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E-Marketing orientation and social media implementation in B2B marketing

Introduction

The potential benefits and opportunities that can be obtained from social media make successful social media implementation essential to effective marketing strategy (Barnes, 2010). Specific benefits to B2B (Business to Business) organisations have been identified in a recent study which found that social media addressed lead generation, which is a significant issue for B2B marketers (Schulze, 2013). Social media also has the capability to reinforce brand images over time in different contexts to B2B purchase decision-making targets (Rindell and Strandvik, 2010).

The most commonly cited B2B applications of social media include: posting content on a company blog, building relationships with bloggers, community moderators and social influencers and uploading content to social sharing sites such as YouTube, Flickr, and SlideShare (Schulze, 2013). Nevertheless, despite the apparent use of social media by B2B marketers, the academic literature reports that B2B marketers are lagging behind Business to Consumer (B2C) marketers in both use and the level of sophistication of social media (Adiele, 2011, Bruhn *et al.*, 2014, Simmons *et al.*, 2010). These findings have been supported in a recent B2B study on social media. Marx (2013) summarised the findings by saying: "Amazingly, many B2B marketers still don't get social media". Director of the study, Christine Moorman, attributes this to B2B marketers having an inappropriate tactical perspective regarding social media, noting that, "the biggest challenge is that many (B2B) companies see social media as a cute promotional activity when it can be a strategic marketing activity" (Marx, 2013). Despite the fact that social media presents a significant opportunity for B2B organisations, the quality of implementation throughout the sector itself also varies substantially. According to Brian Kardon, CMO at Lattice Engines, "social media is becoming a real competitive advantage for the (B2B) companies that do it well; the gap is widening between the companies that have been organizing around social media and those that have not" (Marx, 2013).

The lack of implementation guidelines for B2B managers suggests that an organisational orientation framework should be considered. An appropriate organisational orientation model is likely to help B2B managers to bridge the gap between B2B and B2C social media regarding usage and sophistication. Unlike traditional market orientation models (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990, Narver and Slater, 1990, Callaghan *et al.*, 1995), the electronic marketing orientation (EMO) has been specifically developed to address electronic and digital marketing and hence is appropriate for the implementation of social media in B2B marketing.

The EMO model comprises four components being: Philosophical, Initiation, Implementation, and Adaptation. The EMO model addresses social media implementation with each of these components. A further benefit of the EMO, in comparison with more generic market orientations, is that it was developed in the B2B context and hence has the ability to evaluate and guide the resourcing of the e-marketing processes (Anche *et al.*, 2014).

The aim of this paper is to provide direction for future empirical research that would examine the utility of the EMO model in addressing current B2B social media implementation challenges. By focusing on B2B marketing this paper recognises the differences that were

identified in literature between B2B and B2C marketing (Dibb and Simkin, 1993). Differences in the use of social media for marketing communications between the two sectors were also identified by practitioner research. These include: varying levels of educational media (hubspot, 2014), different emphasis on social media platforms such as Facebook and different emphasis on other platforms such as LinkedIn, and SlideShare relative to Facebook (Miller, 2012a).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows:

- The implications of B2B marketing characteristics on social media implementation
- The characteristics of social media
- Electronic marketing orientation
- Research propositions
- Managerial implications and summary

Implications of B2B marketing characteristics on the implementation of social media

The differences between B2C and B2B marketing in terms of buyer behaviour and target marketing (identified by academic and practitioner literature) result in differences in traditional as well as digital marketing communications. For example, while B2B companies place a higher value on educational formats such as blogging and webinars, consumer businesses are slightly more willing to experiment with advanced digital formats like interactive content and online tools, Infographics are also preferred (hubspot, 2014). The role of social media platforms in B2C and B2B also varies. While the number of companies that have acquired customers from Facebook in B2C was found to be 77%, the rate is only at 43% for B2B companies (Miller, 2012a). Reasons for these differences include the following:

Number of decision-makers and/or purchase influences

The larger number of decision-makers/influencers in B2B means that B2B marketers must consider different media and different messages for each person involved (Jussila *et al.*, 2014). A Forrester Research Study (2013) revealed that nearly two-thirds of B2B marketers identified engaging key decision-makers as their top challenge (Zachary *et al.*, 2013). However, engaging more decision-makers/influences increases the level of complexity in marketing communications. Accurately measuring brand awareness and preference is also more difficult in B2B contexts. The greater number of decision-makers/influencers also necessitates a greater number of different communication channels and different messages.

