

Measuring the Impact of Social Media on Brand Trust

A Case Study of Virgin Media

by

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ABSTRACT

With scant literature on Social Media and brand trust influenced through the online environment, I have decided to conduct a research based on this theme. Although ethnography would have been a more appropriate methodology, because of certain limitations, two methods of research will be used: semi structured interviews with key employees from Virgin Media and an online survey ran through the customers of Virgin Media.

The interviews have given a better understanding of the company's culture and how they view and use Social Media. Several themes were identified through the interviews and then, with the help of the survey, i could see if the strategy Virgin Media is implementing is actually reaching the customers and having the desired result. With the help of the survey, a brand trust scale will also be developed and several items from it will be crucial in its development.

The Online Marketing sector from Virgin Media is strictly connected with the Customer Service one, thus giving them a better coverage of the customer feedback and a better understanding of what impact Social Media has on them. Although some of the channels Virgin Media are using (e.g. Facebook) have been recently set up, customers seem pleased with their management and feel they can trust Virgin Media through these channels.

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INTRODUCTION

“The ultimate goal of marketing is to generate an intense bond between the consumer and the brand, and the main ingredient of this bond is trust” (Hiscock 2001, p.1).

Even though there was an increase attention in this subject during the past ten years and relevance was drawn by the relationship principles in both theory and practice, application of the relationship notion at the level of brand have been scant (Fournier 1988). The lack of theoretical and empirical research on this subject is remarkable due to the fact that relationship thinking guides today’s brand management practices to leverage consumer-brand bonds, especially due to the increasing unpredictability and heightened competitive pressures characterizing the current marketplace (Shocker, Srivastava, and Ruekert 1994). In addition, on a theoretical level, the understanding level of consumer- brand relationship is perceived as having critical importance to the development of marketing and consumer behaviour theory (Miller 1995), and also lead to other implications in areas such as brand loyalty and brand equity.

Blackstone (1992) stated that there is a relationship between the person and his/her possessions. Having this in mind, consumer researchers have demonstrated that these relationships have a major contribution to the consumer’s sense of self and may even mediate a person’s social or identity relationships (Belk 1988, Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989, Wallendorf and Arnold 1988).

One of the most important researches that have been conducted about consumer- object interactions, is the one made by Fournier (Fournier 1995, 1998, Fournier and Yao 1997). It has been exceptionally valuable on this matter in particular. From her research, Fournier describes the relationship consumers have with brands as a multifaceted construct to capture the richness of the fabric from which brand relationships arise (Fournier 1998). As such, what matters in these consumer- brand bonds are aspects that include commitment, love/passion, intimacy, self-connection and brand partner quality.

However, one of the important aspects in her framework is missing. When it comes to understanding a consumer-brand relationship, the analysis of the consumer's trust in the brand is a key factor in this framework. Today's brand management practices and how brand managers embrace this concept when it comes to defining their brands, is a very well-illustrated idea.

Bainbridge (1997), Kamp (1999), Smith (2001) and Scott (2000) believe that trust is the most important attribute any brand can own. MacLeod (2000) considers that most of the vocabulary used for brand building includes words associated with personal relationships such as "trust" and for Blackstone (1992) trust is one of the main components of consumers' relationships with brands.

Furthermore, the absence of trust in Fournier's (1998) framework calls out for attention despite the fact that it has emerged as a key component of a desirable relationship in a variety of other disciplines. Psychology and sociology view trust as a cornerstone and one of the most important desirable qualities of any close relationship (Rempel, Holmes and Zanna 1985, Rotter 1980) or as a feature of human relations (Larzelere and Huston 1980). In more applied areas as management and marketing, trust is viewed as a core element of relationships within the business environment (Dwyer, Schurr, Oh 1987, Garbarino and Johnson 1999, Hess 1995, Morgan and Hunt 1994).

According to Jo Causon, chief executive at the Institute of Customer Service UK, using Social Media can build brand trust for a brand among consumers. She also noted that the "balance of power" has shifted to the consumer, which has been enabled by technology such as Social Media. "Research shows that 78 per cent of consumers say they trust peer recommendations on Social Media- only 18 per cent trust advertising", she said. After friends and family, the number one driver for brand trust is online reviews and feedback from the Social Media space. More than 40 per cent of consumers go online to check reviews and consumer feedback before purchasing. 60 per cent of those going online have visited a social network, with half going back every day according to Facebook. Consumers expect for companies to be active in Social Media and respond frequently to their enquiries, even before purchase. Recent research by Rocket revealed, however, that just 21 per cent

of marketers thought social media was effective for brand building, although 94 per cent still use social networks as part of their digital marketing strategy.

In summary, trust is a very important variable affecting human relations at all levels (Rotter 1980). Therefore, whether concepts and theories from research on interpersonal relationships are used to characterize and evaluate consumer-brand relationships, trust should be analysed as another facet of the bond between consumers and brands. Unfortunately, no current scale exists to measure trust in brand setting. In this paper, I will research how Social Media, as part of Marketing influences brand trust in a major media company. Toward this end, I begin by examining the concept of trust in studies conducted in different academic fields to understand its meaning and its main characteristics. Based on the literature review, a definition of brand trust will be provided. I will then, deal with a research design, the methodology proposed to conduct the research, the data collection. Finally, I will discuss the results in terms of their managerial practice, their limitations and directions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trust in Literature

Trust has received a great deal of attention from scholars in several disciplines such as psychology (e.g., Deutsch 1960; Larzelere and Huston 1980; Rempel et al. 1985; Rotter 1980), sociology (e.g., Lewis and Weigert 1985), and economics (e.g., Dasgupta 1988), as well as in more applied areas like management (e.g., Barney and Hansen 1994) and marketing (e.g., Andaleeb 1992; Dwyer et al. 1987; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Although the multiple interest in this subject has brought a significant addition to the construct, such a diversity of scholarship makes it difficult to integrate the various viewpoints on trust and find a consensus on its nature. Bhattacharya, Debinney, and Pillutla (1988) have said that not only these different scholars approach trust concept from different sides and methods, but they have pointed out different opinions over its nature. Specifically, Lewicki and Bunker (1995) identify three different approaches on how trust can be viewed. As opposed to how psychologists view trust as an individual characteristic (Rotter 1980), social psychologists consider trust to be an expectation drawn upon a certain transaction and the person with whom is transacting. On the other hand, economists and sociologists are interested in how institutions and incentives reduce uncertainty, and in turn increase trust, associated with these specific transactions.

A careful review of the existent literature makes apparent that post perspectives on trust agree that there are two critical components that should be introduced in the definition of trust; these are confident expectations and risk. For example, Deutsch (1973) defines trust as “the confidence that one will find what is desired from another, rather than what is feared”. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) say that trust is “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party...”, and Barney and Hansen believe that trust is “the mutual confidence that no party to an exchange will exploit another’s vulnerability”. In summary, to make the assumption that another person is trustworthy, the possibility to show that he or she is trustworthy must exist (Rempel et al. 1985).

In situations where trust is involved, the sources of risk are linked to vulnerability and/or the possibility of uncertainty of an outcome. Blomqvist (1997) has associated risk with a certain situation of imperfection, because “in total ignorance it is possible only to have faith and/or gamble, and under perfect information, there is no trust but merely rational calculation”.

Consequently, trust can be viewed as a psychological state interpreted in terms of “perceived probabilities” (Bhattacharya et al. 1998), “confidence” (Barney and Hansen 1994; Deutsch 1973; Gabarino and Johnson 1999) or “expectancy” (Rempel et al. 1985) assigned to something positive happening from the trusting party. Accordingly, to trust someone means to expect a high degree in the probability that this person will perform actions that will result in positive, or at least non-negative, outcomes for his/her exchange or relational partner.

For the previous theoretical treatments of trust, it is believed that this probability of occurrence may be based on the dispositional attributions made to the partner about his/her intentions, behaviours (verbal or non-verbal), and qualities. In other words, trust is based on the notion that people understand their partners when it comes to taking into consideration terms of acts, dispositions, and motives that would predict positive responses (Rempel et al. 1985).

When considering these attributes, each discipline that has studies trust has its own emphasis on a particular attribute. The variety of these attributes had led to the construct of two main categories, which will be called dimensions in the concept of trust, some of them are of motivational nature and others are of technical or competence-based nature.

From the studies conducted in psychology, it can be drawn that the motivational dimension is viewed as the core one when it comes to talking about trust. The dimension is related to the attribution that the exchange partner’s behaviour (verbal or non-verbal) is guided by favourable or positive intentions when it comes to considering the welfare or interests of his/her partner (Andaleeb 1992). Therefore, this dimension reflects that one of the partners does not have the intention to lie, break a promise, or to take advantage of one’s vulnerability. When referring to this dimension, a certain terminology was used. For example, Frost, Stimpson, and Maughan (1978) highlight the term *altruism*; Larzelere and

Huston (1980) propose two qualities of trust: *benevolence* and *honesty*, and Rempel et al. (1985) use the words *dependability* and *fairness*.

Nevertheless, further research in the management and marketing areas have reached the conclusion that there is a second dimension attributed to the concept of trust, this being of a technical or competence nature. The reason behind this idea is that, in a business field, in any transactions taking place, there is a certain dependence on delivering certain outcomes and performing certain activities. Therefore, when measuring if someone is trustworthy, it is vital to know if he/she owns the capacity or ability to perform these activities and even produce the desired outcome (Andaleeb 1992). Several of the researchers have agreed upon the fact that, it is important to acknowledge the second dimension of the trust concept and have even used a variety of terms to refer it. In the channel literature, Morgan and Hunt (1994) use the term *reliability*, Ganesan (1994), and Doney and Cannon (1997) use *Credibility*, and Andaleeb (1992) and Mayer et al. (1995) mention the term *ability* when it comes to mention this concept.

In summary, firstly, the motivational dimension of trust is the extent to which one believes that its partner is interested in the one's welfare and interests. Secondly, the competence or technical dimension refers to the belief that the partner has the required amount of expertise to perform his/her activities, carry on his/her obligations in order to accomplish his/her promise.

In conclusion, drawing on the above literature, brand trust can be defined as: *feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, which is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer.*

After defining brand trust, there is the question "What is the purpose of building brand trust?" The main aim of building brand trust is "to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage and thereby enhance a business performance" (Kanagal, p.1). Except for the ones mentioned before, many other researchers have reached a communal idea that brand trust can be established through a combination of familiarity, security, privacy, word of mouth, advertising, and brand image (Chow and Holden 1997, Delgado- Ballester and Munuera-Aleman 2001, Garbarino and Johnson 1999, Wernerfelt 1991). On the downside, these

researchers have not conducted studies on the subject of how to build brand trust online. While it may be argued that brand trust is a core dimension of brand loyalty, the latter is composed out of such a vast number of dimensions, that it would be pointless to consider it only in general terms.

Indeed, brand trust is the main ingredient when considering increasing brand loyalty online. "For example, on an auction site, like eBay.com may have a very reasonable pricing, but the potential consumer may find the product performance questionable. As a result, a low brand trust may counterbalance high brand satisfaction to reduce the probability of purchase of a product or service on the Web. In contrast, a high level of trust may ultimately convert a satisfied customer into a loyal one." (Ha 2004, p. 330). Thus, how to create brand trust online is the major objective of this study.

