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Social media: is this the new organizational stepchild?

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate what activities allow the firm to efficiently and effectively integrate social media into its strategic marketing activities.

Design/methodology/approach – As the current research investigates a new area of focus in the literature, an exploratory study consistent with the adoption of new technology in a firm was used to identify salient activities. In-depth interviews with those who oversee their firm's social media strategies were conducted to discover and assess organizational activities.

Findings – Findings suggest that many firms did not adopt organizational activities important for effective social media execution, leading us to the view social media as the "step-child" of corporate functions, not receiving resources more traditional functions would receive; those responsible for the social media function, an exercise in external communications, may be hampered by poor internal communications; and few firms have defined and measured goals for social media where employees are held accountable for supporting an overall marketing strategy.

Practical implications – The findings point the way for future confirmatory empirical research of organizational activities, top management team support and effective internal communication in the rapid-response environment of social media. Findings also provide implications for marketing practitioners for the use and measurement of social media to achieve marketing objectives.

Originality/value – The current research is meaningful and unique in that it approaches social media from the organizational process perspective, which has received little attention in the social media literature.

Keywords Qualitative research, Executive support, In-depth interview, Organizational activities, Social media marketing objective

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Consumers increasingly use social media as a trusted source of information to share opinions on firms' offerings. These consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-brand communications provide both great opportunities and threats to a firm's relationships with existing and potential customers (Kiron *et al.*, 2012). Some firms have thus begun to incorporate social media into their marketing programs (Berthon *et al.*, 2012). While the strategic importance of social media has prompted many researchers to investigate various aspects of social media, most attention has been given to consumer-oriented social media research: including consumers' motives in engaging in different social media platforms (Cheung *et al.*, 2011), activities driving consumers' high and low social media engagement (Men and Tsai, 2012) and impact of different cultures on usage and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behaviors (Chu and Choi, 2011; Jackson and Wang, 2013). Also, researchers have investigated how firms can better gather

consumer-generated content to achieve their various objectives such as attracting more consumers to their brand page (de Vries *et al.*, 2012; Smith *et al.*, 2012).

Despite firms' embracing social media to foster *external* communications with consumers, extant research has little to offer on how firms should adapt their *internal* organizational activities to the dynamic social media environment. There has been a paucity of research on firms' internal activities that enable firms to understand how they could capitalize on social media to accomplish their social media marketing objectives. Researchers have suggested, however, that when adopting innovative technologies like the Internet, it is necessary for firms to revisit and adapt their organizational activities to the technologies because these can greatly influence the achievement of firms' marketing objectives (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Theodosiou and Katsikea, 2012; Wu *et al.*, 2003; Zhu *et al.*, 2006). This seems especially true of new technologies that demand effective and efficient responsiveness of firms' managers (Wei *et al.*, 2014). For example, according to a survey by Lithium Technologies, 72 per cent of Twitter users expect a response to a complaint within one hour (Brown *et al.*, 2013). Such responsiveness puts pressure on firms to quickly and effectively manage or coordinate firms' internal communication to support effective external communication.

The purpose of the current research, therefore, is to identify organizational activities that allow firms to adopt and utilize social media as one of their essential strategic marketing tools and to investigate how the activities affect the achievement of firms' social media marketing objectives. The contribution of the current research is twofold. First, the current research expands and enriches the extant social media marketing literature by identifying an internal organizational framework with specific activities for firms' successful use of social media, which has received scant attention from researchers. Second, findings drawn from the current research suggest a more effective flow of communications is required to support social media to achieve the firm's social media marketing objectives.

The current research uses in-depth interviews with those who are responsible for design or execution of their firm's social media marketing strategies to uncover activities important to accomplish firms' social media marketing objectives. The current research proceeds with a literature review of organizational process and activity research based on the new technology adoption. Following that, relevant organizational activities from current social media research are addressed. Next, the research methodology is presented, followed by the research findings, discussion and implications. Finally, limitations, future research and conclusions are presented.

Research on organizational processes and activities

When innovative technologies emerge, the resulting business potential often causes firms to adopt the new technology and, therefore, adapt their activities to embrace the new opportunity (Zhu *et al.*, 2006). The emergence of social media challenges firms to adapt their organizational activities to be successful in the evolving market. From this perspective, a review of the literature based on the adoption of innovative technology provides a relevant theoretical framework for the current research.

