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## How Social Media Networking is Supporting Customer Engagement and Brand Awareness: A PR Perspective in an Irish Context.

Miriam O'Regan

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How Social Media Networking is supporting  
Customer Engagement and Brand Awareness:  
A PR Perspective in an Irish Context

MIRIAM O'REGAN

M.A. in Public Relations with New Media

CORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

2013



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Cork Institute of Technology

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an Irish Context.**

**Miriam O'Regan**

MA in Public Relations with New Media

2013

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of

Master's Degree (MA) in Public Relations with New Media

Is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purposes other than in partial fulfilment for that stated above.

Signed .....

Date .....

## **Acknowledgements**

First of all, I would like to acknowledge Emmett Coffey and Gearoid O'Suilleabhain for all the guidance and support throughout the academic year.

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Thanks.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this research paper to my mother.

"I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be." – (Douglas Adams)

## ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this thesis is to investigate the phenomenon of social media networking in the Irish organisational context. The study examines how Irish organisations are utilising social media networking as a communication platform. The research assesses the aspects of phenomenon that provide organisational advantages in Public Relations. Therefore, aim of the study is to identify how social media networking is influencing customer engagement and brand awareness.

The first research phase comprises of an extensive literature review of key academic sources of secondary research including reports, articles and publications. This review cultivates a range of sources with insight into the background of the research. More importantly, the academic sources in this chapter will be utilised to justify the research findings and conclude with a final hypothesis.

A qualitative research process was conducted which included a case study approach of two Irish organisations, Barry's Tea and Truly Irish. The research methodologies included two semi structured interviews with the organisations. The interviews were designed to obtain information from two social media professionals regarding their expertise and knowledge of the phenomenon who are similarly engaged in the research context. The purpose is to compare and contrast their interpretation of the phenomenon from an Irish business perspective. Secondly, a focus group was conducted including six participants who are fans of the Barry's Tea Facebook page. The objective was to explore the subjects thoughts and opinions regarding the social media networks for the two organisations. The group discussion was based on the data obtained from the interview findings. Furthermore, the sample group is active social media users who are engaged in the phenomenon and are also fans of Barry's Tea. Therefore, the subjects are relevant to the phenomenon and are familiar with the context. In addition it generates personal opinions from the customers perspective.

The research findings were compared and contrasted with one another and a list of key themes were identified and were validated with relevant academic sources. These themes are central to the research. On the basis of the results, it conveyed a positive view that social media networking does facilitate customer interaction as well as promoting brand image. It was concluded that Irish organisations can utilise social media networking to engage in two-way symmetric communication, to fosters positive relationships and online communities which ultimately enhances customer engagement and brand awareness.

## **Abbreviations**

P.R. – Public Relations

B.T. - Barry's Tea

T.I. – Truly Irish

## **Key Words**

Social Media

Web 2.0

PR 2.0



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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Research Question: How is Social Media Networking Supporting Customer Engagement and Brand Awareness: An Irish Perspective.**

The aim of this research is to examine how social media networking is helping Irish organisations to interact with customers through two-way, dialogical and symmetrical communication. This research will examine the reasons why Irish organisations are using social media and to clarify if effective use can enhance customer engagement and brand awareness. Furthermore, it will examine if social media networking is providing key organisational advantages which could also be an additional element in overcoming in long-term survival.

Developments in technology have resulted in the emergence of computer-based digital media which are providing newer strategic communication opportunities for organisations. (Smith 2009) discusses this new phenomenon with the emergence of social media. He defines social media as an “umbrella term for various types of interactive media in which the audience is an active participant in the development and presentation of the messages.” (p.207) Social media is enabling customers to interact and actively engage online through the use of social networking platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, etc. Therefore, the researcher will assess how Irish organisations are utilising social media networking to implement two-way symmetric communication with customers.

Slattery (2013) states that brand awareness is the main reason why Irish organisations use Facebook and Twitter. Despite common presumptions that organisations use social media for financial reasons, it is in fact brand awareness and customer engagement that are the main objectives for social media networking. These two sources highlight the significance of new media technologies in enabling two-way communication between Irish organisations and customers. The sources indicate the potential for social media in providing organisational advantages in the form of customer engagement and brand awareness.

The researcher adopted a qualitative methodological style to investigate the concept of social media networking and how it its supporting customer engagement and brand awareness. Firstly, the research involved a case study approach on two Irish organisations, Barry’s Tea and Truly Irish who are engaged in the research phenomenon and are relevant to the research context. Secondly, two types of qualitative research methods were used. One semi-structured

interview was conducted with each of the two organisations. One focus group comprising of six participants from Barry's Tea Facebook page were selected. Therefore, the subjects are relevant to the phenomenon and are familiar with the context. The research findings were compared and contrasted with one another and a list of key themes were identified and were validated with relevant academic sources. These themes are central to the research.

The results concluded that Irish organisations can utilise social media networking to engage in two-way symmetric communication, to foster positive relationships and online communities which ultimately enhances customer engagement and brand awareness. In addition, the findings of the results concluded with identifying various key aspects including relationship, reputation, trust, community and communication which are determining factors in influencing customer engagement and brand awareness on social media networking. The results portray how dynamic technological changes are resulting in the increase in social media networking. Furthermore it is providing Irish organisations with the opportunity to foster positive relationships with consumers and to engage directly in conversations through the use of different social media platforms.

Communication is experiencing a radical change. Therefore, the impact of this technological revolution is affecting all aspects of how we exchange information. Likewise, communication strategies and processes must also evolve with these digital developments. Organisations must guide public participation, experiment with content through a variety of social media channels and learn to connect and build relationships with stakeholders through new technologies.

### **Research Objectives**

- To examine the use of social media networking as a strategic PR tool for creating a communication platform between Irish organisations and customers.
- Outline the main reasons why Irish organisations use social media networking.
- Investigate how Irish organisations are implementing two-way and symmetrical communication online.
- Determine what are the benefits and limitations for Irish organisations using social media platforms for communication.
- Identify how social media platforms are fostering customer relationships and developing brand awareness between organisations and their consumers.



## **1.2 Context Review: Case Study**

### **1.2.1 Barry's Tea**

Barry's Tea was founded by James J. Barry in 1901 in Cork city and has now become one of Ireland's leading tea brands. Since 1901 the company has continued to grow. The company is a National brand that is an iconic Irish product and is also recognised for its quality of high blended tea produce. This national brand has been marketed throughout Ireland on traditional methods including television, radio and press. Its slogan has become synonymous "Every day should have its golden moments." Today, the company acquires 40% of the Irish tea market. While the company continues to expand nationally and internally, its marketing is transforming and the company has adopted new media. Since 2009, the company began a social media strategy to communicate with their target audience of customers in Ireland and abroad. The company has an extensive range of social media networks including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, and many more. The international brand has a well established social media platform that appeals to both Irish and international customers. Barry's Tea is a renowned Irish brand with a positive brand image. The organisation are now utilising social media networking to interact and engage with their large target audience with almost 120,000 customers as Facebook fans alone.

### **1.2.2 Truly Irish**

Truly Irish is a farm based business established by pig producers throughout Ireland. The company is known for its local Irish produce of high quality pork products, including sausages and rashers. The company is a national brand who coined the slogan "Not just a name, our guarantee." The organisation supplies products in Ireland and internationally to the U.K and mainland Europe. Like Barry's the company promotes their Irish identity as well as their Irish sourced produce and Irish brand. Traditionally Truly Irish adopted the traditional style of communication but since 2009 with the growing trend in social media, the organisation established a social media strategy. The company utilises networks including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The company objective was to engage in social media to interact with customers and to promote brand identity. Although the organisation is a smaller sized organisation, it almost has 15,000 customer fans on Facebook.

Both organisations are relevant to the context of the research thus providing an Irish perspective. Both are prominent local Irish brands in Ireland. One of the primary research objectives is to examine how companies, like Barry's Tea and Truly Irish, are engaging with their customers on social media. In addition, a recent survey conducted by Social Bakers (2013) rated Barry's Tea as number forty four in Irelands Top 100 Facebook brands, thus demonstrating the companies strong online social media presence. Although Truly Irish represents a smaller section of the Irish market, the company is however growing on social media networks. Nevertheless, the two organisations are appropriate Irish cases to adopt for the research. The two companies are logical cases for selection. They are both intrinsically interesting as well as serving practical purposes and instrumentally useful for the research.

## CHAPTER TWO:LITERATURE REVIEW

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a critical review of the literature from several relevant and appropriate sources. These sources comprise useful information from books, reports, and journal articles. This chapter is the foundation for the research. It is an outline of the expected key themes from the literature research and it cultivates a range of research aims and objectives. The researcher highlights a range of relevant authors to convey theories on the research phenomenon. Furthermore, the literature review provides an insight into the research background as well as adding reliability and validity to the research context. More importantly, the academic sources in this chapter will be utilised to justify the research findings and conclude with a final hypothesis.

### **2.2 Public Relations Defined**

This research paper is based on the Public Relations Industry so it is necessary to define the term Public Relations (P.R.). Due to its broad range of industries, Public Relations requires different skills and competencies. Therefore, the definition is flexible given that P.R. involves different contexts. As a result, there is no universal definition. However, according to Tench and Yeomans (2009) “Public Relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics.” (p. 4). Bowen and Rawlins (2010) also supports Tench and Yeomans (2009) perspective that Public Relations is a management function and further adds that “Public Relations is a strategic conversation.” (p. 9).

P.R. has many definitions and the term is interpreted differently by various authors. However, the researcher acknowledges that the notion of communication is a common theme within the P.R. industry. Both authors (Tench & Yeomans, 2009; Bowen & Rawlins, 2010) share similar perspectives and highlight how Public Relations serves to establish communication links between an organisation and its publics. The authors focus particularly on the management of communication with various publics and emphasise that P.R. has a strategic role to play with building positive relationships with external publics. By managing communications and developing positive relationships with publics, this creates a strategic advantage by enhancing an organisations reputation. Furthermore, the authors continue the theory that “Public Relations is a management function that establishes and maintains

mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends”. (Tench and Yeomans, 2009, p. 5) .

Overall the application of a communication system between the organisation and its publics is a crucial element in determining its success or failure. Hence, an organisation must implement and manage a strategic communication network with their publics to establish mutually beneficial relationships and influence their publics through dialogue. “Influence should be exerted through dialogue- not monologue – with all the different corporate audiences... acting as a strategic resource and helping to implement corporate strategy”. (Tench and Yeomans, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, the implementation of a good communication network with dialogue between an organisation and its publics can foster mutually beneficial relationships which can further influence external publics and ultimately contribute to the organisations success.

“The ideal PR professional of the twenty-first century is not only a market expert, but also an informed, socially adept conversationalist” (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009, p. 27). The authors propose the view that PR involves facilitating and maintaining relationships which fosters trust and credibility with myriad groups of people. It further claims that the effects of these enhanced relationships and increased trust will be directly visible and benefiting brand communication and customer loyalty. Therefore, effective communication can enable Irish organisations to create positive relationships with their key publics. The research notes that P.R. is about the management of communication. As a result, this research will seek to identify how Irish organisations are utilising social media networking as a communication platform. Thus, it will investigate how they are engaging in conversations and building relationships with key publics, and ultimately if social media networking has the potential of providing significant organisational benefits.

### **2.3 Key Publics**

Smith (2009) suggests that “Good communication planning calls for the identification of an organisations various publics.” (p. 51). The term “general public” is non-existent because each public linked to an organisation has a unique relationship. Therefore, the author presents four useful categories of linkages: customers, producers, enablers and limiters. He identifies these as an organisations four key publics. Customers are the most apparent type of public who receive products or services off an organisation. Customers include current customers, potential customers, shadow constituencies and secondary customers.

“Public Relations work is characterised by an approach to corporate communication that attends to all stakeholders (e.g. Employees, shareholders, suppliers, investors, trade unions). For many organisations, consumers are the crucial public.” (Estanyol, 2012, p. 831). The author proposes a similar perspective to Smith (2009) and is in agreement that consumers are a significant public. Given that customers are generally perceived to be the most significant category of publics, this group are the primary focus for this research. Firstly, the research aims to investigate if organisations consider customers to be the primary public in online communication. In addition, the research will examine how Irish organisations are establishing online media platforms to communicate and foster relationships with their current and future customers. Hence, by selecting the most significant category of publics (i.e. Consumers), it will access how Irish organisations are communicating online with a key target audience through social media networking. Thus, investigating how social media platforms are creating two-way conversations and supporting customer engagement.

## **2.4 Increase in Social Media**

### **2.4.1 Recession**

It is apparent that social media networking has increased at a phenomenal rate in recent years. One of the primary factors for its escalating popularity is the global economic recession. M2PressWire (2010) and Hawkin (2010) are two articles stating how the global economic recession is a contributing factor to the increase in social media networking. M2PressWire (2010) discusses how organisations are seeking opportunities to create “a buzz around brands” to become “more directly involved in the conversations” across social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter. (p. 3). Hawkin (2010) shares the same view as M2PressWire (2010) regarding the recession impacting the increase in social media for communication and branding. “With social media came a two-way communication between brands and consumers.” (Hawkin, 2010) Both are in agreement that the recession triggered organisations to utilise social media networking. Therefore, there is an assumption that organisations focus more towards social media networking for financial reasons. Hence, the research will assess if organisations utilise social media networking as a financial substitute for traditional advertising. Additionally, it will view the possibility if enhancing custom engagement on social media networking can provide organisational benefits for overcoming the recession.

## 2.4.2 Mobile Technology

Secondly, M2PressWire (2010) draws attention to the phenomenal increase in the rate of consumers engaging in social media websites. “The number of subscribers to these networks is increasing and these subscribers are spending growing amounts of their online time engaged in social media activity.” (p. 3). Furthermore, the article describes how the emergence of “the new generation of mobile devices” are facilitating consumers to be continuously engaged in social media networks. This conveys the dynamic changes in communication. Due to technological advances in the form of mobile phone devices, it signifies how it is enabling consumers to have continuous online engagement with social media websites. This theory is in conjunction with recent statistics. Marketing Charts (2013) conducted a survey which confirms that “55% of Social Networking Consumption occurs on a mobile device.” This further adds to the notion that mobile devices are contributing to customer interaction with social media networks.

In relation to the transforming P.R. industry, Breakenridge (2012) draws attention to the notion of change. “Public Relations will continue to transform and the changes you see are monumental. For better or for worse, a career in PR means handling communications in the public spotlight because of the increasing use of social media.” (p. 1). These technological advances demonstrate how communication between organisations and their external publics is evolving. Furthermore, it conveys how technological developments are facilitating social media networking which therefore support customer engagement. More importantly, these dynamic technological changes are resulting in the increase in social media networking and are furthermore providing Irish organisations with the opportunity to foster positive relationships with consumers and to engage directly in conversations through the use of different social media platforms.

Therefore, the recession and mobile phone devices will be accessed as potential influencing factors. Likewise, these elements will be explored as possibilities for facilitating or conversely limiting customer engagement on social media networking. These may or may not be a factor linked to the communication and interaction of customers with brands on social media. Furthermore, the recession and the increase in the use of mobiles could easily be determining factors that are fostering the relationships between Irish organisations and consumers. Therefore, the recession and new mobile devices will be accessed as potential trends that may be supporting customer engagement and brand awareness.

## **2.5 Potential Social Media Objectives for Organisations**

### **2.5.1 Brand Awareness and Customer Engagement**

Slattery (2013) revealed in a recent newspaper article that brand awareness is the main reason why Irish organisations use Facebook and Twitter. Despite common presumptions that organisations use social media for financial reasons, it is in fact brand awareness and customer engagement that are the main objectives for social media networking. Bord Gais Energy conducted the survey on 300 Irish businesses and revealed that “six out of ten companies include social media as part of their overall commercial strategy.” This demonstrates how brand awareness and customer engagement are key elements in social media networking and also in developing business strategy. Therefore, the article highlights how Irish companies are utilising social media to enhance their reputation and also to interact with customers to increase the organisations success.

This survey supports the view that communication is a strategic management function. (Tench & Yeomans, 2009). It further conveys that when organisations interact with customers online through dialogue, it generates organisational benefits including brand awareness and customer engagement. While only 36 per cent of Irish firms claim that social media networking contributes to increased sales, the survey nevertheless highlights the financial incentives in the form of increased revenues that can also be achieved through the effective use of social media networking. The current economic recession in Ireland is proving to be a challenging period for Irish organisations. This suggests that by implementing effective communication platforms online through the use of social media networking, it can provide significant benefits in the form of brand awareness, customer engagement and potential increased sales revenues. Therefore, this research will examine the reasons why Irish organisations are using social media and to clarify if customer engagement is a primary objective. It will examine if social media networking is providing key organisational advantages in the form of customer engagement, which could also be an additional element in overcoming in long-term survival.

### **2.3.2. Communication and Relationships**

As stated by Tench and Yeomans (2009) Public Relations “helps management keep informed on and responsive to public opinions.” (p. 6). To achieve this, communication is a vital instrument for organisational PR as it shapes the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders. Effective and efficient communication is necessary with internal and external publics. Therefore, organisations need to establish a “favourable relationship” with publics. It is the most ideal situation which implies a reciprocity or symmetrical approach between the organisation and its stakeholders. It is a proactive way of managing strategies “with the aim of reducing the gap” of how external publics view an organisation. (p. 239). Therefore, by establishing a symmetrical approach, it reduces the gap between an organisation and its publics creating mutually beneficial relationship. In addition, by “reducing the gap”, this strategy aims to influence how publics view the organisation and how the organisation would like to be viewed. This research aims to identify how Irish organisations are building favourable relationships with customers by utilising symmetrical communication on social media networking. Furthermore, the research assesses if a customers perception of an organisations image and reputation on social media networking enhances customer engagement and brand awareness.

### **2.5.3. Reputation**

L'Etang (2009) proposes that “Reputation is one of a number of linked concepts which form the basis of Public Relations.” The author believes that “the concept of reputation nurturing is a central function to Public Relations.” (p. 48) The authors theory is in agreement with Tench and Yeomans (2009) who discusses the emergence of corporate reputation as a concept of PR communications and its importance in influencing public opinion. The author further adds that “General beliefs may be influenced by public expression of opinions which implies information sharing and networks of communication.” Likewise, the authors perspective is similar to Tench and Yeomans (2009) regarding the notion of “reducing the gap” to influence publics. (p. 240). The view by L'Etang (2009) argues “the importance of social networks in the formation of reputations.” (p. 49). She adds that reputations are partially derived from social discussions whereby individuals exchange views about the images they have of third parties. Reputations are derived from an individuals or organisations actions, words, relationships and experiences they have. With regard to the aspect of relationships, again it is apparent how the formation of positive relationships between an organisation and its publics



are significant in establishing successful communication networks but also in fostering an organisations reputation. Furthermore, it conveys how communication networks like social media networking can impact peoples general beliefs and is a significant channel for portraying an organisations reputation.

In fostering positive relationships with publics, trust is a crucial element for enhancing an organisations reputation. L'Etang (2009) proposes her view that "Trust, reliability, sincerity and authenticity all contribute to a good reputation." (p. 50). Trustworthiness is essential for communicators and failure to demonstrate this can threaten the reputation of an organisation. The author reinforces her view that "reputation is dependent on trust and transparency and the interplay between the concepts of identity and images." This conveys that trust and openness in communication are crucial in influencing publics and are beneficial in establishing positive relationships between an organisation and its publics. Parsons (2005) provides a similar perspective illuminating how trust is an impeding factor on communication and reputation. The author discusses how the credibility of the sender, in the eyes of the receiver, can be a major distorting factor. If the receiver, (i.e. the customer) does not trust the source, then it imposes a barrier on communication as it influences the organisations credibility. This illustrates how trust is a crucial element for influencing credibility which ultimately impacts the relationship between the organisation and the customer. Therefore, trust can enhance positive relationships which are necessary in supporting customer engagement in online communications.

