



Social Media in the Business-to-Business Context: Use and Value

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1. Executive Summary

Social media are now an integral part of how people stay connected and communicate. Given that personal relationships and interactions play a key role in the business to business environment, it is pertinent to investigate how social media can be successfully deployed by such organisations. This report examines the successful use of social media by businesses that primarily sell to other businesses. This was done by reviewing academic and practitioner literature that discussed specific examples of adoption of social media platforms by business to business firms, and how such adoption had added value to the organisation in question.

Our study identified examples of successful use of social media in small as well as multinational organisations, and in a variety of manufacturing and service contexts. The application most discussed in the literature reviewed was branding, followed by communications. There was also evidence of social media being used as part of the sales cycle, particularly in terms of lead generation. In addition, social media were deemed valuable in the areas of customer service and market intelligence.

The study also explored how business to business organisations are using social media to achieve their objectives. It is clear that social media require a style of communication different from other, traditional platforms. There is an emphasis on approachability, authenticity and interaction, and an increased use of stories and content that show the human side of the organisation. There is also an emphasis on visual content, such as archival or behind the scenes photos and, increasingly, video. This new style of communication is best achieved when there is participation from different parts and members of the organisation, and where there is limited red tape.

The findings from this study provide inspiration and guidance to business to business firms wishing to use social media as part of their marketing strategy. It should be noted, however, that the examples identified in our study, and mentioned in this report, consistently presented the perspective of the supplier organisation, and its perception of value and success. That is, the perspective of the business to business customer is largely absent from the literature, which is in sharp contrast with the business to consumer context, where there is a substantial research done on consumers' attitudes, motivations and expectations, which can guide social media investment. The lack of insight into the business to business customer's perspective means that business to business organisations may be missing on opportunities to expand the value derived from social media.

2. Introduction

Social media platforms have become ubiquitous, and permeated almost every aspect of daily life. As a result, being present on social media can bring many benefits to brands selling directly to consumers, from being a source of market insight (Canhoto & Padmanabhan, 2015), to a customer service channel (Canhoto & Clark, 2013), and even a vehicle for sales (Clark, Bryan & Shapiro, 2011). What is less clear, however, is how business to business firms can tap into the opportunities offered by these platforms (Quinton & Wilson, 2016).

On the one hand, the highly conversational and informal nature of social media make these platforms a natural fit for the business to business environment, where personal relationships and interactions play a central role (Huotari, Ulkuniemi, Saraniemi & Malaska, 2015). Furthermore, social media can support collaboration (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010), and offer very cost effective ways of engaging with customers (Rollins, Nickell & Ennis, 2014; Moncrief, Marshall & Rudd, 2015). On the other hand, the public nature of social media interactions makes some managers fear possible backlashes and negative attention (Katona & Sarvary, 2014), or even the loss of competitive advantage (Yadav and Pavlou, 2014). Moreover, some managers think that the light-heartedness of most social media content is at odds with the solemn image of business to business firms (Katona & Sarvary, 2014), while others see social media as a waste of time (e.g., IHS, 2015).

With social media technology well past the novelty stage, and with more and more workers embracing social media as part of their lives and their working practices (Rapp & Panagopoulos, 2012; IHS 2015), it is time to establish how social media can add value in the business to business to context. This report does that. Specifically, this report presents evidence of successful use of social media by firms that primarily or exclusively do business with other firms. It goes beyond the theoretical discussion of how social media platforms might be used in the business to business context, to analysing actual use of these media, by such organisations. In doing so, the report identifies the purposes for which social media are used, and the approach followed by B2B firms.

The next section outlines the approach followed by the researchers, to investigate how B2B firms derive value from using social media. Then, the following section describes how B2B organisations have been using social media to derive benefits in the areas of branding, marketing communications, sales, customer service and marketing intelligence. Subsequently, the report looks at the role of approachability, authenticity, interactivity and storytelling, when using social media in the B2B context. Finally, the report concludes with reflections for B2B companies wishing to use social media as part of their marketing strategy.

3. Methodology

The identification and analysis of the literature for this study proceeded as follows.

First, electronic databases such as EBSCO, WARC and Google scholar were searched, using the terms 'Social Media' and 'Business to Business' or 'Industrial Marketing'. The relevant articles identified through this search were reviewed to eliminate those that did not refer to actual use of social media platforms by business to business organisations – for instance, those articles discussing potential use, only.

Subsequently, the articles were analysed in order to identify those that described successful use of social media. Given that this project sought to identify how business to business organisations are deriving value from social media, in practice, we did not have an a priori definition of what successful use might be. Instead, we adopted the definition presented by the authors of the papers. While some articles discussed very tangible aspects such as the impact of social media use on sales (e.g., Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012) or the increase in brand awareness (e.g., Stelzener, 2015), others discussed less tangible positive outputs such as the impact on the formation of business to business relationships (e.g., Jussila, Karkkainen & Aramo-Immonen, 2014), or on brand perception (e.g., Katona & Sarvary, 2014).

Articles that did not mention any positive outcomes were excluded from the sample. Those that remained were categorised according to the application described. The articles were also analysed in order to identify the approaches taken by the various organisations. This includes the type of content posted and the managerial approach, as well as the platforms used.

Examples were identified in a broad range of sectors – from manufacture (e.g. oil and labels) to service (e.g., transport and software). Likewise, we found examples of social media use by organisations of all sizes, from start-ups to multi-nationals.

4. Applications of social media in B2B

While social media use is not as widespread or common in the B2B environment as it is in the business to consumer (B2C) context (Rodriguez et al, 2012; Stelzner, 2015), our study identified numerous and varied applications of this technology). These are summarised in Figure 1, and discussed next.

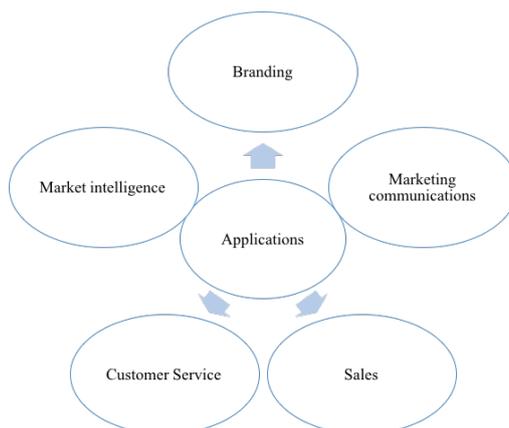


Figure 1: Successful applications of social media in the business to business context

4.1. Branding

The main benefits arising from using social media, for B2B, are around branding. For instance, in a survey of US-based B2B marketers, 64% of the respondents said that they had been able to establish thought leadership through the use of social media, while 63% stated that they had used these media to build or develop a loyal fan base (Stelzner, 2015). In turn, customers from Danish shipping company, Maersk, said that the company’s social media presence had not only improved their awareness and recognition of the Maersk brand, but also their perception of the company (Wichmann, 2013).

