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Systematic Analysis of the Current Academic Research on Social Media Marketing

Martin Klepek*

Abstract

With the advent of social media where customers have the technical ability to upload own content the change occurred in some of the communication habits online. This world of constant communication is a challenge for businesses as well researchers. Academic research in this area is bringing valuable insights into people attitudes and behaviour on the social media. What is the current situation and where the research field is heading is a question of high importance. This study uses the systematic approach to reviewing the literature and to show the development of publications produced at Czech universities. Although the results show an increasing number of studies, Czech research is lagging behind other similar countries. Compared with the best countries, it is lagging behind in the number of quotations per article. On the basis of these analyses, suggestions for future research that can help to promote future theory development are proposed.

Keywords: communication; marketing; research gap; social media; social networks.

JEL classification: M30; M31.

1. INTRODUCTION

Given the growing adoption rates of social media and more specifically of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram across the globe, practitioners and academics need to understand the role of social media in the marketing of all sizes and types of businesses. The idea of creating customer relationships that are based on quality, dialogue, learning and innovation has proven to be a more sustainable strategy since it is much more difficult to imitate these aspects and to mimic the relationships (Nguyen and Mutum, 2012). In this concept, marketing is used to build brand-customer relationships that generate sales and profits (Moriarty *et al.*, 2011). For the marketers, the art of listening becomes a key feature, and those who want to focus more on the customer and build relationships need to focus intensely on communication rather than on persuasion. Duncan and Moriarty (1998) mention that communication is the platform on which relationships are

* Department of Business Economics and Management, School of Business Administration in Karviná, Silesian University in Opava, Czech Republic; e-mail: *klepek@opf.slu.cz*.

being built. Understanding the consumer-brand relationship building process and the differences in comparison with traditional communication schemes where the brand is a sender and the consumer is a passive receiver of the message is of utmost importance.

One of the most important goals of research in the area of business management is to develop a knowledge that can be converted into skills that advance the practice (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998). Unfortunately, there are some serious concerns regarding the usability of outputs in the business world Anderson *et al.*, 2001; Rynes *et al.* (2001) ; Chen *et al.* (2013) ; MacIntosh *et al.* (2017) . Van De Ven and Johnson (2006) divided knowledge applicability problems into two main categories. First, there is knowledge transfer problem, when the smooth flow of results is not secured from theory to practice. Second, is the view that theory and practice are distinct kinds. McKelvey (2006) explains this situation further as that the academics and practitioners live in two different knowledge worlds. Expecting knowledge to flow between them is like expecting round pegs to fit square holes. Based on these assumptions, social media marketing research could be divided on knowledge generated for academic purposes and knowledge for the practical world.

This paper is approaching the problem from latter perspective. Thus, the idea of research in social media marketing is in minimising the risks connected with social media adoption in enterprises across the industries. Providing practitioners with valuable research outputs should generate better-informed decision making. The question here is obvious: ***Influenced by significant changes in technology, are the academicians following pace with which the area of marketing is changing?***

2. SOCIAL MEDIA

Defined by Moriarty *et al.* (2011, p. 405) "*social media sites open up a new environment of conversation-based marketing communication, creating opportunities for entirely different forms of nearly instantaneous customer connections".* The term social media marketing is commonly used in business practice. Within its range, we can include blogs, social networks and online communities as the tools to be utilized to build relationships with customers. This leads to demand for a new job position in marketing departments and completely new set of skills required from an employee or entrepreneur. Therefore, the academia should provide a set of skills and knowledge to students so they can succeed in today's dynamic business world.

The companies must know clearly the consumer's attitudes and expectations towards this form of communication in order to communicate with them via social media effectively. Firstly, the permission marketing approach has to be utilized since the consumers choose what they want to see, share, comment and like. Secondly, the social media platforms itself has established rules of communication to provide the best experience for its users. In this new environment companies, at least partially, lost control of marketing activities (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, the power shifted from a company to the consumers. In the context of technological development, the consumers also expect changes in the communication of brands (Killian and McManus, 2015). Above the external communication with customers, social network platforms could be utilized for internal communication of the employees. As previous research showed, the penetration of social network in the group of generation Y in the Czech Republic is nearly 100% (Becan and Smutny, 2016). This finding shows how social media adaptation into business practice is important.

