Managing social media as a marketing tool in the Greek business environment

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Abstract: The rapid expansion of the global social media sphere has revolutionised the way people communicate, access information and interact. Consumers are no longer passive receivers but actively participate in the marketing and buying process. On the other hand, although companies need to adjust to the new market rules in order to gain competitive advantage, many of them are unable to comprehend social media’s broad environment and evaluate its effective use as a marketing tool. This paper aims to conceptualise the integration of social media into the marketing process focusing on the Greek business field, through the conduction of a quantitative online survey research. The main findings indicate that Greek companies acknowledge its importance as a marketing tool while indicating that the main benefits are the increase of exposure and sales’ improvement. Among those companies that do not use social media, a significant number show eagerness in incorporating it into their marketing strategies in the near future. Almost half of the respondents seem to follow a certain social media strategy, a significant number use a distinct budget for social media, while only a small number of companies were able to measure its usefulness and return of investment.

Keywords: social media; traditional media; social media marketing; marketing communications; social media metrics; customer engagement; social media strategies; Greece.

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1 Introduction

Over the last decade the rapid expansion of the global social media sphere has revolutionised the way people communicate, access information and interact. Social media has increasingly attracted the attention of academic and industry researchers who were intrigued and overwhelmed by this virtual world.

Enterprises nowadays, despite their size, are being confronted with a new way of communication widely known as Web 2.0. Individuals that once were just consuming information suddenly with the advent of social media became publishers of information, having the ability to create content, share knowledge and opinion about any business’ products or services. This alteration in consumers’ behaviour has definitely affected and changed the way companies market themselves generating new business opportunities as well as several potential risks. Companies focus on targeting audiences and broadcast messages through unidirectional mass media. In this new direction, ‘markets are conversations’ and ‘participation is marketing’. Therefore, it has become crucial for businesses to learn how to operate through these new channels in order to engage with their customers and prospects and penetrate newly developed niche markets.

Although research in the field of social media marketing is continuously developing and expanding there are still no sufficient and verified findings concerning the comprehension of social media’s broad environment and their management as a marketing tool especially in the Greek market.

Based on the above, the main research question of this paper is to examine the level of adoption and incorporation of social media into the Greek companies’ marketing process. For the purposes of this study a quantitative descriptive research approach was chosen while the method of a cross sectional online survey was selected. The selection of the primary data, required to answer the main research question, was carried out through the use of a self administered structured questionnaire that was adjusted for online completion.

More specifically, in the first section there is an attempt to define and classify social media while underlining its significance as a new way of communication. In Section 3 we explore the shift in the marketing field from managing traditional media to managing
social media, interpret customers’ new role, the formulation of new strategies and companies’ ability to measure the impact of social media. Moreover, in Section 4 we describe the research’s methodology and its limitations. In Section 5, an analysis of the survey’s findings is presented. Finally, concluding remarks are provided as well as suggestions for future study.

2 Social media

2.1 Defining social media

Trying to define the term ‘social media’ in a manner that everyone readily accepts seems to be a non-trivial procedure. Confusion exists regarding what exactly should be included under the specific term and the main difficulty for a commonly accepted definition among academic researchers and managers tends to be the broad spectrum of social media.

A simple definition could state that social media includes any of the several online tools which allow individuals with similar interests to share information network in an open process or learn from others (Safko and Brake, 2009). People have the tendency to be included in groups of similar like-minded people with whom they feel safe and comfortable to share their opinions, experiences, inner thoughts and ideas. This could explain accurately the word social. As far as the second term is concerned it refers to all the technologies (media) we use in order to effectively reach out and connect with other individuals.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media could roughly be defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User-Generated Content (UGC)”.

In order to understand the above definition we should draw a line and explain the relation between the Web 2.0 and UGC entities. The term Web 2.0 was introduced in 2004 by Tim O’Reilly, founder and CEO of O’Reilly Media, Inc., describing a collection of digital platforms based on social computing (where participants are able to collaborate and modify content and applications) used for generating, refining and sharing information. Web 2.0 contributes to the improvement of users’ interface while it also enables end users to view data more quickly and dynamically through richer user interfaces using AJAX, REST, RSS, etc. Examples of Web 2.0 include blogs, wikis, social networking sites, web applications, video sharing sites, forums, chat, messaging, email etc.