Smith (2009) also concurs with the view of L'Etang (2009) that reputation is a key part in the communication process between an organisation and its publics. The author states that "Reputation is based on both word and deed - on the verbal, visual and behavioural messages, both planned and unplanned, that come from an organisation." (p. 37). Again, this emphasizes how customers general beliefs are formed based on the reputation perceived from an organisation communication. He develops his idea further claiming that "Visibility" is an enormous factor to an organisations reputation. The extent to which an organisation is known is visibility. Therefore, an organisation that has strong visibility and a positive reputation has a greater ability to form positive relationships with publics and support customer engagement. The studies further portrayed that "64% of CEOs rate reputation as 'critical' or 'very important' to their organisations success." He continues and states that "a company with a solid reputation earns the benefit of the doubt in times of crisis". Hence, these theories confirm how reputation is a significant element in communication. It further demonstrates its

non-financial importance for Irish organisations utilising social media networking as a communication platform for supporting customer engagement. This research will examine the element of reputation and its significance in influencing customers on social media networking. In addition, reputation will be accessed as a possible factor which serves as an organisational advantage in fostering customer engagement and brand awareness.

## **2.6 Social Media**

Developments in technology have resulted in the emergence of computer-based digital media that are providing newer strategic communication opportunities for organisations. Smith (2009) discusses this new phenomenon with the emergence of social media. He defines social media as an “umbrella term for various types of interactive media in which the audience is an active participant in the development and presentation of the messages.” (p. 207). Social media is enabling customers to interact and actively engage online through the use of social networking platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube.

Social Media is continuing to transform. Likewise, communication strategies and processes must also evolve with these digital developments. According to Breakenridge (2012) organisations must “guide public participation, experiment with content through a variety of social media channels and learn to connect and build relationships with stakeholders through new technologies.” (p.1). A similar view is held by Kelleher (2007) who conveys how the function of public relations is connected with the concept of interactivity. His theory concurs with Breakenridge (2012) regarding the effectiveness of social media communications in building positive relationships with publics. “Cyber public relations as part of a relationship-building process means thinking of public relations as a communicative activity that entails stimulation feelings such as connectedness, involvement, appreciation and meaningfulness.” This highlights how PR professionals must acknowledge the benefits of new social media technologies in providing organisations the opportunity to enrich the interactive exchanges and also build positive relationships with their customers in the absence of face-to-face communication. As a result, this research will be examine the different social media platforms and how they are facilitating organisations to interact with customers. Furthermore, it will be assessing how social networks are developing communications and connecting organisations with customers.

### 2.6.1 Web 2.0

Communication is experiencing a radical change. The impact of this technological revolution is affecting all aspects of how we exchange information. According to McNamara (2007) there are major new developments notably in online communication which is broadly categorised as Web 2.0. This process is revolutionising the web and the way we communicate. "In an environment where organisations can no longer closely control the media and the message, the real customer experience carries enormous importance". (Brown, 2009). Web 2.0 is changing how organisations communicate with their audiences, which consequently is affecting the power that consumers have with conversations. "Consumers have the ability to talk back and to share their views and opinions with other consumers." This may create a challenge for organisations as customers are gaining control of the conversations. As the author suggests organisations can overcome this dilemma by embracing these new web 2.0 technologies and utilise social media networking channels to participate in conversations with their audience.

McNamara (2007) characterises Web 2.0 with two key words "Conversations" and "Communities". (p.2).The author emphasises the strengths of Web 2.0 for creating "two-way conversations between individuals and organisations where both get to talk and have their views communicated". He further adds that "Web 2.0 applications are showing signs of bringing communities together." In addition, he discusses how online communities are engaging people in a forum whereby conversations and dialogues are generated with one another without face to face interaction. "Chat rooms, online forums, blogs and collaborative Web sites bring together small communities of like-minded people who communicate in an authentic trusted way." (p. 3). A similar view is held by Breakenridge (2012) who claims that Web 2.0 is characterised by conversations and communities. These two concepts of Web 2.0 "Conversations" and "Communities" are enabling Irish organisations to have real conversations with key consumers and to establish a community of like-minded people. With reference to trust and reputation, McNamara (2007) also discusses the notion of "Source Credibility" (p. 3). He states how source credibility is an important element in media and communication. Therefore, the researcher is assessing how social media networking is facilitating interaction and two-way communication in developing positive relationships and ultimately enhancing customer engagement and brand awareness.

Web 2.0 technologies are engaging people. Therefore, social media networking is providing key attributes in the form of communication, interaction and conversations. It can therefore enable Irish organisations to interact with consumers in an online community which can potentially facilitate customer engagement and brand awareness.

### **2.6.2 PR 2.0**

As previously stated by Solis and Breakenridge (2009) PR is characterised by building relationships with the public through meaningful communication. A new concept called PR 2.0 is emerging whereby new technology and multimedia applications are transforming the PR industry, enhancing how organisations can communicate with customers and facilitating direct communication with one another.

“PR 2.0 was born through the analysis of how the web and multimedia were redefining PR and marketing communications, while also creating a new toolkit to reinvent how companies communicate with influencers and directly with people” (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009) The authors develop the theory in line with L’Etang (2009) and Tench and Yeomans (2009). He authors portray social media as an influential factor in promoting a positive reputation which can facilitate engagement through dialogue and strengthen relationships with customers. Therefore, PR 2.0 in the form of social media networking could facilitate Irish organisations to communicate directly with consumers and hence increase customer engagement. Breakenridge (2012) emphasises that organisations must overcome the limitations of social media and embrace the technology in order to use it to their strategic advantage. “There is no control with social media. However, you can guide and direct the communication to benefit your brand and the relationships you build moving forward.”

## 2.7 Two-Way Symmetrical Communication

Throughout this research, two fundamental aspects keep emerging, ‘conversations’ and ‘relationships.’ One of the most recognised authors on communication theory in Public Relations is Grunig (2009). The author argues the necessity in acknowledging the four processes of communication in PR for managing stakeholder relationships. The advocate for the paradigm proposes that two-way symmetrical is the best-fit model of communication. He outlines four distinct types of PR practices.

1. Press Agency or Publicity
2. Public Information
3. Two-way Assymetric
4. Two-way symmetric

According to Davis (2007) Grunigs fourth type of communication “two-way symmetric” is the most effective communication model for a Public Relations practice. Grunig (2009) formulates a strong theory on the use of two-way symmetrical communication on social media. The author states “these new media have the potential to make the profession more global, strategic, two-way and interactive, symmetrical or dialogical.” (p. 1) Therefore, two-way symmetric communication is the most effective approach for Irish organisations to adopt with regard to online communication.

In addition, there are a variety of recommendations suggested to achieve effective communication. Although effective communication is characterised by attaining the “gift of the gab”, one must also however acquire a skill of “understanding, observation and practice” to be effective at two-way communication. (Davis, 2007) In addition, a recent study conducted by (Chu, Woo, King, Choi, Cheng, & Koo, 2011) demonstrated that “knowledge and information sharing and the provision of a better communication platform” were the two main purposes for medical organisations using social media networking. In contrast, however, “time constraints and low staff engagement” were identified as the most highly rated difficulties. These theories suggest that by gaining experience with two-way communication, it can facilitate organisations with aspects including information sharing and communication. Therefore, the researcher will apply this to the Irish context and examine if information sharing and good communication can foster customer engagement and brand

awareness. Hence, the researcher is assessing the reasons for organisations utilising social media as well as determining the limitations.

## **2.8 Building Human Face.**

Social media involves the two-way communication between an organisation and its customers. In light of the previous section, reputation is a crucial element in fostering trust and credibility with customers. Likewise, organisations need to convey this positive image through social media to promote their reputation and image. In order to enhance an organisations reputation, the organisation must develop a best practice approach to build the human face. Breakenridge (2012) argues that “Proactively protecting a reputation starts with the human face.” The author develops the argument by stating that “People relate to people” and social media networking requires both transparency and a human face. The success of an organisation in building customer relationships is directly linked to an organisations transparency and human face. Furthermore, the author proposes that “People want to know they are talking, sharing and creating with other humans.” Customers want to interact and engage with a person. It is imperative for organisations to build the human face and therefore create a sense of personality on social media networking. By building the human face, the organisation can engage in more informal communication which develops relationships with customers and overall enhances the organisations reputation. By adopting a best practice approach to reputation, this can essentially support the two aspects of customer engagement and brand awareness.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provides a critical review of the literature from several relevant and appropriate sources. These sources explore the background to the research in light of various key themes that are relevant to the research. The objective of these sources is to provide credibility in validating the research outcomes. These sources are necessary for acknowledging the key characteristics of social media networking and their significance to the PR practice in the application of online communication. In addition, they are pivotal references in verifying whether social media networking is or is not supporting customer engagement and brand awareness.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical framework of the research methods and data collection methods adopted by the researcher in conducting this research. Firstly, the chapter defines the term research and its purpose for this study. Secondly, it outlines the research approach as well as examining the two research methods utilised for data gathering and analysis. These are critical aspects that are necessary for the researcher in obtaining the research objectives as outlined in Chapter One. The research is discussed with reference to potential positive and negative aspects. The research methods that are selected are explained in detail and the reasons for their selection are justified. Furthermore, a list of academic references is provided in the research methodology to explain the rationale behind the choice of methods.

### 3.2 Research and Public Relations

Research is motivated by intellectual interest in a phenomenon and has as its goal an extension of knowledge. Merriam (2009) states “Its primary purpose is to know more about a phenomenon.” (p. 3) This is reflected in the purpose of this research. The aim is to develop knowledge on how Irish organisations use social media for enhancing customer relationships. A similar view is held by Tench and Yeomans (2009) “Academic Research aims to generate theories and models, to describe and analyse trends in PR.” (p. 199) With regards to PR, research plays an important role in creating theories and models for examining trends in the public relations industry. The authors further elaborate that “Research can have different purposes and origins.” Although research has many purposes, its main aim is to add to existing knowledge in the field of PR. This research is significant in accessing the stated objectives in order to investigate if social media networking is supporting customer engagement. By conducting research, it demonstrates whether the theory is supported by the results from the research. The information attained is converted into findings which can provide further knowledge to the field of PR.

### 3.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Methodology is divided into two approaches, qualitative research and quantitative research. According to Damon and Holloway (2011) “Qualitative research methods are a powerful means of gaining an in-depth, holistic understanding of the relationship between international culture and communication from the perspective of those inside a society or ethnic group.” (p. 7) The author suggests that qualitative methods are more ideal for researching contexts involving communication and groups of people. The theoretical framework of this research involves the concept of social media communication in Irish organisations and focuses on the element of fostering relationships with customers. Therefore, the use of qualitative methods are relevant for this style of research. More importantly, it enables the research to gain an understanding of the phenomenon as oppose to adopting scientific methods in the form of experimenting or measuring the theory.

Jensen (2002) provides a similar perspective to Daymon and Holloway (2011) regarding qualitative research. The author proposes that in qualitative research, the researcher is an “active sense maker, seeing the research process as a way of learning and generating knowledge in conjunction with research participants”. Therefore, the researcher is actively engaged with the subjects enabling the researcher to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and therefore determining a more realistic and personal conclusion of results.

In contrast, in quantitative research, “the researcher is a detached investigator standing at a distance from their research.” (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p.8). The authors outline the alternative research approach. However, it is unsuitable for this research. Given that this research is about gaining knowledge about the phenomenon of social media and its influence on customers, it is only logical that qualitative methods of research are utilised. In addition, it facilitates the researcher to connect with their participants which generates more personal opinions and thoughts. Consequently, this provides more accurate and realistic knowledge on the two paradigms. Merriam (2009) develops this view and portrays how “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.” (p. 5). This research seeks knowledge from organisations and customers on their experiences with social media. Hence, this qualitative is a viable method which matches the research needs. This research involves examining the relationship between Irish organisations and their customers. Therefore, the quantitative approach is discarded because the qualitative methods of research



are more suitable for this type of analysis. Similarly, the type of research methodology depends on the needs of the research. As a result, a qualitative approach is selected as it is an ideal fit to the style of research.

### **3.4 Qualitative Research Attributes**

“Qualitative research is an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.” (Merriam, 2009, p.13) Therefore, the most apparent attribute to qualitative research is the ability to understand and gain a greater sense of the people and their experiences in the world. The author continues elaborating on the advantages of qualitative research. This method of research allows the researcher to expand their understanding through non-verbal as well as verbal communication. In addition, the information and data can be processed by the researcher while conducting the research, which is more time effective. More importantly, the material gathered by the researcher can be clarified, summarised and compared with participants for accuracy of interpretation. Furthermore, it enables the researcher to explore unusual or unanticipated responses from the participants. As a result, this approach creates flexibility and creativity. The notion of serendipity enables the researcher to explore new and emerging aspects from the research. In addition, the qualitative style enhances the credibility to the research while the advantage of clarifying data with the research participants.

Despite the positive attributes there are limitations Merriam (2009) claims that “Interpretive research is where qualitative research is most often located, assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single observable reality.” (p. 8) As the author suggests, there is no specific answer to the research. It is flexible and assumes a series of possible realities or interpretations of the event. This can be considered a potential limitation to the research as it considers multiple situations. In contrast, the research is perceived by others to be more realistic as it includes a variety of circumstances.

Damon and Halloway (2007) present a similar perspective stating that qualitative methods are influenced by an interpretive view as oppose to quantitative research which generally obtains a positivist perspective. Although this research has some structure, it is open to changes so the adoption of qualitative methods is more practical. Furthermore, while the quantitative style of research is generally large scale and focuses on specific factors, it presents a significant limitation. It isolates variables from their natural context and the researcher is

detached. Qualitative research therefore, is a more suitable approach as it presents a key feature of providing deep, rich description of research which matches the needs of this study. Hence, qualitative research presents key characteristics and is therefore the chosen paradigm for this study.

### **3.5 Case Study Approach**

Case study research is one form of qualitative research. This research involves a case study approach on Barry's Tea and Truly Irish. According to Damon and Halloway (2007) case studies are beneficial if your objective is "to capture the complexity of a phenomenon, including its intricacies and its context." (p. 108) A similar definition is provided by Merriam (2009) who defines a case study as an "in depth description study of a phenomenon." (p.39). The author further elaborates how case study research searches for "meaning and understanding." The purpose of this research is to examine the use of social media networking and thus gain an increased understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, case study research is a more viable approach as the researcher engages in data collection and analysis to gain a rich descriptive result. By utilising a case study approach with two cases, it enables the researcher to identify distinctive features by comparing and contrasting the research information with one another. Therefore, similarities and differences regarding the phenomenon between the two cases can be identified and thus creates a more accurate and coherent evaluation of the findings.

Furthermore, the objective of this research is to investigate the phenomenon of social media networking and its influence on customer engagement in the context of Irish organisations. Therefore, I selected two cases for the research which match the research criteria. Firstly, the two companies utilise social media networking and are therefore relevant for examination as the two are engaged in the phenomenon. Likewise, the two cases are organisations from an Irish environment. Hence, the two cases are of relevance in matching the context of the research. Two case studies are more instrumentally useful in portraying valuable features to the research.

## 3.6 Data Gathering Methods

### 3.6.1 Interviews

In the field of Public Relations and Communications, interviews are a primary element of qualitative research. Likewise, for this research, interviews are adopted as a key method in satisfying the research objectives. According to Merriam (2009) an interview is defined as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focussed on questions related to a research study.” (p. 87) Damon and Holloway (2011) agree with this view and describe the interview as a “talking questionnaire” where the interviewer “aims to extract information from respondents to suit the purpose of the investigation.” (p. 220). This matches the objective of this research which aims to explore the meanings, thoughts and feelings of the interviewee. Interviews are a valuable method as they are very flexible and the interviewee's answers create an evolving conversation with the interviewer.

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#### 3.6.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi structured interviews are one of two methods of data gathering for this research. Participants can explore their own thoughts more deeply. In addition, participants are likely to respond spontaneously and more honestly to the interview questions as they are face-to-face with the interviewer. The semi structure interview is a relevant method for this research as it enables to researcher to understand the interviewees opinions and beliefs about the situation. Therefore, the semi structured interview contributes to the purpose of this research by gaining personal knowledge from key participants who are linked to the context. Their personal information creates a more coherent understanding about the phenomenon of social media networking. Therefore, the semi-structured interview method is adopted for this research, as this style of interview allows the researcher to create a guideline of interview questions while simultaneously being open to unexpected responses. Although it is structured, it also allows the benefit of serendipity as well as face-to-face contact to facilitate the interview.

#### 3.6.1.2 Selecting Interview Participants

The researcher provided a rationale for the sampling strategy. Consequently, two Irish companies were selected for the semi-structured interview, Barry's Tea and Truly Irish. Merriam 2009, states that “purposeful sampling should be used to include people who know the most about the topic.” (p. 94). The two companies were chosen as they match the research criteria. Firstly, both organisations are engaged in the phenomenon of social media

networking. Furthermore, both Irish organisations are relevant to the context of the research thus providing an Irish perspective. Both are prominent local Irish brands in Ireland. One of the primary research objectives is to examine how companies, like Barry's Tea and Truly Irish, are engaging with customers on social media. In addition, a recent survey conducted by Social Bakers (2013) rated Barry's Tea as number forty four in Ireland's Top 100 Facebook brands, thus demonstrating the companies strong online social media presence. Although Truly Irish represents a smaller section of the Irish market, the company is however growing on social media networks. Nevertheless, the two organisations are appropriate Irish cases to adopt for the research. They are both intrinsically interesting as well as serving practical purposes and instrumentally useful for the research. In addition, one expert from each organisation was selected as the interview participant. The two interviewees both specialised in the field of marketing and PR, as well as being involved in the input of social media networking for their organisations. This indicates that the interviewees are credible participants as they are both professionals in their working industries and are both working in the context for this research.

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### **3.6.2 Focus Group**

The second type of method adopted for this research is a focus group. This method is combined with the semi-structured interview as a qualitative approach to examining the two case studies, Barry's Tea and Truly Irish.

“A focus group involves a group of people - often with common experiences or characteristics - who are interviewed by a researcher (who is known as a moderator or facilitator) for the purpose of eliciting ideas, thoughts and perceptions about a specific topic or certain issues linked to an area of interest.” (Damon and Holloway 2011, p. 242).

Tench and Yeomans (2009) concur with the view of Damon and Holloway (2011) stating that “the interviewer plays the role of a moderator leading the respondents in a relatively free discussion about the topic” (p. 206). The purpose of the focus group interviewing for this research is to concentrate on the research objectives and discuss them with the group of participants. Therefore the creation of a “free discussion” is suitable for this research. One of the primary goals of focus group interviewing is the opportunity for the researcher to see the phenomenon from the participants point of view. In addition, by using a second method, the data from the interview will be re-examined with the focus group. The focus group can

explore the participants opinions, compare and contrast the data from the two methods and therefore determine a more realistic and accurate outcome on the findings.

According to Damon and Holloway (2011) “Questions, answers and opinions are produced by members of the group themselves inspired by the dynamic of the group setting.” (p. 242). The authors discuss one of the main benefits of focus groups for generating group conversations to gain in-depth information for the researcher. This method assists the researcher in gaining substantial insights into a variety of issues and strategies. In this context, it will enable the researcher to obtain data regarding the phenomenon of social media networking and its influence on customer engagement.

