



**Investigating Social Media Strategy in  
Organisations: Implementation and Platform  
Evaluation**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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# ABSTRACT

The implementation of SM is considered an important criterion that influences the accomplishment of business performance and achieves competitive advantage. However, there is a limitation in SM research concerning the implementation of SM strategy and the selection of suitable SM platform for business. Therefore, the investigation and analysis conducted in this study provide an understanding of the application of SM in business by examining the implementation process and the selection of SM platform. Accordingly, a SM strategy framework was developed for a practical implementation of business which includes three stage-process.

This empirical research context includes two field investigations in relations to the views and experience of the SM personnel who participated in this study. Both investigation phases were analysed using thematic analysis with respect to the interpretive qualitative analysis approach. The research revealed that companies do follow directly or indirectly some base guidelines in employing SM but do not have a strategic implementation process in carrying out this activity as described in the framework presented. Also, companies are required to consider selecting a suitable SM platform for business which leads to added value to the holistic strategically implemented process.

The analysis of the SM strategy framework revealed that an alignment of SM strategy and business strategy could be established through strategic implementation. The implementation process of SM strategy would require company's readiness as described in the framework to ensure successful SM integration to support in achieving business goals. This research provides in-depth knowledge of how the implementation process can be conducted in stages and the application of this technological innovation.

The results of the analysis of the framework indicated that companies establish a presence on platforms where their customers are located. Leading to further investigation in the second phase where Practice theory is employed. Revealing an in-depth understanding on how platform evaluation can be carried out by examining the actual act of enacting the selection process, understanding the routine and considering the individuals involved in shaping and implementing platform evaluation in the company. Therefore, the findings can be used by managers or key SM personnel to implement SM strategy efficiently to improve business performance and applied by researchers for further evaluation and analysis of this process.

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To my Father, I owe you my life. Thank you, God Almighty.

# **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my dearest family and to God Almighty.

# PUBLICATION

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>SM</b>	Social Media
<b>SNS</b>	Social Networking Sites
<b>B2C</b>	Business to Customer
<b>B2B</b>	Business to Business
<b>C2C</b>	Customer to Customer
<b>IS</b>	Information System
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>CRM</b>	Customer Relationship Management
<b>e-WOM</b>	Electronic-Word of Mouth
<b>PRS</b>	Products Review System

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# 1 Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Social media (SM) are online platforms that help global collaboration and sharing amongst users. With the rapid growth and availability of network bandwidth and technology, SM had a rapid increase in usage, which enables users to connect with one another and share contents (Kietzmann et al., 2011). By doing so, SM platforms have a significant amount of data which contains useful and knowledgeable information (Cheung, Lee and Wagner, 2014).

According to Cheung et al. (2011), the study of online social networks, purposive value, self-discovery, entertainment value, social enhancement and maintaining interpersonal activity are the critical factors for SM adoption. These social networking sites give people a platform to share their personal lives with friends and family through pictures, videos and in words too. Zolkepi and Kamarulzaman (2015) studied the role of media needs with regards to the adoption of SM. The study showed that the use of SM is influenced by three types of requirements: personal need, social need and tension release. These demands have driven the creation of various SM innovations which has increased usage.

SM is being used for (i) Personal reasons: keeping in touch with friends that are hundreds of miles away. (ii) Business purposes: widely embraced by businesses with the rapid rise of Internet marketing, connecting with customers to help solve some challenges they face with products and getting direct feedback from them too. (iii) Business networking: it allows business to business (B2B) to a network by sharing ideas or partnering together for projects. (iv) Marketing: details on products, new products, redefined products, best sellers and so much more can be posted on SM sites for marketing purposes. (v) Entertainment: music and videos are quickly spreading on SM (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

While discussing SM, electronic-Word of Mouth (e-WOM) can't be left out because the majority of online referrals/comments/feedbacks are done on the various SM platforms available. It is important to state that brand equity is no longer measured by the amount of money an organisation invest or have; instead, customers are dictating the value of an organisation by what is said amongst them. Jansen et al. (2009) define e-WOM as an electronic form of conveying information from one person to another, and this information plays a lead role in a customer's purchase decision. In commercial situations, e-WOM involves sharing

opinions, feelings about a product, services and experiences with other people. Positive e-WOM is a reliable medium for organisations to gain customers because people tend to rely on friends, families and also not familiar people in their social networks on their opinion on products they claim to have used. Duana et al. (2008) research state that people appear to believe unbiased opinions from people outside their inner cycle social network; an example for this is online reviews.

However, so many companies have adopted the use of SM and e-WOM practice in their business. In spite of the advantages, some companies are yet to identify what their SM presence is to entail thereby not fully benefiting from using SM as a technological innovation (Jansen et al., 2009).

This study acknowledges the importance of adopting SM into the business and exploring the advantages of the business reaching more people over the Internet. Also, it highlights that companies lack the strategy to explore SM to its full capability efficiently.

In this chapter, these outlines will be followed; background of SM, the current use of SM in companies, the motivation for research, research aims, objectives and research questions, research methodology, research contribution and structure of the thesis.

## **1.2 Background of Social Media**

The increase in global usage of Internet media and applications has a tremendous influence on the social interaction between individuals and society (Cooke and Buckley, 2008). From 2000 to 2015 there has been an increment of Internet users from 544% to 753%. According to statistics from the Internet World Stat, the population of the world as of 2015 is 7, 264,623,793 and the world Internet users are about 3,079,339,857. It was also reported that the majority of this population uses SM mainly (Internet World Stats, 2015). Initially, SM started as a medium of interaction and information sharing, allowing Internet users to exchange media context between themselves (Cooke and Buckley, 2008). Recent research has shown that SM is a censorious area of interest for marketing scholars and 88% of marketers use SM and spend up to 60million dollars annually on advertising. Having a good relationship with consumers through SM has proven to show significant returns in business (Okazaki, Katsukura and Nishiyama, 2007).

According to Whiting and Williams (2013), the seven themes or reasons people use SM are: social interaction, Information seeking, pass time, relaxation, communication tool and convenience utility.

- ❖ **Social interaction:** As the name implies, uses SM to communicate and interact with others. According to Ko, Cho and Roberts (2005), it is scaled at the meeting with people of similar interest and keeping up with them and the things going on around them.
- ❖ **Information seeking:** This theme defines how SM is used to find information and also educate oneself.
- ❖ **Pass time:** This represents using SM as a means of occupying time and relieving boredom. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) suggest that the internet is used when people have nothing else to do.
- ❖ **Entertainment:** SM is used to provide enjoyment and entertainment. Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) used a term call escapism, which was defined as pleasurable, fun and enjoyable.
- ❖ **Relaxation:** This usage is described as using SM to relieve the day to day stress (Whiting and Williams, 2013).
- ❖ **Communication utility:** According to Whiting and Williams (2013) this SM usage is defined as communication, facilitation and providing information to share with others.
- ❖ **Convenience utility:** This provides convenience and usefulness to individuals. Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) used the term convenience, which was explained as having the convenience to shop on the web wherever and whenever.

In early 2015 it was recorded that Facebook has 901 million users, LinkedIn has approximately 161 million and Twitter with 140 million users worldwide. These statistics show the value, importance and influence these applications hold. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), exposing a business to the online community can be one of the best business decisions as it takes advantage of the growing number of people frequently using SM applications with a high potential of creating business opportunities. The exposure of a business to these platforms will hence enlarge the number of potential customers.

However, it is not enough for business to only create a presence on SM by creating a page on Facebook or create a Twitter account but to use SM effectively. In other words, businesses are supposed to develop a strategy for its use and also identify the reason why they want to be involved in the online world.

## 1.3 Current Research on Social Media for Companies

For many businesses, it is vital to engage in SM to benefit from the opportunities it provides. According to Harris and Rae (2009) companies have recognised the opportunities that lie in the adoption of SM; to build, maintain trust and commitment with customers as the key stakeholders.

The different SM platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc. are used to enable online interaction to share and collect information about products and services. The platforms can serve as a place where different ideas can be obtained from a vast range of population concerning the development of new products also.

In past research, studies have shown that SM adoption has created a high positive impact on businesses that incorporate this technology into their innovation process in comparison to companies that are yet to do the same (Smith and Taglino, 2014). According to Li and Li (2014), SM creates a cordial relationship between a company and its customers, thereby, influencing various aspects of consumer behaviour which includes purchase behaviour, awareness, information acquisition, post-purchase communication and opinions (Paniagua and Sapena, 2014). According to Jiang, Luo and Kulemeka (2016), from a business perspective, SM can be used in various ways to improve operations and enhance business profile. SM enhances communication, maintains a good relationship with existing customers and attracting new ones, intensify the word of mouth effect, advertising the company's products and services, improving brand awareness and increasing traffic to websites. Businesses are increasingly attempting to adopt and implement SM as an integral part of work life and to enhance competitive advantage (Carmichael and Cleave, 2012).

SM has brought about an improved and more efficient way of running a business digitally. According to Weisgerber and Butler (2011), SM has enabled organisations to gain exposure of the needs, opinions and desires of a wider audience and also provide an opportunity of connecting with a highly targeted population that would be potential customers to the organisation. From the company's perspective, SM creates a better communication process between customers, stakeholders and the business itself, which progresses to an innovative process in the organisation (Lehmkuhl *et al.*, 2013).

As stated above, the potential benefits of the use of SM practices are quite significant. Individuals can communicate, and exchange information with people around the world and companies have the potentials to reach a large number of customers (Zolkepli and Kamarulzaman, 2014). Using SM, companies can establish a presence online which can be used for promotion of their products and render better services to their customers (McCann and Barlow, 2015). Also, the benefits extend to reaching potential partners and customers easily.

There is a limited study on the SM platform suitable for business. According to Cestyakara and Surendro (2013), different companies have different visions, business strategies, customer target and products, so companies are advised to investigate the platforms available and choose which is best appropriate for the company's use to meet target audience. Companies who fully benefit from SM are those who do not only establish a presence but also effectively use the technology to enhance positive growth (Gorman, Resseguie and Tomkins-Tinch, 2009).

It is important to state that despite the positive change SM brings to both our personal lives and business; it is cost-effective, which makes it easily accessible. According to Lehmkuhl et al. (2013), the United Kingdom (UK) had the highest adoption level on SM technology; next were United States of America (USA) and Russia respectively. It is safe to say these countries are on the top list of the most successful countries in the world and their high involvement with technology would have gained them the attained position. Gao *et al.* (2012), state the factors which affects the low level of SM usage can be both economical and political variables in different countries. Inadequate infrastructures for the stable Internet can also reduce the acceptance level. In general, businesses are adopting SM, thus magnifying the impact consumer to customer (C2C) conversations have in the marketplace. Unfortunately, most marketing managers do not know how to incorporate SM into their business strategy (Berthon *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, managers are challenged by the role SM play in the company's promotional process. Companies frequently ignore the threats and undermine the opportunities created by creative customers and lack the understanding of the various forms SM take (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Kietzmann et al. (2011), gave an illustration of seven SM functionalities; presence, relationship, reputation, groups, identity, conversation, sharing. These functionalities were described in the study as a means to help managers understand their audience and engagement needs. For example, managers will need to have an understanding of the role of each of the functions in order to select a suitable SM platform for the company.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2009), there are different SM applications available, and more are developed regularly. It is not wise to participate in them all but choosing the right platform(s) for your purpose is dependent on the target audience to be reached. Different SM applications attract a special group of citizenries. For this reason, companies should be active where their customers are present. For instance, if your target group is book readers/lovers, a content community where people share novels, verse forms and even academic books is a suitable position for your function. Using different applications can be a worthwhile strategy which will enable a wider potential audience to reach, and it is of the essence to keep the information the same to avoid contradicting messages across different SM platforms. For example, the information posted on Facebook should be the same information put up on Twitter (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009).

Depending on the company's focus area, a platform can be developed, or an existing third party platform (Facebook, Twitter Instagram etc.) can be applied. Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) suggested that it is preferable to use an existing platform as user-based presence has already been established, but also observe that in some instances it is wise to develop a new one as the required platform is not available. Whatever the decision is; to build, develop or have both, it is essential to understand the features of the platform(s).

## 1.4 Research Motivation

Companies invest in their SM activities because they acknowledge the importance to participate in SM conversations to protect their brand reputation, increase engagement with the customer and increase sales (Keegan and Rowley, 2017). Additionally, in today's business environment, C2C conversation/thoughts/reports has a tremendous impact on the company's reputation (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Before the digital age, a dissatisfied customer can converse with a circumscribed number of people about their experience with a company. However, with the availability of the Internet and SM, an unhappy customer can bear on their displeasure with over 15million people, and this will cause a negative impact on the company (Park and Lee, 2009). As companies increasingly use SM for business, it is essential to adequately integrate SM into the business to contribute to achieving business goals.

The research on SM strategy is limited. There are a few researchers in the area of strategy such as; reputation management, adoption of SM and activities and benefits of SM (Keegan and Rowley, 2017). Despite the expanding interest in the impact of SM in business, there is still a limited research on the implementation of the SM strategy in a troupe. Furthermore, research shows that there is a need to engage with customers in their choice of SM platform (Edwards, 2015). Therefore, it has become inevitable to successfully integrate SM into the business without a strategic implementation process.

SM provides an avenue for secure communication for both customers and managers. The connection between customers has limited the control businesses have on the capacity available in the public knowledge base concerning the company (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Companies may not have control, but they can influence the conversations and direct it to the mission, performance and goals of the business. For example, creating an SM presence can enable customers to engage with other customers who share a similar interest. By thus doing, the company has created a community of shared interest for like-minded individuals.

Therefore, research indicates that little attempt has been taken in to examine the implementation of SM strategy. Also, the knowledge to identify the suitable platform(s) to create a company's presence (McCann and Barlow, 2015).

## **1.5 Research Aim, Objectives and Questions**

The research is informed by an underlying assumption that the successful implementation of SM can positively influence the SM activities for business purpose and that the selection of SM platform can contribute in achieving the desired outcomes if applied effectively. However, the process and benefits of integrating SM strategy with business strategy have not been realised in some companies where they are implemented.

The previous studies are focused on the use of the SM, its adoption and uses. Although SM has several advantages to business, its potentials have not thoroughly been explored for competitive advantage. Therefore, it is significant for companies to efficiently implement SM strategy and select the most appropriate SM platform for their business.

This study aims to propose a framework for the implementation of SM strategy in companies and to strategically select an appropriate SM platform(s) for business purpose.

To achieve the research aim, this study attempts to carry out the following objectives:

- ❖ Objective 1: To gain an extensive understanding of SM studies, to identify and explore the elements of SM strategy from the literature.
- ❖ Objective 2: To propose a framework for the implementation of the SM strategy in organisations
- ❖ Objective 3: An empirical investigation to examine the proposed SM strategy framework
- ❖ Objective 4: Further investigation to gain insight into the platform evaluation process
- ❖ Objective 5: To provide detailed steps for managers to successfully integrate SM into business

The research questions that motivate this research is stated below:

- ❖ Question 1: How do companies implement SM in their business?
- ❖ Question 2: How are companies identifying and evaluating platforms most appropriate for their business needs?

The research questions above were systematically developed to guide the study and achieve the aim of the research. The first questions provide a richer understanding of SM implementation process while the second question provides the required factors needed for platform evaluation. Also, the phenomenon under investigation highlights the consequence for not evaluating the platforms at the company's expense. Additionally, the research questions provided the structure for conducting this research, its limitations, the development of data collection guide and the type of data collected (Bryman, 2008).

## 1.6 Research Methodology

The philosophical stance applied in this study is the interpretivist approach. Interpretivist approach is used because there are societal, political and cultural issues relating to SM strategy implementation. Hence, the study of SM strategy implementation can not be detached from an organisation and its cultural context. Additionally, interpretive research approach is appropriate for this study because it allows concepts to emerge from field data rather than using

preconceived theories (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). This particular research required rich empirical data in order to provide a better understanding of SM implementation process. Interpretive approach addresses the various meanings people ascribe to a phenomenon, and also, grants access to gain insight on a particular situation. This approach helps to test the application and implementation of SM by companies and allowing the researcher to identify new concepts from the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Therefore, the interpretive approach seems appropriate for analysing the research findings (DiMaggio, 1995).

Qualitative research methodology has been chosen for this study because this approach is suitable for analysing the context in their natural settings while trying to understand phenomena about people and their interpretation (Denzin et al., 2000). Qualitative research requires empirical data to provide an in-depth understanding of the SM strategy and platform evaluation process. Also, giving knowledge on the different meanings and perspectives of things, it bears a serious emphasis on the procedure to follow and why decisions were made which will become handy when tackling and answering the research questions (Gregor, 2006).

For data analysis, a thematic analysis approach is applied. The thematic analysis identifies, analyses and reports patterns within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This analysis describes data and interprets the research subject matter (Boyatzis, 1998). Initial codes are being generated from the theory-driven analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Crabtree and Miller, 1999; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The interviews were analysed using the Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) hybrid thematic analysis and Crabtree and Miller (1999) deductive thematic analysis of both phases respectively.

The interview approach has been selected for this research. The interview is particularly useful in getting the story behind the participant's experience. The researcher can probe in-depth information about a subject. The interview is commonly used in information system research (Kvale, 1996). There are different types of an interview; Telephone interviews, face-to-face interview, video interviews, formal and informal interviews, and email interviews. Qualitative research interviews are suitable for addressing "what", "why" and "how" questions and can be styled as unstructured, semi-structured and structured (Kvale, 1996).

## 1.7 Research Contribution

This study seeks to contribute to the developing area of SM strategy research by proposing a theoretical framework for implementing SM in companies. The framework will introduce the guideline for the analysis of the SM strategy framework implementation process that will be adopted in this study and described in the next chapter. This study will include empirical and theoretical investigation on SM strategy implementation process in companies. Hence, lead to further research on choosing the appropriate platform for business; providing a roadmap for obtaining strategic benefits from implementing this SM for business use.

From a theoretical perspective, the study will contribute to the knowledge of SM research and the implementation process in companies in an attempt to acquire an in-depth understanding of the area of SM strategy. Also, this study contributes to the existing SM strategy frameworks by concentrating on the implementation process. Practice theory is being applied to analyse platform evaluation process. This theory provides an understanding of the practices used for selecting the suitable platform for business.

From a practical perspective, the research findings will provide a framework for the implementation process. Also, it can help develop and improve their strategy by revealing the process in detail to gain competitive advantage and to gain a better understanding of the SM strategy implementation process. The proposed framework will be useful to companies interested in evaluating their existing or potential strategy. Additionally, this is particularly important to the decision-making process for both at management level and project group level. This contribution is vital as SM is a fast-growing, innovative technology used in the industry irrespective of the sector.

Hence, the research entails a theoretical and empirical investigation of the process involved in the development of an approach and will lead to the development of a framework.

## 1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured in seven chapters as represented in Figure 1-1. And described as follows:

Chapter one gives an overview of the SM, provides the background for the current use of the SM, the research questions, aims and objectives, motivations for research, research methodology and research contributions.

Chapter two provides in-depth background on SM. The literature discusses the relationship between companies and customers. The literature review covers the different types of SM, the impact of SM on both companies and customers. The chapter further discusses on how SM can be applied in the company. Also, the literature covered SM strategies and research on existing frameworks. A SM strategy framework is proposed. The chapter ends with theoretical approaches and the selection of practice theory. Practice theory will assist in understanding the process of the platform selection.

Chapter three the research methods used in this study to examine the implementation and application of SM by companies. This chapter gives the necessary issues to be considered before selecting an approach for research. Also, the chapter describes the underlying research assumptions for information system research and the rationale for the approach taken and its suitability. In addition, background information about companies involved in this study and their experiences of using SM is discussed.

Chapter four provides in detail the empirical context of this study. The first phase of the data collection is described in this section. The results and research findings are discussed concerning the proposed framework, and a refined framework is presented. The research findings from this phase provided data for further investigation for the selection of suitable platform for business.

Chapter five the analysis of the second phase field study will be presented in this section. The background information on the second phase will be presented. Practice theory will be employed in this study to help understand the process of selecting the suitable SM platform in companies.

Chapter six presents the discussion of both the first and second investigative phase.

Chapter seven provides the conclusion of the research. It summarises the research findings of both stages and gives an overview of the research contributions. Lastly, it provides the limitations of the study and future research directions.

A summarised reference of the structure is shown in figure 1-1.

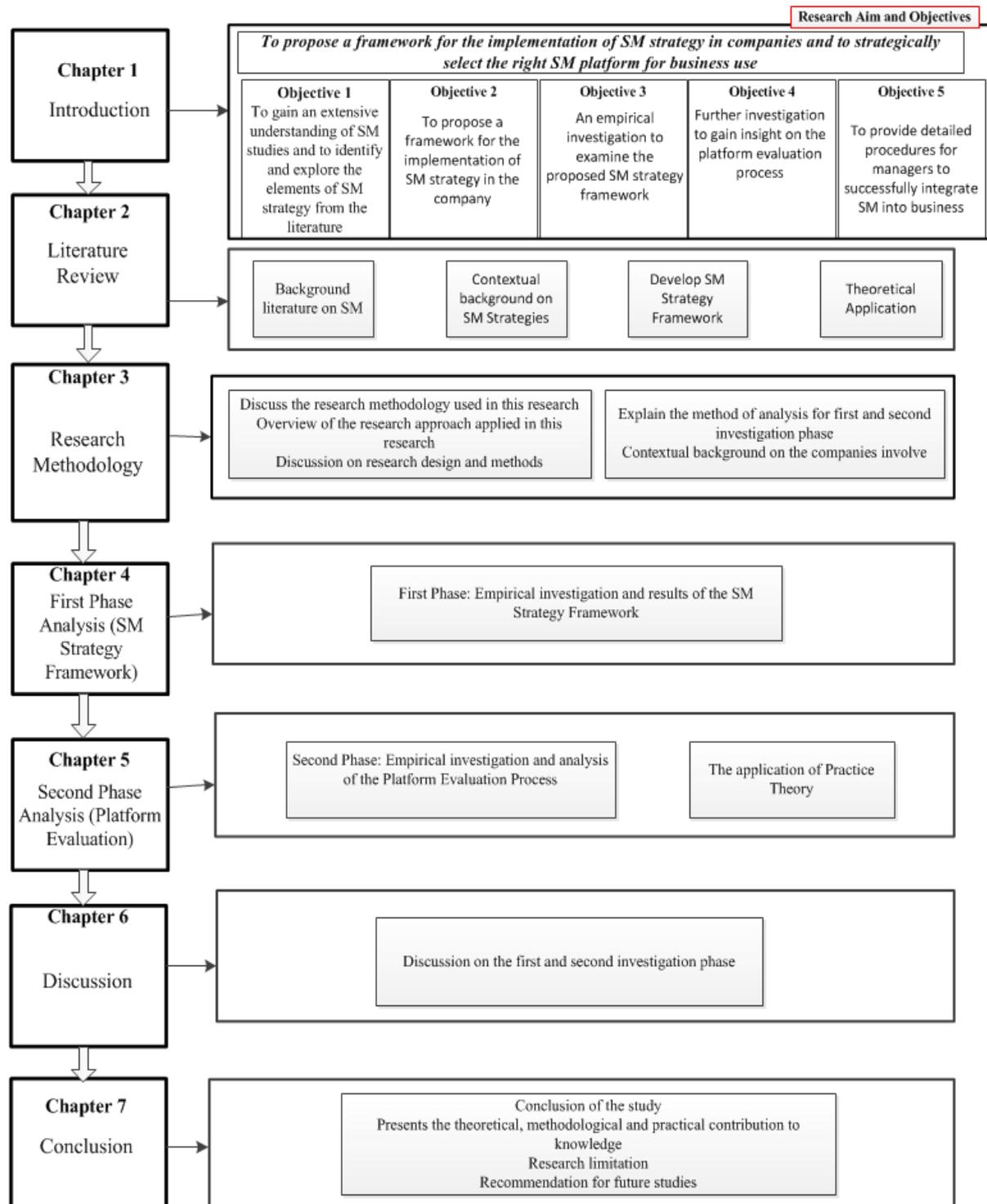


Figure 1-1: Structure of the thesis

## **2 Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to review previous literature related to social media (SM) studies and companies, to give a clear understanding of the impact of SM and the factors associated with adopting and strategically implementing SM in a company. Despite the importance of SM, there remains a paucity of evidence shown on how companies address the lack of strategy for the use of SM and the selection of suitable platform by an organisation. However, extensive research has been carried out on the adoption of SM, use and measurement of SM by companies and growth and development of the Internet in general, provides the theoretical background literature for this study. This chapter begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research by getting a background knowledge of the relationship between companies and their customers, different types of SM, then going further down to examine the impact of SM on companies, the impact of SM on customers, the different ways SM is utilised by companies, lack of strategies by companies and the theory used for this study.

### **2.2 Relationship between Companies and Customers**

Due to the dynamic and effective nature of SM, companies are challenged with using these platforms for communication. Unlike the traditional marketing channel, SM allows for a two-way conversation (Keegan and Rowley, 2017). Companies are investing in SM because there is an increase in customer engagement on these platforms. As companies continue to engage in the SM space, it is significant to develop and maintain a good relationship with their customers to protect the brand reputation, increase customer engagement and increase the company's sales (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014).

The relationship between companies and customers is united by a concept called customer relationship management (CRM). To fully achieve the benefits of SM to engage/connect with customers, companies need to move their business into social and reinvent their customer relationship.

### **2.2.1 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)**

The maintenance and development of customer relationship are essential for competitive advantage (Kim *et al.*, 2012). Jolson (1999) describes customers as the blood of a company that nourishes the company financially. In an attempt to provide customers with good customer experience, companies use the customer relationship management system (CRM) as a tool to increase performance (Javalgi *et al.*, 2006). CRM is a blend of process, people and technology that investigate to understand the customers of a company (Chen and Popovich, 2003).

According to Carolyn and Gautam (2011), companies should place more effort in cutting the danger of negative brand exposure to be perceived positively. Also, stating that some companies use SM monitoring software to monitor customer conversations. SM helps to change the CRM function; marketing, into a cross-functional approach used to network and integrate communities with clients facing challenges such as customer maintenance and customer sale. It cross-functional approach integrates business process management strategy that maximizes relationships and encompasses the entire organisation. The direct contact with customers gives insight to the company on how to improve the customer's experience, and this leads to the development of a new innovative model for customer engagement (Nguyen and Simkin, 2013).

Liz *et al.* (2015) state that one way of improving competitive advantage is by attracting more customers and increasing customer retention; by using the CRM in developing and sustaining a long-term relationship between a company and its customers. As the bargaining power has shifted to customers, companies become customer focused and are driven by customer expectations to maintain their loyalty. Previous studies have shown that on average, it costs a company more to attract new customers than it is to develop and implement a retention strategy (Liz *et al.*, 2015). Reicheld, Markey and Hopton (2000) study suggested that it costs 20% to 40% greater to acquire new customers than to retain old ones. They also added that loyal and existing customers are less sensitive to price change compared to new customers. CRM also has an established root in relationship management; it aims at improving long-term profitability and builds mutually beneficial relationship with new and existing customers.

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the mass production and mass marketing changed the competitive landscape of customers by increasing product availability (Nguyen and Simkin, 2013). This purchasing process has hindered the intimacy of a company and customer, therefore, weakens

customer relationship and loyalty. Some companies use CRM technology to bridge sales and marketing function to improve business target while others use CRM as an instrument for customer communication process. According to (Gulati and Garino (2000) CRM applications help answer questions relating to the importance of products and services and how to communicate with customers. Customers feel valued and appreciated when their problems are resolved separately. Customer loyalty grows as they receive direct information for good purchase decision on special deals and other organisational news (Carolyn and Gautam, 2011).

A CRM system performs functions like; accumulating, storing, maintain and distributing customer data throughout the organisation. Managing of information is crucial in CRM for this information is essential in the tailoring of products, comprehensive view of customers and service innovation (Chen and Popovich, 2003). These enable a better understanding of customer-driven and customer profitability to effectively tailor their offers to suit individual customers and also build customer portfolio (Chen and Popovich, 2003).

According to Liz et al., (2015), CRM is not an application that is used only for transaction-based processes such as marketing, sales and services but can integrate business process management strategy that maximises relationships to encompass the entire organisation.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, companies and customers lost their intimate relationship. Companies did not know their customers by name and did not understand their individual needs. Customers are more empowered today, so CRM attempts to focus on customers first instead of products to build a long-lasting beneficial relationship (Greenberg, 2010).

While traditional CRM has been very useful in the past years, it was designed to manage the customer relationship via traditional channels. In today's environment, where the customer is basically in control, CRM is emerging as an approach for managing the dialogue with customers (customer engagement), not the customers themselves (Liz et al., 2015). CRM gives companies the ability to meet the personal product and service challenges of its customers while also meeting its own business goals, plan and making it social presences well known at the same time (Nguyen and Simkin, 2013).

As discussed above, companies apply CRM systems to develop and strengthen customer relationships. However, SM is a cost-effective channel where these goals can be achieved.

## 2.3 Previous Research on types of Social Media

### 2.3.1 Microblogging

Munar (2011) stated that microblogging could be placed in a blog category which has become popular all thanks to Twitter and other social networking sites such as Facebook. Twitter has a word limit of 140 characters. Companies and individuals use this platform to microblog their information to users. Microblogging emerged from Twitter in 2006 and Twitter grew to 145 million users by September 2010. Twitter encouraged information delivering, social networking and microblogging (Liu, Liu and Li, 2012). Microblogging creates an opportunity to communicate with people to have a clear understanding of their needs. The opinions of others can reflect the thoughts of different classes of people in the society. Information collected on microblogs can accurately reflect the opinions of the general public. According to Xiao (2013) in a situation of crisis, microblogging can play a positive role in guiding the opinion of the people and making relevant announcements to avoid misunderstandings and misconceptions. Xiao (2013) says the government can use microblogging for the three main roles; “communicate with people, information delivery and mobilising the society,” he stated that, microblogging could be used to release comprehensive information on government affairs and progress of work done to the people. Listening to the people’s needs via microblogging, the response can be given in an appropriate manner which is faster, and it provides a direct link to the public and can lead to a comprehensive decision-making (Tran, Strutton and Taylor, 2012).

Zhang *et al.* (2010) define microblogging as a “lightweight tool to post brief updates about daily activities and thoughts and also help support knowledge sharing and communication.” Entries like short sentences, photos and embedded videos can be posted. According to Huang *et al.* (2015) in comparison to other traditional information technology, microblogging is commonly used for entertainment, social, e-commerce knowledge sharing, communication and expert advice. Sharing of information such as presidential elections, movie reviews, emergency events, the stock market, general news etc. has also been adopted using microblogging platforms (Kwak *et al.*, 2010).

Microblogging emphasises on the adoption and interaction of users, which is key in measuring successful growing microblog platform. The above statement shows that the research on the factors which motivates individuals to adopt microblogging is of high priority (Huang *et al.*, 2015). The findings on Jansen *et al.* (2009) study on microblogging shows that microblogging

can be used for online word of mouth branding and this service could play an important role in marketing and build-up of a company's image. It also showed that the data collected on microblogging platform could help predict the outcome of a situation. For example, the elections (Tran et al., 2012).

### **2.3.2 Products Review System Website (PRS)**

The Internet and web-based technologies have progressed rapidly, and this has made the use of e-commerce common. Customers who use the e-commerce websites are asked to give product reviews on the products they purchased (Noroozi and Fotouhi, 2010). This allows for customers to give their honest reviews. The PRS websites are less personal in comparison to other forms of SM (for example, social network sites), but are used very frequently for e-WOM practice so customers can post reviews about products they purchased (López and Sicilia, 2014). Studies have shown that customers have more trust in reviews posted by another customer than the information provided by the company. For this reason, study has shown that most customers base their purchase decision on the opinions of other customers (Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007).

However, from the organisation's viewpoint, PRS websites enable an organisation to reach a large number of customers at a low cost, create a customer-company relationship and also know the thoughts of customers on specific products (Lopez and Sicilia, 2014). It can be difficult for potential customers to get an opinion on a specific product due to the enormous amount of reviews available. According to Miao and Li (2008), a way of overcoming this problem is to develop an opinion search system that can provide specific reviews on specific products. Using this system will help customers to search and filter information to only what they are interested in (for example, customers' opinions on smartphones). Reviews.co.uk is one of the review websites customers use to post their thoughts on a company (either services or products). According to the Reviews.co.uk website, in 2014 over 2.5million reviews and opinions was collected for companies like Sportdirect.com, gocompare.com and euro car parts. Furthermore, some companies create their own PRS websites while others integrated with already existing ones (Heyes and Kapur, 2012).

### 2.3.3 Social Networking Sites

A social networking site (SNS) is a virtual community that creates an atmosphere for family, friends, co-workers, and other Internet users to connect and share various types of personal information and interact with each other (Chiang, 2013). In the past few years, these sites have been the most commonly used sites, especially among students and young population. SNS allow the visibility of users to connect, establish and maintain relationship with other users. They provide users with the opportunity to do work-related activities, personal issues (romantic relationships and events), shared interest such as politics, fashion, sports, music and art (Huang and Lin, 2011).

The population using SNS websites has increased rapidly worldwide. According to Alexa.com, SNS websites are included in one of the ten most trafficked websites which includes Facebook (Chang et al., 2012). Facebook allows its users to have a profile, invite others as their friends and allows easy access to view pages (comments and posts). It has 1.11 billion active users monthly (Facebook, 2013). Cheung et al. (2011) predicted that SM sites would earn 29.1 billion in 2015 through advertisements and \$14.9 billion was predicted for 2012.

The mission of SNS is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. Social networking sites have a structure which includes list of connected friends, user's personal profile (timeline), news feed (showing your friends activities), a 'like' function used to endorse a comment or a picture post, section to view notifications and a window that allows private conversations (inbox). Companies use this networking site for the various reasons stated at the beginning of this section, and it helps in the growth, development and improvement of the company's online presence.

Chiang (2013) highlighted the business potential of Facebook on a social advertisement for companies. In February 2012, Facebook was the leader of all other SM platforms in advertising for its public pages and social ads. This gives companies an opportunity to reach a large number of people (Chiang, 2013). Kasavana, Nusair and Teodosic (2010) suggested three strategies for successful viral marketing and advertising on social networking sites: creative content, customer engagement and image making.

### 2.3.4 Blog

A blog is defined as a web page that is a free and accessible journal (Viégas, 2005). This type of SM has attracted the public for a few years and new blogs are registered daily (Dearstyne, 2005). The application of blogs for business is valued by Internet users as an advanced tool for communication. A corporate blog (business blog) can be used to reach business goals such as customer service, brand equity and for promotional purposes (advertising etc.). According to Maxurek (2008), corporate blogs communication is asymmetric, and the users do not have wider opportunities as that of the social networking sites to effectively provide companies with valuable information and the possibility to have a conversation with one of the company's employees.

There are some factors for successfully operating a corporate blog: “symmetric communication, informal language, dialogue with the readers, which can lead to the creation of online communities, regular posting, the integration of other media platforms and clear purpose of publishing content” (Viegas, 2005). Setting-up corporate blogs often lead to challenges despite its unlimited opportunities and benefits they still have to deal with privacy, authenticity issues, accountability issues and risk of losing control over communications (Maxurek, 2008). According to Maxurek (2008), there are different types of corporate blogs:

- ❖ Leadership corporate blogs: An employee is chosen to represent the company on both brand building and company's views on various aspects of the business. The leadership corporate blogs are employed by leading companies in a market sector.
- ❖ Group corporate blogs: This type of blog allows all employees the right to contribute to the development of the company's blog. However, the company has one blog which is incorporated into the company's website, and the blog has many co-authors.
- ❖ Promotional blogs: This is where the sponsored posts, advertising of products and services, events and marketing activities take place.

Discussing the various ways in which a company uses SM is important, but it is also very important to have an insight on the impact of SM in a company to get a comprehensive understanding of the literature.

## 2.4 Social Media and Companies

### 2.4.1 Impact of Social Media on Companies

SM has proven to be an imperative technology to engage with for both business and individual purpose which has forced companies to adapt, evolve and change its business practice (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden, 2011). In chapter 1, the current research of SM for companies (section 1.3) was discussed; the importance, benefits and impacts were also mentioned. Here, more investigations on the influence of SM on a company will be studied.

Acquiring a high level of customer engagement is viewed as desirable as it may inflate a company's reputation and brand loyalty or even purchase decision (Hollebeek, 2011). The relational outcome of customer engagement includes customer loyalty, commitment, customer brand attachment and trust. Thus, in previous studies, it is said to have added value for companies, especially those in the highly competitive market (Brodie et al., 2013).

According to Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom (2015) study on a company's reputation, the most pervasive motive behind company's involvement with SM is enhancing customer relationship/commitment, brand attitude and company's trustworthiness. These activities are often referred to as online reputation management. Managers engage in these activities because it is assumed that the company reputation will be perceived as slow to adopt technology if the customers' demands are not met via these channels. Walsh *et al.* (2009) study show that customers are keen to patronise companies with a positive reputation and have the willingness to pay more for their products. Secondly, positive company's reputation can result in market entry barriers for competitors, promote customer loyalty and customer retention, which will enable a company to attract more customers and lead to a higher market value (Smith, Smith and Wang, 2010). Thirdly, a positive company reputation can motivate stakeholder's readiness to invest in a company. Previous studies have shown, been active on SM platforms is beneficial to a company's reputation, but there are downsides to these platforms for it is not a one-way communication channel but rather allows uncontrolled content and participation which may pose a risk of reputational damage (Dijkmans et al., 2014). Customers have the power to give negative feedback. For instance; it could be product quality or customer satisfaction as one dissatisfied customer can cause a dent in a company's reputation (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). An example of that is the incident with United Airlines where a customer made a complaint on

YouTube over a bad experience and cost the Airline its good reputation and monetary loss of over \$180million (Tripp and Grégoire, 2011). The travel industry is more vulnerable to this type of risk because their product characteristics are intangible as such the service needs to be consumed before they are fully appraised (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan, 2008).

As seen in the discussion above, customer's opinion is relevant to a company because it can bring either a positive and negative reputation. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the impact of SM on customers.

## **2.4.2 Impact of Social Media on Customers**

Despite company's exposure to a diverse audience by using SM, customers are the most significant stakeholders because they create the company's revenue streams (Dijkmans et al., 2014). The customer's perceived opinion and word of mouth communication can influence other stakeholders' view about a company (Walsh et al., 2009).

