October 2018

Social Media Deployment in a Business to Business Environment: Theory and Practice.

Loran Jarrett

University of South Florida, loranjarrett@gmail.com

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Social Media Deployment in a Business to Business Environment: Theory and Practice

by

Loran Jarrett

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Business Administration
Department of Business
Muma College of Business
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Richard Plank, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Sajeev Varki, Ph.D.
    Anand Kumar, Ph.D.
    Moez Limayem, Ph.D.
    Steve Oscher, DBA

Date of Approval:
October 12, 2018

Keywords: Relationship Quality, Relationship Life Cycle, Relationship Marketing, Social Media, Business to Business

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DEDICATION

To my husband, my rock in life. To my children, in hopes of this degree inspiring you to always strive to be the best in whatever you choose to do. To my parents, for your support towards me being the first in our family to earn a doctorate. Without each of you I would have never been able to make this dream into a reality.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completing this dissertation would have not been possible without the direct support and assistance of my committee co-chairs: Professor Richard Plank and Professor Sajeev Varki. My committee also included Dean Moez Limayem, Dr. Steve Oscher, and Professor Anand Kumar. Each provided insight, support, time, and energy which enabled me to become a better scholar. For that, I will always be appreciative.

I would also like to acknowledge my fellow dissertation committee members: Jim Gregory, Vjolica Hysenlika (aka “V”), Denise Gravatt, and Kunal Shah. Each of you provided mentorship when it was needed and friendship throughout. Thank you for the laughs, drinks, and sanity checks.

A special thanks to Mathew Mullarky and Grandon Gill for developing the University of South Florida’s Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program and to Michele Walpole and Lauren Baumgartner for their “behind the scenes” roles in keeping the program together.

I would also like to express my admiration for the members of my cohort of the DBA program. Each of you helped me to grow, and I am thankful we had those 3 years of monthly 2-day sessions together.

I must also acknowledge my family and friends. My husband Tim supported me in this journey and continues to do so each and every day. Thank you for being my rock. My sons, Chase and Tripp, have made my heart grow larger than I knew possible; thank you for being understanding of the time I dedicated to this degree. To my friends who continued to be my friends when I was missing in action from working on this degree, thank you. I love you all.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables ................................................................................................................................. iii
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................ iv
Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... v
Chapter 1 Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1
Chapter 2 Literature Review ........................................................................................................... 6
  Social Media ............................................................................................................................... 6
  Defining Social Media ........................................................................................................... 7
  Social Media and Marketing Communications ....................................................... 7
  Relationship Life Cycle ........................................................................................................ 10
    Exploration Phase ................................................................. 11
    Expansion Phase ................................................................. 12
    Mature Phase ........................................................................ 14
    Decline Phase ........................................................................ 15
  Constructs .......................................................................................................................... 16
Chapter 3 Methods ........................................................................................................................ 22
  Preliminary Study .............................................................................................................. 22
  Research Design ................................................................................................................. 23
  Participants ......................................................................................................................... 23
  Data Collection ................................................................................................................... 24
  Data Analysis ..................................................................................................................... 28
  Theoretical Analysis .......................................................................................................... 30
Chapter 4 Results .......................................................................................................................... 33
  Exploration Phase ................................................................................................................ 35
    Humanizing ................................................................................................................... 37
    Community Relations ................................................................................................. 38
    Use of Influencers, Face, or Guests ........................................................................... 38
    Being a Resource, Expert, or Thought Leader ....................................................... 39
    Transparency ............................................................................................................. 43
    Customer Service ....................................................................................................... 43
    Culture ......................................................................................................................... 44
    Trust and Credibility ................................................................................................. 44
    Commitment ............................................................................................................... 46
    Liking or Being Satisfied by the Company .............................................................. 47
  Expansion Phase .............................................................................................................. 48
    Humanizing ................................................................................................................ 48
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Constructs Found in Relationship Life Cycle Literature ........................................ 17
Table 2: Company Characteristics .................................................................................... 25
Table 3: Constructs Mentioned in Interviews ................................................................... 35
Table 4: Breakdown of Each Construct Mentioned by Each Company Within the Exploration Phase ................................................................................................................................. 36
Table 5: Themes in the Exploration Phase in Practice and in Theory Ranked by Importance ........................................................................................................................................... 37
Table 6: Breakdown of Each Construct Mentioned by Each Company Within the Expansion Phase ................................................................................................................................. 49
Table 7: Constructs in the Expansion Phase in Practice and in Theory Ranked by Importance ........................................................................................................................................... 50
Table 8: Breakdown of Each Construct Mentioned by Each Company Within the Mature Phase ................................................................................................................................. 65
Table 9: Constructs in the Mature Phase in Practice and in Theory Ranked by Importance ........................................................................................................................................... 66
Table 10: Judges’ Reliability for All Companies for the Exploration, Expansion, and Mature Phases ........................................................................................................................................... 83
Table A1: Expert Panel Experience ..................................................................................... 118
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The importance of information exchange and goal congruence within the second phase of the relationship lifecycle.......................................................... 14
Figure 2: Developments and explanations of a repetitive relationship lifecycle sequence............................................................................................................... 16
Figure 3: What practitioners believed B2B social media offered to buyers and sellers...... 22
Figure 4: Linear transmission of a message through one-way communication .............. 26
Figure 6: A resource-related post on social media.............................................................. 41
Figure 7: A resource-related post on social media.............................................................. 42
Figure 8: A community-relations-related post on social media......................................... 51
Figure 9: A guest-contribution-related post on social media ........................................... 53
Figure 10: A resource-related post on social media............................................................ 56
Figure 11: A humanizing-related post on social media...................................................... 66
Figure 12: A community-relations-related post on social media..................................... 69
Figure 13: A customer-service-related post on social media .......................................... 75
Figure 14: A trust-related post on social media................................................................. 78
Figure 15: A social media post showing commitment within the mature phase of a relationship........................................................................................................... 80
ABSTRACT

Social media has increasingly been used by business-to-business (B2B) firms to engage with their customers as they seek to maintain and grow their relationship with their customers. Existing theories of marketing communication have not necessarily supported these practices well. Social media communication objectives of B2B firms were examined at the exploration, expansion, and maturity phases of the relationship life cycle. A panel of social media experts evaluated the social media efforts of these firms to determine how well these firms achieved their stated social media objectives. The objectives observed in practice were contrasted with theoretical recommendations of appropriate objectives at corresponding phases of the relationship. Several gaps between practice and theory were identified. Further research is necessary to better understand those social media communications objectives deemed important in practice that had no theoretical support.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Marketing media has been permanently transformed by social media (Sheth, 2018). As of January 2018, 78% of adults between the ages of 30 and 49 used at least one social media channel daily (Pew Research Center, 2018). And as of July 2018, there were 2,560,000,000 users of social media worldwide, with 1,000,000 new active users added every day (We Are Social, 2018).

I used a qualitative approach to examine how and why business-to-business (B2B) firms of varying size and industry used social media marketing tools during different phases of their relationships, and how those practices differed from existing theories. I developed an organic understanding of social media use and views in B2B firms, and the results of this study will provide a richer understanding of the how firms treat the importance of social media marketing in the B2B space.

Social media has been reshaping communication, including the creation, composition, dissemination, and consumption of messages (Page, Barton, Unger, & Zappavigna, 2014). Forrester Research and Business 2 Community (n.d.) forecast that social media marketing expenditure in the United States would amount to $17,300,000,000 in 2019. Expenditure has grown at an average of 13% each year (We Are Social, 2018) while conventional media (magazines, in-home television, newspapers, etc.) has declined by 4% (PwC, 2018).

According to Lamberton and Stephen (2016), research within digital, social media, and mobile marketing has entered a boom era. However, social media research in the B2B space has
not garnered the same attention as the business-to-consumer (B2C) arena (Itani, Agnihotri, & Dingus, 2017; Salo, 2017; Siamagka, Christodoulides, Michaelidou, & Valvi, 2015). In fact, understanding of social media marketing within the B2B environment has been relatively limited (Salo, 2017; Siamagka et al., 2015). This has been in spite of the size of the B2B ecommerce industry, which was forecast to grow to $1,200,000,000,000 by 2021, with 55% of B2B purchases expected to move online (Forrester, 2017).

In B2B environments, buyer–seller relationships have been key (Wilson, 1995). Such relationships have been known to take longer to develop, exhibit higher substitution costs, last longer, and have greater influence in B2B settings, compared to B2C settings (Zhang, Netzer, & Ansari, 2014). Given that relationships are fundamental in B2B settings (Wilson, 1995), and communication is key to maintain a relationship (Jap & Anderson, 2007), social media should have a role to play in the B2B space.

However, relationships are not static; they evolve over time (Hibbard, Kumar, & Stern, 2001). According to Jap and Anderson (2007) and Jap and Ganesan (2000), there are four distinct phases of business relationships, and at each phase the communication needs are different. Particular marketing actions may be more effective in some phases of the relationship life cycle than in others (Luo & Kumar, 2013; Netzer, Lattin, & Srinivasan, 2008).

A relationship begins with the exploration phase, which is characterized by examining and weighing potential costs, benefits, and obligations (Eidelson, 1980; Holmes, 1991; Jap & Ganesan, 2000). As both parties decide to continue the socialization process, the expansion phase begins. This is where more certainty and confidence surround the standards of conduct, norms, and values for the future (Narayandas & Rangan, 2004). The mature phase occurs when both parties begin to obtain real rewards through the relationship. Each party has devoted time
and resources towards this evolution. However, in the event that one or both of the parties begins to feel dissatisfaction, the relationship may terminate or fall, entering the decline phase. Within each phase, the nature of the buyer’s needs differ, and social media strategies need to take into account these differing needs. Within this dissertation I focus on the first three phases only (exploration, expansion, and maturation) because these phases characterize a healthy ongoing relationship.

I found relatively little existing research related to the role of social media in different phases of relationships in the B2B space. In the B2C space, Sashi (2012) proposed seven parts for the customer engagement cycle within social media: connection, interaction, satisfaction, retention, commitment, advocacy, and engagement. In the sales arena, Moore, Hopkins, and Raymond (2015) compared the usage of social media within the B2C and B2B spaces. They focused on the use of internet-oriented (e-mail, hosting sites, instant messaging, etc.) social media tools in sales. Moore et al. concluded that B2B salespeople used relationship-oriented social media considerably more for prospecting, handling objections, and follow-up and after-sales service. Meanwhile, Iankova, Davies, Archer-Brown, Marder, and Yau (2018) surveyed the use of social media using Sashi’s (2012) framework for customer engagement as it pertained to the perceived importance of social media for acquiring customers (connection and interaction) and enhancing the business relationship (satisfaction, retention, commitment, advocacy, and engagement). They performed separate analyses for firms classified as B2B, B2C, and business to business to consumer (B2B2C). Iankova et al. discovered that across all types, including B2B, firms used social media more for acquisition than for enhancing a relationship. However, the survey-based approach of Iankova et al. did not provide an in-depth understanding of the
motivation and rationale for such a focus and whether firms contemplated other uses of social media.

I aimed to investigate these nuances. I used a qualitative approach to examine how, and for what objective, B2B firms of varying size and industry used social media marketing tools. I imposed no framework on the responses, such as that of Sashi (2012). Instead, from the coding of the responses, I was able to generate an organic understanding of social media use and views in B2B firms. The results will enrich understanding of the how such firms use social media marketing in the B2B space.

For example, Jap (2001) conducted an offline study of competitive advantages within the buyer–seller relationship and found that foundational trust could not be developed in the exploration phase of a relationship. However, Quinton and Wilson (2016) conducted a study on LinkedIn and found that foundational trust could be built online with social media tools in the exploration phase of the relationship.

I employed a panel of social media experts to evaluate whether the social media efforts of the firms met the set objectives and quantified the accuracy of these expert judgments to determine whether the social media objectives outlined by the firms had been met.

The substantive value of my study was to highlight how practice differs from theory when it comes to the social media communication objectives of firms in different phases of relationships. The methodological contribution of my study was to provide a method to help firms evaluate their social media content in relation to their social media objectives. This will enable firms to correct course if they find that their content is not delivering the desired results.

The rest of this dissertation is structured as follows. First, I review the existing literature related to how communication needs change over the relationship life cycle. Second, I report the
results of my qualitative research into what communication objectives firms in the B2B space sought to achieve across three phases of the relationship cycle. Third, I contrast my findings with the communication objectives suggested in the existing literature and see how well theory and practice match.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

I analyzed existing literature regarding social media in order to accurately define the domain of the study. I also conducted a systematic analysis of existing research in the area of the relationship life cycle for the purpose of ranking constructs for this comparative study.

Social Media

I limited my review of existing literature regarding social media to those published between 2001 and 2018. I selected 43 research papers that focused on social media in the marketing field: 25 were published between 2015 and 2018, the other 18 were published between 2011 and 2014. Google Scholar, The University of South Florida library database, and The University of Tampa library database were used to procure publications. Search terms began broadly with phrases such as B2B social media and social media marketing. The search continued and narrowed by viewing results for phrases such as social media relationship life cycle and B2B relationship life cycle social media. Research was then restricted to peer-reviewed journals within the marketing arena. Research papers by top tier journals such as The Journal of Marketing and The Journal of Marketing Research were given credence. Early researchers focused on comparative studies of communication online versus traditional methods. The applications, implementations, and benefits of social media research have been continuously evolving and because of the rapid evolution in the field I focused particularly on those works published between 2015 and 2018.
Defining Social Media

I conducted this analysis for the purposes of arriving at a definition of social media for the purposes of this research.

Research in social media became business oriented in 2006 when McAfee coined the phrase “Enterprise 2.0,” (p. 23) researchers have not arrived at a consensus on the definition of social media. Social media has offered both internal and external company platforms. Lewis (2010) defined social media as “the current label for digital technologies that allow people to connect, interact, produce and share content” (p. 12). Social media has reshaped communication practices, including the way that messages have been created, composed, disseminated, and consumed (Page et al., 2014). It has changed communication across borders (Bernoff & Li, 2008). It has been common practice for social media users to collaborate and communicate across multiple platforms, discussing a single theme or topic (Mehmet & Clarke, 2016).

Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch (2017) defined social media marketing is an “interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media (often in combination with other communications channels) to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders” (p. 123). For the purpose of this research, I defined the term social media as digital media that allow multidirectional communications and real-time interactions on social networking platforms, specifically Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. These three platforms formed the context for my investigation.

Social Media and Marketing Communications

Jaffe (2007) highlighted social media as a gateway to “a series of endlessly rich, dynamic, gratifying, robust, authentic and meaningful conversations going out there” (p. 22). Unlike traditional market research methods, social media has offered a real-time peek into the
consumer’s mind (by effectively listening to conversations) as well as an opportunity for businesses to receive real-time feedback from the consumer (Chen, Ching, Tsai, & Kuo, 2008). Marketers have thus been able to make changes based on what was working at a given moment (Edelman, Ostrovsky, & Schwarz, 2007). Bughin, Manyika, and Miller (2009) reported that the biggest advantage deriving from the utilization of social media sites by B2B marketers was the access to knowledge it afforded.

