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The development of B2B social networking capabilities

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ABSTRACT

The adoption of social media (SM) as a marketing platform in B2B markets has been growing, but there is a lack of research exploring the development of the social networking capabilities organizations need to build and maintain relationships via SM. By applying a qualitative, in-depth, case study research design in 12 organizations, this paper identifies a four-stage journey of social networking capability development. The stage-model captures the types of capabilities organizations engage or develop to be effective in creating actor engagement, network development and network management on SM. Through this, we demonstrate how the capabilities build over time and integrate with each other to improve the organizations' perceived competitive performance on SM. We highlight the operational, dynamic and adaptive capabilities needed to build capacity for seizing the opportunities available through SM.

1. Introduction

Social media (SM) is becoming increasingly important for marketing communications and customer engagement within Business-to-Business (B2B) organizations (Drummond, Toole, & Mcgrath, 2020; Rooderkerk & Pauwels, 2016; Wang & Kim, 2017). However, SM implementation often relies on trial and error for integration with the overall marketing strategy (Cartwright, Davies, & Archer-Brown, 2021; Salo, 2017). As a result, organizations often passively engage in SM without a clear strategic and procedural approach (Rangaswamy et al., 2020; Rooderkerk & Pauwels, 2016).

Although the proliferation of SM has been slower in B2B organizations than in consumer organizations (Foltean, Trif, & Tuleu, 2019; Iankova, Davies, Archer-Brown, Marder, & Yau, 2019), scholars acknowledge the potential for SM in B2B relational network development (Foltean et al., 2019; Karampela, Lacka, & McLean, 2020; Rangaswamy et al., 2020). By moving away from disconnected SM activities towards embedding SM within a networked, community-based organizational culture (Labrecque, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013), organizations can exploit the opportunities available through SM channels to improve their strategic positioning in their networks (Bocconcelli, Cioppi, & Pagano, 2017; Pardo, Pagani, & Savinien, 2022), and influence relationships with stakeholders (Andersson & Wikström, 2017). As such, SM is not solely a communications tool (Drummond et al., 2020), but a tool that requires strategic understanding of its unique features and relational nature (Magno & Cassia, 2020). Yet research on the processes, activities and capabilities required to enhance inter-firm relationships through SM is fragmented (Drummond et al., 2020; Herhausen, Miočević, Morgan, & Kleijnen, 2020). There is an urgent need for research exploring *how* organizations embed SM at a strategic level (Cartwright, Liu, & Raddats, 2021), and to identify which capabilities organizations need to enhance their relational bonds through SM platforms (Herhausen et al., 2020).

In response to this knowledge gap, this paper explores the embedding process of SM within B2B organizations. Drawing upon the networking capabilities literature, and using the dynamic (Teece, 2007) and adaptive (Day, 2011) capability frameworks, we determine how SM strategies, and social networking capabilities are embedded within organizations over time, addressing the research question: What are the social networking capabilities organizations engage or develop when implementing SM for relational purposes, and how are they integrated over time?

Utilizing empirical data from twelve in-depth case studies, this paper represents the first empirical study drawing upon the adaptive capabilities' framework in B2B SM marketing, highlighting how it is situated within the broader networking capabilities and dynamic capabilities' framework and its value in understanding SM within business networks. We identify an original theorization of the capability development journey organizations undertake when utilizing SM for network development and management purposes, proposing a four-stage framework

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for how organizations develop effective social networking capabilities. This framework constitutes an important contribution to the B2B SM literature, which has been recognized as lacking robust theoretical foundations (Salo, 2017). From a practical perspective, this study aids marketers in developing their SM strategy by recognizing that effective networking capabilities result from first utilizing existing operational capabilities, before developing more advanced capabilities.

2. Literature review

In seeking to address the paucity of literature on the process of SM strategic development in B2B organizations (Cartwright, Liu, & Raddats, 2021) and SM capability development (Herhausen et al., 2020) we draw on four key pieces of literature. First, we explore the networking capabilities organizations need to operate in B2B environments. This leads to exploring the limited research on social networking capability development, then the value of the dynamic capability (Teece, 2007) and adaptive capability frameworks (Day, 2011) to deepen our understanding of social networking capabilities.

2.1. Networking capabilities in B2B environments

B2B relationships are complex, with multi-level actors undertaking activities to develop resource bonds between organizations (Håkansson & Shenota, 1995; Ritter, Wilkinson, & Johnston, 2004). Yet decision-makers need to balance the opportunities available through being embedded in networks with the limitations of being mutually interdependent with their relational partners (Håkansson & Ford, 2002). The importance of considering B2B relationships beyond a seller-to-buyer dyad led to the rise of one of the most prominent innovations in the marketing literature, the network perspective (Håkansson & Ford, 2002; Möller & Halinen, 2018).

The network perspective expands the view of who is relevant in understanding the dynamics of inter-firm relationships to include a diverse range of network partners including customers, suppliers, consultants, competitors, and government agencies among others (Ritter, 1999). It is underpinned by the thesis that the activities of individual parties influence the expanded network and the strength of individual relationships within that network (Johnsen, Wynstra, Zheng, Harland, & Lamming, 2000). As such the inter-organizational relationships of a particular focal business depend not only on the dyadic relationship between them and their partners but the myriad of other inter-organizational relationships connecting the different parties throughout the network (Grönroos, 1984). The capabilities organizations need to develop and manage these diverse networks have, therefore, emerged as a substantial stream of research (Arasti, Garousi, & Jafarpanah, 2021; Forkmann, Henneberg, & Mitrega, 2018).

Mitręga, Henneberg, and Forkmann (2018) broadly define capabilities as "the power to do something" (p. 1) drawing on the Oxford dictionary definition. Whereas networking capabilities can be viewed as: "The competency of a firm to purposefully search and find network partners, manage and leverage network relationships for value creation" (Mu, Thomas, Peng, & Di Benedetto, 2017, p. 189). These affect the breadth and depth of inter-organizational relationships and how they are developed over time (Arasti et al., 2021). Although an expansive literature covering the capabilities required for both network development and network management has emerged (see Arasti et al., 2021 for a thorough review), including multiple types of relationship, both within customer and supplier relationships (Forkmann, Henneberg, Naudé, & Mitrega, 2016; Mitręga, Forkmann, Zaefarian, & Henneberg, 2017; Ritter & Geersbro, 2012), as well as a more advanced alliance (Niesten & Jolink, 2015; Wang & Rajagopalan, 2015) and multi-partner relationships (Mu et al., 2017; Zaefarian, Forkmann, Mitrega, & Henneberg, 2017), the literature has tended to focus on individual relationship development capabilities, "while capabilities relating to other aspects of managing in business relationships and networks as well as the interplay of these capabilities remain less well understood" (Forkmann et al., 2018, p. 6). Studies on the capabilities needed to operate in a B2B social networking environment are even more scarce (Herhausen et al., 2020; Wang & Kim, 2017), despite suggestions that these capabilities could be different to other forms of networking capability (Muninger, Hammedi, & Mahr, 2019). The SM environment, although only part of the overall relationship network, has been identified as requiring distinct forms of networking capability, that have often been neglected by businesses operating within the environment (Herhausen et al., 2020; Wang & Kim, 2017). We, therefore, turn to what is known about networking capabilities in SM.

2.2. Social networking capabilities within the B2B domain

Although SM research has concentrated on business-to-consumer (B2C) markets, with platforms such as TikTok and Instagram dominating the market, LinkedIn and YouTube are of growing importance within the B2B domain and B2B organizations are seeing significant opportunities for relationship development on SM networks (Guesalaga, 2016; Quinton & Wilson, 2016). For social networking capabilities to be developed, organizations require capability layers (i.e., connecting, engaging, co-ordinating and collaborating type capabilities) that enable them to create digital engagement activities which result in stronger inter-firm relationships (Drummond et al., 2020). The major impediments to expanding social networking capabilities include the limited knowledge of how best to implement SM (Cartwright, Davies, & Archer-Brown, 2021; Rooderkerk & Pauwels, 2016) and how to develop these required capabilities (Chirumalla, Oghazi, & Parida, 2018; Wang & Kim, 2017). Reasons for these obstacles include the complexity of the ever-changing SM landscape, the large investments required for content development, and unfamiliarity with the available platforms (Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto, & Jayawardhena, 2012; Rooderkerk & Pauwels, 2016; Valos, Polonsky, Mavondo, & Lipscomb, 2015).

