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Social Media as a Bridge to E-commerce Adoption in SMEs: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract:

Through the analysis of a number of previous studies, this article aims to present an overview of extant literature on the adoption of e-commerce by Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) using social media. Firstly, the study provides an overview of e-commerce definitions and benefits; SMEs' characteristics; opportunities and challenges of e-commerce adoption by SMEs; and social media and e-commerce adoption to offer some background. Secondly, studies that identify factors that influence SMEs to use social media to adopt e-commerce are highlighted. Finally, current gaps in knowledge are identified and future researches are highlighted.

Keywords: E-commerce, Social Media, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

Introduction

Recently, social media has increasingly become adopted by enterprises (Hawkins & Vel, 2013) as it is a new phenomenon that has revolutionised online communication (Kuitunen, 2012). In fact, online forums, web blogs, podcasts and social media are rapidly becoming an essential part of the daily, personal, social, and business life as well as a major source of customer information and a prime channel of communication, information sharing, and distribution of individual creativity and entertainment (Constantinides, 2008; Constantinides, Alarcón-del Amo, & Lorenzo-Romero, 2010).

In contrast, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are critical to the economies of all countries (Fathian, Akhavan, & Hoorali, 2008) since they represent the largest sector of companies, and play an important role in most world economies because of their flexibility, capacity to generate income and their ability to innovate (Bahaddad, AlGhamdi, & Houghton, 2012). Therefore, their survival and growth has been a major issue (Ozmen, Oner, Khosrowshahi, & Underwood, 2013). They have a critical role in widening the production base, supporting large scale manufacturing firms, and providing national and regional employment opportunities. SMEs are recognised as "the life blood of modern economics" (Bahaddad et al., 2012).

SMEs are different from large companies in various important ways such as in the lack of a substantial information system management (Ramdani, Kawalek, & Lorenzo, 2009); lack of financial resources (Piercy, 2010); common responsibilities are a concerted effort by one or two individuals rather than the specialisation of top management executives (Ramdani et al., 2009); lower levels of available resources (Lindman, 2004); and an expert of knowledge management (Piercy, 2010). Therefore, SMEs face many challenges including economic change, globalisation of markets, decreasing product lifecycle, changes in consumer needs, rapid technological development and increased competition. In contrast, to overcome these

challenges, SMEs need to be more stable and innovative in all areas of operation including planning, production, finance, marketing, and human resource management (HRM) (Demirbas, Hussain, & Matlay, 2011).

Social media is specifically suitable for SMEs as it provides numerous opportunities including its minimal cost, low level of IT skills required to use it, and low barriers to participation (Derham, Cragg, & Morrish, 2011). In addition, small businesses can build brand communities, promote their products and services, and reach diverse market niches (Gligorijevic & Leong, 2011). It is a simple and low cost solution for: reaching potential customers, listening to customers' voices, creating extensive business networks (Constantinides et al., 2010), managing reputations, developing customer trust and loyalty, and gathering marketing intelligence (Chua, Deans, & Parker, 2009). Nowadays, many SMEs believe that they 'must' engage with social media (Durkin, 2013).

Several efforts have been made for analysing existing knowledge; for example, addressing the opportunities that virtual worlds may offer for SMEs as a strategic international marketing tool (Hassouneh & Brengman, 2008); and examining how SMEs could employ the various Web 2.0 instruments in order to improve customer relations, market their products, and enhance internal operations (Constantinides, 2008). Other such examples include: giving some insight on the application of Web 2.0 artefacts in SME networks (Blinn, Lindermann, Fäcks, & Nüttgens, 2009); examining how SMEs are gaining value from using social media (Derham et al., 2011); and investigating business-to-business (B2B) SMEs and measuring the effectiveness of Social Networking Sites (SNS) as a marketing tool (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011). Moreover, it also includes analysing SMEs' social media marketing practices (Nakara, Benmoussa, & Jaouen, 2012); investigating how SMEs use Web 2.0 to collaborate with other SMEs (Barnes, Clear, Dyerson, Harindranath, Harris, & Rae, 2012); examining how SMEs can gain business value from using social media

(Stockdale, Ahmed, & Scheepers, 2012); and investigating the possibility of using social network tools to implement CRM for SMEs (Cappuccio, Kulkarni, Sohail, Haider, & Wang, 2012). Finally, it examines the adoption, usage, and benefits of social media and SMEs in addition to the potential concerns that may prevent SMEs from wider adoption of the social media (Meske & Stieglitz, 2013).

