



Waterford Institute of Technology

“An empirical investigation of the use, integration, and performance of social media platforms in Irish SMEs.”

By

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ABSTRACT

Social media has transformed how organisations do business, as it now allows them to have real time communication with their customers. In recent study it highlighted that 62 per cent of SMEs use social media as both a communication and marketing tool (Prah, 2011). However, there are few studies, which help, in particular, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to develop appropriate strategies in an Irish context. Furthermore, as highlighted by Aral *et al.* (2013) businesses use social media features to promote themselves, to communicate with consumers and society, and to cocreate new features and add-ons that can contribute to the evolution of social media itself, but there is little investigation into how SME's use them in the promotion of their business.

The aim of this study is to explore the use, integration and performance of social media platforms by Irish SMEs. This study will explore the different classifications of social media, the features of social media platforms, the level to which SMEs use these features, the integration level SMEs have between their social media platforms and website, and the measurement tools SMEs use to rate their social media success. The research method will be based on an interpretivist, exploratory/explanatory and mixed methods approach which included semi-structured interviews with social media experts and representatives of SMEs, matrix analysis of SME social media profiles, and online/offline document analysis.

Key findings from the study illustrated that SMEs don't sufficiently integrate their social media platforms and website to maximise the benefits of social media. The study also shows that SME's suffer from a significant deficit in knowledge and skills with respect to using and integrating social media platforms and their features. Furthermore, it was evident that the majority of SMEs look at the insights to the social media platforms, however, don't have a framework, strategy or tool to look measure their performance in detail.

Therefore, the author believes that SMEs need to educate themselves more before using social media platforms, and continuously educate themselves with new up and coming features, as every year these platforms are developing their design and implementing more features. It is

now not good enough to just have social media widgets on an SME's website; therefore, the author proposes that each SME should at minimum have a live activity feed, widgets and social login. Furthermore, a performance measurement strategy should be implemented, allowing SMEs to see whether they are meeting their target audience and highlight downfalls in their current procedures.

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ETHICAL DECLARATION

I declare that this project is wholly my own work except where I have made explicit reference on the work of others. I have read the Structured Masters” Programmes Research Policy, Procedures and Guidelines and hereby declare that this dissertation is in line with these requirements. I have discussed, agreed and complied with whatever confidentiality or anonymity terms of reference were deemed appropriate by those participating in the research and dealt appropriately with any other ethical matters arising.

I have uploaded the entire project as one file to Turnitin in Moodle, examined my “Originality Report” by viewing the detail behind the overall “Similarity Index”, and have addressed any matches that exceed 3% when quotations and bibliography are excluded. I have made every effort to minimise my overall “Similarity Index” score and the number of matches occurring.

Catherine Ryan

Date

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SEO Search Engine Optimization

SME Small to Medium Enterprise

B2C Business-to-Consumer

B2B Business-to-Business

ROI Return on Investment

EU European Union

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the rationale for this study which is to investigate the key features of social media platforms adopted by Irish SMEs, the challenges posed by their integration, and how the overall effectiveness of their social media strategies is measured. Section 1.1 discusses the background to the research topic. Section 1.2 states the research objective and research questions. Section 1.3 outlines the method of the study. Section 1.4 states the research findings. Section 1.5 highlights the research recommendations. Section 1.6 mentions the research limitations and section 1.7 outlines structure of the research.

1.1 Research Background and Review of Literature

In the context of this study, the author has defined social media as “*a group of internet-based applications that allow organisations increased interaction, authorship and a platform to exchange user generated content with their customers*”. As a recent study by Amárach Research it highlighted that 60 per cent of Irish small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) believe that social media has contributed to their business growth (Rickard, 2015). Therefore, as marketing in SME’s relies heavily on word of mouth (Halligan *et al.*, 2009), social media marketing offers this tool on a virtual platform, which allows access to a wider customer base (Marketing Donut, 2011). However, there is a lack of understanding to how it actually benefits organisations, (Parveen, 2012) and more importantly its effectiveness for small to medium enterprises (SMEs).

Social media has various advantages to SMEs including empowering a superior comprehension of shopper needs (Ferneley *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b) while giving potential outcomes to quick and simple joint effort. The social connections assume dynamic parts in the internationalisation of firms, they serve as a powerful method for producing information about both the geographical and physical markets that the firm might be occupied (Prah, 2011). Furthermore, social media provides customers and organisations with a real time channel to communicate with each other (Healy, 2012). The popularity and use of social

media is increasing in Europe, as SMEs account for over 99 per cent of businesses within the European Union (EU)(Prah, 2011).

As highlighted by Aral *et al.* (2013) businesses use social media features to promote themselves, to communicate with consumers and society, and to cocreate new features and add-ons that can contribute to the evolution of social media itself, but there is little investigation into how SME's use them in the promotion of their business. Moreover, Rauschnabel (2012) highlights there is very little is known about how organisations should design their social media postings and how specific design features affect the overall effectiveness of these postings. Additionally, Demaria (2012) stated that organisations, but more specifically SMEs, needs to ensure that they integrate their social media platforms with their corporate website. With this integration it will increase their traffic to both platforms, but also rating on Google (Demaria, 2012). Moreover, McCann and Barlow (2015) highlighted that the measurement of social media is different compared to other online and face-to-face correspondences. Therefore, Etlinger (2011) outlines that appropriate strategy or framework needs to be implemented to undertake performance measurement.

1.2 Research Objective and Research Questions

The aim of this research study is to contribute to theory by expanding our knowledge of social media platform features and the integration between the platforms and corporate websites. The study will contribute to research by developing approach matrices for the analysis of social media platform use. In order to achieve these aims, the following research objective (RO) has been established:

“An empirical investigation of the adoption, integration, and implications of social media platforms in Irish SMEs.”

In order to address this research objective, the author established three primary research questions (RQs):

1. What social media platforms are SMEs using and how well integrated are they with SME websites?
2. Which social media platforms features are SMEs using and how intensively are they being used?
3. How do SMEs measure their social media performance?

1.3 Research Methodology

In order to satisfy the requirements of the research objective and research questions, an interpretivist, exploratory/explanatory, mixed method approach was implemented in the study. Therefore, case studies were deemed to be the most applicable, as it allowed an in depth understanding to why Irish SMEs use, integrate and measurement social media platforms. Consequently, the research design chosen is a holistic multiple case design. In order to achieve this seven semi-structured interviews were conducted, two with social media experts and five with Irish SMEs. Furthermore, in order to gain rich data a social media analysis was undertaken on each SME prior to their interview.

In order to undertake the social media analysis of each SME, two matrices were developed; one for ranking the website integration level and the intensity each SME uses the social media features. Once this was achieved the results were compared to a ranking scoring. Through this research it would allow the author to gain insight into the above questions and the findings from the literature reviews. The findings assisted in authenticating the current theory relating to this topic, and also introduced new information that is non-existent in the current literature available.

1.4 Research Findings

The research highlighted there is a lack of knowledge and skills in regard to social media platforms. SMEs have recognised this but due to financial and time restraints overcoming this issue is easier said than done. Furthermore, SMEs don't integrate their social media platforms

appropriate with their website, which in turn reduces their search engine optimisation (SEO) on Google.

Additionally, only one SME out of the five investigated used measurement software to measure their performance on the social media platforms. The majority of SMEs outlined that they did look at the insights on each social media platform, however, didn't have a strategy or framework in place to measure it in depth.

The majority of SMEs used the two big platforms: Facebook, Twitter. Then depending on industry and target audience other platforms including Blogs, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest were used. Not one company excelled in all social media platforms they implemented; however, two SMEs did show better knowledge and use.

1.5 Research Recommendations

The main recommendations that are proposed by the author is that SMEs should invest energy and time into undertaking market research in regards to both their target audience and each social media platform. This knowledge will stand as a vital component to their success on each social media platform.

In regards to future research, an investigation should be done into specific industries or target audiences, as from the primary research it highlighted that each industry and target audience would use different social media platform and features.

1.6 Research Limitations

The main limitation was time. Since, the study was undertaken over a short period of time the author was limited in the amount of case studies undertaken. Furthermore, some SMEs expressed concern in regards to confidentiality, which meant the author didn't gain access to the exact sample size. Finally, since the author has very little experience in regards to undertaking research, the analysis of the findings may have been different if undertaken by a experienced researcher.

1.7 Structure of the Research

The accompanying dissertation comprises of six chapters, each outlining specific points. Chapter one gives the foundation to the exploration, purposes behind undertaking the examination, perceives the points of targets and decides the structure of the dissertation.

Chapter two identifies the ideas related to the research topic: social media platform design and features, characteristics and dimensions of social media.

Chapter three demonstrates the effectiveness of Irish SMEs and measuring the success of SME's Social Media Performance.

Chapter four explores and looks at how the study was drawn nearer to accomplish the objective and outlines the limitations of the methods chosen.

Chapter five demonstrates the findings of the research that were recognized. The outcomes from the interviews will be addressed under exploration topics.

Chapter six considers the findings from the primary research, highlighting the similarities and differences between them.

Chapter seven contains a re-evaluation of the research findings and outlines recommendations for SMEs and future research

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Understanding Social Media Platforms

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will define social media. It will explain both the characteristics and dimensions of this ever changing environment. It will demonstrate the importance of utilising the different platform features and integrating these platforms with a website. The chapter commences by first defining what is meant by Social Media in the context of this study in Section 2.1. Section 2.2 discusses the various dimensions of social media. The characteristics of social media are highlighted in Section 2.3. Section 2.4 outlines social media platform design and the features of social media platforms are discussed in Section 2.5.

2.1 Definition of Social Media

It is clear from the literature, that there is a significant variation in how researchers, academics, and business personnel define social media. However, a review of these definitions indicates that there are two particular distinctions in how social media is applied, which typically focus on internal and external applications (Piskorski, 2011).

Firstly, organisations use social media for outside gatherings, these incorporate clients, merchants and the general population. Furthermore, organisations use social media with respect to internal parties (Piskorski, 2011). Interestingly, McAfee (2009) states that not at all like outer employments of social media crosswise over numerous open platforms, most associations execute an incorporated social media platform for internal correspondences, which contains a few capacities inserted in them, for example, web journals, wikis and different elements for social tagging and archive sharing (McAfee, 2009).

Kuhn's (2012), cited by Lachman (2013, p. 326), defines social media as a "generalized term for a group of online software tools that allow for increased interaction, authorship, and development of online content by any web user". Furthermore, Kaplan and Haenlein (2009, p. 61) state that social media "is 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."

In the context of this study, definitions by Kuhn (2012) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) are refined to define social media in the context of this study as “*a group of internet-based applications that allow organisations increased interaction, authorship and a platform to exchange user generated content with their customers*”.

2.2 Social Media Dimensions

According to Ali-Hassen *et al.* (2015), social media dimensions can be broken into three distinct categories: social use, hedonic use and cognitive use. Social Use is defined as using social media to build new social relations (i.e. making new friends), identify individuals with shared interests, and stay in touch with existing friends and acquaintances (Ali-Hassan and Nevo, 2015). Hedonic Use refers to using social media for fun (Brandtzæg and Heim, 2009), passing time (Quan-Haase and Young, 2010), relaxing and escaping (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2011) and entertainment (Shao, 2009). Cognitive Use of social media focuses on creating and sharing content and accessing content produced by other individuals (Ali-Hassan and Nevo, 2015) including sharing opinions, stories, ratings, debates, personal photos and videos (Leung, 2009; Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2011).

However, in Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classification of social media framework, the authors highlight that the classification is based on the concept of self-presentation and self-disclosure. Self-presentation states that in any type of social interaction people have the desire to control the impressions other people form of them (Goffman, 1959). On the one hand, this is done with the objective of influencing others to gain rewards. However, it is driven by a wish to create an image that is consistent with one's personal identity. Therefore, the key reason why people decide to create a personal webpage is the wish to present themselves in cyberspace (Schau and Gilly, 2003). Usually, such a presentation is done through self-disclosure; that is, the conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information that is consistent with the image one would like to give. Self-disclosure is a vital step in the building of close relationships but can also take place between complete strangers (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Consequently, the classification of social media is based on the degree of

self-disclosure it requires, and the type of self-presentation it allows. As illustrated in Table 2.2, the classification of social media is made up of six forms:

		Social presence/Media Richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self presentation/self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social Networking Sites	Virtual Social Worlds
	Low	Collaborative Projects	Content Communities	Virtual Game Worlds

Table 2.1 Classification of Social Media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010)

Collaborative projects are the least complex sort of social media. They permit every client to include, evacuate or change content based substance (Nikolova, 2012). It is trusted that all through the communitarian endeavors of various clients the data offered by that source of social media is turning out to be more solid (Thomas and Akdere, 2013). An example of a collaborative project is Wikipedia, a free, electronic, online reference book composed with the basic endeavors of volunteers and open by everybody with an Internet access (Nikolova, 2012).

Blogs are another delegate of social media. They let clients distribute and take an interest in a multithreaded discussions online (Weber, 2009). Blogs are critical for organisations as they can undoubtedly upgrade their notoriety if there should arise an occurrence of positive blogging and in the meantime devastate a decent notoriety with negative blogging (Scott, 2013).

Content communities give individuals the chance to share media content between each other (Young, 2015). Under media substance is implied the trading of recordings (You Tube), photographs (Flicker) or even PowerPoint presentations (SlideShare). Clients of content communities more often than not don't make a profile page, yet simply have an individual record with their later and general movement (Cellary, 2008). For organisations and substantial enterprises content communities are of an incredible resource as it can go about as a stage for sharing copyright materials (Kaplan, 2009).

Social Networking Sites connect individuals associate while trading individual data, photographs, recordings and even texts (Schauer, 2015). Individuals can likewise welcome companions to have access to this data. Facebook and Twitter are thought to be the most well known social networking sites. Organisations these days switch to Facebook in their endeavours to bond with the client (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009). Twitter is a free social network and micro blogging service that permits individuals to pursue and trade content based posts that are up to 140 characters. These posts are called "tweets" (Lim, 2010, p. 13).

Virtual game worlds present three dimensional situations where clients collaborate with each other appearing as symbols and encountering genuine circumstances (Nikolova, 2012). Virtual game worlds give the most abnormal amount of social nearness and media wealth (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009). Virtual social worlds marginally vary from the game worlds. They permit a client to pick their conduct and play like it's their own lives. Virtual social world clients show up as symbols and connect in a three-dimensional virtual environment, however at the same time, there are no guidelines for the conceivable associations, with the exception of essential physical laws, for example, gravity (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009).

