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Evaluation of the deployment and adaptation of monitoring tools

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Purpose: The deployment and adaptation of the Monitoring tools by typical regional Small and Medium Enterprises (SME).

Results: Four regional SMEs, of the area of Ioannina in Greece, were recruited and agreed to take part in a study in which they adopted three Social Media Monitoring (SMM) tools in their daily business activity for an extended period of time. To ensure the proper deployment and adaptation of the Monitoring tools we focused on the individual needs of each SME. The results from this procedure are challenging for several reasons: (i) companies with varying profiles have diverse needs and therefore the effect of introducing SMM tools in their activities differed considerably, (ii) companies seem to have a mismatch of what social media can offer and what is demanded from them to do with purpose to increase their social image, (iii) it is not trivial to define a standardized SMM interface for all existing and future social media platforms that facilitates all SMEs in same way. Moreover, a common and very interesting effect that SMM tools introduction had to all SMEs was an increase in their Social media engagement as well as an interest to experiment with new kind of activities.

Conclusion: The value and the cost of the SMM tools adoption seemed to be understood of all SMEs, that they had realized also the positive effect of managing information gained through SMM.

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Deployment and adaptation of the monitoring tools

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to record the deployment and adaptation of Social Media Monitoring (SMM) tools by regional Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Four SMEs with completely different profiles from the area of Ioannina in Greece were participated in a series of interviews in order to evaluate the usefulness and ease of adoption of three SMM tools developed within the Intersocial project. Considering the needs and problems that may be occurred in regard to social media of typical regional SMEs, the current study contributes by giving an evaluation criterion to help them to select the tool that is compliant with their needs and goals.

The remainder of the document is structured as follows: Section 2 presents an overview of Social Media Monitoring Tools, whilst Section 3 describes the methodology was followed for the evaluation of the whole procedure as well as brief overview of the participating SMEs and the SMM tools that have been introduced to them. Section 4 focuses on the results of the actual comparison of the tools based on the criteria chosen. The last section presents the conclusions of the present study.

2. Social media monitoring tools

Given the increasingly large number of consumers using social media, SMEs cannot ignore the power that is weaved within its networks. People are using social media to express their needs and complaints, as well as opinions about proprietary products and services, and to compare them with solutions from other vendors (Stavarakantonakis et al., 2012). Due to the explosion of social media sites, marketers have an exponentially larger audience and the ability to instantly communicate with consumers (Perdue, 2010).

Today SMEs utilize a wide range of traditional and non-traditional methods to listen to customers; however, in recent years, survey researchers are facing difficulties in collecting data through the traditional methods of listening to clients. Moreover, the attractiveness of using free online sources of information is further sustained by the relative costliness and time-intensive nature of traditional survey research. As a result, in recent years, SMM tools and platforms have emerged to address the need for customer listening methods, as well as to harness the wealth of information available online in the form of user-generated content. These tools offer means for listening to the social media users, analysing and measuring their activity in relation to a brand or enterprise, process that can lead to valuable insights from the side of enterprises regarding which strategy they should employ, how customers view their services and solutions, what the SME should

expect in the future or which of their offered features are not as effective as estimated. The added value of SMM tools is that it offers access to real opinions of customers, complaints and questions, at real time, in a highly scalable way. Moreover, another advantage is given by the speed at which one can investigate a topic of interest, which greatly exceeds that of a traditional survey approach. There is no longer the need for sample identification, question construction, contact attempts, and data collection prior to the analysis – social media monitoring tools only require access to the online comments and mentions posted by customers.

The substance of retrieved information from social media through SMM tools is to understand better the way consumers behave to SMEs. Some insights that can be gained through SMM tools are: overall reputation of a brand, competitor's analysis, feedback about marketing campaigns, current issues and requests in regard to specific and products, new ideas for product development (Fensel et al. 2012). Therefore, identifying the information needs must be the first step in setting up a SMM project.

3. Methodology

With purpose to estimate and evaluate the deployment and adaption of the three SMM developed by Intersocial project from local SMEs, in their everyday activities, we have chosen to create a multi-phased evaluation study. Selected SMEs based in Ioannina had the chance to have for free an introduction to the specific tools and also training material, tutorials and support. Willing to make them familiar with the various tool functionalities we had prepared training material contained of various tasks and usage scenarios tailored for each SME individually.

