

Social Media in an Alternative Marketing Communication Model

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While current literature has sufficiently profiled word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing, customer relationship management, brand communities, search engine optimization, viral marketing, guerilla marketing, events-based marketing, and social media each on an isolated, individual basis, there is no comprehensive model that effectively incorporates all of these elements. The first purpose of this paper is to therefore profile the current literature landscape surrounding WOM marketing, alternative marketing communications, and social media as viable components of integrated marketing communications. Additionally, this paper aims to develop an integrated alternative marketing communication conceptual model that can be applied by industrial practitioners to help them achieve their marketing objectives.

INTRODUCTION

As companies begin to realize the value of the Internet as a primary component of their communications platform, they are correspondingly beginning to leverage alternative marketing practices that are more cost-effective and more efficient at actively engaging with consumers, than traditional advertising channels. While the use of social media, guerilla tactics, and experiential campaigns are becoming more prevalent, best practices surrounding the strategic execution of these ever-evolving marketing tools and their incorporation into an integrated marketing communications (IMC) approach has not yet been robustly identified.

The effective use of alternative marketing practices can be especially advantageous for smaller to medium sized firms in the consumer products and services industry, which oftentimes lack the resources that are necessary for employing traditional forms of advertising. When integrated through a social media platform, viral, guerilla, and events-based marketing are cost-effective promotional options that can also deliver measurable business results. When developed in accordance with a company's overall strategic objectives, a smaller firm not only has the ability to communicate its message to its target audience, but also the ability to begin to cultivate meaningful relationships with its consumers.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: firstly, it will provide insight into the current best practices for the formation and execution of alternative marketing strategies, specifically in terms of word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing strategy, marketing communications, and social media marketing. Secondly, it will develop a managerial model for alternative marketing, geared toward small to medium sized entrepreneurial firms in the consumer products and services industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) Marketing as a Viable Strategy

Consumer purchase decisions are highly affected by the opinions and decisions of one's peers, with peer-to-peer communication acting as a highly valid and reliable source of product information. As previously summarized by Cheema and Kaikati (2010), word-of-mouth information sharing is a crucial component of the marketing process, as consumers tend to greatly rely on the advice of others when making purchase decisions, especially when purchases are financially or psychologically risky (Gershoff & Johar, 2006). Moreover, word-of-mouth has been shown to be even more effective in influencing purchase decisions than traditional advertising channels (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Herr *et al.*, 1991) and retaining customers over time (Trusov *et al.*, 2009). Consumers are motivated to spread information via word-of-mouth communications when they are satisfied or dissatisfied with a product (Anderson, 1998) and highly committed to the firm (Dick & Basu, 1994).

The advent of the Internet has increased the ability of individuals, and potential future customers, to interpersonally connect with one another, thereby creating a powerful means through which product information can be rapidly disseminated and products be more cost-effectively adopted by the market (Trusov *et al.*, 2009). As a result, marketers can use these interpersonal networks and online communities to promote their products and services through electronic forms of word-of-mouth. The most recent and up-to-date WOM model is the Network Coproduction Model, which postulates the idea that both the consumers and the marketer develop WOM communications together by taking into account the fact that marketing messages are no longer unidirectional, largely as a result of the Internet, with messages and meaning being actively exchanged within a consumer network (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). In this model, marketers use various new types of tactics and measures to influence the consumer or opinion leader.

WOM referrals have also been shown to significantly increase new customer acquisition and boast much longer carryover effects than traditional marketing actions as well as higher response elasticities (Trusov *et al.*, 2009). WOM marketing is quickly becoming a driving force behind all strategic marketing campaigns as the wide variety of social media outlets are increasing in prominence and maturity, and act as crucial resources for informing influencers' decisions. Tie strength, which refers to the strength of an interpersonal relationship, has been shown to be one of the most important factors that influence the spread of word-of-mouth communication, with stronger ties resulting in increased reliance on WOM information as a basis for purchase (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Source expertise is another important factor, with consumers being more likely to trust and believe experts in a particular field (Bansal & Voyer, 2000).

In terms of the online world, networks of friends tend to be the best suited for rapid dissemination of word-of-mouth referrals, as opposed to other types of stakeholder networks (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). However, more public forums are also effective, whereby users are connected through some common interest and trust others' opinions as a result of their unique experiences, but do not necessarily know one another on a personal level (Dellarocas, 2006). With the majority of WOM marketing moving online, the spread of WOM messages is becoming more heavily influenced by what Huang (2010) refers to as predispositional ties: preexisting similarities between the source and receiver in terms of their attitudes and interests. Within an online social community, the network must define content in such a way that provides users with an enjoyable experience that keeps them coming back and contributing.

