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Bachelor's Thesis

Content Marketing – The key to effective brand communication
in digital media

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Appendix I : “How marketing is affected by the surge of inactivity”

Appendix II : Traditional and Modified Mass Communications Model

1 Introduction

StoneWareUK is a newly established UK company whose aim is to produce natural stone products for use in the home. The strategy of the company is to create a high-quality product proposition that can be sold into prestigious high street retailers and online companies already established in the target market for homeware and tableware specifically. In addition to business-to-business marketing, StoneWareUK plans to communicate their brand directly to their final customer through different digital media channel such as their own website as well as social media networks.

For a small-sized company like StoneWareUK digital media has several attractive qualities. Farrar (2010) notes that managers, looking to cut spending, have focused their attention on online promotions to take advantage of the Internet's unique ability to measure success. Digital media enables interactive and personalised communication with the customers whereas increase the reach of company's communications to the global market due to its independence of location. (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.35-40) In addition, digital marketplace reminds quite closely the concept of perfect competition where barriers of entry are gone and everyone has the similar information available. (Chaston, 2001, p.10)

However, a qualitative study of (mainly European and North American) business executives has shown that managing brand health and reputation is considered increasingly difficult in digital media. In fact, managers see it as a bigger challenge than other threats such as increased competition and price transparency. (Leeflang et al., 2014) The main reason to this, in addition to customers becoming more educated, better informed and less brand loyal (Khashani, 1995), is the interactive nature of digital media that has made brands strongly affected by what is said about them in the virtual world. (Stone and Woodcock, 2013)

Furthermore, Winterberg (2013) notes that the barriers of engagements in traditional marketing messages has risen significantly over the past years with customers being able to skip television commercials with DVRs, hide Internet ads with pop-up blockers or screen incoming calls with caller ID which has led to the increasing ineffectiveness of traditional

marketing messages such as advertising ‘pushed’ to the customers. Therefore, companies have started to develop ‘pull’ mechanisms instead where the focus is on having good visibility particularly in search engines when customers are entering search terms relevant to a company’s products or services. (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.35-36)

The ‘pull’ mechanisms are known as ‘inbound marketing’ which is more complicated than traditional communication methods and require a deeper knowledge of the customers, however, once on the website, the individuals give the company their full attention and valuable response (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.35-36) provided that the content on company’s website is valuable and personally relevant to them. (Winterberg, 2013)

Therefore, content becomes the key communicational concept in digital marketing. (Tuten and Solomon, 2014) According to Lieb (2011, p.2) the main idea of content marketing is to provide information attractive to customers without selling and its non-interruptive nature has the potential to aid in brand recognition, trust, authority, credibility, loyalty and authenticity. The high potential of content marketing is also the reason why Light (2014) claims that the declining brand loyalty is caused by marketers continuing to hang on to traditional but out-of date- marketing ideas.

Therefore, in order for StoneWareUK to benefit from the opportunities digital media offers, it needs to understand and adjust to the environment of digital media especially in terms of the changed concepts in customer communication. Therefore, this research is looking digital media through its core characteristic such as interactivity and individualisation, introduces the social media environment through the aspects of electronic word-of-mouth and brand communities, and finally analyses the specific content marketing concepts. According to Jutkowitz (2014) the advent of the Internet, social media, and the dispersal of knowledge in every direction puts companies in a unique position to distribute the information they’ve gathered in exchange for audiences, readership, and brand loyalty.

1.1 Research Objectives

The aims of this research have been defined as the following:

1. To explore the conceptual areas of digital, social media and content marketing in terms of their development and opportunities

2. To analyse the change in marketing communication brought upon by the digital media and demonstrate opportunities how businesses can improve their marketing capabilities and gain competitive advantage through adjusting to the new concepts
3. To apply the content marketing theory through the analysis of the StoneWareUK competitors and suggest a brand communication strategy based on the results
4. To reflect and implement the success and issues related to the competitor analysis

2 Literature Review

2.1 Digital Marketing

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012, p.10) define digital marketing “the application of the Internet and related digital technologies in conjunction with traditional communications to achieve marketing objectives” which in practice means managing company’s online presence in order to acquire new customers and provide service to the existing ones by using a variety of techniques. Royle and Laing (2014) emphasize the role of digital media in creating an integrated, targeted and measurable communication while building deeper relationships with the customers as well as keeping in mind the ongoing importance of promoting products or services in the digital world.

When consumer marketing used to have a fairly small set of communication channels such as advertising, direct marketing, public relations, personal sales and sales promotion (Egan, 2015, p.20), Winer (2009) has introduced additional ‘new media’ category including the Internet, product placement in video games, mobile, social networking, podcasting, viral marketing, blogs, and video websites such as YouTube. Currently most widely used media channels include company’s home pages, e-mail and social media from which social media together with mobile applications are expected to represent the biggest growth areas for companies over the next years. (Leeflang et al., 2014)

Several opinions on the impact of digital marketing exist. Egan (2015, p.45) sees internet as a tactical tool that has changed the process of marketing communications by making it faster and more effective, however, not the underlining theory behind marketing communications in general. Stone and Woodcock (2013) state that the interactive nature of the ‘new media’ has affected absolutely every area of marketing from communications mix to product design (See Appendix I) and Leeflang et al., (2014) even see digital marketing as a disruptive force having a profound impact in transforming business models despite the fact that most companies generate less than 5% of their sales online. “Digital organisa-

tional design” where all processes of the company are digitally harmonised was identified as the biggest opportunity for businesses.

However, some companies find it continuously difficult to make the best use of digital marketing since marketing itself is still recovering from the “downstream activity” status that Porter’s value chain approach has given it. (Stone and Woodcock, 2013) However, several authors report the ongoing change in the balance of power in the “historically” established value chains (Leeflang et al., 2014) where instead of focusing on different activities for profit, the success of a company is seen increasingly to depend on its core capabilities. (Stone and Woodcock, 2013) This reflects the switch from supply- to demand-side thinking (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.41) leading to the growing importance of Customer Value Management (CVM) where determining and maximizing the value of a firm’s customer base is seen as one of the core goals in marketing. (Verhoef and Lemon, 2013).

Since brand can be defined as “the characteristics of a product of a service perceived by the customer” (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.272), Customer Value Management is essential in branding. In digital marketing brand value appears through two main concepts: Firstly, the concept of ‘interactivity’ since brand experience defined by the frequency and depth of interactions with a brand and secondly, ‘individualisation’, since the online measures of brand equity (assets linked to the brand) are based on customisation and relevance of the brand to the customer. (p. 274)

2.1.1 Interactivity

John Egan (2015, p.15) emphasizes the philosophical change in marketing communications from the end of twentieth century that has challenged mass communication and in parallel introduced the rise of digital marketing, namely, the paradigm shift from one-way value creation from company to customer (Tuten and Solomon, 2014) to relationship marketing where the focus is on mutual exchange of information and fulfilment of promises between the company and its customers. (Egan, p.16) Consequently, Egan defines the entire goal of marketing communications to stimulate dialogue leading to better commercial or other relationships. (Egan, 2015, p.4)

The two-way communications and more precisely, interactivity (the process where two or more parties mutually affect each other through communication (Lindström and Andersen, 2000, p.80), is one of the key concepts in digital marketing. (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.35) After the dot-com collapse in 2001, it took internet almost ten years to establish the infrastructure to deliver the anticipated digital revolution (Farrar, 2010) from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 - the interactive social system that is available 24/7 (Tuten and Solomon, 2014) and facilitates countless amount of human dialogue that marketers increasingly participate in. Kumar et al (2014) therefore claim that marketing has evolved from 'digital' to 'interactive' marketing.

In addition to the interactive nature of company-customer relationships, Hoffman and Novak (1996) have introduced the Modified Communications Model (See Appendix II) which demonstrates that customers now are able to also interact with the medium they use and with the content that companies produce. Furthermore, the model demonstrates how users also interact between each other which Tuten and Solomon (2014) call the 'horizontal revolution' since messages among digital media (and especially social media) users are moving at an astounding speed across a global landscape and have the potential to influence public opinion on corporate reputation, product and brands. (Botha and Reyneke, 2013)

The enhanced interactivity of the Internet has led to a fundamental shift of power between brands and consumers (Nam and Kannan, 2014) and digital media now facilitates the control of brand messages both in content and in medium of delivery. (Quinton, 2013) In fact, the word "branding" is in digital media being replaced with "communication" because of the increased involvement of the customer defining the brand and adding value to it. (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.41) Therefore, brands are no longer passive assets but partially independent market entities which are influenced by the environment and marketing managers. (Quinton, 2013)

2.1.2 Individualisation

Whereas the growing interactivity has made communication more complicated for the companies and increased the vulnerability of brands, the development of internet and other technological platforms has given marketers the ability to analyse and target individual

customers through the sophisticated data collection and processing (Egan, 2015, p.15) leading to the Single Customer View (SCV) where a company's knowledge about each customer is summarised and fully documented in a single data record which is accessible to all those making decisions about and managing the customer. (Stone and Woodcock, 2013)

Targeting individual customers is enabled by Big Bata, the explosion of data, which offers opportunities to follow customer journey - the journey customers perform from awareness or orientation on a product to purchasing and even becoming loyal to the products which is considered a key requirement to optimize advertising campaigns and budgets. In many corporations, departments like "consumer insight" or "customer intelligence" are replacing the older "market intelligence" or "marketing information", reflecting the move from less targeted forms of marketing towards precision marketing and creating personalized customer experiences. (Stone and Woodcock, 2013)

However, mapping the journey is often complicated due to the dynamic nature of consumer behaviour in the all-round available internet (Tuten and Solomon, 2014) Also, what was earlier known the "multichannel approach" where the company chose the channels it wanted to use, is now called "omnichannel" where the customer chooses the channels they use. Therefore, companies must integrate their outbound (from organization to customer) and inbound (customer to organization) Internet communications to interact more dynamically with the consumer. (Stone and Woodcock, 2013)

Furthermore, Big Data have their problems, such as the size, volatility, lack of structure or missing data. Also, creativity and innovation may be somewhat reduced in a data-driven environment. (Leeflang et al., 2014) Therefore, Peterson et al. (2010) suggest that the success of online marketing requires a sophisticated, strongly aligned blend of marketing savvy and technological expertise to Verhoef and Lemon (2013) add the need to ensure that Customer Value Management is more customer driven than IT driven so that the focus would remain rather internal than external.

