



Investigating social media strategies utilised by brands on Facebook and Instagram in order to establish brand loyalty and foster a brand community– A qualitative research study.

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Abstract

Widespread internet connection and easy access has led to a generation of individuals who spend a considerable amount of their time online making use of various social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This has created a new opportunity for brands to connect with their consumers and has essentially changed the way we market products and services.

This research report has taken this into account and has looked at the various marketing strategies employed by brands on networks such as Facebook and Instagram. A strong textual analysis of pre-existing literature, combined with qualitative research in the form of online surveys with consumers has shown that there are several aims and motivations of owning and running a branded social media page for a business. In order for brands to hold a strong presence online and in the minds of their online customers, posts either need to serve functional, social, psychological, hedonic or monetary needs for the consumer. Fundamentally, brands need to ensure that their pages serve their target audience whilst creating brand awareness and maintaining a positive area for engagement as this ultimately builds trust in a brand and leads to brand loyalty.

In a day and age where technology is ever changing and social networking sites are in today and out tomorrow, it is important for brands to find which platforms gives them the best reach as well as to know what strategies solicit the responses they are looking for.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter one deals with the rise of social media marketing and the strategies behind the field. It then goes on to discuss the researchers key objectives and concepts whilst giving a brief overview of what the study entails.

1.1 Background and Context

Technological advancements, along with the rise of social media has resulted in a great opportunity for brands to take their marketing strategies further and promote their products and services on a different platform (Barwise & Meehan, 2010). With this having been said, not all social media pages run by businesses have seen the same level of success. It is therefore crucial that social media strategies are implemented right from the get go in order to help build and maintain a brands image and identity. Social media allows for great speed and reach when it comes to communicating with customers, which is both advantageous and disadvantageous as communication can now take place on a much larger scale. This allows for consumers to actively engage with brand content. However, in some contexts this may be seen as negative as bad PR can be spread just as easily, making it difficult for some companies to recover from what used to have been viewed as a minor mishap.

Social media plays a substantial role in the majority of people's daily lives as they are more likely to share information that they normally would not share on existing platforms such as email and instant messaging (Zhao & Rosson, 2009). More and more people are increasingly becoming connected on social media as smartphones and internet connection are far more common in this day and age and getting online is far less complicated than it was twenty years ago. With this having been said, social media is becoming common place as most of us are continuously connected and even when we are "offline" we still receive constant notifications about online activity.

These technological advancements have allowed businesses to move away from more traditional models of marketing and to use various new, innovative platforms to extend their reach. Not only are businesses extending their reach but consumers are continuously using these platforms to interact with not only the business itself but

with fellow consumers who share similar values. These technological advancements have resulted in an entire new field of marketing as we now see job positions being offered that did not even exist a few years ago. Social media has essentially created a space where businesses can receive valuable insight and allow them to reach a larger community that they may have never been able to connect with by using traditional marketing channels.

Looking at what has been discussed above, it becomes evident that social media plays a substantial role in the majority of people's lives and the presence that a brand has online could potentially make or break the company (Kumar, et al., 2016). Therefore it would be interesting to look at the social media strategies employed by companies on popular social networking platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram and to look at how these tools are used to communicate a congruent brand image and identity as well as foster a brand community.

1.2 Problem statement

In today's day and age, technology and all that it entails forms a major part of the majority of people's lives. People spend a considerable amount of their time online consuming social media content on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and its becoming common practice to interact with brands on this level (Laroche, et al., 2013). Therefore, it would be interesting to look at the relationship between brand building and social media strategy. It will also be interesting to see how companies are implementing these tools to their advantage on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Another interesting area to look would be why consumers respond to these methods as well as to look at what drives their need to follow brand pages and what motivates their need for interaction with brands on these platforms.

1.3 Research Question

Main research question:

What marketing strategies are employed on social media in order to build and maintain brand loyalty as well as to foster a brand community?

How does Social Media contribute to creating a congruent brand identity and image?

Sub questions:

Why do consumers actively engage with social media content generated by brands?

1.4 Objectives

The main objective of the proposed study is to find out how brands are effectively implementing social media strategies in order to build and maintain brand loyalty, as well as foster a brand community

This study will look at the various social media strategies involved in actively engaging with consumers as well as how consumers respond and interact with brands social media content on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

A large quantity of secondary research will be considered in the form of a literature review of material currently published in this area and primary research will include information gathered from surveys from consumers who interact with brands on digital platforms. The findings of this report could be considered helpful to industry professionals in both the branding and social media fields.

1.5 Conceptualisation of Key Concepts

The following terms and definitions will be referred to throughout this research report.

Social Media: Social media has been described as a collection of internet based applications which allows for the creation and exchange of user generated content which is not consumed passively (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Applications and internet sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat will be referred to as social media in this study.

Facebook: An online social networking site which allows users to upload personal content, connect with friends and family as well as connect with likeminded people and pages that interest them.

Instagram: An online application which allows users to take and edit images and videos and then share them either publicly or privately.

Brand Identity: Brand identity refers to the uniqueness of the brand that originates from the company, i.e. the image the brand would like to project (Nandan, 2005, p.264).

Brand Image: Brand image refers to the customer/consumers beliefs and perceptions of a brand (Nandan, 2005, p.264).

Brand Loyalty: Brand loyalty develops when consumers become committed to a brand and its products. They will continue to make purchases regardless of convenience or price. Brand loyalty is affected by a consumers behaviour and is ultimately influenced by their preferences (Baldinger & Rubinson, 1996, p.22)

Brand Community: A brand community has been defined as “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p.412). Brand communities therefore facilitate information sharing between consumers and the brand; it also cements the history and culture of the brand, and provides a platform for consumers to be assisted.

