COTRUGLI Business School

DBA Dissertation

„Company Generated Problem-Solving Content on Social Media (SM) and
Online Brand Equity: Designing and Testing a Model for Its Effectiveness „

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Company Generated Problem-Solving Content on
Social Media (SM) and Online Brand Equity:
Designing and Testing a Model for Its Effectiveness

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DBA Dissertation Signature Approval Form

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ABSTRACT

The importance of professional content and its positive effect on brand visibility and business performance has become an exceedingly important marketing issue.

To date, there has been limited empirical literature on professional "content type" in social media (SM). However, there is consensus among researchers that content has a positive effect on brand exposure, and, in fact, results in improved company sales. The literature on marketing, branding, and internet sales is much more abundant, but none of that research directly addresses online professional content structure (e.g., content type and content thematic) and online company branding. In addition, to the knowledge of the author there is no model or theory available that could provide a direction for interested users to create, distribute, maintain and analyze professional SM content to achieve better sales results through its application.

The aim of this dissertation was to test a model developed by the researcher to aid small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs) to promote their brands online. This study employed mixed methods. It was argued that the most suitable method for this study was twofold. First, grounded theory was applied for the development of the proposed model using qualitative data. Second, for the purpose of testing the model quantitative data was used. The model designed by the researcher was tested based on data collected from 2012-2015 at Naton.

The proposed model formed the basics to support positive effect on brand performance using social media. The testing of the model confirmed the positive effect on brand performance. The proposed model provides general guidance for online support

building brand equity and online business exposure. The model serves as a manual for SMEs, offers detailed support, and explains proposed processes.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to many people who have helped me along my learning journey. First, I would like to thank my parents who have given me the foundation, support, and love throughout my life. Second, I would like to thank Drazen Kapusta, the principal of Cotulgi Business School who believed in my idea to write a dissertation and who encouraged me to pursue my dissertation and who always told me to never give up. Third, I am grateful to my life-long business partner who supported my efforts to work on this dissertation and who stood by me in the good and bad times. Together we have forged a great partnership and have made many accomplishments. Last, but not least, is Natasha, my better half, who has always been there to support me during this dissertation process even though I have often spend time away from her working on this dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The importance of professional content and its positive effect on brand visibility and business performance has become an exceedingly important marketing issue (e.g., Botha, Farshid & Pitt, 2011; Cheng, 2012; Kumar, et al., 2016; Schweidel & Moe, 2014). In fact, some researchers have found a direct positive correlation between social media and sales and between new methods of inbound marketing (Colvin, 2013; Dunn, 2010; Paradiso, 2015; Saye, 2011; Stavrianea & Kavoura, 2015; Weinberg, 2009; Winterberg, 2013). Verhagen, Booter and Agelar (2010) provide an overview on research that explored the impact of different website content elements on the online purchasing process (see Table 1). The authors highlighted the category "advice" that can be described as recommendations, and advice from experts. For the purpose of this study, professional content is associated with this "advice" category and is defined as non-academic publications such as white papers and other problem solving content.

Despite these varied studies, there is limited research that has explored web content category advice and its effects on website traffic and on brand performance. In order to better understand its impact for companies, it is imperative that additional research be conducted to determine this content and its contributions to this subject.

Purpose Statement

The aim of this dissertation is to test a model developed by the researcher to aid small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs) to promote their brands online.

Research Objectives

The research objective of this dissertation is to provide effective support for online marketing strategies for those companies that currently have an online presence or desire one. The researcher developed a model slightly more than 10 years ago after several years of observing the various trends in the field and in conjunction with reading relevant literature in the field. Once the model was created, data collection to test the model began in 2012. The six year delay from model development to testing was a result of the rapid technical changes and advancements that were taking place at Google, a Menlo Park, California, company that offers Internet services and products. Google served as one of the major sources of data collected on the company investigated in this dissertation. The results from testing this model may indeed help support marketing managers initiatives to develop online strategies in a simple and uncomplicated process. Specifically, the objective of this research is to test a model to help small and medium

sized enterprises (SMEs) plan, build, and execute their online marketing strategies and build their brand exposure more effectively.

Research questions

Three research questions have been posed to test the model presented in this dissertation.

RQ1. To what degree does problem solving content in the form of online publications have an effect on brand exposure and performance?

RQ2. To what degree does problem solving content in the form of online publications have an effect on website traffic?

RQ3. What is the appropriate content format and which Social Media (SM) channels should be used for content publication and distribution in order have a positive effect using the proposed model?

Research Methods

This study employs qualitative and quantitative or mixed methods. Although qualitative and quantitative research designs are considered equally acceptable research designs by most researchers, using a combination of these two methods to triangulate the data strengthen the research. In particular, this study used the grounded theory method (GTM) as its research method. GTM is commonly used to develop or detect a theory, explain practice, or provide a model for further research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). GTM has been traditionally associated with purely qualitative research using qualitative data such as in-depth interviews, observation, and artifacts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles &

Huberman, 1994), though recently Walsh (2015) demonstrated that qualitative and quantitative data and techniques can be used in GTM to aid building sound theories in information systems. Walsh noted that “. . . it allows researchers to build theories of greater abstraction and scope: it helps sense-making in the drive from substantive to parsimonious formal theories” (p. 531). Following this line of thought, this study is predominantly qualitative in nature, but, in fact, uses some quantitative methods to test the model.

For Corbin and Strauss (1990), qualitative data for grounded theory can come from a variety of sources including, but not limited to, interviews, observations, videos, books, and letters. In short, any source that can shed light on a question or questions under consideration in a study. Similarly, and perhaps even more far-reaching, Glaser (2001) emphasizes an important feature in GTM-- that everything can be considered as data including existing literature, views of participants and researchers, historical information, and personal experience. For the purpose of this study, academic and practitioner literature, historical company information, observations, and views of the researcher and personal experience all apply.

In grounded theory, the processes of collecting and analyzing data are interconnected, “concepts are the effects”, and sampling is based on “theoretical grounds” (8). Corbin and Strauss's statement fits the frame of this dissertation. It focuses on theory development and not on sampling individual model blocks. Rather it focuses on the various components of the model and makes analyses based on “constant comparisons” (9). Corbin and Strauss's remarks are aligned directly with the approach

taken in this dissertation during the data collection stage. As such, this study can be attributed to incident analysis and comparison to other incidents, where a researcher compares incident to incident with the aim of establishing the underlying uniformity and its varying conditions (Glaser, 1978 cited in Lawrence & Tar, 2013). These constant iterations improved the model by making comparisons and by avoiding any potential bias. In fact, in creating the model, careful consideration was given to examining the “broader structural conditions” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, 11) to ensure their inclusion into the theory as well as conducting research on all the facts connected to the model theory.

Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected in several ways for this dissertation: through various Internet data base searches including, but not limited to, Google scholar, EBSCO, ProQuest, Sage, and the University of Ljubljani's DiKUL portal with provided access to more than 20,000 journals and access to leading academic databases (e.g., Elsevier Science Direct, Springer Link, Wiley, ACS, IEEE/IEL, IOS Press, JSTOR, Emerald, Sage, EBSCO, Taylor & Francis, Oxford University Press, Web of Science, and Scopus and through selected key words such as: a) content, b) social media, c) system engine optimization (SEO), d) inbound marketing, and e) Google to determine their presence in the literature. Academic peer-reviewed journals, practitioner and popular business magazines articles were selected for relevance to further refinement the process and resulted in purposive sampling to select only relevant literature (Cooper, 1988).

Quantitative data collected to test the model included: a) the number of content published, b) the type of published content, c) the number of social media (SM) platforms used, d) the content format, e) the number of web page unique visits, f) the Google positioning index, g) the number of indexed organic words, and h) the number of white paper (WP) downloads at Naton d.o.o., a 20-year-old human resource agency that conducts business in Adriatic Balkan Region (including Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Bulgaria) and that focuses on temporary and permanent recruitment. Naton currently employs more than 1,200 people and it is considered the third largest regional human resource agency in size and revenue.

The three phase model developed by the researcher was tested to determine its effectiveness and applicability for any company interested in developing and/or improving its online presence. Figure 1 presents the three phase process of the Online Brand Exposure Model (OBEM). Phase 1 focuses on the existing literature review and other research tools (e.g., observation and emerging themes) collected to develop the model. In Phase 2, data from Google analytics and the Google webmaster tool were collected to test the model, and finally in Phase 3, the outcome or business performance.

Figure 1 Three Phases of the Online Brand Exposure Model.

Source: Author

Significance of the study

This study seeks to test a model that could possibly assist companies in developing a successful online marketing presence on their websites. By applying the model to their companies, marketers and marketing campaigns can better position company brands in highly competitive new social media (SM) environments.

While it may not be possible to generalize the experiences of one company to other companies or industries (Yin, 2014), this model may provide some new ideas and applications to help other companies to better position themselves online. The model may be more easily adaptable to small or medium sized enterprises (SMEs) that seek to build their brand online and that are searching for a strategic solution that covers the overall process involved in an online business brand exposure. To date, very few models or frameworks that focus on online marketing in a quick-paced, ever-changing global online business environment exist. Moreover, there is a lack of effective support for online business development (Ha, 2005). This lack of support creates a variety of difficulties for many businesses to identify and understand the most appropriate and effective business model to adopt to make them both effective and efficient. The proposed study seeks to close this existing gap by testing a model aimed at improving online presence.

Social media (SM) sites create value for customers by providing the possibility of brand connection and two-way communication. Posted content is a critical vehicle to reach prospective customers and should be written with the client audience in mind. The

content should address current and important issues for the targeted clients and the content must be updated frequently for effectiveness (Winterberg, 2013). Thus, there is a compelling need for a model or a conceptual framework to aid companies to build content which serves as a more successful way to brand positioning and to attract and engage potential clients.

Regardless of the marketing channels used to promote, position, or sell products and or services on line, the branded content must be connected to the customer to engage the customer with the brand, especially if it is the customer's intention to share branded content through its network. As a result, professional content can trigger audience engagement in brand sharing and include the importance of company generated content to sales results (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). If content has been prepared and monitored correctly, businesses, in a sense, are able to have free brand marketing (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Quality content is the future of search engine optimization (SEO) and it will always be rewarded (Gillette, 2011). Therefore, professional quality content is one of the major issues to be addressed in this dissertation.

Social media marketing (SMM) or content marketing offers free unlimited content distribution, personalization, and customer two-way communication (Csordás & Gáti 2014). Botha, Farshid and Pitt (2011), Cheng (2012), Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, and Kannan (2016) and Schweidel and Moe (2014) point out the importance of firm generated content and its positive impact on better revenues and sales. Moreover, Verhagen, Boter and Adelaar (2010) have suggested that firm generated content has an effect on the online purchasing process. Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie

(2014) point out that consumers have become increasingly more knowledgeable about brand engagement in SM. To help small and medium-sized companies position and expose their brand better online, this model will provide a full range process. This includes those companies without an online presence and those companies with a more advanced presence. It will include the production of professional problem solving content, using content management software (i.e., social media), and using search engine optimization (SEO) processes for increased online exposure. To reiterate, the model to be tested is based on existing research and on four years of a data collection (2012 through 2015) on one company. This model will map a possible process for companies that are presently online or wish an on-line presence.

Operational Definitions

In this dissertation, problem solving content is defined as “professional quality content that provides internet users with the right information, recent algorithm changes in Google awarded high quality content and a good user experience over keyword manipulation and SEO gimmicks” (Tornoe, 2016, 72).

In this dissertation, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) or Search Experience Optimization is defined as adapting Google web pages and forcing "companies to focus on user experience and quality content" to enable consumers to locate company webpages (Tornoe, 2016, 72).