With the emergence of SM in B2B environments, organizations are seeing a shift in relationships within their networks, with exchanges becoming increasingly many-to-many networked interactions (Cartwright, Davies, & Archer-Brown, 2021). Following the paradox of the network perspective that actions of any network member have consequences for all network members (Håkansson & Ford, 2002), SM has the potential to disrupt business networks. Organizations therefore require the development of capabilities to ensure continuity of relationships in a more complex environment. However, effective SM network building is proposed to require different competencies than for selling a product or service (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Lacoste, 2016). SM environments have been identified as needing specific competencies to orchestrate activities across the network, to support and empower their employees, and to facilitate fast decision making and knowledge flow across the organization (Muninger et al., 2019). According to Holliman and Rowley (2014), understanding the audience, and creating a flow of communication between networked actors is a good starting point, but limited empirical work has focused on what capabilities are needed for successful SM activities (Drummond et al., 2020; Herhausen et al., 2020). Day (2011) and Kozlenkova, Samaha, & Palmatier (2015) have conceptualized the benefits of both dynamic and adaptive capabilities in responding to the emergence of SM, and Forkmann et al. (2018) call on scholars to better integrate developments in strategic management dynamic capabilities literature within the networking capabilities literature. Thus, we turn to the dynamic and adaptive capability frameworks for understanding how to develop capabilities in digital environments.

2.3. Dynamic capabilities within social media

Many B2B organizations have historically been successful by exploiting operational competencies; these being capabilities organizations use "in an effort to earn a living in the present" (Helfat et al., 2007, p. 122); sustaining an existing competitive advantage through using

resources effectively to drive operational efficiencies (Martin, 2011). Conversely dynamic capabilities are strategic and organizational processes that act on the operational capabilities and organizational resources to reconfigure them to match a changing business environment (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). These capabilities are dynamic in the sense that they focus on changing something, and allow organizations to "continuously create, extend, upgrade, protect and keep relevant the enterprises' unique asset base" (Teece, 2007, p.1319). Furthermore, dynamic capabilities are higher-level competencies that allow organizations to adapt and change in response to the overall network (Kachouie, Mavondo, & Sands, 2018; Teece, Peteraf, & Leih, 2016).

Unlike operational capabilities, which provide the means for doing things right, dynamic capabilities are focused on capabilities which allow organizations to reconfigure processes, actors, resources and activities to do the right things at the right time (Teece, 2014). Consequently, the development of dynamic capabilities is a continuous process, which is implemented in steps over time (O'Toole & McGrath, 2018). The process of developing capabilities consists of interaction levels that take place throughout time through actions, episodes, and sequences (Holmlund, 1996). Like the actor-resource-activity framework by Håkansson and Shenota (1995), where actors transform resources through activities, a competitive position can be reached when capabilities are coordinated between actors (i.e., actions), such that activities are orchestrated (i.e., episodes) over time (i.e., sequences), and resources optimally utilized (Matarazzo, Penco, Profumo, & Quaglia, 2021).

Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) situate dynamic capabilities as organizational-level routines which allow for operational capability and resource recombination that provides unique value in dynamic or indeterminate situations. Conversely, Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) approach it from a behavioral strategy perspective in which dynamic capabilities are repeatable activities with a purpose leading to better resource configurations, developed more quickly than the competition (Di Stefano, Peteraf, & Verona, 2014). As we contend that SM is a new and dynamic phenomenon in B2B marketing, and our interest is in organizational capability development, we adhere to Teece et al.'s (1997) original conception of dynamic capabilities.

Teece (2007) proposed the importance of organizations being agile in their environments, by developing dynamic capabilities which help them sense and shape opportunities and threats, and seize on new opportunities by enhancing, combining, protecting, and reconfiguring the organization's resources. Sensing opportunities entails scanning, searching and understanding competitors' and customers' needs, as well as identifying opportunities brought by technological advances to meet customers' needs better than the competition (Teece, 2007). To sense opportunities, organizations need capabilities allowing them to obtain and collate an intimate knowledge of both the organization and the network within which they operate (Kozlenkova et al., 2015; Teece, 2014). Shaping requires capabilities that allow for the effective integration of internal and external inventions, technology transfer, and protection from possible imitation by competitors (Teece, 2007). Shaping capabilities allow organizations to mold opportunities in a way that makes them beneficial (Palmatier, Houston, Dant, & Grewal, 2013; Teece et al., 2016). Seizing entails developing capabilities such as new product development, service innovation and the incorporation of processes within the strategy, which often require upfront investment (Teece, 2007). For an organization to be able to seize an opportunity, it must have the right business model, incorporating technology that is continuously improved through competencies and resources (Teece, 2014). Successful organizations show that, by sensing, shaping, and seizing opportunities, and by adapting to the competitive landscapes, they can revolutionize the market space (Kachouie et al., 2018).

2.4. Adaptive capabilities within social media

To be able to adapt to dynamic marketing environments, Day (2011) proposes that organizations require not just dynamic, but also adaptive capabilities, or what Schilke (2014) refers to as second-order dynamic capabilities; these being capabilities such as organizational learning routines which allow organizations to acquire or improve first-order dynamic capabilities. Day's (2011, 2014) premise is that the dynamic capabilities literature is too internally focused; focused on reconfiguring what operational capabilities and resources organizations have, rather than identifying what new capabilities they need to develop. Day (2011) suggests that adaptive capabilities are network orientated, and augment/extend dynamic capabilities, enabling organizations to react more effectively to an organic, networked environment. Day (2011) identifies three market-based adaptive capabilities: (a) Vigilant market learning (b) Adaptive market experimentation and (c) Open marketing. *Vigilant market learning* focuses on market insights, allowing for the anticipation of market changes or unmet needs. This requires a willingness to continuously engage with network actors, to be open-minded to their latent needs, and to be able to sense and act upon new opportunities. *Adaptive market experimentation* focuses on continuous planned experimentation in the network from which knowledge can be extracted. This requires organizations to continuously interpret and share learning, which is contingent upon three factors: 1) willingness to challenge existing beliefs, 2) codify and share successful practices within the organization, and 3) learn from the wider business network. Finally, *open marketing* entails being more transparent in actor relationships. Open marketing is thought to be facilitated through new media such as SM (Day, 2014) and involves initiatives to leverage business networks and widen the horizon of the organization's perspective. If organizations can 'open up', they will have access to a wider array of valuable insights garnered from the business network (Day, 2011).

With the growth of SM and its impact on network development, organizations need to remain more fluid and develop relevant adaptive and dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2014). To develop such capabilities successfully, organizations need to reconfigure their internal activities into "signature" practices that are uniquely their own (Birkinshaw, Zimmermann, & Raisch, 2016; Teece, 2014). The knowledge required to implement this is not widely known in marketing organizations. Therefore, this paper explores the journey of implementing SM as a relational channel, investigating what social networking capabilities organizations engage in or develop and how they are integrated over time.

3. Methodology

The research applies a multiple case study research design consisting of 12 UK-based B2B organizations. This methodology enables the team to collect rich data from real-life industrial contexts and to build a theory that is grounded within that context (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). Qualitative research was most appropriate as it allows the research team to gain in-depth insight into how actor relationships change and evolve within SM, the activities carried out over time, interactions between actors, as well as the meanings of relational exchanges between parties (Rynes & Gephart, 2004). The limited research carried out around strategic and procedural SM marketing (Cartwright, Davies, & Archer-Brown, 2021; Salo, 2017), and the required capabilities (Drummond et al., 2020; Herhausen et al., 2020) lends itself to a deeper qualitative approach as this allows for a broader exploration of the research aim and theoretical elaboration (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

3.1. Case selection

To gain a nuanced view from multiple perspectives, a literal and theoretical replication logic (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) is utilized to select a variety of cases (Table 1). This approach serves to identify the occurrence of similar results between cases or contrary results to other cases. Eisenhardt (1989) suggests between four and ten cases as sufficient for theory-building purposes, although Hedges (1985) suggests an

Table 1
Case Study Information and Stages of Development.