Slower decision-making cycle

The slower decision-making cycle for B2B purchasing means that customer progress through the purchase funnel must be recorded for each decision-maker in order to match resources with potential purchases (Garber and Dotson, 2002). This makes the collection of up-to-date accurate pre-purchase data more cumbersome as well as increases the potential for error. Unfortunately, this is becoming a greater problem for B2B marketers. A recent B2B study by SiriusDecisions (2014) revealed that the length of the average sales cycle has increased by

22% over the past five years due to the participation of a greater number of decision-makers in the B2B buying process (Morrison, 2014).

High-value exchange

B2B purchases are usually of greater value than B2C purchases (Garber Jr and Dotson, 2002). This creates a situation where consumer risk perceptions are likely to be heightened, compared to the B2C context. B2B marketers can use social media to ameliorate risk perceptions and reassure customers by providing rational content. Fortunately, diverse social media has the capacity to communicate a large amount of customised factual information that is based on the risk profile of individual decision-makers. The CFO of a B2B company, for example, may be more risk averse than the CMO. This creates a situation that calls for different messages for each different decision-maker. Testimonials of successful sales and possibly videos by internal product experts or satisfied customers could be located on social media platforms such as LinkedIn or Facebook.

More direct and intense customer relationships

B2B purchasing is more likely to involve more intense direct relationships and richness of pre-purchase information (Jussila *et al.*, 2014). This relationship provides more opportunities to collect information than exists in B2C. Social media has the potential to perform some of the functions previously carried out by salespeople, who usually provide individualised information based on different customer contexts. Salespersons are able to take a role that addresses the emotional needs of different decision-makers where social media can be used to communicate and satisfy rational information requirements. Effective use of social media requires coordination between the sales department and the operations and marketing departments, because these complementary roles must be clearly understood in order to avoid duplication. Sales staff can be relieved of tasks that are best suited to self-service technology and online communities such as Dell IdeaStorm, where people seeking information are served by both customer advocates and internal technical experts.

More functional rational or utilitarian decision-making criteria

Buyer decision criteria differ between B2C and B2B. For example, B2B consumers are less hedonistic and less pleasure driven than B2C consumers. Message and media credibility for promotional message is more important in B2B contexts (Dibb and Simkin, 1993). B2B marketers must ensure that social media messages for consumer products, which often are informal, casual and humorous, do not send a signal that the company is not technically competent. The tone as well as content of messages must ensure that the company does not create the impression that it is frivolous. Achieving a balance between humour or entertainment value to engage, without affecting the functional positioning of a B2B organisation's marketing requires careful management.

Products are more complex

B2B products or services are often more complex than consumer products and services. Greater product complexity means that B2B purchasers tend to rely more information (Jussila *et al.*, 2014). This imposes greater demands on B2B marketers to communicate greater amounts of logical information. The challenge for B2B marketers, in terms of social media, is to match the social media platform (for example, SlideShare LinkedIn blogs etc.) and content

with the decision-maker (for example, CIO, CMO or CFO). This must then be timed and coordinated with the sales funnel stage allowing for multiple decision-makers to access different information depending on their buyer readiness stage and receptivity to information types.

Customers are more knowledgeable

In general, B2B purchasers are more knowledgeable than B2C purchasers. To some degree this is due to the higher level of risk involved in a high-value purchases (Jerman and Završnik, 2012), but it could also be due to the more complex nature of the product or service. Social media enables customer access to even greater knowledge by searching online communities, blogs, user forums, etc. Further, B2B purchasers are more likely to become aware of negative word-of-mouth from dissatisfied customers. The challenge for B2B marketers is to represent their products authentically while managing consumer-generated content and opinion-sharing.

Differences in B2B marketing communication promotional tools and messages

B2B purchasers rely on personal sales relatively more than advertising as a source of product information (Urban *et al.*, 1993). The complexity of products, the high-value exchange and the more intense relationship demand a richer and more personalised communication and media strategy. In terms of social media, B2B marketers are likely to use webinars, blogs and platform such as LinkedIn rather than Pinterest and Instagram. Content marketing is an approach taken by B2B marketers in order to deal with the rational needs of multiple decision-makers involved in B2B purchasing.