Instead of Web 2.0, which represents the ideological and technological aspect, UGC refers to any material generated on the internet by media amateurs. Although UGC has not received yet a formal definition it can be well described through three main characteristics, proposed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):

a publication requirement; UGC has to be published in specific context, e.g., on a website or on a social networking site

b creative effort; a specific amount of creativity has to be put into creating the work and users should add their own value to the work
Managing social media as a marketing tool

People contributing to UGC on the web are usually on the look for three main returns: connecting with people, a form of self-expression and receiving recognition or prestige for their work.

Bearing in mind the previous general definition the next step is to try classifying social media. Some classification attempts have focused on the primary use of a particular medium such as relationship maintenance, communication, transaction, collaboration, entertainment and sharing opinions (Vermaas and Van de Wijngaert, 2004). Other classifications were based on the content of a medium e.g., pictures, videos, text (Saiko and Brake, 2009). Still there are other hybrid classifications that mix content, uses and types of media. Finally, there are classification systems that focus on self-presentation/self-disclosure and the degree of social presence and media richness (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

According to Goffman (1959), the term of self-presentation denotes that people, regardless of the type of social interaction, tend to control the way other people think about them. Self-disclosure is both the conscious or unconscious act of disclosing more about yourself to other people, e.g., emotions, thoughts, desires, preferences or dislikes while developing intimate relationship even between strangers. Additionally, Short et al. (1976) related the degree of social presence in communication media with the way people communicate and noted that communication media having high social presence are more personal than the ones with low. Media richness is a similar theory which claims that a communication medium differs in the way it delivers rich information while its utility depends on its condition and scope of usage. According to Daft and Lengel (1986), rich information which includes non-verbal, social and feedback cues, is far better than non-rich information in order to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty and to communicate shared meanings. For this reason, communication media able to deliver rich information are more suitable for uncertain situations or evasive tasks compared to non-rich media. By applying the above set of theories in the field of media research and social processes Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) created a classification scheme with six different types of social media: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds.

2.2 Social media in business

The adoption of social media is nowadays widespread for businesses in emerging markets while it has definitely changed the way we do business online. Owing to the continuously increased competition, companies nowadays are striving to improve their business, meet or forecast their targeted audiences’ needs, engage their customers, differentiate their products or services in order to be more competitive, achieve brand awareness, be more innovative and creative and finally achieve company’s goals (Sweeney and Craig, 2010). On the other hand consumers have also changed their purchasing behaviour and are no longer passive receivers; instead owing to their instant participation in the whole marketing and buying process their role has become very active from setting a trend to forming opinions (Hanna et al., 2011). Therefore, it is imperative for companies to understand the functions of these new channels, discover new ways to operate through them and develop their businesses in order to penetrate into new specialised markets.
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Note: *Differences between the last column and the sum of the previous two columns are due to rounding.

Source: Giannakouris and Simihly (2013, p.2, Table 1)
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Source: Giannakouris and Smihily (2013, p.2, Table 1)
Based on a survey conducted by Eurostat (2013) between enterprises of the European Union members, Norway, Iceland and FYROM regarding the usage of information and communication technologies as well as electronic commerce focusing on social media usage, Giannakouris and Smihily (2013) have recently published a report with considerable results (Table 1). The number of surveyed enterprises reached 147,000 out of 1.5 million.

This specific report denotes an increase of 6% of enterprises maintaining a website compared to 2010, which means that three out of four companies have their own website (the highest shares where noted in Nordic countries). Moreover, according to the report 30% of the participating companies have used at least one type of social media within 2013 (the shares ranged from 15% in Latvia to 55% in Malta). Among them 28% of the companies have used social networks (the highest rates were found in Malta – 52% of enterprises with at least 10 persons employed), 11% have used content sharing sites (the highest rates where noted in Netherlands), 10% used blogs (first came Netherlands with 27%) and 6% used wikis or social bookmarking sites (the highest proportion was noted in Lithuania). It is also crucial to highlight that only 8% of the participants had a formal social media policy (the biggest shares where noted in Ireland).