Organization	Size	Industry	Interviews carried out	Stage
1	200 employees	Mobile marketing applications developer and service provider	4	Stage 4
2	265 employees	Media, digital and communications service provider	6	Stage 4
3	1338 employees	Advertising, marketing, and corporate communication service provider	5	Stage 2
4	850 employees	Social media customer engagement service provider	3	Stage 1
5	10 employees	Media Consultancy	2	Stage 3
6	30 employees	Social media customer engagement service provider	3	Stage 1
7	250 employees	Office products manufacturer	7	Stage 1
8	450 employees	Pottery manufacturer	6	Stage 2
9	50 employees	Raw material manufacturer	3	Stage 1
10	30 employees	Pharmaceutical machinery manufacturer	3	Stage 1
11	800 employees	Catering supplier	3	Stage 3
12	150 employees	Electronics manufacturer	2	Stage 3

upper limit of 12 case studies in multi-case research. Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 30) suggest that more than 15 cases make a study "unwieldy". In our study, we found theoretical saturation (Eisenhardt, 1989) was achieved by the 12th case, so data collection was taken "to the point of redundancy" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 204). This relatively high number of cases is drawn from the variety of B2B organizations operating in the SM environment. As with many multi-case designs, the selection process is of fundamental importance and gaining access to informants involved a variety of approaches (Dubois & Araujo, 2007). Based on previous work experience in SM marketing, organizations one and two were known to the research team to be leaders in their field. For this study, they form a literal replication, due to their similar market natures, and their similar level of development in SM marketing. Despite both offering digital marketing services to clients, the focus of the interviews was on their internal implementation of SM marketing, rather than what they did for their clients. Cases three to six were selected based on their objective similarity to cases one and two (service providers developing and managing marketing strategies for their clients but with varying levels of SM service offering), thus extending the literal replication. These organizations were contacted via LinkedIn using industry and job filters to identify senior marketing individuals, and SM feeds were observed to ensure they were active users of SM for marketing purposes.

Theoretical replications are, in general, utilized to test the boundaries of the emergent theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Hill & Brown, 2007). Companies seven to 12 were selected, from a variety of industries and are of different sizes to provide this theoretical replication. We followed Eisenhardt's (1989, p. 545) suggestion to investigate between four and ten cases for theoretical replication. Cases seven to 12 were all known to members of the research team through previous investigations; they were each known to be implementing their SM strategy at the time of study and were, therefore, approached for inclusion in this project. This decision enables a fuller and broader exposure to the research context than is usually available to researchers when first getting access to an organization (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012). By using both literal and theoretical sampling, the richness and robustness of the data were increased, to the benefit of the subsequent framework development (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.2. Interview development, data analysis and data quality

A total of 47 semi-structured interviews with employees from marketing, sales, and digital divisions are carried out across the 12 cases, lasting between 38 and 93 min. The reason for interviewing employees within these roles is due to the emergent finding that these departments are the dominant home for SM, and all our interviewees are actively involved in strategic decision-making regarding SM implementation. Following Yin (2018), the interviewees are seen as "informants" who provide detailed information about SM from a relational perspective and were considered sources of corroboratory evidence. We follow an appreciative interview approach that enables the interviewee to reflect on the processes (i.e., past and present reflections and experiences) and capabilities required for developing and sustaining inter-firm relationships over time (Michael, 2005). This 'journey' led us through the capabilities, decisions, and barriers that organizations experience when adopting SM for managing inter-firm relationships. This research method enables us to understand the development of social networking capabilities and what works well (Schultze & Avital, 2011).

The interviews commence with preliminary questions enabling the participants to tell their stories of events and experiences (Perry, 1998) in the process of implementing strategic SM. For example, the first question asks interviewees to discuss their SM strategy and how the strategy evolves. This allows us to capture the participant's perceptions, and to understand the capabilities required to move towards a more advanced strategy. We follow Dick's (1990, p. 9) suggestions that "the starting point is a question that is almost content-free. This is your warranty that the answers came from the respondent and did not arise simply because your questions created a self-fulfilling prophecy". Probe questions starting with "How…?" that cannot be answered with yes and no-follow. For example, "How do you develop strategic content on SM?" or "How do you engage your employees on SM activities?" or "How do you leverage relationships with customers and other stakeholders through the uses of SM?". These probe questions constitute a large part of the interviews (Yin, 2018), and provided a reliable framework for cross-case analysis of the data (Perry, 1998). All questions are grounded in extant literature such as the dynamic and adaptive capabilities literature within the digital economy (Herhausen et al., 2020; O'Toole & McGrath, 2018), SM capabilities (Drummond et al., 2020; Kozlenkova et al., 2015; Wang & Kim, 2017), and B2B SM marketing literature (Cartwright, Davies, & Archer-Brown, 2021; Salo, 2017), allowing the research team to achieve reliability (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010).

Interviews are audiotaped, transcribed, and analysed immediately ensuring descriptive validity (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010). This allows the research team to ask questions in future interviews relating to matters previously mentioned. One researcher is responsible for the data collection, and two researchers independently analyse and code the interviews, allowing for construct validity. This analysis method enables the research team to gain rich qualitative data whilst presenting analytical advantages of comparison within and across several cases (Darke, Shanks, & Broadbent, 1998), helping enrich theory building (Perry, 1998). Within- and cross-case analysis identifies similarities and differences across the cases (Yin, 2018). To ensure internal validity, a constant comparative analysis approach is employed (Barnes, 1996), entailing the comparison of multiple respondents within the same cases, allowing the comparison of previous memos, resulting in the development of theoretical constructs (Yin, 2018) (Fig. 1). Finally, external validity is ensured using the cross-case comparison. The analysis of the interviews utilizes manual coding in NVivo allowing the data management to be easier and more transparent (Ryan, 2009). Once the coding process was finished and theoretical saturation achieved, the conceptual model was developed.