2.3 Characteristics of Social Media

With the increasing number of online community participants, social media platforms have become a major medium explored by businesses, who find it the most effective way of getting closer to the customers and getting to know the customers (Managements Study Guide, 2013). Therefore, there are a number of important characteristics that set social media apart from any other sort of traditional media or online content (Inkling Media, 2015). However, many authors have different interpretation of social media characteristics, for example, Saxena (2013) highlights that the main characteristics are web space, web address, build profiles, connect with friends, upload content in real time, enable conversation and posts have time stamp. In contrast, Grace *et al.* (2014) states that interaction – two-way and proximity, self-image control – non-verbal and verbal, usage volition – behavioural control, risk – social and personal identity and other – resources, demographics and perceived value are the

characteristics of social media. As a result, the following characteristics of social media are the ones that are most prominent emerging from the review of literature.

Interactivity – Interactivity is as a combination of rich content, active intelligence and collaborative communications, creates a compelling user experience in business settings (Chou, 2014). Social media sites are virtual platforms for interactivity and information exchange (Perlmutter, 2008, cited by Smith, 2010), where issues are debated and defined (Park and Reber, 2008). Social media users collaborate in content creation are proactive in searching information, and value control in social media participation (Guillory and Sundar, 2008). Social media user interactivity is influenced by functionality (website features) and contingency (interdependence of responses) (Guillory and Sundar, 2008).

Platform Quality - Information quality refers to the provision of valuable data and information in the timely manner of content updates (Chou, 2014). System quality refers to the maintenance of a reliable and accessible functionality that helps customers to search and share information quickly and conveniently (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996, cited by Chou, 2014). Jang *et al.* (2008) suggest that both of these quality indicators influence commitment to social media platforms.

Knowledge Sharing Mechanism - A knowledge sharing mechanism facilitates knowledge transfer between people and is usually able to augment the value of knowledge through speeding up and expanding knowledge distribution (Chou, 2014). The links between intra-organisational members are able to create knowledge flow for exchanging specific concepts and understandings (Tsai, 2000). Davenport *et al.* (1998), cited by Chou (2014), suggest that organizations establish an internal knowledge market for creating and distributing knowledge in real and virtual interactive space.

2.4 Social Media Platform Design

According to Aral *et al.* (2013, p. 4) the “design of social media enables and constrains their use and, therefore, creates the socio-technical foundation on which the strategies,

management, and value derived from social media are built.” The interfaces, policies, and features that an organisation provides not only structure how customers interact, but also how third parties can provide add-on features and applications that extend a platform’s functionality (Aral *et al.*, 2013). People are spoiled for choice for when it comes to social media platforms, organisations don’t get second chance to impress customers (Andrew, 2015). That puts added pressure on web designers, especially when it comes to ease of use and intuitive design. Customers now expect things to "just work" and generally aren’t highly motivated to invest time to figure things out (Andrew, 2015). Therefore, according to Desmen (2003) organisations should follow the K.I.S.S. principle and "keep it simple, stupid". Sleek, intuitive design, layouts, and navigation that allow users to quickly accomplish their goals are important (Andrew, 2015).

Consequently, conforming to minimal design practices with little to no variation can lead you to a cookie-cutter design, doing little for your content (Moss, 2015). However, form should also serve function – if your business requires that you communicate the idea of offering lots of varied content, a overly simple design may not convey this (Andrew, 2015). Nevertheless, simple design and layouts are not popular without reason. Even a site with a lot of content should be as intuitive as possible in order to accommodate mobile and other users with limited resources (Desmen, 2015).

With users accessing websites and apps from a variety of platforms and multiple "screens", sometimes all at the same time, there’s absolutely no excuse for your digital creations not to function equally well across various devices, from smartphones to tablets to laptops or desktops and even smart TVs (Andrews, 2015). Therefore, ensuring that your customers can access their site from any device, at any time or location.

Furthermore, Cronin (2009) mentions that good designers treat text as content, while great designers treat text as user interface. While content is basically a huge block of text, user interface incorporates subtle variations of text colour, background, font-sizes and link presentation to make the content more accessible.

In addition, the importance of social media platform integration with corporate websites can't go unnoticed (Demaria, 2012). According to Demaria (2012), social media platforms assume a vital part in a firm's website's search engine optimisation (SEO), particularly after pursuit quality-based algorithmic upgrades like Panda and Penguin. Social signs have turned out to be progressively critical towards enhancing your website's look positioning. As a web entrepreneur, in any case, you have to remember that social media platforms are likewise an essential piece of your site's customer experience and maintenance. At the point when your site gives social media buttons, your clients need not leave your website to like or prescribe it (Cisnero, 2015). Consequently, Owyang, (2010) developed the Feature Attribute Benefits of Social Integration Matrix, see Table 2.4 below, whereby he explains the different features that should be integrated with an organisations website.

Feature	What it does	Benefits	Downsides	What no one tells you
Sharing Features	Allows users to share content from corporate websites to social networks	Free to deploy, as social networks offer features or Share this or Add this	Beyond sharing and simple analytics, there's limited functionality	It's scary to send traffic away –but it cause viral effects you didn't expect
Embeds and Widgets	Embed features on social networks (like Facebook Fan Reactions) on your corporate website	Breathes real social interaction to static corporate sites, showing real world customer interaction	Control over what's being said is limited.	If you don't integrate this with your look and feel and use default features your site will look amateur
Authentication	Login to a website using a social networking login; often through two clicks like Twitter connect.	Increase chances of interaction. Users hate filling out registration pages, so this allows them to "login" faster using their own login.	You have less ability to glean their email address, as they've logged in another route. In the long run, you'll have disparate data.	Social networks are really an identity play, by using this, they gain more control.
Cross Publishing from my site to social networks "Pollination"	Users can share information to specific friends in their social networks	Rapid sharing of content, and sometimes the ability for users to specifically select who they'll share to –this is beyond simple sharing features as activities and actions can quickly spread	Spreading information means more disparate instances of data, making it hard for brands to maintain control.	Careful. Don't allow for users to simply spam their friends with content, be selective.
Real time updates	Update websites in real time with social content on corporate sites.	Enable your website really be real time through updates in social networks in real time, and vice versa.	Not all content will be relevant, and excessive updates will become white noise.	Use this for key events, or important customer transactions

Social Personalisation	Serve up content based on users profile information and previous behaviour	Rather than subject customers to a generic user experience on your corporate website, customize the experience based on their social networking profile, increasing relevancy.	Create a series of specific content types is costly, as well as the engine to develop this.	Don't assume what a customer does in Twitter is relevant to your own product; one size does not fit all.
Social Context	Present real time information based on their friends behaviour,	Allow your users friends to increase relevancy by suggesting content and products to each other –increasing rate of action.	This is very complicated system to create, and requires a mindset to let go to gain more as users may say and recommend things you don't like.	Every company is a media company, and the smartest companies realize they are a marketplace.
Application Platform	A platform that offers third parties to create web based applications using the social networks APIs, access to data	Companies want to extend unique features onto social networks (like the most popular content on a corporate site) to increase interaction	Costs to developing these applications are high, you need specific developers that understand the ever changing nuances of these platforms	You'll need long term resources or budget to do this and your existing team may not have the skill set.

Table 2.2 Feature Attribute Benefits of Social Integration Matrix (Owyang, 2010)

2.5 Features of Social Media Platforms

The ways in which features enable and constrain user behaviour provide the building- blocks on which social processes and norms of interaction are built (Aral *et al.*, 2013). Organisations use social media features to promote themselves, to communicate with customers and to co-create new features and add-ons that can contribute to the evolution of social media itself (Aral *et al.*, 2013).

According to Dou *et al.* (2013), social media features can be divided into four main sections: communication features (chat, avatar interaction), collaboration and cocreation features (wikis, content editing, tagging), peer referral functions, and reputation building. However, as each individual social media platform is different the features designed on them can vary, the author has constructed table 2 to illustrate the different features of each platform.

	Collaborative Projects	Blogs	Content Communities	Social Networking Sites	Virtual Social Worlds	Virtual Game Worlds
Forum	X			X		
Event				X		
Group				X		
Blog		X		X		
Photos, Videos		X	X	X	X	X
Chat			X	X	X	X
Polls		X		X		
Wiki	X					

Table 2.3 Platform Comparison

2.5.1 Forum Feature

Forums are discussion boards where users can hold conversations about various topics (Social Networking Reviews, 2015). They provide the ability for users to quote other posts, thread the conversation posts, ability to subscribe to forums or posts, allows users to attach files to their posts and allows the use of HTML (use of different colours and fonts in posts) (Cronin, 2009).

2.5.2 Events Feature

Events could be a local gathering, an online event, or user's birthdays (Social Networking Reviews, 2015). Social media platforms provide the ability for users to create events and furthermore, they can be integrated with a calendar, allowing events to be public or private, members of the site to be invited, has a signup or RSVP system, fields like start and end date/time, location, description, number of attendees allowed, notation for guests and others, allows the creation of recurring/repeating events and integration with a mapping site (Social Networking Reviews, 2015).

2.5.3 Group Feature

Groups tend to be, not only public, but "invite only" (i.e. seen by the membership but you can only join if invited) and/or "private" (completely invisible on the site to all but those who are members) (Social Networking Reviews, 2015).

2.5.4 Blog Feature

A blog is a space for webpage executives or clients to expand on their encounters or different things that more often than not identify with the theme of sympathy toward the website (Stuart, 2009). The most valuable usefulness you may look for in blogs may be the capacity to use tags and classifications to arrange sites and make them simpler to search, spare draft duplicates of a blog before distributed, highlighting particular classifications or bloggers, permitting them to show up on the front page or some other conspicuous area, permitting clients to subscribe to particular site classifications and/or creators and permit make a site public or confine it to a specific subset of individuals (Social Networking Reviews, 2015).

2.5.5 Photos, Videos and Files

Being able to see other users through photos and videos of them and community activities is often a tool for strengthening the engagement with customers (Social Networking Reviews, 2015). Some users desire the ability to upload documents, programs, code, modules and other items that do not fall under the heading of video or photo (Stuart, 2009). Therefore, social media permits managers to set confinements for the size and kind of documents to be transferred, allows sorting of files that are transferred and have coordinated media players to permit all clients to get to the documents paying little respect to devices accessible all alone PCs (Social Networking Reviews, 2015).

2.5.6 Chat Feature

Some platforms offer real-time chat functionality integrated into your web site (Social Networks Review, 2015). This allows users to communicate directly with each other. However, this is often a premium feature, only available with higher level paid packages (Stuart, 2009).

2.5.7 Poll Feature

Polls allow administrators and members to receive the thoughts, opinions and preferences of other members by allowing a vote (Social Networks Reviews, 2015). The basic features on Polls create several possible answers to the question posed by the poll, allowing each member to only answer once (but may have the option to change his answer prior to the closing of the poll), a start and end date for the poll and the displaying of poll results to either the members or just to the poll creator (Social Networks Reviews, 2015).

2.5.8 Wiki Feature

A Wiki is a collaborative editing system whereby several users can collectively maintain documents (Social Networks Reviews, 2015). A Wiki is typically edited directly through a web browser without the need for any special programs, tools or add-ons and uses its own language for creating things like links (Cronin, 2009). Wikis are not currently common in social media platforms but might be useful for groups that wish to collaborate on projects (Social Networks Reviews, 2015).

2.6 Conclusion

Through the evolution of social media platforms it is important for organisations to understand the design and features of each platform before implementing them into social media plan, as the chosen platform must fit with the organisations strategy. Given the changing environment within social media, it is vital that the characteristics are taken into

consideration too. Therefore, organisations must ensure that they keep up with current trends with social media. Every year there are new trends coming into social media whether it is “buy” features, or where social networking sites put on more restrictions in regards to promoting your business on their platforms (King, 2015).

Furthermore, when a decision is made by an organisation to implement a social media service to accommodate for a set of interactions, the design of the service and the features it offer can have a great impact on the efficiency of that interaction and the overall individual and social experience (Tsikerdekis, 2012). Consequently, the understanding of the features and the design behind each social media platform is essential, as with this understanding organisations can get the most out of each individual social media platform, and in turn get engagement from their customers. The next chapter will outline more specifically how social media platform’s features have been implemented by SME’s.

Chapter 3

Literature Review: SMEs and Social Media Platforms

3.0 Introduction

This chapter highlights the importance of social media for SMEs and how they implement the features and design of specific social media platforms. Section 3.1 discusses the importance of social media to Irish businesses. Section 3.2 outlines examples of good practices of social media. Section 3.3 states the role of SMEs in the Irish economy. Section 3.4 explains the use of social media by Irish SMEs. Section 3.5 outlines how SME's implement social media features, and Section 3.6 considers how SME's measure the success of their social media performance.

3.1 Importance of Social Media to Irish Businesses

According to a report by the European Union (2013), social media within the EU, but more specifically Ireland, is continuously expanding and is here to stay, as Ireland has more than 1.9 million people connected to others by way of at least one form of social media platform (Epresence, 2015). Social media has the potential to offer additional information to organisations by allowing more efficient communication and collaboration within and across organisations and by creating new social connections (Epresence, 2015).

In recent years social media has gone from being a “nice to do” activity to an essential competitive tool (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009). Furthermore, Rickard (2015) highlighted those Irish businesses “can’t afford not to” as customers now want good customer service from organisations through social media platforms. Therefore, organisations must ensure that all posts are answered otherwise this could have serious implications on the organisation (Rickard, 2015). Potential customers expect news and information to be available and knowing this information has proven beneficial to Irish businesses (Epresence, 2015). It is important that the Irish organisations keep pace with trends in the global marketplace by utilizing social media platforms in the critical areas of reputation management and reaching out to potential customers (Epresence, 2015).

Furthermore, the evolution of social media has really transformed the way in which organisations does business and many organisations have taken it in their stride. Organisations now employ teams of people to monitor and engage in social media. Organisations like Paddy Power and McDonalds all spend thousands of Euros each year in social media campaigns. Consequently, one of the most recent memorable uses of social media practices in Ireland was by Tayto. Tayto utilized a nattily dressed crisp magnate named Mr Tayto (Adword Ventures, 2011). Through the Mr Tayto site and social media platforms, for example, Facebook and Twitter, the brand's famous nonentity has, to date, taken control of a general election, left on an across the nation chase to discover a spouse, and discharged his down to business life account, The Man Inside the Jacket (Adword Ventures, 2011). With 270,000 Facebook fans and more than 6,500 Twitter supporters, the shrewd fresh lord is making a bundle for his managers at Largo Foods (Independent, 2014). Tayto showcasing manager Alina Ui Chaollai said: "The Mr Tayto Facebook page is a crucial piece of our correspondences methodology. Connecting with our 275,000 Facebook fans is a need for us as it helps us to construct partiality for Tayto"(Independent, 2014).

3.2 SMEs and their Role in the Irish Economy

Much academic literature adopts the European Commission definition of an SME. Therefore, this definition states that SMEs employ fewer than 250 people (Gilmore *et al.*, 1999), and have an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million euro, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million euro (ISME, 2015).

According to the Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association (2015), estimates that there are approximately 200,000 SMEs in Ireland, the most recent official CSO figure relates to 2012, when there was over 185,500 active enterprises in Ireland and 99.7% of them were SMEs. The latest CSO Business Demography results for 2012 found that 68% of Irish private sector employees work for an SME. They account for 52% of total employment (ISME, 2015).