Many companies provide customer service through SM, engaging and assisting their customers with challenges promptly (Nguyen and Waring, 2013). The evolution of customer power is tremendous following the increase in building and maintaining profitable customer relationship by delivering superior customer value and satisfaction. The rise of SM has empowered customers to have an active role in their relationship with the company (Abedin and Jafarzadeh, 2015).

The emanation of SM has opened more opportunities for companies to listen and engage with their customers who can gradually become advocates for the company or their products (Chatterjee, 2011). This is not all positive as customers can share a negative word of mouth about a company or brand (Kim *et al.*, 2012).

Previous studies have shown that most customers accept that things can go wrong, and failures can occur, but failures alone do not lead to dissatisfaction, but the service provider's response to the failure or lack of response is the most likely cause to trigger dissatisfaction from customers (Nguyen and Waring, 2013).

Discussing the impact of SM on customers, electronic word of mouth is an important practice on SM to be discussed.

### 2.4.3 E-Word of Mouth (e-WOM)

The internet allows individuals to read and share their opinions to others around the world. This communication process is known as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). According to Duan et al. (2008), e-WOM provides a platform in which customers can share both positive and negative reports among themselves and also to future customers. According to Park and Lee (2009), customers react more to the negative e-WOM than that of positive e-WOM. Duan, Gu and Whinston (2008) also states that e-WOM is a strong means of sharing information among people because most of the opinions are usually associated with personal experience with the products and assessment of the company. E-WOM influences customer purchase decision (Severi, Choon Ling and Nasermodeli, 2014). Customers rely on the opinions of other customers in evaluating a company, their new products and services. Therefore, this has shifted their focus from information, advert and marketing process of the companies to the “sincere” opinion of their peers (Severi, Choon Ling and Nasermodeli, 2014). By seeking the views of others, customers are growing their network of e-WOM communication which assists in purchase decisions. This behaviour highlights the power C2C opinions have in purchase decision process.

With the availability of the different online platforms and SM applications e-WOM is well practised. One of the popular networking applications is Facebook. Customers create profiles on Facebook which they use to socially interact with friends. While companies attempts to use this application to develop a relationship with their customers with the intention customers may share some of their products or information within their personal network, which will expose them to a wide range of potential customers thereby increasing the company’s reach (Chatterjee, 2011). In other cases, e-WOM allows customers to exchange comments or images anonymously for those who do not want to be identified (Jansen *et al.*, 2009).

Jansen et al. (2009) state one commonly used form of e-WOM is microblogging (it involves making of the frequent short post to a microblog) using SM communication services; Twitter. Companies compete to get the attention of potential customers in social networking commercial areas; they are aware of the new process of exchanging information and also aware that the content flow cannot be controlled. They get involved in microblogging to try to direct information about the company by protecting the reputation of the company and also marketing products and services. Companies are also aware that regarding urgency, e-WOM

microblogging occurs up until purchase process and companies are concerned because it affects them directly. Above all, microblogging has significant importance for the success of advertiser, business exposure and products using e-WOM communication channel. According to Park and Lee (2009) research, people use microblogging to share information about their personal and daily activities.

E-WOM practice can be defined as an exchange of information amongst customers. Hence, communication takes place; companies can use information gotten from this practice for market research and for another business achievements. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the various business uses of SM for business growth and development.

## **2.5 Various uses of social media by companies**

### **2.5.1 Communication**

SM allows worldwide users to communicate, share an idea, interact, experience, and share information. According to Li and Wang (2011), there has been a difference in communication approach of companies since the birth of SM. Prior to the recent process where companies tend to have a one-way communication channel with their customers helps to entice customers to contribute and interact to enhance collaboration and mutually beneficial\profitable relationship. In service-dominant logic, customers are perceived as co-creators as this logic is an understanding of the mindset of a unified organisation, market and society (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). In other words, customers are the vital factor for any business. Acquiring information on customers and general market needs (satisfaction, preference list, needs and motives of customers) through SM improves in-depth understanding of customer's needs, requirements and development of co-creation process. Co-creation process can take place as a business to customer (B2C) and C2C interaction process facilitated by SM which produces a mutual valued outcome (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Through SM interaction, customers engage with social marketers to generate valuable information. Therefore, the lack of engagement may affect the essence of implementing the SM approach in company's business strategy (Chan and Guillet, 2011).

However, communication with customers has been made easy as companies can give out information such as news, updates and new product in development via instant communication

(Chan and Guillet, 2011). In the same way, customers can provide both positive and negative comments on a strategy, approach or even products or services of a company. Negative online comments and negative e-WOM is a challenge for all companies, but the availability of SM provides a platform for apologies, allows for the explanation of the reason behind service failure, mollify dissatisfied customer and an opportunity to redeem the brand image (Schmallegger and Carson, 2008).

Furthermore, SM goes beyond providing opportunities for customer engagement but also provides communication within a company (among employees) and externally for (B2B) clients, customers and stakeholders. According to Li and Wang (2011) the intranet blog is a valuable tool for training for companies whose staff members are in various locations. The connection between SM adoption and management provides positive business results such as increased employee trust, increased rate of employee participation, efficient knowledge sharing and improved relationships with stakeholders (Meng and Berger, 2013)

However, the success of implementing SM depends on the strategy being used not the technology itself (Gretzel, Yuan and Fesenmaier, 2000). The figure below shows internal and external SM communication network of an organisation.

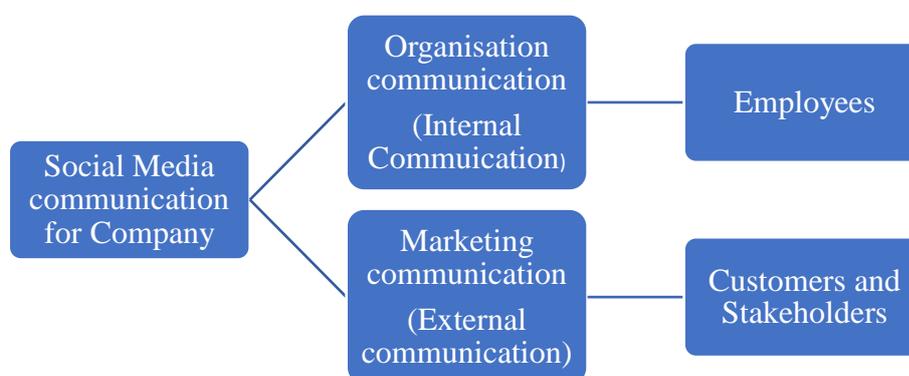


Figure 2-1: Diagrammatic representation of communication in a company

### ❖ **Communication for a Company**

The effective communication process is one of the important steps companies take while improving employee's work activities and satisfactory customer experience for the full purpose of advancing the mission\goals of an organisation (Effing and Spil, 2016). This can be classified as the internal and external communication process in an organisation (Oliveira and Figueira, 2015).

#### **Internal communication**

The internal communication takes place within the company, typically between employees in an organisation (Radun, 2006). The structure and culture of the company determine the communication system to be used. This type of communication is centred on how communication takes place in the hierarchical structure of an organisation, for example, if a hierarchy structure is complex, it is at the internal communication level that integration takes place for a successful flow of information within the organisation (Robinson, 1990).

#### **External Communication**

External communication in an organisation means sharing, interacting, building of relationships and exchange of information between employees and other individuals outside the organisation. For example, customers, stakeholders and possibly competitors (Radun, 2006).

## **2.5.2 Promotion and Marketing**

In comparison to traditional advertising, SM is considered as a cost-effective means for promotion. Company blogs create an atmosphere for business to customer (B2C) interaction which creates a lively and credible content and to expedite continuous contact with clients (Ellion, 2007). According to Schmallegger and Carson (2008), blogs are inexpensive marketing promotion activity as the cost of managing and establishing blogs or forums is cheaper than traditional advertng activities. Marketing and promotion can serve as an information source; SM provides opportunities to develop a brand voice and inculcate trust in both stakeholders and customers (Leung *et al.*, 2013). After the development of trust, a more direct approach to marketing, promotions and advertising can be used to deliver products and services to the

audience. This activity then contributes to product and service awareness, brand building which generate an increase in revenue (Leung *et al.*, 2013). Previous research has shown that company's involvement in SM improves its ranking position using the search engines which increases traffic to a company's website (Wyld, 2008).

Mangold and Faulds (2009) argues that SM is a hybrid element of the promotion mix because it allows companies to share information with their customers (Traditional sense) while in the untraditional way it allows customers to communicate directly with each other (word of mouth) in most cases the marketing managers cannot control the user-generated content. However, companies adhere to a principle called integrated marketing communication to control the different elements of promotional mix which consist of advertising, sales promotion and direct marketing (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

### **2.5.3 Market Research**

The user-generated content on SM is widely being considered as a good source of information for market research, including internal and external environmental analysis (Leung *et al.*, 2013). Monitoring user-generated content through social networking sites and blogs is described to be an effective way to discover what customers\ non-customers say about a company, its competitors and also a user-friendly way of finding ideas for product development, enhancements and demands. According to Choi, Lehto and Morrison (2007) analysis done on blogs and SNS sites can give companies access to difficult market segments and also reveal some strengths and weaknesses. Noone, McGuire and Rohlf (2011) state that analysis of user-generated content on SM will help give a clear understanding of various characteristics of customers and this information can be used to develop advertising for the target audience and promotional messages for specific SM applications. However, some researchers argued that analysing user-generated content and evaluating SM might be difficult in reality because of financial and resource constraints (Kim and Hardin, 2010).

## 2.6 Lack of Social Media Strategy

In early 2000s, during the inception of SM which brought the launch of platforms like Fotolog, Myspcae, hi5, Friendster and del.icio.us, companies have established a presence on these platforms to explore the benefits of SM for business. The early adopters were intrigued by the number of users subscribed to these platforms and its increasing usage among its customer base. Previous research has shown that most companies randomly establish a presence on SM while others avoid these platforms altogether because of unknown business risk and lack of understanding (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013). Establishing a presence on several SM platforms without a defined strategic approach does pose some risk to a company. Therefore, defining a clear strategic approach for insight on the target audience, that will promote distinct overall business objectives. Nevertheless, during the adoption process of SM, company's use up time, human resource, efforts, technology and skills, these parameters need to be considered so return on investment can to be measured effectively. Strategic content planning, resources or undefined job responsibility can lead to the inconstancy of content flow. Therefore, companies will not be able to keep customer's interest for long (Oliveira and Figueira, 2015).

In the excitement of creating a presence on SM platform (for example, Facebook page) for customers to join (like) and for advertising videos which tend to go viral. A company could either be exposed positively or negatively; negative exposure can affect the business and company's reputation (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). The nature of SM makes it difficult to govern as it is a user-generated platform and difficult to be controlled (Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom, 2015). However, having carefully studied SM mechanisms companies can foresee SM risks and provide quick response to them. Lardi and Fuchs (2013) state that the adoption of SM brings an advantage to a company's value when properly incorporated into the company context. Recent research shows companies are beginning to understand the need to adopt an SM strategy, clearly defining the objectives of the use of having an SM presence for their business, identifying the target audience and the selection of suitable SM platform(s) for specific business needs (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013).

A strategic business change impacts all the aspects of the company; the people, culture, process, technology and also the implementation of SM strategy. Applying SM as a business strategy and not just a platform for marketing allows a company to find an appropriate use for SM with a maximum business value (Oliveira and Figueira, 2015).

Therefore, it is important to mention there is a difference between SM strategy and SM marketing strategy. However, it is necessary to understand these differences in overall business values. The SM strategy is based on a managerial perspective, enhancing areas in the business that can help boost business values or goals while SM marketing strategy has a focus of target customers, promoting brands and products or services (Oliveira and Figueira, 2015). According to Lardi and Fuchs (2013) study, a few differences between SM strategy and SM marketing strategy was provided in respect of the perspective it is viewed.

The table below gives an overview of the differences stated by Lardi and Fuchs (2013)

		<b>SM Strategy</b>	<b>SM Marketing Strategy</b>
1.	Scope	Within an Organisation	Customer-based
2.	Objectives	The integration of SM adoption with strategic business objectives. A clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities of SM in a company. High competitive advantage.	Sharing of corporate information using SM platforms. Strengthen customer relationship using SM platforms. Create brand presence.
3.	Approach	Evaluate the readiness of a company for SM use and management. Clearly defined the best area(s) to apply SM for effective business returns (either internal or external focus). Identifying possible SM activities.	Conversion of business objectives with marketing objectives. Identification of target audience. Identify SM platforms for higher marketing impact. Define message for the target audience.
4.	Responsibility	Management team, Innovative team.	Marketing and branding team.
5.	Input	Strategic objective. Overview of activities on SM (customers and competitors). Relevant online conversations.	Marketing and promotion messages. Target audience. Media platform approach (e.g. Twitter: tweets, Instagram: pictures).
6.	Target Audience	Either external and internal	External (customers and partners)
7.	Outcome	Benefits and important factors for SM implementation. SM adoption plan to integrate with business plans. SM vision for the company. Readiness of a company for SM use.	Online Marketing Campaign. SM marketing plan and budget.
8.	Success Measures	It is measured depending on planned objectives such as revenue generation, efficiency and cost reduction.	It is measured based on customer (for example page views, website traffic, conversation and sales tracking).

Table 2-1: SM strategy and SM marketing strategy (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013)

Despite the numerous researches done on SM, there is still limited research in the area of companies using SM strategies for their business values.

#### ❖ **Scope**

SM strategy: is purely organisational based that is, it is primarily focused on the business objectives of a company.

SM marketing strategy: This is customer-centric, which means it is focused on advertising and promotion of products and services.

#### ❖ **Objectives**

SM strategy: McCann & Barlow (2015) say it is important to have a planned adoption process for SM and also determine the business objectives for accurate measurement of effectiveness. Thus, it is the alignment of business objectives with SM adoption. This integration provides top-notch opportunities and increases competitive advantage. Businesses should have a strategy for the use of SM, a clear objective of why it is being used and specifically identify ways it can support their business (Stockdale, Ahmed and Scheepers, 2012).

SM marketing strategy: Marketing strategy is concerned with customer relationship and building of brand presence in SM platforms. According to Effing & Spil (2016), some companies align their goals with marketing objectives and not with their business objectives.

#### ❖ **Approach**

SM strategy: According to Culnan et al. (2010) while deciding to adopt SM for interacting with customers, companies need to ensure there is an alignment between the SM platform, a company's culture, its business objectives and customers.

While making a business decision or strategic change, the readiness of the company to adapt to change is significantly before implementation process begins. It is important to identify what areas of the business need improvement and a clear understanding of the business goals and the benefits SM strategy offers (Kiráľová and Pavlíček, 2015).

SM marketing strategy: Notwithstanding the provision of SM marketing companies and individual marketers, there are no tangible frameworks available to measure SM marketing frameworks. Hence, there is no tool for companies to monitor their campaigns (Sand *et al.*,

2014). Companies should ensure they have SM marketing tools use to gain insight and track their marketing process on SM. More specifically, these tools will help to listen and interact with their customers on SM thereby to allow instant communication with customers online (Sand *et al.*, 2014)

#### ❖ **Responsibility**

SM strategy: it is the responsibility of the senior management or the executives or the innovative team to make decisions concerning a company.

SM marketing strategy: the promotion and marketing team is responsible for the marketing strategy.

#### ❖ **Input**

SM strategy: Has an overall impact on the business; customers, competitors, business values, products and services while

SM marketing strategy: impacts are mainly on the customers, and identification of SM platform to be used for creating a brand presence.

#### ❖ **Target Audience**

SM strategy and SM marketing strategy: Omosigho & Abeysinghe (2012) states that the target audience of a company is the important factor in the adoption of SM. The inability of a company to determine its target audience is the utmost reason why SM fails in companies.

Furthermore, while implementing an SM strategy, companies need to consider both the employees (internal) and the customers (external).

#### ❖ **Outcome**

SM strategy: Having a good SM strategy ensures comes engagement with millions of people and also create a B2B practice across the world at the company's convenience. These advantages help encourage contributions and growth of an organisation (Jefferson and Traughber, 2012).

The overall outcome of SM strategy is to align the SM adoption plan with business strategy, to gain the full benefits of implementing SM as a business plan (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013).

SM marketing strategy: The SM platforms represent the measure to which social marketing resources (for example, conversation, sharing of information, presence) are converted into financial performance and capability such as sales. Companies have adopted SM as an imperative part of their marketing strategy and as such SM has helped to increase revenue and SM marketing is cost-effective (Paniagua and Sapena, 2014)

#### ❖ Success Measures

SM strategy: Culnan et al. (2010) states that attracting a large number of customers is not the most imperative success measure for SM initiative, but rather creating a feasible customer community with active participants. However, according to Lardi & Fuchs (2013), the success of SM strategy is measured by the generation of revenue, reduction of cost and company's efficiency while

SM marketing strategy: According to Paniagua & Sapena (2014) SM marketing strategy success is measured by sales, growth in the customer relationship, traffic on the website and the number of views on the company's page.

## 2.7 Social Media Strategy Frameworks

Companies are challenged as they face an environment where the adoption and implementation rate of SM has massively increased by customers and employees. However, companies face tremendous pressure to create a presence on various platforms as expected by customers (Larson and Watson, 2011). Companies are struggling to implement SM for it is not enough to just create a presence, but to do it strategically and enjoy its benefits. There is limited research on SM strategy (Keegan and Rowley, 2017). However, many companies find implementing a successful SM strategy difficult (Bottles and Sherlock, 2011; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011).

### 2.7.1 Existing Frameworks

SM is growing rapidly and providing risks and opportunities for organisations. To a great extent, managers stress the importance of using SM competitively (Harrison and Barthel, 2009). However, companies want to be able to predict return-on-investment in SM. This can be achieved by deriving a more thorough understanding and theoretical grounding, the design structure and implementation of social media strategy. Nevertheless, there is a lack of comprehensive frameworks, theories, methods and research instruments to implement SM (Effing and Spil, 2016). Previous researchers such as; Kietzmann *et al.* (2011); Királ'ová and Pavlíčeka (2015); Oliveira and Figueira (2015); Effing and Spil (2016); Jiang, Luo and Kulemeka (2016) studied SM strategy from various perspective and this will be discussed below.

Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) study on the Honeycomb of SM attempts to inform executives on the various forms SM can take and introduced a framework that defines SM by using the seven functional building blocks; presence, relationship, reputation, groups, identity, conversation and sharing. According to this study, SM activities are defined by how they focus on the various functional building blocks and the implications these blocks have on how companies should interact with SM. Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) rationale for developing the Honeycomb framework is to help managers develop a strategy and effectively allocate resources to SM. The framework focuses on the functions of SM, SM user experience and provides managers with functional attributes of SM activities as they seek to understand their audience engagement needs (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). A brief description of the seven building blocks below:

- ❖ **Presence:** Allows users to know the location of other users in the virtual and real world. The importance of presence is that companies would need to pay attention to user availability and location for SM activities.
- ❖ **Relationships:** This represents how users can be related to other users. The link between two or more users which links to conversations, hangouts and sharing of objects.
- ❖ **Reputation:** Reputation has different meanings in SM platforms but can be referred to as trust. This functional building block is considered a significant implication for how companies should effectively engage with SM. By ensuring brand image and their content are evaluated using content voting systems. Additionally, popularity on SM does not indicate a good reputation or automatically imply the number of views on a post.

- ❖ Groups: Group functional block allows users to form communities and sub-communities in SM platforms to better organise friends and followers into groups as the population of the platform grows bigger. With the excessive traffic on SM platforms, groupings form filters to create order in chaos.
- ❖ Identity: This represents the revealing of information such as age, name, gender, location, profession and information that discloses fundamental beliefs. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) suggest that user's identity is often revealed through subjective information like thoughts, likes, dislikes and feelings.
- ❖ Conversation: This functional block of the framework represents the extent to which users communicate with each other in SM. The platforms are generally designed to foster conversations among individuals and groups.
- ❖ Sharing: sharing block represents the exchange, distribution and receiving of content among users.

Effing and Spil (2016) study developed a framework to analyse SM strategies. This study constructed a framework for evaluating the key elements of SM strategies and focused on reviewing the comprehensiveness and the stages of maturity of SM strategies within selected organisations. The levels of maturity of SM strategies proposed in this study are initiation, diffusion and maturity. Initiation includes the elements; target audience and channel choice, diffusion includes; goals, resources and policies, maturity includes; monitoring and content activities. The elements will be described below;

#### ❖ Initiation

Target audience: Companies should identify the target group to address using SM platforms as segmentation allows for them to prioritise their customers and define the population that access SM (Thackeray *et al.*, 2008).

Channel choice: The choice of platform generally determines the effectiveness and appropriateness of interacting through a specific SM platform (Klang and Nolin, 2011).

#### ❖ Diffusion

Goals: SM should align with business goals to be of value. A clear purpose, concrete and measurable goals are set as part of SM plans (Thackeray *et al.*, 2008; Klang and Nolin, 2011).

Resources: Thackeray *et al.* (2008) suggest that the outcome of an SM strategy is dependent on the resources allocated to it.

Policies: Gotterbarn (2012) suggest that rules and regulations should be set to manage the employee's communication on behalf of the company and to ensure their freedom of speech.

#### ❖ Maturity

Monitoring: Companies do not have control over the communications happening through SM. Therefore, Klang and Nolin (2011); Larson and Watson (2011); Berthon *et al.* (2012) suggests that monitoring and listening on SM platforms is significant in order to manage conversations in public space.

Content Activities: An orderly timeframe is set for content to be posted. According to Barnes (2014), a predefined timeframe allows for frequent contributions to different platforms.

Kiráľová and Pavlíček (2015) study on the development of SM strategies in tourism destination reveals that strategies aligned with SM ensure that destinations are competitive. Furthermore, it discusses the development of communication technologies and its influence on the relationship between the destination and their visitors. SM allows destinations to contact visitors at low cost that cannot be achieved by using a traditional communication method (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The focus is on developing a plan that is concerned with strategically prioritising locations, using SM as a marketing tool for the interactive marketing purpose. According to Kiráľová and Pavlíček (2015) to remain competitive, SM can help destinations present engaging content, creatively support and motivate interactive conversations.

Finally, Oliveira and Figueira (2015) study propose an SM regulatory communication framework that supports the strategic communication management within a company. The SM strategy is relevant when aligned with the communication strategy to public tertiary education sector's organisational goals. This strategy focuses on internal (students, employees, academics and administrative) and external (Policymakers, competitors, parents, etc.) communication in the higher education sector. This study presents a regulatory communication framework for the design and management of HPPEI SM strategies, clear insight on SM usage and the type of SM strategies been pursued.

Although, the above SM strategy frameworks provide benefits and valid knowledge in different forms for companies and SM domain. Nonetheless, the existing frameworks do not provide a detailed implementation process for applying SM strategy effectively in a company. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of Lardi and Fuchs (2013) SM strategy framework which gives a step by step approach for implementation, from start to finish is presented in the next section.

### **2.7.2 Social Media Strategy Framework (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013)**

An analysis of Lardi and Fuchs (2013) SM strategy framework will be practiced in this research where the core contribution of this study in regard to SM strategy founded on. The framework gives a step by step procedure to assist companies to make a strategic decision on the use and implementation of SM in a company by evaluating the readiness of a company and how SM can be used in a business context. According to Effing and Spil (2016) “there is a lack of comprehensive frameworks, methods, theories and research instruments to develop and analyse SM strategies” (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013). However, Lardi and Fuchs (2013) framework help to integrate the dynamic nature of SM strategy in business. This framework is divided into two main phases: stage 1 which is the “Develop Strategy” and stage 2 which is “Plan and Deliver”. Stage 1 helps the company to define the reason to adopt SM before diving into it. Stage 2 is broken down into two approaches, depending on the target audience the approach is focused on either internal or external audience. While internal is called the Enterprise Collaboration, which is within the company and the external is represented as Business 2.0.

The figure below is the SM strategy framework by Lardi and Fuchs (2013)

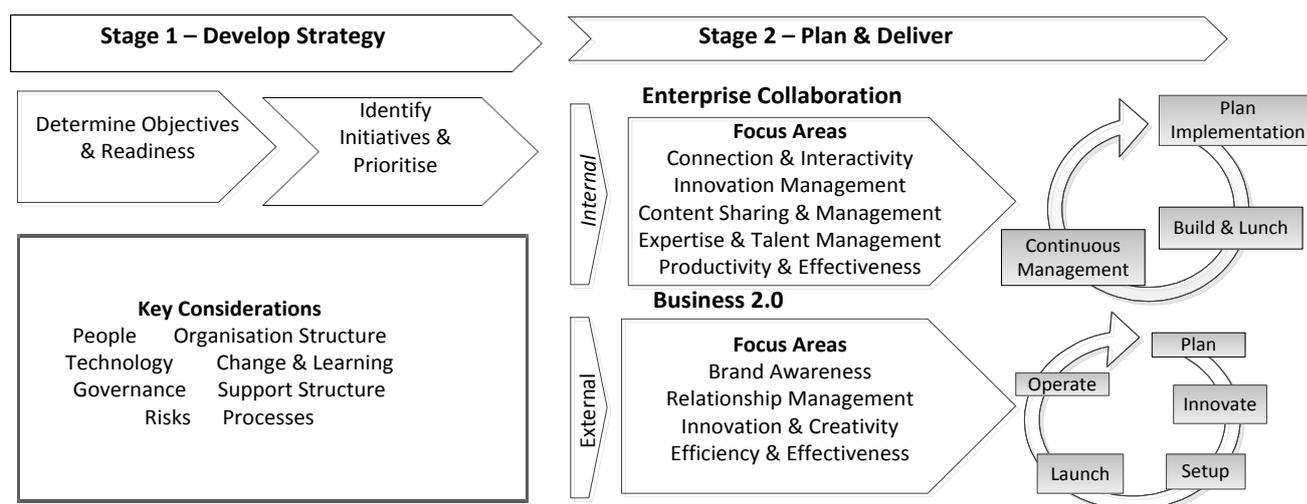


Figure 2-2: SM strategy framework (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013)

### ❖ Phase 1 - Develop Strategy

According to Lardi and Fuchs (2013), this first stage is very important because it is at this level that a complete assessment of a company's ability, capability and readiness to adopt SM is analysed. However, this stage is important to both companies new to SM and existing SM users for business purposes. Lardi and Fuchs (2013) state that it will be beneficial to have individuals from different departments in a company to assess the possible business value of SM. The idea is to get everyone's dimensional ideas which will result in a comprehensive, balanced view of SM adoption in a company. The following four key inputs were suggested for this stage;

- ❖ **Strategic Objectives/Vision for SM:** The strategic objective of a company determines the approach to adopt SM. This indicates whether SM can be integrated into the company's business operations.
- ❖ **Trend Assessment:** This assessment is based on researching SM technologies to identify ways SM contributes to business values\goals.
- ❖ **Overview of competitor activities in SM:** Gives knowledge of how other companies are using SM, what they are doing with it and how it is being applied to their business for the innovative purpose.
- ❖ **Customer SM adoption:** Having a good knowledge of which platforms, customers are present in, and an idea of what they use them for is beneficial to the development.

### **Determine Objectives and Readiness**

This is when the senior management, identify company's objectives for the proposed SM activities, the decision on the customer groups to target and the development of SM platform or consideration of using an existing platform(s). It is imperative to have a strategy which is an indispensable part of a company's business strategy as SM is part of our personal and work life (Kilgour et al. 2015).

To determine the readiness of a company, an analysis of the current business environment is done at this stage, bringing to light a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of a business which can be assessed by developing a SWOT analysis of the existing business model. Also, it is important to consider the rules and regulations, business operations and processes, resource availability (skills and technologies) and the use of SM in the company (if implemented) in determining a company's readiness to adopt SM (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013).

### **Identify Initiatives and Prioritise**

According to Lardi and Fuchs, (2013), this step is based on the business goals and challenges that have been defined in the previous step, so a clear indication of areas for improvement is defined. Hence, this step aid in the promotion of strategic business objectives and benefits from SM. In prioritising, companies have to consider factors like (i) Business impact: how much impact will SM have in a company. The acceptance of technologies has caused companies to develop a comprehensive strategy to support their business goals (Jiang, Luo and Kulemeka, 2016) (ii) Need to have or nice to have: basically, setting priorities straight. According to Királ'ová and Pavlíček (2015) to remain competitive in the industry a company should use SM. However, companies need to identify the reason(s) this technology is to be adopted; either for growth or trend.

### **Key Considerations**

There are various factors that should be considered to increase success while implementing SM in a company. The stage 1 - Development Strategy section outlines key consideration; people, technology, governance, risks, organisation structure, change & learning, support structure and

processes. All these are important in preparing a company for SM implementation. However, the impact level of the key considerations varies depending on the industry and business type (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013).

### ❖ **Phase 2 – Plan & Deliver**

This phase is divided into two sections; Enterprise Collaboration and Business 2.0

#### **Enterprise 2.0 (Internal)**

Enterprise 2.0 refers to the interaction of employees within the company, for example, communication, sharing ideas, learning, etc. Enterprise collaboration gives power to the employees by slowly getting rid of the traditional corporate structure in a company (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013). The implementation of Enterprise Collaboration creates an opportunity for companies to tap into the creativity of their employees for improved productivity and enhance daily work activities (Husin et al. 2010). Social technologies have provided the means for the quality of innovation of the employees by creating a convenient avenue for communication, collaboration and coordination, circulate e-learning, and also create a sense of corporate community in the workplace (Gardner 2013). According to Lardi and Fuchs (2013), the basic idea of enterprise collaboration is for efficiency, networking and connecting within the company and integration of employees with technologies. This process is done in three stages (i) Plan implementation: it is at this point companies substantiate the functional requirements, develop a business case that fits the business and employee's requirements. Also, identify a specific business area where social technology can be identified and implemented. Important factors like training for employees, special skills and adoption process is critically considered. (ii) Build and launch: the actual building and launching of the platform will be done here if, for example, the company does not want to use existing third-party applications like Facebook, etc. (iii) Continuous management: Monitoring and analysing the adopted platform to measure the quantity and quality factors and also continuous analysis of the platform for further development.

## **Business 2.0 (External)**

Business 2.0 refers to using social networking applications in ways that promote interaction, innovative teamwork, the conception of customer value and collaboration of external stakeholders in an efficient way for business purpose (Burrus 2010). Since the emerging of SM, it has been used for different functions. For example, most companies have adopted the use of this technology to connect all employees and increase customer relationship and collaboration. Examples of SM tools companies use are blogs, microblogging, social networking sites, podcast, etc. (Chiang 2013; Munar 2011; Viégas 2005). Many companies begin the process of implementing Business 2.0 by creating presence in the most commonly used and talked about platforms. It is important to critically define the focus and purpose for Business 2.0 to your business by considering the advantage to areas like brand awareness, relationship management, innovation and creativity and efficiency & effectiveness (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013). However, these focus areas may vary depending on the area with need for development in a company. In order to use Business 2.0, the following steps need to be done; (i) Plan: the planning stage is where the target audience and the SM platform they use is identified. Different target groups will require different messages, therefore, a clearly defined message to each target group will satisfy customers' needs and encourage productive communication. However, the most effective way to benefit from business 2.0 initiatives is by the selection of suitable SM platforms (Kirá'ová and Pavlíček, 2015). (ii) Innovate: this is where the brainstorming activity takes place. According to Berman and Hagan (2006), to innovate is to change the basis of competition that is, rather than competing head-on with other competitors, companies create new ideas to exploit a growing market needs to get an edge over its competitors to have a market advantage. (iii) Setup: before the implementation of Business 2.0 a few adjustments are required internally to accommodate the activities. Setup stage is basically the modification of the company's policies and development of SM policies to allow companies to handle the necessary change the implementation process brings (Effing and Spil, 2016). Furthermore, SM accounts and tools are set up and also content messages for the target groups and time frame for posting are determined at this point (Lardi and Fuchs, 2013). (iv) Launch: This is done when the platform(s) are built and ready to be used. The launch of the platforms can be done all together or one at a time. The launch approach varies amongst companies. (v) Operate: After the platform(s) have been launched, the effect of how SM activities are influencing and creating traffic to the corporate websites is monitored (Effing and Spil, 2016).

Lardi and Fuchs (2013) SM strategy framework provides an easy step by step approach to developing and implementing SM in a company. The selection of SM platform process is also significant. However, this step has not been boldly included in the framework.

### **2.7.3 Selection of Social Media Platform Process**

Previous research has shown that most companies do not take strategic steps in the selection of suitable SM platforms for their company's business values (Oliveira & Figueira 2015). This is identified as a gap in the literature. So far, very little attention has been paid to the evaluation and selection of SM platforms by companies.

Edwards (2015) developed three main viewpoints on how a company can identify which SM network is right for them; (i) research competitors to know what SM platforms they use (ii) developing a list of competitors and monitor their activities; the number of likes and followers they have, the frequency of the comments and updates posted on their platforms, observe the look and feel of their platforms, and also monitor their customer relationship. (iii) Suggested tools and tactics to use for measuring the level competitors are at in SM. For example, Facebook: Facebook graph search and Facebook interests and for Twitter: Followerwonk and Twitonomy.

However, Tavana *et al.* (2013) derived a network structure of how an evaluation of SM platform process can be conducted. This structure includes five elements; content, impression score, cost, look & feel and audience fit. These elements describe the different important factors to consider during this process.

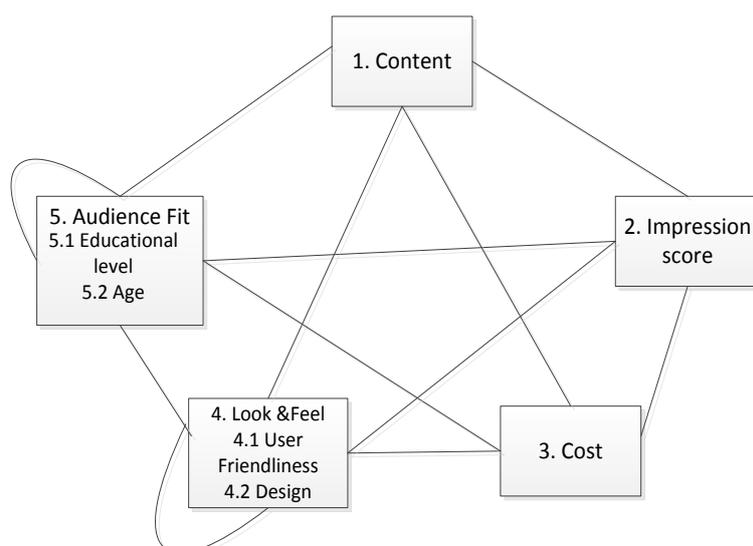


Figure 2-3: Platform evaluation structure (Tavana *et al.*, 2013)

### ❖ Content

With the increased growth of SM in the community, the tools and strategies companies use to communicate with customers have changed appreciably. This significant change allows consumers to generate content online with the intent of sharing and educating one another about products, services, experiences and brands (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2006). According to Tavana *et al.* (2013), the content of an SM platform is used to measure the amount of pertinent information on that platform. Hence, content is significant because it keeps customers interest to prevent them from switching to a different platform. Barnes (2014) states that it is important to create a schedule for content updates to ensure frequent participation in the platform(s). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) states that SM is about sharing and interacting with an audience, so it is important to ensure an active presence whereby posting, new updates and also engaging in discussions with customers and target audience.

### ❖ Impression Score

According to Kiráľová and Pavlíček (2015) research on tourism destination, SM is used as a promotional\marketing tool which has a high number of visitors using SM applications. Therefore, to monitor these visits impression score is employed. Impression score collects the behaviour of users\customers who visit the website (Tavana et al. 2013).

### ❖ **Cost**

Initially, SM began as a medium for entertainment; then became the most common tool for marketing because of the vast advantage it brings to the business area. To create a presence on most SM platforms, this can be done free of charge or at low cost. As a result of its cost-effective nature, it's considered to be the preferred marketing tool in the business environment. Hence, companies have employed SM as an outstanding approach and a marketing strategy to reach out to their customers and potential audience. Furthermore, companies benefit from cost reduction in marketing by using SM as a marketing strategy (Kirtiř & Karahan 2011).

Therefore, multinational companies, small and medium-sized enterprises, non-profitable organisations and even government agencies all implore SM because of its cost-effective nature and high level of efficiency (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010).

### ❖ **Look and Feel**

The look and feel of a site is stated to mean the design and user-friendliness of an SM site. Furthermore, it can represent the need for minimal training expense and the simplicity of the tool (Tavana et al. 2013). SM platform with an intuitive and user-friendly interface ensures that customers can engage with the systems without training (Lardi & Fuchs 2013).

### ❖ **Audience fit**

Companies are advised to define what target groups to address using SM platforms. They have to prioritise the population to identify the degree of the population who use and access SM (Effing & Spil 2016).

According to Edwards (2015), the most effective way for a company to reach its target audience is by identifying its business goals and objectives and the audience suitable for the business. For example, age group, educational level, gender, etc. all of these determined an audience fit. Therefore, if a company is targeting the young audience, a preferable SM platform to concentrate on would be Snapchat and/or Instagram.

The discussion on figure 2-2 and 2-3 has revealed the limitations of each structure. Hence, this study has merged both structures to form a more comprehensive SM strategy framework.

