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Perceptions of executives from seven selected companies of the use of social media in marketing practices

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PERCEPTIONS OF EXECUTIVES FROM SEVEN SELECTED COMPANIES OF

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MARKETING PRACTICES

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Learning Technologies

by

Abir Alameddine

August, 2013

John F. (Jack) McManus, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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VITA

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ABSTRACT

The problem addressed in this study is that the recency of the social media phenomena created a research gap in terms of understanding how companies exploit various social media platforms for marketing purposes and measure the effectiveness of their social media marketing campaigns. Thus, there is a need for increased understanding of the effectiveness of social media marketing techniques. *Social media marketing* is defined as the blending of sociology and technology as a means to change marketing efforts from a monologue to a dialogue. The purpose of this study was to determine, based on research participants' perceptions, the reasons that select organizations use social media marketing, the different social media marketing strategies that companies utilized, and the perceived effect of social media marketing on revenue generation. In particular, the research questions concerned whether social media marketing had its own specific social metrics, and the study investigated the evolution of social media marketing and the benefits that social media brings to traditional marketing approaches. The overall research design employed semi-structured, in-depth, individual interviews with seven executives in regard to their use of social media marketing and its role as part of an integrated marketing approach. Commonalities in the interview data were color coded and analyzed, and field notes, verbatim transcriptions, and member checks were used to triangulate the data. The results of the study generated three specific categories: engagement with customers, the essence of social media presence, and communication by choice. Knowledge in each of these categories provides companies with a deeper understanding of the social consumer and enhances the value of social media marketing in terms of competitiveness. Specifically, based on such knowledge, companies have a

greater ability to target qualified leads as well as to improve the conversion rate of those leads. Finally, they have a means to determine how their social media marketing efforts contributed to the overall revenue generated.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Problem

The emergence of the digital age and, in particular, the Internet, has transformed the way that consumers research, discover, share, shop, and connect. Further, the Internet has paved the way for the emergence of a new facet of marketing: social media marketing (SMM). As described by Solis (2007), social media is the "fusion of sociology and technology, transforming monologue (one to many) into dialogue (many to many)" (para. 6). Many companies use SMM to connect with consumers. For example, to build relationships with its customers, Target uses a combination of Pinterest (photo-sharing application), Twitter (microblogging application), and YouTube (video-sharing application) to announce events such as exclusive sales or limited promotions and to visually share content such as fashion tips.

Reyneke, Pitt, and Berthon (2011) stated that social media has revolutionized both the manner that companies interact with consumers and the way of transacting business. In the past, traditional marketing methods (print and radio ads, billboards, and direct mail), which can be best described as unidirectional forms of advertising techniques, were not always welcome by consumers. In this context, unidirectional refers to advertising that is originated by a company and directed to the consumer. Ghimire (2008) noted that, due to their unidimensionality, traditional marketing methods have become irrelevant. For example, while a person who reads the printed version of the *Financial Times* cannot customize the newspaper to his or her individual needs, the online version (and mobile application) of the *Financial Times* let users categorize the news content according to their personal preferences. Correspondingly, Internet-based

organizations such as eBay and Amazon present consumers with interactive purchasing options such as multiple-point price comparisons, user-contributed products ratings and feedback, and recommendations for related products that traditionally were unheard of (Willcocks & Plant, 2001).

Social media's velocity has forced organizations to re-evaluate the way that they make marketing decisions. In the face of such an increasingly connected marketplace, it is important to illustrate how companies shift their marketing strategies to remain competitive in this global market. First, it is useful to provide a discussion of social media.

Social media are not new, as other media have provided the public with a means of social networking. Telephones, for example, are social media that born out of the need for people to connect with one another. Other media that developed after the (land-line) telephone included cellular phones and the Internet. Although the Internet has existed since the 1960s, it was not until the early 1990s that it became available to some segments of the public, including the government and academia. Within about five years, millions of people were afforded the opportunity to experience the Internet at home through Internet service providers (ISPs), which was developed throughout the U.S. in 1995. It was through ISPs that people could, for the first time, send a message to friends via a novel technology called *e-mail* (now *email*) and join various discussion forums attended by thousands of other members. Those forums gained massive interest and paved the way for the interactions that we see today.

By the mid-1990s, vendors competed to get personal computers (PCs) into every household, and, by 1995, social networking was born. The first social networking site

(SNS) was SixDegrees (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). SixDegrees was one of the first websites that not only allowed people to create online profiles but also to list their friends and view their friends' lists. Although the features promoted through SixDegrees had previously existed under some form, it was SixDegrees that combined personal profiles, friends, and friends' lists within one platform. Although SixDegrees attracted millions of users, it closed in 2000 because it failed to become financially sustainable.

Soon after, in 2002, Friendster, which supported various tools that helped users to create personal profiles as well as search for and connect with friends, emerged in the social networking scene. Although Friendster's users base accounted for over 300,000 individuals through word of mouth alone (O'Shea, 2003), it collapsed, partially as a result of the many technical difficulties that users encountered (Boyd, 2006). Friendster ultimately turned into "one of the biggest disappointments in the Internet history" (Chafkin, 2007, p. 1). The subsequent surge of SNSs, from 2003 to the present, witnessed the rise of LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. Then, in a short span of time, the Internet became one of the major avenues of social media and a powerful tool for marketing. The launch dates of the major SNSs were presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Popular social media platforms launch dates. Source: Boyd and Ellison (2007).

Companies that utilize online marketing use one or multiple platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn, blogs, and websites as avenues for marketing, and an increasingly larger portion of retailers' advertising budgets are being used for SMM. Thus, there is concern with how companies design SMM strategies and evaluate their effectiveness.

Online marketing, in general, and SMM, in particular, gained in popularity over traditional marketing methods. Social media provide advantages to both consumers and producers. Some key advantages that social media provide consumers include instant access to information, interaction through dialogue, and community (Lim, 2010). E-commerce also provides a more efficient way for consumers to shop without leaving the comfort of their homes.

Several of the advantages that social media offer include more accurate consumer profiles, two-way dialogue and customer loyalty, and lower cost. In regard to more accurate consumer profiles, Kramer (2002) explained that organizations compete for customers' time, attention, and loyalty and that having such profiles, particularly when sellers carry the same products, provide a competitive advantage. One of the advantages of social media is their ability to provide companies with insight on consumers, which gives retailers a clear picture of each customer and can be used to predict the future behavior of the customer, which can form the basis of marketing strategies.

Social media also encourages two-way dialogue between companies and customers, which strengthens the voice of customers and can contribute to customer loyalty. Ghimire (2008) stated that social media eliminates one-sided, flat, and impersonal traditional media and have pushed companies to alter the way that they market their products and services to consumers. Similarly, when companies get to know their customers on a more personal level, many problems can be addressed before they even occur. "There is a difference between asking people about what they want . . . and asking them about their problems . . . once problems are discovered, marketers will . . . find techniques to solve [them]" (Zikmund & Bodur, 1985, p. 123). SMM pave the way

for better customer service and higher levels of customer satisfaction, which can result in customer loyalty.

Lower cost for both the company and the consumer is another outcome of social media. Lucas-Stannard (2008) noted that people connect via social networks based on shared interests. Because people can be grouped together based on common parameters or characteristics, marketers can target specific social networks (Miller, 2005). This capability saves companies a portion of their resources that can be allocated to R&D or market research. Further, marketers experience instant gratification due to their ability to receive customers' feedback nearly immediately, as compared to traditional marketing, which does not allow for such a quick response (Pickren, 2010). Such quick feedback enables companies to make changes that respond to customer needs, which also results in cost savings.

Problem Statement

The Internet has been one of the most rapidly growing and changing media of all time. Related to such growth are SMM and an increase in associated spending on advertising. Forrester Research (as cited in Lacho & Marinello, 2010) forecasted that spending on SMM would surpass $3 billion by 2014. In this regard, Balwani (2009) expressed the need for marketers to evaluate the impact of SMM practices on revenue to justify the various resources that companies allocate to its use. Additionally, the recency of the social media phenomena created a research gap in terms of a lack of an understanding of how companies exploit various social media platforms in marketing and measure the effectiveness of their SMM campaigns. It was thus necessary to examine the

evolution of marketing strategies and learn what benefits, if any, social media can bring to marketing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research was to understand the use of social media in marketing and to develop associated categories and properties. This study presented the experiences and perceptions of seven executives in regard to their use of SMM and its role as part of an integrated marketing approach. Additionally, this research concerned the effectiveness of SMM techniques and the reliability of the processes by which the data gathered by various social media metrics were interpreted.

Research Questions

The present study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the stated reasons why marketing executives from selected companies use social media in online marketing?

2. Which social media metrics and analytics are used by marketing executives from selected companies for online marketing?

3. What are examples of successful marketing strategies implemented by marketing executives from selected companies?

4. How reliable are the metrics used by marketing executives from selected companies in interpreting the data they collect by which the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns is being measured?

5. How do marketing executives from selected companies assess the effect of social media marketing on their revenue?

Significance of the Study

This study was based on the acknowledgment of the growing importance of Internet marketing, the important role that social media play in the marketing and sales process, and the access to a large-scale market that is never as open or as complicated. In this research, the experiences of the executives interviewed may provide other business owners, marketing professionals, and researchers with important information and suggestions to help them to make more informed decisions in the social media realm. The results of this study also will contribute to the literature by expanding the body of knowledge of SMM and its implementation.

Further, ROI might have a different meaning when associated with marketing online. As such, this study shed light on the concept of social return on investment (SROI), which calls for the retailers' ability to quantify this form of return on marketing investments. It is in this context that this study presented the groundwork for an integrated marketing approach using social media. By identifying the decision-making tools that companies use in online marketing, this study illustrated how companies approach SMM. It is important to note, however, that, similar to other qualitative research, because this study focused on select businesses, the generalizability of the results to other businesses is limited. Nevertheless, the information and illustrations provided may be valuable to the fields of marketing and social media.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative, exploratory study, the researcher collected information from in-depth interviews of seven executives who represented the organizations that have volunteered to participate in the research, all of which incorporate social media into their

marketing strategies. Data collection was conducted through the use of interview questions that were constructed based on the literature review. The interview responses were digitally tape recorded and stored for future verbatim transcription. The transcripts were analyzed for content and arranged according to categories and properties, based on answers drawn from the research participants.

The scope of the study involved developing a description of the role that social media plays in marketing, the goals of businesses in regard to their use of SMM, the SMM strategies and tools used by the research participants, and the metrics that participants used to determine the effectiveness of their SMM campaigns. The codification and triangulation methods used are expected to ensure the validity of the research findings and to lead to results that practitioners such as business owners, executives, and marketing consultants can draw upon in similar business situations.

Definition of Terms

Return on investment (ROI). This term refers to a quantitative measure of a company's sales revenue (Balwani, 2009). In the context of this study, ROI is associated only with traditional forms of marketing practices.

Social media marketing. This is the blending of sociology and technology as a means to change marketing efforts from a monologue to a dialogue. According to Yost (2010), social media is an important means by which people discover, read, and share information.

Social return on investment (SROI). In the context of this study, and when compared to ROI, SROI is associated with a more flexible measure (not a number) that should be considered within a framework for investigating a company's social impact.

SROI is related to the process of quantifying the effects of SMM, which cannot be monetized and which is used by a company to make informed decisions in regard to its marketing strategies.

Key Assumptions

The researcher assumed that, due to the anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected, and taking into consideration that the research participants were volunteers, all respondents were truthful in sharing their personal interpretations, experiences, and knowledge in regard to the field of SMM. Nevertheless, representatives of some companies may not have been willing to fully share their approaches to SMM.

Delimitations

As noted, the purpose of this study was to develop a description of the experiences and perceptions of seven executives with regard to their use of social media in marketing practices. Thus, one delimitation was that this study focused on a limited subset of the companies that used SMM. These companies might have employed different marketing approaches, used different platforms, or utilized other tools that were suitable for particular challenges. Similarly, the choice of the problem, research objectives, research questions, and methodology constituted additional delimiting factors to this study. Finally, the approach to this research consisted of interacting with the research participants, mainly through in-depth, one-on-one interviews focused on the sharing of the participants' personal experiences and perceptions related to the use of social media in marketing. Other dimensions were not pursued beyond such parameters because they fall outside of the focus of this study.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. There were restrictions in the time available to conduct the research, which, in turn, meant that the number of respondents had to be kept relatively small. Moreover, due to the nature of this study, the data had limited generalizability. The unavailability of the managers, chief financial officers, or marketing staff members of the selected companies also contributed to the small number of participants available for this study. Further, due to the novelty of SMM and its ever-changing nature, limited academic research was available for use as a reference for this study. Finally, the researcher had a substantial role in the design and the analysis of the data, which lead to the potential for researcher bias in data interpretation.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This chapter presented the background of social media and its emergence as an integral part of marketing. This chapter also contained the objectives of this study, which included identifying how companies, such as the selected organizations, incorporate social media into their marketing strategies and how they perceive the effectiveness of their campaigns. The research questions, which guided the study, also were presented, as was the significance of the study, which expanded the literature on SMM by providing an understanding of the implementation and perceptions of the effectiveness of SMM.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review, which served as the foundation for this study. In this chapter, SMM and its evolution are explained. Additionally, various SMM campaigns, in general, and those pertaining to the selected research participants, in particular, are discussed. Moreover, the limits of the literature, as related to availability and reliability of social media ROI metrics, are noted.

Chapter 3 provides the methodology by which the objectives of the study were achieved. In this chapter, the organizations represented in this research are described, as are the methods for data collection and analysis. The means to ensure protection of participants' rights also are presented and include assurances of confidentiality and informed consent. Finally, the means of transferability and credibility are explained, along with the limitations that were encountered. Chapter 4 presents the findings, and Chapter 5 provides the conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The intent of this chapter is to present the literature that serves as the foundation of this study. In particular, the literature on SMM and the factors that drive companies' integration of social media into their marketing practices is discussed. Also included is the limited research on applying traditional ROI metrics to online marketing, which lays the groundwork for the concept of SROI.