As firms become more aware of the emergence of an innovative technology, they begin to evaluate its value and assess emerging opportunities (Zhu *et al.*, 2006). Then, if they adopt the technology, managers at the firm will develop or modify internal organizational activities to gain the benefit of the new technology (Theodosiou and

Katsikea, 2012; Wu *et al.*, 2003). Finally, firms implement the new or modified activities not only to capture new business opportunities but to enhance the success of their overall strategies (Zhu *et al.*, 2006). Some firms proactively adopt innovative technologies and actively pursue the resultant opportunities. Other firms passively follow the trend and are slow to adopt new technologies due to perceived barriers such as lack of money, irrelevance to their business or unfamiliarity with the technologies (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011; Srinivasan *et al.*, 2002).

Researchers have demonstrated several important organizational activities to successfully embrace new technologies for the firm's success. The activities include top management's vision and support, a long-term orientation and horizontal and vertical coordination within the firm. Vision is the leadership and initiative of the top management team (TMT) that provides long-term guidance and direction for the firm (Schultz and Hatch, 2003). Vision significantly influences knowledge sharing and use among firm employees (Garrett and Neubaum, 2013). Having a strategic vision indicates that innovative technologies can be a platform for reengineering existing business processes and promote knowledge and information transfer within the organization (Brooke, 2000).

Another activity is top management support, which is the commitment of the TMT to endorsing the adoption of innovative technologies, which often comes in the form of financial or other resource support (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2002; Rim and Khalid, 2008). Through conspicuous support, the TMT can be a strong advocate for organizational change that enables members to adapt to the technologies and provides valuable knowledge, expertise and legitimacy for the firm to best utilize social media technologies (Garrett and Neubaum, 2013; Liang *et al.*, 2007).

Researchers have argued that it would take time for organizational members to have sufficient knowledge about new technologies, and misalignment between the technologies and the user environment can often occur due to the insufficient knowledge of the technologies such that firms should not expect immediate returns from deploying the technologies (Kelley, 2009; Zhu *et al.*, 2006). Having a long-term orientation becomes important to fully grasp the benefits of the technologies (Srinivasan *et al.*, 2002).

Research also suggests that vertical coordination between the TMT and middle-level management and horizontal coordination across departments is important to share and transfer knowledge of adapting to innovative technologies within the firm (Zahay and Peltier, 2008). These types of coordination can lead to positive and harmonized relationships among organizational members when managing innovative technologies, allowing for the effective implementation of the technologies (Arndt *et al.*, 2011).

In the social era, firms should observe users' posts and responses and properly respond to posts, requests and complaints not only to improve relationships with customers but to increase positive brand and firm image and profitability (Kumar and Mirchandani, 2012). Therefore, observing, monitoring and responding to users in a timely manner can help firms achieve their social marketing objectives and become critical for the success of firms (Kane *et al.*, 2014).

As social media is a new technology being adopted by many firms, we believe an investigation of the firms' activities that are theoretically grounded should provide insights as to how firms are adopting and adapting to social media and guidance for future empirical research on firms' internal adoption methods and successes with social media. We thus believe internal organizational activities related to social media

adoption need to be investigated to determine what activities may be important in achieving firms' social media marketing objectives.

Research methodology

As very little is known about organizational activities needed to make social media a part of the firm's strategic marketing approach, the current research is exploratory in nature and, thus represents an under-researched phenomenon. We used literature related to the adoption of new technology and organizational behavior to create a framework for the identification of activities that organizations would likely modify or create when adopting innovative technology. Based on this framework, we sought contextual information from firms actively involved in social media and used qualitative methods to gather, code and analyze the results. We recruited companies from multiple industries and of various sizes (e.g., the number of employees and sales volume) to obtain rich and real data to improve the generalizability of the findings (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2008).

By spanning our professional networks, we were able to identify and recruit a total of 14 companies (with 17 informants) and conduct interviews with managers, executives or owners who were responsible for their firm's social media strategies. We sought interviews only of those who were highly knowledgeable of, and directly involved in, the management and/or operation of social media for their firm. The informants served in roles ranging from social media manager, to Vice President of marketing, to owner. The participant firms have been using various social media platforms (see Table I for detailed descriptions about participant firms' characteristics). Facebook and Twitter were the main social media platforms across participant firms. Each firm had generally similar social media marketing objectives.

