



Title: An investigation of the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Brand Equity for Fashion Brands and the sustainability thereof.

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the B.Com Honours in Strategic Brand Management degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institute for degree purposes.

ABSTRACT

Social Media Marketing (SMM) can be defined as a means through which individuals can engage with firms and brands through social media sites. Fashion brands are moving towards social media platforms in order to effectively market to consumers. However, it is difficult to measure the effect that Social Media Marketing has on brand equity. Brand equity is made up of underlying constructs namely; brand engagement, brand awareness and brand loyalty. Furthermore, the sustainability of Social Media Marketing has not been explored, presenting a gap in literature. For these reasons, this study aims to investigate the extent to which Social Media Marketing affects brand equity for fashion brands. An experimental method was used, whereby 60 participants aged 19 to 25 were randomly divided into control and experimental groups and were asked to complete a questionnaire, in order to investigate the influence that Social Media Marketing has on brand equity. Interviews were conducted with two marketing experts who have worked or are currently working in the fashion industry, in order to determine whether Social Media Marketing is sustainable. Findings from the study suggest that Social Media Marketing has a positive influence on brand equity. Each construct was evaluated and it was found that Social Media Marketing has a positive influence on brand awareness, brand engagement and brand loyalty. It was also found that Social Media Marketing is sustainable. These findings will enlighten fashion brands as Social Media Marketing will continue to be a relevant marketing tool in strategies in order to achieve marketing goals.

Key Words: Social Media Marketing, Fashion Brands, Brand Awareness, Brand Engagement, Brand Loyalty, Brand Equity.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTUALISATION

Marketing has become very necessary over the past few years as consumers have more choice in terms of which brands to purchase and be loyal towards. Marketing efforts allow brands to differentiate themselves through connecting with consumers. Social Media has become one of the “best opportunities available” to a brand in terms of connecting with prospective consumers (Neti, 2011). Neti (2011), states that the social media sites are able to win the trust of consumers by connecting with them on a deeper level. It can be said that forming a relationship with consumers is advantageous for businesses as it can increase the consumer life cycle. The consumer life cycle is a term used to describe the various stages a consumer goes through when considering purchasing, using, and maintaining loyalty to a product or service. Through Social Media Marketing, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) can track the consumer life cycle. It is evident that Social Media Marketing can lead to an increase in brand loyalty through moving the consumer to the last stages of the consumer life cycle as well as building and maintaining meaningful relationships with the consumer. It is important to note that through Social Media Marketing, consumers are able to engage with the brand through commenting and liking and subscribing to pages belonging to various brands that traditional forms of marketing has failed to achieve.

Social Media Marketing can aid in the success of businesses in terms of their marketing strategy, but will businesses see a return on their investment? Social Media Marketing can be an expensive endeavour for many businesses and therefore needs to be worth the investment. This paper aims to investigate the extent to which Social Media Marketing affects Brand Equity and if it is sustainable. Due to the large investments made, businesses need to know if Social Media Marketing will be sustainable or if it will too will see a decline. Prior studies have investigated the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Band Equity as well as the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Consumer Equity. However, there is a gap in literature with regards to the sustainability of Social Media Marketing, which forms the part of the rationale for this study.

1.2 RATIONALE

Pulizzi (2012), suggests that for non-media companies, the content is created for attracting and retaining customers rather than solely for profit generation. It is therefore vital that organisations understand to what extent their content marketing is increasing brand equity as well as which aspects are the most successful. It is important that brands have a strong social media strategy to stay relevant and competitive (Erdoğan & Cicek, 2012). Thus, it is key for brands to understand what it is that makes a successful social media marketing strategy. This study aims to provide businesses with insight with regards to their Social Media Marketing strategy aimed at Generation Y individuals. The perceived quality and perceived intent of the Social Media Marketing based on feedback from Generation Y individuals can guide the Social Media Marketing strategy in achieving the intended outcome.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Social media has been a growing phenomenon over the past decade and has created a platform for both individuals and organisations to express themselves. Due to the growth of the internet and social media, organisations need to consider how to effectively use these tools to communicate with customers (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Social Media Marketing is different from the traditional forms of advertising or marketing and therefore affects brand equity differently. Since Social Media Marketing is a new concept, it is important to test the extent to which Social Media Marketing affects brand equity and whether the relationship is sustainable or not.

1.3.1 Research Goal

The goal of this research paper was to explore Social Media Marketing as a concept. Due to the growth of this concept, it is important to explore the effect that it has on brand equity. It is important to note that every marketing effort taken by businesses should yield a return. The research goal is to therefore, to determine the extent to which Social Media Marketing affects brand equity. Furthermore, due to the decline of traditional forms of marketing, such as print media, if Social Media Marketing is sustainable or if it will too see a decline in the near future.

1.3.2 Research questions

Primary Research Questions:

- To what extent does social media marketing influence brand equity for fashion brands?
- Is the relationship between Social Media Marketing and brand equity sustainable?

Sub-questions:

- To what extent does Social Media Marketing influences brand engagement?
- To what extent does Social Media Marketing influence brand loyalty?
- To what extent does Social Media Marketing influence brand awareness?

1.3.3 Research objectives

The primary objective underlying this research question is:

- *To determine whether Social Media Marketing can increase brand equity.*

From the primary objective, three secondary objectives can be defined:

- *To determine whether Social Media Marketing has a positive effect on brand engagement*
- *To determine whether Social Media Marketing has a positive effect on brand loyalty*
- *To determine whether Social Media Marketing has a positive effect on brand awareness*

1.3.4 Hypotheses

H1: Social media marketing increases brand engagement for fashion brands.

H2: Social media marketing increase brand loyalty for fashion brands.

H3: Social media marketing increases brand awareness for fashion brands.

H4: Social media marketing increases brand equity for fashion brands.

1.4 PURPOSE STATEMENT

Businesses are moving away from traditional forms of marketing and advertising and towards the online space such as Social Media Marketing. The purpose of the study is to investigate the extent to which Social Media Marketing influences brand equity, by means of an experimental approach. Understanding the influence that Social Media Marketing has on brand equity serves as an indication for marketers and fashion brands as to whether their current strategy is successful in increasing brand equity. Therefore, the conclusions from this study will serve as a signal to those fashion brands that do not currently employ Social Media Marketing as a strategic tool to increase brand equity. This study further, aims to determine if Social Media Marketing is sustainable, through conducting interviews with marketing experts. Conclusions drawn from the qualitative data will serve as a signal for fashion brands, which currently employ Social Media Marketing, to continue to pursue this strategy. Lastly, conclusions drawn from the sustainability of Social Media Marketing will contribute to literature regarding brand equity as there was limited literature on the subject matter.

1.5 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The key concepts identified for this study are:

Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Social Media Marketing is the use of marketing on social media to communicate the brand image, promotions, brand personality and general information about the brand.

Brand Equity

Brand equity can be described as the difference in the choice that consumers make between products that are branded and products that are not branded but possess the same features (Yoo, Donthu & Lee, 2000). The creation of value for both the organisation and the consumer can be attributed to brand equity (Yoo, Donthu & Lee, 2000).

Brand Engagement

Lucassen & Jansen (2014), describe brand engagement as the emotional connection that exists between a brand and customers.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is the ability for the consumer to recall and recognise the brand and therefore known brands will be included in the consumer's consideration set (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2014).

Brand Loyalty

Consumers who are committed to the brand and make repeat purchases are said to be brand loyal (Mellens, Dekimpe & Steenkamp, 1996). Thus, brand loyalty is the commitment to the brand.

1.6 ANTICIPATED CONTRIBUTION

1.6.1 Business

Businesses spend a considerable amount of money on marketing efforts to best present their product or service to consumers. Many businesses are moving away from traditional forms of marketing and advertising, such as print media, and towards the online space, in the form of Social Media Marketing. However, the effects of Social Media Marketing on brand equity has yet to be researched and businesses need to know that there could be a potential return on their investment efforts. This research paper aimed to test whether or not Social Media Marketing increases brand equity and whether or not it is a sustainable marketing practice. Social Media Marketing could potentially cost a business a considerable amount of money to both establish and maintain for a few years and understanding the sustainability is therefore paramount. This research aimed to answer the necessary questions concerning return on investment of Social Media Marketing for businesses.

1.6.2 Government

Government is responsible for all legislation in South Africa and it is therefore necessary for government to have all the necessary information in order to make an informed decision when passing legislation. This study will add to the aforementioned information and give a broader and deeper insight into the effects of Social Media Marketing as well as the sustainability aspects thereof. Social Media Marketing has the potential to increase brand equity for businesses as well as encourage consumers to participate in the economy. However, Social Media Marketing requires that consumers not only have access to social networking sites, but that data is readily available and cost effective. In addition to all the

other reasons (such as training, access to information for education, etc.) Government can encourage telecoms companies to decrease the price of data or offer a reduced rate for the use of social networking sites.

