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# Digital engagement strategies and tactics in social media marketing



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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Digitalisation has increased the importance of online forms of marketing, including social media (SM) marketing, for entrepreneurial firms. This paper aims to identify digital engagement strategies and tactics in developing SM marketing capability.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study uses ethnographic content analysis of an entrepreneurial firm and a network of business-to-business (B2B) actors to classify 1,248 B2B Facebook posts and Twitter tweets from a case of an artisan food producer in addition to semi-structured interviews with 26 networked actors.

**Findings** – The authors derive a range of digital engagement strategies (8 in total) and tactics (15 in total) for the four defining layers of SM marketing capability, namely, connect, engage, co-ordinate and collaborate.

**Research limitations/implications** – This research focuses on a case study and a network of B2B actors within the artisan food sector. However, the strategies and tactics are applicable to other entrepreneurial firms and contexts.

**Practical implications** – The digital engagement strategies and tactics are of direct practical benefit to entrepreneurial firms willing to learn and develop SM marketing capability in interaction with their B2B partners.

**Originality/value** – This study investigates three under-researched areas, SM as it relates to B2B relationships, and entrepreneurship, and marketing capability gaps in an era of rapid digitalisation. The definition of SM marketing capability and associated digital engagement strategies and tactics are new to the extant literature moving forward the understanding of SM B2B marketing in theory and practice.

**Keywords** Business-to-business relationships, Digital engagement strategies, Digital engagement tactics, Facebook and Twitter, Social media marketing capability

**Paper type** Case study

## Introduction

Social media (SM) has a ubiquitous presence in marketing in general (Valos *et al.*, 2014), particularly in a business-to-consumer (B2C) context. Although business-to-business (B2B) SM research is still in its infancy (Bocconcelli *et al.*, 2017; Quinton and Wilson, 2016; Swani

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*et al.*, 2014), we know that industrial marketing practice is profiting from SM use by marketers (Salo, 2017). Yet, we know surprisingly little about SM from a relationship and network marketing perspective (Bocconcelli *et al.*, 2017; Singaraju *et al.*, 2016) or within an entrepreneurial B2B context (Drummond *et al.*, 2018; Sigfusson and Chetty, 2013).

The potential benefit of SM marketing for the entrepreneurial firm lies in its ability to generate value in relationships and networks. For the entrepreneurial venture, its low resource commitment, ease of implementation and simplicity to use (Chahine and Malhotra, 2018; Georgescu and Popescul, 2015) compared to traditional marketing communications has particular appeal. SM allows participants to connect, share information and begin dialogue with one another (Leek *et al.*, 2016), mobilise resources (Drummond *et al.*, 2018), aid the sales process (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2016) and intensify relationships with existing industrial partners (Jussila *et al.*, 2012). Additional applicable advantages include; its marketing campaign efficiency and effectiveness (Iankova *et al.*, 2018), immediate responses (Jussila *et al.*, 2012), a place to connect with virtually no barriers to entry (Toppi *et al.*, 2012), helping to create awareness, build brand image and share knowledge in existing B2B connections (Andzulis *et al.*, 2013).

While the benefits of SM marketing are attractive, rapid digitalisation can bring accelerated complexity for managers, firms and markets, which require new thinking about marketing capabilities (Day, 2011). Responding to marketing capability gaps, this research focuses on SM marketing capability, defined as the ability of the entrepreneurial firm to connect, engage, co-ordinate and collaborate in interaction with business exchange partners. In interaction is significant and central to the industrial network (Håkansson and Snehota, 2006; Håkansson *et al.*, 2009) and relational exchange perspectives (Dyer and Singh, 1998; Lorenzoni and Lipparini, 1999), the theoretical lens adopted for this study. As such, the capability is positioned as being developed and fine-tuned in interaction with business customers, suppliers, distributors and competitors. In line with all capabilities, SM marketing capability is not innate or instinctive (Teece *et al.*, 1997); rather, it takes time to build (Hite, 2003; Larson and Starr, 1993), and this process is learned and leveraged through experience gained in interaction (Dyer and Singh, 1998; Zahra *et al.*, 2006). Capabilities, by virtue of their overriding ambition to attain competitive advantage, are heterogeneously developed and distributed (Day, 1994; Zahra *et al.*, 2006). Given the increased importance of SM for the entrepreneurial venture and their underdeveloped knowledge of same (Henninger *et al.*, 2017), this paper unpacks SM marketing capability and poses the following question:

*Q1.* What are the digital engagement strategies and tactics used in developing SM marketing capability for the entrepreneurial firm?

To address this question, we empirically examine SM marketing capability using ethnographic content analysis (ECA) with an exemplary case firm complemented with interview data from the firm's network of actors.

This study responds to calls for more empirical research investigating B2B SM marketing (LaPlaca, 2013; Rapp *et al.*, 2013; Salo, 2017), capability development processes (Day, 2011; Winter, 2012) and, more specifically, in an entrepreneurial context (Autio *et al.*, 2011; Drummond *et al.*, 2018; Sigfusson and Chetty, 2013; Zahra *et al.*, 2006). However, the importance of this paper is manifold beyond the paucity of studies in the space. The entrepreneurial firm can access much needed resources through the use of SM marketing capability, overcoming the traditional limitations associated with being new and small (Baum *et al.*, 2000; Stinchcombe, 1968). Resources can be acquired from outside the firm's local network context as SM, with its open platform orientation, allows interactions from any potential new network actor, broadening the entrepreneurial firm's network horizon

(Holmen and Pedersen, 2003). This can provide the firm with access to a wider pool of resources helping them to break free from an over-reliance on their initial local network. Understanding techniques of how to effectively use SM for marketing purposes is lacking (Iankova *et al.*, 2018), the literature on the strategic use of SM requires further empirical research (Salo, 2017). Providing a range of digital engagement strategies and tactics in the development of SM marketing capability breaks new ground in showing the strategic usage of SM to create new value in interaction that can be appropriated by the entrepreneurial firm and its partners. Understanding the engagement strategies and tactics can facilitate the entrepreneur in developing SM marketing capability, which is important as recent research suggests their underdeveloped appreciation of SM, which requires practical advice (Henninger *et al.*, 2017).

Our paper begins by reviewing the literature on SM and internet-based marketing capabilities. Using the extant literature in the SM and entrepreneurial relationship space, we provide a robust definition of SM marketing capability. The entrepreneurial firm's profile is outlined as is the ECA of the data from the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the case firm. The findings and discussion present 8 engagement strategies and 15 tactics linked to the development of SM marketing capability, contributing to the literature in this space. The strategies and tactics are concluded to have practical value for firms, as they can be directly applied in an SM relationship development campaign.

## Theoretical and conceptual foundations

### *Theoretical background*

Increased digitisation and the advent of SM is reshaping marketing, changing the way we communicate, collaborate, consume and create (Valos *et al.*, 2014). Rapid marketing change generates accelerated marketing complexity. The traditional view of marketing capabilities as integrative processes designed to apply the collective knowledge, skills and resources of the firm to market-related needs of the business (Day, 1994, p. 38) is being challenged as firms must learn to cope with comprehend and fruitfully leverage disruptive marketing based technologies (Day, 2011). Vital marketing capabilities such as market research, pricing, product development, channels, promotion and market management (Vorhies *et al.*, 1999) need to be complemented with new adaptive capabilities to address the marketing capabilities gap (Day, 2011).

Recently, we have witnessed an emergence of literature focused on digital based marketing capabilities. Recognising the importance of digitalisation, Bianchi and Mathews (2016) define internet marketing capabilities as a firm's capability to use the internet in marketing functional areas such as online advertising, online sales, online after sales, market research and purchasing/procurement to generate value for customers. Nguyen *et al.* (2015) introduce the concept of SM strategic capabilities or the ability of firms to integrate their knowledge garnered from SM resources and skills with their strategic directions. The definition of SM marketing capability presented in this paper departs from and adds to the two digital marketing capabilities found in the literature in three important ways. Firstly, SM marketing capability is not assumed as inherent, rather developed in interaction processes between the entrepreneurial actor and his/her network. Secondly, it is defined using a relational exchange perspective (Dyer and Singh, 1998; Lorenzoni and Lipparini, 1999), which views competitive advantage as stemming from idiosyncratic capabilities embedded and developed in interaction in dyadic and network relationships rather than developed internally at an individual firm level. Thirdly, SM is viewed as part of the capability rather than as a communication tool for capability development.

*Social media marketing capability*

SM marketing capability comprises four-layered abilities; the ability to connect, engage, co-ordinate and collaborate in interaction with business exchange partners. It rests on SM's ability to create activities and resources in the interaction between the entrepreneurial firm and its B2B partners. Marketing activities and resources created may range from a simple connection to a new B2B customer or to the co-creation of a new service or product via interacting on SM.

The ability to connect and engage as part of SM marketing capability development is related to the way in which entrepreneurs can communicate using the technology. SM has reshaped communication methods (Mehmet and Clarke, 2016). SM is often defined, and thus, confined in this way as a usage or communication tool (Leek *et al.*, 2016; Swani *et al.*, 2014) to enable other activities and resources to be activated, for example, to improve customer engagement, customer service, lead generation and support marketing outcomes (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011). Using SM in this way, the entrepreneurial firm can reach out beyond their restricted network context or the part of the network the firm considers relevant (Anderson *et al.*, 1994) into a wider network horizon (Holmen and Pedersen, 2003), to bring new and diverse activities and resources into the firm. Few studies have focused on how entrepreneurial firms can develop relationships and networks in this way (Sigfusson and Chetty, 2013), to establish contacts with new business customers or distributors and develop existing relationships, as well as replacing older ones (Bocconcelli *et al.*, 2017; Lipiäinen, 2015).

"Connect" is defined as the ability to target and receive specific messages to sought after B2B actors outside the entrepreneurial firm's local networks. Defined in this way, SM is viewed as a connection and communication tool (Lacoste, 2016). Strategies in resource and activity interactions centre on SM as a means to initiate relationships with a wider network horizon than the local context to which they are embedded. This could include initiating relationships with business customers, distributors (Schultz *et al.*, 2012) or other network actors where the message content is and can be personalised and designed with reciprocity in mind (Toppi *et al.*, 2012). The communication has become more strategic and is designed to initiate dialogue on activities such as information handling, production, delivery and administration (Håkansson and Johanson, 2002), which can develop towards the two-way use of SM as B2B relationships develop (Quinton and Wilson, 2016; Shih, 2009; Swani *et al.*, 2014) and the message increases in complexity (Mehmet and Clarke, 2016).

"Engage" refers to the ability to immediately communicate social and business messages between current and future B2B relational partners. SM's use as an engagement tool begins where the actors create a conversation or two-way, bilateral engagement. Message content is created in interaction, meaningful for all parties, forging deeper relational engagement (Harrigan *et al.*, 2015). Engage in the B2B relationship marketing sense moves beyond the simple notion of customer engagement as the message content is created between the partners through their interaction on SM. In engagement, the nature and atmosphere of this primarily bilateral content are unique to the interacting parties.

Co-ordinate and collaborate are related to how entrepreneurs can use the technology to co-create value (Frow *et al.*, 2015). Viewed in this way, SM can be bundled with other resources and, as such, be used by interacting firms to link and create activities and resources in combination with one another. That is, SM can be transformed in interaction in a strategic relationship marketing activity or resource where a degree of uniqueness is created in interaction. Viewed as a relationship and network marketing development tool, SM has the potential to be an activity and resource in its own right with wider strategic

relationship marketing value, which can be harnessed to create value for network actors in interaction and to be part of complex forms of interaction.