Theoretical Framework

McLuhan's (1964) notion that "the medium is the message" provides the theoretical framework for this study. McLuhan believes that the effect of a medium on individuals is a concept separate from the information that the medium presents. According to McLuhan, the message can evolve or be transformed through the use of technology. The scale, pace, or pattern of the message can be changed by the medium, which can affect the receivers of the message and, ultimately, a society's culture.

Further, this medium allows people to communicate and to connect on a variety of levels like never before. In this regard, McLuhan described the invention of the railway and noted that, while the medium did not introduce transportation, the railway has allowed society to experience new activities and locations within shorter periods of time. Additionally, McLuhan did not intend to dismiss the value of the message of the medium but, rather, wanted to emphasize the need to understand the role of a new medium in society and the changes it brings about. In the present study, the new medium refers to the Internet and, consequently, the birth of social media, which have been changing the systems by which marketing is implemented. Because marketing practices are about

communication, the message of the medium is the need to have a bi-directional communication process, or a conversation between consumers and retailers.

According to McLuhan (1964), the personal and social consequences of a particular medium are worthy of study. Although McLuhan believes that technology creates simplicity, he also noted that it also brings about complexity in the way that individuals in a society interact and build relationships with each other. In the context of this study, marketing and its relationship to technology is the focus. The emergence of the Internet brought about the use of integrated media, which can lead to the complexity that McLuhan acknowledged. One change is the need for new measures to assess the ROI of online marketing campaigns.

Historical Research

Marketing channels. Murphy (2010) noted that marketing channels have evolved over time, and there have been different means by which companies market their products to consumers. The traditional modes of marketing include purchased air time (e.g., radio, television, telephones) or space (e.g., print ads). Although these channels are not completely obsolete, the Internet provides advertising with a more targeted and expanded role. For example, although there are those who still look forward to receiving paper coupons, the Internet has created a time advantage for that same market; they can receive coupons in their inboxes and on their mobile devices instead of in their mailboxes.

In the 1980s, cable television became more popular, which led to an increase in the number of broadcast channels on television. Accordingly, marketing campaigns, which were highly reliant on the few traditional advertising methods available during

those times, used cable television as an advertising medium (McAllister & Turow, 2002).

Television viewers were grouped by the time slots of the shows. With the Internet, the

audience became more fragmented, which led to the need for market segmentation. Now,

through social media, marketers have more accurate knowledge of which markets to

target.

Today's consumers are considered wary of the passive marketing seen in

traditional media (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Further, consumers are always on the

move and do not have the time or focus to absorb the continuous bombardment of

traditional advertising. Marketers who use multiple media outlets remain visible to the

public and are better able to persuade their markets to choose their brand over others that

are less visible (McAllister & Turow 2002). Moreover, real-time exchanges, made

possible through the ability of the Internet to carry audio-visual material, keep companies

and consumers connected.

Murphy (2010) stated that social media allows for a variety of communication

vehicles (e.g., websites, blogs, social networks, e-mail, search engines,

videoconferencing, video streaming) to be used in conveying messages to consumers.

While the choice of the specific channel will depend on the market that one wants to

reach, to work effectively, most marketing segments require an Internet presence.

Marketing communication also has evolved into events marketing, online viral

marketing, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and SMM approaches (McAllister &

Turow 2002). The goal is to create integrated marketing campaigns that will strengthen

the various online and offline channels by ensuring that at least one will be visible to

target consumers, wherever they might go. In this regard, the next section concerns the important role of consumers in the marketing process.

Role of consumers. Companies invest substantial resources in research, with the intention of learning about consumers' needs and, consequently, implementing strategies that specifically cater to those needs. Consumers serve as the focal point for which all efforts are directed. Consumers do not simply buy products; they make purchasing decisions based on a wide range of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that marketing research seeks to discover.

According to Kotler (1977), products are not valued because of their physical attributes, but based on their specific functionalities and how they are marketed to solve specific needs of consumers. The retail industry often involves competition between companies that offer similar products with comparable features. This propels companies to strive harder to gain a competitive advantage in terms of increasing the value that consumers can gain from the products and services that the company provides. Companies often experience growth as a result of focusing on meeting the desires of their consumers. Levitt (2006) explained that it has become increasingly necessary for companies to understand how their customers view them and what they have to offer. Levitt added that, to create a successful marketing strategy that will drive consumers to action, organizations need to develop a self-perspective that is closer to that of the consumer.

Traditional vs. social media marketing. SMM, as opposed to traditional media marketing, can provide interactive, innovative, novel, and dynamic communication processes among organizations, between the organizations and the consumers, and among

consumers. Through social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Pinterest), consumers can interact with the organizations and with each other, influence and be influenced through posting comments and products reviews, and create eWOM.

McAllister and Turow (2002) noted that social media offer three essential elements that differentiate these media from traditional media. The first is the ability of social media to empower consumers to access, send, transform, create, and store materials online. Similarly, the Internet has sophisticated software that can track, sort, and predict user activity through intelligent agents. This allows social media marketers to analyze consumers' conversations through discussion forums that are open to the public. While, for example, a consumer may be involved in a discussion about a specific sports hobby in a dedicated chat forum, the chat transcription can be stored for content analysis that can help in the creation of a custom advertising message targeted to that specific forum or individual.

The second is the social media ability to create a real-time, two-way interaction between the senders and the receivers of messages. The ongoing and instantaneous capacity by which communicators connect is a strong advantage of social media. Examples of this capacity include consumers' reviewing products online and, thus, instantaneously promoting brands through various social networks; teenagers' sharing videos; and individuals' from all over the world reviewing trending topics over Twitter. Pickren (2010) noted the instant gratification that marketers obtain from this form of marketing. Marketers can use forums and trending messages to determine how their messages were received, and the impact of social media campaigns can be experienced

and recorded in a simultaneous manner. Pickren stated that SMM offers the highest return rate, and in a faster time frame, in terms of marketing campaigns.

The third, as McAllister and Turow (2002) explained, is the ability of the commercial Web to allow for expansion in a synergistic marketing communication. *Synergistic marketing communication*, a term coined in the 1990s, is the intended use of different media outlets and advertising campaigns to facilitate the marketing of products. Such communication involves the development of strategies in regard to the type and variety of channels that can be used. The systematic use of various promotional outfits, which takes research and planning, is done to send a consistent message about the company's brand among different target audiences. In the context of the study, this concept relates to the need to identify the extent of the investments of companies into the relatively new field of SMM, which, in turn, calls for them to further understand SMM.

Current Research

Marketing trends. The trend toward service marketing emerged from businesses' realization that they could not simply assume that there is a demand for their products. Vargo and Lusch (2011) have argued that people should be the focal point of and active participants in a service-centered model, based on a relationship between the business entity and its customers that goes beyond a simple marketing exchange. This model stands in contrast to the traditional marketing mix, which included a focus on product, price, place, and promotion, but not on the relationship with the consumer (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000).

Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) noted that, in response to the changing needs of consumers, due to the ease of information access and sharing brought about by

technology, the marketing mix now includes a focus on people, physical evidence, and process. *People* refers to employees who participate in the delivery of the marketing strategies; they are the ones with whom consumers interact, and they can affect the buyers' perception of the company. *Physical evidence* refers to the environment in which customers and firms interact and includes the performance of and communication about the product. In the context of this study, physical evidence is a company's presence, which can include websites and blogs. *Process* refers to the mechanism by which marketing is conducted or to the flow of activities. The customer's experience of the overall marketing encounter is a significant part of the marketing mix.

In regard to online activity, social media has significant implications regarding how marketing campaigns are carried out (Pickren, 2010). Pickren has argued that traditional marketing has become less effective compared to emerging SMM techniques that allow for the integrated use of different online and offline mediums. This notion is supported by Chan-Olmstead (2002), who noted the need for companies to strategize how they can connect with their customers through innovative ways.

According to Bloomberg (2010), social media is a relevant marketing tool because of the rogue approach it offers to the communication process. Specifically, it allows for rich, relevant consumer experiences that can grow strategically. Faust and Householder (2009) explained that marketers need to make their brands distinctive, keep their products socially relevant, and maintain a good relationship with consumers. Social media messages must be optimized for viral functionality; that is, the message must be easy to share with the recipients' contacts and to post on social media networks. Overall,

the marketing message must be relevant, timely, simple, engaging, interesting, and sharable.

SMM has been used with great success by a number of companies. In a humorous campaign, via WhopperFreakout.com, Burger King announced that they were going to stop selling the Whopper on a certain day. The social media passed around the story, generating significant buzz for the brand. Similarly, the Free Pastry Day at Starbucks, driven by social media, was a success. According to Chouke (2010), based on the understanding that web-based channels can engage customers and employees, Starbucks considers social media an essential element of its marketing strategy.

In contrast, McDonald's was less effective in its "We Love to See You Smile" campaign (Faust & Householder, 2009). Although the promotion was online, it was derided by consumers and disinterested employees, which detracted from the effectiveness of the campaign. Faust and Householder noted that Burger King was able to remind customers that they liked the Whopper, while McDonald's unintentionally invited criticism of customer service. Plimsoll (2010) noted that customer engagement, among other factors, can work for or against SMM.

Angel and Sexsmith (2009) stated that there are three goals that can drive the adoption of social media as a form of marketing; two goals are external in nature and complementary to traditional marketing methods, and one goal is internal. The first goal is to transform the company-consumer relationship by expanding the brand's reach. The second is to conduct more traditional brand promotional campaigns. Social media can allow companies to achieve goals through eWOM, with the help of brand ambassadors, who are simply consumers themselves (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The third goal is internal,

wherein the company can foster relationships and culture by making group and individual

decisions. For examples, some companies have developed systems for listening to and

engaging with consumers, wherein marketers can meet the consumers at the point of their

interest.

The perceived ease of use and cost-effectiveness of the SMM approach is leading

companies to add SMM to their marketing mix (Rao, 2010). Lim (2010) noted that the

various social media platforms and broadcasting channels allow customers to get the

information they need, when they need it. This has transformed marketing from

outbound to inbound, push to pull, and from a monologue to a dialogue. Accordingly,

Croft (2008) explained that social media is characterized by citizen journalists who man

its operations. Businesses that want to add SMM to their marketing mix have a number

of channels from which to choose.

Popular social media platforms. Yost (2010) noted that there is a variety of

social media platforms available and that businesses need to select the channel(s) that

best suit their goals. The factors to consider before designing a marketing campaign

include the nature of the goals, the target audience, the human resources available, and

the ability to mobilize information. Yost noted that the sole reliance on e-mail marketing

can be counterproductive, as online users are already experiencing e-mail overload.

Social media networks can complement e-mail marketing in terms of relevance and

effectiveness.

Yost (2010) stated that the most popular platforms for marketing are Twitter,

Facebook, LinkedIn, and online blogs. However, the use of these channels must be

accompanied by comprehensive websites that tie them together as well as avenues by

which consumers can be invited into companies' websites. Social media channels can provide such an avenue.

According to Costa (2010), brand managers must be knowledgeable about how different social media platforms can add substance to their integrated marketing strategies. For example, Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and LinkedIn often are used to build a following. In this regard, it is important to note that the successful integration of social media technology depends on consumers' trust. Krell (2009) stated that companies need to be honest with consumers and conduct SMM from the heart because this is what will cause consumers to respond. Each of the platforms is discussed below.

Twitter. Twitter is a social networking service launched in 2006 that has become a great means for SMM through its hashtagged tweets or micro-blogs of up to 140 characters each. Multiple sources have claimed that Twitter has over 500 million users; however, Twitter itself has not issued an official number of users. The notion of a *trending topic* is often attributed to Twitter. It refers to a topic that is being tagged or tweeted (in this case) at a much higher rate than other subjects or events. Accordingly, through trending topics, Twitter helps users to get up-to-date information on major events that occur around the world. Hashtags contribute to a user's ability to search keywords for easy retrieval of information (Twitter, n.d.).

Twitter describes its business capability as follows:

Twitter connects businesses to customers in real time—and businesses use Twitter to quickly share information with people interested in their products and services, gather real-time market intelligence and feedback, and build relationships with customers, partners and influencers. From brand lift to CRM to direct sales,

Twitter offers businesses an easy way to reach an engaged audience. (Twitter,

n.d., para. 4)

Brandau (2009) claimed that, through Twitter, businesses are able to develop long-term

relationships with their customers because of the platform's built-in re-tweeting (RT)

capability that has been effective in spreading marketing messages and creating eWOM.

Facebook. Facebook is a multilingual social networking site that was initially

launched in 2005 (founded in 2004) as a student-only database but that has grown to

reach over 1 billion active monthly users, as of December 2012 (Facebook, n.d.c).

Although Twitter was designed for public use, Facebook was able to assemble a wider

user base and offer more of a community experience, in which real connections between

users are facilitated (Yost, 2010).

Facebook's *Nearby* is a built-in location-based marketing tool that enables

retailers to have Facebook users check in to their establishments and receive certain

rewards, such as free upgrades, discounts, and the like, when the establishments detect

their check-ins (Facebook, n.d.a). This, of course, motivates consumers to choose certain

brands over others. The check-ins can be published and tied into consumers' online

social network pages as well. According to McEleny (2010), Facebook's *Nearby*

application allows location-based marketing to become mainstream. Similarly, through

the status update, subscribe, and like features associated with Facebook, businesses are

gaining access to users' interests and habits as well as listening to their needs. It is worth

mentioning that the like button is a social networking plugin that became mainstream

through Facebook. It allows users to share a piece of content in one click (Facebook,

n.d.b).

LinkedIn. Although this professional network has existed (since 2003) longer than has Facebook (2005) and Twitter (2006), LinkedIn has only approximately 200 million users (LinkedIn, 2013) due to its much narrower focus on business and its community of professional users. LinkedIn drives services and events for professionals (Yost, 2010), and it is a way for businesses to connect with each other. LinkedIn serves all types of organizations and can enable relationships not only between businesses but also between businesses and consumers.

LinkedIn operates on levels of connections. The service allows users to contact people with whom they are directly connected or with whom they are connected through any of their direct connections (also called a second-degree connection). LinkedIn has gained popularity among headhunters, job seekers, consultants, and professional service providers as a means to access trusted referrals.

Blogs. Blogging, which results in a type of online diary, achieved mainstream status in 2004 (Yost, 2010). A blog (the term comes from web log) is considered a solid vehicle for marketing because of its flexibility and capacity to be interactive. Moreover, blogs can reach a variety of audiences in a variety of ways. Most blog followers enjoy reading and obtaining in-depth information and opinions. Blogs can be an important avenue for marketers to evaluate how consumers perceive products.

