



Social Media in Marketing Communications: A Synthesis of Successful Strategies for the Digital Generation

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INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies have investigated social media in marketing communications and have advanced our understanding of how it unfolds (e.g., Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012; Hudson & Thal, 2013; Kumar, Choi, & Greene, 2016). We currently have a mounting body of (1) evidence which shows that social media influences marketing outcomes (e.g., Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016; Chung & Austria, 2010; Erdoğmuş & Cicek, 2012), and (2) several frameworks that offer an explanation of the complex social media marketing process (e.g., Effing & Spil, 2016; Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

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In recognition of its critical importance, according to Gallagher and Ransbotham (2010), many companies have established online presence and continuous conversations with their consumers (e.g., Old Spice, TEDx, Starbucks, Pampers, Xbox, Zappos, Ford Motor Company, Cisco, JetBlue, Uber). These companies have shifted relationships with consumers from dialogue to triologue, with consumers engaging one another and the firms in meaningful relationships (Lipsman, Mudd, Rich, & Bruich, 2012; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). With the use of social media, these organisations have forged relationships with new as well as existing customers and formed virtual communities that interactively join forces to recognise problems and advance solutions (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014).

These interactions, in turn, have changed the traditional roles of both the customer and the seller in exchange relationships. The consumers, on their part, have reduced their dependence on the traditional media (i.e., television, radio, newspapers, and magazines) as a source of information to guide their purchasing decisions. They now demand more control over their media consumption and prefer on-demand and immediate access to information, at their convenience (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). By utilising the social media to conduct their information searches and make purchasing decisions (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008), the consumers increasingly perceive social media as a more trustworthy source of information on products and services than corporate-sponsored communications (Foux, 2006). In particular, the consumers respond to this information in a manner 'that directly influence all aspects of consumer behaviour, from information acquisition to post-purchase expressions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction' (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 361). They add value to the information by generating content, and they can influence purchase decisions of others in peer-to-peer interactions (Sashi, 2012).

Additionally, from giants like IBM and Starbucks to the local barber, organisations have realised the fact that vast amounts of information about their products and services are communicated by individual consumers on social media. They know that social media, today, provides one of the best opportunities available to a brand for connecting with prospective consumers (Neti, 2011). In recognition of these processes, therefore, managers, who consistently wield a high level of control over company-to-consumer messages, must learn new strategies to influence discussions in the social media space. Whether it is an individual, a startup, small business, or a large corporation, successful strategies must be put in place to leverage the power of social media.

However, despite the recognition that social media is effective in connecting with customers (Selina & Milz, 2009; Hackworth & Kunz, 2011; Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014), there is limited understanding regarding the successful strategies for social media marketing. Most of the relatively few studies in the literature consider social media as a novel marketing tool (e.g., Berinato, 2010; Kirtiş & Karahan, 2011; Bowen & Bowen, 2016), which can boost marketing communication effectiveness (e.g., Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009; Dholakia & Durham, 2010), and very few focus on specific strategies for social media marketing (e.g., Mangold & Faulds, 2009). To the best of our knowledge, there appears to be limited research examining the successful strategies that firms use for their corporate fan pages on social media like Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube.

Considering this gap, the increasing recognition of the significance of social media in marketing communications, its rapidly expanding evidence base, and the numerous social media marketing frameworks that are emerging, this study seeks to increase the understanding of social media in marketing communications by undertaking a conceptual synthesis of the successful strategies in literature and from business practices. The study identifies the successful strategies in social media marketing and includes specific actions related to these strategies that can be utilised to achieve success. This study, therefore, differs from other studies in the literature, as it delves into the ‘how-to’ of social media marketing (i.e., specific procedures and strategies). Systematically identifying these action-oriented strategies can serve as practical guidance related to specific tasks to include in the planning and/or execution of social media marketing. It is believed that the explicit focus on specific strategies that can be used to operationalise social media in marketing communications would make a significant contribution to the literature.

In the next section, we present a brief historical overview of social media; and issues related to social media marketing are described. The following section further discusses the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) framework. In the fourth section, the social media marketing strategies are synthesised; while the last section covers the concluding thoughts of this study.