1.6 Outline of Chapter Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to social media and its uses

Chapter 2: Literature review discussing sources that relate to social media and marketing and how these platforms are utilised.

Chapter 3: Method of data collection (Consumer surveys and secondary research).

Chapter 4: Data analysis and findings

Chapter 5: Conclusion

1.7 Overview of Paradigm, Research Approach and the Methodological Implications thereof

This research report will make use of the constructivist paradigm as this approach tends to rely on dialogic methods, which often combines observation and interviewing with approaches that encourage conversation and reflection. This approach is aimed towards understanding rather than predicting. A vast majority of information will be gathered in the form of textual analysis of pre-existing literature, which will then be combined with information gathered through surveys with consumers who engage with various brands on social media.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter deals with the theoretical foundations of this study and is a summary of existing literature which relates to the topic.

According to Keller, building a strong brand involves four steps. The first is to establish a proper brand identity which establishes breadth and depth of brand awareness. The second is to create appropriate brand meaning through strong brand associations. The third step is to elicit positive brand responses and last but not least, to establish brand relationships with customers which are characterized by active loyalty (2001, p.4). Brand loyalty can be enhanced when there is congruency between both brand identity and brand image. For the purpose of this study, brand identity originates from the company whereas brand image refers to the consumers' perceptions and beliefs that they have about the brand (Nandan, 2005, p.264).

Social Media allows brands to effectively tap into a larger community and reach an audience that they may have not have been able reach through traditional marketing channels (Erdoğan & Çiçek, 2012, p.1354). The average consumer spends a third of their time online consuming social media on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Laroche, et al, 2013, p.76). Facebook alone has over 955 million users, half of which actively log in on a daily basis (Ibid. p.76) Due to the incredible, ever growing popularity and ability of social media to help build and maintain virtual communities of likeminded people and businesses, many industry professionals and researchers strongly encourage businesses to hold an active presence on social media and to take advantage of the ever expanding reach these platforms provide if they are to survive in the current cutthroat market (Ibid. p.76). Laroche, et al., conducted a study in 2013 which displayed how brand communities on social media influence elements of the customer centric model, such as "relationships between focal customer and brand, product, company, other customers" as well as brand loyalty (2013, p.77).

Kaplan and Haenlein, describe social media as a collection of internet based applications which allows for the creation and exchange of user generated content which is not consumed passively (2010, p.61). Social media ultimately provides a platform for a brand community to further develop. A brand community has been defined as "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured

set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p.412). Brand communities therefore facilitate information sharing between consumers and the brand; it also cements the history and culture of the brand, and provides a platform for consumers to be assisted. Consequently, allows for an area for brand communities to expand which translates to brand loyalty which in due course builds a stronger brand (Laroche, et al, 2013, p.78). Brand loyalty is a reflection of a perceived unique value, as well as trust and reliability which often results in the willingness of consumers to pay more for products as they feel they are paying for quality goods and services (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

According to Erdoğan and Çiçek, not only is social media allowing firms better communication with consumers to build brand loyalty but it is also allowing firms to move away from “trying to sell” products and services and rather to try “make connections”, which has resulted in many businesses moving away from big campaigns and trying to stick with small acts, as smaller campaigns can now reach a vast number of people in a short amount of time (2012, p.1355). This has also resulted in many companies cutting advertising costs as social media is an effective means to create brand awareness and boost brand recognition and recall (Laroche, et al, 2013, p.78). An infographic study also found that half of Facebook/Twitter users were more likely to talk about/ recommend or purchase products after engaging with the company via social media as social media marketing is far more sincere than traditional means, as it tries to show what a brand is, rather than trying to control its image (Erdoğan & Çiçek, 2012, p.1355). Social media marketing is therefore linked to relationship marketing (Ibid. p.1355), as it plays on the psychological need that humans have to feel that they are connected to groups or symbols that they find desirable and feel that they can associate themselves with (Laroche, et al, 2013, p.77).

Advancements in technology, particularly in the web sector, has allowed for applications such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to build and enhance the customers experience within the brand community. This, in the long run contributes to the mediating role that brand trust plays on translating the effects of the brand community into brand loyalty, which in turn contributes to strengthening the brands image and identity (Ibid. p.81).

Technological advancements paired with rise in the use of smartphones, means that companies now have new possibilities to create and maintain customer relationships (Bergstorm & Backman, 2013, p.2). It is now an expectation for all brands to be represented on social media, as customers will discuss these products whether the brand is active online or not. Hence it is important for companies to be present on these platforms so that they can become part of the conversation. Instagram is a particularly interesting platform, as it allows companies to share content that would not normally be appropriate for any other type of medium (Ibid. p.2)

Bergstorm and Backman, investigated the top five companies on Instagram and looked at how these brands worked with marketing and PR, as well as how their posted content affected the levels of user interaction. The pair of researchers made use of two methods of analysis, namely content analysis of 200 Instagram posts and a survey which investigated Instagram's user's motivations for making use of the platform. The study found that different kind of posts evoked different levels of user interactions (2013. p.2). Companies whom posted content that promoted their products and shared information on upcoming releases and events received low level interaction on their posts, with as little as 1% of their followers liking their post and 2 in 10000 commenting. Yet, when they posted content which made use of the platforms co-creative features, for example, encouraging users to use specific hashtags, the level of interaction increased by as much as five times. Essentially, companies can use Instagram as a tool to connect and to communicate with both its current and potential customers (Ibid. p.11).