SME's in Ireland is regarded as an important contributor to sustainable economic and employment recovery (Lawless *et al.*, 2012), as their largely indigenous, employment-intensive nature has meant that post-2008 economic, financial and employment crisis has been particularly felt throughout this segment of the economy (Lawless *et al.*, 2012).

Furthermore, the capital structures, market and economic position of SME's have a disproportionate reliance on banks for their funding needs, as ninety-four per cent SME's finance is from financial institutions (InterTradeIreland, 2013). However, the majority of SMEs are unaware of the public schemes and funds that are available, through the complex nature of non-bank sources and the varied application routes making the use of these resources and services very difficult and often expensive (Lawless *et al.*, 2012). In addition, the majority of the funding schemes are focused on exporting SME's or companies trading in specific sectors, even with agencies highlighting they are open to all business sectors (ISME, 2015).

Andreosso –O'Callaghan and Lenihan (2006) stated that the Irish industrial policy has a focus on inward foreign direct investment (FDI) since the first comprehensive policy. Conversely, official policy has moved towards encouraging the role of domestic enterprise and national competitiveness in recent decades (Lawless *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, since the economy of Ireland is dominated by micro companies with low levels of turnover, employees and a domestic economy focus, however, since not all SMEs are moving towards growth mode there is a less emphasis on development capital (InterTradeIreland, 2013). Consequently, a lack of investment in a business ultimately damages that business and leads to represents a systematic and long term risk to the economy of Ireland (InterTradeIreland, 2013).

3.3 Social Media and Irish SMEs

A recent study conducted by Amárach Research on behalf of Virgin Media Business highlighted that 60 per cent of Irish SME's believe that social media has contributed to their business growth, even though organic reach on platforms has been reduced (Rickard, 2015).

Furthermore, the study highlighted that 62 per cent of SMEs have a social media account, with 55 per cent of this group operating a Facebook page (Rickard, 2015).

Moreover, IPSOS MRBI's Social Networking Quarterly review stated that 59 per cent of adults in Ireland had their own Facebook account, expressing the understanding of the importance of maintaining a social media presence is vital in order for organisations to meet their target market (Rickard, 2015). However, some Irish SMEs are not practicing what they preach, as 51 per cent of Dublin businesses surveyed mentioned that monitoring online reviews is important, but only 35 per cent actually are implementing this (McKenna, 2015).

Marketing is a crucial activity for the survival and success of any SME, as they have more marketing opportunities than ever (Bresciani and Eppler, 2010). As marketing in SME's relies heavily on word of mouth (Halligan *et al.*, 2009), social media marketing offers this tool on a virtual platform, which allows access to a wider customer base (Marketing Donut, 2011). SME's practitioners increasingly recognise that a business opportunity exists in effective social media adoption, to build and maintain issues of trust and commitment with key stakeholders in their network, such as customers, and to enhance and maintain quality in those networked relationships (Harris and Rae, 2010).

Barwise and Meehan (2010) however state that as an outcome of the ascent of social media there has been a movement of force towards the shopper, and that, as new mechanical instruments have engaged clients through client created content their desires have expanded as needs be. Advertisers must move to a more individual and consent situated engagement model which considers a more positive gathering in developing online groups (Godin, 1999; Brown *et al.*, 2007). Frequent contact with clients is essential as their post on social media that it supports your firm (Forbes, 2014). To stay aggressive in this new idea, firms need to participate in online talks, forums and podcasts while creating mindfulness and building associations with both new and loyal clients (Lim, 2010). Without social media a firm's inbound movement is obliged to individuals who definitely know their image or who are looking for certain keywords. To build movement on their social media platforms it is imperative to have quality content (Forbes, 2014).

Moreover, Rickard (2015) mentions that the main social media platforms implemented in Irish SMEs are Facebook at number one, LinkedIn at number two and Twitter taking third. Given that product promotion and reaching new customers are the two most prominent uses of social media representations and considering customer service was cited as the third most important use of social media, this explains the order in which the social media platforms are ranked (Rickard, 2015).

Additionally, not only is Ireland the European Headquarters for Facebook, LinkedIn and Google it also is the third highest in the EU for using social media in the workplace (Mckenna, 2015). Therefore, with the implication of social media in SME's they must ensure that the understanding of the design and features behind each social media platform (Cronin, 2009). Once this understanding is established SME's must choose the approach platforms that meet their overall goal and strategy (Social Networking Reviews, 2015).

3.4 SME's Implementation of Social Media Features

When it comes to the implementation of social media features each SME is unique, as each different platform offers different features. However, according to Gray (2013) no matter what platform SMEs are on they must ensure they implement the following features: listening, sharing and measuring. Listening is where an SME provides the tool at the top of their customer service funnels in order to engage customers at the very start (Gray, 2013). It is not efficient enough for an SME to spend their time and resources guessing when and where to engage. Instead, use social listening and lead scoring to learn exactly how to introduce social content to generate and nurture leads (Social Networking Reviews, 2015). Sharing is where a SME makes it as easy as possible for a user to share its content. Therefore, SMEs must ensure they don't bombard their users with irrelevant information and share content that will add value to their lives (Gray, 2013). Furthermore, SMEs are now seeing the next phase of sharing, in which brands ask for a response to enter a promotion (Karimi and Naghibi, 2015). Additionally, by adding the area of listening it allows SMEs to form a complete conversation with their customers and potential customers (Gray, 2013). Finally, if an SME is

participating in social media they must ensure that they track it, otherwise how will they know if it has been effective or not (Sulaiman *et al.*, 2015).

Digital Web Manager (2015) emphasis further those SMEs should ensure that by listening to their customers they will be able to build a community, as this is the most important benefit to them. Moreover, the popularity of social media has essentially forced search engines such as Google to include social signals into their Search Engine Rankings (SEO) algorithm. SMEs that engage in social media and link to their Web sites on their social media profiles, can expect to receive an increase in quality traffic (Digital Web Manager, 2015).

Even though there are many social media features available to SME in the promotion of their organisation, many authors believe that some social media features can be done without. For example, Gray (2013) highlighted that auto-follow and auto-message aren't very effective as they are very anti-social and offer too much of a wide audience for organisations to measure. Suamiman *et al.* (2015) outlined that social scraping feature available on social media platform requires too much time to achieve, therefore, the use of more legitimate and effective software is available. Cronin (2009) stated that every year social media platforms integrate new features into their platform design and SMEs then get easily distracted and forget about the traditional methods that they know are effective. Therefore, don't fall in love with every feature the new social technology offers. Instead, listen for opportunities to engage (Gray, 2013).

3.5 Measuring the success of SME's Social Media Performance

McCann and Barlow (2015) state that social media is not quite the same as customary method of face-to-face and online correspondence, and in this manner requires an alternate way to deal with measurement. The effect of customary online action can be measured utilising characterised quantitative measurements, social media creates an enormous measure of qualitative data which conventional measurements alone don't address or evaluate in money related terms (Stockdale *et al.*, 2012). In this manner, there is no single approach to quantify

the money related effect of social media thus return on investment (ROI) stays dubious (Divol *et al.*, 2012).

Social media is seen as a major player alongside other digital platforms, magazines and broadcast channels as an essential form of marketing for businesses (Rickard, 20215). Therefore, your social media ROI needs to meet your strategic goals (Mershon, 2011). Spending time thinking through an organisations vision and setting specific business objectives and strategies is extremely important (Mershon, 2011). Consequently, through measuring an SME organisation strategy is simply proof that their social media strategy is working (Rickard, 2015).

This was heightened by Etlinger (2011), as the author highlighted that once an SME has established their goals they must then think deeply about how you will measure whether you're achieving that goal. Furthermore, Hoffman and Fodor (2010) and Murdough (2009) state that regardless of the distinctive models structures, they all make them thing in like manner: they concur that unmistakably characterised objectives, destinations and measurements must be settled upon before an organisation's section into the social media field and that these ought to drive any choice on which social media platforms and logical devices an organisation ought to use to quantify and convey results. Consequently, McCann and Barlow (2015) developed the Measurement ROI of Social Media Framework, which is illustrated in figure 3.1.

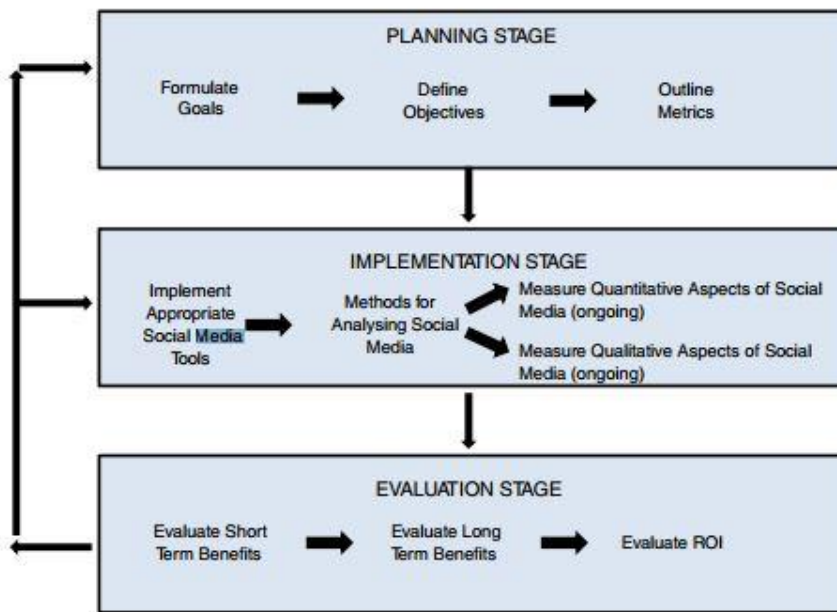
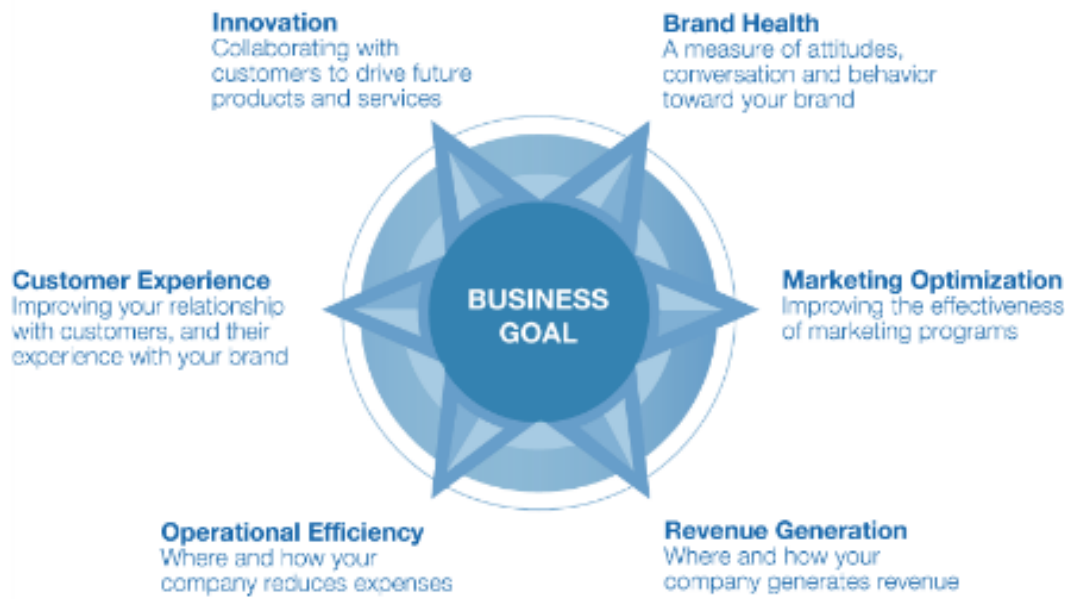


Figure 3.1 Measurement of ROI of Social Media Framework (McCann and Barlow, 2015)

The framework comprises of three principle stages: planning, implementation and evaluation. The planning stage should include setting objectives, characterizing goals and delineating appropriate measurements for measuring the effect of social media (McCann and Barlow, 2015). The second stage involves actualizing suitable social media instruments (contingent upon objectives, goals and measurements distinguished in past stage), executing strategies for breaking down social media (this may join particular diagnostic devices and/or communication and checking by particular work force) and progressing estimation of the quantitative and the subjective parts of social media (McCann and Barlow, 2015). The third stage is the assessment of both fleeting and long haul advantages and an evaluation of the more extended term ROI (McCann and Barlow, 2015). Murdough (2009) then again offers an social media estimation process life-cycle model which recognises the significance of articulating key objectives, targets and measurements before choosing which stages to utilize and influence to bolster goals. However, the author believes the framework developed by Etlinger (2011), is the most applicable to this study. The Social Media Measurement Compass framework explains the six use cases for social media and therefore measurement. As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the Social Media Measurement Compass is made up of six business goals:



Source: Altimeter Group

Figure 3.2 Social Media Measurement Compass (Etlinger 2011)

Furthermore, Hoffman and Fodor (2010) advise companies to pay attention to four key motivations – connections, creation, consumption and control. Therefore, through the considerations of Hoffman and Fodor (2010) and the model proposed by Etlinger (2011), the author believes that through this adoption an SME can see the benefits of both their social media performance in accordance with their business goals and strategy. Furthermore, the author proposes to incorporate elements of this model, especially operational efficiency, customer experience and brand health, with her social media platform analysis matrix. The above elements were chosen as these are seen to be the most beneficial elements to an organisation, since the evolution of social media, but also these are the main elements that customers look for (Ryan, 2015).

3.6 Conclusion

SMEs represent 99 per cent of the business population in Europe and with 62 per cent of them engaging in social media, it is important to understand why and how they use their social media platforms (Prah, 2011). SMEs use social media to engage with their customers and gain access to potential customers. Consequently, SMEs need to understand the different features

of the social media platforms, however, due their complexity SMEs are finding this difficult. With customers looking for more behind the scenes from SMEs and more engagement, SMEs must integrate their social media platforms with their website, measure their performance levels and know exactly social media platforms to us. However, currently there is a lack of rich literature in the regards of Irish SMEs specifically, and with each social media platform regularly introducing new features and modifying its design, it hard for SMEs to keep up to date with them all (Aral *et al.*, 2013) Therefore, the following chapter will emphasise how this study was done in order to overcome this research gap, describe the research design and also highlight the limitations that occurred.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter describes and justifies the research methodology for the study. Section 4.1 defines the research objective and describes the research questions. Section 4.2 highlights the research philosophy behind the study. Section 4.3 discusses the research design. Section 4.4 describes the research strategy, whereby it justifies the selection of a case study technique as the primary research method and the data collection methods used. The limitations of the research method adopted are discussed in sections 4.5. Finally, section 4.6 provides a synopsis of the key aspects of the research methodology.

