

Fang Fang Li

The integration of social media and marketing strategy

Tactics, strategy, and culture



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Tiivistelmä <p>Sosiaalisesta mediasta on tullut lupaava markkinointiväline. Suosiosta huolimatta sosiaalisen median sisällyttäminen yritysten markkinointistrategioihin on jatkuva haaste erityisesti kansainvälisille yrityksille, jotka käyttävät sosiaalista mediaa markkinoinnissaan globaaleilla markkinoilla. Tässä väitöskirjassa lisätään ymmärrystä sosiaalisen median ja markkinointistrategian integroinnista ja sosiaalisen median soveltamisesta kansainväliseen markkinointiin. Tavoitteena on vastata tutkimuskysymyksiin: Mitkä ovat sosiaalisen median vaikutukset markkinointiin ja miten sitä voidaan hyödyntää ja hallita strategisesti erityisesti kansainvälisessä markkinointiympäristössä? Tutkimus perustuu resurssipohjaiseen näkemykseen, dynaamisten kyvykkyyksien lähestymistapaan ja asiakkaan sitoutumisen teoriaan. Väitöskirja koostuu neljästä artikkelista ja soveltaa sekä kvalitatiivisia että kvantitatiivisia tutkimusasetelmiä.</p> <p>Tutkimus osoittaa kattavan kirjallisuuskatsauksen (327 artikkelia) avulla, että sosiaalinen media muuttaa radikaalisti keskeisiä markkinointitoimintoja, kuten myyntiä, viestintää ja asiakassuhteiden hallintaa. Tutkimuksessa käsitteellistetään sosiaalisen median markkinointistrategia (SMMS) ja yksilöidään neljä SMMS:ää: sosiaalisen median kaupankäynnin strategia, sisältöstrategia, seurantastrategia ja asiakkuudenhallinnan strategia. Tutkimuksessa ehdotetaan, että asiakkaiden sitoutumista voidaan pitää toivottavana markkinoinnin suorituskyvyn mittarina, koska se kuvastaa yhteyksien ja vuorovaikutuksen tulosta sosiaalisessa mediassa. Kulttuurinen arvo vaikuttaa suuresti yritysten SMMS-kehitysprosessiin sekä kuluttajien asenteisiin ja vuorovaikutukseen sosiaalisessa mediassa. Tutkimuksessa ehdotetaan, että yritykset käyttäisivät sosiaalista mediaa strategisemmin ja ymmärtäisivät sen kulttuurisidonnaisuudet. Tutkimus antaa mittavan teoreettisen panoksen eri tutkimusaloille ja tarjoaa hyödyllistä tietoa yrityksille sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin johtamiseen.</p>		
Asiasanat Sosiaalinen media; markkinointistrategiat; sosiaalisen median markkinointi; sosiaalisen median strategiat; asiakkaiden sitoutuminen; kulttuuri; kansainvälinen markkinointi		

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Social media (SM) has become a promising marketing tool to achieve firms' business goals and competitive advantages. Despite the popularity of SM marketing, incorporating SM into firms' marketing strategies is an ongoing challenge, especially for international firms who are using SM in global markets. In this dissertation, the author aims to advance the understanding of the integration of SM and marketing strategy and its application in the international marketing context. The key objective is to answer the following research questions: What are the impacts of SM on marketing and how can SM be strategically utilized and managed, especially in an international marketing setting? This study draws on the resource-based view, the dynamic capabilities approach, and customer engagement theory. The dissertation consists of four papers and adopts a mixed-method approach, including both qualitative and quantitative research designs.</p> <p>Through a comprehensive and systematic review of SM marketing research (N=327 articles), the study shows SM is radically transforming the key marketing functions, such as selling, communications, and customer relationship management. This study conceptualizes social media marketing strategy (SMMS) from SM and marketing strategy dimensions, and identifies four SMMSs, namely, social commerce strategy, social content strategy, social monitoring strategy, and social CRM strategy. The study also suggests that customer engagement can be regarded as a desirable marketing performance metric, as it reflects the outcome of connectedness and interaction on SM. Cultural value greatly impacts firms' SMMS developmental process and consumer attitudes and interactions on SM. Therefore, this study suggests firms use SM more strategically and understand its culture-bound nature. This research thus makes great theoretical contributions to different research fields and provides useful managerial implications for SM marketing management.</p>		
<p>Keywords</p> <p>Social media; marketing strategies; social media marketing; social media strategies; customer engagement; culture; international marketing</p>		

In memory of Jorma Larimo

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Abbreviations

SM	Social media
SMMS	Social media marketing strategy
CRM	Customer relationship management
UGC	User-generated content
FGC	Firm-generated content
WOM	Word-of-mouth
RBV	Resource-based view
DCs	Dynamic capabilities
CE	Customer engagement

Publications

- [1] Li, F., Larimo, J., and Leonidou, L. C. Social media marketing: A review and future research agenda. Early version of this paper was presented at *ICORIA Conference*, 21-23 June, 2018, Valencia, Spain and *EMAC Conference*, 29- 31 May 2019, Hamburg, Germany.
- [2] Li, F., Larimo, J., and Leonidou, L. C. (2021). Social media marketing strategy: definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, validation, and future agenda. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 49(1), 51-70.¹
- [3] Li, F. and Larimo, J. A cross-cultural comparison of social media marketing strategies development of international firms: Evidence from Finland and China. Early version of this paper was presented at *European International Business Academy (EIBA) Conference*, 10-12 December, 2021, Madrid, Spain.
- [4] Li, F., Larimo, J., and Leonidou, L. C. Global customer engagement via social content strategies: Framework, propositions, and implications. Early version of this paper was presented at *AMA Global Marketing SIG Conference*, 18-21 May, 2020, Taormina, Sicily, Italy.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter starts with an overview of the research background to outline the importance and status of the research topic. This leads to a discussion of the research gaps and the rationale for the research aims and questions. Following that, the chapter addresses the positioning and intended contributions of the study, highlighting the significance and novelty of this research work. The chapter concludes with a presentation of definitions of key concepts applied in this study and the structure of the dissertation.

1.1 Background of the study

During the last decade, marketers have greatly shifted their marketing communications from using traditional platforms (e.g., TV and newspaper) to exploiting the use of digital marketing channels. The advancement of innovative technology solutions has also enabled companies to capture more accurate consumer data and provide two-way, customized, one-to-one, and database-driven marketing communications. As one of the most extensive forms of digitization, social media (SM) is largely responsible for these dramatic changes in marketing and communication management practice (Katsikeas et al. 2020; Lamberton & Stephen 2016). SM has not only enriched the opportunities for firms to develop and maintain relationships with customers (Chuang 2020; Rapp et al. 2013), but also empowered customers to become conversation initiators and value co-creators through SM interactions (Koivisto & Mattila 2020; Maslowska et al. 2016). Consumers are now taking control of marketing communication, as they can decide whether and when to receive the message (Hewett et al. 2016). According to Stephen (2016), future consumer marketing will mostly take place in digital settings, particularly on SM devices and platforms.

For marketers, the interactive and dynamic nature of SM provide incredible business opportunities in numerous ways, such as (a) SM content and campaigns can increase brand awareness, improve user experience significantly, and quickly generate a large audience for the company; (b) compared with traditional advertising channels, SM is the most cost-effective tool that require less investment and drastically increases firms' conversion rates; (c) SM can provide the means to engage and interact with customers through two-way and collaborative communications, which help to reach millions of customers worldwide; (d) SM can develop and maintain new forms of brand–customer relationships through personalization and customization, regardless of economic,

political, cultural, or other differences; (e) the voluminous data generated from SM platforms can provide valuable and reliable information about customers, competitors, and markets across the world, assisting to make better decisions for global marketing managers (e.g., Lamberton & Stephen 2016; Muninger et al. 2019; Nijssen & Ordanini 2020; Katsikeas et al. 2020; Kumar & Pansari 2016).

As SM enables global customers to connect and interact through communities and networks, the role of SM usage has evolved. It has developed from a single marketing tool to marketing intelligence sources, where firms can market their products, collect information, and engage with customers (Colicev et al. 2018; Lamberton & Stephen 2016). Both scholars and professionals have acknowledged the value of SM. According to eMarketer (2021), digital channels are overtaking traditional channels in terms of spend, while SM advertising spending in the USA rose by 11.4% to over \$40 billion in 2020 and is estimated to increase by more than 21.3%, to reach \$49 billion in 2022. This shows the tremendous opportunities SM tools have offered companies to derive value from their use, but it also presents enormous challenges for them to leverage the use of SM and maximize its benefits (Appel et al. 2020; Schultz & Peltier 2013).

Over the last decade, researchers have significantly broadened the understanding of SM and its use in the marketing sector, as seen by the rapidly growing number of related studies (e.g., Kumar et al. 2013; Malthouse et al. 2013; Zhang et al. 2017). Recent advances in the SM and marketing strategy interface have provided further theoretical foundations of the impact of SM on firms' marketing strategies and its potential to increase marketing performance (e.g., Kumar et al. 2013; Kumar & Pansari 2016). Despite growing recognition of the strategic value of SM networks, challenges remain around how to more effectively incorporate SM into marketing practices and strategies (e.g., Ancillai et al. 2019; Nam et al. 2017; Rapp et al. 2013; Schweidel & Moe 2014; Wang & Kim 2017). Multinational companies operating in global markets increasingly rely on SM as a communication, branding, and marketing tool and a way to reach multi-cultural customers. Therefore, it is imperative for such firms to use SM strategically and create social media marketing strategy (SMMS) to strengthen marketing performance and competitive advantage (Fraccastoro et al. 2021).

1.2 Research gaps

This dissertation addresses a number of gaps in the SM marketing literature and builds on several fields of study, including consumer marketing, strategic marketing, and international marketing. The booming of SM phenomenon in the

past decade has led to a dramatic increase in the number of SM marketing studies (Appel et al. 2020). Despite the diverse and substantial body of literature on SM marketing, the extant research remains specific and fragmented (Salo 2017). In particular, existing research in SM marketing field largely focuses on online consumer behaviors, such as consumer buying behaviors, engagement behaviors, complaining behaviors (e.g., Eigenraam et al. 2018; Kim et al. 2016; Luo et al. 2014; Park et al. 2018). The research focusing on the firm perspective, especially the strategic use of SM practice, remains insufficient (Lamberton & Stephen 2016). Furthermore, given the rapidly growing body of SM marketing literature, there is a lack of an overarching framework to provide structure and guidance for further research, which has created new challenges of knowledge development in this field. Therefore, a systematic review, evaluation, and integration of the extant literature on the strategic use of SM from the firm's perspective is urgently required. Such action would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of SM in marketing, and identify areas that warrant future research attention.

The value of SM has been stressed and substantiated by extensive studies (e.g., Ancillai et al. 2019; Schweidel & Moe 2014). As firms strive to build SMMSs and extract value from SM actions, the problem for most businesses has not been launching their SM campaigns but incorporating SM into their marketing strategies and using it strategically to build valuable and long-lasting relationships with customers (Lamberton & Stephen 2016; Schultz & Peltier 2013). Questions relating to SMMS and its development still reveal huge gaps in the literature. The fundamental question concerning how to integrate SM into firms' marketing strategies remains unanswered. Further, as performance has been a longtime research interest in the marketing field, many attempts have been made to unpack marketing performance in the SM context. From the strategic marketing perspective, one central issue is examining the relationship between marketing resources, capabilities, and performance (Varadarajan 2015). The issue merits further elaboration of what resources and capabilities are empowered or generated by SM. From a practitioner perspective, customer engagement is recognized as an essential output in the SM marketing field. Central to successful customer engagement management is the stimulation of a firm's efficient engagement initiatives through SM content (Harmeling et al. 2017). However, one remaining issue is that most existing research looks at customer engagement as customers' behavioral outcomes without aligning it with SM content (Meire et al. 2019). In other words, research on "what" SM content affects "which" customer engagement behaviors is still rather scattered and limited.

Another significant gap in extant SM marketing literature is the paucity of cross-cultural research, which is likely due to the challenges in voluminous data

collection and analysis across borders (Okazaki & Taylor 2013). As a recent study shows (Hudson et al. 2016), empirical research on the effects of cultures in SM marketing is strongly needed, as global brands are now dealing with multi-cultural customers across countries. Further, discussions of issues such as which SMMSs to approach internationally and whether to have a centralized or regional SM presence are ongoing (Kitirattarkarn et al. 2019). Therefore, it is evident that the role of cultural and economic differences across countries is not fully appreciated in the literature. This is unfortunate because SM marketing is a global concept and is used broadly in the international context. Without the full knowledge on the role of cultural value in SM marketing, it may affect the outcomes of SMMS decision-making.

1.3 Research questions and objectives

To fill the research gaps mentioned above, address the theoretical challenges, and respond to the calls for appropriate strategies to leverage SM in the ever-changing marketing landscape (e.g., Aral et al. 2013; Guesalaga 2016; Moorman & Day 2016; Salo 2017; Schultz & Peltier 2013), this dissertation aims to enrich the understanding of the integration of SM and marketing strategy, and explore the implications of SM as a marketing strategy in the international marketing setting. Specifically, this research intends to provide a positive step in understanding *what* and *how* questions involved in the strategic use of SM in marketing, thus significantly contributing to the SM, marketing strategy, and international marketing streams of literature.

Following the main research objective, this dissertation addresses one fundamental question: *What are the impacts of SM on marketing and how can SM be strategically utilized and managed, especially in an international marketing setting?* This question is further explored in three sub-questions:

- (1) *How does SM impact marketing, and what are the research status and opportunities available on the SM marketing topic?*
- (2) *How can “SMMS” and its developmental process be conceptualized?*
- (3) *What are the outcomes of SMMS, and how do national cultural values affect the outcomes?*

These sub-questions are developed based on a marketing environment–marketing strategy–marketing performance research logic. This first sub-question intends to explore the marketing environmental changes caused by SM and offer an overview

of the research status and research opportunities on SM marketing topics. Based on the big picture provided by reviewing SM marketing research, the second sub-question aims to examine the intersection of SM and marketing strategy. Specifically, the aim of this sub-question is to conceptualize SMMS and explore the developmental process of SMMS via well-grounded theoretical foundations. Accordingly, the third sub-question looks at the outcomes of SMMS and how cultural values may affect these outcomes.

These sub-questions are answered in four research papers included in this dissertation. The first sub-question is mainly addressed by way of a systematic literature review paper (Paper 1). The key objectives of that paper are to evaluate the research status and suggest research opportunities for future studies. The paper presents a systematic review of the SM marketing research field to (a) identify different research streams; (b) evaluate the research status; and (c) propose guidelines for future research regarding the theoretical, methodological, and contextual perspectives.

The second sub-question is answered in Papers 2 and 3. Paper 2 aims to conceptualize “SMMS”, to explore the developmental process model of SMMS, and to investigate different types of SMMSs built based on various marketing resources and capabilities in different firms. Paper 3 contextualizes the findings of Paper 2 by looking at the SMMS developmental process model in international firms and specifying the key elements (i.e., enablers and barriers) in the process.

The third sub-question is answered by Papers 2, 3, and 4. Paper 2 discusses customer engagement as the key outcome of SMMS in the developmental process model. Paper 3 looks at the firm perspective and investigates how culture impacts SMMSs development in international firms. In contrast, Paper 4 looks at the customer side and explores the relationships between one specific SMMS identified in Paper 2 and marketing outcome in the international marketing context. More specifically, Paper 4 discusses the relationship between social content strategy and customer engagement and uncover the moderating role of cultural values in this relationship. The whole research framework and the link between the four papers is summarized in Figure 1.

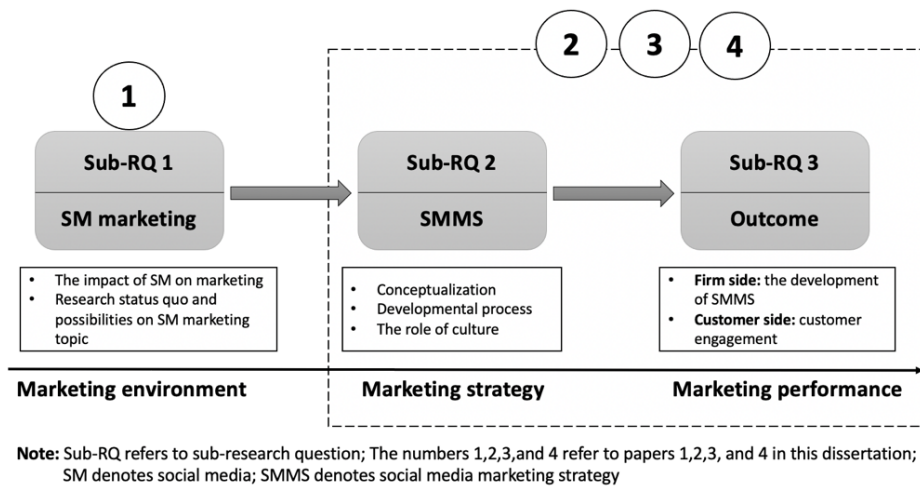


Figure 1. The research framework and relationships between each paper

1.4 Positioning of the study and intended contributions

The main goal of this dissertation is to understand how firms can strategically use SM for marketing purposes, especially in the international marketing context. The goal-setting of this dissertation thus has directed the applied literature under the umbrella of research in SM marketing, marketing strategy, and international marketing. Figure 2 shows how this dissertation is situated at the intersection of three major literature streams.

A vast majority of SM studies look at the roles of SM in the marketing field. For instance, some researchers focused on the study of SM in the selling process, which highlighted the commercial value derived from SM platforms for social commerce purposes (e.g., Dehghani & Tumer 2015; Guesalaga 2016; Voorveld et al. 2018). Lamberton and Stephen (2016) produced the seminal research on SM reviewing substantial studies on this topic over the preceding decade and identified three main research themes: (1) SM as a means of individual expression, (2) SM as a marketing tool with user-generated content, and (3) SM as market intelligence source with complex data. However, Lamberton and Stephen (2016) also pointed out that most studies are anchored in consumer aspects rather than other perspectives. This study positions itself from a firm perspective to explore the possibilities of using SM as a marketing strategy. Accordingly, this study is located in the overlapping area of SM and marketing strategy research (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Research focus in the dissertation

Another focus of this dissertation is to investigate the relationship between SMMS and performance outcomes (i.e., customer engagement). To better position this dissertation, I will shed some light on the different streams of marketing strategy and firm performance studies. According to Morgan et al. (2012), there are four different research streams studying marketing strategies. The first relates to the individual-level perspective focusing on factors influencing managers' decision-making in the relationship. The second perspective deals with the marketing program-level aspect, focusing on factors affecting the relations between marketing program planning, implementation, and performance. The third stream looks at supporting organizational structures and cultures and tries to explain how they moderate firm strategy-performance relationships. The fourth stream takes the formulation-implementation perspective and investigates how processes and capabilities impact performance outcomes. This dissertation generally adopts the fourth perspective and seeks to understand how variables such as resources and capabilities are defined in the SM context and how they support the developmental process of SMMS.

Furthermore, this dissertation is delimited in an international marketing context by examining the role of cultural values from both the firm and customer sides. More specifically, this study will first investigate the international firms' SMMSs and the impact of cultural values on Chinese and Finnish firms' SMMSs development. Accordingly, Hofstede's (1983) dimensions of cultural orientations (i.e., individualism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity, and long-

term orientation) were adopted to capture the cultural differences. Furthermore, this study also looks at the customer perspective and explores the impact of social content strategies on customer engagement behaviors. It also considers the moderating role of culture in that relationship. Here, the literature on cross-cultural consumer behaviors and communication strategies, especially the studies on global advertising and word-of-mouth (WOM), provided a thorough understanding of the variation in SM content preference. In addition, culture dimensions from Hofstede (1983) and Hall's (1989) high- and low-context cultures framework will be applied in this customer engagement study.

This dissertation therefore contributes to the 1) SM marketing, 2) marketing strategy, and 3) international marketing literature streams. First, this dissertation aims to contribute to the literature in the SM marketing field. By conducting a systematic review of the fragmented body of SM marketing literature, this research aims to provide useful insights in terms of identifying empirical, theoretical, and methodological research implications and future directions on SM marketing topics. This thesis will further propose an overarching framework to provide a clearer structure of SM marketing in organizing rapidly emerging different research streams. Furthermore, in answering the fourth sub-question, this research will scrutinize the relationship between SM content and customer engagement and how the relationship is moderated by cultural values. It will thus expand knowledge of SM marketing in a global market context.

Second, the study intends to extend the current understanding of using SM as marketing strategies, thus adding to the body of knowledge in the field of strategic marketing. Unlike previous research, which has primarily focused on SM as an environment or context, this research aims to understand SM through a marketing strategy lens, where marketing tools and skills can be extracted and created. As a result, this research adds to strategic marketing knowledge on SM resources, capabilities, and their connections to SMMS and outcomes. This dissertation aims to conceptualize SMMS, propose novel insights on the process and differences of the SMMS phenomena, and provide extensive future research directions on the SMMS topic. It will provide theoretical contributions on how to capitalize on SM usage and the opportunities to integrate SM with the current company marketing strategy.

Third, this research responds to the calls to investigate the cultural effect on SM marketing across countries (e.g., MSI 2020) and thus contributes to the international marketing literature on the role of cultural meaning in global SM marketing. Current research in this field has predominantly concentrated on variations in SM behaviors across cultures and has generally theorized about the

impact of separate cultural dimensions, preventing a holistic view of culture's effects on SM and marketing strategies. This dissertation intends to investigate the effect of cultural values on the developmental process of SMMSs and customer engagement as a performance outcome. To do so, this research advances cultural theory and is intended to have a substantial long-term effect on the growing importance of SM in international marketing.

To summarize the relevance of this dissertation, Figure 3 visually presents the main research gaps, objective, the sub-questions, the intended outputs, and the intended research contributions.

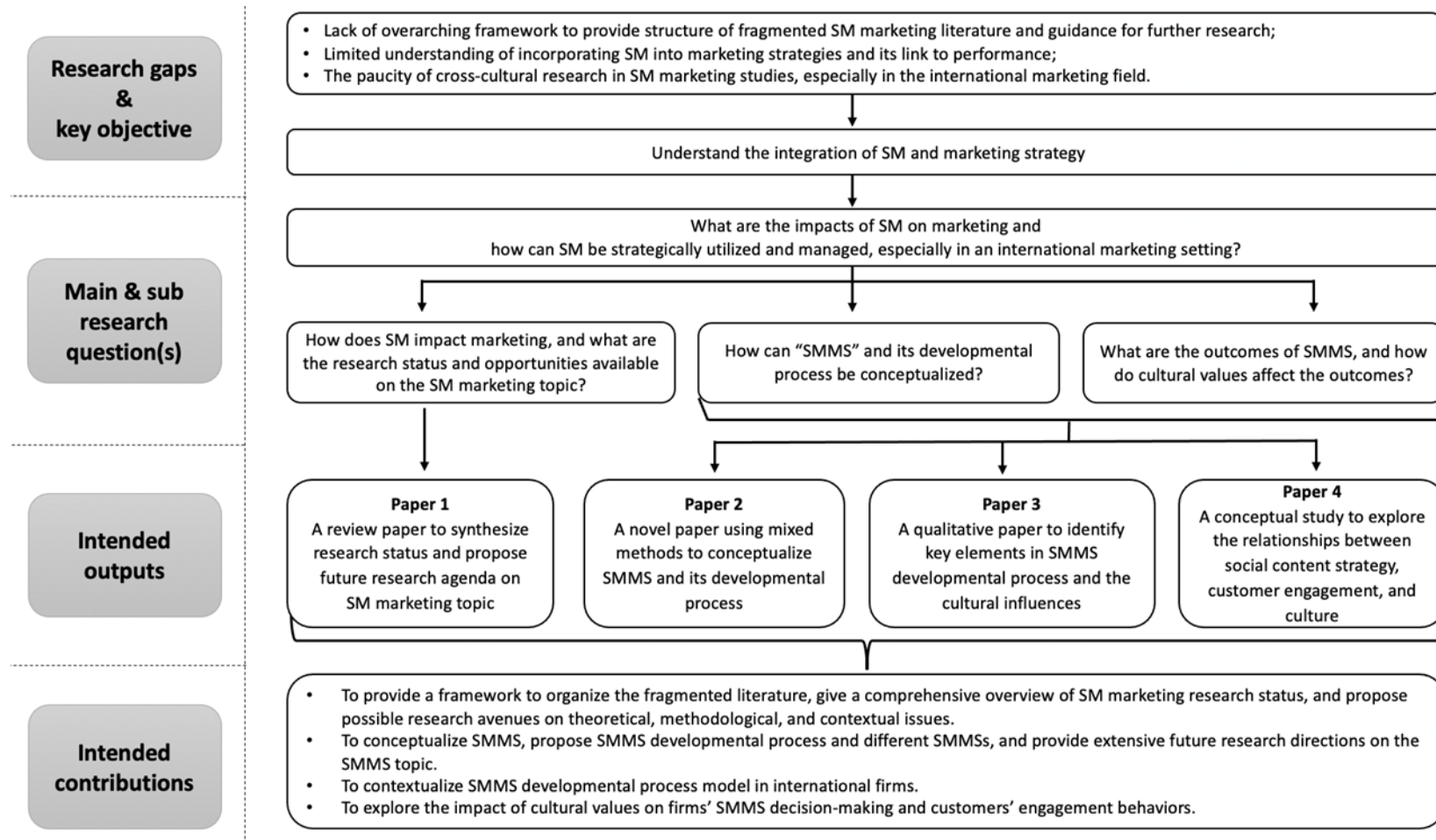


Figure 3. An overview of the research gaps, objective, questions, intended research outputs, and contributions

1.5 Definitions of key concepts

The identification of key concepts' definitions is critical for the consistency and clarity to understand the studying phenomenon. The key concepts included in this dissertation are: social media, social media marketing, social media marketing strategy, social content strategy, social CRM strategy, customer engagement, culture, and marketing strategy. Table 1 presents the summary of the definitions of key concepts.

Table 1. Definition of key concepts

Key concepts	Descriptions
Social media	"A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, p. 61).
Social media marketing	"SM marketing is the umbrella term for using social networks, online communities, blogs or any other Internet form of media for marketing purpose. SM marketing differs from traditional marketing approaches in the way consumers interact with the company" (Mabry & Porter 2010).
Social media marketing strategy	"An organization's integrated pattern of activities that, based on a careful assessment of customers' motivations for brand-related SM use and the undertaking of deliberate engagement initiatives, transform SM connectedness (networks) and interactions (influences) into valuable strategic means to achieve desirable marketing outcomes" (Li et al. 2021, p.54).
Social CRM strategy	"The integration of customerfacing activities, including processes, systems, and technologies, with emergent SM applications to engage customers in collaborative conversations and enhance customer relationships" (Trainor 2012, p. 319).
Content marketing	"Creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome" (Holliman & Rowley 2014, p. 285).
Customer engagement	"The mechanics of a customer's value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and indirect contribution" (Pansari & Kumar 2017, p. 2).

Key concepts	Descriptions
Culture	“The collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede et al. 2005, p. 28).
Marketing strategy	“An organization’s integrated pattern of decisions that specify its crucial choices concerning products, markets, marketing activities and marketing resources in the creation, communication and/or delivery of products that offer value to customers in exchanges with the organization and thereby enables the organization to achieve specific objectives” (Varadarajan 2010, p.119).

1.6 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is organized into two parts: part 1 provides an overview of the dissertation and part 2 comprises the dissertation papers. The first part consists of five chapters. The first chapter (Introduction) starts with a brief discussion of the study background. This leads to a discussion about the research gaps and justification for the research objectives and research questions. Following that, the scope and positioning of the study, the definitions of key concepts applied in this dissertation, and the intended research contributions are presented. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the structure of the dissertation.

The second chapter (Theoretical background) provides a comprehensive theoretical background of the dissertation and an overview of the key existing studies. The purpose of this chapter is to review the research status of the related topics and present an assessment of the key research premises underlying the four papers of this dissertation. The literature review will be organized around several parts: SM, SM as marketing tools, SM as marketing strategies, SM and customer engagement, and SM in international marketing. This chapter ends with a discussion of the theoretical lens applied in the study. More specifically, the resource-based view, dynamic capabilities approach, and customer engagement theory are discussed to establish the theoretical foundation.

The third chapter (Methodology) outlines the methodology of the study and provides a fuller explanation of the philosophical underpinnings of the work. This chapter starts with comparisons between different methodological philosophies and justifications for selecting critical realism as the research paradigm. Next, the mixed-method research strategy is justified with a comprehensive explanation.

This is followed by a detailed description of the abductive research approach. Lastly, the research design with empirical samples and analysis will be presented.

The fourth chapter (Summary of dissertation papers) introduces the key summary of each dissertation paper, including the research background, research methods, research findings, and research contributions.

The fifth chapter (Conclusion and discussion) concludes the first part of the dissertation. It starts with an integrative summary of the major findings across four papers, followed by a presentation of the dissertation's theoretical and managerial contributions. Finally, discussions of study limitations and suggestions for future research avenues are provided.

Part two presents the four papers included in this dissertation. Paper 1 is a literature review paper that mainly address the research status and opportunities relating to the SM marketing topic; Paper 2 is an empirical paper that conceptualizes SMMS and its developmental process by applying a mixed-methods approach; Paper 3 is a qualitative research paper that contextualizes the SMMS developmental process in international firms; and Paper 4 is a conceptual paper that tackles one specific SMMS (i.e., social content strategy) and its outcome (i.e., customer engagement).

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This dissertation is situated at the intersection of SM, marketing strategy, and international marketing literature. The chapter starts with the review of extant research, centering on the definitions of SM and its key features. These serve as an important baseline for follow-up discussions in two parts: SM as marketing tools and SM as marketing strategies. The literature on customer engagement and SM in international marketing are also reviewed to reflect the important role of SM in assisting international marketing and to further build theoretical understanding on the SM marketing topic. The chapter ends with the discussions on three theories (i.e., the resource-based view, the dynamic capabilities approach, and customer engagement theory) and the rationale to apply them in this dissertation.

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 Social media

SM (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter) became popular and appeared in academic research in the late 2000s in contrast to Web 2.0 that achieved popularity in the early part of that decade. In marketing discipline, researchers generally consider SM a platform where people build networks and share information or sentiments (Fournier & Avery 2011; Habibi et al. 2014). Peters et al. (2013) address SM from communication science and sociological perspectives and define it as “communication systems that allow their social actors to communicate along dyadic ties” (p.282). An alternative is Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010) definition of SM 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 (UGC)” (p.61). They also discuss the conceptual domain of SM, which includes media research (i.e., social presence and media richness) and social processes (i.e., self-presentation and self-disclosure).

The concept of SM has recently been expanded as “it has essentially become almost anything—content, information, behaviors, people, organizations, institutions—that can exist in an interconnected, networked digital environment where interactivity is possible” (Appel et al. 2020, p.80). According to Appel et al. (2020), SM can be seen as “a technology-centric—but not entirely technological—ecosystem in which a diverse and complex set of behaviors, interactions, and exchanges involving various kinds of interconnected actors (individuals and firms, organizations, and institutions) can occur” (p.80). The development of this

definition has substantially enlarged the scope of the SM landscape and broadened the range of actors from firm–customer–customer to include potential stakeholders.

The interactive nature of SM provides companies and customers a communication platform with each other (Killian & McManus 2015). Accordingly, the core form of SM is interaction, which underlying the different levels of engagement (Blazevic et al. 2014). Malthouse et al. (2013) distinguish two levels of engagement: lower engagement (refers to passively consuming content, e.g., “liking” on Facebook) and higher engagement (refers to actively participating in various forms of co-creation, e.g., writing reviews). According to psychological motivation theory, SM users must be motivated to interact and engage with firms (Swani et al. 2017), as the brand consumers are heterogeneous with different motivations (VanMeter et al. 2018). Rohm et al. (2013) categorize consumer–brand SM interactions into the following primary motivations: incentives and promotions, product information and entertainment, information and service responses, brand engagement (specifically identification and relationship to the brand). Therefore, firms should recognize the motivations of their members before launching marketing efforts (Baldus et al. 2015; Hoffman & Fodor 2010; Rohm et al. 2013).

From the firm perspective, the role of SM as marketing tools to facilitate communication with customers and disseminate information has broadened (Lamberton & Stephen 2016). Customer SM behaviors and UGC are now becoming sources through which firms can observe customers and gain market insights that can be used as informational resources. But it is worth noting that the study by Singaraju et al. (2016) indicates that SM is only a technological platform but not a resource per se without customer interaction and engagement. Only when firms and customers interact and provide information on SM does a platform become a resource integrator. Singaraju et al. (2016) also argue that informational and relational resources can be converted into high-order resources (i.e., composite operant resources) through active firm–customer interactions.

In combination, the above discussions indicate the key features of SM are:

- 1) The core form of SM is interaction;
- 2) Customers interact on SM with different motivations and behaviors;
- 3) SM can serve as a resource integrator only when customers interact and exchange information on the SM platform;

- 4) The informational and relational resources can be converted into higher-order resources through active firm–customer interactions.

2.1.2 Social media as marketing tools

Diverse domains of inquiry, each with its own specific focus, have led to different perspectives on SM marketing being adopted. Following Li et al. (2021), the use of SM in marketing has four major specific objectives: (1) to sell, (2) to communicate, (3) to monitor, and (4) to empower customers. These marketing objectives also correspond to four marketing functions: sales management, marketing communication, market information management, and relationship management. Accordingly, different research streams focus on different SM marketing purposes. Those purposes are SM for selling purposes, SM for communication purposes, SM for monitoring purposes, and SM for customer relationship management purposes.

SM for selling purposes. Firms are increasingly using SM as promising routes for selling purposes, given their global reach, especially to the millennial generation (Confos & Davis 2016). Guesalaga (2016) highlights the need to understand the drivers of using SM for selling process. Guesalaga's (2016) survey among sales executives indicates that organizational factors play a crucial role in using SM in sales, and in ensuring personal commitment. SM has also been used for advertising and promotional purposes. Voorveld et al. (2018) examined survey data from more than 1,000 consumers and concluded that customer behaviors are platform-specific, comprising various experiences related to advertising evaluations. Dehghani and Tumer (2015) also conclude that SM advertising positively impacts brand evaluation and purchase intention. With the constantly growing spending on SM advertising, many scholars have investigated the association between SM users' behavior and SM ads. Researchers have found that interactiveness, informativeness, entertainment, and credibility features had strong positive impacts on customer behavior and purchase intentions (e.g., Shen et al. 2016; Zhang & Mao 2016).

