

Towards Greater Understanding of Social Media Marketing: A Review

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Marketing researchers and practitioners show significant interest in understanding the opportunities and usage of the phenomenon of social media and its usage in marketing. Literature indicates that social media marketing is increasingly vital to corporate marketing strategies. Social media is increasingly seen as an impactful channel to promote interactions between companies, customers, groups, advertisers, forums and marketers. Given the importance of social media marketing, this paper attempts to review current scholarly social media marketing literature and research, including its beginnings, current usage, benefits and downsides, and best practices. Avenues for future research and conclusions are also presented.

INTRODUCTION

Although social media has existed for many years, it has recently exploded as a medium for companies to market products and services, interact with customers, and study customers' motivations and needs (Agichtein, Castillo, Donato, Gionis, & Mishne, 2008; Buzzeto-More, 2013; Clark & Melancon, 2013; Fulgoni, 2015; Meiners, Schwarting, & Seeberger, 2010; Mohammadian & Mohammadreza, 2012; Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012). Today, over 90% of companies use social media marketing (SMM) to connect with consumers, and the number of companies using SMM continues to grow (Clark & Melancon, 2013; Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012). SMM literature is currently emerging and the literature in this area is widely scattered across different areas (Dwivedi, Kapoor, & Chen 2015). To add to this emerging stream of literature, this paper aims to review the current scholarly literature – published within the past 8 years (2007 to 2015) – on social media marketing, how companies use SMM, and how SMM can be an asset to a company's marketing efforts.

BACKGROUND

Originally, marketing was a personal dialog between the producer and the consumer, assert Meiners, et al. (2010). For example, tailors hand-made clothing to suit their customers' specific needs, and many household objects and tools were custom-made. Different eras spawned different methods of communication, as various eras changed day-to-day life, but the dialog generally remained personal and focused (Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012). Since World War 2, however, the focus has shifted away from personal dialog to mass marketing, with companies endeavoring to spread the word about their

products and services as quickly as possible to the most number of people possible (Meiners, et al., 2010). For consumers, the number of media outlets was fairly manageable into the 1960s, as the media was mostly limited to TV, radio, magazines, and newspapers. However, by the mid-1990s, the internet and mobile communications had greatly expanded media options and usage, leading to customers being bombarded with thousands of marketing messages each day (Clark & Melancon, 2013; Meiners, et al., 2010).

Traditionally, marketing messages have been created by a relatively small number of publishers to be consumed by a large set of potential customers (Agichtein, et al., 2008). At the turn of the 21st century, this began to change, with social media outlets supplementing traditional media outlets (Agichtein, et al., 2008; Stephen & Galak, 2012). Customers began generating their own marketing messages – both positive and negative – in the form of blog posts, customer reviews, and social media mentions of products, services, and brands, increasing the influence of word of mouth (WOM) among customers (Agichtein, et al., 2008; Meiners, et al., 2010). This shift was welcomed by consumers who had become disillusioned with both mass communication and company-generated information and believed WOM information was a more trustworthy source to base their attitudes and emotional ties (Meiners, et al., 2010). Another issue triggering the move away from traditional company-generated messages was the increasing fragmentation within communication channels. Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi (2012) believe that social media has become the “method of statement” in the 21st century, and thus the medium of choice for customer-generated WOM messages (p. 4444). Meiners, et al. (2010) state that WOM is the new standard in marketing, moving from one-way to two-way conversations (Clark & Melancon, 2013).

In the current marketing environment, traditional media and social media channels coexist, even as the lines are increasingly blurred between the two media types. Once seen as the domain of younger, more tech-savvy customers, social media has mainstreamed to cover a broad demographic of consumers. (Stephen & Galak, 2012) Customers are evolving, and companies must also change its rules to respond to the needs and developments taking place around it (Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Buzzeto-More, 2013; Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012).

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Before exploring how social media is used in the current marketing environment, most authors define what social media is and what social media marketing entails. Mohammadian & Mohammadreza (2012) define social media as “activities, practices and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinions using conversational media [which] are Web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios” (p.58-59). In other words, social media consists of communities sharing content with each other over the internet. Agichtein, et al. (2008), define social media simply as user-generated content, including blogs, web forums, social bookmarking sites, photo and video sharing communities, networking platforms such as Facebook, and community-based question / answering portals. Lastly, Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi (2012) define social media as “any kind of online media that stimulates participation, [opens] conversation, connectors and a sense of community” (p. 4444). As we can see from these definitions, social media revolves around communities and the conversations these communities take part of over the medium of the internet.