We now live in an "era of interactivity" as technology has changed the way brands and costumers connect. As mentioned previously, companies can use their social media pages to create and develop brand recognition by posting content that appeals to their customers (Ibid. p.14). Furthermore, social media also provides a platform for communication to occur both publically and directly and so brand content is given large penetrating power, as content is able to reach thousands of users instantaneously. This has therefore resulted in a new sector of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), as companies are now focused on setting their brand apart from others by personalising communication with customers (Ibid. p.14). Social media thus provides a platform where customers can elevate their relationship with a particular brand (Ibid. p.15)

The study also found that consumers discuss brands on social media, regardless of whether or not that particular brand is active on certain platforms or not. For example, at the time of this study, McDonalds had no official Instagram account. Yet, if one were to search for the hashtag McDonalds, more than 2 million results were returned, which meant that the brand was missing out on an already ongoing conversation and thus could not influence or manage what was being said about them (Ibid. p.15). Since then, McDonalds has a number of verified pages on Instagram that represent branches across the globe.

Communication that takes place amongst likeminded consumers and the brand helps foster a brand community, which in turn influences brand loyalty as well as trust. This is due to the fact that users are able to share their experiences and aid each other in answering questions, which reduces uncertainty and increases the predictability of brands actions (Ibid. p.17). Social networking therefore makes up one of the four key practises through which consumers are able to co-create value in brand communities. The other three key practises listed are impression management, community engagement and brand use (Ibid. p.17).

Essentially, Marketing has changed, as the relationship between company and consumer is no longer top-down, but rather horizontal as what the customer has to say online is equally as important (Ibid. p. 17). There are four factors that contribute to creating this engagement, namely, consumption, curation, creation and collaboration (Ibid. p. 18). Consumption relates to all activity that consumers engage in online – reading, watching, downloading and listening. This is the most common type of social media usage as only 42% of internet users actively engage on social media. The second term, curation, refers to the act of engagement moving from passive to active as consumers start commenting, liking and hashtagging, The third term, creation, refers to the requirement for users to upload their own content to a particular platform. This is often seen on Instagram as companies often post content and then encourage followers to post similar content, using a particular hashtag. This interlinks with last term, collaboration as content is then co-created when consumers upload their own images after being influenced by a company's post (Ibid. p. 18).

Word of mouth is also another major contributing factor to a company's success on social media as people love to communicate with one another and give feedback on

their experiences and thus this gives them a feeling of involvement (Ibid. p. 18). Consumers find a sense of involvement on four different levels, the first of which is product involvement as this relates to giving their feedback on whether they had a positive or negative experience with a product. The second level of involvement is self-involvement and this refers to the users need to acquire a certain sense of prestige and status. The third and fourth levels of involvement are other involvement and message involvement and this revolves around the product and messages around the product (Ibid. p. 18). The phenomenon of using these different types of involvement collectively is known as word of mouth, and is an incredible tool used to generate recommendations of a brand/product. Previously, this tool has been somewhat limited as everyday people did not have the reach required to make a major dent in sales but social media has provided a new power to consumers as this limitation has been removed (Ibid. p. 19).

Ownership of the brand is now shared between the consumers of the brand and the brand itself and the brands reputation is at the mercy of the consumer. This is due to the fact that social media is allowing consumers to be actively involved in the dissemination of information and consumers are able to broadcast stories whether they are personal or second hand. Hence social media strategy involves leveraging these stories in order to influence the consumers thoughts on the brand (Booth & Matic, 2011,p.185). It is therefore important for brands to recognize these storytellers and engage with them as discussions held by the brand help to shape and protect their reputation. Brands need to listen and monitor what is said, both the good and the bad, as awareness and understanding of consumers can turn an unhappy customers into a brand advocate. This is due to the fact that engaging in conversation can change perceptions, diagnose expectations and create clarity (Ibid. p.186). Social media builds relationships and enables conversation within the marketplace. Companies cannot directly control these points but they can influence them and influence is the foundation on which all economical viable relationships are built (Ibid. p.186).

Companies on Instagram use the power of word of mouth by reposting customer photos and encouraging their followers to tag photos with their hashtags as this allows them to spread their reach to an extended network of followers (Bergstorm & Backman, 2013, p. 19).

Businesses should consider making use of Kaplan's *four* model of integration, individualisation, and involvement and initiative when trying to adapt to a social media environment (Ibid. p. 19). Companies should try to integrate their social media activities into the lives of their users and content should be individualised and target the users interests and preferences. Companies should also involve consumers through engaging in conversations and they should also initiate the creation of user generated content and word of mouth, as the most successful campaigns have all embodied these four points (Ibid. p.19).

Ultimately, Instagram is a platform which allows brands to allow their customers closer to the core of the brand, which in turn aids in creating a stronger bond between the company and the consumer. As brands are able to display "behind the scenes content" that would not normally be appropriate for other platforms (Ibid. p. 20).

As mentioned before, consumers are now active creators and influences as there is a shift in power, which has created a new marketing reality that is designed around the customer and is a two way system of peer to peer communication (Hutter, et al., 2013, p. 343). People are highly influenced by social media and a study conducted by Hutter et al shows that people rely on social networks when making decisions concerning purchases. This is mainly due to the fact that engagement on platforms such as Facebook has a positive effect on brand awareness and word of mouth (2013, p.347).

Like Instagram, Facebook is also increasingly being leveraged by companies to build and enhance their brand. A study conducted by a group of researchers looked at how beauty companies are using Facebook to engage and interact with their fans and consumers and found that Facebook is the perfect platform to create a viral word of mouth scenario for product promotion and brand management (Shen & Bissell, 2013, p.19). The study found that posts coded as entertainment were the best received amongst consumers and the most popular posts included questions that normally saw a high response rate in the comments sections. Overall, people had a higher response rate when they were asked to engage in conversation, whereas posts simply conveying information were not liked, shared or commented

on as much due to the fact people prefer two way interaction over passively consuming media (Ibid. p.12).

