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interact with consumers in the retail industry: An
analysis on Woolworth's online strategies

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ABSTRACT

This proposed research is a small-scale qualitative study that explored the world of digital media specifically social media. Social media was looked at in-depth with regards to how brands can utilise this media platform to engage and interact with their consumers. The South African retail brand, Woolworths, was analysed in terms of their social media strategy. Woolworths was analysed because of their strong online strategies.

With the advancement of technology within the past few years, digital media has grown a lot and is sometimes preferred over traditional media, such as newspapers and magazines. Since digital media has advanced, social media platforms have been getting stronger every year. A lot of South African are using different types of social media platforms, therefore it is imperative that South African brands keep up to date with current trends and focus part of their marketing strategies on social media. This also includes brands being able to interact with their customers through social media.

This proposed research topic is relevant both to brands and consumers, because social media plays a very big role in today's age. Many people are using social media, so in order for companies to boost their brand recognition and build and foster relationships with their customers, they need to connect with them in an efficient way.

This interpretivistic study analysed customers from Woolworths, with regards to their opinions and thoughts about brands interacting with their customers on social media. Information for this proposed research was obtained from questionnaires from twenty participants in the Umhlanga area. From the data collected, it was noted that consumers felt that social media is very important in today's society and that many of the participants were attracted to the Woolworths social media pages, because of their interesting content and quick responses to consumers.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- Living standard measure (LSM)-

Living standard measure is a South African marketing tool that is used to measure the standards of the way people in this country live (SAARF, 2017).

- Marketing strategy-

A marketing strategy combines all of an organisation's goals in order to reach a specific target audience. A marketing strategy is important to any business and makes sure that it addresses specific consumer needs (Newlands, 2015).

- Online social engagement-

This refers to the act of being in touch with people through digital media. For example, a business can keep in touch with their customers and reply to their complaints or send them updates on sales either through the company's website or social media pages (Patel, 2014).

- Social media-

Social media is collective term for online platforms in which individuals can access via the internet to communicate with one another. This includes sharing content such as photos, videos and messaging. Examples of social media would be Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Rouse, 2016).

- Traditional media-

Traditional media is a form of mass communication that was made available to society before social and digital media was created. Examples of traditional media include television, radio, newspapers and magazines. This type of media is the most common type that is used by local organisations on a day to day basis (Christian, 2014).

Chapter ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes information that is the foundation of this proposed research. It describes the research title and background, as well as the problem statement of this research. The background of the research title is described in-depth to give the reader an understanding of why this topic was chosen, as well as why it is important.

1.2 RESEARCH TITLE

How social media can be used to engage and interact with consumers in the retail industry: An analysis on Woolworth's online strategies.

1.3 CONTEXTUALISATION

Social media is an internet platform that is designed for individuals to communicate with one another at a fast and effective rate (Carpenter & Shankar, 2012). Social media is a faster way of communicating, compared to the traditional ways, such as television, print and radio. Examples of social media include Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2012). Social Media has recently become one of the fastest growing marketing channels in the world and has changed how people communicate with one another, as well as how organisations communicate and interact with their consumers (Aral, Dellarocas & Godes, 2013). As a result of the vast amount of scope of consumer markets that social media can address, more organisations began to invest into the creation and execution of social media marketing strategies (Balogh, Coursaris & Van Osch, 2013).

Research shows that individuals post half a billion tweets on Twitter every day and a huge amount of those tweets comprise of organisations and their consumers engaging with each other (Coen, 2016). For brands, social media presents advantages and disadvantages. One school of thought argues that social media supply's brands with a personal platform to engage with consumers and mould their views of the organisation. The other school of thought states that social media has definitely given consumers the power to hinder long-established brands with one small negative comment online (Becker, Kanabar, Nobre, 2013).

Consumers have the ability to easily access anything that they need just by accessing online websites through their smart phones or through other electronic devices, such as laptops or tablets. Although social media marketing provides many opportunities for both consumers and marketers, it does have negative impacts on both (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard, 2013). With the rise of social media, this proposed research is aimed at finding out how social media can be utilised to help the retail industry interact and engage with consumers. The retail brand, “Woolworths”, will be analysed with regards to their online strategies and how they interact, engage and foster their relationships with their consumers.

1.4 RATIONALE

A rationale provides the researcher with reasoning for beginning to tackle a specific issue with a specific solution (Rojon & Saunders, 2012).

The proposed research topic is relevant both to brands and consumers, because social media plays a large role in today’s age. Many people are using social media, so in order for companies to boost their brand recognition and build and foster relationships with their customers, the companies need to connect with them in an efficient way (Quesenberry, 2014). It’s relevant for brands as it reaches a large number of people in a fast and cost-effective manner. Many people today will research a company online, before making a purchase. Online reputation is where many companies have the most impact from customers (Smith, 2014). Social engagement and consumer reviews are some of the elements that contribute to a person’s decision to make an initial purchase. With the rise of social media today, consumers are more likely to buy from a company that is interactive online (Neti, 2011).

1.5 PROPOSED JOURNAL

The journal that would be most suitable and appropriate for this proposed research is “The journal of social media in society”. This journal would be appropriate, because it includes content relating to current social media in today’s society. The aim of the JSMS is to advance the study and practice of social media based on theoretical literature and research, therefore making this journal the ideal place for this proposed research to be published in.

1.6 PROBLEM STATEMENT

A problem statement is an explanation of a problem that needs to be tackled. It gives the surroundings for the research study and produces questions which the research study will attempt to answer. The problem statement is the main focus of any research (Bryman, 2007).

This proposed research is aimed at finding out how retail brands interact and engage with their consumers on social media. With the recent growth of social media, companies are constantly trying to pay attention to the changes in the consumers' opinions and attitudes (Kotler, 2011). Brands are trying to keep up to date with changing and new technologies, in order to meet the needs of their consumers. The imbalance in the utilisation of social media compared to the benefits that it provides, can be caused due to the absence of understanding how to handle matters such as negative publicity (Kietzmann, 2011).

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A research question is the basic core of a research study. Creating a research question is a task. Good research questions are formed and worked on (Sequeira, 2015).

- how effective is interacting on social media with consumers, for Woolworths to gain insights on how consumers feel?
- how do South African retail consumers perceive retail brands being advertised on social media platforms, especially the Woolworths brand?
- how much do South African retail brands rely on social media to interact with their consumers?

1.8 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

A research objective is a brief statement which gives guidance to explore the elements of a research study. Research objectives focuses on the ways to measure the elements, such as to identify or describe them. Objectives must be set after formulating good research questions (Bhasin, 2016).

- To describe the effectiveness of engaging with consumers on social media

- To describe what insights retail brands can take from Woolworths, with regards to their social media strategies
- To describe how retail brands rely on social media, to interact with their consumers

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes a specific theory that relates to social media interaction and provides more insights into why individuals in society want to use specific media platforms. The Woolworths brand is analysed in relation to the specific parts of the chosen theory. There are relevant findings from past literature on brands utilising social media for consumer engagement. The literature review contained academic sources that are new, due to social media being a new media platform. Previous sources were consulted with regards to definitions within the literature review. The research paradigm for this proposed research is also mentioned, as well as why it is relevant to the research.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Uses and Gratification Theory

The theory that will be used in this proposed research is “The Uses and Gratifications Theory”. Elihu Katz (1973) first introduced the Uses and Gratification Approach and his colleagues, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch continued to expand on the idea. The approach states that a media user looks for a media source that proves to best satisfy the needs of the individual and that the users have different possibilities to fulfil their needs (Blumler, Gurevitch & Katz, 1973). One of the theory’s main points is what society does with the media, compared to what the media does to society. This approach aims to find out why people seek out different types of media and what they use it for. It investigates how people intentionally pursue different and specific media to satisfy their particular needs (Foulkes & Katz, 1962). The needs for the theory are cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integration needs, social integration needs and tension free needs (Kane, 2015).