In this dissertation, social media (SM) is defined as “Web-based platforms that allow users to communicate messages with specific or random users or Broadcast messages to everyone in the group or community, post, edit, and sort text and files linked

to themselves or others and view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the group or community at any time of their choosing” (Leonardi, Huysman & Steinfield, 2013, 19).

In this dissertation, positioning is defined as the way a company presents its strengths and weaknesses and its competitors (Ries & Trout, 2000).

In this dissertation, inbound marketing (IM) is defined as “practice of placing content in to the marketplace online and offline” (Saye, 2011, 23).

In this dissertation, outbound marketing (OM) is defined as "placing ads in online and offline media such as TV, radio, newspapers with self-proclamatory content” (Saye, 2011, 23).

In this dissertation, conversion is defined as a lead to a potential online sale and includes forms (e.g., acquiring new email from potential customer or direct product sale).

In this dissertation, content management software (CMS) is defined as a way to update/upload content to the target audience (Winterberg, 2013).

In this dissertation, landing pages are defined as web pages that feature items such as video, download offers, and contact request forms (Winterberg, 2013).

In this dissertation, a quick response (QR) code is defined as a mobile application that recognizes a code link and sends a user to a landing page (Winterberg, 2013).

In this dissertation, WEB 2.0 is defined as an advanced interaction that allows users to generate and provide contents.

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

There are six (6) assumption in this study:

1. That there is a sufficient amount of information available from recent studies to support the proposed model.
2. That SM and Google trends will stay the same in the future.
3. That internet user behavior will stay the same in the future
4. That organizations will continue to focus their attention on customers and to engage in two-way communication.
5. That consumers will cooperate and share content, and
6. That focused content will have a direct impact on brand positioning and sales results.

Limitations

There are six limitations to this study. First, the proposed model will focus on intra-organizational processes and target online business strategies and not apply to offline approaches. Second, the use of manual sample data collection may include some human errors and may affect the findings of the study. Third, many company marketing processes and marketers are unwilling to introduce new marketing approaches and techniques. Such a perspective may also apply to their views about the proposed model. Fourth, employee knowledge including content production and the lack of computer skills may limit potential users of the model. Fifth, the results of this study may not be

generalizable to other companies across different sectors (Yin, 2015) or applicable to large companies. Finally, the literature selected for review were published between the years: 2005 and 2016. In general, there is little discussion on the design of the professional content in the literature reviewed.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to set the stage for the development of this dissertation. It began with the problem statement or an overview of the study. The purpose of the study was stated followed by the research objectives of the study. Next, three research questions were provided followed by the methods of collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. The grounded theory method (GTM) will be used as the research method. A model designed by the researcher will be tested based on data collected from 2012-2015 by Naton, a 20-year-old human resource agency that conducts business in Adriatic Balkan Region (including Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Bulgaria) that focuses on temporary and permanent recruitment. The company currently employs more than 1,200 people and it is considered the third largest regional human resource agency in size and revenue. The results of this dissertation are vitally important as they shed light on an area of research that has had limited exploration and analyses. Operational definitions as well the limitations of the study were also provided in this chapter.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation follows a traditional five (5) chapter model. Chapter 1 has been described above. Chapter 2 will include a review of the literature. Chapter 3 details the research methods, the research questions. Chapter 4 presents the findings and discusses them, and Chapter 5 provides a conclusion, gives some implications for theory and for management and practice, lists the limitations of the study, and makes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the extant literature of online content concepts and its relationship to social media (SM) and search engine optimization (SEO). In addition, this chapter presents changes and new approaches in marketing and content distribution through SM channels. Major concepts and models are provided as well SM, SEO, and brand development. The literature review has been organized as follows:

(a) comparison of outbound and inbound marketing approaches, (b) inbound marketing influence on sales and brand exposure, (c) online brand positioning and behavior, (d) content and SM, and (e) SEO effect on brand revenues and exposure. Unfortunately, the literature in these fields has not kept pace with the development in the fast moving field and therefore the literature review may not be as extensive in this area as in other traditional areas.

Selection of Review Literature

While the Internet and traditional research sources often provide an abundance of literature on a given area or subject, some of these sources may not be applicable, appropriate or acceptable to confirm or refute research questions and the model developed in this doctoral dissertation. In order to ensure the relevancy of such literature, selected criteria were established to filter the related literature (e.g., professional, academic and other publications) for review in this dissertation. These criteria were based

on: 1) relevant professional and/or academic articles, 2) related literature published during 2005-2016, 3) literature that included content, social media (SM), search engine optimization (SEO), and inbound marketing, and 4) related literature written in English.

This purposive sample method was chosen to select relevant literature and to dismiss any irrelevant literature (Cooper, 1988). Selecting the related literature consisted of a comprehensive review of academic databases including ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the University of Ljubljani's DiKUL portal with provided access to more than 20,000 journals and access to leading academic databases (e.g., Elsevier Science Direct, Springer Link, Wiley, ACS, IEEE/IEL, IOS Press, JSTOR, Emerald, Sage, EBSCO, Taylor & Francis, Oxford University Press, Web of Science, and Scopus).

The first iteration of the related literature search occurred through a search of key words such as "content", "social media" (SM), "search engine optimization" (SEO), "inbound marketing" and "Google". This initial search produced only 36 relevant articles in this newly emerging field. The second iteration of the literature search complemented the first search by focusing on those authors and experts whose works appeared repeatedly in the literature and resulted in 10 additional relevant publications.

Most of the related literature was published in academic journals such as: *Association for Consumer Research, Budapest Management Review, Business Information Review, East Caroline University Journal, Fairfield County Business Journal, Harvard Business Review, Journal of Financial Planning, Journal of Marketing and Research, Journal of Marketing Education, New Hampshire Business Review, New York Business Review, Psychology & Marketing, South African Journal of Business*

Management and Westchester County Business Journal. Relevant practitioner articles appeared in *Air Conditioning Heating & Refrigeration News*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *Brand Strategy, Campaigns & Elections*, *Editor Publisher*, *eWeek*, *Event DV*, *Fortune*, *Insurance Advocate*, *Marketing News*, *Online*, and *South Carolina Business*.

Conceptual Frameworks, Business Modelling and Models

This section of the literature review focuses on existing conceptual frameworks and models to inform the dissertation.

Colvin (2013) applied a conceptual framework of relationship marketing to measure the impact of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on sales success of experience goods. Colvin's research on the effects of Social Media (SM) and the dispersion of e-WOM on the sales of goods of Amazon Kindle books investigated the number of customer reviews and the number of Amazon "likes" and found no correlation between sales success and the average author rating, but rather found that there was a significant relationship between e-WOM and sales which suggested that e-WOM was equivalent to content sharing and indeed had a direct impact on sales.

Kumar et al. (2016) applied another conceptual framework that focused on the effects of firm generated content in SM on customer behavior and cross buying behavior. These authors found a relationship between customer characteristics, length of relationship and SM proneness, firm generated content, traditional media marketing, digital media communication and customer spending habits. Moreover, firm generated content had a positive effect on customer behaviour, spending, and cross buying, thus reinforcing the notion that content creation and content sharing positively affect sales.

Hyoryung and Kannan's (2014) conceptual framework combined (a) the relationship between social media (SM) mentions and user generated content, (b) marketing actions such as advertising and public relation efforts, (c) brand awareness and image, and (d) accounting performance which resulted in company value. These authors discuss the informational value of social tagging network and the way financial markets react to information about brand value based on brand surveys, expert reviews, or user generated content (e.g., data that indicated brand value). In the cases of higher SM brand presence, company stock value usually rose and stocks were extremely sensitive to brand reputation through SM mentions and user generated content. In fact, SM brand equity increased in value almost daily.

Landers' (2014) conceptual framework funnel of system engine optimization (SEO) hierarchy performance metrics places keywords ranking on the bottom of the funnel importance. The framework continues with impressions created when a web site was listed in the organic result hits. Clicks or visits were placed in the middle of SEO performance metrics. The author warned that visibility is the key issue that leads to clicks or visits, and suggested that to improve the odds of clicks or visits, a website should appear on Google's first search result page. Visits lead to "leads" and "leads" occupy the next place in the SEO performance metrics. Tracking SEO investments informs companies about "which aspects are working and which need to be changed and retested or eliminated altogether" (Landers, 2014, 1). The top place of the SEO performance metrics funnel is reserved for sales which depend on other SEO performance metrics

funnel factors. They lead to sales and strengthens the view that SEO make an impact on brand visibility and sales.

Botha, Farshid, and Pitt's (2011) conceptual framework included a tool for collecting brand visibility information. The authors analyzed five university brands and their relative marketing positioning from a SM perspective. Of the two available ways to collect data: Option 1 (counting the vast number of comments, posts on SM channels could be an option), or Option 2 (obtaining data from a service that regularly trawls through SM and compiles data on brand visibility), the authors selected Option 2. They found that brand university was exposed the most, thus confirming the importance of SM brand presence and activity.

Another framework proposed by Leonardi, Huysman and Steinfield (2013) investigated business SM and its prospects. These authors discussed the advantages and disadvantages of SM as a communication platform within the workplace. On the one hand, advantages included individuals attention to information and communication from others with whom they would not normally interact. The public nature of communication provided more accurate and honest information. Because information communicated through SM platforms were transparent, managers often used these platforms to better understand employees and recognize human capital. On the other hand, disadvantages of workplace SM communication included increased ability for surveillance and control, knowledge that management was watching, more generic communication as a result of management control, and people were engaged in conversations outside their areas, resulting in a loss of time. SM in workplace helps to engage employees in company

activities and encourages them to create company content that increases brand worth and revenues.

This section of the literature review focuses on business modelling.

In recent years, the use of modeling techniques has gained significant importance for planning and effective application of new organizational processes (Aytulun & Guneri, 2008). A business process modeling (BPM) is one of the most powerful tool for achieving goals. Modeling goals are divided in three (3) main categories: (1) communicating--to provide perfect understanding between the model designer and the user to simplify the comprehensibility of the model, (2) designing the optimal process--whereby the model designer accounts for measuring, analyzing and ultimately evaluating business performance, and (3) managing and tracking the progress of the model-- as a control mechanism to allow managers to track the model processes constantly and to manage process relationships and measure their performance.

In defining a quality of BOM technique for model suitability, Geyer and Fourie (2015, p. 254) state:

Suitability, effectiveness, and ease of use. It is fair to argue that a BPM technique is eventually considered suitable if it possesses the capability to design and support business process models that enable the relevant organisation to achieve its modelling objectives.

This implies that a BPM technique must first be regarded as effective before it can be regarded as suitable. In the same vein, we argue that a BPM technique is effective if it can design and support business process models that are complete, efficiently generated,

easy to understand, and sustainable. Collectively, these four quality characteristics represent the ease with which a BPM technique can be used to design and support effective business process models. Given these arguments, it is necessary to determine the following characteristics of a BPM technique: ease of use, which can serve as an indication of its ability to design and support effective business process models; and Effectiveness, which can serve as an indication of its suitability for a specific modelling application. Considering this from another perspective, the suitability of a BPM technique can be indicated by measuring its effectiveness. In turn, the effectiveness of a BPM technique can be indicated by measuring its ease of use. Ultimately, the ease of use associated with a BPM technique can be indicated by the weighted average of its related sub-measurements – completeness, efficiency generation, ease of understanding, and sustainability.