However, owing to their global nature, statistical data provided by the above research cannot derive more detailed results for each EU country separately (e.g. individual social media usage for each company type). Our research improves upon this direction, considering the case of Greece while concentrating on the marketing field.

Some of the main benefits that can be acquired by businesses implementing social media are:

- increase in brand exposure and awareness since customers become aware of companies’ products or services while understand their benefits
- creation of targeted traffic to companies’ website or blogs, since social media sites are storing users’ data such as age, gender, geographical location, interests, and other information, providing companies with more insights concerning their users
- generation of valuable leads since companies may gain more online followers, connect with users, share valuable content and capture consumer’s interest
- identification of competitors’ strategy and their interaction with customers since companies are able to monitor a variety of several aspects concerning their main online presence.

3 Social media marketing

3.1 Traditional vs. social media marketing

Marketing has gone through many changes over time while its continuous shifts indicate the new digital era. The use of internet and the creation of social communities have replaced the traditional form of marketing. However, to conform, learn and apply all the up-to-date tactics in the newly created realm of blogosphere and social media is not a task.
that can be performed and undertaken quickly (McDonald and Wilson, 2002). Marketers must understand how the dynamics of customer networks operate and who and what influences people positively or negatively. In order to understand the difference between traditional and social media marketing and the tendency to integrate into the new rules of marketing it is necessary to distinguish the characteristics of these two approaches.

Marketing and its invaluable advantages still plays an important role and remains the primary concern for today’s entrepreneurs, although the rules of the game have totally changed (Zarrella, 2010). One explanation stems from the transformation of the company itself. Nowadays companies should take new decisions concerning their functions and objectives, select the appropriate form of marketing in order to reach company’s needs and goals and find ways to satisfy the increasing demand for lower costs.

Another reason resulting in the changing field of marketing is the invasion of technology. Formerly, marketing managers were supervising company’s salesmen as well as customer service representatives. Nowadays, many of their former responsibilities and functions have been replaced with specialised software such as sales force automation (SFA) and customer relationship management (CRM), reducing not only costs but also required time. Technology has also empowered customers to perform functions and tasks that previously were undertaken by employees, e.g., online banking resulting in substantial cost savings.

Moreover, nowadays social hierarchy does not depend only on income and class neither can patterns of demand and consumption be considered predictable or stable. Consumers are more demanding, cannot be easily impressed or manipulated, want to participate into activities and interact with others while they need to belong somewhere which is also the main reason of social media’s tremendous evolution.

This newly formed networked society emerges many opportunities and challenges for marketers. One significant opportunity is the creation of clients’ networks without bearing substantial costs that were necessary before through the procedures of traditional advertising, branding and sales promotion. In order to succeed, word of mouth is the key element while internet is the appropriate medium (Margolis and Garrigan, 2008). Furthermore, companies should focus on their products or services and try to differentiate them from others, define the appropriate price, aiming in innovative campaigns and engage with customers.

One solution might be the establishment of a customer network by recruiting or giving incentives to network users or influencers (hubs) to interact with each other. This activity will invite their followers and the latter will attract more, making the network a viable and dynamic tool for the company. The challenge in this case is to evaluate the right network size in order to be viable and not create negative effects concerning the quality and customers’ service.

By exploring the way marketing is formed nowadays with the massive use of social media we are able to see the difference between traditional and social media marketing (Sinha and Foscht, 2007). In Figure 1, a traditional marketing model is depicted, where firms provide information about their products to their customers in order to create relationships with them. The arrows going outward show the relationship that firms are trying to establish with potential customers through traditional methods, e.g., television and radio advertising, sales coupons etc. This approach is considered to be ineffective while it creates marginal returns at best.
On the other hand, in a model of social media marketing (as depicted in Figure 2) hubs take the advantage, while firms have no longer a central role. In order to define hub we could say that it is considered to be an opinion leader, a person with extensive authority who creates a great number of network connections. Hubs have great influence and thus they can propagate a network with the aid of word-of-mouth publicity and through their viral interactions with others.