A second point when studying brand trust online is familiarity analysis- used when building the branding trust relationship (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Hoffman et al., 1998; Tractinsky et al., 1999). Brand familiarity can be defined as the continuous variable which measures how often the customer is in touch with the brand (directly and indirectly) (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). They stated that, unless a person has a negative perception of the brand, familiarity with the brand can lead to higher brand trust. A strong correlation between familiarity and trust has been indicated by researches conducted by Cheskin and Sapient (1999). However, many of the online companies have not yet achieved the level of familiarity needed to achieve brand trust. On the other hand, some researchers in the field suggest that familiarity is not a dependable when it comes to brand trust (McNight et al. 1998). Though, a high level of familiarity based on positive consumer experience may influence brand trust online (Smith and Wheeler 2002).

Very little research has been conducted on factors affecting online brand trust. There were a few exceptions: Hoffman et al. (1998) and "literature on familiarity with Web is the basis of testable hypotheses that describe the relationship between brand trust and the factors affecting it" (Ha 2004, p.330). The major goal of this research is to assist practitioners and researchers who are interested in both familiarity with the brand and how to strategically construct online brand trust. In particular, this research will be useful for practitioners and researchers who will be interested in the empirical work, because much of the theoretical

work has been done already. There has been empirical work done on online trust by McKnight and Kacmar (2002) and Jarvenpaa et al. (2000). Furthermore, there can be other factors, different ones that affect online brand trust, than the ones affecting it in bricks and mortar context (Liang and Huang 1998).

In the present study, brand trust is defined as how willingly an average consumer is to rely on the ability of the brand to perform a certain function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Doney and Cannon (1997) and Moorman et al. (1992) state that the notion of trust is relevant only in cases or situation where uncertainty is involved. More specifically, “e-trust reduces the uncertainty in an environment in which consumers feel vulnerable because they know that they can rely on the trusted brand” (Ha 2004, p. 330).

The whole process of development and maintenance of brand trust through the internet is at the core of every marketing strategy nowadays, especially when it comes to highly competitive markets which have an increasing unpredictability and decreasing product differentiation (Fournier and Yao, 1997).

Social media

Social media has become in the last ten years an evolving “phenomena” in business marketing. Enlightened marketers have started to integrate social media in their marketing strategies and campaigns in order to drive the increase of new customers and fans. There are several sub-disciplines of marketing that have started to use social media, such as promotions, marketing intelligence, sentiments research, public relations, marketing communications and product and consumer research.

As with any shift in philosophy and trend adoption, understanding the real benefits of leveraging social media as a strategy within the marketing department continues to be a challenge in many business organisations. Many researchers have become to question the real value which comes out of investing in a social media strategy. Others question the wisdom of “easing control” over the public and exposing the brand. Therefore, many early commercial approaches of social media have been flawed and misguided and do not agree with social media as being a concept of open and transparent engagement with the market

place. Nonetheless, this feeling is beginning to fade as many marketers are increasingly embarking on social media campaigns as an additional support of the traditional marketing ones.

Social Media Channels

Solis describes social media as the “shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and contents” (Solis, 2007a). People are doing as Solis stated through the internet using: blogs, social networks (*Facebook, MySpace, Orkut*), news aggregators (*Digg, Stumbleupon*), video and music portals (*YouTube, LastFM*), social bookmarking (*Reddit, Delicious*), micro-blogging (*Twitter, Plurk*), online forums and reviews (*Amazon, Yahoo Answers!*, some companies having their own online forums: *Virgin Media*) and other social media communication channels. All this has been made possible with the technological evolution, also known as “Web 2.0”, meaning the internet being used as a two-way communication channel (O’Reilly, 2005). He explains in his work the revolution of the internet and he calls it “wisdom of crowds”.

The first companies which started using social media were IBM and Lego. They began building their own community forums and corporate blogs. Other companies immediately followed, such as Dell and Ford. They used these approaches to reach out to customers (Li and Bernoff, 2008). These approaches turned out to be successful; therefore marketing strategies began to include social media campaigns as well. The usage of Facebook and Twitter to product market and services began to receive a lot of attention from the business environment during the past years. The main reason to this massive widespread of social media is the relative low cost to implement it and the ability to bypass traditional media when it comes to advertising and promotional needs.

Fail

However, not all attempts of social media strategies have proved to be successful when implementing them; for example, Sony’s Playstation Portable (PSP) blog. The existing blog about PSP, which was presumably set up by a teenager user of it, was discovered to be

owned by an advertising company hired by Sony in order to promote the PSP (Kingsley-Hughes, 2006). This finding has generated bad publicity relation for Sony.

Experts and Thoughts Leaders

Due to this being a new field, there is a clear lack of research in this area. “Interestingly too, because of its fairly recent introduction into mainstream commercial landscape, many of the recognised experts and key authors in social media today are current practitioners in the social media/marketing space” (Tanuri, p.4). Unlike academics, these practitioners have influenced the others through the channels they know best, and these are the ones from social media. Many of these leading social media practitioners are bloggers like Seth Godin, David Meerman Scott, Mitch Joel and Chris Brogan who have become social media experts, built their own personal brands and they share their work experience through online channels and digital word of mouth. Their profiles are described in Appendix A.

The Engagement Concept

Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff outline in “Groundswell” (2008) the following core activities that define the engagement with the groundswell: listening, talking, energising, supporting and embracing. This framework has been developed and proposed by Li and Bernoff when talking about the understanding of companies must have about engaging with their customers through social media. They also stated that social media is about people and the relationships and online communities must be the cornerstone of any social media marketing strategy.

Although this framework is seen to provide a clear understanding of the community engagement model, it does not provide any long term value of investment in these activities. The process of engaging with customers and prospects on a broad scale has proven to be a significant cost to most companies. On the other hand, Mitch Joel, in his book “Six Pixels of Separation” (2009), has made a clear point in favour for close engagement with customers and prospects. Nowadays, people are becoming more and more connected to each other through the internet and social networks. With the current rate of adoption, the online users have become a relevant target market for any company.

By investing and getting involved in their online lives, companies will have an edge and a competitive advantage in the future. This will build customer trust. This, coupled with rapport build over time is a durable asset which will be hard to be overcome by competitors (Godin, 1999).

Saying “No” Social Media Marketing

Nonetheless, the fact that social media is a part of marketing is not a universal shared view. Tom Martin (2009), in *Advertising Age*, said that social media is not a channel for marketing and that any corporate involvement in the conversations will decrease the identity value. Glen Dury (2008) states that marketing has no place in social media; that it's actually destroying the social media foundations by undermining its human elements.

Furthermore, the well-known blogger and social media expert, Chris Brogan, in his blog post “Marketing is NOT social media- Social media is NOT marketing” (2007), says that marketing and social media are two entirely separate entities and should not be perceived as being part of each other. His main argument is that social media is a set of tools that allow people to access certain information and have shared interests and these tools should not be owned by marketing. Instead, he suggests that marketers should observe and pay attention to how regular people get involved in media. The same view is shared by Lee Odden, voted number 15 in 2008's top of digital marketers. Odden (2009) believes that social media is no place for direct marketing and that people join only social networks, and the Web 2.0 for a reason: to be social within a like-minded community, instead of being marketed to.

This study is not in agreement with these views. Even when traditional marketing is used, engagements with prospects are made through advertising and promotional advertising. These involve multiple levels of human interaction, seen or unseen. The major difference nowadays, through social media, the company can have a two way relationship with the customers, where the customers can respond to the company's campaign directly and get relevant feedback quicker. At the essence of it, the main principle of marketing does not change; it still satisfies human wants and needs. Social media marketing is viewed as an evolution from traditional methods used until now.

The Paradox

On one hand, consumers are highly empowered by the internet, they are encouraged to have their own say and opinions about brands and experts like Brogan and Odden say that consumers should have total freedom when it comes to their interaction with the brands. On the other hand, marketers are desperately trying to get through to customers using social media to drive their marketing campaigns and to develop a certain image of their brands online.

The Advocates

Supporters of social media marketing for enterprise believe that the right approach can be beneficial for both businesses and customers. Eikermann, Hajj and Peterson (2007) support the notion that companies should re-strategize and profit from this 'threat'. They believe that companies should actively seek to engage in conversations with their customers. However, companies must observe a condition of moving away from 'controlling the message' and let consumers decide on the flavour of the conversations. Additionally, in their research, they observed that Web 2.0 has caused the fragmentation of marketing channels, in that, communities and websites tend to cater to niches and particular demographics. These should be used to the advantage of companies as they can be efficient through the use of highly-targeted effective marketing messages despite the clutter.

This study agrees that the sheer volume of advertising clutter is causing consumers to question the authenticity behind the claims of these messages. It is also agreed that brand recall is suffering from increased consumerism as companies capitalise by developing countless new products and brands. Tellingly, a CBS news report (2006) states that an average person is exposed to about five thousand advertising messages in a day. As such, David Meadows-Klue (2007) argues that, with the explosion of cheap, one-way advertising channels and growing customer literacy in the art of marketing, the impact of traditional marketing communications has been undermined. Therefore, Meadows-Klue is of the

opinion that social media is the right channel for marketers to regain attention from customers.

The Bridging Factor: Influencers

Despite the opposing arguments for social media's involvement in marketing, it is ultimately social media's creation of a new layer of influencers that will prove to be beneficial for both marketers and consumers (Solis, 2007b). In *'The Tipping Point'* (2000), author, Malcolm Gladwell, emphasises on the importance of influencers in the transference and spread of any new idea or knowledge. Without these idea facilitators, many commercial successes, such as the *Apple*, *Hush Puppies* and *Google* brands, will remain on the peripheral. For consumers, recommendations through peer influence tend to be perceived as highly authentic and objective.

For marketers, whose predominant purpose is the influence of customers to their products, the easy creation of consumer-influencers is a vital benefit that can be reaped from the integration of social media in their campaigns. Moreover, many marketing experts agree that *word-of-mouth* (WOM) is an effective element of promotion. In the Web 2.0 era, the WOM activity can be easily facilitated through the sharing of viral videos, email or peer reviews on Facebook. Trusov *et al* (2009), in a research on the effect of WOM on social networks' sign-up, found that the elasticity of WOM referrals is 20 and 30 times higher than that of marketing events and media publicity, respectively. Thus, this study is of the opinion that a major role of social media in marketing practices (if adopted) must be objectively related to the creation of influencers within communities.

Return on Influence

Another applicable theory in the matter of WOM through social media is the *Return on Influence* (Brogan and Smith, 2008). The prevailing idea is that marketing must be strategically carried out through identifying and influencing those with the most influence over others. At present, social media is the only medium that allows for such detailed effort. Despite the intricacy of this tactic, the objective of focussing messages to the right audience is in accord with marketing fundamentals of segmenting and targeting audiences for

maximum conversion. This tactic is also in agreement to Gladwell's *Law of the Few* theory (2000). The influence of a Connector personality ('Connectors know lots of people') over an ideology or trend will quickly mobilise its spread and reach until it reaches the 'tipping point'. This is when an idea achieves critical mass and universal recognition through a sudden exponential growth.

Brand Advocates

However, traditional marketing philosophies do not explicitly cater for external contribution to a brand by anyone, other than an employee of a company. Commercial marketing objectives are typically aligned to achieve incremental revenue through quality lead generation and brand building. Because of this, no added emphasis is usually given to building external non-sale relations with customers.