Andzulis *et al.* (2012) identified a gap in the extant research in explaining how social media should be used in B2B when compared to B2C. The differences between B2B and B2C mentioned above highlight the need to explore B2B social media implementation separately from B2C marketing.

Characteristics of social media

Social media 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). Social media platforms include social networking tools with the most popular being Facebook and Twitter, professional networking sites such as LinkedIn, media sharing sites such as YouTube and Instagram, commerce communities such as Amazon, discussion forums and blogs (Agarwal and Yiliyasi, 2010). The benefits of social media include facilitating strategy, cost reduction, information collection, database enhancement, service delivery (Barnes, 2010) and expanded geographic reach (Wright *et al.*, 2010). These benefits are facilitated by the following characteristics:

Interactivity and Individualisation

Social media facilitates the creation of content that can be shared internally (employees-to-employees), externally (consumers-to-consumers or other external stakeholders) and, across organisational boundaries (consumers-to-organisation). This, however, presents an implementation challenge to organisations with traditional hierarchies and centralised control structure (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Integration of communication with distribution channels

Social media enables a close link and ease of customer movement between alternate digital channels such as the company website and Facebook. The digital environment allows consumers to move between information search channels such as a search engine and the website where purchases can be made with greater ease. In terms of implementation however, integrating consumer processes has organisational ramifications. This is because linking different functions and processes changes both the roles of and relationships between functional areas such as marketing, advertising, sales, and IT. As a result, some organisations will need to change their structure while others will manage increasing levels of inter-functional complexity as customer inter-facing processes are realigned (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

Immediacy

Social media facilitates customer-response immediacy in two ways. Firstly, social media monitoring enables real-time insight into consumer trends and into the effectiveness of current marketing efforts, facilitating a 'test and learn' capability to refine and develop more effective marketing initiatives. Secondly, immediacy facilitates a rapid dissemination of consumer opinions through electronic word-of-mouth (Mitic and Kapoulas, 2012). This can speed up sales due to viral behaviour and information transfer. Immediacy also means that consumers expect a rapid response. Organisations can respond in a multiplicity of ways, including self-service technologies or customer advocates within online communities. An example of the latter is Dell's IdeaStorm for B2B service enquiries where one customer is an evangelist or an advocate and satisfies the enquiry being made by other customers. Consumer-to-consumer advice facilitates low-cost, fast response solutions for B2B companies.

Information collection

In addition to immediacy, social media platforms facilitate the collation of new types of information (Wright *et al.*, 2010, Mayeh *et al.*, 2012, Bekkers *et al.*, 2013, Brooks *et al.*, 2014). Online communities such as Dell IdeaStorm enable the capturing of 'naturalistic' information expressed in consumers' own words and hence, allow further insight to information collected through overt and formal traditional market research. Organic information can be valuable in guiding product innovation and service improvements.

The previous section of this article demonstrates that in order for B2B marketers to leverage the beneficial characteristics of social media they must address organisational issues that can hinder social media implementation. These issues can be considered cultural or structural. The electronic marketing orientation model (EMO) can address the cultural, structural and resourcing issues relevant to digital marketing. The next section will explain the four components of the EMO, which will later become the basis for research propositions to address the needs of B2B marketers using social media.

Electronic marketing orientation

EMO is a more recently proposed organizational orientation (Shaltoni and West, 2010). EMO differs from Market Orientation (Narver and Slater, 1990, Kohli and Jaworski, 1990) due to its more specific digital technology focus and hence is appropriate for social media

implementation. The rapid development of digital marketing and the opportunity it represents for B2B marketers have provided the impetus for a model such as EMO (Fazlzadeh and Bahram Nezhad, 2010, in Shaltoni and West, 2010). The model comprises four components (Philosophical, Initiation, Implementation and Adoption). The components of the EMO are discussed further in the research propositions section and are aligned with social media implementation activities.