BRIEF HISTORY OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

In the last decade, social media has enjoyed phenomenal success. As at 2019, Facebook, a social networking website, has 2.27 billion active users worldwide; Twitter, a micro blogging website, currently hosts more than

349 million active users with about 500 million tweets per day; and YouTube, a video-sharing website, has over 3 billion daily video views (Internetlivestats.com, 2019).

The origin of social media marketing can be traced back to the 1990s when scholars began to highlight the implications of the Internet's interactivity for marketing and suggesting the possibility of IT developments rendering traditional marketing practices obsolete (van Raaij, 1998). Within a few years, the huge impacts of the web on consumer behaviour can be described as similar to those of the Industrial Revolution, of the printing press, or the railroads (Sharma & Sheth, 2004). Due to the impact of the web, consumer preferences are no longer only influenced by the traditionally defined controllable and uncontrollable stimuli, but also by the web experience, or the online atmospherics consisting of online controllable factors such as website usability, interactivity, aesthetics, and online marketing mix (Constantinides, 2009; Fotis, 2015), and by the website's interface, quality, satisfaction, and experience (Darley, Blankson, & Luethge, 2010).

The Internet had become a great enabler of consumer power, causing a steady decline in the influence of traditional mass media (Constantinides, 2009; Urban, 2003). As noted by Sharma and Sheth (2004, p. 696), 'the web is fundamentally changing, and will continue to change marketing thought and practice', social media realigned marketing focus from a supplier to a customer standpoint, aiding a customer-centric rather than a mass-market approach. Therefore, it is the customer now, and not the product, that initiates marketing activities (Fotis, 2015). In other words, the key lies with the change in the consumer's mindset, leading to 'a culture of active engagement, immediate access to anyone and for anything and constant communication. This is, of course, something that the traditional advertisement and other marketing methods could not ever achieve' (Kaushik, 2012, p. 92).

The first companies to use social media for marketing were Usenet in 1979, Bulletin Board System in 1979, Online Service in early to mid-1980s, CompuServe in 1980, AOL in 1983, Genie in 1985, Internet Relay Chat in 1988, and ICQ in mid-1990. The earliest social media were dating sites and online forums, such as Six Degrees in 1997 and Asian Avenue, MiGente, and Black Planet in 1997–2001, Live Journal in 1999 and Massive Multiplayer Online and Role Playing Games in early 2000. Then came along Friendster in 2002, LinkedIn in 2003, Myspace in 2003, Photo bucket in 2003, Delicious in 2003, Digg in 2004, Flickers in 2004,

Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Twitters in 2006, Kontain in 2008, and Posterous in 2009 (Kaushik, 2012).

With these platforms and more in the cyberspace, social media evolved into eight types of applications, namely, social networking sites, blogs, wikis, microblogs, consumer review sites, content community sites, Internet forums, and location-based social media. These applications created a virtual space within which users listen, express, share, discuss, engage, and interact through user- and brand-generated content. As social media became popular and the number of users increased, the commercial value soon became apparent. Marketers started to consider this shift in the media landscape, rewrote conventional strategies, and transformed the basic campaigning structure.

In the last decade, social media has transformed ‘the web from a “one to many” to a “many to many” communication channel, and simultaneously to a “one to one” channel of interaction, allowing users not only to communicate but also to interact and engage’ (Fotis, 2015, p. 34). This transformation has implications for marketing in the form of consumer empowerment, greater information transparency, possibility for product co-creation and personalisation, content generation and publishing, capacity to sanction/reward brands for product performance, and ethical and social responsibilities (Buhalis & O’Connor, 2005; Rodriguez-Ardura Meseguer-Artola, 2010).

There are also unintended implications. Social media makes consumers highly individualistic, more information-intensive, more time-driven and demanding, dictating time and mode of communication, and with bigger expectations (Akehurst, 2009). Moreover, the huge volume of information on the web leads to information overload, negatively affecting users’ ability to locate information tailored to their specific needs, and causing other pathologies of information such as infobesity and information anxiety (Bawden & Robinson, 2009).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH (eWOM)

The framework we used addresses the linkage between word-of-mouth (WOM) and social media (see Fig. 4.1). WOM can be defined as ‘the act of exchanging marketing information among consumers and plays an essential role in changing consumer attitudes and behaviour towards prod-