Nevertheless, with social media, the unpaid brand advocates are a reality. In the 'Groundswell' (Li and Bernoff, 2008), it is proposed that brand advocates are 'grown' through purpose-built community forums for ardent fans of brands such as Lego, Dell and the iPhone. In retrospect, this act of 'energising the groundswell' is in effect a controlled and strategized word-of-mouth effort.

Stickiness Wins

Another triumphant brand advocate campaign was the successful bid to have Barack Obama elected as President of the United States (Lardinois, 2005). The synchronised use of social media channels gave extended awareness and publicity to the Obama digital campaign and a measurable edge over John McCain, the Republican Senator.

This was achieved through endorsements made online by Obama advocates who have a lasting and visible impact as the internet retains a level of permanency and transparency.

Again, this observation concurs with another of Gladwell's theory in 'The Tipping Point', *the Stickiness Factor* (2008). This is the study of the strength of a message in a person's mind that will allow it to be relayed from one person to another effortlessly until it reaches tipping point. From a marketing perspective, the Stickiness Factor is an important criterion

in the crafting and testing of marketing messages: the viral effect of 'United Breaks Guitars' and Susan Boyle's 100 million YouTube views (Ostrow, 2009) are evidence that the carefully-crafted message is a powerful tool for the marketer.

Conclusively, the use of external resources, who will evangelise a brand to friends, relatives and colleagues for "the most honest form of marketing" (WOMMA, 2009), is similar in effect to an over-achieving direct marketing campaign, at minimal or no cost.

The Obama campaign is compelling evidence that social media can assist in achieving marketing objectives if efforts are focussed on marketing through influence and brand advocacy.

Permission and Trust Marketing

Irrefutably, traditional marketers are grappling with the decline of mainstream advertising and the rise of social media which has deeply affected the media and newspaper industry. Forrester Research, in its 5-year forecast, reports that global advertising budget will decline significantly and this will be supplanted by a 34% growth in social media budget (VanBorskirk, 2009). This is a strong indication that advertising is fast losing its effect as a promotions tool.

Without a doubt, the works of Seth Godin in the area of permission marketing have influenced a new generation of digital marketers. In '*Permission Marketing*' (1999), Godin explores the use of interactive technology, such as email and online games, in order to receive explicit customer permission for a brand to initiate direct interact. Godin argues that only marketing messages and approaches that are *relevant, personal* and *anticipated* will be readily accepted by customers.

Godin's theory has been proven just as relevant today as customers continue to eschew traditional advertising in favour of word-of-mouth recommendation and peer reviews. With social media, practitioners of digital marketing are able to gain inroads to potential customers through the proven method of permission marketing. Instead of brands pushing and 'shouting' their messages across, social media channels allow for consumers to

voluntarily 'befriend' (via Facebook Fan Pages) or accept communication (via Twitter or email newsletters) from brands. The building of trust through such relationships typically benefits both companies and consumers.

As organisations become exceedingly visible through social media, it is therefore notable that marketing of trust is important. Mitch Joel (2007) expounds the theory that if an organisation does not provide value, be open and transparent and create opportunities for two-way communications, the brand will not survive in a time when social media is becoming an accepted platform for brand-building. Joel further states that these ideals are can only be possible through the 'building of community based on trust'. Based on these arguments, this study therefore has the opinion that modern organisational marketing must involve efforts in social media in order to maintain and increase trust and authenticity from customers' perspective.

The Reality

The above arguments indicate that social media can be mutually beneficial for both parties if the boundaries of engagement are specified. In areas where corporate sponsored social media activities are managed (such as product support forums), branding and direct marketing should be reasonably accepted. In public and closed social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook respectively, permission must be sought for marketing messages to be broadcasted or relayed to specific users. Breaching these boundaries is akin to interruption marketing, similar in purpose and effect to untargeted advertising and email spam.

Social Media and CRM

Bernoff (2009) recommends that every organisation must know every single one of their best customers by name. To achieve this, social media can be used to provide visibility and almost real-time direct channels to engage and interact. The argument also extends to the idea that your best customers will always know where to find your company if they have a problem. Meadows-Klue (2007) concurs with this view. He further states that, as customers

have been empowered by easily-available social media tools, the expectation is growing that their favourite retailers will engage them in the online domain.

Limitation to Resources

However, such idealistic views may be contrary to business ethos of efficiency and that close attention on every single customer, even the best ones, may be a resource drain, especially in the fast moving consumer goods industry. The call for companies to be exceptionally frugal in this economic climate resonates clearly among business leaders.

Expert advice dictates that the focus must be on spending that generates real returns on investment (ROI), not just in marketing activities but also in operations (Maddox, 2009).

New Rules of CRM

This is where the argument for social media and customer relationship management (CRM) converges. CRM drives the radical customer-oriented marketing concept (4Cs of customer, cost, convenience and communication) that is slowly replacing the traditional 4Ps of marketing thinking (product, place, price and promotion). As outlined by Dr. Ned Roberto (World Village, 2008), the 4Cs' emphasis is to approach marketing from consumers' perspective. In this regard, we can find that both CRM and social media offer the same benefits and end-results for companies and their customers, which is visibility and long term patronage.

A recent Forrester survey found that social media is extensively helping companies to deepen their relationships with customers through complementary uses of social tools and CRM systems (Karpinski, 2008). Supporting this view, David Myron (2009), in his editorial in CRM Magazine, also theorises that using social media, in conjunction with CRM tools, provides a new level of customer intelligence. Listening in to customers' sentiments and gathering attitudinal data via social media will provide business strategists with higher level of confidence in decision making.

Summary

The above literature review has shown that social media is an integrated part of marketing nowadays. Although there are some researchers who have disagreed with social media being a marketing tool, generally, social media has proven to be a very helpful tool in advertising, marketing campaigns, public relation activities and customer relationships management programs.

A certain balance need to be kept when integrating social media as a part of the marketing strategy. The experts call for marketers to engage in a subtle and restrained manner when it comes to engage customers using social media. They should interact with them in order to influence them, rather than trying to use social media as a selling technique, this will more likely bring long term benefits to the company and the brand. In conclusion, the objective of social media should be to transform customers into trusting customers and act later on as advocates for the brand.

The importance of social media as a corporate ideology should be the main focus of it and cannot be ignored. Through social media, an open and transparent communication should be conducted between the brand and the customers, thus building brand trust. "This is important in an era where corporate social responsibility is emphasised in the wake of corporate scandal, such as Bernie Maddox's and Satyam's" (Tanuri, 2004, p. 18). Social media has been proved to be an important tool in public relations and also in creating of thought leadership for a company.

In conclusion, social media being a recent tool used in the business environment, it should definitely not be overlooked. Furthermore, more research and development is needed in this area in order to become an increased force in corporate adoption. Nonetheless, social media is an important tool for any organisation moving its activity into the Web 2.0 and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

In seeking to develop answers to the research objective laid out above, I will gather data from Virgin Media, the Marketing Department based on London. Virgin Media is a national based company which provides broadband and mobile services. After a work experience in the Marketing Department from Virgin Media in 2009, I have kept contact with the key employees from the company. I have decided to do my research with this company, because of the access granted to me by the Senior Manager of the Online Marketing Department.

I will begin with a company profile to give the reader an overview of Virgin Media and provide perspective before describing my methodology and the limitations that exist within it. Virgin Media has launched in 2007, as an amalgam of the UK cable industry- the old NTL and Telewest (which themselves were made up of 55 merged cable companies), the UK's largest MVNO (Virgin Mobile) and Virgin.net. It is the biggest Virgin Company in the world. They have almost 10 million customers across their broadband, digital TV, home phones and mobile services. They are the second Pay TV provider in the UK. They were the first company to launch broadband in the UK (2000) and offer the fastest services (100 Mb launched at the end of 2010), with over 4.2 million broadband customers. They are UK's first "quad play" provider and they currently have approximately 12,500 employees.

What are they doing in regards to Social Media? Their current channels include: Forums, Promoter Community, Facebook and Twitter. The Help and Support Forums have been launched in August 2009, successfully being implemented as they receive more than 5,000 posts weekly. The content is Google friendly, being relevant and frequently updated. The main purpose of them is to focus on peer help and customers helping themselves. The Promoter Community or "the Sofa" is a channel based on their website. It is viewed as a closed community (open to invitees only based on NPS survey feedback) and its main purpose is to receive customer feedback through it and to share product details, for trials, etc. it benefits from direct input from product teams and marketing teams. There is a certain customer service queries received, but they tend to be policy related, rather than

individual problems. There are escalation channels used to deal with individual queries considering it is a closed and low in number community with almost 800 members at present. The official Facebook page is used to promote V Festival, Shorts, Pioneers and off campaigns. Conversations on the Facebook page are “friend to friend”. Other unofficial Facebook pages have been created by users in order to complain, to which Virgin Media employees have no access to, but they do engage with campaign groups’ direct, dealing with group operators. Virgin Media launched @virginmedia twitter feed in December 2008. It was one of the first UK ISPs to engage with customers via Twitter- customers were already talking about them. Followers are increasing steadily with no signs of slowdown.

Details about this company which are reported in this research come from auto ethnography and examination of company’s documents that was conducted before the current study began as well as informal consultation with relevant individuals with relevant individuals from within the company.

I will now look at the methods I plan to employ to gather my data, also having key concerns and considerations along the way, before moving to explain my samples and discuss the development of the hypotheses. When deciding to research this particular case and see how Social Media can influence brand trust, several methodologies were taken into consideration. The most suited methodology for what I wanted to obtain, was ethnography. Ethnography would have been more appropriate, especially when entering a company, it would have given me more time to explore the culture of the company and see how the social groups within the Marketing Department interact. It would also benefit my research, as I would have been able to see how the current strategy of Virgin Media would have evolved and what kind of issues are they facing. I would have had much more material from which to choose my main themes of the research. In order to follow this kind of methodology, it would have been more appropriate to follow the whole strategy of the company, which would have lasted for more than six months. Because of the time pressure, I have decided to condense everything and try to get the information needed through other methods of research. Virgin Media and its customers offer me a wide range of respondents, but I would have to be careful when choosing them. I have reduced the whole Marketing Department to only the people who have contact with the Online Strategy, from which I

have chosen the key employees. And from the whole database of customers, I will choose only the ones from a certain part of the country.

To develop answers for the proposed research objectives, I feel it would be necessary to use both qualitative and quantitative research. Unlike grounded theory, where the method used is validating or not a theory, I am using a combination of methods in order to reach the answer of my research question. The data collected through semi structured interviews will be followed by identifying categories and properties; a general statement will be created based upon them and then I will try to validate it through the quantitative research.

When conducting qualitative research, the most common method used is interviews. Interviews are viewed as conversations with purposes, as in this case, in order to obtain knowledge about the respondent's world. "Qualitative interviewing is a great adventure; every step of an interview brings new information and opens windows into the experiences of the people you meet. Qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others think and feel about their worlds. Through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences, and reconstruct events in which you did not participate. Through what you hear and learn, you can extend your intellectual reach across time, class, sex, and geographical divisions. Qualitative interviewing builds on conversational skills that you already have" (Rubin, J.H. and Rubin S.I, 1995, p.1). The qualitative research conducted will imply semi structured interviews with key employees from Virgin Media (see Appendix B), in order to obtain a better understanding of their strategy used and how they believe this will help when it comes to matters of increasing and measuring brand trust. The responses from these questions will bring a better understanding of how they manage customers who contact the company via Social Media, how they prioritize them, what is the strategy chosen, how do they monitor the Social Media channels and most importantly what do they expect to gain from Social Media.