Social networking sites allow for viral marketing and word-of-mouth promotion to be just as effective – if not more effective – than traditional media outlets because of the high levels of consumer engagement associated with these alternate forms of Web-based media. Opinion leaders have the ability to greatly influence the beliefs, behaviors, and values of consumers, and they are able to effectively reach masses of individuals through blogs and social networks (Acar & Polonsky, 2007). Social networking sites have provided marketers with new and efficient ways of reaching deeply into their target market to communicate their message (Trusov *et al.*, 2009). Managers can thus encourage positive word-of-mouth communication and favorable recommendations among online communities by increasing consumers'

commitment to the company; this increased commitment can be achieved by aligning customer values and identities with those of the organization (de Matos & Rossi, 2008).

There are various scales and tools that have been developed to assess the degree and success of WOM marketing. Kumar, Petersen, and Leone (2010) have developed a way to measure customer referral value (CRV) using a four-step approach: first, determining whether a consumer would have bought regardless of referrals; second, predicting the future value of each referred customer; third, predicting the number of referrals; and fourth, predicting the timing of customer referrals. This four-step approach is predicated on the idea that future behavior can be predicted by past behavior, with a marketing campaign potentially acting to increase the predicted CRV of a customer. The effectiveness of a WOM program in a social media marketing program, as summarized by Figure 1, can be measured as “word-of-mouth equity”, which gauges the impact of WOM messages on consumers’ decisions to purchase. WOM equity is a metric that takes into account both the impact (the ability of the message to change behavior) and the volume of messages that are comprised of both recommendations and dissuasions (Harrison-Walker, 2001), and how together these factors affect sales and market shares for various products, and the effectiveness of individual campaigns. (See Appendix Figure 1)

Alternative Marketing Communications with Social Media

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

CRM is one aspect of the marketing mix that benefits from synergistic strategic planning and integration (Rust & Verhoef, 2005). The use of relationship-oriented interventions to build consumer loyalty, which requires personalized marketing efforts for individual consumers, will only be effective in increasing a firm’s profitability if these efforts are realized (Rust & Verhoef, 2005). There has been a shift away from a product-centric approach to marketing towards that of a customer-centric focus in that consumer opinions are largely affected by the combination of messages they receive from marketers and their peers. A customer relationship is cultivated by four key actions of a firm: customer acquisition, customer retention, customer growth, and the winning back of customers (Reinartz & Venkatesan, 2008). Effective customer relationship management begins with properly identifying and acquiring the *right* customer, and accurately estimating each customer’s lifetime value so as to appropriately allocate marketing resources to relationship development.

Overall, effective CRM strategies consist of two key components. The first is firm competence in knowledge management: the collection, analysis, dissemination, and application of customer information from its dynamic customer database. A database provides the firm with the information it needs to effectively understand, segment, and target its customers in such a way that allows them to more efficiently allocate resources to creating customer value, devising customer-centric strategies, increasing customer loyalty, and consequently increasing firm profitability. More specifically, a customer database can provide a firm with recency-frequency information as well as behavior and characteristic information regarding their customers (Abe, 2009). This type of information provides marketers with the tools they need to identify active customers, predict purchase patterns, and customize marketing efforts in line with overall marketing objectives (Rust & Chung, 2006; Sun, 2006).

The second is firm competence in relationship marketing: developing and maintaining fruitful relationships over time (Arnett & Badrinarayanan, 2005). Taylor (2010) stresses the importance of long-term coordination of marketing communications in such a way that a consistent message is communicated at all points of contact between the marketer and the consumer. In order to catch consumers’ attention in a cluttered advertising environment, firms must begin to plan for synergy among various communication and media outlets (Taylor, 2010). The rapid growth in new media, while challenging preexisting business models, also provides opportunities for firms to better understand consumers and manage customer interactions. Social media platforms have allowed customers to become more active parties in marketing exchanges and these platforms therefore act as a database for marketers, as user-generated content creates an abundant source of customer preference, behavior, and characteristic information (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010). An increased emphasis on customer relationship management has resulted in significant changes to how companies market their products and services.

