Club 2.0: Investigating the Social Media Marketing Strategies of Nightclubs in the Midlands and West of Ireland

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Frieda Nevin* and Ann M. Torres*

ABSTRACT

Social media is already an established feature in the marketing strategies of large global brands. This study explores how the social media success stories of large global brands may be emulated on a smaller scale by nightclubs in the midlands and west of Ireland. The topic is explored from both consumer and organisation perspectives. Focus groups were conducted with target consumers and in-depth interviews were carried out with nightclub marketing personnel. The findings indicate nightclubs are highly compatible with social media, but nightclubs are not using social media to their full potential; instead they are adopting an unstructured, outdated approach. This study adds to the debate on the role of relationships and promotion in social media marketing by presenting a cross-sectional account of the current use of social media marketing. The resulting framework is designed for nightclub marketing managers as a tool to enhance their social media marketing strategies.

Key Words: Social media marketing; web 2.0 marketing; online marketing; service marketing; hospitality marketing; nightclub marketing

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the internet forty years ago many new applications have been created. One of the most recent innovations to emerge is web 2.0, 'a collection of web services which facilitate certain behaviours online, such as community participation and user-generated content' (Chaffey and Smith, 2008: 499). Examples include the micro-blogging site Twitter, the social networking site Facebook, and the video-sharing site YouTube. Circle (2009) lists these particular web 2.0 applications among the top future marketing trends. The addition

* J.E. Cairnes School of Business and Economics, National University of Ireland, Galway

of a Masters degree in social networking at Birmingham City University further illustrates this growing trend of using social media for communications and marketing purposes (Birmingham City University, 2009). Many organisations have begun to realise the power and potential of these new communication channels. Social media is already successful as a marketing channel for many large global brands. One need only look at Dell's micro-blogging on Twitter or Ikea's innovative use of photo tagging on Facebook for proof of this success (Circle, 2009; Warren, 2009). However, the most recent social media marketing industry report indicates social media marketing is still in the preliminary stages of development. 'A significant 88% of marketers surveyed are using social media to market their business, but 72% have only been doing so for a few months or less' (Stelzner, 2009: 5).

As an entertainment industry, the Irish nightclub industry has been one of the major casualties of the recent economic recession. The number of organisations operating in the industry is declining steadily, in line with the decrease in the discretionary income levels of consumers (Vintners' Federation of Ireland, 2009). An emerging trend within the industry is the use of social media as a marketing solution to overcome the effects of the downturn; however, the levels of success appear to vary greatly among organisations.

The likelihood of compatibility between nightclubs and social media marketing is high. As small and medium enterprises (SMEs), most Irish nightclubs have a lower percentage of their budgets available to spend on marketing compared to large global companies. These budget constraints, coupled with the low costs generally associated with social media marketing, suggest a substantial opportunity for SMEs to increase their marketing activity, relatively inexpensively, through social media marketing. However, the use of social media within the Irish nightclub industry is an unexplored topic and, while many organisations within the industry are engaging in social media marketing, detailed information on best practice is not currently available within the literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

'Social media' is the broad term used to describe web 2.0 tools and applications built specifically for the purpose of allowing users to interact and socialise with others on the internet, including applications such as message boards, blogs, wikis, podcasts, instant messaging, social networking, email, and photo and video sharing (Preziosi, 2007; Miletsky, 2010). Much of the literature suggests marketers should use social media simultaneously to complement their other online marketing strategies. Antion (2005) and Pattison (2009) also advocate using an independent website with its own domain name to reach potential customers who are not active on social media websites. The general consensus in the literature regarding the use of social media websites, as opposed to using independent websites, is encapsulated effectively by Kirby (2010), who concludes that a company-specific website should be complemented by social media tools to drive traffic to the company-controlled portal (Kirby, 2010).

The number of Facebook users reached a milestone 500 million in July 2010 (Wortham, 2010). Giles (2010) likens this to the populations of the world's largest nations, highlighting the current popularity of the world's biggest social networking website.