SM for communication purposes. SM has increasingly been used as a communication tool for firms, where the key objectives are to achieve and sustain trusted brand status (Holliman & Rowley 2014) and generate positive WOM (Libai et al. 2013; Meire et al. 2019). Accordingly, studies around SM communications and content effectiveness have surged dramatically. For instance, Steinmann et al. (2015) confirm that a formal communication style is expected in online brand communities, especially in German-speaking countries. However, Gretry et al. (2017) revealed that the decision to use an informal communication style on SM

depends on customers' brand familiarity. SM content is also categorized and compared with different customer behaviors. Research showed brand names through functional and emotional appeals (Swani et al. 2017); animated rather than static ads (Bruce et al. 2017); transformational messages, emphasizing transcendental brand experiences and identity (Tafesse & Wien 2018); and the use of full story development, high-quality, and professionally shot pictures (Li & Xie 2020; Quesenberry et al. 2019).

SM for monitoring purposes. Social monitoring emphasizes the importance of social listening and responding to online customer voices (e.g., Timoshenko & Hauser 2019). The other emphasis is on the importance of SM intervention in enabling a swift reaction to incidents. Hanson et al. (2019) show that using different types of "webcare" strategies (i.e., social monitoring) and platforms can help control negative WOM, while the effect is likely to be mediated by the human voice. Similarly, the experimental study of Schamari and Schaefer (2015) showed that personal webcare is more effective in engaging consumers than using an impersonal style (e.g., nonhuman voice). To detect and reduce negative WOM, Herhausen et al. (2019) suggest that managers use tailored responses that also vary in their timing. Kim et al. (2016) claim that e-NWOM can be harmful to purchase decisions, but a firm's public apology has a positive mediating effect on e-NWOM viewers. Chang et al. (2015) compare the influence of different firms' response strategies on customer dissatisfaction and stress that accommodative strategy is the best way to increase customers' perceptions of a brand's reputation.

SM for customer relationship management purposes. Research shows that different relationship management strategies in SM adopted by companies are also pivotal. For instance, Hamilton et al. (2016) examine the impact of three SM interaction strategies on customer value. The three interaction strategies are the satisfaction-only strategy (mainly focuses on increasing satisfaction), immersion-only strategy (mainly focuses on creating customers' immersive experiences), and hybrid strategy (satisfaction-plus-immersion). The study showed that both interaction satisfaction strategy and immersion strategy positively influence customer value and customer relationship management. In line with that, Choudhury and Harrigan (2014) argue that a firm should be extremely creative and combine SM data with its CRM system to generate better customer-learning opportunities.

2.1.3 Social media as marketing strategies

Marketing strategy is mainly served with the goal of sustainable competitive advantage and firm-specific objectives (Webster 1992; Barney 1991; Varadarajan

2010; Hunt 2015). Numerous studies have discussed the definition of marketing strategy. Varadarajan (2010) recognized the important role of resource, process, and objectives in marketing strategy and defines marketing strategy as “an organization’s integrated pattern of decisions that specify its crucial choices concerning products, markets, marketing activities and marketing resources in the creation, communication and/or delivery of products that offer value to customers in exchanges with the organization and thereby enables the organization to achieve specific objectives” (p.119).

Day (1994) emphasized marketing actions and established that marketing strategy should centralize marketing activities and decisions that serve the goal of a sustainable competitive advantage. Taking a different perspective, Barney (1996) highlights resource allocation and coordination and defines strategy as “the pattern of resource allocation that enables firms to maintain or improve their performance” (p. 26). The findings of Webster (1992) could help management effectively implement marketing strategy within the organization. Doing so would involve applying marketing strategies on three levels: corporate, business, and functional/ operating levels. Along with the three levels, Webster (1992) also identified three marketing dimensions: “marketing as culture, marketing as strategy and marketing as tactics” (p.10). However, Webster (1992) points out that while the market is taking on a new form, long-term customer relationships should be at the core of marketing strategy.

When viewing SM through the marketing strategy lens, the conceptualization and definition of SMMS seem very blurry. The term *SMMS* has been used by many researchers (e.g., Choi & Thoeni 2016; Kumar et al. 2013), but so far, no one has proposed a definition of it. Some similar terms were found in the literature. For instance, Effing and Spil (2016) define “SM strategy” as “a goal-directed planning process for creating user-generated content, driven by a group of Internet applications, to create a unique and valuable competitive position” (p.2). This definition emphasizes the strategic goal and objective of SM use, but unfortunately fails to capture the different functions and features of SM. Aral et al. (2013) refer to SM strategies as a broad concept that includes strategies, such as public relations, product development, partnership, marketing, and internal knowledge management. Felix et al. (2017) define “strategic SM marketing” as a strategic level of “interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses SM (often in combination with other communications channels) to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders” (p.123). According to Felix et al. (2017), strategic SM marketing covers organizational decisions about SM marketing scope, culture, structure, and governance. Again, this definition restricts the use of SM to communication purposes alone.

To address the shortcomings around the conceptualization of SMMS, Li et al. (2021) explore SMMS through both the SM and marketing strategy dimensions, which capture the key features of SM and the basic elements of marketing strategy. The study identified four strategies. The first strategy identified in SM studies is the *social commerce strategy*. In this case, studies focus on the link between selling/promotion on SM and performance outcomes (e.g., Yadav et al. 2013), paying particular attention to some specific issues, such as SM sales and advertising. For example, Agnihotri (2016) investigated the use of SM by salespeople and found that SM can enhance salesperson responsiveness and service behaviors, thus improving customer satisfaction.

The second strategy identified is the *social content strategy*. The emphasis is then on social message strategy (how content is designed and presented) and seeding strategy (how content is disseminated). This strategy represents an important and growing vehicle for achieving and sustaining trusted brand status (Holliman & Rowley 2014), affecting sales leads (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016; Wang et al. 2019), and generating positive WOM (Libai et al. 2013; Meire et al. 2019). This strategy can be classified as the social content strategy, as it focuses on the creation and dissemination of SM content (Hollebeek & Macky 2019).

With the emphasis being mainly on the capacity to nurture firms' listening and responding on SM, Li et al. (2021) categorize these firm activities as the *social monitoring strategy*. A broad array of studies also emphasize the importance of SM data analytics and usage to understand customer needs and market insights (e.g., Timoshenko & Hauser 2019). For instance, Nam et al. (2017) presented a new approach to extract information on brands through user-generated social tags, which can serve as a brand-monitoring dashboard to identify key representative topics and extract common dynamic trends on SM. Borah et al. (2020) also highlight the importance of SM intervention to closely monitor trends and react spontaneously.

This last strategy is the *social CRM strategy* that focuses on long-term customer relationships by integrating data and organizational processes, which will ultimately lead to a firm's competitive advantage (e.g., Ahani et al. 2017; Malthouse et al. 2013; Trainor et al. 2014). SM is becoming a powerful enabler of CRM as customers become more collaborative and interactive (Choudhury & Harrigan 2014). The use of a social CRM strategy can lead to higher customer satisfaction and better business performance (Ascarza et al. 2017; Charoensukmongkol & Sasatanun 2017; Wongsansukcharoen et al. 2015). This social CRM strategy mainly deals with customer engagement and social CRM

capabilities. At its core, social CRM strategy is driven by customer engagement (Choudhury & Harrigan 2014).

2.1.4 Social media and customer engagement

Customer engagement is one of the key indicators used to measure the success of SM marketing. The research on the diversified conceptualization of the topic has recently expanded. For instance, Brodie et al. (2013) adopted a process standpoint and identified five nonsequential customer engagement subprocesses: learning, sharing, advocating, socializing, and codeveloping. From the customer perspective, Barger et al. (2016) operationalized customer engagement into a number of measurable actions: simple reactions (e.g., likes, ratings), giving comments (e.g., comments, replies), sharing and forwarding brand content (e.g., shares, retweets) and creating own content of brands (e.g., product reviews).

When adopting SM for marketing purposes, firms should clearly understand the drivers of consumer engagement (Barger et al. 2016). According to Barger et al. (2016), the reasons for consumer engagement can be categorized into five aspects: brand factors (e.g., attitude, commitment, spending), product factors (e.g., using experience, hedonic, utilitarian, and quality), consumer factors (e.g., attachment to SM, social networks, and personality), content factors (e.g., interestingness, emotional sentiment of message, and purpose) and SM factors (e.g., perceived usefulness, and ease of use). The following related studies elaborate on the influencing factors for effective customer engagement from different aspects.

Customer factors. Customers are heterogeneous with different motivations to engage with the brand. Baldus et al. (2015) suggest that firms should recognize the motivations of their members before conducting marketing efforts, and they also recommend that firms can profile their community members based on their different needs to better engage with their followers. Jahn and Kunz (2012) found that functional and hedonic content are the key drivers of consumer involvement in Facebook brand pages. According to Baldus et al. (2015), brand communities can offer special rewards for members who value the hedonic factors to engage customers. Blazevic et al. (2014) divided online customers into active contributors and passive lurkers and developed a new construct named general online social interaction propensity (GOSIP) to gauge different propensities of individual online interaction, which can help marketers understand online customer engagement behaviors.

Content factors. Research has also demonstrated how content factors influence customer engagement. Swani et al. (2017) found that SM message strategies using

brand names and functional and emotional appeals increase brand popularity. De Vries et al. (2012) examined the characteristics of content and found that vividness and interactivity (e.g., questions) of content enhance the number of likes and comments. Consistent with De Vries et al. (2012), Labrecque (2014) stated that the more customers perceived content to be interactive and open, the closer the relationships they built with the content provider would be. In addition, content that contains certain emotions, such as awe, anger, or anxiety (Berger & Milkman 2012), is more likely to be shared. Gao and Feng (2016) emphasize the importance for brands to connect with a larger ecological context and argue that brand posts with inspirational knowledge and trending topics may add value for customers following brand SM pages.

Social influence factors. As advocated by social impact theory (Latane 1981), social status, character traits, or early adopters can make certain individuals more influential than others, which becomes an important driver of rebroadcasting firm-generated content (FGC) activity (Zhang et al. 2017). Using field experiments, Gong et al. (2017) found that when the tweeting was conducted by the influential, it brings new followers to the firm and increases product demand. Furthermore, the study by Baldus et al. (2015) also indicates that campaigns led by the influential on SM can improve customer engagement. Hinz et al. (2011) advise marketers to adopt a seeding strategy that uses highly connected people as the initial seeds to provide a wider spread of viral messages.

Platform factors. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), customer engagement may differ from each platform, as SM applications are designed with different functional purposes. For example, Facebook is mainly for social networking, Twitter is mainly for microblogs, while YouTube is a content community site. Given the different functions of SM platforms, Killian and McManus (2015) categorize them into four types: relationship management, news gathering, creativity, and entertainment. Kietzmann et al. (2011) point out that some SM applications provide more enduring customer engagement opportunities, while others are better suited for providing information and entertainment to the users. Therefore, in order to create a deeper connection with customers, firms should fit the right type of campaign with the right platform.

Organizational factors. Effort and commitment on the part of organizations play an important role in enhancing customer engagement initiatives. For instance, Guesalaga (2016) found that customer engagement is partially mediated by organizational factors. Therefore, Guesalaga (2016) highlighted the importance of efforts from an organizational level and called for the experienced marketers with competence and commitment to use SM and launch communication campaigns.

Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) examine the relationship between content marketing and sales using marketing automation tools and recognize the importance of organizational processes to deliver customized content to increase firm performance.

2.1.5 Social media in international marketing

Culture has been widely recognized as an overarching stimulus that not only impacts a brand's communication with its customers but also customers' preferences and behaviors (Tsai & Men 2017). Culture is defined as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede et al. 2005, p. 28). To date, Hofstede's model remains the most-cited cultural framework in the marketing research field (Soares et al. 2007). It identifies five basic value dimensions: collectivism–individualism, masculinity–femininity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation (Hofstede 1983; Hofstede & Bond 1984).

SM marketing literature has underscored the role of cultural differences in consumers' preferences and behaviors related to SM. For example, Tsai and Men (2017) demonstrate the influential role of culture in consumers' engagement activities in SM brand pages, while Kim et al. (2018) reveal differences in the consumption and generation of online reviews among, which they account for by reference to cultural differences among consumers. These studies suggest that managing SM with a global vision helps to reach international customers more effectively and better accommodate their preferred needs. Research from different countries and SM platforms shows that SM plays a positive role in building international brand image and the brand–consumer relationship, which can lead to enhanced business performance (Hudson et al. 2016; Quinton & Wilson 2016).

Previous research has emphasized the cultural differences in firms' SM strategy development. Referencing intensive data, De Swaan Arons et al. (2014) compared different factors within high-performing and low-performing organizations, and found that the high-performing firms excelled in their customer relationship management compared to low-performers, which was indicated by their ability to engage globally with their customers and deliver rich customer experiences. More importantly, firms that have fluid organizational structures to cope with the changing digital environment prove to have stronger capabilities for cross-functional collaboration and strategic focus.

Context is an important concept when conducting SM studies in the international sphere. Context refers to the situational/environmental information that must be

known beforehand to understand the meaning of a communication subject. In cultural studies, context can be categorized into high- and low-context cultures to capture the degree of context-dependence (Hall 1989). Accordingly, communication information in low-context culture “is vested in the explicit code,” while in a high-context culture, “most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit transmitted part of the message” (Hall 1990, p. 8). In other words, communications in a low-context culture tend to be more direct, less context-dependent, and fact-based, while high-context communications are more indirect, intuitive, and less explicit (Tsai & Men 2012).

Managing SM communications also requires an understanding of different contexts. Previous studies have indicated the importance of high/low contextuality in determining media communication styles, which in turn are reflected in different types of content (De Mooij 2018). These communication approaches are usually mirrored by the indirect and emotional appeals and symbolic association with celebrity endorsements. Prior studies have also evaluated high- vs. low-context through aspects of symbolic associations. For instance, Kim and Papacharissi (2003) found that website authors from high-context cultures (i.e., Korea) tend to represent themselves with the photos of cartoons and media characters rather than their own photos. Similarly, symbolic visuals such as endorsers’ photos were commonly used by Chinese corporate communicators on their SM pages, while straightforward and indicative brand logos dominated in low-context communication (Tsai & Men 2012). Therefore, it will be reasonable to expect that effective marketing selling messages also reflect cross-cultural differences in high/low-context culture.

2.2 Theoretical lens

This section outlines the main theories applied in this dissertation: The resource-based view (RBV), the dynamic capabilities (DCs) approach, and customer engagement theory. Section 2.2.1 will elaborate on the key arguments and related studies of the firm-level theories (i.e., RBV and DCs), as some SM studies adopt the two theories concurrently. Section 2.2.2 will look at the customer level theory (i.e., customer engagement theory) and its related studies, while section 2.2.3 will summarize how these theories are used in an integrated manner as the foundation for this dissertation.

2.2.1 Firm-level theories: RBV and DCs approach

The RBV has been broadly applied in the marketing context, especially in the marketing strategy, international marketing, and marketing innovation domains (Kozlenkova et al. 2014). The RBV posits that if firms holding or controlling resources that are valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable, enables them to achieve a competitive advantage and potentially superior long-term performance (Barney 1991). Resources here refer to “tangible and intangible assets that firms use to conceive of and implement its strategies” (Barney & Arkan 2001, p. 138). According to Barney and Hesterly (2019), there are four main resources: physical, financial, human, and organizational. In the marketing context, Kozlenkova et al. (2014) argue that the uses of marketing-based resources (e.g., brand, relationships, and knowledge) are different from those in non-marketing contexts.

As an extension of the RBV, the DCs approach addresses the rapidly changing environment (Barreto 2010; Teece et al. 1997). In some cases, scholars use the terms hypercompetitive or high-velocity environments (Bourgeois & Eisenhardt 1988). Unlike the RBV, which assumes the resources and capabilities are static in nature, the main assumption of the DCs approach is that (sustained) competitive advantage can be attained through a firm’s capability to renew and reconfigure its resources in a dynamic environment (e.g., Teece et al. 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin 2000; Makadok 2001). In particular, firms can attain a competitive advantage by integrating, combining, and utilizing resources into new value-creating strategies (Eisenhardt & Martin 2000). In this regard, some researchers tend to define DCs as a specific resource due to its embeddedness with the organization and nontransferable nature (e.g., Makadok 2001; Kozlenkova et al. 2014), and the value of the DCs approach lies in the firm’s capability to renew and reconfigure resources (Eisenhardt & Martin 2000).

From the DCs approach perspective, resources include both tangible and intangible assets accessible to the firm, and capabilities are the abilities (e.g., Teece et al. 1997) or identifiable processes/routines (e.g., Eisenhardt & Martin 2000) that foster attaining new resources and transforming existing ones (Morgan 2012). Accordingly, the DCs approach includes organizational and strategic processes such as alliances, decision-making, and product development (Eisenhardt & Martin 2000; Kozlenkova et al. 2014). Learning mechanisms are extremely important to the development and evolution of DCs (Eisenhardt & Martin 2000; Vorhies et al. 2011). For instance, Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) suggest that DCs evolve through repeated practice, past mistakes, and experiences. Moreover, Zollo

and Winter (2002) also highlight the importance of deliberate cognitive processes such as knowledge articulation and knowledge codification.

Both the RBV and the DCs approach offer rich theoretical foundations for understanding the achievement of competitive advantage and superior performance (e.g., Barney 1991; Eisenhardt & Martin 2000). Although there is some evidence that marketing resources are important drivers of firm performance (Fang & Zou 2009), some resources do not confer performance by themselves. Performance improvement involves implications and implementation (Kay 1993) and therefore, effective marketing strategies are required to deploy resources via firms' marketing capabilities in achieving desired performance (Morgan 2012). Most importantly, the conversion of resources should be something valuable to customers. In other words, for a resource to be converted into performance, it should deliver value to customers through value-creating strategies (Fahy & Smithee 1999). Accordingly, resources and capabilities are also converted through marketing strategy and linked to performance.

The RBT and DCs approach have been broadly applied in marketing studies, as they provide a compelling framework to explain the synergistic and differential effects of diverse resources on performance (Fang et al. 2011). However, to understand the application of RBV and DCs in SM studies, it is important to understand how SM resources are exploited/applied in SMMSs, and what marketing capabilities will be required to achieve competitive advantage in the SM context.

Many studies have stressed the importance of SM resources capabilities by applying the resources-based and DCs approach. For example, Muninger et al. (2019) shed light on capabilities in knowledge management, top management understanding, and networking and collaboration when using SM for innovation purposes. These capabilities largely rely on the realization of key resources, such as competent SM managers in coordinating communication and decisions, operational and strategic SM teams, and the digital infrastructure, time, and budget allocation. Michaelidou et al. (2011) also showed that lack of staff familiarity and limited technical skills are key barriers to firms using SM for marketing purposes. Table 2 lists the example studies that have applied the RBV and DCs approaches in the SM context.

Further, Trainor et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of social CRM capabilities and examined the impact of SM technology usage and customer-centric management systems on social CRM capabilities. The study modeled data from 308 organizations and found that the technological resources of SM, together with customer-centric management systems, are positively related to customer

relationship performance and can increase customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention levels. The studies mentioned above elucidate the various resources and capabilities needed to effectively use SM. The overall results support the resource-capability-performance nexus in the SM context (e.g., Mahmoud et al. 2020).

Table 2. Example SM marketing studies that applied resource-based view and dynamic capabilities approach

Examples of SM marketing studies that apply RBV theory					
Authors	Type of study and sample	Identified SM resources	Arguments	Complementary resources	Selected findings
Trainor et al. (2014)	Quantitative/308 firms in the USA	SM technology usage	Have access to valuable customer information through direct and indirect interactions	Customer-centric management system	SM technology usage can be regarded as a resource, but it may ultimately impact performance-enabling by firm capabilities.
Quinton & Wilson (2016)	Qualitative/554 LinkedIn group and 12 interviews	SM networks and relationships	Both transactional and relational relationships can create value through SM	Not given	SM networking can enhance business performance.
Muninger et al. (2019)	Qualitative/16 interviews	Operational and strategic SM teams, SM manager	Have full knowledge about SM platforms and skills	Digital infrastructure, time and budget allocation	Three key capabilities and related resources were identified to enhance SM for innovation.
Tajvidi & Bangor (2021)	Quantitative /384 hotels in UK	SM	Internet-based resource that can share information with customer thus enhancing their decision-making behaviors	Offline networks (e.g., TV, radio, magazine)	Significant relationship between SM use and firm performance, the relationship is also moderated by firm's marketing capabilities (branding and innovation).

Examples of SM marketing studies that apply DCs approach				
Authors	Type of study and sample	Identified SM capabilities	Key features/definition	Selected findings
Trainor et al. (2014)	Quantitative/ 308 firms in the USA	Social CRM capability	“The integration of traditional customer-facing activities, including processes, systems, and technologies with emergent SM applications to engage customers in collaborative conversations and enhance customer relationships” (Trainor 2012, p. 321).	SM technology usage and customer-centric management systems positively affect customer relationship performance via firm-level social CRM capabilities.
Nguyen et al. (2015)	Quantitative / 357 online technology ventures from China	SM strategic capability	“Ability to acquire, integrate, and apply knowledge from SM to organizational resources in alignment with an organization’s strategic directions and choices, thus enabling the capabilities to be swift and flexible” (p.15).	SM strategic capability has a positive impact on brand innovation and also moderates the relationship between knowledge acquisition, market orientation, and brand innovation.
Wang & Kim (2017)	Quantitative/ 232 companies	Social CRM capability	“A firm’s competency in generating, integrating, and responding to information obtained from customer interactions that are facilitated by SM technologies” (Trainor et al. 2014. p. 1202).	Social CRM capability is critical to improving customer engagement and firm performance.
Wang et al. (2017)	Conceptual	SM capabilities	A dynamic organizational capability on four levels (technological, operational, managed, and strategic).	The foundation of SMC lies in its IT feature, but it can be transferred to organizational capability through the proposed four-stage mature model.

2.2.2 Customer-level theory: customer engagement theory

Customer engagement theory has emerged over the past decade, especially in its application of SM studies. The popularity of customer engagement has resulted in

a surge of interest in, and a variety of interpretations of, the concept. For instance, focusing on its multidimensional features, Brodie et al. (2011) and Calder et al. (2016) argue that customer engagement has cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions that are context-specific. However, Barger et al. (2016) view customer engagement from a process perspective and define it as “a mutually beneficial process through which firms and consumers co-create brand-related content and social experiences on SM” (p. 279). Vivek et al. (2012) diverge, by describing customer engagement as “the intensity of an individual’s participation in and connection with an organization’s offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the firm initiates” (p.127). More recently, Pansari and Kumar (2017) highlighted the value contributed by customers and referred to customer engagement as “the mechanics of a customer’s value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and indirect contribution” (p. 295).

Despite the various interpretations of the construct, there has been a consensus that customers make contributions through their owned resources, such as “knowledge, skills, and time, to facilitate the focal firm’s development of its offering” (Jaakkola & Alexander 2014, p. 255). Accordingly, customer engagement theory emphasizes the importance of customer values and encourages firms to take initiatives to engage customers. For example, Harmeling et al. (2017) encourage firms to use experiential initiatives, which help motivate autonomous customer contributions. Hanson et al. (2019) also suggest using reputation signals as a strategic tool to engage customers in online brand communities and emphasize the critical role of social signals in approaching new community members.

Customer value is a key concept in customer engagement theory, which is driven by the intensity of customer engagement (Kumar et al. 2010). Kumar et al. (2010) define customer engagement value as the value derived from a customers’ active interactions with a firm, including both transactional and non-transactional interactions. The same study conceptualized customer engagement value as comprising four components: customer lifetime value, customer influence value, customer referral value, and customer knowledge value. Customer lifetime value is measured based on the future profit a customer brings to a company in their lifetime (Kumar et al. 2010). Customer influence value is defined as “the value of the influence that an individual (usually a customer) exerts on other customers or prospects” (Kumar et al. 2010, p. 302). Kumar et al. (2010) suggest measuring customer influence value by assessing the customer’s tendency to recommend the brand to others through sharing the knowledge and eWOM (Kumar et al. 2013). Customer referral value emphasizes a customer’s value is derived from their referrals of new customers. The propensity to recommend and be an opinion

leader can be used to measure customer referral value. Customer knowledge value seizes the value of feedback delivered by customers regarding their ideas on innovation and product improvements. Customers' propensity to provide feedback can be measured as customer knowledge value.

The key argument of customer engagement theory is that customers are equal value contributors through transactional or non-transactional means (Harmeling et al. 2017; Pansari & Kumar 2017). Studies show that customer engagement is a key success factor in enhancing self-brand connection (Harrigan et al. 2018), competitive advantage (Kumar & Pansari 2016), and ultimately firm performance (Rapp et al. 2013). In the SM context, customer engagement can be manifested in three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Hollebeek et al. 2014). Accordingly, customer engagement can take different forms, such as, fun practices, learning practices, customer feedback, work for a brand, and talk about a brand (Eigenraam et al. 2018), affiliation, conversation, and responsiveness (Yang et al. 2016), and making a voluntary resource contribution (Jaakkola & Alexander 2014). Table 3 lists some example studies that apply customer engagement theory in the SM context.

Table 3. Examples of SM marketing studies that apply customer engagement theory

Authors	Type of study and sample	(Customer) engagement related arguments	Selected findings
Kumar & Pansari (2016)	Quantitative/120 companies	Engagement is defined as “the attitude, behavior, the level of connectedness (1) among customers, (2) between customers and employees, and (3) of customers and employees within a firm” (p.498).	Customer engagement and employee engagement can positively influence performance, but this effect is moderated by employee empowerment, type of firm, and nature of the industry.
Harmeling et al. (2017)	Mixed/case illustrations, and quasi-experimental study /N = 1203	Customer engagement is “a customer’s voluntary resource contribution to a firm’s marketing function, going beyond financial patronage” (p. 316).	Experiential engagement initiative has proved to have a significant indirect effect on customer engagement with mediating factor of self-transformation.

Authors	Type of study and sample	(Customer) engagement related arguments	Selected findings
Gupta et al. (2018)	Conceptual	Customer engagement is “the mechanics of a customer’s value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and indirect contribution” (Pansari & Kumar 2017, p. 2)	Cultural value has impact on customer engagement with firms
Meire et al. (2019)	Quantitative/ Study 1: N=265,530 comments from 52,431 users; Study 2: a survey of 356 participants	Customer engagement theory proposes that “customers’ brand- or firm-related experiences influence their emotional or affective states, which then influence the nature of their indirect engagement with firms, including contributing positive word-of-mouth on SM” (p.22).	Market-generated content surrounding experiential events can influence the sentiment of customers’ digital engagement

2.2.3 A combined theoretical lens in the dissertation

In the SM marketing context, SM effectiveness and market performance are often the research focus, reflecting a resource view of SM value in influencing firms’ decision-making and business performance. In this dissertation, customer engagement theory complements RBV and DCs in two ways. First, the customer engagement theory highlights customers have their owned resources which extends the concept of resources in SM context. For instance, Harmeling et al. (2017) argue that firms should harness customer owned-resources (e.g., network assets, persuasion capital, knowledge stores, and creativity) through firms’ engagement marketing initiatives in order to achieve a sustainable marketing performance.

Secondly, while RBV and DCs rather focus on the firm perspective, customer engagement theory focuses on the equal importance of customer aspects, especially in the digital context. Customer engagement theory emphasizes the importance of understanding customer motivations as a precondition of the firm developing effective SMMSs, because different customer motivations to use SM can result in different attitudes and behaviors. Consequently, firms can capitalize on customers’ SM interactions and engagement behaviors to generate marketing advantages. Therefore, by integrating theories from both firm and customer level

will offer a more comprehensive picture of SMMS development. Table 4 provides a combined overview of the theoretical foundation in this dissertation.

Table 4. A summary of theoretical lens in the dissertation

Theory	Key concept	Key arguments of the theory	Theory applications in SM context	Supporting literature
RBV	Resource	The proper use of valuable and distinctive resources is the key to achieving performance and competitive advantage.	The use of SM/technologies resources and their performance and competitive advantage	Choudhury & Harrigan (2014); Trainor et al. (2014); Wang & Kim (2017)
DCs approach	Capabilities	Resources alone are not always enough to create substantial results; instead, they should be transformed into unique capabilities to gain competitive advantages.	The integration of SM with CRM processes; SM capabilities and performance	Trainor et al. (2014); Wang & Kim (2017)
Customer engagement theory	Customer value	Customers can contribute to firm value through direct (e.g., buying) or indirect (e.g., reviews, shares) ways.	Customers owned resources: knowledge, skills, and time	Harmeling et al. (2017); Jaakkola & Alexander (2014)

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology employed in this dissertation. The purpose of the methodology discussion here is not to repeat the method parts of each paper. Rather, it provides the overall methodological justification of how all the employed methods and techniques in each paper contribute to the dissertation as a whole. The methodological choices and analytic processes are also discussed in the respective papers.

In the following part, I will start with the discussion of the research paradigm, as it guides the theorizing methods, data gathering, and data analysis methods (Sayer 2010). This study follows critical realism as the research paradigm (Bhaskar 1978; Sayer 2010). In line with this paradigm, I will also describe how the abductive research approach (Dubois & Gadde 2002) was carried out in the whole research process and how it is reflected in the dissertation papers. The mixed-method approach was selected as the research strategy because it provided different perspectives and data sources to look at the complex SMMS phenomenon. Accordingly, the research strategy section explains and justifies how the use of a mixed-method approach addresses the core purpose of this dissertation. Finally, this chapter ends with a thorough discussion of each paper's research design, data collection, and analysis. Notably, since the fourth paper of this dissertation is a conceptual paper, discussion will be only focused on the other three papers.

3.1 Critical realism as the research paradigm

Researchers' methodological decisions are largely influenced by their worldviews and the research paradigms being followed (Guba & Lincoln 1994). The research paradigm encompasses "systems of beliefs and practices that influence how researchers select both the questions they study and methods that they use to study them" (Morgan 2007, p. 49). The research paradigm offers guidance to formulate research questions and make decisions during the inquiry process, and provides a clear indication to researchers who want to align themselves with others with similar beliefs (Shannon-Baker 2016). Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that the differences between each research paradigms are based on three philosophical assumptions: ontology (i.e., how we assume the "real" world, the nature of the reality, and what can be known about them), epistemology (i.e., the relationship between the reality and the researcher, the posture of the researcher being objective detachment or value freedom), and methodology (i.e., how we believe it can be investigated and the research techniques by which a researcher can acquire knowledge about reality). Based on these three basic beliefs, Guba and Lincoln

(1994) further identified four alternative research paradigms: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory et al., and constructivism. It is important to note that the focus of this part is not to explicitly list every paradigm in the social science realm. Instead, the emphasis here is on explaining how this study tentatively selected one specific research paradigm and how it is reflected in the research aims and methodological selections. Because this dissertation adheres to critical realism as the research paradigm, the following discussion will focus solely on it.

Critical realism (Bhaskar 1978) is believed to provide an alternative viewpoint sitting between positivism and constructivism but is one that supports a realist ontology of knowledge (Bhaskar 1978). Critical realists acknowledge the existence of a reality while also believe our understanding is independent of reality and limited by empirical observation (Lincoln & Guba 2000; Mingers et al. 2013). Epistemically, the way we understand the world is constrained and mediated by our existing knowledge and theoretical lenses. Theory is useful in directing the research process, but we should also recognize that theories might be partial or incomplete to give full views of reality (Shannon-Baker 2016). Hence, it is critical to consider all viewpoints equally (Mingers et al. 2013). Methodologically, critical realists advocate different research methods to pursue knowledge, which exist in different types of objects (physical, social, and conceptual). Therefore, adopting a mixed-method research strategy is likely to be beneficial (Mingers et al. 2013).

According to Tsang and Kwan (1999), critical realism has three basic contentions. First, it claims that the reality that we study mainly refers to the systems and mechanisms of the world, rather than events that happen empirically. Second, empirical events are context-bounded in that the underlying structures and mechanisms are contingently connected to the events. Third, we can acquire new knowledge through creative constructions and replications of new theory testing. Similarly, Bygstad et al. (2016) stated that the core of critical realism methodology lies in unveiling or understanding the underlying mechanism(s) of a phenomenon. These mechanisms are usually not observable but can be identified through abstract research and systematical analysis of the interplay between layers, components, and their evolution over time through social interactions (Bygstad et al. 2016). Meanwhile, mechanisms at a general level can provide a causal structure, which is contextual and probably contingent on other mechanisms (Bhaskar 1978).

The implications of critical realism's epistemology and methodology are represented throughout the study. Building on notions presented by critical realism, the present study considers causality as contextual and emergent tendencies. In doing so, I applied three theories in this dissertation as theoretical foundations: the RBV, DCs, and customer engagement theory. The adoption of the

RBV and DCs approach is essential because of firms' internal resources and capabilities focus, while the use of customer engagement theory as another theoretical lens is also beneficial to address the importance of external factors (i.e., the power of customers in SM context). Doing so might offer a far more complete picture of the studied phenomenon (Shannon-Baker 2016). A researcher seeking a better understanding of the reality that is beyond our interpretations must understand the context in which the actors operate (Welch et al. 2011). In other words, critical realism emphasizes a process and generative view by seeking to understand how phenomena are caused and its underlying causes that are (or maybe) at play (Clark et al. 2007). Therefore, critical realists are interested in context-based causality with "particular situations and events, rather than addressing only general patterns" (Maxwell & Mittapalli 2010, p. 156).

In terms of this dissertation, a key contribution is the conceptualization of SMMS and its developmental process based on the inputs from two sides: the firm and the customers. It is the interplay between resources, capabilities, and firm objectives that creates different SMMSs. Therefore, the aim of the dissertation is not to give a specific answer or infer definite SMMS consequences, but to outline the underlying key dimensions of a particular phenomenon, which is also in line with critical realist claims. In the course of searching for underlying mechanisms that enhance market performance, the present study examines the relationship between SM marketing content and customer engagement within the international marketing context. Accordingly, another contribution is the discussion of cultural value as a moderator, thus reflecting a contingent viewpoint of contextual causality (Welch et al. 2011).

