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Introduction

Social Media (SM) is constantly evolving and playing an increasingly significant role in organisations’ marketing communications with other organisations, communities, and individuals (Kietzmann et al., 2011). According to Barnes (2010), SM is becoming integral to marketing strategy due to its interactive nature (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) that allows collaboration (Prohaska, 2011) and fast, efficient information collection (Wright et al., 2010). Through the use of SM, business organisations can build relationships with existing and prospective customers, and identify problems and solutions through collaborative interaction between online communities (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014).

As recently as 2010, researchers found that only a limited number of organisations utilised SM (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Since that time, however, social media has proliferated throughout the corporate environment with two in three organisations reportedly making use of it (Treem and Leonardi, 2012). Challenges remain, however, with integrating SM into marketing communication strategy (Zarkada and Polydorou, 2013). Despite its potential benefits, the integration of SM could result in the loss of control over brand messages (Winer, 2009). Moreover, SM may require new lines of communication and responsibility (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, Denning, 2010) between organisational departments (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

Over the past few years, several studies have attempted to examine the roles of SM in business organisations. Most of these studies have been done from the perspective of the
customers. Yap and Lee (2014) found that customers’ loyalty to SM networks (i.e. Facebook page of a company) is associated with social influence, compatibility and enjoyment, and usage behaviour associated with the company’s offerings. Jin (2012) found that consumers’ perceptions of luxury brands are significantly related to their satisfaction with the luxury brand’s Facebook page, and intentions to use the brand’s SM platform for online shopping. In a study of location-based social network sites, Singh et al. (2014) found that customers’ check-in behaviour is driven mainly by social enhancement values (i.e. to promote their desired self-image) and entertainment value (i.e. the enjoyment of interacting with others). Despite the increasing importance of SM in business organisations, most studies in the past have focused on consumers’ attitude towards SM, while relatively limited academic research has examined how firms themselves may benefit from SM (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014).

Even though SM have been acknowledged as a powerful medium for building relationships with customers, there is a lack of understanding of how and why organisations are actually using them (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). The existing frameworks available to marketers for guidance in terms of marketing communication, planning implementation and measurement were largely developed before the pervasive use of SM for the purposes of information seeking, purchase and post-purchase behaviours (Schultz, 1996, Schultz and Kitchen, 1997, Schultz and Schultz, 1998). Hence, the dramatic increase in the use of SM and social networks requires a renewed emphasis on Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) research (Porcu et al., 2012). Since the characteristics of social and digital media are quite different from traditional marketing communications channels, there is a need to modify existing IMC frameworks for effective integration of SM in organisations’ IMC strategy. Furthermore, the services industry has characteristics that differ considerably from those of non-services industries. The intangible, inseparable, perishable, and variable nature of
services has not been well reflected in existing IMC frameworks, notably in marketing messages (Abernethy and Butler, 1993, Grove et al., 1995, Stafford, 1996), branding (De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999, Berry, 2000, McDonald et al., 2001), and channels (Wilson 2001). In view of these research gaps, the present study aims to contribute to IMC research within the service literature.

This study seeks to accomplish two main objectives: First, to provide empirical insights into the strategic roles of SM for services organisations from marketers’ perspectives; and second, to develop a modified IMC framework that integrates SM with Traditional Media (TM). It is expected that the framework will provide relevant contemporary guidelines to managers and researchers in the services marketing area. This paper is organised as follows: the literature review addresses SM and IMC frameworks, and marketing communication issues for services marketers. Next, the qualitative exploratory methodology is justified and explained. The subsequent sections provide the study findings and address how the findings can be implemented. Finally, the paper concludes with management guidelines and directions for future research.

**Literature Review**

*Characteristics of Social Media*

SM is defined as “a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61). SM platforms include, but are not limited to, social networking tools (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), professional networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn), media sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Instagram), commerce communities (e.g.,
Firms have used a combination of SM platforms to attain various organisational objectives. A Facebook fan page is used by firms to establish interactive communication with their existing and prospective customers. Twitter posts are used by media enterprises to spread short informational messages in real time. Firms with visualised messages make extensive use of their YouTube channel to promote their products or services through video advertisements (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). Restaurants make effective use of Instagram to promote their menu items and to encourage customers to share their dining experience with their social networks (Bilgihan et al., 2014).

The benefits and opportunities presented by SM have meant that it is becoming integral to marketing strategy (Barnes, 2010). These benefits include reaching a wide array of customers beyond geographical constraints (Wright et al., 2010), enhancing service quality, facilitating timely and cost-effective research, building and enhancing databases, and reducing costs (Barnes, 2010). However, compared to TM, SM possesses unique characteristics and its implementation requires a significant modification of existing IMC frameworks. For the purpose of this study, TM is defined as any conventional form of one-way communication such as television, radio, direct mail, outdoor billboard, newspapers, magazines, newsletters and other print publications. The following section provides an overview of SM characteristics in comparison with its TM counterparts.

