AN INVESTIGATION INTO HOW SOCIAL MEDIA CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT CAN BE USED BY E-SME BRANDS TO DEVELOP TRUST AND BUILD BRAND REPUTATION, WITH NEW AND EXISTING CUSTOMERS.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Manchester Metropolitan University Business School for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2015

Abstract

Social media is an ideal environment for online small to medium sized enterprises (e-SMEs) to build and develop brand communities. However, there is currently limited research investigating how initial and continual consumer trust is formed through this type of engagement for new and existing e-SME customers. Conducted from three data sets (an e-SME social media netnography, key informant and consumer interviews) this thesis investigates this issue by developing a framework highlighting how engagement within social media brand communities can influence e-SME brand trust. The findings identify eight core trust themes which positively influence initial and continual consumer trust, expanding the existing online consumer trust literature. The increasing role of engagement is also investigated with strategic avenues identified, as well as the influential effect engagement can have on loyalty and trust. This thesis also investigates how e-SMEs can identify business value from the use of social media and increase corporate reputation through social media brand communities. Business value through social media brand community engagement is found to lie primarily in the lasting relationships developed and trust created for consumers.

This thesis provides an important contribution to knowledge by increasing the theoretical and managerial understanding of social media brand community engagement for e-SMEs, and how the effects of such engagement can influence consumer trust and reputation.

Glossary of Key Terms

B2C- Business to Consumer

Bricks and Clicks- Business with a physical and online store

C2B- Consumer to Business

C2C- Consumer to Consumer

ECCI- Electronic Consumer-to-Consumer Interactions

E-SME- Electronic Small to Medium sized Enterprise

E-WOM- Electronic Word of Mouth

'Pure Play'- an organisation that does business purely through the Internet and as such have no physical store (brick and mortar) where consumers can shop.

SMBC- Social Media Brand Community

TAM- Trust Acceptance Model

Contents

Tables

Figures

Acknowledgements

I owe a great debt of gratitude in the execution of this thesis to a number of people.

Firstly, I would like to thank my main supervisor Dr Catherine Ashworth for all her wisdom, guidance, support and patience. Her dedication and expertise have been invaluable, and I would like to thank her for consistently motivating me to succeed and complete my PhD thesis.

Thanks also to my other supervisors Dr Chris Bull and Professor Cathy Urqhart for their guidance, support and consistent encouragement. I am also most grateful to all of the respondents who provided me with access to their thoughts and their time.

Last but most importantly of all, my thanks, appreciation and love go to my parents, Colette and Richard whose support and sacrifice provided me with the opportunities I have enjoyed. Also special thanks and love to my amazing family, Jillian, Paul, Michelle, Ewen, Naomi, Connie, James, and my beautiful girlfriend Donna. Without their love and support I would not have achieved my goal.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Background

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1. Thesis Overview

This chapter contextualises the research question in relation to the concept of consumer brand trust and reputation development through social media engagement. An in-depth analysis on sports retail UK e-SMEs' social media strategies provides additional insight.

1.1 Introduction and Background

A recent emerging body of literature have advocated the importance of branding to small and medium-sized (SME) retailers (Angel and Sexsmith, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2013). However, this discourse does not fully consider the complex and contemporary nature of social media and how online engagement can enhance brand reputation and trust.

Due to their importance to the UK economy (Ward and Rhodes, 2014) this research focusses on 'pure play' small to medium sized enterprises, which for the purposes of the study will be referred to as 'e-SMEs'. In online commerce terms, a 'pure play' is an organisation that does business purely through the Internet and as such has no physical store (brick and mortar) where consumers can shop. Engagement on social media for an e-SME is becoming paramount for business survival (Michaelidou et al., 2011) as well as growth (Aaltonen et al., 2013) and social media platforms offer a place for developing online brand communities, which in turn provide an environment for e-SMEs and consumers to interact and learn from one another. However, SMEs are the largest type of company under-utilising online brand communities on social media (Aaltonen et al., 2013) and a number of them see social media as a major challenge with many simply not recognising the value in developing social media based brand communities (Heinze et al. 2013).

The concept of trust is important during the shopping process (Powers et al., 2012) and is a main antecedent of consumer patronage (Pentina et al., 2013; To and Ho, 2014), whereas the emergence of social media has also significantly influenced marketing practices (Habibi et al., 2014). Social media communities are an effective environment for e-SMEs to build stronger relationships with customers, and gather consumer insight (Ashworth, 2012). Consequently, there is a need to increase the understanding of social media and further develop knowledge which suits the imperatives of e-SMEs in social media environments (Habibi et al., 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). In 2014, 2.046 billion people globally used social networks, with Facebook's active user base showing growth of 2.3% reaching 1.35 billion. Twitter's figures showed that the platform claimed 284 million active users around the world

(Wearesocial.com). Consumers now possess almost unlimited opportunities to engage with brands through social media (Christodoulides et al., 2012; Helm and Jones, 2010) and brand social media community practices have gradually attracted more attention from marketing researchers and practitioners (Zaglia, 2013; Habibi et al., 2014). For e-SMEs to gain new and retain existing customers, trust is a vital concept (Kim and Han, 2009; Rahimnia and Hassanzadeh, 2013). There has been a proliferation of recent trust (Pavlou, 2003; Bart et al., 2005; Toufaily et al., 2013) and engagement literature (Brodie et al., 2014; Leeflang, 2011; Schau et al., 2009) regarding e-business across all sectors of industry. However, e-SMEs in general and sports pure play organisations have been slow to extend these aspects into their brand strategy. Therefore, following calls from the recent literature (e.g. Mitchell at al., 2013; Stockdale et al., 2012) for further qualitative research into social media for e-SMEs, this research aims to fill that gap by conducting an in-depth exploration into multiple UK sports retailor e-SMEs operating in e-commerce.

The study focuses on four key areas of interest: trust, engagement, reputation and social media. Unlike other studies, which often explore only one perspective (e.g. Kim and Han, 2009; Habibi et al., 2014) this research analyses multi-perspectives (e-SME brand, consumer, social media industry experts) in order to elicit as much in-depth data as possible. This study advances the understanding of consumer trust by applying it in the context of e-SME brand social media communities. This thesis also explores the initial trust that consumers develop when they engage with an e-SME's social media community for the first time (McKnight et al, 2002) as well as the 'continual trust' that may develop through repeated social media interactions (Toufaily et al., 2013) which ultimately assists e-SMEs with acquiring and retaining customers. The findings provide detailed insights for e-SMEs and identify which elements of a brand community can be detrimental and which can be beneficial in building a trustworthy brand.

Engagement activity on social media brand communities can have positive effects on the brand as well as shared community foundations, value creation processes as well as service quality (Ellahi and Bokhari, 2013; Laroche et al.,2012). Consequently engagement activity has caused changes in branding strategies towards engagement platforms for organisations to acquire and retain customers by developing and building trust. (Vock et al., 2013; Naylor et al., 2012, Verhoef et al., 2010 and Van Doorn et al., 2010; De Vries et al., 2012; Naylor et al., 2012). Different definitions and conceptualisations of the engagement concept have been explored in the academic literature (e.g. Sashi, 2012; Brodie et al., 2011). In recent years the knowledge of this phenomenon has developed significantly, although a general consensus has yet to be reached (Brodie et al., 2013). Achieving a high level of consumer engagement is a desirable outcome as it may enhance a company's reputation, brand loyalty (Doorn van

et al., 2010; Hollebeek, 2011) and purchase decisions (Patterson et al., 2006). Consumers that engage with brand social media communities see themselves as part of that community or 'tribe' (Cova and Cova, 2002) and according to Goulding et al. (2013) these 'tribes' and communities may need to be addressed differently from a marketing perspective (Goulding et al., 2013). Research conducted by Ashworth (2013) and Coulter and Roggeveen, (2012) argue that social media communities can be highly effective in strengthening relationships which in turn leads to the strengthening of bonds between organisations and consumers, resulting in increased brand trust.

However, Fournier and Avery (2011, p193) argue that the commercialisation of brands is neither well received nor welcome in social media because as: "the web was created not to sell branded products, but to link people together". Nevertheless, updates to social media technology have empowered the consumer allowing them to determine their level of interaction with any brand (Curran et al., 2011). Social media also offers the opportunity for two-way relationships (Lipsman et al., 2012) which enables increased communications about a brand. However little research exists beyond the consumer perspective despite the opportunities provided for the industry and sector practitioners (Rowley et al., 2014). Furthermore, in recent years, SMEs in particular, have been slow to react to the changes and opportunities presented by social media and as such they are limiting their ability to capitalise on new opportunities (Parrott et al., 2010).

In summary, determining the effect that social media brand communities have on brand trust is essential for organisations and this thesis aims to highlight how effective engagement developed on social media can develop reputation and influence brand trust for consumers. The study explores the importance of engagement in brand communities (Hanna et al., 2011) analysing social media brand community engagement strategies and examines the direct role that engagement has on developing consumer trust for an e-SME brand. Despite its importance, limited evidence around this area exists. Also, the current knowledge of e-SME social media brand communities is scarce and does not mirror new aspects of social media in which the structure of the communities, the social context within which members communicate, the size, and the way stories are being told are different from previous types of brand communities (Habibi et al., 2014).

Understanding the 'value' that social media has for an e-SME is a challenge and one way of measuring return on investment is to examine what kind of ''marketing objectives'' the social media activities would satisfy (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010, p42). A consistent challenge for marketers has been to see how their efforts can pay off and how their social media activities can influence important brand related variables, such as 'brand awareness' (Hoffman and

Fodor, 2010). Therefore, there is an ever increasing need for updating the understanding of social media and further developing knowledge which suits the imperatives of marketing in social media environments (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013).

The position of this study in relation to ontology and epistemology is that reality is socially constructed rather than objectively determined (Carson et al., 2001). A qualitative case study approach is undertaken, investigating 12 e-SME brand communities using a netnography (online ethnography) approach from a social constructionist perspective. Data is generated through social media community postings as well as in-depth interviews with consumers and social media industry experts (key informants) involving a combination of telephone and face-to-face methods. Findings and theory are developed through thematic qualitative analysis.

This theoretical framework shows how effective engagement, developed on social media, can influence brand trust and subsequently this study makes important contributions by addressing this challenge (Laroche et al., 2012; Habibi et al., 2014; and To and Ho, 2013). This thesis provides a new contribution to knowledge on several levels: updated synthesis of the literature; new methodology; and new findings which have contributed to the existing knowledge base enabling new theory to be generated. Recommendations and further implications to strategy and theory are presented in the concluding chapter.

The next section provides further context to the research covering e-SMEs, the sports retail market and online sports retail with social media.

1.2 Research Context Overview

The primary themes explored in this thesis have been briefly identified in the previous section and current and previous theory is challenged as the fields of consumer engagement and social media surrounding e-SMEs are in a constant state of flux. Therefore, this research highlights the crucial strategic considerations that e-SMEs face when engaging with their customers using social media. The main focus of this study is on e-SMEs but more specifically around sports product organisations that operate pure play businesses with no physical retail outlet, and whose selling existence is solely based online. This research provides a rare holistic overview of consumer trust in e-SME brand social media communities and contributes to current theory through the development of trust-based models, which provide new insight into users' engagement behaviour in the context of brand pages on social media.

1.3 Pure Plays Small – Medium Sized Enterprises (e-SMEs)

According to the UK government's Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) there is no single international definition of a small firm due to the diversity of businesses operating in the marketplace (www.dti.gov.uk, 2007). The DTI define a small to medium sized enterprise as

one, which is an independent trading organisation, with no parent company and less than 250 employees. Within the context of this research 'pure play' small to medium sized enterprises (e-SMEs) are organisations which do not hold a high street presence and only operate in an online setting (Rowley et al., 2014). Before we can review e-SMEs further it is important to highlight the importance of SMEs to a country's economy. The importance of SMEs has previously been highlighted in the literature (e.g. Dholakia and Kshetri, 2004; Elia et al., 2007) reflecting their role in economic development and sustainability.

In developed market economies, SMEs have played an additional and an equally important role as vehicle for innovation and technology diffusion (Piech, 2004). Furthermore, they are able to react to the opportunities created by systemic change better than the larger and more established organisations (Iraj et al., 2010). A vibrant SME sector remains crucial to employment, building the foundations companies need to expand as well as contributing to the UK's long-term growth and competitiveness (Ashworth, 2013, Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012).

E-SMEs play a significant role within the UK economy, both in terms of their economic presence and the contribution that they can make to economic growth. SMEs in the UK comprise 99.9 per cent of private businesses and account for 59.3 per cent of private sector employment and 48.1 per cent of private sector turnover (BIS, 2013a). However, it is their potential to stimulate innovation, competition and job growth (BIS, 2013b; Glover, 2008) contributing to economic growth that is valued. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that there are obstacles which are hindering their success, such as the internal capacity and capability of the SME, the vision of the owner, and the external environment (BIS, 2013b) which require further investigation.

1.4 The Sports Retail Market

Consumer expenditure through specialist sports goods retailers is expected to grow to £3,750 million in 2014, due to a combination of the wider high street recovery, the solidifying of recent gains made in regular sport participation rates and the return of some buying deferred in preceding years (Sports Retail Market, Mintel 2014).

The key findings from the recent Sports Retail Market, Mintel 2014 report include:

• Across the market as a whole, the retailer's expert recommendation does not appear as valued as has traditionally been assumed – just 11% of all adults and 16% of sports goods buyers would purchase from a new or different retailer on the strength of the advice they offer alone.

• 18% of all adults, 24% of purchasers and 34% of students would try a new sports shop on the basis of personal recommendation from family, friends or other players.

These statistics indicate for e-SMEs that the rise of social media looks to be an important factor in shifting the value of recommendation away from retailers and towards purchasers' peers.

1.5 E-SME Sports Retail and Social Media

According to the Mintel Social and Media Networks Report UK - May 2014, Facebook remains the most popular social or media network used in the UK, with 74% of internet using consumers accessing the platform. And over a quarter of online consumers have used social or media networks to ask people for help with finding information on specific products they are interested in. Although this is potentially a useful platform to promote products and services for some e-SMEs, however, social media may be seen as more resource-intensive to maintain. Customers may increasingly expect retailers to respond to them through this channel as quickly as they would return or answer a phone call. A key advantage for e-SMEs is that specialist advice remains an important weapon for independent retailers in particular, and especially those focusing on a smaller number of key sports (Mintel Sports Market Overview, 2014). However, it needs to be deployed tactically rather than as a blanket solution sales strategy which can often be the usual approach for some organisations. The recent market analysis represent a clear opportunity for e-SME sport retailers to effectively use social media brand communities as a fundamental base to build a marketing strategy due to the popularity and growth of online sport consumption (Hur et al., 2011).

1.6 Contribution

As previously established within this study, social media is an ideal environment for e-SMEs to build brand communities, however, there appears to be limited research about the benefits and consequences of brand communities established via these platforms (To and Ho, 2014). By developing a framework depicting how e-SMEs develop relationships with consumers through social media, this research aims to show how community engagement develops initial and continuous brand trust. The main contribution of this research is two-fold: First, while, previous research has focused on brand related constructs (Georgi and Mink, 2013), most do not purposefully build a brand trust and engagement-specific model in a social media community. Therefore, this work constructs a new model based on empirical evidence for brand trust and engagement which is important to brand reputation and trust theory as it positions social media community engagement around eight core trust constructs. Second, this model helps practitioners understand the relevance to everyday branding practice. The

comprehensive evidence collected online assists e-SMEs to further understand the role of these trust values in consumers' social media experiences.

1.7 Aim and Objectives of the Research

From the previous discussion, it is possible to clarify the main aim of this research as follows:

"To investigate how social media consumer engagement can be used by e-SME brands to develop trust and build brand reputation, with potential and current customers."

In support of this aim, the following objectives will be addressed:

Research Objectives

1. To identify the constructs that develop consumer online trust for e-SME brands using social media communities.

2. To identify the constructs that build reputation for e-SME brands using social media communities.

3. To analyse the engagement strategies used by sports retailers within e-SME brand social media communities.

4. To investigate the e-SME brand and consumer perspective of using social media engagement to create trust and build reputation with potential and current consumers.

5. To analyse the perceived corporate value of social media engagement from key informants working with e-SMEs

6. To develop a conceptual framework for e-SMEs with the aim of demonstrating how effective social media engagement can potentially create and develop brand trust and reputation in order to acquire and retain customers.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is presented under chapter headings as follows:

Chapter 1- Introduction

This Chapter sets the scene for the research by presenting a market overview and identifying the theoretical areas of study.

Chapter 2- Literature review

This Chapter covers the published material on the research area. It identifies and analyses the key drivers, determinants and factors relating to social media engagement achieved

through reviewing the most prominent theorists and authors in the field. These views are evaluated, compared, contrasted and structured in order to identify the key themes that determine and shape consumer trust in an e-SME brand. This chapter identifies the research gaps in the analysis of social media consumer engagement and aims to provide a critical analysis of the methods of engagement, e-SMEs undertake to acquire and retain customers.

Chapter 3- Methodology

The research approach is established using the philosophical assumption that the process of conceptual development is socially constructed through understanding e-SME, social media practitioner and consumer perspectives. Research credibility, sampling, data collection methods and analysis, as well as ethical issues and limitations, are also reviewed.

Chapter 4- Finding and Analysis

Presentation of the findings and analysis for the constructs that develop consumer trust and build reputation for e-SME brands using social media platforms, from theoretical integration of the literature and case netnography.

Chapter 5- Findings and Analysis

Sports Retail e-SME Brands Social Media communication strategies to encourage engagement and develop trust, presentation of findings and analysis.

Chapter 6- Findings and Analysis

E-SME Brand Social Media Communications to create Engagement, Trust, and develop Reputation: Social Media Expert Perspectives, presentation of findings and analysis.

Chapter 7-Findings and Analysis

E-SME Brand Social Media Engagement-Perceived corporate value in using Social Media to acquire and retain customers-presentation of findings and analysis.

Chapter 8-Findings and Analysis

E-SME Brand Social Media communications to create engagement, trust, and develop reputation: Consumer perspective, presentation of findings and analysis

Chapter 9- Discussion

Discussion of findings, analysis and key concepts

Chapter 10- Conclusions

Contribution to Knowledge, Research Agenda and Implications.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter sets the context, objectives and scope for the research presented in this thesis. In summary, this research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of consumer trust and brand reputation, through e-SME social media engagement. Understanding the engagement strategies used by e-SME brands as well as the consumer and social media practitioner perspective are also pertinent to this study, in order to gain a wider and more in depth view of trust. Understanding these elements enables a contribution to knowledge relating to trust, brand reputation and engagement strategies in the e-SME domain and online sports retail marketing in particular.

Investigating an appropriate research methodology (Chapter Three) allows this thesis to inform the choice of effective research strategies, suitable for analysing e-SME social media communities, in order to gather empirical data and outline theoretical and practical implications for e-SMEs practice based on rich case and interview evidence. In the context of this thesis e-SME sports retailors are reviewed.

A limitation of this research results from the number of e-SME cases addressed, due to resource constraints and access limitations which are a common hurdle in SME research (Ashworth, 2008). However, saturation of evidence across cases and sectors provides a strong foundation for theory development in this research. The next chapter of the thesis considers the theoretical literature for trust, reputation, and engagement in the context of e-SME social media communities in order to highlight research gaps, which support the research objectives and provide justification for the methodological approach taken in this thesis.

2. Literature review

In order to develop a theoretical understanding of trust formation, reputation development and brand engagement on social media for e-SMEs, literature from an extensive number of studies published up to November 2014 have been reviewed.

2.1 Introduction

The literature review is divided into three sections, and in accordance with objectives one and two, the first part provides a review and critique of the key theoretical literature concerning trust and consumer online trust. The key contextual literature for this section covers branding, online purchasing, and corporate reputation within social media environments.

The second part explores the key theoretical literature for consumer engagement and the strategies used by organisations to create consumer engagement in social media communities. This division within the literature review provides a theoretical basis to achieve objectives three, four and five. Contextual Literature from the organisational perspective regarding the value obtained from engaging in social media activity is also reviewed.

Finally, in Part three of the literature review, the previous sections are used to identify key trust and engagement themes for e-SMEs. This section provides a theoretical framework which highlights the main areas of focus for this research, and presents the relationships between social media engagement, brand, reputation and trust. The literature review forms the first stage of this research study and from the findings the design for a potential qualitative research project was produced.

2.1.1 Literature Review: Part One

Part one is divided into sections and social media, branding and SME/e-SME branding will be dealt with initially before reviewing customer theory and online purchasing. The final sub-sections cover trust and reputation in order to provide further details pertinent to the research area.

2.2 Social Media

Before key research themes such as trust and engagement are reviewed, it is important to define the term 'social media' and to highlight some of the capabilities of various platforms to connect with consumers. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61) define social media as:

"A group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content."

Social media provides organisations with the opportunity and flexibility to engage with and respond to consumers directly. Consequently, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that social media is not only appropriate for large companies, but is also suitable for smaller organisations such as e-SMEs. A key consideration for e-SMEs is that the definitions put forward by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61) and Habibi et al. (2014) state that consumers have constant access to online social media networks, including blogs, microblogs and video/photo sharing communities (Harris, 2009). Furthermore, due to the number of social media platforms available, a major issue for e-SMEs is to determine and evaluate which methods to use. Different forms of social media include social networks (Facebook, and LinkedIn), micro-blogs (Twitter), reviews and ratings (Yelp, Amazon, and Trip Advisor), and videos (YouTube and Vimeo), as well as online communities and chat rooms.

With such a large potential customer base available to e-SMEs, the importance of utilising the capabilities of social media to connect with consumers and compete with competitors has previously been discussed in detail (Corstjens and Umblijs, 2012). However, Habibi et al. (2014) and Fournier and Avery (2011) suggest that the main impact of social media for e-commerce is consumer empowerment, as consumers have a strong influential voice and e-SMEs are not in control of the conversations between consumers. Nevertheless, although not in complete control of consumer conversations, this does not mean that e-SMEs are not able to influence and participate in consumer interactions (Reyneke et al., 2011), thus reinforcing the concept that consumer's social media postings and conversations should matter to e-SMEs.

Social media is comprised of user generated content (UGC), which is content created by consumers that is publicly available, readily distributable, possesses some degree of creativity, and is not constructed through professional content creation practices (Habibi et al., 2014). Research by Gonzalez (2010: 23) suggested that UGC produces social currency for marketers, as it helps define a brand, "while social media provides never ending avenues for communicating, it is the individuals who serve as the influencers not the technology." Zinnbauer and Honer (2011) continued research into this area and describe social currency as a process whereby consumers recommend a brand or share information about a brand. Their research suggested that social currencies are derived from interactions between consumers and are usually beyond the direct control of a company. Through their empirical

study Zinnbauer and Honer (2011) proposed that there are six components of social currency, which are detailed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: The Six Components of Social Currency

Component	E-SME context
Affiliation	The value of an e-SME brand is closely linked to the affiliation and sense of community it creates among other likeminded consumers. E-SMEs create value by promoting the community and building exchange opportunities.
Conversation	Non-customers or customers may proactively discuss an e-SME's products and services with each other. By engaging in these conversations e-SMEs can instigate further conversations and discussions by providing additional knowledge and perspectives.
Utility	Social exchange with other consumers provides an opportunity for e-SMEs to build invaluable utility for customers or consumers by helping them to increase their own social relevance.
Advocacy	Non-customers or customers are willing to tell others about an e-SME brand or recommend it further. This brand advocacy is one of the key value drivers.
Identity	Non-customers or customers develop a strong sense of identity and the ability to express themselves to others by using the e-SME brand.
Information	The more information non-customers or customers have about an e-SME's products or services, the more likely they are to develop preferences for that brand.

Source: Adapted from Zinnbauer and Honer (2011)

The study by Zinnbauer and Honer (2011) noted that although social currency consists of six different components, brands do not rely on all of them to facilitate brand loyalty among users. Their investigation also concluded that when a brand becomes integrated into a consumer's daily life then it enables consumers to connect, interact, and benefit from like-minded brand users, and thus the likelihood of CGA for a brand increases (Zinnbauer and Honer, 2011). CGA extends the principle further and is reviewed in the next section.

2.2.1 Consumer Generated Advertising

According to Campbell et al. (2011), consumer generated advertising (CGA) is a form of UGC which makes reference to specific instances where consumers create brand focussed messages with the aim of informing, persuading or reminding other consumers. An alternative definition for CGA uses the term 'vigilante marketing' to describe the practice of CGA (Pehlivan et al., 2011), which Muniz and Schau (2007: 35) define as:

> "Unpaid advertising and marketing efforts, including one to one, one too many, and many to many commercially oriented communications, undertaken by brand loyalists on behalf of the brand."

Cheong and Morrison (2010) investigated the credibility of both positive and negative UGC, and found that retailers need to consistently assess and review UGC to completely understand its influence. Campbell et al. (2011) agreed, stating that traditional marketing now co-exists with CGA, and as a consequence, online retailers need to be aware of CGA as it can positively support traditional marketing or may negatively impact and undermine it. Furthermore, Heinonen (2011) stated that consumers are participating in a variety of activities, such as discussing purchases and sharing knowledge, with other consumers.

Pehlivan et al. (2011) reported that CGA differs from firm generated advertising (FGA) because each type of advertising (CGA or FGA) generates different discussion content for an advert. Consumers were found to display appreciation for FGA but found CGA to be more entertaining, causing consumers to discuss an advert more (Pehlivan et al., 2011). Similarly, Taylor et al. (2012) argued that consumers trust CGA over FGA, and the more entertaining an advert or post the more it will be shared. Developing the concept further, Taylor et al. (2012) discovered that social media users' message sharing behaviours could also be attributed to the need for self-enhancement, which will be reviewed in Part Two of the literature review.

This argument suggests that when consumers view a message or post on social media from an e-SME which they perceive to be consistent with their identity, then they are more likely to disseminate it amongst their social contacts if it reflects who they are and what they are interested in. Taylor et al. (2012: 13) concluded that "advertisers should consider the symbolic and self-expression properties of their online ads and match them to targeted consumers' self-concepts." Therefore retailers have to consider how to react when their brand is talked about by consumers (Campbell et al., 2011; Pehlivan et al., 2011). This view was supported by Muniz and Schau (2007), who argued that CGA is relevant to companies because it provides proof of consumer perceptions of brands and their feelings towards a brand. Their key finding was that CGA is crucial for retailers as they provide examples of persuasive marketing messages from brand loyalists. This can potentially affect e-SMEs through consumers retweeting or

sharing posts. The next section continues the discussion by reviewing SME use of social media.

2.2.2 Social Media and SMEs

Recent studies by Bonson and Ratkai (2013), Sarosa (2012), and Wong (2012), have analysed the use of Facebook by businesses and concluded that it can be a positive mechanism for organisations to connect with consumers. Facebook can be implemented in any business without any additional resources. Consequently, even SMEs can use it for their daily transactions as the cost is minimal and it requires a low level of information technology (IT) skills (Derham et al., 2011). The current literature highlights the use of Facebook among SMEs and found that it was utilised for various organisational objectives such as; marketing, communication, sales, advertising, innovation, problem resolution, customer services, human resources, information technology, driving cultural change (Bhanot, 2012), advertising (Beloff and Pandya, 2010; Handayani and Lisdianingrum, 2012), and internet marketing (Stockdale et al., 2012). Furthermore, Meske and Stieglitz (2013) stated that SMEs use social media technologies like Facebook as an additional method to communicate with their customers and support internal communication and collaboration.

In contrast, Wamba and Carter (2013) argued that firm innovativeness, age and geographic location have a significant impact on factors influencing the use of social media, such as Twitter adoption, by SMEs. A number of studies have indicated that factors such as compatibility (Wang et al., 2012), cost effectiveness (Chong and Chan, 2012), trust (Chai et al., 2011) and interactivity (Lee and Kozar, 2012) also influence social media adoption from SMEs. Furthermore, recent studies have found cost effectiveness to be an important variable in the adoption of new technologies (Chong and Chan, 2012; Premkumar and Roberts, 1999). Consequently, it can be argued that social media is suitable for e-SMEs because of the low cost, low barriers to participation, and low level of IT skills required to use it (Derham et al., 2011).

2.3 Branding

Traditionally, a brand has been defined as "the name related to one or more items in the product line which is used to recognise the source of character of them" (Kotler, 2000: 396). A number of definitions for the term 'corporate brand' are also available within the literature (de Chernatony, 1999; Hatch and Schultz, 2003; Otubanjo and Melewar, 2007) however, some authors have defined the concept in terms of values, whilst others as a means of transferring identity (Razeghi et al., 2014). As consumers have become aware of brand communities, organisations have evolved their focus from product brands to corporate branding (de Chernatony, 1999; Hatch and Schultz, 2003) in order to be part of that

community. Companies realised that customers had started to develop an interest in brands, i.e. what is behind the product they are buying (de Chernatony, 1999; Razeghi et al., 2014). Based on previous research, the consensus is that a corporate brand can be defined as an expression of the features and personality of an organisation, so that it can offer a distinguished value to the stakeholders (Otubanjo et al., 2010; Bickerton, 2000; Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004).

Heding et al. (2008) identified two further brand management perspectives: the emotional and cultural approach. Within the emotional perspective the brand construct is extended as a central tenant within brand communities, as a conveyor of an emotional brand story, and a basis for an intimate brand customer relationship (Mitchell et al., 2013). In contrast, the cultural approach of branding takes into account the socio-cultural perspective of the brand construct, which is perceived as a cultural artefact, and is particularly important given the elevated role of consumption within post-modern society (Mitchell et al., 2013). However, Brodie and De Chernatony (2009, p97) argue that a subjective ontology of the brand construct should be considered for research purposes, as "there will never be a unifying definition of the brand, but a constantly evolving series of contexts or lenses through which the phenomena is viewed." This opens up the agenda for research to approach the issue of e-SME branding through a contemporary phenomenon, such as social media. This thesis therefore provides empirical insight into the brand concept as viewed by e-SME brands in the online sports retail industry. The following discussion on retail and SME branding extant research will provide the theoretical context for the subject area.

2.3.1 Retail Branding

Keller (2003, p82) defined the retail brand as:

> "The goods and services of a retailer that differentiates them from those of competitors. A retailer's brand equity is exhibited in consumers responding more favourably to its marketing actions than they do to competing retailers."

Similarly, Burt and Davies (2010) stated that traditionally, branding within the field of retailing has been closely associated with private label brands produced by retailers. This provides a significant operating advantage for these firms in the form of superior profit margins, economies of scale, market segmentation, and differentiation (Mitchell et al., 2013). This method helped organisations define their retail brand in terms of the products and services they provide but crucially as the main differentiator between the firm and their competitors.

Although evolving in complexity, the retail brand construct put forward by Burt and Davies (2010) highlights retail offering components (product and service provision), the retailer's

ability to add value through the retail store (retail image), and the corporate perspective (customer relationships and firm identity). These definitions have generated competing retail brand perspectives in the retail literature, which encourage more complex combinations of tangible and intangible service, product, and organisational multi-sensory brand elements as a coherent brand strategy (Mitchell et al., 2013; Mitchell, 1999; Kent, 2003; Burt and Davies, 2010). Consequently, there has been a call for research to develop an understanding of how retailers become engendered with brand significance through retail brand management techniques, both from the consumer and practitioner perspective (Mitchell et al., 2013; Fernie et al., 1997; Moore et al., 2000; Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Therefore, e-SMEs should consider the nature of brand development from a wider perspective. This has yet to materialise to any great extent in the e-SME sports retailer domain, which drives the agenda for this research. The SME retail branding literature provides a starting point to investigate e-SME brand trust through social media engagement, which will be reviewed in Part Two of the literature review. The next section reviews SME branding.

2.3.2 SME Branding

Previous research for SME branding has suggested that SME owner-managers should develop and encourage strong brands within a macro environment which is characterised by issues such as crowded marketplaces, short product lifecycles, rapid innovation diffusion, and symbolic consumption (Krake, 2005; Abimbola and Kocak, 2007). In contrast, studies by Gilmore et al. (2001) and Carson and Gilmore (2000) have centred on comparing the organisational idiosyncrasies of marketing management between entrepreneurial firms and large firms' branding strategies. Meanwhile Inksip (2004) argues that the brand concept remains peripheral to the operational consciousness of owner-managers, although other studies have identified various levels of brand management orientation within SMEs (e.g. Ojasalo et al., 2008).

Despite this previous research there remains a significant gap in the study of SME brand management within a retail context, specifically e-SME brand trust and reputation strategies through social media engagement. This theoretical gap arises due to individual SME circumstances, especially in terms of branding (Spence and Essoussi, 2010). Further insight into these areas is required, as a brand identity which engenders strong consumer trust will allow e-SMEs to obtain a maximum return from their resources (Bergstrom et al., 2010).

2.3.3 Branding Discussion

Although many researchers have highlighted the opportunities and benefits that online social platforms may offer companies (e.g Culnan et al., 2010; Fournier and Lee, 2009; Gallaugher and Ransbotham, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Porter et al., 2011; Schau et al., 2009),

critical commentaries have argued that even historically strong brands are vulnerable in these new environments due to greater transparency, consumer empowerment, and online activism (Aula, 2010; Fournier and Avery, 2011; Otubanjo, 2011). E-SME branding is facing important challenges following the rise in digital and social media platforms that facilitate and enable electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), which is discussed in part two of the literature review (Russel et al., 2013; Fournier and Avery, 2011; Kozinets et al.,2010). The SME branding literature suggests that the meaning of the term 'branding' has a variety of definitions, which relate both to the symbolic and functional interpretation by the owner-manager throughout the retail business (Russell et al., 2013; Wood, 2000; Heding et al., 2008; Gabbott and Jevons, 2009). This could be linked to the theory that an owner-manager is placed as the key driver behind the creation, implementation and management of branding activity (Russell et al., 2013; Gilmore et al., 2001; Krake, 2005). Table 2.2 highlights the existing gaps and key concepts applicable to e-SMEs.

Table 2.2: Branding Concepts

Concepts	Key Issues	Recent literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in a E-SME context
E-SME Branding	E-SME brand is influenced by the market or owner characteristics.	Razeghi et al. (2014) Abimbola (2001) Inskip (2004), Otubanjo (2011), Ahmad and Baharun (2010), Hillestad et al. (2010)	• E-SME approaches on social media in terms of influencing the market or being influenced by the market on corporate brand strategy.
	E-SME brand is presented to consumers through formal and informal branding activities.	Otubanjo (2011) Russell et al. (2013).	• How branding activities demonstrated through social media communities can influence perception of an e-SME brand.

Research by Razeghi et al. (2014), Abimbola (2001), Inskip (2004), Otubanjo (2011) and Centeno et al. (2012) all concluded that SME corporate brand is influenced by the entrepreneur's understanding of the market. This contrasts with studies by Ahmad and Baharun (2010) and Hillestad et al. (2010), which argued that there is no relationship between market perception and corporate brand for SMEs. From a speculative point of view, this could be due to the internal nature of the corporate brand (He, 2008). Applying this discussion to e-SMEs, this conflict would suggest that further investigation is required into e-SME approaches

on social media in terms of influencing the market or being influenced by the market regarding the corporate brand strategy. Juntunen et al. (2010) and Centeno et al. (2012) argued that in the SME life cycle, an organisation needs other sources of brand value in addition to the personal brand of the entrepreneur. Otubanjo (2011) supported this by stating that the corporate brand should be presented to stakeholders through formal and informal branding activities. This adds strength to investigating how branding activities demonstrated through social media communities can influence the perception of an e-SME brand. Potentially, SMEs are able to react and adapt using their own resources, such as culture, customer care, position and performance of the company, which could help consumers to identify and trust their brand. However as the literature highlights (e.g. Juntunen et al., 2010 and Centeno et al., 2012), there is a risk for SMEs that their brand credibility may become dependent upon the entrepreneur. Russell et al. (2013) advocated an alignment between values, the characteristics of the entrepreneur, and the corporate brand. By adopting this approach SMEs reduce their dependence on the entrepreneur and achieve a unique and distinctive brand which can flourish (Russell et al., 2013). This suggests that e-SMEs should prioritise values such as innovation and have a clear focus on the distinctive characteristics of their brand in order to ensure consistency and the alignment of the brand message to achieve consumer trust. Before brand trust in a social media community context can be reviewed, brand communities, potential different consumer groups and the importance of consumer online purchase motivation are covered in the following sections.

2.3.4 Brand Community

A brand community is essentially created from a variety of relationships that community members develop with a brand, product, marketers, and other consumers. A definition for brand community was put forward by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001: 412) as a "specialised, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand." Casalo et al. (2008) suggested that a brand community is comprised of a group of people who share the same interest in a particular brand, product or service. Consequently, virtual brand communities have emerged as part of brand management strategies (Arnone et al., 2010). Brand communities can perform many important functions on behalf of the brand, such as providing assistance or informing customers of new product developments. Within a brand community consumers play the role of the brand's agents within the community (Schu et al., 2009). The next section addresses social media brand communities.

2.3.5 Social Media Brand Communities

Habibi et al. (2014) proposed five dimensions that make a social media brand community (SMBC) unique compared to other communities, and these are outlined in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: The Five Dimensions of a Social Media Brand Community

Social Context
- The social context provided by social media is unique. The Web 2.0 technologies put the social context of social media communities, somewhere between offline/ physical communities and solely text based communities. For example, members can obtain a great deal of information (e.g. profiles, pictures, location, gender, and family status) about their fellow members; this was perhaps not possible in other conventional communities.

Structure
- The second differentiating dimension is structure. Basically, there is no explicit or implicit structure in social media communities (Habibi et al., 2014), unlike previous communities in which a mechanism was implemented to distinguish devotees from newbies (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Sicilia & Palazón, 2008).

Scale
- The third distinguishing dimension is the scale of social media communities. While brand communities do not go beyond thousands of brand aficionados, Social communities may have millions of members (Habibi et al., 2014). The implications of brand community size were investigated before, but never such mega sized brand communities.

Story
- The fourth factor is storytelling, which is an important aspect of brand communities. In social media communities storytelling is completely different by using videos and photos accompanied by texts. Storytelling also is more interactive due to the ability of readers to instantly comment or 'Like' the story.

Affiliates
- The fifth dimension is numerous affiliated brand communities. In social media the cost of initiating a community is nearly zero; thus there are many subgroups and related groups in a given brand community. This can bring up important issues such as multiple memberships (McAlexander et al., 2002).

Source: Habibi et al. (2014)

Hanna et al. (2011) argued that engagement is perhaps the most crucial aspect of social media, as organisations strive to obtain a larger share of consumers' attention and engagement with their pages. Nevertheless, social media consumer engagement varies, as consumers may spend just minutes or several hours reviewing e-SME content. As a result, community members vary according to their engagement with the brand community, and have

varying attitudes towards a brand according to their motivations to become a community member on social media (Lapointe, 2012). Consumers may join communities for a number of reasons, such as to seek information and receive advice, in order to aid their understanding about the products they use, for entertainment, and to reflect their concerns (Zaglia, 2013). They also may join following a recommendation from a friend or social network connection. This highlights that the level of engagement is not the same for all people and that the term 'community' does not mean the same to all of them (Habibi et al., 2014). Casalo et al. (2008) concluded that when a member completely trusts the social media community that they are part of, then this increases their amount of participation, resulting in a positive experience and loyalty to a brand. Cha's (2009) study found that trust is an integral factor to ensure a social media community's survival. The study argued that security is crucial and heavily impacts a consumer's opinions concerning social media communities and can ultimately impact upon trust. This reinforced the conclusion of Casalo et al. (2008) that SMBCs rely on individual users' participation, and that both group unity and awareness can strengthen users' satisfaction with an SMBC.

A more recent investigation by Georgi and Mink (2012) further supports this theory by arguing that within SMBCs new forms of social exchanges are taking place between consumers of e-retail services, which have been labelled electronic consumer-to-consumer interactions (ECCI), which it could be argued are an aspect of e-WOM (Georgi and Mink 2012). As a consequence of ECCI, consumers are playing a more influential role with one another when making purchase decisions. An example of ECCI, which is any interaction between consumers of online retail services, is when a consumer posts a question concerning the specifications of a product displayed online and another consumer answers the question or provides an opinion. For examples in the online sports retail market the question could cover the capability of running trainers and which surface they are most applicable for. However, according to Muniz and Schau (2007), the nature and culture of SMBCs affects the ways members of such groups interpret and attach meaning to brands and products. Zeng et al. (2009) noted that community members within a strong social group were more likely to have group intentions to accept advertising within online communities. This would imply that if an e-SME's SMBC is centred on characteristics associated with the brand, then posts which reflect these characteristics are more likely to resonate with consumers and consequently improve brand reputation.

Bielski (2008) and Kane et al. (2009) speculated that although social media platforms are considered particularly suitable for developing customer relationships, it is the increased role of social media that has created a need for the concept of customer engagement. This was supported by Brodie et al. (2011), who noted that brand communities provide an important

platform for customers' engagement behaviours, which firms can utilise to engage with their customers. Research by Schau et al. (2009) suggested that brand communities provide both companies and consumers with a number of ways to engage with each other. Similarly, Algesheimer et al. (2005) found that community participation from a brand is focussed on engaging with loyal customers, influencing members' perceptions about the brand, disseminating information, and learning from and about customers. More recently Libai (2011) has considered this form of customer engagement to be directly related to the emergence of new media and all the new ways in which customers can interact with firms, covering both purchase and non-purchase behaviour. Verhoef et al. (2010, p247) defined this type of engagement as "a behavioural manifestation toward the brand or firm that goes beyond transactions", which also includes all consumer-to-firm interactions and consumer-to-consumer communications about the brand. This definition suggests that e-SME brands wishing to participate in an online community should be aware that consumers undertake a number of firm-related behaviours, many of which did not exist a decade ago, and these may have both positive and negative consequences for an organisation. Van Doorn et al. (2010) also identified potential behaviours as including commenting and contributing to online discussions within social media communities.

Customer engagement has been identified as a key research priority for academic practitioners by the Marketing Science Institute (Bolton, 2011). However, few empirical studies have been performed to investigate customer engagement behaviours within a social media environment. Consequently, little is known about how customer behavioural engagement within a particular type of SMBC can improve customer acquisition and retention through engagement. Previous research has identified the consequences of customers' engagement behaviour, which result in factors such as trust, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011a; van Doorn et al., 2010). However, it could be argued that consumers' experience relationship benefits with a brand when engaging in a SMBC. The basis for this argument is that social media can add to the shopping experience and provide entertainment and knowledge. However, further analysis is required to investigate how relationship factors can influence purchase decisions.

2.3.6 Multiple Social Media Brand Communities

Zhang et al. (2011) suggested that organisations should have a number of SMBCs to increase their brand presence and potential audience. However, this strategy may not be suitable for e-SMEs that are constrained by limited budgets and resources. Nevertheless, SMBCs provide an innovative stage for brand marketing, as consumers actively contribute to the communication by marketing brands. Consequently, businesses have become creative when trying to gain control of their marketing (Chi, 2011). Golan and Zaidner (2008, p961)

highlighted various strategies, such as viral stealth marketing, which they describe as "a marketer's attempt to fly below consumer radar by recruiting brand pushers to pose as consumers", which has become a tactic for organisations to try and control social currency. Furthermore, their research recommends that online retailers should use viral stealth marketing as an attempt to gain currency in the form of consumer-to-consumer recommendations, which they argue to be the strongest of all consumer activities. Ultimately, viral stealth marketing strategies are designed to engender consumer-to-consumer communication about a brand or product. It can be argued that consumer-to-consumer communication is the dominant force for distributing messages created by advertisers, and for this reason e-SMEs need to evaluate their marketing strategy in order to include social media marketing within their business plan (Golan and Zaidner, 2008).

Previous research has suggested that retailers can increase awareness of their brand by utilising SMBCs to create engaging content for consumers. "As more shoppers are using social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn) and rely on them for marketing shopping decisions, promotion through these media has become important" (Shankar et al., 2011, p32). Curran et al. (2011) described social media sites, such as Facebook, as being more effective than other advertising avenues because it stores information on all its users, therefore ensuring that marketing reaches a retailer's specific target market.

It can be argued that SMBCs provide a creative platform for e-SMEs to improve the consumer experience of their brand. This theory was supported by Sorescue et al. (2011), who argued that a retailer must go beyond the advertising and promotion aspect of social networking sites and attempt to discover ground breaking methods to use these platforms as a way to instigate conversations with consumers, instead of a one-way communication network. Sinclair and Vogus (2011) investigated large organisations' social media activity, and their findings suggested that large companies consider social media sites to be strategic tools and some businesses are even creating specific roles to cover the social media business aspect. Whether their findings are applicable to smaller companies will be investigated in this thesis.

Social media is able to provide online retailers with valuable customer feedback, which many businesses have often struggled to obtain (Gonzalez, 2010). The majority of studies have focussed on incorporating social media marketing into an organisation's business plan; however, research is required into which strategies actually work and are the most effective for e-SMEs. Furthermore, research based on the e-SME perspective is limited (Hagen et al., 2012; Taylor and Murphy, 2004), which suggests that deeper analysis is required to evaluate how e-SMEs incorporate social media within their business model, and how successful social media engagement can be to increase customer relationships, brand reputation, acquisition,

and retention of customers. Cheong and Morrison (2008) highlighted that when large organisations present a new product they consider both traditional and non-traditional media in which to place advertising in order to ensure that they reach their target market. Sorescu et al. (2011) suggested that small retailers also need to utilise non-traditional, engaging communication methods to increase customer awareness:

> "Another way in which retailers can engage customers is by selling not just products, but an entire experience that while centred on the products, adds an entirely new exciting layer to the retail setting." (Sorescu et al., 2011: 11)

Reyneke et al. (2011) further argued that engagement with consumers enables e-SMEs to use social media as a tool for their marketing strategies, as consumers are able generate new business, instigate interactions, and promote awareness of an online brand by Tweeting, Liking, Friending or Following, etc. Consumers who already have a strong affinity with a brand also have the potential to generate e-WOM which is crucial for e-SMEs (Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012) and this will be covered in Part two of the literature review. Corporate reputation is an important but intangible asset for organisations, yet is increasingly difficult to manage in an era with hard-to-control online conversations (Aula, 2010), and this will also be discussed later in section 2.7.

Therefore it could be suggested that social media provides a variety of possibilities for e-SMEs, especially potential interactions with consumers. Consequently there is a need for further studies examining the impact of this phenomenon on e-SMEs. The next section reviews customer profiles on social media.

2.4 Customer Profiles on Social Media

Dijkmans et al. (2014) suggested that the effects and reach of a company's social media activities will differ among customers and non-customers. Table 2.3 outlines the key differences between these two consumer groups.

Table 2.3: Difference between Non-Customers and Customers

Non-Customers	Customers
No direct experience with a brand, have only a limited interaction with a company, and are therefore more likely to be influenced by indirect experiences, such as news reports in traditional mass media, brand advertisements, and e-brand activities in social media (Shamma and Hassan, 2009).	Direct experience with a company and its products (Smith and Swinyard, 1982). Brand related beliefs and attitudes are likely to be held with more confidence and are less likely to change upon exposure to a marketing campaign (Zauner et al., 2012).

When reviewing the differences between customers and non-customers, Dijkmans et al. (2014) proposed that both groups have different antecedents and motives to follow and become engaged in an organisation's social media community. Webster (2012) suggested that for non-customers, general company interest or merely curiosity may play an important role in social media engagement; whereas for customers, social media communities are also channels for customer service, feedback, industry and company updates. Customers also have personal experience of a company, are more involved with it, and know more about it as a result of information seeking behaviour before a purchase (to collect product information), and also after a purchase (Blackwell et al., 2006). Consequently, as Sichtmann (2007) highlighted, customers are in a different relationship stage compared to non-customers, which is also reflected in differences in the antecedents and consequences of social media brand trust for both groups, which is investigated in this research. Habibi et al. (2014) argued that customers have more positive perceptions of a company's reputation than non-customers, regardless of their intensity of social media use and engagement in a company's social media activities. Furthermore, customer support via social media could also have important side effects for non-customers that view customers being supported within SMBCs which may strengthen their perception of a brand (Kelleher and Miller, 2006). Van et al. (2011) supports this view and stated that the conversational human voice is of added value in brand evaluation and candidness within online dialogues demonstrates enhanced trust and familiarity (Lee et al., 2006). Collectively, these aspects could potentially influence the perception of the corporate reputation of an e-SME. This results in an interesting point regarding which type of customer an e-SME should target. Although such an approach may not be suitable for certain industries, and some organisations may focus on customer retention, as opposed to acquisition, depending on their strategic objectives. However, Habibi et al. (2014) argued that organisations need to continuously explore opportunities to acquire new customers, since existing customers may fall away; however, they warned that in the short term firms may not see market performance effects (higher sales or market share) from their social media activities focused on non-customers. Drucker (1994) also stressed that understanding consumers changing needs and preferences is critical for companies, thus highlighting the requirement for e-SMEs to keep in touch with non-customers' tastes and preferences for their products and services (Hoyer et al., 2010).

2.4.1 Customer Profiles Summary

Table 2.4 highlights the current literature, as well as the customer profile knowledge gaps, yet to be examined for the e-SME context on social media.

Table 2.4: Customer Profile Concepts

Concepts	Key Issues	Current literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in E-SME context
Customer Profiles (Non-Customers or customers)	The relationship between social media engagement and corporate reputation for new or existing customers.	Habibi et al. (2014) Van Noort and Willemsen (2011) Hoyer et al. (2010).	• Strategic decision to focus social media activities on non-customers or customers
	Industry specific for customer retention as opposed to acquisition.	Kelleher and Miller (2006).	

The next section reviews consumer purchasing behaviour online.

2.4.2 Purchasing Behaviour on the Internet

The internet provides a number of avenues for online information seeking, and the comparison of attributes and prices. As a result, online purchases are influenced by a number of stages in the decision-making process of consumers (Schindler and Bickart, 2005). The introduction of Web 2.0 in recent years has brought about additional possibilities for consumers which go beyond product purchase. Consumers can potentially post reviews of products, read reviews by other consumers, and exchange experiences concerning products, brands, or services (Schindler and Bickart, 2005). All these aspects feed into the decision making process in order to resolve a problem, which Fill (2009) suggested is comprised of problem recognition, an information search, alternative evaluations, purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation. Consequently, tailoring marketing communications to different consumers, knowledge of the buying decision making process and its determinants, is crucial (Fill, 2009).

Efendioglu and Yip (2004) and Yang et al. (2007) highlighted a number of online shopping benefits, such as greater access to information, competitive pricing, and broader selection; however, despite these benefits the main obstacles to shopping online have been noted as security, privacy concerns, and the suitability of the products being sold (Yang et al., 2007). As online shopping develops it can be argued that the type of internet information search is becoming more diverse, placing e-SMEs in direct competition with larger brands when consumers conduct such searches. As a result of the large number of options available,

consumers potentially looking to social media to further inform their decision. This provides e-SMEs with the opportunity to distinguish their offering from larger brands whilst using the same social media platforms.

Fill (2009) and Li (2010) also suggested that classic models of buyer behaviour indicate that the buying process commences with problem recognition and is followed by an information search and evaluation stages, depending on the level of purchase involvement. This suggests that once a customer has found an e-SME that they trust, then they will be more likely to re-purchase from the same organisation, rather than follow the standard re-qualification route suggested by traditional models of buyer behaviour (Li, 2010). However, a lack of empirical or rigorous research necessitates reliance on anecdotes rather than hard facts.

Heinonen (2011) argued that in order for retailers to be successful they need to be constantly aware of purchasing behaviour and to monitor consumer attitudes and motives towards the products or services they offer. Indeed, consumers are increasingly creating content about brands, something previously controlled solely by companies (Heinonen, 2011). Chu (2011) investigated aspects of SMBCs that impact upon consumer attitudes and motives, by looking at the links between Facebook brand related group participation, advertising responses, and the psychological factors of self-disclosure and attitudes among members and non-members of Facebook groups. The research concluded that users who are members of groups on Facebook are more likely to disclose their personal data than non-members. Chu (2011) also found that consumers who have more positive attitudes towards advertising are more likely to join a brand or a retailer's SMBC in order to receive promotional messages or to engage in communications from an online retailer. This suggests that a connection exists between consumers' engagement with group applications, which influences the rate and effectiveness of consumer engagement on social media. Harris and Dennis (2011) utilised the trust acceptance model (TAM) and concluded that consumers, specifically students, exhibit a hierarchy of trust when using social media, such as Facebook. Students' trust 'real' friends, then Facebook friends, followed by expert blogs and independent review sites, and lastly celebrities and e-retailer sites. This would suggest that a degree of scepticism still exists when e-SMEs interact with customers. However, to investigate this area further, Di Pietro and Pantano (2012) also used TAM to identify that enjoyment is the major factor that influences consumers to use SMBCs as a platform for assisting in their buying decisions, proposing that:

> "Facebook promotes a consumer-to-consumer approach, exploited by consumers to share experiences and create a common knowledge on products and services; on the other, it provides managers a direct channel for communicating with clients through a business-to-consumer approach." (Di Pietro and Pantano, 2012,p 20)

Di Pietro and Pantano (2012) concluded that retailers can enhance their SMBC appeal by including interactive applications and contests, which can attract new customers. However, it could be suggested that e-SMEs need to continuously keep up to date with consumers' attitudes when it comes to social media marketing. A deeper understanding of how consumers perceive social marketing and engagement will help to ensure that marketing strategies are consistent and effective. In contrast, Heinonen (2011) argued that consumer activities, such as consumption, participation, and production, are not connected to just one motivation factor and concluded that consumer activities are a combination of a variety of motivation factors.

This belief contradicts the singular enjoyment theory of Di Pietro and Pantano (2012) and requires further analysis for e-SME strategies. Heinonen (2011) suggested that the classical concept of consumers as individuals is outdated and strongly argued that consumers are now active producers of business value, as UGC is reducing the influence of traditional marketing tactics. The findings put forward by Heinonen (2011) imply that it is important for an e-SME to be aware of consumers' purchase behaviour motives as this provides a deeper understanding of what influences users to create content about an online brand. Table 2.5 highlights the existing theoretical gaps for consumer online purchase behaviour and the concepts applicable to e-SMEs.

Table 2.5: Online Purchase Behaviour Concepts

Concepts	Key Issues	Current Literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in the e-SME context
Online purchase behaviour	The buying process commences with problem recognition, followed by an information search and evaluation stage, depending on the level of purchase involvement	Fill (2009) Li (2010) Chu (2011)	• Engaging social media content to provide information as part of the buying process.
	Retailers need to be constantly aware of consumer attitudes and motives toward the products or services they offer.	Heinonen (2011) Harris and Dennis (2011) Di Pietro and Pantano (2012)	• Awareness of consumer attitudes through social media research.

2.5 Trust

Due to technological advances following new developments and trends, current academic knowledge of e-commerce and e-SMEs may not match with these new aspects and the

implications of social media (Dijkmans et al., 2014). Consequently, researchers need to conduct further investigations into areas in which marketing intersects with social media in order to help e-SME brands move forward. Such areas include trust, reputation and engagement developed through social media (e.g. Laroche et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2014; Dijkmans et al., 2014).

With the advent of social media many e-SMEs have attempted to increase consumer online trust by utilising different social media applications, which support two-way interactions between online shoppers, thereby enhancing the feeling of social presence (Karimov and Brengman, 2011). Despite the fact that many e-SMEs integrate social media into their web stores (Toufaily et al., 2013) empirical studies investigating the effectiveness of social media with regards to online trust formation and brand relationships within an e-commerce environment remain limited (Toufaily et al., 2013). Furthermore, in-depth explorations of e-SME social media activity and strategic engagement practices for brand trust and reputation is largely absent in the context of sports retailers. This may be due to the issue of access, which is common to small companies in general and e-businesses in particular (Ashworth, 2011). As a consequence, perspectives are also largely academic and rich insights from industry experts or e-SME brands are rare (Mitchell et al., 2013; Bergstrom et al., 2010; Toufaily et al., 2013). Table 2.6 summarises the existing theoretical gaps in the strategic social media implications for e-SMEs.

Table 2.6: Strategic Social Media Concepts

Concepts	Key Issues	Current Literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in an E-SME context
Social Media	Consumers view a social media post from an e-SME which they perceive to be consistent with their identity. Consumers may be more likely to disseminate such posts amongst their social contacts if it reflects who they are and what they are interested in.	Taylor et al. (2012) Campbell et al. (2011) Pehlivan et al. (2011) Muniz and Jensen Schau (2007) Shankar et al. (2011)	E-SME strategic consideration of how to react when their brand is talked about by non-customers and customers.
	Presence on many multiple social media sites to increase their consumer audience.	Zhang et al. (2011)	Allocation of resources to run many different accounts, and to create different content for each platform.
	E-SMEs possess the ability to influence the conversations consumers are involved in when discussing their brand. Nevertheless, consumers' ability to communicate with each other restricts the amount of control e-SMEs have over the content and distribution of data.	Mangold and Faulds (2009) Sorescue et al. (2011)	e-SME strategic consideration of when to join a consumer conversation

The next section looks at the factors which contribute to the development of consumer trust.

2.5.1 Consumer Trust

The academic understanding of trust has been widely studied in different disciplines, such as psychology, management, finance and marketing (Grabner-Kräuter and Kaluscha, 2003). The concept of trust has been conceptualised in a variety of ways, both theoretically and operationally (Gefen et al., 2003), and researchers have long acknowledged the confusion within the field (e.g. McKnight et al., 2002). Although there is no single definition, trust indicates

a willingness to be vulnerable based on the positive expectation of another party's future behaviour (Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Mayer et al., 1995). As an elusive concept, trust includes multiple dimensions, such as personality based trust (trust propensity), institution based trust (structural assurance) as proposed by Bock et al. (2012) and Gefen and Pavlou (2012), and interpersonal trust (Kim and Park, 2013). Thus, the extant research has identified trust to be a significant factor that facilitates online transactions (Beldad et al., 2012; Li et al., 2012). Within an e-commerce setting trust reflects a consumer's belief in an online retailer's ability, integrity and benevolence (Han and Windsor, 2011; Hwang and Lee, 2012; Chen and Sharma, 2013). The term 'ability' is concerned with the knowledge and expertise that e-SMEs possess that is required to complete consumer orders, whist an e-SME's 'integrity' means that they are honest in all of their dealings and do not knowingly deceive customers, and finally, 'benevolence' reflects an e-SME's concern for consumer welfare.

For this research the concepts of 'initial trust', as well as 'continual trust', are considered and analysed. This thesis analyses the initial trust that consumers develop when they interact with an e-SME's social media community for the first time (McKnight et al., 2002); therefore assisting e-SMEs with acquiring new customers. In addition, trust that may develop through repeated social media interactions (Toufaily et al., 2013) and therefore assist e-SMEs with retaining customers and sustaining 'continual trust'.

For the purpose of this thesis, the focus is online trust. Unlike offline trust, the object of online trust in this context is SMBCs and e-SMEs social media activity (Bart et al., 2005; Toufelay et. 2013). Online trust will be reviewed in the following section.

2.5.2 Online Trust

Pavlou (2003) previously stated that online trust is concerned with the conviction that allows consumers to willingly be exposed to web retailers after having taken a retailers' characteristics into consideration. Furthermore, according to Bart et al. (2005: 134):

> "Online trust includes consumer perceptions of how the site would deliver one's expectations, how believable the site's information is, and how much confidence the site commands."

As websites act as a storefront for e-SMEs they provide an important connection to customers (Chen and Dibb, 2010); therefore, it could be argued that a consumer's interaction with an e-SME's SMBC is similar to their experience with an organisation's website. Consequently, consumers could develop perceptions of trust for an e-SME based on their interactions with their SMBC (Bart et al., 2005). For this research the two dimensions proposed by Ganesan and Hess (1997): credibility-based trust and benevolence-based trust, will be analysed further.

This approach is supported by Walsh et al. (2010) who argued that the separation of trust into benevolence and competence provides an understanding of the role trust has in service relationships.

2.5.3 Credibility Based Trust

Credibility is dependent upon a consumer's belief that a supplier has the required expertise to carry out their role in the transaction effectively, with competence and reliability (Ganesan, 1994; Flavian and Guinaliu, 2006). Fassnacht and Kose (2007) also stated that in order to gain consumers' trust, e-SMEs should convey the image of a fair and reliable exchange partner, i.e. communication should be targeted and credible in order to reduce consumer resistance. However, Bart et al. (2005) argued that protection from fraud and privacy violation is at the forefront of concerns of retailers, along with the respect for the information disclosed by consumers (personal and financial data). This may be true when exchanging personal financial data on an e-SMEs website, but generally this information is not shared in SMBCs and so requires further investigation to determine if it is a prevalent concern for social media trust.

2.5.4 Benevolence Based Trust

Benevolence is defined as a customer's belief that an organisation is interested in their welfare (Flaviàn and Guinalìu, 2006). Benevolence is applicable within the context of repeated consumer–seller relationships and requires familiarity and prior interaction between parties (Wang et al., 2003). The traditional acceptance of benevolence refers to a supplier acting with good intentions that are beneficial to a buyer (Touflay, 2013); however, for a consumer, the idea that an e-SME is genuinely concerned about their welfare in general requires further investigation. According to Johnson (2007), there are four sets of online trust antecedents, which are highlighted in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7: Online Trust Antecedents

Online Trust Antecedents	Current Literature
Branding	Bart et al. (2005), McKnight et al. (2002)
Privacy and security	Balasubramanian et al. (2003), Gefen et al. (2003) Pavlou and Gefen (2004), Yousafzai et al. (2005)
Propensity to trust	McKnight et al. (2002), Pavlou and Gefen (2004),
Website performance	Bart et al. (2005), McKnight et al. (2002).

Source: Johnson (2007)

Table 2.8 reflects the existing knowledge gaps in consumer trust, as well as the concepts which are applicable to e-SMEs, which require further investigation.

Table 2.8: Consumer Trust Concepts

Concept	Key Issues	Current Literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in e-SME context
Consumer Trust	Initial trust' and' continual trust' connection with non-customers and customers and online trust	McKnight et al. (2002) Toufaily et al. (2013)	• Social media content to create online brand trust for new and existing customers.
	Credibility and benevolence-based trust	Walsh et al. (2010)	• Separation of trust into benevolence and competence provides an understanding of the e-SME role in service relationships.

2.6 Social Media and Trust

Consumers visit and join organisations' SMBCs in order to gather more information before making a purchasing decision (Liang et al., 2011). As a result, trust for an e-SME brand may be built upon consumer experiences within the interactive communities of social media platforms. Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) argue that a social media community serves two purposes: firstly, the ability to deliver marketing information to subscribed fans or followers; and secondly, as an online community where customers with similar interests in specific brands can share and exchange experience and information. Consequently, it can be suggested that consumer trust in an e-SME brand may be based on both information attributes and community attributes displayed within their social media communities.

Trust in online communities has been previously explored by Ba (2001), who categorised the development of trust into different stages. Ba (2001) argued that initial trust is based on economic benefit and when there is online information communication then trust is developed, as the information creates a level of predictability of the other party. At the same time, online trust is embedded in social relations with other members. This belief was supported by Hsu et al. (2007) who suggested that trust in SMBCs may be based upon the benefits derived from

information and knowledge available in the community, and also on social identification with other members of the community. One of the main appeals for e-SMEs to develop SMBCs is the opportunity to disseminate promotional information to consumers. Promotional information highlighting products and services provides customers with the opportunity to assess the trustworthiness of the social commerce websites (i.e. credibility and benevolence). Pletikosa et al. (2011) proposed that trust in an e-SME SMBC could primarily be based upon the quality of its information, such as accuracy, reliability and objectivity. Therefore trust which is formed due to information quality requires further academic investigation. Consumers' trust in an e-SME brand may also be based upon their identification with other consumers within a social media community. Ng (2013) argued that the trustworthiness (credibility and benevolence) of other consumers can be transferred to a social media community, and therefore helps customers to build stronger levels of confidence in an e-SME brand. Previous studies by Westerlund (2009) and Valenzuela et al. (2009) support this theory, suggesting that when users have a high level of trust in other members then they are more likely to trust a social media community and to frequently use it. Therefore, identification-based trust is also recognised as a component of social media trust which requires further research.

2.6.1 Social Media and Trust Discussion

Table 2.9 indicates the existing theoretical knowledge gaps and how these contribute to e-SME strategic considerations.

Table 2.9: Social Media and Trust Concepts

Concepts	Key Issues	Current Literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in E-SME context
Social media and trust	Consumer trust in an e-SME brand may be based upon both information attributes and community attributes displayed in their social media communities.	Liang et al. (2011) Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) Ba (2001) Hsu et al. (2007)	Trust in social media communities may be based upon the benefits derived from information and knowledge within the community, and also upon social identification with other community members.
	Consumers trust in an e-SME brand may be based upon their identification with other consumers within the social media community.	Ng (2013) Westerlund (2009) Valenzuela et al. (2009)	If consumers have a high level of trust in other members, then they are more likely to trust the social media community and use it frequently.

Research conducted by Johnson (2007), Chen and Dibb (2010) and Toufaily et al. (2013) reported the importance of nurturing consumer trust in the context of e-commerce and noted that consumers are concerned with a possible violation of their security/privacy when making

online transactions; therefore firms should reassure online users of a secure internet environment. Toufaily et al. (2013) further highlighted the importance of a social presence for building online trust, whilst Keeling et al. (2010) and Hess et al. (2009) advocated the use of social cues on a website as these provide a source of social presence and increase consumer online trust. One of the reasons for this may be the impersonal nature of electronic shopping and the lack of human interaction. In order for e-SMEs to address this issue, Dijkmans et al. (2014) argued that they should convey social cues and personal presence via their social media communities, as this will lead to consumer trust in the brand.

Although research by Keeling et al. (2010) has contributed to existing online consumer trust theory by analysing social presence (e.g. Hessetal., 2009; Keeling et al., 2010), very few studies have taken into account each dimension of trust from a social media engagement perspective. Chen and Dibb (2010), Kim et al. (2009), and Toufaily et al. (2013) demonstrated that perceived online benevolence and perceived online credibility are positively associated with brand perception. This implies that consumers who believe that an e-SME brand is honest and considers the welfare of its customers, will have a positive attitude towards an online retailer, develop trust for a brand and recommend it to social connections.

By reviewing SMBCs that can display trust through benevolence and credibility, this research answers the call made by Toufaily et al. (2013) for future studies to consider diverse options in order to capture the variation in online customer trust among different channels. The following section reviews the existing corporate reputation literature and how social media can impact upon an e-SME.

2.7 Corporate Reputation

Corporate reputation has been defined as 'a collective representation of a firm's past behaviour and outcomes that depicts the firm's ability to render valued results to multiple stakeholders' (Fombrun et al., 2000, p.243). However, Fombrun et al. (2000) also argued that reputation is an attitudinal construct that consists of two components: an emotional (affective) component and a rational (cognitive) component. Recent contributions suggest that there is an urgent need for a review of branding and reputation management perspectives in the context of social media (Fournier and Avery, 2011; Dijkmans et al. (2014). Furthermore, there is a growing interest in the role of corporate reputation, reputation building, and reputation management within organisations (Aula and Tienari, 2011; Balmer, 2008). Although social media has received increasing attention within the branding and marketing literature (Fournier and Avery, 2011; Gallaugher and Ransbotham, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kozinets et al., 2010; Porter et al., 2011), there is currently a lack of empirical studies and theoretical

contributions which investigate corporate reputation management in the context of SMBCs for e-SMEs.

Corporate reputation is important to e-SMEs for a number of reasons. According to Walsh et al. (2009), reputation is a key parameter in the supplier selection process by potential customers. This view was reinforced by Graham and Moore (2007), who argued that consumers are more likely to select companies with a positive corporate reputation and are willing to pay more for their products. Furthermore, a positive corporate reputation can protect a company in times of crisis (Shamma, 2012), foster customer loyalty and retention for organisations of all sizes (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001), and enable a company to attract more customers (Gardberg and Fombrun, 2002). Essentially, reputation is about how trust between parties is developed, assessed and maintained (Pavlou and Gefen, 2004; Dellarocas, 2005) and social media can have a significant impact upon an e-SME's reputation (Kim and Ko, 2010). The extant research has mostly focused on customer dialogue (Culnan et al., 2010; Porter et al., 2011) and investigating how the emerging social media landscapes impacts upon brand management strategy (Fournier and Avery, 2011; Schau et al., 2009). However, broader issues crucial to corporate reputation management in social media, such as the ways organisational members contribute to reputation building, have largely been left unaddressed (Labrecque et al., 2011). This research investigates how social media engagement can affect consumer perception of e-SME corporate reputation, which will be reviewed in the next section.