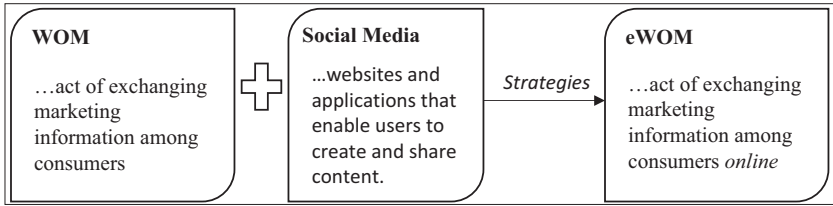


Fig. 4.1 The linkage between WOM and eWOM. Source: Authors' representation

ucts and services' (Chu & Kim, 2011, p. 47). WOM has been shown to significantly affect consumer attitudes and is seven times more effective than traditional print advertising in influencing brand-switching decisions (Engel, Kegerreis, & Blackwell, 1969; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Consumers often rely on WOM when they are in need of information to aid their purchase decisions. This is due to the fact that WOM is created and delivered by friends and family and therefore is a more trustworthy source of information than company-generated messages (Chu & Kim, 2011; Crotts 1999).

The emergence of WOM in social media has led to eWOM (electronic WOM) (see Fig. 4.1). According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p. 39), eWOM is 'any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet'. eWOM occurs in a wide variety of online media, such as blogs, emails, virtual consumer communities, social networking sites, and consumer review websites and forums (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). This eWOM acquired from friends and family is construed to 'be more credible, honest, and trustworthy than that generated from marketers, since the communicators are not compensated for the referral. Advancements in the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies now allow consumers to access personally meaningful critiques not only from friends and relatives but from strangers' (Pan & Crotts, 2012, p. 43).

In the social media marketing literature, there has been an increasing interest in understanding how eWOM affects sales, diffusion, and other marketing performance outcomes (i.e., Bruce, Foutz, & Kolsarici, 2012; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Onishi & Manchanda, 2012; Trusov et al., 2009; Van den Bulte & Lilien, 2001; Villanueva, Yoo, & Hanssens, 2008). For example, Godes and Mayzlin

(2004) showed that online discussion forum activities influence television show ratings. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) demonstrated how user-generated online book reviews affect book sales. Trusov et al. (2009) showed that referrals to join an online social media platform affect a website's growth. Further, Onishi and Manchanda (2012) depicted that blog activity affects sales of a set of Japanese brands.

Consistent with the findings of the literature above on how eWOM affects a product's marketing performance, marketing managers combine WOM and social media to create eWOM, via effective social media marketing strategies (Fig. 4.1). Using effective strategies, the marketing managers engage the consumers in social interactions with the firm and the product and thereby get rewarded with likes, comments, or dissemination to the consumers' social connections. Consumers freely create and disseminate brand-related eWOM to friends, family, and acquaintances (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Through these social media interactions, consumers can show their brand preference to their connections, thus leading to eWOM (Chu & Kim, 2011). Utilising effective strategies, therefore, a firm can employ WOM on social media to generate eWOM (i.e., buzz marketing) and make its products go viral.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

As more firms incorporate social media into their marketing communications, emphasis needs to be placed on creating and adopting effective strategies that can generate eWOM and make the brand go viral. The strategies outlined in this study are discrete social media practices that researchers have identified as universally beneficial for organisations to adopt. The aim here is not to generate radically new ideas for social media marketing in a discrete sense; each of the strategies is being operationalised in some organisations today. Rather, the purpose of this synthesis is to provide a measure of coherence, purpose, and success to social media marketing.

By synthesising these strategies, this study is able to aggregate the critical themes from the available literature and international experience to suggest actions that marketing practitioners can employ to ensure success. In order for a firm to achieve its goals in a social media campaign, it has to identify the successful strategies first and ensure that those strategies run in tandem with its overall marketing strategy. The strategies could serve well to nurture the creative and adaptive marketing capabilities of the organisation.

Create Good Content

Social media and content have a symbiotic relationship: without social media, the content cannot be accessible, and without great content, social media is pointless (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Kietzmann et al., 2011). Studies such as Dolan (2016) have shown that social media content design and delivery influence the engagement behaviour of Facebook fans. Consumers are more likely to generate eWOM about the firm and its products when they have adequate knowledge (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). For example, Starbucks gives tips to help people use its products on its 37-million-fans Facebook page. Pages are actually a great means of connecting with audiences where they hang out.