However, critics such as Raskin (2006) believe the popularity of Facebook may actually lead to its ultimate demise, as it becomes oversaturated with marketers' messages. Morrissey (2010) reinforces this crowded image of Facebook and suggests the micro-blogging site Twitter as a less cluttered and more unique alternative for marketers who wish to engage in social media marketing. Research conducted by Jansen et al. (2009) indicates 19 per cent of micro-blogging sites contain mentions of brands, indicating micro-blogging is a feasible and practical channel for SMEs in terms of implementing marketing campaigns and nurturing customer relationships. While recognising the widespread use of Twitter among companies of all sizes, Klara (2010) believes it is the smaller companies, such as nightclubs, which have the most success when using Twitter.

According to a study conducted by Forrester Research, younger generations are frequent viewers of online videos (Haven et al., 2006). The young demographic of this audience suggested by the Forrester report indicates YouTube may be an effective means of targeting young nightclub patrons. However, Haven et al. (2006) caution about the resource requirements of incorporating YouTube into a social media marketing strategy. Although little monetary resources are presently required to implement a YouTube campaign, substantial effort and high-quality, creative video content is essential in order for an online video marketing campaign to be effective (Haven et al., 2006).

Authors writing on the topic of social media marketing, such as Preziosi (2007) and Greenberg (2009), readily accept the inclusion of short message service (SMS) marketing into the social media category, in its broadest sense. Chaffey et al. (2009) also recognise text messaging as a commonly used channel for communicating with consumers, yet they are sceptical of its effectiveness in comparison with other social media channels. According to Chaffey et al. (2009: 554), the 'level of activity in e-mail marketing is much higher than mobile text messaging' and they suggest the reason for this relatively low usage of text message marketing is largely due to the intrusive nature of text messages compared to permission-based email marketing. Although these channels are currently the most popular social media channels among nightclub consumers, it is not known how long this popularity will persist. Andersen (2008: 2) believes the speed at which social media tools develop may make social media websites dangerous territory for marketers and he cautions marketers against investing and committing substantial amounts of resources to social media marketing, referring to social media websites as 'potentially fleeting properties'.

Strong ties with consumers are essential for social media marketing to be effective. Brown et al. (2007) believe the marketing potential of word-of-mouth activities associated with social media and the level of impact word of mouth has on the consumer decision-making process and attitude formation are limited by a number of key factors, including tie strength. They explain tie strength as the closeness of the bond between the information hunter and the source – the stronger the tie the more effective the marketing activity will be, thus highlighting the importance of relationships.

Cram (1994) and Skinner et al. (2005) counsel against over-reliance on price-based competitive techniques such as drinks promotions in nightclubs as they may result in negative outcomes by provoking a price war, damaging the company image and diverting

attention from customer needs. However, the possible short-term benefits associated with price competition may make it difficult to resist. Furthermore, Chaston and Mangles (2002) explain it is more tempting for service companies, such as nightclubs, to engage in online price-based competition because prices are more visible to consumers online and therefore they are easier to compare. In the offline environment, price information is not as readily available or as easily compared due to consumers' time constraints, which prevent them from seeking out competing prices.

Kunur (2010) recommends staff outside of the marketing department should also be involved in the organisation's social media activity as it can be employed at every stage of the selling cycle. He suggests adopting a model that incorporates a combination of central-ised and distributed responsibility. However, Gay et al. (2007) believe getting buy-in from other areas of the business, particularly from management, may be a challenge for some organisations. This difficulty emphasises the need for top managers to be committed to the concept of e-marketing and to share their enthusiasm as internal champions.

The literature on social media marketing, while not extensive, deals predominantly with strategies, tools and online consumer behaviour; less attention has been focused on the area of measurement. The reason for this lack of attention to measures of social media marketing campaigns may be partially attributed to the difficulty of measuring such campaigns. It appears the most effective social media tactics are often not as meas-urable as their less effective counterparts. Maddox (2009), one of the few authors to touch on the subject, highlights the shortage of concrete measures available to organisations to accurately determine social media's actual contribution to revenue growth. However, Kirby (2010: 40) underplays the significance of financial measures by suggesting 'return on investment is only one way to gauge the success of a campaign', and advises comple-menting return on investment with other measures such as return on engagement.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research project takes a cross-sectional view of the current status of social media usage among nightclubs in the midlands and west of Ireland, using a mixed method approach. The primary data collection process was carried out in two phases: 1) consumer focus groups and 2) organisational interviews. A self-selection sampling technique was used to determine the focus group sample. In total, ten nightclubs (five rural and five urban) and twenty-eight consumers (fifteen females and thirteen males aged between 18 and 30) took part in the study, and the responses were analysed using the qualitative analysis technique known as template analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Several key findings emerged from the research analysis in areas such as social media experience, social media relationships, social media trends, and the management, imple-mentation and measurement of social media marketing campaigns. The findings from both data collection processes are discussed simultaneously.