Csordás and Gáti (2014) developed a model analyzing Social Media (SM) content generation in providing value for media and marketing communication purposes using online content data analysis and data mining in the service industry. The authors found that the power of "posts" and "likes" had a direct influence on the measure of activity-generation. Activity on analyzed SM pages demonstrated a significant difference when SM was used as a marketing tool or a media channel suggesting that SM be used as a marketing tool and as a media marketing channel. If "followers" were approached correctly, they could serve as ambassadors of the company and disseminate positive information about products. In fact, SM branded sites offer additional value for the customers providing possibility of brand connection and two-way communication.

Cheng (2012) build a model to capture the process of video spreading. Cheng analyzed YouTube insight dataset from a partner's side and found an inherent relationship among different metrics which affected the popularity of the video. These findings encouraged YouTube partners to adapt the usual content deployment to generate more views. The model focused on traffic prediction and workload synthesis and the important co-existence of sharing and streaming.

Schweidel and Moe (2014) created a model to measure underlying brand sentiment expressed in SM posts. They found that the success of a marketing researcher depended on the location of the SM. For example, listing SM in wrong place could lead to misleading brand sentiment metrics results. In order to validate their approach, the authors compared the model with performance measures from external data (e.g., brand stock prices). The model can be used as a leading indicator of the changes observed in the external data sources and outperforms other current SM metrics.

Ashley and Tuten's (2015) model identified creative strategies of different SM channels (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Flickr). The authors recorded creative message strategies used in branded content and SM channels and in content distribution and client interaction. In addition, their model measured message strategies and behaviors such as interactivity, functional appeal, emotional appeal, uniqueness, social cause, exclusivity and animation. The authors found that functional appeals were used most commonly in SM, followed by emotional appeals. Regardless of the channels used to promote a position or sale, content should be customer-oriented to engage customers with the brand and to share it through their SM network.

Aggarwal and Vaidyanathan (2005) described their model for creating and positioning brands online based on an analysis of websites containing brand related information. They analyzed the enormous amount of information stored online in the search engine databases and uncovered information needed for successful brand building. The authors explained that the WWW provided an unlimited source of information on brands, products and services, but without the right tools, the collection of information would be virtually impossible and too time-consuming. They custom-coded applets for building application program interface provided by Google and analyzed data from more than four (4) billion web pages. By examining similarities and associations between brands and their published content, the authors exceeded simply counting text and focused on guiding and driving marketing decisions.

Schweidel and Moe (2014) developed a model to write SM posts and to add attachments to posts. The authors found that if SM is monitored incorrectly, then incorrect information can be obtained by the company and/or its marketing team. They also noted that Blogs that hosted larger content (e.g., article review and description of some travel destination) had higher proportion of positive comments. Thus, the design and type of content are extremely valuable for getting positive comments which lead to increased sales results.

New Marketing Approaches: Social Media (SM)

This section of the literature review focuses new marketing approaches particularly Social Media (SM).

For Colvin (2013), traditional marketing through media such as television, radio, and newspaper advertising has become ineffective as consumers rely on references, word of mouth, reviews, and other forms of recommendations and product experiences. Consumers trust SM references more than the average marketing and other media sources. Marketers have begun to embrace SM marketing for different reasons including customer relationship management, branding and other sales promotions, with branding identified as the most valuable. For the first time in history, WOM can be recorded, but unfortunately it is still difficult to measure completely, because it occurs for the most part on private SM networks. Electronic WOM (e-WOM) is a direct outcome of SM. In a review of Amazon Kindle book sales, e-WOM had a positive impact on book sales based on the increase of customer reviews, the numbers of “likes”, and numbers of Twitter followers during Christmas holidays.

Weinberg (2009) has suggested the SM marketing (SMM) process empowers individuals or marketers to promote their web sites, products, or services through online social channels and to communicate with and connect with a larger community available through traditional advertising channels. SMM focuses on the collective rather than the individual. Listening to multiple communities online via SM and interpreting their communication about a specific product, service, or brand is vital as SMM connects a business and its audience. SMM has five main goals: 1) to increase traffic to the brand's website, 2) to drive relevant links to the website, 3) to raise the number of people who follow the brand, 4) to expand brand awareness to other audiences, and 5) to trigger

conversations. Weinberg research added value by building on existing basic guidelines for SMM.

Winterberg (2013) defined the impact of inbound marketing and the ways it changed the marketing industry. Outbound marketing techniques such as television and magazine ads and aggressive email campaigns have become increasingly obsolete. Currently, there are new ways to block outbound marketing messages daily, to avoid television commercial with digital video recorders (DVRs), to hide invasive internet ads, to block incoming sales phone calls and emails, all ways to avoid outbound marketing reach. The evolution of internet marketing has moved to SM and mobile devices which provides direct and focused access to desired targeted audience in a new approach called inbound marketing or the practice of making an individual or a company easy to locate and then draw targeted clients to valuable content through website, blogs, or SM visits. The key for success is posted content and should be written for the "ideal" client audience. Content should address current issues important to the targeted clients and should be updated regularly. The technology attracts and engages the most sought after clients in various ways.

For Paradiso (2015), inbound marketing is not simply a practical technique. It is a guiding philosophy. Increased reliance on inbound marketing channels reduces the reliance on classical outbound marketing techniques, though outbound marketing may be used short term to reduce the time required to construct inbound marketing. In fact, inbound and outbound marketing may work in tandem. One possible strategy is to remain in front of the prospects and to create a condition where outbound marketing remains a

"fast" message distribution and to use inbound marketing to measure the engagement level of leads, which outbound marketing techniques unfortunately cannot do. It is suggested that a business to business communication strategy begins with business-orientated SM platforms (e.g., LinkedIn). A major benefit of inbound marketing vs. outbound marketing is the construction of a target market to gain a clearer understanding of potential market and potential clients.

Saye (2011, 1) discussed the advantages of inbound marketing techniques: "placing content into the marketplace, online and offline to allow the target audience to locate it". The author recommended that "traffic" be driven to the company's website to engage the visitor to stay on the website long enough to leave needed information; thus, the content of the website should be suitable enough to connect the audience with a brand. It could be a lead in the form of an email address in exchange for white paper download access. Conversion or "lead" campaigns come in various forms to receive information from the customer to convert the relationship into a sale by converting and by analyzing it.

Dunn (2010) discussed branding and its application to products, organizations, and individuals. Universities, businesses, and non-profits were selected to understand how they used SM as a branding tool. SM has given consumers a voice, so managing a brand could be extremely difficult as SM has appeared in different forms worldwide. SM represents a way to share daily events, is a way to communicate new products or brand awareness, and is a reputable informational source. For example, in 2010, Wyclef Jean Twitter, the Haitian musician, raised more than a million dollars for the 2010 Haitian

earthquake crisis by appealing to his 1.3 million Twitter followers. SM travels extremely swift for natural disasters and can be a positive or negative brand builder/destroyer in a few hours.

Holt (2016) found that companies such as Facebook and YouTube had a positive effect on brands. However, once an audience has blocked advertisements, it became extremely difficult for the brands to re-establish their presence online. Holt also discussed the impact of on-line audience behavior regarding paid brand advertising and compared it with feedback marketing strategies as a means of two-way communication between companies and customers. Starbucks, for example, had encouraged its customers to provide feedback and suggestions to help future product development through its "My Starbucks idea" web page. Empowering customers had a positive effect on Starbucks' customers "care" relationship. In essence, relationship marketing focuses on establishing and developing a learning relationship with customers, rather than just focusing on sales with increased value to both the business and customer.

Devaney (2007) discussed ways Budweiser, the American beer brewing giant (now owned by InBev, a Belgian brewer) used the virtual world to create brand loyalty and brand reinforcement. For Devaney, old brand loyalty approaches were unsophisticated loyalty brand tools which required a pressing need for a new approach. With the establishment of Bud Bucks virtual currency, Budweiser launched a new strategy for brand loyalty where beer drinker earned between five and 100 Bud Bucks from every Budweiser purchase. These Bud Bucks are usable in the virtual Budweiser bar, listening to music, watching television, and drinking virtual beer. Budweiser's goal

was to create a comfortable virtual environment where visitors would feel at home. Coca Cola, the American beverage giant, also embraced a similar approach by allowing customers to gain virtual Coca Cola currency for every bottle or can they purchased, usable in Coca Cola's virtual world--Coke studios. Microsoft's virtual loyalty currency emerged in the gaming world. Xbox gamers buy and trade games with Microsoft loyalty points. According to Budweiser's, Coca Cola's and Microsoft's brand managers, virtual currency is more cost-effective than the old-fashioned points and prizes systems, and creates a win-win situation for company brands and their consumers.

Csordás and Gáti (2014) found that on-line brand building and positioning activities require different forms of communication and on-line activities. Small and medium-sized companies benefited the most from SM marketing and SEO, because they took advantage of building an on-line brand presence without having to worry about financial considerations. Moreover, small and medium-sized companies can use SM content marketing to create a more personalized marketing approach to attract potential customers through a more direct relationship with bona fide company representatives. SM content marketing also allows companies to develop a greater understanding of the customer product experience, resulting in a two-way customer-catered communication process that has a major impact on their sales strategies and product development. This approach furnishes users with a direct platform to share, create, and discuss company related content; therefore, companies can pay attention to, change, and adapt their products as needed, resulting in a new type of value--audience's social value. SM

marketing or content marketing offers free unlimited content distribution, personalization and customer two-way communication.

Many writers have emphasized the importance of firm generated content and its positive impact on increased revenues and sales results. Most studies do not discuss online content types as the literature is silent on the issue of the design of the professional content. Rather it has focused on its importance.

Cheng (2012) investigated SM content distribution. In 2004, the interaction with web pages has drastically changed with the introduction Web 2.0. This has created the possibility for companies and customers to interact with each through websites and for them to mutually generate and create firm generated content. Cheng also analyzed how YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter partners adapted their content deployment and user engagement strategies to generate more views or "hits" and subsequently increase their revenues. Therefore, the importance of content deployment is not ignored. For example, YouTube insight datasets were analyzed and found that the inherent relationship among various metrics affected video popularity. As a result YouTube partners have been able to adapt their content deployment and user engagement strategies to generate more views and to increase their revenues.

Ashley and Tuten (2015) analyzed creative strategies in SM content shared by some top brands and found SM channels were used most frequently. The authors noted that those marketing campaigns that used SM added touch, prospective, and strengthened consumer-brand relationships. The authors also described several options about ways to position and place brands in the SM landscape (e.g., paid display advertising,

participating in social networks as a brand persona or customer participation via surveys and published branded content). Regardless of the channels used to promote, position or sell a product/service, any branded content should be customer-oriented to ensure customer's engagement with the brand. Hence, professional branded content can trigger audience engagement in brand sharing and cover the importance of firm generated content to sales results. Furthermore, a creative strategy of content making can focus on matching the brand to consumer aspiration, experience, feelings, insight and the need for knowledge or deliverance of a product.

Mangold and Faulds (2009) argued that SM is a hybrid of different promotions. It provides a way for one person to reach thousands of people. By using SM companies can "talk" with their customers and customers can talk among themselves, and thereby have direct control over products. People must be prepared to join the conversation (good or bad) to defend a brand. Joining the conversations creates direct feedback, knowledge of potential problems, and even possible solutions. When customers talk among themselves, they create an extension of traditional WOM communication. Here customers are provided with networking platforms such as blogs and SM tools and "spread the good word" about a product and brand marketing for free. This study has confirmed the importance of SM as a sharing and communication tool to distribute content.