Finally, in order to compare the effectiveness, in relation to marketing expenditures between the two marketing approaches we use the following plots (Sinha and Foscht, 2007). In the traditional form of marketing (see Figure 3), although the effectiveness may increase, the curve is concave. Cost has the tendency to increase due to the fact that customers are getting bored and thus showing a stark aversion in being instructed by others. On the other hand, the new form of marketing appears to be more effective and less costly while providing higher returns.
3.2 Social media and customer engagement

Marketing is evolving rapidly to become more of a conversation than a lecture while marketers have realised that in order to be heard in today’s world, they need to participate in that conversation (Ryan and Jones, 2009). The art of listening is really important especially for marketers in order to approach their targeted audience. Through social media marketers have the potential to foster much more stable and strong positive relationships with their customers and influencers and gain more powerful insight into their perceptions of the company’s products or services.

Engagement means the involvement, participation and collaboration between customers, company, employees and company’s products or services. The higher the engagement is, the stronger the relationships will become for a company even if the engagement is not directly with the company (Sweeney and Craig, 2010).

The process of engagement includes not only the interaction and cooperation between consumers but also the activities which connect the firm with its customers as well as the company’s employees. According to Evans and McKee (2010), there are four stages concerning the process of building strong customer engagement. The first one is content consumption, which is the ability to download, read, share, watch or listen to any digital content. The next stage is curation which is a very important social action where users are able to comment, like, rate, filter or review on any online content. The third stage is creation where users can share and distribute what they are doing, what they are interested in etc. Finally, the fourth and most important stage is collaboration which can be considered as the bridge between customers, employees, stakeholders and companies while it is also a very powerful tool for innovation, progress and authenticity.

Companies which have managed to adopt the appropriate social engagement strategy are able to identify their influencers, come closer with their online audience and connect effectively with their potential customers (Brown, 2012). According to Ryan and Jones (2009) engaging successfully with customers through social media can provide companies with the following potential advantages.
First of all, knowing what a customer really thinks may be considered a valuable asset for companies in order to plan a successful marketing strategy while engaging with their online audience can be extremely beneficial for the whole organisation. Moreover, by engaging proactively, a company can increase its online reputation while it is imperative for customers to form a good impression of the firm in order to proceed to their purchases. Furthermore, it is really important for managers to understand the new rules of the game. Using social media companies are given the ability to figure out instantly what their potential clients feel or want, to have immediate access to the market’s insights and their competitors, and to use online metric tools in order to evaluate their investments without bearing excessive financial cost. Additionally, not all individuals who take part in social media activities devote and spent the same time and not all of them have the same level of effect on others. There are always those who have a more active behaviour and are considered to be dominant influencers for a group of people, while companies can cultivate brand advocacy by engaging with people who have formed a positive opinion about them and are willing to promote and recommend the products or services.

In order to create and implement the appropriate and according to every company’s different needs and goals strategy, it is really important for companies to combine this new dynamic engagement process and include it into their traditional marketing approaches. Moreover, managers should discover methods to effectively capture the new two-way conversation with customers and find new techniques to manage the enormous amount of information, the existing media, their customers’ needs and their competitors’ actions while using them to their advantage (Brown, 2012). In order to achieve customers’ engagement companies should be flexible, have a well organised marketing plan, respond instantly to the communities, clarify their goals, achievements, targeted audience and define themselves. Furthermore, companies should be honest, open and remain authentic in providing customers the belief that they are treated with respect (Ryan and Jones, 2009).

3.3 Social media strategies

Contrary to the common belief, creating a social media strategy should be considered the first step in a company’s attempt to become social. First of all, a complete internal alignment is necessary, which means that companies have to evolve into a more collaborative and integrated structure. Moreover, social media function’s ownership should be precisely defined, a standard model of management should be established and the appropriate technology should be selected.

According to Chaffey et al. (2006), it becomes quite obvious that it is very important to set the proper objectives before a company forms its strategy which is the first and most essential part of the strategy itself.