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter discusses the research design in more depth and explains the methods used to collect data relating to the topic in further detail.

3.1 Research Problem

The growing popularity of smartphones paired with advancements of the World Wide Web means that people are increasingly becoming more connected as the number of social media users continues to increase. Not only are people able to connect with friends and family but they are also able to interact with brands online as many companies are now present on these platforms in order to create dialogue and influence perceptions about their brand. Therefore, as mentioned previously, this research paper aims to investigate the relationship between brand building and social media strategies and how companies are using these platforms and tools to their advantage. This paper will also touch on how and why consumers respond to these strategies, as well as what drives their need to follow these pages and what motivates them to interact on these platforms.

3.2 Research Design

For the purpose of this study, qualitative research techniques will be employed. This is due to the fact that qualitative research is primarily an exploratory tool which allows for researchers to gain an insightful understanding of underlying reasons, attitudes and motivations. "Qualitative research relies on linguistic rather than numerical data and employs meaning-based rather than statistical forms of data analysis" (Niewenhuis, 2016. p.53). It has also been noted that qualitative research is naturalistic, as it focuses on natural settings where interactions take place and therefore views social life in terms of a process rather than in static situations. Hence qualitative research seeks to properly explore how people arrange themselves and make sense of their social settings through symbols, rituals, social structures and social roles etc. (Ibid. p.53). Therefore, this type of research will prove helpful in investigating and gaining an understanding of the specific techniques used by social media strategists as well as gaining insights into the motivations behind consumers who use social media to engage with brands online.

3.3 Data Collection and Population Sampling

Participants will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire and the research population will be made up of both male and female social media users who engage and follow/like official branded pages. Participants will not be targeted on age but rather on their level of engagement with the said pages and so they will not necessarily fall between any particular age brackets. It can also be said that this is a convenience sample as the survey will be distributed to those whom agree to part-take in their free time.

In order to effectively answer the research problem and question, both primary and secondary research will be conducted. Primary research will be conducted using qualitative methods to collect information and gain an insight into the consumer's perspective. Short online surveys will be created with the popular and easy to use survey tool, "Survey Monkey". A link will then be distributed randomly via social media platforms asking participants questions concerning to their social media use and whether or not they interact with brands online. If participants disclose that they do in fact interact with brands online, further questions will be asked in order to gain an insight into the type of interactions they have with brands and their social media pages and what motivates their interactions with the brands that they follow/like online.

Hence the main unit of analysis for this thesis will not only be the strategies used by marketing teams but also how and why consumers respond to these methods.

Chapter 4: Data Collection, Analysis and Findings

Chapter four involves a discussion about the data collection methods employed in this study as well as the major findings.

4.1 Data Collection

The data collection for this research paper consists of both primary and secondary research. The majority of information collected has come from secondary research sources, as the bases of this paper has been formed by analysing existing literature on similar topics. This information has then been compared to findings from the primary research phase in order to see whether or not there is a consensus between the two. The primary phase of research has made use of qualitative data collection methods in the form of online surveys which were distributed randomly via the popular social media site Facebook, and thus made use of convenience sampling methods. These results were used gain a basic insight into the consumer/ social media user's perspective of branded social media pages and activity.

4.2 Data Analysis

When reading over and analysing most of the existing literature that has been published on the topic of social media and online marketing, it becomes evident that there are some basic elements that are consistent throughout. One of the major themes that seem to be repeated throughout all sources is the fact that social media is growing at a rapid rate and is able to address an unlimited scope of consumer markets (Coursaris, et al., 2013, p.2). Social media is continually becoming more popular amongst businesses as it is an attractive option as it can either replace or complement existing traditional marketing schemes, it is also inherently free, personal and opens up opportunities to reach and target smaller market segments (Ibid. p.2). Hence more and more companies are investing money into the development and execution of social media marketing strategies (Ibid. p.2).

A study conducted during 2013, criticised existing literature for being too broad and lacked the ability to provide "strong empirically grounded and comprehensive typologies for assessing, classifying and framing social media marketing strategies" in order to inform the design and development of successful social media messages and campaigns (Ibid. p.2) . One of the major criticisms was that that there was a

great void in information due to the fact that there are far too many platforms to be analysed critically. Hence, this particular study focused solely on the extremely popular social networking site, Facebook. Not only did they focus on a single platform, but they also chose to focus on a single element of the site, pages run by brands. This aimed to create a typology which was comprehensive enough to classify any single branded Facebook page message, but also general enough to account for the wide range of product/service categories. Therefore the study closely analysed 6 weeks' worth of content from the pages of three different fortune 110 companies, namely McDonalds, American Airlines and Wal-Mart in order to try and establish what type of messaging brands employ for communicating and engaging with their followers. Facebook was selected initially as the site has an astounding following and level of dedication from its users. HubSpot also found that 80% of the social networks users prefer to connect with brands via this medium; therefore it was and still is a vital touch point for communication between brands and their customers (Ibid. p.2). The final typology for classifying brand Facebook Page messages includes seven higher-level main categories, namely, brand awareness, corporate social responsibility, customer service, engagement, product awareness, promotional and seasonal, as well as 23 other sub-categories. Although some posts may be grouped into more than one category, for example, a post could foster both brand and product awareness, but for the purpose of this study, they were kept mutually exclusive (Ibid. p. 6). By using a Multi-Grounded Theory approach which analysed and coded over 250 brand posts, the study was able to suggest a generalizable typology which is not only useful for future research concerning the topic but also for assessing engagement amongst consumers (Ibid. p.6).