There are three main components to social media content strategy: type of content, time of posting and frequency of posting (Chauhan & Pillai, 2013). The type of content relies on form (i.e., how the information is presented—text only, images, links, video, amongst others) and context (i.e., company voice and platform trends). Since each audience is unique, firms must identify the best type of content, time of posting, and frequency of posting in order to accrue more engagement or more likes and follows. Moreover, to get more engagement, likes and shares, firms may need to continue to inspire their audience; make their content shareable, fun and useful; use great graphics and video; and cross-promote to other channels (Berthon et al., 2012).

Get the Right People to Spread the Message

Creating successful social media marketing requires the right people to spread the message (Pfeffer, Zorbach, & Carley, 2014; Tuten & Solomon, 2014). To effectively transform an ordinary message into an eWOM phenomenon, three groups of messengers are needed: market mavens, social hubs, and salespeople. In line with the conversion theory (Moscovici, 1980), these minority group of messengers have a huge effect on the majority. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2011, p. 256), '[c]onsistent with classical laws of concentration, 20% of messengers can be expected to carry 80% of the load; it is, therefore, especially crucial to select wisely the initial hosts' for the message.

Market mavens are individuals with access to vast marketplace information, and proactively discuss and diffuse information (Feick & Price, 1987). The market mavens first receive the message and transmit it to

their immediate social hub, who begins the eWOM phenomenon. Social hubs are people with large social connections (Goldenberg, Libai, & Muller, 2001), who facilitate immediate transmission of the message to a large number of consumers. In cases where market mavens are not particularly convincing in transmitting the message, salespeople would be needed to amplify and transmit it to the immediate social hub for further dissemination (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

Create Virtual Communities of Individuals with Common Interests

The literature has shown that consumers like to network with people of similar interests and desires (e.g., Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Weber, 2009). Organisations can, therefore, leverage on this desire by creating virtual communities of like-minded individuals, centred on shared interests and values (Rolls, Hansen, Jackson, & Elliott, 2016; Weber, 2009). Virtual communities encourage interaction, sometimes focusing on a particular interest or just to communicate. Users can interact over a shared passion through various means, namely, chat rooms, message boards, virtual worlds, or social networking sites. Since a virtual community potentially crosses geographical and political boundaries, it provides unprecedented leverage to grow and maintain a firm's network, as well as create eWOM.

For example, Roadrunner Records' website, www.roadrunnerrecords.com, has a forum for fans of rock and metal music where users connect and share interests. The Obama 2008 presidential campaigns leveraged on their online presence to attract supporters and provide information. Toyota leveraged on a blog written by a team of a father and a son who embark on annual 5000-mile adventures to unusual destinations in their Toyota FJ Cruiser. Readers respond to the blog by posting their own observations, insights, and stories. For many firms, these virtual communities provide various types of information for users, with opportunities for increased interaction via forums, chat rooms, and message boards (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Such communities provide excellent consumer engagement.

Careful Planning and Little Intervention

As with any communication exercise, it is necessary to plan social media marketing campaigns carefully prior to their launch. Once the process is set in motion, intervention may be disastrous (Berthon et al., 2012;

Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Specifically, a truly compelling social media marketing campaign should be able to run independently and develop its own dynamics. Firms should, therefore, develop a comprehensive and robust social media strategy which can generate eWOM dynamically. A good example is Evian, whose Roller-Skating Babies campaign was crowned by the Guinness Book of Records as ‘the most viewed advertising spot’, with more than 45 million online views. Evian engaged in careful planning before launching the video: it chose the right topic (10 years earlier the company had an advertising campaign based on babies), the right music (a remix of a 30-year-old rap song), and the right messengers. Once the eWOM was unleashed, the company restricted itself to reacting to the eWOM phenomenon, instead of proactively swaying the message.

