Integrated Marketing Communications and Social Media

Systematic approach to social media incorporation into IMC strategies
Abstract

It is commonly held in current marketing communication literature that social media is immensely influential to business and that integrated marketing communications (IMC) concept is the most recent advancement managing marketing communications. While correct, yet there was no significant contribution integrating social media into IMC.

The fundamental purpose of this study was to discover and develop theoretical and systematic approach to social media incorporation into integrated marketing communication strategies that would be applicable to marketing practice. Sequential aim was to address the issue of wide theory/practice gap by contrasting IMC’s theoretical foundations and integral means of social media that were available at contemporary academic literature to the knowledge and experience of experts working in their local contexts. Finally, a certain focus was put on providing the relevant outcome and practical recommendations regarding the issues emerging while implementing the construct.

In regards to theoretical part, most recent and relevant literature of IMC and social media integral means was reviewed and critically assessed. As a result, theoretical framework of systematic approach was constructed. Conceptual proposal of Jerry Kliatchko served as a foundation for IMC and other three academic proposals were to enhance social media utilization and integration within IMC strategy.

With respect to empirical research, phenomenological enquiry was initiated in order to explain the IMC and social media phenomena from individual perspective of marketing communication experts. Several marketing communication experts from local advertising agencies were interviewed and descriptions provided were explicitated. Empirical results were used to evaluate, adjust and validate the theoretical construct of social media integration within IMC strategies.

Consequently it was found that with certain adjustments construct could be practically used by marketers, though with one condition – tools proving the efficiency of social media must be present in order to utilise the guidance at daily business basis. Consequently, this issue was addressed and final construct was supplemented with recommendation to use Google Analytics. Moreover, in order to reduce theory/practice gap, academics were encouraged to shift understanding of relevance and embrace mixed methods as well as to move away from positivistic methodologies while further exploring the topic and issues discovered.
Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 2
Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 5
  Problem Statement ............................................................................................................. 6
  Structure ............................................................................................................................ 6
  Methodology of Conducting Literature Review ................................................................. 7
  Delimitations ..................................................................................................................... 8
Literature Review .................................................................................................................. 8
  Integrated Marketing Communications ............................................................................. 9
    Revisiting the IMC construct, Four Pillars of IMC ......................................................... 9
  Social Media ...................................................................................................................... 14
    The Use of Social Networking Sites .............................................................................. 14
  Social Media and Its Role in Direct and Interactive IMC: Implications for Practitioners and Educators ........................................................................................................ 16
  Social Media: The New Hybrid Element of the Promotion Mix ........................................ 19
Concluding Literature and Constructing Theoretical Framework ......................................... 21
Closing the Gap between the Theory and Practice and Linking Literature with Empirical Research ......................................................................................................................... 23
Expectations ......................................................................................................................... 27
Empirical Research .............................................................................................................. 28
  Recruitment of Relevant Experts ...................................................................................... 29
  Arrangements and Access: The Problem Gaining Entry ..................................................... 30
  The Phenomenological Approach and Interview as Data Collection Method .................. 31
    Phenomenological Approach .......................................................................................... 31
    Interview as Data Collection Method ............................................................................. 32
  Data Storing Methods ....................................................................................................... 33
  The Phenomenological Analysis ....................................................................................... 34
  Quality and Trustworthiness of Study .............................................................................. 37
  Results: IMC, Social Media and Reflections of Practice .................................................... 40
Discussion ............................................................................................................................ 42
  Comparing Empirical Research Results with Literature .................................................. 42
  Delimitations .................................................................................................................... 45
Implications .......................................................................................................................... 45
Implications for Academics ................................................................................................. 45
Implications for Practitioners........................................................................................................... 46
Conclusion........................................................................................................................................... 47
Bibliography ......................................................................................................................................... 49
Appendices.......................................................................................................................................... 54

Characters (no spaces): 130 017
Introduction

During the past decade, the role of technological development has risen to an absolutely new level. Given the advances in technology, Internet accessibility and mobility, such phenomenon brought substantial changes into consumers’ lives. In very short time World Wide Web has dramatically influenced the way people communicate shop, work, learn, and stay connected. More efficiently than ever before they can access, share, exchange the information as well as communicate in real-time no matter where they are or what are they doing. Moreover, the emergence of another widely recognized phenomenon known as social media enabled consumers to do even more and even more efficiently and conveniently. Such form of media “describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues” (Blackshaw & Nazzaro , 2004).

Today social media, also referred to as consumer-generated media (CGM) is continuously growing in both number and format on the Internet. It also to be referred to any number of online word-of-mouth vehicles, including but not limited to: consumer-to-consumer e-mail, postings on public Internet discussion boards/forums, Usenet newsgroups and listservs, consumer ratings Web sites or forums, blogs (short for Web logs), moblogs (sites where users post digital images/photos/movies), vlogs (video blogs), social networking Web sites and individual Web sites. Although influenced or stimulated by traditional marketers and marketing activities, online word of mouth is nonetheless owned and controlled by consumers, and it often carries far higher credibility and trust than traditional media, especially as media channels become more fragmented and less trusted. The growth of CGM’s influence poses challenges and opportunities for marketers (Blackshaw & Nazzaro , 2004).

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is one of the great initiatives to develop a guiding principle organizations follow to communicate with their target markets taken by academics during past decades. Integrated marketing communications attempts to coordinate and control the various elements of the promotional mix – advertising, personal selling, public relations, publicity, direct marketing, and sales promotion – to produce a unified customer-focused message, and, therefore, achieve various organizational objectives (Boone and Kurtz, 2007). However, though IMC is tightly tied to the lives of consumers at home, at work, and on the go, it has experienced substantial changes since its inception. Basically those changes are resulting from two primary shifts in the relationship between marketers and consumers.

The first shift emerges from technological development perspective. As consumers’ lives change, given the current explosion of advances in technology itself, accessibility of Internet, mobility and efficiency, so are the modes and strategies of marketing communications. That was the basic premise of the integrated marketing communication movement that attempted to align and coordinate the firm’s external marketing communication activities so that a clear and concise message was being communicated (Schultz D. , 2009). However, IMC reliance on mass media communication shifted to more recent emphasis on personalized one-on-one promotions. Over the past decades it has included the use of mail and newspapers to telephone, radio and television, to email and mobile phone, and most importantly – digital means such as social media.
Another shift concerns the approach integrated marketing communication took while communicating with its audience. It started by following the transaction orientation back in early days, then, during the late 1980s the multidisciplinary study of integrated marketing communication was born in United States. From the pioneering work of Northwestern University Medill School of Journalism, in cooperation with the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4As) and Association of National Advertisers in United States in 1991 to the mid-2000s, scholarly work on IMC has evolved from a limited view of coordinating communication tools to a strategic process (Madhavaram et al., 2005). During the last decade the concept of IMC witnessed a couple of significant changes in its paradigm. The main focus shifted from just a tactical coordination and inward-looking mindset of traditional organizations of the past to the strategic coordination and an outward-looking orientation (i.e. IMC is customer or audience-centric) (Kliatchko, 2008).

**Problem Statement**

Despite these trends, from academic perspective, understanding of how social media is to be incorporated into integrated marketing communication strategies remains limited in scope. There is lack of systematic studies of social media influence on IMC, optimal approach for both social media management and implementation within organization’s business processes (i.e. IMC). Other than that, it is evident that social media is extremely efficient (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004; Sago, 2010; Fisher, 2009), yet there is a little investigation how it could be exploited within IMC strategies (Mangold et al., 2009). Accordingly, there is no consensus reached in terms of measuring social media effectiveness (Fisher, 2009).

Though the concept of social media seems to be problematic from systematic approach, most of latter mentioned problems come from lack of understanding what actually IMC is, what is current and up-to-date state of IMC in both theoretical surroundings and business perspective (Kliatchko, 2008), (Kitchen et al., 2004). As a result, ungrounded theoretical foundation is a primary obstacle towards integrating social media.

Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to explore the interrelation between integrated marketing communications concept and recent social media phenomenon from both academic and business practice perspectives. In other words, it is to address the issue of wide theory/practice gap by contrasting theoretical foundations of IMC and integral means of social media into IMC processes/strategies that are available at contemporary academic literature to the knowledge and experience of experts working in their local contexts. Specifically, this paper is aimed to focus on current paradigm of IMC, its current status both in literature and business practice, implications of IMC for marketing communication practitioners and development of IMC. Moreover, it is also intended to focus on social media concept, its management as well as to explore to which extent social media can be incorporated and exploited within IMC’s strategies from both academic and practice perspectives. Here it is asked “What is the systematic theoretical approach towards integrating social media within IMC strategies that would be applicable in practice; and how emerging problems could be solved if there are any?”

**Structure**

Accordingly, the Figure 1 below illustrates objective-tied structure of the paper.
The first part of paper is dedicated to the conceptual background of both IMC as the basis of organization’s communication in consumer’s market and social media as the communication mean. In the sense that the first part is about exploring theoretical implications, consequently, the second part is dedicated for researching the phenomena from perspective of marketing communication experts at their local contexts. The phenomenological enquiry was chosen in regards of fundamental aim of the paper. Latter enables to explain the phenomena of IMC and social media in respect to marketing communication experts who are ones to actually make use of them. Finally, the results are to be presented, juxtaposed with the theoretical perspective resulting in broad discussion. Theoretical construct is to be appropriately adjusted; emerging problems are to be addressed and dealt as further implications are to be discussed in depth in regards to both academic and business context.

As the following section is dedicated for literature review, choice of methodology is to be explained as well as actual methodology of conducting the review is to be introduced. Moreover, it is to be supplemented with delimitations that frame the scope of this paper.

Methodology of Conducting Literature Review

As there is an essential need for systematic approach integrating social media into IMC processes, which also serves as the main goal of this paper, the literature review is aimed at unfolding the contemporary state of theoretical robustness of the IMC from social media perspective that is currently available in academic literature. However, as previously justified, the current tendencies of contemporary academic knowledge production suppose the assumption that some of the academic theories in this field might be found to be irrelevant. Nevertheless, the selection of the most relevant literature is to be reviewed and critically assessed. To maintain the order, the systematic approach is to be followed (Cronin et al., 2008). Two main themes, Integrated Marketing Communications and Social Media, are accented while emphasizing such factors as mutual interrelation, up-to-date developments and relevance which are mostly supposed by a very recent nature of issue.

The sources of the literature vary from the common Google Scholar search-engine feature to the more specialized Aarhus University Library search-engine and Business Source Complete. The keywords used to find the material mostly consisted of “integrated marketing communications”, “IMC”,

Figure 1, objective-tied structure of the paper.
“construct”, “social media”, “paradigm”, “social network”, “integration”, “integrated marketing communications” and various combinations of them while using the Boolean operators. Given the current advances in technology and development it is possible to assume that such search inquiries are effective enough to provide the sufficient results. Consequently, the initial collection of academic materials was gathered.

As the selection criterion was established, the initial collection was reduced to the appropriate and relevant amount. However, it is worth to mention the breadth of literature sourced was not adequate between two themes. For example, while the inquiry “integrated marketing communications” for the primary literature provided a number of results, the “integrated marketing communications AND social media” inquire reflected very limited outcome. Assuming the limited resources, all the search-engines were utilized but unfortunately with no considerable success.

The final selection of articles is illustrated in Figure 2 below. Accordingly, the literature review is to follow this structure onwards.

### Theme “Integrated Marketing Communication”


### Theme “Social Media”


*Figure 2, selection of themes and articles to be reviewed and critically assessed*

### Delimitations

The scope of this paper is tightly limited within theory of integrated marketing communications as well as integral means of social media within IMC strategies that are available at contemporary academic literature. Such areas as marketing planning, implementation of IMC, or social media marketing are out of interest here. Although one could see direct link between them, inclusion would result in extreme deviations, excessive content and blurry focus on what is aimed to achieve in this paper. In respect to latter mentioned and limited resources at given situation, choice to stick with initial selection is made.

### Literature Review
Referring to the previous discussion, during the recent past integrated marketing communications has undergone significant changes since its inception. Namely these changes are resulting from two substantial shifts in the relation among marketers and consumers. The first shift results from technological development perspective and directly points towards the one of two distinguished themes in this review “Social Media”. Another shift appeals to a different approach integrated marketing communications took in terms of communicating with its audiences and refers to the second distinguished theme “Integrated Marketing Communication”. In this paper, the approach is adopted that IMC is to serve as the basis for the organization’s communication in consumer market; therefore the associate literature is to be treated as central to the topic as well as requires in-depth analysis.

Integrated Marketing Communications

Revisiting the IMC construct, Four Pillars of IMC

The conceptual and theoretical paper “Revisiting the IMC construct” (2008) by Jerry Kliatchko from University of Asia and the Pacific attempts to propose the most up-to-date definition of IMC, in-depth investigation on IMC development, reflections to the issues as well as a clear and explicit formulation of IMC implementation to the business organizations. It is aimed towards the revision and re-examination of IMC definition previously published by him and additional improvements. It is worth to mention that previous work “Towards a new definition of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC)” by Kliatchko (2005) is used as a foundation to this new construct. As an outcome, Kliatchko suggests that theoretical foundations and definitional issues of IMC continue to be important and are of research for most academics. Moreover, he introduces conceptualized view of the four pillars of IMC as an additional improvement to the proposed and revised definition as well as the discussion of each pillar in-depth. Finally, the paper resumes by illustration of the interrelation among the pillars and levels of IMC. Although the fact that revision paper was chosen over the one with original roots of the new concept might seem a bit controversial, latter was excluded mainly due to the outdated and incomplete views when compared to the 2008 edition. The essence remains present and only in certain cases it is to be referred.