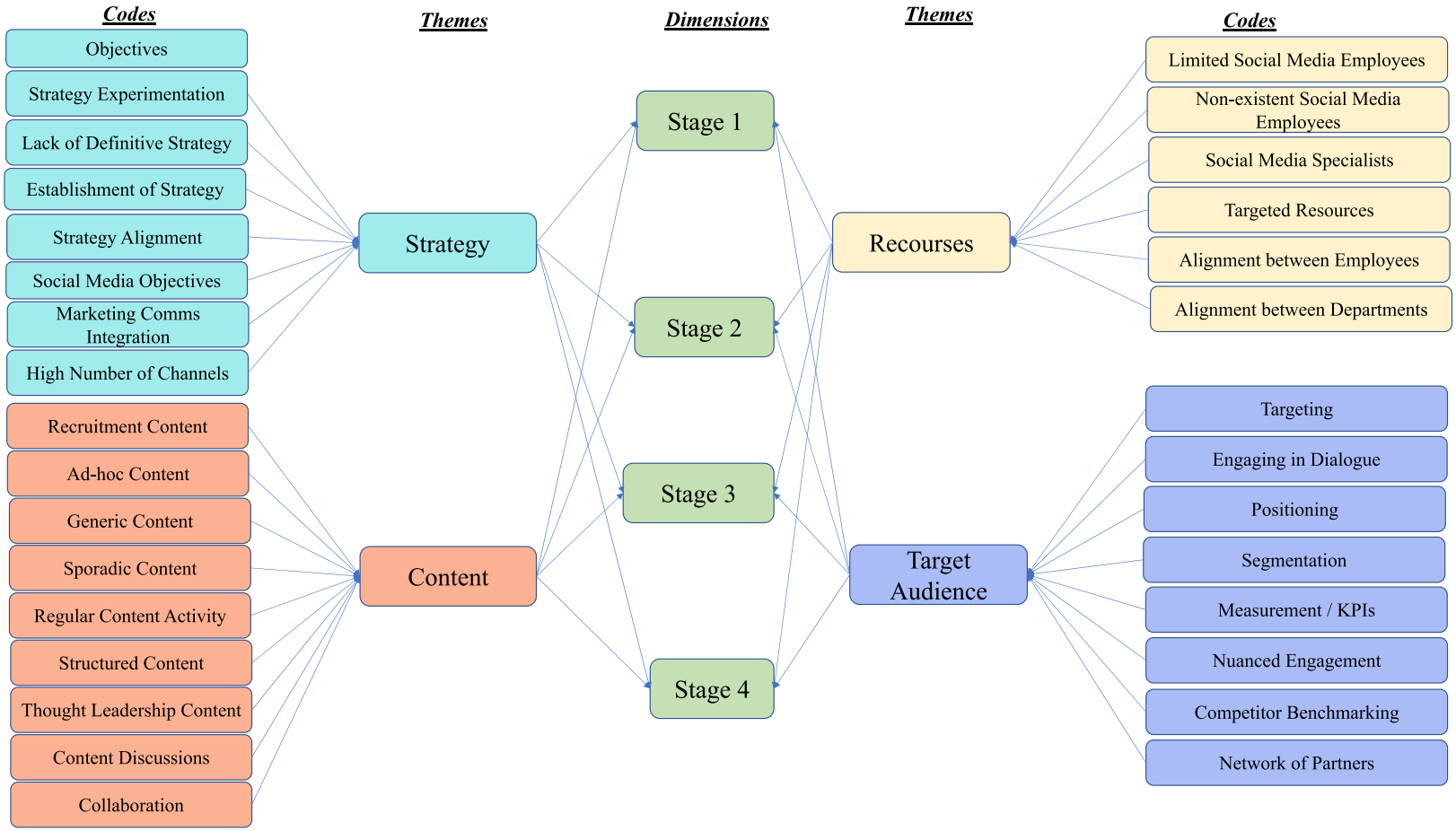

Fig. 1. Coding diagram.

4. Empirical analysis

The level of adoption of SM differs noticeably across organizations, although each refers to a journey metaphor in some form when exploring their adoption: "*It's a journey to take the business on and educate us internally*" (Org. 7, Interview 2). *"It was about our own kind of learning, all the time learning what we use SM for"* (Org. 5, Interview 1). From this, we identify four distinct stages organizations transition through in their adoption of SM for network development purposes (see boxes in Fig. 2). To progress to the next stage, organizations develop certain capabilities that enable them to enhance their SM network development (see arrows in Fig. 2). The next section considers the organizational context, resources employed, and activities undertaken at each stage and the capabilities they need to develop to move to the subsequent stages. The findings are structured to represent all four stages organizations go through in the process of developing an integrated SM strategy. Each stage is discussed in detail, providing integrated analysis of the four stages, their inter-relationships, and their relations with B2B objectives and theories.

4.1. Stage 1

Organizations at the beginning of their 'journey' had limited established procedures to apply to the SM context, which is in line with literature suggesting organizations do not have the required capabilities for strategic SM development (Chirumalla et al., 2018; Wang & Kim, 2017). Indeed, early in their journey, cases showed limited use of existing operational marketing capabilities (such as market research, planning, targeting, or positioning) in their approach to SM network development. We find organizations starting SM activities do so in a highly disorganized way, focusing on establishing a presence on an array of different SM channels, but without a clearly articulated and integrated SM strategy, or links to their overall relationship strategy. This inevitably resulted in (1) limited applications of resources to SM activities, (2) experimentation with an excessive number of different channels, (3) unfamiliarity with their target audiences' needs on those channels, and (4) too much irrelevant content posting.

4.1.1. Limited applications of resources to SM activities

Companies starting on SM typically don't allocate sufficient resources to make a meaningful impact. When first commencing SM activity, all 12 of our organizations started with little more than a strategy of 'we need a SM presence':

> *"Most brands realise that you need to have social media presence but there are too many brands doing it too reluctantly"* (Org. 2, Interview 6).

> *"It will take us ages to build a reasonable presence on social media"* (Org. 9, Interview 2),

> *"There is a PR agency that we have in the US that does social media monitoring for us, but we are not driving our social media presence."* (Org. 10, Interview 2).

Responsibility for this is usually subsumed into an existing marketing employees' role, who may not necessarily be savvy in commercial SM usage, although they may be active users of SM in their personal lives. Oversight of this activity was usually lacking, and core aspects of typical marketing or relationship strategies such as objectives, channel strategy, actions, metrics, and a business case were missing; thus, competencies to orchestrate activities across the network is inevitably non-existent (as per Muninger et al., 2019). To deal with this uncertainty, and lack of resources; the employee response is to open multiple corporate accounts across a variety of platforms to give 'presence', but with no targeted marketing or clear content strategy.

4.1.2. Experimentation with an excessive number of different channels

The employee response to uncertainty leads to a degree of experimentation with different SM channels, without a clear direction of which channels align best with their existing relationship strategy. Although previous research shows that organizations face certain barriers such as unfamiliarity with SM, uncertainty, and irrelevance (Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011), our data shows that one of the main challenges was a large number of channels available. *"If anyone within the business said what their number one challenge was, it's a communication problem, because there're so many different options and channels"* (Org. 1, Interview 1 reflecting on the start of their SM journey). The solution to this was frequently to expand over a greater variety of channels to expand reach, but many of these channels quickly fall dead. *"People have personal SM profiles, and they think, 'I'll set one up for our project group', running like for 2 weeks and they suddenly realise that they've set up a Facebook page that has*

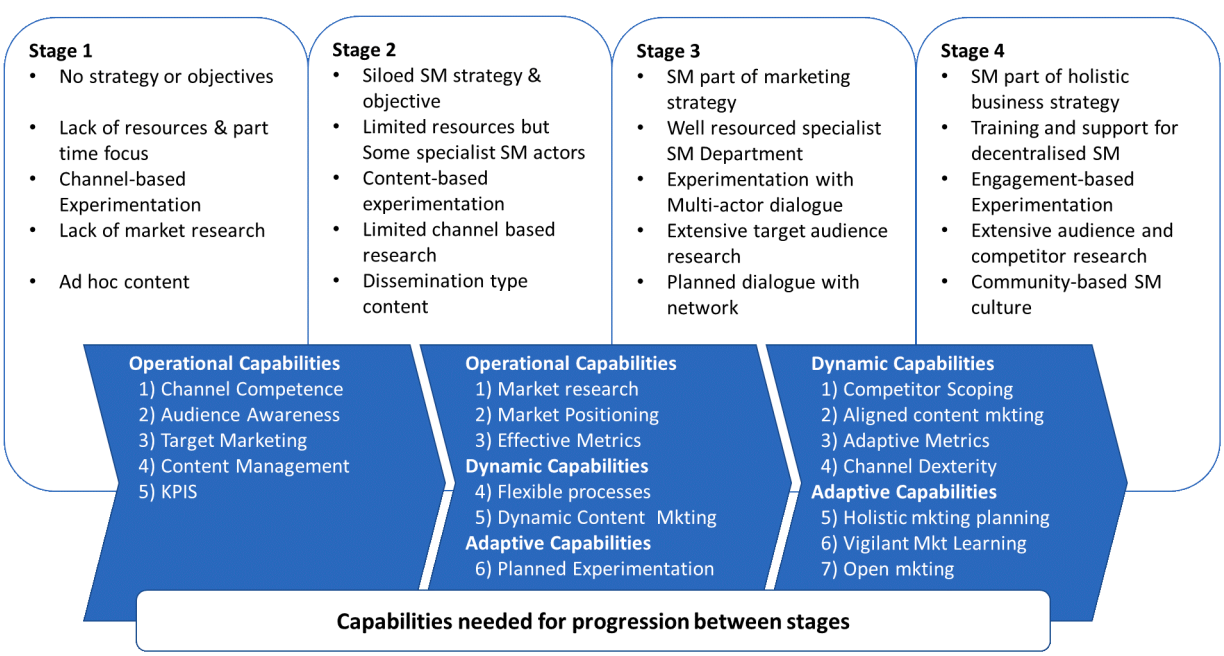

Fig. 2. Stages of Social Media Implementation and Requisite Social Networking Capabilities for Progression.

now gone dead and they don't really understand why" (Org. 2, Interview 6). The lack of strategic SM understanding (Pardo et al., 2022) results in no clear up-front strategy, with many organizations taking an ad hoc approach to SM engagement, creating too many outlets, none of which are properly serviced. *"The challenge is that there're many experts here and they've all an opinion on SM. To create one person that owns the strategy and to fully align, that's quite difficult"* (Org. 4, Interview 1). This does start to ease over time as organizations realise SM 'presence' does not mean on every channel *"I narrowed it down to Twitter and LinkedIn. That's all you need, really"* (Org. 6, Interview 1), although even in this example the decision for these two was based on a hunch rather than structured evidence. Therefore, research suggesting that LinkedIn and Twitter are the most used channels in B2B (Drummond, McGrath, & O'Toole, 2018; Lacoste, 2016) may not be based on a strategic decision.