## 2.7.4 Proposed Social Media Framework

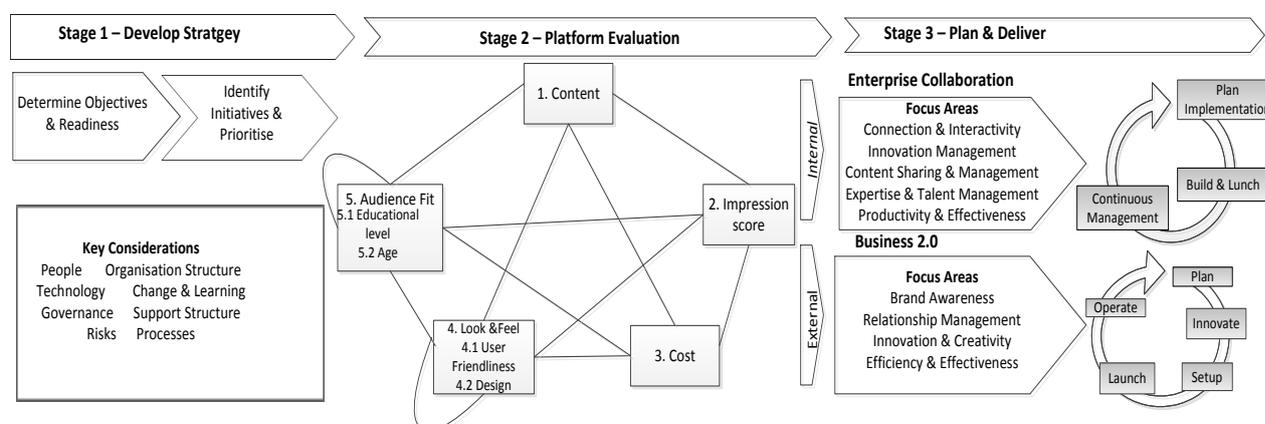


Figure 2-4: The proposed SM strategy framework

There is a lack of focus on the capability and readiness for companies to adopt SM in the literature. There are limited studies for the implementation of SM and the evaluation of SM platform for a company. For example, "The Honeycomb Framework" (Kietzmann et al. 2011) is designed to help understand SM and its functionalities, so this does not necessarily focus on SM readiness or how it can be implemented successfully in a company (Omosigho & Abeysinghe 2012)

The SM strategy framework in figure 2-2 gives an illustration of how SM can be implemented by a company effectively while considering the company's readiness, transparency to employees and customers, the merging between SM and existing business activities and the importance of defining the target audience for SM use (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga, 2010). Nonetheless, the SM strategy framework (figure 2-2) lacks a profound process to effectively select a suitable platform for both the Enterprise Collaboration (internal) and Business 2.0 (external).

The Platform evaluation process (figure 2-3) shows the key factors necessary for consideration in selecting a suitable SM platform. The literature shows there is a lack of a framework to determine the right SM platform for businesses. Although Edwards (2015) suggested ways of selecting the right SM platforms by having a good knowledge of user statistics; daily active

users, monthly active users and overall users of each platform. However, this is not an effective way to determine the right SM platform for business, for it is based on number counts. Different platforms are developed for different purpose with different functionality and different target audience (Culnan et al. 2010). For example, LinkedIn is known to be a platform for working professionals.

Both figures 2-2 and 2-3 form a more comprehensive framework for SM strategy implementation and platform evaluation process. This framework provides the necessary need for adoption and improvement of an existing SM practice and the useful method for the selection of SM platform. The frameworks were merged and presented in figure 2-4. This framework is suggested as a comprehensive way for the implementation of SM in companies. The proposed SM strategy framework (figure 2-4) is applied as a theoretical background and guide in constructing the interview questions and carrying out the analysis of the first investigative phase of this research (chapter 4).

## **2.8 Theoretical Approaches used to study Social Media**

The literature reveals that various researchers have applied several theoretical approaches in conducting SM research in companies. Several theories have been employed in SM research to study the socio-psychological behaviour of SM users such as stakeholders and customers. As discussed by Ngai et al. (2015) there are three categories of theories in SM research; personal behaviour, social behaviour and mass communication.

For personal behaviour theories, its purpose is to understand/explain the behaviour of people at a more personal and individual level. These theories are used in describing the characteristics influencing user's behaviour. For example, the research done by Correa et al. (2010), Labrecque et al. (2011), Lu & Hsiao (2010) and Zhong et al. (2011) all concentrated around personality traits such as openness, conscientiousness agreeableness, neuroticism and extraversion which were used in explaining the behavioural intentions of SM users. Hsu & Lin (2008) employed the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to study human beings' willingness to participate in SM activities. Casaló et al. (2010) and Chang and Zhu (2011) applied the Theory of planned behaviour (TPB) which is an extension of TRA. TPB was used to anticipate users' behaviour. Casaló et al. (2010), Hsu & Lin (2008) and Steyn et al. (2010) employed

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in their research as this model is vastly used in SM research to examine similar scenarios using different SM technologies. This model has also been used to study ease of use and usefulness of new technologies regarding people's approach to adoption.

Social behaviour theories are focused on explaining the behaviour of individuals towards SM in a social context. Social Aspects Theory is a term that comprises of all social factors such as social identity, social capital and social influence. The studies of Cheung et al. (2011), Fischer & Reuber (2011), Blanchard (2008), Chai & Kim (2010) and Shiue et al. (2010) use SM to describe socio-psychological and voluntary behaviour thus social factors have been extensively used to investigate the users' intentions, actions and attitudes in relating to SM usage and adoption. Wei (2009) research on social power theory defines bloggers as the influences; based on their ability to influence many people in the context of SM. Shiue, Chiu and Chang (2010) employed social loafing theory to study the online communities on SM.

Mass communication theories have also been used to study SM. Examples of these theories are Para-social interaction (PSI) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). In SM research Colliander and Dahlén (2011) used the PSI to examine the behaviour of users regarding purchase intention and brand attitude. In understanding customer behaviour in SM research, Eighmey & McCord (1998) applied the UGT in their study to investigate how to satisfy customer's needs (Chen & Hirschheim 2004; Dholakia et al. 2004; Porter & Donthu 2008).

Furthermore, Huang et al. (2010) applied social network theory to understand how the anticipated performance, integrity and the mass of a website are connected to the purchase intention of products from it. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is also used in SM studies. According to Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014) in the study of ANT nonhumans such as technologies are also identified as actors to understand the social context. Humans and nonhumans (for example, SM) are called actants.

In recent years the researcher has adopted the use of materiality and technology in strategising and in the context of our progressive digital society by using the term Sociomateriality (Vaara & Whittington 2012). According to Suchman (2007); Leonardi (2012); Carlile *et al.* (2013), the focus of the relationship between social and the material is emergent from technology studies which aim to improve, but also investigate the different aspect of technology in social life. Leonardi (2012) uses sociomateriality to highlight the role of materiality in a context

considered social and also argues that technology is independent of people. The summary of the theories used for SM research can be viewed in table 2-2.

<b>Theory/Model</b>	<b>Research Articles</b>
Theory of Reasoned Action	Hsu & Lin (2008)
Theory of Planned Behaviour	Casaló et al. (2010); Chang & Zhu 2011
Technology Acceptance Theory	Casaló et al. (2010); Hsu & Lin (2008) and Steyn et al. (2010)
Social Aspect Theory; social identity, social capital and social influence	Cheung et al. (2011); Fischer & Reuber (2011); Blanchard (2008); Chai & Kim (2010) and Shiue et al. (2010)
Social Power Theory	Wei (2009)
Social Loafing Theory	Shiue et al. (2010)
Para-social Theory	Colliander & Dahlén (2011)
Uses and Gratifications Theory	Eighmey & McCord (1998); Chen & Hirschheim (2004); Dholakia et al. (2004); Porter & Donthu (2008)
Social Network Theory	Huang et al. (2010)
Actor-Network Theory	Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. (2014)
Sociomateriality	Vaara & Whittington (2012); (Leonardi (2012); Suchman (2007); Carlile et al. (2013)

Table 2-2: Summary of the different theories used in SM research

Although these theories have been used in SM research, their theoretical attributes do not allow for the researcher to apply these concepts to the phenomenon under investigation. For example, the theories of personal behaviour focus on an individual experience with SM. Secondly, the social behaviour theories are concerned with user's intentions while using SM. Additionally, the mass communication theories were used to understand the user's purchase intentions on SM. However, the theories as mentioned above have dominated the information system research on SM and none aids in understanding the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, they have not been applied to this research. For sociomateriality, the concept is focused on social and technical (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al. 2014), while this study seeks to understand the practice of SM as well as the social and technical. The next section discusses Practice theory as the theory applied in this study.

### **2.8.1 Practice Theory**

From the 1970s, the practice approaches are increasingly influential and employed for the analysis of science, technology, culture, learning, policy making, language and consumption phenomena. "The appeal of what has been variably described as practice idiom, practice standpoint, practice lens and a practice-based approach lies in its capacity to describe important features of the world we inhabit as something that is routinely made and re-made in practice using tools, discourse and our bodies" (Nicolini 2012). Hence, practice theory offers a fresh view on things social and organisational. Therefore, the appeal on practice approach comes from its ability to reproduce contemporary experience as the digital world increases in interconnectivity. Here social is ongoing and complex as the boundaries around the existence of social are expanding and difficult to deduce.

Ortner (1984), Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina and Savigny (2001), Reckwitz (2002) and Rouse (2007), suggests that a practical view of social proposes a solution for some problems unsolved by other approaches, especially, the view which describes the world in dualism (For example, actor & system, theory & action, body & mind and social & material). They suggested that practice approach improves analytical capability and possess the ability to dissolve dualism which provides a theoretical stance that allows the understanding of social, organisational and work practices. Practice stands are processual and see the world as an ongoing routinized and repetition of events.

According to Orlikowski (2010) there are three ways to study, practice theory; “a focus on the empirical study of how people act in an organisational context, a theoretical focus which aids in understanding the relationship between the action people take and the structure of organizational life, a philosophical focus on the constitutive role of practice in producing organisational reality” (Orlikowski 2010). The three ways are critical to organisational scholars using practice lens. Firstly, the empirical approach answers the ““what” of practice lens”; it focuses on everyday routine and improvised forms of activities. This approach is primarily on structural features while disregarding the influence of human action. Secondly, the theoretical approach to practice focuses on Practice theory, and it answers the ““how” of a practice lens”. This approach focuses on everyday activities, but also very concerned with particular explanations for the activity. It is interested in the dynamics of day-to-day activity, the generation and how they are carried out within different contexts. Lastly, the philosophical approach argues that social reality is made up of practices. This approach views the social world through day-to-day activity rather than seeing it as external or socially constructed. This approach answers the ““why” of practice lens” (Feldman & Orlikowski 2011). These approaches present different foci for researchers in their application of practice lens. This study is centred on the second approach; Practice theory as a theoretical paradigm (Schatzki et al. 2001).

## 2.8.2 Applications of Practice Theory

The application of practice theory in SM, particularly for platform evaluation allows for the researcher to investigate the dynamics of day-to-day activity. Practice theory has been used in organisational studies as those social actions that repetitively creates the structure which restrains and authorise actions (Giddens 1986). The works of science and technology scholars like Shatzki (2001); Suchman (2007); Latour (2005) highlights the role of natural objects and technology (non-humans) in carrying out a social life. Although these scholars theorise non-human agents differently, their studies help other practice researchers acknowledge the significance of materiality in social life.

As previously mentioned, the application of Practice theory has progressed within the organisation studies. This theory can be applied in three fields; strategy, knowledge and institutionalism (Feldman & Orlikowski 2011). Strategy is applied in Practice theory as

strategy-as-practice. The application of Practice theory for this study aligns with strategy field. The strategy of the platform evaluation allows for companies to select the suitable platform for their business purpose effectively. In investigating this phenomenon, the researcher agrees with Whittington (1992, 2006); Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007); Golsorkhi *et al.*, 2010; Rauniar *et al.*, 2014) studies which suggest that Practice theory aids to understand the relevant connection and enacting nature of strategising. Strategy-as-practice is aligned with what actors do rather than what organisations own. This is an act of understanding “strategy in the making” as a progressive process and not a static act. The strategy-as-practice researchers are focused on how strategy is conducted through the day-to-day activity of organisational participants. Implementing this theoretical concept in platform evaluation allows for researchers and companies to focus on how strategy is carried out instead of how companies change, so to give a better understanding of the interactions through which strategy develops. This could contain both change and stability (Jarzabkowski 2005).

Knowledge and Institutionalism are the two other fields researchers could apply practice theory. Knowledge field researchers within organisational studies use practice theory to redefine believes of the employed knowledge in management literature. Giddens (1984), Bourdieu (1990), Lave (1988) and Hutchins (1991) argues that knowledge is a significant activity which is embedded in the day-to-day implementation of practice. According to Giddens (1984), knowledge is “inherent within the ability to go on within the routines of social life” while Bourdieu (1990), suggest that knowledge has been built up within practice and not passive. This brings an insight of the understanding of “knowing in practice” as “knowledgeability” which is constantly executed in practice. Although Boland (1979); Brown and Duguid (1991); Wenger (1998); Gherardi and Nicolini (2000); Carlile (2002); Tsoukas (2005, 2009), have various views on knowledge, but their different studies suggest that knowledge is not static, it is dynamic, and it enacts when actors engage in practice.

The institutionalism stream is focused on developing the institutional field and how it affects individual understandings and their actions (Powell & DiMaggio 2012; Greenwood & Hinings 2002). This research stream constitutes a move from organisational field to institutions and then to individuals; hence, the relationship between action and institution is not significantly theorised. However, the recent institutional research considers practice as a fundamental element of institutions.

Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) suggests that Practice theory aids in understanding the use of technology in the company. However, many theories used for information technology in organisational research have an underlying assumption on technology as an irrevocable system. Furthermore, the concept of “technological determinism” states that technology is external, independent and unchangeable had no space for the human actor. These concepts assume that “the technology that was planned and designed would be built, that the technology that was built would be used in particular ways, and that the technology that was used would produce specific anticipated and intended outcomes” (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). Orlikowski (2000) argues that there is no way of anticipating how people will implement a technology and the outcome it will produce over time. The application of SM in companies is evident of technology enactment in practice. Due to the digital consciousness in business, the use of technology (in this case SM) is influenced by an individual understanding of the features and functionalities of the technology. These are particularly affected by the descriptions, interpretation, beliefs, and demonstrations presented by intermediaries such as managers, vendors etc. (Orlikowski et al. 1995). Additionally, when individuals decide to implement a technology, they also identify ways to engage with the technology. Hence, they could consciously or unintentionally use it in ways unexpected by developers.

There are two entities considered in this study; the use of technology (SM platforms) in the company and the application of strategy field. Practice theory can suggest significant implications for practitioners who implement strategies using technology for business (Feldman & Orlikowski 2011). Studying practice allows for researchers to investigate issues that apply to research focused on technology and strategy (Golsorkhi et al. 2010). Hence, this study is focused on the strategy field, thus, using strategy-as-practice a more appropriate lens in understanding the phenomenon.

### **2.8.3 Strategy-as-Practice**

In early 2000, strategy-as-practice appeared to be a unique approach for “studying strategy decision-making, strategizing, strategy-making, strategic management and strategy work” (Whittington 1996; Johnson et al. 2003; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007). Strategy-as-practice research is concerned with the micro-level activities, processes and practices that describe the organisational strategy. This approach provides an understanding of strategic decision-making

from an organisational perspective and giving a strategic point of view for investigating the process of organising and also, creating a relationship between strategic management research and practice-based organisational studies (Golsorkhi et al. 2010). Strategy-as-practice approach attempts to shift focus from concentrating on the results achieved from the effects of strategy on performance to an in-depth analysis of the process of strategy making, planning and implementation and other actions of strategizing (Golsorkhi et al. 2010).

The application of strategy-as-practice perspective is focused on the platform evaluation. This gives insight into the strategy behind the selection of the appropriate SM platform for business. This point of view gives an in-depth understanding of the actors, interrelated organisational practices and process in the company. Whittington (2003) argues that strategy research has lost human agency in its approach, but the strategy-as-practice perspective emphasises, the need to understand why and what actors do as they develop, and implement strategic purpose (Johnson et al. 2003; Whittington 2003). Practice theory observes praxis (human activity) and the actor's behaviour is embedded in practice (Reckwitz 2002).

In strategy-as-practice perspective, three elements of analysis are considered; praxis (the actual activity in strategizing), practices (the tools, routines of strategy-making), practitioners (role and identity of the actors involved in strategy-making) (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006; Golsorkhi et al. 2010).

### ❖ **Parxis**

The concept of praxis is the actual act of creating and enacting strategy; this is what actors do (Whittington 2006). Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) suggest that praxis is the flow of the actual activity in which strategy is derived. According to Brown and Duguid (2001), one of the advantages of the use of practice approach is to discover the process in the activity which means to gain an in-depth understanding of the actual activity. Praxis allows for a new strategy; this is when strategy inductively develops from strategic sense-making activities in the organisation in contrast to the high-level plan. The application of strategy-as-practice perspective in the context of platform evaluation allows for the researcher to investigate the importance of micro-level details such as capabilities, resources and the emergence of new strategies from the routine (Vaara & Whittington 2012). Praxis allows for managers (practitioners) interpretation of activity. Silence & Mueller (2007) describe the influence of managers to create and enact strategic initiatives, according to their understanding which changes the strategy over a period.

Vaara & Whittington (2012) suggest that practices are filled with uncertainty thus the process of praxis relies greatly on the skills of the practitioner.

### ❖ Practices

Information systems and strategy-as-practice research are both interested on social technologies in practice. Technologies contains “constraints”, “norms” and “expectation” that could influence daily use. Orlikowski (2000) describes technology as artefacts and “technology-in-use” as the recurrent use of technology. Strategy-as-practice researchers agree with information system researchers which suggests that social and technology are connected (Orlikowski & Scott 2008). Reckwitz (2002) define practices as the “routinized types of behaviour which consist of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge”. Practices are a combination of behaviour, knowledge, process and resources through which practitioners can communicate to achieve social activity. These resources are used as a routine and forms pattern over time. However, the routinized practice is not unchangeable, rather, it is variable and can be altered according to the way it is used (Whittington 2014).

### ❖ Practitioners

In Practice theory, it is a general assumption that practitioners are actors whose activities shape and actualise strategy (Whittington 2014; Huang et al. 2014). Hence, practitioners are interconnected with praxis and practices (Reckwitz 2002). Both the strategy-as-practice researchers and information system researchers are concerned with the individuals who do the actual work and consume knowledge. In strategy-as-practice research, a strong theme considered for practitioners is the competence. The practitioners are accessed in both their capabilities and the skills needed in strategizing (Fauré & Rouleau 2011). For this study, the researcher focused on the key informants of SM in the company; they are involved in the decision-making and strategizing. According to Mantere & Vaara (2008) study on strategy participation, the inclusion and exclusion of practitioners in strategizing praxis is determined by the practices in the company. The practitioner is assumed to have the skills to employ the strategy. Strategy research typically concentrates on top-level managers while strategy-as-practice research allows for a focus on middle managers in strategy. This study highlights the important role middle managers take on as interpreters, communicators and creators of strategy

in their companies. Hence, the involvement of the managers is critical to the company (Vaara & Whittington 2012).

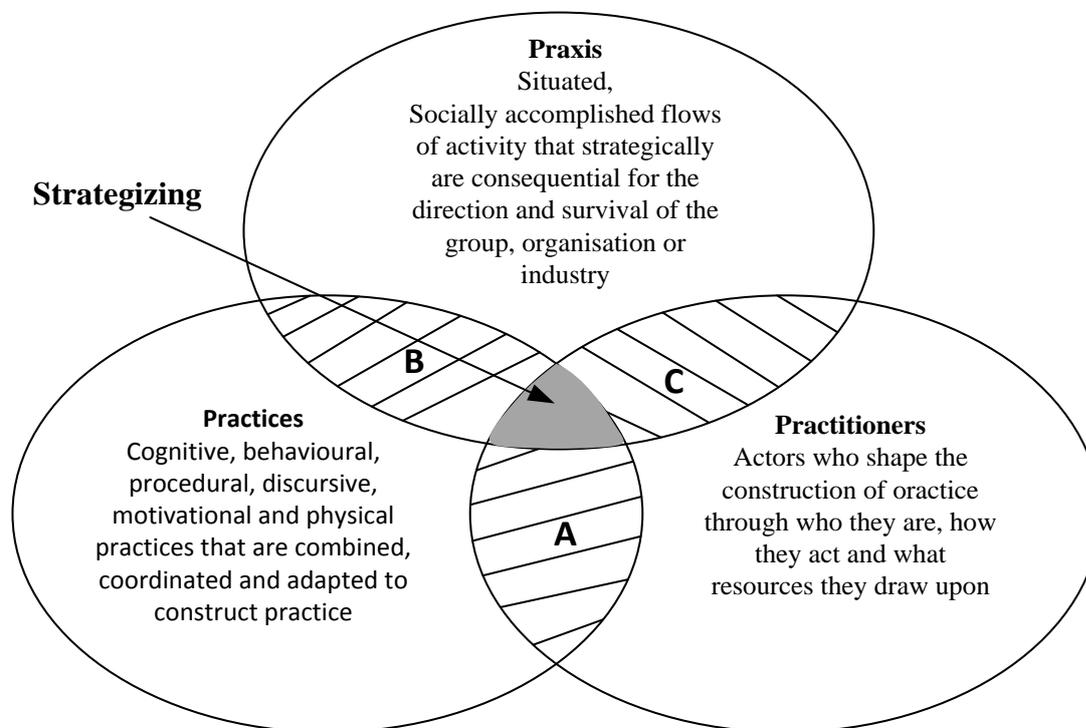


Figure 2-5: A conceptual framework for analysing strategy-as-practice (Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007)

Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) framework suggest, although the concepts of praxis, practices and practitioners are different, they are interconnected and impossible to study one without considering the others. Additionally, it is almost certain that most research questions will link all three elements; there might be different areas of focus as highlighted in the figure above as A, B and C. For example, a study might focus on the interconnection between practices and practitioner as the dominant area.

## 2.8.4 Summary of Strategy-as-Practice

According to Johnson, Melin and Whittington (2003), the description of what people should do when a strategy is implemented do not align with the evidence of what they actually do. There is a need for empirical and theoretical investigation of how and where strategizing and organising is actually done. Therefore, this has led to the application of strategy-as-practice approach based on the actual activities within an organisation rather than a prescribed set of activities (Whittington, 1996, 2003).

Furthermore, the practice approach allows a progression from general reflection on social activity to specific analysis of social reality. However, this does not mean that all practice-oriented studies should engage in ethnographic research, rather, practice literature are theoretical in nature (Golsorkhi *et al.*, 2010). Nonetheless, the advantage of applying practice lens to the study of platform evaluation and other areas like strategy lies primarily in its ability to explain in detail the micro-level foundations of social activity in a distinct setting. A practice lens in strategy research should not only focus on the behaviour or action of managers but seek to understand how the behaviours or actions are connected with practices. A primary insight in practice lens suggests that the practitioner's behaviours and actions are typically related to how a social actor is to think, feel or communicate in a specific situation. Additionally, another important fact is, the notion of practice allows social actions to be linked with structure and agency. Although, there are different views on the connection between structure and agency most scholars indicate the potential of practice to explain why and how social actions follow, repeat routines, norms and rules and sometimes do not.

The strategist dilemma is the reconciliation of concurrent but conflicting needs for change and stability. The world is always changing so companies must adapt. Yet most companies need some level of stability to function properly. More specifically, strategy-as-practice research has “demonstrated the enabling and constraining aspects of strategy practices, the role of skilled performance in changing the course of events, and the social construction of strategy practitioners” (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). This growing approach has important theoretical and methodological implications. Also, the in-depth analysis reveals practical implications for managers and other key company actors. Strategy-as-practice significantly contributes to strategic management, more so, (Orlikowski, 2000; Golsorkhi *et al.*, 2010) argues that to realise the full potential of strategy-as-practice more is to be done.

## 2.9 Conclusion

This chapter reviews the available literature on SM, types of SM, the impact of SM in companies, application of SM in companies, and SM strategies. This chapter focused on gaining a better understanding of how companies use SM for the business purpose. During this research, the researcher identified gaps in the literature; a limited availability of SM strategy framework and the evaluation and selection of SM platforms. Furthermore, the chapter includes a detailed description of the SM strategy framework proposed in this study. The framework discussed (figure 2.4) will be helpful in forming the interview guide/data for the first phase of the investigative field work, which will be presented in Chapter 4. The proposed framework is used as the basis for analysis, which also provides the categorisation of themes and sub-themes that emerged from the dataset. The framework was used as a tool for analysing the implementation of SM strategy in companies. To address the second gap in the literature, the researcher will adopt Practice theory to gain in-depth knowledge on the selection of SM platform.

## 3 Chapter 3: Research Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the research methods used in this study to investigate the issues related to social media (SM) strategy in companies as presented in the previous chapter. In the area of information systems (IS), several research methods have been used. Therefore, the decision to employ an approach is quite challenging. Nonetheless, based on the gap mentioned in chapter 2 of this study, a qualitative research methodology using an interpretive research approach has been chosen as the most appropriate approach for this study. This is based on the exploratory nature of this research, and this will help in understanding emerging phenomena.

This chapter provides information on the primary approaches and methods used in the data collection process and the contributions it made in achieving the research aims and objectives.

The philosophical assumptions for carrying out this research is derived from the interpretive research philosophy, which argues that our knowledge of reality which includes the human action gained through social constructions (Kaplan & Maxwell 2005). Interpretive research has become much more important in the IS field than it was in the early 1990s (Walsham 2006). It has been used in different areas of IS research, such as organisational intervention and management of IS, system design and social implication of IS (Walsham, 1995). According to Klein and Myers (1999), interpretive research helps IS researchers to understand human thoughts and actions in social, an organisational context which gives insights into IS phenomena. The qualitative data collection source is the semi-structured interviews.

This chapter is structured as follows. The next section will discuss the issues to consider before deciding to use a particular research approach. Secondly, examining the underlying research presumption that guides IS research. Thirdly, the discussion on the rationale for selecting an interpretive research approach. The next session will discuss the suitability of using a qualitative research approach for this study. Also, the research design is presented, followed by the background knowledge of the companies involved in this study.

## 3.2 Selecting an appropriate Research Approach

The diversity of research paradigms poses complex challenges for the selection of the appropriate approach for this study. According to Galliers and Land (1987) in the field of the IS, before the decision on the proper research approach is made, the nature of IS should be considered, and the expected result gained from examining this approach is to be evaluated. They further discussed that IS field is a meta-subject that spreads through many disciplines such as social science, business and natural science in some context. Hence, selecting an appropriate research approach is not straightforward. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) agree that there is a lot to be considered when deciding on an approach for conducting research.

Galliers (1993) states it is necessary to consider the organisational and managerial issues associated with IS research. They also suggested that researchers should adopt a perspective that is compatible with their research interest and be open-minded to other assumptions and interests.

Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) agree with Chua (1986) categorising of research epistemologies into Interpretive, Positivist and Critical studies on the assumption of the research philosophical outlines. In other words, the definition of what forms a research paradigm consists of issues of ontology (the nature of existence), epistemology (the criteria for constructing useful knowledge), research methodology and the relationship between knowledge and the world. Hence, they explained the three major research paradigms in IS research which has been briefly summarised below:

- ❖ The interpretive research adopts the position that “our knowledge of reality is a social construction by human actors” (Walsham 1995). Hence, value-free data cannot be obtained in interpretive studies as the enquiry is dependent on the researcher’s preconception which guides the enquiry process. According to Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) interpretivist studies “assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meaning as they interact with the world around them” (Orlikowski & Baroudi 1991). Furthermore, this method allows the researcher to interact with human participants. An interpretivist cannot have a pre-defined limit to phenomena, but grants participants the opportunity to their own belief and experience.
- ❖ Positivist studies are assumed on the existence of a previous relationship within a phenomenon which is usually investigated with instructions. Furthermore, it is the

assumption of the existence of the objective world was evidence of quantifiable measures of variables and statement is used to test hypotheses. Positivist attempts to “capture approximations of real-world entities, many of which are intellectual (or social) constructions to be sure” (Straub et al. 2004).

- ❖ The critical research aims to critique an existing state of affair, through the disclosure of beliefs that are ingrained, within social systems and social conditions. According to Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), the criteria adopted in “classifying critical studies were evidence of a critical stance towards taken-for-granted assumptions about organisations and information systems, and a dialectical analysis, which attempted to reveal the historical, ideological, and the contradictory nature of existing social practices” (Orlikowski & Burundi 1991).

Table 3-1 gives brief underlying assumptions guiding the three main paradigms in IS research and their basic beliefs. However, design science can be classified as another paradigm. It helps in the creation and evaluation of information technology artefacts which solves organisational problems (Hevner et al. 2004).

<b>Beliefs</b>	<b>Positivist</b>	<b>Interpretive</b>	<b>Critical</b>
Beliefs about physical and social reality	The physical and social world that exists independent of human are to some extent un-problematically apprehended, measured and characterised.	Emphasis is made on the importance of subjective meanings and social-political also symbolic action in the process through which human construct and reconstruct their reality	Social reality is historically constituted; therefore, people, organisations and societies are not limited to existing in a particular state.

Beliefs about Knowledge	It is concerned with the empirical testability of theories. Thus this requires the “verification” and “falsification” of theories. This belief is a hypothetical-deductive account of scientific explanation.	Understanding social reality requires understanding how practice and meanings are formed and informed by language and norms shared by people working to achieve a particular goal. Researcher builds up interpretations or explanations that account for how subjective meanings are created and maintained in a particular setting.	This is concerned with the deep-rooted historical and ethnographic studies of organisational processes and structures.
Beliefs about the relationship between knowledge and the empirical world	Positivist researchers are impartial observers hence this allows the objective evaluation of predicted actions and processes but cannot get involved in moral judgements or opinion.	Interpretivist researcher never presupposes a stand and is always implicated in the phenomena being studied.	The researcher must make aware the restrictive conditions of the status quo, thereby initiating change in the social relations and practices helping to eliminate the basis of elimination and domination

Table 3-1: Three main philosophical assumptions

Nonetheless, previous studies have shown the use of two paradigms and explained that the basic differences between the three paradigms do not imply a limitation on conducting research which merges them. Lee (1991) argues that interpretivism and positivism can be mutually supportive in the context of organisational research.

Becker and Niehaves (2007) developed a framework that systematically analyses and illuminates the epistemological assumptions for various research approaches. They also suggested that in assessing a research, epistemology should be explicit. Their analysis converges to the pluralism in IS research. However, most IS researchers think that the three major paradigms are contrasting, and their conceptual differences are impossible to bridge. According to Weber (2004), this assumption is intense within the IS research community. Nonetheless, other researchers have supported the idea that different paradigms can be used and the fundamental differences do not pose hard constraints on conducting studies that integrate them. Lee (1991) argued that interpretivism and positivism can be supportive in the context of organisational studies. Furthermore, Weber (2004) explains that the difference between positivism and interpretivism is based on choosing research methods. Mingers (2001, 2003, 2004) agrees with mixed methods in IS research as he justifies his approach by stating

“It is possible to detach research methods (and perhaps even methodologies) from a paradigm and use them, critically and knowledgeably, within a context that makes different assumptions” (Mingers, 2001, 2003, 2004).

Furthermore, to explain the philosophical position that IS researchers adopt as stated by Chua (1986), Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) described that these beliefs are about physical and social reality, belief about knowledge and assumptions about the relationship between knowledge and the empirical world. These beliefs explained below:

#### ❖ **Beliefs about Physical and Social Reality**

Ontological views have to do with the phenomena under investigation; that is, whether the empirical world is assumed to be objective and independent of humans, or subjective. Therefore, having existence only through the action of humans in creating and recreating it. The beliefs about social relations are concerned with how people relate to organisations, groups and society.

### ❖ **Beliefs about Knowledge**

Epistemology assumptions are concerned with knowledge about phenomena which are constructed and evaluated. For example, the positivist view is a theory that is true only if it is not falsified by empirical events (Chua, 1986). Methodological assumptions indicate the research methods to consider for gathering abundant empirical evidence.

### ❖ **Beliefs about the relationship between knowledge and the empirical world**

This belief is concerned with the role of theory in the world of practice and reflects the values and intentions researchers bring to work. Specifically, what researchers believe is suitable for their research and the intended goal of the research area.

In the next section, the justification for using an interpretive study is presented.

## **3.2.1 Philosophical Perspective: Interpretive**

The different research paradigm makes it a challenge to select the appropriate approach for this research. All research, either qualitative, quantitative or a mixed method, is based on some fundamental assumptions about what research methods are suitable. For this study, an interpretive research paradigm was taken, with the assumption that our knowledge of reality is gained through social constructions such as consciousness, documents, shared meanings, language, and other artefacts (Klein and Myers, 1999). In other words, interpretive research does not predefine variables (both dependent and independent) but is concentrated on human sense-making as the situation arises (Kaplan and Maxwell, 2005). Furthermore, the interpretive approach aims to understand the "how" and "why" individuals interact with, relates and participates in their social environment (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991).

In IS research, interpretive methods produce an understanding of a context of the phenomenon whereby IS influences and is influenced by the context presented (Walsham 1993). Likewise, Klein and Myers, (1999) argue interpretive research can help IS researchers to understand human thoughts and actions in social and organisational contexts; allowing for in-depth knowledge into IS phenomena which include management of IS and information development. According to Orlikowski and Baroudi, (1991), interpretive research gives the opportunity for participants (the IS users) to present their opinions and experiences in their words from their

perspective. Klein and Myers, (1999) and Avison and Pries-Heje (2005) describe interpretive research as a valuable way to gain insight into a phenomenon.

The researcher's assumption is that social process is not hypothetically derived rather social reality can only be interpreted and understood as a social process involves immersing oneself in the world of those generating it. However, the rationale behind using the interpretive research approach was instigated by the nature of the problem that needs to be examined. In this thesis, an investigation on the use of SM strategy in an organisation is conceptualised as an organisational necessity to align company's business objectives with SM effectively. Applying SM as a business asset rather than simply a marketing tool is a way of successfully implementing the use of SM for business. There is a relationship between people, social and technical which dynamically influences and is influenced by the practitioner's activities aiming to enhance the application of SM for business with regards to their work routine. Adopting these assumptions guides the researcher to believe that interpretivism is the most suitable approach to investigate and comprehend the interconnection amongst the user's thoughts, their actions, social process and the different technical factors. According to Gibbons (1987) and Walsham (1993) interpretive research attempts to understand phenomena through the subjective meanings in social life that people assign to them.

Furthermore, another reason for taking the interpretive approach is to allow the researcher an in-depth (i) investigation of the use of SM in companies (ii) to gain detailed knowledge on the influence of having an SM strategy in organisations. These can be investigated more thoroughly by taking an interpretive stance. This is because the underlying argument of an interpretive researcher is that individuals respond to situations by their understanding of that situation which typically arises from social interaction and the interpretations are developed and modified using interpretive process (Boland 1979). The concept of SM strategy can be studied from different angles; however, as discussed in the literature review chapter, SM strategy are contextual, and their outcomes are based on resources, expertise, technicalities, people and social conditions. Applying an interpretive perspective, helps in understanding of the phenomenon (implementation of SM strategy and platform evaluation) as it is investigated in its natural setting and from the view of its participants (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Chen and Hirschheim, 2004).

Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) argue the positivist approach is not suitable for this research as the major limitation of this approach is the disregarding of historical and contextual conditions

that surround the IS phenomenon. “The design and use of information technology in organisations, in particular, is intrinsically embedded in social-contexts marked by time, locale, politics and culture and neglecting these influences may reveal an incomplete picture of information systems phenomena” (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). However, the interpretivist approach allows participants to express their opinions in their own words and to draw on their concepts and experience.

The exploratory process included in this study were interviews and qualitative questionnaires. Listening to and analysing what participants had to say about the use of SM in the business environment.

### **3.3 Research Approach - Qualitative**

Qualitative research allows researchers to study complex phenomena within its context to develop rich insight (Myers & Avison 2002; Baxter & Jack 2008). According to Curry, Nembhard and Bradley (2009), qualitative research is a scientific inquiry that spreads through different disciplines, fields, and consist of many different approaches. It is also used to understand the complex social process to capture phenomena from the perspective of participants. It aims to investigate various aspects concerning IS through the use of qualitative data from a variety of sources, such as interviews, observations, archival materials and interventions (Conboy et al. 2012).

Qualitative research enables researchers to understand people and study the social and cultural context in which they live (Myers and Avison, 2002). However, regarding the philosophical assumptions of the researcher, a qualitative researcher can take the approach of a positivist, interpretivist or critical (Klein and Myers, 1999).

In social research, methodologies are categorised mainly qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative research highlights the description and understanding of the situation behind the factors while quantitative research objectively reports reality. The qualitative research methods were initially developed in the natural science to study natural phenomena (Myers and Avison, 2002; Chen and Hirschheim, 2004). In order, to justify the suitability of qualitative methods for this study, Curry, Nembhard and Bradley, (2009) gave an example of when the qualitative approach should be considered. They are:

- ❖ Investigate complex phenomena that are difficult to measure quantitatively.
- ❖ Generate data necessary for a comprehensive understanding of a problem.
- ❖ Gain insights into potential causal mechanisms.

Furthermore, (Marshall & Rossman 1999) describe the types of research for which qualitative research is suitable. They are as follows:

- ❖ Studies that seek to explore “where” and “why” policy
- ❖ Studies on unexplored phenomena
- ❖ Research that investigates in-depth into complexities and processes
- ❖ Research on little-known phenomena
- ❖ Studies on informal and unstructured relationships and processes in organisations
- ❖ Studies that can be conducted practically but not experimentally for ethical reasons
- ❖ Research for which relevant variables are to be identified

According to Lacity and Janson (1994), researchers may hesitate to adopt a qualitative research approach because they might be unfamiliar with analysing qualitative data. Nevertheless, the qualitative research approach has been selected as appropriate for this study because it is useful to achieve a better understanding of the phenomena for this research. Furthermore, qualitative research allows researchers to understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live; this is a suitable approach for this study.

For this research, the implementation of SM strategy is examined with the purpose of understanding the views of the key informants concerned with the use of SM in an organisation. The qualitative research approach is especially useful for this study because it seeks to explore where and why policy and local knowledge and practice.

### 3.3.1 Qualitative Research Process

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative research process in five phases. They are as follows:

- ❖ **Phase 1: The researcher**

While carrying out a qualitative research, there are complex traditions and research perspectives that emerge for the researcher. These traditions build the research history,

guidelines and constrain of a study. It is essential to examine the ethics and politics for a study and also the role of a researcher in a specific research. The role of a researcher will be further explained in section 3.4.2.

#### ❖ **Phase 2: Theoretical paradigms and perspectives**

Qualitative research is carried out based on the combination of epistemological, methodological and ontological beliefs. This belief forms how the researcher views the world. The paradigm used in this study and the reasons are explained in section 3.2 and 3.3.

#### ❖ **Phase 3: Research Strategies**

This stage starts with the research design and leads to a clear focus on the research questions and the aim of the study. This section the researcher develops the appropriate information needed for the explanation of the research questions and the strategy to use. Therefore, research strategies help with the method of collecting and analysing empirical data. The research strategy selected for this study is explained in section 3.4.1.

