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To what extent is social network 'Facebook' used as a communications tool to develop brands in Chester's nightlife scene

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Author(s): Ryan Cawley

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BU 7001 Management Research Project

'To what extent is social network 'Facebook' used as a communications tool to develop brands in Chester's Nightlife scene'

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Many thanks also go to the differing promoters who took time out of their busy schedules meet me for the interviews. Their willingness to answer the questions openly and in-depth gave great value to their answers. The members of the focus group also deserve praise; they choose to remain anonymous which in many ways made their answers more reliable as they could honestly gage their thoughts and opinions on what's expected.

I would also like to highlight the support my family and friends have given me during this time. They've kept me motivated throughout the project and driven me to perform to the best of my ability.

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the extent social networking has on branding within Chester's night life clubs. The concept of using social network 'Facebook' to develop a brand is relatively modern; therefore there is little previously bounded literature within this area. Therefore the approach taken during this process will aim to build a theory that answers such questions.

The literature that will be analyzed will be centered on generalized marketing terms around the areas of building a brand image, creating word of mouth and developing a brand community. Under the bracket of such headings, many differing academic theories and models can be considered. The research will evaluate and consider existing research concerning many differing aspects of branding. Such as creating brand awareness, re-forcing the brands image, creating brand associations, building brand perception, developing a corporate image, communication messages.

The base knowledge gathered from such data will give the project a good base from which to move from. The information hear will then be used to develop relevant questions ready for the qualitative data to be gathered in the form of the interviews and the student-led focus group. This approach will although for the results to be compared and contrasted against and viable conclusions to be drawn.

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Declaration:

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any other academic purpose. All secondary sources are acknowledged.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

The proposed research intends to explore the modern concept of social networking and its impact upon promotion, the market place and focus more so upon how brands are born and developed. The information and data will be gathered in a qualitative fashion, in the form of in-depth interviews to discuss the organisation's perspective with these results being compared and contrasted against the respondents in the corresponding focus group who will be placed similar or relevant questions.

1.2 Research question

Objective

To what extent is social network 'Facebook' used as a communications tool to develop brands in Chester's Nightlife scene.

Aims

1. To discover to what extent 'Facebook' is used as a promotional tool in building Chester's nightclubs/bar 'brand image'
2. To analyse the extent 'word of mouth' communications have on Chester's promotional brands
3. To analyse the impact building a 'brand community' on Chester's promotional brands

1.3 Justification for the research

In contemporary society, it could be argued internet marketing is now considered by many as a key tool in promoting business. This research intends to explore the extent to which such networks use social networks for this and then engage the customer's viewpoint on this.

1.4 Outline methodology

The methodological stance taken throughout this project is based upon the concept that social network marketing being a relatively new concept, the more valuable data comes from face-to-face discussions as opposed to quantitative analysis. Through gauging a valuable impression of the discussions between such organisation's and the consumers themselves, in this way freedom of expression is released.

1.5 Outline of the MSc Management Research Project chapters

Primarily the Literature review section will look to address the issues concerning what the relevant theorist's views are concerning the relevant theorist's opinions and thoughts upon the area surrounding social networking. These thoughts will then be analyzed and used to decipher upon a relevant methodological stance created by such a literature review. This methodological stance will be used to devise a research plan that will be incorporated to plot questions against for interview analysis and to create a focus group questionnaire ready for consumer analysis. The results will be analyzed and conclusions drawn from these in the form of overall evaluations which will then be evaluated against.

1.6 Definitions

The terms will be centered on branding, however this will incorporate such target markets as developing the brands image, spreading word of mouth, viral communication marketing, building the brand community, corporate branding, social networking, pull and push marketing, promotion, internet communication.

1.7 Summary

This chapter has established its research problem and has suggested the direction that will be taken in order to address the conclusion of branding and the impact social networks such as Facebook have on a brands image, word of mouth communications and building a brand community. The methodological stance that will be taken has been discussed and justified against the reason for and why the report is needed.

2. Literature Review

This section will draw upon several researchers' theory relevant to the proposed research question. Their notions will be built upon within the research and used in conjunction with research methods to meet the research topics requirements, aims and objectives as discussed in this section.

The concept of using social networks as viable marketing tool is a contemporary phenomenon which has little if any previously generally accepted boundaries, therefore the theory supporting this research will in the main be drawn from journal articles and via the internet. However grounded marketing communication concepts from academic books will be used to evaluate the extent of effectiveness to which social networks may provide organisations.

Through both journal articles and websites, information will be explored in order to provide background knowledge into the phenomenon of social networking sites, providing the platform for primary research in investigating how Chester's nightclubs use this in practice, and meet research aims such as the extent this has on developing the brand image.

Lea et al (2006) defines a social network as a set of people, organisations or other social entities that are connected by a set of socially meaningful relationships to better achieve desired outcomes through sharing expertise, resources, and information. Lea et al (2006) goes on to suggest both direct and indirect relationships enhance social integration and provide the participants opportunities to be engaged with their peers within the social network; therefore allowing for information and knowledge transfer.

Marketing week (2008) would support Lea et al (2006) notions, describing the social web as the online place where people with a common interest can gather to share thoughts, comments, and opinions. It includes social networks such as MySpace, Gather, Friendster, Facebook, BlackPlanet, Eons, LinkedIn, and hundreds more. This is a new world of unpaid media created by individuals or enterprises on the Web, consequently new organisational strategies are created as a reaction to such cultural changes.

Social networks are used to spread the brands message through word of mouth communications. Some examples of social networks include; 'MySpace', 'Bebo' and 'Facebook'; these differ in many ways however it could be argued the dominant social network leading the way in today's world market is 'Facebook'. The technology incorporated by Facebook is ahead of alternative social networking sites in that the software used allows applications to be added and the site to be constantly updated and improved. Graham et al (2009) discuss how "unlike MySpace ... Facebook gives users different levels of control for their profile".

On the other hand as Ostrow (2009) suggests (*See Appendix 3*), discussing how in North America, MySpace is the largest Social Network and maintains a dominant position as media site, primarily aimed at youth, giving them the opportunity to relate to brands and bands, as well as self-express. This site will continue to do with advertisers, promoters and marketers. Where as many users will join many differing sites, Facebook differentiates itself from its competitors as the applications it uses can be constantly updated and improved where as sites such as 'MySpace' and 'Bebo' are far more rigid. This notion is emphasised by Owyang, J (2008), who discusses how there are over 14 million photos uploaded to Facebook each day. Additionally, there are over six million active user groups on the website. Over 7,000 applications have been built on Facebook, and over 80 percent of Facebook's members have used at least one of these (*see Appendix 2*).