Social media marketing takes social media and uses it for the benefit of a company. SMM has been defined as a new marketing tool, which encourages high attention and participation from consumers via social networks (Jara, Parra & Skarmeta, 2014). SMM has been seen as an attractive channel for brands to participate in a variety of activities with potential customers (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Mohammadian & Mohammadreza (2012) define SMM as “any form of direct or indirect marketing that is used to build awareness, recognition, recall, and action for a brand, business, product, person, or other entity and is carried out using the tools and the social Web, such as blogging, micro blogging, social networking, social bookmarking, and content sharing” (p. 59). Often, SMM utilizes user generated content such as word of mouth (WOM) to promote a product or service; however, companies can also create their own

content to the same end; for example, promotional videos on YouTube (Toubia & Stephen, 2013). The goal of all social media in a business context is to engage people; namely, customers and potential customers (Mohammadian & Mohammadreza, 2012). However, SMM is not about money, institutions, stockholders, or corporate ownership, although social media can increase sales (Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012; Walker Naylor, Laberton, & West, 2012). Rather, it is about customers taking control of the world around them and joining their voices to receive what they want, including satisfaction, information, relationships, a voice in decision making, and specific products or services (Buzzeto-More, 2013; Clark & Melancon, 2013; Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012; Toubia & Stephen, 2013).

There are between six and eight generally accepted social media mediums (Mohammadian & Mohammadreza, 2012; Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012; Walker Naylor, et al., 2012):

1. Social Networks
2. Blogs
3. Wikis
4. Podcasts
5. Forums
6. Content communities / media-sharing sites, / social bookmarking and selection sites that organize and share specific kinds of content (for example, Flickr and YouTube)
7. Micro Blogs which distribute small bits of information (for example, Twitter)
8. Effective Worlds (for example, Second Life Virtual World)

The most commonly used SMM tools by businesses are, as presented by Clark & Melancon (2013) and Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi (2012):

1. Facebook (92%)
2. Twitter (84%)
3. LinkedIn (71%)
4. Blogs (68%)
5. YouTube (56%)
6. Social bookmarking (for example, Pinterest) (26%)
7. Forums (24%)
8. Foursquare (17%)
9. MySpspace (6%)

For discussions of specific SMM mediums, including key statistics, see Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi (2012) and Toubia & Stephen (2013).

BENEFITS AND DOWNSIDES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Nearly 95% of brand managers admit to using SMM in their marketing mix; 83% state that SMM is now a strategic imperative for a business (Buzzeto-More, 2013). This certainty in social media marketing is closely related to the benefits of the internet medium. However SMM also has its downsides. The pros and cons of social media marketing are described below.

Benefits of Social Media Marketing

SMM is the only form of marketing that can touch and influence customers at every individual stage of the buying process, from pondering brands and products through after-purchase decisions (Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012). Because of this, it is very valuable to marketers who wish

influence customers who are in different stages of the buying process, or who wish to walk customers through the entire buying process.

Social media is also a tool for co-creating value with customers (Clark & Melancon, 2013). Customers receive value in a variety of forms, including coupons, discounts, product information that can be used in decision making, and breaking news, as well as feelings of significance from being part of the decision making process (Buzzeto-More, 2013; Mohammadian & Mohammadreza, 2012). Companies receive value from contact with a community that more accurately depicts its customer base than mass media, increased brand impressions, global reach, and a better understanding of its customers (including customers' needs, behaviors, habits, and buying procedures) (Clark & Melancon, 2013; Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012).

Greater understanding of key customer segments is perhaps one of the most beneficial aspects of SMM for companies. Interactions with these customers help companies understand customers' needs, motivations, and desires, allowing companies to produce better products and services, which in turn produces increased sales, profitability, and brand strength (Mohammadian & Mohammadreza, 2012).