*Interactivity and Individualisation:* Most TM channels do not allow two-way interaction between customers and marketers. Direct mail and call centres do have a direct and two-way element, but are not as technologically sophisticated as SM. This contrasts sharply with Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) definition of SM which emphasises content creation and
sharing that can occur entirely internally (i.e., employees-to-employees), entirely externally (i.e., consumers-to-consumers or other external stakeholders), or across organisational boundaries (i.e., consumers-to-organisation). This results in SM being a challenge to traditional authority and control in regard to an organisation’s branding and customer relationship management activities (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) which are traditionally very hierarchical, with a centralised control structure.

Integration of communication and distribution channels: these were clearly delineated and less integrated prior to the development of SM. The growth of SM has brought these channels closer and made it easier for customers to move between them in a seamless, and indeed, imperceptible manner. SM has the potential to have a broad impact on the organisation both within and between functional areas such as marketing, sales, advertising and IT (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Organisations that successfully manage the increased level of complexity of these business functions may well outperform others in the new environment.

Immediacy: SM monitoring and behavioural tracking allows consumer-centric information to be obtained and disseminated quickly. SM empowers consumers by providing quick access to information, facilitating a faster response to marketing activities. The immediacy and digital nature of SM also permits marketers to quickly and accurately measure the effects of these activities. An important aspect of immediacy is the viral nature of SM whereby information can be disseminated quickly by consumers to their peers (Mitic and Kapoulas, 2012).

Information collection: SM offers new ways of researching customers as it allows marketers to observe consumer comments via SM platforms that capture consumers’ own words in a naturalistic manner (Bekkers et al., 2013, Mayeh et al., 2012, Brooks et al., 2014, Wright et
Thus, SM represents an opportunity for more informed decision-making for marketing communications specifically and marketing generally.

**Integrated marketing communication**

IMC is seen as a process that integrates and aligns strategic and tactical marketing communication decision-making (Reid et al., 2005, Schultz and Schultz, 1998). Early IMC frameworks were developed to allow marketers to achieve the optimum mix of communication elements to reach target markets effectively. The frameworks were also designed to assist marketers with communicating consistent brand messages across different channels.

Schultz and Schultz (1998) argued that marketing and marketing communications are in transition due to technological advances. Thus, an organisation moves from one stage of IMC development to another as a result of the organisation’s ability to capture and manage information technology. The conceptual framework developed by Schultz and Schultz (1998), although effective in describing the IMC process of integration, did not take into account the importance of feedback mechanisms for future improvement of IMC programs. Nor, obviously, did it account for developments in media technology such as SM. Duncan and Mulhern (2004) expanded the model by incorporating two-way communications with an emphasis on creating long-term value through a mutually exclusive exchange. More recent conceptualisations of IMC were provided by Kliatchko (2008) and Winer (2009). The ‘four pillars model’ of Kliatchko (2008) was based on the interaction between a brand’s stakeholders, content, channels and results. This framework emphasises the “outside-in” perspective in terms of being customer-focused. On the other hand, Winer (2009)
incorporated management decisions such as target market, strategy, copy, media, timing, budgeting, and evaluation within the conceptual framework.

Despite the recent advances in IMC frameworks, most of those identified in the literature are generic and were developed prior to the pervasive use of SM. To the best of our knowledge, there are few studies on the development of IMC frameworks that take into account the unique characteristics of the services industry.

**Implications of the characteristics of services for marketing communications planning**

Previous studies have reported differences in marketing communications between services, FMCG and durables (Dibb and Simkin, 1993, Stafford, 1996, Pina et al., 2006, Mann and Kaur, 2013, Tripp, 1997). The following four characteristics discussed in the context of IMC are largely accepted in the literature as differentiating services from products (Dibb and Simkin, 1993, Parasuraman et al., 1985).

**Intangibility:** According to Stafford (1996), services marketers should use specific cues in marketing communications to provide perceptions of tangibility more so than FMCG marketers. It has been found that services marketing communications place greater emphasis on cues of quality when compared to communications of FMCG organisations (Abernethy and Butler, 1993); moreover, they emphasise factual information more so than do the non-services (Grove et al., 1995).

**The entwined customer-employee relationship:** There is an inseparable relationship between customers, employees and the service, as the service outcome is co-produced on demand by the parties involved. Because of the close relationship and interactions between employees
and customers, organisational culture affects branding and marketing messages through employee-customer interaction (Pina et al., 2006). It has been suggested that organisational culture will have a bigger impact on a customer’s perception of brand than will formal marketing communication (Wilson, 2001). Thus, there is a need to consider the employee-customer interaction as part of a marketing communication framework.

Direct company-customer contact based relationship: In services, customers have a real-time interaction with an employee and/or technology from the company. Customer touch points, whether they be employee- or technology-based, need to support the brand promise; otherwise, the image of the brand will be compromised.