Previous to conducting the interviews, I have exchanged emails with the Senior Manager of the Online Department in which I have presented the research, the purpose of it and even gave her the interview questions upfront. Prior to my arrival to the company, interviews were set up by her. I will begin each interview by explaining that I am there in an academic role, there will be a confidentiality agreement signed and they will not have to fear that I

will disclose any information they will provide me with during the interviews. To continue my reassurance, I will let them know also, that any information provided by them will not be disclosed to any of their colleges and it will not be made public in any library after the paper will be written.

The sample for this method of research will be rather small, but it will consist of key employees in the company. The first interview will be conducted with Sonia, the Senior Manager of the Online Marketing Department. The second one will be with Shean Hewit, he manages the Customer Service Department, especially the complaints that come from the customers using Social Media as a channel of communication. He was based to manage the Twitter account, and recently has overtaken the Facebook page as well. There were supposed to be two more interviews: with Assam Ahmed and Alex Brown, the first two employees Virgin Media has had in Customer Service. Assam Ahmed is now part of the Public Relations team. Alex Brown is in charge of the Customer Experience and runs the NPS survey; he also develops the channels and manages Customer Care.

I will develop a set of questions in order to gain a better understanding of what each interviewee understands through Social Media and how they approach it. The structure of the interviews will come out from the following questions:

- How do you monitor Social Media
- How do you manage with customer empowerment? Do you control it?
- 25 of Virgin Media employees have personal blogs; do they also post information about the company as well?
- How do you prioritise and manage the negative feedback received from customers via social media channels?
- Could you give me examples of both negative and positive experiences on the social media channels Virgin Media uses?
- What is your opinion about Social Media as a marketing tool?
- What is the future Social Media strategy of Virgin Media?

The first part of the interview has as aim the involvement of the employee from the company, and to uphold a better understanding of why this research of mine is relevant and what is the degree with which customer empowerment is dealt. Further questions reveal

how much personal involvement an employee has, considering that everyone uses Social Media and Virgin Media being such a well-known company, how do they cope with related issues when not at work and also how do they manage feedbacks. Afterwards I will wish to obtain negative and positive examples the employees have with regards to social media customer experience. The last set of questions will reveal Social Media as a marketing tool, its importance to building customer relationships and brand trust and what is Virgin Media's future Social Media strategy.

At this stage, I hope to observe links between social media techniques discovered in the literature review and those used in practice, as well as potentially discovering some methods that are under-researched in the literature, in order to provide guidance for future research. The employees have a proactive engagement, especially on the Twitter account. VMTwits (staff members- over 400 of them) search for comments on "Virgin Media" and encourage customers to tweet them. They tweet out in news, product launches and updates, sales offers, portal articles, general education, competitions and acquisition hunting. They receive tweets regarding feedback, questions, complaints, service recovery issues, compliments and appreciations. The average growth on Twitter is approximately 30-50 new follows per day. Customer Care done through Twitter has a Reactive and a Proactive approach. Through the Reactive approach, customers tweet to @virginmedia asking for help, venting frustration etc. one of the Twitter "Tweams" picks it up and offers help on the spot if they can. If not, they invite the customer to send details on to their dedicated team mailbox. Most issues are resolved within the same day, or in five days at the latest. Emails are responded within one hour (business hours) keeping the customer updated at every step of the way. Through the Proactive approach, "Tweams" uses keyword searches on Twitter to locate customers talking about Virgin Media, reaching out to offer assistance as needed; this has been the source of many of their biggest "wow" reactions from customers.

The interview will benefit from additional questions which will help with the correct flow of it. Also, not all interviews will be the same and not all questions will be asked, considering that not all the interviewees work in the same department, therefore, they will not have the same knowledge and do not have the same course of action. I have invested in a video camera containing enough memory to record up to two hours of video. As I expect each interview to last around half an hour to three quarters of an hour I will have sufficient space

to record the interview in its entirety before transferring the file to a computer to clear space for the next tape. I plan to position the camera in such a way that I can see both myself and the participant in the shot however this will only be done on request. If the participant feels uncomfortable being on camera I will ask if I can take an audio recording instead. I would prefer to have video files of both myself and my participants so that I can refer back to their body language as well as assessing my own conduct in the interview to ensure I am behaving in the context I wish to be portrayed. This way I can make any necessary self-adjustments to my conduct before my second round of interviewing. It is necessary for me to have audio recordings of my conversations to allow for later reference to the conversation. I will retain my video files and compare these to draw comparisons of the conversation in its entirety instead of taking notes in which case I run the risk of missing key details which I do not pick up on the first time I hear them. Contrary to many traditional methods, I plan to compare conversations in their video form instead of studying pages of transcribed text. This is because so much communication occurs from body language and expression, which is impossible to pick up on when studying text. I therefore believe I will be able to draw more meaning from the conversation if referring back to it in its original form.

As a second method of research, a questionnaire will be developed and will include (1) the 11-item brand trust scale; (2) the Social Media influence; (3) several items relating the channels used; and (4) demographic information such as age, gender and education level (See Appendix C).

Data Collection and Sample

Data were collected for the questionnaire was done online. Virgin media provided a database with customers based in the Midlands area, especially customers based in Birmingham and Nottingham and the surrounding areas. The database was provided in order to have all valid answers and no “non-Virgin Media customers”; thus having a 100% relevant sample. The potential respondents were contacted and sent the survey via email. The survey ran from 15th of June until 15th of August, gathering a total of 221 respondents. With a total number of 1,250 customers in the database, the rate of response was 17.68%, higher than the expected rate of response (5%). Fifty-seven per cent of the sample was men

and forty-three per cent was women. The median age of the respondents was 26.27 years old and their median level of education was some college (See Appendix D, Table 1).

Evaluation Procedures

I have first conducted a series of exploratory factor analyses to examine whether the brand trust items produce the proposed factors and if the individual items load on the attended factors. Principal component analysis with a Varimax rotation technique was conducted on all brand trust items, first on the five fiability items, and then on the six intentionality dimension. No restrictions were placed on the number of components to be extracted. On the basis on “eigenvalue greater than 1” heuristic, five components were extracted that account for 84.22% of the total variance. Nevertheless, after a further observation of the correlation matrix for the 11 brand items suggested the non-convenience of three items to the analysis, because of the correlation values under .3. These items are respectively “Virgin Media meets my expectations”, “Virgin Media would make any effort to satisfy me”, and “Virgin Media would compensate me in some way if I had a problem with their products”. (see Appendix D, Table 2.). These three items were next deleted and another and final principal component analysis was performed on the remaining eight items.

In the second analysis, three principal components were extracted, these having an eigenvalue greater than one. These three items explain for 72.37% of the total variance (see Appendix D, Table 3.).

Reliability and Confirmatory Analysis

The remaining eight items which comprise the scale were next examined more rigorously in order to detect the dimensionality of the concept. For that purpose, a measurement model was specified to have three factors (latent variables) and each item was prescribed to be loaded on one specific latent variable according to the factor structure indicated in the exploratory factor analyses. Because of the lower than .4 factor loadings, questions 6 and 7 were not loaded on any of the three factors. So, each factor has been loaded with two

questions each. To summarize, these analyses produced a three factor model of brand trust, six-item scale comprised of four fiability and two intentionality items. Tables 4. and 5. show the final items and their loading values.

In order to test the reliability of these three factors, reliability analysis was conducted. For the first factor, which had item 1 and item 8 loaded on it, the Cronbach's Alpha value was .881, therefore acceptable (being higher than .7). With Corrected Item-Total Correlation values of .800 (over .3), the two item do measure what the whole scale does. The Alpha if Item Deleted values are lower than the final alpha value obtained, therefore, the items will not be deleted from the scale (See Appendix D, Table 6.). The second factor had loaded on it the third and the fifth question. The Cronbach's Alpha value was .532 (see Appendix D, Table 7.), therefore unacceptable with the sample. Items could not be deleted from the sample in order to increase the total alpha, because the Alpha if Item Deleted turned out to be equal to zero. The third factor had loaded on it the second and the fourth question. The Cronbach's Alpha was below .7 again, making the factor unacceptable with the sample.

A less reliable measurement of these factors would be to generate factor scores with "data reduction" and simply making a regression which will display a factor score coefficient matrix, which will help in loading each item with a variable (See Appendix D, Table 8.). A second part of the survey was conducted as well; with the influence of Social Media on the relationship customer have with Virgin Media. Also with what channels are the customers using and how effective they consider them to be. In terms of usage when customers approach Virgin Media, they have the following percentages: Facebook with 30.5%, Twitter with 56%, Forums with 6.7% and Promotion Community with 6.8%. in terms of how effective these channels are when solving a problem or communicating with the customers, the percentages are: Facebook with 17.6%, Twitter with 60.2%, Forums with 8.3% and Promotion Community with 13.9%.

As for the influence of Social Media in the relationship customers have with Virgin Media, 73.5% of the respondents believe that Social Media channels have improved their relationship with the company.

DISCUSSION

I shall begin the discussion of my results by underlying a guide to how I sorted out the data to find meaningful trends and arguments within. To sort my data I used semi-structured interviews with key people from the marketing department. Afterwards a customer survey was developed and sent out to them to identify if the strategy which Virgin Media are implementing, actually works and are getting positive responses to. From the interviews conducted, main themes mentioned in them have been identified:

- Evolution of Facebook
- Evolution of Twitter
- Customer service
- Control
- Future Social Media Strategy

For each of these themes I took samples from the interviews that referred to these topics and grouped them. I also made a note of which participant the comment was taken from. This technique allows for easy referral to specific topics of discussion and also permits comparison of each participant's comments on each topic with ease. Within each section of these themes, there are sub-themes that were identified in the interviews and also in the secondary data provided by the participants. Also, examples were provided with most of the answers, for a better understanding.

From Virgin Media's perspective, Social Media uses web based technology to turn communication into interactive dialogues. It's no longer about shouting at customers; it's about talking with them and understanding their issues. Done well, Social Media can help transform a business, its corporate perception, brand warmth and drive commercial growth. Social Media at Virgin Media has been small scale until recently. To build a Social Media strategy for Virgin Media means to focus squarely on the customer and should be aligned with their core business objectives and brand positioning.

The major outputs from their Social Media should be:

- Key business issues and challenges: NPS, Drive quad play, reduce churn
- Other opportunities and routes to mitigating threats: reducing negative comments, harnessing advocacy, contact strategy
- Governance model- coordinated versus organic
- Clear ROI expectations
- On-going listening- a recommendation for Buzz Monitoring
- Framework for supporting marketing campaigns
- Social media guidelines
- Recommendations per platform.

The methodology for this is simple:



Virgin Media believes that Social Media helps meet business challenges, such as:

- Increase NPS
- Reduce churn
- Increase pride and advocacy
- Reduce cost of service
- Increase brand envy/ switch
- Increase affection for products.