Leonardi, Huysman, and Steinfield (2013) provide business enterprise SM definition which can have a significant implication inside the business where SM has been used as an internal communication tool among employees. SM, as a digital the platform, has created unlimited possibilities for communication allowing any business

employee to participate, comment, or communicate at any time and it can result in improved interaction with new employees, knowledge sharing among employees, managing and building of social capital with to better understand ways to contain and control communication activities, so communication is not an overwhelming burden.

Stavrianea and Kavoura (2015) investigated SM and online user-generated contents role in service advertising. They focused on the internet use for collecting materials and people's attention to advertisement through different media sources. They found that SM content ranked higher on people's decision to select a place to vacation. They also found that official web pages and blogs held the number one place in people's minds about travel, followed by travel magazines, and then by travel guides. Interestingly, Facebook advertisement ranked third for the participants in the study. People were slowly abandoning traditional media and embracing SM content, confirming the importance of online content and its distribution.

Kumar et al's (2016) investigated firm generated content in SM using three key customer metrics: 1) spending, 2) cross-buying, and 3) customer profitability. They also compared the effects of firm-generated content to email marketing and television advertising. They found that firm-generated content indeed had a positive effect on customer's behavior for several reasons: (1) its practical informative content was created to help customers, (2) it provided real time product updates and virtual presence with the brand, and (3) by posting content on line, companies enabled customers to participate in content creation by "liking" (adding approval for content) or by adding comments which could generate more brand evaluation.

Botha, Farshid, and Pitt (2011) investigated SM content tracking (i.e., what it meant to follow a brand on YouTube, Facebook or other SM platforms and how time consuming and difficult to track). Tracking began with a brief general overview of the SM phenomenon. It explained ways to distinguish between different SM platforms such as blogs, micro-blogging platforms, social networking websites, friendship websites, picture sharing websites, video sharing website and social news websites. The authors pointed out that brand visibility is needed to construct any marketing strategy as such data give a competitive advantage to brand managers.

In addition, white papers, documents that provide information by companies to underscore the properties of a product or service, are often used as lead generation tool to educate a target audience and to influence potential new customers. They represent a "perfect" marketing tool that allow business brands to share their knowledge and expertise with a content "hungry" audience. While other marketing channels are often effective, white papers provide certain types of knowledge on a topic and they are perceived as professional literature that offers an in-depth discussion and possible analysis on a subject than do SM, blogs or even websites content.

Search engine optimization (SEO)

In order to assist companies in attracting additional customers a website is a prerequisite, though simply one does not necessarily bring potential customers to the website with both visibility and internet exposure as required features. Most websites are found through crawler-based search engines such as Google or Yahoo that create their listing automatically. These search engines have spider programs that "crawl" the web,

and that organize or index web pages, and information. The search engine optimization (SEO) was created to help these "spiders" locate websites easier. The successful SEO is measured by the rank of the website on search engine. For example, the higher the rank the better. Applying SEOs include (a) choosing the right keywords, (b) optimizing the meta data, (c) naming the graphics and, (d) using relevant links and content.

By combining SEO friendly website design and quality website content, SM channels can be filled with quality public relations (PR) news and events content covered online. For example, Purdy (2016) has discussed the importance and structure of Google's first result page or "real estate" which includes organic results such as: 1) news, 2) videos, 3) images, 4) local listings, 5) site links, 6) maps, 7) reviews, 8) SM updates and 9) advertisement all of which vary based on the nature of an individual search. Purdy, however, has suggested that 10 or more organic results for every search are no longer reasonable. In fact, Google has shortened its organic hits depending on other priorities such as advertisement, relevant content from blogs, twitter news, reviews or videos.

The SEO market in North America is a lucrative financial market and has reached more than \$16 billion. A large portion of this market came from low quality content farms which produced and placed low quality links and content to keep their clients websites ranked high on Google search engine. In 2010, Google made major changes to its algorithm to improve content quality and exclude low quality link farms (Gillette, 2011). This change resulted in a 25% loss of traffic on most websites, because it affected organic results. Google defended the algorithm change as it would reward high quality

websites and punish low quality websites, spam content, and link farms. Therefore, quality content ensures high ranking on Google.

SEO performance metrics includes two major components: 1) key words and 2) leads to impressions (generated when the result of a search shows a website between organic results hits). The value of impression ranked higher if the person or "searcher" opened a website. To achieve website visit/click, visibility is imperative. Websites that do not appear on Google's first page are rarely clicked. "Leads" pave the way for appointments and appointments lead to sales. Of the six components of SEO performance metrics keys words and leads to impression are the most important in achieving a successful SEO campaign (Landers 2014).

When the SEO was initially created search engines such as Lycos, Yahoo, and AltaVista led the web. Marketers simply loaded websites with keywords, tags and stuff pages influenced search engine ranking. However, when Google became *the* dominate search engine, the rules of engagement changed radically and quality content became a priority. This forced companies to focus on creating rather "cheating", and it lead to the SEO era. These new changes have been positive, because now quality is rewarded and the "black hat" techniques have become less effective, resulting in higher quality content. The new changes in combination with SEO has allowed a company to shift its focus from search engines directly to its customers. In 2015, mobile searches outnumbered desktop searches for the first time. Google's updated launch of a major algorithm gave the website for mobile sites a distinct advantage and visibility over nonmobile sites.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has been devoted to a literature review on the extant literature on models, SM, SEO, and SMM. Unfortunately, there has been limited empirical literature on professional "content type" in SM, though there is consensus among researchers that content has a positive effect on brand exposure, and, in fact, results in improved company sales. The literature on marketing, branding, and internet sales is much more plentiful, but none of that research directly addresses online professional content structure (e.g., content type and content thematic) and online company branding. In addition, this literature review found that no model or theory available that could provide a direction for interested users to create, distribute, maintain and analyze professional SM content to achieve better sales results through its application. The Internet continues to evolve annually and research findings have revealed some new answers about organization behavior on the Web. Additional research needs to be conducted on topics such as content type, SM and SEO to better inform marketing professionals.

CHAPTER 3

Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research methods adopted for this study.

This study employs a mixed methods design (qualitative and quantitative). Although a qualitative and a quantitative design are equally acceptable research design, the combination of these two methods strengthens the research agenda. Qualitative research is used via grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Grounded theory is commonly used to develop or detect a theory, explain practice or provide a model for further research (Creswell, 2007). While the grounded theory approach is traditionally qualitative (Creswell, 2007), more recently Walsh (2015) demonstrated that qualitative and quantitative data and techniques can be used in grounded theory to aid building sound theories in information systems. The author notes that "...it allows researchers to build theories of greater abstraction and scope: it helps sense-making in the drive from substantive to parsimonious formal theories" (Walsh (2015, p. 531). Following this line of thought, this exploratory study is predominantly qualitative in its nature. However, some quantitative methods are used to test the proposed model.

Qualitative data to be collected and analyzed include: Internet data base searches including, but not limited to, Google scholar, EBSCO, ProQuest, Sage, and the University of Ljubljani's DiKUL portal with provided access to more than 20,000

journals and access to leading academic databases (e.g., Elsevier Science Direct, Springer Link, Wiley, ACS, IEEE/IEL, IOS Press, JSTOR, Emerald, Sage, EBSCO, Taylor & Francis, Oxford University Press, Web of Science, and Scopus and through selected key words such as: a) content, b) social media, c) system engine optimization (SEO), d) inbound marketing, and e) Google to determine their presence in the literature. Academic peer-reviewed journals, practitioner and popular business magazines articles. Observation of day-to-day business conduct and note taking at Naton d.o.o. over a four-year period.

Quantitative data to be collected and analyzed include: (a) number of content published, (b) type of published content, (c) number of SM platforms used, (d) content format, (e) number of web page unique visits, (f) Google positioning index, (g) number of indexed organic words, and (h) number of white paper (WP) downloads.

The model will be tested at Naton d.o.o., a 20-year-old human resource agency in Ljubljana, Slovenia that focuses on temporary and permanent recruitment. Naton employs more than 1,200 people and it is considered the third largest Slovenian agency in size and revenue.

Research Methods

The study was performed using a grounded theory method allowing for the evolution of data collection and an emergence of theory as the study progresses (Creswell, 2007). This qualitative research design uses a grounded theory approach to develop the model (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). "Grounded theory is a design of

inquiry from sociology in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants" (Creswell, 2013, 42). To test the model the researcher used quantitative.

Walsh (2015) is supportive of this approach and demonstrated that qualitative and quantitative data and techniques can be used in grounded theory to aid building sound theories in information systems. The author notes that "...it allows researchers to build theories of greater abstraction and scope: it helps sense-making in the drive from substantive to parsimonious formal theories" (Walsh (2015, 531).

A predominantly qualitative study is a good fit due to the complexity of the resources and the desire to collect data from multiple elements (Creswell, 2007).

Data were collected for analysis from the four year period between 2012 and 2015. This dissertation used a deductive approach, which began with review of the extant literature. The deductive approach is also appropriate because it begins with a theory and narrows down to particular situation especially if the research develops a general model that has been built on existing theories.

Saunders et al. (2000: 91) distinguish between two different approaches to research - deduction and induction. Deduction relates to the development of conceptual and theoretical models prior to their examination using empirical observation, whereas induction starts with observing empirical data based upon which explanations and theories are fashioned (Gill & Johnson, 1991). As such, both approaches may lead to the use of different types of data. While deduction is concerned mainly with quantitative data

and induction primarily with qualitative data (Saunders et al. 2000; Gill & Johnson, 1991).

Creswell (1994) (as cited by Saunders et al., 2000: 91) suggests that "a topic on which there is a wealth of literature from which you can define a theoretical framework and a hypothesis lends itself more readily to the deductive approach". Accordingly in terms of induction, "With research into a topic that is new and exciting much debate, and on which there is little existing literature, it may be more appropriate to generate data and analyse and reflect on what theoretical themes the data are suggesting".

The following deductive approach structure was adhered to: a) literature review, b) a business case as a basis framework; c) research questions/hypothesis, (d) tested the model on an existing business, and d) examining and confirming the findings results and showing the validity and practical implications of the proposed model.

Due to an analytical need of collecting the data, this study falls under analytical type of research, locating and identifying the different variables involved, but also aims to employ predictive research (Bradford University School of Management), speculates on possible future of positive effects on brand equity and business performance, proving positive effect trend with four years of examined data.

Due to a better process understanding and a number of benefits, this dissertation used business process modelling to show and design processes in graphic model, benefits of using graphic modelling are substantial, graphic model includes the graphic portrayal of business process features such as inter-functional communication, resource requirement, and sequential constraints (Geyer & Fourie, 2015).

This research method and design aimed at accomplishing the goals of this study with a flexible and dynamic approach.

Research Questions

The review of literature also led to research questions connected to the relationships among events. As stated in Chapter 1, there were three (3) research questions:

RQ1. To what degree does problem solving content in the form of online publications have an effect on brand exposure and performance?

RQ 2. To what degree does problem solving content have an effect on website traffic?

RQ 3. What is the appropriate content format and which SM channels should be used for content publication and distribution in order to achieve positive results using the proposed model?