Variability: Services tend to be heterogeneous in quality (Dibb and Simkin, 1993) due to minimal tangible differentiation. As a consequence, services rely more on a corporate brand while FMCG rely more on a house of brands approach (Mann and Kaur, 2013). Firms seek to overcome the greater perception of risk associated with services by focusing on a strong corporate brand (De Chernatony and Dall'Olmol Riley, 1999, Berry, 2000, McDonald et al., 2001).

These inherent characteristics of services may have potential implications for services’ marketing media and messages. In addition, the use of SM by services marketers also raises different issues than those of other industry sectors as far as a framework of IMC is concerned. This study focuses on exploring the appropriateness of existing IMC decision-making frameworks for service marketers using SM. In particular, we consider the following research question:
How do existing Integrated Marketing Communication decision-making frameworks need to be modified to incorporate the characteristics of SM for services marketers?

Methodology

As SM is a rapidly evolving phenomenon, an exploratory approach integrating the existing literature with a qualitative methodology was appropriate. Previous examples of the applicability of this approach in marketing theory building include (Bonoma, 1985, Frazier and Antia, 1995, Pitt et al., 2011, Woodside and Wilson, 2003, Workman Jr et al., 1998, Kohli and Jaworski, 1990).

Sampling

Purposive sampling of senior marketing executives was undertaken in order to obtain participants who had significant responsibility for SM (Shiell et al., 2009) or a sound knowledge of the implementation of SM within their organisations (Agarwal and Prasad, 1998). Such participants can be considered as ‘expert’ or ‘key’ informants (Kumar et al., 1993, Abaddi et al., 2011). Only services organisations were approached as the literature indicates differences in the marketing communication practices of FMCG, durables and services (Mann and Kaur, 2013, Dibb and Simkin, 1993).

Thirty potential participants from a reputable and comprehensive corporate database of marketers were e-mailed and invited to participate in an interview. Two follow-up emails were sent to increase participation rates. All selected participants were responsible for developing or implementing marketing and communication strategies within their organisations, and had a diversity of job titles. Eight respondents indicated that they would be
interested in participating and mutually acceptable interview times and dates were agreed on. Table 1 provides participant characteristics whilst maintaining participant anonymity.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviewing is often described as a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Berg and Lune, 2004) and is a reliable primary data collection method for qualitative research. The informal style of the semi-structured interview generates a discussion as opposed to a structured question-and-answer format (Mason, 2002). This methodology allowed the exploration of managers’ experiences not currently identified in the literature, which is appropriate given the rapid evolution of SM. Further, the qualitative interviewing process has greater potential for eliciting rich information (Mason, 2002).

A pilot study was conducted via telephone with an interviewee who fulfilled the requirements of the criteria sample. This enabled pre-testing of the interview protocol and the sequence, structure and quality of the individual questions (Yin, 2009). This pilot interview was not used in the sample but was an instrumental part of the iterative process of conducting the research in a rigorous manner (Patton, 2002). Contents from both the pilot study and the existing IMC framework were used to develop the interview agenda (see Appendix A1) consisting of 16 semi-structured, open-ended questions, and one closed-ended question (Cresswell, 2007). These questions addressed marketing communications strategy, and implementation and measurement of both TM and SM.

The eight interviews were conducted at the respondents’ place of work and took between 45 minutes and 60 minutes to complete. In the tradition of qualitative studies which aim to
achieve consistent processing of data (Yin, 2009), the protocol for the interview process followed a simple procedure. Each interview was preceded by a reiteration of the topic, completion of the plain language consent form, questioning procedures and a reminder that the interview would be recorded. Follow-up questions invited participants to expand on their responses and comment on other issues, thereby eliciting deeper meaning. The broad nature of the questioning was designed to allow participants to discuss their experiences as well as identify those factors which they believed facilitated or impeded the implementation of SM within their organisations (Botha et al., 2011). The questioning structure was derived from issues identified in the literature in regard to problems with SM implementation. The questions were also designed to allow respondents to raise issues that had not previously been identified within the literature.

Data Analysis

This research used thematic analysis (Grbich, 2007) to process the data according to the broad areas identified within IMC literature (Schultz and Schultz, 1998, Duncan and Mulhern, 2004, Kliatchko, 2008, Winer, 2009). This approach is especially useful when examining a theoretically underdeveloped area (Zhang et al., 2009, Botha et al., 2011). Thematic analysis requires the researcher to categorise the underlying themes within data (Miles and Huberman, 2006), thus enabling researchers to draw together the common topics discussed, allowing for the different terminology used by the participants (Morgan, 1997). This approach is especially valid for examining organisations’ use of SM, as the terminology and applications are continually emerging and evolving, with alternative terms often used for the same practice and approach. Thematic analysis is also appropriate for theory construction or proposition development (Warwick and Lininger, 1975, Weinberg and Berger, 2011, Yi et
al., 2006), although the analysis is not generalisable outside the sample frame (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

There is a reciprocal relationship between the development of a coding system and the evolution of understanding a phenomenon under consideration (Weston et al., 2001). Interview transcripts were coded according to the three areas of marketing communication decision-making and then grouped and classified under the most appropriate theme.