#### ❖ **Phase 4: Methods of collection and analysis**

The qualitative researcher is challenged with which data collection method to use for collecting empirical data; interviews, direct observations, documents. However, the selection of the data collection method is usually based on the selected search strategy. For this research, interview and qualitative questionnaires are the data collection method chosen. The chosen techniques are discussed in section 3.5.

#### ❖ **Phase 5: The art, practices and politics of interpretation and presentation**

At this step of the qualitative research process, the researcher has to produce a public text and a research interpretation that comes to the reader. This is done by using the evaluation criteria to evaluate the practices and to show the quality of the results. The discussion about this data is presented in chapter 4, 5 and 6.

### **3.3.2 Quality Assurance for Qualitative Research**

According to Noble and Smith (2015) evaluating the findings of a research is important to consider the quality of the research without bias. The terms validity, reliability and

generalisability are concepts associated with quantitative research. However, an outline of the strategies adopted to ensure credibility for this research is discussed below. Qualitative research is typically criticised for poor justification of the methods applied, lack of scientific rigour, lack of transparency in the analytical procedures and the findings; which are a collection of participants' opinion subject to research bias. As quantitative researchers employ statistical methods to justify validity and reliability of findings, qualitative research applies and incorporate methodological strategies to guarantee the trustworthiness of the research findings. In order to achieve trustworthiness, the researcher will need to justify that the study is valid, reliable and can be applied in a different context.

#### ❖ **Validity**

The researcher ensured that the findings of this study accurately reflects the data. However, recognising that multiple realities exist, the researcher outlines personal opinions and experience that may have resulted in methodological bias. Therefore, presenting the participants perspective clearly and accurately (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Noble and Smith, 2015).

#### ❖ **Reliability**

For consistency and trustworthiness, the researcher remains transparent and clear on the decisions by which the methods have been conducted and also, accounts for personal and research methods bias that may have influenced the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Therefore, an independent researcher should be able to arrive at similar findings or comparable findings. Confirmability is achieved when truth value, consistency and applicability have been considered. Furthermore, the methods applied, and findings are naturally linked to the researcher's philosophical position, experience and perspectives. Therefore, this should be accounted for and differentiated from the participant's viewpoint (Klein and Myers, 1999).

#### ❖ **Generalisability**

The transferability of the findings from a study to another and its applicability in another context. The applicability is considered as to whether findings can be applied to other contexts, settings and groups (Noble and Smith, 2015).

## 3.4 Research Design

The SM strategy framework is used as a guide to develop the interview questions. With a focus on analysing the existing themes from the framework and emerging themes from the dataset. Below is the description of the research methodology steps applied in this study.

### ❖ Step 1

This step involved developing the project plan and gaining in-depth knowledge on SM strategy and company. The overall investigation of SM strategy and platform selection process leads to the theoretical aspect that motivated the research. Therefore, leading to the development of the proposed SM strategy framework in chapter 2. The theoretical background enables the design of the next step with a focused approach. Although, the literature for SM strategy framework is limited, the first and second investigation phase would give an in-depth understanding of this study. Semi-structured interview was developed based on the framework developed from the literature review.

### ❖ Step 2

The first investigative phase is conducted here. Particularly, the development of semi-structured interview questions which was based on the framework derived from the literature review. The data collected is analysed using the hybrid thematic analysis. The appropriate participants were selected from the knowledge gotten from the literature review. The proposed SM strategy framework is redefined from the findings of this study.

### ❖ Step 3

This step is the second field investigation phase. In this step, further investigation is carried out due to the findings from the first phase. Additionally, the second field investigation phase will give insight on the results.

It is significant to maintain the design flexibility which is very important for qualitative methods. In building a research design, the following topics should be addressed; the overall strategy and rationale; data collection methods; data management: data analysis strategy; trustworthiness features; and a management plan (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). According to Janesick (2000) research design consists of three stages:

- ❖ The warm-up phase: here the research design decision is made at the beginning of the study such as the research questions and research strategy (chapters 1, 2, 3).
- ❖ The total workout stage: the design of the decision is made throughout the study. And this is where the fieldwork is carried out (chapters 4, 5).
- ❖ The cool-down phase: this point, the design decisions are made at the end of the study (chapters 4, 5, 6).

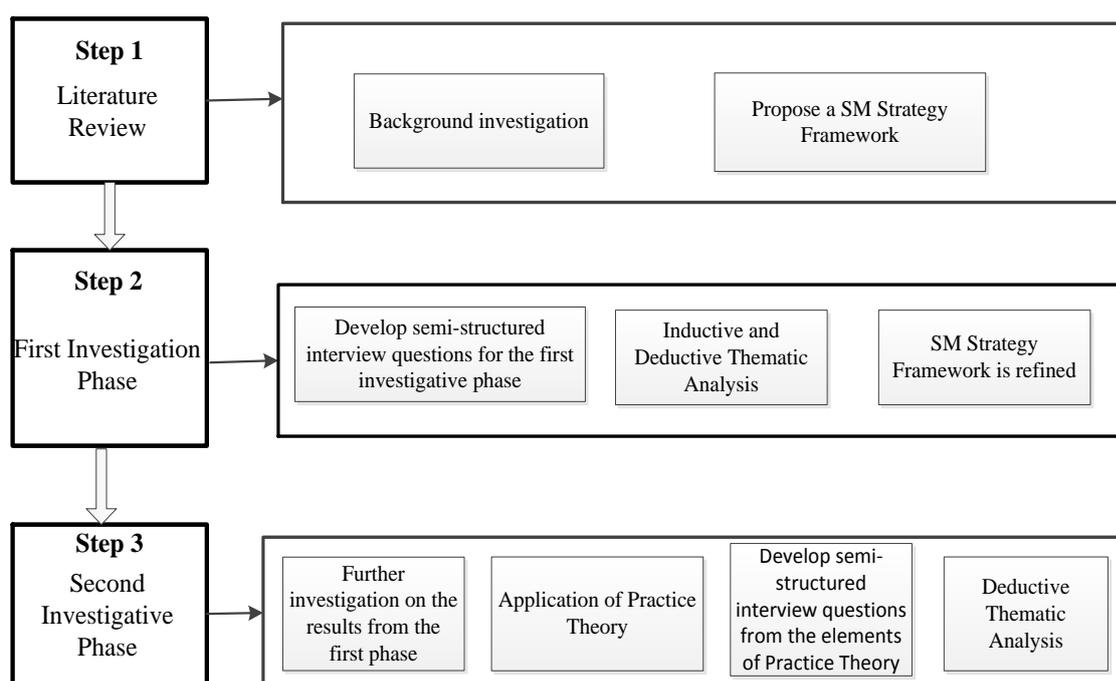


Figure 3-1: The 3-step research plan structure

### 3.4.1 Research Strategy – Field Study

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), research strategies are ethnography, case study, field study or field research and grounded theory. Ethnography commonly requires the researcher to spend a long period of time in the ‘field’ and provide detailed and observational evidence (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Case studies are used when contextual conditions are covered because the researcher believes they are important to the phenomenon under investigation.

Also, “when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context of study are not clear” (Baxter and Jack, 2008). While the field study is applied by several disciplines especially natural scientists, however, social scientists use field study by interviewing and observing individuals in their natural environments, language, culture and social structures (Edmondson and McManus, 2007).

The research strategy selected for this study is the field study. Field research is defined as a study that depends on the collection of primary data either qualitative or quantitative by studying people, problems and organisations (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). Also, Orlikowski & Baroudi (1991) states that field studies generate valid interpretive knowledge, for this explains humans in their social setting. (Edmondson and McManus, 2007) argues that field study is appropriate for exploratory attempt to encourage new theoretical idea and to validate whether an established theory holds up in the real world. In conducting a field study, four key elements are considered; research questions, prior work, research design and contribution to literature. This is presented in table 3-2 below.

Coolican (1990) explained that field studies are carried out in the ‘field’ which is the natural environment of the people studied and also gives the opportunity to view the natural behaviour as it occurs. The field research involves the researcher in a relationship with the subjects of the study; it includes the activities of the researcher, the influence of the researcher on the study, the procedures of carrying out the research, the data collection method and data analysis (Burgess 1989). For this study, field research was carried out in two phases, as the data collected from the first investigative phase were analysed and the findings led to the setting for the second investigative phase.

The rationale to design this study in two phases is to investigate the practicality of implementing SM strategy in business and a successful selection of platforms. Participants from the companies are identified, and their opinions were gotten from their daily natural environment. The participants selected are employees who are directly involved in the use of SM in their companies. The reason for this is to gain rich insight on SM strategy from participants who have a broad understanding and experience of the importance of SM in business.

In the first phase, participants from five companies were involved in this study. Sharing their individual opinions and experiences on the use of SM in business. For the second phase, further

investigation was done based on the findings obtained from the first phase. An in-depth understanding of the results uncovered in the first phase is analysed at this stage. The participants selected for the second phase are based on the knowledge, influence and experience they have in the area of this study. They are the same individuals who participated in the first phase.

The table below shows the four key elements for conducting field study project by Edmondson and McManus (2007), and how it was applied in this study.

<b>Element</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>My Thesis</b>
Research questions	Focuses on a study	This study focuses on SM domain
	Narrows the topic area to a meaningful, manageable size	From the literature review, the researcher narrows its focus to investigating SM strategy
	Address issues of theoretical and practical significance	The research question is designed to investigate the company's SM strategy. Developing a framework with detailed implementation process
	Points toward viable research project – that is, the question can be answered	The research questions were answered by employing empirical data collected
Prior work	The state of the literature	This study discussed previous work on SM strategy frameworks and the limitations in relation to the proposed framework for this study.
	Existing theoretical and empirical research papers that pertain to the topic of the current study	(Kietzmann <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Lardi and Fuchs, 2013; Tavana <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Királová and Pavlíček, 2015; Oliveira and Figueira, 2015; Effing and Spil, 2016)
Research design	Type of data to be collected	Qualitative data was collected

	Data collection tools and procedures	Interviews and Qualitative questionnaires were conducted
	Type of analysis planned	Thematic analysis; hybrid thematic analysis for the first phase data analysis and deductive thematic analysis for the second phase data analysis
	Finding/selection of sites for collecting data	The companies selected for SM strategy are the primary implementation stakeholders as they were identified from the study by Huang, Baptista and Galliers (2013). Participants were selected based on their experience and a direct influence on company's SM activity
Contribution to literature	The theory developed as an outcome of the study	A refined SM strategy framework was developed (figure 4-6)
	New ideas that contest conventional wisdom, challenge prior assumptions, integrate prior streams of research to produce a new model, or refine understanding of a phenomenon	Figure 2-2 and 2-3 were integrated to form the proposed SM strategy (figure 2-4).  The application of Practice theory in SM domain is a new idea in understanding the daily practice of platform evaluation from a company's perspective
	Any practical insights drawn from the findings that may be suggested by the researcher	This research provides a practical guide for managers to integrate SM with business strategy and successfully selecting an appropriate platform

Table 3-2: Elements of a field study (Edmondson and McManus, 2007)

The field researcher may use any data collection method such as interviews, observation, document review etc. For this study, interviews and qualitative questionnaires were applied. The next section discusses the data collection methods.

### **3.4.2 Data Collection Methods**

Qualitative researchers conventionally use four techniques for data collection process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The techniques are as follows: in-depth interview, direct observation, review of documents and material culture. In this study, the data collection methods that were used are interviews and qualitative questionnaires. These techniques are discussed in detail below.

#### **❖ Interviews**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative researchers commonly use the interview technique, and it is considered a handy methodological tool that can take many forms. However, this research follows the interpretive approach which acknowledges interviews as the most appropriate approach for data sourcing. Walsham (1995) stated that the advantages of using the interview technique as a data collection method include: i) the participant's interpretation of events, actions and experience ii) the participant's views and goals for themselves and other participants. Also, it enables the researcher to examine the interpretations of their participants.

There are three approaches to conducting a qualitative interview: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Fontana and Frey, 1994; Oates, 2005). The structured interviews are typically fixed or identical questions for all interviewees. While the semi-structured interviews are carried out with a framework, which allows conversation between the interviewer and interviewee. Lastly, unstructured interview many have no format, leaving the researcher to have less control of the conversation. According to Kvale (1996) interview enables the researcher to capture subjective views and opinion on the phenomena of study. Interviews are typically carried out on a one-on-one basis and can also involve two or more people. In this study, the semi-structured interview was used for the first and second phase data collection.

The first and second phase data collection was carried out based on the methodology of field studies. According to Coolican (2014), the research methodology is based on studying empirical data in their natural setting. The research method encourages the development of knowledge of processes, pattern and change in regard to organisation, position and social interaction (Coolican 1990). This study relies on the vast understanding and experience of managers involved in SM strategy implementation and the selection of SM platform, particularly selecting interviewees who are directly involved with SM activities.

The first phase of interviews was carried out between March and September 2016 at a duration of 30mins to 1hour 30mins long. The interview guide contained 34 questions in total (including sub-questions) for each participant (which included the heads of departments and managers). The questions asked were mainly structured from the SM strategy framework proposed in chapter 2, and they were open-ended questions to allow probing. The reason was to provide insight into the context of the study and to be able to define a transparent strategic approach for companies.

The second phase interview questions and analysis were theory driven. This research implored the three conceptual elements from Practice theory using strategy-as-practice perspective as the unit of analysis and to give insights on the results from the first phase within the research context.

The research conducted aimed to gain insight on how companies evaluate their SM platforms which include their process and activities. Also, the second phase of the investigation included the development of the semi-structured interviews. These questions are based on the finding from the first phase. The second phase interview guide contained 15 questions.

Both first and second phase field study investigations were conducted in the same companies. The different job roles of the participants helped the researcher gain different opinions on the same subject. The 'snowballing' technique was used to select information-rich participants who were willing to participate in the study. The snowballing method is defined as using participants to contact other participants who have similar interest and characteristics (Palinkas et al. 2013). The rationale for selecting the key SM informants was to obtain an in-depth practical experience and valuable opinion on the study. The table 3-2 and 3-3 below shows the participants, their roles and the duration of each interview for both the first and second investigative phase.

### ❖ Qualitative Questionnaires

According to Geer (1988), open-ended questions allow for participants to respond in their own words. Previous research shows that allowing people to respond freely ensures the researcher gain insight into the phenomenon of study. For this technique, the questions asked during the semi-structured interview process were used for this technique. The qualitative questionnaire was used because some participants were a lot more comfortable writing down their responses.

## 3.4.3 Data Analysis

### Thematic Analysis

For this research, thematic analysis was used as suggested by (Boyatzis 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible and widely used qualitative analysis technique for identifying, analysing and reporting themes found in data.

For the first investigative phase, this study used the inductive and deductive thematic analysis. The hybrid approach used for this research was informed by Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006) study on inductive and deductive coding. The data collected was analysed following the six-stages of analysis (figure 3-2) which includes the inductive approach by Boyatzis, (1998) and the deductive approach by Crabtree and Miller, (1999). This hybrid approach allowed the researcher to implement the process of deductive thematic analysis while allowing for the emergence of new themes from the data using inductive coding (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The figure below represents the six-stage employed for the hybrid thematic analysis in the first investigative phase.

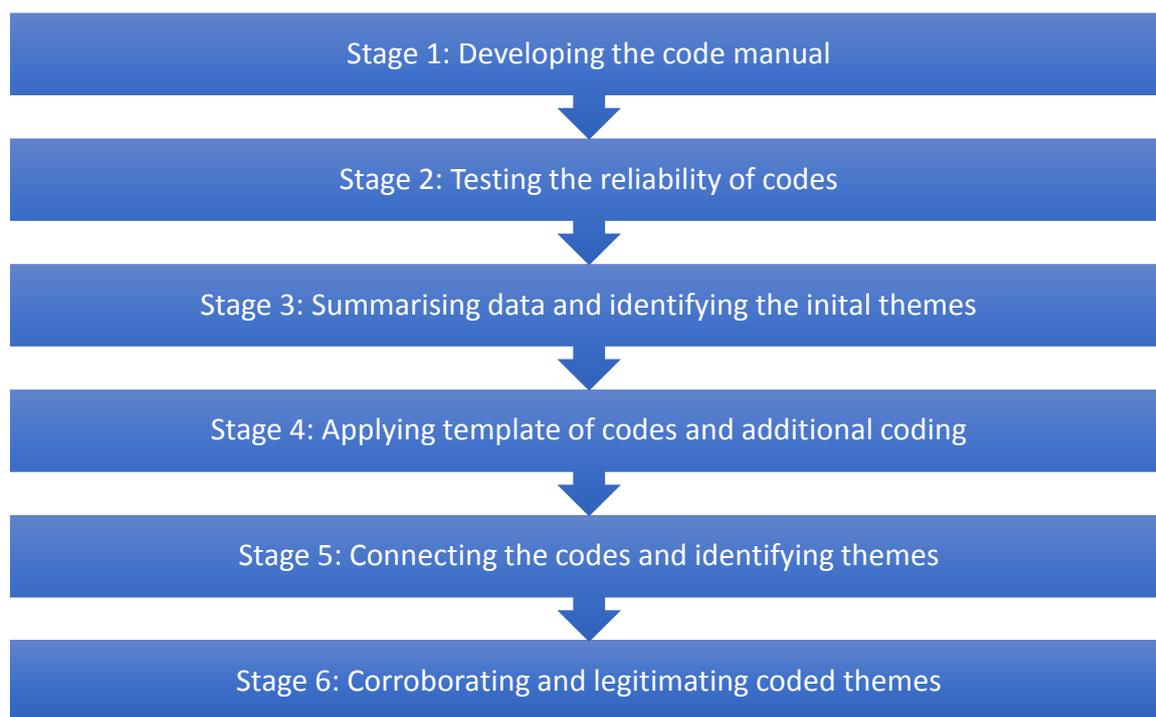


Figure 3-2: First phase hybrid thematic analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) derived from (Boyatzis, 1998; Crabtree and Miller, 1999).

#### ❖ **Developing the code manual**

Using a code manual for this study served as a data management tool for organising sections of similar text to aid in interpretation (Crabtree & Miller 1999). For this study, the initial themes were derived from the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2 (figure 2-4). The elements of the proposed framework formed the code manual. According to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) applying a template indicates a trail and allows for the credibility of a study.

#### ❖ **Testing the reliability of codes**

It is important to ensure the codes apply to the collected data (Boyatzis 1998). For this study, it was not difficult to test and identify the codes as the framework served as a basis for designing the interview questions.

### ❖ **Summarising data and identifying initial themes**

This stage summarises data “into your unconscious and consciously processing information” (Boyatzis 1998). This stage includes reading, listening and summarising the data. This technique was used to analyse the transcripts of all the participants.

### ❖ **Applying template of codes and additional coding**

Using Crabtree and Miller (1999) template technique, the codes from the codebook (manual codes) were applied to identify useful content. The manually derived codes from the SM strategy framework were entered into Nvivo software as nodes, and the segments of data representing these nodes were coded respectively. The analysis was guided using the framework but was not constrained by the derived codes. While coding the data, the researcher observed and allowed for new themes to emerge (Boyatzis 1998).

### ❖ **Connecting the codes and identifying themes**

This is the process codes the entire dataset and allows for the identification of themes and patterns (Crabtree & Miller 1999; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006).

### ❖ **Corroborating and legitimating coded themes**

This process puts together a group of similar themes that were initially identified from the coded data. This final stage ensures that the clustered themes represent and describes the initial data analysis efficiently (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006).

The data collected from the first field study were theoretically analysed using the theory-driven themes (framework) and the findings from this phase, led to the development of semi-structured interviews for the second field study. However, the researcher was careful not to get locked-in the existing themes as to allow free and clear interpretation of the data (Walsham 2006).

The second investigative phase used the deductive thematic analysis called the template organising style described by Crabtree and Miller (1999) for creating codes, code manuals and the different methods for coding, sorting and connecting contents. On building an analytical method, the process is dependent on a few factors; the goal of the analysis, the level of the

researcher and the background and experience of the researcher. Hence, a researcher who aims to confirm a hypothesis, test a theory or investigate a particular dataset may develop an analysis process with structure. Thus, adopting a template technique that uses code manual. The use of templates or code manual is focused and time efficient. However, it is necessary for the researcher to read through the text. Applying the template technique, the researcher concentrates on specific aspects of the content which avoids the tedious immersion process and obtains the necessary data (Crabtree & Miller 1999). The template or code manual can be built up based on previous research or theoretical perspectives or initial read-through of the text (Miles & Huberman 1994). Below, the representation of the four-stages in template organising style.

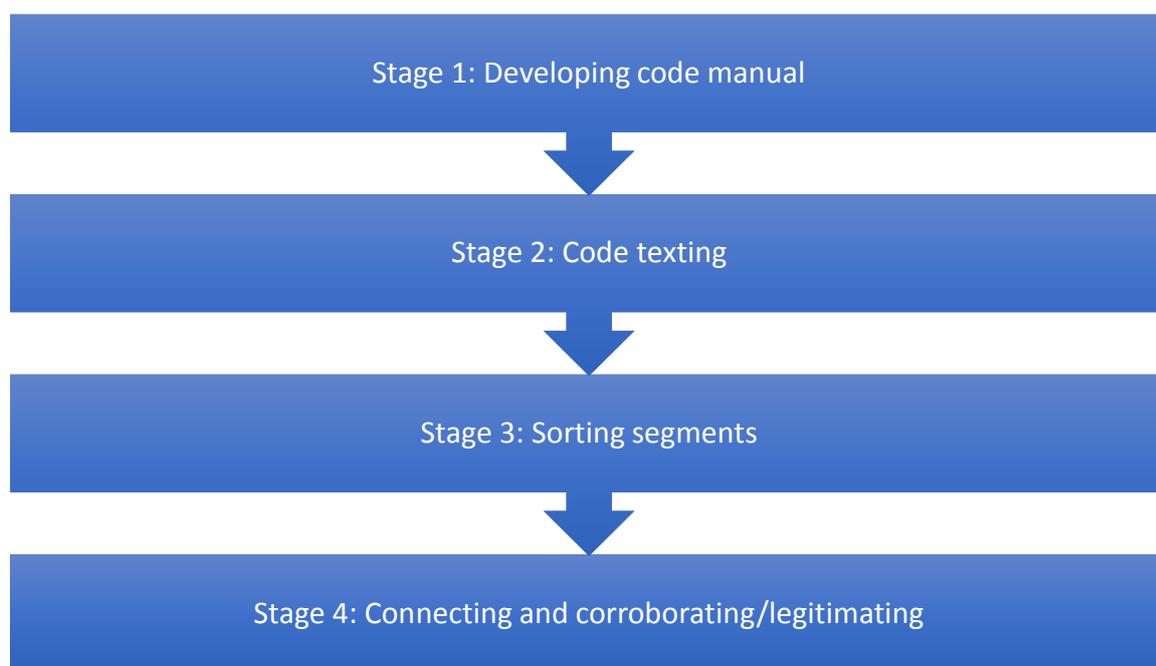


Figure 3-3: Second phase deductive thematic analysis (Crabtree and Miller, 1999)

#### ❖ **Developing code manual**

Code manual or code scheme can be created in several ways; the researcher can depend on a predefined code based on the understanding of a previous research or theoretical perspectives. Secondly, codes can be developed after preliminary exploration of the data. This approach discloses the researcher's paradigmatic assumptions. At this stage, it is important to decide the

level of data to be coded, and it is dependent on where the researcher is in the research process. According to (Crabtree and Miller, 1999) “preliminary studies may require a much broader net to catch alternate explanations than a study designed to enlighten several specific hypotheses emerging from earlier research”.

#### ❖ **Code texting**

In the past, before computers and analysis software programs were developed, data were hand-coded. This study employed the computer coding of data which involves instructing the software to the beginning and end of each segment. This stage depends on the style and experience of the researcher as some researchers would consider hours of looking at a computer screen as tedious compared to hand coding which can be done by using papers and highlighter (Crabtree and Miller, 1999).

#### ❖ **Sorting segments**

In template organising style, sorting segments are done by using a computer software to search, select and view coded data. However, when hand coding, sorting segments involve sorting stacks of cards.

#### ❖ **Connecting and corroborating/legitimizing**

This stage involves reading the segmented data and drawing connections. Coding of data into empirically and meaningful segments improves the progress of the analysis (Crabtree and Miller, 1999).

Both the first and second phase includes the completed analysis and the write up of the analysis in a concise manner which describes the data and translates the thematic findings into arguments about the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Codes were identified and used to create themes and sub-themes. Furthermore, the thematic analysis allows the generation of sub-themes and further dividing them into more sub-groupings. Chapters four and five shows how this analysis is carried out and will aid in the refining of the SM strategy framework. The technique acknowledges that the number of the instance within a dataset is not important on its own. The primary importance of a theme is its relevance about contributing to the overall research question.

Additionally, this study uses Nvivo 11: software which is widely used for analysing and transcribing qualitative data. The approach to analyse the data was to gather the collected data (Interviews, qualitative questionnaires and documents) and upload them to Nvivo 11. The researcher reads through the data carefully while recognising patterns of ideas that frequently occurs which strikes as potential interest to the study. Recurring patterns were coded, and similar patterns were placed in categories. These categories were placed into the corresponding themes of the framework or theory discussed in the literature review (Boyatzis 1998). According to Lichtman (2012), this process is referred to as the “three Cs of analysis: from coding to categorising to concepts” (Lichtman 2012).

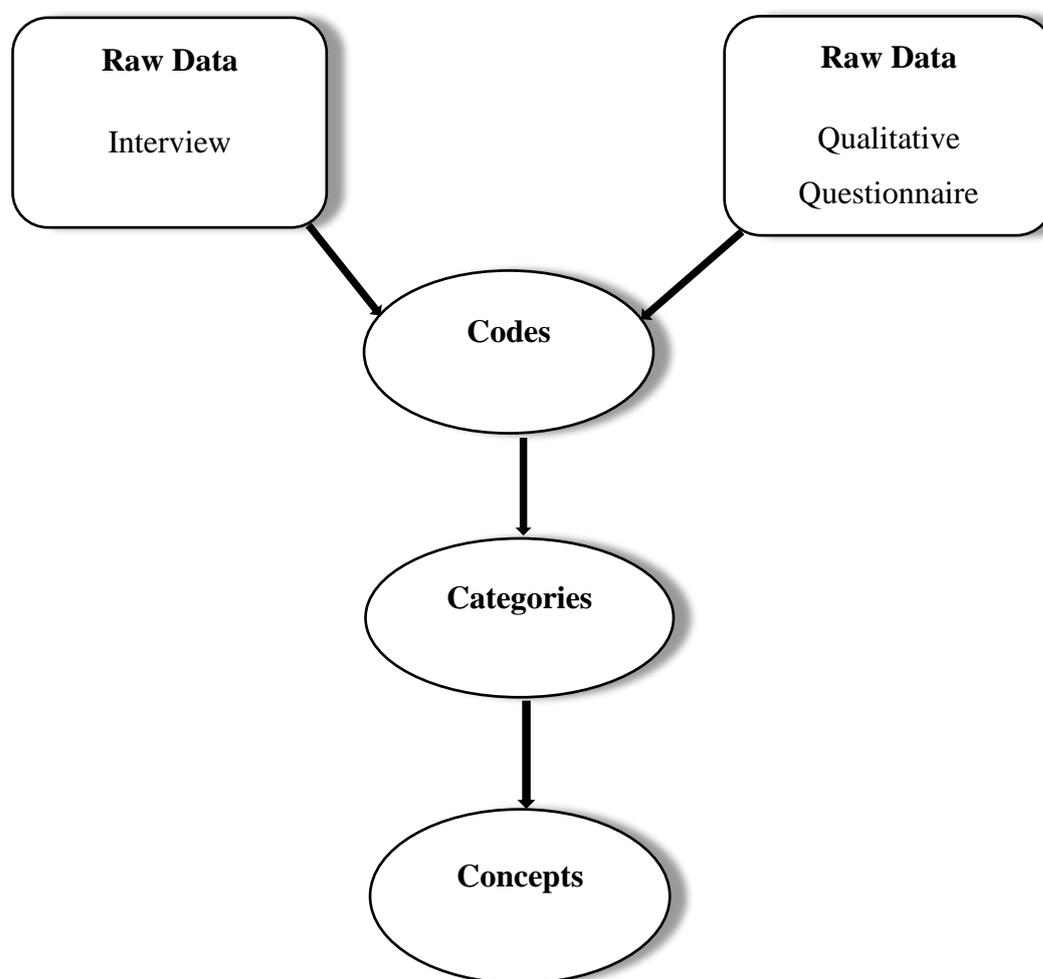


Figure 3-4: Analysis concept diagram (Lichtman 2012)

For the first phase, the coding was carried out as illustrated in figure 3-2. The three stages of the SM strategy framework and its elements constitute the nodes for the initial analysis. For the second phase, the nodes used for analysis were theory-driven as they were obtained from Practice theory. Hence, this indicates that a hybrid and deductive approach was conducted for the first and second phase analysis respectively. The themes were created into Nvivo 11 for corresponding data to be coded. The researcher ensured that relevant statements were systematically coded to the appropriate themes. Codes are either a statement, a complete sentence or a paragraph. The coding process continued until the researcher was satisfied that all relevant data was coded to the appropriate themes. Then the initial codes which were generated from the various themes were revised to dispose of duplicates and merge similar codes.

### **3.4.4 Role of the Researcher**

According to Walsham (1995), interpretive researchers attempt to analyse and interpret other people's ideas. By filtering the information through their conceptual structures while giving back the interpreted version of events to their audience.

Janesick (2000) discusses the significance of a researcher to explain his/her role carefully. This allows the reader to understand the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Furthermore, it is necessary for the researcher to identify and define their role in the research (Burgess, 1989). There are two roles identified, which are “outside observer” and involved researcher. For this study, the research took the outside researcher stances. However, the interpretation of the people studied is unavoidably influenced by the researcher. Nevertheless, the outer researcher stances do not allow the researcher to influence the personnel in the field organisation. This is because the researcher would not have a view of the interpretations, outcomes and will enable the participants to freely express their opinion (Walsham, 1995).

The researcher was mindful not to influence the research process and ensured to take steps that did not negatively affect the research process. The researcher's knowledge of the context of study helped to identify participants for the study. According to Walsham (1995), a significant disadvantage to the “outside observer” stance is that the researcher is not physically present for direct observation. Also, another downside is that the researcher would not have access to sensitive and confidential issues on a day-to-day basis. Nonetheless, these disadvantages does

not affect this study for the researcher does not require sensitive data. Therefore, the researcher took the role of an ‘outsider’ (Morris et al. 1999). This stance has its advantages as the employees did not perceive the researcher as an informant for the senior management or aligned with a third-party or having specific views on the systems or users. Hence, the researcher was seen as a normal person without a personal gain of the outcome. The researcher's neutrality allowed for participants to be comfortable and freely share their opinions and experiences.

### **3.5 Background of the Companies Studied**

Five companies took part in this study. The companies are varied in energy, telecommunication, media and hospitality & entertainment industry. This approach was taken to ensure that the research is not directed at a particular sector and providing a good representation of various sectors. The researcher used other sources of documents and materials such as websites information and SM activity and strategy reports to form the background and experience of the companies providing explanations for the phenomenon of study. These documents gave insight on the discussions surrounding the day-to-day SM activities with regards to achieving the overall business goal of a company.

The companies selected for SM strategy are the primary implementation stakeholders as they were identified from the study by Huang, Baptista and Galliers (2013). The criterion considered in selecting the companies that participated in this study is; implement and actively use SM for business. Participants were selected based on their experience and a direct influence on company's SM activity. Additionally, the companies chosen for this study had different levels of engagement and expertise regarding the use of SM internally and externally. A total of 29 interviews was conducted in this study, which included: the heads of the digital marketing department and the various managers representing the key SM personnel in the companies. The participants were interviewed twice during this research for the first and second phase the study.

### 3.5.1 Company A

This organisation is to be referred to as “Company A”. Company A is one of the world’s leading communication services companies, which serves the customer’s needs in the United Kingdom (UK) and about 170 countries across the world. The organisation provides broadband, mobile, fixed-line services, networked IT services, TV products and services. Company A sells products and services to customers, small and medium-sized enterprises and the public sector. This organisation has six customer-facing line of business and has built a successful strategy in the UK as one of the leading power of communication by bringing together the best network, technologies and expertise. One of their business objectives is to broaden and maintain their customer relationships.

The company’s SM objectives are aligned with the overall strategy of the business. Hence SM is widely used in this organisation. This study was conducted with the participants in one of the six lines of business in the organisation. This line of business has got a team of five who oversee all SM activities for their division. They use Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn to interact with customers, but due to their audience type, LinkedIn is preferred as the most suitable platform. Company A use SM to interact, develop and maintain relationships with customers, partners and suppliers, seek customer’s ideas on products and service development, promote innovation through collaboration and interact with employees, etc. Their end goal is to sell products and services to the customer, so they use SM as part of their communication strategy to engage and to leave no room for competitors to gain an advantage over them in the social sphere.

### 3.5.2 Company B

Company B is one of the biggest energy suppliers in the UK. They supply energy to millions of homes and offices around the UK. The company prides itself on one of the few companies to provide good value for money to its customers, excellent customer service, innovative energy solutions and a top-notch home care expertise in the UK. Company B has got a SM team of 4, and they are responsible for all the SM activities in the company. This company use Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn and are very active. These platforms are used as one of the methods to achieve their business objectives which are to aid customer engagement and customer acquisition for both old and existing customers. SM has been adopted as one of the

leading channels of communication with customers and the SM team work very closely with customer support team. Additionally, Company B use of SM has allowed them to remain in the forefront of the customer's mind, and they engage by having always-on content and an excellent social strategy. However, they face a challenge of how the brand tone of voice could be represented on all SM platforms and to customers similarly. Therefore, employees undergo SM training on how to use SM to engage with customers professionally.

### **3.5.3 Company C**

Company C is one of the leading service restaurants with the best quality fast food and excellent customer services in Nigeria. The company also has a delivery market and are focused on providing a complete customer satisfaction. One of the overall strategic business objectives of Company C is to reach more customers, which in turn will generate more revenue. SM serves as a technological tool to achieve this goal. This company has got two employees, who are responsible for the SM activities. They use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, but are more active on Facebook. The company remains active in the social environment by posting comments and interacting with customers about products and services. Whereby, in some cases, ideas on product innovation is gotten from customers via SM. Company C uses SM as one of the tools to inform customers about the change in price, products and events. Furthermore, Company C created a forum for all the managers on various outlets to discuss progress/challenges that arise in their regions and the best ways to handle situations. The SM team found SM easy to use, but it was a challenge for the rest of the employees because they had to be trained and be aware of the company's SM guidelines and policies. Regarding the decision to adopt SM, Company C decided to establish a presence on SM without assessing the readiness of customer, stakeholders and employees.

### **3.5.4 Company D**

Company D is a media company that provides news channels. They are best known for broadcasting current events, governmental policies and activities to the public. The SM team in Company D consist of four people; they are responsible for all SM activities. Company D is active on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The company's business goals are to increase reach, create awareness, generate leads, engage with the broader audience and promote the

company. With regards to the business objectives, Company D indicates that they use SM to meet these goals, though the implementation of SM has created a 24hr work schedule, to allow prompt response to customer's queries. Like some of the other companies mentioned, the SM strategy for Company D aligns with the overall business objectives of the company. While implementing SM to the business, the company found SM to be easy to use and interactive, but there was a slight change in work practice as Company D reshuffled its employees from related units to form a single digital department. This allowed for efficiency, management, coordination and proper division of labour in the digital space. Company E also re-enforced the use of SM communication guidelines and policy to allow for consistency in the tone of voice across the company relating to customers.

### **3.5.5 Company E**

Company E is a multiple award-winning media company. The company's primary focus is on producing news and current affairs programs for the society. They also act as the curator on the governmental activities and policies, bring this to light to the general public. Company E uses SM to expand their business reach, drive conversations and engagement with customers and receive real-time feedback. The SM platforms they use are: Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn and have a team of 2 who are responsible for the activities on these platforms. For Company E, SM is not aligned with its overall business objectives, but it is employed to meet specific business functions. The company previously tried to reach a wider population using the traditional media, but that was impossible to achieve.

In regard to understanding the benefits and difference between the traditional media and SM, this company had used the traditional media previously, and therefore they can identify the positives in using social to grow their business. They preferred to use SM because of its ability to reach more people. However, Company E is faced with the challenge of restricting their employees from airing their own opinions which may be misconstrued as the company's opinion. Hence, the company enforces corporate policy and guidelines on posting content to SM for employees. Like the previous companies, Company E has an established presence on SM and actively engaged.

<b>Companies</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Mode</b>
Company A	Head of Digital Marketing	30min	Interview
	Social Media Manager	37min	
	Senior Digital Producer	1hr 15min	
	Principal Researcher	37mins	
	Digital adoption Manager	56min	
Company B	Head of Digital Marketing	1hr 15min	Qualitative Questionnaire
	Social Media Manager	1hr	
	Social Media and Content Manager	46min	
Company C	Information Technology Manager	45min	Interview
	Assistant Information Technology Manager	32min	
Company D	Digital Marketing Executive	1hr	Qualitative Questionnaire
	Public Relation Manager	40min	
	Public Relation Executive	1hr	
	Social Producer	35mins	
Company E	Social Media Manager	1hr 30min	Qualitative Questionnaire

Table 3-3: First investigative phase participants and their roles

<b>Companies</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Mode</b>
Company A	Head of Digital Marketing, Data and Platforms	20min	Interview
	Digital Campaign Lead	20min	
	Senior Digital Content Marketing Manager	1hr 17min	
	Principal Researcher	28min	
Company B	Content and Social Media Manager	17min	Qualitative Questionnaire
	Assistant Digital Marketing Manager	20min	
Company C	Assistant Administrator	28min	Interview
	Assistant System Administrator	21min	
Company D	Digital Marketing /Social Media Manager	1hr 24min	Qualitative Questionnaire
	Senior Researcher	23min	
	Online Content Producer	20minute	
	Researcher	1hr 30min	
Company E	Head of Information Technology Department	1hr 40min	Qualitative Questionnaire
	Social media/ Online Content Manager	1hr 24min	

Table 3-4: Second investigative phase participants and their roles

## 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical values are important to carry out good and acceptable research in information systems. The issues involved in conducting research are significant that companies and universities, in particular, have policies and guidelines in the way research should be carried out. This study was carried out under the Brunel University Ethical Framework and Code of Research Ethics. For this research, the human subject was limited to semi-structured interview and qualitative questionnaire hence it is vital to protect the participants.

