

Exploring and Evaluating Success Factors of Social Media Marketing Strategy: A Multidimensional-Multicriteria Framework

Purpose- Today, social media is counted as an integral part of marketing strategies, which has led to a paradigm change in this field. As reported, social media marketing has been growing over the recent five years and is predicted to be exponentially growing in the future. However, despite the huge promise and intention to adopt social media marketing strategies by organisations, there remain challenges regarding the successful implementation of these new marketing programmes. Accordingly, marketing managers' awareness of the success factors of social media marketing is essential to return investment in this area. Due to the little research been accomplished in this field, this paper aims to identify the success factors of social networks' marketing and to rank the factors by using of interval Best-Worst Method (BWM).

Design/methodology/approach- To serve the research aims, an extant literature review is accomplished and a focus group approach is conducted to identify the main success factors and sub-factors. To analyse the focus group discussions, a qualitative content analysis approach is applied. Interval BWM is applied to calculate the weights of each identified factor.

Findings- In the final framework, six main success criteria, including strategy, process, technology, content, performance evaluation, and people are identified, for each sub-criteria are developed. The interval BWM results suggest the content criterion as the most important success factor in developing a social media marketing strategy.

Originality- While the related studies have mostly concentrated on the capabilities and activities required to conduct social media marketing, and the few research investigated the critical success factors most concentrated on the customer and the content related factors, the finding of this research goes beyond that and suggests technical, process, and human aspects simultaneously in the implementation process in a holistic view.

Research implications. First, this research provides a comprehensive insight into the success factors and best practices of social media marketing. This is the first to draw on the critical

factors affecting the success of social media marketing, considering 1) people in the organisation such as top management, employees, and customers, 2) strategy, process, and performance evaluation focusing on the change management requirements for applying social media marketing, and 3) technology as the technical factor of the adoption process, simultaneously. Identifying critical success factors of social media marketing will help marketing managers to avoid falling into the trap of developing social media strategy based on less important areas and ignoring the critical ones. Besides, owing to the limited resources of organisations in implementing social media marketing strategies, prioritising and weighing the success factors will lead to a focus on more important areas.

Keywords. Social media marketing; Social media marketing strategy; Success factors of social media marketing strategy; Interval Best- Worst Method (BWM).

1. Introduction

The use of social media platforms as marketing channels has grown in recent years to disseminate brand-related content and to engage with customers and their conversations (Iankova et al, 2019; Shareef et al, 2019). Social media has enabled companies to communicate with their end-users directly in a timely, low-cost, and high-performance way in comparison to traditional communication tools (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Through the use of social media, marketers can benefit from the major support of new customers, brand awareness, customer service channels, high-level support for campaigns, brand equity, and integrated marketing plans (Valos et al, 2016). Seeing that social media is an integral part of customers' online activities, social media marketing has become a dominant strategy in digital marketing plans. According to Smartinsights (Smartinsights, 2020), nearly 60 percent of the world's population is already online, and trends suggest that more than half of the world's total population will use social media by the middle of this year. Overall, digital consumers are now spending an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes per day on social networks and messaging apps as stated by Global Web Index (Smartinsights, 2020). Therefore, the application of social media platforms is at the forefront of marketers' priorities to communicate effectively with customers, gather customer knowledge and receive feedback on the company's products and services, build a reputation, and increase sales (Jami Pour and Jafari, 2019; Schaupp and Bélanger, 2019; Ananda et al, 2016). Turban et al. (Turban et al, 2018) define social media marketing in three main domains, including advertising, market research, and customer service. Based upon on Yang and Che (Yang and Che, 2020), there are two common types of social media marketing, say, user-generated content-based social media marketing and social-based social media marketing. This type of social media marketing is relatively easy to be integrated with business objectives. Social-based social media marketing uses instant communication in social media like WeChat. This type of social media marketing is a virtual social community to share news and express emotion (Yang and Che, 2020).

In 2021, social media advertising expenditure in the United States was predicted to amount to 47.9 billion U.S. dollars, about 25% of the total online media advertising expenditure

forecast for that year (Statista, 2021). According to the CMO survey report in 2019 (CMO Survey, 2019), marketing managers responded that 88.2% of their companies spending used social media for brand awareness and brand building compared to 45.6% in 2018.

From the business view, one of the key challenges of social media marketing is that social media are user-centric technologies and they are built for individuals, not for companies or brands (Pitt and Berthon, 2011); thus, customers have high control on messages emanating from social media channels, even play an important role in creating companies' contents (Kim and Ko, 2010). Therefore, from a business lookout, the use of social media marketing can simultaneously lead to various opportunities and challenges for organisations, and efficient exploiting of opportunities via social media in marketing has become a major concern of executive marketing managers (Fournier, 2011).

Accordingly, despite the advantages of social media marketing and the increasing investments in the field, the question at issue is why social media performance lags even as investments increase? Why do many organisations fail to implement social media marketing? According to eMarketer (2020), the most important challenge that lies ahead for a digital marketer is to determine how to use social media in the marketing process successfully. There are various types of tools and approaches (Chaffey and Chadwick, 2020) for stepping into social media marketing, which confuses marketing executives to formulate appropriate strategies. To succeed in implementing a social media marketing strategy, critical success factor methodology is considered as a mean for supporting information system-related projects strategic planning (Remus and Wiener, 2010); thus, it is an appropriate way to assess the current situation of social media marketing projects and adopt proper strategies to meet marketing goals.