The data analysis and refining process involved two iterative stages. Stage one involved two researchers independently coding the data, which is designed to ensure reliability of the interpretations (Kassarjian, 1977). There was 80% consistency in assessments. Discussion between the researchers occurred where there was disagreement, and these contentious items were allocated after consensus was reached. In the first stage, participants’ comments and statements were categorised according to the ideas and concepts (Gibbs, 2002), where “discrete passages of text or other data items that, in some sense, exemplify the same theoretical or descriptive data” (Gibbs, 2002, p.57).

The second stage of the analysis involved grouping ideas and concepts into larger themes using the data coding procedures developed by (Galman, 2013). A two-level hierarchical codification framework grouping concepts into themes is at the heart of many qualitative approaches, such as within NVivo (Hutchison et al., 2010). When coding the data, comments related to multiple ideas and concepts were attributed to multiple themes. The iterative hierarchical process enabled ideas and insights to emerge from the data, which may not have been identified in the first categorisation (Miles and Huberman, 2006).
Findings

Characteristics of Sample

We begin by describing the relevant characteristics of the sample. Table 2 shows the characteristics of the service organisations interviewed in terms of the types of SM being used and their purpose. Virtually all organisations use Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. No organisation used Pinterest, with only CHARITY using blogs. Further, CHARITY also used the most SM (eight forms in total) while SUPER 1 and FINANCE used three SM forms. While it is obviously not generalisable, three finance-related respondents reported using fewer forms of SM.

Table 2 around here

Table 3 below shows the use of SM in a number of roles traditionally associated with TM. However, there are a number of roles that are quite different from TM (termed ‘innovative roles’ in Table 3) that encompass some degree of interactivity such as customer service word-of-mouth (WOM) advocacy, and include reaching audiences not typically reached with TM.

Table 3 around here

While FINANCE used the fewest SM channels, it was one of the organisations where SM had the most roles to play. Intriguingly, whilst PUBLIC TRANSPORT was one of the heavier users of SM channels, it did not see SM as playing any specific role. SPORT 1 was in a similar position: although using seven of the eight SM channels, SM was considered to have only a single role.
As shown in Table 4, the integration of SM provides benefits for organisations, consumers, and marketing applications. For organisations, the benefits include: speed, reach, lower cost, and recruitment tool. The benefits for consumers include: two-way conversations, WOM advocacy, value proposition enhancement, and younger audience. Marketers could benefit from advocacy leading to new customers, brand awareness, customer service channel, support for above the line campaigns, brand equity, positioning, and integrated marketing programs. In addition, there are several determinants of SM success for these three groups such as resources, open and authentic communication, lower advertising expenditure than TM for niche brands, and so on.

Table 4 around here

Dominant themes

The responses were coded and classified and four dominant themes emerged. These were: (1) strategic role, (2) message, (3) organisational implementation, and (4) measurement.

A number of sub-themes emerged from these four themes, which highlighted implications for the existing IMC planning framework. The sub-themes were: (i) integrated role clarity, (ii) reach, (iii) service channel, (iv) speed, (v) WOM advocacy, (vi) message control, (vii) consumer generated message, (viii) message consistency, (ix) cross-functional coordination, (x) employee skills, (xi) real-time listening, and (xii) behavioural measurement.

1) Strategic roles

Integrated role clarity: A number of comments were made regarding the place of SM within the marketing communication mix driven by its unique characteristics, such as WOM
advocacy), and its ability to listen to a number of stakeholders (competitors, customers, bloggers etc.) and subsequently inform marketing actions. CHARITY said: “What we are trying to get to is social media being included as a part of the first-step planning phase, and then become an integrated part of a campaign, as opposed to an extension, but that is still a part of the internal journey as far as getting the right content for social.” The dynamic nature of SM is, however, creating uncertainty in marketers’ minds. They are unsure of the proper role of SM, and whether the impact would be short-term or long-term. PUBLIC TRANSPORT said: “Knowing what is going to work and what is not going to work can be quite challenging.” Further, there are some concerns about the efficacy of SM: “People have a tendency to overestimate the impact of digital and SM in the short period of times, while underestimating its impact on the long term. Right now, it is almost as if we have all discovered that SM is not the silver bullet to all our marketing woes, but at the same time the risk now is, not underestimating its impact on a much grander scale in the long term” (CHARITY).

