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A framework of social media engagement: case studies with food and consumer organisations in the UK and Ireland

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Abstract

For organisations that interface with a large audience (i.e. governments, businesses, consumer bodies, non-profits), there are expectations that engagement on social media can improve responsiveness. The paper develops a framework of social media engagement based on a case study with food governance and consumer organisations in the UK and Ireland. Application of the framework identifies three key capabilities that can frame the contribution of social media engagement in this context: (1) consistency in managing social interactions, (2) creating content to engage with specific audiences and (3) using social media as information sources to develop network alertness. Moving beyond simply characterising social media engagement in terms of the speed and volume of social interactions, this study contributes to a more systematic examination of the concept as an enabler of organisational responsiveness.

Keywords: Social media, organisational responsiveness, consumer organisations, stakeholder engagement, food communication.

1. Introduction

Modern organisations are expected to develop a social media presence in order to enable them to share information and engage with the networked public. Starting with internal collaboration and knowledge management tools (McAfee, 2006), social media have become relevant to the whole spectrum of organisational interactions with the public, from customer engagement and brand promotion to complaints, queries, campaigning and participation in policy making (e.g. McCarthy, Rowley, Ashworth, & Pioch, 2014; Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp, & Agnihotri, 2014; Whelan, Moon, & Grant, 2013). Interactions with the public are taking place on channels that include online networks (Facebook, LinkedIn), blogs (Blogger, WordPress), microblogs (Twitter, Tumblr), video/photo sharing platforms (YouTube, Instagram, Flickr) and social bookmarking sites (Pinterest, Delicious, Reddit).

Current work on social media in organisations has focused on business engagement, mainly relationships with customers and managing brand communities (e.g. Baird & Parasnis, 2011; McCarthy et al., 2014; Trainor et al., 2014) or content and information management models (e.g. Aladwani, 2014). Contributions outside business engagement have either mapped online interactions with public sector (Mergel, 2013) and cultural organisations (Padilla-Meléndez & del Águila-Obra, 2013) or explored how non-profit organisations use social media to engage with stakeholder groups (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Kristen Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012). Those studies have highlighted operational and strategic aspects of social media engagement.

As interactions between organisations and the public are taking place in online spaces, there are increasing expectations for organisations to be more responsive, for example, to reply instantly to queries, update content regularly, manage multiple channels and be prepared to engage with the public on any issue. As a result, social media initiatives that usually start with a simple presence on different channels, quickly involve more complicated decisions about how to scale up the level of commitment. Making those decisions can be quite challenging, for example, Argenti et al. (2005) emphasise that responsive engagement strategies require attention to several aspects like channel integration and using feedback sources to inform an organisation's capacity to engage with different stakeholder groups.

To more systematically consider the engagement potential of social media and map its key dimensions, this paper develops a framework based on a case study with five organisations in the UK and Ireland. The organisations include consumer and food governance bodies that interface with a range of publics and stakeholders at the national level and that use social media with different objectives and levels of sophistication. Food communication provides an interesting context to illustrate the challenges of social media engagement as food topics, especially ones related to health and obesity, draw significant attention and reactions (Kolk, Lee, & Dolen, 2012; Shan et al., 2013). Public and third sector organisations involved in food

communication usually have to address a constant flow of queries, manage food crises like the 2013 horsemeat adulteration incident and at the same time lead engagement around key campaigns (e.g. healthy eating habits, food safety) (Rutsaert et al., 2013).

The review of the relevant literature in the next section uses the concept of organisational responsiveness as a theoretical lens to identify challenges of social media engagement. Section 3 presents the framework development methodology based on a multiple case study approach, which leads to the presentation of the framework in section 4. The conclusion in section 5 elaborates on the practical implications by identifying three pathways to responsiveness. The three pathways support an understanding of responsiveness as a way of managing two-way interactions as well as using social media to reach key audiences.

2.   Social media engagement and the challenge of responsiveness

Responding to the communication needs of different stakeholders - particularly costumers - has been at the core of how organisations leverage value. Since the concept of responsiveness can be ambiguous, a brief definition within the scope of this study can be useful. Meehan and Dawson (2002) outline responsiveness in very practical terms as the ability of being "fast and right". They argue that demonstrating timely and effective responsiveness requires certain elements of learning such as the ability to balance risk tolerance and speed, innovate and experiment that cannot always be found even with major consumer-focused organisations. While all stakeholders are of value to an organisation, responsiveness to their needs has to be balanced and involves trade-offs according to Koll, Woodside and Mühlbacher (2005). Moving beyond the needs of different stakeholder groups, Zaheer and Zaheer (1997) closely link responsiveness with alertness or the ability to respond proactively to information from the environment.