Brand Communities

A brand community refers to “a group of ardent consumers organized around the lifestyle, activities, and ethos of the brand” (Fournier & Lee, 2009). Strong brand communities are formed on the basis of understanding the individual and social needs of consumers, and connect consumers along these lines through affiliation with the brand itself. In order for a brand community to be a success – in that it elicits a high level of consumer loyalty, marketing efficiency, and brand authenticity – firms must incorporate brand communities into their overall business strategies, focus on engineering the community rather than building the brand, and allow community members to manage and control themselves, defining only the terms of participation (Fournier & Lee, 2009). Brand communities provide a platform through which consumers can share information and experiences regarding a certain product or service; this in turn provides marketers with a means for identifying consumer needs and promoting brand loyalty involvement (Casalo *et al.*, 2008). The effectiveness of a brand community may be measured in terms of engagement indices, the size of the community, the loyalty garnered from members, and member-generated ideas for growing the business. Consumer participation in such virtual brand communities is positively correlated with affective commitment to the brand itself, thereby providing marketers with a cost-efficient way to retain customers and strengthen consumer ties (Casalo *et al.*, 2008).

Email Marketing

The formation of a permission-based email database can be a valuable tool in CRM, offering firms a straightforward and cost-effective way to acquire customers and strengthen customer relations. Email provides marketers with an additional channel for interactively reaching their consumers such that a stronger brand identity and loyalty among consumers can be built. Email marketing increases consumers’ involvement with a brand, and this increased involvement has been shown to consequently increase purchase intent and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Muller *et al.*, 2008). As a result, the effectiveness of an email marketing campaign can be measured in terms of its delivery and open rates, link clicks, and brand website traffic.

Search Engine Optimization

As consumers continue to move online to obtain product information, search engine optimization (SEO) campaigns are becoming increasingly more crucial to integrated marketing communications. A well-planned SEO campaign typically begins with a keyword analysis, in which the appropriate key words are mined and assessed. Website content is then crafted to include the keywords in titles, tags, and other text. Additionally, companies have the option to engage in paid search advertisements, wherein a search engine is paid to serve text advertisements in response to certain generic or branded keywords (Rutz & Bucklin, 2011). The success of such a campaign can be measured by analyzing website rankings and traffic, impressions, clicks, and referrals, and these metrics are often made readily available through search engines themselves.

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing encourages word-of-mouth promotion by capitalizing on social networks and customers’ desire to contribute to and share message content with their peers. A viral marketing campaign is more likely to succeed when the message content is able to highly resonate with the target audience and appeal to this group’s motivations for sharing information. Consumers who are more individualistic (in that they want to differentiate themselves from others) and/or more altruistic tend to be those who are also most likely to forward online content (Ho & Dempsey, 2008). In general, there are three types of strategies that marketers can use to seed a viral campaign: seeding emails, online advertising, or offline advertising. Once a campaign has been initiated, it is crucial that marketers effectively manage every stage by analyzing the source of the viral content invitation; if and when a customer accesses the viral campaign page; and the number of referrals a customer makes to his or her friends (van der Lans *et al.*, 2010).

Guerilla Marketing

Online communications channels have also helped in increasing the effectiveness of guerilla marketing campaigns. Levinson (1993) first introduced the concept of guerilla marketing, identifying these campaigns as those intended for small businesses. Guerilla campaigns are characterized by their low cost but extreme effectiveness in building a firm's reputation through generating buzz and favorable consumer perceptions. Guerilla marketing is creative, energetic, and flexible. Online venues allow for guerilla marketing messages to be virally spread within blogs and social networks, thereby increasing the relative exposure and effectiveness of the program when compared to offline guerilla venues alone. The effectiveness of such a campaign can be measured by such metrics as the attendance at guerilla events, the sales and customer acquisitions that result, and the effects on company's website traffic.

Events-based Marketing

Events can be essential to marketing strategy and marketing communications as they help to build one-to-one relationships with stakeholders. They can take various forms, including cause-related marketing; sports, cultural, and musical events; lifestyle marketing; and sponsorships. Events allow a firm to build its image and reputation within its industry, as well as establish and nurture important contacts within its target audience. Moreover, events allow for the circulation of a firm's message to other consumers who are potentially outside of the primary target market, thereby expanding the reach and impact of the communications. Successful events are characterized by high fit between the brand personality and the event itself, as well as the ability to foster a sense of entertainment and excitement among the audience, with the event audience consisting of members of the firm's target market (Samu & Wymer, 2009). An experiential campaign's effectiveness can be measured by its effect on sales, the level of attendee engagement that results, and the number of new relationships that are fostered.

