

Social media and brands

In this special issue, we are pleased to introduce some interesting and groundbreaking research on the topics of social media, branding, brand engagement and the phenomenon of co-creation. In keeping with the broad-based philosophy of *QMR*, the articles in this special issue are similarly diverse, covering a range of substantive areas and qualitative methodologies. The articles create awareness and stimulate thinking about the wide-ranging impact and influence of social media, including social network sites (SNSs), on marketing in general, and brand strategies in particular.

SNSs are online platforms used to build social networks or social relationships with other people who share similar interests, activities, backgrounds or connections. Thus, SNSs can serve as excellent vehicles for fostering relationships with customers and implementing brand strategies. Most businesses have little in-depth knowledge about SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn and also apply few if any quality metrics to assess the effectiveness of their SNS marketing efforts. Surprisingly, in spite of this absence of knowledge about SNSs, businesses currently using SNSs reportedly plan to increase their marketing spending in this important communications channel, highlighting the growing importance of better understanding customer online interactions with brands.

In this special issue, the articles focus specifically on strategies either currently being used on SNSs, or that potentially could be effective if implemented. The qualitative focus of these articles introduces concepts and ideas we believe will stimulate thinking. We also anticipate they will provide a platform for future testing and confirmation of the concepts and theoretical relationships posited through quantitative studies.

As indicated in the call for papers for the special issue, the purpose of this special issue was to explore various aspects of social media in marketing. In particular, this special issue welcomed submissions that focused on social media, especially articles using qualitative techniques, including papers that offered sound theoretical bases, literature reviews, debated key ideas or created frameworks and models that improve understanding of the vibrant and fast moving role of social media in marketing. We are pleased to have received more than 40 papers for this special issue submitted by authors from North America, Asia, Europe and Australia on a wide range of social media topics. Because of a large number of high-quality submissions and the broad range of topics covered, we divided the accepted papers into two issues. The first issue focuses on social media and branding while the second issue includes an array of social media topics. Issue one is titled "Branding and Social Media" and contains five articles. Issue two is titled "Emerging Areas in Social Media" and contains seven papers on a diverse range of social media related topics.

Within issue one, "Branding and Social Media", there are five competitive papers that represent different areas of interest within social media and branding. The first article by Tuten and Perotti, titled "Lies, Brands, and Social Media," illustrates the influence of media coverage and sentiment about brands on user-generated content amplification and opinions



We, the Guest Editors, would like to thank the authors who worked so diligently to produce their best manuscripts. We are grateful to the reviewers whose feedback, comments and suggestions helped develop these manuscripts into their best and current form. We also thank the Editor-in-Chief, Andrew Lindridge and Claudia Knight, of Emerald for their help and support with this Special Issue.

expressed in social media. The approach is a mixed-method qualitative design that uses a brand scenario as a case example, followed by a sentiment analysis of social media conversations and media coverage. The authors tracked the diffusion of a false claim about a brand based on online media coverage, subsequent spreading of the false claim via social media and the resulting impact on sentiment toward the brand. Their findings illustrate the influence of digital mass communication sources on the subsequent spread of information about a brand via social media channels, as well as the impact of the spread of false claims on brand sentiment. Questions are posed about the value of social media listening and sentiment analysis for brands as an ongoing business practice. The findings provide a strong foundation for follow-up quantitative testing of related hypotheses.

The second article, “Consumer Engagement on Social Media: Insights from a Virtual Brand Community,” by Lima, Irigaray and Lourenco, develops and confirms a theoretical model of consumer engagement in a virtual brand community. To do so, the study investigates this phenomenon and verifies the validity of the model’s assumptions in the context of a Facebook fan page. Specifically, a netnographic approach was applied to explore the interactions between L’Oréal Paris, Brazil and the members of its virtual community. The findings reinforce the perspective that simple participation or involvement does not presume engagement. Rather, consumer engagement is a complex psychological state dependent on the context, which requires researchers to examine how antecedent and consequent processes are manifested in behavior.

The third article, “Luxury and Twitter: An Issue of the Right Words,” by Mazzoli, Grazzini, Donvito and Aiello, presents the results of a content analysis of Twitter posts of six luxury fashion brands and the related Twitter-based electronic Word of Mouth of fashion bloggers. Specifically, the paper examines the alignment between luxury brand identity and luxury brand image in online communications. Firm-generated content and user-generated content (UGC) are compared based on the form of bloggers’ contents. The findings indicate that brands and bloggers both stress the same dimensions of luxury (i.e., esthetic, desirable, symbolic, restricted accessibility and hedonistic experience), demonstrating that communications of luxury brands to consumers are aligned. Moreover, it appears that luxury brands could likely reinforce their brand value by making more use of words that are semantically related to luxury. Guidelines are proposed for luxury brand managers to consider in managing and adapting the way they communicate and interact with customers.

In the fourth article, Fujita, Harrigan and Soutar examine how co-created content can facilitate relevant and meaningful customer experiences in social media brand communities, titled “The Strategic Co-creation of Content and Student Experiences in Social Media: An Identity Theories Perspective.” Their netnography approach investigates the characteristics of co-created content and the effects the content has on engagement from an identity theories perspective. Narratives and cues were identified and categorized into university, sub-groups, and student role identity themes. The resulting identity-consistent reactions demonstrated that narratives and cues are likely to influence perceptions of the distinctiveness, prestige and similarity of the identities they enact. Moreover, university identity themes enable some individuals to project other group member’s identity narratives, while sub-group and student role identity theme co-creation tends to increase identity synergy. Social media brand community members appear to be important integrators of symbolic resources that influence other members’ identity constructions, and further their perceived relationships with the organization and other members, while also enhancing customer experiences.

The fifth article, “Understanding Digital Moms: Motivations to Interact with Brands on Social Networking Sites,” by Treviño and Garelli, explores the motivations of digital moms for developing online brand relationships. Three qualitative approaches – netnography, focus groups and depth interviews – were executed to collect data. Uses and gratifications theory was applied as a framework to pursue a deeper view into why people use social media. Eight motivations emerged as influencing mothers with small children to engage with and follow brands on their social networking sites. They included information, entertainment, knowledge-seeking, social influence, social interaction, brand-relationship maintenance, communication and self-expression. These motivations were then categorized into a proposed framework based on the level of engagement and the type of user. A unique component of this article is the practical implications provided for managers seeking to design and implement improved branding strategies that incorporate new functions that brands fulfill in an online environment.

We encourage you to read the articles in this special issue and share your new ideas with your colleagues. We hope this will lead to future research that will build upon the research presented in these articles.

Anita Whiting

College of Business, Clayton State University, Morrow, Georgia, USA

David Williams

Department of Marketing, Dalton State College, Dalton, Georgia, USA, and

Joe F. Hair

*Department of Marketing and Quantitative Methods, University of South Alabama,
Mobile, Alabama, USA*