Unlike publications, there are almost no restrictions as to what bloggers can say, which they can choose to share with a private or a public network. Further, many bloggers are individuals who simply talk about the products they have experienced. Their firsthand experiences and the lack of a paid endorser-bias make them a credible source of information for potential customers. Bloggers can easily build a following of

readers, and blogs have allowed consumers to go viral and get read by a broad public.

Marketers have argued that companies should evaluate factors such as reach (number of

followers), relevance (content), and credibility (reputation) before choosing the right

third-party blog on which to advertise their products.

     Google+. Google+ (sometime written as Google Plus), a multilingual social

networking service, was officially launched mid-2011 and has quickly caught on, with its

user base's reaching 135 million active users by the end of 2012 (Google, 2012).

Through the use of circles (groups), stream (newsfeed), messenger (chat), and hangouts

(group video chat), this service enables the organization of people and the content seen

by (or hidden from) each of the groups (Kaste, 2011). Similarly, through the platform's

built-in tools, including hashtags, ripples, stream, and sparks, businesses can search for

trending conversations, visualize and influence the re-sharing of users' activity, listen to

customers, and advertise through Google Places (a location-based marketing feature). It

is believed that having Google+ followers boosts the Google organic search ranking more

than does Facebook or Twitter.

     Pinterest. Pinterest is a social networking service that was launched in 2010 and

has since gained popularity. This service facilitates the creation and management of

images (and video) whereby users can create, save, and categorize or bookmark images

or video (known as pins) through the use of boards or pinboards. The initial goal of

Pinterest was to connect people based on their interests (e.g., food and drinks, crafts,

travel, fashion, sports, art) via a platform of inspirational pinboards. Pinterest users can

also *like* other users' pinboards, pin outside content brought from another social media

platforms (e.g., Twitter), share a pinboard with followers on other social media sites (e.g.,

Facebook), and, similar to Twitter, can re-pin pinboards created by others to add to their own collections. Following Pinterest's revamping of their site to allow for business accounts (October 2011), the service started gaining popularity among retailers, especially within the fashion industry, because the platform facilitates the targeting of qualified leads of potential customers who share similar interests. *Time* magazine has ranked Pinterest.com number 38 out of 50 websites that "make the web great" ("50 Websites," 2011). A summary of types of and popular social media platforms is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Types of and Popular Social Media Platforms

Type	Definition	Example(s)
Social networking	Content sharing, mainly personal and business information	Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+
Microblogging	Blogging (online diaries), mainly text-based that uses hashtags (less than 140 characters)	Twitter, Tumblr
Blogging	Online diary	Blogger
Social news	News rating	Digg, StumbleUpon
Media	Content sharing, mainly videos and photographs	Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr

Benefits of social media in marketing. According to Gopinath (2010), users spend more time on social networking sites than on any other site on the Internet. Gopinath added that, because social media have been influencing the way that people communicate, as well as changing consumers' day-to-day activities, companies need to

leverage social media to expand their customer reach and to improve employee productivity.

Mendez (2007) noted that there is a different level of convenience experienced over the Internet, which companies can use to their advantage. For example, whenever consumers *tag* YouTube videos, Pinterest pinboards, or Instagram photographs, they aid marketing professionals in choosing the key words to purchase for paid advertising campaigns (e.g., Google Adwords sponsored listings). Vemuri (2010) discussed how companies can use social media to their advantage. Importantly, companies need to know the current and potential applications of these channels, one of which is to create buzz around the company's online entity. In this regard, social media networks can be used to drive awareness about a company's campaign.

Social media also can be used to deepen the company-consumer relationship. This can be done by increasing what Vemuri (2010) called "the stickiness of the brand," whereby consumers instantly recall, prefer, and patronize a brand. Additionally, it is important for companies to foster innovation. According to Vemuri, social media channels are a market researcher's dream come true, as users provide critiques, new ideas, and suggestions for improving products.

Vemuri (2010) also noted the need to determine the fit between certain strategies and the choice of certain media channels. Some channels work better than others for certain campaigns. In any case, however, it is important to attract new consumers and to retain old ones. Contests and giveaways are great ways engage consumers and create buzz around a brand as well as to attract new customers. Vemuri also pointed out the

need to employ a platform that has the potential to be timeless. Retailers need to have a foundation that makes sense in the present and in the future.

Brogan (2009) also discussed the benefits associated with SMM. Deepening the relationship with the consumer base is perhaps the most discussed and the most significant contribution of social media to marketing efforts. Social media tools can provide businesses with the means to listen to the needs of customers. In the same way, they can be used to increase consumer awareness of the brand and to provide companies with relevant prospects. Brogan also noted that marketers can gain potential customers online through the prospecting of social networks (and other social media channels), a technique known as soft selling. Additionally, companies can build communities around their products by scouting for consumers to promote products or brands through web forums and other modes of discussion. Brogan stated that social media tools can turn consumers into evangelists for the products.

Social media tools can effectively engage the audience, as well as empower a group of fans to promote the products for free through their social networks. Referrals are crucial elements to a company's generation of new sales, a marketing strategy that can be built around taking care of existing customers. Retailers always have recognized the need to invest in the right marketing approaches to remain competitive. While, traditionally, companies have invested a lot of effort and money into reaching their audience, this personal referral approach can be achieved through a minimal financial investment (Brogan, 2009). However, companies need to know how to use SMM.

Krell (2009), in presenting how SMM can be successfully used, noted the need for collaboration. Collaboration can be done between different organizations, as well as

between companies and consumers, for businesses to improve on their products and services. Oliver, Rust, and Varki (1998) stated that co-production or collaboration with customers in regard to the development of products can be fueled through social media. Additionally, social media allow for real-time access to consumer feedback.

Krell (2009) also noted that innovation, with a foundation of out-of-the-box thinking, is crucial to business success. Such thinking can be encouraged by the flexible landscape of social media and the fast-growing social media networks. The technology in which social media operates is ideal for connecting with consumers, establishing relationships, and soliciting feedback, which feeds into the design of future products and services. Krell described social media as similar to an incubator, wherein the expansion of organizational innovation can be achieved.

Performance, according to Krell (2009), is also a key element to success. One way for companies to measure and enhance performance is to analyze their various marketing campaigns, compare them against those of competitors, and readjust their strategies to optimize for market success.

Most importantly, companies need to build an internal culture that revolves around social media advocacy. Such a culture can empower employees to take initiative, test and learn, and become their company's agents of change, so that the company can achieve its goals (Faust & Householder, 2009). The company culture should involve an awareness of the aspects of SMM, each of which is discussed below.

Viral marketing. Dobele, Toleman, and Beverland (2005) described viral marketing as the converting of electronic text into an "advocacy or word-of mouth (eWOM) referral endorsement" that can spread from existing customers to future

potential consumers (p. 144). The communication between consumers who use social media has made dissemination of information about brands and products more credible and widespread (Huang & Chen, 2006). Dobele et al. stated that, to engage consumers in participating in viral marketing through eWOM, marketers need to ensure that the message content is *sharable*. This means that the information contained in the marketing message is relevant and valuable from the perspective of potential customers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) recommended that research be conducted on the factors that make an online ad interesting and entertaining.

Through viral marketing, opinions are exchanged between consumers, with little intervention from marketers, which could potentially affect products' or brands' positioning in the market. It is important to note, as well, that unhappy customers can tweet, re-tweet, and post viral videos that can reach thousands of people within hours, if not minutes (Vemuri, 2010). This demonstrates how social media networks can harm companies. Through SMM, negative interactions can lead to attacks against the company, which can influence a whole range of potential consumers and can consequently be a determining factor in a company's success (or failure).

Niche marketing. Costa (2010) stated that the building of closed groups provides valuable insights for marketing campaigns. He explained that online communities serve as cost-effective marketing research tools, whereby companies can learn more about consumers. In terms of providing information, these communities were found to be 47% more effective than were focus group discussions. This argues for the usefulness of such closed groups, particularly in regard to time and cost.

According to Blau, Mor, and Neuthal (2009), when targeting a niche group or portion of the population, companies could monitor certain chat rooms or online forums to gain insight on consumer needs. Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) considered online groups or communities to be key aspects of social media. Social media networks allow companies to tailor-fit their messages to certain groups. Each group creates pressure for each member to identify with others to feel belongingness; thus, each group acts in a collective way (Bhatnagar, Misra, & Rao, 2000). This connection influences members to purchase a product or support a company as propagated by social media.

Two-way interaction. Ghimire (2008) noted that traditional marketing has been widely based on the advertising process alone, with little or no concern about the consumers' voice. Such a unidimensional method, according to Pickren (2010), made traditional marketing irrelevant, especially for the young digital generation, because it does not allow for customer engagement in a dialogue. In contrast, social media allows an interactive, personal, transparent, engaging, dynamic, and conversational approach to communication. Customers talk, share, endorse, and complain via social media networks. Lim (2010) stated that the use of social media is an effective form of marketing because it allows for interaction, unlike traditional methods.

Fisk, Stephen, and Bitner (1993) stated that companies appear to have thought that they needed to attend to consumer concerns only when something negative happened with the product. According to Brown (2008), social media afford companies the opportunity to hear from customers before something potentially goes wrong.

Social media has enabled consumers to take a more active role in informing themselves about products and in letting companies know what they want and what is missing from their current products (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Within the context of SMM and ease of access to information, consumers have gained more power (Ramsey, 2006). Brown (2008) stated that, with the advent of social media, the individual customer does not need a higher authority to dictate what to think or buy.

Normann and Ramirez (1993) noted the importance of companies' welcoming consumer feedback and acting upon it. The authors explained that listening to customers can eventually lead to increased customer loyalty and, thus, repeat business. Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) stated that social media is an effective tool for generating consumer feedback. Positive comments from customers were reported to improve brand image, and a quick response or innovation to address negative feedback makes a company appear more responsible. Rifkin (2000) noted that social media creates one of the strongest ways for consumers and producers to come together, in real-time and in a low-cost interaction. Finally, Bloomberg (2010) emphasized the importance of relationships formed in the digital world, particularly between companies and their customers. Through these relationships, customers can feel that they are valued.

Promotions and discounts. A traditional strategy for promoting a brand or a product is the use of gift promotions, discounted prices, reward offers, and loyalty stamps (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991). Balwani (2009) noted that, for both online and offline retailers, digital coupons are an excellent way to reach out to potential consumers and to collect information, as described below. For example, Starbucks offers

promotions and coupons, through their online networks, which Facebook friends can exchange for pastries after they purchase their drink.

Balwani (2009) recommended that marketers limit the coupon to a specific promotion, to separate coupons by channel (e.g., online, offline, mobile), and to separately promote each strategy (e.g., online coupons) through specific social media outlets (e.g., Twitter) to ensure that each strategy is tracked correctly and its reach is accurately measured. Balwani explained that a community size, which includes the adding of friends' counts across social networks, can provide a rough percentage of sales generated by the specific social media channel employed, if one assumes that the entire community is exposed to coupons. To achieve success, companies need to experiment with different strategies across various platforms to see what works for various products and/or brands (Derham, Cragg, & Morrish, 2011). Some of theses strategies are presented below.

Strategies. Bloomberg (2010) noted the need to make the best use of the data collected through the Internet. When collecting data, a company needs to keep objectives relevant and to have unfiltered consumer conversations. Such conversations are valuable because they add depth to the marketing approach, something that is missing from traditional marketing research. Even when online marketing research is inexpensive, companies still need to take the time to read the blogs of their consumers' communities. Consistent listening, although time consuming, can lead to a successful market-focused orientation.

Bullas (2011) stated that companies need strategies that rely on up-to-date knowledge of the dynamic nature of SMM. Reyneke et al. (2011) similarly noted the

urgency to formulate immediate social media business strategies precisely because of the dynamic and ever-changing nature of social media and its vast reach. Bloomberg (2010) stated that, for a company's use of SMM strategies to become successful, marketers need to have defined objectives and goals built on the appreciation of the benefits of the various social media platforms, as well as the limitations of the tools.

While there is still the need to conduct traditional promotional campaigns, companies should find the right balance between online and offline marketing channels to achieve their goals. Angel and Sexsmith (2009) stated that companies can use traditional marketing strategies over the Internet while maintaining the dynamic and entertaining elements of social marketing. Most marketing campaigns, both online and offline, seek common desired results, including the increase in the visibility of the business or brand, the strengthening of the business customers' relationships, and the improvement in business revenue through increased lead generation. In this regard, Dinovici (2010) noted that the administration of surveys (a traditional method) through social media platforms can help companies to measure consumer awareness of their products and their brands' images.

SMM, however, provides a strong advantage in terms of developing and maintaining relationships with customers for the purpose of developing credibility and driving sales. Fisher (2010) noted that, most importantly, companies need to have a good product, build and foster great relationships with their customers, align marketing initiatives with business goals, and understand how to integrate the use of multiple marketing platforms effectively. This will ensure higher ROI or SROI, as discussed below.

Return on investment. The increase in social commerce has triggered the need to understand the manner by which companies are able to evaluate revenue from their investments as related to SMM. Channey (2010) stated that the choice for the use of SMM cannot be fully grasped without efficient mechanisms for measuring the sales revenue that is produced through SMM efforts. Warren (2009) explained that, although ROI is not difficult to track offline, the broad and diverse nature of social media has made it difficult to accurately track social media's ROI. Warren noted that 84% of social media programs did not measure ROI, which means that many businesses are not able to accurately tie their SMM efforts to their business outcomes, mainly because they do not know how and where to start. Accordingly, as more companies turn to social media channels to market their products, it is important to offer analytics to determine this medium's effectiveness.

Balwani (2009) stated that there are multiple ways in which social media can influence revenue, which is generated in different locations. In this regard, one of the most difficult aspects to measure is offline sales. Similar to display and television advertisements, social media provides a branding component that can trigger consumers to make a purchase; however, triggering an action can translate into either an online or an in-store purchase.