The approach will be applied to this proposed researched, because the aim is to analyse how Woolworths builds their online relationships with their customers.

The theory is used, because it explains how people use media for their needs. Therefore the theory relates to how consumers of Woolworths need to interact with

the brand on social media to fulfil their needs, such as knowing about types of products that Woolworths sell (Lorenz, 2011).

Cognitive needs refers to society utilising the media to obtain data (Nabi & Oliver, 2009). Some people have different cognitive needs than others. Gratifying the need for a constant stream of information regarding current on-goings in the world. This need is built around the perception that people feel better after they encounter certain information, so that they are aware of what is going on around them (Lee & Ma, 2011). Consumers are trained to ignore advertisement online, therefore brands should initiate a strategy for consumers to pay attention online. Consumers are regularly obtaining information, therefore brands need to compete with all the other information and catch their consumers' attention (Hyken, 2014).

Woolworths mainly updates their consumers through the social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter (Tubbs, 2013). Their online content consists of new products, price changes, and latest trends in the fashion industry and technical difficulties on their website to inform consumers. They grab their consumers' attention by using big bold words and catchy titles such as interesting food recipes. Their online strategies are planned in such a way that consumers feel much more informed after visiting the Woolworths social media pages (Mahlaka, 2014). Information that is distributed on the social media platforms is feasible and consumers can find it useful in their everyday lives (Cockcroft, head of the Woolworths online, 2013),

Affective needs refer to all types of emotions or moods portrayed by society (Khalid, 2007). Brands have the ability to fulfil the consumer's affective needs by appealing to their emotional side. An important element is for the brands to create an emotional connection to the consumer (MacInnis, Park & Thomson, 2005). Emotions are some of the main reasons why consumers choose brand name products (Murray, 2013). Woolworths appeals to their consumers through various community projects that they are involved in. This includes sustainable farming, reducing energy usage and protection of water supplies.

A recent project of Woolworths involved collaboration with local designers to produce products for the brand. This project appealed to the brands consumers, as the consumers realised that Woolworths is aiming to inspire and promote the local designers to help them start their career, as well as boost the country's economy. This

can result in the consumers feeling happy and proud and they too want to support the brand for all its positive outcomes (Mbele, 2016).

Personal integration needs refers to self-esteem. People utilise the media to increase or expand their status levels and credibility (Nabi & Oliver, 2009). The theorist believed that some people may select different media options as a reference to their personal identity. Some brands have the ability to provide consumers with an extravagant event in order to increase the consumer's self-esteem. By interacting with consumers on a personal level, brands give consumers the ability to gain recognition with the brand (Moorman, Muntinga & Smith, 2011). In doing so, the consumer's self-esteem is increased and this influences their buying decisions. Brands also reward their consumers with a loyalty program online and this makes the consumers feel important and this results in their personal integration need being fulfilled (Lazarevic, 2012). Consumers like and support Woolworths for its unstoppable concentration on the high standards on products and positive in-store encounters. Brands that are patriotic are rewarded with loyalty from their consumers. Woolworths designed a rewards programme to create and foster profitable relationships with their consumers (Mackay & Blyth, 2014).

Social integration needs comprises of the need to interact with one's family and friends. Today, much social interaction takes place online (Nabi & Oliver, 2009). Brands aim for their consumers to purchase their products and they talk about it to their family and friends on their social media page. They achieve this by creating multiple online communities filled with entertaining and valuable information. Therefore, consumers now discuss the products that they have purchased with their family and friends online. They share pictures of the products and comment on it (Smith, 2010). Woolworths uses the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter (Wilson, 2013). Their online strategy includes expanding the Woolworths brand experience by utilizing the Omni-channel philosophy. Their Ecommerce platform merges editorial content into the online shopping experience to inspire and engage with the consumers. The communication channels increases conversations between the consumer and the brand, to ensure that the consumers experience was satisfactory (Booyesen, 2012).

Tension free needs refer to people utilising the media as a way of escapism (Nabi & Oliver, 2009). This is usually any form of activity that takes your attention away from what you are doing or from what you intended to be doing. The theorists of the uses and gratifications approach believed that some individuals may select particular media sources as a way of escapism. This would permit the individuals to divert from everyday life and do something different of their choice.

The need for diversion accounts for using the media for entertainment purposes. Woolworths collaborated with famous American singer, Pharrell Williams, on a community project that was aimed at creating recognition about the importance of education and environmental sustainability in South Africa (TheCitizen, 2015). In order to bring entertainment to loyal consumers, Woolworths partnered with "Big Concerts", an events company, to bring Pharrell to South Africa to perform at a concert. The event was created to give consumers a form of entertainment for their loyalty, as well as to gain their attention for the community project. Members of the Woolworths rewards programme has a chance to win tickets to the concert. This shows the brands loyalty to their consumers (Mahlaba, 2015).

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

With the rise of many new social media platforms, companies are now attempting to reach their consumers through different ways, compared to the traditional marketing strategies (Patino, Pitta & Quinones, 2012). Brands looking for current and creative ways to boost customer engagement can now use the power of social media. Any type of social media platforms can be a powerful tool for connecting with the brands audience, therefore brands are quickly moving towards advertising on social media, in order to reach a wider target audience (Rohm, Kaltcheva & Milne, 2013). Social media provides retailers with unprecedented visibility into their customer base. It provides a place where retailers can directly communicate with their customers and it can be an extremely powerful tool for collecting and using customer insights to improve planning decisions (Bunk, 2016).

Although social media can help brands with customer engagement, Hanna, Crittenden and Rohm (2011) argue that many organisations do not know how to fully utilise social

media platforms successfully and this can result in their brand being hindered. Faulds and Mangold (2009) states that social media is a mixed component of the promotion mix, because in a traditional way it allows organisations to communicate with their consumers, whereas in a non-traditional way it allows consumers to communicate directly to each other. While engaging with consumers on social media has advantages, it does have some disadvantages. The content, timing and the rate of occurrence of media based conversations taking place between consumers are not in the manager's control. Social media has supplied consumers with the ability to control and correct the data that they collect and distribute it successfully, mainly online (Drennan, Kelly & Kerr, 2013). Woolworths is one of the largest retailers in South Africa, operating a chain of more than 120 stores, which sell a select range of textiles and foods (WoolworthsHoldingsLimited, n.d). South African shoppers are developing and demanding more creative, engaging and integrating experiences from their brands. There is a rise in multi-channel access points, social media and digital platforms are becoming more and more important (OnShelf, 2016).