Our review of social media activity of business to business organisations identified three types of branding messages, posted by B2B companies (Figure 2).

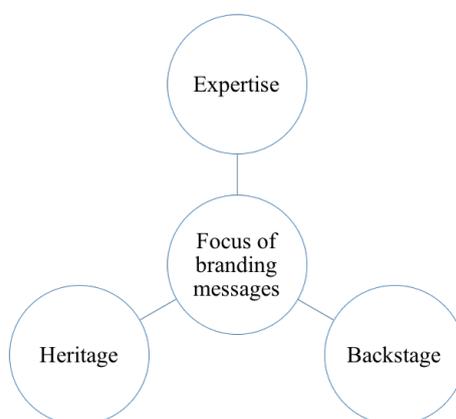


Figure 2: Focus of B2B branding content on social media

One of the types of branding efforts identified via our study concerned the establishment of expertise in a particular sector. This is in line with findings that one of the key drivers of the use of social media sites by business to business professionals is, exactly, to ‘find expertise’ (IHS, 2015). The companies identified in our study demonstrated, or sought to signal expertise, using a range of tools such as publishing reports or hosting webinars on matters relevant to the industry. Figure 3 illustrates two such instances, one from multinational conglomerate General Electric (GE), and the other from Dutch start-up, Usabila. Another way for B2B firms to demonstrate expertise is to share industry news, and by joining or even hosting group discussions about industry issues. For instance, distributor of heavy machinery, Toyota Equipment, shares industry news on Twitter, via the Twitter handle @ToyotaEquipment (Kelley, 2014). Maersk Line also shares industry news, though this company tends to do so via LinkedIn, and they also participate in discussions in various LinkedIn’s groups and forums (Katona, & Sarvary, 2014).

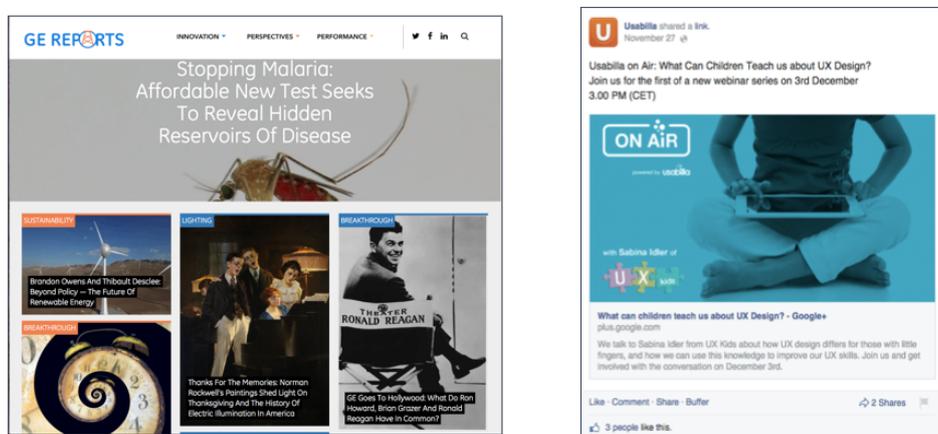


Figure 3: Example of use of social media to establish expertise

Another type of branding effort identified, focused on revealing the backstage operations. This emphasis may be related to the role of trustworthiness and perceived authenticity in business to business network formation (Quinton & Wilson, 2016). In our sample, companies mostly did this through two ways. One way was through status updates, usually complemented with pictures – for instance, about the acquisition of a new piece of machinery. The other way, was by producing and distributing videos focused on the production process. Figure 4 shows one example of such videos – this one was shared by Anglo-Dutch multinational oil and gas company, Shell, and is part of a collection of videos focusing on various aspects of the company’s operations.



Figure 4: Example of use of social media to reveal backstage operations

The other type of message identified in our review of branding efforts on social media related to demonstrating the company's heritage. B2B companies often invoke the company's history to show that they are trustworthy partners, to differentiate themselves from competition, or to show the coherence behind a portfolio of products or services that might otherwise seem disconnected (D'Esoppo & Glynn, 2014). Some companies communicated heritage by sharing historic marketing materials, such as old packaging and advertisements. One example of this approach comes from Avery Dennison, a global manufacturer of self-adhesive labels, clothing labels and tags, RFID inlays, and medical products such as tapes and wound dressings, and is depicted in Figure 5. Other companies communicated heritage by sharing materials about the company's history, such as stories and/or pictures of the company's founders, previous CEOs, old warehouses or company headquarters, historical equipment, or key events in the company's history. For instance, Maersk often posts pictures from its historical archive of photos of ships, seascapes, and ports; as well as historical pictures from the management team. One such story that caught the attention of social media users was an article (Figure 5), posted by Maersk on its Facebook account, about how one of its ships had rescued 3,628 Vietnamese fugitives in 1975 (Katona & Sarvary, 2014). The post, which included video footage from the ship's arrival in Hong Kong and an interview with the vessel's captain, not only generated high numbers of likes, shares and comments, but also e-mails from descendants of the fugitives (Wichmann, 2013).