Mobile Marketing

Mobile marketing is a very recent form of marketing communications that is beginning to grow in popularity. It has the ability to integrate all forms of media and marketing communications to drive sales, collect CRM data, and add viral value. Mobile marketing can take several forms, including messaging, Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) and the mobile Internet, streaming media, and downloadable content. Consumers are readily accessible through this emerging form of new media, with mobile campaigns having the ability to build a database of consumers that can be mined to better understand consumer wants and needs, which in turn can help develop highly targeted campaigns (Ferris, 2007).

Messaging allows for marketers to extend their reach beyond traditional media to target specific audiences and encourage immediate consumer action upon viewing an advertisement. It can take the form of mobile alerts, content services, mobile coupons, voting, quizzes, and sweepstakes. WAP and the mobile Internet allow marketers to leverage the Internet to deliver content. Streaming media (video, audio, and text) allows for content to be consumed as it is delivered, and can take the form of on-demand streaming or live streaming. In a mobile marketing campaign, streaming media can be used to deliver communications messages through subsidized advertisement content, opt-in video ads, or branded entertainment. Downloadable content is often used to increase consumer engagement with a campaign, acting as a motivator for campaign participation (Mobile Marketing Association, 2007). Mobile marketing effectiveness can be measured in terms of cost-per-acquisition and the relative level of consumer engagement with the various aspects of the campaign. Additionally, mobile marketing provides the opportunity to leverage social networks to increase engagement with and consumption of digital content. According to Truong and Simmons (2011), consumers are highly inclined to use their mobile devices to access social media networks. Consequently, a combination of mobile-accessed social networks can be used to push communications and target specific segments of consumers.

Summary

The above-discussed forms of marketing communications and their corresponding evaluative criteria are summarized in Table 1. Success stories of each type of communication are also briefly identified for illustrative purposes. (See Appendix Table 1)

BACKGROUND OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social media take advantage of social interaction in order to be distributed. The role of social media in a company's overall communications program can have significant business results if implemented correctly. With the advent of Web 2.0, advertising has become about engaging in conversation with consumers, as the most trusted sources of recommendation come through word-of-mouth communication. While a set of hard-and-fast rules for incorporating social media into an overall communications campaign does not exist, there are a variety of best practices that can be leveraged to maximize the effectiveness of a social media program.

User-Generated Content in Social Media

According to Moran and Gossieaux (2010), a successful social media strategy must begin with an understanding of consumer conversations and characteristics. Consumers are more likely to respond to a social media strategy when they are able to interact with and help others. The ability to foster a social relationship between consumers and companies is the most important component of a social media strategy. Moran and Gossieaux (2010) explain that a firm must first listen to what existing online communities are saying about their products and services before a social media strategy can be developed. The success of a social media program is highly dependent upon knowing where the majority of conversations are occurring.

Once these conversations have been identified, marketers must leverage social media to participate in the conversation and effectively manage their customer relationships. Social media is about fostering communication with consumers rather than a one-sided push of a brand message (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010). A social media strategy must therefore allow for users to share and contribute to content. A content strategy must be developed according to the characteristics of preexisting online consumer communities and supported by an integrated online campaign (including a company blog, interactive website, articles, and videos). The social media tools employed in such a campaign should be chosen based on where the majority of conversations about a company are taking place and the social media habits of the participants.

Social Media Marketing Tools

There are a variety of tools to choose from when formulating a social media strategy. The network's power must be multiplied through the integration of various social media tools. The mix of social media highly depends on the objectives of the strategy and the trends in social media usage among the target market. A summary of these tools and the corresponding objectives that they achieve can be found in Table 2.

Chat Rooms

Chat rooms are one of the oldest forms of social media, but still have significant value in terms of developing an effective social media strategy. This is particularly true when a firm is trying to identify where conversations are already occurring about their products and services (Moran & Gossieaux, 2010). Incorporating a chat room or discussion board into a firm's website has the ability to improve customer service, increase the sense of consumer community, and effectively address consumer needs through better communications and enhanced relationships.