3. RESEARCH WITHIN SOCIAL MEDIA

The pace of research lags far behind the rapid pace of development of new technologies and not only development but the social media adoption in general population. On the business side, however, many new possible ways of interaction with customers complicate the adaptation of social media and social networks into day-to-day businesses practice (Yadav and Pavlou, 2014).

Pierce and Garven (1995) provided an explanation for pressure to publish research findings in scholarly journals. Major sources are tenure and promotion process, which offers job security and enhance professional status. Furthermore, university collective publication record is an important element of obtaining or retaining accreditation (Hult *et al.*, 1997).

Specifically, in the new research area of social media where by default the academicians are all newcomers, it is important to act fast and develop outputs which enable academicians to establish new subjects or study programs devoted to these areas of interests. Guarantor's relevant publications in the field are essential for the development of current curriculum for future marketers and other business administration graduates. To keep in touch with the marketplace, scholars in every area of the marketing discipline need to understand the implications and consequences of the new social media paradigm (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2013).

Therefore, this paper aims to highlight important articles in a body of academic literature affiliated to Czech universities on the topic of social media. For academicians in the business and management field is vital to stay up to date with technology development and provide quality research for managers and entrepreneurs. Thus, the research question is: ***How efficiently are Czech marketing academicians following the shift in social media landscape?***

4. METHODS

To answer the research question, the systematic approach to reviewing the body of literature was chosen following Denyer and Tranfield (2009) five-step process. This search strategy is described in the following text in greater detail. Systematic reviews, originating from medical sciences, differ from traditional narrative reviews by adopting a replicable, scientific and transparent process, in other words a detailed technology, that aims to minimize bias through exhaustive literature searches of published and unpublished studies and by providing an audit trail of the reviewer decisions, procedures and conclusions (Cook *et al.*, 1997). For example, in the systematic review, the researcher is required to set specific relevance and quality criteria for the selection of studies and to make such criteria transparent to readers (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). This paper is consistent with the recommendations for strengthening rigor of reviews in economic field by Tranfield *et al.* (2003) by using a quantitative approach to analyze a body of knowledge generated by authors affiliated to Czech universities and research institutions. Secondary quantitative data from databases were used to map the social media marketing landscape with emphasis on descriptive techniques and data interpretation.

4.1 Step 1: Review question formulation

The question guides the review by defining which studies will be included, what the search strategy to identify the relevant primary studies should be, and which data need to be

extracted from each study (Counsell, 1997). Since this review is serving the very narrow purpose the review question was formed by the author alone and not the group of stakeholders as Petticrew (2001) advised. Review questions are connected to the research question: How efficiently are Czech marketing academicians following the shift in social media landscape? By decomposition of the word "efficiently", the four main areas are proposed to build the needed answer. If a journal publishes an article that is cited by articles in other journals, it contributes to the exchange of ideas in a field of inquiry and is thus considered influential (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003). Therefore, efficiency will be measured by following indicators typical for determining research quality. First is a *number of publications* and its trend, second is a *number of citations*, third is the *average number of citations per paper* and last but not least the *structure of research design used* in papers. Measures will be compared to other countries and interpreted in broader context.

- Review question no. 1: Is there a growing number (positive trend) of publications from authors from Czech universities within the social media marketing area?
- Review question no. 2: Is there a reasonable amount of citations of these papers?
- Review question no. 3: Do we have a reasonable amount of average citations per paper?
- Review question no. 4: What is typical research design in studies conducted within the social media marketing area.

These review questions provide a solid grounding for answering the main research question by a description of current nature of the body of literature researched.

4.2 Step 2: Locating studies

In conducting stage, research focused on the secondary data collection. For the collection, today's two most prestigious databases were used. First one is the Web of Science and the second is Scopus. These databases are fundamental in the process of research quality evaluation at Czech universities hence we can conclude that every marketing academician should produce research which will be indexed within journals or conferences in these particular databases. Since the paper aims to assess the meaningful impact of Czech academicians within the theme of social media marketing, only these two databases were taken into account.