2.7.1 Role of Social Media in Corporate Reputation

Corporate reputation is a valuable intangible asset for e-SMEs; however, it is increasingly difficult to manage within social media (Mitchell et al., 2013). Nevertheless, organisations continue to create online communities due to the belief that they can be beneficial to a firm's reputation.

The emergence of social media has led to a change of behaviour among consumers, since they are now able to exchange information and experiences, learn about brands from various sources, and make buying decisions dependent upon this information, without companies being able to influence these processes (Schau and Gilly, 2003; Bunting and Lipski, 2000). As a consequence of embracing social media, a number of authors and researchers agree that companies should refrain from the traditional top down communication models and instead build open, qualitative, and trustworthy dialogues with potential and existing customers via social media in order to increase consumers' awareness and perception of them (Fournier and Avery, 2011; Tuten, 2008; Bunting and Lipski, 2000; Evans, 2008; Weber, 2008).

The implications of this could be that companies lose their dominance over information flows, as they are exposed to critics and negative word-of-mouth, which could affect their brand reputation at a significant speed (Bunting and Lipski, 2000; Jones et al., 2009, Neef, 2003; Ferguson, 2008; Rice, 2010; Aula, 2010). A study by Aula (2010) argued that companies lose their control over stakeholder relations and communications between various stakeholder groups, suggesting that social media increases the risk of reputational damage. Aula (2010: 47) summarised three scenarios in which SMBCs could potentially increase the reputation risk that e-SMEs are exposed to:

(1) While the content in social media is user generated, social media users can publish true and false facts concerning a company or distribute information about them that differs from that which companies are willing to share.

(2) Social media can enhance expectations (e.g. regarding the ethical behaviour and transparency of companies), which companies might not be able to fulfil.

(3) Reputation risk results from the dialogues and behaviour of companies engaged in social media, including reactions to conversations held or the manipulation of information (e.g. facts about the company in Wikipedia) and activist influencers in social media (e.g. the bribing of popular bloggers).

However, Valor (2009: 9) disagreed with Aula (2010) stating that "the internet is the best tool for improving reputation that has yet been created". Valor (2009) highlighted that mechanisms such as blogs and social networks provide new opportunities for consumers to express positive opinions about organisations and influence the reputation of an e-SME brand in a positive way. This view was also supported by Flanagan (2010), who argued that social media attracts voluntary participants who join social media services because it is beneficial to them. For e-SMEs these are desirable target groups, as it can be assumed that they are active online consumers. Rice (2010) recommended that companies must participate in social media in order to observe conversations and correct potentially false information which consumers may be exposed to. If a company acknowledges a potentially negative issue, then the tone of a discussion can change entirely and can be beneficial in repairing the reputation of a company (Scott, 2009). When participating in social media Aula (2010) recommended that companies should instil a proactive communications approach in order reduce the risk of losing their online reputation and to have the ability to rectify such situations. An example of this was demonstrated by Bughin et al. (2009), when they argued that companies implementing social media into their operations have increased awareness as well as conversions to actual purchases. Consumer satisfaction and loyalty is also increased, and valuable business benefits such as these can be developed through social media, which e-SMEs should

consider. Singh et al. (2008: 282) further argued that consumers are more likely to be influenced by marketing activities "when they have control over what they see, when they see it, whether it can be personalised to fit their needs, and when they can actively participate in the marketing process".   These studies suggest that social media can impact upon the perceptions of consumers regarding brand reputation, and that subsequently online reputation can influence consumers' purchase decisions. However, in order to contribute to the existing theory. and with opinion divided (e.g. Aula, 2010 and Singh et al.,2008) over the amount of control organisations have, further analysis is required to determine the positive and negative considerations for e-SMEs using social media to develop brand reputation. Table 2.10 highlights the existing theoretical gaps present in the literature.

Table 2.10: Social Media and Corporate Reputation

Concepts	Key Issues	Current literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in an E-SME context
Social media and corporate reputation	E-SMEs potentially lose their dominance over information flows, being exposed to critics and negative e-WOM, which could affect their brand reputation.	Rice (2010) Aula (2010) Valor (2009) Flanagan (2010) Burghin et al. (2009) Van Noort and Willemsen (2011) Dijkmans et al. (2014) Fournier and Avery (2011)	Research has highlighted that mechanisms such as blogs and social networks provide new opportunities for consumers to express positive opinions about organisations, and influence the reputation of an e-SME brand in a positive way.
	Social media activity is positively related to corporate reputation, especially among non-customers and social media engagement is predicted by general social media use, especially among customers.	Dijkmans et al. (2014)	E-SME focus on reputation for customers or non-customers.
	The relationship between social media activity and corporate reputation is more prevalent among non-customers.	Dijkmans et al. (2014) Hoyer et al. (2010) Keh and Xie (2009)	E-SMEs should actively concentrate their social media activities on non-customers. It could be argued that the customer or non-customer focus is dependent on the organisation's ethos or market forces.
	E-SME's social media community activity can develop a positive perceived corporate reputation.	Van Noort and Willemsen (2011) Bruhn et al. (2012) Schivinski and Dakabrowski (2013	The argument is based on an assumption that e-SMEs will mostly share positive and entertaining company and industry news through social media. Also that community moderators are helpful and responsive to consumer enquiries.

The increase in social media activity amongst organisations has raised concerns over the impact of social media efforts, particularly with regard to the effects on corporate reputation.

Dijkmans et al. (2014) stated that social media activity is positively related to corporate reputation, especially among non-customers, and social media engagement is predicted by general social media use, especially among customers. Social media engagement will be discussed in further detail in part two of the literature review.

A concern for e-SMEs managing their reputation through social media involves customers' posting complaints or negative comments online. It could be argued that reading customers complaints about an organisation would negatively affect consumer evaluation and the reputation of a company. However, research conducted by Van Noort and Willemsen (2011) and Dijkmans et al. (2014) indicated that witnessing a company responding to customer complaints on social media positively affects the evaluation of a company. This thesis aims to contribute to this theory by analysing the effects of different types of content that consumers are exposed to when they engage with an e-SME brand social media community, thus answering the call from Dijkmans et al. (2014) to further investigate this area.

When evaluating the reputation considerations for customers and non-customers, it is important to highlight the different antecedents and motives for following an e-SME's social media activities. Non-customers may simply have a general interest, or within the online sports industry may be looking to try a new sport. In contrast, SMBCs for customers can provide product/company updates and customer service channels (Webster, 2012).

Blackwell et al. (2006) argue that existing customers that have a personal experience of a brand are more involved with it and know more about it, resulting from information seeking behaviour before a purchase (to collect product information), and also after a purchase (to reduce cognitive dissonance). As a result, customers are in a different relationship stage compared to non-customers, which is also reflected in differences in the antecedents and consequences for brand trust for both groups (Sichtmann, 2007). Therefore, it could be argued that the differences between customers and non-customers represent different perspectives for both groups with regards to social media engagement and corporate reputation.

Dijkmans et al. (2014) concluded that the relationship between social media activity and corporate reputation is more prevalent among non-customers. This would imply that e-SMEs should actively concentrate their social media reputation activities on non-customers. This approach could be adopted for a number of reasons, such as the potential market share of non-customers, and the possibility of existing customers using other brands. For instance, understanding consumers' changing needs and preferences is crucial for SMEs, which reinforces the requirement for organisations to monitor non-customers behaviour. Hoyer et al. (2010) identified social media channels as platforms to highlight consumer opinion and to generate new product ideas with a relatively low expense, which for small organisations with

limited resources is a crucial consideration. It can also be argued that the customer or non-customer focus is dependent upon an organisation's ethos or market forces (Dijkmans et al., 2014). Indeed, Keh and Xie (2009) advocated a non-customer focus as non-customers may turn more easily into customers, since corporate reputation is an important aspect within purchase intentions. However, there are currently few research studies which have reviewed the customer and non-customer approaches by e-SMEs when determining their social media approach and content. As a consequence, this area will be further investigated and reviewed in the empirical findings within this thesis.

2.8 Summary of the Literature Review: Part One

This section has provided an overview of social media, trust, and online trust. A number of studies have been reviewed which have provided insight into trust formation at various stages of the purchasing process, as well as antecedents of online trust. However, knowledge regarding the development stages of trust for e-SMEs social media activity and understanding remain limited within the literature. Despite increasing research in this area, roadmaps to initial trust and trust formation for e-SMEs using social media remain elusive. Given the disparate nature of e-SMEs and the multitude of products and services they provide, there may not simply be one generic answer. However, this research will answer the call from Habibi et al. (2014) to provide deeper insight for e-SME brand managers, as it reviews a specific product category.

Providing a definition for branding is beyond the boundaries of this research, however this research will contribute to the theory by adopting a subjective ontology of the brand construct (De Chernatony, 2009) to the social media phenomenon. In response to the calls from various authors (Mitchell et al., 2013; Fernie et al., 1997; Moore et al., 2000; Ailawadi and Keller, 2004) this research aims to provide further understanding of how retailers become engendered with brand significance through retail brand management techniques, both from a consumer and practitioner perspective. Despite recent social media research there remains a significant gap in the study of SME brand management within a retail context, particularly e-SME brand trust and reputation strategies through social media engagement (Spence and Essoussi, 2010).

Consequently, this research provides further insight into e-SMEs' brand identity, which can develop consumer trust and allow e-SMEs to achieve the maximum return from their resources. When considering the online purchasing behaviour of consumers the literature suggests that once consumers have discovered and are satisfied with an e-SME then there is a high possibility that they are likely to re-purchase from the same e-SME. This contrasts with the standard re-qualification route suggested by traditional models of buyer behaviour (e.g. Efendioglu and Yip, 2004 and Yang et al., 2007). However, a lack of empirical or rigorous

research necessitates reliance on anecdotes rather than hard facts. This research seeks to address this knowledge gap though consumer perspective research.

Protection from fraud and privacy violation is at the forefront of retailer concerns, along with respect for the information disclosed by a consumer, such as personal financial information (Bart et al., 2005). However, this may be accurate for consumers exchanging personal financial data on an e-SMEs website, but this information is not generally shared within social media communities and requires further investigation to determine if it is a prevalent concern for consumers or organisations when interacting on social media. Trust in an e-SME brand social media community can be primarily based on its identification with others, as well as information quality, such as accuracy, reliability, and objectivity. Conflicting studies by Valor (2009), Aula (2010) and Flanagan (2010), suggest that social media can impact the perceptions of consumers towards brand reputation, and that subsequently, e-WOM and online reputation influence consumers' purchase decisions. In order to contribute to the existing theory and the divided opinion over the amount of control organisations have, further analysis is presented in Chapter Eight to assess the positive and negative considerations for e-SMEs using social media to develop brand reputation.

Part Two of the literature review analyses the engagement literature connected to social media communities.

2.9 Literature Review: Part Two

Part Two of the literature review covers three main areas: Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), consumer engagement, and social media engagement strategies.

2.9.1 Electronic Word of Mouth

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004: 39) define Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) as:

> "Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet."

E-WOM has been a popular research topic in recent years (Chan and Ngai, 2011; Cheung and Thadani, 2010; Cho and Koo, 2012; Kawakami et al., 2012; Parry et al., 2012). Previous research has indicated that e-WOM has an impact on purchase intention through two channels. E-WOM has a direct impact on purchase intention, with positive e-WOM enhancing purchase intention, and negative e-WOM reducing it (Bailey, 2004; Xia and Bechwati, 2008). E-WOM also influences purchase intention through its impact on consumers' trust (Chan and Ngai, 2011).

2.9.2 E-WOM Tie Strength

Source/recipient tie-strength has been found to impact upon the level of influence associated with a personal information source from e-WOM (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008; Trusov et al., 2009, 2010). Coulter and Roggeveen (2012) argued that within online social networks, tie-strength or source closeness may be far less relevant as a source of influence. Essentially, the links or ties between a message recipient and all members of their social network should be stronger than the links between a recipient and online community members outside of their social network.

This theory was also supported by Wen et al. (2009), who found that the difference between strong-tie and weak-tie utilitarian product endorsers using an experimentally manipulated online social networking site was not significant. Guernsey (2000) had previously argued that consumers often rely on opinions posted to online feedback systems to make a variety of decisions and concluded that for the majority of cases the sources of such opinions are not known at a personal level. The suggestion here is that within a social network 'weak' sources (such as unknown social media members) may be just as influential as 'strong' sources (such as friends/connections) in driving brand trust, and also product purchase and adoption, and this requires further research. The next section analyses how e-WOM can impact upon social media trust.

2.9.3 Social Media Trust and E-WOM Intention

Yadav et al. (2013) proposed that SMBCs allow consumers to obtain information related to products and services concerning a specific brand. The trustworthiness of this information includes various perspectives, such as accuracy, objectivity and reliability (Pletikosa et al., 2011). Jansen et al. (2009) argue that e-WOM communications in Twitter function via trusted sources of information, thereby suggesting that if consumers perceive information posted on an e-SME brand's social media community to be trustworthy then they may be more inclined to post positive e-WOM on these communities. Royo-Vela and Casamassima (2011) proposed that in SMBCs customers' interpersonal trust is deeply embedded in their identification with others and they argued that a high level of identification with others in an online brand community would also develop positive e-WOM from consumers. Cheung and Lee (2012) suggested that when consumers trust others and identify themselves as part of a community then they will be more willing to spread e-WOM. In addition, a high level of identification based trust will make customers believe that what others share in a community is of good quality, and therefore they are willing to spread e-WOM to connected friends (Li and Du, 2011).

2.9.4 Brand Trust and E-WOM Intention

Consumers' trust in a brand and their e-WOM intention towards a company's products and services has been well established in the literature. Ranaweera and Prabhu (2003) analysed the positive relationship between trust and customers' WOM intention in traditional business environments; however, in an online setting Chu and Kim (2011) found that trust is one of the most important determinants of customers' e-WOM intention to participate in social networking communities. This suggests that customers can develop trust in a company through interactions and engagement in its social media community. Chow and Shi (2014) further argued that the two factors of social media trust, information-based and identification-based, significantly influence brand trust, which in turn influences e-WOM intention. Their study found that identification-based trust in a brand social media page directly influences users' e-WOM intention. This reinforces the findings of Jansen et al. (2009) Palvia (2009) and Mukherjee and Nath (2007), who cited that e-WOM communication depends largely on the connection and trust amongst people. In addition Chow and Shi (2014) suggested that information-based trust in social media communities does not directly predict e-WOM intention. This could be due to consumers trusting one specific brand but not trusting other brands that an organisation promotes and sells, thus they may not convey e-WOM to other consumers. However, Ng (2013) argued that trust in a company's social network community can also directly influence users' behavioural intentions towards a brand. Nevertheless, both Ng (2013) and Chow and Shi (2014) advocated that trust transference theory helps in explaining e-WOM intention in social commerce websites, where trust in a close social networking community may be transferred to trust in the companies in their SMBC.

2.9.5 Trust and E-WOM Discussion

Table 2.11 highlights the existing theoretical gaps within the literature and further considerations for e-SMEs.

Table 2.11: Trust and E-WOM

Concepts	Key Issues	Current literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in an E-SME context
Trust and e-WOM	Information-based trust in social media communities does not directly influence e-WOM intention.	Chow and Shi (2014) Kim (2008)	Consumers do not associate the quality of a company's social media brand pages as exactly the same as the quality of a company.
	Trust is a context-dependent construct, which implies that consumers' own experience would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how trust operates in a certain context.	Yang et al. (2008) Akter et al. (2011)	E-SME employees responsible for their social media platforms may choose to focus on improving and reinforcing information trustworthiness, including its accuracy, validity, and objectivity.

Chow and Shi (2014) recently argued that trust in social media activity is comprised of trust in the information (information-based trust) and trust in the members on the site (identification-based trust). Utilising the trust transference theory proposed by Kim (2008), Chow and Shi (2014) concluded that both information based and identification-based trust in a company's brand page are good predictors of customers' trust in a company. They further argued that when consumers have a positive previous experience of an organisation, then they tend to depend less on information-based brand page trust to form their brand trust. Interestingly, they suggest that consumers' prior experience has no direct effect on their trust development in brand pages. This suggests that consumers do not associate the quality of a company's SMBC with the quality of a brand's service offering. By applying the information based trust concepts proposed by Kim and Han (2009) and Rahimnia and Hassanzadeh (2013), a trust-based model was recently developed by Chow and Shi (2014), which provided new insight into consumers' e-WOM behaviour in the context of brand pages in social media environments. However, there are currently very few empirical research studies (Kim and Han, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2013) that provide a holistic overview of e-SME brand consumer trust within social media communities. Previous studies have applied trust transfer theory without considering consumer attributes, which could influence the process of trust transferral (e.g. Yang et al., 2008). However, Akter et al. (2011) argued that trust is a context-dependent construct, which implies that consumers' own experiences would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how trust operates in a specific context. Therefore, by exploring the

consumer perspective of trust, this thesis will contribute to the existing theory. E-SMEs may choose to focus on improving and reinforcing information trustworthiness, including its accuracy, validity, and objectivity. For instance, regular content and engagement reviews to determine the effectiveness of social media postings and credibility could be acknowledged through customers who post high quality information. In addition, since company trust is a key mediator between social commerce trust and e-WOM intention, more product/service information could be posted in the social media community in order to improve user perceptions of the integrity, benevolence, and competence of the brand. Chow and Shi (2014) suggested that when customers have a rich prior experience with a company then they tend to depend less on social media community trust constructs to form initial brand trust. Therefore, managers of an e-SME social media brand community should potentially focus on customers' level of prior experience. For consumers with less prior experience more resources should be provided to them through the social media community.

In summary, social media communities have prominent features for driving value for both companies and users. Consequently, further understanding of consumer trust and how this impacts upon consumer e-WOM intentions can provide guidance for the content and operation of e-SME brand social media platforms. Hajli and Khani (2013) proposed that consumers' trust in the information and in the members of a social media community can result in a stronger sense of trust in a brand, and could drive customer intentions to spread e-WOM to their connections. The next section will review the concept of engagement and strategic insight for encouraging consumer interaction with a brand.

2.10 Consumer Engagement

While engagement has received significant attention across a number of academic disciplines, such as social psychology and organisational behaviour, the concept has only relatively recently began to appear within marketing literature (Brodie et al., 2014; Leeflang, 2011). In the emerging academic marketing literature, engagement has been viewed as a promising concept, expected to provide enhanced predictive and explanatory power of focal consumer behaviour outcomes for organisations, including brand loyalty (Avnet and Tory Higgins, 2006; Pham and Avnet, 2009; Schau et al., 2009). Table 2.12 is adapted from Hollebeek (2014) and provides an overview of recent engagement studies, where the number of emerging engagement based concepts highlights the nascent developmental state of engagement research in marketing to date.

Table 2.12: Consumer Engagement Research

Engagement conceptualisations in the marketing literature	Research type	Concept	Definition	Dimensionality [C – cognitive] [E – emotional] [B-behavioural]
Brodie et al. (2011)	Conceptual	Customer engagement	A motivational state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g. a brand) in focal brand relationships.	Multidimensional: 1. Cognitive 2. Emotional 3. Behavioural
Hollebeek (2011a)	Conceptual	Customer brand engagement	The level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state	Multidimensional: 1. Cognitive 2. Emotional 3. Behavioural
Hollebeek (2011b)	Empirical: Qualitative	Customer brand engagement	A customer's level of cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions.	Multidimensional: 1. Cognitive 2. Emotional 3. Behavioural
Phillips and McQuarrie (2010)	Empirical: Qualitative	Advertising engagement	'Modes of engagement' are routes to persuasion.	Multidimensional: Consumers engage with ads to: 1. Immerse (C) 2. Feel (E) 3. Identify (E) 4. Act (B)
Brodie et al. (2013)	Empirical: Qualitative	Consumer engagement	A multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural dimensions, which plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community.	Multidimensional: 1. Cognitive 2. Emotional 3. Behavioural
Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009)	Empirical: Quantitative	Online engagement	A second-order construct manifested in various types of first-order 'experience' constructs, with 'experience' being defined as 'a consumer's beliefs about how a (web)site fits into his/her life.'	Multidimensionnel: 1. Stimulation & inspiration (E) 2. Social facilitation (E) 3. Temporal (C) 4. Self-esteem & civic mindedness (E) 5. Intrinsic enjoyment (E) 6. Utilitarian (C) 7. Participation & socialising (B) 8. Community (E)

Engagement typically reflects a multi-dimensional concept which is comprised of relevant cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Hollebeek, 2012), although the specific expression of focal engagement dimensions may vary across contexts. This is exemplified in contrasting studies by Calder et al. (2009), who identified eight online engagement dimensions, and Mollen and Wilson (2010), who proposed three online engagement dimensions, which include active sustained processing, experiential value, and instrumental value.

Research into online consumer engagement is not new; however, before 2005 there were very few academic articles in the field of marketing which mentioned the term 'engagement' (Brodie et al., 2011). Despite significant interest there have only been a few systematic scholarly attempts to define the concept, and its distinctiveness from the more traditional relational concepts such as participation or involvement, the conceptual roots of customer engagement (Brodie et al., 2011), and how perception of engagement may potentially differ from the corporate and consumer perspective.

In the majority of research studies published to date engagement is defined in terms of a combination of cognitive aspects (e.g. being interested in a company's activities), behavioural aspects (e.g. participation in a company's activities) and/or emotional aspects (e.g. feeling positive about a company's activities) (Dijkmans et al., 2014). However, Brodie et al. (2011) highlighted that there is a lack of consensus on the engagement concept and that definitions vary greatly, from broad, overarching definitions such as 'the level of a customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions' (Hollebeek, 2011, p.565), to narrow definitions focusing on only one perspective, e.g. 'a behavioural manifestation toward the brand or firm that goes beyond transactions' (Verhoef et al., 2010, p.247).

Van Doorn et al. (2010, p.254) defined consumer engagement as:

> 'Behaviours that go beyond transactions, and may be classed as a customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand focus beyond purchase resulting from motivational drivers.'

Supporting the theory proposed by Van Doorn et al. (2010), Brodie et al. (2011) and Hollebeek (2011: 7) defined consumer engagement as a 'multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/ or behavioural dimensions', which plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where the other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community. These behaviours consist of a consumer's interactive experiences with a brand, and Brodie et al. (2011) suggested that they are context dependant and enhance the consumers' experienced

brand value. Van Doorn et al. (2010) suggested that customer engagement consists of five dimensions:

1. Engagement can be expressed in different ways depending on a customer's resources (e.g. time)

2. It can result in different types of outcomes for a customer (e.g. improvements in service)

3. It can vary in scope and be momentary (e.g. issuing a complaint)

4. It has a varying impact on an organisation and its peers (e.g. negative or positive)

5. Customers may engage in the behaviours for different purposes

Previously, Bowden (2009) argued that customer engagement is a sequential psychological process that customers experience in order to become loyal towards a brand, outlining the process by which brand loyalty and trust may be developed for new and existing customers. The research by Bowden (2009) suggested that the customer engagement process helps when examining the dynamic relationship consumers have with corporations and to further understand how they drive the development of customer trust. Verhoef et al. (2010) noted that the emerging concept of customer engagement is integral for an increasingly networked society. Recent customer management research has focussed on the transactional side of the customer-organisation relationship (Brodie et al., 2013); however, non-transactional forms of behaviour have also gained their share of attention recently. Studies by Verhoef et al. (2010) and Kumar et al. (2010) have highlighted the importance of e-WOM and have argued that ignoring the non-transactional behaviour manifestations may have negative effects for a firm because of the potentially incorrect valuation of the customers (Kumar et al., 2010). Kumar et al. (2010) proposed a new metric for customer valuation, which included both the value from transactional and non-transactional behaviours, and consequently, disagreed with the view of van Doorn et al. (2010).

Hollebeek (2011:785) further explored the concept of customer brand engagement and defined it as:

"The level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterised by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in direct brand interactions, where the focus lies on the interactions between a specific subject (the customer) and the focal object (brand)."

The implication here is that cognitive activity refers to the level of focus or concentration towards a brand, whereas emotional and behavioural activities represent the level of an individual's pride or inspiration and the level of energy expressed while interacting with a

brand, respectively (Hollebeek, 2011). Similar to the study by Bowden (2009), Hollebeek (2011) proposed that customer brand engagement contributes to developing customer loyalty and trust by focusing on conceptualising the positively conveyed expressions of customer brand engagement. Hollebeek (2011: 922) proposed a definition for online consumer brand engagement, stating that:

> "Engagement is defined as a cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value and is suggested to comprise the dimensions of active, sustained, cognitive processing, attainment of instrumental value (relevance and utility), and experiential value (emotional congruence)."

A further concept evident in the literature is brand engagement in self-concept, as suggested by Sprott et al. (2009). Their research developed a scale to measure self-brand connections with individuals, and their proposed construct stated that consumers vary in their tendency to possess brand related schemas, meaning that differences exist in consumers and their tendency to engage brands in their self-concepts, and therefore also in their brand-related behaviours. However, this concept has been criticised for failing to fully capture the interactive nature of customer engagement (Brodie et al., 2011).

In summary, the general consensus would appear to be that customer engagement is a sequential psychological process, comprised of transactional and non-transactional forms of behaviour that consumers experience in order to trust a brand. E-SMEs should be aware of this when determining their engagement strategy, as Raymond and Bergeron (2008: 560) stated that the 'ideal engagement profiles vary in the relation to the firm's strategic orientation.' Further analysis is therefore required to determine whether social media can improve an e-SME's customer engagement.

To continue the engagement analysis the next section will analyse the existing engagement conceptual foundations.

2.11 Engagement Conceptual Foundations

A number of perspectives were identified in the academic literature when assessing the conceptual foundations of customer engagement. Brodie et al. (2011) argued that the theoretical roots of customer engagement can be examined by drawing on service-dominant (S-D) logic and relationship marketing theory. S-D logic is a framework that conceptualises business exchange theory by considering service as the main purpose of organisations and attempts to explain how different network actors, such as customers and other stakeholders,

can co-create value while interacting with each other (Karpen et al., 2012). The reasoning behind this theory argues that co-creation of superior value replaces the more traditional notion of value provision, suggesting that creating superior value in cooperation with a customer becomes a source of competitive advantage for e-SMEs. Karpen et al. (2012) argued that the nature of value is highly contextual and is subject to experiences, which reinforced the analysis by Vargo and Lusch (2008) which determined that value is achieved using a combination of resources, and therefore cannot be created unilaterally, making the customer a co-creator of value. An alternative perspective for looking at the conceptual foundations of customer engagement focuses on the broadened relationship marketing domain (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek, 2011), which is represented in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: **The Consumer Engagement Process in a Virtual Brand Community**
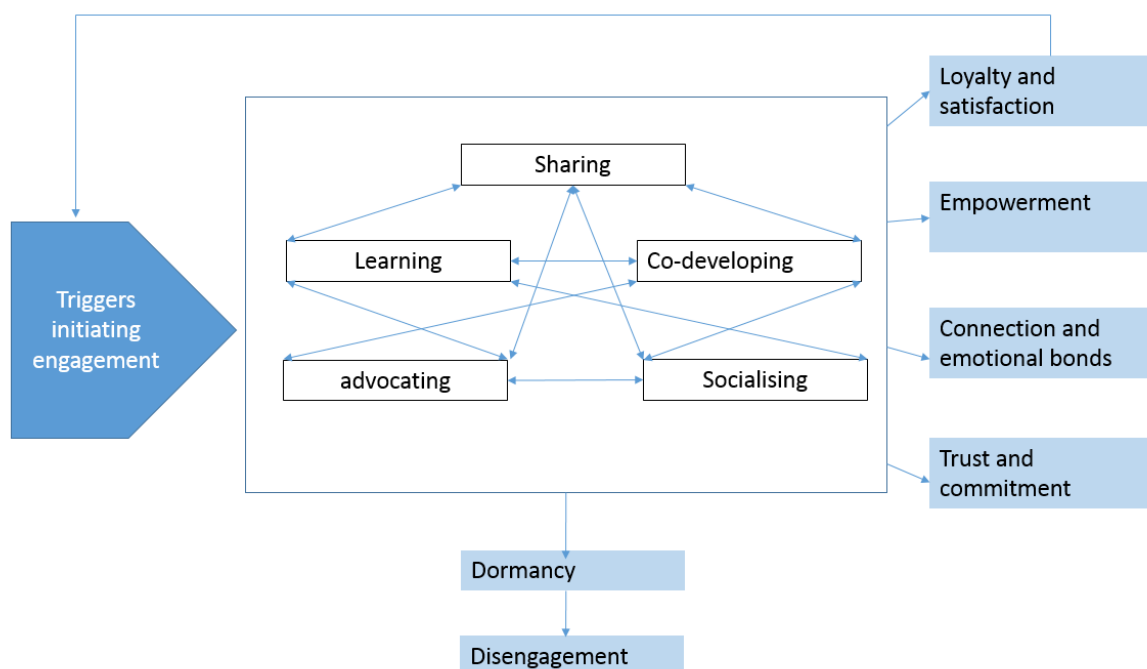
Source: Brodie et al. (2011 : 6)

While S-D logic and relationship marketing perspectives highlight customer behaviour as being influenced by interactive and co-creative experiences within complex relational networks, Hollebeek (2011) also draws on social exchange theory to explain the rationale behind consumers' motivation in contributing to value creation. Social exchange theory posits that one party will perform a favour for another party with the motivation of an expected equivalent future return. Verhoef et al. (2010) stated that customer engagement is part of a behavioural manifestation towards a focal object, such as a brand or an organisation, other than a purchase, resulting from motivational drivers. Hollebeek (2011) cited evidence to support the belief that a customer experiencing a benefit from a brand relationship is expected

to respond with positive thoughts, feelings and behaviours towards that brand. Following on from the discussed engagement conceptual foundations, the next section reviews engagement in the online social media context.

2.12 Engagement in the Online Social Media Context

The recent inception and rise of new social media channels has enabled consumers to increasingly participate in new forms of corporate/consumer interactions. Discussion forums, chat rooms, emails, bulletin boards, blogs and social networks are just some of the mechanisms available to create interactive customer experiences, which may eventually foster the development of customer engagement with a specific brand (Brodie et al., 2011).

2.12.1 Value Co-Creation through Social Media Engagement

The concept of value co-creation was developed by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), who stressed that the value of a service or a product is not created solely by an organisation but co-created by an organisation and consumer of the product or service. Since this seminal piece of research academics have started to develop models to investigate how value is co-created by a brand and consumer. Vargo et al. (2008) and Payne et al. (2008) proposed models that demonstrated value co-creation in a service system, and for managing value co-creation, respectively, while Payne et al. (2008) stated that consumers' emotional engagement with a brand engages consumers to value co-creation. Most studies have been focused on developing a research framework and measurement instruments for assessing value co-creation (Dong et al., 2008; Ng et al., 2010).

2.12.2 Engagement with E-SME Social Media

The relational consequences of consumer engagement can potentially include commitment, trust, consumers' emotional brand attachment, and loyalty (Brodie et al., 2013). The majority of social media research has been centred on the effects of online consumer product and service reviews (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009; Utz et al., 2012). However, recent studies by Van Noort and Willemsen (2011), Bruhn et al. (2012), and Schivinski and Dakabrowski (2013), have researched the impact of social media communications on consumer brand perception. From the earlier research there is a strong argument that an e-SME's social media community activity can foster consumer engagement, which is based on the assumption that e-SMEs will mostly share positive and entertaining company and industry news through social media. In addition, community moderators (e-SME employees) will be helpful and responsive to consumer enquiries.

2.12.3 The Engagement Cycle

When an e-SME understands the needs of its customers then it is in a position to strategise their approach through a process called the engagement cycle, which Sashi (2012, p.260), which defined as a way off 'satisfying customers by providing superior value than competitors to build trust and commitment in long term relationships.' Social media platforms are able to facilitate this engagement process in an interactive manner and the engagement cycle can thus be defined in seven stages: connection, interaction, satisfaction, retention, commitment, advocacy and engagement (Sashi, 2012, p. 261).

1. *Connection* – substituting, although not completely replacing, traditional direct, physical methods are new online methods utilising social media. This can be more cost effective and quicker than traditional methods and more global in the potential reach.

2. *Interaction* – many organisations have set up and enabled networking and interaction, and in particular have found that they receive a 'push' of information from consumers, as well as a 'pull' from market research activities.

3. *Satisfaction* – following on from a successful interaction, it is anticipated that satisfaction results from this interaction. This is comprised of distinct phases, from anticipation of the interaction, the success of it, and the immediate service afterwards.

4. *Retention* – the key consideration for e-SMEs is will satisfaction lead to the retention of a customer? It is likely to but there have been studies that have shown that despite a positive emotion resulting from the interaction this has not led to loyalty (Ribbink et al., 2004). The emotional perspective here can be unclear.

5. *Commitment* – this can be calculative or affective, or convenient or emotional, with each liable to change depending on circumstances. However, a combination of both is likely to produce a stronger commitment and social media may be able to deliver this.

6. *Advocacy* – closely related to endorsement from consumers, this is likely to produce either WOM advocacy or in the social media age a 'like' on Facebook or 'retweet' on Twitter. It can also encompass advocacy on behalf of consumers from the seller.

7. *Engagement* – when consumer delight is shared and is combined with loyal purchasing behaviour, then the cycle has turned 360 degrees and a customer can be said to be engaged.

The engagement cycle is conceptualised in Figure 2.3

Figure 2.3: The Customer Engagement Cycle
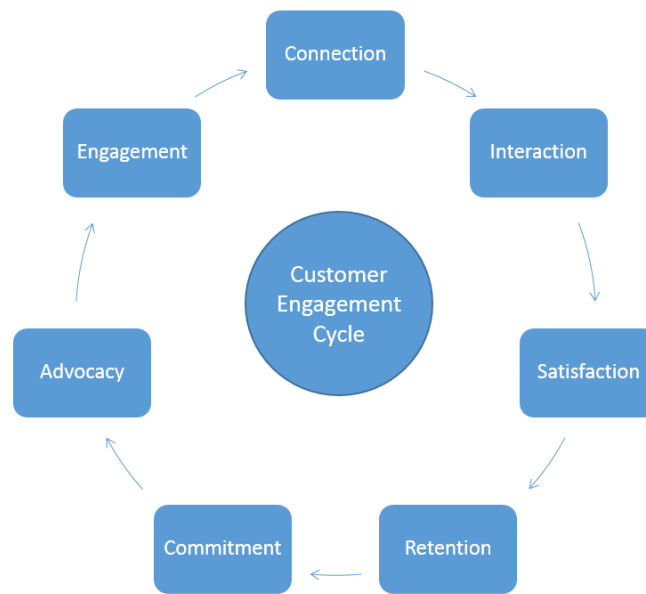
Source: Sashi (2012: 261)

The engagement cycle acknowledges the opportunities provided by social media to enhance the relationship between non-customers and customers. However, it does not acknowledge the level of engagement that consumers may be at nor the level of trust connected to the engagement stages. Dijkmans et al. (2014) highlighted the notion of customers and non-customers, noting that the cycle fails to appreciate the initial and continuous stages of trust that are developed from the engagement process. Conceptualisation of such a model is still lacking within the literature.

2.13 E-SME Brand Engagement in the Social Media Context

Marketing is a key focus for activity in social media use, and of particular value to SMEs who are often able to harness applications more effectively than larger organisations (Economist, 2010). Social media marketing requires SMEs to plan aspects of their customer relationship management (CRM) that are rarely formally addressed. CRM in SMEs tends to be driven by the experience of a business owner or manager (Lindman, 2004). Dyerson et al. (2009) argued that SMEs use of IT was focussed on the more superficial levels of communication, disregarding potential opportunities for more strategic uses, such as facilitating engagement with customers, the collection of customer information, and building dynamic interactive websites. These findings have considerable implications in the highly interactive environment of social media, where interactivity leads to customer expectations of immediate and consistent results (Geho et al., 2010). This could potentially be problematic for e-SMEs that

are 'failing to gain a deeper insight into the 'true' nature of their customers' (Parrott et al., 2010, p.198), and who will therefore not be able to take advantage of effective and relevant communications in the current era of social networks.

Another key consideration for e-SMEs is the ability of customers to freely exchange information about products and service, whereas in traditional marketing communications the information exchange is carefully controlled by an organisation (Mangold and Faulds 2009; Palka et al., 2009). Interactivity also requires consideration of when and how often a business joins the conversation (Kietzmann et al., 2011), and how much they support customers talking to other customers (Geho et al., 2010), as well as 'defining their own perspectives on companies and brand' (Bernoff and Li, 2008, p76). This again provides important resource considerations for e-SMEs (Mitchell et al., 2013). In order to increase effective customer engagement, organisations often undertake promotional activities with consumers to develop relationships (Angel and Sexsmith, 2011). For example, the 'like' facility on Facebook instantly shares promotional activity amongst consumers (Lacho and Marinello, 2010). Increased social media use can also improve search engine aggregation results when directing consumers to official company websites. Lacho and Marinello (2010) inferred that although promotional activities have the potential to introduce products and services to a massive audience, they are seen to be particularly effective for e-SMEs. Their main argument is that an e-SME is able to expose their products and services to an extremely large market, yet still have a relationship component with their users. Organisation blogs also have the potential to provide a level of interactivity that can be utilised for branding purposes through enhancing customers' positive perceptions and sense of connectedness, thereby formulating interpersonal brand relationships (Chua et al., 2009). The interactivity of blogs can encourage customers to articulate knowledge and exchange views and expertise in their niche area, while also contributing to the reputation and trust of a small business (Chua et al., 2009).

Culnan et al. (2010) identified community building, whether for a niche or broader market, as a key implementation strategy for social media adoption by larger organisations and termed these communities 'virtual community environments'. Culnan et al. (2010) advised that for organisations there is are requirements to maintain fresh content, assign responsibility for such content, be prepared to concede a degree of freedom to members of the community while retaining accountability, and avoid over-emphasis on the commercial aspect of the business to encourage regular customer engagement. Although this strategy is applicable to larger organisations, further analysis is required to determine if it is suitable, or even possible due to resource considerations, for e-SMEs to adopt this method.

In summary, Weiner (2008) has reported that small firms are increasingly keen to market themselves via social media; however, there are a number of issues to consider before incorporating social media into an organisation's strategy. These include CRM, managing consumer expectations, and utilising responses in order to further understand consumer perspectives of a brand. Developing an online social media community could potentially assist e-SMEs with these tasks, but new empirical work is required to develop existing theories for online brand reputation and social media.

In this research the focus of engagement refers to a consumer interacting with an e-SMEs social media community in order to aid with the formation of initial trust, as well as familiarity with a company's social media activities (i.e. cognition) and the online following of these activities (i.e. behaviour) leading to continual trust. This approach was taken as the concept can be regarded as the principal starting point (i.e. as a precondition one first needs to be familiar with a company's online activities, and start to follow them) from which subsequent expressions of online engagement behaviour towards an e-SME brand may develop (e.g. experiencing or expressing interest/emotions, interacting, contributing, participating, etc.). This approach was also utilised in the study by Dijkmans et al. (2014). Table 2.13 highlights the current theoretical gaps concerning e-SME consumer engagement.

Table 2.13: Consumer Engagement Concepts

Concepts	Key Issues	Current Literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in an E-SME context
Consumer engagement	Customer engagement is a sequential psychological process, comprising of transactional and non-transactional forms of behaviour that consumers experience in order to trust a brand	Raymond and Bergeron (2008, p.560)	Ideal engagement profiles vary in relation to a firm's strategic orientation. Further analysis is required to determine whether social media can improve e-SME customer engagement.
	The behavioural measures of trust and engagement currently available for online social media platforms, such as the number of fans, followers, repeated visits or interactions with a brand page provide little information about the returns to be expected and how companies can utilise these metrics to encourage purchases.	Brodie et al. (2011)	E-SME to determine measures.
Consumer engagement is dependent upon new or existing customers	The engagement cycle can be defined in seven stages as: connection, interaction, satisfaction, retention, commitment, advocacy and engagement.	Sashi (2012)	Dependent on the target audience.

2.13.1 Customer Engagement: Acquisition and Retention

Previous research states that there are two basic customer engagement orientations or processes: customer acquisition and customer retention (Lewis, 2006; Reinartz et al., 2004). A customer acquisition orientation refers to a firm's focus on gaining information about potential customers, measuring their potential value, and allocating resources to acquire those with greatest long-term value (Todd et al., 2010). Alternatively, a customer retention orientation focusses on obtaining information about, differentiating between, and allocating resources to manage relationships with existing customers on the basis of their long-term value (Todd et al., 2010). However, customer acquisition and retention orientations are not mutually exclusive, as a business can decide to focus on both although to different degrees (Reinartz et al., 2004).

2.13.2 Social Media Engagement

Whilst previous research has been unable to determine a single definition of consumer engagement (e.g. Bijmolt et al., 2010; Brodie et al., 2011; Verhoef et al., 2010), most studies agree that there are different levels of consumer engagement, which fall on a continuum ranging from very low to intensely high levels (Malthouse et al., 2013). This has led to conflicting opinions regarding the focus and scope of engagement, with some scholars highlighting the psychological state of the consumer (e.g. Algesheimer et al., 2005; Malthouse and Calder, 2011), whereas other research has centred on the non-purchase activities of consumers, such as posting reviews (e.g. Brodie et al., 2011; Wirtz et al., 2013). Nevertheless, when reviewing social media consumer engagement it is import to distinguish this from its potential impact. For instance, simply following an e-SME brand on Twitter is a low form of consumer engagement, as it requires little processing of the brand meaning (Malthouse et al., 2013); however, a consumer's 'follow' might be viewed by a large circle of followers and even cause potential followers to make a purchase decision. To analyse this issue further, Malthouse et al. (2013) differentiated between two levels of engagement: lower engagement, which describes situations in which consumers passively consume content or use very basic forms of feedback (e.g. following on Twitter), and higher engagement, where consumers actively incorporate the brand into their lives or participate in various forms of value co-creation, such as blogging or sharing brand posts. This suggests that an e-SME would need to determine its social media strategy dependent upon the level of engagement that consumers are likely to display and the objectives that an e-SME would like to achieve.

2.13.3 Lower Customer Engagement: Acquisition and Retention

Organisations of any size integrate social media with consumer acquisition by running promotions on Facebook or sales offers on Twitter. Consumers with lower levels of

engagement might simply consume such information or they may interact with it by 'liking' it or 'sharing' it (Malthouse et al., 2013). These actions can essentially assist e-SMEs by creating awareness and influencing consumers, thereby contributing to the acquisition of non-customers. However, activities such as sales offers and competitions do not take full advantage of the interactive characteristics of social media, and arguably do not actively engage consumers, which is why these are described as lower consumer engagement activities. Although these activities depend on some form of consumer engagement, such as 'liking' a Facebook brand page, they are still limited in terms of the extent to which they encourage consumers to participate in a brand's retention initiatives (Malthouse et al., 2013). Therefore, it could be suggested that they only signify the first phase of a consumer engaging with a brand.

By adopting a 'retention' focus into social media activity brands can incorporate social media into their efforts to retain existing customers and to enhance relationships with them. According to De Vries et al. (2012) and Naylor et al. (2012), Facebook brand communities have been shown to be effective in influencing brand evaluation among customers who 'like' them. The ability to retain customers is especially important for industries in which organisations cannot easily identify their existing end-customer base, such as fast-moving consumer goods or were brands depend on indirect distribution (Malthouse et al., 2013), and could be considered vital for e-SMEs.

2.13.4 Increased Consumer Engagement

Aula (2010) suggested that if customers are more engaged with a brand through social media channels then a company no longer has full control over the messages to which its consumers are exposed. For instance, non-customers with low levels of engagement may simply consume or share e-SME brand approved promotions, whereas a highly engaged customer may choose to distribute an independent blog of a company's product or reveal promotional offers that an e-SME brand might prefer not to expose to a wider consumer audience. One implication of this phenomenon is that among highly engaged populations, acquisition activities cannot be isolated from retention activities (Malthouse et al., 2013). For example, if an e-SME brand chooses to send a specific type of acquisition promotion to prospective customers who meet specific criteria, it cannot rule out the possibility that these individuals will share that information with current clients who do not meet the criteria. Existing customers may demand to receive the same benefits and threaten to leave an e-SME if it does not comply. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) even suggested that under certain conditions a brand may even encourage this type of behaviour in the hope that its message becomes 'viral'. Hinz et al. (2011) argued that a standard strategy for achieving this is to carefully select the customers who receive the message in the first place, i.e. to target customers with a

particularly high number of social contacts (Lyengar et al., 2011; Libai et al., 2013) or customers who are financially attractive (Haenlein and Libai, 2013).

However, the inability to separate retention from acquisition represents one of the largest differences between traditional marketing and social media marketing (Malthouse et al., 2013). Within social media marketing such a separation is potentially very difficult for e-SMEs, since marketing activities are likely to reach non customers and customers of a brand at the same time. This development may potentially cause e-SMEs to reconsider the social media techniques that they use for the management of acquisition and retention activities, such as providing non-customers with more attractive offers than are available for customers. Coordinating across acquisition and retention strategies, as well as multiple social media communities, represents a major challenge for e-SMEs in the short term but could potentially improve customer satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability (Malthouse et al., 2013). Further investigation is required to determine which approach or combination of approaches is suitable for e-SMEs.

2.14 Consumer Motivation to Join Social Media Brand Communities

According to Zaglia (2013) and Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008), the main reason for consumers to join a brand community is the positive values which are associated with membership. Examples of such values include social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985) and social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988). Social identity theory states that consumers join a brand community to satisfy a need for identification with symbols and groups. This concept was investigated by Muniz and Schau (2007), who argued that consumers' need for identification is manifested through participation in brand communities. Zaglia (2013) supported this, stating that consumers also share their passion and receive pleasure from participating in brand communities. Social capital theory posits that consumers pursue some economic value through networking with their fellow members within a brand community (McAlexander et al., 2002; Zaglia, 2013), and noted that one of the main motivations of consumers is to obtain the necessary information or skills to better use a product from their favourite brand, hence to gain economic value or value for money from a purchase.

2.15 Brand Motivation to Host Social Media Communities

Brands host social media communities for consumers for a number of reasons. For instance, consumers can act as a brand's advocates if an organisation comes under attack (Habibi et al., 2014), as well as promoting the brand to new consumers (Schau et al., 2009). Fuller et al. (2008) also proposed that social media brand community members can be an excellent source for innovation and product improvement, as they are deeply attached to the community and the future prospects of a brand matters to them.

A brand community can also increase the loyalty of their members through different mechanisms, such as oppositional loyalty and integration within the community (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Algesheimer et al. (2005) researched the social effects of brand communities on variables such as purchase intentions, brand loyalty, and community identification. Their research found that brand relationship quality has a positive impact on brand loyalty and purchase intentions, and that brand community identification has a positive effect on brand loyalty through the mediation of community engagement, which is an essential but understudied variable within the brand community literature (Habibi et al., 2012). Casalo et al. (2007) and Tsai et al. (2012) have investigated the effects of participation in brand communities on brand trust and loyalty, and determined that in the context of online brand communities, participation enhances brand trust and brand loyalty.

Whilst most researchers have focussed on the positive aspects, brand communities can also have some negative effects. Algesheimer et al. (2005) suggested that brand communities can exert normative pressure on members (e.g. requesting retweets on Twitter), which results in decreased intention to recommend a community, decreased community participation, and reduced loyalty. Hickman and Ward (2007) also determined that identification with a brand community can lead members to speak negatively about outsiders. This thesis focuses on brand trust, reputation, and the role of community engagement, which are understudied concepts within the literature but are highly pertinent to the social media context. The analysis also answers the call from Habibi et al. (2014) to extend research into brand communities on social media platforms.

Table 2.14 details the knowledge gaps and how these gaps are applicable to e-SMEs within the context of this research.

Table 2.14: Social Media Community Concepts

Concepts	Key Issues	Current Literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in an E-SME context
Community	Community content strategy	Culnan et al. (2010)	Requirement to maintain fresh content, assign responsibility for such content
	Security and privacy	Casalo et al. (2008)	e-SME security considerations that impact a consumers' opinions toward social networking
	Social media posts reflecting characteristics of an e-SME brand.	Muniz and Jensen Schau (2007)	e-SME social media community centred on characteristics associated with a brand, then posts which reflect these characteristics are more likely to resonate with consumers and consequently improve brand reputation
	Reasons for consumers to join a brand community are the positive values which are associated with membership.	Zaglia (2013) Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008)	Consumer motivations to engage with e-SMEs through social media.
	Brand motivation to host social media communities	Habibi et al. (2014) Schau et al. (2009) Füller, Matzler & Hoppe (2008)	Social media brand community members can be an excellent source for innovation and product improvement, as they are deeply attached to the community and the future prospects of a brand matters to them.
	Community members vary according to their engagement with a brand community and have varying attitudes towards a brand according to their motivations to become a member on social media.	Hanna et al. (2011) Lapointe (2012) Chen et al. (2009) Habibi et al. (2014)	Consumer engagement varies on different social media platforms, as members may spend minutes or hours reviewing e-SME content.

Consumers are able to join a brand community by simply pressing a 'follow' or 'like' button. This aspect alone differentiates SMBC from traditional ones, where only brand employees and loyal trusting customers are members. For e-SME brands utilising social media as part of their communications, the focus is to build community members and increase consumer engagement with fellow members and the organisation (Hollebeek, 2011; Lipsman et al., 2012). Therefore, it could be argued that the benefit of engaging consumers in brand communities lies in the stronger relationships they form with a brand, product, other consumers, and a company (Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012).

In order to develop trust amongst non-customers and customers, Chen et al. (2009) concluded that emotional and informational interactions, which are natural consequences of consumer participation in online interactions, positively influence trust. This theory was developed by Habibi et al. (2014), who found that brand community relationships, such as customer-brand, customer-product, and customer-company, positively influence brand trust. However, their study revealed that the consumer-consumer relationship negatively influences brand trust. This could potentially be explained by research by Fournier and Avery (2011) and Powers et al. (2012), as the consumer-consumer relationship is the point that brands have no control over within social media contexts, since consumer-consumer relationships can eventually contain some negative talk about a brand, this can negate the effect of such relationships on trust (Fournier and Avery, 2011).

Previous studies have recommended that in order to avoid the negative trust effects of such empowerment, brands should encourage and facilitate conversations and not interrupt them (Fournier and Avery, 2011), although negative posts or comments on social media have five times the effect of positive ones (Corstjens and Umblijs, 2012; Powers et al., 2012). However, as Habibi et al. (2014) stated, researchers should further investigate this issue before making generalisations and identifying how brands can minimise such negative effects should be the subject of future studies. When it comes to evaluating engagement community success via social media, there is a large gap between what the goals of the community are and what is actually being measured by an organisation (Moran and Gossieaux, 2001). For instance, a number of researchers (e.g. Brodie et al., 2011) have argued that the main goal for e-SMEs engaging in social media communities should be increased loyalty, market insights, and consumer trust. However, some organisations may place greater significance on the number of followers or posts in order to expand their target audience. As a result, further insight is required into what e-SMEs determine as business value when creating these consumer communities.

In summary, as Brown et al. (2007) highlighted, social media communities are fitting environments for e-SME brands to share content, and for non-customers and customers to form strong relationships with brand elements, which in turn add to their trust in a brand. The next section reviews e-SME value when engaging in social media activity.

2.16 Business Value from Social Media

Recent research shows that organisational marketing budgets for social media are constantly growing, suggesting that brands are increasingly interested in establishing and even leveraging their voices for a greater marketing impact (Lipsman et al., 2012). Previous studies researching online communities have attempted to explain why firms may be interested in

social platforms (Laroche et al., 2012; Hofman and Fodor, 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). Kozinets (2002) proposed two key reasons for interest in online brand communities: WOM and market research. The importance of e-WOM has been covered but consumer interactions on social media can also open up new possibilities for marketers to get close to consumers and collect information about their preferences, desires, and needs (Kozinets, 2002). Further studies on the anticipated benefits connected to social media activity are highlighted in Table 2.15.

Table 2.15: Social Media Benefits

Social Media Research	Benefits
Bartlett, 2010 Hackworth and Kunz, 2010 Monseau, 2009 Selina and Milz, 2009	• Brands can effectively develop and enhance relationships with customers. • Social media not only intensifies the existing firm-to-customer and customer-to-firm relationships, but also creates new variations on conventional options, increasing the ability of firms to interact in firm-customer dialogue, thereby strengthening their communications.
Gallaugher and Ransbotham (2010)	• Ease of contact, volume, speed, and nature of these interactions.
Dong-Hun (2010) Newman (2003)	• Firms can reach out to people that otherwise could not be accessed.
Fanion (2011)	• Social media can establish and raise brand awareness.
O'Flynn (2012)	• Social media tools allow firms to access millions of people. • A brand's name presence all over networks can help inform people about it and become familiar with a firm, thereby creating brand awareness.

Due to the continuous evolution of social media platforms and the applications that they can provide, organisations are able to constantly test various methods of using social media and to observe their use by competitors. Nevertheless, e-SMEs must also consider the associated risks concerning social media usage. Dekay (2012) highlighted the potential for negative or inaccurate social media postings, as well as no agreed organisational strategy with which to handle them. Ineffective handling of such situations could generate negative e-WOM among social media users. Consequently, a major challenge for e-SMEs is to develop appropriate response strategies to negative WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010); otherwise, social media marketing may have a negative impact on a firm's brand image and sales (Corstjens and

Umblijs, 2012). The use of IT to create business value has been much debated, particularly with regards to how such value should or could be assessed (Stockdale et al., 2012; Melville et al., 2004). Poon and Swatman (1999) stated that determining how business value can be gained from IT remains crucial for smaller businesses, as they will only invest where they can see a return. This was supported by Prananto et al. (2003), who argued that SMEs need to see short term tangible value emerging from ventures into IT. Tangible benefits may be subjective to the interpretation of an e-SME brand; however, where the perception of derived value is lacking, manager-owners are quick to withdraw support and close down initiatives (Stockdale et al., 2012).

For social media Blanchard (2011) argued that the greatest potential for deriving business value is seen to be in the domain of customer relationships. However, Blanchard (2011) advocated that value can only be generated by recognising that social media is a tool that must be incorporated into existing strategies and used to support existing business objectives. This recommendation can be applied to organisations of all sizes, as Dunn (2010) highlighted the benefits of utilising social media communities as complementary communication channels with the aim of contributing to business value. However, research by Angel and Sexsmith (2011) warned that many organisations do not realise the business value from the use of social media, as they failed to define the value proposition. Potential failings were also highlighted by Blanchard (2011), such as failing to identify desired goals and therefore underperforming in their use of the applications. For social media communities the value proposition lies predominantly in the ability of businesses to engage with their customers (Stockdale et al., 2012; Economist, 2010).

2.17 Measuring and Achieving Social Media Business Value

Measuring business value from IT applications has long been a problematic area for organisations (Melville et al., 2004) and remains a difficult challenge in the domain of social media (Stockdale et al., 2012). For e-SMEs a lack of quantitative measures, such as return on the investment of time and money, is problematic when determining the continued use of social media, evidence of value in both the short and longer term is required (Prananto et al., 2003; Geho et al., 2010). Culnan et al. (2010) cited financial figures, customer retention and employee satisfaction as some of the measures that may be used as suitable analytics to reflect e-SME social media community success. However, to fully capture the extent of the value which can be derived from social media use, a number of measures have recently been introduced by social media firms, such as Facebook insights.

Customer engagement and improving traffic flow to firms' websites are the most frequently cited activities from which business value is deemed to be gained (Stockdale et al., 2012). In

order to achieve this, e-SMEs may consider a continuous review of their social media content strategy in order to remain current and interesting. This is an area where the flexibility and agility of e-SMEs (Wickert and Herschel, 2001) may become a great asset in responding to consumer needs, particularly if the responsibility for social media posts is allocated to specific individuals in order to reduce the time taken to authorise content. Derham et al. (2011) recommended the use of different applications for different purposes; however, this requires an understanding of the potential uses of the many social media tools available, as well as keeping up to date with new technological developments. Sufficient staff resources and channel specific content is also a consideration for e-SMEs. Table 2.16 highlights the key literature gaps and concepts applicable to e-SMEs.

Table 2.16: Value Co-creation Concepts

Concepts	Key Issues	Current Literature	Knowledge gaps yet to be examined in an e-SME context
Value co-creation	Consumers' emotional engagement with a brand engages consumers to value co-creation.	Payne et al. (2008) Dong et al. (2008) Ng et al. (2010)	Strategic considerations regarding different types of value creation content.
Value co-creation	Industry context	Stockdale et al. (2012)	Different platform capabilities are potentially more suitable for certain brands.

An analysis of the literature demonstrates that business value can be gained from the adoption of social media by e-SMEs. Social media engagement provides e-SME value in the form of enhanced business website traffic, through greater recognition of the traits of an e-SME's customer base and the provision of information and knowledge to enhance reputation and create trust, thereby gaining a competitive advantage (Stockdale et al., 2012). To achieve these benefits requires significant planning by e-SMEs and the literature highlights the requirement for planning whilst remaining flexible in order to accommodate consumer requirements and market trends. However, there is a need to further examine developments in this environment from a more theoretical perspective and to gain deeper insights into the rapidly developing field of brand social media community research (Kim et al., 2010). This research also seeks to answer the call from Stockdale et al. (2012) to empirically analyse issues such as industry context and e-SMEs social media strategies for consumers.

2.18 Summary of the Literature Review Part Two

This section of the literature review provides strong evidence that e-SMEs can acquire and retain customers using social media engagement to develop online brand trust and reputation. Existing research highlights both benefits and drawbacks of using social media, although further research is required to determine how applicable or suitable these strategic considerations are for e-SMEs. Furthermore, the current literature has mostly focused on consumer perceptions of online trust and has not considered the corporate perspective, as well as social media practioners' perspective of trust development (Nelson-Field and Taylor, 2012; Creamer, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011). The issue this research addresses is concerned with the knowledge gaps and strategic considerations within the field of online brand engagement, trust formation, and reputation of e-SMEs.

2.19 Literature Review: Part Three

The current literature reviewed in the previous two sections has covered the constructs which encourage consumer engagement through social media, and the factors that e-SMEs can potentially utilise to develop trust and build brand reputation amongst new and existing customers. The literature review concluded that in order to continue the empirical investigation further, potential engagement strategies and barriers must be clearly analysed in order to contribute to the existing theory

2.19.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework proposed in this section provides a context to determine how different social media engagement factors can influence new and existing e-SME customers. The first section of the framework encompasses the 'first order constructs' (Edwards, 2003), and these are highlighted in Figure 2.4. At this stage of the investigation these areas are all strategic considerations for an e-SME.

Figure 2.4: E-SME First Order Constructs
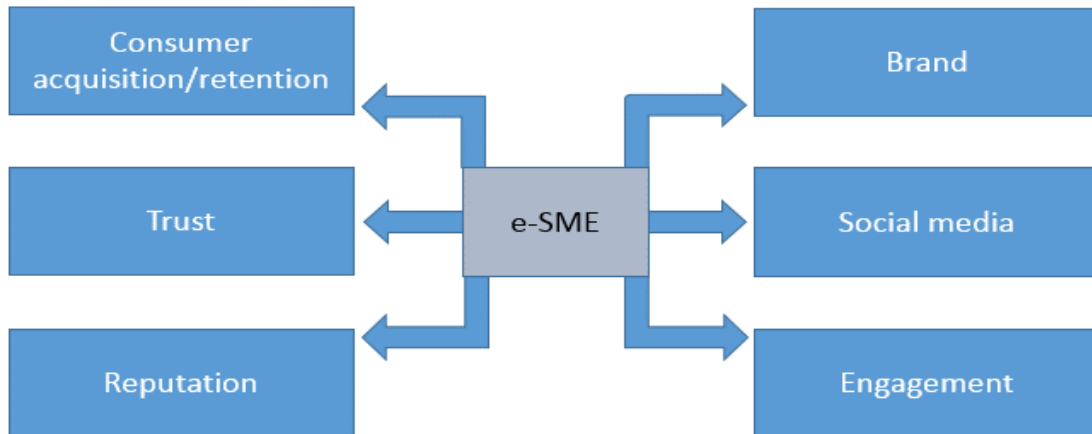
Source: Inductively Developed From the Literature

To be able to add to the theory and to help understand these areas further, a second phase of the theoretical framework has been constructed. This involves grouping the engagement factors reviewed in the literature, and offsetting them against considerations faced by e-SMEs and the research objectives 1-5, which are highlighted in Table 2.17. The combination of research objectives 1-5 will enable research objective 6 to be achieved.

Table 2.17: E-SME Considerations

Consideration (1): Consumer trust	Consideration (2): New and existing customers	Consideration (3): Branding	Consideration (4): Trust and e-WOM
Objective 1	**Objective 2**	**Objective 3**	**Objective 4**
Social media content to create online brand trust for new and existing customers. Separation of trust into benevolence and competence.	The relationship between social media engagement and corporate reputation for new or existing customers.	Corporate e-SME brand is influenced by the market or owner characteristics. Corporate e-SME brand should be presented to stakeholders through formal and informal branding activities.	Both information based and identification based trust in a company's brand page are good predictors of customers' trust in a company. Consumer motivation to share content.
Consideration (5) Social media engagement strategy	Consideration (6) Online purchase behaviour	Consideration (7) Social media Community	Consideration (8) Social media and corporate reputation
Objective 3	**Objective 4**	**Objective 4**	**Objective 5**
e-SME consideration of how to react when their brand is talked about by consumers Resources to run many different accounts, create different content for each platform and to join conversations. Attempt to discover ground-breaking methods as a way to instigate conversations with consumers, instead of a one-way communication network. Consumers' emotional engagement with a brand engages consumers to co-create value.	Buying process commences with problem recognition, followed by an information search and evaluation stage, depending on the level of purchase involvement Retailers need to be constantly aware of consumer attitudes and motives towards the products or services they offer.	Brand community relationships, such as customer-brand, customer-product, and customer-company, positively influence brand trust. The main reason for consumers to join a brand community are the positive value of information and knowledge in the community, and also social identification	Companies lose their dominance over information flows, become exposed to critics and negative WOM, which could affect their brand reputation at a fast speed. The relationship between social media activity and corporate reputation is more prevalent among non-customers.

Source: Inductively Developed From the Literature

This categorisation helps to further conceptualise the key trust concepts as discussed in the literature review. The ability to overcome the engagement barriers could be determined by the engagement capability displayed by an e-SME. To fully understand the conceptual social media engagement factors and trust/reputation constructs, it is essential to establish the relationship between them in the context of an e-SME and the social media environment. In

order to investigate these processes and relationships, as well as to address the theoretical gaps, the corporate and consumer perspectives were added to the framework. These areas fall into a substructure of components, defined for the purposes of this study as 'second order constructs' (Edwards, 2003), which are highlighted in Table 2.18.

Table 2.18: Second Order Constructs

Corporate (e-SME)	Consumer
- Engagement strategy - Objectives of the business - Business value of using social media	- Consumer motivation - Experience e.g. knowledge, enjoyment - Loyalty - Consumer trust, e.g. security, benevolence, knowledge, access to social media platforms

This grouping continues the theory from Figure 2.4 and leads to further development of the theoretical framework. It is important to realise that the framework is dynamic, thus the relative weightings of social media engagement are subject to the interconnectivity of the first order considerations impacting upon the e-SME communications model. Connecting the first and second order constructs will potentially affect the levels of consumer trust, either positively or negatively. As referenced in the literature review, theorists and industrial reports highlight the link between the effects of engagement and business performance, i.e. customer acquisition and retention remains tenuous and fails to explain the benefits in real terms (Nelson-Field and Taylor, 2012). In addition, marketers have been actively exploring and developing the field; however, further insight is required to understand how online brand trust is developed using social media networks. These issues provide the framework with a neutral standpoint, i.e. without the pre-supposition that social media engagement is positive for e-SMEs, as some e-SMEs may not recognise the benefit of engagement given the resources required and associated risks. The resource costs and risks can be defined as third order constructs (Edwards, 2003), which are directly informed by the second order constructs but are themselves the determinants of an e-SME business value proposition. The final aspect of the framework sets the research parameters for the selected e-SMEs concerning their level of social media activity and are highlighted in Table 2.19.

Table 2.19: E-SME Social Media Activity

E-SME Social Media Activity
Fully engaged - Variety of social media platforms, web presence, regular engagement with consumers, and regular use of social media for commercial promotion.
Partially formally engaged - Some presence on social media, limited consumer engagement activity.
Partially informally engaged - Social media platforms, but no dedicated or regular engagement activity.

The final theoretical framework is displayed in Figure 2.5 and identifies the main areas of focus for this research, presenting the relationships between social media engagement, brand, reputation and trust. It acknowledges the objectives of the research from the previously highlighted philosophical position, and as a result guides the research methodology, and considers the respondent's views within the framework.

Figure 2.5: Theoretical Framework

Trust	Objectives	Brand
Consumer acquisition and retention	E-SME • Fully engaged • Partially formally engaged • Partially informally engaged	Brand strategy
Reputation		Social media community
Risk/Resource		Engagement
Value	E-WOM	Engagement strategy

Source: Inductively Developed from the Literature
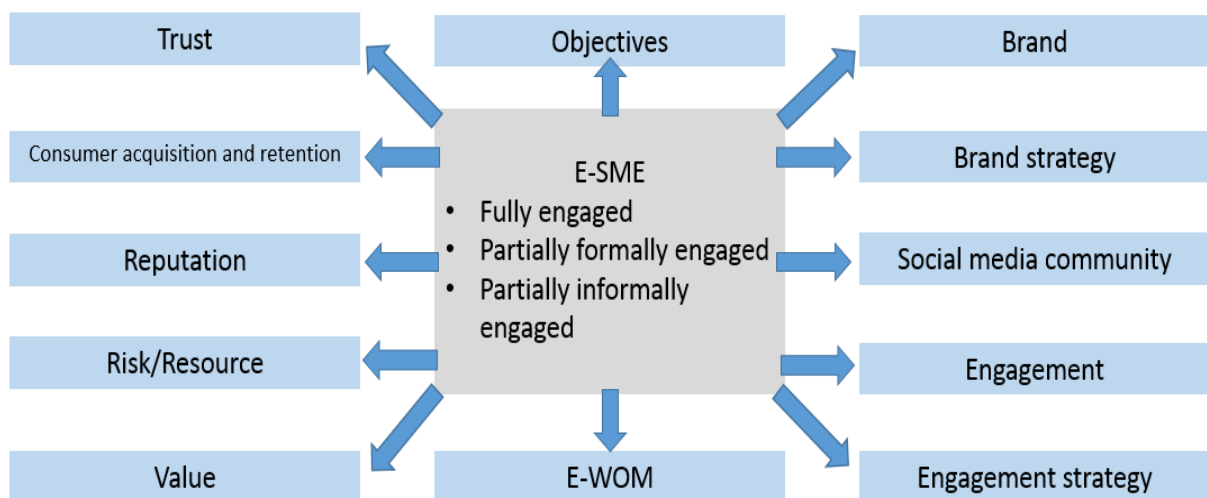
Chapter Three – Methodology

3. Introduction

Having considered the concepts relating to trust, brand, reputation and social media for e-SMEs in Chapter Two, this chapter reviews the ontology, epistemology and methodology adopted for this research. The research approach is established using the philosophical assumption that the process of conceptual development is socially constructed through understanding e-SME, social media practitioner and consumer perspectives. Research credibility, sampling, data collection methods and analysis, as well as ethical issues and limitations, are also reviewed.

3.1 Research aims

A number of gaps were highlighted in the literature review (Chapter Two) concerning the current knowledge on understanding how social media consumer engagement can be used by e-SME brands to develop trust and build brand reputation with new and existing customers. The recent literature on e-SME retailing has mostly centred on either a survey approach or relied on secondary data (e.g. Adam et al., 2014; Walsh and Lipinski, 2009). Where in-depth qualitative methods have been used, the research has been limited by a small number of studies (e.g. Stockdale, 2012). As a result, there is a requirement for qualitative research across multiple cases in order to address the limitations of existing works within the online retailing domain. There is a need for qualitative research to be conducted across multiple cases in order to address the limitations of existing works. Given the emerging and speculative nature of much of the e-business literature, exploratory and in-depth methods will potentially provide the richest insights (Bryman and Bell, 2007). As a consequence, an e-SME, key informant (social media practitioner) and consumer perspective are sought in this research, stressing the exploring and understanding of phenomena (Carson et al., 2001). This thesis therefore aims to investigate how social media consumer engagement can be used by e-SME brands to develop trust and build brand reputation with new and existing customers. The research objectives are identified in Chapter One. The next section discusses the ontological and epistemological focus of this thesis.

