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BUSINESSES AND MOBILE SOCIAL MEDIA CAPABILITY

Elvira Bolat, Kaouther Kooli and Len Tiu Wright

Abstract

Purpose: Mobile social media (MSM), an interaction, exchange of information and creation of user-generated content, mediated by mobile devices is becoming the locomotive that drives forward evolution of the online world. a limited number of academic studies touched upon the MSM subject with all the papers being of a conceptual nature to provide recommendations to B2B firms. This paper aims to explore how B2B firms use MSM in reality.

Methodology: This paper adopts the grounded theory approach to analyse interviews conducted in twenty-six B2B firms representing the UK advertising and marketing sector. Interviewees represent key decision-makers who understand the aspects of mobile technology use in their firms. Eighteen firms stressed the importance of social media as a trigger to adopt mobile devices. Follow-up data collection in these eighteen firms focuses on strategic orientation, processes, routines and skills required utilising MSM.

Findings: We found that marketing and advertising firms use MSM for branding, sensing market, managing relationships and developing content. MSM is treated by businesses as a strategic firm-specific capability that drives firms' competitiveness, where imitation of such capability by competitors is limited because MSM skills are specific to individuals within organisations and MSM routines are manifested as a result of firm-specific MSM skills' interactions.

Originality: This study is amongst the first to provide insights into B2B firms' practices of using MSM. Additionally, the research is novel because it discovers that MSM capability is

developed as a result of the overlap between individuals' and organisational knowledge and memory, contradicting existing theory on the subject.

Keywords: *Social media, mobile technology, B2B marketing, the capability approach*

Article Classification: Research paper

Introduction

Mobile technology has been around for at least two decades and rising mobile devices penetration rate is not something companies have passed by (Thompson, 2009). Internet connectivity has become a common feature which the customer asks for when purchasing new mobile phone or tablet computer (Kaplan, 2012). However, it is questionable whether research work around e-commerce and online consumption could be applied to the mobile context. Ubiquity and mobility, key distinctive characteristics of mobile technology, imply consumption of information and services anytime anywhere regardless of connection to the Internet (Balasubramanian *et al.*, 2002; Xiaojun *et al.*, 2004).

The vast majority of research about the use of mobile technology explores the B2C context with a particular interest in the adoption of mobile marketing (Barwise and Strong, 2002; Varnali and Toker, 2010) and there are few papers about mobile commerce (e.g. Barnes, 2002; Anckar and D'Incau, 2002). There are organizational benefits of using mobile technology such as flexible communication, mobility of employees, cost reduction and positive financial performance (Rochford, 2001; Hammed, 2003; Lee *et al.*, (2007); and Donnelly, 2009).

In this paper, we decided to address the limited number of exploratory studies in the B2B context and investigate how mobile technology can be utilised as a business tool. We adopted

the grounded theory approach and found that expansion and popularity of social media are primary reasons for business to use mobile devices to access social media sites anywhere and anytime. As a result, the key research question has been modified from ‘How do B2B firms use mobile technology?’ to ‘How do B2B firms use mobile social media?’ So the research aim is to explore how B2B firms use MSM in practice and the objective is to carry out an exploratory study to research the reality of how business use mobile social media, thus contributing to the academic literature. Academic literature (e.g. Michaelidou et al, 2011; Kaplan, 2012) supports this way of thinking that similarly to social interactions, business communications has experienced a series of substantial transformations related to digitisation and technological advancements. These have facilitated the nature and means of communications available to business professionals. Although “*research into social media... is still at an embryonic stage*” (Michaelidou et al, 2011, p.1154), to answer the research question we outlined in the introduction that this study provides insights into the practices of utilising social media and mobile technology in B2B firms. Hence, this paper focuses on two interrelated developments that cause businesses to react and change their strategic and operational principles, (1) increased usage of mobile devices and (2) expansion of social media applications beyond personal interaction and information exchange towards commercial opportunities for firms.