4.1.3. Unfamiliarity with their target audiences

A lack of resources attributed to researching network partners' needs in SM interactions, or which channels were most appropriate for communicating with them is a major barrier to progression. None of our respondents still in the early stages of SM usage had done any market research around SM in their sector, which may explain the limited strategic SM understanding in current research (Pardo et al., 2022; Salo, 2017). As will be seen in the next stage the movement towards researching and learning from others on how to approach SM relationship building is a capability they must adopt if they are to progress with SM relational activities.

4.1.4. Irrelevant content posting

Organizations at this stage had limited strategic focus and engage in unplanned experimental activity. Content is often reposted from industry thought leaders, rather than creating original and stakeholder-relevant content. *"I tweet things, relevant news stories, copy and paste a headline, a link and send them out"* (Org. 7, Interview 1). Content posting is often sporadic, offering little in the way of structure, and with little thought given to the experience of the end-user. Digital personal communication (see Murphy & Sashi, 2018) is missing, and, therefore, networking capabilities around network development (Arasti et al., 2021) are non-existent. Content posts often entail a news story, a post about a job opening, a recent project, or a scheduled event, none of which are apt to prompt engagement and none of which are targeting a particular audience. *"I just do that (re-post content) whenever something interesting happens to show that we're alive"* (Org. 6, Interview 1). This common response suggests that respondents thought they were already adding value by being transparent and attuned to market change. However, ad-hoc posting of irrelevant information does not encompass value to network actors according to interviewees at a later stage of SM development: "*It's not about pumping content, it's about driving conversation and that takes time. Re-tweeting and reposting are not the way forward*" (Org. 2, Interview 6). Posting at regular intervals about relevant subjects has the advantage of providing coherency, which is often overlooked by companies at stage 1. This finding complements and supports previous research (Holliman & Rowley, 2014), showing that network partners (e.g., suppliers, distributors and intermediaries) need content that is useful, relevant, compelling and timely.

In summary, organizations at this stage lack capabilities to sense the right opportunities and provide valuable content for the development of inter-organizational relationships. There is a clear need among organizations in stage 1 to integrate existing operational marketing capabilities (see first arrow in Fig. 2) around audience awareness, segmentation, targeting, positioning, content management and the development of basic success metrics to help guide their transitions to greater levels of SM competence. They also need to incorporate strategic planning, to enable them to identify which SM channels present the most appropriate opportunities.

4.2. Stage 2

By stage 2 organizations begin to align their internal resources, starting to organize SM more formally through the specific allocation of people, departments, and resources to SM content development. Specifically, they stopped experimenting with different SM channels and started experimenting with different types of content. Some non-goal-aligned content remains in circulation, but these were now more relevant and had meaning, indicating organizations were learning how to develop their SM content. Reflecting on their experience of moving from stage 1 to stage 2 Org. 8, Interviewee 3 stated, "*(We used to) do SM for SM's sake… (now) we're using it more wisely*". However, rather than developing dynamic or adaptive capabilities, organizations are taking advantage of their existing operational marketing and relationship-building networking capabilities. The transition through stage 2, however, revolves around the formalization of SM marketing resources, experimentation regarding content development, but a continuation of a myopic perspective of creating value for network partners.

4.2.1. Resource allocations

In terms of resource allocation, companies entering stage 2 typically identify the necessity for more specialist SM marketers. Having a more specialist team means organizations feel more focused and confident when identifying which SM channels were effective for them, developing a SM presence, and trying out different types of content. For example, all organizations in this stage have a designated team looking after SM, attempting to generate engaging content. However, these groups tend to remain in a silo within the marketing function and attempt to retain overall control of all SM activity. "*I'm uncomfortable about other employees posting for the business. I'm discouraging it now… Unless they're putting it together with the right context, they could badly damage how information gets portrayed*" (Org. 8, Interview 1). What this betrays is a reluctance to use SM as a multi-actor dialogue forum, which is key for successful engagement between actors via SM channels (Haenlein & Libai, 2017). Organizations are typically using SM as an information dissemination tool, in much the same way that many traditional marketing channels (such as print advertising, websites and brochures) are used as a one-to-many dissemination tool. "*We're using social media, to share live info. live feed information… That information would be shared anyway but SM is sharing it quicker"* (Org. 3, Interview 1). This does mean some effort is extended on targeting and positioning, but the benefits of co-created dialogue, actor engagement and social capital generation are not explored, inevitably leading to limited understanding of the relational nature of SM (Magno & Cassia, 2020), and little development of networking capabilities related to managing network dynamics (Mu et al., 2017).

4.2.2. Content experimentation

Organizations in this stage have a more experimental mindset around content development and are willing to implement SM as a tool for gaining greater exposure: "*It started off with a lot of product-based stuff. I found out from the chefs that we work with that product-based stuff on SM comes across as if we are trying to sell the products and that it doesn't work. Now I get those emails through about trends and stuff like that and I try to incorporate this into a post*" (Org. 8, Interview 2). Organizations are learning and experimenting with what type of content is most desirable for network partners (e.g., customers, suppliers, distributors, and intermediaries). Some of this experimental content may gain traction, but this can give rise to overconfidence about content capability: "*We promoted the literature (catalogue) through Facebook, Twitter and all the SM channels first. Normally we wouldn't do it that way. We would go: Website, email broadcast, salesperson etc. and SM would be the last one. We did it the other way around, because of my need to get it out, but I was intrigued about the level of engagement and reaction. It's blown me away in terms of the reaction*" (Org. 8, Interview 1). Although an example of early success, this comment betrays experimental thinking rather than carefully

crafting and disseminating content. This experimental thinking is, therefore, lagging far behind Day's (2011) planned experimentation.

4.2.3. Target audience and content myopia

Interestingly, organizations that have progressed to later stages identify overconfidence in content generation as a significant barrier to social networking capability development. A reason for this barrier could be because of organizations inappropriately implement B2C business models into B2B contexts (Iankova et al., 2019). Organizations hold the belief that they understand how audiences use SM: *"A lot of it's about driving people to join the company. We feel that a lot of our audience is going to be people that are looking to come to the company"* (Org. 3, Interview 3), but may not be collecting data or setting KPIs to support their claim of competence. A newfound enthusiasm for new directions develops, which often results in a lack of definitive direction and structure, along with a tendency to change orientation frequently: *"[Early on] you can share and push content but taking it to the next level and getting any real value of it by generating content behind it all, like blogging the video, investing in images, all of that stuff that seems basic was quite often overlooked and not appreciated how much time it takes*" (Org. 5, Interview 2 reflecting on previous stages of development). However, organizations lack market insight (i.e., vigilant market learning), SM engagement with target audiences, a clear strategy, and the use of appropriate metrics. As such network development capabilities (Mitręga, Forkmann, Ramos, & Henneberg, 2012) and brand building plans remain poorly integrated with the overall marketing or communications strategy with SM content often being developed in a silo from other relationship development activities.