The keyword *social media* was searched first without any limitations in Web of Science to ensure Tranfield *et al.* (2003) recommendation for cross-disciplinary perspectives and alternative ways in which a research topic has previously been tackled. Simple operator "_" was used between *social* and *media* to filter only relevant sources. Search was performed for "topic" which includes title, keywords and abstract within one search. The results were limited by the timespan from 2006 to 2016. With the first search 18,278 articles, conference proceedings, books, reviews, editorial material etc. in the whole database were found from various research areas. The most represented were Computer science (5,584), Engineering (2,158), Business Economics (2,001), Communication (1,723) and Educational research (1,260).

4.3 Step 3: Study selection and evaluation

Following the requirement for transparency of process, systematic reviews use a set of explicit selection criteria to assess the relevance of each study found to see if it actually does

address the review question (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). The author chooses to limit the review to the reviewed journal articles and conference papers only since these can be considered validated knowledge and are likely to have the highest impact in the field. Then the second criterium was to refine the results by research area. Business economics was chosen and 2,001 entries were found. It is 10.95% of all records with social media topic on Web of Science. Last filtering step was to pick only records affiliated to Czech universities. This procedure led to the identification of 38 papers which is 0.21% of all records.

Selected studies were then amended with Scopus indexed papers and proceedings. The same procedure described was applied in the second databases. Since some of the papers were indexed in both databases, only 4 papers were added to the final sample. Finally, 42 abstracts of research articles and proceeding papers were manually reviewed and the connection to marketing topic of interest was assessed. The rule was to have at least two of following words present in the abstract, title or keyword: marketing, brand, image, communication, social network, Facebook, engagement. Surprisingly all of the reviewed papers had at least small connection to marketing topic and therefore were kept in the final sample.

4.4 Step 4: Analysis and synthesis

In this stage of the review process, the collected data has to be analysed by breaking down individual studies into constituent parts and describe how each relates to the other. The resulting body of evidence is explored, cross-tabulated and analysed and in quantitative synthesis, the reviewer might highlight both the regularities and discrepancies in the data (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009).

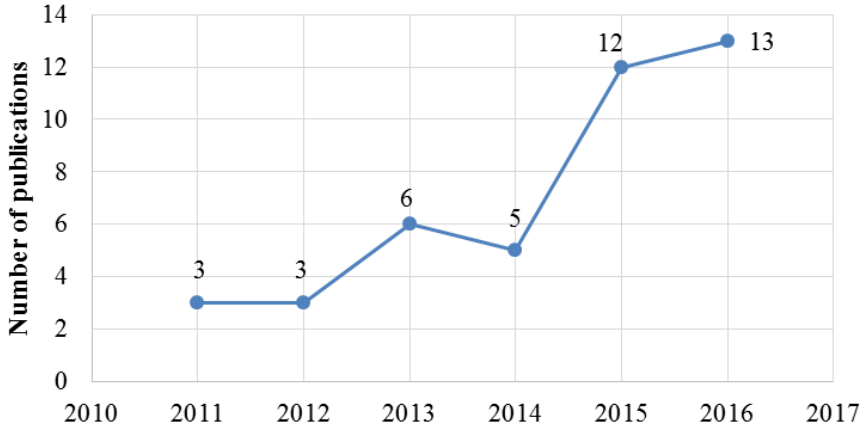
Data from 42 papers were extracted from databases to MS Excel. Variables included in data analysis were: database (WoS/Scopus), author(s), title, keywords, abstract, year of publication, type (proceedings/journal), source title, total citations, average citations per year, DOI/ISSN. To answer the last review question, author manually extended the dataset by reading abstracts and reviewed: type of study (questionnaire, experiment, focus group, case study, literature review, etc.), data sources (primary/secondary) and data form (Quantitative/Qualitative/Qualitative + Quantitative).