### **3.6.2.1 Selecting Focus Group Participants**

There are no stated number of people to be in a focus group. However, six to ten participants are the recommended number, preferably those who are strangers with one another. Damon and Holloway (2011) perceive the ideal focus group size to be six. It is large enough to obtain a variety of perspectives and small enough to manage and control. Like the semi structured interviews, purposeful sampling is also necessary. Suitable candidates will provide relevant data regarding the phenomenon. This is expressed Jenson (2009) who claims that “Qualitative researchers perform sampling of cultural settings, communities, informants, and activities. They transform theoretical concepts into empirical, researchable phenomena.” To design an empirical study, it is necessary to identify and delimit a portion of reality. This portion are examined with reference to a theoretically informed purpose. This focuses on a particular group of people who are relevant to the context of research. Therefore, the participants were selected from one of the organisations social media networks. The researcher reviewed 85 mutual friends with Barry’s Tea Facebook page. On contacting the some of the mutual friends, six were shortlisted as the most suitable candidates. The researcher selected the participants based on their inter-personal skills. In addition, the shortlist consisted of six candidates, three males, three females from from various college degree backgrounds and professions. The subjects are regular social media users who are engaged in the phenomenon with social media networking as well. Therefore the focus group candidates are a relevant group for examining in this research as they are strongly linked to the phenomenon and context of the research. Hence, one focus group with six participants was selected.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

Miller et.al (2012) proposes that “Ethics concerns the morality of human conduct. It refers to the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of the researcher throughout the research process.” (p. 14). In abiding by the ethical code of conduct, the research will adopt an ethical approach throughout the research process. The researcher aims to engage in a moral approach. Therefore, consent forms will be provided to all research participants. (See Appendix G, Appendix H & Appendix K). This clearly states the research guidelines to the two interviewees and the six focus group participants. It also confirms the permission of the candidates to participate, to record them and utilise their statements and data for the purpose of the research alone. It ensures confidentiality on the part of the researcher and develops trust between the researcher and the subjects.

### **3.8 Reliability & Validity**

Reliability and validity are fundamental concerns in qualitative research. According to Klenke (2008) “Traditionally, validity in qualitative research involves determining the degree to which researchers claims about knowledge correspond to the reality (or research participants construction of reality).” Validity on the other hand is “the extent to which the results are credible or believable from the standpoint of the participant.” (p. 38) Therefore, these two paradigms are paralleled with the terms credibility and dependability. It is essential for the researcher to acknowledge these crucial factors throughout the research process in order to heighten the research data and to compose a realistic hypothesis of the outcome of results.

### **3.9 Procedures**

#### **3.9.1 Conducting the Case Study Approach**

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were selected as the research methods to collect and analyse the data for the case study research. A semi-structured interview with each of the selected organisations, Barry’s Tea and Truly Irish was organised. Two focus groups were organised which consisted of social media users who were also Barry’s Tea Facebook customers and fans. Both methods, the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups are used in conjunction with the case study. Nevertheless, a plan for the case study was outlined to draft a plan to conduct the case study research.

Firstly, the research constructed a detailed description of the two cases, Barry's Tea and Truly Irish. This portrays the situation analysis and furthermore provides insight into the background and setting for the two organisations. It gives the reader knowledge regarding the context of the research, in particular to the communication and social media practices and processes.

Secondly, Themed headings were formulated by the researcher from the data in the research methods to demonstrate the key research findings. The themed headings provide a guideline of the development of social media networking, as well as outlining the key findings in terms of social media objectives. This is a form of coding to categorize the key data findings under clear headings. The findings of the two interviews and the focus groups are divided into sections. The similarities and differences from both methods of research are compared and contrasted with one another under the themed headings. (See Appendix M.)

The themed headings allow for probable and plausible interpretations of the context and phenomenon for the two cases. Cross-referencing the similarities and the differences between the two cases allows reasonable and realistic interpretations to emerge. Likewise, cross-referencing the data from the methods of research i.e. the interviews and focus groups heightens the validity of the findings. According to Damon and Holloway (2011) "The triangulation of ideas is useful in helping you achieve a measure of validity, comprehensiveness and also interconnectivity." (p128) The authors state how a case study approach allows the researcher to interpret different perspectives, highlight "negative cases", and allow "hidden voices" to be heard. Therefore, by employing a strategy of triangulation, the researcher can corroborate evidence from different subjects. This provides different meanings and perspectives for each of the key themes. On analysing the findings of the research, the author discusses the outcome of the results. In addition, the researcher provides a personal perspective in terms of recommendations which are based on the researchers study and knowledge on the research topic.

### **3.9.2 Conducting the Semi-structured Interviews**

The two organisations, Barry's Tea and Truly Irish agreed to participate in the semi-structured interview for the case study research. The researcher requested two criteria from the Irish organisations. Firstly, the researcher sought an experienced professional to represent each company with a knowledge in Public Relations or Marketing. Secondly, the interviewee must either manage or utilise the social media networking for the organisation and interact

with the organisations publicly online. One semi-structured interview was organised with each of the selected organisations. The interviewees were as follows.

1. Rachel McGuire, Marketing Assistant and social media operator with three years experience in managing the consumer engagement and interaction online, represented Barry's Tea.
2. Caroline Daly, Market Researcher, Sales assistant and social media operator with over two years experience represented Truly Irish.

The two interviewees fitted the criteria and have the required experience for the research. More importantly, the two subjects are engaged in the social media phenomenon. Therefore, the two are appropriate candidates to interview. Hence, their knowledge and experience of the phenomenon provides relevant data which heightens the reliability of the research findings.

The two interviews were arranged via telephone. Confirmation for the interviews were communicated via email. (See Appendix C & Appendix D). Likewise, the interview questions were communicated via email. (See Appendix E & Appendix F). The two interviews took place separately in the offices at the organisation of the interviewees. This is an additional benefit to the research because the interviewee feels more relaxed as they are situated in their own familiar work environment. Likewise, it is an advantage for the researcher to collect data when the interview subjects are situated within their own social context where the research phenomenon occurs.

The stages of the semi-structure interview include:

1. Introduction and greetings
2. 'Warm-up stage' - Tea and chat
3. Outline Research background and guidelines
4. Code of conduct- Consent form and recordings
5. Interview
6. Conclude- Thanks.

Although a list of pre-planned questions were prepared and given to the interviewees, (See Appendix E & Appendix F) the format of a semi-structured interview was open to allow the interviewees thoughts and opinions to emerge. The sequencing of questions varied in the two interviews as a result of the participants providing different responses which determined the



direction of the interview questions. The interviews were conversational and flowing. In addition, a variety of techniques were utilised for asking questions. The set of questions related to experience and behaviour, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge and background. The researcher offered different types of questions which matched the qualitative style of research. The researcher avoided using leading questions in order to obtain accurate responses. Furthermore, the researcher guided responses by using probing questions during the interview to gain a better understanding and to clarify certain responses. The use of exploratory questions allowed the interviewee to elaborate on specific aspects of the research. Likewise, the use of summary statements were utilised to encourage the participants to elaborate more on a particular aspect. (Damon and Holloway, 2011 p 231) Planning the timing of the interviews was estimated at 30 minutes. However, the researcher was flexible in allowing the interview to continue for as long as required. Both interviews were completed under thirty five minutes.

In qualitative approaches to interviewing, it involves close and personal interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. It is suggested that it is imperative for the researcher to establish a researcher-participant relationship. (Damon and Holloway, 2011, p235) To establish a good rapport with the interviewees, the researcher got to know the interviewee on an informal level prior to the interview. Therefore, 15 minutes was taken to chat with the interviewee, have a cup of tea and get familiar with the interviewee. Damon and Holloway (2011) state "If you are able to establish rapport from the beginning of the research process, the evidence you collect will be valuable and insightful." By creating a relationship, it establishes rapport with the interviewee. Furthermore this facilitates an open and qualitative manner which enhances the data results.

In addition, trust is built through close interaction. Concise and informal language was used when communicating with one another. Therefore, from the initial stages of the research process trust was embedded into the through friendly informal contact. More importantly guidelines of the research and full disclosure of the research details was provided in complying with ethical code of conduct which enhances the trust between the researcher and the two interview subjects.

### **3.9.3 Conducting the Focus Group**

The design of the focus group research was based on the data results from the two semi-structured interviews. The focus group comprised of six participants who are all Barry's Tea Facebook fans. The research and recording guidelines were explained and consent forms were signed by participants, in following the ethical code of conduct. The group was intimate and informal with a positive and friendly group dynamic. A slide show presentation was used and snacks were provided as simple tactics to foster group dynamics. (See Appendix L). A range of questions and visual samples of the two organisations social media networks were presented to the group on slide show presentations with audio. (See Appendix A & B). Participants were asked a range of questions in exploring the various research criteria. The group chatted and discussed various key themes. Data analysis was conducted with the group to verify data results through coding. (See Appendix M). The stages of the focus group included:

1. Welcome
2. Warm-up. Chats, sweets and chocolates
3. Slideshow presentation
4. Personal Introductions
5. Research Guidelines and objectives
6. Consent Forms- Permission and Recording
7. Focus Group Interviewing
8. Data Analysis and Conclusion
9. Thank you

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

#### **3.10.1 Transcription, Memo Making and Coding**

The researcher transcribes the two semi-structured interviews. This method analyses the data more closely and provides more thorough content. (See Appendix I & Appendix J). Secondly, the researcher uses a practice called coding. The coding of the data is an integral part of qualitative data analysis. (See Appendix M for examples). This comprises segmenting the research data into manageable sections of meanings to gain a more coherent understanding. (Charmaz, 2011)The research divided the research data into colour coded categories to aid in the generations of theory on the phenomenon. This identifies the emerging categories and enable categorisation into specific groups. The data is segregated into colours themes and categories. This technique was utilised for the semi structured interviews and the focus group. It facilitates the researcher by conveying interpretations on a more conceptual level. Furthermore, this will generate more accurate theory and will enable the researcher to synthesise a potential hypothesis of the phenomenon.

#### **3.11 Conclusion**

This chapter conveyed all the necessary stages, techniques and methods required for conducting the research. These are all relevant to the research process and are beneficial to the researcher in obtaining reliable and valid data, which will provide valid results. Hence this will generate more realistic findings and overall heighten the research results and provide a hypothesis on the research phenomenon.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a clear presentation of the findings of the primary research outlined in the previous chapter. The semi-structured interviews with Barry's Tea and Truly Irish are the primary focus of the research process. The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group are explored. Based on their opinions and knowledge, potential theories are considered. The chapter identifies the linkages and emerging relationships from the analysis. Consequently, a guideline of potential theories are suggested for the framework of research. These theories are based on the research objectives as stated in the literature review. Furthermore, these theories are developed from the authors understanding of the primary and secondary resources to explore the research phenomena.

The data is presented in the form of narrative findings and is supported with relevant quotations from participants in the research process. In addition, the researcher transferred some of the narrative findings into visual representations and charts which were analysed during the focus group research. (See Appendix M). The headlines serve as an outline of the research questions and themes obtained from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups to explore the research findings. Ultimately, the outcome of the research will determine a hypothesis whether it concurs or rejects that social media networking supports customer engagement and brand awareness in Irish organisations.

The names of the two organisations, Barry's Tea and Truly Irish are utilised throughout the research findings. To avoid repetition, abbreviations are adopted for the two organisations. Therefore Barry's Tea is abbreviated as B.T. and likewise Truly Irish is abbreviated as T.I. Rachel is the interviewee participant representing B.T. and Caroline is the interviewee participant for T.I. The findings are outlined under the following categories.

## 4.2 Social Media Networking

Rachel from B.T. describes social media as “a new channel to engage with your consumers, engage with your fans and to pay them back for their loyalty.” Rachel continues that social media is direct and one-to-one which allows the company to provide advice and information. Caroline provides a similar description and describes social media as a means to “gather information, to communicate, express your opinion.” She adds “I think it’s very important for businesses, it’s a relatively cheap means of communicating your brand message.” She elaborates how “it’s about building your brand with social media so you can build trust.” Caroline also refers to social media for providing information in terms of “educating people and “repeat exposure.” The data can be interpreted as customer service and advertising.

The focus group participants described social media giving one word answers, as well as short descriptions. The words were displayed on a spider diagram so participants got a visual of their suggested ideas. (See Appendix M for diagram). The focus groups understanding of social media is reflected in terms of key words including “Communication, Networking, Information sharing, branding and dynamic.” Participants made reference to similar key terms as the interviewees while also making similar interpretations. The participants describe social media as “a new channel of communication” which is interactive, fast, direct, one-to-one, with two-way dialogue. The group also describes it as a networking channel for knowledge and information sharing. Furthermore, the group interprets social media with the association of branding and marketing. The group notes that branding is becoming an increasing influence on social media. Although the two interviews provide a more business-orientated perspective of social media, the researcher nevertheless acknowledges similarities with key factors including communication, interaction, networking, branding, information sharing, community and relationships. These key elements are the foundation of the research as it reflects the subjects understanding in both the interviews and the focus groups. Their perspectives on the phenomenon resulted in the formation of the subsequent themed headings for the research.

## **4.3 Increase in Social Media**

### **4.3.1 Emerging Trend**

Rachel from B.T. commenced the interview by recounting how the organisation started engaging in social media as a result of the sudden surge in the phenomenon. “Purely with the growth of social media.” She discusses how it transformed peoples lifestyles and social culture and routine “Social media took over from the likes of texting, took over from the likes of T.V.” She adds that “People now connect more through social media.” As she talks about the phenomenon, it becomes apparent that organisations recognised social media as an emerging trend transpiring among Irish people. Caroline from T.I. provides a similar outlook to Rachel on how the organisation started engaging in social media. She concurs that social media was an emerging trend. Likewise, she also makes reference to how it has altered peoples lifestyles and how the phenomenon has transformed the way people interact with one another and also with the organisation. Caroline from T.I. states “If you think about what happened before social media, how did customers engage with the company? I know we still get calls to the office, but we get most of our comments, whether they be complaints or compliments through social media.”

The two semi-structured interviews emphasised the emerging trend of social media in the Irish culture. In light of the profound increase in social media, the focus group identified the reasons for engaging in the social media trend. The group provided the following statements. Lisa states, “Everyone else was on it.” Marco adds, “To find out what was happening, to get the news.” Brid said “To stay tuned in.” James further added, “It just happened really.” The group all concurred with the above reasons but emphasised that “It just happened really” as the primary reason. The researcher interprets “It happened really” as an “emerging trend” and all the group concur with this theory. The two interviews and the focus group highlight social media as an emerging trend in society. The researcher notes the concept of social media as an “emerging trend” and also a main contributor to the growth in social media.

### **4.3.2 Part of Everyday Life**

The researcher acknowledges how social media was an emerging trend and therefore wanted to see how influential is social media on peoples daily lives. The researcher wanted to assess how significant social media networking is for Irish organisations and customers. Rachel from B.T. claims “I think social media, especially Facebook, has become part in parcel of most peoples every day lives. Like even my friends and myself, we spend half our time

communicating through Facebook or Twitter.” Caroline from T.I. offers a very similar opinion claiming “Social media has become a huge part of peoples lives. Personally, judging from the amount of time I spend online, it is mostly on social media, mostly Facebook.” Social media networking has essentially become part of peoples everyday lives, in particular Facebook. The network has merged into peoples daily routine of communication. Therefore, this is a new channel of communication that is evolving the way people communicate and interact with others. This is also reflected in how it is transforming the way customers are communicating with Irish organisations. Social media networking is an emerging trend that is developing organisations communication strategy and this is particularly significant in terms of customer engagement.

The focus group was questioned about their online engagement in social media networking. The group portrayed overwhelming results which match the two interviews. Karen remarks “Well I have Facebook on my phone so I use it throughout the day.” Marco adds “I’m on social media 24/7 on my phone.” Shane declares “I’m using it everyday on my Iphone.” The group unanimously agreed that they all use social media on a frequent basis throughout the day. Focus group findings also illuminate that Facebook is the largest and most popular social media network with users interacting on the platform on a frequent basis throughout the day. More importantly, the group concurred that social media has become part of everyday life. These results coincide with the interview findings. Therefore, the researcher can establish that social media networking has undoubtedly become part of peoples everyday lives and is engaging people in a profound way that is transforming communication with one another.

#### **4.3.4 Recession**

Rachel from B.T. does not think that the recession was a contributing factor to the increase in social media. “I think it was more an emerging trend.” She believes that it was evolving technology that influenced the growth of social media, as oppose to organisations seeing it as a cost effective way to divert from traditional methods of communication. Despite the recession, B.T. are still utilising both traditional and new methods of communication to reach all the customers. “We are still spending money on traditional methods because at the end of the day, some of our customers would not be on social media.” In contrast, Caroline from T.I. offers an alternative perspective. She believes that the recession was an influential factor in contributing to the increase in social media in organisations. “For most organisations social media is a cost effective means of communication.”

She further adds, "I think they're adapting towards social media because they are seeing its benefits and its costs are generally low." While B.T. are utilising both traditional and new methods of communication, T.I. on the other hand are starting to focus towards new media, in the form of social media networking, as a means of developing their interaction with customers. "We do still use traditional methods but we are beginning to focus more towards social media. We are working on building the social media networks."

However, the focus group participants were not examined on the subject of the recession. The recession was examined as a potential factor for the increase of social media among organisations, not consumers. Therefore, the recession is only relevant to the two organisations.

Overall, the findings for the recession were inconclusive. The two organisations offered contrasting business perspectives regarding the recession. While examining the notion that the recession may be an influential factor in determining the increase in social media among Irish organisations, B.T. disagrees that the recession has any effect on organisations increasing the use of social media. However, T.I. agrees that social media is recognised as a cost effective resource, whereby organisations are adopting as a result of the recession. Nevertheless, the recession is not disregarded as a potential factor for the increase in social media. The researcher assumes that it is all dependent on the type of organisation. It is also noted that the two organisations are utilizing both traditional and new methods of communication in order to fully engage and connect with their customers. However, T.I. are beginning to place more emphasis on social media networking rather than traditional methods for reaching their customers.

#### **4.4 Key Publics**

The two interviewees were asked who is the most important public in the organisation. Rachel from B.T. claims that the "loyal consumers" and the "tea fans" are of strong importance to the organisation. She emphasises that in general it is the "Irish nation who love Barry's Tea". Caroline from T.I. also states that "consumers" are the most important public. "They would be our main priority with our social media." In contrast to Rachel from B.T., Caroline added that the "shareholders" and "retailers" are secondary publics for the company. However, both interviewees declared that customers are the most significant public in the organisations.



To support the interview findings, the focus group observed the social media networks for the two organisations separately. The objective was to examine the focus group participants to test who is creating input on the two organisations social media networks. In addition, the aim of the observation is to test whether the focus group distinguish customers as the primary public on the social media networks of the two organisations. The participants were asked what type of people are communicating and engaging with the organisations on the social media platforms. The group identified different categories of people as social media users who are engaging on the organisation's social media. The focus group identified the same types of users for both companies, “customers”, “satisfied customers”, “Irish fans” and “middle-aged women”. However, the group also provided additional categories of people for B.T including “Emmigrants” and “Expatriates”. The group noted that the company promotes strong engagement with customers who are living abroad on their social media networks, particularly Facebook.

The group overall concluded by defining all the various types of social media users as “customers” because all of the categories are fans of the companies and ultimately purchase the products irregardless of their categorisation. Therefore, participants determined that customers are the primary public for the social media networking platforms for the two organisations. Hence, the findings of the interviews are conclusive with the findings of the focus group and customers are an organisations key public.

## **4.5 Organisations Social Media Networking Objectives**

### **4.5.1 Two-Way Symmetric Communication**

Communication is generally considered to be one of the primary functions of social media. For this research it is important to access the importance of two-way, symmetrical communication for interacting with customers on social media. More importantly, it is necessary to analyse how organisations are creating the two-way communication and how it facilitates customer engagement.