As the foundation of paper, Kliatchko offers the extensive review of IMC research topics from 1990 to 2006. Decision is argued by one of the supplementary goals of the paper to ‘...cover some of the pivotal issues that are still confronting the development of the IMC concept, and seeks to provide some contribution to IMC literature in its search for an acceptable and suitable definition, as well as identify the parameters and constructs that are necessary to move forward’ (Kliatchko, 2008, p.134). This ambitious aim is supported by primary source, namely research by (Swain, 2004). In his research, Swain conducted the internet survey among samples of six professional groups relating to marketing communication. The results of quantitative analysis revealed some clustering of leadership preferences but little movement toward marketing communication measurement and agency compensation methods consistent with models of IMC as a developing paradigm (Swain, 2004). Although Swain is concerned dealing with various aspects around the IMC and then referring to inconsistency with IMC concept, Kliatchko adopts a quite straight-forward standpoint of recommendation and moves on by reviewing two past decades of IMC research topics.
Despite a “loose” argumentation, the research topics on IMC from 1990 to 2006 are presented in coherent and systematic way. Chronological approach is adopted and exploited to examine the emergence of the IMC topic over the past two decades. As the result, Kliatchko identifies three general fields of research that became present in 2000 and continued to be significant onwards. They go as follows: (1) IMC and interactive media, media synergy and media planning; (2) IMC and branding issues; (3) IMC and internal marketing. Although the analysis of IMC topics review would be unnecessary due to the extensive extent, it is essential to mention that a brief outlook to the primary sources used, reflected the dominance of positivistic methodologies (Nowak, G.J. & Phelps, J., 1994; Grein, A.F. & Gould, S.J., 1996; Gronstedt, 1996; Phelps, J. & Johnson, E., 1996; McArthur, D.N. & Griffin, T, 1997; Gould, S.J., Lerman, D.B. & Grein, A.F., 1999; Kitchen, P. J., Shultz, D. E., Kim, I., Han D., Li T., 2004). Consequently, the findings imply the assumption that historical development of IMC theoretical foundation is highly influenced by the positivistic approach and unexceptionally, Kliatchko relies on it as well.

The actual definition Kliatchko proposes is derivation of the one suggested in his previous work (2005). The main difference is the inclusion of the fourth pillar ‘content’ which is mainly argued by the importance of aspect of the content or messages contained and delivered through IMC programmes. Another improvement is the adoption of the term ‘business process’. Despite that content is quite implicit itself in marketing communications, Kliatchko expresses the belief of the importance to state it in the definition ‘... as content is the very impetus that induces persuasion in communication, and in turn causes behavioural effects on the target audience - a core principle of IMC.’ (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 140). Regardless the implicit agreement and the relevance it provides to the main thesis of this paper, such argumentation is can only be treated as personal opinion lacking the credible support. As it is an addition to definition, it requires an appropriate attention. On the other hand, referring to another improvement, Kliatchko supports his proposal by the work of Schultz and Schultz (1998) and states the key difference in the use of ‘business process’ – phrase ‘audience-driven’ summons the centricity that IMC gives to relevant publics. The final result is:

"IMC is audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programs” (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 140)

Consequently, Kliatchko moves on explaining the IMC definition he proposed. Namely, he distinguishes two complementary elements (1) IMC as an audience-driven business process and (2) the four pillars of IMC. To get a sense of their meaning, impact and relevance as well as overview the main content, following paragraphs are devoted for such intent.

**IMC as an audience-driven business process**

Basically, Kliatchko explains this element as comprising of various angles of the centrality given to multiple audiences and publics in connection to the stimulus for all business decisions. The support comes from echoing the new communication paradigm, namely outside-in approach, as well as defining the business process on two, corporate and operational, levels. However, the progression of marketing communication approach from merely inward-looking to the current outward-looking one is not a news for both academics and practitioners (Kitchen, 2005; Holm, 2006). Kliatchko, in this case, relies on rephrased definition coming from Shultz (2004) as such approach suppose ‘demand chain’ rather than out-dated ‘supply chain’. Unfortunately, the same picture is brought by Kliatchko’s
proposal to look at IMC business process from two perspectives – corporate and operational levels. Despite the new form of representation and rephrased definitions of strategic and management issues, the essence remains extremely similar or, depending on the point of view, the same as presented in Holm’s (2006) paper and originally developed by Smith et al (1999). Smith et al (1999) developed a tool to show the marketing integration occurring at one or more of seven levels and directly corresponds to Kliatchko’s proposal. However, direct referencing and arguing are missing.

**Four pillars of IMC**

Regarding the second element of Kliatchko’s definition, author points out the advantage of the four pillar (stakeholders, content, channels, results) rendering as it actually captures the various principles around the IMC concept originally coming from his previous work (Kliatchko J, 2005). The main principle of such is the closed-loop model within fixed time-frame allowing the ‘…feedback mechanism of measurement, evaluation and analysis that will impact future directions for succeeding programmes.’ (See the Figure 7 in Appendices) (Kliatchko, 2008). Given the cycle, four pillars are to be treated as premises and results of the IMC process.

(1) **Stakeholders.** Appealing to Shultz and Shultz (1998) position, Kliatchko refers the term ‘stakeholders’ to both external (customers, consumers, prospects etc.) and internal (employees, managers etc.) audiences as it is typical to the corporation organization. The emphasis is set to the customer-centric approach while entire IMC process places the target market at the core of business process aiming to effectively address their needs, wants and establish long-term and profitable relationships with them (Kliatchko J, 2005; Kliatchko, 2008). It is to be done by employing the use of databases containing customer data such as demographic and transactional data. Moreover, in regards to this pillar, Kliatchko also addresses the need to link external audience-related marketing activities to the internal marketing as it fosters the progress towards the customer-orientated employees.

(2) **Content.** As the newest inclusion and improvement in the definition of IMC, this pillar attracts a lot of attention, intentionally due to the main interest of this thesis. Here Kliatchko adopts the differentiation of content, namely the messages and incentives (Schultz, D.E. & Schultz, H.F., 2004). He continues by addressing the advances of technology that are becoming accessible world-wide and resulting to what he calls “participatory media” or “citizen media” and what it is referred to the terms “CGM” and “social media” adopted in this thesis. Kliatchko supports this fact of new type media emergence by the survey conducted by Economist (2006) and continues without any in-depth contemplation. Nevertheless he offers an insight to the new content creation model which mirrors the difference of traditional content creation model and the new one, namely interactive paradigm (See the Figure 8 in Appendices). It is the one where audiences are both creators and receivers of the content and the level of control media firms and marketers possess is reduced. Once again, no further or deeper speculation is offered.

(3) **Channel.** In connection to the outside-in approach, or customer centricity, Kliatchko offers the new outlook - instead of bombarding consumers by all possible means of contact to achieve maximum exposure, IMC media planning should decide according to the perspective of consumer. He offers to conduct brand contact audit as well as examine customer’s actual path to purchase that would result in an identification of actual contact points and channels that customer actually prefers. As it is further argued, content loses its potential and value if
inappropriate audience is reached. Moreover, in regards to the channels, Kliatchko suggest to pay more and more attention to the growing phenomenon of simultaneous media exposure and usage as well as changing media consumption habits of audiences today. Mostly it is influenced by the paper of Schultz and Pilotta (2004) where media advertising is questioned in today’s global and interconnected context.

(4) Results. The need for result assessment over the set objectives has always been essential for the business organizations. Quite the same applies to the IMC programmes where such aspect always was at the top of discussion when questioning the theoretical foundation of IMC (Reid, 2003; Ratnatunga et al., 2005). In response, Kliatchko adopts the view of Schultz and Walters (1997) which appeals to the behavioural responses and outcomes of IMC programmes. Both means suppose the need for accountability and thus Kliatchko offers the ROCI (return-on-customer-investments) – the predicted incremental sales achieved by investing in specific customers (Kliatchko, 2008). Accordingly, the measurement of IMC programmes then follows the predictive modelling approach that focuses on customer that generate returns for the brand, and estimating the impact and effect that various brand marketing investments have on the actual programme (Schultz, D.E. & Schultz, H.F, 2005). It must be mentioned that such measurement proposal is well-argued. Kliatchko states that it provides the opportunity to effectively manage firm’s limited resources when targeting the audience by evaluating customer. Moreover, ROCI reflects the returns to the firm as well as assesses the wealth contribution of investments made in target customers (Kliatchko, 2008). Unfortunately, there is no support by any empirical study that would confirm the credibility of such suggestion.

Having the explained definition and its complementary contents, Kliatchko finally arrives at the point concerning the implementation of IMC programmes in organization. The actual process is presented in the rendering of two main elements, namely the four stages model by Schultz and Schultz (1998) and four pillars of IMC proposed by Kliatchko.

(1) Tactical coordination. On the basis of paper by Duncan and Caywood (1996) Kliatchko states that despite the emphasis put on channel coordination at this stage, the final goal is primarily the delivery and reception of a clear and consistent message (content) for maximum communication influence (Kliatchko, 2008). However, the reach for recipients is to be treated as ultimate objective.

(2) Redefining the scope of marketing communications. At this stage, emphasis is put on pillar “channels”. Kliatchko suggests that at this stage there is a need to identify the channels for delivering appropriate content on the basis of customer’s preferences. More relevant messages are said to be delivered with more accuracy and result in increased IMC effectiveness. However, no arguing is present in this case.

(3) Application of information technology. On the basis of the advances in IT, Kliatchko suggest the need to employ customer databases containing empirical data to deepen the knowledge of their targeted audiences, so-called shareholders. As the result, it should provide various valuation tools and techniques. Once again it must be mentioned that no further support is present in this case either.

(4) Strategic and financial integration. According to Kliatchko, this is the final level of implementation as it is assumed that previous three were completed. At his stage, financial measurements are to serve as the indication of success/failure in regards of IMC.
This implies that with the efficient use of IT, the accurate target audience was identified and evaluated, preferred channels were set and clear and consistent content was delivered. Consequently, all this implementation process should result in positive ROCI.

Despite the effort Kliatchko puts in interrelation of his development of pillars between the four stages implementation model, the actual presentation seems to lack rigidity, clarity and empirical support. Even the expression author uses highlights the latter notion “In fact, all the four pillars may be said to be present in each of the four levels of IMC to a lesser or greater extent, but with one pillar being given prominence at each level” (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 153). In addition, the previously discussed principle, on which Kliatchko rely his definitional credibility, implies the contradiction. The closed-loop model within fixed time frame as well as the treatment of four pillars as antecedents and consequences at the same time, suppose the doubt. To maintain the good flow and effectiveness of IMC programme, one requires rigid compatibility among four pillars and continuous adjustments regarding the dynamic nature of marketing communications. On the other hand, if this interplay of levels and pillars of IMC is to be treated as an attempt to find the relation of author’s conceptual development to the recognized ways of implementation, such effort is fine, however, lacking empirical support. In the same way it might be treated as the same thing just presented the way around and that is not the feature of quality paper.

To conclude the conceptual/theoretical by Kliatchko (2008) a few notions must be present. First of all, as one of the newest entries of this topic, it is quite significant contribution towards the robust theoretical foundation of integrated marketing communication (Kliatchko J, 2005). Namely, it addresses the main issues concerning the historical development of IMC concept as well as it covers contemporary ones. Secondly, it offers one of the most advanced definitions of IMC available (Kliatchko J., 2009). The one, proposed by Kliatchko, emphasizes the centricity of audience in terms of business process while accounting for the main attributes of IMC foundation, namely, four pillars, and aiming at successful execution of brand communication programmes. Thirdly, the dynamic process applying each of the four pillars when implementing IMC programmes was fully-pictured as well. In addition, the changing media behavioural patterns among audiences and its tremendous impact on central tenet of IMC were apparent in Kliatchko’s proposal.

Nevertheless, some inconsistencies and contradictions need to be addressed as well. First of all, in regards to the historical development of IMC theory and the research in this field, the impact of modern marketing theory is said to be consequential. Marketing today is thoroughly postmodern in practice, especially at its leading edge in the economically advanced North American, West European, and East Asian settings, but modern in terms of its theoretical and philosophical constructs (Firat et al., 1995). However, despite the previously discussed call for moving away from positivism, quite contrary applies for the proposal by Kliatchko. As Robson and Rowe (1997) argues “...marketing cannot claim to have developed a theory and most of the current debate is lodged within the modernism/postmodernism debate. Dialectical discourse using phenomenology or systems theory is merely the start of reconstruction”. In regards, the support by qualitative research is highly recommended as this concept is merely built on studies exploring quantifiable relationships of perceptions and theoretical attributes.

Despite the brief dialectical discourse, the Kliatchko’s proposal is to be treated as possessing valuable outcome, especially in relation to thesis of this paper. It mirrors the state of contemporary
academic knowledge in this field and the theoretical positions lying behind. It is relevant in the academic realm, however, doubtful in the practical one. By taking this conceptual/theoretical proposal by Kliatchko (2008) as the premise for further research in this paper, it will be addressed later. At the moment, literature review continues by critically exploring a few primary sources and shifting the focus to the second theme “Social Media”, however, maintaining the relation to the latter and central one “IMC”.

In order to get a sense of what academic literature suggests in terms of incorporating social media into IMC programmes, a following part of literature review is dedicated to achieve this goal. A selection of up-to-date primary sources is to be reviewed providing different perspectives on this issue.

**Social Media**

**The Use of Social Networking Sites**

The empirical research paper by Michael Obal, Gordon Burtch and Werner Kunz (2011) “How can social networking sites help us?” published in International Journal of Integrated Marketing Communications offers the study analysing the influence of weak-tie advice in comparison to strong-tie advice across search, experience and credence products Obal et al. (2011). The authors accounted for recent changes in word-of-mouth (WOM) communications caused by the appearance of social networking sites (SNSs). As they are enabling consumers to interact on the basis of new communication paradigm, SNSs provide the extreme depth and reach in marketing efforts. However, proving the previous presumption, authors posit the lack of optimal and systematic approaches to incorporate SNSs into a firm’s IMC strategies. Consequently, quantitative research was conducted and an outcome presented. They identify that reliance on strong-tie advice over the weak-tie advice has the lowest influence for search goods consumers and they also are more likely to consider weak-tie advice for search goods than consumers of experience or credence products. As a result, the recommendation to place SNSs at the core of IMC strategies for search product providers is emphasized, while combination of SNSs with other IMC promotional tools for experience and credence products providers is also advised. However, to get a broader picture of relevance to this study, following paragraphs are to provide critical assessment and insights.