For some organisations, SM can and does reach many of their customers. Its features also make it possible to actually target carefully selected markets. For example, INSURANCE believed that SM “is commercially viable for big companies because they don’t have a choice. They have to be there because their customers are there. It is like not answering the phone. They have to be there.” The FINANCE company had launched a travel credit card aimed at young Australians via SM channels such as Facebook and Twitter, stating: “I guess we are restricted in the sense of this product does not have a huge marketing budget, so I don’t think we have ever had the opportunity to go out and use above the line communications.” This is not to say that there are not issues with SM, with INSURANCE stating: “I think there is a place for social media, but I don’t think it drives as much into the
business as some of the other channels, I have not seen success from social media, as much as I’m seeing in other channels, further the conversion of advertising through Facebook has not been as successful as other channels to date.”

Reach: Depending on the reach of each SM within the markets of organisations, SM will have different roles. For instance, Facebook might be used by 90% of the target market but Pinterest only 10%. This will vary according to each organisation and the service being targeted. Moreover, the use of SM for services may be more appropriate for younger than older consumers, who may not use social platforms to the same extent. The roles of SM need to be considered according to the nature of the target market. For example, “The group, we felt that it appealed to the most was a younger demographic. That younger demographic tended to operate in the spheres of social media, so that is why there is more focus on social media for that product than our other products,” (FINANCE). Other respondents had quite different target markets that made little use of SM. This reiterates the importance of understanding the differences between markets for various types of services marketers when it comes to communications planning. “We are quite a conservative organisation. When we asked them (fund members), would you feel comfortable about dealing with (the brand) on any of these (SM platforms), 92% say no” (SUPER1).

Service channel: Some respondents stressed the role of SM as a service channel. PUBLIC TRANSPORT uses Facebook and Twitter mainly to provide service information directly to customers in real time: “[It] is almost a full-time job to get all the service information out primarily through social media. The need for social media to address issues of service organisations is much greater than non-service organisations. Twitter especially has a role to play here.”
Speed: Some respondents considered speed to be one of the strengths of SM, allowing organisations to respond quickly to opportunities and threats. “If you had the content ready to go, you could quickly implement that campaign and make adjustments on-the-fly without having to spend significant amounts of money and taking significant amounts of time” (FINANCE). However, there are constraints at times on the use of SM, which slow down its implementation. SUPER1 explained: “one of the hindrances we always have with all our communications, and Twitter ... is the fact that we have got a very conservative legal and compliance team. It was quite a challenge initially to get them to approve us even using Twitter. They are very risk averse and very conservative.”

(2) Message

Word of Mouth Advocacy: consumer-to-consumer communications can increase the reach of a marketing message, and WOM via SM can be a powerful channel. It can be a free channel, although in order to instigate wide-reaching WOM, the marketer must earn that reach. “You can build places, forums and platforms ... but it ultimately comes down to the type of customer experience that you create to be able to give those advocates the opportunity ... to advocate. You build up the trust through benefits and attributes, and then you continue to build that base of advocates through consistent provision over time” (FINANCE). However, not all services organisations have the consumer passion to drive viral WOM; superannuation, for example, is often seen as an uninteresting product as its impact is not immediate but occurs well into the future. The chance to acquire WOM advocacy is weaker for this subset of services organisations, as SUPER2 found: “It just comes back to the fact that we are not particularly interesting so we have got to earn our right to be there.” The heterogeneity of services when compared to FMCG and durables is likely to result in more negative WOM than will be the case with FMCG due to the variation in service quality. On
the other hand, exceptional service experiences are likely to facilitate positive viral WOM. This suggests the need for service operations to be linked to SM communication.

**Message control:** Both negative and positive issues relating to brand messages were identified in the data. The negative were often associated with the legal regulatory risk of employees saying something in an inappropriate manner or an issue to do with industry or organisation culture. The positive were to do with the tension between having consistent brand messages across various SM platforms versus matching the brand message with the particular characteristics of the SM platform. “I think the risk involved with social media is probably an area that we haven’t talked about. How do you manage content that is not in line with, firstly, what your brand stands for, secondly, what is considered as being regulatory compliant” (FINANCE). Some organisations have found brand consistency to be challenging due to the organisations’ empowering of employees to comment on their behalf “We do find there is a bit of style difference between who says what, but that is fine, as long as it is on message,” (PUBLIC TRANSPORT). A solution to the management of risk was put forward by CHARITY whose organisation developed a rating system to indicate the seniority of sign-off required for approval. “We do have rating systems [where] it is green, orange or red. At a red level, we make sure it is going to a General Manager who will sign off and approve things. Largely everything is prepared with FAQs and what we can and can’t say. A lot of trust is placed in the social team, given that they work hand in hand with PR and public affairs.”