In order to use social media to engage with consumers, retail brands have to first understand what the audience wants (Aaker, 1996). In order to know what online platforms to use, as well as what content to upload, Woolworths scans their social media pages for consumer satisfaction by using various instruments such as focus groups and online panels (WoolworthsHoldingsLimited, n.d). Pressault (2014) agrees with Aaker (1996) by stating that if retail brands create a keyword detection system and monitor what consumers are saying about the organisation, then this will give the brand a new perspective of what their target audience wants. The brand will therefore know how to engage with their consumers. Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2014) agree with Pressault (2014) by stating that social media is the perfect place for creating brand communities, but there is not alot of information about the opportunities and risks of brand communities created on social media platforms, therefore it is hard to state whether or not social media can influence brand exposure.

According to Prout (2014) consumers are always browsing and being interactive on social media. In order to foster relationships with consumers, engage with them and build on brand awareness, retail brands should keep uploading a constant flow of relevant information on their social media pages. Bruhn, Schafer and Schoemueller

(2012) disagree with the above statement by Prout (2014) by stating that user-generated social media communication does not have an impact on the consumer's perception of the brand. However, with over 9000 comments on facebook weekly, Woolworths has a carefully built content strategy implemented for all of their updates on their social media pages. Their focus is on their messages being constant throughout their communication channels (Bruhn, Schafer and Schoemueller (2012).

Brasel (2012) states that in today's fast changing media environment, it's difficult for consumers to pay attention to any type of information for a long period of time. Within this environment, marketing and branding must serve consumers who are utilising more than one media platform concurrently. Brasel (2012) goes on to mention that brands that provide a constant and powerful brand identity, can maintain their power in this new media environment, because little exposure is all that is needed to initiate the organisations powerful brand identity. Van Noort and Wilemsen (2012) disagree with the above statement by stating that through customer engagement, online complaints have a negative impact on consumer's evaluations of a brands image. Woolworths states that when dealing negative feedback or complaints from consumers, their marketing team always attempts to be quick in response and supportive towards the consumers feelings (WoolworthsHoldingsLimited, n.d)

Wolny and Mueller (2013) state that strong visuals are especially important for retail brands on social media, because they are more likely to be shared and require less time and effort to process, than plain text. Gou, Wang, Zhao and Zhou (2015) agree with the above statement by mentioning that with the emerging social networks, images have become a major medium for emotion delivery in social events due to their infectious and vivid characteristics.

Hyken (2014), CEO of The Customer Focus, states that brands should not only reply to consumers who had a negative perception of the brand, but they should also be focusing on engaging with the consumers who already love and support the brand. Mallinson (2015) agrees with Hyken (2014). Mallinson, European managing director of Stackla, mentions that social media platforms have progressed and grown not only as an instrument for motivating consumer development, but also as an instrument for improving business production. Therefore, if brands engage and interact with their consumers, they will receive positive feedback and support from their consumers and

this will result in an increase in sales. Woolworth's online strategy comprises of the brand attending to both positive and negative reviews, instead of only focusing on the positive. When Woolworths received complaints regarding certain products, they reacted by politely asking their consumers to attend a coffee meeting, as a face to face communication channel for consumers to voice their perceptions of the brand and also provide recommendations as to how the brand can improve itself (WoolworthsLimitedHoldings, n.d). Benady (2014) agrees with Mallinson (2015) by stating that social media is not all about directing unfavourable remarks. Two-way communication permits customers to take part in brand activity through co-creation. This could involve the brand giving the public a chance to give their own opinions on how an ad campaign is created for that brand. This could mean that social media can be used as a development tool where customers can give their own opinions on improvements towards the brand.

According to Meola (2016) brands that want to encourage engagement between social media and their consumers must find a way to respond to their customers in a quick and efficient way. Meola (2016) also mentions that the problem is that social media is not designed to be used as a platform for customer service. Many brands and retailers use it to create a presence and draw in customers. The social media representatives at these brands typically need to upload photos, write posts, and promote the brand while handling customer service requests at the same time.

Chrysochu (2013), a professor in Marketing and Consumer Behaviour, states that in order to use the influence of interaction in the best possible way, it is vital to pay attention to engage with the consumer in both an emotional and behavioural way. Therefore the interaction on social media should excel in an emotional interest and recommend various types of interaction with the brand. Barbara (2012), a Forbes contributor, disagrees with Chrysochu (2012) statement of the behavioural concept. Barbara (2012) believes that even though social media does have a magnifying impact on consumers and the brand, just like other technological elements, it can be used for good or bad, therefore social media can produce "bad consumers", because it creates an anonymous environment where people are have no responsibility.

2.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm is a world view (Sarantakos, 2013). It is a method of understanding and making sense of how complex the world is, by making certain fundamental assumptions about the nature of the universe, of the individual and of society. Paradigms are standardised. They decide what a person thinks is important and unimportant (Lynch, 2012).

This research proposal is an interpretivistic paradigm. Interpretivism looks at a person in society. It states that that human behaviour cannot be understood through quantification. This is about the need to describe and understand reality (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Interpretivists feel that reality is not objectively decided, but is socially created and for this reason it is presumed that by studying people in their natural environment, there is a greater opportunity to understand the views that they have of their own activities. The role of the researcher in the interpretivistic paradigm is to understand and describe social reality through the eyes of different people (Maree, 2016).

The researcher is open minded to new information during the study and allows the information to evolve with the help of the selected individuals. The use of such an emergent approach is constant with the interpretivist belief, that individuals have the capability to adjust (Edirisingha, 2012). Interpretivists use research methods, such as interviews and observations and this will result in data being high in validity, qualitative and empathetic (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

This proposed research is interpretivistic, because it is a qualitative study that focuses on the perceptions and attitudes of individual consumers. Data received from participants are more detailed and therefore gives more in-depth information into what is really happening. It is not possible to measure the uniqueness of the participants, their thoughts, ideas and perceptions through numerical points. Reality is interpreted through the eyes of each individual within a specific situation and it then becomes meaningful.

This paradigm will not just give a description of a person's actions, but will provide reasons for those actions. With regards to this proposed research, participants' perceptions on consumer relationship through social media will be analysed. The participants' thoughts and feelings will be looked at in detail to determine and

understand why they think and feel the way that they do about this specific topic. Participants will be focused on as individuals. Their thoughts, ideas and perceptions will not be looked at as a group.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about the proposed research methodology. It includes in-depth information about the research design, the unit of analysis, the population characteristics, the data collection methods, the data analysis methods and ethical considerations for this proposed research. The aim of this chapter is to extend and explain the specific methodology process that was chosen for this intended research.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The nature of this proposed research will be qualitative, because it will attempt to observe and understand the feelings, values and perceptions that influence the behaviour of the selected target audience (Patton, 2005). Qualitative research is also used to research the strengths and weakness of the chosen topic, as well as the attitudes towards it. This proposed research is qualitative, because it attempts to understand the feelings and perceptions that influence consumers to engage and interact with their favourite brands online. It also attempts to analyse the data retained from the consumers' attitudes, in order to provide insights into brand positioning, reputation, engagement and marketing and communication strategies.

3.3 UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis is the crucial entity that the researcher will be examining in the research proposal. It is the "what" or the "who" that is being analysed (Wertsch & Del Rio, 1995).

Woolworths is a leading retailer that attracts a shopper profile at the LSM (living standard measure) 7 – 9 level, and has always stood for quality (SAARF, 2017). The unit of analysis for this proposed research will be males and females in the Umhlanga area, between the ages of twenty five and forty four. The unit of analysis would be studied as individuals and not as a group.