Despite the emphasis on the importance of the critical success factors regarding the insights these factors provide for marketers to implement social media marketing projects successfully in different research, limited research has been conducted in this area. Some studies have proposed the social media marketing process (Chaffey and Smith, 2013) and some have identified social media marketing activities or taxonomies (Li et al., 2021; Godey et al., 2016; Ananda et al., 2016). As Freund (1988) has discussed, the critical success factors

should not be confused with the planning process or activities. Critical success factors are few and must be addressed if a project is to be successful. Identifying critical success factors of social media marketing will help a marketer to avoid falling into the trap of developing social media strategy based on less important areas and ignoring the critical ones. Besides, owing to the limited resources of organisations in implementing social media marketing strategies, prioritising and weighing the success factors will lead to a focus on more important areas.

Hence, the current research is intended to identify the key success factors of social media marketing. The identified factors and their criteria are targeted to be weighted and ranked using a well-established Multi-Criteria Decision making (MCDM) method. Best-Worst Method (BWM) developed by Rezaei (Rezaei, 2015; Rezaei, 2016) is a comparison-based MCDM method with less pairwise comparison data and inconsistency of results in comparison to other MCDM methods like AHP. Since some decision-makers may prefer to have multiple optimal solutions, interval ranking BWM is applied in this research.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Literature review is presented in Section 2. Moreover, the BWM and interval BWM are also explained in this Section. The research methodology is addressed in Section 3. Findings are presented in Section 4 and discussed in Section 5. Theoretical and practical implementations are debated in Section 6. Limitations and future research are embarked on in Section 7.

2. Basic Concepts

The purpose of this section is to identify the knowledge gap and to identify initial criteria to develop the success factors of the social media marketing framework. Thus, the related concepts, including social media and web 2.0, social media marketing, and social media marketing success factors are reviewed, respectively. Then, BWM and interval BWM ranking methods are explained in brief.

2.1. Social media and Web 2.0

With recent developments in information technology and the emergence of Web 2.0, new horizons in the way companies create values for their customers have emerged which, in turn,

increases the popularity of social media in business (Li et al, 2018; Zhang and Nos 2014). There is no commonly agreed definition of Web 2.0. It is defined as the next generation of Web, having more mature communication platforms and user-centered Web applications. It contains features, like collaboration, social connectedness, sharing knowledge, user-generated content, and being free (Jami Pour et al, 2020). Social media are tools used for communications that have Web 2.0 features, such as participation, collaboration, knowledge dissemination, and user empowerment (Kargaran et al, 2017). Among the benefits of social media marketing, increased access, increased traffic, amplified loyal customers, better market insights, improved search ranking, grown business partnership, more intellectual leadership, improved sales, and reduced marketing costs can be noted. The increase in adoption of social media, due to the increasing popularity of social networking sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter has increased social commerce and social media marketing (Akman and Mishra, 2017). No agreed definition could be fined for social media. Kaplan and Haenlein (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) define social media as a group of Internet-based programmes built on Web 2.0, based on which content and applications are constantly updated by users, and it supports the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Boateng (Boateng, 2016) considers social media as a group of Internet-based programmes developed based on Web 2, enabling users to create and exchange content, and interactively supporting them to create, learn, share, provide and exchange online information. Today, the use of social media is at the top of management requirements for an organisation's profitability (Chua et al, 2013), which establishes effective communication with customers (Zhang and Vos, 2014), gathers organisational knowledge, receives feedback as to products and services of the company (Greenhow et al, 2011), and creates reputation and increases sales and revenue for the company (He et al, 2013).

2.2. Social media marketing

Social media has become the most important digital marketing channel, having been widely accepted and expanded by marketing managers in recent years (Iankova et al, 2019). In social media platforms, customers are willing to generate information and share their experience

with their friends and companies, and to create online brand communities via posts, tweets, shares, likes, and reviews (Jacobson et al, 2020). Social media marketing is a new version of digital marketing. The term social media marketing means the use of social media platforms, including social networks, online communities, wikis, content sharing platforms, and microblogging sites for marketing, sales, public relations, and consumer service delivery (Barker et al, 2013). Turban et al. (2018) define social media marketing as the application of marketing communication and other marketing tools using social media. Social media marketing uses social media to achieve marketing objectives, both protecting and expanding the company's brand (Chaffey et al, 2017), and helps marketing managers to communicate with customers, build brands, repair reputation damage in social media, and sustain long-term customer relationships (Turban et al, 2018).

Social media marketing is used for gaining website traffic or receiving attention to an issue through social media. Social network marketing programmes usually focus on creating content that attracts the attention of the audience on those platforms and encourages them to share the contents among social networks (Kietzmann and Canhoto, 2013). Social media helps companies to create a brand and to improve their visibility, fame, knowledge sharing, customer acquisition and maintenance, low-cost advertising, new product development, and customer relationship marketing (Chikadiwa et al, 2013; Felix et al, 2017). Companies could integrate customer support activities and direct marketing programmes significantly using social channels (Turban et al, 2018).