In summary, organizations in stage 2 are often attempting to seize opportunities, without yet investing sufficiently in market learning to sense the right opportunities for integrating SM within their overall marketing strategy. Without systematic research, organizations tend to hold a belief that they know why others are using SM, and insist they intuitively know what type of content is successful. The overconfidence and curiosity leads to expanding use of SM, with uncoordinated efforts to disseminate context across multiple channels. The innocence from stage 1 has receded, but there remains a lack of strategic direction limiting what SM can be used for, and limiting network partner engagement. Organizations in this stage acknowledge their need for a strategic approach, and through content experimentation within the SM environment, are learning what works in their industry. To move to the next stage, however, they require a different orientation to SM usage, built on capabilities around effective metrics, SM market research, clearer market positioning, linking SM strategy with the overall relational strategy and breaking up the siloed approach to content generation to allow content to be more dynamic, flexible, and engaging rather than focusing on information dissemination (see second arrow in Fig. 2).

4.3. Stage 3

As organizations mature in their SM usage, strategies and goals are becoming well established, and more time and effort are invested in developing engaging content. For organizations in stage 3, SM is becoming a vital part of the overall marketing strategy: *"[SM] is absolutely embedded within our core marketing strategy"* (Org. 11, Interview 3), rather than as its own siloed strategy and is supported by higher levels of investment. Organizations in this stage have learned from their earlier actions on SM, developing successful practices across the organization and increasing the variety of approaches used. New insights on how to understand the relational nature of SM are also being unveiled (addressing Magno & Cassia, 2020), and organizations understand that leveraging relationships is advantageous within their network (O'Toole & McGrath, 2018).

4.3.1. Resourcing SM: Specialist departments and market research

Organizations at stage 3 have learned the need for deeper channel knowledge and are recognizing the need for substantial investment to be successful in SM network development: "*Employing people who love social and live and breathe it has really helped. It changes your view on things. I'm not one of the millennial generations, but you start to understand it and see it from somebody else's eyes, that changes your opinion, and you grow, you develop. If you apply marketing principles to it, social works then*" (Org. 11, Interview 2). Organizations in this stage have often recruited specialist social media managers and content creators who liaise with other team members to create and disseminate content. Although there is a tendency for content creation to be driven by a central unit (usually the marketing department): "*[Marketing] create all content internally*" (Org. 11, Interview 1); "*We're generating our own content and show our voice*" (Org. 12, Interview 2), which can have implications for the dynamism of content creation due to its curated nature, and command and control structure.

The specialist teams however have driven investment in market learning with progressive market research, clear targeting, and the collection and sharing of engagement metrics. "*When we did our listening, we spent some time to understand what got high levels of engagement. We looked at what other people were doing, we looked at how our different audiences are responding*" (Org. 11, Interview 3). As such we begin to see the emergence of adaptive capabilities in vigorous market learning which relates closely to the networking capabilities of determining the size and boundaries of the network (Johnsen et al., 2000; Mu et al., 2017), engaging in information processing about network partners (Johnsen et al., 2000) and determining actors' roles and positions (Ritter, 1999).

4.3.2. Planned content development and multi-actor dialogue

Organizations in this stage sense opportunities within SM and respond by developing targeted content which results in positive outcomes (such as brand awareness and developing new actor bonds). Content is now aligned and focused, with a clear strategic direction, suggesting organizations are developing networking capabilities related to designing the relationships (Arasti et al., 2021) they want through SM. The "hard-sell" approach is replaced with more nuanced engagement in actor-to-actor conversations, which Swani, Brown, and Milne (2014) identify as vital for successful SM content dissemination. SM is viewed as a resource, enabling networks to be continuously created and developed (Ford, Gadde, Håkansson, & Snehota, 2007). One informant reflects on their journey to stage 3 and acknowledges: "*We traditionally haven't used SM other than in an opportunistic way. What we historically looked at is that when there was a reason to post something - then we posted it. That could be when we are at the tradeshow then we tried to notify people. We're currently transforming this*" (Org. 12, Interview 2). Organizations are spending more time developing their content, publishing longer, thought-provoking articles, specifically targeting their market, and showing a strong content marketing capability: "*We were [previously] in a reactive mode rather than proactive. As a result, we put together a strategy how to communicate with different customer types, through different types of content, and find our SM voice*" (Org. 11, Interview 3). Thus, organizations are cognizant of the positive outcomes of planning original content to a greater degree: *"For our company, we tend to plan ahead 6 to 8 weeks in advance"* (Org. 5, Interview 2). This allows the organizations to position themselves to engage in multi-actor dialogue resulting from external actor engagement with this content: "*The marketing department has a plan for the whole year. SM is combined with that. We manage relationships by being responsive and making sure we are there to answer questions quickly, trying to post content that we think they (network actors) will like*" (Org. 11, Interview 1). For example, rather than re-posting content as in earlier stages, organizations plan content in advance that focuses on market trends, news, new product developments etc. that are relevant to their industry. This content is then disseminated across the network with planned time for responding to network partner engagement, thus creating a networked multi-actor dialogue. This appears closely related to Nordin, Ravald, Möller, and Mohr's (2017) context

handling networking capability with data-led sensing of opportunities being strategically used to connect with existing and potential customers, thus expanding the organization's network and increasing awareness. Rather than being reactive as in previous stages, they are sensing and responding with their SM approach (Day, 2011).

4.3.3. Social networking capabilities needed to progress

The organizations still re-post some centralized content and look up to other thought leaders within the industry: *"A lot of it is sharing, keeping an eye on what other agencies are doing, making sure we are in the competitive environment, and we are sharing that information as well"* (Org. 5, Interview 1). They acknowledge that opportunities and potential can arise from being knowledgeable in their field, but still face obstacles in seizing them. For organizations to move to the next stage, they need to scope competitors' actions rather than simply follow what others do. This lack of focus does not position the company in a unique space as a thought leader but is more defensive in not falling behind its competitors: "*Our philosophy is driven by what can we produce (content) that still translates into meaning and drives awareness. Let's just make sure that we post something 3 times a week*" (Org. 12, Interview 2). Consequently, organizations in stage 3 are finding their voice and beginning to engage in some planned multi-actor dialogue, but the stronger focus on centrally derived content still limits taking full advantage of the opportunities for actor engagement. As suggested by a now stage 4 organization: *"SM was ticking along. It always got that part-time focus; it was never prioritized. I think quite a big part of that is because people don't understand its value"* (Org. 2, Interview 6). Even at this stage, the focus is on network development rather than network management capabilities, which only appear in our final stage.

4.4. Stage 4

Organizations in stage 4 are not only researching and targeting their content as in stage 3 but are also making the choice to strategically involve more actors in the SM strategy, thereby taking advantage of relational opportunities to create stronger actor bonds. Here, organizations are embedding SM activities whilst actively engaging actors and promoting a networked / community-based organizational culture (Labrecque et al., 2013).

4.4.1. Decentralizing SM engagement

By Stage 4, SM strategy is fully aligned with the business objectives: "*SM in the business is very much dependent on the business strategy and all departments work collaboratively to create content that focuses on thought leadership and presents the organization as digitally savvy*" (Org. 2, Interview 4). Part of this, however, is related to becoming more dynamic and flexible in their SM approach. Capabilities are under development or already implemented (see arrows in Fig. 2), to allow the organizations to respond quickly and engage in more dialogue than in previous stages. For example, content is generated through various actors rather than solely by the marketing department as is the case in earlier stages. This results in more committed and engaged actor relationships and employees are becoming "go-to-advisors" for their organizations (Kumar et al., 2020; Liu & Bakici, 2019), by creating thought leadership content that benefits their audiences. Thus, a broader base of employees is involved in multi-actor dialogue, and a more collaborative working capability is evolving as organizations look beyond the core SM marketing team to a broader spectrum of actors within and outside the organization. One of the organizations, for example, had developed closed forums with their audiences (i.e., networked community) where they collaborated on new product developments (i.e., co-creation), providing specific content that is beneficial for their customers. This, in turn, helps develop a corporate SM network of individuals who are actively involved in ongoing dialogue with network partners. As such we only see the emergence of network management capabilities of network governance and leadership (Arasti et al., 2021) and network coordination (Johnsen et al., 2000) in stage 4 organizations.