We define "co-ordinate" as the ability to synchronise activities among and to share resources between, B2B partners. Viewed in this light, the SM platform becomes part of the resource or activity in itself. At a resource level, this could involve the coordination of information and knowledge flows with multiple network partners (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2016; Andzulis *et al.*, 2013; Leek *et al.*, 2016) that could potentially add to product and services exchanged. SM is immediate, involves real-time conversations, new dialogue and multiple discussions simultaneously (Fischer and Reuber, 2011; Iankova *et al.*, 2018). Hence, SM can be used to configure activity between partners to resolve problems and as a resource to quickly respond to partner needs.

"Collaborate" is defined as the ability to create and co-create new activities and resources between current and future partners. Of the four defining layers of SM marketing capability, it may be the most difficult for competitors to imitate. SM may offer the potential for multiple actors, in partnership with the entrepreneurial firm, to cooperate on new activities that create business opportunities for the firms. B2B relationships become more collaborative with engagement and there has been some evidence in recent years that SM can support increasingly complex forms of interaction, such as collaborative co-created activities (Lipiäinen, 2015). In this way, SM acts as a resource and activity in developing collaborations, catalysing innovations (Shaltoni, 2017) and value co-creation (Andzulis *et al.*, 2013). SM, in the context of collaboration, becomes part of the product/service offered by the entrepreneurs. For example, by using SM a group of entrepreneurial firms can cooperate to offer their products at a co-operative event. The essence of this collaboration, that is, what they are offering to the buyer, is not possible without its creation in a virtual environment. The barriers to its creation and logistics needed to make this a reality would be too great in the physical environment or using traditional marketing media. This impact is one beyond viewing SM as just a communications platform. We suggest that SM, as a collaborative network resource, enables the entrepreneurial firm and its partners to co-operate to create new products, new services and, potentially, new business networks.

*Digital engagement strategies and tactics*

We have defined SM marketing capability to comprise the ability of a firm and its partners to use the digital medium to co-create activity and resource layers in interaction and outlined these layers. However, for this capability to be realised in practice it needs to be cascaded from a meta-theoretical, relatively abstracted (higher-order), concept. This is achieved by translating it into digital engagement strategies and tactics. Linking capability to strategy and tactics addresses the need to develop marketing theory that is relevant and applicable to practice (Bonoma, 1984; Grönroos, 2006; Homburg *et al.*, 2017; Marcos-Cuevas *et al.*, 2016).

Digital engagement strategies represent the purposeful element of planning for implementing SM marketing capability, see, for example, Chirumalla *et al.* (2018) who develop SM adoption strategies for the marketing-R&D interface. These strategies represent the overall approaches to guide action and, in the case of this research, will be derived from working between the data and the four capability layers. Strategies of this type represent the framework that a firm can use to set objectives and plan its SM marketing effort. Digital engagement strategies in a collaborative context necessitate thinking about how message content can be used to initiate resource and activity interaction of which SM is a part. Identifying these engagement strategies will then present an array of choices to implementation, which is interdependent on reactions and actions of partners including B2B customers, suppliers and competitors.

Tactics enable the realisation of SM marketing capability into practice. Putting the capability into effect completes a cycle of the cascade of capability to strategy to practice, which informs its next iteration. Marketing tactics are the implementation of strategies into practice or everyday marketing actions to achieve market goals (Bonoma, 1984; Tafesse and Wien, 2018). In this research, we will be directly deriving engagement tactics from SM accounts of an entrepreneurial firm and validating them through interviews with its network of partners. This data will facilitate the grouping of tactics to match the layers of SM marketing capability. Tactics are especially attractive to the entrepreneurial firm as they are the active components of SM engagement, which suit the "ready fire aim" agile nature of the entrepreneurial firm (Harrison and Leitch, 2005).

## Methodology

### *Research design*

This study used a qualitative research methodology, using a single, embedded case study research design (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003), and an ethnographic content approach to data analysis (Altheide, 1987; Altheide and Schneider, 2013) of an entrepreneurial firm and its network of actors to identify the digital engagement strategies and tactics used to develop SM marketing capability. Case study research is the most popular method used in the study of business networks (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005; Easton, 2010) and suits the study of relationship engagement and interactions being built over SM platforms (Beverland and Lindgreen, 2010). This method acknowledges calls for more qualitative B2B SM research (Alves *et al.*, 2016) and aligns with the theory building objectives of our study (Cope, 2011; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

Selecting a single case study design allows for deep understanding and rich description (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991) and can be used to provide a very powerful example (Siggelkow, 2007). Furthermore, the connectedness of business networks comprising multiple actors makes gaining rich insight into network processes complicated, which may render single case designs both fitting and inescapable (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005; Easton, 2010). Recognising that "richness may lie in the eye of the beholder" (Weick, 2007, p. 14) we sharpen the view through the use of 26 embedded cases to strengthen our study and gain further insight and meanings (Eisenhardt, 1991; Yin, 2010) perceived as vital to understand complex business relationships (Dubois and Araujo, 2007). Case studies allow for multiple methods to be used (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Kohlbacher, 2006), leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the practices involved (Wahyuni, 2012). The three data sources selected for this study were the communications between network actors on the SM platforms frequently used by the case firm (Facebook and Twitter, in this instance), two in-depth interviews with the entrepreneurial case firm owner who operated its SM accounts, and one interview with 26 actors whom the case firm engaged with on SM. In total, almost 40 h of interview data was collected.

An ECA approach (Altheide, 1987; Altheide and Schneider, 2013) was used to analyse the substantial volume of textual data generated (Bernhard *et al.*, 2010). ECA is used to gather and analyse the content of the text (Weber, 1990), which is then codified into various categories depending on selected criteria and specific content characteristics (Opoku *et al.*, 2008). ECA differs from the traditional quantitative content analysis in a number of ways. Firstly, the researcher is central to the process (Altheide and Schneider, 2013) as the approach is essentially a recursive and abductive movement between concept development, coding, analysis and interpretation (Bryman, 2012). Secondly, although there is initial categorisation applied to the data (our four layers of SM marketing capability in this study),

the expectation is for the boundaries of these to evolve during the course of analysis. ECA is a more reflexive approach that allows concepts and categories to emerge iteratively during analysis, rather than depending on predetermined and rigid categories associated with a more deductive study (Altheide, 1987).

We limited the unit of analysis to be measured by examining B2B marketing engagements made through two SM sites, Facebook and Twitter. This choice was mainly an outcome of the empirical data collected, as the entrepreneurial case firm rarely used or mentioned the use of other SM sites. This approach has been used in other studies in the same area of research (Lacoste, 2016). Additionally, entrepreneurs that use SM sites on a personal level, with Facebook and Twitter tending to be the most commonly used (Harrigan *et al.*, 2015; Leek *et al.*, 2016), predictably tend to use the same platforms for their business ventures and potentially in a similar manner (Keinänen *et al.*, 2015). As a result, SM communications were analysed from Facebook and Twitter only.

*Case description and selection*

The case firm "Artisan" is an entrepreneurial venture, established in 2014 by "Bob". The firm is based in the South of Ireland and currently employs one person. It produces a range of artisan sauces distinguished from the competitors in the market by their high quality taste and artisanal status. Currently, the business is undergoing rapid expansion having attained a listing in one of Ireland's largest grocery retail chains and is now available in 300 of its stores. The case firm is distributing to independent retail stores in the UK and Dubai with the firm's UK exports, in particular, growing substantially in the past 12 months. Case selection commenced with an in-depth analysis of our outcome of interest, the SM activities of eight entrepreneurial firms (Dubois and Araujo, 2007). The case firm was chosen as an exemplar, purposive case from among the researchers' data bank of eight cases in the industry sector to meet our study's theoretical aims (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). This decision was based on the owner's expertise in SM and the firm's extensive and sophisticated use of SM (Felix *et al.*, 2017), in comparison to the other cases analysed and its use of the same to build its B2B relationships and networks. "Artisan" was deemed an information rich case (Patton, 1990), allowing the researchers to gain insights that the alternative entrepreneurial firms would not be able to provide (Siggelkow, 2007) because of their less collaborative use of SM.

The researchers were able to gather data from the firm's SM accounts from when they were set-up, which included the period prior to the firm commencing trading. The SM accounts are controlled by the firm's owner-manager, which provided a baseline of consistent interaction with network partners and more strategic use of SM. In addition, the firm facilitated the researchers in making contact with all of its B2B network actors that it engages on SM, which allowed us to collect rich interview data in addition to having access to the content of the SM accounts of the entrepreneur. The firm has a number of vital business actors in its network, including two main distributors, multiple suppliers, numerous independent stores and other entrepreneurial firms with whom the case firm has built and maintained relationships.

*Data sources*

The data sources for the analysis were from the SM accounts of the entrepreneur and from interviews. The researchers analysed data from two of the case firm's SM accounts, Facebook and Twitter. SM platforms such as Facebook and Twitter facilitate communication in several specific ways (Macnamara, 2012). For example, you can "post" comments on other user's communications (A "status update" on Facebook or "tweet" on

Twitter), "like" Facebook pages, "follow" Twitter pages, and "tweet" or "re-tweet" to Twitter users. For this study, Facebook "posts" and Twitter "tweets" were analysed. These communications were gathered from when the firm created the Facebook and Twitter accounts, in 2011 and 2010, respectively, up until January of 2017 – the study's data collection end period. Of note, the accounts were set-up when the entrepreneur viewed the business as a hobby, with the majority of content posted from the end of 2013. The SM data was collected using image capture software (the snipping tool application was used and the resultant jpeg images were uploaded to NVivo), as many of them included images, video, links to external internet sites/pages and interactions among actors. In total, 920 Facebook posts and 1,152 tweets were collected. The analysis of the SM data was supported by two in-depth interviews (lasting approximately 1.5 h each) with the entrepreneurial firm's owner to gather his perspective, experiences and opinions (Bryman, 2012) on SM for B2B relationship and network engagement. We also interviewed 26 actors with whom the case firm engaged in SM. The interview data was used to solidify and validate the capability layers and tactics, and to identify the strategies developed from the ECA.

*Data analysis and coding strategy*

To cope with a large amount of data generated, the ECA was complemented by using the ECA was complemented by using NVivo to ensure accuracy in the coding procedure, making the data handling easier and transparent (Ryan, 2009). Stage 1 of the data classification was to reduce the SM data to B2B posts and tweets only. The unit of analysis focused solely on B2B marketing engagements between actors using SM. Given the theory development objectives of the paper, the ECA method permits analysis to move recursively between data and theory. Stage 2 of the analysis was to link the SM posts and tweets to the four layers of SM marketing capability. As these were loosely defined at the start of the process from the extant literature, an open coding procedure was followed (Miles and Huberman, 1994), and this coding process iteratively made the boundaries of the layers of capability clear. We relied heavily on NVivo codes or *verbatim* chunks of data to categorise SM engagements. Stage 3 of coding was focused on the SM data and coding the data assigned to each of the capability layers into groups and labelling each of the resultant digital engagement tactical categories. Stage 4 of data analysis and coding, which also acted as a validity check on the process to date, classified the interview data from the entrepreneur and his network of SM actors into the tactical categories. The overall amount of data classified to this stage is presented in Table I in numeric format (1,248 posts and tweets, and 596 pieces of interview data). Once the digital engagement tactical categories were finalised and the definitions of the four layers of the SM marketing capability bounded, the researchers worked between these two classifications and the interview data to derive the digital engagement strategies. The details of each of the coding stages are presented in the next section and linked to sample SM and interview data in Appendices 1 and 2.

