RURAL SOCIAL MEDIA CHAMPIONS
DEVELOPMENT OF MODELS OF DIFFUSION AND BEST BUSINESS PRACTICES

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OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

Project scope and goals
Background
Defining social media champions
Rural social media user profiles
Factors in diffusion
Factors in adoption and use
Best practices
Future research
PROJECT SCOPE AND GOALS

Our goals for this project …

Identify rural business owners who are social media champions in their communities and profile their best practices.

Develop a model of social media diffusion and adoption processes to identify factors that facilitate social media adoption.

Develop case studies concerning best practices in social media by rural retailers.

SOCIAL MEDIA-DEFINITION

Social media (SM) refers to a group of Internet-based applications…that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, blogs)

Social media is a form of digital communication characterized by:

• High social presence (intimacy, immediacy)
• Media richness (low ambiguity and uncertainty)
• Opportunity for self-presentation and self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

THE RURAL BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Small rural businesses:

• Have been slower to adopt social media strategies.
• Limited exposure to new technologies.
• Less access to support networks.
• Lack of time and money, skills.

Quinn, McKitterick, McAdam, & Brennan, 2013

Rural SM users:

• Are younger and have about half the number of ‘friends’.
• Post fewer comments, log in more frequently, and have fewer reciprocal relationships.
• Have geographically smaller networks.
• Are more likely to use social media to deepen relationships with people they already know.

(Gilbert, Kanahalios, and Sandvig 2010).
DIFFUSION AND ADOPTION MODELS

ROGERS' DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION

TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL (TAM)

Rural Social Media Champions

ROGERS' DIFFUSION OF INNOVATION

Rogers model defines the process of diffusion of an innovation:

Knowledge → Persuasion → Decision → Implementation → Confirmation

Diffusion is influenced by:

- Communication channels (local vs. mass media, networks, change agents)
- Adopter characteristics (previous experience, innovativeness, socio-economic, personality)
- Nature of innovation (relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, observability)

Rogers (2003)

TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL (TAM)

TAM predicts adoption of a new technology based on:

- Perceived attributes of the innovation
  - Ease of use
  - Usefulness
- Communication channels
- Nature of the social system
- Change agents' promotional efforts
- Nature of the decision

Venkatesh, Morris, Davis and Davis, 2003
WHO ARE RURAL ‘SOCIAL MEDIA CHAMPIONS’?

Business owners who are actively and successfully using innovative social media techniques in their marketing and promotional efforts.

Champions serve as exemplars for other local businesses and facilitate the diffusion of social media technologies in their communities.

FOR THIS STUDY, RURAL SOCIAL MEDIA CHAMPIONS ARE DEFINED AS:

• Among the first in their communities to use social media.
• Using at least one form of social media to promote their business.
• Social media users for at least one year.
• Considered a leader related to business social media use in their community.

PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION AND RECRUITMENT

Phase 1
• Researchers contacted 125 rural business groups in 3 states (Michigan, Iowa and Ohio) to request referrals of social media champions in their communities.
• Identified 99 potential participants.

Phase 2
• Business owners referred by community organizations and who met study criteria were contacted to request their participation in the study.
• 55 business owners agreed to participate.

Phase 3
• Researchers completed 32 face-to-face interviews (19 did not respond, 5 declined) with business owners (11 Michigan, 11 Ohio and 10 Iowa) in 30 communities.
• 28 of 32 participants also completed a web-based survey.
DATA COLLECTION

Face-to-face interviews conducted April-August 2013.
Web-based survey captured demographics, business characteristics sent post-interview.
Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.
Nvivo10 used to analyze data, using diffusion and adoption constructs to code data.
Inter-rater reliability established using Nvivo tools.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE: SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Businesses included agriculture, broadcasting, retail, personal services, accommodation, food, professional services.
Facebook used by all respondents; 57% used more than two years.
All participants used one or more social media tools for personal use.
25 of 28 participants used at least two social media tools; 21 of 28 reported using at least three tools.

Other social media platforms:

- Pinterest: 16
- Blog: 10
- LinkedIn: 11
- YouTube: 10
- Twitter: 10
- Foursquare: 7

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

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28 of 32 participants responded to profile survey.
SOCIAL MEDIA USER PROFILE

Primary use of social media is to interact with customers; a critical element in managing customer relationships.

Secondary uses include:
- Linking with suppliers (static vs. interactive)
- Business networking
- Connecting with local businesses (co-promotions) and to share business/community information.

Twitter primarily used to find new suppliers/follow trends; not used by customers.

Other platforms (Pinterest, Foursquare, YouTube, blogs) used sparingly.

Traditional and non-traditional marketing tools needed to complement social media.