1.6.3 Academia

Due to the fact that businesses are moving away from traditional forms of marketing and advertising, their marketing strategies have needed to be changed. For this reason, the marketing academic space will see a change in future. If the results show that Social Media Marketing is sustainable, marketing courses might need to be adapted in order to accommodate the inclusion of Social Media Marketing.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study used a conclusive, causal research design more specifically, an experimental research design. The experiment was conducted in Cape Town and asked participants aged 18 to 25 to complete a questionnaire in order to gather quantitative data. This data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) through conducting hypothesis tests. Furthermore, the study aimed to determine if Social Media Marketing is sustainable, which was investigated through interviews. The interviewees consisted of marketing experts that either currently work with or have worked with fashion brands. A detailed discussion on the research methodology is discussed in Chapter 3.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

This research paper consists of three chapters.

- Chapter Two consists of a literature review the researcher has examined prior literature relevant to the current study.
- Chapter Three comprises of a discussion of the research methodology employed in order to conduct the experiment, collect and interpret data and ultimately, answer the research questions.
- Chapter Four reports on the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data from which insights are drawn.
- Chapter Five concludes this research paper with a discussion on the conclusions drawn from the findings. Chapter Five further discusses the implications of the conclusions, ethical considerations as well as limitations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing will be defined and explored through the review of former studies. The importance of Social Media Marketing will be discussed as well as Social Media Marketing Activities. Social Media Marketing and the impact that it has on the performance of companies will be discussed as well as the activities that luxury brands use effectively.

2.1.1 Defining Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing (SMM) can be defined as a process that allows individuals to engage with firms and brands through their social media sites (Akar & Topçu, 2011). Through SMM, brands can communicate and listen to a wide community of consumers which is not possible with traditional marketing channels (Akar & Topçu, 2011). SMM uses social media as a tool to increase the brand's visibility on the Internet to present their products and services (Akar & Topçu, 2011).

Marketing on social media has had a significant impact on the marketing strategies of firms as it is replacing the more traditional forms of marketing (Akar & Topçu, 2011). In contrast to traditional forms of marketing, SMM has new features which include multidirectional dialogues. SMM consists of multi-directional dialogues which means that not only do brands talk to consumers and consumers talk to brands, but most importantly consumers also talk each other about these brands. Another feature of SMM is that it is participatory. This means that SMM relies on user participation. The last feature of SMM is that it is user generated. SMM relies on not only the participation but the interaction between the brand and consumers.

SMM allows for most of the content and connections between the consumers and the brand to be created by users. The aim of SMM is to allow the consumers to provide opinions about the brand in order for the brand to better cater to the customer (Akar & Topçu, 2011). Consumers are able to receive information about the product and service offerings from the brand in an alternative way. For example, consumers are able to receive information about the product and brand from other consumers (Akar & Topçu, 2011). According to Akar &

Topçu (2011), 28% of global consumers believe and trust the opinions of other people over data provided from the firm.

2.1.2 Relevance of Social Media Marketing

Anada, Hernández & Lamberti (2015) explain that in the present day, in order to achieve the desired brand image, brands can no longer rely on one-way communication only, but requires engaging and incorporating consumers in social media marketing activities. The engagement from consumers on SMM is important for marketers because they are effective. Consumers who try new products are able to share their experiences and opinions with other potential consumers. These opinions are seen as more objective than the marketing messages shared by the firm (Akar & Topçu, 2011).

Akar & Topçu (2011) state that only a few studies about social media and SMM exist and that most of the studies focus mainly on social networking sites. However, Akar & Topçu (2011) reviewed a study conducted by DEI Worldwide (2008) and the results showed that consumers who visited social media sites of the brand make better purchasing decisions in comparison to those who did not. It is evident that SMM is an important tool for marketers to provide relevant information and to stimulate a desire to purchase the product. However, through unsuccessful SMM activities, a brand can experience a negative brand reputation through negative reviews and opinions from consumers.

2.1.3 Generation Y and Social Media Marketing

Generation Y consists of those who are born after 1981 and are also referred to as Millennials, according to Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Gruber, Komarova Loureiro, and Solnet (2013). Generation Y actively contributes, searches for and consumes content on social media platforms (Bolton *et al.*, 2013). Generation Y's social media usage are of great interest to service managers and researchers as it may serve as an indication of how people will behave in future (Bolton *et al.*, 2013). Social Media users who are between 18 to 34 years old are more likely to prefer social media for interactions with acquaintances, friends and family than older age groups (Bolton *et al.*, 2013). Generation Y's are more likely to value others' opinions on social media and feel important when providing feedback about brands (Bolton *et al.*, 2013). However, Bolton *et al.*, (2013) go on to say that Generation Y is characterised as being more skeptical, impatient and blunt

due to being raised in an environment of information transparency and technologies that offer instant gratification.

2.2 Review of Prior Studies

A study conducted by Kim & Ko (2012), aimed to determine if SMM activities enhances customer equity for fashion brands. The study identified the five constructs that make up SMM activities as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation and word-of-mouth (WOM). The former study aimed to test if the five constructs influence value equity, relationship equity, brand equity, customer equity and purchase intention. The research was conducted through questionnaires made up of statements measuring these constructs and was distributed using convenience sampling. This former study uses quantitative research methods to determine the relationship. The relationship between the variables were tested using a structural equation model. Cronbach's alpha's (α) was applied to this study in order to test the internal consistency reliability of each construct of SMM. Furthermore, the effect that these constructs have on a variable is measured and determined by their factor loadings. A similar model will be used in this study to determine whether SMM activities affect the constructs of brand equity. In order to determine if the constructs are reliable, the study will apply the Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha used in the former study, could be used in this study and is therefore relevant to analyse. The factor loadings will be analysed in order to determine which factors influence and have the most influence on the constructs of brand equity.

The findings with regard to the constructs of SMM are that luxury brands that participate in SMM are able to entertain customers through offering a variety of free content and social network activity. Furthermore, luxury brands are able to create interactions among users that lead to consumers participating in online Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM) and Word-Of-Mouth. The spread of eWOM and WOM affects the brand image and contributes to the trend element of SMM. Kim & Ko (2012) found that contrary to marketing efforts that directly appeal to the value of the product, luxury brands SMM activities emphasise the hedonic and empirical values that are able to be reached by indirect brand experience.

This study found that SMM as an integrated marketing medium, SMM enhances customer equity by providing value that traditional forms of marketing cannot offer (Kim & Ko, 2012). This study found that SMM creates a platform for customers to engage with the brand on social media. However, the study found that the three customer equity drivers did not have

a positive influence on customer equity with regards to luxury fashion brands (Kim & Ko, 2012). Kim & Ko (2012) conclude that the reason for this lack of influence is due to the increased competition among luxury fashion brands. The study explains that customer loyalty is more difficult to sustain for a specific brand and that other factors might have influenced customer equity more than the three drivers mentioned (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Another finding is that customer equity and purchase intention are highly related. This is an important finding as Kim & Ko (2012) state that both value equity and brand equity affect purchase intention and it is therefore suggested that luxury fashion brands continuously invest in these factors. SMM activities influence both factors and by taking SMM into account could be a possible solution to the problem. It is mentioned that the limitation of the study was that the visual representation of the brands' SMM activities shown to participants poses a possible controlling problem.

A study conducted by de Vries & Grensler (2012) aimed to investigate the effects on Social Media Marketing with regards to brand posts and brand fan pages. The former study investigates the popularity of brand posts with regards to SMM. The former study empirically investigated eleven international brands across six different product categories (de Vries & Grensler, 2012). The results of the study showed that when marketing managers aim to increase the number of likes, they launch highly vivid or a medium brand post characteristics such as a contest or a video (de Vries & Grensler, 2012). However, posting questions on social media has a negative effect on the number of likes obtained which could point to the fact that the question cannot be answered by liking the post.

Furthermore, entertaining posts also have a negative effect on the number of likes obtained which points to the fact that the entertaining posts contain information that is irrelevant to the brand (de Vries & Grensler, 2012). The study further found that the share of positive comments positively relates to the number of likes. This information is relevant to this study as brand fans are possibly more likely to engage with a brand that they like. This could be a potential problem and could possibly affect the data collected in this study. This former study is relevant to this study as it investigates the interaction between the consumer and the brand, and ultimately brand equity. However, the study was conducted abroad and may not be relevant to South Africa. For this reason, it is crucial to conduct this research in South Africa as there is a gap in available literature in this regard.

2.2.1 Social Media Marketing Activities

2.2.1.1 Social Media Marketing Activities and Effects on Firm Performance

Social media sites are platforms through which interactions and collaborations with the consumers and the brand are facilitated (Kim & Ko, 2012). As the users of the social media sites increase, firms and other organisations started using the sites as a tool for communication (Kim & Ko, 2012). However, unlike individual users of the social media sites, firms and organisations use the sites for marketing and advertising. Kim & Ko (2012) explain that through social media marketing, firms are able to perform integrated marketing activities more effectively and at a lower cost.

According to Kim & Ko (2012) who reviewed a study, 36% thought more positively about firms and organisations which blog regularly. Furthermore, 70% of consumers have visited social media sites in order to acquire information, 49% of consumers have made a purchase decision based on the information they have acquired through the social media sites and 45% of those who searched for information online, engaged in WOM with regards to the content found. Lastly, 60% of consumers said that they would use social media in order to pass on information to other social media users.