For this research, the researcher must ensure that participants are allowed to exercise their rights to participate anonymously and freely as described by Orb et al. (2001) ethical principles. The researcher explained the rights of the participants; it was made known that the study didn't have a monetary incentive to it but was a voluntary exercise as they could decide on whether to participate or not. They were also informed that there is no binding contract and they could opt out at any stage of the process. Importantly, the researcher asked the consent for an interview to be recorded for each participant.

Another issue the researcher faced was age. During the early stage of data collection, a participant mentioned that employees are reluctant to engage in company's SM activities as they perceive this platform as better understood by the younger generation. Hence, some employees are insecure about their ability to use SM platform. With this knowledge, the researcher consciously assured the participants that there are no right or wrong answers and all they needed to do was to speak about their views and experiences with SM platform freely.

Furthermore, some principles were put in place to ensure proper work ethics for this research. The ethical principles used are summarised below:

- ❖ The researcher ensured that the participants involved had been contacted and their consent to participate in the study was granted in advance.
- ❖ The purpose of the study is explained before the research is carried out.
- ❖ The participants were informed of their right to opt out of the research at any point they decide not to participate.
- ❖ Confidentiality and anonymity. Approval must be obtained before carrying out interviews, observations or document analysis. Data and identity of all participants must be confidential, and participants must agree to this.

- ❖ The progress of the research must be available and accessible to participants.

In addition to the ethical principles used, the researcher ensured the research was conducted responsibly in a professional way. The researcher did not take advantage of the participants, respected their time, opinion and rights. Lastly, the researcher was granted an ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Brunel University.

### 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the various research approaches which was selected for this research. First, the various epistemologies that a researcher can assume were examined, and the interpretive research approach was chosen. The rationale and suitability of this approach were discussed.

Qualitative research was selected and discussed; the field study approach was selected for the collection of data. The various techniques used for data collection were discussed, and lastly, the thematic analysis for organising, coding and analysing data were presented.

The table below shows the different choices made for the research approach used in this study:

Qualitative research was selected and discussed, the field study approach was selected for the collection of data. The various techniques used for data collection were discussed and lastly, the thematic analysis for organising, coding and analysing data were also discussed.

The table below shows the different choices made for the research approach used in this study:

<b>Research Approach</b>	<b>Choices Made</b>
Research assumptions	Interpretive
Research Strategy	Field study
Role of researcher	Outside observer

Data collection approach	Qualitative
Data collection techniques	Interviews, open-ended questionnaires and the review of documents
Data analysis	Thematic Analysis
Validation	Feedback from participants on research results

Table 3-5: Research approach choices

# 4 Chapter 4: First Phase Data Analysis (Social Media Strategy Framework)

## 4.1 Introduction

The findings from the first investigation phase are analysed in this chapter. The analysis is presented in three levels to reflect the three different stages in the social media (SM) strategy framework presented in chapter two (figure 2-4). To achieve this, the researcher interviewed primary personnel directly involved in SM in the organisation such as SM managers, IT managers and heads of the digital marketing and IT department. This analysis reflected the present practices and phenomenon at the various companies to attain rich insights. The proposed SM strategy framework presented in Chapter 2 was the guide used to develop the interview questions in the data collection process.

This analysis followed the six phases of the hybrid thematic analysis presented in chapter 3 (section 3.6). The thematic analysis allowed, data-driven themes to be coded to show the flexibility of the researcher to emerging themes. This approach was conducted to address the concern of using theory rigidly that leads to researchers losing sight of important emerging themes. However, the framework was applied as a guide for data collection and the data analysis process, but this did not prevent the researcher from identifying emerging themes during analysis.

In this chapter, the analysis is based on the themes already identified in the framework. During the analysis, data were coded to the nodes methodically, and this was analysed, and a report is created. The researcher used some data extracts from the transcript to support the analysis. The sections below discuss the study, for each stage of the framework in details.

## 4.2 Applying Hybrid Thematic Analysis

As discussed in chapter 3, the hybrid thematic analysis by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) was used to analyse and interpret the data for the first phase of this study. The data used for this study are transcripts from semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires. In order to achieve the research aim, an SM strategy framework was proposed in chapter 2 (figure 2.4). To evaluate the implementation of this framework an interview and qualitative questionnaire questions were developed based on the three stages and each element in the framework. A description of how the six-stages of hybrid thematic analysis is presented below:

### ❖ **Developing the code manual**

A code manual is important because it serves as a data management tool for putting together segments of similar texts to aid interpretation (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). The researcher used NVivo 11 software as the data management tool for this study. NVivo software allows for segments of similar/identical contents to be placed in a particular code or node. Hence, the researcher reads through the transcripts, identifies similar opinions and collects them in a particular code that best describes the views of the participants. For this study, the template was obtained prior, based on theoretical concepts provided in Lardi and Fuchs (2013) study. The outputs of this activity, formed the three broad code categories; develop strategy, platform evaluation and plan & deliver.

### ❖ **Testing the reliability of codes**

Testing the reliability of codes determines that the raw information is categorised to a segment that is applicable to that code. The codes used were theory-driven. Therefore, the researcher adopted the elements from the framework which was used for analysing and segmenting data. As this study applies the predefined codes, the researcher invited a second reviewer to code the interview transcript. Both results were compared and there was no modification required.

### ❖ **Summarising data and identifying initial themes**

The researcher is immersed in the data by reading, listening and summarising the raw data. Therefore, identifying the similarities in the response to the interview questions asked by the researcher allowing for potential themes to be formed from the raw data. The results from this step allowed for new themes to emerge. This technique is the first step when analysing the

transcripts. At the end of this process the researcher produces a summarised note of each transcript.

#### ❖ **Applying template of codes and additional coding**

The researcher matches the codes derived from the framework with segments of text from the transcripts that represents a particular code in the NVivo software. The result of this step produces codes with the information representing the codes.

#### ❖ **Connecting the codes and identifying themes**

At this point of the analysis, the researcher identified similarities and differences between groups of data in relation to the research question. This step discovers themes, patterns in the data and merges the similar codes.

#### ❖ **Corroborating and legitimating coded themes**

The researcher goes over the coded text and further clusters previously identified themes. A close examination was conducted to ensure the clustered themes are representing the initial data and assigned codes. The step produces fewer themes as similar themes are being cluttered. The researcher produced twenty-four themes, at the end of this step seventeen themes remained.

## **4.3 Stage 1 – Develop Strategy**

### **4.3.1 Determine Objectives & Readiness**

As described in chapter 2, it is essential to have SM strategy, integrated with the business strategy. It is also significant to evaluate the readiness of the business environment to have an insight on the strength, weaknesses and challenges of the company and its activities on SM in achieving the business goals. All participants interviewed indicated there was no detailed analysis or evaluation process carried out to determine the company's readiness to adopt and implement SM. However, a few business areas where SM can provide benefits were identified after adoption. Different companies have various reasons for employing SM to their business. However, all five companies have common substantial benefits; using SM to create customer engagement, maintaining and building customer relationships (both old and new customers),

brand awareness and generate revenue. Also, regardless of the underlying reason for the implementation of SM in business, it was identified, that SM activity is directly aligned with the overall business objective of the companies.

Furthermore, SM and content manager from Company B explained that the SM department is a sub-department of the marketing department and the SM objectives are integrated with the marketing team objectives. The participant further explained that the marketing team gets their objectives from the senior leadership team business objectives and all of these are integrated and aligned with the overall strategic business objectives.

The information technology manager in Company C also expressed that one of the company's business objectives is to reach more customers and SM has been identified as a useful platform to help achieve that purpose.

Evaluating a company's readiness before establishing SM presence is a process businesses neglect. The analysis indicated that companies conducted market research to gain knowledge of the activities taking place on SM after they have established a presence. From the market research, managers can identify the SM platforms their customers are using. The SM manager from Company A mentioned that the company carried out social listening; they listen to the conversations of customers about their products & services and paid attention to the discussions of the competitors and influencers. The user-generated report was used to develop a good SM strategy.

The head of digital marketing from Company B expressed that companies' conduct research to identify the SM platforms that are commonly used by their audience. And then decide on the contents to best fit the different platforms and customer segments.

While discussing the company's readiness to implement SM, the assistant information technology Manager from Company C revealed in the statement:

*“No assessment was made and we didn't seek opinion from anybody. We just went ahead: the reason that was done is because we saw that we had to take advantage of the technology as everybody is in information technology and social networks”* (Information Technology Manager, Company C)

The information technology manager from Company C, further added that SM has proven to be the new 'big thing', many customers and competitors had a presence on this platform. The

fear of becoming irrelevant, been seen as not technologically involved and losing out on the benefits the platforms provide was the rationale behind establishing a presence.

### 4.3.2 Identify Initiatives and Prioritise

This theme focuses on the identified business areas for improvement in the company. Companies strategically use SM in their business to meet business goals and customers' demands. During the implementation of SM, companies A, B, D and E indicated that initiatives on how to implement SM in their business were decided upon to strengthen their SM presence and SM strategy. Head of digital marketing from Company B mentioned how they increase their social presence below

*“Having an ‘always-on’ content & social strategy and consistent content creation & amplification to remain front of mind for target audience.”* (Head of Digital Marketing, Company B)

All five companies agreed that it is vital for a business to define significant business objectives which indicate the reason for having a social presence. As mentioned previously, this purpose could be customer engagement; building customer relationship by interaction, creating brand awareness and generating revenue. The digital marketing executive from company D explained that these are priorities and to successfully achieve this goal; it is essential to possess the ability to assess and initiate ideas.

## 4.4 Stage 2 - Platform Evaluation

### 4.4.1 Content

Content generation and developing of posting strategy to engage with customers on all the different platforms is a challenge for SM managers. Due to the customer segments, different customers are typically interested in various products or services the company provides. Therefore, businesses are challenged to post out comprehensive information which covers every aspect of the business so to meet customers' needs and prevent negative feedback. Companies A, B, C, D and E all indicates content is an essential part of maintaining an SM strategy as this is the primary form of passing and receiving information to and from customers

through the various SM platforms established. It was evident that creating an SM presence on different platforms does come with regular content posting and engage challenge. The social media and content manager from Company B mentioned that Twitter has got a limited word count of 140 characters and Facebook does not. Therefore, it is crucial to consider restructuring the messages to fit the different platforms. For it is of enormous benefits to share and interact with customers on company's platform(s). During the interview with the digital marketing executive of Company D, the participant expressed that sharing of content across various SM platforms allows for the information to reach potential customers. The use of these platforms provides an exchange of information which allows for customers to engage with the company leading to sales.

Also, the social media manager from Company A emphasised the importance of posting content and information where their customers can easily view them.

The findings indicate it is important to post content that fits a particular SM platform. However, the material in itself is very significant as companies have realised over time that customers are more attracted to images in comparison to text. The participants from company A and C agreed to this concept. The social media manager from company A stated:

*“One of the things we know about social channels is that images are extremely impactful. People get more attracted to images, so we use images a lot in our social media activities because that attracts the customer’s eyes, you then got to grab their attention around that image with some words and then the journey leading off...”* (Social Media Manager, Company A)

It was interesting to find out that graphics, images and videos are used to attract customer's attention to content created, and marketing activities are amplified through SM platforms. The social media manager from Company A stated that it is essential to create an opportunity for customers to engage with a post. Further explaining that platform accommodate and allows generation of content. These benefits influence the customers and support the SM managers achieve its business\marketing goals.

Furthermore, the head of digital marketing from Company A expressed that in the past, when companies were strictly emailing marketing information, it could contain different stories which would take over a week to communicate to customers. SM has made marketing activities

a lot easier, faster and allows posting of a significant amount of information frequently to create actions on these platforms and to cause customer engagement.

#### 4.4.2 Impression score

As discussed in chapter two, impression score captures visitor's behaviour on a website. However, the participants noted that the companies do not use monitoring tools to monitor the activities or visitor's actions on their SM platforms. Instead, they do "social listening" where they use social listening tools to monitor online conversations to understand what customers, stakeholders and competitors are saying about their brand, products and services.

The findings indicate that companies A, B, D and E all did online research. Listening to what customers, competitors and stakeholders are saying about the company's products and services. The information derived from this research is put together to help build a strategy. The principal researcher from Company A expressed that sentiment analysis is conducted to identify the negative and positive comments and the percentage of each. In measuring impression score (or social listening as the participants preferred to call it), the companies listen to what is said about the brand. See statement below:

*"We have a couple of tools; we have social listening which is our primary tool we use. One is Oracle SRM the other is Broadview. And they are the two primary platform to listen to what customers say."* (Social Media Manager, Company A)

In support of the above statement, the senior digital producer from Company A mentioned that they track referrals, the traffic that comes from SM and then run a report to identify the location of their customers. Further explaining, the participants revealed they listen to anything in the public domain that will generate revenue such as; conversations online, the share of company's voice against competitors, the hashtags being used, the brand influencers and finally the customers. Also, an investigation is conducted on how customers use SM to innovate and gain competitive advantage.

All companies that participated in this study confirmed that they use social listening to identify what social network(s) their customers have established a presence. They also engaged with customers to understand how they use these platforms and what they expect from companies

who have established a presence. Finally, the social listening reports give information on the platform(s) customer are likely to use.

### 4.4.3 Cost

The analysis of this theme is to gain insight into the cost of SM implementation and to determine its importance in developing an SM strategy. The respondents from all five companies indicate that cost is a significant factor, although most SM platforms are free or relatively less expensive in comparison to traditional methods. However, there is still a budget allocated for everything digital in the company which includes SM: the cost of advertising, promotion, subscription for the social pages, license fee, staff training and maintenance cost.

The digital adoption manager from Company A did state that platform cost is free, but a few expenses emerge from the application. See statement below:

*“They are free. I don’t think there is any cost. The cost associated with social media is the content generation and promotion, and also we have sales navigation licenses.”* (Digital Adoption Manager, Company A)

It was evident in the findings that SM is cost-effective in comparison to other traditional means of expanding business reach. However, the participants reveal that there are expenses made such as; the upfront cost of developing and purchasing the platform, ongoing license fees for an internal product, ongoing cost of maintenance for an external product, ongoing annual fees and the cost incurred for staff training. The head of marketing department from Company A did suggest that companies who decide to develop their internal SM platform are challenged with the additional cost of software; building, maintaining and labour cost. The head of IT department from Company E stated that the marketing team plays a vital role in creating marketing messages and can influence the content being generated for marketing purpose. Also, they are required to understand the different SM platforms available and how to apply them in business. The sales team is considered as a direct link to customers, so this group of individuals are professionally trained to represent the company on the matter of sales.

The head of IT department from Company C did mention that it is vital to create a balance between cost and functionality. That is, to consider the obtainable cost in maintaining a platform against the benefit it provides. Although there is a price for gaining premium services

on third-party platforms (for example, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc.) such as; sponsored activities, paid promotions and advertisements but this is considered to be less expensive in comparison to the traditional methods. Additionally, the expense of a platform does not prevent the company from establishing its presence if it has got a large customer base present. More so, these customers are the capitalised source of revenue for a company as they make strategic business decisions.

The researcher observed the delight the respondent displayed concerning the benefits SM bring to the business.

#### **4.4.4 Look & Feel**

Look & feel represent the design and user-friendliness of a platform. The analysis showed that all five companies considered the design and user-friendliness of a platform while building an SM strategy. Additionally, they consider the easy to use, interactivity and nature of the platform.

##### **❖ Design**

The design is a sub-node under the look & feel node. According to the analysis, the companies who participated in this study did not consider this theme significant because they mostly use the readily available third-party platforms: where their customers are present. So, they are not involved in the design or build these platforms.

##### **❖ User-friendliness**

The Companies, A, B, C, D and E indicated that although they do not participate in building and developing of third-party platforms, the user-friendliness of the platforms is of utmost importance to both the employees and customers. Especially the SM managers and SM advisers who represent the companies and the customers who use these platforms to communicate with the company. Social media manager from Company B explained that for internal platforms, it is functionality and ease of use against the cost. Hence, they consider the platform the employees could easily use, the platforms which have got similar functionalities with the external SM platform to ease the journey and culture change in the company. While externally (communicate with customers), it is the location of the customers and understanding the platforms and the risk involved.

The participants had similar views in employing a platform that is easy to use because it would not require intensive training. The analysis indicates that companies, preferably, concentrate on the applicability of a platform for both its employees and customers rather than the cost or the design of the platform.

The principal researcher from Company A indicated that the features a platform provide impacts directly how quickly, easily and efficiently employees can interact with customers. Explaining that cost does not immediately affect interaction with customers, but the features of a platform can control the quality of communication.

It was evident from the participants that the look & feel specifically, the user-friendliness of a platform is paramount in selecting an SM platform because it embodies the content to be displayed.

#### **4.4.5 Audience fit**

This theme states that companies consider customers as a primary element in platform evaluation. The customer is a significant aspect of an SM strategy as the findings show that businesses do online research to identify the platforms their customers are located and then establish a presence. The participants indicated concern in ensuring that messages are not lost, but reach the targeted customers as to achieve its business and marketing purpose. Social media manager in Company B expressed that companies select a platform to establish a presence on based on the customer's presence on a specific platform.

As discussed in chapter 2 there has been a tremendous increase in the use of SM by both companies and customers. Therefore, companies are inclined to consider the customer's needs and meet their demands effectively. Furthermore, it was apparent that while companies were considering what platform is suitable for their business, a significant element was the customers as they are the primary reason for the display of information on the digital space. See statement as below:

*"[...] We basically look at what channels do our customers use? What channels do our influencers use? And that was basically the criteria. We basically go where our customers are..."* (Digital Adoption Manager, Company A)

*“Yes, it is essential, the first point is the customer, all the time. Is where the customers are? Is the customer using the platform? Will the customer see our messages on that platform? So, the customer is essential.”* (Social Media Manager, Company A)

The SM manager from Company E also agreed with the statement during the discussion of the importance of customers to their business and in selecting an SM platform suitable for their business. Furthermore, it was revealed that they consider the targeted audience demographics and then leverage the platform that has got the highest concentration.

The analysis evidently shows that all participants across Company A, B, C, D and E firmly believe that the customer plays a significant role in business. They also indicated that they do not segment their audience by either age or educational level; they are all classified as customers. Additionally, participants expressed delight in the use of SM for business as an efficient channel to meet the biggest audience and a place with the cheapest rate for advertising to customers.

## **4.5 Stage 3 – Plan & Deliver**

### **4.5.1 Enterprise Collaboration**

This stage has two sections, namely: Enterprise Collaboration and Business 2.0. The Enterprise Collaboration section is the internal use of SM within a company (which is among the employees) while the Business 2.0 is the use of SM externally (with customers).

#### **❖ Connection & Interactivity**

This theme represents the internal collaboration amongst employees using SM in the company. The internal use of SM in the workplace is becoming prevalent: creating connections between employees and communicating with them using SM tools is significant in building and empowering social activities in employees. The senior management employs a well-engaged workforce to support them to reach their business growth and strategies at a faster pace.

The analysis indicated that internal collaboration using SM influences productivity as it encourages frequent posting of content and drives meaningful conversations across the company. Thereby, employees learn from each other and form new ideas. The digital marketing

executive from Company D stated that connection & interactivity increases productivity, reduces the timescale for projects and improves employee relationships as they share information and experience.

In response to a question asked as to how the internal use of SM is beneficial to employee's work practices, the head of digital marketing from Company A stated that:

*“By getting teams to work more seamlessly together, internal communication. Rather than sending out lots of emails, if people engaged in lots of conversation on social channels, it's a lot easier to join that conversation rather than carrying on doing everything like they have done in the past...”* (Head of Digital Marketing, Company A)

It was evident from the opinions of the participants that SM helps to communicate strategy easier rather than sending emails which appear to be formal with a limited avenue for a conversation to understand what needs to be done precisely. It was evident from the participants that creating communities for employees with similar interest help increase the reach of employees in different teams, allowing access to a broader community, people that are outside direct contact.

#### ❖ **Innovation Management**

From the participant's perspective, the business environment is changing rapidly; managing innovation is necessary for a company to remain competitive. To sustain this advantage, this may require a company's ability to skilfully direct innovation resources to address the changing business environment.

The participants indicated that discussions, activities, decisions and practices drive an idea to realisation for the core purpose of generating innovation for business value. They further expressed that, the communication of both management and employees support the constant change, innovation potentially impact in all business areas.

#### ❖ **Content Sharing & Management**

This theme reveals a similarity with connection and interactivity theme in 4.3.1. When discussing on sharing content among employees, they referred back to connection and interactivity theme where they mentioned connecting, interacting and sharing ideas and documents with other employees for the growth and development of the business. At the

inception of SM internally, employees were overwhelmed with the idea of contributing in a social communities\groups. A participant expressed that employees viewed SM as outside their job description, but also stated that the senior management ensures that employees embrace the digital space.

The participant stated some benefits they derive from collaboration:

*“[...] It’s quite easy you get a message quite quickly, and they can do things like searching control: people spend a lot of time searching for documents as well. So, if you’ve got a group you can put all your material in one group, everybody knows where it is, and they can comment on it and collaborate on something if you are brainstorming...”* (Digital Adoption Manager Company A)

The participants indicated that ones the employees became confident in using SM, they realised the usefulness of internal collaboration.

#### ❖ **Expertise & Talent Management**

The senior management ensures that SM (in-house or external personnel) experts are invited to conduct staff training on how to apply the platforms for business to increase the confidence of employees to integrate SM into their work activity.

The head of digital marketing manager from Company B mentioned they intensively train the “sales team”, “social media advisers” and “customer service” to ensure professionalism while communicating with customers for they represent the company in the social space. It is their responsibility to respond to customer’s queries on SM and ensure that contents are posted frequently.

#### ❖ **Productivity and Effectiveness**

The participants highlighted the positive attributes of employing SM in the workplace. When asked about how effective this has made the employees, they revealed that communication among both employees and senior management is the key that leads to achieving business goals. During the interview, the head of IT department of Company C referred to the discussion on internal collaboration stating that active collaboration either by word of mouth or sharing of documents leads to productivity and effectiveness.

The principal researcher from Company A specified the usefulness of social groups\communities for employees as he emphasised the importance of sharing reports and knowledge among employees and creating groups for employees who have similar interests. This type of knowledge sharing raises awareness of knowledge among employees.

It was evident during the analysis that this theme is linked to connection and interactivity theme. The participants' reference to employees' collaboration showed that they believe that collaboration ensures productivity and effectiveness.

## 4.5.2 Business 2.0

### ❖ Brand Awareness

It is important for most companies to develop and maintain a strong communication system for this creates an essential factor for their marketing strategy. In a business context, brand awareness is the primary concern in consumer behaviour and advertising strategy. The senior digital producer from Company A stated that in theory, brand awareness is envisaged to enable customers to identify a brand. This applies in practice and allows customers to recognise the availability of a company's products and services. Brand awareness is a significant step in promoting products and in differentiating similar products from that of a competitor. The head of IT department from Company E stated that brand awareness is equal to mass awareness. The application of SM to promote products and services allows companies to reach a large number of people and engage with a broader audience in the social space.

Also, it is important to state that while asking the questions on the business goals companies aim to achieve through the use of SM. One of the frequently repeated response was to create brand awareness as companies believe that higher brand awareness typically equates to higher sales. The head of digital marketing from Company A revealed that

“[...] *Having brand awareness is to be fond of mind with the customers.*” (Head of Digital Marketing, Company A)

The head of digital marketing from Company A, further explained that if customers are on SM channels and a company has no social presence in that space, then they are losing out an

opportunity to strengthen and build customer relationships. Also, an active presence online is creating a positive image in the customer's mind.

Also, the study revealed that aside sales, it creates an avenue for customers to know in detail what products and services a company offer, and brand awareness creates an impression in a customer's mind.

### ❖ Relationship Management

As discussed in Chapter 2, customer and business relationship is an essential element in building a brand. It is easier to concentrate on making new sales but maintaining a good relationship with existing customers and striving to build a relationship with new customers is essential for business success.

The result of this study shows that companies consider the relationship with customers a significant part of their business for the productive use of SM. And subsequently, SM content and business strategy aim to meet the demands of customers. The findings for this theme indicated that customers have the bargaining power over companies for SM has enabled them to gain access quickly to other companies for customer switching cost has become relatively low\none existent.

While demonstrating the company's effort in making sure customers are satisfied, the head of digital marketing from Company B made the statement below:

*"[...] Social has been adopted as one of the main channels of communication with customers. A dedicated process to make the issues known & the actions being taken to solve the issues was created. The Social team work very closely with customer support."* (Head of Digital Marketing, Company B)

It is evident that customer relationship is of priority in a business and this was expressed as the social media manager from Company B was asked questions about how the company ensure they maintain good relationships with their customers using their SM platforms, their response below:

*"Being as friendly and open as possible with customers and trying to answer all customer queries within 30 min window working hours."* (Social Media Manager, Company B)

Social media manager from Company A revealed that the company has a set of social guidelines and corporate tone of voice which they implement while interacting with customers online. Additionally, the governance structure guides employees on how to interact with customers on various platforms. Furthermore, the information technology manager from Company C also emphasised that the purpose of creating SM is to reach out to the customers. Hence, it is important that the customers do not feel a sense of discrimination and the company should have a standard response structure for all customers.

The digital marketing executive in Company D also mentioned that regular posting of content, timely response to customer's queries and comments are ways to maintain a good relationship with customers. Also, the sharing of content across the company's SM platforms allow potential clients to access them. The platforms enable the customers to reach out to businesses easily which helps in the exchange of information and subsequently leading to the generation of revenue and business growth.

Additionally, the participant indicated that customers visit their SM platforms more frequently than they visit the company's website. It was revealed that the SM platforms create a channel to communicate with new and existing customers to understand the products and services they offer. In a case where a customer isn't satisfied with a service that was provided and then makes this known on SM, the information technology manager from Company C did mention that to maintain a good relationship with the customers, the problem is solved promptly.

#### ❖ **Innovation & Creativity**

The findings from this theme indicate that for companies to remain competitive, there has to be a continual innovation & creativity in the business as digital marketing is a fast growing & innovative area. The digital marketing executive from Company D revealed that they use SM as a market research tool. Companies listen to the conversations online and try to innovate by implementing some changes to their products and services to meet the need of their customer.

Social media manager from Company A mentioned that companies think about different ways to innovate their content to get their message to more customers. Different platforms have got various features. For example, Twitter has got a limited word count in comparison to Facebook. Therefore, there will be a need for restructuring of messages to fit the particular platform. Furthermore, the contents which are of business interest to the customers are identified based

on the level of engagement. This process involves creativity to pass the right message to the appropriate customers and achieve its business purpose.

The social media manager from Company A indicated that the influence of SM in the creativity and innovation management among employees is challenging. See statement below:

*“It depends on the employees, some employees it is a challenge social media. It really is taking them out of their comfort zone and helping them make the steps into an area they are not familiar with”.* (Social Manager, Company C)

Additionally, the most significant innovation is doing things differently to how other companies participate in the online space.

Most participants mentioned that innovation and creativity had become a critical skill in attaining success in business and senior management has asked employees to look at SM as part of their job description.

#### ❖ **Efficiency & Effectiveness**

The analysis of this theme gained insight on assessing and measuring the performance of a company. In spite, the apparent reasons for evaluating a company’s performance, companies do not often assess the full impact of SM on their business. However, the findings from the analysis indicated that SM had created an avenue for most companies to be of competitive advantage in the social space by relating and engaging with their customers, stakeholders and competitors promptly. The digital marketing executive from Company D emphasised the importance of participating in the social space while discussing the impact of SM on efficiency and effectiveness:

*“Customers get responses to their request within minutes because of the dedicated team that monitors activities on the various platforms. Social media also makes it easy to share exclusive content.”* (Digital Marketing Executive, Company D)

However, social media Manager from Company A argued that efficiency is not all positive. This opinion contradicts the above statement. Also, stating that SM has increased the workload of employees in the company. See statement below:

*“[...] My first thought on efficiency in terms of internal, it actually causes us a lot more work because we have to think about all the different channels when we are creating new content”*

(Social Media Manager, Company A)

The participants expressed that although the platform(s) comes with more workload, it has opened up dialogue and discussions that would not have been gotten any other way. SM has allowed companies to identify the right contacts to build relationships successfully. Regarding marketing and advertising, the results of the analysis proved that SM has made advertising convenient and cost-effective for the marketing managers, for online marketing requires a few clicks only to reach potential customers. The assistant information technology manager in Company C states that SM is a marketing tool and with the use of SM in the business, it strengthens the business marketing strategies. He further added that the effectiveness SM brings to the company is by broadening marketing to reach a wider audience easily.

The head of digital marketing from Company A expressed that SM marketing is a cost-effective channel for marketing. Rather than sending an email or having a big page spread in Times news articles or newspaper, the platform is better used to compliment marketing strategy.

The analysis indicated that proper implementation of this technology ensures the task is completed quickly in comparison to the traditional method. The senior digital content manager of Company A expressed concern in regard to the generational gap in some organisations. It was stated that the older generation finds it challenging to adopt SM to their work in comparison to the younger generation of employees. The company is trying to bridge this gap to have a less cultural divide in order to allow SM to impact the business positively.

### **4.5.3 Platform Maintenance**

This theme represents the maintenance of the SM platform(s) from the planning stage to the actual building of the platform, down to the operation and continuous management. Additional indications from the analysis revealed that a company's social presence online is the SM platforms. Hence, it is vital to ensure the brand image is presented correctly, platform and its contents are up to date. Most participants argued that the occasional maintenance of the platform and solving of SM related issues or technical problems are resolved in-house. The assistant information technology manager from Company C disclosed that the maintenance of

the company's SM platform was part of his job description which is executed professionally because the image of a company influences the customer views about the company.

## **4.6 General Findings from First Phase Data Analysis**

The analysis confirmed the use of SM for business in a general context. SM is considered the innovative technological way for companies to establish a presence in the social space. From the dataset, all participated companies share similar views on the impact of SM in their various businesses.

During the interview, the durability of a platform was discussed. The principal researcher from Company A emphasised that it is important to know how long a platform would last for or how receptive the users, business and acceptance among the general population. Also, the SM manager from Company B revealed that SM is used for staff recruitment.

From a business perspective, the participants revealed SM provides several advantages: an easy flow of information, target customers (exciting and new), information management, improvement in work practice and business process.

While discussing the importance of SM strategy, communication was mentioned as a conceptual factor which envelopes the framework. The managers indicated that SM strategy enhances communication in companies, in discussing the stage 3: plan & deliver, the participants expressed SM benefits and influence on work practice.

The next section addresses communication as a significant benefit for companies in implementing SM strategy in their business.

### **4.6.1 Communication**

The use of SM for easy communication was recurring during the interview. The analysis revealed that SM strategy plays a significant role in the company's communication strategy to save cost, drive organisational change and improve work practice. SM strategy as noted from the interviews is embedded in the interaction among employees and with customers. It was revealed that both companies and customers engage more using SM platforms. The internal

use of SM allows for the effective dissemination of communication, expression of views and easy flow of information.

The literature review indicated that companies take necessary steps to improve communication and awareness in the business. The analysis acknowledged that the benefits of using SM for communication have established a strong relationship with both employees and customers and enhanced engagement and productivity with little cost.

## **4.7 Result from First Phase Data Analysis**

The proposed SM strategy framework presented in chapter 2 (Figure 2.4) supported this study by providing the elements to be applied, for the implementation of SM in companies. The result of the first phase of the research described the implication of SM strategy and gave insight into the implementation process. The participants indicated high importance in selecting the right platform to use for their business. The critical factor in choosing a platform is the customer. The managers revealed that they create a presence on the SM platform where their customers are. Therefore, the researcher saw the need to investigate this phenomenon further (chapter 5) to gain insights into how companies evaluate their platforms.

## **4.8 Refined Framework**

The framework presented in Chapter 2 (figure 2-4) is in 3 stages which are Stage 1 – Develop strategy, Stage 2- Platform evaluation, Stage 3- Plan and deliver. The interview guide and analysis were based on the proposed SM strategy framework presented in chapter 2. The findings allowed for a few changes in the framework.

### **4.8.1 Stage 1 - Develop Strategy**

The results of the analysis showed that it is significant for companies to define the objectives for implementing SM. However, these goals in most cases are determined after creating a presence on the platform. As discussed in section 4.1.1 it is important for companies to

incorporate SM into their business as this has proven to be an avenue to support business objectives. Hence, creative initiatives on how to use these platforms to its full capacity are defined.

Furthermore, the findings showed that readiness was a significant factor the companies considered, they determine readiness by conducting market research for both customers and competitors. This study generates reports on how customers and competitors use SM which in turn gives insight into the companies to enable them to build an SM strategy. The assistant technology information manager stated that SM is aligned with the overall business objective of the company, it is important to have an effective strategy and prioritised activities on this platform(s).

The head of digital marketing in company B indicated that social listening gave companies insight on building their strategy; they listened to find out if their customers are on the SM platforms. Social media manager from company B also stated that the objectives for companies to use SM was to create awareness of products and services rendered and build a customer relationship.

The participants indicated that the process to determine objectives & readiness and identify initiatives and prioritise is not considered a linear process which is contrary to the suggested method in chapter 2. When goals are defined, actions on how this can be carried out is proposed. This process is done simultaneously to identify the appropriate method to achieve a business objective before moving on to stage 2.

## **4.8.2 Stage 2 - Platform Evaluation**

In this stage of the SM strategy framework, it was revealed that companies do not apply the concept of impression score on their platforms rather, they do the social listening. The difference between these factors is discussed below:

### **Impression Score**

As discussed in chapter 2 (literature review) the impression score refers to monitoring the number of visitors to an SM platform (Tavana *et al.*, 2013). This process keeps account of the customers who visit a company's social page /and the content viewed. According to

Thorbjørnsen and Supphellen (2004) The frequency of visits and duration of visits are important behavioural variables considered. Consumers who develop a relationship with their preferred brands visit their SM platform frequently for updated content on products and services. It is no hidden fact that the implementation of SM for business has led to increased competition for customer's attention and loyalty online. Therefore, impression score does suggest that it is necessary to keep track of the traffic on these SM platforms (Thorbjørnsen and Supphellen, 2004).

### **Social Listening**

While analysing the data, the participants indicated they do not monitor the number of visits on their SM platforms (impression score). Rather, they do social listening to gain insight on conversations happening in different platforms (Martin, 2013). Businesses are more open to dynamic conversations, listening, posting relevant content to engage/earn the trust of customers and stakeholders. SM managers employ the ability to understand customer's mood, find new sales lead, gain insight on new product leads, respond to customer, learn customer's thoughts on their competitors and predict customer's needs by listening to their conversations online (Woodcock, Green and Starkey, 2011). Also, social listening is implemented as a by-product to measure and evaluate a campaign in order to learn how it's of interest to customers.

However, the difference between impression score and social listening will focus within the scope of this study. Impression score was changed to social listening as this best describes the practice of the SM managers. In summary, impression score monitors the number of customer's visit on a platform while social listening monitors customer's conversations happening online. This study is focused on effective implementation of SM strategy in a company. To successfully integrate SM into the business, certain factors are considered to ensure this process is conducted effectively (as discussed in chapter 2). The participants reveal that impression score is not an important element for platform evaluation as companies are not focused on monitoring the numbers of visits rather they are concerned with listening to online conversations of both customers and stakeholders.

The results from the platform evaluation analysis are discussed below.

## ❖ Content

From the analysis, it is evident that content is a significant factor in an SM strategy because the aim of producing good content is to promote interaction between a company and its customers. Therefore, it is important that companies critically analyse the content before it is posted. Considering that the content is the information shared with customers to meet their demands and expectations. The online content manager from Company E suggested that companies have creative ways in which they share content online by using graphics, videos and words. Customers are happy to engage with businesses, but for businesses to gain from the interaction they first have to listen to customers' conversation online to identify their interests.

According to Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga (2010), regular engagement with customer builds a successful relationship which is likely to grow into loyalty.

In discussing the relationships of the five factors presented in the second stage of the framework, the analysis has shown that content has a relationship with all the other factors. Which will be explained below;

### Content – Social listening

As expressed by the social media manager from company A, one benefit of the aftermath of social listening is that it gives companies insight into what customers and competitors are saying about their brand. This knowledge allows for the SM managers or content managers to generate content and in some cases, develop products and improve services that meet the customer's needs.

The report from social listening gives the SM managers an in-depth knowledge of creating content for customers or potential customers that should be targeted. Content marketing becomes effective when using social listening to create a paid advertising strategy. Deciding on what content to promote is challenging, so companies listen to know what areas customers are interested in then boost paid for the material to reach its target customers.

The SM and content manager from Company B stated that social listening gives the company insight on which of their platforms, customers prefer to use, and this information is used to tailor content to the platform.

### Content - Cost

The relationship between content and cost is the cost incurred when a company pay to promote ads on SM with the intention that these ads would reach potential customers. And expected to go viral, bringing thousands of followers, and more followers could lead to more sales and create brand awareness. Social media manager from Company B revealed that their company has a budget for SM and content production, which includes the cost of Facebook ads and promoted pins. However, the cost of content in SM is considered as the most cost-effective and convenient channel for marketing products to a targeted audience.

The public relations executive from Company D stated that the cost incurred from using SM also involves getting the right tool to measure performance daily, weekly or monthly. Furthermore, suggesting that some of the free social analytical tools do not give accurate figures. Also, it was stated that in developing an internal platform they consider the cost of the project, the cost of maintenance and overhead cost.

### Content- Look & feel

The look & feel of a platform is referred to as the design and user-friendliness of the platform. The relationship between content and look & feel has to do with the features of the platform and how content is displayed on a particular platform. The analysis revealed that companies structure content for the various platform(s) differently. This is because some SM platforms allow for more word count than others. For example, Twitter allows 140 characters, and Facebook word count is limitless which allows for a detailed description.

The principal researcher from Company A stated that in determining the platform to use for the company, they considered the functionality and ease of use. The assistant information technology manager from Company C expressed that they consider the functionality of a platform, it is also essential to identify the platform(s) their customer access easily.