*Data coding process*

Stage 1 of analysis resulted in the SM data being condensed to B2B interactions only – included were business actors such as suppliers, distributors, retailers, other entrepreneurial or larger firms, as well as various other business interest groups such as local enterprise groups, independent media and food bloggers. This was achieved by noting all user names/SM aliases of those who interacted with or were interacted with by, the firm and determining whether they were a business (B2B) actor or a consumer actor (B2C). This was verified by checking each individual SM profile of the relevant interaction, which took place during data collection to ensure they were a B2B actor. Upon completion of this task, the

| Connect | Engage | Co-ordinate | Collaborate |
|---|---|---|---|
| Feeler posts and tweets<br>SM (54); E (15); I (56) | Dyadic, bilateral conversation posts and tweets<br>SM (137); E (6); I (59) | Information sharing posts and tweets<br>SM (23); E (1); I (31) | Collaborative events and pop-up posts and tweets<br>SM (385); E (5); I (59) |
| Delivery announcement posts and tweets<br>SM (163); E (3); I (12) | Reciprocation and new partner posts and tweets<br>SM (22); E (4); I (22) | Knowledge sharing posts and tweets<br>SM (20); E (1); I (37) | Product adaptations and collaborative food pairing posts and tweets<br>SM (86); E (7); I (43) |
| Rating, review and recommendation posts and tweets<br>SM (51); E (2); I (23) | Rating and recommendation conversational posts and tweets<br>SM (72); E (2); I (7) | Order processing and fulfilment posts and tweets<br>SM (5); E (2); I (40) | Collaborative sales promotions posts and tweets<br>SM (21); E (4); I (59) |
| Content and post sharing to instigate connections<br>SM (127); E (0); I (16) | Multi-actor and multi-thread conversational posts and tweets<br>SM (67); E (0); I (15) | | Collaborative networking posts and tweets<br>SM (15); E (5); I (60) |
| *Total SM data count: 395*<br>*Total interview data count: 127* | *Total SM data count: 298*<br>*Total interview data count: 115* | *Total SM data count: 48*<br>*Total interview data count: 112* | *Total SM data count: 507*<br>*Total interview data count: 242* |

**Notes:** SM (number) refers to the number of posts and tweets categorised to the tactic code; E and I (number) refers to the number of pieces of interview data categorised to the tactic code from the entrepreneur (E) and the 26 network partners (I)

**Table I.** Four defining layers and their associated digital engagement tactics based on ECA coding procedures

B2B communications reached a combined total of 1,258 Facebook posts and Twitter tweets (10 communications could not be classified leaving 1,248 for further analysis). The reasons for the excluded posts were because of duplicated posts, an incorrect B2B network actor identification, and a B2B entity named in a B2C engagement.

Stage 2 of data analysis involved the researchers coding the large quantity of SM B2B data captured. This commenced by linking the posts and tweets to one of the four layers of SM marketing capability. This enabled the researchers to develop the initial boundaries between the four layers further. Appendix 1 provides 77 key examples of the SM data from this process related to the four defining layers.

Stage 3 in data analysis concentrated on grouping each post and tweet in the capability layers and labelling the resultant categories (Table I). This data analysis began by first categorising the Facebook posts and Twitter tweets that were assigned to our four categories based on social activities or behaviours of the network actors, and the type of interaction. For example, the engagement may have been in relation to a potential supplier wanting contact information, classified as "potential partner post" or a discussion on or promotion of an upcoming food festival, classified as "food festival post". The analysis was completed by generating common groups around the identified activities or topics of the engagement. The researchers used a similar process to Zubiaga *et al.* (2015), in their study of SM trends, grouping the tweets or posts under categories based upon the type of activity or communication used by the network actor, and completed with the discretion of the researchers in terms of which category was appropriate for each engagement. For example, the case firm would send "feeler posts and tweets" to other business actors to try and instigate a conversation for the first time. This was reciprocated as an activity by other

business actors to the case firm. In total, 54 of the Facebook posts and Twitter tweets fell under this tactic grouping. Another example was the grouping of collaborative elements of the case firm's SM activities. The announcement and promotion of tasting events, food festivals or farmer's markets that were held in conjunction with other network actors would fall under the same category heading of "collaborative events and pop-up post and tweets" – this yielded 385 Facebook posts and Twitter tweets. In total, 1,248 posts and tweets were grouped under 15 different SM relationship marketing tactics groupings. At the end of this stage of data analysis 15 tactics categories were finalised and linked to the four layers of SM marketing capability (Table I), and their development solidified further the boundaries and the definition of the layers in line with our abductive theory building research process.

Stage 4 of data analysis used NVivo to link the interview data to the layers of SM marketing capability and to the 15 digital engagement tactics. This was conducted using codes in NVivo from the capability layers and the labels of the digital engagement tactics to classify the data. Sample data from the interviews are presented in Appendix 2 and Tables II-V. The researchers also manually coded some interviews to validate the coding process. In overall terms, the interview data confirmed the categories from the earlier stages of coding with very little change at this final stage. To complete the process of linking digital engagement tactics to SM marketing capability, the researchers compiled a set of SM digital engagement strategies for each of the layers. These reflect the strategic rationale behind the digital engagement tactics groupings the case firm used for building B2B SM marketing capability. We identified eight SM digital engagement strategies in total (Table VI) by working back and forth between the boundaries of the four layers of SM marketing

**Table II.** Digital engagement tactic grouping for connect and their descriptions

| Tactics groupings | Description of connect tactics |
|---|---|
| Feeler posts and tweets | Posts and tweets sent by one network actor to another, designed to grab the recipients' attention and generate reciprocal communication. Our interview data illustrates that these may ensue through flattery "by saying wow that looks fantastic or something like that" (NA 9) or for "lead generation, actually contacting restaurants" (NA 7) and to "reach out and say would you be interested in talking" (NA 16) |
| Delivery announcement posts and tweets | Posts and tweets in which the firm uses the delivery of a new batch of products or the announcement of a new retailer or supplier to target potential network actors via SM, who may reciprocate. For example, "we tag retailers to let people know where it is stocked and where you can buy the product" (NA 11) |
| Rating, review and recommendation posts and tweets | Posts and tweets written by one network actor to another network actor's SM accounts, publically attesting to their excellence or quality, to illicit a communicative response from them. NA 16 noted that they dedicate SM posts each Friday to recommend other, unknown craft producers "in the hopes of developing relationships with them". Similarly, NA 10 stated that they "have recommended brands to businesses via SM" whilst others have received positive ratings and reviews, "people mention me, such as bloggers . . . they love what I do" (NA 8) |
| Content and post sharing to instigate connections | The focal actor shares a post/tweet from the potential network actor's SM accounts or vice versa, in the hope of generating a response from the potential network actor. NA 3 stated that news about the growth of their firm was shared by other SM B2B actors to instigate a connection, whereas others mentioned sharing content "such as posts on recipes or products" (NA 10) to build further relationships |

capability and the tactics and using some data from the interviews where we were able to ask about the rationale for using various SM engagements (see, Appendix 2, for some data examples from this process).

*Data authentication*

The NVivo coding was completed by one of the researchers. At each stage of the data coding process, peer debriefing was extensively used by the researchers (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Although one researcher led the coding activity and conducted the physical coding practice, a group debriefing session was held at each stage with all researchers present to discuss the codes. Sample data was drawn for each category developed to debate the robustness of its classifications. The final boundary definitions of the SM marketing capabilities, the labels of the tactics grouping and the strategies were agreed by all the researchers. Disagreements were resolved through further iterations of coding until each member of the research team was satisfied with the finalised categories for each stage of the coding process. A codebook was used, iteratively developed over this entire process, and is reflected in the definitions of each tactic category. For example, Table III outlines a detailed description for each tactic grouping in the connect layer of our SM marketing capability. The use of a codebook also

| Tactics groupings | Description of engage tactics |
|---|---|
| Dyadic, bilateral conversation posts and tweets | Single actor conversations with the potential to develop into multi-thread communications with current and/or potential network actors. The actors discussed how reactions to posts on SM, that is, "liking" posts or adding comments, signals agreement or approval and can engage multiple players. Others noted that saying "congrats and that kind of stuff" (NA 3) helps build interaction and encourages retweeting as "Twitter is all about developing conversation" (NA 21) |
| Reciprocation and new partner posts and tweets | Posts and tweets concerned with reciprocation and acknowledging a network actor reaching out to the focal firm. As was noted in relation to developing new business, "I put out on Twitter that I didn't have a Dublin stockist and within 2 days I got two new shops from putting it out on social media" (NA 8); "we use Facebook to contact small independent shops as sometimes they won't have an email address or website, so SM has kind of helped with that" (NA 6) |
| Rating and recommendation conversational posts and tweets | Public rating, recommendation posts and tweets aimed at fostering reciprocation and initiating further discussion and potential relationship development. NA 9 discussed how some SM B2B network actors continuously recommend his produce by commenting on SM posts, "they may say 'oh fantastic' if my stuff comes up". NA 8 discussed how retailers were great for promoting and recommending her products on SM, "some of my stockists are also quite good, there are guys up in Belfast and they're regularly tweeting about my products." |
| Multi-actor, multi-thread conversational posts and tweets | Posts and tweets discussing everyday topics but with multiple actors and multiple conversation threads. For example, NA 3 mentioned it was common for SM posts on Twitter to lead to in-depth conversations on a given topic where multiple actors become involved, "someone might do the first tweet and tag about 9 companies and then you're flying it, you can follow them and keep going with it. It cascades then, yeah". Similarly, NA 14 noted, "you would be following the twitter conversation and you would be tagging in the other food producers." |

**Table III.** Digital engagement tactic grouping for engage and their descriptions

ensured a level of inter-coder reliability and reduced the bias that may be attributed to a sole coder. Validation of the data using two sources of data (Smith *et al.*, 1994) – SM data and interviews – in addition to a suitable audit trail through the use of NVivo, completed the rigour of the research process.

## Findings

The theory development objectives of our paper were developed through a recursive cycle of abductive analysis. Our findings are summarised as follows: Table I summarises the results of our ECA data quantitatively and aligns it to the layers of SM marketing capability and to the 15 tactical groups that emerged from our SM data analysis. It also presents the number of interview data pieces aligned to each tactical grouping for the case study firm and its 26 SM partners. In each section of the findings, we make reference to appendices, which contain sample raw data for SM posts and tweets (Appendix 1) and interviews (Appendix 2), which backed up our classification of the SM data. Tables II-V present the post-analysis descriptions of the 15 SM digital engagement tactics groupings that an entrepreneurial firm can use to implement its SM digital engagement strategies (8 identified) in the development of SM marketing capability. While our findings are presented for the case firm, supporting evidence from the 26 embedded network actors for each of the digital engagement strategies and tactics is provided in Tables II-V and Appendix 2. Our findings are organised around the four layers of SM marketing capability as follows: connect, engage, co-ordinate and collaborate.