These statistics show that it is evident that firms that do not participate in social media marketing as part of their marketing strategy, miss the opportunity of reaching consumers. The percentage of consumers who pass on information online or through WOM is significant and therefore, the value of one customer is worth more than what he or she initially spends (Kim & Ko, 2012). It is clear that firms and brands need to consider the value of consumers and how social media influences them (Kim & Ko, 2012).

However, the reverse effect has not been considered in previous literature. Social media can have an adverse effect on the brand in terms of brand image, brand loyalty and brand reputation. With consumers being able to share comments online and through WOM, consumers can have a negative influence on brand equity.

2.1.2.2 Social Media Marketing Activities of Luxury Brands

The definition of luxury has been used to indicate the concern of the horizontal marketing of goods that have the design as a premium feature, while maintaining a high selling price-to-manufacturing cost ratio (Anada *et al.*, 2015). Anada *et al.*, (2015) explain that the idea of luxury does not just apply to premium priced goods, but that it comprises of distinct characteristics that include delivery of premium quality, recognisable style and design, exclusivity, global brand reputation, emotional appeal and the presence of elements of uniqueness and lifestyle of the creator.

In the past, luxury brands hesitated to participate in social media marketing as this “classless mass media” seemed to contradict the exclusivity that luxury brands offer Anada *et al.*, (2015). However, the luxury industry has gradually acknowledged the significance of embracing social media as a marketing platform (Anada *et al.*, 2015). The development of technology posed many benefits for the fashion industry by inviting customers to engage with the brand through social media.

Through Social Media Marketing, fashion brands are able to participate in the current trend such as tweeting and blogging (Kim & Ko, 2012). Customers build a relationship while interacting with the brand through social media sites, a relationship is built and the desire for luxury is stimulated. In 2009, the use of social media by luxury brands began to surge. Brands such as Gucci and Burberry use social media in order to appeal to the digital generation customers (Kim & Ko, 2012). As a result of the social media marketing efforts, online sales increased. Furthermore, through the participation of Burberry customers online allowed for the brand to gain insights, in order to generate content that better resonates with customers (Kim & Ko, 2012).

Kim & Ko (2012) explore another brand that effectively utilizes social media marketing. Dolce and Gabbana uses social media marketing in order to gain insight and receive feedback from their customers. Dolce & Gabbana fashion bloggers upload feedback from the fashion shows which allows customers to view their favourite brand being modelled in the show. Through this social media marketing activity, Dolce & Gabbana can build customer purchase intension.

Kim & Ko (2012) found that contrary to marketing efforts that directly appeal to the value of the product, luxury brands SMM activities emphasise the hedonic and empirical values that are able to be reached by indirect brand experience.

2.3 Relevance of Prior Literature to Current Study

The former study conducted by Kim & Ko (2012), measures the degree of effect to which SMM has on enhancing customer equity. The statistical analysis is relevant to this study as similar tests will be conducted in order to determine if SMM affects brand equity. The five constructs of SMM identified by Kim & Ko (2012) are relevant to this study as these constructs need to be sustainable in order to have a long-term effect on brand equity. The five constructs need to remain relevant and appeal to the correct market in order to be effective.

The study found that through SMM brands can provide entertainment and social network activity and, create interactions among social media users. These interactions lead to eWOM and WOM which affect brand image and the trend element. These aspects of SMM are relevant to the study as it is important to understand which aspects appeal to consumers. Although these aspects of SMM are relevant to the study, former studies have not considered whether these elements are sustainable or not. These constructs will be measured in terms of sustainability in this study.

In the study conducted by de Vries & Gensler (2012) showed that in order to increase the number of likes, brands post vivid pictures or videos. However, entertaining posts can potentially have a negative effect on the number of likes. This is relevant to this study as the type of post could have an effect on one specific construct of brand equity, but not all. It is important to understand SMM and the activities that brands have launched for the various reasons. Certain activities could have an effect on one construct, but not all and is therefore important to note. However, no studies could be found with regards to the sustainable relationship between SMM and brand equity and this gap establishes the motivation for this study.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Former literature provides a solid theoretical foundation from which the current study can gain insights regarding data collection methods, Cronbach Alpha's and statistical analysis techniques. A review of prior literature revealed that Social Media Marketing increases customer loyalty and suggested possible reasons for this increase. However, researchers have not considered the affect that Social Media Marketing has on brand equity. Furthermore, there is limited literature regarding the sustainability of Social Media Marketing. The current study aims to investigate the effect that Social Media Marketing has on brand equity as well as the sustainability thereof, in order to contribute to current literature.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research design and methodology and data collection methods applied in this study in order to address the following research objectives:

The primary objective underlying this research question is:

- *To determine whether Social Media Marketing can increase brand equity.*

From the primary objective, three secondary objectives can be defined:

- *To determine whether Social Media Marketing has a positive effect on brand engagement*
- *To determine whether Social Media Marketing has a positive effect on brand loyalty*
- *To determine whether Social Media Marketing has a positive effect on brand awareness*

Causal research design was used in order to address the research objectives. In addition to these research objectives, an experiment was conducted in order to address the following hypotheses:

H1: Social media marketing increases brand engagement for fashion brands

H2: Social media marketing increase brand loyalty for fashion brands

H3: Social media marketing increases brand awareness for fashion brands

H4: Social media marketing increases brand equity for fashion brands.

This chapter proceeds with a discussion of the paradigms adopted in this study in section 3.2. This is followed by a discussion in section 3.3 regarding the research methodology and justification for the use of this particular methodology. Section 3.4 discusses the target population and the sample used in this study. This is followed by section 3.5 which outlines the questionnaire design used for the quantitative data collection. Section 3.6 outlines the pilot testing procedure and outcomes which are followed by a discussion regarding the data collection process in section 3.7. A description of the data analysis method employed is provided in section 3.8. Section 3.9 discusses the measures and processes employed to

ensure the reliability and validity of the research instrument. Section 3.10 outlines limitations of the research methodology.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The current study relied on the positivist paradigm. This approach was used for this study as it aimed to identify the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Brand Equity. This study aimed to determine the extent to which these variables are related and the positivist paradigm allowed for the researcher to observe outcomes of tests as well as test hypotheses. Former studies have examined the relationship between Social Media Marketing (SMM) and another variable using the positivist paradigm, similar to this current study. Former studies have attempted to understand SMM and if it enhances customer equity.

Along with the positivist paradigm, this study used the interpretivist paradigm. This approach was used to determine if the relationship between SMM and brand equity was a sustainable one. This approach was used as the study gained a more descriptive insight with regards to the sustainability of the relationship. Through this approach, industry experts and consumers could provide their opinion in the subject matter. Through the evaluation of the responses received, this study would determine if the relationship is sustainable.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design can be defined as a framework or blueprint for carrying out marketing research (Malhotra, 2010). For this particular study, a conclusive research design was most appropriate and is a quantitative approach. Due to the nature of this study, a conclusive, causal research design was implemented. According to Malhotra (2010), the primary objective of causal research is to obtain evidence of causal relationships. The aim of this study was to measure the effect that Social Media Marketing has on brand equity.

Due to the causal nature of the research design, an experimental method was required to manipulate the independent variable (SMM) in order to test its effect on the dependent variable (brand equity). More specifically, the method used was a static group design, which falls under pre-experimental research (Malhotra, 2010). This involves two groups – an experimental group which was exposed to a treatment (exposure to a fashion brand's Social

Media Marketing campaign), and a control group which was not exposed to a treatment (Malhotra, 2010). Measurements on both groups were then taken in order to determine the effect of Social Media Marketing on brand equity (Malhotra, 2010). This is illustrated by the diagram below:

Experimental Group:	X	O1
Control Group:		O2

The symbol X refers to the exposure of the treatment and O1 and O2 refer to the observation. Further discussion with regards to the administration of the surveys is contained in section 3.7.2. During the process of designing the research method, it was important to consider any extraneous variables that could affect the results obtained from the experiment. The only extraneous factor specifically relevant to this study was selection bias. This occurs when test units are placed into groups according to the researchers' judgement (Malhotra, 2010).

3.3.1 Justification for Research Methodology

As discussed previously the research use a quantitative research as the aim of the study was to gain insights into the statistical significance of relationship between Social Media Marketing and brand equity. Quantitative research allows for the investigation of relationships between two variables which is appropriate for this study. Additionally, qualitative analysis was used to question the sustainability of social media marketing. Qualitative methods are useful when examining questions that require an opinion, which is deemed appropriate for this study. Questionnaires were used and interviews were conducted in order to gain insight to best answer the research questions. Questionnaires and interviews were selected as the means to collect data as it was found to be the most practical and cost effective methods. Furthermore, through these methods, results can be easily quantified and analysed by the researcher.

3.4 RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLE

3.4.1 Population

Malhotra (2010), defines the target population as the collection of objects or elements that hold the characteristic of interest to the researcher. The target audience for this study was fashion conscious individuals who reside in Cape Town. Due to the nature of the research question, the target audience needed to have some knowledge about the fashion industry in order to better give feedback and insight to the researcher. Cape Town has a diverse population which is the key reason the location was chosen. Cape Town houses many different cultures, religions, levels of income and professions which is advantageous to the study as individuals from different backgrounds can perceive certain aspects of Social Media Marketing in different ways. A diverse target population would result in a diverse range of answers and helped to fully understand the constructs of the question.