In their analysis they have proposed some key activities concerning the process of setting objectives. First of all, a specific layout of what is expected to be achieved is necessary as well as the specification and setting of numerical targets. Secondly, companies must search for the appropriate and most useful web analytic tools in order to measure their business performance. Thirdly, it is prerequisite for all enterprises to have a general insight of the micro and macro environment. Furthermore they suggest that an internet marketing strategy should dispense an unfailing direction for companies’ online activities in order to incorporate them into their existing ones.
In a more recent book, Ryan and Jones (2009), among other issues, deal with marketing strategies in order to engage the new digital generation while suggesting that in order to define a strategy there are some components which should be taken into serious consideration. First of all, companies should consider if their products or services are suited to be sold online or are more appropriate for direct traditional marketing. Additionally, a thorough look into a company’s core is necessary in order to examine its function, advantages and weaknesses and realise the degree in which its structure and human resources can be adapted to the new changes. Moreover, a deep and careful examination of a company’s competitors is vital in order to understand the main market rivals, their advantages and mistakes in order to differentiate and create a lead in the market. Another factor which is really important when defining a marketing strategy is customers. Knowing your customers’ needs and characteristics raises the possibility of achieving successful and productive engagement, long lasting relationships and consequently it increases firm’s profitability. Furthermore, setting measurable, short term and achievable goals enables companies to implement a successful digital marketing strategy. Finally, due to the numerous key performance indicators (KPIs) companies are provided with the ability to measure and compare their progress, popularity, visitors etc.

3.4 Social media tools and metrics

Social media’s measurement and analysis is widely considered as a very complicated procedure since there are many different metrics and tools that can be used in order to evaluate their impact. In order to handle the vast data information and not measure everything which would be chaotic, misleading and time consuming, companies should first set their business’ objectives and then determine their measurement strategy.

Most companies having as a goal to maximise profits consider ROI the most important metric while others such as traffic, comments, followers, leads, reviews, sentiment and buzz come as supplementary metrics. What a company decides to measure depends exclusively on its goals and objectives and what it is expected to receive in return for its investment in time or money (Sweeney and Craig, 2010). Business’ objectives can be categorised into exposure, engagement, influence, and action/results.

According to Turner and Shah (2011) since so many different metrics and tools are available in order to evaluate a company’s social media strategy, they proposed a three step measurement process aiming to help companies stay more focused and organised in their approaches.

The first step concerns quantity measurement which provides a general picture of a company’s marketing strategy effectiveness while gaining insight into the volume of traffic that is being generated and online customers’ engagement. These metrics are quantitative in nature and have little emotional content.

The second step concerns the measurement of quality. The underlying metrics provide information about emotions, relationships, thoughts, the intensity of feelings about a firm’s services or products, customers’ brand loyalty and the fulfilment of their needs.

Finally, the last step concerns ROI’s measurement, which enables a company to evaluate its business’ success and measure the extent to which the maximum profit of social media’s usage has been achieved. This measurement includes customers that have been retained, leads, revenues etc.
4 Research methodology

4.1 Methodology

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001) research can be defined as a process of collection, analysis and interpretation of data aiming to comprehend and perceive a phenomenon. It can be also defined as a scientific and systematic search for knowledge on a specific situation, problem or a strategic effort to gain insights and new knowledge on a specific topic (Redman and Mory, 1933). In order to conduct a research three common approaches exist: quantitative, qualitative and the mixture of the latter two approaches. In this study a quantitative approach was followed, which can be classified into four broad categories, descriptive, correlational, experimental and cause-comparative.

For the purposes of this study the descriptive approach has been chosen since it is a basic research method which enables researchers to examine a situation at its time of existence and its current state while it involves the determination and identification of the characteristics of a particular phenomenon based on observation as a means of collecting data. In order to conduct a descriptive research, several methods exist. Among the most popular are observational or correlational studies, developmental designs and survey research. In this paper the method of survey research has been selected. Based on time dimension, surveys can be classified in two categories, cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys. The approach of a cross-sectional survey was selected since it is suited to examine a single point in time or capture a one-time snapshot approach involving observations of a population’s sample.