According to Netage, 50% of users on social media in South Africa are in the 25-44 age bracket, around 30% in the 16-24 age bracket, and the remainder over 55 (Netage, 2016). According to Carol Reynolds, a Pam Golding properties area principal

in Durban, Umhlanga is a high living standard measure area (Reynolds, 2015). This means that people with high incomes can afford to shop at Woolworths and are well versed in technology, therefore allowing them to operate the latest digital devices.

3.4 POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Population characteristics are referred to as the statistical measure quantity which for a population, is fixed and which is used as the value of a variable in general distribution to make it descriptive of given population (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Population characteristics of this research study will include:

- Males and Females in the Umhlanga area;
- All participants must have access to technology, such as a television, a laptop or a smartphone;
- All participants must have access to the internet either at work, in their homes or on their smartphones;
- All individuals must be familiar with the specific type of social media platforms Facebook, as Facebook is one of the strongest social media platform used by Woolworths (Kamau, 2012)

3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data Collection is an essential characteristic in any type of research. Incorrect information collected can lead to incorrect end results. In collecting data, the researcher must decide which data to collect, how to collect the data, who will collect the data and when to collect the data (Rouse, 2016).

There are many qualitative data collection methods for research such as focus groups, questionnaires, observation and action research. For this research proposal, questionnaires will be discussed and used to collect data.

Questionnaires-

Questionnaires can be thought of as a kind of written interview. They can be carried out face to face, by telephone or post. Questionnaires provide a relatively cheap, quick and efficient way of obtaining large amounts of information from a large sample of

people. Data can be collected relatively quickly because the researcher would not need to be present when the questionnaires were completed. This is useful for large populations when interviews would be impractical (Chandra, 2017).

The advantages of questionnaires include that they are practical, large amounts of information can be collected from a large number of people in a short period of time and in a relatively cost effective way, it can be carried out by the researcher or by any number of people with limited affect to its validity and reliability and the results of the questionnaires can usually be quickly and easily quantified by either a researcher or through the use of a software package (Debois, 2016).

The disadvantages of questionnaires include that they lack validity, there is no way to tell how truthful the participant is being, the respondent may be forgetful or not think within the full context of the situation and it is argued to be inadequate to understand some forms of information - i.e. changes of emotions, behaviour and feelings (Debois, 2016).

This questionnaire will be handed out to participants, the consumers at the shopping centres in Umhlanga, to be completed on Saturdays and Sundays between 9am and 4pm, as these are the busiest times for shopping centres. During the weekend the consumers will have enough time to complete the questionnaire to the best of their ability. This enables the researcher to get clear and honest results from interpreting the answers received from the consumers. The questionnaire is not to be handed out to consumers during the week, as most of them are busy with work and will have a time limit with regards to their lunchbreaks. The questionnaire will take 5 minutes. Once the researcher has collected all the data, they can then start analysing and presenting the findings of the questionnaire.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involves data from different references being collected, reviewed and then analysed to shape a specific finding or end result (Haregu, 2012).

For this proposed research, thematic analysis will be used to analyse the data that will be obtained from respondents that are participating in the questionnaire.

Thematic analysis is a specific procedure for distinguishing, examining and describing patterns in a specific set of data that is obtained by the researcher. The purpose of the

specific data analyses method is to provide an answer for each question that is being addressed in the research (Wigdorowitz, 2016). Thematic analysis allows for some flexibility in the researchers own decisions of the theoretical framework. The method also provides the researcher with the opportunity to receive a full and detailed explanation of the data obtained (Javadi & Zarea, 2016).

There are six steps in thematic analysis (ResearchAssociate, 2016):

Step 1 - Familiarisation with the data. This step includes the researcher going over the data to understand its contents.

Step 2 - Coding. This step includes producing short labels or codes that can distinguish important elements from the data obtained, that is useful in answering the research question.

Step 3 - Searching for themes. This step includes analysing the codes identified above and the data obtained to distinguish a broader pattern.

Step 4 – Reviewing themes. This step includes checking the specific themes, from the previous step, against the data obtained to decide if the data answers the researcher's question.

Step 5 – Defining and naming themes. This step includes creating a comprehensive analysis of each theme mentioned in the third step.

Step 6 – Writing up. This last and final step includes combining the analysis of the data with previous literature on the chosen topic and concluding the information as a whole.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations in research are critical. Ethics are the norms or standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong. They help to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Ethical considerations in research refers to procedures or techniques for determining how to behave and for analysing difficult situations. Ethical consideration in research protects the participants' rights (Adams, 2013).

Importance-

There are several reasons why it is important to adhere to ethical norms in research.

Firstly, ethical norms encourage the aims of research, such as knowledge, truth, and avoidance of error. Secondly, since research often involves a big deal of cooperation and coordination among many different people in different disciplines, ethical standards promote the values that are important to collaborative work, such as trust and accountability. Thirdly, ethical norms help to make sure that researchers can be held accountable to the public for their actions. Fourthly, ethical norms in research also help to strengthen public support for research. People are more likely to fund a research project if they can trust the quality and integrity of research (Datt, 2016).

The ethical considerations for this proposed research will be:

- Informed consent- Informed consent is one of the means by which a participant's right to self-government is protected. Informed consent seeks to incorporate the rights of autonomous individuals through self-determination. It also seeks to prevent assaults on the integrity of the patient and protect personal liberty and truthfulness (Brizee & Driscoll, 2012).
- Respect for anonymity and confidentiality- anonymity is protected when the subject's identity cannot be linked with personal responses. If the researcher is not able to promise anonymity then they have to address confidentiality, which is the management of private information by the researcher in order to protect the subject's identity. Confidentiality means that individuals are free to give and withhold as much information as they wish to the person they choose and the researcher is responsible to maintain confidentiality that goes beyond ordinary loyalty (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).
- Respect of privacy- privacy is the freedom an individual has to determine the time, extent, and general circumstances under which private information will be shared with or withheld from others. Invasion of privacy happens when private information such as beliefs, attitudes, opinions and records, is shared with others, without the patient's knowledge or consent. A researcher cannot decide on behalf of other persons on those delicate issues. All aims, instruments and methodology must be discussed with the prospective subject and the research workers prior to the investigation (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

The researcher will provide the participants with information about the research project that is understandable and that permits them to make an informed and voluntary decision about whether or not to participate. Participants will be asked to sign a consent form to indicate that they agree to participate in the proposed research. The researcher must also mention in the consent form that the feedback given by the participants will remain confidential and only the researcher can access these documents. The researcher should also mention that the participant will remain completely anonymous throughout the proposed research.

CHAPTER FOUR:

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes the presentation of the findings that the researcher has obtained from the data collection of the research participants. Presentations are shown in both tables and graphs. Data collection methods for this proposed research included a questionnaire of twenty participants. This was a small-scale qualitative study, resulting in the information obtained from the participants thoughts and opinions about the topic.

4.2 OBJECTIVE QUESTION MARIX

Objective	Questions
1- To describe the effectiveness of engaging with consumers on social media	• How do you feel about being exposed to brands through social media, compared to traditional media? • Do you think that social media can help brands with regards to boosting sales, brand awareness and building and fostering customer relationships?
2- To describe what insights retail brands can take from Woolworths, regarding their social media strategy	• Do you follow the retail brand "Woolworths" on any social media platforms? • What do you think about their social media platforms, in terms of content and responding to consumers?
3- To describe the lengths that retail brands rely on social media to interact with their consumers	• How would you want to engage with the brands that you use?