Kaplan (2012) in his recent publication claims that *mobile social media* (MSM), an interaction, exchange of information and creation of user-generated content, mediated by mobile devices is becoming the locomotive that drives forward the evolution of the online world. According to Boyd and Ellison (2008), social media is particularly effective in marketing activities creating a viral effect truly influencing consumer behaviour in the online world. However, social media consumption mediated by mobile technology allows “*for a tighter integration of virtual and real life*” with the emphasis on location and time sensitivity

(Kaplan, 2012 p137). So far, a really limited number of academic studies have touched upon the MSM subject, with some papers (e.g. Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kaplan, 2012) being of a conceptual nature, providing recommendations to businesses on how to utilise MSM to their best advantage. No empirical evidence is available to prove whether and how firms do it in reality. Our study addresses this gap and finds that marketing and advertising firms, early adopters of digital technologies (Hipp and Grupp, 2005) use MSM for branding, sensing market, managing relationships and developing content.

In addition, our paper reveals that MSM is treated by businesses as the strategic firm-specific capability that drives firms' competitiveness, where imitation of such capability by competitors is limited because MSM skills are specific to individuals within organisations and MSM routines are manifested as a result of firm-specific MSM skills' interactions. We describe the methodological approach adopted in the study followed by an integrated section that simultaneously discusses findings against existing scholarly literature. The final section highlights implications for academics and practitioners.

Methodology

Research context

Initially our research interest focused on the in-depth and holistic understanding of how B2B firms exploit and integrate mobile devices into their strategic and operational existences, rather than focusing on specific areas of operations such as marketing research or customer relationship management. For example, The Economist (2014, p32) reports that commercial media and radio stations, such as Capital and Kiss FM had advertised pages on YouTube and television channels. Advertising and marketing firms are early adopters of information and media technologies, adapting their organisational processes to digital revolution and changing services they provide accordingly (Hipp and Grupp, 2005; Miles, 2009).

Hence, we employed a qualitative methodology in the form of grounded theory to understand the processes of mobile technology used, thereby building theoretical perspectives via the systematic methods of collection and analysis of data to support valid forms of investigation (El-Hussein et al, 2014; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Corbin and Strauss, 1990). In order to collect primary sources of data we conducted 26 face-to-face and web-based Skype interviews with key individuals in firms representing the UK creative sector, particularly in the advertising and marketing industry. The interview method is a strong part of the qualitative researcher's toolkit (Stake, 2010). We followed guidance about good practices in establishing rapport with respondents, not breaching confidentiality and avoiding infringement of data protection laws. Malhotra et al (2013, p7) referred to integrity and trust as important and not just robustness in data collection and analysis as *'such insights should lead to fresh perspectives to business problems and/or a competitively advantaged solution'*. We found good practices in the *Codes of Practice* from associations, such as the American Marketing Association (AMA), European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) and the Market Research Society (MRS).

All 26 firms operate in the B2B context and provide a wide range of marketing services, such as consulting, branding and the digital content development for business customers. Most of the interviewed firms (22) are small companies employing less than twenty people. Four firms operate on a larger scale having a portfolio of international corporate clients, such as Sony, Volkswagen, Jaguar and the BBC, that provided 150 to 300 workplaces. The industrial and business context homogeneity of the sample allows and validates a theoretical comparison among responses. As a matter of ethical practice and to maintain confidentiality of data that interviewees provide, we do not reveal any names of firms which participated in the research or have been subject of the interviews.

Interviewed individuals represent key decision-makers who make strategic decisions or simply understand the aspects of mobile technology used in their firms. Specifically, 22 interviewees play the role of managing directors in firms they either own or are employed in. Four individuals who participated in our research had various responsibilities concerning the strategic and technical set-ups of their businesses. Generally, the qualitative interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours each. Flexibility to allow topics and themes to emerge from the data meant that no questionnaire protocol was used. The grounded theory approach allowed for simultaneous data collection and analysis to contribute to the focus of the paper. As a result of initial analytical procedures (open coding), we discovered that 18 interviewees named social media as a primary reason to employ mobile devices in their firms. Therefore, a case perspective (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) is followed through to focus on the 18 firms that stressed the importance of social media as a trigger to adopt mobile devices. In studying process of MSM use within firms, we realise the complexity of this process and had identified key theoretical perspectives, a capability approach (Teece et al, 1990), to analyse and conceptualise findings. With the help of (1) follow-up e-mails asking 18 interviewees to discuss strategic orientation, processes, routines and skills required to utilise MSM (using Teece et al. (1997) paper as a guide), (2) visual and thematic analysis of the content presented on firms' blogs, Facebook and Twitter pages, we are able to compare conditions that all 18 firms have in common.