Broad and semi-structured interview questions, derived from the literature review framework, were sent to each interviewee about 10 days before the actual interview. However, we were careful not to lead informants or to strictly follow our pre-specified questions; informants were allowed to freely express their thoughts and opinions about other relevant issues not addressed in the original questions and we followed-up during the interviews as new topics arose. For example, some activities (e.g. monitoring competitors' social media and user-to-user engagement) emerged as the interviews progressed and were added to the original questions for the purposes of a qualitative topic, which is appropriate for the research method (Eisenhardt, 1989). Informants were assured that their name, their company's name, and all company-specific data would be kept confidential. Interviews were an average of 50 minutes. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face at the informant's office or via telephone depending on each informant's preference. With their permission, the interviews were audiotaped with the recordings later transcribed verbatim for coding.

The transcriptions were analyzed using an online qualitative analytical tool (Dedoose), which allowed for excerpt identification and selection, blind-coding and mixed-methods analysis of transcribed qualitative data in an online multi-user environment. Procedures based on the study by Viswanathan et al. (2010) were used. The authors first independently identified excerpts and coded them based on the pre-defined activities extracted from the literature review. As new activities emerged, these were included in an updated catalog of activities, and working definitions of the activities were agreed upon by the authors. Text that had been coded prior to a new

ID number	NAICS description	Size (sales/assets)	No. of employees	Customer type	Primary social media	Interviewee's position	Years using social media
1	Finance and insurance	$1.2 billion (assets)	1,100	B2C	Facebook	E-marketing Manager	1.5
2	Manufacturing	$275 million	1,000	B2B	YouTube	Director of Retail Marketing	2
3	Educational services	NA	3	B2C	Facebook, Twitter	Director of Marketing and Public Relation	2
4	Retail trade	$9.4 billion	13,700	B2B	YouTube	Communications Manager	1
5	Finance and insurance	$8.9 billion (premium)	11,500	Both	Twitter	Senior Director of Marketing Communications	2
6	Professional, scientific and technical services	$2.5 million	13	B2B	Facebook, Twitter	Marketing Coordinator	3.5
7	Professional, scientific and technical services	$1 million	12	B2B	Twitter	Marketing Manager	4.5
8	Manufacturing	$1 billion	2,500	B2B	Facebook	Product Director for Digital Marketing	4.5
9	Retail trade	$1.2 billion	10,900	B2C	Facebook	Senior Vice President of Marketing	2.5
10	Retail trade	$150,000	2	B2C	Facebook	Co-owner	0.5
11	Arts, entertainment and recreation	$120 million	1,000	B2C	Twitter	Senior Director of Brand Marketing	2.5
12	Retail trade	$1.25 billion	4,000	B2B	Twitter	E-mail Marketing Manager and Director of Marketing	0.5
13	Health care and social assistance	$8.8 billion	60,000	B2C	Facebook, Twitter	Manager, Center for Social Media	3
14	Accommodation and food services	$385 million	7,000	B2C	Facebook	Manager of Social Media	3

Table I.
Characteristics of interview participant firms

activity emerging was rescanned for the new activities. Coding excerpts emerging from the data were then compared, revisited, reviewed and/or refuted between the researchers to reach a common shared interpretation and categorization (Spiggle, 1994). More cases were categorized and compared with developed activities and categories to ensure their consistencies (Jarratt and Fayed, 2001). The findings from comparing the differences and similarities across cases were synthesized by activity and grouped into organizational processes derived from relevant literature to ensure a comprehensive view (Blazevic and Lievens, 2008). Inter-rater reliability (*kappa*) was then calculated on all common excerpts and resulted in a value of 0.903, indicating "almost perfect agreement" (Landis and Koch, 1977).

Results

Top management vision

Although most participant firms acknowledged the importance of top management vision, only one firm (14) could provide support for TMT vision within their firm:

> The first person who bought a Facebook ad was our CEO, he did it just to try it out. Our executives were touring our store locations and the CEO said, "let's put out an ad on Facebook", this is back in 2009. So the executives are all sitting on the tour bus and he is using the Facebook ad builder to target people who are interested in [his topic]. And he was so impressed how he could drill down to all those different audiences and he was, "Oh man, we have to do this for our company". So he did, and the rest is history. A lot of people are a little jealous but we are very lucky.

While nearly all interviewees were very appreciative of TMT *support* (see next section), only Firm 14 could cite *vision* or direct involvement of the TMT. For most firms, the TMT's vision was limited to an awareness of social media. This apparent lack of TMT vision might indicate that top management believes social media to be a tactical issue that should be dealt with by middle-level managers. It may also be that the lack of clear evidence of a financial return on investment in social media could be hindering vision and support. These postulates, however, warrant more studies to investigate.