Create Separate Strategies for Each Channel

Users interact with content in different ways on different social channels (Entrepreneur, 2015). While some users may find pleasure in multiple channels, some have found a single community they love and are sticking with it, even when the lures of a new social channel arise. Some may favour one network today and in six months discover that another meets their needs better. A firm must follow such customers and prospects so it can network in all the right places. It needs to adapt its strategy accordingly while maintaining the same voice across channels. A firm can also seek out inspiration by checking out its top competitors. Investigating what the competitors are doing and how they engage with their followers, can help the firm to meet its consumers’ needs better (Dixon, 2000).

Design Products that Create Buzz

To stimulate conversations, products and services should be designed with consumers’ desired self-images in mind (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), and must be capable of generating buzz for the business. The key is products and services that are easy to use, fun, intriguing, highly visible, and engaging are more likely to inspire eWOM (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & van Wijk, 2007; Dobele, Toleman, & Beverland, 2005). The iPhone is likely to be bought and discussed among consumers who want to be perceived as ‘cool’. BMW cars are likely to be discussed and purchased among auto-enthusiasts who value ‘the ultimate driving experience’.

Make the Message Memorable and Interesting

The message must be sufficiently memorable and interesting to have the potential to spur eWOM. To make a message more memorable and interesting, Kaplan and Haenlein (2011, p. 257) suggested minor adjustments to the message: ‘One option is to rely on true stories about real people (“My brother has a friend, John Doe ...”), which are often more persuasive than corporate advertising. Another option is to use rumours, especially positive ones that reflect well on the person telling them, as they have a particularly high chance of being transmitted to others. Moreover, there are the obvious safe bets like practical short lists (e.g., “The ten best ways to lose weight”), humorous or even hilarious messages’. In general, the message must trigger the receiver’s emotions (Dobelet et al., 2007), often with an element of surprise, joy, or fear. Also, marketing managers must exercise caution in using messages that may be too provocative or inappropriate.

Leverage Emotional Connections

People discuss topics or subject matters in which they are emotionally connected (Sashi, 2012). Customers may be emotionally connected to finding cures for diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease. Other emotional linkages include animal rights, environmental issues, child welfare, and education. To leverage emotional connections and generate eWOM, Mangold and Faulds (2009) suggest that organisations can embrace one or more causes important to their consumers. Pepsi, for example, decided not to run any ads during the 2010 Super Bowl. Rather, it spent an estimated US\$20 million of the saved budget on the Pepsi Refresh Project, an interactive online platform where users can submit and vote on ideas that have positive impacts and can help make the world a better place (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Ice cream producer Ben and Jerry’s supports causes that are important to the founders and its customers. These causes range from investing in the nation’s children, supporting family farms, avoiding the consumption of meat from cloned animals, and promoting social and environmental concerns.

Offer Exclusivity

Everyone likes to feel special (Leung, 2013; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). By offering products, information, and special deals exclusively to the consumers, feelings of specialness can be created (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

For example, Starbucks' stand-out feature on social media is its active online consumer engagement. Starbucks provides its customers with the option to manage and reload their coffee cards online. It also makes it possible for its consumers to locate nearby locations, check out international Starbucks spots, and apply for jobs at its stores. Likewise, Unilever gives its reader's coupons and product samples from Dove's 'Campaign for Real Beauty'. Another example is XBox's Twitter page an interesting resource, with news update, slick advertising photos, and promotions. Gamers can get instantaneous responses to their issues at its @XboxSupport handle. Also, Xbox provides phone numbers and addresses common topics online.

Harness the Power of Storytelling

Stories can be memorable; they provide the connection between facts to make them memorable (Kosara & Mackinlay, 2013). The more memorable the stories are, the more likely they are to generate eWOM (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Refined stories that depict a real, but still discreetly created image of a business are key to humanising a brand to existing customers, and potential sales leads. For example, the Adidas campaign 'Impossible is nothing' was successful because it communicated a true story; so authentic, that it touched consumers. It left the story of Messi, the concept of the campaign, and the brand impregnated in consumers' memory for years. The phrase 'Impossible is nothing' resonated like a scream of glory in people's ears, and since then Adidas has been associated with that spirit. Such stories create vivid memories that are likely to generate eWOM, as well as traditional WOM (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Firms must, therefore, harness the power of social media, not just to 'share' content, but to 'tell it', and to 'narrate' the brand. Social media platforms need to be seen as a conversation channel; a transmission of experiences, values, dreams, feelings, failures, successes, and truths.