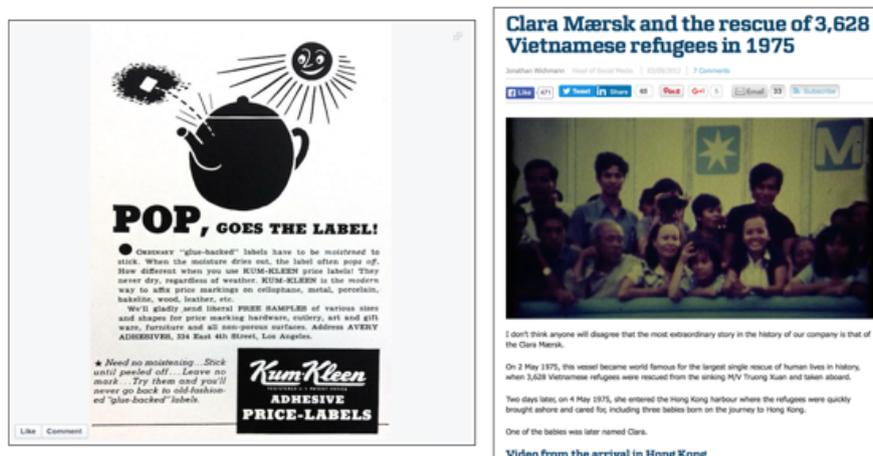


Figure 5: Example of use of social media to demonstrate heritage

4.2. Marketing Communications

Social media have emerged as major channels of communication, and our study shows that B2B is no exception. B2B organisations use social media technology to reach out and interact with a broad range of stakeholders, not just their customers. For instance, on its Facebook page alone, Maersk interacts with NGOs, current and potential employees, suppliers, competitors, regulatory bodies and shipping enthusiasts (Katona, & Sarvary, 2014). The use of social media for business to business communications may be driven by two factors. On the one hand, more and more people use social media as part of their lives, and how they communicate and search for information, and so it is normal that they transfer those practices to the professional context (Rapp & Panagopoulos, 2012). On the other hand, social media allows for very targeted communications (Wittlake, 2015), which are more cost-effective for the sender, and more relevant for the user, than broadcasting advertising.

Figure 6 summarises the three types of marketing communications activity identified in our study.

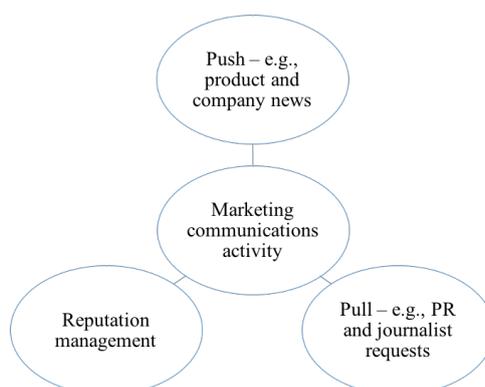


Figure 6: Type of B2B marketing communications activity on social media

One common type of marketing communication activity identified in our study was that relating to the announcement of product or company news. For instance, Figure 7 shows how US-based, software organisation MariaDB used Twitter to announce the releases of a new version of its database relational system. This post contained a link to the website, from where users could then download the updated version of that software. There was also evidence of social media accounts being used to communicate company news, such as the development of business partnerships, the publication of financial results, and other significant events in the life of the company. This type of communication activity is in line with findings from surveys such as IHS (2015), which show one of the main reasons why business professionals use social media is in order to stay informed of product launches and company news.



Figure 7: Example of use of social media for push communications

Another type of communication activity observed, consisted of responding to requests for information. It is quite common for buyers to use social media to contact a supplier or service provider (see IHS, 2015), and companies can respond to these requests for information directly, by suggesting phone or e-mail contact, or by directing the person to the company's website or other online source of information. Companies also use their social media presence to respond to, or to pre-empt, journalist and public relations requests. For instance, Maersk directs external press requests to its Flickr page (Katona, & Sarvary, 2014), to where the company has uploaded high resolution photos of its CEO and ships, among others (Figure 8).

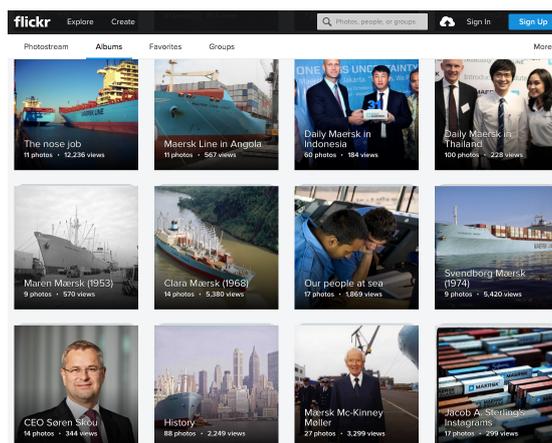


Figure 8: Example of use of social media for pull communications

In addition to regular marketing communications, social media can be a valuable aid in reputation management, particularly in the event of a public relations crisis. Once such a crisis occurs, it is vital for the company at the heart of the crisis, to communicate quickly, because the Internet spreads news faster than ever (Vanden Bergh, Lee, Quilliam and Hove, 2011). In addition, it is important to communicate in a way that restores confidence in the brand (Balakrishnan, 2011). Social media can help organisations manage public relations crisis quickly and effectively, because it enables the monitoring and identification of changes in sentiment towards the brand, and allows the firm to engage with the relevant online communities (Canhoto, vom Lehn, Kerrigan, Yalkin, Braun & Steinmetz, 2015). One example of a company using social media to help it manage a public relations crisis comes, once again, from shipping company Maersk. When one of Maersk's ships struck a whale, in June 2012, the company took to social media to keep the public informed about the event and its aftermath. The company used Facebook (Figure 9) to not only report on the event, but also express how upset the company was about it, and to handle questions from the public. Maersk also created a picture board on Pinterest, as a sign of respect for the whale. This proactive approach was in striking contrast with how such crises had been previously handled, when there had been an emphasis on reacting to queries, rather than volunteering information. However, the posts were very well received by the public, generating a high level of engagement (measured in terms of likes and shares), and attracting largely positive comments (Katona, & Sarvary, 2014).

Maersk Norwich whale strike

8 June 2012 at 04:30

Maersk Line does everything it can to avoid creating a negative impact on the marine environment. Despite these efforts on Wednesday 6 June we saw images of a 12 metre long whale caught on the bulbous bow of the Maersk Norwich. This image, of a noble and elegant creature accidentally struck down by a Maersk Line vessel deeply affected us all.



Below are some of the questions we were asking ourselves in Maersk Line:

What happened after the whale arrived in port?

When the ship arrived in the Port of Rotterdam, the Port Authorities called a zoologist to examine the whale. According to our information from the port, the whale was most likely dead when hit by the ship. The whale has been sent for destruction by the zoologist.