Social Media Experience

All ten nightclubs studied have an active presence on the internet and in the social media world. However, variations exist between the levels of activity and depth of experience they have regarding the use of online tools such social media; these variations are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Online Marketing Experience of Nightclubs

Nightclub	Independent Website	Year Joined Social Media	Hours per Week Spent on Social Media Marketing
Urban 1	Yes	2005	3
Urban 2	Yes	2005	3
Urban 3	Yes	2008	3
Urban 4	Yes	2008	2–3
Urban 5	Yes	2007	5–8
Rural 1	Yes, shared	2009	3
Rural 2	Yes, shared	2007	2–3
Rural 3	Yes	2009	5
Rural 4	Yes	2009	2
Rural 5	Yes	2008	2

Although differences exist between rural and urban nightclubs in terms of their social media experience, both groups demonstrate a level of experience over and above the average experience levels suggested by current research, indicating social media marketing may be at a more advanced stage of development than presented in the literature.

All of the urban nightclubs studied have active independent websites which they update regularly and which are linked to their social media pages, while the independent websites of rural nightclubs are relatively inactive and not linked to their social media. In this respect, the activity of the urban nightclubs is reflective of the current marketing literature, which highlights the importance of maintaining an active online presence outside of social media through an independent website. Rural nightclubs, however, do not appear to be using their independent websites to their full potential.

Social Media Trends

Facebook

All of the nightclubs studied have active Facebook accounts and share a positive opinion of Facebook as the most popular and most effective social media website for marketing purposes. This finding confirms the popularity of Facebook as a marketing tool that is suggested in the literature (Pattison, 2009; Miletsky, 2010). All of the consumers who

participated in the study are also active Facebook users with the majority of them describing Facebook as the hub of their social media activity.

Twitter
Six out of the ten nightclubs that took part in the research have a presence on Twitter – all five urban nightclubs and one rural nightclub. This finding challenges the popularity of Twitter suggested in the literature by authors such as Morrissey (2010). While the majority of nightclubs have a Twitter presence, their presence on Twitter is relatively low-key in comparison to their Facebook activity. A similar finding was drawn from the focus groups. Only five consumers said they have set up an account on Twitter and subsequently admitted to highly sporadic usage patterns, thus indicating Twitter may not yet be a viable social media channel for nightclubs in the midlands and west of Ireland as usage among consumers appears to be relatively low. Of those consumers who are not active on Twitter, many regarded the website as predominantly an American site. These statements resonate strongly with early attitudes of Irish consumers towards Facebook, which in its infancy was viewed by Irish consumers as an American social network. This finding implies the potential of Twitter as a marketing tool may increase in the near future, as patterns observed from the literature suggest Irish consumers' internet usage tends to closely follow the usage patterns of American consumers (Singh et al., 2010).

YouTube
The potential of YouTube suggested in the literature is reinforced by the favourable attitude of consumers towards YouTube uncovered during the focus group interviews. Consumers regard YouTube as 'amusing', 'entertaining' and 'addictive'. However, none of the nightclubs involved in the study have used YouTube as part of their marketing activities. Many of them were aware of the website's existence and were familiar with the website's features, but had not considered the idea of using it for marketing their nightclub until the topic was raised during the interviews.

SMS Marketing
The intrusiveness of text message marketing was discussed during focus groups and organisational interviews. Consumers relayed stories of negative experiences with invasive mobile marketing from nightclubs and some nightclubs admitted to sending marketing messages via SMS to consumers who had not given their explicit permission. The overall findings from both the organisational interviews and the consumer focus groups present text message marketing as an effective channel for communicating with nightclub consumers provided the nightclub obtains explicit consent from consumers and establishes a straightforward process whereby consumers can easily unsubscribe from the text alerts service.