SMM can also support customer relationship management efforts (Buzzeto-More, 2013). Unsatisfied customers may complain on social media; if the company sees the complaint, customer service representatives can resolve the issue, which otherwise may never have come to the company's attention. Over 20% of customers admit to having spoken negatively about a brand on a social network (Clark & Melancon, 2013). However, customers are more likely to share a positive buying experience than a negative experience; this online WOM is extremely influential: over 85% of those studied said they had purchased a product based on the recommendation of a blog, while 60% said they had made a purchase based on a Facebook recommendation (Clark & Melancon, 2013). WOM has the greatest impact of all message types; 75% of those studied said that recommendations from peers are credible and likely to influence their purchase decisions (Buzzeto-More, 2013). Furthermore, customers generate more than 500 billion impressions about products and services annually with 62% of those studied stating that they regularly recommend brands, products, and companies to friends via social media (Buzzeto-More, 2013). For customers seeking information, social media has the advantage of a structure that offers more available data, many user-to-document relation types, and many user-to-user interactions (Agichtein, et al., 2008).

SMM contacts also tend to have higher levels of relationship investment, relationship quality, and customer satisfaction, loyalty, and positive WOM intentions than non-contacts, allowing companies to connect with those with the highest likelihood of purchasing the company's products (Clark & Melancon, 2013). Social media content is indispensable to millions of users (Agichtein, et al., 2008).

SMM can lower the cost of connecting with customers and broadening customer knowledge, as well as allow for customized messages for customer groups, leading to higher customer loyalty (Buzzeto-More, 2013, Clark & Melancon, 2013). It is hypothesized that social media will have a greater effect on sales than will traditional media, or at least impact the traditional media: SMM is better targeted toward the target audience and may be an effective early-stage indicator of what products will be popular (Stephen & Galak, 2012). This will be especially true with niche markets, where mass media does not effectively reach the market.

Finally, SMM has significantly longer carryover effects than do traditional marketing activities, as well as higher rates of action and response elasticity (Buzzeto-More, 2013). In a study covered by Stephen & Galak (2012) it was found that although traditional media has a larger per-event effect on sales and a greater reach than social media, the later occurs more frequently and therefore has a greater overall impact on sales. Other studies have shown that social media has, indeed, improved various companies' sales (Buzzeto-More, 2013; Walker Naylor, et al., 2012).

Downsides of Social Media Marketing

However, SMM is not without its downsides. First, social media allows companies to lose control over their brand image (Clark & Melancon, 2013). Customers can speak negatively about a company and millions of potential customers can see the negative WOM. Also, the global reach of social media opens

the opportunity for dual brand images to arise from different strategies being used in different countries (Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012). Second, a SMM campaign can only be effective if customers are attracted to the company's social media presence and interact with the organization's activity (Mohammadian & Mohammadreza, 2012). Relationships with customers can be difficult to develop and maintain; often those who succeed have special talents for attracting and maintain followers (Buzzeto-More, 2013; Clark & Melancon, 2013). Third, just as information distributed through social media is used by customers to convince them to purchase a product or service, the same information can turn potential customers away, effectively losing the sale. Fourth, customers can be turned off by overt marketing or advertising techniques; only a minority of social media users engage with such messages (Buzzeto-More, 2013). Lastly, there is some debate over the ability to accurately measure the success of an SMM campaign (Stephen & Galak, 2012; Walker Naylor, et al., 2012). Although there are methods for measuring participation (for example, Facebook Likes or the number of user reviews on a website), it can be difficult to connect social media actions with actual sales.

How Social Media is Used

While we are discussing the pros and cons of social media, we must also look at the different ways companies vs. customers use social media. We will begin by discussing the reasons why customers use social media, then look at company motivations for using SMM.

How Customers Use Social Media

Customers use social media primarily as a communication channel (Buzzeto-More, 2013). Toubia & Stephen (2013) suggest two motivations for using various social media platforms: intrinsic utility (the user finds it enjoyable) and image-related utility (the user finds self-worth, status, or self-acclaim through using the media). For example, those posting on Twitter can find intrinsic utility in posting what is happening around them and image-related utility through their number of followers (a social status symbol of popularity) (Toubia & Stephen, 2013). A second example is videos about products: customers spend hours making videos about their favorite products to help others and to feel like they are giving back to their online communities (intrinsic utility) (Meiners, et al., 2010). Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi support this by stating that social media enables us to express our beliefs, ideas, and manners in a new way (2012).

Buzzeto-More (2013) offers a different explanation. People seek engagement and enlightenment; they have been transformed in a "hyper-connected habitué" of social media where they are "compelled" to receive a constant stream of information and updates (p. 87). Mobile technologies have aided this transformation, making users "permanently tethered" to their electronic devices (p. 87). Thus, users are more informed, more self-motivated, and more impelled by the opinions of others. Meiners, et al. (2010) support the claim that customers are seeking information – most internet users engage in a product search at least once a day. When choosing peer groups, people are more likely to socialize with others of similar interests (Clark & Melancon, 2013).