What is happening inside Virgin Media:

- Support their campaigns: educate people about product range, features and value for money; help people experience a more exciting place to live and differentiate offers
- Build relationships proactively: build pride intimacy and advocacy with dialogue and reward; trusted advisor to assist prospects with their decision-making
- Help up get aligned: get the right Virgin Media people engaged in the right way; demonstrate the ROI of Social Media for them; help themselves develop small pilots to explore potential; help themselves coordinate an operating model.

From secondary data gathered from the company, I have received a summary of where conversations about Virgin Media are happening on the internet. The conversations about Virgin Media's content happen in the following percentages: Twitter 51%, Forum 26%, Blogs 14%, News 8% and general 1%. Conversations about Virgin Media's install happen in the following percentages: Forum 70%, Twitter 18% and Blogs 10%. From these conversations, most of them imply negative comments when it comes to Virgin Media's content and install.

Facebook

Following the main themes identified, the first one that drayed my attention was Facebook. The official Facebook page of Virgin Media has been implemented recently, in March 2011. It has been launched as a care channel. V Fest and Shorts already existed as separate channels. The tagline and brand engagement focus was: "More exciting place to live". Of course, such as other social media channels, the official Facebook page catered for customer service. Customer service issues are dealt with in public if able to; if not, account specific issues are taken offline to e-mail. The official Facebook page has reached approximately 5,400 "likes" in a few months from its release. At the moment, there is one main Virgin Media page that pulls together all the different social media strands, themes and conversations. When considering it as a social media hub, the Virgin Media Facebook page aggregates content from and points out to the other social properties: demos on YouTube, Discovery Zone, Virgin Media movies. It is also used to set the tone of the conversation. Even though the Facebook main page of Virgin Media has been set up in order

to ease the conversation between the customer and the company, there have been negative experiences as well (example provided by Sonia and Alex as well): a few months ago, unsatisfied customers with no Virgin Media coverage have set up their own Facebook groups where they used to complain that there is no service in the Plymouth area (see Appendix E). The initiative has escalated and other clients have joined the group as well. The whole situation was cleared by one of the Customer Service people who has joined the group and managed to identify the Administrator. Tracking his IP, he managed to get his contract details and solved his problem in a matter of hours. After everything was solved, the group was taken down off the internet. Virgin Media has also been “attacked” on Facebook only several hours after setting up their main page, several groups were created with the logo “Don’t go with VM”. Being a public space, there was no action Virgin could have taken, just to try and understand why these groups were created. Being a new hub used by Virgin Media, most of the customer service questions posted on the Facebook main page are re-directed to the Twitter account.

Twitter

Twitter was set up as a contact channel in December 2008. It was one of the first UK ISPs to engage with customers via Twitter- customers were already talking about them. Followers are increasing steadily with no signs of slowdown. The channel is growing organically and through pro-active engagement. It is a dedicated customer care resource that supports customers. The follower growth is currently linear (See Appendix F, Figure 1). The account has had over 25,000 posts since launch, with exponential growth, this showing the engagement of Virgin media when it comes to Customer Care (See Appendix F, Figure 2). There are other Twitter accounts such as: V Festival (@vfestival), On Demand (@vmondemand), Movies (@vmmovies), Shorts (@VMediaShorts), Pioneers (@vmpioneers) and Virgin Media Business (@vmbusiness). There were also two other feeds but they are retired now: Portal news& editorial engagement and Special offers. The employees have a proactive engagement, especially on the Twitter account. VMTwits (staff members- over 400 of them) search for comments on “Virgin Media” and encourage customers to tweet them. They tweet out in news, product launches and updates, sales offers, portal articles, general education, competitions and acquisition hunting. They receive tweets regarding

feedback, questions, complaints, service recovery issues, compliments and appreciations. The average growth on Twitter is approximately 30-50 new follows per day. Customer Care done through Twitter has a Reactive and a Proactive approach. Through the Reactive approach, customers tweet to @virginmedia asking for help, venting frustration etc. one of the Twitter “Tweams” picks it up and offers help on the spot if they can. If not, they invite the customer to send details on to their dedicated team mailbox. Most issues are resolved within the same day, or in five days at the latest. Emails are responded within one hour (business hours) keeping the customer updated at every step of the way. Through the Proactive approach, “Tweams” uses keyword searches on Twitter to locate customers talking about Virgin Media, reaching out to offer assistance as needed; this has been the source of many of their biggest “wow” reactions from customers. The number of followers of the Twitter account of Virgin Media is increasing by word of mouth and reputation of service. Monthly tweets are growing- this is the channel of first contact for some. It is no longer just a complaints channel. Its increasing scope is to help and expand hours of coverage; it is not yet marketed as a care channel. Here is a summary provided by one of the respondents (Alex):

“What we do and how we do it:

Respond and recognise:

- Proactive and Reactive customer engagement
- Manage at first contact if possible
- Promote self-care channels

Case Management:

- Take offline with details
- Agent ensures issue resolved to customer satisfaction
- Empowerment to make customer happy

Learning and reporting:

- Weather vane for new issues
- Feedback to agents, techs etc.
- Product/process improvement
- Productivity “

One of the respondents said that the brand values have to be reflected in how customers are being approached. Sonia continues saying

“we usually have a warm, peer-to peer brand, after you understand this, you can reflect it in your tone of voice, you have to be honest, this leading to listening customers more directly”

This not only shows that all employees understand brand values, but also that they know how to reflect them when communicating with the customers. This statement has been linked perfectly with a positive example Sean and Alex gave when asked to tell positive stories from the Customer Care department. After a landline went down, a very friendly conversation was carried on Twitter between a customer and a member of the team:

“Customer: Ahoy, my landline is down so I can’t make any calls. What’s happening is this: I pick up the phone, the dial tone is there, and then it fades away to silence over about 1 second. I hang up the phone, pick up again, same deal. Can communicate via email/twitter/Skype please help! Matt.

Tweam: Good day Me Heartie, Looking into your telephone issue it isn’t something that’s affecting your area, so we’re going to have to look a bit deeper. Could I ask if you tried using a telephone? If you haven’t is there any way you could give that a whirl, I don’t want to be wasting your time with a technician visit if it’s not needed. Looking forward to hearing you soon cap’n =)

Customer: Yo Ho Billy, I hoisted up a sail on the ARRRRRRRR virgin media support forum, so I did, so I did. A buccaneer by the name of Ray has signalled a privateer to come aboard on the 6th day, here’s hoping he fixes me magic talky box. YAR

Tweam: Hi Matt. Just checkin’ in t’see how your services be havin’. Did our privateer do everythin’ required or does he needs to walk the plank? Billy

Customer: Ahoy Billy, Yer privateer lined his sights square at sabotage, seems a mercenary not 6 sunrises past gone fiddlin’ where he ought not to and crossed me riggin with a rival clan over yonder. With a merry belly laugh yer fella had me sail hoisted quicker than ye can say “Avast the pigs fallen overboard” may his bounty be plentiful and his cup never dry, and so say all of us. YAR”.

After solving customers' problems via Twitter, the company has received some great feedback. Here are some examples:

- @virginmedia once again you guys n girls at VM are on the ball! Less than 24hrs for engineer to come fix my Broadband & new modem! Excellent
- Have to say, excellent customer service from @virginmedia- tried to sort a problem without being directly tweeted! Thanks :)
- The customer service provided by @virginmedia really are second to none. Quality, personable and professional. Or as us gamers say "l33t!"
- Well, @virginmedia were very helpful indeed. We do (and by we, I mean me) complain a lot, so it's nice to give credit where it's due. Ta
- @virginmedia- Thanks for your email, it is reassuring to know that the Virgin brand can be trusted. I realise that things can go wrong!

Apart from feedback, the process of Fostering Advocacy is found on the Twitter page as well. Here are some examples:

- @virginmedia well it is actually true, when I reached the point of giving up entirely your help persuaded me to stick with virgin
- @virginmedia My 50Mb install on Saturday went smoothly and it was nice to see downloads of 5.8MB/sec! Thanks again!
- @virginmedia Thanks for listening and responding. Email on the way.

Managing Feedback

From the interview conducted with Shean Hewit, he said that he had come across feedback about Virgin Media on accounts that are not directly appointed to the company, and these are mostly on Twitter. When asked how the negative feedback or problems is prioritised, his answer was:

"The most important criteria would be the level of influence of the person tweeting: if he has many followers or if he works in the media environment. After that point, it's person by person".

The reason behind this procedure is: followers can be categorised into Influencers and the ones that produce the Halo Effect. For example, Stephen Fry is an influencer. With just a handful of tweets- each time Stephen Fry mentioned 50Mb he reached over 500,000 followers (now has 1.7m+). One high profile installation has the power to create immense word of mouth. (See Appendix F, Figure 3) on the other hand, Rob Bryndon has created the Halo effect: each time Ron Bryndon mentioned Virgin/50Mb he reached over 50,000 followers (now has aprox. 200k). Another high profile installation generated significant word of mouth and significant influence (See Appendix F, Figure 4).

Alex Brown, Senior Manager in the Customer Experience department said about Virgin Media using Twitter:

“The conversation is happening about you, whether you join in or not. If your products don’t work, social media customer service won’t fix them. Don’t be daunted- get stuck in and do it now! We have the power of case management. Trust the staff’s judgement! Never underestimate the importance of internal feedback contacts and Twitter is an instantaneous feedback channel”.

Control

I have identified in the literature review elements of control that the company may use over their clients. When asked in the interviews how customer feedback is controlled on the social media channels, both of the interviewees responded the same:

Shean: “We are an open company, and we create an environment to connect and receive feedback from customers. We do not control the feedback in any way, or the content post by our customers on the social media channels”

Sonia: “We do not control, it is more to do with how we change the communication approaches.”

Asked further questions on this subject, both of them have specified that yes, it is true that comments or posts from clients are not deleted from the web-pages, but the conversations are some-how redirected to different channels of communication. When the official Facebook page appeared, customers viewed it as another channel where they can post

comments and complaints about faulty Virgin Media products. When in reality, the page was created in order to promote Virgin Media products and give information about them. The Twitter account is viewed as a customer care channel. Therefore, when customers complain on the Facebook page of Virgin Media, they are carefully redirected to the Twitter page, where specialists can handle the complaint, thus no management of complaint processes are visible on the Facebook page. Although this is not viewed as controlling the customers, because the company is not deleting any comments, they are being manipulated with this redirection to another channel, which would suit better the company's image.

Taking Action Outside Work Hours

From previous work experience within the company, I was informed that from all the employees of Virgin Media in the Marketing Department, 25 of them have personal blogs. When I asked in respondents if they are part of those 25 employees, they all responded affirmative. When asked if they share information about Virgin Media or promote Virgin Media products in any way on their blogs, one of the answers, given by Sonia, was:

“There is no strict policy. I work for Virgin Media, but the views from this blog do not reflect the views of the company. “

In order to evaluate if the employees are indeed committed and identify themselves with the company, I have asked the following question: “In your web-surfing, have you ever come across customer blogs in which they discuss their opinion about Virgin Media and their products/ services? If yes, have you taken any action?” The answers given were almost the same with little variations: “Yes, I have and I have taken action, but just to offer information”, or “Yes, I have. On Twitter. “

Even though these employees have a schedule and some of them work in Customer Care, they do take the job to the next level and even in their spare time, whenever they come across a comment about Virgin Media on the internet and they feel they can help, they take action. A few feedbacks from customers have shown that they have been helped by Virgin Media employees outside working hours and have been highly appreciative of this gesture.