Graham et al (2009) re-iterates the success Facebook has had, suggesting Facebook is the fifth-most trafficked site on the internet worldwide and the second-most trafficked social media site in

the world. The ability to reach such vast numbers of people and the advantages this has for organisations is discussed by Raskin (2006), who discusses its impact in building brand communities, stating how Facebook doesn't belong to any academic community and how marketers can utilize users profile pages for significant data and trends.

Iqbal (2006) highlights Anderson, who argues when the costs of connecting supply and demand are dramatically lowered; the entire nature of the market could be affected; therefore suggesting if organisations find such methods, management practice may change immensely. The use of social networks such as 'Facebook' has allowed organisations to not only reduce marketing costs but in some cases, eradicate them, as 'Facebook' is free to use by anyone in the world.

Constant re-enforcement of the brand associations created through use of highlighting brand awareness are essential in creating a good brand image for any promotional brand at any of Chester's nightclub, as they are in any product or organisation in influencing customers association with the brand. Through attracting repeat business from event to event, brand loyalty is created which as Doyle (2002) highlights provides lower marketing costs and can destroy weaker branded competition.

Nevertheless if the consumer loses trust with the brand, the impact this has on the brands reputation could be immense and ultimately destroy the brand. Matzler (2008) discusses the commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994); suggesting trust is a key variable in the development of long-term relationships.

All social networking sites are used in order for communication, therefore organisations can exploit this use for the benefit of re-iterating the brand associations their brand has and create brand loyalty. Nightclubs will however pass on such information as ticket prices and drinks offers etc. in order to increase sales and revenue through social networking, although this isn't done to directly get sales, more-so to re-enforce the brands associations. For instance

organisation 'L.A.M.E' (Liverpool and Manchester Events) will re-iterate its consumer awareness of brand associations of value for money through the prices it discusses through Facebook. Matzler (2008) suggests brand loyalty generates branding benefits such as substantial entry barriers to competitors, better ability to respond to competitive threats and lower the customer's sensitivity to marketing efforts of competitors. Such literature will be analysed in order to address the demands of Aim 1.

Brand awareness may also expand customer base through (WOM) 'Word of Mouth' communications; Aim 2 will look to address the extent to which WOM does this in Chester's Nightclubs and bars promotional brands. Iqbal (2006) argues that to succeed in a world of message fragmentation, the organisations 'word', will 'guide its brand future', for instance Chester promotional organisation 'BEANS' use the 'slogan' the 'University of life' as an association of their brand.

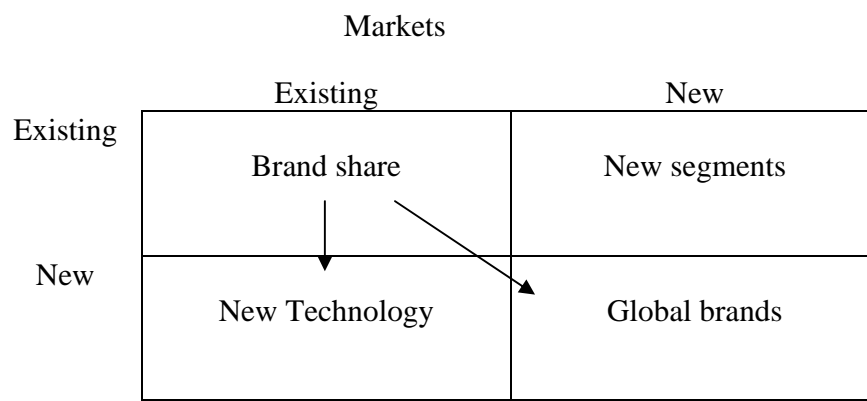
Iqbal (2006) gives the example of Russell Davies, planner provocateur and ex-worldwide planning head of Nike in arguing consumers want complexity, depth, humour, tension, and drama; as opposed to communications that are distilled to a simple essence or refined to a single compelling truth. Davies goes on to suggest that no-one ever came out of a movie and said "I really liked that. It was really clear". Clarity is important to our research methodologies, not to our consumers". Butterfield (1999) would support Iqbal's (2006) assertions and suggest that advertising seeks and succeeds in building quality perceptions of the product, resulting in enhanced product and company image.

Through using theory such as provided by Iqbal (2006) and Butterfield (1999, *see figure 1*), the research can gain an understanding into the impact on marketing 'Facebook' is having and look to meet the questions posed by the aims, concerning building brand awareness and the effects building a 'brand community' and 'word of mouth' on organisations within this sector. Through analysing these affects, this dissertation will look to address the resulting impact this has on branding, which as Martenson (2007) suggests and as Varey (2002) agrees, the corporate image

is essential, discussing Roberts and Downling (2002) who distinguish the corporate brand as a valuable intangible asset that may help to achieve sustained superior financial performance.

Figure 1.

Brand Growth direction matrix



Iqbal (2006) highlights the 80/20 principle as a “dominating force” that has shaped our understanding of business and popular culture. Iqbal (2006) suggests that as only a handful of music albums released every year were hits, these brought “in the money”, however the rest were money-losers and failures. Iqbal (2006) argues retail businesses recognise this and with their own 80/10 scarcity principles to deal with and limited and expensive shelf space to compete for; some of these projections invariably turned out to be wrong.

Iqbal (2006) states very few make money, hence it could be suggested the internet has taken away the need for expensive shelf spaces, consequently social network sites may ultimately be used to direct and influence consumer behaviour, although it could be said influencing free will is impossible therefore social networks are more so used to attach customers to the promotional brand in question. Chester based organisation ‘L.A.M.E’ has over 600 members for example,

customers will have chosen to such a brand community, therefore marketing communications will be spread through messages which will look to create brand loyalty (See Figure 2) and ultimately attract repeat business.

Figure 2.

Effects of creative branding



Changes in technology will ultimately affect any organisation, nevertheless specifically to Aim 3, the effects contemporary technology has, and the extent such changes have had on Chester's nightlife environment will be discussed in relation to how the clubs and bars will have adapted operations to suit such changes in the environment.