3.2 Ontological and Epistemological Perspective

Before determining a research philosophy, it is necessary to consider the twin pillars of methodology, namely epistemology and ontology, to fully comprehend the appropriateness of any approach adopted (Marsh and Furlong, 2002). According to Crotty, (1998: 8) ontology and

epistemology concern a "theoretical perspective' that provides a 'way of looking at the world and making sense of it". Ontology identifies the assumptions made about the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002), and refers to "the study of being – concerned with what is" (Crotty, 1998: 10). Closely connected with ontology and its consideration of what constitutes reality, epistemology considers views about the most suitable ways of enquiring into the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008) and the sources and limits of knowledge (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). It primarily deals with the assumptions made by the researcher as to what it is possible, the authenticity of knowledge and how that knowledge can be collected, with regard to method, validity and scope (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Epistemology is the study of the foundations of knowledge (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996), which demonstrates a 'way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know' (Crotty, 1998: 3) and determines the criteria by which justified knowledge is possible (Johnson and Duberley, 2000). According to Ashworth (2008: 109):

> Ontology and epistemology form a philosophical perspective which informs methodology by contextualising and grounding the research process in order to utilise appropriate strategy to resolve research questions which assists in determining credibility in social research.

In social science research, two contrasting ontological and epistemological perspectives dominate, namely positivism and social constructionism (Remenyi et al., 1998). Positivism stresses that an objective reality independent of humankind can be identified using a deductive approach, adopting scientific measurements to formulate and test hypotheses which establish an assumed objective truth (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Alternatively, social construction questions the existence of an objective reality, since ontologically it does not assume any pre-existing reality and consequently emphasises 'the active involvement of people in reality construction' and requires a more iterative approach to analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 21). These contrasting perspectives are highlighted in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 – Fundamental Aspects of Positivism and Social Constructionism

Research consideration	Positivist Assumptions	Social Constructionism Assumptions
Ontology and Epistemology	Objective reality exists and can be discovered Possible to obtain objective knowledge of reality through accumulation of data Governed by hypotheses and stated theories and is purportedly value free	Reality is socially constructed (i.e. social phenomena and categories are socially constructed and 'given meaning' by people) Reality understood through 'perceived' knowledge and is value-laden Seeks to understand specific context
Research Focus	Research focuses on generalisation (or 'facts') Seeks causality and fundamental laws (i.e. clear distinction between facts & value judgments) Formulate and test hypotheses Units of analysis reduced to simple terms Generalisation through statistical probability	Focus on meanings (and perceptions) Seeks to understand what is happening in context to increase general understanding Gather rich data from which ideas are conceptualised Includes complexity of whole situations Generalisation through theoretical abstraction (and saturation)
Appropriate Methods	Requires objective or scientific methods – i.e. phenomena require a form of measurement Large sample, random selection, survey approach	Should incorporate stakeholder perspectives Small sample investigation, cases chosen for specific reasons (i.e. theoretical purposive sampling)

Source: Ashworth (2008: 110)

Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) have suggested that positivism postulates that an objective reality independent of humankind can be discovered via a deductive approach using scientific measurements to formulate and test hypotheses in order to establish an assumed objective truth. This can potentially be achieved in business research by adopting a survey approach that lends itself to statistical analysis (Crotty, 1998), since an experimental design allows for data to be treated independently and, assuming a sizeable sample, generalised to a wider population (Ashworth, 2008). Furthermore, Ekanem (2007) has argued that positivist research studies aim to maintain an independent, objective stance, whereby the researcher is distinct, detached and emotionally neutral from the research object, yet it offers a limited insight into how and what questions in small enterprise research (Ekanem, 2007). However, social construction challenges the existence of an objective reality, as ontologically it does not assume any pre-existing reality and consequently emphasises "the active involvement of

people in reality construction", requiring a more iterative approach to investigation analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 21). Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) have stated that business social construction research can potentially explore the constructions and meanings consumers place on events or experiences to enable a contextual understanding to be gained and interpretation made (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) that enables theory building or theory generation (Carson et al., 2001). Social media and e-SME research, particularly in relation to trust and engagement, are at an early development stage that suggests that this research would benefit from adopting a non-positivist approach (Gilmore et al., 2001; Carrier et al., 2004). Furthermore, Bryman and Bell, (2007) suggest that business situations are complex and unique, and therefore a positivist approach is unsuitable when deep insight is required. As this thesis aims to investigate how social media consumer engagement can be used by e-SME brands to develop trust and build brand reputation with potential and current customers, a social construction research approach is considered appropriate. This belief is supported by Denscombe (2000), who has suggested that social construction research is appropriate to understanding not only 'what' is happening, i.e. how e-SMEs develop consumer trust and brand reputation, but also comprehend management perceptions as to 'why' events occur (i.e. social media engagement objectives and strategies).

Shaw (1999) has suggested that SME research is concerned with the study of perceptions, experiences and behaviours of owner-managers, who think for themselves and have an opinion about their social world. Consequently, it may not be considered an appropriate approach for the study of smaller-sized companies from the objective viewpoint stipulated by positivist research. Therefore, Shaw (1999) has recommended that emphasis should be placed on social construction and in-depth research, where the study of e-SMEs may benefit from a qualitative approach. The position of this research regarding ontology and epistemology is that reality is socially constructed rather than objectively determined (Carson et al., 2001) as human interaction is perceived to arise from the sense people make of situations, rather than as a direct response to external stimuli (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Salmeron and Hurtado, 2006; Poon and Swatman, 1997). Adopting a social construction epistemology has ramifications for the research methods employed in this thesis, and Figure 3.1 highlights the philosophical and methodological underpinnings for this research in order to provide its direction (Crotty, 1998). Figure 3.1 also shows how the research for this thesis will follow a qualitative case study netnography approach, employing in-depth interviews with key industry informants and consumers, and using thematic data analysis in order to satisfy the research aims and objectives. Utilising this approach endorses the social construction research process put forward by Bryman and Bell (2007).

Figure 3.1 – Philosophical scaffolding adopted in this thesis
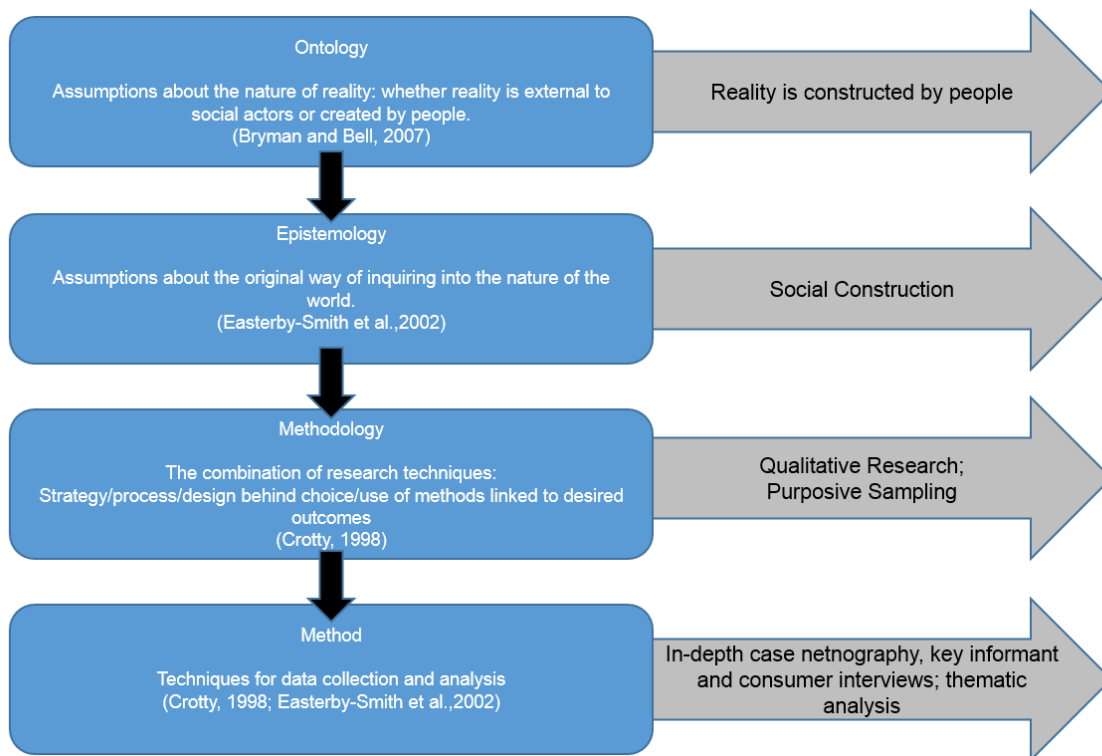
Source: Adapted from Ashworth (2008)

3.3 Research Methodology

The research methodology is essentially the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena (Rajasekar et al., 2013). It is also defined as the study of methods by which knowledge is gained and a plan provided for research. The remainder of this chapter highlights the research strategy, design for data collection and analysis approach adopted for this thesis.

3.3.1 Qualitative Approach Justification

In the social sciences, quantitative research is the systematic empirical investigation of observable phenomena via statistical, mathematical or computational techniques (Given, 2008). In the social sciences, the term relates to empirical methods, originating in both philosophical positivism and the history of statistics, which contrast with qualitative research methods (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Bhattacherjee (2012) describes qualitative analysis as the analysis of data (e.g. data from interview transcripts) that is dependent on the researcher's analytic and integrative skills and personal knowledge of the social context where the data is collected, while quantitative analysis involves statistics that are largely independent of the researcher. However, in qualitative analysis, rather than explaining or predicting, sense-

making must be emphasised in order to understand the experience (Van Esh and Van Esh, 2013). Cassell et al. (2006) have argued that qualitative research outputs are significantly more relevant to management practitioners than quantitative outputs, particularly for e-SMEs as:

> "The development of small firms and the behaviour of owner-managers often does not fit neatly into models associated with traditional quantitative approaches, rich descriptions have much to offer." (Cassell et al., 2006: 163)

Verification of qualitative research as a valid approach has been advocated in the recent literature (e.g. Creswell and Miller, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Cepeda and Martin, 2005; Cassell et al., 2006). Qualitative methods are also increasingly 'being adopted in management research in response to the failure of quantitative techniques to address new theory development', particularly in SME research (Fillis, 2006: 200). The qualitative case method and interview method are suitable for investigating how social media consumer engagement can be used by e-SME brands to develop trust and build brand reputation with potential and current customers. Lofland (1995) argues that qualitative research is centred on complex settings and that it is via case studies that complexity can be defined and understood (Gummesson, 2000; 2006). Since the research objectives include the investigating of rich data and require an exploration of category or context-specific phenomena (Reynolds, 2002), the qualitative case method is used to explain the complexities involved and comprehend the social media setting as described by the multiple voices of the e-SME brands, key informants and consumers.

3.3.2 Methodology Choice

This thesis provides an in-depth exploration of the social media domain, investigating trust and reputation development for customers through brand community engagement, in line with sustained calls for research by Habibi et al. (2014). Qualitative research is utilised in order to achieve rich meaningful insights into aspects that could lead to an organisation's success, especially in the e-SME environment (Carson et al., 2001). E-SMEs were investigated using a qualitative comparative case study approach and a social media community netnography.

3.3.3 Netnography

Kozinets (1997; 1998; 2001; and 2002) is credited with introducing the term and concept of netnography, which is based on the ethnographic research method. Ethnography is a research process in which the ethnographer closely observes records and engages in the daily life of another culture, and then writes an account of this culture emphasising descriptive detail (Marcus and Fisher, 1986). Netnography is an ethnographic variety, which refers to an

ethnography that is undertaken in computer-mediated environments, mainly the internet (Kozinets, 1998). It is increasingly being recognised amongst marketing practitioners and researchers alike that virtual communities connected to market-related topics form suitable research subjects (Kozinets, 1998; 1999; 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Schau and Gilly, 2003; Muniz and Schau, 2005). This view has been further supported by de Valck et al. (2009), who have argued that virtual communities contain detailed descriptions about the way consumers behave. The use of netnography is 'consumer centric', allowing small or global businesses to continually enhance their consumer and industry knowledge. Netnography enables the social media industry to gain an insight into how the consumer co-creation of value influences product development online (Kozinets, 1998).

Once the netnography was completed and emerging concepts were identified, an in-depth interview approach with key informants (social media industry practitioners) and consumers was used in this thesis. Due to access to e-SME owners being limited, social media practitioners and consumers were interviewed using face-to-face, Skype and telephone methods. This thesis explores e-SME social media engagement strategies based on key informant and non-customer and customer experiences from the consumer perspective. Therefore, iterative process conceptualisations are proposed to explain the phenomena within the set context, allowing new theory and insights to emerge (Carson et al., 2001).

3.3.4 Case Study Approach

A case study is typically regarded as a specific and bounded (in a time and place) instance of a phenomenon selected for study (Bryman and Bell, 2007), and the phenomenon of interest may be a person, process, event, group or organisation (Schwandt, 1997). A key challenge and the biggest change associated with the advent of research in a social media environment is the potential to collect and review large datasets. According to Cepeda and Martin (2005), case studies provide a suitable management research strategy for three key reasons: the researcher can study various aspects of management, learn about 'state-of-the-art' developments and generate theories from practice. Cases allow the researcher to answer 'how' and 'why' questions in order to understand the nature and complexity of business life, and provide an appropriate strategy to explore areas where research studies are scarce. Case studies provide an effective research strategy for a number of reasons. Cepeda and Martin (2005) have concluded that using this approach allows researchers to learn about current industry activity and generate theories from practice. Case studies also allow the researcher to answer 'how' and 'why' questions in order to understand the nature and complexity of business life, and provide a suitable strategy for exploring under-researched areas (Cepeda and Martin, 2005). Case study research is an increasingly popular approach among qualitative

researchers (Thomas, 2011). Several prominent authors have contributed to methodological developments, which has increased the popularity of case-study approaches across different disciplines (Creswell, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Ragin and Becker, 1992; Stake, 1995). Determining which organisations constitute appropriate case studies is determined by the research question (Carson et al., 2001). In the context of this thesis, a case is outlined as an e-SME online sports retailer (supplying sports clothing, footwear or accessories).

A constructivist perspective in case study research (Stake 1995, 2006) can recognise multiple perspectives and the researcher's role in constructing interpretations. A multiple case study design was chosen to promote the richness, depth and complexity that is drawn from multiple events that help understand the phenomenon of interest that is shared among the diverse cases (Anaf et al., 2007; Stake, 2000).

3.3.5 Case study research – Generalisation and Saturation

Ashworth (2008) has stated that research generalisation is viewed as crucial in positivist research in order to determine how closely research findings can be applied with a specific level of statistical significance to a wider population. In contrast, Carson et al. have stressed that 'generalisability is not an issue within qualitative research' as the 'specificity of qualitative research virtually excludes generalisability and because of this it is not an issue' (2001: 69). Bryman and Bell (2007) have suggested that generalisability should be addressed in all research since consideration of generalisation may add rigour to a study. Consequently, guidelines for the number of cases required to generate theory are required.

Nevertheless, case study research has been criticised by authors such as Chetty (1996), who state that they provide a limited basis for scientific generalisation (Chetty, 1996). Analytic generalisation enables the researcher to expand and generalise theories rather than enumerate frequencies, which, as statistical generalisation, is the process common to positivist studies (Chetty, 1996). Gummesson, however, argues that this view is too positivistic for social construction studies, although, generalisation is 'closely related to validity' (2000: 91). However, ecological validity (Brewer, 200), which, in this thesis, allows for an understanding of real-world processes (Burr, 2003) across multiple cases, enables generalisation across e-SME cases, encouraging a degree of transferability that allows research results to be transferred to situations with similar parameters and characteristics (Ashworth, 2008).

Gummesson, (2003) has argued that it is difficult to define the number of cases needed to draw conclusions. Although this thesis adopts a social construction perspective, the dilemma

of whether the general applicability (and validity) of conceptualisations can be based on a limited number of cases is answered in terms of theory generation. Barnes et al. also posit that it is possible to generalise results from only a limited number of cases 'with caution' (2004: 337), whereas, Carson et al. (2001) recommend that between four and twelve cases are used in order to generalise theory in qualitative management research.

Consequently, determining the number of cases requires a process of comparison, where e-SMEs can be selected to represent aspects of reality – i.e. corresponding to 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 45–77). This is supported by Eisenhardt (1989), and is also referred to as 'purposive sampling' (Neuman, 1997, Ashworth, 2008). This approach is connected to the concept of 'saturation' put forward by Gummesson (2005) and Creswell and Miller (2000). A salient factor, however, is the need to consolidate and potentially extend the initial findings of the research (Carson et al., 2001) in the light of additional evidence in order to add rigour to theory-building research, which is the approach adopted in this thesis.

3.3.6 Validity and Credibility

The concepts of validity and credibility have developed historically from knowledge as a 'reflection of reality' to the more astute view of knowledge as a 'social construction' of reality (Burr, 2003), whereas positivist methods are predominantly concerned with ensuring results provide accurate reflections of reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that the validity is affected by the researcher's perception of validity in the study and their choice of a paradigm assumption. Consequently, researchers have developed their own concepts of validity and have adopted what they consider to be more appropriate terms, such as quality, rigour and trustworthiness (Davies and Dodd, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). In searching for a definition of rigour in research, Davies and Dodd (2002) have proposed that the term as used in research appears in reference to discussions about reliability and validity. Davies and Dodd (2002) have inferred that the application of rigour in qualitative research should differ from those in quantitative research by acknowledging the quantitative bias in its conception, and developing a re-conception of rigour by exploring subjectivity, reflexivity and the social interaction of interviewing. Kvale (1996, p236) has also stated that validity refers to the 'correctness' of a statement, whereby a valid argument is 'well-grounded, justifiable and convincing'. However, Leedy (1997, p168) warns that validation of socially constructed data is a complex process, with qualitative researchers "in disagreement" about how to address the traditional topics of validity and reliability.

3.3.7 Ensuring Validity and Credibility

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) believe that validity refers to the degree of congruence that exists between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world. Tackling the issue of validity, they have stated that continuous refinement of the sampling and data collection techniques throughout the data collection process increase it. Cresswell and Miller (2000) have stated that in order to ensure credibility in the validation of social construction studies, researchers should employ one of three options: negative evidence (to explore multiple perspectives), engagement in the field (where multiple perspectives build 'context'), or a thick, rich description (where vivid detail builds 'credibility'). These strategies were essential to the research outcomes developed within this thesis. From a constructionist perspective, validity and credibility are present where findings 'reflect the phenomena of interest' (Pervin, 1984: 48), i.e. that the research investigates what it set out to explore (Gummesson, 2000). Creswell and Miller (2000, p124) have pointed out that an underlying assumption is that "validity refers not to the data but to the inferences drawn".

This is compounded by the concept of 'good fit' (Gummesson, 2000: 93), where theories, models and concepts provide an understanding of a social context from a given perspective and reliability is achieved through theoretical saturation. According to Gummesson, saturation is defined as 'the diminishing marginal contribution of each additional case', where the researcher has 'no need to continue with further cases when the marginal utility of an additional case approaches zero' (2000: 96). Credibility and research reliability are accomplished where data is 'saturated', thereby establishing 'appropriate themes/categories' built on rich, detailed accounts (Ashworth, 2008). This perception of 'truth' as 'intentional fulfilment' has been advocated by Cepeda and Martin (2005: 856), and it is this position that is adopted for this research.

In qualitative studies, multi-method approaches are often employed by the researcher to ensure the generalisability of the research and in order to enhance its reliability and validity. Furthermore, Bashir et al. (2008) have argued that researcher bias can be reduced if the researcher spends enough time in the field and employs multiple data collection strategies to corroborate findings. Therefore, it could be suggested that engaging in multiple methods, such as observation, interviews and recordings, will lead to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities from the data.

To enhance the analysis and understanding of construction of phenomena, triangulation is a step often undertaken by researchers (Bryman and Bell, 2007), involving several investigators or researchers' interpretation of the data at different times or locations. Similarly, a qualitative

researcher can also utilise investigator triangulation (Bryman and Bell, 2007) to consider the ideas and explanations generated by additional researchers studying the research participants, (Johnson, 1997). According to Bashir et al. (2008), reliability and validity can be conceptualised as trustworthiness, rigour and quality within a qualitative paradigm.

In order to add credibility to the interview process, Johnson and Weller (2002) have recommended that interviewees should be experts in the area of study, which means that participants identified for interview should have considerable experience working in the topic area and be currently involved in the activity. Taking into account the above discussion, multiple qualitative methods will be used to ensure validity and credibility through triangulation. These methods will include industry observations (netnography), consumer interviews and industry expert (key informant) interviews. The process for identifying and implementing these methods will be discussed further in the next section that covers the research design.

3.4 Research Design

Bryman and Bell have defined research design as the 'framework for collection and analysis of data' (2007: 731), which best provides for how a study meets its objectives (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002), whereas, Hartley (2004: 326) has suggested that research design is:

> "The argument for the logical steps which will be taken to link the research question(s) and issues to data collection, analysis and interpretation in a coherent way."

The fieldwork was conducted in six stages:

1. Sampling (i.e. identifying and tracking e-SME sport retail sites to select highly social media active cases) and identifying consumers and experts (native speakers) for interview to discuss social media strategies of chosen cases

2. Case study strategy (detailed investigation, with data collected over eight months, the aim being to provide an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied)

3. Social Media netnography analysis of selected e-SME brands

4. Consumer interview design or analysis (in order to generate themes for expert interviews)

5. Key informant interview design/analysis. Discussion of social media strategy and anticipated or resultant consumer responses by social media practitioners (interviews)

6. Analysis and conceptual framework development

The research design in this thesis involves a qualitative multiple case design, utilising e-SME social media communications and consumer in-depth interviews, as well as industry experts (key informants) in-depth interviews (telephone and face-to-face). A thematic analysis is used in order to investigate how social media consumer engagement can be used by e-SME brands to develop trust and build brand reputation with potential and current customers. To support this design, purposive sampling was utilised. In order to justify and provide context to the fieldwork, the relevant stages and strategic decisions are explained in further detail.

The online sports retail sector has been selected for marketspace research since it represents one of the areas of e-business least developed in the literature (Sports Goods Retailing, UK – Mintel, 2013). On the philosophical basis that reality is socially constructed, the research design in this thesis involves a qualitative multiple case study design that adopts a social media netnography (reviewed in section 3.4) to review the textual analysis, as well as utilising key informant (social media practitioners) in-depth interviews (telephone and face-to-face) with high-interest stakeholders (consumers). It adopts a thematic analysis in order to understand how social media consumer engagement can be used by e-SME brands to develop trust and build brand reputation with new and existing customers.

To support this design, purposive sampling was utilised. In the pilot, a four-week netnography was employed as well as two key informant and consumer interviews, and in the main study, an eight-month netnography and a combination of telephone and face-to-face approaches were used. The implications of this are discussed in section 3.7. Adler and Adler (2002, p 525) recommend that both telephone and face interviews should be 'informal' since 'a less structured atmosphere enhances rapport'. This approach was undertaken in this thesis. The pilot and main studies are discussed in Section 3.8.

3.5 Sampling Strategy

Parasuraman (1991: 474) defines the sampling frame as a 'listing of population units from which a sample is chosen'. As part of the research design, the selection involved purposive sampling to identify e-SMEs potentially rich in data pertinent to gleaning an understanding (Marshall and Rossman, 1995) of the issues related to trust and reputation development through social media engagement. The online sports retail sector was selected for market space research as it represents one of the most profitable and emotive e-commerce markets for investigation. There is also a lack of research within this area currently. Furthermore sports retailer e-SMEs were chosen as they provide an insight into the effectiveness of social media for e-SME brands. Given the qualitative and inductive nature of this research, the key is to look for a convergence of themes and findings in order to develop meaningful, applicable conceptual frameworks conclusions (Marshall, 1996). It will also provide an insight into the

effectiveness of the social media for e-SME marketing with consumers who are passionate about the products they purchase. This cannot be considered applicable to online industries that provide less emotive products.

A UK search for 'online sports store UK' using Google draws about 504,000,000 results, many of which are e-Bay sites and blogs. Therefore, the internet sampling frame for UK e-SMEs is vast and cluttered. This could potentially create an issue for positivist research, which requires a statistically representative sample (Ashworth, 2008). However, given the exploratory nature of this thesis and the qualitative research design employed, it is more appropriate to select cases that are likely to be the most informative or 'theoretically useful' to meet the research objectives (Eisenhardt, 1989). Consequently, the sampling strategy undertaken in this research followed a two-step process. Firstly, cases were located according to the selection criteria outlined below:

For the purposes of the research, 'e-SME brands' shall be defined as those that fit three criteria:

1. Operating as an online store with no physical premises with which to sell products

2. Maintenance of an active web presence (i.e. a website) where transactions occur

3. Active integration of web-based social media applications with their business communications

Secondly, e-SME social media channels were reviewed and screened for suitability.

Due to the potential vast amount of information available on a number of social media platforms, the number of social media mechanisms investigated for each case was determined by the social media links highlighted and promoted by the e-SMEs' website home pages.

For the purposes of the research, online sports retail e-SMEs were defined as those that meet the below criteria:

1. Maintenance of an active website online store only, with no physical retail outlet selling:

- Sports clothing, e.g. football kit, tracksuits, swimwear, hooded sweatshirts, accessories (gloves, caps, etc.)

- sports footwear, e.g. golf shoes, running shoes, football boots

- sports equipment, e.g. tennis racquets, golf clubs and balls, trampolines, skateboards

2. Active integration of official social media promoted via their online store with their communications model (e.g. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube)

In order to identify suitable UK sports e-SMEs, a search was conducted using search engines such as Google and Bing, as well as the search functions on Twitter and Facebook, using key words such as 'UK', 'sports' and 'online business'. The choice of the e-SME was based on social media community activity, and was informed using the following criteria, as suggested by Kozinets (2002):

(1)   A more focused and research objective question-relevant segment, topic or group

(2)   Higher 'traffic' of postings

(3)   Larger numbers of discrete message posters

(4)   More detailed or descriptively rich data

(5)   Engagement interactions of the type required by the research question

This section covers the first part of the analysis by providing an overview of the samples used for the research. An analysis of company background, product offerings and social media channels used for each e-SME case is shown in Table 3.2. The e-SMEs were well-established online (over five years), were transactional and had survived beyond the three-year critical period when most SMEs fail (www.dti.gov.uk, 2007) and the 18-month period when most e-businesses fail (Harry, 2006). Therefore, it was anticipated they would be useful organisations for research. The e-SMEs selected have all been using social media for over five years. In this thesis, the purposive sampling of cases through screening criteria enabled a variety of cases to be included (Lewis and Harris, 2006), acknowledging an opportunity for in-depth research to be conducted (Stake, 2000). The number of e-SME cases and a brief description of them are provided in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 E-SME Case Background

E-SME	Address	Social media channels	Description
The Soccer Store	Unit A2 First Business Park First Avenue, Crewe Cheshire, CW1 6BG.	• Facebook • Google+ • Twitter	• Online football shop selling football training equipment • Using social media since 2011
Surfdome	Dentressangle Unit 29, Vaux Road Finedon Road Industrial Estate Wellingborough, NN8 4TG	• Facebook • Twitter • Google+ • Pinterest	• Surfing products online store • Using social media since 2010
Sportsjamkits	87 Whitchurch Road Postcode/City:SY1 4EE, Shropshire	• Facebook • Twitter	• Online Football Equipment Using social media since 2010
Sportshoes	1 The Park, Jubilee Way Shipley, West Yorkshire BD18 1QG, UK	• Facebook • Twitter	• Online sports shoes, retail and consumer merchandise • Using social media since 2011
ProBikeKit	Meridian House, Gadbrook Park, Gadbrook Way, Northwich, CW9 7RA	• Facebook • Twitter • YouTube • Google+	• Cycling equipment • Using social media since 2010
Newitts	Claxton Hall Flaxton, York, North Yorkshire YO60 7RE, United Kingdom	• Facebook • Twitter	• UK sports equipment supplier • Using social media since 2009
Kitbag	Greengate, Manchester England, M24 1FD	• Facebook • Twitter • Pinterest • YouTube • Google+ • Instagram	• Sports equipment retailer • Using social media since 2007
Fitsense	Warehouse - 9-15 Grundy Street, Liverpool, Merseyside L5 9SG UK	• Facebook • Twitter	• Sports and fitness products and accessories, • Using social media since 2011
Chelston Direct	Chelston Direct, Unit 6 Monument View, Chelston Business Park, Wellington, Somerset, TA21 9ND	• Facebook • Twitter • Google+	• Online ski wear supplier • Using social media since 2011
Direct Soccer	3 Ainslie Street, DD5 3RR Dundee	• Facebook • Twitter	• Soccer equipment online store • Using social media since 2011
Direct Teamwear	Direct Teamwear, Beck House, 77 King Street, Knutsford, Cheshire, United Kingdom WA16 6D	• Facebook • Twitter	• Football kits, training kit • Using social media since 2011
Fitness Footwear	Bolingbroke Road, Fairfield Industrial Estate, Louth, LN11 0WA. UK	• Facebook • Twitter • Google+	• Sports footwear and exercise clothing • Using social media since 2011

3.5.1 Key Informants Sampling

When identifying key informants, Johnson and Weller (2002) have argued that sampling members with a specialist experience base provides credibility to qualitative studies because a greater depth of knowledge and understanding may be drawn upon from the data. Therefore, it was crucial to examine the history of the e-SMEs researched and their social media engagement activity as well as the knowledge base of the key informants, and background of consumers. This would then provide an understanding of the level of experience, engagement and membership participation within the sample. As Gummeson (2003: 490) states, "there is a wealth of information stored in the minds of people who have lived through important events with unique access". Since social media practitioners who work on behalf of e-SMEs have a strong and holistic insight into strategies for their clients, they can be considered as holders of tacit knowledge across functional areas of their clients.

Marshall (1996) has argued that the probability sampling techniques used for quantitative studies are rarely appropriate when conducting qualitative research. The process of selecting a random sample is well defined and rigorous and can be considered inappropriate for most qualitative research, specifically because the aim of a random sample is to provide the best opportunity to generalise the results to a population (Marshall, 1996). Marshall (1996) has argued that this method is not the most effective way of developing an understanding of complex social issues relating to human behaviour for both theoretical and practical reasons. These reasons are outlined below:

1. Samples for qualitative investigations are usually small. Even if a representative sample is suitable, the sampling error of such a small sample is likely to be so large that biases are inevitable.

2. For a true random sample to be selected, the characteristics under study of the whole population need to be known; this is rarely possible in a complex qualitative study, and not possible for this research.

3. Random sampling of a population is likely to produce a representative sample only if the research characteristics are normally distributed within the population. The values, beliefs and attitudes that form the basis of qualitative investigation do not necessarily conform, making the probability approach inappropriate.

4. Individuals are not equally good at observing, understanding and interpreting their own and other people's behaviour. Qualitative researchers often recognise that some informants are 'richer' than others and that these people are more likely to provide insights for the researcher.

3.5.2 Sampling Schemes – Generalisation

For qualitative research, authors generally believe that there are two types of statistical generalisations, external statistical generalisations and internal statistical generalisations. External statistical generalisation, which is identical to the traditional notion of statistical generalisation in quantitative research (Curtis et al., 2000), concerns the creation of generalisations or inferences on data taken from a representative statistical sample from the population on which the sample was drawn. In contrast, internal statistical generalisation involves making generalisations or inferences on data extracted from one or more representative or elite participants about the sample from which the participants were drawn (Curtis et al., 2000). Analytic generalisations are 'applied to wider theory on the basis of how selected cases 'fit' with general constructs' (Curtis et al., 2000: 1002). Finally, case-to-case transfer requires generalisations being made from one case to another (similar) case.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that social constructionists study phenomena within their natural settings and attempt to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena with respect to the meanings people bring. Specifically, qualitative researchers should 'generalise words and observations to the population of words/observations representing the underlying context' (Onwuegbuzie, 2003, p. 400). The aim of this study is not to generalise to a population but to obtain insights into a phenomenon, individuals or events. As is most often the case in interpretivist studies, the qualitative researcher purposefully selects individuals, groups and settings for this phase to increase understanding of the phenomena under study (Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

3.5.3 Sample Size – Choosing the Sample Population

Some methodologists (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007) have provided guidelines for selecting samples in qualitative studies based on the research design, for instance, whether it is a case study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory or a research method using focus groups (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). In general, sample sizes in qualitative research should not be so large that it is difficult to extract rich and varied data. On the other hand, Sandelowski (1995) has noted that the sample should also not be so small that it is difficult to achieve data saturation (Flick, 1998; Morse, 1995) or theoretical saturation (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

3.5.4 Qualitative Sampling Designs

Saunders et al. (2009) have stated that there are three broad approaches to selecting a sample for a qualitative study, as highlighted in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Sampling approaches

Sampling Strategy	Approach
Convenience sampling	Viewed as the least rigorous technique, this process involves the selection of the most accessible subjects to the researcher. It has many attractions, being the least costly to the researcher in terms of time, effort and money. However, there may be issues around the quality of data and intellectual credibility (Bryman and Bell, 2007).
Purposive sampling	Also referred to as 'judgemental sampling'. This is the most common sampling technique. Here, the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question. This is often based on the development of a framework of variables that might influence an individual's contribution. The researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself is then used to inform and select the sample. This arguably provides a more sophisticated and rigorous strategy than simple stratification, although age, gender and social class might be important variables. Respondents may be able to recommend useful potential candidates for study or snowball sampling, as used by Tseng (2007).
Theoretical sampling	This form of sampling is the iterative process of qualitative study design, where samples are usually theory driven to a greater or lesser extent (Drauker, 2007). Theoretical sampling necessitates building interpretative theories from the emerging data and selecting a new sample to examine and elaborate on this theory.

Source: Inductively Developed From the Literature

Considering the sampling options available, the author chose to adopt purposive sampling for the netnography as well as the sampling approach being used in the interview research. The investigation adopted purposive sampling, where the researcher first collects, codes and analyses data (Brodie et al., 2011). Then, in order to refine the preliminary 'consumer engagement' conceptualisation, decisions are made about which specific data to collect next, and where to collect this data. Bryman and Bell (2007) recommend this data collection process when the research objective is to generate or refine theory. This seemed logical for this thesis as the nature of both the subject matter and the analytical approach adopted, as discussed below, clearly indicated the appropriateness of the method. In order to investigate and analyse the factors which develop consumer trust and build brand reputation through social media engagement, it was necessary to seek insights from the corporate and consumer perspective. This leads the strategic discussion to the case respondent sampling strategy.

3.5.5 Sampling Strategy – Locating Cases and Determining Key Informants

Cataloguing sports retail e-SMEs proved time consuming, given that no formal database of UK online sports retailers exist at the SME level. The selected cases were located through extensive online searches using search engines such as Google and Bing, as well as the

search functions on Facebook and Twitter. This method has been advocated by Marciniak and Bruce (2003).

In order to identify case companies, the author, following the premise of purposive sampling as described above, used a practical knowledge of the research area and evidence from the pilot study to inform and select the case e-SMEs. In order to cover any concerns over regional bias, case companies from around the UK were chosen. Lewis et al. (2007) previously highlighted that SMEs are difficult to pin down and penetrate, which is a well-acknowledged phenomenon in business research (Lewis et al., 2007), especially when faced with researchers seeking knowledge on success, failure and finance (Barnes et al., 2004). Nevertheless the decision was taken to interview social media experts to discuss the strategies undertaken by sports e-SMEs once the netnography had been completed, this approach was in keeping with the justification on interview validity from key experts within the industry (Bashir, 2008).

The majority of e-SMEs were well-established online and, given their survival beyond the three-year critical period where most SMEs fail (www.dti.gov.uk, 2007) – and the 18-month period when most e-businesses fail (Harry, 2006) – it was anticipated they would be useful e-SME social media brand communities for analysis. In this thesis, purposive sampling of cases through screening criteria enabled a variety of organisations to be reviewed (Lewis and Harris, 2006), and the opportunity for in-depth research is acknowledged (Stake, 2000). The number of e-SMEs involved in this study are summarised by sector in Table 3.2.

The sample selection represented a number of sports and sports products; therefore, the variety of products represented in the data, and the differences in cases enables theory to be credibly built (McCracken, 1988; Carson et al., 2001) from the evidence base. The clothing, footwear and sports accessories available to purchase from the e-SMEs in this research meet the minimal requirements for generalisation in case research put forward by Barnes et al. (2004), given the saturation of evidence across the different cases (Gummesson, 2000).

3.5.6 Key Informant Selection Criteria – 'Native Speaker' Perspective

For this section of the research, purposive sampling was considered appropriate due to the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study (Tseng, 2007). Contact with e-SME owners proved challenging, as the majority of brands contacted refused access due to time constraints and for confidentiality reasons (Ashworth, 2008). Lewis et al. (2007) have previously acknowledged the difficulty of gaining access to SMEs for research purposes. As a result, the decision was taken to contact social

media practitioners who have previously worked with/for e-SMEs to gain a corporate perspective. Interviews were arranged following consultation and negotiation with key informants who were pre-briefed to allow sufficient thought processing in order to ensure productive interviews were conducted. Social media practitioners were selected as empirical data sources since they are uniquely active and informed about issues relating to the strategy and objectives for their e-SME clients.

The purpose of the key informant interviews was to collect information from a wide range of people, including industry leaders and professionals who have first-hand knowledge of the community being researched (Bryman and Bell, 2007). These industry experts, with their particular knowledge and understanding, were able to provide a rich insight into the phenomena and give causes or strategic recommendations. The first step in the selection process was to identify and create a list of potential key informants from the target population. This was achieved by typing in key search terms such as 'social media' 'manager' and 'e-SME' into social media platform LinkedIn and reviewing the search results. In creating this list, the aim was to obtain a diverse set of representatives with different backgrounds who had considerable experience of working with social media and have represented, and currently represent, e-SMEs. Choosing the potential key informants was therefore based on the following criteria in line with the research objectives.

Table 3.4 Key Informant Selection Criteria

Key Informant Selection Criteria
Social media industry experience
Have represented or currently represent e-SMEs
Experience of engagement strategies and enhancing brand reputation

A review of the potential key informant list from the LinkedIn search was then conducted and key informants were identified who could provide deep insight into social media engagement, brand trust, and building reputation and provide a variety of perspectives (Palinkas et al., 2013). Informants were researched, identified and contacted using Google and social media platform LinkedIn. In order to justify the key informants that were selected for interview, the professional backgrounds of the key informants is available in Appendix 1.

3.5.7 Consumer Selection Criteria

Purposive sampling was adopted on the likely ability of consumer interviewees contributing to theoretical understanding (Bryman and Bell, 2007). For the purposes of the research, consumers were selected who fitted the following criteria:

Table 3.5 Consumer Selection Criteria

Consumer Selection Criteria
Regularly use social media applications
Regularly purchase sports products online
Interact with e-SME brands through social media

The background and justification of the selected consumers is available in Appendix 2.

3.6 Case Study Research Strategy

Hartley (2004: 323) has proposed that case study research:

> "Consists of a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena, within their context,' with the aim being to provide an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied."

Furthermore, it is important to consider whether the case study will be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory, and a key decision to be made is whether the research will be based on a single case study or on multiple cases (Hartley, 2004). Hartley (2004) also states that the case study strategy is ideally suited to exploration of issues in depth, and in following leads into new areas of new constructions of theory, the theoretical framework at the beginning may not be the same one that is used at the end.

3.6.1 Selecting Data for the Case Study

Urqhart and Vaast (2012) have put forward the idea of 'central texts' and 'less central texts' and how these texts should be analysed. They advocate the method of analysing some text more deeply than others, hence the notion of having central texts to analyse. Less central texts can be used to provide corroboration or triangulation. The logic of determining central texts can provide an avenue for the researcher to consider which data sources are important in a design. The argument for central and less central texts to be identified supports the notion of establishing the boundary of a case study. One important consideration for social media

researchers is whether their boundary is purely a social media boundary, i.e. does the study only consider social media brand communities when collecting data?

As discussed previously, a further challenge when researching social media environments is the context issue. If the research is confined to an online environment, the same argument for context is applicable. Where Heverin (2011) investigated microblogging (Twitter) in various contexts and situations, this would involve the selection of microblogging posts (tweets) as the unit of analysis. However, in order to contextualise the study, tweets are short, and making sense of the sentiment in itself is difficult as, according to Boyd (2010), tweets are to be understood within an ensemble, such as the notion of ambient awareness, which is an awareness created through regular and constant contact or exchange of information fragments through social media communities (Kaplan, 2012).

For researchers, it is important to consider context, i.e. what the organisation tweeted and what the responses involved. When digital texts embed links to other digital texts that have some conceptual relevance, this again creates an issue in terms of the boundaries for the case study. An obvious downside of this is that researchers may be overwhelmed by potentially relevant data. It could also be argued that, link by link, the entire internet could become a research setting, making theory building all but impossible and meaningless (Urqhart and Vaast, 2012). This factor again emphasises the requirement to set boundaries for the case companies that are being researched, suggesting that purposeful sampling of similar groups that have different memberships can potentially increase the scope of the theory or increase the density of concepts in the theory (Urqhart and Vaast, 2012).

3.6.1 Sector Cases Observation

An observation of each e-SME's social media activity was undertaken in order to explore the various engagement strategies employed by the organisation. This allowed for a rich impression across the e-SMEs and also enhanced the evidence by evaluating multiple cases within the same sector. Case social media activity was tracked using the netnography approach over eight months, November 2013–June 2014, to discover strategies and engagement methods for two reasons. Firstly, pre-interviewing, to identify emerging themes and tactics relating to brand engagement and trust when interviewing consumers and key informants, and, secondly, post interviewing, to validate claims made in the interviews and literature.

3.6.2 Case Study Boundaries and Context

The central and less central digital media texts (Urqhart and Vaast, 2012) were identified in Table 3.6. During the netnography, all e-SME social media content was reviewed and

categorised into the areas advocated by (Urqhart and Vaast, 2012). This approach was undertaken to allow the researcher to condense the amount of data reviewed during the netnography.

Table 3.6 Central and Less Central Digital Media Texts

Characteristic	Example	Text (Central or Less Central)
Held in digital format	Chat threads, photos	Central
Contained on a web site	Web content	Less
Co-produced by more than one person	Web forums, wikis	Less
Ephemeral	Comments on a link, Facebook post	Central
Embeds other discourses	Link within a web page, linking digital text to another	Less
Contains images	Avatar, web content, photos	Central
Contains video	YouTube clips	Central
Lack of context	Microblog posts, e.g. tweets 140 characters	Central
Linguistic innovations blurring the distinction between icons and discourse	Emoticons, acronyms, e.g. lol	Less

Central texts and less central text were employed in this study and are highlighted in Table 3.7

Table 3.7 Central Text and Less Central Texts

	Central text	
Characteristic	**Example**	**Justification**
Comments on Facebook	Consumer posts/reactions to e-SME social media posts	Consumer responses will provide further insight and enable textual analysis for insights into which strategies are effective for trust development
	Less central text	
Characteristic	**Example**	**Justification**
Icons on Twitter	Emoticons	Analysis due to interpretation of emoticon design.

This research is based on posts and engagement responses from individual e-SMEs and consumers within a multiple case study framework, as well as key informant and consumer

interviews. In order to encompass credibility and robustness and construct validity, the case data will be analysed on two levels:

1. Intra-case analysis: a comparison is made of data with the theory covered in the literature review and theoretical framework.

2. Cross-case analysis: here, social media data from one e-SME case is compared to data in other e-SME cases.

3.6.3 Number of Cases and Interviews

In trying to verify hypotheses, quantitative researchers have finite ideas prior to starting research about the scope and aims of their projects. However, Adler and Adler (2011) state that qualitative researchers, working in the context of discovery, are more open-ended and often follow emergent empirical and conceptual findings in unexpected ways. A total of 12 e-SME sports companies (cases) were reviewed, and, for the purposes of this research, the number of interviews conducted was 30 (See Appendix for further interviewee details) as according to Adler and Adler (2011), this number could potentially provide a subject pool that offers the advantage of penetrating beyond a very small number of people without imposing the hardship of endless data gathering, especially when researchers are faced with time constraints. However as Becker (2007) has argued, there are no rules to tell you how much evidence is enough for a conclusion. Therefore, it was anticipated that the number of interviews may change but that the researcher must ensure that when the data gathering ceases, the data must support the conclusions and the conclusions cannot go beyond what the data can support.

This next section reviews the ethnographic research method for the SMBC analysis of chosen case site communications and feedback from consumer perspective online responses, as well as the possibilities and challenges associated with the data collection.

3.7 Possibilities and Challenges

Monitoring virtual communities using netnography has a number of advantages over traditional qualitative methods used to study the drivers of consumer behaviour, for instance, focus groups, personal interviews and market orientated ethnographies (de Valck et al., 2009), one example being that member interactions can be observed in a context that is neither created nor directed by the researcher. According to de Valck et al. (2009), researchers are able to observe a natural information exchange that influences opinion amongst community members and listen in on how they talk about brands and products. The community can also be observed without any invasion of privacy or interference with its activity. Focus groups, personal interviews and traditional ethnographies cannot be conducted unobtrusively (de

Valck et al., 2009); however, netnography can be conducted entirely unobtrusively if so desired (Kozinets, 2002). Furthermore, virtual communities can be examined from behind the researcher's desk and are accessible at any time (de Valck et al., 2009). Therefore, in contrast to traditional ethnographies of consumer communities, online community research and social media research are less time consuming and costly due to having continuous access to informants (Kozinets, 2002).

However, there are also challenges to using netnography. There is a large amount of data online, rendering these communities and their correspondence highly accessible to any investigator with access to the internet. Nevertheless, Kozinets (2006) has argued that raw or medium-raw data is not information, and knowledge has differential degrees of power. Consequently, it is easy to become overwhelmed by netnography's data tidal wave. Therefore, considering the amount of information online, the main challenge for the netnographic researcher is to find the relevant information about a research phenomenon and interpret it.

One further challenge is that netnography is also limited by the textual nature of much of the communicative exchange, which misses much of the richness of in-person communication, with its tonal shifts, body language and eye movements and so on (Kozinets, 2006). Within a textual reality, the anonymity that is sometimes advantageous at obtaining disclosure prevents the researcher from having confidence that they understand the discloser. In other words, the researcher is unable to have any fully reliable means of verifying the participants' expertise or background. However, whilst the researcher may not know the real people behind the people online, they can understand how they behave, interact and construct their lives and realities online.

3.7.1 Measuring Brand-Related Phenomena in Social Media

According to Li and Bernoff (2008), there are two relevant listening strategies on the web: either setting up your own private community or beginning brand monitoring of blogs, micro-blogging and social media platforms. Social media measurement analytics is still in its infancy stage, but it enables a company to evaluate whether conversations on a topic are increasing in size or decreasing, or if the conversation on the negative side increases or if there is a positive buzz around a brand or a product (Mandelli et al., 2010). Nevertheless, there also are limits to these models. They are both technical and conceptual, and they suffer from problems like privacy issues, incomplete raw data, oversized amounts of information, abstractions and assumptions, semantic complexity and the difficulty of connecting data to actions (Burby and Atchison, 2007).

3.7.2 Constructing Theory from Social Media Research

Constructing theory from social media environments provides researchers with significant challenges, such as theorising both the source of the data and being mindful of the social material context (Urquhart and Vaast, 2012 , Leonardi, 2011; Boyd and Ellsion, 2008). Research by Treem and Leonardi (2012) has concentrated on the use of case studies for building theory using social media, as the case study method affords researchers the ability to adjust to the specifics of the environment and gradually get to collect multiple types of data (Urquhart and Vaast, 2012). The label 'case study method' is a collective term, which indicates that developing a case study can rely upon a number of sources of evidence, such as documents, records and participant observation. This is particularly well suited for the purpose of generating theories using social media, as these environments have the potential to generate new data, and create a need for creativity on the researchers' part regarding data collection and analysis. However, a key challenge facing researchers is analysing digital texts within social media environments.

3.7.3 Digital Texts for Social Media Environments

A major challenge that social media researchers are faced with is defining legitimate units of analysis when, in a social media environment, they are provided with a considerable amount of data (such as web pages, posts and comments) that require evaluation. One further consideration is the use of imagery in social media communications. Banks (2007) made reference to the importance of including imagery in qualitative research; however, Urqhart and Vaast (2012) have highlighted that images tend to be analysed separately as opposed to being seen as part of the text that contains an image. They have also recommended that when reviewing digital text, images (with or without accompanying text) should be included. The characteristics of digital texts have been tabulated by Urqhart and Vaast (2012) and are reviewed below in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8: Characteristics of Digital Texts

Characteristic	Context	Example
Held in digital format	The digital format characteristic aligns with the digital text definition, describing text that is held in a digital format. There are a number of examples that potentially can create research concerns around data management.	Chat threads, photos
Contained on a web site	The web site characteristic concerns the context in terms of what the web content actually provides for the consumer.	Web content
Co-produced by more than one person	Co-produced by more than one person; confronts researchers ethical considerations within the research, such as letting the forum participants know that they are part of a research project, and does this require permission?	Web forums, wikis
Ephemeral	The ephemeral nature of the text creates further issues for social media research. This involves the creation of a systematic method of capturing texts. This, inevitably, can lead to the collection of large amounts of data, which effectively leads to further issues, such as data management and critically determining which texts are required for analysis.	Comments on a link, Facebook post
Embeds in other discourses	Digital texts can often embed other texts using hyperlinks. A key aspect of a digital environment is the potential to link content to each other. Hence, digital texts can be embedded in each another, creating new issues for data collection.	Link within a web page, linking digital text to another
Contains images	Imagery within social media is also an important characteristic to consider due to its popularity in newer social media platforms, such as Instagram and Pinterest.	Avatar, web content, photos
Contains video	Video content supports the previous characteristic. Information videos provide information from nonverbal cues. As a result, social media research may ascertain a lot of information from such video sources and they should be considered when designing the study.	YouTube clips
Lack of context	Lack of context is a consideration that social media researchers should also be aware of, such as time of day or company background.	Microblog posts, e.g. tweets 140 characters
Linguistic innovations blurring the distinction between icons and discourse	Linguistic innovations encompass the growing dependence upon acronyms, such as 'LOL', 'FYI'. Furthermore they have transformed written text, making it in some ways closer to oral language, like when lol interrupts a digital conversation, similarly to when laughter punctuates an unmediated conversation (Spencer and Mandelli, 2007).	Emoticons, acronyms

Source: Urqhart and Vaast (2012)

From a conceptual viewpoint, a framework is required which allows companies to better understand what brands can do in social media, for improving their reputation to participating in these social collectives, as well as understand how these new market encounters and narratives can help build better knowledge and support for action (Mandelli, 2010).

3.8 Data Collection Strategy and Conceptual Development Process

This section covers the data collection method utilised for this thesis. Data collection involved three key stages. Firstly, a pilot study was carried out, and, following this, the second stage concerned the main study. Thirdly, these stages were analysed following the process of

conceptual development undertaken in this research. These stages are displayed in Figure 3.2 below. Carson (2001) has argued that these stages provide a solid framework for business case research, and they have been utilised by Ashworth (2008) when conducting SME research. Figure 3.2 conveys how the data collection strategy facilitated a three-stage approach to theory building and key model development. Stage one covered the initial findings, which were established using the research design, involving a literature review, pilot study and interviews. The second stage involved collecting the main data (netnography and interviews). For stage three, the findings were collated in order to consolidate the theoretical understandings.

Figure 3.2 Conceptual Development Process

Stage 1: Exploratory		
Chapters	**Methods**	**Key Models**
Chapters 2,3	Develop initial conceptualisations • Literature review • Methodology • pilot study, • interview pilot	Figure 2.1: The Five Dimensions of a Social Media Brand Community Figure 2.2: Consumer engagement process in a virtual brand community Figure 2.3: The Customer Engagement Cycle Figure 2.4: E-SME First Order Constructs Figure 2.5: Theoretical Framework Figure 3.1 Philosophical Scaffolding Figure 3.2 Conceptual Development Process Figure 3.3 Interview Process Figure 3.4 Thematic Analysis Framework
Stage 2: Iterative		
Chapters	**Methods**	**Key Models**
Chapters 4,5,6,7,8	Main data collection 12 e-SME brands via netnography, 15 key informant interviews, 15 consumer interviews Confirmation and extension of initial conceptualisations through thematic analysis	Figure 4.19: Social Media E-SME Trust and Reputation Constructs Figure 5.18: Social Media Consumer Engagement and Trust Framework Figure 6.7 E-SME Social Media strategic engagement roadmap Figure 7.3: Social Media Corporate Value Figure 8.2 Consumer Trust Framework
Stage 3: Theory Consolidation		
Chapters	**Methods**	**Key Models**
Chapter 9	Theory developed and reviewed to confirm and extend initial conceptualisations	Figure 9.1 Social Media Consumer Engagement For Initial and Continual Trust Framework

Source: Adapted from Carson et al. (2001: 97)

Conceptual Models

Conceptual models are visual displays of theory demonstrating a picture of what the theory says is going on with the phenomenon being investigated. Miles and Huberman (1994, p18) defined a conceptual model as a visual or written product that "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied, the key factors, concepts, or variables, and the presumed relationships among them".

A conceptual model consists of two things: concepts and their relationships (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and can be used to pull together theory in order to see its implications, limitations and relevance to research. They can also be used to develop theory, assisting the researcher with identifying unexpected connections, or to highlight holes or contradictions in current theory and develop methods to resolve these issue in practice (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Ravitch and Riggan, 2011),

For the purposes of this research conceptual models will be used to display the findings, build theory and achieve the research objectives. It is anticipated that throughout the research the frameworks will develop as each data set is analysed, as according to Becker (2007) conceptual models usually require considerable reworking to get them to the point where they are most helpful to the researcher. Furthermore Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that conceptual frameworks are best suited to studies of social processes and that the conceptual framework is not an end in itself; it is a tool for developing theory and making that theory more explicit.

The conceptual model development followed the process highlighted by Miles and Huberman (1994). Whereby existing constructs were highlighted in the literature review (Chapter Two) from recent theory and the findings were analysed to identify and display the important connections between constructs. A narrative describing how the conceptual model reflects the phenomena will also be provided.

Becker (2007) argues that a conceptual model is not something that you do once and are finished with; rather researchers should go back and rework frameworks as understanding of the phenomena being investigated develops. Consequently, each iteration of the model presented will be used to inform the next stage of the research, as well as any updates as a result of additional findings. For instance the models developed from the netnography findings will be used to inform the interview frameworks. Final versions of the models will be presented

in the conclusions section of this research. (Chapter 10). This approach is displayed in Figure 3.2.1 highlighting model development in accordance with the research objectives.

Figure 3.2.1 Conceptual Model Development

Social Media Netnography
- Conceptual model for Social Media E-SME Trust and Reputation developed
- Conceptual model for Social Media Consumer Engagement and Trust developed
- Informs key informant and consumer interview sections of the research

Objectives 1,2,3

Interviews
- Confirms/updates Conceptual model for Social Media Consumer Engagement and Trust from social media netnography
- Conceptual model for E-SME Social Media strategic engagement developed
- Conceptual model for Social Media Corporate Value developed
- Conceptual trust framework developed

Objectives 4,5

Conclusions
- Conceptual Consumer Trust framework proposed
- Conceptual model for Social Media Consumer Engagement and Trust from social media netnography
- Conceptual model for Social Media Corporate Value

Objective 6

3.8.1 Exploratory Stage: Pilot Study

A four-week netnography of two e-SME brands and two in-depth pilot interviews were conducted with Sportshoes.com and Fitsense to enable comparative analysis and allow the richest, broadest insights pertinent to the research to be reviewed. Pilot e-SMEs were selected through the same screening process as the main study and provided an opportunity to store and analyse data gathering techniques. The pilot provided an opportunity to ensure interviews encompassed the key themes that emerged from the literature while also enabling the flexibility to explore emergent context/sector specific elements, as appropriate, to lay the foundations for the full-scale research, and that it was of appropriate duration to gather the required data (Ashworth, 2008). According to Gummerson (2005, p 312) crucial to qualitative research analysis is comparison, and, consequently, data were compared 'between cases', 'with existing theory', and 'with results from previous research'. Continuous comparison formed part of a sense-making process, where patterns were formed and developed into concepts and initial theories were formulated (Carson et al., 2001; Gummesson, 2005).

3.8.2 Main Study

The second and main phase of the study involved social media netnography for the selected e-SME brands and in-depth interviews in order to understand and conceptualise social media engagement strategies that develop trust and reputation. The netnography was terminated after eight months and the interviews were capped at 15 for consumers and 15 for key informants (including pilot research) as the data became saturated (Gummesson, 2000): this strategy ascertained the consistency of themes across the research. The research was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines required by Manchester Metropolitan University which follows the MRS (2002) Code of Conduct in terms of the treatment of interviewees, disclosure of interview aims and outcomes in relation to data collected and the use of information in the post-interview phase. To meet ethical requirements relating to confidentiality and to have the freedom to publish the results, informed consent was verbally gained, recorded, digitally stored and transcribed for each interview.

3.8.3 Netnography Stage

From November 2013–June 2014, all the social media postings from the sports e-SME social media channels were analysed rather than specific engagement messages, as reading all the postings enabled the author to get a better perspective from the e-SMEs and consumers. Reflective field notes were written during the data collection process. Kozinets (2002) has recommended this procedure because these written reflections often prove invaluable for contextualising the data. For this research, the writing of field notes helped to identify emerging themes from the discussion. Having conducted an observation of each e-SMEs social media postings and engagement contents (in order to explore cross-sector product/service offerings within e-SME cases), most cases were found to promote complementary products that spanned product categories rather than simply marketing one focal sports product category. This allowed for a more holistic and richer impression across cases and provided for a wider cross-industry understanding from an e-SME management perspective.

3.8.4 Netnography Data Analysis

Data collected using a netnography can be analysed through content analysis. According to Flick (2002), content analysis is one of the main procedures for analysing textual material, no matter where the material comes from – ranging from consumer interviews to e-WOM discussions on the internet. One of the essential features is the use of categories, which are often derived from theoretical models, where categories are brought to the empirical material and not necessarily developed from it; however, they are repeatedly assessed against it and modified if required (Flick, 2002). As the aim of this research was to investigate how social

media consumer engagement can be used by e-SME brands to develop trust and build brand reputation with potential and current customers, central and less central texts content analysis was considered to be the best method for analysis.

The content analysis was carried out with the guidance of the theoretical framework categories (Chapter Two). The theoretical framework worked as a directing tool rather than a fixed categorisation for analysis as this research employed thematic content analysis**.** Thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge that are deemed to be important to the description of the phenomenon (Daly et al., 1997). The process involves the identification of themes through 'careful reading and re-reading of the data' (Rice and Ezzy, 1999: 258). It is a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis.

3.9 Interview Strategy

Due to access limitations, six interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis and 24 via telephone, which is a method that has been previously adopted for Canadian SME research (Tiessen et al., 2001). Both methods enabled probing questions to be asked in order to maximise data richness (Ashworth, 2008). Personal demographic data was not collected for any of the interviewees as the pilot study showed key informant and consumer reluctance to reveal detailed personal facts beyond work-oriented or research information. Tiessen et al. (2001) advocates 'grand-tour' questions, which were utilised in this thesis, based on over-arching themes in the main study interview guide. This enabled key themes to be probed and meanings explored, elaborated on and clarified. Note taking was also carried out throughout the interviews. This allowed prompt recapping and any queries to be dealt with during the interview. Stake (1995) and Warren (2002) argue that interviews are best conducted at the source; however, comparable data richness was achieved via telephone interviews in this research. Both face-to-face and telephone interviews lasted around one hour, although the longest interviews lasted for over 90 minutes.

The stage interview process utilised for preparation of this thesis, which incorporates access, cracking the e-retail code, the presentation style of the interviewer, rapport, data collection strategy and outcomes, is summarised in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 Interview Process

Process Step	Description
1. Access to the setting	Access to key informants/consumers
2. Understand language/culture of participants	Understanding the setting
3. Decide how to present self	Professional-yet informal attire/conduct
4. Locate participant(s)	Identify key informants
5. Gain trust and involvement	Developed from screening, built upon from further communication
6. Establish rapport	Open direct and informal approach
7. Collect, probe, elicit	Email/telephone/ face to face open dialogue enables rich data generation
8. Transcribe, review, code, conceptualise	Continuous review to identify themes

Source: Adapted from Ashworth (2005)

3.9.1 In-depth Interview Rationale

In-depth interviews are a significant source of evidence used in this research as they are 'one of the most powerful techniques in qualitative methodology' and a significant research tool with the capability of deriving 'shared meanings' (McCracken, 1988: 7). In-depth interviews are also considered to be the 'best method of gathering (detailed) information' (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002: 86) and are one of the 'most common and powerful ways' by which to 'understand' (Fontana and Frey, 2000: 645). By adopting a guided interview approach, the in-depth method also has the advantage that issues are framed by participants. McCracken (1988, p 12) highlights that that the in-depth approach to an interview strategy is designed to 'take advantage of the opportunity for insight and minimise the dangers of familiarity'. However, a key concern for in-depth research is that individuals lead 'hectic, deeply segmented and privacy-centred lives, even the most willing have only limited time and attention to give' (McCracken, 1988: 10). Consequently, 'time scarcity and concern for privacy, stand as important impediments to the qualitative study of modern life' (McCracken, 1988: 11), and this was also the case when interviewing key informants and consumers. As a result, interview times were coordinated at convenient times for all participants. The rationale for utilising the

in-depth interview method in social construction research is advocated by Fontana and Frey (2000: 646), who suggest that interviews act as active interactions that lead to contextually-based results, which are, unlike other forms of social research, able to reveal both the 'how' and the 'what' of business or e-SME life. Furthermore, they assume that interviewing can result in a true and accurate reflection of the research area. In-depth interviews also allow the researcher to 'achieve qualitative objectives within a manageable methodological context' (McCracken, 1988: 11). Recommendations in qualitative interviewing necessitate that there be a focus on the voices of the interview participants (Fontana and Frey, 2000) as a way of ensuring rich, quality data and enhanced understanding of topics under investigation (Gummesson, 2005), effectively framing the interview as an emergent process, which is the stance utilised in this thesis.

3.9.2 Screening Interviews

Screening interviews were typically conducted via telephone and email communications with the key informants and consumer interviewees. Screening calls/emails enabled the author to further understand the interviewees background and if they met the sampling criteria. Once interviewees agreed to participate, interviews were scheduled at an appropriate time to fit participant commitments.

3.9.3 Elicitation, Probing and Laddering

Johnson and Weller (2002) state that elicitation and probing allow interviewees to report 'with some degree of accuracy, perceptions, judgements, decisions' and 'particular areas of experience' (Johnson and Weller, 2002: 492). From a social constructionist perspective, elicitation techniques have an exploratory emergent character implicit in the process of revealing tacit or subjective understandings (Ashworth, 2008). Consequently, interview guidelines were composed, yet remained open and flexible, to accommodate new phenomena and exploration of themes and constructs arising from the literature and to allow interviews to flow (Tesch, 1994), which helped information elicitation relevant to the research questions (Lewis, 2004). Elicitation techniques are used in the context of this research to 'aid in expert knowledge acquisition through the identification of explanations of domain processes' (Johnson and Weller, 2002: 492) as well as gain valuable consumer insights. Indeed, Silverman (1997) states that a key advantage of this method is that utilising open questions allowed interviewees to speak freely about complex issues, which would have been difficult to determine from a closed-questionnaire approach. This also allowed respondents to determine their own responses, so not limiting possible responses (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

Interviews were carried out in accordance with Dick (1998), who recommends commencing the interview in an open-ended way, with more specific questions asked as the interview progresses. The interview techniques undertaken for each interview included clarification, feedback (without leading the interviewee) and probing. This approach ensured that questions and answers were understood, participants were encouraged to share experiences and deeper meanings were investigated via 'laddering' to provide full, rich and comprehensive data for analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Laddering 'enables the researcher to understand an individual's construct system' (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 431), where 'laddering up' provides information as to why a particular aspect is important and 'laddering down' explores the effect of perceptions. For example, consumer interviewees were asked what motivated them to engage with e-SME brands on social media and which aspects developed trust. As a result, interview protocols for the key informant and consumer interviews were also constructed and are available in Appendices 3 and 4.

3.9.4 Adopting Telephone Interview Research for Long Interviews

Distinctive in this thesis is the use of the telephone to conduct 'long interviews' (i.e. over 20 minutes' duration). According to Wenger (2002), telephone interviewing relates to short interviews that usually last half the duration of face-face interviews, never exceed 30 minutes and result in limited data. However, this research utilised telephone interviewing to conduct in-depth interviews lasting generally one hour. This was a useful strategy for accessing time-constrained participants (Tausig and Freeman, 1988) and enabled data to be generated with comparable richness to that generated from face-to-face encounters. However, telephone interviewing does not enable the researcher to observe participant body language. Nevertheless, this is balanced by effective listening acknowledged in this thesis. This enabled aspects of conversations involving pause and intonation to be probed in order to understand appropriate emphases and meanings regarding pertinent issues. The rationale for the largely telephone-based approach was due to the time constraints of the individual key informants and consumers, in accordance with Tausig and Freeman (1988), and resulted in rich qualitative data being provided. This offered an effective approach for gaining rich insights into the perceptions of key informants and consumers.

3.10 Data Analysis

Data are, by definition, raw intelligence that requires analysis and subsequent interpretation to become useful information (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Patton (1990) has claimed that analysis of data aims to provide sense, reduce volume, identify trends and themes and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveals. Bryman and

Bell (2007) have stated that there are several generally accepted methods of analysing qualitative data, as outlined in Table 3.9.

Table 3.9 Methods of Analysing Qualitative Data

Discourse analysis	Interpreting language used by individuals within a specific social context
Narrative analysis	Showcasing the stories and metaphors that people tell and use to interpret their lives and the social context of the world around them
Thematic Content analysis	The classification of textual units into specific categories for identification of inferences around a specific social phenomenon
Template analysis	Interpretation through the design of a template consisting of codes subject to continual review and change as the researcher gathers and analyses data in order to highlight themes and patterns within the data

Source: Bryman and Bell (2007)

3.10.1 Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Bryman and Bell (2007) state that code-book analysis, also referred to as 'qualitative thematic analysis', falls within the social construction framework. This involves data analysis based on a thematic (coding) template, and this is the approach taken in analysing data gathered in this thesis. This thesis (given the saturation of themes across participant e-SMEs, key informants and consumers) stresses the development of a holistic conceptual analysis of the empirical data from cumulative cases rather than presenting individual participant stories in their entirety (Ashworth, 2008). As a result, digressions and repetitions are edited out of social media category postings and transcript excerpts for reasons of brevity and ease of understanding (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Quotes were taken directly from the social media platforms as well as interview transcripts in order to maintain data richness. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that any case study within qualitative research should by its very nature be flexible and open-ended, and as a consequence may continue to evolve throughout the study. Consequently, texts (social media posts and interview transcripts) were analysed and transcribed on an ongoing basis with accompanying brief field notes (Gummesson, 2000) so that any emergent

phenomena could be probed in following interviews. This approach ensured that the researcher did not identify data omissions in the final stages. As this research sought to investigate how social media consumer engagement can be used by e-SME brands to develop trust and build brand reputation with potential and current customers, content analysis was adopted for analytical purposes. This allowed for the pre-determination of initial themes derived from the literature and theoretical framework and subsequent revisions based on the ongoing analysis.

3.10.2 Analysis Framework

From a data analysis perspective, the internet provides many opportunities for gathering observational data on a large scale and for using data to construct, test and adapt models of how consumers behave in a web environment. Utilising the methods available to conduct research gives brands the opportunity to thrive in a fast moving, competitive and constantly changing environment (Breakenridge, 2008). Scott (2009) considered the Internet and social media in particular to be similar to a huge focus group with uninhibited customers offering up their thoughts for free. As a result, customer-generated (or expert-generated) information about a specific brand should be considered important and valuable as more formal market and media research (Scott, 2009).