**Consumer generated messages:** Some comments identified a role for SM in facilitating message development (this echoes the Listening sub-theme identified below). SPORT2 believed that “ideas for content must come from the fans’ perspective in order to be more
strategic in how we integrate our commercial messaging through our social channels.”
Along similar lines, CHARITY remarked how the SM voice influenced the TM voice, asking “How can we get more of our communications to sound like our social media voice?”

Message consistency: Two differing experiences involved consistent brand message across media, some finding that message consistency was relatively easy to achieve, and others the opposite. INSURANCE ‘repurposes’ above the line content for SM: “whatever we do online somehow fits with our above-the-line, so it is like a big overall push.” In contrast, CHARITY found that “Television commercial content does not necessarily work well on social media.”

(3) Organisational Implementation

Cross-functional co-ordination: The difficulties of obtaining senior executive support were raised. This support is fundamental in terms of staffing technology and ensuring cross-functional support from various stakeholders, all of which can hinder the successful use of SM. CHARITY mentioned: “It is our job to convince the executives within our various organisations on what they need to be doing and how they need to be changing. It is not going to happen overnight.”

Employee skills: In terms of implementation issues, CHARITY believed that staff must be skilled in SM to ensure that their interactions support other service channels and other marketing communications. “The biggest challenge for lot of brands is, if you have got one social media person, they probably come from a low-level communication background or mid-level communication background and they are not a customer service expert.” When organisations empower employees to speak on the brand’s behalf, the latter need to be skilled (and cognisant of the sensitivity of their role): “We are fairly open to our players using social
media as well. We are fairly open, when it comes to letting our players appear in the marketplace and converse with customers” (SPORT1).

(4) Measurement

Behavioural measurement: Some respondents were successfully measuring the link between specific SM click-throughs and sales and were utilising specific analytics and programming techniques to do so. Examples of this measurement of behavioural outcomes of SM include

FINANCE: “when they run SM campaigns, they measure it against a benchmark or a baseline, and they can see a definite correlation between campaigns that they run through social media and the increase in the number of applications for their product.”

INSURANCE: “you can ... identify where the click has come from. You can monitor all the activity that has happened from the click.”

SPORT1: “The rich engagement targets have obviously got a direct correlation to the membership and attendance targets, we can insert various coding to ... give us a direct indication of the success of a post on social media.” This contrasts with the measurement of TM effectiveness where it is more complicated to measure the link between media exposure and sales.

Real-time Listening: Unlike TM, SM allows an organisation to monitor complaints and other consumer ‘outputs’ such as opinions about new products and ideas about marketing issues in real time. CHARITY utilised negative comments as insights to improve customer experience, mentioning “generally we are happy to have the good comments and I’m usually really happy about the bad comments from a customer service perspective. It gives a lot more insight about the things we need to focus on and improve internally.”
Discussion

This study used a qualitative methodology to investigate how the existing IMC frameworks of services marketing organisations may need to be modified to incorporate SM. The qualitative methodology was particularly appropriate for this study as: a) SM platforms and their use by consumers are rapidly changing, and b) a holistic organisation-wide understanding of IMC is required. SM is a long way from being integrated into marketing communication frameworks (Zarkada and Polydorou, 2013), particularly in the services context. This is the first study to explore this issue with a methodology that identifies the range of SM’s strengths as well as implementation issues needing incorporation into IMC frameworks. We discuss the four themes and their sub-themes and present implications for SM and a services-focused IMC framework.

(1) Strategic role

If organisations see SM as an add-on and not as a vital part of integrated marketing communication, they are not likely to grasp the opportunities offered by social media. This should be addressed as the first step of both marketing strategy and marketing communication strategy planning. It is suggested that due to the infancy and nature of SM, it is more ambiguous than TM (Kunz and Hackworth, 2011, Mangold and Faulds, 2009), and this is a barrier to SM investment. One of the great strengths of SM and digital media is that consumer activity can be tracked and collated. The value offered by social media is twofold. First, it allows targeted communications to be efficiently delivered in a manner not previously possible. Second, it facilitates the development of effective communications by linking consumer response to specific SM contacts.
In terms of the strategic role of SM, the in-depth interviews showed various usages of SM ranging from its use as a broad media platform to a more narrow targeted use such as launching niche products to target young people. An understanding of the strategic role of SM will drive a service organisation’s decision to choose specific social networks. For example, our findings reveal that Twitter is used mainly to provide information to customers in real-time, whereas Facebook is used as an advertising channel to promote products and services, with the aim of converting “likes” into purchases. Thus, organisations should first define the strategic role of SM prior to deciding which SM network(s) to utilise.

SM may be used in a strategic role to facilitate service delivery; it may be used to provide up-to-the-minute service in a way that reduces the load on call centres, as well as potentially building loyalty and developing relationships with customers. This is where SM has a role that goes beyond typical advertising and blurs the line between promotion and service delivery channels. In regard to services heterogeneity and intangibility, this provides an opportunity to quickly respond to service complaints. This suggests that the more aligned the services marketing SM issues are with marketing communications strategy, the more effective and efficient the SM strategy will be.