In the first step of our procedure, participating SMEs were profiled in regard to their overall social media activities according to qualitative data collected through a pre-study interview. In the next step, we gave a period of one month to SMEs to become familiar with the SMM tools, supporting them whenever they asked. After this period, we contacted them again for a series of interviews which aimed to debrief the companies and detect attitude changes towards social media in order to gather insights about how the tools were perceived in terms of functionality, usability, usefulness as well as to assess the general impact on their social media activities.

The study also focuses on the basic features of the SMM tools, as well as on the personalised needs of each SME. The criteria applied in the evaluation were: objectives, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

Participating SMEs

In this section we present the the general profiles of the selected SMEs that participated in our study. We give general information about these local companies; we make a brief

description about their activities, number of employees as well as an overview of their web social presence.

BERRIS S.A.

Berris S.A. is an industry of bakery and related goods established in 2004. Starting with the idea of producing goods of “traditional quality” the company today is mainly producing traditional handmade sweet and salty cookies, with which supplies the Balkan market. On privately owned land in the industrial area of Ioannina, today Berris S.A. employs about 30 internal and external people in different posts (production, sales, promotion, etc.). The 10% of employee have higher education degrees while the rest of them have complete the basic education.

LAKMOS PLAST S.A.

Lakmos Plast S.A. is a plastics industry established in the industrial area of Ioannina in 2007. As a new innovative company, produces plastic goods with respect to environment and society. The company is focused in business to business (B2B) solutions and products. Its workforce entailed 15 employees that most of them are working in department of production.

ARCHONTIKO VOYAROU

Archontiko Boyarou is an agricultural enterprise based in the village Kalarrytes in Ioannina. This company is consisted by a traditional guesthouse, restaurant, and an area where visitors can come in contact with plants and animals of the Greek nature (i.e. boars, deers, chickens, ducks, turkeys, rabbits). The enterprise is a family business and employs 6 people.

GKOUNTAS TRADITIONAL SILVERSMITH

The art of processing of silver, but also the style of jewellery production in the region of Ioannina, has a long tradition as the folk art masterpieces are really known throughout Greece and abroad. The history of the city of Ioannina and of the region is connected with the tradition of folk art in silverware. Gkountas Traditional Silversmith is an individual traditional silver craft enterprise based in Ioannina. It employees 5 people which product, promote and sell unique silver art items (i.e. jewelleryes, decoration accessories, etc.).

Description of the SMM Tools

The purpose of this study is to record the deployment and adaption of SMM tools in local SMEs that could benefit from these tools by using them in daily activities in order to increase their social media presence and achieve their goals. For that reason three SMM tools were designed and developed by the Intersocial project (InterSocial Monitoring tool, Soneta, and ESA). In this section we give a brief description for each SMM tool that has been included in the study along with information about their capabilities.

INTERSOCIAL Monitoring Tool is a Facebook and Twitter specific search engine, built upon Facebook's and Twitter's publicly available APIs. The tool allows the user to search for specific keywords or phrases on the Timelines of Facebook and Twitter subscribers which they had denoted as being "Public". The tool can retrieve public posts from Facebook, Twitter or both simultaneously. The SMM capabilities of this tool are keyword monitoring, reputation management, competitor analysis, monitoring multiple networks.

ESA (Enterprise Social Aggregator for SMEs) tool allows the management and monitoring of three of the most widely used social network platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, and Google plus). Currently the tool is available both as a Wordpress widget and as an Android mobile application. In addition, ESA offers the possibility of calculating statistics of aggregated data from social media, by exploiting the Facebook and Twitter API (e.g. reaches, total mentions). It is an open source project and is available for download on Codeplex. The SMM capabilities of this tool are keyword monitoring, reputation management monitoring and management of multiple networks, data filtering and analytics.