Jacobson et al. (Jacobson et al, 2020) clarify three main functions of using social media analytics for marketing, namely, extracting insights via opinion mining, delivering information via targeted advertising, and communicating via customer relations with new or existing customers. In another study accomplished by Thoring (Thoring, 2011), the purposes of social media as a marketing tool are mainly categorised into four groups, including market research and feedback, advertising, branding and credit creation, customer service, and customer relationship management (CRM) (Thoring, 2011). Felix et al (2017) mention seven functional building blocks common to all forms of social media, say, identity, conversation, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups (Felix et al, 2017). Social media

marketers use these elements with differing emphases to create value for the users. Turban et al. (2018) categorise various topics in social media marketing as social CRM, customer services; viral marketing, recommendations, referrals, affiliate marketing; video marketing, etc. (Turban et al, 2018). Chaffey et al. (2017) introduce social media marketing radar which consists of social bookmarking, social publishing, social networks, social streaming, social search, social knowledge, social blogging, and social customer service (Chaffey et al, 2017).

2.3. Studies related to social media marketing

Various studies have been applied to successfully manage social media marketing strategies. Li et al. (2021) provide a list of useful managerial recommendations for the successful implementation of social media marketing according to the maturity of social media marketing strategies (social commerce strategy, social content strategy, social monitoring strategy, and social CRM strategy). Dahnil et al. (2014) offer determinants of social media marketing adoption in SMEs context. Their proposed influential factors are entitled as end-users, organisational, technological, management, and business environment. Chaffey and Smith (2013) suggest a social media marketing capabilities' assessment framework from the Viapoint website that can be applied as a checklist of practical steps to improve social media marketing, containing leadership/direction, strategy, integration, culture and governance, resources, community building, content generation, and data. In another study, Godey et al. (2016) categorise social media marketing activities in five main dimensions, namely entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and word of mouth (WOM). Entertainment is a strong driver for social media use, upon which marketers must consider the hedonic aspect of social media marketing efforts. Social interaction is an important motive for creating user-generated content and brands need to be active and open in discussion and promote users' interactions. Trendiness focuses on the capabilities of social media to disseminate the lasted and trendiest information about the brands. Customisation is another aspect of social media activities that refers to offer customised messages to the intended audience. Another aspect of social media marketing success is facilitating space for eWOM in which consumers share information related to brands with each other. Ananda et

al. (2016) introduce the RENL framework for social media marketing activities. The framework comprises two top-level categories of social media marketing strategic actions, including content-specific and platform-specific actions. The RENL framework decomposes these two top-level social media marketing activities into four categories, say representation, engagement, networking, and listening in. Mohammadian and Mohammadreza (2012) address five success factors of social media from a marketing perspective. Their findings categorise social media success into five main factors, including communication, content, security, reputation, and design-related factors. Chaffey and Chadwick (2020) recommend six categories of social media activities that require both content and communications strategy. These main activities are listening and managing reputation, transforming the brand throughout social media, acquiring new customers, increasing sales to existing customers, and delivering customer services. Li (2016) recognises six critical success factors of social media marketing content in China which comprise exclusivity user image, high-arousal, celebrity endorsement, beneficial information, ontological humor, and flirting information. Heckadon (2010) identifies critical success factors of social media marketing campaigns from a literature review in his dissertation. The findings comprise ten critical success factors encompassing having a social media marketing strategy, integrating the social media marketing strategy into the broader marketing strategy, optimising social media, creating a community, encouraging user content creation and feedback, being open and honest, keeping content fresh and relevant, making the user feel special, identifying with a cause, and measuring social media marketing performance.

Mohammadian and Mohammadreza (Mohammadian and Mohammadreza, 2012) count five main success factors of social media marketing, namely communication, content, characters, security, reputation, WOM, replying to questions in social media, and membership. Felix et al (2017) propose a strategic social media marketing framework with its four central dimensions, the same as social media marketing scope, social media marketing culture, social media marketing structure, and social media marketing governance. Table (1) summarises these studies at a glance.

Insert Table 1 Here

Despite the importance of using social media in marketing, there are still challenges in this area that necessitate further research. First, most studies have identified a limited number of social media marketing activities, and the main focus of the research has been on the capabilities and activities required to conduct social media marketing (Li et al., 2021; Chaffey and Chadwick, 2020; Ananda et al., 2016; Godey et al., 2016). Few studies have identified the success factors of social media marketing, they have focused on a limited area, and have only investigated the success factors as to content (Li, 2016) or the success factors on social media marketing campaigns (Heckadon, 2010). The study by Mohammadian and Mohammadreza (2012) has also identified the critical success factors for social media in general and focuses less on how to implement social media marketing. The study of Felix et al. (2017), which is a valuable study in the field of social media marketing, has identified the main elements of strategic social media marketing at a macro level while providing few factors to make operational each of the elements. Based on Orij et al. (2019), the key success factors for the use of social media in business domains such as marketing must consider the organisational context, human aspects, technological as well as environmental dimensions (Orij et al., 2019).

Second, none of the previous studies has seen prioritisation and ranking of identified factors or activities. Due to the limited resources of organisations in implementing a social media marketing strategy, prioritising success factors will lead to a focus on more important areas.

Third, according to the researchers' knowledge, no study identifies the critical success factors holistically and comprehensively, considering the multiple aspects of implementing social media marketing projects.

Accordingly, these three research gaps are the main motive of the current study.