Iqbal (2006) suggests the extent to which social networks and 'blogs' can make organisations money, suggesting Google's Ad Sense programme as a way this can be achieved by all organisations however big or small. Marketing week (2008) discusses the research conducted by MEC and Microsoft who wanted to gain a deeper understanding of consumers' time spent on the internet; the research aimed to highlight the importance of context in online brand communications and provide advertisers with insight into how better to plan online campaigns. Marketing week (2008) found that overall consumers recognised a role for both "push" and "pull" brand communications if it supported, enhanced or improved their online journeys.

The findings confirmed that consumers are less likely to be open or aware of traditional online advertising formats when social networking or uploading content; Hence giving weight to Iqbal's

arguments that the use of social networks as a marketing tool may be the future for many organisations.

Communication messages are essential in advertising as Anderson suggests, cited by Iqbal (2006), through emphasising the importance of people in relating to a brand and create communication for them all. Thus through having a network of communication links through people as 'Facebook' provides, communication becomes easier and therefore brands can be pushed to the forefront of consumers' minds. Iqbal (2006) suggests traditional brand-building is complicated and expensive, and goes onto suggest, the future of advertising and brand-building will also be fast, cheap and out of control. 'Facebook' provides the perfect platform for this to happen and this research will look into the extent this is doing so in Chester's night clubs.

Marketing week (2008) discusses how around the world a greater percentage of advertising investment is being allocated to online media, suggesting knowing how and where to use the internet as a communication channel is difficult, therefore the extent to which Chester's night clubs are doing so will be evaluated. Stokes (2002) highlights how marketing is influenced by local, national and international economic factors and therefore plays a significant role in determining the likely demand for products and services, with potential lower demand as a result of the economic downturn. Communication is essential to the environment a product or service is sold within, therefore literature surrounding the local Chester economy will need to be analysed and evaluated against and conclusions reached through the primary research conducted.

Pandemonium (ND) suggests methods to which organisations should conduct such marketing practice, recommending marketers should participate in, organise, and encourage social networks to which people want to belong. Rather than talking at customers, marketers should talk and communicate with them. Pandemonium (ND) argues the social web is the most effective way in the world to do just that on a large scale. Therefore re-enforcing the effectiveness of 'Facebook', as nightclub owners, managers etc, are able to communicate directly between customers and potential customers; rather than previous marketing methods of talking at people or distributing

flyers for instance. Thus creating s Varey (2002) discusses, brand loyalty, resulting in a reduced need for costly promotion.

Creating such 'brand communities' could potentially change how employees and consumers interact, although through creating this added database of customer, priority for the organisation is that the brand's values, norms and culture are re-enforced. The research will analyse the impact such online 'brand communities' have on branding; Aim 3 will address such issues.

Nevertheless there are many advantages to using a social network as a marketing tool; on the other hand however, both ethically and morally, organisations may be questioned. Pandemonium (ND) stresses the importance to organisations in learning how to market on the social web responsibly. Rao (1997) emphasises issues such as the problems of laws, quality and responsibility that the internet has. Consequently marketers can use this to their advantage but must place close attention to how their actions could be interpreted through the consumer or the media; there is always the possibility of receiving bad press in accidentally saying the wrong thing to promote irresponsible drinking for example, with comments on a 'group' on Facebook, which again competitors may use to their advantage against the organisation in question and Vice versa.

Methodology

As Thornhill et al (2007) highlights, ontology questions the assumptions researchers have to how the world operates. The research will take a subjectivist ontological stance, with the lack of theory to support any previously substantiated pre-bounded views around the topic of the use as social networks as a method available to organisation's as a marketing tool. As opposed to the objectivist stance, the subjectivist view is more radical and can be used to introduce new values, through analysing the social phenomena created from human perception and action, which will prove crucial in analyzing and determining any evaluations concerning the extent to which Chester night clubs/bars use 'Facebook' as a marketing tool to develop their corporate brand.

An interpretive epistemological view aims to understand social actions through interpreting their meaning, it is necessary for the researcher to understand differences between humans in our role as social actors; as supported by the Harvard theory that behaviour is influenced through social change and social situations. Therefore as this research primary concern is how social actions can be influenced by organisations in provoking buyer behaviour through the contemporary use of social networks the interpretive stance will be the most effective point of view to take in order to as Thornhill et al (2007) describe, be critical of positivist traditions.

The use of the internet as a marketing tool is a relatively modern concept so there are not any previously bounded views or norms of generally accepted views or opinions based around this area. Other research ontological and epistemological stances were rejected on the bases that none incorporated the social aspects regarding corporate branding.

This research will look to the extent to which organisations are adapting business practice if at all, to use 'Facebook' as a potential marketing tool, hence a subjective interpretive paradigm will be taken, enabling the research to understand and explain how organisations will adapt communication practice to the interactive market space.

As this research is looking to develop theory concerning the use of social networks and in particular, 'Facebook' in developing a corporate identity and corporate image being used as a marketing tool it will be considered inductive research, with qualitative methods of data collection being used to construct such theory. Such a research design for this topic is most appropriate for this research in that it is essential to gather a social reaction of both the organisation and the consumer in order to gather viable results that can be analysed and used for evaluation.

Methodological Literature Analysis

The bulk of the debate this research will address will focus upon how social networks such as Facebook are used to develop the corporate brand, corporate identity and the corporate image.

Organisations may use social networks as a method to develop their brand and re-enforce their brand image, as Brunetto and Wharton (2002) argues, social identity theory categorises people according to age, gender, socioeconomic status, interests and skills. As in this theory, social networks can be used to group people together with a common interest, Korte (2007) would support this view and claims group dynamics affect individual behaviour and consequently influence learning; therefore as Doherty and Chadwick (2000) suggest retailers must develop innovative ways to use such sites to develop a coherent strategy, which will support relationship marketing. Hence through using interviews as a research method, valuable information can be drawn from the nightclub owners regarding the use of Facebook as a tool for branding, as they are more likely to expand upon any views in a face-to-face interview as opposed to a questionnaire. In-depth interviews are an appropriate method as they give the opportunity to probe deeper into the respondent's answers and go against their attitudes and beliefs.