In 2015, only 41% of B2B marketers viewed LinkedIn as an important platform on which marketing activities could be conducted, 30% valued Facebook in this way, and less than 20% valued Twitter in this way (Richter, 2015). By 2017, Facebook surpassed LinkedIn for B2B social media usage (Sullivan, 2018). This indicated a shift in B2B social media use because Facebook offered more innovative options for marketers such as live streaming, stories, and events. It seemed reasonable, at the time of writing, to expect that social media platforms would continue to grow in importance within B2B marketing, although “US based firms are the furthest ahead and utilizing social media for business-to- business marketing” (Brennan & Croft, 2013, p. 2).

Stimulated by the demands of enhancing marketing efficiency, increasing market variety, and applications of technology, the focus of marketing has moved from being product-centric and segment-centric to being customer-centric and relationship driven (Sheth, Sisodia, & Sharma, 2000). This new era of relationship-based marketing has required theorists and practitioners to evolve beyond the traditional marketing mix and include communication within their strategies (Grönroos, 1997). Firms have been able to monitor and analyze conversations on social media, which can offer information about how consumers view the firm and its activities (Schweidel & Moe, 2014).
Two studies are of particular relevance to my own work. Giamanco and Gregoire (2012) suggested three areas where social media (LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook) could be used within a B2B environment: prospecting leads, qualifying leads, and managing relationships. Similarly, Rodriguez, Peterson, and Krishnan (2012) established a 3-step recommendation for social media use: creating opportunity, understanding customers, and relationship management.

Moore, Raymond, and Hopkins (2015) argued that both B2B and B2C sales people used similar relationship-oriented marketing approaches on social media to accomplish their selling objectives. However, Iankova et al. (2018) found that B2B social media was distinctly different from the approaches used in B2C and even B2B2C settings. Recipients have been shown to decode business-oriented messages differently from B2C consumer-oriented messages (Brown, Zablah, Bellenger, & Donthu, 2012; Gilliland & Johnston, 1997). According to Lothia, Donthu, and Hershberger (2003), B2B messages tended to trigger a central processing approach, which could be considered parallel to the logical and rational B2B environment. Brown, Zablah, Bellenger, and Johnston (2011) reported that fewer impulse purchases decisions occurred in a B2B environment through social media messages. Swani, Milne, Brown, Assaf, and Donthu (2017) argued that the B2B viewing environment was surrounded by higher risk and involvement because the information reviewed was geared more towards business and information accumulation.

These results suggest that any B2B social media relationship framework would have to be different from a B2C social media relationship framework (Salo, 2017). Current social media framework research available is predominately focused on the B2C space. Despite the growing importance of social media in the B2B space, a B2B social media framework lacks (Itani, Agnihotri, & Dingus, 2017; Salo, 2017). Thus, this B2B social media research is exploratory in
nature with the purpose of finding foundational nuances only available through qualitative measures (Kirk, Miller, & Miller, 1986).

**Relationship Life Cycle**

I selected 62 research papers of the 124 that I found that related to the relationship life cycle. I focused on the traditional well-developed theories of the relationship life cycle. The papers were published between 1959 and 2016. Google Scholar, The University of South Florida library database, and The University of Tampa library database were used to procure publications. Search terms began broadly with phrases such as *relationship life cycle*. The search continued and narrowed by viewing results for phrases such as *B2B relationship life cycle social media*, *engagement cycle*, *RLC model*, and *relationship marketing life cycle*. Research initially focused on journals within the marketing arena and expanded to insure a comprehensive review. I uncovered four distinct portions of the relationship life cycle along with underlying themes. I performed this analysis as a background for defining the relationship life cycle for the purposes of this study.

Relationships pass through phases characterized by distinctive behaviors, processes, and orientations (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). There has been little consensus as to how many phases there are: Researchers have proposed as few as two and as many as seven. What has been consistent is the definition of a relationship phase as how parties within the relationship regard one other (Dwyer et al., 1987; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Each phase represents an evolution of the parties’ perceptions of each other along with expectations of, attitudes toward, and alignments with each other. Dwyer et al. (1987) argued that relationships function differently as they progress over time. Researchers have often used distinct “stages” (Wilson, 1995, p. 335) or “states” (Netzer, et. al., 2008, p. 185) to classify
empirical differences in exchanges between the parties as relationships move through the life cycle (Heide, 1994; Hibbard et al., 2001; Jap & Anderson, 2007; Jap & Ganesan, 2000). Jap (2001) and McCall (1988) preferred the term phase because this does not carry the connotation that all phases occur in a fixed sequence. I adopted phase in this study for the same reason.

Dwyer et al. (1987) suggested that a deep understanding of the relationship dynamics of the buyer–seller relationship is necessary for marketing research. According to Ford (2002), “relationships in the B2B marketplace evolve over time and go through several states marked by increasing mutual adaptation, commitment, and reduced distance” (p. xi). Jackson (1985) suggested that buyer–seller relationships have the capacity to sometimes last for decades. Ford (2002) also claimed that it takes time to attain a return on investment from a relationship. Relationships can evolve and change substantially through this time.

Understanding that B2B relationships take an extended time to establish (Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995), buyer-seller relationships need to be maintained in a proper fashion. Jackson (1985) proposed that the key to maintaining a successful relationship for a business marketing in a B2B environment is to focus on the individual customer, understand specific behaviors over time, and to use an impactful marketing mix to connect with each customer. Digital marketing has affected each of the relationship life cycles.

**Exploration Phase**

In most relationship life cycle frameworks, relationships begin with little experience and few norms (Jap & Anderson, 2007). This phase is considered fragile and can be characterized by low-to-moderate exchanges and interactions with a correspondingly low number of relational state components. Awareness may blossom, often with minimal interpersonal bonding, in a similar way to what Anderson and Narus (1991) called “transactional exchanges” (p. 96).
The exploration phase is an examination and trial phase, where potential “obligations, benefits, and costs” (Jap & Ganesan, 2000, p. 229) of a continued relationship are considered and weighed (Eidelson, 1980; Holmes, 1991). There is a potential to cultivate or destroy trust. Reduction of uncertainty and evaluation of potential value are the core objectives within in this phase (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Berger & Calabrese, 1974; Kent, Davis, & Shapiro, 1981).

Some individuals within these relationships may be perfectly content to continue in this transactional mode without the desire to cultivate the relationship. This may be due to their lack of relationship-oriented skills (Palmatier, 2008) or because the business which has initiated the relationship is merely a small portion of their portfolio. Conversely, other partners seek opportunities to improve the relationships, with the ultimate goal of improving it.

B2B marketers can use social media platforms to successfully identify and develop new business partners (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011) and new business opportunities (Breslauer & Smith, 2009). Therefore, by connecting individuals or businesses that would have not otherwise have communicated, social media can be a conduit for the exploration phase of the relationship.

**Expansion Phase**

The second phase of the relationship life cycle, expansion, is characterized by additional information exchanges, shared purpose, and value-creating participation by both parties. Interdependence and the taking of risks (by making nonrecoverable investments) tend to develop during this phase (Dwyer et al., 1987). Benefits increase for both parties (Frazier, 1983).

The overarching goal in this phase is to understand the other’s intentions and motivations and to develop a mutually beneficial relationship that permits the relationship to be perpetuated in the long term. Social media platforms offer vehicles for information to be communicated by
the seller. Levitt (1983) articulated the importance of the seller’s role within this phase: “The sale merely consummates the courtship. Then the marriage begins. How good the marriage is depends on how well the relationship is managed by the seller” (p. 111). Throughout this phase the socialization process continues for both parties, which establishes standards of conduct, relational norms, and values for future exchanges (Narayandas & Rangan, 2004).

Figure 1 illustrates the importance of communication within this second phase, highlighting how goal congruence and clarity of norms and conduct both reach their peaks within this phase (Jap & Anderson, 2007). The seller’s dependence, shown on the X-axis through a 1-5.50 scale, peaks within the second phase. This phase is characterized by increased certainty and confidence, which are reflected in the behaviors of the parties as they explore, expand, and build the relationship. Through the testing of trust and establishment of joint satisfaction both parties tend to take greater risks. Additionally, the parties typically develop contractual obligations and have shared experiences, which contribute toward the longevity of the relationship (Dwyer et al., 1987). The parties work through their internal requirements of a relationship and toward a common goal.

**Mature Phase**

The mature phase is characterized through both parties implicitly or explicitly making a pledge to continue the relationship. They maintain the relationship, which can be viewed as the buyer–seller relationship continuing to collaborate through exchange episodes together (Anderson, 1995). At this point, both parties have a long-term perspective and the functions within the relationship are stable.

The mature phase can be identified by the high levels of tangible and intangible inputs into the relationship (Blau, 1964). At this point, both parties feel satisfaction through an instilled confidence; each party is more at ease with the other party’s motivations and intentions (Jap & Ganesan, 2000). Both parties are reaping real rewards.
This phase does not guarantee relationship contentment. When one party is extremely dependent on the other, the relationship might continue despite underlying problems (Frazier, 1983). A negative relationship state exhibits low levels of trust, commitment, and norms; many times this can be the result of an underlying relationship failure (Jap & Ganesan, 2000; Samaha, Palmatier, & Dant, 2011). This phase has the potential to lead to the end of a relationship.

**Decline Phase**

Several researchers have developed conceptual models regarding the marketing-oriented relationship dynamic in which the parties periodically evaluate each other's performance (Anderson, 1995; Håkansson, 1982; Håkansson & Wootz, 1979; Nevin, 1995; Wilson, 1995). Parties choose to remain in relationships, provided the benefits are satisfactory relative to the costs. When one party is dissatisfied, that party begins to explore alternative relationships and communicates an intent to terminate the relationship. This decline phase is characterized by a short-term point of view expressed in communications and business interactions. The displeased party typically exhibits more opportunistic behaviors.

Ring and Van de Ven (1994) recognized that relationships form through a “developmental process” (p. 97) and that their lifespan is contingent on dependency, as shown in Figure 2. Håkansson and Snehota (1995) suggested that exchanges in business relationships follow economic law, meaning that the economic return of a buyer–seller relationship is evaluated through a cost–benefit analysis. Håkansson (1982) and Håkansson and Wootz (1979) supported this conceptualization and stated that an exchange relationship can be defined as a series of distinct episodes or interactions that produce an economic and social outcome. Other researchers have argued that an evaluation of these discrete interactions provides an opportunity for parties to decode each other's actions (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Doney & Cannon, 1997;
Morgan & Hunt, 1994). These impact a party’s decision to continue or terminate a relationship (Friedman, 1991).

![Diagram](image)


Marketing resources are rarely put toward clients that fall within the decline phase of the relationship cycle. Social media efforts would be on such resource. Therefore, in this study I focused on three of the four relationship life cycle phases: exploration, expansion, and maturity.

** Constructs**

An understanding of buyer–seller relationship dynamics is necessary for marketing research (Dwyer et al., 1987). Several researchers have acknowledged that buyer–seller relationships progress through distinct phases with different construct levels and performance (Celuch, Banham, & Kasouf, 2006; Dwyer et al., 1987; Jap & Ganesan, 2000). Table 1
illustrates the results of a systematic review of the relationship lifecycle literature, breaking down key dimensions or constructs mentioned within the exploration, expansion, and mature phases.

Table 1

*Constructs In Relationship Life Cycle Literature*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Key Dimensions</th>
<th>Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987)</td>
<td>Humanizing &quot;attractiveness&quot;</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iankova, Davies, Archer-Brown, Marder, and Yau (2018)</td>
<td>Influencers</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lott and Lott (1974)</td>
<td>Resource &quot;sharing information&quot;</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kusari, Hoeffler, and Iacobucci (2013)</td>
<td>Resource &quot;showing expertise&quot;</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanzoni (1979)</td>
<td>Resource &quot;communication, development, and expectation development&quot;</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cozby (1973)</td>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iankova, Davies, Archer-Brown, Marder, and Yau (2018)</td>
<td>Thought Leadership</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berger (1973)</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jap (2001)</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent, Davis, and Shapiro (1981)</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archer and Yuan (2000)</td>
<td>Culture &quot;corporate image&quot;</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andersen (2001)</td>
<td>Culture &quot;general image&quot;</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golembiewski and McConkie (1975)</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987)</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1 (Continued)

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<td>Trust and Satisfaction</td>
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<td>Mature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jap (2001)</td>
<td>Trust &quot;important in mature but not as important as expansion phase&quot;</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmatier, Houston, Dant, and Grewal (2013)</td>
<td>Trust &quot;diminishing returns of trust at this stage&quot;</td>
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<td>Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987)</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
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CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Preliminary Study

In the fall of 2016, I collected preliminary data through a brainstorming session consisting of four branding professionals and four social media practitioners. Each individual had a minimum of 8 years full-time experience in the marketing industry. Four of the individuals each had over 25 years of full-time experience. The session was recorded and was a critical step. This one hour and fifty-two minute discussion at a private business club in Tampa, Florida, assisted me in developing an unbiased baseline of information for developing a rigorous path of research. The session involved a deep dive into each component of social media, resulting in Figure 3.

Social Media

• Visuals
• Engagement
• Connection to Brand
• Integrated Marketing Communications
• Customer Service
• Community Centric
• Trusted Source of Information
• Messaging
• Leads

Figure 3. What practitioners believed B2B social media offered to buyers and sellers.
**Research Design**

I decided that a qualitative approach was necessary to properly assess and understand the impacts and value of the relationship-oriented marketing platforms that make up social media. Qualitative research allows the exploration of “the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 16). The first part of the study used interviews to evaluate B2B social media within the relationship life cycle.

**Participants**

The population consisted of direct social media strategist within marketing departments of B2B companies. To obtain participants, I posted a request on the University of South Florida’s physical whiteboard, sent an e-mail to 120 University of South Florida’s Doctoral Business Administration students requesting interview referrals, and posted on personal social media channels on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. I received 22 responses over the course of 44 days. Three of the companies that were referred to my study did not respond in adequate time or at all to be included in the study. Five of the companies were uncomfortable participating in the study due to a lack of knowledge about research’s available anonymity, despite informing attempts. I was limited by location with the inability to travel. Additionally, I was constrained by time due to the Doctorate of Business Administration program and my committee’s guidelines.

From these responses I selected a cross-industrial sample of 14 B2B companies. Twelve of the companies agreed to move forward after the initial structured interviews. The companies’ sizes, ages, and locations were varied to procure a diverse sample; this provides many possibilities for comparison, which enables richer theory development. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967;
The selected companies were purposefully large, in the sense that none had less than $7,500,000 in annual revenue. The characteristics of the 12 selected companies are listed in Table 2. The number of interviews was consistent with other qualitative studies in this field (Veloutsou & Taylor, 2012; Wallace & Chernatony, 2007).

**Data Collection**

Data were collected directly using structured interviews and these data were validated by a panel of experts.

I conducted structured interviews with key informants from the initially selected 14 companies. Two of the companies elected not to move forward after the interview, but I still considered these interviews to be of value and they were an influence in the knowledge gained within this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
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<th>Employees</th>
<th>2017 revenue</th>
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<td>International loyalty marketing firm</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>$70,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oneida</td>
<td>International hospitality product manufacturer</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>$300,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTJB</td>
<td>National media outlet</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>$15,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusoft</td>
<td>International software developer</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>$20,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kable</td>
<td>International manufacturing company</td>
<td>&gt; 100,000</td>
<td>$118,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampa International Airport</td>
<td>Large international airport</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>$280,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ValPak</td>
<td>National couponing franchise</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>$110,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak</td>
<td>National franchise broker</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>$7,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trojan Battery</td>
<td>International battery manufacturer</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>$215,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skiborn</td>
<td>International financial security company</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>$3,900,000,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Express</td>
<td>International shipping company</td>
<td>425,000</td>
<td>$17,000,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasasa</td>
<td>National banking program</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>$78,500,000</td>
</tr>
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</table>
In the interviews I focused on exploring practitioner experiences of direct communicators of social media direction and campaigns. I conducted interviews with informants in roles that included marketing director, vice president of marketing, digital marketing director, senior manager of marketing, senior manager of brand and user experience, director of social media, director of research and air service development, publisher, and chief marketing officer.