### *Connect: digital engagement strategies and tactics*

The case firm demonstrated the use of both SM platforms to target messages strategically with reciprocal engagement in mind and to connect with sought after business actors outside its local networks. For example, network actors would try and reach out to the case firm to establish contact (Appendix 1, Data examples 1 and 2 (AA, 1 and 2)), while the case firm, in turn, would do the same with possible business partners or entities it viewed as having the potential to add value to it (AA, 3). Appendix 1, Data examples 1-9 are of feeler posts and tweets tactics used to initiate relational dialogue (Appendix 2 has sample interview data for actors, 16 and 26 that also illustrate feeler posts). This tactic grouping was also evident in the interview with the case entrepreneur, Bob, for example:

> [. . .] It's also good for contacting people, articles and publishing [. . .] More and more I see people saying "I saw you on Twitter". So I see it as a good way of generating, or at least initiating a relationship.

The case firm attempted to establish online connections with its retailers through delivery announcement tactics (AA, 10-14) of new stockists on a regular basis (AA, 10 and 11), in addition to deliveries being made to restock retailers (AA, 12) and enquiring as to how a new stockist was finding the case firm's produce (AA, 14). Potential network actors also left rating, reviews and recommendation posts and tweets (AA, 15-18) regarding the quality of the case firm's product or service (AA, 15 and 16). This was reciprocated by the case firm in many instances towards similar entrepreneurial ventures or local restaurants (AA, 17 and 18). Bob explained in the interviews:

> I would put up stuff as well that say – "Oh can't wait to try out this new product from X company" or "I just tried out Y company's new product, it was savage".

Finally, the case firm would share content (AA, 19-22) from network actor's profiles to try and commence a new relationship with that network actor (AA, 19), while current network actors such as suppliers or retailers would have their content shared by the entrepreneurial

firm to promote the existing offline relationship (AA, 20 and 21). Business actors would reciprocate with, for example, a firm sharing the case firm's new website (AA, 22) (see, additional examples for interviews for Actors 3 and 10 in Appendix 2). The post-data analysis description of the digital engagement tactic category, connect, is presented in Table II.

*Engage: digital engagement strategies and tactics*

The message content in this category depends on reciprocity and is created in interaction between the case firm and network actors. The message content involves social and resources communication in a primarily bilateral engagement not only on a dyadic level but also on a multi-actor level.

Dyadic bilateral conversations posts and tweet tactics (AA, 23-28) on general topics were common, which facilitate the case firm and responding network actors to develop their business relationship further. The level of engagement and further reciprocation varied:

> Some will just like the post, others will comment back and say oh glad you enjoyed it, love your products too. Most would say something like that or that they can't wait to try Case Firm A! Most would reciprocate in that way yeah. If they haven't tried our product then they tend to, and will put up a post (Bob).

New network actors commended the firm on its recent appearance at an event, awards won in industry competitions or recent expansion of the business (AA, 24 and 25). Existing relationships with network actors were also maintained through holiday greetings (AA, 26), thanking a firm for its help (AA, 27) or interaction around seeing each other at some event or gathering (AA, 28).

Many posts and tweets regarding the acknowledgement of a network actor's first interaction (reciprocation and new partner posts and tweets tactics grouping data AA, 29-33) were also common. Network actors engaged with the case firm by "following" their Twitter account or "liking" their Facebook page. The case firm engaged with multiple new businesses through SM, many making enquiries into whether they could be considered as stockists of their sauces (AA, 30 and 31). Posted and tweeted tactics centred on ratings, recommendations and conversations were evident (AA, 34-38). For example, the case firm receiving and responding to praise and official reviews from various network actors via SM (AA, 34 and 35). The primary difference between this grouping and the similarly named "rating, review and recommendation posts and tweets" grouping in our "connect" category of our framework is that these posts were often reciprocated. An example of this tactic from the interview transcript is as follows:

> I put up a post a while back for Salad-Store1 inside in town, saying that I'd stopped off for lunch and that their stuff was great [. . .] another place up in Dublin called Lunch-Store1 posted a picture of their food when I had lunch there. [. . .] some will just like the post, others will comment back and say oh glad you enjoyed it, love your products too [. . .] (Bob).

Finally, evidence of multi-actor or multilateral conversation posts or tweets tactics between multiple network actors was present throughout the SM data. These multi-thread communications (conversations with multiple "comments" on Facebook or response "tweets" on Twitter, around the same, initial interaction) showed that both platforms support the case firm and its network of business partners to engage successfully in a public setting with content created through interaction on many topics (AA, 39-42). Back up interview data with the case firm's network of SM partners for each of the tactical groupings in this section are in Appendix 2 (8 sample pieces of data presented for the engage layer

from a total of 103 pieces from the 26 interviews [Table I]). The description of the engage tactic category is presented in Table III.

*Co-ordinate: digital engagement strategies and tactics*

The case firm used both SM platforms to respond quickly to its B2B partner needs, to action and create activity with its partners. The firm was also able to use SM to share knowledge and information that adds to product and services exchanged in the network.

Sample data for the information sharing tactics grouping is presented in the sample data in Appendix 1 (AA, 43-47). Other entrepreneurs shared external links and information they believe the case firm might find useful (AA, 43 and 44), retailers shared information regarding the availability of the firm's produce in their stores (AA, 45), with the case firm sharing listing information as well (AA, 46), and blogs/recent reviews would be shared by bloggers or industry leaders (AA, 47). Knowledge sharing (AA, 48-53) was also disseminated between the case firm and its network of business actors in an effort to create additional value. Businesses enquired as to how best to use the sauces provided by the case firm with their own products (AA, 48), with the firm making suggestions for food pairings in multiple conversations (AA, 49 and 50). Other entrepreneurs, restaurant owners and chefs consistently asked the case firm regarding the availability of raw materials in Ireland (AA, 51 and 52), with others requesting the official heat level of certain sauces (AA, 53). Six pieces of data from the interviews with the case firm's network actors is presented in Appendix 2 for these two co-ordinate tactic groupings.

Another co-ordinate category use of SM by the entrepreneurial firm was in relation to order processing and fulfilment (AA, 54-58). The case firm and its network actors used SM to conduct activities such as ordering products (AA, 54 and 55), re-stocking existing retailers (AA, 56) and altering order or delivery details (AA, 57), while it would also share details regarding delivery times and dates with some retailers on occasion (AA, 58). The case firm owner explained how one of his longest serving retailers used Twitter solely to re-order products, while Facebook was also used by a number of retailers and restaurants:

> Yeah, Butcher1 use Twitter. Private messaging they'd use, contact me and ask for X amount of jars, and I'd reply [. . .] deliver to them then. The odd time shops would do it, but mainly them. Restaurant1, I know the manager [. . .] he uses Facebook to contact me about the same thing. If any shop contacts me on Facebook or Twitter, then that's grand, I'm happy with that because it's a sale at the end of the day. Places have contacted me directly asking for samples (Bob).

The final description of the co-ordinate tactic category is presented in Table IV.

*Collaboration: digital engagement strategies and tactics*

In the collaborate category, the case firm demonstrated the ability to use its SM platforms as an activity integrator between one to many partners and to co-create new resources between one or many partners. The case firm and its network actors engaged in activities surrounding the promotion and execution of collaborative events and pop-up posts (AA, 59-65) where multiple network actors took part such as food markets or food and drink festivals (AA, 59 and 60). The case firm also used SM as an outlet to promote collaborative events with retailers such as food tastings (AA, 61), and the firm actively engaged in specific entrepreneurial events, workshops and boot camps that used SM as the primary promotion and communication tool throughout the event (AA, 62-65).

SM was used by the case firm for product adaptations and collaborative food pairing posts and tweets (AA, 66-70). New product partnerships and collaborative food projects were announced via both platforms for the first time (AA, 66 and 67), while other network

| Tactics groupings | Description of co-ordinate tactics |
|---|---|
| Information sharing posts and tweets | Posts and tweets that centre on general information of value to the network actors, for example, links to blogs, sales opportunities and/or relevant event information. For example, NA 15 noted, "you might say listen guys I have been in this store and they are looking for products, so if you go in there you might get a bit of business". Further information exchanged related to "information about packaging, suppliers, ingredients, anything and everything" (NA 8) and potential buyers, "I have sent information about buyers we have met, I have sent presentations and stuff like that through instant messenger" (NA 16) |
| Knowledge sharing posts and tweets | Knowledge shared via posts and tweets aimed at enhancing the product/service of the firm in some manner, for example, knowledge in relation to product use, product storage or more detail on ingredients. Some common responses from interviews are illustrative, "SM can help to bounce ideas off someone or just to see if someone else has experienced what you are experiencing at the moment . . . You might go in looking for a supplier and say look lads, I've an awful problem with fellas selling me boxes, and do ye know anyone who could do the packaging for me" (NA 25); "we talk to the small producers every day. We talk to each other about some issues, anything that is valuable that could be a bit of a resource for each other" (NA 11) |
| Order processing and fulfilment posts and tweets | Posts and tweets associated with the logistical operations of the firm and the network actors involved. For example, re-ordering and delivery with retail customers and distributors ensued via SM, "there was a small cafe last year that ordered from us on Facebook and they got into the habit of doing that" (NA 23), "I do all my ordering from them via twitter" (NA 8). For others, SM facilitated the sale and delivery of new products, "on Twitter you will get enthusiastic pubs saying make sure we get a keg of that new brew, put it in our next order, that kind of thing. The immediacy of Twitter really helps the producers to speak to the retailers" (NA 4) |

**Table IV.** Digital engagement tactic grouping for co-ordinate and their descriptions

actors such as chefs, bloggers and even some other businesses would create and post to SM their use of the case firm's products in new recipes or in combinations of a variety of artisan products (AA, 68-70). As the case owner commented:

> There has been people who have used the sauces to do stuff, I know Pub1 are using them and Restaurant1 are using them for burgers, that's them making something using my sauce so quite happy about that [. . .]. Blogger1 would do lots of recipes and would post that she is using Case Firm's sauces in them [. . .] (Bob).

Joint or group efforts were also made via SM for the purpose of collaborative sales promotional posts and tweets (AA, 71-73), especially in the form of collaborative competitions or giveaways – many of which were initiated and fully executed over either Facebook or Twitter without offline interactions taking place. The firm cooperated with many firms via SM for the creation of competitions where produce from multiple network actors would be combined to give away (AA, 72 and 73). An example from the owner's interview was as follows:

> [. . .] myself and 14 other businesses [. . .] Each one of us had a hamper to give away, and we posted them up and tagged all the other businesses in the posts to give them away. That got a great reaction [. . .] Some of the traction you got online [. . .] was crazy, which was great. The reach organically was massive (Bob).

Finally, SM made it possible for the entrepreneurial firm and multiple network actors to collaborate on new activities and resources. This was evidenced in the collaborative networking posts and tweets (AA, 74-77) between the case firm and its network of business actors. SM enabled the entrepreneurial firm and its partners to collaborate more easily on events such as farmers' markets, festivals (AA, 74) and potentially develop new networks through #FF (Follow Friday) (AA, 75 and 76). This #FF function made it possible for one network actor to publicly connect multiple businesses using one tweet. Sample data from the interviews with the case firm's network of actors is presented in Appendix 2 for all of the tactical categories of the collaborative layer of SM marketing capability. The description of the digital engagement tactical grouping is presented in Table V.

## Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this research was to identify the digital engagement strategies and tactics aligned to a business network approach to SM marketing capability of the entrepreneurial firm. In the literature review, we proposed a definition of SM marketing capability comprising four layers of digital engagement. These layers were theoretically bounded and defined, and their associated digital engagement strategies and tactics were derived from the SM data of an entrepreneurial firm complemented by interviews with its owner and 26 of its network partners. The final definitions of the four layers and their associated digital engagement strategies (a total of 8) and tactics (a total of 15) are presented in Table VI. The contribution of this research is its development of a definition of SM marketing capability and its identification of digital engagement strategies and tactics for the entrepreneurial firm linked to this definition. From a theoretical standpoint, SM marketing capability is translated into practice via the strategies and tactics, and this cycle is recursive.

Our contribution is significant in the light of entrepreneurship and capability-based literature remaining largely silent when it comes to the study of capability development (Autio *et al.*, 2011; Zahra *et al.*, 2006). Our definition of SM marketing capability adds to this limited literature and further addresses the marketing capability gap in an era of change and digitalisation (Day, 2011). SM marketing capability and the associated digital engagement strategies and tactics also contribute to the literature by focusing on SM from an entrepreneurship and business network perspective (La Rocca *et al.*, 2013; McGrath and O'Toole, 2018). The dearth of published work in this area is surprising given the importance of networks for entrepreneurs to overcome their liabilities of newness and smallness by providing a conduit to external resources.

The definition of SM marketing capability comprising four layers of engagement fits the action orientation of the entrepreneurial firm (Davidsson, 2015; McMullen and Shepherd, 2006) by focusing on how SM is used in interaction with its business partners. The definitional layers are based on a business network view of marketing in relationships and networks (Ford *et al.*, 2003; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995), which focuses its unit of analysis on interaction and interdependence among business actors. While there are other views of how B2B relationships might be co-ordinated (Felix *et al.*, 2017), it would be difficult for an entrepreneurial firm with a limited network power base, influence and marketing knowledge to use these approaches to build marketing capability. Layers of capability classifications are ideally thickly bounded (Durand and Paolella, 2013) and are presented as such in Table VI. The use of each ability is not mutually exclusive, meaning the available combinations of strategies and tactics emerging from the layers are wider than in categorisations based on multiple theories or options, albeit our ability labelled "collaborate" does require the most sophisticated SM ability to use effectively. Our defining layers are based on an interactive, collaborative SM position and integrated around this thematically

| Tactics groupings | Description of collaborate tactics |
|---|---|
| Collaborative events and pop-up posts and tweets | Posts and tweets designed around the development of, and participation in, collaborative events. As NA 5 noted, "I've organised a seminar for the last three years . . . and I organise my speakers on twitter every year, I know them primarily via twitter". For others, tasting events were organised via SM with details posted on twitter and Facebook to create awareness, "we would definitely have gotten tasting requests through social media, we will be tagging them and saying we are here in this retail store for this day and they would tag us in something as well" (NA 16). Event organisation and participation was evident amongst the majority of interviewees, "you can use the hashtag that they use at an event . . . asking to be involved in, or help out at different events does come through Facebook as well" (NA 24) |
| Product adaptations and collaborative food pairing posts and tweets | Posts and tweets designed to offer a new product to the market based on collaboration between two network actors. Examples from the interviews included posts created by one firm regarding the use of another actor's product as an ingredient or a new or adapted collaborative product offering developed between firms, ". . . a beer making company using tea in their beer contacted me via SM, a good collaboration came out of it" (NA 11); "we now have a collaborative product, a coffee IPA" (NA 25). Suggested food pairings and recipes we also commonplace, "it definitely has happened where people might post your product and mine will go well together and they might do an event or something like that. Lots of connections are made" (NA 20) |
| Collaborative sales promotions posts and tweets | Posts and tweets planned to promote a group offering or joint collaborative sales effort via SM. For example, joint competitions or product discounts with retailers were organised from inception to execution via SM platforms without the use of traditional communications channels, "I'd contact a company through social media and say would you like to do a competition?" (NA 10). Promotions extended to multiple firms engaging, "we did Christmas hampers where we all put products in and we would run the competition on each other sites on Facebook and we would all be promoting each other so every day you would be promoting a different business. It was that power of coming together that was really helpful and we reached something like 100,000 people with that campaign" (NA 16) |
| Collaborative networking posts and tweets | Posts and tweets designed to fit the collaborative and social nature of SM platforms allowing multiple network actors to simultaneously interact and create a new collaborative network resource. Our data suggested that hashtags (#) are used to co-ordinate communications and mobilise network actors permitting network actors to join the public dialogue being co-constructed by interacting network actors. For example, "I love the link on Twitter, the way you can drop in the pebble and it just flashes or explodes out. This woman was asked to collaborate on an Irish Christmas in a big store. She went straight on Twitter and said help guys and got 171 leads in minutes" (NA 22). NA 2 noted, "Twitter is beginning to diminish the old marketplace and the workings of the old marketplace . . . In terms of a product idea, it might come up, it might be suggested and acted upon" |

**Table V.** Digital engagement tactic grouping for collaborate and their descriptions

**Table VI.** Definitions of capability layers linked to digital engagement strategies and tactics

| SM marketing capability layer | Definition | Digital engagement strategies | Digital engagement tactics |
|---|---|---|---|
| Connect | Ability to target and receive specific messages to sought after B2B actors outside local networks | Message content designed with reciprocity and to invite users that match the firm; and message content delivered to a wider network horizon than possible via traditional communication media | Feeler posts and tweets<br>Delivery announcement posts and tweets<br>Rating, review and recommendation posts and tweets<br>Content and post sharing to instigate connections |
| Engage | Ability to immediately communicate social and business messages between current and future B2B network partners | Message content created in interaction and the nature and atmosphere of this content creates a platform for other exchanges; and social and resource communication primarily bilateral engagement between actors | Dyadic, bilateral conversation posts and tweets<br>Reciprocation and new partner posts and tweets<br>Rating and recommendation conversational posts and tweets<br>Multi-actor, multi-thread conversational posts and tweets |
| Co-ordinate | Ability to synchronise activities among, and to share resources between, B2B partners | Ability to use SM to respond quickly to B2B partner needs and to use it to action and create activity between partners; and ability to use SM to share knowledge and information that adds to product and services exchanged in the network | Information sharing posts and tweets<br>Knowledge sharing posts and tweets<br>Order processing and fulfilment posts and tweets |
| Collaborate | Ability to create and co-create new activities and resources between current and future partners | Ability to use SM as an activity integrator between one to many partners; and ability to use SM to co-create new resources between one to many partners | Collaborative events and pop-up posts and tweets<br>Product adaptations and collaborative food pairing posts and tweets<br>Collaborative sales promotions posts and tweets<br>Collaborative networking posts and tweets |

(Finch *et al.*, 2012; Fjeldstad *et al.*, 2012) rather than presenting SM use along opposing marketing strategies or within a singular typology (Homburg *et al.*, 2004; Woodside *et al.*, 1999). The four layers presented in Table VI are thus an integrated SM B2B engagement resource for the development of SM marketing capability for the entrepreneurial firm.

The eight strategies presented to digitally enhance interaction in relationships and networks using SM are defined in Table VI. Our eight strategies comprise message content, message reach, message co-creation, SM as a problem solving activity, as an activity structure, as a resource provider and as a resource. There are few SM strategies in the empirical literature for B2B marketing and those that exist tend to be for established firms, see, for example, Lacoste's (2016) strategies for how key account managers use SM or

Schultz *et al.*'s (2012) profiling of salespersons' use of SM. In addition, extant strategies tend to be developed for the single actor delivering an autonomous strategy, for example, a larger B2B actor building its brand, rather than in combination with other actors as in this paper. They are, therefore, inclined to define SM strategy in a more limited way, predominantly as a communication and engagement tool (Quinton and Wilson, 2016; Rapp *et al.*, 2013) rather than as being part of a potential resource and activity in a relationship (Baraldi *et al.*, 2012; Drummond *et al.*, 2018; Gadde *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, we advance the literature by identifying the value in defining SM, in addition to its use as a communications tool, as a resource engaged in interaction with B2B network partners.

Table VI defines the 15 SM tactics categories derived from our case analysis and aligns them to the four capability layers and to the engagement strategies. Tables II-V provide detailed descriptions of each tactic category. The tactics represent the action or practice part of our capability. Each of the four layers of capability has a prescriptive set of tactics available to the entrepreneurial firm to enable them to implement SM engagement strategies and to learn in interaction with their partners. Our tactics groupings extend the work on the assessment of B2B SM usage in prior studies by Lacka and Chong (2016), Michaelidou *et al.* (2011) and Swani *et al.* (2014) by delving into the actual tactics, which includes the content of the messages, and by using an interactive relationship marketing approach to present an array of such tactics. We further develop ideas on content sharing by adding the element of co-created content and messages in an interactive space. Our tactics are also specific to the entrepreneurial firm context, which is underrepresented in industrial marketing research (Drummond *et al.*, 2018; Sigfusson and Chetty, 2013).

While it is difficult to draw analogues between the business network approach to digital engagement and relational approaches taken in consumer marketing it is useful to provide a perspective on how both canons converge and diverge. In terms of the work outlined in this paper, the assumptions and motives of the collaborating partners are unlikely to have a parallel in SM consumer relationship marketing as firms aim to manage the interaction with consumers to a considerable degree regardless of their level of involvement (Iankova *et al.*, 2018; Roberts *et al.*, 2014; Trainor *et al.*, 2014). Cooperation of the type outlined in this paper is more apparent where consumers self-organise their own SM communities (Goh *et al.*, 2013). We have tried to adhere to a common nomenclature for the layers of SM marketing capability and do find similar SM strategies in consumer marketing to our connect and engage layers (Kao *et al.*, 2016). However, as our co-ordinate and collaborate categories involve the co-sharing and creation of resources in interaction, it is difficult to find similar processes in SM relationship consumer research. Indeed, SM marketing capability is not divisible by a single layer, but in the totality of engagement with network partners without which it does not adhere to the strategic nature of possessing a capability.

In practice, for entrepreneurial firms, our definition and associated digital engagement strategies and tactics groupings enable firms to develop a more planned approach to SM B2B relationship marketing, right through to implementation. However, to exploit SM in this way requires a partnering mind-set, which may have to be learned. SM communication is transparent, and goals and motives are visible to partners, which makes pursuing our strategies risky without a co-creation or co-sharing agenda in mind. Nonetheless, we present tactics groupings, which can be easily applied to other entrepreneurial firms. The SM message content and how the medium can be used are defined for each tactic grouping, which makes the practical implication of this part of our research very direct. The tactics and strategies are the stepping stones to SM marketing capability development and bridge the theory building practice divide evident in much research.

Our paper is based on a single case study of an entrepreneurial firm and its network of B2B actors with researcher access facilitated to the SM communications of the firm. Thus, the findings are limited by the context of our case firm and their associated network. The case firm's use of SM developed over time with a level of sophistication of network engagement, which enabled this research to derive the capability building process. While the specific value co-created by the cooperating network of firms has not been analysed in our research, interviewing 26 network actors lends significant support to the findings. An opportunity for further research is to explore the SM marketing capability development process in the context of other networked actors or across a different sector. Additionally, two communication platforms were selected for analysis, Facebook and Twitter, as they were the ones used by the case firm. Further research could, however, examine alternative SM sites such as Instagram, not analysed in this paper. Our tactical groupings may be bounded by the technologies we analysed and including other SM platforms might expand the range of engagement tactics notwithstanding the validation of our approach through the use of the interview data. Finally, the results of our study were not evaluated at the level of the technology platform but each type, given its design, is more useful at performing certain tasks, and inter-actor communication for certain activities may gravitate towards a particular platform. We used the interaction among actors as the unit of analysis of the study but the technology itself could also become a unit of analysis in future research.