Rachel from B.T. began the interview with addressing the factor of communication on social media and how it helps the company to interact and engage with the online customers and fans. With regards to B.T. communication strategy, she states “It was more to connect with them really.” Caroline from T.I provides a similar view to Rachel while discussing the

communication benefits of social media. Caroline shares that “Social media is about having conversations with our customers.” The two interviewees explore how social media is a new channel of communication which is enabling the organisations to interact with customers on a personal level which is ultimately developing relationships with customers. Caroline from T.I. adds that “By replying back, I think it gives customers a thrill and it looks good for a company as it gives them a personal face.” Rachel from B.T. also states that “We are there and the customers know that there is someone who is actually going to reply to them and who is actually going to answer them.”

The focus group analysis confirms the two organisations objectives. The group observed that the communication generated is “personal and intimate,” and “friendly,” in order to “create dialogue” and “create conversations” with customers. The group concurred that the organisations are trying to “keep customers interacting on their networks” by maintaining communication that is conversational and interactive. Therefore, the researcher acknowledges that the communication with customers is personal to create two-way interaction with customers. Hence, the researcher can assume that two-way communication initiates dialogical conversations while also facilitating customer interaction by utilising an informal and personal approach.

#### **4.5.1.2 Customer Service**

While examining the notion of communication, the research revealed how two-way communication is helping organisations to develop customer service online. A strong emphasis is placed on organisations assisting their customers on social media regarding various aspects of customer service questions or issues. Rachel from B.T. discusses how the new channel of communication provides B.T. “with a direct link where customers can voice complaints, they can voice questions... anything we can do to help them.” In discussing how social media is a new channel of communication, Caroline from T.I. said “I know we still get calls to the office, I still take calls from customers but we get most of our comments, whether they be complaints or compliments through social media.” Caroline adds that “People, like our customers are using social media all the time and are using networks like Facebook because it has become the new way to communicate with us directly, whether publicly on our page or privately through an email.” The two organisations are recognising how social media networking is developing a new channel of communication for customer service by enabling two-way conversations for customer queries.

In relation to the focus group findings, James observes that “With Barry’s online store, well social media is the best way to get the word out there about that. Immediately, it is helping the customer to order directly from the social media store.” James makes reference to two aspects, communication and information sharing and also to customer service. As the group conversation develops, participants discuss how social media is allowing organisations to share knowledge and information online to a global audience and enable customers to access their products. This conveys how organisations can share information and communicate to a wide audience in a way which would not be possible without new media communication. Therefore, the researcher can establish that communication on social media networking is assisting in two aspects. Firstly, social media is communicating the information to customers. Secondly, social media networking is enhancing the customer service by providing a direct route to connect the customer to the required service.

As already outlined in the research findings, social media networking is “a part of everyone’s every day lives.” Consequently, customers are now utilising the new channel of communication as a new approach to communicate with Irish organisations online. The researcher identified how social media is supporting two-way communication with customers which is “direct”. More importantly, the communication creates informal and personal conversations to engage and interact with customers online. In addition, the social media is enabling organisations to provide knowledge and information communication which is developing customer service online. Therefore, the researcher can determine that social media is enhancing communication with customers online and ultimately is facilitating customer engagement.

## **4.6. Customer Engagement**

### **4.6.1 Personal Content**

As already outlined, the researcher acknowledges personal and intimate communication being utilised by organisations to interact with customers, which is supporting customer engagement. With regards to customer engagement, the researcher examined two criteria. Firstly, it is necessary to acknowledge how the organisations are engaging with their customers. Therefore, what type of content increases customer interaction on social media. Secondly, it is important to recognise the type of content customers use to engage with the organisation.

In assessing the type of content that organisations generate to engage their customers, the two interviews provided similar results. Rachel from B.T. announces “I think images use to be quite effective whereas now, I think people prefer questions where they can actually engage and give their opinion.” She adds that “The content people would relate to most, would be content that really engages them, like asking questions and asking them for their own opinions. Like ‘*A Time for Tea?*’.” Rachel elaborates how asking questions directed at the customer generates conversations as customers respond to the organisation by expressing their thoughts, opinions and tea related experiences. She also notes that as well as directing personal questions, she uses images, comedic posts, competitions and giveaways, interesting tea facts and quotes, to encourage customer to engage in conversations. However, Rachel argues that there is no definite type of content that guarantees customer engagement. “To be honest it changes a lot. I think images use to be quite effective whereas now I think people prefer questions where they can actually engage and give their opinion.”

Although she states that there is no specific type of content that will fully determine high customer engagement, she does distinguish personal and question style content as two overall influential factors for enhancing customer interaction. Likewise, Caroline from T.I. provides a similar perspective to Rachel. Caroline states that a mix of content is generated on social media. She further adds “Content that gets people thinking and then talk back to us with their thoughts and opinions.” Like B.T. T.I. utilise personal and question style posts, images, comedic posts, competitions and giveaways to increase customer interaction. Caroline from T.I. asserts a similar perspective to Rachel from B.T. stating “I decided to use questions on Facebook and ask our fans to generate ideas on our products. This creates useful content and creates a forum of conversations and interactions ” The researcher can clarify from the findings that both organisations are aiming to generate content in the form of personal and question style that will increase customer engagement on social media.

In addition, the researcher analyses that customers interact with the brand as if it is a person by sharing their thoughts, idea and even personal moments enjoying the product. Rachel from B.T. said “We just love, love, love when people Tweet at us their cups of tea. That’s why it’s about the content of the questions because it’s about people sharing their own experiences with us and with the brand.” On discussing the social media content, Caroline from T.I. states “Our fans and customers love to tag their pictures from our events which I think is great and they also put up their personal photos and tag Truly Irish in their pictures.”

The findings from the two interviews confirm that both companies experience increased interaction among customers on social media as a result of utilising personal and up-to-date content whereby the customer can engage in a conversation and provide their thoughts and opinions. Based on the interview findings, the researcher can evaluate that generating content which is personal and is connected to the consumer can further increase customer engagement. The content is relevant and personal. Therefore, both the organisations and the customer are sharing posts to one another as if it is person to person. Rachel from B.T describes the intimate interaction with customers and states how “The Facebook for Barry’s Tea has almost become a friend to customers and fans.” Ultimately, the two subjects are engaging in dialogue that is two-way and symmetrical. However, the interaction is informal and one-to-one which is furthermore enhancing positive and personal relationships with one another.

The interview findings matched the responses from the focus group. The participants proposed a range of factors regarding the content utilised to engage customers on the social media for the two organisations. Karen initiated the conversation by claiming “They’re asking people questions, to get them to interact and give their opinions.” James agrees and added “The organisations are both using questions and asking them about the product and how they use it and what they like.” All the group unanimously agreed that the communication is predominantly question orientated and personal. By generating questions, the organisation is initiating conversations with customers and is therefore engaging in two-way symmetrical communication. As the focus group stated, the questions are all product related and subconsciously advert the consumer back to the brand, logo or product in a way that can be considered subliminal marketing. The group established category descriptions for characterising the types of posts and content that the organisations customers are generating when communicating on social media. (See Appendix M)

While observing B.T. Facebook page, James notes that “Barry’s posts are a bit of craic.” Shane also commented that “A lot of people are putting up pictures of them enjoying the Barry’s Tea product.” However, Brid observed that the social media for B.T. is related to Irish emigrants. “A lot of the comments look like they are from people abroad who are happy with their deliveries.” James supported that statement by saying “Yeah the people are mostly living overseas and are thankful for the service.” The group agreed that the customers are generating similar content on the organisations social media. However, the content shared by customers in Barry’s Tea social media is more “personal and intimate” and portrays a

significant amount more satisfied customers “enjoying the product” of Barry’s Tea. The group also acknowledged how a lot of the content generated by customers are those who are Irish emigrants or expatriates which they already analysed as publics.

As the conversation developed the group explored the personal content in more detail. Shane conveys that the two organisations are “associating their products with intimate moments and customers are them sharing their personal experiences with the products on social media. That makes it more personal.” B.T. are more effective with utilising personal content. Marco agrees saying “They are making the product personal and part of your life.”

The group demonstrated two examples.

1. On the Barrys Tea Facebook page, a couple shared their engagement picture while enjoying Barry’s Tea.
2. On Truly Irish page a mother shared a picture of her young son starting the day with a Truly Irish breakfast.

As the group analysed the content, Brid states how “People are sharing their personal experiences of the product with images and compliments of the products. It's very intimate and it looks good to see the customers enjoying the product.” The group concluded that although the organisations are attempting to create strong brand awareness, it nevertheless “looks good to see the customers enjoying the product.” The participants agreed that it portrays a good representation of the organisations. Therefore, the researcher can denote how personal and informal content which generates two way communication can convey a positive reputation for the organisation.

#### **4.7 Develop Relationships**

Social media involves the two-way communication between organisations and customers. The research is examining how social media is developing relationships between Irish organisations and customers. In reference to the previous findings, it is apparent that relationships are emerging from the informal interactions and conversations. The interviews revealed how developing relationships and engaging with customers are significant factors for organisations using social media. Rachel from B.T. said “Social Media is a new channel to engage with your customers, engage with your fans and pay them back for all their loyalty.” Caroline from T.I. also states that “Social media is enhancing relationships with our customers.”

Both interviewees discuss the importance of building relationships with customers. In addition, the researcher can identify how the two organisations want to engage with customers and foster positive relationships through communication and interaction on social media. Rachel from B.T. “We always want to have a good relationship with the Irish people, our most loyal consumers, our tea fans.” In addition, Caroline from T.I. discusses how “dialogues with our customers make it more personal and therefore it helps us to develop our relationships with our customers.” She portrays how engaging in conversations is assisting with customer service queries and is furthermore connecting the company with their customers. Hence, communication on social media networking is developing relationships with customers which is facilitating customer engagement. Therefore, the research analyses that the two organisations want to enhance customer engagement in order to build positive relationships with their customers on social media.

However, Rachel from B.T. disagrees that social media is building relationships with customers. She argues that social media is a relationship enhancer. Rachel states “I wouldn’t say social media builds relationships, I’d say enhances relationships. Social media is more of a relationship enhancer. We already have a relationship with the customer and social media enhances and heightens our engagement with our customers.” Rachel believes that social media helps organisations to foster positive relationships with existing customers. Caroline from T.I. provides a similar view on the issue of relationships. She states that “Two-way communication is enhancing our relationships with customers.” Like Rachel, Caroline concurs that social media involves engagement with existing customers. Therefore, it is not building new relationships. However, it helps organisations to build on existing customer relationships.

The focus group observed the social media for the two organisations and discussed the organisations communication and interaction with customers. Based on the observations of the focus group, the participants conveyed that the two organisations utilise personal and question style content to create conversations and dialogue online. The participants conveyed that the organisations are generating informal and personal content to “attract and maintain” customers and to “engage customers” through conversations. Lisa states “They are trying to build relationships with their customers by making it personal with one another.” The group all concurred with her statement. The group developed this theory and concluded that the organisations are being “interactive” which is facilitating customer engagement. Furthermore, the group outlined that “this personal approach is helping them to build relationships” They

believe that the two organisations overall objective is to “build relationships of friendship and trust” with customers.

However, the group acknowledges that although the two companies are building relationships with customers on social media, they did regard the two firms on different levels. The group perceive that B.T. have an “efficient use of personal content”, are at a more established level of customer interaction, and have “stronger customer relationships”. The group critique T.I. to be not as effective as B.T. regarding customer relationships. Although T.I. are engaging in customer interaction and are building relationships with customers, the group believe that the social media for T.I. is not developed or extensive as B.T. Nevertheless, the group commends T.I.s use of social media networking for an organisation of a smaller size. They acknowledge that T.I. is a smaller organisation than B.T. and therefore comprehend that B.T have a more extensive interaction and larger volume of customer relationships on social media.

#### **4.8 Promote Reputation**

##### **4.8.1 Transparency**

The semi-structured interviews reveal how an organisations reputation is a key feature of social media networking. The findings of the interviews demonstrate that the two organisations focus on reputation, in terms of conveying brand awareness and transparency. Rachel from B.T. states that “Transparency in todays world is needed and I think social media does provide that platform to be transparent with your consumers.” She further adds that “Social media shows people a bit of your personality.” Caroline from T.I. shares a similar view to Rachel with regards to transparency. She claims that “It’s all about creating good social media channels, like Facebook, so when people look at it, they can see how we are interacting with customers.”

Unlike Rachel, Caroline makes reference to other publics including shareholders and retailers. Caroline explains how social media is a significant network for people to access and research the company. “Retailers can learn about us and our background, reputation. It gives retailers an idea of how we interact with our customers.” Similarly, she emphasises how transparency is crucial for organisations, as it portrays everything regarding the brand and conveys how the organisation interacts with its customers. Furthermore, it is an information sharing network where organisations can be open and provide a range of information for people to access.



The researcher can identify that transparency is an important factor in developing an organisations reputation which facilitates customer engagement and brand awareness. A positive reputation coinciding with a positive brand personality fosters relationships of trust with customers. Likewise, the findings of the research present transparency as an influencing factor on various organisational objectives. Hence, transparency with customers on an open forum reflects a positive outlook in the organisation. In addition, the authors can conclude that transparency is an aspect of social media networking that facilitates customer engagement and brand awareness.

While discussing the notion of interaction on the organisations social media, the focus group provided a range of matching descriptions of the platform. The group explored the topic of two-way communication and describe social media as an “interactive network”. The group add that it is “an open forum” with “no barriers to communication” allowing for conversations to generate. Shane states “Both the firms seem open and have positive relationships with customers.” Marco adds “Well judging by both of the companies social media, I think it’s showing their good reputation. It makes them look good.” They group highlighted how the interaction and communication on both the organisations conveys a good reputation of both organisations. Based on the participant observations of the companies social media, the group concurred that the terms “friendly, personal, informal, one-to-one” would describe the brand personality of the two organisations. Therefore, all the participants agreed that they good a strong positive and the social media was an effective representation of the companies reputation.

#### **4.9 Brand Awareness**

Brand awareness is a significant feature of the research. The researcher is analysing the topic as a potential influencing factor for an organisations social media strategy. The researcher is also examining its relationship with the phenomenon to determine whether social media is supporting brand awareness.

The findings of the two interviews confirm that brand awareness is a key element in organisations social media strategy. Rachel from B.T. claims that “the strategy was always to portray the Barry’s Tea message. Portray our Irishness, our history, our love of tea, to share that with the consumers and to have them share it back with us.” Caroline from T.I. discusses how brand awareness is a key element for the organisations social media strategy. “Promoting our Irish image and getting our message out there that our products are 100%

Irish.” Caroline explains how social media facilitates brand awareness. “It’s a good way to educate customers and provide information. As it develops more and more, we can build our brand and our fan base with customers.”

The two organisations both have comparable social media strategies. One of the primary objectives is to promote the company brand on social media so a positive image of the organisation is portrayed to the online forum of users. More importantly, the organisations objective is to promote brand awareness of the produce. By generating personal and two-way conversations it is promoting the brand while also enhancing the organisations reputation on an open forum with customers. It demonstrates social media is facilitating brand awareness as well as customer engagement. By demonstrating brand personality, the researcher can establish how organisations are synthesising transparency and branding on the social media networks. Rachel from B.T. further adds “I think most organisations see social media in a way for them to share a lot more of the brand personality.” Rachel infers that Irish organisations utilise social media to promote the brand personality and therefore implement brand awareness as part of the companies social media strategy.

As already outlined in the findings, the type of content used by the companies is essential in building brand awareness on social media. Organisations are using social media as a means to share their brand personality. Rachel confirms this by stating “That, at the end of the day is what I get from social media strategy, it’s to share more brand personality with your loyal customers who are interacting with the organisation.”

As previously presented in the findings, by generating questions, the organisation is initiating conversations with customers and is therefore engaging in two-way symmetrical communication. As the focus group stated, the questions are all product related and subconsciously advert the consumer back to the brand, logo or product in a way that defined as subliminal marketing. In reference to brand awareness, Shane discussed the promotion of products on social media for the two organisations. He claims “A lot of the posts are complimenting their own products. Basically promoting their own products.” Shane makes reference to the content of the posts generated by both organisations on social media. Marco verifies the notion of product promotion. He claims “Its indirectly telling you about their products and to communicate with their audience.” As the discussion developed, James synthesises the use of personal content and brand awareness. “The comments are relevant to certain events and link their products to peoples daily lives such as Truly Irish suggesting to

start the day with a Truly Irish breakfast or Barry's suggesting to have a cup of decaf tea before bed." Brid formulates the concept of subliminal marketing. She states "It's like subliminal marketing. They're also looking for information off people." Lisa concurs adding, "the comments from both companies are influencing customers by driving them towards their products." The group observed how all the comments are relevant to the products of the organisations and are intentionally referring back to their own produce. The participants all concurred that brand awareness was a key feature on the social media networks for the two organisations. The group compliment the effective use of personal and intimate social media content generated by the organisations and perceive social media as enhancing customer engagement. However, the group critique the content of the social media as over-emphasising their produce.

#### **4.10 Online Community**

In relation to the social media for the two organisations, people who share and interact with the companies are generally customers who all share a common trait. They all have a shared interest and personal connection to the product and online community and engage with the organisations as well with one another. Rachel from B.T. believes that "Everyone has a tie and an investment into the brand and everyone knows that the Barry's brand is part of Irish culture for a long time now. There are memories with the brand and it's nice to see that on social media." With regard to customer engagement, Rachel elaborates how B.T. "saw it as a strategy to have a more open forum for the customer to talk to us." She continues that "It's a community. I think a lot of our customers and fans see it that way. It's a forum for everyone to chat." From her perspective, Rachel believes that social media is a way for the organisation and customers to stay connected with one another in an open online community. It serves as a means for the organisation to communicate with customers but more importantly it enables people and fans to interact and engage with one another in the online community. Caroline from T.I. provides a similar perspective. She infers how T.I. aims to generate dialogue and interaction on social media with reference to social media as a "forum of conversations". She states "We try to create a forum of conversations and interactions with customers."

In addition, the focus group summarise the social media for the two organisations as a means of "attracting and maintaining customer engagement" so the companies can "stay connected with their customer audience." Therefore, the online community is serving as a platform for

customers with a connection to the product and who want to engage in a forum of dialogue regarding product and personal experiences.

#### **4.11. Limitations of Social Media Networking**

Throughout the research, the interviewees and the focus group focussed primarily on the benefits of social media networking. Overall the research findings presented a strong indication that social media networking is supporting customer engagement and brand awareness in Irish organisations. However, despite my research being centred on social media attributes, it was necessary for the researcher to also assess the negative factors of the phenomenon. Therefore, the limitations of social media networking were examined in regard to customer engagement and brand awareness.

The two interviewees offer contrasting limitations for social media. Firstly, Rachel from B.T. outlines the difficulty in pin-pointing the specific type of content for engaging customers. She explains that “You can’t say that this kind of post will get you seven hundred likes or this post will get you one hundred comments, to be honest it changes a lot.” Caroline from T.I. shares a similar view to Rachel from B.T. stating that one of the main challenges is change. She states how “It’s always changing. It’s all a learning curve, seeing what works and what doesn’t because it is still a new channel of communication.”

In contrast to Rachel from B.T., Caroline from T.I. discusses the difficulty in allocating time to engage, interact and maintain all the networks. Although it is time consuming, it is a necessary strategy. “There are challenges regarding time constraints.” She elaborates how it is imperative for organisations to engage with customers on a personal level, to foster relationships on social media. Caroline states “If you don’t maintain the page, then it’s showing customers that you’re not staying current.” She elaborates how it reflects poorly on the organisations reputation if social media is not maintained and monitored appropriately.

Rachel from B.T. shares a similar outlook on social media monitoring. She outlines how failing to monitor social media can “provide a forum where companies could really let themselves up against harsh criticism and do more damage than good.” However, she provides a similar view to Caroline regarding social media as a new form of communication which is about learning and adapting to its dynamic transformations. Both companies are still learning. Social media is still a relatively new means of communication. “There’s a fine line where you can become the page that people click ‘hide from newsfeed.’ It’s about trying to

get a balance with the statuses, with good relevant content that interests our customers.” Caroline adds how organisations must be careful as you may lose customer engagement on social media if the content is irrelevant or from overuse of content.