At the beginning of each interview, I asked the interviewee to sign a waiver, shown in Appendix A. I assured the interviewees of confidentiality and anonymity (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and discussed the interview foundational questions, which can be found in Appendix B. I focused the interviews on identifying emotions evoked and whether an identifiable approach existed based upon the life cycle phase of the relationship with a customer within B2B social media. All questions were open-ended and therefore did not limit the interviewee’s response (Gubrium, Holstein, Mavasti, & McKinney, 2002). More than 30% of the questions asked were elaboration based to elaborate on a topic that the interviewee specialized in or showed a keen interest in. The interviews ranged in length from 31 min to 70 min. I recorded each interview, and after each one I immediately uploaded and transcribed the recording.

The second portion of the data collection was designed as an accountability measure to assess what the companies studied worked to achieve through their social media. Did their social media convey what they wanted it to within the appropriate life cycle phase?

Information is decoded through a channel in the midst of noise, as shown in Figure 4. The channel is this research was a social media platform. Understanding the decoding of information would enable full dissection of social media as a communication method. Asking
business informants to corroborate this directly would have presented difficulties with confidentiality.

The best alternative for validating the qualitative research was through the use of an expert panel. Twenty-one experts, with a mean of 10 years of digital marketing experience and a mean of 8 years social media marketing experience (see Appendix E), evaluated the 12 companies. Panel experts were selected to provide diversity of location, age, race, sex, and experience. To obtain panel experts, I posted a request on the University of South Florida’s physical whiteboard, sent an e-mail to 120 University of South Florida’s Doctoral Business Administration students requesting panel experts, and posted on personal social media channels on LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. I received 26 responses. Five volunteers were unresponsive or unable to complete the panel within the time frame of the study. I supplied them with a vignette of the specific life cycle circumstances and then offered them statements, which they judged using a 5-point Likert scale. The points on the scale corresponded to strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The purpose of this panel was validation of whether the selected company exuded the social media objectives claimed by the informants.

Figure 4. Linear transmission of a message through one-way communication. The mathematical theory of communication. (p. 7), by C. E. Shannon and W. Weaver, 1949, Urbana,
I conducted a pretest with three of the panel experts first. This was to allow for adjustment of the panel survey if needed and to work out any issues prior to the main deployment. I made minor adjustments to the survey to make it more user friendly.

The judges were divided into three groups of seven each, again ensuring diversity within each group. Each group was assigned to a particular phase of the life cycle and given a vignette about being a B2B purchaser in the exploration, expansion, or mature phase of the relationship in order to internalize the scenario. This was intended to elicit responses to mainstream scenarios (Hill, 1997).

Before each expert took the online panel survey, I sent him or her an e-mail (see Appendix C) to schedule a phone call and gather information on marketing and digital marketing experience. I made brief group calls, about 9 min long each, to go over the instructions and each statement (see Appendix D). I did this to insure consistency and offer any clarification to the experts before the panel.

For each life cycle phase there were 12 question sections, one for each company. An example panel question section is shown in Appendix F. Each company focused on different constructs in each life cycle phase, therefore each question section was unique. Each panel section included 1–10 statements that directly correlated to constructs the company had stated it used within the relevant life cycle phase. The expert’s job was to confirm or deny whether the objectives the company claimed to meet were actually met.

Members of the panel for the exploration phase were asked questions while they were in the mindset of being a purchasing manager, without knowledge of what the company was or
what they would be viewing. The panel experts for the expansion phase were in the mindset that
they had heard of the company they were viewing within the past month. The mature panel
experts were in the mindset of purchasing managers who had been in the role for 5 years and
who were consistent customers of the company they were now viewing on social media. In each
mindset they had just discovered this company was on social media and decided to take a look at
least 10 of the company’s posts on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to get a feel for how the
company portrayed themselves on social media.

The panel survey was done over the course of 20 days, for the purposes of limiting an
adjusted social media post view. The survey was deployed promptly following the coding of
data from the interviews to ensure that the social media viewed by the panelists was the work of
the informants interviewed. Panel experts took an average of 88 minutes to complete the survey.

**Data Analysis**

Interview transcripts underwent a three-phase coding process, as suggested by Strauss
and Corbin (1990). I performed a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts in order to
develop a rich portrayal of the data and to detect implicit and explicit ideas in the data (Creswell,
2013). Thematic analysis was appropriate for this type of research because the approach seeks to
construct theories that are grounded in the data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2002). In the initial
coding, I used the In Vivo coding method because social media was a relatively new topic which
has evolved rapidly, along with its terminology (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Participant-
generated wording was the best choice for effectively coding the interviews, because it honors
and prioritizes the participant’s voice (Saldaña, 2016). Additionally, In Vivo coding is
applicable for practitioner research (Stringer, 2014). I used simultaneous coding as well, due to
the dynamic nature of the interview topics, because “social interaction does not occur in neat, isolated units” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 130).

I used structural coding for utilitarian elements of the interviews, such as years on social media, the particular platforms the company utilized, the size of the company, and any measurement tools utilized. Secondary coding analysis followed the six phases recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, search for themes among codes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final account of the findings. Through the codes, I developed categories and eventually arrived at themes, assertions, and theory.

The qualitative interviews resulted in a rich source of information regarding the focuses of each company’s social media. By using a comparative methodology of data collection and analysis and its categorization, based on emergent ideas and themes, I developed constructs inductively throughout the process (Charmaz, 2006; Quinn & Perelli, 2016).

During the interviews and coding process, verbiage and context were paramount to allow me to determine how the interviewee used and focused on the theme they were discussing. Understanding which phase of the relationship life cycle was under discussion was essential for coding. Although there were moments when informants directly mentioned the focus they had on, for example, driving leads, many times it was unclear what phase was under discussion until it became obvious that the focus had shifted to a different phase of the relationship life cycle. I performed rigorous three-phase coding to allow for accurate dissection of the responses. The final step was analysis of the expert panel’s responses. For this I used the proportional reduction in loss reliability measure developed by Rust and Cooil (1994). This allowed me to determine
the quality and strength of the collected data. Based upon Nunnally’s (1978) rule of thumb, I reviewed only constructs of that were validated with a reliability of 70% or greater.

**Theoretical Analysis**

I selected 62 research papers of the 124 that I found that related to the relationship life cycle. I focused on the traditional well-developed theories of the relationship life cycle. The citation counts were also taken into account for the purpose of narrowing the scope of research. The papers were published between 1959 and 2016. Google Scholar, The University of South Florida library database, and The University of Tampa library database were used to procure publications. Search terms began broadly with phrases such as *relationship life cycle*. The search continued and narrowed by viewing results for phrases such as *B2B relationship life cycle social media*, *engagement cycle*, *RLC model*, and *relationship marketing life cycle*. Research initially focused on journals within the marketing arena and expanded to insure a comprehensive review. I uncovered four distinct portions of the relationship life cycle along with underlying themes and constructs. Table 1 lists the results of the review.

I ranked the constructs in the literature, based upon the quantity of mentions and netted out the mentions based upon the support and opposition of the particular construct. The strength and support of the arguments were taken into consideration for ranking order.

This research focuses on the relationship life cycle literature because of the tenure of time the relationship lifecycle has been researched. Social media research is limited to work published between 2001 and 2018.
My research ranked the 10 thematic constructs within each phase of the literature. These are summarized in Figure 5, Figure 6, and Figure 7. In the sections that follow, I superimpose practice onto the theorized construct rankings for comparison.

*Figure 5.* The results of the theorized construct rankings for the exploration phase.
Figure 6. The results of the theorized construct rankings for the expansion phase.

Figure 7. The results of the theorized construct rankings for the mature phase.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The three most common types of social media utilized by the 12 companies studied were Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. These three platforms directly correlated with the limited scope established for the study. The Social Media Examiner’s (2018) Industry Report confirmed that 91% of B2B firms utilized Facebook, 79% used LinkedIn, and 70% used Twitter. Every company studied had or had had paid campaigns within these platforms. Additionally, Instagram, Pinterest, Google+, YouTube, Snapchat, Vimeo, and Slide Share were also mentioned as social media platforms. The last two were outwardly not classified as a social media platform by the interviewees.

Through thematic analysis that formulated meanings by clustering elements of the interviews, categories of constructs began to form: humanizing, community relations, use of influencers, developing of a face of the company, use guest contributions, being a resource, showing expertise, being a thought leader, transparency, customer service, showcasing the company culture, credibility, trust, commitment, liking the company, and satisfaction. These categories condensed into just 10 thematic constructs:

- humanizing;
- community relations;
- use of influencers, face, or guests;
- being a resource, expert, or thought leader;
- transparency;
customer service;
culture;
trust and credibility;
commitment; and
liking or being satisfied by the company.

The results of the qualitative interviews are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

*Constructs Mentioned in Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Exploration</th>
<th>Expansion</th>
<th>Mature</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanizing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of influencers, face, or guests</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a resource, expert, or thought leader</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and credibility</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17.59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking or being satisfied by the company</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>% of total</td>
<td>17.38</td>
<td>39.06</td>
<td>43.56</td>
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</table>

My research found a number of differences between what has been theorized and what was done in practice. The top three ranked theories versus the top three ranked constructs in practice are summarized in Figure. In the sections that follow I elaborate on the results.
Figure 8. The results of the comparative study.

Exploration Phase

When I began the study I expected that the exploration phase would be a large part of what B2B firms used social media for. I thought that B2B companies would be focused on driving leads and that they would fall within the early adopter phase or be just entering the early majority phase of the diffusion of innovation. However, the exploration phase was the least mentioned life cycle phase, consuming just 17.38% of the total quantity of mentions in the interviews.

Table shows whether informants from each company mentioned each construct in connection with the exploration phase of the company’s social media. Table compares the most used constructs in practice to the most important constructs in theory within the exploration phase.
Table 4

**Breakdown of Each Construct Mentioned by Each Company Within the Exploration Phase**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Kobie Marketing</th>
<th>Oneida</th>
<th>BTJB</th>
<th>Accusoft</th>
<th>Kable</th>
<th>TIA</th>
<th>ValPak</th>
<th>Peak</th>
<th>Trojan Battery</th>
<th>Skiborn</th>
<th>Federal Express</th>
<th>Kasasa</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanizing</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2 (16.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>7 (58.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of influencers, face, or guests</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2 (16.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a resource, expert, or thought leader</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>10 (83.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1 (8.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1 (8.33)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Culture</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1 (8.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and credibility</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>8 (66.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4 (33.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking or being satisfied by the company</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4 (33.33)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 (33.33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Y = yes; N = no.*
Table 5

*Themes in the Exploration Phase in Practice and in Theory Ranked by Importance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>In practice</th>
<th>In theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Being a resource, expert, or thought leader</td>
<td>Liking or being satisfied by the company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trust and credibility</td>
<td>Being a resource, expert, or thought leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td>Trust and credibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Humanizing**

Humanizing was mentioned by informants from just two of the 12 companies in connection with this phase. It was one of the least used elements used by the practitioners with social media within this phase.

Theorists have described humanizing as anthropomorphism, animism, or brand love (cite). I found that humanizing was a practitioner term. Like practitioners, theorists have placed little emphasis on humanizing, and I found little existing research regarding this concept. Dwyer et al. (1987) mentioned “attractiveness” (p. 16) within the earliest phase of a relationship. They emphasized attractiveness early on in a relationship through mirroring of one beliefs, values, and personality. Wilson (1995) recommended “social bonding” (p. 13) as a way of enhancing the relationship. Wilson described this action as a degree of personal friendship between two parties. He highlighted its significance within the initial phase of a relationship and throughout the expansion phase. These ideas are connected to the idea of humanizing because these concepts, like anthropomorphism, were described by Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto (2009) as “brands perceived by consumers as actual human beings with various emotional states, mind, soul, and conscious behaviors that can act as prominent members of social ties.”
Community Relations

Community relations were mentioned by informants from seven of the 12 companies and was the third most important construct mentioned in practice. However, fewer companies incorporated it into their strategy in the exploration phase compared to either of the other two phases. Additionally, it was mentioned the least (12 times) in this phase compared to the expansion (21 times) and mature (31 times) phases. Practitioners felt that when buyers engaged in social media and they saw a company that was giving back to the community, they subconsciously felt that they were giving back to the community through osmosis when they bought from that company. Additionally, informants enjoyed displaying their company’s community support through social media and felt that there were no potential negative scenarios for the company by doing so.

Outside of the relationship life cycle literature, Manchanda, Packard, and Pattabhiramaiah (2015) reported a positive correlation between sales and activity and social connections within a community. However, I found nothing within the relationship life cycle literature regarding community engagement within the exploration phase.

This finding indicated a large gap between practice and theory. Practice emphasized the importance of community engagement within this phase while theory offered no support for this.

Use of Influencers, Face, or Guests

Influencer tactics were one of the least mentioned strategies by informers with regard to the exploration phase. It was also mentioned less in this phase than either of the other two phases. However, one informant indicated that guest contributions can be strategically and successfully used in the exploration phase when done with best practices:
It makes a lot of sense because at the end of the day, nobody wants to see someone
talking about themselves. They want to see a product and a real situation, they want to
see how people like them and would use it. They want to see specifically how the people
who they admire might use that product. That has been much more impactful for us from
an engagement perspective than anything we ever put out on our own coming from our
brand. (Social Media Director, Oneida)

I did not find use of influencers or guest contributions within existing in relation to the
earliest phase of the relationship life cycle. Iankova et al. (2018) mentioned influencers within
the acquisition stage of a relationship, but they did not include that variable in their survey.

I found that theory and practice were similar here because neither emphasized this
strategy within this phase.

**Being a Resource, Expert, or Thought Leader**

Informants considered being a resource through showcasing expertise or, as they
sometimes called it, “being a thought leader,” to be the most important construct within this
phase. Examples of social media messages exhibiting this construct can be seen in Figure 9 and
Figure. It was mentioned in interviews by informants from eight of the companies and 26 times
overall in connection with the exploration phase.

Being a resource and showing expertise is logical for companies within the exploration
phase. Buyers could be directly seeking information as to whether a company is the right fit for
what they are shopping for. Buyers may even be unaware of a need for a product or service
because they are online. If the initial mindset of the buyer is to find a seller, then a buyer coming
across an experienced and knowledgeable company through social media offers nothing but
potential positive outcomes. If the buyer is already in a content relationship with another seller,
then there are two alternatives that may occur. Either the seller will become a future option if the existing buyer–seller relationship falls into the decline phase, or the buyer will be stimulated to check the expertise of their existing seller. If the buyer is unaware of the existence of the product or service, then a showing information may offer just enough incentive for the buyer–seller relationship to enter into the expansion phase.