In the fast changing and turbulent e-commerce markets of today, it is especially important to conduct brand research on a regular basis, as consumer behaviour can change much faster than any formal market research programme (Breakenridge, 2008). Li and Bernoff (2008) have recommended two relevant listening strategies for the web: setting up a private community or beginning brand monitoring via blogs, micro-blogging, social networking and video sharing. Linguistic models for these platforms allow brands to analyse the content and the tonality of a story, even revealing whether the speaker is male or female (Breakenridge, 2008).

The analysis in this thesis examines the data for constructs, themes, and patterns, and the insertion of rich quotations and examples from social media platforms and transcripts are used to describe and explain phenomena (Gall et al., 1996). The analysis of the texts formed an ongoing iterative process. This involved reading and re-reading transcripts as well as field notes in order to gain a deeper understanding of the data and their underlying patterns across cases (Ashworth, 2008). Initial conceptualisations structured and guided data gathering and analysis, ensuring they were not restrictive (Cepeda and Martin, 2005). For example, the constructs drawn in understanding trust development and reputation through social media engagement were developed through emergent themes arising from the netnography and interviews.

Key issues were derived from the data and comparisons made, whilst maintaining richness (Silverman, 1997), enabling elements of the data to speak for themselves (Gummesson, 2000) in the form of rich quotations from the texts being appropriately dispersed within the research, and providing evidence for the subsequent conclusions that were made.

Data in this research were condensed in order to make them more manageable without losing their weight, which is a technique advocated by Gummesson (2005) and Bryman and Bell (2007). For example, over 400 pages of transcripts and netnography postings were condensed into an analysis section across five broad categories linked to the research objectives, incorporating: (1) e-SME strategies to develop trust, (2) e-SME strategies to encourage engagement, (3) key informant perception of trust and engagement, (4) key informant perception of value, and (5) consumer perspective of trust and engagement on social media. Theoretical saturation was established through evidence gained of recurrent themes across cases.

3.10.3 Manual Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Data were manually analysed since 'interpretation cannot be taken over by computers even if software for treating qualitative data can facilitate research' (Gummesson, 2003: 485). Software packages, such as NVivo, can increase the speed and efficiency of the interpretation process (e.g. Seale, 2002; Bringer et al., 2004). However, according to Gummesson (2003), software such as NVivo can assist research but it should not take over from author interpretation, as interpretation requires the researcher's ability to consistently fine-tune data as the research project unfolds (Ashworth, 2008). This was covered through adjusting critical themes that evolved from the pilot study to the main study and the application of thematic constructs to enable analysis across case e-SMEs. The main advantage of the manual thematic analysis used in this thesis is that it enabled the researcher to become connected with the rich data as texts were reviewed and transcribed through several readings of the transcripts during data coding and condensing. This type of analysis resulted in theory generation within the realm of constructionist research. This research process has been iterative in nature and the study advanced from 'pre-understanding' (literature review) to initial 'understanding' (pilot study) 'to a new level of understanding' (full-scale research study) and from substantive, specific data, in the form of rich interview transcripts (Ashworth, 2008), to conceptualisations that may 'serve as vehicles for reaching more general theory levels' (Gummesson, 2003: 491). In this thesis, the strategy adopted was one of cumulative theory development – where extended and new theories constitute the results (Carson et al., 2001).

3.10.4 Quality Criteria and Validation Issues

Diekmann (2003) has proposed that any form of social research claims to fulfil certain quality criteria for measuring and collecting data. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that measurement or the methods of measurement should be as objective, reliable and valid as possible Bryman and Bell, 2007). Titscher et al. (2000) have also stated that when conducting content analysis, the research strategy that is often undertaken is governed by the traditional criteria of validity and reliability, where the latter is a precondition for the former (but not vice versa). This was reinforced by Mayring (2003), who posited that since arguments concerning the content are judged to be more important than methodical issues in qualitative analysis, validity takes priority over reliability. However, Mayring (2003) also warned that there can be a dearth in statements about the reliability and validity of the results achieved.

3.10.5 Data Collection Application

The social constructionist paradigm, inductive method and qualitative data gathering are all focused on giving voice to the reality perceived by individuals to given social phenomena and specific contexts (Bryman and Bell, 2003). To accomplish this, the researcher must use a number of interpretive techniques, first describing and then decoding the messages received from the study. As stated, the author chose to utilise a multiple case study approach, which can provide information to the researcher from a number of different sources, such as company messages, and direct observation by the researcher. Data collection began after the e-SME social media communities were selected (Kozinets, 2002). According to netnography, data collection and analysis require joining and actively participating in the communities under study to become familiar with the context and cultural aspects of the communities (Kozinets, 2010). The author was able to view each e-SME social media community by accessing their page through the e-SME website links and by pressing the 'like' or 'follow'. For example, the author was able to receive social media updates once the brand posted new content. The author then followed and reviewed the e-SME social media content from the selected cases. The data were comprised of posts on the page created by the e-SMEs, as well as comments, pictures and videos accompanying explanatory texts (most of the members' posts on the wall).

3.10.6 Thematic Data Analysis

When analysing textual data, there are two main options to pursue. Either the researcher can code the text at a detailed level or they can apply a thematic framework of some kind (Bryman and Bell, 2007). This is still applicable in the social media environment (Heverin, 2011). By adopting a central text format, the data can be analysed in depth, provided that the less central texts are integrated into the findings.

Thematic frameworks are often used to analyse qualitative data, and there are a number of options available. For example, there are many frameworks in discourse analysis (e.g. Brown and Yule, 1983) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) that can be applied to digital texts. Braun and Clark (2006) have also suggested building thematic frameworks from the data reviewed.

3.10.7 Analysing Visual Digital Texts

There are various ways of analysing visual data such as images, photos and videos. First, the information can be coded as if it was any other type of digital text. Most qualitative data analysis packages have the capability to store visuals and code them; hence, there seems to be no obstacle to this type of analysis being conducted (Urqhart and Vaast, 2012). Banks (2007) also previously suggested images can be viewed as not neutral but as constructed texts. This again leads back to the context of the case study design.

3.10.8 Interview Pre-Communicated Framework

The use of a pre-communicated framework utilised the available time to its best advantage and worked well with the delivery mechanism for the semi-structured interviews. It had the additional advantages of:

a) Allowing the interviewee to pre-process the context of the question areas, allowing for more reflective, structured answers which were an aid to analysis, and

b) Re-enforcing the applicability of responses between and across the case companies and, thus, the robustness of the research findings.

3.10.9 Analysis of the Formal Interviews

Fereday and Muir-Cochran (2006) have stated that such codes and constructs need to be firmly rooted in the subjective meaning of human action. Therefore, they have identified three essential postulates:

1. Logical consistency: clarity of conceptual framework and method

2. Subjective interpretation: what any action or decision means for the 'actor'

3. Adequacy: clarity of focus between the researcher and the respondent

3.10.10 Analysis Framework

The analysis in this research involved exploring the data for themes, constructs and patterns, with the inclusion of quotations from transcripts used to describe and explain phenomena (Gall et al., 1996). The analysis formed an ongoing iterative process, which required reading and

re-evaluating transcripts to ascertain a comprehensive understanding of the data and its underlying themes across cases. Initial conceptualisations from the pilot research and literature review assisted with the structure and steered data gathering and analysis (Cepeda and Martin, 2005), building through emergent themes that arose from the interviews, demonstrating brand trust was identified. Conclusions were drawn from the data, with comparisons being made from the netnography and expert, consumer interviews.

In order to research the constructs that assist with the formation of brand trust, coding and template analysis allowed textual analysis to be conducted of the netnography case studies and interview transcripts. Themes from the data were then highlighted and coded to attain higher order themes. Transcripts and interview notes were condensed within the analysis framework by case company using categories that are linked to the research objectives. Theoretical saturation was achieved through the evidence of recurrent themes across cases. A thematic analysis framework is presented in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 – Thematic Analysis Framework
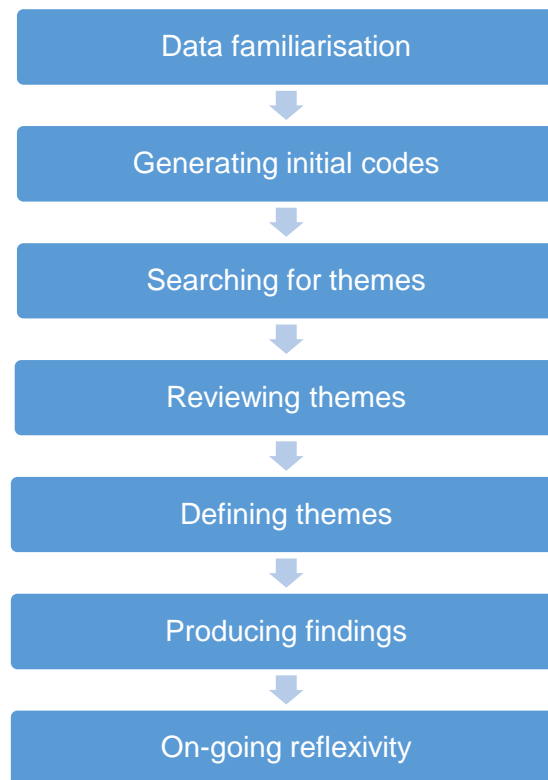
It was anticipated that this structure would facilitate the fluidity of movement as it allowed the sub-groups and codes to influence emergent themes. Critics of this approach might question the suggested structure and organisation of a project as time consuming and unnecessary (Chamberlain, 2000). However, as mentioned previously, the author was of the belief that this

method would increase the validity and credibility of the study (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Figure 3.5 highlights the analytical framework adopted when reviewing each social media post in order to categorise and analyse emergent themes.

Figure 3.5 Social media netnography analytical framework
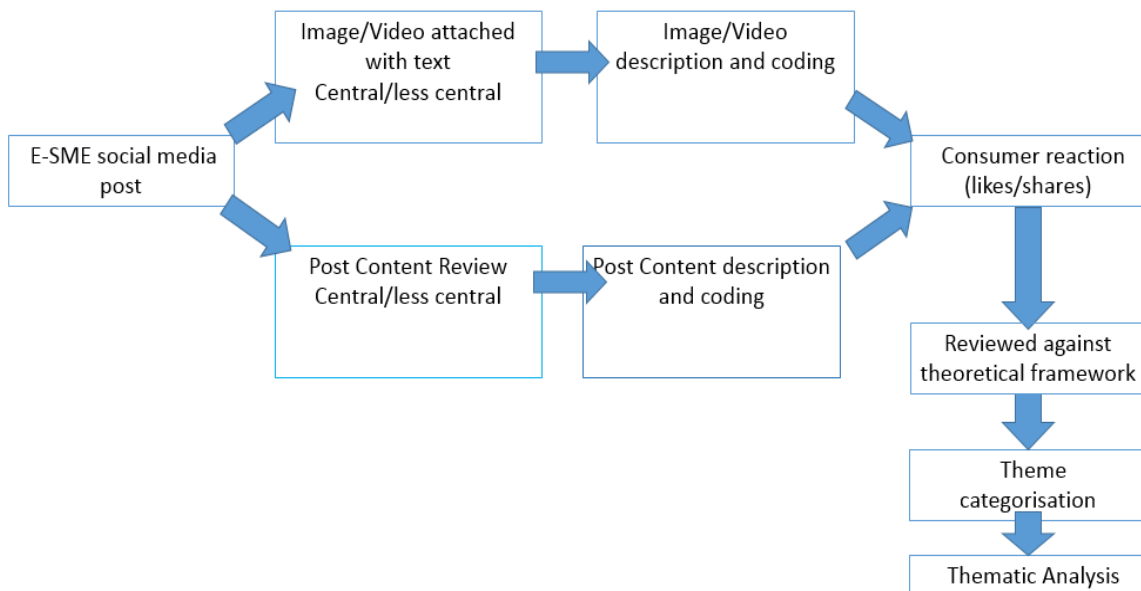
Examples of the netnography coding are represented in figure 3.6.

Figure 3.6: E-SME social media brand community netnography post and coding
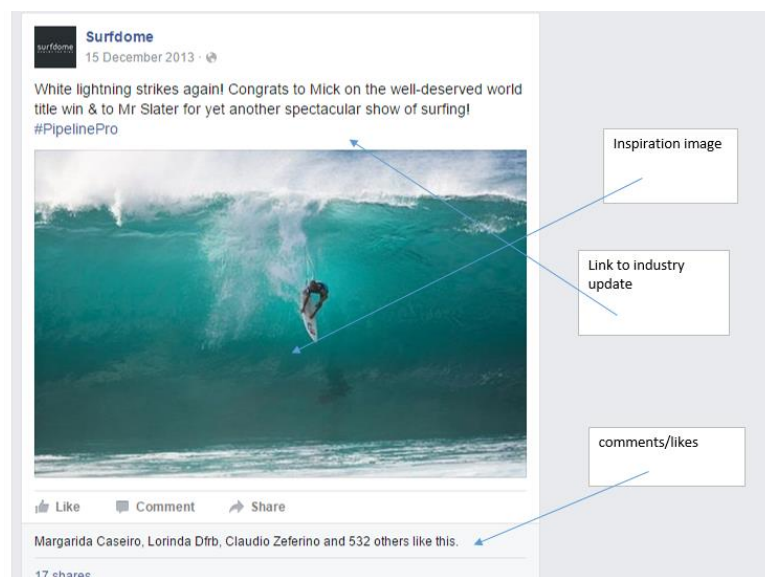
The interview framework applied and coding examples are represented in figures 3.7 and 3.8 respectively

Figure 3.7: Interview Framework

Figure 3:8 Interview coding example

3.10.11 Analysis Protocol

Data analysis followed a four-part protocol that linked to the research objectives and guided the analysis.

Analysis Part One: Sample Overview, Meanings and Constructs

The first stage of the analysis addresses research objective 3, which was to analyse the current strategies sports retail e-SMEs employ to create online consumer brand engagement in social media communities. In order to ground the context of the cases, this involved preparation of an e-SME sample and products overview. Details of the case companies and social media channels can be seen in Table 3.2. In order to develop an understanding of the e-SME engagement strategies, the next level of analysis involved thematically coding the data into meanings for trust, engagement and reputation according to criteria social media experts perceived as important. Social media activity and transcripts were analysed to extrapolate the constructs and types of communication that create trust and develop reputation (objectives 1 and 2). Constructs were then tabulated and a qualitative thematic analysis conducted to categorise the activity.

Part Two – Driving Engagement Communication Constructs

The next stage concerned reviewing the communications constructs that effectively encourage consumer engagement with an e-SME brand. Transcripts were analysed and thematically coded in order to attain objectives 3 and 4. Core constructs were outlined by consumers and key informants as critical drivers for social media engagement, and a comparative thematic matrix analysis of the transcripts was undertaken to display the prevalence of each theme. Themes were positioned into concepts, which were then examined in order to determine the incidence of social media activity and engagement success.

Based on the overall prevalence of each theme across cases, a hierarchy of concepts was developed. Categories were then utilised to organise the data and determine the nature of the constructs and any relationships between them (Tiessen et al., 2001). The findings were then conceptualised into an e-SME brand social media map for consumer engagement to develop trust and build brand reputation with potential and current customers. The aim was to visually demonstrate engagement perceptions regarding what drivers for trust and reputation formation were. Concepts which emerged from the netnography and interviews were then compared with existing and emergent themes within the literature (Gummesson, 2006), to either contrast or confirm existing theories, as well as contributing new theories.

Parts Three and Four: Conceptual Framework Development

In part three, data were analysed in order to conceptually develop an understanding of the way corporates perceive the value of using social media to acquire and retain customers in order to achieve objective 5.

Finally, part four of the data analysis involved using the analysis framework to sort the interview data so as to review social media engagement strategies in order to satisfy objective six. Objective six involved developing a conceptual framework for e-SMEs to demonstrate how effective use of social media communities can potentially create and develop brand trust and reputation through online consumer brand engagement. Aspects were identified and incorporated into the previous analysis findings to create the final stage of the conceptual model. Findings were conceptually developed, and, as Gummesson (2005) stated with regard to qualitative research, if the aim is theory generation then the study must provide conceptualisation and condensation or the researcher has not contributed interpretation and meaning to the phenomena.

In summary, a multiple case approach has been adopted in this thesis to generate theory. Given that saturation of evidence was achieved across multiple cases and interview respondents, the findings are positioned to assist in understanding the complexities of consumer trust and reputation development through e-SME social media engagement. Considering the strong ecological and participant validity in this thesis, the findings may teach general lessons to a wider domain, in line with Barnes et al. (2004), McCracken (1988) and Carson et al. (2001). Justification is also provided by Burr (2003), who argues that social constructionist research is sufficient so long as there are recurrent themes to identify members as belonging to the same group.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the ontological and epistemological approaches to this thesis, which centres on a social constructionist research philosophy in order to explore e-SME social media consumer engagement and how this method of communication can develop trust and build brand reputation with potential and current customers. A case study research strategy adopting a netnography for the e-SME sports retail sector, in-depth semi-structured interviews with consumers and social media experts to the point of data saturation was deemed suitable. Both face-to-face and telephone interviews were employed to gather data. In order to claim validity and credibility for the research, triangulation procedures were undertaken to

consolidate the rigour within the study (Gummesson, 2000), such as multiple qualitative methods, and also saturation of cases. The research design used for this thesis ensured that the findings of this study have emerged from understandings of e-SME social media strategy and, as a result, this thesis satisfies the demands for theory building in qualitative research in accordance with Carson et al. (2001) and Barnes et al. (2004).

In order to claim trustworthiness in social constructionist research, several validity or credibility procedures were undertaken to establish rigour in the process (e.g. Creswell and Miller, 2000; Gummesson, 2000), including the saturation of cases, social media tracking, peer review, maintaining rich descriptions via e-SME social media examples and insertion of excerpts from transcripts within the thesis, via qualitative thematic analyses, to explore perceptions of phenomena related to consumer trust and e-SME reputation development, through social media engagement. For this research to claim credibility and trustworthiness, its follows the recommendations of Fontana and Frey (2000). That is, it should have some structure and that it establishes a social setting, identifiable cases and discernible interviewees. In the context of this thesis, structure is present, guided by the initial research; and there is a 'social setting' and identifiable cases (the e-retail social media netnography), as well as discernible interviewees (key informants and a consumer perspective). The cumulative experience of the participants also adds credence to the interview approach advocated by Johnson and Weller (2002). The next chapter will discuss the findings of the research. The data from the netnography cases and the consumer and key informant interviews are presented in the form of excerpts to enable the representation of a number of themes and key perceptions in order to develop an understanding of the phenomena. Advocates of this 'frame-grabbing' technique, who include Gummesson (2000) and Silverman (2006), argue that highlighting rich direct quotations allows the data to emphasis the key areas. This method is used throughout the remainder of the analysis chapters. To summarise, the findings presented in this thesis are generated from multiple sources, which include e-SME social media activity, key informants (i.e. social media practitioners) and consumers, collectively representing an in-depth understanding and considerable cumulative experience in the e-commerce and social media domains. This satisfies the requirement for respondents to have full-time experience in the topic under consideration and current involvement in the activity in order to add credence to interview studies (Johnson and Weller, 2002; Creswell and Miller, 2000).

Chapter Four

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4. Presentation of the findings and analysis for the constructs that develop consumer trust and build reputation for e-SME brands using social media platforms, from theoretical integration of the literature and case netnography.

4.1 Part One- Introduction

Before investigating the constructs for initial trust and continual trust it was important to establish a theoretical foundation for trust. This chapter displays the trust and reputation constructs, findings and analysis from the case netnography social media brand communities (SMBCs). The posts and consumer responses used in the netnography are taken from the 12 selected e-SME brand social media communities. In order to stay true to the data, the language used by consumers and e-SME brand social media posts are typically adopted in the excerpts used to support the constructs identified in this chapter. The concepts of trust and reputation are considered primarily in the context of social media interaction between e-SME brands and consumers, which is in accordance with research objectives 1 and 2. In presenting the findings, for reasons of brevity, examples of social media posts and comments are included, which provide a representation of a number of exemplary perceptions to analyse the research. This frame-grabbing technique allows the researcher to demonstrate evidence of probing and the richness of the research text. This protocol is employed throughout the remainder of the analysis chapters (4-8).

4.1.1 Cumulative Experience-Based Evidence

To establish credibility and to validate social constructionist research, engagement in the field is required in order to develop context. As a result, it was necessary to review the experience base of sports e-SME cases, key informants (reviewed in Chapters Six and Seven) and consumers (reviewed in Chapter Eight) in order to provide further understanding of the level of experience, engagement and membership participation within the sample. A total of 12 e-SMEs were researched as part of the netnography, with 2,882 social media posts analysed during the research period. Some organisations focussed on different social media platforms to develop their communities and as a result were not heavily represented in all of the constructs presented. Table 4.1 outlines the e-SMEs researched as well as the amount of 'fans' or 'followers' on their respective official social media communities. The social media channels and followers highlighted were correct at the time of conducting the research.

Table 4.1 Case Study E-SME Representation

e-SME	Facebook Likes	Twitter Followers	Google + Followers	YouTube Subscribers	Pinterest Likes	Instagram followers	Total
The Soccer Store	4,459	2,769	67	n/a	n/a	n/a	7,295
Surfdome	428,231	49,900	984	142	579	n/a	479,836
Sportsjamkits	1,449	609	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,058
Sportshoes	11,413	3,245	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14,658
ProBikeKit	51,418	4,996	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	56,414
Newitts	5,544	1,981	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7,525
Kitbag	57,824	36,600	255	553	n/a	1,312	94,424
Fitsense	1,539	451	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,990
Chelston Direct	2,523	3,292	39	78	n/a	n/a	5,815
Direct Soccer	6,572	1,687	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8,259
Direct Teamwear	189	564	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	753
Fitness Footwear	2,938	1,184	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4,122
Total	**574,099**	**107,278**	**1,345**	**773**	**579**	**1,312**	**683,149**

Table 4.2 displays the number of social media posts from each e-SME during the netnography period. The research included empirical data gathered from the 12 e-SMEs social media communities covering an eight month period from November 2013-June 2014.

Table 4.2 E-SME Social Media Community Posts

E-SME	Facebook posts	Twitter Tweets	Google + posts	YouTube Video posts	Pinterest Pins	Instagram posts	Total
The Soccer Store	68	177	28	n/a	n/a	n/a	273
Surfdome	50	102	114	n/a	174	579	1,019
Sportsjamkits	35	15	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	50
Sportshoes	46	166	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	212
ProBikeKit	39	135	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	174
Newitts	37	124	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	161
Kitbag	37	356	84	7	n/a	8	492
Fitsense	25	31	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	56
Chelston Direct	50	136	60	n/a	n/a	n/a	246
Direct Soccer	9	68	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	77
Direct Teamwear	13	70	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	83
Fitness Footwear	18	21	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	39
Total	**427**	**1,401**	**286**	**7**	**174**	**587**	**2,882**

The role of trust in social networks has previously been investigated by looking at various sources and types in an attempt to explain trust-related decision making by consumers. However, the literature review highlighted that little empirical research has been conducted specifically for e-SMEs in this area. Consequently, this section of the thesis addresses objectives 1 and 2 by identifying the constructs from the netnography that form online consumer trust and develop reputation for e-SME brands in comparison to the literature review (Chapter Two). The analysis and interpretation first led to the development of a conceptual model, illustrating that a combination of seven core constructs develop consumer trust for e-SMEs on social media, presented in Table 4.3 and conceptualised in Figure 4.1. The model highlights the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of consumer trust. The constructs are further explained through the empirical netnography findings, with conceptual models and sub-constructs for each area throughout this chapter.

Figure 4.1   E-SME Social Media Trust Constructs
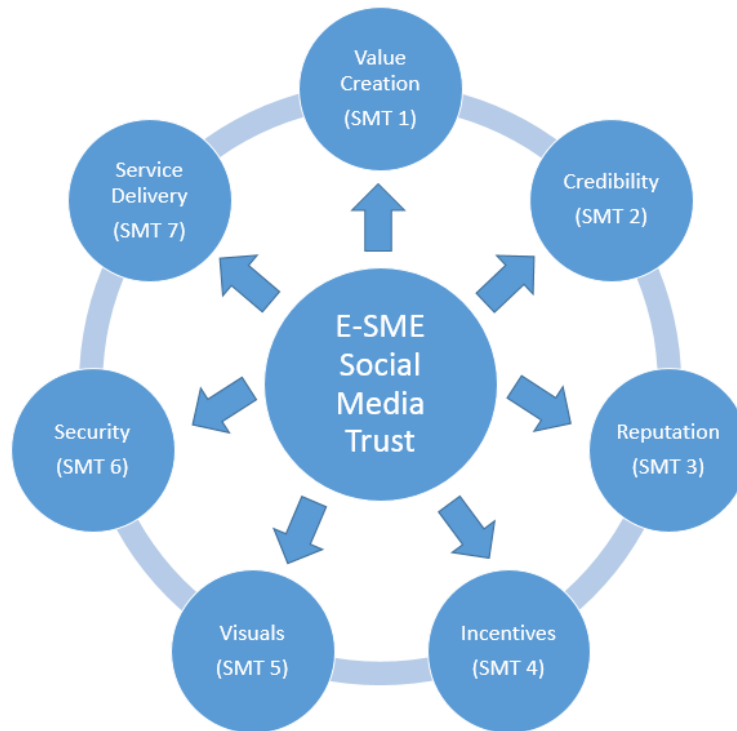
Source: Inductively developed from the data

Table 4.3 E-SME Social Media Trust Constructs

Theme-Social media (SMT)	E-SME Social Media Trust Constructs	Definition
SMT 1	Value Creation	**Information dissemination covering product/service usage, as well as personal information and experiences between e-SMEs and consumers (Schau et al., 2009).**
SMT 2	Credibility	**Supplier having the required expertise to carry out their role in the transaction effectively, with competence and reliability (Ganesan, 1994); Flaviàn and Guinalìu. 2006).**
SMT 3	Reputation	**Attitudinal construct that consists of two components: an emotional (affective) component and a rational (cognitive) component (Fombrun, et al., 2000).**
SMT 4	Incentives	**Financial rewards for purchasing or engaging with an organisation (Blattberg and Neslin 1990).**
SMT 5	Visuals	**Visual associated with a social media post which can be subject to consumer interpretation (Aula, 2010).**
SMT 6	Security	**Information preserving techniques specifically tailored to social media platforms Novak and Li (2012).**
SMT 7	Service Delivery	**Act of providing and maintaining a service to consumers (Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012)**

This section of the thesis also informs the interview sections of the research, by highlighting key development areas as well as valuable contributions to theoretical knowledge. The following analysis reviews the E-SME consumer social media trust constructs from the empirical findings. Each construct section shall adopt the presentation framework displayed in Figure 4.2. For reasons of brevity e-SME managerial implications from the constructs will be reviewed in the conclusions chapter.

Figure 4.2 Construct Presentation
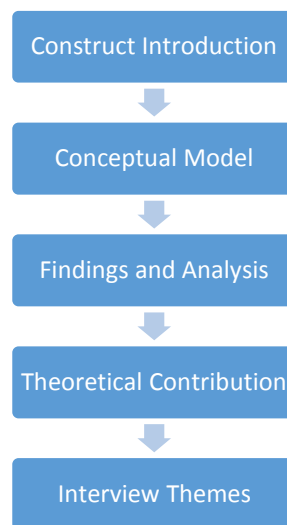
In summary, the evidence presented in this section is generated from social media posts and comments from e-SME social media brand communities displaying in-depth understanding and considerable cumulative experience in the sports retail social media engagement field. The next section presents and analyses the constructs of consumer trust and reputation building in an e-SME brand social media community.

4.2 Part Two-Investigating the constructs of consumer trust and reputation building in an e-SME brand using social media engagement

The second part of this chapter addresses the constructs of consumer trust and explores reputation building through e-SME brand social media engagement among the cases and exhibits an updated conceptual model for the constructs associated with trust development. Evidence is provided in the form of excerpts and engagement scores (i.e. the amount of likes, shares, comments, retweets each post generates) offering further development to recent academic literature.

4.3 Value Creation

One of the avenues for developing online consumer trust is 'Value Creation' which is based on information dissemination covering product/service usage, as well as personal information and experiences between e-SMEs and consumers. The findings demonstrated that value is created through two sub constructs: knowledge and experience, from both the e-SME and consumer, which together comprise value creation. These constructs are conceptualised in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 Value Creation Constructs
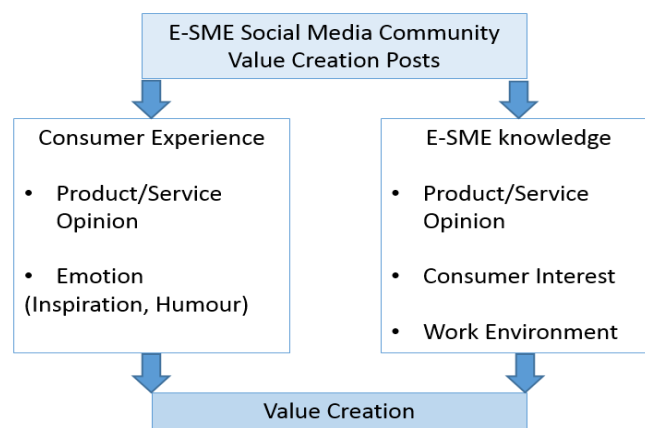
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data

Previous e-business literature has highlighted that social media platforms facilitate the process of information dissemination and that repeated interaction through long term relationships are introduced as key to building trust. The suggestion here is that these enhanced relationships lead to brand trust and that brand social media communities can engender value creation practices, where consumers are able to develop close relationships and draw values from their long term interaction.

By highlighting the consumer experience construct, the findings contrast with the literature which focuses on the organisation providing value in order to create trust. Such as, providing information about the product and the brand. This research extends the emotional engagement construct in a social media community to highlight inspiration, and humour. This section of the research further argues that e-SME knowledge and consumer experience are equally important sub constructs in defining social media value creation to enhance brand trust. The next section will analyse the value sub construct e-SME Knowledge.

4.3.1 E-SME Knowledge

The first value sub construct relates to e-SME brands sharing product and service knowledge to enhance consumer trust. The netnography for this research highlighted that 6 e-SME brands (The Soccer Store, Surfdome, ProBikeKit, Fitsense, Chelston Direct, and Fitness Footwear) utilised this approach on their social media platforms. Table 4.4 and Figure 4.5 highlights the e-SME activity when posting product/service knowledge posts. Social media platforms such as Pinterest and Instagram were not included in Table 4.4 as the selected e-SMEs did not utilise these platforms for 'Knowledge posts'. The main consumer motivations for obtaining such information from e-SME brands and fellow consumers shall be reviewed in Chapter Eight.

Table 4.4 E-SME Product/Service Knowledge Posts

e-SME	Facebook Posts	Twitter Posts
The Soccer Store	1	1
Surfdome	8	0
Sportsjamkits	0	0
Sportshoes	0	0
ProBikeKit	1	0
Newitts	0	0
Kitbag	0	0
Fitsense	1	0
Chelston Direct	7	30
Direct Soccer	0	0
Direct Teamwear	0	0
Fitness Footwear	4	8
Total	22	39

Engagement strategies will be covered in Chapter Five, and example 'Knowledge' posts are highlighted in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4 - Product/Service knowledge
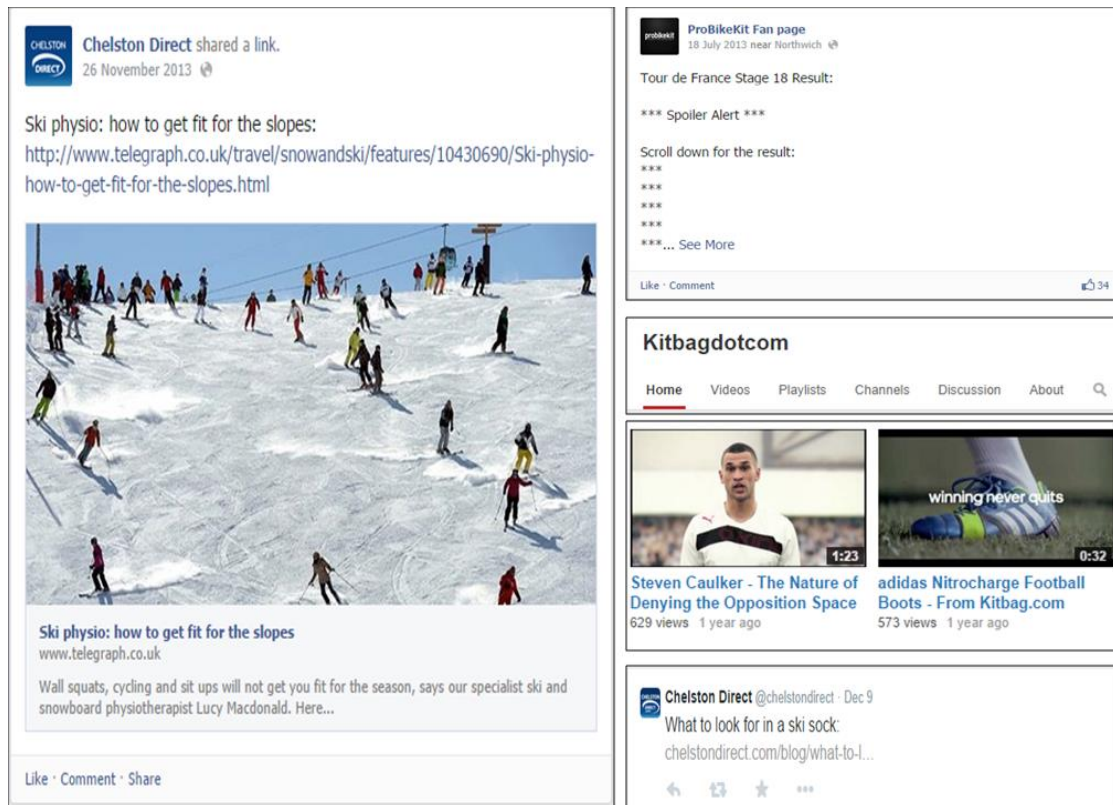
Social media platforms with virtual touch points allow consumers to integrate resources and co-create value through relationships, facilitate user-generated contents and enrich the purchase experience. Whilst the findings support the literature, such as an ability for consumers to share resources like product information, the comments are unable to demonstrate an enriched purchase experience unless there is a consumer declaration of a positive experience post purchase on the social media platform (e.g. retweet or share). Therefore this area will be further analysed in the interview section of the research. The next section will review the value sub construct 'Experience'.

4.3.2 Experience

An e-SME's social media community provides consumers with the opportunity to create and maintain relationships with the e-SME brand and communicate with other customers. When consumers 'follow' or 'join' an e-SME's social media community, they are actively choosing to be exposed to the brand's content. As well as the experiences/emotions that other consumers (that follow the brand) have had with the brand and its offerings. Table 4.5 highlights the e-SME posts which encouraged consumers to share experiences.

Table 4.5 E-SME Posts Which Encouraged Consumers to Share Experiences

e-SME-Shared experience	Facebook	Facebook engagement	Twitter	Twitter engagement	Google +	Google + engagement	YouTube	YouTube engagememt	Instagram	Instagram engagement	Pinterest	Pinterest engagemnet
The Soccer Store	3	0	2	0	2	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Surfdome	6	487	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sportsjamkits	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sportshoes	7	91	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ProBikeKit	2	664	6	36	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Newitts	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kitbag	2	0	24	96	n/a	n/a	0	0	3	36	n/a	n/a
Fitsense	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Chelston Direct	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Direct Soccer	1	1	6	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Direct Teamwear	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Fitness Footwear	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	21	1,243	38	132	2	0	0	0	3	36	n/a	n/a

Five of the e-SMEs did not adopt this approach, however e-SMEs such as Sportshoes, Surfdome and Probikekit encouraged consumers to pass on experiences by asking them to share emotions such as inspiration, as well as asking consumers about their future aspirations, Examples are highlighted in Figure 4.5. Whilst this construct was evident in the findings it did not appear to reproduce the same results for organisations such as The Soccer Store or Kitbag. Therefore further analysis was required to validate the construct and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

Figure 4.5 -Shared Experience Examples

These types of social media posts encouraged significant engagement in the way of 'likes' and comments on Facebook as highlighted in Table 4.5. The findings show that high engagement can be achieved by e-SMEs actively encouraging consumers to share experiences and emotions with the brand on social media. Although six of the e-SMEs adopted this approach, it could be argued that this does not represent theoretical saturation at this stage of the research, and further analysis is required to validate the construct. However, the findings suggest that such interactions support the established constructs in the literature, whereby consumers are not just mere recipients of the products and values of the firm, but as co-creators of value, competitive strategy and the firm's innovation processes. The findings indicate that e-SME SMBCs positively influence these value creation practices. This research has also found that practices such as sharing good news stories about products and experiences, or recommending others to use the brand, create impressionable trust associations with the brand for consumers. An example of this is highlighted from Probikekit:

Consumers' motivations for following and posting on e-SME brand social media shall be reviewed in Chapter Seven, but regardless of the consumer motivation, the findings suggest that members of an SMBC are involved in the co-creation of value with an e-SME. The netnography demonstrated two overriding emotions connected to the e-SME social media postings, namely inspiration and humour. In particular organisations such as Surfdome and The Soccer Store utilised this approach. The number of posts as well as the engagement score (collective amount of likes/retweets etc.) are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Emotive Posts

e-SME social media emotion posts	Humour-social media posts	Humour engagement	Inspiration-social media posts	Inspiration engagement
The Soccer Store	66	192	5	5
Surfdome	28	2,146	14	2,206
Sportsjamkits	0	0	0	0
Sportshoes	7	313	2	0
ProBikeKit	11	409	1	62
Newitts	0	0	0	0
Kitbag	14	59	0	0
Fitsense	0	0	0	0
Chelston Direct	21	5	5	1
Direct Soccer	2	0	0	0
Direct Teamwear	0	0	0	0
Fitness Footwear	0	0	1	0
Total	**149**	**3,124**	**28**	**2,274**

Humorous posts were utilised by seven of the e-SMEs, with example posts demonstrated in Figure 4.6. This suggests that humour is a popular method for e-SMEs to develop trust with consumer audiences. Nevertheless, with organisations such as Sportshoes and Direct Teamwear choosing not to adopt this approach, this implies that some organisations perceive this to a be a high risk approach as misplaced humour can be judged to be in bad taste and negatively received by consumers. Humour is subjective, however it could be suggested that if the e-SME brand adopts a consistent approach, when it comes to humour, as Kitbag.com utilised then it allows consumers to be accustomed to the type of messages they view. This approach could be deemed effective for customers but presents a more difficult proposition for encouraging trust for non-customers.

Figure 4.6 Humour Posts
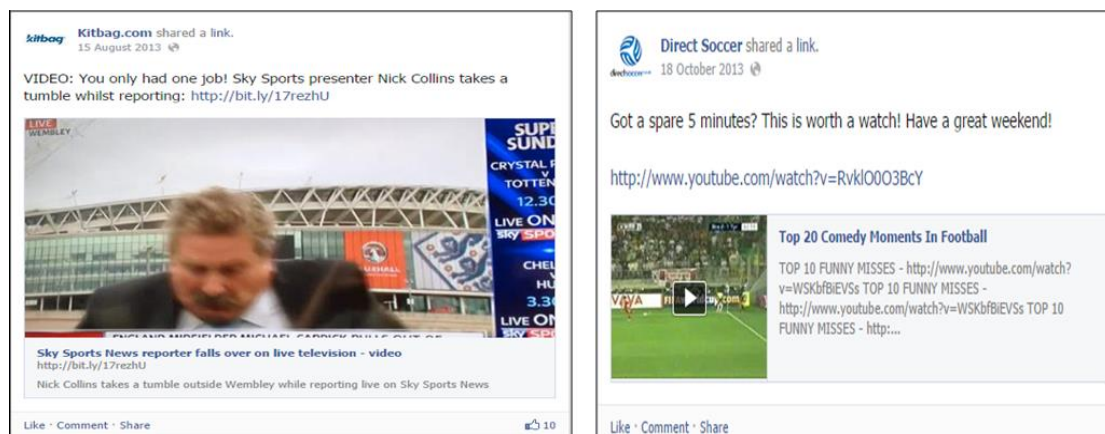
The netnography demonstrated that 'Inspiration' posts were adopted by 6 of the selected e-SMEs, with examples highlighted in Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.7 Inspiration Posts
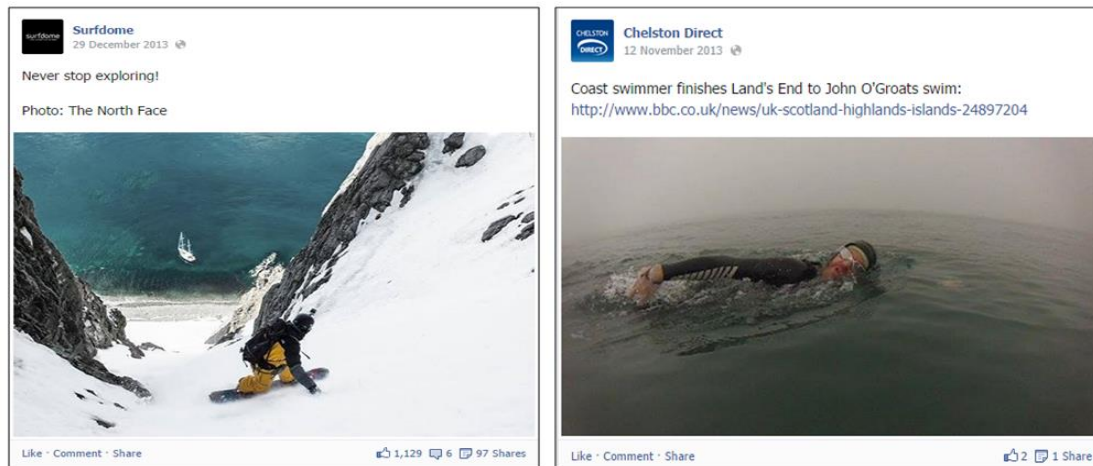
Surfdome scored the highest engagement scores with their 'inspiration' posts and whilst it has to be acknowledged that they have the largest amount of social media followers, this approach appeared to resonate with their community followers. By posting inspirational posts, such as 'exploring' and 'daring' images (that the consumer can visualise themselves achieving) they are connecting with the consumers' hopes and ambitions which arguably lead to them trusting the brand. This suggests that inspirational posts should focus on the consumer in order to create trust.

Previous research on consumer–brand relationships has clearly demonstrated that understanding the emotional components of such relationships is highly relevant to both marketing academics and practitioners. The feelings that a brand generates have the potential to strongly differentiate one brand from another, especially as consumers usually emotionally attach to only a limited number of brands. The netnography demonstrated that e-SME brands use imagery to connect with consumers by telling stories using inspiration and humour, however further analysis is required to identify further emotions which can contribute to brand trust.

4.3.3 Value Creation-Theoretical Contribution

This stage of the research makes a valuable contribution in the proposed conceptual model for value co-creation (Figure 4.3), by developing the consumer experience construct to add to the existing theory, which focuses on the organisation solely providing value in order to create

trust. To develop value co-creation, e-SME brands have to consistently demonstrate their values every day by engaging their communities with interesting content. E-SME brands looking to create value should provide genuine interaction with people online, instigating and participating in positive, honest, and inspiring conversations. Organisations should focus on the quality of the content they share on their social media communities, with each post providing value; a fundamental part of the story the brand is telling to its community. This allows e-SMEs an authentic opportunity to share brand messages through creative dialogue. Therefore key discussion areas for the interview analysis in Chapter Seven Shall review:

- Consumer motivation for posting on social media
- Consumer value created when visiting e-SME social media platform
- Consumer interaction to create value
- Emotion connected to posts

The next section will review the 'Credibility' construct.

4.4 Credibility

The literature highlights 'Credibility' or 'Source expertise' as a significant factor in determining the effectiveness of persuasive communication on social media and trust generation by listening to what consumers have to say. This research has also found that credibility is influential when establishing trust from an e-SME social media platform with 2 core constructs; e-SME expertise and consumer expertise, supported by 2 sub constructs, products and service, conceptualised in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8 Credibility Constructs Conceptual Model
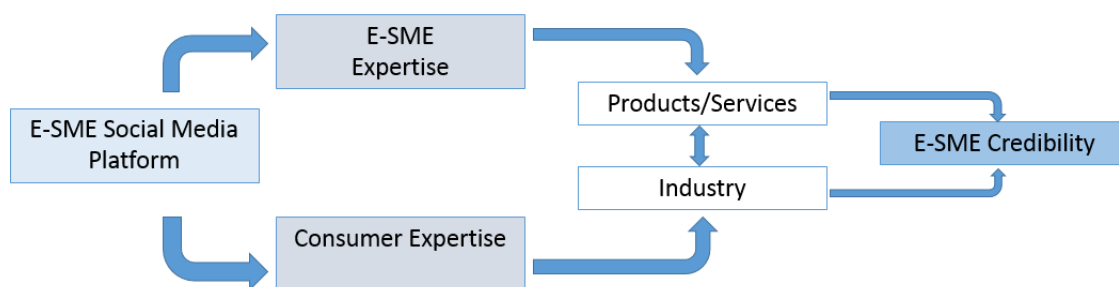
Source: Inductively developed from the data

Table 4.6 highlights netnography excerpts from e-SMEs highlighting their organisation's credibility through industry expertise or product knowledge on their social media platforms.

Table 4.6 E-SME Credibility Posts

e-SME	Social Media Platform	Post	Context	Construct
Fitness Footwear	Twitter	Get some sturdy boots for winter walking-http://www.fitnessfotwear/st-750-footwear.htm	Product suitability for seasonal activity followed by product URL link	**E-SME Expertise-Product**
Fitness Footwear	Blog-promoted via Twitter	2XU Compression Gear coming soon to fitness footwear-http://www.fitnessfootwear.com/blog/new-2xu-compression-clothing-coming soon	Detailed blog on product information.	**E-SME Expertise-Product**
Probike Kit	Blog promoted via Twitter	New PBK blog post-Advanced cycling nutrition:3 pro tips to take your ride to the next level http://goo.gl/fb/lhs8x	Detailed blog on sport performance information.	**E-SME Expertise-Industry**
Sportshoes	Facebook	These technical running socks are super soft, constructed from Merino Wool, with great wicketing properties and an anatomic, performance fit. http://sportshoes.com/products?q=smartwool+socks	Product information followed by product URL link.	**Consumer Expertise-Sharing**
Sportshoes	Facebook	The number of people taking up jogging on a regular basis has risen by more than a third since 2005 according to Sport England: http://bbc.in/1efhBOF	Educational/informative link connected to the sports industry	**E-SME Expertise-Industry**
Sportshoes	Facebook	OK team, how are you all coping with training in hot weather? Let us know your hot weather training tips!	Encouraging consumers to share expertise with e-SME and each other	**Consumer Expertise-Sharing**
Sportsjam Kits	Facebook	Sportsjam Coaching are offering half price football courses if you book tomorrow! Contact us on 01743442222 or email coaching@sportsjamkits.com	Emphasising e-SME brand's connection with sport coaching expertise.	**E-SME Expertise-Industry**
Newitts	Facebook	Kettlebells are one of the most versatile tools for all-round fitness, strength, balance, power and core conditioning. Find out more at http://www.newitts.com/product/IT054463/XLR8_Kettlebells.htm	Product information followed by product URL link.	**E-SME Expertise-Product**
Newitts	Facebook	NEW Atreq 50 Marking cones, ideal for grass, play grounds or sports halls, used to mark out field areas, goal areas .. http://www.newitts.com/product/IT061209?aTREQ_50_Marking_Cones.htm	Product information followed by product URL link.	**E-SME Expertise-Product**
Fitness Footwear	Blog promoted via Twitter	Keep active with Kinesiology Rocktape/Fitness Footwear-http://www.fitness footwear.com/blog/keep-active-with-kinesiology-rocktape #rocktape	Detailed blog on product information.	**E-SME Expertise-Product**

Table 4.6 reveals the rich constructs of credibility perceived as important to e-SMEs and consumers. The findings contrast with the existing literature which focusses on credibility in terms of the supplier having the required expertise to carry out their role in the transaction effectively, with competence and reliability. This issue has a strong role to play in the development of trust and will be covered in the 'service delivery' construct, this section of the research argues that both industry and product expertise is also important in the development of trust.

4.4.1 Credibility Theoretical Contribution

Figure 4.9 highlights the credibility constructs evident from the netnography which stem from the risk a consumer may experience before purchasing from an e-SME and using their social media channel to obtain purchase assurance. Credibility can be promoted via the social media community by the joint promotion of expertise from the e-SME and the consumer. The organisations and consumers expertise can be emphasised with posts or blogs which provide knowledge on product use or industry tips. In relation to this study, the importance of nutrition to improve sporting performance for instance. This method is also connected with e-SMEs actively encouraging consumers to share their expertise or tips with fellow community members. Essentially making the e-SME a knowledge and information hub which passionate consumers are motivated to visit on a regular basis, and non-customers are convinced is an informed and trustworthy organisation. Following on from the netnography findings, interview themes for credibility will review:

- The perception e-SME Product/Service expertise and how this impacts trust
- How social media posts can demonstrate product/service expertise

4.5 Reputation

In contrast to the existing literature which argues that reputation is an attitudinal construct that consists of two components: an emotional (affective) component and a rational (cognitive) component, the netnography found that the reputation construct is supported by 6 sub constructs which are conceptualised in Figure 4.9

Figure 4.9: E-SME Social Media- Reputation Constructs Conceptual Model
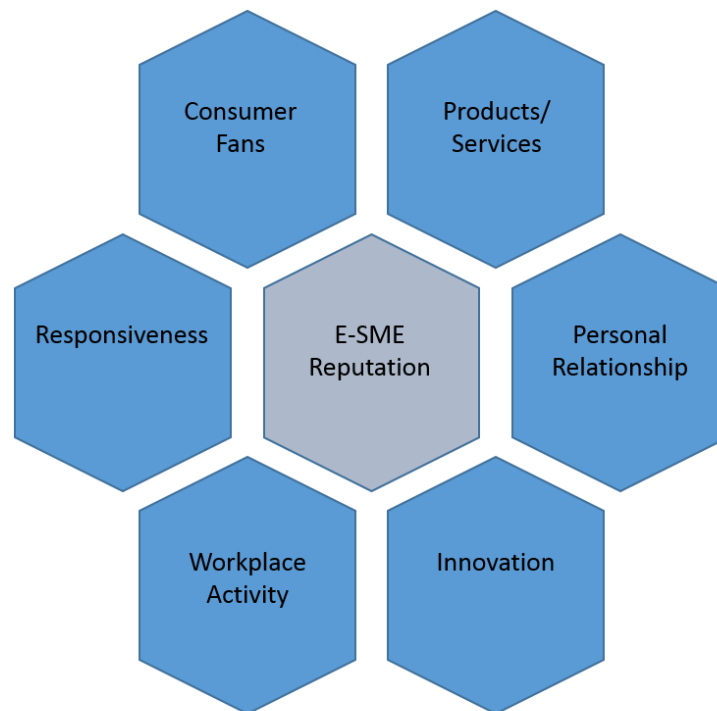
Source: Inductively Developed From the Data

4.5.1 Consumer Fans

The amount of social media community 'followers' or 'fans' for the e-SMEs represented in the netnography are presented in Table 4.1. Case study e-SME representation, the figures were accurate at the time of the research being conducted. For e-SME social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, consumers are able to view the number of members (likes or followers) when visiting the page. Examples are provided in Table 5.1 and there is a suggestion that the amount of members could impact consumer trust i.e. a large amount of community members indicates a credible brand.

However, the current study found no clear indicators at this stage as to specifically why consumers have liked or followed a page. In order to increase their reach e-SMEs have incorporated 'liking' into their promotional activities, such as 'like' our page to be entered into a free competition. The insinuation here is that consumers 'like' the page for the proposed tangible benefit of receiving a prize and not to receive information and product updates from the brand. This suggests that 'liking' or 'following' a page represents a weak connection and cannot actively portray the consumer trusting the integrity of the e-SME brand, with regard to product/service offering. The findings from the research indicate that member number in and

of itself does not serve to establish trust but must be supplemented with further product and industry information. Therefore this issue will be further analysed in Chapter Seven.

4.5.2 Responsiveness

A crucial issue for e-SMEs when managing corporate reputation through social media is the level of responsiveness. Within seconds of posting a message, millions of consumers are able to 'like', 'retweet', 'check-in' and more around an organisation's content. Therefore small online businesses need to have sufficient plans in place for this level of service. Table 4.7 represents the e-SMEs that utilise social media communities as a customer services platform to respond to a query or redirect consumers to their central customer services communication channels.

Table 4.7 Customer Services Re-direct

e-SME social media customer services posts	Customer services enquiry	Customer services redirect
The Soccer Store	1	0
Surfdome	0	6
Sportsjamkits	0	0
Sportshoes	0	34
ProBikeKit	3	33
Newitts	11	0
Kitbag	96	0
Fitsense	0	0
Chelston Direct	0	0
Direct Soccer	3	8
Direct Teamwear	0	1
Fitness Footwear	0	0
Total	**114**	**82**

As a consequence of embracing social media, a number of authors and researchers suggest that organisations should avoid the traditional top down communication models and build open, qualitative, and trustworthy dialogues with stakeholders in social media to increase consumers' awareness and perception of them. However recent literature speculates that organisations lose their dominance over information flows, as they are now exposed to negative word of mouth which is capable of adversely affecting reputation very quickly. In addition to losing control over information flows, this implies that companies could also lose their influence over stakeholder relations and communications between their various stakeholder groups. When participating in social media companies should instil a proactive

communications approach in order to reduce the risk of losing online reputation and have the ability to rectify such situations. This is reflected in Figure 4.10 which highlights examples of how Kitbag and Sportshoes.com respond to consumer enquiries on Twitter to resolve negative situations.

Figure 4.10: Customer Service Response
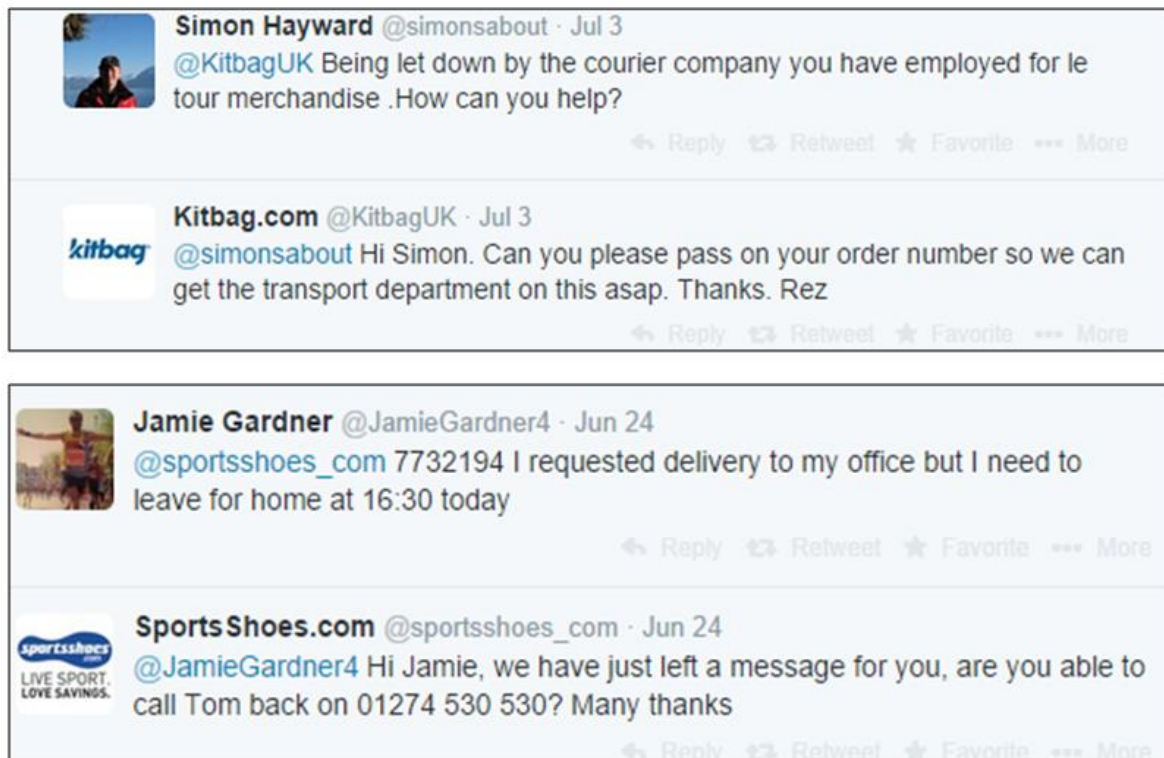
The findings argue that companies implementing social media into their operations, increase awareness as well as conversions from online registrations to actual purchases. Consumer satisfaction and loyalty also increased. The netnography data suggested that business benefits such as these can be developed through social media which e-SMEs should consider. However, with only 8 out of the 12 e-SMEs adopting this approach, there is a suggestion that some organisations agree feel that social media adoption can increase risk due to loss of information control. Consequently, this aspect will be further explored in Chapters Seven and Eight.

4.5.3 Personal Relationships

The netnography also indicated that building strong brand trust through social media and utilising these channels as a means of being more emotionally connected to consumers can

be highly beneficial to all businesses. Table 4.8 highlights the personal message posts promoted by 7 of the researched e-SMEs.

Table 4.8 Personal Posts

e-SME	Personal Message	Engagement	Consumer opinion-product/industry	Engagement
The Soccer Store	1	0	10	13
Surfdome	0	0	0	0
Sportsjamkits	4	10	0	0
Sportshoes	3	83	8	54
ProBikeKit	1	0	19	51
Newitts	0	0	0	0
Kitbag	0	0	20	120
Fitsense	0	0	0	0
Chelston Direct	3	0	0	0
Direct Soccer	2	0	0	0
Direct Teamwear	0	0	0	0
Fitness Footwear	2	2	0	0
Total	**16**	**95**	**57**	**238**

Figure 4.11 demonstrates personal message examples from Sportsjam.co.uk and Sportshoes sending seasonal greeting messages. Whilst the messages are not technically 'personal' as they are posted to everyone within the SMBC, they demonstrate appreciation for consumer's business and well wishes in a non-retail context (e.g. wishing consumers a happy new year).

Figure 4.11: Consumer Well Wish Examples

4.5.4 Workplace

By providing insights into their working day and effectively their personality, organisation's employees are able to connect with consumers.The netnography findings highlighted that it is important for e-SME employees responsible for social media content to have flexibility, autonomy, and authority to meet the needs of their customers. This could provide considerable difficulty concerning resource for e-SMEs and shall be further investigated in Chapters Six and Seven when reviewing the consumer and corporate perspectives.

4.5.5 Products

The findings indicated that the quality and amount of products available impacted reputation, which will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

4.5.6 Innovation

The netnography highlighted that e-SMEs are able to utilise SMBCs to gauge opinion and develop products on the basis of consumer recommendations. This was utilised in the form of polls, or posts which requested feedback. Further investigation into the value of this approach will be further discussed in Chapters Five and Seven.

4.5.7 Reputation-Theoretical Contribution

This section of the research has sought to expand current academic theory on corporate reputation management for e-SME social media communities. Evaluating the associated benefits and challenges of social media in order to identify interview themes for the interview research.

The findings in this section of the thesis suggest that corporate reputation management in social media is a balancing act for e-SMEs incorporating internal and external potential constructs which will be further explored in the interview research. The case study netnography has demonstrated context specific and in-depth insights into a phenomenon that is taking shape as e-SMEs continue to understand a developing communication environment. These insights are balanced and weighed off in an ongoing dialogue and sense-making by managers who try to come to terms with the challenges and to manage corporate reputation effectively on social media communities. One of the main reasons for e-SMEs to develop SMBCs is the assumption that they are beneficial for their corporate reputation. E-SMEs are keen to be reputable with consumers and use reputation as a competitive edge and therefore may be keen to develop e-SME branding as a mechanism for reputation and innovation.

Furthermore, corporate brand reputation can be an important and appropriate method of introducing and differentiating the e-SME since they may have limited resources for branding, with the intention that differentiation and brand identity will enable them to get maximum return on their resources. The netnography findings suggest that reputation is seen by e-SMEs as a key parameter in the supplier selection process by non-customers. Therefore consumers are more likely to select e-SMEs with a positive corporate reputation. Furthermore, a positive corporate reputation can foster customer loyalty and retention and enable a company to attract more customers. As a result of the netnography findings, the interview stage of the research shall investigate:

- The impact the amount of current community members has on trust
- Personal relationships developed through SMBC and their impact on trust
- The significance of response time for reputation building

The next section shall review the importance of incentives and imagery/video content in creating trust and developing reputation through social media.

4.6 Social Media Incentives and Visuals

Once an e-SME has decided to create a social media community it has to define, implement and follow up specific activities on the selected social media. Popular activities from the e-SMEs included sales discounts and competitions for consumers, which highlighted the importance of images and their variation depending on the type of post (conceptualised in Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12: Visual Social Media Trust
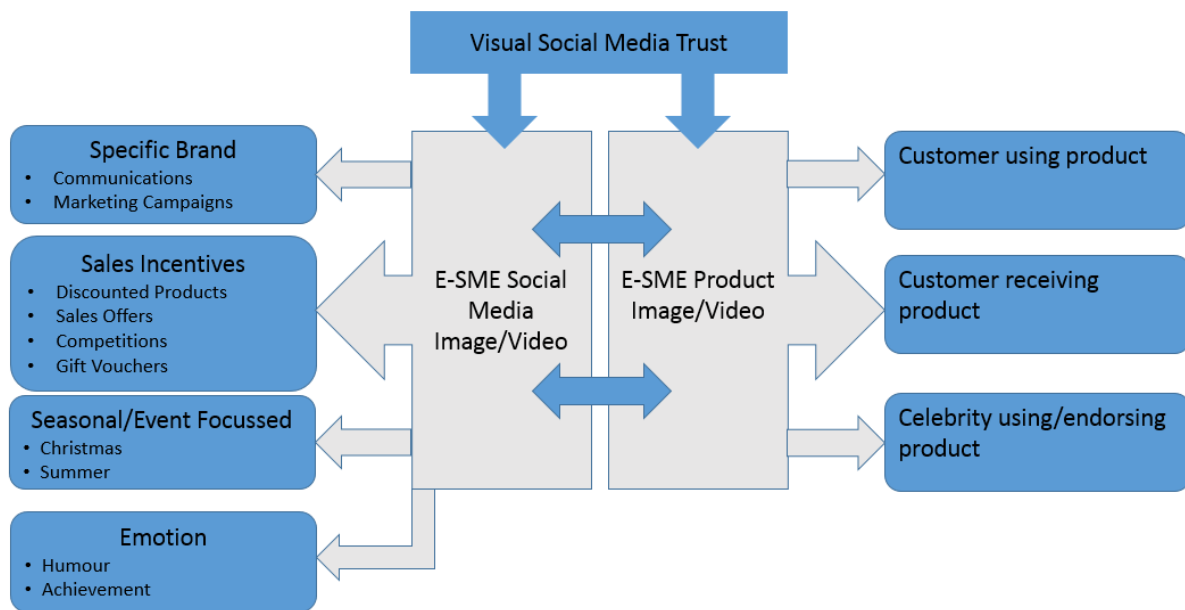
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data

Figure 4.12 shows the dynamic conceptual model derived from the author's analysis and interpretation of the netnography. The model shows that visual social media trust is divided into two main constructs. First the 'E-SME product' image/video which concerns the product/service being used. And second the 'E-SME Image/Video' connected to further triggers to develop trust such as sales incentives and emotion. The competition activity is represented in Table 4.9 and was utilised by all of the e-SMEs except Chelston Direct. This suggests that e-SMEs consider this method to be extremely fruitful when attempting to encourage interest in engaging with their SMBC and trusting their organisation.

Table 4.9: Incentives/Competitions

E-SME Competition	Facebook Competition Post	Facebook Engagement	Twitter Competition Post	Twitter Engagement	Google+ Competition Post	Google+ Engagement	YouTube Competition Post	Youtube Engagement	Instagram Competition Post	Instagram Engagement	Pinterest Competition Post	Pinterest Engagement
The Soccer Store	5	336	11	1	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Surfdome	10	942	0	0	18	3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0
Sportsjamkits	7	266	2	96	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
SportsShoes	5	334	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Probikekit	5	115	9	6	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Newitts	1	7	7	73	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kitbag	3	68	24	36	18	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fitsense	4	18	5	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Chelston Direct	9	251	11	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Direct Soccer	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Direct Teamwear	4	6	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Fitness Footwear	2	227	2	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	55	2,570	72	207	36	5	0	0	0	0	0	0

Examples of e-SME SMBC completion posts are exemplified by Chelston Direct, The Soccer Store, and Surfdome in Figure 4.13.

Figure 4.13: Competition
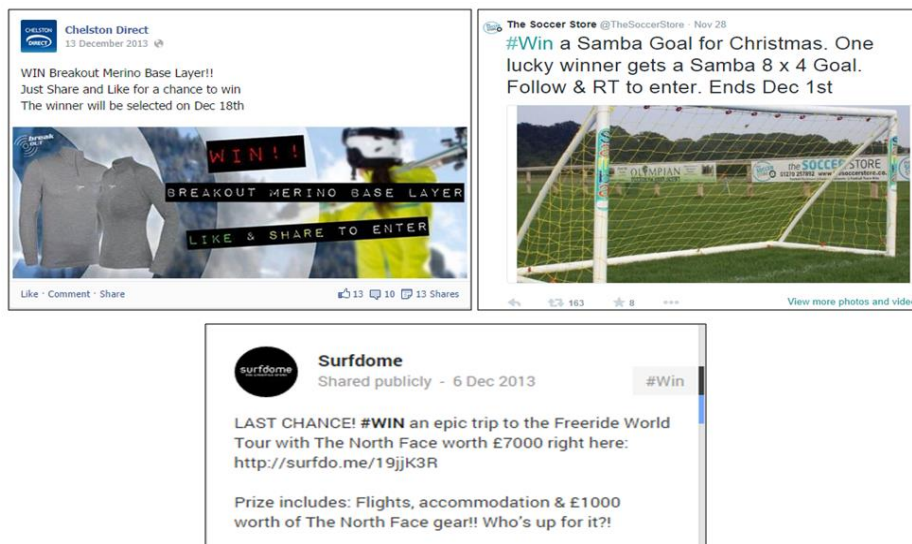
A similar approach was evident in the form of sales offers, whereby products and offers were posted on SMBCs. Again this strategy was adopted by all of the e-SMEs except The Soccer Store. The sales offer activity highlighted in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Sales Offers

e-SME sales offer	Facebook post	Facebook engagement	Twitter post	Twitter engagement	Google + post	Google + engagement	YouTube post	YouTube engagememt	Instagram post	Instagram engagement	Pinterest post	Pinterest engagemnet
The Soccer Store	0	0	0	0	2	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Surfdome	6	65	12	24	18	24	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0
Sportsjamkits	6	13	1	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sportshoes	2	3	10	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ProBikeKit	3	15	12	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Newitts	4	0	20	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kitbag	4	22	2	10	2	0	n/a	n/a	0	0	n/a	n/a
Fitsense	1	1	3	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Chelston Direct	7	11	8	0	12	3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Direct Soccer	5	11	23	3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Direct Teamwear	4	5	3	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Fitness Footwear	2	0	3	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	44	146	97	39	34	27	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	0

In terms of engagement scores this method proved extremely popular and will be discussed in Chapter 6. However the imagery associated with the post is very interesting regarding consumer trust and Figure 4.14 highlights example images used for sales offer posts.