Data analysis

A systematic process of constant comparison and theoretical sampling (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) facilitated the emergence of concepts and categories to proceed with axial and selective coding. NVivo 10 qualitative software package has been applied to perform and record all the

analytical procedures of coding and categorisation. Analysis of 26 interview transcripts involved open coding procedures where the key category of MSM has been selected to narrow down the research focus. Extracted narratives about the MSM phenomenon were used to determine key categories, i.e. respondents identified various skills that are utilised and developed to use MSM advantageously. The last stage of the analytical process involved integration of key categories within particular clusters of data i.e. branding using MSM and managing relationships using MSM. The practices of putting MSM to has helped this emerging framework. Crosschecking of codes and categories was performed to ensure the validity of the analytical process.

Mobile social media in the B2B context: a capability approach perspective

This study found that B2B firms, representing the UK advertising and marketing sector, use mobile technology primarily as a platform to access social media sites, understand canons of MSM consumption and utilise MSM to reinforce the strategic position of a firm. The Managing Director in firm 12 argues “companies that don’t engage in social media, both in terms of how their company functions and in terms of designing for it, are the ones who are going to be left behind”.

The Proprietor and business owner from firm 5 who started his business 15 years ago supports this view:

With mobile technology I use a lot of what I call business media as opposed to social media. Social media – Twitter, Facebook for social purposes, then Twitter, Facebook – for business purposes; such division helps me to divide my orientation and ways I apply social media for personal interactions and business purposes.

He describes the main purpose for using mobile devices. Due to the specialised nature of services his firm provides, he needs to continually pick up on the latest technological trends

and incorporate them into operations and offerings for clients. Although social media is primarily related to the B2C context, he admits that B2B firms should not neglect this medium and that they should use it strategically to their own advantage as well as benefits for customers.

Overall, the firms studied discern mobile technology and social media as strategically important to embrace and incorporate into their firms' practices. Small business owners from firms 6 and 7 claim:

Mobile technology is obviously seen by me as a strategic resource. So things we do with it are strategic. (Firm 6)

I do access social media in most cases on the go... I have a personal account on social media; I have business accounts as well. I always stress the importance of social media... My clients' customers do it so you should be proactive in understanding this tool to create value for your business client. (Firm 7)

Interviewees see the strategic value of MSM to firms' performance. Particularly, the Strategic Director from Firm 1 argues that MSM is "a creative tool with measurable means", allowing firms to assess return on investments in marketing campaigns. To illustrate this, the Managing Director in Firm 9 told us about the project his organisation has worked on for the promotion and co-ordination of the classic music festival, 'Serenata'. 60% of ticket sales for the event have been made through social media sites, from which 38% of visitors accessed social media and paid via mobile devices. Using MSM on a day of the event itself Firm 9 followed up with promotional activities and obtained visitors' feedback about the effectiveness of the marketing campaign. The Managing Director of Firm 9 says:

Social media 'on the go' helps to us to justify campaigns, measure campaigns and know where we are positioned, but also to amend things and know what can be done in the future.

Taking into account the strategic nature of the MSM deployment process and its contribution to a firm's performance through customer satisfaction, reputation in being "technologically savvy" (Firm 3), and new resources acquisition of data on new potential clients and "contacting people" that you could not before (Firm 3), we suggest that the process of employing MSM is a capability, which allows advantageously deploying mobile devices and social media platforms.

Conceptually the capability approach (Day, 1994; Juga, 1999) in tandem with the Resource-based View (Penrose, 1959) considers firms as a 'static' mechanism with their own cultures and bundle of organization-specific assets, skills and competencies that form a source of competitive advantage. Tangible resources in the form of assets represent a basis for companies to develop and acquire distinctive skills and processes (Day, 1994). Firms' capabilities, on the other hand, are complex systems of processes where interaction between information, skills and competences allows resources to be deployed strategically sustaining firms' competitive advantage. Thus capability is a 'dynamic' phenomenon, which facilitates flexible transformation and adaptation of firms to ever-changing externalities (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Teece et al, 1997; Wang and Ahmed, 2007).