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## Appendix 1: Key examples of SM data related to the four layers of SM marketing capability, digital engagement strategies and tactics

| | |
|---|---|
| **CONNECT:** | |
| **1.** | *'Hello there! I was searching around Facebook for chili foods and hot sauce companies and came across your page. I'm not sure if anyone has asked you this before, but I was wondering if I could do a video review of your products. I'm also not sure if you ship to the US, but I would love to try your products and introduce it to people here…Please get in touch with me if you are at all interested in discussing this more…'* |
| **2.** | '@MexRestaurant1 must send you up some samples to try!' |
| **3.** | '@Retailer1 let me know if you'd like me to send you some samples to try!' |
| **4.** | *'Great to meet @CaseFirm @FoodFestival1'* |
| **5.** | *'Great day @FoodFestival1. Met the @CaseFirm dudes. They're some hot stuff!'* |
| **6.** | '@Artisanproducer1 Congrats on the award guys!' |
| **7.** | '@Restaurant2 delighted to hear this is happening! Congrats and look forward to the opening' |
| **8.** | '@Foodmedia1 thanks for the mention on the list! Much appreciated!' |
| **9.** | *'made it to Facebook!' message posted to the case firms Facebook page* |
| **10.** | 'Our products are now available in Butcher2 and Butcher3!' |
| **11.** | 'Another place to purchase our products at the fantastic @Retailer2!' |
| **12.** | 'Fresh batch just delivered to @Butcher4 #SouthIrelandfood' |
| **13.** | *'Congrats and best of luck to @CaseFirm on their first order heading to Dubai #buyirish #onwardsandupwards'* |
| **14.** | '@Restaurant3 hey guys, hope the sauce is going down well! ☺' |
| **15.** | *'Great product perfect balance of heat and flavour! I've tried tons of different artisan sauces and this is by far the best!! 10/10'* |
| **16.** | *'I would strongly recommend @CaseFirm products, they are simply delicious #SouthIreland #foodie #burritos #hotsauce'* |
| **17.** | 'Delicious @Artisanproducer2 #greatstart #SouthIrelandfood' |
| **18.** | 'Incredible dinner in @Restaurant4 tonight. Fair play guys #greatfood #greatview' |
| **19.** | *'CaseFirm Shared Blogger2 post* - Another fantastic recipe as per from Blogger2!' |
| **20.** | '*CaseFirm Shared Distributor1 post* – Delighted to be getting on board with the lads at Distributor1. If our products are not being stocked near you, let us know and we will fix that!' |
| **21.** | '*CaseFirm shared Retailer3 photo "Delighted to stock CaseFirm Range in our corner store, the award winning Sauce makers hale from South Ireland"* – Another listing in Placename7!! Very excited to be stocked in Retailer3' |
| **22.** | *'Check out the site I did for a friend who is running his own company CaseFirm. They have some amazing sauce products, well worth checking them out! http://www.CaseFirm.com/'* |
| **ENGAGE:** | |
| **23.** | *Well @CaseFirm what news have you got? #Incubator1 #SouthIrelandhour'* '@MediaAccount1 started @ Bank1 Startup Academy today and sent our first order for export to Dubai last month! SouthIreland sauce going global! #MediaAccount1' |
| **24.** | *'#EntrepreneurNetworkGroup1 Best Start Up from @EnterpriseOffice1 is Bob X @CaseFirm #StandOut'* '@CaseFirm congrats!!! Totally deserved! Enjoy the celebrations!' **'Well done Bob of @CaseFirm on winning best startup for SouthIreland City @EntrepreneurNetworkGroup1 @EnterpriseOffice1 #Standout'** 'Thanks so much! @EntrepreneurialFirm1 @EntrepreneurNetworkGroup1 @EnterpriseOffice1' |
| **25.** | *'Very excited to introduce the new Artisanproducer3 range!! 2 new flavours – Double Choc and a very healthy Sugar Free Oat & Raisin!* '@Artisanproducer3 best of luck guys the range looks fab!!' |
| **26.** | *'Happy New Year to @CaseFirm Post of the Month http://www…'* '@Blogger3 Happy New Year Ben!' *'@CaseFirm Many Happy Returns. No doubt, I'll see you at a stall somewhere!'* '@Blogger3 There or on a billboard before long! ;)' *'@CaseFirm Onward and Upward!'* |
| **27.** | '@Foodproducer1 Just wanted to say thank you very much for your help last week!! Much appreciated ☺ #superstars' *'Our pleasure, thanks for the bottles we all enjoyed it for lunch today!'* '@Foodproducer1 Just wanted to say thank you very much for your help last week!! Much appreciated ☺ #superstars' |
| **28.** | *'Thanks for the lovely company today @CaseFirm today @FoodFestival2 @ChristmasFestival1 #latenightsnack #addicted'* '@Artisanproducer4 @FoodFestival2 @ChristmasFestival1 Likewise! Great to learn all about @Artisanproducer4' |
| **29.** | *'@CaseFirm thanks for following lads!'* '@MediaAccount2 no prob, likewise!' |
| **30.** | *'Would love if you could contact me regarding stocking your products in a deli I supply'* 'Allison; mail your telephone number to 'hello@CaseFirm.com' and we will be in touch' |
| **31.** | *'Hi could you please contact the Retailer4, we'd like to place an order but can't find your contact details anywhere, thanks!'* 'Hi Sarah. Will do!' *'Cheers!'* |
| **32.** | *'Hey CaseFirm, we're doing a min-regatta at 16:00 at the College1 for Event1 on Sat 10th September. Are you around at all? Fancy joining us then staying on for the Event2 'Corona' are bringing the beers which would help soothe the palette from the sting of your Sauces.'* 'Sounds good but we're in FoodFestival3' |
| **33.** | 'Be Careful with that pepper! It's dangerous! #milk' *'@CaseFirm hi, who can we email about our new service, introducing supplier to buyer directly?'* '@Distributor2 Hi, you can email Bob@CaseFirm.com Thanks!' |
| **34.** | *'@CaseFirm Bought your sauce at # FoodFestival4 at the weekend, it's fab, well done guys! #BordBia #IrishFood'* '@Artisanproducer5 Thanks guys! Hope you enjoy it! ☺ #@FoodFestival4 @Bordbia' |

(*continued*)

| | |
|---|---|
| **35.** | *'Its been a while but heres a new blog post #ThinkingOutsideTheBox featuring @CaseFirm http://www...'* 'Great piece @MediaAccount3 and thanks for the mention! #SouthIrelandfood' *'@CaseFirm Anytime Bobl #SouthIrelandfood'* |
| **36.** | *'Delighted @CaseFirm is in our Corner Store. Try their 'Red Sauce with Lemongrass and Ginger', its amazing!'* '@Retailer3 thanks guys! Glad you like them ☺' |
| **37.** | *'Stockists of @CaseFirm from #Placename. Fast becoming a giant in its market! #SouthIrelandhour #Butcher5 #tasty'* '@Butcher5 thanks guys! You're too kind ☺' |
| **38.** | *'We are excited to help introduce our members to SouthIreland's own award winning @CaseFirm at #NetworkGroup1! @Bordbia'* '@NetworkGroup1 @Bordbia Delighted to be a part of the conference! Best of luck!' 'Best of luck to @CaseFirm SouthIreland own award winning Sauce. #SouthIrelandMatters' '@SouthIrelandFoundation @NetworkGroup1 @Bordbia thanks guys! Much appreciated' |
| **39.** | *'Any chance @Retailer5 or @FoodFestival5 or @ Retailer6 would stock @CaseFirm wonderful products?'* '@CaseFirm get in touch…let's spice things up!' '@Retailer5 @MediaAccount4 sounds good, will do!' *'@CaseFirm Excellent news! Will you let me know how it goes?'* '@MediaAccount4 certainly will' *'@CaseFirm Will you follow me so I can DM you?'* |
| **40.** | *'What did you have with your @CaseFirm I believe it's powerful stuff alright @Butcher6'* '@MediaAccount5 @CaseFirm just a tortilla chip. I was too brave I took a serious scalp of it. #hardman >.<' *'haha I will have to keep an eye out for a tasting to try it out it sounds the biz @Butcher6 @CaseFirm'* '@MediaAccount5 @Butcher6 you'll have to have a taste soon!' *'Certainly will can't wait ☺ @CaseFirm'* |
| **41.** | *'One thing I immediately had to get used to when I got to Ireland was the food. Where are all the spices? P.S. I was used to SPICY stuff!'* '@MediaAccount6 check out @CaseFirm – like you I hate food that is supposed to be spicy but is bland.' '@CraftBrewOrganisation1 @MediaAccount6 We have some pepper Sauce products you should try. Real heat and real flavour!' '@CaseFirm @MediaAccount6 I've your ArtisanSauce4. Unfortunately while I got a taste of the Ghost Naga, I still haven't been able to buy it' '@CraftBrewOrganisation1 @MediaAccount6 My personal favourite is the Hot Relish. Smoky flavour and good heat. Will be doing a naga batch soon…' '@CaseFirm put me on your naga notification list please' '@CraftBrewOrganisation1 no prob' *'@CaseFirm @CraftBrewOrganisation1 ooh let me know on my personal account'* '@MediaAccount6 @CraftBrewOrganisation1 no prob will do. All of my products are on CaseFirm.com if you want to take a look!' |
| **42.** | *'Have we any room on our shelves for a *hot* new Irish product? You betcha! Welcome @CaseFirm'* '@Retailer7 @CaseFirm nice new labels' '@Artisanproducer6 @Retailer7 cheers Artisanproducer6. They're going down well so far ☺' |
| **CO-ORDINATE:** | |
| **43.** | *'Did you see this @CaseFirm? [LINK to info]'* 'Thank you! @Firm1' |
| **44.** | *'[Link to information regarding a spicy vegetable in the firms sauces having health benefits]'* Network actor @MediaAccount7 sharing link to Case Firms Facebook page |
| **45.** | 'All our sauces are now available in the wonderful store that is @Retailer10 in Placename2. So many other great products there too!' *'@CaseFirm from tomorrow they're available from both our stores link road #Placename2 and #Placename3'* |
| **46.** | *'@CaseFirm where can we pick up your stuff in Placename8? Looks bleedin delish'* '@Firm2 alright fellas, Retailer8, Butcher7, Retailer9!' |
| **47.** | *'Check out latest blog post – [Link] - @Artisanproducer7 @Artisanproducer8 @Artisanproducer9 @Artisanproducer10 @CaseFirm'* '@MediaAccount8 thanks guys!' |
| **48.** | *'@CaseFirm hi guys – would love to use one of your sauces in our new chilli burger-any suggestions?'* '@Restaurant5 hey guys, would love to! I'd really recommend the Artisan Sauce 1 or the Artisan Sauce 2! I'll send ye some samples' *'@CaseFirm sounds awesome guys – looking forward to experimenting'* |
| **49.** | *'@CaseFirm Had this with Thai Green Curry last night. #totallydelicious'* '@Blogger4 thanks Sarah! Also beautiful with a soft cheese or cooked meats ☺' *'@CaseFirm or just on cream crackers with butter and a cuppa Earl Grey Tea!'* '@Blogger4 Exactly!' |
| **50.** | '@Restaurant6 hey guys, hope the sauce is going down well! ☺' *'@CaseFirm we cant get enough of the ArtisanSauce2!!'* '@Restaurant6 try it with some Brie and you'll love it even more!' |
| **51.** | *'Hey, does anyone know where you can get Masa Harina – maze treated with lime, for tortillas – in SouthIreland? @MediaAccount9 @Artisanproducer11 @CaseFirm'* '@Artisanproducer12 @ Artisanproducer11 @CaseFirm not sure bout SouthIreland, Mark bt @Chef1 sells online @Restaurant7 Irish masa marina soon' **'@Chef1 yep, we stock Mexican masa-harina at @MexRestaurant1'** '@MexRestaurant1 is the best place to get it' *'Thanks guys'* |
| **52.** | *'@CaseFirm is it possible to get the actual whole tobasco capsicum frutescens pepper fresh or dried in Ireland?'* '@Chef2 I can more or less get any chilli or pepper ordered in via @Distributor3 so I can't imagine it being a problem. You need?' *'@CaseFirm @Distributor3 maybe…been asked to come up with ideas 4 tobasco theme café & like 2 start with real chilli rather than sauce'* '@Chef2 @Distributor3 if you need the freshest and tastiest sauce around, you know who to call' |