The target population was further narrowed down to fashion conscious individuals who reside in Cape Town and fall between the ages of 18 and 25. This particular age bracket was chosen to identify how Social Media Marketing affects the Generation Y consumers. One of the key characteristics of Generation Y consumers is that they have experienced early and frequent exposure to technology (Boltman, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Gruber, Loureiro & Solnet, 2013). According to Boltman *et al.*, (2013), there are many external events that have influenced Generation Y consumers' social media use and their buying behaviour. This study aimed to identify how Social Media Marketing can affect their loyalty, engagement with the brand and brand awareness.

3.4.2 Sample

Due to the given target population, this study aimed to use a sample size of 60. This sample size would allow for a diverse number of participants which lead to a diverse range of responses. This sample size was used as it was considered to be large enough to be an accurate representation of the target population.

3.5 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

3.5.1 Questionnaire Layout

3.5.1.1 Filter questions

Filter questions are included in a survey in order to filter participants to meet the requirements of the targeted participants. Therefore, the survey included questions such as gender, age, whether or not the participant uses social media and if the respondent follows fashion brands on social media. These variables were asked in questions 1 to 4 respectively. Question 5 questions which brand is the most successful on social media in the mind of the participant of the four brands listed. If these questions do not meet the requirements of the study, the experiment is not taken into account as the participant does not fall within the parameters of the target population. Question 6 was included to question which aspect the participant finds to be the success factor for these brands on social media. The options included in the survey were found from research conducted in the literature review and include frequency of posts, visual content and information relayed.

3.5.1.2 Scales for Measurement

The scales used were taken from the Marketing Scales Handbook and was used to measure the constructs of brand equity (Bruner, 2013). All constructs in this study used a five-point Likert scale. A five-point Likert scale was implemented to measure the extent to which participants disagreed or agreed with a statement (Malhotra, 2010). A typical five-point Likert Scale is structured in the following way: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. This shows that the scale makes use of negative words as well as positive words in order to best identify with the participant (Malhotra, 2010). Brand engagement was measured using the multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale. Brand loyalty was measured using the commitment to the brand scale and brand awareness was measured using the brand familiarity scale.

3.5.1.2.1 Brand Awareness

Brand Awareness was measured according to the Brand Familiarity scale and therefore, the two terms will be used interchangeably throughout the research paper. The Brand Familiarity scale was appropriate to use for this study as it aimed to highlight and measure brand awareness for individuals aged between 18 and 25. The scale used makes use of a five-point Likert Scale to evaluate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the three statements regarding brand awareness. Brand awareness was measured using questions 7.1 to 7.3 through the following scale items:

Question 7: Brand Familiarity

7.1. This brand is very familiar to me

7.2. I am knowledgeable about this brand

7.3. I have seen advertisements about this brand in the mass media

3.5.1.2.2 Brand Engagement

Brand engagement was measured using the multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale and, was researched, adapted and used by Yoo and Donthu (2001). The multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale uses a five-point Likert scale that was developed by Oliver & Bearden (1985) and further developed by Yoo & Donthu (2001). The scale used four items and five-point Likert Scale to measure brand engagement. Therefore, the participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements regarding brand engagement. Brand engagement was measured using questions 8.1 to 8.4 through the following scale items:

Question 8: Multidimensional Consumer-based Brand Equity Scale.

8.1. I am very involved with product category X.

8.2. I use product category X very often.

8.3. I am a product category X expert.

8.4. I am interested in the product category

5.3.1.2.3 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty was measured according to the Commitment to the Brand scale. The scale captures a consumer's devotion to the brand and the resistance to buying other brands if the brand in question is available. Therefore, the Commitment to the Brand scale was appropriate as it aimed to measure brand loyalty. The four-item scale was used in the study on a five-point Likert Scale. Therefore, the participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements regarding brand loyalty. Brand loyalty was measured using questions 9.1 to 9.4 through the following scale items:

Question 9: Commitment to the brand

9.1. I consider myself to be loyal to _____

9.2. _____ would be my first choice.

9.3. I would not buy other brands if _____ is available.

9.4. I am willing to pay a higher price for a _____ product than I would for other brands.

3.6 PILOT TESTING

After the completion and approval of the survey, a pilot test was conducted. The pilot testing was conducted to ensure that participants understood what was been asked as well as the ease at which the questions were understood. Four questionnaires were handed out in the manner in which the experiment will carried out, to ensure that all external and environmental variables are tested in the process of the pilot testing. Two control group questionnaires and two experimental questionnaires were conducted to ensure that the experiment process was appropriate, well received and understood. From the pilot testing, it was found that the questionnaire was understood and that the use of an electronic device to show visuals of the brands' social media marketing was successful. Furthermore, where the questionnaires were administered proved to be successful as all four respondents fell within the target population parameters. No amendments were made to the questionnaire as well as the experimental design process.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

3.7.1 Sampling technique

The sampling technique implemented was a non-probability technique. According to Malhotra (2010), the non-probability sampling technique does not use chance selection procedures and relies on the personal judgement of the interviewer. This study used the non-probability sampling technique as non-probability samples were able to better yield good estimates of the characteristics of the population. This study made use of convenience sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling technique. According to Malhotra (2010), convenience sampling attempts to attain a sample of convenient elements and the interviewer uses their discretion when selecting the sampling units. An advantage of convenience sampling was that it was the least expensive and least time-consuming sampling technique. This sampling technique has the benefit of having sampling units that are accessible, easy to measure, and cooperative (Malhotra, 2010). Although there were many advantages when using the convenience sampling technique, there are limitations to using this sampling technique. A possible disadvantage when using the convenience sampling technique is that there are many potential sources of selection bias present (Malhotra, 2010). Selection bias is a disadvantage as the convenience samples are not accurately representative of a definable population (Malhotra, 2010).

3.7.2 Administering the surveys

The questionnaire was administered in malls in Cape Town as the mall-intercept method was used as part of the research design. The mall-intercept method involves being in a shopping center or mall and asking participants to fill out the questionnaire. This method was the most appropriate for this study as it relied on participants being aware of certain brands. Participants were selected at random and were asked to complete the survey. However, the manner in which the experiment is conducted was influenced by whether the participant falls within that control or experimental group.

3.7.2.1 Control Group

The control group was simply asked to fill out the questionnaire without being exposed to the networking sites beforehand. The reason for having a control group was to ensure that the independent variable (SMM) was the only variable affecting the brand equity of the company at hand (Malhotra, 2010). However, it is important to note that respondents were not made aware of the particular group in which they were placed in order to manage any bias that could occur.

3.7.2.2 Experimental Group

For this particular study, the experimental group was exposed to the SMM campaign on social network sites before being asked to complete a questionnaire relating to brand equity. Exposure to the campaign on social networking sites was achieved through the use of a tablet or a cell phone. The fieldworkers would hand respondents the tablet/cell phone and they would then have a chance to interact with the social networking sites for a few minutes. Once they had done this, respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire. It is important to note that respondents were not made aware of the particular group in which they were placed in order to manage any bias that could occur.

3.7.3 Conducting Interviews

The interviewees are social media experts that are currently working or have worked in the fashion industry. The interviews were conducted at a neutral location to omit any bias that may arise. The researcher used the list of questions to guide a conversation in order to gain insight into the sustainability of social media marketing. This was done in order to retrieve as much information as possible from the interviewee and not be bound by the list of questions. An advantage of conducting the interview in this manner was that other questions were raised due to the conversation that was guided by the researchers' questions. A discussion arose regarding the aspects that make fashion brands successful in terms of social media marketing. From this discussion, the interviewee was asked if these aspects would be sustainable or whether new strategies would arise in the future. These discussions provided valuable insight into the aspects that allow for social media marketers to be successful and if their strategy would remain relevant in future. The interviewee was asked whether social media marketing can be seen as a sustainable marketing practice for fashion

brands in order to gain insight with regards to the overall sustainability of social media being a platform for marketing of fashion brands.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

After the data has been collected, it was recorded in a spreadsheet. Once the data was recorded correctly, it was coded accordingly. Once the data was coded, it was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). SPSS is a statistical programme that allows for statistical tests to be conducted. There were many statistical tests that needed to be conducted which included; descriptive statistics, normality tests, factor analysis and hypothesis testing.

The descriptive statistics was a test run in order to report on the mean and standard deviation of each scale item. The descriptive statistics allowed for a better understanding of the average opinion of the sample population. Due to the research design used in the study, the hypothesis test conducted was the difference between groups. All the hypotheses were considered the difference between groups and so an independent sample t-test was conducted. Testing the difference between groups allowed for the effect of the Social Media Marketing to be seen from the control group and the experiment group. The independent sample t-test was conducted according to the hypotheses below:

H1: Social media marketing increases brand engagement for fashion brands

H2: Social media marketing increase brand loyalty for fashion brands

H3: Social media marketing increases brand awareness for fashion brands

H4: Social media marketing increases brand equity for fashion brands.

Hypothesis 1:

H0: There is no difference between groups.

H1: Fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of **brand engagement** than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

Hypothesis 2:

H0: There is no difference between groups.

H1: Fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of **brand loyalty** than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

Hypothesis 3:

H0: There is no difference between groups.