Consequently, we place Integrated Strategy at the apex of our model. It is not sensible to think of a TM strategy and an SM strategy in isolation; hence, we see this as a bidirectional link. These areas of communication must be considered in conjunction with one another in the context of the organisation’s markets. Integrated strategy also has significant implications for the Message (below) and Organisation Implementation (below).
(2) Message

Both channel and message aspects of SM can be seen as integrated and mutually supportive as far as viral word-of-mouth is concerned. This is more marketing supposition than empirical fact: in other words, the reach of the message is arguably a function of the creative execution and high impact of the message, although recent research has cast some doubt on this (Nelson-Field, 2013). SM facilitates positive communications between consumers, providing opportunities to communicate with known individuals but also via anonymous review sites regarding positive service experiences. The opposite is also true since reports of a poor service experience can spread rapidly among consumers; hence, the services channel rapidly informs the viral channels (Mitic and Kapoulas, 2012), although WOM studies have generally found that positive rather than negative WOM is more common (East, et.al., 2007). Further, since services are seen as a high risk purchase, consumer comment enhances credibility and reduces consumer risk (Dibb and Simkin, 1993).

Our research identified that respondents at times used consumer feedback to guide brand message development, and at other times used the SM brand messages and positioning to modify non-SM branding. Research shows that services require more tangible message cues than do FMCG or durables (Stafford, 1996) and suggestions as to the most appropriate can be gleaned from observing consumer opinions and comments in SM. The collaborative aspect of SM supports this relationship (Prohaska, 2011), as do our findings.

The type of message that a service organisation expects to receive through SM networks is an important driver in that organisation’s choice of SM networks. An organisation may opt to distribute different types of messages through various SM networks. For example, Twitter can be effectively used to elicit positive word-of-mouth among customers, whereas Facebook
can be used as a means of gathering customer feedback about an organisation. Detailed information about a new service can be posted in Facebook whereas Instagram can be used as a powerful tool to entice potential customers to a particular new service or product, without giving too much information away.

(3) Organisational implementation

It has been suggested in the literature that organisational culture will have a bigger impact on customers in services organisations than in FMCG organisations (Pina et al., 2006, Wilson, 2001). This highlights the importance of formal and informal cross-functional coordination between departments and organisational culture, especially within services organisations. SM requires a greater level of effective cross-functional relationships, teams and organisational culture compared to TM, which is potentially less reliant on internal relationships between different functional areas.

Respondents reported the risks associated with non-adherence to regulatory, legal and policy frameworks. There are also the challenges of ensuring branding and message consistency as many employees may be empowered to speak on behalf of the organisation, as the more approvals that are required for SM comments, the slower the response time, and speed of response is one of the key benefits of SMs.

Our findings reveal that employees’ skills in using SM are of significant importance in service organisations’ implementation of SM strategy. The competence of employees in utilising and managing various SM networks should be a determining factor when an organisation chooses which SM networks to focus on. Service organisations with employees who are highly skilled in managing SM can afford to use a comprehensive combination of
SM networks to achieve various strategic objectives. Others with limited SM capabilities might decide on one or two SM networks to achieve their organisational objectives.

Integrated Strategy directly affects Organisation Implementation, as organisational form, processes and systems need to be sensitive to the demands of strategy, and indeed may constrain it. Measurement (as discussed in section 4 below) also impacts on Organisation Implementation, as employees need to respond in real time to consumer communications and behaviours.

(4) Measurement

With the ability to track consumers’ pre-purchase search behaviours, communications via SM platforms and behaviour within company websites, digital marketing has an enhanced ability with customer analytics and SM monitoring to provide measures of behavioural activities (DiStaso et al., 2011). In contrast, many consumer behaviours that relate to TM cannot be captured. The unique characteristics of SM nevertheless create implementation issues for services organisations and affect Organisational Implementation.

In terms of the measurement role of SM, this provides input into branding as well as providing performance measurement of marketing activities. The use of SM monitoring is similar to qualitative research, and captures consumers in naturalistic settings. The ability to obtain real-time feedback is also an advantage which can inform media and message strategy (Bekkers et al., 2013); with services being both more complex (Dibb and Simkin, 1993) and contentious than FMCG or durables, this is likely to play a bigger role. The more aligned the services marketing message strategy is with measurement and organisational implementation, the more effective and efficient SM strategy should be.
Measurement has important implications for Organisational Implementation. Our findings reveal that the number of “likes” generated by a Facebook page, the number of clicks/visits to a website, and the number of customer applications for a particular service are important measures of the success of SM campaigns. This measurement of impact should therefore drive service organisations’ decisions about the choice of specific social networks. Service firms should invest more in those SM channels that produce the most impact on their target audience.