2.2 Social Media Marketing

Tuten and Solomon (2014) define social media as “the online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities, and organizations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility.” Social networks facilitate user-generated content (UGC) and the exchange messages between different users (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p. 670) and the eight most popular forms of social media are: Blogs, Microblogs, Social Networks, Media-Sharing Sites, Social Bookmarking and selection Sites, analysis Sites, forum and effective Worlds. (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012)

Marketing in social media is becoming more and more relevant as a part of digital communications strategy since it enables to reach a large number of people at relatively low cost. (Leeflang et al., 2014) Through social media companies can engage with their audience by sharing content and developing great creative concepts which they hope will be transmitted by the electronic word-of-mouth. (Levy and Gvili, 2015) Social media crosses the boundaries between mass and personal media by enabling one-to-one communications as well reaching millions of people at once. (Tuten and Solomon, 2014)

In addition, users of social media actively create valuable content to the company by expressing and sharing their opinions about brands and products (Nam and Kannan, 2014) through both customer-initiated social media (e.g. reviews, blogs) and firm-initiated social media (e.g. brand communities) (de Vries et al., 2012). Therefore, instead of seeing customer as a target, customer becomes a partner whose input to product and services is required. (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.41)

However, Schultz and Peltier (2013) warn about the consequence of engaging the already engaged in social media indicating possible wasted resources. In addition, the effect of social media depends on the type of contact between the customers which may vary over time and the results are therefore difficult to measure. (Leeflang et al., 2014)

2.2.1 Social Media Networks

Social networks focus on enabling community interactions between different consumers. (Chaffey and EllisChadwick, 2012, p.22) Mintel (2014a) divides social media networks

into social networks and media networks, and reports that over a quarter of UK consumers have used social or media networks to ask people for help with finding information on specific products that they are interested in which indicates different possibilities for companies to participate in those platforms.

Social networks are defined by “any networks which have person-to-person interaction at the heart of their offering.” The four main social networks in the UK are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Facebook has the highest frequency of engagement, with three quarters of all Facebook users in the UK visiting the site either once a day or more often. (Mintel, 2014a) Due to its popularity Facebook is also titled as ‘the’ online mass media channel. (Lieb, 2011 p.62)

Media networks facilitate person-to-person communication either through the sharing of media, or with a thematic focus on media (such as books, films or games). For example, in UK the most popular ones are YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest and Tumblr which are all media networks with a social element. Media networks are popular partly because they allow users to enjoy more niche interests than social networks can accommodate, through joining communities and seeing/listening to/reading content specifically aligned with a particular interest or theme, as opposed to absorbing everything presented in a social feed. (Mintel, 2014a)

2.2.2 Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is a general concept of marketplace interpersonal interaction (Walsh and Mitchell, 2010) between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, product or service (Levy and Gvili, 2015) which companies cannot control but can encourage and facilitate. (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.236) WOM communication is perceived to be more credible and trustworthy than firm-initiated communications (Muniz and Schau, 2007) and therefore an important vehicle for marketing messages. (Levy and Gvili, 2015)

Internet has enabled electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) which is similar to traditional WOM in terms of consumers’ motivation to participate in the communication process;

however E-WOM is considered less immediate and intimate but at the same time more influential. (Levy and Gvili, 2015)

There are also several approaches for facilitating WOM from which most widely used concept is “viral marketing” (aka buzz marketing) where marketers use highly entertaining or informative messages that are designed to be passed along rapidly like a virus in order to bypass the growing apathy towards traditional communications. (Egan, 2015, p.23) However, there is no guarantee that the campaign will ‘go viral’, in which case the investment will be wasted. (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.539)

Also, studies of Levy and Gvili (2015) have shown that consumers do find it difficult to evaluate and determine the credibility of electronic word-of-mouth due to the growing popularity of marketerinfluenced and manipulated E-WOM messages. Therefore, it is necessary to stress out three important channel properties to increase the credibility of E-WOM: Firstly, by building trust and familiarity with the source; secondly, providing detailed and timely information and thirdly, by enabling interactivity with the content. (Levy and Gvili, 2015)

2.2.3 Brand Communities

McAlexander et al. (2002) define brand community from a customer-experiential perspective as “a fabric of relationships in which the customer is situated.” It is believed that when people have emotionally invested in the welfare of the company and joined the community, they have the desire to contribute to its success by serving as brand missionaries, carrying the marketing message into other communities and providing valuable feedback. Therefore, companies create and participate in brand communities in social media for customer input. (Quinton, 2013)

Quinton (2013) sees the interactivity in brand communities in a much wider context than merely relationships. When in relational orientation the emphasis is on one to one communication which develops into the community experience notion, in interactional orientation, more attention is given to the transformative power of sharing within and between digitally enabled communities. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge to importance of brand communities in social media in terms of value creation for brands.

However, since the relationship occurs between the empowered, internet-enabled, passionate consumers (Quinton, 2013), it is necessary monitor the negative customer sentiment since customers can easily become value destroyers instead of creators which is often caused by the uncertainty of demand in the fast-changing markets. (Verhoef et al., 2013) But since according to the findings of Ind et al (2013), people participate in a community because it offers them the chance to find fulfilment, to express their creativity, and to socialize, co-create products and services, therefore brand communities would potentially bring more value than destroy

2.3 Content Marketing

Joe Pulizzi (2014, p.5) defines content marketing as a “marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action.” Now that digital media has removed cost barriers that were once a mandatory part of creating and disseminating content (Lieb, 2011 p.3.) this marketing technique has become central in digital and social media marketing. (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012)

Content marketing is used to generate interest, attract prospects, and build trust. It is a faith that when delivering consistent ongoing valuable information to the customers, they ultimately reward the company with their business and loyalty. (Pulizzi, 2014, p.6) Light (2014) adds that it is a complex, multi-dimensional idea that includes differentiating features, functional and emotional benefits as well as a distinctive brand character. However, interactivity with the content remains a crucial part of the content marketing strategy since according to Lindström and Andersen (2000, p.85), only interactions with the content count and the navigation of content is not desirable.

From the marketing communication tools, content marketing is mostly associated with advertising, especially since advertisers are increasingly focusing on content-creation. (Lieb, 2011, p.113) However, advertising is still distinct from editorial content by being more interruptive whereas content marketing and is closely linked to the concept of “permission marketing” where marketers seek customers’ permission

2.3.1 Content in Social Media

According to Tuten and Solomon (2014) content marketing is the basis for social publishing strategies since content is the unit of value in social community which provides a social object for community participation and is expected to generate word of mouth. In addition Light (2014) introduces the need for ‘inclusive individuality’ where customers want to be respected as unique individuals and they do not want to feel uniquely alone; therefore, they want a constant, continuing flow of engaging content to which they want to respond as individuals as well as share as members of a community of common interests.

However, Pulizzi (2014 p.8) differentiates content marketing from social media marketing since in the case of social media the centre of gravity are the social networks themselves, whereas in content marketing the centre of gravity is the website. Nevertheless, social media involves heavily content and Tuten and Solomon (2014) add that publishing in social media has similar goal with content marketing: to increase exposure to the brand messages and to use the content to drive traffic to the brands website.

2.3.2 Types of Content

Content is generally classified as educational/informative or entertaining. (Lieb, 2011, p.19 and 29) Harad (2013) distinguishes also the third type – editorial content – which focuses on presenting the opinion, philosophy and value of the people in order to stand out to people with whom the message would resonate. The content can thereby demonstrate what kind of voice and personality the company has since already fifteen years ago Andersen and Lindström (2000, p.109) emphasized the importance of creating a personal dialogue with the customers which would be characterized by intimacy and knowledge therefore reminding an old-fashioned village store.

In addition, content can be original or curated. Original content is of higher value than filler content which can range from basic original content to the highest quality level called ‘flagship content’ that builds authority and shapes the way people think about something. On the other, hand curated content serves a purpose of developing a valuable form of content that draws from the collection of existing content. (Tuten and Solomon, 2014) Lieb (2011 p.48-49) defines content curation as a “highly proactive and selective approach to finding, collecting and displaying content around redefined sets of criteria and

subject matter to appeal to a target audience”. She adds that coming up with original content can be challenging and timeconsuming for managers and curated content helps to establish thought leadership and elevate brand visibility. (p.53)

2.3.3 Forms of Content

Lieb suggests publishing content using multimedia since images, photo, audio (e.g. podcasting) and video content enhances content offerings. (p.13) Posts with pictures are visually more pleasing which is why they are recommended to be almost always added (Pulizzi, p.263) and since video sharing on the Internet has become increasingly popular among Internet users (Botha and Reyneke, 2013), creating videos would be a highly recommended form of content since video as a medium has a potential of generating a ‘wow factor’ and going viral. (Egan, 2015, p.22-23)

Another form of content in social media is called ‘social tagging’ which is a new way to share and categorize online content that enables users to express their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings with respect to diverse concepts. In social tagging, content is connected through user-generated keywords— “tags”—and is readily searchable through these tags. The rich associative information that social tagging provides, gives marketers new opportunities to infer brand associative networks. (Nam and Kannan, 2014)

2.3.4 Content Distribution

According to Light (2014) the idea of owning a single-minded, distilled word in the customer’s mind worldwide is an out-of-date brand management and in this era of co-creation, sharing and engagement within marketing, the idea of owning the customer’s mind is marketing arrogance. Therefore, ongoing communications should resemble more of a brand ‘magazine’, where each article is different, each edition is different and in each region it is different: different subjects, different topics, different messages; all coming together in a dynamic, interesting, relevant and coherent manner (Light, 2014) however keeping in mind key themes and messages. (Lieb, 2012, p.12) In addition, Nam and Kannan (2014) claim that marketing managers of weak brands should invest in creating more content or comparable attributes that can be linked to their competitors making the brands more assimilated and comparable to competitors.