To understand and analyse firms' capabilities Teece et al (1997) introduced the following three dimensions: routines; skills and knowledge; with co-ordination mechanisms. We have adopted these dimensions to understand the process of MSM deployment in the chosen context. Particularly, our findings indicate that the MSM capability is a system consisting on four interrelated practices, namely market sensing; managing relationships; branding; developing content (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Mobile social media as a strategic capability: exploratory results

Activities	Routines	Skills/Know-how	Coordination Mechanisms	Representative Quotations Representative Quotations
<p>I. <u>Market sensing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researching market • Tracking competition 	<p>Understanding the target audience behaviour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Finding what social media channels the audience uses ▪ Understanding how the target audience consume social media (particular emphasis on time and location) <p>Collecting data to map market trends</p> <p>Collecting data to map competition and analyse competitors' profiles</p> <p>Following Twitter, Facebook accounts of competitive firms</p> <p>Keeping records on best practices</p> <p>Discussing informally various practices with the creative and technical teams</p>	<p>Analytical skills for social media content analysis</p> <p>Technical skills in applying technological means (specialist software) to understand social media metrics</p> <p>Creative know-how about competitors' content (design and information) on social media channels</p> <p>Technical know-how about competitors' services and products</p>	<p>Disseminating and interchangeably exchanging market research results between management, creative, and technical teams</p> <p>Coordinating knowledge about various approaches to use social media channels within and outside of the industry</p>	<p><i>We use social media on the go the research platform within contextual dimensions of time and location. It is critical for us because so-called mobile social media adds extra value to our data, to our end user profile. That brings the targeting up to a different level. (Firm 4)</i></p> <p><i>Being able to find out who is who through social networking... I am linked into may be YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and various others but it just means that I could monitor those while I am on the move. (Firm 5)</i></p> <p><i>For example, in a social media side of things a lot of time and effort have to go into finding out what is the best audience for your message and where and how they consume their media...Mostly it is through mobile so we as a firm do the same is order to understand the consumption patterns (Firm 6)</i></p>
<p>II. <u>Managing relationships</u></p>	<p>Searching for new clients</p> <p>Promptly engaging with potential clients – trafficking to firm's social media channels (i.e. Twitter profile, Facebook page)</p> <p>Using social media channels as a communication device with existing clients</p>	<p>Technical skills in applying technological means (specialist software and online technology) to analyse traffic</p> <p>Customer care skills</p>	<p>Firms use Facebook app, Twitter app, LinkedIn app on mobile devices to communicate internally and externally</p> <p>Coordinating knowledge on potential clients between management and technical teams</p>	<p><i>Now you have to find new ways of engaging with potential clients. So, how do I engage with them? I engage with them through social media, I set up the social media site. I track them to that site. They begin to read and like what I've said. I then will pick from my statistic or my social media site that you are visiting my site. I then pick up your IP address. I then contact you through your e-mail saying: "I've noticed that you have been visiting our website and having a look to a certain product. Can I come and talk to you about it?" But I send you e-mail. And I am sending you e-mail not from my</i></p>

				<p>office or from my client's office but from the lounge in the hotel. Mobile technology allows me to do that. (Firm 5)</p> <p>We get DMs [direct messages] in Facebook and we get DMs in Twitter. There are at least ten ways for my clients to contact me. Surprisingly, no one simply calls anymore because I can access social sites on my tablet, on my mobile, through laptop apps. (Firm 9)</p> <p>If somebody twitters something about my company or about me, I could see that quickly on my phone, which means that I can respond quickly. (Firm 11)</p>
III. Branding	<p>Updating regularly firm's and personal social media pages' content with news feeds about the firm's developments and "emerging trends" in the industry</p> <p>Promoting new services and products via social media channels</p>	<p>Transferrable skills: translating experience and knowledge about mobile social media on a personal level to business setting</p>	<p>Integrating personal level experience into business purposes</p> <p>Developing an 'intrapreneurial' organisational culture / democratisation of corporate communication: Using internal blogs to brand the firm empowers employees in making tactical and strategic decisions about the company's image.</p>	<p>I felt that I should probably do Tweeter updates myself as well; it's all about finding the time and finding the information to put on it. I think it's important for us because it does steadily build up almost like a fan base or awareness of that particular client. It also helps in a Google rating which everyone is chasing at the moment. If you have lots of Tweets flying around which feature your name, linking back to your website. (Firm 2)</p> <p>We also are trying to increase our Tweets so that we are getting a regular amount of news out there. It just makes people aware of what we are doing and creates a bit of personality... Our designers, for instance, get inspiration from real life situations, take photos and instantly upload these pictures on our Twitter page through their cell phones (Firm 3)</p> <p>We've got a CHS Facebook page, we upload any charity events, any updated news. PR events are uploaded in office mostly but various news are always instant. As an example, when I negotiated new deal with a client, I will post this on Facebook through my iPad. (Firm 16)</p> <p>I do use quite a lot of Social Media personally and for work as well. In terms of my company it is mostly business type of media like LinkedIn or Twitter and I need to see how it works, experience it to be able to offer it to my clients and actually claim that I can do it for them on a professional level. And I see that mostly updates happen remotely and instantly because they need to be relevant. Mobile allows me to maintain relevance. (Firm 18)</p>
IV. Developing content	<p>Analysing user-generated content available on social media channels</p> <p>Incorporating social media into</p>	<p>Creative skills/know-how to develop social media content</p> <p>User-generated content</p>	<p>Learning about functionality and consumption patterns of social media</p> <p>Understanding functional</p>	<p>With a Facebook and a Twitter, and things like that, I mean these are things that people tend to look at on the go. All the time they are constantly checking, that's a constant 'bib' on your phone with new message and all other new pieces of information for you. Therefore, I</p>