4.2 Sample selection, data collection and limitations

Sampling can be defined as the process of selecting a subset of individuals from a statistical population in order to evaluate and estimate characteristics of a whole population (Cochran, 2007). The procedure by which a sample of units is being selected from a population is called the sampling design which can be classified into two broad categories, non-probability and probability sampling. For the purposes of this study the non-probability approach was selected. This sampling procedure does not provide any basis for estimating the probability of each individual in a population to be included in the final sample.

More specifically, in order to conduct the survey the core group of participants that were initially selected was 50 employees from different the marketing departments companies operating in the Greek market located in the capital city of Athens. Using the snowball sampling technique, the sample size increased reaching 110. The participants were selected from all levels of management while companies where selected independently from their size and their economic business activity.

Moreover, in order to collect the required primary data, the method of an online survey was selected where a self-administered questionnaire was used. According to Manfreda and Vehovar (2008), online or web surveys are transforming over the years and are considered an essential tool for selecting information for a variety of research areas such as marketing, social and even official statistics research.

Concerning the collection of the survey’s data a structured questionnaire with definite, concrete and pre-determined questions was designed and adapted (Brace, 2008;
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Poynter, 2010; De Vaus, 2013) for the web using Google docs survey tools. Two different versions of the questionnaire (Greek, English) were designed and they were sent to the participants through email, in which the scope of the survey was clearly stated and whereby respondents were given access to the questionnaire through a link which directed them to the online form according to the selected language. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 24 questions that were carefully selected and adjusted to serve the purpose of the specific survey, mainly based on a published industry report (Stelzner, 2013) as well as other online researches and surveys relevant to the field (Technorati, 2013; Nielsen, 2012; Moorman, 2013) while dividing them in four sections. In the first section the questions were formulated in order to collect general socio-demographic data concerning the respondents, the second section was addressed to those who do not use social media into their marketing efforts, the third referred to those who use them and finally the last section contained questions regarding companies which have a distinct social media budget. The majority of questions used in the questionnaire were closed-ended questions, including the types of dichotomous questions, multiple choices, branching questions, matrix questions and Likert-type scaled questions. The online survey was initiated on the 15th of March 2014 and ended on the 1st of May 2014, generating 51 respondents which indicated a response rate of 46.4%.

The main limitations that should be taken into consideration can be summarised as follows:

1. time constraints
2. perception as junk mail
3. impersonal approach
4. biases
5. overlapped questions by respondents
6. technical breakdowns during completion.

5 Research findings

5.1 Respondents’ profile

1. Age, gender and level of management. Based on the data gathered, the majority of survey’s participants (74%) were between the ages of 30 and 39, 12% of the respondents belong to the age group of 40–49, while only 8% were between 20 and 29 years old. Furthermore, females outweighed males, representing 69% of all respondents. Additionally, almost half of the individuals (49%) who participated in the survey were middle managers, followed by those (29%) belonging in the top level hierarchy of management.

2. Business target audience and company’s size. More than half (58%) of the participants focus primarily on targeting business customers and the remaining 42% aim mainly on attracting consumers. The largest group participating in the survey work for small businesses of 10–49 employees (31%) followed by micro-entities (27%) and large enterprises (26%).
3 Business economic activity. The highest shares where noted among companies focusing in information and communication activities while the same percentage (18%) shared companies involving with service activities. Financial and insurance companies as well as companies involving in the wholesale and retail trade activities shared a percentage of 10% each, while a quite high percentage of respondents (12%) reported their business activity in the classification of ‘other’ sectors.

Figure 4 Business target audience

Figure 5 Company size

5.2 Social media usage

Based on the responses the majority (73%) of the participants use social media in order to market their business, while a percentage of 27 do not consider important to incorporate social media into their marketing efforts.

In order to examine and identify the main reasons why 14 companies of the sample do not consider important to use social media to market their business the following three questions were addressed.

1 Reasons for not using social media. The majority of the respondents, who work for micro-entities (1–9 employees) or small companies (10–49 employees) and focus primarily on targeting business customers, claimed that the main reasons for not including social media into their marketing strategies are the lack of skilled employees as well as their unaccustomed targeted audience. A percentage of 14% of the participants believe that social media does not yield high benefits to their business, 7% consider their usage as a waste of productivity and time while a low percentage of 4% hesitate in investing on social media since their usage is considered a waste of money. Finally, a percentage of 11% respondents noted some disadvantages of using social media where the most popular answers were the risk of
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negative comments, the difficulty in measuring success and security and privacy issues.