(*continued*)

| | |
|---|---|
| **53.** | *'Proud of your intestinal metal?? Fancy a challenge (and a meal for two if you win!)? Bring on the Firewings!'* '@BBQBar1 what numbers are we talking, scoville wise?' *'@CraftBrewOrganisation1 we'll be using a 5 million scoville extract in the sauce! You reckon you're up for it??'* '@BBQBar1 let me check – hey @CaseFirm how many scoville units in your ghost naga paste?' '@CraftBrewOrganisation1 @BBQBar1 fairly close to 1 million.' '@CaseFirm @BBQBar1 so, mild then…' |
| **54.** | *'Still mad to sell those sauces in our Butcher8 shops…???'* 'Hi Brad. Send a mail to casefirm@live.ie'. We don't supply Placename8 area presently, but can discuss.' *'Kyle…can you give me a buzz on 08******** when you get a chance…cheers' 'I will get a courier to pick a load up for us to try sell. If they go well…we are in business…we have 3 shops in Placename8…'* |
| **55.** | *'Hi any chance of a delivery to Retailer11 please, getting low…Mary.* 'Delivered' |
| **56.** | *'Thanks for sharing guys! BTW, we're very, very short on your fab Artisan sauce…will be in touch t'restock, it's a favourite of our customers!'* 'That's great to hear! Let me know when you want me to send a box up.' |
| **57.** | *'Am trying to contact you regarding collecting an order from you for some hampers, I am in SouthIreland this Thursday, please can you contact me! 086*******'* 'Hi Laura, just emailed you!' |
| **58.** | '@Retailer12, @Retailer13 Placename4, @RetailChain1 Placename5, @CoffeeShop1, @Baker1 #RESTOCK #freshdelivery [Shares photo of delivery route and info]' |
| **COLLABORATION:** | |
| **59.** | 'Come to Placename3 Farmers Market today for sunshine, fresh Artisan sauce that was made yesterday and a selection of great local food! Also, we will be announcing the winner of our Facebook and Twitter competitions at 2pm today! They will win the saucy display below' |
| **60.** | 'Set up on Placename9 in ChristmasFestival1 until 8:30pm today! Sauce and delicious chocolate from @Artisanproducer4 #ChristmasFestival1 #Christmas' *'The lovely Allison @Artisanproducer4 and Bob @CaseFirm are at the @FoodFestival2 stand today at @ChristmasFestival1 – make sure to pop by'* |
| **61.** | 'We're heading to Placename6 on Saturday for tastings in two great stores. First up, we'll be in Retailer14 of Placename6 and then onto Retailer15! Come along to try the tastiest sauce in the country! #irishfood #CaseFirm #Placename6food #IloveSauce' |
| **62.** | *'Plotting for Sunday's #cookout @Pub2 tks Bob @caseFirm things are hottin' up at Chef3 HQ'* |
| **63.** | 'Getting started at @EntrepreneurNetworkGroup1 Business Boot camp! Should be a great weekend! #standout #EntrepreneurNetworkGroup1' |
| **64.** | 'Busy day ahead @SouthIrelandClimathon' *'#Climathon #SouthIreland Second problem owner is @CaseFirm which wants to use more Irish producers in its products:'* 'The problems are being pitched @SouthIrelandClimathon. Next up is Bob of @CaseFirm talking about sourcing Irish Ingredients #Climathon' |
| **65.** | 'Some pics of us at the weekend at EntrepreneurNetworkGroup1 Business Bootcamp in Hotel1. Great to meet everyone and looking forward to seeing them again! EntrepreneurialFirm2, EntrepreneurialFirm3, EntrepreneurialFirm4' *'CaseFirm Thanks for the Sauce! It's going down a treat. Keep growing the beard it'll keep you warm for the winter!!'* 'No prob! Must get some oils off you! ☺' |
| **66.** | 'We're very excited to announce that we are teaming up with FastFood1 to offer something totally new and unique to the people of SouthIreland…Launching this Friday, head to the FastFood1 to try the best wings in SouthIreland with the best Artisan sauce in Ireland.' |
| **67.** | 'Delighted to be teaming up with Bar1 for their new 'Rebel Burger'. It's a Cajun chicken burger topped with our Artisan sauce! Dropped in 10 litres just now so that should do for this week☺' |
| **68.** | *CaseFirm Artisan Sauce in our Chilli Con Carne! Range of CaseFirm also available in the shop ☺ @CaseFirm'* '@Retailer16 perfect thing to warm people up!' |
| **69.** | *'New Rebel Steak Burger' I made today especially for the week that's in it @CaseFirm @RetailChain1 #goodfoorkarma'* '@Butcher6 have to try these!' |
| **70.** | 'Only at FoodFestival4! @Distillery1 Vodka and ArtisanSauce' |
| **71.** | *'Great weather out there, busy making our CaseFirm steak burgers earlier, 4 for €5 #Goodfoodkarma #bestbeefever'* – Retweeted by CaseFirm |
| **72.** | 'Christmas is over but we're going to keep on giving! To give those January blues a saucy kick, we're teaming up with Blogger1 to give away a hamper of our delicious sauces. Simply like our page and then pop over to Blogger1 and follow the instructions of their page to be in with a chance to win☺ Plain time is over' |
| **73.** | 'It's almost Christmas. We've joined up with some of the best food producers in Ireland to give away this amazing hamper full of delicious food just in time for the festivities! To enter, tag two friends that you would share the hamper with and make sure they have liked our page, Don't forget to share! Winnerannounced this Thursday at 12pm! Artisanproducer13, Artisanproducer14, Artisanproducer15, Artisanproducer16, Artisanproducer17, Artisanproducer18, Artisanproducer19, Artisanproducer20, Artisanproducer21, Artisanproducer22, Artisanproducer23.' |
| **74.** | 'CaseFirm spicing it up and @Artisanproducer24 cooling it down @FoodFestival4 @Chef4 #FoodFestival42016' *'Loads of action w/ the hot stuff @CaseFirm @FoodFestival4 & try our @Artisanproducer24 juice to quench your thirst!'* |
| **75.** | *'@Firm3 @RetailChain2 @Coffee1 @Chef5 @Butcher9 @Firm4 @Blogger5 #FF and please follow my own little @Blogger6 too ☺'* |
| **76.** | *'#FF to some fav foodies - @Artisanproducer25 @Artisanproducer7 @Butcher9 @MexRestaurant1 @CaseFIrm @Firm5 @CoffeeShop2* @Artisanproducer26' '@CoffeeShop2 My number 1 Italian indulgence when I come to Dublin' **'@MediaAccount10 very kind of you'** *'@MediaAccount10 @Artisanproducer7 @Butcher9 @MexRestaurant1 @CaseFIrm @Firm5 @CoffeeShop2 @Artisanproducer26 happy Friday to all'* '@Artisanproducer25 @Artisanproducer7 @Butcher9 @MediaAccount10 @CaseFIrm @Firm5 @CoffeeShop2 @Artisanproducer26 cheers Lorraine! #FF right back' *'Tks @MediaAccount10 @Artisanproducer7 @B @MexRestaurant1 @CaseFIrm @Firm5 @CoffeeShop2 @Artisanproducer26 '* |
| **77.** | *'@CaseFirm Hey guys, hope you're well. Thanks for following back and welcome to our #tortillarevolution'* '@Restaurant7 hey guys sounds good. Sauce and tortillas is goooood ☺' *'@CaseFirm That's what I was thinking, would love to partner up at some stage'* '@Restaurant7 sounds good. Get onto us when suits!' *'@CaseFirm Sure thing, we're still in pre-production at the moment but we'll let you know when we're up and running'* '@Restaurant7 sounds good. Good luck!' |

**Notes:** Case Firm = Case Firm; SM Network Actor 1 = *SM Network Actor 1*; SM Network Actor 2 = *SM Network Actor 2*; SM Network Actor 3 = **SM Network Actor 3**; SM Network Actor 4 = SM Network Actor 4; SM Network Actor 5 = SM Network Actor 5; SM Network Actor 6 = SM Network Actor 6

## Appendix 2

| Layer definition | Digital engagement strategies | Digital engagement tactics |
|---|---|---|
| *Connect*: ability to target and receive specific messages to sought after B2B actors outside local networks | *Message content designed with reciprocity and to invite users that match the firm*<br>Network actor A.17 (small producer): "it has made it way easier to reach out to other companies and for people to reach out to us, without a doubt . . . More and more, for sure, we would be tagged by people . . . using it to message us"<br>Network actor A.20 (networking organisation): "I think social media has made it easier for people to connect . . . it's like a way to communicate with people you would never ever in a million years"<br>*Message content delivered to a wider network horizon than possible via traditional communication media*<br>Network actor A.23 (small producer): "it empowers you to make connections when you don't have a budget"<br>Network actor A.9 (butcher/retail): "it's easier, easier definitely. Instead of having to physically leave your shop . . . you can get on to them and initiate something while still maintaining your place in your stall and being active and productive. The minute you go out of the shop, you're immediately not productive and something else can happen" | *Feeler posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.16 (small producer): "you might get on to them to say would you be interested in talking, definitely and direct messaging for sure"<br>Network actor A.26 (small producer): "the day is gone of putting your head down and doing your own thing, you must put yourself out there to meet these people . . . if you are out there on social media, you have a chance then of getting known so it just increases your chances of making contact"<br>*Delivery announcement posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.11 (small producer): "anytime a new cafe or restaurant would take on our tea, I'd take a nice photo and post it on Facebook. They would make sure their location is tagged there"<br>Network actor A.23 (small producer): "yeah you would say oh we're in store here now, today we are in here, delighted to be and tag them"<br>*Rating, review and recommendation posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.22 (restaurant/retail): "he gave me a fabulous plug on Twitter"<br>Network actor A.9 (butcher/retail): "but people do, I've had some people initiate contact by saying 'wow looks fantastic' or something like that"<br>*Content and post sharing to instigate connections*<br>Network actor A.3 (small producer): "yes, and sharing news for example . . . certain people who would share our news for example, we get retweets on awards from Artisanproducer36"<br>Network actor A.10 (blogger): "sometimes they will share it on their page" |

(*continued*)

**Table AI.** Interview quotations from the case firm network actors for each of the digital engagement strategies and tactics

Table AI.