Hoogervorst et al (2004) argues culture communicates how things should be, and defines such unwritten rules. Nightclubs may use a brand to develop a culture through Facebook. The brand's name will have hidden meanings and associations which potential customers will attach themselves to and believe in. Wetherell (1996) discusses people adjust their sense of identity and behaviour to mirror that of the social groups they are part of, therefore organisations will brand a product in a way that attempts to attach themselves to a certain group or brand, Brooks (2006) would support such notions and argues attitudes are influenced by the organisation.

Christensen (2001) would agree with Brooks (2006) and suggest our notions of corporate image and identity are often based on common sense understandings of communication and reality. Social networks also allow for a less formal mode of communication to take place, Connelly (2006) states that using such a medium as e-mail is too formal and impersonal, "Less formal forms of communication provide a more real-world experience".

Nevertheless, Stanton (1996, pp.4) suggests barriers to communication include "differences in perception, jumping to conclusions, stereotyping, lack of knowledge, lack of interest, difficulties with self-expression, emotions and personality". Organisations on Facebook must look to avoid such barriers, and create a credible identity; Kouzes and Posner (1993) found out that credibility is the number one reason people follow someone. Managers must be at least perceived to be credible or the communication process will break down. Christensen (2001) argues that in times of new technology the challenge to communicate the message is even harder. A strong identity has a number of potential benefits for an organisation e.g. adding value to increasingly similar products, generating consumer confidence and loyalty.

Evaluation of Research Design

In order to decipher the best research method to take, many differing factors affected the decisions, although the most effective way to make such choices is to evaluate previous research within the area of corporate branding and then criticize these, use their strengths and make sure this research minimizes the weaknesses such previous research may have had.

Hood et al (2005) looked at branding in the UK public library service, in order to analyze such research. Hood (2005) conducted primary research over a four-week period that consisted of a questionnaire survey distributed to heads of services in order to gain data regarding branding of the service, finding that properly planned branding could raise the public library services image. However, it could be argued that as only the heads of services were asked, the employees' concerns were not taken into account and therefore without the employees to implement the plan, corporate branding may fail. Therefore there is great value in not only gauging the views of those making the decisions upon who to brand, but to those who are attached to the brand hence the student focus group.

The use of questionnaires as a research tool must also be questioned, these are seen by many as unreliable as the researcher only gains the opinion of the respondent at the time and whose answers may or may not be their true feelings, therefore interviews are the best course of action to take as these allow for a face to face response to questions posed, where a social reaction of the respondent can take place and allow for any further comments to be added.

Miller (2008) analyses the principles of corporate branding, evaluating a Canadian leather goods retailer, however he only discusses theory from the literature, which would give good grounding information, there is a distinct need to relate this to real-life in order for it to be useful for a real life organisation. Therefore such principles as Miller (2008) discusses could be very useful however how the organisation implements these is essential. Consequently this research will

combine background theory from the literature with the thoughts and opinion of both the organisation and target market they are looking to reach through the medium of interviews and focus groups.

Research methods

It will be essential in this research to analyze the research participant's attitudes and opinions, consequently as Thornhill et al (2007) suggest, qualitative research methods should be used.

This qualitative method will be used to reflect the social issues around this topic in that in-depth interviews are typically unstructured. Gummesson (2000) argues in-depth interviews combine academic and management consultancy, such qualitative interviews aim to be interactive and sensitive to the language of the interviewee as Britten (1995) underlines.

Although as it would prove useful to allow the sample of nightclub managers to expand on any questions posed to them but restrict them solely to their use of 'Facebook' as a marketing tool this research will use in-depth interviews as a method of data collection and will compare and contrast these results against the thoughts of a student sampled focus group (between 10-20 people randomly selected) in order to gauge an impression of how the consumer is influenced, this somewhat method of 'convergent interviewing' as Nair and Riege (1995) discuss, allows the interview to be structured but gives flexible exploration of the subject matter without determining the answers. In such process, Dick (1990) argues more is learned about the issues involved, where as Phillips and Pugh (1987) argue convergent interviewing is a series of tasks which lead to the progressive reduction of uncertainty.

Such questions as 'to what extent would you say social networks such as Facebook make up your marketing campaign on building your corporate brand?' will be used in the interviews to the organizations, to address Aim 1 for example. Other questions surrounding the opinions of the organisations to impact and importance of developing a strategy that builds a brand community

of people to spread the message of the brands associations will be used to meet Aim 2 and 3. For example, 'Do your promotional strategy look to develop word of mouth discussions of your brands values and associations'.

This research will be influenced by axiological values. The interpretive epistemological assumption taken is used to understand the differences between humans as social actors. Hence in order to avoid validity and reliability failings the research must remain as unbiased as possible when considering interview questions. Patton (1990) argues internal validity in the convergent interviews is achieved through purposeful sample selection on the basis of information richness.

In order to gage a response to criticize the findings from the night clubs owners against that of the consumer, it is essential the consumer's views are taken into account. Therefore as many students used social networks such as 'Facebook' as a medium to attach to brands a focus group of around 10-20 students will be asked similar questions to that of the nightclub owners. Morgan (1993) suggests focus groups are appropriate when research needs to use group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction within a group.

As Neuman (2000), and supported by Aaker and Day (1990), the snowball sampling technique is appropriate when research is concerned with a small, specialised population of people who are knowledgeable about the topics. This research will use such a technique to address the focus group, a few respondents will be identified then the others will identify others in the interconnecting network to sample, thereby allowing the sample to grow in size.

When comparing and contrasting the results from both the interviews and focus groups it is essential variables are found that are linked between the two in order to produce reliable statistics that are relevant to the aims and research question. Hence through analyzing both the organisational use of 'Facebook' and how the consumers respond to this use, relevant

conclusions may be drawn to the durability and effectiveness of 'Facebook' as a marketing concept and tool.

In order to keep the findings valid it must be ensured the night club managers are fully aware that their views remain anonymous and that they won't be used any further than for this the purposes of this research as the organisations analysed are all competitors and therefore may not be so willing to give out information or pass on knowledge if they weren't assured this was the case.