Although the two organisations view change as a difficulty in managing the customer engagement and brand awareness, the focus group acknowledges change as a positive factor. In reference to social media being dynamic, James suggested that “The fact that it keeps changing is what keeps people interested.” The group agreed with this statement. The researcher can conclude that change may be considered a negative factor but is it an obstacle that is imperative for organisations to overcome

#### **4.12 Long-term Social Media Strategy**

The main research objective is to examine the use of social media networking as a strategic P.R. tool for communication. Therefore, it was necessary to access the future outlook for the phenomenon. The two interviewees were assessed and provided similar perspectives on their long-term communication strategy. Rachel from B.T. provides a long-term outlook on social media stating “By the way the world is moving digitally, I think social media is just part in parcel of how we’ll communicate in the future.” She discusses how the advantages and the disadvantages to social media networking are irrelevant. However, she explains that social media needs to be utilised accordingly as a strategy for developing customer interaction and brand awareness.

Rachel from B.T. further claims “It’s continuous progression, its continuous adaption with constant monitoring and making sure that you are portraying yourself correctly.” Caroline from T.I. concurs that social media is a continuous progression “Keep on it, keep building it. So keep maintaining the two-way communication to stay connected with our customers, enhance relationships and continue promoting our brand image.” The researcher interprets the findings as the need for organisations to continue reforming with the social media developments in order to maintain an effective channel of communication with customers. Hence, adapting with the changes will enhance enable organisations to enhance customer engagement and promote brand awareness.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The researcher outlined the research findings under key headings in Chapter four. This chapter aims to discuss these key findings following the same key headings. Therefore, the researcher will summarise the themed headings and conclude the research with relevant results. This is a pivotal chapter that links the researchers interpretation, analysis and discussion from the data collected in chapter four. Furthermore, the research will critique the findings by either supporting or contradicting the data with the primary research conducted in chapter one. As well as providing a theoretical conclusion, the evaluation of findings will further validate the research findings with academic sources and therefore enhance the credibility and authenticity of my research. In addition, the limitations of the research are also acknowledged for those pursuing in similar research studies.

### **5.2 Limitations to Research Methods.**

As already outlined, the researcher conveyed the positive characteristics of utilising semi-structured interviews and focus groups as research methods for the qualitative research. In addition, one of the research objectives is to minimise the potential of any negative aspects affecting the research process. However, all types of research methods present potential limitations to the research.

#### **5.2.1 Time**

Time was a big challenge for this research. The time period for the research is three months which is challenging for the researcher to contact, organise and conduct the research on two organisations within the specified time period. The time of the year was also an issue as the majority of Irish organisation take summer vacation. In addition, on contacting organisations, there is a long waiting period to get clearance from the organisation. However, Barry's Tea and Truly Irish resulted in being ideal candidates as they were easily contactable and acquired that personal customer contact which was fundamentally reflected in the research context.

#### **5.2.2 Semi-Structured Interview Preparations**

Preparations for semi-structured interviews were challenging. Firstly, the researcher tested the interview questions on friends to predict potential interview responses. However, one cannot fully anticipate the results of an interview. Secondly, it is difficult to ensure that the

research questions are representative of the research objectives. Thirdly, although the researcher arranged a list of interview questions as a guideline to control the interview, it is impossible to predict. Therefore, the researcher needs to be prepared, know the questions and anticipate the flow of the conversation. It is imperative to link the subjects accordingly and prepare for the change and spontaneity of the discussion.

### **5.2.3 Recording and Audio Difficulties**

With regards to the focus group, a camera recorder was set up as the main recording device. A dictophone was also placed as back-up device. Unfortunately the camera recorder stopped recording. However, the dictophone recorded the audio. On listening to the audio of the interviews, the researcher acknowledged some minor audio difficulties. At certain times, the audio is poor when all the group members are excited and responding altogether.

### **5.2.4 Inexperience of Researcher**

The most apparent limitation to the research is the inexperience of the researcher. This is the first time the researcher engaged in academic research. Therefore, the researcher lacks the acquired skills of a professional researcher. With regards to the role of the researcher, the audio identified some areas of the interview conversation where the researcher interrupted the interviewee. The researcher was too spontaneous and eager to ask questions concerning the interviewee statements. This limitation is primarily due to inexperience of the researcher.

### **5.2.5 Honesty of Interviewees**

In semi-structured interviews, the researcher cannot guarantee the honesty of interview participants. The researcher can establish an informal and personal relationship with the interviewee prior to the interview to create rapport with one another. Open ended questions are difficult to analyse when comparing and contrasting two interviews with one another.

### **5.2.6 Leading Questions and Interviewer Bias**

In one of the interviews, the researcher acknowledged the use of leading questions in two situations. As a result this could effect the accuracy of the data, as the researcher may have influenced the interviewee. To combat this issue, the researcher revisited the questions at the end of the discussion to explore other thoughts and opinions. Likewise, the researcher can be bias during the research. When conducting the research, the researcher may extract the data and interpret the data according to their own personal opinion. Therefore, the researcher

adopted a subjective approach to explore all the various data outcomes, in order to obtain viable results.

### **5.2.7 Sampling Group**

One of the first recognisable criticisms for this aspect of research is the sampling group. The sampling for the focus group were shortlisted from the researcher mutual friends with the Barry's Tea Facebook page. However, the participants are not friends with the Truly Irish Facebook page. Given the organisational size of Barry's Tea, it is apparent that it is a more well known brand. Ideally, the researcher considered focus group participants who liked both the organisations Facebook pages. However, the probability of retaining a focus group who are social media fans for both the organisations is virtually impossible. Therefore, the sample group may be regarded as unrepresentative sample. However, it is impossible to obtain subjects who could fully represent the ideal sample group.

### **5.2.8 Dominant Focus Group Participants.**

For the focus group interviewing, the researcher experienced a few challenges. There were two focus group participants who were dominant in the group discussion. However, the researcher was familiar with the participants prior to the focus group. Therefore, the researcher anticipated that specific subjects could potentially control and direct the group discussion. It was difficult to engage the quieter subjects and maintain a balance of opinions. However, the researcher generated encouraging questions and directed the conversation towards the less dominant personas to engage them into the discussion.

### **5.2.9 Group Think**

This is a psychological phenomenon whereby members of the group conform with the group majority. Subjects may be inclined to keep quiet on certain opinions and only express opinions that are acceptable by the group. Therefore, participants may keep quiet on their true opinion or similarly alter their views to match the group. Consequently, this may impact the validity of the data results. Group cohesion is a factor that sways the groups opinion and ultimately it may present incorrect results. However, to combat this issue to researcher repeated questions on different formats. By subtly revisiting the questions it enabled the researcher to obtain the maximum possibilities of responses for data analysis.



## **5.3 Discussion**

### **5.3.1 Social Media Networking**

The two interview findings provide a more business-orientated perspective of social media, compared to the focus group participants. Nevertheless, the researcher acknowledges similarities with the interviews and the focus group. By examining the participants knowledge and understanding of social media, the main features of social media were identified. The two methods of research conveyed key factors including communication, interaction, networking, branding, information sharing, community and relationships. These findings are supported by authors (Tench & Yeomans, 2011; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009; Slattery 2013; L'Etang, 2209; Smith 2009) who provide various theories that these factors are the attributes of social media. These seven key elements are the foundation of the research as it reflects the subjects understanding of social media in both the interviews and the focus groups. Their perspectives on the phenomenon resulted in the formation of the subsequent themed headings for the research. In addition the research revealed the benefits and limitations for social media networking. Although all the participants in both the interviews and the focus group acknowledged communication as the primary objective of social media, as the discussions develop, other significant features of social media networking emerge. The researcher analysed each of the main factors under the key headings as recommendations to Irish organisations who are utilising social media networking.

### **5.3.2 Increase in Social Media**

The researcher originally was investigating if the recession and mobile phone technologies were contributing factors to the growth of social media with organisation and customers. With regard to the recession, the researcher cannot fully evaluate if the recession was an influential factor in facilitating the rapid increase of social media networking. The findings were inconclusive. Barry's Tea disagree that the recession was a contributing factor for Irish organisations utilising social media. On the other hand Truly Irish believe that the recession has encouraged organisations to focus more on digital media. The data from Truly Irish supports the views of M2PressWire (2010) and Hawkin (2010) while the results from Barry's Tea are in disagreement. The focus group think that the recession did not influence people and customers to start using social media. Overall, it is unclear if the recession impacted the significant growth in social media networking.

The two interviewees and the focus group all agreed that mobile phone technologies have contributed to the increase in social media networking. Therefore, the research results support the views of M2PressWire (2010) and Marketing Charts (2013) It also demonstrates how new technological advances like mobile phones are facilitating social media networking, engaging customers and therefore fostering positive relationships. Hence, the research further supports the views of Breakenridge (2012) who proposes that dynamic technological changes are facilitating customer engagement on social media networking. Overall the researcher can conclude that the recession may possibly be a factor. However, evolving technologies are a confirmed element for the growth in social media. While examining these two factors, the research revealed a new theory. The interviews and the focus group all discussed how social media networking is “a part of everyday life”. All participants viewed social media as an emerging trend and as a phenomenon that “just happened” as oppose to stating reasons for its growth. The research concluded with the theory that social media networking was an emerging trend.

### **5.3.3 Key Publics**

One of the primary objectives of the research was to examine the use of social media networking as a strategic tool for creating a communication platform with customers. B.T. and T.I. stated that customers are their number one public. The focus group validated this finding. When analysing the social media for both organisations, the group listed all the different types of people who are engaging interacting and communicating with the organisations on social media. The group classified the types of people as “customers”. The findings of the research are in agreement with Estanyol (2012) and Smith (2009) who note that customers are the most significant public in organisations. Although B.T. have a significant amount of Irish emigrants and expatriates interacting through social media, the customers for T.I. on the other hand are predominantly middle-aged Irish women. The difference with the type of customers is irrelevant. It signifies how Irish organisations should utilise social media as a strategic tool for interacting and communicating with customers. Social media can facilitate positive relationships with all types of customers.

## **5.4 Organisations Social Media Networking Objectives.**

### **5.4.1 Communication**

The research objectives were to examine the use of social media networking as a strategic tool for communication and determine the benefits for utilising the resource. The findings of the interview and focus group findings support the view of Tench and Yeomans (2012). The authors note that “Influence should be exerted through dialogue - not monologue- with all the different corporate audiences...acting as a strategic resource and helping to implement corporate strategy.” Communication is more effective when organisations engage in two-way dialogue with customers. Dialogues are more influential because it engages the customers and generates interaction between users.

Tench and Yeomans (2009) state how communication acts as a “strategic resource” and based on the research findings, the two organisations are attempting to use social media networking as a strategic communication resource to interact with customers. Grunig (2009) also emphasises the potential for new media in creating two-way communication for developing customer relations. This is especially apparent with regards to customer service issues. Communication is adapting and the way in which customers would traditionally contact an organisation has transformed aswell. Compliments, complaints, questions, queries and various customer related issues are now channelled through social media networking on an open forum. Social media networking is transforming communication but more importantly it is enhancing customer communication, relationships, interaction by enhancing customer service. It is proving to be more efficient to traditional means because it adopts more advanced features including direct, faster, one-to-one, two-way. Based on the results of the research, I concur with the view of Grunig (2009) who states that “The new digital media have dialogical, interactive, relational and global properties that make them perfectly suited for a strategic management paradigm of Public Relations.”

#### **5.4.2 Customer Engagement- Building the Human Face**

The research findings demonstrate an overwhelming response to organisations who have a brand personality. The findings concur with Breakenridge (2012). Social media networking is a strategic way for organisations to increase customer engagement and brand awareness. The core concepts of social media are communication, relationship building and branding. It is about connecting and interacting on a more personal, informal and direct manner through two way communication. When you build relationships, you build trust. Therefore, by creating the human face on social media, it creates a sense of personality. A more personal approach conveys authenticity and credibility. Both organisations are attempting to portray their brand personality. They are being authentic with customers by generating personal, informal and intimate communication. This is fostering relationships by building trust and credibility with customers. By demonstrating that there is a human behind the business, it creates a more personal element. As Rachel from B.T. stated “Barry’s Tea is more of a friend.” Ultimately people want to connect and interact with a human as oppose to a server.

#### **5.4.3 Develop Relationships**

The research sought to identify how social media networking is fostering relationships and developing trust between Irish organisation and their customers. In addition the research objective was to determine the benefits of social media networking. Based on the comparison of the findings, the researcher can conclude with the assumption that social media is fostering relationships with customers on various online networks, predominantly Facebook. Therefore, the researcher can interpret the view that social media does not create relationships but helps organisations to develop existing relationships with customers online. The results support the view of Tench and Yeomans (2009). By developing relationships, the two organisations are attempting to “reduce the gap” in order to establish “favourable relationships” with customers. Although T.I. are not as advanced as BT, given BT are a more prominent national brand with decades of experience, the two nevertheless are attempting to enhance customer relations through social media networking. As Rachel from B.T. states “Social media is taking customer relationships to the next level and it’s taking it to a different place where years ago brands could not have gone.”

#### **5.4.4 Promote Reputation**

Essentially, social media serves as an open platform where one can access to view an organisations reputation. The two interviewees summarise how it is important for an organisation to promote positive customer relations and branding on social media because transparency fosters mutual and informal relationships with customers. The notion of transparency is a fundamental aspect for enhancing an organisations reputation. Transparency reflects positively on the organisation, by portraying a good reputation for the organisation on social media. Many researchers have reached a similar conclusion that social media enhances an organisations reputation. (L'Etang, 2009; Tench & Yeomans, 2009; and Smith, 2009) "Trust, reliability, sincerity and authenticity all contribute to a good reputation." (L'Etang, 2009, p. 50) The author notes that trustworthiness is essential for communicators and failure to demonstrate this can threaten the reputation of an organisation. Therefore, transparency with customers on an open forum reflects a positive outlook in the organisation. In addition, the authors can conclude that transparency is an aspect of social media networking that facilitates customer engagement and brand awareness.

#### **5.4.5 Brand Awareness**

The objective of this research was to examine how social media networking is developing brand awareness. The findings of the interviews and the focus group convey that the content generated by the two organisations is facilitating brand awareness. Furthermore, the focus group postulate the possibility of the organisations over-engaging in marketing aspect and over emphasising the companies products. Nevertheless, the findings of the focus group matched the results of the interviews. The researcher can summarise that brand awareness is a key element to organisations social media strategy.

Slattery (2013) revealed in a recent newspaper article that brand awareness is the main reason why Irish organisations use Facebook and Twitter. The research findings agree with this statement. Both the organisations are developing brand identity on social media in order to increase sales. It is apparent that branding is a key feature as the focus group observed the marketing element to be significant on the organisations social media networks. However, branding needs to be managed effectively on social media and organisations should refrain from over-engaging in marketing and generating too much content on products and promotions. Nevertheless, the survey further highlights the financial incentives in the form of increased revenues that can also be achieved through the effective use of social media

networking. Therefore, organisations can utilise the social networks as a means of portraying a positive brand image as well as knowledge and information sharing. This is relevant to customers and likewise promotes the brand.

#### **5.4.6 Online Community**

This research aims at assessing how organisations are implementing two-way communication and how organisations are fostering customer engagement and developing brand awareness. One significant aspect that emerged from the findings was the use of an online community. The findings support the view of McNamara (2007) “Chat rooms, online forums, blogs and collaborative Web sites bring together small communities of like-minded people who communicate in an authentic trusted way.” (p. 3) Based on the findings from both the interview and the focus groups, social media is “creating dialogue” and “creating conversations” in an online community. This is enhancing customer relationships and fostering trust between the organisations and customers. As the focus group outlined, social media is a community of interaction, networking and two-way communication which creates an intimate style forum. Hence, the online community facilitates customer engagement as well as brand awareness.

#### **5.4.7 Organisational Limitations to Social Media Networking**

Although this research aimed at examining the benefits of social media networking, it is also necessary to address the limitations. The researcher can conclude that the results are overwhelming in favour of social media networking and in general the phenomenon has an overall positive view. The most apparent criticism was the notion of change and how the dynamic technology is proving to be challenging for organisations to stay current with the transformations. The interview results support the view of Solis and Breakeyridge (2009) who regard the issue of change as a potential limiting factor for organisations maintaining a competitive advantage. Therefore, the authors suggest the need for organisation to embrace the change and adapt to it. In relation to communication, the authors highlight how change creates “a new toolkit to reinvent how companies communicate with influencers and directly with people.” However, from the focus group perspective change is viewed more positively. “It keeps social media interesting”. In addition, Caroline highlights the issue of time constraints which supports the study of Chu et. al (2011) who identify time constraints as the most rated difficulty.

#### **5.4.7 Long-Term Social Media Strategy**

The two interviewees provided their perspective on the future of social media networking and the organisations long-term social media strategy. The findings portrayed by the two interviewees are in agreement with Breakenridge (2012). The author notes “There is no control with social media. However, you can guide and direct the communication to benefit your brand and the relationships you build moving forward.” Organisations must embrace the dynamic technology. The resource provides such extensive benefits for communicating. Social media is going to continue transforming. Therefore, Irish organisations must acknowledge the concept of social media networking as a communication strategy for achieving organisational objectives including interacting with customers, developing relationships, enhancing reputation which ultimately contributes in developing customer engagement and brand awareness. It is inevitable and therefore organisations must adapt with the phenomenon to obtain the full advantages of social media networking. From a long-term business perspective, it is a resource that can provide organisational objectives as mentioned above. These significant benefits can potentially contribute to an organization's long-term success.

#### **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the researchers interpretation, analysis and discussion from the research data collected in chapter four. The researcher explored and criticised the research findings by either supporting or contradicting the data with the primary research conducted in chapter one. The discussion evaluated the research findings and portrays how social media networking is supporting customer engagement and brand awareness. This critical analysis provides a theoretical conclusion enabling the researcher to postulate a hypothesis as well as generating a range of suitable recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter comprises a range of recommendations established by the author. These recommendations are based on the results of the research findings and analysis as outlined in chapter four and chapter five. The recommendations are derived from the researchers interpretation and opinion on the results of the investigation.

### **6.2 Social Media**

My findings and analysis explain how these key factors are supporting customer engagement and brand awareness. I would recommend other companies not to view social media networking as only a communication tool for PR. Given the current economic climate organisations should acknowledge the other key features and attributes of social media including, enhancing reputation and fostering trust and adopt them into the business communication strategy.

### **6.3 Increase in Social Media**

Two of the research objectives were to examine the factors that influenced the growth in social media networking and to examine the phenomenon as a strategic PR tool for communication. I believe that social media does not replace traditional methods of communication. The increase in social media networking has not resulted in the decline of traditional methods. It is essential for Irish organisations to utilise both old and new methods accordingly with your target audience in order to interact and engage with all your customers effectively. I would recommend to organisations to find a balance of media and utilise the most relevant communication channels for reaching the customers.

Secondly, I can conclude that social media was an emerging trend that is transforming dramatically. Although the reasons for its growth are unclear, it is apparent that mobile phones are facilitating customer engagement. I would suggest that Irish organisations acknowledge how these technologies are increasing customer engagement online. More importantly, it highlights the dynamic changes in technology.

These technological advances demonstrate how communication between organisations and their external publics is evolving. Furthermore, it conveys how technological developments are facilitating social media networking which therefore support customer engagement. More



importantly, it is providing Irish organisations with the opportunity to foster positive relationships with consumers and to engage directly in conversations through the use of different social media platforms. Although both B.T. and T.I are aware how important it is to stay current with the changes, I think it may be more difficult for T.I as oppose to B.T given the difference in organisational size and market experience. In general, Irish organisations need to recognise customer engagement is increasing as a result of technological advances and they need to evolve their social media networking to coincide with the increase in customer engagement.