	What would you want your favourite brands to upload on their social media accounts?
--	---

Table 4.1- The objective questions matrix

4.3 DEMOGRAPHICS ON PARTICIPANTS

Certain demographics of participants were included in this research, because age and area is important in obtaining information from a high LSM area on retail brands engaging with their consumers on social media. Other demographics such as gender and race is not necessary in order for this research to be conducted.

4.3.1 Age of participants

Below is a table that includes the ages of those individuals who participated in the researcher's questionnaires. It is noted that there is a large portion of participants below the age of 30 and there is a small amount of participants spread out of the 30 year age gap.

24-29	30-35	36-41	42+
11	5	3	1

Table 4.2 Age of participants

4.3.2 Areas of participants

Below is a pie chart that shows the different areas where the participants live in. As shown below, it can be seen that most of the participants reside in Umhlanga.

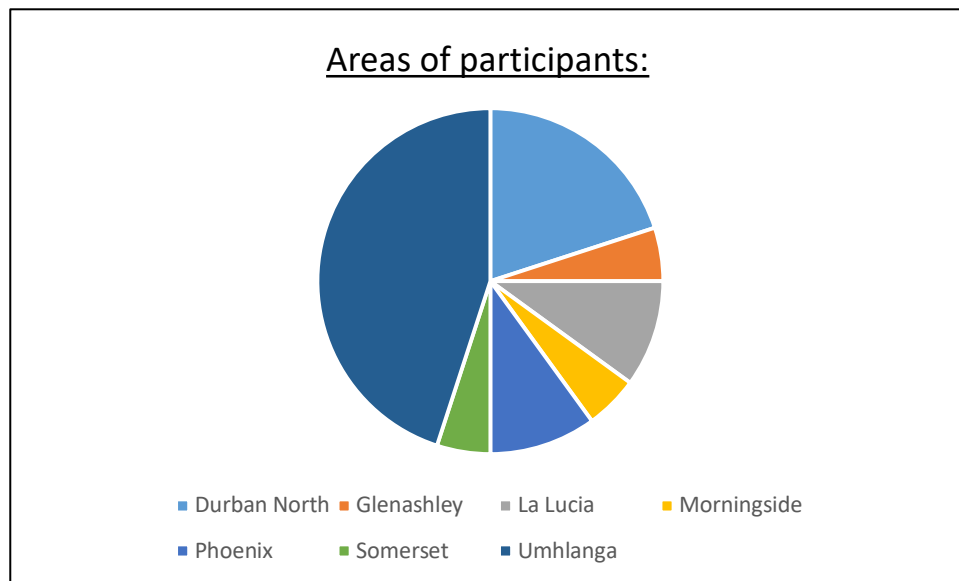


Figure 4.1 Pie Chart showing the areas where the participants reside in

4.4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The information mentioned below are the findings of the participant's answers to the questionnaires of this research. Each objective in this proposed research will be paired with the appropriate questions from the questionnaires. Answers from each question will be discussed as a whole in a qualitative manner.

Objective 1- To describe the effectiveness of engaging with consumers on social media.

Question 1- How do you feel about being exposed to brands through social media, compared to traditional media?

Findings-

- ✓ "I prefer digital marketing as compared to traditional marketing."
- ✓ "I feel more involved, because I see certain adverts more on social media than on print media."

- ✓ “It makes me feel up to date, seen adverts being so constant on my social media accounts.”
- ✓ “I feel like I am more interested viewing ads, because of the moving visuals compared to print media.”
- ✓ “I feel like online adverts disappear quicker, so when I go back to view them I can’t find them.”



Figure 4.2 Word cloud showing how consumers feel about being exposed to brands through social media.

A common thread can be noted in the above findings, as most of the participants have given a positive response towards being exposed to advertisements online. Participants felt that online advertisements of brands are much more engaging and interesting compared to advertisements seen in print media, such as magazines and newspapers. The participants clearly chose and preferred social media advertising to print advertising.

Question 2- Do you think that social media can help brands with regards to boosting sales, brand awareness and building and fostering client relationships?

Findings-

- ✓ “With technology constantly being updated, advertising on social media can help brands because that’s where a lot of people spend their time”.

- ✓ “I think with the reach of social media, it is a good platform for all brands”.
- ✓ “Yes, because there is a lot of people on social media, therefore it’s perfect for customers to be targeted on”.
- ✓ “Yes, because social media is much quicker and cheaper to advertise on”.
- ✓ “Yes, because there’s 24 hour access to social media, so customers can always view adverts”.
- ✓ I feel that it’s much quicker for brands to respond to their customers, than compared to letters or emails”.
- ✓ Social media can give brands more recognition because it’s so popular”.
- ✓ I feel that it updates people on what they want to know much faster than newspapers.
- ✓ “Yes, because it can help brands reach their customers quicker than television or newspapers.

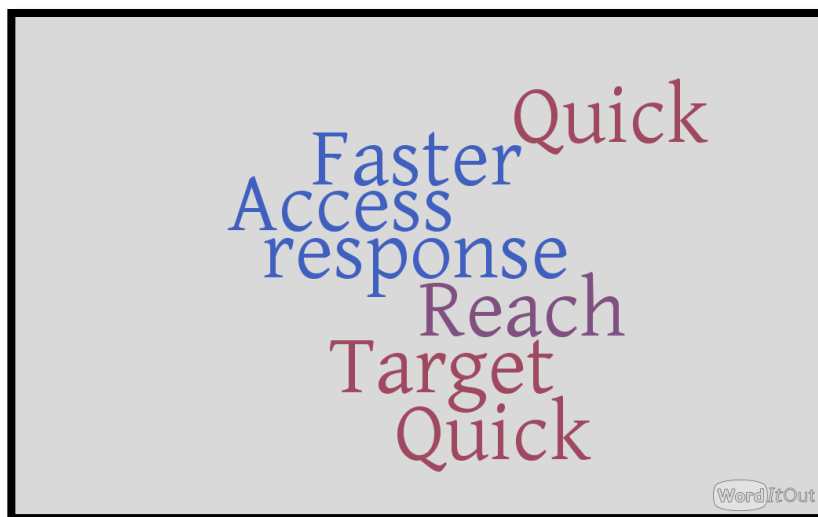


Figure 4.3 Word cloud showing what consumers think about social media helping brands

A common thread can be seen in the above findings, as majority of the participants felt that social media does help brands. The participants felt that by brands being active on social media, benefited their customers in many ways. Some of these included that it was easier for customers to find out quick and easy information about the brand, as well as that many brands can target more people through social media as compared

to other media, such as print. There was a small number of participants who mentioned that they personally felt that social media could not help all brands across the country. With South Africa being a third world country, many of the population does not have access to the internet and therefore cannot be active on social media. Therefore, cheaper brands that most of the population can afford, should be advertised on different and accessible media such as newspapers. It was also mentioned that brands should make more of an attempt to build client relationship face to face instead of online.

- ✓ I feel social media doesn't help brands, because not everyone has access to the internet to log onto social media".
- ✓ "Personally I think that brands should be developing relationships with their customers face to face and not through digital platforms".

Objective 2- To describe what insights retail brands can take from Woolworths, regarding their social media strategy

Question 3- Do you follow the retail brand "Woolworths" on any social media platforms?