In conclusion, the study was able to classify the following different types of social media strategies used by brands in order to create engagement between them and their followers. The first category, Brand Awareness is concerned with building the brands presences in a digital market; this is achieved through posting content that relates to promotional aspects, the brands heritage and their operation. The second category, corporate social responsibly deals with posts that promote and builds the brands image of being involved in supporting and strengthening the community. These posts either create awareness about certain issues, or promote fundraisers. Customer service is another major category which aims to build customer knowledge

about the product, industry and brand changes. These posts normally come in the form of notifications of openings, outages and public service associations which may post something concerning the brand. Engagement posts make up the fourth category and are made up of posts which either assist, promote communities, encourage likes, direct consumers to branded photos and video content, question or poll consumers, show appreciation or direct consumers to perform an action other than liking the post (Ibid. p.7). The fifth category concerns Product Awareness posts are designed to build product knowledge, understanding and existence and either promote name brands that are not specifically produced by the posting brand or promote house brands which are made and sold by the posting brand. Promotional posts make up the sixth category and are designed to stimulate immediate or near future purchases by notifying consumers of a deal or a chance to earn a reward either in the form of a contest, giveaway or sweepstake. The last category of posts are known as seasonal posts and aim to remind and inform consumers of seasonal and annual events which are related to the product and brand. These posts either mention specific holidays, climate and sports seasons, and events which are which are not related to holidays, for example graduation, day light savings or tax day (Ibid. p.8).

Looking at the information discussed above, it becomes evident that branding is considered a powerful means of establishing long term relationships between a brand and their consumers. In short, consumers who are committed to a brand are more likely to spread positive word of mouth, generate repeat purchases and ultimately be willing to pay more money for products and services provided by the brand they feel more affiliated to (Kang, et al., 2014, p.145). Brand information now comes from a diverse range of sources and influences the consumers experience; hence many businesses feel that it is important to manage consumer-brand based relationships, particularly through their communication strategy. The study conducted by Kang et al aims to understand the foundation of this relationship with particular reference to the restaurant industry and their Facebook fan pages (2014 p.145). Generally the authors found that Facebook fan pages which are liked and followed by consumers who show a keen interest in the brand, provide a mixture of informative material that is often a combination of brand content and co-created content. This information then assists users to make more objective judgements

about the business and the products/ services that they provide. Pages that contain positive information about the brand ultimately help to build trust and confidence in the brand which in turn enhances people's psychological attachment and generates commitment (Ibid. p.145). Brand pages therefore serve two major purposes, one, to establish awareness and two, build relationships. Participation is therefore a vital part of relationship building and brands therefore encourage members to be active as this creates a highly interactive environment in which members interactive in a positive setting which in turn leads to increased attitudinal commitment by all those who follow and interact with the brands content (Ibid. p.145)

Although the study conducted by Kang et al is widely concerned with the use of social media within the restaurant industry, their findings are applicable to social media pages run by various brands providing various products and services and so the results will be discussed in a generalised term. A brand community refers to a "specialised, non-geographically bound community, which is based on a structured set of social relations, among admirers of particular brand" (Ibid. p. 147). In order for brands to build and manage active online communities through their social media channels, they need to understand the motivations of their members as well as be aware of the benefits that they seek (Ibid. p.146). Understanding member's motivations and being aware of their needs which can be categorised in to functional, social, psychological, hedonic and sometimes monetary, actively allows brands to attract new followers, connect likeminded fans and motivate repeat visits to their page (Ibid. p.146).

The study also found that there are different levels of participation which can either be categorised as passive or active. Passive participation refers to members who browse the page and take advantage of the benefits but do not actively contribute to the success of the page and its community. These members are often referred to as lurker's as they simply sit back and watch what is being posted (Ibid. p.146). Active participants are on the opposite end of the scale and are highly motivate to participate and engage, create content, provide information and emotional support to other members. It is therefore a vital goal for brands to convert lurker's to active participants in order to insure a community is formed (Ibid. p.146). The key to running a successful online brand community is therefore to have a deep understanding of who you are talking to and what their needs are and then to deliver

value to them as the customer, as they are more likely to participate and be committed and loyal to the brand when they perceive that they are benefits to taking part and interacting (Ibid. p.146).

The first categories of perceived benefits that social media pages need to meet are functional benefits. These benefits refer to the fundamental need of obtaining and share information. They also relate to the perceived utility and quality of the brand (Ibid. p.147). The next category refers to the social-psychological benefits. Social identity and social exchange theories explain why people are motivated to participate in online communities. Social exchange is major contributing and can be defined as a reciprocal interaction among individuals who expect to receive social rewards relating to approval, status and respect. Although there is no guarantee to receiving these things, members are willing to participate in the hopes of receiving reciprocal interactions. Social identity theory refers to the need for individuals to identify with other people in order to feel that they are part of a group and that they belong. When people feel that they belong, they are more likely to participate as they feel that it is a safe environment. These theories therefore relate to the psychological need to feel a sense of belonging (Ibid. p.147). Another category which plays an important role in motivation participation and engagement are the hedonic benefits. These benefits refer to the entertainment value offered by a brands page and states the participation levels are increased when people feel that they are having fun and enjoying the content that is posted on the page (Ibid. p.147).