Top management support

A vision, to be viable, leads to support in the form of budget and personnel dedicated to social media. These were frequently mentioned as important activities interviewees used as an indicator of TMT support. Many interviewees (Firm 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13 and 14) have at least one person up to a full team, who are entirely dedicated to social media. However, despite the importance of social media budget, few firms have specific budget allocation for social media. Firm 2 had "a very little [allocated] from the marketing budget", whereas Firm 1 was "trying to get [funding] from VP of advertising and our PR department".

The findings suggest that there is a lack of appropriate and dedicated funding and personnel for social media for the firm's successful implementation of social media marketing strategies (Garcia-Morales *et al.*, 2014). These findings suggest that firms may be funding social media efforts to determine its value, or as a defensive position, seeking justification of a larger investment in social media before supporting social media as a major component of the overall marketing strategy.

Long-term orientation
Because it takes time for top- and middle-level managers to understand the need for a new technology and to reap its benefits, a long-term approach is required or the technology withers within the firm (Kelley, 2009; Zhu *et al.*, 2006). Firm 2 illustrated this point:

> When, I first started teaching social media there were a lot of conversations with folks at my level, trying to help them understand why we need it […] and what benefit I thought it would bring to the company […].

Fragmentation among users and social media platforms also pose difficulties for achieving firms' objectives. When adopting a new technology, patience may be required while the ambiguity that typically accompanies new technologies settles out. Firm 14 illustrates this:

> The difficulty right now is in mass fragmentation […] with so little crossover. People are leaving Facebook for Instagram, people who are primarily Twitter users are not Facebook users, and it is hard to be effective in all these different spaces. One of our longer term goals is to build our own social community and then use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest to drive people to it.

Alignment between marketing and social media marketing strategies
The issue of alignment between marketing and social marketing strategies was discovered during the interview process. Several interviewees noted the importance of the alignment for the achievement of social media marketing objectives. Firm 14 noted:

> We would like to align our social media goals with our overall marketing objectives. For example, our goal is to rank number one in industry benchmarks on various aspects of restaurants such as beverage quality, food quality, or knowledgeable staff […]. What can we do in social media to enhance our appeal in these categories? Social media earns its keep because we are supporting each of these initiatives through social media.

These statements illustrate that when social media and marketing strategies are well aligned, the firm's overall goals can also be achieved as Firm 14 indicated. However, misalignment has consequences because effective alignment is needed for firms to achieve a competitive advantage and improve organizational performance (Benbya and McKelvey, 2006; Dulipovici and Robey, 2013). With few exceptions, we find strategy alignment – a form of internal communication – lacking, which may be related to lack of TMT vision and/or support for social media.

Vertical coordination
Vertical coordination refers to top-down and bottom-up information sharing and discussions within the organization's hierarchy (Downs and Adrian, 2012). Vertical coordination helps by having a shared understanding between the upper echelons of the firm and employees who carry out the firm's strategies, which allows the firm and employees to reduce uncertainty about the firm's stance (Barrels *et al.*, 2010). The shared understanding can ultimately lead to successful strategy implementation (Downs and Adrian, 2012).
Firm 6 said:

> […] if we want to change certain things we'd bring it up in the weekly meetings where the president and CEO is involved, so it is an ongoing process in which they are involved with all aspects.

However, the lack of communication with upper management raised concerns for most firms, suggesting "a gap between senior leaders and the social working team" (Firm 4) and "no actual engagement from upper management (Firm 2)". Likewise, several firms involve senior management with active social media events in an effort to better engage the TMT. For example, Firm 11 says "we actually hang TVs with just Twitter feeds so [executives] can monitor on a minute-by-minute basis [during an event and be involved with responses]" and Firm 4 says:

> We go on road shows to try and educate [our senior leaders and middle management about social media] as much as possible, but there is definitely a gap between our most senior leaders and the middle management where people are actually executing.

Horizontal flexibility

Coordination between related functional areas or departments has been shown to positively impact new product development, individual employee performance and overall firm performance (Arndt *et al.*, 2011; Troy *et al.*, 2008). The speed of the social media environment illustrates the need for near real-time coordination. Because of the highly variable content and number of user posts, one traditional stand-alone department may not be appropriate to efficiently and effectively respond to all posts across all social media channels the company supports. This situation makes it imperative for coordination between functional areas or departments.