TABLE 2
SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS AND THEIR OBJECTIVES

Tools	Objectives
Chat Rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve customer service • create sense of community • garner customer feedback
Blogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drive WOM recommendations • build meaningful relationships • increase loyalty
You Tube	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harness power of video to increase embedding of content in other sites
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising • develop a community • target specific audiences
LinkedIn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connect with professional communities
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • customer engagement • conversation propagation
Google Wave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase collaboration and engagement • crowdsourcing
Four Square	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase local and mobile connectivity • increase network engagement

Blogs

A business blog is a powerful and universal way to drive positive word-of-mouth recommendations through the content that a company publishes. Blogs enable companies to establish and build meaningful relationships with their target, thereby increasing customer loyalty and the number of third-party advocates for the firm. A blog is considered to be a successful marketing tool when the conversation on the blog turns into online buzz for the firm (Niederhoffer *et al.*, 2007). A business blog can be used as a marketing tool by using it as a forum to offer tips and advice, publish an incentives program that encourages referrals, hold contests, answer questions, gather and showcase customer stories, and publically respond to stakeholder comments to maintain the conversation.

YouTube

Harnessing the powers of video is critical to the content of many social media campaigns. YouTube is the second most searched site after Google (McNealy, 2010). Maintaining a YouTube channel for one's company allows for videos to also be embedded within a company's blog, thereby cross-pollinating the sites, which in turn helps to increase website traffic. YouTube also allows for consumer engagement through user-generated content (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010).

Facebook

Facebook boasts more than 400 million active users and is therefore the most popular social networking site (McNealy, 2010). Not only does Facebook offer various advertising programs, but it also enables companies to create their own customized profile and share important information in the creation of their own brand community. Furthermore, Facebook provides companies with the unique opportunity to very specifically target users and spawn a two-way conversation with consumers (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010).

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is another social networking site that is geared towards a more professional audience. Like Facebook, there are opportunities to advertise one's business on this site, develop a profile for a company that is visible to LinkedIn users, and foster two-way relationships with individual career professionals as well as other firms (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010).

Twitter

Twitter is referred to as a "micro blogging" tool, as posts are limited to 140 characters. Twitter is beneficial for engaging with customers and propagating the conversation about one's brand, products, and/or services. It is also ideal for building relationships with key stakeholders (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010; McNealy, 2010).

Up & Coming

The future of social media is likely to be influenced by two key platforms. Google Wave is expected to have a revolutionary effect on collaboration and engagement once it becomes mainstream. This tool works in such a way that consumers can actively interact and engage with one another in real-time, and with marketers. It will enable marketers to create rich brand experiences through crowdsourcing (Laker, 2010). Four Square is another new tool that is still in its infancy. It leverages networked activity to connect individuals on a local and mobile basis, while incentivizing participants through increased participation. Businesses may use Four Square as a means of encouraging engagement within their networks, whether externally or internally (Armano, 2009).

Measurement of a Social Media Program

The power of an effective social media program must be measured. This can be accomplished by continually assessing the level of dialogue and engagement among members. Specifically, relationships and content constitute the two sources of social media currency. The effectiveness of a social media marketing program must be measured in terms of its ability to generate positive buzz about a firm, as well as its products and services. This, in turn, should translate into measurable business results for the firm -- whether in the form of increased awareness, increased sales, or increased loyalty. Social media effectiveness should not solely be measured in terms of the volume of WOM buzz; rather, the importance, impact, and level of involvement of WOM communication must also be quantified (Dwyer, 2007). Similarly, Stewart and Pavlou (2002) explain that in an interactive context, measuring the structure of the interaction is crucial for assessing a social media program. While exposure metrics (such as click-through rates, cost per click, number of hits, and Web site traffic) are ways of beginning to understand how well a program is working, interaction-related outcomes that add value and quality to consumer-marketer interactions must also be a focus of measurement (Stewart & Pavlou, 2002). A wide variety of free analytical tools are available for measuring the success of a social media marketing strategy and are summarized in Table 3 (Barros, 2009; Hall, 2010).

Generally speaking, social media can be used to accomplish one of three goals for a business: building awareness, increasing sales, or building loyalty (see Table 4). If the goal is to build awareness, measurement of success will revolve around the analysis of web traffic, web traffic referrals, search volume trends, volume of followers, social mentions, and share of voice. If the goal is to increase sales, measurement of the social media program's success must take into account web traffic, time spent on the site, bounce rate, repeat visits, content acceptance rate, followers, social mentions, and share of voice. If the goal is to build loyalty, success measurement will need to include an analysis of time spent on the site, repeat visits, followers, content acceptance rate, repeated social mentions, share of voice, recommendations and reviews, and social connectivity among purchasers. Therefore, the most appropriate success measurement techniques depend on the specific goal that is being pursued through the social media marketing program (Baer, 2009).

