

Chapter 69

An Evaluation of the Effects of Social Media on Client: Advertising Agency Relationships in the UK

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ABSTRACT

High level of informality in the relationship between brand managers and advertising account representatives has been described as factor affecting positive work dynamic and long – term success. Although means of informal communications such as emails are still used, social networks have been gaining increasing popularity in the business landscape. This paper examines the effects of social media on client – agency relationships with focus on Facebook as an example of personal network. The methodology combines primary and secondary research. The paper reviews literature on client – agency relationships and social media, which provide the foundation for primary research. The paper concludes that connecting on Facebook with a client or agency representative is a way of showing the relationship has moved beyond strictly a working one. However, connecting with a work contact on Facebook should not be done in order to make the work relationship stronger. The study offers recommendations for practitioners and direction for future research.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has been transforming all areas of everyday life and the business environment for years. Over the last decade social networking sites have drastically changed the way people communicate and do business. Almost every employee today has some kind of online presence on social media sites and although these platforms vary based on function and use, it is true to say that social media is increasingly blurring the lines between personal and professional relationships.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-9020-1.ch069

Bearing in mind the nature of the marketing and communications industry, the client – agency relationship is a highly complex one. The importance of a good relationship between brand and agency account managers for a successful project outcome cannot be questioned. In “The Implications of the Internet on the Advertising Agency-Client Relationship” Durkin & Lawlor (2001) found that a high level of informality in the personal relationship of a client representative and agency executive was often described as a factor affecting long-term success.

Although the study mentioned above states phone calls as the most common means of informal communication, it is worth noting that the paper is not recent and has not taken into account the evolution of the Internet and the recent shift in technology which has resulted in the rise of social networking sites and changed the way people communicate today.

Since 2003, social networking sites have been gaining increasing popularity in the cultural and business landscape. Although some academic literature on how organisations can use social networking sites for businesses and recruitment purposes exist, there is little research on whether or not client representatives should be connected with advertising agency executives on personal social media sites such as Facebook, and if so, how such interaction affects their working relationship.

The aim of this paper is to address this and explore the connection between the two topics. This paper focuses on Facebook as an example of personal social networking site and examines if and how connections between clients and agencies influence their working relationship.

The Literature Review looks at academic literature on the two topics. The Methodology part states the types of research undertaken and the reasons they are considered appropriate. The most relevant insights from the primary research are discussed in the Findings section, while key results are analysed in the Conclusions section. The paper concludes with Recommendations for Practitioners, Direction for Future Research and possible research topics that stemmed from the main findings.

Research Objectives

This paper pursues the following objectives:

- To outline the nature of client – agency relationships within the advertising industry;
- To assess the different ways in which clients and advertising agencies maintain working relationships; investigate ways of communication between them;
- To critically review the academic literature available on the topics of client-agency relationships and social media (with focus on Facebook);
- To evaluate the effects of social networks on client – agency relationships and the way in which online connections between these brand and account managers influence the working relationship;
- To make recommendations for practitioners in the industry and further academic research based on the findings.

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