Figure 4.14: Sales Offer Examples
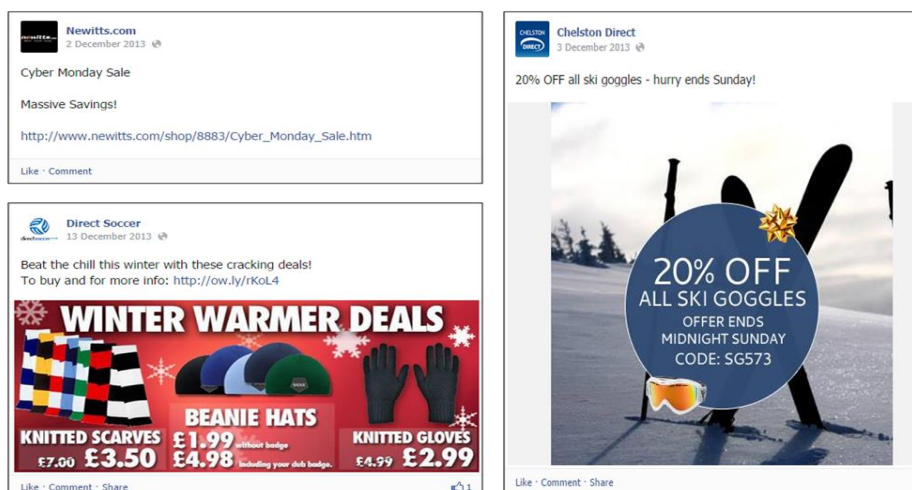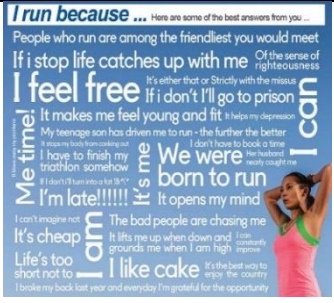
The case netnography highlighted that e-SMEs share images of products and link these to their online commerce site. By doing this, e-SMEs can potentially encourage sharing of product images and drive traffic to the website. Examples of e-SME Facebook posts as well

as the associated visual trust constructs are available in Table 4.11. This potentially could be attributed to the creativity that imagery and information videos allows e-SME brands.

Table 4.11 Image Trust Constructs Exemplified on Facebook

e-SME	Image	Context	Construct
Newitts		Product available for purchase	**Product image**
Newitts		Branded communications from product being sold by e-SME	**Brand specific communication**
Newitts		Product being used in practice	**Consumer using product**
Sportsjam		Celebrity using products, product images, brands	**Celebrity using product** **Product images**

e-SME	Image	Context	Construct
Kitbag		Celebrity endorsing branded football boots	**Celebrity using product**
Kitbag		Consumers wearing Lions Rugby Top	**Consumers using product**
Probike Kit		Funny caption competition with e-SME encouraging responses	**Emotion-Humour**
Sportshoes		Consumers were asked to post statements describing why they enjoy running-image highlights responses	**Emotion-inspiration**
Sportshoes		Christmas promotional image	**Seasonal**

Adding a visual element to any post increases its visibility on consumers' social media timelines, as well as the opportunity to develop trust. The difficulty for e-SMEs is understanding which images will get the most likes, comments, shares and retweets. Though the netnography has provided an indicator of which options are available for e-SMEs to develop trust, it can still be suggested that creating visual content requires trial and error, as well as creativity. The majority of posts focussed on the promotion of financial savings for consumers such as sales incentives and discounts, as well as seasonal or event focussed offers. Images were also used to engage with consumers by incorporating emotion, such as inspiration and humour (in keeping with the 'value' construct) in order to inspire consumers to create a trusting connection with the brand. The product being promoted was often the focal point of the posted image, and the main emphasis was to create situations in the mind of the consumer of how the product would impact their life. Such as the consumer using the product, receiving the

product or inspirationally seeing a celebrity endorsing the product. For e-SMEs that sell big brand products, their individual promotional posters were also used.

4.6.1 Incentives and Visuals Theoretical contribution

This section of the research makes an important contribution by highlighting the importance of images and their variation dependant on the type of post in developing trust (conceptualised in figure 6.3). Whilst this proved a popular method, it is also beneficial for e-SMEs to consider the subjective nature of images and the potential difficulties of controlling the effect or impact of the visual of video. For these instances, the visual can be subject to consumer interpretation, which may not seem attractive for an e-SME wanting to retain control of its reputation. The crux of this concern requires the e-SME to have a strong understanding of the audience and fully consider how an image may be interpreted by its current and targeted consumers, and how it effects their brand reputation. Engaging pictures allow both brands as well as their consumers the possibility to create interesting pictures for their online social networks, as well as reassuring consumers to trust an e-SME. Consequently the impact and effectiveness of visuals to develop trust shall be analysed during the consumer and key informant interviews. The next section shall cover privacy concerns for consumers using social media.

4.7 Security

According to Novak and Li (2012) Turban et al., (2012) and Williams et al., (2009) online consumer security is comprised of five sub constructs which develop trust , which are represented in Figure 4.15.

Figure 4.15: Security Constructs
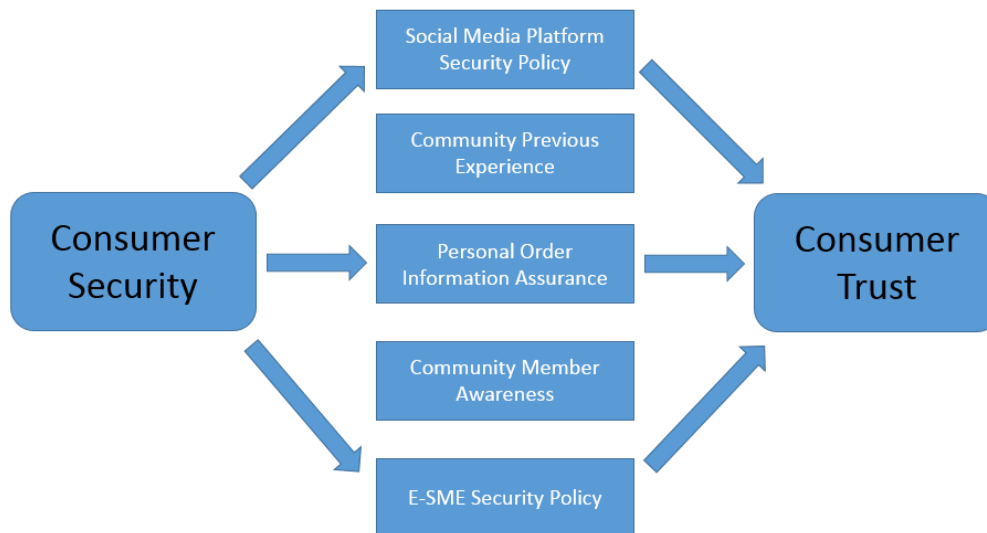
Source: Inductively Sourced from the Literature

However, 'security' evidence and excerpts from the netnography were minimal due to the reluctance of the e-SMEs to publicly discuss consumers' personal information in a public environment such as an SMBC. In order to reduce the risks connected to the spread of users' personal information, there is an argument that consumers must have a way to control their personal information. A key issue for e-SMEs is establishing the responsibility parameters for the secure management of this information. Access control should be complemented with security preserving techniques specifically tailored to social media platforms. The findings show that e-SMEs tended not to take responsibility or control of such measures to ensure the consumer's privacy but rather used the social media communities to provide order assurance or highlight any online payment difficulty. Examples of such instances are demonstrated in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12: Consumer Security Posts

e-SME	Social Media Platform	Message	Context	Construct
Probike Kit	Facebook	With the recent payment issues due to a technical glitch at RBS, we have extended most of our offers to ensure you don't miss out, that's the PBK way	E-SME using platform to make reference to payment issues and reassuring consumers	**e-SME security policy**
Sportshoes	Twitter	@NickyGarewal Hey guys. Ordered some trainers this morning but still haven't received confirmation email can you guys help? Thanks @Sportshoes Hi Nicky, if you could call our customer service team on 01274 530 530, they will be able to help you. Many thanks	E-SME requesting consumer contact them directly and not to discuss personal order information.	**Personal Consumer Order**

The findings displayed that a number of interactions are virtual; where people connected within an SMBC may have never met before but have established a relationship. Unfortunately, this level of connection was impossible to determine due to the constraints of the netnography method.

Security settings, that allow a consumer to control the profile view and distribution of personal data, vary across the different social networking platforms. Most social media platforms provide their users more authority to control privacy settings, which can be updated for e-SME social media communities. However literature highlights listed some steps for online social network users to stay safe. These included: being aware of the risks of social networks, limiting the posting of personal information details, and being careful when dealing with strangers online or when reading any information from any sender. The netnography indicated that the majority of e-SMEs did not actively promote these measures, but that is not to say that they would not encourage consumers to follow these precautions. Nevertheless, relatively few examples of consumer security posts were made by e-SMEs.

Previous studies have suggested that there is a conflict between organisations and consumers regarding security of data and invasion of privacy. However there are methods to reduce these concerns. Firstly e-SME brands can associate their brand with an objective third party. This approach aims at building consumer trust by affiliating the customer with trusted third parties. However, the empirical findings failed to demonstrate such measures, as these certificates

are not visible on the main stream social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Security settings are available, but are specific to the particular platform and were not prominently displayed within the network.

4.7.1 Security discussion

Trust is a typical feature of SMBCs since the contents shared among social friends are more trustworthy than those from strangers. Furthermore, users may not fully trust reviews from strangers since a stranger's preferences could be quite different, and the reviews might not be useful. Consumer security should also be preserved when exploring trust to improve the SMBC experiences of consumers. A challenge for e-SMEs is how to build trust relationships among non-customers and customers and provide trustworthy contents to them. E-SMEs need to provide transparent data privacy policies to build trust and brand loyalty for all consumers. For organisations that utilise social media communities as a valuable source of consumer insight, it is important that they manage actual and perceived efforts to maintain privileged and confidential consumer privacy information. Social media sites pose considerations for consumers, as they may not be aware of all the e-SME's policies, and they may not know that many social networking sites actively engage in sharing some of their member's information to external organisations. Organisations can also potentially use information that community members post, for instance photos to emphasise credibility and essentially create consumer trust for the organisation.

In summary, although security posts were not prominent in the netnography, security will always remain a concern for consumers. And it likely will continue to matter, as long as consumers feel mistrust about how an e-SME uses their personal data or until they feel they have more control over how and where their information is used.

This section of the research reviewed the importance of protecting consumers' persona information on e-SME social media communities. The netnography examined e-SMEs awareness of the risks and threats to personal information privacy, and highlighted the key security constructs important to consumers. However in order to increase trust e-SMEs may benefit from letting customers know they have privacy options they should be aware of in their profiles. Therefore, the interview analysis shall review security responsibility assessing the consumer and key informant perspective. As the constructs identified in Figure 4.15 were not often represented, further research is required to fully determine how crucial the security construct is for social media trust. Consequently the interview themes will cover:

- E-SME's security policies for consumers
- The perception of responsibility for security

The next section shall review the service delivery construct.

4.8 Service Delivery Constructs

This section considers the service delivery constructs displayed in the netnography. The growth of social media in recent years, coupled with the importance of e-WOM for organisations and consumers in social communities, make the construct of service delivery and competency very interesting for e-SMEs. Consumers perceived effective service delivery through two core constructs: Service information and Consumer Positive/Negative endorsement, conceptualised in Figure 4.16.

Figure 4.16: E-SME e-WOM Service Delivery Constructs
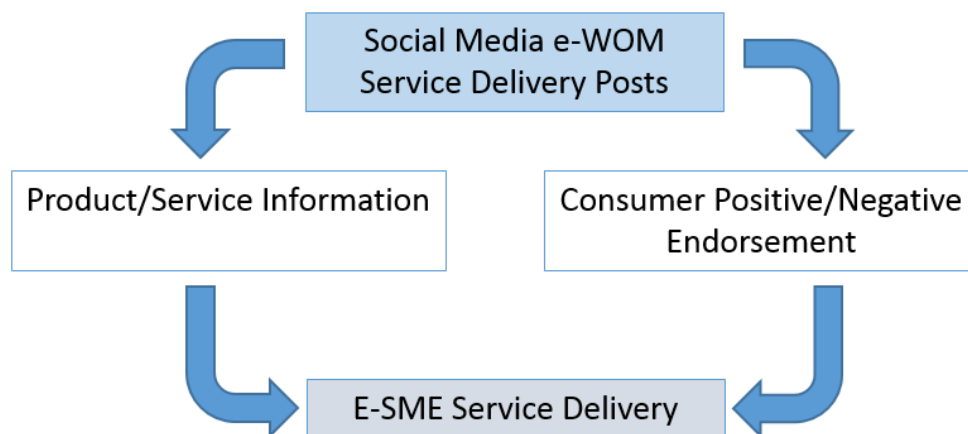
Source: Inductively Developed From the Data

Figure 4.16 includes bidirectional arrows representing the two-way iterative nature of service delivery from e-WOM. Whereby e-SME Service Delivery is an interplay of sub-processes including 'Product/Service Information' and 'Consumer Positive/Negative Endorsement'. All of the e-SMEs from the netnography used their SMBCs to highlight potential products on offer and their benefits which are reflected in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13: Product Focussed Posts

e-SME Product focussed	Facebook	Facebook engagement	Twitter	Twitter engagement	Google +	Google + engagement	YouTube	YouTube engagememt	Instagram	Instagram engagement	Pinterest	Pinterest engagemnet
The Soccer Store	7	0	4	40	6	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Surfdome	4	155	0	0	24	48	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	26	18
Sportsjamkits	6	5	1	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sportshoes	4	30	16	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ProBikeKit	3	272	6	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Newitts	27	0	45	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kitbag	9	186	9	0	16	0	3	989	5	95	n/a	n/a
Fitsense	9	10	7	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Chelston Direct	13	0	42	0	21	9	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Direct Soccer	2	8	3	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Direct Teamwear	5	7	3	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Fitness Footwear	9	1	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	105	488	136	43	51	59	3	989	5	95	26	18

Social media can establish and raise awareness of the products/services an e-SME brand can offer consumers. The netnography findings suggest that e-SMEs view SMBCs as a platform to develop trusting relationships that can increase sales. This would suggest that by promoting products, e-SMEs consider SMBCs suitable platforms to instigate traffic for their web site and make more online sales. This approach was exemplified in particular by Newitts, who focussed all their SMBC content on product promotion. Examples of product specific SMBC posts are highlighted by Newitts, Surfdome, and Direct Teamwear in Figure 4.17.

Figure 4.17: Product Posts
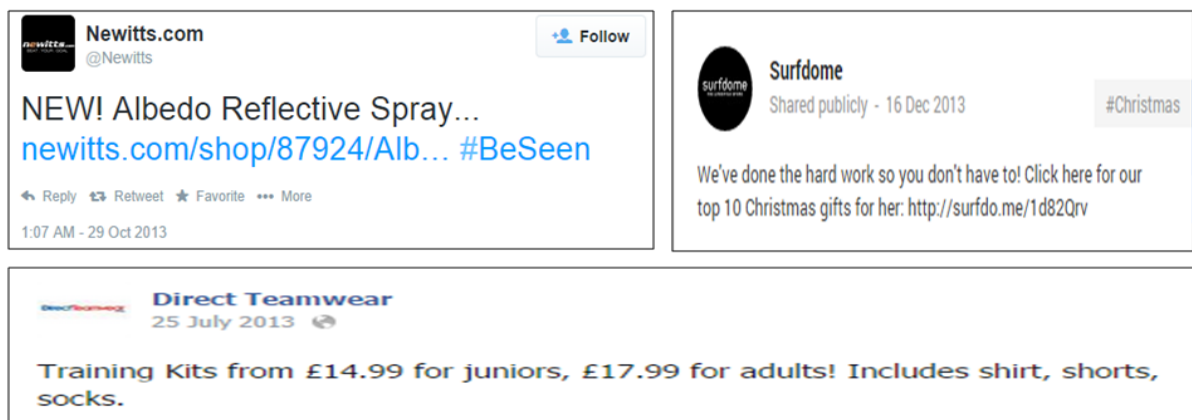
When consumers had posted positive endorsements about their experiences the majority of e-SMEs (all except Chelston Direct and Fitness Footwear) shared those comments to serve as customer testimonials, which are highlighted in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14 Consumer Endorsement Posts

e-SME	Twitter retweets
The Soccer Store	31
Surfdome	12
Sportsjamkits	7
Sportshoes	74
ProBikeKit	6
Newitts	6
Kitbag	60
Fitsense	2
Chelston Direct	0
Direct Soccer	22
Direct Teamwear	4
Fitness Footwear	0
Total	**224**

Examples of e-SMEs 'retweeting' consumer tweets which showcase the organisation in a positive light, exemplified by Sportshoes.com, Direct Soccer, and The Soccer Store.

In terms of e-WOM on the e-SME social media platforms, service delivery was perceived to include effective customer service and delivering the correct purchased product on time. Social media gives organisation's the opportunity to increase the perception of 'competence' by delivering an engaging social media platform and by responding to customer problems efficiently and effectively. The netnography showed that consumers used some e-SME social media platforms such as Probikekit, Sportshoes and Kitbag to request information and express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the e-SME brand's service delivery. For reasons of brevity a selection of excerpts are presented in table 4.15 which demonstrate some of the example posts from the netnography.

Table 4.15 Consumer Service Delivery Posts

e-SME	Social Media Platform	Message	Context
Probike kit	Twitter	@ProBikeKit Is there anything I can help you with @mccaffinator if you provide me with your order number I'd be more than happy to help, thanks Jordan	Consumer requesting delivery information.
Probike Kit	Twitter	Retweeted by @ProBikeKit – Placed an order for Christmas Day, Delivered this morning! Thank you	Consumer endorsing service. Retweeted by e-SME.
Probike Kit	Twitter	Thank you @ProBikeKit for screwing up my brother in laws Christmas present @losinggrace Hi can you please provide the order number and I can look into this issue for you? Kind regards tom	Consumer complaining about delivery. E-SME attempting to resolve the situation.
Sport shoes	Twitter	Hi @jodie we are having issues with order confirmations, however if you can DM us your details we'll check for you.	e-SME seeking to reassure consumer that their order is being processed
Sport shoes	Twitter	Ho @Keabran will be Feb for delivery of more, but we have this colourway in stock now http://www.sportshoes.com/product/bro578/brooks-ghost-6-womens-running-shoes	Consumer requesting product information. E-SME responding with details plus alternative options.

The findings in this section of the research suggest that service delivery can be defined as a continuous cyclical process for developing and delivering products or services to consumers. The findings indicate that by using social media, e-SMEs can implement and promote this process to customers in order to build trust and is conceptualised in Figure 4.18.

Figure 4.18: E-SME Social Media Service Delivery Cycle
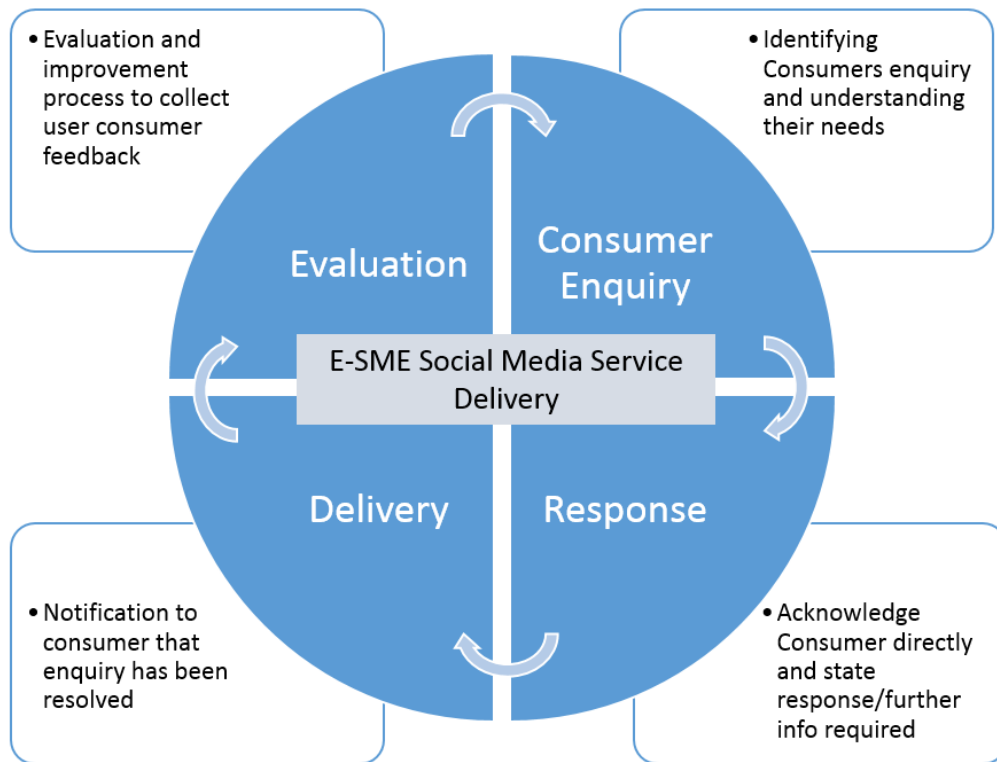
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data

The E-SME Social Media Service Delivery Cycle condenses the netnography findings into four cyclical stages, namely, consumer enquiry, response, delivery, and evaluation. The first stage 'Consumer Enquiry' concerns an analysis of what the customer is requesting. The second stage 'Response' covers the e-SME acknowledging the consumer issue and providing a resolution. Thirdly, 'Delivery', acts as an indication from the e-SME (e.g. direct message on Twitter) to the consumer that the issue has been resolved. And finally 'Evaluation' allows the e-SME to review the issue in order to ensure that it is not repeated.

4.8.1 Service Delivery E-WOM Discussion

In a social media community context, the role of e-WOM is meaningful as a complimentary source of information used by the e-SME and consumer, in order to reduce uncertainty

associated with purchasing decisions. With respect to the disposition of consumer comments, when the comment is positive, it tends to be a result of the customer's satisfaction with the product or service. Therefore it could be argued that this emotional state is positively related with the dissemination of e-WOM. Consequently, it is not surprising that e-SMEs such as Kitbag and SportShoes, are investing resource in promoting positive e-WOM through social media communities in order to develop trust and attract new customers and convert them into followers.

However, if e-WOM is negative, it is expected that it will affect the valence of the associations consumers hold towards the brand, thereby influence trust towards the e-SME. In particular, a lack of social media post credibility may cause a simultaneous rejection by consumers, which, in turn, might provoke a rejection of the social media community. With any social media strategy, there are risks as well as rewards for e-SME brands with highly engaged communities. As the research highlights, fans that are highly committed and involved with brand values show a unique level of advocacy and contribute to the brand's evolution by providing inspiration.

4.8.2 Service Delivery Theoretical Contribution

The netnography contributes to the existing e-WOM literature by conceptualising the impact of service delivery e-WOM as a method for developing trust and brand reputation through e-SME social media communities.

The findings suggest that e-SMEs operate under the assumption that product-related messages received from, or endorsed by, consumers are much more likely to be accepted by fellow consumers. The notion here is that ties between the message recipient and all members of their network should be stronger than those links between the recipient and online community members outside the Friend Network; therefore the persuasiveness of positive e-WOM communication should increase. The netnography findings showed e-SMEs establish and facilitate social network platforms and encourage consumers to join these communities in order to trust the brand. Therefore key interview areas shall review:

- The reliability of e-SME social media posts
- The strength of personal or random consumer recommendation

The next section will review the conceptual development core trust and reputation constructs

4.9 Part Three-Conceptual Development Core trust and reputation constructs

4.9.1 Social Media Trust Summary

This section discusses e-SME brand social media community trust and reputation in relation to the findings from the netnography and the current literature. Whilst many of the constructs defined in this section of the research are aligned with the existing trust and reputation constructs in the literature, a number of differences have emerged for value co creation and service delivery. These constructs will be further analysed in the interview section of the research to add further credibility to the proposed conceptual models. Following the findings from the netnography data, an update to Figure 4.1 (Overview Core online consumer brand trust constructs from the literature) is provided in the form of Figure 4.19.

Figure 4.19: Social Media E-SME Trust and Reputation Constructs
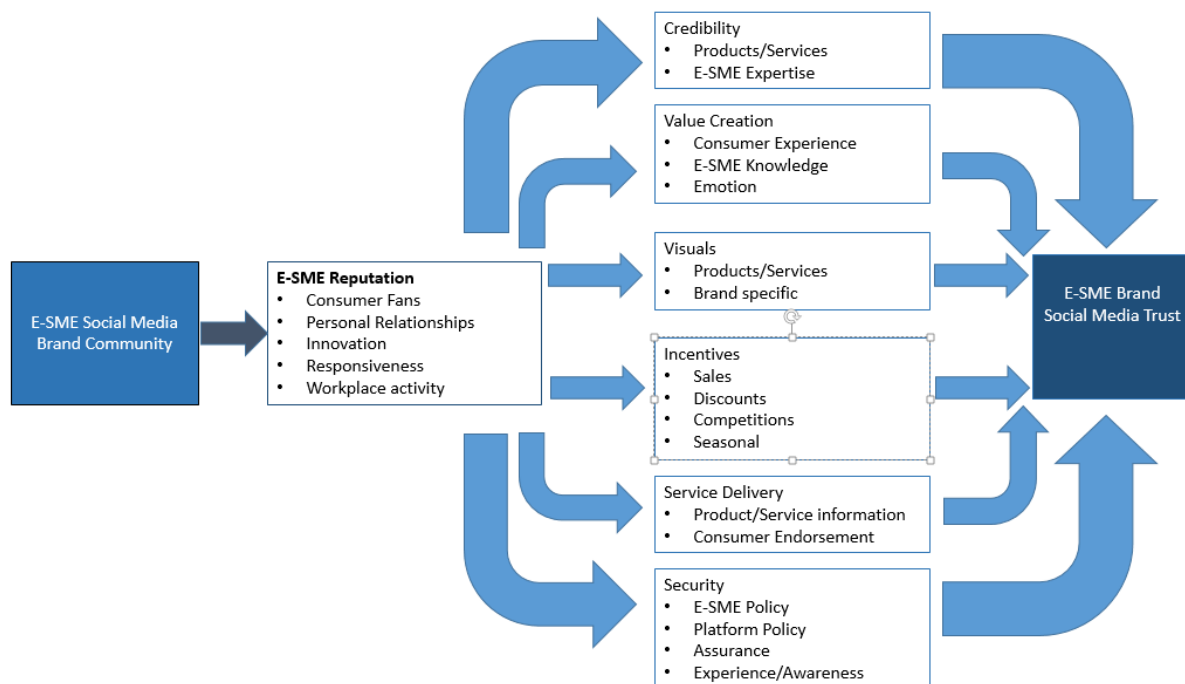
The analysis and interpretation of the netnography led to the development of a conceptual model illustrating the constructs of social media e-SME trust and reputation as shown in Figure 4.19. The model reveals established relationships between the e-SME's reputation that is developed through their SMBC and the trust formation constructs; Credibility, Value Creation, Visuals, Incentives, Service Delivery, and Security.

4.9.2 Chapter Summary

Objectives one and two in this thesis aimed to identify the constructs that develop consumer online trust and reputation for e-SME brands using social media platforms. The existing literature typically defines online trust through two core constructs i.e. credibility and benevolence. However, this section of the research finds e-SME trust to be defined through seven core constructs with 22 sub constructs (see Figure 4.19). In adding to the current theory, this part of the research has found e-SMEs to collectively develop trust through a number of constructs which together provide a holistic view of the consumer and social media community considerations involved. Although, the netnography findings support previous online trust constructs research this research makes an important contribution to knowledge highlighting the importance of visuals, incentives, and co creation of social media value for consumers to develop e-SME brand trust through social media platforms.

However, rich insight from the consumer and corporate perspective is still required to further validate these constructs. The development processes highlighted in the proposed models now require further exploration, in order to determine how the key informant perception of social media trust and engagement compare with consumer perceptions, which was obtained through empirical interview based evidence and reviewed in chapters 7 and 8. Therefore this section of the research also informs the interview sections of the research (see Table 4.16), by highlighting key development areas as well as valuable contributions to theoretical knowledge.

Table 4.16: Interview Areas

Theme	Interview areas
Value Creation	- Consumer motivation for posting on social media - Consumer value created when visiting e-SME social media platform - Emotion connected to posts
Credibility	- Perception E-SME Product/Service expertise on trust development - Social media communication methods to demonstrate Product/Service expertise
Reputation	- The impact the amount of current community members has on trust - Personal relationships developed through social media community membership and their impact on trust - The significance of response time for reputation building
Visuals and incentives	The impact and effectiveness of visuals to develop trust shall be analysed during the consumer and key informant interviews.
Security	- E-SME's security policies for consumers - The perception of responsibility for security
Service Delivery	- The reliability of e-SME social media posts - The strength of personal or random consumer recommendation for service delivery

To summarise, the key discussion areas from this section of the research are outlined in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17: Key Discussion Areas

Theme	Key Finding	Theoretical Contribution	Practical Contribution
Value Creation	Brand/product knowledge and consumer experience are equally important core constructs in defining social media value creation to enhance brand trust	Proposed conceptual model for value co-creation (figure 5.4), by developing the consumer experience construct to add to the existing theory, which focuses on the organisation providing value in order to create trust (Chiu et al., 2010; Gefen et al., 2003).	In order to create value e-SMEs should encourage consumers to share their experiences with the brand and fellow consumers.
Credibility	Credibility can be promoted via the social media community by the joint promotion of expertise from the e-SME and the consumer. The organisations and consumers expertise can be emphasised with posts or blogs which provide knowledge on product use or industry tips	Figure 5.9 highlights the credibility constructs evident from the netnography which stem from the risk a consumer may experience before purchasing from an e-SME and using their social media channel to obtain purchase assurance	E-SME's should highlight their organisation's expertise and experience when posting social media content
Reputation	Corporate reputation management in social media is a balancing act for e-SMEs incorporating internal and external potential constructs	Figure 6.0 Reputation constructs conceptual model	Organisations should implement social media guidelines for staff to develop the brand's reputation externally
Incentives	Financial incentives provided significant engagement scores	Importance of images associated with financial posts	E-SME brands can use financial incentives to create and establish relationships.
Visuals	By highlighting the importance of images and their variation dependant on the type of post in developing trust (conceptualised in figure 6.3). Whilst this proved a popular method, it is also beneficial for e-SMEs to consider the subjective nature of images and the potential difficulties of controlling the effect or impact of the visual of video.	Figure 6.3 Visual Social Media Trust	Mindful of the importance of visuals, e-SMEs could develop an image policy for each type of post.

Theme	Key Finding	Theoretical Contribution	Practical Contribution
Security	Social media sites pose considerations for consumers, as they may not be aware of all the e-SME's policies, and they may not know that many social networking sites actively engage in sharing some of their member's information to external organisations.	Figure 6.6 Security Constructs, inductively sourced from the literature is comprised of 5 further sub constructs	E-SME brands may wish to allay any privacy and security concerns by sign posting their policy when referencing financial transactions within any social media posts.
Service Delivery	Service delivery can be defined as a continuous cyclical process for developing and delivering products or services to consumers. The findings indicate that by using social media, e-SMEs can implement and promote this process to customers in order to build trust,	The netnography contributes to the existing e-WOM literature by conceptualising the impact of service delivery e-WOM as a method for developing trust and brand reputation through e-SME social media communities (figures 6.7 and 7.0)	E-SMEs must reinforce their service delivery standards by promoting satisfied customer posts as well as proactively and publicly handling delivery issues.

In summary, knowledge regarding the development of trust constructs on social media platforms for e-SMEs remains limited. The case netnography however provided insight into the current strategies that sports e-SMEs are undertaking in order to create and sustain trust, which has been conceptualised in Figure 4.19. This model adds to the existing theory for social media consumer engagement and developing trust and reputation online, and has provided a foundation for the consumer and key informant interview stage of the research. The next set of findings shall discuss the strategies used by sports retail e-SME brands to create consumer brand engagement in social media communities.

Sports Retail e-SME Brands Social Media communication strategies to encourage engagement and develop trust, presentation of findings (In accordance with objective 3) - Presentation of Analysis.

5. Introduction

The findings in this section review the methods which the case e-SMEs are undertaking in order to create trust through engagement. This section conceptualises and then explains with rich evidence how e-SMEs can engage with non-customers and customers using social media brand communities. The chapter guide is conceptualised in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 - Chapter Five Guide
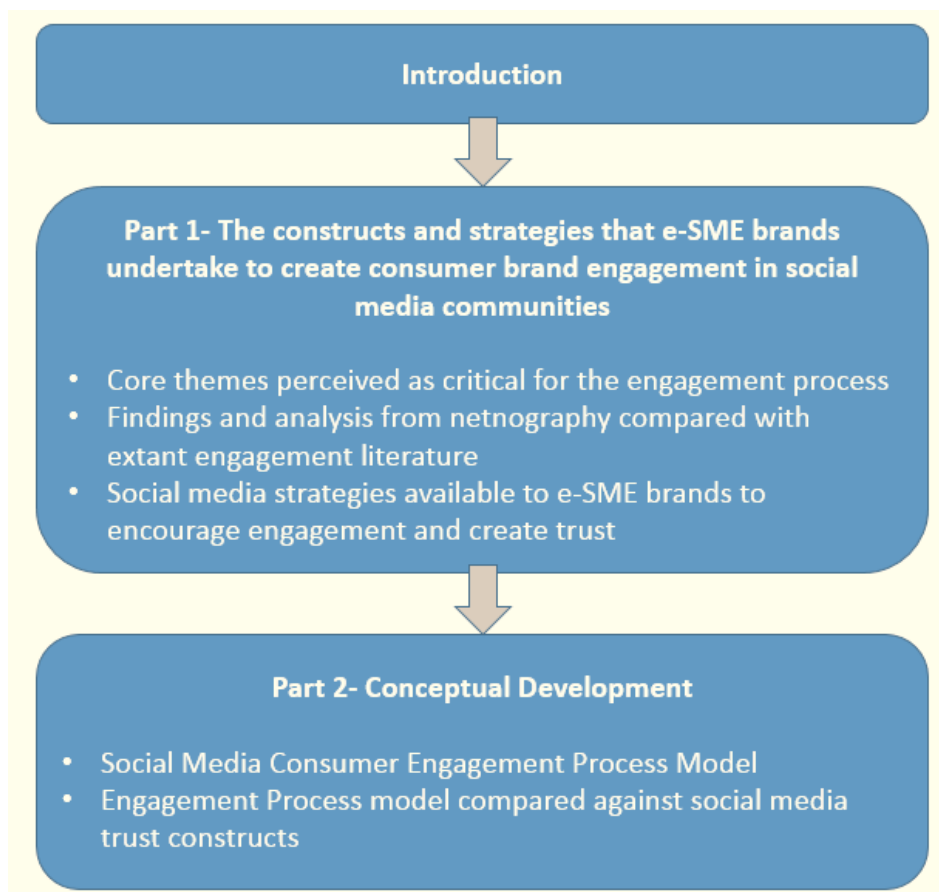
The literature review (Chapter Two) identified seven drivers of engagement. This may be appropriate for large brands, but these drivers and subsequent strategies may not reflect the

multiple roles and activities which e-SME owners or employees are responsible for due to resource limitations. For this research, nine core themes were identified (Awareness, Financial Motivation, Connection, Value Creation, Commitment, Knowledge, Relationship, Satisfaction, and Loyalty) from a comprehensive analysis of social media engagement strategies in order to map the process. Conceptual development involved the establishment of nine core themes, which are then located within a framework for strategic consumer engagement based on the findings from the case netnography. Findings are then compared back against the trust constructs established in Chapter Four and a combined model of engagement and trust is presented. The conceptualisation sections will focus on developing engagement frameworks constructed through evidence from the case netnography. This chapter therefore covers the third objective of the thesis, which aims to provide insight into the constructs and strategies that e-SME brands undertake to create consumer brand engagement in social media communities.

A thematic analysis was conducted to map the presence of the themes for each e-SME which enabled analysis within the e-SME online sports retail sector. Findings and analysis are provided for each theme, which compares and contrasts with the existing literature (Chapter Two). The theoretical and practical contributions from this section of the research are provided in the form of a conceptual model of engagement constructs, which demonstrate a roadmap for the development of initial and continual consumer trust. The netnography findings indicate that engagement is a combination of cognitive aspects (e.g. being interested in an e-SME's activities), behavioural aspects (participation in the e-SME's activities), and/or emotional aspects (feeling positive about an e-SME's activities). The level of engagement (i.e. low or high) is dependent on the consumer trust stage (Initial or continual) stating that customer engagement is a sequential psychological process that consumers experience in order to become loyal towards a brand, outlining the process by which e-SME brand trust and reputation can be developed for new and existing customers. The staged process framework put forward in this section of the research, provides an important contribution to knowledge by highlighting the consumer trust development and key competencies, which enable progression to the next engagement stage, differentiating it from traditional engagement and trust models such which do not include the trust stages alongside engagement concepts.

This accordingly involves strategic activities to be conducted at each stage which emphasises the need for the e-SME to utilise their industry knowledge. The proposed model represents a nine stage process, with themes overlapping as trust develops across engagement stages. The new model developed from this research also incorporates the application of 'value

creation' alongside initial and continual trust themes in relation to engagement as this was identified by e-SMEs as a crucial strategy for trust development.

The framework further expands the consumer engagement process by arguing that the customer engagement process helps to examine the dynamic relationship consumers have with organisations and further understand how they drive the development of consumer trust.

This analysis is based on evaluations of the trust themes developed in Chapter Four and argues that customers and non-customers have different antecedents and motives to follow and become engaged in an organisation's social media community. Which is reflected in the stages within the model. The next section provides an overview and analysis of each core theme. This extends the concept of staged trust development into the e-SME social media brand community however to add further validity to this theory further investigation is required from the consumer perspective. The staged process shows the consumer developing trust and key competencies which enable progression to the next stage differentiating it from traditional engagement and trust models which do not include the trust stages alongside engagement concepts. This accordingly involves strategic activities to be conducted at each stage which emphasises the need for the e-SME to utilise their industry knowledge. Existing models assume seven stages to exhibit engagement however, as the model represents a process, themes overlap and trust develops across engagement stages. The framework also incorporates application of value and alongside initial and continual trust themes in relation to engagement as this was identified by e-SMEs as a crucial strategy for trust development. In the light of evidence from the case netnography, strategic options available to e-SMEs are also outlined in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Engagement Constructs

Themes	Engagement Constructs	Social Media Strategic Options-	Customer stage
T1	Awareness	Watching Listening/ Observation -Social media monitoring tools, searches	Non-customer
T2	Financial Motivation	Promotional offers, competition, discounts	Non -customer
T3	Connection (e.g)	Multiple platform options- Like, follow? Receive regular social media updates	Non -customer
T4	Value Creation	Consumer invited to interact-join discussion, questions, opinion? (does it come from a person, call to action within the content to engage i.e. encourage a response) Asking opinions- interacting with social issues that are close to the consumer's interest, as well as expressing concern and attention in customer opinions and ideas. consumers update and change information on their profiles, forward information and share information with the fold; consumers respond to the content of others, actively participate, give opinions, but only personally; Negative Engagement- organisations should not try to force their way into a conversation	Non –customer-Customer
T5	Commitment	Encourage commitment by adopting T1,2,3, and 4 within social media content	Non –customer-Customer
T6	Knowledge	Expert product/industry posts, video, blogs, social networking, comments	Customer
T7	Relationship	A relationship is then formed where co creation of value exists-be prepared to reply, bi-directional relationship (e-SME knows customer, stands out from competition) Be Honest	Customer
T8	Satisfaction	Members of a community including seller and customers result in satisfaction will they stay connected and continue to interact	Customer
T9	Loyalty/Advocacy	Retweets (e-WOM)	Customer

5.1 Part 1- Constructs of Social Media Engagement

This section explores the nine engagement themes (ET1-9) outlined in Table 5.6 and provides rich evidence to demonstrate findings and analysis. The first findings examine the nature of the social media engagement and trust concepts by investigating consumers' specific

interactive experiences, engagement objects, motivational states and engagement dimensionality within the context of an e-SME SMBC. In order to ensure data richness, excerpts from the netnography are utilised for each of the nine themes. For reasons of brevity, extracts are provided from only one or two of the case e-SMEs in each instance. Table 5.6 shows the nature of the nine constructs which e-SME brand's social media communities have utilised in order to create engagement and develop trust. The conceptualisation sections focus on efforts for the development of an engagement roadmap constructed through evidence from the netnography. As there is a degree of overlap across themes (e.g. connection and motivation) some of the examples could sit in various themes – however, examples are allocated to only one theme in order to curb repetition.

5.2 Awareness (T1)

Of the 12 e-SME brands researched all cases demonstrated consumer awareness posts in their social media communities. If e-SMEs are able to develop a comprehensive awareness of consumers' social media brand community activity intentions, and behaviours, they may be able to use these insights in the development and implementation of more effective communication content, in order to attract and retain customers. This was demonstrated by the case e-SMEs in Table 5.2 which represents the collective engagement scores (likes/shares/comments) from each of the e-SME SMBCs. For the purpose of this research engagement scores are the combination of consumers that 'like' 'comment' 'retweet or share a post etc. The analysis identified that the majority of e-SMEs utilise multiple SMBCs in order to 'stay in touch' with consumer's needs and interests.

Table 5.2 Social Media Posts Engagement Scores

e-SME	Facebook Posts	Facebook Engagement	Tweets	Twitter Engagement	Google + Posts	Google+ Engagement	YouTube videos	YouTube Engagement	Pinterest Pins	Pinterest Engagement	Instagram Posts	Instagram Engagement
The Soccer Store	68	70	177	67	28	148	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Surfdome	50	6971	102	1314	114	32	n/a	n/a	174	64	579	n/a
Sportsjamkits	35	325	15	115	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sportshoes	46	1030	166	30	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
ProBikeKit	39	2209	135	81	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Newitts	37	23	124	79	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kitbag	37	575	356	1156	84	6	7	4424	n/a	n/a	8	129
Fitsense	25	40	31	7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Chelston Direct	50	287	136	13	60	27		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Direct Soccer	9	19	68	13	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Direct Teamwear	13	18	70	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Fitness Footwear	18	229	21	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	**427**	**11,796**	**1,401**	**2,951**	**286**	**181**	**9**	**4,424**	**174**	**64**	**587**	**129**

The 'awareness' construct was evident in the netnography in terms of e-SMEs seeking to increase awareness and understanding of current and potential consumers interests and even which social media platforms their target audience use. For example, e-SMEs such as Chelston Direct focussed on Twitter as opposed to Facebook. This approach could be for a number of reasons, such as limited resources to dedicate time producing or sharing content over two SMBCs, or from a strategic perspective Chelston Direct may consider that they can 'connect' with their audience more effectively using Twitter.

The findings highlight the opportunities for e-SMEs choosing to adopt 'awareness' as part of their SMBC strategy, which suggests that they can be used as platforms to identify emerging market trends, allowing e-SMEs to tailor their products/services to the needs of the consumer. One further advantage of knowing customers is that e-SMEs can focus on ideal customers who fit to their products and strategies. Thus the pool of qualified prospects increases and relationships are enhanced which might lead to increased customer acquisition and retention.

5.2.1 Awareness Strategic Implications

One goal for e-SMEs is to define a method not for detecting the emergence of new paradigm shifts, but rather for combining qualitative and quantitative data sources to refine and provide awareness of existing patterns identified within social media communities. The ultimate goal of awareness is to uncover hidden insights, i.e. trends, by combining data from numerous sources, such as internet tracking data, social media, conversations, text and documents. However, it is important to state that neither qualitative nor quantitative trend spotting is a

method to prescribe exact courses of action, since any trend can be broken. Nevertheless, a structured method for timely recognition and interpretation of deep consumer trends reduces the risk of innovation mistakes due to exclusive reliance on faulty individual beliefs.

This section of the research puts forward that social media 'awareness' is a crucial stage in the development of engagement and that social media posts should be part of a specific strategy to find, analyse and engage with current and potential consumers. A well-developed strategy can help ensure effective results. The findings in this thesis therefore advocate e-SMEs adopting a social media consumer awareness approach which allows e-SMEs to discover the strengths and weaknesses of an e-SME's own or competitors' products as well as customers' feedback. Since all cases demonstrated consumer awareness by adopting multiple social media communities this suggests consumer awareness as a key theme for social media engagement.

Social media facilitates the establishment of connections with a large number and wide variety of consumers and e-SMEs. The 'awareness', stage requires e-SME brands to form an association with consumers. Strategically organisations are able to do this due to their presence on a number of social media sites, which completes the first stage of customer engagement. If e-SMEs set up a number of different SMBCs this allows them the opportunity to significantly facilitate consumer interaction with the brand by creating new communities and bringing together members who share similar interests.

This section of the research reviewed the importance of e-SME consumer awareness on social media. The findings suggest that by developing a comprehensive awareness of consumers' social media brand community activity intentions, and behaviours, e-SMEs can utilise these insights in the development and implementation of more effective communication content, in order to attract and retain customers.

Therefore, the interview analysis shall review:

- The methods that e-SMEs adopt to monitor consumers social media behaviour and needs.
- The number of SMBCs that an e-SME can potentially manage.
- How this analysis can be integrated into the e-SME's strategy and objectives.

At this stage e-SMEs offer initial incentives to receive regular updates such as entry into a competition or discounts for 'liking' or 'retweeting content'. Which moves onto the next stage of engagement 'Financial Motivation'.

5.3 Financial Motivation (T2)

This section provides insight into how e-SMEs can utilise consumer motivation to engage with brands on social media by analysing the potential drivers to begin to engage with an e-SME. This section of the research provides evidence identifying that consumer motivation to engage at this stage is represented by financial incentives such as competition and product price reductions, which was evident in the majority of cases who argued that consumers are motivated to become engaged the most by the benefits they receive from the organisation. Figure 5.2 shows that e-SMEs, similar to large organisations, post new product information and this approach was demonstrated by all 12 of the netnography cases.

Figure 5.2 E-SME Products
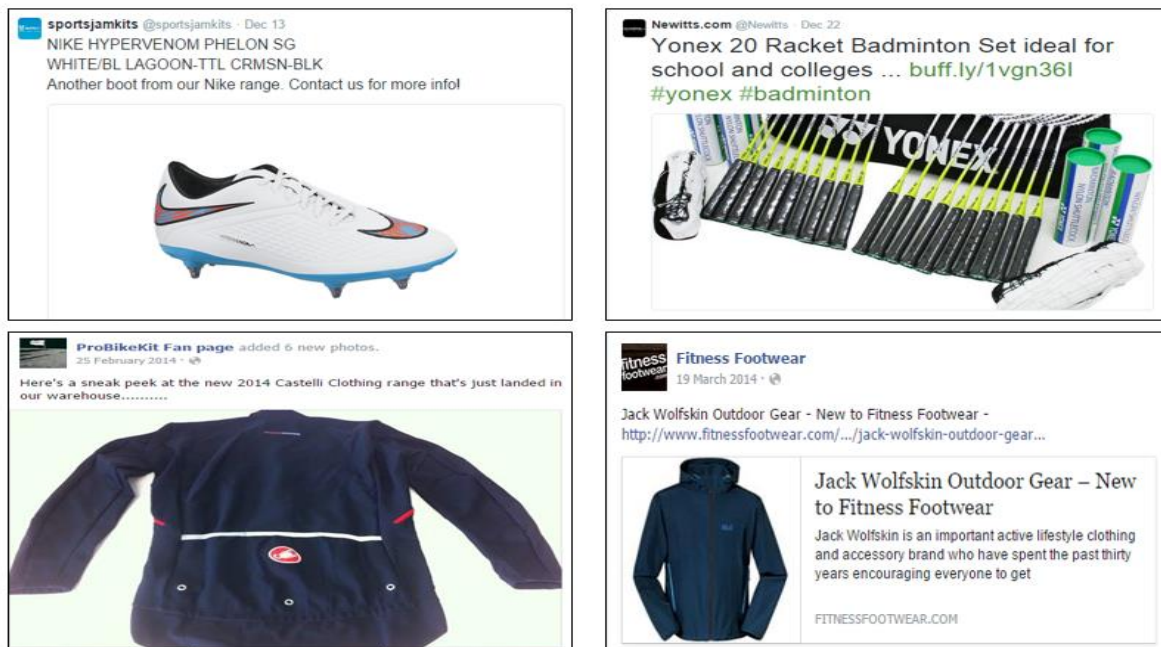
The netnography findings suggests e-SMEs focus on product promotion in particular. In contrast the established literature advocates that organisations should focus on value creation posts (discussed in section 5.5). However the influence of financial motivation through social media engagement is reviewed in the next section.

5.3.1 Social Media Financial Motivation Posts

Social media provide e-SMEs with the opportunity of developing their relationship between consumers and their brand. By its very nature social media thrives on conversation, interaction and the sharing of ideas. Although rewarding fans and customers with limited products and exclusive offers is an effective and popular approach. There is an argument that e-SME brands are also able to reward fans through the social media experience that they are creating by

providing educational and emotional experiences which is connected to the T4 interaction themes. Examples of financial rewards such as consumer competitions, which was an approach adopted by Kitbag.com, Fitsense Sports and ProBikeKit are displayed in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 E-SME Competitions

One further strategy for the case e-SMEs was to offer consumers product/service discounts and promote these offers via their SMBCS. This was exemplified by Direct Teamwear, Newitts.com, ProBikeKit and Kitbag.com in Figure 5.4.

**Figure 5.4 E-SME Social Media Posts-Price Discounts**
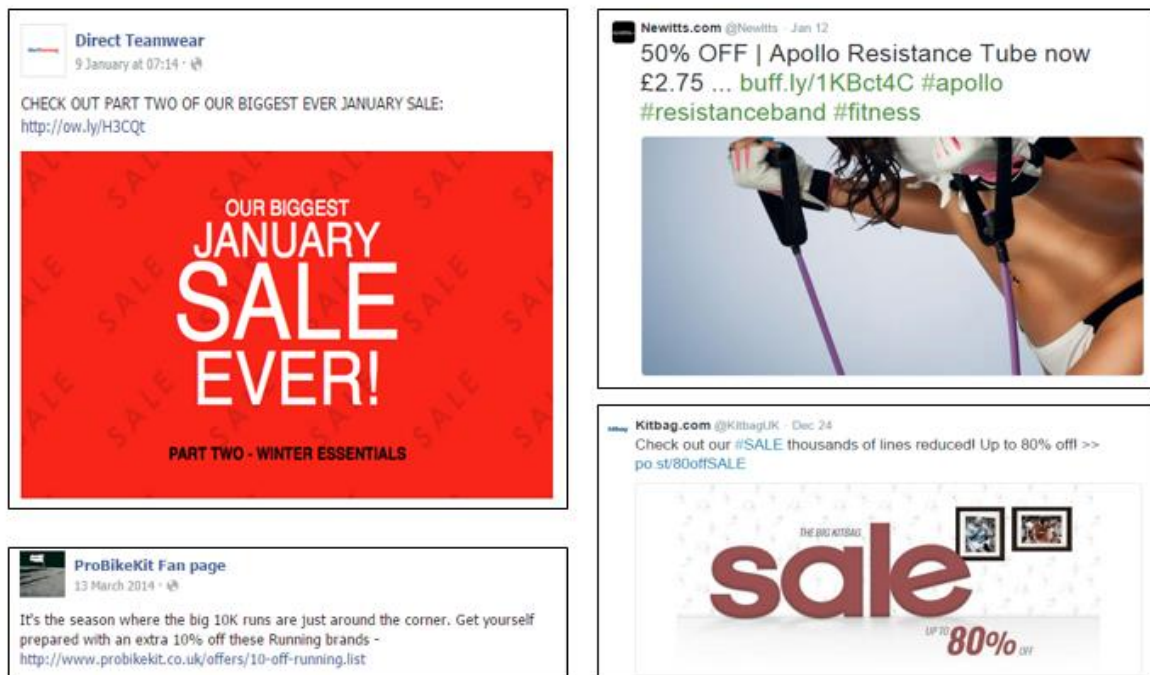
The analysis shows that SMBCs greatly facilitate the opportunity for e-SMEs to promote financial incentives to non-customers and customers. Due to the competitive nature of online retailing, financial promotions can assist the establishment of connections with a large number and wide variety of consumers and e-SMEs. This approach was supported by all of the case e-SMEs, which adds empirical support to social capital theory whereby e-SMEs believe that consumers pursue some sort of economic value through SMBCs. As the netnography findings and literature review demonstrated, e-SMEs attempt to create engagement by providing financial incentives for consumers. The evaluation of financial motivations enabled a deeper understanding of e-SME activities performed using social media, which required further analysis during the interview stage of the research. Therefore interview themes will cover, the main motivations that consumers have in order to begin engaging in e-SME social media brand communities. The next section addresses the 'connection' construct.

5.4 Connection (T3)

One of the key elements which was evident in the netnography and appeared to bring a significant amount of engagement success was e-SME brands creating an experience that places the consumer as the focus of the social media posting. Thereby establishing a connection with potential consumers (non-customers). In order to ensure the target audience was reached, e-SMEs identified methods to connect with non-customers and posted content upon their social media communities in order to engage with consumers. E-SMEs are able to create this connection with consumers by interacting with issues that are close to the

consumer's interest, as well as expressing concern, attention, and attempting to inspire consumers. Several of the cases spent considerable time adopting this approach and this was exemplified by Sportshoes.com in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5: E-SME Social Media Posts-Connection

Whilst these posts were addressed to all members of Sportshoes.com's Facebook community, the same approach was used to engage with consumers on a more personal level, which is demonstrated in the following example.

"@harryemery-I love running but I've just lost my motivation this year but it's getting out of control now!
@sportshoes_com-So easy to do! Just have to get back out there and run! You'll soon have your running mojo back "
(SportsShoes-Twitter)

In this example, Sportshoes are engaging with a consumer but purely discussing their motivation to run and not discussing products or orders. This personal contact suggests that the e-SME are genuinely interested in the consumer's passion and are happy to use the SMBC to facilitate the conversation.

E-SMEs such as Surfdome and Fitness footwear often used a video postings to connect with consumers. Video post examples are highlighted in Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6: E-SME Social Media Posts- Video Connection
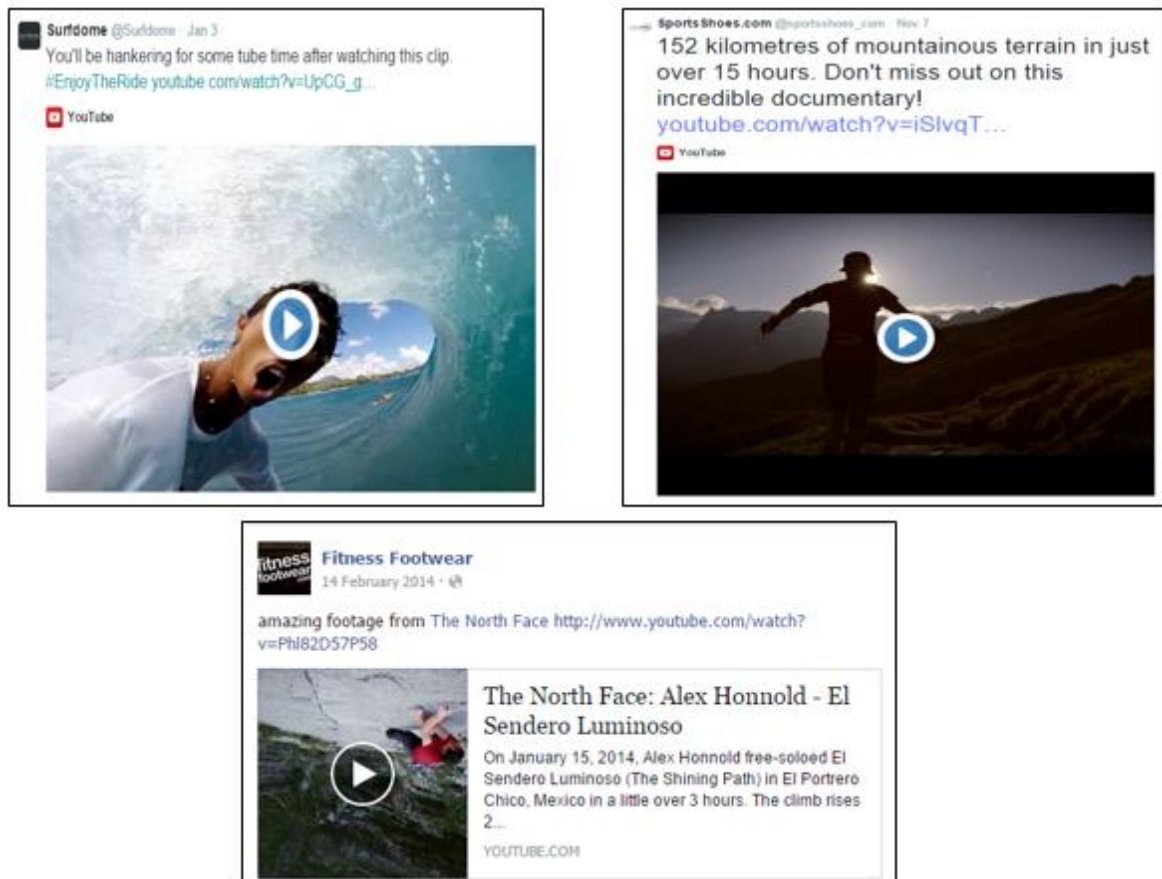
By posting video content the e-SMEs are providing consumer focussed content in order to entertain or inspire but crucially continue to engage with their target audience. Imagery was also used to add 'further weight' to an SMBC post and connect with consumers, which was again exemplified by Fitness Footwear, Surfdome, as well as The Soccer Store in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7: E-SME Image Connection
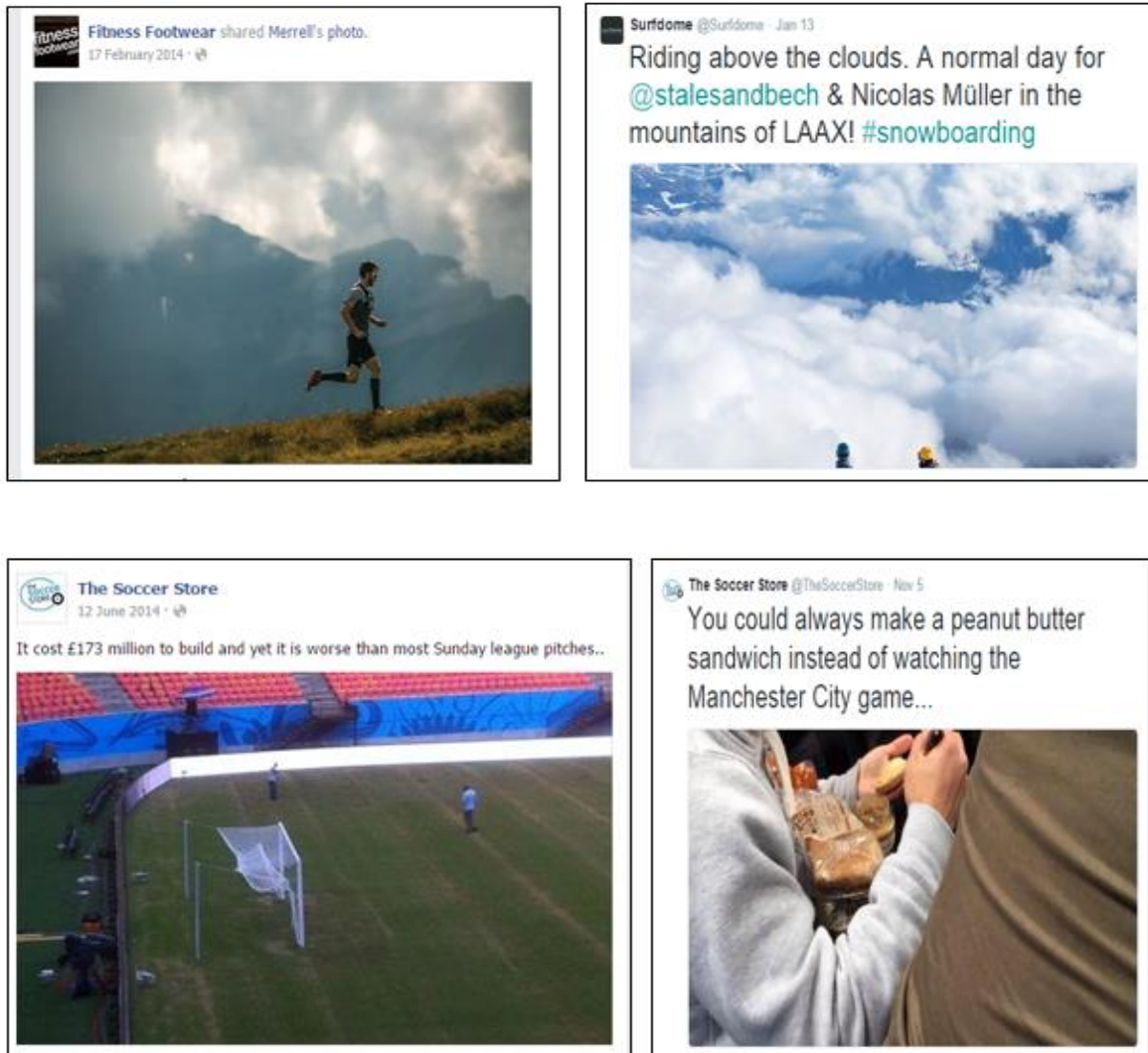
Whilst imagery was mostly found to be used for product promotion, it also assisted the majority of e-SMEs with connecting with their audience to promote further connection activities such as humour. Only Newitts.com chose not to develop a connection to their new brand in this manner. This was principally because (as referenced in the previous section), their focus of social media content was for financial incentives. Nevertheless, this research therefore supports the choice of connection strategic integration posts in the online engagement literature in the case of e-SMEs developing trust through social media communities.

5.4.1 Connection Strategic Implications

Strategies encouraging consumers' to connect with e-SMEs on social media can also be connected to the three usage motives, i.e. consuming, participating, and producing. Connection activities related to information that resonates with the e-SME's target audience aligned with the company's goals enabling involvement and sharing by non-customers. This

strategic area is related to a consumers' participation activities based on social connection motives. This involves a stronger support of interactions between consumers. Increasing the consumption associated with social connection is not only a question of attracting fans to a company Facebook account for informational purposes. Instead, it is important to get individuals to share their thoughts and interact with each other. This goal is related to the feeling of belonging and community sense making. The Sportshoes.com social media communities are a good example of this type of community bonding, where users are connecting with and supporting each other. From an e-SME perspective, the research findings demonstrate the importance of understanding how consumers engage in SMBCs and the consequences of this connection. The research indicates that consumer engagement enhances this connection by highlighting the importance of understanding what inspires consumers. Thus, e-SMEs need to listen to consumers and continuously interact with consumers in SMBC communications. In summary the netnography findings contribute to knowledge by stating that e-SMEs can instigate engagement by creating an experience that places the consumer as the focus of the social media posting. Thereby establishing a connection with potential consumers (non-customers). Therefore interview themes covered:

- The types of content that e-SMEs post to create a connection with consumers
- The most effective format (image, video) for these posts
- The emotional drive behind the content

The next stage concerns the value associated with SMBCs once a connection has been established.

5.5. Value Creation (T4)

Social media community members are connected online by shared motives and interact with one another for practical reasons such as product knowledge sharing or even discussions relating to the brand performance or service. Posting content that had an interactive value added focus and was demonstrated as crucial to the engagement process. The 'value creation' construct was displayed on the social media platforms in terms of the potential drivers to engage with an e-SME. For example, when a consumer tweeted asking for advice and Sportshoes.com responded with a recommendation:

" @kimick need new trail shoes, any recommendations?
@sporstshoes_com -Hi Kim take a look at these http://www.sportshoes.com/products/SA2042/Saucony-grid-adpat-trail-running-shoes/ Great reviews and unbeatable value for money. Many Thanks"
(SportsShoes.com –Twitter)

Providing information connected to the industry, which is of interest to the consumer and hence motivate them to continue to visit the e-SME platform, is also acknowledged in the literature which highlights 'shared motives. This is exemplified by ProBike Kit and Fitness Footwear who provided industry and product opinion below:

"ProBike Kit Blog-Tour de France Review" (ProBike Kit- Website Blog)
"Great review of the @salomon_running Sense Mantra Trail Shoe- http://www.bikerunswim.co.uk/salomon-sensemantra-trail-shoe-review/ #Running " (Fitness Footwear- Twitter)

Value Creation was also demonstrated not only in the desire to understand more about potential products and services but also in relation to key news and information concerning the sport. This is highlighted by Sportsjam.co.uk for instance, who regularly post updates on sports competitions and professional performances:

From the section findings it is clear that the social media environment has changed the motivation for consumers to interact with, talk about, and respond to brands due to the variety of content and how it is delivered on an e-SME's SMBC. Further insight is thus necessary to aid understanding of the consumer behaviour effects of social media engagement strategies which shall be reviewed in the consumer interview section (Chapter Seven). An SMBC can also initiate discussions related to brand, and share topics related to their interests, which was demonstrated by Sportshoes, Sportsjam.co.uk, Direct Soccer and Kitbag in Figure 5.8.

**Figure 5.8: E-SME Social Media Posts-Community Discussion**

Further value creation factors demonstrated can also include product knowledge searching as well as a sense of belonging to a community. However, these motivational factors may not be the same for organisations who decide to become engaged in social media. These findings therefore suggest that, from a strategic social media point of view an e-SME's goals in social media should be linked with its general operational objectives.

The findings indicate that an e-SME's consumer engagement through a SMBC, should focus on consumers' interests and needs in order to provide superior value that is relative to competitor activity. This can potentially be achieved by creating, disseminating, and responding to intelligence regarding consumer needs in keeping with preferences and seeks to develop trust and commitment in relationships with customers. By highlighting the importance of value creation to consumer engagement, this research provides a basis for developing engagement strategies based on shared motives between the e-SME and consumer.

Consumers can express their opinions on different social media platforms and evaluate e-SME brands. At this stage opinions will depend on associations raised by brands comments and on personal contributions of consumers, their motivation to participate, comment and support brands. This is exemplified in Figure 5.9.

Figure: 5.9 Interaction

Interactions between e-SMEs and consumers can improve understanding of customer needs, particularly changes in these needs over time, and enable modifications to existing products or the development of new services to better satisfy these needs.

This was exemplified by Kitbag.com, SportsJam Kits, and SportsShoes.com. For instance SportsShoes.com use their social media platforms to understand customer needs, gain insights into new products and services, and allow customers to share aspirations. When sharing consumers choose to update their profiles or community pages with content which

demonstrates their desire to display knowledge or opinion connecting to the brand offering. E-SME SMBCs provide sharing options but the organisations must be mindful of the way the information will be interpreted by engaged consumers. Some of the e-SMEs researched in the netnography effectively collaborate with customers by asking for their opinions and thoughts on new products or online competitions. This is exemplified by Sportshoes.com

> "@sportsshoes_com Any ideas for comps guys?
>
> Retweet-@Hebdedben "Some new Nike trainers would be great"
>
> (SportsShoes-Twitter)

Case e-SMEs also sought to create value by providing sports industry updates and well as recommendations for training programmes. Examples of these posts are represented in Figure 5.10.

Figure 5.10: Industry Information Sharing

A number of the case e-SMEs were also keen to be seen as an information hub by providing industry updates or 'breaking sports news' and posting these updates on their respective SMBCs. Examples from the Facebook SMBC's for Chelston Direct, Kitbag.com, Newitts.com and Fitsense Sports are displayed in Figure 5.11.

