions suggest that CRM holds the potential of adding value to organizations since it increases performance and helps companies to build sustainable competitive advantages. On the consumer side, it is reasonable that the relational benefits are felt in the offer of innovative products and services with better fit with their needs and desires.

We must note the relevance of the terms relationship marketing and buyer-seller relationship, since they denote the intrinsic connection between CRM and relationship marketing strategies, especially in the context of consumer market (B2C). Relationship marketing is the philosophical basis of CRM, emphasizing the importance of customer retention and guiding CRM implementation (Ballantyne, Christopher, & Payne, 2003; Zablah, Bellenger, & Johnston, 2004). Hence, there is no way of understanding CRM without visiting relationship

marketing literature. Together, these constructs are a powerful resource for companies and brand that seek for sustainable sources of competitive advantage.

In the following, we have identified **the main research streams in CRM literature** by using the bibliographic coupling method from the program VOSviewer (version 1.6.9), we conducted an analysis of the articles from the sample in order to create a network diagram that shows the connection between publications, in terms of the number of citations in common. Figure 3 illustrates our findings.

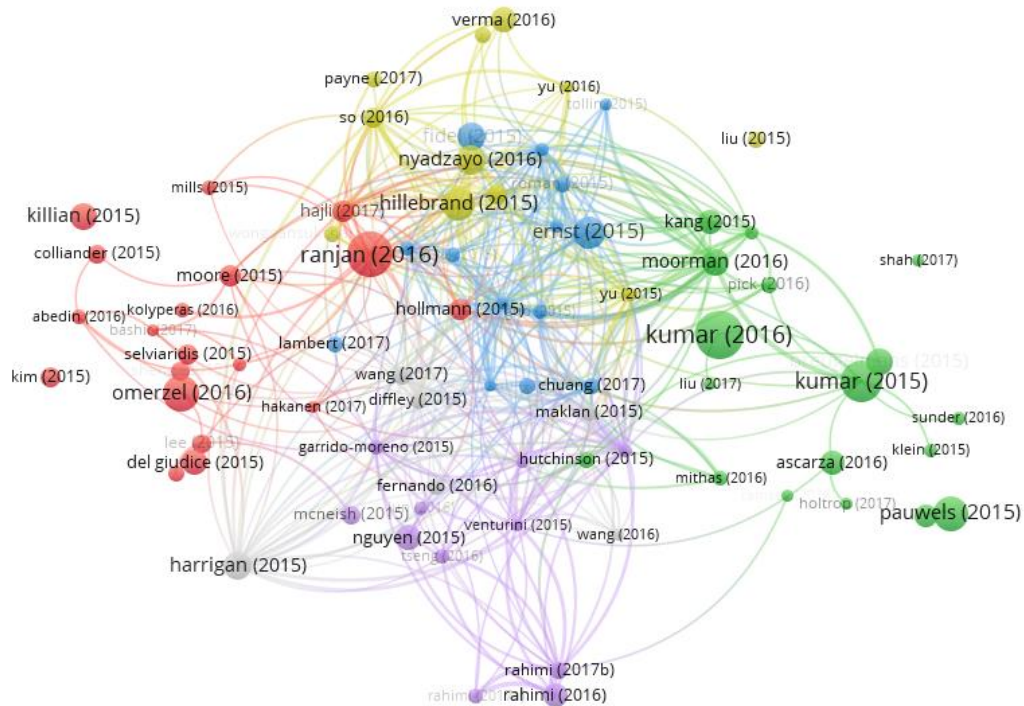


Figure 3. The CRM knowledge network

Firstly, we present an analysis of each cluster, considering they engender research streams that, together, create the body of knowledge of CRM.

The **blue cluster** comprise articles about B2B perspective, exploring the metrics used to measure CRM efficacy, indicating that metrics centered in the customer are the most effective and useful ones, since they provide a multidimensional overview of the current and future situation of the company and its clients base (Fotiadis & Vassiliadis, 2017). We have also identified the relevance of CRM experiences of marketing companies in the communications B2B context (Wali, Uduma, & Wright, 2016). The authors conclude that the nature of B2B relations, against the extensive literature on CRM, is guided by product and selling objectives instead of the customer focus.

The **purple cluster** embraces articles relating CRM, organizational performance and structure. In this scenario, authors are interested in the relation between knowledge management and CRM performance (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2015); in the impact of organizational culture in the implementation of CRM (Rahimi & Gunlu, 2016) and in the impact of organizational culture in the components of CRM – people, processes and technology (Rahimi, 2017). There is also an effort in developing an integrated model to explain the impact of CRM dimensions (complaints solution, client knowledge, client capacitation and customer orientation) in customer loyalty and competitive advantage, revealing a positive association between them (Bhat & Darzi, 2016).