Figure 9: Example of use of social media for reputation management during a crisis

4.3. Sales

The B2B selling process has, traditionally, evolved and adapted as a result of technological changes (Moncrief & Marshall, 2005; Obal & Lancioni, 2013), and social media are no exception. Research indicates that not only do B2B sales personnel use social media as part of the selling process, but also that they use these social media tools significantly more frequently than their B2C counterparts (Moore, Raymond & Hopkins, 2015). This could be because of the more relational nature of B2B sales vs. B2C sales (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2013; Moore et al, 2015). Social media helps the process of B2B relationship building (Jussila et al, 2014), particularly in the case of interactions where the parties are geographically dispersed (Quinton & Wilson, 2016).

While there may be no record of sales done over social media channels, yet, these media can offer important push and pull opportunities, as per Figure 10.

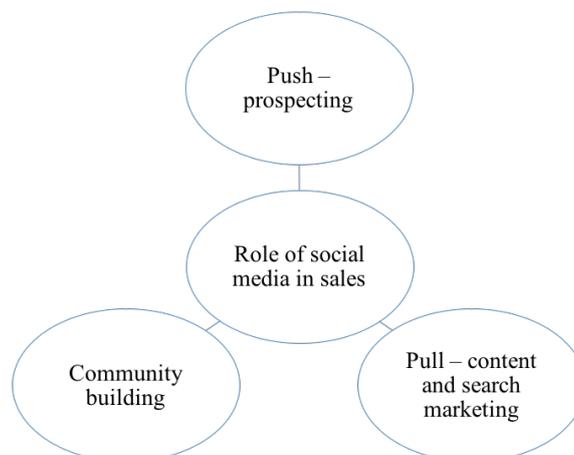


Figure 10: Role of social media in sales

Our investigation identified examples of B2B companies using social media as push mechanisms. Specifically, we found organisations using online social networking platforms, such as LinkedIn and even Facebook, to identify potential sales opportunities and trigger the sales process. While networks have always been an important source of new business, in the B2B environment (Möller & Svahn, 2009), the popularisation of social media in general, and online social networks in particular, has amplified the potential for connections and has accelerated the development of professional networks (Quinton & Wilson, 2016). This is because the online environment is particularly effective at bringing together people of equivalent status (Putnam, 2000), with common interests (Hampton & Wellman, 2003), and connected by pragmatic rather than emotional ties (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001; Lin, 2001). One company that used online social networks to generate sales leads was US-based, data management software company Aster Data Systems. According to Shih (2010), senior management at this company instructed staff to search for the term “data warehousing’ in the title or functional expertise of their online social network contacts. This way, Aster Data Systems was able to identify professionals who might be interested in the company’s products, more than a dozen of whom went on to buy a database solution from the company within a year (Shih, 2010). Sales staff can also use social media channels to collect information on a potential client before the first contact, thus making the first contact more targeted and, thus, more cost effective for the seller (Rodriguez et al, 2012). Targeting is also less invasive, and more value-adding and relevant for the client (Quinton & Wilson, 2016), thereby facilitating the development of deeper relationships (Shih, 2010).

Our investigation also identified examples of B2B companies using social media as pull mechanisms. Social media is now well established as part of the search process in B2B, particularly among the younger generation of organizational buyers (Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012). These professionals are able, and often prefer, to find the information that they need online rather than by talking face to face with a salesperson (Moncrief et al, 2015). Therefore, some companies have created informative content, which answers the questions that potential clients may have, when they are search for information online. These companies share the content on their websites and on social media, using relevant keywords and hashtags to make the content more findable. One example of a company that followed this approach was Morgan Lovell. This British office design and refurbishment company, created a range of content to address the key questions and worries that potential clients might have. For instance, the company created step by step guides to managing an office refurbishment, checklists of key issues to consider when designing or relocating an office, and whitepapers on sustainable office design, among many others (Figure 11). This content was posted on the website using relevant keywords, and shared on social media. A potential client searching for information about an office design or refurbishment problem that they might be facing, would find the content produced by Morgan Lovell. Through these interactions with the content produced by Morgan Lovell, the potential client would come to see Morgan Lovell as an expert in the field, and a helpful and trusted source of advice.

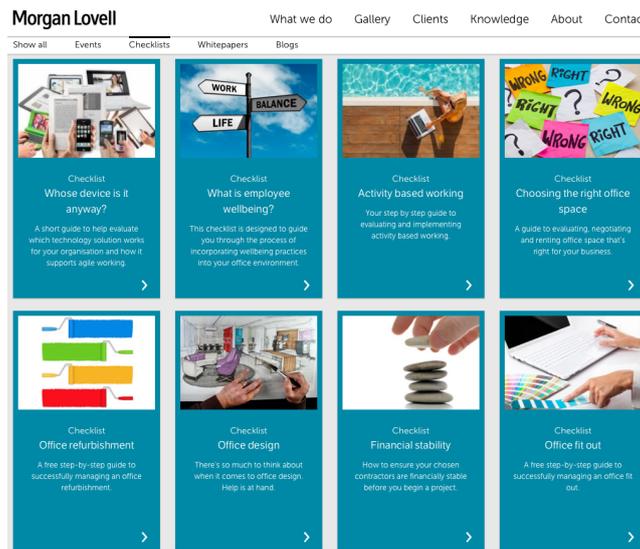


Figure 11: Example of pull sales activity on social media

In addition to creating push and pull opportunities for lead generation, social media can help managing the sales process. That is, social media can help maintain the connection, and deepen the relationship, between the parties in those cases where contact has been made, but the potential client is not ready to buy, yet (Rodriguez et al, 2012). Companies can achieve this by organising seminars and webinars, which give clients valuable information as well as access to the company (Lager, 2009). Another approach is to participate in online communities and discussion groups, where firms can not only access potential customers, but also influential opinion leaders (Rodriguez et al, 2012) and peers (Buday, 2011). Participating in selected communities and nurturing influencers can be a particularly good strategy for small and medium B2B companies, which lack the resources to be present on multiple social media channels (Fertik, 2014). An example of community building is that followed by Martindale-Hubbell, a US-based information services company serving lawyers and other legal professionals. Martindale-Hubbell built an online community offering free online legal assistance to the public, and hosting a searchable database of lawyers (Figure 12).