SONETA is a tool that can be used to monitor and enhance the social media presence of an SME. The tool enables tracking of social media traffic in Twitter for a user-defined set of keywords within a user-specified time period and within user-defined geographical region(s). It can be used to recognize trending conversation in specific geographic region and returns data visualizations in the form of wordclouds, bubbleclouds and treemaps. The SMM capabilities of this tool are keyword monitoring, trend analysis, geolocation monitoring, reputation management, competitor analysis, data filtering and analytics, campaign monitoring.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation approach followed in the study began with a semi-structured interview which conducted capturing SMEs' business profiles, existing social media presence, policies, and needs. In the next step, we introduced to participant SMEs a set of SMM tools and we also offered them training sessions in order to get used them. The participating SMEs used the SMM tools for a period of four months, in which they had also our technical support. At the end of this period, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each SME in order to collect qualitative data on the deployment and adaption of the monitoring tools as an impact to their social activities. The semi-structured interviews were oriented to ask about the level of effort that was required on SME's part to learn and start using the tools as well to assess the sufficiency of the provided training material. The focus in the third phase was on the user experience the participants had with the social media tools included in the study. They were asked to comment about the usefulness, usability, learnability, and functionality of the SMM tools. The results of this study came from the analysis of all gathered qualitative data by using Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) techniques (Miles et al., 2013).

4. Results

This section presents the results from the evaluation study. In the first phase, we show the needs and problems in regard to Social Media as described by the SMEs in our first contacts and in the pre-study interviews and we analyze the results of the objective measurements and the assessment of the real-world impact of SMM tool usage. In the second phase, we present the results of the qualitative data analysis followed by some comments.

Phase 1

This phase started before the deployment of SMM tools. What we need as a first step at that time was to find the participated SMEs, discuss with them about their needs and problems in their social web presence, and understand their possibilities to use and work out with the information that they will get through these tools.

Berris S.A. had already a web presence and social media activities of this company were rather limited before their engagement with Intersocial project. After our first contact and discussion about the benefits they might have through a strong web social presence, they decided to update their webpage and to create social media profiles by using social media platforms Facebook, Twitter and Google+. Before that, only the general manager and the director of food safety used their personal social media Facebook accounts for networking and promoting reasons. They reported also that the average of spending hours per week on social media activities was too limited due to their duties and responsibilities in the company. The main reason that they decided to participate as volunteers in the study was to achieve with their engagement in social media a better communication with their consumers and to understand better their taste preferences in order to try new products in the labor market. The tools that could help them in their activities were those measuring the effectiveness of their posts as well as tools supporting them to build more effective promotions and campaigns and help them understand the needs of their followers.

The main characteristic of Lakmos Plast S. A. was the fact that the most employees are occupied in the department of production and no one was responsible for the management of the company's social media presence. The problem of this company in regard to social media was that the owner and at the same time manager of the company had so many other responsibilities and therefore had not enough time to engage actively in social media. The second issue this company was difficulties in managing multiple social media platforms. Participating in our study, company's primary goal was to achieve a new way of promoting its products and services through social media technology, improve its client's network and expand into new markets. When asked about what kind of help they would prefer they affirmed being interested in tools helping them viewing and posting on multiple Social Networks as well as tools that let them measure their social presence. They were not aware of any of the tools that already exist that were