2.4. Best Worst Method (BWM) and interval BWM

To analyse and measure the importance of criteria in MCDM models, scholars have strived to develop optimal and robust methods. In this regard, many MCDM methods have been developed by researchers to measure the importance criteria including analytical hierarchical process (AHP), analytical network process (ANP), simultaneously evaluation of criteria and alternatives (SECA), etc. Each of the aforementioned methods stands on experts' opinion and require a high rate of participation from experts or high-level managers (Mahdiraji et al., 2020). For instance, in AHP and ANP, at least each expert should complete a questionnaire consisting of $\frac{n \times (n-1)}{2}$ questions. Besides, the number of pairwise comparisons increases by the number of criterias, exponentially. Compared to other available methods, BWM requires lower comparisons and easy for experts to complete the questionnaires; hence, more interested to participate in the survey (Rezaei et al., 2016). Besides, to reflect the environment uncertainty in MCDM models, in this research, interval/grey numbers and operators have been implemented and employed as interval BWM (Mahdiraji et al., 2019). BWM was initially developed by Rezaei (Rezaei, 2015; Rezaei, 2016) to solve MCDM problems. The logic of judgment in BWM is comparing the best criterion to the other criteria (alternative), and all the other criteria to the worst, instead of using a full pairwise comparison matrix, resulting in fewer comparisons and questions. Thus, in comparison with other MCDM methods like AHP, BWM needs less pairwise comparison data and engenders outputs with more consistency. Furthermore, this method employs a nonlinear model to optimise the weights of criteria instead of using simple heuristic matrix-based approaches. Moreover, one of the most important challenges in MCDM models is the consistency of the expert's evaluations; nonetheless, the BWM nonlinear model measures and monitors the consistency of evaluations efficiently (Rezaei, 2015). This methodology has been successfully utilised by many researchers in various real-world problems, such as supplier selection (Rezaei et al, 2016; Wu et al, 2019), the sustainability of supply chains' evaluation (Ahmadi et al, 2017), technology assessment (Ren et al, 2017; Mokhtarzadeh et al, 2018), hospitals' maintenance appraisal (Karimi et al, 2020), and cloud-based E-learning vendors' selection (Jami Pour et al, 2020). The state-of-the-art on applications of the BWM in decision-making problems

could be found in (Mi et al, 2019). The main advantages of this method compared to other similar weighting methods are as follows (Mokhtarzadeh et al, 2018; Taghavifard et al, 2018; Mahdiraji et al, 2019).

- A novel NLP model with possible global results by LINGO software,
- Presenting optimal weight for each factor by finding the global optimal solution,
- A simple approach for evaluating the consistency of each expert,
- Few comparisons; thus, less confusing for experts,
- More appropriate for a large amount of criteria's,
- Considering the uncertainty by interval, fuzzy, etc. approaches,

The steps of the well-known non-linear BWM are followed as below (Rezaei, 2015; Rezaei, 2016).

Step 1. To identify a set of decision criteria defined as $\{C_1, C_2, \dots, C_n\}$.

Step 2. To determine the best (e.g. most desirable, most important) and the worst (e.g. least desirable, least important) criteria denoted by CB and CW, respectively.

Step 3. To define preference ranking for the best criterion to be determined by experts over the other criteria on a scale of 1-9. The best-to-others (BO) vector would be:

$$A_B = (a_{B_1}, a_{B_2}, \dots, a_{B_n}). \quad (1)$$

Where, a_{B_j} indicates the preference of the best criterion CB over criterion C_j .

Step 4. To conduct pairwise comparison for determining the relative importance of the other criteria over the worst criterion on a scale of. The resulting others-to-worst (OW) vector would be:

$$A_W = (a_{1W}, a_{2W}, \dots, a_{nW}) \quad (2)$$

Where, a_{jW} indicates the preference of criterion j over the worst criterion W.

Step 5. Calculating the optimal weights ($W_1^*, W_2^*, \dots, W_n^*$), such that the maximum absolute differences $\left| \frac{W_B}{W_j} - a_{B_j} \right|$ and $\left| \frac{W_j}{W_W} - a_{jW} \right|$ for all j are minimised. Regarding the non-negativity and sum condition for the weights, the following problem emerges:

$$\begin{aligned} & \min \max \left\{ \left| \frac{W_B}{W_j} - a_{B_j} \right|, \left| \frac{W_j}{W_W} - a_{jW} \right| \right\} \\ & \text{s.t.} \\ & \sum_j W_j = 1 \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

$W_j \geq 0$ for all j

Model (1) can be solved by converting to the following non-linear problem:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \min \lambda \\
 & \left| \frac{W_B}{W_j} - a_{Bj} \right| \leq \lambda \text{ for all } j \\
 & \left| \frac{W_j}{W_W} - a_{jW} \right| \leq \lambda \text{ for all } j \\
 & \sum_j W_j = 1 \\
 & W_j \geq 0 \text{ for all } j
 \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

Solving model (4), the optimal unique weights ($W_1^*, W_2^*, \dots, W_n^*$) are emanated alongside with λ^* . The λ^* implies the consistency ratio of each decision-maker in comparing the most and least important criteria over other criteria, which is calculated as in Equation (5).

$$\text{Consistency Ratio} = \frac{\lambda^*}{\text{Consistency Index}} \tag{5}$$

Where Consistency index denotes the maximum values of λ^* for different values of a_{BW} as presented in Table (2).