H1: Fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of **brand awareness** than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

Hypothesis 4:

H0: There is no difference between groups.

H1: Fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of **brand equity** than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

3.8.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provide simple summaries of statistical data about both the sample and observations that have been made with regards to the research. Measures that are commonly used to describe the sample include central tendencies. Central tendencies include mean, median, mode, variance and standard deviation. Both graphs and tables were used to summarise the respondents' responses.

3.8.2 Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics enable the researcher to make inferences with regards to a population from the observations and analysis of a sample. Inferential statistics are used to determine relationships that exist between two variables. The researcher used inferential statistics in order to form valid conclusions from observations. For this particular study, an independent-samples t-test was used in order to compare the means of two unrelated groups on the same continuous, dependent variable. Therefore, the means of the control group and experimental group are compared based on the same questionnaire. The difference

between the means would correlate to the difference in the experimental design, exposure to the social media marketing platforms. Thus, inferential statistics and more specifically independent-samples t-test was appropriate for this particular study.

3.9 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

3.9.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency with which a survey instrument measures an attribute or construct. It is important to consider the reliability of the constructs of brand equity as they are to be used to measure brand equity and to answer the research question. Due to the study using scales in order to measure brand engagement, brand awareness and brand loyalty, it is important that the scales actually measure the construct being investigated. The scales used were taken from the Marketing Scales Handbook and was used to measure the constructs of brand equity (Bruner, 2013). From this Marketing Scales Handbook the following Cronbach alpha's were recorded from previous studies conducted.

Table 3.1: Cronbach Alpha's for Constructs of Brand Equity

Construct	Cronbach Alpha in Original Research
Brand Engagement	0.7
Brand Loyalty	0.92
Brand Familiarity	0.91

(source: SPSS Output)

Theory suggests that a Cronbach alpha equal to or greater than 0.7 is indicative of internal consistency reliability (Malhotra, 2010). Therefore, from the above table it is evident that all scales used to measure brand equity exhibit internal consistency reliability. It can therefore be concluded that the scales used to measure the constructs of brand equity are reliable. Cronbach alpha's for the current study as well as a discussion on the actual internal consistency reliability achieved will be further explored in Chapter four.

3.9.2 Validity

In order to ensure that this study is valid, the questionnaire will be drawn up using the aforementioned scales. Once the questionnaire has been drawn up it will be handed to four random individuals to be completed. The researcher then compared the original questionnaire with the completed documents in order to test if respondents understood what was being asked and did not interpret it in their own way.

In addition to ensuring that the questionnaire was well understood by respondents, the researcher ensured that construct validity was achieved. In order to improve construct validity, the researcher limited the subjectivity of questions in the questionnaire. This was achieved by linking the questions in the questionnaire to the research questions, objectives and hypotheses. Questions seven, eight and nine directly link to the secondary objectives and hypotheses highlighted in Chapter one.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Limitations of the chosen sampling technique used for this study include selection bias. Selection bias is a limitation as the convenience samples could not be an accurate representative of a definable population (Malhotra, 2010). Furthermore, another limitation for the questionnaire survey method would be non-response bias. Non-response bias occurs when a potential respondent does not wish to participate in the study or fail to fully complete the survey and omit certain questions. Another limitation of the research methodology is the fact that smaller sample sizes could lead to skew data. Due to the time constraint limitation, a smaller sample size was required, which could lead to skew data. Further limitations of the study will be discussed in Chapter five.

3.11 CONCLUSION

The researcher ensured that the research methodology employed was the most appropriate for the study. The correct paradigm, research designs as well as experimental procedures have been discussed as well as tested. Additionally, suitable data analysis methods have been employed to ensure validity and reliability. The research methodology outlines processes employed in order to conduct the data analysis, which is detailed in the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to detail the specific data collection methods and data analysis techniques used in order to conduct this research study. Due to this study using a mixed methodology approach, an analysis of the quantitative data collected will be analysed using SPSS to test the statistical significance of the influence that Social Media Marketing has on brand equity. Furthermore, qualitative data was collected from interviews and will be analysed and interpreted, in order to determine if Social Media Marketing is sustainable.

Findings highlighted in this chapter relate to the experiment conducted to address the following hypotheses:

H1: Social media marketing increases brand engagement for fashion brands

H2: Social media marketing increase brand loyalty for fashion brands

H3: Social media marketing increases brand awareness for fashion brands

H4: Social media marketing increases brand equity for fashion brands.

This chapter proceeds with a discussion of the findings for both the quantitative and qualitative research for this study in section 4.2. This section highlights descriptive statistics and the hypothesis testing used in order to address the above hypotheses. Further, this section highlights findings from the qualitative research and analyses according to the interview questions. This is followed by a discussion in section 4.3 regarding the validity and reliability of the research methodology employed in this study.

4.2 FINDINGS

4.2.1 Descriptive statistics

As defined in chapter 3, descriptive statistics provide simple summaries of statistical data about both the sample and observations that have been made with regards to the research. The data collected in the survey pertaining to brand awareness, brand engagement and brand loyalty was scale data. Therefore, the following descriptive statistics report on the mean and standard deviation of each scale item.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q7.1: This brand is very familiar to me.	60	3.65	.820
Q7.2: I'm very knowledgeable about the brand	60	3.30	.720
Q7.3: I have seen many advertisements about the brand on social media.	60	4.05	.928
Q8.1: I am very involved with the brand	60	3.30	.788
Q8.2: I browse or buy this brand very often	60	3.35	.971
Q8.3: I am a brand X expert	60	2.97	.843
Q8.4: I am interested in fashion brands.	60	4.27	.660
Q9.1: I consider myself to be loyal to this brand.	60	3.07	.778
Q9.2: This brand would be my first choice.	60	3.20	.898
Q9.3: I would not buy other brands if this brand is available.	60	3.00	.844
Q9.4: I am willing to pay a higher price for this brand than I would for other brands.	60	3.50	.834
Valid N (listwise)	60		

(Source: SPSS Output)

From the above table, it was found that respondents were neutral with regards to majority of the items which the means was 3.00 or above. This means that respondents answers, on average, were neutral for most of the questions. However, outliers will be discussed in order to identify which questions scored above or below the average.

Item three (question 7.3), had a mean of 4.05 with a standard deviation of 0.928. This showed that respondents, on average, agreed with the statement regarding seeing advertisements of the fashion brands on social media. Answers ranged from 2.19 and 4.98. This shows that respondents answers ranged from disagree to agree with regards to seeing advertisements on social media.

Item six (question 8.3) had a mean of 2.97 and a standard deviation of 0.843. This indicated that, on average, respondents disagreed with the statement regarding being a brand expert. However, answers ranged from 2.127 to 3.813. This indicated that respondents disagreed or were neutral with regards to being a fashion brand expert.

Item seven (question 8.4) had a mean of 4.27 and a standard deviation of 0.660. This indicated that, on average, respondents agreed with the statement regarding being interested in fashion brands. With answers that ranged from 3.61 to 4.93. This indicated that respondents were neutral or agreed with being interested in fashion brands.

4.2.2 Hypothesis Tests

Hypothesis testing was conducted in order to determine the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Brand Equity. For this particular experiment, the difference between the groups needed to be determined in order to identify the effect that Social Media marketing has on brand equity. For this reason, independent sample t-tests were conducted for the following hypotheses.

4.2.2.1 Hypothesis 1: Social Media Marketing and Brand Engagement

Hypothesis 1:

H0: There is no difference between groups.

H1: Fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of **brand engagement** than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

Table 3: Independent sample t-test for brand engagement

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Brand Engagement	Equal variances assumed	.243	.624	-15.404	58	.000	-1.22500	.07953	-1.38419	-1.06581
	Equal variances not assumed			-15.404	57.666	.000	-1.22500	.07953	-1.38421	-1.06579

(Source: SPSS Output)

Levene's Test for equality of variance had an F-statistic of 0.243 with an associated p-value of 0.624. As a result, H0 was not rejected at the 5% level of significance. It can therefore be concluded that the variances were equal.

The independent sample t-test revealed a t-statistic of -15.40 and an associated p-value of 0.00. Therefore, H0 was rejected at the 5% level of significance. As a result, it was concluded that the means were different across the different groups. Therefore, fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of brand engagement than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

In order to determine whether Social Media Marketing increased or decreased levels of brand engagement, it was necessary to compare the group means of the control and experimental groups. These statistics are presented in the table below.

Table 4: Group Statistics for Brand Engagement

	Control Group or Experimental Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Brand Engagement	Control Group	30	2.8583	.31950	.05833
	Experimental Group	30	4.0833	.29605	.05405

(Source: SPSS Output)

It was necessary to compare the means of the different groups, as the changes in the means is due to the change in the experiment. Changes in the means between the control group and the experimental group were due to being exposed to Social Media Marketing. The mean for the control group was 2.86 and the mean for the experimental group was 4.08. It is therefore evident that social media marketing had a positive influence on brand engagement as the difference between the mean is positive. This can be seen in the difference between the means for the control and experimental groups.

4.2.2.2 Hypothesis 2: Social Media Marketing and Brand Loyalty

In order to determine whether fashion brands' Social Media Marketing activity positively influenced brand loyalty, the following hypothesis was tested using an independent samples t-test.