The research paper follows a tidy order and good structuring while leading the reader throughout the study. The main problem is well-defined and supported by academic literature contributions. The purposive literature review starts from early works in a field of WOW communications and progresses towards social networking analysis. Early but well-recognized Granovetter’s work “The Strength of Weak Ties” (Granovetter, 1973;1983) serves as a strong background and many other contributions are cited relating such fields as social networking, marketing, online consumerism, and online social networking websites. Moreover, section regarding information economics and the IMC mix provides justified background for further investigation of SNS’ weak ties influence for consumers on different product types as well as of implications for IMC strategy.

In connection to the previous research areas and constructed theoretical framework, authors present a collection of hypothesis to test. In consists of 5 hypotheses based on assumption that weak-tie advice will be more useful for consumers of search products than consumers of experience or credence products and involving such factors as expertise, product type, similarity and intention
to rely. The premise for the main study was online survey with vague\(^1\) sampling of 125 respondents that was used to classify the products and identify for what products consumers would rely on advice from weak tie sources. Next, the main test was conducted with a purposive sample of 81 students from North-eastern University in order to evaluate the similarity and expertise treatments, and the moderating effect of product type. Respondents first were asked to provide demographic information. In the context of SNS, to test the hypotheses an experimental design of a 2 (high/low) x 2 (similar/dissimilar) x 3 (search/experience/credence product) was executed (Obal M., Burtch G., Kunz W., 2011). At the beginning, respondents were presented with the scenario of purchasing one of the three products from different product categories (from previous pre-study for product classification) and then with randomly assigned Facebook (SNS chosen to be dealt with in this study) profile page that corresponds to quality of similarity and expertise. It is worth to mention that as the previously provided demographic information was used to manipulate the similarity of weak ties, respondents were presented either with completely similar profile page (gender, age, employment, education, activities and interests were the cues for high/low expertise and similarity), or completely dissimilar one. After being familiarized with the Facebook profile page, respondents were given the questionnaire aimed “...at evaluating the weak-tie source in terms of how likely they are to follow this person’s advice, the person’s expertise in this product category, and the perceived similarity between this person and oneself” (Obal et al., 2011, p. 39). Moreover, the questionnaire also featured the questions related to strong tie advices as well as ones related to realism of scenario given.

After the data collection, appropriate quantitative analysis was executed in order to test the hypotheses. As a result, authors posit that SNSs can be effective way for communicating the benefits of products and brands while product type, the expertise of the messenger, and the similarity of the messenger to the consumer have to be accounted to determine the effectiveness of SNS. Regarding the implications for managers, the recommendation for providers of search goods is to place SNSs at the core of their IMC strategy, while ones providing experience and credence products should use them complimenting with other, more traditional, IMC promotional tools.

The initial impression of latter research paper appeals for appreciation and agreement. The problem identified addresses relevant and contemporary issues and is being solved in traditional positivism-inspired way employing quantitative methods. The strong background supporting theoretical framework is present and all the decisions regarding the methodology are backed up by academic literature. Regarding the interest of thesis, relevance aspect is accounted as well – there is a section dedicated for managerial implications with clear suggestions of how to incorporate SNSs into IMC strategies and what aspects should be considered. However, regardless the precision, the research methods used call for the discussion regarding the impact they have on a final outcome of research.

First of all, the sample of respondents used for initial analysis categorizing products is questionable in a sense of nature they are coming from as well as the selection criterion. Amazon (2012) Mechanical Turk is the online “complete-the-task-and-get-paid” platform offering the possibility for quick and small earnings (0.01 to 26.1$ (Amazon, 2012)) completing simple tasks such as copy text from business cards, audio recording transcription, questionnaires etc. Such nature supposes the considerations regarding the appropriateness of respondents that were used and non-existence of

\(^1\) Amazon Mechanical Turk – instantly-paid online task platform by Amazon
selection criterion. Given that the product classification was later used as the basis for the main study, the credibility remains in question.

Secondly, the credibility and appropriateness of methodology for the main study might be regarded as controversial. It traces back to the initial study with vague sampling that was used as premise to the main one and continues to the actual design of main questionnaire. As the respondents were presented with completely different Facebook profile pages as the background for corresponding low/high expertise and similarity continuing with the questionnaire, one would be just naïve to accept the validity of such decision. Although this assumption is not sustainable from academic perspective, reality dictates just completely different nature. There is only tiny probability of fact that anyone would come across completely similar/dissimilar experience (high/low expertise) of other consumer that would influence his/her purchasing decisions. Shortly after, another question rises whether one-time observation of profile outlook would give any persuasive impression towards the actual purchase no matter what kind of product category it is. Other than that, the questionnaire validation criterion might be regarded questionable as well. Three qualities were presented to respondents as an indication of realistic scenario: “The scenario was described in a way that made it easy to imagine (1), The scenario was easy to relate to (2), The scenario was very realistic (3)”. Although it is easy for both researcher and respondent to make use of, latter qualities show the contrast to the large extent. From perspective of reality, one is asked to make very marginal decisions.

All in all, the proposal by Obal M., Burtch G., Kunz W. is nothing but a great participation approaching the systematic incorporation of social media into integrated marketing communications. It regards contemporary issues, deals with them in an effective way and proposes relevant implications for practitioners. However, a brief outlook into the research methods again supposes a fact of how the quantitative means and reality pass each other and in turn impact the validity and credibility of research. Although it looks just fine in general, the one that is supposed to make use of it might find it irrelevant in the same sense of theory/practice gap.

Social Media and Its Role in Direct and Interactive IMC: Implications for Practitioners and Educators

While previous article approaches social media (SNSs) as awareness and branding tool for various product categories, literature review continues with quite different angle suggested by (Spiller et al., 2011) for social media incorporation into IMC. In their paper authors explore direct and interactive IMC evolution and present the concept of Social Direct IMC that accounts for the most recent advances of digital and interactive channels. The focus lies on direct and interactive marketing communication applications based on social customer relationship management and social commerce. Moreover, authors also account for the educational needs teaching such concepts and conduct content analysis of marketing textbook resources currently available. It results in assessment of the educational resources and implications for educators teaching social CRM and Social Direct IMC. Though the main focus reviewing this article is on the Social Direct IMC, the results of content analysis are assumed to give a taste of the relevant literature that was not available in case of this thesis. Following paragraphs are dedicated to further explore this new concept proposal.
Yet at very beginning of the paper, authors aim at bringing the fields of direct and interactive marketing and integrated marketing communications all together reaching the consensus of what is called Social Direct IMC. They approach this concept from quite interesting angle – all the fields are superficially review from historical development perspective and then brought together on the foundation of technological advances and their impact to the latter ones. The new and different perspectives to marketing communications (Kliatchko J., 2008, p. 142) are exemplified and used as a path arriving at technologically-based social media which serves as pivotal mean arriving at Social Direct IMC concept. It must be mentioned there is a certain approach adopted to this concept and limited to the relationship orientation. According to Spiller et al. (2011), over the time, both Direct and IMC’s reliance on data mining, increased accountability and new interactive channels progressed more and more. Additionally, as the IMC is customer-centric and focused on communication dialog with customer, CRM is treated to be crucial aspect. Consequently, social media has it all. An enormous amount of extremely useful customer information and almost unlimited access of it can ensure efficient and effective relationship nurturing and management from perspective of Direct IMC. As a result, authors offer new theoretical derivative – the concept of Social Direct IMC focusing on Social CRM.

Using social CRM as a framework, Spiller et al. (2011) picture actual systematic incorporation of social media into IMC and benefits it can offer. It consists of the three levels (Seed Nurturing, Lead Nurturing and Customer Acquisition) of relationship maintenance funnelling into customer retention. Yet, quite the same approach is used while relating CRM to actual social media processes as it was in paper by Kliatchko (2009). Seed nurturing corresponds to social networking and publishing to establish awareness and credibility. At this level, it is suggested to use social media channels of social networking and social publishing to begin developing initial relationship with prospects while using SNSs, blogs, white paper etc. Next, Lead Nurturing stands for social advertising and social response messaging. Here, key role is played by social ads that are directly targeted depending on user’s behaviour online. They are highly personalised and able to deliver relevant message as well as includes response mechanism – user is able to respond to offer immediately. Given the relationships established, next social commerce takes place to transfer prospects from leads to a customer. The main advantage identified here is social nature of shopping – social commerce allows customers interact with each other to a high extent. Spiller et al. (2011) suggests social media storefronts as actual applications to use as they allow business to conduct transactions directly from SNSs and regards this phenomenon as direct selling. Finally, all of the above mentioned result in customer retention. It achieved by latter three stages and maintained by social networking and publishing for social CRM. More specifically, “Social CRM encourages the use of SNSs to listen and react to customer comments and continue to interact with customers beyond the sale” (Spiller et al., 2011, p. 79).

In connection to the presented concept, authors move on by presenting implications for practitioners and educators. However, this section serves more like literature review identifying the extent to which academic environment is familiar with the theoretical concept they have proposed rather than implicit concept exploration to wider extent. Accordingly, the interest is put on the extent to which social media marketing techniques are covered in leading texts and content analysis of the leading marketing textbooks is conducted. It is worth to mention that analysis revealed quite interesting findings in both article’s and thesis’ contexts. First of all, Spiller et al. (2011) identified that there is insufficient amount of academic material to foster discussions of Social Direct IMC in
the classroom. Secondly, the content that might be related to Social Direct IMC emphasises social media merely as networking and branding tool. Finally, authors gradually shift to the final part of their paper concluding and suggesting the use of their conceptual proposal as educational material.

A brief review regarding the contents of Direct Social IMC proposal definitely invites for a discussion. First of all, the credibility of the concept suggested is quite ambiguous. Although most of the contemplations related to the path arriving to conceptual consensus are theoretical (direct and interactive marketing, IMC, social media, CRM etc.), there was almost no theoretical referencing at all. Most of the theory presented gives the sense as it is a common knowledge and only IMC’s relationship orientation is highly supported by academic literature. Moreover, even the historical development of Direct IMC is explored from quite descriptive perspective – there is no mentioning of empirical research studies and the same tendency is apparent throughout the whole paper. However, when it comes to the social media field, its relevance is mainly based on online resources. And although explanation of Social Direct IMC there servers as the background for the content analysis, to be treated as valid secondary source (Cronin et al., 2008, p. 41) one requires explicit synthesis of studies as well as well-justified theoretical background.

Secondly, given the fact of vague theoretical position for conceptual proposition same trend traces throughout the whole paper. The model used to illustrate Social CRM and Direct Sales Funnel (Spiller et al., 2011, p. 78) initially might be regarded as simplified CRM model approached from social media horizon, however, there are no evidence supporting it. Furthermore, quite the same applies to the business process suggested (Seed Nurturing, Lead Nurturing, Customer Acquisition and Customer Retention). Consequently one might question the coherence of paper and the way authors are encompassing their research aims while having such unjustified foundation.

Other than that, profoundly escalated aspect of relevance should be addressed in this paper as well. Both the conceptual proposal as well as final result, namely implications teaching Social Direct IMC, lack for actual relevance when it comes to the theory/practice gap. All of the business processes suggested by Social CRM model not even lack for any empirical research but are lied down in abstract structuring. Even if one assume the recipient of this paper to be academic, it should be argued that despite the superficial compilation of well-known marketing communication modes while emphasizing CRM through social media, nothing more is really offered. Moreover, not even if one assumes that the essence of the paper lies in content analysis and further derived implications, such assumption is invalid. Having unsubstantial theoretical position authors constructed abstract theoretical framework folding it in interest area, namely social media, and arriving at the purpose of the paper discovering how well this fairly new concept is covered in textbooks. Consequently discovered that theories provided by textbooks are relying on classic approaches to the topic rather than tending to extremes, Spiller et al (2011) are suggesting considering their conceptual proposal while educating students. Additionally, despite supporting proposal by their own empirical research or one already conducted, they are suggesting that exploring and experiencing Social Direct IMC as it occurs online would be a valuable experience for students. Unfortunately, such experience definitely would be valuable for practitioners as well, though put in coherent, credible and valid way. It would correspond to the academic need as well as the need for practical relevance.

All in all, the conceptual proposal by Spiller et al is an interesting participation in the marketing communication field. Lacking robust theoretical foundation and coherent expression it provides
useful insights and supports social media’s incorporation into IMC from quite different angle. Even though authors ask to treat Social Direct IMC as the most recent advancement in the field, such proposal should be justified and not left out in rather descriptive way. Theory/practice gap is present and an outcome is questionable. As a result, Social Direct IMC is to be treated as one of the possible approaches of social media incorporation into IMC, though further and appropriate research is needed.

Social Media: The New Hybrid Element of the Promotion Mix

Continuing with literature review, the third article stands in contrast to the one previously reviewed. The paper “Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix” published in Business Horizons by W. Glynn Mangold and David J. Faulds adopts the social media as the hybrid element of IMC’s promotion mix as it allows business organizations to communicate in new and interactive ways. Namely it is suggested that contrary to the traditional sense where one way company-customer dialog was dominant, social media enables customers to talk directly to one another. Consequently, it raises a number of issues that have never been dealt with – in opposition to the traditional IMC paradigm where high degree of content management was promoted, social media is barely controllable. According to the authors, the content, timing, and frequency of social media-based conversations that occur between consumers are outside manager’s direct control (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Based on this, authors identify the urgent need for managers to learn to shape consumer discussion in a way consistent with the company’s mission and performance goals. Consequently, the paper is aimed to provide managers actual methods achieving such results.

Generally stated, this paper is dedicated to accomplish three objectives – to argue social media as hybrid promotional mix element and its potential to be incorporated as an integral part of company’s IMC strategy; to juxtapose traditional and new communication paradigms; to explore actual business processes that are to be used by managers while shaping consumer-to-consumer conversations to the high extent.