### Content - Customer

Content is a significant factor in the relationship between employees and customers. For communication purposes, information is highly reliant on the content posted on SM. The digital adoption manager from Company A stated that the customer is the most important factor considered in generating content. Customer relationship is essential as companies post out messages with the sole reason for communicating and engaging with customers. While

customer generated contents are also important to companies as they require this information for their business evaluation, analysis and customer relationship management.

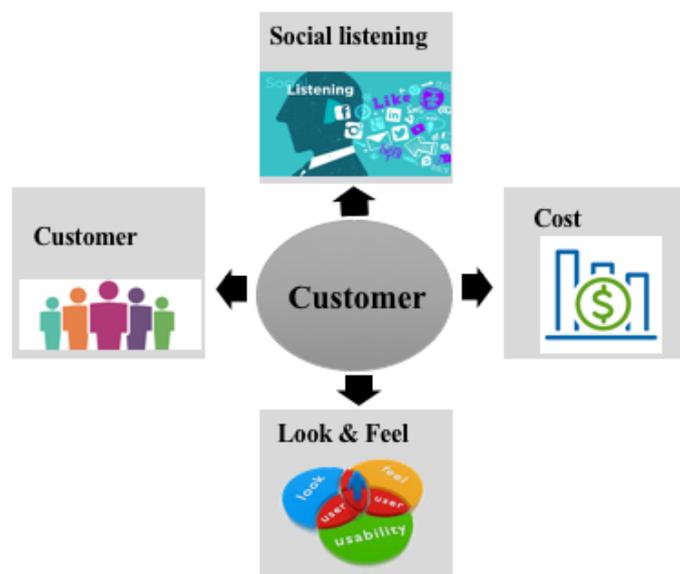


Figure 4-1: Content relationships

#### ❖ Impression score

As mentioned in section 4.2.2, the findings proved that companies do not necessarily monitor the number of visits on their platforms as suggested in the proposed framework; rather they do “social listening” to gain insights on what is said by customers about their brand, products, services and competitors. The insight gotten from social listening is valuable to companies in making business decisions. The head of digital marketing from Company A indicated that the capturing of customer’s behaviour could not be done on SM as impression score suggested in the literature, but social listening is done on SM. The researcher has decided to change this factor name from “impression score” to “social listening”.

The SM strategy framework presented in figure 2-4, displayed “impression score” (social listening) has a relationship with content, cost, look & feel and audience fit. However, the analysis reveals that is not the case. The data revealed that social listening has a relationship

with cost, customer and content but no relationship with look & feel. The relationship between social listening and content have been established in the previous section.

### Social listening - Cost

Many social listening tools are free. In a situation where the free version of the software does not allow for professional features that a company needs, it will require the purchase of a premium version of the software. Hence, incurring a cost. The social media manager from company A indicated that they measure the functionality of a platform against its cost. That is, the cost of a social listening tool is not viewed as a disadvantage if the tool offers the functions needed.

### Social listening - Customers

The head of information technology from Company C stated that among the various advantages of social listening, one benefit is, it gives the company a good understanding of customer's needs. Furthermore, some social listening applications have revolutionised customer experience by communicating with customers across different platforms (for example, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook) in real time supporting customer's needs.

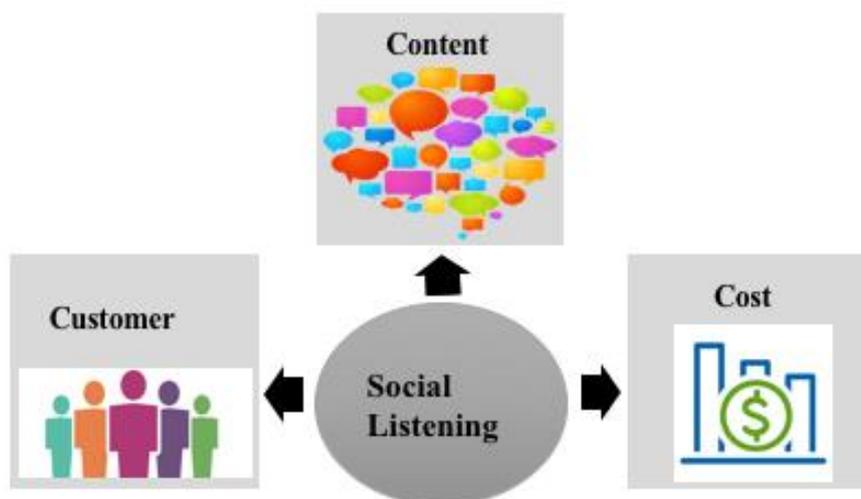


Figure 4-2: Social listening relationships

## ❖ Cost

### Cost – Customer

SM is known as a cost-effective avenue to reach customers. However, these platforms are not entirely cost-free, there is expense made. The analysis revealed the various ways SM platforms incur cost; promotions, social listening tools, license fees, sponsored post, content production and management, etc. The relationship between cost and customer is significant as the rationale behind the paid activities on SM is to allow better engagement and broader reach to customers. Furthermore, the digital adoption manager from Company A stated that the cost obtained from staff training is classified as a link between cost and customers as employees are trained to be able to interact with customers professionally.

Additionally, cost has got a relationship with content and social listening, but this has been discussed in the previous sections.

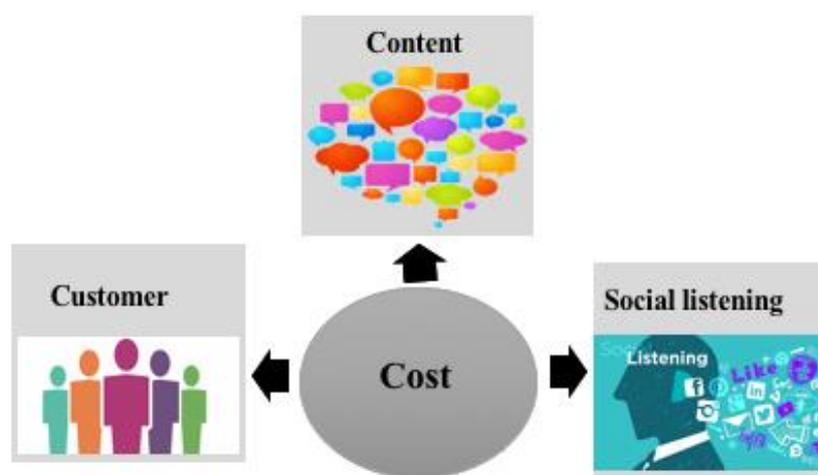


Figure 4-3: Cost relationships

### ❖ Look & Feel

#### Look & Feel - Customer

Companies share information via SM platforms; it is important that the platform is easy to use and can be manipulated to fit a purpose. The analysis revealed that a user-friendly platform encourages customer engagement. The relationship between look & feel and content has been previously discussed. The digital marketing executive stated that, although companies are not involved in building the third-party platforms (for example, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) the ease of use and interactivity of these platforms remains a criterion for selecting a suitable social media platform.

The design is a sub-node under look & feel as presented in the proposed SM strategy framework as discussed in section 4.2.4. The participants expressed that companies most often do not develop or design their SM platforms but use the third-party platforms available. Hence, it is not a primary element to be considered in this framework.



Figure 4-4: Look & Feel relationships

### ❖ Audience fit

The two sub-nodes for this theme are educational level and age as presented in the proposed framework in chapter 2 (Figure 2-4). The participants indicated that these sub-nodes are not of primary concern because they do not group customers in segments of their educational level or age group. The findings showed that customers are not selected or targeted based on these

criteria. The participants expressed that companies establish a social presence on the platforms their customers use. The audience fit addressed in this section is identifying the customer's presence.

The head of IT department from Company E indicated that the segmentation of customers is not done at this level. Segmentation is carried out after presence has been established to determine the demographics of the audience being targeted and then leverage on the highest concentration. Therefore, the researcher does not consider educational level and age among the primary elements to consider in platform evaluation. Hence, the researcher decided to change the name from “Audience fit” to “Customer” as a more appropriate name for this theme.

The analysis indicated that the element “customer” has a relationship with all four elements (content, social listening, cost and look & feel) presented in the proposed SM strategy framework in chapter 2. The discussion of these links has been presented in the sections above.

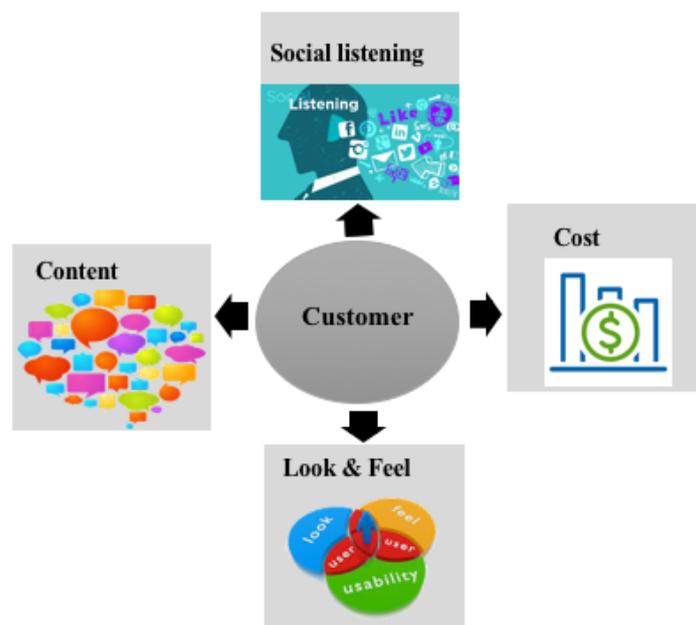


Figure 4-5: Customer relationships

### 4.8.3 Stage 3 - Plan & Deliver

The proposed SM strategy framework presented in Chapter 2 showed the use of SM in Enterprise Collaboration (internal) and Business 2.0 (external). The purpose of SM in Enterprise Collaboration and Business 2.0 is identified as specific functions under each section in Figure 2-4. However, the analysis revealed that some functions are used for both Enterprise Collaboration and Business 2.0.

Efficiency & effectiveness and innovation management & creativity were identified to be employed in both the internal and external applications of SM in the company. The participants discussed how SM influences these factors.

The head of digital marketing from company B expressed that employees reach their maximum productivity when they share ideas and documents with each other concerning a project. Furthermore, creating a work community group for employees with similar interest enhances efficiency, effectiveness, innovation management and creativity. The proposed framework placed efficiency and effectiveness under Business 2.0 (external) but the SM manager from Company B expressed that employees' efficiency and effectiveness builds and maintains good relationships with customers. Thereby, positioning efficiency and effectiveness as a function applied in Business 2.0. An example is prompt response to customer's queries and solving of problems.

Also, the results of the analysis uncover that communication is the underlying rationale for the implementation of SM strategy in a company.

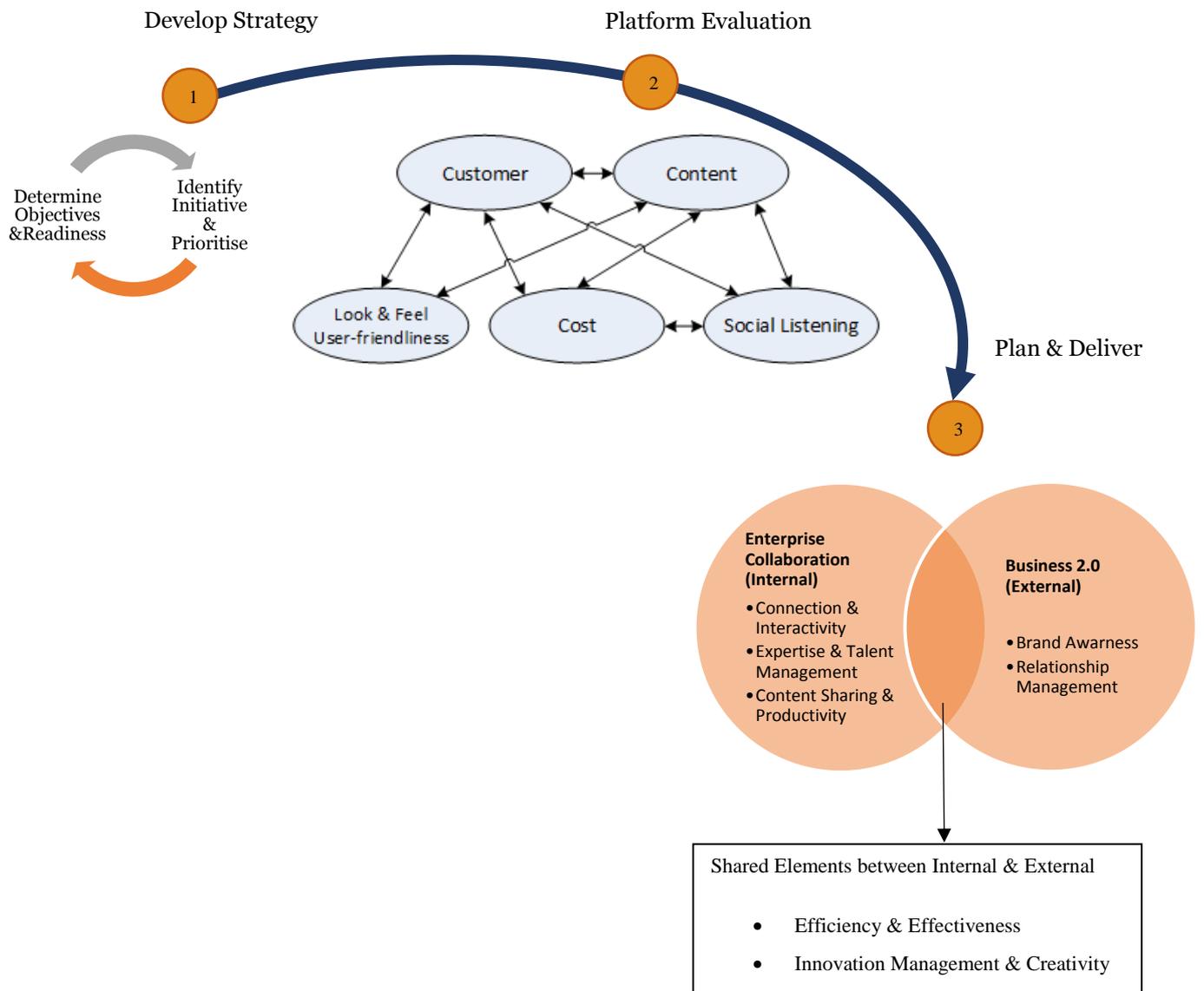


Figure 4-6: Refined SM strategy framework

## 4.8 Conclusion

Five companies from different industry sector participated in this study. The participants involved were all managers and heads of departments. This chapter has analysed and discussed the results of the SM strategy in their different stages: presenting their findings and collecting the dataset to develop the refined SM strategy framework.

The next chapter will discuss the results of the second phase investigation on platform evaluation.

# 5 Chapter 5: Second Phase Data Analysis (Platform Evaluation)

## 5.1 Introduction

The SM Strategy framework of this research as presented in chapter 2, consists of three stages to be considered in the implementation of SM strategy. These stages are the Develop strategy (stage 1), Platform evaluation (stage 2) and Plan & deliver (stage 3). To conduct an empirical investigation on the SM strategy framework discussed in chapter 2, an interview and qualitative questionnaire were conducted on five companies. The analysis reflected the company's current practice of SM in business as shown in the first investigation phase (Chapter 4). Hence, revealing an important area of focus in the platform evaluation stage. In this chapter, the analysis of the second phase of this study is presented using the data obtained from semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires involving the key informants (managers and heads of the digital marketing department) on SM in a company.

The findings of the SM strategy framework in chapter 4 (first phase) were used as a basis for the investigation of the Platform evaluation process (stage 2). In the proposed framework (figure 2-4), stage two suggested five elements to identify the right SM platform for business. However, the findings revealed that companies establish a presence where their customers are located. Therefore, this drew a focus on investigating the platform evaluation stage for an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

Practice theory is implemented as a guide to gain deeper and profound understanding of the phenomenon and as a guide to the design of the data collection process. The level of analysis was applied in line with the strategy-as-practice perspective to provide insights on the actual act of creating and enacting the platform evaluation process that may be similar or not similar from the institutionalised routine due to the interpretation, understanding or sense-making of the practitioner involved (Praxis). Also, understanding the routine that guides, platform evaluation process (Practices), and the individuals involved in shaping, implementing and analysing the platform evaluation in the company (Practitioners) (Huang *et al.*, 2014).

## **5.2 Background of the Second Phase Field Investigation**

The research carried out in the second phase of data collection aimed to gain more insight on how companies evaluate platforms for business purpose. The second phase gives insight on the guidelines, process, practices and the actors involved in the implementation of platform evaluation.

The companies who participated in this study are active in the use of SM for their business purpose. All five companies who took part in the first phase empirical investigation of this study agreed to also participate in the second phase. List of companies and participants are presented in chapter three (figure 3-3). The participants are professionals who are well-informed, have vast experienced in the subject area and have been responsible for their company's SM activities for over five years. Thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data (as explained in chapter three). The second phase semi-structured interviews consisted of questions that allow for in-depth understanding and knowledge of platform evaluation strategy.

### **5.2.1 General Information on the Second Phase**

The context of the second phase includes an in-depth investigation of the platform evaluation in an attempt to gather rich information to improve the data collected in the first phase. The empirical data were collected over a period of 4 months, from April to July 2017. To understand this phenomenon and gather detailed information; the data collection techniques applied for this phase were the semi-structured interview and qualitative questionnaire.

The first investigation phase (Chapter 4) presented the analysis of the SM strategy framework from stage 1 through to stage 3; from determining the business objective to the implementation stage. Therefore, highlighting the purpose and structured process for implementing SM strategy for the business. The findings from the first phase were used to develop the theory based semi-structured questions about platform evaluation applying the three elements of Practice theory from the strategy-as-practice perspective (Praxis, Practices and Practitioners).

## 5.2.2 Data Collection and Management

The methodology and research design used for this study was discussed in chapter 3. The interview data were analysed using the four phases of deductive thematic analysis as suggested by Crabtree and Miller (1999) as presented in figure 3-4. The deductive thematic analysis was applied to analyse the second phase investigation.

As revealed by the participants in the first investigative phase (chapter 4) the main criteria companies consider in selecting a platform is where their customers are located. The second investigation phase provides an in-depth understanding of the activities, practices and the actors involved in the platform evaluation process in a company. Furthermore, the initial findings, combined with Practice theory helped in developing the interview guide. The wealth of information gotten from the interview data introduces an in-depth analysis of platform evaluation in the second phase.

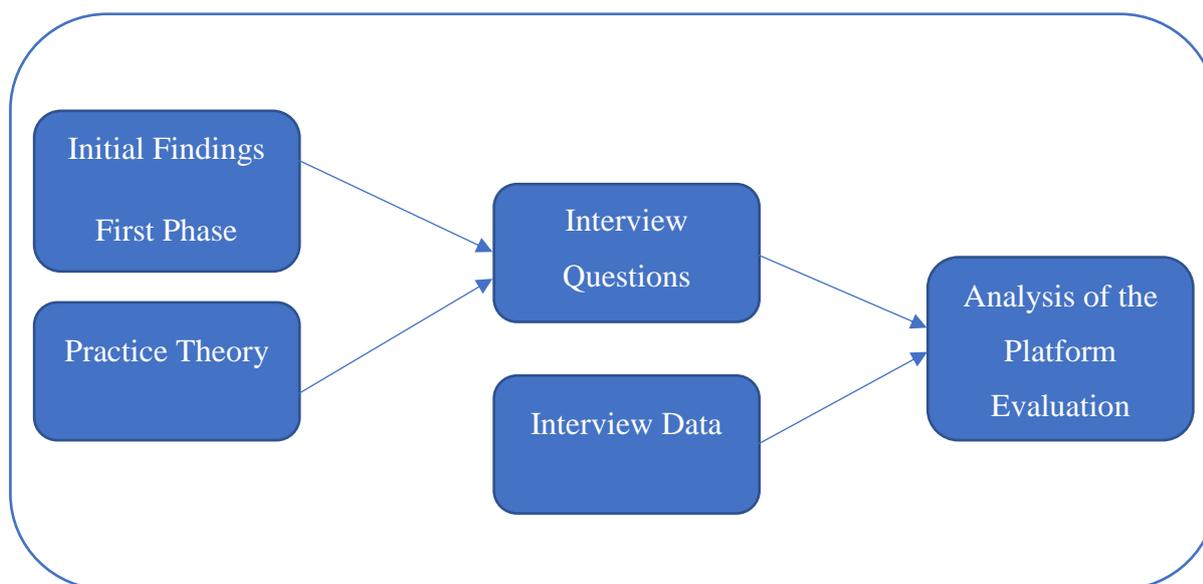


Figure 5-1: Second investigation phase development

This chapter presents the results and findings using the empirical data analysed based on the three conceptual elements from strategy-as-practice.

### 5.3 Justification for Further Investigation

This section presents the opinions of all participants involved in the SM activities of the company. This is to improve the investigation on deciding the SM platform companies adopt. As suggested by Edwards (2015) SM is as significant as any other marketing initiative or campaign. Therefore, it is important to engage customers within their choice of platform. Additionally, in developing a SM strategy, guidelines in selecting a suitable SM platform and the value the platform provides is identified. The process of devising this strategy is called strategising (Whittington, 2014).

The strategy-as-practice perspective concentrates on the practice of strategy, strategising and the practices that actors substantiate to seek the required actions taken to achieve this goal (Arvidsson, Holmström and Lyytinen, 2014). Previous strategy-as-practice studies concentrated on investigating the detail of a day-to-day internal strategy process by describing meetings, workshops, decision-making sessions and other micro-activities of skilled employees. This typically answers the questions of “where and how strategising and organising is done?” (Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007). Nonetheless, Whittington (1996), Jarzabkowski (2004), Chia & Holt (2007) and Chia & MacKay (2007) expressed that in strategy-as-practice studies “there is a basic lack of clarity about what practice is, in relation to processes and individual activities” (Jarzabkowski, 2004). For that reason, “activities, practices and process are often interchangeable which is viewed as an epiphenomenon and therefore reduces to the actions and goals of individual agents” (Chia and MacKay, 2007). Hence, this research connects with (Chia and MacKay, 2007) studies that concentrate on the activities, practices and process.

As discussed, the selection of an SM platform was previously presented in chapter two (section 2.7.3.). Five elements were identified as the appropriate factors to consider when selecting a platform. However, the findings in chapter four indicate companies establish a presence where their customers are located. Without completely disregarding the other criteria they evaluate in the selection process, the participants expressed that the choice of their platform is highly influenced primarily by the SM platforms their customers use. The assistant administrator from Company C explained that different platforms have different audience type and companies will have to identify which of these platforms have got a wider customer audience. Also, companies are interested in the most popularly visited platforms and the type of

conversations happening on these platforms. For example, the senior digital content manager from company A expressed that for a business to business (B2B) company, LinkedIn will be most appropriate in comparison to Facebook. As Facebook is more suitable for a business to customer (B2C) relationship.

The participants indicated this when asked the question, "in deciding on what SM platform to use what criteria were considered?"

*"For us, it's the audience. So where are your audience? And included in that audience, I'm talking not customers only but also influencers."* (Senior Digital Content Manager, Company A).

The participants from all the companies mentioned a few other criteria they considered after they have identified the presence of their customers:

- Ease of use
- User friendliness
- Allow effective interaction with customers
- Content type (for example, support for videos, images and amount of characters)
- Capabilities of the platform
- Immediacy
- Cost (for example, Licensing fee, staff training, content ad)
- The ability to tailor business objectives in the platform
- Ability to measure performance
- Popularity amongst its audience

### **5.3.1 Applying Deductive Thematic Analysis**

Qualitative research typically involves a large volume of data that must be analysed and interpreted. The data used for this study are transcripts from the in-depth semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires. In order to achieve the research aim, this study attempts to provide a method that allows the selection of the appropriate platform for business. To develop the interview questions, the researcher applied the findings from the first phase analysis and the concept of strategy-as-practice to help understand the activities required for platform evaluation. As discussed in chapter 3 (figure 3-3) this study employed the deductive

thematic analysis approach to analyse and interpret the data. Hence, applying the four-stages of template organising style suggested by Crabtree and Miller (1999). The researcher considered this method appropriate for this phase since it is focused on testing a theory as it provides a more structured analysis process. Below are the four-template organising style for organising, connecting and corroborating as applied in this phase:

#### ❖ **Developing code manual**

As previously discussed in chapter 3 (section 3.7) there are several approaches used to create a code manual. However, for this study, the researcher had predefined codes based on an assumption/understanding from a theoretical perspective. The codes/themes used for the analysis of the second phase are the three elements of Practice theory (Praxis, Practice and Practitioner) (Whittington, 2006). These themes were used as the initial code manual to organise segments of similar text for easy interpretation to either confirm or disconfirm evidence. The code manual technique allows for the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the findings, which emerged from the first investigative phase of this study. The result from this process provides the developed codes used for analysis. For this study, a preliminary code manual is based on the conceptual model from the literature review.

#### ❖ **Code texting**

This study used Nvivo; a computer software program employed for analysing data. Transcripts were imported into the software, the three elements from Practice theory were the themes used for analysis. Nvivo allows codes to be splits, refined and coded efficiently into different themes as they relate using “mouse work” (clicking of the mouse). At the end of this process, the data from the transcripts were coded and segmented into the themes they represent for easy interpretation.

#### ❖ **Sorting segments**

Sorting segments is an easy process using the template organising technique. Nvivo allows the researcher to search and print out sorted/segmented data with ease. The coded data are in themes, so data is found and identified quickly. The data coded in praxis, practices and practitioners are easily viewed in segments of the themes they represent. The output of this process, allowed the researcher to count the frequency of different codes and identify areas that form the basis for analysis

### ❖ **Connecting and corroborating/legitimizing**

Coding the data into themes using the template is an important part of the analysis, and this facilitates the analysis phase. The researcher used chunking approach to examine and connect a group of related/similar text to identify themes within the segments and gain in-depth understanding. Displaying data approach helps discover connections. At the end of this process, large segments of similar coded texts are summarised, and new themes are discovered within similar segments.

## **5.3.2 Social Media Value in Business**

The value SM brings to a business is not restricted on social, but on how it impacts every aspect of the business. However, a company is required first to identify its business goals, as the question "what value do you want to achieve on SM?" is asked by the researcher. The managers stated they could determine and measure the SM return-on-investment (ROI) based on their business objectives. With the increased dependency on SM by customers, companies are faced with the challenge of selecting suitable platform(s) and producing appropriate contents for that platform(s). In considering the difficulties involved in this process, the participants were asked about the values they seek to achieve from SM platform.

And this was expressed in a series of rhetorical questions by a participant, see statement below:

*"In terms of the values, it really is the number of our contacts who are using that platform and how they are using it? So, are they engaged in it? Can we engage with the platform? Can we do that organically? How can we enhance that through paid activity? What type of information does it give us back in terms of who is engaging with us?"* (Digital Campaign Lead, Company A)

The principal researcher from Company A revealed that platforms with specific features allow for companies to tailor and accomplish as many business goals as possible, (for example customer's reach, engagement, user-friendly and awareness) using this for business purpose. Therefore, they are interested in platforms that allow different levels of engagement, creating awareness to customers and customer acquisitions. Additionally, the head of IT department from Company C expressed that Facebook has got 2 billion users. Hence, this signified an estimated ratio of customer population on Facebook would be higher in comparison to other platforms. Furthermore, in recent times companies focus on what they do with these platforms

rather than trying to establish a presence on multiple SM platforms. Most of the companies revealed that they turn to SM to achieve some of their business goals. They expressed the values gained in using the platforms for business.

*"Social media exposure and good image branding, by continuously generating content for my company, creating new ideas and campaigns, and measuring how effective those ideas are."*  
(Head of IT, Company E)

However, the content and social media manager from Company B expressed that they do not select a platform due to the value it provides but for the consideration of its customers and their interest.

## 5.4 Praxis

According to Orlikowski (2000), "the Practice lens focuses attention on what people do with technology in their ongoing and situated activity" (Orlikowski, 2000). The Practice approach is centred on what people do, how they use the technology and being conscious of adaptation and improvisation of practical life. From the strategy-as-practice perspective, praxis is concerned with knowing what people actually do in their strategic activity (Whittington, 1996). Praxis is also defined as the embedded concept that could be operationalised at different levels from macro to micro through a flow of interactions between each level. These activities may be more or less similar to the institutionalised routine of practices due to the interpretation of the practitioner. However, there might be a need for improvisation due to unanticipated circumstances. Hence, it is safe to say praxis is an interplay of practices and practitioner and these activities can be changed over time.

In analysing the actual activity of creating and enacting the platform evaluation, the researcher investigated the fundamental necessities for the process by gaining in-depth knowledge on:

- Activities carried out to identify the presence of their customers on various platforms
- Identifying the competence/skills required for carrying out the strategic activity
- The involvement of the company in developing the intellectual know-how of practitioners

While assessing the platforms to determine the presence of customers, the digital marketing/social media manager and the researcher from Company D indicated they measured the level of engagement, level of interaction, market rating, user population and feedbacks; the information received is used to determine the presence and customer's interests in a platform. Also, the digital campaign lead from Company A revealed the use of agencies to gain in-depth knowledge about other platforms and also get prove of segmentation and audience. The digital campaign lead from Company A further revealed that the company has a target audience profile, stating they research on the best ways to engage around content and then build an execution plan on how best to target the customers using the platform. Furthermore, the platform to be used for B2B companies is a bit obvious as many B2B companies are on LinkedIn and LinkedIn is known as a professional platform. However, these companies do quite a lot on Twitter as well, but the downside is Twitter does not allow for audience segmentation against their various companies. They can only segment their audience against their followers while LinkedIn provides the ability to target companies. Additionally, companies search to see if people are talking about their products and services on those platforms by directly searching for specific keywords.

*"Basically, we can become a member of these different platforms, using the search capability we can see whether anybody is talking about our products and services on this platform"* (Principal Researcher, Company A)

*"With a platform like Facebook, it's a no-brainer. We know Facebook penetration is high. Therefore, our customers will be there, and we can use Facebook's sophisticated targeting capabilities to reach them"* (Content and Social Media Manager, Company B)

The assistant digital marketing manager from Company B interestingly pointed out that the company does not only consider where their customers are but the prospective customers as well and they also review the demographics that use what SM platform. The interview also highlights that companies identify the platform(s) their tech-savvy customers prefer to use and look out for reactions, responses and feedback from all customers.

In creating and enacting the platform evaluation process, all the participants recognised that the employees can enact this process only if they have particular competence. This is illustrated in the quotes below, as discussed by the principal researcher from Company A. The competence required are interpersonal, organisational and technical skills. The understanding

of how best to use a platform, the type of features on the platform and what interest the customers. The ability to use words, images or the mixture of both and a platform to get the best result. Hence making sure SM guidelines are applied (e.g. Tone of voice, etc.) to ensure the content is engaging with the customers to get the desired result.

All the participants expressed that the platform evaluation process is carried out based on the interpretation of the practitioner involved. During the interviews, all participants revealed that certain competence is required from an employee:

- Understanding customer base
- Understanding content and messaging
- Communication skills
- Community engagement
- Pattern Recognition
- Visual thinking
- Statistical analysis
- Social listening abilities
- Listening abilities
- Branding
- Customer service skills,
- Proficient in the English language

In further discussing the competence, the head of IT department from Company E agrees with the participant from Company A, stating that, it is important to know how best to use the platform, knowledge on the type of features available and what feature could be used for what purpose. Also, understanding how best to use sponsored post, sponsored emails and ads. Typically, this is done with the digital team, and they are required to have knowledge of proposition to present to the customers, understanding the customer's interest/needs and how best to sell, mix up content to get the best result. By applying things like company tone of voice, branding and ensuring the content is engaging with the audience to achieve the desired results.

Displaying an in-depth knowledge and understanding of SM platforms, their respective participants and how each platform can be deployed in different scenarios.

*"Must have adequate knowledge of our services and products, must be tactful, must be able to converse in English adequately. And also, must know the internal systems within the company to be able to answer the questions raised on social media..."* (Principal Research, Company A)

The above quote illustrates that the practitioner is expected to have adequate knowledge of the systems used in the company. The head of digital marketing, data and platform explained that questions are raised on SM platform(s) that may require the employee to access the appropriate system or multiple systems (database or knowledge base) to find the information. Hence, it is important to have a good knowledge of the systems to be aware of where certain information is located.

In discussing Praxis, the companies described that the actual act of enacting this strategy requires that participants should have individual skills in implementing this process, some which have been mentioned under competence. During the interviews, the participants revealed that employees tend to develop their abilities as they enact the strategy in practice. The content and social media manager from Company A expressed that the employee must have an interest in SM, know the basics of copywriting and have knowledge of features a platform offer. Such as, understanding of search, the mechanism of a platform and how to optimise a platform.

During the interviews, all participants indicated the skills required, and they are:

- General knowledge of platforms and features
- Content skill /Editorial
- Strategy planning
- Tactics and execution
- Peculiarities of platforms
- Community management
- Understand how content works on a social web
- Optimizing content and technology
- Creative mindset
- Good writing skills
- Be on top of the latest digital marketing trends
- Analytical skills
- Being tech-savvy is necessary
- Leadership and communication skills

Also, understanding how the platform works, the features and functionalities available on that platform, but also understanding what other platforms provide. The ability to understand the maximum value a platform provides, and its potential returns is significant to the growth of the company.

The assistant system administrator from Company C expressed that the SM team was not trained to know how to use this technology as the team were expected to have a good understanding of the platforms and develop the required skills to use the platform(s). While for the other companies, the interview revealed that employees were trained and given guidelines on the do's and don'ts of SM. They were to know; what to say, how to say it, the tone of voice and how to deal with aggressive customers etc. However, the head of digital marketing, data and platform from Company A, expressed they do train their staff but strongly emphasised that a lot more is learnt by using the platform(s). The content and social media manager from Company B also stated they develop their abilities/skills/methods during practice and bring in their characteristics into the conversations they have with customers and other stakeholders using these platforms. Also, employees are advised to attend trainings and workshops, but personal experience and continuous practice makes all the difference.

*“Develop the skills while using the platform. Our customer service agents who liaise directly with customers will have training on how to use the platform as well as how to interact effectively with customers.”* (Assistant Digital Marketing Manager, Company B)

For SM managers, it is important to understand the potential returns and how best to get returns on SM platforms. The digital campaign lead and senior digital content manager both from Company A expressed that images work better than word so the use of infographics, images are used for strong visibility and compelling customers to a post. Therefore, this technique allows employees to identify the best content which gives insight on what content to use for paid activities. Another point that was brought up in the interviews was the availability of learning resources on how to use SM and provided information on how to deal with common queries. See quote below:

*“[...] We have various academy set up on the main group intranet, so there are tons and tons of resources to guide you to do almost anything you wanted to do. A lot of those resources*

*exist, there is a lot of how to guide, which we can all assess."* (Senior Digital Content Marketing Manager, Company A)

The assistant system administrator from Company C revealed, there are requirements (guidelines) from a company's perspective which was stated as important for the online representation of the business. However, there was no indication of a strict implementation policy as employees learn more as they use the platforms and are allowed to bring in their personal experience and characteristics. All participants suggested that as they use the platforms they learnt and developed more skills. As new tools were implemented into daily work use new skills were learnt.

## 5.5 Practices

From the strategy-as-practice perspective, practice is best understood as an institutionalised routine (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007). According to Reckwitz (2002), "routinised types of behaviour which consist of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz, 2002).

Also, the practice provides a guide to what should be done in a context based on existing policies, traditions and norms in today's work environment. However, the difference between practice and praxis is the routine that guides the activity and the actual activity itself (Reckwitz, 2002). In practice, it is a focus of cognitive and interpretive activities and the know-how of activity. Information technology is ubiquitous in companies today, so this study is centred on technology-enabled practice. That is, using technological tools to strategise for business purpose. This element is concerned with the provided routines as a guide.

In analysing the practices involved in the platform evaluation process, the researcher investigated the routines and traditions of practices in the company. They are:

- Identification of business goals
- The SM functionalities used
- The guidelines in using/evaluating SM platforms

To implement strategy-as-practice as a theoretical basis to conceptualise organisational ambidexterity, it is important to identify practitioners involved in organisational change, viewing ambidexterity as a practice and also consider the nature of practice which allows practitioners to investigate knowledge.

All participants stated that the identification of business goals and objectives is a part of strategic practices in business. These goals are typically structurally placed within the business strategy of a company. According to the company's practices, a specific strategy is set to target individual customers, thus companies segment against that audience. However, the discussion on this study has gained knowledge/understanding on selecting the appropriate platform for business. Hence, platforms have provided a medium for companies to achieve their goals efficiently. Some business goals as stated includes:

- Wider outreach of customer
- Customer interaction/engagement
- Receive real-time feedback from viewers
- Create awareness
- Provides an alternative channel for communication
- Allow for customer target/ customer service target (NPS)
- Optimised paid media
- Creates conversation and drive engagement
- Sales target
- Customer service target

While discussing this scope, it was revealed that companies go through challenges on how to create awareness within customers on what they are doing, how to get customers to understand the products and services they provide. However, the managers indicated that the platform provides a medium for companies to approach customers and communicate their intent. Also, SM platforms help to identify gaps in their customer base, identify and target these customers.

During the interviews, the head of digital marketing, data and platform from Company A stated that companies do not consider platforms, base of the functionalities (likes, follow, view, comment, invite, tweet or retweet and share) they provide, rather, these functionalities are

measures of success. In the past, companies started off by increasing their followers and the number of views. However, as they evolved, they began to concentrate more on customer engagements, moving away from engaging with any customer online to engaging with a selected few where potential value can be gotten. And customer's engagement could be anything from a like, comment, share follow etc. Companies are interested in customers engaging with the content posted, then they can select the best performing content and repeat them in different time zones and different time periods. Hence, the discussion highlights the functionalities embedded in a platform as a means of accomplishing business goals, objectives and measuring Key Performance Indicator (KPI) in SM platforms.