Solicit Feedback

Feedbacks are important for consumer engagement. Consumers become more involved with products and organisations when they can submit feedback (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). For example, Toyota solicits and gets feedbacks from consumers in the form of accolades, criticism, and helpful suggestions on a broad range of issues through its 'Open Road

Blog'. The feedback provides a sense of community in which open communications are stimulated, and customer engagement is boosted. An organisation can leverage its network, for example, before launching products to solicit the feedback of its virtual communities (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011). One of the greatest benefits of social media is that a firm's network probably consists of not only existing customers, but also target customers, prospects, and industry influencers. Indeed, a firm can get a wide range of feedback on new products (i.e., whether they are worth launching in the first place; whether they are easy to use; or what should be next in the development queue) and get the all-important community buy-in for greater adoption rates at launch time.

In line with the theory of social influence (Friedkin, 2006), people are strongly influenced by how they perceive their relationship with the influencer. Likewise, consumers are more likely to communicate when they have a relationship with the product or service. In particular, some companies have been encouraging consumers to submit photos or recorded footage of their product in action. For example, a promotion for Procter and Gamble's quick-clean product, *Swiffer* challenged consumers to make short videos recounting 'how they left their old cleaning method for a new romance with Swiffer'. Then, the top ten videos were posted on YouTube and consumers were asked to vote on the winner. The contest sparked a huge amount of attention. Such online voting provides Internet users with a sense of ownership and increased engagement.

Intensify Social Media Presence to Increase Reach

Search engines are beginning to adopt signals from social media sites into their search ranking design (e.g., Bing Social Search, TripAdvisor). Social media presence can therefore greatly increase a firm's search rankings (Demers, 2015). Recent studies (i.e., Ghose, Ipeirotis, & Li, 2014) have found that a consumer utility-based ranking mechanism on product search engines, that integrates multidimensional consumer preferences and signals from social media sites leads to significant surplus gain for consumers. As with most search ranking strategies, there is one basic principle: the better experience you give your users, the higher you rank in Google. Going by the norm of reciprocity (Burger, Sanchez, Imber, & Grande, 2009), if a firm gives its users a better experience, it has opened the widest possible channel for new potential customers to find its brand.

Include the Rest of the Marketing Communications Mix

Despite all the advantages of social media in marketing communications, it needs to be accompanied by concerted efforts with the rest of the marketing communications mix (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The buzz surrounding social media marketing usually dies out quickly. ‘Nothing tends to be more boring than yesterday’s news’, the old saying goes. To maintain the eWOM momentum, social media marketing must be complemented with more traditional forms of communication. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011, p. 261) illustrated this by relating the story of Wilkinson’s Fight for Kisses advertisement as follows: ‘To support the launch of its newly-developed disposable razor, Quattro Titanium, the company relied on a viral marketing story about a baby fighting his father for kisses from the baby’s mother. This campaign consisted of an animated video and an interactive computer game, combined with a series of press announcements, radio spots, and sponsorship of the France—Ireland rugby match that took place during the same time period. Despite its limited budget of only \$62,000 (about US\$90,000), the campaign was a huge success and resulted in a five-percentage-point market share increase within the target group’. Social media marketing promotes satisfactory results when utilised in combination with the rest of the marketing communications mix.

The literature has also demonstrated that social media play a significant role in driving traditional media activity (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). For example, Stephen and Galak (2012) analysed 14 months of daily sales and media activity data from a microlending marketplace using a multivariate autoregressive model. The authors found that both traditional and social earned media affect sales. However, because of the higher frequency of social earned media activity after adjusting for event frequency, social earned media’s sales elasticity is significantly higher than traditional earned media’s. Further, social earned media tends to play a significant role in driving traditional earned media activity. Organisations should, therefore, combine social media and the traditional media in order to achieve marketing success.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study has shown that, in social media marketing, emphasis needs to be placed on creating and adopting effective strategies that can generate eWOM and make the brand go viral. The strategies synthesised in this study will, therefore, help managers to modify their marketing input. The

budding field of social media marketing tends to borrow many of the traditional off-line techniques for managing interpersonal influence (i.e., stimulating and creating opinion leaders) while at the same time creating new techniques aided by the special characteristics of social media. Marketing managers must understand that their consumers are going online in increasing numbers and that, on the social media, they are being exposed to and influenced by their competitors. Marketing managers should, therefore, take the lead in understanding and utilising the emerging technology and strategies of social media marketing.