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

As pointed out by Corbin and Strauss (1990), the data for a grounded theory can come from different sources and include interviews, observations, videos, books, letters, etc. In short, any source that can shed a light on the questions under study. The authors also explained that, each of the sources could be coded and organized according to specific grounded theory procedures for data collection and analysis, for example; (a) “data collection and analysis are interrelated processes” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 6), as the model changed and adapted due to new acquired data, after four years resulting in

a developed and tested business effect model; (b) “concepts are the basic units of analysis” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 7), what has also been demonstrated during this dissertation model development, as it was developed with conceptualization of data and not the actual data and justified by the collected data showing positive model effects; and (c) “sampling in grounded theory proceeds on theoretical grounds” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 8). Corbin and Strauss's statement fits in to the frame of this dissertation theory development not sampling individual model blocks, but rather the model properties, dimensions and variations; (d) “analysis makes use of constant comparisons” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 9), the cited statement aligned with dissertation approach, with collection of data in the four year period, attributed to possibility of successful incident analysis and comparison to other incidents, which enabled the model improvement, making comparisons assist the research, protecting it against potential bias; (e) “process must be built into the theory, breaking a phenomenon down into stages, phases, or steps during process analysis” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 10). The dissertation model is composed from three main parts which makes the data analysis more manageable, and; (f) “broader structural conditions must be analysed, however microscopic the research” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 11), pointing out the importance of including broader analysis into the theory, researching all the facts surrounding the model theory and its essential parts.

A grounded theory approach should help the reader with the assessment of the model components, the assessment of the actual research process and help to achieve best possible process understanding of specific criteria regarding original sample, events and different categories selection (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, 17).

According to Corbin and Strauss, (1990), events should be indicated, as their indication is one of the research process criteria. In the case of this dissertation data collection, events are: (a) content upload and publishing; (b) HR firms website traffic and sessions; (c) the HR firm's organic keywords indexing; (e) the HR firms Google website ranking, and (f) SM content reads and impressions.

A sample of 508 pieces of content were posted on the Naton's SM network. These problem solving content pieces were used to collect data. Content pieces were published on different six (6) online channels during four year data collection period: (1) the company's four country (e.g., Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia) and international websites, (2) three LinkedIn pages, (3) five Facebook pages, (4) a blogger page account, (5) four Twitter accounts, and (6) a issue channel (a platform for publishing pdfs). Furthermore, the following data were collected (a) number of content published; (b) number of publishing sites; (c) number of unique firms website visitors every year; (d) number of organic keywords indexed by Google; and (e) Google's positioning index of Naton's firms keywords. Secondary data were not needed due to unlimited administrator access to all the needed data. However, three sources of information: 1) Google analytics, 2) Google web master tools, and 3) SM insight analytics tools were used to collect data and will be placed into appropriate tables to provide a comparative annual analyses.

Case Example

Data were collected from Naton d.o.o., a human resource firm, operating in four Adriatic countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia and an international HR

platform during the four year period, 2012 to 2015. Naton is a 20-year old human resource agency whose purpose is to recruit temporary and permanent employees for companies such as manufacturing, automotive, and pharma. From 2012-2015 Naton employed some 4, 000 people. It is considered one of the largest HR agencies in the region in terms of both size and revenues.

Naton was an ideal company from which to collect data for this dissertation for several reasons. First, the researcher was also the founder of the company and therefore the issue of accessibility to the organization, to the raw data, or to any other possible constraints was possible or not a problem. Second, the online development, that started in 2012, coincided with the timeline established in this dissertation. Third, major SM sites were selected for use in this dissertation based on their popularity and compatibility with Google.

Data collection

Data collection and coverage was done in two search cycles. The first and second search cycles included search through academic internet data bases. The databases included: EBSCO, DIKUL, ProQuest, Sage, and GOOGLE Scholar.

In the first cycle the following search key words were used: content, social media, system engine optimization, inbound marketing and outbound marketing to determine the availability of the literature in the field. Academic peer-reviewed journals, practitioner and popular business magazines articles selected for relevance to this dissertation were also part of a further refinement process or purposive sampling to select relevant literature and to dismiss non-relevant literature (Cooper, 1988).

The search produced 36 appropriate literature pieces, proving EBSCO as best source with over 80% usable articles. After reviewing find literature, specific authors were recognized. The second search cycle was based on literature from selected authors. An additional six articles and four studies were found using same academic internet data bases. Because of specific thematic, consulting and sharing the list of references with colleagues and experts were not possible with the exception of the mentor overview. Purposive sample method was chosen to select relevant literature and to dismiss literature that was not relevant for the study (Cooper, 1988). Studies that were selected for the literature overview were published in the following journals and reviews: *Psychology & Marketing, East Caroline University Journal, Journal of Marketing and Research, International Conference on Integrated Information, Sage, South African Journal of Business Management, Association for Consumer Research, Harvard Business Review, Wiley & Blackwell, Business Information Review, Fairfield County Business Journal, New Hampshire Business Review, Budapest Management Review, Journal of Financial Planning, Westchester County Business Journal, Central New York Business Review, and Journal of Marketing Education*. Chosen articles were published in magazines such as *South Carolina Business, Marketing News, Event DV, Air Conditioning Heating & Refrigeration News, Editor Publisher, Campaigns & Elections, Brand Strategy, Insurance Advocate, eWeek, Online, Bloomberg Businessweek and Fortune*.

Due to analytical need, collecting the data, this study falls under analytical type of research, locating and identifying the different variables involved, but also aims to employ predictive research (Bradford University School of Management), speculates on

possible future of positive effects on brand equity and business performance, proving positive effect trend with four years of examined data.

The study used a manual sample data collection. Despite the fact that data were double checked, there is a possibility of human errors, which can affect the results, but will not affect final dissertation goal, showing the positive influence of content on brand equity and business performance.

Due to a better process understanding and a number of benefits, this dissertation used business process modelling to show and design processes in graphic model, benefits of using graphic modelling are substantial, graphic model includes the graphic portrayal of business process features such as inter-functional communication, resource requirement, and sequential constraints (Geyer & Fourie, 2015).

It uses quantitative research methods to collect data based on the proposed model developed as part of this dissertation. To test the proposed model, data collection will be collected from one firm. The model will include factors such as (a) number of content published, (b) type of published content, (c) number of SM platforms used, (d) content format, (e) number of web page unique visits, (f) Google positioning index, (g) number of indexed organic words, and (h) number of WP downloads.

The model was tested at Naton, a human resources consulting company located in Ljubljana, Slovenia, during the time period 2012-2015. To test and confirm the model and answer the proposed research questions, this dissertation included a four year review of the model.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the research methodology adopted for this study. This chapter listed the data collection process using both qualitative and quantitative (mixed) methods. It aimed to establish an appropriate research process to be used to answer the research questions. It was argued that the most suitable method for this study was twofold. First, grounded theory was applied for the development of the proposed model using qualitative data. Second, for the purpose of testing the model quantitative data was used. This approach, based on two phases, allowed for the development and testing of a robust model.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the data collection and answers the research questions posed in Chapter 1 and 3. In addition, the model developed prior to the analyses has been presented and has been discussed based on the findings of the research questions. This chapter is organized as follows: (a) deduction section explains the deductive logic behind the research, (b) research questions are explained, (c) the findings are presented and discussed, and (d) the data findings and analyses supports the model.

Deduction

This dissertation used a deductive research approach. It began with observation to create a model. The researcher recorded observations and then constructed a model. Next, the researcher reviewed the related literature and narrowed the dissertation into a manageable process. The deductive approach was used to develop a model by building on existing theories. The model was confirmed based on the analyses of four years of data collected on Naton, the Slovenian HR company.

The model is a general online business model, derived from observation and extant theories which may be adapted by small and medium sized companies, (b) the model and its underlying theory provided general guidance for online support building brand equity and online business exposure, and (c) the model offers detailed support,

general guidance, and an explanation of proposed processes to SMEs companies, though other industries may take alternate approaches when applying the model.

Research Questions and Findings

This dissertation has its roots in extant research and theories. It has established a new e-business model applicable to small and medium-sized businesses that operate and promote themselves online. During the development of the business effect model, assumptions were made whether the proposed model could provide the needed results to Three research questions have been posed to test the model presented in this dissertation.

RQ1. To what degree does problem solving content in the form of online publications have an effect on brand exposure and performance?

RQ2. To what degree does problem solving content in the form of online publications have an effect on website traffic?

RQ3. What is the appropriate content format and which Social Media (SM) channels should be used for content publication and distribution in order have a positive effect using the proposed model?

The answers to these questions are presented and the model has been tested based on data collected by Naton from 2012-2015.

RQ 1.To what degree does problem solving content in the form of online publications have an effect on brand exposure and performance?

RQ 1: A test of the model showed a clear and strong positive effect on brand exposure and better business performance by the company. For example, in 2012, when the

business model was implemented Naton, the HR firm in this study, declared 8 million Euros in turnover and 150,000 Euros EBIT on group level. Some three years later, in 2015, the firm declared 12 million Euros in turnover and 800,000 Euros of EBIT. Online exposure with the HR firm's brand equity helped to increase the financial statement and created a vehicle for the firm to gain the trust of new clients. Naton's online activity was practically non-existing prior to 2012, and had only three major clients and no other marketing activity, other than proposed online marketing (i.e., business effect model introduction). Table 1 shows the increase in revenue during the 2012-2015 from 4 million Euros to 12 million Euros as well as the dramatic increase in major clients from 3 to 100.

Table 1. Naton's financial performance: 2012 to 2015

Source: Based on the HR firm's financial statements and for the years 2012 through 2015.

Table 2 presents the number of content produced by Naton, its distribution channels, and its content type.

Table 2. Number of problem solving content produced by Naton

Publishing channels	Content type	Number of published content in 2012	Number of published content in 2013	Number of published content in 2014	Number of published content in 2015
Website posts	Articles	17	5	27	44
LinkedIn	Articles				69
Blogger	Articles	0	0	0	10
Facebook	HR news	44	30	10	215
Twitter	Job posts	64	88	89	82
YouTube	Videos	0	0	0	1
Issue E-mail content distribution	White paper	0	0	6	14
	White paper	5	5	7	12

Source: Based on the HR firm marketing department

RQ2. To what degree does problem solving content in the form of online publications have an effect on website traffic?

Tables 3 shows an increasing positive results with the collected numbers. A special Google analytics and Webmaster tracking code was inserted into Naton's Web channels to enable precise analytics for the data collected. It also shows an increase in website traffic during four years period. In Year 1 of the data collection phase there were 1,619 unique visitors and in Year 4 there were 98,825 unique visitors.

Table 3. Website unique visitor's traffic results

Country of operation	2012	2013	2014	2015
Slovenia	1.619	12.413	47.067	55.980
Croatia		486	20.101	25.626
Serbia		48	3.600	6.667
Bulgaria			83	4.898
Global		91	2.728	5.654
Total	1.619	13.038	73.579	98.825

Source: Based on the Naton data gathered from Google analytics tool

Table 4 shows an increase in organic key words indexed by Google in 2012 (53) and in 2015 (476). (Note that the majority of these increases occurred in Slovenia.)

Table 4. Number of organic keywords indexed by Google for Naton

Country of Operation	2012	2013	2014	2015
Slovenia	53	432	443	449
Croatia		0	0	7
Serbia		0	0	7
Bulgaria			0	7
Global		0	0	6
Total	53	432	443	476

Source: Based on the data gathered from Google web master tool

RQ3. What is the appropriate content format and which Social Media (SM) channels should be used for content publication and distribution in order have a positive effect using the proposed model?