*"[...] Engagement is very important, so whichever platform, we are in, you just have to utilize the engagement mechanisms that are available on the platform and just to ensure you measure them"* (Senior Digital Content Manager, Company A)

Although there are different platforms and new ones are being developed often, companies aim to implement platforms that allow easy monitoring, interaction and assessment of traffic flow. The head of IT department from Company E says they employ the functionalities provided by a platform because this contributes in providing analytics and to enable the company to gather as much data as possible in the design of future content and targeting. Additionally, the information gathered provides knowledge on the preference or demand of customers for particular products and services which aids management team in decision making. Specifically, the SM engagement reports are an indication of the products, customers are interested in by measuring the different levels of engagement (likes, comment, share etc.).

*"[....] The total number of engagement on content determines the performance of a post or tweet."* (Social Media/Online Content Manager, Company E)

Furthermore, "share" is considered important as these features allow for customers to share a post with their connection, permitting wider awareness of company's products and service.

All the participants argue about the importance of SM platform guidelines; these platforms are becoming more popular daily. Consequently, there is a need for companies to seek to implement social platform correctly as it has become a more complex phenomenon.

*"Managing some of the social media platforms have become a complex, multi-faceted role that operates to help a business achieve its highest-level goals. It isn't a job that functions independently or in isolation within the company."* (Head of IT Department, Company E)

While discussing the platform, practices and the decision-making in SM Platforms, all participants expressed, it is crucial to identify platforms which allow:

- Easy traffic flow
- Target audience
- Immediacy
- Compatibility with business types
- Accessibility.
- Followers & engagement
- Traffic Generation
- Content Synergies
- Customer Preference
- Conversions & customer value

The guidelines help to instruct employees on how to interact with customers on SM. This discussion led to the communication strategy or the SM communication know-how. All the participants emphasised on being cautious of the information they post on SM; as they are advised not to disclose information that is not available in the public domain for it could be sensitive to the company.

The platform capability is mentioned from the interviews, the ability to solve problems raised by customers. Also, there is a requirement for a platform to provide a forum or avenue for the conversation with multiple persons and the availability of private messaging to deal with more personal issues. The participants from Company A and B indicated they rely on their various agencies to provide expertise on the innovation from the platform(s) and how best to use them for business.

## 5.6 Practitioner

In Practice theory, it is a principal assumption that practitioners' activities make a difference. In their actual activity (praxis), the actors (practitioners) enact practices in ways that influence result; hence their activity is worth studying (Whittington, 2014). Importantly, IS and strategy-as-practice, researchers are both concerned with the human factor in their study. Therefore, this improves the contribution of information system researcher specifically to a strategy-as-practice perspective (Whittington, 2014). Furthermore, investigating the strategic influence of information practitioners, specifically from the strategy-as-practices perspective the contribution would not be to concentrate on the size of the budget but the skilled interference of practice in action. According to Peppard (2010) for practitioners as actors, it is important to know how practice is skillfully performed in a context.

This session discusses the individual actors who shape, influence and actualise the platform evaluation process. Also, their roles which equate to job responsibilities, and the interrelationships in performing their activities. All participants highlighted that the actors and activities involved in the platform evaluation process vary with each company depending on the organisational structure.

The SM managers, marketing managers, public relations managers, and digital marketing managers, executives and other key SM experts in the company have a strong influence on selecting an appropriate platform for the company. For large organisations, there is a centralised body in charge of the overall governance. However, some of these organisations have got different lines of business; each area has got their SM leads within them. The SM leads are responsible for governing everything from how individuals use the platform to how employees use the corporate account, setting up new accounts, monitoring and tracking existing accounts. Also, ensure they are using the platforms correctly and pushing out the right messages and branding for each platform.

According to all the participants, these are the following actors involved:

- Senior Management/Executives
- Head of Marketing Department
- Head of IT Department
- Social Media Managers

- Content Managers
- Information Technology Managers
- Corporate Affairs Managers
- Sale Manager
- Public Relation Manager
- Customer Service
- Account Department
- Research Department
- Head of Web department
- Online Editors
- Content Producers
- Video Editors
- Legal Department
- Social Analysts
- Software and Operations Department

As indicated above, this process is not solely dependent on the SM team, but a combination of other departments in different forms to promote the company's product and services. In explaining the involvement of other departments in planning the platform evaluation process, the assistant administrator from Company C expressed that the accounting department gets involved in the platform evaluation process in reference to cost. Furthermore, the accounting department is involved in the finance of the platforms through paid promotions, licence fee and overall cost of a platform. The interactivity proves the interrelationship among various departments in conducting the platform evaluation process like any other project in the company various aspects of the project is considered. The corporate, web and program departments are also involved as they provide content information on events and company branding. Companies ensure to have a form of uniformity; contents, logos and style on all social platforms, so to appear organised.

The social media and online content manager from Company E also stated that aside from the digital marketing team/ SM team, other departments are involved in planning and evaluating the platforms suitable for their campaign. As they pre-determine certain factors; identify the intended result of the activity planned, carry out an assessment of what they want to achieve,

how to achieve it and the best platform to use for the campaign. This information is gotten from the research team as they have the background knowledge about the marketplace, existing platforms, the product campaign and new platforms. It is the responsibility of the research team to find out if their customer uses the emerging platforms. This establishes an indirect influence in platform evaluation for company campaign. Also, senior management influences this process as they typically have a definite view on what they want for their region and teams. The evaluation process is not done in seclusion with only top management due to the integration of business process, but there is a constant stream of requirements/feedbacks from around the business, between the SM teams and senior management.

*"[...] The senior managers have definite viewpoints, and definite expectations about what they want to see on our website and from social platforms and they are very vocal filling in those requirements...."* (Senior Digital Content Marketing Manager, Company A)

However, while discussing the involvement of other departments in the planning/carrying out of platform evaluation process, the digital campaign lead from Company A, highlights that their users influence the development and enhancement of LinkedIn and Facebook. These platforms are interested in how customers use them and the functionalities they apply.

Jarzabkowski (2004) defined strategy from strategy-as-practice perspective, "as an emergent set of practices, which are constantly in the making". The researcher followed the concept of innovation, the emergence and improvisation to help explain how the use of SM is apparent in practice using the three conceptual elements of strategy-as-practice and how they interact within a company (Orlikowski, 2000). During the interviews, the assistant digital marketing manager from Company B revealed the existence of a strategy document which contained guidelines on how to use SM; the do's and don'ts. In theory, the document states the practice and implementation of SM and platform evaluation by an employee while practically applying this in business. This document holds up during the initial implementation stage and provides SM rules and regulations, but as practice continues, evolving takes place, innovation emerges, and new practices are formed.

*"[...] But it was actually a living, breathing document. It is not something like we wrote it and threw it away. So, it's a live document and it continues to evolve, and it continues to adapt. I really, strongly think that in the world of digital and social, you have to be constantly adapting*

*and reacting and planning and watching and taking advantage of new developments, so it has to be a living breathing strategy"* (Senior Digital Content Marketing Manager)

Furthermore, the companies have got the tone of voice and employees are required to apply this whenever they are posting on behalf of the company. However, there is always a bit of personality applied to employees and this is not against the company's strategy. Nevertheless, when marketing, for example, employees are expected to post comments without emotions, but using the company's tone of voice. Furthermore, the use of these platforms has evolved compared to previous years because companies have learned the type of post that works for them, what doesn't and the best ways to grab customer's attention. It is a continuous and evolving process. The strategy evolves as we move from strategy to implementation and post-implementation stages.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the second phase of the empirical field investigation used for this study and using Practice theory from a strategy-as-practice perspective as the lens for understanding the method of selecting a suitable SM platform for a company using the three theoretical, conceptual elements: praxis, practices and practitioners. This chapter analysed and discussed the results of the second phase of this study. More so, the chapter gives insight on the activities of enacting SM into work activities.

Despite the limitations in generalising the findings to different context and settings, this research presents very important contributions and implications in providing a better understanding of how strategy agents carry out strategy practice. While the use of Practice theory to empirically examine platform evaluation remains limited, by applying the lens of strategy-as-practice in theorising this research, the study presents an empirical detail of strategising which included the activity, the process and the individuals.

From a practical perspective, this study will aid companies to understand better the various elements involved in strategising, the different activities, process, expertise and individuals required for both SM and business strategy. While from a theoretical perspective, the research attempts to gain insight of this relatively new and inadequately explored phenomenon.

The next chapter will discuss the results of both the first investigative phase (SM strategy framework) and second investigative phase (platform evaluation) of this research.

## 6 Chapter 6: Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction

The proposed framework in chapter 2 presented three main stages in the implementation of SM strategy in companies. The stages are; develop strategy, platform evaluation and plan & deliver. For research purpose, the semi-structured interview and qualitative questionnaire were conducted to investigate the impact of SM strategy in a company, as presented in chapter 4 (first phase). Additionally, further investigations were done with the same participants from the first investigative phase to understand the practice of platform evaluation as presented in chapter 5 (second phase).

In this chapter, the discussion is presented using the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires which includes the participants from all five companies of both the first and second investigative phase of this study. The research findings are discussed in relation to the existing studies in the areas of the implementation of SM strategy and platform evaluation process. The result of the first investigative phase of this research suggests that companies place high importance in selecting the right platform for their business and by so doing their primary consideration for this process are the customers. Furthermore, to elucidate the research findings, Practice theory will be applied to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The participants' view of the platform evaluation process is discussed based on the three elements (praxis, practices and practitioner) of Practice theory. The researcher discusses the participant's views from the angle of praxis; understanding the actual activity carried out, practices; understanding the routines and practitioners; the actors who carry out these activities. These elements were discussed according to the experience and views of the participants.

This chapter begins by discussing the findings from the first investigative phase (chapter 4) in section 6.2, the findings from the second investigative phase is presented in section 6.3. Finally, the conclusion in 6.4.

## 6.2 Discussion of the First Phase Data Analysis (Proposed Framework)

This section discusses the three stages mentioned in the proposed framework in chapter 2 (figure 2.4). As these were suggested by the researcher for the implementation of SM strategy in companies. The stages are; stage 1- develop strategy, stage 2- platform evaluation and stage 3- plan & deliver. The findings that emerged from this study are discussed below.

### 6.2.1 Stage 1 - Develop Strategy

As discussed in chapter 2, the first stage of the framework is vital in the implementation process, for this is where the companies begin to assess their readiness, objectives, visions, initiatives and capabilities to adopt an SM strategy for the business.

#### ❖ Determine Objectives and Readiness

According to Kilgour, Sasser and Larke (2015), SM is part of our personal and professional life. Hence, it is crucial to have an SM strategy that aligns with the business strategy/objectives. Also, it is important to evaluate the readiness of the business to obtain knowledge on the strength and weaknesses of the companies before SM adoption. As stated in chapter 2, the senior management is expected to identify the company's objectives for adopting SM.

However, the research findings highlighted that no detailed assessment or analysis was carried out to determine readiness to adopt and implement SM, but the senior management did identify business goals and objectives that could be achieved using SM. Companies A, B, C, D and E revealed that the only assessment that was done before implementation was to identify the platforms their customers were using as the choice to have an SM presence was a no-brainer with both customers and competitors going digital. Although different companies have various objectives for implementing SM, the findings revealed that the SM strategy is typically aligned with the overall business objectives and this is essential in contributing to the company's performance goal. Mangold and Faulds (2009) argue that marketing and SM managers should be included in the development and execution of SM strategy. Also, they should ensure that the SM activities are aligned with business objectives, culture, brand and customer's interest

(Omosigho and Abeysinghe, 2012). Below are some of the business objectives mentioned by all the participants:

- Increase customer engagement
- Customer acquisition
- Create awareness
- Reach a wider audience
- Assist customers with technical support
- Cross-sell to existing customers via paid channels
- Build customer relationship

According to this research, evaluating the readiness of the business before establishing a presence on SM was neglected. However, the findings revealed that after companies established a presence on SM, then market research was conducted. Nonetheless, this was not considered a good practice for it opens the company to unforeseen risk as most company's initial reaction to SM indicates their inability to effectively use this technology for business purpose (Omosigho and Abeysinghe, 2012). According to Omosigho and Abeysinghe (2012) companies need to consider specific factors in adopting SM efficiently. Very often, companies take up SM without considering the readiness of the company.

Arvidsson, Holmström and Lyytinen (2014) suggest that it is crucial for companies to allocate resources and engage effectively in competitive activities which includes the choice of technology to employ to help achieve the business objectives. Additionally, the inappropriate mix match of using technology to solve a business problem has resulted in failed strategic implementation. That is, it is the inability to employ the most suitable strategically aligned technology to achieve business purpose.

Kırtiş and Karahan (2011) suggest that it is important for companies to approach SM with a strategy which includes the right objectives, role and methods. SM is implemented in business due to its various advantages with time, customers, relationship building, cost, etc. Companies need to consider their objectives, aims and readiness then apply the appropriate SM for each

use. SM is mutually beneficial for both companies and customers if business objectives are identified and strategically implemented.

#### ❖ **Identify Initiatives and Prioritise**

After determining objectives and readiness, this section is challenged with identifying the initiatives best for carrying out the business objectives. The findings revealed that not all companies define business objectives and assess readiness before implementing SM. The findings suggest that companies typically create a presence on SM before they begin to analyse the platform and the potential benefits to the business. Királ'ová and Pavlíček (2015) suggests that, companies are to employ SM to their business areas to remain competitive in the industry. Four of the five companies (Companies A, B, D and E) who participated in this research indicated that decisions on how to implement SM in the business were decided upon to gain a competitive advantage and achieve its desired business goals. Although some of the initiatives were posited after establishing a presence on SM.

All the participants from Company D revealed that there was no prior assessment, readiness analysis nor market research conducted before the implementation of SM. The finding highlighted that Company D was influenced by the popularity of social network amongst businesses and customers. Hence, the decision to take advantage of the growing technology. Additionally, all five companies that participated in this research acknowledged that SM activities were prioritised and initialised based on the business goal, campaigns and branding. Jiang, Luo and Kulemeka (2016) suggest that prioritising SM activities have allowed for this technology to be accepted and used to support business goals.

According to Aral, Dellarocas and Godes (2013), it is crucial for companies to identify the SM initiatives that work best for their business and the functional areas to be transformed using an appropriate suitable SM platform. Trainor *et al.* (2014) suggest that the senior management team is the most appropriate to make decisions on strategic initiatives as they are exposed to the detailed ideas, values and vision for the company. Also, highlighting the importance of companies to align their SM strategies with the overall business strategy. The findings reveal SM strategy is aligned with the overall strategic business objectives as SM is applied to support in achieving business goals. Further analysis indicated that SM pierces through different departments (marketing department, accounting department, public relations and customer service) in the company and support in their practice in achieving goals.

The next section discusses the elements companies analyse while evaluating their SM platforms.

## 6.2.2 Stage 2 - Platform Evaluation

### ❖ Content

Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006) assert that content is significant to SM and customers generate content online with the intention to share or educate others about products, services, brand and experience. Tavana et al. (2013) further explained that content is measured to attain the relevance of a platform. However, the findings reveal that generating content on a SM platform is a challenge for businesses as there are various segments of customers with different interests. Hence, posting a content contrary to the customer's interest could generate a backlash. However, these platforms provide a channel for interaction while also allowing the generation of enormous amount of content with important knowledge (Smith and Taglino, 2014). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also, asserts that SM environment is focused on interacting with stakeholders and customers as such an active presence is crucial to a company's growth in this space.

The research findings reveal that content is crucial to SM strategy as it is vital in communicating to customers via SM platforms. For companies to remain relevant on SM platforms, SM managers are required to regularly post content. This does not go without the challenge of the different platform having different functionalities. As companies are expected to be active on all their platforms, content plays a significant role in this process. The research reveals that the allocated number of word count differs on various platforms. For example, Twitter has got a limited word count of 140 characters. This limitation can pose a challenge in the distribution of similar content on all company's SM platforms. Whereby, the content posted on Facebook or Instagram would have to be restructured as these platforms allow more words compare to Twitter. The digital marketing executive from Company D believes that sharing similar contents across all platforms gives the company an organised and unified front while allowing for the content to reach potential customers.

The study also reveals that a particular type of content fits a specific SM platform best and even customers are more attracted to images than text. The social media manager from Company A stated that, as these platforms evolve it can incorporate different forms of content. And customers are particularly attracted to graphics, videos and images in comparison to written material. Additionally, Tsionis and Dimitriadis (2014) assert that the use of these different types of content on SM interaction has changed the traditional role of companies, customer relationship and exchange of information online.

SM is now prioritised in the corporate world; a large number of companies are actively present on SM platforms. Companies are now sold into the business implications, the new user-generated content medium and the overall benefits of these new channels for business (Paniagua and Sapena, 2014). The findings reveal that using the traditional methods, it could take a more extended period to communicate the different contents with customers, but SM activities have made marketing activities a lot easier, faster and cost-effective. According to (Tavana et al., 2013), the leading cost of content on SM are content production, promotion, strategy execution and editing.

#### ❖ **Impression score**

As discussed in chapter two, impression score captures the number of visitors who visit a website and their behaviour. This process keeps a record of the number of people that visits a site. However, the findings indicated that managers are not particularly interested in the number of people who visit their platform, rather they are interested in what their customers are saying about their products, services and brand. The companies use social listening tools to listen to conversations online to understand what customers, stakeholders and competitors are saying concerning the company. Also, the research found out that social listening tool was also used to conduct market research to gain knowledge on the activities of competitors. For example, to find out what they are saying or doing with SM, how they use it, the different products and services they provide on SM and what customers are saying about them as well. For this reason, “impression score” was changed to “social listening” in the refined framework presented in chapter 4 (figure 4.6).

According to Floredu and Cabiddu (2016), the companies engage in transparent conversations online with customers; social listening helps with online reputation management. Woodcock, Green and Starkey (2011) argues that brand online marketing is not a static relationship, but

dynamic where companies engage, converse and listen to customers in an attempt to gain their trust. Also, suggesting that by social listening, companies can better understand or anticipate the customer's needs and gain ideas for new products by listening to their conversation. Additionally, Sand et al. (2014) states that listening to customers through SM provides valuable insights for the company. Nevertheless, there is a negative impact of not monitoring your business using SM or other monitoring tools available. According to Barid and Parasnis (2011) listening creates awareness of a potential adverse post or negative exposure and allow for quick response to the situation. Powell *et al.* (2016) describes social listening as a regular marketing safety surveillance.

All the companies that participated in this research indicated that they used social listening to identify the SM platform(s) their customers have established a presence. The companies involved in this research are active on SM and exposed to the different SM tools available. Social listening is mainly applied by companies who are active on SM. However, companies who are not active can utilise the social listening tool to understand the customer's notion of the company better and identify ways to improve customer value in the business.

#### ❖ Cost

Although SM is considered to be cost-effective some aspect of this technology incurs a cost. The research findings indicated that the cost of a platform is an important factor to consider while implementing SM. As discussed in chapter two, companies apply SM as a medium for marketing as the nature of this technology can reach a wider audience efficiently and these platforms are less expensive in comparison to traditional marketing. The research data revealed that although SM is not expensive, companies still allocates budget to this technology. For most SM platforms, there are no fees charged to create an account, but when these platforms are used professionally, to gain its full potential, some premium services are paid for. For example, the cost of advertising, cost of promotion subscription, content creation and license fee etc.

The findings further revealed that there is a budget for staff training and maintenance of the platform (both internally and externally used platforms). Individually, the marketing, customer service and the sales teams are at the forefront of communication with the customers, it is imperative they are knowledgeable on the mechanism of the platforms. However, all staff members are trained to use these platforms efficiently as they could be representing the

company in different ways. Therefore, it is essential they gain adequate knowledge about the platforms, its functionalities and the company's SM policy as they directly engage in the social space. For internally developed platform, an additional cost is incurred such as; the upfront cost of development, project cost (software and human labour cost) and maintenance fees. However, the research findings highlighted that managers measure cost against the potential benefit it provides.

Chong and Chan (2014) suggest that the cost-effectiveness is an important factor in adopting new technology. Thus, there is a relationship between cost and adoption of a platform. Considering the profitability of SM, companies utilise this technology due to the low cost of information technology skills required to use it and the low communication cost with customers. Ainin *et al.* (2014) also stated that cost is a factor that influences the use of SM in companies. SM allows businesses to advertise, sell and market at a low price. Hence, companies promote their products and services by sharing and posting information.

SM is employed by companies in different industries for various objectives. According to Kose and Sert (2015), one of the productive application of SM is for marketing. Thus, the application of SM for marketing is significantly successful for business goals are achieved efficiently with low cost. Therefore, in the business world, SM has become an essential part of communication and sharing information.

#### ❖ **Look & Feel**

The look & feel discuss the design and user-friendliness of an SM platform (Tavana et al., 2013).

#### **Design**

The research data stated that companies do not consider the design of a platform as a significant factor to consider while selecting an SM platform. This is because companies are not involved in the development and design of these platforms as they mainly use the third-party platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram etc. Rather, they are more interested in the functionalities (likes, post, share, comments, private chat etc.) provided and how it could be used for business purpose. The functionalities allow for companies to measure performance and engagement level with the audience.

The platform developers consider the interface, feature and policy while developing as these forms the user's application of the platforms and the functionality it provides (Aral, Dellarocas and Godes, 2013). Martin (2013) argues that the functionality of a platform varies depending on its intended application. The platforms are developed with similar features placed on the different interface to meet the various needs of their users. However, each functionality though available on all platforms are used at different levels. According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), the diagram of the seven functional blocks of SM displays the seven functionalities present in four SM platforms and the different strengths in function based on its intended application. For example, Facebook's encourages building relationships, and YouTube is sharing videos etc.

### **User-friendliness**

The research finding indicated that the user-friendliness of the platform is important to both companies and the employees. From the company's perspective, the ease of use of a platform is of utmost importance to employees who represent the company in social space. The technicality or complexity of a platform determines the level of expertise required to obtain meaningful benefits. Also, the research findings indicated that, in cases where different platforms are used internally and externally, employees prefer to use the external platforms which have got similar functionalities with the internal as this allows for easy transit between them. From the customer's perspective, it is straightforward. The customers would only engage on platforms they understand and find easy to use. Additionally, it was revealed that companies focus on the applicability of the platforms rather than the cost of the platform.

Rauschnabel, Brem and Ro (2015) argue that people are more likely to use a platform because of its user-friendliness. Therefore, if a customer perceives a platform requires high technical skills they would be sceptical about their abilities and are less likely to interact with that platform. Hence, platform developers are challenged with developing a user-friendly but also an innovative technological tool (Christophe *et al.*, 2009). The natural use of a platform minimises the training expense required for employee's application (Nguyen *et al.*, 2014).

### **❖ Audience fit**

As discussed in chapter two, one of the most effective ways for companies to reach their target audience is by identifying the business goals, objectives and the segment of audience suitable for their business. All of these were revealed in the analysis. However, the findings further indicate that the customer is the primary consideration in platform evaluation process.

Companies create accounts in platforms where their customers are present. As presented in chapter two, the use of SM platforms by customers have increased tremendously. Therefore, companies are faced with the challenge of establishing a presence on these platforms to engage with customers. Additionally, the findings highlighted that companies do not segment their audience based on age, educational background or gender as the initial SM strategy framework (figure 2.2) suggested. Nevertheless, companies are interested in building and maintaining relationships with customers.

SM gives customers bargaining power as it influences company's actions, decisions and also affects the customer's choice of products and services based on the reviews provided by other customers. Since the emergence of SM there has been an increased study on customer engagement amongst managers (Sashi, 2012). The interactive nature of SM has allowed for conversations and content generation which assists companies in satisfying customer's needs. SM empowers customers to express their views, experiences about products and services. Customers play a significant role in SM as they define the brand image, build and also can destroy the reputation of a company by their experience, impression and feelings (Severi, Choon Ling and Nasermodeli, 2014).

Nevertheless, the employee engagement on SM is crucial as they represent the company and are responsible for shaping its reputation. An unsatisfied customer can cause substantial reputational damage in the social space (Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom, 2015). In the era of SM where the customer plays a vital role, companies are particular about building and maintaining valuable relationships (Dreher, 2014). According to Floreddu and Cabiddu (2016) study, SM provides a new channel for companies to communicate. However, customers remain the determinant factor for a company's performance, reputation and goals.

Plan & Deliver section (stage 3) discusses the use of SM platform among employees (internally) and customers (externally).

### **6.2.3 Stage 3 - Plan & Deliver**

The last stage of the SM strategy framework consists of two sections: Enterprise Collaboration and Business 2.0. Enterprise Collaboration is the use of SM within the company (internal) while Business 2.0 is the use of SM with customers and other stakeholders (external).

#### **❖ Enterprise Collaboration**

##### **Connection & Interactivity**

SM has been integrated into work practice and used within the company. This section discusses the internal collaboration and interactivity amongst employees. The findings indicated that the use of SM in the workplace is important for it encourages building relationships, creating connections and communication among employees using SM tools. The application of SM tools into their job builds employees confidence and exposes them to social activities. Additionally, the use of SM within the company increased internal collaboration and productivity as employees were allowed to share content which produced innovative ideas, systematically reduced time to complete a project and built connections among individual with similar interests.

According to Husin et al. (2010), SM allows employees to connect, communicate and collaborate with other employees using SM platforms. The interactive nature of SM provides for two-way communication, which creates the flow of information among employees to achieve effectiveness and productivity. The use of SM within the company encourages interactivity which exposes employees to content generation, improve writing skills, share opinions, insights, experience, knowledge, create and maintain relationships with other employees (Zolkepli and Kamarulzaman, 2014). Posting of content in an internal platform allows for employees to communicate about work informally and easily. Also, the clarity in communication attracts the attention of specific employees with similar interest to brainstorm over a post, allowing for employees to know more about the background and activities of each other (Treem and Leonardi, 2012). According to Chen (2011) study, employees who are active on the internal SM platforms have stronger connections and relationships with other active employees on the platform.

## **Innovation Management**

The research data indicated that discussion on internal platforms amongst employees often produces new ideas. Hence, it is crucial to carefully analyse the content generated and implement best plans for business growth. The traditional work practice is changing rapidly, so for companies to remain competitive, there is a necessity to manage innovation. Also, the findings reveal that using an internal platform has allowed for senior and junior staff to relate easily. Furthermore, employees who are in different locations are not left out in the brainstorming process as they can all access the internal forum and do not need to be physically present to make innovative contributions and express their viewpoints.

According to Huang, Baptista and Galliers (2013) study, employees are limited in expressing their views so senior management can retain control over all activities to avoid undermining of authority. Thereby, restricting the employees, companies prevent the expression of different perspectives, diverse interests in innovation. However, for innovation to occur, it is essential to create and nurture organisational culture, the relationship between employees and senior management as this must allow for ideas, viewpoints and concerns to be freely conveyed (Huang, Baptista and Galliers, 2013). Nonetheless, it is important to collect the ideas presented by employees and evaluate innovation. Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga (2010), suggest that being innovative means to implement the right ideas mindfully and at the right time. Companies are advised to draw ideas from its employees as the top-down approach does not get work done efficiently. Employees are the most valuable asset of a company. Despite the innovation, innovation defined process and how innovation management is used, employees are responsible for innovating in the company (Cerinsek and Dolinsek, 2009).

## **Content Sharing and Management**

Previously, SM impact on business innovation expanded the reach for the target audience. Prior to that, marketing campaigns were to get customers to visit the company's website, but recently the primary objective is to build relationships and sustain engagements. The increased usage of SM for business has shown how users no longer view static data but share content among themselves (Harris and Rae, 2009). SM allows for employees to create, share and generate content within the company, it encourages participation and communication in the workplace (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). According to Zolkepli and Kamarulzaman (2014) the benefits and uses of SM are developed from the user-generated content, and the integration of SM in

business incorporates SM practice with the company. Thereby transforming passive employees to active employees and contributing to the conversations on the internal SM platforms (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

From the above discussion, it could be concluded that SM encourages content sharing and management within the company. The participants revealed that efforts are made by the senior management for all employees to be involved in SM irrespective of the department and job descriptions. Employees are advised to go online, interact, engage, build their community and ensure they connect with relevant people in the industry. The findings indicated that connecting and sharing ideas and documents with other employees has a positive impact on the growth, performance and development of the business. Sharing of knowledge, materials and experience for a project, saves time and reduces risk when a different team picks up a similar campaign for this provides a roadmap on how to conduct the project.

Also, ideas gotten from customers are brought to the employee's forum and discussed, and employees work together to improve the company's products and services. The internal platform is beneficial because employees have access to other employees across functions as oppose to connecting with people you only know. The internal platform(s) play a significant role as a centrally managed repository of relevant information which allows employees to engage in discussions across regions, hierarchical levels and business areas. The generated content is also used by senior management to make sense of the views and opinion of the employees to improve the organisational culture of the company (Huang, Baptista and Galliers, 2013).

### **Expertise & Talent Management**

According to the research findings, there are two ways employees can gain SM skills; trained by the in-house SM experts (for example SM team) who knows how to use these applications, or they could be trained by experts from external agencies. Allowing all employees access SM is risky, so companies try to manage the opportunity and risk involved by conducting staff training. The training helps to control the challenges and educate the team on how they can best avoid risk and work safely in the business environment. The SM team, sales team, customer services are typically the first point of contact for customers, so these groups are professionally trained on how to respond, the use of the company's tone of voice, policies and full knowledge of the features and how these can be implemented.

Dreher (2014) suggests that the SM team should consist and collaborate with different departments, including sales, marketing, public relations, customer service and senior management to ensure diverse expertise. According to Woodcock, Green and Starkey (2011); Effing and Spil (2016), study employees should be trained to receive the necessary skills to work with SM platforms. Continuous training is conducted for specific employees to meet the professional potential of SM as premium services are employed. The findings revealed that not all companies train their staffs. The assistant administrator and assistant system administrator from Company D expressed that they were not trained but were expected to have the required skills. Company D participants emphasised that gaining SM skills was a result of self-development. Schroeder (2014) argues that companies easily overlook a formal training to develop business skills, use tools and features required for the business environment.

Furthermore, training employees to get online communication skills, performance, rewards and promotes the right type of behaviour for a successful SM use. All employees are to develop their knowledge and understand the required skills and expertise to implement SM in their various business areas (Schroeder, 2014). According to the senior digital content manager from Company A, age plays a role in the adoption and implementation of new technology. The older generation is a little reluctant in embracing technological change and needs more support in comparison to the younger generation. Therefore, the older generation is embarrassed and avoids the platforms entirely (Husin et al., 2010).

### **Productivity & Effectiveness**

The implementation of SM in business has helped with productivity (Martin, 2013). Therefore, the issues relating to implementing SM is not related to the platforms but with the employees. The level of productivity achieved by using these platforms lies in the level at which companies decide to research and gain the required capabilities to implement these platforms effectively. Also, SM is employed in business to increase productivity and profit (Jefferson and Traugher, 2012).

SM allows employees to be more productive by improving the communication strategy in the workplace which grants access to employees in different functions and to the senior management. The companies that participated in this research considered the benefits gotten as the key driver to achieve business goals. There is a direct link between connection & internal collaboration with productivity & effectiveness. The findings revealed that, as employees

connect, share ideas and collaborate the outcome of these activities is productivity and effectiveness. Nguyen et al. (2014), asserts that productivity allows the company to achieve a degree of performance to satisfy customers demand.

## ❖ Business 2.0

### Brand Awareness

According to Nugroho *et al.* (2015), the primary purpose of implementing SM in marketing is for brand exposure and brand awareness. For that reason, SM is fundamental for business and financial gains. However, nonfinancial benefits like brand awareness are equally as beneficial as financial or monetary gains gotten from SM. Though brand awareness is intangible, difficult to measure and may not necessarily mean increased sales, but company's presence across SM platforms can eventually lead to monetary gains. The research data revealed that businesses believe that the brand awareness relates to increased sales. Brand awareness can be measured by analysing metrics such as; likes, mentions, followers, positive & negative comments, number of friends or followers etc. (McCann and Barlow, 2015). Companies believe that SM is important to the business and implement it to build and maintain relationships with customers and create or improve brand awareness. The importance and use of brand awareness found in this research agree with the literature. The companies involved in this study used SM to build brand awareness by increasing customer reach, engaging with the broader audience, using paid advertising for this strengthens and builds brand loyalty (Effing and Spil, 2016).

The research findings indicated that brand awareness enables customers to identify a brand, it allows for customers to be aware of the products and services companies provides. Companies use SM to promote products and services to reach a wider audience. This process of sharing initiates e-WOM as customers engage and share company's post the company is exposed to an entirely new network of people (Moran, Muzellec and Nolan, 2014; Királ'ová and Pavlíčka, 2015). Erdoğan and Çiçek, (2012) argue that the conversation between customers is an efficient way to expand the brand, boost recognition and loyalty. The research data indicated that been on SM creates a long-lasting impression on customers. Peng (2015), suggest that a positive e-WOM creates an excellent opportunity for customers to familiarise with companies using SM.

## Relationship Management

Relationship management in SM is described as interacting, connecting and engaging with customers (McCann and Barlow, 2015). From a business perspective, SM can be used in different ways to improve and enhance business. Building relationship with new and existing customers is significant. This study reveals that it is easier to make sales than it is to maintain a relationship with customers. Also, SM activities and business strategies are aligned and structured to meet the customer's need. Building relationship with customers is one of the critical factors in developing brand loyalty as the customer engages with the company, trust is developed, reputation is enhanced and then customer loyalty and retention (Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom, 2015). Additionally, the research findings reveal that building a relationship with the customers is paramount as customers have the bargaining power over companies and SM allows access to other companies with no switching cost required. According to (Kim *et al.*, 2012), the customer relationship is essential for competitive advantage. The companies involved in this research indicated that building customer relationship is one of the business objectives the implementation of SM seeks to achieve. Although they had similar goals, their methods of execution were different.

Company A ensured that training programs were conducted so employees would master the act of corporate tone of voice which included professionalism and friendliness during interaction on SM. Company B publishes a weekly and monthly reports on their platforms to foster transparency with customers and stakeholders on its products and services. Company C and D believes constant interaction and prompt response to customer's queries on SM platforms creates and maintains a good relationship. Company E agrees with Company A. They engage with customers by posting and interacting on SM platforms.

According to McCann and Barlow (2015), SM consist of people and relationships, so companies are required to participate in conversations and developing relationships with customers to ensure a positive outcome. Jiang, Luo and Kulemeka (2016) argues that businesses implement SM for both the internal and external audiences to engage, build and strengthen their relationships.

## **Innovation & Creativity**

The concept of innovation has allowed companies to develop in the different business area. Due to the increased use of technology in the workplace, companies have innovated their communication strategy as SM has proven effective by decreasing the cost of marketing via this platform(s) (Carter, 2014). Kirtiş and Karahan (2011) suggest that SM provides companies with a cost-effective way to interact with customers and promote their products and services effectively. Additionally, innovation & creativity allows for companies to monitor and influence the conversations across SM platforms and collect useful information which could be interpreted in measuring performance and levels of engagement with customers (Schroeder, 2014).

However, the research findings indicated that companies do market research to gain information about what customers say, need and prefer. And, be innovative by implementing change1 to products and services to meet customer's demand. It was revealed that if creativity & innovation is achieved companies gain an advantageous edge over its competitors. Insights can be gotten to develop new products (Acker *et al.*, 2011). Also, from the research findings, it was revealed that, aside the customer's influence on innovation & creativity, innovation takes place in two functions namely; content and internal (employees) innovation. For content, there is a constant restructuring of messages to meet target audience. From information gathered by social listening, company's tailors so to send the right message to the target customers. While internal involves employee's innovative ideas and the individual skills in implementing SM.

Baird and Parasnis (2011) states that innovative companies identify influencers on SM platform and leverage on their influence on customers by making them ambassadors for products. Innovation strengthens the company's reputation and offers quality products and services using SM as an innovative technological tool revamps the business (Huang *et al.*, 2014; Floreddu and Cabiddu, 2016). Therefore, innovation & creativity is vital in developing business strategy. SM innovation provides both companies and customers with different communication channels that allow sharing of content. The nature of this technology encourages users to establish a presence (Zolkepli and Kamarulzaman, 2014).

## **Efficiency & Effectiveness**

Companies can efficiently post content on different SM platforms, communicate with the customer and use this technology to achieve its business goals. Although the research data agree with this, but the findings also indicated that companies consider efficiency a challenge as they have to consider all the platforms when creating content. Also, allowing companies to achieve their business objectives, SM has changed the work practice in companies. For example, it is used as a marketing tool to strengthen marketing strategies which encourage the marketing team to operate differently and reach a wider audience, unlike the traditional method.

SM is intended as a process to amplify efficiency & effectiveness by facilitating the introduction of new methods and optimise its use to support companies in decision making and achieving the business goal (Sidorova, Arnaboldi and Radaelli, 2016). Fusi and Feeney (2016) suggests that efficiency simplifies daily activities such as faster communication with customers and stakeholders and increased information sharing. It allows companies to engage promptly in a high level of efficiency which cannot be achieved by applying traditional methods (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). As SM is employed in the business, it increases participation and fosters efficiency and interactivity (Huang, Baptista and Galliers, 2013). Also, this research reveals that to gain the full potential of SM and to measure its efficiency, SM strategy needs to be aligned with the overall business goals (Oliveira and Figueira, 2015).

The first investigative phase research findings have shown that even though SM possess emulous benefits for business, companies are required to implement this technology appropriately. Therefore, SM strategies are to be aligned with business strategies, and initiatives should aim at strategically implementing SM. Providing adequate resources, expertise and trainings for the employees by the senior management to help them develop the required skills and improve the business. The findings also reveal that companies' key consideration for selecting a platform is the customer. They only establish a presence in SM platforms where customers are operating.

## 6.2.4 Proposed SM Strategy Framework and Existing Frameworks

There are limited studies focused on the SM implementation and platform evaluation. However, the redefined SM strategy framework in chapter 4 (figure 4-6) provides a comprehensive implementation process which considered business growth from the company's perspective by aligning SM activities with business strategy (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga, 2010). The three stages as illustrated in this framework provide a theoretical and practical knowledge in SM domain and for managers to apply SM for business. As previously discussed in chapter 2 and 4, stage 1 (develop strategy) provides a guide for identifying business objectives, readiness and initiatives before implementation so to have a defined focus. Stage 2 (platform evaluation) is crucial because the appropriate platform(s) to be adopted for SM practice (internally and externally) is defined here. Finally, in stage 3 (plan & deliver), SM is integrated into the daily business activities for both employees and customers.