An alternative view of the concept comes from scholars in public administration where a responsive government should respond in a timely fashion to any and all demands of citizens (Pennock, 1952). Responsiveness here refers to the speed of completing citizens requests (e.g. transactions, requests for information, agenda setting) (Vigoda, 2000) but, at the later stage, also involves the capability to listen to the public and engage proactively (Stivers, 1994; Vigoda, 2002). The latter view marks a transition from administrative to collaborative responsiveness, which values the organisation's ability to listen to the public further to managing requests. For the scope of this study, it is important to consider both reactive and collaborative elements of responsiveness, as the value of social media can be evident in both.

Social media have not been the starting point in the debate on information technology and organisational responsiveness to stakeholder needs - earlier studies found that online interactivity is difficult to achieve compared to information provision (e.g. Kent, Taylor, &

White, 2003; Saxton & Brown, 2007). Studies of government websites have similarly found that interactivity is highly challenging even though it constitutes an important element of public value (Justice, Melitski, & Smith, 2006; Karkin & Janssen, 2013). Saxton and Brown (2007, p. 156) frame a core dimension of website responsiveness for non-profit organisations as "integrating transactional and interactive content to foster the participation and inclusion of their multiple stakeholders".

The relevance of social media in participation and interactivity is evident as their different functionalities enable organisations to share information, construct identities and network according to their aims (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Due to the use of social media, interactions with the public no longer simply take place on a central website but on different channels whose functionalities convey different propositions for engagement (Panagiotopoulos, Al-Debei, Fitzgerald, & Elliman, 2012). For example, microblogging applications (Twitter, Tumblr) act as immediate tools for brief updates while blogs usually serve diverse purposes of more in-depth engagement with the general public or specific groups.

After establishing the importance of social media in creating new types of interactions, we need to consider why responsiveness can be particularly challenging in this context. One of the main challenges relates to the fact that assessments of social media use in organisations tend to be reflected in measures of interaction, for example, the volume of reactions to content published by the organisation (e.g. retweets, likes) or the size of networks formed (e.g. Facebook friends, Twitter followers). Measures of popularity on social media – known as metrics or analytics – are usually considered indicative of an organisation's ability to engage. They are critical for domains like marketing where there needs to be a clear return on investment (Fan & Gordon, 2014; Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Peters, Chen, Kaplan, Ognibeni, & Pauwels, 2013; Sterne, 2010). Applying and making sense of analytics in a broader engagement context is however not easy. Critics emphasise that having more data than ever before does not always mean that we can reach the right audiences (Baym, 2013) nor does it necessarily help construct meaning about how audiences behave (Boyd & Crawford, 2012).

In addition to the limitations of interaction metrics for measuring responsiveness, more advanced consideration of social media audiences is needed for several further reasons. First, the relationship between traditional and social media audiences is complicated by the requirement for organisations to reach new ones as well as offering value to those who already engage (e.g. Kidd, 2011; Panagiotopoulos, 2012). Second, social media host distributed audiences that form around events or interests usually on an ad hoc basis (Highfield, Harrington, & Bruns, 2013). Hence, they are more dynamic in their formation and do not always sustain. Third, the demographics of social media users show that there are systematic differences in channel use across users and over time. For example, the Oxford Internet Survey in 2013 identifies the age groups 45-64 as the most rapidly growing users of

social networks, which might gradually lead to younger users moving to different networks (Dutton, Blank, & Groselj, 2013). These dynamic trends require respective adaptions in engagement strategies.

Even when organisations are able to identify important audiences, engaging with them requires internal reporting mechanisms and decisions about which types of interaction deserve more immediate attention. Culnan et al (2010) frame those decisions as an organisation's absorptive capacity or the ability to monitor social channels, process incoming messages and manage response processes. In addition to managing the interactive elements of communication, absorptive capacity can be extended to the value of social media as information sources to inform decision-making in organisations (Kolk, Lee, and Dolen 2012). The network effects of social media can turn them into particularly useful sources of information for domain experts or the general public (e.g. Doan, Ramakrishnan, & Halevy, 2011). However, due to the vast amount of information sources and different functionalities of each social media application, decisions need to be made about how to monitor and when to intervene. This constitutes another important challenge for organisational responsiveness.

3.   Research methodology and background of cases

To systematically map the dimensions of social media engagement, a qualitative multiple case study approach was adopted (Yin, 2014). Due to the theory building objective of this study, the case selection followed a theoretical sampling logic where the cases were selected as suitable to illustrate the main concepts and contribute to theory development (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Data collection took place from November 2012 to June 2013 and involved one preliminary study at the first stage and the main study with four organisations at the second stage, which was the main input to the framework development. Table 1 provides background information for the five organisations and outlines the social media channels used during the time of data collection. Prior to using social media, all organisations communicated with the public using a consumer helpline or call centre and to a varying extent using emails.