However, a detailed examination of existing research suggests that no systematic review has been conducted for synthesising and analysing factors that influence SMEs to use social media to adopt e-commerce. Given a large interest in studying such a topic, it was believed appropriate to exert such an effort. Therefore, this research aims to carry out a systematic review of existing studies that have explored SMEs' use of social media for e-commerce adoption. This is presented as follows. First, an overview of e-commerce definitions and benefits, SMEs' characteristics, opportunities and challenges of e-commerce adoption by SMEs, and social media and e-commerce adoption is provided to offer some background. Furthermore, studies that have identified factors that influence SMEs to use social media to adopt e-commerce are highlighted. Finally, current gaps in knowledge are identified and future researches are highlighted.

Opportunities and challenges of e-commerce adoption by SMEs

Internet technologies provide SMEs the opportunity of overcoming challenges and to compete more effectively in bigger markets with larger organisations as well as increasing international opportunities (Bochenek & Blili, 2013). Internet technologies can:

    1. Increase capability of SMEs to compete both locally and nationally with other companies.

    2. Create new opportunities for more diverse entrepreneurs to start a business.

    3. Offer easy and convenient ways of completing business transactions online (24 hours a day, seven days a week).

4. Offer inexpensive means of communication and reduce costs for traditional businesses (compared with fax, telephone, postage, and travel) (Dholakia & Kshetri, 2004).

As a result, SMEs are increasingly making use of the Internet (Daniel & Grimshaw, 2002). It is no longer an option for SMEs to ignore the Internet and take a 'wait attitude' (Drew, 2003). Many SMEs are already presenting their entrepreneurship strength by taking the opportunities offered by ICT (Fathian et al., 2008). Research has shown that SMEs are rapidly adopting the Internet and e-commerce (Drew, 2003; Huy & Filiatrault, 2006) to have access to global markets and to gain competitive advantages. Both buyers and sellers can benefit significantly from the usage and implementation of e-commerce (Ghobakhloo, Arias-Aranda, & Benitez-Amado, 2011). A survey of SMEs has confirmed that the reasons for using a website include: sending and receiving business e-mails (78%); researching goods and services (60%); sending and receiving personal e-mails (48%); conducting research (41%); and purchasing goods and services (40%) (Dholakia & Kshetri, 2004). In fact, the benefits of e-commerce are not only for large firms, SMEs can also benefit from e-commerce. E-commerce adoption by SMEs can reduce costs, help improve business processes, achieve a closer relationship with clients (Huy & Filiatrault, 2006), allow SMEs to compete with large businesses, provide ease of communication as well as location and time independence (Grandon & Pearson, 2004). Furthermore, the adoption of e-commerce by SMEs has become a necessity in the context of market globalisation (Huy & Filiatrault, 2006).

In contrast, it is widely recognised that a number of major difficulties face SMEs when aiming to adopt e-commerce, and numerous reviews tackle these areas (Simpson & Docherty, 2004) requiring in-depth evaluation. Common barriers that SMEs encounter when implementing e-commerce strategies include the cost of implementation, lack of financial resources, the need for immediate returns on investment, complexity of technologies, lack of

organisational readiness, having limited existing IT resources, limited IS skills in-house, lack of assertiveness by the owner/manager, and security concerns (Levy, Powell, & Worrall, 2005).

Social media and e-commerce adoption

Social media plays an important role in commerce and in the economic development (Lea, Yu, Maguluru, & Nichols, 2006). Social media offers both organisations and customers new ways to connect with each other. Companies began to embrace social media websites as a way to improve information sharing, communication, and collaboration by implementing many innovative and essential business practices (Burrus, 2010). This includes adding social media to companies' marketing and brand building activities (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlström, 2012). In fact, company websites started to use richer presentation media by using multiple cues to distribute information, including text, photos and videos, aiming to lead to more positive social judgements, and greater degrees of user trust (Cho, Phillips, Hageman, & Patten, 2009). Companies began to look for leverage into the "people's Internet" and to gain knowledge to pull the "likes", "shares" and "comments" for profit making (Mitic & Kapoulas, 2012). Nowadays, it is common to see businesses launch "Facebook" pages, "Twitter" accounts, "YouTube" channels and blogs in an attempt to maintain significance amongst the competition and to create or strengthen links with customers (Mitic & Kapoulas, 2012). They start by creating product pages upon which users are invited to join those product pages in order to "follow" the products (Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012). Social media drives companies to work faster by creating and managing more interdependencies and operating in global markets (Kalpic & Bernus, 2006). As a result, social media increases the competitiveness of organisations, whilst also leading to the transformation of business models in all sectors (Garrigos-Simon, Alcamí, & Ribera, 2012).