There are many models on distribution of content. For example, Hanbury (2011) from Content Marketing Institute provides a Content Marketing Pyramid about what type of content and how often companies should generally produce. The first layer of the Pyramid is relevant information followed by content on teaching the audience how to do something. Once a week Hanbury (2011) suggests starting a conversation with the audience and the two top categories which include inspirational and entertaining content should be communicated less frequently. The suggestions in the pyramid are in correlation with the UK market trends where users of social and media networks claimed to prefer adverts to be short and relevant to their interests, however, they did not require that their ads are entertaining. (Mintel, 2014a)



Figure 2.1. Content Marketing Pyramid Source: Hanbury, K. (2011) Available at: <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2011/02/content-mix/>

In terms of frequency, it is generally believed that the more often companies shares content, the more frequently their prospect "sees" them (Harad, 2013) and brand awareness helps to increase the likelihood of a brand being included in the consideration (Nam and Kannan, 2014) However, Kumar et al (2014) found that too much communication is harmful to the firm-customer relationship and makes customers less interested in the permission marketing program. In addition studies of Levy and Gvili (2015) have proven that with the increased quantity of content, its value goes down, therefore, companies should focus on customizing the content on the basis of their customer's interest rather than increasing marketing intensity. (Kumar et al 2014)

2.3.5 SEO and SMO

The most important technique in content marketing is search engine optimisation (SEO) - the process of modifying content, site characteristics and content connections to achieve improved search engine rankings, marketers develop and publish content in ways that improve the likelihood that search engines will rank the sites will in response to search queries. (Tuten and Solomon, 2014) Lieb (2011, p. 99) identifies the best keywords characteristics in content marketing:

- Strong relevance – terms which the content supports
- Relatively high search volume – terms people search for
- Relatively low competition – terms with a small number of search results

In addition, companies use social media optimisation (SMO) which is a process that makes it more likely for content on a specific social media platform to be more visible and linkable in online communities. SEO focuses on manipulating the processes controlled by search engines and in contrast, SMO focuses on building community. (Tuten and Solomon, 2014). SMO is therefore essential in social media and content marketing and the technique becomes even more relevant with the development of the next generation web – Web 3.0 – that incorporates high-speed connectivity and complex cross-community interactions. (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012, p.34-35)

However, what makes the marketers' job more difficult is the RSS feed (Rich Site Summary/ Really Simple Syndication) which allows newsreaders and aggregators to scrape headlines summaries and links off websites for syndication and exclude the ones they are not interested in. (Lieb, 2011, p.53) Quinton (2013) therefore suggests that the ability by the consumer to select RSS means that the brands need to sit back and become, if chosen, a supportive facilitator between consumers. Creating compelling content could once again be the solution.

3 Content Analysis

This research contributes to the "Challenge Academy" employability intervention which supports small and medium-sized enterprises such as StoneWareUK. As a part the "Challenge Academy" platform, the author of this research is personally interested in improving the business capability and performance of StoneWareUK which is why the topic choice

and method of analysis were chosen based on the usefulness of the analysis to the company.

Since StoneWareUK is planning on communicating their brand to their end-customers solely through digital media channels, the conceptual literature and trends of digital and social media marketing repeatedly emphasized the importance of creating relevant and valuable content to bypass the barriers of engagement and create opportunities for positively enforcing the brand, building a loyal brand community and encouraging electronic word of mouth which ultimately helps to achieve different marketing objectives.

Inspired by the work by Nam and Kannan (2014) which suggests that in digital communication strategies weaker brands with new products should ‘nick’ positive associations from the competitors as well as the ideas of Light (2014) who emphasized that the brand value in the collection of different sections of content instead of a single word, this research focuses on analysing the five main rivals of StoneWareUK in the UK market. The main questions this analyses tries to answer are: what kind of content the competitors are publishing (if any), how the content communicates their brand, whether it is potentially relevant to their target audience and most importantly, how StoneWareUK could benefit from that knowledge for creating a successful digital marketing communication strategy.

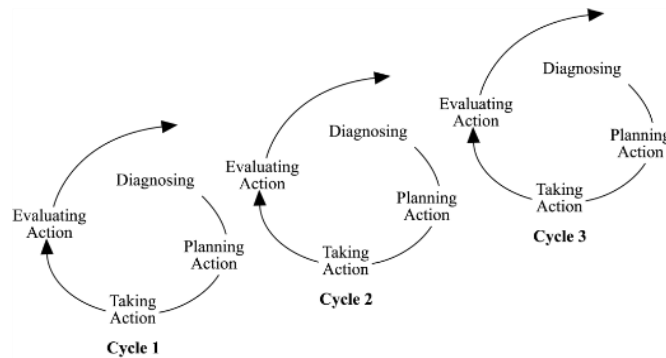
3.1 Research Methodology

First of all, this research has interpretivism philosophy according to which reality is a projection of human imagination and its epistemological stance is obtaining phenomenological insight by exploring pure subjectivity. (Collis and Hussey 2009, pp. 61) Unlike positivist tradition, interpretivism tries to avoid law-like generalizations which is considered a highly appropriate in the marketing field where business situations are both complex, unique and function in a particular set of circumstances and individuals; therefore, the possibility of applying research results to cases or situations beyond those examined in the study is not seen as crucially important. (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 106-107)

Consequently, the approach of this research is inductive where the results formulate a theory not the opposite way. Even though inductive approach has the risk of no useful data patterns or theory emerging. especially in terms of content marketing is a relatively new

study area in consumer marketing; it was considered a more appropriate choice than deductive approach since the competitor analysis focuses more on researching the particular digital media context in which the subjects are situated in. (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 118-119)

The strategy of this research follows the action research methodology since the author is involved in the research as a practitioner and has a genuine interest in contributing to the success of the business. Figure 3.1 (below) demonstrates the iterative nature of action research which consists of diagnosing, planning, taking action and evaluating phases in a specific context and with a clear purpose. (Coghlan and Brannick, 2001, p.19) Blichfeldt and Andersen (2006) conclude that action research takes its questions, puzzles, and problems from the perceptions of practitioners within particular, local practice contexts which is therefore consistent with the research philosophy and approach.



Source: Coghlan and Brannick (2001) p. 19

Figure 3.1 Action Research Spiral Source: Coghlan, D. and Brannick, T. (2001) p.19 Doing action research in your own organization, 1st edn., London: Sage Publications.

However, Saunders et al. (2007, p.290) emphasize that the research which is concentrated on observing the physical setting, the key participants and activities, needs to still ‘go further’ and develop a framework of theory that will help to understand, and explain to others what is going on in the research setting. Therefore, this research follows the content marketing framework which will be continuously reflected even in the action implementation part.

The data used in this research included documentary written materials such as company online communications and time-based industry reports. (Saunders et al., 2007, p.249)

The choice of using secondary data over primary was based on the secondary data saves resources, is unobtrusive, provides comparative and contextual data and foremostly, because of its higher possibility to result unforeseen discoveries. In addition, this research chose secondary data in order to evaluate it prior to use. (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 263)

In terms of methods, this research uses mixed method approach by including both quantitative and qualitative analysis but not combining them. Quantitative analysis was used to introduce which digital channels the companies are using for an accurate and descriptive profile of the companies' digital marketing presence (Saunders et al., 2007, pp.134), however the main focus remained on qualitative data in order to find out 'how' the companies are communicating their brand through content. (Saunders et al., 2007, p.145-146)

Qualitative data was divided into meaningful categories partly based on the theoretical framework of content marketing but also based on the data itself. However, as an interpretivist inductive research, the qualitative was less structured as opposed to procedural analysis. (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 479) In terms of time horizons, the study is cross-sectional – a phenomena “snapshot” of a particular time as since opposed to longitudinal this is concerned by a particular development over a time period. (Saunders et al., 2007, pp.148) Therefore, based on the literature on content marketing starting being relatively new, the timeframe of the sample collection was set from the beginning of 2014 until May 2015.

3.2 Research Credibility

The credibility of this research can be assessed in terms of its reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the extent to which the data collection techniques and procedures yielded in consistent findings (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 149) and validity is concerned the extent to which the research findings accurately reflect the phenomena under study. (Collis and Hussey, 2009, p.64)

Since the author included in this research all the competitors StoneWareUK had itself identified, all possible digital media channels the companies were actively using and all the possible examples of published content for over 1.5 years using secondary data, the methods and data can be considered appropriate for answering the main research question

of how the competitors are using content to communicate their brand thereby indicating high reliability.

In terms of the reputation of resources Mintel market research reports used to are considered to be reliable and trustworthy by research literature. (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 265) In addition, the company communications channels proved to be authentic (e.g. social media pages were linked to the official home page). In addition, the data in this research is available to other observers as well.

However, since the author takes part in the research as a practitioner, an observer bias might exist which might threaten the research validity to a certain extent. In addition, Collis and Hussey (2009, p.57) emphasize in that the case of interpretivism that the act of investigating social reality has an effect on it since it is impossible to separate what exists in the social world from what is in the researcher's mind. Therefore, the thinking process of the author can be described as 'the ladder of inference' (a.k.a. the Argyris ladder) where first the researcher observes the pool of available data, then selects data based on observations and links data to the theory in order to formulate a meaning which is followed by assumptions and conclusions. However, 'a reflexive loop' might occur in which the beliefs of the author partly affect the initial data that is selected. (Argyris, 1983) Being aware of the possibility, the researcher tried to increase the objectivity as much as possible and collect a sufficient amount of data to avoid it.

4 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1 Digital Media Overview

Table 4.1 demonstrates the digital media accounts of StoneWareUK's five main competitors. Since the focus of this research was on consumer marketing, the analysis excluded accounts in LinkedIn – a platform that facilitates publishing content between professionals such as communication with employees. (Pulizzi, 2014, p.27) The channels titled as "inactive" were based on whether the company had published any content since January 2015.

Company Information 28.04.2015	Main digital channel	Facebook (size of brand community)	Twitter (size of brand community)	Other social media accounts
Slateware by Welsh Slate	Website, newsletter	Inactive (387)	Active (890)	YouTube (inactive) Google+ (inactive) Tumblr (inactive)
Just Slate	Website, newsletter	Two accounts: 1. active (2075) 2. inactive (55943)	Inactive (433)	YouTube (inactive) Google+ (inactive) Tumblr (inactive)
Creative Tops	Website, blog	Active (4956)	Active (2774)	Pinterest (active) Instagram (active) Google+ (active)
Slate plate USA	Website	Active (4926)	No account	YouTube (inactive) Google+ (inactive) Tumblr (inactive)
Derwent Slate Plate	Website	Inactive (2)	Inactive (235)	No accounts

Table 4.1: Competitor Digital Media Presence

All of the competitors of StoneWareUK use their web page as their main digital channel. Creative Tops has additionally a company's blog and the customers of Just Slate and Slateware can sign up to a company's newsletter which already indicates that those three companies publish more content than Slate Plate USA and Derwent Slate Plate.