Insert Table 2 Here

2.5 Interval BWM

In some cases, BWM conduces to multi-optimal solutions, meaning there would be different sets of weights for the criteria. When debate among the experts has an important role in the decision-making process, the multi-optimal weights help the decision-makers to integrate other information that cannot be modeled into their decision-making process. To this end, Interval weights are suggested by Rezaei (Rezaei, 2016) as a way to rank the criteria in the case of multi-optimality. To obtain the interval weights, after solving model (4) the lower and upper bounds of the weight of criterion j are calculated according to models (5) and (6), respectively.

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \min W_j \\
 & \left| \frac{W_B}{W_j} - a_{Bj} \right| \leq \lambda \text{ for all } j \\
 & \left| \frac{W_j}{W_W} - a_{jW} \right| \leq \lambda \text{ for all } j \\
 & \sum_j W_j = 1
 \end{aligned} \tag{6}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
& \max W_j \\
& \left| \frac{W_B}{W_j} - a_{Bj} \right| \leq \lambda \text{ for all } j \\
& \left| \frac{W_j}{W_W} - a_{jW} \right| \leq \lambda \text{ for all } j \\
& \sum_j W_j = 1 \\
& W_j \geq 0 \text{ for all } j
\end{aligned} \tag{7}$$

By solving these two models for all the criteria, the optimal weights of the criteria are gained as intervals. To access a unique ranking for the criteria, interval ranking methods could be applied, for which interval numbers, interval arithmetic, and interval numbers comparison method are to be introduced firstly. Considering the interval number $A = [a_L, a_R] = \{x: a_L \leq x \leq a_R, x \in R\}$, where, a_L and a_R are the left limit and the right limit of A, respectively, the operations on closed intervals are defined as below (Rezaei, 2015; Rezaei, 2016; Mahdiraji et al, 2016; Mahdiraji et al, 2011; Hajiagha et al, 2015; Beheshti et al, 2016; Hajiagha et al, 2015).

$$A + B = [a_L, a_R] + [b_L, b_R] = [a_L + b_L, a_R + b_R] \tag{8}$$

$$A - B = [a_L, a_R] - [b_L, b_R] = [a_L - b_R, a_R - b_L] \tag{9}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
A \cdot B &= [a_L, a_R] \times [b_L, b_R] = \\
& [\min(a_L \cdot b_L, a_L \cdot b_R, a_R \cdot b_L, a_R \cdot b_R), \max(a_L \cdot b_L, a_L \cdot b_R, a_R \cdot b_L, a_R \cdot b_R)]
\end{aligned} \tag{10}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{A}{B} &= [a_L, a_R] : [b_L, b_R] = [\min(a_L/b_L, a_L/b_R, a_R/b_L, a_R/b_R), \max(a_L/b_L, a_L/b_R, a_R/b_L, a_R/b_R)] \\
& [b_L, a_R/b_R]
\end{aligned}$$

(11)

$$A^{-1} = [a_L, a_R]^{-1} = [\min(\frac{1}{a_L}, \frac{1}{a_R}), \max(\frac{1}{a_L}, \frac{1}{a_R})] \tag{12}$$

The degree of preference of A over B (or A4B) is defined as:

$$P(A > B) = \frac{\max(0, a_R - b_L) - \max(0, a_L - b_R)}{(a_R - a_L) + (b_R - b_L)} \tag{13}$$

If $P(A > B) = 0.5$, then $A = B$, $P(A > B) > 0.5$, then A is superior to B , and $P(A > B) < 0.5$, then A is inferior to B .

Using Equation (13), the interval weights of the criteria are compared to each other. To compare the interval weights the 'matrix of the degree of preferences DP_{ij} , and the 'matrix of preferences' P_{ij} are calculated, respectively, as follows (Rezaei, 2015; Rezaei, 2016):

$$DP_{ij} = \begin{matrix} A \\ B \\ \vdots \\ N \end{matrix} \begin{pmatrix} P(A > A) & P(A > B) & \dots & P(A > N) \\ P(B > A) & P(B > B) & \dots & P(B > N) \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ P(N > A) & P(N > B) & \dots & P(N > N) \end{pmatrix} \quad (14)$$

$$P_{ij} = \begin{matrix} A \\ B \\ \vdots \\ N \end{matrix} \begin{pmatrix} P_{AA} & P_{AB} & \dots & P_{AN} \\ P_{BA} & P_{BB} & \dots & P_{BN} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ P_{NA} & P_{NB} & \dots & P_{NN} \end{pmatrix} \quad (15)$$

Where:

$$P_{ij} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } (P_i > j) > 0.5, \\ 0, & \text{if } (P_i > j) < 0.5, \end{cases} \quad i, j = A, \dots, N \quad (16)$$

By calculating the sum of the elements of each row in the matrix P_{ij} , the rank of the criteria is obtained. The more row summation denotes the higher rank for the corresponding criteria.

3. Methodology

The main aim of this study was to identify the success factors of social networks' marketing. To serve this aim, the following steps were followed.

Step 1. A primary literature review was accomplished by keywords, including digital marketing, internet marketing, and social media marketing. Topics were searched among journals in Science Direct, Emerald, IEEE, JSTORE databases. The inclusion criteria for selecting the studies were (1) published in English, (2) available in full-text, (3) relevant to the topic area, say, digital marketing, internet marketing, and social media marketing. After researching the process, 22 studies were selected and more reviewed. Since the whole topic of social media marketing has been recently developed, the authors have limited the publication period over the past 5 years. The initial set of success criteria and sub-criteria for social media marketing was developed in this step.