Table 5 shows the Google index achieved by Naton from 2012-2015, and the number of inbound links leading to the published content of the firm in relationship to Google's chosen keywords. Furthermore, it offers Google Webmaster index data, and the clicks counts from a Google search results page that landed the user on the company property. Clicks do not equal organic sessions in Google Analytics. The impressions

column revealed the links to the firm's site a user saw on Google search results. The count is aggregated by site or page. Click-through rate (CTR) column includes the click count divided by the impression count. If a row of data has no impressions, the CTR will be shown as a dash (-) because the CTR is divisible by zero. A position is defined by the average position of the top most result from the company site. For example, if the site has three results at positions 2, 4, and 6, the position is reported as 2. If a second query returned results at positions 3, 5, and 9, the average position would be $(2 + 3)/2 = 2.5$. If a row of data has no impressions, the position will be shown as a dash (-), because the position does not exist (Google Webmaster, 2016, <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/6155685?authuser=0>)

Naton achieved a strong Google index position using the proposed model. Table 5 lists 10 keyword example phrases of more than 476 indexed keywords groups obtained by Google from Naton's published content in the four year observation period. Table 5 also shows specialized and focused keyword phrases (i.e., keyword groups) that solved some unanswered questions or thematic gather most of Google's index attention and thereby confirmed the importance of high value problem solving content. For example, starting pay, keyword phrase associates with a specialized questions, was asked by many potential people seeking employment. Naton published a white paper covering this question which led Google to index position of this keywords with an 8.8, because the content was published in Naton's channel network. Google awarded the published content a high index value and placed Naton's home website at top position on Google's first page when a user used keywords associated with starting pay for a regular worker in Slovenia.

Table 5. Google positioning index for www.natonhr.com

Keywords	Click	Impression	CTR %	Google index position
Naton	644	3845	16.75	4.6
Naton Agency	100	335	29.85	1.2
Naton HR	24	147	16.33	5.5
Naton doo	16	71	22.54	3.1
Yearly Bonus Pay	5	27	18.52	8.3
Naton HR Global	8	85	9.41	7.0
Open Job Posts	3	49	6.12	8.7
Starting Pay	2	107	1.87	8.8
4 Hour Workday	2	27	7.41	8.7
Personal Income	1	60	1.67	6.4

Source: Based on the data gathered from Google web master tool

According to Google analytics which followed Naton's main website in the Slovenian market (i.e., www.natonhr.com) from September 2012 to the July 2015, some sizable data were found: (a) direct unique traffic increased more than 1000%, (b) new user visits increased more than 900%, and (c) new visiting session increased nearly 400%. A review of traffic for the same time period found that: (a) due to focused exposure of published content, direct access prevailed, occupying almost 94% of the website's access, (b) Google's organic search represented slightly more than 3%, (c) SM and referral cross linkage contributed an additional 3%. However, due to a limited possibility in the Google analytics tool, approximately 50% of the direct traffic leading to Naton's website, was sent to other publishing sites such as Issue, Slide Share, and Facebook in the cross linkage network. Similar trends on a smaller scale were also recorded for Naton in the other countries where it maintains a business presence.

Table 6 unifies the collected SM channel data for 2012 to 2015. Each channel insight analytics was used for detailed data collection and divided the data into three sections: (a) reads - which represent the exact number of read content on a specific channel, (b) impressions - which show the number of noticed content by the users, and (c) the uploaded content column - which describes the number of published content from Naton. The grey areas in Table 6 mark missing data due to channel analytics technical collection inability. The data showed the effect of uploaded content on specified channel reads and impressions and the effect of uploaded content on Naton's website sessions and unique clicks. Table 6 also provides a unique glimpse into the relationship between uploaded published content and its effect on channel reads and impressions (what gives a clear picture on the positive content impact). Finally, it shows the possibility of channel performance overview and aided identifying the best performing publishing channel: Facebook.

Table 6. Naton's SM published content statistics: 2012 to 2015

Channel	Reads	Impressions	Uploaded content
LinkedIn profile	128	1,994	69
LinkedIn global page	546	12,299	13
Blogger	3,495		16
Facebook Slovenia page	119,735	303,392	156
Facebook Global page	9,898	27,534	43
Twitter Slovenia		43,114	260
Twitter Global		3,067	50
Issue	1,456	20,354	24

Source: Based on the data gathered from analytics tools of Naton's publishing SM accounts: (a) LinkedIn, (b) Google's Blogger, (c) Facebook, (d) Twitter, and, (e) Issue. Missing data from grey areas were unavailable.

Table 7 offers data from each Naton's website. Google analytics was used to collect data by dividing the data into three sections: 1) sessions (represents the number of a website user visits, 2) click (represents the number of unique clicks made by Naton's website visitors, and 3) uploaded content (describes the number of published content from Naton).

Table 7. Naton's websites published content statistics: 2012 to 2015

Firm's Websites	Sessions	Click	Uploaded content
www.natonhr.com	84,832	105,242	766
www.natonhrglobal.com	9,179	10,410	34
www.natonhrcroatia.com	36,841	45,385	137
www.natonhrserbia.com	12,015	15,778	51
www.natonhrbulgaria.com	5,241	6,068	36

Source: Based on the data gathered from Google analytics tool

Naton was creating, optimizing, and publishing content according to model. The collected data from the model during the testing period had a positive effect on Naton's website visits, indexed keywords, and brand equity. It also had an positive impact on Naton's business performance during this period. Naton's website traffic increased more than 500%, and the number of indexed organic keywords increased more than 800%, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of the model.

While some online marketing models are available, none includes all the features in the model. By using the proposed model, marketing managers can gain support in developing online strategies in a clearly defined step-by-step approach. The model can help small and medium-sized companies plan, build, and execute their online marketing

approaches, and build their brand exposure more effectively, as model maps a possible path and process for companies to achieve better business results.

Figure 2 Dissertation graphical concept design

Model and Process Diagram

There are few available and proven business models available about online marketing in the fast-paced, quickly changing global online business environment. Many companies lack the knowledge to adapt and to support online business development (Ha, 2005). To address the problem, a business model was developed as part of this dissertation to help companies develop successful online marketing campaigns and to position their brands in existing new social media environment. To test the proposed model, data collection and research questions on Naton, an HR company. The model is a general online model and is not industry specific. Further, it can be adapted on a majority of small and medium sized companies. With limited funding and influence, small and medium-sized business occupy a weak position within the advertising industry, which

gives them uncompetitive prices comparing to the giants, so it is more difficult for them to reach customers (Csordás & Gáti, 2014).

The extant literature supports the view that firm generated content has had a positive effect on brand equity and brand exposure, and a direct impact on business performance. To help small and medium-sized companies position and expose their brand better online, the model should show the complete process from: (a) producing and publishing professional problem solving content, (b) using content management software (i.e. social media), (c) using a SEO process for better online exposure, and finally (e) recognizing the positive effects toward better company profitability.

The foundation for this model was based on previous research and further enhanced by four years of research on Naton, a Slovenian HR company, where the model was tested from 2012 to 2015. The results from testing the model showed positive results on higher brand equity and exposure, and resulted in better business performance and overall recognitions in the targeted region. This confirmation of the model is one of the major contributions of this study, because it maps a possible path and process for other companies to follow and modify accordingly.

The model is effective, is easy to use, and is suitable for use by other companies.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the positive effects of firm generated problem solving content on social media and online brand equity.

Figure 3: Conceptual business effect model on the positive effect of firm generated problem solving content on social media and online brand equity

Legend:

Rectangle : Decision variables

Oval : Model results

Oval braked : model side results

Circle : uncontrollable variables or events

Oval dotted : dependant variables

Brace : different part separator

Fat arrow : different variable factors

Straight arrow : certain relationship

(Source: author)

Table 2 presents each part of the three part model: 1) Part 1, Content and Distribution; Part 2, SEO; and Part 3, Results. Included within each part of the model is a variable and an explanation of each variable.

Table 2 Variable explanation for the three part model

	Variable	Explanation
Part 1. Content and Distribution	GPSC	Generating problem solving content
	OCD	Online content distribution
Part 2. SEO	CCS	Content and channel SEO
	CLNC	Channel and content link network
	CVA	Content visibility and availability
Part 3. Results	PEPI	Positive effect on Google's positioning index
	PEOW	Positive effect on the number of Google's indexed organic words
	PEMR	Positive effect on the on Google's multiple result hits
	PESMT	Positive effect on Social Media and website traffic
	PEBEE	Positive effect on brand exposure and equity
	PEBP	Positive effect on business performance
Dependent Variables	*Adequacy of content type and format *Number of published content *Number of available Social Media platforms and distribution channels *Employee qualification and project dedication *Other incentives	
Uncontrollable Variables or Events	*No change in SM and Google trends *User internet behaviour will stay similar in the future	

(Source: author)

Part 1: Content and Distribution

Problem Solving Content

Problem solving content is a company's generated content usually in the form of white paper. White papers reflect certain knowledge reference on the given topic and are perceived as professional literature that investigates a subject in-depth and more thoroughly than content on SM, blogs or websites (Marketing News, 2015). The main goals of structured problem solving content (i.e., white paper) are (a) knowledge sharing,

(b) education, (c) answers frequently asked questions, (d) advise to relevant professional topic, and (e) exclusivity.

Two key concepts emerged with the culture of content sharing: 1) authenticity and 2) transparency. Professional firm generated content must be authentic (i.e., firm or company knowledge), and transparent. These two concepts are rewarded by the reader and the focus of the corporate writing is on clear readable communication and on the delivery of value to the consumer. Content should not be simply marketing-orientated. (Barefoot & Szabo). It is better positioned in the reader's mind if it comes directly from a source, and if it includes pictures and graphics as the reader values exclusive content higher. "Words can be more vivid than images sometimes—as when a book is better than a movie—but for quick Internet consumption, a picture will win every time. And by the way, videos are even better than pictures" (Bailyn, 2011, 191).

The idea is to produce valuable problem solving content that helps the readers with potential problems, questions, or situations from specific business fields or practices. In return, value as an expert and brand value grows in the reader's prospective. If content is prepared and maintained correctly, readers can share it, and in a sense the brand marketing is free (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Table 3 presents the title of seven white papers Naton issued, their length-ranging from three to four pages each, and their https link.

Table 3 Problem solving content examples

White Paper Title	White Paper Length	White Paper Form	White Paper Link
21 recruiters benefitted from personal LinkedIn network	4 pages	pdf	http://natonhr.com/uploads/news/21_RECRUITER_BENEFITS_FROM_PERSONAL_LINKEDIN_NETWORK.pdf
Graphology ins and outs	4 pages	pdf	http://natonhr.com/uploads/white_paper/GRAPHOLOGY_INS_AND_OUTS.pdf
How headhunting has evolved through the years?	3 pages	pdf	http://natonhr.com/uploads/news/HOW_HEADHUNTING_EVOLVED_NATON_HR_WHITE_PAPER.pdf
How to convert open job into leads and leads into new clients?	3 pages	Issue	http://issuu.com/natonhrglobal/docs/how_to_convert_open_job_into_leads_
Internet job searching revolution	3 pages	pdf	http://natonhr.com/uploads/INTERNET_JOB_SEARCHING_REVOLUTION.pdf
What makes an extraordinary recruiter?	3 pages	pdf	https://issuu.com/natonhrglobal/docs/what_makes_an_extraordinary_recruite
Tips for HR candidates	3 pages	html	http://www.natonhrglobal.com/news/tips-for-naton-hr-candidates

(Source: author)

Online Content Distribution

To distribute written content online, specific knowledge about SM channels is needed. The term channel describes the growing number of communication tools, technologies, and platforms on the web, as a channel also serves as a delivery mechanism for created content (Barefoot & Szabo). To distribute firm generated content successfully, the right channels must be selected and specific content type must be published.

Table 4 presents several recommendations regarding publishing channels and content types.