Informants from Accusoft, BTJB, and Kable companies described social media as an “amplification tool” or a “communication tool.” They said that the ultimate goal was to drive traffic to the website and to convert social media followers into clients. Additionally, the "sales funnel" was mentioned by four different companies. An informant from Kable gave examples of their success through this strategy. The informant spoke of the impact their social media engagement had had by adopting a thought-leadership strategy:

Just by determining and writing down our strategy, we grew our social engagement by 97 percent from 2016 to 2017. In that same time frame, our follower numbers grew by 33 percent. One of our main goals on social media is to drive more traffic to our website. By tracking and utilizing more effective CTAs, we grew web traffic from social channels to our website by 55 percent. (Director of Communications, Kable)

A firm choosing to be a resource was highlighted in the literature a number of times. I judged this construct to be the second most recommended in theory. Lott and Lott (1974) recommend sharing information in order to appeal to another party within this phase. They argued that being forthright with information leads to attractiveness. This directly relates to being a resource of information for a customer. Kusari, Hoeffler, and Iacobucci (2013) discussed how buyers choose a seller. They stated the importance of a positive reputation and
highlighted competence. I suggest that one way for companies to show competence would be through showing expertise.

*Figure 9.* A resource-related post on social media. From “The Four Pillars of Building a Supply Chain” [2018 post], by Anonymous, September 6, 2018 (http://LinkedIn.com). Copyright 2018 by Copyright Holder. Reprinted with permission.

Scanzoni (1979) used five life cycle phases that Dwyer et al. (1987) developed for their research. Within their initial relationship phases, three subprocesses relate to being a resource: communication, development, and expectation development. Communication is giving of information. Development of power is showing expertise. Expectation development is telling a firm what they should anticipate as they hire a company. Each of these is based around the idea of explaining information to potential customers. In fact, researchers have shown that to
continue through this phase, a party needs to reveal resources for reciprocation (Cozby, 1973; Davis & Skinner, 1974).

Figure 10. A resource-related post on social media. From “Branches aren’t dead” [2018 post], by Kasasa, June 8, 2018 (https://www.linkedin.com/company/kasasa/). Copyright 2018 by Kasasa. Reprinted with permission.

Iankova et al. (2018) addressed thought leadership within the acquisition stage of their online research regarding the relationship life cycle. Their findings corroborated the importance of being a resource: thought leadership was the second highest variable within their study for relationship-oriented social media efforts.

In theory, being a resource, expert, or thought leader was an important construct but not the most important. I found that theory was close to practice for this construct, but not exactly parallel.
Transparency

Transparency has been defined as a “lack of hidden agendas or conditions, accompanied by the availability of full information required for collaboration, cooperation, and collective decision making” (“Transparency,” YYYY). Transparency was one of the least mentioned constructs within this phase: The informant from only one company brought it up. In addition, transparency was mentioned fewer times in connection with the exploration phase compared to either of the other two phases.

Three groups of researchers addressed transparency in relation to the relationship life cycle. A stated goal of this phase is to enhance predictability and reduce uncertainty (Berger, 1973; Jap, 2001; Kent, Davis, & Shapiro, 1981). From this goal, I inferred that predictability stems from transparency and that these theorists supported transparency within this phase.

Comparing theory and practice, theory seemed to place more emphasis on transparency than practice did. However, neither offered substantial support for this construct.

Customer Service

Customer service was also one of the least mentioned constructs within this phase: the informant from only one company brought it up. And, like transparency, customer service was mentioned less in connection with this phase compared to either of the other two phases. The informant from the company that did encourage customer service communications said it with the idea of being proactive and giving peace of mind to potential customers. The informant wanted buyers to understand that customer service was important and a part of the company.

I found no mention of customer service in the theoretical literature in connection with the exploration phase. Understandably, the research recognized that if there were no client to give service to, there would be no customer service to offer.
I found that theory and practice were similar in their lack of emphasis on this construct within this phase.

**Culture**

Culture was mentioned by the informant form one company in connection within this phase. It was also mentioned less in this phase compared to either of the other two phases.

I found two studies that supported an emphasis on culture within the exploration phase of the relationship life cycle. Archer and Yuan (2000) showed through their e-commerce research that “corporate image” (p. 390) was an important element of their seven relationship life cycle phases. Andersen (2001) also noted that this phase is filled with information gathering to decide if both buyer and seller would like to move into the next phase of the relationship. One of the criteria for each party to judge is “general image” (Andersen, 2001, p. 172). From this, culture can seamlessly be considered a component of a general image or corporate image because this is the simply the generic perception of the firm.

Theory seemed to place more emphasis on culture than practice did. However, neither offered substantial support for the construct.

**Trust and Credibility**

According to the informants, trust was the second most important construct. Trust was said to be a part of the social media strategy by informants from 8 of the 12 companies. Although informants mentioned trust was 18 times within the interviews in relation to the exploration phase, it was still less than the number times it was mentioned in either the expansion of mature phases. When I asked interviewees to elaborate on the word *trust*, each offered more than one example of how they worked to express trust to their audience.
Informants from each company respected that trust took time to build and that it was not just given freely. One informant said:

With word-of-mouth marketing or influencer marketing comes a lot of inherent or borrowed trust. That saves us a ton of work. Instead of trying to start from scratch or build trust through sales messages, which is really hard, you can borrow the credibility of someone else. (Content Manager, Kasasa)

Trust was the most mentioned attribute within the exploration phase literature. I judged trust to be the third most important construct due to the varying theories associated with it. and Golembiewski and McConkie (1975) stated that “perhaps there is no other single variable which so thoroughly influences interpersonal and intergroup behavior” (p. 131). Dwyer et al. (1987) supported this statement and specifically spoke to trust being the main basis of the exploration phase. Akrout and Diallo (2017) also focused on trust within the relationship life cycle and found that calculative trust had a positive effect with regard to reputation. Lewicki and Bunker (1996) found that relationship building began with activities based on the development of calculus-based trust. These researchers all suggested that success or failure of these interactions determined whether the next stage of knowledge-based trust could occur.

Not all researchers supported trust so clearly. Jap (2001) argued that trust cannot be developed in this early phase and that it has minimal impact. Her results supported the idea that there is so little information found within this initial phase that any semblance of trust developed would not be considered foundational trust. She defined trust as being based upon good faith.

Quinton and Wilson (2016) conducted a study that directly relates to this point. They focused on LinkedIn and found that trust could be expedited within the exploration phase through the conception of a relationship on social media. Quinton and Wilson said that this was
because firms had easy access to credentials and relevant information to either develop or impede trust. Their model justified the importance of firms initiating relationships through social media channels. Quinton and Wilson explained that connecting with other firms, individually or internationally, most likely would have not have occurred as often or as quickly without the medium of social media. They explained that the circumvention of gatekeepers and traditional bottle necks was now possible.

Trust fell into the top three most important constructs for both practice and theory. However, in practice, trust was the second most important construct, while in theory, it was the third most important. I suspect that this was partially due to how much trust had been dissected in theory. As with any scrutinized topic, imperfections were bound to surface. Displaying the opposing views of trust were the main reason for its ranking.

**Commitment**

Commitment was mentioned by informants from four of the companies within this phase. It was mentioned less in this phase than in either of the other two phases.

Many researchers have studied commitment, however only Jap and Ganesan (2000) directly mentioned commitment in relationship life cycle research within the exploration phase. Jap and Ganesan noted that within this initial phase, a supplier’s showing of commitment through transaction-specific investments can enhance a retailer’s perception.

Theory was similar to practice for this construct, because neither was strongly indicated by either practitioners or theorists.
Liking or Being Satisfied by the Company

Informants from only four companies mentioned satisfaction within the exploration phase. It was tied with commitment as the fourth most important construct in practice. Additionally, it was mentioned less in this phase compared to either of the other two phases.

Many researchers had studied satisfaction within the relationship life cycle. Due to the positive nature of the research, I classified satisfaction as the most important theorized construct of this phase. Many authors claimed that satisfaction was key to entering the next phase. According to Frazier (1983), a relationship cannot move beyond the exploration phase without it. Oliver (1997) supported this statement by saying that satisfaction is the element that causes a transition from one phase to the next. According to Blau (1964), satisfaction can come from tests that occur within this phase. Passing the tests leads to an increase in attractiveness and liking of the company (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

Wilson’s (1995) integration of relationship variables and the relationship development process determines that the focus of satisfaction is important within this phase, specifically where so-called partner selection is performed. A few researchers focused on the idea of being liked within this phase. Pulles and Hartman (2017) found that liking a company substantially influenced the opportunity for a firm to engage in communication for collaboration. Dowell, Morrison, and Heffernan (2015) incorporated liking into their trust research. They found that while liking is important throughout a relationship, it was most important within the earlier phases. A company can even posture a bit, in a manner to garner attention, and be more likeable (Dwyer et al., 1987).

Theory highlighted satisfaction within this phase, to the extent that I deemed it the most important theoretical construct within the exploration phase. In contrast, satisfaction was not one
of the top three constructs in practice. This difference between the theory and practice is representative of a large gap.

**Expansion Phase**

I found B2B marketers utilized social media within the expansion phase of the relationship life cycle in which buyer–seller relationships grew. The Social Media Examiner (2018) corroborated this, stating that B2B marketers were 57% more likely to incorporate social media for the growth of partnerships. This is compared to the 45% of B2C marketers who use social media for the growth of partnerships. I found that the practitioners emphasized the expansion phase more than the exploration phase but less than the mature phase. In addition, use of influencers, being perceived as a resource, and trust were all most pronounced by practitioners within this phase compared to the other two phases.

Table shows whether informants from each company mentioned each construct in connection with the expansion phase of the firm’s social media.

Table compares the most used constructs in practice to the most important constructs in theory within the expansion phase of the relationship life cycle.

**Humanizing**

In practice, humanizing was mentioned by informants from three of the 12 companies in connection with the expansion phase, the fewest of any construct. This was also the least mentioned construct overall within this phase.

I found nothing in existing literature regarding humanizing a brand within this phase. Therefore, theory and practice were similar for humanizing in this phase because neither emphasized it. However, the fact that it was used in practice and there was no research on humanizing within the relationship life cycle literature did indicate a gap.
### Table 6

**Breakdown of Each Construct Mentioned by Each Company Within the Expansion Phase**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Kobie Marketing</th>
<th>Oneida</th>
<th>BTJB</th>
<th>Accusoft</th>
<th>Kable</th>
<th>TIA</th>
<th>ValPak</th>
<th>Peak</th>
<th>Trojan Battery</th>
<th>Skiborn</th>
<th>Federal Express</th>
<th>Kasasa</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanizing</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3 (25.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>10 (83.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of influencers, face, or guests</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>7 (58.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a resource, expert, or thought leader</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>12 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4 (33.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4 (33.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4 (33.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and credibility</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>12 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>6 (50.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking or being satisfied by the company</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>8 (66.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>70 (58.33)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Y = yes; N = no.
Table 7

*Constructs in the Expansion Phase in Practice and in Theory Ranked by Importance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>In practice</th>
<th>In theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Being a resource, expert, or thought leader</td>
<td>Trust and credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Liking or being satisfied by the company</td>
<td>Liking or being satisfied by the company and customer service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Community Relations**

Informants reported community relations prominently in connection with all three studied relationship phases, but informants from 10 of the 12 companies highlighted it in the expansion phase of the relationship. Informants mentioned its importance 21 times within this phase during the interviews.

Figure shows an example of a social media message related to community relations. The expansion phase emphasis related directly to the importance in this phase of collecting additional information to make an informed decision about whether the buyer and seller want to advance the relationship. It is logical for a company to focus its efforts on showing the good will it has within the community. The company offers up positive aspects of itself to showcase on social media. The Director of Communications at Kable said, “Our community relations activities and employee coverage typically gets the most engagement on our social channels.” Another informant said:

I submitted one of our new application stories out of Tanzania for a village micro grid. There's a big organization called Intersolar that does this tradeshow. Anyway, we're up for an award for that, which will be given out in June. And so, every time we have a customer application stories, which I write, and when they're done and approved, I
I found nothing in existing literature regarding community relations within this phase. There was thus a large gap between theory and practice. Practice placed a large emphasis on this construct while theory placed no emphasis at all on it.
Use of Influencers, Face, or Guests

Informants reported ample use of influencers, face, or guests in connection with both the expansion and mature phases, with informants from one more company reporting its use in this phase than the mature phase. However, informants mentioned the construct 23 times in connection with the expansion phase, compared to just 9 times in connection with the mature phase.

This emphasis within the expansion phase is understandable because influencer marketing is based around the idea of being a gatekeeper toward the greater, or mature, population. Figure  shows an example of a social media message related to this construct.

Influencer marketing dates back to the 1940s and 1950s, when Lazarsfeld, Katz, and colleagues developed a groundbreaking theory of public opinion that incorporated “opinion leaders” (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p. 3) who received more attention than the media. According to Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), a “two-step flow” (p. 5) of communication existed, in contrast to the idea that information flowed from the media in one direction.

Merton (1968) later dubbed these individuals “influentials” (p. 441). Influencers, as they have become known, came to have a strong hold on future communication theories such as the diffusion of innovations (Coleman, Katz, & Menzel, 1966). Influencers within the theory of innovation are critical to whether a product is adopted by the early adopters, late adopters, and eventually laggards.

The interviews clarified the definition of influencers used by practitioners:

There’s not just one kind of influencer. A loud and out there celebrity can be an influencer and bring credibility to your brand through endorsement or amplifying your message, but there are also influencers out there who can help shape your perception
because they are good at crafting messages and have access to a niche community where your message will get seen by the right audience. (Content Manager, Kasasa)

Figure 12. A guest-contribution-related post on social media. From “Chef Keith Williamson” [2018 post], by Author, June 19, 2018 (https://www.facebook.com/FlyTPA/). Copyright 2018 by Tampa International Airport. Reprinted with permission.

I found nothing in the existing literature regarding influencers or guest contributions within the expansion phase of the relationship life cycle. Thus, there was a large gap between theory and practice. Practitioners deemed this construct to be the fourth most important within this phase, while theory placed no importance on it.
**Being a Resource, Expert, or Thought Leader**

Informants considered being a resource to be the most important construct during the expansion phase: informants from all 12 companies mentioned it in connection with this phase. They also mentioned it more in connection with this phase than any other. In fact, being a resource, expert, or thought leader was the most mentioned construct in across all three relationship life cycle phases.

Figure shows an example of a social media message related to this construct. It seems natural for a business to tout its experience and knowledge on social media, but it would only be logical for firms to continue expressing this information if they were receiving likes, comments, and positive engagement from their social media audience. The broadcast of public and free knowledge through a social media platform is beneficial for potential and existing customers, which correlates with this construct being the most used within the expansion and mature phases.

Informants from every company interviewed substantiated the value of being a thought leader or resource in some form. According to one informant:

The way that we do it is just proving we are smarter, more knowledgeable, can get the information faster. When a client comes to us, they quickly need something say, on consumer research - and we have the experts that can quickly provide that information. I think it's important to show that we can respond quickly and we have the knowledge across multiple verticals. (Social Media Manager, Kobie Marketing)

Another informant put it this way:

It gives consumers a reason to think about us. People have a lot on their mind – they’re very consumed by their day-to-say. You hear it all the time now. Someone has a question
and the reply is always “Google it.” I want to set up that relationship where our brand can be the name people think of whenever they have a problem. (Content Manager, Kasasa)

Akpinar and Berger (2017) showed that informational posts were effective through social media because they increased purchase intentions. Downsides of sharing this knowledge could be competitors taking the information and redistributing it as their own, or outsiders perceiving the company as narcissistic. Presumably, the reward of being viewed as an expert or thought leader within a firm’s industry outweighs the risks, because 26.99% of the quantity of mentions, as a whole, focused on this construct.