Step 2. To enrich the initial framework, a focus group of experts was formed. The inclusion criteria for selecting the experts were: 1) working as a social media marketing manager with a minimum of ten years experience in digital marketing and five years' experience in social media marketing, 2) having held at least three digital marketing campaigns in their

companies, and 3) having a master degree or higher degrees in marketing-related fields. Accordingly, a total of nine participants were involved in the group. They included three male managers of three well-known consulting agencies have been responsible for successful social media marketing projects in the country and two male marketing managers having run successful social marketing projects in their companies. All managers hold a masters degree, three in marketing and two in information technology management. Furthermore, four academics were incorporated into the group- two males and two females- with more than seven years of practical experience in digital or social media marketing consulting in different companies. All academic participants hold PhD, three of them in digital marketing and one in information system management. Participants were between 37 and 49 years old.

First, they were asked to specify which of the criteria were more relevant to their operations. Second, they were asked for suggesting other relevant criteria and sub-criteria based on their experience in Iranian organisations. To analyse the focus group discussions, qualitative content analysis was applied. As the key concepts were taken from previous literature, to validate the main factors and to categorise them in the main groups the qualitative approach was adopted. The procedure included four main stages according to Bengtsson (2016), say decontextualisation, recontextualisation, categorisation, and compilation.

Step 3. In the third step, the verified criteria and sub-criteria were weighted using BWM by the same participants as in step 2. To determine the worst and the best criteria as to the main criteria and also their sub-criteria, the panel consensus approach was used. After around 3 hours, the experts arrived at a common consensus. Then, they were asked to do a pairwise comparison of all the criteria and the sub-criteria in a conventional BWM questionnaire. The discussion took about six hours in one day to arrive at a common solution. The optimal unique weights of the main criteria and the sub-criteria were calculated by solving Model (4) (totally 7 models) and λ^* for each model was obtained.

Step 4. In the final step, the optimal interval weights of each criterion and sub-criterion were calculated by applying Models (6) and (7), having the λ^* values as inputs from stage 3. Finally, the criteria and sub-criteria were ranked according to the interval weights through Equation (13). The research steps are depicted in Figure (1).

Insert Figure 1 Here

4. Results and Analysis

Findings are presented in the same steps as mentioned in Section 3.

Step 1. The success criteria and sub-criteria identified through the literature review are presented in Table (3).

Insert Table 3 Here

Step 2. To enrich the applicability and usefulness of the identified criteria and sub-criteria for Iranian companies, a focus group of experts was formed. To analyse the focus group discussions, qualitative content analysis was applied in four main stages. In the decontextualisation stage, the main factors extracted from the literature by the authors, as initial open codes are written on a piece of paper, were given to the participants. The coding list, including explanations of the factors, was used to minimise a cognitive change during the process of analysis to secure reliability. They confirmed all the criteria and sub-criteria extracted from the literature; however, during the process, the inductively produced codes were changed in the way to explain them. In the recontextualisation stage, the initial codes were double-checked by the notes extracted from discussions, so there were found unmarked texts that did not match any initial codes. As a result, three success factors, “availability of up-to-date technical capabilities in social media marketing (such as creating communities, creating social customers’ profiles, multicasting, multimedia sharing, etc.)”, “content integration with company products/services”, and “having plans to reduce the resistance to change” were added to the initial list. In the categorisation stage, before creating categories, the number of words for each code denoting a success factor was reduced without losing the content of the unit. Then, the categories were identified. Initially, the main categories applied in the balanced scorecard were proposed by the authors in line with the deductive strategy; however, after discussions, several categories were generated, the number was later reduced including six main categories, namely strategy, process, technology, content, performance evaluation, and people. In the compilation stage to get a quick overview of the results, a table is presented to present a summary of the identified factors and the categorisation. The final criteria and sub-criteria denoting the success factors of social marketing and their sub-factors are presented in Table (3).

Step 3. In the third step, The BO and OW vectors in which the relative importance of the most important criterion over the other criteria and that of the other criteria over the least important criterion were determined, and the optimal weights for each main criterion and each sub-criterion in each group were gained by solving Model (4) as presented in Table (3). λ^* is also accessible.

Insert Table 3 Here

The objective functions' values (λ^*) gained in this step were used as inputs of Models (6) and (7) for calculating interval weights in the next step. The consistency ratios as to the pair-wise comparisons of the main criteria and the sub-criteria in each group are obtainable in Table (4).

Insert Table 4 Here

Based on Table (4), the consistency ratio regarding all pair-wise comparisons is less than 0.5, denoting consistent reliable results upon them.

Step 4. The interval weights of the main criteria and the sub-criteria in each group were calculated by solving models (6) and (7) in Lingo software. The degree of preference of each criterion to another criterion and each sub-criterion to another sub-criterion was calculated by Equation (13). Then, the DP_{ij} and P_{ij} matrices for the main criteria and their sub-criteria were attained through (14) and (15), respectively. The DP_{ij} and P_{ij} matrices for the main criteria are obtainable in (17) and (18), respectively.

$$DP_{ij} = \begin{pmatrix} 0.5 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 0.5 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0.5 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 1 & 0.5 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0.5 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0.5 \end{pmatrix} \quad (16)$$

$$P_{ij} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{matrix} \text{Sum} \\ 2 \\ 4 \\ 1 \\ 5 \\ 0 \\ 3 \end{matrix} \quad (17)$$

The sum of each row is used for ranking the criteria, which implies that the content >> process >> people >> strategy >> technology >> performance evaluation. The optimal interval weights and the rank-orders of the main criteria and the sub-criteria in each group are attainable in Table (5).