Marketing Tool

As stated in the literature review, Social media has become in the last ten years an evolving “phenomena” in business marketing. Enlightened marketers have started to integrate social media in their marketing strategies and campaigns in order to drive the increase of new customers and fans. There are several sub-disciplines of marketing that have started to use social media, such as promotions, marketing intelligence, sentiments research, public relations, marketing communications and product and consumer research. Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff state that the following activities should be at the core of the engagement of any company in the relationship with the customers: listening, talking, energising, supporting and embracing. Also stating that social media is about people and the relationships and online communities must be the cornerstone of any social media marketing strategy, I have asked the interviewees if Social Media is a strategy that motivates the company to discover new clients or to enrich the relationships with the existing clients. From the Senior Manager of the Online Marketing Department, the answer was simple and short

“Definitely to obtain new customers!”,

but from the Customer Service interviewee, the answer was different:

“I believe Social Media strategy is used to support current customers. On the other hand, it is a tool used to gain new customers as well. For example, our next week’s strategy is to target some new prospects: with some recommendations, we hope to switch customers from competitors.”

In summary, even though the literature shows that Social Media could be used just as a marketing tool in order to support current customers, in real life, the managers from Virgin Media believe it is a strong tool to get new customers as well. Using the social media channels, they are able to attract customers and even switch customers from rival companies on the market, such as BT and Sky.

How does social media influence brand trust

At the end of the interview, the respondents were asked to give their opinion on: how does social media influence brand trust. Even though, the company does not avail of a brand trust measurement, they do try to measure it when they are running the Net Promoter Score survey. The NPS is a survey which is given annually to Virgin media customers who have previously filled in a complaint about the company. So, not all customers receive it. The NPS has a few questions about brand trust, but it is not measured with its own survey or research. These questions are part of the “Brand Tracking studies” from the Net Promoter Score survey. Alex and Shean have stated that brand trust has improved since the launching of social media; therefore social media has a positive influence on brand trust. Sonia believes that the employees of Virgin Media should reflect the values in how they approach customers. They pursuit a warm, peer-to-peer brand, and suggests that they could reflect that in their tone of voice. If they are honest and listen to customers more directly, this should be appreciated by the customers. As an example, each time Virgin Media has had a problem of internet coverage in some area of the country, they have used the social media channels to announce the customers of the problems. According to Sonia, another important function of social media is to excite the customer and prospects- after you have identified the needs of the customers or prospects, provide such services, which will mean that you understood the customers.

Brand Trust Scale-Results

After carrying the semi-structured interviews and understanding better the culture of the company, their views and concepts and what they understand by social media, I have carried an online survey. The survey was sent through email to Virgin Media customers. In order to avoid non-valid responses, a database of the current customers from Birmingham and Nottingham was provided by the company. The survey has three sections: (1) 11-item brand trust scale, (2) social media influence, and (3) demographic information, such as gender, age and education level.

The first and third parts have been run through SPSS. The survey ran from 15th of June until 15th of August, gathering a total of 221 respondents. With a total number of 1,250

customers in the database, the rate of response was 17.68%, higher than the expected rate of response (5%). Fifty-seven per cent of the sample was men and forty-three per cent was women. The median age of the respondents was 26.27 years old and their median level of education was some college.

Because Virgin Media does not have a brand trust scale, I have developed a survey which includes a brand trust scale. The first part of the survey is dedicated to this brand scale development. The 11 items proposed have been categorised into two groups: the fiability measure and the intentionality measure. The fiability or viability part shows how brand trust can be reached, or how capable it is of being done in a practical and useful way. The intentionality measure refers to the degree with which Virgin Media would be able to make any efforts in solving customers' problems, how reliable Virgin Media is in the eyes of the customers and if the main value of Virgin Media (honesty) is perceived by the customers. Conducting a dimension reduction factor analysis, three of the eleven items have been deleted, due to low values of correlation between these three items and the others. These deleted items are: "Virgin Media meets my expectations", "Virgin Media would make any effort to satisfy me", and "Virgin Media would compensate me some way if I had a problem with their products." Thus leaving the survey with four items in the Fiability part and four items in the Intentionality part.

From the factor analysis, three major factors have been identified and the remaining items have been loaded on them. In order to see how reliable this scale is, a Reliability analysis has been conducted. Due to the sample size, only the first factor has been proven to be reliable, which had only two items of the initial eleven loaded on it. From this analysis, I suggest that Virgin Media should implement these items in their Net Promoter Score survey. Even though the other factors have not been proven to be reliable, this is the case of the sample being limited to a certain area of the country and focused on only two major cities and the areas that surround them. With a larger sample, the factors could have been proven to be reliable. Even though the database provided by the company was significantly large, the rate of response was low, thus leaving me with a relatively small sample.

The second part of the survey includes questions about social media influence. The following percentages have come up:

- 68.2% of customers believe that social media is more reliable than traditional advertising. This is based upon the fact that people tend to believe what peers have to say about a particular product and consider this to be a more reliable source than something that comes from the company directly. This argument has been presented in the literature review as well.
- 72% of respondents believe they could form an opinion just by using social media. The argument is similar to the one above.
- Virgin Media has been contacted through social media by 52.5% of the respondents. This comes as no surprise, as Sean has stated in his interview that the customer service done through call centres has dropped significantly since Twitter provides customer service as well and is really effective.
- Only 32.3% of the respondents consider that the channels through which Virgin Media communicates, offer them enough information about the company and its products/ services. This low percentage may be explained by the fact that the official Facebook page has been set up recently, in comparison with other companies on the market and the activity on this page has been low.
- Even though the low percentage in the question above, 56.3% of the respondents would recommend others to contact Virgin Media via social media. This coincides with what the interviewees said that the customer service done through social media is very effective.
- Finally, a significant percentage of 73.5% of the respondents said that social media has helped improve their relationship with Virgin Media.

Regarding what channels the respondents have used to follow or contact Virgin Media, the percentages are:

- Facebook- 30.5%
- Twitter- 56%
- Forums- 6.7%
- Promotional Community- 6.8%

From the customers' point of view, they believe that the most effective social media channel used by Virgin Media when it comes to solving their problems is Twitter (60.2%), followed by Facebook (17.6%), Promotional Community (13.9%), and Forums (8.3%). Even the interviews have stated that twitter is the most used social media channel to communicate with the customers, it has been their first methods of online communication with them, and it provides an easier way of solving their problems.

Future Strategy-Discussion

Based on these analyses and findings, in collaboration with the company and with the insight that they have provided me with, a future strategy of the company will be proposed. Influenced by what Virgin Media wants to implement and also by the findings, the future strategy has as tagline: "Fix, Navigate, Excite". Each section of it will be explained as follows:
FIX- resolving issues quickly and easily (transaction technical product)

- Don't allow unhappy customers to toxify the social media channels
- Address their issues but look to drive them to the places you want to deal with them: email, phone, self-care
- Self-care- easily find info before they ask and to help each other
- Proactive- try and stop issues arising, share info on outages, delivery problems, give users easy access to self-help tips

NAVIGATE- discovering and getting more from VM products (emotional relationship story)

- use social media channels to demonstrate to and educate both customers and prospects
- Harness and increase existing advocacy by pulling the forums and support info into other more prominent areas (Facebook) and allowing users to share tips easily
- curate user reviews from across the web and allow prospects to see what users really think

EXCITE- encouraging you to have the richest possible digital experience

- Increase affinity with customers by engaging them in discussions around the things they love
- Creating an editorial style content calendar for all relationship channels is essential
- Offer them brilliant and exclusive content

Consistent with the literature review, Virgin Media categorises the Advocacy members into two groups:

1. Employees-
 - a) **Encourage** employees to take part in discussions on forums, blogs and chat sites
 - b) **Empower** those passionate and knowledgeable about a relevant subject and interested in SM to get involved
 - c) **Allow** them to become a valued part of the community and help guide and shape the discussions
2. Customers:
 - a) Identify customers with an infectious passion for the products and service
 - b) Work with key influencers to persuade them that VM is the best solution
 - c) Provide easy to find and share content that advocates can use
 - d) Recognise advocacy with incentives and rewards

Being a new channel that Virgin Media is using, the future strategy for the official Facebook page looks like this:

- one main Virgin Media page that pulls together all the different social media strands, themes and conversations
- Aggregate content from and point out to the other social properties: demos on YouTube, discovery zone, virgin media movies
- Set the tone of the conversation

LIMITATIONS

In this final section, the issues of limitations as well as further research that have been highlighted as gaps in the literature were beyond the scope of this research to address, as well as gaps of the study itself, will be suggested. I will begin with the limitations of the study which may have had affected the results:

Firstly, as Virgin Media is a huge company, with more than 50 people employed in the Marketing Department, I had to carefully choose the method of research. Ethnography may have been more revealing as participants may make up answers to please the researcher and make them feel like they are giving quality data. Ethnography has the ability to observe the people in their natural role instead of an artificial interview setting. Better method would be to identify a company which is trying to increase brand trust and study the methods, rather than asking them which ones they are using. It would have given me the possibility to observe the employees work in their environment and let them speak freely, rather than conducting semi-structured interviews where they had to follow a certain structure imposed by myself. With a limited amount of time, I have opted for semi structured interviews with key employees who deal with Online Marketing and Customer Service. This would also counter the limitation of interviews putting individuals on the spot with questions which they may never had considered before or make them come with an answer which they believe the researcher wants to hear, rather than an honest answer. As the interview is a social form of exchange, there are a number of social forms which will affect the answers. Ethnography would have given me a more accurate picture of the issues covered in this research.

Secondly, as for the quantitative method, there was a limited area of research. The database provided was concentrated on customers living within the Birmingham and Nottingham area; a more significant sample would have been a national one.

Thirdly, because of the rather small sample in the database, the rate of response was low, which has affected the significance level of my brand trust measurement scale. With a larger

sample of respondents, it would have been possible to identify certain trends and certain areas in which Virgin Media needs improvement when it comes to building brand trust.

FURTHER RESEARCH

As a further research, which should be conducted as a result of this paper, I believe a development of a reliable brand trust scale should be developed, which can be applicable in all industries.

Secondly, I believe research should be conducted in alternative industries, to identify how other companies with different backgrounds from Virgin Media manage brand trust and how they use Social Media to increase it.

As literature is scant of articles covering Social Media, I would suggest further research into this area. Social Media has become a powerful Marketing tool and the existing literature does not make it justice. Also, there is separate literature on brand trust, but no literature on Social Media and brand trust. Currently, the existing literature shows how brand trust can be influenced by other factors, rather than Social Media.

CONCLUSIONS

The above study has shown that social media has an important role to play in contemporary marketing. Although there are some researchers and academics who believe that social media is not part of marketing, and it is not appropriate as a marketing tool, generally, social media has proven to have applications for marketing campaigns, public relations campaigns and customer relationship management.