There are different ways to measure ROI for traditional marketing, and there are ways that are appropriate for online marketing, as well. Angel and Sexsmith (2009) explained that, if traditional metrics were applied for SMM, they would focus on website traffic, click-throughs (the number of ad clicks), attention rate (time spent on a website), responds versus non-responds, engagement rate (e.g. comments, shares, interaction),

sentiment (a customer's tone), and the like. These are ways that traditional marketing media can be measured in their own context. While these metrics are important, it is noted that they cannot be used as stand-alone metrics for SMM.

Balwani (2009) explained that, to achieve more meaningful sales measurements, companies need to identify signals that correlate with sales. Such indicators can validate social media's impact on the brand. Balwani added that companies also need to familiarize themselves with a variety of metrics, e.g., total distinct referrals from third-party social media sites and entry to sales.

Nevertheless, as noted, such data are difficult to track. Additionally, the fragmented landscape of social media limits access to accurate consumer information. For example, it is difficult to precisely assign sales generated directly by and immediately after a consumer interacts with the brand because most social media interactions arise from third-party websites. Moreover, there are times when consumers engage with the brand through their online presence but carry out the sale long after; this is even more difficult to track and to quantify. In this regard, Balwani (2009) explained that, because user cookies (visitor tags that define user's sessions) expire after 90 days, sales cannot be attributed to SMM beyond the 90-day mark, especially when third-party platforms prevent companies from tracking consumers any other way. Additionally, most companies do not have access to sophisticated analytic programs and lack the knowledge to make an informed decision about which software to invest in. Nevertheless, there are several programs available.

Warren (2009) presented different tools for measuring web traffic, one aspect of ROI metrics. Google Analytics is a powerful, free tool used for tracking incoming links

and activities. Tempo Social uses built-in analytical components to analyze data

provided by various social media platforms. Other tools measure the duration of website

visits, increase in the number of new unique visits, sales through friends or

recommendations, email-open rates, number of fans, and the like, all of which are

examples of metrics that can provide companies with valuable information on brand

awareness, consumer satisfaction, and related concerns. After one defines the baseline,

there is a need to monitor the tools. The correlations generated between sales and

customer retention can provide valuable information (Warren, 2009). Overall, searching

for trends and associating them back to their source is integral to determining the ROI

from SMM practices.

Social return on investment (SROI). Warren (2009) explained that social media

ROI measurements are not fully dependent on numbers but on what the numbers lead up

to. Similarly, Paine (2009) stated that the use of SMM requires a new way to measure

marketing success. In keeping with this, Mulgan (2010) noted the importance of

understanding other measures for ROI to account for the social aspect of social media,

which led to the development of social ROI (SROI). SROI is a more flexible measure, as

compared to a mathematical equation's leading to a specific number, that can serve as the

foundation for investigating the success of SMM efforts.

Balwani (2009) stated that marketing tools should be evaluated based on their

ability to help companies understand the relationship between marketing and sales.

Dinovici (2010) noted that financial metrics can tie and track conversions and revenue

per sale but that revenue per sale is just the tip of the iceberg in regard to measurable

benefits. There is a need to understand whether social media brings about customer

retention. Companies invest to retain their customers; thus, aside from sales revenue, customer retention is an important factor to consider in regard to SMM. Other factors include promotion response rates, percentage of increase in a conversation about the brand (buzz), savings from decreased return rates, increase in unaccounted sales, and the rate of reduction of other costs (such as customer support). "Not everything that counts can be counted; not everything that can be counted counts." SROI, however, is an attempt to measure what counts in SMM.

Summary

In this chapter, the literature on the nature and benefits of the various uses of social media channels has been presented. Through this literature, this chapter has shown the evolution of the marketing based on advancements in technology brought about by the Internet and, consequently, social media. SMM is a significant approach used by companies to build or enhance existing relationships with consumers. Due to its ease of use, relatively low cost, and wide reach, as well as its ability to generate consumer participation and information, marketing through social media is now at the forefront of marketing methods.

SMM strategies that are effective in regard to image building and creating brand awareness, with the goal to increase sales, include viral marketing through eWOM, fostering company-client relationships, responding to online feedbacks, providing discounts, and promoting credibility through customer-to-customer interaction. The extent to which social media has been used as a marketing tool has not fully reached its potential, however, due to the social media's infancy, its fast growth, and its ever-changing nature. Most marketers utilize popular channels such as Facebook, Twitter,

LinkedIn, Pinterest, and blogs to increase the extent of their brand reach, among other goals. Few firms, however, have been able to accurately measure the direct impact of social media on an increase in sales volume, as there is no standard for measuring traditional ROI for social media (Angel & Sexsmith, 2009; Balwani, 2009; Channey, 2010; Warren, 2009). Without such information, social media have not yet been used optimally for business. Thus, SROI was born out of the need to take into account the metrics particular to SMM. The next chapter will present the methodology used to address the purpose of the study and to answer the research questions.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to describe the reasons that select organizations use SMM, the different SMM strategies that companies utilize, and the perceived effect of SMM on revenue generation, based on the perceptions of the research participants. With the emergence of social media, there is a need to understand the ways by which companies assess the effect of their online marketing investments on their revenue. In particular, the researcher sought to determine whether SMM has its own specific social metrics, for example. It is important to note, however, that the research did not focus on numerical values; instead, it provided in-depth examination of participants' perceptions as related to the phenomenon of interest.

Study Design

This study was exploratory, for which a qualitative design was the most appropriate due to its inquisitive nature (Creswell, 2009). Further, as noted by Drisko (2008), the qualitative research approach is suitable for research that has social purposes. Overall, this approach was chosen due to its ability to provide an understanding of the reasons underlying a specific phenomenon, with a focus on people's perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors.

The exploratory research approach is robust and was used when investigators have few or no antecedents in a certain field of research. In this regard, the approach generates valuable in-depth information about a group of participants as a means to identify variables for further exploration. The purpose of exploratory research is "to gather preliminary information that will help define problems" (Kotler & Armstrong,

2006, p. 122) and to diagnose the "dimensions of problems so that successive research projects will be on target" (Zikmund & Bodur, 1985, p. 121).

An exploratory research design enabled the researcher to describe specific processes that are unique to SMM and to the select organizations, increase knowledge of the different SMM techniques used by businesses across various industries, and understand the relationship between the business objectives of the select organizations and their use of various social media platforms.

The researcher used semi-structured, individual interviews with one executive each from seven companies that integrates social media into their marketing strategies. Interviews were the best means to obtain the perspectives of participants in regard to the goals of this study.

Participants

As noted, participants were drawn from seven companies, and, as such, the unit of analysis was the executive of each company. These executives included CEOs and marketing or social media directors, whose participation was voluntary.

Human subjects considerations. To abide by the Institutional Research Board (IRB) guidelines, prior to conducting interviews or collecting data, participants were informed of the purpose and goals of this study, as well as the interview process, and were assured that there were no risks to their participation (Creswell, 2002). Then, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix A) prior to the conducting of the research. The form contained complete information on the research process as well as notification that participants had a right to withdraw from the research, or to stop the interview, at any time, that all information, including their names and the

names of the companies, was to be kept anonymous and confidential. Participants and their companies were assigned pseudonyms (Creswell, 2002).

Further, participants were informed that their contact information would be stored in a private, password-protected digital file, to which only the researcher will have access and which will be destroyed after five years (Sieber, 1998), "so that it does not fall into the hands of other researchers who might misappropriate it" (Creswell, 2009, p. 91). Due to the security of the data and the ensuring of anonymity and confidentiality, an application for a claim of exemption was submitted to the IRB (Appendix B).

Data Collection

Creswell (2003) explained that investigators "choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes" (p. 13). In this regard, qualitative researchers seek "the involvement of their participants in data collection" (p. 208). For the purposes of this study, interviews were the best method by which to collect data. The researcher also conducted a review of the related literature to become informed about trends in SMM that were used to construct the interview questions.

Yin (2009) stated that, in qualitative research, the use of six to ten individual interviews are sufficient to achieve data that support the objectives of a study and that answer the research questions. The researcher recruited seven participants who were chosen according to the recommendations of Patton (1990). Maxwell (1997) explained that *purposeful sampling*, in which "settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide" (p. 87), should be used in qualitative research. Accordingly, as noted, the participants were those who had experience with

integrating social media into their marketing campaigns and who represented various

industries.

The researcher sent an email to the identified executives as a means for the

researcher to receive permission to conduct the interview (Creswell, 2002). They were

informed that the phone interview was to last between 30 minutes and 1 hour and were

asked to set up a date and time for the interview. A modified semi-structured interview

guide was developed for data collection (Appendix C). The modified version of the

interview instrument included the edits suggested by the second and third raters. The

interviews were digitally tape recorded and later transcribed.

Instruments and the Researcher's Role

Creswell (2009) explained that data collection tools, which traditionally included

open-ended, semi-structured interviews, now include sounds, emails and that the data

collected involve text (or word) and images (or pictures) data. In this study, the in-depth

interviews were the main instrument for data collection. In keeping with Creswell,

however, other instruments consisted of a digital recorder to tape the interviews, and

multiple email conversations that introduced the purpose of the study, asked for

permission to conduct the interviews, collected the participants' consent forms, and

followed up by soliciting feedback on the researcher's conclusions and answering any

questions that participants might have had.

As noted, the interview questions were constructed based on the literature on

SMM. Because a semi-structured interview protocol was used, participants had the

opportunity to respond to the questions with few restrictions. Additionally, as noted by

Creswell (2009), open-ended questions allowed the information "to emerge from

participants in the project" (p. 16). Further, as needed, the researcher asked, when applicable, for the participants to elaborate on their answers, without influencing the direction of their responses. In this way, the researcher also served as an instrument. In the researcher's role as an instrument, "[t]he purpose is to help formulate the problem and clarify concepts rather than to develop a conclusive evidence" (Zikmund & Bodur, 1985, p. 124). It is important to note that, due to the emergent nature of qualitative research, the initial interview questions were preliminary and might have been polished as the researcher discovered what to ask (Creswell, 1999). The contribution of the researcher as an instrument was seen in the richness of the data gathered, which provided "insights and understanding of the problem setting" (Malhotra & Peterson, 2006, p. 150).

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, the interview responses undergo a process of conceptual analysis. The data analysis techniques depend heavily on the researcher's perspective. The researcher makes an interpretation of the data and seeks "to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the view of participants" (Creswell, 2003, p. 22). The interview transcripts underwent content analysis, whereby the researcher looked for emergent categories and properties including types of SMM used, goals for using SMM, and mechanisms for assessing the overall effect of SMM use on the select organizations' revenue.

Maxwell (2009) explained that the coding of data in qualitative research involves fracturing the data and reorganizing it into categories that are descriptive of the subsumed data. This is a way for the researcher to create an understanding of "what is going on" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, p. 57). It is also a means to construct conceptual models about

the meaning of the data collected and to "personally and theoretically [state] the lessons learned" (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). Several authors (Atkinson, 1992; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Maxwell, 2005, 2009; Maxwell & Miller, 2008), however, have questioned the fracturing and categorizing of data. They argue that such methods result in diagnostic shields that can hinder the investigator from evaluating various approaches to making sense of the data. Thus, the researcher constructed properties with the goal of connecting with and drawing upon the categories that were initially founded on existing theory or during the research process. Similarly, the use of subcategories played an important role in preserving the context within which the data were given meaning. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) view abstract categories as bins, wherein descriptive subcategories or properties can be applied to organize the data for further analysis and insight as to what is occurring. Similarly, Atkinson (1992) explained that the approach of connecting, instead of fracturing and resorting, values the data within its context and enables the researcher to identify relationships among the mixture of data elements. Atkinson stated:

> I am now much less inclined to fragment the notes into relatively small segments. Instead, I am just as interested in reading episodes and passages at greater length, with a correspondingly different attitude toward the act of reading and hence of analysis. Rather than constructing my account like a patchwork quilt, I feel more like working with the whole cloth. (p. 460)

After the interviews concluded, they were transcribed, and the transcriptions were read several times. The researcher then began the process of reading the transcriptions and identifying key words that were similar among the participants. Bogdan and Biklen

(2006) explained that this evolving process is a system used to find similarities among all the participants. Once the key words were noted, the identification of concepts began. Key concepts of categories and properties were developed from a global perspective. Specifically, concepts were developed from the insights of participants. As the data analysis progressed, the researcher's identification of key words and phrases were used to create the actual categories and properties. Once the categories and properties were created, each received an acronym to be used for future reference. After determining which concepts were categories and which were properties, the researcher coded each category with a random color. The next step was to double color code each of the properties beneath its corresponding category. The first color corresponded to the category under which the property was found, while the second color corresponded to an individual property. Each property received a different color.

Researcher bias. It is important to note that the data analysis might have been influenced, to some degree, by the investigator's biases about the use of SMM. The researcher's academic background, professional experience, and personal preferences could have influenced the manner by which data are handled or processed, and, as such, are sources of bias. Additional sources of bias included the researcher's impatience, need to participate in a conversation and draw conclusions, or lack of focus that might be experienced during such lengthy interviews. To limit such biases, the researcher kept a journal with detailed notes about her observations and feelings about each of the interviews, as needed, and reviewed such notes when coding the data. This enabled the researcher to bracket out her biases.

Validity and reliability. Validity concerns the integrity of the conclusions drawn from research (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (1990) explained that the concept of validity is "always specific to the particular purpose for which the instrument is being used" (p. 257); accordingly, a tool may be valid in one instance but not in another. Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (2000) proposed various methods to minimize possible threats to validity and reliability that can arise in qualitative research. The threats to validity in this study and ways to minimize them are presented below.

Internal validity. Internal validity is the degree of which a test measures what it was initially constructed to assess. It pertains to "what is really going on with these phenomena" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 221). To ensure that this research generated results that addressed the purpose and research questions, the semi-structured interview protocol was reviewed by Thomas Davies, Ed.D., and Allison Powell, Ed.D., graduates of Pepperdine University. Each was asked to provide input on the construction, validity, and reliability of the interview questions (Appendix D), which, as noted, were then revised based on their recommendations.

External validity and reliability. External validity and reliability refer to the level to which test results can be generalized. To ensure external validity and reliability, the study used rich data, a verbatim transcription, member checks, and triangulation, each of which is discussed below.