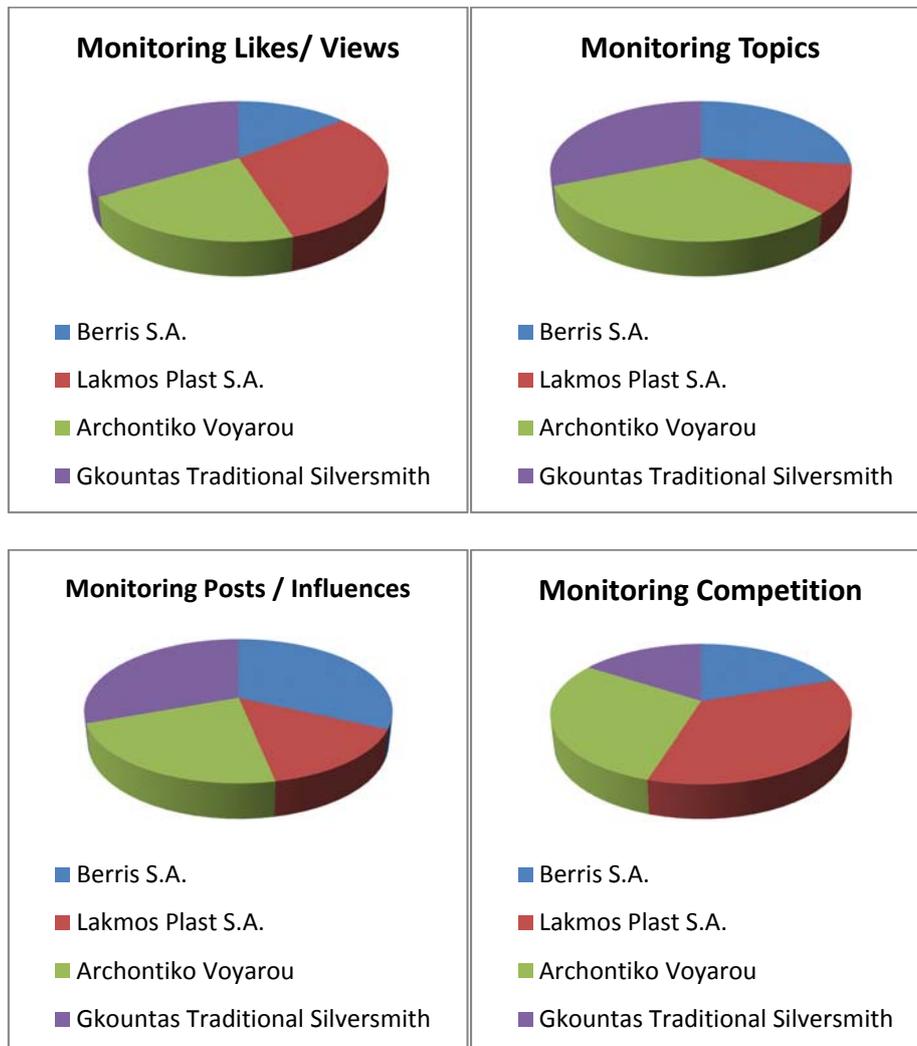
capable to fulfill their requirements and they were mostly interested in reputation management and in tools that would let them monitor multiple Social Media platforms.

Before participating in this study Archontiko Boyarou enterprise representatives stated explicitly that they were convinced about the Return of investment (ROI) of Social Media engagement for their kind of business. They had good results with their Facebook page, that already counted 228 page likes with approximately 10 posts per month were created, but not in their profiles in Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+. This happened because they used to spend time to update only their Facebook account. Also, the general manager mentioned that he believed in the strong influence of Facebook at Greek consumers and this was the reason that the enterprise was focused in this specific social media. On average they reported spending one hour per week on social media activities. They also mentioned that they spend more hours in periods that they don't have so much work, like October-November and February-April. The main problem of this company in regard to social media was that the most employees were not digital literate and was just one person responsible to manage the company's social media presence. They stated that it was difficult for them to hire a new employee to work exclusively on Social Media thus information about how to use the various Social Media platforms effectively was extremely valuable to them. The enterprise found really interesting the idea to use SMM tools with they believe to attract more visitors and especially to extend its reputation. At that point they used only "Facebook Insights" but they had not used it to monitor their social reputation by studying metrics such as total reach or post effectiveness. The only kind of monitoring they reported doing was checking general metrics such as overall number of page likes. They did not study the demographics of their followers and were not actively searching to identify influencers. They stated their interest about techniques could help them identify general themes of conversations and learn what their customers are talking about. They also intended to integrate keywords of popular conversation in their posts hoping to engage their customer more. Their hope was that by increasing page likes in Facebook more customers would be seeing their offers which would hopefully be translated into more visitors.

Gkountas Traditional Silversmith enterprise had already a web presence through its web site. However, they did not have an actual company's social media. They used their personal accounts mainly for networking and for the purpose of monitoring developments in jeweler market (following specialized groups, news etc.). They seemed to be habitually passive social media users since were mostly interested monitoring information on various networks rather than contributing content themselves. After our contact they realized the real value that social media can offer in their SME and they decided to participate in order to increase its fame and promote better their work. The tools that could help them in their activities were those measuring the effectiveness of their posts as well as tools that integrate keywords of popular conversation in their posts hoping to engage their customer more.