Informants from two companies described themselves as an educator. The first was from Tampa International Airport:

What's really interesting is that we are educational based in our mission. We wanna tell our passengers about things and we never want to sell them anything. That can become increasingly challenging as we start to see our revenue lines become more and more critical to our overall success. (Director of Marketing, Tampa International Airport)

The second was from Trojan Batteries:

When management asked me, “What are the most popular posts?” Those come out to be our new customer or product announcements, and my posting of what I call “Trojan Tips.” Our whole thing . . . is to educate. (Director of Communications, Trojan Batteries)

I found little support in existing literature for the importance of being a resource for customers within this phase. However, this phase has been characterized by substantial information sharing (Frazier, 1983; Jap, 2001; Ring & Van de Ven, 1994), which directly correlates to being a resource.
These three papers in the literature indicated a large gap between theory and practice. Practice placed the most emphasis on this construct within this phase, while theory treated it as a minor aspect of this phase.

**Transparency**

Informants from four of the 12 companies mentioned transparency in connection with the expansion phase. Informants mentioned it 11 times in connection with this phase, only one less time than they mentioned it in connection with the mature phase.

I found nothing was found in literature regarding transparency within this phase. This indicated a gap between theory and practice because transparency was used in practice but not mentioned in theory at all.

**Customer Service**

Informants from four of the 12 companies mentioned customer service in connection with the expansion phase. Based on the interviews, it ranked sixth in importance in this phase.
I judged customer service to be the third most important construct in the existing literature for this phase of the relationship life cycle. A customer has just initiated the relationship with a firm in this phase. A seller may indicate intentions within this phase by focusing on enhancing the support it gives to a buyer (Jap, 2001) and thus offering customer service through support.

Johnson and Selnes (2004) offered a theory of relationship exchanges that includes a transition from strangers to acquaintances. Part of the motivation given by Johnson and Selnes for this transition was the reduction of uncertainty with repeat interactions, such as sales and service, so that familiarity has an opportunity to occur. Again, this supports the importance of customer service as the formal relationship initiates. Eggert, Ulaga, and Schultz (2006) conducted a longitudinal analysis of value creation within the relationship life cycle and concluded that “service support” (p. 25) was the strongest driver of value within the second phase of the life cycle. The emphasis on support and customer service is very logical. This is the first opportunity for a firm to show its support of a customer, whether anticipated by common transitional needs or unexpected issues that need resolution. In either case, the customer is in an uncharted situation and needs guidance, which will reiterate or delineate the decision of purchasing from the particular seller.

These findings indicated a gap between theory and practice. Customer service was not considered as often in practice as in theory in connection with the expansion phase of the relationship life cycle.

**Culture**

Informants from four of the 12 companies mentioned culture in connection with the expansion phase, the most for this construct across all three phases. However, informants
mentioned the construct 9 times in connection with this phase compared to 14 in connection with the mature phase. This implied that culture was more widely used within the expansion phase.

The expansion phase is characterized by a growth of information regarding both sides of the relationship in terms of the company, values, norms, and expectations. Thus, it is understandable why the culture of a company would be emphasized within this phase. When people engage in social media and they see a company that makes its employees a priority, they subconsciously feel that they are supporting people who work there when they support the company. “The highest response on social media in terms of typical likes/comments/shares is definitely our culture posts” (Social Media Manager, Kobie Marketing).

Showcasing the culture of a company through social media showed a focus of companies to retain people who work there and to encourage others to want to work there. Many firms understood the resources consumed by employee turnover, and enhancing employee satisfaction through a public display of employee enjoyment reemphasized a positive workplace. Additionally, generational differences mean that potential employees have been increasingly comfortable with technology and social media, and companies have proactively utilized social media as a recruitment tool. This was specifically mentioned by informants from three companies: “We’d like people to see us and feel like Kobie seems like a cool place to work, I could really fit in, and I could also contribute a lot to the company” (Social Media Manager, Kobie Marketing).

I found nothing in existing literature regarding culture within this phase. This indicated a gap between theory and practice because practice emphasized culture in social media, but culture was not mentioned in theory at all.
Trust and Credibility

Informants from all companies interviewed cited trust as being important within the expansion phase. Informants mentioned trust more in this phase than in either of the other two phases.

Informants told stories about how brands offered trust with action-oriented examples. The informants recognized that trust is earned and also that it can quickly be lost and that their actions could make that happen. A few informants felt that by not trying to sell to potential and current customers through social media that they were building trust.

I judged trust as the most important construct in theory in this phase. Jap and Anderson (2007) discovered the importance of trust within this phase, pointedly stating that it was the pinnacle of relationship development. Within their study, trust was explored and compared between the exploration phase and the mature phase. Jap and Anderson highlighted the importance of trust within the exploration phase, arguing that the mature phase is merely filled with routine behaviors and that trust cannot be enhanced as much there. Palmatier, Houston, Dant, and Grewal (2013) provided a theoretical explanation for Jap and Anderson’s findings based on their own study of commitment velocity. Palmatier et al. also highlighted the importance of trust being “critical for growth early in a relationship” (p. 26). Zaheer, McEvily, and Perrone (1998) determined that two distinct types of trust existed: interpersonal and interorganizational. Zaheer et al. reported that trust within interorganizational exchange relations mattered, particularly within the expansion phase because this was where the relationship could progress the most.

Wilson’s (1995) also focused on trust in integration of relationship variables and the relationship development process. Wilson emphasized that trust is the conduit of how purpose
becomes defined. Similarly, Ring and Van de Ven (1994) offered a framework for cooperative relationships (Figure 2). Their framework underlines the importance of trust prior to transitioning beyond the expansion phase.

Jap (2001) said that trust has the greatest impact on satisfactory outcomes in this phase. Akrout and Diallo (2017) specifically focused on trust within the relationship life cycle and found that positive results were associated with cognitive trust within this phase. Cognitive trust is defined as a willingness to trust a service provider’s ability (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). However, Dowell et al. (2015) disagreed and claimed that affective trust is most critical within the early phases of a relationship but overall less important than cognitive trust. Affective trust is described as the confidence placed on a partner based upon feelings derived from expressions of care and concern demonstrated to another party (Rempel et al., 1985).

Several researchers have coupled trust with commitment. Researchers have found that as a relationship progresses through this phase the relational variables of trust and commitment grow, even if only for short periods or at different rates (Jap & Ganesan, 2000; Palmatier et al., 2013; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). Hibbard et al. (2001) offered relationship quartiles that also coupled these constructs with the emphasis on trust, commitment, and shared values or culture. Hibbard et al. confirmed that these three aspects of a relationship were highest in relation to performance within the first quartile (1 month to 96 months). The authors found that all three were positively associated with performance throughout the relationship, however they diminished in importance as time passed. The theory of Hibbard et al. works to explain to firms that although a relationship may be worth investing in, understanding is required of the relative focus required for each of the three constructs as the relationship advances.
Trust was the most important construct in both theory and practice within the expansion phase.

**Commitment**

Based on the interviews, commitment was the fifth most important construct of seven in the expansion phase, accounting for ties within the rankings. Informants from six of the 12 companies mentioned commitment in connection with the expansion phase of the relationship.

I judged commitment to be the second most important construct in theory. Jap (2001) argued that a critical goal of this phase is to focus on interactions that increase commitment. Hardwick and Ford (1986) mentioned that commitment implies the relationship will offer value or benefits in the future. A customer would not remain within the relationship if there was no value in it, especially at such an early moment in a relationship. Wilson (1995) considered commitment to be a critical variable in measuring a relationship’s future. According to Spekman (1988), commitment is simply a necessary condition to extend a relationship.

Jap and Ganesan (2000) emphasized that in the expansion phase suppliers have a motivation to preserve the relationship by showing commitment. They gave sound advice that perception by buyers has a positive and powerful effect which increases relationship satisfaction.

There was a large gap between theory and practice for this construct. Commitment was not considered as often in practice as in theory.

**Liking or Being Satisfied by the Company**

Informants from eight of the 12 companies mentioned satisfaction in connection with the expansion phase of their social media strategy. This was third most important construct mentioned by informants within this phase.
One informant from BTJB pointedly spoke of how, if he or she did not see expressions of satisfaction through the company’s social media, then the informant noted that as a signal that something was wrong. One informant from Kobie Marketing spoke about a client coming into the company’s physical office even when a meeting had not been set because that customer enjoyed being around the business. The customer expressed satisfaction to the company by saying that the customer felt “like being around family” (Social Media Manager, Kobie Marketing). Another three companies expressed satisfaction at seeing customer testimonials or reviews. In a similar way, another company described a portion of their strategy as finding a way to enable testimonials for new customers. Feelings of satisfaction appeared to be oriented toward action:

I don't think they realize all the platforms that we are on and part of the reason we are on so many is because different people consume content differently. So, we have to make sure that we appealed to the way people like to see things. (B2B Director of Content & Customer Marketing Strategy, ValPak)

Satisfaction continued to be of theoretical importance within the relationship life cycle literature in this phase. I judged satisfaction to be the third most important construct, in theory, of the expansion phase. Dwyer et al. (1987) argued that it is necessary for moving to the next phase. Oliver (1997) supported this by suggesting that in order to transition from the expansion phase into the mature phase, satisfaction is the specific element required.

Sashi (2012) developed a framework for the cycle of customer engagement regarding B2C social media, which was based on B2B theories. Satisfaction in Sashi’s framework occurs after the initial interaction. Sashi stated that it is a “necessary condition for customer engagement” (p. 262). Murphy and Sashi (2018) determined, in a study of B2B sales people,
that digital communication methods (including social media), used appropriately, led to increased satisfaction.

Satisfaction was the third most important construct in both practice and theory for the expansion phase, which indicated a match between theory and practice.

**Mature Phase**

I found the largest gaps between theory and practice in connection with the mature phase. This could be because informants mentioned more constructs in connection with this phase than any other (Table 3). Over half of the total quantity of all mentions of each construct occurred in connection with the mature phase for seven of the 10 constructs. This suggested that informants’ passion regarding any given construct was higher in connection with this phase than other phases.

An additional thought most of the conversations related to the mature phase is that all of the companies in this study were considered to be established. Researchers have shown that it is more 5 times more expensive for a firm to earn a new customer than to maintain a relationship with an existing customer. The experienced strategy would be to focus on maintaining relationships with existing customers, so the emphasis on customers in the mature phase found in the study is logical.

Table shows whether informants from each company mentioned each construct in connection with the mature phase of the firm’s social media. Table shows the results of the most used constructs in practice while comparing them to the most researched constructs in theory within the mature phase of the relationship life cycle.
Humanizing

Informants from seven out of 12 companies mentioned the importance of conveying a human essence, more than in either of the other two phases. Humanizing was the fifth most important construct of seven in practice, accounting for ties within this phase. The human traits invoked up by this technique were either real or imagined through interactions with companies. I inferred humanizing with language such as “connecting emotionally” from BTJB, or “humanize the brand” from Kable, or “a brand is emotional” from Federal Express, or “being a real person” from Valpak. Figure 5 shows an example of a social media message related to this construct.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) showed that anthropomorphism could occur as a result of a need to satisfy a social connection. Rauschnabel and Ahuvia (2014) connected anthropomorphism directly to brand love. Associating emotional attributes with a brand assists in forming a deeper relationship, which makes the interaction feel unique—just as a personal interaction feels individualistic. The unique humanizing characteristics the relationship cause it to triumph in comparisons to relationships with other brands (Blackston, 1992). The B2B Director of Content & Customer Marketing Strategy of ValPak said, “It makes you feel like you have a friendship.”
### Table 8

*Breakdown of Each Construct Mentioned by Each Company Within the Mature Phase*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Kobie Marketing</th>
<th>Oneida</th>
<th>BTJB</th>
<th>Accusoft</th>
<th>Kable</th>
<th>TIA</th>
<th>ValPak</th>
<th>Peak</th>
<th>Trojan Battery</th>
<th>Skiborn</th>
<th>Federal Express</th>
<th>Kasasa</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanizing</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>5 (41.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>8 (66.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of influencers, face, or guests</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>6 (50.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a resource, expert, or thought leader</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>10 (83.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>5 (41.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4 (33.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3 (25.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and credibility</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>12 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>8 (66.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking or being satisfied by the company</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>8 (66.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>69 (57.50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Y = yes; N = no.
Table 9

**Constructs in the Mature Phase in Practice and in Theory Ranked by Importance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>In practice</th>
<th>In theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Trust and credibility</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Being a resource, expert, or thought leader</td>
<td>Being a resource, expert, or thought leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Liking or being satisfied by the company, commitment, and community relations</td>
<td>Trust and credibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5.* A humanizing-related post on social media. From “Father and son FedEx pilots” [2018 post], by FedEx, June 17, 2018 (https://www.facebook.com/FedEx/). Copyright 2018 by Copyright FedEx. Reprinted with permission.
I found nothing in existing literature regarding humanizing within the mature phase. This represents a gap because practice placed an emphasis on humanizing in social media in this phase, but theory did not mention it.

**Community Relations**

Community relations formed the third most important construct mentioned by informants. It was mentioned more in this phase than either of the other phases. In fact, almost half of its mentions occurred in connection with the mature phase. However, informants from eight of the 12 companies mentioned it most in connection with the expansion phase. This implied that companies that valued community relations within the mature phase of a social media relationship felt strongly about the construct. Figure 6 shows an example of a social media message related to this construct.

Community engagement assists in maintaining a positive sense of goodwill for a buyer to potentially maintain the relationship. The buyer sees the seller giving back, involved in positive community outreach, and feels as if the buyer, too, is supporting that outreach. The Director of Communications at Kable said:

> We take a three-pronged approach to our social media content, focusing on: insights, research and trends on high-level technology topics; community relations; and employee recognition and workplace. One of the largest initiatives from the last year followed Hurricane Maria, where we created a support fund for Puerto Rico. Employee donations helped us raise more than $50,000, which were distributed equally among our affected employees in Puerto Rico. In addition, our CEO actually flew in with other staff members to bring essential supplies and aid for our employees there. We try to show
stories like these and other community relations activities around Environment, Empowerment and Education. (Director of Communications, Kable)

Figure 6. A community-relations-related post on social media. From “Purple Eagle plane” [2018 post], by FedEx, June 8, 2018 (https://www.facebook.com/FedEx/). Copyright 2018 by Copyright FedEx. Reprinted with permission.

When I asked the Director of Marketing at Tampa International Airport about decisions made by business customers when choosing the airport as a route, they attributed 10% of the
decision-making process to the brand and “that sort of feeling and sense of growth in the community. . . . That emotion is our brand essence.” The director continued:

So the incentive plan is about the same and that is about the same airline has one plane airplane, one crew and one opportunity to put that put in somewhere. It's that 10% where we feel like our marketing, our environment, our community, or way of doing business here. . . . The approach we have can be the difference here. (Director of Marketing, Tampa International Airport)

I found nothing in existing literature regarding community relations within the mature phase. This represented a large gap between theory and practice. Practice strongly emphasized this construct but theory did not address it at all.