Rich data. According to Becker (1970), long-term, in-depth interviews enable the collection of detailed data that provide an informative depiction of a process or a phenomenon. Although, due to the limitations of this study, long-term interviews could

not be conducted, the researcher nevertheless made every effort to collect rich data, both in the interview and through follow-up with the participants.

Verbatim transcription. Becker (1970) explained that, in studies that use interviews, data collection and analysis often require videotaping or digital recording to allow for a post-interview *verbatim transcript.* In the context of this research, verbatim transcription, based on audiotapes, ensured accuracy of the data, which contributed to validity and reliability. Moreover, as noted, the researcher kept a journal of her observations and feelings, which enabled her to bracket out any potential biases.

Member checks. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the need for researchers to seek feedback on their research results and conclusions to ensure accuracy and lack of bias, a process known as member checking. Thus, after the termination of data collection, the researcher communicated the findings to the research participants, via email, asked for their feedback, and incorporated any edits into the results and conclusions.

Triangulation. Denzin (1970) defined triangulation as the incorporation of data from various individuals and settings, using diverse methods as a means to reduce limitations and the risk of bias as well as to gain a better understanding of the research results and conclusions. The researcher used multiple methods of data collection, including email; semi-structured in-depth interviews; digital recordings; verbatim transcription of the interviews, and field notes. Additionally, companies of different sizes and individuals with different backgrounds and experience were chosen to minimize bias and enhance the generalizability of the research. Finally, to ensure that this research generated results that accurately represented the transcriptions and addressed the research

questions, Suki Stone, Ph.D., a core adjunct professor at National University, San Diego,

California, was asked to provide input on the construction of the categories and

properties, which were then revised, based on her recommendations.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology used to conduct this study. A qualitative

method was chosen as the most appropriate approach because of the exploratory

characteristics of the research and the need to describe specific processes that are unique

to SMM and to the select organizations, increase knowledge of the different SMM

techniques used by businesses across various industries, and understand the relationship

between the business objectives of the select organizations and their use of various social

media platforms. A researcher-developed semi-structured interview protocol served as

the primary data collection instrument, and participants were drawn from seven

organizations that represented various industries. Finally, the data collection methods,

including the protection of human subjects as required by the IRB, were presented. The

results of this study are presented and discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the findings from the data collected through semi-structured individual phone interviews with one executive each from seven companies that integrate social media into their marketing strategies. The results are based on qualitative analysis methods. The chapter begins with a restatement of the purpose of the study and the research questions. This is followed by a presentation of the data collection and demographics, data analysis, and then the findings, which are organized by categories and properties and include outlying data. The chapter concludes with a summary of the major findings.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research was to understand the use of social media in marketing and to develop associated categories and properties. This study presented the experiences and perceptions of seven executives in regard to their use of SMM and its role as part of an integrated marketing approach. Additionally, this research concerned the effectiveness of SMM techniques and the reliability of the metrics by which the data gathered by various social media metrics were interpreted.

Restatement of the Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the stated reasons why marketing executives from selected companies use social media in online marketing?

2. Which social media metrics and analytics are used by marketing executives from selected companies for online marketing?

3. What are examples of successful marketing strategies implemented by marketing executives from selected companies?

4. How reliable are the metrics used by marketing executives from selected companies in interpreting the data they collect by which the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns is being measured?

5. How do marketing executives from selected companies assess the effect of social media marketing on their revenue?

Data Collection and Demographics

As noted, interviews were the best method by which to collect data. The researcher conducted a review of the related literature to become informed about trends in SMM, which were then used to construct the interview questions. As noted, a semi-structured interview guide was developed for data collection. Recruitment of participants used purposeful sampling and was conducted via email.

The researcher recruited a total of seven participants, who volunteered by indicating that they wanted to participate in this research. Participants were executives (CEOs and online marketing or executive directors) who have experience with and expertise in integrating social media into their marketing campaigns. Overall, the seven participants represented a variety of industries. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for protection of his or her identity and for confidentiality (Appendix E).

Marissa is the CEO/president of a marketing agency (Company 1). Because her company employs nine individuals, it is designated as a micro-business. Marissa conducts all SMM activities in-house. Sergey is an executive director of a software development and telecommunications enterprise (Company 2). The company is

designated as large because it has over 500 employees. Sergey's company conducts SMM activities in-house. Mark is the online marketing consultant for a power equipment company (Company 3). His company has fewer than 10 employees, which makes it a micro company. Mark's company outsources all social media-related activities. Steve is an online marketing consultant for an educational institution (Company 4). Steve's company has between 10 and 50 employees, which makes it a small company. Steve stated that his company both outsources and conducts social media marketing in-house.

Bill is the CEO/president of a mixed martial arts studio (Company 5). His company's size is considered micro because there are fewer than 10 employees. Bill conducts all social media marketing in-house. Jack is an online marketing consultant for a small medical software development company (Company 6) that employs fewer than 10 employees, which makes it a micro company. Jack's company outsources marketing through social media. Larry is an online marketing consultant for a real estate firm (Company 7). His company is considered micro, as there are fewer than 10 employees. Larry's company outsources all online marketing activities, including those that use social media.

The researcher sent an email to the identified executives as a means to receive permission to conduct the interviews (Creswell, 2002). Participants were informed that the phone interview was to last between 30 minutes and 1 hour and were asked to set up a date and time for the interview. The data were gathered though individual phone interviews, conducted during a two-week period in May 2013, that were digitally recorded and later transcribed, which resulted in a total of seven completed interviews

that were included in this analysis. As noted, the seven participants also signed an informed consent form.

Data Analysis

After all the interviews were completed and transcribed, the transcriptions were read a minimum of five times, and key words that were similar among the participants were identified. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) explained that this evolving process is a system used to find similarities among all the participants. As noted in Chapter 3, once the key words were noted, the identification of concepts began. It is important to note that some of the answers provided by the participants during the interview process spanned multiple research questions. Thus, the researcher needed to merge all transcripts. This resulted in categories and properties that were developed from a global perspective based on the insights of participants. As the data analysis progressed, the researcher's identification of key words and phrases were used to create the actual categories and properties. The researcher developed the words and definitions that comprise the categories and properties; accordingly, other researchers might have given the categories and properties different names. After determining which concepts were categories and which were properties, each category was coded with a random color. The next step was to double color code each of the properties beneath its corresponding category. The first color corresponded to the category under which the property was found, while the second color corresponded to an individual property. Each property received a different color.

Answers to Research Questions

The data yielded three global concepts, which resulted in three categories related to participants' use of SMM at their workplace. Category 1 included four properties, category 2 included three properties, and category 3 included three properties. The properties comprised the participants' perceptions as related to the global concept of each category. The findings resulted from a qualitative discovery process, and, as discussed, the process involved analyzing all the merged transcripts from a global perspective. Below are the answers to the research questions, which were addressed by an analysis of the interview data.

Research Question 1. What are the stated reasons why marketing executives from selected companies use social media in online marketing?

The data indicated that the reasons that marketing executives use social media include gaining exposure through the triggering of business connections, which builds an online presence and adds to their circle of influence. Other reasons for SMM use involve obtaining insight into customers' behaviors through the feedback that they provide. One means to do this is the built-in analytics of some of the social media platforms, which allow for measurement of individuals' level of interest in a particular post. Finally, the ability to identify users' concerns, as a means to address them, and to promote the delivery of unique content also were reasons for the use of social media in marketing. One participant specified that delivering content to customers though email is no longer the best method of communication, particularly when compared to the interactive, permissive nature of social media.

Research Question 2. Which social media metrics and analytics are used by marketing executives from selected companies for online marketing?

The interview data from the seven executives revealed that all participants used *Facebook Insights*, a built-in tool that tracks users' activities as they relate to company content and generates a report. *Facebook Insights* is offered at no additional charge to businesses with a Facebook presence. The metrics include the number of Facebook *likes* and of *people talking about this* on a per-post level. Notably, five of the seven participants did not use other third-party analytics mainly because they either did not know where to start or they did not have a sufficient budget allocation for such practice.

Research Question 3. What are examples of successful marketing strategies implemented by marketing executives from selected companies?

Promoting company events, because it often allowed for name recognition and credibility building, is one example of a successful SMM strategy. Such events promoted engagement with existing clients as well as a connection with potential customers, which established the groundwork for future revenue generation. It is important to note that events promotion is a key component of traditional marketing methods as well. Other examples included increasing the number of followers or *likers* as well as the number of *shares* or *retweets* of particular content posted by a company. Additionally, the executives cited the ability to track referral sources that led to revenue generation, which is another key component of marketing through traditional channels, as an example of a successful marketing strategy.

Research Question 4. How reliable are the metrics used by marketing executives from selected companies in interpreting the data they collect by which the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns is being measured?

The data indicated that the metrics were reliable. Specifically, the reliability of the metrics used in assessing the effectiveness of SMM campaigns is based on their built-in nature and include the statistical record keeping (e.g., the number of *likes*), the extent of a social media platform's reach (e.g., the number of *people talking about this*, the number of *views* as expressed on the platform), and users' weigh-in. When measured, users' feedback is a reliable indication of the effectiveness of a particular SMM campaign.

Research Question 5. How do marketing executives from selected companies assess the effect of social media marketing on their revenue?

As noted, the participants did not speak of specific numbers or formulas as related to assessing revenue. They did, however, describe a close relation between engagement with the platforms' users and the concept of conversion of leads into customers, which is a revenue creation mechanism. For example, creative marketing methods, such as offering a free webinar through the social media platforms, enabled one company to provide valuable content, which helped them gain exposure and eventually led to increased revenue. Activities related to events planning, for example, allow companies to receive name recognition and build credibility. Similarly, according to the participants, SMM allows for the leveraging of the various platforms globally, which also is a source of revenue generation. As such, the more exposure through connections, the more

information is exchanged on the various platforms, which provides momentum that can lead to future revenue production.

Study Findings

Prior to presenting each of the specific findings, it is important to note that the use of SMM varies from company to company and is closely tied to the companies' objectives. Further, as noted, the semi-structured interview was designed to elicit responses specific to the context of businesses' use of social media in marketing.

Figure 2 presents a summary of the data that was derived from the transcripts and includes each category and property as well as their definitions.

Category 1: Engagement with Customers
Definition: Information sharing and credibility building

Property	Definition
Multiplier Effect	Connections of public or private communities
Followers with Traction	People who have influence
Uniqueness of Content	Uniqueness by post and by platform
Conversion	Tracking referral sources

Category 2: The Essence of Social Media Presence
Definition: Insights into customers' behaviors

Property	Definition
Emotional Reaction	Consumers' involvement with the product
Pressure for Problem Resolution	Problem posing that results in problem solutions
Global Exposure	Leveraging the reach into global markets

Category 3: Communication by Choice
Definition: The option of selective behavior

Property	Definition
Triggering Business Connections	Building an online presence
Users' Feedback through Weigh-in	A measure of the level of interest in individuals
Communication for Business Exposure	Receiving business awareness and name recognition

Figure 2. Categories and properties.

Category 1: Engagement with customers. In this study, Engagement with Customers was defined as "information sharing and credibility building." The data indicated that engaging with customers by delivering unique content through the various social media platforms can lead to a ripple effect, generated by the reach of the various social media platforms, and consequently an increase in the number of users added to a company' circle of influence. Additionally, the participants indicated that engagement also is related to the concept of conversion, which can lead to an increase in revenue. The excerpts presented below are indicative of this category and its properties.

Multiplier effect. The first property is the Multiplier Effect, which is defined as "connections of public or private communities." The excerpts below address this property.

> Facebook has proven to reach audiences in the hundreds of thousands in seconds, and there have been so many examples, specifically on the Facebook area, that highlight how powerful this social media platform has become and its ability to reach thousands and thousands of people, in some cases, millions of people, in days and for free. YouTube is another example. I can share several campaigns on YouTube, and the campaign went viral and, in a few days, had millions of hits and viewers of that campaign. LinkedIn [too]. I sometimes post job offers, job openings on LinkedIn, and I get dozens of resumes a day without having to pay a penny for an executive search company. Do more viral campaigns, get more creative in how we imitate campaigns that go viral to improve our campaign reach. (Sergey)

We will post up his fight from that event, and then his friends will re-post it. All of their friends are like, "Oh, describe the gym that you go to." We keep an eye on whatever people are doing on Facebook . . . but it's more of a friendly competition of, "We've got 2,000 people following us on Facebook and you've got 1,500." (Bill)

It's much harder to get somebody to follow you on LinkedIn than to connect with you. So it's a lot harder to get people to follow the company as opposed to connect with you personally. So a lot more people will connect to you personally, but not follow your company, so you want to get that information out to their connections. And that is good for the multiplier effect. (Larry)

How many people are adding us to their circles and sharing our information? You get the multiplier effect of social media if other people share your information. (Steve)

Engaging thought leaders in the medical industry in the US who get published. They are active on social media, so getting engaged with them, sharing their information, hopefully, eventually, they will share our information. So it's not going directly to the end user. It's more on the association level and thought leaders level who are active on social media. On Twitter, it's whenever we get a re-tweet, we look at who re-tweeted. Potentially finding out about the business through these platforms because somebody shared a post that they put out and then people who they were friends with saw the post and became interested. And that's the power of social media; it's an amplification process. (Jack)

Followers with traction. The second property is Followers with Traction, which is defined as "people who have influence." The excerpts below concern this property.

We would like to get into more interesting content, more infographic type of content that is easily shared through social media, more videos. We've done videos but we'd like to do more—more interactive content that is more likely to be shared. Those are the visual things that tend to be shared more often. That's when you really start to gain traction. That's what you're trying to do. (Steve)

Oh, the president of this association just started following us. That's huge. So it really requires that you look very carefully, look at what the engagement is. When we get somebody to re-tweet something, for example, or get somebody new who follows us, and they turn out to be somebody influential, then that is meaningful. (Mark)

Where we've been able to get some traction in engaging the associations. These are the people who we are hoping will one day start to re-tweet us, to share information with their 5,000 or 10,000 followers. One of our objectives on Twitter, for example, is to get re-tweeted by people who have influence. These activities on social media are meant to help the business development process along. They're meant to get the name in front of people in influential positions. (Jack)

Uniqueness. The third property is Uniqueness of Content, which is defined as "uniqueness by post and by platform." The excerpts below indicate this property.