Hypothesis 2:

H0: There is no difference between groups.

H1: Fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of **brand loyalty** than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

Prior to the above hypothesis testing, it was necessary to test the assumption for equality of variances using the following hypotheses:

H0: The variances are equal

H1: The variances are not equal.

Table 5: Independent sample t-test for brand loyalty

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Brand Loyalty	Equal variances assumed	.066	.798	-12.915	58	.000	-1.31667	.10194	-1.52073	-1.11260
	Equal variances not assumed			-12.915	55.009	.000	-1.31667	.10194	-1.52097	-1.11237

(Source: SPSS Output)

Levene’s Test for equality of variance had an F-statistic of 0.07 with an associated p-value of 0.798. As a result, H0 was not rejected at the 5% level of significance. It can therefore be concluded that the variances were equal.

The independent sample t-test revealed a t-statistic of -12.92 and an associated p-value of 0.00. Therefore, H0 was rejected at the 5% level of significance. As a result, it was concluded that the means were different across the different groups. Therefore, fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of brand loyalty than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

In order to determine whether Social Media Marketing increased or decreased levels of brand loyalty, it was necessary to compare the group means of the control and experimental groups. These statistics are presented in the table below.

Table 6: Group statistics for brand loyalty

		Group Statistics				
Control Group or Experimental Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Brand Loyalty	Control Group	30	2.5333	.34575	.06312	
	Experimental Group	30	3.8500	.43845	.08005	

(Source: SPSS Output)

The above table shows that the mean was 2.53 for the control group and 3.85 for the experimental group. Therefore, it was evident that Social Media Marketing had a positive effect on brand loyalty due to the subsequent difference in means of the experimental and the control group.

4.2.2.3 Hypothesis 3: Social Media Marketing and Brand Awareness

In order to determine whether fashion brands' Social Media Marketing activity positively influenced brand awareness, the following hypothesis was tested using an independent samples t-test.

Hypothesis 3:

H0: There is no difference between groups.

H1: Fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of **brand awareness** than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

Before the above hypothesis test could be carried out, it was necessary to test the assumption for equality of variances using the following hypotheses:

H0: The variances are equal

H1: The variances are not equal

The following table summarizes the results obtained from both hypothesis tests mentioned above.

Table 7: Independent sample t-test for brand awareness

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Brand Awareness	Equal variances assumed	2.419	.125	-14.077	58	.000	-1.26667	.08998	-1.44679	-1.08654
	Equal variances not assumed			-14.077	49.650	.000	-1.26667	.08998	-1.44744	-1.08590

(Source: SPSS Output)

Levene's test for equality of variances had an F-statistic of 2.42 with an associated p-value of 0.125. As a result, the null hypothesis was not rejected stating that variances are equal. Therefore, it was concluded at the 5% level of significance that the variances were equal, and thus equal variances were assumed when conducting hypothesis test.

The independent sample t-test had a t-statistic of -14.077 with an associated p-value of 0.00. As a result, the null hypothesis was at the 5% level of significance. We could therefore conclude that there was a difference between the brand awareness of fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing, when compared to those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

In order to determine whether Social Media Marketing increased or decreased levels of brand loyalty it was necessary to compare the group means of the control and experimental groups. These statistics are presented in the table below.

Table 8: Group statistics for brand awareness

Group Statistics					
	Control Group or Experimental Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Brand Awareness	Control Group	30	3.0333	.41384	.07556
	Experimental Group	30	4.3000	.26767	.04887

(Source: SPSS Output)

The above table revealed that the control group had a mean response of 3.03 and the experimental group had mean response of 4.30. Therefore, it was evident that Social Media Marketing had a positive effect on brand awareness due to the subsequent difference in means of the experimental and the control group.

4.2.2.4 Hypothesis 4: Social Media Marketing and Brand Equity

In order to determine whether fashion brands' Social Media Marketing activity positively influenced brand equity, the following hypothesis was tested using an independent samples t-test.

Hypothesis 4:

H0: There is no difference between groups.

H1: Fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of **brand equity** than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

Before the above hypothesis test could be carried out, it was necessary to test the assumption for equality of variances using the following hypotheses:

H0: The variances are equal

H1: The variances are not equal

The results for both of these hypothesis tests are displayed in the table below.

Table 9: Independent sample t-test for brand equity

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Brand Equity	Equal variances assumed	.256	.615	-19.494	58	.000	-1.26944	.06512	-1.39980	-1.13909
	Equal variances not assumed			-19.494	52.342	.000	-1.26944	.06512	-1.40010	-1.13879

(Source: SPSS Output)

Levene's test for equality of variances had an F-statistic of 0.256 with an associated p-value of 0.615. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected at the 5% level of significance, and concluded that the variances among the two groups do not differ.

Assuming equal variances, the independent sample t-test revealed a t-statistic of -19.49 with an associated p-value of 0.00. As a result, H0 was rejected at the 5% level of significance. Therefore, it was concluded that fashion conscious consumers (aged 18-25) who follow brands and are aware of Social Media Marketing have a higher level of brand equity than those who do not follow brands and are not aware of Social Media Marketing.

In order to determine whether Social Media Marketing increased or decreased levels of brand loyalty, it was necessary to compare the group means of the control and experimental groups. These statistics are presented in the table below.

Table 10: Group statistics for brand equity

Group Statistics					
	Control Group or Experimental Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Brand Equity	Control Group	30	2.8083	.20663	.03773
	Experimental Group	30	4.0778	.29073	.05308

(Source: SPSS Output)

Table 10 revealed that the mean response of respondents in the control group was 2.81 and the mean response for the experimental group was 4.08. Therefore, it was concluded that Social Media Marketing had a positive influence on brand equity for fashion brands.

4.2.3 Sustainability of Social Media Marketing

From interviews conducted with experts in the marketing field, it was evident that there are many views in the marketplace with regards to Social Media Marketing for fashion brands. However, all experts interviewed believed that Social Media Marketing will be sustainable. An analysis of each question will be provided in the following sections.

4.2.3.1. Question One

Question One of the interview asked the interviewee about the reasons behind fashion retailers or fashion brands moving towards social media in order to market to consumers. According to marketing experts, social media provides marketers with the ability to effectively market to consumers in a cost-effective manner. Marketers, for many years, have relied on print media, radio and television in order to reach their target audiences at exorbitant rates. It was found that marketers are able to reach target consumers through social media at approximately 20% of the cost. Furthermore, the experts went on to explain that Millennials are a growing market for fashion brands and will, in the next few years, most the target audience. It is for that reason, that marketers are implementing Social Media

Marketing strategies to efficiently and effectively capture a large share of the Millennial target market.

4.2.3.2 Question Two

Question Two aims to determine the various aspects of Social Media Marketing that allows for fashion retailers to be successful on social media. Aspects discussed include frequency of posts, shock appeal, “share-worthiness”, information relayed to consumers and storytelling.

4.2.3.3 Question Three

Question Three asked interviewees whether social media marketing is one of or the most important factor contributing to marketing success for fashion brands. According to the interviewees, social media marketing is part of a marketing teams broader strategy. The interviewees went on to suggest that, although social media marketing can be a successful tool, it is the manner in which it is used that is the underlying important factor. Therefore, fashion brands should consider their broader strategy and include social media marketing in order to survive or thrive in the marketplace.

4.2.3.4 Question Four

Question Four stated that the marketing industry has seen significant shifts in the past 20 years. New channels have started yielding better results for marketers and organisations as well as being a more cost-effective channel. In light of the above statement, interviewees were asked to give their opinion with regards to the sustainability of Social Media Marketing. Interviewees suggested that Social Media marketing is sustainable due to the growth seen in technological platforms. With regards to marketing practices, it is evident that many brands have moved and are seeking ways to move into the online space. Therefore there is tremendous growth potential for social media marketing due to more brands connecting with consumers through social media marketing according to interviewees. However, due to this growth potential, social media networking sites need to be able to cater for the increasing demands from brands.

In addition, the question asked interviewees to provide reasons for their answers. The following reasons were provided to the interviewer. With increasing marketing trends found in various industries, marketers will need to consider trends such as Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR). With these trends, it is evident that the marketing industry is moving towards being digitally diverse space. Interviewees then suggested that social media will be the driving force when introducing both AR and VR in future as consumers are already on an online platform. Another reason provided was the fact that social media networking sites provide an easy-to-use and easily accessible platform that is readily available for fashion brands. Fashion brands, therefore, do not require any website launches which need to adhere to many legal requirements in South Africa. Due to the many advantages of Social Media marketing, interviewees concluded that Social Media Marketing will be sustainable for fashion brands in future.

4.2.3.5 Question Five

So due to the study aiming to determine whether a relationship exists between Social Media Marketing and brand equity, Question Five asks the interviewee to provide their opinion as to whether this relationship would be sustainable. From the interviews conducted, it was found that the interviewees believe that the relationship will be sustainable. In addition, the question asked to provide reasons for their answers. The reasons provided for the interviewee was that Social Media Marketing should, create brand awareness, encourage brand engagement and inspire brand loyalty. It was stated that Social Media Marketing is explicitly used in order to create brand awareness, brand engagement and brand loyalty. Interviewees stated that marketers strategically use Social Media Marketing to increase brand equity and will therefore yield a sustainable relationship.