As marketers recognised this trend, they started leveraging social media sites seeking to generate awareness, interest, and eventually product purchase. Their strategy involves creating product-related pages and then trying to guide potential customers to those pages through advertising (Coulter & Roggeveen 2012). One of the benefits of social media websites to marketers is that a range of consumers can gather marketing data including: data on the satisfaction of a service or product; data on features of future products; data on degrees of brand loyalty and price sensitivity; data on unexpected markets or uses of products; data on competitors of different products; and data on the changes of consumer attitudes over time (Pitta & Fowler, 2005). As a result, social media offers companies a variety of ways to reach consumers, communicate with them, and measure their browsing and purchasing activities (Hennig-Thurau, Malthouse, Friege, Gensler, Lobschat, Rangaswamy, & Skiera, 2010)

While companies aim to engage with loyal customers, influence members, spread brand awareness, distribute information and learn about customers (Gummerus et al., 2012), customers also benefit through the different practices that they perform online (Marandi, Little, & Hughes, 2010). In fact, the ways in which consumers communicate with each other have changed significantly in the last decade, as has the way they gather information about products, exchange it, obtain products and consume them. Social media has empowered consumers in such a way that they can promote and distribute their own offers. "Consumers today serve as retailers on eBay, media producer-directors on YouTube, authors on Wikipedia, and critical reviewers on Amazon and TripAdvisor; they do all of this and more on Facebook and MySpace" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

Factors that influence SMEs to use social media to adopt e-commerce

A variety of studies have been acknowledged that identify the factors that influence SMEs to use social media to adopt e-commerce in different countries throughout the world including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands, Finland, Romania, Croatia,

Australia, New Zealand, India, and Indonesia. The literature revealed twenty-eight studies between the years of 2008 to 2013 within this context. The most significant amount of research in this field began to take place in 2011 (Derham et al., 2011; Gligorijevic & Leong, 2011; Handayan & Lisdianingrum, 2011; Harris, Rae & Misner, 2012; Kuitunen, 2012; Nakara et al., 2012; Zeiller & Schauer, 2011). In contrast, the least number of studies was found in 2009 with only two studies (Blinn et al., 2009; Chua, Deans & Parker, 2009) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of studies that identify the factors that influence SMEs to use social media to adopt e-commerce in other countries of the world
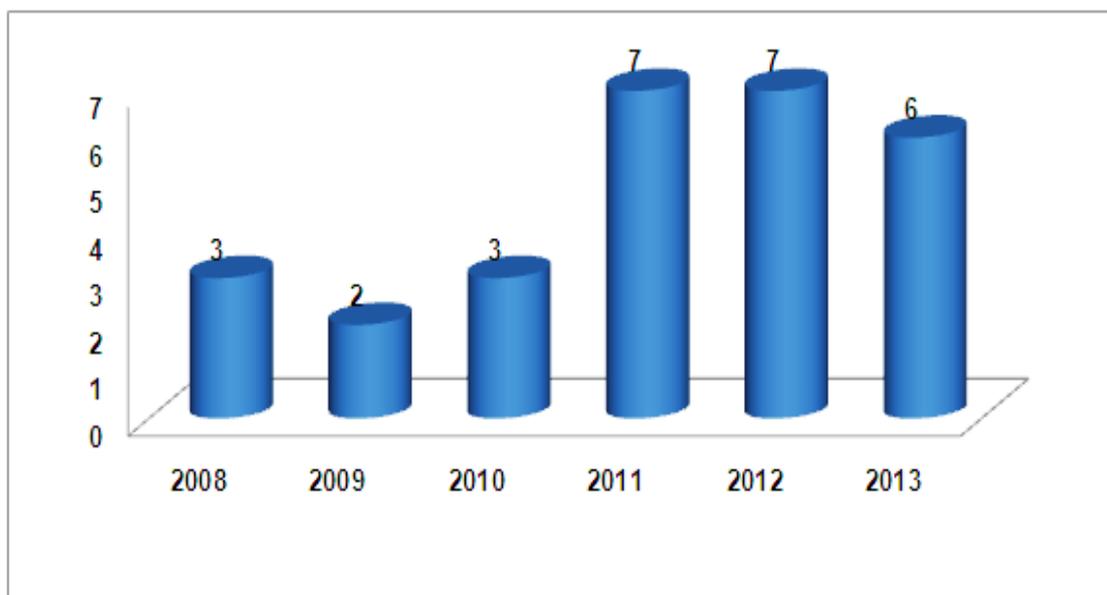
While analysing the studies, it has been found that most of the research within this context have used a qualitative approach including exploratory interviews with SMEs' representatives (Blinn et al., 2009), qualitative-interpretivist-exploratory methodology and semi-structured one-to-one online interviews (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010), case studies and in-depth interviews (Derham et al., 2011; Gligorijevic & Leong, 2011), a qualitative case study by conducting semi-structured interviews (Barnes et al., 2012), and a case study approach (Handayan & Lisdianingrum, 2011; Razmerita & Kirchner, 2011; Zeiller & Schauer, 2011). In contrast, few studies have used a quantitative approach including mail

survey, online survey, and collecting data from websites (Harris et al., 2012; Meske & Stieglitz, 2013; Wamba & Carter, 2013) and only two studies have used mixed methods including applying a questionnaire and multiple case studies (Kuitunen, 2012) and an online survey with semi-structured interviews (Nakara et al., 2012). This indicates that there is limited research within the field and more research needs to take place specifically using a quantitative approach or mixed methods.