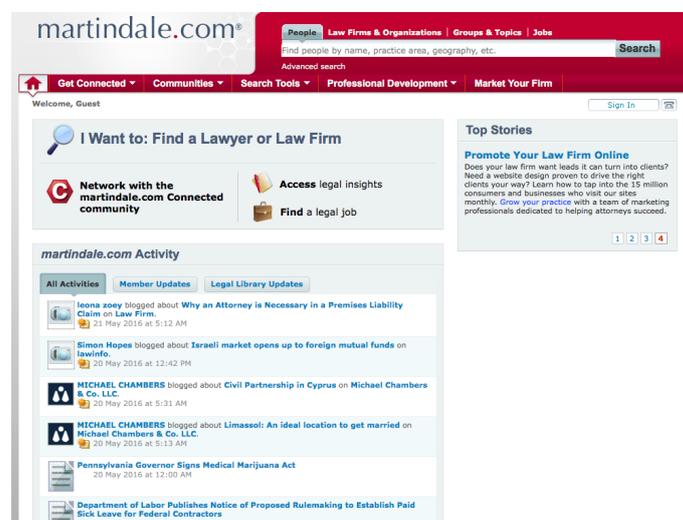


Figure 12: Example of community building on social media

4.4. Customer Service

Customer service and after-sales support are an important driver of use of social media in the B2B environment. For instance, more than one-third of respondents of IHS (2015)'s survey listed 'technical support' as one of the reasons for using social media sites. But it is not only buyers that benefit from using social media for customer service purposes. While some B2B managers fear possible backlashes from such public conversations (Katona & Sarvary, 2014) or worry about providing sensitive information which might give competitors an advantage (Quinton & Wilson, 2016), handling customer service issues via social media can be greatly beneficial to sellers, too. This is because transparency can help build or restore confidence in the brand (Balakrishnan, 2011). Moreover, other customers often join these social media conversations, sometimes helping solve the customer service problem without the customer care team having to intervene – e.g., Dell's and Maersk's Facebook page, or SAP and Lexis-Nexis's online communities (Buday, 2011; Katona & Sarvary, 2014). This means that social media can actually be very cost-effective means of supporting the company's customers. It also means that social media can do more than offer tangible support to customers; they can also be sources of informational, emotional and social support (Canhoto & Clark, 2013), which create value for the firm as well as the members of the community (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga, 2010). Figure 13 depicts the two ways in which social media were used to provide customer service, as identified in our study.

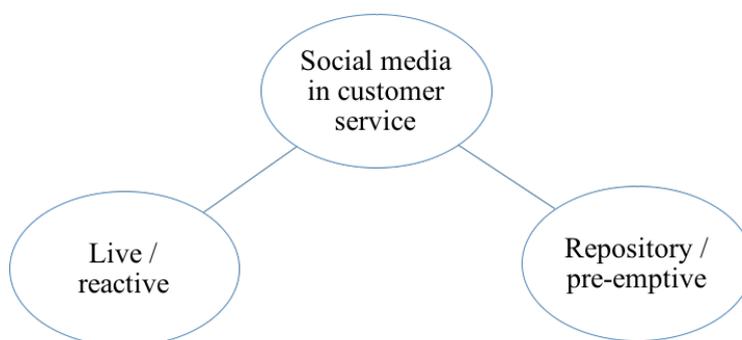


Figure 13: Use of social media in B2B customer service

One of the forms of using social media for customer service, identified by our study, was by replying to customers' questions in real time. By doing so, the company is positioning itself as accessible and listening, which is believed to reduce switching behavior among dissatisfied customers (Johnston, 2001). One example of this form of customer service is provided in Figure 14, with Toyota Equipment using its Twitter presence to invite customers to ask any questions about their equipment. Another approach is that followed by multinational, computer manufacturer Dell, which monitors social media for mentions of customer service issues related to the brand, so that these can be handled promptly (Katona & Sarvary, 2014). Yet, another approach is to allow customers to post questions on the company's Facebook page or online community, as German software company SAP does, which are then handled by the customer care staff or, often times, other customers perusing the page (Buday, 2011).



Figure 14: Example of live / reactive customer service

The other form of using social media for customer service, identified by our study, was the use of repositories of answers or solutions to common customer service queries. Many B2B buyers are *'fully capable of finding needed information through the internet and social media'* (Moncrief et al, 2015, p. 47). Therefore, these repositories offer a cost-effective way of solving common problems experienced by customers, because they pre-empt queries and avoid the need for direct contact. These repositories often take the form of a list of common questions and associated answers (e.g., FAQ pages) (Buday, 2011). Alternatively, they can take the form of a curated collection of documents (e.g., product manuals or how-to guides) that guide the customer on aspects of using the product, or on how to find further information. An example of this latter format is provided in Figure 15.

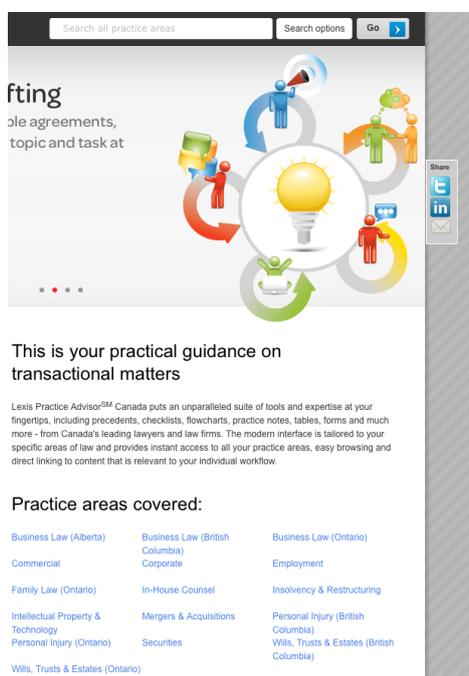


Figure 15: Example of archival / pre-emptive customer service

4.5. Market Intelligence

The ever-growing volume of product or brand-related conversations on social media platforms (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009), has captivated the attention of marketing researchers and managers, as it promises to offer valuable insight into market behaviours and

motivations. On the one hand, social media allow for the collection of data in real-time, unobtrusively, and in a cost-effective way (Murthy, 2008, Christiansen, 2011). On the other hand, there is now an abundance of commercial software tools that mine textual data and produce reports of expressed opinions and sentiment about the brand, quickly and demanding very little manual intervention (Sterne, 2010). As such a growing number of companies have changed their processes and workflows, in order to be able to regularly collect and mine social media data to obtain market insight (Bughin, Bui & Harryson, 2015). Social media data can provide valuable intelligence about two aspects of the market: customers and competition (Figure 16).