#### **6.4 Key Publics - Customers**

Social media can facilitate positive relationships with all types of customers. It is apparent that it is customers who are predominantly interacting with organisation on social media networking. Similarly, organisations are targeting customers through communication, engagement and branding on social media. The researcher would recommend that Irish organisations should utilise this resource to enhance the communication with other important publics. It would be strategic for organisations to adopt a similar approach to T.I who utilise social media to promote a positive image to other significant publics, including shareholders and retailers. Caroline from T.I states “We always refer our retailers to our social media so they can learn about us and our background, reputation and involvement with customers. It gives retailers an idea of how we interact with our customers.” Therefore, the researcher suggests that Irish organisations should not focus primarily on customer, but should develop their social media to engage with other important publics. A positive relationship with fellow publics, like retailers, reflects a positive organisational image to the customers. For developing future relations, organisations should consider engaging with fellow publics on social media which portrays a good image of the organisation.

#### **6.5 Two Way Symmetric Communication**

It is imperative for organisations to utilise two-way communication on social media networking. It is a strategic method of communication that generates dialogues and increase interaction with customers. Furthermore, dialogues and personal interaction will provide positive outcomes including enhancing customer engagement and brand awareness for the organisation. The researcher would suggest that organisation should implement two-way communication to initiate dialogical conversations so it can increase customer interaction by using an informal and personal approach. In addition, the research recommends organisation

to place a strong emphasis on two-way communication for dealing with customer service relations. It facilitates customer service issues while also enhancing customer engagement. Ultimately it reflects positively on the brand and furthermore enhances brand awareness.

### **6.6 Customer Engagement- Building the Human Face**

Based on the research findings, the researcher strongly recommends that Irish organisations should build the human face on the social media networks. Content which is personal tends to engage the customers the most. Therefore, the researcher perceives that organisations are interacting with customers by adopting a personal, friendly approach, with a brand personality as oppose to being an unknown server. The researcher formulates this theory given that the organisations are creating their own personality, while also engaging with the customer on a one-to-one and personal level which creates a more formal, friendly and intimate approach. The organisations are essentially building the human face. By building the human face on social media, the organisations are being authentic and creating a personality whereby the customer is more attracted to an organisation with a likeable sense of personality. The researcher suggests that organisations should aim to generate comments like humour to create a human face and convey a personality for the brand.

### **6.7 Develop Relationships**

The researcher suggests that Irish organisations should utilise social media networking to enhance existing customer relations. Organisations likes BT and TI are connecting on a more intimate and personal level with their customers, unlike any previous methods of communication. Hence, the researcher can analyse that the two organisations are enhancing positive relationships with customers while also fostering relationships of trust. Furthermore, in reference to branding and customer relationships, the researcher can propose that social media networking is facilitating Irish organisations with brand awareness and customer engagement. It is necessary for Irish organisations to note “Cyber public relations as part of a relationship-building process means thinking of public relations as a communicative activity that entails stimulation feelings such as connectedness, involvement, appreciation and meaningfulness.” (Breakenridge, 2012, p. 1)

## **6.8 Promote Reputation**

One of the key research objectives was to assess how social media networking is developing trust between organisations and customers. The research suggests that transparency is a core feature for organisations utilising social media networking. Therefore, the researcher suggests that Irish organisations should be transparent on social media in order to convey a credible, sincere and authentic reputation. In addition, social media is essentially an open platform whereby anyone can access. Hence, a positive image of the organisation needs to be conveyed in order to enhance the organisations reputation. Ultimately this will develop the brand awareness for an organisation. As Caroline from T.I outlined “Transparency is really important with customers. It shows everyone who we are and what we do.” The researcher suggests that Irish organisations should adopt transparency into their social media strategy. Transparency with customers on an open forum reflects a positive outlook in the organisation.

## **6.9 Brand Awareness**

While brand awareness is noted as one of the primary objectives of Irish organisations, it is important to recognise some other criteria explored in the research. The researcher suggests that Irish organisations should utilise social media networking to its full potential because it is a free marketing and advertising resource. The researcher can note that social media is a pivotal resource for engaging with customers but more importantly for portraying the brand personality of the organisation. However, organisations must generate content that is relevant and personal which customers can relate to or interact with. Hence, organisations should generate content in the form of knowledge and information sharing which is of customer interest and it further engages the customer into the social media forum. As well as benefiting the customer, the content is relevant and furthermore promotes a positive image of the brand. As one focus group participant suggests “It’s like subliminal marketing”. Organisations should refrain from over utilising too much branding and advertising as this is “pushing the product on customers”. The focus group outlined this as one of the biggest limitations of organisations on social media. However, branding can be used effectively by not over-emphasise the marketing aspect. Social media can provide financial incentives for organisation if utilised effectively. Therefore, the organisation can subtly promote the brand through generating useful content that is not over-emphasizing the marketing aspect.

### **6.10 Online Community**

Social media is creating a community of memories and is serving as an online forum for people, in particular customers and fans to share their opinions and thoughts for those with shared and similar interests. The researcher suggests that Irish organisations need to generate personal content which creates a sense of community. Social media networking contains a group of like-minded people, fans, and customers who all share a common interest. Therefore, the researcher would recommend that it is necessary for organisations to facilitate this online community, encourage customer engagement and channel customer interaction, thoughts, opinions and memories on an open platform. Furthermore, an informal integrated online community generates a forum of dialogue and conversations which ultimately enhances two-way communication.

### **6.11 Organisational Limitations to Social Media Networking**

It is essential for Irish organisations to acknowledge the limiting factors. The researcher recommends for organisations to embrace the technological developments and adapt to the transformations. It is imperative for organisations to adjust with the changes in order to stay current and to maintain a competitive advantage. As Rachel from B.T states “By the way the world is moving digitally, I think social media is just part in parcel of how we’ll communicate in the future.” In addition, time constraints can be an issue for organisations in keeping social media relevant. Although it is a challenge to keep social media up to date, it is nevertheless essential for organisations. Therefore, the researcher suggests that organisations maintain active social media networks and generate a good balance of personal communication to keep the audience engaged in the online forum. “It’s about creating a balance with statuses, with good relevant content that is personal and that interests the customers.”

### **6.12 Long-Term Social Media Strategy**

The researcher suggests that Irish organisations must embrace the changing technology. Irish organisations must acknowledge the concept of social media networking as a communication strategy for achieving organisational objectives including connecting with customers, developing relationships, enhancing reputation which ultimately contributes in developing customer engagement and brand awareness. As Rachel from B.T. suggests “It’s all a learning curve, seeing what works and what doesn’t because it is still a new channel of

communication and it's always changing.” Change is inevitable so the researcher advises organisations to stay relevant and keep up to date with social media changes as it may achieve long term organisational goals.

### **6.13 Further Study**

As Tench and Yeomans (2009) states “Academic Research aims to generate theories and models, to describe and analyse trends in PR.” (p. 199) With regards to this research, this study reflects a realistic outlook of two case study examples in the Irish context. Therefore this research overall can facilitate those engaging in similar research pursuits in the field of P.R and communications. Furthermore, the research examines the current social media trends of two National Irish brands and therefore would be of relevance for existing Irish organisations who have a social media strategy.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

Based on the overall findings and analysis the researcher can conclude with the hypothesis that social media networking is supporting customer engagement and brand awareness. The key findings outlined the attributes of social media networking in the form of relationships, reputation, community, trust and communication. With regard to the aspect of customer engagement, it is apparent how the formation of positive relationships between an organisation and its publics, are significant in establishing successful communication networks, but also in fostering an organisations reputation. Furthermore, it conveys how communication networks, like social media networking, can impact peoples general beliefs and is therefore a powerful resource in determining an organisations reputation.

Two-way communication on social media is a vital element for Irish organisations. The results demonstrate that social media networking is a new channel of communication which can help Irish organisations. Customer engagement and interaction is increasing considerably due to the dynamic in technology. The research provides an overall positive view that two way communication can facilitate organisations with regards to various key aspects. The results conclude that the effective use of two-way communication can generate interaction and develop positive relationships with customers. Social media is essentially helping organisations to “reduce the gap” in order to establish “favourable relationships” with customers as stated by Tench and Yeomans (2009)

The research highlights the limitations but portrays the organisational incentives that can be achieved through the effective use of social media networking. There is no control with social media. However, the organisation can guide and direct the communication to benefit the brand and foster positive relationships. It is necessary for Irish organisations to adapt with the technological changes in order to maintain a competitive advantage and to stay connected with customers on social media. “Public Relations will continue to transform and the changes you see are monumental. For better or for worse, a career in PR means handling communications in the public spotlight because of the increasing use of social media.” (Breakenridge, 2012, 1)

Social media is an emerging phenomenon that is providing organisations with an opportunity to enrich the interactive exchanges in an online forum while building positive relationships with their customers in the absence of face-to-face communication. As Rachel from BT explains social media is evolving communication so organisations need to adapt with the

changes. “Social media is taking customer relationships to the next level and it’s taking it to a different place where years ago brands could not have gone.”

**The study formulates the research hypothesis that Irish organisations who utilise effective two-way symmetric communication on social media networking can enhance customer engagement and brand awareness.**

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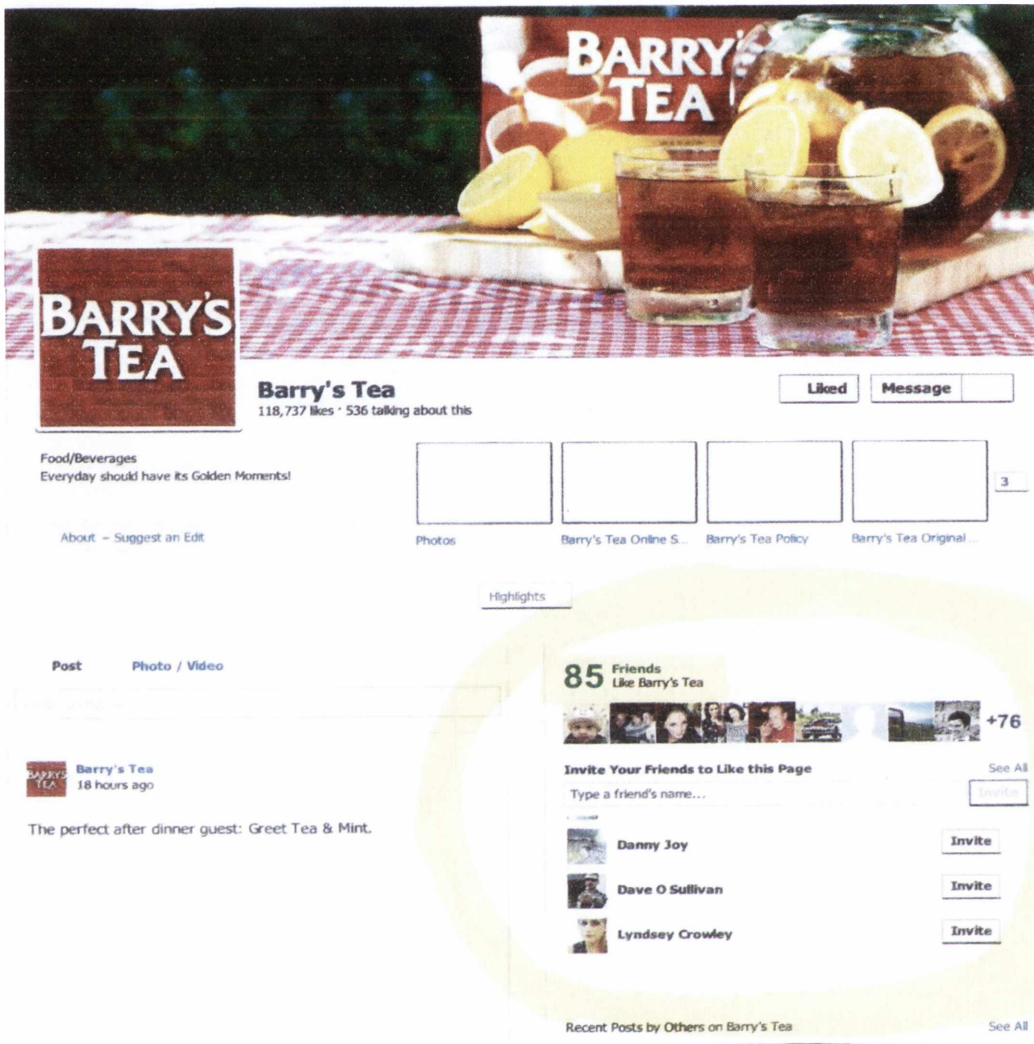
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## Appendix A) Barry's Tea Social Media



The focus group participants were sourced from the Barry's Tea Facebook page as mutual friends to the researcher and the organisation. A sample group was chosen with three male and three female from various professional backgrounds. The sample were not friends with Truly Irish on Facebook.

## Appendix A) Barry's Tea Social Media

**BARRY'S TEA**  
Barry's Tea  
July 31

A lovely couple were keeping us updated on their tea-rific camping holiday over on our Twitter page (@BarrysTeaTweets). They then delighted us with the news that they got engaged and we were thrilled that our tea was a part of the moment. To celebrate, we made them this special box of Barry's Tea. We raise our cups to you, Alison Chat (Off) in moments that you've shared over Barry's Tea?



Like · Comment · Share

125 6 3

Personal and intimate content helps organisations to build the human face on social media. It portrays close and informal relationships with customers while enhancing the organisations reputation.

**BARRY'S TEA** Barry's Tea  
July 26

Love a late night cup of tea but want to ensure you catch some zzz's? Why not try our decaf tea that won't stop you dreaming.



Like · Comment · Share

198 17 12

**BARRY'S TEA** Barry's Tea  
July 26 near Dublin

Dublin tea fans! Want to throw the ultimate tea party or summer picnic? Head over to Dublin's Q102 & FM104's Facebook pages for the chance to win grocery vouchers and delicious Barry's Tea hampers!

**BARRY'S TEA** FM104  
*Win!*

The best way to start your day is with Jim-Jim & Nobby on The FM104 Strawberry Alarm Clock weekdays from 6am. Andy Preston will keep you going through your work day with FM104's 10-3 show. From 3pm Ben Murray is in to get you home from work on FM104's The Jam. Kilian O'Sullivan is here from 7pm in...

Page: 167,281 like this

Like · Comment · Share

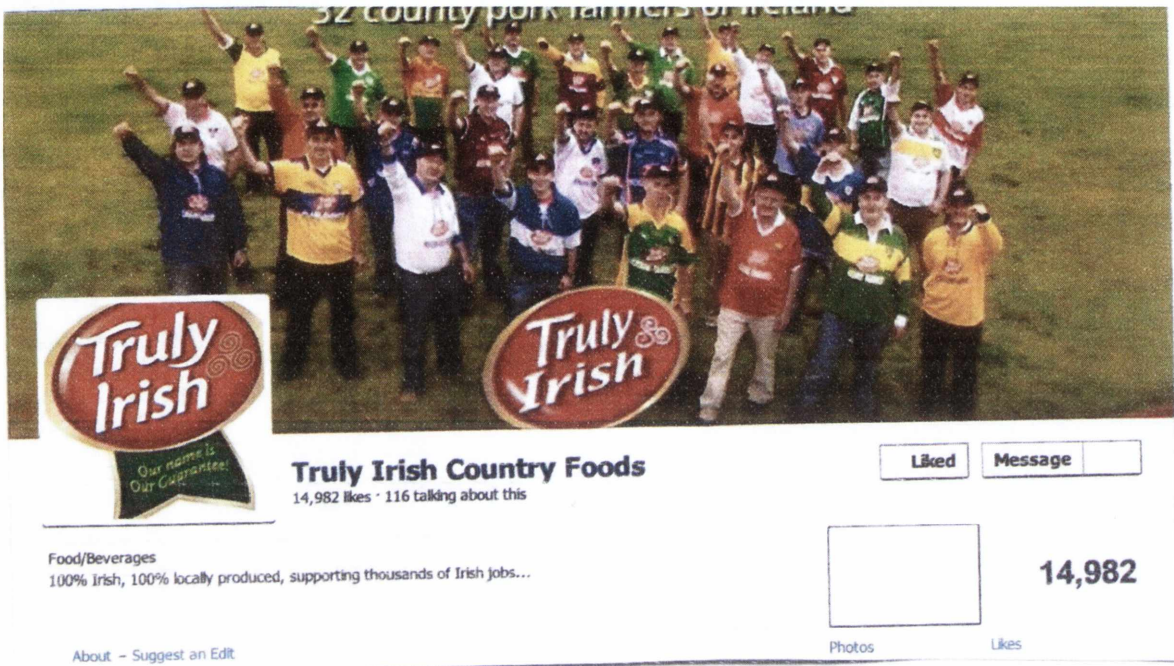
8

**BARRY'S TEA** Barry's Tea  
July 24 near Dublin

Galwegian fans! Are you dreaming of a big dinner party full of delicious delights? We're here to make that a reality. Enter our competition on Galway Bay FM's Facebook page for your chance to win shopping vouchers!

The left image illustrates Barry's promoting the brand message and product. The focus group refer to this as "marketing and subliminal marketing" with linking back to the product. The right post shows how Barry's share information and 'give back to loyal customers.' The focus group acknowledge this as "knowledge and information sharing" with their publics.

## Appendix B: Truly Irish Social Media



Pictures of the Facebook Page above and videos below shows how the organisation uses social media to promote the brand image and Irish identity.

Filters ▾

Popular on YouTube

- Music
- Sports
- Gaming

CHANNELS FOR YOU

- YouTube Spotlight
- The YOMYOMF Network
- Alex Day
- Truthloader
- danisnotonfire

Browse channels

Sign in now to see your channels and recommendations!

Sign in >



**Truly Irish - JFC Innovation Awards 2012**  
by **Irish Farmers Journal** · 3 months ago · 59 views  
Truly Irish - Great tasting natural pork products which are Bord Bia Quality marked & approved. www.trulyirish.ie Finalist in the JFC ...  
HD



**Truly Irish Ad**  
by **bimentaldisease** · 3 years ago · 6,326 views  
Truly Irish Country Foods advertise sausages, rashers and ham. Song is 'A prayer for the dead' by Ornsslaught ...



**Truly Irish funny clip of Head Office**  
by **wesdrtyuh8j** · 1 year ago · 2,137 views  
Ever wondered what happens in the Truly Irish Head Office? Here is just a regular day at the office...enjoy!!!!



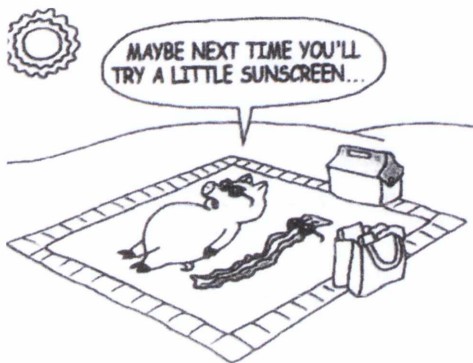
**Truly Irish pig climbs pole**  
by **wesdrtyuh8j** · 11 months ago · 2,252 views  
Truly Irish pigs are like no other pigs, they can climb!!!! Percy, the Truly Irish pig faced all his fears in the climb of his life and is ...



**Are you truly Irish?**  
by **Eleanore Sharkey** · 2 months ago · 20 views  
The so called Druid decedents can tell whether Celtic blood flows through your veins or not!

## Appendix B: Truly Irish Social Media.

Below is a sample of the type of content utilised by Truly Irish on social media to engage customers. A mix of content is generated to enhance conversations with customers. The focus group acknowledge how the imagery promotes the product. The use of humor and comedy status conveys the “human face” of the company. The company use imagery of an Irish celebrity Nevan Maguire to promote the quality of the product.



