MSI CALL FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS ON SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Submission Deadline: March 10, 2014

The Marketing Science Institute (MSI) is pleased to announce a research proposal competition to foster novel research on the broad topic of social interactions and social media marketing. We have allocated $150,000 to help fund 10-20 research grants. Competitive submissions should propose high quality research on critical questions in this area that are relevant to both academics and marketing practitioners. This is open to all research methodologies, and we especially encourage proposals for research that plans to use multiple methods (e.g., behavioral experiments combined with empirical modeling of actual consumer or market data) to advance knowledge in this area.

Proposals must be received by Monday, **March 10, 2014**. Funding decisions will be announced in June.

BACKGROUND

Social interactions take place between marketing actors all the time, and can take on many different forms. For example, consumers exchange information with each other regularly through word-of-mouth communication, online reviews and ratings, and social media posts (to name just a few). Social interactions between customers, clients, and partners also occur regularly in business-to-business settings. Although the topic of social interactions has been studied for decades in marketing, the ubiquity of social media and, critically, the widespread use of social media, present new opportunities (and challenges) for marketers. Thus, new research questions have arisen that warrant rigorous examination.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES AND SUGGESTED TOPICS

We encourage researchers to submit proposals related to one (or more) of the seven research priorities listed below. These priorities were developed by a committee of leading researchers (behavioral and quantitative) and representatives from some MSI member companies. Proposals must be relevant to the broad topic of social interactions and social media marketing, and demonstrate the potential to make a substantive and theoretical contribution to the field of marketing.

1. **The consumer journey in a social media world.** Traditional models of the consumer journey or decision processes (e.g., the “marketing funnel” or hierarchy of effects models) may not apply in a social media context. Research is needed to characterize the consumer journey when social interactions and social media engagement are potential sources of influence. How do consumers process, act on, and distribute brand/product information obtained through social channels at different points in their journey? Such work may provide valuable insights into the dynamic evolution of consumer social

learning and social attitude formation over time, and could help understand how consumers respond to multiple sources of influence (social and non-social) in a multi-channel environment. It could also involve an examination of social advertising (e.g., advertising on Facebook) and seeing how effective social advertising is in transitioning consumers between different states on their journey towards purchase.

2. **Social media engagement and return on engagement.** The term "engagement" has emerged as an important marketing objective and performance metric. What "engagement" is, however, is not always clear and is often poorly defined. A better understanding of engagement (and its different types in different social contexts) would be valuable so that managers know what is worth measuring and paying attention to. Research is needed to help establish what individual consumer or user engagement in social media is, what causes it, what it affects, and how it changes over time. Further, we encourage research that establishes methods for quantifying "return on engagement" in a social media context. For example, research comparing different types of engagement with respect to how they generate different returns (or kinds of marketing value) would be useful.

3. **Social media and customer relationship management (CRM).** This research priority seeks new research that helps establish the value of individual-level social media data for CRM, customer valuation, segmentation/targeting, and related marketing activities. Very little is understood about how consumers' behaviors in social media can be used for CRM. We encourage research linking individual-level social media data to CRM data. For example, how a customer interacts with other customers, with whom they interact, and how frequently they interact could provide valuable insights into their value as customers. Individual social network position may also be relevant, since prior research has looked at connectivity (number of friends) but other network-related measures may be informative. Further, research that identifies individual differences that help discriminate between consumers and help managers more appropriately customize and/or target offerings based on social media data could be useful.

4. **Mechanisms for incentivizing and encouraging social interactions.** Much of marketing is about finding effective approaches for encouraging consumers to behave how companies want them to. Often this involves various kinds of incentives designed to make consumers more likely to purchase products. In the context of social interactions and social media, companies want customers to share information about products with their friends either via face-to-face communications or through social media. How can marketers make these social interactions more likely to happen? More importantly, how can marketers make certain types of social interactions—such as those that are more impactful on consumers' attitudes and behaviors—more likely to happen? We encourage research that develops and empirically tests mechanisms for incentivizing or encouraging specific types of marketer-desired social interactions. This could involve completely new approaches, or consider how existing marketing tactics such as promotional offers and discounts could be used to trigger social interactions.

5. **New approaches to social media monitoring.** Companies are increasingly using social media monitoring services to track mentions of products and brands over time, measure sentiment, identify "influential" consumers, and conduct competitive intelligence. Although this is potentially valuable, there is likely more value to be extracted from social media monitoring data. Research in this area could try to identify new uses for social media monitoring data and attempt to understand how a company

should optimally monitor and, importantly, react to what they see in social media. This could include building better statistical models for forecasting brand metrics using social media monitoring data, linking social media monitoring metrics to more general brand health metrics to see whether social media data can be used to reliably measure brand health, and using social media monitoring data to develop new metrics other than "volume" (number of mentions) and "valence" (sentiment) that are both meaningful and linked to marketing outcomes of interest.

6. **Consumption of social media platforms and services.** Although marketers typically think about social media platforms as channels for promoting or advertising their products/services/brands, or for interacting with customers, the platforms themselves are services. Popular platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have vast numbers of users, and new platforms emerge on a regular basis. Research is needed to better understand how social media platforms as consumed/used. This research could consider issues such as consumers' decisions to adopt and dis-adopt social media platforms, modeling usage over time, quantifying network effects and externalities, understanding how different platforms are used in different ways, and how consumers allocate time and attention across multiple platforms.

7. **Typology of social media interactions in marketing settings.** Currently we use an over-simplified and homogeneous characterization of the social information transmission process (often simply referred to as word-of-mouth). There are, however, many types of consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-business social interactions that take place in various offline and online settings. Not all interactions are the same, and a typology of interactions that accounts for type of social interaction, context/setting, and key differences would be valuable to the field, particularly if it is empirically grounded.

SUBMISSIONS

All proposals should include the following sections:

- One-page summary/abstract.
- Clear statement of the intended contribution(s), both theoretical and substantive.
- Background, including a brief review of relevant literature and how the proposed research will provide a novel and interesting contribution.
- Motivation and research questions, including a statement of the specific research question(s) that will be addressed, why they are important and interesting, and what the researchers expect to learn from answering these questions.
- Research design and methodology, including a detailed description of study design, data sources/collection procedures, experiments to be run (if applicable), modeling techniques to be used (if applicable), and any other relevant details. Methodological details will play a crucial role in the evaluation process, and the proposed research should be feasible.
- Project timeline, including approximate dates for key milestones, deliverables, and an expected completion date.
- Budget, including specific funding and support needs (itemized, ideally).
- Vita(e) of the researchers and contact information.

Proposals should not exceed 10 double-spaced pages (excluding summary/abstract, vita(e), and any appendices or exhibits). **Submit to Ross Rizley (ross@msi.org) by March 10, 2014.**

EVALUATION COMMITTEE

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