4.4.2. Engagement-based content

Individuals across the network are forming an open dialogue around SM communication: "*The real differentiating factor in what makes SM a successful platform is its network effect*" (Org. 1, Interview 2). For example, employees across the entire organization regularly gathered to discuss topics of interest for the employees' specific audiences and created that content in collaboration with the marketing department. This content was then adjusted and disseminated across different channels by different employees creating multi-party dialogue. By collaboratively creating thought leadership content and engaging in multi-party dialogue, the employees demonstrate their expertise in the industry and simultaneously cultivate their relationships whilst promoting the organization. Employees in operational or professional positions are now also communicating with other actors within the business network, as opposed to the previously centrally derived content of previous stages. Organizations are, therefore, trying to create mutually rewarding interfirm relationships between actors (Håkansson & Ford, 2002). This results in the organization identifying more relational opportunities, which enables them to leverage greater network influence. Organization 1 came to acknowledge that individual employees' SM is more powerful than corporate SM for sensing opportunities: "*It's more powerful when every individual of the business is sharing content because you connect with a far wider audience*" (Org. 1, Interview 1). SM is viewed as an opportunity to actively connect with a wider network, as a more open, networked organization (O'Toole & McGrath, 2018).

Our analysis shows that organizations in stage 4 do not view SM as an amplification tool, but rather a tool that supports the development of relationships within a wider audience, through thought leadership content and related dialogue: "*We're not a company that is going to dictate things, we're an open company so it's more that, what we're saying will show to others that we're thought leaders*" (Org. 1, Interview 4). For example, organizations regularly meet within departments as well as within the entire organization to discuss the next strategic steps towards social media marketing. One of the topics discussed via social media, online forums and podcasts were 'women in leadership' thus showcasing equality as organizational culture. At this stage, the organizations view themselves not only as thought leaders but as *"being the embodiment of the digital economy"* (Org. 2, Interview 6). They shape the opportunities that arise or reshape the industry narrative by investing appropriate time and resources into generating strategically aligned thought leadership content, which is disseminated in a guided manner through the trained, SM-savvy employees, rather than by the corporate account. The focus is now to create multi-actor dialogue as opposed to the one-directional information dissemination of previous stages and involves significant levels of coordination effort. Original content is strategically targeted*: "It's about making sure that every piece of content counts and that we have very targeted audience segments, that's really the key"* (Org. 2, Interview 6). Thus, the goal in targeting audiences is to build the company's reputation as a thought leader and develop new and stronger relationships: *"We give them something that is useful, some piece of content or knowledge that they need for their business"* (Org. 1, Interview 3). Organizations, therefore, demonstrate their excellence by developing SM content that aligns with the messages in their other communication channels but also provokes reciprocal information sharing and/or dialogue.

4.4.3. SM community-based culture

Only in stage 4 is content developed with specific goals, such as engaging existing partners or widening social networks, as part of the overall communications strategy. The open marketing approach, where employees share information online and reach previously inaccessible partners, shows that the business is active, engaged, and up to date with industry-specific topics. By regularly updating their SM channels, organizations are still experimenting and adapting to the market by

continuously learning what is and is not working and sharing this information across the organization. *"One of the ways that we're trying to do it across the whole network is we created a leadership group that is representing all the CEOs, MDs who sit within all the brands and once a quarter we bring them all together"* (Org. 2, Interview 4). This shared learning, but flexible approach forms a dynamic capability within organizations in this stage, which is hard to imitate by less open, and well-trained organizations. The content is developed at different levels of the organization, i.e., the senior, middle, and lower management, and by different departments depending on the target audience. This also highlights the importance of humanizing the organization through the participation and involvement of multiple actors in open marketing. "*That's putting a human face to our business and to get across our personality as a business and of our people*" (Org. 2, Interview 2). Humanizing content, generated across different functions is shaping a new adaptive capability within stage 4 complimenting previous research on the importance of humanizing SM content (Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap, & Singh, 2012). The incorporation of a wider array of actors within content development enables building and sustaining relationships and shows the culture of the organization with a personal, rather than a corporate, tone of voice. This raises the organization's profile and simultaneously creates trust and commitment from stakeholders who gain value from SM interactions. This complex array of social networking capabilities (see Fig. 2) allows the organization to purposefully locate targeted network partners, and then manage and leverage these network relationships for ongoing value creation.

5. Theoretical contributions

This study addresses the capabilities organizations are enabling or developing when implementing SM for network development and management purposes. The study identifies an integrated set of networking capabilities in our case organizations at different stages of SM implementation (Fig. 2). As such this study contributes to the understanding of how to implement SM (Cartwright, Davies, & Archer-Brown, 2021; Rooderkerk & Pauwels, 2016), and the mix of capabilities utilized to generate a perceived level of competence (Chirumalla et al., 2018; Wang & Kim, 2017). As such, we contribute to four literature fields: SM implementation, the IMP networking paradox of control, networking capabilities, and dynamic and adaptive capabilities.

Concerning the literature on SM implementation in B2B, few papers or case studies explore how SM is integrated with the marketing and relationship strategy, and we support the extant proposition that implementation is often a trial-and-error process (Cartwright, Davies, & Archer-Brown, 2021; Salo, 2017). However, our model suggests a more strategic approach to implementing SM for network development and management purposes is possible. In this paper, we identify an assemblage of capabilities that aid organizations in progressing their SM activity (Fig. 2). We agree with Wang and Kim (2017) and Herhausen et al. (2020) that early-stage implementation of SM often neglects to invest appropriately in capability development, but as suggested by Holliman and Rowley (2014) certain operational marketing capabilities like understanding the audience and communication skills, are often extant capabilities organizations can repurpose for SM engagement. We add to this list repurposing other operational competencies around planning, metrics, segmentation, targeting and positioning as a core suite of capabilities for more strategic implementation of SM. However, organizations perceived to be more successful in relationship building on SM extend beyond repurposing operational capabilities. These organizations develop both dynamic and adaptive networking capabilities. Dynamic capabilities to allow the repurposing of extant operational capabilities and redeployment of resources, and adaptive capabilities to develop market sensing, planned experimentation, organizational learning and a more open community-based engagement style which humanizes the organization with network partners. These higher-order capabilities are required to facilitate more open dialogue and engagement as opposed to information dissemination engendered by operational capabilities alone. Indeed, we propose organizations that work collaboratively in their network, and incorporate more actors in SM activities, can develop a better dialogue with network partners and ultimately gain a greater competitive positioning. Marketing relinquishing control over SM content generation and curation appears a key step in utilizing SM for network management purposes, and as such reflects Håkansson and Ford's (2002) IMP Groups' network approach paradox that trying to control a network diminishes the value-creating potential of that network. As such this paper contributes a more extensive and empirically supported theoretical framework for understanding the capabilities needed for the successful utilization of SM for network development and management purposes, which is currently lacking in the literature (Drummond et al., 2020; Herhausen et al., 2020).

Regarding our contribution to the IMP Group, our research addresses Ritter et al.'s (2004) assertion that the management of networks requires further investigation. Organizations attempt to control relationships internally (e.g., organizational hierarchy) and externally (e.g., customer engagement) to achieve their goals and objectives (Rajamma, Zolfagharian, & Pelton, 2011). However, organizational environments are continually evolving through technological advancements and innovations (e.g., AI, VR, cloud etc.), resulting in changing business networks and relationships. For example, power is shifting from organizations to customers (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush, 2016), and organizations increasingly struggle to control relationships, especially in a SM environment (Drummond et al., 2020). According to Håkansson and Ford (2002), p.137) "the paradox is that the more that a company achieves this ambition of control, the less effective and innovative will be the network". Our data affirms that controlling SM activities results in organizations not being able to move to higher and more successful stages of SM implementation. We suggest that the more control imposed within SM networks, the less effective these become. For instance, organizations in stage 4 have less centralized control over the multi-actor dialogue on SM but appear to be more effective in creating value within the network. Indeed, the organizations at stage 4 actively encourage free-flowing dialogue and engagement from their employees, which naturally involves much less centralized control of content. Rather than seeing networks as a structure of opportunities and constraints (Gadde, Huemer, & Håkansson, 2003), organizations that train rather than control their employees on SM activities, can develop more effective social networking capabilities. Similarly, the NetFrame developed by Möller and Halinen (2018) recognizes that actors and networks influence the development of potential new ecosystems and networks. Being able to develop and maintain successful relationships within a network is a "fundamental property of any living organism" (Ritter et al., 2004, p. 181), and our results show that trying to exert too much control over this SM ecosystem hinders its development and value creating potential.