	<p>existing service offerings (i.e. online ads visible on Facebook) Developing new service/product on social media (developing and maintaining clients' Facebook pages, Twitter accounts)</p>	<p>analysis</p>	<p>boundaries of social media in relation to creative inputs Firms use the mechanism of regular meetings and informal knowledge sharing through their intranets to boost creative thinking</p>	<p><i>do push clients in that direction and I think it's important for them to be covered... Regarding Twitter, it's not something that I do. It's something that I am working on to get into. We are redesigning our websites and things like this. I recommended it to so many clients and it worked. (Firm 2)</i></p> <p><i>We can do a Twitter page and do a Twitter profile, in fact we do for one of our clients, we look after a Twitter page for them (Firm 10)</i></p> <p><i>Use of Social media platform is always interesting to analyse. Now we have found that nowadays people have short temper with browsing social networking sites and the interesting thing with Twitter is that there are only 145 characters to look on and then you can pass it or move to another one. Now I read news and learn about different innovative solutions and generate idea through the Twitter while I am travelling to my work on a tube or commuting to other places to have meetings with clients. People do not tend to spend huge amount of time on websites anymore and this is why websites have now the Twitter thing. It is just basically you are able to create the content according to own preferences and follow people who you want to follow and hear from. That is an interesting insight. The relevance level is enormous in term of the content for each user. This should be picked up by companies like our, for the clients, and obviously within the company like our, for ourselves. (Firm 14)</i></p> <p><i>In terms of Social Media that is used on the go, yes. I do develop and maintain Twitter pages for our clients and when it comes to the content and how it operates, the purpose of it has to be related to the experience of people who consume that information. Twitter is mostly consumed on mobile devices while you are in train, commuting, travelling or waiting for friend in bar. So, when I think about the content, I do bear this in my mind. (Firm 18)</i></p>
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Market sensing

All 18 firms use MSM to sense the market in order to learn about potential business clients and client's customers, who are the ultimate target in value proposition for B2B customers and "use it as a research platform to learn of their behaviour" (Firm 7). Learning about the market is particularly advantageous in the mobile technology context where offline data about MSM users become available (Kaplan, 2012). Advanced permission for engaging into conversation with customers reduces non-cooperation effects (Barwise and Strong, 2002). Periodic literature on social media (Baker and Green, 2008; Berinato, 2010) is consistent with this study's empirical finding that monitoring a marketplace is a substantial function of the MSM capability.

Michaelidou et al. (2010) posit that attracting new customers and potential clients is the ultimate goal of using social media in the B2B context. Our findings are in line with this argument and demonstrate that social media creates opportunities for networking and enlarging the customer base. Business Owner of Firm 5 says:

Now you have to find new ways of engaging with potential clients... I engage with them through social media, I set up the social media site. I track them to that site. They begin to read and like what I've said.