Zhang and Fjermestad (2008) investigated how SMEs respond to and actively utilise the opportunities brought by independent low-cost instant messaging (IM). Using a comparative case study approach examining two case studies with two US SMEs, where data was collected by interview, observation, and IM transcripts, a qualitative data analysis was deployed and IM was found to be beneficial to SMEs in several ways. In addition, the IM usage management is found to be more a managerial issue than a technical one. Finally, the study identified a set of organisational and managerial factors that are critical for achieving these benefits. Hassouneh and Brengman (2008) intended to address the opportunities that virtual worlds may offer for SMEs in general and as a strategic international marketing tool. Based on literature from both information systems and international marketing in addition to studying current business practice, the researchers designed a model for internationalisation using virtual worlds. It has been found that virtual worlds offer SMEs a unique opportunity to obtain experiential knowledge about foreign markets that allow them to make decisions about their internationalisation strategy, and build their brand before entering the foreign markets and internationalise faster. In the same year, Constantinides (2008) defined the Web 2.0 occurrence and examined how SMEs could employ the various Web 2.0 instruments in order to improve customer relations, market their products, and enhance internal operations.

Blinn et al. (2009) aimed to give some insight on the application of Web 2.0 artefacts in SME networks. It suggested a conceptual base that follows the design scientific approach.

Based on organisational and technical requirements resulting from exploratory interviews with SMEs' representatives participating in a regional SME network, the researchers transferred the requirements in a prototypic concept. This artefact that has been developed provides a basis for a field test for further research. In addition, Chua et al. (2009) aimed to reveal how the heterogeneity of SMEs and their particular business uses of e-business technologies such as blogs can guide the e-business research society in conducting much needed studies by presenting a future research agenda in the form of research questions. The researchers added that the existing e-business literature treats e-business collectively instead of focusing on specific business uses of different e-business technologies, and to treat SMEs as a standardised group. The study concludes with a discussion of how this research agenda can guide the e-business research society to use a range of different research methods and to build a theory which better explains SMEs' adoption of e-business.

Bulearca and Bulearca (2010) explored the significance of Twitter as a tool that should be taken seriously by SMEs in their marketing strategies, focusing on the stand of SMEs and how they use, see, and perceive the future of Twitter for their businesses. Using a qualitative-interpretivist-exploratory methodology, semi-structured one-to-one online interviews took place on a homogenous sample including four/five British and Romanian SMEs with around two employees from the PR/ marketing departments of each company. This study covers the first stage of the project, which is a pilot interview with a British SME, intended to discover initial insights while testing the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the research. The research found that even though Twitter should not be viewed as "the be all and end all for our communications", it is a critical platform, especially if companies want to listen to and influence consumers' opinions. Moreover, Constantinides et al. (2010) presented the results of a national survey recording the demographic, behavioural and social characteristics of the Dutch users of Social Networking Sites (SNS). The research identified four different user

profiles and proposed a segmentation framework as a foundation for better understanding the behaviour and nature of online communities' participants. The study findings highlight new insights to marketing strategists keen to use the communication potential of online communities. The findings also are interesting for businesses ready to discover the potential of online networking since it is a very efficient alternative to physical networking and has a very low cost. This study reveals that Social Networking Sites provide several opportunities to SMEs as part of their marketing strategy according to the type of customers they want to reach.

Constantinides (2010) explained the nature and effect as well as the current standing of the Internet applications focusing on social media and Web 2.0. He reviewed their role as marketing instruments and identified the opportunities for SMEs if they incorporated them as part of their marketing strategy. The researcher defined and analysed the social media phenomenon by identifying approaches made by the main corporations after engaging social media and Web 2.0 applications in order to support, improve, or complement their traditional and online marketing activities. These approaches aim to use social media as a source of market intelligence through efficiently developing, marketing, and distributing products, communicating with customers, and also improving customer retention and relations. The researcher presented a categorisation of the main social media applications and their roles as active or passive marketing instruments. Moreover, the researcher identified the main options and conditions for SMEs willing to utilise social media as a commercial tool in order to connect to new consumers in the physical and virtual marketplace as well as advance their marketing operations. While field experience indicates that large companies rather than SMEs are more likely to incorporate social media marketing, the low cost and potential of social media among customers make it extremely attractive for SMEs.