Regarding networking capabilities, our study addresses Forkmann et al.'s (2018) assertion that limited networking capabilities research investigates the interplay between different networking capabilities and has not fully integrated the developments in dynamic capabilities from the strategic management literature. Our research suggests (and as we have presented it in Fig. 2) that networking capabilities are not standalone capabilities, but a complex inter-twining of operational, dynamic and adaptive capabilities, which need to be utilized/developed in combination to allow for greater networking competence. Although we explicitly investigate social networking capabilities, these are focused on the activities and routines for initiating and developing business relationships, and constitute a form of networking capability (as per Mitręga et al., 2012 and Mu et al., 2017), as such we extend the networking capability literature into the digital space. However, the main contribution is in identifying networking capabilities as an integrated cluster of other capabilities required to both develop and manage B2B SM networks rather than unique stand-alone capabilities. It is only in stage 3 we see the emergence of true networking capabilities (focused on network development), built on reconfiguring operational

capabilities utilizing dynamic and adaptive capabilities such as flexible processes, vigorous market learning and dynamic content development. These networking capabilities have required the development of Day's (2011) adaptive capabilities of vigorous marketing learning and adaptive market experimentation, to provide the knowledge base from which operational capabilities could be reconfigured into networking capabilities. What this demonstrates is the interplay between operational capabilities and dynamic and adaptive capabilities in delivering higher-order networking capability. Stage 4 demonstrates this further as we see the development of network management capabilities such as network leadership (Arasti et al., 2020) and network coordination (Johnsen et al., 2000). These are underpinned by the development of an open marketing orientation (Day, 2011) and an organizational learning and sharing environment (Schilke, 2014), allowing trained and knowledgeable actors from different departments and at different levels to share best practices and engage in a more extensive dialogue-based SM interaction. We identify that social networking capabilities encompass a broad range of different levels of capability from the operational, through the dynamic to the adaptive (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2017; Harreld, O'Reilly, & Tushman, 2007). It is likely, as Forkmann et al. (2018) suggest, that networking capabilities both on- and offline are likely to be higher-order capabilities which are a combination of operational, dynamic and adaptive capabilities configured in such a way as to allow the focal organization to build a knowledge-base about their network, integrate information from multiple different points to generate insight, planned experimentation with engagement styles, and organizational learning mechanisms which allow for knowledge dissemination in dynamic network environments. Knowledge dissemination appears particularly important; to share best practices and expand both the number of actors engaging in that network and enhancing the quality of engagement. We, therefore, propose that networking capabilities are not a separately defined field from operation, dynamic and adaptive capabilities, but an assemblage of these, orchestrated in such a way as to allow organizations the flexibility and dynamism needed to succeed in network environments.

Regarding dynamic and adaptive capabilities, we contribute to understanding their interaction, which has had limited empirical exploration (Kozlenkova et al., 2015). Dynamic capabilities have a long heritage, with extensive exploration in the field of strategy, but less so within the marketing domain (Matarazzo et al., 2021), and adaptive capabilities have received little empirical investigation despite their specific focus on marketing capabilities (Kozlenkova et al., 2015). Our study suggests that Day's (2011) adaptive capabilities share many commonalities with Schilke's (2014) second-order dynamic capabilities, in that they are a bundle of capabilities around observation, unlearning and learning. As such adaptive capabilities are a marketing-specific bundle of capabilities which allow organizations to better understand their environment, identify what resources and capabilities need to be reconfigured, and identify what new capabilities an organization needs to develop. Having adaptive capabilities allows organizations to better understand their environment and provides the collateral to redevelop dynamic capabilities or identify the need for new operational capabilities to suit a changing environment. However, adaptive capabilities cannot operate in isolation from dynamic capabilities, as it is the dynamic capabilities which allow for the redeployment of resources and reconfiguring of extant operational capabilities (Teece et al., 2016). What our research suggests is that Day's (2011) adaptive capabilities are potentially built through experimentation from traditional marketing operational capabilities. Fig. 3 shows the interplay between the level of capabilities; for instance, vigilant market learning builds on the reconfiguration of operational capabilities such as market research, planning, and segmentation capabilities already present in most marketing organizations, rather than the development of a whole new type of capability. The ability to reconfigure these capabilities to a new environment is itself a dynamic capability, but through reconfiguration, operational capabilities can rise to become adaptive capabilities, to help support the identification and development of future operational and dynamic capabilities.

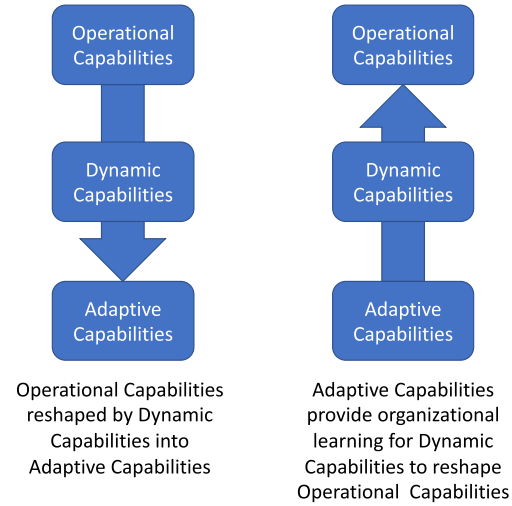

Fig. 3. Interplay between levels of capability.

5.1. Managerial implications

With the conceptualization of a four-stage model, this study guides marketers on what capabilities need to be developed and how they must be implemented to work effectively in the SM environment. Our model documents the learning journey organizations undergtake in the development of SM strategy. We highlight the process by which organizations can develop the necessary dynamic and adaptive capabilities to progress towards developing networking capabilities. This research offers important insights into how organizations can strategically plan, implement, and evaluate networking, dynamic and adaptive capabilities to target the right audiences, develop valuable content, and align strategic SM activities within the business. We suggest that managers need to carefully plan activities rather than approach SM in an ad-hoc manner. Moreover, managers should not see SM as a threat and accept trial and error, where improvement comes from learning from mistakes. With clear metrics and better strategic alignment, progressive organizations experiment with different forms of content and understand the optimal placement of the SM content in their communications process.

Managers also need to steer away from centralized content development, as it limits the reach and weakens the human voice projected by the organization. Greater strategic alignment, extensive planning, training, and organization-wide communication, allows for more profitable experimentation regarding sources and forms of content. The level of engagement in SM increases within organizations as they attain expertise, leading to a declining reliance on third-party content and an increasing focus on targeted, employee-generated content and multi-actor dialogue.

5.2. Limitations and future research directions

The study is limited by its methods and scope. First, we applied a qualitative methodology, limiting the number of identified stages and the generalizability of the findings. Extant research on how organizations implement SM strategy remains limited, and the extent to which our model is generalizable across industries and sectors is questionable. Future studies may, therefore, be advised to explore the generalizability of this model and the factors leading to alternative approaches to SM strategy development. Second, our research investigated SM rather than considering different approaches through different channels. The variety of available SM channels implies that certain channels may differ

concerning their strategic effect. Therefore, from a managerial perspective, there are a plethora of approaches in different media, and a lack of clear understanding of how best to select among them. Finally, our research focused on twelve case studies, but future investigations may wish to explore specific sectors. The increasing prevalence of SM usage calls for a concerted academic consideration of this neglected research topic.

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