RESULTS

KEY FACTORS IN DIFFUSION AND ADOPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY RURAL BUSINESS OWNERS

FACTORS IN DIFFUSION/ADOPTION OF SM: KNOWLEDGE

Developing Knowledge of SM
- Awareness of SM developed via history of personal use.
- Trial & error experimentation and online tools often used.
- Workshops, consultants, coaches, and studying SM pages of other businesses used by some.

Communicating Knowledge about SM
- Actively seek and share SM ideas locally (embedded in local networks & socially active).
- Actively seek and share SM ideas with professional & personal contacts outside community (embedded in external networks).
- Link SM page strategically to other entities’ SM pages.
FACTORS IN DIFFUSION/ADOPTION OF SM: 
PERSUASION

Relative Advantages:
• Greater reach versus traditional marketing and communication methods.
• More cost effective (free) and can change/update more efficiently; tailor your message.
• Get much more consumer feedback than with a website.
• Flexibility; fit social media in when convenient.

Disadvantages:
• Readiness of target market for SM.
• Time consuming to monitor and manage SM.
• Pressure to be responsive and consistent in SM efforts.

DIFFUSION/ ADOPTION OF SM: 
PERSUASION

Compatibility:
• Helps busy business owners feel connected to everyday life; fits into daily routine.
• Familiarity/carryover from personal to business life; seamless management. Fits easily with other business functions (e.g. email, data base management).
• Time consuming. Compatibility and benefit varies with SM use of clientele.

Complexity:
• Facebook easy to use and navigate at the basic levels. Finding time to figure out new SM applications was an ongoing issue for some.
• Social media perceived to be easy yet challenging at the same time; needed to seek help from others beyond the basic level of applications.

Trialability:
• Most business owners spent time as needed to learn Facebook; realize they need to continue to invest time.
• Low barriers to entry on social media encourage small business owners to try it out.
• Pressure to keep up with new applications and responses to customers once committed to SM.

Observability:
• Using social media shows customers a business is innovative.
• Observing what other businesses are doing gives confidence to try new approaches; a non-threatening way to find out about the local market.
• Observed benefits of SM time and effort less certain.
FACTORS FACILITATING ADOPTION OF SM

- **Perceived usefulness:**
  - Ability to meet business goals (sales, awareness, brand management).
  - Implement strategies instantaneously; feedback is immediate.
  - Flexibility; messages can be adapted quickly to react to shifting trends.
  - Consumes less time and money resources than other media.
  - Improves response time to customers; able to connect 24/7.
  - Ability to tap markets not reached by traditional media.
  - Ability to connect with customers outside of region.

- **Ease of use:**
  - Familiarity with Facebook through personal use.
  - Minimal training needed to use basic features.
  - Less confident about developing comprehensive SM strategies (barrier).
  - Challenging to maneuver frequent, unexpected changes to FB features (barrier).

- **Perceived enjoyment:**
  - Allows users to be creative.
  - Social interaction with customers.
  - Communication reflects personality of the business/owner.
  - Share business owner’s excitement about products with customers.

BEST PRACTICES:
GAINING & DIFFUSING SM KNOWLEDGE

Develop knowledge about SM by asking known users for help, experimenting, and using online help tools. Adopt a learn-as-you-go approach.

Seek SM information from sources outside local community, as well as inside. Examine SM of other businesses, competitors, vendors/suppliers, customers, and industry for ideas.

Share knowledge about SM by developing and maintaining local and non-local networks as well as personal and professional networks, actively participating in SM user-groups, and strategically cross-promoting with other businesses and local community using SM.

Rural Social Media Champions
BEST PRACTICES: USING/ADOPTING SM

Social media is cost and time effective relative to traditional media; integrate SM with existing marketing efforts.
Determine ways to use social media as both a marketing vehicle and as a market information source.
Leverage immediacy of SM to create interest, excitement, awareness and drive traffic.
Management tools (i.e., Hootsuite, SnapRetail) can streamline social media efforts and improve connectedness across different social media platforms.
Use analytics to determine which SM tactics are effective.
Do not outsource SM maintenance; it will not convey as authentic and thus be less effective.

BEST PRACTICES: SM, ENGAGEMENT & BALANCE

Enhance customer experience by providing a SM vehicle for frequent interaction. Connecting on a personal level with customers is more effective than traditional advertising tactics (sales).
Invite customers to engage with your business via SM.
Recruit friends/followers to help spread your SM presence.
Find synergies in your SM use to effectively manage your personal and business life.

ONGOING AND FUTURE WORK

Continue to develop/empirically test an explanatory model of diffusion and adoption of social media technology among small rural business owners.
Develop multi-media case studies to profile and illustrate best practices in social media use.
Broader implications for explaining diffusion, adoption and transfer of innovative business practices/systems in rural settings.
REFERENCES