The nature of horizontal flexibility was discovered during the interview process and provided insight as to its dual dimensionality encompassing horizontal coordination (i.e. communication across functional areas or departments) and coordinated flexibility (i.e. employees outside the official social media function handling social media marketing tasks as needed). Conceiving of horizontal flexibility in this way describes how firms are managing to respond to the highly variable user demand.

Many firms described a formal method of communication that was a precursor for flexibility. Firm 11 describes formal meetings to address communication:

> We have weekly integration meetings where our communication leaders in the department go through what is happening that week and the next three weeks, any new issues, and recap on the past week.

However, there are difficulties in coordinating among various functional areas as well. Firm 4 noted:

> You can't own a channel, you have to partner [within the company]. And that's not a mindset shared [by everyone]. Everyone sees [social media] working for his or her department in a different way. How do you coax that feedback? How do you make sure everyone is represented? It's been the biggest challenge on our social media journey.

Most interestingly, many firms formally defined flexibility. For example, regardless of who and how many are in charge of the firm's social media strategy or execution, interviewees (Firm 4, 5, 6, 7, 11 and 12) stressed that firms need to maintain a certain amount of resources (i.e. trained and authorized staff) who are not a regular part of the daily social media execution team but who can responsibly handle the social media task to meet user expectations. Several firms supported this with comments like, "[…] we have a few other folks who, although it is not their defined responsibility, pop in and out especially on Facebook" (Firm 2) and "there's an additional four people who kind of come

in and out" (Firm 4) and "We have someone else in there as a backup, in case we are not able to post" (Firm 7). The firms' statements suggest that the delegation is contingent upon the situation and should be appropriately timely, but needs to be flexible among social media marketing personnel and others who can handle social media marketing tasks.

Following the interviewees' remarks on the need for communication between departments and the "flexible aspects" within the firm, we labeled this phenomenon as "horizontal flexibility" and define it as an interdepartmental coordination where temporary delegation of social media tasks is assumed by non-core social media marketing personnel to efficiently and effectively respond to user posts and queries within an appropriate time.

Subsequent research on flexible organizations suggested that when organizational units within the firm flex to complete the task in hand, the firm could efficiently integrate and recombine resources available for new market opportunities (Klein *et al.*, 2006; Wei *et al.*, 2014). We thus argue that given the importance of real-time monitoring and rapid response to social media users, horizontal flexibility becomes necessary to efficiently accomplish such functions. Implementing horizontal flexibility should, therefore, improve response time, response quality and user satisfaction.

Observing users
The most important function of social media is observing (reading and analyzing) users' engagement (posts, comments, reviews, referrals or recommendations) rapidly on social media (Heinonen, 2011). Close and careful observations help firms understand and effectively respond to improve the firm's relationship with users and carry out the firm's social media marketing strategies (Malthouse *et al.*, 2013; Trainor *et al.*, 2014).

All 14 firms noted that the most important task in their social media endeavor is improving user understanding so they can better engage their customers. Social media have become useful communication channels for activities from "simply watching [customers] to hearing and monitoring users' [pubic] conversations" (Firm 10). The following excerpts similarly demonstrate these observing aspects of social media for firms.

"We're listening to our members and let them know that we're listening to them" (Firm 1). Firm 2:

> Social media serves as a platform for us to hear from our end user directly […]. From a marketing strategy perspective, what it really brings to us is dialogue, we do something that we don't get through any of our other marketing channels.

Firm 14 also said, "We monitor every single brand-related mention". The remarks by two firms summarize their purpose of observing, "Social media is to understand what conversations are happening about [our] products" (Firm 8).

> One objective of our social media is listening [so we can] really understand what people are saying about our product and company and turning that into proactive change, maybe faster than we've been able to do in the past. (Firm 5)

Responding to users
Unprecedented real-time comments, opinions and sentiment are expressed by social media users, which can make it critical for firms to respond in a timely and appropriate

manner. Researchers have addressed that appropriate responsiveness to consumers has become a success factor (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Wei *et al.*, 2014), and almost all firms expressed a goal of timely responses to users regardless of the nature of the questions and comments. The response times varied by medium, with Twitter being the social medium perceived as requiring the quickest response, between 2 hours (Firm 2) to 12 hours (Firm 7) and 24 hours (Firm 6, 9, 10 and 13).

A few firms institutionalized their response methodology, which defined how quickly to respond, how to respond and who should respond. Firm 1 explains:

> We have a social response triage tiered into three levels. First, if it's a critical issue, we have an hour to hour-and-a-half response time. Second, if it's not a critical issue depending on the day of the week, for example if it is a Saturday, we'll get back to them on a Monday. Third, if members are posting just to say they like us […] on occasion, we may respond, "Thank you for being a member".