| Layer definition | Digital engagement strategies | Digital engagement tactics |
|---|---|---|
| *Engage*: ability to immediately communicate social and business messages between current and future B2B network partners | *Message content created in interaction and the nature and atmosphere of this content creates a platform for other exchanges*<br>Network actor A.5 (small producer): "you can't do social media in isolation, you . . . have to interact with people"<br>Network actor A.24 (small producer): "yes I do find it is good for engaging with B2B . . . through social media getting to know people is great and then creating different relationships online kind of allows that engagement to continue. . .it is definitely making it easier to keep in touch with people and keep up with what they are doing and maintaining relationships definitely as well as supporting each other and giving each other a pat on the back, giving them a like and sharing stuff with them. It definitely does make it much easier"<br>*Social and resource communication primarily bilateral engagement between actors*<br>Network actor A.6 (small producer): "following each other on social media, and then just maintaining that relationship, just commenting on each other's posts . . . We would always comment on each other's posts . . . on social media"<br>Network actor A.12 (retailer): "Twitter is much more interactive, I find it more engaging and people are more willing to chat and talk to you. It's more interactive and it has a bigger appeal for someone working with artisan producers, foodie bloggers, etc" | *Dyadic, bilateral conversation posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.3 (small producer): "we would do the same for other food producers and be commenting on posts with 'Congrats' and that kind of stuff . . . So yeah, we'd interact and retweet"<br>Network actor A.9 (butcher/retail): "if something is interesting or pertinent or relevant to something I'm doing then I will interact"<br>*Reciprocation and new partner posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.6 (small producer): "it is through Facebook that we are contacting small independent shops . . . you'd be quite surprised how many of the small independent stores who don't have websites . . . it's free to start a Facebook page so easier for them to put everything on their Facebook. So, quite often we've contacted them through Facebook and then, yeah they definitely respond"<br>Network actor A.20 (networking organisation): "so it's important to tell and thank people, like anything if people do anything for you. The guy Neil from Company1 he is brilliant at thanking people, he will say thank you for example @YourName for following me and I will look forward to all our interactions. He does it properly"<br>*Rating and recommendation conversational posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.9 (butcher/retail): "she interacts with me on social media. She may say 'oh fantastic' if my stuff comes up"<br>Network actor A.22 (restaurant/retail): "yesterday morning I tweeted to him saying that his desk looked far too clean, straight back I got what I wouldn't do for one of your Buttery scones. That went out to all his followers"<br>*Multi-actor, multi-thread conversational posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.19 (small producer): "you could be tagging in a few producers just to let them know about |

(*continued*)

| Layer definition | Digital engagement strategies | Digital engagement tactics |
|---|---|---|
| | | something or maybe there are people there that you want to let them know about"<br>Network actor A.11 (small producer): "something like using a hashtag and tagging 9 people in . . . it is easier on Twitter with a picture and you can link them directly and it comes up on their feed. And it is easy to do and you can do that in a store" |
| *Co-ordinate*: ability to synchronise activities among, and to share resources between, B2B partners | *Ability to use SM to respond quickly to B2B partner needs and to use it to action and create activity between partners*<br>Network actor A.6 (small producer): "if it wasn't for messenger on Facebook, we probably wouldn't have a business because in the beginning when we first went to Placename16 in 2013, Facebook had just started up over there . . . because he couldn't ring and he didn't have an email address . . . so we've just maintained that whole relationship through Facebook . . . one of our suppliers over there . . . He does sometimes contact us via Facebook as well. So yeah, it wouldn't have gotten off the ground (the business), as we had no other way to contact Bob . . . it was all through Facebook and still to this day is through Facebook"<br>Network actor A.22 (restaurant/retail): "yes I will tell you one exact example now called Artisanproducer39 . . . I would never have known about them if it was not for Twitter. I saw them and DM to them to follow me. I said can I order live on Twitter in public, they followed and said DM us. So, that is 1 exact example of that, now I have it on my shelves and I use it in my food and I also use it in our chips it is on the menu and it is a small element of our food but it is a great example"<br>*Ability to use SM to share knowledge and information that adds to product and services exchanged in the network*<br>Network actor A.26 (small producer): "I will put it to you another way that if someone wanted to redesign their packaging they would put something up and go look I am doing new packaging, would you know of anyone and some | *Information sharing posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.11 (small producer): "if there is something that comes up on tax or some relevant issue something like food regulations for example . . . We talk to the small producer's every day. We talk to each other about some issues, anything that is valuable that could be a bit of a resource for each other"<br>Network actor A.25 (small producer): "store x, y and *z*, their fridge is broken this week lads so there is no point in anyone going there. That will then save 15 other producers that are all going there to try and deliver refrigerated goods"<br>Network actor A.2 (food consultant/writer): "I do have a reputation for having identified quality and a standard . . . I'm perceived as having an opinion worth . . . people ask me on Twitter, ask my advice or can I suggest somebody for . . . because I would know a network of producers"<br>*Knowledge sharing posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.23 (small producer): "it is good for people who have things like oh if you use a carton or box maker, who do you use? One might be asking about packaging, stuff like that. Using it to share knowledge and experiences I guess . . .. on insurance or anything related to the business if you think someone can help you . . . Or even who looks after the invoicing in this store, do people have the contact details for them, that type of thing"<br>Network actor A.22 (restaurant/retail): "I can ask a |

(*continued*)

**Table AI.**

Table AI.

| Layer definition | Digital engagement strategies | Digital engagement tactics |
|---|---|---|
| | people would put up oh stay away from this company, they ripped us off and another might say try this company they are very honourable, things like that . . . they might put up the first draft of the packaging and get feedback and it would be fairly good like they would get the feedback that they want on it. There is a kind of 'what do you think' aspect of it . . . through Facebook" | question on Twitter, and those informed, knowledgeable followers that I have on Twitter are people I find will instantly reply to me"<br>Network actor A.14 (small producer): "if you had a problem, how did you resolve it, if you had a packaging problem for instance where you needed x amount of boxes tomorrow, you would post. . .Absolutely and you wouldn't go anywhere first without checking for recommendations because everyone has an experience of being burnt or being naive or spending too much or not getting the thing right"<br>*Order processing and fulfilment posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.8 (small producer): "I have one shop, Retailer17 in South Ireland, only order by Twitter Direct messaging. So I have to keep an eye on my Twitter Direct messaging for him . . . which is nice because it is low maintenance"<br>Network actor A.6 (small producer): "there is another like market stall that does food and I have actually arranged prices, everything like that over twitter messenger. Yeah, I sent her the price, and yeah, we have actually discussed prices, they sent me delivery address, everything like that . . . Yeah, so even if they are ordering stuff"<br>Network actor A.9 (butcher/retail): "I might say send them a direct message saying '[I] want my order', put a tweet out then saying 'we need a restock'. Then you have a bit of interaction . . . so then I ordered this off him here, what time are you open until, I said 5 . . . Yes that and another producer are the two that I would do that through versus maybe email . . . Pat will come in with an invoice for me and I pay cash like there and then" |

(*continued*)

| Layer definition | Digital engagement strategies | Digital engagement tactics |
|---|---|---|
| *Collaborate*: ability to create and co-create new activities and resources between current and future partners | *Ability to use SM as an activity integrator between one to many partners*<br>Network actor A.20 (networking organisation): "it definitely has happened where people just kind of gel and they're like well maybe your product and mine will go well together and they might do an event or something like that. Lots of connections are made"<br>Network actor A.25 (small producer): "the giveaways and competitions would be something we would do. We used to try and do it four times a year, we definitely do one at Christmas time. What we did in the past would be if there were 12 producers, we would have 12 hampers . . . I can guarantee you that if social media hadn't been there along the way, then none of this would have happened for us. I do think a lot of them would have just fizzled out, especially the collaborative stuff. . .I do think that [if] social media. . .twitter hadn't have been there, I don't think it would have driven it along as much as it did. . .It wouldn't have happened, 90% certain it wouldn't have, yeah"<br>*Ability to use SM to co-create new resources between one to many partners*<br>Network actor A.22 (restaurant/retail): "I love the link on Twitter the way you can drop in the Pebble and it just flashes out or explodes out. That is what Twitter is useful for or what these social media platforms are useful for . . . [This woman] was asked to collaborate on an Irish Christmas in a big store. She went straight on Twitter and said help guys and got 171 leads as to who to import from"<br>Network actor A.16 (small producer): "probably, yes and even Caroline would have been doing work with Artisanproducer44 and they would have chatted over social media, yeah probably, and then taking it on to email as it became more formal but yes the initial stuff you would have used social media for that for sure" | *Collaborative events and pop-up posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.4 (Irish food/drink organisation): "I would notice when breweries do tap takeovers and so on, festivals in the UK, then you would see lots of that on social media . . ."<br>Network actor A.8 (small producer): "we would know each other through social media . . . We got in touch because she was doing a big dinner in a restaurant and she wanted to use my chocolate. I said awesome and gave her some chocolates through social media, they took photos of that and put it up on social media. Then, through there I organised her being a part of an event I was organising for the Festival. We organised all of that on Twitter, part of a five-course mystery dinner"<br>Network actor A.3 (small producer): "yes, very much B2B networking . . . Going to all of those events, linking up with other food companies and tagging journalists, that kind of thing . . . Live at the event, so it could be the people next to you and they'd include you in their tweet . . . so we'd all start tagging each other and taking pictures of each other . . . I suppose Twitter uses a hashtag of the events . . . So, you're generating awareness and getting the journalists and bloggers involved, because quite often they are coming to the event and they'll see popular tweets from the event or they might be included in some of the tweets then and they interact"<br>*Product adaptations and collaborative food pairing posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.6 (small producer): "yeah, like, we're always trying to collaborate with other companies and especially on social media for competitions for things like that, recipe ideas and all of that. At the moment we're talking with another producer about . . . doing a recipe with her with our products because obviously she is on amazon as well with us so it would be great to get some videos of something like that" |

(*continued*)

**Table AI.**

Table AI.

| Layer definition | Digital engagement strategies | Digital engagement tactics |
|---|---|---|
| | | Network actor A.1 (small producer): "I think he liked something and we said we'd reach out to him, he was doing well on social media. I messaged him . . . I said we can collaborate [on a product] . . . that's what I wanted . . . Twitter and Facebook, yeah"<br>*Collaborative sales promotions posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.15 (small producer): "we've also gotten together with other producers and we do like a hamper, a combined competition with the hamper giveaway where we all put in a few bits and pieces and do a competition that way. . .you are getting more of a hit on the social media than if you just did one competition on your own"<br>Network actor A.10 (blogger): "I'd contact a company and say would you like to do a competition, yeah through social media . . . Then you're back and forth online, talking about the competition and being an online pal"<br>*Collaborative networking posts and tweets*<br>Network actor A.11 (small producer): "we were in one of those groups, a food group that we just chat together . . . It's a similar sort of activity to doing these things at a local food market . . . Facebook or Twitter, allow you to really find those people. Facebook particularly, I see it all the time . . . is my main way of keeping in contact with them all as it's a big audience in one go"<br>Network actor A.24 (small producer): "it highlights as well that you were in that group. Using the hashtag it allows you to link up with other businesses to stay on the radar and it allows you to connect with people in that way . . . I think #FF, is foodie Friday or something so I'd say they were just tagging me in the post . . . I would just try and engage back . . . as well then send a greeting back to them, I didn't know any of them" |

**Note:** Appendix legend: Network actor A 1-26 refers to the network of 26 actors interviewed related to the case firm