At the first stage, to validate and expand our initial approach, we selected a major consumer association in the UK that engages heavily with the public on a variety of topics (organisation A). The organisation has been operational for over 50 years as a fully independent consumer body that conducts product reviews and receives questions or complains from the public about their rights as consumers in addition to organising campaigns (e.g. about the energy market or banking reform). To support these activities, the organisation conducts wider consumer engagement and marketing research on a regular basis (e.g. collective switching schemes, price comparisons, data protection). Organisation A suited the aims of a

preliminary study due to the significance of its social media activity, for example, maintaining nine different Twitter accounts whose followers ranged from a few thousand to almost 20,000.

At the second stage, to build and contextualise the framework, the investigation focused on four organisations in the UK and Ireland that communicate with the public about food-related matters including food safety, promotion of healthy habits, labelling, allergy alerts and hygiene ratings. Ireland has a similar communication and cultural context as the UK with the main difference being the scale, as the population of Ireland is 4.5 million compared to the UK's 63 million. In the UK and Ireland, adoption of social media is quite high and relevant to both personal and professional networking. In the UK, an Ofcom (2014) report and the bi-annual Oxford Internet Survey (Dutton et al., 2013) show that about two thirds of all Internet users have at least one profile in a social networking site (mainly Facebook, with Twitter reaching 30% of Internet users). Adoption statistics from Ireland show similar patterns with 60% of the population being Facebook users and about 30% having a Twitter or LinkedIn profile (Ipsos, 2014). It is also important to note that, according to the Central Statistics Office of Ireland, enterprise use of social media was at the levels of 50% in 2013, notably higher than a European Union average of 30% at the time (CSO, 2013)

The four organisations included the two main food governance bodies in the two countries (organisations B and C) as well as one organisation from Ireland that engages in food communication about safety and health eating habits (organisation D) and a promotion agency of Irish food nationally and internationally (organisation E). All four organisations used a number of different social media channels at the time of the study and were at the process of evaluating their impact and making decisions about future investments.

In each case, the unit of analysis concentrated on the social media initiatives and their impact on the organisation's public engagement objectives. Data collection involved both primary and secondary data starting from a comprehensive examination of available background information about the organisation as well as a collection of publicly available interactions on social media. Primary data came from 17 interviews with 16 participants across the five organisations, which included 3 marketing and communication managers, 3 information managers or officers, 3 social media managers (one of them interviewed twice), 4 social media operators, 1 media relations manager and 2 advice line executives.

Table 1: Background information for case studies

Organisation	Country	Scope and remit	Social media channels	Main communication aims
A - preliminary	UK	Consumer association, independent body	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blog, Flickr, RSS feeds	− Supporting the organisation's core mission and expertise in consumer research. − Promotion of campaigns to consumers with emphasis on social sharing and actionable content (e.g. petitions). − Feedback from the public on upcoming campaigns and identification of future issues.
B	UK	Food safety and hygiene, labelling, law enforcement and food crisis management	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blog, RSS feeds, mobile apps, podcasts, Pinterest, Thinglink, Storify	− Networking with experts and other important groups, engagement around key content. − Campaign promotion and public engagement on issues of health eating, food safety and hygiene. − Quick identification of potential emergency situations and intervention.
C	Ireland	Legislation and law enforcement, food crisis management	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube	− Disseminating key content in a less formal way and driving traffic back to the website. − Sharing knowledge regarding frequently asked questions. − Quick information updating, especially in emergent situations.
D	Ireland	Food safety and healthy eating promotion Food marketing	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest	− Educating the public about food safety and healthy eating practice. − Supporting public campaigns, programmes, and other initiatives. − Interacting with followers around social media postings, and gaining insights from their feedback.
E	Ireland	Food marketing, trade development and promotion body	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn	− Establishing and promoting social networks within the Irish food and drink industry (e.g. information about facts and upcoming events). − Sharing food recipes and food sources, promoting advertisement campaigns.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format organised around the main four themes shown in table 2, which were adapted to the specific person and organisation. The interviews started by discussing the background and organisation's public engagement context with respect to the main themes established in the initial guiding framework. Then, interviews focused on the use of social media for engaging with the public and aspects of responsiveness, for example, the impact of social media on the organisation's commitment to answer questions from the public within specific timelines. To contextualise discussions, an important part of each interview was to collect instances of online interactions in advance and use them as input. For example, discussing posts from the organisation's page on Facebook and making sense of the response workflows or how content is organised and updated. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with one exception where extensive notes were taken.

Table 2: Agenda for semi-structured interviews

Interview themes	Indicative questions
Channels and tools of engagement	Generally, how does your organisation receive questions and comments from the public? Which channels do you use to disseminate information and reach specific audiences?
Nature and types of interactions	What kind of questions do you receive from the public, when and where engagement takes place? Does the frequency of interactions change around specific events (including crises)?
Commitment and engagement processes	What is the commitment of your organisation to answer questions from the public? How are the processes for responding organised?
Impact of social media on organisational responsiveness	How have social media changed the way your organisation communicates with the public? For example: number of queries, speed of reaching people, maintaining consistency across communication channels, decisions about when and how to engage.