In terms of social networks, Creative Tops is using both Facebook and Twitter actively, however Slateware and Just Slate have both existing accounts in Twitter and Facebook from which Just Slate had given up using Twitter but is actively posting in Facebook and as a contrast, Slateware is using Twitter but had decided to quit updating its Facebook page. Slateplate is actively using Facebook without an existing account in Twitter and Derwent Slate has no active social media accounts at all which makes the company the least active of the five competitors.

When it comes to media networks, Creative Tops continues to have the most diverse digital communications strategy with having active accounts in Pinterest, Google+ and Instagram. Derwent Slate had no additional accounts to be found and the rest of the three companies were registered in YouTube and Google+ and Tumblr; however, all of the channels remained inactive. The amount of the neglected accounts in social media indicates that the companies are testing different channels out to see what works the best and then focus their resources on the most popular one. However, for the reasons unclear Just Slate had initially two accounts in Facebook and from 2015 it stopped using the one of its popular accounts over 55 thousand people as audience and continues to post in the account with roughly over 2000 people.

As opposed to simply testing different channels out, the social media channel choices should be based on the location of target audience. The findings of Mintel (2014a) market research in social media show that for the AB socioeconomic group (who is broadly the target market for StoneWareUK), Facebook is the main social media channel with some 64% using it frequently. The second most frequently used channel is Twitter with 24% frequency rate which is followed by YouTube with 21%. The rest of the results showed that Google+ had 9%, Instagram 8%, Tumblr 5% and Pinterest 3% of AB group using those channels frequently.

Based on these results, Facebook the undeniably the most attractive digital media channels for StoneWareUK to engage with their audience. However, even though Twitter is half as popular amongst the AB group, Mintel (2015a) reports that Twitter has made a deal with Google that will allow 'tweets' (Twitter content) to appear in search results in real time starting from the first half of 2015 which raises the value of integrated, multi-

channel marketing campaigns in Twitter. Therefore, StoneWareUK is suggested to create profiles on both platforms.

Also, Mintel (2014a) notes social sites as a group are now seen as relatively mature and when it comes to learning about new products or offers from brands or retailers, users of media networks are marginally more likely than users of social network. Therefore, StoneWareUK could also engage in some media platforms that are relatively popular amongst AB customers such YouTube or Instagram. When in analysing both platforms from content form perspective, YouTube allows the distribution of video content which has potential of going 'viral' and Instagram, the platform of sharing photos, can emphasize the aesthetic beauty of StoneWareUK products.

4.2 Content Overview

When analysing the content companies produce in their active digital media channels, it became apparent that digital media is mainly used by companies to directly advertise their products whether in term of promoting their products' qualities, introducing new product ranges or offering discounts. However, despite the fact that content marketing was not as dominant as advertising, a sufficient amount of examples of published content were still found which enabled the analysis of the content communicates the brand message and relevance to their audience based on Mintel reports on home- and tableware trends.

4.3 Slateware

Slateware by Welsh Slate is collaborating with celebrity chef Michael Caines in their digital marketing campaigns, in fact, the name of the two time Michelin star owner chef features even on the company's logo. Michael Caines therefore acts as the company's opinion former - someone with potential authority over people's lives by having a real status (Egan, 2015, p.38) thereby ensuring the quality of the products of Slateware and associating them with gourmet food. According to Mintel (2015b) celebrity endorsements are widely used in the UK tableware market.

The presence of Michael Caines also sets the general style of the company by demonstrating the high-end nature and luxuriousness of their products. In addition, the photography style (Figure 4.1) throughout the company's digital media channels is quite simple and

minimalist, and according to Egan (2015, p.30) “space” has symbolic connotations of richness and elegance.

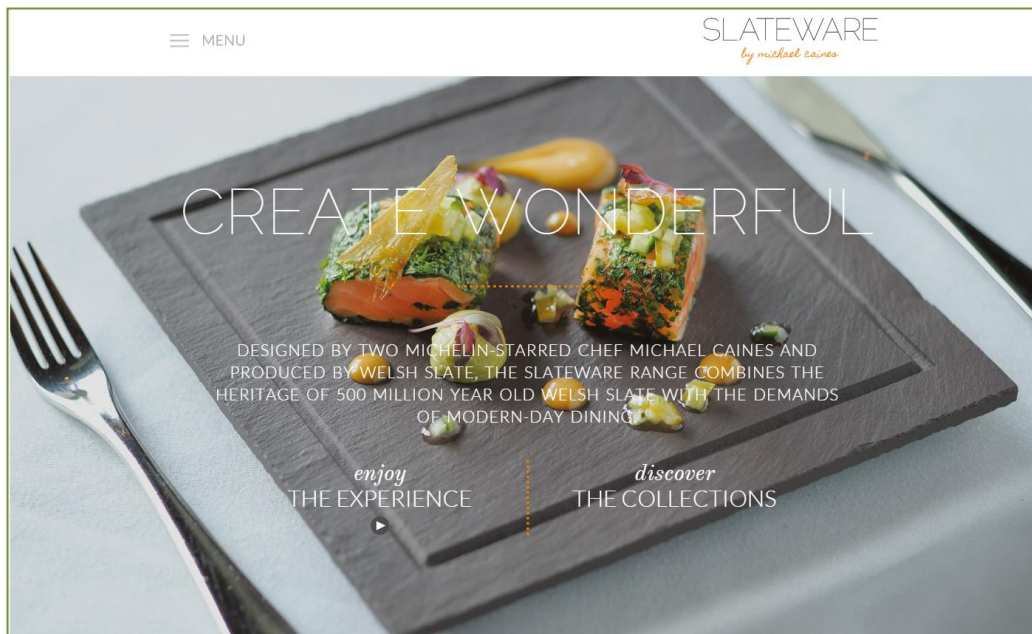


Figure 4.1. Slateware’s home page

Michael Caines also leads to the first example of Slateware’s (2015a) content marketing efforts, namely, the different food recipes the company is providing on their webpage (Figure 4.1) as well as in their digital journal and through social media. The recipe from the provided example of “pan fried scallops and provençal vegetable terrine with tapenade tomato and aubergine vinaigrette” enforces the expensiveness of Slateware brand and therefore, is presumably relevant to their affluent target audience.

The relevance of the recipes is further encouraged by Mintel (2015b) report stating that some 41% of UK adults cook from scratch nowadays and 39% of people enjoy experimenting with different recipes and ingredients which indicate a high level of interest in cooking and dining. In addition, reportedly some seven in ten people bake at home which justifies the recipes of macaroons and scones in Figure 4.2.

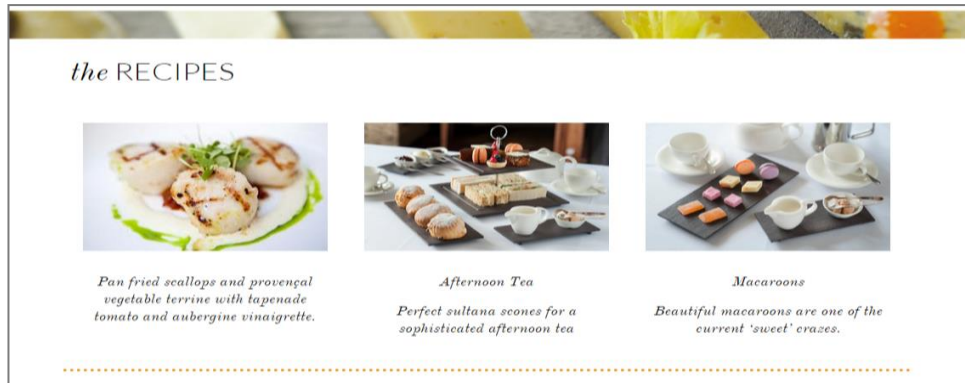


Figure 4.2. Content from Slateware's home page

In Twitter Slateware (2015b) is relying heavily on curated content by mainly “retweeting” posts from other users; however, the curated content is nevertheless as meaningful to the brand message as the original one. For example, the company is posting content from expensive restaurants, luxury hotels (Figure 4.3) and even Yacht shows. The curated content therefore demonstrates symbols of achievement (Egan, 2015, p.56 and 60) which can be linked to the Slateware brand and likely addresses the top-end lifestyle of their target audience, thereby indicating high relevance to them.



Figure 4.3 Curated content from Slateware's Twitter page



Figure 4.4 Original content from Slateware's Twitter page

In terms of original content the company is publishing in Twitter, there are positive and negative examples of content creation. On one hand, the tweets of Slateware often show what the company is up to (Figure 4.5) with pictures of people from their organisation which indicates the company is doing well (active presence in fairs and food shows) as well as gives the company a more personal voice. According to Pulizzi (2014, p.241) ‘action shots’ of the company help the audience imagine themselves as customers. In addition, Figure 4.4 shows how Slateware is emphasizing their Welsh origin (which they also

do through curated content) which once again gives the brand more personality and the localness could be relevant to their target audience.



Figure 4.5. Slateware's organisational 'action shot' in Twitter

However, there are also examples of inconsistencies with the general brand message and style. Figure 4.6 demonstrates an entertaining picture of a smiling monkey; however, the generally formal and classy style of the organisation does not match with it, especially when in comparing the monkey with Figure 4.5 featuring a man in a suit. Entertaining and informative content do not have to exclude each other; however, the type of entertainment chosen create confusion in terms of the brand persona and 'voice' (Lieb, 2011, p.16) and what Slateware as a brand represents.

In addition, Figure 4.7 shows the company's effort on starting a conversation with their customers by asking whether the audience preferred an Indian takeaway or fish and chips. However, the choices they offer differ greatly from the previous expensive gourmet recipes and might not address the target audience. Therefore, the original content of Twitter could be improved.