4.2.3.6 Question six

Question six assumed that Social Media Marketing is sustainable and asks if the interviewees believe that the same Social Media Marketing activities will still be as effective as they are currently. Interviewees agreed that due to the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the fashion industry, there will be new ways in which to market to consumers. The interviewees believe that Social Media Marketing activities or techniques that are viable and successful today, might not be as successful or viable in future due to the changes in consumer preferences, changes in demand for fashion and general industry trends.

4.2.3.7 Question seven

Question seven assumed that Social Media Marketing is sustainable and asked interviewees to comment on the implications for marketers, fashion retailers and academia. From the interviews conducted it is evident that they believe that there are, in fact, implications for marketers, fashion retailers and academia. Firstly, marketers need to be able to align strategies to create a coherent online contact journey for consumers which includes producing content that is effective for social media platforms. Secondly, fashion retailers need to be aware of trends in the marketplace with regards to online platforms utilised as well as trends found on social media platforms in order to survive or thrive in the industry. Lastly, implications for academia included the introduction of courses to enable future marketers to be industry ready and be well equipped to work with social media platforms and create content for Social Media Marketing.

4.3 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

4.3.1 Cronbach's Alpha

In order to measure the reliability of the scales used in the study, each scale's Cronbach alpha was measured. Theory suggests that a Cronbach alpha equal to or greater than 0.7 is indicative of internal consistency reliability (Malhotra, 2010). Therefore, the internal consistency reliability of each scale was discussed below through analysing the Cronbach alpha of each scale. The following table summarises these results.

Table 11: Cronbach alpha results

Construct	Cronbach Alpha in Original Research	Cronbach Alpha in Current Research	Items Deleted	Revised Cronbach Alpha
Brand Engagement	0.7	0.86	None	-
Brand Loyalty	0.92	0.94	None	-
Brand Familiarity	0.91	0.85	None	-

(Source: SPSS Output)

The scale used to measure brand engagement had a Cronbach alpha of 0.86 which was above the cut-off point of 0.7. Brand loyalty had a Cronbach alpha 0.94 for the current study which not only exceeds the cut-off point, but exceeds the Cronbach alpha used in previous studies. The last scale used in this study was brand familiarity. Brand familiarity had a Cronbach alpha of 0.85 which was above the cut-off point. Therefore, the all scales used in this study exhibited internal consistency reliability.

4.4 CONCLUSION

An in-depth analysis was conducted from the appropriate data collection and analysis methods. The data collected from respondents were interpreted accurately and without bias and meaningful findings could be determined and reported. As a result, the study was a success and the findings can be used to contribute towards literature regarding Social Media Marketing. The findings could answer the research questions and sub-questions which guided conclusions, implications and limitations for this study as is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to conclude the research study through summarising the findings outlined in Chapter Four. This chapter discusses conclusions drawn from the findings, implications of the findings for future practices and ethical considerations.

The aim of the research study was to determine whether Social Media Marketing positively or negatively influenced brand equity. Furthermore, the study aimed to determine whether Social Media Marketing will be sustainable. By means of conducting an experiment, the researcher was able to receive information with regards to the statistical significance of the relationship that exists between Social Media Marketing and brand equity. Through conducting interviews with marketing experts, the researcher was able to determine whether or not Social Media Marketing is sustainable and, analyse the reasons behind their stated opinions.

This chapter proceeds with concluding answers to research questions in section 5.2. This is followed by implications of findings for future practices in section 5.3. Section 5.4 highlights ethical considerations for the research study. This is followed by the conclusion to the research paper.

5.2 CONCLUDING ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to draw conclusions to research questions, the findings were analysed and interpreted. From the experiment conducted, there were 60 respondents in total, which was made up of 30 control group respondents and 30 experimental group respondents. From the responses received from the respondents, the findings were reported. The research findings, reported in Chapter Four, allow for conclusions to be drawn with regards to both the primary research questions as well as the sub-questions for the study. The following conclusions were deduced from the findings and provide answers to the two primary research questions.

5.2.1 Research Question One

Research Question One considers the extent to which Social Media Marketing influences brand equity for fashion brands. However, in order to answer this research question, sub-questions needed to be explored as brand equity is made up of three underlying constructs namely; brand engagement, brand loyalty and brand awareness. Therefore, the following three sub-questions are provided and need to be answered.

1. To what extent does Social Media Marketing influence brand engagement?
2. To what extent does Social Media Marketing influence brand loyalty?
3. To what extent does Social Media Marketing influence brand awareness?

Sub-question one considers the extent to which Social Media Marketing influence brand engagement. From the findings outlined in chapter 4, it can be concluded that Social Media Marketing positively influences brand engagement. As stated in chapter four, the mean for the control group was 2.86 which shows that, on average, the respondents' answers were 'disagree' to the questions regarding brand engagement. However, the experimental group had a reported mean of 4.08, which shows that the average response for the experimental group was 'agree' to the questions regarding brand engagement. Reasons for this positive influence could be attributed to sharing or liking of posts from the fashion brand, engaging in Word-Of-Mouth and entering competitions. A review of previous literature, Kim and Ko (2012) found that 45% of consumers who have searched for information online, engaged in Word-Of-Mouth with regards to content found. Additionally, prior research revealed that 60% of consumers stated that they would use social media networking sites in order to share information for other social media users. Therefore, Social Media Marketing positively influences brand engagement through creating content that consumers are able to share, like and receive information from.

The second sub-question aimed to determine the extent to which Social Media Marketing influences brand loyalty. Conclusive evidence was found to conclude that Social Media Marketing positively influences brand loyalty for fashion brands. From the findings, outlined in Chapter Four, the control group had a reported mean of 2.53 and the experimental group had a reported mean of 3.85. The difference in the means is attributed to the exposure to social media networking sites. Social Media Marketing, as defined by Akar and Topçu (2011), is a process that allows individuals to engage with firms and brands through social

media sites. Kim and Ko (2012) argue that Social Media Marketing allows for brands to engage with consumers, build relationships and create the desire to purchase goods. It can therefore be argued, that Social Media Marketing assists brands to build relationships through engaging with consumers and providing relevant information for them.

The third and final sub-question aimed to investigate the extent to which Social Media Marketing influences brand awareness. According to Keller (1993), brand awareness is related to the strength of the association with the brand in the minds of consumers. Additionally, brand awareness questions whether the brand identities serve their function or not. Therefore, it is important to determine if Social Media Marketing positively influences brand awareness as it could serve as a means to strengthen the association of the brand in the minds of consumers. The reported findings, discussed in Chapter Four, show that Social Media Marketing positively influences brand awareness. The comparison of the control and experimental group means indicated that social media marketing increases brand awareness for fashion brands. The reported mean for the control group was 3.03 and the experimental group mean was 4.30. This shows that on average, the control group respondents answered 'neutral' to the questions pertaining to brand awareness and the experimental group respondents answered agree to the same questions. Therefore, Social Media Marketing has allowed for the experimental group to become familiar to them, become more knowledgeable about the brand and to be exposed to advertisements in the mass media, which increases brand awareness.

Finally, in order to investigate the first primary research question an independent sample t-test was conducted with all three underlying constructs of brand equity. The control group had a reported mean of 2.81 and the experimental group had a reported mean of 4.08. It is evident that there was an increase in the mean when comparing the control group and the experimental group. This difference is attributed to the increase in brand engagement, brand awareness and brand loyalty. Therefore, this study concludes that Social Media Marketing positively influences brand engagement, brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand equity.

5.2.2 Research Question Two

Research Question Two aims to determine if the relationship between Social Media Marketing and brand equity is sustainable and used interviews with marketing experts who are currently or have worked with a fashion brand. The interviews conducted resulted in findings, discussed in Chapter Four. Through these findings, the following conclusions are drawn.

According to the interviews conducted, it is evident that Social Media Marketing will be sustainable for fashion brands. Many fashion brands which have previously relied on print, television and radio advertising, have found a new cost-efficient platform through which to market to consumers. This statement agrees with prior literature and research conducted by Kim and Ko (2012). Kim and Ko (2012) explain that through Social Media Marketing, firms are able to perform integrated marketing activities more effectively and at a lower cost, as discussed in Chapter Two. According to the findings, Social Media Marketing is able to effectively communicate with Millennials, a growing market for fashion brands. Marketing experts explain that in the next few years, Millennials will make up majority of the target audience. Therefore, the following insight can be recorded. Millennials are a growing market for fashion brands and will become the majority of the target market in future which is in agreement with the position of Bolton *et al.*, 2013. Therefore, brands need to be able to effectively communicate and build relationships with these groups in order to ensure brand longevity as well as brand success.

According to the interviewees, there are various factors that contribute to the success of fashion brands on social media. These factors include, the content, frequency of posts, shock appeal, “share-worthiness”, information relayed to consumers and storytelling. Content refers to the pictures, videos and texts uploaded onto the social media platforms. Content, according to the experts, has the ability to persuade and engage consumers as well as to create brand awareness for the fashion retailer or brand. However, experts noted that it is important to choose content that is best suited to the image of the brand and should not confuse consumers with regard to the nature of the brand, product offerings or brand image. It was further suggested by experts that content is an important factor as it is the initial point of contact with the brand on these social media networking sites. Frequency of posts refers to the frequency at which fashion brands or retailers post to social media sites. The frequency at which fashion retailers or brands post to social media, influences brand

engagement and brand awareness, according to the experts. The more frequent brands post, the more consumers are able to engage with the brand and receive information with the brand.