Bebo
Although little attention was given to Bebo in the literature, both nightclubs and consumers have previously used the website. All of the rural nightclubs and one urban nightclub have

used Bebo in the past for marketing their nightclubs and over half of the focus group participants admitted to having used Bebo before, many identifying it as their first social media experience. However, the popularity of the website is in decline. Bebo's decline in popularity is reflective of the rapidly evolving status given to social media in the literature. The current image of Bebo among consumers as a social networking site for children suggests Irish nightclubs should be wary of using Bebo for their marketing purposes, primarily because it is potentially a waste of resources as the target audience no longer uses the website. Furthermore, and more ominously, using Bebo to promote nightclubs may raise serious legal and moral issues regarding the advertising of alcohol-related events to minors. Many of the nightclubs have already identified these pitfalls and have followed in the footsteps of their customers, moving from Bebo to Facebook, yet some nightclubs are continuing to use Bebo to promote their nightclub and alcohol-related events. However, many nightclubs in both rural and urban areas also hold underage, non-alcoholic events on their premises, thus maintaining a presence on Bebo could prove beneficial for these nightclubs when promoting such events to underage consumers.

Social Media Relationships
The suggestion in the literature that strong ties with consumers are essential in order for social media marketing to be effective (Brown et al., 2007) is challenged by the results obtained during the focus groups. The majority of consumer responses gathered for this study were relatively homogeneous; however, the discussion on social media relationships with nightclubs raised much debate. Many consumers said they would only look at a nightclub's social media page if they were going somewhere for a vacation or if they were going to a nightclub they are not familiar with, insisting they are less likely to check the social media page of the nightclubs they most frequent, because they are going to attend those nightclubs regardless of what promotion is on. This consumer opinion suggests social media marketing does not require strong consumer ties in order to be effective and it may also be effective with consumers who have weak or no ties with the nightclub.

On the other hand, some consumers demonstrate much stronger social media ties with their most frequented nightclubs, describing the social media presence of their local nightclub or nightclubs as online membership schemes. The findings from the organisational interviews reinforce this description: four of the nightclubs have membership schemes in place which are linked to their social media activity. In general, focus group participants were largely in favour of nightclub membership schemes. The majority of participants hold in their possession at least one nightclub membership card; in fact, many of the participants are involved in multiple nightclub membership schemes. Low levels of consumer loyalty towards nightclubs are also evident on social media: all of the focus group participants are linked to multiple nightclubs through social media and describe the strength of these links as considerably strong. Consumers are linked to multiple nightclubs on social media in that they are fans or friends of their local nightclub's page, but they have little or no interaction with these nightclubs' pages. They do not view the pages on a regular basis. They are more likely to visit the page of a nightclub that is unfamiliar to them to see what it

is like than to visit the page of a nightclub they know, even though they may be friends or fans of the local nightclub on social media. Thus, strong ties with consumers can be potentially advantageous for nightclubs engaging in social media marketing; however they do not guarantee consumer loyalty.

With regards to establishing social media relationships, the potential legal issue of adding underage friends and/or fans arises. Many nightclub representatives said they deliberately avoid Bebo because of its underage user demographic. In spite of the strong awareness of this sensitive issue demonstrated during the Bebo discussion, only four out of the ten nightclubs impose a strict over 18s policy when adding or accepting friends on social media websites. Three more nightclubs adopt a markedly more relaxed approach. They 'try to maintain an over 18s only friend list, when possible', but have no formal procedures or guidelines in place for standardising the process of adding or accepting online friends. The remaining three nightclubs admit to having no age restrictions at all in place on their social media friends lists. This finding suggests the majority of nightclubs demonstrate a preference for quantity over quality when it comes to establishing social media relationships, in an attempt to appear more popular than competitors.