4.1 Research Objective and Research Questions

Brannick and Roche (1997) highlight that the creation of a principle research objective clarifies ones assertion of the overall research gap by stressing the authors recognition of the need for a research contribution to be made. Therefore, the objective of this study is formally stated as:

“An empirical investigation of the use , integration, and performance of social media platforms in Irish SMEs.”

Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that developing research questions is a valuable defence against the confusion and overload that is possible in the early stages of research, and projects the specifics of the researcher’s interest in the phenomena. The extent to which the researcher can produce clear conclusions drawn from the data collected is determined largely by the clarity of the initial research questions (Saunders *et al.*, 1997). Therefore, in order to address the research objective, the following three research questions have been formulated:

RQ1. What social media platforms are SMEs using and how well integrated are they with SME websites?

A review of the literature highlights that social media platforms are very important to the success of SMEs and through proper integration with their corporate website, customers can see social proof and can see the day to day happens of that organisation (Cisnero, 2015). Furthermore, Aral *et al.* (2013, p. 4) highlight that without an understanding of each social media platforms design, organisations will find it difficult to implement successful strategies.

RQ2. Which social media platforms features are SMEs using and how intensively are they being used?

According to Dou *et al.* (2013), social media features can be divided up into four main sections: communication features (chat, avatar interaction), collaboration and co-creation features (wikis, content editing, tagging), peer referral functions, and reputation building. It is how each SME uses the different features and which social media platform they use, that will determine their success. Furthermore, Gray (2013) highlights that no matter what social media platform is adopted, SMEs must ensure that they listen, share and measure.

RQ3. How do SMEs measure their social media performance?

The literature emphasises that it is vital that SMES measure their performance on social media platforms. However, robust measures of performance are lacking in social media literature (Divol *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, each SME may use a different framework to measure performance or some may not use one at all.

4.2 Research Philosophy

In order for the researcher to appropriately determine the most applicable research method, they must first understand the research philosophy behind each method. Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that the research philosophy can be classified into three distinct categories: positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory. However, since critical theory places a strong emphasis on values and the liberation of the individual, instead of the description and

understanding (Walsham, 1993), the author deemed it not suitable for this study. Therefore, the following section will focus on a discussion of positivism and interpretivism.

4.2.1 Positivism

According to Bilton *et al.* (1996) the essential presumption behind this paradigm is that social reality is autonomous and the examination of this reality won't influence it. The objective is to find hypotheses, in light of the exact exploration led through trials and perceptions. Researchers that direct their studies under this paradigm are utilizing speculations to clarify or foresee wonders happening in reality. In this way, researchers are utilizing coherent thinking and realities to clarify the wonders that are being studied (Hussey, 2009).

The positivist paradigm is connected with quantitative strategies for examination; since this paradigm accepts that the data under study can be measured (Sobh and Perry, 2005). There are a couple of reactions with respect to this paradigm (Collis and Hussey, 2009). These reactions include:

- It is difficult to separate individuals from the social connections in which they exist
- People can't be comprehended without inspecting the recognitions they have of their own exercises
- A exceptionally organised research plan forces limitations on the outcomes and may disregard other pertinent discoveries
- Researchers are not objective, but rather part of what they watch. They convey their own advantages and values to the examination
- Capturing complex marvels in a solitary measure is deceiving (for instance it is unrealistic to catch a person's knowledge by doling out numerical qualities)

4.2.2 Interpretivism

This paradigm was developed in response to the criticisms brought to the positivist paradigm. Interpretivism presumes that reality is socially constructed by the individuals acting in it (Sobh and Perry, 2005). The researcher cannot separate himself from the reality and therefore interacts with what is being researched (Walsham, 1993). Interpretivism focuses on explaining phenomena, not measuring it as it is in the positivist case (Tushnet, 1983). A summary of both paradigms compared through these assumptions is presented in Table 4.1.

Positivism	Interpretivism
Reality is objective and singular, separate from the researcher	Reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by the participants
Researcher is independent from what is being researched	Researcher interacts with what is being researched
Research is value free and unbiased	Researcher acknowledges that research is value-leaden and biases are present
Researcher writes in a formal style and uses the passive voice, accepted quantitative words and set definitions	Researcher writes in an informal style and uses the personal voice, accepted qualitative terms and limited definitions
Process is deductive.	Process is inductive
Study of cause and effect with a static design (categories are isolated beforehand).	Study of mutual simultaneous shaping of factors with an emerging design (categories are identified during the process)
Generalisations lead to prediction, explanation and understanding	Patterns and/or theories are developed for understanding
Results are accurate and reliable through validity and reliability	Findings are accurate and reliable through verification
Research is context free	Research is context bound

Table 4.1 Assumptions of the Main Paradigm (Creswell, 1994 p. 5 and 1998 p 75)

Consequently, taking into account the above criteria, the overall research philosophy that was completed inside this exploration study is interpretivism. Bryman and Bell (2015) state that interpretivism is worried with the vehement comprehension of human activity. This logic advocates that it is imperative for the analyst to understand the distinctions that exist between people in our part as social performers. Saunders *et al.* (2012) concurring with Bryman and

Bell (2015) stresses the significance for the researcher to receive an unequivocal position in this specific research philosophy.

Thus, a positivist methodology is considered wrong for this research study as it is worried with one target reality. Rather, the interpretivist holds reality is one of a kind to every individual contingent upon their own arrangement of circumstances and contrasting backgrounds (Quinlan, 2011). It is then further specified by Quinlan (2011, p. 105) inside the framework of interpretivism the examination undertaking "will explore the thoughts, feelings and beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation."

4.3 Research Design

The research design contains the arrangement for the "collection, measurement and analysis of data" that will empower the researcher to fathom the research questions and objectives (Blumberg et al. 2008, cited by Jatto, 2014). This section will discuss qualitative and quantitative research methods and outline the differences between the research design categories.

4.3.1 Research Design Categories

According to Domegan and Flemming (2007), there are three classifications under research design: exploratory, descriptive and causal. Exploratory research is executed when the subject is new, there is a restricted measure of data accessible at this point, or the theme has not yet been scrutinised (Neuman, 2011). Descriptive research is organised, exceptionally scientific and greatly formal (Domegan and Flemming, 2007). Causal examination is the place theory is tried by means of investigations and cause-effect connections among the variables (Domegan and Flemming, 2007)

Furthermore, Marshall and Rossman (1989) agree with Domegan and Flemming (2007) and added that there is a fourth classification: predictive. Their framework for evaluating research methodologies in the context of the state of existing research is illustrated in Table 4.2.

Purpose of the Research	Research Question	Research Strategy	Examples of Data Collection Techniques
<u>Exploratory</u> To investigate little understood phenomena. To identify/discover important variables to generate hypotheses for further research.	What is happening in this social program? What are the themes and patterns in participants meaning structures? How are these patterns linked?	Case Study Field Study	Participant-observation In-depth interviewing Elite interviewing
<u>Explanatory</u> To explain the forces causing the phenomenon in question. To identify plausible causal networks shaping the phenomenon.	What events, beliefs, attitudes, and policies are shaping this phenomenon? How do these forces interact?	Field Study Case Study Ethnography	Participant-observation In-depth interviewing Document analysis Unobtrusive measures Survey questionnaire
<u>Descriptive</u> To document the phenomenon of interest	What are the salient behaviours, events, beliefs, attitudes and processes occurring in this phenomenon?	Field Study Case Study Ethnography	Participant-observation In-depth interviewing Document analysis Unobtrusive measures Survey questionnaire
<u>Predictive</u> To predict the outcomes of the phenomenon. To forecast the events and behaviours resulting from the phenomenon.	What will occur as a result of this phenomenon? Who will be effected and how?	Experiment Quasi-Experiment	Survey Questionnaire (Large Sample) Kinetics/Proxemics Content Analysis

Table 4.2 Matching the Research Purpose with Research Approach (Marshall and Rossman, 1989)

Consequently, based on Marshall and Rossman (1989) framework, the author believes that in order to fully understand why SMEs use certain features over others, how they integrate them with their corporate websites, and to measure their performance, a significant level of richness and depth of understanding is required for which an exploratory/explanatory research design approach is most appropriate.

4.3.1 Methodological Debate: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods

Burns and Grove (2003, p.19) state that qualitative research is “a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and situations to give them meaning”. Moreover,

qualitative research is a kind of exploration that covers various philosophical introductions and methodologies, as "qualitative researchers are occupied with seeing how individuals translate their encounters, how they build their universes, and what meaning they ascribe to their encounters" (Merriam, 2009, p 5). Furthermore, qualitative research provides a rich and valuable description of a broader environmental spectrum of interest (Marshall and Rossman, 1989).

According to Bless *et al.* (2006, p.37), quantitative research relies on "measurement to compare and analyse different variables". This information usually takes the form of numeric data which is then subjected to statistical analysis which attempts to show that the world can be studied in terms of one reality, which when isolated in context can be measured and understood (Gay and Airasian, 1999).

Mixed methods research has been characterised as an insightfully supported model of request consolidating subjective and quantitative models of examination with the goal that confirmation might be blended and information is expanded in a more important way than either model could accomplish alone (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). In addition, Rocco *et al.* (2003) states that the researcher is stronger when it mixes research paradigms, because a fuller understanding of human phenomena is gained. Therefore, a mixed methods approach was chosen for this study as it allow for generation of rich data in relation to the relatively unexplored area of features and design of social media platforms, and then to expand this knowledge with added benefits in SMEs integration and their performance.

4.4 Research Strategy

Wright and Crimp (2000) states the selecting of the research strategy is a vital part in the research process. Firstly, an understanding about social media platforms design and the features must be achieved (Aral *et al.*, 2013). Secondly, the use, integration and performance of platforms and features by SMEs must be addressed. . Therefore, in section 3.4 a detailed description of the proposed research strategy will be discussed. Consequently, this section

will discuss the chosen research method of multiple case studies, outline the data collection methods and describe the technique for interpreting all the findings.

4.4.1 Case Studies

Stake (1995) depicted case study methodology as a strategy of request in which the analyst investigates in-depth a project, occasion, movement, procedure or one or more people. Cases are limited by time and action, and researchers gather detailed data utilizing an assortment of information accumulation methods over a managed timeframe (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Moreover, case study research exceeds expectations at bringing a comprehension of a mind boggling issue or question and can stretch out experience or add quality to what is now known through past examination (Rowley, 2002).

Furthermore, Yin (1984) defines the case study research method “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1984, p. 23). Therefore, Yin (2009) named five components of effective case study research design: (1) research questions; (2) propositions or purpose of study; (3) unit analysis; (4) logic that links data to propositions; and (5) criteria for interpreting findings.


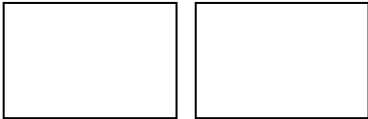
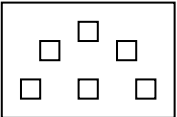
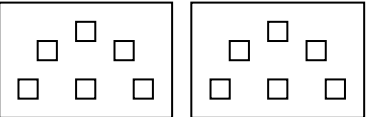
	Single Case Designs	Multiple Case Designs
Holistic (Single unit of analysis)	TYPE 1 	TYPE 3 
Embedded (Multiple units of analysis)	TYPE 2 	TYPE 4 

Table 4.3 Basic Types of Case Study Design (Yin, 1989)

Therefore, after determining the five components it is applicable to outline the case study design that was implemented. As summarised in Table 4.3 case study designs can be categorised along two dimensions, reflecting whether the number of case studies contributing to the design, and the number of units in each case study respectively (Rowley, 2002).. A single case design is akin to a single experiment (Baxter and Jack, 2008) and are fitting when the case is extraordinary (in connection to set up hypothesis) for reasons unknown (Rowley, 2002). This may emerge when the case gives a basic test to an entrenched hypothesis, or where the case is great, interesting, or has something unique to uncover (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Nonetheless, the more cases that can be marshalled to set up or invalidate a hypothesis, the more powerful are the examination results (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

In addition, case studies can likewise be separated into holistic or embedded studies. Holistic case studies inspect the case as one unit (Rowley, 2002). They may, for instance, concentrate on expansive issues of authoritative society or procedure. This methodology guarantees a helicopter perspective of the case, however can be shallow, and may miss changes in the unit of investigation that could affect on the fittingness of the first research outline (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Embedded studies recognise various sub units, (for example, gatherings, parts or areas) each of which is investigated exclusively; comes about because of these units are attracted together to yield a general picture (Yin, 2009). Be that as it may, the greatest test with embedded studies lies in accomplishing an all encompassing point of view from the investigation of the sub-units.

Therefore, Scholz and Tietje (2002) description of the dimensions and classifications which can be adopted when choosing use case studies to build theory adapted in Table 3, the research method selected by the researcher for this study is a Type 3 holistic multiple case design consisting of six case studies. Additionally, through the use of this approach it will allow the author to address the research questions in order to reveal greater insights into social media platform use, performance and integration in Irish SMEs.

Dimensions and Classification of Case Studies		
Dimensions	Classifications	Classification Adopted
Design	Holistic or embedded Single case or multiple case	Holistic Multiple Case
Motivation	Intrinsic or instrumental	Intrinsic
Epistemological Status	Exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory	Exploratory
Purpose	Research, teaching, or action/application	Research
Data	Quantitative or qualitative	Mixed
Format	Highly structured, short vignettes, unstructured, ground breaking	Structured

Table 4.4 Case Study Dimensions and Classifications (Adapted from Scholz and Tietje (2002))

Furthermore, Table 4 establishes the key requirements for this study in order to attain the research objective and answer the research questions, and underlines the suitability of case study analysis for this study. This then informs the selection of participants and the sample chosen, which will be discussed in section 4.2.2.1

Requirements of the Study	Case Study Characteristics
The study seeks to identify the role of social media platforms features to SMEs.	The case study approach is particularly suited to social media research, as the object of the field is the study of social media platforms in SMEs, and interest has shifted to organisational rather than technical issues. (Pettigrew, 1985; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994)
The study aims to identify the intensity use of the different social media platforms. The study seeks to identify how the SMEs integrate these features with their corporate websites.	The strength of the case study is that it enables the capture of reality in more significant detail and permits the analysis of a greater number of variables than is possible with any other research method (Galliers and Sutherland, 1991).
The study aims to address the lack of research into how to undertake a social media platform analysis, with a specific focus on intensity of feature use.	The case study approach is appropriate because it enables the researcher to explore an area in which few previous studies have been carried out. (Benbasat <i>et al.</i> , 1987)
The researcher requires firsthand experience of social media platforms in action and the context in which they are implemented in multiple SMEs.	The case study approach provides context within which exploratory research can be conducted, and it is an appropriate strategy where a contemporary phenomenon is to be studied in its natural context and the focus is on

The researcher must investigate the phenomena within their real context, and must gain an understanding of the contextual environment in which the negative effects of social media platforms are experienced.	understanding the dynamics present. (Benbasat <i>et al.</i> , 1987; Myers, 1998)
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Table 4.5 The Suitability of a Case Study for the Requirements of the Study

4.4.2 Case Study Data Collection Techniques

This section will outline the case study data collection techniques adopted for this study. It will look at the data collection methods of: interviews and social media platform analysis, and the proposed data analysis technique.