Data analysis took place in two rounds of iteration, which expanded and further refined the initial themes until the framework was devised. The thematic analysis in each stage followed the methodology by Braun and Clarke (2006). Our starting point in the framework development was to consider the nature of different interactions via multiple channels as well as to specific audiences. The preliminary study was useful to identify three initial themes that served as the basis for the framework development:
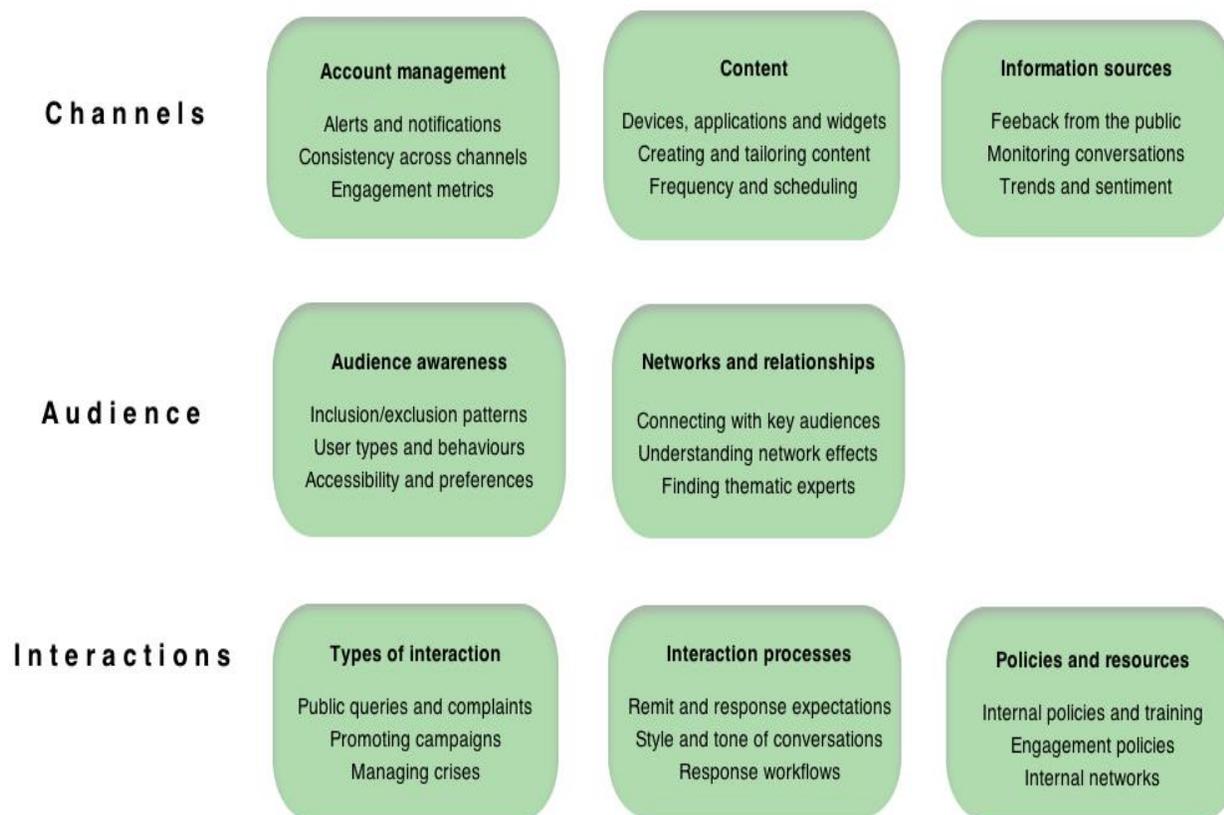
- Engaging on multiple channels and establishing information flows both to manage incoming messages and monitoring content. This involves selection of channels, using specialised software to manage multiple accounts and creating content to promote awareness campaigns or information about topics of interest.
- Identifying networks of stakeholders and developing audience awareness across different channels.
- Managing interactions with consideration to resources, processes and structures, for example, how different interactions need to trigger different response processes.

The framework was revised and further adapted based on the findings of the four cases and structured around the three main themes shown in figure 1. Apart from mapping the dimensions of social media engagement, the analysis focused on interrelations between the concepts that emerged from the case findings as key aspects of responsiveness. These are discussed in the concluding section, following the presentation of the framework.

4.   Framework of social media engagement

Food communication provides an interesting context to illustrate the challenges of social media engagement since, although everyone eats on a daily basis, food policies and regulations require elaborate scientific evidence, monitoring and close collaboration with European food authorities. Furthermore, consumers have a legitimate interest to understand, influence and seek explanations about food policy decisions.