How to respond was brought to the fore when dealing with negative feedback. All firms agreed that offensive or profane postings would be removed. However, beyond offensive posting, all firms had a formal or informal policy to leave negative comments on their social media pages, but to attempt to address the concern first directly then "offline" (out of view of the social environment). Both Firm 2 and 4 had formal processes in place to deal with negative feedback that expand on the process described above. Firm 4 explains:

> In the event of a ranting customer, we [use] a triage map, [which first] handles offensive comments. Then, if the customer goes on with the rant, we thank them for their feedback, apologize for the inconvenience, and recently we have been giving them a link to provide us more feedback. We found that not only does that make them feel better, it also takes additional negative conversations off our page.

Facilitating user-to-user engagement

As the interviews progressed, a new activity, user-to-user (U2U) engagement, emerged. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of facilitating U2U engagement for their social media marketing strategies (Firm 2, 4, 5, 6, 13 and 14). Although these firms stated they want to see more engagement among users who talk about the firm's offerings, only Firm 13 implements specific strategies to facilitate U2U engagement. While most of the firms have merely considered U2U to be a desirable goal, Firm 13 has had great success in U2U engagement by offering a members-only forum where many members actively exchange ideas and get advice on their medical conditions. The success may be attributed to the medical topics and the guaranteed privacy of the forum.

The subsequent review of engagement reveals the literature has mainly focused on engagement between consumers and firms (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). Given social media is the place where users freely interact and communicate with each other about the firm and its offerings (i.e. brands and products or services), understanding and facilitating U2U engagement can benefit the firms by creating a rich, more sustainable consumer environment around the firm's brand. Research suggests that engagement among social media users contributes to accomplishing the goals of firms' social media marketing strategies (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005). Facilitating U2U engagement could provide an opportunity for firms to observe and learn from their customers, improving strategy for the firms' offerings and services. For researchers, investigation of activities driving U2U

engagement and the impact of U2U engagement on the firm's objectives can be the "holy grail" in social media research (Mollen and Wilson, 2010).

Monitoring competitors' social media
The aspect of monitoring competitors' social media was also discovered as interviews progressed. The review of the marketing literature suggests that firms are theoretically monitoring competitors to understand what competitors are doing, which enables the firm to gain in-depth knowledge about the market and help it strategize its marketing efforts (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990). Monitoring competitors thus would lead to better understanding of competitors' weaknesses allowing for more competitive products, improving positioning and thus improving the firm's performance (Voss and Voss, 2000). It could be possible that monitoring competitors' social media would provide opportunities to learn from competitors' good strategies and mistakes so the firm could address unmet needs of the market.

Our research supports this theory in that firms indicated that they monitor competitors' social media to get "competitive intelligence" (Firm 8) and provide "opportunities" (Firm 4) by allowing them to "see what content is resonating with the competitors audiences, and take learning from that" (Firm 7). Similarly, monitoring competitors' social media platforms would allow firms to implement "a similar strategy" used by competitors (Firm 14).

Firm 13 explained a specific way of monitoring a competitor's social media:

We actually track [competitors'] social media and compare it with ours, not in-depth, but how many followers they have in common through weekly analytical data that we can see. For example, Company A has huge spike on YouTube; so what is going on? Then we will investigate as to why […]. We do compare ourselves with other organizations throughout the country in regard to social media connection.

Social media marketing objectives
Although industries are different, all participant firms try to achieve multiple and generally similar social media marketing objectives, though few had established meaningful metrics for which they were held accountable. As social media platforms are channels through which both firms and their existing and potential customers can engage in dialogue, all the firms want to hear from their customers and communicate with them. Firms want social communities to share ideas and help the firm and customers to jointly finding solutions to problems (Firm 12). Firms also want to educate their customers about what they can offer (Firm 6, 7 and 13) and provide customers service and support (Firm 14). Brand-related objectives such as brand exposure, awareness, recognition and engagement were also commonly mentioned objectives (Firm 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 12). Building relationships with their customers was another main objective (Firm 1, 4, 9 and 12).