The link between EMO and social media implementation challenges is demonstrated in Figure 1 (below). As shown in Figure 1, the model addresses customer's digital needs, technology resourcing, technological skills, and the ability of employees to learn about customer facing social media technologies through internal adoption of technology. Research propositions, derived from the model, are provided below and detail how each of the four components address particular issues relevant to the B2B implementation of social media.

-INSERT FIGURE 1-

Research propositions

Drawing on existing B2B marketing, social media and organisational orientation literature, this section develops research propositions that address the conceptual model detailed above in terms of providing future research directions for each of the four components of the EMO model. The model by way of its four components has a specific orientation to digital marketing and has been associated with effective strategy implementation (Smart and Conant, 2011) and enhanced performance (Tajeddini, 2010). This section demonstrates how each of the four components of EMO addresses different implementation issues encountered in implementing social media and more specifically the unique issues facing B2B marketers.

Philosophical Component

The Philosophical Component refers to the organizational culture and internal belief that marketing is fundamental for organization success. This is similar to the Customer Orientation component of the Market Orientation model (Narver and Slater, 1990). Organisational culture is important to the successful implementation of social media since a lack of commitment across an organization underlies many social media implementation challenges (Denning, 2010). By engendering commitment to social media activities, the EMO can provide an optimal organizational environment for successful social media implementation. It does this by providing a consumer-focused approach which enhances appreciation to the importance of understanding and responding to customers.

The Philosophical Component of the EMO model can help address one of the challenges that research identified as hindering B2B marketing, i.e., the perception that social media is not strategic. According to Christine Moorman Director of the CMO B2B Survey, "The biggest challenge is that many companies see social media as a cute promotional activity when it can be a strategic marketing activity" (Marx, 2013). Joe Chernov, VP of Marketing at Kinvey, also suggested that "A big part of the problem is that most B2B companies don't understand that social media requires both a technology and a business approach" (Marx, 2013). A key finding of the CMO study (2013), suggested that the Philosophical Component can facilitate an internal culture that perceives social media as part of the business approach rather than mere technology (Marx, 2013).

The Philosophical Component places an emphasis on the culture and internal belief that digital marketing, including social media, is essential for customer satisfaction and organisational success. The literature proposes that a flexible culture is required to implement social media (Denning, 2010). This suggests that the Philosophical Component of the EMO is capable of addressing specific B2B social media implementation issues. In response, we suggest the following research proposition:

P1: The greater the organisation's Philosophical Component of EMO, the more likely the organisation will be successful with the following social media implementation issues and challenges:

- Dealing with the increasing challenge of customer privacy concerns by building trust and credibility as well as developing appropriate rewards for customers who consent to provide valuable information that enhances individual or aggregate marketing actions.
- Achieving a cohesive technologically oriented customer driven culture. This will facilitate cooperation and coordination between the different departments that deliver social media, for example, operations, PR, sales, service and marketing.
- Achieving role clarity for alternate social media platforms through understanding customers' media usage and channel needs of different decision-makers involved in B2B decision-making (CIO, CMO, CFO, etc.).
- Managing the balance between proactive and reactive content. Being too aggressive alienates B2B customers as they already receive large volumes of marketing messages. Coordination between different social media platforms is required in terms of timing of contacts and messages/offers so as not to overwhelm customers.
- Overcoming B2B executive information overload by developing appropriate B2B social media tools such as mobile and desktop filtering apps and information seeking robots. These will help executives acquire and sort through the increasing amounts of data that B2B executives receive.

The Philosophical Component is a general aspect of this model that refers to an organisational mind-set. The remaining three components are more specific, in that they refer to actions or processes. The value of the Philosophical component is in its impact on inter-functional coordination and information collection and dissemination, which are the main characteristics of the Initiation Component.

Initiation Component

The Initiation Component refers to actions taken, rather than to the attitudes or mind-set underlying them. These actions support information gathering and dissemination as well as the coordination of functional areas. A successful social media implementation includes information flows from customers to the organisation as well as between functional areas. This is very similar to the information dissemination and inter functional coordination components of the Market Orientation (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990).