TABLE 3
MEASUREMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Analytical Tools	Functions
Google Analytics, Woopra, Clicky, Piwik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide detailed reports on web visitor characteristics
Yahoo! Web Analytics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide key visitor information, including demographics and category interests • provide campaign management features • assist in the understanding of audience needs
Blog Tracker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • track blog visits in addition to other key statistics about the blog's performance
GoingUp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • integrate visitor information, referring URLs, and search engine traffic statistics to aid in searching in optimization
Gr.aider.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide statistics on the number of times website posts are shared on social networking sites
Socialmeter.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • measure a website's social popularity
Statsaholic.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compare up to three websites simultaneously on the basis of relative rankings and other information
Webslug.info	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compare the performance of a website to the performance of any other site
Pagealizer.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suggest ways to optimize website performance

TABLE 4
SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY GOALS AND RELATED METRICS

Goals	Related Metrics
Build Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • web traffic and web traffic referrals • search volume trends and volume of followers • social mentions • share of voice
Increase Sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • web traffic and time spent on site • bounce rate and content acceptance rate • repeat visits and volume of followers • social mentions • share of voice
Build Loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time spent on site • repeat visits and volume of followers • content acceptance rate • repeated social mentions • share of voice • recommendations and reviews • social connectivity among purchasers

When measuring the effects of social media in coordinating all aspects of a firm's marketing activity, it is crucial that a measurement system is built into the program from the very beginning. More importantly, benchmarks should be set so that they are comparable to traditional marketing metrics, such as sales, traffic, brand satisfaction, and customer loyalty (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010).

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING COMMUNICATION MODEL

While current literature has sufficiently profiled WOM marketing, CRM, brand communities, SEO, viral marketing, guerilla marketing, events-based marketing, and social media each on an isolated, individual basis, there is no comprehensive model that effectively incorporates all of these elements. Moreover, the research in this field lacks a model that is actionable and specific, and that can be applied and adapted by firms to help them achieve their various marketing objectives. Therefore, the following model has been developed based on the research findings detailed in the existing literature. (See Appendix Figure 2)

Model Components

A word-of-mouth strategy forms the foundation of the model. The entire model is predicated on the goal of creating and sustaining positive buzz for a firm. All components of the model work together in an integrated fashion to reinforce the message that a firm wishes to communicate to consumers, thereby enticing consumers to pass the firm's message along to others.

A social media platform serves as the vehicle through which all marketing communication efforts are connected into one easily accessible, integrated consumer venue. Social media is pervasive by nature and is characterized by its ability to instantaneously connect an infinite number of people. As a result, it represents the hub of the model. In order for social media to be an effective platform, its presence must funnel through from the firm's main Website.

This platform can take the form of any or all types of social media, including a blog, YouTube channel, Facebook page, and/or Twitter account. The specific social media chosen should reflect the firm's objectives in terms of the content it wishes to create, the manner in which it wants to communicate this content to consumers, the extent to which the firm engages consumers in a two-way conversation, and the degree of consumer conversion that is being sought. A blog is an effective way to develop high quality, meaningful content for consumers, as well as an effective means for clearly articulating a particular message. YouTube also represents a way in which content can be generated by firms. Facebook and Twitter are effective ways to engage consumers in conversation. All social media formats have the potential to convert consumers into loyal customers by connecting with consumers on a one-to-one level and cultivating meaningful relationships with them.

Guerilla marketing, events-based marketing, and search engine optimization (SEO) represent the inputs that support the social media hub. Guerilla marketing focuses on the building of a firm's reputation through boldly unique tactical marketing executions. Through the integration of guerilla marketing executions with the social media hub, such as through pre- or post-campaign promotions via the social media platform, a firm is ultimately able to multiply the effects of the guerilla program. In other words, guerilla marketing feeds into the social media hub so as to encourage viral spreading through blogs and social networks; this, in turn, increases the exposure and effectiveness of the program.

Events-based marketing focuses on developing one-to-one relationships with members of a firm's target audience. Similarly to guerilla marketing, the integration of pre- and post-promotion of events with the firm's social media platform enables the life of the event to be extended and the reach of the program to be infinite. An event can be documented through video and photos, for example, which can then be incorporated into the social media hub and spread from consumer to consumer.

Search engine optimization acts as a foundational support for the social media platform. It increases the effectiveness of exposing consumers to a firm's Website and social media efforts. SEO can be accomplished through paid insertion, wherein a company pays a search engine to ensure its site is present when a consumer types in a particular keyword; paid advertisements, wherein a company pays for its site

to appear as an advertisement alongside search results that use a particular keyword; or organic means, wherein a company creates content in a strategic way such that its site is listed when consumers make particular search queries.