Social Media Activity

Promotional

Advertising the nightclub and promoting events is the primary social media activity identified among the nightclubs studied. However, these activities are often done to excess, at the expense of other important activities. Nightclubs which focus their social media efforts solely on promotions are not viewed favourably by consumers. When discussing their social media usage patterns, focus group participants placed great importance on interaction, reinforcing the findings of previous studies published on the topic of social media consumers (Gibson and Jagger, 2009). The level of attention given to promotional activities by the nightclubs studied indicates they are underperforming in terms of meeting the needs and expectations of their consumers on social media. Many participants relayed anecdotes of negative past experiences where they had contacted nightclubs via social media websites to enquiry about upcoming events, reservations or general queries and experienced negative emotions when they were subsequently ignored by nightclubs which failed to reply to their enquiries.

The danger of price-based promotions was highlighted in the literature by authors such as Cram (1994). Evidence of price wars instigated through social media promotions was obtained during the organisational interviews and the level of promotional activity among nightclubs on social media websites, and Facebook in particular, appears to be dangerously high. One particular rural nightclub posted an advertisement on its Facebook page offering drinks for €2 all weekend. The following week, its closest competitors copied the strategy. For three consecutive weeks, both nightclubs advertised the promotion aggressively on Facebook. After three weeks one of the nightclubs withdrew the offer, but the withdrawal was only temporary. Pressure from angry consumers, who expressed their dissatisfaction on the nightclub's Facebook page, led to the offer being reintroduced. At the

time the interviews for this study were conducted, both nightclubs were still advertising the offer through social media.

Timing is a crucial yet often overlooked factor of social media promotions. The literature review highlighted the importance of content and frequency when delivering marketing messages (Cram, 1994); however, the timing of message delivery is not given adequate attention in the literature. Regardless of what promotional activity is being carried out, the findings from the consumer focus groups suggest nightclubs should give strong consideration to the timing of their messages. Both male and female consumers largely agree; evening is the time of day when they are most likely to be online. Focus group participants indicate they only occasionally look at the social media pages of nightclubs by searching for the nightclub's page unprompted; typically consumers arrive on nightclub pages by clicking on links in comments posted by nightclubs, which appear on the stream on their homepage, thus identifying the timing of messages as an crucial factor, as the stream is in real time and therefore constantly changing. Although promotion was identified as the main social media activity of nightclubs, in some cases non-promotional activities were also identified, such as uploading photographs, dealing with booking enquires and conducting informal competitor and customer research.

Non-Promotional

The associated co-creation and the interactive nature of social media marketing highlighted in the literature suggest there is substantial potential for nightclubs to use social media channels for other non-promotional purposes such as consumer research. However, none of the nightclubs are currently engaging in formal or informal consumer research through social media. The reason cited by most nightclubs is because it had never occurred to them to do so, while some of the nightclubs have deliberately avoided engaging in consumer research through social media as they refute the credibility of social media as a formal consumer research channel.

Some nightclubs admitted to using social media channels to engage in competitor analysis, albeit in an informal manner, what one nightclub described as 'keeping an eye on what they're doing down the road'. The potential of social media as a means of conducting competitor analysis was not previously identified in the literature, thus this interesting finding enhances the literature on social media marketing by identifying a new, non-promotional business activity for which social media can be used. One nightclub described how it had previously used its Facebook page to advertise vacancies within the organisation, by inviting interested parties to send their CV to the company through their Facebook mail, to which it received an overwhelming response. One urban male consumer also raised the issue of recruitment during the focus group, explaining how he used Facebook to obtain the contact details of nightclubs and pubs when he was searching for employment. LinkedIn, a business-oriented social media website, is regularly used for recruitment and head hunting; however the literature did not recognise the potential to conduct recruitment activities on social media websites such as Facebook, which are widely regarded as personal networks rather than professional networks.

Managing and Implementing Social Media Marketing Strategies
In general, the discussion of the research findings so far has presented urban nightclubs as slightly more advanced social media users than their rural counterparts. However, unexpectedly, it is the rural nightclub category which excels in terms of the effective management of social media marketing strategies. Three nightclubs, two rural and one urban, acknowledged the management and implementation of their social media marketing strategy as a team effort, with involvement from personnel from all areas of the organisation. The remaining eight nightclubs relied exclusively on one person to design, manage and implement all of their social media marketing strategies. In some cases, this responsibility was carried out by a designated marketing manager; however, in most cases no designated marketing manager role exists and the responsibility of social media management was left to the general manger of the nightclub. Perhaps it is unfeasible in rural nightclubs to employ designated marketing personnel due to budgetary and resource constraints. In such situations, it may be beneficial to involve staff members from other areas of the business instead of placing the responsibility on the general manager, who is often preoccupied with other non-marketing-related issues. The rural nightclubs that took part in the study and have already employed such an approach have experienced more successful social media strategies as a result. With regards to employing a dedicated marketing manager, while this strategy is considerably more beneficial than relying solely on the general manager, it still appears to be beneficial to encourage input from other organisational departments, outside of the marketing department, to obtain a fuller picture and maintain a fresh perspective.