The **red cluster** brings together the studies concerning the use of social media and cloud computing in the context of CRM. The papers under this umbrella concern the role of social media helping companies to create new CRM resources (Wang & Kim, 2017); social media as a tool to develop and reinforce brand-customer relationships (Mills & Plangger, 2015); social media relationship strategy as a consequence of market pressures (Abedin, 2016); and social media as the main contemporary relationship marketing strategy (Killian & McManus, 2015). From this cluster, we understand that social CRM has a major impact in the construction of relationships with customers and in the communication and interaction with them. These findings signalize that companies are adopting the recommendations from Malthouse et al. (2013) by offering more points of contact – the social media – in order to strengthen relationships and add value to companies and customers.

In the **yellow cluster**, the articles put light on the relation between CRM and customers' well-being. Studies in this perspective focused on electronic customer relationship management, a strategy to attend to customers' individual needs in the online environment (Yu, Nguyen, Han, Chen, & Li, 2015); customer involvement and the role of this construct in building relationship quality (So, King, Sparks, & Wang, 2016); and the mediating role of quality in service evaluation and customer loyalty (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016).

Lastlt, the **green cluster** illustrates the front of research related to CRM tools such as loyalty programs and loyalty strategies. Articles in this cluster discuss the adoption and implementation of a loyalty card program, covering planning, execution and evaluation of this decision (Hutchinson, Donnell, Gilmore, & Reid, 2015); customer perceptions about the benefits of loyalty programs (Kang, Alejandro, & Groza, 2015); and the impact of new technologies on loyalty programs projects, evaluation and trends (Breugelmans et al., 2015). There is also a concern about the influence of loyalty strategies on loyalty intention (Ou, Verhoef, & Wiesel, 2017) and about the efficiency of such strategies on customer retention (Ascarza, Ebbes, Netzer, & Danielson, 2017).

Together, the red cluster (social media), green cluster (loyalty), yellow cluster (customers), blue cluster (business-to-business) and purple cluster (CRM and performance) conform the main topics of CRM literature.

In the center of the network drawn in Figure 3, there are the blue and the purple cluster, representing articles interested in business-to-business and performance related subjects. It is plausible to say that this cluster is a point of connection for the other clusters, representing a structural theme in CRM literature. We can assume from this that the knowledge on CRM is built on a strategic perspective, actively engaged with firm performance, financial results and competitive advantage creation. The other clusters connect through these two main cluster, reflecting the strategic nature of this body of knowledge.

We have also observed that the red cluster is not as interactive as the blue and purple clusters, for example, given the number of nodes found in the red area of the figure. We can interpret that these clusters indicate new topics in the CRM agenda, since social CRM is a recent topic of investigation, while the other clusters represent CRM solid themes that have been taken care for many scholars. We can also alert that the blue and the purple clusters are building blocks of CRM knowledge, being the red cluster a trend, in other words, a topic in development.

In a similar way, the green cluster is not as robust as the red and purple cluster, for example, although loyalty is a matter of great interest since the beginning of relationship marketing and CRM research, as proposed by Oliver (1999). We suggest, from this, that a conceptual cleaning has happened. For a long time, CRM was used as a synonym for loyalty programs, customer data or customer retention, which has conducted a misunderstanding that neglected fundamental aspects such as long-term orientation, emotional bonds developments and trust between customers and firms/brands (O'Malley & Tynan, 2000; Grönroos, 2009). Hence, the fact there is a group interest only in this theme shows an evolution of the

comprehension of CRM concept and its objectives. Loyalty is a building block in relationship marketing and CRM strategies, but it is a consequence of the strategies, not the same thing.

Finally, we must notice the yellow cluster as the smallest group in Figure 3, which lead us to believe customer-centric CRM practices are a topic under development. Given the proximity between the red and the yellow cluster and the nodes they share, we understand the growth of CRM studies focused on customers will follow the increase of social CRM research, due to the empower online customer, the social customer, whose behavior has changed the firm and client interaction.

DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH AGENDA PROPOSITION

The analysis of our findings has given us an overview of the current state of CRM research, allowing us to draw a few research trends for the near future.