4.5 Step 5: Reporting and using the results

Subsequently, a systematic review is structured in a similar manner to a report of empirical research. The introduction section provides a statement of the problem and the review questions. The methodology section provides precise details of how the review was conducted – the search strategy, the selection criteria, and the analysis and synthesis criteria. The findings and discussion section contain a summary of all the studies in terms of the data extracted from the studies such as the percentage of studies in the field that are philosophical/discursive/conceptual, literature reviews, surveys, case studies, evaluations, or experiments/quasi-experiments. The findings and discussion section also specify precisely what is known and unknown about the questions addressed in the review. The conclusion section provides a summary of the review, the limitations of the study, recommendations for policy and practice, and future research needs (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009).

5. RESULTS

The results from the secondary data analysis are described in this section. Figure no. 1 presents the overview of publications observed in the analysis by year. The topic of social media is clearly getting the increasing attention of academia. The number rocketed from three papers a year in 2011 and 2012 to thirteen papers in 2016. However, the total amount of top research papers indexed in two main databases is very small. Leaders in the field started to publish papers on social media earlier around 2008. Unfortunately, these were mainly outside the indexed journals and conferences. Publishing outside the databases has negative effects on traceability and citability of the work. Consequently, in Web of Science the average citation per item is 0.71 and in Scopus, there is no paper with a citation at all.

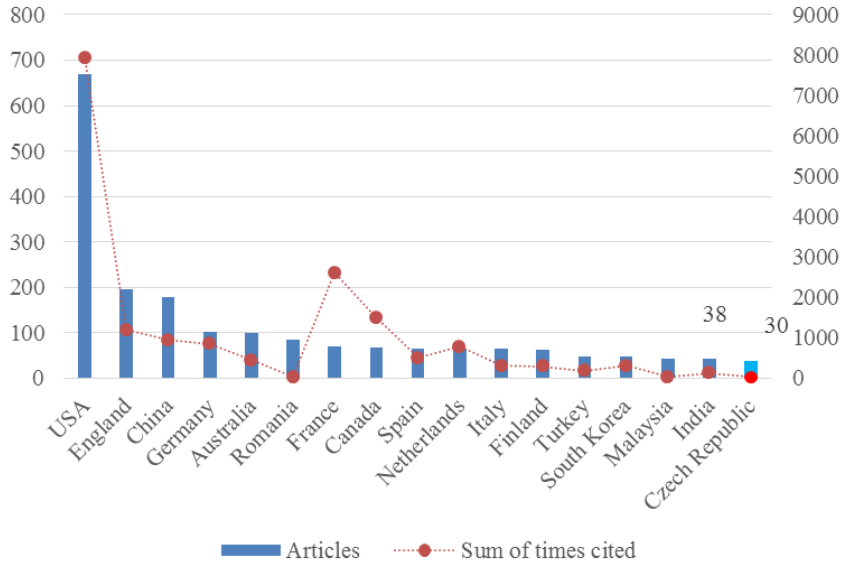


Source: Own processing based on data from Web of Science and Scopus

Figure no. 1 – Papers in Web of Science and Scopus databases from 2006 to 2016 with affiliation to Czech universities

Even in respected databases, the number of papers is only usable to assess the trend but it says very little about the overall quality. Baumgartner and Pieters (2003) pointed out that scholarly journal is influential to the extent that it publishes articles that contribute significantly to the exchange of ideas in some field of inquiry. This is variously referred to as influence, importance, impact, or quality. Therefore, even though the trend is positive we have to look deeper in the data. One of a good measure of the quality is a number of citations which is 30 for 38 papers. If we look at Figure no. 2, the most citations have authors with affiliation to US universities followed by England and Chinese scholars. Interestingly, France has higher paper/citation ration than other countries and the same applies to Canada. Again, looking deeper in the databases, the reason is apparent. Several highly-cited papers such as Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) or Kozinets *et al.* (2010) are the main cause. To be precise not only these two papers but numerous others with abnormal citation count are behind this condition. The paper in Business Horizons journal by Kaplan and Haenlein presenting a sophisticated classification of Social media generated more than two thousand citations in Web of Science. In Canada, the major contribution can be conceded to Robert Kozinets and his work on Netnography. The research method combining ethnography and the internet usable for research in communities on social media.