Phase 2

In second phase, we present the results of the qualitative data analysis of the interviews sessions that we had with participants after the period of four months that they had to use the SMM tools. We choose to follow the qualitative techniques to measure our results due to they are not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis, allowing for a level of depth and detail that quantitative strategies cannot provide. The results from the semi-structured interviews were organized according to the evaluation dimensions of deployment, user experience and overall impact. Trying to have a deeper analysis, we reorganized these results so that a single text was derived for each individual participating SME. Through this process we managed to identify and index patterns and categories which may model specific circumstances and types of behavior. We used the process called constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), where all data within the same pattern or category were checked and compared with the rest in order to establish analytical categories. Figure 1 demonstrates the frequency by which participant SMEs mentioned specific codes referred to the area of application of SMM.



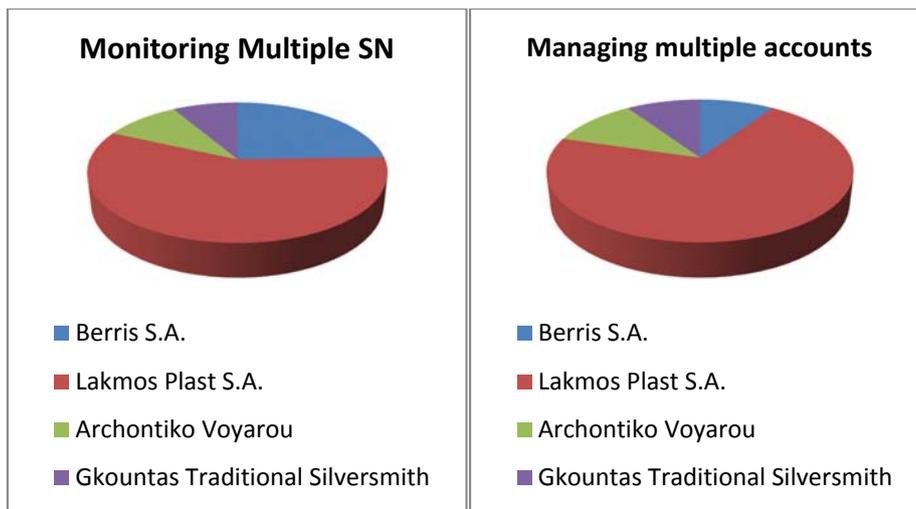


Figure 1 Pie charts showing count of specific code mention for the four participating SMEs

Assessing the results of our study we see that the influence of SMM tools in Berris S.A. affected a lot the company which adapted social media strategies in its daily activity to enforce its web presence. They also included the SMM tools in their web page and subscribed to many blogs and other web sources in order to attend the changes and developments in the field of social media monitoring for business. The director of food safety reported that during this trial period with the SMM tools and because of her subscription to that online communities, she had the opportunity to attend two free webinars on how to enforce hers company social presence by using properly social media technology. During the study they were interested about the ability to monitor topics, post, influence and competition. A very interesting initiative that they took was the organization of Berris S.A. first social media competition on Facebook. They tried to keep theirs customers interesting up for a period of two weeks by posting daily texts and photos with their products and company’s philosophy. All this period the used the SMM tools to observe the influence of that initiative and to direct their public posts properly. The interesting part of this procedure was the interview that they had with the competition winners which were not old customers but at the end they knew a lot about the company. This fact made people in Berris S.A. to be convinced even more about the success of use SMM tools and social media in general. To conclude, this company was enthusiastic about social media and their reflection to their consumers. They did not use social media tools before with that way and their deployment opened them up to new possibilities.