In connection to the first aim of the paper, authors argue their proposal to the extent containing various IMC-related aspects. Namely, it is posited that social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix due to combined characteristics of traditional IMC tools (companies talking to customers) with a highly extended form of WOW (customer talking to one another) whereas the content and frequency of such information is out of managers control. Furthermore, regarding the hybridity of social media, it is based on mixed technology and media origins that enable instantaneous, real-time communication while utilizing multimedia formats as well as various delivery platforms with global reach (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Thus, social media is to be treated as valuable promotional mix element, however, standing in contrast to traditional communication means.

Continuing with non-traditional perspective to marketing communication that social media supposes itself, Mangold et al. (2009) argue that managers should change their perception and approach the power and critical nature of discussions occurring between the consumers in social media. As it is stated, marketing managers must embrace the reality that most of the information of their products is being escalated and discussed by individual consumers to other consumers via social media. Accordingly, the effect of such information circulating is directly influential to all aspects of
consumer behaviour, namely from information retrieving to post-purchase expressions of satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Other than that, as more and more consumers are turning away from the traditional elements of the promotion mix and advertising is losing its influence on them. Consequently, there is certain need for managers to learn to influence the conversations happening in the social media while talking with them instead of talking at them.

Finally, as an outcome of the paper, Mangold et al. (2009) present their actual proposal how to manage social media in the way of shaping the discussions. As it was promised, such proposal is expressed in quite extensive way guiding managers throughout the actual business processes achieving the influence of customer-to-customer conversations. It is lied down as 8 different advises as such: 1) Provide networking platforms; 2) Use blogs and other social media tools to engage customers; 3) Use both traditional and Internet-based promotional tools to engage customers; 4) Provide information; 5) Be outrageous; 6) Provide exclusivity; 7) Design products with talking points and consumers’ desired self-images in mind; 8) Support causes that are important to consumers. It is worth to mention that every single of them is discussed in depth as well as illustrated with relevant insights from real world cases providing the sense of practical establishments.

This brief overlook of another different and interesting angle of the systematic way incorporating social media into IMC strategies supposes quite interesting discussion. First of all, one must pay attention to the fact that it comes from Business Horizons, journal of the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University. The editorial aim of this journal is to publish original articles of interest to business academicians and practitioners. Articles cover a wide range of topical areas within the general field of business, with emphasis on identifying important business issues or problems and recommending solutions that address these. Ideally, articles will prompt readers to think about business practice in new and innovative ways. Business Horizons fills a unique niche among business publications of its type by publishing articles that strike a balance between the practical and the academic (Elsevier, 2012). Regarding editorial nature of journal, the paper of Mangold et al. (2009) directly appeals for the pivot of this thesis (theory/practice gap regarding the topic) and provides practical guidance on the theoretical basis. Nevertheless, a couple remarks have to be made. As the paper is non-research literature, qualities as credibility, content and coherence should be considered as the key areas developing it (Cronin et al., 2008). As the authors provide nice and tidy structuring, coherent topical synthesis as well as consequential outcome, the appraisal criteria and limitations regarding latter are not present. Moreover, notwithstanding the nature article comes from, recommendations (guidance to shape customer conversations occurring on social media) lack of support. More specifically, all of the eight guidance elements are illustrated with insights drawn from practical cases of companies that are chosen without any selection criteria. For instance, suggestion for network platforms provision is pictured by well-known brand Dove and its “Campaign for Real Beauty” that was able to achieve success in this case. Then it is followed by Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John McCain 2008 presidential campaigns that also achieved a success to a great extent. Next it continued with well-known brands from automotive industry and etc. Unfortunately quite the same applies to the rest of the guidance as it consist of number of great stories of big companies regarding the one or another way using the social media. Such method is at least controversial supposing the promising sound, however, having facile and superficial relevance due to a lack of some certain limitations regarding target market, audiences, product types, company’s development etc.
Although this paper is slightly out of academic format and directly aims at closing theory/practice gap, it still manages to provide a great contribution towards a systematic approach incorporating social media into IMC. It has a quite strong theoretical position as it accounts for new communication paradigm and consistently aligns social media next to the traditional promotion elements. However, regarding the main interests of this thesis, the universal truth approach used when providing the practical guidance in this paper is to be treated only in critical manner. It is a great contribution providing very useful insights put in rather descriptive and atypical to academic manner.

Concluding Literature and Constructing Theoretical Framework

The profound and exhaustive literature review reflects quite interesting findings in terms of current literature of integrated marketing communication, social media, and possible systematic parallel between them as well as overall contemporary academic knowledge production. The conceptual and theoretical proposal by Kliatchko (2008) turned out to be the most recent advancement in the field covering up problems occurred throughout historical development as well as contemporary ones. Additionally, Kliatchko was able to provide the IMC proposal that accounts for the new IMC paradigm maintaining the essence of such as it accounts of current dynamic and customer-centred market. The changing media behavioural patterns among audiences and its tremendous impact on central tenet of IMC were apparent in Kliatchko’s proposal as well leaving open gates for further explorations towards social media.

The attempt to find valid and systematic ways incorporating social media as communication mean into IMC strategies was quite successful. Although the results of literature search inquiry were extremely limited, the profound analysis of three selected articles if not covered at least cross-lighted the way towards social media systematic incorporation. Proposal made by Obal et al. (2011) recommends to place SNSs at the core of IMC strategies for search product providers is emphasized, while combination of SNSs with other IMC promotional tools for experience and credence products providers is also advised. Although it might not be regarded directly as the actual approach, it definitely justifies the use of social media in IMC strategies at some certain cases, namely, product categories. Another proposal by Spiller et al. (2011) appeals to the core aspect of IMC (CRM) and suggest a fairly new concept Social Direct IMC based on Social CRM. It provides Social CRM model in order to guide marketers trough the full CRM process taking place at social media while paying attention to the essence of IMC. Spiller et al. also identifies the lack of relevant academic material as the result of Social Direct IMC content analysis in current academic literature. The final proposal by Mangold et al. (2009) suggests treating social media as a new and hybrid element in IMC’s promotion mix. It accounts a potential of social media and the fact that social media enables consumer-to-consumer conversation while it is out of managers’ control and what is quite contrary to traditional IMC. Consequently the need to manage social media is present and appropriate guidance is offered.

As the result, all three proposals offer some useful and potential guidance that might be used developing systematic approach. There is a clear and visible tendency accounting the new communication paradigm that is apparent throughout all the material reviewed. This was well-discussed and escalated in both academic and trade publications in the last decade (see Kliatchko,
2008, p. 142). More specifically, new dynamic and interactive communication that is emphasized tenet of IMC in Kliatchko’s conceptual proposal is to serve as a foundation when bringing all the reviewed material together. It perfectly aligns with all three social media proposals while focusing on new marketing aspects as such: one-to-one marketing approaches, relational models of marketing, behavioural differences of consumers, focus on customer retention, consumer dialog, known prospects and consumers, targeted communications, multiple relevant, interactive, digital points and media neutrality, as well as focus on building relationships. Consequently, social media is to serve as new and hybrid promotional element enabling managers to effectively promote search products, support the promotion of experience and credence products (awareness and branding tool), foster and nurture the relationships with prospects resulting in customer retention while Social CRM is in use as well as manage the customer-to-customer discussions of their product that appear in social media. The Figure 3 below illustrates theoretical construct of systematic approach of social media integration into IMC strategy.

![Figure 3, IMC and Social Media incorporation plot according to literature](image)

However, when it comes to the quality of this contemporary academic knowledge production, quite different perspective emerges. Evidently, despite the different type and nature all the material is coming from, it is highly influenced by the trends of modern marketing theory. Regarding the previous discussion, marketing today is thoroughly postmodern in practice, especially at its leading edge in the economically advanced areas, but modern in terms of its theoretical and philosophical constructs. Quite the same tendency is captured as the review progressed. Contributing authors tend to have an idealistic and mechanistic view of the world. For instance, it starts with the conceptual proposal of Kliatchko’ and continues throughout. IMC concept heavily relies on its
historical development and pursuits for universal truth that accounts both simpler “rational” consumer of the past and the one that replaced it by a more complex “explainable” consumer. The historical development of latter is greatly influenced by quantitative and positivism inspired empirical research that mainly deals with quantifiable relationships of various variables that were determined regardless the dynamic nature they are coming from. For example, study by Kitchen et al. (2004) conducted quantitative research using mail surveys and identified the fact that there are certain inconsistencies of what IMC theory implies and what is being practiced at daily company’s routine. They posited the need for research of IMC development that would account for business practice domain. However, while reviewing the IMC-related literature it was noticed that such application was treated nothing but the evidence of insubstantial theoretical position and recognition of IMC concept (Kitchen, 2005; Kliatchko J., 2008). Inability of data to capture the richness of nature, theory is ought to be applied on, is present to wide extent. Another few examples are the research method used by Obal et al. (2011), business practice-related proposal by Mangold et al. (2009) that were discussed in this literature review. Researchers and academics attempt to produce valuable and useful knowledge, however, it seems they do not account for modernism dominant knowledge production traditions tracing from the past and the postmodernity driven contemporary marketing practice. As a result, relevance of such knowledge becomes questionable at today’s business horizons and the theory/practice gap widens (Brennan, 2008).

Closing the Gap between the Theory and Practice and Linking Literature with Empirical Research

A certain focus was put on the quality and contemporary status of academic literature regarding IMC and social media integral means. The question was raised whether the positivism dominant modern theory could relate to contemporary business practice. This section is aimed at exploring what actually theory/practice gap is, and perceiving the methods that would ensure relevant and valuable outcomes from both empirical research and whole paper. The various perspectives from which theory/practice gap emerges are to give a sense of the extent it appears in literature. Consequently, appropriate choices are to be made when conducting empirical research.

Over the recent years there was a significant shift of attention towards the “practice” as an analytical object in management studies. The turn towards practice in contemporary social theory, treated as a growing concern, shifted the emphasis on research designs that are potential to produce richer and more penetrative treatments of context and process (Brownlie et al., 2008). Continuously growing investment in practice-related research programs, especially in strategy (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007) has set the green light for academic discussion as well as the presentations in practice-related tracks at EGOS, BAM, EURAM and AOM2. However, the same trends are set in terms of marketing and consumer research (Araujo, 2007; Hackley et al., 2008; Kjellberg, 2008). As Brownlie at al. states, all these efforts continue to attract scholarly investment, leading to further development of the knowledge base of ‘practice’ in management and organizational studies.

---

2 EGOS - European Group for Organization Studies, BAM - British Academy of Management, EURAM - European Academy of Management, AOM - Academy of Management
The most concerning subject in terms of theory-practice of management scholarship and recent turn towards the practice is the perceived character of management research, often expressed in a way of the problematic status of its “relevance” for management practice. Institutionally framed concerns of the extent to which the users and producers of knowledge production were involved and integrated within managed networks of activity and collaboration led to the debates concerning the general topic of knowledge production in management studies (Brownlie et al., 2008). The best example to illustrate such phenomenon would be the abstracted rendering of dialog between eminent researcher and practitioner Stanford’s James March\(^3\) and Citigroup’s John Reed\(^4\) on the relationship between business and academia subject. According to the perspective of March, the key role of the university “is not in pursuing the identification of factors affecting organizational performance, or in trying to develop managerial technology. It is rather in raising the fundamental issues and advancing the knowledge about fundamental processes affecting management”. As he continues discussing the subject:

“What in management research is important for management practice? If we look historically... it is not the passing fads of management gimmicks. It is not the numerous studies attempting to relate the performance to one thing or another. It is the basic ideas that shape discourse about the management – ideas about the conflict and interest, problems with information and incentives, bounded rationally, diffusion on legitimate forms, loose coupling, liability of newness, dynamic traps of adaptation, absorptive capacity and the like... the primary usefulness of management research lies in the development of fundamental ideas that might shape managerial thinking, not in the solution of immediate managerial problems” (March, 2000; Starkey K. and P. Madan, 2001).

Consequently, the approach of March is responded by John Reed (2000). It follows by the description why he values the opportunity for discussing the research: “I look forward to get out of the day-to-day, to sit back and try to understand what is going on in the research community. It allows me some breathing room and gives me a sense what is that I have been spending last 34 years doing”. As for him, the essential focus for management research does concern its integration with practice and it is aimed at a particular business need: “We are now at the point where understanding what humans are, how they respond to the opportunities, and what they dream about is essential to business practice”. Such form is to be treated as strategic because of the significant provision of potential input into what John Reed describes as the task of “improving the opportunity space for our enterprise” (Starkey K. and P. Madan, 2001).

Such dialog between well-known and widely-recognized researcher and practitioner is a perfect example of the issue raised. It generalizes and addresses the tensions and conflicts between the perspectives of academic and business world. In other words, this is the context in which the relevance gap in management research exists. However, before moving on, there is a certain need to explore the key issues concerning the gap and relationship between the theory and practice of management scholarship. Additionally, particular interest supposes the demand of looking into the literature of academic contributions in the nature of issue for further inspiration.

---

\(^3\) James G. March is the professor at Stanford University holding the chairs in international management, political science, sociology and education.

\(^4\) John S. Reed is the former Chairman of the New York Stock Exchange. He previously served as Chairman and CEO of Citicorp, Citibank, and post-merger, Citigroup. (Wikipedia, 2012)
The paper published in European Business Review Special Issue by Brownlie, D., Hewe, P., Wagner B., Svensson, G. (2008) deals with such issue in depth. The main questions asked by authors go as follows: Considering the putative relationship between theory and practice, as from the perspective of potential contributors from management disciplines, what the character of that relationship might be? In case this relationship treated as essential, how and in what ways does it matter? They suggest that “relevance” and “being critical” are the qualities widely attributed to efforts that close, contest or interrogate the gap between theory and practice, as they expressed – between the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge products by those practicing in the knowledge economy, whether as situated members of the community of managerial practitioners, or members of the community of academic practitioners. They posit the need to contribute on the various qualities of reflexive scepticism which are treated to be well worth to fostering and preserving. However, the latter mentioned qualities are put in the position of essence while dealing the nature of issue.