Figure 4.6 Slateware's entertaining content in Twitter



Figure 4.7 Slateware's conversation starting attempt in Twitter

However, to sum up with a more positive example, Slateware has created the topic area in Twitter called #slateware (Figures 4.6; 4.7 and 4.8) that the company repeatedly uses in their posts. On one hand, it is the company's name anyway but as a trending topic it acts as a denominator by representing the whole product category. Therefore, it enables user-generated content which increases exposure to their brand. Furthermore, the same topic area features also in Instagram and Tumblr where Slateware is not even actively creating content but users are doing it for them. The company, however, must ensure that the products linked to the topic area are in fact theirs.



Figure 4.8 Trending topic of #slateware in Twitter

4.4 Just Slate

Just Slate is marketing their brand much less in the luxury brand category than Slateware. This is indicated by the constant flow of discount offers on their web page (Just Slate, 2015b) as well as in Facebook (Just Slate, 2015b). Even though StoneWareUK has no intention in offering discounts in their marketing campaigns and they intend to represent the high-end category, Just Slate demonstrates successful examples of organising contests in Facebook to win their products which can potentially act as an initiative for people to take part of the permission marketing program (join the brand community) which is some-

thing a new company like StoneWareUK could consider when creating the social media channels.

From content perspective, Just Slate is positioned in the giftware category by offering different gift ideas for different occasions both on their web page and in Facebook. (Figure 4.9) However, since the products gift ideas are only consisting of solely their products, it is more advertising then branded content. In addition, Mintel (2015b) findings show that people in UK are generally less likely to buy homeware than to themselves (with the exception of weddings), so the very general approach of offering gifts might not be of high relevance to their audience.

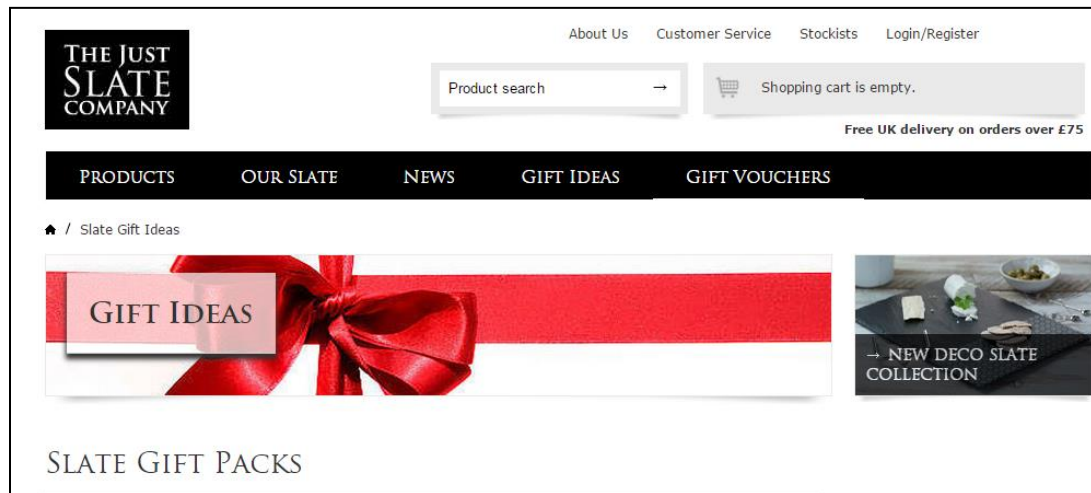


Figure 4.9 Just Slate's home page

In addition to gift ideas, there were some other kinds of content marketing efforts found from their Facebook page. The first one (Figure 4.10) is an original post from Just Slate which demonstrates how to use their coasters both as a cheese and dessert plates which could be classified as 'relevant information' for their target audience since according to Mintel (2015b) 'functional design' ranked as the most important quality when in purchasing homeware.



Figure 4.10 Just Slate's original content in Facebook



Figure 4.11 Just Slate's curated content in Facebook

The second example (Figure 4.11) is a curated content piece of Glasgow's food festival that similar to Slateware's efforts to associate the company with Wales, Just Slate demonstrates their Scottish origin which differentiates those two brands from each other and gives both more personality.

Another content marketing example that could be useful for StoneWareUK is how Just Slate is communicating with their retailers through social media. Figure 4.12 shows how the Just Slate is sharing content published by Andross Farm Shop and also their quite style personal conversation. There attempts demonstrate good relationships with their retailer when they positively (and seemingly selflessly) promote each other's brand, thus the commercial partners are co-branding through social media. (Egan, 2015, p.389) Since StoneWareUK is also going to sell their products through retailers, this kind of content could be also relevant for the target audience to know from which retailers StoneWareUK products can be found.

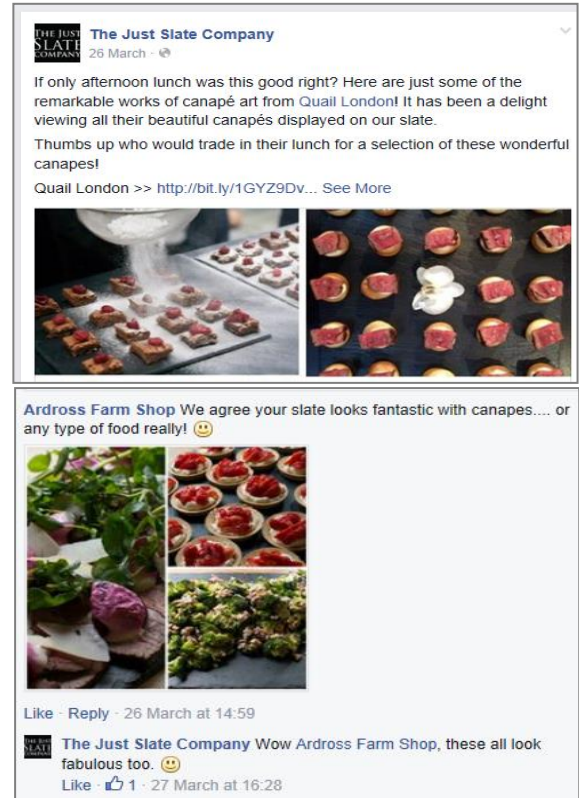


Figure 4.12 Just Slate and Ardross co-creating content

Compared to Slateware, Just Slate has less content that transmits the brand characteristics or distinguishes its specific style of communication. Furthermore, even though they position themselves in the giftware category, the gifts are often not personalised or tailored to any specific occasions nor that is content examples in which the company relates their brand to different occasions. StoneWareUK could represent their company in the giftware category better by making the gifts more personalised and tailored to specific occasions such as weddings. Also, using curated content to further enforce the gift-giving aspect would be highly recommended and would create stronger relevance for their audience.

4.5 Creative Tops

Creative Tops has the most amount of active digital media channels as well as most examples of content marketing compared to the rest of the competitors. Starting from their web page, Creative Tops (2015a) has a section called "Hints and tips" where customers can find different food recipes as well as home decorating tips. (Figure 4.13) Since ac-

According to Mintel (2015b), most homeware is bought by people who are setting up a home, it can be considered as a highly relevant content.

The company's photography style is fun and playful and their brand is strongly related to the shabby chic style in terms of interior design which represents a mixture of old and rustic with new. Therefore, the company communicates a unique style of what their wide range of products and their brand represents. Since tableware is mainly bought by people aged 34-35 who prefer to 'mix and match' with the table setting, the content Creative Tops publishes can indicate high them. (Mintel, 2014b)

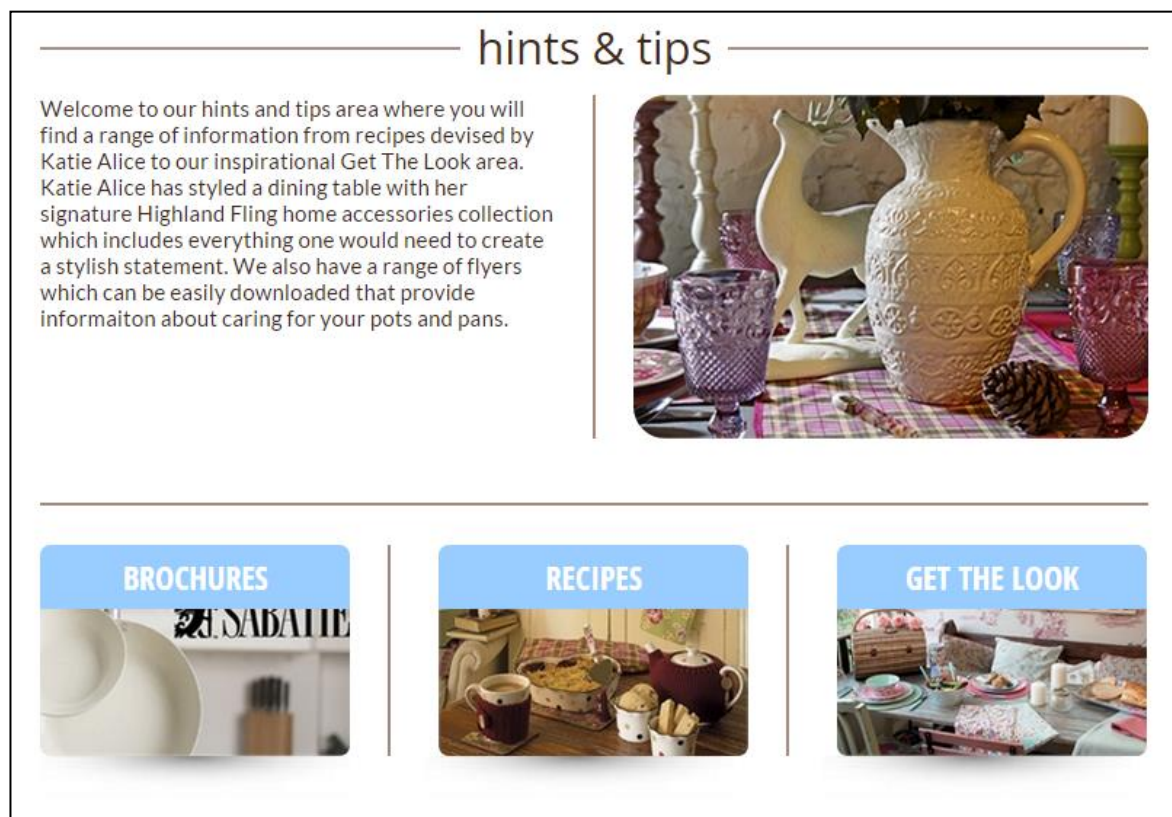


Figure 4.13. Content on Creative Tops' home page

The website of the company is linked to their blog (Creative Tops, 2015b) where it is possible to find content that reflects the company's values, thus, editorial which makes their content marketing strategy more advanced than in the case of Slateware or Just Slate. For example, the blog post on "#meatlessmondays" that urges individuals to try out vegetarian dishes (Figure 4.14) demonstrates the company valuing vegetarianism and/or healthy lifestyle which gives the brand a distinctive personality. Also, with the trend towards vegetarianism (reference), many people find that kind of content relevant.