Findings-

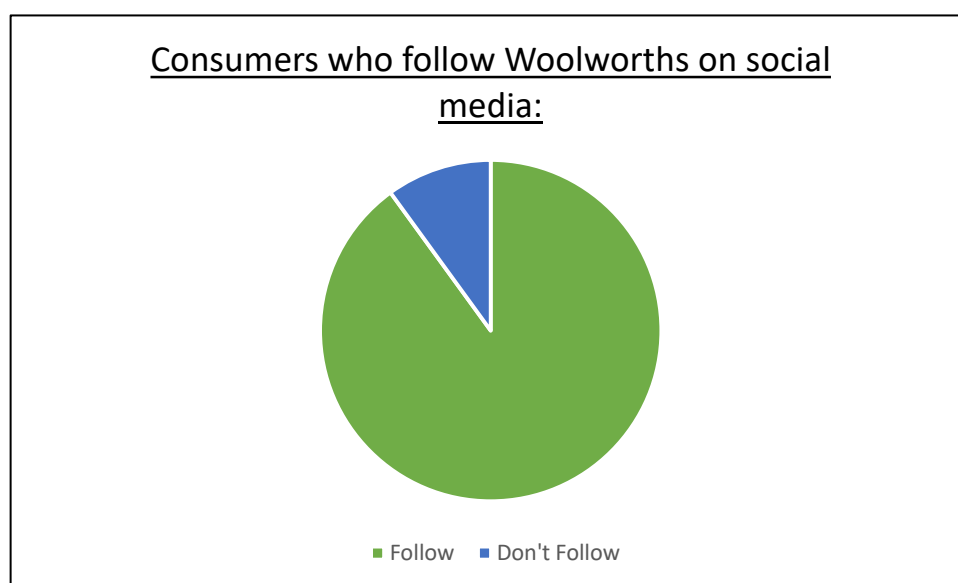


Figure 4.4 Pie chart showing participants who follow and don't follow Woolworths on social media

Question 4- What do you think about their social media platforms, in terms of content and responding to consumers?

Findings-

- ✓ “Their Facebook page is full of useful content and they are very responsive”.
- ✓ “They have encouraging posts, such as healthy food pictures”.
- ✓ “I think they post inspirational content about people feeling good about themselves”.
- ✓ I personally feel that they are very quick in responding towards customer complaints”.
- ✓ “They post a wide variety of stuff like clothes, food and homeware items”.
- ✓ “Woolworths gives us such helpful tips with food and fashion items”.
- ✓ “I feel that they’re constantly posting a variety of content”.
- ✓ “I love how they keep their followers informed about community projects, such as the MySchool programme”.



Figure 4.5 Word cloud showing what consumers think about Woolworths social media platforms

A common thread can be seen in the above findings, as most of the participants feel that Woolworths has excellent content on their social media pages. The participants felt that they were inspired and motivated on a daily basis after viewing specific content that Woolworths posts every second day. The participants also felt that Woolworths catered to their needs and provided them with good customer service, as Woolworth's feedback are always speedy and helpful. The participants felt updated, as the content they received from Woolworths involved everyday topics which the customers felt was necessary. However, there were a few participants who felt that Woolworths did not respond to customers quickly enough through social media, therefore the participants felt like they were wasting their time. They felt like their complaints were not being heard.

- ✓ "I feel that Woolworths takes too long to give feedback to their customers".
- ✓ "They only address easy complaints".

- Objective 3- To describe the lengths that retail brands rely on social media to interact with their consumers

Question 5- How would you want to engage with the brands that you use?

Findings-

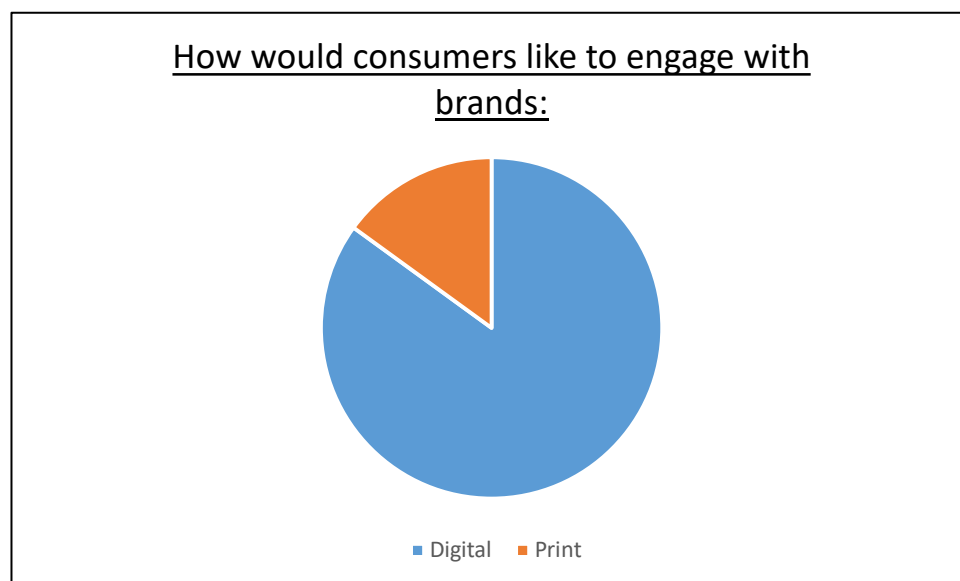


Figure 4.6 Pie chart showing which media consumers choose for their brands

A common thread in this finding was that many participants felt that they would want to engage with their favourite brands through digital media, such as websites and social media. Participants mentioned that this type of media was better compared to print media, because it was easy and quick to receive updates on specific products and services from brands. Participants also felt that digital media is always on the go, as information online is constantly being updated compared to print media where information is set until the next publication of newspapers and magazines. Although majority of the participants preferred digital media, a few participants mentioned that print media was stronger than digital media. These participants felt that print media was much stronger, as the content printed in certain print publications would be more credible because of trusted news houses. They felt that anyone can edit content online and that's why they find it untrustworthy.

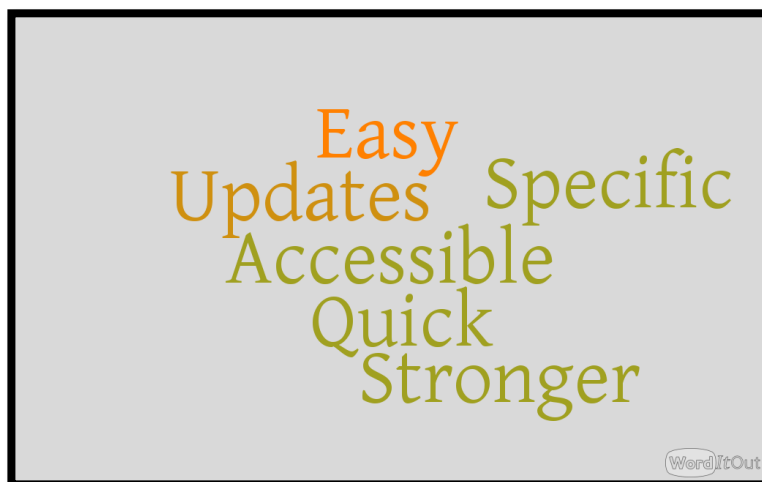


Figure 4.7 Word cloud showing what consumers think about digital media

Question 6- What would you want your favourite brands to upload on their social media accounts?