Insert Table 5 Here

The interval weights of the main criteria are illustrated in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 Here

According to Table (5), the “content” criterion by the interval weight of [0.2488208, 0.2699075] is indicated as the most important factor in social media marketing. “Process” criterion with the interval weight of [0.1612969, 0.2161397] is known as the second priority. “People”, “strategy”, “technology”, and “performance evaluation” are ranked as the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth criteria in the interval BWM ranking, respectively. As to Table (5) “senior management support of social media marketing” and “strategic analysis of the position of the company in the market” are recognised as the two first key sub-criteria denoting the strategy factor. Based upon Table (5), “justifying the use of social media marketing” and “selecting the appropriate channel” are the most important sub-factors which imply process criterion. The most imperative technology-related sub-criteria are “social media integration with other customer relationship channels” and “availability of up-to-date technical capabilities in social media marketing (such as creating communities, creating social customers’ profiles, multicasting, and multimedia sharing, etc.)”, respectively. As indicated in Table (5), “attractive visual design” and “providing creative content” are the highest priorities in content-related sub-criteria. Besides, “identifying the measurable organisational values (MOVs) of social media marketing” and “identifying the effectiveness indicators of social media marketing (number of visitors, sales, subscription, drop rates, etc.)” being declared as the most significant criteria as per performance evaluation factor. Following, “establishing a strong social media marketing team” is deemed as the first, and “Having the necessary expertise in marketing personnel” is considered as the second priority among the people sub-criteria.

5. Discussion

Today, social networking tools are extensively applied in marketing communications and marketing strategies, which has led to the concept of social media marketing. Regardless of the huge investment in social media marketing, success in social media marketing strategies is conditional on many factors. Thus, in this research, the authors focused to identify and rank the success factors of social media marketing strategies. To this end, a comprehensive literature review was accomplished to identify the main success factors and sub-factors of social media marketing strategies, then the list enriched by experts’ viewpoints, finally the final list of criteria and sub-criteria were weighted and ranked by applying interval BWM. Based on the comprehensive literature review and semi-structured interviews, six main

criteria were extracted, including strategy, process, technology, content, performance evaluation, and people. The results of BWM indicated that “content” was the most important factor in social media marketing, in which “attractive visual design” and “providing creative content” were recognised as the two first key sub-criteria, respectively. It is compatible with the results gained by Gunelius (Ahmadi et al, 2017).

“Process” criterion was known as the second priority, which verified the results obtained by Turban et al (Turban et al, 2018). In this criterion, the sub-criterion “justifying the use of social media marketing” was acknowledged as the most important factor and the second priority was attributed to the sub-criterion “selecting the appropriate channel”.

“People”, “strategy”, “technology”, and “performance evaluation” were ranked as the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth criteria in the interval BWM ranking, respectively.

To summarise, the social media tools improve the cooperation and communication between firms and stakeholders (such as customers, suppliers, business partners), facilitate the identification of products with a high sales potential and appropriate marketing channels to attract and retain online customers; as such, their application has become a strategic priority in the field of marketing. Therefore, the identified criteria and sub-criteria could be considered when a new social media marketing strategy is developing.

6. Theoretical and Practical Implication

Despite considerable interest in social media marketing among academics and managers, most have focused on capabilities and activities required to conduct social media marketing or the critical success factors of social media marketing only concentrated on the content factor. Besides, social media marketing-related studies, have less focused on identifying and prioritising success factors and best practices for implementation of the social media marketing plan; this was the main objective of the current study. This study integrates the appropriate guidelines of social media marketing implementation that should be considered in the implementation process of these new initiatives by marketing executives. To sum up, the major theoretical contributions of this research were threefold. First, this research provides a comprehensive insight into success factors and best practices of social media marketing. This finding goes beyond an isolated focus on customers and/or communicative aspects extremely being concentrated on social media marketing literature. The proposed framework considers technical, process, and human aspects of the implementation process.

Second, it provides an assessment tool to reveal the weaknesses and strengths of social media marketing projects. Third, ranking and weighting the social media success factors provides a managerial tool for prioritising implementation targets and allocating resources to each factor and criterion. In another word, it could assist marketing managers to optimally assign digital marketing budgets to social media marketing activities. By providing the rank-orders and weights of each social media marketing success factor, the practitioners can save time and effort to consider the important aspects of social media marketing projects, and take suitable strategies to make progress.

The findings of this research provide an advanced understanding of social media marketing best practices that can guide managers' decision-making while developing and improving their strategic social media marketing activities. The findings help managers to assess the current state of their social media marketing projects, develop their organisation's roadmap, and to formulate an appropriate strategy toward successful social media marketing. By limiting the strategies to the critical areas defined as critical success factors in this research, managers would be able to focus the limited resources of their organisations on the areas offering maximum benefits.