3.2 Abductive research approach

This dissertation follows an abductive research approach adhering to the critical realism research paradigm. There are three main research approaches found in social sciences studies: the inductive, deductive, and abductive. Inductive approaches aim to explain relationships or create/develop theories based on data described as "a risky leap from a collection of single facts to a general truth" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2017, p. 3). In contrast, deductive approaches begin with the development of theoretical propositions that are subsequently tested with empirical evidence that does reflect the positivism research paradigm (Piekkari et al. 2010), but "proceeds from a general rule and asserts that this rule explains a single case" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2017, p. 3). Abductive logic challenges the linear research process of the two logics mentioned above but is not purely a combination of the two (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2017; Dubois & Gadde 2002). The

abductive research advocates an iterative research process comprised of a series of sequential research stages and suggests intertwined activities back and forth between theory and data (Dubois & Gadde 2002).

Abduction sometimes begins with “an unmet expectation and works backward to invent a plausible world or a theory that would make surprise meaning.” (Van Maanen et al. 2007, p. 1149). In this dissertation, the “unmet expectation” was evident in both theory development and data collection process. The initial step of this study was to develop a literature review paper on SMMS to obtain a full picture before conducting any empirical studies. After delving into hundreds of related studies, I was surprised by the limited number of studies that address the theoretical development of SMMSs. Consequently, the study was redirected to review the theory development of SMMS. More specifically, questions like, what is the uniqueness of SMMS, and how can we derive key features from SM and marketing strategies to form a solid theoretical foundation for SMMSs were frequently asked. Going back and forth across the literature of different research streams, the study shows an absolute non-linear and iterative research process.

The abductive process also emerged in the data collection, showing the direction and redirection in several research processes. The study was conducted using two rounds of data collection. The first round aimed to identify the key differences in using SM between different companies; the data were collected through in-depth interviews and followed up with a survey study. Consequently, the original research framework was successively modified when I repeatedly returned to the literature and compared the findings with the literature. The search for theoretical arguments and building connections between constructs was carried out constantly throughout the whole process. Dubois and Gadde (2002) argue that the abductive approach can lead to “unanticipated empirical findings, but also of theoretical insights gained during the process” (p.559).

3.3 Mixed-method as the research strategy

In general, there are three types of research methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method. Quantitative and qualitative research methods are two research paradigms advocated by different scholars for over a century (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004). Qualitative research is the analysis, interpretation, and classifications of types of phenomena and observations for the purpose of uncovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships (Hohenthal 2006). According to Doz (2011), qualitative research is especially suitable for making substantial contributions to areas by opening the black box of organizational

processes and theory building by providing rich “descriptions of real phenomena and action instances” and “surfacing contextual dimensions of international business” (Doz 2011, p.583-584). On the other hand, quantitative research is shaped by positivism and empiricist and is based on deductive logic, aiming to test and understand relationships that are hypothesis testable (Babbie 2020). Mixed-method research is meant to overcome the drawbacks of the two research, which is defined as “the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Johnson et al. 2007, p.123). The central premise of mixed-method research is that the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches can provide a richer understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007).

This dissertation adopts a mixed-methods research strategy (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki & Nummela 2006) that is aligned with the critical realism research paradigm and abductive research approach. Combined they support the idea that quantitative and qualitative studies can work together to overcome each other’s shortcomings (Shannon-Baker 2016). The study of SMMS incorporates complex issues that are difficult to comprehend from a single perspective. Multiple perspectives and data sources are needed to understand the various aspects and dimensions of this complex phenomenon. Accordingly, this dissertation blends both qualitative and quantitative research (even though the quantitative analysis was not very strong), which involves investigating the phenomenon with various approaches and data sources, and ensuring the reliability by converging information via different methods (Bechara & Van de Ven 2011).

Numerous researchers have identified the benefits of mixed-methods. For instance, Jick (1979) argued that the triangulation including both quantitative and qualitative methods offers more reliable findings based on thicker and richer data. Triangulation can also reveal contradictions and support the integration of theories. Rossman and Wilson (1985) explained that using mixed-methods means the data can confirm or corroborate each other through triangulation. Furthermore, Sieber (1973) summarized that the integration of quantitative and qualitative research could bring value to the whole research process, including refining conceptual and instrument development at the design stage, helping to avoid bias at the data collection stage, and facilitating the generalizability of the findings at the data analysis stage.

Regarding the research design of mixed-method, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) identified three mixed-methods designs: explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential, and convergent. Explanatory sequential designs start with quantitative data collection and analysis and qualitative studies follow up to explain the initial quantitative results. Exploratory sequential designs begin with qualitative exploratory studies and are followed by quantitative studies with a larger sample to test or generalize findings. Finally, convergent designs involve more complex designs; that is, the qualitative and quantitative studies can be conducted in a single phase in which data collection and analysis are carried out in parallel and integrated to support the comparison of results from the two forms of research. In this dissertation, I applied the exploratory sequential design. I first conducted in-depth interviews to obtain detailed insights into firms' SMMS issues, then confirmed the results with a larger sample survey of marketing managers.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

The data used in this dissertation comprises both qualitative and quantitative means, including interviews, surveys, and a dataset of 327 papers on SM marketing topics. In the following sub-sections, I will provide an outline of the data collection and analysis processes for these papers (Listed in Table 5). There will be no discussion of any data issues relating to Paper 4 since it is a conceptual paper. The original names of the firms which offered interviews are omitted to preserve their anonymity.

Table 5. Research method of each paper

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4
Research Method	Desk research	Mixed method	Qualitative method	Conceptual
Research design	Literature review	Quantitative and qualitative studies	Explorative case study	Explorative
Data collection	Published journal articles	Surveys, semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured interviews	-
Sample size	N=327 journal articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey with Manager (U.S.) (N=52) • Interviews (China, Finland, Sweden) (N=15) • Survey with academic researchers (global) (N=43) 	N=5 Chinese firms and 5 Finnish firms	-

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4
Data analysis	Systematic review approach	Content analysis and descriptive statistics analysis (Nvivo, SPSS)	Thematic content analysis (Nvivo)	-

3.4.1 Paper 1

Paper 1 is a literature review paper based on the analysis of 327 papers. A systematic review process was adopted in the review process, where the data collection and analysis were carried out primarily in four steps.

Step 1: set the article and journal selection criteria. My co-author and I first defined the review scope, which included studies with three criteria: (1) paper type: empirical research, (2) study level/perspective: focusing on marketing views from the firm, rather than purely the customer perspective, (3) study context: the study is conducted in the context of SM, (4) publication outlet: articles were published in journals listed in the UK-based ABS journal ranking catalog, which leads to the exclusion of non-listed journal papers, book chapters, conference papers, and business magazine articles, and (5) time period: articles that were published from 2009 onward, when the first empirical articles relating to social networking site and WOM began to appear on the subject (Trusov et al. 2009).

Step 2: searching process-inclusion and exclusion of papers. To identify the relevant articles, we searched various electronic databases, including ScienceDirect, EBSCO, ABI, and Google Scholar, etc. We also used various keywords to ensure all the related studies were included, the main keywords included SM marketing (strategy), digital marketing (strategy), SM strategy, social CRM (strategy), SM engagement (strategy), and etc. This initial search yielded over 3000 articles, which were then reduced to 311 papers that conformed to our eligibility criteria after initial evaluation (following a reading of the title and abstract) and full evaluation (following a reading of the full paper attentively). A manual search using a snowball procedure was used to identify other articles, for example, to check the reference list in selected articles to identify the missing literature. These processes helped finalize the total number of eligible articles for review to 327 from the period 2009–2020.

Step 3: paper information extraction and coding procedure. In order to further evaluate the content of the selected articles, we adopted a coding protocol consisting of five parts: (1) source of articles, (2) research design, (3) scope of

research, (4) research methodology, and (5) research stream. Under the supervision of the principal investigator, two researchers coded all qualifying articles. The two coders worked independently during the coding process to extract relevant information from the articles chosen. Comparing the two sets of completed coding sheets revealed that the intercoder reliability rating for the different issues examined was above 90%–95%, which is satisfactory. Discrepancies in coding were resolved during a joint meeting of the two coders with the principal investigator. The extracted information was logged and stored on an Excel sheet.

Step 4: data analysis. This step is to analyze and synthesize the data following an iterative and categorization approach (Bazeley & Jackson 2013). The data analysis consisted of two parts: descriptive analysis and further analysis. The descriptive analysis shows the trend of topics in the past decade, the distributions of journal publication outlets in the different time periods, and the trend (upwards and downwards) in each research stream. The further analysis includes empirical, theoretical, and methodological issues in each research stream. All distributions of percentages were calculated by using SPSS.

3.4.2 Paper 2

Paper 2 used a mixed-method approach to verify the proposed theoretical framework, including 15 in-depth interviews with SM practitioners from China, Finland, and Sweden, 52 surveys with marketing managers from the USA, and 43 received email surveys out of over 200 emails sent to global SM marketing scholars. All these empirical data were collected between February and June 2019. The selection of the key informants in both interviews and surveys had to meet the following criteria (1) have their own firm or brand accounts on SM platforms, (2) have at least one-year experience in SM marketing, and (3) be experienced enough to address SM marketing issues relevant to their company, which limits the interviewees to marketers, marketing managers, business directors, or company CEOs. The empirical research process was mainly carried out in the following steps:

(1) Conducting qualitative studies

The qualitative study relied mainly on in-depth interviews that were conducted either face-to-face or via video calls. We first sent emails to over 30 firms that we identified online to request their participation in the study. After about two weeks, we had received positive feedback from 15 managers from a variety of industries and firm sizes that agreed to an interview. The managers to be interviewed were

sent an interview guide to ensure they understood the purpose of the interview and the background of the study. Apart from these questions, we also picked up some issues that emerged during the interviews, which helped identify the uniqueness of the certain context. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour and centered on three major areas: the firm's SM marketing activities, the design of SMMSs, and customers' reactions and engagement behaviors in relation to the SM marketing initiatives. NVivo software was used for coding with the content analysis method.

(2) Conducting quantitative research

The aim of the quantitative analysis was to confirm differences in the profile characteristics of the four types of SMMSs using descriptive statistics. A structured questionnaire incorporating the key parameters in the proposed framework was sent to a random sample of 52 SM marketing managers in the USA via a third-party marketing research company. The survey approach offers an opportunity to examine the relationships between certain parameters.

A pilot survey study was conducted among some academic colleagues to check the workability of the questionnaire and get feedback to improve the quality of the survey. After the pilot study, the questionnaire was electronically sent to marketing managers in the USA, which results 52 valid data sample. The data were analyzed using SPSS software with descriptive statistical analysis.

(3) Conducting supplementary studies

In order to provide a deeper and broader view of the future research opportunities on SMMS topic, we also designed a questionnaire sent to over 200 researchers, with who we identified their contacts in their SM-related publications. The questionnaire includes mainly four questions:

- Please identify three of the broad thematic areas referring to SMMSs that you think will be of great importance for future research in this field.
- Within each of the three thematic areas selected, please specify three topics that, in your opinion, should be given particular attention by future researchers.
- Please elaborate on some specific subject(s) that, in your opinion, would be representative of the investigation of the topics selected in future research.

- Please indicate the theory(ies)/paradigm(s) that, in your opinion, would be of particular usefulness in providing a theoretical backing for the investigation of the specific subjects selected.

As a result, we received 43 responses. We analyzed the answers using content analysis to combine similar topics and extract key/identical topics. Consequently, we identified 82 topical questions that can guide future research directions.

3.4.3 Paper 3

Paper 3 adopts a qualitative method to contextualize the SM marketing developmental process model. The research is informed by 10 in-depth interviews with SM marketers from China and Finland. An interview guide was sent to interviewees before the meeting to ensure that they understood the aim of the interview and the study background. The interview guide included a summary of the aims of the study and the major questions that would be discussed. The preordained questions were supplemented with others when interesting or unique aspects of the respondents' treatment of SM marketing emerged during the interviews. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour and centered on two major areas: the firm's SM marketing activities and marketing initiatives, the formulation and implementation of SMMSs. More specifically, the following questions were asked during the interviews.

- How do you see the role of SM in your marketing strategy?
- How is SM used in your company (e.g., the usage frequency, the outcomes)?
- What is the main objective of SM marketing in your company?
- The formulation and implementation of SMMS (who makes the decisions, who implements, what factors influence the implementation)?
- How do you engage customers on SM?
- Do you have techniques or tools in your company to promote SM listening?
- How do you respond to customer needs on SM (e.g., customer inquiries, negative comments)?
- How do you utilize SM data?
- What are the main challenges in SM marketing?

Data analysis of the interviews employed NVivo software to ensure transparency. I used open thematic content analysis to code the data from the interviews, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2012). The triangulation technique ensured multiple perspectives were captured. That involved two researchers conducting the face-to-face interviews and interviewing two people from a firm whenever possible. The information provided by informants was verified using different data sources, including firm websites, SM platforms, and blogs.

3.5 Research quality

Research quality is strongly reflected in the process determining how the research is conducted and reported. As this dissertation is in a sense qualitative-oriented, the trustworthiness of the research is assessed through the commonly used quality criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility refers to the truth of the data that ensures the consistency between participants' views, researchers' interpretations, and the data representations (Cope 2014). One way to enhance credibility is data triangulation (Stake 1995). According to Cunningham (1997), there are two types of triangulations: between-method triangulation and within-method triangulation. Between-methods triangulation involves employing different research methods, whereas within-method triangulation requires employing multiple data sources within a single method. This research relied on both referenced triangulation methods. In Paper 2, between-method triangulation was adopted. More specifically, the research framework and arguments were first verified through a qualitative method (i.e., interviews), and were then further tested through a small sample quantitative survey. Papers 2 and 3 rely on within-method triangulation to validate their credibility. The accuracy of primary data was safeguarded by interviewing multiple people from the same company, sometimes with more than one interviewer in attendance, to ensure the interpretation of interview data was consistent (Ghauri 2004). Another way to ensure credibility is to verify the research findings with the participants (Cope 2014). As mentioned above, the interview questions were sent to the interviewees before the interviews. The interviewees were also offered the opportunity to give feedback after the coding and interpretations. The published manuscript (Paper 2) was sent to all companies involved along with a summary of the key findings and managerial implications.

Dependability refers to the data constancy over similar settings (Cope 2014). The primary approach adopted to meet this criterion was to increase the transparency

of the research process (Dubois & Gibbert 2010). As the data analysis in this research was rather iterative with an abductive research logic, I used NVivo software to ease coding, analysis and synthesizing of the data to ensure trustworthiness. Specifically, all material, including interview transcripts, memos, and related literature, was uploaded to NVivo when data collecting was complete. Furthermore, research diaries were kept over the whole research process period to increase the reliability of the data coding and analysis. Transparency is also assessed through intercoder reliability during the coding process. In Paper 1, two coders undertook rigorous training and worked individually to extract the relevant information under the supervision of the principal investigator. The intercoder reliability rate has to be above 90%–95%, and the coding discrepancies were resolved during a joint meeting of the two coders with the principal investigator, with finalized data of the unified coding protocol used for subsequent analysis.

Confirmability refers to “the researcher’s ability to demonstrate that the data represent the participants’ responses and not the researcher’s biases or viewpoints” (Cope 2014, p.89). Accordingly, to enhance the confirmability of the research, the researcher can report the findings by including rich quotes from participants that reflect each emergent theme (Cope 2014). I therefore added many direct quotes from interviews in Papers 2 and 3 and described my interpretation of each quote. Furthermore, I adopted the “Gioia method” (Gioia et al. 2013) to illustrate how the data were extracted and aggregated into different order concepts to produce the different themes applied.

Transferability refers to findings that can be applied to other settings or groups (Cope 2014). That means the researchers should “provide sufficient information on the informants and the research context to enable the reader to assess the findings’ capability of being fit or transferable” (Cope 2014, p.89). My co-authors and I have provided sufficient information regarding the participants’ background, firm/country background, and interview/survey process in each empirical paper in this dissertation. Nevertheless, generalizability of the findings of this research was not among its aims. Accordingly, I acknowledge the shortcomings of the research by listing research limitations and suggestions for future research in each paper.

4 SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION PAPERS

This chapter summarizes the key research findings of the four papers comprising the second part of the dissertation. Each paper addresses a different research question that informs the research objectives of this dissertation. I also outline how each paper makes contributions to relevant theoretical research streams and their key implications. Table 6 provides an overview of four papers in this dissertation.

Table 6. An overview of four papers in the dissertation

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4
Title	Social media marketing: A review and future research agenda	Social media marketing strategy: definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, validation, and future agenda	A cross-cultural comparison of social media marketing strategies development of international firms: Evidence from Finland and China	Global customer engagement via social content strategies: Framework, propositions, and implications
Research objective	To conduct a literature review on SM marketing topic, evaluate the research status, and suggest research opportunities for future studies	To conceptualize SMMS, and understand its developmental process	To explore the elements (i.e., barriers and enablers) that influence SMMS developmental process and how culture influences its development	To explore the impact of cultural values on the relationship between SM content marketing and customer engagement
Research question	How does SM impact marketing, and what are the research status and opportunities available on SM marketing topic?	How to conceptualize, develop, and distinguish SMMSs?	What are the key elements in the SMMS developmental process, and how does national culture influence its development?	How do social content strategies impact customer engagement and what are the roles of cultural factors?
Research design	Review paper	Mixed-method	Qualitative method	Conceptual paper
Data	Literature (N=327)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Manager survey (US) (N=52) •Interviews (China, Finland, Sweden) (N=15) •Academic researchers (global) (N=43) 	Interviews (China, Finland) (N=10)	—

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4
Data analysis	Systematic review approach	Content analysis and descriptive statistics analysis (Nvivo, SPSS)	Thematic content analysis (Nvivo)	—
Research findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified five different SM marketing roles representing five different research streams. • Provided summaries in terms of empirical, theoretical, and methodological applications. • Outlined the research gaps and offered a rich agenda for future research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMMS is a form of integrated activities that enable social interactions and connectedness into marketing resources. • The four identified SMMSs were rather representative in terms of the maturity of strategic SM usage, but not necessarily sequentially. • The choice and development of SMMSs are largely dependent on the firms' strategic goals and the supporting resources and capabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SMMS developmental model comprises four major components: drivers, inputs, throughputs, and outputs. • The development of SMMSs usually follows a subsequent process. • Cultural values exert influence on SMMSs development in different aspects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content marketing should provide value to customers. • Identified four key elements of social content strategy: characteristic, source, valence, and persuasion approach. • Culture values strongly impact the relationship between SM content marketing and customer engagement.

	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4
Research contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an extensive literature review on SM marketing topic. • Offer future research directions on the topic. • Offer extensive managerial implications that are synthesized from reviewed papers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualize SMMS, helping alleviate definitional deficiency and increase conceptual clarity. • Offer insights into different SMMSs and required resources and capabilities. • Provide future research opportunities on SMMS topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a process model of SMMS formulation. • Contextualize the SMMS developmental process model in international firms. • Contribute to international marketing and business literature by exploring the impact of cultural value. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a new understanding of social content strategy. • Fill the research gap of cultural impact on customer engagement. • Propose a set of propositions that advance theoretical understandings and guidance for future customer engagement research.

4.1 Paper 1

With the exploding use of SM-based marketing tools, questions such as the impacts of SM on marketing, the research status in the field, and possible research opportunities on this topic remain fragmented and in need of clarification. Paper 1 intended to provide a holistic overview of the SM marketing field and propose guidelines for future research. The study provides a systematic review and synthesis of 327 articles on SM marketing topics published in the period 2009–2020, centering on five different research streams, each of which emphasizes different SM roles. Throughout the paper, my co-authors and I identified some key thematic areas addressed in each stream to consolidate the theoretical understanding in SM marketing. We also provide researchers with an overview of research gaps regarding the theoretical, methodological, and contextual limitations. That process led to proposing potential future research avenues.

The starting point of the research was the identification of five different SM marketing roles representing five different research streams. Those were SM as a general marketing and strategic tool, SM as a promotion and selling outlet, SM as a communication and branding channel, SM as a monitoring and intelligence source, and SM as a customer relationship management and value (co)creation platform. It is evident that these five research streams have distinct domains and are useful for organizing the fragmented literature. To further differentiate the five research streams, Paper 1 discusses how different SM marketing activities feature in each research stream. A systematic review of existing studies identifies several key future research avenues that warrant research attention. For example, some new theoretical bases also need to be transferred from other more mature marketing fields to explain the SM marketing phenomenon.

This study thus makes significant contributions to the SM marketing field. First, this research is among the first to provide a systematic and comprehensive assessment of prior studies on the SM marketing field with a large data set (N=327). It presents a framework that organizes the SM marketing literature into five different research streams. The proposed framework thus serves as a foundational lens to assess the research status of the field, identify research gaps, and direct future research. Second, it identifies key thematic research topics in different research streams and offers relevant insights to advance marketing practice. Finally, it provides fruitful research agendas regarding the theoretical, methodological, and contextual perspectives, which advances the generation of knowledge in the future. These integrative research efforts will collectively advance

theory development and could have a significant long-term impact on this increasingly significant SM marketing area.

4.2 Paper 2

The starting point for Paper 2 was the increasing number of calls for research on how SM practices could be efficiently incorporated into marketing strategy (e.g., Ancillai et al. 2019; Nam et al. 2017; Rapp et al. 2013; Schweidel & Moe 2014; Wang & Kim 2017). With the literature on SMMS mainly focusing on specific and isolated aspects, Paper 2 aims to understand the integration of SM with marketing strategy. The paper addresses one main research question: *How to conceptualize, develop, and distinguish SMMSs?* Therefore, the study had three key objectives. First, to conceptualize the term “SMMS” to enhance conceptual clarity; second, to differentiate the SMMSs used by different firms; third, to explore and propose a research framework of the SMMS developmental process enabled by various marketing resources and capabilities.

My co-authors and I first conceptualized SMMS as “an organization’s integrated pattern of activities that, based on a careful assessment of customers’ motivations for brand-related SM use and the undertaking of deliberate engagement initiatives, transform SM connectedness (networks) and interactions (influences) into valuable strategic means to achieve desirable marketing outcomes.” Further, we identified four distinctive SMMSs, namely, social commerce strategy, social content strategy, social monitoring strategy, and social CRM strategy, upheld by different firm business goals, resources, and capabilities. For instance, social commerce strategy aims to attract customers with transactional interests; social content and social monitoring strategies aim to deliver valuable content and services to customers; while social CRM strategy focuses on building long-term customer relationships by integrating SM data within a CRM system and organizational processes.

The conceptualization of SMMS and identification of four different strategies were further verified by a series of in-depth interviews with 15 SM marketing practitioners from China, Finland, and Sweden. The interviews were then complemented with an electronic survey among a randomly selected sample of 52 US SM marketing managers with appropriate experience of SM marketing. The empirical findings show the four SMMSs were represented in the maturity of strategic SM usage, but not necessarily sequentially. The findings also reveal that the choice of SMMS is largely dependent on the strategic goals of firms using SM, together with the resources and capabilities supporting their SM planning.

Additionally, we sent over 200 emails to SM marketing scholars requesting they propose focal issues for future research. We received input from 43 of those scholars, which we incorporated into Paper 2.

Consequently, Paper 2 narrows an emerging and urgent research gap and makes several important contributions. First, to the best of our knowledge, this paper is among the first to conceptualize SMMS by combining SM and marketing strategy dimensions. We thus contribute to the existent literature by providing a clearer and deeper understanding of the concept. Secondly, the identification and verification of four SMMSs illuminate how to build SMMSs. The finding highlights the different stages regarding the use of SM, resource integration, and interaction leading to social capabilities. Third, it contributes to the growing body of literature with suggestions for future research. The inputs received from SM researchers offer insightful information and expand SMMS research by presenting potential avenues of future research on the subject.

4.3 Paper 3

Paper 3 seeks to fill the research gap on SMMS study in the international marketing context. With many studies focusing on SM marketing practices and some emphasizing the adoption of SM at the organizational level, studies on SMMS development are rare. Furthermore, despite recognition that culture is an overarching stimulus that impacts how brands communicate with their customers and also customer preferences and behavior (Tsai & Men 2017), the cultural influence on firms' SMMS development remains to be addressed. Therefore, this paper aims to answer the following research question: *What are the key elements in the SMMS developmental process, and how does national culture influence its development?* Accordingly, this paper focuses on SMMS development in international firms.

The study follows Li et al.'s (2021) conceptualization of the SMMS developmental process, highlighting the role of and intakes from both firms and customers. The developmental model comprises four major components, namely drivers (i.e., a firm's SM marketing objectives and customers' motivations for SM use); inputs (i.e., a firm's SM engagement initiatives and the customers' SM behaviors); throughputs (i.e., connections and interactiveness between firms and customers to exchange resources and satisfy needs); and outputs (i.e., resulting outcomes). This study also examined cultural impacts by applying Hofstede's culture model with five basic value dimensions: collectivism/individualism, masculinity/femininity,

power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation (Hofstede 1983; Hofstede and Bond 1984).

The study used international firms in China and Finland as a basis for empirical inquiry. Building on an inductive research logic, ten case firms (five from Finland and five from China) were approached, and their representatives were interviewed. The data gathered helped explore the potential facilitators and obstacles in the SMMS developmental process and how cultural differences influence SMMS development between firms in two countries. The data analysis followed the Gioia method, that is, an iterative process was applied to aggregate the first-order statements into more abstract second-order concepts (Gioia et al. 2013), which were later collapsed and combined into aggregate dimensions. NVivo software was used to code, analyze, and synthesize the data to ensure their trustworthiness. Content analysis from the brands' SM web pages was also used in triangulation (Yin 2011).

The results indicate that the development of SMMSs usually follows a subsequent process. Firms usually start SM operations with some objectives that either come directly from leaders or align with the firm's business strategies. The interactions on SM platforms are largely supported by firms' existing resources and capabilities. That means resource limitations prevent some firms (especially small ones) from launching large-scale content campaigns or conducting social listening on SM. The comparative analysis between firms from the two countries also shows similarities and differences. For instance, the orientation of Chinese firms is more transactional than that of Finnish firms, and they are more eager to find a way to link SM to sales.

The cross-case data analysis shows that national culture affects the development of SMMSs. For instance, the influence of the individualism/collectivism cultural dimension is evident in the SM content creation and collective problem-solving aspects. Decision-making, such as the formulation and execution of SMMSs, reflects a difference concerning the power distance dimension. The uncertainty avoidance dimension impacts the willingness to accept risk and how firms use SM information. Based on those empirical observations, the paper concluded with five propositions on the cultural influence on key SMMS developmental variables. The study thus offers important theoretical implications to the marketing strategy and international marketing literature. It extends the literature on the role of cultural value in the application of SM marketing across borders and the marketing strategy theory through the integration and clear conceptualization of SMMSs in both western and Asian contexts. The managerial implications outlined in the

study can help international marketers understand the culture-bound nature of SM behaviors and decision-making.

4.4 Paper 4

Paper 4 explores the impact of social content strategy on customer engagement and how cultural values will moderate that relationship. Literature has highlighted the importance of SM content as an effective stimulus for customer engagement; however, there is still a lack of an integrative and theoretical understanding of how content marketing impacts customer engagement (Akpinar & Berger 2017). Furthermore, despite the popularity of SM in a global context, the extant research on the related topics seemed to have paid little attention to the role of cultural factors. Although research has identified the impact of cultural differences on some specific consumer perceptions, emotions, and behaviors relating to SM usage (e.g., Jiao et al. 2018), some of the findings in different contexts are inconsistent. The literature does not provide a consistent integrative framework to guide further research.

Paper 4 is a conceptual paper based on an extensive literature review and integrating different research streams. It aims to provide a theoretical understanding of cultural influences on customer engagement behaviors. More specifically, the paper intends to answer the question of *how do social content strategies impact customer engagement and what are the roles of cultural factors*. The study was built on Gupta et al.'s (2018) definition of *global customer engagement* and applied different cultural dimensions to propose the effect of cultural values on SM customer engagement behaviors. Consequently, the research proposes a conceptual model that posits that the impact of different types of content on customer engagement will be moderated by cultural value. The study adopts Hofstede et al.'s (2010) individualism and uncertainty avoidance, and Hall's (1989) high/low-context dimension to capture cultural differences at the individual-level.

One of the key findings of this study is identifying four key elements of social content strategy that strongly impact customer engagement behaviors. Those elements are: content characteristics (functional vs. emotional), source of the content (FGC vs. UGC), valence of the content (positive vs. negative), and persuasion approach (hard-sell vs. soft-sell). Further, the research gathers literature from different streams and advances four propositions that illustrate how cultural factors impact the relationship between social content strategy and customer engagement. For instance, the online customer review, eWOM influence,

and referrals literature were thoroughly discussed to provide a solid theoretical foundation on how the individualism–collectivism cultural dimension moderates SM content as a trigger of customer engagement. One finding of Paper 4 was that SM users in individualist cultures are more likely to display higher customer engagement toward emotional content. In comparison, SM users in collectivist cultures are more likely to display higher customer engagement toward informational content.

Paper 4 makes several theoretical contributions and offers several managerial implications. First, it contributes to the literature on content marketing and customer engagement. The extensive review of content marketing extends understanding of social content strategy, highlighting the customer value as strategic goals that were largely overlooked in previous definitions. Second, the study proposes an integrative framework that offers guidance to firms in strategically managing SM content for customer engagement purposes. Third, it provides a theoretical understanding of how the cultural values moderate customer engagement toward different SM content that is particularly applicable for international marketing managers to better engage global customers. Managerially, it provides valuable managerial suggestions for firms seeking to enhance their strategic decision-making associated with SM content marketing in the global market.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter reports the findings of each paper in an integrative manner to show how the four papers are linked and meet the general purpose of the research. The discussion is followed by a presentation of the overall theoretical contributions and managerial implications of the dissertation and ends by outlining its limitations and suggestions for future research.

5.1 Key integrated findings

To recap, the main research objective of this dissertation is to understand the integration of SM and marketing strategy by examining the impacts of SM on the marketing field and exploring the strategic use of SM as a marketing strategy, especially in an international marketing context. One main research question and three sub-questions were posed to guide that research goal, and each sub-question was addressed through the different papers comprising this dissertation. This section will provide integrated findings in response to three sub-questions and the main research question. Table 7 provides an overview of the key findings.

Table 7. Summary of key findings of the dissertation

Research question		Integrative findings
Main question	Sub-questions	
What are the impacts of SM on marketing and how can SM be strategically utilized and managed, especially in an international marketing setting?	How does SM impact marketing, and what are the research status and opportunities available on the SM marketing topic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SM is radically transforming the key marketing functions, such as selling, communications, and customer relationship management; • Information search and dissemination are more than ever becoming low-cost and high-speed; • Marketing communications are transitioning from one-to-many to one-to-one; • Content marketing, customer engagement, and data analytics are three key research topics that have a steep increasing trend, especially in the last five years.
	How can “SMMS” and its	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “SMMS” can be conceptualized as “an organization’s integrated pattern of activities that, based on a careful assessment of

Research question		Integrative findings
Main question	Sub-questions	
	<i>developmental process be conceptualized?</i>	<p>customers' motivations for brand-related SM use and the undertaking of deliberate engagement initiatives, transform SM connectedness (networks) and interactions (influences) into valuable strategic means to achieve desirable marketing outcomes";</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four identified SMMSs, namely, social commerce strategy, social content strategy, social monitoring strategy, and social CRM strategy; • When formulating SMMS, firms should equally look at customer motivations while evaluating the resources and capabilities that a firm holds; • Capture the nuance of different SMMSs enabled by the firm's different SM marketing objectives, resources, and capabilities.
	<i>What are the outcomes of SMMS, and how do national cultural values affect the outcomes?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer engagement can be regarded as the desired outcome because it includes both direct and indirect value contributed by customers through buying and SM interactions; • Cultural value greatly impacts firms' SM marketing developmental process; • Culture influences how consumers search, consume, respond, and exchange content on SM; • Selecting appropriate cultural dimensions for future SM studies.

The exploding use of SM in the past decade underscores the need for guidance on strategically using SM to foster relationships with customers, advance customer engagement, and increase business performance. By synthesizing 327 papers on SM marketing topics, we found SM to be radically transforming the way marketing functions. Examples include the influence on selling, communications, information access, and customer relationship management. For instance,

information searching and dissemination are becoming increasingly low-cost and high-speed with the help of SM. Marketing communications are transitioning from one-to-many to one-to-one, empowered by SM's hyper-connectedness and interactions, regardless of time or place (Hewett et al. 2016). Such changes necessitate holistic planning and the integration of SM into marketing, whereby the convergence of online and offline activities work together to achieve higher performance levels. Moreover, our study indicates that content marketing, customer engagement, and data analytics emerged as the three top substantive research themes (via keyword analysis) and have shown a steep increasing trend, especially in the last five years.

The study also identified five different SM roles in the marketing field. First, SM is used as a promotion and selling channel, in which case SM platforms are presented with dominant selling or promotional content. Second, SM is used for communication and branding purposes. Then, SM content is delivered so as to influence customer perception of a brand/product. SM is also used to communicate with brand users and followers. Third, SM is used as a monitoring and intelligence source, where firms use SM to monitor customer voices and opinions. In some cases, SM can uncover innovation opportunities through the observation of market changes and competitors. Fourth, SM is also used for customer relationship management and as a value (co)creation platform. In that case, the firm prioritizes the customer relationship and integrates SM use with a CRM system to manage relational data derived from SM platforms. Finally, SM is used as a general marketing and strategic tool, which means there is no specific differentiation of SM use within the firm, but rather it is used for marketing purposes.

The second sub-question is addressed by the proposal that the concept of SMMS can be conceptualized as “an organization's integrated pattern of activities that, based on a careful assessment of customers' motivations for brand-related SM use and the undertaking of deliberate engagement initiatives, transform SM connectedness (networks) and interactions (influences) into valuable strategic means to achieve desirable marketing outcomes.” (Li et al. 2021, P.54). In short, SMMS comprises integrated activities enabling social interactions and connectedness to marketing resources. This conceptualization was further elaborated with a developmental model highlighting the equal importance of considering customer motivation when formulating the SMMS. In contrast, conventional marketing strategies tend to focus on the evaluation of the resources and capabilities of a firm. The developmental model also highlights customer engagement as the desired outcome because it drives customers to voluntarily contribute their own resources to firms.

The study also identified four SMMSs to capture the nuances of different SMMSs enabled by firms' different SM marketing objectives, resources, and capabilities. Those are: social commerce strategy, social content strategy, social monitoring strategy, and social CRM strategy, representing the growing levels of strategic maturity. It is worth noting that the adoption of four different SMMS does not necessarily follow a sequential pattern but is determined by the firm's strategic objectives, resources, and capabilities. The mere use of SM alone does not generate customer value. The generation of social networks and influences (via firm-customer and customer-customer interactions) can subsequently be used strategically for resource transformation. Accordingly, the study suggests that firms should first recognize customers' motivations for engaging in brand-related SM activities and encourage their voluntary contributions.