Findings-

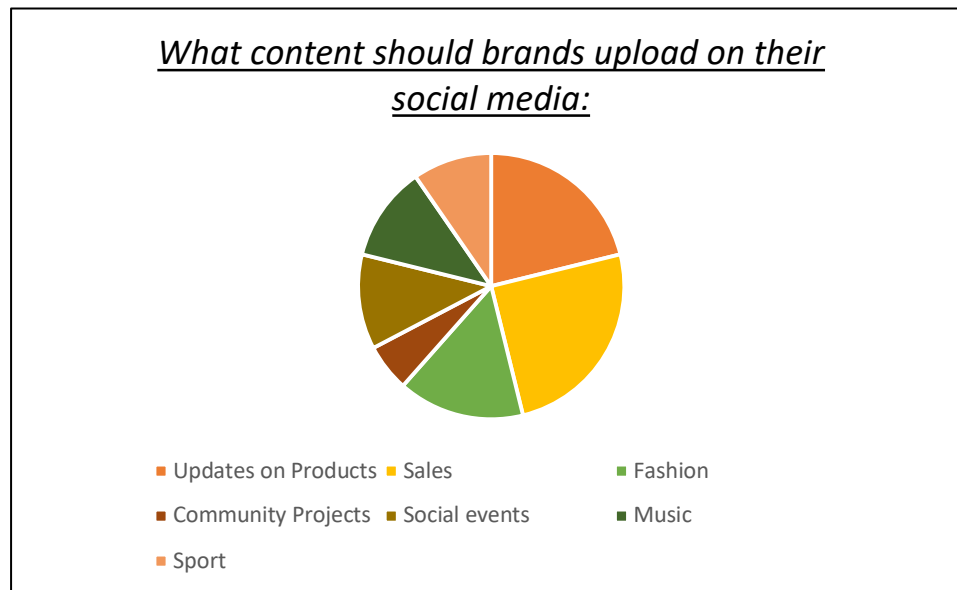


Figure 4.8 Pie chart showing what content consumers want brands to upload on their social media pages

From the pie chart shown above, it can be noted that individuals who utilise social media would like for their brands to post content that would include content that the consumers can relate to. Although many brands focus on their own product or service, from what consumers want nowadays, brands should incorporate their customer's passion points into their social media content when posting about their specific product or service. The above mentioned information will help brands to gain more recognition if their social media is interested, as well as it can enhance the brands relationship with their customers by focusing more on what they want to see.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes the three main objectives of this research, which will then be linked to the findings from the literature review and the findings from the primary research. This chapter will then go on to the conclusions and recommendations for each objective. This chapter will also include limitations from this proposed research.

5.2 OBJECTIVE 1

To describe the effectiveness of engaging with consumers on social media

5.2.1 Findings from literature

Digital media has quickly advanced in today's society compared to a few years ago. Therefore many organisations are attempting to target their consumers through new platforms relatively known as social media (Patino, Pitta & Quinones, 2012). It's imperative that brands connect with their customers through social media as it provides quick and easy access to communicate with those customers. Therefore it can be very positive and powerful effect on retail brands if they engage with their customers through social media, because this digital platform is useful in gaining consumer insights for the business (Bunk, 2016). It can be noted that if retail brands are constantly being active on social media and communicating with their consumers, then they will receive positive support and responses from them because the customers will feel that they are being heard and not ignored. (Mallinson, 2015). This can result in an increase in sales for retails brands, as well as their brand image becoming much stronger than it previously was.

5.2.2 Findings from research

From the primary research obtained from the proposed research, it can be noted that it is very effective for brands to engage with their consumers through their social media platforms. Majority of the participants for this proposed research mentioned that they personally felt that social media can help brands build client relationships because of specific factors. Some of factors included that social media was easy to access, it's a quicker platform for brands to respond to customers, brands gain more recognition

because of how popular social media is and because social media is cheaper than other forms of media.

5.2.3 Conclusion

From the information mentioned above in both the literature and research findings, it can be known that both findings match up and are consistent with each other. Findings from the literature mentioned that social media can be very effective in assisting brands with regards to client engagement. From the research findings, it can be noted that participants of the research personally felt that brands can interact with their customers in a more advanced way from their experience. The participants felt that social media was much faster and cheaper for brands to connect with customers, compared to newspapers and magazine adverts. Although there were a few participants who didn't feel strongly about communicating with brands through social media, the outcome of this objective were all positive responses. To conclude, the findings on social media helping brands to engage with their customers were mostly positive.

5.2.4 Recommendations

In order to assist those participants who felt negatively about social media advertising and consumer engagement, brands should implement strategies to make sure they know what their target audience needs, while still keeping with the trends of today. Brands should implement surveys to ask their customers what they like and don't like about social media. From here specific brands will then know how to equally advertise and engage with their customers on all accepted communication channels. Brands should also take into consideration those audience which do not have access to the internet and therefore cannot engage with the brands online. Therefore, brands should utilise all media platforms and not neglect one over the other.

5.3 OBJECTIVE 2

To describe what insights retail brands can take from Woolworths, with regards to their social media strategies

5.3.1 Findings from literature

Woolworths, one of South Africa's largest retailers, understand the importance of social media and engaging with their customers through this digital platform. Woolworths has created important and powerful strategies that implemented for all of their updates on their specific social media pages. An important strategy that they use that is important to consumers, is that all their messaging is consistent on all their media platforms (Bruhn, Schafer & Schoemueller, 2012). This is important so that Woolworths' consumers don't get confused with the different messaging strategy on the different communication channels. Woolworths only posts content that is relevant to their consumers and they obtain this information through online panels (WoolworthsHoldingsLimited, 2017). This is important as this strategy makes their consumers more interested and engaged on Woolworth's communication platforms. Although there is many positives in engaging with consumers through social media, there are also negatives aspects. Woolworths receives many negative responses every day on all of their social media platforms, but there is a strategy in place to handle online problems. Woolworths has the necessary strategy in place to quickly respond to negative comments on social media, as well as supportive feedback to help unhappy customers (WoolworthHoldingsLimited, 2017).

5.3.2 Findings from research

From research obtained from the participants it was noted that many of the customers from Woolworths were very happy with the brands social media strategies. The participants mentioned that they liked the way that the Woolworths social media pages was being handled due to specific reasons such as, great content, great response time, inspiring and motivational posts. Through these insights obtained from customers of the Woolworths brand, it can be seen that Woolworths does a great job on their social media pages, because of all the positive responses that the public have mentioned.

5.3.3 Conclusion

From the information mentioned above, it can be noted that retail brands can learn a lot from the Woolworths brand. From the insights gained from the Woolworths customers, retail brands can take into account how active they have to constantly be on social media in order to keep their consumers interested and happy with new and fresh ideas. Woolworths has a special marketing team to manage their online

platforms and this makes customers happy, because they receive quick responses from the Woolworths brand. From the literature findings, it was noted that Woolworths know what their customers want and that is how they plan their content strategy. From the research findings, it can be known that participants feel very strongly about what Woolworth's posts online, as they can relate to the posted content.

5.3.4 Recommendations

Retail brands in South Africa need to be more aware of what their competitors are doing order to find out why they are doing so well. Retail brands can make use of the online monitoring tool called "Social mention". This tool can help retail brands to find out what their competitors are doing online and help them to succeed as well. As mentioned previously, brands should implement strategies to find out from their consumers what type of content they would be interested in.

5.4 OBJECTIVE 3

To describe the lengths that retail brands rely on social media to interact with their consumers.