This study has identified a series of available strategies for harnessing the power of the social media for firms to stimulate their marketing efforts. Firstly, as with any communication exercise, it is necessary to plan social media marketing campaigns extensively before their launch. Once the eWOM is launched, the company should limit itself to reacting to the eWOM phenomenon, instead of proactively swaying the message. Additionally, in contrast to traditional marketing, which involves limited customer participation, managers need to develop new forms of advertorial content that encourage user engagement. Marketing managers are more likely to generate eWOM if they continue to inspire their audience; make their content shareable, fun and useful; use great graphics and video; and cross-promote to other channels. As well, it is necessary to create separate strategies for each channel because users interact with content differently on every social channel. A firm must follow such customers and prospects so it can network in all the right places.

Creating successful social media marketing requires the right people to spread the message. To effectively transform an ordinary message into an eWOM phenomenon, therefore, a firm must employ the three identified groups of messengers (i.e., market mavens, social hubs, and salespeople) to spread the message. While spreading the message, organisations should create virtual communities of individuals with common interests, centred on shared interests and values. Such communities provide excellent consumer engagement.

To further stimulate eWOM, products and services should be designed with consumers' desired self-images in mind to create buzz. The message must be sufficiently memorable and interesting to have the potential to spur eWOM. Marketing messages must trigger the consumer's emotions. Firms must leverage emotional connections because people discuss things to which they are emotionally connected. Likewise, people like to feel special. To leverage on this, managers must provide exclusivity.

Also, marketing managers must harness the power of stories. Stories can be memorable. The more memorable the stories are, the more likely they are to generate eWOM. Feedbacks are, as well, important for consumer engagement. Indeed, a firm can get a wide range of feedback on new and existing products and get the all-important community buy-in for all the ranges of its products. Firms must also increase social media presence in order to greatly increase their search rankings. If a firm gives its users a better experience, it has opened the widest possible channel for new potential customers to find its brand. Also, social media marketing must be complemented with the rest of the marketing communications mix. To maintain the eWOM momentum, therefore, firms should combine social media and the traditional media in their marketing campaigns.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the conceptual nature of the study and the fact that social media is an emerging field of research, the strategies should be considered exploratory. Although many global companies have successfully created eWOM with the identified strategies, surveys should be carried out to provide a better-grounded view of the social media strategies. Also, a longitudinal examination of social media strategies is necessary in order to determine how firms adjust their strategies over time.

Further, the strategies offered in this chapter suggest a number of interesting research questions. What strategies are most consistent with successful social media marketing? Some strategies have been offered, but that list is by no means exhaustive. What range of marketing strategies and associated practices flows from social media? How do the connective processes in social media contribute to the development of marketing practices?

Some social media strategies emerge over time and are not always pre-planned. Investigation into those strategies means focusing qualitatively on the connective capabilities of social media and on the psychology of e-conversations that can lead to transformative change in marketing. One way to approach some of these questions would be to construct some high-level, exploratory hypotheses tying a marketing approach on social media to perceived strategic resources to organisational outcomes. One could construct a hypothesis concerning the significance of a social media strategy, and another pertaining to the degree of usage of the strategy, covering the intention and execution. For instance:

- Competitive advantage flows from appropriate marketing strategies on social media.
- Greater usage of social media marketing strategies is associated with greater relative industry performance.

A possible method for exploring these hypotheses might be to pick comparator companies, who have relatively equal strategic positions in the same industry, and gather qualitative data on their respective social media marketing schemes. Qualitative and quantitative comparisons of high-and low-performing firms in the same industry could as well be constructed to explore the hypothesis and to help in the construction of others more specific. Most significant and perhaps generalisable findings out of such a study would be not just the particular strategies themselves but the mechanism and rationale within the firm of drafting such strategies (e.g., the participants, time frames, conversations, and inputs).

Beyond the above macro-oriented questions, managers should, on a practical level, initiate their own studies focused on their specific products and services to assess the level of current eWOM and explore different strategies to increase it.

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