While, the Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) honeycomb framework is focused on the seven functional building blocks - presence, relationship, reputation, groups, identity, conversation and sharing, which provides a useful tool for companies to monitor and understand the different SM activities in regard to their function and impact and also developing an adequate SM strategy based on the appropriate building blocks for the society. Effing and Spil (2016), study suggest three levels of maturity of SM strategy – initiation, diffusion and maturity which included the importance of seven key elements (target audience, channel choice, goals, resources, policies, monitoring and content activities) of SM strategy development. However, this framework is focused on analysing and comparing SM strategies. While Kiráľová and Pavlíčeka (2015) study on the development of SM strategies discusses that strategies aligned with SM aids competitiveness. Additionally, Oliveira and Figueira (2015), study propose an SM regulatory communication framework. This framework is aimed at supporting the communication management within the companies for this provides a clear indication, direction, purpose and help integrate all communication activities.

Kietzmann *et al.* (2011); Kiráľová and Pavlíčeka, (2015); Oliveira and Figueira (2015); Effing and Spil (2016) frameworks shed light on relevant aspects of SM strategy. However, the literature review revealed the lack of SM strategy implementation framework and a standard method for platform evaluation. The framework introduced in this study was initially derived from the literature review (figure 2-4) and based on the results of this study the framework is redefined (figure 4-6).

## **6.3 Discussion on the Second Phase Data Analysis (Platform Evaluation)**

In stage 2 (platform evaluation) of the proposed SM strategy framework (figure 2.4), five elements (content, impression score, cost, look & feel, audience fit) were analysed in the context of how companies select the appropriate platform for their business. The findings reveal that although all five elements play important roles, in platform evaluation process companies only establish a presence in SM platforms their customers are located. Therefore, this section presents the discussion on this phenomenon as analysed using Practice theory.

The introduction of Practice theory highlighted essential aspects of platform evaluation process following the strategy-as-practice perspective; praxis, practices and practitioners.

### **6.3.1 Praxis**

The concept of praxis is the actual activity of creating and enacting a strategy which is the activity that takes place (Whittington, 2006). In the context of this study, praxis help to understand the actions of the SM personnel in trying to select the appropriate platform for business. The advantage of using the practice approach is to gain an in-depth understanding of the actual activity (Brown and Duguid, 2001).

The research findings from the different companies (Company A, B, C, D and E) confirmed that businesses establish a presence where their customers are located as discussed in the previous chapter. However, further analysis reaffirms the claim of praxis as suggested in the strategy-as-practice literature (chapter 2). This study highlights the employee's process of praxis for platform evaluation in the company. Additionally, allowing for the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge by identifying the presence of customers on various platforms, identify the competence/skills required for carrying out strategic activity and company's involvement in developing the intellectual know-how of practitioners.

According to (Vaara and Whittington, 2012) practices are filled with uncertainty thus the process of praxis relays greatly on the understanding, interpretation, skills and ability to enact this strategy in daily work activities of the practitioner. The praxis assumptions allow for the researcher to investigate the micro-level details required for the evaluation of platforms in this

research. The findings from this study reveal the various investigation conducted which can be implemented in order to analyse praxis in a company.

The findings from the analysis are discussed as the participants from Company C, D and E indicated that to determine the customer's existence, they measure the level of engagement, level of interaction, market rating, user population and feedbacks. The head of digital marketing, data and platform from Company A expressed that, it is apparent where their customers are for they run business to business (B2B) and it is not difficult to identify LinkedIn as a professional platform. Company B in a similar manner as Company A, establish a presence on Facebook because of the high penetration of this platform which is known as a B2C channel. Also, they create a presence on Twitter because, from the analysis of their customer base, it was discovered that their tech-savvy customers preferred to use Twitter.

Furthermore, skills and competence were discussed as the participants reveal that for praxis to take place, employees must have the right skills to implement this process. Employees need to understand the mechanism behind a platform, know the features available on the platform(s) and how best to use them. These skills ensure the flow of the actual activity in which strategy is derived (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). In measuring the level of engagements and interaction, analysing market rating and user population, the SM personals are allowed to interpret and implement this information according to their understanding (Sillince and Mueller, 2007; Huang et al., 2014).

Although these activities may be institutionalised, the routine can be transformed over time (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). As revealed by the research data, the companies invest in the employee's execution of the strategy by providing training for employees. The coming together of employee's skills, understanding of strategy, policy training and the activities (market research, market rating, feedbacks, interaction and engagements) on the platform explains the concept of praxis and how companies identify their customers.

The findings from this research reinforce the concept of praxis as the flow of activity in which strategy is accomplished by providing relevant micro-level activities which could be applied for future work (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007).

The following section will discuss the practices and its impacts on platform evaluation process.

### 6.3.2 Practices

Huang et al. (2014) defined practices as the institutionalised routine of strategic activities which are based on norms, traditions and rules within and beyond the company. These routines are guidelines of what should be done based on the existing strategy, organisational practice, cultural rule, organisational culture and procedures. The difference between praxis and practices is the actual activity and the routine that guides the activities (Reckwitz, 2002). In the context of this study, practices help to understand the routine and tradition that governs the practice strategy work (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009).

The findings support the concepts of practices as the results reveal the routine that guides strategic activity for platform evaluation. The underlying assumptions of practices allow for the researcher to identify business goals, SM functionalities applied and the guidelines in using/evaluating SM platforms. Understanding the critical and complex role practices play in shaping how strategies are enacted is thus important for the successful implementation of the strategy (Orlikowski, 2000; Arvidsson, Holmström and Lyytinen, 2014). This study draws attention to the practice of strategy and the practice employees conduct to justify and enact both the future state they seek to bring, and the actions carried out to achieve this goal. The merging of processes and technology re-configures practices in order for value to be actualised as the value derived from strategy generally emerges during business change and innovation (Grover and Kohli, 2012).

Additionally, the findings suggest that in practices, social and technology are inseparable (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008; Cecez-Kecmanovic *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, revealing that the entanglement and intertwining of social and technology motivate, enhance and highlights the relationship between social, technology and process in practice while handling day to day business strategy of a company. Practices agree with the notion of appropriation that captures the importance of human action in shaping the application of technology. As discussed in the literature review (chapter 2) practices is an “institutionalised routine that guides strategic activities based on traditions, norm and procedures that exist both within and beyond the boundaries of an organisation” (Huang *et al.*, 2014). The findings reveal a view that allows employees to frame the use of strategy, activities, processes and technology as an enactment.

The identification of business goal, SM functionalities implemented and the guidelines in using and evaluating SM platform are a bundle of practices which is made up of interrelated concepts

and interconnected activities to bring about strategy (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). Based on the analysis, the identification of business goals, objectives and guidelines in using SM is considered strategic business practices. All company's participants expressed that, there are routines mapped out to achieve these business goals. According to the participants, creating awareness has become easier to do by employing SM to achieve this business goal. Companies overcome the challenge of creating awareness of brand, products and services with customers. Also, SM allows this activity to take place with minimal cost and to suits the allocated budget for the digital expense in the business. They believe that SM is faster and more efficient technology that supports their business activities in approaching and communicating the intent with customers.

In praxis, all the participants expressed that SM functionalities (likes, share, posts, comments, tweets or retweets, views, invites and share) are implemented as routine activities that guides SM activities for business purpose. The research data revealed that Platform functionalities are not indicative measures for selecting a platform. Rather, they are used to measure the level of customer engagement. Also, the companies indicated that the user-generated content collected provides analytical insights and this information helps in developing future content and targeting.

Furthermore, the participants strongly believe that developing and implementing platform guidelines is an essential part of practising SM for improving professionalism in the social space. The participants believe that it is important to follow SM guidelines correctly as the platforms are sophisticated technologies that help to achieve business goals.

According to Whittington (2014), technology-in-practice produces recognisable results even if praxis is improvised. Information system researchers argue that technical and social are inseparable therefore they develop the term sociomateriality to explain this (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008). This simply means when researchers discuss the technology, they also describe practices (Leonardi, 2012). The implementation of new technology subsequently alters routine and allows for enactment by modifying employees' work practice (Orlikowski, 2000).

The next section presents practitioners and their role in platform evaluation.

### 6.3.3 Practitioners

Practitioners are the actors who carry out the strategic activities. In Practice theory, during praxis, practitioners enact practices in a way that will produce a different result. Therefore, the practitioner is defined as the individual with the potential to skilfully implement the strategy. Vaara and Whittington (2012) argue that, strategy-as-practice perspective allows for the human agency to be explored in organisational practice. According to Whittington (2014), study in investigating the strategic influence of practitioners, a valuable contribution to strategy-as-practice perspective would not only be to consider the position of practitioners in organisation level or budget size but also the practitioner's skills.

In the context of this study, practitioners are the individuals who shape, influence and actualise the platform evaluation process. In this study, the findings reinforce the Practice lens as its concepts allow for the researcher to engage in a direct conversation with the practitioners. Investigating practitioners in the platform evaluation process suggests that the researcher examines issues relevant to those dealing with strategy; either strategist(practitioners) dealing with strategic planning or activities linked with strategy. This study focused on both the strategist and the activities linked with strategy. By so doing, this study contributes to SM, contemporary management, strategy and organisation research by the advancement of theoretical understanding thus that has a practical relevance for SM managers (or digital team) and other organisational teams (Damon Golsorkhi *et al.*, 2010). There are a few studies which highlight how actors are constrained and at the same time enabled. Considering that practitioners are not omnipotent but follow SM rules and regulations provided by the senior management to apply praxis. However, the practitioners are allowed to shape, actualise and enact strategy, allowing characteristics and personality reflect on the process.

The SM managers, digital marketing managers, digital campaign lead, public relations managers and other key SM experts in the company influences platform evaluation. The companies that participated in this study believe that the practitioners are responsible for enacting praxis in practice. Therefore, they ensure the strategic activities are carried out. From the analysis, it was revealed that the shaping and actualising of the platform evaluation process was not done solely by the SM team but the public relation, customer service, research, content and marketing departments all get involved in selecting an appropriate platform and in shaping the platform evaluation process. Hence suggesting that the SM team allows interrelated activities in platform evaluation. For example, the accounting department is involved in making

strategic decisions which influence the selection of a platform by means of cost (platform license fee, content creation, promotion, adverts) and the corporate affairs department for branding. Hence, revealing an interrelationship amongst various practitioners/departments across the company in conducting praxis (the actual activity carried out for platform evaluation).

Additionally, exploring practitioners involves understanding how they skilfully conduct praxis in business. According to Whittington (2014) “power is a matter of performance”. Hence, a strategy-as-practice perspective provides an understanding of how practitioners perform in praxis and also the competence required (see section 6.3.1). There are guidelines practitioners have to abide by in enacting practice. However, they are allowed to implement the strategy in their own ways, applying their different skills, interpretation and personality. Therefore, allowing the strategy to evolve and take up various forms. From a strategy-as-practice perspective, practitioners are to be analysed for they form strategic activities through how they act and what practices they put into action (Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007).

## 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed various issues, based on the research findings and the existing literature on selection of SM platforms, Practice theory and SM strategy in companies. The discussions presented are from the participants from Company A, B, C, D and E. The research findings indicated that, in implementing SM strategy and identifying the suitable SM platform for business purpose, companies select/establish a presence where their customers are located.

More so, the research findings indicated that companies do not assess the readiness of their business before implementing SM, they typically join because their customers and competitors have established a presence on these platforms. The discussion of both the first and second phase of the research presents the process and practices to consider while implementing a SM strategy framework to fully gain the benefits it provides when strategically employed for the business purpose. Also, Practice theory was applied to gain an in-depth understanding of the “how” factor which explains the dynamics of the phenomenon under investigation.

From a practical perspective, the SM framework and analysis will help companies develop and improve their SM strategy to identify business areas for SM implementation and to obtain a

competitive advantage. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to knowledge about SM strategy framework and its implementation within the company. Also, a contribution to knowledge by application of Practice theory in SM domain.

The next chapter presents the conclusion, contribution and further research for this study.

## 7 Chapter 7: Conclusion

### 7.1 Overview

This chapter presents the conclusions from the research findings for the entire study that was carried out to achieve the research aims and objectives. This research offers an understanding of the impact of social media (SM) strategy in businesses. The researcher attempts to develop a theoretical framework to strategically evaluate and implement SM strategy in companies and identify the suitable platform for the business. This chapter summarises the structure and conduct of this study by reviewing the chapters of the thesis and then the findings. After that, present the research contributions; contributions to theory, methodology and practice. The research limitations are considered, and finally, suggestions for future research are discussed.

### 7.2 Research Summary

Chapter one introduced the research agenda and highlighted the research motivation, research questions and contributions. The chapter emphasised the importance of SM strategy and why businesses are increasingly applying this technology to their business. The increased global use of the Internet has influenced social interaction, and companies benefit from this technology by investing in SM applications. Although companies are adopting SM to achieve some of their business goals and objectives, they do not strategically implement this technology into their business. Hence, miss out on the advantages derived in achieving business goals. Therefore, Chapter 1 states this research aimed to propose a framework for companies to strategically implement SM and identify the suitable SM platform for business value. Furthermore, research questions are developed to guide the focus of the research, objectives and the methodology to be employed were presented and the contribution of the research.

Chapter two provided the literature on this research. The research presented reviews of existing literature on the relationship between companies and customers. To understand the concept of SM, the various types of SM was reviewed to provide a background knowledge of the different categories of SM and how they can be implemented to facilitate business. Furthermore, the impact of SM on companies, customers and the influence of e-WOM, provided information on the importance of this innovative technology in business practice. The chapter identifies the

various ways SM can be employed and helps understand how companies can fully benefit if implemented strategically. Thereafter, the theoretical rationale of this study was introduced by reviewing the existing frameworks in SM research. Also, the literature review examined the platform selection process to provide the appropriate platform for business. For the theoretical approach, Practice theory was considered appropriate with the justification that this theory provides an understanding of platform evaluation. Additionally, an initial SM strategy framework was derived from the theoretical perspective of SM strategies.

Chapter three highlights the analysis of the research methodology used in this study to examine the implementation of SM strategy. This chapter discusses the issues to consider before selecting the appropriate research approach. Also, the description of the underlying research assumptions for information systems (IS) research, the rationale in the approach employed and its suitability for this research was discussed in this chapter. Regarding the gap found in the literature review chapter, the interpretive research approach within the qualitative methodology was considered appropriate for this study. Since this research is exploratory and this approach provides an understanding of emerging phenomena within their context. Interpretive research allows IS researchers to gain in-depth knowledge of human thoughts and action in social and organisational context. The qualitative research, including the qualitative research process was outlined, and its suitability for this study was examined, and the field study approach was used to collect and analyse data. Then, the research design as it is applied in both first and second phase of this study. Next, the discussion on the empirical data collection was presented with the focus on the particular methods used for this research. Also, the method of data analysis was examined. Finally, the selection of thematic analysis approach for organising, analysing and coding data was presented.

Chapter four presents the analysis and results of the field study conducted in the first investigative phase of this research. The participants involved in this study are the heads of digital marketing, SM managers, IT managers and other principal personnel directly involved with SM from the five companies. This chapter focused on the elements in each stage of the proposed SM strategy framework discussed in chapter 2 (2.4). The elements in stage one; determine objective & readiness and identify initiative and prioritise. Stage two are; content, impression score, cost, look & feel and audience fit. Stage three; enterprise collaboration and business 2.0. Thematic analysis was applied as the method of analysis to investigate and identify the underlying ideas, assumptions and concepts which are theorised to shape and

inform data. The empirical data present viewpoints of each participant concerning the elements of the SM strategy framework. The data were presented following the proposed framework discussed in chapter 2. Finally, the chapter explained the results derived from this phase of analysis and a refined SM strategy framework was presented.

Chapter five presents the second investigative phase. The analysis of the field study was conducted using the data obtained from the same participants who took part in the first phase. Similar to the first phase, thematic analysis was used as the method of analysis for this phase. The data were analysed with the aim of understanding the views and practices of the participants regarding platform evaluation. The application of strategy-as-practice elements; praxis, practices and practitioners allowed for the researcher to focus on the process of strategy making, planning and implementation. Practice theory allowed for the understanding of social, organisational and work practices. This chapter analysed the findings discovered from the first phase.

Chapter six gives the detailed discussion of the results of both the first and second investigative phase of this study. The chapter presents the discussion on the data in view of the literature.

Chapter seven gives an overview of the previous chapters as well as an overview of the research contributions; contribution to theory, contribution to methodology and contribution to practice. The limitations of the research will be outlined in this chapter. Finally, directions for future studies for the continual development of this research domain will be presented.

## **7.3 Findings**

The field study investigation was conducted in two phases which examines and addresses the primary aim of the research. The aim of this research is; providing a method in which companies can strategically implement SM and also identify suitable SM platform for the business. This study proposed an SM strategy framework and identified the key elements required for strategic implementation and integration with business strategy. The analysis of the SM strategy framework implementation process provided the defined procedure and also gives theoretical and practical contributions in the field of study as a guide for companies to implement. The findings from the first phase will be discussed in the three stages of the

framework. Also, the research findings from the second phase will be discussed using the three elements of Practice theory.

### 7.3.1 First Phase - Social Media Strategy Framework

#### ❖ Stage 1: Develop Strategy

The research highlighted the significance to determine objective and readiness for SM implementation. The findings from this stage revealed that companies did not evaluate the business to determine objectives & readiness. The participants explained that the evaluation that was done was to identify the platform(s) where their customers are present. The objectives and readiness are identified after presence have been established on the platform. Although the companies have their different goals or business areas to implement SM, the findings indicated that to apply SM effectively in the business; SM strategy is aligned with the overall business strategy. Initiative to employ for a particular objective is identified to strengthen the application of SM strategy in the social space. The process of determining objectives & readiness and identify initiatives & prioritise is not considered a linear process. That is, when objectives are defined, initiatives on how this can be carried out is proposed. This process is done simultaneously to identify the appropriate method to achieve a business objective before moving on to stage 2 of the framework.

#### ❖ Stage 2: Platform Evaluation

**Content:** The research findings highlighted the importance of content creation and the different forms of content that encourages customer engagement. It was revealed that customers are particularly drawn to images, graphics and videos. Hence, companies are being creative with their content.

**Impression score:** It was revealed that companies are not interested in monitoring the number of customers who visit the platform. Rather, they are concerned with what customers are saying about the brand, products and services. For this reason, they apply social listening to listen to the conversations happening online. Hence, this element is changed to social listening.

**Cost:** It was found that cost is an essential factor in platform evaluation. The research revealed that platforms are not entirely free. Although they are cost-effective, they do incur a charge

depending on if the platforms are internally developed (upfront cost of developing, purchasing the platform and ongoing cost of maintenance), or they use the third-party platforms available (license fee or current annual fee). Also, advertising, promotions and content production incur a cost.

**Look & Feel:** represents the design and ease of use of a platform. Most companies use the third-party platforms (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) which means they are not involved in designing the interface the platform. For this reason, companies do not consider the design of a platform a primary factor for selection. Instead, their concern is focused on a more user-friendly platform.

**Audience fit:** The research reveals that audience fit for companies does not equate to segmenting customers based on their professional levels or age. However, in a digital platform such as SM, companies are interested in targeting their customers while reaching out to potential customers. The participants emphasised that the customers are the first consideration when selecting a platform to establish a presence on SM. Further stating that being on a platform where the customers are located is crucial in efficiently applying SM for business.

In chapter 2, the proposed framework suggested an interrelationship between all five elements in platform evaluation stage. However, the finding reveals that this is not the case as content and audience fit are identified to have a connection with all other elements. While social listening, look & feel, and cost does not have relationship with all five elements.

### ❖ Stage 3: Plan & Deliver

The proposed SM strategy framework in chapter 2 suggested that Enterprise Collaboration and Business 2.0 have specific functions. Regarding the application of SM internally (connection & interactivity, innovation management, content sharing & management, expertise & talent management and productivity & effectiveness) and externally (brand awareness, relationship management, innovation & creativity and efficiency & effectiveness). The participants agreed with the above benefits for using SM. Nevertheless, the findings revealed that using SM for Enterprise Collaboration and Business 2.0 allows for efficiency & effectiveness and innovation management & creativity in the company. Therefore, these functions are considered to be beneficial for both internal and external use of SM in the company.

### 7.3.2 Second Phase - Platform Evaluation

The investigation of the first phase revealed that companies create a presence on platforms where their customers are located. This was the primary consideration in selecting an SM platform. In an attempt to understand the process by which they identify their customers they focus on strategy making. Therefore, Practice theory allows for the understanding of social, organisational and work practices.

#### ❖ Praxis

The analysis of praxis in platform evaluation highlights the processes and activities of creating and enacting platform evaluation strategy that may or maybe not be similar to business routine because of the interpretation of the SM personnel involved and the unexcepted events that can disrupt the routine. Further analysis reaffirms the claim of praxis as the assumption enables the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge by identifying the presence of customers on various platforms, identify the competence/skills required for carrying out strategic activity and company's involvement in developing the intellectual know-how of practitioners. The findings reveal the micro-level activities that should be conducted in order to effectively evaluate a platform.

In an attempt to understand praxis for platform evaluation, the findings indicated that market rating, user population and feedbacks, level of engagement and level of interaction are activities carried out to identify the presence of their customers in a particular SM platform. Also, it was revealed that for Company A and C, an assessment was not done as the presence of their customers on LinkedIn and Facebook was evident based on the nature of the platforms and the segments of the customers in these platforms. Additionally, the competence, skills, knowledge of the features and functionalities available on the platforms are required factors for strategic activities to be conducted by employees.

Strategy-as-practice literature refers to praxis as “the activity involved in strategy-making (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). This study has given insight into the type of activities that could be classified as strategy-making and how SM personnel enact these activities in their daily work practice. Although, this may vary by companies, type of business, sector or industry the analysis provides a theoretical and practical knowledge on how investigations on praxis are executed.

## ❖ Practices

The concept of practices has allowed the researcher to understand the routine that guides the activity of platform evaluation process. In an attempt to implement SM and select the platform, the practices that govern the platform evaluation process are; identification of the business goals, the strategic use of SM functionalities and the guidelines in using SM platforms. Practices play a critical and complex role in shaping how strategies are executed for the successful implementation of platform evaluation in a company (Orlikowski, 2000; Arvidsson, Holmström and Lyytinen, 2014). According to Reckwitz (2002) practices are “routinized types of behaviour which consist of several elements, interconnected to one another”. This study focuses on strategy, employee’s practice routine and activities but also, allowed room for the study of technology.

The findings revealed that the interconnection between processes and technology re-configures the platform evaluation practices in order for business value to be actualised as the value derived from strategy generally emerges during business change and innovation (Grover and Kohli, 2012). For platform evaluation study, the underlying assumption of practices provided an in-depth knowledge on the value SM functionalities provide in strategy making and the importance of adopting the company’s rules and regulation for applying SM for business.

The findings of the platform evaluation process revealed that the SM functionalities (likes, tweet, follow, invite, share, post, comment, retweet etc.) are not considered as a criterion for selecting an appropriate platform for business. Rather, the features are used as measures of success. These functionalities allow for companies to measure levels of content engagement as SM personnel are moving away from engaging with customers to engaging with selected few where potential values can be gotten. Also, rules and regulations on how to implement SM for business were provided. However, as previously discussed, these guidelines to guide employees on how to interact with customers such as; company’s tone of voice and information to disclose etc. Nonetheless, this does not prevent the employees from applying their personalities and characteristics while strategising.

### ❖ Practitioners

From a practice perspective, this study reinforces on the work of Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007) who suggests that practitioners are interrelated with practices and praxis. They are influenced by the way they behave, think, emote, know and act within their society (Reckwitz, 2002). These agencies are embodied within each practitioner and how individuals are able to act are connected with the situation and context. From a strategy perspective, practitioners are obvious entities for investigation as active participants in the development of activities that are significant to the company. The result from this study could help strengthen the field of SM and the use of Practice theory in IS research. This study revealed that investigating practitioners in the platform evaluation process allows for the researcher to examine issues relevant to strategist and the activities linked with strategy. Including managing interactivity amongst participants from various departments. Additionally, this study contributes to SM, contemporary management, strategy and organisation research by the advancement of theoretical understanding thus that has a practical relevance for SM managers (or digital team) and other organisational teams (Golsorkhi *et al.*, 2010).

The findings revealed that the employees who enact strategy in business are as important as the strategy itself. In strategising, the skills and competence of an employee are significant in the lens of strategy in practice. The heads of digital\IT managers, SM managers, public relations managers, account managers and other SM personnel are responsible for the implementation of platform evaluation. However, this varies with each company based on their organisational structure. This study reveals that companies have strategy documents which contain the guidelines on the application of SM in business. Stating that this document is most useful during the initial implementation stage but as practice continues, evolving takes, innovation emerge, and new practices are formed. Although SM experts are given the same strategy and guidelines, this will be implemented differently based on the individual skills, experience, interpretation and personality of the employees. Also, the findings revealed the interrelationship among various departments in carrying out this strategy. For example, the accounting department is connected with the digital department in regards to finances, corporate affairs are about branding etc.

## 7.4 Contributions of the Study

This study creates a diverse contribution to the theoretical, methodological and practical dimensions of the research domain. Thereby, adding to knowledge in research and practice of companies who are looking to implement SM in business by aligning SM activities with business activities. In addition, this study developed a theoretical framework which extends the research in this field and further explaining the practice behind platform evaluation in companies. In an attempt to achieve this, the theoretical framework was proposed to implement SM strategy successfully and introducing the Practice theory to which led to an understanding of the routine practice in selecting a suitable SM platform in the company.

### 7.4.1 Contribution to Theory

In chapter 2, the research identified the limited existence of SM strategy framework and selection of suitable SM platforms from existing studies in this field. It was recognized that the strategy in implementing SM in a company had not been considered in previous studies. Theoretically, this study attempts to develop the SM strategy framework in the context of aligning SM activities with business goals while considering the implication of the suitable SM platform for business.

In the case of SM strategy framework, this study offered a detailed process on how to strategically implement SM for business. Starting from determining the business objectives & readiness to selecting a suitable platform and then, the application of the technology for both the internal and external process\activities of the business. The use of SM for business has been in existence for a couple of years. However, the full integration of SM strategy in the business strategy is a practice that is newly adapted. The existing SM strategies were initially used in a generalised way to identify the SM functionalities and the primary elements for the development of SM strategy. However, the research focused on proposing a SM implementation framework.

Previous studies have applied various theories such as the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behaviour, social power theory, social network theory, technology acceptance model etc. to explore the personal, social and communication behaviours in SM research. However, the influence of strategy and practice in the companies have had limited

consideration. Therefore, this study improves previous research by developing a SM strategy framework and applying Practice theory to investigate platform evaluation. This is an improvement in SM research as previous studies focused on the benefits of SM in the company with no consideration of the strategy, practice and human factors in implementation. Additionally, there is a limited research in the application of Practice theory in SM research. Specifically, in attempting to understand the process of selecting a SM platform for business.

The previous research applies Practice theory in organisational studies as social actions that repetitively recreates structures which restrains and authorise actions. Also, Practice theory used in the field of practices is stated as the core of interconnected human practices. The field of practice allows for the study of nature and transformation of their subject which embodies practices around shared practical understanding. This present study consists of two domains; SM and strategy. The contribution to theory is revealed as employing Practice theory to understand SM practice in general and with the combination of strategy-as-practice perspective to understand the implementation of SM strategy in practice; specifically, to examine the platform evaluation process in companies. This is an improvement in studies of SM as previous studies have focused on applying SM platforms without considerations on how to select the appropriate platform for business purpose. Also, this study has provided knowledge on the various activities required for platform evaluation.

According to Vaara and Whittington (2012) studies in strategic management are focused on activities and practices which has improved the knowledge of how strategising takes place. However, this has not been applied in Practice theory, particularly in the area of activities embedded in a social environment. For this study, Practice theory is explicitly used to understand the selection of a suitable platform in SM domain. The analysis for this study focused on the SM team in the companies. These teams consist of the individuals with vast knowledge and experience in SM implementation and strategy. The SM team can be referred to as the practitioners who make strategic decisions, initiatives and carry out strategy in the company.

## **7.4.2 Contribution to Practice**

This research provides a wealth of knowledge and experience that was obtained from the heads of marketing departments, head of digital marketing, heads of IT departments, SM managers,

content managers and other SM experts that were involved in this research. This study has practical inference for the implementation of SM strategy with the ability to improve the application of SM in business. Thereby, enhancing company's performance and increase productivity for the proposed framework is comprehensive, including all significant stages; determine objectives & readiness, platform evaluation and plan & deliver. The framework provides insight to companies, identifies steps to ensure successful implementation of SM strategy and providing significant benefits by using SM activities to achieve business goals. The analysis of participants' views revealed an area for further investigation, which was addressed in the second investigative phase (chapter 5).

This study provides companies with insights of certain business areas and how the successful application of SM can enhance performance. Also, to ensure successful implementation, companies need to identify their business needs and select the appropriate platform(s). Thus, providing the maximum benefit the platform adopted is to offer for business purpose. This aligns with the opinions of the participants in the second investigative phase of this study. They indicated that companies should establish SM presence on platforms their customers are located.

The result from this research shows that some companies can benefit from this study as they attempt to identify the suitable platform for their business and enhance their platform evaluation strategy which provides insights on the activities (praxis), the routine that guides these activities (practices) and the employees (practitioners).

Also, the senior management could identify the benefit to determine the business objectives and define the guidelines for using SM in the company. For employees, it provides a roadmap for enacting strategy in practice and guidelines for implementation.

## **7.5 Limitations of Research Approach**

This research applied the interpretive research approach. As discussed in chapter 3, the interpretive research approach does not predefine variables. Therefore, the subjective interpretation of the phenomenon under study could impact the understanding of the findings. The research shows that previous studies on SM are centred on investigating the benefits and uses of SM in companies. However, this study discusses the benefits but focuses on the

implementation of SM business. Thereby, providing an SM strategy framework and in-depth understanding of the platform evaluation process. Nonetheless, it is important to discuss the limitations of the study.

More research is required to further test, explore and refine the SM strategy framework. Even though this study was conducted with five companies within a multi-industrial context and different geographical regions, further study is required to test the framework in various sectors and similar regions.

Although, this research has highlighted the elements to be considered for a successful implementation of SM strategy and platform evaluation, it was identified that time constraint was a limitation. Due to the time allocated for this study, the researcher could not be physically present with the participants to observe their routine and take into account the actual work done to understand the practices of platform evaluation. A semi-structured interview and qualitative questionnaire were conducted to obtain this knowledge. Although interviews are commonly used techniques and they ensure collection of rich data, the researcher believes that an ethnography method would better examine the behaviour of participants and understand their interpretation. Additionally, the information received from using the qualitative questionnaire technique was limited as this method prevented the researcher from probing further for more information just as the semi-structured interview allows.

Trust was a limitation. The researcher contacted various companies in the UK and Nigeria requesting they participate in this study. However, the offer was rejected due to trust and data protection policy. The quality and quantity of the empirical data collected depend on how much the participant is willing to disclose. Even though Companies A, B, C, D and E gave as much information as possible a participant withheld specific information in regard to their strategy because the information was considered sensitive and was unwilling to share with the researcher. Therefore, future researchers are burden with the responsibility to persuade companies to participate and convincing them of data confidentiality.

Even though SM strategy framework provides a procedure for implementing SM for business purpose, there is a need for empirical evidence to show that companies successfully integrated SM strategy with business strategy by implementing the framework and evaluating the impact on achieving the business goals.

Although the research was conducted in a multi-organisational context, the findings of this study may only apply to the similar type of companies presented in this study. The study did not consider whether the organisational culture, similarity\ differences in strategies and application of SM influenced participants perceptions and experience.

## 7.6 Future Research

This research has contributed to understanding the implementation process of SM strategy and platform evaluation. The experience of SM personnel was analysed and areas for further research has been identified. First, this study focused on the 3-stages implementation of SM and the business value for SM implementation. During the field investigation, the participants revealed the importance of examining the readiness of the business before SM implementation. Hence, this is an area to future explore prior to implementation.

Further research is encouraged to test the framework in various industries, sectors and geographical regions. An empirical evaluation of the impact of integrating SM with business strategy while applying SM strategy framework is another important direction for future study. SM managers and senior management are encouraged to test and employ the platform evaluation practice. As this will provide additional empirical evidence to an approach that attempts to support a practical method of selecting an appropriate SM platform for business purpose. This will encourage companies to have a conscious approach to the platform to achieve a particular business goal. Interviews and qualitative questionnaires were applied as the data collection techniques for this research, future studies are encouraged to apply ethnography technique as this will allow the researcher to have a closeup examination on participates behaviour, understandings and interpretations on how strategy is enacted in companies.

Future strategy researchers will have to convince companies on the importance of providing unrestricted access, as many companies are reluctant to collaborate with academics to conduct studies perceived to reveal their strategy and data. More investigations will help to improve SM and business strategy related issues which include trust and policy etc. Thereby, guiding both employees and researchers on how to conduct a similar study.

There are different companies have different organisational structures which can influence the social interaction of a company. However, in studying platform evaluation, Practice theory was applied. The elements of Practice theory; praxis, practices and practitioners are interconnected, and it is almost impractical to examine one without drawing on elements of the others. While this study has examined all three elements, it would be interesting to focus on one dominant element. For example, future studies could consider focus on the practitioner so as to gain insight from an actor perspective on the human influence in strategising.

In this study, Practice theory is applied to the SM team of the companies to understand the platform evaluation aspect of SM domain. Nonetheless, future study can use the concept of praxis, practices and practitioners in human resource department in order to understand and gain knowledge of the routine and activities carried out in setting up the workforce for a company.

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# **APPENDIX A: SM Strategy Framework**

## **Investigation Questions (First Phase)**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **Background Questions**

1. What is your job title?
2. Do you use social media in your personal life?
3. What is your opinion on using social media in the business environment?

#### **Stage 1: Develop Strategy**

1. What are the business goals the company aims to achieve through the use of social media?
2. Is social media aligned to the overall strategic objectives of the business or aligned to specific business functions?
3. During social media adoption, what were the changes incurred in the work practice?
  - (i) Regarding the organisational culture, what were the changes made as a result of social media adoption?
  - (ii) Infrastructure?
  - (iii) Existing policies and guidelines?
4. Did the company assess the readiness of the external stakeholders (customers and competitors) before implementation? How was this done?
5. What are the challenges that come from using social media in your company?
  - (i) How does the company solve this problem?

#### **Stage 2 – Platform Evaluation**

1. In selecting a social media platform what are the key functionalities that the organisation considers as an appropriate platform for its business purpose?
2. What structure is used to post out content on these platforms? Are these messages/updates defined to meet specific business objectives?
3. What monitoring tools does the company use in capturing the behaviour of customers who visit the social media platforms?

## Appendix

4. In determining the cost of a platform what are the criteria the company focuses on?
  - (i) Is there an existing budget for social media?
  - (ii) Is the cost considered by the functionalities the platform provides?
  - (iii) Are human resources available?
5. Does the company consider the user-friendliness of a platform while selecting a suitable platform for the business?
  - (i) Are there extra procedures taken to ensure customers find the platforms easy to use? If yes, please explain?
6. While considering what platform(s) are suitable for your business, is the audience fit considered in this process? If yes or no, please give reasons?
  - (i) How does the company ensure they meet the needs of its target audience using social media?

### **Stage 3 – Plan & Deliver**

#### **Internal Environment**

1. Is social media used for the internal collaboration productivity of employees?
2. How does social media influence creativity and innovation management among the employees?
3. What business areas does the internal use of social media by the employee tackle?
4. What are the benefits social media provided to ensure and enhance interactivity between employees?
5. Are there technical challenges experienced while using social media internally? How are they resolved?
  - (i) Is it being out-sourced? Alternatively, are there internal expertise?
6. Are the following outsourced or done in-house; the implementation, build & launch and continuous management of the social media platform(s)?

#### **External Environment**

7. What measure does the company take to ensure a good relationship with customers and stakeholder using social media?
8. How has the use of social media assisted the company to reach potential customers?
9. In what ways has social media influenced efficiency and effectiveness?

## Appendix

10. Does engagement with customers via social media lead to product innovation and creativity? If yes, please give an example?
11. In deciding on what social media platform to use amongst the employees (internally) and also for customers (externally), what were the considered criteria?

## **APPENDIX B: Platform Evaluation Investigation Questions (Second Phase)**

### **Interview Guide**

#### **Background Questions**

1. What is your job title?
2. What does your role entail?
3. What social media platform(s) does your company use to interact with customers?
4. In deciding on what social media platform to use what criteria was considered?
5. What values do you seek when selecting a platform? How do you achieve that?

#### **Parxis**

1. How do you assess the platform prior to selection? I.e. how do you know your customers are on a platform?
2. What competence is required in an employee for the interaction with customers on the platforms?
3. What are the skills required for the effective use of the platform?
4. How do you learn to interact with the social media platform? Is there a workshop done or do you develop the skills while using the platform(s)?

#### **Practices**

1. What are the business goals that determine the selection of a social media platform?
2. What social media practices (likes, follow, views, comment (SM functionalities)) do you sought when selecting platforms? And why?
3. What are the guidelines for evaluating platforms?

#### **Practitioner**

1. Who are the people involved in platform evaluation process?
2. Are other departments or managers outside the Digital Marketing team involved in planning/carrying out the platform evaluation process? If yes, please explain this activity.

## Appendix

3. Looking at it from a strategy-as-practice perspective, would you say the strategy mapped out for platform evaluation process was carried out directly or will you say evolving took place as the practice continued?

## APPENDIX C: Consent Form



### MODEL CONSENT FORM

The participant should complete the whole of this sheet		
<i>Please tick the appropriate box</i>		
	YES	NO
Have you read the Research Participant Information Sheet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Who have you spoken to?		
Do you understand that you will not be referred to by name in any report concerning the study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• at any time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• without having to give a reason for withdrawing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• (where relevant, adapt if necessary) without affecting your future care?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(Where relevant) I agree to my interview being recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(Where relevant) I agree to the use of non-attributable direct quotes when the study is written up or published.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you agree to take part in this study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Signature of Research Participant:		
Date:		
Name in capitals:		
<u>Witness statement</u>		

## Appendix

<b>I am satisfied that the above-named has given informed consent.</b>
<b>Witnessed by:</b>
<b>Date:</b>
<b>Name in capitals:</b>

<b>Researcher name:</b>	<b>Signature:</b>
<b>Supervisor name:</b>	<b>Signature:</b>