Social media in marketing: A review and analysis of the existing literature

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

People worldwide are largely engaged and attached with the web 2.0 technology and Social media platforms. By the same token, businesses start looking at such technologies as effective mechanisms to interact more with their customers. Equally, the related issues of social media marketing have been also the focus of attention for academics and researchers to expand the current understanding about such phenomena over the marketing area. Accordingly, the main aim of this study is to systematically examine and review the current studies that have conducted over the related area of social media and marketing. By reviewing approximately 144 articles, the researchers were able to provide an overview of the main themes and trends covered by the relevant literature such as the role of social media on advertising, the electronic word of mouth, customers' relationship management, and firms' brands and performance. In this review, it has also studied the most common research approaches adopted to examine the related issues of social media marketing. Further discussion is also introduced followed by an explanation of the current review limitations and recommended directions to be examined by future studies.

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1. Introduction

People increasingly look at social media applications as an important part of their daily life and more likely to move their interactions to the virtual platforms (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter). This, in turn, positively reflect on their orientations and behaviours toward all kinds of social media technology as reported by Alalwan et al. (2016a), Dwivedi et al. (2015), Rathore et al. (2016), Taylor et al. (2011), Zhu and Chen (2015). Therefore, social media applications have been observed as one of the most efficient and influential implications that have been progressively engaged in most aspects of people's lives (i.e. social life, commercial life, business life, educational sector, political life) (Alalwan et al., 2016a; Algharabat et al., 2017; Abed et al., 2015; Hawkins and Vel, 2013; Hinz et al., 2011; Rathore et al., 2016; Usher et al., 2014; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014; Zhu and Chen, 2015).

Social media has been largely realised as an effective mechanism that contributes to the firms' marketing aims and strategy; especially in the aspects related to customers' involvement, customer relationship management and communication (Filo et al., 2015; Saxena and Khanna, 2013). For instance, from the perspective of the national governing bodies, social media could strategically enhance a two-way communication between firms and customers, and accordingly, attaching customers more with the organisations' brands. This would be in addition to the ability of social media to present the content posted visually, verbally, or textually or using a mix of textual, visual, and verbal content (Okazaki and Taylor, 2013). Over different contexts, firms have been looking forward to utilising the social media in many aspects of their interaction with customers such as facilitating the information search, interactivity, promotion and enhancing the customers buying behaviours (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). Therefore, a variety of interactive practices and mechanisms have been developed by organisations to enhance their brand identity as well as their marketing performance (Leeflang et al., 2014; Filo et al., 2015; Schultz and Peltier, 2013). In fact, a considerable amount of time and resources have been projected over this area in order to attract more customers either in the terms of involvement or in the term of online customer relationship (Filo et al., 2015). Bennett (2013) reported that most business firms (about 93%) worldwide have adopted and engaged such innovative platforms and tools in their process to communicate and serve their customers.

In general, social media has been the focus of attention either by practitioners or researchers to know more how such applications could be successfully adopted and implemented (Billings, 2014; Hardin, 2014; Hutchins, 2014; Sanderson, 2014). This is due to the necessity to learn more about the main requirements of successful implementation of such technology as well as how much the investment in such applications is feasible (Hutchins, 2014). In this regard, Hutchins (2014) greatly supported the importance of examining the role of social media over different contexts to expand the existing knowledge toward such important issues of social media. In the same line, Pedersen (2014), Knoll (2016), Pegoraro (2014), Rowe (2014) attributed the importance of addressing the related issues of using social media platforms to the innovative nature of these technologies as well as the current state of research over this area is over initial, exploratory stage which, in turn, required further interest and understanding. As well as, in their recent review study, Filo et al. (2015) debated that despite the fact there is a good number of studies that have examined social media and its applications over different area of interest, there is still an need of proposing a theoretical model covering the most important dimensions that could have either positive or negative influence on the success of implementing such systems.

Table 1
Social media definitions.

Term Using	Definition	Reference
Social networking	An electronic service, application, platform, or site used by individuals who have a common interest, beliefs, attitudes, culture, activities and really life relationships	Wikipedia (2016a)
Social networking	Using social media as a means to directly contact and have interaction with other personnel thereby having a real relationship with them	Wells (2011)
Social media	Social media as such they enable individual to broadcast as well as to approach more people and more influence on them	Wikipedia (2016b)
Social Media	New media technologies facilitating interactivity and co-creation that allow for the development and sharing of user-generated content among and between organisations (e.g. teams, government agencies and media groups) and individuals (e.g. customers, athletes and journalists)	Filo et al. (2015)
Social media marketing	A dialogue often triggered by consumers/audiences, or a business/ product/services that circulate amongst the stated parties to set in motion a revealing communication on some promotional information so that it allows learning from one another's use and experiences, eventually benefitting all of the involved parties	Dwivedi et al. (2015)
Social media marketing	The utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software is to create, communicate, deliver and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders	Tuten and Solomon (2015)