4.4.2.1 Participants and Sampling

With the assistance of XYZ Company (pseudonym), the researcher contacted ten organisations who had contracted XYZ Company to help them grow their business. An initial letter of correspondence (refer to Appendix B) was posted to the owner of each SME, outlining the objective of the research and the level of cooperation required from each SME should they choose to participate in this particular study.

As previously mentioned the data collection methods for this study is focused on a social media analysis and interview responses from both experts and SMEs in the area of social media marketing. Therefore, through the use of the above table, seven interviews will be undertaken, two with experts and six with SMEs, with details of each interview illustrated in table 5. The researcher received a reply from ten organisations, of which eight expressed an interest in being involved in the study.

Company	Industry	Interviewee	Role	Length	Date Interviewed
Heartwise	Health	DJ O'Dwyer	Owner	27 mins	05/08/2016
Blanco Nino	Food	Philip Martin	Owner	15 mins	10/08/2016
Nut Shed	Food	Evie Ward	Owner	17 mins	10/08/2016
Sue Anne Life Coach	Health	Sue Anne O'Donnell	Owner	39 mins	14/07/2016
The Cliff House Hotel	Hospitality	Sara Dolan	Digital Marketing Executive	30 mins	05/08/2016

Table 4.6 Details of Company Interviews

4.4.2.1 Pilot Testing

The aim of a pilot test is to enhance the questions to watch that respondents comprehend them, to check the questions quality and that dependable information will be gathered (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Birn (2000) recommends that a pilot must be done on veritable target respondents and that most disappointments in market research happen as a consequence of poor piloting. A pilot test was carried out over a two week period, with each respondent guide being sent to various experts for feedback. Once feedback was obtained the questions were modified accordingly. Furthermore, the author undertook interviews with each expert to gain their views on how SMEs should use social media platforms.

Company	Industry	Interviewee	Role	Length	Date Interviewed
Tipperary Local Enterprise	Enterprise	Barry Ryan	Enterprise Executive	35 mins	11/07/2016
Shadow Marketing/Tucar	Marketing	Justin Kearns	Owner	26 mins	13/07/2016

Table4. 7 Details of Expert Interviews

4.4.2.2 Interviews

An interview is one of the most important sources of case study information (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, an interview is a conversation between two or more individuals where the narrative of a subject is built in an open community way (Seidman, 2012). Whilst interviews can give rich information on every member's convictions and learning, the level of point of interest can be fairly convenient to interpret (Bryman, 2001). Additionally, interviews can be formal and structured utilising an arrangement of questions that relate back to the research objective (Yin, 2009). The two most regular interviews completed are structured and unstructured interviews, which can permit a profound dialog of individual or gatherings conclusions of point/subjects (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Furthermore, semi structured interviews enable the author to adopt a progressive approach to questions or particular subjects and themes they need to talk about with the participant (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Whilst undertaking this technique, the author does not have to follow

the order of questions, once the discussion streams coherently (Yin, 2009). Questions that are not recorded may likewise be solicited on the day from the interview as the participant may specify something fascinating and as an outcome the discussion can give the author additional information (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Therefore, this study adopts semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, with a more stringent and reliable arrangement of questions. Notwithstanding, the nature of the expected interviews will be determined through an open and adaptable way, which permits the interviewee to increase rich contextual insights from the interviewees.

4.4.2.2.3 *Interview procedures*

Each of the seven interviews was completed in precisely the same way. All members were firstly advised about the motivation behind the study and made mindful of the sorts of questions being inquired. Subsequently, every member was asked to sign a consent form (see appendix E) to permit the researcher to utilize their recordings. Following this, the recording of each of the interview partook (see appendix C and D for respondent guides). These recordings were later transcribed into a Word document and from there manipulated using cross-column analysis and thematical coding. The procedures for coding and sorting out the accompanying themes follows the methods illustrated by Loshin (2010) and Marschan-Piekkari and Welch (2004) who contend that the generations of themes requires continuous referral back to the information and cross checking of the researchers assumptions. The data was coded from seven semi-structured interviews, where each question responses were sketched out into tables. The researcher assembled different ideas together around the research questions. These then were assembled into topics. Key subjects will then additionally be acquired from the investigation of the interviewees feeling and viewpoints. The most widely recognised events of sentiments were coded and afterward were appropriated into the pertinent topics that addressed that particular research question. The level of importance to the inquiry will likewise be noted (Loshin, 2010)

4.4.3 Social Media Platform Analyses

Unobtrusive methods are ways of collecting data that do not interfere in the ongoing flow of everyday events (Marshall and Rossman, 2010). In the context of this study, social media platform analysis is considered to be a form of unobtrusive data collection, which is used to compare and contrast with data collected from interviews, to add to the richness of the case studies. This analysis allows the author to get a more in-depth understanding of the use, integration and performance of the different features have on SMEs, but furthermore it allowed the author to capture richer data then with only interviews. In order to undertake the analysis the author developed matrices by reflecting on the matrices of Kininmonth (2000) and Owyang (2010). In total two matrices are used in the analysis of the social media platforms used by participants. Features Usage Matrix, illustrated in Table 6, will show the intensity to which the SME uses the features on their social media platforms.

	Social Networking Sites						Content Communities		Blogs
	Twitter	Facebook	LinkedIn	Pinterest	Instagram	Snapchat	YouTube	Slide Share	
Basic Features									
Events									
Group									
Reach									
Page Fans									
Admin Posts									
Fan Posts									
Comments									
Likes									
Engagement									
Responsiveness									
Share of Voice									
Content Analysis									
Status									
Link									
Photo									
Videos									
Endorsement									
Total									

Table4. 8 Features Usage Matrix

Furthermore, the following table illustrates the ranking and heat map which will be used throughout this analysis, to show the intensity to which the organisation uses each different feature. A heat map is a graphical representation of data where the individual values contained in a matrix are represented as colours (Zhao *et al.*, 2014). Heat maps helps get an instant feel for an area by grouping places into categories and displaying their density visually (Zhao *et al.*, 2014). The darker the colour is, the higher the density is.

<i>Effectiveness</i>				
Intensity used	Shading	Excellent	Average	Bad
High degree		20	10	4
Moderate degree		15	7.5	3
Low degree		10	5	2
Not currently		5	2.5	1
Not at all		0	0	0

Table4. 9 Values Attributable to Assessment Criteria (Adopted from Kininmonth (2000)).

The following matrix (table 4.9) will be used to analysis the integration level an SME has between its social media platforms and its corporate website. In addition, table 4.10 and 4.11 illustrates the ranking scale to the intensity of website integration matrix, and explains the meanings to the different ranking levels.

	Social Buttons*	Social Share	Social Login	Social Video	Social Proof	Activity Feed	Authorship	Social Commenting	Total
Sue Anne O” Donnell Life Coaching									
Heartwise									
The Cliff House Hotel									
NutShed									
Blanco Nino									

Table4. 10 Intensity of Website Integration

*social buttons intensity was based on position of the buttons i.e. top, bottom or along the side

<i>Weighting</i>				
Intensity used	Shading	Essential	Important	Desirable
High degree		20	10	4
Moderate degree		15	7.5	3
Low degree		10	5	2
Not currently		5	2.5	1
Not at all		0	0	0

Table 4. 11 Values Attributable to Assessment Criteria (Adopted from Kininmonth (2000))

Scoring	Sophistication	Example	Benefit	Challenge
0-5	1) Do nothing, no social integration	Corporate websites that have no integration with social tools at all.	Cheap. Ignorance is bliss, at least in the short term	Your corporate website is irrelevant.
6-25	2) Link directly away without a strategy	Corporate homepages that have widgets that say “Follow us on Twitter/Facebook/YouTube” sending traffic away, see share this, add this and tweet me	Encourages growth of social channels	Sending traffic away, without having a strategy
26-45	3) Link away, but encourage them to share with a pre-populated message	A widget that encourages new Twitter followers to Tweet at their friends “I’m now following X brand”	Triggers a social alert as a form of endorsement	Better than the above, it may not have a follow up or call to action
46-75	4) Brand experience is integrated in social channels	Extending the brand to social channels, so the corporate experience is somewhat mirrored on social channels	Regardless of wherever users go, they are still experiencing the brand	Social channels sometimes serve better as a conversational area –not for traditional branding campaigns
76-95	5) Aggregating the discussion on your site	Aggregating select conversations from Tweets like the skittles homepage did, top discussions in communities or blogs.	Centralizes the discussion on your site, making it a resource to first look at. Low cost content	Lack of control over which content can be created, still links off site
96-125	6) Social login systems that allow users to stay on site	Using FB connect, or Twitter connect allow users to use their existing logins to access site.	May increase sign ups, widening marketing funnel, chances are content is more accurate than a sign up form	May not have access to email addresses, as users pass through using social logins.
126-145	7) Social login systems that allow users to stay on site, but triggers viral loop	In addition to the above, there’s an actual social or interactive experience on the corporate site that triggers them to share with their friends	Users stay on site, interact with brand or peers, yet recruit other members in social networks	Requires planning, a campaign, and extensive resources.
146-160	8. Complete integration between corporate site and social sites	Other than URLs there’s no difference between a corporate site and a social site, the experiences are seamless	Customers, prospects, and employees mix together, churning on new members and viral activity	It doesn’t exist, yet.

Table4. 12 Explanation of Ranking Scale for Website Integration (Owyang, 2010)

4.5 Resources and Limitations

This study was completed by one researcher over a four month time span (May-September 2016). Considering this, the study is restricted as far as the extension and profundity of the expected examination. To finish this study, the researcher recorded seven individual interviews. The interpretation and examination of this information was entirely convenient and in this manner implied that more interviews couldn't be done. Adding to this, a few organisations who were initially interested couldn't focus on cooperation because of interior promoting approaches and other work duties.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research method employed by this study. The objective of this study is to investigate the adoption, integration and implications of social media platforms in Irish SMEs. The research questions of this study are outlined and described. The interpretive paradigm was discussed and chosen as the most applicable for the study. The study was determined to employ a mixed method approach and be exploratory/explanatory in nature. Case studies research strategy and multiple data collection techniques are adopted for this study, including interviews and unobtrusive methods. Finally, the limitations of the research were outlined and described. Chapter five will show the findings from primary research, where the coded information from the interviews will be introduced through recognised themes.

Chapter Five

Research Findings

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the research findings of the study. The chapter is presented as six major sections, a section for each of the five companies involved in this study, and a section focusing on social media expert opinion. The five company focused sections are structured in a similar manner, each consisting of six subsections: an outline the company background; social media analysis; social media platform and features; website integration and measurement; and a summary. The social media analyses uses the matrix analysis techniques as outlined in Section 4.4.3 in Chapter 4. This chapter concludes with a summary of the overall findings of the research study.

5.1 Company A

Company A was launched in 1998. They are based in the South East of Ireland, but more specifically in Fethard, Co. Tipperary. They provides Life Coaching, Professional and Personal Development, for one to one and group sessions, and also designs and delivers RSE workshops for primary school students. Furthermore, Company A works in conjunction with the Student Enterprise Awards of Ireland also, with the focus being the Tipperary Student Enterprise Awards.

5.1.2 Social Media Analysis

	Social Networking Sites				Blogs
	Twitter	Facebook	LinkedIn	Instagram	
Basic Features					
Events	0	7.5	1	0	0
Group	0	1	1	0	0
Reach					
Page Fans	7.5	7.5	20	15	20
Admin Posts	10	10	3	20	20
Fan Posts	2	7.5	0	2	7.5
Comments	10	7.5	7.5	10	10
Likes	10	7.5	7.5	5	7.5
Engagement	5	10	20	5	10
Responsiveness	20	20	20	20	15
Share of Voice	10	10	7.5	10	10
Content Analysis					
Status	7.5	20	7.5	20	10
Link	20	20	20	7.5	1
Photo	20	20	1	10	2

Videos	10	7.5	1	10	1
Endorsement	20	20	10	20	1
Total	152	180	119.5	154.5	115

Table 5.1 Company A's Social Media Analysis

Company A utilised two of the classifications proposed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) social networking sites and blogs. The social media that came out on top was social networking sites. Facebook and Instagram were their two most effective social networking sites, as illustrated in table 5.1, Facebook obtained 180 grading, while Instagram obtained 154.5 grading. However, closely behind was Twitter with 152. The analysis of their Facebook accounts, it illustrated that they had high engagement and responsiveness to their customers, and that the content in which they shared with their customers was at high intensity and at a high standard. Furthermore, they utilises four out of the five content analysis features at excellent high intensity, which therefore transfers over into the high scoring in engagement and responsiveness. Their use of photos, with nearly every post, links across the different social media platforms and the diversity in their status, highlights the grading on their content analysis

However, it did highlight that their share of voice demonstrated low intensity, but very effective. Company A's Instagram and Twitter ranked closely between the different categories of features. In fan posts, likes, comments and engagement ranked as low intensity and a mixture between excellent too bad. However, they do post regularly but the conversation rate overall from their followers doesn't highlight this. On the other hand, Twitter did rank better on content analysis compared to Instagram. The majority of Instagram ranked between mixtures of low – high intensity, compared to twitter where it ranked the majority with excellent high intensity. Instagram weighted the best on endorsement and status, with a score of 20 on each.

Company A's Blog is overall very informative and has a high engagement rate. They regularly posts, however, the use of photos is quite small, closer to non-existent. Overall, they gained a ranking of 115 out of 300, with a mixture between high and low intensity on each feature, which is illustrated in table5.1. Moreover, Company A's LinkedIn account was

utilised for both personal and business use, as they are so closely related. Their page utilised the majority components with them gaining an All Star rating from the social media platform. Their posts are very diverse, with posts varying between inspirational to factual, and their endorsement from connections is high. In addition, throughout the majority of their social media platforms they provided great endorsement for other businesses and vice versa. However, the use of basic features were not utilised across the majority of the social media platforms, or were not yet being utilised.

	Social Buttons*	Social Share	Social Login	Social Video	Social Proof	Activity Feed	Authorship	Social Commenting	Total
Company A	3	10	0	7.5	10	0	10	20	60.5

Table 5.2 Company A's Website Integration Analysis

Company A's Blog demonstrated a moderate degree of integration with her corporate website. They utilised six out of the eight criteria, which is illustrated in table 5.2. The two which were not used included social login and activity feed. According to Owyang's (2010) Explanation of Ranking Scale for Website Integration Matrix, illustrated in table 4.12, her website demonstrated *"brand experience is integrated in social channels"*. They have integrated social commenting, authorship and social proof to a high intensity with their corporate website. However, the use of their social buttons was graded as low intensity, due to the fact that two of three widgets didn't work and were positioned on the right hand side of the page, at a very small scale. Furthermore, on each page of their page they allowed the option to social share, which led to the grading of low intensity, with good effectiveness.