Measuring Social Media Marketing Strategies
The difficulty in measuring social media marketing campaigns highlighted in the literature (Maddox, 2009) is echoed in the responses from nightclubs. None of the nightclubs involved in this research have established a formal, quantitative measure for evaluating the return on their social media marketing efforts. Some nightclubs measure their social media success by monitoring the level of activity on their social media webpages, while others list informal feedback from customers who attend their events as a key performance indicator. Some nightclubs, particularly the urban clubs, have previously attempted to quantify the effectiveness of their social media activity by measuring attendance of events promoted exclusively through social media and comparing these results to attendance figures for events not advertised through social media, some noting an increase as high as 50 per cent for events marketed through social media. Thus, while some nightclubs have been relatively successful at measuring the effectiveness of promoting once-off events on social media, none of them have yet established a method for measuring the long-term effectiveness of their ongoing social media activity.

While all of the nightclubs acknowledged the difficulty of measuring their social media campaigns, none of them expressed a major concern regarding the immeasurability of social media. The general consensus among nightclub representatives is that it costs nothing to implement a social media marketing strategy so they have nothing

to lose. However, the potential for negative word-of-mouth suggests nightclubs should maintain some measure of social media success, whether informal or formal, in order to avoid a negative return on investment. The term 'return on investment' is appropriately used here as all the nightclubs have invested time, usually three hours per week, into their social media strategy. However, none of the nightclubs recognise the time spent on their social media strategies as an investment. All of them declare they have made no investment in social media because they have not spent any money on it. This attitude suggests they do not take social media too seriously and are not considering the long-term, strategic impact of their social media use.

CONCLUSION

The compatibility between nightclubs and social media is considerably high owing to two key factors: 1) shared goals and consumer base, and 2) flexibility. Nightclubs and social media are inherently suppliers of entertainment with remarkably similar target consumers. Furthermore, the level of experience nightclub marketers have with social media is increasing. In terms of flexibility, both consumers and nightclub representatives change their social media consumption habits regularly. This evolving nature of social media usage patterns is well documented in the literature (Andersen, 2008). The flexibility demonstrated by the nightclubs which moved from Bebo to Facebook suggests nightclubs are to some extent meeting the current needs and expectations of consumers and suggests they have the capacity to adapt to meet consumer needs. The combination of these factors indicates a potential strategic fit between nightclubs and social media.

The use of social media among most nightclubs studied can be described as mundane and uninspiring. The lack of creativity is particularly notable in two key areas: choice of social media channels and social media activities.

Choice of Channel

Facebook and SMS messages are the channels used most frequently by nightclubs engaging in social media. While these channels are successful at reaching their target customers, both channels are saturated with messages from nightclubs and other organisations. In order for nightclubs to increase the effectiveness of their social media marketing and obtain a competitive advantage they need to expand their portfolio of social media channels by establishing an active presence on more innovative social media channels such as Twitter and YouTube, which are rising in popularity among marketers and consumers.

Social Media Activity

Most of the nightclubs have adopted a relatively narrow approach to social media marketing. Social media by its nature is an interactive channel, readily facilitating direct marketing and dialogue between multiple parties. It appears many nightclubs in the midlands and west of Ireland have not yet grasped the concept of marketing 'with' consumers rather than 'at' them. They use their social media presence mainly to promote their nightclub and their events. They do not actively encourage feedback from consumers and when feedback

or other unsolicited communications, such as enquiries, are received from consumers via social media they are often ignored or overlooked by nightclubs.