Events-based marketing and the social media platform enable a firm to build a consumer database and engage in effective CRM. Any event hosted by a firm as a means of engaging with stakeholders provides that firm with the opportunity to build its database of consumers and contacts. Additionally, the social media platform provides a firm with a variety of ways to interact with consumers and obtain their permission to archive their personal information, particularly email addresses. The more comprehensive a customer database becomes, the better equipped firms also become in their ability to effectively understand their customers and meaningfully target them.

A database-driven CRM program that is continually adapted to changing consumer needs will drive consumer loyalty and sustain it over the long-term. The building of consumer loyalty represents the ultimate goal of any CRM program. The consumer database is a means through which a firm can effectively bridge the CRM program with this objective of increased consumer loyalty. By leveraging consumer information from the database and translating this information into actionable targeting strategies, personalized marketing efforts for consumers can be developed and executed. Personalized marketing efforts result in the creation of value for consumers and set the stage for establishing and maintaining long-term relationships with clients.

Viral marketing and brand community development represent the outputs of the social media platform. A social media platform takes in the content from guerilla marketing and events-based marketing, and leverages SEO in such a way that a firm's alternative marketing efforts become centralized and reinforce one another as well as the overall message being projected. Blogs and social networks enable marketing content to be rapidly disseminated and transferred among individuals and groups of individuals, thereby exponentially increasing consumer exposure to and engagement with such content. This constitutes viral marketing. Additionally, these same blogs and social networks provide consumers with an interface through which they can come together with one another as well as with firm representatives to form a brand community. This is the ultimate expression of brand loyalty. Through online viral marketing and brand communities, as supported by a social media platform, WOM buzz can be rapidly generated.

The model serves to effectively accomplish the objective(s) of a firm's alternative marketing communications program. A program that is designed out of this model will enable a firm to 1) increase consumer awareness; 2) increase sales; and/or 3) increase consumer loyalty. An objective of increasing consumer awareness will result in an emphasis on developing the inputs into the social media hub (guerilla and events-based marketing, SEO). An objective of increasing sales will result in an emphasis on driving the CRM component of the model. An objective of increasing loyalty will result in an emphasis on both CRM and developing the outputs of the social media hub (viral marketing and brand community development). However, it is important to note that while different components of the model are emphasized to achieve different objectives, a successful program will still integrate all components to one degree or another. The model is one of a synergistic nature, meaning that in order for its effectiveness to be optimized, all components must work together and feed into one another to communicate the overarching message to all stakeholders.

Additionally, the firm's focus in terms of the objectives being pursued will determine how success of the program is measured.

Measurement of the success of a program contributes to a feedback loop that determines how future executions will be adjusted to increase the program's effectiveness. The program must be evaluated pre- and post-execution in order to assess the extent to which the firm's objectives were achieved. Based on these measures, ways to improve future programs should be identified and incorporated into any relevant aspect of the model. Tables 3 and 4 in the literature review outline the various social media measurement tools and metrics for program evaluation.

CONCLUSION

It has been said that the age of interrupted marketing is over, with future marketing efforts taking the form of community creation and one-to-one relationship building to sell products and develop brand loyalty (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010). The current consensus is that social media marketing works to effectively achieve the latter through word-of-mouth referrals and communication, when it is properly executed. Proper execution involves the integration of all of a firm's marketing efforts within one coherent strategy, with social media acting as the means through which all efforts can be coordinated. A successful IMC program incorporates both traditional and alternative tactical executions (CRM, brand communities, search engine optimization, viral marketing, guerilla marketing, events-based marketing) to maximize the impact of the overall marketing strategy. All components of a marketing communications campaign must feed into and reinforce one another, and communicate to consumers the same consistent message. Both traditional and evolving metrics must be used in combination to measure the results of interactive marketing programs (Stewart & Pavlou, 2002).

The alternative marketing model proposed herein provides marketers with a framework for effectively leveraging the efficiencies and synergies of WOM marketing through a social media platform, supported by alternative marketing communications. It is the first model to integrate a variety of marketing communication tactics in such a way that reinforce and promote the same brand message at all consumer touch points. With the industry-wide movement towards IMC, this conceptual model will provide both marketers and academics with a clear template for efficiently and effectively organizing communication campaigns and interacting with stakeholders. Marketing practitioners can use this model to structure a campaign according to the objectives they wish to achieve, and execute their campaign through the different alternative communication forms that are identified to help achieve such objectives.