As the “relevance” is the first quality to be dealt with, authors are echoing the “rhetoric of ‘distance’ between interlocking cultures” aspect of issue that is widely dealt among many academics (Starkey K. and P. Madan, 2001; Holbrook, 2005). The latter is treated to be one of the influential factors mainly caused by the naturally imposed academic need to get in touch with the reality in real-world practice; though, commonly resulting in even widening gap between received wisdom of management practice that inform scholarship and the contemporary reality of work within various management occupations. As from other side, the nature of the crisis of “relevance” is commonly understood in terms of radically changing business environments demanding innovative solutions and new competences of work organizations and their staff (Starkey K. and P. Madan, 2001; Brownlie et al., 2008).

However, based on the notion of “relevance” proposed by (Brownlie et al., 2007), editors of EBR give the explanation of latter quality as well as identify the possible means to avoid the misguided understanding of it. It goes as follows:

“The construct “relevance” offers a convenient “prism” through which to understand perennial debates about the balance between putting theory into practice and practice into theory in management and business subjects. Current notions of “relevance” are located with respect to historical developments of the apparatus and accoutrements of management research as a disciplined domain of knowledge-making and education-based social reproduction. The emergent institutional structures and processes that govern the conduct of knowledge production in management have evolved over time in response to questions asked by circumstance and power, particularly regarding the functioning of programmatic statements about the domain of practice” (Brownlie et al., 2008).

They argue that our current understanding of how “relevance” is accomplished and performed is misguided and inadequate to the actual need to accountability and accessibility in research. In other words, what authors are trying to say is that such statement is to be interpreted as the call for shift in understanding the “relevance”. Latter treated as an event, as an outcome or an argument and usually just simply positioned in academic text to secure the relevant position rather should be expressed as the process of work that itself needs management.
Naturally, the previous argument imposes the obvious need for the actual means how to accomplish the research with the actual relevance to the business practice and thus, the value the research is to produce itself. Therefore, a couple of interesting proposals are to be reviewed considering the suggestion by EBR editors.

The paper by Ross Brennan is intended to follow a relatively different approach supposing the need for a more detailed understanding of the nature of the gap between theory and practice. He draws the parallel between three cognate areas of management, namely economics, nursing and marketing resulting in the reflection of theory/practice discussion and how its forms differ in these fields. As an example, in case of nursing, the emphasis is put on evidence-based practice and consequently the gap is narrowed. Meanwhile, within the field of economics which has ‘an idealized, mechanistic view of the world’, the criticism is expressed on the ontological assumptions that influencing the understanding contemporary reality. As the up-to-date knowledge of current research is essential to nursing, so they have an access to the materials providing such knowledge and are actively encouraged to pursue that as the support for their daily practice. Contrary to the latter case, Brennan argues that way too much academic theory is discovered to be irrelevant in marketing perspective. Consequently, practitioners that seldom have the direct access to academic materials do not read them and moreover, treat them as irrelevant. According to Brennan, such phenomenon is caused by common rejection of academic institutions to reward applied research. However, as the solution, Brennan adopts and supports the approach of marketing theory that can develop and outside the confines of boundaries, time frames and commercial deadlines.

The following approach to the issue is expressed by Michael Baker in a way of need for actual experience of the practice of marketing. According to him, the subject of marketing is dynamic and consequently academics need to re-appraise and revise the ideas. The main point emphasized in this paper is that many disciplines are applied and concerned with finding the answers to real-world problems, while others such as marketing are founded on many disciplines each based on accepted theoretical base on its own right (Brownlie et al., 2008). The essence of Baker’s paper as the residence of gap, might be expressed in a way that most of the past lecturers in a field of marketing had actual experience of the practice of marketing, however, today academic qualifications are treated as sufficient foundation.

Finally, this short review is completed by another viewpoint of Barry Ardley who questions the appropriateness of academic books in terms of theory/practice gap. The argument proposed states that most of academic texts fail to capture and understand the interpretive nature of knowledge mainly due to dominant approach towards the universal truths and positivistic outlooks. Additionally, he argues the underestimation of ethnography, phenomenology and ethnomethodology for the research of marketing management. To prove his point and support the arguments proposed, Ardley conducted several phenomenology-inspired interviews with marketing practitioners who confirmed initial assumption of the inappropriateness and irrelevance of textbook approaches to knowledge production, decision-making and understanding (Brownlie et al., 2008). The citation of Ardley in connection to his findings emphasizes the importance of intuition and tacit knowledge typical to the marketing practitioners working in their local context: “...they have a gut feel for what is going to work and what isn’t going to work”. Put in other words, in Ardley’s view, what is important and matters the most are the narratives and stories told by actual marketing practitioners while making sense of their own world. Unfortunately, such outlook and need is not
expressed in most of the academic books. Obviously marketing knowledge is dynamic and therefore
not fix, thus continuous adjustments are needed. Despite that some of the remarks made by Baker
are addressed in this paper, Ardley also supposes the need for academic freedom to develop new
theory.

The remarks and ideas made throughout this section suppose a quite interesting and unusual
outlook of the contemporary state of both academic and practice perspectives. Evidently, the gap
between theory and practice exists and ongoing academic discussions are addressing it as a growing
concern to a wide extent. Some opinions are quite similar while others are differing more. However,
the consensus on this subject might be expressed in quite straight-forward way – it is more than
essential for academic knowledge to find the ways of mutual interconnection with practice.
Undisputedly it is beneficial for both environments, as it is to encourage the relevance as well as to
reduce the gap.

As for the inspiration for further marketing research, it is essential to understand the adequate ways
how the actual relevance to the practice is accomplished and performed satisfying the need for
accountability and accessibility in research. Rather than treating relevance as outcome or discussion
object, the researcher is to seek raising the fundamental issues as well as advancing the knowledge
about fundamental processes that affect management. To achieve such goal, researcher is to shift
from favouring universal truths and positivistic approaches while trying to understand interpretive
nature of knowledge and move on to academic freedom discovering the relevant knowledge by
embracing mixed methods, qualitative, quantitative, phenomenology, ethnography etc. (Brownlie et
al., 2008)

Despite the fact that no matter how wide or close the gap is, it will always exist. However, as the
nature of universe dictates, the one have to be treated as dynamic and always changing. Knowledge
production calls for continuous adjustments and non-static views.

Expectations

The overriding proposition of this thesis is that integral means for social media incorporation into
IMC processes and strategies available at contemporary academic literature are overpassing the
relevance to the daily business practice as well as increasing the theory/practice gap at the field. The
literature reviewed supports the latter view as well as suggests that dominant and the most popular
research methods fail to capture the rich and interpretive nature of knowledge resulting in an
irrelevant academic theory. Regarding the previous discussion, marketing today is thoroughly
postmodern in practice but modern in terms of its theoretical and philosophical constructs.
Consequently, to provide valuable contribution in terms of finding systematic approach
incorporating social media into IMC processes one researching this field must recoil upon the ones
practicing it on daily basis to capture knowledge available there. For this investigation, focus is put
on local contexts marketing communication experts are working in and their daily routines where
problems regarding the social media and IMC are emerging. In particular, two aspects are
emphasized here, namely, the relevance of IMC and social media previously interrelated concepts to
the daily practice; the need for academic guidance in connection to IMC and social media combined.
With respect to the latter two notions, the following expectations are presented:
Expectation (1): The academic and theoretical guidance available at contemporary academic literature regarding the systematic incorporation of social media into IMC processes is irrelevant to the ones practicing marketing communications at daily routine.

Expectation (2): There is a certain need for the most recent advancements of academic and theoretical guidance regarding the systematic incorporation of social media into IMC processes.

Expectation (3): By choosing the right methods it is possible to adjust theoretical guidance to extent it is applicable to practice.

Latter three directly point towards the theoretical framework that was constructed according the literature reviewed. Thus, it is expected that theoretical construct is irrelevant to marketing communication practitioners. However, on account of the immense influence of social media and IMC’s potential, it is also expected that such construct is of need to practitioners. Consequently, with respect to previous section dedicated to theory/practice gap, empirical research is conducted. Moreover, it is expected that the results would provide the sense of how that construct could be adjusted and applied on daily practice of marketing practitioners.

Empirical Research

Regarding the aim of the thesis and the highly escalated need expressed towards research designs that offer richer and more penetrative treatments of context as well as practice-related research methods (Brownlie et al., 2008), phenomenological, social constructivism perspective is adopted. As the literature review suggested, traditional perspective on marketing research suppose the tendency of researcher investigating and revealing some unproblematic and general laws and then general views of prescriptive background are abstracted of IMC as well as social media’s integral means. The decision to adopt phenomenological approach to this study is made due to previously uncovered fact that while quantitative methods that employ questionnaires and surveys as data collection methods may provide insights into marketing communications, they fail to represent the rich, dynamic and complex nature of those practicing and working with marketing communications. To explore the relevance, need and theory/practice gap in terms of IMC and social media, it is necessary to gain marketing communications experts’ perceptions of sense objects (Integrated Marketing Communications and Social Media) in their local contexts. More specifically, phenomenological enquiry here is to acquire the specific and individual perceptions and descriptions of IMC and social media phenomena that marketing communication experts are experiencing at their daily lives in business context. Then the aim is to explain such phenomena in details. Consequently, phenomenology is here to serve such need. However, given the limited resources of thesis and the fact that not that many phenomenological inquiries are conducted within the field, the most relevant and useful study by Ardley B. (2005) was chosen for inspiration and support. The latter was well-recognized and approved by community of academics (Brownlie et al., 2008).
Recruitment of Relevant Experts

- Searching for companies to contact on websites
- Contacting companies by telephone
- Acquiring the details of contact persons
- Sending emails with enquiry outline and direct contact by phone
- Making arrangements

Figure 4, levels of contact procedures

It was purposively decided to reach for marketing communication experts who could participate in telling about IMC and social media practices occurring in their organizations. The limited time frame, financial budget and movement within the area were accounted far in advance as the aspects directly influencing access for participants in qualitative research. Contrary to quantitative methods, personal in-depth interviews require researcher and respondent to get more closely than it would be in case of simply handing over or sending the link of a questionnaire (Flick, 2006) as well as it results in time consuming and difficult process (Gill, 1997). The initial number of organizations to contact was determined using the results of two business-related websites' search engines. The purposive sampling took place with regards to the intention to conduct interviews with the experts coming from one type organization, namely, advertising. As a result, better saturation was expected.

As the resources of research provided limited ability of movement within the country and type of research method required personal interaction, the interest area was limited only to Aarhus city. Accordingly to the relatively small population (252,213), initial sample of advertising agencies was 15 organizations. All of them are Aarhus-based agencies varying from small local business to international ones. As the initial sample was quite small, it was decided to contact all of the organizations without any further deliberations. Considering the type of inquiry (in-depth personal interview) as well as the current period of time (spring/Easter period) it was expected to get in touch with at least 5-7 marketing communication experts coming from advertising agencies as well as from local and international ones. As Boyd (2001) propose, two to ten research participants are sufficient sample size to reach saturation, thus the targeted number of experts aligns to recommendation.

To identify and reach the “right” people for interview based research is on the most common and important issues to deal with. As the Ardley (2005) argues, it might turn out to be quite difficult, especially in the context of marketing as current tendencies for this function suppose diffusion and integration across the organizations. This was the key factor to put under consideration as most of the companies were small-sized and within local business. Consequently, all of the 15 organizations

---

5 De Gule Sider, Denmark’s leading paper and online based marketplace, [http://www.degulesider.dk/](http://www.degulesider.dk/), 2012
City Map, another, internet-based marketplace listing market-related information, [http://www.city-map.dk](http://www.city-map.dk), 2012
6 in the inner urban area, Wikipedia, 2012
were contacted by telephone in regards to determine who is actually in charge of marketing communications. It was predicted that the first person to respond is probably the receptionist, thus it was decided to put general inquiry as it follows: “As I am interested in contacting the person responsible for marketing communications in this company, who should I talk to?” As the result, such direct inquiry was quite successful in most of the cases. However, it must be mentioned, that 7 of the companies contacted returned the inquiry as the person of interest was out of the office for the period from one to two weeks. Consequently, sample size was reduced to 8.

The initial process acquiring information of key persons was quick and successful process. The persons to answer calls were enough helpful to provide the names and contact details either directly or by forwarding to their websites where the information needed was provided. It is worth to mention that only medium organizations had almost no interest of knowing the purpose of the inquiry or who the researcher was. Contrary, small businesses were highly interested what the inquiry was all about. In such cases, it was explained that researcher is a student carrying out his bachelor thesis project into marketing communications and is hoping to get a collaboration of the experts working at local firms. As there was no further effect visible, it was assumed that such inquiries are quite common at their daily routines.

**Arrangements and Access: The Problem Gaining Entry**

The successful collection of names and contact details regarding the persons of interest was followed with direct contacting process. The email consisting of outline, requirements and expectations was considered to be sent to prospects as a direct inquiry of availability for interviews. It is worth to mention, that researcher’s position as a student at local educational establishment (Aarhus School of Business and Social Sciences) was considered to be quite useful in terms of gaining access to business organizations. Such manoeuvre was assumed to suppose the attempt to be responsive and willing to serve the needs of local business. Furthermore, it was expected that prospects would be helpful as well as interested in the main topic stated in email as it was exploring contemporary marketing communication issues in context of theory/practice gap. The open ended structuring of interview was emphasized in email as it was presupposed to be highly indicative of the researcher’s expectations. Such aspect was assumed to be highly important considering the strict schedule of prospects as well as possible misunderstandings in future - nature of research inquiry could be seen as attractive/unattractive in this case. Also, as open ended nature of interviews implied possible exposure of confident information regarding actual cases or company-client relationships, the aspect of anonymity was considered as well. Email included paragraph dedicated for ensuring the confidentiality of respondents regarding both personal details and personal interaction. However, regarding the experience during the name and contact details collection process as well as time constraint, it was decided to make direct calls in order to make sure that prospects will be available in the foreseeable future for possible meeting arrangements if agreement could be reached. Such manoeuvre proved to be expedient – three of prospects turned down the inquiry as either they were about to leave for business-related purpose or had busy schedules hereafter. It resulted in sample size of 5 business organizations.