5.1.3 Social Media Platform and Features

It is clear from Company A's interview that they are very comfortable with the content side of her social media accounts. They are most comfortable on Facebook but are aware that they can utilise different features of the other platforms like Twitter and Instagram to compliment their work. Company A stated that *"people were more likely to find me on Facebook"* and that it was *"most effective."* They also acknowledged that they used Twitter to *"build excitement... for quick ones"* and that Instagram was *"for pictures"* and *"I'm learning about hashtags... I have to get better at that."* They are comfortable around the content aspect of social media was also reflected with their

views on using new and upcoming features “*not everyone learns by reading if I could put the post up, have you done this, this week but if I could put up a verbal of it and someone might pick that up before they would pick up the reading.*” Furthermore, after analysing the interview there is a huge opportunity for Company A to take advantage of these features as they mentioned that in her work with student enterprise there is a lot of group interaction, event planning and management “*I work with 1800 students...1000 teams and could answer... with 1 Facebook post.*”

5.1.4 Integration with Website and Performance Measurement

Returning to the characteristics it is clear that Company A is quite proficient in two areas; interactivity and knowledge sharing. They has demonstrated in their interview and this has been corroborated in the features usage matrix that they has a strong understanding and strong ability to maximise the various features of the three key platforms they use to promote their business. Where they fall down is their integration with their website and also how to integrate all platforms and her website. However, they has recognised this, “*If I’m honest with you I haven’t utilised my website as good as I could do....someone set it up for me, they did the links and then I don’t know...*”, and hopes to update it in the near future. Furthermore, they expressed that “*if I’m honest people have more hope to find me on Facebook than they have through my website*”.

Company A expressed that even though they would have good reach with a post they might only have ten likes. Therefore, they do look at the insights in which each social media platform offers, but doesn’t use a certain strategy or framework to analysis their results. Furthermore, “*I do notice that there are spikes after I have been in schools definitely...*”, therefore, by Company A checking their insights they highlighted they were able to “*check am I doing it right...*”

5.1.6 Summary

From the social media analysis it outlined that Company A is successful way better on some social media platforms than others, but they are open to learning new things and taking risks when it comes to the different features available. They outlined that they do look at the insights each platform offers, however, that is about it. Finally, they understand the integration level of their social media platforms and website needs to improve

5.2 Company B

Company B provides a support service to those who are recovering after a cardiac episode and help people prevent to heart disease. Through physical Exercise and Lifestyle Management Company B focus on nutrition, stress management, relaxation to assist in Coronary Care, diabetes prevention and weight management. Company B has an extensive background in sports training and rehabilitation and has worked as a cardiac rehabilitation specialist for the last two years.

5.2.2 Social Media Analysis

	Social Networking Sites		Blogs
	Twitter	Facebook	
Basic Features			
Events	0	2	0
Group	0	0	0
Reach			
Page Fans	5	15	0
Admin Posts	7.5	7.5	10
Fan Posts	2	2	0
Comments	2.5	2	0
Likes	15	10	0
Engagement	5	5	2.5
Responsiveness	3	10	2.5
Share of Voice	4	7.5	4
Content Analysis			
Status	7.5	10	10
Link	20	4	4
Photo	10	20	3
Videos	1	5	1
Endorsement	0	0	0
Total	82.5	100	68

Table 5.3 Company B's Feature Usage Matrix

From the analysis of Company B's social media platforms, it highlighted that they only use two of the classifications proposed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) social networking sites and blogs. Under the two classifications social networking sites demonstrated the highest effectiveness with a 182.5 ranking, which is illustrated in table 5.3. The two social networking sites that Company B uses are Facebook and Twitter. From the analysis, the author can see that the reach and basic features implemented by Company B are lacking in effectiveness, compared to its content analysis features. Company B's Facebook page highlights low intensity with fan posts, comments, likes and engagement, whereas on its twitter account it had a mixture between low, moderate to high intensity and effectiveness ranging from excellent to good. This was evident why the author found that Company B posted moderately in both sites, however, lacked to reach its proposed target audience with their desired information. Company B's blog lacked integration from its social networking sites and thus lacked in engagement. However, it did demonstrate a variety among its share of voice and admin posts. Therefore, this led to an analysis of only 68, due to the majority of features not been utilised. In addition, throughout the entire social media platform used Company B did not use the feature of endorsement, under content analysis, and only in Facebook did it use the feature of groups.

	Social Buttons*	Social Share	Social Login	Social Video	Social Proof	Activity Feed	Authorship	Social Commenting	Total
Company B	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6

Table 5.4 Company B's Website Integration Level

From the analysis of Company B's social media platform integration with its website, which is illustrated in table 5.3, it can be seen that it has nearly the lowest form of integration. According to the Owyang's (2010) Explanation of Ranking Scale for Website Integration Matrix, illustrated in table 4.12, Company B's integration is categorised as *"Link directly away without a strategy"*. This highlights that Company B have incorporated widgets into their website and have authorship, however, everything else has been overlooked, therefore, demonstrated a score of 6.

5.2.3 Social Media Platforms and Features

Company B's main focus in terms of social media marketing, based on their interview is Facebook. However, they highlighted that they have a lack of knowledge about how to leverage different features to benefit his business *"I don't know what's working... how many (Facebook) likes walk in the door?"*

Referring back to the three characteristics we can see that Company B would be at a low level of proficiency. Regarding interactivity, Company B's strongest attribute, we see that they are quite aware of the importance of visual content and has had a successful video campaign which received X,000 views. Company B acknowledged this by stating that *"if you don't have a picture or a video its a waste of time."*

Regarding the other characteristics platform quality and knowledge sharing Company B struggles in these area's again due to a lack of knowledge regarding best practice and also a lack of knowledge regarding the individual features and how to use and subsequently maximise the potential of each of these features *"I get frustrated...(Social Media) has to be easier to use... it is designed for young people but its older people like me that are using it for business"*

5.2.4 Website Integration and Measurement

It is clear that Company B does not have any system in place in order to measure the effectiveness of his online presence and there is little or no connection between their social media accounts and between their website *"there could be a bigger connection"*

5.2.5 Summary

Overall, Company B has demonstrated a lack of knowledge and effectiveness in regards to their social media platforms. They are continuously learning about them and are trying to find

the right way to hit their target audience, however, as Company B expressed “*how to we get these people on social media in my door*”.

5.3 Company C

Company C is part of the two award winning Mexican street food eateries in Dublin called The Little Ass Burrito Bars. They were established in 2012 and having discovered a love of Mexican food and culture he decided to expand his portfolio and make his own tortilla’s. Company C has a factory based in Clonmel which produces gluten & GM free tortilla’s for the food service sector in Ireland, the UK and across Europe. The next step will be to enter the retail market and educate the Irish consumer about the Irish company making waves with a Mexican flavour.

5.3.2 Social Media Analysis

	Social Networking Sites			Content Communities	Blogs
	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	
Basic Features					
Events	2.5	0	0	0	0
Group	2.5	2	0	0	0
Reach					
Page Fans	15	15	15	2	7.5
Admin Posts	10	10	10	2	5
Fan Posts	7.5	7.5	5	2	0
Comments	5	7.5	5	3	0
Likes	2	7.5	5	3	2.5
Engagement	10	7.5	10	2	7.5
Responsiveness	3	7.5	2.5	2	5
Share of Voice	10	10	7.5	3	7.5
Content Analysis					
Status	15	15	15	2	15
Link	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5
Photo	7.5	20	20	2	7.5
Videos	7.5	3	0	20	7.5
Endorsement	10	15	5	3	10
Total	160	135.5	107.5	71.5	82.5

Table 5.5 Company C Feature Usage Matrix

From the analysis of Company C’s social media platforms, illustrated in Table 5.5, it highlighted that three of the classifications proposed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) were utilised. These included: social networking sites, blogs and content communities. From the

analysis, social networking sites demonstrated this most effectiveness, with the majority of use being moderate intensity. The three social networking sites utilised by Company C were Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Twitter was the most effectiveness out of the three, as it ended up with a ranking of 160. However, it can be seen that Company C does use Facebook at a more moderate level, at an average effectiveness, compared to the other two social networking sites, Twitter and Instagram

The content community that Company C implements is YouTube. The author found that Company C mostly used its YouTube channel to promote videos developed by other mediums about themselves. Furthermore, it uses its YouTube channel in accordance with its other social media platforms in the promotion of content; therefore, this demonstrates why they were graded with 71.5 out of 300. Finally, Company C's blog showed that it operates its content analysis features to a moderate intensity, with an average effectiveness. However, even with its moderate intensity and content analysis its engagement from its target audience is at low intensity. Therefore, this emphasises the rankings on fan posts, comments, and not yet on likes. Throughout both content communities and blog Company C do not implement the basic features of group and events.

	Social Buttons*	Social Share	Social Login	Social Video	Social Proof	Activity Feed	Authorship	Social Commenting	Total
Company C	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	5

Table 5.6 Company C's Website Integration Level

Company C got a ranking of 5, as they illustrated no integration at all with their social media platforms, which is illustrated in table 5.6. Under the Owyang's (2010) Explanation of Ranking Scale for Website Integration, illustrated in table 4.12, they were graded under the category of "Do nothing, no social integration", therefore, this highlighted that their website is irrelevant in regards to their engagement with their target audience.

5.3.3 Social Media Platforms and Features

It is clear that their content is extremely high across all three categories particularly photographs on Facebook & LinkedIn which is backed up in their interview when he states that *“you get much higher conversion with video and image rich content”*

Although in their interview they stated that they currently views Facebook in a less beneficial light *“Facebook is a mailbox”* it is clear from the Feature Usage Matrix that they have a very high level of reach through features like fan posts, comments engagement and share of voice

It is obvious from the interview that Company C has a strong sense of how certain social media platforms can be beneficial for certain aspects of promoting his business and this is reflected in the Feature Usage Matrix where we can see high red scores for endorsement on Twitter and the same for photo's and video's on Instagram. Company C echoed this result when questioned about how SME's in general can increase effectiveness on social media platforms *“food needs to be (promoted)on social media...Professional services need to be on LinkedIn... so having the right platform is first”*

5.3.4 Website Integration and Measurement

Company C expressed that his website is nearly redundant, as most of his traffic is on social media. Furthermore, they did express that they are links on their website to their social media platforms, however, from the Intensity of Website Integration Matrix it can be seen that this isn't the case. In regards to measurement of their social media performance they use a tool called Syfe, *“online dashboard... it gives more details and cheaper than other tools available online”*.

5.3.5 Summary

Company C utilise their social media platforms more than their website and see the platforms to be more effective in reaching their target audience. The Feature Usage Matrix indicates that

a higher level of intensity could be used through all its social media platforms and the generation of new creative ideas could be established to reach their target audience.

5.4 Company D

Company D began at a kitchen sink mixing the ingredients to create a range of confectionary that focuses on wholefoods, superfoods and creating delicious, nourishing eats for your body & soul. Their products are gluten free, dairy free & no refined sugar. They began selling their range of confectionary in the Milk Market in Limerick and haven gained a loyal customer base, they have expanded to artisan stores around the country including Avoca and Sprout.

5.4.2 Social Media Analysis

	Social Networking Sites		Content Communities
	Twitter	Instagram	Snapchat
Basic Features			
Events	0	0	0
Group	0	0	0
Reach			
Page Fans	7.5	20	15
Admin Posts	15	20	10
Fan Posts	10	20	20
Comments	10	15	7.5
Likes	7.5	15	7.5
Engagement	7.5	10	20
Responsiveness	7.5	10	10
Share of Voice	10	15	10
Content Analysis			
Status	7.5	10	15
Link	7.5	7.5	7.5
Photo	20	20	20
Videos	5	2	20
Endorsement	7.5	7.5	7.5
Total	122.5	172	170

Table 5.7 Company D's Feature Usage Matrix

Company D displayed an implementation of social networking sites and content communities, from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classifications. Throughout the two classifications Company D doesn't make use of the basic features of group and events. However, both their social networking site, Instagram, and their Content Community, Snapchat, established similar ranking with Instagram achieving 172 out of 300 and Snapchat attained a ranking of

170. Company D's effectiveness throughout its Snapchat was a mixture between excellent to average, with intensity levels being moderate to high. They demonstrated a wide variety of share of voice, engagement levels and admin posts. In regards to their Instagram account, it was recognised for its high intensity and high effectiveness, however, Company D only utilise the feature of videos to a low intensity, with bad effectiveness. All the above findings are illustrated in table 5.7. Finally, Company D's Twitter account demonstrated a lack of consistency among its posting and share of voice, as Company D mostly posts about Milk Market.

However, over the last week this has changed and more is going on their customer views. Company D's Twitter account is moderately effective, however, compared to its other social media platforms it is lacking in effectiveness. Furthermore, like Instagram it doesn't use the feature of video to the intensity that would be expected, especially since it uses Snapchat to such a high intensity and effectiveness.

	Social Buttons*	Social Share	Social Login	Social Video	Social Proof	Activity Feed	Authorship	Social Commenting	Total
Company D	5	0	0	0	7.5	7.5	0	0	12.5

Table 5.8 Company D's Website Integration level

Company D illustrated a "Link directly away without a strategy", based on the classifications formed in Owyang's (2010) Explanation of Ranking Scale for Website Integration, shown in table 4.12. The social buttons that were integrated with their website were at the bottom, right hand corner. This in turn demonstrates the ranking of low intensity, at an average effectiveness. Furthermore, at the end of their website they have integrated a live feed of all their Instagram posts. This allows their audience to social proof and updated activity feed.

5.4.3 Social Media Platforms and Features

It is also clear that they use Instagram and Snapchat, with Instagram as the main drivers of their business. We can see from the reach analysis that engagement and responsiveness, fan posts and share of voice are the features that rate the highest and most often and this is

reflected in the interview when she says *"I figured out my demographic within the brand and I figured that (Instagram & Snapchat and twitter) would be the platforms that would be most useful to me... i genuinely chat with all my customers, they genuinely get engaged with the brand"*

Two words that kept on coming up again and again throughout the interview were authentic and consistency and these sentiments can be seen in the analysis scoring high across all three platforms of specific features like photographs, fan posts and especially responsiveness and share of voice on Instagram and Snapchat... *"i genuinely chat with all my customers, they genuinely get engaged with the brand... it has to be personal... be consistent, there's nothing worse than odd photo's... you have to create a collage"*

5.4.4 Website Integration and Measurement

Company D also acknowledged that although their website was only live for a couple of months and that they did have their Instagram account connected but felt that their website wasn't currently the main focus of her online presence... *"i have a constant Instagram feed on my website... its good have a connection... most of my followers are generated by social media platforms"*

The most interesting discovery from the interview with Company D was that for somebody with such a strong sense of what works for her business in terms of social media they don't measure the performance of their online presence in anyway.