From this, a discussion began questioning what “information” refers to. Experts suggested that information refers to not only the factual content posted, but also information regarding the brand image, brand associations, perceived quality and brand value. Shock appeal and “share-worthiness” refer to the type of content or information posted to social media. Experts suggest that shock appeal and share-worthiness stimulates either an emotional connection or detachment from the brand for consumers. Lastly, storytelling was seen to be a successful trend for fashion brands with regards to social media. An expert suggested that fashion brands such as Burberry and Chanel have been particularly successful in this regard as they have created a strong emotional connection with consumers through their storytelling advertisements.

Interviewees suggested that Social Media Marketing is sustainable due to the growth in technological platforms. Experts concluded that brands are constantly seeking new and innovative ways in which to engage with consumers in a meaningful way. This statement is supported by Kim and Ko (2012) and Ananda *et al.* (2015, as discussed in chapter 2. It was found that due to the emergence of Augmented and Virtual Reality, brands need to continue operating in the online space in order to survive or thrive in the market according to trends. The interviewees suggested that Social Media Marketing could serve as a driving force in order to engage with consumers using both Augmented and Virtual Reality.

Due to the study aiming to determine whether a relationship exists between Social Media marketing and brand equity, interviewees were asked for their opinion regarding the sustainability of this relationship. It was found that this relationship is sustainable as marketers use Social Media Marketing in order to create brand awareness, encourage brand engagement and inspire brand loyalty. Furthermore, it was found that Social Media Marketing is a strategic tool in marketing strategies that enables consumers to engage with the brand by offering consumers value, which is unobtainable through traditional forms of marketing and therefore allow for brands to increase brand equity and customer equity. This statement is in agreement with prior literature as Kim and Ko (2012) found that Social Media Marketing enhances customer equity by providing value for consumers that traditional forms of marketing cannot offer.

After establishing that Social Media Marketing is, in fact, sustainable, Social Media Marketing activities were investigated in terms of their relevance in future. It was found that all interviewees agreed that the fashion industry is a dynamic and ever-changing and therefore Social Media Marketing activities that are successful today, might not be as successful in future. Due to changes in consumer preferences, changes in demand for fashion and general industry trends, Social Media Marketing activities need to be in line with the trends in the market in order to be successful. It was further found that the activities, through posts, need to be aligned with the brand image in order to be successful. A trend found in the industry, according to interviewees, is storytelling by brands. However, from prior research, de Vries and Grensler (2012), found that entertaining posts can have a negative effect on the number of likes obtained which points to the fact that entertaining posts have the potential to contain information that is irrelevant to the brand.

In conclusion, Social Media Marketing is sustainable as there are many advantages to marketers that will remain relevant in future. However, content needs to be altered in future in order to meet consumer preferences and industry trends. Social Media Marketing will remain a strategic tool in marketing strategies to increase brand equity.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR FUTURE PRACTICES

This study aimed to investigate the extent to which Social Media Marketing influences brand equity for fashion brands. Furthermore, the study aimed to determine if Social Media Marketing is sustainable and if the relationship between Social Media Marketing and brand equity is sustainable. Through exploring the influence of Social Media Marketing on brand equity, this study aims to contribute to current literature regarding the subject matter. A review of previous literature indicated a gap in literature regarding the sustainability of Social Media Marketing. Therefore, this study aims to provide insights for businesses, government and academia with regards to the influence of Social Media on brand equity as well as the sustainability thereof.

5.3.1 Business

As previously mentioned, businesses devote a large portion of their budgets on marketing efforts in order to best present their products to consumers. Most businesses are moving

away from traditional forms of marketing and advertising and towards the online and social media space. From drawing conclusions from the findings, this study concluded that Social Media Marketing is sustainable. Therefore, businesses need to be well equipped in future in order to survive or thrive in the fashion industry. Social Media Marketing could potentially be costly to establish and maintain in its infancy, the benefits discussed are well worth the expenses. It was concluded that Social Media Marketing positively influences brand awareness, brand engagement and brand loyalty which are goals for any brand.

5.3.2 Government

This study found that Social Media Marketing is sustainable. Due to the fact that government is responsible for legislation in South Africa, it is necessary for government to have this information in order to make well-informed decisions regarding legislation. Social media marketing has a positive influence on brand equity and therefore aids in strengthening brands in the South African economy. Additionally, Social Media Marketing encourages consumers to participate in the economy. However, Social Media Marketing requires that consumers engage on social media platforms. The cost of data in South Africa is relatively high, discouraging consumers from engaging with brands online. Therefore, consumers are not participating in the economy as much as they could potentially. Due to the conclusion regarding the sustainability of Social Media Marketing, an implication of the conclusions for government would be to consider finding ways for telecoms companies to decrease the cost of data in order to encourage consumer participation in the economy.

5.3.3 Academia

Businesses are moving towards Social Media Marketing and away from traditional forms of marketing which requires a revision of current marketing strategies. These marketing strategies are taught in Universities in order to best equip marketing graduates to be successful in their careers. However, due to the conclusion regarding the sustainability of Social Media Marketing, a revision regarding marketing course material is required as well. Social Media Marketing should be included in course material in order to allow for graduates to be both industry-ready and able to be successful in their careers. Course material should include Social Media Marketing activities and how to align these activities to a brands and more specifically, their brand image.

5.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is of vital importance that this study was conducted in an ethical manner. The ethical concerns regarding this study were the concerns about choice, knowledge and anonymity. The study allowed for participants to engage with social networking sites, however, no graphic content will be shown to protect the participants. All content shown was directly linked to and limited to Social Media Marketing. Participants were informed about what the study aimed to investigate and determine, as well as how their contribution would impact the study. Respondents were not offered any incentives for participating in the study as this is considered to be unethical. It was possible that incentives could cause respondents to answer questions dishonestly in order to obtain the incentive (Singer & Couper, 2009).

All participants had the right to stop partaking in the study if they wished to do so. The study had an anonymity clause which stated that all information provided to the researcher would remain anonymous and that the information would only be used for academic research. Furthermore, interviewees identities were not revealed in the study in order to adhere to confidentiality and anonymity agreements made by the researcher. All information provided from the interviews were summarised as to not highlight or quote any specific interviewee. The researcher conducted both the experiment and interviews in accordance with the aforementioned ethical considerations. Therefore, the research study was done in an ethical manner.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Possible limitations of the study included time constraints, access to participants, not being able to generalize results to a broader population and not being able to generalize the results to a different industry.

There are various limitations which applied to this particular research study, the first of which is the time made available to conduct the research study. Due to the time constraints, the researcher had to make amendments to the original research plan such as decreasing the number of respondents in the study.

Another limitation for this study was access to participants for the interviews. Due to the fact that this study aimed to interview marketing professionals or experts, the interviewees

needed to be approached through specific departments. Many potential interviewees declined due to the time required in order to conduct the interview.

It was found that another limitation was that the participants did not accurately reflect the chosen target audience. Participants could be dishonest in their answers which presented itself as another limitation for this study. Furthermore, another limitation would be that the results found in the study could not be generalized to the broader population. The implications of not being able to generalize the results could be that the study is limited to Capetonians and therefore limits the research conducted. Additionally, a potential limitation could be that the effects of Social Media Marketing cannot be generalized to other industries such as Banking, Construction and Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) businesses. The research is specific to fashion brands and could therefore, be specific to only fashion brands.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which Social Media Marketing influences brand equity for fashion brands. Furthermore, the study aimed to determine if Social Media Marketing is sustainable for fashion brands. This study was both positivist and interpretivist in nature as the study aimed to identify the relationship that exists between Social Media Marketing and brand equity as well as, determine the sustainability thereof.

A review of prior research indicated that Social Media Marketing is a growing phenomenon and increases consumer equity. However, there was limited research regarding the influences of Social Media Marketing on brand equity. Furthermore, a review of prior research indicated that there is limited literature regarding the sustainability of Social Media Marketing. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to contribute to the limited literature regarding the sustainability of Social Media Marketing.

Through conducting an experiment and interviews in order to answer the research questions, the researcher needed to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner. This meant that the appropriate data collection and data analysis methods and, interpreting the data was conducted in an ethical manner. Therefore, the researcher was required to interpret the data without allowing personal, researcher or interviewee bias.

From both the experiment and interviews, the data was collected, coded and analysed using

SPSS. The quantitative data was analysed by means of a statistical analysis and interpreted accordingly. The qualitative data was recorded and scribed in order to sort and interpret the data efficiently and effectively. From the findings recorded, conclusions were drawn and the research questions were addressed. It was found that Social Media Marketing positively influences brand equity and, that Social Media Marketing is sustainable. Furthermore, it was found that the relationship between Social Media Marketing and brand equity is sustainable.

Conclusions drawn from this study have impact on businesses, government and academia. It is suggested that all three entities consider Social Media Marketing as a strategic tool to increase brand equity, encourage consumer participation in the economy and to be included in course material for University courses.

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