MSM, in particular, helps firms to understand the consumption of social media where the dimensions of time and location interact. According to Xiaojun et al. (2004), 'location measuring capabilities' of mobile devices are widely acknowledged and used to maintain supply chain efficiency. Such efficiency is also related to the supply of information on the user's exact location at a specific time. It is a unique aspect of mobile technology in comparison to stationary, fixed IT. Our findings illustrate that MSM helps B2B firms engage in 'localised' interaction with the end users of social media sites and based on knowledge obtained offer "really target value proposition to our business clients". This is a claim also from Firm 1. It highlights that location and time-specific information is mainly demanded by their brick-and-mortar retailing clients in order to provide real-time service through immediate reaction and response to their customers' requests.

In addition to sensing the demand side of the market, MSM is deployed to understand and "track what our competitors are doing" (Firm 3). B2B firms in the advertising and marketing sectors, according to our interviewees, keep records of best practices for using MSM through direct and indirect competition. So indirectly, informal discussions between technical and

creative teams about existing practices to utilise MSM, would facilitate organisational learning to incorporate individuals' knowledge into organisational memory. Firms use the mechanism of regular meetings and informal knowledge sharing through their intranets to boost creative thinking:

We meet on a weekly basis and discuss new ideas about new approaches in the industry. It encourages the team to think outside the box... Our internal blog is a buffer for interesting things happening in the industry. (Firm 13)

Overall, creativity is underlined as an essential skill to the successful integration of MSM into business processes. Managing Director in Firm 8 insists:

Creativity is the only legal means to win over competition when it comes to mobile technology and social media. Especially when you can learn this technology quite easily, some kind of special ingredient is needed. For us, it is creativity.

Managing relationships

Relationship management is part of the MSM capability and is considered to be a critical practice, particularly in the mobile context because opportunities to access social media anywhere anytime lead to the flexibility and efficiency in communication processes. The Small Business Owner of Firm 5 claims that social media in general promote prompt engagement of conversation with potential clients, "If somebody tweets something about my company or about me, I could see that quickly which means that I can respond quickly". The interviewee from Firm 18 adds that MSM is an effective channel as a means to communicate internally:

Facebook app, Twitter app, LinkedIn on my phone and iPad are pretty much the touch point, my contact info. We communicate in a company through Facebook. It is quicker as you are always connected to it.

In addition to analytical skills and creativity implementation, market sensing and relationship management practices require technical competences to apply specialist software. Firms 1, 10, 15 and 17 use NetMiner, SAS (social media analytics and monitoring) and Google Social Media Analytics. Such software gathers social media metrics data about traffic to various social media sites and allows managing businesses' presence on social media across various platforms.

Branding

Social media is mainly considered to be a branding tool where businesses promote their products and services via a firm's profile page as well as personal pages of owners and employees. The Managing Director at Firm 17 says:

Social Media nowadays is probably the most successful form of online advertising... Everyone has pages on Facebook. I can get one for free... Then in the description you put branding information. It is such a powerful branding tool, free of cost in most of the cases.

Dutta (2010) claims that entrepreneurs embrace social media channels to engage with various audiences and potentially find new business partners and customers. This is particularly true in the mobile context where there are no time and location constraints for communication.

All 18 firms that we interviewed understand the importance of intertwining brand's MSM strategy with a personal social media strategy. Interviewee from Firm 7 says:

I have a personal account on social media and I have business accounts. It is critical to represent my company and myself as one brand. My employees, to be honest, do the same.

Hence, transferable skills on understanding how to integrate personal level experience into business purposes are something firms focus to develop. Emphasis here is made on the mobility aspect due to the fact that almost everyone accesses social media sites on the move (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). All 18 interviewees claim that they "do access social media in most cases on the go".

Using internal blogs to brand the firm empowers employees in making tactical and strategic decisions about the company's image. Such practice is named by Menzel et al. (2007) as an 'intrapreneurial' organisational culture or in the social media context (Kietzmann et al., 2011) democratisation of corporate communication.

Furthermore, B2B firms insist that branding activity implies strategic thinking behind:

Having a mobile social media campaign, about 80% of it is all about strategy, time limits, goals and realization of results rather than actually doing the work. (Firm 6)

Otherwise "the whole thing become a bit pointless", Interviewee from Firm 14 argues.