5.4.4 Summary

Company D demonstrated a wide knowledge in terms of social media platforms and the features in which they use to attract their audience. They have a clear understanding of their target audience, and are using the social media platforms which best suit them. However, they don't measure their performance which is quite a worrying thing for such a high driven social media business.

5.5 Company E

Company E is a five-star, privately owned luxury hotel located close to Cork and Waterford. The building seems to cling to a cliff on the south side of Ardmore Bay where there has long been a fishing village, and a Christian settlement that pre-dates St. Patrick. The hotel has 39 sea view facing rooms, all overlooking Ardmore. It is well-known for its Michelin-starred House Restaurant from Martijn Kajuter, and has been awarded with many outstanding awards over the years for its excellent service and hotel practices.

5.5.2 Social Media Analysis

	Social Networking Sites					Content Communities	Blogs
	Twitter	Facebook	LinkedIn	Pinterest	Instagram	YouTube	
Basic Features							
Events	2.5	20	2.5	0	0	0	0
Group	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Reach							
Page Fans	20	20	10	7.5	15	5	5
Admin Posts	20	20	10	7.5	10	7.5	10
Fan Posts	20	20	5	2	10	0	0
Comments	10	10	7.5	2	15	5	0
Likes	10	15	7.5	2	15	5	0
Engagement	15	15	7.5	2	10	5	0
Responsiveness	20	10	7.5	10	7.5	2	0
Share of Voice	7.5	20	15	3	7.5	7.5	5
Content Analysis							
Status	7.5	10	10	10	10	5	5
Link	10	10	10	5	7.5	2	5
Photo	7.5	20	20	10	20	7.5	5
Videos	5	7.5	10	0	20	20	0
Endorsement	5	7.5	5	0	7.5	10	0
Total	160	210	127.5	61	155	81.5	35

Table 5.9 The Cliff House Hotel's Feature Usage Matrix

Company E uses a wide range of social media platforms in the promotion of their business to their customers. However, it can be seen in table 5.9, that they are more effective in using some social media platforms over others. They seem to concentrate on four main platforms and forget about the other three. However, this wasn't always the case. From the analysis of their social media it was found that only in the last three-four months they have started using LinkedIn and Instagram to the same intensity as they were using Facebook and Twitter. As illustrated in table 5.9, they use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn as their main

social media platforms. Facebook is their most effective platform as it has high intensity and excellent effectiveness, especially reach and content analysis. The only feature they seem to be lacking on is group, which they use at low intensity, with an average effectiveness.

The two platforms that show least effectiveness is their blog and Pinterest accounts. This was due to the fact that even though the blog has been present for a number of years, it has only been in the last few months that regular posts have been published. Furthermore, Company E seems to use their blog as another advertising tool rather than an engagement and sharing of knowledge tool. Consequently, this led to low engagement and receiving a score of 35 out of 300. Nonetheless, their Pinterest has a wider variety of content, which links both local businesses and the cliff itself. It also shares customer images that were posted across their other social media accounts too. However, with that said they still only utilise the features to a low – moderate intensity.

	Social Buttons*	Social Share	Social Login	Social Video	Social Proof	Activity Feed	Authorship	Social Commenting	Total
The Cliff House Hotel	10	10	0	0	7.5	0	0	0	27.5

Table 5.10 The Cliff House Hotel's Website Integration Level

Overall, Company E has displayed average level interaction between its social media platforms and its corporate website, which is illustrated in table 5.10. Its social buttons and social proof are visible on a additional panel at the bottom of page, therefore, every page a customer changed to it was visible in front of their eyes. Furthermore, a social share button is displayed on the left-hand side of each page, which allows their customers to share the information on their social media platforms

5.5.3 Social Media Platforms and Features

Company E is the first case study that we can see active use of the basic features in their social media. This is particularly prevalent on Facebook where they score a very high mark in events. It is clear from both the Feature Usage Matrix and also the interview that Company E sees Facebook as vital in driving their business and their high proficiency in reach and content

makes this evident *"spending a little bit on Facebook advertising we managed to fill (an event) up but the cost alone for me to get to am something like 40,000 customers in the neighbouring counties versus the local paper which probably gets to two or three thousand"*

Company E also recognises how engagement and content is a two way street which allows the customers to engage on a deeper level with their brand *"Information, engagement, chat, they also want to tell people about their stay or where they have been and so forth....so they want to tell others that they are here or coming here or that sort of thing, so it is a two way thing, they want to be proud that they were here or show off that they have been here and they also tell people after their stay or during it this is where I am"*

Furthermore, Company E also utilizes Instagram quite effectively scoring very consistently and highly in content and reach, Company E expresses that through the use of Instagram it allows them to reach more of their individual leisure customers, as people in the hospitality industry love their photos and videos.

5.5.4 Website Integration and Measurement

In 2014, Company E were awarded for the top quality website, however, as social media has become more and more part of the promotion of SMEs, *"we must now look at becoming more integrated between both our website and social media....we are currently in the process of developing our new website"*. Company E highlights that they hope to integrate a live activity feed of their Twitter account and their Instagram accounts. Furthermore, *"we want to incorporate our blog more...especially for the foodies..."*. Moreover, in regards to *"our Wifi customers have to login with their email addresses, we propose to have the option to login with their social media accounts as well..."*

Company E mentioned that they have access to all this vital information on their social media platforms, but they don't actual really measures it currently. They look at the insights, however, *"it really isn't enough for such a success organisation like ourselves....we are looking for something to help us with this"*. Additionally, she expressed that measurement of

a business success rate is vital, *“if you just post anything and it doesn’t reach anything or if it isn’t organic enough to be picked up by Google then there is no really point in posting that content”*. However, there are many measurement matrixes’ out there but finding the right one to fight The Cliff House Hotel’s strategies and target audience is important and time consuming.

5.5.5 Summary

Company E is very effective when it comes to their social media platforms. They have high intensity, with excellent effectiveness across the majority of their platforms. They understand that content and reach are very important features that they must utilise to the best of their ability. Both the interview and social media analysis highlight this point.

5.6 Expert Analysis

The following section will outline the findings from the two expert interviews, which are illustrated in table 4.7. The findings of both interviews will be discussed under:

- Platform features
- Integration with website
- SMEs lack of performance measurement
- Skills deficit

5.6.2 Platform Features

Many different features were expressed by both Expert A and Expert B, however, the one in which they were both agreement on was the use of paid advertising and boosting posts. Expert B outlined that *“Boost good content boost decent content...don’t boost shite”*. Expert A highlighted that *“you can drill down as deep as possible. So that if that you are literally talking about people that like dogs with three legs in south east of Ireland you can get your*

message in front of those people.” Additionally, Expert A outlined to vital use of “*metatags about all tags about you know making sure that your pictures are optimized for different platforms and things like that..*”, and “*it seems like video and live broadcasting is going to be a huge factor in the next three to five years*”. Moreover, Expert B stated that they are many new features coming available on Facebook like 3D pictures; allow Instagram advertising through your Facebook account. Also, Instagram have recently launched Instagram stories.

Expert B expressed that one negative feature of social media platforms is the reach in which you can obtain, through the use of organic posts; whereas Expert A outlined that the intrusion of privacy was negative feature to the platforms.

5.6.3 Integration with Website

Expert A outlined that the widgets on an SMEs website should be linked to the landing page of what they are talking about, rather than just the home page. Additionally, Expert B expressed that at a minimum level SMEs should have widgets on their page, but they really should integrate with their website more. He mentioned that Wordpress is what he tells his clients to use, as “*you could display your posts from Facebook on your website very easily... you can have like a gallery..*”. Furthermore, the use of posts in a blog post, “*you embed it in your blog post therefore anyone can go onto your website and read that blog post, they are seeing a post on Facebook that could be two years old but is relevant to that blog post*”.

5.6.4 SMEs Lack of Performance Measurement

Expert B expressed that micro business uses Google Analytics to measure their performance. Conversely, Expert A outlined that “*I haven’t come across a massive amount of SME’s who are at the stage where they are ready to measure their online presence unfortunately.*” However, they both did express that many SMEs don’t realise that Twitter has insights like Facebook has. Expert B stated that he used to try helping companies measure their social media by implementing the framework they use “*Lean Social Media Strategy*”, however, after years of trying companies just didn’t do it. Expert B now proposes that SMEs employ a

consulting firm do this for them, but SMEs must make sure they meet them every two months to make sure everything is running correctly

5.6.1 Skills Deficit

Throughout both interviews both participants expressed a skills deficit in regards to social media platforms and the features that they offer. Expert B expressed that even though they are many supports available including *“local enterprise boards who do put on courses and you have skillnet who also do courses in social media but to be fair like you pay for what you get at the end of the day and someone attending..”*, however, in the end that instructor is trying to teach the content to people that are in wide variety of disciplines and industries. Expert A agrees with this by stating that *“out of the three hundred or more SMEs I worked with, only a small few or if any, have a good understanding of social media platforms”*. Furthermore, both expressed that if a SME was lucky enough it would employ someone to do their social media for them, however, Expert B outlined that *“someone can be very social media savvy, but not your business savvy. Therefore, this partnership would need a lot of work to work out”*.

Furthermore, a lack of understanding and knowledge was expressed by both to heighten this deficit problem. Both Expert Band Expert A stated that SMEs must have a good understanding of their target audience prior to choosing their social media platforms that use. Consequently, Expert B expressed that *“business to business, business to consumer are two total splits, you know am, if its business to business there is LinkedIn and Twitter can be pretty good, but business to consumer if you are in the beauty industry, fashion, you know Instagram, Snapchat are fantastic channels to explore”*.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from the seven interviews undertaken, with both expert and SMEs, and the social media analysis of each SME, with some of the findings been similar and others expressing completely different concerns. The findings were structured and discussed under themes representing the research questions. In regards to the individual cases,

it was evident that there is a lack of skills and knowledge present in regards to social media usage and implementation. Furthermore, out of all the cases not one illustrated excellent integration between their social media platforms and website. Additionally, company C highlighted they use of a tool for measuring the performance of their social media platforms.

In regards to the experts, skills deficit and lack of knowledge was also highlighted as a main concern. Expert B identified that each SME should invest in continuous learning on social media platforms and their features. However, due to lack of funding and time this may not always be the case. Furthermore, Expert A expressed out of all the SMEs he works with not many are at the stage to measure their performance, however, still expressed that it is vital to do so. Finally, each expert identified new up and coming features which will be available to SMEs, these including 3D pictures and live streaming. However, with that said privacy and organic reach were a few examples of the negative aspects to social media features. The next chapter will discuss these findings and compare them with the literature discussed in Chapter two and three.

Chapter Six

Discussion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the findings from the primary research carried out in connection to the literature. On a very basic level, this chapter hopes to address the research questions of the study by looking into the outlook of academics in the field, with the findings of the study. This chapter analysis the research findings by delving deeper into the three research questions: social media platform use, integration with website and performance measurement. The chapter will revolve around the different ways SMEs use social media, do all SMEs use the same platforms and to what intensity, are SMEs doing enough to utilise social media features, SMEs integration levels with their websites and the measurement techniques used.

6.1 How do SMEs use Social Media?

Rickard (2015) highlighted those Irish businesses “*can’t afford not to*” as customers now want good customer service from organisations through social media platforms. This was agreed by all SMEs throughout the study. Each SME used social media platforms to a certain context. However, as Expert A and Expert B outlined SMEs understand the need for it but lack of knowledge and skill set is restricting their success rate. Company B emphasis this by outlining, “*I don’t know what’s working...how many (Facebook) likes walk in the door.*” Therefore, the author believes that there should be more then incentives for SMEs to educate themselves, as Expert B outlined the Local Enterprise Offices do teach courses but in the end that instructor is trying to teach a certain amount to many people of different industries and disciplines. Therefore, the right knowledge may not be gained by all participants.

A recent study conduct by Amárach Research highlighted that sixty per cent of Irish SME’s believe that social media has contributed to their business growth (Rickard, 2015). This concurs with what Company D outlines as she believes that through the use of social media it has allowed her to engage more with her customers and given her access to a wider customer base. This was emphasis by Marketing Donut (2011) outline, as they express that social media marketing access to a wider customer base for SMEs.

6.2 Do all SMEs use the same platforms and is it the same intensity?

The research findings highlighted that across the five companies all companies used two out of the big three stated by Rickard (2015): Facebook and Twitter. Rickard (2015) stated the third main social media site implemented by Irish SMEs was LinkedIn, however, from the research findings it highlighted that two SMEs used it: Company E and Company A. The author believes this was due to the fact that both SMEs do Business-to Business (B2B) work, therefore, this agrees with Justin's point where he highlights that there are two splits: B2B and Business-to-Customer (B2C), *"if it's business to business there is LinkedIn"*.

Furthermore, as Expert Band Expert A highlighted it really does depend on target audience and industry to what platform an SME would implement. Company D highlighted that they are on Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter, as this is where her target audience is and where she can see engagement mostly with her customers, whereas Company A highlighted that she was mainly on Facebook due to fact that all her cliental had an account with them compared to the other social media platforms.

6.3 Are SMEs doing enough to utilise Social Media Features?

Cronin (2009) highlighted that SMEs need to understand the design and features behind each social media platform. However, the primary research outlined that many of the SMEs didn't understand all the features in each platform. Companies A, D and E understood most about the features, whereas the majority of the other participants showed lack of knowledge or understanding behind them, or didn't even know they existed. Furthermore, Company B expressed he didn't know much about what he was actually doing in regards to social media features, which gives the reasoning to his low ranking in his Feature Usage Matrix. In addition, Company B mentioned that he employs someone to do this social media for him, which would explain his lack of knowledge. This corresponds with both the primary research and literature as both highlighted that some SMEs employ someone to control social media, so that the owners and managers can concentrate on day to day business of the SME.

The literature expressed that no matter what platform SMEs are on they must ensure they implement the following features: listening, sharing and measuring (Gray, 2013). In the majority of the cases it highlighted they do implement these three criteria, however, some implement it better than others. The author believes that without an organising listening to their customers how will they ever engage with them and get them to share, like and comment. All cases showed on average a moderate intensity when it comes to the listening to customers, as engagement was reached, but also the level of sharing highlighted this also.

Cronin (2009) stated that every year social media platforms integrate new features into their platform design and SMEs then get easily distracted and forget about the traditional methods that they know are effective. This has proven to be a problem to most of the SMEs part of this study, however, some are taking on the challenge, *“I’m learning about hashtags... i have to get better at that”*, stated Company A. Furthermore, the literature also stated that don’t fall in love with every feature the new social technology offers (Gray, 2013), you must look at ones with best suit to engage with your customers. This emphasis with what Expert Band Expert A highlighted, as they expressed that every year more and more features are becoming available like 3D pictures, live streaming and stories, but if it doesn’t fit with your target audience and industry then there is no point using them.