Before digital media, the four organisations had to use costly media advertisements to reach their audiences with limited feedback and targeting options. Everyday interactions with the public were mainly through helplines that are in place to help consumers with queries related to food labelling, hygiene and any issues regarding food policy. Consumer research in the form of surveys or panels would take place around specific needs or on an annual basis to assess general food safety and eating habits. Three of the organisations would also use mobile text messaging and mainstream media to issue warnings about product recalls and allergies – sometimes as a matter of urgency.

Channels

Account management
Alerts and notifications
Consistency across channels
Engagement metrics

Content
Devices, applications and widgets
Creating and tailoring content
Frequency and scheduling

Information sources
Feeback from the public
Monitoring conversations
Trends and sentiment

Audience

Audience awareness
Inclusion/exclusion patterns
User types and behaviours
Accessibility and preferences

Networks and relationships
Connecting with key audiences
Understanding network effects
Finding thematic experts

Interactions

Types of interaction
Public queries and complaints
Promoting campaigns
Managing crises

Interaction processes
Remit and response expectations
Style and tone of conversations
Response workflows

Policies and resources
Internal policies and training
Engagement policies
Internal networks

Figure 1: Framework of social media engagement

Although the progressive adoption of social media did not replace any of the previous activities, it did reshape the type, frequency and distribution of interactions with the public as each organisation's presence became more visible on channels like Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn. Most respondents were confident that social media learning within their organisation was advancing rapidly and the impact had been more transformational since over a short period of time. Social media managers appeared generally confident that distinctions between social media and other communication channels would soon cease to exist. In particular, one of them stated: *"in a year or two we won't even call it social media, it will just be about communicating … It will be like when people started using email".*

4.1. Channels and information flows

Account management

How to manage multiple social media accounts was one of the main challenges identified in all four cases. Most organisations adopted one or more specialised software tools to integrate all interactive accounts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) and facilitate common administration usually by a small group of staff. Features of social media management software that respondents found particularly useful were alerts and notifications over incoming interactions. Apart from triggering response processes, central administration of interactions made recording more systematic and facilitated the gathering of engagement metrics, which were summarised periodically or around campaigns or events.

Central administration also ensured that the content between accounts remained consistent, which was particularly highlighted by interview participants who interact daily with account administration. Consistency was not so much an issue of internal coordination but more due to differences in the format and content of social interactions (e.g. a tweet or a Facebook post).

Content

Closely related to this is the challenge of creating social media content to support communication and engagement objectives. To stimulate engagement, organisations had to increase the different forms of content that they were able to produce, from tweets and Facebook posts to visual galleries including, for example, interactive calendars about food safety advice throughout the different events of the year. Social media content has to be interesting, timely, and when necessary actionable, for example, asking the public to engage with a campaign, view an article or complete a survey. Other types of common content were periodic updates about policies or regulations, food hygiene and safety advice, consultations and events. At the time of the study, infographics were becoming increasingly used as a way to visualise complicated topics and create a shareable item across all channels of communication.

An important difference with the more static content on the organisations' websites is that the frequency and scheduling of updates has to be planned more carefully using the several manual and automated features of social media management tools; for example, decisions about when to launch a new campaign on Facebook or schedule periodic updates on Twitter. The accessibility and format of content via different devices was also an important consideration with a growing number of users engaging via mobile phones or tablets. Certain types of content could be offered via specialised mobile applications and even shared publicly via application interfaces. An important example here is the UK Food Hygiene Scheme that rates all eating facilities ratings from 0 (improvement urgently needed) to 5 (very good). The ratings are available via the organisation's website, a specialised application in all major mobile platforms, as a public dataset for further analysis and through an application programming interface to support the work of developers.

Social media as information sources

Further to producing content, the role of social media as sources of information was a key theme in all interviews and an element of rising importance in organisations' social media planning. At an initial level, social media was being used to seek and stimulate pubic input in many different forms including polls, surveys, and tweets asking for information or linking to formal consultations. At a more advanced level, organisations were interested to monitor content on topics of interest posted by others within or outside the reach of their networks. This involved both the monitoring of conversations around keywords and the identification of trends that could be considered as indicative of public sentiment and emerging news agendas. To enable this level of monitoring, organisations were experimenting with specialised software that could work either as standalone tools or together with account management software.

4.2. Audiences and networks

Audience awareness

The main features of social networking sites and adoption statistics were used by organisations to understand where their most important audiences were and how they access online networks. However, extrapolating from this information to the design and execution of campaigns that target specific individuals was particularly challenging.

Conceptualisations of the audience formed an important part of all interviews with participants having diverse opinions about the constitution and behaviour of social media users. Some communications managers felt strongly that social media are the most effective way to engage with certain audiences for consumer awareness campaigns (e.g. against obesity, food safety on budget, food labelling awareness), while campaigns targeted at food professionals (e.g. resources for food businesses, training seminars, guidance on storing and using vegetables) need a more balanced combination of online and offline channels.