The current literature on social media marketing also places considerable emphasis on promotions; however, the approach to social media promotions suggested in the literature is a more personal and informal approach than that taken by the nightclubs (Gibson and Jagger, 2009). In this respect, the traditional approach taken by nightclubs is not reflective of social media marketing literature and is more reminiscent of dated, mass marketing literature. Essentially, nightclubs are trying to use modern marketing tools, such as social media, in the same way as they would use traditional marketing channels, such as radio or local press. By adopting this obsolete approach they are limiting their ability to meet the needs of their consumers within their social media networks, as they are not providing consumers with entertainment or the opportunity to interact. Nightclubs are lazily approaching social media as primarily an advertising tool and not realising the full potential of it as a creative, interactive channel.

Most of the nightclubs are underperforming in terms their level of forward planning and their attention to detail. The majority of nightclubs appear to devote less attention to their social media strategies compared to their other marketing strategies. A small number of nightclubs have correctly identified social media marketing as requiring a team effort and have been successful at obtaining buy-in from management and staff at various levels from within the organisation. In this respect, these nightclubs reflect the best practice techniques suggested in the literature. The remaining nightclubs have achieved buy-in from management, but have not delegated any social media related tasks to non-management members of the organisation, resulting in their social media strategies being narrow-minded and minimal in terms of planning and implementation. Those nightclubs which involve members from throughout their organisation in their social media marketing activity have better planned strategies which are generally more creative. For this reason, these nightclubs tend to perform better in terms of meeting customer expectations than those where one person is solely responsible for the design and implementation of their social media marketing activity. This finding suggests preparation is a pre-requisite for effective social media marketing.

The findings on age restrictions strengthen the argument for the need for prior planning. Many of the nightclubs do not impose strict age restrictions on their social media pages, risking the possibility of legal issues arising. One of the factors contributing to the laidback approach of most nightclubs towards social media may be the lack of financial investment required. There appears to be a misguided attitude among nightclub representatives suggesting social media is an informal channel and, thus, it is acceptable to adopt an informal approach. A clear line needs to be drawn between being open and informal, and acting in a socially unacceptable manner. Companies need to engage in prior planning in order to ensure they strike a balance between being socially oriented and maintaining integrity and professionalism.

Theoretical Implications
The findings of this study add to the debate on the importance of relationships and tie strength in social media marketing literature, by strengthening the argument which suggests close relationships are not always a requirement, and social media marketing can also be effective in situations where weak ties or no ties exist. This research also helps to move current literature past focusing predominantly on promotional activity, by presenting consumer research, competitor research and recruitment as business activities which may be potentially carried out through social media. The overall conclusion of this research reinforces the argument in current literature which insists innovative tools such as social media require innovative attitudes, and in order for social media marketing to be effective marketers must enter the social media world with an open mind.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research
This study presents a cross-sectional account of the current use of social media marketing by nightclubs in the midlands and west of Ireland by interviewing nightclub marketing personnel and nightclub patrons from within the region. Future investigations in this area may involve the use of deeper qualitative data collection methods such as participant observation to investigate whether the responses provided during the interview accurately represent the actual behaviour of nightclubs and consumers. The focus group section of this research was also limited to consumers who have an established, active presence on social media. Further nightclub marketing research may also include participants who do not have a presence on social media. Other research may build on this work by taking a longitudinal approach, repeating this study and examining the extent to which the use of social media among nightclubs and consumers has changed over time.

Practical Implications
The implications of this research from a managerial perspective are presented in the form of a conceptual framework, which was created based on the main findings emerging from the research (see Figure 1).