Like · Comment · Share 40 7 43

 Truly Irish Country Foods  
June 4

We'd like to thank everyone who visited our stand during the 5 days of Bloom in the Park, it was really great to meet you all.

And don't forget, Truly Irish is available in Dunnes, SuperValu, Tesco, Superquinn, Spar and Eurospar!!

Truly Irish, it's not just a name...it's our guarantee!!!

Like · Comment · Share

25

 Truly Irish Country Foods  
May 5

Nothing better on a lazy Sunday morning than a Truly Irish Beechwood Smoked Rasher sandwich! Mmmm... Delicious.

How do you like yours?



Like · Comment · Share

11 1 1



Seasonal. Fresh. Irish.

Like · Comment · Share

9 3

 Truly Irish Country Foods  
June 6

Hello Summer!! BBQ season has well and truly arrived!!

Truly Irish Jumbo Sausages (82% Pork content) are the perfect accompaniment to any BBQ!!



Like · Comment · Share

10 1 1

 Truly Irish Country Foods  
June 1

Nevan Maguire popped by to check out our gluten free sausages!

Bloom special 2 packs for only 5 Euro



Like · Comment · Share

13

 Truly Irish Country Foods

## Appendix C): Barry's Tea Email Correspondence

+You Search Images Mail Drive Calendar Sites Groups Contacts More

**CIT** Student Mail miriam.oregan@mycit.ie

Mail Move to inbox More 11 of 290

COMPOSE **Interview Questions** **mcguire**  
rmcguire@barrystea.ie


**Inbox (170)**  
Starred  
Important  
Chats  
Sent Mail  
**Drafts (53)**  
College dinners (1)  
CV (1)  
Documents  
Follow up  
Misc  
Priority  
More

**Miriam O Regan** <miriam.oregan@mycit.ie> 22 Jul  
to rmcguire  
Hello Rachel

Please find the questions attached for the interview tomorrow at 3.30pm.

As I mentioned earlier, the interview will be recorded for the purpose of the research. Overall, it is an informal semi-structured interview. Very casual, more of a conversation really. I hope thats ok with you.  
If you have any questions about the interview, please feel free to email me or ring me on 087 9116739.  
I'll see you tomorrow,

Kind Regards,  
Miriam O'Regan

 **Barrys interview questions.docx**  
15K View Download

Show details

Email correspondence with Rachel Maguire for the interview.

## Appendix D): Truly Irish Email Correspondence

+You Search Images Mail Drive Calendar Sites Groups Contacts More

**CIT** Student Mail miriam.oregan@mycit.ie

Mail Move to inbox More 9 of 290

COMPOSE **RE: Semi-structured interview** **Caroline Daly**  
caroline@trulyirish.ie

**Inbox (170)**  
Starred  
Important  
Chats  
Sent Mail  
**Drafts (53)**  
College dinners (1)  
CV (1)  
Documents  
Follow up  
Misc  
Priority  
More

**Caroline Daly** Hi Miriam, My name is Caroline and I'm currently looking after soc 23 Jul  
**Miriam O Regan** <miriam.oregan@mycit.ie> 25 Jul  
to Caroline  
Hello Caroline,

Thank you so much for getting back to me.  
Please find attached a list of the interview questions that I will be asking.

The interview is semi-structured. Its informal and more of a conversation really. It's very relaxed and you just say your thoughts about social media for Truly Irish.  
You mentioned on the phone that Monday 29th is suitable for the interview? What time would you like? I can come down at whatever time.  
If you have any questions about the interview or want clarity on the questions please feel free to email me or ring me on 087 9116739.

Kind Regards,  
Miriam

Show details

Email correspondence with Caroline Daly for the interview.

## **Appendix E): Barry's Tea Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

**For: Rachel Maguire**

**Research Title:** How is Social Media Networking supporting Customer Engagement and Brand Awareness? A PR Perspective in an Irish Context.

### **Prior to interview**

- About myself
- Give background of my research
- Explain about the recording (dictophone)
- Consent form

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Q1 Rachels background**

Q1. Tell me: About yourself / your role in Barry's / your input in Barry's social media.

#### **Q2. Beginning of Barry's social media**

Q2. What does social media mean to you?

Q3. History of Barry's – How did they start engaging in social media?

Q4. Did Barry's specifically develop a social media strategy? And why?

#### **Q5. Publics**

Q5. Who do you regard as your important publics in the organisation? (e.g. employees, customers, shareholders, etc.) Are there certain categories that you focus on?



## **Social Media**

*Barry' Tea use a wide variety of social media networks: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Tumblr, Pinterest, etc.*

Q6. How do you think each of the networks are helping Barry's to engage with the customers?

Q7. Which **one** do you find the most effective for interacting and communicating with customers. And why?

## **Customer Interaction**

Q8. Has Barry's seen increased interaction with customers on social media?

Q9. From your observation, what influences conversations on social media? / What engages customers?) (E.g. certain type of content, videos or photos?)

Q10. How do all the different networks interact with one another? / How are they all **linked**?

Q11. How has two-way communication helped Barry's to connect with customers and develop relations?

## **Additional factors.**

Q12. Overall what do you think are the main **advantages** for Barry's using social media?

Q13. Are there any **limitations** for using social media.

## **Conclusion**

Q14. What is the longterm strategy for Barry's social media? (future objectives?)

**ENDS**

## **Appendix F): Truly Irish Semi- Structured Interview Questions**

**For: Caroline Daly**

**Research Title:** How is Social Media Networking supporting Customer Engagement and Brand Awareness? A PR Perspective in an Irish Context.

### **Prior to interview**

- About myself
- Background on my research
- Explain about the recording (dictophone)
- Consent form

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Q1 Carolines background**

Q1. Tell me: About yourself / your role in Truly Irish / your input in the social media for Truly Irish.

#### **Q2. Beginning of social media for Truly Irish**

Q2. What does social media mean to you?

Q3. History – How / why did they start engaging in social media?

Q4. Did Truly Irish specifically develop a social media strategy? And why?

#### **Q5. Publics**

Q5. Who do Truly Irish regard as important publics? (e.g. employees, customers, shareholders, etc.) Is there a certain category you focus on?

## **Social Media**

*Truly Irish use a variety of social media networks: Facebook, Twitter & YouTube.*

Q6. How do you think each of the networks are helping you to engage with customers?

Q7. Which **one** do you find the most effective for interacting and communicating with customers. And why?

## **Customer Interaction**

Q8. Have you seen increased interaction with customers on social media?

Q9. From your observation, what influences conversations on social media? / What engages customers?) (E.g. what type of status, content, video or photo?)

Q10. How do all the different networks interact with one another? / How are they all **linked**?

Q11. Do you think two-way communication is helping Truly Irish to connect with customers and develop relations?

## **Additional factors.**

Q12. Overall what do you think are the main **advantages** for Truly Irish using social media?

Q13. Are there any **limitations** for using social media.

## **Conclusion**

Q14. What is the longterm strategy for the companies social media? (future objectives?)

**ENDS**

## Appendix G): Semi-Structured Interview Participant Consent Form

### Written Consent Agreement

Name of Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Job position: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please read and **tick** the following (✓)*

Do you consent for this interview to be recorded with a dictophone? (to aid the researcher in the process of understanding) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you consent for the researcher to quote from this interview for the purpose of research, using your real name in association with the content you are willing to share? \_\_\_\_\_

If necessary please state any contingencies to researchers use of the interview here:

*Please read and **initial** the following statements:*

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that this research is intended for the study of how Social Media Networking is supporting customer engagement in Irish organisations by Miriam O'Regan for the Masters degree in Public Relations and New Media at Cork Institute of Technology.

\_\_\_\_\_ Subject to the confidentiality conditions stated above, I authorise Miriam O'Regan to use this interview for the purpose of research which may be published.

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed name

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## **Appendix H: Rachel Maguire, Barry's Tea Interview Transcript**

**Thank you very much for meeting with me today.**

No worries

**Rachel would you like to tell me about your about yourself, your role here in Barry's Tea and your input in Barry's social media.**

I'm Rachel Maguire, I'm the marketing assistant here in Barry's Tea for three years. My background is in general business and specialising in marketing. I've a general commerce degree and I did my masters in marketing. Here at Barry's Tea, I would have a very substantial part in social media for the company. I work with the PR to create and manage all the posts that are generated, manage the engagement, manage the consumer interaction, everything like that. Obviously, make sure everything that is portrayed is portrayed correctly for the company.

**What does social media mean to you?**

I suppose social media is a new channel to engage with your consumers, engage with your fans and in some ways pay them back for all their loyalty over the years because through social media you are able to give them directly in terms of advice, in terms of new products, in terms of competitions and everything like that. It really is brand to consumer specific communication. There's no middle player within it. In a way it seems one-to-one. It's a direct route to your fans and to your customers, so we place high importance on it.

**How did they start engaging in social media?**

Purely with the growth of social media. When social media took over from the likes of texting, took over from the likes of t.v. and for people meeting up coffee. Obviously, people still do that but a lot more people now connect more through social media with long lost friends or people they see every day. When people started to do that, I think people began to see this as a way straight into a persons life and straight into a channel of communication. So yeah ,with the growth of social media, that is when we really took off with it in Ireland.

**So you saw it as an opportunity really to connect directly with people through social media?**

Yeah, like at Barry's Tea the consumers are number one, the fans are number one. Everything Barry's Tea does is for the consumers and I suppose by providing them with a direct link where they can voice complaints, they can voice questions, anything like that. Anything we can do to help them was the main reason for starting social media.

**Do you think the recession contributed to the increase in social media as well because organisations are under a lot of financial pressure now? Like do you think social media is an opportunity for them to save on more traditional methods of marketing?**

To be honest, I think it was more an emerging trend. Companies are still spending money on traditional methods because at the end of the day some of our customers would not be on social media. It's not like the network 48, you know "Go Conquer", the majority of their consumers would be on social media so the majority of their spend would probably be on social media to get to those consumers so it's targeted. So if your target market are all on social media, then yes you probably could save money on the traditional channels but when your target market is split on different channels, you can't, because you have to appeal to everyone you know.

**Did Barry's specifically develop a social media strategy? And why? As you mentioned the fans, was it really just to connect with the fans and for their loyalty.**

Well the strategy was always just to portray the Barry's Tea message. Portray our Irishness, our history, our love of tea, to share that with the consumers and to have them share it back with us. It was more to connect with them really and that everyone had a forum for whatever they wanted to talk about. If they wanted to talk to us about tea, they could talk about tea, or if they wanted to talk about our blending. We saw it just as a strategy to have a more open forum for the consumers to talk to us.

**Kind of like a community?**

It's a community, like definitely. To be honest I think our fans do see it that way. I think most organisations see social media in a way for them to share a lot more of the brand personality. That at the end of the day is what I really get from strategy. It's to share more brand

personality with your loyal consumers who are interacting with the company. That's just the main thing, to make sure that everyone is engaging with everyone.

**Who do Barry's regard as their important publics? You mentioned the fans, is it the fans really, current customers? (E.g. Employees, customers, shareholders, etc.) Are there certain categories that you focus on?**

It's definitely our most loyal consumers, our tea fans who just love tea in general, not just Barry's Tea. It's the Irish nation who love Barry's Tea. We are the number one tea brand in the country and we're blended right here in Cork. We always want to have a good relationship with the Irish people and our most loyal consumers. So that's the main thing. So it will be the tea fans, the consumers.

**Barry's Tea use a wide variety of social media networks. There's a lot, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Tumblr, Pinterest, etc. How do you think each of the networks are helping Barry's to engage with the customers?**

I think social media, especially Facebook has become part in parcel of most peoples every day lives. Like, even my friends and myself, we spend half our time communicating through Facebook or Twitter and all the other social media. But I definitely think Facebook is a huge part of everyones life. So, it helps us in that regard to engage with the consumers to see, you know *"is it time for tea yet today?"* That kind of thing. Facebook has almost become like a friend, which sounds weird.

**No I understand**

It's something that people go on to. It's a forum for everyone to chat. So to us Facebook is just that. Maybe it's making sure that we are a touch point with everyone. So when they log on everyday, they can check in with us. The customers are involved and connected with us.

**Would you say it's a means of building relationships with your customers?**

I wouldn't say building, I'd say enhancing. Yeah, Facebook is more of a relationship enhancer. I think it's not a relationship builder because people aren't going to like the page if they haven't heard of the product. So, it's people who like the page already know the product. They already have a relationship with the product so it's more that we are able to enhance and heighten our engagement with them. And Twitter, Twitter is just kind of a fun thing. We

just love, love, love when people Tweet at us their cups of tea or you know “*I’m just about to have a cup of tea*” and actually a lot of people who are abroad, a lot of expats love tweeting.

**I’ve seen that.**

When they receive their tea boxes from us abroad, we love to see that. So it's just that. It’s definitely real time, like if we’re sampling or anything like that. If people are near, we like to let them know that we are sampling or that they can come down and have a cup of free tea or whatever we are giving out on the day. So we would use it more like that, for awareness really. And then obviously the images that's purely just for awareness and promotion.

**Yeah I’ve seen the Flickr images, they’re very good. Very vibrant.**

Yeah, it’s good. It’s just showing people that we are out there really. I think that we are ya know not just in shops but we’re also kind of out there on the streets, at marathons, whatever, just handing out some cups of tea to people and just reinforcing ourselves you know.

**Which one do you find the most effective for interacting and communicating with customers. And why?**

**Is there any specific one that you find the best?**

I think that for us personally probably Facebook. Am, I know that Twitter is you know obviously growing pretty rapidly and growing fast and for certain brands that would be the most effective but personally I think here for us its Facebook. Am just due to the amount of people that we actually have as fans on Facebook, who like the page and theres a substantial amount more and that’s it to be totally honest. And I suppose aswell with Facebook your posts can stay on peoples walls for longer

**How do all the different networks interact with one another? Like do you have them all linked up?**

No we keep them separate enough but if we have a message that we feel strong enough we would send throughout so we keep them separate like we wouldn’t have our Tweets going live on our Facebook page or anything like that. No, I think they are two separate entities so I think in some ways you don’t want to be duplicating the message or anything like that. Like sometimes that can happen if you link them too much.

**Have Barrys seen increased interaction with customers on social media?**



We've gotten a lot more, I think consistent with it, so we'll say when Barry's Tea first started out with social media, although it was consistent, the engagement wouldn't have been quite as high as it is now...

**I suppose it very new aswell at the time?**

Very new! It was very at a testing stage, you know there was different stuff going on, posts were written differently, images were different all that sort of stuff. Whereas now, we've really got the swing of things so its just to keep it going. We know what works, we know what doesn't work, we know how to engage people and a lot more people now I definatley think because they have seen our Facebook page and they see that we are the brand to answer to a query or complaint or if people have a question. You know even just a statement to say that I love the brand, I love the tea, or I love whatever. We are there and they know that there is someone who is actually going to reply to them and who is actually going to answer them. That people will actually engage with the page.

**So from your observation, what influences conversations on social media? Is there specific content that you put up like images or do you find competitions or tips about gets a good reaction from people?**

People love their names on the Barrys Tea boxes. Everyone absolutely goes crazy for it. Am, that's just giving people ownership. I mean when I saw it, I was 'Oh my god Rachels Tea' I nearly freaked when I saw it. But you could say that this kina post will get you seven hundred and something likes or this post will get your one hundred comments ... to be honest it changes a lot. I think images use to be quite effective whereas now I think people prefer to kind of like questions where they can actually engage and give their opinion on, which we love to see aswell. That seems to get a good reaction from people

**So something they can relate to?**

Something they can relate to yes but something like they can give their own opinion on and give their own answer to and they can give like 'Would you drink your tea with sugar or not?' Some people are like two teaspoons, two cubes, one cube, none. Like that type of thing. Its actually nice to see because people want to engage with us in that sort of way with the brand. The competition on Facebook have put in a lot of rules and regulations in terms of what you can and cant do and we stick very stringently to those rules. But we do the odd competitions but we wouldn't be doing the 'like' competitions, that's obviously against the

rules. But the content people would relate to most would be stuff that really engages them like asking them questions, asking them for their own opinions. Like 'A time for tea' and people are like 'Oh four o'clock in the day, eleven o'clock in the morning, first thing in the morning, last thing at night' that kind of thing really increases the engagement with customers.

**Ya I saw that and I saw the post with the Iced Tea recipe, I loved that, I was actually googling that last week..**

Oh really?

**I really liked that so when I saw it on Facebook, I was like yes**

Ya we definitely do try to kind of try to stay relevant in terms of the events like for St. Patrick's day we had Paddy's tea, or the summer we had the iced tea because it was insanely hot. For Christmas, we had Santa's tea. That kind of thing. We try to stay relevant and we try to keep it current so in keeping with people are looking for at that particular time.

I really liked as well the way people can share their 'Golden moment' using different networks like Flickr and Facebook. The woman with her 'Putting the kids to bed and im having the Barry's Tea.' I was just skitting. As I was going through them, I thought 'That is such a good idea'.

Barry's is exactly that, it is a sharing brand. That's why it's about the content of the questions because it's about people sharing their own experiences with us and with the brand and being able to say nice I have the kids in bed, I can sit down and have my cup of tea and that type of thing and your getting just an insight into that Barry's tea drinker and that's really nice to see I think. From my own study of social media it is the message that we can send, it is a very strong and engaging message. People have their own association to the brand and to the tea and have their own memories with the tea and they want to share them. So it makes our work that little bit easier.

**Definitely. How has two-way communication helped Barry's to connect with customers and develop relations?**

It definitely has enhanced relationships with the customers sharing and being able to share their moments with us and us being able to give whatever we can through social media whether that is advice, information, or our history, our background, whatever we can do it is enhancing that for them. It is giving them a little more insight into us and us getting a little more insight into them. So as I said it is taking the relationship to the next level and its taking it to a different place where years ago brands could not have gone.

**So overall what do you think are the main advantages for Barrys using social media? You already mentioned enhancing relationships, communicating with them?**

The main advantage would definatley be to enhance the relationship with customersto share their moemtns but also to provide any information that people want to know because I think Transparency in todays world is needed and I think social media does provide that platform to be transparent with your consumers. So transparency, knowledge sharing, enhancing of customer relationships and fun. You can have a bit of fun with the consumers and you can actually show them a bit of your brand personality which I think is really important aswell. We want everyone to know that we are an Irish family owned business so there is a lot of history to this brand.

**Yes I really that off social media and I really get a sense of community and fun as you said.**

Ya I think everyone has a tie and an investment into the brand and everyone knows that this is brand is part of Irish culture for a long time now so there are memories with the brand and its nice to see that on social media.

**What about any negative factors? Do you find any limitations to using social media.**

You know we actually probably welcome, well obviously not complaints but we strive for a quality brand and quality tea which we do provide but sometimes it is nice to know if anything is wrong, that they have a channel to communicate to us and we can try to sort it out. We havnt, touch wood, been stung majorly through social media, like maybe McDonalds with their Twitter campaign last year. Speaking not from Barrys or from a brand, speaking from a person on social media and what disadvantages it can provide, I think that it could provide a forum where companies could really let themselves up against harsh criticism and do more damage than good. Some people could view it as disingenuous or its not truthful or anything like that some people would perceive it. I don't think we are perceived to be bad in

any way or negatively through social media. I think that some companies people could view them as that. By with the way the world is moving digitally, I think social media is just part in parcel of that now and with what. Obviously it is not about advantages or disadvantages, its just about fact and this is what happens on it.

**What is the long-term strategy for Barrys social media?**

Our long-term strategy for Barry's tea is to keep going, to keep engaging with our fans, the tea drinkers, with our consumers, to stay relevant, to stay up to date and to move with the times and make sure that we are constantly contemporary and modern and just keep developing. It is continuous progression, it is continuous adaption with constant monitoring and making sure that you are portraying yourself correctly. So stay with the times, stay relevant and keep up to date with everyone are the main goals I suppose.