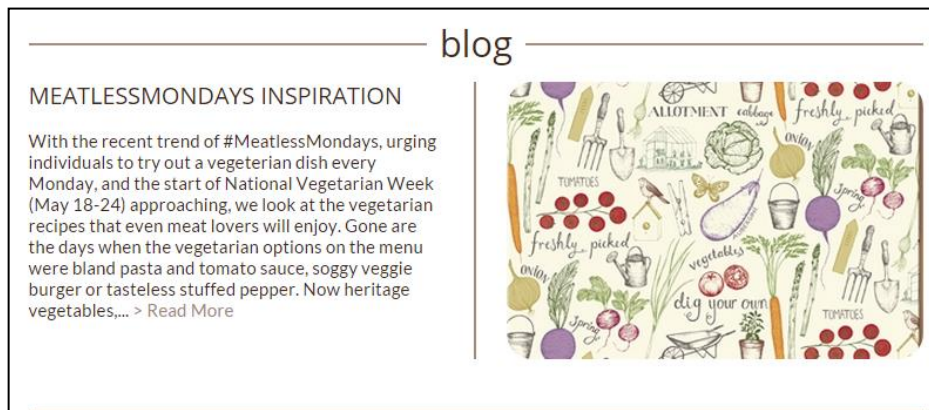


Figure 4.14. Editorial content on Creative Tops' blog

From social media, Creative Tops is using both Twitter (2015c) and Facebook pages (2015d) in a relatively similar way and they are even occasionally posting identical messages for both channels. In both channels the company is portraying their organisation as a team of young, fun-loving and women. For example, Figure 4.15 shows the contrast between Slateware and Creative Tops in their Facebook accounts where Slateware features an older man with a suit with grey and black tones whereas the team in Creative Tops has painted their faces yellow for the topic area #YellowforSeth which supports a boy living in a rare health condition (thus, another example of editorial content). Both companies therefore communicate their brand differences well in terms of content related to their organisation.

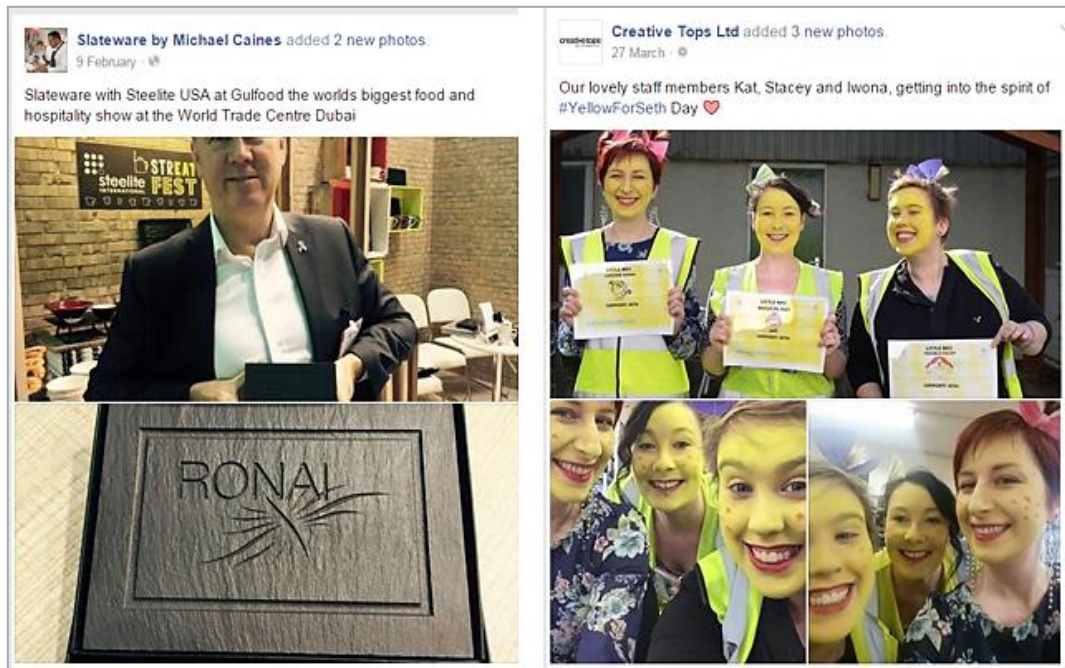


Figure 4.15 Organisational content comparison between Slateware and Creative Tops

In addition to their organisational style, Creative Tops publishes a wide variety of content in their social media pages, however, as opposed to Just Slate where the different content pieces did not communicate a consistent brand character, Just Slate has managed to do that. In Figure 4.16 the company is showing how to use teapots as an interior decoration piece which qualifies from a content marketing perspective “teach how to do something”. Figure 4.17 is an example of Katie Alice, the company’s founder and designer who is giving conferences on how companies can manage their finances and secure support for their business which shows Creative Tops standing for successful business women which could be an “inspiring” content for their target audience.



Figure 4.16 Creative Tops' content on Facebook Figure 4.17 Creative Tops' and business-related content on Facebook

Similar to Just Slate, Creative Tops is offering different gift ideas for occasions in Twitter, Facebook and also in Pinterest. However, the gift ideas from Creative tops are better tailored to different occasions (Figure 4. 18) and repeatedly emphasize the keyword “inspiration”. Figure 4.19 shows the Creative Tops’ (2015e) board on Pinterest named “Easter inspiration” more elaborately where the company is once again teaching their customers how to make different sweets and cakes with the help of their products. In addition, the company is using Google+ (Creative Tops, 2015f) for curating posts from other users (Figure 4.20), however, the posts of similar nature to their original posts in Pinterest – teaching the audience how to do something.

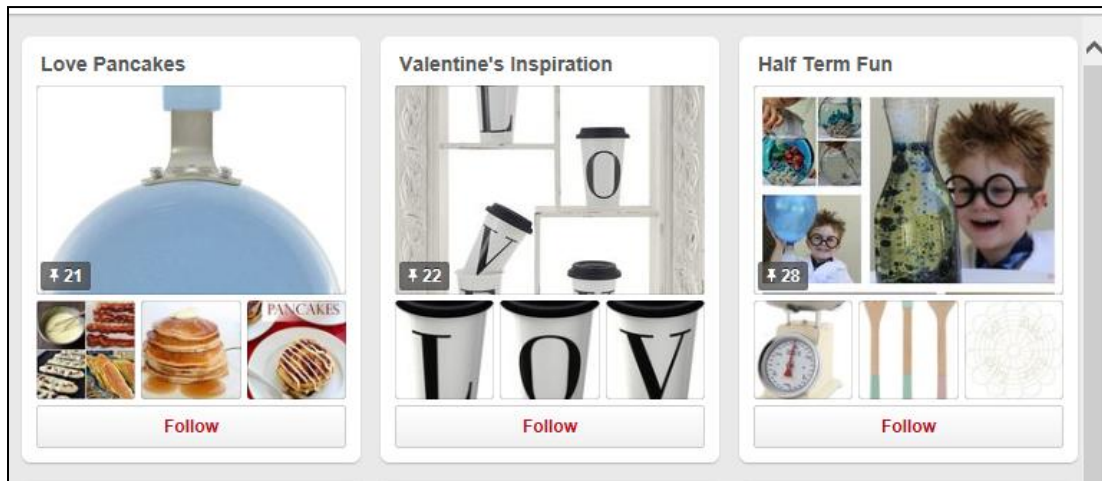


Figure 4.18 Creative Tops' tailored Pinterest content

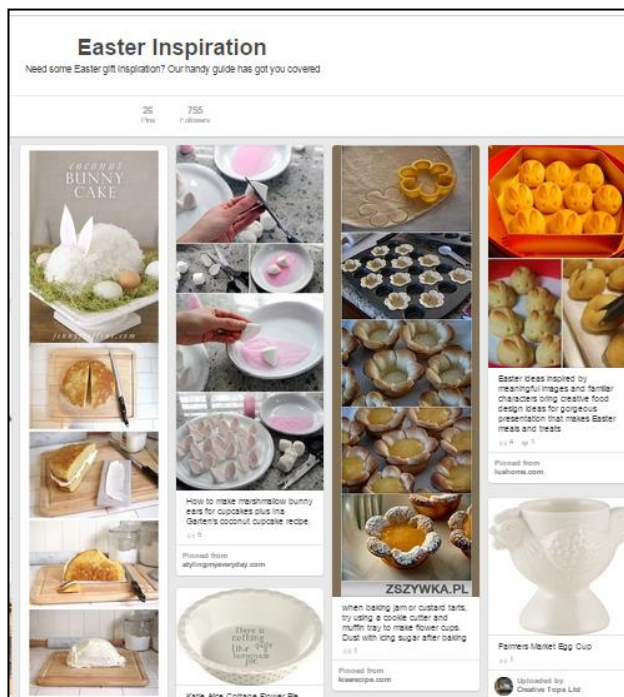


Figure 4.19 Creative Tops' Easter Inspiration board on Pinterest

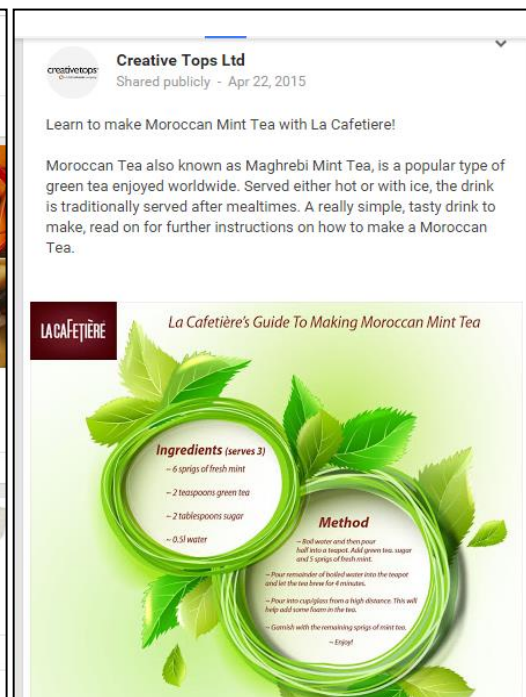


Figure 4.20 Creative Tops' curated content on Google+

Even though the market trends in UK do not generally favour positioning in the giftware category Creative Tops has managed to create content that shifts the focus off selling their tableware and relates their brand more with inspiring and fun activities to do on those occasions. Thus, the company is potentially taking a part of the lifestyle of their audience which increases the chance of their products being in consideration on those occasions not as strictly tableware items but more as items packed with set of values and inspiration.