A balanced and complementary approach is needed for social media to work properly as a marketing tool. The experts suggest for a subtle involvement when it comes to implementing social media strategies. The advice is to make inroads through influence and permission, rather than using social media as a way to sell; this strategy will be more effective in the long run. Therefore, the role of social media is to turn current customers into advocates.

The significance of social media as a possible corporate ideology cannot be ignored. With open and transparent communication through social media, companies can benefit from an increased level of brand trust. In this sense, as far as brand trust is a signal of a steady relationship between a company and its customers, a brand trust scale would contribute to the management of the relationship individuals develop with the companies.

The online marketing environment affects the way consumers view their relationships with the brands, because anonymity of the internet makes branding more crucial. In this context, when trying to build a loyal customer, brand trust is everything, and the brand scale suggested would be a strategic tool to manage consumers' relationships with the brands.

Although social media is a recent arsenal to the field of business marketing, its influence on brand trust cannot be overlooked. However, further development in its practice and usage is required in order to increase corporate adoption. Also, a study on the measurement of social media and its effectiveness on the return on investment, should be undertaken. Only then, the real value of social media in an enterprise could be revealed. Nonetheless, social media is a powerful tool for any organisation moving on the Web 2.0 space and beyond.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Social Media Thought Leaders

The following profiles the leading experts in social media and digital marketing:

Seth Godin

Godin is author of ten books that have been bestsellers around the world. His most recent titles include *The Dip* and *Meatball Sundae*. *Free Prize Inside* was published in early May, 2004 and *All Marketers Are Liars* was published in 2005. His books that have been bestsellers around the world and changed the way people think about marketing, change and work. *Permission Marketing* was an Amazon.com Top 100 bestseller for a year, a Fortune Best Business Book and it spent four months on the Business Week bestseller list. It also appeared on the New York Times business book bestseller list.

Charlene Li

Charlene Li is the Founder of Altimeter Group and co-author of the business bestseller, “*Groundswell: Winning In A World Transformed By Social Technologies*”, published by Harvard Business Press in May 2008. She frequently consults and speaks on social and emerging technologies and publishes a blog, *The Altimeter*.

Josh Bernoff

Josh is senior vice president, idea development at Forrester Research and is responsible for Identifying, developing, and promoting some of the company's most influential and forward-looking ideas. Josh is the co-author of the BusinessWeek best-selling book *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies*, a comprehensive analysis of corporate strategy for dealing with social technologies. *Advertising Age* picked it as "the best book ever written on marketing and media," and Amazon's editors put it in the top ten business books of the year.

David Meerman Scott

David Meerman Scott is a marketing strategist, keynote speaker, seminar leader, and the author of the hit new book *World Wide Rave*. His previous book, *The New Rules of Marketing & PR* is an award-winning BusinessWeek bestseller and is being published in 24

languages. He is a recovering VP of marketing for two publicly traded technology companies and was also Asia marketing director for Knight-Ridder, at the time one of the world's largest newspaper and electronic information companies.

Mitch Joel

Mitch Joel is President of Twist Image - an award-winning Digital Marketing and Communications agency. He has been called a marketing and communications visionary, interactive expert and community leader. He is also a Blogger, Podcaster, passionate entrepreneur and speaker who connects with people worldwide by sharing his marketing insights on digital marketing and personal branding. Mitch is also the author of 'Six Pixels of Separation'.

Chris Brogan

Chris Brogan is President of New Marketing Labs, a new media marketing agency, and home of the Inbound Marketing Summit conferences and Inbound Marketing Bootcamp educational events. He works with large and mid-sized companies to improve online business communications like marketing and PR through the use of social software, community platforms, and other emerging web and mobile technologies.

Appendix B

- Since the “balance of power” has shifted to the consumer during the past years, which has been enabled by technology such as social media, how do you control it?
- I have found out that 25 of the Virgin Media employees have personal blogs; do they also post information about the company there as well?
- Have you ever received considerations about the offers of Virgin media from clients or potential clients, regarding the awareness of the brand?
- In your web-surfing, have you come across customer blogs in which they discuss their opinion of Virgin Media and your products/services? If yes, have you taken any action?
- As a marketing tool, do you consider social media a strategy that motivates you to discover new clients for Virgin Media?

- Do you have any activities with the customers of Virgin Media, in order to build brand trust?
- How to do manage the negative feedback coming from the customers via social media? How do you prioritise them?
- Could you give me examples of both negative and positive experiences on the social media channels you use?
- How do you think Social Media influences brand trust?
- Do you have any measuring scale for brand trust?
- What is the future social media strategy of Virgin Media?

Appendix C

(1) A) Fiability Dimension

1. With Virgin Media I obtain what I look for in a product
2. Virgin Media meets my expectations
3. I feel confident in Virgin Media
4. Virgin Media never disappoints me
5. Virgin Media is Constanta in satisfying my needs

B) Intentionality Dimension

1. Virgin Media would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns
2. Virgin Media would make any effort to satisfy me
3. I could rely on Virgin Media to solve a problem
4. Virgin Media would be interested in my satisfaction
5. Virgin Media would compensate me in some way if I had a problem with their products
6. Virgin Media would be willing to solve the problem I could have with their products.

(2) Social Media Influence

1. Do you consider Social Media more reliable than advertising?
2. Could you form an opinion about a brand just by using Social Media?
3. Have you contacted Virgin Media through Social Media?

4. If yes, through which channel? (Facebook, Twitter, Forums, Promoter Community)
5. Do you consider Social Media offers you enough information about Virgin Media?
6. Would you recommend others to contact Virgin Media through Social Media?
7. Which channel has proven to be more effective in solving your problems? (Facebook, Twitter, Forums, Promoter Community)
8. Has Social Media helped improve your relationship with Virgin Media?

(3) Demographic Information

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your educational level?

Appendix D

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	221	20	33	26.27	3.821
Valid N (listwise)	221				

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Correlation Matrix

	I obtain what I look for	meets my expectations	feel confidence	never disappoints	not constant in satisfying my needs	honest and sincere	mane any effort	rely to solve the problem	interested in my satisfaction	compensate me	would be willing to solve the problem
Correlation	1.000	-.261	-.278	-.117	.133	-.131	-.165	-.208	-.194	-.125	.800
I obtain what I look for											
meets my expectations	-.261	1.000	.068	.041	.274	-.298	.092	.003	.163	-.273	-.326
feel confidence	-.278	.068	1.000	-.112	.334	.002	-.028	-.044	.061	.038	-.347
never disappoints	-.117	.041	-.112	1.000	-.265	.364	-.073	-.233	-.129	.288	-.146
not constant in satisfying my needs	.133	.274	.334	-.265	1.000	-.245	.109	-.325	-.246	-.229	.198
honest and sincere	-.131	-.298	.002	.364	-.245	1.000	-.223	-.351	-.327	.954	-.164
mane any effort	-.165	.092	-.028	-.073	.109	-.223	1.000	.143	-.410	-.264	-.206
rely to solve the problem	-.208	.003	-.044	-.233	-.325	-.351	.143	1.000	.509	-.334	-.260
interested in my satisfaction	-.194	.163	.061	-.129	-.246	-.327	-.410	.509	1.000	-.312	-.243
compensate me	-.125	-.273	.038	.288	-.229	.954	-.264	-.334	-.312	1.000	-.157
would be willing to solve the problem	.800	-.326	-.347	-.146	.198	-.164	-.206	-.260	-.243	-.157	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)		.000	.000	.041	.024	.026	.007	.001	.002	.032	.000
I obtain what I look for											
meets my expectations	.000		.158	.271	.000	.000	.087	.480	.008	.000	.000
feel confidence	.000	.158		.048	.000	.487	.337	.258	.183	.285	.000
never disappoints	.041	.271	.048		.000	.000	.140	.000	.028	.000	.015
not constant in satisfying my needs	.024	.000	.000	.000		.000	.053	.000	.000	.000	.002
honest and sincere	.026	.000	.487	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.007
mane any effort	.007	.087	.337	.140	.053	.000		.017	.000	.000	.001
rely to solve the problem	.001	.480	.258	.000	.000	.000	.017		.000	.000	.000
interested in my satisfaction	.002	.008	.183	.028	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
compensate me	.032	.000	.285	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.010
would be willing to solve the problem	.000	.000	.000	.015	.002	.007	.001	.000	.000	.010	

Table 3. – 8 Items Total Variance

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.325	29.067	29.067	2.325	29.067	29.067
2	1.899	23.741	52.808	1.899	23.741	52.808
3	1.565	19.568	72.376	1.565	19.568	72.376
4	.672	8.400	80.776			
5	.595	7.436	88.212			
6	.443	5.532	93.744			
7	.317	3.959	97.702			
8	.184	2.298	100.000			

Table 4.- Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component		
	1	2	3
I obtain what I look for	.886	.074	.064
feel confidence	-.555	.059	.624
never disappoints	-.196	.499	-.527
not constant in satisfying my needs	.128	.179	.865
honest and sincere	-.255	.693	-.370
rely to solve the problem	-.191	-.811	-.229
interested in my satisfaction	-.234	-.744	-.159
would be willing to solve the problem	.922	.097	.101

Table 5. – Component Transformation Matrix

Component Transformation Matrix

Component	1	2	3
1	.839	.493	.230
2	.405	-.849	.340
3	-.363	.192	.912

Table 6. –Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.881	2

Table 7.- Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.532	2

Table 8. – Coefficient Matrix

Component Score Coefficient Matrix

	Component		
	1	2	3
I obtain what I look for	.342	.168	-.159
feel confidence	-.126	-.033	.499
never disappoints	-.017	-.359	-.200
not constant in satisfying my needs	.169	.102	.496
honest and sincere	.018	-.431	-.071
rely to solve the problem	-.263	.281	-.189
interested in my satisfaction	-.258	.254	-.129
would be willing to solve the problem	.363	.172	-.143

Appendix E

The screenshot shows a Facebook group page. At the top left is a Speedtest.net widget displaying download speed of 0.12 Mbps, upload speed of 0.43 Mbps, and ping of 81 ms. The group title is "Virgin media in Plymouth problems? ...we need to sort this out!". Below the title are tabs for Wall, Info, Discussions, Photos, Video, and Events. The "Info" tab is selected, showing the group's name, category ("Common Interest - Current Events"), and description. The description explains that the group is for people in Plymouth who are experiencing broadband issues and want to pressure Virgin Media for a service upgrade. It also mentions that members will be forced to take action to resolve the problem. The privacy type is set to "Open: All content is public." and the location is "Plymouth, United Kingdom".

Information

Category: Common Interest - Current Events

Description: The title says it all!

This group is for collecting people suffering from what has been confirmed as an 'oversubscribed student area' to discuss appropriate action for getting our broadband service area, Plymouth, upgraded.

Basically, if enough people join the group and say theyve had a problem of some sort.They will be forced to take action to upgrade, or resolve the problem in our area....which should mean faster service!

ahhh just imagine it.....Youtube vids will buffer, facebook wont...

Basic Info

Name: Virgin media in Plymouth problems? ...we need to sort this out!

Category: Common Interest - Current Events

Description: The title says it all!

This group is for collecting people suffering from what has been confirmed as an 'oversubscribed student area' to discuss appropriate action for getting our broadband service area, Plymouth, upgraded.