Whatever the reasons for engaging in social media, it is increasingly becoming an integral part of users' lives (Agichtein, et al., 2008). Customers no longer trust mass communication; thus, in their quest for enlightenment they are turning more frequently to other customers' opinions about products (Meiners, et al., 2010); up to 80% state that they use social networks to guide purchase decisions (Buzzeto-More, 2013). Furthermore, customers are turning to social networks to learn about new and unfamiliar brands (Walker Naylor, et al., 2012). People look to their peer communities for the truth on products / services, pricing, customer service, vendor and after sale support, and the best / latest models (Buzzeto-More, 2013). Customers give greater credence to the ideas and opinions of their peers than almost any other source, Buzzeto-More (2013) explains, with much better engagement than with brand-generated messages. These customers rely on recommendations from social sources, strangers on the web, and friends rather than marketers, although the closer the friend or relative, the more likely the advice will be accepted as truth (Meiners, et al., 2010).

How Companies Use Social Media

Companies, however, are primarily interested in connecting with customers and making sales. Companies must attract new or repeat customers with their marketing – including using SMM – to continue as a viable business (Meiners, et al., 2010). Because of this, their motivations (and therefore actions) are slightly different than average social media users. Meiners, et al. explain that the five most common goals of SMM are to 1) build relationships, 2) build brand strength, 3) give the company publicity, 4) aid in the promotion of the business, and 5) engage in market research (2010). Because of the importance of WOM and peer communities, companies not only try to engage customers, but also affect the attitudes of peers, especially those that act as influencers (Buzzeto-More, 2013).

Meiners, et al. (2010), explain that the four “P’s” of marketing – Product, Price, Place, and Promotion – do not include the customer service angle of the marketing mix. Therefore, companies use SMM to fill this gap in the mix (Meiners, et al., 2010). Furthermore, Clark & Melancon (2013) state, SMM can be an effective means to connect with the marketing-message-overloaded customer. The effectiveness of traditional marketing is diminishing due to customers being bombarded with thousands of marketing messages (Meiners, et al. (2010) estimate around 6,000 each day) and therefore trying to control these messages by tuning them out or choosing which messages they want to listen to; SMM managers use social media as a means to help customers choose a specific company’s messages (Clark & Melancon, 2013; Meiners, et al., 2010). Companies are no longer storytellers to passive listeners; the “listeners” are now active participants in the marketing process, becoming prosumers by influencing the design and delivery of goods and services to themselves and their peers (Buzzeto-More, 2013). It has been documented that social interaction leads to higher quality relationships as well as aiding the company in understanding the needs of customers and company alike (Clark & Melancon, 2013; Meiners, et al., 2010).

Companies can generally take three approaches to their SMM: 1) using social platforms as a media outlet (broadcasting to customers), 2) using it as a viral marketing platform (such as WOM), or 3) using it as a customer insight platform (for example, marketing research). Some companies advertise on social platforms, but most rely on peers in the customer community to be content providers (for example, WOM). (Toubia & Stephen, 2013)

As discussed above, word of mouth is becoming an increasing method by which customers decide which products to purchase; companies see social media as a method with which to encourage positive WOM messages – social talk generates billions of brand impressions each day (Clark & Melancon, 2013). As research has shown that those engaged with a brand on social media are more likely to mention the brand to friends and family, and WOM is one of the most effective forms of communication in marketing management, companies are understandably anxious to connect with customers and begin the WOM opportunities (Buzzeto-More, 2013; Meiners, et al., 2010). Clark & Melancon (2013) go as far as to state that creating WOM and brand advocates is the primary reason companies use social media. This makes sense in that peer pressure from peer-to-peer involvement in social media creates pressure for outsiders to conform to group feelings about products, services, etc., thus furthering the company’s objectives with little effort from the company. However, in studies, groups with broader diversity had more influence (peer pressure success) than did homogeneous groups. (Buzzeto-More, 2013) Social groups are becoming more relevant, in part because customers can now connect with and interact with others who are similar to themselves: for example, customers who interact on a specific company’s Facebook page know what each other look like due to pictures each has uploaded (Walker Naylor, et al., 2012).