This dissertation also suggests that customer engagement can be regarded as a desirable marketing performance metric, as it reflects the outcome of connectedness and interaction between the firm and its customers on SM (as well as customer-customer interaction) (Harmeling et al. 2017). In line with customer engagement theory, the findings of this study indicate that the more customers connect and interact with the firm's SM activities, the higher is the level of customer engagement created and the higher the customer's value add to the firm (Pansari & Kumar 2017). That is because customer engagement value not only includes the direct transactional value obtained through customer buying behavior but also the indirect value contributed by customers' active interactions with a firm, including customer lifetime value, customer influence value, customer referral value, and customer knowledge value (Kumar et al. 2010).

The data analysis from Paper 3 also stressed the great impact of cultural value on firms' SM marketing developmental process. For instance, the individualism/collectivism culture dimension greatly influences how SM content is created and resolves communal problems. Regarding the power distance dimension, decision-making on the formulation and implementation of SMMS differs. SM presences and interactions reveal cultural differences in the SMMS development process when looking at the masculinity/femininity axis. Uncertainty avoidance affects an organization's propensity to take risks and how it uses SM data. Finally, the long-term orientation dimension can explain the disparities in SM marketing goals in different cultures. For international companies, these understandings are particularly beneficial. They will be able to build different strategies to exploit their SM usage and improve understanding of SMMS development and cultural values.

The findings also suggest that cultural factors significantly influence consumer attitudes and interactions with content marketing strategies. We offer theoretical

explanations of why and when each cultural dimension matters the most in influencing how consumers search, consume, respond, and exchange content in an SM context, rather than lumping all cultural dimensions into one variable. Since it is often not empirically feasible to include all cultural dimensions in one study, this attempt will provide theoretical guidelines for selecting appropriate cultural dimensions for future studies. Individualism–collectivism, for example, is most significant for individuals from cultures that emphasize social relationships and individual expressions, whereas uncertainty avoidance is crucial for content negativity that addresses danger and ambiguity, and power distance may be the most important dimension to consider when reviewing status-relevant content, especially that of luxury brands.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

This dissertation makes significant contributions to the current body of SM marketing literature. It advances the theoretical understanding of SM use in the marketing strategy, international marketing, and customer engagement research fields. Table 8 provides an overview of the key theoretical contributions in this dissertation.

Table 8. Summary of theoretical contributions of the dissertation

Literature stream	Contributions
Contributes to SM marketing literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a systematic literature review of prior studies on SM marketing; • Summarize five different research streams where different SM roles are emphasized in each stream; • Provide reviews of SM marketing knowledge in terms of empirical, theoretical, and methodological implications; • Outline the research gaps and offer a rich agenda for future research.
Contributions to international marketing literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to calls to investigate the cultural effect on consumer attitudes toward media messages across countries; • Provide an integrative view on culture impacts on both firms' SMMS decision-making and customers' engagement behaviors; • Add to the literature on the role of cultural meaning in global SM marketing;

Literature stream	Contributions
Contributions to strategic marketing literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualize SMMS, which may serve as a basis for developing SMMS constructs, operationalization, and measurement scales; • Distinguish four SMMSs; • Develop a process model for SMMS development; • Provide a new understanding of SM as a resource integrator where marketing resources and capabilities can be derived and developed further.
Contributions to RBV, DCs approach, and customer engagement theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SM can be used as a strategic resource that could alter the formation of firms' international marketing strategies; • extended the customer engagement theory framework developed by Pansari and Kumar (2017) by adding to the importance of cultural value; • May have a meaningful long-term impact on building a new theory (or theories) of SM marketing.

First, this dissertation contributes significantly to SM marketing literature. Although extensive research has emerged on the SM marketing topic, our review shows that extant literature is both fragmented and not programmatic. Therefore, to bring together the isolated research subjects and give a holistic picture of SM marketing research, this study takes the firm's perspective to explore the role of SM in marketing and investigate the research status in the field. This research is among the first to use such a large sample size to provide a systematic literature review of prior studies on SM marketing. In doing so, the study presents a thorough review of the literature centering on five different research streams, each emphasizing different SM roles. It summarizes the finding derived from the thorough review and provides summaries of relevant empirical, theoretical, and methodological applications. Accordingly, this dissertation can advance the understanding of the research status of SM marketing. The study also outlines research gaps and offers a rich agenda for future research. I believe such comprehensive and integrative efforts will help guide the analysis and development of SM marketing knowledge.

Second, this dissertation contributes significantly to international marketing literature. It responds to calls to investigate the cultural effect on consumer attitudes toward media messages across countries (e.g., MSI 2020; Tang 2017) and adds to the literature on the role of cultural meaning in global SM marketing. Most importantly, this dissertation fills a gap and provides an integrative view of cultural

impact from both firm and customer viewpoints. More specifically, the existing research in this field has concentrated predominantly on variations in individual SM behaviors across cultures, preventing a systematic view of the effects of culture on both firms and customers. In light of this, this research investigated the effect of cultural dimensions on firms' SMMS decision-making and customers' engagement behaviors. This integrative research could advance cultural theory and have a substantial long-term effect on the growing importance of SM marketing.

Third, this dissertation contributes to strategic marketing literature. Unlike previous studies that mostly consider SM as an environment or context, this dissertation seeks to understand SM as a resource integrator where marketing resources and capabilities can be derived and developed further. To the best of its authors' knowledge, Paper 2 is among the first to conceptualize SMMS by combining the SM and marketing strategy dimensions. The paper grasps the interactivity and connectedness at the core of SM, which enables the four different SMMSs to be distinguished. Furthermore, the research also proposes some key features on the concept and develops a model to bolster the understanding of SMMS, which may serve as a basis for developing SMMS constructs, operationalization, and measurement scales. The definition also highlights the recognition of customer online motivations to enhance the rate and quality of customer interactions, which could be transformed into informational and relational resources (Hunt et al. 2006). Therefore, the paper provides theoretical contributions on how to capitalize on SM usage and the possibilities for companies to integrate SM with their current marketing strategies.

Last but not least, this dissertation contributes to the RBV, DCs approach, and customer engagement theory. This dissertation provides researchers with new perspectives on integrating SM with marketing strategy by extending the applications of the RBV and DCs approaches in SM studies. Digital technologies (e.g., SM) have traditionally been thought of as an enabler or facilitator of international business (Banalieva & Dhanaraj 2019). This dissertation argues that SM can be used as a strategic resource that could alter the formulation of firms' international marketing strategies. Furthermore, this dissertation also contributes to the emerging customer engagement theory by specifically applying it in the SM context within an international marketing setting. The study extends the customer engagement theory framework developed by Pansari and Kumar (2017). That framework indicates that satisfaction and emotion are the antecedents of customer engagement. This dissertation adds evidence of the importance of cultural value to customer engagement theory. Such integrative efforts can have a meaningful long-term impact on building a new theory (or theories) of SM marketing. The current

research could prompt a deeper theoretical understanding of the roles played by SM in terms of resource identification, utilization, and reconfiguration.

5.3 Managerial implications

The findings of this dissertation provide a number of managerial implications that are presented here into recommendations for marketing managers and SM marketing management. The following practical implications highlight the importance of strategic thinking, planning, and implementation, as well as the global vision of using SM for marketing purposes. Table 9 provides an overview of the key managerial implications in this dissertation.

Table 9. Summary of managerial implications of the dissertation

Literature stream	Contributions
Strategy formulation stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the different goals of using SM as a marketing tool and develop its strategies accordingly; • Understand customer motivations on using SM and effectively deploy the necessary resources to accommodate these motivations; • Clear goals should be set to guide the development of SMMSs, while customer interactions and engagement should be emphasized, which creates the premises for marketing resources;
Strategy implementation stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not disseminate huge volumes of commercial information on SM because that could annoy customers; • enhance the two-way communications and encourage customer engagement in SM dialogues; • Substantial organizational commitment and continuous investment; • Careful assessment of company resources, customers, and SM activities, and effective allocation and management of marketing resources; • Build special SM capabilities to utilize SM data, integrate company platforms, and manage customer relationships.
International marketing implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one-fits-all SMMS to engage global customers; • Understand the drivers of customer engagement in different cultural contexts; • Marketers need to understand the cultural similarities and differences to develop sound SMMSs.

The analysis of this study conducted on SM marketing revealed the need to revisit strategically managing brands and customers in an SM context. Companies must understand the goals of using SM as a marketing tool and develop strategies accordingly. A starting point is understanding customer motivation for using SM and effectively deploying the necessary resources to accommodate those reasons. Firms should also think carefully about engaging customers in implementing their marketing strategies because SM is a platform that becomes a resource integrator only when customers interact and provide information (Singaraju et al. 2016). Therefore, the success of an SMMS requires clear goals to guide the development of SMMSs, while customer interactions and engagement should be emphasized to create the premises for marketing resources.

Integrating SM use with business strategy is a dynamic process that requires substantial organizational commitment and continuous investment (Andzulis et al. 2012). At the early stage, firms mainly work on establishing an SM presence. However, bear in mind not to disseminate massive commercial information on SM webpages in hoping to attract customers, because customers may find it annoying. Therefore, it is wise for managers to clearly determine their strategic goals with regard to SM involvement, before embarking on choosing a specific SMMS. As SM knowledge increases, firms should enhance two-way communications and encourage customer engagement in SM dialogues. Therefore, one key suggestion for managers is that firms should be customer engagement-oriented in SM marketing, as it will increase market performance and help achieve competitive advantage. That engagement orientation involves providing valuable SM content appeals, interacting with customers properly, and responding to their needs and feedback in a timely manner.

Our research also suggests that the building of SMMS should be based on careful assessments of company resources, customers, and SM activities. Marketing strategy is about the effective allocation and management of marketing resources (Barney 1996). Marketers must think carefully about the resources available to implement a marketing strategy. The outcome of SM strategy is highly dependent on available resources and capabilities (Brink 2017). From the firm level, using SM data and managing customer relationships through SM is a vital issue. Therefore, our study suggests that SM investments should focus on integrating SM platforms with internal company systems to build special SM capabilities. Such capabilities are vital in developing a sustainable competitive advantage and superior market and financial performance.

As with the SM operation for global managers, there is no one-fits-all SMMS to engage customers worldwide. Therefore, it is critical to understand the drivers of

customer engagement in different cultural contexts and develop culturally tailored SM content in culture-specific areas (Gupta et al. 2018). For instance, in a collectivistic culture where customers rely heavily on extended social networks for opinions, brands can address their social needs and add more references to ease their uncertainty (Jiao et al. 2018). In contrast, in an individualistic culture, brands' SM communicators should satisfy their customers' personal needs. On the other hand, marketers also need to understand the relevant cultural similarities and differences to develop sound SMMSs. That means cultural values have certain impacts on the SMMS developmental process, and it is important for managers to understand the culture-bound nature of SMMS decision-making. Accordingly, this dissertation provides advice to international marketers on how to manage SM campaigns strategically in a global context.

5.4 Limitations and future research directions

No work is perfect, and this dissertation contains a number of weaknesses and limitations, which offer opportunities for future studies into the use of SM in the marketing field.

First, this dissertation primarily examines the emerging SM usage in the marketing field through the lens of strategic marketing. Given the wide adoption of SM by firms with different purposes, the use of SM at the organization level and the implementation of SMMS remain to be explored. Although the use of SM has been researched considerably in recent years, focusing on its top-down implementation by organizations is relatively rare. That focus must address questions such as 1) what kind of resources and capabilities are needed to adopt SM at the organizational level? 2) what are the impacts of SM usage on organizational structures and processes? Another future research direction might involve examining how competitive analysis around rival firms' actions affects the formulation of SMMS, where related studies are largely absent. Additionally, a more thorough understanding of the impact of SM marketing adoption on the market and financial performance might also help managers choose between traditional and electronic marketing tools as part of their budget allocation decisions.

Second, this dissertation adopted customer engagement theory and treated customer behavioral engagement activities (e.g., likes and shares on SM) as marketing performance metrics. Accordingly, measurement of the link between SMMS and marketing performance (e.g., relational and branding) and financial performance would be a fruitful area for further work. The core challenge of

measurement in the SM context is the availability of metrics (Salo 2017). Unlike objective financial metrics, marketing emphasizes subjective measures, such as engagement behaviors and customer values. Therefore, more accurate measures would be required to capture actual customer intentions and behaviors on SM. Furthermore, the use of a particular SM technology is easy to capture, but the multilevel influence of the actual strategic use of SM is more complex to measure through quantifying means (Swani et al. 2017).

Third, the verification of the typology of SMMS was supported with 15 in-depth interviews and surveys with 52 US managers. The small data sample may limit the applicability of the results. Empirical studies with a large data set, especially where the data are drawn from multiple sources, are highly desirable. Research also needs to employ less frequently used methods (e.g., field experiments) to better understand the causal relationships between factors influencing and influenced by SM marketing activities (Colicev et al. 2019; Johnston et al. 2018; Swani et al. 2017). Mixed-methods, especially experimental approaches, could provide a clearer and more complete picture of the causal relationship between SMMS and various performance outcomes in future studies. Consequently, some research questions can be proposed for further investigation: 1) how might appropriate measurement metrics be developed for use in the SM context? 2) how might the actual impact of SMMSs at multiple levels through organization be captured and quantified? 3) how might different approaches capable of depicting the relationships between SM input and outcomes be developed?

Fourth, it should be noted that one of the key goals of this work is to develop new insights into how SM contributes to international marketing and business. However, I believe more research is needed to explore SM marketing and SMMS in an international context (e.g., the international business field). For instance, we still lack understanding about the SMMS decision-making process in global companies, and especially of how consumer perceptions and behaviors across cultures influence certain SMMS. The following research questions might address that void: 1) how are different SMMSs affected by cultural factors, and to what extent? 2) which SMMS (standardization versus localization strategies) is more effective in terms of global SM marketing? 3) how do social and regulatory differences impact SMMS implementation (e.g., strict access in China)? 4) how do SMMSs impact other aspects of business performance (e.g., internationalization)?

Last but not least, in terms of the research scope, most studies focus on the domestic market, which means that the roles of cultural, economic, and regulatory differences across countries are not fully appreciated. Furthermore, there is greater emphasis on company SM practices primarily in the developed countries

such as the United States and Europe, with relatively little research conducted in emerging markets and other developing countries. Consequently, another way to consider contexts outside the firm would be to study SM marketing in the cross-culture context. That is, to examine how consumer perceptions and behaviors toward certain SM practices vary across different countries and cultures. Such research has implications for understanding the standardization and localization strategies in the global SM marketing context. Future research might also explore the extent to which certain SMMSs are affected by social or cultural factors. It would also be interesting to know how customers from different cultures react to the same marketing strategy.

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Paper 1

Social media marketing: A review and future research agenda

Abstract

The prevalence of social media (SM) has provided unprecedented insights into the evolution of the firm-customer relationship and plentiful opportunities for practitioners to integrate SM into their marketing strategies. However, despite the critical role of SM in this new digital era, the studies on SM marketing remain fragmented. This paper reviews existing studies on five identified SM marketing research streams: SM as a general marketing and strategic tool; SM as a promotion and selling outlet; SM as a communication and branding channel, SM as a monitoring and intelligence source, and SM as a customer relationship management and value (co)creation platform. Systematically, we evaluate and synthesize extant knowledge through a critical review of 327 empirical articles published in the 2009–2020 period. The paper also provides recommendations for future research in terms of theoretical, methodological, and contextual issues.

Keywords: Literature review; Social media marketing; Social media; social media marketing strategy

Introduction

Social media (SM) has emerged as one of the most important tools for brand marketing and customer engagement (Colicev et al. 2018; Lamberton & Stephen 2016). Businesses now have significant opportunities to take advantage of SM but leveraging its use and maximizing revenues poses enormous obstacles (Schultz & Peltier 2013; Appel et al. 2020). Therefore, it is imperative for firms to use SM strategically and effectively incorporate SM practices into marketing strategies (e.g., Ancillai et al. 2019; Nam et al. 2017; Rapp et al. 2013; Schweidel & Moe 2014; Wang & Kim 2017). Over the past decade, researchers have considerably enhanced the understanding of SM and its adoption in the marketing strategy domain (e.g., Kumar et al. 2013; Malthouse et al. 2013; Zhang et al. 2017). Recent advances at the SM marketing and performance interface have also provided many empirical pieces of evidence of the impact of SM marketing on firms' market performance and their potential to create competitive advantage (e.g., Kumar et al. 2013; Kumar & Pansari 2016). Nevertheless, despite the emerging and diverse studies on SM marketing, the extant research remains specific and isolated, focusing on issues such as tactics for effective SM marketing.

Generally, the literature on SM marketing has adopted several different perspectives that can be categorized into five research streams. The first stream adopts a transactional-based perspective, investigating the strategic use of SM as a selling channel (e.g., Agnihotri et al. 2017; Saboo et al. 2016), and focusing on the link between selling/promotion via SM and performance outcomes (e.g., Yadav et al. 2013). The second stream mainly explores the use of SM as a communication channel. The SM channel creates, delivers, and disseminates content to obtain positive word-of-mouth (e.g., Colicev et al. 2019; Holliman and Rowley 2014). The focus of this stream is mainly on the creation and dissemination of SM content (Hollebeek and Macky 2019; Pulizzi and Barrett 2009).

The third study stream posits the use of SM as an information source and investigates how firms listen promptly, intervene properly, and react appropriately to customer voices and how information value can be derived from SM data (e.g., Moe and Schweidel 2017). This stream has a strong focus on SM listening and responding. The fourth stream of research adopts a customer engagement-oriented perspective. That perspective highlights the use of SM as a customer engagement tool (e.g., Choudhury and Harrigan 2014; Hanson et al. 2019). Accordingly, SM platforms are utilized to connect with and engage customers through personalized firm-customer interactions with organizational commitment. This stream focuses on long-term customer relationships by integrating data and organizational processes, which will ultimately generate

competitive advantage (e.g., Ahani et al. 2017; Malthouse et al. 2013; Trainor et al. 2014).

The final research stream views SM as a general strategic marketing tool. The majority of studies in this stream focus on the strategic adoption of SM for marketing purposes, the impact of SM on organizational structure, SM usage and management, and SM's strategic marketing perspective (e.g., Valos et al. 2017). As a result, this stream focuses on the strategic value of SM and the impact on stimulating and shaping strategic thinking in the firm's marketing division.

Therefore, to bring together the isolated research themes and provide a holistic picture of SM marketing research, we aim to make an integrative effort and contribute by achieving three major objectives: (1) organizing the fragmented literature and evaluating the status of research based on key research stream; (2) analyzing and synthesizing empirical findings, theoretical underpinnings, and methodological issues in the reviewed studies; and (3) proposing valuable future research directions based on the gaps identified from articles reviewed. The approach above also responds to the calls for appropriate strategies to leverage SM (e.g., Schultz and Peltier 2013; Guesalaga 2016; Moorman and Day 2016).

First, this research is among the first to provide an integrative and systematic literature review of prior studies on SM marketing. In doing so, we present a thorough review of the literature on five different research streams in SM marketing topics. Specifically, we identify some key thematic areas addressed in each stream which helps to consolidate the theoretical understanding in SM marketing. Second, our study helps advance the understanding of research on SM marketing by synthesizing the empirical findings applied in the reviewed studies. Finally, our research provides researchers with an overview of research gaps regarding the theoretical, methodological, and contextual limitations. The research can thus offer useful guidelines for future research.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the next section, we discuss the methodology applied to identify, select, and analyze the articles in our review. Then, we discuss the review findings in five research streams. Following that, we synthesize research findings and identify the research gaps. Finally, we provide suggestions for future research avenues in terms of theoretical, methodological, and contextual issues.

2. Review method

In line with Tranfield et al. (2003), we adopt a systematic and integrative approach to review the pertinent literature on SM marketing topics. We carried out our

review in three steps. First, we defined the scope of the review, which included studies focusing on views from the firm—rather than the customer—perspective. These studies had to be empirical and conceptual and review/meta-analytic articles were excluded from the analysis. Book chapters, conference papers, and business magazine articles were also excluded, as were articles published in journals that were not listed in the UK-based ABS journal ranking catalog. We specifically searched for articles that were published from 2009 onward, when the first empirical articles relating to SM and word-of-mouth communication strategy appeared.

Second, to identify the relevant articles, we employed various electronic databases (e.g., ScienceDirect, EBSCO, ABI, and Google Scholar), searching using mainly the following keywords: *social media marketing, social media strategy, social media CRM, social media marketing, social media engagement strategy, social commerce, social monitoring, social CRM strategy, social media sales, social selling, social media promotion, social media advertising, social media branding, social content marketing, viral marketing, and Facebook/Twitter marketing*. This initial search yielded 436 articles, 268 of which fully conformed to our eligibility criteria.

The above step was followed by a manual search, using a snowball procedure, in which we tried to identify other relevant articles by searching for keywords in each journal and the reference sections of the articles collected. This process helped expand the total number of eligible articles for review to 327, derived from 58 journals in four major disciplines, namely-marketing (71.9%, N=235), management (15.3%, N=50), information (10.4, N=34), and others (e.g., IB and innovation, 2.4%, N=8). Among which, more than half (50.8%) of them published in Journal of Business Research (13.1%), Journal of Interactive Marketing (9.8%), Journal of Marketing (8.6%), Industrial Marketing Management (8.0%), Journal of Marketing Research (6.1%), and Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (5.2%) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Journal contribution to social media marketing articles

Journal	Total (N=327) %	Time period				Article nature			
		2009- 2011 (N1=10) %	2012- 2014 (N2=47) %	2015- 2017 (N3=127) %	2018- 2020 (N4=143) %	Quantitative (N1=247) %	Qualitative (N2=57) %	Mixed- method (N3=16) %	Methodol ogical (N4=7) %
Journal of Business Research	13.1	-	2.1	11.0	19.6	13.0	15.8	12.5	-
Journal of Interactive Marketing	9.8	10.0	10.6	8.7	10.5	11.7	3.5	-	14.3

Journal of Marketing	8.6	40.0	14.9	4.7	7.7	10.9	1.8	-	-
Industrial Marketing Management	8.0	10.0	2.1	12.6	5.6	6.5	14.0	12.5	-
Journal of Marketing Research	6.1	10.0	10.6	7.9	2.8	7.7	-	-	14.3
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	5.2	-	4.3	5.5	5.6	6.9	-	-	-
Psychology & Marketing	4.3	-	-	6.3	4.2	4.0	3.5	12.5	-
International Journal of Research in Marketing	4.0	-	2.1	5.5	3.5	5.3	-	-	-
European Journal of Marketing	3.7	-	4.3	0.8	6.3	3.6	-	18.8	-
Marketing Science	3.1	20.0	6.4	2.4	1.4	2.0	-	6.3	57.1
Computers in Human Behavior	2.8	-	-	5.5	1.4	2.8	1.8	6.3	-
Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing	2.8	-	-	4.7	2.1	2.4	5.3	-	-
Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	2.4	-	6.4	2.4	1.4	2.0	1.8	12.5	-
Journal of Marketing Management	2.1	-	2.1	2.4	2.1	1.6	5.3	-	-
Journal of Advertising	1.8	-	2.1	-	3.5	2.0	1.8	-	-
Decision Support Systems	1.5	-	2.1	2.4	0.7	1.6	-	-	14.3
Information Systems Research	1.2	-	2.1	0.8	1.4	1.6	-	-	-
Journal of Services Marketing	1.2	-	-	2.4	0.7	0.8	3.5	-	-
European Business Review	0.9	-	2.1	0.8	0.7	-	5.3	-	-
Industrial Management and Data Systems	0.9	-	-	0.8	1.4	0.4	-	-	-
Journal of Advertising Research	0.9	-	4.3	-	0.7	1.2	-	-	-
Journal of International Marketing	0.9	-	-	-	2.1	0.8	1.8	-	-
Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice	0.9	-	-	-	2.1	-	5.3	-	-
Management Decision	0.9	-	-	1.6	0.7	0.4	3.5	-	-
Marketing Letters	0.9	-	2.1	-	1.4	1.2	-	-	-
International Marketing Review	0.6	-	-	-	1.4	0.8	-	-	-
Journal of Brand Management	0.6	-	-	-	1.4	0.4	1.8	-	-
Journal of Consumer Psychology	0.6	-	-	-	1.4	0.8	-	-	-
Journal of Internet Commerce	0.6	-	-	1.6	-	0.4	1.8	-	-
Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management	0.6	-	4.3	-	-	0.4	1.8	-	-

MIS Quarterly	0.6	-	2.1	0.8	-	0.8	-	-	-
Others	8.3	10.0	12.9	8.0	6.3	4.8	21.6	18.9	-
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The third step was to evaluate the content of the selected articles. To do so, we prepared a coding protocol consisting of five parts: (1) source of articles (i.e., journal name, author name, and publication year), (2) research design (i.e., research focus, research questions, and applied theories), (3) scope of research (i.e., type of study, countries/industry/product involved, research context, and unit of analysis), (4) research methodology (i.e., research method, sample characteristics, and analytical techniques), and (5) research streams and thematic areas (e.g., sales, social listening, and customer engagement).

Two researchers with knowledge of the SM literature coded all eligible articles under the supervision of the principal investigator. Both coders undertook rigorous training on how to code the information contained in each article and participated in a coding exercise to achieve consistency in interpreting the information. The two coders worked separately to extract the relevant information from the articles selected during the coding process. The two sets of completed coding sheets were subsequently compared, revealing an intercoder reliability rate above 90%–95% for the various issues examined, which is satisfactory. Coding discrepancies were resolved during a joint meeting of the two coders with the principal investigator, with finalized data of the unified coding protocol used for subsequent analysis.

3. Review findings

In this section, we provide an overview of the major topics addressed. In addition, we offer key insights gleaned from previous studies on each stream.

3.1 Stream 1: SM as promotion and selling platform

SM is increasingly used as a marketing tool for sales and promotional purposes and has repeatedly been proved to positively affect customer purchase behavior (Ancillai et al. 2019; Kumar et al. 2016; Zhang et al. 2017) and firm financial performance (Kumar et al. 2013).

3.1.1 SM and sales

SM is claimed to be the dominant new selling tool that has changed the way buyers and sellers interact (Marshall et al. 2012). It offers a new opportunity for sellers to obtain customer information and make the initial interaction with the customer

more efficient (Rodriguez et al. 2012). Agnihotri et al. (2016, 2017) explored the use of SM by salespeople and found that it can enhance salesperson responsiveness and service behaviors, thus improving customer satisfaction. Saboo et al. (2016) investigate the impact of customer SM activities (e.g., sampling, following, commenting) on brand sales in a music industry context and report that customer SM engagement activities influence buying behavior.

Several studies have reflected the increasing use of SM in selling products and services by focusing on how social influence affects sales or customer purchase intentions (e.g., Kumar and Rajan 2012). For example, Park et al. (2018) support the “social dollars” effect, in which social interaction between online community users increases within-community commerce. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2015) also present empirical evidence of the “Twitter effect,” which suggests that microblogging WOM shared through Twitter strongly affects early product adoption behaviors, especially for experiential media products. In another study, Naylor et al. (2012) show that brand followers’ “mere virtual presence” exerts a social influence on consumers’ brand evaluations and purchase intentions, even when followers’ demographic characteristics were revealed only. Finally, Luo et al. (2014) reveal that the deal popularity of group buying (a unique selling strategy operated through social interaction) increases the likelihood of consumer purchases. Moreover, the effect is amplified by factors related to social influence, such as referral intensity.

3.1.2 SM and advertising

Firms are also increasingly using SM as a promising outlet for advertising purposes (e.g., Dao et al. 2014; Zhang and Mao 2016). The synergistic effects of SM and traditional advertising are another stream of research identified in the literature. Using data from 68 advertised brands in the US Super Bowl championship games, Spotts et al. (2014) report an interactive relationship between traditional television advertising and SM conversations. Spotts et al. (2014) further argue that television advertisements play an important role in amplifying SM conversations. De Vries et al. (2017) explored the interrelationships between traditional advertising and SM messages (including firm-generated content and customer-to-customer message). The study found that traditional advertising remained the most effective approach for both brand-building and customer acquisition, while SM messages complemented traditional advertising efforts.

3.2 Stream 2: SM as a communication and branding channel

More than one-quarter of the articles reviewed were found in this stream. The bulk of them emphasized social message strategy (how content is designed and presented) and seeding strategy (how content is disseminated).

3.2.1 Social content and message

Factors influencing the virality of SM content/message have been an important area of research, mainly because SM can help increase brand awareness and popularity in a less expensive and faster way than traditional advertising (Liu-Thompkins 2012). Gavilanes et al. (2018) categorized SM content into seven types and found the types led to different customer behaviors. Studies have also identified other factors that influence the outcome of social content. For example, content disclosure timing and brand prominence have a positive effect on consumers' intention to share entertainment content (Choi et al. 2018). To explain time differences in SM content effectiveness, Kanuri et al. (2018) built an algorithm and showed that scheduling attributes (i.e., time of day, content type, and targeted content advertising) positively affected the link clicks metric. Combining customer emotion, behavior intention data, and data on movie box-office revenues, Liu et al. (2018) were able to propose an optimized procedure to produce more effective clips and promote brand video content. Gao and Feng (2016) emphasized the importance of brands connecting with larger ecological contexts and argued that brand posts presenting inspirational knowledge and trending topics could add value for customers following brand SM pages. In addition, as Zhang et al. (2017) explain, it is important to produce content–user fit strategies to increase users' rebroadcasting behavior.

3.2.2 Seeding strategy

The success of marketing campaigns conducted on SM is determined not only by the content factor (which makes it viral to disseminate) but also by seeding strategies targeting the initiator to drive customer rebroadcasting activities such as positive WOM. As Libai et al. (2013) argue, the social value of seeding programs lies in market expansion and customer acceleration. Using field experiments, Gong et al. (2017) found that when tweeting is conducted by SM influential, it brings new followers to the firm and increases product demand. Liu-Thompkins (2012) suggests that instead of simply choosing seeds with wide reach, marketers should focus on seed consumers who have strong relational ties with the seeding company. Peng et al. (2018) scrutinized the tweets of nine well-known brands and revealed that network overlap (i.e., common followers, common followers, and common mutual followers) has a positive impact on content sharing. The finding

implies that SM user targeting could be improved by considering user network overlap. In a similar vein, Hinz et al. (2011) advised marketers to adopt a seeding strategy utilizing well-connected people, as the initial seeds provide a wider spread of viral messages.

Chen et al. (2017) adopted a new Bayesian method to devise a new approach for analyzing a weighted network and showed that different relationship characteristics have different impacts on information diffusion processes through SM. Drawing on social impact theory, Zhang et al. (2017) claim that social status, personality traits, and social ties can make certain individuals more influential than others and thus are important drivers of rebroadcasting FGC activity. However, Kozinets et al. (2010) advise marketers to be aware of the complexity of WOM behaviors in a networked world, as communal WOM does not simply increase or expand marketing content but may also alter the meaning of the messages sent by the firm. Similarly, Lanz et al. (2019) suggest that content creators, especially those who are unknown, should be aware of the risk of influencer seeding, as they found that unknown content creators rarely benefit from the practice.

3.3 Stream 3: SM as monitoring and intelligence source

Social monitoring emphasizes the importance of social listening and responding to SM activities to better understand customer needs and build stronger customer relationships (e.g., Timoshenko and Hauser 2019). Of the articles reviewed, the emphasis of this stream is mainly on listening and responding.

3.3.1 Listening

With the abundance of attitudinal and behavioral data, SM offers *listening tools* or *windows* through which firms can observe and analyze customers (Rydén et al. 2015), search for and share information (Drummond et al. 2018) and identify innovation opportunities (Carlson et al. 2018). Tirunillai and Tellis (2012) investigated the relationship between UGC and firm performance and found a significant association. Schweidel and Moe (2014) collected SM comments across multiple venues and reported that listening to such comments is a good way to become aware of customer sentiment. However, the metrics of listening platforms may be misleading if the difference between venues is not considered.

Although SM data offer great opportunities for gleaning consumer insights, their voluminous, unstructured, and network nature makes analyzing the data challenging (Moe and Schweidel 2017). Different techniques have been proposed to overcome this challenge; for example, Feit et al. (2013) proposed firms combine

individual-level data with aggregated data to monitor multiplatform data usage. Büschken and Allenby (2016) developed a model for text analysis taking sentence structure into account, leading to an improved inference and prediction of ordinal ratings. Moreover, Nam et al. (2017) presented a new way to extract brand data utilizing user-generated social tags, which can serve as a brand-monitoring dashboard to identify key representative topics and extract common dynamic trends on SM. Furthermore, Klostermann et al. (2018) integrated image, text, and social tagging data from SM to devise a two-step method to cluster, aggregate, and map brand-related user-generated content to acquire meaningful customer insights.

3.3.2 Responding

Several studies confirm firms' interactions with customers are an effective way to influence online behavior. Labrecque (2014) also indicates that parasocial interactions with brands increase customer loyalty intentions and encourage greater willingness to provide brand-related information. Firm responsiveness (i.e., volume and speed) influences customer reactions to SM (Proserpio and Zervas 2017; Sheng 2019). In an analysis of one extremely extensive data set (18,577,733 tweets), Hewett et al. (2016) found that brands could benefit from personalized customer responses. More recently, Barcelos et al. (2018) explored the impact of a brand's SM tone of voice on customer purchase behaviors and found that the human voice is not always the best choice. That is because, while using the human voice can increase customers' hedonic value and purchase intentions, actual purchases may be deterred by negative comments and the perceived risk of being associated with humanness.

Noting the damage caused by electronic negative word-of-mouth (e-NWOM) on SM, many studies have shed light on how firms can appropriately respond to customer online complaints and requests. For example, Coyle et al. (2012) found that problem-solving responses are better than empathetic responses in strengthening customer perception of trustworthiness and benevolence. However, Johnen and Schnittka (2019) argue that a firm's responding strategy on SM should bring in the context of complainant–brand interactions, as they found that a defensive response strategy can be very effective in hedonic contexts but might fail in utilitarian ones. Using sentiment analysis of more than 115,000 consumer posts in ten online forums, Homburg et al. (2015) identify diminishing returns on consumers' reactions occurring in conversations focusing on functional needs (e.g., complaint handling) but not on social needs (e.g., entertainment, inspiration). Homburg et al. (2015) also suggest that firms can adopt sentiment measures to assess consumers' reactions, evaluate the prosperity of SM marketing

initiatives, and allocate their resources to different types of conversation and customer groups.