**Use of Influencers, Face, or Guests**

Informants from half of the 12 companies mentioned use of influencers, face, or guests in connection with the mature phase. Informants treated this strategy as being more important than in the exploration phase but not as important as in the expansion phase.

This was presumably because within the mature phase the buyer is a customer, obviously already aware of the company, and has already formed an opinion of the company. An external influence may assist in reminding a buyer of their good decision, but the informants did not consider this as important as applying this strategy within the expansion phase when the seller is in relationship growth mode.

I found nothing was found in literature regarding influencers within the mature phase. This indicated a gap between theory and practice. Practice heavily emphasized this construct while theory placed no emphasis on it.
Being a Resource, Expert, or Thought Leader

Informants emphasized being a resource, expert, or thought leader in connection with all three phases of the relationship, but it was the second most important construct in connection with the mature phase. Informants from 10 of the 12 companies mentioned this construct. Informants mentioned it 49 times in connection with the mature phase, more than any other construct in this phase.

I judged this construct to be the second most important construct in the theoretical literature. The mature phase of a relationship offers the benefit of time and multiple exchanges between parties. The buyer and seller have communicated and swapped information. Andersen (2001) highlighted information exchange within the mature phase of his communication model. Within the information exchange, shared technical language is the focus. This can be construed as showing expertise and being a resource.

According to Duncan and Moriarity (1998), an exchange includes informing, understanding, and answering communication. Through this shared expertise firms can augment product offerings through the relationships formed and enhance collaboration (Anderson & Narus, 1991). The sharing and quality of the information communicated positively influences the relationship (Mohr & Spekman, 1994) and is an integral part of developing a fruitful connection (Hallean & Sandstroem, 1991). These results suggest that being a resource influences the successful outcome of a relationship.

A resource is considered exclusive when it is available to a limited audience (Barone & Roy, 2010). Information offered through a company’s social media reaches a narrow audience. Therefore, by offering exclusiveness, a company gives an attribute that is generally valued (Balachander & Stock, 2009). Continuing to offer value to buyers within the mature phase is an
intelligent strategy to maintain a customer for a longer time, which typically results in more company revenue. As one informant said, referencing long-time client relationships, “Hopefully, our clients already know how smart we are” (Social Media Manager, Kobie Marketing).

In relationship marketing, communication serves to influence informing, listening, and answering, which require two-way communication (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). A social media platform is one such communication conduit. Informing is a part of being a resource. Sharing information and being a resource can also make the other party feel as if it is receiving information that other parties are not. It can enhance the relationship because the connection feels special and exclusive (Collins & Miller, 1994). One informant said, “Thought leadership is an important component to driving conversations with clients and prospects” (Social Media Manager, Kobie Marketing). Another informant said:

I think that where we often could perform better is in the instance of approaching every single thing we put out in terms of this is the story the consumer wants versus we as a corporation have a message that is important to tell the consumer. It's our job to tell the consumer what they want to hear. It's our job to tell the local market what they need to hear from us, not the other way around. (Senior Marketing Manager, Tampa International Airport)

Being a resource, expert, or thought leader formed the second most important construct in both practice and theory in the mature phase. This indicated that theory accurately represented practice for this construct in this phase.

**Transparency**

Informants from five of the 12 companies mentioned transparency in connection with the mature phase, the most for this construct in any phase. Additionally, informants mentioned it
more in connection with this phase than the other phases. Transparency was the fifth most important construct within this phase.

Transparency is showing authenticity in what a company is. A brand can be considered more authentic if it is perceived to be truthful and faithful to its social media connections and itself (Morhart et al., 2015). This transparency can be shown through the communication style (Morhart et al., 2015). Authentic communication improves relationships between brands and customers, cultivating “emotional brand attachment and brand choice likelihood” (Morhart et al., 2015, p. 4).

Each informant interviewed felt that social media offered another level of legitimacy. Informants also mentioned the trend of ease and seeing more about what a company is doing. The idea was to see other people’s opinions or other honest information that the brand itself had not composed. The theme of transparency and authenticity evolved into a construct. Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker, and Bloching (2013) argued that the act of authenticity offers a positive enhancement towards social media exchanges. Transparent communication enables a viewer to infer that the brand is sincere and genuine (Giles, 2002).

*Transparency* was a term used by informants in practice and was not mentioned directly in existing literature. Instead I found wording and phrases that can be construed to have the same meaning. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) discussed a total association through relations. They discussed a deepening identity as one of the affiliated benefits. Through a deeper closeness with the seller, transparency and a like for the company occur. For customers to feel that they are seeing a deeper level of the selling company, the company must offer a clearer sense of collaboration, cooperation, and a feeling of full visibility of information.
Theory and practice related to this construct in the mature phase were similar because neither emphasized this construct.

**Customer Service**

Informants from four of the 12 companies mentioned customer service in connection with both the mature and expansion phases. However, informants mentioned customer service more times in connection with the mature phase than the expansion phase. This trend was logical because the mature phase of the relationship offers more opportunities for customer service.

Given that bad customer service in cost companies $62,000,000,000 in 2016 (NewVoiceMedia, 2016), it was understandable that companies were emphasizing customer service. In the digital age, marketing departments have taken on new roles like customer support service (Kalyanam & McIntyre, 2002). This role has extended to social media. Of consumers who have experienced a positive customer service encounter with a brand on social media, 71% have tended to recommend the brand (Ambassador, 2013). Figure 7 shows an example of a social media message related to customer service.

One of the informants had this to say:

I was talking to this woman and we were talking about the airport and what I do and she said “I was amazed. I Tweeted that I was at the airport and my phone was almost dead and somebody brought me a phone charger.” And we have done that several times.

(Director of Air Service Development, Tampa International Airport)

Customer service now has a real time tool that these businesses have been allocating resources to. When used properly this tool can grow the value of the brand. The informant from Tampa International Airport told another story about a customer service post that went viral internationally and the positive impact their company had seen from following this trend. The
story was about Hobbes, a 6-year-old child’s stuffed tiger that was lost at the airport. Hobbes was found and, through the marketing team at the airport, the tiger took a documented grand tour of the airport. His adventure culminated with a return to his young owner and international coverage by traditional media outlets such as USA Today, Fox News, CNN, and NPR. “There's an example of ultimately a happy ending of how marketing communications works together. Hobbes was a turning point. Our airport was allowed to be an emotional narrative. And things changed in that moment” (Director of Marketing, Tampa International Airport).

When a customer is within the mature phase, it would be rare for the company not to have offered customer service at some point in the relationship. I was surprised to find only three relationship life cycle studies that offered a sense of customer service at this point in the relationship. Anderson and Narus (1991) offered an approach to relationship building with 10 ways to augment collaborative relationships. Three of the 10 involved customer service: warranty, maintenance and repair agreements, and technical assistance. Archer and Yuan (2000) piggybacked on the research of Anderson and Narus (1991) and showed through their e-commerce study that “warranty performance” (p. 56), which is a portion of customer service, was a part of this phase. Both groups of authors advocated for a firm understanding of the importance of customer service to assist with building relationships.

Iankova et al. (2018) referenced customer service in their study of relationship-oriented social media use. Of the six significant uses that Iankova et al. studied within this phase, B2B organizations considered customer service to be the least important.

Theory and practice were similar for customer service in the mature phase because both emphasized this construct to a similar (limited) degree.
In my findings, only three of the 12 companies mentioned culture in connection with the mature phase, the least of any phase. However, informants mentioned culture 14 times overall in connection with the mature phase, compared to only 9 times for the expansion phase. This implied, based on the quantity of mentions, that the informants who did mention culture within the mature phase felt more strongly about it.

I found only one mention in existing literature that was even related to culture within the mature phase. Rousseau et al. (1998) highlighted teamwork culture within the relationship,
because it ties to trust within a customer’s mind. Perhaps the lack of literature on culture in the mature phase reflected an assumption that customers would already have an understanding of a company’s culture by this phase and, thus, the construct did not need to be highlighted.

Theory and practice were similar for culture in the mature phase, because neither emphasized it strongly.

**Trust and Credibility**

Informants from all 12 companies cited trust as being important within the mature phase. Trust was therefore the most important construct for informants in the mature phase of the relationship.

Figure 8 shows an example of a social media message related to this construct. I asked a question in each interview about benefits of being on social media. Over and over again, informants responded using the words *consistency, reliability,* and *reputation.* Trust was specifically mentioned in every interview. For example, one informant said:

So, now it's changed because now most companies are understanding that if you don't have an online presence, it's going back to that reputation. No one's going to trust you. It went from being, you know, just a cute thing that the kids did to now it's usually one of the first things that somebody interacts with. So, it's just, it's really changed the entire face of marketing. Like really, right now, if you don't have a digital component of your marketing strategy, then it's really not a real marketing strategy. (Director of Marketing, Accusoft)

From the interviews, I gathered that not adopting social media had a negative impact. The Director of Marketing from Accusoft spoke about online reputations and the “damage that can be done.” This informant also mentioned the financial implications of not claiming
businesses on social media and retroactively attributing time and resources to these platforms. The interviews showed that social media directly correlated to trust and therefore not having a social media presence meant that the amount of trust, and ultimately the reputation, of a company would be negatively affected. When asked for an opinion about a company that does not have a social media presence, one informant responded, “I think it just tells me a lot about them, it tells you that they lack innovation, that they lack market understanding and even the ability or the care or effort” (Publisher, Major B2B Media Outlet).

B2B brands need a platform to create trust and develop both cognitive and affective connections (Malaska, Saraniemi, & Tahtinen, 2011). Social media can provide that avenue for companies. As one informer said, “But the thing about it is like trust. We weren't trying to sell them anything. We were offering a service. We were giving information. We were providing solutions” (Director of Marketing, Tampa International Airport).

Trust continued to be the most researched construct in this phase of the relationship life cycle. Due to the varying nature of the literature, I judged trust to be the third most important construct in connection with the mature phase. Dwyer et al. (1987) determined that the confidence from a buyer–seller exchange within this phase came from trust. Wagner (2011) piggybacked on this idea to argue that contribution, by a showing of trust, is more effective for suppliers in the mature phase. Customers however, through familiarity, come to trust that a company is offering a superior product for them (Johnson & Selnes, 2004). Emotionally, familiarity can feel like a friendship of individuals, brands, or organizations, and these require trust to come into the mature phase (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Rousseau et al. (1998) held trust in the highest esteem and determined that trust was the cause responsible for most effects in most relationships. Other researchers dissected trust in this
phase. Lewicki and Bunker (1996) described this stage of trust as being knowledge-based or sometimes identification-based. His research focused more on the evolution of trust within working relationships. Johnson and Grayson (2005) concluded that the benevolence portion of trust continued to grow as the relationship evolved, and this was an organic result of reoccurring satisfactory interactions. Dowell et al. (2015) determined that competency trust was most critical in the mature phase of the relationship cycle and that affective trust declined at this point.

Figure 8. A trust-related post on social media. From “Title of Post or first few words of post” [2018 post], by Trojan Battery, June 19, 2018 (https://www.facebook.com/TrojanBatteryCompany/). Copyright 2018 by Trojan Battery. Reprinted with permission.

Conversely, Jap (2001) agreed that trust is important in the mature phase but argued that it was not as important as in the expansion phase. Palmatier et al. (2013) argued that diminishing
returns of trust occur within the mature phase and that there is a limited value that trust can have in this phase.

In practice, trust was the most important construct in the mature phase, but theories were mixed on its importance, which implied that trust was not the most important but the third most important construct. There was a gap between theory and practice for trust in the mature phase.

**Commitment**

According to analysis of the interviews, commitment was the third most important construct in practice in the mature phase. Informants from eight of the 12 companies mentioned commitment in connection with this phase. Informants mentioned commitment 18 times in connection with this phase, more than half of the total number of times they mentioned it over all three phases. This indicated that practitioners emphasized commitment in this phase.

Figure 9 shows an example of a social media message related to commitment in the mature phase of a relationship. The idea behind commitment in practice was that it should be in place before this phase and that it was what cemented the relationship in its current state. Reiterating to the customer that the company has a commitment to them was important, but not as important as theory considered it to be. One informant said:

> If it was us and City X and the dollars were more in City X, they're gonna go to City X.
> If it's us and City X and it's really neck and neck, there's a really good chance they're gonna come here because that's that one differentiator that we play is the way we support our carriers compared to other places. (Senior Marketing Manager, Tampa International Airport)

Another informant said:
In the B2B, it's usually a longer relationship. So it's more about the idea for them that we're always here for you to give you piece of mind that whatever you're going to sell, we're not just going to walk away and not support it anymore. We've seen how important that relationship is from our revenue. We have clients that have been with us for many years. (Social Media Manager, Accusoft)

Figure 9. A social media post showing commitment within the mature phase of a relationship.

From “No matter where I was…” [2018 post], by FedEx, September 6, 2018 (https://www.linkedin.com/company/fedex/) Copyright 2018 by Copyright FedEx. Reprinted with permission.

Dwyer et al. (1987) labeled the mature phase the commitment phase, implying that commitment is the most important construct of this phase. I also judged that it was the most
important construct, in theory, for the mature phase. A commitment bonds the two parties and thus, they will continue within the investment. The parties highlight consistency and the importance of commitment. Should one party waver in their commitment level, it affects the other party’s commitment and feelings of consistency. Morgan and Hunt (1994) argued that a long-term relationship is predicated on relationship commitment. Wilson (1995) deduced that the focus of commitment is important within this phase, specifically creating relationship value and maintaining the relationship.

Dowell et al. (2015) focused on trust, however they also studied commitment. They found that commitment did not improve the performance of a relationship as it entered the mature phase. Rather, Dowell et al. found, commitment was consistent throughout the phases.

In opposition to other researchers, Jap and Ganesan (2000) showed that communicating commitment in the mature phase of a relationship was not as valuable as in an earlier phase.

Sashi (2012) placed a retention phase after the commitment phase in the customer engagement cycle. Sashi specified that social media can generate calculative commitment through strong emotional bonds. Likewise, Ring and Van de Ven (1994) noted in their framework that commitment is a part of the repetitive interorganizational process of relationships (Figure 2). In their research, the terms commitment and mature stage were essentially synonymous in their context and they considered commitment to be so critical that they even listed it as one of the “rules for future action in the relationship” (p. 98). Ring and Van de Ven used commit as a verb, implying action was associated and needed in this context.

In theory, commitment was the most important construct in this phase. In practice, however, it was the third most important construct. This indicated a gap between theory and practice for commitment in the mature phase of a relationship.
Liking or Being Satisfied by the Company

Informants from eight out of the 12 companies mentioned satisfaction in connection with this phase of the relationship. This placed satisfaction as the third most important construct within the mature phase. Informants mentioned satisfaction 30 times in the interviews, over half of the mentions of satisfaction across all phases.

A common feeling among the informers was that a customer would have not gotten to this phase of the relationship had they not been satisfied. They believed that it was part of the role of social media to reiterate the positive relationship the company has with its customers. Many of the informants correlated positive online feedback from a client, through testimonials, as a display of satisfaction on social media. One informant said:

We work with Fortune 500 clients, who often say we work with Kobie because we like you. We like working with the people. We like the teams. We like going on your website and seeing the fun photos of people. We like actually feeling like a part of the family. . . . We're trying to evoke that building loyalty is more than just the behavior, and it's all about the emotion (Social Media Manager, Kobie Marketing).