5.4.1 Findings from literature

With regards to the advancement in digital media, brands in today's society have to constantly keep up with everyday trends online in order to keep their customers happy. Brands are not focusing more on social media advertising than traditional advertising methods, in order to reach more of their consumers (Rohm, Kaltcheva & Milne, 2013). Since social media is still new, many brands don't fully understand how to make use of it to their advantage (Hanna, Crittenden & Rohm, 2011). Therefore, some brands rely on social media to such an extent that they create a specific marketing team to manage their social media pages, for example Woolworths (WoolworthsHoldingsLimited, 2017). Brands rely on social media to an extent that they constantly have to be active on social media to upload interesting and relevant content, to keep their customers engaged and interested in the brand (Prout, 2014).

5.4.2 Findings from research

From primary research conducted many participants mentioned specific topics that they were interested in. These topics, for example, included music, fashion and sport.

This meant that these were what the consumers want to find on their favourite brands social media pages. It was noted that customers will engage more with brands on social media, if those brands post content that their customers can relate to. Participants from the research also mentioned that they wanted updates on the brands they used, for example news products or services, as well as sales on products or services.

5.4.3 Conclusion

From the information mentioned above, it was noted that brands need to step outside of their comfort zones to post what their customers want, instead of the brands deciding themselves what to post on their social media pages. With the advancement of technology in today's society, brands have to keep up with everyday trends to keep their customers interested in their brand, therefore enhancing their interest to communicate with the brand through social media.

5.4.4 Recommendations

As previously mentioned above, brands need to step outside of their comfort zones in order to keep their customers happy on social media. Retail brands should post content relating to their products, as well as integrating their customers' interest with those specific products. Retail brands should find out from their customers what they are specifically interested in. This will make the customers feel special and makes them feel that their requests are being heard by the brands that they use.

5.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY

Trustworthiness refers to the verification that the proof for the findings researched is reliable and when the argument made based on the results is strong. The trustworthiness of a research study can be increased by maintaining high credibility and objectivity (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Trustworthiness consists of the following elements, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (DeVault, 2017).

- Credibility refers to having sufficient information in the research setting so recurrent patterns in data can be properly recognised and substantiated (DeVault, 2017). This element of trustworthiness applies to this research

proposal, due to the manners and the methods that the researcher collected data from participants in this proposed research. The researcher spoke to the participants about brands interacting with customers through social media, while they filled in the questionnaires. That procedure resulted in the researcher increasing their chances of credibility for this proposed research, as they would receive more data from the participants that can be added to the findings of the research.

- Transferability refers to showing that the findings of a research study have applicability in other contexts or different situations (DeVault, 2017). This element of trustworthiness does not apply to this research proposal, because the findings of this research proposal is specific to this topic. The results will not make sense if it is used in different topics other than the original research title. This proposed research has specific specifications, such as specific participants, their location, their age, their LSM and detailed questions that are specific to the particular participants. Therefore, these findings are specifically meant for this proposed research.
- Dependability refers to showing that the findings of a research study are consistent and could be repeated (Shenton, 2004). This element of trustworthiness does not apply to this proposed research, because this research cannot be consistent across time and different analysis techniques. The same methods used in this proposed research cannot be used for individuals of different age groups. Specific ways of collecting and interpreting data must be used for different age groups. Different people will have different answers for different research titles, therefore the researcher has to analyse the target audience before deciding on how to collect and interpret data received from those people.
- Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of the research study are shaped by the respondents and not the researcher (Shenton, 2004). With regards to the research, all answers from the participants were similar. The researcher used the data obtained from the participants to interpret the research findings. The researcher had no say or part in adding to the results of the research. The researcher had to remain neutral and know that answers could only come from the participants. Results from this research questionnaire are based only on the participants' answers.

5.6 LIMITATIONS

Limitations refer to various influences and constrictions that a researcher has no control over. These limitations can restrict the type of research that can be conducted and carried out. These limitations can have an impact on the findings from the research conducted. (Datt, 2016).

- Time-consuming- The questionnaire was time consuming, as each individual wrote slowly and took their time reading the questions. This questionnaire was also time consuming, because it was very difficult to get people to participate. Many people said they didn't have the time to answer the questionnaire and refused to partake in answering the questions.
- Lack of information- This questionnaire has eleven questions, which a few of them requires in-depth answers. Although many participants took their time to read the questionnaire, they did however only write one sentence for some of the questions. This made it difficult to analyse the data and produce solid results.
- Costly- The questionnaires for this proposed research were costly because each questionnaire was three pages long. New questionnaires had to be printed as some participants did not take the questionnaire seriously and did not put any relevant answers in the appropriate spaces.

5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This proposed research focused on social media in today's society and how it could be used to help retail brands interact and engage with their consumers. The retail brand Woolworths was analysed, in terms of their social media strategies, in order to find key insights of what other brands could learn from Woolworths since their online strategies are so strong and valuable. This qualitative research was conducted to determine how powerful social media actually is in nowadays, as well as to find key

insights on how brands can better their customer relationships through various communication channels.

Primary research was collected through questionnaires and the literature review was conducted to review academic information on the research topic. The literature reviews surrounding social media and customer engagement, presented solid arguments for brands utilising social media to engage with the customers online. Primary research that was conducted through for this proposed research justified the literature review as the participants of this research had more positive thoughts about online engagement compared to negative ones.

From the information mentioned throughout this proposed research, it can be concluded that social media can in fact be a very powerful tool for retail brands to connect with their consumers. The primary research obtained from the Woolworths brand concluded that many participants felt strongly about their social media pages and how the brand handles it. Through the information mentioned throughout this proposed research it can be known that social media is a much quicker, cheaper and easy way to connect and engage with a brands customers. Social media can also help brands to keep their customers interested and engaged in their brand. Through the conclusions and specific recommendations made, if followed through should increase the retail brands relationships with their current and potential consumers.

ADDENDUM A

Please see next page for ethical clearance letter

ADDENDUM B**Questionnaire:**

Good day! As part of the requirements of the Vega school of Brand leadership, Honour students are required to go out into the field and collect primary research relating to a chosen topic. This questionnaire attempts to describe if brands are actually being helped by advertising their products or services on various social media platforms. The Woolworths brand will be analysed in terms of their social media strategies. This questionnaire will take 5 minutes. Please answer honestly and cross the appropriate box where necessary. Your time and patience is appreciated.

Questionnaire title: A qualitative questionnaire to determine whether or not social media can be used to engage and interact with consumers in the retail industry.

1) What area do you live in?

2) What is your age?

3) Do you have access to the internet?

Yes

☐

No

☐

4) Do you have a social media account?

Yes

☐

No

☐

- 5) How do you feel being exposed to brands through social media, compared to traditional marketing tactics?

- 6) Do you think that social media can help brands with regards to boosting sales, recognition and building and fostering client relationship?

Yes

No

☐☐

If yes, please state why?

- 7) Do you follow the retail brand "Woolworths" on any social media platforms?

Yes

No

☐☐

If yes, what platforms?

- 8) What do you think about their social media platforms, in terms of content or responding to consumers?

9) How would you want to engage with the brands that you use, through social media?

Digital (Apps, social media, websites)
magazines)

☐

Print (Newspapers,

☐

Please state why

10)What would you want your favourite brand to upload on their social media pages?

11)How you think social media affects brands advertising online?

Thank You! 😊

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