3.4 Stream 4: SM as CRM and value creation tool

3.4.1 Customer engagement

Studies have shown that customer engagement is a key success factor in enhancing self–brand connection (Harrigan et al. 2018), competitive advantage (Kumar and Pansari 2016), and ultimately firm performance (Rapp et al. 2013). For example, Lu and Miller (2019) confirm a positive relationship between social CRM strategy and engaged customers' purchase behavior. Despite multiple definitions, there is consensus among researchers that customer engagement refers to customers' voluntary contributions to a firm beyond individual transactions (Harmeling et al. 2017; Hollebeek et al. 2019).

In the SM context, customer engagement behaviors can manifest in three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Hollebeek et al. 2014). Accordingly, customer engagement can take different forms, such as for fun practices, learning practices, customer feedback, work for a brand, and talk about a brand (Eigenraam et al. 2018), affiliation, conversation, and responsiveness (Yang et al. 2016), and making voluntary resource contribution (Jaakkola and Alexander 2014). From a process standpoint, Brodie et al. (2013) identify five nonsequential customer engagement constituent subprocesses: learning, sharing, advocating, socializing, and codeveloping. Hollebeek et al. (2019) stress the role of customer resource integration, customer knowledge sharing, and learning as foundational customer engagement processes, which can then lead to customer individual/interpersonal operant resource development and co-creation. Finally, active participation, community trust, and commitment are major drivers of customer engagement in SM (Vohra and Bhardwaj 2019).

One line of research has focused on firms' initiatives to engage customers. For example, Harmeling et al. (2017) encourage firms to use experiential initiatives, which help motivate autonomous customer contributions. Hanson et al. (2019) suggest using reputation signals as a strategic tool to engage customers in online brand communities and emphasize the critical role of social signals in approaching new community members. In addition, Grewal et al. (2019) argue that firms should be careful in encouraging customers' SM posting actions, as they found that posts of identity-relevant products can lead to reduced purchase intentions.

3.4.2 Social CRM capabilities

A social CRM capability is “a firm-level capability and refers to a firm’s competency in generating, integrating, and responding to information obtained from customer interactions that are facilitated by SM technologies” (Trainor et al. 2014, p. 271). According to Ahani et al. (2017), compatibility of social CRM with business procedures and information captured through SM are critical drivers of a firm’s adoption of social CRM in small and medium-sized enterprises. Key challenges in building social CRM capabilities include data integration and problems related to how companies link the massive SM data on customer activities to other data sources (e.g., customer service records) (Moe and Schweidel 2017). Choudhury and Harrigan (2014) argue that a firm should be extremely creative and combine SM data with its CRM system to generate better customer-learning opportunities.

A few notable studies have examined the impact of social CRM capabilities on market performance. From an empirical study among 232 companies, Wang and Kim (2017) concluded that a firm’s social CRM capabilities positively correlate with customer engagement levels, thus influencing firm performance. They highlight the importance of social CRM capability. They argue that firms that can effectively leverage information and engage with customers will serve those customers better than firms that cannot. Trainor et al. (2014) examined the impact of SM technology usage and customer-centric management systems on social CRM capabilities. Modeling data from 308 organizations indicated that the technological resources of SM, together with customer-centric management systems, are positively related to customer relationship performance and can increase customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention levels.

3.5 Stream 5: SM as general marketing and strategic tool

3.5.1 The adoption of SM

SM is becoming an influential marketing tool because of its power to enhance connections and provide two-way conversations; however, it can also improve firm profits and competitive advantage. For instance, SM (e.g., consumer reviews) is a well-established determinant of new product success (Marchand et al. 2017). In addition, SM is perceived as a useful means to overcome resource limitations (especially for SMEs) (Brink 2017), and can enhance opportunities for new resource configurations (Bianchi and Andrews 2015). Drummond et al. (2018) showed that SM serves as a resource layer in creating and maintaining B2B relationships and networks.

Extensive studies in this field have examined the antecedents (e.g., reasons for use, challenges, and barriers) of SM usage. For instance, Michaelidou et al. (2011) revealed the main three reasons for firms' SM usage are: new customers attraction, customer relationship development, and increasing brand awareness, while lack of staff familiarity and technical skills are two key barriers. The study by Siamagka et al. (2015) shows that, in B2B industry, SM adoption is significantly affected by perceived usefulness, which is determined by image, perceived ease of use and perceived barriers. Furthermore, Brink (2017) identified the challenges of SM usage to insufficient leadership, knowledge, and experience to motivate employees' applications of SM. Brink's findings are consistent with those of Rydén et al. (2015) that SM usage depends on the decision-maker's business logic; such differences lead to significantly different SM marketing objectives.

3.5.2 SM strategies and their implementation

Research on SM strategy implementation is scant. Extant studies have focused on SM adoption (in terms of SM possession) but rather neglected the effective utilization of SM technologies (Tafesse and Wien 2018A). Nevertheless, recent research has started to emphasize the importance of SM marketing strategy and the resources and capabilities needed to implement it (Li et al. 2021). For instance, Brink (2017) stressed the importance of employees' communication capabilities to the appropriate use of SM as a business tool. Lashgari et al. (2018) highlighted the capability to take business decisions efficiently and proactively. The same study also stressed the importance of formulating strategies before posting information on SM platforms. Such strategies should include well-thought-out SM goals, target groups, and information accessibility approaches. Furthermore, Mahmoud et al. (2020) explored capability factors, including relational and informational capabilities, that contribute to the successful deployment and transformation of SM resources.

Some studies highlighted the importance of strategies from both the resources and capabilities perspectives. For example, Muninger et al. (2019) applied organizational capability theory to shed light on capabilities that facilitate knowledge management, top management understanding, and networking and collaboration when using SM for innovation purposes. These capabilities largely rely on the realization of key resources, such as, a competent SM manager to coordinate communication and decisions, operational and strategic SM teams, and a digital infrastructure, accompanied by the efficient allocation of time and budgets. The studies mentioned above elucidate the various resources and capabilities needed to effectively use SM. The overall results support

the resource-capability-performance nexus in the SM context (e.g., Mahmoud et al. 2020).

4. Summary and research gaps

The exploding use of SM in the past decade underscores the need for guidance on how to foster relationships with customers, advance customer engagement, and improve business performance. However, there is a lack of comprehensive and integrative efforts to guide the analysis and development of SM marketing. This dissertation provides a systematic review and synthesis of the SM marketing literature, centering on the five distinct research streams.

Overall, we found a significant number of studies in streams 1,2, and 4, while streams 3 and 5 had attracted relatively less research attention. The situation can be attributed to the recent introduction of SM as a strategic marketing tool. Both academics and practitioners still lack the necessary knowledge on how to convert SM data into actionable strategic insights (Moe and Schweidel 2017). This dearth is also because adopting more advanced SM strategies requires a company culture that encourages breaking free from obsolete mindsets, employee skills with intelligence in data and customer analytical insights, and operational excellence in organizational structure and business processes (Malthouse et al. 2013).

Research on the subject is relatively atheoretical, while theories that could comprehensively explain the integration of SM with marketing strategies are not yet available. A relatively small proportion of research is anchored in consumer behavior theories (e.g., uses and gratification theory, brand attachment theory) that emphasize the customer rather than the firm perspective. Likewise, some theories derived from the mass media communications field (e.g., social contagion theory, communication theory) fail to acknowledge differences between traditional media and SM, and thus do not fully capture the idiosyncratic nature of the SM phenomenon. In addition, some key constructs (e.g., customer engagement) still lack theoretical substantiation and standardized operationalizations, which creates inconsistent findings and unnecessary confusion in the field.

From a methodological standpoint, the majority of extant empirical research has been quantitatively rather than qualitatively driven. There is also a greater emphasis on company SM practices primarily in the USA and secondarily in Europe, with relatively little research conducted in emerging markets and other developing countries. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the studies reviewed obtained their data from surveys of customers, while the firm's perspective on SM strategies is virtually absent. Furthermore, despite vast differences in buying behavior between consumers and business buyers,

surprisingly few studies have distinguished variations in a B2C versus a B2B context.

With regard to the empirical insights gained from the studies reviewed, it seems that research on firms' SM marketing usage investigates tactical issues rather than strategic ones. The extant literature provides only scattered coverage on how to strategically use SM for marketing purposes rather than adopting a systematic and holistic perspective. Another fundamental problem in the literature is the limited integration of an SM marketing strategy into the firm's overall marketing strategy and how this works synergistically with the various components of the marketing mix. In terms of research scope, most of the studies focus on the domestic market, which means that the roles of cultural, economic, and regulatory differences across countries are not fully appreciated. The results also show a lack of studies addressing the distinctions between different firm sizes (e.g., smaller vs. larger firms), product characteristics (e.g., low-utilitarian vs. high-utilitarian), and markets (e.g., consumer vs. industrial).

5. Future research agenda

Our literature review extends the understanding of various aspects of SM marketing strategy. While the extant literature offers many perspectives on SM strategies focusing on selling and advertising, content creation and dissemination, platform listening and monitoring, and the importance to integrate CRM with SM in attaining successful customer management and building long-term relationships, we believe that the field is still under-explored with many unresolved areas meriting further study. We divide our future research suggestions into three distinct but related aspects: theory, methodology, and context.

5.1 Future directions – theory

The literature review conducted illustrates that although SM marketing has attracted a great deal of research interest in the past decade, theoretical development of the field is rather limited. For example, only half the studies reviewed were anchored in specific theories, with the most commonly employed being social capital theory, uses and gratifications theory, and social contagion theory. Accordingly, future research should provide more explicit theoretical reasoning on the use of SM as a marketing strategy and aim to answer the related "how" and "why" questions.

Some new theoretical bases could also be transferred from the relationship marketing field, such as resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) and transaction cost economics (Williamson 1979), to an SM context to enhance

understanding of the strategic role in managing buyer–seller relationships. Future studies could also capitalize on traditional theories employed in the strategic marketing literature, such as the resource-based view (Barney 1991), dynamic capabilities theory (Teece et al. 1997), and industrial organization theory (Tirole 1988).

Most importantly, we believe there is a need to develop an entirely new theory (or theories) to capture the unique qualities of SM. Although the evolving nature of knowledge of SM marketing will complicate that task, it is imperative because most of the extant empirical studies in the field are atheoretical. Our study has broadened and deepened the understanding of SM marketing by providing a thorough review of each research stream and identifying their key thematic research areas. The current research also distinguishes the different SM strategies driven by different firms' objectives and the different resources and capabilities devoted to leveraging SM. This finding underscores the need to establish a deeper theoretical understanding of the driving roles of resource identification, utilization, and reconfiguration in the SM field.

5.2 Future directions – methodology

The majority of the studies reviewed adopted quantitative-methods approaches, which indicates the need for more qualitative research (e.g., case studies). Such methods could help develop new theoretical frameworks and extend the understanding of the subject. The use of more sophisticated methodological approaches (e.g., mixed-methods) to obtain a more holistic picture of the phenomenon is also recommended (Agnihotri et al. 2016; Saboo et al. 2016). In addition, the dynamic nature of SM implies a need to conduct longitudinal research to monitor changes in these strategies over time.

Research should also employ other methods (e.g., field experiments) to test causal relationships, such as the effect of a certain SM strategy on financial performance (Colicev et al. 2019; Johnston et al. 2018; Swani et al. 2017). From a data source perspective, extant studies usually use data extracted from SM. However, as Schweidel and Moe (2014) suggest, future research could combine SM data with survey data to deepen insights into customer behavior. It is also important to complement data obtained from secondary sources with data from primary research to gain a richer understanding of the antecedents and outcomes of SM marketing.

With regard to measurement issues, future studies should develop more sophisticated metrics for measuring key aspects of SM marketing performance, such as customer SM engagement behaviors (e.g., quantify engagement levels), SM

use (e.g., capture use intensity), and value objectives (e.g., brand evaluation). Moreover, given the different ways in which researchers operationalize the various constructs, it is important researchers agree on universal measurement scales. Furthermore, to better assess the impact of SM on company outcomes, there is a need to broaden the unit of analysis, from the individual to the firm level.

5.3 Future directions – contexts

SM marketing strategies are outcomes of firms' strategic choices implemented in contextual settings. Future research might employ different theoretical lenses to generalize the current findings into different contexts. Researchers might for example investigate how customers react to the same strategy on different platforms (e.g., Facebook versus Twitter), given that different SM platforms have different functional orientations. Similarly, it would be interesting to investigate how results differ in B2C and B2B contexts, with different products (e.g., high-involvement versus low-involvement) and using different devices (computer versus mobile).

Another way to consider contexts outside the firm would be to study SM marketing based on the cross-culture context. That might involve examining how consumer perceptions and behaviors toward certain SM content/strategies vary across cultures. Such research has implications for understanding the standardization and localization strategies in the global SM marketing context. Future research could also explore the extent to which certain strategies (e.g., social content strategy) are affected by social or cultural factors. It would also be interesting to know how customers from different cultures react to the same strategy.

6. Conclusion

SM is transforming the dynamics of firm-customer interactions and creating a new understanding of marketing strategy and customer value. Although extensive research has emerged on SM marketing topic, our review shows that extant literature is both fragmented and nonprogrammatic. In this paper, we provided an integrative and systematic review of five SM marketing research streams: promotion and selling, communication and branding, monitoring and intelligence, customer relationship management and value (co)creation, and a general strategic marketing tool. We summarized the findings derived from a thorough review and provided summaries in terms of the theoretical and methodological applications applied in the reviewed papers. We also outlined the research gaps identified and offered a rich agenda for future research.

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Social media marketing strategy: definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, validation, and future agenda

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Abstract

Although social media use is gaining increasing importance as a component of firms' portfolio of strategies, scant research has systematically consolidated and extended knowledge on social media marketing strategies (SMMSs). To fill this research gap, we first define SMMS, using social media and marketing strategy dimensions. This is followed by a conceptualization of the developmental process of SMMSs, which comprises four major components, namely drivers, inputs, throughputs, and outputs. Next, we propose a taxonomy that classifies SMMSs into four types according to their strategic maturity level: social commerce strategy, social content strategy, social monitoring strategy, and social CRM strategy. We subsequently validate this taxonomy of SMMSs using information derived from prior empirical studies, as well with data collected from in-depth interviews and a quantitative survey among social media marketing managers. Finally, we suggest fruitful directions for future research based on input received from scholars specializing in the field.

Keywords Social media · Social media marketing strategy · Customer engagement · Marketing strategy

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed the development of complex, multifarious, and intensified interactions between firms and their customers through social media usage. On the one hand,

firms are taking advantage of social media platforms to expand geographic reach to buyers (Gao et al. 2018), bolster brand evaluations (Naylor et al. 2012), and build closer connections with customers (Rapp et al. 2013). On the other hand, customers are increasingly empowered by social media and taking control of the marketing communication process, and they are becoming creators, collaborators, and commentators of messages (Hamilton et al. 2016). As the role of social media has gradually evolved from a single marketing tool to that of a marketing intelligence source (in which firms can observe, analyze, and predict customer behaviors), it has become increasingly imperative for marketers to strategically use and leverage social media to achieve competitive advantage and superior performance (Lamberton and Stephen 2016).

Despite widespread understanding among marketers of the need to engage customers on social media platforms, relatively few firms have properly strategized their social media appearance and involvement (Choi and Thoeni 2016; Griffiths and Mclean 2015). Rather, for most companies, the ongoing challenge is not to initiate social media campaigns, but to combine social media with their marketing strategy to engage customers in order to build valuable and long-term relationships with them (Lamberton and Stephen 2016; Schultz and

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Peltier 2013). However, despite the vast opportunities social media offer to companies, there is no clear definition or comprehensive framework to guide the integration of social media with marketing strategies, to gain a rigorous understanding of the nature and role of social media marketing strategies (SMMSs) (Effing and Spil 2016).

Although some reviews focusing on the social media phenomenon are available (e.g., Lamberton and Stephen 2016; Salo 2017), to date, an integrative evaluation effort focusing on the strategic marketing perspective of social media is missing. This is partly because the social media literature largely derives elements from widely disparate fields, such as marketing, management, consumer psychology, and computer science (Aral et al. 2013). Moreover, research on SMMSs mainly covers very specific, isolated, and scattered aspects, which creates confusion and limits understanding of the subject (Lamberton and Stephen 2016). Furthermore, research deals only tangentially with a conceptualization, operationalization, and categorization of SMMSs, which limits theory advancement and practice development (Tafesse and Wien 2018).

To address these problems, and also to respond to repeated pleas from scholars in the field (e.g., Aral et al. 2013; Guesalaga 2016; Moorman and Day 2016; Schultz and Peltier 2013 to identify appropriate strategies to leverage social media in today's changing marketing landscape, we aim to systematically consolidate and extend the knowledge accumulated from previous research on SMMSs. Specifically, our objectives are five-fold: (1) to clearly define SMMS by blending issues derived from the social media and marketing strategy literature streams; (2) to conceptualize the process of developing SMMSs and provide a theoretical understanding of its constituent parts; (3) to provide a taxonomy of SMMSs according to their level of strategic maturity; (4) to validate the practical value of this taxonomy using information derived from previous empirical studies, as well as from primary data collection among social media marketing managers; and (5) to develop an agenda for promising areas of future research on the subject.

Our study makes three major contributions to the social media marketing literature. First, it offers a definition and a conceptualization of SMMS that help alleviate definitional deficiency and increase conceptual clarity on the subject. By focusing on the role of social connectedness and interactions in resource integration, we stress the importance of transforming social media interactions and networks into marketing resources to help achieve specific strategic goals for the firm. In this regard, we provide theoretical justification of social media from a strategic marketing perspective. Second, using customer engagement as an overarching theory, we develop a model conceptualizing the SMMS developmental process. Through an analysis of each component of this process, we emphasize the role of insights from both firms and customers to better understand the dynamics of SMMS formulation. We also suggest certain theories to specifically explain

the particular role played by each of these components in developing sound SMMSs. Third, we propose a taxonomy of SMMSs based on their level of strategic maturity that can serve as the basis for developing specific marketing strategy concepts and measurement scales within a social media context. We also expect this taxonomy to provide social media marketing practitioners with fruitful insights on why to select and how to use a particular SMMS in order to achieve superior marketing results.

Defining SMMS

Although researchers have often used the term “social media marketing strategy” in their studies (e.g., Choi and Thoeni 2016; Kumar et al. 2013; Zhang et al. 2017), they have yet to propose a clear definition. Despite the introduction of several close terms in the past, including “social media strategy” (Aral et al. 2013; Effing and Spil 2016), “online marketing strategy” (Micu et al. 2017), and “strategic social media marketing” (Felix et al. 2017), these either fail to take into consideration the different functions/features of social media or neglect key marketing strategy issues. What is therefore required is an all-encompassing definition of SMMS that will capture two fundamental elements—namely, social media and marketing strategy. Table 1 draws a comparison between social media and marketing strategy on five dimensions (i.e., core, orientation, resource, purpose, and premise) and presents the resulting profile of SMMS.

Social media

In a marketing context, social media are considered platforms on which people build networks and share information and/or sentiments (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). With their distinctive nature of being “dynamic, interconnected, egalitarian, and interactive organisms” (Peters et al. 2013, p. 281), social media have generated three fundamental shifts in the marketplace. First, social media enable firms and customers to connect in ways that were not possible in the past. Such connectedness is empowered by various platforms, such as social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), microblogging sites (e.g., Twitter), and content communities (e.g., YouTube), that allow social networks to build from shared interests and values (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). In this regard, “social connectedness” has also been termed as “social ties” (e.g., Muller and Peres 2019; Quinton and Wilson 2016), and the strength and span of these ties determine whether they are strong or weak (Granovetter 1973). Prior studies have shown that tie strength is an important determinant of customer referral behaviors (e.g., Verlegh et al. 2013).

Second, social media have transformed the way firms and customers interact and influence each other. Social interaction

Table 1 Comparison of social media, marketing strategy, and social media marketing strategy

Dimension	Social media	Marketing strategy	Social media marketing strategy
Core Orientation	Interaction and connectedness Passive actor versus active actor	Long-term customer relationship building Transactional-oriented versus relational-oriented	Customer engagement Transactional-oriented versus engagement-oriented
Resource Purpose	Resource integrator To interact and connect	Basic resources and high-order resources To achieve competitive advantage	In exchange with customer-owned resources To generate, integrate, and reconfigure social media resources to achieve specific marketing objectives
Premise	To recognize different customer motivations of social media brand-related activities	To enhance long-lasting customer relationships by delivering superior value	To capitalize on social media interactions and customer engagement so as to generate marketing resources

involves “actions,” whether through communications or passive observations, that influence others’ choices and consumption behaviors (Chen et al. 2011). Nair et al. (2010) labeled such social interactions as “word-of-mouth (WOM) effect” or “contagion effects.” Muller and Peres (2019) argue that social interactions rely strongly on the social network structure and provide firms with measurable value (also referred to as “social equity”). In social media studies, researchers have long recognized the importance of social influence in affecting consumer decisions, and recent studies have shown that people’s connection patterns and the strength of social ties can signify the intensity of social interactions (e.g., Aral and Walker 2014; Katona et al. 2011).

Third, the proliferation of social media data has made it increasingly possible for companies to better manage customer relationships and enhance decision making in business (Libai et al. 2010). Social media data, together with other digital data, are widely characterized by the 3Vs (i.e., volume, variety, and velocity), which refer to the vast quantity of data, various sources of data, and expansive real-time data (Alharthi et al. 2017). A huge amount of social media data derived from different venues (e.g., social networks, blogs, forums) and in various formats (e.g., text, video, image) can now be easily extracted and usefully exploited with the aid of modern information technologies (Moe and Schweidel 2017). Thus, social media data can serve as an important source of customer analysis, market research, and crowdsourcing of new ideas, while capturing and creating value through social media data represents the development of a new strategic resource that can improve marketing outcomes (Gnizy 2019).

Marketing strategy

According to Varadarajan (2010), a marketing strategy consists of an integrated set of decisions that helps the firm make critical choices regarding marketing activities in selected markets and segments, with the aim to create, communicate, and deliver value to customers in exchange for accomplishing its specific financial, market, and other objectives. According to

the resource-based view of the firm (Barney 1991), organizational resources (e.g., financial, human, physical, informational, relational) help firms enhance their marketing strategies, achieve sustainable competitive advantage, and gain better performance. These resources can be either tangible or intangible and can be transformed into higher-order resources (i.e., competencies and capabilities), enabling the delivery of superior value to targeted buyers (Hunt and Morgan 1995; Teece and Pisano 1994).

Different marketing strategies can be arranged on a continuum, on which transaction marketing strategy and relationship marketing strategy represent its two ends, while in between are various mixed marketing strategies (Grönroos 1991). Webster (1992) notes that long-standing customer relationships should be at the core of marketing strategy, because customer interaction and engagement can be developed into valuable relational resources (Hunt et al. 2006). Morgan and Hunt (1999) also claim that firms capitalizing on long-term and trustworthy customer relationships can help design value-enhancing marketing strategies that will subsequently generate competitive advantages and lead to superior performance.

SMMS

From a strategic marketing perspective, social media interaction entails a process that allows not only firms, but also customers to exchange resources. For example, Hollebeek et al. (2019) assert that customers can devote operant (e.g., knowledge) and operand (e.g., equipment) resources while interacting with firms. Importantly, Gummesson and Mele (2010) argue that interactions occur not simply in dyads, but also between multiple actors within a network, underscoring the critical role of network interaction in resource integration. Notably, customer-to-customer interactions are also essential, especially for the higher level of engagement behaviors (Fehrer et al. 2018).

Thus, social media interconnectedness and interactions (i.e., between firm–customer and between customer–

customer) can be considered strategic resources, which can be further converted into marketing capabilities (Morgan and Hunt 1999). A case in point is social customer relationship management (CRM) capabilities, in which the firm cultivates the competency to use information generated from social media interactions to identify and develop loyal customers (Trainor et al. 2014). With the expanding role of social media from a single communication tool to one of gaining customer and market knowledge, marketers can strategically develop distinct resources from social media based on extant organizational resources and capabilities.

Drawing on the previous argumentation, we define SMMS as *an organization's integrated pattern of activities that, based on a careful assessment of customers' motivations for brand-related social media use and the undertaking of deliberate engagement initiatives, transform social media connectedness (networks) and interactions (influences) into valuable strategic means to achieve desirable marketing outcomes*. This definition is parsimonious because it captures the uniqueness of the social media phenomenon, takes into consideration the fundamental premises of marketing strategy, and clearly defines the scope of activities pertaining to SMMS.

Although the underlying roots of traditional marketing strategy and SMMS are similar, the two strategies have three distinctive differences: (1) as opposed to the traditional approach, which pays peripheral attention to the heterogeneity of motivations driving customer engagement, SMMS emphasizes that social media users must be motivated on intellectual, social, cultural, or other grounds to engage with firms (and perhaps more importantly with other customers) (Peters et al. 2013; Venkatesan 2017); (2) the consequences of SMMS are jointly decided by the firm and its customers (rather than by individual actors' behaviors), and it is only when the firm and its customers interact and build relationships that social media technological platforms become real resource integrators (Singaraju et al. 2016; Stewart and Pavlou 2002); and (3) while customer value in traditional marketing strategies is narrowly defined to solely capture purchase behavior through customer lifetime value, in the case of SMMS, this value is expressed through customer engagement, comprising both direct (e.g., customer purchases) and indirect (e.g., product referrals to other customers) contributions to the value of the firm (Kumar and Pansari 2016; Venkatesan 2017).

Conceptualizing the process of developing SMMSs

The conceptualization of the process of developing SMMSs is anchored on customer engagement theory, which posits that firms need to take deliberate initiatives to motivate and

empower customers to maximize their engagement value and yield superior marketing results (Harmeling et al. 2017). Kumar et al. (2010) distinguish between four different dimensions of customer engagement value, namely customer lifetime value, customer referral value, customer influence value, and customer knowledge value. This metric has provided a new approach for customer valuation, which can help marketers to make more effective and efficient strategic decisions that enable long-term value contributions to customers. In a social media context, this customer engagement value enables firms to capitalize on crucial customer resources (i.e., network assets, persuasion capital, knowledge stores, and creativity), of which the leverage can provide firms with a sustainable competitive advantage (Harmeling et al. 2017).

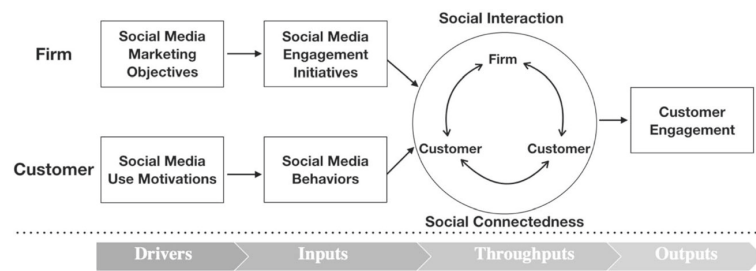
Customer engagement theory highlights the importance of understanding customer motivations as a prerequisite for the firm to develop effective SMMSs, because heterogeneous customer motivations resulting from different attitudes and attachments can influence their social media behaviors and inevitably SMMS outcomes (Venkatesan 2017). It also stresses the role of inputs from both firm (i.e., social media engagement initiatives) and customers (i.e., social media behaviors), as well as the importance of different degrees of interactivity and interconnectedness in yielding sound marketing outcomes (Harmeling et al. 2017). Pansari and Kumar et al. (2017) argue that firms can benefit from such customer engagement in both tangible (e.g., higher revenues, market share, profits) and intangible (e.g., feedbacks or new ideas that help to product/service development) ways.

Based on consumer engagement theory, we therefore conceive the process of developing an SMMS as consisting of four interlocking parts: (1) *drivers*, that is, the firm's social media marketing objectives and the customers' social media use motivations; (2) *inputs*, that is, the firm's social media engagement initiatives and the customers' social media behaviors; (3) *throughputs*, that is, the way the firm connects and interacts with customers to exchange resources and satisfy needs; and (4) *outputs*, that is, the resulting customer engagement outcome. Figure 1 shows this developmental process of SMMS, while Table 2 indicates the specific theoretical underpinnings of each part comprising this process.

Drivers

Firms' social media marketing objectives Though operating in a similar context, SMMSs may differ depending on the firm's strategic objectives (Varadarajan 2010). According to resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), the firm's social media marketing objectives can be justified by the need to acquire external resources (which do not exist internally) that will help it accommodate the challenges of environmental contingencies. In a social media context, customers can serve as providers of resources, which can take

Fig. 1 A conceptualization of the process of developing social media marketing strategies



several forms (Harmeling et al. 2017). Felix et al. (2017) distinguish between proactive and reactive social media marketing objectives, which can differ by the type of market targeted (e.g., B2B vs. B2C) and firm size. While for proactive objectives, firms use social media to increase brand awareness, generate online traffic, and stimulate sales, in the case of reactive objectives, the emphasis is on monitoring and analyzing customer activities.

Customers' social media use motivations Social media use motivations refer to various incentives that drive people's selection and use of specific social media (Muntinga et al. 2011). The existence of these motivations is theoretically grounded on uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al. 1973), which maintains that consumers are actively and selectively involved in media usage to gratify their psychological and social needs. In a social media context, motivations can range from utilitarian and hedonic purposes (e.g., incentives, entertainment) to relational reasons (e.g., identification, brand connection) (Rohm et al. 2013). Muntinga et al. (2011) also categorize

consumer–brand social media interactions as motivated primarily by entertainment, information, remuneration, personal identity, social interaction, and empowerment.

Inputs

Firms' social media engagement initiatives Firms take initiatives to motivate and engage customers so that they can make voluntary contributions in return (Harmeling et al. 2017; Pansari and Kumar 2017). These firm actions can also be theoretically explained by resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), which argues that firms need to take initiatives to encourage customers to interact with them, to generate useful autonomous contributions that will alleviate resource shortages. Harmeling et al. (2017) identify two primary forms of a firm's marketing initiatives to engage customers using social media: task-based and experiential. While task-based engagement initiatives encourage customer engagement behaviors with structured tasks (e.g., writing a review) and usually take place in the early stages of the firm's

Table 2 Theoretical anchoring of components constituting the process of developing social media marketing strategies

Process	Component	Definition	Applied theory	Supportive Literature
Drivers	Firms' social media marketing objectives	The specific organizational goals to be achieved in social media strategic decisions (Choi and Thoeni 2016; Felix et al. 2017)	Resource Dependence Theory	• Felix et al. 2017 • Rydén et al. 2015
	Customers' social media use motivations	Incentives that drive people's selection and use of media and media content (Muntinga et al. 2011, p.14)	Uses and Gratifications Theory	• Muntinga et al. 2011 • Rohm et al. 2013
Inputs	Firms' engagement initiatives	Firm's deliberate effort to motivate, empower, and measure a customer's voluntary contribution to the firm's marketing functions beyond the core economic transaction (Harmeling et al. 2017, p.317)	Resource Dependence Theory	• Harmeling et al. 2017 • Pansari and Kumar 2017
	Customers' social media behaviors	Consumer activities pertaining to brand-related content on social media platforms (Muntinga et al. 2011, p.14)	Uses and Gratifications Theory	• Dolan et al 2016 • Masłowska et al. 2016 • Muntinga et al. 2011
Throughput	Social connectedness	The number of social ties (Goldenberg et al. 2009)	Social Exchange Theory	• Hinz et al. 2011 • Verlegh et al. 2013
	Social interaction	Any actions a nonselling party takes that affect other consumers' valuations for the product or service (Chen et al. 2011, p.239)	Social Exchange Theory	• Chen et al. 2011 • Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010
Outputs	Customer engagement	The intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the firm initiates (Vivek et al. 2012, p.127)	Service-dominant Logic	• Brodie et al. 2011 • Hollebeek et al. 2019 • Kumar et al. 2019

social media marketing efforts, experiential engagement initiatives employ experiential events (e.g., multisensory events) to intrinsically motivate customer engagement and foster emotional attachment. Thus, firm engagement initiatives can be viewed as a continuum, where at one end, the firm uses monetary rewards to engage customers and, at the other end, the firm proactively works to deliver effective experiential incentives to motivate customer engagement.

Customers' social media behaviors The use of social media by customers yields different behavioral manifestations, ranging from passive (e.g., observing) to active (e.g., co-creation) (Maslowska et al. 2016). These customer social media behaviors can be either positive (e.g., sharing) or negative (e.g., create negative content), depending on customers' attitudes and information processes during interactions (Dolan et al. 2016). Harmeling et al. (2017) characterize customers with positive behaviors as "pseudo marketers" because they contribute to firms' marketing functions using their own resources, while those with negative behaviors may turn firm-created "hashtags" into "bashtags." Drawing on uses and gratifications theory, Muntinga et al. (2011) also categorize customers' brand-related behaviors in social media into three groups: consuming (e.g., reading a brand's posts), contributing (e.g., rating products), and creating (e.g., publishing brand-related content).

Throughputs

Within the context of social media, both social connectedness and social interaction can be explained by social exchange theory, which proposes that social interactions are exchanges through which two parties acquire benefits (Blau 1964). Based on this theory, such a social exchange involves a sequence of interactions between firms and customers that are usually interdependent and contingent on others' actions, with the goal to generate sound relationships (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). Thus, successful exchanges can advance interpersonal connections (referred to as social exchange relationships) with beneficial effects for the interacting parties (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005).

Social connectedness Social connectedness indicates the number of ties an individual has on social networks (Goldenberg et al. 2009), while Kumar et al. (2010) define connectedness with additional dimensions, including the number of connections, the strength of the connections, and the location in the network. Social media research suggests that connectedness has a significant impact on social influence. For example, Hinz et al. (2011) show that the use of "hubs" (highly connected people) in viral marketing campaigns can be eight times more successful than strategies using less connected people. Verlegh et al. (2013) also examine the impact of tie

strength on making referrals in social media and confirm that people tend to interpret ambiguous information received from strong ties positively, but negatively when this information comes from weak ties.

Social interaction Social interaction within a social media context is quite complex, as it represents multidirectional and interconnected information flows, rather than a pure firm monologue (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2013). This is because, on the one hand, social media have empowered customers to be equal actors in firm–customer interactions through sharing, gaming, expressing, and networking, while, on the other hand, customer–customer interactions have emerged as a growing market force, as customers can influence each other with regard to their attitudinal or behavioral changes (Peters et al. 2013). Chen et al. (2011) identify two types of social interactions—namely, opinion- or preference-based interactions (e.g., WOM) and action- or behavior-based interactions (e.g., observational learning)—with each requiring different strategic actions to be taken. Chahine and Malhotra (2018) also show that two-way (multiway) interaction strategies that allow reciprocity result in higher market reactions and more positive relationships.