Theory relating to satisfaction showed all positive associations within the mature phase of the relationship life cycle. Gladstein (1984) showed that satisfaction led to the long-term perpetuation of relationships. According to Dwyer et al. (1987), satisfaction is a direct benefit from a relationship. Archer and Yuan (2000), found, via an e-commerce study, that satisfaction was an important determinant of whether a company would renew and continue a contract with a seller.

Theory and practice were similar but not completely aligned within the mature phase. Theory and practice both recognized the existence of satisfaction exists but differed regarding
the degree of emphasis that should be placed on this construct. The emphasis seemed to be slightly less in theory than in practice.

Validation

Table illustrates the expert panel’s assessments of the reliability of the qualitative results. Judges were asked to strongly disagree, disagree, feel neutral about, agree, or strongly agree that company conveyed a particular construct through its social media channel. The reliability measure indicates how similar the judges’ opinions were. The higher the reliability, the more uniform the opinions.

Table 10

*Judges’ Reliability for All Companies for the Exploration, Expansion, and Mature Phases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>% reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanizing</td>
<td>72(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of influencers, face, or guests</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a resource, expert, or thought leader</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>91(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>77(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and credibility</td>
<td>86(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>95(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking or being satisfied by the company</td>
<td>81(^a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Reliability > 70%.
I adhered to Nunnally’s (1978) rule of thumb that reliability of 70% or higher is suitable for exploratory work. I found that 73% of the constructs measured were at or above 70% reliability, as marked in Table. Of the total 10 (constructs per company) \( \times 3 \) (phases) \( \times 12 \) (companies) = 180 elements of data evaluated, 98, or 54% were above the 70% validation requirement.

Should reliability fall below 70%, it translates to mean that the panel of judges’ opinions were more varied and that there was less consensus among the judges. A large portion of research resulting in a low reliability would be recommended for a reevaluation of instructions to the panel insuring accurate guidelines are being adhered to. If clear instructions are being upheld, an evaluation of judges’ credentials should be reviewed or additional judges should be added to the panel to minimize outlying opinions.
Methodological Contribution

The methodological contribution of my dissertation is a method that others can use for measuring social media in the future, including a validation platform for social media. According to Perreault and Young (1980), qualitative data has been criticized for not “measuring up” (p. 1) in scale when compared to quantitative interval scale properties. However, marketing research often involves collecting qualitative data. While some qualitative research is direct and structured, other research can be emotionally charged, and numerous judges would give a more accurate assessment (Perreault & Leigh, 1989). When a researcher is in this situation, the question becomes whether the consensus of the judges is accurate. Rust and Cooil (1994) developed their proportional reduction loss approach to assess this. I have taken their method and used it as recommended but in a new domain: social media.

Firms can now evaluate their social media content in relation to their social media objectives. This is important because unlike traditional one-way communication where firms controlled the marketing dialogue, social media is two-way communication. Thus, new reliability measures are needed.

Through a panel of experts, and with an additional layer of reliability, social media researchers will be able to produce more rigorous results. This method of reliability measurement can be used for other emotionally charged qualitative studies and I recommend the method for studies of online two-way marketing communications.
Practical Implications

At the time of writing, digital marketing was less than 20 years old, and social media only 14 years old. Since the arrival of social media analytics and measurement tools have advanced each year. Advances in social media and online relationships have been happening more rapidly than before because of the sheer speed of the digital world. My dissertation contributes an advance in understanding the role that social media plays within the relationship life cycle.

Marketing practitioners need information to be able to quantify and justify social media management as part of B2B campaigns. Through an understanding of practices are used in each phase of the relationship life cycle, practitioners may enhance and optimize their existing strategies. The social media they deploy will be of a higher quality and be better suited for maximizing the entire spectrum of their customers are. Through a deeper understanding of social media best practices, relationships with customers may deepen or advance more rapidly and two-way communication with customers can be more strategic.

The results of my study also offer theorists an opportunity to understand where the gaps currently lie. This will stimulate research within these areas so that practice and theory will ultimately become more parallel as social media continues to evolve.

I have also formalized a measure of reliability for social media. High reliability of information is important in research and in practice. Poor data leads mangers to make incorrect decisions. Incorrect research data can spiral into more and more incorrect or badly focused research. This measurement tool I formalized combines a traditional respected reliability measure with a modern marketing environment. By using this measurement tool firms will be able to correct course if they find that their content is not delivering desired results.
Data Limitations

All research has limitations. In any literature review, such as the one I used for analysis of the theory in the study, the choice of articles is open to criticism. To ameliorate this criticism, I focused first on articles that had high academic prestige from respected academic publications. Additionally, I searched multiple platforms and the search terms were varied so as to insure a thorough review of literature.

The sample for my study consisted of only 12 companies. While this smaller sample size was in line with similar qualitative studies, I could have expanded the sample. Additionally, the study was a short cross-industrial glimpse into an emerging fast-paced phenomenon. To more fully understand social media and its evolution, both extended and short-term research would be necessary.

I narrowed the focus for the study to three social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. There were a multitude of other two-way communication platforms available for marketing, just within social media. The study was limited by the restricted social media platform focus.

Conclusion

The goal of most businesses is to sell a product. Products are purchased by customers, and customers must be acquired, after which they enter a relationship with the business. Every relationship has a life cycle, and by understanding techniques that speed up the relationship life cycle a business can move more rapidly toward its goal of selling products.

My study resulted in social media objectives that can assist with each phase of the relationship life cycle. Thought leadership, trust, and community relations, when used within the
exploration phase, may allow practitioners to exercise more control over the speed at which relationships form and bear fruit.

I discussed how relationships begin with the exploration phase in which potential costs, benefits, and obligations are examined and weighed (Eidelson, 1980; Holmes, 1991; Jap & Ganesan, 2000). Thought leadership, as discussed, provides information to the potential customers. In the study I determined that thought leadership was the most important construct in practice, and by incorporating it into the exploration phase of a relationship in an online arena, the relationship may move through this phase more rapidly than in an offline environment.

As the buyer–seller relationship seller progresses and enters expansion and mature phases, businesses may continue to utilize the three objectives identified in the study as the most influential in social media for B2B companies: thought leadership, trust, and community relations. However, the expansion and mature phases emphasize an additional focus on satisfaction. In the study I determined that, in these later two phases, practice focused on showcasing trust within social media would offer the most benefit to the seller. In the expansion phase the seller has the flexibility to produce the best results from social media by using it to either showcase trust or illustrate resourcefulness or expertise.

I discovered that in each phase emphasis on a different set of constructs is appropriate. Generally speaking, though, I discovered that if a business focuses on being a resource, trust, community relations, and satisfaction within their social media then the business should see positive results from its social media efforts.

A B2B company can use this knowledge strategically. Should the business want to generate business with potential customers who are unfamiliar with their company, it should focus on being a thought leader, as this is the most important in practice within the exploration
phase. If the business finds that it is already involved in a large number of conversations that are not leading to sales, then it should recognize that these relationships are in the expansion phase. The business should focus on being a resource and showing trustworthiness in order to transition potential buyers into the mature phases of their relationships. If the business notices that a large part of its social media traffic corresponds to relationships in the mature phase, then the business should focus on trustworthiness and credibility to maintain those relationships.

It seems likely that many gaps in knowledge throughout all phases of the relationship life cycle exist because the majority of the existing theoretical work has focused predominantly on the offline environment. This is understandable because of the short time that the online environment has even existed. However, in today’s rapidly evolving and dynamic space of digital marketing, research related to the offline environment within the relationship life cycle has limited relevance. I believe that exploration phase is expedited by default in the online environment: I discovered the greatest discrepancies between theory and practice within this phase and I believe that the inconsistencies can be attributed to the evolution of communication.

Jap’s (2001) study is a good example of research conducted on the relationship life cycle in an offline environment. Jap’s study was very relevant for a time when online environments barely existed. Quinton and Wilson (2016) also addressed the relationship life cycle but in an online environment. These studies differed greatly on their opinion of trust in the exploration phase of a relationship. Jap found that foundational trust could not be developed in the exploration phase of a relationship whereas Quinton and Wilson (2016) showed that foundational trust could be built online with social media tools in the exploration phase of a relationship. These two studies, and the contrast between them, exemplify the need for different studies in different environments. Offline studies have missed context that did not exist at the time they
were conducted: an online environment. The online environment has brought new nuances and factors that need to be addressed in research.

The primary goal of my study was to understand the gaps between theory and practice within the relationship life cycle in the online environment of social media. Overall, I found that existing research regarding the relationship life cycle was focused on many of the more traditional relationship qualities such as trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Theoretical research was both wide and deep regarding these three constructs. However, with the introduction of social media there is much more to understand about the relationship life cycle. Generally speaking, little research has been done, in the context of the relationship life cycle, regarding constructs such as humanizing, community relations, transparency, culture, and use of influencers.

During the study I uncovered multiple constructs used in social media practice on which I could find no theoretical research. This needs to be remedied. Community relations was one construct with which there was little to no research associated for any phase of the relationship life cycle. In practice, however, it was highlighted as one of the most important objectives within each phase. Community relations with regard to B2B social media deserves ample research to support and guide its use. The divides between practice and theory for other constructs were neither so wide nor as consistent. Within the exploration phase, customer service was used in practice but had no theory to support it. Within the expansion phase, culture, transparency, use of influencers, and humanizing were used in practice with no supporting theory. And within the mature phase, influencers and humanizing had no supporting theory. Techniques were being used in practice that theory had not even begun to address. Each of these constructs needs further research.
As a whole, my study could be expanded upon to confirm its generalizability. Broader cross-sectional research could use quantitative measures. Conversely, future research could break the research domain down by industry, size of firm, paid versus organic campaigns, and other moderating effects.

In order to measure the reliability of modern marketing, I recommend using the proportional reduction in loss method expanded on in the method of this study. A specific call for future work would be to utilize this method in future social media research.

Existing social media research has been more tactical than strategic (Salo, 2017). Specific research opportunities opened up by the study revolve around how any of the 10 constructs identified can be best conveyed and interpreted through social media channels. A unique aspect of the study was the importance of understanding both the buyer’s and seller’s prerogatives and viewpoints. Much existing research has taken a one-sided perspective in line with traditional one-way marketing communications. Another suggestion for future research, then, is to expand this full spectrum pattern into other areas. Two-way communication simply offers a better understanding for modern research. Two-way communications should be researched more than one-way communications because one-way communications are becoming the minority of marketing performed today. One-way marketing communications research is looking backwards while two-way communications looks forward.

Social media has dramatically affected some traditional business departments, such as recruitment and customer service. A specific future research opportunity includes a focus on using social media for employee recruitment. That tactic was devised by three companies in the study. An understanding of how modern marketing has influenced the hiring industry would be beneficial. Another industry that has been transforming thanks to social media is customer
service. The job of customer service has fallen more and more on to marketing departments because of the demand for communication by buyers through social media. This has created an overlap of departments, and investigating this overlap forms another specific focus for future research.

It would also be beneficial to investigate the B2B and a B2C online engagement life cycle. There is a currently circulating B2C cycle based on Sashi’s (2012) research. But Sashi’s cycle is a foundational piece rooted in outcomes and behaviors (commitment, satisfaction, etc.) rather than relationship phases. For theory to become more consistent with practice, additional research is needed to develop modern online engagement life cycles in variety of business domains.

The results of my study indicated that B2B companies have been using social media within their marketing strategy, but that theory is lacking to support many of these practices. It appears that the relationship life cycle theories were more prescriptive in nature rather than descriptive of practice. Thus, future research should focus on developing theories, insights, and recommendations that will aid businesses in utilizing social media efficiently and effectively to achieve their objectives.
REFERENCES


doi:x 10.1037/h0033950


doi:10.1037/h0036191


APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk and Authorization to Collect, Use and Share Your Health Information

Pro # _ 33960_

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

**Issues and Challenges in Social media Marketing in a Business-to-Business Environment.**
The person who is in charge of this research study is Loran Jarrett. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Richard Plank.

The research will be conducted at 2309 S Clewis Ct, Tampa, FL 33629.

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**Purpose of the study**
In the business-to-business (B2B) communities, the persistent question of value arises when it comes to marketing products and services via social media. This study will seek to exude clarity about value and social media.

**Why are you being asked to take part?**
We are asking you to take part in this research study because of your involvement in the Business to Business company along with it’s marketing endeavors.

**Study Procedures:**
If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:
The interview will pose several questions over 45 minutes while others may observe, listen and learn. We will record the interview for audio and video. Each interview will then be transcribed and be stored in the USF Learning Management System – Canvas – in the DBA course module.

Total Number of Participants
About 15 individuals will take part in this study at USF.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal
You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits
You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation
You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs
It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential.

These individuals include:
The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, research nurses, and all other research staff.
Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.
We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Loran Jarrett at 813-304-5084.
If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent    _______________________

Date ______________
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about some of the company’s long and short term goals.
2. Tell me about your overarching marketing strategy?
3. Tell me about your digital marketing strategy, specifically social media?
4. Do you have a written annual social media strategy?
5. How often do you post? Why?
6. What social media platforms do you utilize? Why?
7. How long has your company been on social media?
8. Why do you use social media as part of your strategy? Why?
9. What does social media offer beyond the website?
10. How do you measure effectiveness?
11. Three main goals of using social media?
12. Think about the relationships your company has with it’s customers.
    a. How does your marketing influence those relationships?
    b. What are you trying to accomplish?
    c. How does your social media influence those relationships?
    d. New customers?
    e. Long term customers?
    f. Previous Customers?
    g. Not yet customers?
13. What type of emotions are you trying to evoke from your customers through social media?
14. Have these emotions evoked met, exceeded or not met your expectations? Why?
15. How do you try to ‘stand out’ from competition?
16. Tell me about a “failure” that your company had with social media.
17. How do you seek to gain attention from the recipients?
18. How do you try to entice action from your followers?
19. How do you connect online and offline activities?
20. Would not being on social media be an option? Why?
21. Demographic information

If trust, commitment and/or satisfaction NOT brought up:

1. Is trust, commitment and/or satisfaction important to your company’s relationship with it’s customers?
2. How do you work to develop that through your marketing?
a. Through your social media?
APPENDIX C

EXPERT PANEL INSTRUCTIONS

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of the expert panel (via survey) for my dissertation research on B2B social media.

There will be 1 survey for each expert to complete, lasting about 15-30 minutes.

Prior to the survey becoming active, I would like to do a 5-10 minute phone call simply going over some basic elements of the panel and questions to potentially lend any clarity, if needed.

If you are available this coming Tuesday July 3rd at 2pm for the 5-10 minute phone call, can you please respond letting me know?

If each of you can please respond to me answering the following questions:
1. How many years’ experience do you have in:
   a. marketing?
   b. digital marketing?
   c. social media?
2. What is the current company title you hold?
3. Relevant marketing experience? (If you have things listed on your LinkedIn profile and it us easier- you can simply send me a link to your profile for this question)

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Many Thanks for your time, it is truly appreciated.

Loran Jarrett
Thank you for your availability tomorrow at 11am for a 5-10 minute phone call to go over the instructions for the expert panel you are apart of. I appreciate your time very much and want to be available to answer any questions you have as well.

We will review the instructions and talk through the attached* document. Then I will email you the survey.

Please let me know if you have any questions in the interim.

Dial-in number (US): (605) 472-5773 Access code: 932159

*Attachment:

*Early Lifecycle:

Assume that you have a need for golf cart batteries in your role as a purchase manager.