SMM has transformed marketing into a two-way communication channel. It allows brands to more effectively communicate with customers, but also for customers to more effectively aid or hurt a brand or product. (Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012) As such, SMM can help companies with customer relationship management (CRM), from attracting clients to building loyalty to increasing customer engagement (Buzzeto-More, 2013; Clark & Melancon, 2013). CRM via SMM allows companies to address customer issues that may not have come to the attention of the company otherwise, leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty (Clark & Melancon, 2013). People are more honest and forthcoming on social media, and more willing to disclose personal information, which is useful to

companies for marketing research, as well as knowing their customers' honest opinions (Meiners, et al., 2010; VanMeter, Grisaffe, & Chonko, 2015). This has transformed research methods to allow companies greater access to customer opinions, but it also requires the company to listen more closely to customer demands (Buzzeto-More, 2013; Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012). Interactions also aid the company in understanding their customers' needs and wants, as well as their behaviors, buying procedures, and so on, and furthering customer research (Mohammadian & Mohammadreza, 2012). Social CRM has been shown to be strongly related to customer retention (Buzzeto-More, 2013).

Buzzeto-More (2013) discusses six types of customers who use social media:

Creators: Those who create content, perspectives, and opinions

Critics: Those who comment, rate, and review information

Collectors: Those who aggregate information to make decisions

Joiners: Those who maintain a presence, but do little to aid WOM or engagement

Spectators: Those who read, watch, and listen, but take even less action than Joiners

In-actives: Those who do not participate at all

It is the company's objective to encourage Creators and Critics to create more positive content and "buzz" about the company or brand, further engage Collectors and Joiners, and to make Spectators and In-actives into active advocates.

SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES IN SMM

Although much scholarly literature studies how companies have used SMM, the literature also covers "best practices" and practical strategies that companies can use in planning and executing an SMM campaign. As most social media users know, company messages can vary from excellent, useful, and engaging to outright abuse and spam (Agichtein, et al., 2008). For an SMM strategy to be successful, companies must focus on the former and avoid the latter. Because of this, it is important for a company to know how their SMM is perceived, for example, by keeping a close watch on the internet for social talk from customers who have interacted with the brand online (Clark & Melancon 2013).

Mohammadian & Mohammadreza (2012) offer four elements to a successful SMM strategy. First, companies should create a privacy policy, as this will assure customers that their information is secure not being abused. Second, it is important to create a good reputation online, for example, by using references to other articles and posts that are credible resources. Third, attractive content is vital to interest customers in the brand and products. This information must be up-to-date and engaging. Agichtein, et al., (2008) support this, suggesting that a rich variety of information sources (including content, links between items, and quality ratings) will attract customers. Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi (2012) also endorse quality content, but caution that the content must be collective, original, and help companies take the lead in the digital sphere. For example, a current scientific discovery may be interesting, but it must offer a dramatically non-normal perspective if customers already know about the discovery. Fourth, companies should have increased interaction and communication with the group of "friends" who interact with the company. For example, the company can celebrate holidays, making special infographics to represent times, dates, and years; however, companies must be careful not to accidentally offend customers by choosing to celebrate only specific holidays (for example, only celebrating British holidays). The authors also state that an effective SMM campaign must attract customers and get them involved with the company's activity online.

Toubia & Stephen, however, maintain that companies cannot even begin to plan social media strategies until it understands what motivates social media users (2013). Therefore, companies should study potential customers' social media profiles and usage to determine their needs and motivations before attempting to create buzz or sell products through the social medium.

Other researchers focus on the aesthetics of the web medium in attracting or turning off potential customers. Walker Naylor, et al., delve deeply into this topic, studying how photos in social media can aid

– or detract from – company objectives of influencing brand evaluations and purchase intentions (2012). Formally, the authors explain, buyers did not know much about each other, except what they saw while in a brick-and-mortar store and by the demographics of spokespeople. Now, on social media sites, customers can see the demographics of other customers via photos, such as profile pictures and images uploaded by other users. As people tend to have an affinity for those similar to themselves, these pictures have the potential to build brand affinity (when the pictures display people similar to themselves) or to thwart brand affinity (when other customers are different than themselves). The situation can go beyond pictures to written content such as reviews; for example, a mother of a young child reading a review from another mother of a young child may feel affinity toward the brand because of the similarity between herself and the reviewer.