The information gathering aspect of the Initiation Component would be most useful in addressing a number of problems faced by B2B marketers in implementing social media. A Forrester Research study (2013) highlighted the importance of high quality appropriate information to guide targeting of multiple B2B decision-makers. - A study by SiriusDecisions (2014) also found that many B2B marketers are struggling to use social media information collection and dissemination technologies, with only 15% being comfortable that they are using it appropriately. According to a Forrester research study (2013), 7% of B2B marketers said they either close (i.e. result in sales) fewer than 4% of all marketing-generated leads, or they don't even know this metric (Zachary *et al.*, 2013). This lack of understanding of social media information hinders the ability to implement social media effectively. Inability to generate quality marketing leads results in inefficiency and reduces the intentions of B2B marketers to: 1) use social media, and 2) use it effectively. An industry study by B2B Technology Marketing Community provides some support, commenting that, "The biggest challenge B2B marketers face in regards to lead generation is generating high-quality leads (61%)" (Schulze, 2013).

Another aspect of the Initiation Component is coordination, which is proving to be a major challenge to successful social media implementation. Effective use of social media may require more complex internal departmental links, new lines of communication as well as the allocation of responsibilities between organizational departments (Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011). Evidence of the lack of coordination between different departments and functional areas was highlighted in the recent CMO study (2013) which noted that, "While B2B social media spending increased 9.6% last year, the majority of B2B companies failed to integrate social media into their business practices" (Marx, 2013). Brian Kardon CMO Lattice Engines offered further insight into coordination issues, commenting that, "We're in the 'silo' stage" where most social media is generally segregated from the rest of the organization" (Marx, 2013). Cross-functional teams that allow different functional areas to gain greater insight through closer working arrangements may provide another solution. Coordination is also an implementation problem due to the need to outsource tasks to a large number of specialists in different aspects of social media and its various platforms, for example, search engine specialists, Twitter specialists and Facebook specialists. The main B2B social media activities outsourced include: creative graphic design, public relations, and search engine optimisation (Schulze, 2013). In contrast, only 25% of B2B marketers do not outsource any digital marketing.

The preceding findings suggest that the Initiation Component of the EMO would address B2B social media implementation issues in terms of information and coordination. We therefore provide the following research proposition:

P2: The greater the organisation's Initiation Component of EMO, the more likely the organisation will be successful with the following social media implementation issues and challenges:

- Dealing with the increasing diversity of devices, multiple customer touch-points and social media platforms. As these devices and touch-points are constantly evolving and proliferating relative to traditional media, the need for role clarity and effective coordination between different departments and functions (for example sales, service, public relations, marketing, accounts, operations and so on) is required.

- The information aspect of this component can help achieve a 360° view of the customer journey with information being shared between different channel touch-points. Further each touch-point can collect unique information that can be combined and then be further shared centrally or to diverse touch-points. This information can be used in order to develop a seamless customer journey from information search to purchase to post purchase. The two characteristics of the Initiation component are strongly related. Cross-functional coordination can be facilitated by the appropriate collection and dissemination of social media monitoring data and the sharing of information collected from customers between functional areas and touch-points.
- Information collection and dissemination of social media data can identify potential external advocates and influencers. Advocates/influencers can be leveraged for positive word-of-mouth as well as facilitate information collected on different media platforms and communities used by different B2B decision-makers. i.e. CMO, CIO, CFO etc.).
- In B2B marketing credibility of functional rational messages is important and information collection and generation with appropriate consumer contact through multiple touch-points can ensure these functional messages are provided directly or through customer advocates.

The rapid evolution of internal marketing technologies such as social media monitoring and customer analytics require different skills than those required for traditional marketing. In this way the Implementation Component that follows addresses co-ordination and information dissemination aspects of this component.

Implementation component

The Implementation Component is similar to the Initiation Component in that that it links many internal implementation activities required to implement social media. (Shaltoni and West, 2010). The Implementation Component refers to resourcing, skills, and technology capabilities for e-marketing. This requires an investment in appropriate skills and technological expertise in order to successfully engage with the rapidly evolving digital marketing environment. The rapidly changing digital marketing environment generates an ongoing need to update strategy and tactics as new social media platforms emerge and the characteristics of traditional platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter change, for example, the reduction in organic posts (free reach) and the facility to incorporate more video posts in Twitter and LinkedIn. Joe Chernov, VP of Marketing at Kinvey stated that: “A big part of the [social media implementation] problem is that most B2B companies don’t understand that social media requires both a technology and a business approach” (Marx, 2013). Unfortunately, B2B marketers are also slow to adopt marketing automation software, which is rapidly evolving and enables both insights and rapid deployment of marketing initiatives. One study showed that only 42% of B2B marketers use marketing automation (Ivey, 2014). These findings suggest that the Implementation Component of the EMO can address particular B2B social media implementation issues. As a result we provide the following research proposition:

P3: The greater the organization’s Implementation Component of EMO, the more likely the organisation will be successful with the following social media implementation issues and challenges:

- Acquire appropriate cutting-edge technologies such as social media monitoring and marketing analytics. These technologies facilitate the collection and dissemination of relevant information to various departments and functional areas to ensure appropriate customer sales and service interactions. These technologies also help target specific media and messages to the different B2B purchase decision-makers.
- Acquiring technologies that facilitate the measurement of social marketing initiatives in real time. This allows experimentation and rapid testing and learning of alternate marketing initiatives. Doing this would require specific digital technology resources and specific digital technology skills.
- Obtaining and/or developing skills in customer analytics where employees need a bimodal ability to understand statistical patterns within the data as well as to understand the relevance of these findings for commercial and entrepreneurial initiatives. Often employees are commercially oriented but struggle with data analysis or vice versa.
- Obtaining and/or developing skills in digital content creation. Each B2B decision-maker requires different content, based on the characteristics of different social media platforms (for example, YouTube versus LinkedIn) and content delivery mechanisms (mobile and desktop). Skills in infographic development, digital storytelling, content marketing, customer channel and employee video production and management of online communities are relevant for B2B social media implementation. Online communities, such as Dell IdeaStorm, are particularly important for B2B since they facilitate information rich content and word-of-mouth/references that are highly valued by B2B businesses. The need for relevant factual information in B2B messages and credible corporate positioning must be considered when using humorous or casual message execution techniques to gain attention. It is important to maintain corporate credibility for these high-risk purchases and so the right level of trivial or humorous content must be carefully controlled.

In the same way that the Initiation and Implementation components of EMO are practical manifestations of a culture or mind-set, the fourth component, the Adoption Component, engages with the actual use of e-marketing and is specifically digital in that it addresses the resourcing, skills and technological capabilities necessary for e-marketing.

Adoption component

The Adoption Component refers to the use of e-marketing by employees in the normal course of carrying out day-to-day business. The component reflects the recognition that employees can learn about appropriate and effective use of social media tools internally and utilise this knowledge when interacting and/or designing social media channels or content for customers. Practitioner literature provides an example of how IBM uses internal social media platforms for brainstorming, culture change and sharing best practice between departments and countries. In 2012, Jeff Schick, IBM's Vice President of Social Software made the following comments, "I see IBM as a social business... We've broken down the barriers of reaching out to the people within the organization — not to mention partners and clients as well" (Kiron, 2012). This suggests that the Adoption Component of the EMO would facilitate effective implementation of social media. As a result we provide the following research proposition:

P4: The greater the organisation's Adoption Component of EMO, the more likely the organisation will be successful with the following social media implementation issues and challenges:

- Understand the characteristics of building and managing successful online communities, based on the company's own internal experience of usage. Through internal usage B2B marketers can better understand the motives that different community members have for participating in online communities and appropriate communication etiquette.
- Understanding how to repurpose content to reduce costs while developing presence in a wide range of social media platforms and to a wide range of B2B decision-makers. Nevertheless some channels may require content of a different nature so the reuse of information may require adaptation. E.g. greater use of infographics in LinkedIn. Relevant content is essential across the board since B2B purchasing may involve more than one decision-maker and hence different media (Jussila *et al.*, 2014).
- Appreciating first-hand the need to avoid irrelevant or verbose content as social media requires concise communication and executives are already facing information overload. It is important to understand best practice in the development of infographics and videos to provide rational information to B2B decision-makers.
- Appreciating the importance of personalising the brand as a means of obtaining engagement. This can be addressed through both message tone and media type e.g., videos for different types of customers and employees from different functional areas, e.g., sales vs service. One means of doing this would be through narrative digital story telling. This method has the ability to engage, personalise and differentiate a brand.
- The ability to identify and appreciate the role of passionate advocates who facilitate viral reach, message credibility and positive word-of-mouth.
- Leverage social media platforms as a means of improving service quality and communication credibility. This can be done through online communities as well as continually monitoring social media platforms such as Twitter. This allows the organisation to deal with customer issues before they escalate. Further, consumer issues are sometimes resolved by other consumers in online communities.