Derham et al. (2011) examined how firms are gaining value from using social media by using a case study approach that focuses on the findings from one New Zealand SME (a restaurant). The values identified from using social media are efficiency, novelty, firm practices, the firm's strategic intent, public practices; these are producing value for the restaurant. There is, however, less evidence of value produced through complementarities or lock-in. Additional sources of value were identified in the study, which were not included in the conceptual model. However, this case study did not disclose evidence of any effect on firm performance. In the same year, Gligorijevic and Leong (2011) used a qualitative methodology to examine how a group of Australian SME managers made use of social media websites to connect, communicate, and maintain their customer base. The researchers applied the case studies of four companies based physically in Victoria, Australia. These companies have a high existence in online consumer groups by being representatives of their businesses and active members of their communities. As a primary research method, the study has used in-depth interviews, and in addition monitored the companies' activities on social media sites such as blogs, micro-blogs, forums, and social networking services. Finally, the researchers identified helpful practices for developing trust, building reputation, and creating brand image in online communities.

Handayan and Lisdianingrum (2011) presented the impact analysis of using Facebook in two SMEs in Indonesia. These businesses are: Inspired twenty-seven and Garlick Store Company. It appears that most SMEs nowadays have adopted Facebook as their marketing medium, yet they have not measured the effectiveness or the impact of the marketing they have done. The study aimed to provide a better understanding of the needs of online marketing for SMEs as well as providing guidelines for Indonesian SMEs when choosing a marketing medium. In addition, Zeiller and Schauer (2011) analysed the motivation, adoption and implementation and the success factors involved in the utilisation of social media with

relation to the collaboration of team members and their benefits. Based on several case studies on the use of social media by SMEs, a standardised case study structure is introduced to provide a set of case studies that allow for in-depth analysis and detailed comparison of multiple case studies.

Razmerita and Kirchner (2011) reviewed the literature related to the introduction of social media in organisations and presented a small case study in an IT consulting company as it introduced wiki-based solutions into its daily operations. The researchers explored the usage and impact of wiki on the knowledge of work followed by a comparison of the findings from the literature review and the case study. The findings show that knowledge processes can start from 'bottom-up' through an initiative that better manages personal knowledge. Additionally, personal and collective knowledge articulation is possible in a more transparent manner. Furthermore, Zekan, Cvrtaka and Šerić (2011) in their article analysed the factors that influenced entrepreneurial communication with its target market through online communication. The study will use a case study approach to present an example of a successful female entrepreneur in Croatia within the craft industry. The selected case study aims to show successful marketing communication strategies for small business ventures. The article concluded that social networks produced significant benefits for the company through continuous communication and by maintaining long-term contact with the final users. This research aims to give clear guidelines to small business entrepreneurs on the new ways of doing business online, and how to use modern technologies in order to make their organisation and their brand better known.

Michaelidou et al. (2011) investigated business-to-business (B2B) SMEs and measured the effectiveness of Social Networking Sites (SNS) particularly the usage and perceived barriers of using SNS as a marketing tool. Using a mail survey, the study found that over a quarter of B2B SMEs are currently using SNS to achieve brand objectives in the UK. In

contrast, the most important barrier of using SNS is the lack of perceived relevance for particular sectors. Remarkably, the majority of users don't assess SNS effectiveness by adopting any metrics. The researchers added that approximately half of the investigated SMEs that currently use SNS have pointed out their intention to increase their marketing spending on SNS as the growing importance of this channel in B2B context.

The following year, Kuitunen (2012), in a thesis aimed at investigating the use of social media in international brand communication, focused on small Finnish design-intensive companies. The study contributes to the research gap in SME branding. The research used mixed methods by applying a questionnaire and multiple case study methods. The questionnaire was used to gather the preliminary data. After that, four case studies of companies were studied in more depth using interviews. The results show that small Finnish design-intensive companies had internationalised quickly after they had been founded, although the share of exports was low in most of them. Also, the results revealed that social media was already widely used in the exporting companies and it is expected to grow further in the future. In addition, Barnes et al. (2012) investigated how SMEs use Web 2.0 to collaborate with other SMEs. The study had two goals: to investigate the benefits from the use of Web 2.0 in SMEs' collaborations, and to differentiate the different types of online collaborations. The study used a qualitative case study methodology by conducting semi-structured interview with 12 UK-based SMEs' owner-managers who are adopters of Web 2.0 technologies in the services sector. The research identified the benefits from the use of Web 2.0 which are categorised as internal operational efficiency, external communications, lifestyle benefits, enhanced capability, and enhanced service offerings. After that, a 2×2 framework was developed to categorise SMEs' collaborations using the level of Web 2.0 and ICT use (simple vs sophisticated) and is the basis for inter-

organisational collaboration (control vs cooperation). The study was limited to a small number of firms from a similar sector, size and location which limits generalisation.