Authors from Czech universities produced enough articles to secure 17th position in the world. On the other hand, in the case of citations, they drop down to 30th place. This shows that quantity slightly supplants quality. Interestingly, Romanian academicians produced a high number of papers which resulted in 6th position but thanks to a very low number of the citation the overall average citation per article is the lowest of all 35 analysed countries (0.34). Hence, it takes three papers to produce one citation within the database. Detailed list of countries with all considered statistics is available in Annex 1.

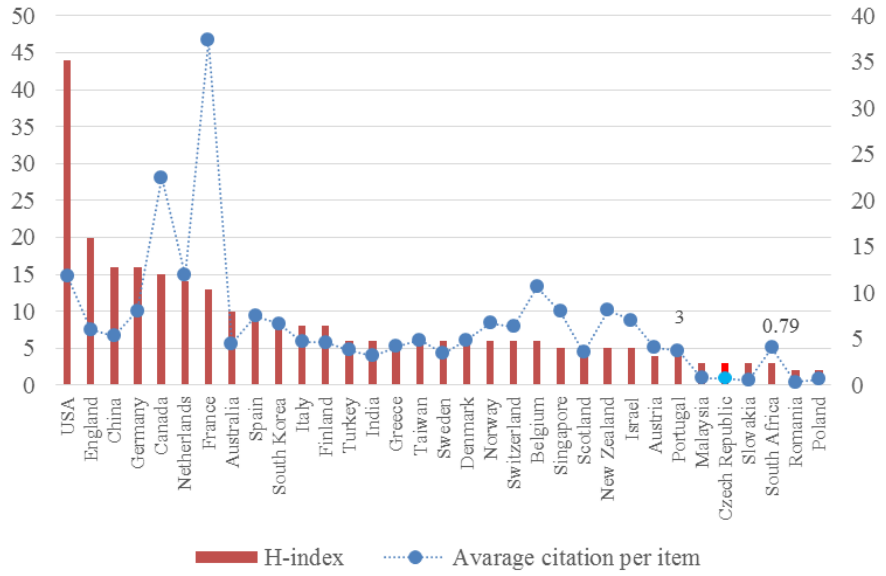


Source: Own processing based on data from Web of Science

Figure no. 2 – Frequency of papers and sum of times cited in Web of Science database from 2006 to 2016 by country of affiliation

To get the even more accurate look, Figure no. 3 shows H-index and average citation per item. H-index is metrics used to assess the quality of research. For the purpose of this study, the index was counted for the selected timespan. Czech research occupies the 31st position in average citation and 29th in H-Index. It is again interesting to see, that Romania which is 6th in the world in a number of papers published on social media within business and economics area is 32nd in H-index.

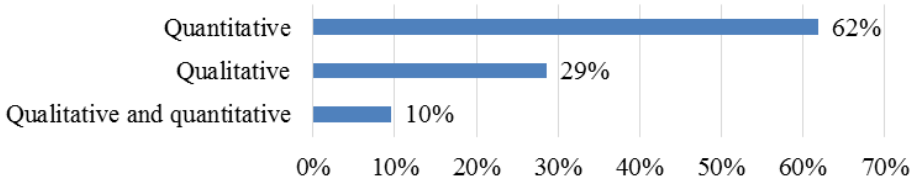
H-Index correlates significantly with the sum of times cited (0.922 significant at the 0.01 level) and average citation per item (0.423 significant at the 0.05 level). Thus, it is dependent not only on quantity but also on quality. Except for the rare situation as the Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) paper with more than 2,000 citations, the usual way to improve is through constant superior citable studies. This general view of countries, authors and universities are important in searching for international partners for collaborative research in the area of social media marketing. From closer inspection of the data, Czech authors cooperated mostly with Spain, Slovak, Netherlands and Italian colleagues (2 co-authorships) and also with Romanian, Macedonian, German, France, England, Belgium, USA and Australian partners (1 co-authorship).