According to the results, given that the "content" dimension has gained the highest weight amongst other success factors of social media marketing implementation, it is recommended that marketing managers seek to produce and improve appropriate content for social media audiences by developing capabilities, such as using interactive advertising, applying attractive visual design, providing creative content, fitting content with target customers, developing appropriate schedule to publish content on social media, and using proper search keywords. By focusing on social content generating, the company does not need to promote its products; instead, by delivering timely and proper content as to the customer needs, it attracts the customers involvement in creating content increasing the sales of the product. To wit, managers are to focus on how to design the content and when to spread the content. This changes the passive observers to active participants leading to more customer interactions and thus the company's brand promotion.

The process is the second important factor influencing the success of social media marketing in companies. Managers are to justify the necessity of the transaction of information in the new structure. In this respect, the company must select the target market and the appropriate

channel. When the competitors jump to use social media in their marketing activities to stay ahead, the company is to adopt new technologies concentrating on the right market through proper channels to stay in the competition. Resource availability such as money, time, and human talent are to be considered by the top management in initiating and completing the e-marketing activities. Based on the available resources, the appropriate methods for advertising on social media could be determined.

People in the organisation are a key factor affecting the success of social media strategy. In this respect, all employees are to believe in social media and accept the risks of negative comments which may receive from customers. So, an organisational change plan is needed by the top management to diminish the resistance against change. Besides, adopting a social media marketing strategy requires a change in the organisational structure in which all employees are aware of their roles and responsibilities. As Felix et al. (2017) suggest, managers are to make decisions on who is responsible for interacting online with customers, activists, and pundits in the company.

The right strategy affects all other success factors of social media marketing in the companies. Top management directly affects the strategy in that all decisions from daily jobs to future investments are made by them. The goals of social media marketing should be compatible with overall marketing objectives in the company and by developing a comprehensive strategy for social media marketing, the nature of the firm's goals, the level of interactions between the company and the customers, and the level of customer engagement in the process would be defined. Thus, a clear vision for social media marketing is to be set by the top management which brings forth a common understanding of the value of social media marketing, and consequently, the commitment and participation of the employees in technology adoption.

The technology factor is the fourth important success factor in social media marketing. The infrastructure like high-speed internet connection as well as the available resources of the company are key factors in adopting the compatible technology. Based on the human talent, the level of comfort with technology should be considered. Managers are to be aware that social media technologies be integrated with the company's internal social media platforms to be able to create special social media capabilities. Albeit, according to Li et al. (2021), it demands a change in the company's structure, culture, managerial commitment, and a huge investment. Besides, as for the technology, managers must be conscious of consumer

concerns regarding data privacy concerns. According to Appel et al. (2019), companies need to hold social media accountable for their actions as to consumers' data and adopt necessary tools to protect such data.

Finally, having a strong and continuous plan for performance evaluation of the social media marketing strategy adopted by the company is critical to be up to date and to improve it because the main output of the social media marketing is the customer engagement affecting the sale of the company. According to Maslowska et al. (2016), customer engagement occurs in three-level, including observing, participating, and co-creating, the level of which could be accessed by effectiveness indicators like the number of visitors, sales, subscription, drop rates, as well as web-based analytics. This level should be in line with the social media marketing strategy first adopted by the company, and if it does not result in the main objective of the sale boost, so the adopted base strategy must get revised.

It must be noted that all success factors are affecting each other, thus by concentrating on one overlooking other factors and their interconnections the improvement would not be possible.

Furthermore, as “justifying the use of social media marketing” is recognised as the most important amongst all other measures, it reminds managers of the importance of changing people's beliefs and attitudes as to using social media marketing and suggests informing and educating marketing staff regarding the necessity of social media marketing.

7. Limitations and future research recommendation

Considering the approach used in this research, there are some limitations, many of which may create opportunities for future research. First, the proposed framework is presented at the theoretical level and is not applied in practice. To evaluate the applicability of the developed framework, different social media strategies could be ranked as alternatives by using the identified criteria and sub-criteria; thus, the user could be estimated in practice. Second, interactions among the identified factors are not considered in the study. Consequently, future research could investigate the direct and indirect causal relationships among the factors using a MADM method like “Decision Making Trial and Evaluation Laboratory (DEMATEL)”. By Applying the DEMATEL method, how each factor affects the other factor with which weight would be determined; thus, planning on the social media marketing strategy, the compatible technology to the strategy, and the organisational change process to adopt the technology by people in the organisation would be investigated

systemically. Besides, investment priorities would be determined according to the systemic interconnections among the success factors instead of improving only one factor overlooking the other factors. Third, the proposed framework generally provides an implementation context regardless of the social media platform's type; therefore, it is suggested that future researchers identify success factors as per the application of each social media platform considering the specific nature of them. The evaluation method in this research is based upon certain and interval BWM methods. However, regarding recent developments in this area, other novel methods and approaches could investigate the uncertainty of the environment in-depth. Bayesian BWM, Hesitant fuzzy BWM, Interval Fuzzy BWM, Intuitionistic Fuzzy BWM are some of these applicable approaches. Besides, the results emanated from BWM could be compared with other weighting methods such as SWARA, SECA, LINMAP, etc. to investigate the differences and benchmark the results. Furthermore, recently some developments of the BWM method have been investigated by scholars such as bayesian BWM and Phlitogenic BWM, which are recommended for future researches. Moreover, it is highly recommended to employ group decision-making approaches and democratic-autocratic decision-making styles in future investigations to determine the importance of each factor. Note that, in this research, a focus group's opinions were considered as the basic input of further calculations; nonetheless, individual participation of the experts to reduce the negative effects of group thinking could be employed and compared with the results of this research.

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