Nakara et al. (2012) analysed SMEs' social media marketing practices. Based on an online survey with 104 SME owner/managers in tourism, seven semi–structured interviews with online marketing consultants, and a netnographic study, this study analysed the place of social media in SMEs by describing their practices, showing that SMEs are not making full use of these tools, and proposing some recommendations to SME owner/managers. In addition, Stockdale et al. (2012) examined how SMEs can gain business value from using social media. First, the research examined the relevant literature involved in the use of social media to identify the key issues. After that, it examined five case studies and its websites. The study found that business values lie primarily in the field of customer engagement and the SMEs' realisation of benefits is strongly influenced by their ability to connect with their customers. It is expected that the findings of this research will promote an understanding of the business value that can be achieved from the use of social media by SMEs. Pentina, Koh and Le (2012) extended the technology acceptance model (TAM) by aiming to discover the role of social influences in the context of social networks marketing (SNM) technology adoption by SMEs. The study found that the adoption of SNM is strongly affected by social influences from competitors, experts, and customers. These social influences have an effect on the intention to adopt SNM technology, both directly and indirectly, by affecting the awareness of technology usefulness. For SMEs who are already using SNM, social influence is the one and only strong determinant for the intention to maintain employing this kind of marketing technology and the amount of experience with this technology would strengthen this relationship.

Harris et al. (2012) aimed to investigate the networking styles of owner/managers of SMEs. The researchers analysed the impact of networking activities on the business growth,

aiming to develop a classification of networking based on a business, its size, and the owner's attitudes to their use of online and offline networking. The researchers analysed the situations in which SMEs adopt Web 2.0 tools to increase their marketing activities by using an online survey of 645 small firms based in the USA, UK and other European countries. The researchers compared the networking behaviours of SMEs using face-to-face versus online modalities, and measured the differences between the size of the business and the home market (USA vs UK vs Europe). The study identified three different categories of networking behaviour in terms of geographic reach and attitude towards scaleability. The researchers demonstrated that effective online networkers are also good face-to-face networkers, as well as showing that successful online networkers can be small and flexible but still "punch above their weight" when compared with larger companies that are usually more traditional in their structure and approach. Cappuccio et al. (2012) investigated the possibility of using social network tools to implement CRM for SMEs. The study reviewed theories on e-business SMEs, social CRM, and successful ways to utilise social network tools for CRM in SMEs. The research focused on how online social CRM services are used as a strategic choice for SMEs to adopt e-business by defining SMEs and identifying the benefits of SMEs doing e-business, as well as discussing strategies and impacts of CRM best practices on SMEs utilising competitive strategy gained from Porter's generic strategy framework.

In the next year, Schaffer (2013) explored how a student-industry project assisted in reducing barriers in the social media usage of small tourism-related businesses. Small tourism-related businesses (with a staff of between 0-19) partnered undergraduate students to manage, monitor, and create various social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The participating businesses included adventure tourism and leisure providers, accommodation, transport (buses and cruises), and community groups. The business-student group partnerships engaged in the projects for seven weeks in 2010 and 2011. In the two-year

project, different student partners and different businesses were involved. Qualitative and quantitative responses were collected using online questionnaires that were administered to participating businesses at the end of each course and a total of fifty (86%) responses were provided. This paper reports on the exploratory research of an ongoing project and is limited to the participating businesses.

In addition, Kim, Lee and Lee (2013) reviewed the major Web 2.0 technologies and presented a conceptual model for Web 2.0 applications which are organised around three major application categories including: social networking, information sharing, and collaboration. Moreover, the researcher analysed SMEs' Web 2.0 usage. The user was classified into three interaction categories: they were business-to-employee-to-employee, business-to-employee-to-consumer, and business-to-employee-to-business. The study analysed the Web 2.0 practices of 100 US SMEs by collecting data from the websites of the fifty 'best SMEs' in America in 2009 and another fifty SMEs were randomly chosen from an SME online source - "manta.com". *T*-tests were conducted for statistical analysis. The study found that although the fifty 'best SMEs' adopted Web 2.0 to some extent, other SMEs need to connect with consumers and to remain competitive by increasing their efforts to improve their performance.

Meske and Stieglitz (2013) examined the adoption, usage, and benefits of social media and SMEs in addition to the potential concerns that may prevent SMEs from wider adoption of social media. The study conducted a survey by decision-makers of German SMEs with 190 responses. The findings indicated that German SMEs started to use internal social media such as wikis and blogs in order to support collaboration between employees and improve knowledge management. On the other hand, German SMEs still face some problems in managing social media adoption and in identifying relevant business values. Moreover, Wamba and Carter (2013) combined an emerging literature on social media, social

commerce, and the diffusion of innovation (DIO) to identify the role that managerial, organisational, and environmental characteristics play in the adoption of Twitter by SMEs. To test the model, the researchers administered a survey questionnaire to 453 SME managers from the following countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and India. The results indicated that the firm's age, geographic location, and innovativeness have a significant impact on Twitter adoption by SMEs.