Basically, if enough people join the group and say theyve had a problem of some sort.They will be forced to take action to upgrade, or resolve the problem in our area....which should mean faster service!

ahhh just imagine it.....Youtube vids will buffer, facebook wont... (read more)

Privacy type: Open: All content is public.

Contact Details

Location: Plymouth, United Kingdom

Appendix F

Figure 1- Average Growth

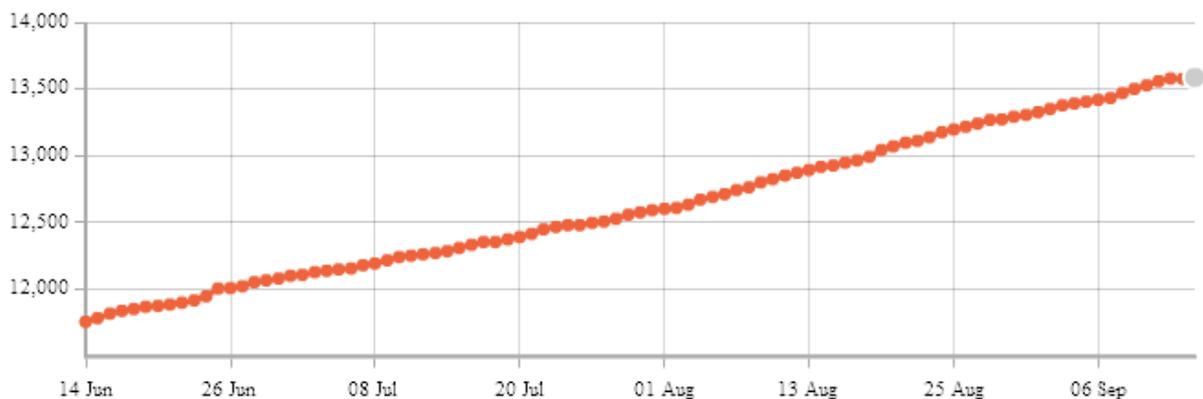


Figure 2- Exponential growth- @virginmedia engagement

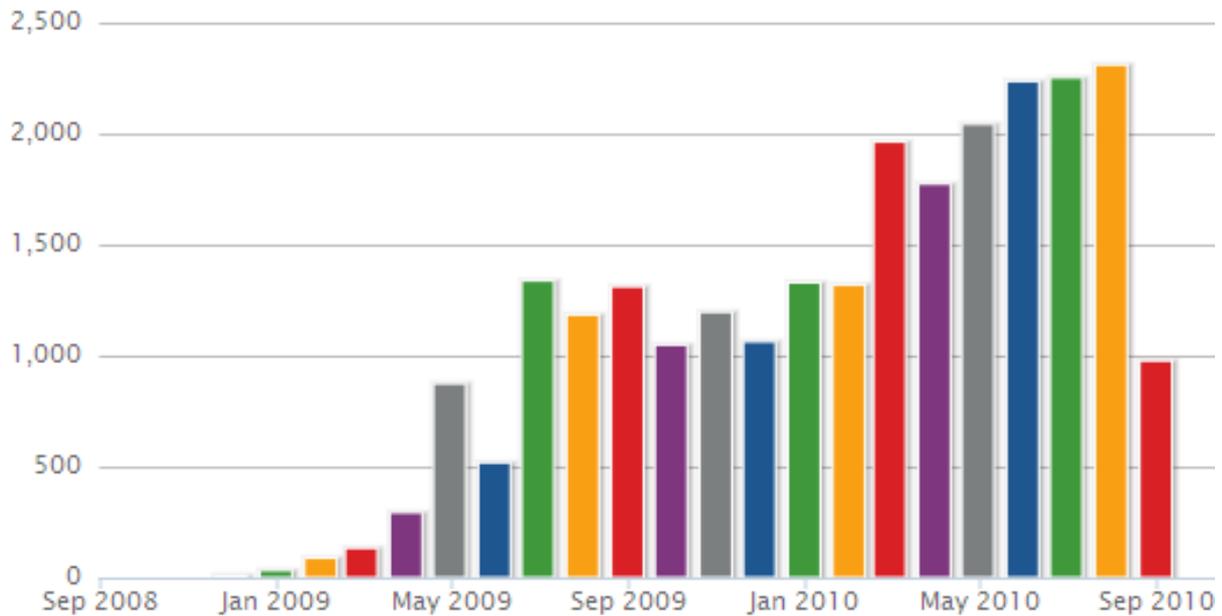
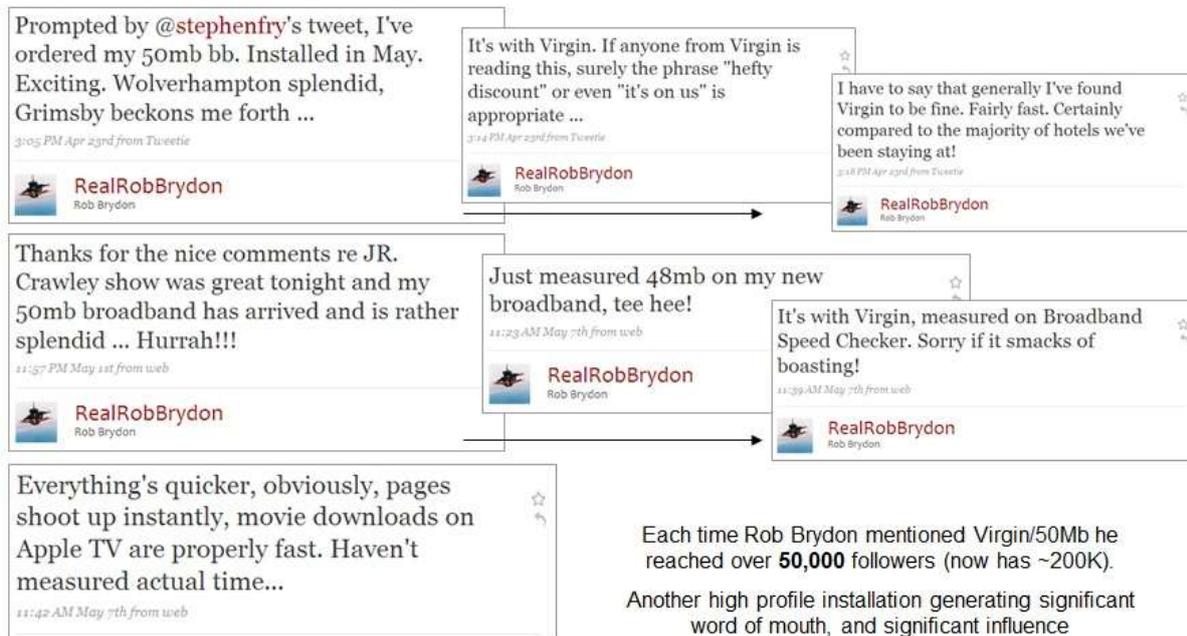


Figure 3- Stephen Fry



Just a handful of tweets – each time Stephen Fry mentioned 50Mb he reached over **500,000** followers (now has 1.7m+).

Figure 4- Rob Brydon



Appendix G- Sample of interviews

Interview 1: Sonia- Head of Online Marketing

I have done some research and I found out that the social media Virgin Media uses are: Forums, Promoter Community, Facebook and Twitter.

- Since the “balance of power” has shifted to the consumer during the past years, which has been enabled by technology such as social media, how do you control it?
Sonia: It is more about the way we change communication approaches, for example if we detect a customer having a problem and posting it on the Facebook official page, the customer service employees re-direct him to the Twitter account, where we deal with it more easily. But there is no control, customers can post whatever they want on the public pages we have got.
- I have found out that 25 of the Virgin Media employees have personal blogs; do they also post information about the company there as well?
Sonia: There is no strict policy when it comes to this. I work for Virgin Media, but the views from my personal blog do not reflect the views of the company.

- Have you ever received considerations about the offers of Virgin media from clients or potential clients, regarding the awareness of the brand?

Sonia: Uhm...not often, really. People are pretty aware of our company.

- In your web-surfing, have you come across customer blogs in which they discuss their opinion of Virgin Media and your products/services? If yes, have you taken any action?

Sonia: Well, yes. Mostly in blogs or on Twitter. If I can see a problem that it comes into my speciality area, but not necessarily, if I see a problem that someone could actually fix it, I might offer information. But this is just because it's the company I work for.

- As a marketing tool, do you consider social media a strategy that motivates you to discover new clients for Virgin Media?

Sonia: Oh yes! Definitely! It is a very powerful marketing tool that enables us to attract new customers.

- Do you have any activities with the customers of Virgin Media, in order to build brand trust?

Sonia: V Magazine, V festival...

- How to do manage the negative feedback coming from the customers via social media? How do you prioritise them?

Sonia: For this, to understand it better, you should talk to Alex from Customer Service, he deals with this. I guess it's first come, first served.

- Could you give me examples of both negative and positive experiences on the social media channels you use?

Sonia: Yes, sure. As a negative example, some people have launched Facebook pages in which they said "do not go with Virgin Media", either just because they were with the competition; either they had a complaint about our services (e.g. Plymouth case). And as a positive feedback...when they post a complaint, we solve it and they come back and post a positive feedback about us.

- How do you think Social Media influences brand trust?

Sonia: I believe it's a reflection of our brand values in how you approach the customers. We usually have a warm, peer-to peer brand, after you understand this,

you can reflect it in your tone of voice, you have to be honest, this leading to listening customers more directly. And by honest I mean, well, let me give you an example: if we have a problem in a certain area for three hours, we post a comment on Twitter, letting the customers know about the problem. We do recognize their needs and try to provide something that the customer understands.

- Do you have any measuring scale for brand trust?

There are brand tracking studies, not very developed, there is a survey, but that's it.

- What is the future social media strategy of Virgin Media?

Fix, navigate, excite

Interview 2- Shean Hewit- Customer Service

- Is there any way in which you control the feedback that comes on Social Media channels? If people make comments on their blogs about VM, do you control that in any way?

Shean: We try to provide an open environment, one in which we connect with the customers and they give feedback. We do not control it in any way.

- Have you come across feedback about VM outside the VM Facebook page or the ones directly appointed to VM on twitter? Do you take any actions?

Shean: Yes, on twitter. I have given information when I saw some customers having problems with our services.

- How to do manage the negative feedback coming from the customers via social media? How do you prioritise them?

Shean: The most important criteria would be the level of influence of the person tweeting- if he has many followers or if he works in the media environment. After that it's a person by person.

- Could you give me examples of both negative and positive experiences on the social media channels you use?

Shean: Customers have given up contacting us through call centres. After giving a negative feedback, they come back with a generic question. Oh, as a positive experience, there is one example: a customer's landline was down and we had a

really friendly conversation with him. He tweeted his problem, we tracked down his customer number and name, and we contacted him back on Twitter.

- As a marketing tool, do you consider social media a strategy that motivates you to discover new clients for Virgin Media? Or is it a better strategy to keep in touch with current clients?

Shean: I believe Social Media strategy is used to support current customers. On the other hand, it is a tool used to gain new customers as well. For example, our next week's strategy is to target some new prospects: with some recommendations, we hope to switch customers from competitors

- How do you think Social Media influences brand trust?

Shean: It has improved, but there is no measuring scale for it. We currently use NPS survey which includes some questions about brand trust, but there is no specific measurement method for this specifically.