After direct contact was established, all 5 prospects were sent an email with research inquiry-related information. As it was mentioned, it consisted of outline, requirements, and expectations (open ended nature of interview) as well as of a part regarding the anonymity issue. The information
provision was directly related with final probable reduction of sample – as it was foreseen, the in-depth interview could be treated as time-consuming, difficult to participate because of language barrier (English is treated as the second language for both researcher and respondent) or requiring to produce knowledge unrelated to daily routine. As all 5 emails were sent, research process in companies was expected and considered to begin as soon as an arrangements could be made, meaning the granted access. This expectation is argued as some prospects could have emergencies in terms of business or no time allocation for later involvements. Unfortunately, only three positive replies were received. Two individuals responded negatively by arguing that interview type and coverage are too extensive than it was anticipated. Some types of questionnaire or survey were expected rather than open ended questioning as it probably could take too much of their time. However, finally three marketing communication experts responded positively to interview inquiry. They were representatives of advertising agencies ranging in their specialization and size.

After all above mentioned procedures final arrangements were made regarding the actual meetings for interviews. It was relatively easy process as all of the experts were aware of research inquiry before making the arrangements. As a result, there was almost no delay or uncertainty in regards to determining actual dates for interview – with mutual cooperation actual meetings were spread out over the three weeks period with the respect to their strict and busy schedules.

The Phenomenological Approach and Interview as Data Collection Method

Phenomenological Approach

According to the phenomenological perspective, the view of society as well as its derivatives (i.e. institutions, organizations etc.) is to be treated as composition of rather different understandings and perceptions of reality. In order to understand the social reality of such perspective, one should do that in respect to individuals’ experiences of that certain social reality. Contrary to positivistic views, phenomenology imposes the contradiction towards the social world understanding in causal relations and social events appearing under universal laws (Goulding, C., 1999; Ardley, 2005; Goulding, 2005). With regard to contemporary application of phenomenology, the work of Schutz during the 1960s which combined Husserl’s philosophical phenomenology with a social phenomenology has possibly had the greatest impact on applied methodology (Goulding, C., 1999). In terms of methodological point of view, rather than philosophical, Shutz (1967) propose that individuals approach life world with a stock of knowledge built of common sense constructs and categories that are essentially social in action. Consequently, such stocks of knowledge produce familiarity; however, they are always incomplete and open ended (Goulding, 2005). For Shutz, language is to serve as medium transferring meanings which supports and provides a methodological orientation for phenomenology. Namely for phenomenology of social life that is interested in relation between use of language and the actual objects of experience. As the essential task of language is to convey information and describe “reality”, the actual meaning of word is considered to be what it references, corresponds with, or stands for in the real world. Shutz also accounts for commonality appearing while others experience the world in essentially the same way, however, sharing the same meaning but in intersubjective way. The key presumption here is that a person’s life is a socially constructed totality in which experiences interrelate coherently and meaningfully (Shutz, 1967; Goulding, 2005). The specific aim of this enquiry was to obtain and perceive experts individual perceptions of the objects of experience (IMC and social media) rather
than conduct analysis of the object themselves. Consequently this enquiry focused on marketing communication experts working at advertising agencies in local context. The narratives of experts were to serve as conversational language and medium transferring the knowledge and experience of IMC and social media that is only intrinsic to local context, namely social reality. As it corresponds with the phenomenological approach, the focus is also put on autonomy of the interview. According to the study by Thompson et al. (1989), the text of interview must be treated as an autonomous body of data in the way that any attempt to confirm experiences that were acquired from respondents with outside verifications is forbidden.

**Interview as Data Collection Method**

As it regards the actual interview, it was decided to design an interview guide (see Appendix A) to serve a couple of goals. Although Bentz and Shapiro (1998) argues that interviewer must allow emergence of data by capturing respondents’ rich descriptions of phenomena as well as their settings, some of the experts requested information regarding the scope and nature of enquiry in advance. Thus, an appropriate interview guide consisting of fourteen broad questions was designed and presented both in printed form during the interviews and in email form as it requested beforehand the interviews. It enabled interested respondents to do some thinking about the issues before actual interview taking place as it served as broad interview guide for both interviewer and interviewee. It is worth to mention that the use of interview guide varied in terms of specific situations – in some interviews it served as pivot, in others rather just marginal (see Appendix B).

As it concerns the interview guide, fourteen questions were presented in order to provide background for narratives and guide experts throughout. They were designed according the literature and its central topics such as IMC concept, impact of new media, customer-centrism, integration, client-agency relationship, influence of social media, management of social media etc. As these topics are pillars to the theory reviewed as well as to theoretical construct, they served as foundation when designing the questions. However, it must be mentioned that they served only as marginal context in guide, as questions were left open-ended.

The actual process and approach of interview was intended to follow a quite loose pattern. As Ardley (2005) on behalf of Bryman (1988) argues, in terms of open ended interview “rambling” is some certain notion where researcher provides just minimal guidance and fosters respondent’s own participation agenda to a certain extent. Though possibility of losing control in terms of the actual interest is existent, data acquired could reveal unexpected findings that might support the central data. As advised by Moustakas (1994), interview began with more general and undemanding question that served as introductory one providing some information about the company, role of the expert and continuation to more specific themes. In all the cases, interview took place in companies where experts were working. Usually it was the empty meeting room where inquiry happened, thus there was no disturbance and influence on interview process. Accordingly to business environment, appropriate clothing was chosen as it provides the impression of similar values to respondents (Ardley, 2005). Moreover, as it is also was suggested by Ardley (2005), all interviews were regarded as interpersonal dramas, as respondents were constantly monitoring who they are in parallel to the interviewer.
Data Storing Methods

What concerns the data storing, audio recording method was used. All of the conversations were captured using audio recording device as the permissions of respondents were granted. The use of audio recordings was considered perfectly aligning with the research design, as Heritage suggests:

“The use of recorded data is an essential corrective to the limitations of intuition and recollection. In enabling repeated and detailed examination of the events of the interaction, the use of recordings extends the range and precision of the observations which can be made.” (Heritage 1984, p.238)

Each of interviews was labelled with a code containing unique name of respondent as well as date interview took a place. Although most of the literature (Easton et al, 2000) cautions about possible equipment failure or poor recording quality, the contemporary advances in digital technology can easily overcome such issues, as they did in this case. Each of interviews was located in digital file and supplemented with transcription notes made as soon as it was possible.

What concerns the transcription of audio recordings it was quite long, tiring and exhausting process. Kvale (1996), remarks that the transcription of audio recordings is in some certain way itself an interpretative process. It might involve bias of the one transcribing recordings as different people may adopt different approaches typing the recordings. More specifically, audio recording transformation into written form involves outside approach translating from an oral language with its certain set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules. Such transcription might be seen as a map, reflection or representation of some certain reality (Ardley, 2005). When it comes to particular research of this thesis, certain approach of transcription was followed. Due to the limited resources all transcription process was conducted by researcher himself and was done in verbatim form. With specific focus that nothing is missed of left out, structure of dialog was used to make sure concise and precise manner is maintained throughout the transcription of all interviews. Researcher himself determined the actual structures of sentences (i.e. start and end of sentence, type of sentence etc.) and checked for accuracy from both interviewer’s and researcher’s perspectives. As the quality of recordings was fine, there were no problems while transcribing them. Finally, as transcription process was finished, digital files were sent back to experts for verification as respondents’ validation was considered to be important (Flick, 2006). As a result, a couple interviewees responded with some useful remarks that were accounted and stored as field notes.

As Groenewald (2004) posits, field notes are to be treated as secondary data storage method in terms of qualitative research. Due to a nature of human and its natural tendency to forget details, field notes are figuring as extremely important when it comes to retaining the data gathered (Lofland et al, 1999). Consequently, four types if field notes were made as it follows the model used in study of Groenewald (2004) and originally developed by Schatzman L. and Strauss A. They go as follow:

- Observational notes – “what happened notes” are considered to be useful to researcher to make as Bailey (1996) suggest the use of all senses while making observations.
- Theoretical notes – “attempts to derive meaning” in regards of researcher making reflections on experiences.
• Methadological notes – “reminders, instructions or critique” intended to researcher as the process progresses.
• Analytical memos – progress reviews or summaries.

Together with audio recordings, transcripts and field notes that was a collection of data to be used in this research. As Kvale (1996) remarks, transcription of audio recordings might be treated as itself interpretation process which implies data explicitation at some point. Furthermore, Morgan (1997) suggest that due to interpretation involvement field noting process might be treated as a part of analysis rather than data collection. Yet having the rich, supplemented and verified data collection the research process is already premise for data analysis. The latter is elaborated in next part.

The Phenomenological Analysis

As it was previously discussed, according to the phenomenological approach, the basic assumption is that individual’s life is a social construct where experiences interrelate coherently and meaningfully. In phenomenology, language is the central medium transferring the meaning, thus it concerned about social life expressed in relation of language use and the objects of experience. As Goulding (2005) advocates, as it regards the process of inquiry, the phenomenologist has only one legitimate source of data, and that is the views and experiences of the participants themselves. In this case, following the advice of Goulding, researcher deals with audio recorded oral language of the experts who lived the actual experience under the study (various situations in regards the IMC and social media phenomena occurring at daily basis). The descriptions of objects of the experiences were captured during the in-depth interviews and the sampling was purposive from very beginning. Consequently, in order to make use of data and derive thematised meanings, researcher is involved in explicitation of data rather than analysis.

As Hycner (1999) notes, “analysis” has contradictory connotations when it comes to phenomenological process. He argues that term “analysis” usually stands for “braking into parts” and thus results in particularity loss of whole phenomenon. Meanwhile the explicitation is treated more suitable as it implies “investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole” (Hycner, 1999, p. 9). However, it must be mentioned that term “explicitation” is adopted here to emphasize the effort that is made in order to arrive at explicit meaning of phenomena rather than to involve some new or unusual trends in this part of process. As when it comes to the actual process of analysis or explicitation of data, most of guidelines advices by scholars concur with each other. For instance, the concise version if Hycner’s (1999) explicitation process involves five stages: 1) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction; 2) Delineating units of meaning; 3) Clustering of units of meaning to form themes; 4) Summarising each interview, validating it and correcting where necessary; 5) Extracting general and unique themes from interview collection and abstracting overall summary. Whereas in his analysis of consumer experiences Thompson (1997) advises an interactive process to whole analysis. At first, it starts by reading the full interview transcripts in order to get a sense of general picture. After a couple of readings of interview transcripts hermeneutic endeavour or intertextuality process follows. Latter two involve looking for patterns and differences across transcripts. However, as it might be regarded as quite loose guidance, Thompson posits the need to broaden the analysis with the inclusion of wider range of considerations as it helps the researcher to arrive at a holistic interpretation. Furthermore, the researcher must account the fact that when it comes to the final explanation, it represents a fusion
of horizons between the interpreter’s frame of reference and the texts being interpreted (Thompson C., 1997; Goulding, 2005). As it can be clearly seen, the concurrence and alignment of interpretation processes suggested by different academics are present. In case of this research, the guidance outlined by Colaizzi (1978) and suggested by Goulding (2005) is chosen due to rather same concurrence of Thomson’s (1997) and Hycner’s (1999) suggested interpretation processes, though more explicitly formulated process. It involves seven stages that go as follows:

1) The first task of the researcher is to read the participants narratives, to acquire a feeling for their ideas in order to understand them fully.
2) The next step “extracting significant statements”, requires the researcher to identify key words and sentences relating to the phenomenon under study.
3) The researcher then attempts to formulate meanings for each of these significant statements.
4) This process is repeated across participants’ stories and recurrent meaningful themes are clustered. These may be validated by returning to the informants to check interpretation.
5) After this the researcher should be able to integrate the resulting themes into rich description of the phenomena under study.
6) The next step is to reduce these themes to an essential structure that offers an explanation of the behaviour.
7) Finally, the researcher may return to the participants to conduct further interviews or elicit their opinions on the analysis in order to cross check interpretation. (Goulding, 2005, p. 303)

Before starting the explicitation or data analysis in a way it is suggested by Colaizzi, it must be mentioned that the need for phenomenological reduction and bracketing was accounted as it has a determinant impact to whole process and outcome. At this point researcher attempted to suspend (bracket) his own personal views or preconceptions in order to experience the unique world of marketing communication experts (Moustakas, 1994). However, as it argued previously, the very first stage (stage one) of data processing was the transcription and field noting. Furthermore, phenomenological reduction is here to be regarded as the second stage (stage two) at this process. Consequently, due to enriched analysis design, now it consists of nine stages.

Stage three. In order to get a deep sense of whole picture about the each interview, a couple of listenings to each audio recording took place at this stage. It was supplemented with rereadings of transcripts as well. Moreover, at this stage the final corrections for transcripts were made if necessary. At this point, having the final versions of interview transcripts, each of them were summarized and entered under field notes. As the following steps involved extracting significant statements and deriving general meanings, such manoeuvre was quite handy – it provided general overview.

Stage four. In regards to the third stage, adjusted and corrected transcripts were reread and words, phrases and sentences related to the IMC and social media phenomena were identified and extracted. As this stage was all about abstracting or condensing the marketing communication expert’s views across the whole interview it was a step towards the fifth stage where formulation of meanings takes place.

Stage five. As both Colaizzi (1978) and Hycner (1999) advocate, after significant statements were identified and extracted, general meanings for those statements were created. It resulted in a
variety of meaning units that were noted down in each transcript and supplemented with appropriate comments that complemented previously abstracted summaries. At this point, the collection of formulated meaning enabled researcher to move on towards sixth stage where thematisation process emerged.

**Stage six.** During this stage of data explicitation or analysis, previously generated meaning units were reviewed and themes which appeared to be emergent noted down. This process was supported by comments and field notes that were made at previous stages. The main factors considered at this stage were recurrence, meaningfulness and relevance to issues of this study as well as to research questions. It must be mentioned that as stage five resulted in quite wide range of meaning units, some of them were considered as irrelevant and unnecessary to address regarding the aim of the study. Consequently, theme clustering was involved. It meant grouping the units of meaning together in order to derive units of significance, i.e. clusters (Moustakas, 1994). Each transcript reflected from four to seven central themes that were written in field notes. Finally, this stage was completed by emailing the themes to experts in order to validate the interpretation. Only a couple of remarks were received and appropriate adjustments were made enabling researcher to continue with broadening descriptions of the phenomenon.