Figure 5.11: E-SME Social Media Posts-Sports Latest News Updates
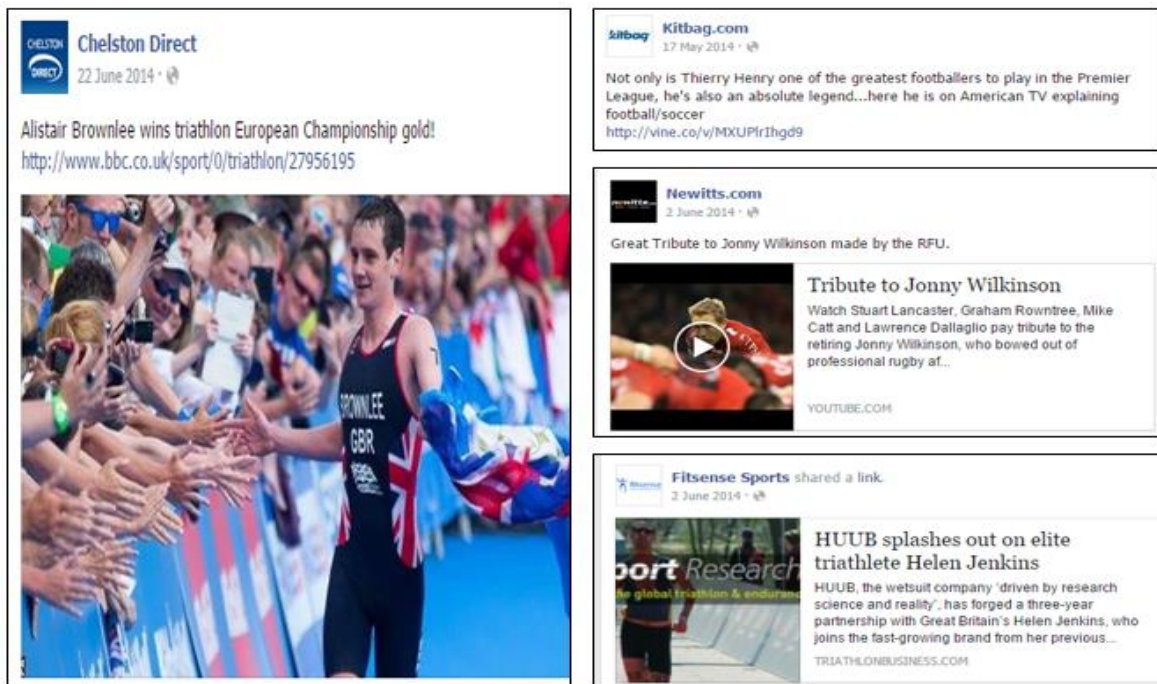
Therefore e-SMEs should provide consumers with commenting opportunities. The commenting opportunity will help companies to identify and reach consumers easier, watch their reaction, and gauge their opinion. At the value creation stage e-SMEs identified consumers that have established relationships with their brands and on the basis of their experience produce and share content on social media. Consumers for this stage are motivated to communicate their personal goals through self-expression. At this stage consumer loyalty to the brand and trust is developing, therefore it is important to offer them platforms where engaging discussions take place capable of attracting potential fans of the brand. Although SMBCs demonstrate high levels of engagement and loyalty to a brand, the activities of such platforms can also have negative impact on brand trust. Therefore it could be suggested that e-SMEs should consistently observe how engaged consumers communicate with one another and seek to enter the conversation if any incorrect information is being discussed.

5.5.1 Innovation

Through social media communities e-SMEs can provide consumers with opinion platforms where users have the chance to post their views, suggestions and complains as well as improvements, ideas or solutions concerning a new product or innovation. This helps e-SMEs to gain new insights. E-SMEs have a wide range of possible types of social media to use for innovative purposes. In contrast with the literature, the case e-SMEs did not utilise their SMBCs to take advantage of this type interaction with consumers. With none of the selected

12 cases posting messages which included requests for consumer insight or opinion on product service development. Nevertheless, at this stage of the research this sub theme of value creation cannot be dismissed, as generally speaking, organisations that use SMBCs in their innovation process are able to increase their customer focus and orientation. This can potentially be achieved by obtaining detailed information about their customers which can provide an overview of different market segments. Consequently, further insight is required to aid understanding of perceived consumer value which is reviewed in the consumer interview section. Therefore the interviews will review the types of posts that create value for consumers.

5.6 Commitment (T5)

Consumer commitment was perceived as being a key stage in the engagement process. The recent literature outlines two types of commitment: affective and calculative commitment. Affective commitment concerns the emotional commitment involving trust, whereas calculative commitment is based on rationality, such as lack of choice or cost savings. Calculative commitment is more rational and results from a lack of choice or cost incentives. For instance, an online consumer may purchase from an e-SME brand due to discount prices and is linked to T2 Financial Motivation. Calculative commitment can potentially lead to higher levels of customer loyalty and enduring relationships with sellers. However this level of commitment was difficult to analyse using the netnography method unless consumer postings made specific references to the cost savings in their postings.

However this would still not even be classed as an effective method to demonstrate commitment as a consumer may reflect that they were happy with a cost saving but there is no indication that they would not use an alternative store if they were to offer a similar offering. This issue shall be further reviewed in the consumer interview section (Chapter Seven). Affective commitment is more emotionally charged and occurs due to the trust and reciprocity in an e-SME brand and consumer relationship. For example, an online consumer who regularly purchases form an e-SME could develop a personal relationship with an organisation's employee, who remember the consumers previous orders or sports interests and provides excellent service. Therefore the resulting affective commitment creates higher levels of trust and emotional ties in the e-SME/Consumer relationships. This is highlighted in the below example where ProBikeKit attempt to create this trust by responding to posts with and individual signature, so that the consumer is aware that they have a direct point of contact for their issue:

> "@ProBike- Can you please provide me with an order number so I can have a look into this further for you? Thanks Jordan"
>
> "ProBikeKit-Twitter"

The findings indicate that by satisfying transactional customers, e-SMEs can attempt to develop stronger relationship bonds and develop continual trust. This suggests that continued interaction between e-SMEs and customers through an SMBC can facilitate the transition through different stages in the consumer engagement and trust framework. This can then be used by the e-SME to foster retention and create affective and/or calculative commitment. However, the specific SMBC used for this approach may depend on the nature of the interaction sought with different SMBCs preferred for different e-SME objectives. The findings undicate that customer loyalty may be considered the result of calculative commitment to a product, brand, or company while consumer e-SME brand trust is the result of affective commitment to a product, brand, or company. If consumers are loyal and trust the brand as a result of engagement, then both calculative and affective commitment could be achieved. Whereby the consumer and e-SME sustain a strong relationship. However, this was recognised as an area for development in pursuit of further information and will be further analysed in Chapter Eight.

In summary, the netnography suggested that consumer commitment is a key stage in the engagement process. However, further investigation is required into the consumer perspective, analysing how social media engagement can create affective or/both calculative consumer commitment. Therefore interview themes will include the reasons a consumer may have to return to an e-SME SMBC.

5.7 Knowledge (T6)

A 'Knowledge' focus was fundamental to developing consumer engagement on social media. The knowledge theme extended to providing consumers with detailed product and industry knowledge. Being recognised as a source of information was found to also be linked to value (T4) and was also perceived as critical by e-SMEs to engage with consumers and reward them for being a member of the community and visiting the social media platform. This was demonstrated in the form of industry and product blogs by Chelston Direct, Fitness Footwear, Surfdome in Figure 5.12.

Figure 5.12: E-SME Blogs
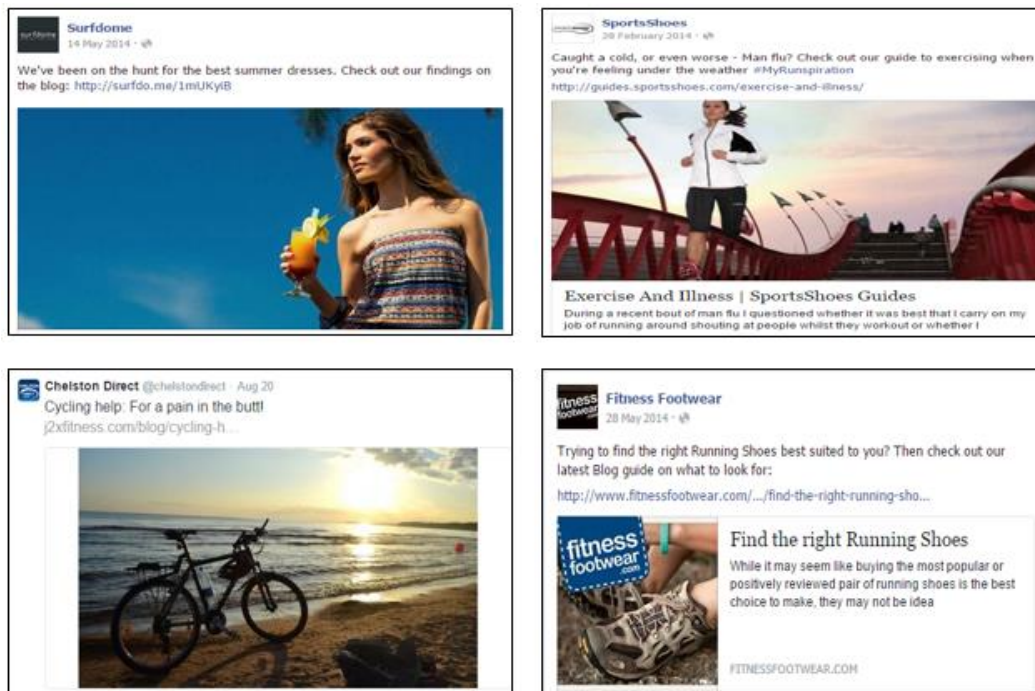
The analysis argues that this stage of the consumer engagement and trust process is founded on consumers' need for information. Whereby 'knowledge' stage of the consumer engagement process is highly interactive, experiential, and based on aspects such as, 'learning,' 'sharing,' 'advocating' and 'co-developing'. This suggests that, by sharing knowledge in suggesting ways to improve skills when using the products/services provided by and e-SME, the organisation develops a trusting relationship through their SMBC engagement. Beyond the shared knowledge aspect, a community connection was also seen to be a rewarding feature for consumers. Overall, a knowledge focus was implicit throughout the majority of case e-SMEs and as such was strongly perceived to positively affect consumer engagement. The findings also suggest that a knowledge focus was crucial to establishing and maintaining consumer engagement on social media.

In summary, the knowledge theme extended to providing consumers with detailed product and industry knowledge and recognition as a source of information was also perceived as reward them for consumers being a member of the community and visiting the social media platform. Therefore interview themes will cover the reward types that are the most effective engagement methods for new and existing customers.

5.8 Relationship (T7)

Social media consumer engagement requires the establishment of trust and commitment in e-SME and consumer relationships. Once the above constructs (T1-6) have been achieved an engaging relationship is formed between the e-SME and consumer.

The interactive nature of social media is likely to blur the integrity of e-SMEs and consumers and if trust is not being developed at this stage then a lasting relationship is unlikely. At this stage of the engagement process, if a consumer begins to trust the e-SME they can potentially become advocates at a later stage of the process. Therefore, in order to prolong and enhance this relationship e-SMEs may look to strengthen the emotional bonds that T1-6 have created with relates back to the argument that affective commitment establishes and sustains trust in a relationship. As a consequence, a relationship can only continue if there is consistent satisfaction (discussed in Theme 8) well as an emotional bond from the e-SME such as consumer concern.

Concern for consumers in the netnography was reflected in terms of recommendations in the form of product suitability (for particular sport or environment) and value for money. This was exemplified by Surfdome in Figure 5.13.

Figure 5.13: E-SME Recommendation

Surfdome @Surfdome · Jan 5

Off to the snow? Make sure you check out our mates @powderbeds for the best snow accomo going powderbeds.com

Case e-SMEs such as Sportsjamkit, Direct Teamwear and Surfdome also used SMBCs to develop relationships by posting consumer 'well wish' messages which are exemplified in Figure 5.14.

Figure 5.14: E-SME Well Wish Messages

Surfdome @Surfdome · Dec 31

Happy New Year people! We wish you a year full of epic adventures and radical rides! #EnjoyTheRide

Direct Teamwear
@DirectTeamwear — Follow

Good luck to all the teams playing today!! Tweet us who you're playing and we'll give you a shout out #shoutoutsunday

sportsjamkits @sportsjamkits · Dec 24
Merry Xmas and a happy new year. This year we have decided to make a donation to @ciaranscause instead I sending Xmas cards. Sportsjam team

Relationship marketing, however, broadened the domain to focus explicitly on the exchange relationship, enhancing our understanding of relationships between sellers and customers. Most importantly this research has, identified constructs that influence the nature of the relationship in SMBC exchanges between e-SMEs and consumers.

To prolong and enhance relationships with consumers, further analysis is required into the consumer perspective and how they define a relationship with an organisation. Therefore interview themes considered:

- The e/SME consumer perception of a relationship with an e-SME
- The methods to develop and sustain the relationship on social media

5.9 Satisfaction (T8)

It is important to maintain customer satisfaction and delight the customer to maintain success in a competitive environment. The findings indicated that a high level of consumer satisfaction is achieved when customer expectations are exceeded and emotions become highly positive has been described as not just satisfaction but delight. This would suggest that the goal for e-SMEs social media content is to create 'consumer delight' due to their content and postings.

Examples of this are highlighted below from the case netnography:

"Great customer service from John Newton@ProBikekit" (Probike Kit –Twitter)
" Thanks @sportshoes_com super swift delivery" (Sportshoes-Twitter)

However, it could be argued that satisfaction is not an end in itself, as the use of customer satisfaction surveys and ratings sometimes suggests, and is rather an intermediate step in strategies to achieve the goals of an organisation.

Whereby the aim of marketing is not just satisfaction but customer empowerment through relationships with brands that enable customer communities to mutually construct their wants and needs. This belief suggests that satisfaction is a necessary requirement for customer engagement. Examples of consumer satisfaction were evident partciuarly by SportsShoes.com, Surfdome, Sportsjamkits, DirectSoccer and Kitbag.com reflected in Figure 5.15.

Figure 5.15: E-SME Consumer Satisfaction

The examples of consumer retweets in Figure 5.15 demonstrate that customers with strong emotional bonds can become advocates for e-SMEs in peer interactions with other customers and non-customers which plays an integral role in the engagement process. User-generated content, such as retweets on Twitter signifies customer satisfaction, loyalty, and/or delight with the e-SME. As a consequence, the case e-SMEs looked to share user-generated satisfaction content on their SMBC. This suggests that the expansion of customer roles to encompass seller roles not only reinforces the emotional bonds between e-SME and customer and among customers, but also makes it a more relational exchange because customers actively participate in creating value for other customers and non-customers.

E-SMEs must also consider the risk that although satisfaction with interactions during a purchase process may precede or follow the purchase it does not guarantee repurchases or a long-term relationship. Examples of such instances are exemplified in Figure 5.16.

Figure 5.16: E-SME Consumer Order Satisfaction
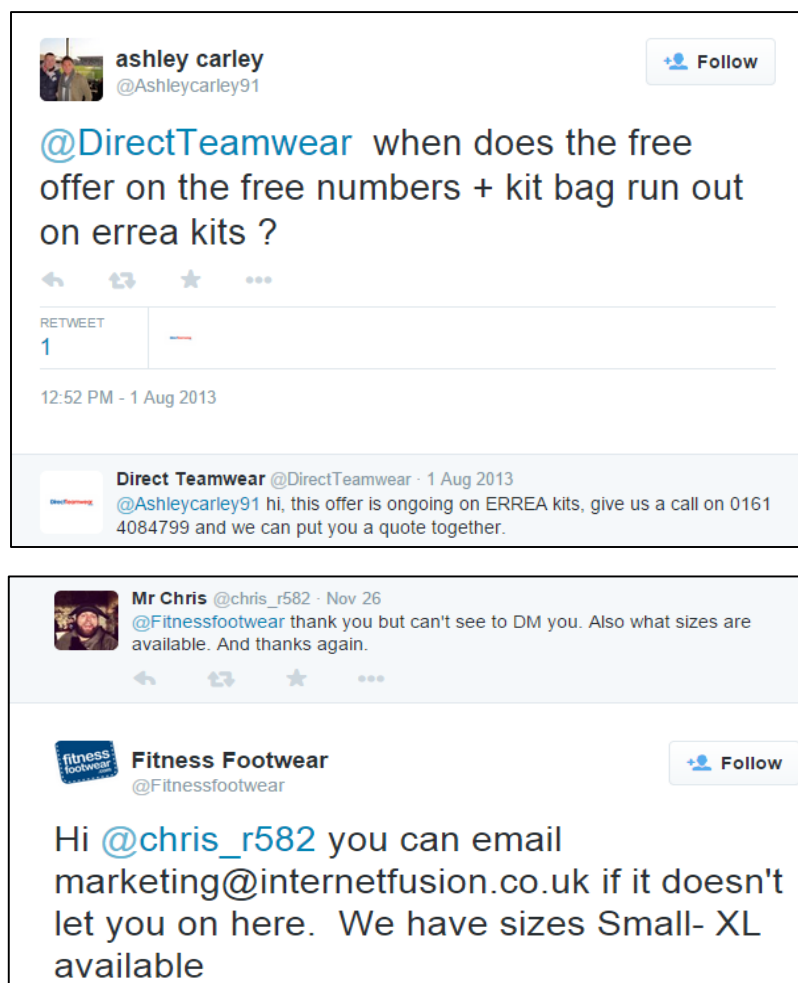
Brands must also be aware that dissatisfaction at any stage can disrupt the engagement process and result in customer not returning to the social media platform. Satisfaction over time could be judged on repurchases which suggests a strong relationship between e-SME

and consumer and positive emotions for one another. However a customer's highly positive emotions for a seller do not imply that the customer has a long-term relationship with the seller. However the strategies to achieve retention as a result of satisfaction from the netnography findings remain unclear and require further analysis from the interview analysis (Chapter Seven). The impact of social media responses on customer satisfaction varies and is dependent on the severity of e-SME service failure as well as the amount of injustice or inequity perceived by consumers. The netnography suggested that consumer satisfaction is paramount so that they stay connected and continue to interact with e-SMEs and spread positive e-WOM. However the strategies to achieve retention as a result of satisfaction from the netnography findings remain unclear and require further analysis from the interview analysis (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight).

5.10 Loyalty (T9)

The following stage is 'Loyalty' whereby consumers are now fully engaged with an e-SME and become advocates of the brand. This is where delighted consumers engage in e-WOM to spread knowledge regarding positive experiences with a product, brand, or company. This stage is simplified even more on social media, where a delighted customer can easily tell their social world about the e-SMEs offering and their satisfaction. Engagement can also be motivated by favourable brand associations that motivate consumers to share, comment or even produce information related to the e-SME brand. If organisations notice such consumers successfully participating in brand communication, they will encourage, motivate and trust them, i.e. will actively seek to engage them in communication in social media and then it will 'foster' advocates of the brand. Examples of such advocacy are reflected in Figure 5.17.

Figure 5.17: E-SME Loyalty/Advocacy

As well as customers, e-SMEs can also play advocacy roles in relationships. This should then hopefully develop into a strong relationship where the e-SME and consumers look after each other's interests and the focus will be on exchange of values that transcend their self-interest.

Social media customer engagement can potentially turn customers into advocates of the brand. The netnography findings support this claim as an e-SME's SMBC allows advocates to connect and interact with other consumers increasing mutual satisfaction and advocacy. The research analysis also found that advocates can also connect and interact with non-customers, potentially turning them into transactional customers and encouraging them to engage with the e-SME.

This approach encourages consumers to actively act, produce, forward, comment on the content in their efforts to seek e-SME brand acknowledgement. Thus it is very important to publicly acknowledge such consumers, once they have been identified, to demonstrate reciprocal trust and continue to motivate them. Each e-SME striving to appropriately enhance brand trust through communication in social media should gradually engage consumers in communication and encourage observers to become active, loyal and advocating consumers. Therefore interview themes covered in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight include:

- How e-SMEs reward loyalty
- Consumer perceived benefits of loyalty to an e-SME
- Consumer motivation for e-SME brand advocacy

5.11 Engagement Strategies for Social Media-Summary

Social media platforms allow e-SMEs to engage with consumers using interactive content in order to create brand trust and encourage community members to become active, loyal and advocating customers. The challenge for e-SME brands is determining which strategies their organisation should adopt in order to engage consumers to build brand trust in social media.

Consumer engagement which builds brand trust can be determined by analysing a consumer's motivation to become engaged and develop a relationship with an e-SME. The main motivations a consumer may have for engaging include the financial, cognitive and social benefits received through interaction. Organisations can also benefit from such interaction and from a strategic perspective it is vital for e-SMEs to understand how they can promote the engagement that they have with consumers and enhance trust for the brand.

There is an argument that engagement strategies within social media platforms should be connected with the various stages that a consumer goes through when interacting with an e-SME but also the consumer e-SME brand trust stage that they are at. The strategies at each stage of social media engagement can then influence the level of trust associated with the brand. The proposed conceptual model of e-SME social media engagement to build trust therefore displays the elements of trust at each stage of engagement.

The netnography highlighted some of the potential benefits of consumer engagement for both the consumer and the e-SME for brand trust building in social media and the potential to apply the prosed model in practice. Brands are looking to facilitate consumer engagement using every available social media platform. Some e-SMEs brands such as SportsShoes and Kitbag provide financial incentives for joining community pages, others such as The Soccer Store hold competitions that require consumers to essentially advertise to those in their social network in exchange for entry (i.e. share this competition post to be entered into a draw). Although these methods are currently successful, in terms of the financial motivation stage of engagement, e-SME brands must continuously appreciate the changing nature of social media. Consequently engagement strategies need to be continuously reviewed and updated. Thus, it is crucial for e-SMEs to understand the role and importance of social networks for consumers, and how the content will support the existing marketing mix within the organisation. This research seeks to address this, by guiding e-SMEs on how to create campaigns that foster consumer engagement for non-customers and customers.

Social media enables consumers to participate in value adding by connecting and interacting not only with e-SME brands, but also with other customers as well as non-customers. A key challenge for organisations is to connect with current as well as potential customers and encourage their opinion and involvement in developing products and services that meet consumer needs. By involving consumers in the value creation process, the likelihood of satisfaction increases and further progression through the social media engagement cycle occurs. This strategy was exemplified by ProBikeKit and SportsShoes. The argument here is that by satisfying consumers, e-SMEs can develop strong emotional connections or develop lasting relationships with them. Continuous interaction between organisations and consumers utilising different social media platforms can also be enhance customer retention by creating affective and/or calculative commitment. Customers with strong emotional bonds can potentially become advocates for e-SMEs when interacting with other customers and noncustomers and play an integral part in the value adding process as co-creators of value. As the connection becomes more relational and the emotional bonds stronger, e-SMEs in turn become customer advocates who try to do what is best for their customers in order to sustain consumer trust in their brand.

5.12 Chapter Summary

This analysis is based on findings from the literature and netnography reviewing strategic social media engagement constructs which create initial and continual consumer trust. Understanding how e-SMEs engaged with consumers and how consumers responded to such communication, was achieved by reviewing the social media posts throughout the

netnography. This research has found that nine core themes are required for effective social media engagement strategies to develop initial and continual consumer trust.

Reviewing the analysis, the findings provide an important contribution to knowledge by arguing that social media consumer engagement is based on satisfying consumers by offering exceptional value which builds trust and commitment in long-term relationships. These findings argue that engaged consumers can become advocates and collaborate with e-SMEs in the value creation process which can effectively satisfy the needs of the e-SME and consumer. Social media consumer engagement entices customers due to the creation of emotional ties in relational exchanges with them. The interactive nature of social media encourages the relationship process with trust and commitment developed between the e-SME and consumer between sellers and buyers. The process of building customer engagement constitutes a sequential process, which the findings support. However, social media consideration must be given to 'Awareness' on the part of the e-SME and consumer. The issue of awareness concerns continuous review of consumer discussion on social media (needs, interests etc.), but also an awareness of how effective and engaging their content is on their social platforms. Financial motivation and providing value were found to key considerations for e-SMEs to encourage consumer commitment to remaining engaged with the SMBC. Building on from these stages, consistently providing knowledge led to consumer satisfaction, relationship building and eventually loyalty in the form of advocacy. As a result of this section of the research and the findings from Chapter Four, where the resulting trust themes from social media engagement were identified (Figure 4.19) , an adaptation of Sashi's (2012) Engagement Cycle is presented with a specific focus on social media e-SME/consumer engagement in Figure 5.18.

Figure 5.18: Social Media Consumer Engagement and Trust Framework
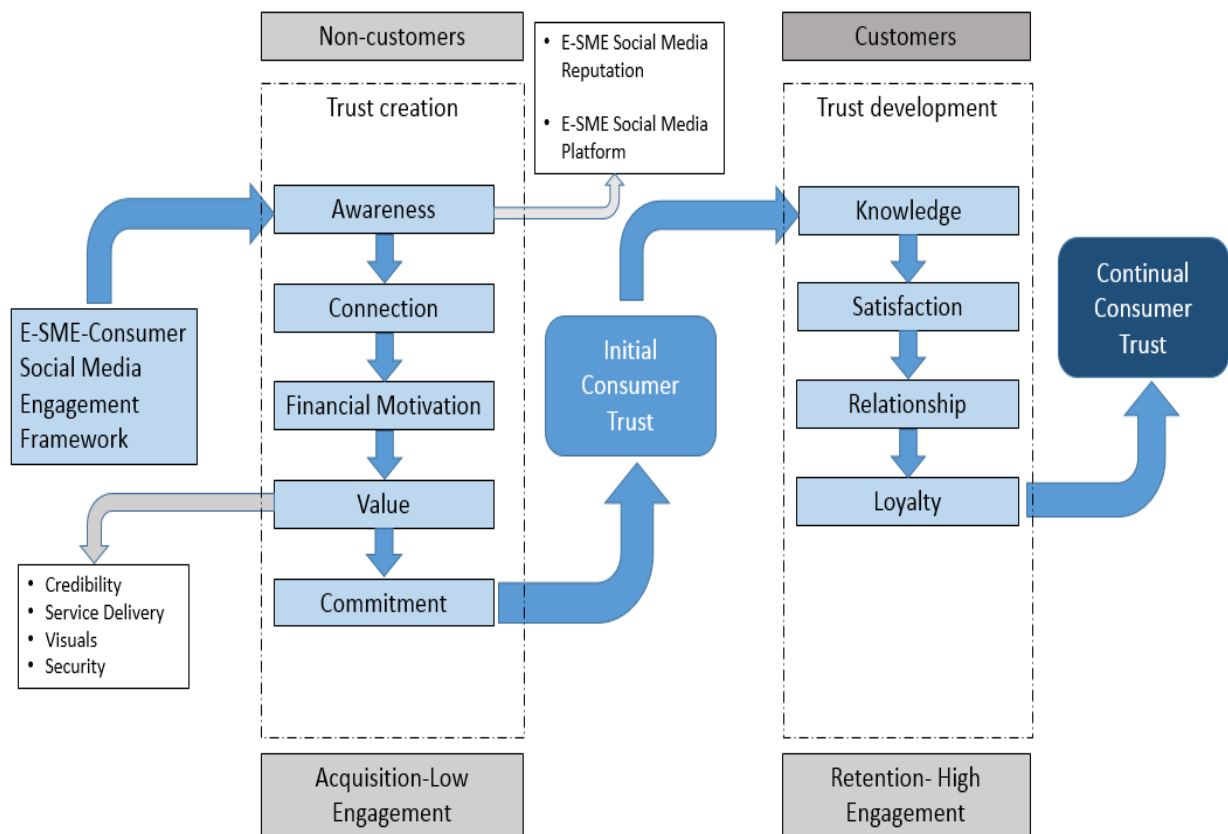
Inductively sourced from the research findings

Figure 5.18 demonstrates how e-SME brands develop their social media communication strategies to encourage engagement and develop trust. This attends to calls from the literature to investigate brand community trust. The framework is based on e-SME social media posts adopting a number of strategies on various platforms as a means of engaging with new and existing customers. This differs from existing models which offer an organisational perspective. Despite each e-SME developing their social media strategies in different ways (i.e. financially focussed or value focussed), there are parallels in terms of the trust stages and approaches perceived as successful by their owners-managers. This research argues that the concept of a staged approach to trust development, through social media engagement, is generated from the e-SMEs' explicit perceptions of their target audience and the content that they find engaging. The framework therefore accommodates a flexible perspective for e-SMEs due to potential resource considerations for some organisations. This requirement for strategic flexibility in e-SMEs social media approach is given little attention in existing literature but may prove to be useful in order to meet organisational targets and objectives. The findings in this section of the thesis therefore extend exploratory works from the e-SME sectors, and in summary, this section of the research finds in favour of a staged approach to trust

development through engagement stages within social media. However whilst the process appears sequential for presentation purposes and to aid understanding, trust development involves engagement in numerous social media activities which could occur concurrently. Therefore further analysis is required from the consumer perspective to determine the staged process consumers go through when trusting an e-SME brand and will be reviewed in Chapter Seven.

Achieving customer engagement requires facilitating non-customers and customers' transition through several stages in the social media consumer engagement and trust framework. The framework outlines the discussed stages of enagement and combines the aspects of initial and continual trust with the levels of engagement connected to non-customers and customers. Although the process finishes with continual trust, the next stage of the research (Chapter Six and Seven) will review the perceptions of continual trust from the key informant and consumer perspective. This will allow further development of the model from the rich insight obtained from the interview stage of the research. It is important to highlight for this research that social media platforms are consistently developing new capabilities and whilst the engagement constructs could still be applicable in the coming years, the technological capability of the platforms could impact the strategies. Nevertheless these findings demonstrate a rich picture which may now requires further analysis in the form of the key informant and consumer interviews time, as to add further validation to proposed constructs highlighted in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Interview Areas

Theme	Interview areas
1.Awareness	• The methods that e-SMEs adopt to monitor consumers social media behaviour and needs. • How this analysis can be integrated into the e-SME's strategy and objectives
2. Financial Motivation	• The main motivations that consumers have in order to begin engaging in e-SME social media brand communities.
3.Connection	• The types of content that e-SMEs post to create a connection with consumers • The most effective format (image, video) for these posts • The emotional drive behind the content
4.Value Creation	• The types of posts that create value for consumers
5.Commitment	• The reasons a consumer may have to return to an e-SME community
6.Knowledge	• Which reward types are the most effective engagement methods for new and existing customers?
7.Relationship	• The consumer perception of a relationship with an e-SME • The methods to develop and sustain the relationship on social media
8.Satisfaction	• The consumer perception of satisfaction and their intention to share on social media-
9.Loyalty	• How e-SMEs reward loyalty • Consumer perceived benefits of loyalty to an e-SME

The findings from the netnography suggest that consumers that are most engaged with an e-SMEs social media content offering, are highly motivated to receive information. Therefore content of an informative nature is most likely to be effective. The netnography also indicated that a combination of informative and entertaining content also encourages engagement. Organisations that succeed in formulating engagement strategies which are mindful of these consumer motivations could potentially develop increased consumer engagement. The netnography results highlight these two motivations which would strongly argue that e-SMEs design their social media engagement content in line with the information and entertainment outcomes to generate interaction.

5.13 Social Media Engagement- Theoretical Contribution

The findings demonstrated that the focus for e-SME social media activity is centred on building their communities, and developing relationships through engaging content through their platforms. The results from this thesis therefore provide rich insight into how effective social media engagement develops e-SME brand trust. Access round the clock to e-SMEs social

media platforms empowers consumers when interacting with organisations. Nevertheless, previous research has suggested that to avoid negative trust effects of such empowerment, brands should encourage and facilitate conversations and not disrupt them. The findings from this research empirically support why community engagement matters in social media contexts. However one notable benefit for e-SMEs engaging with consumers in SMBCs lies in the stronger relationships they develop with the brand, the product, other consumers and even the e-SME employees. Crucially, effective social media engagement increases the impact consumer to e-SME brand relationships have on brand trust, and decreases the negative effect of consumer to other consumers' relationships on brand trust. The netnography indicated that by participating in an e-SME brand's social media community, a consumer automatically trusts the brand and intends to form a relationship. However, this may not necessarily be the case in social media contexts, as there are no restrictions to membership and anyone can join a social media community. A consumer is able to follow an e-SME brand by merely clicking 'follow' or 'like'. This flexibility is traditionally different to traditional brand communities where community owner's moderate membership and those who fully trust the brand become members.

Chapter Six

E-SME Brand Social Media Communications to create Engagement, Trust, and develop Reputation: Social Media Expert Perspectives-Presentation of Findings and Analysis (In accordance with objective 4).

6. Introduction

This chapter addresses the fourth objective which aimed to investigate the key informant perspective of social media engagement creating trust and building reputation with potential and current consumers. This is achieved by providing insight into comprehending what social media community aspects, from a social media practitioner perspective, are perceived to create engagement, trust, and develop reputation. Altogether nine core themes are perceived by social practitioners to create trust and build reputation with potential and current consumers. These are positioned alongside the conceptual models developed in Chapters Four and Five to demonstrate their prevalence throughout the interviews and then conceptualised into an engagement framework for trust and reputation.

6.1 Social Media Engagement- Key Informant Perspective

Given that the literature and netnography provided a diverse combination of social media possibilities and opportunities for e-SMEs, it was important to explore perceptions of effective engagement from the industry perspective. Engagement in general has been described as containing a number of variables. The literature (Chapter Two) explicitly identified seven engagement themes, whilst the netnography findings (Chapters Four and Five) argue that a combination of seven core constructs develop consumer trust for e-SMEs on social media and nine themes drive consumer engagement.

These themes were strongly matched across the disparate literature findings throughout the interview analysis. Consistent across the literature is that existing publications and studies focus on organisations identifying broader market aspects in describing effective engagement rather as opposed to taking a more holistic consumer view. This may be appropriate for large organisations, however this approach is unlikely to reflect the multiple roles and responsibilities that e-SME staff are involved with due to their size and resource limitations. In this section of the research, probing enabled nine core themes (T1-9) to be generated which are perceived by industry practitioners to have helped drive consumer engagement on social

media. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify the presence of the themes for engagement and trust for each key informant respondent. This enabled a comprehensive comparative analysis between the netnography themes and industry themes. An overview is given for each theme, with supportive evidence compared between respondents and analysis concentrating on the specific themes that draw out similarities and contrasts with the existing literature. These themes are then located within a roadmap for engagement based on saturation of evidence across the literature (Chapter Two), netnography, (Chapter Five) and industry respondents. Additionally an e-SME social media engagement strategic framework is also provided in the summary section. A first overview of the themes acknowledged by the key informants is listed, by theme number, in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Key Informant Themes

Themes	Engagement
T1	Awareness
T2	Connection
T3	Motivation
T4	Commitment
T5	Value Creation
T6	Reward
T7	Relationship
T8	Satisfaction
T9	Loyalty

Table 6.1.1 highlights which key informants referenced particular themes when providing responses during the interviews.

Table 6.1.1 Theme Representation

Key Informants	Key Informant Responses								
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9
Jill Quick	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Nicky Kriel	x	x		x	x			x	x
Jocelyn Kirby	x		x	x		x	x		x
Kay Harding	x	x	x		x		x	x	x
Andy Farmer	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Liz Willder	x		x			x	x	x	x
Annie Boyd	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Rachel Robinson	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Eileen Brown	x	x	x			x			
Adam Smith	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Paul Wolferstan	x		x		x		x	x	x
Helene Hall	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
Leslie Hickmott	x	x		x	x	x		x	x
Joseph Faul	x	x	x	x		x	x		x
Paul Chatterton	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Total	(15/15)	(12/15)	(12/15)	(11/15)	(10/15)	(12/15)	(11/15)	(12/15)	(13/15)

6.1.1 Construct Analysis by Theme

This section explores the themes for engagement, trust, and reputation established in Chapters 4 and 5 against consumer and social media expert perspectives. Evidence from the interview stage of the research will demonstrate the findings. In order to maintain richness, excerpts from interview transcripts are used for each of the themes.

6.2 E-SME Awareness (Theme 1)

The netnography findings highlighted that further investigation into the methods that e-SMEs adopt to monitor consumers social media behaviour and needs, and how this analysis can be integrated into an e-SME's strategy and objectives. Improving brand awareness can increase the volume of traffic to an e-SME's web site, which can increase sales and improve collaboration when establishing SMBCs. Brand and platform awareness was acknowledged by all key informants. This construct was highlighted by respondents in terms of brand personality and suitability of platform for target demographics.

Following on from the netnography, emergent interview themes included the methods that e-SMEs adopt to monitor consumers social media behaviour and how this analysis can be integrated into the e-SME's strategy and objectives. Awareness of consumer interests and needs was acknowledged by all respondents, with three key sub-themes highlighted which are represented in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Consumer Awareness
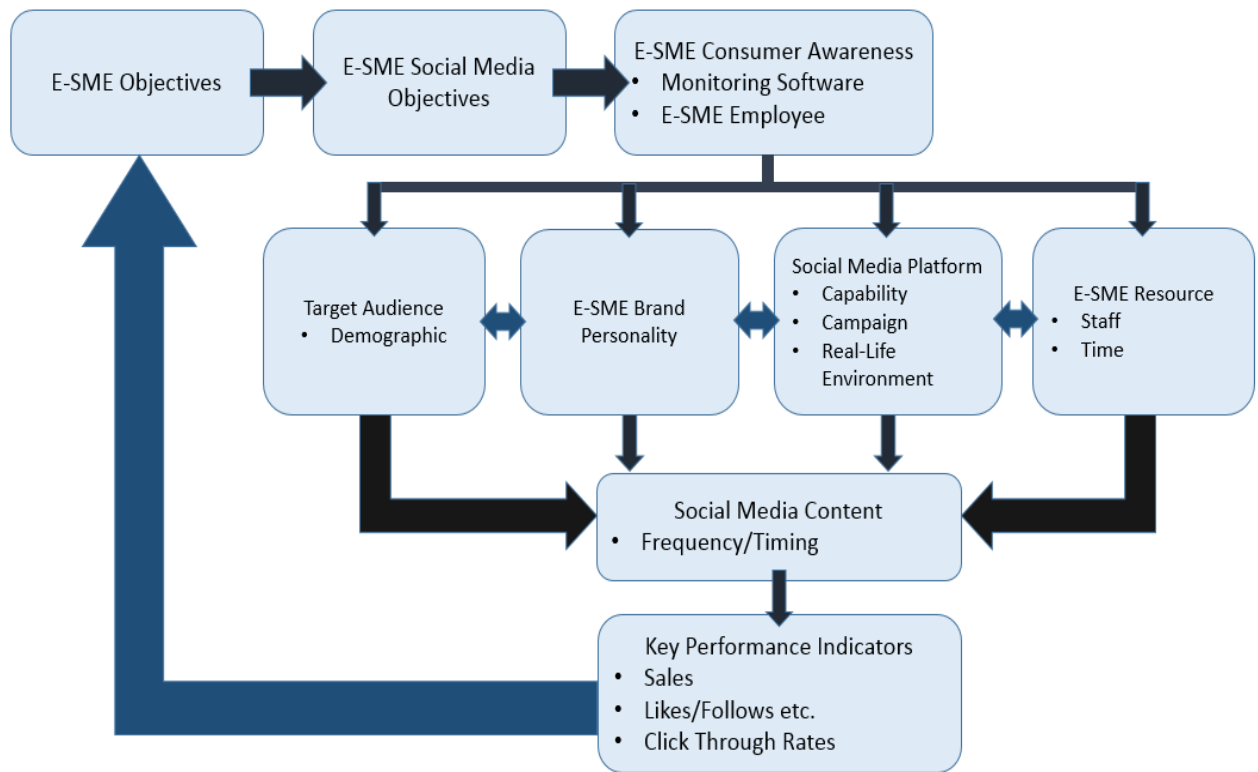
Source: Inductively Developed From the Data

This theme was explained by respondents in terms of monitoring consumer opinion, to develop consumer understanding. For example, when asked to sum up the importance of the social media platform to match the e-SMEs target demographic, the following extract typified key informant perspectives understanding their target audience:

> "Yeah. I think it's more to do with the industry that they operate in. For example, someone that's in the retail industry can use social media really well, and it will benefit their business to grow their customer base." (**Kay Harding)**

Consumer awareness was also demonstrated in terms of target audience but also in relation to the relevant platforms for the e-SME brand. For example, when asked about different SMBCs for different target audiences or demographics, the importance of suitability was highlighted by Annie Boyd, Andy Farmer and Helene Hall, but was also reflected across the majority of respondents. Additional factors were highlighted such as the capability of the platform for different types of engagement in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Key Informant Responses- Social Media Platforms for Different Target Audiences or Demographics

Key Informant Responses- Social Media Platforms for Different Target Audiences or Demographics
"I would say this depends on your objectives and your target audience. For example, if you want to chat to the under 25s, and you've got a product and a story that lends itself to photography, then you want to be on Instagram." (**Annie Boyd**)
If you have a very engaged Twitter audience that is only one sector of your market, and you also use Instagram, the likelihood initially is that only under 25s are going to be aware of that. If it gets picked up on Twitter or somebody else, it will balloon very fast. " (**Andy Farmer**)
E-SMEs need to understand what the target market is and the reason that they're actually doing it. Engagement could be your engaging with your potential customer or with a specific demographic, but in order to actually do it and to the reason of doing social media engagement, you actually want to know why you're doing it and what you actually want to achieve." (**Helene Hall**)
"For e-SMEs that I work with, they think they should sit on Twitter and Facebook and things like that, but it totally depends on the kind of brand you are as to what social media space you sit on." (**Adam Smith**)
Facebook's strength is building relationships with existing customers. If you've already got customers or people who know you or like you, whether they've bought or not, for retaining their interest, keeping yourself top of mind, building relationships, Facebook has got that as a strength. LinkedIn is very business-focused, so there are certain businesses that would be more suitable for LinkedIn, as their primary one." (**Nicky Kriel**)

The strategic difficulty in determining which platform suits the brand's characteristics was also referenced by respondents in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Key Informant Responses- Social Media Platforms for E-SME Brand's Characteristics

Key Informant Responses- Social Media platforms for E-SME Brand's Characteristics
"Absolutely. I'd say that's really key. We find it quite hard to find a platform that matches our brand. A lot of social media is very B2C. It's very funky and friendly. It doesn't necessarily fit with a corporate image, but I do think that the mainstream channels have handled that really well." (**Helene Hall)**
"Basically, this retailer I work with understands full well who its audience is so it just Tweets funny and borderline offensive stuff because it's the sort of thing that their punters will more than likely find that funny, and so they can get away with that, but if they stuck to their core principle of the business, which is obviously selling sports products, it wouldn't come across." (**Joe Faul)**
"Yeah. The million dollar question. It depends very much on the campaign. The honest answer is I don't think you can unless your social media is designed, firstly designed to allow you to measure that, but realistically, if it's very much designed to be a direct response almost campaign level activity you're almost looking to make a direct sale as the result of social media activity."(**Paul Wolferstan)**

This suggests that e-SMEs compare SMBCs to 'real life' environments where their customers may hang out, e.g. LinkedIn-boardroom, Facebook-pub. Twitter-festival. This aspect was reinforced by informants in Table 6.4, highlighting the notion of matching social media platforms to consumer behaviours and social settings (i.e. create a community environment that mirrors a social setting).

Table 6.4 Matching Social Media Platforms To Consumer Behaviours and Social Settings.

Key Informant Responses- Matching Social Media Platforms to Consumer Behaviours and Social Settings.
"You really have to know who are your customers and what are they like, what are their needs, and what are they looking for, if they're looking for engagement, or are they just looking for reassurance. What in particular does your audience talk about where do they hang out, or what areas of communities do they take part in; that's really key to the whole process and the strategy, because something that would work for one business is definitely not going to work on another." (**Jill Quick**)
"It's lots of different behaviours and with LinkedIn, it depends on what your business is, whether your business is targeting the more professional, or is it something that's more for the younger demographic, you want to go down a different route." (**Helene Hall**)
"Yes and no. Each platform is slightly different. It's got different abilities and different things that they focus on. It's like, for example, hashtags work on Twitter. They work on Instagram. Facebook has introduced hashtags. I haven't seen a major use of hashtags on Facebook, and I can't see it actually taking off in a big way. I think it's only marketers who actually use it rather than consumers who are doing it. On Twitter, you can be both a business person as well as an individual. You can talk about a range of subjects. On Facebook, it tends to be chattier, even if you're talking about business. It's far, far more conversational. The personality of the platform has an impact." (**Nicky Kriel**)

However, respondents were keen to highlight that this practice should always link back to the objectives of the e-SME, and which platforms are most suitable for their objectives, exemplified in Table 6.5. The findings argue that e-SMEs are increasingly attempting to embrace social media as an integral part of working life and exploiting it for competitive advantage. The responses indicate that in order for a SMBC to be effective, e-SMEs must have a strategy for its use and consider why they are using it as well as, more specifically, how it can support business objectives. E-SMEs must also consider the resources required in implementing and using the SMBC, and how they will be able to measure their objectives.

Table 6.5 Key Informant Responses-Social Media Activity Linked To E-SME Objectives

Key Informant Responses-Social Media Activity Linked to E-SME objectives
"Yes, yes, very definitely. Different platforms have different audiences. It might be a stereotype, but the numbers on most of the social media platform are so phenomenal". (**Leslie Hickmott**)
"The numbers are phenomenal on each one. Different ones will have different strengths. For example, my favourite is Twitter just because it's probably the simplest platform to get to grips with. It's great for PR and getting people who don't know about your company to sound off about your company."(**Eileen Brown**)
"I think e-SMEs are fully aware of the advantages social media, but they, such as increased awareness but they seem to struggle with the idea of incorporating the benefits of social into their overall key aims and objectives." (**Jocelyn Kirby**)

These results indicate that although e-SMEs believe that social media can be used to benefit their business. Through more detailed planning of the use, implementation and measurement of social media, e-SMEs could use the media more effectively and be more confident that the effort expended is worthwhile and effective.

Nevertheless, as previously noted resource constraints for e-SMEs may dictate the platform selection as well as the amount of SMBCs manageable:

"Some people might say okay, well, I have to be on LinkedIn or I have to be in Google Plus, Twitter, Facebook … There's so many different channels that you could go in. You don't want to do size and then not have an effective strategy across all of a sudden. It's about knowing which one's going to work for you and some of that, you find that through statistics and the different demographics that are growing within the different networks".(**Kay Harding**)

These considerations emphasise the importance of a planned approach to measure and evaluate activity and allowing sufficient time to monitor the campaign(s) with example responses highlighting this point provided in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 - Key Informant Responses-Social Media Planned Approach

Key Informant Responses-Social Media Planned Approach
"You need to give yourself enough time so that you can measure uplift and changes on channels, and you very carefully monitor both all your own activities with the activities of your competitors. You can certainly do that." **(Eileen Brown)**
"My marketing calendar is all planned out for the year of what activities are happening when, then my content is based around that. If something major happened, it was a real opportunity for them, then we would ditch what we were supposed to be talking about this week, and we'd place it with the cooler thing that had happened. If an athlete suddenly was coming to Scotland, and they were going to do an open day at one of their leisure centres, then that would be the focus this week instead of whatever we had roughly planned. " (**Annie Boyd)**

A consistent theme that was evident in the responses was the strategic need to integrate social media activity with all marketing and communications channels, as highlighted below in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7- Key Informant Responses-Social Media Integration

Key Informant Responses-Social media integration
"Social media marketing and digital marketing are essentially the same thing for some customers who have a multi-channel approach to marketing – however, some brands treat the two areas as two separate focus areas." (**Eileen B)**
"Sports retailers are trying to reinforce their personality within consumers' minds. Basically, with that strategy, obviously, feeds into their overall market and target audiences. It's just an extension of the market strategy through the main target audience and they mould that into the social media content." (**Joe Faul)**
"If it's obviously to build to trust, then you have to make sure that you actually plan it out. I think strategy is really important to anything that you do with social media, as well as being able to measure it, and then adapt. The only way of finding out whether any of these things are actually working is to have a plan and to monitor how you're doing, and then to adapt as you go forward". –(**Helene Hall)**
"There's so many different networks that you can use within social media, but it's really important to link it strongly to what your overall goal is, and then work towards it." – (**Andy Farmer)**

However, it could be argued that this is largely dependent on the objectives of the e-SME and the development stage where the company is at, i.e. how long have they been active in business and how long on social media. The findings in this thesis therefore support the concept that e-SMEs are able to develop a comprehensive awareness of consumers'

intentions, and behaviours, through social media brand communities. Furthermore they may be able to use these insights in the development and implementation of more effective communication content, in order to attract and retain customers.

Whilst this section of the research did not reflect any of the previous trust themes identified in the netnography (Chapter Five) that is not to say that they do not play a part in the consumer trust process, which will be reviewed in Chapter Seven. However, this study also stresses that engagement activity should be linked to the social media objectives in order to develop trust and reputation and are discussed further in the next section. As a result all conceptual frameworks put forward within this section link to the overall objectives of the e-SME. Despite the passion and enthusiasm, key informants warned e-SME brands to consider their social media objectives before engaging in any awareness activity and ultimately using those objectives to dictate social media content that links back to the organisation's objectives. The importance of awareness reinforces the social media engagement findings evident in the netnography, which suggests that this should be a key focus before e-SMEs engage in social media activity. The findings in section of the thesis therefore extend the concept of consumer awareness in the online retail and social media domain. The next section reviews consumer 'connection'.

6.3 Connection (T2)

Consumers often experience the candid way staff from organisations respond with a conversational human voice to several types of online feedback, like questions, compliments, and complaints. In earlier studies, conversational human voice was shown to be of added value for brand evaluation, and candidness in online dialogues enhanced trust and familiarity. These findings support the previously identified engagement theme of connection (ET 3) from Chapter Six and support the trust themes of credibility (SM 2) and service delivery (SM 7) represented in Chapter Five. In order to develop a connection with new customers and enhance connection with existing ones, e-SMEs need to establish what encourages them to connect with an e-SME social media brand community and trust the brand. This tests the capabilities of the e-SME in terms of demonstrating their enthusiasm and commitment to the customer through engaging and emotional content. The need for consumer connection expressed by the e-SMEs closely ties to the e-literature. Developing a consumer connection is perceived to be essential in developing trust for non-customers and this was also reflected by respondents. Connection activities or indicators highlighted the need for consumer empathy, highly knowledgeable staff with a freedom to engage as they see fit, as well as sufficient resource to carry out this activity. These practices are conceptualised in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2: E-SME Consumer Connection
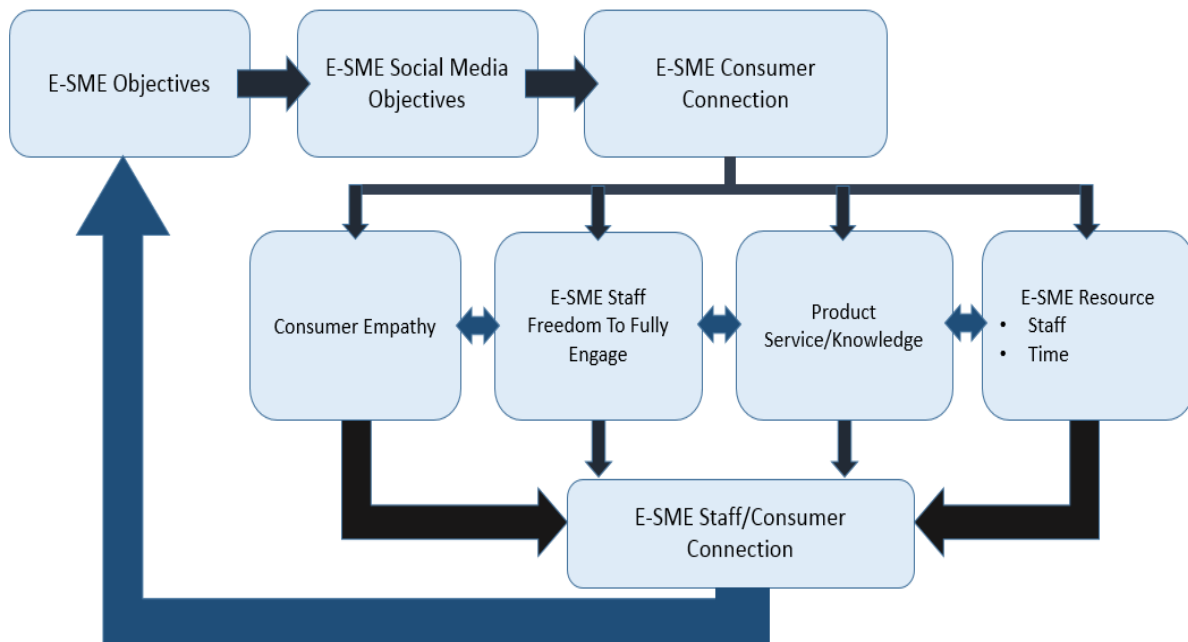
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data

The ability to provide current information was also expressed as key to successful engagement and trusting the brand. This is important as e-SMES on social media could be accused of focussing on profitability and not the needs of the consumer, yet personal relationships can assist in improving e-SME performance. The excerpts highlighted in Table 6.8 reflect some of the methods which have encouraged e-SME connection to develop initial trust for non-customers. When asked how e-SMEs can establish these connections, Adam Smith and Leslie Hickmott advocated the use of personal signatures (see Table 6.8).

Table 6.8: Key Informant Responses-Personal Connection on Social Media

Key Informant Responses-Personal Connection on Social Media
"Where it works is if you've got a big corporate that's on Twitter for instance, but then they do that little thing with the arrow and they put AP or whatever their name is afterwards then you know you're talking to an individual and you feel like you're having a conversation rather than you're talking to a massive corporate that doesn't actually care about the consumer." (**Adam Smith)**
"A huge of amount of information. I still think you need a human. You need a human being to respond to these things, to understand these things, that's where trust comes into it. " (**Leslie H)**

The importance of using this connection to establish an emotional link was also reinforced by Eileen Brown and Joe Faul (see Table 6.9).

Table 6.9: Key Informant Responses-Emotional Connection

Key Informant Responses-Emotional Connection
"If you're an individual people will interact with you more because they think you're more likely to talk back. The whole reason that people or consumers are on Twitter is, some of them will just listen, but a lot of them they almost feel privileged if they can have a conversation with someone from that brand. At least if you're a certain person from a corporate identity and someone talks to you and you talk back you empathize a bit more with the company. You can't have a mate that's a company, but you can have a mate that is a person who works at that company". (**Eileen B)**
What I'm saying is that that brands when on corporates when they talk to individuals they need to touch them from a personal perspective. The consumer then has empathy with that company. I can't believe that I will ever have a relationship with a big company."(**Joe Faul)**

In order to cement this initial connection, respondents cited the importance of having knowledgeable staff on hand to respond to queries, reflected in the responses presented in Table 6.10.

Table 6.10: Key Informant Responses- Knowledge of E-SME Staff

Key informant responses- Knowledgeable E-SME staff
"I really do believe that the best advocates for a business and to run the social media campaigns are the people in house. I see the big PR companies to sell per Tweet. I see they give you a price and as a SME, you would pay X amount of money to have 10 tweets go out a week and get 2 blog posts. I don't think that delivers results, especially if they're working for all the same sector and they're doing the same for everybody. I just don't think it's a good investment."- (**Annie Boyd)**
"Yeah, I think it's about creating that one-to-one relationship and the employee making the customer feel like they're at the heart of what you're trying to do, but it's vital that the employee has the required knowledge of the organisation or product to cement that trust." (**Charlotte B)**

Not only must staff running the social media brand communities be knowledgeable but they must also be afforded a degree of trust from the e-SME owner-manager to react and respond to a customer in a manner that positively reflects the brand. Nevertheless as previously highlighted the connection established must have a business and objective focus. From the findings, connection is considered to be essential for e-SMEs to engage with consumers to develop trust with numerous respondents highlighting its importance. In summary, this section

of the research extends the concept of connection for non-customers in the trust formulation process expanding existing literature (McKnight et al., 2002; Toufaily et al., 2013) into the e-SME domain.

6.4 Financial Motivation (T3)

Having a financial motivation focused approach was demonstrated in the netnography from both the trust (SMT 4) and engagement (ET 2) themes and was seen as key to developing engagement in order to attract and retain target customers from key informants. Understanding the incentives that customers search and identify with was seen as crucial to continue the engagement process. The need for rewarding consumers came out strongly in the key informant interviews, as at this stage e-SMEs must attract the attention of consumers and develop an understanding of the various reward incentives that encourage consumers to engage with their community. Motivation constructs included financial incentives exemplified in the examples in Table 6.11.

Table 6.11: Key Informant Responses-Financial Incentives for Consumers on Social Media

Key Informant Responses-Financial Incentives for Consumers on Social Media
"I think discounts or deals will always get consumers attention,**"(Kay Harding)**
"What's very common these days is rewarding consumers for sharing or liking offers on Facebook,**"(Annie Boyd)**
"They're everywhere, there's always a deal or a competition." (**Liz Wilder**)

However although respondents stated that this a common factor the approach was not unanimously supported in terms of continual trust development for the e-SME brand, as outlined in Table 6.12.

Table 6.12: Key Informant Responses-Financial Incentives Approach

Key informant responses-financial incentives approach
"Yes that's what most brands default to, which is fair enough, but when everyone takes this approach, it doesn't make you stand out, and in my opinion, no way encourages loyalty or trust." **(Jill Quick)**
"Some brands just see it as a quick fix, but it's hardly a sustainable strategy for your social media content. I do think they have a place in the engagement process but there needs to be a balance." **(Joe Faul)**
"It gets people interested in your brand, sure. But it's what all brands do so I don't know if it creates trust in a brand, it's just a promise effectively. Consumers need more." (**Andy Farmer)**

The results demonstrate that both the magnitude of financial incentives, and the relative magnitude of the incentives for e-SMEs and consumers both influence engagement. The key informant responses argue that consumers are motivated to become engaged the most by the benefits they receive from the organisation. However, some respondents indicated that purely adopting this approach would not develop trust due to the amount of other e-SMEs adopting this approach.

Therefore this research argues that although financial saving posts get consumer attention, a variety of content is crucial for trust development. To explore this further the next section reviews consumer commitment.

6.5 Commitment (T4)

As highlighted in Chapter Six commitment (ET 4) was unanimously reinforced as a key indicator of successful engagement leading non-customers to become customers and is also linked to the trust construct 'service delivery' (SMT 7). For e-SMEs applying social media engagement to their acquisition and retention strategy a consumer commitment focus is brought to light in examining the key informant perspective of how consumers demonstrate commitment to a brand. In order to ensure the right target market was reached, key informants identified the main reasons that consumer return to SMBCs, with excerpts presented in Table 6.13.

Table 6.13: Key Informant Responses-Consumer Commitment

Table 6.13: Key Informant Responses-Consumer Commitment
"It all depends on the consistency of their experience. It's easy to like or follow a brand and then if you're not happy, just unfollow. The challenge for e-SMEs is consistently providing engaging content that encourages them to return or continue to follow." **(Rachel)**
"That's the issue for them, how would you define commitment? You can incentivise to get them to commit to receiving updates in their social media streams, but they can then unlike or hide. You have to make it interesting for them or worth their while, with financial gains or regular entertainment." **(Andy Farmer)**

These responses indicate that the three main factors for social media commitment include consistency, financial, and entertainment. However, Nicky Kriel also suggested that regular information or knowledge updates encourage commitment:

"Yea its undoubtedly tough, but I think consumers are consistently searching for knowledge whenever they go on line. I think if e-SMEs can provide regular updates with important information concerning their industry, consumers would commit to these platforms, and maybe see them as an information source. " (**Nicky Kriel)**

Previous research has argues that brands invade the social media environment that should be restricted to that is supposed to be for people and their friends. The key informants argue that this is not the case and that e-SME SMBCs are there for consumers who wish to engage to receive further information on products or an industry that they are passionate about.

The interactive nature of social media is likely to blur the integrity of e-SMEs and consumers and if trust is not being developed at this stage then a lasting relationship is unlikely. This thesis contributes to the existing brand community and social media literatures by arguing that at this stage of the engagement process, if a consumer begins to trust the e-SME they can potentially become advocates at a later stage of the process. This theme was therefore viewed as a strong foundation for the remaining engagement stages and extends these concepts deeper into the social media and e-SME research domains. This links the concept of commitment to T2, T3 as well as value which will be discussed next.

6.6 Value Creation (T5)

Value creation involved a strategic consumer focus as well as innovative techniques from e-SME brands to stand out from competitors and develop continual trust, conceptualised in Figure 6.3. The concept of value creation was highly evident within the netnography findings in terms of trust creation (SMT 1) and engagement (ET 5).

Figure 6.3 E-SME Consumer Value
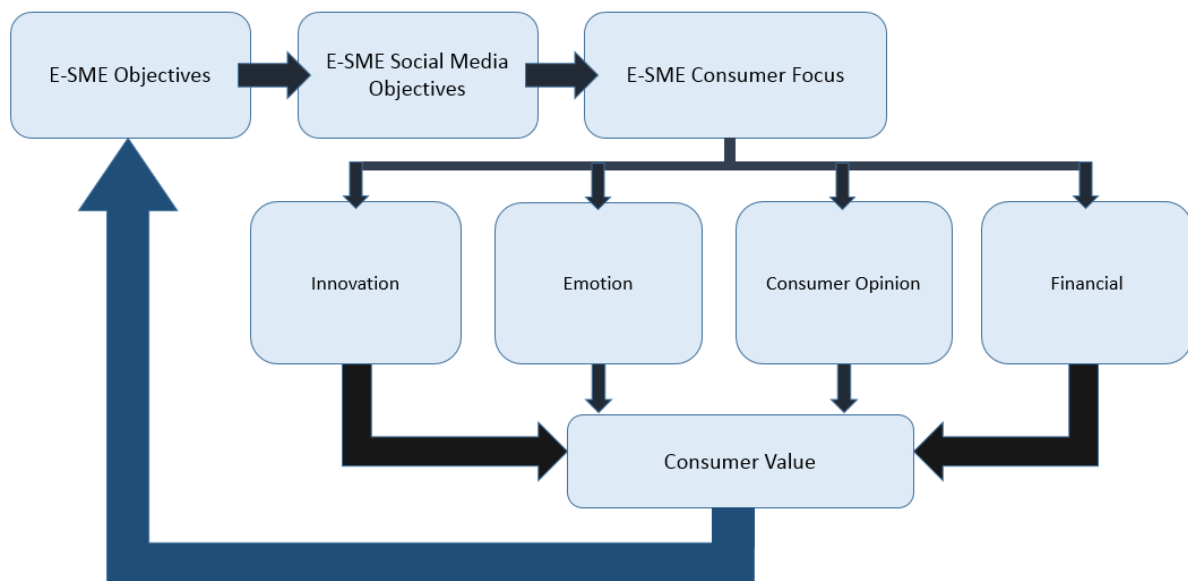
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data

The need for interaction by instigating discussions and sharing content was perceived by the respondents as essential for the next stage of trust and consumer engagement.

Many tactics exist to provide value to consumers that engage with e-SMEs through social media as highlighted in Chapter Five, however when asked about the most effective posts for value creation through social media the responses included a consumer focus and innovative posts. The importance of a consumer focus was evident in the excerpts provided in Table 6.14

Table 6.14: Key Informant Responses-Consumer Focus

Key Informant Responses-Consumer Focus
"I'd say the posts that provide the most value are the ones which encourage consumer opinion. You know like, what do people think of this product or let us know what you think will happen." **(Adam Smith)**
"Yea well that's it, it's about value creation so it takes two sets of people coming together to collaborate or share ideas if you will. I think brands that get that develop really good engagement on their communities." **(Paul Chatterton)**
"Always, always posts that ask questions or gauge opinion. It's really straight forward to do for sports e-SMEs as consumers are passionate about the industry. I think the really clever brands incorporate opinion into competitions. Then you're combining the emotional pull with the financial gain if you know what I mean?" (**Jocelyn Kirby**)
"It was completely from a customer's perspective. I think that's what many people miss with social. They're so busy thinking about what they want to sell and how they're going to sell it, that they forget that the customer has to be at the heart of the strategy, and they have to deliver what the customer wants." (**Annie Boyd**)

Innovative posts were also seen to provide value as a way of standing out from the competition (see Table 6.15).

Table 6.15: Key Informant Responses-Innovative Posts

Key informant responses-innovative posts
"Yea I mean the more creative their posts are the more brands will set themselves aside from the competition**." (Jill Quick)**
"Brands are posting so much content that consumers social media feeds, be it Twitter, Facebook, whatever are being clustered to a point where you literally have seconds to make your post stand out. " (**Paul Wolferstan**)

These findings indicate that the nature of value is highly contextual and subject to experiences which suggests that value is achieved using a combination of resources and, therefore, cannot be created unilaterally, making the customer a co-creator of value. The findings from this thesis also state that both participants in the process benefit from customer engagement into value creation, i.e. the e-SME gains competitive advantage and the customer has greater satisfaction which leads towards trusting the company.

Consumer trust and loyalty as an outcome of engagement through value creation is important for an e-SME's SMBC activity, however this construct has previously been treated differently in previous research. Prior research suggests that value is a one-dimensional construct though

integrating word-of-mouth recommendations and customer intentions; whereas the contrasting sources viewed it as a two-dimensional – attitudinal and behavioural loyalty - construct. This research provides an important contribution by arguing that value can be classed as four dimensional construct for consideration for e-SMEs when strategizing SMBC content.

6.7 Knowledge (T6)

Key informants stated that a reward focus was imperative for trust and engagement. The main focus of reward was that of information and knowledge sharing provided by the e-SME brands. This approach reinforced engagement themes (ET 3, ET 4, ET 5) whereby an education and emotional connection was crucial in terms of reward which ties in with affective commitment. This theme was also strongly linked to the trust theme 'credibility' (SMT 2). Being recognised as a source of information was also perceived as critical for e-SMEs to engage with consumers and reward them for being a member of the SMBC. The responses also suggest that a knowledge focus was crucial to establishing and maintaining consumer engagement on social media reflected in Table 6.16.

Table 6.16: Key Informant Responses-Knowledge

Key informant responses-Knowledge
"I always think that's a good indicator, personally, if a brand is providing industry insight. With some organisations this varies though. It could be as detailed as a technical video showing the correct application of skiing equipment, or something straight forward as their opinion on a team's football line up formation." **(Joe Faul)**
"Blogs are great, really. I think they say to customers that we want to help you enjoy the sport or the industry. If consumers trust their advice, they'll trust the brand". **(Leslie Hickmott)**
"I think tips and practical guides always go down well, especially with sport. I've seen some sports brands upload blogs on dietary advice for running which is brilliant. You can tell right away that it's not a hard sell, its advice to help you enjoy your passion." **(Jocelyn Kirby)**

However, just because a brand provides guidance in the form of a blog, some respondents were still sceptical.

"Essentially guidance is an opinion, you have e-SMEs who are telling consumers what to do or what they think are the best options when they produce blogs, but there's still a large element of trust. Along the lines of do consumers trust these brands to know what they are talking about?" (**Adam Smith)**

One way of combatting these doubts is to encourage guest bloggers which was advocated by Annie Boyd:

> "Yea I think impartiality is a big thing for consumer trust, you know, it's somebody else's reputation, so e-SME brands can become knowledge hubs by association."

The findings suggest that a knowledge emphasis was crucial to establishing and maintaining consumer engagement and trust on social media. The knowledge theme extended to providing consumers with detailed product and industry knowledge and recognition as a source of information was also perceived as reward for consumers being a member of the community and having an interest in the brand. This shift in the information control needle is dramatically influencing the way consumers receive and react to product knowledge or industry insight. Consequently, this research states that e-SMEs should look to providing regular 'knowledge' posts as part of their SMBC content. These findings suggest that e-SMEs cannot ignore the phenomenon of social media as it has rapidly become the de facto modus operandi for consumers who are searching and disseminating information on products and services. This leads to the next theme 'Relationship'.

6.8 Relationship (T7)

At this stage a relationship has developed, potentially leading to continual trust, which fits with the engagement theme (ET 7) from Chapter Six. E-SMEs which make continuous efforts in this area retain a strong customer focus and are thus able to differentiate themselves from competitors. Successful e-SMEs which make concerted efforts to listen and act upon customer feedback establish a relationship, encouraging the consumer to continue to use the e-SME. The sub relationship themes are represented in Figure 6.4.

Figure 6.4: Consumer Relationship
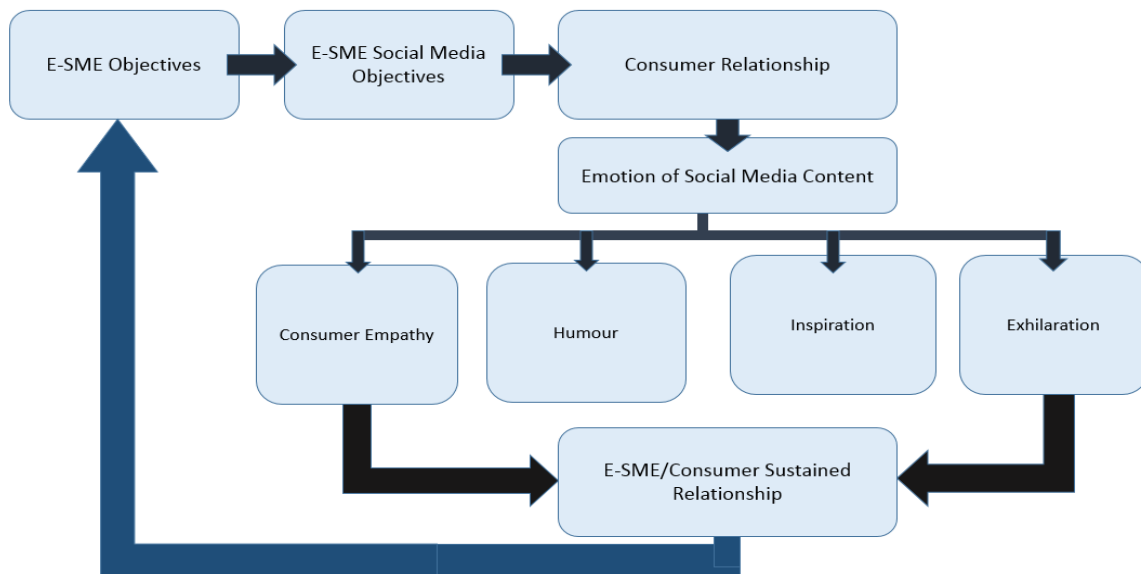
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data.