While the list of objectives resonate with marketing strategy and define conceptual objectives for the social media departments, only one firm had objectives beyond merely increasing the number participating members or frequency of participation. Only Firm 10 (a small retail firm) had a measurable financial objective, increasing sales, as their main social media objective. This pattern of "no emphasis" on meaningful strategic or financial outcomes such as sales levels, revenue-per-customer or profit-per-customer may indicate:

[…] payoffs from social media are not likely to have a first-order impact on company sales and profits […]. Instead, the impact of social media is likely to have first-order effects in non-purchase behaviors, such as people sharing opinions about companies and brands (Moorman, 2013).

Even then, we see little or no evidence of firms defining social media metrics that improve outcomes such as brand awareness, brand loyalty, or positive WOM. A lack of these outcome metrics suggests that the TMT does not look at social media as a strategic tool.

Discussion

Findings from the interviews present organizational processes and activities where firms attempt to efficiently and effectively achieve their social media marketing objectives. The activities identified in extant literature (not bold in Figure 1) provided a basic framework for the current research. Through the interview process, we found that some of the activities were well adopted by firms to embrace social media, whereas others were not well implemented. We also had new activities emerge (bold in Figure 1), which were previously not identified in new technology adoption literature. Accounting for extant and new activities, we developed a framework to better represent the relationship of activities to organizational processes. Figure 1 shows the activities as categorized into the four organizational processes. The four processes will help social media marketing researchers and managers in their efforts to investigate and achieve social media marketing objectives.

Initiation

Initiation is top management's commitment to organizational-wide acceptance and utilization of social media. We believe that to capitalize on social media, top management must advocate social media through a long-term strategic vision, support social media with sufficient resources and link social media into the overall marketing strategy. These actions can legitimize the adoption of organization-wide acceptance and utilization of social media and create a facilitative environment within the firm (Garrett and Neubaum, 2013).

Specifically, in this stage, top management should inspire employees through their vision and support for the adoption of social media. Clear vision and overt support will expedite organization-wide acceptance and use of social media. However, given the nascent nature of and lack of knowledge about the use of social media technologies, it will take time to get the full acceptance and utilization of social media within the firm and, moreover, to achieve visible outcomes from social media. Therefore, top management should set clear and measureable expectations of desired outcomes that increase over time and are designed to align the firm's social media marketing objectives with the firm's marketing objectives.

Figure 1.
Organizational process and activity framework
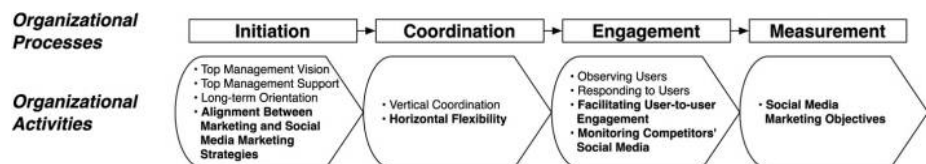
Coordination
The second process is coordination, which we define as communication and cooperation between social media personnel and other functional areas for effective and efficient use of social media. One person, team or department may not be enough to adequately track and respond to all user posts, suggesting that social media personnel should cooperate with others from outside the social media function. When inter-functional areas cooperate with each other, the resources are effectively utilized to create superior value for target customers, leading to business success (Krohmer *et al.*, 2002).

Therefore, communications and sharing information between managers who actually execute and manage social media marketing strategies and those who engage in other customer contact (e.g., customer service) could heighten the level of understanding between the managers, helping to ease the implementation of the strategies. For this purpose, firms can develop specific guidelines like the "Triage Map" (Firm 4) or a checklist (Firm 2) that operationally defines how the firm's functional areas interact to achieve social media marketing strategies. Given the importance of timely response to social media users, firms can also develop a contingency plan that explains who, other than designated social media marketing personnel, can appropriately monitor and respond to users when needed. Although the delegation of the tasks can be temporary, a plan needs to be in place for a better leverage of the firm's available resources to meet consumers' needs.

Engagement
Engagement is the strategic involvement of the firm in interacting with users and in observing competitors' social media. In this process, firms attempt to proactively seek a response or reactively respond to their social media users. The speedy dissemination of information on social media makes it critical for firms to constantly monitor users and promptly react to them. This way, firms can rapidly assist users with problems and prevent possible negative ripple effects to other users, which helps build better relationships with users. While firms also seek to have users engage with other users, importantly, the emphasis is currently on constant observations of users' posts and timely response to their questions, especially to negative comments, which is somewhat reactionary. To achieve the desired service levels, some firms have implemented formal internal procedures for engagement that are enhanced by horizontal flexibility based on the type of user comment or need. Firms seeking to improve service levels, or maintain service levels while growing their user base, should consider formal horizontal flexibility.