Relational benefits assume that both parties benefit in order for the relationship to continue for an extended period of time. Therefore brands provide benefits to their followers in order to increase loyalty and consumers receive core service benefits as well as additional benefits of being part of a relationship with the brand that meets their social, psychological and hedonic needs (Ibid. p.148). An additional core category of benefits that encourage consumers to participate are the monetary benefits associated with branded social media pages. Ultimately, the consumer seeks economic advancement and top quality products and services; therefore you will find that numerous social media pages run by brands often promote discounts and giveaways in the form of promotional codes or advertisements of instore sales as well as regular competitions in which consumers can win featured goods (Ibid.p.148).

Ultimately, motivation is the driving force that initiates and maintains goal driven behaviour. Therefore it is important that brands meet the needs of their consumers in order to encourage and maintain a relationship with them in which consumers actively participate on their pages (Ibid. p.148).

Perceived benefits therefore lead to active participation, which in turn leads to brand trust and commitment. Brand commitment can be defined as a strong and positive psychological attachment to the brand which is attitudinal rather than behavioural. Committed consumers generally have an enduring attitude towards a brand and frequent positive interactions; enhance a positive attitude which ultimately strengthens the bond between the two parties. Trust is also a fundamental element of interpersonal exchange which is also developed through positive experiences (Ibid. p.150).

Although Facebook is still the most popular social networking site, the photo sharing application known as Instagram is becoming increasingly popular worldwide. This has proven that pictures do in fact speak louder than words as the amount of active users exceeds that of the popular social networking site, Twitter (Lee, et al., 2015, p.552). Although one can log in via the website, the application can only be downloaded via mobile devices and the user capabilities are far more user friendly via the app, therefore Instagram encourages users to use the app via their mobile smartphone or tablet whilst they are on the go. The application has an extremely simple, user friendly layout which gives users the creative freedom to not only take, share and acknowledge fellow users lives through photographs, but also to edit them with a selection of professional filters. Users also have the option to tag their photographs location and then plot them geographically (Ibid. p.552). These features give Instagram an edge and therefore the application is considered the ultimate photo sharing app, as it is highly convenient for those that are on the go and want to share part of their lives with the rest of the world. Not only can users share parts of their life that they consider notable but they are also able to follow commercial brands and celebrities who share content that resonates with them (Ibid. p.552). Unlike other social networking sites and applications, Instagram is largely based around photos and so users cannot post solely text based content but instead need to post an image or video which can then be captioned. This “image first, text second rule” has therefore resulted in a very strong visual orientation. This combined with

the idea that content can be created and viewed on the go at any time via the use of mobile smartphones has also contributed to a visual culture which potentially creates a different user (Ibid. p.552).

Instagram has an incredible reach as the application was generating a daily average of roughly 2.5 billion likes and up to 70 million photo updates a day in 2015, a figure which is sure to have grown exponentially within the last year (Ibid. p.552). Incredible advancements in technology not only mean that it is easier to access and share content online. But it also means that images taken on mobile devices now days are of greater quality and therefore the act of taking pictures with mobile devices in a major activity among smartphone users, hence the popularity of Instagram. A survey conducted in South Korea during 2014 found that Instagram users have 5 prim social and psychological motives for using the application. The first of which is social interaction with fellow users and the second is the use of Instagram as an archiving tool to record highlights of their daily lives. The third motive behind the use of Instagram is the freedom of self-expression as the act of sharing photos allows users to present images that resonate or represent their lifestyle, tastes and personalities. The fourth and fifth motives are the abilities to “escape reality” and “peek “at what others are doing and sharing whilst forgetting the troubles they encounter in reality (Ibid. p.555).

Overall, the study showed that the archiving and peeking motivations predict attitudes, as well as intentions to make use of Instagram, which in turn suggest that motives play a major role in users forming positive attitudes towards the platform. These attitudes then have the potential to increase the likelihood of users regular visits, which ultimately aids in reinforcing a variety of social relationships (Ibid. p.555).

This information is therefore helpful to marketers who want to tap into the major branding potential that Instagram offers. These findings offer insights into the proactive role that consumers play in today’s marketplace and understanding their motivations to using these platforms can help marketers provide content that appeals to these needs and ultimately reinforces the consumer brand relationship (Ibid. p.555).

Another study conducted during 2014 looked at how brands are utilizing Instagram to engage with customers as well as how customers are presenting brand images and identifying with brand personalities. The researchers used a hybrid of qualitative and thematic content analysis and in total, they analysed about 238 customer created images and 62 corporate created images from two major brands, Starbucks Coffee and Nike (Chang, 2014, p.9). Data was collected through Keyhole and Statigram, which are online social media analytical tools that the researcher used to narrow down data according to certain criteria (Ibid. p.9). The author found images by searching through Nike and Starbucks hashtags on Instagram. These hashtags yielded thousands of results which were then narrowed down according to the minimum number of likes they received and removing images that did not actually have anything to do with the content tagged. After cleaning the data about 140 Nike posts and 98 Starbucks posts were retained. Branded content was collected via the analytical tools discussed above. Due to the fact that customer content is created a rapidly higher volume rate than branded images, the collection period for branded photos was extended by two months as not to disproportion the data, as during a single month roughly 297,029 customer created photos were posted and only 8 company images (Ibid. p.43).

Like Facebook fan pages, value is created in brand communities on Instagram via the following four categories. The first is social networking, which focuses on creating bonds with other individuals on the platform. The second is impression management and focuses on those that try to create a positive image for the brand, either by “sharing the good news” and encouraging others to try the brands product or service or by justifying their commitment to brand. The third category involves community engagement by documenting the brands relationship journey. The fourth category involves sharing the brands use practices (Ibid. p.45).