Networks and relationships

An important part of understanding social media audiences is considering how users connect to each other and form networks or communities. For all organisations, their brand name and institutional role would facilitate social media visibility; this alone however was not sufficient to guarantee the success of social media initiatives. It still had to be placed in

the context of a networking strategy and decisions about where and how relationships had to be developed.

Many of the monitoring tools that organisations were using produced reports about the size of networks formed. Some of them even mapped key influencers around specific topics and allowed the discovery of users' accounts around descriptions, locations, links or other characteristics. A key distinction here is between networks that aim to facilitate relatively longstanding digital relationships like Facebook and LinkedIn and those aimed at information sharing with secondary networking features; for example, information on Twitter might spread outside existing relationships (followers). Websites mainly driven by content (e.g. YouTube, Pinterest, Flickr or even blogs) also tend to host ad hoc communities where relationships form more dynamically around content instead of user profiles.

Interviewees generally found that taking advantage of existing communities facilitated reaching the right audiences when campaigns had a clear focus. As a consequence, organisations had to consider their own networking strategies to connect with thematic experts of food professionals or other organisations like allergen charities, consumer bodies or government agencies. For one organisation, maintaining relationships by leading a LinkedIn group was identified as the most important priority while the other three reported a wider variety of approaches to relationship building. Relationships could start with simple online actions like "retweeting", "mention", "like" or "pin" and then be escalated into more permanent ones like "followers" or "friends".

4.3. Interactions and engagement

Types of interaction

Further to the logistics of managing social media accounts, the organisations were considering the nature of interactions with the public how this dovetailed with their existing capacity. We generally identified three types of interactions that occur with different frequency and urgency:

- Queries from the public about food-related policies, regulations, eating habits, food storage, transportation and safety; also includes complaints related to eating facilities, food hygiene, labels and expiration dates.
- Reactions and engagement with the organisation's campaigns, news feeds or alerts (including product recalls and allergy warnings).
- Food crises and safety incidents that demand immediate attention and tend to generate significant reaction from consumers.

The transparency and speed of communications on social media has a profound effect on all three types. In general, social media helped reduce the similarity of queries from the public due to the availability of information from many different channels (linked via the organisation's website). Social media also reduced the barriers to making a contact but led to receiving more complicated questions the answers to which required sourcing internal expertise (e.g. interpretation of regulations). This was an observation also related to email queries in two of the organisations. Despite the volume of interactions, all organisations had an implicit commitment to take some form of action for every query and, when a question was outside their remit, to offer the best advice possible. Public handling of queries and complaints can entail reputational risks but most interviewees agreed that it was in fact an opportunity for organisations to demonstrate action taken and in many cases clarify issues about their remit (e.g. which agency is responsible for meat audit). The public nature of responses was seen as positive by one of the social media managers who identified that *"the more information you put out the less people will need to ask"*.

The same was applicable to engagement with campaigns, news feeds or alerts where efforts were made to increase the visibility of interactions, for example, by creating or promoting Twitter hashtags. When people engage with a campaign, support on social media by the organisation in the form of a "like" or "retweet" would act as recognition and facilitate social sharing through users' networks; for example, many restaurants, pubs or coffee houses in the UK share photos of their hygiene rating certificates. Interviewees clearly identified an effect of social media on interactive campaigning. The following comment is indicative of the initial steps involved in such transitions: *"We really wanted to…I keep using the word "engage", but that's exactly what it was. It was understanding that it was a two-way thing; it wasn't just the [organisation] saying "Here's our message and this is it." It was more about listening to what was going on around our remit and things that we're involved with."*

Food crises and safety incidents were a special category of interaction that generally demands providing official information as timely as possible – both unsolicited information and responses to queries by any concerned publics. Food crises have unpredictable durations as they can be ongoing for weeks and escalate or deescalate according to the availability of new information. Twitter, Facebook and blogs were particularly identified by the organisations as relevant in crises, both as sources of information and spaces where crisis-related information is likely to be disseminated more effectively. At the more strategic level, organisations were considering how to incorporate social media into crisis management protocols.

Interaction processes

The requirement to manage new social media interactions had process and resource implications. Internal workflows about responding to letters, phone calls or emails, had a

defined structure to ensure that an appropriate response is provided within a certain number of days and issues are followed up when necessary. The equivalent of a tweet, Facebook post or LinkedIn comment could potentially fit existing workflows with small changes. For example, in one of the organisations, when a Facebook post was identified as a query or complaint, a quick acknowledgment of the issue was followed by a more detailed response a few days later. A similar process was followed on Twitter when a query could be addressed within the character limitations or otherwise redirected to the helpline or an email address.