Outputs

Customer engagement The outputs are expressed in terms of customer engagement, which reflects the outcome of firm–customer (as well as customer–customer) connectedness and interaction in social media (Harmeling et al. 2017).¹ It is essentially a reflection of "the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the firm initiates" (Vivek et al. 2012, p. 127). The more customers connect and interact with the firm's activities, the higher is the level of customer engagement created (Kumar and Pansari 2016; Malthouse et al. 2013) and the higher the customer's value addition to the firm (Pansari and Kumar 2017). Although the theoretical explanation of the notion of customer engagement has attracted a great deal of debate among scholars in the field, research (e.g., Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek et al. 2019; Kumar et al. 2019) has also begun adopting the service-dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004) because of its emphasis on customers' interactive and value co-creation experiences in market relationships. Following the service-dominant (S-D) logic, Hollebeek et al.

¹ Although in our conceptualization of the process of developing SMMSs we treat customer engagement as the output of this process, we fully acknowledge that firms' ultimate objective to engage in social media marketing activities is to improve their market (e.g., customer equity) and financial (e.g., revenues) performance. In fact, extant social media marketing research (e.g., Kumar et al. 2010; Kumar and Pansari 2016; Harmeling et al. 2017) repeatedly stresses the conducive role of customer engagement in ensuring high performance results.

(2019) stress the role of customer resource integration, customer knowledge sharing, and learning as foundational in the customer engagement process, which can subsequently lead to customer individual/interpersonal operant resource development and co-creation.

Despite its pivotal role in social media marketing, extant literature has not yet attained agreement on the specific measurement of customer engagement. For example, Muntinga et al. (2011) conceptualize customer engagement in social media as comprising three stages: consuming (e.g., following, viewing content), contributing (e.g., rating, commenting), and creating (e.g., user-generated content). Maslowska et al. (2016) propose three levels of customer engagement behaviors: observing (e.g., reading content), participating (e.g., commenting on a post), and co-creating (e.g., partaking in product development). Moreover, Kumar et al. (2010) distinguish between transactional (i.e., buying the product) and non-transactional (i.e., sharing, commenting, referring, influencing) behaviors of customer engagement derived from social media connectedness and interactions.

Taxonomy of SMMSs

The distinctive differences among firms engaged in social media marketing with regard to their strategic objectives, organizational resources and capabilities, and focal industries and market structures, imply that there must also be differences in the SMMSs pursued. In this section, we first explain the criteria classifying SMMSs into different groups and then provide an analysis of their content.

Classification criteria of SMMSs

Drawing from the extant literature, we propose three important criteria that can be used to distinguish SMMSs: the nature of the firm's strategic social media objectives with regard to using social media, the direction of interactions taking place between the firm and the customers, and the level of customer engagement achieved.

Strategic social media objectives refer to the specific organizational goals to be achieved by implementing SMMSs (Choi and Thoeni 2016; Felix et al. 2017). These can range from transactional to relational-oriented, depending on the strategist's mental models of business–customer interactions (Rydén et al. 2015). Different mental models have a distinctive impact on managers' social media sense-making, which is responsible for framing the specific role defined by social media in their marketing activities (Rydén et al. 2015). Rydén et al. (2015) identify four types of social media marketing objectives with four different mental models that can guide SMMSs—namely, to promote and sell (i.e., business-to-customers), to connect and collaborate (i.e., business-with-

customers), to listen and learn (i.e., business-from-customers), and to empower and engage (i.e., business-for-customers).

The direction of the social media interactions can take three different forms. These include (1) *one-way interaction*, that is, traditional one-way communication in which the firm disseminates content (e.g., advertising) on social media and customers passively observe and react (Hoffman and Thomas 1996); (2) *two-way interaction*, that is, reciprocal and interactive communication with exchanges on social media, which can be further distinguished into firm-initiated interaction (in which the firm takes the initiative to begin the conversation) and customer participation (by liking, sharing, or commenting on the content) and customer-initiated interaction (in which the customer is the initiator of conversations by inquiring, giving feedback, or even posting negative comments about the firm, while the firm listens and responds to customer voice) (Van Noort and Willemsen 2012); and (3) *collaborative interaction*, that is, the highest level of interaction that builds on frequent and reciprocal activities in which both the firm and the customer have the power to influence each other (Joshi 2009).

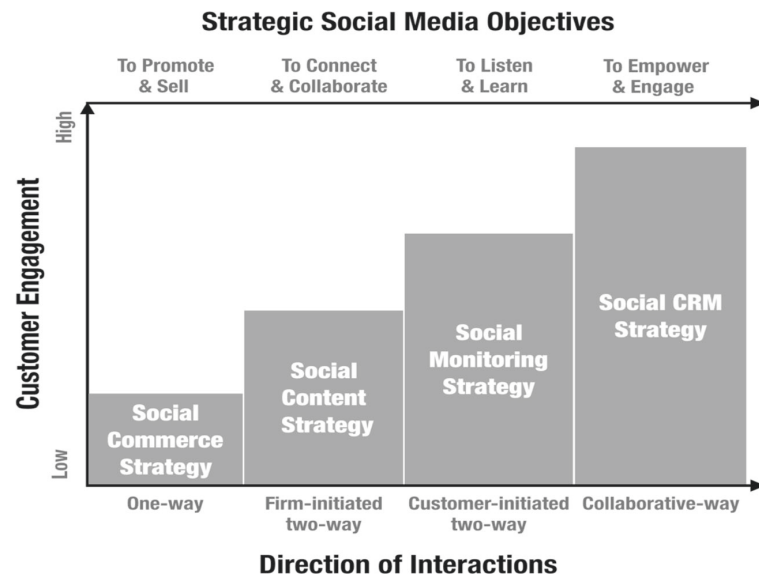
With regard to the level of customer engagement, as noted previously, this heavily depends on the strength of connections and the intensity of interactions between the firm and the customers in social media, comprising both transactional and non-transactional elements (Kumar et al. 2010). Because customer engagement is the result of a dynamic and iterative process, which makes specifying the exact stage from participating to producing rather difficult (Brodie et al. 2011), we adopt the approach proposed by various scholars in the field (e.g., Dolan et al. 2016; Malthouse et al. 2013) to view this as a continuum, ranging from very low levels of engagement (e.g., “liking” a page) to very high levels of engagement (e.g., co-creation).

Types of SMMSs

With these three classificatory criteria, we can identify four distinct SMMSs, representing increasing levels of strategic maturity: social commerce strategy, social content strategy, social monitoring strategy, and social CRM strategy.² Fig. 2 illustrates this taxonomy for SMMSs, Table 3 shows the differences between these four strategies, while Appendix Table 6 provides real company examples using these strategies. In the following, we analyze each of these SMMSs by explaining their nature and characteristics, the particular role

² SMMSs are difficult to operationalize by focusing solely on the elements of the marketing mix (i.e., product, price, distribution, and promotion), mainly because many other important parameters are involved in their conceptualization, such as relationship management, market development, and business innovation issues. However, each SMMS seems to have a different marketing mix focus, with social commerce strategy emphasizing advertising and sales, social content strategy emphasizing branding and communication, social monitoring strategy emphasizing service and product development, and social CRM strategy emphasizing customer management and innovation.

Fig. 2 Taxonomy of social media marketing strategies



played by social media, and the specific organizational capabilities required for their adoption.

Social commerce strategy Social commerce strategy refers to the “exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual’s social network in computer-mediated social environments, whereby the activities correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focal exchange” (Yadav et al. 2013, p. 312). Rydén et al. (2015, p. 6) claim that this way of using social media is not to create conversation and/or engagement; rather, the reasons for “the initial contact and the end purpose are to sell.” Similarly, Malthouse et al. (2013) argue that social media promotional activities do not actively engage customers because they do not make full use of the interactive role of social media. Thus, social commerce strategy can be considered as the least mature SMMS because it has a mainly transactional nature and is preoccupied with short-term goal-oriented activities (Grönroos 1994). It is essentially a one-way communication strategy intended to attract customers in the short run.

In this strategy, social media are claimed to be the new selling tool that has changed the way buyers and sellers interact (Marshall et al. 2012). They offer a new opportunity for sellers to obtain customer information and make the initial interaction with the customer more efficient (Rodriguez et al. 2012). Meanwhile, firms are also increasingly using social media as promising outlets for promotional/advertising purposes given their global reach (e.g., Dao et al. 2014; Zhang and Mao 2016), especially to the millennial generation (Confos and Davis 2016). However, as firms’ social media activities in this strategy are more transactional-oriented, customers tend to be passive and reactive. Customers contribute transactional value

through purchases, but without a higher level of engagement. Therefore, we conclude that, within the context of this strategy, customers exchange their monetary resources (e.g., purchases) with the firm’s promotional offerings.

To better develop this strategy, Guesalaga (2016) highlights the need to understand the drivers of using social media in the selling process. He further stresses that personal commitment plays a crucial role in using social media as selling tools. Similarly, Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) urged for an integration of marketing with the sales department in order to gain better insights from social media marketing efforts. The importance of synergistic effects between social media and traditional media (e.g., press mentions, television, in-store promotions) has also been stressed in supporting social commerce activities (e.g., Jayson et al. 2018; Kumar et al. 2016; Stephen and Galak 2012). Thus, selling capabilities are crucial in this strategy, requiring the possession of adequate selling skills and the use of multiple selling channels to synergize social media effects.

Social content strategy Social content strategy refers to “the creation and distribution of educational and/or compelling content in multiple formats to attract and/or retain customers” (Pulizzi and Barrett 2009, p. 8). Thus, this type of SMMS aims to create and deliver timely and valuable content based on customer needs, rather than promoting products (Järvinen and Taiminen 2016). By attracting audiences with valuable content, the increase in customer engagement may ultimately boost product/service sales (Malthouse et al. 2013). Holliman and Rowley (2014, p. 269) also claim that content marketing is a customer-centric strategy and describe the value of content as “being useful, relevant, compelling, and timely.” Therefore, this strategy provides a two-way communication in which firms take

Table 3 Firm versus customer motivations, activities, capabilities/resources, and outcomes in different social media marketing strategies

Type of SMMSS	Primary motivations		Key activities		Capabilities/resources		Major outcomes	
	Firm	Customer	Firm	Customer	Firm	Customer	Firm	Customer
Social commerce strategy	To promote and sell	Utilitarian reasons (e.g., incentives, promotions)	Sales; Promotion	Observing; Lurking	Selling capability	Monetary resources	Product selling; Promotion	Promotional offerings
Social content strategy	To connect and collaborate	Informational, entertainment reasons	Viral marketing; Influential marketing	Likes; Shares; Comments	Marketing communication capability	Network assets; Persuasion capital	WOM	Entertainment
Social monitoring strategy	To listen and learn	Information, service response	Social listening; Responding	Complaints; Feedbacks; Suggestions	Market sensing and responding capability	Knowledge stores	Market knowledge	Satisfaction with firm service/product
Social CRM Strategy	To empower and engage	Identification, relationship bonds	Engage and empower customers	Speak for firms; Co-creation	Social CRM capability	Network assets; Persuasion capital; Knowledge stores; Creativity	Customer engagement; Co-creation	Experience personalized offerings

the initiative to deliver useful content and customers react positively to this content. The basic premises of this strategy are to create brand awareness and popularity through content virality, stimulate customer interactions, and spread positive WOM (De Vries et al. 2012; Swani et al. 2017).

Social media in this strategy have been widely used as communication tools for branding and WOM purposes (Holliman and Rowley 2014; Libai et al. 2013). On the one hand, firms generate content by their own efforts on social media (termed as ‘firm-generated’ or ‘marker-generated’ content) to actively engage consumers. On the other hand, firms encourage customers to generate the content (termed as ‘user-generated’ content) through the power of customer-to-customer interactions, as in the case of exchanging comments and sharing the brand-related content. In this way, firms provide valuable content in exchange for customer-owned resources, such as network assets and persuasion capital, to generate positive WOM and achieve a sustainable trusted brand status.

To pursue a social content strategy, firms build on capabilities focusing on how content is designed and presented (expressed in the form of a social message strategy) and how content is disseminated (expressed in the form of a seeding strategy). Thus, understanding customer engagement motivations and social media interactive characteristics is central to designing valuable content and facilitating customer interactions that would help to stimulate content sharing among customers (Malthouse et al. 2013). Designing compelling and valuable content in order to transform passive social media observers into active participants and collaborators is also key capability required by firms adopting this strategy (Holliman and Rowley 2014). Empowering customers and letting them speak for the brand is another way to engage customers with brands. Therefore, in this strategy, marketing communication capabilities are important for effective marketing content development and dissemination.

Social monitoring strategy Social monitoring strategy refers to “a listening and response process through which marketers themselves become engaged” (Barger et al. 2016, p. 278). In contrast with social content strategy, which is more of a “push” communication approach with content delivered, social monitoring strategy requires the firm’s active involvement in the whole communication process (from content delivery to customer response) (Barger et al. 2016). More specifically, social monitoring strategy is not only to observe and analyze the behaviors of customers in social media (Lamberton and Stephen 2016), but also to actively search for and respond to customer online needs and complaints (Van Noort and Willemsen 2012). A social monitoring strategy is thus characterized by a two-way communication process, in which the initiation comes from customers who comment and behave on social media, while the company takes advantage of customer behavior data to listen, learn, and react to its customers. Thus,

the key objective of this strategy is to enhance customer satisfaction and cultivate stronger relationships with customers through ongoing social media listening and responding.

With today's abundance of attitudinal and behavioral data, firms adopting this strategy use social media platforms as "tools" or "windows" to listen to customer voices and gain important market insights to support their marketing decisions (Moe and Schweidel 2017). Moreover, Carlson et al. (2018) argue that firms can take advantage of social media data to identify innovation opportunities and facilitate the innovation process. Hence, social media monitoring enables firms to assess consumers' reactions, evaluate the prosperity of social media marketing initiatives, and allocate resources to different types of conversations and customer groups (Homburg et al. 2015). In other words, customers in this strategy are expected to be active in social media interactions, providing instantaneous and real-time feedback. This has in a way helped product development and experience improvements with resource inputs from customers' knowledge stores.

Social monitoring strategy emphasizes the importance of carefully listening and responding to social media activities to have a better understanding of customer needs, gain critical market insights, and build stronger customer relationships (e.g., Timoshenko and Hauser 2019). It therefore requires firms to be actively involved in the whole communication process with customers, as customer engagement is not dependent on rewards, but is developed through the ongoing reciprocity between the firm and its customers (Barger et al. 2016). Thus, organizational capabilities, such as marketing sensing through effective information acquisition, interpretation and responding, are essential for the successful implementation of this strategy. More specifically, monitoring and text analysis techniques are needed to gather and capture social media data rapidly (Schweidel and Moe 2014). Noting the damage caused by electronic negative word of mouth (e-NWOM) on social media, firms adopting this strategy also require special capabilities to appropriately respond to customer online complaints and requests (Kim et al. 2016).

Social CRM strategy Among the four SMMSs identified, social CRM strategy is characterized by the highest degree of strategic maturity, because it reflects "a philosophy and a business strategy supported by a technology platform, business rules, processes, and social characteristics, designed to engage the customer in a collaborative conversation in order to provide mutually beneficial value in a trusted and transparent business environment" (Greenberg 2009, p. 34). The concept of social CRM is designed to combine the benefits derived from both the social media dimension (e.g., customer engagement) and the CRM dimension (e.g., customer retention) (Malthouse et al. 2013). In contrast with the traditional CRM approach, which assumes that customers are passive and only contribute to customer life value, social CRM strategy emphasizes the active role of

customers who are empowered by social media and can make a contribution to multiple forms of value (Kumar et al. 2010). In brief, a social CRM strategy is a form of collaborative interaction, including firm–customer, inter-organizational, and inter-customer interactions, that are intended to engage and empower customers, so as to build mutually beneficial relationships with the firm and lead to superior performance.

Social media have become powerful enablers of CRM (Choudhury and Harrigan 2014). For example, Charoensukmongkol and Sasatanun (2017) argue that the integration of social media and CRM provides a possibility for firms to segment their customers based on similar characteristics, and can customize marketing offerings to the specific preferences of individual customers. With social CRM strategy, firms can enhance the likelihood of customer engagement through one-to-one social media interactions. Customers at this stage are collaborative and interactive in value creation, such as voluntarily providing innovative ideas and collaborating with brands (Jaakkola and Alexander 2014). Hence, besides resource like network assets, persuasion capital, and knowledge stores, engaged customers also contribute their creativity resource for value co-creation.

Social CRM capability is "a firm-level capability and refers to a firm's competency in generating, integrating, and responding to information obtained from customer interactions that are facilitated by social media technologies" (Trainor et al. 2014, p. 271). Therefore, firms should be extremely creative to combine social media data with its CRM system, as well as to link the massive social media data on customer activities to other data sources (e.g., customer service records) to generate better customer-learning and innovation opportunities (Choudhury and Harrigan 2014; Moe and Schweidel 2017). Social CRM strategy also emphasizes the significance of reciprocal information sharing and collaborations that are supported by the firm's culture and commitment, operational resources, and cross-functional cooperation (Malthouse et al. 2013; Schultz and Peltier 2013). To sum up, social CRM capabilities, organizational learning capabilities connected with relationship management and innovation are essential prerequisites to building an effective social CRM strategy.

Validation of proposed SMMSs

Using the previously developed classification of SMMSs (i.e., social commerce strategy, social content strategy, social monitoring strategy, and social CRM strategy) as a basis, we reviewed the pertinent literature to collate useful knowledge supporting the content of each of these strategies. Table 4 provides a summary of the key empirical insights derived from the extant studies reviewed, together with resulting managerial lessons.

Table 4 Key empirical insights and resulting managerial lessons derived from studies on social media marketing strategies

SMMSs	Key empirical insights	Resulting managerial lessons
Social commerce strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media as selling, promotion, and advertising platform has a positive impact on customer purchase intentions and financial performance. • Interactiveness, informativeness, entertainment, and credibility of social media advertising positively affect customer behavior and purchase intention. • Social networks and interactions have a strong influence on social media commerce. • Social media and traditional marketing have synergistic impact on company's sales. • Perceived privacy risk and the intrusiveness of social media advertising negatively impact on customer attitudes and purchase intentions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Use social media carefully and sensibly for the purpose of selling and promoting products/services and this in turn will help increase your customer base and generate more sales. ▶ Make sure that your social media ads are exciting, informative, and believable to gain customer trust and stimulate interest to buy your products/services. ▶ Leverage social networks and interactions to motivate and engage customers to make purchases through, for example, monetization of social networks. ▶ While using social media as marketing tools, it is advisable to combine them with traditional marketing tools to achieve superior results. ▶ In using social media ads, be sensitive and respectful to issues related to customer privacy and intrusiveness to avoid negative feelings by customers.
Social content strategy	<p>Content popularity and vitality are influenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social message strategy (e.g., brand names, functional and emotional appeals, vividness and interactivity, inspirational knowledge and trending topics, content-user fit) • Seeding strategy (e.g., use of highly connected people, different characteristics of relationships, influential) • Context (e.g., B2B, B2C), product characteristics (e.g., low-utilitarian and high-utilitarian), organizational processes and IT tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ To attract customer attention and spread favorable news make your messages lively and attractive, focus on contemporary issues, adjust the content to target customers' interests, and stress the strengths of your products/services. ▶ Increase virality of your messages in social media by seeking the assistance of influential individuals who have an extensive network, are opinion leaders, and have the ability to attract and easily connect with other people. ▶ Be aware that the popularity impact of your social media content becomes stronger when you have proper design processes in place and use the right automation tools. Your viral marketing approach should be also carefully adapted according to your specific product characteristics.
Social monitoring strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social monitoring strategy emphasizes the importance of social listening and responding to customer needs. • Social media have become "listening tools" to observe and analyze customers and firms should adopt different techniques to analyze social media data. • Firms' active interactions with customers influence customer behaviors. • Different types of responses (e.g., volume and speed), voices (e.g., human and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Listen carefully to the discussions and comments made by customers in social media, identify specific needs and preferences from these, and respond accordingly and quickly with the right company offering. ▶ In addition to traditional marketing research methods, make sure you also invest adequate time and effort in using social media as a means to gather useful, reliable, and fresh information about customer attitudes/behaviors. ▶ Actively interacting with customers using social media should be a never-ending process, which, with proper monitoring and right incentives, can help favorably influence customer behavior. ▶ To effectively stimulate positive customer reactions in social media, it is important to

Table 4 (continued)

SMMSs	Key empirical insights	Resulting managerial lessons
	<p>impersonal voice), and styles (e.g., formal and informal) affect customer reactions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firm response strategies (e.g., public apology, problem-solving responses, and accommodative strategies) were found useful in dealing with negative e-WOM. 	<p>respond swiftly and frequently, use different voices/tones, and adapt styles to fit specifically each communication context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Although negative e-WOM should be avoided by all means, in case this appears you can use an array of tools, ranging from corporate acknowledgment and public apology to recovery actions and compensation.
Social CRM strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer engagement and social CRM capabilities affect the core of social CRM strategy, which positively affects competitive advantage and performance. • Customer resource integration, customer knowledge sharing, and learning are the key foundational customer engagement processes. • Although the firm's customer engagement initiatives play an important role in motivating customers' voluntary contributions, their effectiveness may vary across market contexts. • Social CRM capability is a firm-level capability that helps generate, integrate, and respond to social media information and enhance customer engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Put continuous emphasis on engaging your customers in social media in a systematic and consistent way, because this is likely to yield favorable financial and non-financial results. ▶ Take initiatives to enhance the engagement of customers in social media by integrating resources with them, exchanging knowledge, and learning as much as possible about their characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors. ▶ Be wary of encouraging customers to use social media postings (especially for luxury and identity-relevant products), because this may harm customers' perceptions of premium brand image. ▶ Develop specific capabilities (e.g., those anchored on operational excellence, information technology, and specific employee skills/knowledge) to systematically collect, analyze, and act on data derived from interactions with customers in social media.

To validate the practical usefulness of our proposed classificatory framework of SMMSs, we first conducted a series of in-depth interviews with 15 social media marketing practitioners, who had their own firm/brand accounts on social media platforms, at least one year of social media marketing experience, and at least three years' experience in their current organization (see Web Appendix 1). Interviewees represented companies located in China (8 companies), Finland (5 companies), and Sweden (2 companies) and involved in a variety of industries (e.g., digital tech, tourism, food, sport). All interviews were based on a specially designed guide (which was sent to participants in advance to prepare them for the interview) and were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed verbatim (see Web Appendix 2).

The main findings of this qualitative study are the following: (1) social media are mainly used as a key marketing channel to achieve business objectives, which, however, differentiates in terms of product-market type, organization size, and managerial mindset; (2) distinct differences exist across organizations in terms of their social media initiatives to deliver content, generate reactions, and develop social CRM; (3) there are marked variations in customer engagement levels across participant firms, resulting from the adoption of different SMMSs; (4) the firm's propensity to use a specific

SMMSs is enhanced by infrastructures, systems, and technologies that help to actively search, access, and integrate data from different sources, as well as facilitate the sharing and coordination of activities with customers; and (5) the adoption of a specific SMMS does not follow a sequential pattern in terms of strategic maturity development, but rather, depends on the firm's strategic objectives, its willingness to commit the required resources, and the deployment of appropriate organizational capabilities.

To further confirm the existence of differences in profile characteristics among the four types of SMMSs, we conducted an electronic survey among a sample of 52 U.S. social media marketing managers who were randomly selected. For this purpose, we designed a structured questionnaire incorporating the key parameters related to SMMSs, namely firms' strategic objectives, firms' engagement initiatives, customers' social media behaviors, social media resources and capabilities required, direction of interactions, and customer engagement levels (see Web Appendix 3).

Specifically, we found that: (1) each of the four SMMSs emphasize different types of strategic objectives, ranging from promoting and selling, in the case of social commerce strategy, to empowering and engaging in social CRM strategy; (2) experiential engagement initiatives geared to customer

engagement were more evident at the advanced level, as opposed to the lower level strategies; (3) passive customer social media behaviors were more characteristic of the social commerce strategy, while more active customer behaviors were observed in the case of social CRM strategy; (4) the more advanced the maturity of the SMMS employed, the higher the level customer engagement, as well as the higher requirements in terms of organizational resources and specialized capabilities; and (5) one-way interaction was associated more with social commerce strategy, two-way interaction was more evident in the social content strategy and the social monitoring strategy, and collaborative interaction was a dominant feature in the social CRM strategy (see Web Appendix 4).

Future research directions

While the extant research offers insightful information and increased knowledge on SMMSs, there is still plenty of room to expand this field of research with other issues, especially given the rapidly changing developments in social media marketing practice. To gain a more accurate picture about the future of research on the subject, we sought the opinions of academic experts in the field through an electronically conducted survey among authors of academic journal articles written on the subject. We specifically asked them: (1) to suggest the three most important areas that research on SMMSs should focus on in the future; (2) within each of the areas suggested, to indicate three specific topics that need to be addressed more; and (3) within each topic, to illustrate analytical issues that warrant particular attention (see Web Appendix 5). Altogether, we received input from 43 social media marketing scholars who suggested 6 broad areas, 13 specific topics, and 82 focal issues for future research, which are presented in Table 5.

Among the research issues proposed, finding appropriate metrics to measure performance in SMMSs seems to be an area to which top priority should be given. This is because performance is the ultimate outcome of these strategies, for which there is still little understanding due to the idiosyncratic nature of social media as a marketing tool (e.g., Beckers et al. 2017; Trainor et al. 2014). In particular, it is important to shed light on both short-term and long-term performance, as well as its effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptiveness aspects (e.g., Barger et al. 2016). Another key priority area stressed by experts in the field involves integrating to a greater extent various strategic issues regarding each of the marketing-mix elements in a social media context. This would help achieve better coordination between traditional and online marketing tools (e.g., Kolsarici and Vakratsas 2018; Kumar et al. 2017).

Respondents in our academic survey also stressed the evolutionary nature of knowledge with regard to each of the four SMMSs and proposed multiple issues for each of them.

Particular attention should be paid to how inputs from customers and firms are interrelated in each of these strategies, taking into consideration the central role played by customer engagement behaviors and firm initiatives (e.g., Sheng 2019). Respondents also pinpointed the need for more emphasis on social CRM strategy (which is relatively under-researched), while there should also be a closer assessment of new developments in both marketing (e.g., concepts and tools) and social media (e.g., technologies and platforms) that can lead to the emergence of new types of SMMSs (e.g., Ahani et al. 2017; Choudhury and Harrigan 2014).

Respondents also noted that up to now the preparatory phase for designing SMMSs has been overlooked, and that therefore there is a need to shed more light on this because of its decisive role in achieving positive results. For example, issues relating to market/competitor analysis, macro-environmental scanning, and target marketing should be carefully studied in conjunction with formulating sound SMMSs, to better exploit opportunities and neutralize threats in a social media context (e.g., De Vries et al. 2017). By contrast, our survey among scholars in the field stressed the crucial nature of issues relating to SMMS implementation and control, which are of equal, or even greater, importance than those of strategy formulation (e.g., Järvinen and Taiminen 2016). The academics also indicated that, by their very nature, social media transcend national boundaries, thus leaving plenty of room to investigate the international ramifications of SMMSs, using cross-cultural research (e.g., Johnston et al. 2018).

Implications and conclusions

Theoretical implications

Given the limited research on SMMSs, this study has several important theoretical implications. First, we are taking a step in this new theoretical direction by providing a workable definition and conceptualization of SMMS that combines both social media and marketing strategy dimensions. The study complements and extends previous research (e.g., Harmeling et al. 2017; Singaraju et al. 2016) that emphasized the value of social media as resource integrator in exchanging customer-owned resources, which can provide researchers with new angles to address the issue of integrating social media with marketing strategy. Such integrative efforts can have a meaningful long-term impact on building a new theory (or theories) of social media marketing. They also point to a deeper theoretical understanding of the roles played by resource identification, utilization, and reconfiguration in a SMMS context.

We have also extended the idea of “social interaction” and “social connectedness” in a social media context, which is critical because the power of a customer enabled by social media connections and interactions is of paramount

Table 5 Directions for future research on social media marketing strategies

Broad thematic areas	Specific topical areas	Focal issues
Preparation and implementation of SMMSs	SMMS situation analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific firm strengths required to support SMMSs • The role of artificial intelligence and big data to identify social media (SM) marketing opportunities • Challenges encountered in SMMSs (e.g., data security) • Analysis of competitors using similar or different SMMSs
	SM target marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using big data extracted from SM to identify suitable market segments • Using SM to identify and serve niche markets • Key network characteristics (e.g., centrality, density) to segment the SM market • Managing effectively multiple target groups on SM • Changes in SM targeting strategy over different stages of the product life-cycle • Measuring the online value proposition in SM content • The role of SM in brand differentiation and positioning
	Implementing SMMSs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustments in organizational structure to accommodate needs of SMMSs • Changes in organizational culture required to support SMMSs • Integrating existing firm systems with SMMS requirements • HR requirements (e.g., skills, training) to support SMMSs • How will leadership/management style influence SMMS implementation? • How do SM technologies relate to different firm capabilities and performance outcomes?
Social commerce strategy	SM and sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do SM impact on sales across different products, platforms, and devices? • The role of SM as a means to improve existing products and/or develop new products • Selecting the right pricing strategy in different SM platforms to yield higher sales • Defining the optimal number of SM channels to achieve superior sales performance • The impact of SM channel addition/deletion on sales • Linking SM platform selection with distribution intensity to increase sales • How do various types of SM (owned, earned, paid) correlate to marketing outcomes? • How do SM and traditional marketing impact synergistically on sales/advertising effectiveness?
	SM and promotion/advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SM marketing, customer analytics, and location awareness • How to integrate SM with traditional media to improve effectiveness • The role of SM in the firm's pull versus push communication strategies • Measuring effectiveness of different types of SM ads • How do SM interactions impact on advertisement effectiveness? • What is the dark side of the use of SM as a promotional tool?
Social content strategy	Message strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the most effective content with regard to different devices, platforms, and industries? • Which SM messages/content can help improve branding outcomes (e.g., brand loyalty)? • Whether customer co-creation leads to less negative inferences and more valuable virality • What specific message strategies are needed to initiate C2C interactions to help the brand? • Consumer reactions if learned that C2C social messages are incentivized by the firm? • Ethical implications involved in viral marketing activity • How to measure social content marketing performance regarding customer outcomes? • Coping with competitors' social content strategies • What are the implications of an effective social content strategy on the firm's resource allocation?
	Seeding strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determinants of finding the most effective social influencers • Customer reactions to seeding programs and their interaction with marketing mix elements • What type of product/service and customer characteristics impact on seeding success? • What price levels will make the influencer to engage in SM promotions and in which way?
Social monitoring strategy	Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of different predictive analytics (e.g., machine learning) to get customer insights • What are the reasons for driving firms to start with customer engagement initiatives? • What is the best way for firms to engage and how does this impact customer engagement? • How do customer sentiments observed in different SM venues affect performance? • Which social listening approach (i.e., manual, fully automated, hybrid) is the most appropriate?
	Responding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does SM ease of use and pervasiveness elicit higher customer complaints? • How SM responding promotes WOM and enhances market/financial performance? • Using SM to stimulate positive publicity and minimize negative publicity • Ethical and legal considerations in firm responding • How do individual traits, cultural factors and brand perceptions affect responding strategies?

Table 5 (continued)

Broad thematic areas	Specific topical areas	Focal issues
Social CRM strategy	Customer engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do various types of SM have different impact on CRM and customer engagement? • To what degree customer engagement strength affects the performance of SM platforms? • Customer engagement effects on product perceptions (e.g., quality, satisfaction) • How do specific types of digital engagement practices contribute differently to brand equity? • How do differences in modality, self-disclosure, and privacy translate to digital engagement? • What are the most effective strategies to gain deeper and long-lasting customer engagement?
	CRM capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capabilities needed to generate/integrate/reconfigure SM resources to achieve advantages • Determinants of SM capabilities (e.g., data analysis, data synthesis, data interpretation) • How can SM interactions be transformed into valuable marketing resources? • How can SM data/tools be leveraged to generate customer insights and help in new product development? • How do social CRM strategies differ in inexperienced and experienced firms using SM? • How do different strategic decision-making styles influence social CRM strategy outcomes? • What resources/capabilities are needed to implement an effective social CRM strategy?
Miscellaneous	Relationship marketing aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does trust and commitment in a SM context facilitate marketing strategies? • What kind of relational resources can be strategically used in SM? • How is value co-created between sellers and buyers in a SM context? • How does the intensity of SM interaction improve the quality of customer relationships?
	Service marketing aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is service both positioned and delivered in SM? • How is customer service experience on SM different from the traditional service provider? • How do service providers cope with multi-channel environments in SM?
	International marketing aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of country institutional and regulatory effects on SMMS • Variations in SMMS in SM platforms used solely in certain regions • Factors influencing foreign customer preferences for global versus local SM channels • Differences in international branding through SM channels versus traditional channels • Drivers and performance outcomes of SMMS adaptation in foreign markets • SM content localization versus globalization • How do cultural factors moderate SM customer behaviors across different countries? • What are the key factors influencing SM sales in different nations?

importance in explaining the significance of SMMSs (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2013). More importantly, our study suggests that firms should take the initiative to motivate and engage customers, which will lead to wider and more extensive interactions. In particular, we show that a firm can leverage its social media usage through the use of different engagement initiatives to enforce customer interactivity and interconnectedness. Such enquiries can provide useful theoretical insights into the strategic marketing role played by social media in today's highly digitalized and globalized world.

We are also furthering the customer engagement literature by proposing an SMMS developmental process. As firm–customer relationships evolve in a social media era, it is critical to identify those factors that have an impact on customer engagement. Although prior studies (e.g., Harmeling et al. 2017; Pansari and Kumar 2017) have demonstrated the engagement value contributed by customers and the need for engagement initiatives taken by firms, we are extending this idea to provide a more holistic view by highlighting the role of insights from both firms and customers to better understand the dynamics of SMMS formulation. We also suggest certain theories to specifically explain the role played by each of the

components of the process in developing sound SMMSs. We capture the unique characteristics of social media by suggesting that these networks and interactions are tightly inter-related with the outcome of SMMS, which is customer engagement. Our proposed SMMS developmental process may therefore provide critical input for new studies focusing on customer engagement research.