For Lakmos Plast S.A. qualitative data showed that the SMM tools introduced motivated the staff not only to deal with social media, but also to increase their daily social media activities. It is very interesting the fact that quantitative data showed a big increase in related scores of spend considerable time on social media. Also the results showed that SMM tools affected this company in that they started taking their company’s social media presence more seriously than before. They realized that they did not have a clear set strategy for their company in regard to its web presence in general and of course in social

media too. In the period of these four months they discussed about the objectives they would like to gain through the adoption of social media techniques and using of SMM tools and they started measuring the effectiveness and impact of their social media activities. Because of the time limitation that they had they were interesting mainly in the managing of multiple social media accounts as well as in the monitoring and posting on multiple social media. They did not comment about whether and how the intent to act on the new information they could gain through this monitoring activity. However, they become interested in the use of the tools for reputation management by monitoring their own accounts.

The impact of the SMM tools to Archontiko Boyarou enterprise was quite different than the others. This may be happened because of the more structured social media strategy they had from the beginning. This company was already active on social media platforms and its main change came in the form of engagement with SMM tools, which motivated them to start experimenting with the other social media profiles that they already had but up to that point were inactive. They commented that they found very useful the training materials that they get from Intersocial project and also this part referred to strategies that a company could follow to enforce its presence in Twitter community. The main change was in regard to Twitter which they started using effectively partly due to their involvement in this study. Although they will not continue using them on a regular basis they are convinced that the tools will help them during periods in which they will dedicate resources to experiment with social media and in order to discover new ways of engaging with their customers. During the study they were mostly talking about the ability to monitor post success, interesting topics and follower views and likes. They also search and found appropriate keywords they could start tracking that could be useful in to them. The experimentation with the SMM tools helped them formulate their previous and new strategies as well as creating tactics about effective usage of social media on which they was not actively engaged in the past. At the end they become also interested in identifying influencers because they understood how this could help the build a larger follower base on online social media communities.

The results of qualitative data for Gkoutas Traditional Silversmith enterprise showed that at the beginning of the trial period of SMM tools they found it difficult to integrate social media techniques into their activities mainly because they could not find the needed time to experiment and study online information about good practices by others. During the first month they used mainly the monitoring tools to search for post by their competition in order to create an understanding of appropriate Facebook usage. Then they experimented by using the geolocation monitoring tool. After that they become interested in new types of social media activities as for example trend monitoring and campaigns design. This process let them question and redefine their current social media strategies. Although they became intrigued by many features of the SMM tools the main impact was made by tools that let them monitor likes, views and posts on multiple social media. The effect of their introduction to SMM tools was a big effort in new positive attitudes towards social media in general.

SME 2: Some of the SMM tools had a positive impact on this company. The employee responsible for social media management had time issues and needed help in their everyday activities. Tools providing multiple Social Networks management solved a real problem for this company and also triggered interest for new activities (trend monitoring, campaigns).

SME 3: SMM tools had only a marginal effect on this SME that manifested into engagement with a new Social Media platform. This company needed information about effective ways of using new Social Networks more than tools but their engagement with them triggered a experimentation phase from which the company benefited. This SME became interested in trend, geolocation and competitor monitoring.

The SMM tool introduction had only a marginal motivational effect. This company needed information and examples about appropriate ways of using Social networks specific to their company domain more than tools. This lack of strategy led to difficulties incorporating the tools in their activities with some exception (monitoring multiple Social networks, reputation monitoring).

5. Conclusions

Social media offers new opportunities for SMEs, both in monitoring conversations and in actively participating and providing content on social media platforms. SMM tools support these activities, but an enterprise also needs social media management, that means the definition of strategies, roles and processes in this new field. The results of this study showed that SMEs primarily have to realize, that social media is not only a topic for corporate communications or marketing, but also needs to be addressed. Even though SMM tools adopted by participants varied in their functionalities, all SMEs wanted to know what the consumers were talking about them in order to draw conclusions about their actions, create an overview of how they are perceived, and be ready to react on alarming or otherwise significant discussion. All SMEs were also interested in the discussion regarding their overall field of business, in order to create a general view of it. This was a generally expected result since these companies differed considerably in terms of organizational structure and needs in regard to Social media management. The main common effect that the introduction of the SMM tools had among all SME's was a renewed interest for engagement with social media in general. The results also presented the usefulness of the adaption of SMM tools in the general improvement of SMEs web social presence. Choosing the right tools and instantiating an appropriate organization for one's strategy are key factors for SMEs to benefit from social media.

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