There could be many differing foreseeable issues and problems that need addressing with using such research methods. Firstly the owners may feel restricted in disclosing information regarding how they use social networks to brand as they may feel such information could be used by the competition against them, although the research will intend to combat this by drawing up a waiver that will state in no way will their answers be used in anything other than this research project and consequently kept anonymous. Aaker and Day (1990) suggest guarding against this bias, the interviewers need to be not only skilful and experienced, but also have sufficient knowledge about the subject matter and be able to maintain data quality when recording and analyzing the data obtained from the interviews.

Primary Research

Interviews (Organisational owners)

Questions

1. With social networking being common culture now, would you say you've had to adopt your marketing plans to embed social networks as an element to this? If so to what extent have you adopted your plans?
2. If so why do you use social networks such as Facebook for promotion?
3. What impact would you say social networks can have on your brand image?
4. How important would you say creating word of mouth is to developing your organisations brand
5. Facebook allows for a collection of people with similar ideas in the form of groups, to what extent does building such 'brand communities' have on your organisations brand?

Interview Results Analysis

Respondents

Beans Promotion

Lame Promotion

New Meze

Brannigans

'Greed' Promotion

Which networks?

"All Facebook, Also a couple" Beans Promotion

"Hinted that they used to use my space but then moved away to Facebook" New Meze

"I use Facebook, myspace and twitter but I mainly use Facebook" 'Greed' Promotion

Why?

"Volume of people – 'myspace' no one join together" New Meze

"Free form of PR", "communication channels are world-wide", "group messages are the quickest and cheapest form of making contact with people" Lame Promotion

"Easy way to reach large numbers of people, easy way to promote upcoming events" Brannigans

"Cost-effective, and easy way to communicate with customers" Beans Promotion

"Reach our target audience very very quickly" 'Greed' Promotion

Marketing plan changed?

“Always a part of it but getting more important, move away from websites and to Facebook, storm created a couple of years ago” Lame Promotion

“Marketing strategy has changed ‘phenomenally’ in the past five years. Cost of print is down from 175,000 5 years ago to 50,000 flyers per year” Beans Promotion

What are the benefits to your organisation are of using social networks?

“Logo out there, pictures set the scene”, New Meze, “promotes word of mouth amongst consumers”

“Broader range of customers” Brannigans, ‘Younger generation’. “Also helps customers express their opinions and suggestions more easily”.

Beans Promotion “Gives businesses the opportunity to establish itself as a brand or product to a wider market” “Cuts down the costs of running events ‘involving sending a flyering team with flyers increasing the costs of running events”.

Drawbacks of social networking to your organisation?

Limiting yourself to other distribution channels, i.e. flyers staff, as lots of bars do it you have to be careful not to send out negative vibes.

Beans Promotion “Social networks can leave a business open to criticism that is sometimes constructive but most of the time is not’, it is a good way to gage popularity and feedback but it can cause negative effect on the brands image”...

It could seem we are targeting that certain sector of cliental, and neglecting others, i.e. “If you’re not on Facebook you can’t receive current offers”

Importance of spreading word of mouth?

“Essential” Brannigans

“Freedom of expression can have a negative response” Beans Promotion

“Both agree it’s massive, once people have experienced something they may want it again” New Meze and Lame Promotion

“To what extent of your marketing plan does your organisation use social networks to create word of mouth?”

“Sole purpose, re-branding, changing perceptions” New Meze, “builds hype”

“Very important as you will end up with no brand if nobody knows about you” ‘Greed’ Promotion

Marketing plans extent use social networks to create word of mouth?

“Mainly via messages sent to the groups on Facebook informing customers of events and activity. If one person will tell another and so on providing the message is relevant and not complicated to communicate on” Beans Promotion

Why join Facebook groups?

“People they know, communication, because it’s familiar to them and they know exactly how they work” New Meze

“Keeps students informed of the themed nights” Brannigans

“I mainly use Facebook for promotion of events and to communicate special offers and merchandise. People join Facebook groups out of interest and then secondly as a commitment to supporting the brand” Beans Promotion

“I think the main reason people join groups is to get the desired information about what’s happening on a particular night or at a particular event” ‘Greed’ Promotion

Impact of Facebook groups?

“More positive, no negative comments” New Meze and Lame Promotion

“Positive feedback” Brannigans

Beans Promotion “Positive however in November due to a rival group set up we experienced a serious drop in business. It was hard to get the trade back however with the help of Facebook and tactful promotions plan we were able to get the majority of trade back”.

“I’d say we have an 80 percent positive impact from the groups and 20 percent negative as with anything you will always have a small minority that are not happy with everything you are doing” ‘Greed’ Promotion

Do Facebook groups influence the customer perception of your organisations brand?

“No, more about the place, word of mouth, not buyer behaviour” “Too generic, can’t give the experience. All the bars are the same” New Meze

Lame Promotion “Absolutely”

“People behind the groups or admins influence Facebook groups, Facebook is merely a tool of communication and will only influence customers if the marketing and promotion is planned and well thought through” Beans Promotion

“If someone expresses their dissatisfaction on a group, other people could be influenced and put off” Brannigans

“Very much so” ‘Greed’ Promotion

Focus Group Questions (Students)

1. How do you hear about a branded night in Chester? ie. Through word of mouth, posters, flyers, social networks etc.?
2. In today's society to what extent would you say communications via social networks play in the brands you are accustomed to?
3. Through joining brand communities such as that created through a 'Facebook group' to what extent would you say this shows support or loyalty perhaps towards a brand?
4. Is the name of a brand important to you or does its brand associations (what it stands for) mean more?

Focus Group Analysis

Most of the students seemed to agree they hear about branded nights in Chester through word of mouth from their friends who either work for one of the nights, or through a distributed flyers/posters or through social networks such as Facebook. Most students agreed social networks were playing a huge part in why people joined a group. Joining a brand community such as a Facebook group is showing support to its ideas. However most also stated social networks can have a negative impact on their brand image, as there is a lot of spam, whereas most people prefer being spoken to face to face.

All the students were part of a range of social networks including bebo, Facebook, my space and twitter although Facebook seemed to be the most predominant one used. Most students also agreed they joined a lot of different groups but it doesn't mean this will influence their behaviour. The brand name is important but people were more concerned about what the brand gives them (i.e. if they like the night in there or not).