My marketing strategies center on providing valuable content the majority of the time that also positions me as an expert in my field. For example, I started

advertising a free webinar series that I was holding on both Facebook and LinkedIn. Using these platforms enabled me to get the word out. One of the webinars was on the Top 10 Mistakes Business Owners Make on Their Website. Once the webinar was held, I had people who attended the webinar contacting me to hire me for my services. (Marissa)

Look, the thing about social media, you have to have something good to say. And the challenge companies have is they don't know what to say. And the problem starts there. And that's a work in progress. Because the question is, what's meaningful? And that's the struggle. (Larry)

Business is ruled by seasonality, is ruled by the weather, and when things change: it's raining, it's snowing, it's hot outside, whatever it is, they . . . can change messages quickly and engage these folks. (Mark)

We know from experience that that stuff works more than your standard updating, re-tweeting, and doing the average stuff. When you have something unique like that, it tends to get you credibility. And so I'd like to engage our clients more. We don't necessarily apply them equally or every time. (Steve)

Do we have the capacity or the content to keep these things active? And if the answer is, "We are not going to have the content to keep it active," we don't do them. We don't do automated things; we don't automate the Twitter feed based on a blog post that goes out. If it looks automated, that's not what social media is about. So it's a manual process, it's all manual; it's all unique to every single platform. (Jack)

Conversion. The fourth property is Conversion, which is defined as "tracking referral sources." The excerpts below address this property.

So that applies to virtually every platform. Who is engaging with you. Understanding who's engaging with you, and it's trying to understand is it real engagement or is it not. Like, did they end up on your website? You know, that's more meaningful. So there's a lot of a raw data out there, the like numbers, followers' numbers; that stuff is just gross numbers, they don't, they lost their meaning over time. (Steve)

Improve our sales by creating leads and opportunities from the social marketing and social media networks where we start selling solutions. If you capture an additional 1,000 leads, and 10% of these leads end up becoming opportunities, and you sell them a product and they become a customer, then you can attribute that amount of revenue from those opportunities definitely to the success and the ROI. Those are usually very, very good indicators of ROI. (Sergey)

So it's not a direct sales tool, I don't view it that way, as a closing tool; I view it as an exposure, and if you have that exposure, that could create sales. It increases exposure of people talking about it, and that is certainly increasing our sales. (Bill)

When you are talking about those kinds of decisions, and when you are talking a pair of jeans or a T-shirt, or whatever it is, social media, yes, that could lead directly to sales and even snow blower or whatever, it can lead directly to sales. So we are tracking referral resources to the websites. And then we track

conversions. So we are tracking back to see if anyone of those social media platforms has had a real impact on results. We hope that eventually they will come to the website and maybe they will fill out a form for more information. That would be a success. (Jack)

Analysis of category 1. The participants indicated that their involvement in SMM is strongly connected to Engagement with Customers. Making connections with public and private communities provided the participants with information-sharing capabilities and enhanced their business credibility. When the participants shared their experiences related to SMM, they described a Multiplier Effect of using social media platforms as a powerful way to engage with people of influence (Followers with Traction). The participants emphasized that social media engages followers who attract other individuals, who re-share, re-tweet, and like content delivered by the various businesses.

This process of engagement with customers in the social media arena enabled the participants to become successful when employing creative marketing strategies. The goal of such engagement is to increase the competitiveness of a company. The participants also stated that social media has enabled individuals to have a more resourceful approach to seeking and learning about employment opportunities. Social media offers an opportunity for individuals to achieve global exposure through viral campaigns. Through the various social media platforms, executives can reach across continents to find qualified employees, managers, and leaders; they no longer feel restricted by geographic boundaries when filling employment positions.

According to the data derived from the interviews, executives believe that social media is important as an innovative approach to marketing due to the Uniqueness of

Content that the platforms are able to deliver. One participant emphasized that, when content is unique, it tends to drive credibility. Further, this uniqueness tends to engage the clients in a more meaningful way, which could become the basis of revenue creation in future transactions. For example, one participant stated that offering followers a free webinar with unique content triggered a variety of business connections that eventually turned into sales.

Revenue creation is seen in the conversion process when tracking referral sources to return on investment. The individual platforms can capture leads that become opportunities for the establishment of future revenue. One participant pointed out that the ability for individuals to peruse social media platforms in a 24/7 timeframe results in a high level of engagement that, as noted, becomes the basis for future business revenue generation. Organizations analyze this conversion process and watch the nature of the traffic as a means to predict and maximize potential streams of income.

Category 2: The essence of social media presence. In this study, the category of The Essence of Social Media Presence was defined as "insights into customers' behaviors." The data indicated that marketing executives use social media to obtain insight into customers' behaviors, to gain feedback, and to identify problems and propose solutions. According to the participants, a social media presence that generates a positive emotional reaction among customers is a successful marketing strategy. When customers experience an involvement with the product, this contributes to the company's achieving a successful outcome from marketing efforts. Finally, this category relates to the concept of companies' leveraging the various social media platforms on a global basis as a means

to increase revenue. The excerpts presented below are representative of category 2, including its properties.

Emotional reaction. The first property is the Emotional Reaction, which is defined as "consumers' involvement with the product." The excerpts below address this property.

> Our members end up talking a lot about it. People see it for a while and go like: "Oh, I know who that is! I will go down and try that out; I've been watching them on Facebook for 6 months. We will give you a free T-shirt for 15 check-ins." And immediately you see a bunch of people starting to check in every time they come to the gym. (Bill)

> So on Facebook, we are looking at, how many likes do we have on our company pages as a metric. But with these decisions, it is way too complex; it takes months, if not years, for people to make a decision. So it's just part of the credibility building, it's part of getting somebody interested so they start to ask the question. Today, it's a very different landscape, where the business owners are now scared that if they are not on there, but they are not sure why and how effective this is going to be. (Jack)

> If somebody is making a comment about me out on Twitter but not tagging me in it, then I can still monitor everything that's being said. And that's a great way to really monitor that brand image. (Marissa)

> Ultimately, they make a decision six months later. A successful thing has been really around big events—shows or plays or art exhibits, that kind of thing— that gets a lot of activity, the parents get excited, the kids get excited . . .

something with teachers acting silly in short videos and people enjoyed that. It's

kind of putting a human face to the school; that worked very well. That's kind of

what it has been around the exciting events that have been in the school. (Steve)

Pressure for problem resolution. The second property is Pressure for Problem

Resolution, which is defined as "problem posing that results in problem solutions." The

excerpts below relate to this property.

They have to tweak it and then re-test again. That's the power of social

media. Internally connected to our product, we have our own tools that we use

for analytics. We are looking to develop some analytics also in-house. But they

will be for our own products. We develop products that are in the social

enterprise, that are similar to Facebook. We also develop products that are

website management products that have a social capability and social integration

that allow you to do a lot of the social and marketing media on our own website.

So, first, we use our own product, and, second, we support it by using our full-

time resources, employees who do all of our social media and marketing

campaigns. (Sergey)

When somebody posts a question, a customer service issue on Facebook

or on Twitter, they are expecting a resolution very quickly. And it's public to

everybody, so it's a lot of pressure. (Mark)

I think every company has that challenge of making sure that they are out

there as often as they need to be, tracking interactions. Every company I talk to,

that's probably one of their biggest challenges. (Marissa)

Global exposure. The third property is Global Exposure, which is defined as "levering the reach into global markets." The excerpts below are associated with this property.

> People are coming from all sorts of platforms. (Mark)

> The purpose is really to use and leverage social media to improve our brand image and our brand reach into the global markets and the different industries that we are in, some of the emerging markets in the Middle East and Russia, and Asia-Pacific Africa Continent. We serve mostly the enterprise, so it is very important to us to develop and push our social media campaign over networks and platforms that are supporting business users, more than the consumers across multiple cultures. (Sergey)

Analysis of category 2. The research participants indicated that their involvement in SMM is strongly connected to The Essence of Social Media Presence. The executives noted that customers' providing feedback, based on their involvement with the product, triggers an emotional reaction that can help companies achieve higher customer satisfaction rates and, of course, greater success. This is a new dynamic that social media adds to traditional marketing approaches. One participant presented this process as building credibility within the social media realm. Social media platforms allow companies to keep track of the different analytics related to customer feedback, as automatically generated on the platform level. For example, the participants identified the ability to track likes in Facebook, as well as the number of followers on Twitter, as characteristics of some of these platforms. These are now considered marketing tools

that are used to monitor clients and followers, with the goal of achieving a higher rate of customer satisfaction and retention.

The essence of the social media presence is a positive approach to marketing; nevertheless, the participants explained that there are certain challenges inherent in consistently engaging customers. One participant noted the amount of time consumed and the pressure to keep up with clients' demands for urgent problem resolution, which resulted in the property of Pressure for Problem Resolution. The participants also emphasized, however, that posing problems results in finding solutions. One participant stated that problem posing and problem solving are the power behind The Essence of Social Media Presence. Solving a particular problem posed by a client was handled with much more urgency online than offline due to the company's high visibility as related to social media. Consequently, this issue, as noted by another participant, became the catalyst for developing custom software to more efficiently address customers' needs.

The participants explained how Global Exposure, which is leveraging the company's reach into global markets, related to The Essence of Social Media Presence. This presence involves the ability to market in continents that were previously difficult to reach. As noted by one participant, the leveraging of social media provides global exposure, which is one impetus for revenue generation. Further, the ability to leverage social media as a medium for the development of products with global appeal also provides the potential to increase business revenue. One participant noted the usefulness of website management products that allow for the creation of non-traditional forms of advertising that incorporate social aspects into traditional marketing methods and can be

used on a global basis. This global exposure in an open marketplace, through the various

social media platforms, is a foundation for revenue generation.

      Category 3: The communication by choice. In this study, the category of

Communication by Choice was defined as "the option of selective behavior." The

interview data indicated that the use of social media allows for an easy means of

communication with the customer due to its interactive, permissive nature. Successful

marketing strategies involve building on business connections and establishing

recognition. Recognition can be achieved by creating events and using social media

platforms to promote such events.

      According to the participants, the most commonly used social media platforms are

LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter (Appendix F). A number of these platforms

have built-in metrics that offer business users with useful analytics at no additional

charge. Examples of such analytics include the number of Facebook likes on a per-post

level, the percentage change in the number of Twitter followers, the number of new

individuals who have added a company to their Google+ circles, and the number of users

who have hid a specific content posted by a business.

      Further, the analysis of the participants' responses indicated that this category

involves Users' Feedback through Weigh-In. Companies look forward to interacting

with users and to receiving their feedback, which provides insights into customers'

behaviors. Finally, the data indicated that the category concerns the practice of

communication for business exposure. The more the exposure through the social media

channels, the more a company can create business awareness and name recognition,

another basis for increasing revenue. The excerpts presented below are representative of category 3, including its properties.

Triggering business connections. The first property is Triggering Business Connections, which is defined as "building an online presence." The excerpts below relate to this property.

Properly build your LinkedIn presence and then to use LinkedIn more, make a connection, trigger new connections. (Jack)

To attract new business, to help grow the business. That's number one. (Steve)

Social media allows connecting with these small landscapers, these landscape contractors. Getting more followers that way. (Mark)

One is just lead generation in terms of finding qualified leads that might be interested in my services. So that's probably my biggest thing, making sure that I am out there as often as I need to be. (Marissa)

Users' feedback through weigh-in. The second property is Users' Feedback through Weigh-in, which is defined as "a measure of the level of interest in individuals." The excerpts below are indicative of this property.

We are looking how people are actually posting on our company page or liking certain updates on the company page and use that as a measure of what their interest is. For YouTube, we look at number of views and duration of the average view. We are looking to see if these videos are helpful. And with Google+ again, how many people are adding us to their circles and sharing our information? Who cares if you have 1,000 followers if 900 of them are bogus?

And, of course, that's what people used to do, right? They used to buy followers. But I can get 100 new followers and they are all trying to get my business; that's why they're following me. Well, that's not meaningful. Who cares? People are making comments and asking questions. (Mark)

Stats we can get from LinkedIn to see if people are actually paying attention to us, to what's being posted. Comments from people, "Great article. Thanks for sending me the information," people who we don't connect with normally on a regular basis. (Larry)

Making sure that I am taking that time to go back and see what's working and what's not. What kinds of things am I getting responses or conversations started on? And so I can monitor that on a daily basis to know whether I'm getting positive feedback or negative feedback. (Marissa)

Communication for business exposure. The third property is Communication for Business Exposure, which is defined as "receiving business awareness and name recognition." The excerpts below are associated with this property.

The secondary reason is to engage their existing client base. (Steve)

We use social media to get that information out and position as an informed thought leader. We want to elevate and be looked at as an incredible source of information. You talk to social media people; they talk to you about brands and about brand building. It helps to reconnect with contacts that built up over the years in a meaningful way. Just good information about the investment sort of environment. (Larry)

To get our name out there to other people and what we are really doing at the training that we're doing. (Bill)

So it's this one more thing to help get recognition so that, when we go to an event, we're more likely to have the company name recognized when approaching people, and for the event organizers to sort of recognize the company as well. That's the purpose. (Jack)

So my marketing strategies center around providing valuable content the majority of the time (about 80%) that also positions me as an expert in my field. Then when I am doing promotional content (20% of the time), people are more likely to hire me. (Marissa)

Social media is used effectively for big events, invite people, so there is a lot of pre-event activity to get excitement growing and then there is activity during the event to show people that there is a lot of fun stuff going on, pictures are getting posted, stuff is happening, videos. And after the event, we go back and we post a whole bunch of things on Facebook page, Twitter account; we film videos to go on YouTube afterwards. And so the goals are to promote the event and then use that to help build an event for the next year or for the next event. To see if anyone of those social media platforms has had a real impact on results. Jumping on inquiries through social media. People ask questions about stuff like: "How do I turn my lawn mower in the spring?" So we use searches for key words on Twitter, for example, and we answer those questions; that works well. When we get somebody to re-tweet something, for example, or somebody new who

follows us. And we look at who that person is, and they turn out to be somebody

influential. Then that is meaningful. (Mark)

Analysis of category 3. The participants indicated that their involvement in SMM

can be understood as communication by choice and that their building of an online

presence is the foundation for developing business connections. They emphasized that

building connections leads to the attracting of more referrals and followers, which can

potentially increase revenue. Participants emphasized the importance of being attentive

to their clients, and the use of social media enables businesses to nurture business

relationships.