The countries that have published the most were United States, England and India. This finding tells us CRM is a topic of great interest in developed nations, confirming its association with superior competitive advantage, but it also reveals its capability of contributing to the transformation of the economic value in emerging economies. In this regard, studies concerning the influence of CRM in the main areas of economic growth in these countries would be welcome; contributing not only to CRM literature, but also to national competitive sources resources. Besides, global companies could benefit from works regarding comparisons of CRM impact in different countries. In this sense, we suggest investigations about the influence of cultural, political and economic factors in customer relationship perception, CRM adoption and implementation, firm processes articulations and human resources relational aspects.

Considering the fact that “CRM is a strategy not a solution” (Kotorov, 2003, p. 566), we must understand the implementation of CRM in this complex and fast changing market environment. Thus, we propose investigations on the social CRM adoption and implementation processes, not only for global companies, but also for small and medium enterprises. Thus, companies need to prepare their people and process to face this reality, and academic research must follow this trend.

Our findings have also enabled us to identify the main streams of research in CRM: CRM and performance; business-to-business CRM; social media and social CRM; loyalty; and customer-centric studies. Based on this, we believe the primary topic to be developed is social CRM, context in which we must investigate the shift from transactional CRM to social CRM and the implications of this new context to marketing practices, strategy formulation, consumer behavior and for society as a whole.

First, we suggest the development of theoretical essays focused on understanding the nature of this concept and its defining constructs so we can track the routes of its consequences. In this regard, we recommend exploratory and qualitative studies due to the power of these approaches in providing a deep understanding of a subject. The next step, in our view, should be the development of research instruments that enable scholars to measure social CRM in different contexts, cultures, markets and groups of consumers. Scale construction is a welcome plan, since robust scales will allow us to measure and compare social CRM in different situations, which will provide us a higher comprehension of its global impact.

It is important to explore, as well, the relationship between social CRM and other marketing variables. From this, we may be able to identify social CRM antecedents and understand its influence in other constructs in both strategic perspective (firm performance, financial revenue, processes development, knowledge management) and customer perspective (loyalty, engagement, satisfaction).

As stated by Fickel (1999) many years ago, CRM technology application enables connecting front office activities such as marketing, sales and services to back office activities like operations, logistics and finance, creating several touch-points in which the company

communicates with customers. This statement finds resonance in customer experience literature, a topic of growing interest that focuses on understanding customer journey, providing a unique experience in each point of contact between an organization and its customers. Based on this, we recommend works exploring the convergence of CRM and customer experience. We believe the acknowledgement about customer journey will contribute to the development of firm capabilities, helping managers and teams to improve the points of interactions with customers, online and in the physical environment, and preparing the staff to relate with this new kind of consumer expectations.

We strongly believe there is a research gap concerning ethics and privacy aspects of companies using social media to build customer knowledge. Therefore, we believe there are a few questions the research in this arena must answer: do social media impact bring any negative consequence to consumers? Do they want their online information to be used as market intelligence even when they do not know? Do they want to interact with firms? What are the boundaries of this relationship?

Concerning the limitations of the article, our sample was restricted to three databases and it does not cover the entire literature on CRM. Furthermore, we have reviewed only journal articles – working papers from conferences, dissertations, thesis and books were set aside. For future investigations, besides the proposed research agenda, we recommend scholars to update periodically the scientific production on CRM, adding to their scope conference papers and doctoral works, as this kind of work in progress are representative of new trends in CRM.

Even though this article comprises a period of five years, which could be considered a limitation since it does not cover the academic production on CRM, we have tracked a significant amount of recent work, examining the latest findings on this topic and providing guidance for future research. Theoretically, we believe CRM has reached a point of conceptual understanding: it is no longer seen as a set of technological tools, but as a combination of relationship marketing and technology information.

Our findings have demonstrated the prevalence of strategic content in CRM, reinforcing its connection with firm performance. As the main trend to be developed in the near future, we indicate social CRM, regarding the impact of social media in the creation, adoption and implementation of CRM strategies in this new and complex relational context caused by the advances of technology that has changed the way customers and organizations interact.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this article was to develop a systematic review on CRM scientific production and propose new tracks for the development of its academic field. We have examined 566 studies published between 2014 and 2018, a productive period for CRM construct, with growth perspective. Although CRM is not a new construct on marketing literature, its body of knowledge has strong connections with strategy formulation and competitive advantage creation: as market demands these constructs to change, CRM changes as well, explaining its relevance and the constant academic interest in this matter.

Finally, our contributions lie on the proposition of an overview of CRM scientific production, putting light on what is new, what is trend and what we need to focus from now on. We believe our findings and discussion can be used as a guide for researchers, professors and institutions. As for the managerial implications, since CRM is an applied science in nature, this paper indicates relevant issues to be used in strategy formulation, planning, human resources training and companies' processes and capabilities review.

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