6.4 Are SMEs integrating their platforms with their website enough?

The literature emphasised that a vital part of using social media platforms is its integration with your website. Demaria (2012) highlighted that social media plays an important role in an organisation website’s SEO. However, from the primary research it demonstrated that none of the SMEs showed a high level of integration with their website, see table 6.1. With that said Company E and Company A expressed that they realise that theirs aren’t integrated enough and plan on changing that in the near future. Company E stated *“we are currently in the process of developing our new website”*, which will include live activity feeds and a *“blog for the foodies”* However, Company C stated that their website is nearly becoming redundant, as most of his traffic is on their social media platforms.

	Social Buttons*	Social Share	Social Login	Social Video	Social Proof	Activity Feed	Authorship	Social Commenting	Total
Company A	3	10	0	7.5	10	0	10	20	60.5
Company B	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6
Company E	10	10	0	0	7.5	0	0	0	27.5
Company D	5	0	0	0	7.5	7.5	0	0	12.5
Company C	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	5

Table 6.1 Summary of SME's Website Integration

From the Feature Usage Matrix's of each SME and table 6.1 above, it can be seen that the SMEs with the most integration had also the best ranking in regards to their Feature Usage Matrix. For example, Company D got a ranking of 12.5 in regards to her website integration and its lowest grading in their Feature Usage Matrix, see table 5.7, was 122.5 out of 300, whereas Company B got a ranking of 6 in their website integration and its highest in their Feature Usage Matrix, see table?, was 100 out of 300. This corresponds with Digital Web Manager (2015), as they mentioned that SMEs that engage in social media and link to their Web sites on their social media profiles, can expect to receive an increase in quality traffic (Digital Web Manager, 2015).

The primary research highlighted that the best website for SME to use is WordPress. According to Justin, Word Press is what is advises his customers to use as *"you could display your posts from Facebook on your website very easily...you can have like a gallery...embed blog posts."* This is heightened by the fact that the SME to rank the highest in website integration was a SME that uses Word Press as their website. The author believes that an SME must make use of the free and fantastic features available to them, rather than going off and paying hundreds or sometimes thousands of Euros on a website that lacks the integration level that is needed with their social media platforms.

6.5 Performance Measurement tools used

The literature highlighted that some Irish SMEs are not practicing what they preach, as 51 per cent of Dublin businesses surveyed mentioned that monitoring online reviews is important, but only 35 per cent actually are implementing this. Moreover, Gray (2013) mentioned that no matter what platform an SME is on it must measure its overall performance. This was highlighted in the primary research as the majority of the participants indicated they looked at

the insights on Facebook, but none of them actually had a framework or a strategy put in place to see how well they were actually doing, or what else they could do to increase their performance. Additionally, Company D highlighted that they understood who their target audience were and where to find them, but once they were on them social media platforms, they didn't actually measure to see was they content they share reaching their target audience or did their target audience want something different from them. Nevertheless, Company C highlighted they used a system called Syfe, in the measurement of their performance.

Consequently, Expert A expressed that he hasn't come across many SMEs to be at the stage for them to measure their social media performance. The author doesn't agree with what Expert A had to say as every organisation whether big or small needs to measure their social media performance. If not, you could just be posting content that is reaching no one, may not go along with your short term or long term strategy, which then leads into the point of why bother doing it so. Social Networking Reviews (2015) emphasis the fact that you need to align your social media platforms with your overall strategy, but also link it to the content in which you post.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the literature reviews and the primary research findings. The research highlighted that Irish SMEs use social media platforms in the promotion of their business. However, the research highlighted that even though they use the different social media the understanding to why is very little understood. The majority of the SMEs didn't utilise the features enough on the different platforms and the integration level between their social media platforms and website was barely non-existent. Furthermore, very little, if any, performance measurement is undertaken by SMEs, which emphasis the point lack of knowledge and understanding on social media platforms needs to be addressed. The next chapter will outline a summary of the findings and highlight future recommendations for SMEs and future research.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions and Recommendations

7.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the key issues that come forward from the study. Section 7.1 will review the research objective and research questions. Section 7.2 will concentrate on the review of the main findings from the literature reviews. Section 7.3 will reconsider the main points highlighted in the primary research. Section 7.4 will outline the limitations to the study. Section 7.5 will draw upon recommendations for future research. Finally, section 7.6 will highlight a number of recommendations for SMEs and their use, integration and performance of their social media platforms.

7.1 Review of Research Objective and Research Questions of the Project

The primary research objective is to conduct “*An empirical investigation of the use, integration, and performance of social media platforms in Irish SMEs.*” In order to accomplish this objective the following research questions were developed:

1. What social media platforms are SMEs using and how well integrated are they with SME websites?
2. Which social media platforms features are SMEs using and how intensively are they being used?
3. How do SMEs measure their social media performance?

In order to achieve these above questions, a social media platform analysis was undertaken of each SME and therefore, seven in-depth interviews were carried out with each SME. By achieving the above objects the following conclusions were discovered:

7.2 Literature Review Conclusions

It was revealed to the author that SMEs play a vital role in regards to the Irish economy and that social media platforms have allowed these SMEs to access to a wider customer base. Furthermore, when a decision is made by an organisation to implement a social media service

to accommodate for a set of interactions, the design of the service and the features it offer can have a great impact on the efficiency of that interaction and the overall individual and social experience (Tsikerdekis, 2012). Once SMEs understands the importance of using each platform and its features, it can then align it with its strategies and implement a successful social media marketing campaign.

7.3 Summary of Primary Research Findings and their Importance

The primary research highlighted that the majority of SMEs don't have a framework or a procedure in place to measure their social media effectiveness. Through this some of the SMEs don't know whether what they are doing is right and is it bringing people in the door. However, with that said the majority of SMEs indicated they look at the insights that some of the platforms have.

Furthermore, the integration level in which SMEs have with their website was quite lacking in intensity. This didn't correspond with what the literature expressed and even one SME expressed that their website is really becoming irrelevant.

However, SMEs must recognise that it can be a long and time consuming process in order to pick the right platforms, as its not one size fit all scenario. Each social media platform has different features and each feature attracts a different target audience. Therefore, a clear understanding of your target audience must be met before implementing any social media platform.

7.4 Limitations

Sample size - although five cases were developed on SMEs in Ireland this may not have been a big enough sample to see exactly how SMEs use, integrate and performance on social media platforms. Therefore, to see a more accurate account a wider geographical spread of respondents would have enhanced the research more.

Time restraints – the research was conducted over a four month period, which wasn't adequate time to get an in-depth analysis of each SME. Consequently, the study only saw the views of a small portion of the different industries working in Ireland, which meant some findings were generalised.

Lack of experience - the analysis of the findings may have varied significantly to the interpretation of a qualified researcher.

7.5 Future Research Recommendations

The author highlights that a further investigation needs to go into more specific industries and target audiences, as from the primary research it highlighted that it really does depend on those aspects to what platform and features an organisation needs to do.

Additionally, the author believes that a future in-depth analysis on seeing the importance of using the different features in accordance with their social media marketing strategy. A quantitative research would be deemed appropriate, as it would offer statistical data, including graphs and figures, and highlight which features and platforms best suit the SMEs strategy.

Alternatively, researchers may choose to replicate this study and see if SMEs have improved or regressed in their feature usage and their website integration. As from the research findings an SME mentioned that their website was being redundant.

7.6 Recommendations for SMEs

The author believes that in order for an SME to keep growing their customer base and gaining access to information about their customers they must ensure they are integrating their social media platforms with their website. Three of the vital elements the author believes a SME should have on their website;

- Live activity feed to their Twitter or Facebook accounts,
- Social buttons with appropriate landing pages, and
- Social login in.

This will allow both SME and customer to gain vital information on each party, without having to do a great deal of investigation.

Measurement is a vital component to the success of a social media marketing campaign; therefore, an SME should at least use measurement software that will pull in all its insights from the different social media platforms into one area. The smarter SME would implement a measurement framework like the Social Media Measurement Compass or the Lean Social Media Strategy, which links your social media goals with your overall company strategy. Furthermore, this framework should highlight- the intensity to which they use each platform and their features to allow a more in depth understanding.

Finally, a thorough understanding of your target audience must be achieved prior to choosing the social media platforms and more specifically the features in which an SME implements. Without this understanding an SME could be posting aimless content and not engaging any of their desired target audience. Therefore, SMEs should designate major time into the research of each social media platform and to their target audience.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PERSONAL REFLECTION

The whole process of completing my dissertation was considerably different to my dissertation in my undergraduate. I thought I would be fine and knew what I was doing, how wrong I was. However, I must state that if I hadn't completed an undergraduate dissertation previously I would have definitely have had a mental breakdown. My pervious dissertation had given me a great foundation to what was coming ahead. At the beginning, I knew I had to manage my time effectively, but also I knew that the work load would have been more then what was expected in BBS. Therefore, on the first day of the course I started a diary just for my dissertation. It allowed me to right down all my thoughts, set deadlines and give me the best chance to achieving the dissertation I wanted.

However, looking back on the dissertation process I do think that more guidance and help could have been issued to people that never undertook a dissertation before. The modules of research methods, qualitative and quantitative were useful, but they didn't convey the right information that was needed to write a dissertation. For example, many of the fellow colleagues didn't know that nearly every sentence in a literature review had to be referenced or what actually does happen in the discussion chapter. Nonetheless, my supervisor was extremely helpful and guided me every step of the way. I believe that if students had to undertake workshops, like BBS, that it would give them greater access to all the information that is needed in the completion on such an important assignment.

Even though the completion of a dissertation is extremely time consuming and mentally draining sometimes I do believe that I have gained so much knowledge and experience within the marketing industry, both academically and professionally, that will definitely benefit me in my future career. For example, after each interview I undertook I realised that I had the best career path for myself and that I want to work for an SME, you have more responsibility and you don't do the same thing day in day out. I feel the challenge of on SME is what I love. Furthermore, it has allowed me to grow my network of connections and it has changed the

way I look at my current job, I have got more confidence within myself and my employer has even seen my determination change. I now am more determined to try new things, take them extra risky tasks and have the belief that I am good at what I do and that the things I try will work. In addition, by me undertaking my dissertation in social media and having the practical experience within the area, it has opened up more doors to better further job prospects.

Undertaking research is a critical component to any professional career. It ensures that they keep up with the latest trends within their industry, which in turns means they are a greater asset to their employer/organisation. Whether the research is either secondary or primary or both, all of it is vital to the professional development of a person. Without completing my undergraduate dissertation and master dissertation on social media, I honestly believe that I wouldn't have got the same understanding to social media, both the technically side and strategy side, if I had just completed another course in the area, and since this is a vital area within marketing now an understanding is crucial.

Looking ahead if I had to change anything I wouldn't have stopped the ball rolling once second semester had started. I put my dissertation in the background and concentrated on my other college work and if I hadn't done that I believe the stress levels of finishing my dissertation in the end wouldn't have been as high. Furthermore, I have learnt a lot about myself, I know that I am able to multiple tasks, as I was able to juggle two jobs and train for my All Ireland Irish Dancing final, while still completing my dissertation. In spite of this, I wouldn't recommend anyone to do it, but I have always been a very busy person and it's in my nature to push myself.

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEWEE

Dear [name]

My name is Catherine Ryan and I am a student under the Master of Business in Waterford Institute of Technology. My master's research is an exploratory study of the implications of social media platform's features and design on SMEs. The aim of this research is to provide insight into how SMEs use the different social media platforms features and to see how they integrate the different social media platforms with their website.

I understand that your company uses social media and I would be very interested in talking to you or someone from your organisation about your experiences with social media, and/or managing their features.

Would it possible for us to arrange a time when I could come and see you for an informal interview? The interview should take no longer than 40 minutes, and I am happy to work around your commitments so we can agree on a time that is most convenient to you. If you feel that you are not the appropriate person, I would appreciate you letting me know who I should contact instead.

The information you provide will remain strictly confidential and neither you, nor your business will be identifiable in any publications related to the study.

Thank you very much for your time. I will contact you again shortly to ascertain your decision.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Ryan

(087) 7543341

APPENDIX C

RESPONDENT GUIDE: EXPERT QUESTIONS

Social Media Platforms and Websites

1. From your experience, which SM platforms are SMEs primarily using?
2. Why do you think they adopt these particular platforms and not others such as?
3. Based on your experience, of all the social media platforms, is there one in particular that appears to be most beneficial to SMEs, or does it really depend on target audience or the industry in which the SME operates?
4. What is the most effective way SMEs can integrate their social media platforms with their website? (Different tools/strategies)
5. Through your experience, how would distinguish if an SME is integrating its platforms appropriately with their website?

Social Media Features

6. How familiar do you think SMEs are with all of the features of the various social media platforms, or indeed even the primary social media platforms?
7. Do you think that SMEs sufficiently exploit the features of SM platforms? If not, why not?
8. Do you think there is a skills/knowledge deficit among SMEs with respect to the features of SM platforms?

9. If you were working as a consultant to an SME, are their particular key features that you would recommend as standard, or would it again, depend on the target audience/industry?
10. Are there any new/emerging features in the main social media platforms which SMEs could exploit more to their advantage?
11. What do you see are the negative features of social media platforms?
12. What do you believe are the consequences of using features negatively? How would you propose SMEs could overcome them/reduce this happening?

Measurement of Social Media Performance

13. Do SMEs measure social media performance? If so, to what extent?
14. What framework, if any, do you use?
15. If so, would you suggest this framework for SMEs to use?

APPENDIX D

RESPONDENT GUIDE: SMES QUESTIONS

Social Media Platforms and Websites

1. I can see that you are on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, how come you choose these social media platforms compared to other platforms?
2. What social media platform do you see to be the most effective to your company? Why?
3. I can see that you only have social media widgets on your website; do you believe this is the most efficient integration with your social media platforms?

Social Media Features

4. Would you think that you are very familiar with the various social media platform features?
5. Do you believe you exploit them enough?
6. Would you exploit new up and coming features available?
7. What do you see are the negative features of social media platforms?
8. Do you think there is a skills/knowledge deficit among SMEs with respect to the features of social media platforms?

Measurement of Social Media Performance

9. Do you measure your social media performance? If so, how?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

As part of your consent to be interviewed, we ask that you read the information below and sign where specified.

1. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
2. I understand that the study will involve a face-to-face interview of approximately 45 minutes duration, which will be audio recorded and transcribed. The focus of this interview will be my knowledge, perception and opinions of the marketing and business activities my business pursues.
3. I understand that I reserve the right to decline to answer any question..
4. I agree that the research data gathered from me for the purposes of the study may be published, provided that I, or my business, cannot be identified as a participant.
5. I understand that the researchers will maintain my confidentiality and that any information or material I supply will only be used for the purposes of this research.
6. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
7. I agree to participate in this study, and understand that I may withdraw at any time without any effect, and if I so wish may request that any data I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

Name of participant.....

Signature of participant.....Date.....

Statement by investigator

I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

Name of investigator.....

Signature of investigator.....Date.....