Table 4 Online distribution channels, content type and form

Recommended channels	Channel type	Content type	Content download option	Recommended content form
Company's website	Company's website	Problem solving content	Link white paper	Pdf, slide share
LinkedIn	LinkedIn company page	Problem solving content	Link to white paper	Pdf, issue
Blogger	Company blog	Problem solving content	Link to white paper	Pdf
Facebook	Company page	Problem solving content	Link to white paper	Issue
Twitter	Company profile	Short news, announcing new content	Link to white paper	Issue, slide share
You tube	Company channel	Problem solving video content	Link to white paper	Video

Source: Naton Website

Naton's Website and SM

Naton's home website is a center of the linkage network. It is surrounded by SM profiles and sites. It is the company's online reflection and it offers the first line of contact to partners, clients, and potential new friends for the company.

Website optimization is critical with the combination of SEO friendly website design, quality website content, search engine friendly external content, quality linking, local SEO, developed SM channels filled with quality content, PR news and SEO friendly domain name (Purdy, 2016).

The domain name is one of the keys for a successful SEO. The main keyword should be a part of the domain name, preferably the entire URL (e.g., www.funnyvideos.com), if the key words are funny and are videos. Every keyword should be assigned to the landing page with related content and included in its URL (e.g., www.yoursite.com/keyword1.html) (Bailyn, 2011).

According to new Internet trends and Google directives, a company website should follow an inbound marketing philosophy and should include: (a) "content is king"

to explain the importance of publishing content to improve the company's website ranking, (b) should let potential users know that the company's areas of expertise and what sets the company apart from others, (c) should have an appealing visual website and content using infographic which makes the company's website and its content easy to understand, and finally (d) should share the content to establish the company's website as the source of the insightful data and information. In essence these features establish the company's expertise (see Albano, 2014).

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a business social network that connects people. LinkedIn members have a profile that serves as the foundation from which companies can build pages and groups. LinkedIn's profile represents the essence of a company's top management so any profiles need to be accurate. In addition, LinkedIn allows users to access its data base to assist clients in selling their services. It also allows users to publish longer form essays on their profiles and pages. LinkedIn generates content to reach the decision makers and to establish trust for a brand (Lashinsky, 2014). Naton used LinkedIn to publish open job post for executive positions, for white paper announcements, for white paper links, and for short white paper abstracts. Such posts created valuable inbound links for Naton.

Blogs

Blogs are innovative tool for sharing information and knowledge. Bloggers (people who blog) enjoy trust and provide strong social ties. Knowledge acquired and shared ultimately brings bloggers and users together. Blogs allow for the storing, gathering, and sharing of knowledge. They provide links between different sources of

knowledge and have an impact on social capital in knowledge acquisition and sharing (Chai, Das & Rao, 2011).

Blogs should be written weekly to be effective. They should contain between 600 to 800 words and they should include photos/graphics and relevant keywords to allow search engines to locate the easily. An abstract, which usually accompanies a blog, is a two-three sentence summary that can be inserted into the blog software to describe blog content (Baltzell, 2016).

Naton used Google's Blogger platform to publish problem solving high quality blog post content effectively making the platform a valuable company landing reading page. Naton also published written content and graphic to make the content (included associated keywords and links to its website) more attractive. Each new blog post created a new sub-blog page with a unique title and meta-description using related keywords for a Google result hit on Google's first page.

Facebook

Facebook represents a verifiable human individual, a business manager, owner, or an employee. It offers potential clients the ability to connect with others though events, groups and pages. Its pages are visible to search engines and are another publishing channel that offers independent publishing platform for created content (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010). Naton created valuable inbound links by using Facebook pages to publish open job posts, white paper announcements, white paper links and short white paper abstracts on its website.

Twitter

In 2006, Twitter was introduced to the SM community. It is a SM that restricts messages to 140-characters (or Tweets). This micro-blog is one of the most recent forms of SM to gain mainstream media attention, and currently has tens of millions of active users.

Millions of tweets are posted every second of every day. Since Google rewards new content, the indexing of Tweets by Google is a continuous process. When a tweet is posted, it is instantly indexed by Google and placed between top results on Google's first page for a few hours, and they are accessibility if correct keywords have been placed into the search window. Naton used Twitter to post short "teasers" with links to landing pages (e.g., Naton's website, issues, blogger) to publish created content.

YouTube

Online users select YouTube videos according to their beliefs and echo chambers or polarized groups that share the same view or are connecting through the similar interest. Users commenting patterns are accurate predictors of echo chambers formation. As such, YouTube videos are selected and viewed according to users' needs. Those videos that provide knowledge or problem solving value are viewed more frequently (Bessi et al., 2016).

YouTube offers other several benefits as well. For example, different business founders learned their craft by watching YouTube videos. In fact, learning could be acquired by watching YouTube videos. The YouTube search engine is an invaluable tool to locate answers to questions, and it has become a perfect publishing channel for

problem solving video content. Naton had a YouTube channel but its content had not been uploaded at the time this dissertation was in progress.

Part 2: System Engine Optimization (SEO)

When Google become the dominate search engine, things changed dramatically and companies had to create content rather than to "borrow" it. In actuality, these new changes have been positive, because quality is rewarded and "black hat" techniques have become less and less effective, forcing higher quality content. The new changes have also allowed an organization to shift focus from search engines directly to customers (Tornoe, 2016) and SEO has had a direct positive influence on brand visibility and business performance.

SEO plays an important part in the model developed as part of this dissertation. To be successful, content should be optimized to allow Google's search algorithm to locate and to connect it to the targeted audience. To achieve this goal, five basic factors are required: 1) key words must be selected, 2) publishing channels must be optimized, 3) high quality content must be written with added value for a reader, 4) accessible format for reading and sharing must be selected, and finally 5) cross channel linkage must be established.

Content and Channel SEO

Once selected publishing channels have been created with a company's main information, the provider can publish content. For credibility to be achieved, a company's channels must be transparent, professionally designed, and reflect a professional attitude and trust. Produced content should first be published on a company's website and it must

include a clean layout and a clear message with a direct link to generated content. A link must include chosen key words that clearly represent offered content. Many SM publishing channels offer key word input and content description to help Google to identify the content and push it to the final reader.

Keywords

The selection of key words is based on the written content. Key words should be included in the file name of the generated content article, the content title and content description on all publishing landing pages. Key words selection makes the foundation for SEO, and the chosen key words triggers published content to be found by targeted audience.

Choosing keywords is one of the most important components for online content exposure and it must be done when content is initially written. When defining keywords, (or search terms), designer must have some idea about what people would type into a search engine such as Google (Bailyn, 2011). Google constantly reads, measures and categorizes keywords that follow daily published content. According to Google Webmaster Guidelines, keywords are one of the major quality factors. They must be defined according to content and must not be manipulated:

Keyword stuffing" refers to the practice of loading a website with keywords or numbers in an attempt to manipulate a site's ranking in Google search results.

Often these keywords appear in a list or group or out of context (not as natural prose). Filling pages with keywords or numbers results in a negative user experience, and can harm [a] site's ranking. Focus on creating useful, information-

rich content that uses keywords appropriately and in context (Google Webmaster Guidelines, 2016, <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/66358>)

There are several tools available to help with keyword selection (e.g., SpyFu, SEO Digger and Google AdWords). If keywords are chosen correctly and represent published content fairly, Google will index them and rank them accordingly to their importance, thereby exposing published content to potential readers (i.e., clients) (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010).

Meta data

SEO factors must be aligned to ensure that published content is read. Keywords must be selected to ensure high quality content. Meta data should be defined and linkage must be established on the landing pages; otherwise, the SEO system will be inoperable. Specific key elements in Meta data code offer Google directions and descriptions about the website. SM channel/content are required for the desired SEO effect. First, the title should be composed from valid key words forming a description of a website, SM channel, or content. Second is the Meta name, composed from valid key words forming a description of a website, SM channel or content, in no more than 50 words. Third is keywords which should be listed separately in the code to draw specific attention. Three examples of Meta data follow:

(a) Meta data on HR firm's website:

```
<html>
<head>
<meta name="google-site-verification"
<meta http-equiv="content-type" content="text/html; charset=utf-8"/>
```

```

<title>naton hr global | member of work service group | human resource
agency</title>
<meta name="description" content="in naton hr, we know that without providing
the best candidates, we cannot become our clients first choice human resource agency.
we are dedicated to win-win approach, as we believe only partnerships can lead us
to long-term success - naton hr team at your service in Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade and
Sofia">
<meta name="keywords" content="naton, hr, human resource, work service,
permanent staffing, temporary staffing, recruitment, selection">
<meta name="robots" content="index, follow">
<meta name="revisit-after" content="1 days">
<meta name="rating" content="general">,

```

(b) meta data on HR firm's blogger page:

```

<head>
<meta content='text/html; charset=utf-8' http-equiv='content-type'/>
<meta content='a blog about solving human resource questions'
name='description'/>
<meta content='http://natonhrglobal.blogspot.com/' property='og:url'/>
<meta content='Naton HR Global' property='og:title'/>
<Meta content='A blog about solving human resource questions' property='OG:
description'/>
<Title>Naton HR Global</title>; and

```

(c) Meta data on HR firm's Issue page:

```

<Title>Naton HR Global - issuu</title>
<meta name="description" content="Millions of readers find and share the
magazines, catalogues and publications they love on issuu." >
<meta name="keywords" content="naton, hr, global, white paper, pdf, human,
resources, digital catalogue" >
<meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, initial-scale=1.0" >
<meta name="google-site-verification" content="5CyB-vqN7byHfN1pa3hf-
FFj_ecJbkgBJ7iJr3nso98" />

```

Link Network Building

Inbound links lead to a company's website and published content. During a Google search, Google locates every site whose Meta page title contains the words in that search. It then finds all trustworthy links and places the most trustworthy links on the first

page and the least trustworthy ones at the very end. Once the right page title is set, then it is about links (Bailyn, 2011).

Inbound quality links are similar to online currency. They play an important part of SEO and lift the ranking of published content. There is some consensus that SEO can be done on the company's website, but in fact the main attributes of SEO are high quality content and diverse link network.

Figure 4 shows the inbound links between the various social media platforms and demonstrates the linkages among the platforms as well as the company website.

Figure 4 Channel and content link network

Legend:

Oval : CMS (i.e. social media platforms, website, blog, video sharing service)

Straight arrow : Inbound links

Content Optimization

High quality content (e.g., problem solving content) offers a customer added value, provides answers to questions and helps with the topics from specific business field (Barefoot & Szabo 2010). Because of its added value, such content receives higher attention from Google, receives higher ranking comparing to low value content, and ultimately positions the published content near the top of Google's first page. It also positions the creator of the material as *the* expert in the eyes of the customer,

Content Publishing Format

To insure that the reader or potential client will not encounter a problem viewing, reading, and sharing published content, the following formats are recommended: (a) pdf, for content primary format, (b) issue, for online pdf catalogues, and (c) slide share, for online power point presentation. Examples of Naton's published content are presented on its website (see Figure 5), on its Blogger page (see Figure 6), its Facebook page (see Figure 7), on its LinkedIn page (see Figure 8), and its Twitter page (see Figure 9).

Figure 5 Published content Naton's website: <http://www.natonhrglobal.com/news/>

Figure 7 On Naton's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/natonHRglobal/?ref=hl>

Figure 9 On Naton's Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/NatonHR>

Part 3: Effect

Content and websites are ranked by Google on the basis of keywords, quality content, inbound links, Meta page description, trust rank and other factors. Based on these factors, Google positions websites and content through its "real-estate", Google's most valuable first page. Publishing high quality problem solving content adds value for Google users and leads to higher Google positioning index and Google's first page exposure.

Google Multiple Results

Google offers hundreds of products and services and its main ones include Android, YouTube and Google Search (Google.com, 2017). Google uses web crawlers to organize web content and produce a search index. Algorithms analyse what users are looking for and provide the results.