However, alongside direct interactions, organisations had to decide how to handle situations that were less explicitly relevant or less directly requiring action, for example when referred to indirectly in conversations (e.g. Twitter or Facebook mention). This might include criticism about their work or issues that the public brought to their attention. Even when their name is not mentioned in conversations, organisations have potential access to a large volume of discussions that take place within social media communities. The general consensus among social media administrators was that *"even if they [people] don't address us directly [on Twitter], if they address an issue that is relevant to us, we will monitor that and reply if we feel it is appropriate".* Getting involved in these discussions might have benefits for the organisations but decisions had to be made about when to take some form of action or not. In one organisation, it was soon established as a common practice to: (1) intervene in conversations that contained false information even when the organisation was not mentioned and (2) encourage humorous response styles on Twitter whenever appropriate.

Policies and resources

Handling public conversations on social media had direct internal implications. Organisations had to decide the level of investment and internal reorganisation needed to increase compatibility with social media interactions (e.g. to design and enable new workflows, hire or relocate appropriate staff). Internal learning processes also had to include training programmes for social media use and good practice. An important decision within these processes was to establish the level of autonomy that social media administrators had to post information and generate responses. In most organisations, internal learning processes were quickly formalised to cope with new social media challenges; indicatively: *"We have an intensive policy for staff on social media. We have guidelines around tone. Anyone who is involved in social media is well-briefed as to how they should conduct the conversations"*

In one of the cases, the reorganisation process was supported with the use of the internal network Yammer that belongs to the broader category of enterprise social media (e.g. Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013). Yammer's flexible information sharing through open, many-to-many conversations facilitated coordination of response to public queries

and reduced internal email workloads. At the same, it became a source of useful content for the organisation's campaigns.

Finally, an important element of social media planning was the articulation of engagement policies and how to communicate this to the public. All organisations centralised their social media presence on their website but varied around how they set their expectations for engagement. One organisation published an explicit social media policy explaining how and when different channels are used while others used separate guidelines on each account description (e.g. "We'll be with you 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday." on Twitter).

5.   Conclusion and implications

This study focused on examining the dimensions of social media engagement as an enabler of responsiveness for organisations that interface with a large and diverse audience. The findings in the form of the framework shown in table 1 aim to organise and advance our understanding of this evolving phenomenon. Furthermore, as many organisations are developing their digital engagement strategies, the framework can support the planning of future initiatives; it overall points to a direction where interactions with the public remain important but organisations need to further consider adapting to challenges related to information management capabilities and workflows. From this starting point, we now turn to the study's practical and theoretical implications.

5.1.   Practical implications: three pathways to responsiveness

The framework includes both external and internal aspects related to social media engagement. Although there are many possible interrelations between the different concepts, the findings from the case studies suggest that there are three key connections that can act as pathways to responsiveness.

From account administration to managing social interactions

All organisations had to undergo a similar learning process of identifying relevant accounts, understanding their features and then assigning responsibilities for administration. At a later stage, they made decisions about central management of active accounts and how this fits organisational workflows. Responsiveness has been evidently reflected on the effective management of social interactions by establishing the links between account management, the different types of interaction and interaction processes. This proved to be a far more complicated challenge for organisations than the speed of replying to queries or even coping with volume peaks around events.

The use of specialised software to manage social interactions gave clear benefits in terms of consistency across channels and making decisions about when the organisation should start new discussions or intervene in ones that take place. Two important enablers were identified in this context: (1) the coordination and autonomy of organisational members to update accounts across different types of interaction and (2) the articulation of expectations of responsiveness to the public so that it is clear where the organisation maintains a social media presence and what types of interactions can be supported (e.g. Twitter policy). The more progress organisations made with these two enablers, the more confident interviewees felt about the use of social media overall.

Content strategies to engage with audiences

Aladwani (2014) explains how content management can be key to the alignment of organisational objectives and social media activities. Our study further identifies the importance of aligning content strategies with audience and network awareness. By creating content tailored for different channels and updating it at the right times, the organisations had unique leverage to initiate interactions with audiences. Subsequently, they could build more permanent digital relationships that could support future engagement more effectively. In an iterative way, by engaging with the right audiences, organisations had the opportunity to further improve their content creation capabilities and sustain those relationships.

The connection between content and audience further provided a guide to interpreting metrics based on how content can serve the organisations' needs to reach its target audiences (Baym, 2013). For example, the availability of the hygiene ratings via different channels in the UK provided good value both to consumers (accessible on mobile devices, hygiene awareness) and to restaurant owners (incentives to improve ratings, publicity from good ratings). Hygiene advice, recipes, photos, competitions and promotions of events are other examples of popular content that supported the organisations' efforts to build relationships with their audiences. Furthermore, we can observe the importance of internal networks to source useful content within the organisation and support content creation processes. In addition to the use of Yammer in one of the cases, all organisations were improving their content creation capabilities using more ad hoc forms of internal sharing of organisational expertise.