Therefore, based on the quality of content, Creative Tops shows a good example of how to use all kinds of informative, entertaining and editorial content in a coordinated manner so that all attributes contribute to the distinctive brand attributes, values and style.

4.6 Slateplate

Slateplate (2015a) from the United States has no examples of content marketing in their web page (Figure 4.21); however, there are two general themes that StoneWareUK might want to take into account when in creating a content strategy. First of all the company's slogan is "the beauty of nature" which is similar to the StoneWareUK "formed by nature fired by man" featuring several photographs of nature. Therefore, StoneWareUK might consider using the nature aspect in terms of creating content. In addition the company also personalized gifts in the form of engraved slates.

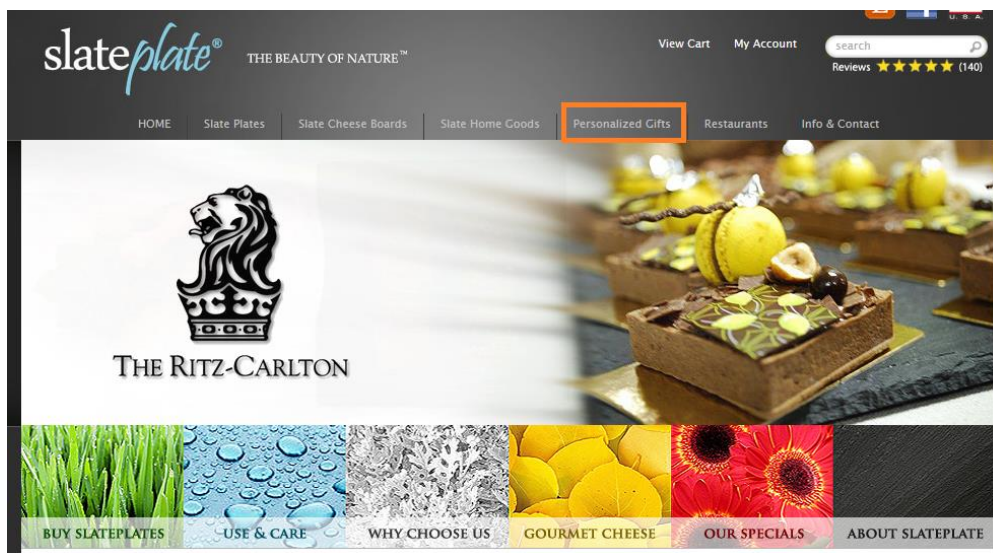


Figure 4.21 Home page of Slateplate

In social media, the company mostly curates content, however their Facebook page shows that instead of reinforcing the "nature" or "personalised giftware" aspects the company focuses on food category and more precisely, colourful food from different restaurants which is presented on their slate. (Slateplate, 2015b) The food pictures can be considered as entertaining content rather than informative since they do not include any recipes and their the style is highly enthusiastic such as shown in the Figure 4.22 featuring two Facebook messages of "Strawberries are in this season!" and "So yummy and colourful!" Ac-

According to Mintel (2014a) customers in social media networks prefer their messages to be rather relevant than entertaining.

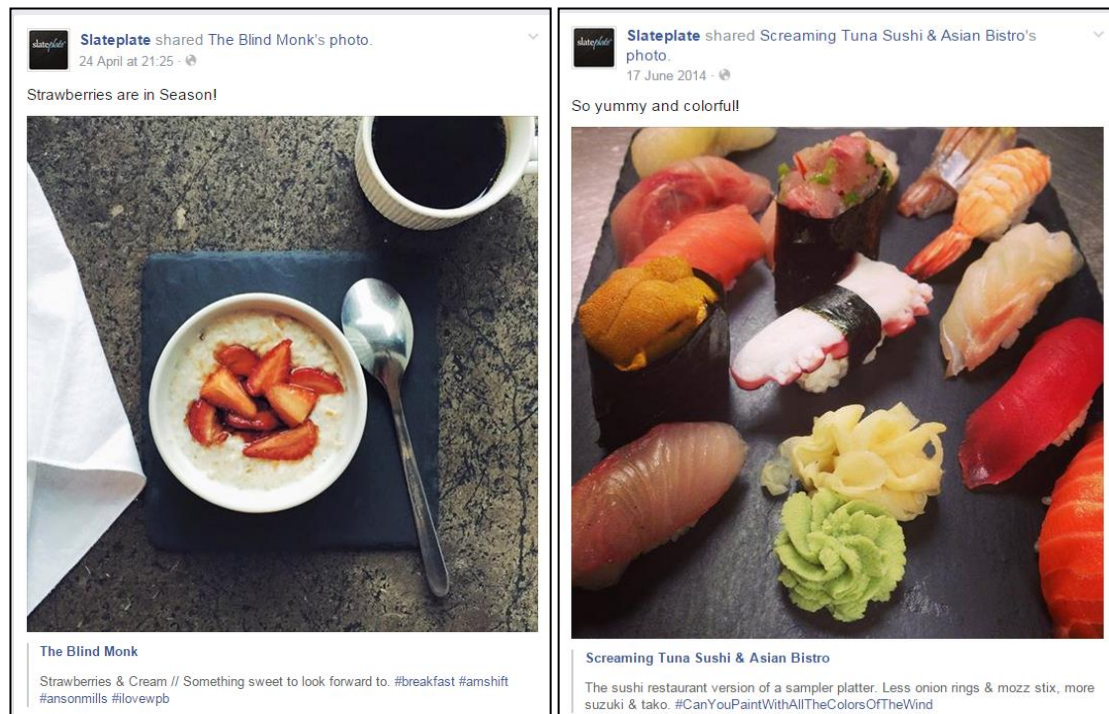


Figure 4.22 Slateplate two Facebook messages of food-related content

It can be therefore concluded that the company has a quite distinctive and personalised style in social media, however since it does not sync with their web page, the curated content does not represent their brand accurately.

4.7 The Derwent Slate Plate Company

Derwent Slate Plate is publishing even less content than Slate plate since no examples can be found from their web page (Derwent Slate Plate, 2015) and in addition the company has stopped using social media from 2015. However, if there is something to learn from Derwent, the company is strongly positioning themselves in the “wedding” category by offering slates as wedding gifts; also engraved place cards, and menus. (Figure 4.23) Promoting the wedding category is in correlation with market trends in the UK which show that the number of weddings is increasingly rising in UK where sentimental, personalised and meaningful homeware items are highly favoured to be given as gifts. (Mintel, 2015b) Therefore, producing original or curated content related to wedding category would be a good opportunity for StoneWareUK.

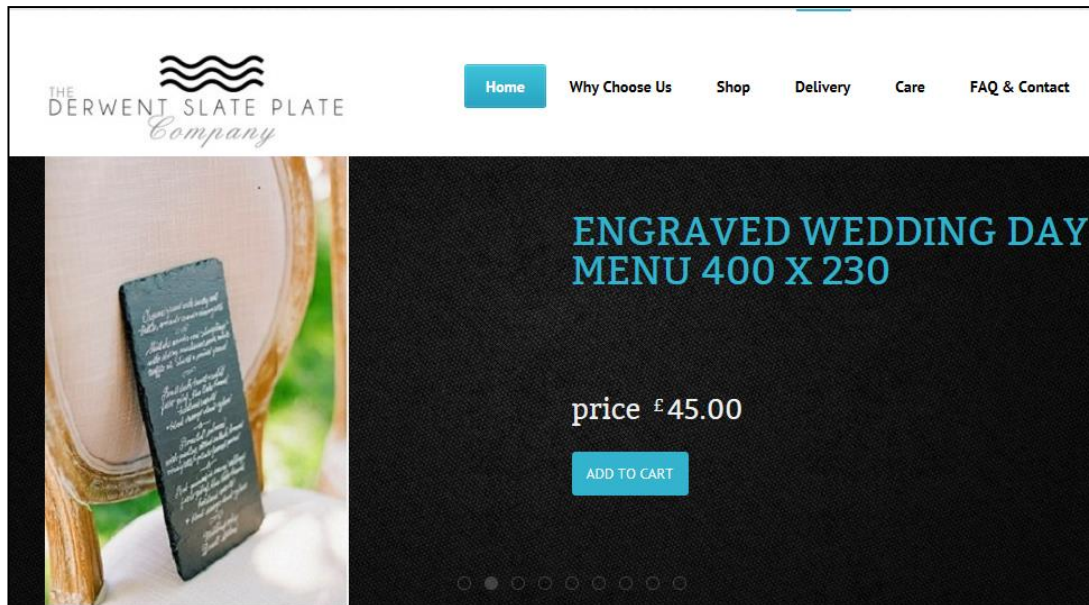


Figure 4.23. Derwent Slate Plate home page highlighting the 'wedding' category

5 Suggestions for Implementation

The competitor analysis in correlation with the current market trends in UK gave several ideas for communicating StoneWareUK brand through content on several social media platforms. Based on the competitors presence and social media marketing trends in UK amongst the AB socio-economic group StoneWareUK is suggested to create strategy in Facebook, Twitter and as well as in YouTube and Instagram.