Source: Own processing based on data from Web of Science

Figure no. 3 – H-index and average citation per item in Web of Science database from 2006 to 2016 by country

In the next section, the thorough view on research methods and designs is provided. Figure no. 4 describes the proportion of quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative research was used heavily by Czech academicians in 62% of cases which is slightly surprising given the social media are new topics within academic research. Clearly, the space for qualitative research on new unexplored phenomena still holds certain potential. To start uncovering the unknown concepts and behaviour, the *why* question, central to qualitative studies, is of high importance. Few studies were based on sentiment analysis of qualitative data on social media which indicates that some of the researchers are already using the full potential of unstructured big data on social networks and discussion forums. Some authors combined quantitative and qualitative research to use a mixed-method approach which is not only allowed but also recommended by many methodological texts (Saunders *et al.*, 2009; Bryman and Bell, 2007).

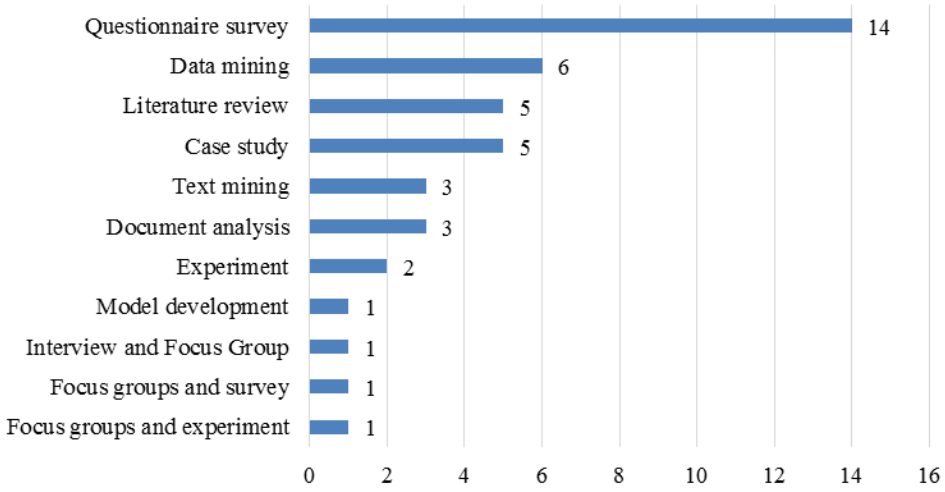


Source: Own processing based on data from Web of Science and Scopus

Figure no. 4 – Type of research conducted in selected papers

Alternatively, Figure no. 5 presents frequencies of research strategies employed by authors of selected studies. It is obvious, that traditional questionnaire survey is most

popular but methods which were enhanced with the software and technology were used extensively as well. To be specific, data mining techniques and text mining were used in 9 papers analysed. Overall 45% of studies used primary data which are collected and created throughout the research process. In today's world where consumers generate enormous volumes of data the potential to use secondary data raises. These data on social media are accessible and software or even cloud solutions enable researchers to dive in and provide a real-time picture of reality under the observation.



Source: Own processing based on data from Web of Science and Scopus

Figure no. 5 – Research strategies

Most of the questionnaire survey had descriptive nature, providing a basic representation of current reality. The answer to "what is going on" is clearly favourite within authors. In future research, there is a possible extension to explanatory research problems and research questions and answer. Saunders *et al.* (2009) encourage this procedure to ensure the development of understanding by uncovering the causal relationship between variables.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Before the final evaluation, the short discussion is desirable. Some interesting information was discovered during the analysis. Seven analysed papers were co-authored with foreign universities but four of them gained zero citations. There is a considerable space for improvement by the more intense internationalisation of the research projects. However, not only connectivity with foreign partners seems to guarantee quality research. Thus, joining excellent research teams and project is a way to go.

Main topics of most papers were marketing communication, social networks, Facebook usage, online (digital, internet) marketing or corporate communication. Only a few papers focused on differences in generations with topics such digital natives or generation Y. Furthermore, only one paper was dealing with engagement and its implications for marketing on social media. This key concept of new communication paradigm, where customers are active communicators and not passive recipients is of utmost importance. A

couple of papers were considering social media as a source for Customer Relationship Management building on the theory of Social CRM. There was only one paper on B2B marketing and limited usage of highly influential papers. Fundamental and maybe now even classic texts by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), Mangold and Faulds (2009) or de Vries *et al.* (2012) were almost neglected from literature reviews. Despite the undisputable advantage of social media (low-cost communication with large audiences), only two papers were considering the application of social media for small and medium companies.