In order to categorise brand personalities and explain how they transfer to images on Instagram the researcher categorised images according to the following criteria. The first of which is sincerity, which is represented by qualities which are down to earth, real and honest. These images are normally a close up shot of the product and often shown in context, for example drinking Starbucks with friends or working out with Nike. Excitement is represented by attributes such as daring and imaginative, on Instagram brand images with these characteristics are shown with an artistic touch

or creative setting. The third personality, of competence is shown by intelligent, reliable and secure attributes. This is normally represented through showing a situation which relates to work, school, elitism or competition. The fourth personality trait is sophistication and is represented by posts showing luxury goods and physical beauty. The last trait, ruggedness is shown through tough, outdoorsy photos which often play on the preservation of human beings. Although these traits are not necessarily mutually exclusive, for the purposes of this particular study the author chose to assign the single best suited trait in order to analyse the brand personality. (Ibid. p.46)

The findings for brand value creation practices showed that the interactions between brand-sharing Instagramers were less about community and engagement and more about themselves and how they show their brand use and manage their online impression (Ibid. p.49). Contact made on Instagram is generally very short and superficial as there is very little conversation or exchange of information (Ibid. p.49). The primary networking method on Instagram is through liking images by double tapping them. In instances where people do comment, they normally just comment a short one liner praising the photograph, thus the value practices of “community engagement” and “social networking” are less common on Instagram as they are on a site such as Facebook. The study also found that engagement and networking are also lacking for the brands side as images posted by them are used rather to entertain and inspire rather than to spark conversation (Ibid. p. 50). It is however interesting to note that brand image sharing does involve the categories “brand use” and “impression management”. Customers generally post images showing their personal experience with the brand (its use) as well as justification for its use (impression management) (Ibid. p.50).

The comparison of brand created images and customer created images showed that there was congruency between the images shared by Starbuck’s and their customers but images from Nike and their consumers differed. For example Starbuck’s and their consumers shared the traits of sincerity and sophistication between their photos. The majority of images shared by Nike possessed the ruggedness (85% of photos) and sophistication (10% of photos) qualities whereas images shared by their fans show ruggedness at 35% and sophistication at 32%.

This shows that these two brands share very different levels of brand personality congruency between themselves and their customers (Ibid. p.52).

This creates interesting implications when it comes to marketing brands and products on Instagram as the study showed that brands are using more indirect techniques to promote their products whilst customers are seen to apply more direct and straightforward messaging to promote and showcase the brands they are interested in (Ibid. p.53). For this particular case study, 85% of Starbucks customers and 79% of Nike customers shared images which directly showed the brand and their products and promoted themselves, whilst 77% of Starbucks official content and 89% of Nikes content promoted the brand indirectly. This shows that the role of traditional marketers and consumers have somewhat reversed as companies are attempting to use more associative images to persuade viewers while consumers are using brand images more directly and far more aggressively in order to promote themselves (Ibid. p.53).

Looking at the findings from this study, it is interesting to note the two different strategies employed by these two very different companies who are both extremely popular, especially amongst the youth. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that the two strategies differ, both brands are using implicit imagery and relying heavily on associative objects and atmospheres. Both companies therefore depend on using brand associations, thoughts, feelings and perceptions to link to their brand and create positive images to promote themselves. Although cases where consumers posted direct and explicit brand content count as word of mouth promotion, it does not necessarily mean those consumers were actually intending on helping the brand by promoting sales but rather that they were actually promoting themselves and “showing off” which then in-directly promoted the brands they captured and tagged in their photographs (Ibid. p.65).

Nikes Instagram account relies heavily on representing the brand as a rugged, outdoorsy brand that supports people going to the limit to be the best they can be, whilst customer related content focuses heavily on both the aesthetic and monetary appeal the brand has (Ibid. p.61). Although Nikes fan base helps to illuminate another aspect of the brands value, the company views its followers as both customers and competitors as they compete for attention and thus have taken on the

strategy of posting highly professional photographers which cannot be easily copied through the use of camera phones (Ibid. p.63). Starbucks on the other hand makes use of collaborating strategies to connect to their fan base as they share similar content to their consumers and post what their customers want to see as these images resonate with the ones posted by their followers. Starbucks also makes use of crowd sourcing and “regrams” (meaning to repost to one’s own Instagram account whilst giving credit to the original poster) consumer created content which appeals to the attention seeking customers and encourages more positive brand image sharing on the platform (Ibid. p.62).

An online survey was created with the online survey development cloud based software, Survey Monkey. This survey was then distributed to a convenience sample via the popular social networking site, Facebook. 75.5% of the participants who took part in the survey fell between the ages of 18-25 and said that they prefer using Facebook over Instagram. This may be due to the fact that Facebook offers an extended array of features, including the option to share photographic and video images. Almost 90% of the participants said that they follow/like branded pages on Instagram and Facebook. The majority of the participants said that they follow these pages in order to stay up to date with the latest products/services, trends and events, with particular reference to fashion, sport and entertainment events.

When respondents were asked about whether or not they interact with brands online, the results were quite similar as 45% of people said they did like or comment on branded content whilst 55% of people said they did not. This shows that the levels of active and passive interaction are somewhat even. Surprisingly, only 40% of participants said they use social media as a channel of complaint and stated that their reason for doing so is mainly due to exposure, as they feel that brands are more proactive about correcting a situation if it is visible to the public as bad word of mouth has the potential to tarnish the brands reputation. However 60% of participants said that they have used and do use brands social media pages as an indication of the quality of the service and/or products brands provide. This is interesting to note as 40% of people use social media to make their complaints heard, whilst 60% use social media as an indication of service, which once again goes back to the idea of active and passive interaction and the idea of “lurkers” on

social media pages. This shows that “lurkers” rely heavily on the opinion of others and use pages to make judgements towards the brand