Jamal, Coughlan and Kamal (2013) inverted the traditional method to personalisation by conceptualising the restrictions of data mining in social networks by using privacy concern as the guide. Data was collected in the period of the failed launch of Beacon (third party marketing initiative by Facebook). By a qualitative investigation of 95 blogs containing 568 comments, a thematic analysis resulted in the development of classification of privacy concerns that offers a concrete means for electronic businesses to better understand Social Networking Sites (SNS) business landscape particularly with regard to the limits of the acceptance and use of personalised marketing in social networks. In addition, Bunker, Rajendran, Corbin and Pearce (2013) examined the inter-relationships among concepts such as identity, involvement, norm, and word-of-mouth actions in the context of the Facebook 'like' feature. Based on a preliminary study and an electronic survey that the researchers developed and tested, several propositions related to customers and non-customers' situations among likers. Few of the propositions are supported, but there were some surprising findings as well. These have suggestions for managers who are struggling to persuade people to 'like' their products/companies.

The previous studies could be organised in the following research themes in Table 1

Table 1: Research themes emerged from the Literature Analysis

Topic	Studies
Use of SM as a Marketing tool for SMEs	Bulearca and Bulearca (2010); Chua et al. (2009); Constantinides (2008); Constantinides (2010); Constantinides

	et al. (2010); Handayan and Lisdianingrum (2011); Harris et al. (2012); Jamal et al. (2013); Michaelidou et al. (2011); Nakara et al. (2012); Pentina et al. (2012); Zekan et al. (2011)
Use of SM to connect with consumers	Blinn et al. (2009); Bunker et al. (2013); Cappuccio et al. (2012); Gligorijevic and Leong (2011); Kim et al. (2013); Meske and Stieglitz (2013); Wamba and Carter (2013); Zhang and Fjermestad (2008)
Use of SM to gain business value for SMEs	Derham et al. (2011); Stockdale et al. (2012)
SM for team members' collaboration in SMEs	Barnes et al. (2012); Zeiller and Schauer (2011)
SM and internationalisation for SMEs	Hassouneh and Brengman (2008); Kuitunen (2012)
Reduce SM usage barriers for SMEs	Schaffer (2013)
The impact of SM on the knowledge of work in SMEs	Razmerita and Kirchner (2011)

Discussion: Research gap and future lines of research

The analysis of the studies indicated that social media has found to be a helpful tool for reaching potential customers, listening to the customers' voice, creating extensive business networks (Constantinides et al., 2010), managing reputation, developing customer trust and loyalty, and gathering marketing intelligence (Nakara et al., 2012). In addition, social media produced significant benefits for companies by continuous communication and maintaining long-term contact with the final users (Zekan et al., 2011). It appears that most SMEs nowadays have adopted Facebook as their marketing medium (Handayan & Lisdianingrum, 2011). Besides, it was found that Twitter is a critical platform, especially if companies want to listen to and influence consumer opinion (Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). In fact, the adoption of social network marketing is strongly affected by social influences from competitors, experts, and customers (Pentina et al., 2012). On the other hand, SMEs are not making full use of these tools (Nakara et al., 2012). SMEs could employ the various Web 2.0 instruments in order to improve customer relations, market their products, and enhance

internal operations (Constantinides, 2008). The low cost and potential of social media among customers make it extremely attractive for SMEs (Constantinides, 2010). The most important barrier of using social media is the lack of perceived relevance for particular sectors (Michaelidou et al., 2011).

- *Measure the effectiveness and the impact of social media marketing tools for SMEs*

- *Use a quantitative analysis approach for social media marketing for SMEs*

- *Examine how SMEs' characteristics and industry influence the uses of different social media marketing tools*

SMEs need to connect with consumers and to remain competitive by increasing their efforts to improve their performance (Kim et al., 2013). Social media is helpful for developing trust, building reputations, and creating a brand image in online communities (Gligorijevic & Leong, 2011). SMEs started to use internal social media such as wikis and blogs in order to support collaboration between employees and improve knowledge management (Meske & Stieglitz, 2013). In addition, Instant Messaging was found to be beneficial to SMEs in several ways (Zhang & Fjermestad, 2008). Some studies indicated that a firm's age, geographic location, and innovativeness have a significant impact on Twitter adoption by SMEs (Wamba & Carter, 2013). In contrast, SMEs still face some problems in managing social media adoption and in identifying relevant business values (Wamba & Carter, 2013).