Planning Recommendations
Nightclubs should create a formal, written plan for their social media marketing strategy, which should start by identifying their objective. It is recommended that nightclubs avoid objectives based solely on cost reductions or promotions. In order to be effective, the objectives should be compatible with the *social* aspect of social media, for example a desire to engage with customers or to better understand their customers' needs. In order to identify suitable social media objectives it is also necessary to understand the social media motives of their target audience, such as entertainment. If no suitable objectives can be identified, it may indicate social media may not be an appropriate marketing channel for meeting the nightclub's objectives.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Social Media Marketing in Nightclub Organisations
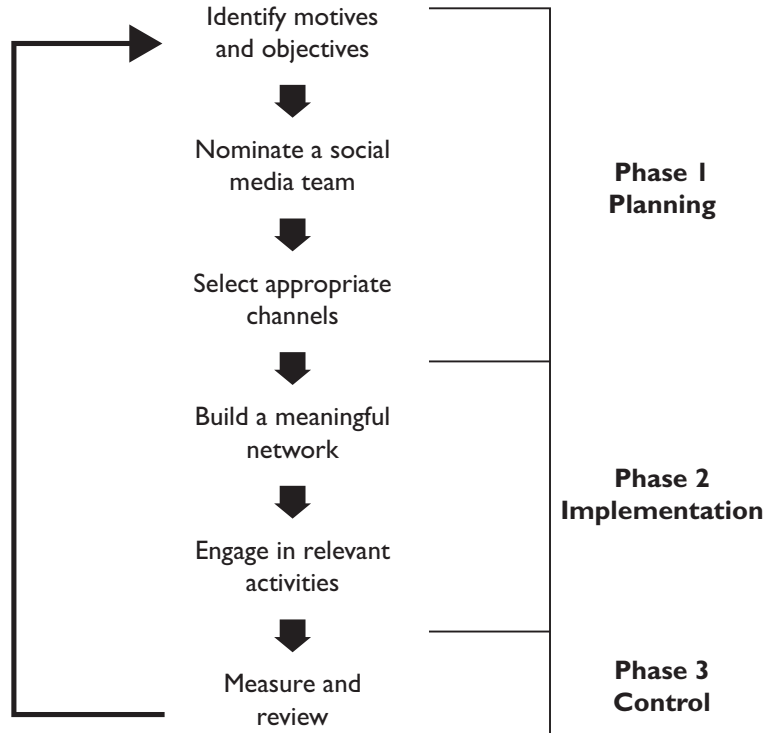
A social media marketing team should subsequently be appointed with representatives from various levels and departments within the organisation. Once organisational objectives and consumer motives have been identified, the elected social media marketing team will be able to make an informed decision about the most suitable social media channels. Decisions should be based on the social media usage of the nightclub's target audience and the ability of the channels to meet its objectives. Although this study focused on the five most relevant social media methods at the time of study, the choice of social media channel should not be limited to these channels as trends in social media are constantly evolving and new social media channels are continually emerging. Nightclubs should aim to include as many social media channels as they can feasibly manage and maintain within their resources.

Implementation Recommendations
When the most appropriate social media channels have been identified, nightclubs should begin to build their networks. Formal guidelines should be established, outlining how the

network is to be built and details of any restrictions should be clearly communicated to all members of the social media team to maintain consistency. Given the nature of the industry, it is recommended that nightclubs impose strict age restrictions on any social media channels used to avoid any legal issues arising. Nightclubs should maintain an active presence on all their social media channels and establish links between their social media and all other channels of communication. For example, hyperlinks should be used to direct consumers from the company website to the social media pages and the URLs of their social media pages should feature prominently in any offline communications.

A subtle, informal approach should be adapted when engaging in promotional activity on social media, paying careful attention to the wording of communications. Postings resembling advertisements should be used sparingly. Nightclubs should also aim to increase the effectiveness of their social media marketing campaigns by engaging in non-promotional activities, such as consumer and competitor research and recruitment. Interaction and dialogue should be key components of any social media activity and communications received from customers via social media should be handled in a professional, timely manner.

Recommendations for Control
Nightclubs should establish a formal strategy for measuring the success of their social media marketing. As quantifying social media marketing success is extremely difficult, the formal measurement strategy may be based on qualitative measures such as customer feedback. The choice of measurement method should be based on the type of activity and thus will vary greatly from nightclub to nightclub. A more important factor than the type of measure used is the frequency of measurements. Regardless of which methods are used, the measurement should be carried out on a regular basis. The dynamic nature of social media means the social media strategies of nightclubs will require constant review and reinvention, thus the six-step process outlined in Figure 1 is a cyclical process that nightclub marketers need to repeat continually.

Adapting a formal strategy, such as the one suggested in the above model, will allow nightclubs to create effective and innovative social media marketing strategies which allow them to meet their consumers' need for social interaction, information and entertainment while keeping marketing costs to a minimum and ensuring the professional image of the nightclub remains intact.

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