Information sources for network alertness

The ability of organisations to monitor social channels has been identified as important from the early development of social media initiatives (Culnan et al., 2010), hence it is not surprising that our study confirms the increasing importance of this aspect. Literature on the

value of information sources for organisations tends to emphasise reputational effects (positive or negative mentions) and engagement with brand names (e.g. Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Fan & Gordon, 2014). As social media are becoming a major source of news and developments across professional networks, it was evident in our cases that their monitoring value could support organisational alertness.

Therefore, although social media developments could not replace traditional consumer research, we were able to observe several examples of how it shaped the scheduling of content updates and planning of future campaigns. This was much more evident regarding the identification of incidents that required the organisation to take action as soon as possible. Around the time of the study, the horsemeat incident in 2013 was an important example of how social media could reflect consumers' concerns and common questions regarding a complicated issue of food safety. Interviewees were also able to identify smaller scale incidents that had demonstrated the importance of monitoring online sources for network alertness. Advancements in the technical capabilities of social media monitoring tools were providing new opportunities in this direction. Useful features included summaries, periodic or ad hoc reporting, visualisations, sampling users, alerts and supporting multiple users/devices.

5.2. Theoretical implications

The concept of responsiveness has been used in various ways in the organisational literature; from practical aspects of customer service to propositions about the mission of public organisations to respond to demands from the public. In this study, responsiveness provided a theoretical lens to frame the dimensions of social media engagement and group organisational challenges and capabilities in the form of the framework. The findings from the case studies suggest that IT-enabled responsiveness on social media takes place in a much more dynamic digital landscape than interactions via organisational websites (e.g. Karkin & Janssen, 2013; Kent et al., 2003; Saxton & Brown, 2007). Issues of networking and channel segmentation, content creation strategies and the use of social media as information sources are new elements of responsiveness that require attention further to the volume and speed of interactions. The framework helps explain how these activities can be linked together while highlighng their technical and organisational enablers (e.g. account administration and monitoring software).

Overall, these new elements together support a shift towards a more proactive view of responsiveness where organisations are more prepared to understand and listen to their audiences while managing two-way interactions (e.g. Vigoda, 2002). The case studies show that this objective is challenging but not impossible to achieve for organisations that are revising their interaction processes and developing new capabilities. Proactive

responsiveness was mainly been evident in the form of general alertness when new important issues were being discussed on social media (e.g. food safety incidents). In parallel, we were able to observe some more regular elements of proactive responsiveness in the form of more network-specific alertness. Whether labelled as monitoring or crowdsourcing, these new information flows can enable organisationa to learn and engage on a more regular basis. Finally, the study shows that there is an interesting interplay between external engagement and internal processes. Huang et al. (2013) elaborate on how social media enable both the consumption and co-production of content within organisations. Internals networks that facilitate information sharing and accelerate communication practices within organisations might also be useful to improve external responsiveness.

5.3. Limitations and future work

The study and resulting framework have certain contextual limitations. First of all, they are based on the case studies with food governance and consumer organisations, which have a unique but also quite encompassing remit that leads to a need of engaging with a very diverse audience. Some of the framework's aspects might not be applicable to other organisations with different or more focused engagement requirements. Furthermore, we need to take into account that the use of social media in the UK and Ireland is generally high across all parts of the population while there is clear relevance of social media to professional networking using channels like LinkedIn and Twitter. This allowed the case organisations to support a variety of networking strategies aimed at both the general public, groups of experts and other types of stakeholders that have a digital presence (e.g. restaurant owners). Finally, there are limitations in terms of the amount and type of data collected. The interviews captured main strategic decisions and operational aspects around social media engagement but mainly came from the perspective of communication officers and managers. It is reasonable to expect that in large organisations there might be different views and priorities as digital interactions become more integrated into communication strategies.

Regarding future work, the study points to three main directions. First, although we can assume that expectations of responsiveness from the public on social media are not the same as offline interactions, we need to know more about how the public actually experiences this transition and what the expectations are. The dynamics of responsiveness on social media provide an interesting ground for further exploration of the concept in this direction. Second, the framework identifies the role of social media monitoring in organisations as an enabler of engagement. As the monitoring of online information sources is becoming more technically sophisticated, issues of privacy, transparency, and accountability have to become more explicit, especially in public organisations (e.g. Bekkers et al. 2013).

Third, although our study appears more relevant to the public and third sectors, it also informs some aspects of business engagement. In line with our findings, Trainor et al. (2014) note that companies that are strong in managing B2C transactional relations are more likely to struggle when moving towards less structured types of interaction on social media. Indeed, the organisations in our study had some good level of readiness due to their prior campaigning and engagement activities. It is important for future work to assess how organisations focused on structured interactions (e.g. banks, utilities) could benefit from being responsive to a much more diverse social media audience.

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