Finally, we build on various criteria to distinguish among four SMMSs, each representing a different level of strategic maturity. We show that a SMMS is not homogeneous, but needs to be understood in a wider, more nuanced way, as having different strategies relying on different goals and deriving insights from firms and their customers, ultimately leading to different customer engagement levels. In this regard, the identification of the key SMMSs stemming from our analysis can serve as the basis for developing specific marketing strategy constructs and scales within a social media context. We also indicate that different SMMSs can be implemented and yield superior competitive advantage only when the firm is in a position to devote to it the right amount and type of resources and capabilities (e.g., Gao et al. 2018; Kumar and Pansari 2016).

Managerial implications

Our study also has serious implications for managers. First, our analysis revealed that the ever-changing digital landscape on a global scale calls for a reassessment of the ways to strategically manage brands and customers in a social media context. This requires companies to understand the different goals for using social media and to develop their strategies accordingly. As a starting point, firms could explore customer motivations for using social media and effectively deploy the necessary resources to accommodate these motivations. They should also think carefully about how to engage customers when implementing their marketing strategies, because social media become resource integrators only when customers interact with and provide information on them (Singaraju et al. 2016).

Managers need to set objectives at the outset to guide the effective development, implementation, and control of SMMSs. Our study suggests four key SMMSs achieving different business goals. For example, the goal of social commerce strategy is to attract customers with transactional interests, that of social content strategy and social monitoring strategy is to deliver valuable content and service to customers, and that of social CRM strategy is to build mutually beneficial customer relationships by integrating social media data with current organizational processes. Unfortunately, many companies, especially smaller ones, tend to create their social media presence for a single purpose only: to disseminate massive commercial information on their social media web pages in the hope of attracting customers, even though these customers may find commercially intensive content annoying.

This study also suggests that social media investments should focus on the integration of social media platforms with internal company systems to build special social media capabilities (i.e., creating, combining, and reacting to information obtained from customer interactions on social media). Such capabilities are vital in developing a sustainable competitive advantage, superior market and financial performance. However, to achieve this, firms must have the right organizational structural and cultural transformation, as well as substantial management commitment and continuous investment.

Lastly, social media have become powerful tools for CRM, helping to transform it from traditional one-way interaction to collaborative interaction. This implies that customer engagement means not only encouraging customer engagement on social media, but also proactively learning from and collaborating with customers. As Pansari and Kumar et al. (2017) indicate, customer engagement can contribute both directly (e.g., purchase) and indirectly (e.g., customer knowledge value) to the firm. Therefore, interacting with customers via social media provides tremendous opportunities for firms to learn more about their customers and opens up new possibilities for product/service co-creation.

Conclusions

The exploding use of social media in the past decade has underscored the need for guidance on how to build SMMSs that foster relationships with customers, advance customer engagement, and increase marketing performance. However, a comprehensive definition, conceptualization, and framework to guide the analysis and development of SMMSs are lacking. This can be attributed to the recent introduction of social media as a strategic marketing tool, while both academics and practitioners still lack the necessary knowledge on how to convert social media data into actionable strategic marketing tools (Moe and Schweidel 2017). This insufficiency also stems from the fact that the adoption of more advanced SMMSs requires the possession of specific organizational capabilities that can be used to leverage social media, with the support of a culture that encourages breaking free from obsolete mindsets, emphasizing employee skills with intelligence in data and customer analytical insights, and operational excellence in organizational structure and business processes (Malthouse et al. 2013).

Our study takes the first step toward addressing this issue and provides useful guidelines for leveraging social media use in strategic marketing. In particular, we provide a systematic consolidation and extension of the extant pertinent SMMS literature to offer a robust definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, and validation of SMMSs. Specifically, we have amply demonstrated that the mere use of social media alone does not generate customer value, which instead is attained through the generation of connections and interactions between the firm and its customers, as well as among customers themselves. These generated social networks and influences can subsequently be used strategically for resource transformation and exchanges between the interacting parties. Our conceptualization of the SMMS developmental process also suggests that firms first need to recognize customers' motivations to engage in brand-related social media activities and encourage their voluntary contributions.

Although the four SMMSs identified in our study (i.e., social commerce strategy, social content strategy, social monitoring strategy, and social CRM strategy) denote progressing levels of strategic maturity, their adoption does not follow a sequential pattern. As our validation procedures revealed, this will be determined by the firm's strategic objectives, resources, and capabilities. Moreover, the success of the various SMMSs will depend on the firm's ability to identify and leverage customer-owned resources, as in the case of transforming customers from passive receivers of the firm's social media offerings to active value contributors. It will also depend on the firm's willingness to allocate resources in order to foster collaborative conversations, develop appropriate responses, and enhance customer relationships. These will all ultimately

help to build a sustainable competitive advantage and enhance business performance.

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Appendix

Table 6 Company examples using specific social media marketing strategies

Type of SMMSs	Company cases
Social commerce strategy	<p>□ L'Oréal, the French cosmetics company, has been fore-fronting to incorporate social media technologies into their business. L'Oréal launched the social commerce platforms on Facebook, which allows its potential customers to make a purchase via social media. Meanwhile, it provides direct on-demand interactions through chats with customers, which boost the average inquiry-to-sale conversion rate to 22% in 5 months. Source: Acommerce (2019)</p> <p>□ ASOS, the UK-based fashion retailer without any physical storefronts. As reported, ASOS made a 28% increase in annual profits from 2017 to 2018 of online sales due to the proper leverage of social media as the promotional tool. Moreover, the company has humanized social media interactions with their fans by providing personal touches and down-to-earth conversations in their Facebook and Twitter feeds. Consequently, the appropriate social commerce strategy has made ASOS fast-moving and differentiated in the fashion business. Source: Robert (2018)</p>
Social content strategy	<p>□ Nike, the globally well-known sportswear giant, has been successful in the social content strategy. Through a mix of effective content from celebrity-endorsed narrative to emotional storytelling, Nike has moved beyond the domain of selling products to branding themselves as a lifestyle. Now, with 77 million followers, Nike is the second most followed brand on Instagram, while its Facebook account is among the top ten most followed. Source: Ravi (2018)</p> <p>□ In the case of Dove's "Real Beauty Sketches" campaign in 2013, the short film has become the most-watched online branded video with over 163 million views globally. The pace of content sharing in that campaign was unprecedented due to the compelling and emotional message, which has resonated with a massive audience. The success of the campaign led to a surge of customer engagement and over a million of 'likes' on the Dove Facebook page. Source: Stampler (2013)</p>
Social monitoring strategy	<p>□ In 2014, Hertz Rent-a-Car announced their social media strategy shift from marketing-oriented view to a customer-oriented view. Thus, Hertz built a 24/7 global social customer care system aiming to improve efficiency and quicker response through social media monitoring. As reported, customer loyalty has been notably increased due to the immediate responding via social media. Source: Waldo (2014)</p> <p>□ An example of leveraging social monitoring can be well illustrated by Barclays bank's new launch of mobile payment app called PingIt. Instead of a traditional product launch approach, Barclay used real-time social media data analysis to listen to customer feedbacks and complaints concerning the app. Within a short period, Barclays made significant changes to the app and successfully turned the customers' negative mentions into valuable market knowledge. Source: Griffith (2016)</p>
Social CRM strategy	<p>□ In coping with increasingly fierce competition and declined customer value in the Chinese market, the US cosmetics brand Max Factor launched a new social CRM system in 2016. The system enabled a new loyalty program as a result of the connection of customers' social behavior data and detailed offline data. In addition, it also empowered real-time, automated, and customized communication system. The company gained more in-depth customer insights and increased average customer purchase value in just four months. Source: Wang (2017)</p> <p>□ Fiat Brazil's car crowdsourcing project is an excellent example to enlighten the importance of customer engagement through co-creation in social CRM strategy. Fiat has recognized customers as a new source of innovation and invited them to share their novel ideas in creating a concept car. In twelve months, Fiat's online platform received suggestions from over 17,000 people across 160 different countries, which results in the world's first crowdsourced car. Source: Saldanha et al. (2014)</p>

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Paper 3

A cross-cultural comparison of social media marketing strategies development of international firms: Evidence from Finland and China

Abstract

Despite the dramatic increase in the number of social media (SM) marketing studies in recent years, research on social media marketing strategy (SMMS) in the international marketing context remains scarce. This study aims to narrow the research gap and respond to calls for appropriate strategies for companies to deal with SM in this changing landscape (Guesalaga 2016; Schultz & Peltier 2013). An explorative and comparative study involving five Finnish companies and five Chinese companies reveals the key elements in the SMMS developmental process. We further explore the impact of culture on SMMS development by applying Hofstede's five cultural dimensions. We propose a framework that offers guidance to firms developing SMMS and provide a theoretical understanding of the moderating role of cultural values. The proposed framework and findings on the development of SMMS can serve as a basis for future research and give insightful managerial implications.

Keywords: Social media marketing strategies; Cross-cultural study; Strategy developmental process; Marketing management

1. Introduction

Social media (SM) usage in marketing tools to attract new customers has grown dramatically (Michaelidou et al. 2011) and influences customer preferences (Kumar & Mirchandani 2012). That growth offers tremendous opportunities for companies to derive value from SM but also presents enormous challenges to leverage the strategic use of SM (Appel et al. 2020; Schultz & Peltier 2013). As firms strive to build social media marketing strategies (SMMSs) and extract value from SM actions, marketing strategy has become an emerging research topic in SM studies. From the strategic marketing perspective, the exploding use of SM stresses the need for guidance on how to use SM strategically to foster relationships with customers, advance customer engagement, and increase business performance. Therefore, how to incorporate SM practices into marketing practices and strategies has become an urgent requirement for firms today as extensive studies stress and substantiate the value of SM (Ancillai et al. 2019; Nam et al. 2017; Rapp et al. 2013; Schweidel & Moe 2014; Z. Wang & Kim 2017).

With the increasing use of SM in international marketing, culture has been widely recognized as an overarching stimulus that not only impacts how brands communicate with their customers but also customers' preferences and behaviors (Tsai & Men 2017). Although extensive research has emerged on the SM marketing topic, studies on how culture influences SMMS remain rare. This study explores how SMMSs are developed within global organizations and the role of national culture on that developmental process. The investigation addresses the theoretical challenges identified and responds to calls for appropriate strategies to leverage SM in the changing marketing landscape (e.g., Aral et al. 2013; Guesalaga 2016; Moorman & Day 2016; Salo 2017; Schultz & Peltier 2013). Specifically, we aim to answer questions on what are the key elements in the SMMS developmental process, and how does national culture influence its development. We address the research question by focusing on the developmental process of SMMS in an international context. Based on inductive research on ten case firms (five from Finland and five from China), we investigate potential facilitators and obstacles along the SMMS developmental process, and how cultural differences influence SMMS' development between firms in two countries.

The current research makes several important contributions. First, we contribute to a better understanding of the SMMS development process. We align SM marketing activities with marketing strategies that can provide useful insights for marketers. Second, we investigate how cultural values impact SMMS development in different marketing contexts. Through a comparative study between Chinese

and Finnish firms, the findings can serve as a good starting point for firms wishing to use SM in their internationalization process.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical basis, namely, the literature on SMMS and the related studies from cultural perspectives. Following that, we justify our methodological approach. In the final section, we present our findings and the theoretical and managerial implications.

2. Literature review

2.1 The development of social media marketing strategy

SM is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content.” (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, p. 61). The definition captures the key difference between SM and other digital technologies, that is, interactions. The interactions (e.g., firm-to-consumers and consumers-to-consumers) enable various users to connect and exchange information on platforms such as social networking sites and communities (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Accordingly, SM should not be used as merely a communication technology or tool to increase short-term sales revenue or promotions. Marketers are aware of the need to found a way to translate an SM presence for marketing purposes into customer value (Schultz & Peltier 2013). Barger et al. (2016) argue that only when marketers change the way to deliver content on SM will they recognize the true potential of SM marketing. Hollebeek et al. (2014) suggest that rather than passively reacting to online customer behaviors and pushing content through SM channels, firms should develop SM strategies relating to their customer–brand relationships to enhance customer reactions and create long-lasting engagement. Consequently, SM is becoming an important component of marketing strategies.

Marketing strategy formulation is an integration of different steps, including the understanding of customer needs and behaviors, segmentation and targeting, and differentiating competitor offerings (El-Ansary 2006). Some studies have highlighted the importance of both the resources and capabilities perspectives in the SM context. For example, based on organizational capability theory, Muninger et al. (2019) reveal the capabilities that facilitate knowledge management, top management understanding, and networking and collaboration when using SM for innovation purposes. These capabilities largely rely on the realization of key resources, such as having competent SM managers coordinating communication and decisions, operational and strategic SM teams, and the digital infrastructure, time, and budget allocation. Guesalaga (2016) highlights the need to understand

the drivers of using SM in the selling process. The author surveyed sales executives to identify how organizational factors play a crucial role in using SM in sales and to foster personal commitment.

This study follows Li et al.'s (2021) conceptualization of the SMMS developmental process, which emphasizes the role and input of both firms and customers. The developmental model comprises four major components: drivers, inputs, throughputs, and outputs. The drivers are the firm's SM marketing objectives and the reasons for customer usage of SM. The inputs refer to the firm's SM engagement initiatives and the customers' SM behaviors. The throughputs show the way the firm connects and interacts with customers to exchange resources and satisfy needs, and the resulting outcome is referred as output.

2.2 Social media marketing and culture

Individual values are not only influenced by marketing strategy and environment but also by other members of society through the socialization process (Markus & Kitayama 1991). Therefore, an individual's behavior results from his/her cultural value system for a given context, which evolves over time (Luna & Gupta 2001). Culture is defined as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede et al. 2005, p. 28). Hofstede's model is the most-cited cultural framework. It identifies five basic value dimensions: collectivism/individualism, masculinity/femininity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation (Hofstede 1983; Hofstede & Bond 1984).

Researchers recognize culture as a determinant of various consumer attitudes, behaviors, and decisions (Markus & Kitayama 1991). In SM contexts, Gupta et al. (2018) showed that cultural orientation could strongly affect customer engagement. For example, a collectivistic culture (e.g., China) has a strong impact on customer value which may mainly focus on being connected to others (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Conversely, customers from individualistic cultures (e.g., the USA) may prioritize their personal goals and interests (Hofstede 2001). Tsai and Men (2012) conducted a comparative study on SM posts from China and the USA and found that brands' SM pages in China tend to appeal to collectivist cultural values, such as the prevalent use of "we" and "friends" to emphasize interpersonal relationships and interdependence. In contrast, American corporates' SM pages promote more individualistic values, including posts that feature individuality, independence, or self-fulfillment. Kitirattarkarn et al. (2019) found that people living in collectivistic cultures show stronger engagement with informative content than those living in individualistic cultures. The uncertainty avoidance dimension has also been studied in the context of a wide range of behaviors. For example,

studies show that a high uncertainty avoidance culture leads to strong resistance to change, while low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures are linked to not fearing the future and are more open to innovations like the Internet as a new medium of communication (Hermeking 2005).

Individualism/collectivism is a value system that explains the relationship between individuals and social groups in society (Hofstede 1983). According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), individualists are independent of their groups, prioritize their own interests and personal goals above group norms, exhibit behaviors that reflect individual needs and preferences. In contrast, collectivists are interdependent within their groups, prioritize group interests and seek social harmony (Triandis 2001). In addition, individualists' behaviors are primarily based on their own attitudes, while collectivists tend to comply with the norms of the referent groups (Han 2017). In general, individualism is a characteristic shared among western societies, and collectivism is more prominent in Asian societies.

Power distance, defined as "the extent to which a society accepts that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally" (Hofstede 1980, p.45), shows a close relationship with SM activities, especially information-seeking behavior (Obal & Kunz 2016). Power typically symbolizes prestige, wealth, and a better social position (Hofstede 2001). People from high power distance cultures are more likely to actively acquire information than people from low power distance cultures. That is because information is unequally distributed in high power distance countries, and people that are associated with more power possess more information. That imbalance makes information search behavior crucial in the decision-making process in high power-distance cultures.

The masculinity/femininity cultural dimension captures the level of assertiveness (masculine ideals) and modesty (feminine values) in a national culture. People from societies with a strong element of masculinity are more likely to show a preference for assertiveness, placing a greater value on achievement and material success. A society marked by strong femininity in contrast shows a greater tendency toward social relationships and tends to value empathy, equality, consensus, and care for the weak (Hofstede 1980).

Uncertainty avoidance reflects the tolerance of uncertainty and was referred to as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (Hofstede et al. 2005, p. 403). The level of uncertainty avoidance strongly impacts information-seeking attitudes and behaviors. Individuals from high uncertainty avoidance cultures have a higher level of intolerance for risk and differing viewpoints and behaviors; as a result, they have a desire for predictability and wish to control their surroundings because they are

uncomfortable in unfamiliar and unstructured situations (Hofstede et al. 2005). Individuals with low levels of uncertainty avoidance, on the other hand, have a greater tolerance of novel situations and alternative viewpoints and are more inclined to embrace risk (Hofstede et al. 2005).

Long-term orientation describes the extent to which a society exhibits a future-oriented perspective. People with a long-term orientation are more inclined to create plans for the future and value characteristics like thrift and perseverance, whereas people with a short-term orientation favor past and current acts over future perspectives (Hofstede & Minkov 2010). People who are short-term oriented are believed to value less perseverance and persistence (Hofstede & Minkov 2010). Long-term-oriented people tend to have conservative attitudes to risk and avoid/minimize that which may adversely affect their future (Lam et al. 2009).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research context

One core aim of this paper is to address the potential impact of culture on SMMS development. Using international firms in China and Finland as a basis for empirical inquiry, the industry context for this research is multiple. Table 1 demonstrates a comparison of five Hofstede cultural dimensions between China and Finland. As seen in the table, the two countries vary significantly in each dimension, thus offering good opportunities to examine the effect of cultural differences in the SMMS developmental process.

Table 1. Comparison of cultural dimensions between China and Finland (Hofstede 1983)

Cultural dimension	China	Finland
Individualism/collectivism	20	63
Power distance	80	33
Masculinity/femininity	66	26
Uncertainty avoidance	30	59
Long-term orientation	87	38

3.2 Data collection

We applied a purposeful sampling approach and developed several case selection criteria. First, the firms had to conduct operations internationally to qualify as international companies. Second, they had to have SM platforms for business purposes and experience of using them. Given these criteria, we approached ten firms that agreed to participate in the study.

We undertook our empirical study through in-depth interviews, which allow for the development of a better cross-cultural understanding that might not be possible with other methods (e.g., surveys) (McCracken 1988). Both initial in-depth interviews and follow-up interviews were conducted over a 6-month research period and provided the data informing the study. The case companies are involved in a variety of industries, including digital tech, insurance, media, and real estate. All firms had international sales and had used SM platforms for marketing purposes for more than a year. Table 2 provides a detailed profile of the interviewees. Follow-up interviews were conducted based on several subsequent face-to-face contacts and feedback provided in electronic form. These follow-up interviews clarified unclear and emerging issues that arose during data analysis.

Table 2. Respondents profile in in-depth interviews

Firm	Industry	Country	Firm size	SM experience (year)	Interview Length (minutes)	Key informants	Triangulation sources
Firm 1	Digital Tech	Finland	Large	4	65	Global Communication Manager	SM page
Firm 2	Insurance	Finland	Medium	4	59	CEO	Marketing manager SM page
Firm 3	Media	Finland	Medium	3	60	Marketing manager	SM page
Firm 4	Smart Tech	Finland	Large	5	50	Sales Manager	SM page
Firm 5	Tech	Finland	Large	5	100	Marketing manager	SM page
Firm 6	Automation	China	Large	1	54	Marketing manager	SM marketer
Firm 7	Digital Tech	China	Large	>10	45	Marketing manager	Marketing specialist
Firm 8	Real estate	China	Large	4	52	Marketing manager	PR manager SM page
Firm 9	Electrical power	China	Large	2	41	SM specialist	SM page

Firm 10	Advertising	China	Large	10	63	Marketing manager	SM page
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Note: Firm size: Micro < 10 employees; Small 10–49 employees; Medium-sized 50–249 employees; Large ≥ 250 employees (European Commission 2016)

3.3 Data analysis

Our research is exploratory in nature and aims to achieve a deep understanding of new and complex phenomena. The subject benefits from being approached from a holistic perspective. Therefore, a grounded theory approach following the “Gioia method” is particularly suitable (Gioia et al. 2013). To ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis, the software NVivo was used for coding, analyzing, and synthesizing the data following an iterative and categorization approach (Jackson & Bazeley 2019).

We started with open coding based on our key research questions and information extracted from interviews (Corbin & Strauss 1990). All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. An iterative process served to aggregate the first-order statements into more abstract second-order concepts (Gioia et al. 2013). Those were later collapsed and combined into aggregate dimensions. Table 3 illustrates the five main themes in the development of SMMSs (i.e., drivers, barriers, strategic objectives, inputs, and outputs) that emerged following a recursive process of concept aggregation. We iteratively examined and compared the data and literature with the initial codes or themes developed to reveal the cultural impact on SMMS development across cases.

Table 3. Coding results and category development

First-order categories	Second-order categories	Aggregate dimensions
Invest a lot of money	Resources	Drivers
Have knowledgeable people		
IT system		
Vertical decision-making process, very efficient	Capabilities	
Make changes based on customer comments		
Team-work (design, photographer, producer, etc.)		
Data from different platforms cannot be integrated		Barriers

How to measure the outcomes	Company-related challenges		
To design interesting and good-quality content			
To transform the followers into buying customers	Customer-related challenges		
Customer targeting and segmentation on SM			
Too many competitors	Market-related challenges		
Platform algorithm rules change from time to time			
Creating awareness, reaching a wider audience	Sales and promotion	Strategic objectives	
New product promotion			
Acquire and retain customers	Customer management		
To influence			
Brand promotion	Branding		
Let people know us			
SM presence should have its own personality	Content strategy	Input	
Viral content			
Content needs to deliver value			
Active in SM activities	SM interaction		
Frequent updates			
Employee engagement			
Customer co-creation			
Listen to customer voice in SM	Monitoring		
Pay extra attention to negative comments			
Product release, campaign, events.	Marketing performance		Output
Customer satisfaction			
Like, shares, and comments			

The number of people talking about us	Customer-level performance	
Sales	Financial performance	
Certain KPIs for digital marketing		

In addition to interviews, content analysis from the brands' SM web pages was also used to ensure consistency with the findings. Content analysis of online marketing information helped determine the trustworthiness of the interviewees' information on their SM presence and customer engagement behaviors. The triangulation (Yin 2011) of different data sources thus facilitated the validity of SMMS development and expanded the understanding of contextual/cultural impacts.

4. Findings

4.1 *The developmental process of SMMS*

Figure 1 presents a framework for the SMMS development process. A firm must start with a clear objective shared within the organization and then set goals to overcome barriers. The firm should also be utilizing its range of resources and capabilities as its drivers. The implementation of SMMSs can be regarded as an input relating to how firms deliver content to engage customers, how they interact with their customers, and how they monitor (listen and respond to customer needs) on SM.

The case studies reveal outputs in the form of performance measurements, among which customer-level performance metrics are the most common. Because it is difficult to link SM input directly with financial performance, firms tend to measure the success of SM marketing with metrics of engagement indicators such as the number of followers, *likes*, *shares*, etc.

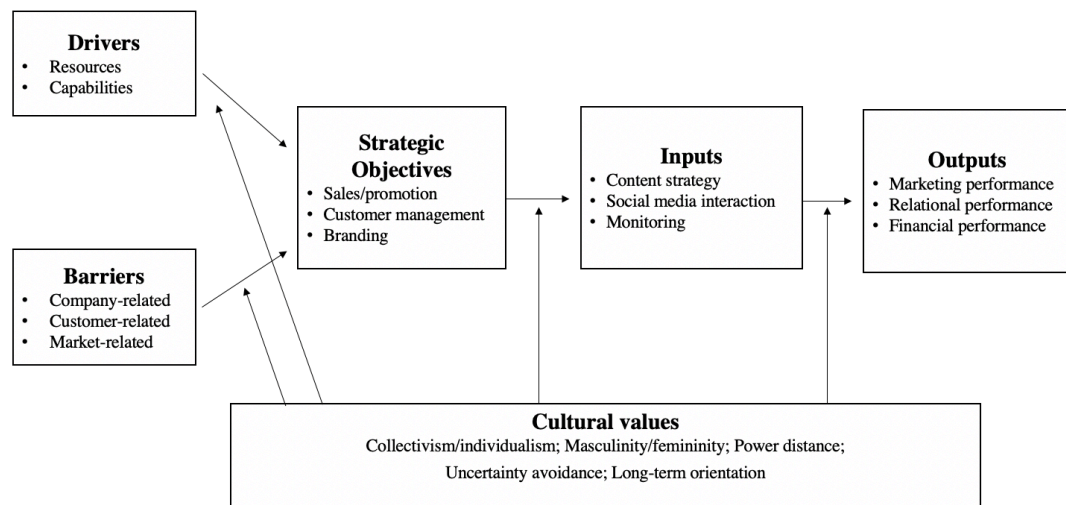


Figure 1. The development process of social media marketing strategies

Conducting the comparative analysis between firms from two countries also revealed the similarities and differences in terms of the SMMS developmental process. The drivers common in both countries are financial investment in recruiting knowledgeable people, providing facilities, and incentives. However, for the firms we surveyed, the devoted resources in the Chinese firms are generally at a more advanced stage than those in the Finnish firms. More specifically, the Chinese firms paid more attention to investment in SM resources and significantly more to building SM capabilities. Barriers to SMMS for both Chinese and Finnish firms include concerns over company-related barriers, including a lack of capability to produce valuable content and maintain frequent updates. In addition, there are barriers to engaging with customers in the long term. Another barrier is the lack of IT techniques to monitor SM interactions. However, analyzing the interview data from Finnish firms shows that a major barrier is organizations having several divisions operating as silos that discourage cooperation and running separate SM accounts. This practice confuses customers. In contrast, our case study reveals big Chinese firms exhibit far better department cooperation.

With regard to the strategic objectives of SM use, firms from both countries confirm the importance of SM as a branding tool. Most have shown the priority of using SM for their branding strategic goals. The case firms thus want to promote their firm/product image through SM and reach and influence a wider range of customers. Nevertheless, two Chinese firms highlighted their SM use is for transactional purposes, to sell and promote product.

The input analysis shows that SM interactions and monitoring are very much neglected in both countries. Most of the firms only focus on content delivery. The

interviews show that there has been a better supporting industry developed in China. The content design, dissemination, SM interactions, and monitoring can easily be outsourced.

As the output, difficulties of performance measurement are identifiable in both countries. Simple metrics, such as follower numbers and likes, are used. Compared to Finnish firms, Chinese firms are more transaction oriented in that they are more eager to link SM to sales.

4.2 The impact of culture on SMMS developmental process

All the firms stressed the importance of SMMS development as SM is becoming a key marketing tool. However, the cross-case data analysis demonstrates that national culture influences the development of SMMS in the interviewed firms. Table 4 offers a thematic overview of how Hofstede's cultural dimensions apply to the development of SMMS, which will be elucidated in this section. As shown in the table, the individualism/collectivism cultural dimension is mainly reflected in the two aspects: SM content creation and collective problem-solving. In relation to the power distance dimension, the key indicators of SMMS development include decision-making, mainly in the formulation and execution of SMMS. In examining the masculinity/ femininity dimension, SM presence and interaction show cultural differences in the developmental process of SMMS. Uncertainty avoidance impacts risk-taking willingness and how firms use SM information. The long-term orientation dimension is primarily discussed in the differences of SM marketing goals which indicate the rationale for using SM and the starting point of doing so.

Table 4. The cultural factors impacting SMMS development

Cultural dimension	Aspects of SMMS development
Individualism/collectivism	SM content creation
	Collective problem-solving
Power distance	Decision-making
Masculinity/femininity	SM presences
	SM interactions
Uncertainty avoidance	Risk-taking
	The use of SM information
Long-term orientation	SM marketing goals

A higher collectivism score indicates an inclination to a collective mentality. For example, when asked how SM content was designed and delivered, several Chinese firms mentioned the collective content/topics were provided by different departments. In contrast, Finnish firms prefer decision-making to be independent. The following quote is an example of how one Chinese firm works collectively toward reducing potential risks: “Apart from that, every employee has their responsibilities to listen to their customers’ voices on SM...We require all employees to work in customer service for some time each year for them to listen to the customer. Therefore, when we plan for an event, we know what motivates our customers and what news will go viral. (Firm 7)”. Accordingly, we propose,

Proposition 1: SMMS development in collectivist cultures is more likely to show a reliance on collective solutions (e.g., SM content creation and delivery) and problem-solving (e.g., negative WOM) than is the equivalent from individualistic cultures.

In both countries, operative decision-making was the responsibility of the marketing department; however, the decision-making on SMMS differs significantly in the two countries. Power over SMMS decision-making is less equally distributed in the Chinese firms than in the Finnish ones. For instance, the marketing manager of Firm 9 explains: “All decisions are made at the top level in the organization. Each month, they will propose what content to post on SM and report to firm leaders for approval. Sometimes, there will be a topical theme assigned by the firm leaders, and we will think/design the content according to that topic.”

Proposition 2: SMMS decision-making in the high-power distance cultures tends to exhibit a more autocratic leadership style than that in low power distance cultures.

The masculinity/femininity dimension is reflected in SM presence and interactions. In China, a masculine society, when asked what kind of content was presented on SM, three of five interviewees mentioned the product-centered and success-oriented content features, which further reflects materialism. From the Finnish perspective, the feminist cultural trait was indicated by the emphasis on relationships in SM. As the Global communication manager of Firm 1 explains: “Showing a picture of a person who is explaining something does get more likes and shares than just using trade press releases. Of course, so that is a clear finding that it should be something personal, happening somewhere, and with somebody explaining. Yeah, so that’s clear. ” The culture situation thus prompts the proposition below:

Proposition 3: With regard to SM presence and interactions on SMMS, masculine cultures tend to show material success and achievement, while feminine cultures are more likely to emphasize relationships and equality.

Risk avoidance was evident among the firms in China. There were repeated mentions of the danger of negative WOM and actions required to reduce uncertainty in the SM operations. One Chinese firm stated that: “We have different alert levels (ranging from 1–4) in the case of negative voices, our firm reacts according to each of these levels” (Firm 7). Another Chinese firm also showed concern about negative customer reviews and ensuring action will be taken seriously when encountering customer dissatisfaction: “We listen to customer comments and communicate with customers who make negative comments” (Firm 10). On the other hand, interviews with most of the Finnish firms did not reveal as strong a focus on negative online comments as in China. As one Finnish respondent put it, “We had encountered no extreme case that someone comment (extremely) negatively on our SM page. If we had, we might contact the person, but it is really rare” (Firm 2). Therefore, we propose the following:

Proposition 4: Decision-makers from high uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to avoid or seek to mitigate risks (e.g., negative WOM) in the SMMS development process more than those from low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures.

Hofstede (1983) reported that long-term-oriented cultures are more relationship-oriented, while short-term-oriented cultures tend to be more transaction oriented. Interestingly, we did not find evidence supporting that argument. In contrast, we found distinctive descriptions by interviewees in the two countries regarding SM marketing goals. China is believed to be a long-term oriented culture (score 87) compared to Finland (score 38); however, most of the case companies stressed the selling purpose of SM. The marketing managers of two firms commented: “SM is used to sell, or to provide a driving force for sales” (Firm 6). “Our goal is to sell, we want to find the customers that are interested in our products who can bring more customers” (Firm 8). In contrast, most Finnish firms showed an interest in building relationships with their customers. For instance, one manager said: “We don’t want to do sales and promotion directly, that will destroy our reliability. We are really careful about our content. Meanwhile, we are trying some slightly experimental content to see what kind of content people are interested in” (Firm3). To reflect on the difference, we think the nature of SM as a digital tool might reduce the wiliness to engage in long-term relationship building in China. People believe SM offers an easy-to-use tool that is perfect for promoting and advertising products without any great cost. Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 5: When developing SMMS, strategic goals from long-term oriented cultures are not necessarily relationship-oriented but can be transaction oriented due to the uniqueness of SM.

5. Discussion and implications

The exploding use of SM has underlined the need for guidance concerning how to build SMMSs to leverage SM use. However, there is a lack of research to explore the cultural impact on the development of SMMSs. This paper takes the first step to addressing this issue and provides some guidelines for developing SMMS in an international context. We highlight the importance of several key elements when developing SMMSs, namely, setting strategic objectives, overcoming barriers, enforcing drivers, and conducting an effective input and output process to develop a successful SMMS. Accordingly, we provide practical insight related to the efficient use of SM for marketing purposes.

Despite the fact that Hofstede's cultural framework cannot explain all behaviors in a marketplace, it provides a useful theoretical lens for comparing cultural variations in the development process of SMMS. For example, the individualism–collectivism dimension is the most relevant for SMMS development. In relation to problem-solving, uncertainty avoidance is critical for dealing with negative WOM that carries the potential for risk and uncertainty. Power distance might be the most important dimension to consider when making decisions. This notion could be helpful in understanding and developing SMMS in international marketing literature.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study has important theoretical implications for the marketing strategy and international marketing literature. First, it improves the current understanding of marketing strategy in the SM context. Our qualitative findings facilitate empirical tests of the framework of the SMMS development process (i.e., drivers, barriers, strategic objectives, input, and output). Such testing contributes to a better understanding of the link between SM marketing strategic choices and successful performance. The findings also illustrate the role of SM in the design and implementation of marketing strategies. The study can thus influence strategy formulation and implementation in the SM context and complement marketing strategy theory through the integration and clear conceptualization of SMMS in both western and Asian contexts.

Second, this research also offers an integrative perspective that extends the understanding of the relationship between SMMS and cultural value. We respond

to calls to explore the cultural impact on SM activities across countries (Okazaki & Taylor 2013). The majority of prior international SM literature focuses on how customer behaviors around and attitudes to SM differ across cultures in general (Johnston et al. 2018). The current research applied Hofstede's (1983) cultural dimensions to explore their impact on SMMS and its developmental process, thus complementing the literature on the role of cultural value in the application of SM marketing across borders (Kitirattarkarn et al. 2019; Tang 2017).

5.2 Managerial implications

SM has significantly affected the customer–brand relationship and business environment, and that influence will continue to grow. For firms operating SM platforms in different markets concurrently, the proposed framework and propositions will help them consider the role of cultural value that impacts SMMS in different markets and revisit their approach to developing SMMS in terms of the drivers, challenges, motivations, and inputs that will significantly impact the outcome of their strategies. Therefore, it is critical for global marketers to understand the culture-bound nature of SM behavior and decision makings (Berthon et al. 2012).