The main contribution of this study is the modifications to traditional IMC frameworks arising from the application of the four dominant themes derived from the data. This is timely as many organisations are contemplating or taking tentative steps towards implementing SM. Figure 1 illustrates the strengths of SM and their relationship to the IMC framework of strategy, message, organisational implementation and measurement.

[Figure 1 around here]

Implications

This study has contributed to the body of literature by identifying the strategic roles of SM in the service marketing context and developing a modified IMC framework that integrates SM with TM. Considering the rapid growth of SM and their rapid diffusion to organisations, this study explores ways by which firms can integrate SM into their IMC planning.

The major contribution of the study is its evaluation of the appropriateness of generic IMC frameworks for organisations that are: a) attempting to integrate SM into marketing
communication, and b) operating in services industries. The evaluation provided suggestions regarding how these organisations can modify the three major aspects of the IMC process: strategic, implementation, and measurement components. These suggested modifications are not surprising considering that IMC frameworks were developed prior to the rapid advancement of digital marketing, marketing technology and the pervasive use of SM by consumers. Research into SM implementation is in its infancy, but is evolving rapidly. The research presented in this paper has provided insights into potential solutions and identified opportunities for future research to empirically assess the relationships between SM, IMC and services-focused organisations.

Services marketers have been attempting to integrate SM into their IMC processes, which have faced a number of challenges. These challenges have arisen firstly due to the rapid evolution of digital marketing in general and SM in particular, and secondly, because of the greater internal organisational connectedness required for both services marketers (compared to non-services marketers) and SM (compared to TM) implementation. Managerial implications based on the themes identified in the qualitative research are as follows.

First, the strategic level managers need to clearly define the role of SM within their overall marketing strategies and TM. It appears that some organisations allow SM to drive strategy, while others develop them independently of each other. Second, as with all branding, it is essential that coordinated and consistent messages are used in all communications and activities; nevertheless, message execution may need to be varied by the SM platform as is the case with TM. Third, as employees are empowered to speak on behalf of the organisation, training is required in order to avoid breaching regulatory requirements regarding inconsistent brand messages. Fourth, cross-functional coordination is essential across the
multitude of SM formats used between various departments that interact with consumers, as different consumers may engage with formats in different ways. Finally, organisations report an emphasis on behavioural metrics including sales; however, metrics and an understanding of the correlation with SM are still evolving and ongoing experimentation will likely be needed, such as converting Facebook ‘likes’ to purchase. These four themes should drive service firms’ decisions to choose specific social networks within their overall IMC strategy.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, since it is an exploratory study based on in-depth interviews, this places limits on the confidence of our findings, and a larger quantitative study of service organisations is recommended. Second, the respondents were marketing managers but the organisational implications of incorporating SM are quite different from TM. This suggests that interviews with operation managers could provide important insight into cross-functional issues and employee-customer interaction. Third, all organisations were large in size and previous marketing communication research indicated that different issues arise based on organisational size. Fourth and finally, the inclusion of a variable that might facilitate the successful use of SM within IMC processes such as market orientation or e-marketing orientation may provide valuable insight. Nevertheless, we have provided important preliminary findings and proposed an enhancement to the IMC framework within this study that will encourage the development of a more robust model of integrated marketing communications for services marketers.
References


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APPENDIX A1 Interview Guide

We would like you to focus on one brand where SM has a significant role to play in your IMC, when responding to the following questions…

Q1 How do you define SM for your brand?
Q2 Which SM platforms do you use for Brand X?
   Facebook
   Twitter
   Pinterest
   Instagram
   Google+
   LinkedIn
   YouTube
   Foursquare
   Blogs _______________________
   Others _______________________

Q3 What marketing activities do you conduct through, or within, these SM platforms?
Q4 What is the purpose of these activities? What do you hope to achieve by performing these activities?
Q5 Do you see the benefits of SM differing from traditional marketing communication media?
Q6 What traditional media do you employ for this brand?
Q7 Does the purpose of SM differ from the purpose of other elements in traditional media? (i.e. traditional media such as television and newspaper)?
Q8 What do you do to facilitate the implementation of SM for Brand X?
Q9 What do you do to hinder the implementation of SM for Brand X?
Q10 How do you ensure brand consistency within your SM activities? Is it harder? Why?
Q11 Do the methods you use to ensure brand consistency using SM differ from methods used to ensure brand consistency via traditional media?
Q12 What is your SM measurement strategy? Do the methods you use differ from those used to measure the effectiveness of traditional IMC?
Q13 How do you think services differ from FMCG in terms of integrating SM?
Q14 How do you go about linking sales to specific SM activities?
Q15 Is there any other issue that we haven’t raised that is relevant to the implementation of SM as part of your IMC mix for Brand X?
Q16 What is the biggest challenge marketers will face with SM in the future?
Q17 How much attention should marketers pay to the decentralisation of advertising and journalism in the age of free media and SM consumption?