2 Marketing methods. Based on the question what other methods are the participants using in order to market their business, the top three answers were direct sales, tv/radio/email/print advertising and word of mouth (40%, 25% and 20% respectively).

3 Using social media in the near future. Only 23% of the respondents stated that they do not intend to encompass social media into their marketing efforts in the near future, 39% denoted that they will incorporate them into their marketing strategy, while 38% were not certain about their future plans concerning the usage of social media as a marketing tool.

Figure 6 Reasons for not using social media

![Bar chart showing reasons for not using social media](image)

Figure 7 Other marketing methods

![Bar chart showing other marketing methods](image)

The following findings concern the number of participants who use social media into their marketing strategy.

5.3 Importance of social media

The vast majority of the respondents (94%) consider social media as a useful marketing tool for their business. More specifically, 40% of the respondents answered that social media are very important in order to market their business, 28% believe that they are important, while a 26% consider them moderately important to their marketing efforts.
Only a 6% of the respondents consider the use of social media of little importance while none of the participants regard them unimportant.

**Figure 8** The importance of social media as a marketing tool

![Pie chart showing the importance of social media](image)

- **Very Important** 40%
- **Important** 26%
- **Moderately Important** 28%
- **Of Little Importance** 6%
- **Unimportant** 0%

### 5.4 Social media marketing experience and weekly time commitment

Sixty-one percent of the respondents surveyed have at least two years of social media experience, while 13% of the participants have recently started using them. Furthermore, more than half of the participants (54%) devote 6 hours or more on a weekly base in order to use social media and 33% spent from 11 to 30 hours weekly. It should be noted that 5% of the respondents spent more than 40 hours using social media.

### 5.5 Benefits of social media marketing

Based on survey’s results the top two benefits of social media marketing are increased exposure (26%) and improved sales (14%). Some of the respondents are using social media in order to develop loyal fans (13%), while the same percentage of 9% was occupied by the increase in traffic, the growth of business partnerships as well as the ability of gaining marketplace insights.

**Figure 9** Benefits of social media marketing

- **Increased sales** 14%
- **Improved exposure** 26%
- **Reduced marketing expenses** 7%
- **Increased traffic** 9%
- **Grown business partnerships** 9%
- **Provided marketplace insight** 9%
- **Generated leads** 8%
- **Developed loyal fans** 13%
- **Improved search rankings** 4%
- **Other** 1%
5.6 Commonly used social media platforms and their usage frequency

Based on the results the most commonly used social media platforms are Facebook (95%), LinkedIn (73%), YouTube (68%) followed by Google+ (65%) while Twitter, forums and blogging are holding the same percentage of 62%.

5.7 Change of usage concerning social media activities in the near future

Most of the respondents (34%) stated that they do not intent to change their social media use in the near future mainly due to the fact that they are satisfied with the obtained results and their level of success accomplished based on their current use. A significant 32% plan to greatly increase their use of social media activities due to the increasing market demand, the wider engagement with their targeted audience and their companies new strategic decisions, while 26% are going to slightly increase their use mainly because they believe that due to Greek market’s size there is no need for great increase while others stated that their slight increase will be attributable in the reduction of advertising costs. Finally, it should be noted that 5% of the participants plan to greatly decrease their usage.

5.8 Use of other types of marketing

The top two other types of marketing used by the respondents in order to market their business were emails (14%) and online ads (13%). Print ads and marketing events hold the same percentage of 12%, while press releases, radio and TV advertisements received respectively 9%. Based on the results it should be noted that respondents are still not familiar with incorporating webinars and mobile marketing into their marketing efforts.