Future research should attempt to understand how this conceptual model and alternative marketing communications in general could be combined with more traditional forms of marketing to create an overarching marketing guide. Additionally, this model should be tested in field as to its ability to deliver measurable business results for both small and medium sized enterprises, as well as larger corporations.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1
FORMS OF ALTERNATIVE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

	Formats	Measurement Criteria	Example
CRM	online & offline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • customer base • sales revenues and marketing costs • partnership with customers 	Ritz-Carlton: CRM system to personalize guest experience
Brand Communities	online & offline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engagement and loyalty • size of community • ideas generated 	Harley Owners Group (H.O.G.)
Email	online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • link clicks and customer service calls • delivery rates • open rates and conversion rates 	Kayak.com: emails build a relationship, well-designed and easy to read, targeted to the recipient, encourage communication (Premick, 2008)
Search Engine	online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • website ranking and link popularity • traffic • referrals 	NY Times: through SEO program, 300% increase in referrals from 2005-08, 65% yearly growth rate in site traffic, increased user engagement (SEO Case Studies, 2009)
Viral	online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of pass-alongs or forwards, embeds, and comments • content downloads • total views and unique viewers • conversions and click-throughs • URL referrals • Email addresses collected 	Old Spice: <i>The Man Your Man Could Smell Like</i> viral video
Guerilla	online & offline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attendance • sales and customer acquisition • website traffic 	Toyota Scion: brand reps positioned at street corners, with music blaring and Scion banners displayed, stop passersby to encourage test driving (Palmeri, 2003)
Events-Based	offline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • business, behavioral, and learning impacts 	Becel: sponsorship of Heart & Stroke Foundation's <i>Ride for Heart</i>
Mobile	online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cost-per-acquisition • consumer engagement 	American Idol: AT&T partnership for texting to vote

FIGURE 1
THE ROLE OF WOM IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

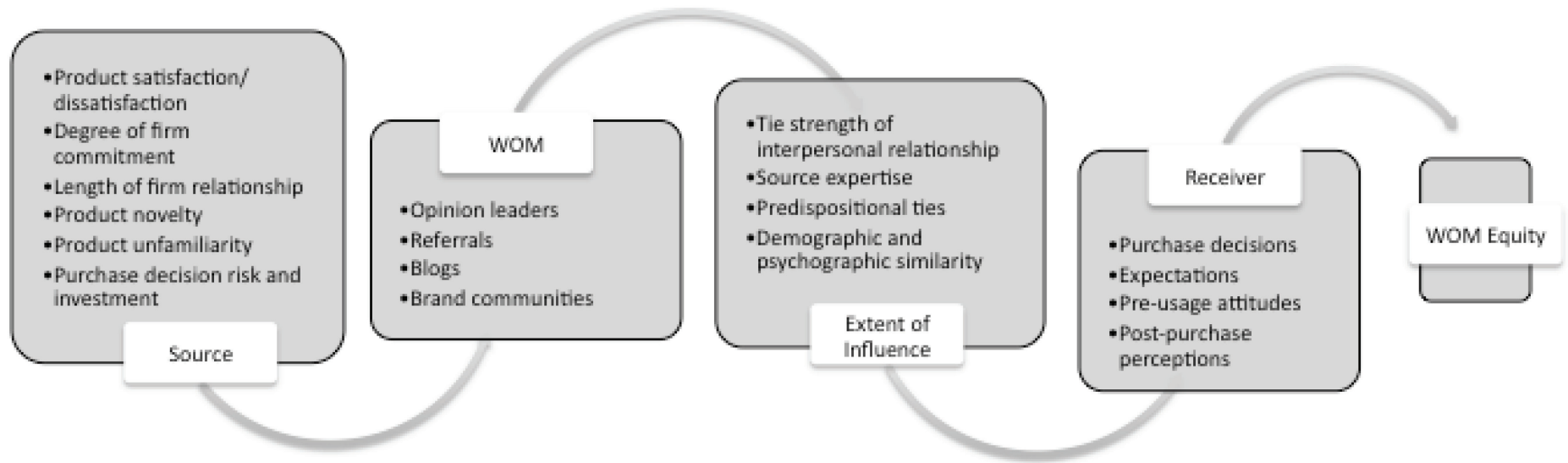


FIGURE 2
A PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE MARKETING MODEL ON A SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