Emotive content and sharing consumer passion in relation to e-SME consumer relationships came out strongly in the analysis. This is compatible with the netnography findings and the concept of strengthening emotional bonds as an engagement process over time. Incorporating human and emotion into consumer engagement content has been linked to success in the literature. Most respondents focused on emotion sustain relationships, demonstrated in the excerpts presented in Table 6.17, focussing on empathy, humour, inspiration, and exhilaration.

Table 6.17: Key Informant Responses- Emotion of Social Media Content

Key Informant Responses- Emotion of Social Media Content
"Then it makes you think yeah they get it. They are human beings. They're not just a bunch of corporates who sat there going okay hold on a minute, this guy's trying to have a joke here." (**Adam Smith**)
What they've found is the exhilaration above and beyond all of the emotions is the strongest motivator in brand recall, greater still than humour. Using emotional content can also lead to consumer recommendations as they are excited by the content the brand produces." (**Joe Faul**)
"I guess those are the ones that impressed me are the brands that use emotion. They work because they tap into something deeper that comes right back to what I said at the start, which is about being remarkable that people want to share, and they want to remark upon it to their friends." (**Kay Harding**)

However, respondents also cited the caveat of having suitable emotions for the brand product/ industry, content, and strategy to sustain relationships, reflected in Table 6.18.

Table 6.18: Key Informant Responses- Brand Emotion Association

Key informant responses- Brand Emotion Association
"It's got to be suitable for the brand or industry though, which I think relates to the profile of your target audience." (**Joe Faul)**
"Yeah, there are loads that get trotted out. It's difficult to pick one where you just say, that has absolutely smashed it. I suppose the ones that impress me the most are the ones that just tap into very basic human, psychological desires, all of these things where there's some basic human cognitive psychological concepts or behaviourally economic concepts. Whether it's by design or accident, people have managed to tap into them." **(Paul Wolferstan)**

Key informants felt that the emotional aspect of developing relationships was based on shared consumer passion, whereby e-SME brands are part of a journey, integrating brands into life and becoming experiential brands highlighted in Table 6.19.

Table 6.19: Key Informant Responses-Shared Consumer Emotion

Key informant responses-shared consumer emotion
"Where brands tend to be going to is trying to get close to people because people want to really comment and share passion. What it comes down to is that people are talking about entering a new age where people's passions are taken more seriously and sharing them and being part of that is where brands need to be at." **(Paul Chatterton)**
"I think where they're going to is going to have to be brands much more as wallpaper in your life, but not wallpaper because you're bland. Wallpaper because you think a brand is cool, you'll just have it everywhere, and it's part of your life, like O2's branded worlds. O2 is not really just a phone brand anymore. It's a life experiential brand, and I think ultimately social media is just going to be an extension of that for a lot of people." **(Paul Wolfestan)**

Possessing in-house skills to adapt content with an emotion focus provides e-SMEs with flexibility and the ability to develop long lasting consumer relationships, which advocate flexibility and creativity as strongly related to emotion and brand trust.

This research therefore argues that e-SMEs should utilise emotional content in the context of developing and sustain relationships through social media. Embracing this strategy enables greater content flexibility, however, maintaining a planning framework and following a manageable review process can help avoid the possibility of consumers reacting to the content in a negative manner. The next section reviews consumer satisfaction.

This thesis also supports contentions that SMBC interactions can lead to high levels of emotional engagement, and that the emotional responses triggered by SMBC content, play a dominant role in explaining trust outcomes. This research also extends the growing evidence that emotional content is an important construct for assessing e-SME-consumer relationships and further extends the literature by demonstrating its relevance for SMBC content. The results also support findings from other industry sectors that show a positive experience from direct brand interaction via social media will lead to favourable recommendations. This finding has important theoretical and practical implications. It is clearly the emotional bond that consumers develop via social media interaction that influences the strength of their relationship with the brand, with the results supporting the proposition made by previous researchers that if e-SMEs intend to build strong brand relationships, they need to incorporate high levels of emotional content in their SMBC content. The next section reviews consumer 'satisfaction'.

6.9 Satisfaction (T8)

Consumer satisfaction has been linked to engagement and trust development in the literature. Response speed in relation to consumer satisfaction came out strongly in the analysis along with the supply of effective product service and knowledge conceptualised in Figure 6.5. This research therefore finds product service information to be aligned with consumer satisfaction.

Figure 6.5: Consumer Satisfaction
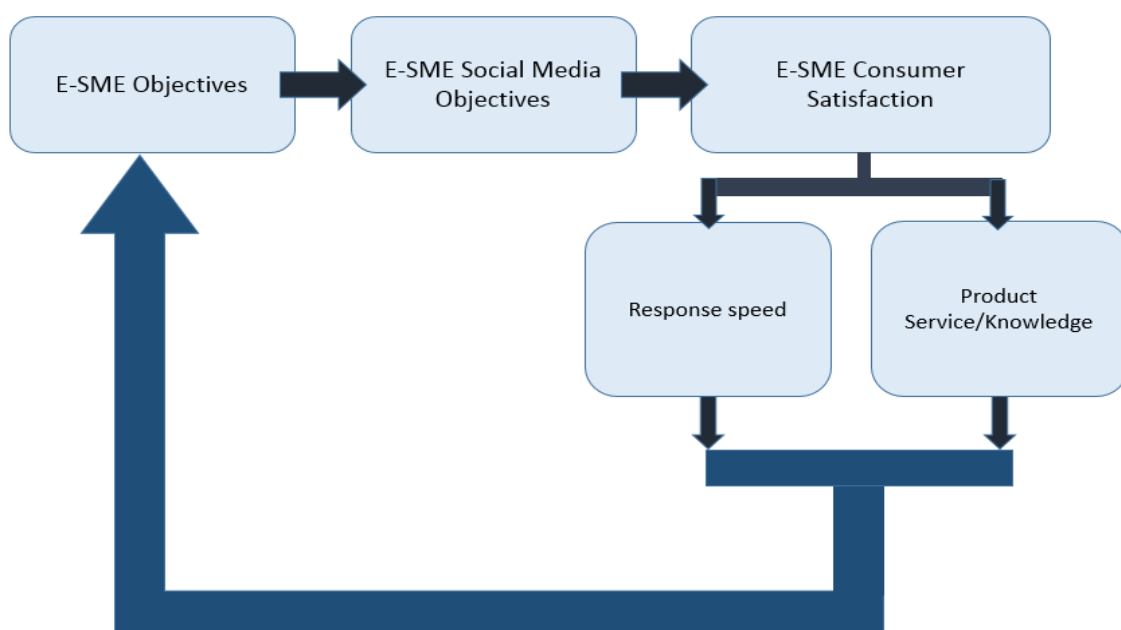
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data

This theme is compatible with the concept of satisfaction being part of an SMBC linking again to credibility and service delivery trust themes, and were reflected by respondents in the examples provided in Table 6.20.

Table. 6.20: Key Informant Responses- Consumer Satisfaction/Response Speed

Key Informant Responses- Consumer Satisfaction/Response Speed
"Consumers generally base their satisfaction on how quickly their problem or issue is resolved. I think it's mostly about transparency for e-SMEs. If they are honest and upfront about resolving a situation then it goes down well. "(**Jill Quick**)
"On social media I think there's two aspects of response speed. Firstly acknowledging the issue and responding and second making good on the assurance given, like when the problem will be fixed like when a product will be delivered. " **(Kay Harding)**

Respondents also focused on the information supplied to consumers in terms of the product or service knowledge supplied by e-SME staff, exemplified in Table 6.21.

Table 6.21: Key Informant Responses-Consumer Satisfaction/Information

Key Informant Responses-Consumer Satisfaction/Information
"Consumers just want the facts, if that makes sense. They're satisfied when they're given information which is most pertinent to them. If is as straight forward as delivery information that's fine, but if its guidance or product recommendations then that's just as good." **(Annie Boyd)**
"When you get a reply to your tweet or Facebook post with accurate knowledgeable information, I think a customer is satisfied as it's a vindication or justification of their choice." (**Rachel R**)

Possessing in-house skills also provided e-SMEs with the flexibility and the ability to respond to consumer queries which links with themes service delivery and links these findings to knowledge evident in the literature which extols consumer satisfaction as strongly related to trust development. The findings suggest that perceived satisfaction focuses on the consumer's own perceptions about a brand and whether it fulfils its function. In summary, the concepts of organisational response speed and product knowledge are themes which have begun to appear more strongly in the literature as a key asset for e-SMEs and a key source of advantage for consumer satisfaction. This research extends these concepts deeper into the e-SME and social media arenas and contextualizes these themes into a more holistic view of consumer satisfaction and suggests this process provides good foundations for e-SME strategy.

However this thesis warns of the difficulty in defining satisfaction due to the subjective nature of an individual consumer's experience. Satisfaction can also be based on consumers' previous experiences, and brings an aspect of comfort to the consumer when using an e-SME brand. This suggests that before a consumer can develop satisfaction, they first must have a level of experience with the brand. This links prominently with next section, consumer loyalty.

6.10 Loyalty/Advocacy T9

In an online environment customer loyalty is usually lower than in traditional environments as consumers may have a wide range of fan pages with different information and products/services from which to choose and they can change from one SMBC to another with just one click. Previous studies that have investigated social media claim that in electronic markets customer retention is one of the keys to business success and survival. Theme 9 jointly encompasses loyalty and advocacy which was present in the engagement theme (ET 9) and trust constructs 'service delivery' (SMT 7) and 'credibility' (SMT 2). Key informants stated that the focus of consumer loyalty and advocacy was dependent on becoming an advocate of the content or service (i.e. sharing brand links or positive e-WOM) or actively engaging with content on the SMBC by posting or commenting. These aspects are conceptualised in Figure 6.6.

Figure 6.6 Consumer Loyalty
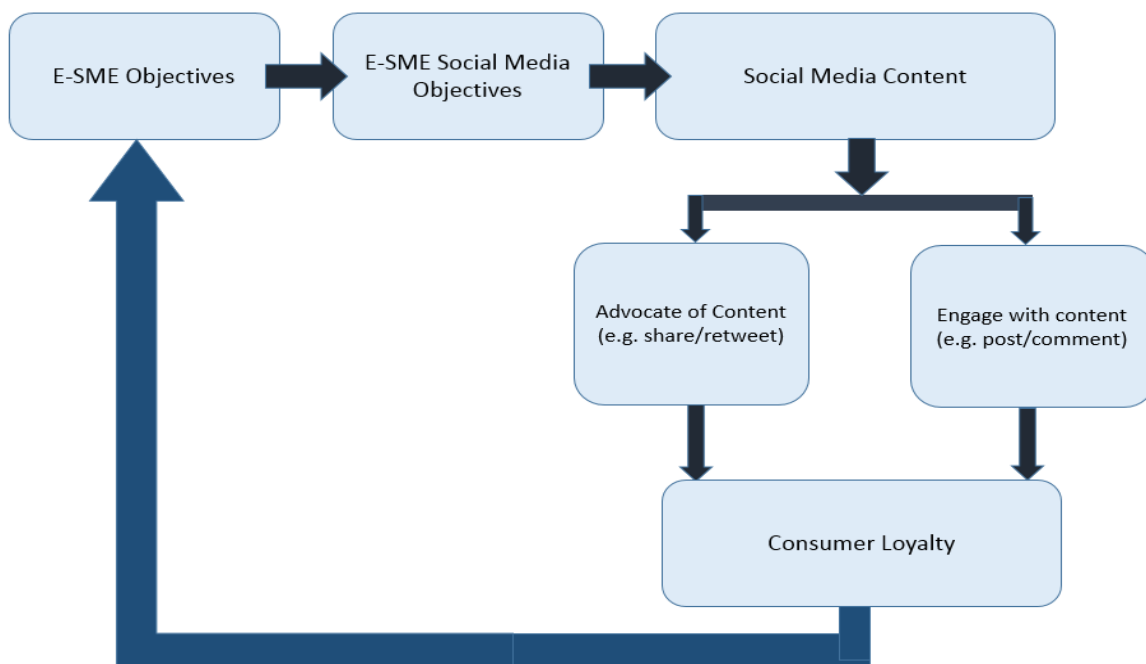
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data

This advocacy stage is where a satisfied customer tells their 'social world' about the e-SMEs offering and their satisfaction. Engagement can also be motivated by favourable brand associations that motivate consumers to share, comment or even produce information related to the e-SME brand. If organisations notice such consumers successfully participating in brand communication, they will encourage, motivate and trust them, i.e. will actively seek to engage them in communication in social media and then it will 'foster' advocates of the brand. Examples of such advocacy were highlighted in Table 6.22.

Table 6.22: Key Informant Responses-Social Media Consumer Advocacy

Key Informant Responses-Social Media Consumer Advocacy
"That's what all brands are searching or hoping for. Consumers that are so happy with the service that they want to tell the world." **(Andy Farmer)**
"You'll probably see from most social communities a lot of brands sharing positive comments, particularly twitter, where brands can search for their mentions and retweet and positive tweets." **(Adam Smith)**
"I'd say that's the end game really. If a consumer is willing to share with their friends on social media a positive opinion of a brand then they completely trust the organisation, and in all likelihood will return to them." **(Liz Wilder)**

This fits with the existing literature which argues that if loyal customers develop feelings of intimacy and emotional attachment become fans of the brand then they are fully engaged and trust the organisation.

However the fragility of such advocacy was also referenced by Annie Boyd below:

> "I think yes is the answer. I think trust can be gone very quickly so it can be difficult. You can build a fantastic community, an engaged community. You can get them on board. You can get them to be ambassadors, recommend your products and recommend your services, but the minute there's a dead cockroach found in the kitchen in your restaurant and somebody posts a photo of it, it's gone overnight." **(Annie Boyd)**

This suggests that e-SMEs must strive to continuously provide effective service delivery in order to encourage this type of advocacy but must be wary that consumer opinion can change and not solely base their social media activity on this approach.

This research argues that consumers' loyalty toward an e-SME SMBC occurs when the consumer's relative attitude towards the fan page is favourable and in addition there is repeat usage behaviour. This finding therefore argue that loyalty to e-retailers results in repeat buying behaviour. As a result, this research argues that loyalty to an e-SME SMBC can be defined

as the consumer's intention to continue using the SMBC in the future, to recommend it to other users, and continue to purchase products from that organisation.

6.11 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, the ever-changing and complex social media environment requires e-SMEs to plan their SMBC investments with care. E-SMEs must understand the area of business which they want to address, formulate measurable goals, objectives and corresponding metrics before deciding which social media platforms are most suitable to leverage these. Before entering into the social media environment, companies should have an awareness to what is being said about their brand, as this can help confirm appropriate goals and may inform the timing of entry into a particular environment. The findings suggest that effective SMBCs require a long-term investment and as the respondents highlighted e-SMEs should focus on consumer relationships and be prepared to participate in dialogue and open conversation, developing effective relationships with customers in order to ensure trust. Social media measurement is in many ways subjective and potentially unique to the interpretation of the entity doing the measuring. When evaluating the benefits, the focus on financial returns must not be lost, although the benefits associated with intangible conversation and participation can also lead to future returns.

6.12 Contribution to Theory

Most existing research on business use of social media is related to large organisations and does not specifically address SMEs. In addition, it tends to be focused on a strategic focus or examining the value gained by the adoption of such applications. This research has focused specifically on e-SMEs and has developed a framework (Figure 6.7) which will allow them to plan their use and measurement of social media and take a more strategic perspective. E-SMEs are under growing pressure to employ technology effectively in order to survive therefore it is increasingly important for them to utilise social media optimally.

Figure 6.7: E-SME Social Media Strategic Engagement Framework
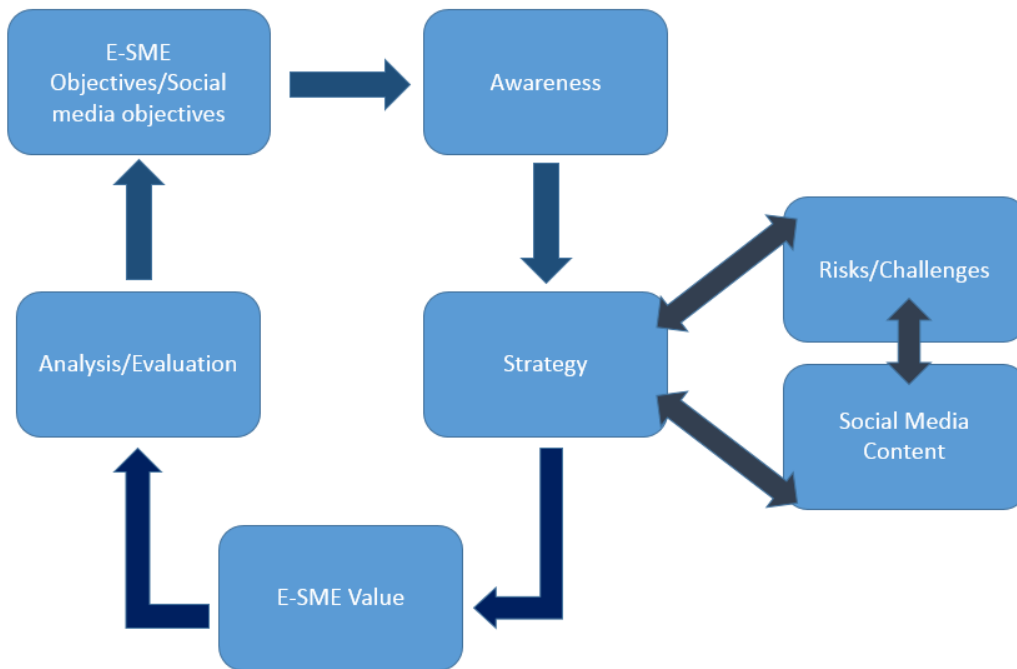
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data

The engagement framework (Figure 6.7) represents the launch of e-SME social media strategy and outlines how the e-SME will be positioned and represented through their social media brand communities. Once objectives have been determined, the e-SME conducts an awareness review, which in turn influence strategy which ultimately provides value to the organisation. Thereby providing an opportunity to analyse and evaluate the effective of social media engagement against their objectives, leading to a continuous awareness review of consumer needs and opinion.

Chapter Seven

E-SME Brand Social Media Engagement-Perceived corporate value in using Social Media to acquire and retain customers-presentation of findings and analysis.

7. Introduction-Social Media Corporate Value

Corporate value from social media activity related to the return on investment (ROI) e-SMEs receive by utilising social media communities such as increasing their audience to acquire and retain customers, enhance their reputation, increase their connection with consumers by providing an additional customer services contact and ultimately increase sales. This raises an important measure of effective engagement for the organisation's objectives. The value an e-SME experiences by using SMBCs involves four themes which are dependent on the organisation's resources and aligned with their objectives. The recent literature highlights how important a comprehensive planning process is to the success of an SMBC, if it is to result in a positive ROI. The findings from this research indicated an effective SMBC strategy should not only address the objectives for SMBC use such as engaging with customers and developing trust, but also how a e-SME will measure the economic value and business benefits. The focus of an organisation should be the objectives that need to be achieved and which SMBCs with corresponding metrics are best to achieve them. Five key themes were identified from the respondents which create social media corporate value for e-SMEs:

- T1 Audience
- T2 Reputation
- T3 Sales
- T4 Customer Services
- T5 Evaluation

Table 7.1 indicates which themes were referenced by the key informants

Table 7.1: Key Informant Responses- Social Media Corporate Value Themes

Key Informants	Social Media Corporate Value Themes				
	T1 (15/15)	T2 (12/15)	T3 (10/15)	T4 (11/15)	T5 (15/15)
Jill Quick	x	x	x	x	x
Nicky Kriel	x	x	x	x	x
Jocelyn Kirby	x	x	x	x	x
Kay Harding	x	x		x	x
Andy Farmer	x	x		x	x
Liz Willder	x		x	x	x
Annie Boyd	x	x	x		x
Rachel Robinson	x		x	x	x
Eileen Brown	x				x
Adam Smith	x	x	x	x	x
Paul Wolferstan	x	x	x		x
Helene Hall	x	x		x	x
Leslie Hickmott	x	x			x
Joseph Faul	x	x	x	x	x
Paul Chatterton	x	x	x	x	x

The themes are demonstrated through the informant responses highlighted in this chapter. The literature highlights potential benefits and risks for e-SMEs using social media to engage and create trust this section of the research has also found that e-SME value is perceived through the enhancement of consumer audience, reputation, and sales, as well as refining their customer service provision. In support of the social media and engagement literature (Chapter Two), e-SMEs were advised to place a strong focus on audience, reputation, and customer services but fundamentally sales were still also key to social media value. The chapter reviews the identified themes supported by key informant responses and themes represented in the literature.

7.1 Social Media Objectives

The key informants indicated that having clear social media objectives helped e-SMEs focus on the content they provide and encourage. Adopting this approach and having a close control of objectives could provide a buffer and advantage for e-SMEs against larger firms, which was highlighted by Joe Faul:

"You've obviously got an end game which ultimately is selling the product or a service. I think the question that you've got is how much you trust social to help meet your objectives. Some brands are adamant that it's got to link directly their retail site. I've

seen plenty of social media guidelines in the past where it is like every phrase must include a link to the product page. That's probably the far extreme of it." (**Joe Faul)**

Indeed, respondents further highlighted the benefits of using key performance indicators for social media content and campaigns in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Key Informant Responses- Key Performance Indicators

Key Informant Responses- Key Performance Indicators
"Usually it's click links and things like that, so they can see how much traffic goes through to their web site on a certain day or with a certain Tweet, so that's usually the KPIs, but you could just have mentions, which is the method we recommend. (**Andy Farmer)**
"Once we've got them to the page that's almost like our job's done, then they need to have the right content on the page to get them to do the sale. KPI wise usually you need, I don't know let's say, on a campaign you want 200 link to whatever the micro site page is or whatever the home page is for the e-SME."(**Adam Smith)**
"You can benchmark areas pre and post campaign. You can look at reviews, returns, potentially repeat purchase." (**Jocelyn Kirby)**

However, Joe Faul disagreed with this approach, suggesting that social media content still has a long way to go before it can compete with e-mail revenue streams, and e-SMEs need to trust that their audience will understand the thinking behind the post.

"The thing is it's not a primary objective because a brand like that email is still the best way of generating digital sales. Social doesn't. It's a not a revenue driver. Social is more to reinforce a brand personality or yeah. It's essentially just showing off, basically." It's difficult because some brands might just want to get hits on their website so having a link to it is perfectly essentially whereas others put trust that their audience will think this is cool content and somewhere down the line that will impact their decision right there." (**Joe Faul)**

This response suggests that e-SME SMBCs should not purely focus on revenue driving activity but to also promote the brand personality.

7.2 Consumer Audience (T1)

Understanding target audience was identified from the responses provided and further divided into analytical value and customer service value. Investing in building a community of users and increasing their engagement enhances both trust and reputation for e-SMEs. Social

strategies that focus on cultivating communities, instead of just measuring and assigning value to tweets, likes, and sharing actions, are crucial to effective online retailing and represent significant value for e-SMEs. For online organisations social media is valuable when it becomes a predictable indicator of future earnings and potential growth. While investment and results in social media are often cyclical as with any other marketing campaign, passionate community members can potentially be predictable in their social activity across communities. Social media activity that is frequently measured, such as number of retweets, is meaningful within the context of those people. Therefore social media engagement strategies that are holistic, consistent, and focused on an e-SMEs target audience provide value by keeping the brand relevant and extending its reach to other potential consumers. One further argument put forward is that key performance indicators have to match the platform but are potentially different for each channel:

"It depends entirely on the brand KPIs and business objectives one channel certainly does not fit all! The big six channels often do not give the required results so a new innovation is often used to great effect – depending on the brand sector of course. This depends entirely on the KPIs and objectives of the brand and which business results they want to achieve there is no correct answer here – and each channel requires a different approach based on objectives and outcomes. " (**Eileen B**)

A key consideration for an e-SMEs objectives should include a process of passing social feedback to the correct department or contact in order to ensure that the feedback can positively impact the organisation's strategy, reflected in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3: Key Informant Responses- Consumer Feedback

Key Informant Responses-Consumer Feedback
"This is what frustrates me and fascinates me in equal amounts about social. People think they're talking to a screen sometimes. There's a whole load of valuable information in it if they connect with people properly and they use that information properly, they can actually. It's an amazing business tool, but they have to put the pieces of the jigsaw together. In order to do that sometimes, I think you need a very clear objective that they can turn to again, to then turn around and see how well they've done." (**Annie Boyd**)
"This is what happens with a lot of places is the communication internally within organizations, even in SMEs, the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. They delegate social media to somebody, and that person could be answering 10 complaints about the same thing. The customer is quite happy with the response, and that's it sorted, but if the person running that social media account doesn't report that problem to the management team or to the product development team, that's not good internal communication." (**Jill Quick**)

Recently, an increasing number of marketing scholars have examined the implications of online consumer product reviews, such as their impact on product sales and firm marketing strategies. This research found that that e-SMEs should look to incorporate consumer feedback into their objectives whenever possible.

The Frequency and Timing considerations of postings was also highlighted as a key consideration for e-SMEs, as indicated by Helene Hall, and Paul Wolferstan reflected in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4: Key Informant Responses- Social Media Posting Frequency

Key Informant Responses- Social Media Posting Frequency
"Yes, yeah … well, the end user or the customer definitely does because we have to think what are they interested in. Say for example, we've got somebody that we're trying to market to sports enthusiasts, we have to think about what kind of things would they be interested in and what would they be doing in their evening, or what might interest them. It's going to be completely different for somebody that's in even the digital space, or that's in a completely different sector." (**Helene Hall)**
"Sometimes with an e-SME you will get ones who are thinking quite far ahead and they come and see you maybe six months before a key event like a book lunch or an exhibition. Sometimes you may get someone at the last minute, and when you go back for engagements sometimes you can get people for whom social media is the very last thing they're thinking of even after any of the type of marketing." (**Paul Wolferstan)**
"It depends on the company. It depends on what they're posting about. There's no point for an SME to go "You've got to post 5 times a day" or whatever, if they don't have the resources to do so. It's better to do a little, but do it consistently and over a long period of time. You'll get better results than try and strain resources by overreaching yourself and then giving up because it becomes overwhelming". **(Nicky Kriel)**
"I think there's a rule on Twitter, like a 4-1-1 rule that basically for every one piece of self-serving content you post four other types with content before you can really promote yourself. You're really, it's about giving back to your audience." (**Paul Chatterton)**

The importance of awareness for effective engagement for e-SMEs is acknowledged in the literature which suggests that organisations need to continuously monitor consumer opinion and respond to their changing needs. Consumer awareness effectiveness is demonstrated not only by having a clear focus of an e-SMEs target audience and brand personality, but also by the suitability of the chosen platform and resource available. This thesis therefore states that organisations should develop open processes to increase their awareness of consumers'

needs and wants. The next section reviews the importance of increasing target audience or reach using social media.

7.2.1 Increasing Target Audience

Following a period of awareness gathering highlighted in Chapter 7. Utilising social media in order to enhance an e-SME's consumer audience involves having an established analysis process in place as well as protocols regarding the interpretation and use of the data. Regarding the reach of an e-SME's social media activity it could be argued that the higher one's intensity of social media use, the more likely one will become a 'friend' or 'follower' of an organisation and to become engaged with their social media content. This signifies the importance of establishing a well thought out brand presence in social media. This aspect was endorsed in the excerpts highlighted in Table 7.5.

Table 7.5: Key Informant Responses- Increasing Target Audience

Key Informant Responses- Increasing Target Audience
"Social media communities offer e-SMEs fantastic reach. An example would be one of my clients has begun to use Twitter. Through Twitter, somebody he was chatting to then invited him to come and do a presentation at one of their networking events to their customers". (**Annie Boyd)**
"I think as the popularity of social media has grown, I'd say it's becoming ingrained in our everyday life. There always new communities that are appearing online. There are the volumes there that make it worthwhile for even SMEs to engage via social media." **(Jocelyn Kirby)**

Increasing 'fan' base within social media was seen to be crucial as this adds more potential consumers into the marketing funnel and also increases social connections with others in the community. A potentially self-sustaining community increases the value for e-SMEs if there are potential resource limitations with running the community (see Table 7.6).

Table 7.6: Key Informant Responses-Increasing Social Media Target Audience

Key informant responses-Increasing social media target audience
"If a social media platform is that popular then followers will post content that they think other fellow consumers will be interested in, which in a way could be doing an e-SMEs job for them." **(Kay Harding)**
"I think most small firms see increasing their following as a way to expand the reach of their products and services. With the numbers involved, this can potentially happen. But from a community value point of view you're also increasing the dynamic innovative content that could be posted on the community, which I always recommend is a key benefit." **(Leslie Hickmott)**

For e-SMEs expanding their target audience via social media communities boost volumes and increase business stability. Further benefits are accrued as sales and will be discussed later in this chapter. The next section shall review the second associated value from using social media to aid business decisions using activity analysis.

7.2.2 Social Media Analysis

Many social media brand communities are established with the main aim of facilitating conversations between consumers and the brand. Due to the sheer volume of conversations or mentions that can take place on social media, organisations need to have processes in place which can find and monitor these discussions. Generally, these posts are of an ephemeral nature, without any obligation to respond. Processes such as analysing previous twitter mentions require an archive system, whereas industry blogs are less about staying connected synchronously and more about facilitating rich, often lengthy conversations that can be traced back to the blog itself. Traditionally, organisations wanting to address operations have adopted a more quantifiable approach using metrics that have tended to be volume-driven, such as number of followers, traffic driven to the website, click-throughs, time spent on-line, postings and comments, conversions, and units sold.

> "There's various different metrics that we would look at and that I've come across brands looking at in the past. Follows, and how many people kind of abandon your social media is one of the aspects that you can look to track.
>
> Also, things like interaction rates would also be beneficial, looking at how many people comment or share any of your posts, because ultimately that's what you're looking for. Those are the main two that we would look to track in terms of interactions." (**Kay Harding)**

Volume oriented metrics are valuable to e-SMEs, and e-SMEs that create social communities naturally want to understand what they are getting in return. However relied on by themselves

they can foster a quantity over quality mentality and may not provide the required insight that e-SMEs require to understand consumer activity. Therefore social media can deliver other returns that have meaningful and measurable financial value.

In order to measure these key performance indicators, respondents referenced some available software options but also highlighted the difficulty of interpreting the results, which were highlighted in Table 7.7.

Table 7.7: Key Informant Responses-Interpreting Social Media Analytics

Key informant responses-Interpreting Social Media Analytics
"I think the whole social media monitoring and evaluation is a really hard one because, like I said, there isn't one tool that does it. We will quite often be able to measure spikes in conversations when we're going out with things, but you can't ultimately prove that that was the result of what we were doing". (**Liz Willder)**
"You can actually see how many people have come through your social media platform. That is very measurable. If it's to drive traffic, you can measure it using Google analytics to actually see how much more traffic you're getting. You can see where that traffic is coming from. And they go "Likes on a page, clicking some of those." It's a measurement for people who're doing social media, but it's not actually of any business significance to you." (**Nicky Kriel)**

In summary, integration between SMBC activity and consumer interests is critical to delivering consistent, relevant experiences that meet the expectations of modern consumers and build social media brand communities for e-SMEs. In order to achieve this brands must align content with data and not place the aspects into different categories. The research found that e-SMEs struggle with the potential break down between their social activity and online retail site activity and often have no effective method of reporting the crossover and ultimately value/return on investment. By investing in communities, brands build relationships that can continue to deliver results. If e-SMEs are to deliver on brand promises, they need a deep understanding of customers, one that can be gained from evaluating customer behavioural data at a granular level.

7.3 Reputational Value (T2)

The use of social media use amongst e-SME brands has raised questions about the effects of their social media activity, especially with regard to the effects on corporate reputation. This research sought to provide further insight on the extent which an e-SME brand's social media activities are related to perceptions of corporate reputation among customers and non-customers. Part of the positive association between engagement and reputation might be the

result of emotional contagion with the tendency to feel and be influenced by others' emotions. Consumers who choose to follow e-SME brands through their social media communities are exposed to both content placed by brand as well as the responses to these posts, and to the questions, complaints and remarks posted mostly by fellow consumers. Therefore this research argues that viewing negative posts about a brand's services, negatively affects the perception of the company. However, it could be argued that by publicly witnessing a company responding to customer complaints in social media positively affects the evaluation of this company.

Therefore, once an e-SME has identified appropriate metrics to analyse reputation through social media engagement, an appropriate evaluation tool must be selected. This could either be based on objective data (e.g., number of views or followers) or reviewing sentiment evident from the community postings. Managing reputational risk formed the next aspect of social media value for e-SMEs. For this theme most respondents suggested that risk concerned a lack of understanding target audience, failing to display a consistent approach, keeping content up to date, as well as legal ramifications, conceptualised in Figure 7.1. The key informant respondents' findings suggest that most consumer brand advocates have developed a passion to play an active role in promoting the brand. This is demonstrated by advocates sharing their knowledge and experience, and what consumers expect in return from e-SMEs will be reviewed in Chapter Eight.

Figure 7.1 E-SME Social Media Reputation
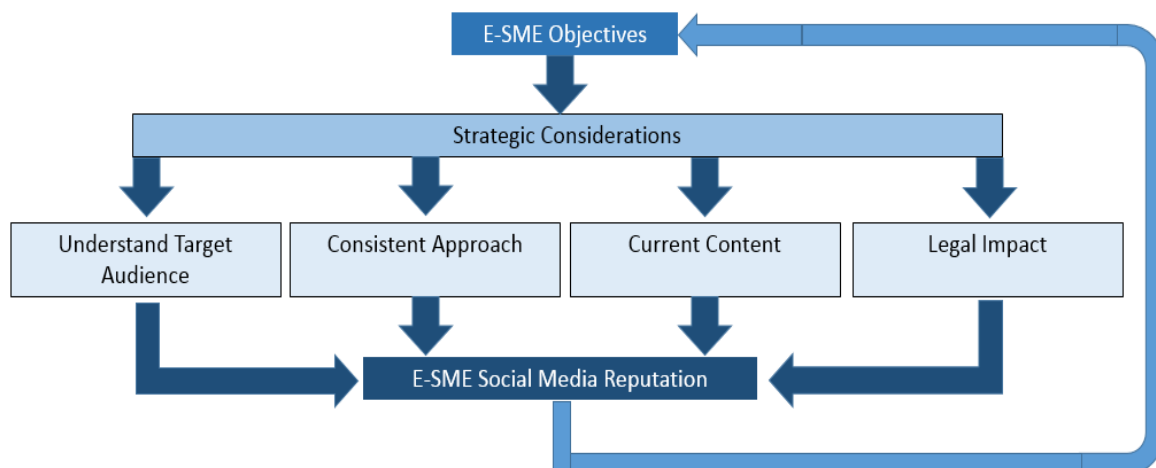
Source: Inductively developed from the data

One of the main risks highlighted by key informants was the risk of adopting the wrong strategy, i.e. one that does not resonate with your target audience, as demonstrated in Table 7.8.

Table 7.8: Key Informant Responses-Reputation Risk

Key Informant Responses-Reputation Risk
"The second risk is overselling is not at its best. I've tried to listen to social media examiner, it's not a direct selling tool, it's about generating awareness and you're basically looking for your followers to tell their followers by word of mouth or by sharing your content and bringing people in that way. Also, with social media it's really part of what a brand should be doing online." **(Joe Faul)**
"I suppose there's quite a few of them, but the main risks I would say is fundamentally misunderstanding the audience and forgetting to put the audience's interests and passions ahead of your own. Far too many brands want to cut back to the sale, the product, the bottom line, almost the social media ROI because they can see it as a very short term thing." (**Nicky Kriel)**
"Some brands just want to make a video, which is often quite dull and corporate, and somehow wave a magic wand and make it go viral. Social media approached in those kinds of terms is always doomed to fail. I think where historically some people got lucky, surprised themselves with the success of what they did, I think a lot of it was just first mover advantage." **(Paul Wolferstan)**
"It's that perseverance and the willingness to repeatedly try and try again and experiment that gets them there. In fairness, they may have ultimately set off with wrong idea about time scales, but they set off with the right attitude. It's a long haul thing. You have to experiment and try and try again." **(Paul Chatterton)**
"Too many people go into social media thinking that it's a quick fix, quick win. If you haven't got the budget to do paid media, and you can't be bothered to do decent, I don't know, segmented direct marketing, just create a viral video because that's guaranteed to work. You and I both know that isn't the case." **(Andy Farmer)**

This risk leads to potentially not understanding the capabilities of the SMBC that an e-SME has chosen to host the community (see Table 7.9)

Table 7.9: Key Informant Responses-Social Media Platform Capability

Key Informant Responses-Social Media Platform Capability
"They definitely want to have a good understanding of whichever platform they use first because you see so many failures." **(Helene Hall)**
"Companies come on and they just blast that corporate messaging day in day out. They don't engage. They don't understand their followers or their likes. Really all they do is annoy people, and I think that almost makes them come across as being pretty scabby and certainly needing credibility. It's certainly an understanding of the social media needed before a brand should engage." **(Kay Harding)**

This aspect links into the risk or consideration of posting content which is current or relevant to the target audience (see Table 7.10).

Table 7.10: Key informant Response- Social Media Current Content

Key Informant Response- Social Media Current Content
"Some brands force their brand into something that they know is going to be culturally relevant, and it comes across really cheesy and corny. People don't appreciate that. I mean, I don't know. If you are sports marketing, it's ideal because you can almost get away with just talking about .You can almost just get away with it but on the whole it's got to be relevant." **(Joe Faul)**
"They're still thinking social media can smash it. But social media has matured so much in the last five years, as have a lot of other channels. Don't get me wrong. There's paid media, a bit of research, all kinds of things have matured a lot, but what I'm saying that a lot of this just comes from the fact that people don't realize how fast the innovations and the standards and the bar is getting raised every year, year-on-year." (**Paul Wolferstan)**

The findings argue that in order for an e-SME SMBC to be seen as an information hub content and postings must be relevant and 'up to date'. If this is not the case then e-SMEs face the risk of consumers visiting competitor SMBCS to find product or industry updates.

The risk of no social media policy or established process in place was also highlighted by respondents with examples highlighted in Table 7.11. In the era of social media, e-SME staff 'voice' can be a valuable resource, due to their product knowledge or passion for the brand but it can also be a significant risk for e-SMEs. As employees who have traditionally had limited choices in voicing their on-the-job experiences can now communicate with hundreds or even thousands of people outside the organization with a few keystrokes.

Table 7.11: Key Informant Responses-Policy Risk

Key Informant Responses-Policy Risk
""People having 2 accounts on a mobile phone, being on a night out, getting drunk, and tweeting from the wrong account. It happens all the time. A social media policy should be in place to stop that. I would say human error are the biggest risks. If you understand the tools and you have a strategy, then you should be okay." **(Leslie H)**
"Human error. Absolutely, human error. Not having a social media policy can be catastrophic." **(Jocelyn Kirby)**

In light of these findings, this thesis highlights employee voice as an employee's attempt to use either organizationally sanctioned or unsanctioned media or methods for the purpose of articulating organizational experiences and issues or influencing the organization, its members, or other stakeholders. Under these circumstances, effective e-SME management of employee 'voice' in the social media era is crucial for SMBC successful engagement. This can potentially be accomplished by the establishment of an appropriate organizational context, communication mechanisms that are appropriate for each purpose of voice, support and guidelines that enable employees to make good voice-related decisions supporting the desired brand image, and engagement in what employees are saying.

One area that was not previously highlighted in the literature is the legal ramifications that organisations can potentially face when posting content or engaging with consumers through social media, highlighted in the Table 7.12.

Table 7.12: Key Informant Responses-Social Media Legal Risk

Key Informant Responses-Social Media Legal Risk
"The main risk is if you're not aware about the normal legal ... There's some legal implications, which people seem to be oblivious of sometimes in terms of defamation. There's advertising standards that apply. You, in effect, are publishing. You have to be aware that you are publishing and the information is being put out in a big way. It's really being sensible, that you're not breaking any of your industry." **(Nicky Kriel)**
"Some industries are more highly regulated than others. There's certain industries it's almost impossible to share your own content or make certain statements, so it's about building relationships. You only can repeat what the official things are. It's really being aware of the regulations. Generally, if you are nice to other people and you're giving helpful information, you're not going to get sued." **(Annie Boyd)**
"The thing is that some customers will be using it as a tool to try and manipulate because I've heard a lot of customers trying to threaten, I'll tweet about this if you don't give me something free." Generally those people will probably not have a big impact." **(Jill Quick)**

> "It's being aware of what other people are saying about you and then, with most things, even if somebody says something negative because everything appears in reverse chronological order, generally the latest thing will get more coverage. It's making sure that you're putting out good stuff about your company, which will react in a positive way when there are questions."**(Adam Smith)**

The responses suggest that it is important for e-SMEs to consider how to operate within the social media environment and understanding the legal pitfalls and maintaining a professional approach can help to protect an e-SMEs reputation. This research argues that e-SMEs should take caution when reviewing potentially libellous SMBC content as well as consumer posts. The next section reviews e-SME sales.

7.4 Sales (T3)

Sales analysis for e-SMEs generally relates back to marketing analytics, which historically has tended to be more about product than customer, i.e. incremental units sold or, less helpfully, incremental conversations.

> "Within social media it's really difficult to find examples of organisations that have seamlessly replicated the process that initially got the consumer to them in the first place. I'd say that analytics from specific promotional activity are mostly easier to measure relationships." **(Jocelyn Kirby)**

The promotional approach (i.e. discounts/sales offers) to social media appears to have staying power, which was evident in the netnography, particularly from Newitts.com. Promotional activities are also the foundation for many social media posts, reflected for example on Facebook, Twitter and other popular sites whose facilities are used, among other things, for posting promotions.

> **"**Value to the consumer is founded on providing useful information to people who chose to interact, focusing not so much on return on investment as return on attention." (**Paul Wolferstan**)

This exemplary quote from Paul Wolferstan argues that e-SMEs should focus on getting the attention of consumers first, with engaging content that creates trust before they begin to analyse the tangible benefits associated with SMBCs. Extending the theme of return on investment further, an organisation's return on investment (ROI) is the relationship between profit and the investment that generates that profit, and is widely used to examine the performance of an investment. However, the recent literature concerning social media ROI

measurement has garnered negative opinions and as a result some organisations have abandoned the idea of ROI as a success measurement for social media. However, due to the amount of consumers on social media, it is clearly an attractive environment for e-SME brands and sales can be viewed as a key indicator of ROI. However, when it comes to selling specialised services that e-SMEs can provide, the value of social media monitoring can be a difficult concept for e-SMEs to understand and utilise.

7.4.1 Cost of Social Media Activity

The cost of an e-SME's social media activity is measured depending on the strategy an organisation chooses. Generally, the costs can be broken down into four basic categories: (a) staff costs; (b) external costs; (c) advertising; (d) other costs. However it can be argued that despite these costs, paying for reputation-tracking tools can be highly beneficial as these tools can help consumer engagement and responding to enquiries in real time.

7.5 Customer service (T4)

In order to develop and sustain trust through engagement, some e-SMEs include customer service as part of their SMBC strategy. In particular, respondents recommended that e-SMEs need to pay attention to consumer service issues, in order to reassure non- customers through a clear representation of problem resolution, as well as assuring existing customers that any potential issue will be resolved quickly. The associated constructs are conceptualised in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2: Customer Service Constructs
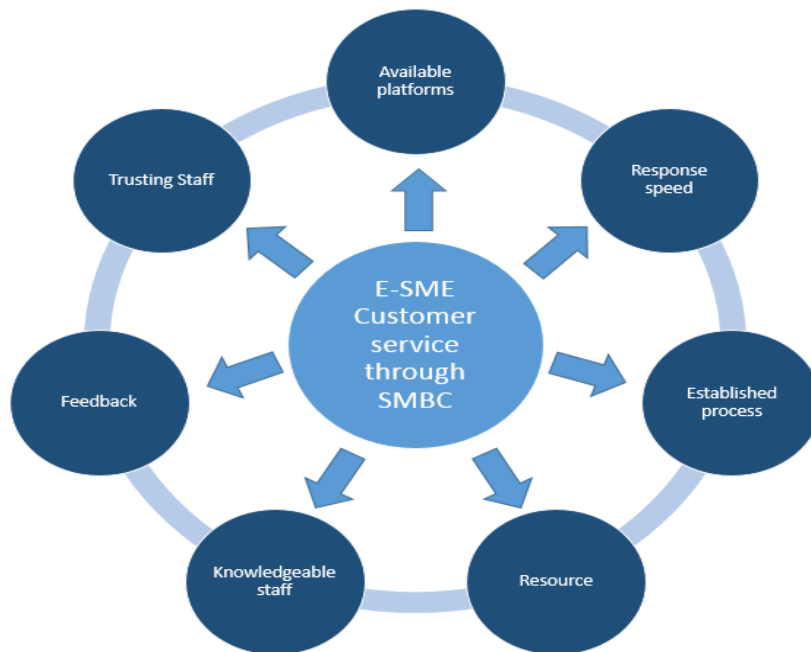
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data

Customer service through a SMBC, in particular as trust mechanism, was unanimously upheld by all respondents as a key aspect of successful e-SME engagement. Establishing a social media customer service process is imperative for facilitating consumer transactions and for indicating trust worthy e-business. This is exemplified in Table 7.13.

Table 7.13: Key Informants Responses-Customer Services on Social Media

Key Informants Responses-Customer Services on Social media
"Yes. There's a big buzz customer service via social media at the moment, particularly when you're looking at the younger audiences. The majority of probably your sub 25-year-old has ... There was a report out recently which said they prefer to be engaged by social media than any other form of contact with a brand or a company." (**Jocelyn Kirby**)
"You can clearly see that they care, that they're acting on it, and that will minimize things like refunds and returns as well. Then you can measure if you actively put in place a social media campaign for customer service and also for engagement, the customer service side of the investment is very measurable because you can look at pre and post campaign return rates." **(Andy Farmer)**
"It's about actually empowering your customer service team to have access to social media and be able to provide the service through social media." (**Liz Wilder**)

This links the concept of customer service as an engagement mechanism to Connection, Value, Satisfaction, and loyalty themes. In terms of efficiency, speed of service and as a reassuring factor to consumers.

> "If they're monitoring customer value every time and they've been put more customer service via social media, they may see that there is more repeat purchase not only from providing the customer service, but also from engaging. That's why social media, it's a lot more personal. If you said that in email, there's no chance to have a conversation."- (**Rachel R)**

However, respondents were also keen to highlight the potentially negative aspects of e-SMEs conducting their customer service practices through social media.

> "Nowadays consumers think I'll go onto social media and just go to them. It just feels like you rarely go onto social media just to go hey you know what I'm going to tell that they were really good today. It's more like I'm going to tell them that they've messed up or something."- (**Adam Smith)**

To prepare for this it was evident from the key informants that e-SMEs need to have procedures in place to handle these enquiries, which include efficiency speed of response highlighted in Table 7.14.

Table 7.14: Key Informant Responses- E-SME Social Media Processes

Key Informant Responses- E-SME Social Media Processes
"Yeah, if they don't have the time to manage it effectively. Say for example they have a customer complaint or something similar, someone makes a negative comment on it, if not replied to or reacted to quick enough, and it can then lead to distrust rather than developing the trust itself. That's a major concern for me. **(Jill Quick)**
"Also, lack of updating the page regularly. Some pages that I've seen for SME's can go a month without any posts or interactions, which in itself makes the brand look bad. It's a good tool if it's used well." (**Kay Harding)**
"I think it's about talking to and communicating with your audiences through essentially new media, but media that's instant. It's about media that's accessible to them, and it's instant. It's ready now. It's about more one-to-one communications than previously". (**Helene Hall)**

The finding from this section of the research has significant implications for e-SMEs. First, the responses highlight the challenges and opportunities brought by SMBCs the need for service innovation. The findings also indicate that SMBCs provides a public communication channel for e-SMEs that allows brands to communicate with the complaining customers and perform service recovery. However, for e-SMEs to adopt this approach, considerable resource must be in place reflected in Table 7.15.

Table 7.15: Key Informant Responses- Resource for Customer Service on Social Media

Key Informant Responses- Resource For Customer Service on Social Media
"With consumers, Twitter, but in terms of needing it as a customer service tool. Our advice is always to ... where you are a service provider for lots of customers, then have a presence on Twitter, but once you sort of open that floodgate, you've got to have somebody on there all the time." (**Nicky Kriel)**
I think the brands that do it really well are the people like Phone2Phone and ... I can't think who the other one is, and they always say, "Hello, it's so-and-so here from nine 'til five today, get in touch if you have any problems," because then if you've got issues with trying to get through on the customer service line or whatever". (**Liz Willder)**

Resources represent an e-SMEs ability to assemble, integrate, and deploy resources in combination to achieve a competitive advantage. Expanding this further this thesis argues that resources alone are not always sufficient to provide significant performance gains and, instead, must be transformed into distinctive capabilities that an e-SME can provide, not just in terms of staff monitoring SMBCs but also have the required knowledge to deal with the query. This finding recognises that the combination and integration of human and business resources positively affect customer relationships, e-SME performance, and consumer trust.

Nevertheless as Nicky Kriel acknowledges, customer service handled in the right way can lead to loyalty by acknowledgement or alternatively increase negative e-WOM and highlight poor internal process if handled poorly:

> "Generally, if there's a complaint, if you respond in a good way to a customer complaint, you'll probably have a loyal customer just by acknowledging somebody that there is a problem and responding in that way. I think some companies haven't got their house in order when they go on social media. It's not going to suddenly make you good at customer service by having a Twitter and Facebook account if your customer service is crap. It can highlight and accentuate internal problems, whereas if you've got good customer service, you're reacting to people well, then it gives you great opportunities."
> (**Nicky Kriel)**

Customer product/service needs were also perceived as a key source of value from key informants.

7.6 Evaluation (T5)

Measuring business value from IT applications such as SMBCs has long been a problematic area for organisations and remains a difficult challenge in the domain of social media. The lack of quantitative measures, such as return on investment of time and money, could eb

considered a hindrance to the continued use of social media by e-SMEs who require evidence of value in both the short and longer term. The findings argue that applying metrics enables the capturing of some levels of information and the measurements are often given as evidence of success within organisations. However, the key informants stated that more qualitative measures are required to fully capture the extent of value to be derived from social media use

Limitations of volume metrics were highlighted by respondents and that e-SMEs need to monitor consumer attitudes and needs more closely. Due to potential resource considerations respondents highlighted a number of platforms available (e.g. Google Analytics, Tweet Deck). However the importance of recognising what to do with the analysis was also highlighted, in particular attributing objectives to specific channels and utilising the statistics, which are highlighted in Table 7.16.

Table 7.16: Key Informant Responses- Social Media Analysis

Key Informant Responses- Social Media Analysis
"I think the future with business and marketing isn't necessarily looking at one particular element. It's about layering data, If you layer all activity together, then you can really get some insights that are going to be really powerful. Look, there are new things that are happening, but it's all about layering your data. The brands that do this first and that do it again with authenticity, they're going to make millions. They're going to do what Tesco did, that absolutely pioneered the way that people do log check boring data in retail and start being more customer centric." **(Jill Quick)**
"There's an area in Google Analytics, which is called Assisted Conversions. The way you have a transactional website or a website where you've got conversion tracking .You might track a contact form being submitted or something like that .You can now see assisted conversions." **(Nicky Kriel)**
"If, for example, somebody came to your site via social media and then went away again, and then came via Google and bought something, previously you would only have seen Google as being the source of the sale. Now you can see assisted conversions. You can see that that person, whilst they bought from Google, they actually originally came to you via social media. You can see the contribution now that social media makes through sites where there's a type of transactional conversion involved. It is becoming more accountable, but ultimately it is about relationships, so they're obviously less quantifiable". **(Jocelyn Kirby)**

Analysing an organisation's social media activity requires organising staff and processes within an e-SME. As part of this process, e-SMEs make efforts to engage and train staff to monitor activity or alternatively utilise social media monitoring software, which are represented by key informant responses in Table 7.17.

Table 7.17: Key Informant Responses- Social Media Monitoring Software

Key Informant Responses- Social Media Monitoring Software
"There's lots of different tools, such as Meltwater Buzz and Brand watch and all these kind of things. They're social media marketing tools, and they're very expensive. Initially, my experience of them is you try them and you think "Wow, my goodness. That's amazing. Look at the amount of the information that drags up." But you've still got to train staff to use them. They measure sentiment, positivity, negativity" (**Annie Boyd)**
"It depends. We've looked at social media monitoring tools, the big ones, such as Radian6 and a few others. We're doing more traditional measuring and through individual tools that monitor our press releases and then also monitor some of our online stuff as well." **(Helene Hall)**
"I have TweetDeck open all day, which I use it as a monitoring tool for work, obviously, to know what's being said about my clients". **(Liz Willder)**

Using monitoring software is claimed to increase understanding of consumers' needs and interests. This software provides metrics such brand awareness, brand competitiveness, and brand likeability. The 'net promoter score' is an indicator of customers' attitudes derived from measuring the customer's likelihood to recommend the organisation or products to other consumers. These metrics provide a more qualitative view of consumers but they still can potentially reinforce volume oriented thinking and thus may be inadequate as proxies for quantitative insights. Engaging staff in this way is claimed to improve relationships with consumers and develop trust by identifying current consumer trends. Training staff on the importance of customer-focused and integrated activities also has the added benefit of improving trust by improving enquiry response times which carries the bonus of enhancing service satisfaction levels which encourage customer retention and positive e-WOM amongst consumers. The importance of having a system of approach to analysing the quality of social media feedback was also cited in Table 7.18.

Table 7.18: Key Informant Responses-Social Media Measurement

Key Informant Responses-Social Media Measurement
"I think that's what's missing, there needs to be some smart tool that helps people properly monitor and evaluate. Yeah, we always have to have key performance indicators or KPIs, we would look at how many times things were re-Tweeted, forwarded, clicked through, traffic the website, Google Analytics, all that sort of thing. So we wouldn't actually go down that route, because you can't control it, but a lot of the time, particularly when you're dealing straight with e-SMEs, they like those sort of hard and fast facts, and that other agencies that they're dealing with can probably deliver that." (**Liz Willder**)
"Yes, you can measure social media. It's unfair to go ... If I take it and treat it as a completely separate you should measure social media if you're not measuring the rest of your marketing activities, the rest of your PR activities, the rest of your customer service relationships. I don't think you need a completely separate return on investment measurement for social media. It depends on ultimately what your objectives, your business objectives social media, is. It it's to gain awareness, then you'd be looking at our compression, you'd be looking at mentions. Those are very measurable. You can actually measure those". (**Annie Boyd**)
Yeah, I mean the increase from capturing the increase in followers, there are a lot of analytics tools for each network which can do that. For Facebook and Google analytics you can look at the social section to see the traffic from social sites." (**Paul Chatterton**)

The aim for e-SMES is to obtain dynamic insights into brand engagement, audience captivation, level of interest, and remarkable content in order to formulate strategy. However, difficulty of analysing or interpreting social media was highlighted in Table 7.19.

Table 7.19: Key Informant Responses-Measurement Difficulty

Key Informant Responses-Measurement Difficulty
"Different organisations use it differently. Some clients will know exactly where all their money is coming from, where all the sources are coming from, and are measuring that already. They'll be really up in terms of SEO and price per click and the cost for getting a lead in. Other companies aren't measuring that, and they're happy if more people phone them or come visit their online store or fill in an enquiry form. – (**Adam Smith**)
"They have lurked for a while and responded. Obviously, if somebody responds to you via Twitter, you can see that that's where they've come from. If people are responding to you on LinkedIn, or through LinkedIn, as you did, you know how that is. In terms of the return on investment of this call, I can't measure that. How do you measure that?" - (**Helene Hall**)
"Email results are easier are to measure, with metrics like 'was it opened?', 'was it clicked through?', or 'was it forwarded?' and is still looking for a really good social media equivalent." (**Jill Quick**)

One further source of value was highlighted by one respondent whereby organisations can use social media as an opportunity to test new products from postings using consumer feedback

> "Often you find that some clients will use social as a barometer for their overall campaign so they'll pilot things on social that are going to be part of a bigger campaign they often might start with a small social campaign." (**Joe Faul)**

Social media is different from traditional means of face-to-face and online communication, and arguably requires a different approach to measurement. Measuring the business value from IT has traditionally been problematic and this extends to social media. While the impact of traditional online activity can be measured using defined quantitative metrics, social media generates a huge amount of qualitative data which traditional metrics alone do not address or quantify in monetary terms.

The findings from this section of the research argue that the key to unlocking the value of an e-SME SMBC relies on consumer conversation which requires the ability to track the tone, perception and nuances of comments making it extremely difficult for e-SMEs to measure and quantify.

Although it can be suggested that only financial gains can be measured in monetary value, non-financial gains from SMBCs may be equally beneficial for e-SMEs resulting in a range of benefits such as increased awareness and trust. The findings from this thesis also suggest that the measurement issue can be linked, in part, to the lack of a measurement standard which makes it difficult for e-SMEs to prove that any investment in SMBCs has resulted in a direct profit or loss. Despite reported successes, the ongoing measurement debate highlighted in this research, shows there is a need for e-SMEs to adopt a transparent, standardised yet flexible measurement framework.

7.7 Theoretical Contribution

This section of the research investigates the perceived corporate value in using social media to acquire and retain customers. Conceptual models are presented which argue the benefits and considerations that e-SMEs experience by creating and managing SMBCs. The models contribute to the literature by providing new theoretical justifications to enhance the current practical and theoretical understanding of e-SME value through social media. Second, this research is one of the earliest studies exploring the relationship between e-SME corporate value and social media to acquire and retain customers.

The non-financial returns for e-SME findings identified by the key informants suggest that the levels of engagement due to consumer reach, customer service, and positive e-WOM, as well as high levels of brand reputation, can emerge from consumers' interaction with social media brand communities. Metrics such as followers, comments, shares and likes, are used in an algorithmic filtering for the calculation of engagement. Facebook insights in this respect could be extremely beneficial for e-SMEs, however due to a range of complexities for Facebook insights, it may be difficult for e-SMEs with limited resources to devote the time to understand and utilise this analysis.

This section of the research argues that ROI for social media can be analysed in two forms for e-SMEs, financial and non-financial. As previously highlighted, social media can aid the generation of revenue for organisations, as communities can be used as promotional platforms for products or services. In respect of the potential non-financial ROI, respondents highlighted increased engagement and developing brand reputation. Therefore this research argues that social media is capable of both providing platforms that contribute to the interactions and transactions between consumers and businesses.

A contribution to marketing literature is also made by developing further understanding of how retailers become engendered with brand significance through retail brand management techniques, both from a consumer and practitioner perspective. To sum up, the findings of this study will bring long-term impacts to both the literature and practitioners in understanding the roles of social media in providing value to e-SMEs.

The findings from this research indicate that e-SMEs can find corporate value through SMBC engagement. The key informants advocated that SMBCs can be beneficial to an organisation as they can build relationships with customers, increase brand awareness, demonstrate expertise and gain new customers. However the key informants also warned that e-SMEs need to be aware of potential measurement difficulties when evaluating the benefits gained from SMBCs. This can potentially be attributed to the complexities involved in the measurement of social media activity and that there is no one single method of measurement ROI for SMBCs can cover a number of measures such as qualitative or quantitative data and tangible or intangible benefits. The potential enormity and complexity of the evaluation may therefore be beyond the resources of many e-SMEs. However, the majority of key informants stated that it is crucial that e-SMEs adopting a strategic or systematic approach to their use and measurement of SMBC activity. Due to this challenge, this research makes an important contribution by highlighting the key themes which provide corporate value for an e-SMEs strategic consideration.

As social media is an ever-changing business environment, due to new technological innovations, it can be argued that a flexible model is needed in order to meet the measurement needs of e-SMEs. One of the main criticisms of existing models is that they appear to be over-complicated, presenting complicated management and evaluation processes, which may be off putting for e-SMEs. The findings from this research argue that an e-SMEs approach too any SMBC should be adaptable due to the changing needs of consumers. As a result a more flexible model is required which is flexible and straightforward to implement for e-SMEs, incorporating measurement and evaluation activity. By using such a model E-SMEs would be encouraged to adopt a more strategic focus when planning, implementing and measuring SMBC activity.

A conceptual framework that provides direction for e-SMEs to evaluate ROI on a SMBC is presented in Figure 7.3. The model is fairly simplistic and can be applied to organisations of all sizes whilst being flexible enough to be able to be adapted to meet the needs of e-SMEs. The framework consists of an e-SME identifying objectives and then evaluating available resource, followed by four themes; audience, reputation, sales, customer services. The next theme evaluation, considers both short-term and long-term value of SMBC engagement, when all five themes are combined as part of a sequential framework provide e-SME social media corporate value. The planning stage should involve setting goals, defining objectives and outlining suitable metrics for measuring the impact of social media.

Figure 7.3: Social Media Corporate Value
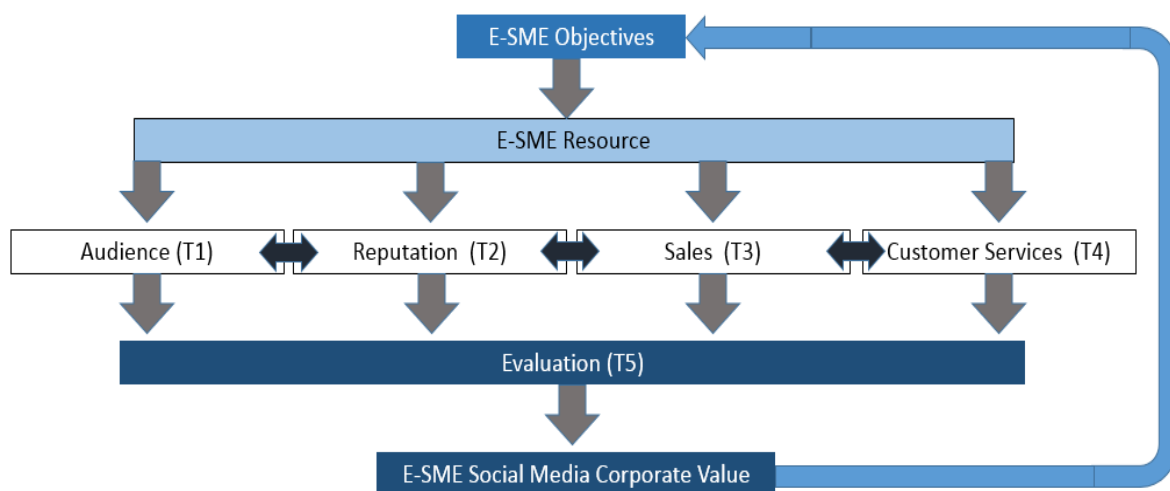
Previous models that analyse social media ROI argue that clearly defined objectives and evaluation metrics must be agreed upon prior to an organisation's entry into the social media arena and that they should influence any decision on which SMBCs and analytical tools an

organisation should use to measure and deliver results. Consequently, this thesis argues that e-SMEs must know what they hope to achieve through their SMBCs before they enter into the social media environment.

7.8 Chapter Summary

In summary, the ever changing and complicated nature of social media requires e-SMEs to plan their SMBCs with caution. Before creating an SMBC, e-SMEs need to be aware of what consumers are interested in as this can help drive appropriate engagement goals and may inform the decision of which social media platform to utilise. The creation and development of any SMBC requires a long-term investment and as social media is all about 'people' and 'relationships', e-SMEs need to invest time into developing effective relationships with customers in order to ensure positive outcomes. When measure ROI, the focus on financial returns must not be lost for an e-SME, although the benefits associated with intangible conversation and participation need considerable attention as they can lead to future returns.

Current research on corporate value from social media focusses on large organisations and does not specifically address e-SMEs. Furthermore recent studies have placed the research emphasis on the technical, user, social and commercial use of the various applications rather than adopting a strategic focus or examining the value gained by the adoption of SMBCs.

This section of the thesis therefore extends the existing social media literature by developing a framework which will allow e-SMEs to plan their use and measurement of SMBCs and adopt a more strategic perspective.

Chapter Eight

E-SME Brand Social Media communications to create engagement, trust, and develop reputation: Consumer perspective-Presentation of Findings and Analysis (In accordance with objective 5)

8. Introduction

This chapter addresses the fifth objective which aims to provide insight into comprehending what social media communications, from a consumer perspective, are perceived to encourage engagement to create trust and develop reputation. This section provides insight into e-SME social media engagement strategies by addressing the issues from the netnography and key informant interviews. The findings indicate that non-customers and customers have different motives to follow and become engaged in an e-SME's SMBC activity and consequently have different levels of trust for an e-SME brand (i.e. initial or continual trust). This suggests that non-customers may be searching for new organisations to purchase from, and customers may use SMBC's for product, company, or industry updates. Therefore this research argues that non-customers are at an initial trust phase through SMBC engagement, whereas customers reach a continual trust phase, which is reflected in differences and consequences of brand trust for both groups.

The differences reflected in the findings between costumer non-customers and customers together indicate different considerations for both groups for e-SMEs with regard to SMBC engagement and consumer trust. This thesis provides an important contribution by also underlining the potential of SMBCs for customer service purposes and the development of trust. Customer support in SMBCs can also influence non-customers, who are able to view customers being supported on platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, which can strengthen their perception of the level of credibility the e-SME has. Furthermore, non-customers experience the candid way employees of an e-SME respond with a conversational human voice to several types of online feedback, like questions, compliments, and complaints.

In earlier studies, conversational human voice was shown to be of added value for brand evaluation, and candidness in online dialogues showed to enhance trust and familiarity. Together, this may influence the perception of corporate reputation.

This research provides evidence identifying that the majority of consumer respondents (fifteen interviews) highlight eight core themes which are perceived by consumers to create trust. The

themes are positioned into a hierarchy to demonstrate their prevalence across responses and then conceptualised into a roadmap for successful consumer engagement. This differentiates from the frameworks identified in the literature detailed in Chapter Two by incorporating the trust stages alongside engagement stages within SMBCs.

In this section of the research, probing enabled eight core themes (CT1-8) and seventeen sub themes to be generated which are perceived by consumers to have helped create initial and develop continual trust, alongside engagement practices. A 'thematic analysis' was conducted to map the presence of the themes for each respondent. This enabled a comprehensive comparative analysis between the netnography and key informant perspectives. An overview is given for each theme, with evidence provided that concentrates on the theme and sub theme and draws out similarities and anomalies within the literature.

Conceptual development involves establishment of a core themes across eight areas. Table 8.1 shows the nature of the eight constructs which consumers indicated create trust through social media engagement.

Table 8.1 Consumer Trust through Social Media Brand Community Engagement

Theme	Construct	Trust Stage	Customer Stage
CT1	Awareness	Initial	Non-Customer
CT2	Financial Motivation	Initial	Non-Customer
CT3	Reputation	Initial	Non-Customer
CT4	Connection	Initial	Non-Customer
CT5	Value Creation	Initial	Non-Customer
CT6	Credibility	Initial	Non-Customer
CT7	Relationship	Continual	Customer
CT8	Loyalty	Continual	Customer

Figure 8.1 shows 'theme presence' across respondents expressing trust creation through social media engagement and provides the empirical basis for the hierarchy of engagement drivers, and the roadmap to trust. The overview is presented prior to analysis of each of the themes in order to contextualize the research setting.