Social media allows for users' feedback through weigh-in, which is a measure of

the level of interest of individuals. The participants indicated that companies, based on

user feedback, customize the content that they post through the various social media

platforms. According to the participants, engagement and communication are interrelated

dimensions of marketing through social media. The data also indicated that companies

that previously invested substantial resources in research and development efforts as a

means to learn about customers' needs have now directed part of their focus to learning

about such needs through the social media platforms.

The data indicated that communication for business exposure, defined as

receiving business awareness and name recognition, allows companies to be positioned as

informed thought leaders. One participant stated that one objective of a company is to

elevate its status as an incredible source of information. In addition, participants

indicated that social media can contribute to building a company's brand and increase

business revenue. Social media provides the foundation for a win-win relationship between the consumer and the business.

Analysis Summary

The qualitative analysis of data collected for this exploratory research on SMM resulted in ten findings that make a significant contribution to the understanding of the use of social media in marketing purposes. The responses to the open-ended questions provided insightful, rich description of participants' experiences with SMM practices in their organizations.

Prior to implementation of the study, the researcher was concerned that participants would skip some of the open-ended questions. However, all seven participants discussed recent social media use in marketing, and the majority offered additional commentary on their SMM practices. Most professionals are increasingly likely to express themselves on the phone or online than via paper, and this research indicates that electronic data collection mechanisms are effective for conducting research with this population. Overall, the open-ended questions about the use of social media platforms as a marketing tool invited responses that provided insight into understanding this phenomenon. The interview approach used in this study appears to have been successful in capturing information about SMM practices.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study, which investigated the use of social media as a marketing technique. In addition to presenting the demographics of each of the participants, the chapter presented an analysis of the data, which resulted in three categories and their associated properties. Participant quotes were used to present

data relevant to each category and its properties. The following chapter presents a

discussion of the findings, as they relate to the literature, and their implications. The

chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

This chapter provides a conclusion to the study and includes a discussion of the findings, in view of the literature, and their implications as well as recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was to describe the reasons that select organizations use SMM, the different SMM strategies that companies utilized, and the perceived effect of SMM on revenue generation, based on the perceptions of the research participants. In particular, the researcher sought to determine whether corporations had their own SMM metrics as related to their SMM efforts.

This qualitative research was exploratory. Data were collected from seven executives, who were interviewed, in regard to their use of SMM and its role as part of an integrated marketing approach. The interview data were supplemented by verbatim transcription and member checking through follow-up e-mails with the participants. Additionally, the data were triangulated with the reviewer's input on the construction of the categories and properties and the researcher's field notes. Data analysis generated three key categories: (a) Engagement with Customers, (b) The Essence of Social Media Presence, and (c) Communication by Choice.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the stated reasons why marketing executives from selected companies use social media in online marketing?

2. Which social media metrics and analytics are used by marketing executives from selected companies for online marketing?

3. What are examples of successful marketing strategies implemented by marketing executives from selected companies?

4. How reliable are the metrics used by marketing executives from selected companies in interpreting the data they collect by which the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns is being measured?

5. How do marketing executives from selected companies assess the effect of social media marketing on their revenue?

Discussion

The study findings comprise new information that adds to and strengthens the existing literature. Below, the findings are discussed in view of the literature.

Engagement with customers. Engagement with customers includes the properties of (a) a multiplier effect, (b) followers with traction, (c) uniqueness of content, and (d) conversion. The participants believed that social media helped them to engage with both existing clients and potential ones, some of whom are people of influence. This process of engaging with customers in the social media arena has enabled the participants to become successful in developing creative marketing strategies. The category of engagement with customers supports the research of Pickren (2010), who stated that social media allows for an interactive, personal, transparent, engaging, dynamic, and conversational approach to communication. In addition, McAllister and Turow (2002) noted that social media is able to empower consumers to access, send, transform, create, and store materials online.

The findings indicated that one must use a multiplier effect for effective engagement, a concept discussed by Faust and Householder (2009). Social media messages must be optimized for viral functionality; that is, the message must be easy to

share with the recipients' contacts and to post on social media networks. These concepts relate to engagement with customers.

The essence of social media presence. The Essence of Social Media Presence includes the properties of (a) emotional reaction, (b) pressure for problem resolution, and (c) global exposure. Participants spoke of the pressure to get customer problems resolved in a timely manner, sometimes using creative solutions, and the need to share information online, both of which were believed to be related to higher customer satisfaction and revenue. Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) specified that a quick response or an innovation to address negative feedback makes a company appear to be more responsible. The property of pressure for problem resolution is in keeping with research by Kietzmann et al. (2011), who explained that social media has enabled consumers to take a more active role in informing themselves about products and in letting companies know what they want and what is missing from their current products. Bloomberg (2010) stated that consistent listening, although time consuming, can lead to a successful market-focused orientation. Participants indicated that creativity in problem resolution triggered an emotional reaction from clients. Such a response was discussed by Normann and Ramirez (1993), who explained that listening to customers can eventually lead to increased customer loyalty and, thus, repeat business.

Communication by choice. Communication by Choice included properties of (a) triggering business connections, (b) users' feedback through weigh-in, and (c) communication for business exposure. This category is in keeping with the research of a number of authors (Angel & Sexsmith, 2009; Balwani, 2009; Channey, 2010; Warren, 2009), who stated that most marketers utilize popular channels such as Facebook,

Twitter, and LinkedIn as well as blogs to increase the extent of their brand reach, among other goals. The participants indicated that one of the reasons that marketing executives use social media is to trigger business connections, a practice that builds their online presence through name recognition, also understood as communication for business exposure. Social media tools can effectively engage an audience as well as empower a group of fans to promote products through their social networks. Referrals are crucial elements of a company's generation of new sales, a marketing strategy that can be built around taking care of existing customers.

The participants believed that social media helped them to gauge the level of interest of individuals. In this regard, communication by choice is in keeping with the research of Brown (2008), who stated that, with the advent of social media, the individual customer does not need a higher authority to dictate what to think or buy. Additionally, Dinovici (2010) noted that the administration of surveys (a traditional method) through social media platforms can help companies measure consumer awareness of their products and their brands' images. This process of building brand awareness in the social media arena has taught businesses to welcome users' feedback.

The property of users' feedback through weigh-in is consistent with the literature on the importance of companies' welcoming consumers' feedback and acting upon it. This practice is explained by Freire (2000), who uses the term *praxis* to describe the process of dialogue as a practice of converting reflection into action. The act of listening to customers is a practical application that Normann and Ramirez (1993) have argued can eventually lead to increased customer loyalty and, thus, repeat business. Customers' loyalty established through feedback, as Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) noted, is an

effective tool generated by social media platforms. Conversations are valuable because they add depth to the marketing approach, something that is missing from traditional marketing research. This notion was supported by Bloomberg (2010), who emphasized the need to make the best use of the data collected. He explained that companies need to have unfiltered consumers' conversations when collecting data.

Conclusion

This study took an in-depth look at how companies use SMM to connect with customers and to achieve their goals. Businesses can create value by engaging with their customers through the social media channels, and the success of SMM strategies relies predominantly on the ability of businesses to carefully orchestrate and manage various aspects of their customer relationship. The aim of companies' use of SMM is to build meaningful and lasting customers relationships.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have several implications. Each of these implications is discussed below. It is important to note that the results of this research should become increasingly relevant as purchasing choices become more controlled by consumers who are used to researching, exchanging information, and making purchasing decisions online.

Social media marketing is not a stand-alone approach. The results indicated that businesses have reached a certain level of maturity in regard to SMM and understand that they need to use a multifaceted approach. Companies view SMM activities as supplementary tools, not a stand-alone approach, to sustain their business. This notion is seen in the research of Yost (2010), who noted the need to accompany the use of the

various social media channels by comprehensive websites and avenues by which

consumers can be invited back into the companies' websites. Organizations appear to

understand that marketing is an integrated approach that requires the use of multiple

marketing strategies, both online and offline, that need to be integrated at the companies'

website level to leverage the various resources, maximize the overall return from such

marketing practices, and tie them back to real business outcomes. Costa (2010) stated

that marketing managers must be knowledgeable about how different social media

platforms can add substance to their integrated marketing strategies. For example,

Twitter followers can be directed to Facebook, Facebook *likers* can be encouraged to visit

the company's YouTube channel, and YouTube comments can automatically feed into

the company blog, and so on. Each platform generates insights into customers, which

can improve the business development process and result in targeted marketing

approaches, better content customization, higher levels of engagement, and expanded

brand reach.

Social media marketing is a self-correcting mechanism. Social media is

becoming more of a science. One participant stated that a company needs to have the

right foundation and tools in place to leverage the instant feedback that the platforms can

offer companies. The SMM process involves the initial launching of a marketing

campaign, an analysis of the feedback and how it measures against the campaign's goals,

the making of adjustments, re-testing, and then repeating this practice with the intention

of finding a combination of analytical metrics that aid the business development process.

In other words, SMM is a science. As noted by Pickren (2010), the instant gratification

that marketers obtain from this form of marketing offers companies a high rate of return

in comparison with direct marketing campaigns, for which feedback takes much longer to be received.

The need for third-party analytics. Although all participants used *Facebook Insights,* a built-in tool offered free of charge that helps companies understand users' activities as related to company content, five of the seven participants either did not use or were not aware of other third-party analytics. This could be tied to a lack of knowledge about the availability of third-party analytics to tie SMM efforts to business outcomes or the lack of a sufficient budget for SMM. This lack of the use of third-party analytics was seen in research by Warren (2009), who noted that 84% of social media programs did not measure ROI, which means that many businesses are not able to accurately tie their SMM efforts to their business outcomes, mainly because they do not know how and where to start.

Common uses of social media. The common uses of social media include identifying the target market and analyzing a platform's capabilities and potential users' reach. Other practices include assessing whether organizations have the necessary content to keep users entertained and engaged with the brand and leveraging the various social media platforms by customizing content and designing different social media strategies based on the individual platform.

One participant stated that the high engagement created around promoting various events through social media helps the company to achieve a global market reach and increase its customer base. Promoting events though social media creates engagement and builds trust and credibility. Similarly, the use of analytics generated by Facebook, such as "people are talking about this," allows companies to deliver meaningful content

to the *likers* and serves as the foundation for generating targeted leads and, consequently, higher sales. Nevertheless, companies may use social media differently based on their goals, the industry, and their target market.

The birth of social return on investment. Monitoring and maintaining social media requires being proactive in foreseeing customers' behavior. Participants indicated that myriad social monitoring tools, e.g., Facebook Insights, Google Analytics, Klout, provide promising, creative ways to make sense of the large amount of data collected from the various platforms. However, even the most popular tools do not tie a particular SMM event back to a specific, quantifiable revenue point. Thus, there is the need for SROI, which could explain why (a) none of the respondents mentioned that traditional ROI was a significant factor that contributed to the use of social media in marketing; and (b) in general, the research participants consistently emphasized the social nature of social media and rarely discussed numbers or statistics. In keeping with this, Mulgan (2010) noted the significance of considering other measures of ROI to account for the social aspect of social media, which led to the development of SROI. Similarly, various researchers (Angel & Sexsmith, 2009; Balwani, 2009; Channey, 2010; Warren, 2009) have stated that few firms have been able to accurately measure the direct impact of social media on sales volume. There is no standard for measuring traditional ROI for social media. Thus, SROI was born out of the need to consider the notion that traditional, and quantifiable, ROI metrics might have different meanings when associated with SMM.

When compared to ROI, SROI is associated with a more flexible measure (not a number) that should be considered within a framework for investigating a company's

social impact. Within the context of this study, the participants failed to recognize, however, that a company's social impact can serve as the foundation for analyzing the success of SMM efforts by understanding what the numbers (e.g., followers, likes, events attendees) mean. For example, correlations generated between sales and customer retention can provide valuable business information. Overall, finding trends and associating them back to their source is integral to assessing the impact of SMM practices. The participants' lack of understanding of the need for a business model that revolves around value creation (Kaganer & Vaast, 2010) and that focuses on the relationship between social media metrics and the concept of SROI implies the need to educate business leaders on SROI.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the participants' lack of understanding of the concept of deriving value from social media activities, it is valuable to focus future studies on ways to tie sales to particular SMM efforts as a means to justify budget allocation to social media marketing. It is also recommended that future studies examine how to develop social media strategies. A qualitative research design would be an effective approach for providing an in-depth understanding of the creation of such strategies. Further, such research, as well as other future research, should acknowledge that SMM is not a stand alone approach.

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APPENDIX A

Research Participant Informed Consent Form

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for your participation. Your input is very much appreciated. This research will benefit scholars, marketing consultants, and companies as related to social media marketing. The purpose of this study is to obtain thorough knowledge from representatives from a select group of companies of their experiences with and points of view on their use of various social media platforms. This will allow an understanding of the common uses of social media in marketing practices and the identification of various tools and metrics available in social media marketing today. To provide full disclosure and comply with Pepperdine University policies, please note:

- You consent to being a research participant.

- Your participation in the interview is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time, without having to give a reason.

- You can contact the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Jack McManus, at anytime if you need additional information or to file a complaint. Dr. McManus can be reached via email at jackmcma@gmail.com or by phone at (310) 548-5657.

- There are no known risks associated with your participation.

- You do not have to answer every question.

- The interview might be audio recorded, in which case the digital records will be password protected to ensure confidentiality and will be stored on the researcher's personal laptop.

- Your identity and the information you provide will remain confidential, and no information that identifies you or the company you represent will be made publicly available.

- The findings of this study will be shared with you and will be used for the sole purpose of this dissertation.

Please read the following statement and sign at the bottom of the page if you agree:

"The purpose of this dissertation, as well as the interview process, was explained to me. I acknowledge that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from this research at any time. I was given the contact information of the researcher's supervisor. I consent to my willingness to participate in this research. I acknowledge that I was informed that my name, the name of the business that I represent, and any information/data provided will be treated with confidentiality."