- *Analyse the relationship between consumers' loyalty and social media*

- *Identify the role of social media on consumer purchasing habits*

- *Analyse specific social media tools including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to highlight their role and benefits for SMEs in connecting with consumers*

- *Investigate how to effectively integrate all customer channels by the use of social media within the limited resources of SMEs*

Only two studies have analysed the use of social media to gain a business value for SMEs. In fact, the values identified from using social media are efficiency, novelty, firm practices, the firm's strategic intent and public practices (Derham et al., 2011). In addition, SMEs are gaining value from significantly improving their business website traffic. Business values lie primarily in the field of customer engagement. Furthermore, the SMEs' realisation of benefits is strongly influenced by their ability to connect with their customers and provide information and knowledge to increase reputation and create trust to gain a competitive advantage (Stockdale et al., 2012).

- ***Examine the developments of SMEs from theoretical perspectives to gain deep insights in the rapidly emerging field of social media to gain business value***

- ***Investigate how to develop social media strategies to gain business values for SMEs in both internal and external uses***

While investigating how small businesses use social media to work collaboratively with other small businesses, it has been found that the benefits from the use of social media are categorised as internal operational efficiency, external communications, lifestyle benefits, enhanced capability, and enhanced service offerings (Barnes et al., 2012). Top management support of the social media activities as well as operational and technical support for users is a key success factor which is much more dominant in SMEs than in large enterprises. Furthermore, the most important motivating factors in SMEs are the improvements in working procedures and processes. In fact, social media helps people to work more efficiently in their business. In SMEs, team members are highly motivated to use social media as these tools provide a significant amount of relevant high quality and up-to-date content (Zeiller & Schauer, 2011).

- ***Examine if social media tools have made it easier for SMEs to adopt ICT and e-commerce in their business operations and collaboration with other SMEs***

- ***Investigate if management support of social media is higher among SMEs' collaboration than large enterprises***

Two studies have been identified that analyse the role of social media on SMEs' internationalisation. It has been found that social media tools and virtual worlds offer SMEs a unique opportunity to obtain experiential knowledge about foreign markets that allow them to make decisions about their internationalisation strategy while building their brand before entering the foreign markets and inter-nationalise faster (Hassouneh & Brengman, 2008). In addition, social media is found to be already widely used in the exporting companies and it is expected to grow further in the future (Kuitunen, 2012).

- ***Measure the effectiveness of social media for SMEs' internationalisation***

- ***Investigate how SMEs use social media to communicate with other SMEs to internationalise faster***

- ***Investigate the international perspectives of SMEs' branding communications***

One approach for overcoming social media adoption barriers is to provide an opportunity for small businesses to participate in student-based projects. Co-operative learning can be the main useful outcome for small businesses in overcoming social media adoption and usage barriers. Furthermore, this opportunity enables comprehensive networks for learning (Schaffer, 2013)*.*

- ***Identify the opportunities to work with students to reduce e-commerce adoption barriers by the use of social media and create benefits for SMEs***

Only one study has investigated the impact of social media on the knowledge of work in SMEs. The study found that knowledge processes can start from 'bottom-up' through an initiative that better manages personal knowledge. Furthermore, personal and cooperative knowledge sharing is possible in a more transparent manner (Razmerita & Kirchner, 2011)

- ***Quantitative analysis of social media usage for knowledge management in SMEs***

Conclusion

Despite the introduction and implementation of different social media tools for SMEs, businesses and consumers are slow in adopting social media for running their businesses. Based on the extensive literature reviewed, only 28 studies have been identified from 2008 to 2013, this means that the topic is still new and more research needs to be taking place within this field. There is limited research and more research needs to take place specifically using a quantitative approach or mixed methods. SMEs could benefit from social media in building their brand before entering the foreign markets and thereby internationalise faster. SMEs started to use social media to support collaboration between employees and improve knowledge management. In addition, social media has found to be a helpful tool for reaching potential customers, listening to customers' voices, creating extensive business networks, managing reputations, developing customer trust and loyalty, and gathering marketing intelligence. The adoption of social network marketing is strongly affected by social influences from competitors, experts, and customers. SMEs' realisation of the benefits of business value is strongly influenced by their ability to connect with their customers and their marketing strategy. SMEs still face some problems in managing social media adoption and in identifying relevant business values. Therefore, measuring the impact of social media marketing for SMEs, analysing the relationship between consumer loyalty and social media, and measuring the effectiveness of social media for SMEs internationalisation would be beneficial for businesses in the worldwide context. This paper reviewed the literature on SMEs' adoption of e-commerce using social media. It will contribute to the field and assist future research by investigating previously related studies and proposing further research directions after highlighting literature gaps within the field.

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