4.3 Findings

Looking at what has been discussed above, we can conclude that social media is an attractive marketing tool as it can either replace and/or compliment traditional marketing schemes. Most platforms are also inherently free and also offer a personal connection to consumers with an endless amount of reach. Social media marketing employs a number of strategies in order for a brand to gain a large, active following, which in turn fosters a brand community and ultimately brand loyalty. It has been found that social media post by brands either fall under 1 or more of the following 7 categories relating to:

- Brand awareness
- Corporate social responsibility
- Customer service
- Engagement
- Product awareness
- Promotional and seasonal posts

Brands are able to build and manage active online communities through their social media channels, by understanding the motivations of their members as well as being aware of the benefits that their members are looking for. We can sum up that consumers are motivated to partake and engage with brands online due to the following motivations:

- Functional
- Social
- Psychological
- Hedonic
- Monetary

It has also been found that social media users consume branded media in two ways. Users are either active and contribute to branded or content, or they consume information passively and “lurk” without making any contribution. When users perceive that they are benefitting from branded content, they in turn become more committed to the brand and choose to interact with the brand. Therefore, it is

important for brands to tap into this thinking as it will help them to build a stronger relationship with their consumers.

We can also see that companies adopt two different approaches; either they aim to post highly professional content to advertise and inspire a specific lifestyle (It is important to note that this content cannot easily be recreated with the use of smartphones). Whilst other companies employ the strategy of co-creation and crowd sourcing in order to gain a following and encourage participation. Despite the different strategies employed, it ultimately comes down to how consumers judge a brand and their products by how they are represented online.

Consumers value the opinion of their fellow consumers and so it is important for brands to engage with consumers on social media on a level that allows them to feel as if they matter, because in the long run, the power of word of mouth outweighs the power of any public relations campaign. Consumers can no longer be preached to as marketing, thanks to social media, has become a two way street and interaction from the consumer outweighs the power of any public relations campaign. Consumers can no longer be preached to as marketing, thanks to social media, has become a two way street and interaction from the consumer is highly valued amongst both brands and other consumers. Consumers who feel valued and feel that they can identify with a brand are more likely to be loyal to the brand and therefore spread positive word of mouth and be willing to spend more on products and services.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The final chapter discusses the overall results of the report and also looks at the validity of the study.

This research report ultimately set out to look at the relationship between brand building, social media and a new era of consumers. As previously discussed, the rise of the internet age has resulted in many people spending a vast majority of their time consuming online contents on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Social media has essentially changed the game of marketing as it is now common practice for consumers to interact with brands on this level. Easy connection and instant access has also allowed brands to move away or enhance their traditional means of marketing as they are able use social media to extend their reach and target segments they would normally not have been able to reach.

This study aimed to look at the types of strategy involved in building a strong branded social media page, as well as to look at how these strategies contribute to building brand loyalty and foster a brand community. It also intended to look at consumers motivations to engage and interact with branded pages. Information was gathered predominantly through primary research, which involved a strong textual analysis of pre-existing literature on the topic. This information was then compared with the results of short survey which was distributed to a random, convenience sample over the popular social media site, Facebook.

After a considerable amount of time was spent analysing the various sources and looking at survey responses, one can easily confirm that there is a consensus between the results of the surveys and the literature review.

Keller stated that strong brands establish a strong identity through the following ways. First they build brand awareness, then they create meaning through strong brand associations, they then elicit positive brand responses and lastly they establish a relationship with their customers which is characterised by brand loyalty (2001, p.4). These four points are very important as one could say the form the bases of all social media strategy. It is also important to note that one of the major aims of branded social media pages is to create a conversation and get their followers/ fans involved with the conversation. This allows for a brand community to form and grow

as likeminded individuals who share a passion for a particular brand are able to interact and share their thoughts. This inherently translates into brand loyalty as individuals are more likely to trust a brand they engage with. This ties in with the section on the power of word of mouth, as the game has changed and the consumers opinion is now valued even more. People are now able to communicate with other customers and give feedback on their experiences, thus giving them a feeling of involvement. Social media has essentially changed how marketing has traditionally operated as it is now less about trying to sell a product but more about creating connections and so we can see a shift in power as interactivity is highly valued when it comes to consumer relationship management. Survey results correlated to this point as they showed that people also value the ability to communicate with brands instantaneously on a public platform as they felt this pressured the brand to deal with any customer service issues quickly and efficiently.

The findings above reveal the motivations and intentions for both brands and their consumers and will be helpful in developing new marketing strategies that could be implemented on social media as the current market is extremely dynamic and will still see great changes in the future. It is important for companies to be aware of these strategies and to adapt their pages accordingly. It is also notable to perform in depth market research so that they are aware of their target user's interests and can cater to their preferences in order to create engaging conversation, as conversation is ultimately one of the most powerful tools that can be utilised.

Looking at what has been discussed above; one can conclude that this report has been successful in answering the questions it set out to answer. Considering that the vast majority of information gathered came from secondary sources, there were little to no ethical concerns. Short online surveys revealed no ethical problems as participants were able to take part out of their own free will anonymously and were able to opt out at any given point. They were also allowed to skip any questions they did not feel comfortable with. In short, one of the major limitations of this study is that social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram hold information on such a large scale that it becomes difficult to complete an in depth analysis on them both. It is therefore suggested that future studies choose one network to analyse as this will allow researchers to give their undivided attention to a particular area and therefore they will be able to conduct an in depth analysis. Choosing a particular brand or

product area may also yield interesting results as more in depth analyse could be conducted on the types of consumers that interact with these pages and therefore one would be able to gain a more insightful perspective of what drives the consumer, which would ultimately aid in creating or improving social network strategies involved with branding and marketing.

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