**Stage seven.** At this stage, researcher attempted to compile all of central themes that emerged from data into narrative summaries for each interview that would give a holistic perspective. The aim was to provide the rich description of phenomenon under study, reflect key issues in each interview as well as capture the essence of the interview.

**Stage eight.** Data explicitation or analysis was concluded by a reducing dominant themes into an essential structure and writing a composite summary that provided an explanation of the behaviour. At this point, field notes, interview transcripts, theme clusters and narrative summaries were returned to. As it was a final summary, it provided a sense and picture of whole as well as it reflected the main themes that emerged from the data. However, as Hycner (1999) advices, researcher put effort to reflect the themes common to most or all of the interviews and accounts for the individual variations. In this case significant individual variations were noted according to individual manager as well as by organization.

**Stage nine.** As this was the final stage of explicitation the validation and confirmation of the study was sought. It was done by emailing the shortened version of final composite summary to the experts for their examination. As the final version was quite extensive, in respect to strict and busy schedules of participants, shortened summary was compiled. Although the latter was composite, such manoeuvre served as theme confirmation from individual perspective of those being researched (Ardley, 2005). The approval of themes was received from all respondents.

After long, tiring and demanding process of data exploitation the focus is to be shifted to quality criteria of the research. Considering the fact that researcher was the only one, who collected, processed, explicated and abstracted the data, one probably would question researcher’s bias as well as quality of study. Indeed, it would be beside the purpose to argue researcher’s subjectivity. It is just inevitable in case of phenomenological research and supposes the need for proper treatment – as Giorgi (1997, p. 205) advocates “nothing can be accomplished without subjectivity, so its elimination is not the solution. Rather how the subject is present is what matters, and objectivity
itself is an achievement of subjectivity”. Consequently, quality criteria in qualitative research must be discussed as it is to be done in next section.

Quality and Trustworthiness of Study

Flick (2006, p.367), Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 114) posit that that actual problem of how to assess and ensure the quality of qualitative research has not yet been solved. Here comes the question whether qualitative research can be assessed with some criteria and conceptual means or general and specific approaches should be applied regarding this issue. As Flick (2006) continues, literature offers two perspectives in regards to this issue. First is quite straightforward and derived from positivistic approach – simply apply an appropriate reformulation of classical criteria of validity and reliability to qualitative research. The second is to develop method-appropriate criteria. It is aimed at accounting specificity of qualitative research – from theoretical foundations to the actual research processes. Accordingly, discussion based on these two perspectives is offered which leads to choice that is to be used and further explored.

Regarding the first perspective, it is generally referred to traditional positivist criteria. For instance, reliability is highly attributed with consistent methods of data collection. While quantitative research is directly dependable upon consistently collected data and aimed at producing results in same way, it is almost irrelevant in case of qualitative research. Latter is aimed towards explaining the responses of researched or researcher at some specific and particular time and place, within the particular local context. Qualitative research regards situations as unique ones without possibility to be repeated in exactly same way. One would be more than naïve to expect to hear same story of same respondent though at different time or place.

Another aspect in classical quality criteria approach is validity. It is mainly attributed to the assumption that actual phenomena under study reflect the reality in sense of undisputed objectivity. Regarding the undeniable diversity of social world it is just impossible to find such reality to which all findings must correspond (Finlay, 2006). Qualitative research by definition refers to qualities, the ones that can be described in only one way – involving subjective interpretations.

Consequently it is quite obvious that classic approach towards assessing qualitative research fails. Even nature of latter supposes the need to look for method-appropriate quality criteria. Thus one is constructed, used and argued.

Evidently enough it was argued that the research have to be evaluated on its own terms. There is a particular necessity to use explicit criteria as it highlights the strengths and limitations, provides the insights about rigour and consistency in the research approach. Moreover, providing clear and explicit quality criteria contributes towards the transparency of the research and lets readers to get a better sense of the researcher’s values and interests (Finlay, 2006).

The academic contribution by Ballinger (2006) suggests linking the choice of assessment criteria to the epistemology of research. Four considerations listed out in work by Ballinger (2006) are to serve as reflections on their certain aims of research: (1) coherence; (2) evidence of systematic and careful research conduct; (3) convincing and relevant interpretation; (4) sensitivity to the role played by researcher. Author suggests using these considerations in connection to researcher’s views of reality. Consequently, adoption of realist or subtle realist epistemologies (phenomenology falls into
this category) appeals for valuing research by evidences regarding the way of being systematic and scientific (for instance, focusing on specified procedures to ensure trustworthiness) (Finlay, 2006).

Accordingly the proposal of Lincoln and Guba (1985), which consists of four criteria for naturalistic or qualitative research, perfectly aligns with one made by Ballinger (2006) and is chosen for the quality and trustworthiness for research.

1) **Credibility.** Lincoln and Guba emphasize the extent to which findings make sense. It is recommended for qualitative researchers to use “member checks”. Accordingly to this particular research, three checks were accomplished in order to ensure minimum level of deviations. Throughout the data explicitation process, the first check was done by sending back the transcripts for respondents to make sure they were consistent with actual interview process. The second one was done at stage six in order to ensure the interpretation by sending the means of significance/themes of each interview to corresponding experts. The final check was done at stage nine where the final central themes were sent back to the respondents to receive approval of them.

2) **Transferability.** In this case, qualitative researchers are to provide a detailed portrait of a setting in which the research was conducted. As the aim is to provide reader enough information, it enables them to judge and estimate the applicability of findings to other settings. As it concerns this research, the detailed picture of local settings was conveyed in section “Recruiting relevant experts” and onwards. More specifically, the research was conducted in Denmark, Aarhus city, among three local advertising agencies which feature variety of specialisation. The respondents recruited were marketing communication experts with significant experience in marketing field (15-20 years). Moreover, it must be mentioned that size of agencies was rather small supposing appropriate marketing specialisation.

3) **Dependability.** Lincoln and Gulba (1985) suggest qualitative researchers to provide an audit trail that would be available for external evaluation and scrutiny— the data documentation, methods and decisions of the research. Accordingly, the interview guide is attached to this research paper as Appendix A, the Appendix B is attached as an exemplification of data analysis process. The latter contains notes, interview transcript, and analysis process of individual interview as well as final result of individual analysis. Moreover, the thesis paper is supplemented with CD containing the actual interview that was transcribed and explicated in Appendix B. As it concerns the methods and decisions of research, the argumentation is present and could be acquired throughout the section of empirical research in this paper. The method used to assess and ensure dependability is almost identical and concur to the areas suggested for checking by Schwandt and Halpern (1988). They require the provision of documentation (raw data, their collection and recording, data reduction and results of synthesis by summarizing, theoretical notes, memos, and so on, summaries, short descriptions of cases etc.) regarding the procedural dependability.

4) **Conformability.** Such aspect addresses the need for auditing as method to reflect quality. Researcher could offer a self-critical reflexive analysis of the methodology used in the research. Flick (2006) offers appropriate assessment procedure regarding the contribution by Huberman and Miles (1998, p. 202):
Are findings grounded in the data? (Is sampling appropriate? Are data weighted correctly?). As it was suggested by literature, sampling was purposive and provided rich and relevant data which were dealt according the grounded methods.

Are inferences logical? (Are analytic strategies applied correctly? Are alternative explanations accounted for?) It is extremely difficult to provide an appropriate answer to this question due to the chosen phenomenological inquiry. As researcher was the one to do interpretations of data, choose the analytic strategies it is quite questionable to make a personal assessment. However, it must be accounted that alternative explanations in result section could vary to a large extent. It might be assumed that variations were not accounted due to a use of second language, inexperience of researcher, possible bias as bracketing process could have failed without notice.

Is the category structure appropriate? It is possible to assume that such inquiry could be related to data explicitation process. There is no right answer as data analysis was completed entirely by interpretation process. Thematisation, clustering, summarizing and etc. could have resulted in different form every time those processes were conducted. However, all the latter mentioned processes were grounded in literature and the most appropriate suggestion was sought.

Can inquiry decisions and methodological shifts be justified? (Were sampling decisions linked to working hypothesis/expectations?) Yes, indeed they can be justified. The first part served as theoretical background to derive possible expectations that could be confirmed/denied/explained. All the methodological shifts and choices were backed up, supported and grounded in appropriate scientific literature.

What is the degree of researcher bias (premature closure, unexplored data in field notes, lack of search for negative cases, feelings of empathy)? Here a discussion could take place, indeed. The nature of research definitely involves the inevitable bias of researcher as it was discussed previously. Other than that, premature closure could be the case here as well. Though the time constraint was the issue, the prolonged research process could have enriched the results, ensured credibility to a greater extent and etc. Lack of search for negative cases could be the case here, although it is believed that exhaustive literature review has accounted for that. Finally, the feelings of empathy could have influence as the researcher is a student of business administration subject and has a certain interest in marketing communications.

What strategies were used for increasing credibility (second readers, feedback to informants, peer review, adequate time in the field)? The detailed procedure was provided under the first aspect when dealing with quality criteria. As it regards the review, other student studying the same programme was asked to review the paper. Moreover, a number of consultations were received from thesis supervisor.

It is assumed that this profoundly escalated section is enough to provide the full picture of explicit quality criteria that was aimed towards ensuring the trustworthiness and slightly appealing for objectivity in this research. If not enough, at least it should serve as good basis for external evaluation.
Next, the focus is to be shifted towards the actual research outcome, namely results of data explicitation process. Here, the phenomena of IMC and social media are to be explained according the life world of marketing communication experts.

**Results: IMC, Social Media and Reflections of Practice**

As it was expected, the use of English which was a second language for both interviewer and interviewees had a certain impact for production of narratives. Some of the respondents had more experience using conversational English, others less. Although interviews were full of stories, experiences, examples etc. some expression was inevitably lost. For instance, metaphors, though usually containing broad social meanings but having very specific and individual meaning in local contexts were rather rarely used. Accordingly, the central themes that emerged from data are listed (see the Table 1). They are to be outlined and discussed aiming at describing the phenomena of IMC and social media.

| * Definitions and perceptions of IMC and Social Media are indexical for experts |
| * IMC and Social Media are enacted according to locally perceived marketing environment |
| * Marketing communication planning is not prescribed rather supposed by local logics |
| * New media is accepted as highly influential to local business |
| * Exploitation of social media is constricted |

*Table 1. Central themes*

As it regards the first theme, all respondents had their own and unique understanding and perception of what is integrated marketing communications and social media. They conveyed the sense of them throughout the local context, the nature of their actual business. It must be mentioned that no misunderstandings, no misconceptions took place, what was described was nothing but practical applications of latter ones. Quite good illustration could be made regarding the answer provided by executive of advertising agency with specialization for kids. When asked to define and share views on IMC at daily business, he made comment:

“... from now on we always consider... when starting of the plan... it as 360 degrees area. And that is what we call IMC. We always... we just focus at the objective. And saying this is objective is to create awareness, to create sales, to create something else...”

The similar approach towards the social media was present. The perception of latter varied in each expert’s narrative and was directly related to a certain situation whether it was related to branding, awareness, relationship, direct response, touch point etc. aspects.

Further findings revealed similar understanding regarding the utilization of IMC and social media at daily business routine. These two concepts of interest were not considered as universally objective truths or entities, rather directly related to local marketing environment in a way of how it is perceived. There is a strong and committed orientation towards the set objectives by clients and corresponding choices of integration and mix of communication means are made. Another example
could be derived from interview with expert from agency specializing in strategic communication planning and PR. When asked to describe demand of integrated campaigns over solitary services, he made a comment:

“...they have a challenge and they ask us to solve that task, to meet the challenge. And they don’t care which tools we use, which means we use. So it’s up to us to consider how we solve this task and that gives a good background to do integrated campaigns of course”

Other than that, the orientation of customer centrisms was described as inevitability when planning marketing communications. However, it seems that such inevitability comes from perspective of communication experts rather than perspective of clients’ demands. Agencies see the certain need to focus on communication dialog with consumers; however, it seems that it takes some time until companies fully understand this orientation. As one expert responded “There is no company that would not put the customer in front and ask what we could do for him/her but at the end of the day they end up with communicating the price.” Moreover, as it concerns the integration of social media, despite recognized advantages it brings to marketing communication, utilization of such is often constrained by ungrounded rationality.

In the context of new media (means of social media) the descriptions provided by experts suppose the understanding that the impact on their business of latter is immense. This huge influence comes from the contemporary market environment and contemporary consumer. The continuously changing environment and intelligent consumer demand the integration of social media means into promotion mix and use it whether it is brand communication, relationship building etc. tool depending on a particular situation. However, at the same time experts remain neutral about it, as it could be illustrated by comment made by one of the experts “People have their life. That means that in many, many ways, in many, many cases you have to disturb your customers or consumers. So you have to use disturbance media and the old media is disturbance media”. Thus social media is treated as rather support for traditional media.

Further findings revealed that the exploitation of social media is somehow constricted and limited. One of the major issues is coming from the inability to measure the influence of social media. The lack of practical approach towards estimating the efficiency of social media means results in rejection by management and clients. As they demand the evidences and direct impacts in terms of financial figures, as often as not those are non-existent. Consequently it results in rejected integration of social media, limited utilization, which in turn cause limited understanding of social media’s potential. When asked to share his opinion on social media when it comes to integration and daily business, one expert made a comment “Everybody is asking for that as it is a big thing for them but only a few understands the real possibilities and limitations of it. It gets difficult if you have some kind of budget on social media, it gets difficult to justify and explain the rationality of using so much social media compared with other kinds of more traditional ways of spending marketing money”.