One student suggested the name of the branded organisation was important although he didn't go to 'off the wall' because it was called that, they go because they know it's built upon a good reputation based upon previous experience on what the customer expects...good music and cheap drinks. A lot of students chose the club itself rather than the brand attached to it. Students want to know what's on that night and what the party is happening. In general most people seemed to agree what the brand gives them means more. So their behaviour is influenced by previous experience in the bar or club as opposed to the branding behind it.

Results

Introduction

The aim of the research was to decipher between the use of social networks from an organisation's perspective and the consumers perspective and see if there was some common ground. A range of promoters for differing organisation's pitted their opinions and similar questions were posed to a group of students randomly selected. From gathering both the views of the organisation and the consumers in question we are able to gage a response to the aims the dissertation looks to address and then can use this data to be analyzed against the theory in question.

Comparison of focus group results and interviews

- Organisations and customers both feel that Facebook can change a person's perception of the brand; however both agree that this can sometimes have a more negative effect than positive impact
- Facebook seems to have taken over from any other social network as predominant in people minds.
- Organisations feel people join Facebook groups out of interest then as commitment to the brand.
- Beans Promotion and Lame Promotion were more concerned about the free form of PR side to Facebook as opposed to New Meze and Brannigans who felt it was more important about the volume of people that could be reached as its benefit.
- Both the organisations and customers in general did seem to agree that although they will join groups and attach themselves to brands, it doesn't definitely mean they will commit and change their behaviour and go and purchase from a bar/club.
- Both organisations and customers seem to agree that social networks are good communication tools to have however they are only part of the reason people go to an event. Face-to-face selling in the form of posters and flyers gives people the choice in their minds whether to go or on the event or not.
- The organisations agree social networks such as Facebook can be used to build or change a brand image, however as the focus group shows its prime importance is to spread word of mouth. Again similar to the use of 'Facebook groups' for building a brand community, organisations agree people join to support its views but as the focus group shows it doesn't definitely mean your behaviour will be influenced.

Application of methodology

As the methodology suggested, corporate branding is key to any successful marketing strategy. In the modern era as Doherty and Chadwick (2000) suggest, organisations need clever marketing strategies in order to fight off and succeed over competitors. Branding in the modern day is more complex business with social networking now playing a major role in developing and maintaining brand position. As the research conducted was in a qualitative fashion, questionnaires and interviews were chosen in order for the answers to be built upon and discussed in a broader context and thus allowing the respondents to build upon any ideas and expand upon any necessary comments made. This allowed for the sharing of information and knowledge in the case of the focus group and thus ideas to flow.

As stated in the methodology, the data gathered needed to be as open minded as possible, therefore it was stated the results gathered would be kept confidential in order for the respondents to give valid responses and gain reliable evidence.

Findings for each research question discussed in the light of the literature

1. To discover to what extent 'Facebook' is used as a promotional tool in building Chester's nightclubs/bar 'brand image'

Both the interviews and focus groups confirmed social networks are used to develop a brand image. However comments made by a couple of the promoters and suggested also by the customers argued that Facebook can sometimes have a more negative effect on the organisations brand through negative comments placed on groups.

2. To analyse the extent 'word of mouth' communications have on Chester's promotional brands

All the promoters agreed spreading word of mouth was essential in the success of any organisation. The focus group supported these views, with respondents suggesting they will discuss a night out with friends/colleagues before deciding what to do.

3. To analyse the impact building a 'brand community' on Chester's promotional brands

The organisations suggest people join groups at first out of interest and also maybe to show support for its views, although the focus group results seem to suggest this won't definitely influence the behaviour of the individual. So although this may create interest at first it may not ultimately impact on their behaviour.

Summary

In summary it seems social networking does have a huge part to play in gauging an opinion to people's perceptions of a brand/organisation although it seems its only part of an overall marketing plan that will ultimately aim to influence consumer behaviour. Therefore the results match the aims the dissertation set out to achieve in that it seems social networks such as Facebook are only in use to spread word of mouth and brand a product or organisation as opposed to directly influence consumer behaviour. It seems in the main organisations use social networks to communicate the message concerning the events/offers available for their organisation as opposed to use it to directly influence consumer behaviour. The views of the focus group also supported these assumptions as although a few respondents indicated they may be persuaded slightly to go to an event because of a Facebook group it was mainly decided that such an event only provokes gossip as opposed to directly influencing behaviour. It seems social networks are more used to provoke opinion behind the brand as opposed to directly influence opinion. It is therefore in agreement that social networks can have both a positive and negative effect on a brand. However the prime importance from the organisations point of view is to influence consumer behaviour therefore as suggested from the interview answers other forms of marketing PR such as flyers and posters influence opinion and will therefore make the choice in the consumers on whether to support a brand or not. This is supported from the view of the consumer who suggests it's more likely face to face selling will provoke their behaviour to purchase as opposed to anything else.

Conclusions and implications

6.1 Introduction

In conclusion the original aims and objectives of the project were met. Although there are many social networks used by organisations it seems in modern times 'Facebook' is the predominant one used by many differing organisations to reach their target audience. The general consensus was that Facebook groups reach the younger audience as it seems the general way to promote these days. It does seem social networks such as Facebook are being used to develop brands however as the project looked to investigate. Nevertheless it has been found this isn't always a positive influence on the brand. Creating word of mouth seemed the most predominant form of promotion.

6.2 Critical evaluation of adopted methodology

The methodology that was adopted was qualitative research and in-depth interviews were carried out therefore a true reflection of the respondents views could be gaged, this proved to be a successful method in both the interview and focus group process and thus the valid and reliable results can be drawn from the results. Nevertheless we could argue to lack of range of views from the interviews restricted the value of the answers given as unfortunately a few promoter respondents let me down with the interview process and with time issues re-arranging interviews proved impossible. Contact was reached through the form of Facebook communication and their views were considered although to maintain reliability such analysis wasn't considered as part of the overall analysis therefore if this project or a similar project was to be considered again in the future and was done on a broader scale possibly the methodological process should be adapted, on the other hand the value of the information gathered is essential to the reliability of the dissertation.