Social media also allows firms to monitor their competitors' social media platforms or vice versa. This monitoring provides accumulation of knowledge and information about competitors' new product launch, responses to user complaints and customer service-related issues (Rinaldo *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, strategic monitoring of competitors' social media can be an efficient information source regarding certain facets of the marketing strategy.

Measurement
The final stage is measurement in which firms evaluate the success of their social media marketing strategies. Firms establish their social media marketing objectives and try to measure progress in achieving them. The findings suggest that firms tend to avoid measuring financial objectives and other "second order" non-financial measures. Instead, the

practice currently is to measure second-order objectives related to communication (e.g. number of comments or response timeliness) and building relationship with users (e.g. number of followers or likes) primarily because of the difficulty of measuring the direct impact of social media on financial objectives (Kumar and Mirchandani, 2012; Moorman, 2013). Firms thus tend to measure "the number of posts, tweets, and followers" (Firm 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 14). Although gaining more posts, for example, may not be the explicit business objective, these measures may, or may not, be valid proxies for marketing objectives that represent more difficult to measure but productive outcomes, such as increasing positive eWOM. Beyond these measures, firms do not appear to have explicit and measurable goals that are tied to corporate marketing objectives. On one hand, this is explained due to the new or experimental nature of social media within many firms. However, not having these accountable and strategic measures undermines the marketing department's ability to justify continuing or increasing investment in social media marketing and may frustrate TMT members, reducing support for social media.

To measure the objectives, firms (6, 7, 11, 13 and 14) use various analytical tools. Advancing the use of analytical tools could allow improved user tracking by providing insights into their preferences, market trends, brand awareness, customer buying behavior and spending patterns. Therefore, analytical tools relevant to each firm need to be in place to objectively measure the extent of the achievement of social media marketing objectives.

Future research
Besides the research suggestions mentioned in the previous sections, we suggest a number of other future research avenues. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, only one or two firms in each industry were included in the sample. It may be possible that certain industry firms (e.g. retailers) require greater engagement with customers, or may have customers more willing to engage, than that in other industries. Similarly, variation in activities such as U2U could be based on firm size (the number of employees and sales volume) or customer type (B2B or B2C). Increasing the sample size and performing an empirical analysis of this question may generate additional meaningful findings. Future research thus needs enough number of firms by industry, size and customer type to provide more generalizable results.

Several activities such as alignment between marketing and social media marketing strategies, horizontal flexibility, monitoring competitors' social media activities and U2U engagement emerged during the interview process. The existing social media research has not addressed the role or impact of these activities on firms' social media marketing strategies. Thus, the empirical testing of the relationship between the role or impact of these activities on firms' social marketing strategies will be an interesting future research avenue.

Finally, empirical testing of antecedents and consequences of TMT vision, support and social media second-order outcomes could provide important insights to the future of social media as a marketing strategy.

Conclusions
The current research is meaningful in that it approaches social media from the organizational process perspective, which has received little attention in the social media literature. Findings suggest that, although some organizational activities are important for

firms to embrace social media, many firms did not adopt and implement them internally, leading us to the view that social media is the "step-child" of corporate functions, not receiving the resources or attention that other, more traditional functions would receive.

Additionally, though a goal of social media is to have effective *external* communication with current and potential customers, we found scant evidence that firms' *internal* communications were effective at supporting such external communication. Specifically, we found few firms methodologically approaching these key activities related to effective internal communications:

- alignment between marketing and social media marketing strategies;
- vertical coordination;
- horizontal flexibility; and
- responding to users.

It is ironic that those charged with effective external communications have not exhibited effective internal communications.

Finally, linkage between social media objectives and the firms' marketing objectives are often weak and rarely supported by established and measured objectives. We would expect to see clear social media objectives that provide first- or second-order outcomes related to the firms' marketing objectives, along with methods to measure these goals and activities that provide accountability and corrective actions.

New activities that emerged from the current research provide additional understanding of internal organizational processes and activities valuable for firms to be successful in the social media era. The newly developed framework (Figure 1) combines and categorizes existing and new activities into efficient and effective organizational processes that can help achieve a firm's social media marketing strategies. Although the suggested processes and activities are not exhaustive, the research on the processes and activities in the social media context points the way for additional research on organizational processes that could impact the achievement of social media marketing strategies. Findings from this research also provide implications for marketing practitioners in their pursuit of effective and efficient internal organization of communication and improved utilization of social media to achieve their firm's social media marketing objectives.

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