Since StoneWareUK is planning to position their brand in the high-end category, Slateware by Welsh slate demonstrated well how the general appearance and curated content can distinguish the brand as expensive and luxurious, and at the same time be potentially relevant to their affluent target market by representing their high-end lifestyle. Also, relating the slate products to gourmet food would be a way to relate to UK adults who enjoy experimenting with cooking at home. Finally, creating a topic area #stoneware similar to #slateware could be a useful way to encourage user-generated content.

Secondly, Just Slate demonstrated well how to build a brand audience through organising contests in Facebook and how to participate in personal-style dialogues with the retailers through social media channels which can potentially amplify each other's brand messages

and increase brand awareness. Also, Just Slate's content on how to use slate products demonstrated the content promoting the 'functional design' of the products which the market trends in UK favour.

Thirdly, Creative Tops had the most advanced content marketing strategy showing a wholesome use of informative, entertaining and editorial content which communicated a distinctive brand character as well as several features indicating high relevance to their audience. For example, providing home decorating tips could be potentially useful for people starting a home and who also buy the most homeware. However, it needs to be added that whereas Creative Tops encouraged experimenting with the tableware elements, Mintel (2014b) found that people with higher income prefer a more matching set, thus more "classical" approach would be recommended to StoneWareUK.

And finally the lack of Slateplate and the Derwent Slate Plate producing any content demonstrated opportunities for StoneWareUK to choose from those companies' collective keywords whether the aspect of "personalisation", "nature" or "wedding" and create content within those keywords.

5.1 Limitations

Firstly, when analysing the theory on content marketing it became evident that the academic literature in this area is still fairly limited. Even the leading authors offer solely best practices and emphasize that the real success of a content marketing strategy lies in monitoring the results. (e.g. Lieb, 2011; Pulizzi, 2014)

Measuring content marketing 'real' results was, however, impossible as an observer due to not being able to gain access to the physical data needed for it (Saunders, et al., 2007, p.162) such as different analytical tools and traffic that content in social media led to the website. Furthermore, the customer 'interactivity' with the content which was the most important concept throughout this research could not have been fully incorporated to the research.

Also, the lack of theory was partially compounded with absence of a clear content marketing and relatively high use of traditional "interruptive" marketing messages of the ana-

lysed companies which meant that the qualitative data could not have been analysed in a systematic and rigorous manner. (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 493)

6 Conclusion

When in analysing the conceptual area of digital, social media and content marketing, several opportunities of how companies, especially StoneWareUK, could positively enforce their brand through the renewed ideas of customer-company relationships, were identified. Companies can make the best use of the interactive nature of digital media in customers adding value to their brand as well as enhance personalised communication strategies through the sophistication of data collection. Social media offers opportunities to create loyal brand communities that act as a partner to the company and facilitate electronic word-of-mouth which customers are proven to trust more than adverts. Building and communicating brand through engaging and relevant content is paramount in all digital media channels.

Even though the competitor analysis faced some limitations such as their continuous reliance on traditional communication methods instead of content creation as well as the limited access to analytical tools, this research served its overall purpose well in analysing and profiling the StoneWareUK competitors which gives several suggestions for StoneWareUK what to do and what kind of mistakes to avoid in order to gain competitive advantage through communication through content. In addition, the Mintel reports turned out to be very helpful and easily related to the competitor behaviour and content marketing theory which helped to assess the relevance of the content.

6.1 Discourse

Jutkowitz (2014) noted in Harvard Business Review that nine out of ten organizations are now marketing with content which means that companies are going beyond the traditional sales pitches and instead enhancing brands by publishing (or passing along) relevant information, ideas, and entertainment that customers will value. He adds that this kind of commitment to storytelling and editorial integrity is how content marketing has begun to

encroach on the whole of marketing and concludes that content has miraculously given brands a greater purpose

6.2 Scope of Future Research

Since digital technologies are constantly evolving and this research has proven content marketing to be an increasingly relevant communicational concept, the scope for future research in terms of content publishing strategies is extremely wide. For instance, Lieb (2011, p 172) highlights several systematic ways of analysing and assessing the content needs of the target audience could be done by conducting a thorough target group analysis.

When it comes to the StoneWareUK, this action research covered only two first stages of the theory, diagnosing and planning action, so the future scope of this action research would involve creating actual presence on suggested social media platforms, publishing content within those platforms and later measuring the result based on different tools and interactions with the customers.

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Appendix I

“How marketing is affected by the surge of inactivity”

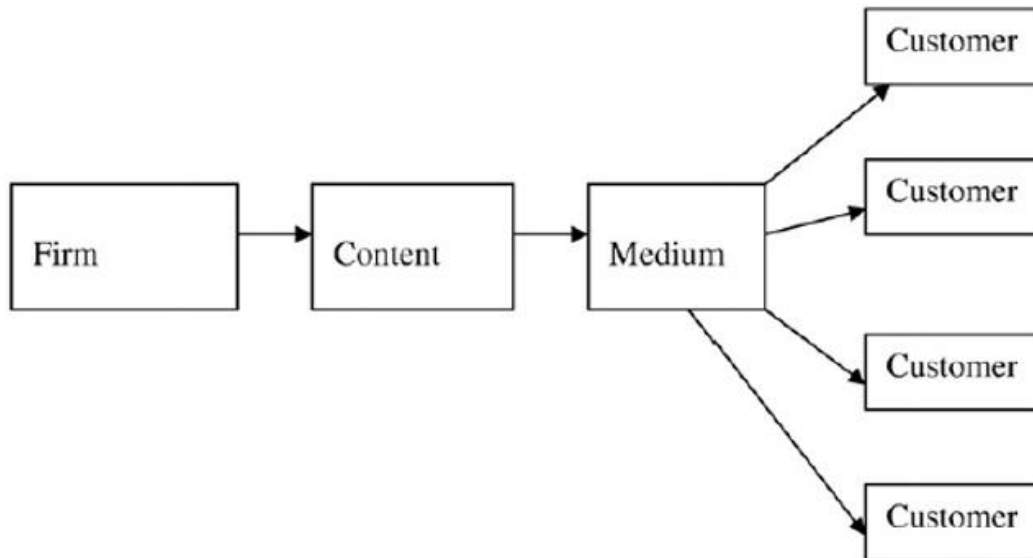
Marketing area	Examples of how interactivity affects each area
	Marketing mix
Branding	The <i>locus</i> of many companies' brands has shifted from the real to the virtual world, while the brands of many others are strongly affected by what is said about them in the virtual world
Product	Customer input into product design (collaborative design) can be obtained much more quickly. Customers can design their own products more easily. Designs can be tested and revised more quickly, while problems can be identified and rectified more quickly and easily
Price	Prices can be tailored more easily to different customers. Yield management can be applied in many new areas
Advertising	Web site/mobile advertising is gradually usurping advertising in conventional media, allowing greater trackability and better assessment of return on investment. This is leading to a blurring of the distinction between advertising and other marketing communications methods
Direct marketing	Direct marketing has expanded out of the conventional media of mail and telephone to include virtually all marketing communications
Personal selling	Personal selling now has much stronger information support, while improved sales management systems, sometimes integrated with response management systems, allow much more effective targeting and management of customers and prospects
Public relations	Electronic word of mouth, or “word of mouse”, is replacing conventional media exposure, not solely through social networks, but through all aspects of web and mobile dialogue. In some sectors, online reviews have become absolutely critical in determining whether a product will sell
Sales promotion	The effectiveness of sales promotions can be gauged much more quickly, while online channels facilitate distribution of coupons and other incentives
Distribution	The web has become a very important channel of distribution for many information-based products and services, as well as some physical products
	Marketing management
People	Marketing, sales and service people can be much better informed about what they need to know to sell and market better, and results of their work can be obtained and distributed more easily
Processes, data and systems	Marketing processes can be migrated onto systems, sometimes running on the “cloud”, enhancing the effectiveness and speed of processes. Systems allow much better access to data required for decision making on everything from individual customers to strategic decisions, and then for measurement, review and calculation of return on investment
Market research	Market research is increasing carried out online, while customer-initiated feedback is providing a new source of information on how customers think, feel and act

Source: Stone, M.D. and Woodcock, N.D. (2014) 'Interactive, direct and digital marketing', *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 8(1), pp. 6.

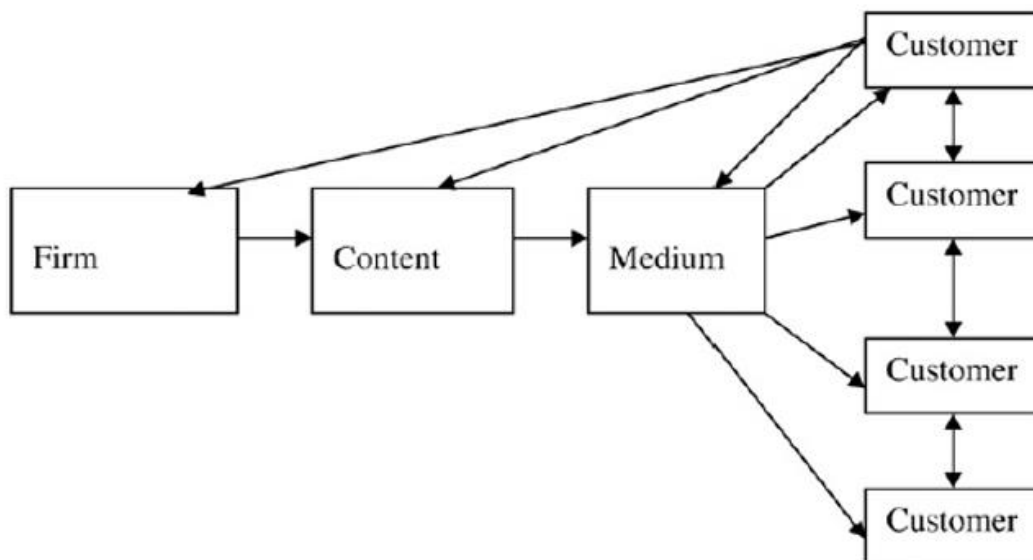
Appendix II

Traditional (a) and Modified (b) Mass Communications Model

a: Traditional Mass Communications Model



b: Modified Mass Communications Model



Source: Hoffman, D.L. and Novak T.P (1996) 'Marketing in Hypermedia Computer-Mediated Environments: Conceptual Foundations', *Journal of Marketing*, 60 (July), pp. 50–68.