Developing content

Social media is a ‘bank’ of ideas and new concepts that can be acquired by firms with no costs (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Fischer and Reuber, 2011). This is mostly applicable to B2C firms. However, B2B firms are primary contributors to the popularity of social media and MSM. B2B firms, particularly in the creative industry, develop and design content for MSM:

We can do a Twitter page and do a Twitter profile. (Firm 14)

In terms of social media that is used on the go, I do develop and maintain Twitter pages for our clients. (Firm 18)

Today developing content for MSM is a strategically important function for B2B firms operating in the marketing and advertising industry because it is a profit-generating activity. MSM content development is becoming a core service that digital firms should provide in order to compete in the marketplace. Once again specialist software supports the practice of developing MSM content allowing analysis of user-generated content and integrating such knowledge into new services and products.

What is interesting about the MSM capability is that coordination mechanisms to implement all four practices as part of the MSM capability are shared across all four functions and mainly involve dissemination and integration of information about the marketplace or about technological advancements that could be incorporated into social media content.

The Marketing Director in Firm 11 reveals:

“The key to effective use of social media consumed via mobile phones or tablets is recording all the data about changes in the industry and market behaviour. Then, such records should be fed back to creative and account management people. Sometimes, technical people might be involved.”

These findings are consistent with Michaelidou et al (2011), as social media platforms are mainstream sources of information.

Developing MSM capability: overlap between individual and organisation memories

Sustainability of businesses driven by organisational unique competencies and resources implies possibilities for firms to overcome uncertainty and dynamic changes in external

environments (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 2013). A task of modifying the business context lies in careful assessment and potential development of critical resources and competences, which a firm possesses or needs to acquire. MSM itself appears to be an externality that hit the market and marketing industry putting pressure on firms to embrace this channel (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In fact, our findings indicate that B2B firms transformed MSM from being an external challenge to being a strategic instrument that creates new opportunities for the business and clients.

Past studies on information technologies (IT) capabilities (Bhatt and Grover, 2005; Huang et al., 2009; Chen and Tsou, 2012) emphasise the significance of technological capabilities for firms. However, Venkatesch and Davis (2000) and Buehrer et al. (2005) suggest that B2B firms are less receptive to new technologies than B2C firms. High costs and acquisition of new skills are main impediments for B2B firms to integrate their new technological solutions. Nevertheless, we found that mobile technology and social media are considered to be cost-effective, “a lot of these mobile technologies out there actually do not cost a lot... there is also social media that is a lot more affordable”, says Firm 3. Moreover, consistent with IT literature, (Michaelidou et al., 2011; Andreu and Ciborra, 1996), the organisational culture based on learning is something the advertising and marketing firms cultivate to minimise their costs in employing new specialists and expertise, “*I had to learn communication protocols for social media in order to use it more effectively on mobiles*”, says Firm 5. Hence, it is no surprise that the majority of firms we interviewed develop or acquire the MSM capability internally.

The MSM capability is developed in the studied firms as a reaction to a constantly evolving environment. Firms adapt to changes in the technological environment, which critically transforms their end users’ behaviour too. Such adaptation induces drastic transformation for market sensing, managing relationships, branding and developing content practices via the use of MSM. This emphasises a re-combination of organisational learned skills taking into account the development of new individual skills. Such transformation is in itself a learned capability (Amit and Schoemaker, 1993) allowing the organisations in our study to adapt to the external changes and to consequently expand their boundaries. The discussion in the previous section demonstrates that learning is an underlying mechanism to develop and deploy the MSM capability. Based on Ahmed and Wang’s (2007) classification we conclude that the MSM capability is adaptive and absorptive in its nature because, firstly, MSM enhances the firm’s ability to adapt to environmental changes through advancement of market

sensing practice in particular and secondly, MSM enhances ability of firms to recognise new information, assimilate it and apply it to for commercial purposes (market sensing, developing new content practices).