_____   _____   _____
Participant Name   Participant Signature   Date

_____   _____
Business Name   Participant Contact Information

APPENDIX B

Pepperdine University IRB Application For a Claim of Exemption

Date: 04/29/2013   IRB Application/Protocol #: E03013D03

Principal Investigator: Abir Alameddine
                    ☐ Faculty   ☐ Staff   ☒ Student   ☐ Other
School/Unit: ☐ GSBM   ☒ GSEP   ☐ Seaver   ☐ SOL   ☐
SPP
                    ☐ Administration   ☐ Other:
Street Address: XX
City: XX   State: XX   Zip Code: XX
Telephone (work): XX   Telephone (home): (   )   -
Email Address: abir.alameddine@gmail.com

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. John McManus
School/Unit: ☐ GSBM   ☒ GSEP   ☐ Seaver   ☐ SOL   ☐
SPP
                    ☐ Administration   ☐ Other:
Telephone (work): (   )   -
Email Address: jackmcma@gmail.com

Project Title: PERCEPTIONS OF EXECUTIVES FROM SEVEN SELECTED COMPANIES OF THE
USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MARKETING PRACTICES

Type of Project (Check all that apply):

                    ☒ Dissertation   ☐ Thesis
                    ☐ Undergraduate Research   ☐ Independent Study
                    ☐ Classroom Project   ☐ Faculty Research
                    ☐ Other:

        Is the Faculty Supervisor Review Form attached? ☒Yes ☐ No ☐N/A

Has the investigator(s) completed education on research with human subjects? ☒ Yes ☐ No.
Please attach certification form(s) to this application.

Investigators are reminded that Exemptions will NOT be granted for research involving prisoners,
fetuses, pregnant women, or human in vitro fertilization. Also, the exemption at 45 CFR
46.101(b)(2), for research involving survey or interview procedures or observations of public
behavior, does not apply to research with children (Subpart D), except for research involving
observations of public behavior when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being
observed.

1.   Briefly summarize your proposed research project, and describe your research
      goals/objectives.

      The proposed research project will examine the use of social media in marketing. The
      goal of this research is to understand consumers' engagement, through social media

platforms, with brands that have an online presence. The objectives of this research are to describe the social media scene and to identify the social media tools used by select businesses to market their products and services online.

2.   Using the categories found in Appendix B of the Investigator Manual, list the category of research activity that you believe applies to your proposed study.
45 CFR 46.101(b) (2).

3.   Briefly describe the nature of the involvement of the human subjects (observation of student behavior in the classroom, personal interview, mailed questionnaire, telephone questionnaire, observation, chart review, etc):

The researcher is planning to recruit six to ten participants who will be chosen based on their existing social media marketing experience. One executive will be chosen from six to ten companies that integrate social media into their marketing practices. These executives will include CEOs, CFOs, marketing or social media directors, whose participation will be voluntary. The researcher will use semi-structured, phone or online individual interviews through Skype or Facetime.

4.   Explain why you think this protocol should be considered exempt. Be sure to address all known or potential risks to subjects/participants.
Participants are adults who consented to voluntary participate in this research. Human subjects' responses will remain anonymous, and the data collected will remain confidential; thus, the subjects will not be identified or endangered.

5.   Explain how records will be kept.
Records, which consist of digital video/audio files gathered from the individual interviews, will be stored on the researcher's personal computer in a private, password-protected digital file, to which only the researcher will have access. Any printed records related to this study will be kept at the researcher's office in a drawer under lock & key and will be destroyed after five years.

6.   ☒ Yes ☐ No   Are the data recorded in such a manner that subjects can be identified by a name or code? If yes:
- Who has access to this data and how is it being stored?
Only the researcher will have access. All material will be password protected and digitally stored on the researcher's personal computer.
- If you are using a health or mental health assessment tool or procedure, what is your procedure for referring the participant for follow-up if his/her scores or results should significant illness or risk? Please describe. N/A
- Will the list of names and codes be destroyed at the end of the study? Explain your procedures.
Yes. Electronic files, backups, and physical records, if any, will be destroyed or shredded, as appropriate.

7.   Attach a copy of all data collection tools (e.g., questionnaires, interview questions or scripts, data collection sheets, database formats) to this form. Be sure to include in such forms/scripts the following information:
- a statement that the project is research being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a course, master's thesis, dissertation, etc. (if applicable)

- purpose of study
- a statement that subjects' responses will be kept anonymous or confidential (explain extent of confidentiality if subjects' names are requested)
- if audiotaping or videotaping, a statement that subject is being taped (explain how tapes will be stored or disposed of during and after the study)
- a statement that subjects do not have to answer every question
- a statement that subject's class standing, grades, or job status (or status on an athletic team, if applicable) will not be affected by refusal to participate or by withdrawal from the study (if applicable)
- a statement that participation is voluntary

Please note that your IRB may also require you to submit a consent form or an Application for Waiver or Alteration of Informed Consent Procedures form. Please contact your IRB Chairperson and/or see the IRB website for more information.

8. Attach a copy of permission forms from individuals and/or organizations that have granted you access to the subjects.

9. ☐Yes ☒No Does your study fall under HIPAA? Explain below. N/A

9.1 If HIPAA applies to your study, attach a copy of the certification that the investigator(s) has completed the HIPAA educational component. Describe your procedures for obtaining Authorization from participants. Attach a copy of the Covered Entity's HIPAA Authorization and Revocation of Authorization forms to be used in your study (see Section XI. of the Investigator Manual for forms to use if the CE does not provide such forms). If you are seeking to use or disclose PHI without Authorization, please attach the Application for Use or Disclosure of PHI without Authorization form (see Section XI). Review the HIPAA procedures in Section X. of the Investigator Manual.

I hereby certify that I am familiar with federal and professional standards for conducting research with human subjects and that I will comply with these standards. The above information is correct to the best of my knowledge, and I shall adhere to the procedure as described. If a change in procedures becomes necessary, I shall submit an amended application to the IRB and await approval prior to implementing any new procedures. If any problems involving human subjects occur, I shall immediately notify the IRB Chairperson.

Abir Alameddine   April 29, 2013
_____   _____
Principal Investigator's Signature   Date

John (Jack) McManus   April 29, 2013
_____   _____
Faculty Supervisor's Signature   Date
Appendices/Supplemental Material

Use the space below (or additional pages and/or files) to attach appendices or any supplemental materials to this application.

Interview Questions Instrument and Purpose of the Study

Completed Education on Research with Human Subjects Certificate

Research Participant Informed Consent Form

Faculty Supervisor Review Form-Pepperdine IRB

Interview Questions Instrument and Purpose of the Study

Time and date of interview: _____

Manner by which interview was conducted: _____

Name of interviewee: _____

I. Introduction

- Explain the purpose of the study
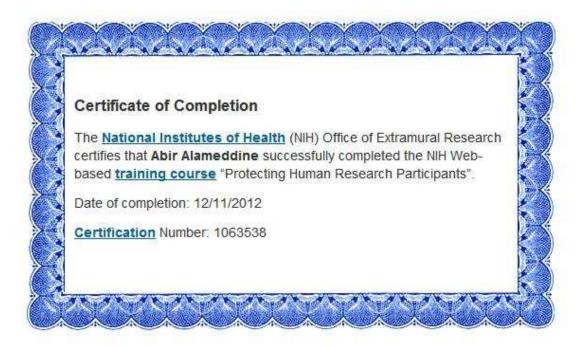- Complete the Research Participant Informed Consent Form

II. Interview Questions

1. What are your company goals that are associated with the use of social media marketing?

2. How does your company manage social media marketing: in-house, outsourced, or both?

3. Which factors, if any, does your company take into consideration when choosing a particular social media platform to use for marketing purposes?

4. Which social media platforms does your company employ?

5. Which social media marketing analytics and metrics does your company use?

6. What are examples of successful social media marketing strategies that your company employs?

7. How does your company quantify the return on investment from social media marketing?

8. In your opinion, how reliable are the social media marketing tools your company use?

9. How would you improve your current company practices as related to the implementation and measurement of the social media marketing procedures?

III. Closing: Additional Questions and Answers

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research is to understand the use of social media in marketing (SMM) and to determine associated themes. This research will present the experiences and perceptions of six to ten executives in regard to their use of SMM and its role as part of an integrated marketing approach. In addition, it will provide an exploration of the effectiveness of SMM techniques and the reliability of the processes by which the data gathered by various social media metrics are interpreted.

Completed Education on Research with Human Subjects Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The **National Institutes of Health** (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Abir Alameddine** successfully completed the NIH Web-based **training course** "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 12/11/2012

Certification Number: 1063538

Research Participant Informed Consent Form

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for your participation. Your input is very much appreciated. This research will benefit scholars, marketing consultants, and companies as related to social media marketing. The purpose of this study is to obtain thorough knowledge from representatives from a select group of companies of their experiences with and points of view on their use of various social media platforms. This will allow an understanding of the common uses of social media in marketing practices and the identification of various tools and metrics available in social media marketing today.

To provide full disclosure and comply with Pepperdine University policies, please note:

- You consent to being a research participant.

- Your participation in the interview is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time, without having to give a reason.

- You can contact the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Jack McManus, at anytime if you need additional information or to file a complaint. Dr. McManus can be reached via email at jackmcma@gmail.com or by phone at (310) 548-5657.

- There are no known risks associated with your participation.

- You do not have to answer every question.

- The interview might be audio recorded, in which case the digital records will be password protected to ensure confidentiality and will be stored on the researcher's personal laptop.

- Your identity and the information you provide will remain confidential, and no information that identifies you or the company you represent will be made publicly available.

- The findings of this study will be shared with you and will be used for the sole purpose of this dissertation.

Please read the following statement and sign at the bottom of the page if you agree:

"The purpose of this dissertation, as well as the interview process, was explained to me. I acknowledge that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from this research at any time. I was given the contact information of the researcher's supervisor. I consent to my willingness to participate in this research. I acknowledge that I was informed that my name, the name of the business that I represent, and any information/data provided will be treated with confidentiality."

_____ _____ _____
Participant Name   Participant Signature   Date
_____ _____
Business Name   Participant Contact Information

Faculty Supervisor Review Form-Pepperdine IRB

By my signature as a supervisor / sponsor on this research application, I certify that Abir Alameddine is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular study SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING in accord with the proposed application and protocol. In addition,

- I have reviewed this application;

- I agree to meet with the investigator on a regular basis to monitor study progress;

- I agree to be available, personally, to supervise the investigator in solving problems should they arise during the course of the study;

- I assure that the investigator will promptly report significant or untoward adverse effects to the Pepperdine IRB chairperson in writing in accordance with the guidelines stated in Section III.G of the Investigator's Manual; and

- If I will be unavailable (e.g., sabbatical leave or vacation), I will arrange for an alternate faculty supervisor / sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence, and I will advise the IRB chairperson in writing of such arrangements.

April 29, 2013

_____   _____
Faculty Supervisor Signature   Date

John (Jack) McManus
Type Name

APPENDIX C

Modified Interview Questions Instrument

Time and date of interview: _____

Manner by which interview was conducted: _____

Name of interviewee: _____

I. Introduction

- Explain the purpose of the study
- Complete the Research Participant Informed Consent Form

II. Interview Questions

1. What are your company goals that are associated with the use of social media marketing?

2. How does your company manage social media marketing: in-house, outsourced, or both?

3. Why does your company use social media as a platform for marketing purposes?

4. Which social media platforms does your company employ?

5. Which social media marketing analytics and metrics does your company use?

6. What are examples of successful social media marketing strategies that your company employs?

7. How does your company quantify the return on investment from social media marketing?

8. In your opinion, how reliable are the social media marketing tools your company use?

9. How would you improve your current company practices as related to the implementation and measurement of the social media marketing procedures?

III. Closing: Additional Questions and Answers

APPENDIX D

Signed Second Rater Instrument Validation Review Form

Interview Instrument Questions	Research Questions
1. What are your company goals that are associated with the use of social media marketing? 3. Why does your company use social media as a platform for marketing purposes? 7. How does your company quantify the return on investment from social media marketing?	1. What are the stated reasons why marketing executives from selected companies use social media in online marketing?
4. Which social media platforms does your company employ? 5. Which social media marketing analytics and metrics does your company use?	2. Which social media analytics and metrics are used by marketing executives from selected companies for online marketing?
1. What are your company goals that are associated with the use of social media marketing? 6. What are examples of successful social media marketing strategies that your company employs? 7. How does your company quantify the return on investment from social media marketing?	3. What are examples of successful marketing strategies implemented by marketing executives from selected companies?
2. How does your company manage social media marketing: in-house, outsourced, or both? 8. In your opinion, how reliable are the social media marketing tools your company use? 9. How would you improve your current company practices as related to the implementation and measurement of the social media marketing procedures?	4. How reliable are the metrics used by marketing executives from selected companies in interpreting the data that they collect by which the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns is being measured?
5. Which social media marketing analytics and metrics does your company use? 7. How does your company quantify the return on investment from social media marketing?	5. How do marketing executives from selected companies assess the effect of social media marketing on their revenue?

Please select either (YES) or (NO) for each of the interview questions above.

Interview Questions	Research Questions	Accept (YES)	Reject (NO)	If you choose Reject (NO), please write your suggested modification
1	1	YES		
3	1	YES		
7	1	YES		
4	2	YES		
5	2	YES		
1	3	YES		
6	3	YES		
7	3	YES		
2	4	YES		
8	4	YES		
9	4	YES		
5	5	YES		
7	5	YES		

Tom Davies

Name

DocuSigned by:
Tom Davies
3D561DO00B874A8

Signature

05/12/2013

Date

APPENDIX E

Pseudonyms

Company / Representative	Code Names
Company 1 / Aby Adams	Marissa
Company 2 / Ben Bishop	Sergey
Company 3 / Carl Connor	Mark
Company 4 / Daniel Davidson	Steve
Company 5 / Stephen McDonald	Bill
Company 6 / Cole Collins	Jack
Company 7 / Archie Dunkin	Larry

APPENDIX F

Social Media Platforms Used by Participants

Social Media Platform	Co. 1	Co. 2	Co. 3	Co. 4	Co. 5	Co. 6	Co. 7
Facebook	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Twitter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
YouTube	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
LinkedIn	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Co. Blog	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Co. Website	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Google Plus	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Pinterest	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No