The number of multiple result hits will rise with higher number of published content on different channels. The goal of Google Search is to achieve as many result hits on the dedicated topic as possible, to direct the potential client to a company's published content, and to turn the client into an admirer of the company. Google results is a copy of each content or site Meta data (i.e., page title, description, keywords). Effective Meta data includes the most valuable keywords in a human and Google friendly way (Bailyn, 2011). Therefore, it is important to recognize other SEO factors that are necessary for content exposure. Due to importance of major SM platforms (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and Blogger) to Google, it is imperative to use them for content

publishing, because they bring additional Google results and help to ensure they appear on Google's most valuable first result page.

Brand Equity

Brand equity has been defined as a set of brand assets and liabilities that are linked to the brands name and symbol (Verbeeten & Vijn, 2010). Due to a huge growth and popularity of online SM networking web sites, marketers and consumers started to build and promote consumer-brand relationships under the umbrella of online communities.

Marketers can facilitate, promote, and advertise their brands, and consumers can manage and promote successful brand communities where they can lead other people to engage voluntarily in different community activities and ultimately promote the desired brand (Doohwang, Hyuk Soo, & Jung Kyu, 2011). This is one reasons that leads to online brand equity value and points to the importance on online brand value if positions are manage correctly. The concept of brand equity began in the early 1990s to bridge the gap between short and long term marketing success by denoting a non-financial market based intangible asset which reflects future profits resulting from the past activities (Ambler, 2003). In late 2000, brand equity become one of the main components for measuring marketing performance and an important source of competitive advantage especially in the service industry. The importance of brands on the internet as proxies has been used to create trust and to label brand equity as a key competition factor for online success (Christodoulides, de Chernatony, Furrer, Shiu, & Abimbola, 2006). Brand equity has recently received a good deal of attention from both managers and academics alike. It is now accepted as a core marketing concept and its importance has been recognized by the

media attention of consulting firm's annual rankings of the world's top brands (Verbeeten & Vijn, 2010). Creating, promoting, publishing, and sharing high quality problem solving content through online channels, companies' brand equity value rises and leads to better business performance and firms trust in the client perspective.

Business Performance

At the corporate level, business performance is usually assessed by Return on Investment (ROI) and measured by changes in the stock price and dividend. Despite its wide use, ROI has been criticized as the only indicator of economic rate of return (Jacobson, 1987). There is also non-financial business performance indicators (e.g., brand-equity measures) that are associated with businesses financial performance, referring to brand equity as incremental utility of value added to a product, suggesting that brand equity is a multidimensional concept, with key dimensions awareness, brand association and behaviour, extremely relevant to all companies, eventually leading to better business performance. Not all business performance is influenced by brand equity. To achieve better business performance product or brand must “stand out from the crowd” to sustain long-term financial durability. Brand equity measures influence stock performance and establishes a direct influence of brand equity on business performance (Verbeeten & Vijn, 2010).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provided the findings of the data collection and answered the research questions. In addition, the model was presented and discussed based on the findings of the research questions.

This dissertation used a deductive research approach. It began with observation to create a model. The researcher recorded observations and then constructed a model. In addition, the researcher reviewed the related literature to develop the model by building on existing theories. The model was confirmed based on the analyses of four years of data collected on Naton, the Slovenian HR company.

The proposed model is a general online business model that was developed from observation and existing theories. It may be adapted by small and medium sized companies. The model and its underlying theory aims to provide general guidance for online support, building of brand equity and online business exposure. Additionally, the model offers detailed support, general guidance, and an explanation of proposed processes pertinent to SMEs companies. As such, other industries may use alternative approaches when applying the model.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

This dissertation investigated company generated problem-solving content on social media (SM) and its effect on online brand equity. Furthermore, this dissertation tested a model and provided effective support for online marketing strategies for companies seeking an online presence. The proposed model may help support marketing managers to develop online strategies in a simple and uncomplicated step-by-step process.

Three research questions have been posed to test the model presented in this dissertation.

RQ1. To what degree does problem solving content in the form of online publications have an effect on brand exposure and performance?

RQ2. To what degree does problem solving content in the form of online publications have an effect on website traffic?

RQ3. What is the appropriate content format and which Social Media (SM) channels should be used for content publication and distribution in order have a positive effect using the proposed model?

The proposed model described in Chapter 4 formed the basics to support positive effect

on brand performance using SM. The testing of the model was based on four year of model testing and confirmed the positive effect on brand performance. The proposed model provides general guidance for online support building brand equity and online business exposure. The model serves as a manual for SMEs, offers detailed support, and explains proposed processes. However, careful consideration must be given to its application in different industries to ensure that content type, content publishing, SM platforms, and its relationships are aligned properly. The model can deliver positive effect on brand performance if certain criteria are met: a) if all elements of the model are taken into the account, b) if brand managers have company support, and c) if small or medium-sized companies embrace new marketing approaches. The importance of professionally-orientated content and its positive effect on brand visibility is an important part of the model as is the positive effect on branding (see Botha, Farshid & Pitt, 2011; Cheng, 2012; Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman & Kannan, 2016; Schweidel & Moe, 2014). Unfortunately, research has yet to explore structure or format of content to support companies online needs.

The publication and online distribution of problem solving content directly influences on publishers' website traffic. Data collected from Naton's four year model testing period indicated a positive effect on firm's website visits, indexed keywords and brand equity. This also affected Naton's business performance as evidenced by its growth over the four year period. For example, Table 3 showed an increase in website traffic during a four year period: from 1,619 unique visitors in year one to 98, 825 unique visitors in year four. The generation of online publication and problem solving content

had a positive effect on website traffic when all elements of the model were included, when content had added value and when content was written correctly-- it includes main key wording), when content was correctly distributed, and when content included links that lead to the website.

The main goals of structured problem solving content are knowledge sharing, education, answers frequently asked questions, advise to relevant professional topic, and exclusivity. While other content formats can also be effective, white papers reflect certain knowledge reference on chosen topics and are perceived as a professional literature that investigates the subject in-depth and more thoroughly than content on SM, blogs, or websites.

Problem solving high quality content is best for blog posts. Naton used Google's Blogger platform to publish problem solving content - a valuable landing reading page. Naton published written content and graphic to make the content more attractive. This content included associated keywords and links to Naton's website. New blog posts created new sub-blog pages with unique title and Meta descriptions. Using related keywords resulted in a Google hit landing on Google's first page.

Micro-blogging is the most recent form of SM to gain mainstream media attention, making Twitter a suitable choice for publishing short blog posts with links to complete problem solving articles. Introduced in 2006 ,Twitter gained rapid popularity and has millions of active users. As a result of the enormous number of Tweets posted every second by Tweetters and Google's policy of rewarding fresh content (Baltzell, 2016), indexing of a Tweet by Google is a continuous process--when a tweet is posted, it

is instantly indexed by Google and placed between top results on Google's first page. The Tweet occupies this position on the Google's first page for a few hours, offers its accessibility with the right keywords input in the search window. Naton used Twitter to post short teasers with links to landing pages (e.g., firm's website, issue, blogger) where created content was published.

Facebook offers another way to connect to potential clients and publishes problem solving content through its events, groups, and pages (Barefoot & Szabo, 2010). Facebook has the ability to post and distribute a firm's problem solving white papers, videos, pictures, and articles. Since Facebook's pages are visible to search engines, they became another publishing channel that offers independent publishing platform for created content.

LinkedIn offers similar approach to Facebook where companies can build pages and groups. LinkedIn is a natural publishing platform for firm generated content such as white papers, videos, pictures, or articles to reach the decision makers and to establish trust for the exposed brand.

Finally, some business founders learned their trade by watching YouTube videos. Formal classroom instruction was no longer totally necessary. Everything could be learned by watching YouTube videos and YouTube has become a valuable tool for finding answers to questions and has become one of the best publishing channels for problem solving video content.

Implications for Theory

This study took a novel approach to develop a model based on a deductive approach. The model was created using observations. The researcher recorded observations and then constructed a model. In addition, the researcher reviewed the related literature to develop the model by building on existing theories. The model was confirmed based on the analyses of four years of data collected on Naton, a Slovenian HR company.

This study made an important contribution to theory and social media research with regard to building an online business model that was developed from both observation and existing theories. This included an advancement of theories on small and medium-sized companies.

This study has made an important contribution towards understanding the effects of professional online content in Slovenia. Another theory advancement included an improved understanding of social media marketing and brand equity in Eastern Europe. While the study was limited to Slovenia, it has provided a solid springboard for future local and international research within this field.

This work also provides an understanding of online support, building of brand equity and online business exposure. Further light was shed on an understanding of support, general guidance, and an explanation of proposed marketing processes relevant to SMEs companies.

Implications for Management

The research objective was to provide working and effective support for online marketing business strategies. The proposed model may help support marketing managers to develop online strategies in simple and uncomplicated step-by-step process and thereby build their brand exposure in an effective scientific way. The model also allows managers to track process constantly, manage process relationships and measure their performance. Because information communicated through SM platforms were open and visible managers can use it to understand employees and recognize human capital. SM in workplace brings the employees closer to the company and encourages them to create company content which contributes to companies brand worth and better revenues.

The implementation of this model in company's marketing process can offer free unlimited content distribution, personalization and customer two-way communication and a more personal approach towards potential customers. SMEs are ideal candidates to adapt this model for behind any SME stands an individual, who can present itself fully through social media content directly to the customer.

Botha, Farshid, and Pitt (2011) investigated SM content tracking (i.e., what it meant to follow a brand on YouTube, Facebook or other SM platforms). The process of tracking began with a brief general overview of the SM phenomenon. It explained ways to distinguish between different SM platforms such as blogs, micro-blogging platforms, social networking websites, friendship websites, picture sharing websites, video sharing website and social news websites. The authors pointed out that brand visibility is needed

to construct any marketing strategy. For Botha et al., such data give a competitive advantage to any brand manager.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitation. First, there was the issue of limited time and resources. The proposed model focused only on intra-organizational processes and targeted online business strategies, which does not apply for offline approach. Due to unavailable and unproven business models covering online marketing and fast changing global online business environment, organizations lack the knowledge to adapt. There is also a lack of effective support for online business development (Ha, 2005). Therefore, it is more difficult for businesses to recognize the right model to adapt and use, giving proposed model limits for wider application. Old marketing techniques are embedded in the company's processes and marketers are often unwilling to try new approaches to marketing (Saye, 2011). Content production and the lack of computer skills that requires knowledge is usually difficult to find between organization employees which limits a number of potential model users, but this should be overcome with time. There is also a limitation outlining the brand manager's implication and identification of future research in this domain. Another limitation is the possibility of human error in collecting data which can possibly affect the results and outcome of the study.

Recommendations for Future Study

As Internet technologies evolve and change rapidly, there is a continuing need to conduct further research on this topic. For example, SEO webpage protocols needs

updating. There is also newly evolving content formats that offers new video options (e.g., VR or 360 degrees video streaming) that could benefit from investigation. Another area of study can focus on the changes in social media regarding content publishing, distribution, and communication. With the implementation of new online technologies people's online behavior, communication, and expressions are also changing and an investigation into these areas can present new opportunities for future study. Questions such as to what extent newly evolving technologies can influence brand visibility may be of particular interest.

Some future research should address the topic of SM content in its structure or type to support company needs. Questions such as the impact of speed at which new technologies are introduced on content would constitute interesting areas for further investigation.

Future research should investigate the findings of this case by reaching out to larger sized organizations. It is within this context that the research can better understand a more personalized approach to connect companies and their customers to determine the impact of social media channels. Questions such as what impact the size of a company has on the development of social media channels.

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