In summary, the research propositions address internal organisational characteristics, such as structure, culture and employee task. All of these are necessary for the successful implementation of social media strategy and to provide both strategic and operational guidance to employees thereby facilitating appropriate choices with respect to platforms and message execution. The research propositions address the major challenges confronting B2B social media marketers.

Conclusions and managerial implications

This paper makes an innovative and substantive contribution to the literature as it is the first paper to highlight that EMO is a relevant conceptual model for developing research propositions and guidelines for future researchers in the specific context of B2B social media implementation. Both industry and practitioner literature indicate that B2B marketers lag

behind B2C marketers in using the opportunities offered by social media. This conceptual contribution is based on industry and practitioner literature in the following areas: B2B marketing, social media and organisational orientations. Both tactical and strategic challenges are shown to be aligned with the four components of the EMO model; namely Philosophical, Initiation, Implementation, and Adoption.

This exploratory paper also makes a substantive contribution to B2B marketing practice by identifying actions that managers can undertake to deal with major issues that are reported by practitioners. The research propositions provide managers with details regarding a number of cultural, structural and job design changes required. They also highlight how these need to be used to make successful choices in terms of appropriate social media platforms and message execution.

The Philosophical Component of the model addresses a number of problems faced by managers given its inherent characteristics of customer focused culture in addition to the belief that digital marketing is important for the company and its customers. This requires that managers ensure they remain up-to-date with rapidly evolving changes in the social media platforms. For example, recent changes in Facebook have resulted in less organic (i.e., free reach) to subscribers as well as the increasing use of video on Twitter and LinkedIn. Further, the philosophical component gives rise to social media champions who can facilitate the use of digital technology in the face of cultural barriers or resistance from different functional areas within the organisation. A culture that embraces technology combined with customer focused B2B managers will be more confident and motivated to deal with the often overwhelming issues that are driven by the constant change and increasing complexity of social media platforms.

The Initiation Component of the model is comprised of information and coordination traits. Managers need to take advantage of a number of new customer analytics and social media monitoring tools in order to fully realise the potential of their social media. The collection of real time data related to customer behaviour and customer opinions within social media platforms should be disseminated to all departments and functional areas responsible for strategy, sales and service. Doing this ensures that all relevant departments have up-to-date, comprehensive information on consumer interactions with multiple touch-points. This allows each channel touch-point to respond with a 360° understanding of the consumer. The information collected can also provide insights into which social media platforms B2B decision-makers are using and the level/type of emphasis required for the use of mobile marketing tactics. -The importance of coordination must be appreciated considering the multiple touch-points often managed by different organisational departments.

The B2B manager's social media challenges are addressed by the Implementation Component of the model through its emphasis on both technologies and employee skills. By introducing sophisticated databases, social media monitoring and customer analytics technologies, behavioural learnings and other qualitative insights can be obtained that enhance the quality of customer interaction through a wide range of social media channels. It is imperative to remain up-to-date in this regard as competitors will develop competitive advantages through superior information technology management. These technologies can provide superior aggregate decision-making as well as superior individual customer targeting. In the case of B2B marketing, insights into multiple decision-makers can be facilitated using these technologies. Recruitment and training both have an important role to play in obtaining employees competent in conducting customer analytics who possess both the commercial

acumen and technological skills. Further skills are required regarding the ability to create B2B content, marketing materials and online community management.

The Adoption Component of the model refers to the importance of enabling and encouraging employees to use internal technologies and internal social media. They can then experiment and learn the proper etiquette and protocols required to effectively improve the customer interaction with social media technology. With constant evolution evident in the multiplicity of platforms emerging, continual learning is required, but the risk of offending customers through improper etiquette or misapplication of technologies is very real. In terms of employees, leaders need to model social media usage behaviours and use the insights gained to develop online self-service educational modules.