Form the methodological perspectives, there is the untapped potential of secondary data since the most of the research used questionnaires. There is a huge amount of data produced every day on social media portraying behaviour and attitudes of customers. The cooperation with data mining experts is one of the areas which has to be addressed by the future collaborative projects. It is evident from foreign research, that data mining from social media is fairly popular research technique. In all analysed research articles, the Netnography as a relatively new method was completely neglected. Moreover, all qualitative techniques were used significantly less than quantitative ones.

To answer the research question, the review questions will be answered first. Data shows there is a growing number of publications from authors from Czech universities within the social media field. Yet the number is relatively small compared to other similar countries. A number of citations are even worse and only 30 citations are recorded in Web of Science database. On the top of that, there are only 6 journal articles (only 3 of them in foreign journals) and the rest 36 are papers in proceedings of various conferences. Consequently, the number of average citation per paper is relatively low with only 0.79 citation per paper indicating a tendency to produce average papers out of top quality journals. The typical research design is quantitative with questionnaire technique but some authors used mixed methods and even combined more research techniques such as focus groups and survey. To conclude, the diversity in research methods and research designs is sensible.

Recommendations for future research are summarised in following sentences. There is still untapped potential of qualitative methods such Netnography or sentiment analysis. Increased number of articles in journals indexed in both Web of Science and Scopus is highly desirable. However, there is no easy way to improve, the only continuous pursuit for well thought and funded research. The internationalisation of the research projects and support for cooperation with leaders in the social media marketing area could be recommended. Unfortunately, science and research authorities are now lowering the value of conferences in academic performance evaluation. Consequently, the platform to contact with leaders in the field is in danger. Reflection of highly cited and influential papers within the literature reviews of future papers is another important element on the way to significant improvements.

To conclude, quality research should provide practitioners with important knowledge to manage various marketing activities on social media such as research, marketing communication, customer relationship management, or product development. On the other hand, it is also the basis for the materials to be assessed for newly accredited subjects and programs. Consequently, any further lagging behind technological development could have seriously jeopardized the relevance of the business schools for practitioners.

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Copyright

ANNEX 1

Case summaries

	Country of affiliation	Number of articles	Sum of times cited	Average citation per article	H-index
1	USA	669	7,931	11.86	44
2	England	197	1,197	6.05	20
3	China	178	952	5.32	16
4	Germany	103	855	8.07	16
5	Australia	101	455	4.50	10
6	Romania	84	29	0.34	2
7	France	70	2 614	37.34	13
8	Canada	67	1 507	22.49	15
9	Spain	66	503	7.51	10
10	Netherlands	66	787	11.92	14
11	Italy	66	310	4.70	8
12	Finland	62	291	4.62	8
13	Turkey	48	184	3.83	6
14	South Korea	47	313	6.66	9
15	Malaysia	42	32	0.76	3
16	India	42	135	3.21	6
17	Czech Republic	38	30	0.79	3
18	Greece	35	147	4.20	6
19	Slovakia	33	18	0.55	3
20	Taiwan	32	157	4.91	6
21	Sweden	32	111	3.47	6
22	Denmark	28	137	4.89	6
23	Norway	24	162	6.75	6
24	Switzerland	23	146	6.35	6
25	Poland	22	14	0.64	2
26	Singapore	21	168	8.00	5
27	Scotland	21	75	3.57	5
28	Austria	21	85	4.05	4
29	Portugal	20	75	3.75	4
30	New Zealand	18	146	8.11	5
31	South Africa	16	65	4.06	3
32	Israel	15	106	7.07	5
33	Belgium	14	149	10.64	6
34	Indonesia	13	14	1.08	2
35	Thailand	11	11	1.00	2
Total (N=35)		**2,345**	**19,911**	**6.4**	**8.1**