Figure 10 Measurement of ROI

5.9 ROI and other metrics used for measuring social media’s impact

In order to evaluate the respondents’ ability to measure the return on investment (ROI) for their social media activities they were asked to rate their agreement with the following statement: “I am able to measure the return on investment (ROI) for my company’s social media activities”. Only 26% of the participants agreed that they are able to measure this performance metric in order to evaluate the profitability of their investment. Furthermore, concerning other metrics most of the respondents (28%) stated that in order to measure
the impact of social media they focus on the number of fans, followers and likes. Twenty percent of the participants are based on the process of measuring of individuals’ comments while a percentage of 15% concentrate on ratings in order to measure the effectiveness of social media.

**Figure 11** Other metrics (see online version for colours)

### 5.10 Social media strategy and budget

Almost half of the participants (49%) stated that they follow a specific social media strategy, opposed to a significant percentage (33%) who indicated that their company does not use a certain strategy concerning social media usage. Concerning the issue of budgeting, only a 36% percentage of the respondents have a distinct budget for social media, opposed to a significant percentage (41%) who indicated that their budgeting strategy does not include social media.

The following findings concern the number of participants who use a distinct social media budget in their marketing plan.

1. **Social media budget specification (in euros).** Based on the results it can be observed that 38% of the respondents, who work for micro-entities which focus on service activities, information and communication as well as arts, entertainment and recreation services, targeting on customers and having at least two years of social media experience, spend 5000€ or less on social media. Around 31% of the respondents, who work on small companies (10–49 employees) which business’ targeted audience are business customers (B2B) and have at least three years of experience on social media marketing, stated that they invest from 5000 up to 20,000€ into their social media marketing strategy, while 15% spend up to 50,000€ yearly for social media. It should be noted that 8% of the participating companies, which concerns large companies (≥ 250 employees) with more than 5 years of social media marketing experience focusing mainly on the fields of construction, communication, entertainment and accommodation, indicated that they are investing a great amount of money concerning social media spending which reaches up to 100,000€.
Prediction for social media spending in the next five years (as a percentage of company’s turnover). The majority of the respondents (79%) stated that they believe that in the next five years their social media spending will be up to 10% based on their companies’ turnover. A percentage of 14% shows that their spending will be between 11–15% while 7% of the participants indicated that they predict their social media spending to be higher than 20% regarding their companies’ turnover.

Figure 12  Social media budget specification (in euros)

Figure 13  Social media spending in the next five years (as a percentage of company’s turnover)

6  Concluding remarks and suggestions for further study

The advent of social media has definitely revealed more opportunities and new capabilities for its users e.g. commenting, sharing, tweeting etc., which undermined the way information is diffused through traditional media. Although traditional marketing has proven its ability to generate sales and increase revenue and is perceived from a certain group of people that it is the only approach companies should use to market their products and services, taken into consideration the dynamic of social media it can be asserted that social media marketing is challenging traditional marketing methods.

More specifically, based on the results obtained from the online survey the majority of the participating Greek companies indicate that social media are considered as an important marketing tool for their businesses. Although a significant number of
organisations are still reluctant to integrate them into their marketing efforts, partly due to its fairly recent introduction into business world and skepticism surrounding its usefulness, a considerable number of those participants seem to welcome the idea of incorporating them into their marketing strategy in the near future. Only a small percentage of the participating companies are able to measure the performance metric of ROI and estimate the return of their investment. Social media usage seems set to expand in the coming years since nearly one third of the companies predicted that they would significantly increase the use of social media as the awareness of their power has grown and the benefits are more obvious. Moreover, almost half of the participating companies seem to follow a certain social media strategy, while among those who have a distinct budget for social media, spending was expected by the majority to possess up to 10% of their company’s turnover in the next five years.

Since the research was undertaken in Athens a further study in the Greek economy and a broader range of industries could be examined in order to produce a stronger validation of the findings. Additionally, it should be noted that the low number of respondents limits the generalisability of the findings, so repeating the same survey across a larger sample of companies would expand the usage of the research findings. Moreover, a longitudinal approach of this survey could be implemented in order to reveal the continuity of the situation, to measure any possible changes between the variables overtime and display causal relationships. Finally, an intriguing direction for future research could involve the area of mobile marketing which appears to gain momentum and attract the attention of marketers worldwide.

References


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