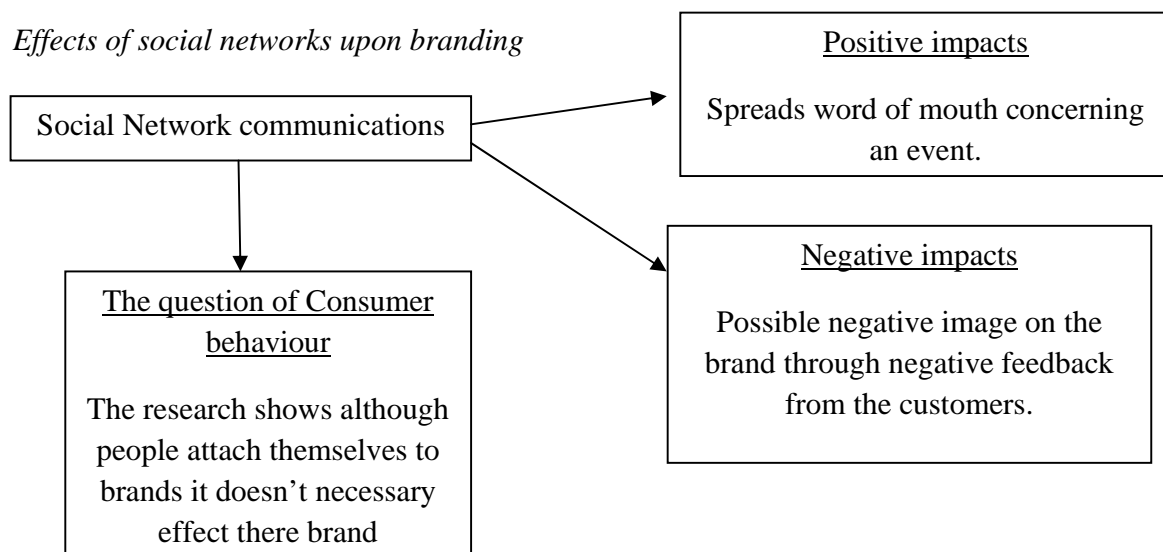
6.3 Conclusions about each research objective

To what extent is social network 'Facebook' used as a communications tool to develop brands in Chester's Nightlife scene.

All in all it does seem many social networks were used previously but now Facebook is used more predominantly to incorporate to build a brand image in Chester's Nightlife scene. It seems from the organisations point of view that communication via such a medium plays more of an

essential role in the overall marketing plan of the organisation in modern times as opposed to that previously, however it was discovered that as opposed aiding brands, Facebook can seemingly have a negative impact upon a brand. Both the focus group and a couple of the promoters hinted at the fact that people can interpret comments which will have a negative fashion. This is summarised in a new conceptualised marketing model as seen below.

Figure.3



6.4 Conclusions concerning the research aims

To discover to what extent 'Facebook' is used as a promotional tool in building Chester's nightclubs/bar 'brand image'.

The results show that Facebook itself is used to build an image of a brand although as discussed promoters must be careful with what they discuss on such social networks as these could always have a negative impact upon the brand. Through comparing such comments made by the interviewees and the focus group it seems that although Facebook is used to promote a brand, both the organisation and customers generalised views aired showed that doesn't necessary influence behaviour, where by its other forms of PR such as flyers, posters, word of mouth and face-to-face selling that does. Therefore the research would indicate that social networks are all used for branding as opposed to directly influencing consumer behaviour.

To analyse the extent 'word of mouth' communications have on Chester's promotional brands

The results conclusively show that word of mouth communication is essential in any brand. The organisations are looking to create word of mouth by their promotion and then the consumers between themselves will discuss whether or not to commit to such an event. So although word of mouth is key in any business, Chester's brands will use word of mouth to create hype surrounding an event and then spread word of mouth and consumers suggest they only discuss nights out as and when they like.

To analyse the impact building a 'brand community' on Chester's promotional brands

The results show that people will commit towards a brand through the form of a group. However promotional brands in Chester do look to build brand communities so they can spread the message about upcoming events. This sometimes can have an adverse affect on the brand or maybe even a positive effect. Most groups will provoke both negative and positive responses, but again groups may often be forgotten once times move by therefore a brands reputation maybe damaged with the wrong promotion. However these comments on the whole reflected Ben Landy's comments that suggested 'We have an 80 percent positive impact from the groups and 20 percent negative'. The promoters indicated customer perception of a brand can be influenced by the groups and the people behind the group; nevertheless as supported by the majority view of the focus group, this doesn't necessarily influence behaviour.

6.5 Limitations of the study

The study was limited in the range of respondents gathered from the organisations point of view, nevertheless in relation to the focus group respondent numbers, in relative terms getting the views of five different organizations views gave enough of a valuable response for reliable and justifiable conclusions to be drawn. The eventual results were also limited in that only one promoter from outside the Chester areas views was recognized although his views seemingly echoed that of the other branded organizations within the Chester area. Overall the study achieved its original objectives and gave a broad enough insight into branding and social networking and tied into with the methodological associations that were primarily discussed at the start of proceedings.

6.6 Opportunities for further research

In the future if this research was to be enhanced upon any further, it should be expanded to a broader area than Chester, and possibly compared and contrasted against concerning the branding techniques in the other cities and the views of the customers in such cities should be taken into account. Then we could gauge a broader view and more representative sample of the impact of Facebook and branding, nevertheless through narrowing the organisational response to primarily Chester we gaged a broad enough view into what is expected from Facebook by the organisation and the respondents to gauge a good insight and pitted such views against that of the customer.

7. Recommendations

For organisation's to succeed in the modern world of social network communications, people will latch onto brands and support what they believe in however this doesn't necessary influence behaviour. The consumer will latch onto the views of people and discuss what needs saying; however this can sometimes have a negative or positive impact on the brand. It has been proved Facebook itself is used for branding however organisations must be careful what they commit to or this could influence the brand in a negative fashion. It seems in general cost and monetary issues can have negative effects on a brand as opposed to the promoters that come across as more doing it for the people. In order to build a strong reputation, brands will incorporate Facebook into their marketing plan however it seems other forms of PR must be used as communication tool in order to spread word of mouth about an event. Therefore attaching the consumer onto a brand is essential although the results have shown to prove this doesn't necessarily affect behaviour. I recommend that in order to strike success the balance between developing a brand and building upon its success is fine as social networks seem to strike controversy more than anything else. Social networks are a fine tool to use to market a brand or product although as it's merely a form of communication it is judged differently by many people and impact upon the views of people as and when.