The findings of this study can also guide managers seeking to align their SM strategy with a broad range of marketing objectives, from tactical to strategic ones. Our study suggests that firms should align their SM marketing objectives with the capabilities and resources available to the firm. Therefore, one key suggestion for managers is that firms should actively get involved in the SM interactions with their customers. Doing so would enable the firm to influence consumer engagement behavior through SM content, actively listen to customer concerns and feedback and respond in a timely manner, and engage with and empower customers to build long-term relationships. Companies that merely reactively interact with their prospective or current customers risk missing the opportunity to reap the potential business value provided by SM.

5.3 Limitations and research directions

This study primarily examines the emerging SMMS research topic through the developmental process and cultural impact lenses. Although we used empirical data from two culturally distinct countries to enhance theory development and theoretical propositions, our analytical findings may not tolerate generalization to other contexts. Accordingly, it would be necessary to conduct more research across different countries, industries, and firm types. Quantitative means (e.g., survey) could also validate our propositions relating to the cultural impact on key SMMS developmental variables. Furthermore, our study did not examine the

development of SMMS over a long time period, future research might therefore investigate the effect of time on SMMS development from a process or longitudinal approach. Last but not least, our study did not specifically look at firm performance, although interviewees repeatedly mentioned the importance of SM marketing performance. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the impact of SMMS on performance might also be interesting to help managers in their budget allocation decisions when choosing between traditional and digital marketing tools.

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Paper 4

Global customer engagement via social content strategies: Framework, propositions, and implications

Abstract

Social media (SM) is becoming a promising marketing tool with which to engage customers globally. Despite its popularity, how firms stimulate customer engagement (CE) behaviors through content marketing strategy on SM has not been thoroughly investigated. Furthermore, the impact of cultural values on CE in a global context has been largely neglected in the existing literature. This conceptual paper aims to fill the gap by offering an integrative framework to delineate the relationship between social content strategies, CE, and cultural value. Consequently, this study 1) offers a new understanding of social content strategy, 2) provides an integrative framework that offers guidance to firms on strategically managing SM content for marketing and customer management purposes, and 3) explores the cultural impact on customer perceptions of different SM content, which is particularly applicable for international marketing managers seeking to engage global customers.

Keywords: Social content strategy; Customer engagement; Social media; Culture; Value creation

1. Introduction

With its interactive and collaborative nature, social media (SM) has not only enriched the opportunities for firms to connect, develop and maintain relationships with customers (Rapp et al. 2013), but has also empowered customers to become initiators and co-creators through SM interactions (Maslowska et al. 2016). Given the evolving roles of customer engagement (CE) in advancing business performance, the importance of the CE issue is recognized by both practitioners and scholars. According to eMarketer (2019), SM is used as leverage due to its top benefits of audience targeting capabilities (49%) and engagement (49%). From the academic side, the call for further research on the most effective ways to engage customers was also stressed in the 2018–2020 Marketing Science Institute (MSI) research priorities (MSI 2018). Therefore, brands now invest substantially in SM marketing to encourage CE in brand content generation and value creation (Hamilton et al. 2016).

Consequently, firms are gradually shifting their SM focus from directly selling products to enhancing customer perceptions and the emotional connection between customer and firm (Hollebeek & Macky 2019; Pansari & Kumar 2017). One of the most common and promising approaches is to deliver valuable content on SM platforms to enhance customers' sentiment and stimulate their engagement behaviors through customer interactions (e.g., clicking likes, writing comments, and sharing content) (Meire et al. 2019). This is referred to as content marketing, as it creates and distributes "educational and/or compelling content in multiple formats to attract and/or retain customers" (Pulizzi & Barrett 2008, p.8). Unlike traditional advertising, which mainly targets persuasion and sales, content marketing is designed to attract the audience with valued content, thus the increased CE may ultimately help sell more products/services (Hollebeek & Macky 2019; Malthouse et al. 2013).

An understanding of the stimulation of CE behaviors and delivering efficient engagement initiatives through SM content is central to the successful management of a content marketing strategy (Harmeling et al. 2017). Numerous studies attest to content marketing positively affecting aspects of CE, such as customer purchase behaviors (Kumar et al. 2016), brand evaluations (Naylor et al. 2012), and customer value (Hamilton et al. 2016). However, research results on the effectiveness of SM content and their resulting customer behaviors based on related quantitative studies are rather disjointed. Furthermore, most studies examined CE as customers' behavioral outcomes without aligning it with firm-generated content (FGC) (Meire et al. 2019). In other words, research on *what* type of SM content affects CE behaviors is still fragmented and limited.

The aforementioned research deficiencies impel this study seeking to understand the relationship between content marketing strategies in SM (refer to social content strategies) and CE in a global context. In doing so, this study builds on the “global customer engagement” concept proposed by Gupta et al. (2018), where cultural dimensions are applied to explain the impact of cultural values on CE behaviors. We aim to answer the following questions: *how do social content strategies impact CE, and what are the roles of cultural factors?* Furthermore, given the core of content marketing strategies is to deliver *valuable* content that is “useful, relevant, compelling and timely” (Holliman & Rowley 2014, p. 269), while the fundamental underlying postulation of CE is “the mechanics of a customer’s value addition to the firm” (Pansari & Kumar 2017, p.295), we argue that a firm’s social content strategy can be seen as a value-adding strategy to deliver superior value to customers to deliver marketing objectives.

Table 1 compares our study with relevant studies focused on investigating the relationship between SM content marketing and CE, irrespective of whether the cultural perspective is considered. In narrowing these research gaps, we contribute to SM marketing and international marketing literature in several important ways.

Table 1. Related representative studies

Authors	Research Focus	Applied Theory	Method	Content Category	Engagement Measurement	Culture Aspect
Berger & Milkman (2012)	Online content diffusion and virality	None	Quantitative	Positive emotional vs. negative emotional	Content transmission	No
De Vries et al. (2012)	Brand post popularity	None	Quantitative	post characteristics (e.g., vividness, interactivity), content of the brand post (e.g., information, entertainment)	Brand popularity (shares, comments and likes)	No
Goh et al. (2013)	Impact of user- and marketer-generated content on consumer behaviors	None	Quantitative	marketer-generated content vs. user-generated content	Purchase behavior	No
Schulze et al. (2014)	viral marketing and sharing mechanism	Information process theory	Quantitative	hedonic and utilitarian content/low- vs. high-utilitarian products	Content sharing	No

Chang et al. (2015)	Persuasive message and its diffusion on SM	Elaboration likelihood model	Quantitative	Persuasive messages (i.e., argument quality, post popularity, and post attractiveness)	Click likes and shares	No
Kumar et al. (2016)	Firm-generated content and customer purchase behavior	None	Quantitative	Content valence, receptivity, and customer susceptibility	Buying behavior	No
Akpinar & Berger (2017)	Content characteristic and valuable virality	None	Quantitative	(1) emotional integral, (2) emotional nonintegral, and (3) informative	Shareability, brand evaluation and purchase (viral and valuable)	No
De Vries et al. (2017)	SM messages, customer acquisition and brand-building	None	Quantitative	F2C messages, C2C messages (volume and valence)	brand-building and customer acquisition	No
Swani et al. (2017)	SM content popularity	Psychological motivation theory	Quantitative	Message Appeal: Functional appeal vs. Emotional appeal	Popularity: likes and comments	No
Gavilanes et al. (2018)	Content strategies for digital CE	None	Quantitative	Seven categories: current product display, new product announcement, sweepstakes, sales, customer feedback, infotainment, and organization branding	four levels of CE: neutral consumption; positive filtering; cognitive and affective processing and advocacy;	No
Lee et al. (2018)	The effectiveness of video content marketing	None	Quantitative	informative vs. persuasive	CE (likes, comments, shares)	No
Tafesse & Wien (2018)	SM message strategy and customer behavioral engagement	None	Quantitative	informational, transformational, and interactional	Consumer behavioral engagement (likes and sharing)	No

First, based on an extensive review of content marketing studies, we propose a new understanding of social content strategy. The new frame captures the richness of content scope and values, as created both by firms and customers. Traditional advertising strategies do not consider customers as equal content and value

creators. This new perspective may be particularly applicable for firms seeking to manage value creation on SM.

Second, we provide a generalized contribution through our theoretical integration of content marketing and CE literature. We offer an integrative conceptual framework to align firms' inputs (i.e., SM content) with customer reactions (i.e., CE). That framework will be especially useful for firms. A firm that has a better understanding of the relationship between social content strategy and CE will be able to develop different content strategies to leverage its SM use.

Third, we explore the impact of cultural value in the studied relationship, and we demonstrate how cultural value can moderate the relationship between social content strategies and CE. In doing so, the study offers guidance to firms on strategically managing SM marketing in a global context.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we present a literature review addressing the previous studies on content marketing and CE. Next, we propose our definition of social content strategy and discuss its key elements to carry forward our conceptual framework. Following that, research propositions are discussed. Finally, we provide implications, research directions, and conclusions from this study.

2. Literature review

2.1 Content marketing in SM

There have been some attempts to conceptualize content marketing. For instance, Rose and Pulizzi (2011) highlight its function as a strategy to create valuable experiences, while Kilgour et al. (2015) underscore the importance of content matching with the target audience. Holliman and Rowley (2014) define content marketing as, "creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome" (p. 285). Conversely, Hollebeek and Macky (2019) delineate digital content marketing as "the creation and dissemination of relevant, valuable brand-related content to current or prospective customers on digital platforms to develop their favorable brand engagement, trust, and relationships (vs. directly persuading consumers to purchase)" (p. 30).

Content is a key component of SM marketing. Two types of content generation in SM platforms are observed in the literature. The first one is that firms create and deliver relevant and engaging content by their efforts to promote themselves and

cultivate relationships with their customers (Holliman and Rowley 2014), which is known as FGC. Kumar et al. (2016) found that FGC is positively related to consumer buying behaviors. Another form is evident when firms encourage and share content initiated by customers, for example, product reviews and comments. That is known as user-generated content (UGC). The growth of UGC has made electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) one of the most powerful sources of influence on customer attitudes and decisions (Rosario et al. 2016). Stephen and Galak (2012) discovered that UGC significantly affects product sales. Therefore, creating and managing FGC, together with the stimulation and display of UGC, have become imperatives for many companies as part of their content marketing strategies in SM (e.g., Kumar et al. 2016; Rosario et al. 2016).

2.2 Customer engagement

The popularity of CE has led to diverse understandings of the construct, as different terms seem to be used interchangeably, such as CE (Kumar et al. 2010; Pansari & Kumar 2017; Vivek et al. 2012), consumer engagement (Barger et al. 2016), customer–brand engagement (Hollebeek et al. 2014), among others. Barger et al. (2016) define CE as “a mutually beneficial process through which firms and consumers co-create brand-related content and social experiences on SM” (p. 279). Inversely, Vivek et al. (2012) describe CE as “the intensity of an individual’s participation in and connection with an organization’s offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the firm initiates” (p.127). Moreover, Brodie et al. (2011) and Calder et al. (2016) argue that CE has context-specific cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.

The extant research has suggested CE as a vehicle for enhancing customer value (Kumar et al. 2010), advancing performance outcomes (e.g., brand referrals and customer satisfaction) (Agnihotri et al. 2016), and gaining competitive advantage (Kumar & Pansari 2016). Recognizing the critical role of CE in actualizing SM marketing effectiveness, researchers have long attempted to investigate its drivers. For example, Van Doorn et al. (2010) state that CE is influenced by firm-related factors (e.g., brand characteristics and reputation), customer-related factors (e.g., satisfaction, trust, commitment), and context-based factors (e.g., competitive factors). Highlighting the importance of customer factors, Brodie et al. (2011) stress participation and involvement as the antecedents of relational CE. Similarly, Pansari and Kumar (2017) argue that CE only occurs when customers are satisfied and have emotional bonding in relationships with firms. Venkatesan (2017) suggests generating conversations on social issues rather than promoting products to achieve a deeper level of CE.

Despite its essential role in SM marketing, the measurement of CE remains disjointed. For instance, Kumar et al. (2010) illustrate that CE encompasses purchases, referrals, and providing feedback that contributes value to firms. In contrast, Barger et al. (2016) operationalize CE into a number of measurable actions: simple reactions (e.g., likes, ratings), making comments, sharing and forwarding brand content, and creating own content (e.g., product reviews). With regard to the diverse measurement, a common consensus is the recognition of the different values that a customer can contribute to a firm, in addition to transactional value, such as the value-added from customers' referrals and their knowledge of new products (i.e., non-transactional value) (Pansari & Kumar 2017; Venkatesan 2017). The current study emphasizes the customer value contributed through CE in both transactional and non-transactional ways and adopts a behavioral perspective on CE, which captures the role of customers as active players in customer–brand relationships rather than as passive consumers (e.g., Coulter et al. 2012; Van Doorn et al. 2010).

2.3 Elements of social content strategy

Having reviewed previous studies on social content strategy we define the concept as, “A firm’s marketing strategy that focuses on creating and disseminating valuable content (either created by firms or customers) on SM in an exchange or co-creation with customers’ direct or indirect value contributions.” We identified four key elements that impact CE behaviors, namely the characteristics of the content (functional vs. emotional), the source of the content (FGC vs. UGC), the valence of the content (positive vs. negative), and the persuasion approach (hard-sell vs. soft-sell).

Characteristic: informational vs. emotional

Different characteristics of SM content have been found to greatly influence customer behaviors. One prominent research perspective is the distinction between emotional and informational appeals in SM studies (e.g., Akpınar & Berger 2017; Meire et al. 2019). According to Meire et al. (2019), informational content contains objective information (e.g., brand’s attributes) but is not directly promotional in its nature. Emotional content is defined as messages aiming to evoke emotional experiences. In SM studies, some researchers have stressed the functional appeals to enhance the number of likes and comments (e.g., De Vries et al. 2012; Swani et al. 2017); however, several studies have shown the importance of emotional appeals. For example, Berger and Milkman (2012) and Akpınar and Berger (2017) consider emotional content more efficient than that with informational appeals to increase sharing.

Source: FGC vs. UGC

We refer to the content posted by firms on their SM platforms as FGC and content created/initiated by customers as UGC. Firms have shifted toward using SM as one of their key marketing channels, and especially UGC, reflecting the *wisdom of the crowd* helps reduce customer uncertainty when they make purchase decisions (Colicev et al. 2019). In other words, consumers are becoming more dependent on opinions generated by previous or existing customers instead of information directly provided by firms. Prior studies confirm a positive relationship between FGC and firm performance (e.g., Kumar et al. 2016) and also between UGC and stock market performance (Tirunillai & Tellis 2012). In a study on the relationships between FGC, UGC, and marketing funnel stage, Colicev et al. (2019) confirmed that UGC has a more significant relationship with the awareness and satisfaction stages of the marketing funnel, while FGC has a stronger persuasive impact on customer consideration and purchase intent

Valence: positive vs. negative

The valence of content refers to whether the provided information on SM is positive or negative (Liu 2006). Valence has often been taken as a cue to determine the quality of online information (Lee & Youn 2009). As FGC is usually positive for promotion purposes, we refer to the valence of customer sentiment (i.e., UGC), which can be both positive and negative. In general, positive reviews imply approval or signal a good experience, while negative reviews usually involve dislikes and complaints (Liu 2006). For instance, according to Li and Hitt (2008), the average review rating reflects the level of satisfaction of previous customers with the product quality and signals the product value that potential consumers should expect. Because of its persuasive effect, the valence of UGC is regarded as an indicator of customer attitude and an important factor that influences other potential customers (Chintagunta et al. 2010). Therefore, previous research generally suggests a positive relationship between the valence of content and sales (e.g., Keh et al. 2015; Rosario et al. 2016).

Persuasion approach: hard-sell vs. soft-sell

Firms have become intensely interested in capturing economic value from social interactions, as SM can also help companies sell products and services (Yadav et al. 2013). Accordingly, a firm's persuasion style conveyed through its SM content refers to how firms persuade customers to buy their products/services. Mueller (1987) theorized two sales approaches (i.e., the soft-sell and hard-sell) based on Japanese and American advertising appeals. Mueller states the hard-sell approach is based on direct and explicit information that highlights product

advantages and performance, while in a soft-sell approach, “[an] image-oriented atmosphere is conveyed through a beautiful scene or the development of an emotional story of verse. Human emotional sentiments are emphasized over clear-cut product-related appeals” (Mueller 1987, p.53). Therefore, hard-sell approaches are generally more direct than soft-sell approaches. In general, previous studies have indicated that the soft-sell approach is more effective across markets (e.g., Okazaki et al. 2010).

2.4 The moderating role of cultural value

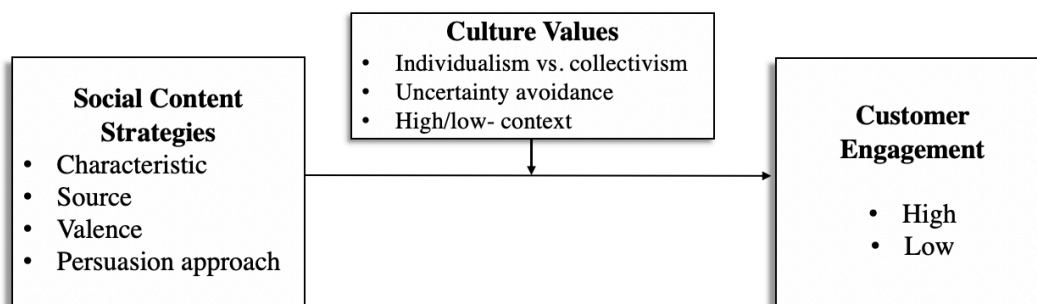
Individual values are not only influenced by marketing strategy and environment but also by other society members through the socialization process (Markus & Kitayama 1991). Culture is defined as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another” (Hofstede et al. 2005, p. 28). Culture has been recognized as a determinant of various customer attitudes and behaviors (e.g., De Mooij 2019; Markus & Kitayama 1991). Many dimensions were developed to understand cultural differences, such as Hofstede’s value dimensions (Hofstede 1983; Hofstede and Bond 1984; Hofstede 2010), GLOBE cultural clusters (House et al. 2004), and Hall’s (1989) high- and low-context cultures framework. In this study, we will adopt the individualism and collectivism and uncertainty avoidance dimensions from Hofstede (1983) to discuss the role of cultural value. That is because it has been proven to be most useful to understand cultural differences relating to consumer-related values and communications (De Mooij 2019). Furthermore, we will also apply the high- and low-context cultures dimension from Hall (1989). This is because SM marketing is communication with customers in nature, and we believe this dimension is specifically relevant to our purpose of understanding how different communication messages impact customer behaviors.

The individualism and collectivism dimension is considered the fundamental distinction between eastern and western countries. For example, a collectivistic culture (e.g., China) has a strong impact on customer value which may mainly focus on being connected to others, while individualistic cultures (e.g., the USA) tend to prioritize personal goals and interests (Hofstede 2001). In addition, the uncertainty avoidance dimension has also been studied in a wide range of customer behaviors. Studies show that a high uncertainty avoidance culture leads to strong resistance to change, while people from low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures are more open to innovations such as the Internet and new media (Hermeking 2006). Hall’s (1989) high- and low-context culture framework is based on the degree of context-dependence. It is claimed that each culture has its preferred communication style (Kim et al. 2009). For example, Chinese

advertising reflects a high-context communication style while American advertising reflects a relatively low-context communication style (Tsai and Men 2012). Next, we will discuss how each culture dimension moderates the studied relationships and conclude by presenting our propositions.

3. Conceptual framework and research propositions

We next propose a model (see Figure 1) that shows the relationship between social content strategies and CE. The framework posits that the impact of different types of content is moderated by cultural value, which thus leads to different levels of CE. The framework also delineates key elements of social content strategies and the dimension of CE. In the next section, the relationships will be interconnected



through the forms of research proposition.

Figure 1. Research framework

3.1 Individualism/collectivism, characteristic of content, and CE

Individualism/collectivism is a value system that explains the relationship between individuals and social groups in society (Hofstede 1997). According to Hofstede (1997), individualists are independent of their groups, prioritize their interests and personal goals above group norms, and exhibit behaviors that reflect individual needs and preferences. In contrast, collectivists are interdependent within their groups, prioritize the group interests and seek social harmony. Therefore, individualists act primarily based on their own interests, while collectivists tend to be heavily influenced by group preferences (Triandis 1989). Researchers have reported that individualism/collectivism significantly influenced online content appeals in western and eastern countries (Steenkamp & Geyskens 2006). Based on a comparative study on SM posts from China and the USA, Tsai and Men (2012) found that brand SM pages in China tend to appeal to

collectivist cultural values, as exemplified by the prevalence of the terms “we” and “friends” to emphasize interpersonal relationships and interdependence. In contrast, American corporates’ SM pages promote more individualistic values, including posts that feature individuality, independence, or self-fulfillment.

Prior studies have indicated the different customer behaviors toward different content appeals in two cultures. For example, using data on 8886 consumers from 23 countries, Steenkamp and Geyskens (2006) discovered that emotional experience is emphasized more by individualistic societies in website visits, while the utilitarian experience weighed more in collectivistic societies. Likewise, Kitirattarkarn et al. (2019) found that people living in collectivistic cultures show higher engagement behaviors toward informative content than those living in individualistic cultures. Additionally, Chu and Choi (2011) compare online WOM activities in America and China, and suggest that Chinese people demonstrate engagement activities (i.e., opinion giving, opinion seeking, and information sharing) more on SM than American people do.

In summary, we propose the following:

P1. *Informational (emotional) content is more likely to generate more intense CE behavior among participants based in collectivist (individualistic) cultures than among participants from individualistic (collectivist) cultures.*

3.2 Individualism/collectivism, source of content, and CE

The individualism/collectivism dimension best explains the cultural difference in influencing customers’ information searches before making a purchase decision (Fong & Burton 2008; Goodrich & De Mooij 2014). That is, people from cultures with a different weighting of individualism and collectivism display different information-seeking behaviors. For example, Money et al. (1998) found that Japanese business customers rely more on referral sources to choose a service provider than American customers do. Similarly, Doran (2002) argues that Chinese consumers are less likely to make decisions based on their own experiences but tend to be influenced by reference groups when compared to American consumers. Fong and Burton (2008) contend that Chinese participants are more active in information-seeking than their American counterparts from individualist cultures in the context of online discussion boards.

Recent studies suggest that UGC has become extremely important in consumer decision-making, as it is considered less intrusive, more credible, and consequently more relevant to customers than FGC (Christodoulides et al. 2012; Lee & Youn 2009; Tang 2017). This is especially true in the case of review websites

for experience products (e.g., hotels and restaurants). For example, Obal and Kunz (2016) suggest that collectivists show more trust in online product reviewers while individualists are more skeptical. Similarly, Lin et al. (2017) claim that people from collectivist cultures rely on online WOM opinions more than those from individualist cultures. By this extension, we can conclude that the collectivists tend to seek more referral sources when making purchase decisions because they have a strong reliance on group ideas. Therefore, people in individualistic cultures rely on information from authorities (e.g., FGC), in contrast, people from collectivist cultures acquire information through personal contacts or via WOM (e.g., UGC) (Goodrich & De Mooij 2014). On this basis, we propose:

P2: *Using UGC (FGC) as a referral source in social content strategies is more likely to drive more intense CE behaviors among SM participants in collectivistic (individualistic) cultures than in individualistic (collectivistic) cultures.*

3.3 Uncertainty avoidance, valence of content, and CE

Uncertainty avoidance reflects the tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, which is defined as “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations” (Hofstede et al. 2010, p. 191). Individuals from high uncertainty avoidance cultures show a higher level of intolerance to risk and different opinions and behaviors. Therefore, they need predictability and want to control the environment as they feel uncomfortable in unknown and unstructured situations (Hofstede 1997). In contrast, individuals from cultures with low levels of uncertainty avoidance show lower intolerance for unfamiliar conditions and different views, and they are more willing to accept risk (Hofstede 2001). Consequently, individuals from different levels of uncertainty avoidance exhibit different information-seeking attitudes and behaviors to reduce uncertainty.

Consumers often rely on user-generated content, especially electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), to evaluate the quality of products and services to reduce the risk of making poor purchase decisions. Research has suggested that the lower the average rating of valence, the higher will be the risk perceptions and lower purchase intentions (Keh et al. 2015). Therefore, the level of uncertainty avoidance and the desire to seek credible information appear to be important determinants of the persuasive effect of content valence (Chintagunta et al. 2010). Schumann et al. (2010) found that the uncertainty avoidance cultural dimension significantly enhances the impact of WOM on customer perceptions, which suggests that people rely on more external sources in their decisions in high uncertainty avoidance cultures than in low ones. Accordingly, review valence may be viewed as more helpful to consumers from a high uncertainty avoidance country as they tend to avoid purchase risks.

However, the acceptance of and the reaction to negative UGC is different from cultures (Tang 2017). For example, the study by Liu et al. (2007) shows that, when facing problems, customers in high-uncertainty-avoidance cultures are less likely to leave negative comments than customers in low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures. That is presumably because members from the latter type of culture value long-term relationships with service providers. Moreover, Tang (2017) argues that customers from high uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to use review valence (e.g., star ratings) to make purchase decisions as they are less ambiguous and more structured than qualitative reviews. Accordingly, we suggest:

P3: *Negative (positive) content valence will have a stronger negative (positive) relationship with CE behaviors in countries associated with high uncertainty avoidance when compared with low-uncertainty-avoidance countries.*

3.4 High/low-context, persuasion style, and CE

Context refers to the situational and environmental information required to be known to understand the meaning of a communication subject (Hall 1989). Accordingly, Hall (1989) categorized cultures into high- and low-context cultures to capture the degree of context-dependence. Accordingly, communication information in a low-context culture “is vested in the explicit code” while in a high-context culture, “most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit transmitted part of the message” (Hall & Hall, 1990, p. 8). In other words, communications in low-context cultures tend to be more direct, less context-dependent, and fact-based, while those in high-context cultures are more indirect, intuitive, and less explicit (Tsai & Men 2012).

Previous research has shown the significance of high/low contextuality in determining media communication styles, which are represented in various forms of content (De Mooij 2018). In low-context cultures (e.g., the USA), product and brand messages are often communicated via a hard-sell approach, which tends to focus on tangible product features and benefits, using rational cues such as the functional value of the product and highlighting its comparative appeal (Tsai & Men 2012). In contrast, consumers in high-context cultures, such as China and Japan, tend to focus on the intangible aspects of commercial information, such as aesthetics and entertainment values (De Mooij 2018). These soft communication approaches are usually mirrored by the indirect and emotional appeals and symbolic association with celebrity endorsements. Therefore, we propose:

P4: *The soft-sell (hard-sell) approach is more likely to stimulate stronger CE behaviors among SM participants in high-context (low-context) cultures than among those in low-context (high-context) cultures.*

4. Implications

4.1 Theoretical implications

Our study offers three important theoretical implications for marketing strategy, CE, and international marketing literature. First, it improves the understanding of marketing strategy in the SM context. The proposed concept of social content strategy contributes to a better understanding of the link between SM marketing strategic choices and successful performance. The concept captures the uniqueness of SM, which underlies the importance of customers as value co-creators. As a whole, these implications can influence strategy formulation and implementation in the SM context.

Second, prior research on SM content and the related customer behaviors has mainly used quantitative means to focus on limited aspects (e.g., Kumar et al. 2016; Meire et al. 2019). We integrate previous findings and provide a holistic framework to better understand the studied relationship. We demonstrate different elements of social content strategies that could spur different CE behaviors. Therefore, by exploring the different elements that comprise social content strategy, we improve the current understanding of the reason for differences in customer CE behaviors, which in turn helps to enhance decision-making around social content strategies.

Third, this research also extends the international marketing research stream. We respond to calls to explore the cultural impact on customer behaviors toward media content across countries (e.g., Okazaki & Taylor 2013). The majority of prior international SM literature focuses on how customer behaviors and attitudes differ on SM across cultures in general (Johnston et al. 2018). In light of this, our research applied three cultural dimensions to explore their impact on the relationship between social content strategies and customer behaviors. In doing so, this study adds to and extends the literature on the role of cultural value in the application of SM marketing across borders (Kitirattarkarn et al. 2019; Tang 2017).

4.2 Managerial implications

SM has changed how firms and customers interact and how customers learn and communicate about products. The increasing use of SM in international marketing has highlighted that culture is an overarching stimulus that impacts both how brands communicate with their customers and customers' preferences and behaviors (Tsai & Men 2017). For firms concurrently operating SM platforms in different markets, the proposed framework and propositions will help (1) consider the role of cultural value that impact CE behaviors in different markets, and (2)

revisit the approach to delivering content via SM in terms of the characteristics, source, valence, and persuasion style that will influence their customers. Therefore, to address customers' different inclinations toward SM content in different cultures, it is critical for global marketers to understand the culture-bound nature of CE and to localize SM content to engage local audiences (Berthon et al. 2012).

Content appeals

SM content can be a key carrier of cultural values, and marketers need to understand the cultural similarities and differences to develop effective international marketing campaigns. For instance, in a collectivistic culture, where customers rely heavily on extended social networks for opinions, brands can address their social needs and add more references to ease uncertainty (Jiao et al. 2018). In contrast, in an individualistic culture, brands' SM communicators should satisfy their customers' personal needs and goals.

Information search

SM has become a source of information to garner opinion and search for related brand offerings (Davis et al. 2014). Some customers may be more likely to engage with brands' SM pages if they consider it to have informational value, especially in collectivistic countries. Tsai and Men (2017) found that the top reason for users to visit or follow brand SM pages is obtaining access to information. Therefore, brands should ensure the information on their SM pages is sufficient and current. They should also encourage customer–customer interaction to generate more WOM (e.g., product reviews and feedbacks), which is also a great informational value source.

Value provider

Brands are investing substantially in SM to improve engagement with their customers through SM interaction. Understanding the drivers of CE in an SM context is central to actively enhancing such interactions (Gupta et al. 2018). "Business is about creating value" (Kumar & Reinartz 2016, p. 36); Accordingly, marketers need to be aware of the importance of translating an SM presence established just for marketing purposes into a role as a customer value provider (Schultz & Peltier 2013). Value is the core construct of and the foundation for all exchange activities (Holbrook 1994).

5. Conclusion and future research directions

SM has significantly affected the customer–brand relationship and business environment, and that influence will continue to grow. This conceptual paper offers an integrative model that extends the understanding of the relationship between SM content marketing strategy and CE. Moreover, this relationship is likely to be moderated by cultural values, such as individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and high/low culture context.

We have offered some managerial implications to guide firms' SM marketing in a global context. Our framework implies that the recognition of customers' different preferred values relating to posted content in different cultures should be the first step in firms' social content marketing efforts. This is especially true if firms intend to build long-term relationships with global customers through SM. Table 2 shows our research propositions, the relevant theoretical arguments, and corresponding managerial implications.

Table 2. Summary of propositions, theoretical arguments, and managerial implications

No.	Propositions	Theoretical arguments	Managerial implications
P1	Informational (emotional) content is more likely to generate stronger CE behaviors among participants based in collectivist (individualistic) cultures than it would with participants from individualistic (collectivist) cultures.	<p>People from individualistic cultures are more self-expressive and tend to display stronger engagement behaviors in reaction to emotional content, while collectivists are more likely to hide emotions (especially negative ones) to protect group harmony (Hofstede 1983; Gudykunst et al. 1987).</p> <p>However, people from collectivist cultures are more likely to share information because they have stronger social ties and are more easily influenced within their reference groups (Chu and Choi 2011; Schumann</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In individualistic cultures, provide emotional content that emphasizes uniqueness or individuality. • In collectivistic cultures, provide content with social and informational value (e.g., emphasis on conformity, harmony, and belonging to the social group).

		et al. 2010; Steenkamp & Geyskens 2006).	
P2	Using UGC (FGC) as a referral source in social content strategies is more likely to drive stronger CE behaviors among SM participants in collectivistic (individualistic) cultures than among those in individualistic (collectivistic) cultures.	Collectivists rely more on group referrals (WOM) than individualists in information searching (Fong & Burton 2008; Lin et al. 2017; Obal & Kunz 2016).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide authoritative and knowledgeable content on SM. • Ensure the posts are trustworthy. • Reduce risks over potential issues (e.g., privacy and legality issues). • Display the UGC as information sources, especially in collectivistic cultures.
P3	Negative (positive) content valence will have a stronger negative (positive) relationship with CE behaviors in countries associated with high uncertainty avoidance when compared with low-uncertainty-avoidance countries.	Valence can be used as indicator of uncertainty. In high uncertainty avoidance culture, negative content is more likely to indicate high risk. Likewise, positive content indicates low risk (Liu et al. 2007; Tang 2017).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop compelling customer experiences to stimulate positive WOM. • React promptly to rectify negative WOM. • Encourage customers to leave positive feedback, which is especially important for prospective customers from high uncertainty avoidance cultures.
P4	The soft-sell (hard-sell) approach is more likely to stimulate stronger CE behaviors among SM participants in high-context (low-context) cultures when compared with those in low-	People in low-context cultures prefer direct messages in hard-sell approaches, while people in high-context cultures prefer the soft communication approaches, which are indirect and focus on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In high-context cultures, firms should address the intangible aspects of a product, using metaphors, aesthetics, and celebrity endorsement. • In low-context cultures, firms should highlight

	context (high-context) cultures.	intangible aspects (Tsai & Men 2012; De Mooij 2018).	product features, and utilitarian or practical aspects of the product.
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However, further empirical studies are needed to investigate the proposed relationships. For example, verifying the proposed propositions with empirical data could be the first step. Future research might extend our framework in relation to firms' ultimate performance and develop methodologies to test the framework. Doing so would permit certain questions to be answered, such as how e-WOM correlates with customer satisfaction and profit growth (Tang 2017)? Moreover, further research might also consider country economic differences, which would substantially affect customer CE willingness (Gupta et al. 2018).

Additionally, future research should consider other cultural dimensions (e.g., long-term /short-term orientation and high/low power distance) that might be pertinent to CE behaviors toward different content strategies (Hollebeek & Macky 2019). In this conceptual research, we specifically focus on the moderating role of culture value by applying two dimensions from Hofstede (individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance) and one dimension from Hall (low-high context), which we believe is the most relevant for our consideration of four key elements of social content strategy. However, we also believe that some other cultural dimensions can be accommodated in our conceptual framework from different theoretical perspectives.

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