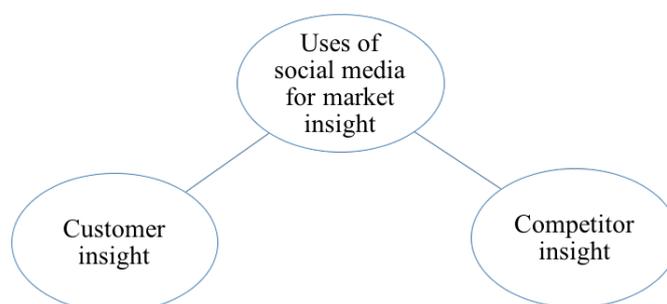


Figure 16: Use of social media for market insight

As more and more people use social media to communicate and access information about their experiences, so conversations about consumption experiences and consumption drivers become more common on these platforms. These conversations, and the conditions around them (e.g., time, device, social media channel, or context), can be recorded and, for instance, integrated with the Customer Relationship Management system (Rodriguez et al., 2012) to assess a client’s potential or to develop targeted interactions. This insight can also be used for product and service innovation. Box 1 gives an example of how Maersk built on insight derived from social media conversations to develop a new product.

Vibrant conversations

(Maersk) has created a discussion group (on LinkedIn) for the Daily Maersk service, which ships cargo from Asia to Europe.

“We know which customers are using that, we have their email addresses. We have invited them to be part of this group because we want to be able to monitor what they say and spot trends. A vibrant conversation with our customers can tell us much more than a survey.”

Maersk Line also uses LinkedIn to bring together shipping experts to discuss issues like piracy, trends affecting the container industry and innovation. This is how the company came across the idea of a container that can be folded when empty to take up only one tenth of the space of conventional containers.

Source: <https://www.simply-communicate.com/case-studies/company-profile/maersk-line-sets-b2b-social-media-example>

Box 1. Example of use of social media for customer insight

But companies can use social media for more than monitoring customer conversations. As more and more companies and professionals start using social media, so it becomes possible to glean valuable competitive intelligence. Companies can do so by monitoring, directly, the company's social media presence, and that of key employees. For instance, one of the main giveaways of a company's change in strategy is the building up of new skills. With so many professionals on LinkedIn, it is relatively easy to spot how talent is moving. Then, looking at the background of the new recruits vs. the company's activities, companies can infer their likely moves. For instance, the launch of 'Storyboard' on blog hosting platform 'tumblr' on May 2012, came as no surprise to those who had been following the company on LinkedIn and noticed that they had been hiring people with editorial skills. Geo tags, too, can offer valuable insight. For instance, the geolocation details attached to an employee's Instagram post will reveal their location, and this in turn can give an important clue regarding business developments. Figure 17 provides an example of an application which automatically discloses the location and travel plans of its users.

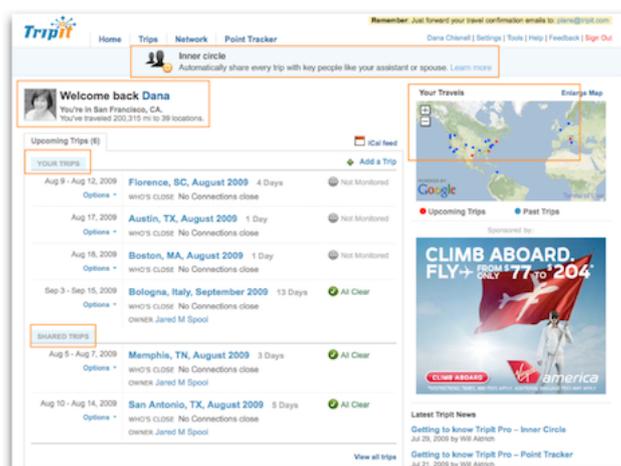


Figure 17: Example of location updates via social media

Employees can also give out clues, inadvertently, about projects that they are working on. For instance, they can ask for technical help on an online forum, or mention webinar that they have attended. Or they may simply have stopped blogging about a hobby because they are very busy at work, and this information, pieced together with other inputs, may suggest an impending product launch. Box 2 gives an example of how individual social media updates, can be very revealing when put together.

From data gathering to engaging and tracking

Social media can also provide windows into the plans of competitors, suppliers, and customers. Consider, for example, how competitive analysts from one organization used LinkedIn to piece together, virtually, an advanced look at new features a major technology company was planning as part of a product upgrade. Because the company’s software developers were publicly sharing information about their work projects, it was possible to produce a surprisingly accurate view of the new product, with significant implications for the R&D and marketing strategies of suppliers within the major player’s ecosystem.

Source: <http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/high-tech/our-insights/how-social-intelligence-can-guide-decisions>

Box 2. Example of use of social media for competitive insight

Rather than monitoring competitors, some companies opt to monitor industry experts as well as social media users who curate relevant information from good quality sources. Table 1 summarises the tools and approaches available, to develop competitive insight from social media, and how these can replace or complement traditional analytical approaches.

Objective	Traditional tool kit	Social-intelligence tool kit
Industry dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Porter’s five forces (analysis of forces at work) Structure, conduct, performance (SCP) Value chain analysis Analysis of consolidation/fragmentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network intelligence: analyzing real-time reactions across industry players, responses to changes Examples: Alterian, TweetReach
Competitive landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> War game and game theory analysis Benchmarking Cost structure comparison Psychological profiling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Real-time competitive intelligence: tracking revenue growth and product usage, marketing success, brand mentions Examples: BoardReader, Radian6, Socialbakers
Future trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trend interaction analysis Granular opportunities Scenario planning Competitive trend exposure (benchmarking exposure to trends vis-à-vis peers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crowd intelligence: tapping into followers and fans for new insights and innovations Weak-signal analysis: identifying emerging trends early Examples: Facebook, LinkedIn, Glassdoor.com
Opportunity/market sizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market sizing by triangulation Estimation of achievable customer base in a previously undefined market Penetration of addressable market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Live testing: getting direct feedback from users on new products/ideas Data mining: using text-analytics to estimate market size Examples: Attensity, Autonomy

Source: <http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/high-tech/our-insights/how-social-intelligence-can-guide-decisions>

Table 1: Analytical tools for competitive insight from social media

5. Approaches and platforms used

While the previous section reported on what B2B organisations have been using social media for, this section will briefly consider the approaches and platforms used by those same organisations.