Finally, the research inquiry revealed that although marketing communication experts are highly aware of IMC and social media, the utilization of them is limited to a certain extent. This means that a certain objective and client are the main factors when shaping the IMC campaign or adjusting integration of social media. However, it was also evident that due to a contemporary dynamic market and intelligent consumer, there is a certain necessity to recoil upon them and look for new
communication touch points, touch points social media could offer. Unfortunately, the most common issue that emerged from data was the absence of practical tools proving effectiveness of social media integration. This sequentially led to a limited exploitation of social media’s potential. The Figure 5 below is to show IMC and Social Media incorporation plot adjusted according to results from data explicitation.

As the empirical research process is completed and results are acquired, along with the purpose of thesis, the broad discussion follows where both theoretical perspective of IMC and social media acquired from literature review is to be juxtaposed with practical one derived from experiences of marketing communication experts.

**Discussion**

**Comparing Empirical Research Results with Literature**

As this section is intended to put theoretical position of IMC and social media integration in comparison to practical one obtained from phenomenological enquiry, the actual aim here is to validate theory in terms of local needs and look for certain areas where improvement is necessary.

First of all, from general point of view, significant difference exists in a way theory posits integrated marketing communication concept and what is actual perception and understanding of such derived from experts’ descriptions. Though a certain understanding of IMC is present, it should be regarded
rather indexical than conceptual – the sense of IMC is derived from its situation, in this case, from business nature. Rich and exhaustive conceptual and theoretical contemplation regarding IMC is seen just useless as only certain aspects are relevant, namely integration and customer-centrism.

As it concerns the well-escalated tendency towards customer-centrism which is basically a tenet of new IMC paradigm, there are some similarities of what literature suggests and what is posited by marketing communication experts’ descriptions. While theoretical position of IMC fully embraces outward-looking orientation and implicitly follows latter as the main driving force for all business decisions, quite different approach is imposed by practice. There customer orientation is existent, though to a certain extent. Companies are trying to recoil upon the consumer however yet unsuccessfully – in many cases they end up with inside-out communication approach and it is only up to agencies to make adjustments. As the result, agencies are developing dialog and two-way communication with consumers, though again - in specific manner, according to local settings. Consequently the tendency of customer-centrism is present in realm of practice, however approached from rather different angle than it is offered by theoretical holistic view.

As it concerns the second aspect of integration, the position taken by literature could be addressed as overrated in comparison to what is obtained from data analysis results. Universal model of IMC pictures integration of various marketing elements and aspects as antecedents and consequences for each other that function in closed-loop model (see Figure 3, p. 22). However on practical side such dynamic interrelation and integration is continuously interrupted by certain way that company and agency define their relations. More specifically, marketing communication planning is never prescribed rather supposed by local logics – task, demand, objective, challenge that is set by company and certain freedom that is given to agency. However, quite similar approach emerges when it comes to integration of social media within IMC processes.

Theoretical framework constructed according to literature reviewed provided a guidance of how social media could be treated and incorporated in terms of integrated marketing communication processes (see Figure 3, p. 22). Accordingly, social media is to be treated as new hybrid element of promotional mix corresponding to different pivotal elements of IMC. It could provide Social CRM and direct sales, customer-to-customer conversation management; also it could be essentially used when promoting search goods as well as a branding and awareness tool. Regardless this promising theoretical construct, the practical expectations and demands of ones actually to be using them, are quite different. There the consensus of impact on business that social media inevitably brings is undoubtedly reached. However, the extent of use is certainly imposed by local settings. The latter includes both treatment of social media and previously discussed task orientation. Social media is seen more like auxiliary mean to promotional mix and support for traditional marketing disciplines (see Figure 5, p. 42). Furthermore, the use of social media is considered to a quite limited extent when compared to potential offered by theoretical framework. Customer relationship management, new touch points, and branding as well as awareness tools were considered as potentially useful. Such contrasting view imposes theoretical overrating towards the extent of social media integration. However, as it is quite straightforward conclusion to make, further explicated juxtaposition of theoretical and practical perspectives provides quite interesting insights.

When discussing the integration process of social media as well as its potential, holistic and theoretical guidance revealed almost perfect alignment with central elements of IMC concept. With
same respect to all four tenets social media was regarded as hybrid element of promotional mix (Figure 3, p. 22). However, reality derived from experts descriptions suppose different picture. As support for traditional marketing disciplines, sequentially social media is underused or used just to a limited extent. The reason for this is non-existent measurement system of social media. Namely communication experts find extremely difficult to argue rationality and necessity to exploit social media to a great extent, especially when it comes to a financial figures, returns on investments as it is of great interest for companies. Consequently, the utilization of social media is constricted and potential underrated. As the Figure 5 (p. 42) shows, in plot constructed according the results of data analysis, social media cannot be directly related to results which are one of the most, if not the most, important pivot concerning both theoretical and practical perspectives of IMC. Here the parallel drawn between theoretical framework and empirical research results revealed topical and relevant problem. The important issue emerging while integrating social media into IMC processes on practical basis is its effectiveness immeasurability or yet non-existent tools for such purpose.

The expectations elicited from literature reviewed were confirmed and fulfilled. Indeed the academic and theoretical guidance constructed according the literature turned out to be quite irrelevant to local marketing practitioners. Moreover, the certain need for the most recent advancements of academic and theoretical guidance regarding social media into IMC processes was present as well. Thus, above escalated process of theoretical framework validation by juxtaposing it with research results revealed the fact that with certain adjustments it could be used by marketers, though with one condition – tools proving the efficiency of social media must be present in order to utilise the guidance at daily business basis. Consequently, this issue is addressed and dealt in further section of implications. As for now, adjusted model of social media integration within IMC strategies is presented below as Figure 6.
Finally, the above presented process of juxtaposing theoretical guidance with empirical research results gives a sense of position taken by theory and then of one taken by practice as well as resulting controversies and elicited areas for improvement. Yet it must be addressed that this sense is quite limited as well as theoretical framework or empirical research. Accordingly one can assume different outcomes if for example other methods like qualitative ones would be employed and sample size increased. That undoubtedly would have resulted in more reliable objectivity, validity and plausibility as more data would be gathered and mathematical data analysis methods employed. Regardless it would be absolutely different story – the choices made in this thesis were directly addressed to the purposes of this paper. Thus the latter sense obtained from this discussion part is to serve as sufficient background for actual outcome this paper was intended to approach. To achieve significance and herewith twofold relevance, implications for both academics and practitioners will take place next.

Delimitations

The final construct is indeed limited to a certain extent. However, it was purposively developed to be used by local needs, namely by local advertising agencies. As it was discovered, utilization of social media is constrained, thus potential is unexploited. Consequently if approach suggested here is to be fully embraced, it is very likely that more opportunities are to be discovered and exploited. Although one could assume that if different type of organizations would have been involved, several angles of discussion would appear. Nonetheless it would be out of interest as one of the aims of the paper was to reduce theory/practice gap and latter could result in extreme deviations. Different organizations have different issues and needs.

Implications

Implications for Academics

The question whether marketing communication practitioners and academics are embracing the social media in terms of integrated marketing communications is yes, they are. However, the consensus that contemporary academic knowledge production is resulting in irrelevance to today’s marketing practice is explicitly conveyed throughout this paper. In connection to partial purpose of this paper to reflect the inconsistencies between theoretical and actual business practice perspectives latter results in certain areas of academic interest. More specifically, there is an essential need to reduce irrelevant knowledge or shift the understanding of what “relevance” stands for. Instead of just simply positioning event, argument or outcome of academic work into secure but limited position, one should embrace the perception that it is the process of work that itself need marketers. Thus this paper calls for recognizing and utilizing mixed and different methods such as qualitative, quantitative, ethnography, phenomenology etc. Also, as it was well-escalated in literature review, there is an essential need to move away from positivistic methodologies. Moreover, it is believed that this particular paper is a good example of how the combination of different methodologies could produce a relevant outcome and reduce the theory/practice gap. Here theoretical framework was constructed according to positivism dominant academic literature and validated/compared with phenomenological enquiry about IMC and social media phenomena.
Though latter process is certainly limited in many ways it still managed to produce the systematic approach and discover the issues that are not addressed in theory (Figure6, p. 44). Namely, the necessity for social media measurement tools that in turn cause underestimation of social media potential. Regardless, this guidance of integration could be used as background or inspiration for further explorations within the field.

Consequently, a measurement tool for social media that would be linked with results relevant to integrated marketing communications could be area for future research. Given the certain limitation of this paper, this proposal should be more concrete. Thus, the main area to focus on is return on investment. As it was previously discovered, such factor is the best and the most relevant indication justifying rationale when investing in social media. Other aspects that should be addressed are directly linked to IMC concept and considered to be important as well: financial measurements, accountability, behaviour-based measures, customer valuation, and wealth contribution.

It is evident that the area of tacit knowledge is left out of abstracted theoretical descriptions, on which accomplishment of action depends (Ardley, 2005). It is strongly advocated to embrace future research of social media integration and measurability with respect to latter notion.

**Implications for Practitioners**

As the empirical research revealed that theoretical framework of social media integration in IMC could be used at daily marketing practice, sequentially it discovered and addressed a certain issue. More specifically, there is a certain need for tools that would measure the effectiveness of social media and be focused on financial measures such as ROI etc. Other than that, compatibility with IMC related aspects such as financial measurements, accountability, behaviour-based measures, customer valuation, and wealth contribution are desirable. However, academic knowledge production is indeed quite slow process and necessity discovered is contemporary. Thus, while scholars are busy, this paper is intended to produce actual and relevant outcome as it was one of the purposes in first place. Namely, it is the model of social media integration as well as solution for latter measurability.

Google Analytics is free web analysis tool with features equivalent to most high-priced solutions currently available in market. It is extremely customizable and contains many features like Analysis Tools, Content Analytics, Mobile Analytics, Conversion Analytics, Advertising Analytics and most important – Social Analytics. As it can be seen, there is a wide range of tools available to satisfy every need for small-medium business that is of interest here. However, the focus is measurement tools for social media, thus Social Analytics is the subject to elaborate on.

Social Analytics is a tool designed to help marketers to measure the actual impact social media has on business goals and conversions. The integration of web and social data that is provided by Social Analytics gives both holistic and very detailed view depending on one’s needs. Conversions reporting is intended to show conversion rates and the monetary value of conversions that occurred due to visits from social networks (Google, 2012). Sources reporting is dedicated to reflect which social networks and sites are referring the highest quality traffic so social campaigns could be adjusted in appropriate way. Sharing reporting is aimed for tracking the sharing of content, both on actual website and external social sites.
Above description is extremely brief compared with opportunities Social Analytics has alone and vast potential Google Analytics has to offer for free. Huge advantage is the possibility to integrate all the data and tools that are of interest in one dashboard as the product is extremely flexible and customizable. Moreover, it is well-applicable in terms of IMC and social media integration and could be potential solution for previously discovered issue. It could be used as missing link between social media and IMC concept enabling the construct of systematic approach to be utilized in marketing practice.

Finally, as it is impossible to offer the measurement guidance that would fit all needs, one intended to use this recommendation should visit Google Analytics webpage. Getting started process is simple and could be accomplished within the minutes.

**Conclusion**

As the paper was intended, most recent development of integrated marketing communications was explored within academic literature and ongoing issues were critically assessed and reflected. The conceptual proposal made by Kliatchko (2008) of IMC was one of the latest advancements within the field and taken as premise for further theoretical framework. The suggested consumer-centric model accounted for both pivotal elements of IMC (stakeholders, content, channels and results) and changing media behavioural patterns among audiences. Sequentially, the theoretical position lying behind was discovered to be positivism dominant and pursuing the approach of universal truth.

Moreover, a certain focus was put on exploring academic literature in order to discover extent to which social media could be used and integrated within IMC strategies and processes. Three academic proposals were reviewed and critically assessed aiming to construct theoretical framework that would offer social media utilization and integration within IMC strategies. It was discovered that social media was to serve as new and hybrid promotional element enabling managers to effectively foster branding and awareness, promote search products, utilize Social CRM and direct sales, and manage customer-to-customer conversations appearing in social media. As all the proposals perfectly aligned with previously explored IMC concept, they also accounted for new communications paradigm. Thus, theoretical framework was constructed and initial systematic approach reached.

Additional interest was laid upon reflecting inconsistencies emerging between theoretical and actual practice perspectives. Phenomenological enquiry was initiated in order to explain the IMC and social media phenomena. Several marketing communication experts from local advertising agencies were interviewed and descriptions provided were explicitated. Results revealed somewhat different perception of both IMC and social media that it is offered by literature. More specifically, they were perceived as indexical, also it was discovered that IMC and social media are enacted according to locally perceived marketing environment, marketing communication planning is not prescribed but rather supposed by local logics, new media is accepted as highly influential to local business and that exploitation of social media is constricted. Such findings served as a good background when discussing and reflecting the issues emerging between theoretical and actual practice perspectives. It was agreed that theoretical framework could be used practically as systematic approach integrating social media into IMC but with some adjustments. Namely by re-categorizing social
media as support for promotion mix, removing irrelevant features such as support for search product promotion, customer-to-customer conversation management and including such features as task orientation and new touch points.

Consequently such process elicited certain issues that were addressed and presented as implications for both academics and practitioners. It turned out that the reason for constricted exploitation of social media is non-existent tools for latter’s measurability. It constrained ability to justify rationale using social media and this in turn caused the limited exploitation. Thus the final practical framework of social media integration into IMC strategies was supplemented by recommendation to use Google Analytics. As it is free, flexible, practical, customizable, and perfectly fits into frames of IMC. However, as it concerns academics, the issue of theory/practice gap was addressed and the suggestion was made to move away from positivistic methodologies and embrace use of mixed methodologies. Moreover, it was suggested that the construct as well as measurability issue could be the areas for further research.

Finally, the fundamental purpose of this paper was accomplished. The issue of theory/practice gap was addressed by contrasting theoretical framework with empirical research results which in turn resulted in relevant outcome. The systematic approach of social media integration within IMC strategies was constructed, adjusted and validated as well as supplemented with practical recommendations.
Bibliography


Appendices

Figure 7, Four Pillars of IMC, (Kliatchko J., 2008)

Figure 8, Content Creation Model, (Kliatchko J., 2008)