You have been aware of a company that makes batteries that could be of interest to your company. You have decided to research the company by examining its social media posts.

Please examine the last 10 posts for each of the social media platforms listed below and then answer the questions that follow:

Facebook:
Twitter:
LinkedIn:

After reviewing the links, please come back to the survey to answer the questions.

Based on the posts that you have examined, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

1. This company comes across to me as being personable.
2. I believe the company is engaged with their local community.
3. This company has great endorsements.
4. I believe their posts provide supportive information about their product or service.
5. I believe this company is honest.
6. I believe the company has good customer service.
7. I believe this company would offer a great environment.
8. I have confidence in the company's ability.
9. I think this company is committed to it's customers.
10. I think this company has a lot of satisfied customers.
### APPENDIX E

EXPERT PANEL EXPERIENCE

Table A1

*Expert Panel Experience*

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* $M*$: 11.57, 9.95, 7.95
Assume that as a purchasing manager, you have a long term relationship with an airport.

You have recently come across the social media for the airport and have decided to inspect its social media posts.

Please examine the last 10 posts for each of the social media platforms listed below and then answer the questions that follow.

Facebook:  https://www.facebook.com/FlyTPA/
Twitter:   https://twitter.com/FlyTPA
LinkedIn:  https://www.linkedin.com/company/tampa-international-airport/

After reviewing the links, please come back to the survey to answer the questions.

Based on the posts that you have examined, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
APPENDIX G
IRB APPROVAL

rsch-arc@usf.edu
eIRB: Study Approved
To: Loran Jarrett,
Reply-To: rsch-arc@usf.edu

IRB Study Approved

To: Loran Jarrett
RE: B2B Social Media
PI: Loran Jarrett
Link: Pro00033960

You are receiving this notification because the above listed study has received Approval by the IRB. To ensure compliance with IRB requirements, please review your approval letter by navigating to the project workspace by clicking the Link above.

UO NOT REPLY: To ensure a timely response, please direct correspondence to Research Integrity & Compliance either through your project's workspace or the contact information below.
Research Integrity & Compliance
University of South Florida - Research and Innovation
UIC Help Desk (eIRB, eAQC, eCOI) (813) 974-2880
t/a: rsch-arc@usf.edu
4401 12th St. S, Tampa, FL 33612-4759

Template: _000 - IRB Study: Approved
Hi Ladies – Yes, it’s approved as well, but please feel free to paraphrase it. I said a lot of ‘likes’ and unnecessary words lol

Wish you the best with your dissertation, Loran. And thank you for helping my boss lady to get a job 😊

Best regards,

Alina Alvarez
Marketing Campaign Manager

Phone: +1 813 933 4600
Direct: +1 813 300 8908
Fax: +1 813 315 6511
Email: wba@alain.com
Website: www.targit.com

See how TARGIT stacks up against the competition - read the BARC BI survey results

At TARGIT, we respect the privacy of our customers, distributors, partners, employees and any other person with whom we communicate. Personal information included in your e-mail may contain confidential and/or privileged information. If you are not the addressee or authorized to receive this for the addressee, you must not use, copy, disclose in error, please advise the sender immediately by reply e-mail and delete this message. Thank you for your cooperation.

---

From: Loran Jarrett <loranjez@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 23, 2018 6:06 AM
To: Dana Gordon <vpprogramming@amatapabay.org>
Cc: Alina Alvarez <ea@targit.com>
Subject: Re: Accusoft I 2 Quotes in dissertation

Thank you 😊

Loran Jarrett

On Aug 22, 2018, at 10:05 PM, Dana Gordon <vpprogramming@amatapabay.org> wrote:

Approved from my end. 😊 I cc’ed Alina on this email.

---

Dana Gordon
VP OF EVENT PROGRAMMING
PO Box 271862 | Tampa, Florida 33688-1862
C. (813) 340-0556

Hey Dana,

These are two direct quotes that I would like to highlight in my research. Can you let me know if you and Alina are okay with that? I don’t have Alina’s email address, if you could please loop her in?

Alina: But in the b to h, it’s usually like a longer relationship. So it’s more about we’re always here for you to kind of give you piece of mind that whatever you’re going to sell, we’re not just going to walk away and not support it anymore.

Interviewer: It almost sounds like a brand in b to h is more critical than a brand in b to c, from what you said.

Alina: Yes. Yes, because, and we’ve seen it from our revenue. We have clients that have been with us for many, many, many years. When, yeah, when you do a sale on b to h, especially when you do a sale in the software industry, if your technology is good, they become, like you don’t even have to do anything else because they become like your client forever.

So, now it’s changed because now most companies are understanding that if you don’t have an online presence, it’s going back to that reputation. No one’s going to trust you. It went from being, you know, just a cute thing that the kids did to now it’s usually one of the first things that somebody interacts with. So, it’s just, it’s really changed the entire face of marketing. Like really, right now, if you don’t have a digital component of your marketing strategy, then it’s really not a real marketing strategy. - Dana

Thanks so much,

Loran
Hi Julie, these are three direct quotes that I would like to highlight in my research. Can you let me know if legal is okay with these?

Also, some companies have said I can screenshot the social media because it is public...is FedEx ok with this or do I need to let them know which shots I will be using?

What we did is, we started over on Instagram. It really set the standard for us in having different social media strategies for different social channels, which makes sense now in 2018. I think in 2013 or whenever this happened, it was a different story back then. Brands were just posting the same thing across channels. Anyway, long story short, we wanted to do something really different. We knew that if we were going to be on Instagram, it had to be something that was authentic to the platform. It had to be beautiful photography. It could not be our staged, perfectly posed corporate photography. We knew that we couldn’t do that through our normal communication content and means and resources. We went out and started asking people for their pictures and seeing FedEx through the eyes of the photographer and how FedEx really does connect people all over the world, but seeing that through this beautiful photography has proven to be extremely successful for us. In fact, we’ve been named by Forbes, Inkt Magazine, Huffington Post, 50 plus different publications about our K2B strategy on Instagram.

Telling about emotions, people get so excited when they see their picture shared by the brand. They then feel like a connection that they didn’t have before...If you think about New York City, you’ll see a FedEx truck on every corner. We end up in a lot of images from New York City and people being like, “Oh, my gosh. I never realized how FedEx is part of my daily life. It’s always there.” It creates that word-of-mouth type emotion that we’ve not had before.

We choose to look at the positive side of social, that it is creating those connections with people all over the world, things that couldn’t have existed 10, 20 years ago. We also treat social very much like it’s meant to be. Social media. It’s a two-way conversation or one to many conversation. While we advertise on social and market on social, the real reason why FedEx has the presence there is to have that two-way connection and to learn and to inspire for each other.

Julie Clement Cochran
RE: FedEx 3 quotes for dissertation
To: Loran Jarrett, Cc: Julie Clement Cochran

So sorry for the delay. The quotes are fine for your dissertation – if it does get published, I will simply need to go back through legal for approval. I hope this helps! Thanks, Julie

Julie Clement Cochran
FedEx Global Social Media
1.901.434.5260

We take a three-pronged approach to our social media content, focusing on: insights, research and trends on high-level technology topics; community relations; and employee recognition and workplace. One of the largest initiatives from the last year followed Hurricane Maria, where we created a support fund for Puerto Rico. Employee donations helped us raise more than $50,000, which were distributed equally among our affected employees in Puerto Rico. In addition, our CEO actually flew in with other staff members to bring essential supplies and aid for our employees there. We try to show stories like these and other community relations activities around Environment, Empowerment and Education.

Just by determining and writing down our strategy, we grew our social engagement by 14 percent from 2016 to 2017. In that same time frame, our follower numbers grew by 24 percent. One of our main goals on social media is to drive more traffic to our website. By tracking and utilizing more effective CTAs, we grew web traffic from social channels to our website by 55 percent.

Our community relations activities and employee coverage typically gets the most engagement on our social channels.

Hopefully this sounds more intelligent. :)

On Thu, Sep 20, 2018 at 12:55 PM Loran Jarrett <loranjarrett@gmail.com> wrote:
If you have a moment and could, I would feel more comfortable with that since you said them. I will send our last communications about it. Great timing too since I am sending things to an editor shortly.

> On Sep 20, 2018, at 12:52 PM, Timur Aydin <timur.aydin@gmail.com> wrote:
> > Works for me!
> > > PS do you need me to edit the quotes? As I saw your name pop up I realized I still haven’t done it 😊
> > > Timur
> > > Sent from my iPhone
> > >> On Sep 20, 2018, at 12:48 PM, Loran Jarrett <loranjarrett@gmail.com> wrote:
> >> >> Hi Timur-
> >> >> I know anonymity is very important to Jabil, so I just wanted to run this by you to make sure you are okay with me using this in my paper. I have blacked out Jabil anywhere including the hyperlink.
> >> >> Please let me know if this is acceptable for you.
Absolutely!

Best,

Andrew Swinney
Content Manager
(512) 349-4315
d

From: Loran Jarrett <loranj@kasasa.com>
Date: Thursday, August 23, 2018 at 9:51 AM
To: Andrew Swinney <Andrew.Swinney@kasasa.com>
Cc: Loran Jarrett <loranj@kasasa.com>
Subject: Re: Kasasa ! 3 quotes for approval

These are great! Thanks!

For the posts- can I use these 2:

- **Kasasa**
  - 4,370 followers
  - Branches aren't dead and the time for mobile development was yesterday. It's not which basket to put your eggs in; you need both.
  - **Used an ATM**
    - 70%
    - 79%
  - **Online banking (desktop computer)**
    - 60%
    - 75%
  - **Mobile banking**
    - 29%
    - 69%

---

Will you be able to retire? Here are 8 tips to ensure that answer is a yes!

8 Steps to Maximize your Retirement Savings
It's easy to put off saving for retirement, right? I mean, who knows how much you'll actually need? It's so far away, and you have bills to pay today... Unfortunately, blog.kasasa.com
Hi Wendy and Loran —

Thanks for the note — I did update the quotes even though I know this is for a class, just to put more context into each quote. Danielle was fine with the modifications. And, you can screenshot the social media posts as well. Good luck with your research!

We work with Fortune 500 clients, who often say we work with Kobie because we like you. We like working with the people. We like the teams. We like going on your website and seeing the fun photos of people. We like actually feeling like a part of the family. UPDATED

Thought leadership is an important component to driving conversations with clients and prospects. UPDATED

The way that we do it is just proving we are smarter, more knowledgeable, can get the information faster. When a client comes to us, they quickly need something say, on consumer research - and we have the experts that can quickly provide that information. I think it's important to show that we can respond quickly and we have the knowledge across multiple verticals. UPDATED

Hopefully, our clients already know how smart we are.

The highest response on social media in terms of typical likes/comments/shares is definitely our culture posts. UPDATED

We'd like people to see us and feel like Kobie seems like a cool place to work, I could really fit in, and I could also contribute a lot to the company. UPDATED

We're trying to evoke that building loyalty is more than just the behavior, and it's all about the emotion. UPDATED

Hi Loran,

Thanks for checking. This is fine to use – also, please feel free to screenshot our social channels.

Best,
Shannon

From: Loran Jarrett  [mailto:loranjarrett@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, August 21, 2018 2:32 PM
To: O'Sheils-Shannon
Cc: Loran Jarrett
Subject: Oneida | 1 quote in dissertation

Hi Shannon-

This is a direct quote that I would like to highlight in my research. Can you let me know if Oneida is okay with that? Also, some companies have said I can screenshot the social media because it is public… is Oneida ok with this or do I need to let them know if I use a shot?

It makes a lot of sense because at the end of the day, nobody wants to see someone talking about themselves. They want to see a product and a real situation, they want to see how people like them, would use it. They want to see specifically how the people who they admire might use that product. That has been much more impactful for us from an engagement perspective than anything we ever put out on our own coming from our brand.

Thanks so much!
I will be sending the results as promised once it is all polished up in the next few weeks.

Loran Jarrett
Thanks for sharing these. I just got done talking with Kari about this, and we were on the record the whole time... so you are good to run with anything we discussed.

Hey... we sound kind of smart!

Looking forward to seeing more of the finished product.

Glad we could help!

DC

From: Loran Jarrett <loranjarrett@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, August 21, 2018 2:51 PM
To: Danny Cooper <DCooper@TampaAirport.com>
Cc: Loran Jarrett <loranjarrett@gmail.com>
Subject: TIA | 4 quotes in dissertation

HI Danny -

These are four direct quotes that I would like to highlight in my research. 2 are yours and 2 are Kari's. Could you let me know if you both and TIA are okay with me using these?

For the 1st quote, you had said 'Cleveland' but being that Cleveland was erroneous, I just replaced with with 'city x' so that the important part could still be utilized.

Also, some companies have said I can screenshot the social media because it is public... is TIA ok with this or do I need to let them know which shots I will be using?

If it was us and City X and the dollars were more in City X, they're gonna go to City X. If it's us and City X and it's really neck and neck, there's a really good chance they're gonna come here because that's that one differentiator that we play is the way we support our carriers compared to other places. - Danny

I think that where we often could perform better is in the instance of approaching every single thing we put out in terms of this is the story the consumer wants versus we as a corporation have a message that is important to the consumer. It's our job to tell the consumer what they want to hear. It's our job to tell the local market what they need to hear from us, not the other way around. - Danny

But the thing about it is like trust. We weren't trying to sell them anything. We were offering a service. We were giving information. We were providing solutions.
- Kari

What's really interesting is that we are educational based in our mission. We wanna tell our passengers about things and we never want to sell them anything. That can become increasingly challenging as we start to see our revenue lines become more and more critical to our overall success. - Kari

Hi Loran,

Hope all is well and congrats on almost being finished. Feel free to email me the quotes you'd like to use and I'll review. Also, since the Social Media posts are public, you can use what you'd like and just reference Trojan's Social Media accounts as the source.

Thanks!
- Kari

On Mon, Aug 20, 2018 at 12:40 PM Loran Jarrett <loranjarrett@gmail.com> wrote:

Hope all is well!

I am coming into one of the final weeks for my dissertation writing. I was interested in quoting you and using some of Trojans social media for examples. Wanted to find out the process for getting approval.

As promised, I will send you results of the project when I am done. I can certainly send you a couple charts and rough materials if you're interested ASAP.

Thanks for all your assistance,

Loran Jarrett
I’m so sorry – I never saw that email!

Please, feel free to quote me all you’d like 😊

Rebecca Fulton
Director, Content & Customer Marketing Strategy
805 Executive Center Drive W, Suite 100 l St. Petersburg, FL 33702
727.300.3999 ext. 3255 office l rebecca_fulton@valpak.com

From: Loran Jarrett <loranjarrett@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 04, 2018 12:48 PM
To: Rebecca Fulton <rebecca_fulton@valpak.com>
Cc: Loran Jarrett <loranjarrett@gmail.com>
Subject: Re: Are you okay with me quoting you?

Just checking in on the below email

On Aug 22, 2018, at 10:56 AM, Loran Jarrett <loranjarrett@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Rebecca,

Are you okay with me quoting you and Valpak in my dissertation? These would be the 2 statements:
"It makes you feel like you have a friendship."
"I don't think they realize all the platforms that we are on and part of the reason we are on so many is because different people consume content differently. So, we have to make sure that we appealed to the way people like to see things"

Please edit if you would like.

Thanks,
Loran Jarrett