**Ok well thanks very much Rachel**

No problem at all

**ENDS**

## **Appendix I) : Caroline Daly, Truly Irish Interview Transcript**

**Alright Caroline, I would like to say thank you for meeting with me this morning and apologies about the delay.**

Ah don't worry about that.

**If you would like to tell me a bit about yourself and your role in Truly Irish and your input into the social media for the organisation.**

Perfect, well I started working in Truly Irish about a year ago, I came into the country working on researching the German markets and working in office administration and that led into accounts. I took over the various social media networks with another colleague. I now run it myself for the past two months.

**So how did Truly Irish begin using social media?**

**So what does social media mean to you? What comes to mind when you think social media?**

In the broadest sense, it is to gather information, to communicate, express your opinion, some people more than others, there's a lot of people expressing their opinions through social media. For businesses, I think it is very important for businesses, it is a relatively cheap means of communicating your brand message, so it is all about building your brand so with social media you can build trust through that. You can educate people about your brand. I mean Truly Irish starting using social media, particularly Facebook, because that's what we tend to concentrate on. It was back in 2009 and I think that's because our main audience, for say our household buyer, our main target market would be the age range that uses Facebook as oppose to say Twitter. The household buyers are middle aged, well twenty five to fifty year olds would use Facebook more than other networks like Twitter. So with social media we can build brand awareness, increase our influence, its repeat exposure for our fan base to see our logo everytime we announce our new products.

**So would you say that its kind of like a new channel to engage with your consumers?**

Yes, more so than say our website, definitely. If you think about what happened before social media how did customers engage with the company. I know we still get calls to the office, I still take calls from customers but we get most of our comments, whether they be complaints or compliments through social media.

**Exactly, you mentioned there about costs and you said how ‘social media is a relatively cheap means of communication’, do you think the recession could have been an influential factor maybe for Truly Irish going towards social media?**

Like in general for most organisations I think they’re adapting towards social media because they are seeing its benefits and its costs are generally low. Id agree with that statement because for most organisations social media is a cost effective means of communication. I mean you can start ads on Facebook and they can run up massive costs if they are running for too long. I mean you need to create a good ade on Facebook to get a good return of investment and know who you want to target but you can set a limit. For example I have a relative and she started up a design business and she started to use Facebook because she doesn’t have a website. She uses a business page on Facebook to promote her business. She uses the ads occasionally to boost her page but she can still control how much she wants to spend, she doesn’t have to spend for a server to serve the website.

**What about traditional means of marketing, in terms of newspapers, billboards? Are you still using them? Is it kind of balanced or are you using social media more?**

We do still use traditional methods like the billboards, leaflets and the branded van but we are beginning to focus more towards social media because when you think about it our retailers, those who buy our products, they would monitor our social media channels with the other brands they have in store, to see if they have a good profile and a good reputation with their customers. So we are still using both traditional and new media but we are working on building the social media networks.

**So how did Truly Irish start engaging in social media?**

Well, it's about transparency, it looks so bad when a company does not have a Facebook page. If I am looking up a website, the website is not enough anymore, I want to see the social media pages, see their customers and how they are interacting.

**Did Truly Irish develop a social media strategy? And why? You mentioned it was back in 2009?**

Yes, it was back in 2009 when social media began to emerge. It just started and then all our customers were on it. It's a good way to educate them, provide information, as it develops more and more we can build our brand, our fan base here in Ireland we can build it up. We are looking more towards the UK now, mainland Europe and Australia with all the Irish emigrating over there and the US.

**So what was your strategy, to portray the image and the brand?**

Promoting our Irish image and getting our message out there that our products are 100% Irish. There's always that claim to be 100% Irish, so it's all about educating. I've done a lot of in store research and even after 4 years a lot of customers still don't know about Truly Irish. Even though it has been on the market for years, the market for pork and bacon is saturated so if you go into a supermarket you've a massive isle of pork and bacon products. So for us our social media strategy, it's all about educating and differentiating ourselves from the other brands, trying to get our message across and to distinguish ourselves with our quality Irish products. And we monitor our competitors pages as well.

**That's interesting so for Truly Irish social media is about promoting the Irish brand and delivering your brand message to consumers through educating and informing people. So who do Truly Irish consider to be the most important publics?**

It would be consumers. They would be our main priority with our social media. We do have 85 shareholders in the company so it is all about creating good social media channels, like Facebook, so when they look at it, they can see the how we are interacting with customers. And our retailers, when they get in contact with us, we always refer them to our social media so they can look at it and learn about us and our background, reputation, involvement with customers. It gives retailers an idea of how we interact with our customers. So those are our three main publics that we are focussed on.

**So I suppose you main publics overall can refer to your social media pages to see how the company portrays itself, how it interacts with customers and get a sense of the companys reputation.**

Yes exactly, our publics can see how we are interacting with our customers and learn about the company.

**Truly Irish use a variety of social media networks, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. How do you think each of the networks and helping you to engage with your customers.**

So Facebook, as I said already, there's a massive fan base we can reach on that network. The Facebook and Twitter are interlinked so when a status goes up on Twitter, it also goes up on Facebook. Our YouTube page isn't properly built up, it is a channel we want to explore, we have a few videos made. There is a lot of room for improvement with Twitter. It is a newer channel, we are still learning and seeing what works and what doesn't. It is more different to use. We've had a lot of customer interaction on Twitter but not to the same level as Facebook. Because of the fact, not as many people are using Twitter to connect with brands like people seem to use Twitter to connect with celebrities and public figures. With YouTube, I think it's in our interest to develop more of a visual video presence but I do think they need to be done properly. That will take time to develop. Social networks are helping us to engage with customers. We are reaching our customers in a way that was not possible before. We can now connect with our customers directly.

**You said how Facebook is your biggest social media network, would you say that Facebook has become part of peoples everyday lives?**

Facebook is undoubtedly the biggest social media network. It has become a huge part of peoples lives. Personally, judging from the amount of time I spend online, it is mostly on social media, as in Facebook. For Truly Irish, I'll always check and monitor our networks everyday because of the amount of interaction and comments we get from our customers on a daily basis, you just have to. I get private messages from customers either a complaint or a compliment or questions. If they don't post it up publicly, they'll send a private message. So people, like our customers are using social media all the time and are using the networks like Facebook because it is part of their daily routine and it has become the new way to communicate with us directly, whether publicly on our page or privately through an email.



**Would you say social media is a means of building relationships or enhancing relationships with your customers?**

That's a good question. Social media is about having conversations with our customers. Actually, when we first started using Facebook I had a conversation with one of our customers. He had a question about the change in ingredients in our recipes. His first message was not replied to. When I noticed the email, I replied to him answering his question and apologising for the delay. The customer was satisfied and thanked me for the reply. I was expecting a disgruntled reply. However, because I got back to him, he was very understanding and delighted with a reply. So in that situation by replying to him and responding to his query, it enhanced our relationship with our customer.

**He was satisfied with your response and communicating with him.**

He appreciated the response and I think it shows how social media is enhancing relationships with our customers. Our most successful responses tend to be the posts for giveaways and competitions. Our customers love a good giveaway, no matter what it is. I think it builds and enhances the relationships that are already there, that already exist, you know.

**I suppose the conversations and two-way communications are helping to develop the existing relationships with your customers.**

Yes it creates dialogue with our customers and that's why I'm trying to build up our social media networks but there are challenges regarding time constraints, to try to reply to every individual comment, email and post you get. That shows that you are responding and it makes it more personal but due to time constraints it makes it difficult.

**Course. Which one do you find the most effective for interacting and communicating with consumers? We already discussed Facebook.**

Yes Facebook, it is all based on the volume of people who use the network. Again, it's back to our target market. There's more of our customers on Facebook than Twitter and YouTube it's a video sharing network but it hasn't really developed as a means of constructive discussion.

**So overall have you seen increased interaction with your customers on social media?**

Yes, since I've started working with Truly Irish, I have seen an increase. We really focussed on Facebook to create conversations. There has been an increase in the number of comments, posts and private messages and as I said, I try to reply back as quickly as possible to them. I think that is one of the cardinal sins of social media, by not replying.

**As you said, I suppose people like seeing a reply back.**

Exactly, by replying back, I think it gives customers a thrill and it looks good for a company as it gives them a personal face. There are certain times we see increased interaction, for example when we have a show, like the ploughing, when we say *'come join us or tag your picture'* we see increased traffic going through our social media channels.

**So from your observation, content that gets people involved and that's personal increases interaction?**

Yes, we have our fans and customers who love to tag their pictures from the events which I think is great. And put up their own personal pictures and tag Truly Irish in their pictures and that is being shared among all their friends which is building our brand to others.

**Any other type of content that influences conversations?**

As I said the prize giveaways, our fans go mad for them. I found as well, lets say if you post up comedic picture, now at Truly Irish we don't put up pictures which shows a live pig, as a cute and cuddly animal because you need to make a distinction between a cute animal and your bacon and pork products. When we post up cartoon drawings, like when the heat wave started, we posted a cartoon drawing of two pigs out sunbathing and one turned into a rasher. Those kind of pictures are ok, you have distance, it's a cartoon, it's not a picture of the live piglet.

**Going back, you said there how customers love to get involved and tag their pictures**

Yeah, at events and shows we have people in three pig costumes who get photographed with customers. Those work well as a marketing tool for customer interactions with kids and customers but people also love to get their photo taken with them. So we are gaining from that, by posting the pictures online the fans can tag themselves, share it and promote the brand. Also posting pictures of food, that tends to be effective, with pictures of products

being used in a fry or rasher sandwich and posting comments such as *'Monday morning blues, what better way to fix it, than with a Truly Irish fry'*. Again, like we discussed, it's that type of personal content of postings which engage people in conversations. Personal and chatty dialogue style really. Getting people to express their opinions and their own comments to our posts and questions. For example, I put one up this morning asking our fans what meals do you use Truly Irish products for besides the fry because I met a guy one day in the shop who was buying several products of pudding and sausages so I asked him what he does with them. He said he puts the pudding into chicken breasts so I decided to use that as a question on Facebook and ask our fans to generate ideas on our products, create useful content and create a forum of conversations and interactions. So getting customers ideas and food recipes from customers by engaging in two way communication. So recipes, food pictures, pictures of our customers and fans at events and comedy statuses. Now at the moment I'm trying to build up a log of interesting sausage facts. Content that gets people thinking and then talk back to us with their thought and opinions.

**How has two-way asymmetric communication helped Truly Irish to connect with customers and develop relationships?**

Well going back to that customer example, where he contacted us asking about the change in recipe, although he was late getting a reply, he was satisfied when we communicated back to him. And with our statuses we can see the typical fans who always leave comments and engage with us and also leave personal messages saying how much they love the product. So two way communication is definitely enhancing our relationship with customers especially when you engage in dialogue with them. For customer service as well, yeah when especially if you have someone who has a complaint you can reply back to them immediately and directly in resolving the issue. We also get feedback about the products and new ideas from customers. We just updated our packaging and we were able to get peoples opinions about it. Most of the people loved the new packaging but some didn't like it so it's interesting to see peoples thoughts about it.

**So two-way communication really has helped Truly Irish to enhance your relationships and assist with customer service.**

Yes, because you need the two-way communication and that's what we are trying to develop on our social media. I try to put up a status every day. But I do find sometimes that if you see something in your personal feed coming up too often, there's a fine line where you can

become the page that people click 'hide from newsfeed'. It's about trying to get a balance with the statuses, with good relevant content that interests our customers. Every day? Every hour? I try to provide content once a day but there is a very fine line because I myself get quite annoyed when statuses and content from a person or company comes up too often and I hide it so either overlook it or delete it. So you have to be careful as you may lose some of your fanbase by overuse of content. Its all a learning curve, seeing what works and what doesn't because it is still such a new channel of communication and it is always changing. But if you don't respond or don't put statuses, it is nearly worse than not having a social media page or channel. It gives off a bad impression of the company, if they don't care about their social media, they don't care about other aspects like customer service. It just reflects poorly on the company if it's not maintained.

**Overall so what do you think are the main advantages for Truly Irish using social media? You said enhancing relationships, customer service, providing information, educating.**

Yes educating people about our brand and distinguishing our brand from other products. It's all about providing the knowledge to customers that our products are good quality products and that we're an Irish company. So promoting ourselves as a premium brand and promoting our Irishness. Building the fan base. Letting people know about our offers, our products. We are a young company and we are trying to grow in the economic downturn. Support Irish jobs and show our brand personality. Transparency as well with all our publics, showing everyone who we are and what we do.

**Are there any limitations to using social media, you mentioned already about time constraints.**

It's full-time work. You'd have to be logging on almost every hour to have a look and reply and some things can take some time to reply to, especially if you are trying to word a post and status, I don't want to make any mistakes. I want to make the post or message as clear as possible with no spelling mistake and trying to come up with new things to say. I've started doing a plan if we have an event coming up, to organise the week of statuses on the networks. I think it's good to do a plan for your daily comments because time is limited. So you need to make the time to maintain the page and if you don't maintain the page, then its showing customers that your not staying current. If something topical happens, like something in the news, I try to put up a comment relating to it, like the week of the our summer heatwave. But

id like to put even more time into our social media. It needs to be done because it is very important for companies and for Truly Irish to keep up to date with it and to keep engaging with our customers.

**So what is the long term social media strategy for Truly Irish?**

Keep on it, keep building it, keep building the fan base with customers in Ireland and the most important thing now is to start building the fan base with customers abroad. We are looking towards the U.K, mainland Europe. Also, to continue and improve our social media updates, develop our communication, continue two-way conversations and even keeping up to date with social media networks as they change. So keep maintaining the two-way communication to stay connected with our customers, expand our fan base by enhancing customer relationships and continue promoting our brand image.

**Anything else you would like to share?**

No I think we covered everything.

**Ok, that's brilliant Caroline, thank you so much for taking the time out of work.**

No problem at all.

**ENDS**

## Appendix J): Focus Group Participant Consent Form

### Written Consent Agreement

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Profession: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: Male / Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please read and **tick** the following (✓)*

Do you consent for this interview to be recorded with a dictophone and a camera recorder?  
(to aid the researcher in the process of understanding) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you consent for the researcher to quote from this interview for the purpose of research,  
using your real name in association with the content you are willing to share? \_\_\_\_\_

If necessary please state any contingencies to researchers use of the interview here:

*Please read and **initial** the following statements:*

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that this research is intended for the study of how Social Media  
Networking is supporting customer engagement in Irish organisations by Miriam O'Regan  
for the Masters degree in Public Relations and New Media at Cork Institute of Technology.

\_\_\_\_\_ Subject to the confidentiality conditions stated above, I authorise Miriam O'Regan  
to use this interview for the purpose of research which may be published.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix K) : Slide Show Presentation for Focus Group


# Focus Group



7<sup>th</sup> August 2013

# Introductions

- ✓ Name:
- ✓ Age:
- ✓ From:
- ✓ Profession:
- ✓ Tell me...





### *"How Social Media Networking is supporting customer engagement: An Irish Perspective"*

- Examining Irish organisations using social media for communication
- Why?
- How?
- Advantages/Disadvantages
  - Connecting with customers?
  - Fostering relationships?
  - Developing trust?




# Case Studies

# Why Focus Group?

- Informal
- Intimate
- Chatty
- Conversational
- Generate opinions & ideas
- Used in reference to interviews
- Consent forms... permission to quote

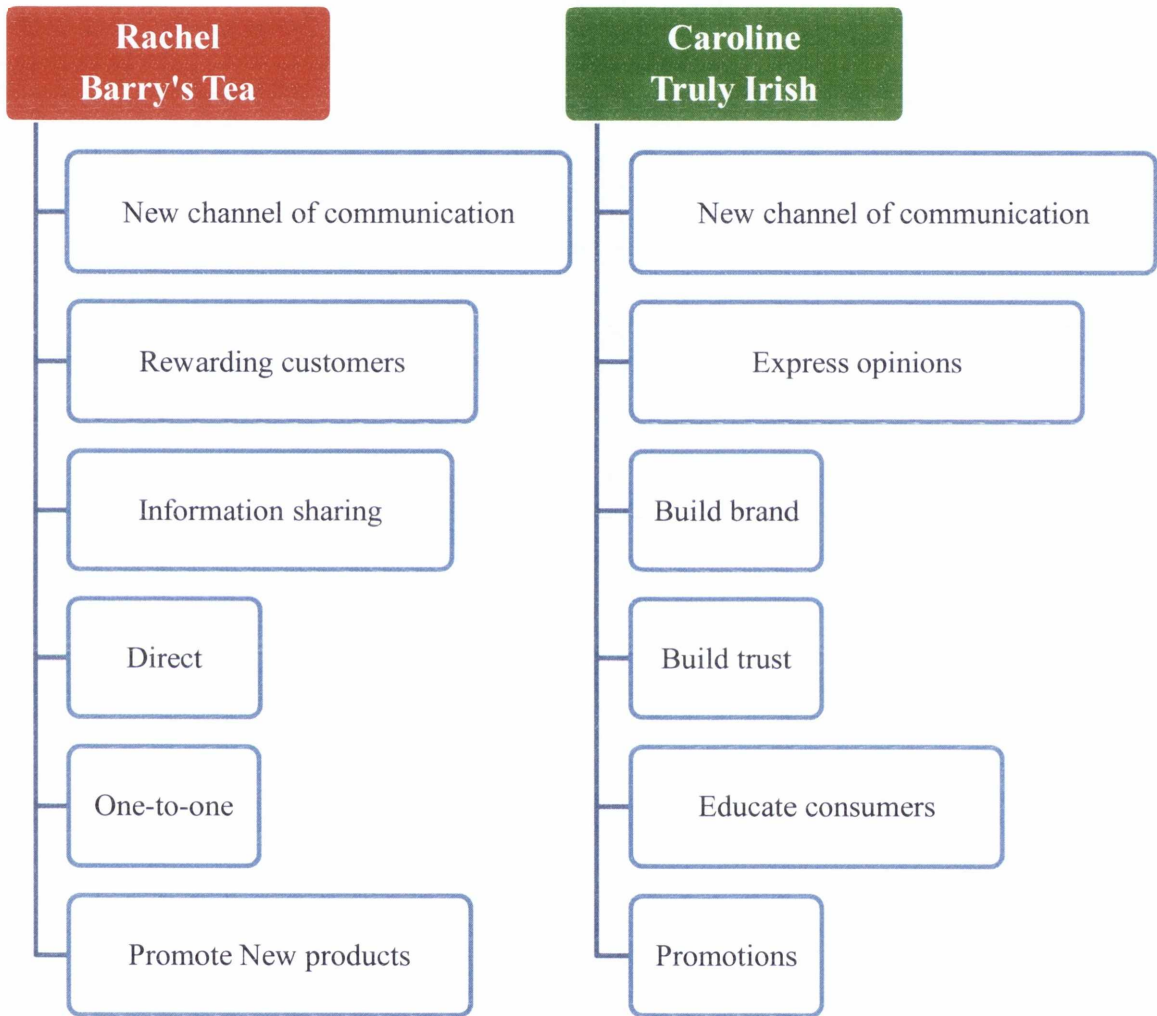



*Opinions, opinions, opinions!*

## Appendix L) : Data Analysis Charts & Graphs

Question: What does Social Media mean to you?

Semi-structured interview responses.



The researcher illustrates the interviewees understanding of social media into key categories.



## Appendix L) : Data Analysis Charts & Graphs

Question: What does Social Media mean to you?

### Focus Group Perspective of Social Media



The above spider diagram was constructed at the focus group. Participants responses were analysed into a visual representation of key terms which they provided to describe social media.