7.1 Implementation plan

From the organisational point of view the timescales involved with incorporating social networks into their brand are nil as these are a free service anyone can use. Nevertheless, the additional marketing plan that surrounds adding to the brand involves the additional PR costs which are where the problems may occur. Nevertheless the timescales and costs needed for customers to reach out to their target market have proved to be significantly reduced; organisations have seemingly realized they must embed Facebook communication as a process of reaching their target market however this merely serves to spread word of mouth as opposed to influencing behaviour. Therefore I would recommend any organisation does use Facebook promotion in order to reach its target market although they must choose their words wisely or negative feedback can be often the case.

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8. Appendices

Appendix One

Reflective Statement

On the whole the research project went to plan and many valuable conclusions and results were drawn from the project. The results gathered from the promoters produced a variety of differing opinions, which gave great value to the data gathered in that the majority verdict of the customers agreed with the views of certain promoters as opposed to other promoters, the access I had to these people through work connections certainly aided the process. Therefore through this process of data analysis, overall the project was a success as we were able to draw up a variety of evaluations that answered the overall research question and met the required aims.

On the other hand if I was studying the same area again, I would broaden the range of interviewees to a wider market and branch out into other areas on a larger scale than Chester and then gauge a response to how customers in other areas would react to such marketing ploys. Nevertheless the results gathered did divide opinion and tied in with the discussions from the views of Facebook networking, providing relevant conclusions against the projects goals and aims.

Originally I set targets and dates by which each section needed to be completed and finished. This timescale did change from time to time however mainly due to the commitments of the interviewee's, however these were solved through effective communication over the phone and via e-mail with meetings being re-arranged to suit the timings around when people were free. Placing together a focus group of students also proved difficult, nevertheless arranging time and

a meeting place was arranged for the random sample of students and although a couple of students missed the date, there was a wide enough variety of customer to gage some viable results.

The minor issues and problems that did arise were in the main due re-arranging times with the interviewees, as getting in touch with and arranging interviews the relevant promoters proved difficult. Although this did push back the timescale of the project, and thus having a knock on effect on the schedule of concluding the analysis of the dissertation. This meant the later stages of the project, the analysis, conclusions and evaluation stage all had to be moved back and therefore I had less time available than expected to complete these stages and considerably more work than expected towards the final few weeks before hand in.

The peer review proved useful in that through gauging the views of another fellow student, the research could be developed and improved in key areas that had been previously over-looked or miss-construed. It is often easy to miss vital areas in drafts, therefore through primarily gaining a differing opinion on the drafts in the early stages of the project, the eventual conclusions and evaluations drawn can be considered more reliable overall.

The tutors advise was useful in how best to construct and structure the project initially and then the feedback from elements A and B allowed the research to be developed and again improved upon leading for a more constructive analysis of data section. In general most of the project was agreed in principal at the early meeting stage with a few follow up e-mails that were highly supportive of the direction the dissertation should take and re-negotiation of the best course of action to take at each stage.

I would certainly argue being able to receive feedback upon the literature and methodology certainly did help the completed project. The suggestions made by the tutor concerning these sections aided me to re-write and re-evaluate my findings.

The management process itself has certainly developed my knowledge and understanding of how the process a management researcher must go through in order to draw reliable and valuable conclusions. The potential career path I've chose as a manager will be greatly aided by this overall process. The research process this project has taken me through will stand me in good stead for future employment.

The actual process itself has developed my understanding of how best to compare and contrast the views of the academics in the context of the research when applied to real-life scenarios. Analyzing the differing the views of the promoters in the form of in-depth interviews against the views of a selective group of students proved the right choice to make as the results gathered linked successfully so there could be viable results drawn and relevant conclusions made. The ethical considerations were met in that as agreed the results gathered would be to be kept secret therefore allowing for valuable results to be drawn and gathered as the respondents were allowed to openly discuss their true feelings on social networks and in particular Facebook and branding, therefore more reliable results and conclusions were drawn and interoperated from the data.

Overall I'm believed the project was a huge success. The theoretical side of the literature supported the findings from both the interviews and focus group and is proven social networks such as Facebook are used for branding as the aims set out to achieve, the primary research

showed and touched upon how this doesn't always effect consumer behaviour. Thus, opening a potential research project in the future regarding use of social networks and buyer behaviour and taking into account differing forms of literature and potential aims and objectives. Nonetheless in reflection upon this current project through keeping the overall objective narrow and the aims closed to focus upon the knock on effects of branding in creating brand image, word of mouth and creating a brand community, the data gathered could focus in upon achieving these goals.

Appendix 2

(<http://www.Facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>)

Facebook (2009)

Statistics

General Growth

- More than 200 million active users
- More than 100 million users log on to Facebook at least once each day
- More than two-thirds of Facebook users are outside of college
- The fastest growing demographic is those 35 years old and older

User Engagement

- Average user has 120 friends on the site
- More than 4 billion minutes are spent on Facebook each day (worldwide)
- More than 30 million users update their statuses at least once each day
- More than 6 million users become fans of Pages each day

Applications

- More than 850 million photos uploaded to the site each month
- More than 10 million videos uploaded each month
- More than 1 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photos, etc.) shared each week
- More than 2.5 million events created each month
- More than 30 million active user groups exist on the site

International Growth

- More than 50 translations available on the site, with more than 40 in development
- About 70% of Facebook users are outside the United States

Platform

- More than 950,000 developers and entrepreneurs from more than 180 countries
- Every month, more than 70% of Facebook users engage with Platform applications
- More than 52,000 applications currently available in the Facebook Application Directory
- More than 100 applications have more than one million monthly active users
- More than 10,000 websites have implemented Facebook Connect since its general availability in December 2008

Mobile

- There are more than 30 million active users currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices.
- People that use Facebook on their mobile devices are almost 50% more active on Facebook than non-mobile users.
- There are more than 150 mobile operators in 50 countries working to deploy and promote Facebook mobile products

Appendix 3

Ostrow (2009)

MySpace Statistics

Owyang's January 2008 study also explored the statistics of MySpace. With over 110 million active users, MySpace is the most trafficked website in cyberspace. MySpace boasts:

- 14 billion comments on the website
- 50 million mails each day
- 10 billion friendships
- 1.5 billion images
- 60,000 videos uploaded each day
- Over 8 million recording artist