We had already stated that individuals share personal knowledge of MSM use with other individuals in the organisation via regular meetings, research blogs or Intranet. Thus MSM organisational knowledge is developed through an accumulation process of those individuals' knowledge. MSM organisational knowledge is then expressed through the use of this accumulated individual knowledge:

“We have a mailing list and blog for internal purposes where we share ‘stuff’ that we like. We share links, share news. But of course it’s not enough. So each of us, on a personal basis, learns the ‘stuff’ that we are interested in. Of course like developers read one kind of article, and the stuff that they read maybe won’t be that interesting to me. But if I need something from this I can always just draft them an email or just ping them on Skype and they will explain to me their points of view. If anyone has a question about social media, mobile technology, and digital trends, he/she will come back to me and talk to me regarding this. This is my area of expertise. It’s really an exchange like this that leads to an upgrade of our organisational expertise that clients become aware of. Why? Because information is shared across different departments and on our monthly meetings the mutual understanding of what we are all doing is evident.” (Firm 13)

This is in line with Kogut and Zander (1992, p. 383) who claim *“knowledge is held by individuals, but is also expressed in regularities by which members cooperate in a social community (i.e. group, organization, or network)”*. MSM capability is developed and acquired from the accumulation of knowledge and through continuous individuals' interactions within the firm. This capability is stored in the organisational memory, used and reused by individuals to create a perpetual flow of new MSM uses resulting in development of new practices or activities.

Our findings show that the skills deriving from MSM uses are specific to the individuals and to the combination that emerges through their interactions. Individuals develop their MSM capabilities through using it and in turn, organisations learn from them to develop their MSM resources and expertise. Organisational MSM capability is developed and stored in individual memories, which are central to organisational memory. They are initiated from individuals'

skills. This is a particular situation where individual memories and organisational memories overlap. As a consequence, organisational MSM capability can be assimilated to organisational routines expressed through individual and collective behaviour in the organisation (Mahoney and Pandian, 1992)

Moreover, Dosi and Marengo (1993) argue that capabilities emphasise a cognitive aspect of the firm, which determines firms' boundaries. MSM capability, through individuals' use, expands physical and cognitive boundaries:

“Lots of our team members work from different locations, so sometimes I don't see people for months. But I communicate with them on a daily basis on different platforms, like Skype or Facebook. We are all travelling, most of the time we communicate on the go. We access social media for personal reasons, but in such situations, MSM becomes a helpful tool where Twitting or Instagraming is more immediate than e-mail.” (Firm 13)

Implications

This study gives insights into the practices of social media using mobile technology in B2B firms. In particular, marketing and advertising firms use MSM for branding, sensing market, managing relationships and developing content. Moreover, we have discovered that MSM capability is developed as a result of the overlap between individuals' and organisational knowledge and memory, which in turn, contradicts the long-standing Nelson and Winter's (1982) vision on individuals' and organisational memories as being distinct concepts. Hence, MSM is treated by businesses as the strategic firm-specific capability that drives firms' competitiveness where imitation of such capability by competitors is limited. This is due to MSM skills being specific to individuals within organisations and MSM routines manifested as a result of firm-specific MSM skills' interactions. Our study illustrates that B2B firms in the advertising and marketing industry do follow scholars' recommendations (Kaplan and Hanlein, 2010; Kaplan, 2012) to embrace MSM. In fact, actual business practices indicate that academic publications are behind in understanding the dynamic influences and realities of how businesses integrate social media and their mobile technologies into their organisational processes.

Managerial implications

It is vital for managers to respond to any environmental challenges and transform threats into opportunities for sustainability achievement. Our paper proves that social media and MSM

particularly open up new avenues for businesses and their industrial clients to build competitive advantages through internal application of such technology as well as development of new services and products.

Practices performed as a result of employing MSM lead to the decreased spending on traditional offline advertising and marketing without sacrificing the innovativeness of the firm. This is due to the fact that MSM is a valuable source of information about the market and a source of ideas that potentially can be incorporated into new products and service offerings. In practical terms, firms can examine practices they perform using MSM and decide whether there is an opportunity to utilise MSM advantageously.

Further research

It is critical to acknowledge that this study is limited in its sample representation presenting only one industry (marketing and advertising) that is heavily involved into MSM due to a specialised nature its business. Other industries should be included for further studies to strengthen our understanding on MSM and its use across sectors. If other sectors are found to underperform creative firms in deploying MSM, this study contributes to provide insights into areas where they could consider using MSM.

In the B2B environment, firms that continue to explore MSM and its uses, are not limited to the four practices we have found in this study. MSM capability is advancing all the time so further research into this dynamic phenomenon should be followed to look at continual appropriateness and adaptation to the needs and contexts of business firms. This research reported in this paper is qualitative and a future study could also examine the integration of MSM practices in similar or different sectors of a quantitative nature for a mixed methods' study.

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