In summary, this paper provides guidance for B2B marketers in the dynamically evolving area of social media and plots a clear direction for future research, aimed at operationalising the EMO model, through the research propositions provided. In doing this, the paper highlights opportunities and challenges for both managers and academics engaged in the field.

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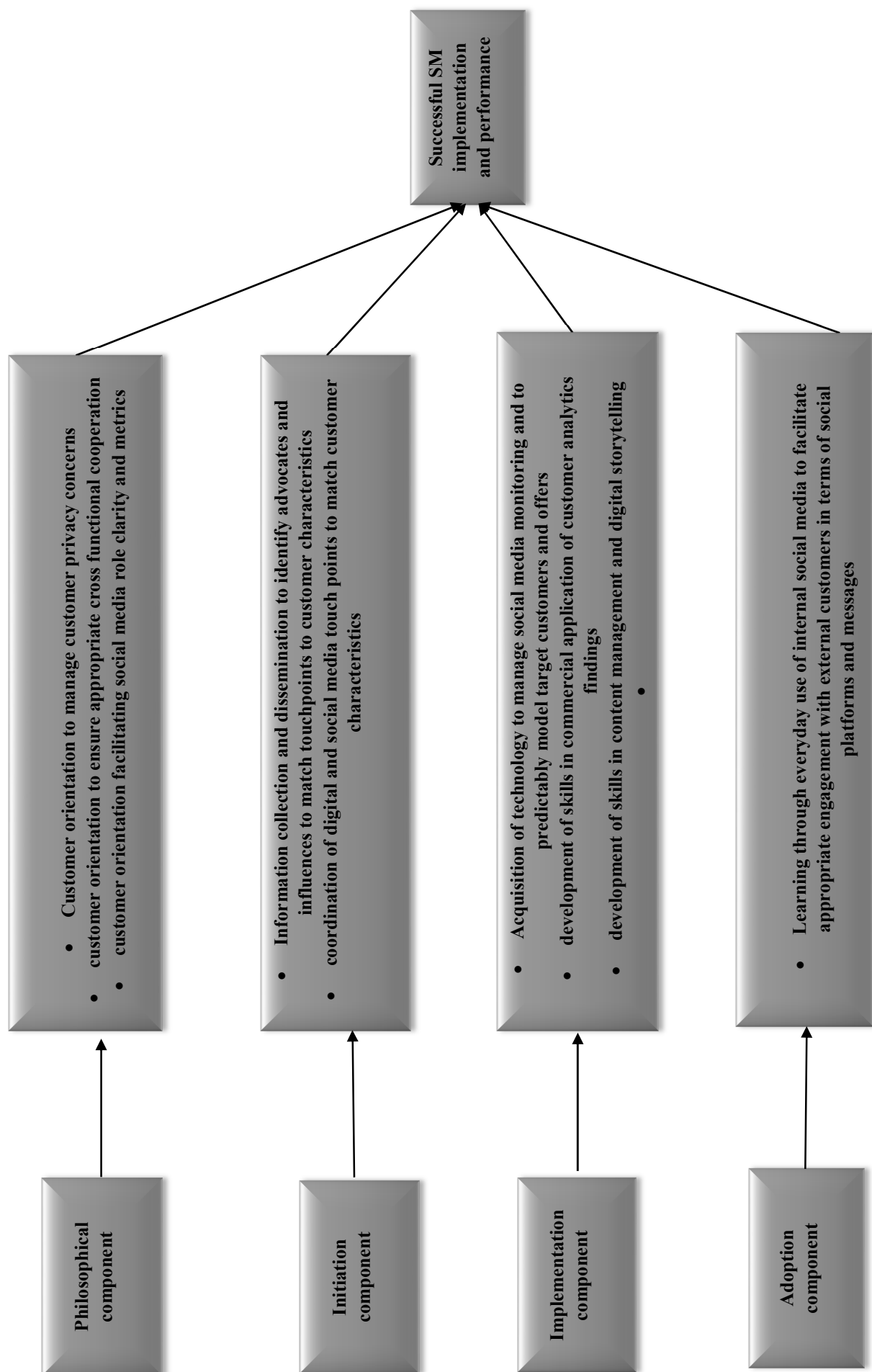


Figure 1. The EMO conceptual Model

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