In terms of how B2B organisations use social media channels to achieve their marketing objectives, it is clear that these channels required a style of communication different from other platforms. Specifically, there is an emphasis on approachability, authenticity, interactivity, and storytelling (Figure 18).

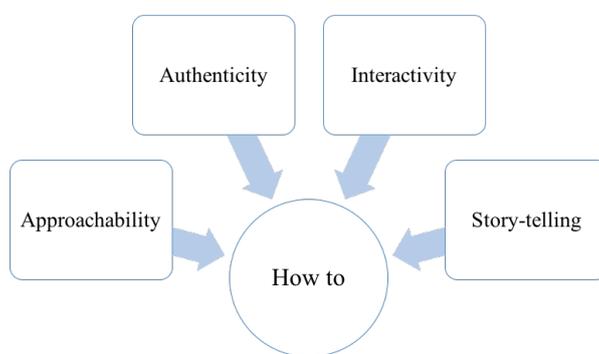
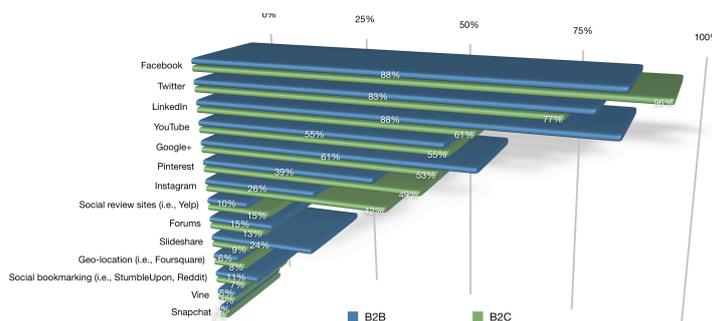


Figure 18: Approach to social media

The examples and organisations considered in this report were all characterised by being very approachable. Being approachable starts with being accessible and, thus, use those platforms where customers were present already (Fertik, 2014), and where they wanted to engage with the companies. This explains why Facebook is such a popular channel for B2B companies (Figure 19), even though it is not traditionally thought of as a professional medium. Youtube, too, is emerging as a popular platform in B2B, possibly because of the way many people, today, search for information (Marshall et al, 2012).



Source: Stelzner (2015)

Figure 19: Popular social medial platforms

Approachability is also reflected in the relatively informal style adopted in many social media content. There is an acknowledgement that, even though these conversations are taking place in the B2B context, the customers use these networks for B2C as well as personal purposes, too (Katona & Sarvary, 2014). Hence, companies do well in adopting a professional communication

style, but straightforward and without jargon. And there is room for quirkiness and originality, too, as exemplified by the post shared by Maersk, reporting on the transport of a giraffe between Melbourne and Auckland (Figure 20).

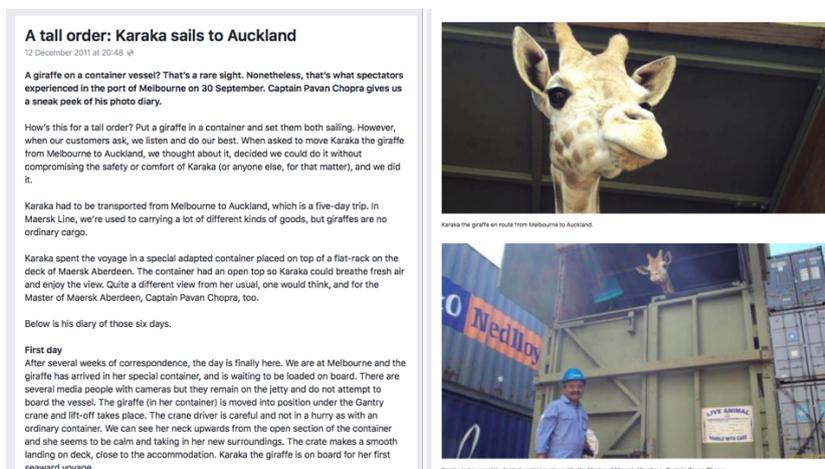


Figure 20: Extract from Maersk's Facebook page

The examples considered in this report also placed an emphasis on authenticity. Social media are not a place for corporate, manufactured messages. Instead, it is suited for content that shows the day to day of the company, and even its personality. This is where drawing on a company's archive and history can be very beneficial, as it allows the company to tell its own unique story. Another way of communicating authenticity is by providing a human face to the social media presence, as opposed to an abstract, corporate voice – for instance, the employee handling a customer query on social media can add their initials to the posting. Yet, another way is by sharing behind the scenes stories and images, as exemplified in Figure 21.

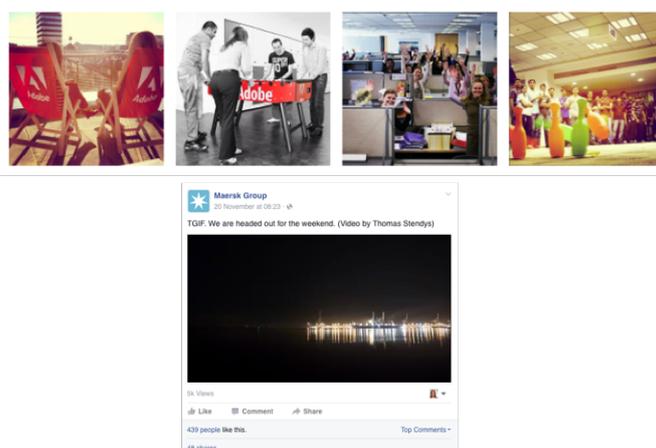


Figure 21: Extract from Maersk's Facebook page

In addition to the emphasis on approachability and authenticity, there is an emphasis on interactivity. This means that social media activity tends to focus on conversations or on sharing content that is valuable to the customer (Rodriguez et al, 2012). This is not to say that the company does not post corporate news; they do, but focusing on what is valuable for the customer. Interactivity also comes from acknowledging and amplifying comments from the

customers, such as thanking the customer who mentioned the company on a post, or sharing a photograph posted by a customer or fan (e.g., boat spotters, in the case of Maersk).

Finally, it was also clear that B2B companies using social media placed an emphasis on storytelling. Examples include telling the company history and sharing archival material (see Figure 5), and keeping customers updated on a particular process (see Figures 20, above). Increasingly, these stories are told with the aid of photos and videos, mirroring the rising popularity of visual content on social media platforms.