Walker Naylor, et al., showed in their research that customers responded similarly if no pictures are shown as if the pictures shown are demographically similar to the buyer or if the pictures included a demographic mix. However, between two studies it was unclear whether demographically similar images were more or less effective than no images. The authors maintain that no pictures may be the best strategy when 1) the fan base is homogeneous and different from the target audience, 2) the fan base is heterogeneous and includes no fans similar to the target audience, and 3) the brand will be evaluated in isolation, while showing pictures demographically similar to the target market may be advantageous when 1) the fan base is homogenous and similar to the target audience, 2) the fan base is heterogeneous but includes fans similar to the target audience, and 3) the brand will be compared to other brands by customers. It may be wise to specifically choose pictures rather than randomly pulling pictures (for example, by removing uploads that do not aid the company's intentions); however, customers may prefer the innocence of random photos rather than feeling like they are being "sold" an image by the company's hand-picked photos. The authors caution that customers may be influenced by other factors, as well, such as prizes or discounts. Some dissimilarity may also be a selling point, such as young models aiding companies selling perfume to older women.

Another method of succeeding in SMM is to effectively use WOM to market products rather than exclusively relying on the company's content. To accomplish this, the company must have high-quality relationships on social media, especially with brand evangelists who will recommend the company's products to their friends and family (Clark & Melancon, 2013). As people feel grateful when others have contributed to them, it may be beneficial to companies to offer special discounts, entertainment, or personal interaction to encourage WOM (Clark & Melancon, 2013). This is especially true for brand evangelists. To create brand evangelists, Meiners, et al. (2010) suggest six approaches: 1) customer plus-delta: continuously gather customer feedback; 2) napsterize knowledge: make it a point to share knowledge freely; 3) build the buzz: expertly build intelligent WOM networks; 4) create community: encourage community between customers; 5) make bite-size chunks: create specialized, smaller offerings to get customers to bite, and 6) create a cause: focus on making the world or the specific industry a better place. The product specifications will influence the type of endorsers the company recruits: hedonistic (pursuit of happiness) products benefit from strong tie endorsers, while utilitarian products benefited more from high expertise users (Buzzeto-More, 2013). The number of reviews on the internet may be an indication of WOM efforts and increased awareness (Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi, 2012).

Saravanakumar & Sugantha-Lakshmi (2012) may sum up how best to use social media by commenting that those who have succeeded at SMM have done three things: created buzz, learned from customers (customer research), and targeted customers.

FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

There are several avenues of future research that can be explored. First, there is relatively little scholarly research on integrating social media and traditional media in marketing campaign. Studies have focused on using exclusively traditional media and exclusively social media, but not the two combined. This is important as the two types of media are rarely used separately and the lines between the two are increasingly blurry. (Stephen & Galak, 2012). Related research avenues include how traditional media

influences social media and vice versa, as this has been only minimally explored (Stephen & Galak, 2012).

Second, many authors (including Stephen & Galak, 2012 and Toubia & Stephen, 2013) agree that the motivations of content providers (for example, WOM advocates, reviewers, bloggers, and journalists) is not well understood. Most past research has focused on outcomes rather than motivations. As these content providers are a vital part of social media and marketing in the second decade of the 21st century, this would be an interesting and valuable area of future research. A secondary avenue of research is the motivations of social media users in general, which is a definite gray area in today's research.

Third, Stephen & Galak (2012) suggest future research regarding same-day interactions on social media and how these affect sales. There has been research as to whether social media affects sales in general, but little is known of how quickly these interactions produce sales.

Fourth, as indicated by Papasolomou and Melanithiou (2012) future research could focus on how consumer perceive SMM, either as just a marketing tool or as a medium to help in understanding of social media operation. Furthermore, future studies could investigate the relationship between followership, social media marketing and sales (Carlson & Lee, 2015).

Fifth, RFID in SMM is a new concept. The authors found only found one study (by Oinonen, Jakal, & Salo, 2012) in this area. Future research focusing on further linkages between RFID and SMM would be of value to this stream of literature.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be seen from this literature review that social media is a major force in today's marketing scene. Customers have more influence over sales and more of a voice in the marketing mix than ever before; however, they can also be useful to company strategies as they act as brand and product ambassadors spreading positive word of mouth about a company's products to friends and family members. This is especially useful as research has shown that customers trust friends' and family members' recommendations and do not trust company advertising. Therefore, it is important for companies to understand social media marketing and to use best practices to attract and retain customers, as well as to avoid being overshadowed by other brands in their industry.

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