6. Concluding comments

This document reported on the findings from an analysis of the social media activity of B2B companies identified, in the academic and managerial literatures, as using social media successfully.

Even though the previous sections reported on the successful use of social media, it does not mean that it was easy or straightforward for the companies mentioned to start using social media as part of their marketing activities. On the contrary, the literature suggests that many social media managers struggled to get buy in from their organisations, and that it took some time to get support from the rest of the organisation. For example, the manager fronting the social media initiatives at Maersk, a company which was mentioned several times in this reported and which is generally referred to as a case study of successful use of social media in B2B, reported that he faced scepticism, both internally and externally. The following quote, taken from Evans (2013) illustrates that: *“When I started, as far as social goes, we were at zero—absolute zero. People would tell me, ‘We’re not right for social media, we’re boring, no one’s going to like us, and who will support us?’ A lot of people inside the company as well as outside just didn’t think it would take.”*

It was also clear from our investigation that it takes some time for companies to start seeing the benefits from using social media. For instance, while the benefits in terms of market insight and costs savings may be visible within the first year, others like lead generation, may require a couple of years, to be noticeable (Stelzner, 2015). In fact, this pattern is like that of other technological investments – for instance, investments in customer relationship management systems – whose benefits take some time to materialise (Rodriguez et al, 2012).

The other important insight derived from our analysis was that it is better to adopt an exploratory approach, starting with one or two social media channels, first (Fertik, 2014). Having said that, it is important to create accounts in all the relevant social media channels quickly and even if there are no immediate plans to use those channels. This is to avoid the username being taken by another party, maliciously or not. It is also useful to experiment with different types of content and frequency of posting, to find out what resonates best with the customer, and works best for the organisation. For this, it is advisable to follow a bottom-up approach, with key decisions regarding when and what to post left to those closest to the customer, in order to be able to maintain spontaneity and flexibility (Katona & Sarvary, 2014). In terms of who is best positioned to lead this effort, it seems that most significant factors are enthusiasm and familiarity with the tools (possibly from personal experience), rather than age, perception of usability or job function (Keinanen & Kuivalainen, 2015, Moore et al 2015).

In summary, there seem to be four key ingredients for successful deployment of social media in B2B: support from the senior management team (SMT), patience, a willingness to experiment, and a bottom approach to decisions regarding content.

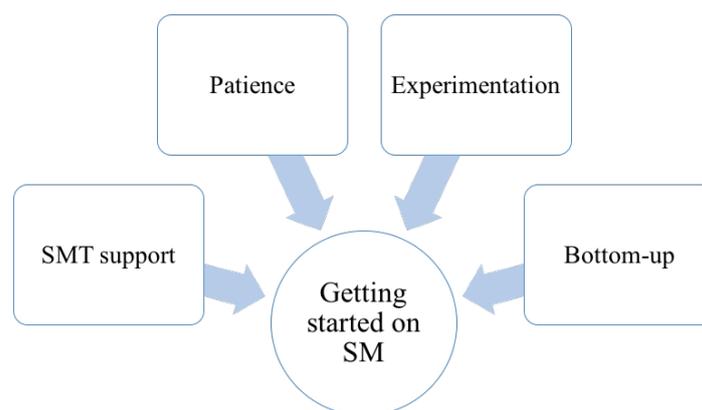


Figure 22: Key ingredients for initial social media success

The notions of successful use presented in the literature, and investigated in this study, were quite varied, and ranged from tangible aspects such as cost savings or revenue generation, to intangible ones such as relationship development or brand perception. However, there is a gap in the literature, in the sense that most of the work done regarding B2B use of social media neglects the perspective of the B2B customer (Keinanen & Kuivalainen, 2015). As a result, our study, too, reported instances and cases that described success from the perspective of the business to business supplier. This means that there may other benefits that can be derived from using social media in the B2B context; or that larger benefits could be obtained in the areas identified – but which we are not aware of. This in contrast with the B2C environment, where studies (e.g., Canhoto and Clark, 2013) have looked at perceptions of value from the perspective of the consumer, and identified aspects where consumer expectations differed from what the literature posited that consumers might value or need.

In the B2B environment, too, it is likely that there is a gap between the potential benefits and challenges of using social media, and those obtained or desired in practice (Jussila et al., 2015). So, future research, should explore specifically the social media needs and expectations of B2B customers.

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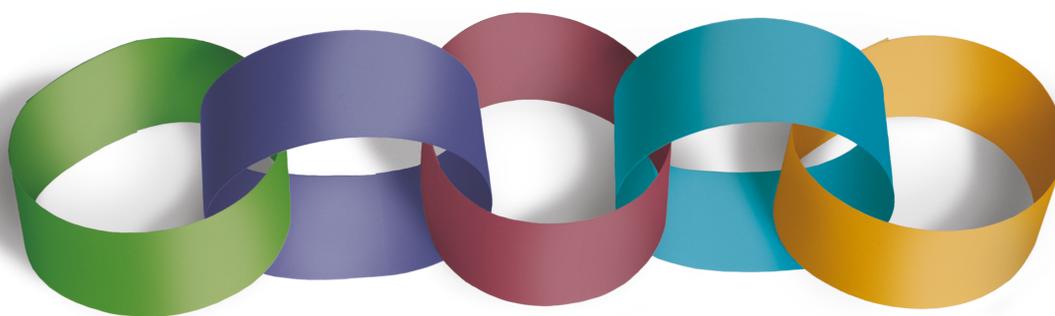
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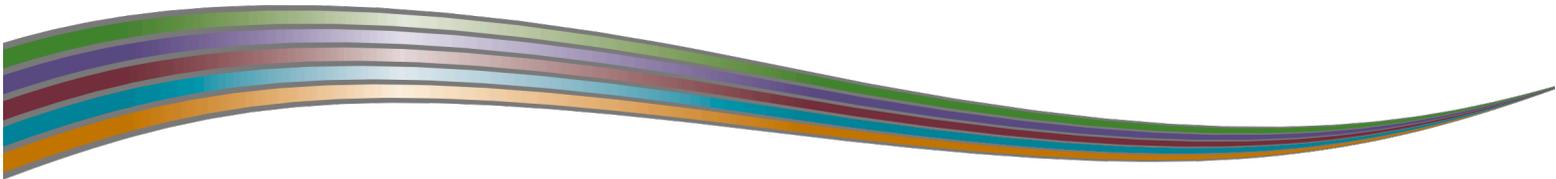
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