Figure 8.1 Trust Thematic Indicator

Initial Trust	
CT1- Awareness	Theme present 10/15 respondents
CT2- Financial Motivation	Theme present 9/15 respondents
CT3- Reputation	Theme present 11/15 respondents
CT4- Connection	Theme present 13/15 respondents
CT5- Value Creation	Theme present 12/15 respondents
CT6- Credibility	Theme present (15/15) respondents
Continual Trust	
CT7- Relationship	Theme present 15/15 respondents
CT8- Loyalty	Theme present 14/15 respondents

Source: Conceptualised From Data from Consumer Respondent Interviews

Findings are then compared back against the themes established primarily in Chapters Four, Five and Six. Key informant interview gaps were identified during the key informant interviews and are reviewed in the following findings sections.

8.1 Awareness (CT1)

The first construct under review was 'awareness' which relates to the process that a consumer undertakes when they begin to purchase a product online and research a company they have not used before (non-customer). Recent studies have highlighted that most consumers start their online purchase process with a query of a search engine. However, findings from this section of the research suggest that when consumers are exposed to both search and social media communities by an e-SME brand, that they are more likely to visit the organisation's online store and purchase products. This suggests that although search and social media are powerful channels individually, when combined they create opportunities for e-SMEs to gain an advantage over their competitors. Consumers indicated that the main reasons they use search first are: the speed and ease of use, the quality and amount of information, and the fact that they use it for most of their online activities. This was exemplified when consumers

258

were asked how they research products online and e-SMEs that they have not purchased from before, demonstrated in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2: Consumer Responses-Awareness

Consumer Responses-Awareness
"I would tend to look at the kind of products that I might want to buy and then a lot of it would be through Google or through Amazon seeing what else came up". (**Jane R**)
"Not really. I tend to just Google for reviews. To be honest with you, I tend to say it was Callaway golf clubs, I'd stick it into Goggle before I'd stick it into Facebook." (**Daniel**)
"If it was say for something like a peculiar object, or random object, I'd tend to go on Amazon to see different options." **(Wendy)**
"I'd maybe do a Google, a search generally of the company, if I hadn't heard of them before, to see what they were like and to see if there was anything that would suggest to me that they were a viable company". **(Sam)**
"No. The only thing I would us ... I'd just search in Google. If it was somebody I wasn't familiar with. Now and again ... You know those adverts inside of Facebook? I've clicked on them." (**Vicky**)

The findings suggest that non-customers will initially use search engines to research e-SMEs and the products they offer, but then view SMBCs as a method of further supplementing their information search, as highlighted in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3: Consumer Responses-Product Information on Social Media

Consumer Responses-Product Information on Social Media
"You're just searching in Goggle, see what the best price options are. The next stage of evaluation is okay, I need a bit more acknowledgment or feedback. Yeah and then sometimes it leads me to Facebook and then I'll have a look at Facebook".(**Sam)**
"It's easier to find out on Facebook what's going on locally and by following these particular brands. So yeah, that's tends to be why. It's if they don't have another website, they don't have Twitter." (**Lauren**)
"Definitely yea, if I don't know them or haven't bought from them, I'll check out twitter to find out a bit more." (**Paul**)

The research also demonstrated that the greatest motivator for social media engagement is to gather the opinions of others (see Table 8.4). These findings argue that consumers are motivated to obtain the necessary information or skills to better use a product.

Table 8.4: Consumer Responses- Consumer Endorsements

Consumer Responses-Consumer Endorsements
"It's helpful for me to go on Twitter and type in a company search, this usually links to old tweets or a blog. Other consumer opinions are really helpful when choosing who to buy from." **(Jill T)**
"Yes it's definitely something I'll research, seeing other people post positive comments always reassures me." **(Sam)**
"I think social media is all about opinion, so I'm always on there to check out a company I've never bought stuff off before." **(Ewen)**

In terms of trust development, this research argues that SMBCs are a further avenue for e-SMEs to provide information about the product and the brand, which enables the consumer to begin to trust the organisation. However e-SME brands should not simply think of social media as an initial passive tool in the purchase decision process as there are active decision-making processes occurring in the social space, such as price and quality of the available products. This suggests to e-SMEs that an SMBC can be an effective avenue when looking for new customers that are searching for new products, however they must also consider the importance consumers place on product reviews, reflected by consumers in Table 8.5.

Table 8.5: Consumer Responses-Social Media Product Reviews

Consumer Responses-Social Media Product Reviews
"Yeah, yeah, reviews and if it was for like a pair of trainers. I do tend to try and read reviews, whether it's regarding the products or the seller that it came from." (**Michelle)**
"In terms of products, it would depend what the product was. If it was something that was quite a lot of money, I would look at product reviews. The one thing I'm always wary of, is that I think people who review things either love it or they hate it. They had a really positive experience or a really negative experience. I think a lot of people in the middle don't bother. I don't know that you always get a balance. I do tend to check that, if it's a big purchase, yeah." (**Lauren)**

A consistent finding throughout this stage of the research was that consumers are having their brand perceptions influenced and altered through social engagement. However due to the early stage in the process, consumers highlighted that they were still a long way away from beginning to trust the brand at this stage (see Table 8.6).

Table 8.6: Consumer Responses-Awareness Trust Formation

Consumer Responses-Awareness Trust Formation
"Yeah, I would have a look at those pages. I would view them at a distance. I would not necessarily follow them or like them, or whatever, at that stage. I think I would just use them as a way of finding out a bit more about the brand and other's experience of it." **(Lauren)**
"It definitely gets my attention, but I wouldn't say that I'd completely trust a new company that I haven't bought off before just on an initial search."**(Jane)**
"Nah, no way, I'd need more information, it's a good start don't get me wrong, but I'd look into it more yea." **(Vicky)**

However, in a case where the brand may not be a category leader, (i.e. an e-SME) it could be argued that the effect is more pronounced, and SMBC influence plays a more substantive role than search in influencing brand trust. This suggests that 'search' continues to make a compelling case as a valid recipient for initial investment of e-SME resource. However whilst evidently a less popular first step than search, social media clearly remains important in the process and combining SMBC content alongside 'search' options can benefit an e-SME. The next construct reviews

These responses indicate that SMBCs help non-customers analyse different options before making a purchase decision, which suggests that at this stage of engagement, consumers are within the initial trust phase of e-SME brand trust. This suggests that at this stage consumers are purely interested in analysing the options available before entering the next engagement stage of initial trust, which this research argues is financial motivation which is reviewed in the next section.

8.2 Financial Motivation (CT2)

The netnography findings (Chapters 4 and 5) highlighted that further investigation was required to further understand the main motivations that consumers have in order to begin engaging in e-SME social media brand communities. The suggestion here is that consumers develop stronger relationships with different aspects of brand communities based on their main consumption motivations. Consequently, consumer motivations can act as indicators of the future behaviour of consumers in a social media brand community. From the previous section covering 'Awareness' the findings suggest that consumers will most likely use a search engine to help them find products but respondents also cited the use of search engines as an aid to compare prices, as a source for locating where to buy an item, highlighted in Table 8.7.

Table 8.7: Consumer Responses-Price Search

Consumer Responses-Price Search
"Yea I usually start with google for almost everything online, especially for trying to find the cheapest deals." **(Ewen)**
"I guess I would use google to try and compare prices. I don't think I would think to go to Facebook or Twitter and tend to have a look. Yeah, I probably would just stick to quite a basic Googling thing." (**Jill T)**

By contrast, the motivation for consumers who use social media to conduct preliminary product information gathering was to help them learn about new brands and products highlighted in Table 8.5. These findings indicate that consumers make stronger relationships with different aspects of SMBCs based on their primary consumption motivations. Therefore, motivations can be an indicator of the future behaviour of consumers in a SMBC.

Some of the main motivations that consumers have in order to begin engaging in e-SME SMBCs were previously identified in Chapters 5 and 6. However, in order to further validate these findings, it was important to analyse non-customer enthusiasm for engaging with SMBCs. This theme was explained by consumers in terms of their financial motivation to visit an e-SME's SMBC in the following extracts (Table 8.8) which typifies the respondents' perspectives

Table 8.8 Consumer Responses-Financial Motivation

Consumer Responses-Financial Motivation
"I'll follow a brand if I was going to get ten percent off or something like that."(**Michelle)**
"Now and again, there's been things that ... Like price deals that will come up that I'm interested in and I'll kind of click on them."(**Daniel)**
"I probably wouldn't like ... Unless I would get a discount. I probably wouldn't "Like" something, a page, unless there was something in it for me. Then I might "Like" it. Yeah. Discounts and things like that."(**Paul)**
"At the end it said for an additional chance to win another 500 pounds, click like for our Facebook thing, so I was like okay, I'll click like even though I'm sure nothing will come of It. "(**Wendy)**
"Yes, yes. Or when new products come in and offers for spring sales or 25 percent off. " (**Ewen)**

These findings were in keeping with social capital theory, which predicts that consumers pursue a form of economic value by engaging in a brand community. Despite the motivation

and enthusiasm, respondents were also careful not to let the community visit completely dominate their initial trust process, with examples highlighted in Table 8.9.

Table 8.9 Consumer Responses-Financial Motivation

Consumer Responses-Financial Motivation
"Money off or competitions always get my attention, I'm always looking for a bargain! But at the same time I'm a bit concerned about the quality, you know, as in why is it so cheap." (**Ewen**)
"It doesn't really differentiate or necessarily make me trust a new shop straight away. You go online and nearly every sports retailer is offering you a deal. "**(Sam)**
"Yeah, no, it would. I think it would if I was feeling nervous about buying from something I hadn't heard from, then, yeah, I would have a look at those and then take it from there. Because also, you've just got that whole business of big scam feeling sometimes, with something you hadn't heard of before. It depends on the level of spend you were considering as well. I might do a lot more research before buying something expensive from somewhere that I hadn't heard of, than I would for something that was a tenner." (**Matthew**)

As indicated in Chapter Six, financial incentives to engage with an e-SME were a key motivating factor consumers, and suggested that the different financial reward types required further validation with consumers, to analyse their impact on trust. The outcomes for consumers were the main motivations as to why they would join an e-SME social media brand community, and in the context of this research continue to visit the community and purchase from the brand's online store.

These findings indicate that non-customers are still within the early stages of initial trust when evaluating SMBC financial promotions. The next section reviews the next stage consumer relationships.

8.3 Reputation (CT 3)

As highlighted in Chapter 7, reputation was perceived to be especially important for e-SMEs on social media. As e-SMEs develop their reputation through their SMBC, this aspect of strategy is likely to take on greater significance. For the consumer respondents and non-customers in particular, social media reputation was viewed in terms of the number of followers and their engagement approach from e-SMEs. This is evident in the excerpts provided in Table 8.10.

Table 8.10: Consumer Responses-Social Media Members

Consumer Responses-Social Media Members
"Yea it just makes it a little bit more reassuring. You know, if they have a lot of people following or liking them, they must be decent. " **(Sam)**
"I think I probably would be swayed by that, actually. I can't really say why ... Because you see everyone's friends. It might not even be people that have used the service, but I think if people have bothered to take the time to do either a like or follow ... Yeah, I probably would be swayed a bit by that, but, as I say, I'm not entirely sure. I think it's probably just affirmation in the company." **(Jill T)**
"It's something I just naturally look for. I think it's from the early days when you used to see how many friends people had. That was always an indicator of popularity, so I guess I just transfer it." **(Jane)**

The responses indicate that reputation should increase as number of SMBC members' increases. On SMBCs (e.g. Facebook) where it is possible to assess the number of members prior to viewing a product page, this research suggests that member number might signal utilitarian or informational value – that is, more members is taken to indicate a better (and hence more credible) e-SME brand and product provider. These findings suggest that SMBC reputation matters to consumers for several reasons. It is a key parameter in the supplier selection process by non-customers, thus, consumers are more likely to purchase from e-SMEs with a positive SMBC reputation, and are willing to pay more for their products.

Nevertheless, some respondents suggested that even for non-customers these metrics did not always provide an accurate reflection of reputation and effectively a trust measure for the brand, referenced in Table 8.11.

Table 8.11: Consumer Responses-Social Media Members Scepticism

Consumer Responses-Social Media Members Scepticism
"You go on some brands pages and they've got thousands of followers, which is all very well and good, but how many do I look for before I definitely trust them? I've no idea, pick a number, you know is a brand with 20000 likes twice as trustworthy as one with 10000?" **(Ewen)**
"I guess it helps but I've heard you can buy followers these days so how many of these people are actually real?" **(Matthew)**

The significance of the strategic approach was also key for reputation building. This was reflected by respondents describing the tactics that some brands undertook in Table 8.12.

Table 8.12: Consumer Responses-Social Media Reputation Approach

Consumer Responses-Social Media Reputation Approach
"I think another thing as well, I follow a couple of companies on Twitter and I get a little bit fed up with it. They just constantly tweet the same thing and promote the same part of their service again and again and again. I think "Well, I might check my Twitter account quite a few times a day. I don't need to see the same message being tweeted over and over again because I'm using Twitter." **(Jill T)**
"I think when some companies use social media to spread awareness with such campaigns and then what they're offering actually doesn't happen, then you soon become much more disengaged and not interested. Once you can't do that, then I'm not interested in being in contact via online or social media methods." **(Sam)**
"Only if they don't use them properly, I suppose. I think the ultimate answer is, I can't think that there's any disadvantages, but there can only be advantages from trying to engage with your customers, and trying to use social media. I think if you're not doing it right, then I suppose that's where the disadvantages might come in." **(Michelle)**

This suggests that e-SMEs must continuously review their strategy to ensure that when they do post content they must ensure that it is varied as messages of a repetitive nature may cause consumers to become disengaged. Consumers also cited how they felt about e-SMEs actively looking to engage with them and using this approach to enhance their reputation (see Table 8.13).

Table 8.13: Consumer Responses-Social Media Reputation Engagement

Consumer responses-Social Media Reputation Engagement
"I think it can be great at times. Sometimes they'll make suggestions to on twitter, but I think it's a fine line from suggestions to being pushy. "**(Vicky)**
"Does it show they care and are interested? I think so, but it depends on how they go about it. It's like salespeople coming up to you in a shop. You like that they've approached you and you know it's their job but at the same time you want to feel in control. " **(Matthew)**

Whilst this approach was not considered appropriate for some respondents, some consumers (as non-customers) were completely put off by the idea of e-SMEs searching for them discussing products and contacting them, with example responses presented in Table 8.14.

Table 8.14: Consumer Responses-Social Media Negative Engagement

Consumer Responses-Social Media Negative Engagement
"Yeah, yeah. I do feel it is a bit creepy. Almost like big brother is watching you. It's almost ridiculous those ads come up in seconds because I've already liked an item, already. Then after I've done that, I've gone on to this blog and then I'm getting adverts for it when I've already searched for it." (**Paul M)**
"It's a little bit like the wrong way around, I'd rather see adverts for stuff that I haven't thought of buying in the first place. Do you know what I mean?" **(Roxy)**
"They're a bit annoying so I do skim past them. Sometimes they seem a bit random and sometimes, it sounds silly but, it's a bit spooky because I might have been looking at something or browsing for something I already have in my mind I wanted to browse. All of a sudden, I got on Facebook and it's got some random little suggested ads." **(Jane)**

The proliferation of social media use amongst organisations has raised questions about the effects of their social media efforts, particularly with regard to the effects on corporate reputation.

This thesis provides an important contribution by investigating how SMBC engagement is connected to consumer perceptions of e-SME corporate reputation among customers and noncustomers. Consumers who choose to follow an SMBC created by an e-SME are exposed to both content placed by brand and the responses to these posts, and to the questions, complaints and remarks posted mainly by customers and often followed by a response by the e-SME. It could be argued that witnessing customers complain about an e-SME's services, negatively affects the evaluation of the company. However, previous studies have shown that witnessing a company responding to customer complaints in social media affects the evaluation of this company. This research found this to be the case for consumers with excerpts highlighted in Table 8.15.

Table 8.15: Consumer Responses-Consumer Problem Resolution

Consumer Responses-Consumer Problem Resolution
"I'm pretty realistic to be honest, you know sometimes orders go wrong, but I like seeing companies do everything they can to fix issues." (**Roxy)**
"Yea I like it when they're just honest with you and sort things out as soon as possible. Those examples come up on my timeline. It's just reassuring to know that if something ever went wrong with my order they'd sort it." **(Paul T)**

In summary, this section of the research highlights the problematic areas of social media from an e-SME's point of view, particularly the issue of when to interact with non-customers in order to develop initial trust. Since SMBCs are able to expand reach and increase speed of response for consumers, e-SMEs need to ensure that they have comprehensive policies in place for these strategic measures. The respondents indicated that whilst this approach can be favourable as it demonstrates support, e-SMEs must be wary not to actively enforce their products or opinions on consumers or risk developing a negative reputation. The aspect of followers or community members enhancing reputation was also referenced. Whilst the metrics connected to a community (likes, followers) did form part of the initial review process for reputation, it was met with some scepticism as there is no definitive numbers of members which signifies trust, and consumers just view them as an initial indicator. This further reinforces that at this stage of engagement, initial trust is still present.

8.4 Connection (CT4)

The connection between e-WOM in SMBCs and consumers' trust towards an e-SME brand's product or services, have changed the landscape for e-SMEs to develop their brand and reputation in the online retail environment. The next theme concerns e-WOM and its impact on non-customers trusting an e-SME and moving toward continual trust. Developing a consumer connection was perceived to be essential in e-SME trust development and this aspect was highlighted in the responses in Table 8.16, when asked about what other consumers say about brands on various social media or communities and reviews of products or services supplied by e-SMEs.

Table 8.16: Consumer Responses-Connection

Consumer Responses-Connection
"If I'm purchasing from a company I've not use before, I will look at reviews of the product that people have on Facebook or something." (**Mary)**
"If I notice that there's quite a few negative ones or even if they're not all very amazing, then it does alter my decision. I tend to go with things that have consistent good reviews or good write-ups or good recommendations. " **(Michelle)**
"Absolutely, yeah. If I have a point of experience for purchasing, I'd definitely go back and I'd definitely use them again or I'd recommend them to people." (**Tom)**

This suggests that from a non-customer perspective, comments provided by other consumers become the e-WOM circulated in the SMBC and are effectively another type of review platform as referenced in CT1. The e-WOM shared within the SMBC aids the evaluation process by aggregating and disseminating mutual experiences. However, when asked the importance

they place in a fellow consumer promoting a product or telling about an experience, than you would with a company who just actively tried to start a conversation or talk about the specifics of a product and its benefits. Respondents highlighted elements of scepticism in Table 8.17.

Table 8.17: Consumer Responses- E-WOM

Consumer Responses- E-WOM
"For me, even if a company approached me and it was something I was interested in, I would still need something else to make me confident to make that purchase." **(Paul)**
"It could just be perhaps even an endorsement from a public figure that I respect or it could be the reviews of customers that have used them. The only problem with that is the way reviews are posted, you don't always know that you're actually getting genuine people's views." **(Tom)**
I think, to an extent, you've got to just go with your feeling. If you think that the company has been presenting itself quite professionally and then you make a purchase, and then the service you receive from them is good, then you will go again. That will give you confidence." **(Lauren)**
"If they're worth following, they're worth being interested in." If, I suppose, you receive bad service, then you just wouldn't bother again. I wouldn't bother again." (**Matthew)**

One further aspect that was highlighted was the scenario where community membership or social media comments could impact consumer's professional career. This was highlighted in Table 8.18.

Table 8.18: Consumer Responses-Positive E-WOM

Consumer Responses-Positive E-WOM
"Usually if there's a load of retweets which show good service or products it's a good sign. If it's on Twitter, you can even click on that person's profile to see how genuine it is." **(Wendy)**
"If one of my mates shares a company or product on Facebook, that's usually good enough for me." **(Paul)**
"I don't know, a lot of the sports brands I follow post pics of consumers using their products, I always think that looks really cool." **(Matthew)**

This factor suggests that e-SMEs must be careful when instigating and encouraging engagement to develop trust when requesting personal opinion. From the key informant interviews, further analysis was required to establish the importance consumer's place on privacy and security within SMBCs. In the context of SMBCs, this relates to the initial trust of a non-customer when they share their identity and personal information with an e-SME brand.

Based on the findings from the respondents, it could be argued that when a non- customer views a lot of positive e-WOM on the brand's SMBC they will have a positive expectation about

the quality of the service to be provided by the e-SME. Indeed, this positive expectation could then lead the consumer to feel confident about purchasing this product from the organisation.

Conversely, if a consumer views significant negative e-WOM on an SMBC they could develop a negative expectation about the standard of the product or service from the service from the organisation, as indicated below in Table 8.19.

Table 8.19: Consumer Responses-Negative E-WOM

Consumer Responses-Negative E-WOM
"Yea if I didn't know the company and had a look on their Facebook page and it's bombarded with negative posts or loads saying don't use these guys, I'd turn off straight away. It's weird? Even though I don't know these guys, I don't want that happening to me." **(Vicky)**
"In the past I've just typed a company's name into the search on Twitter. If there's loads of bad stuff on there about them, I just reckon it's not worth the risk." **(Roxy)**

The responses suggest that negative e-WOM reduces non-customer trust for an e-SME as well as eventual purchase intention. These findings argue that e-WOM connection impacts trust and purchase intention across SMBCs in that e-WOM has a significant impact on the trust on an e-SME SMBC.

This research also argues that positive e-WOM has a positive impact on consumers' initial trust on a product or service (i.e. non-customers) and serves to reinforce the continual trust with existing customers. In contrast, negative e-WOM has a negative impact on new customers and weakens continual trust with existing customers. However, brands that were seen to be handling consumer grievances within their SMBC received positive recognition from consumers.

In summary, this section of the study will assist e-SMEs to develop their social media strategy when targeting non-customers and customers through e-WOM on social media, based on the theoretical model developed. Secondly e-SMEs are able to gain insight into product development by utilising consumer insight by reviewing consumer conversations on SMBCs. The obvious implication for e-SMEs is to maintain a 'strong' SMBC presence by posting important and relevant product information. Also as with other forms of e-WOM, respondents were more likely to click through to the suggested product page if the SMBC content was engaging. Therefore, this thesis argues that it is critical for e-SMEs to not only develop provocative and unique message content that their followers can disseminate to networks of friends that may be non-customers, but also to refresh this content on a regular basis. The next section reviews consumer perception of value creation on social media.

8.5 Value Creation (CT5)

The netnography (Chapters 4 and 5) highlighted the need for further investigation regarding the types of posts that create value for consumers. The theme value creation involves the experience consumers have when they visit the SMBC concerning obtaining the necessary information or skills to better use the product of their favourite brand. The key informant interviews identified areas such as the consumer perception of value created when visiting an e-SME SMBC as well as the emotional meaning or interpretation of the posts. As well as the impact and effectiveness of visuals to develop trust. From a strategic aspect, respondents were asked the type of content that provides value and the format it is presented in Table 8.20.

Table 8.20: Consumer Responses-Video and Image Content

Consumer Responses-Video and Image content
I think some of them do post videos on, say for example if it's a new piece of gym kit or if it's ... I'm just trying to think, but on the whole it just tends to be still images rather than videos." (**Mary**)
"Facebook, to be honest with you, what catches my eye more on Facebook is photos." **(Roxy)**
"I always love seeing images of running locations, it gets me excited thinking about my next run." (**Michelle**)
"Seeing pictures of people using the products like football boots always seems to convince me of their quality, especially if it's professional stars like Sturridge or Sterling." **(Paul)**

The importance of 'knowledge' provision was also highlighted by respondents when discussing value, with example excerpts provided in Table 8.21.

Table 8.21: Consumer Responses-Knowledge Provision

Consumer Responses-Video and Image content
"I love reading blogs with tips on how to improve my swing when I play golf, and the latest scientific updates with golf technology, it's great to have them come up on my twitter wall when I'm on lunch." (**Jane**)
"Yea videos showing how to use products, or even running advice is brilliant." **(Vicky)**
"I tend to trust and respect the brands that know what they're talking about. You usually get this in the way of blogs. It just shows to me that they're experts and their staff have a passion for running too" (**Lauren**)

The value creation theme linked strongly to the consumer respondents need to join a brand community to fulfil the need for identification with symbols and groups. This supports social

identity theory whereby consumers share their passion and receive pleasure from participating in brand communities, exemplified in Table 8.22.

Table 8.22: Consumer Responses-Value from Interaction

Consumer responses-Value from interaction
"One time I messaged a guy on a small company's Facebook page, just asking him what he thought of the trainers he'd bought. I saw he posted a comment saying thanks and that they were really good. He just got back and said they were really good value, which was cool"- **(Daniel)**
I couldn't believe I got these ace pair of Nike footy boots so I just tweeted the company saying cheers! I shared the site link on my Facebook, as I thought some of the lads in my team would wanna know that this company were really cheap. "(**Ewen)**

These responses also related to the concept of value co-creation where the value of a service or a product is not created solely by the e-SME, but co-created by the e-SME and the consumer of the product or the service. However the brand community platform was also highlighted as an aspect of value co-creation in terms of convenience of access. When asked if the platform format influenced the type of social media they followed brands on, respondents indicated (see Table 8.23).

Table 8.23: Consumer Responses-Platform Considerations

Consumer Responses-Platform Considerations
"I think it totally is, it's so convenient and short, and I can see it whenever I want. It's easy to scan it, it's easy for me to scan through and see something that I think is relevant for me. " (**Daniel)**
Yeah, it totally is a convenience aspect, probably. Because I've also selected to follow, it kind of already fell to what I'm interested in." **(Sam)**
"It's mainly Twitter. I don't, I actually quit using my Facebook and cleared it. I was only ever on Facebook, I would maybe only ever follow, maybe like small businesses, or local restaurants. I would never, I probably don't go for the big brands anymore, because they're clogging up my feeds." (**Jill T)**
"Yeah, I must admit I'm probably the same. I might see something during the day and think that looks interesting but I'll have a look at it later, it tends to be during my lunch hour and during the day. I don't tend to spend much time on them. It's more clicking in and out rather than spending any length of time on them". (**Mary)**

The next section reviews the value creation sub theme emotion consumers experience when engaging with social media platforms and how this leads to trust.

8.5.1 Emotion

Previously Payne et al. (2008) argued that consumers' emotional engagement with a brand encourages consumers to co create value. This was evident when responses cited emotion such as humour and in the sport retail context exhilaration, as a key part of engaging social media content reflected in Table 8.24

Table 8.24: Consumer Responses-Social Media Emotion

Consumer Responses-Social Media Emotion
"Yeah I think it's good when they incorporate a bit of humour into it and sometimes it can be completely random posts on events that have been going on." (**Ewen**)
"Twitter, I like because most of the time it is quite comical." (**Roxy**)
"Yeah, disguised, definitely humorous or something like that. Or if there was a story behind it, or reason, you know, with that product, "Oh this person just completed the marathon, and this is ...I'd rather that there was something behind it. I don't like getting bombarded with straight product info." (**Paul**)

The findings from this research suggest that the consumer learning process in the customer value-creating processes helps a consumer to gain a better understanding about the brand and engage in the product or service provided by the e-SME. This aspect relates to the initial consumer trust which affects the value co-creation is the trust that the consumer will experience and provide value each time they visit the SMBC. In summary an e-SME creates and maintains and SMBC to enhance its brand for their products and share product information as the input for value co-creation. If no consumers view and use the SMBC, the community will have no value at all for new and existing customers as well as the e-SME. However, when consumers visit and use the SMBC to obtain information about the product and provide their comments on it, the consumers' actions will effectively co-create the value of this community. From the e-SME viewpoint, a consumer engages in an SMBC by viewing content and sharing opinions about the brand's products, which provides an opportunity for the firm to create value with the consumer.

This section of the thesis supports previous findings from the extant literature highlighted in Chapter Two which outline the requirement for e-SMEs to consider the emotional perspective, if they intend for non-customers to develop long relationships with the brand, where the brand construct is extended as a central tenant within brand communities, as a conveyor of an emotional brand story, and a basis for an intimate brand customer relationship.

The findings in this thesis extend the concept of value creation being linked to emotion in a social media context. However, this study also stresses that value creation for e-SMEs should

be a flexible aspect in order to execute trust development, due to the subjective nature of consumer emotion.

The next section reviews consumer perception of credibility.

8.6 Credibility (CT6)

From a consumer perspective, credibility is a person's belief that the firm has the ability to provide the products and services in an acceptable way. With regard to an SMBC, it is about the belief of a consumer that the e-SME is able to deliver the product or service to her in an acceptable way, from the content available on an organisation's SMBC. Following on from the previous theme, such beliefs can strengthen or damaged an e-SME as the comments provided by prior consumers of the service will help other consumers to estimate the competence of the organisation. Organisational credibility has gained increasing academic interest recently in relation to social media. Establishing credibility is perceived as a key factor in creating and developing trust, yet few studies have focused on leveraging this aspect of trust in an e-SME e-social media setting. From the key informant interviews a key theme focussed on the perception of e-SME product/service delivery on trust development and social media communication methods to demonstrate expertise. Additionally, customers view social media sites as a service channel, where they can engage on real-time basis with the businesses. This theme was found to be particularly pertinent for non-customers, and links into the theme of service delivery (Chapter Five) as well as the key informant interview themes (Chapter Four) concerning the reliability of e-SME social media posts, and the strength of personal or random consumer recommendation for service delivery. Therefore, e-WOM shown in the fans page can strengthen or weaken such belief. If fellow consumers of the e-SME brand leave positive comments (i.e., positive e-WOM) in the firm's SMBC, these comments will then strengthen other consumers' belief that the firm has the competence to deliver the product or service as stated. However, if there are a lot of negative comments (i.e., negative e-WOM), such belief could potentially diminish. This was supported by the consumer view that if consumers ever had a complaint about an organisation, they would go on social media to let them know about their complaint, with exemplary responses in Table 8.25.

Table 8.25: Consumer Responses-Social Media Complaints

Consumer responses-Social media complaints
"I was on a sports retailer's site once and the service was really poor. I commented on their Facebook page. Nobody responded but, I just thought that maybe they would try and sort something out. I thought that maybe they'd come back and sort the situation out, but they didn't. Or, they'd try and make, slightly, make things better. But, no nothing." **(Mary)**
"I've noticed with smaller organisations I shop with and follow that as soon as anything goes on public domain, such as Facebook, they want to try and sort it out straight away because they don't want a negative perception of the company and things like that." **(Ewen)**
"The only other time that I'd be inclined to complain on social media, would be if I tried phoning them, and they didn't answer the phone, and I tried e-mailing them, and they didn't answer the e-mail." **(Vicky)**

Due to these findings it could be argued that e-WOM based credibility factors in SMBCs directly impact non-customers' trust for an e-SME brand, and at this stage of engagement, prior to purchase, they are still within the initial trust phase for e-SME brand trust.

8.6.1 Security

Trust in social media platform has an impact on the brands using the platform, whereby e-SME brand SMBC trust two aspects, structural assurance and situational normality. Structural assurance relates to consumers who believe that secure operational structures (ordering, delivery etc.) are already in place. Within SMBCs it is the belief of a number of consumers, within this research that protective measures, such as the legal protection and technological design of the community, can protect them from problems in sharing information to aid trust and assist the purchase decision. This is exemplified in Table 8.26.

Table 8.26: Consumer Responses-Security

Consumer Responses-Security
"Yes it's crucial to me that I feel secure that any new company I use will store my bank details safely." (**Jane R)**
"Absolutely, you look for the registered trademarks and stuff, but if you've never used them before this always a bit of doubt."(**Sam)**

Security issues in e-commerce are related to the abilities of e-SMEs to protect their online transaction systems. The findings indicate that consumers consider security as an important factor when purchasing goods or services on the Internet. For this reason, seals of approval, which are perceived as indicators of security by consumers, need to be adopted by SMBCs

which can have positive effects on trustworthiness for non-customers. This suggests that trust in the Internet is chiefly influenced by the security consumers perceive with respect to the use of their private data. This implies that in order to connect with consumers and create continual trust, e-SMEs need to make privacy and security an actionable priority within their social media strategy and as such are required to devote resources.

8.7 Relationships (CT 7)

Creating lasting consumer relationships is a key focus for e-SMEs brands social media activity as organisations strive to get a bigger share of customers' attention and engagement in their communities.

8.7.1 Satisfaction

At this stage in the engagement and trust formation process, the findings indicated that once non-customers have experienced themes 1-6 they are content with their initial trust and move toward continual trust by developing a relationship with the e-SME.

Highlighted in the key informant interviews, the consumer perception of satisfaction and their intention to share on social media was unanimously upheld as a key aspect of trust creation and development across all respondents (see Table 8.27).

Table 8.27: Consumer Responses-Satisfaction

Consumer responses-Satisfaction
"If I'm happy with what I've gone through, then yea I'd definitely tweet saying they were awesome."(**Mary**)
"I've had it before when I've been totally blown away by the service I've received! Yea it makes me trust them as I'd go to them again, but I also want to let other customers know to use these guys! When I've tweeted them they usually always respond thanking me for my thank you, if that makes sense." (**Paul**)

The findings indicate that if interactions between an e-SME and a customer, or among the members of an SMBC result in satisfaction will they stay connected and continue to interact with one another and progress towards continual trust. This links the concept of satisfaction as a trust indicator to themes of Credibility (SMT 2) and Service Delivery (SMT 7). The next stage discusses the relationship formed through this level of engagement

The consumer responses suggest that enhanced relationships between customers and brand e-SMEs could increase e-SME brand continual trust. As customers now experience repeated interactions and long term relationships were seen as key in developing trust (Holmes, 1991). Developing relationships through SMBC engagement was also viewed to increase

relationships and between the e-SME and consumers so that brand trust is positively affected. These elements are exemplified in the excerpts presented in Table 8.28.

Table 8.28: Consumer Responses-Social Media Relationships

Consumer Responses-Social Media Relationships
"I think social media is a good starting point, and I think it's a place to direct people to. I think part of the problem with social media. Its word of mouth a lot of it, isn't it? I think, in a sense, you have to be known in the right circles already for you to reach a wider audience." **(Michelle)**
"Things like Twitter, it's all about how many followers you can get logging into your Twitter account and reading your tweets." **(Wendy)**
"I think if you use other methods combined with social media as a backup and to support and as a place that people can go to once you've made that original contact, then that keeps them interested. I think it also shows that the company is progressive and in touch with how people are communicating currently, but I don't think it's the best way to start off." **(Jill T)**
"Yeah, definitely, because I think with all the different platforms that there are, people can get the brand in people's face on a different variety of platforms, and then therefore you're connecting that brand, going in a way that if you, depending on what the problem was I suppose, but if you were buying, you wouldn't necessarily buy the name." **(Vicky)**

However, it is important to highlight that consumers vary in terms of their engagement with SMBCs, as they can spend minutes or hours each day viewing and sharing social media content. As highlighted in the 'reputation' theme, it would perhaps be an oversimplification to believe that whoever follows a brand or becomes a member of a community in anyway would be heavily influenced by the brand community. This was evident in the following excerpts presented in Table 8.29.

Table 8.29: Consumer Responses-Social Media Relationships

Consumer Responses-Social Media Relationships
"Yea I'll follow or like a brand but I don't know if that means I have a relationship with them? I'd tend to think that a relationship is something that lasts over time." (**Matthew**)
"I've always considered loyalty to be a key part of a relationship. I honestly don't know how loyal I am these days? I'm just always looking for the best deal." **(Vicky)**

These findings argue that members' activity varies greatly according to their engagement with an e-SME SMBC and have differing attitudes toward the organisation according to their motivations to become a member of their community. This suggests have to consistently monitor consumer attitudes by evaluating the impact of certain SMBC content.

As highlighted previously in the engagement theme 'motivation' (ET 2) some consumers join to receive support, discover information, and learn and improve their skills and knowledge about the products, and some for entertainment or to convey their complaints. Consumers may also join as they were recommended to by other friends on their social network.

It could be argued that the effects of these relationships on brand trust should be stronger for customers who are highly engaged (continual trust) in the SMBC, compared to those with low engagement (Initial trust). Considering the two aspects of trust creation and enhancement, it could be argued that higher engaged members with continual trust for the e-SME brand gain more information about the brand, and as a result would be less inclined to search for alternative brands.

Therefore this research argues that brand engagement has a moderating role in translating the effect of brand community elements to brand trust. This section of the research empirically supports the benefits of social media relationships such as the stronger relationships consumers form with the brand, the product, other consumers and the e-SME. The findings from this section of the research provide detailed insights on how engagement with an e-SME's SMBC create and develop trust. When developing a relationship with consumers on social media consumer empowerment is key. Consumers' connectivity (Theme ET 3) and co creation of value (Theme SMT 1) make relationships stronger so that they expect more from e-SME brands.

The analysis suggests that in order to avoid negative trust effects of from consumer empowerment, e-SME brands should encourage and facilitate conversations, and not interrupt them or seek to manipulate them. As there would inevitably be some negative comments about the brand, this can negate the effect of such consumer-brand relationships on trust. A consumer can join an SMBC by pressing the 'Like' or 'Follow' button. In this respect, brand communities based on social media are different from traditional brand communities for which only brand owners and those who already trust the brand could become members. However, this research argues that 'liking' a community is within the stages of initial trust and when consumers continually trust the brand, they participate in the e-SME SMBC developing and building relationships.

The findings argue that consumer engagement requires the establishment of trust and commitment in e-SME and consumer relationships. Calculative commitment is achieved at the financial motivation stage but when customers achieve affective commitment, an emotional bond between e-SME is formed which encapsulates the trust and reciprocity in a relationship. Therefore this thesis advocates that trust and commitment will likely result in customer engagement.

These aspects were also linked closely to the engagement concept of satisfaction (ET 8) whereby satisfaction is key to continuous engagement as well as the concept of e-SME brand continual trust, extending knowledge into a social media context. The concept of satisfaction as a sustainable strategy for organisations has received support in the literature. This section of the research therefore puts forward that by adopting this strategy provides e-SMEs with greater organisational flexibility, advocating a planning framework that allows manageable processes in order to avoid stretching resources.

In summary, the concept of satisfaction as a trust indicator on e-SMEs SMBCs is a theme which has begun to appear more prominently in the recent literature as a key asset for e-SMEs and a key source of advantage over larger organisations. Consequently this research extends these concepts deeper into the e-SME and online retailing environment and contextualizes these themes into a more holistic view of consumer trust and suggests this process provides good foundations for social media engagement strategy. The next section reviews consumer perception of relationships formed and sustained on social media.

As the findings suggest in the value co creation theme emotional and informational interactions are natural consequences of one's participation in online interactions, positively influence trust.

This thesis emphasises the role of e-SME social media communities and engaging customers with content to create and develop trust. The findings argue that brand community relationships enhance brand trust and engaged customers develop lasting relationships with the e-SME. When it comes to analysing community success in social media, and the impact of relationships there can often be a gap between the objectives (as highlighted in Chapter 7) of the community for the e-SME and what is actually being measured. Such as number of active users, posts, or visitors. This suggests that e-SMEs should be more sensitive to other measures such as relationships built on consumer-brand trust. The next section further reviews the consumer perception of loyalty.

8.8 Loyalty (CT 8)

Following on from the aspect of continual trust from Chapter Five (This section of the research highlights how e-SMEs can sustain continual trust once it has been obtained. According to the recent loyalty and trust literature, trust is one of the main antecedents of consumer loyalty. Previous research is in agreement that one of the main consequences of building and enhancing brand communities and consumer engagement within the context of a SMBC is to make customers loyal to the brand. However, despite previous research and other qualitative evidence, it is still not clear how the process of increasing brand loyalty in brand communities looks like. Considering that online communities, as a social structure, have positive effects on

trust and loyalty, this research argues that relationships developed through SMBC engagement increases brand continual trust, which has a positive effect on e-SME brand loyalty.

This thesis argues that two sub themes comprise consumer loyalty through which enhanced relationships between customers and e-SMEs could enhance brand trust. First, repeat visits serve to develop relationships with customers and aspects of SMBC can increase relationships and connections between the brand and customers so that brand trust would be positively affected. Furthermore, relationship enhancement occurs concurrently with knowledge sharing and dissemination between different elements of the SMBC, which decreases information asymmetry, reduces uncertainty and increases predictability of the brand which can increase trust.

Loyalty was one of the key themes which consumers expressed as critical to e-SME brand trust in terms of how e-SMEs reward loyalty and consumer perceived benefits of loyalty to an e-SME in accordance with the key informant themes. This led to consumers returning to the SMBC and subsequently continuing to purchase from the e-SME, with exemplary responses highlighted in Table 8.30.

Table 8.30: Consumer Responses-Social Media Loyalty

Consumer Responses-Social Media Loyalty
"I think in this day and age, all organizations need to show that they have a decent online presence and that they are aware of social media, but I don't think they should just do it for the sake of it. I think they need to be doing it correctly, and I think they need to demonstrate that they're using it effectively for the audience they are trying to target." **(Michelle)**
"I think if I was logging on, or using Twitter or Facebook or Pinterest or anything else like that, I'll always look on brand pages or posts where I've had a good experience." **(Jill)**
"I would think then this company is on the ball, and they're up to date with what is going on in that particular field. That makes me feel confident as a consumer that I'm buying from somebody that is knowledgeable. As I said, I think some of that would need to be established before you actually went on Twitter. That's just me." **(Ewen)**

Recent loyalty and trust literatures state that trust is one of the main antecedents of loyalty. Considering that SMBCs arguably act as a social structure and have positive effects on trust and loyalty, the responses in Table 8.31 suggest that consistent 'value' focussed content enhanced relationships developed within brand SMBCs which can sustain continual trust, and have a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Table 8.31: Consumer Responses-Social Media Loyalty and Value

Consumer Responses-Social Media Loyalty and Trust
"If I keep getting entertained, I'll keep going back, it's that simple really. Some brands that I follow I don't even think about it. One sports brand I follow on twitter always posts great blogs on healthy diets so I'll always visit their twitter feed." **(Ewen)**
" Yea I mean if you go onto Facebook and you're receiving posts on your wall with funny or informative stuff, you're always gonna visit their page and see what offers they have."**(Jill)**
"I'm definitely brand loyal, but they've got to keep me interested or I'll soon get bored. But with great brands that provide things like blogs or info videos, I'll always recommend them to my friends! Mostly so I can take credit." **(Roxy)**

These comments suggest that SMBCs enable consumers to share information with fellow consumers about the product and services and increase brand loyalty through networking, conversation, and community building. However it was also important to highlight that all respondents referenced a desire to continue to receive financial incentives as well as 'value' content in order to continue to visit the SMBC and remain loyal to an e-SME, with example excerpts reflected in Table 8.32.

Table 8.32: Consumer Responses-Social Media Loyalty and Financial Incentives

Consumer Responses-Social Media Loyalty and Financial Incentives
"Yea I love reading all the product tips and things like that but there's so many offers out there I think that brands need to also provide savings for loyal customers too" **(Paul)**
"There's nothing that frustrates me more than discounts for new customers posted on Facebook pages, that makes me want to shop elsewhere, you know I should be entitled to discounts too."**(Jane)**
"To be honest I think it's a combination of being excited by a brand and getting a good deal, if I get both of those and brands promote this too me on their pages I'll remain loyal and continue to trust their services ." **(Tom)**

This thesis therefore argues that that in order for continual trust to be sustained a combination of value and financial engagement posts should be the main focus for e-SME content in order to keep both non-customers and customers engaged.

Consumers who are exposed to excessive brand messages on social media communities eventually filter out the content that is not relevant to them, highlighted in Table 8.33.

Table 8.33: Consumer Responses- Excessive Posts

Consumer Responses- Excessive Posts
"There's loads on their whenever you log on, so it's gotta be something that grabs me straight away, I think this is a skill in itself! I mean the language that they use to grab your attention." **(Mary)**
"Yea the more current I think the tweet is, the more it grabs my attention." **(Ewen)**

The findings advocate that providing relevant and updated content is one of the most crucial strategies to manage a brand on social media successfully. Popularity of the social media platform and the content among friends is another important reason for the customers to be engaged with brands on social media.

The responses suggest that SMBCs can enhance brand trust and loyalty by improving customer relationship with the brand, other consumers, and the e-SME. The findings are consistent with previous research that found participation in SMBCs positively influences brand loyalty.

8.9 Practical Considerations

E-SMEs that want to run effective SMBCs need to evaluate the benefits and advantages that they offer to the new and existing customers in their campaigns, in order to make consumers loyal to their brand. The findings suggest that brand trust is affected by service offerings that are offered by the e-SME on social media, which may imply that consumers are looking for creative content, financial incentives, variety, and differences for engaging with their brands on social media.

Relevancy was also an important factor influencing brand trust in terms of appropriate and relevant content for a sports SMBC. Consequently e-SMEs must keep up to date with consumer interest, interests and perspectives of the industry. This also supports the findings in Chapter Seven, 'utilising awareness and 'motivation.

8.10 Theoretical contribution

This section of the thesis contributes to the existing brand community and social media literatures and provides its own theoretical implications as well. Firstly the conceptual roadmap developed demonstrates how an SMBC can affect consumer brand loyalty. The role of continual brand trust as a destination of these effects was identified, an aspect which was mostly neglected in previous studies. This thesis extends the concept of brand community within social media for e-SMEs, thereby providing academics with further insight for brands operating in social media environments.

8.11 Conceptual Frameworks

This section conceptualises the findings from the analysis and presents a framework of key themes pertinent to consumer trust creation on social media brand communities. The findings are constructed into a format involving over-riding main themes and contributory sub-themes involved in the process of creating trust for an e-SME brand. Presented in Table 8.34 are the six themes which have emerged as crucial to the creation initial trust, followed by two concepts to develop continual trust. Seventeen sub themes (T1-17) from the eight overarching themes are also included in the framework. These eight overarching themes are perceived to create and develop initial and continual trust from consumers for an e-SME brand.

Table 8.34: Consumer Trust Constructs

Theme	Construct	Sub Theme	Trust Stage	Consumer
CT1	Awareness	Information search (TI 1)	Initial	Non-Customer
CT2	Motivation	Financial competitions, sales, discounts (TI2)	Initial	Non-Customer
CT3	Reputation	Community members (TI 3)	Initial	Non-Customer
CT4	Connection	Consumer e-WOM (TI 4)	Initial	Non-Customer
CT5	Value Creation	Content (TI 5) Emotion (T6) Time (T7) Format (TI 8) Visuals (TI 9) Platforms (TI 10)	Initial	Non-Customer
CT6	Credibility	Service delivery (TI 11) Expertise (TI 12) Privacy and Security (TI 13)	Initial	Non-Customer
CT7	Relationship	Satisfaction (TI14) Endorsement (TI 15)	Continual	Customer
CT8	Loyalty	Relevance (T16) Repeat visits (TI 17)	Continual	Customer

The trust concepts are conceptualised into a roadmap for trust from social media engagement. Each of the sub themes for trust (T1-17) are aligned with an overarching theme to display a framework of trust formation for e-SME SMBCs and are displayed in Figure 8.2.

Given the evolving nature of social media research, particularly for e-SME brand trust, it is crucial to analyse the overall picture and therefore the significance to consumers of each construct is not measured, yet this presents an opportunity for future research. Figure 8.2 displays the penetration of themes across the hierarchy.

Figure 8.2 Consumer Trust Framework

CT1- Awareness	Information search (TI 1)				
CT2- Financial Motivation	Competitions, Sales, Discounts (TI2)				
CT3- Reputation	Community Members (TI 3)				
CT4- Connection	Consumer E-WOM (TI 4)				
CT5- Value Creation	Content (TI 5)	Emotion (TI 6)	Visuals (TI 9)	Time (TI 7)	Platforms (TI 10) · Format (TI 8)
CT6- Credibility	Service Delivery (TI 11)		Expertise (TI 12)		Security (TI 13)
Initial Consumer Trust					
CT7- Relationship	Satisfaction (TI 14)			Endorsement (TI 15)	
CT7- Loyalty	Relevance (TI 16)			Repeat Visits (TI 17)	
Continual Trust					

A number of inter-relationships exist within the framework as trust is not created from any one theme in isolation, but as a combination of themes working together. This relationship is demonstrated by the connecting lines in the conceptual roadmap. The literature reviewed in chapter two highlighted the significance of trust creation from a number of recent studies, and further academic research was called for and as a result, this research in contrast, has found eight themes are perceived by consumers that collectively create initial and sustain continual consumer trust in an e-SME brand. As well as 17 sub themes that comprise consumer engagement.

These findings present a rich picture of current social media consumer perception adding a holistic dimension to the online trust creation literature. Consequently, findings and analysis support that future research explore this topic from a wider perspective.

In contrast to existing publications, this section of the research provides a framework which demonstrates the prominence of the trust thematic indicators from consumer perceptions of e-SME SMBCs. A framework of this nature could be a useful tool for e-SMEs in relation to their strategic focus for social media content across different stages of trust and customer acquisition and retention.

8.12 Chapter Summary

Achieving consumer continual trust through consumer engagement requires facilitating consumers' transition through eight stages in the framework. The importance of SMBC

engagement has primarily been recognised in the recent literature as a method to build enduring consumer relational exchanges with strong emotional connections. By formulating a conceptual framework of trust through SMBC customer engagement we provide the basis for the development of e-SME customer engagement strategies using social media platforms that focus on customers to provide value. This thesis also helps e-SME practitioners in their involvement with social media. The vast reach, being placeless, having low cost, and the popularity of social media motivate e-SMEs to try to take advantage of it in different ways. The framework and findings show that with creating and enhancing brand communities based on social media, and by facilitating feelings of value, information sharing, as well as financial rewards strengthen the social bonds among non-customers and customers to increase brand continual trust.

As highlighted in the engagement and trust framework model (Chapter Five: Figure 5.18) the finishes with consumer continual trust. However the findings from this section of the research argue that in order for trust to be continual and engagement to be consistent, e-SMEs must consistently provide value and financial SMBC posts. This issue will be further reviewed in Chapter Nine.

9. Discussion of the findings and analysis

9.1. E-SME Social Media Trust Constructs

The first research objective sought to identify the constructs that develop consumer online trust for e-SME brands using social media communities. Previous research investigating trust in social media communities has focussed on different trust sources and types in an effort to explain trust-related decision making by consumers (Habibi et al., 2014; Zaglia, 2013; Turban et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the literature review highlighted that little empirical research has been conducted specifically for e-SMEs in this domain. Accordingly, Chapter 4 sought to address this issue and achieve objective 1 by identifying the constructs from the netnography that form online consumer trust for e-SME brands, in comparison to the literature review (Chapter Two). The findings and analysis highlighted that a combination of seven core constructs develop consumer trust for e-SMEs on social media:

- **Value Creation**
- **Credibility**
- **Reputation**
- **Visuals**
- **Incentives**
- **Security**
- **Service Delivery**

The findings highlighted the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of consumer trust through social media engagement. This contrasts with the literature which typically outlines two core constructs for defining online trust, i.e. benevolence and credibility (Ganesan and Hess, 1997; Walsh et al., 2010) and extends the four online trust antecedents (branding, security, propensity to trust, website performance) put forward by Johnson (2007), in the form of 'value creation', 'service delivery', 'visuals', 'incentives' and 'reputation'. The analysis identified that e-SMEs have a strong marketing and promotion focus, demonstrated by the 'Incentives' and 'Visuals' constructs, but also that they are inherently concerned with providing added value to new and existing customers, in order to build trust and develop reputation. The netnography findings were found to be more in line with Pletikosa and Michahelles (2013) and Liang et al. (2011) who argued that a social media community has the ability to deliver

marketing information, as well as serve as a forum for consumers with similar interests, who can share and exchange experience and information. The findings also supported Turban et al. (2012) as well as Salo and Karjaluoto (2007) in demonstrating that e-SME social media trust is created from a number of factors, related to the social media content provided by the e-SME which can impact relationships with the consumer.

The constructs 'Credibility' and 'Service Delivery' support Alam and Yasin (2010) Hsu and Wang (2008) as well as Song and Zinkhan (2008), highlighting that if the information on the social media platform is accurate and useful, consumers are more likely to trust the e-SME brand. The 'Service Delivery' construct agrees with Goode and Harris (2007) to an extent, as their research stated that when consumers find evidence of unreliable service or online performance, such as provision of inaccurate information, they will often leave the website and be disappointed with the online service. Their research however refers specifically to organisations websites, whereas the findings in this research focus on trust constructs found on social media platforms. Service delivery also covers the e-SME 'order fulfilment' which is an essential aspect of trust. Order fulfilment describes the 'promise' that an e-SME delivers a product or service when a transaction is made. The research put forward by Goode and Harris (2007) found that consumers and e-SMEs use social media to query or endorse order fulfilment to create trust for potential and current consumers, which reinforces Bart et al. (2005) and Shankar et al. (2002).

Concerning e-SME corporate reputation, the 'Reputation' construct supports Saaksjarvi and Samiee (2007) which suggests that consumers use social media platforms to reduce the risks involved in purchasing decisions. This thesis argues that reputation indicators, such as responsiveness, innovation, and number of social media followers or fans provide an indication of quality and enhance trust. The 'Security' construct refers to the protection of confidential and private information displayed on the social media platform. This includes the detailed explanation and implementation of an e-SME's consumer privacy policy. The findings presented and analysed for objective 1 support previous online trust construct research (Alam and Yasin, 2010). However, this research makes an important contribution to knowledge highlighting the importance of visuals, incentives and creation of value for consumers to develop e-SME brand trust through social media communities. This thesis supports the work conducted by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) who stressed that the value of a service or a product is not created solely by an organisation, but co-created by the organisation and the consumer of the product or the service. The findings also reinforce Payne et al. (2008) stating that consumers' emotional engagement with a brand contributes to value co-creation. However this research extends the emotional engagement construct in a social media community to highlight inspiration and humour. This research further argues that e-SME

knowledge and consumer experience are equally important sub constructs in defining social media value creation to enhance brand trust.

Previous research by Schau et al. (2009) and Zaglia (2013) state that one of the main motivations for consumers to interact with organisations on social media is to obtain the necessary information or skills to better use the product/service. However Kozinets et al. (2010) questioned the motivation of members who engage in this activity, which is difficult to fully determine on the basis of postings in the findings. Nevertheless, this research puts forward that consumers participate in brand communities to share their passion for the brand, product, or sports industry. This theory supports Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) and Zaglia (2013), who argue that consumers join a community to receive a specific outcome. Consumers' motivations for following and posting on e-SME brand social media was analysed in Chapter Eight, but regardless of the consumer motivation, the findings suggest that members of an SMBC are involved in the co-creation of value with an e-SME.

The role of emotion in marketing and advertising has been considered extensively since early work by Zajonc (1980) who argued that emotions function independently of cognition and can indeed override it. Since then, emotions in commerce have been shown to enhance the emotional connection consumers have with brands (Mehta and Purvis 2006), which include advert likeability (McDuff, et al., 2013), engagement (Teixeira et al., 2010), recall (Hazlett and Hazlett 1999; Ambler and Burne 1999) and decisions to share (Berger and Milkman 2011). These relationships suggest that a connection could exist between emotional responses to engagement posts by e-SMEs. By creating posts that surprise, entertain, and even inspire, e-SMEs aim to help consumers remember their products/service, and build trust with the brand.

The findings highlighted two aspects which are decisive to define co-creation of value:

(1) Consumer experience-(product/service opinion and emotion)

(2) E-SME knowledge-(product/service, consumer interest, work environment)

This reinforces the work carried out by Vargo and Lusch, (2008), where the co-creation experience can be viewed as an interactive and a collaborative process in which the consumer actively participates in the configuration of a personalised experience with the e-SME. The case netnography found that the co-creation experience emerges when consumers directly interact with the e-SME. However further investigation is required to analyse value co-creation within the environment that the brand facilitates, such as other consumers. This potentially increases the role of consumers as value creators which is consistent with the literature (Helkkula et al., 2012; Dahl and Moreau, 2007; Nambisan and Baron, 2009) whereby

customers can benefit from the social interactions with other users and the potential friendships that may develop among them. Though this was not recognised in the netnography, Colgate et al. (2005) argued the existence of social benefits and as part of these interactions, consumers seek feedback and previous experiences from users that have already used/bought a service/product, as some authors have suggested (Garretson, 2008; Hart and Blackshaw, 2006).

9.2 E-SME Brand Reputation

The second objective sought to identify the constructs that build reputation for e-SME brands using social media communities.

Fombrun, et al. (2000), argued that reputation is an attitudinal construct that consists of two components: an emotional (affective) component and a rational (cognitive) component. Recent contributions suggest that there is an urgent need for a review of branding and reputation-management perspectives in the context of social media (Fournier and Avery, 2011; Dijkmans et al. 2014). Furthermore, there is a growing interest in the role of corporate reputation, reputation building, and reputation management in organisations (Aula and Tienari, 2011; Balmer, 2008). Although social media has received increasing attention in the branding and marketing literature (Fournier and Avery, 2011; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kozinets et al., 2010; Porter et al., 2011) there is currently a lack of empirical studies and theoretical contributions investigating corporate reputation management in the context of social media communities. Coulter and Roggeveen (2012) posited that perceived corporate brand reputation should increase as number of product network members' or consumer fan numbers increase. The academic literature has previously emphasised that social media communities bring a number of challenges for organisations, including accentuated reputation risks (Aula, 2010) that have significant implications for brand management (Fournier and Avery, 2011). Further studies have reviewed consumer dialogue (Porter et al., 2011), and e-WOM marketing (Kozinets et al., 2010), however these studies have tended to explore phenomena related to social media marketing and branding from product or consumer focussed perspectives. The growth of social media in recent years, coupled with the importance of e-WOM for organisations and consumers in social communities, make the 'service delivery' and 'competency' very interesting for e-SMEs brand reputation. This belief is highlighted in a number of recent academic studies researching the subject (e.g Rejón-Guardia and Martínez-López, 2014; Chow and Shi, 2014; Ng, 2013; Hsieh et al., 2012). Researchers have previously identified three dimensions of e-WOM specifically related to SMBCs (Bonds-Raacke and Raacke 2010): a dimension of information (searching and sharing information), a dimension of friendship and a dimension of connection. Diffusion of news about products keeps with the

above dimensions, making social media communities the ideal forums for e-WOM (Stockman, 2010). The netnography contributes to the existing e-WOM literature by conceptualising the impact of service delivery e-WOM as a method for developing trust and brand reputation through e-SME social media communities.

9.3. E-SME Social Media Engagement Strategies

The third objective sought to analyse the engagement strategies used by sports retailers within e-SME brand social media communities which were analysed in Chapter 5. Following calls to explore social media engagement (Brodie et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013; Shankar et al., 2011) the findings conceptualised and justified with rich evidence how e-SMEs can engage with non-customers and customers, by creating and maintaining social media brand communities. Existing research centres on seven themes in relating to social media engagement in order to develop brand trust from the engagement model processes put forward by Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaite, (2012) Sashi (2012) Kaplan and Heineman (2010) Li and Owyang (2010) as opposed to adopting a more holistic view incorporating a number of themes. This could be considered appropriate for larger corporations, however this approach may not appreciate the number of activities which e-SMEs are involved with as a result of their size and resource limitations (Lee et al., 1999; McAdam et al., 2014). At the initial stages the findings identified nine sequential core themes which encouraged social media consumer engagement in order to develop and build brand trust, represented in figure 5.18.

Figure 5.18: Social Media Consumer Engagement and Trust Framework
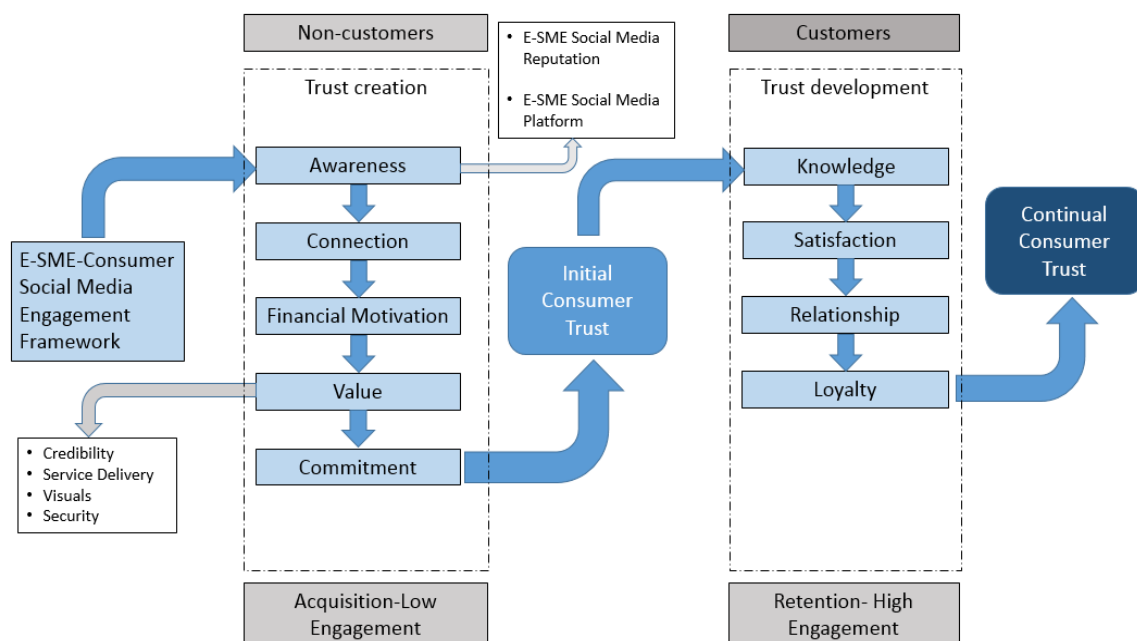
The sequential framework developed supports Bowden (2009) Hollebeek (2011) Sashi (2012) and Dijkmans et al. (2014) arguing that customer engagement is a sequential psychological process that consumers experience in order to become loyal towards a brand. As a result of this research an adaptation of Sashi's (2012) Engagement Cycle is presented with a specific focus on e-SME social media consumer engagement and trust (figure 5.18).

This research also argues that the level of engagement (i.e. low or high) is dependent on the consumer trust stage (Initial or continual). This finding develops Bowden (2009); Hollebeek (2011); Sashi (2012) and Dijkmans et al. (2014) stating that customer engagement is a sequential psychological process that consumers experience and potentially become loyal towards a brand, outlining the process by which e-SME brand trust and reputation can be developed for new and existing customers.

The staged process framework put forward in this research, provides an important contribution to knowledge by arguing that consumer trust development and key competencies enable progression to the next engagement stage, differentiating it from traditional engagement and trust models such as Sashi (2012) which do not include the trust stages alongside engagement concepts.

Consequently, strategic activities can be conducted at each stage which emphasises the need for the e-SME to utilise their industry knowledge. The findings also support Bowden (2009) by expanding the consumer engagement process in the model put forward by Brodie et al. (2011) arguing that the customer engagement process helps to examine the dynamic relationship consumers have with organisations, and further understand how they drive the development of consumer trust. Furthermore, this thesis reinforces Sichtmann (2007) and Dijkmans et al. (2014) whereby customers and non-customers have different antecedents and motives to follow and become engaged in an organisation's social media community, which is reflected in the sequential stages. As a result, these findings extend the concept of staged trust development into e-SME social media brand communities, (e.g. Ng, 2013; Chow and Shi, 2014). The staged process highlighted in this thesis demonstrates the consumer developing trust and key themes which enable progression to the next stage, differentiating it from traditional engagement and trust models such as Sashi (2012) which do not include the trust stages alongside engagement concepts. The framework also incorporates the application of value and alongside initial and continual trust themes in relation to engagement as this was identified by e-SMEs as a crucial strategy for trust development.

This thesis provides an important contribution to knowledge by arguing that social media consumer engagement is based on satisfying consumers by offering exceptional value which builds trust and commitment in long-term relationships. These findings support Sashi (2012)

whereby engaged consumers can become advocates and work with e-SMEs in the value creation process, which can effectively satisfy the needs of the e-SME and consumer. Social media consumer engagement entices customers due to the creation of emotional ties in relational exchanges with them. The interactive nature of social media encourages the relationship process with trust and commitment developed between the e-SME and consumer between sellers and buyers. As Sashi (2012) argues, the process of building customer engagement constitutes a customer engagement cycle, which the findings support. Nevertheless, social media consideration must be given to 'Awareness' on the part of the e-SME and consumer. The strategic issue of awareness concerns the continuous review of consumer discussion on social media (needs, interests etc.), but also an awareness of how effective and engaging their content is on their social platforms. Financial motivation and providing value were also found to be crucial considerations for e-SMEs in order to encourage and sustain consumer commitment to remaining engaged with the SMBC. Following on from these stages, consistently providing knowledge led to consumer satisfaction, relationship building and eventually loyalty in the form of advocacy.

This thesis demonstrates how e-SME brands can create and develop their social media communication strategies to encourage engagement and develop trust. Despite each e-SME developing their social media strategies in different ways (i.e. financially focussed or value focussed'), there are parallels in terms of the trust stages and approaches perceived as successful by their owners-managers. This research argues that the concept of a staged approach to trust development, through social media engagement, is generated from the e-SMEs' explicit perceptions of their target audience and the content that they find engaging. The frameworks put forward therefore accommodate a flexible perspective for e-SMEs due to potential resource considerations for some organisations.

This thesis argue that consumers that are most engaged with an e-SME's social media content offering, are highly motivated to receive information. Therefore content of an informative nature is most likely to be effective. This reinforces Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1992) who suggested that those consumers who desire information explore and use new alternatives. The findings also indicated that a combination of informative and entertaining content also encourages engagement. Organisations that succeed in formulating engagement strategies which are mindful of these consumer motivations could potentially develop increased consumer engagement.

The findings demonstrated that the focus for e-SME social media activity should be centred on developing their communities, and building relationships through engaging content through their platforms. The results from this thesis therefore provide rich insight into how effective

social media engagement develops e-SME brand trust. One further issue is 'access' which includes round the clock access to e-SMEs social media platforms which empowers consumers when interacting with organisations. However, previous researchers such as Fournier and Avery (2011) and Powers et al., (2012) have suggested that to avoid negative trust effects of such empowerment, brands should encourage and facilitate conversations and not disrupt them. The netnography indicated that by participating in an e-SME brand's social media community, a consumer automatically trusts the brand and intends to form a relationship. However, this may not necessarily be the case in social media contexts, as there are no restrictions to membership and anyone can join a social media community. As a consumer is able to follow an e-SME brand by merely clicking 'follow' or 'like'. This flexibility is different to traditional brand communities where community owner's moderate membership and those who fully trust the brand become members.

This requirement for strategic flexibility in e-SMEs social media approach is given little attention in existing literature but may prove to be useful in order to meet organisational targets and objectives. The findings in this section of the thesis therefore extend exploratory works from the e-SME sectors (e.g. Michaelidou, 2011) , and in summary, this section of the research finds in favour of a staged approach to trust development through engagement stages within social media. However whilst the process appears sequential for presentation purposes and to aid understanding, trust development involves engagement in numerous social media activities which could occur concurrently.

9.4. E-SME Social Media Engagement and Trust- Key Informant and Consumer Perspective

The fourth objective aimed to investigate the e-SME brand (key informant) and consumer perspective of using social media engagement to create trust and build reputation with potential and current consumers.

The netnography findings highlighted the methods that e-SMEs adopt to monitor consumers social media behaviour and needs, and how this analysis can be integrated into an e-SME's strategy and objectives. Improving brand awareness can increase the volume of traffic to an e-SME's web site, which can increase sales and improve collaboration when establishing SMBCs (Divol et al., 2012; Stockdale et al., 2012; Fischer and Reuber, 2011; Montalvo, 2011; Nair, 2011; Zhang et al., 2011; Hoffman and Fodor, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Cook, 2008; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Brand and platform awareness was acknowledged by all key informants. This construct was highlighted by respondents in terms of brand personality and suitability of platform for target demographics.

Following on from the netnography, emergent interview themes included the methods that e-SMEs adopt to monitor consumers social media behaviour and how this analysis can be integrated into the e-SME's strategy and objectives. The findings argue that e-SMEs are increasingly attempting to embrace social media as an integral part of working life and exploiting it for competitive advantage, which supports Kiron et al. (2012) and Qualman (2010). The responses indicate that in order for an SMBC to be effective, e-SMEs must have a strategy for its use and consider why they are using it as well as, and more specifically, how it can support business objectives. The findings are also in agreement with Stockdale et al. (2012) whereby e-SMEs must also consider the resources required in implementing and using the SMBC, and how they will be able to measure their objectives.

Through more detailed planning of the use, implementation, and measurement of social media as indicated by Stockdale et al. (2012), Nair (2011), Sexsmith and Angel (2011), Bernoff and Li (2008), Constantinides et al. (2008), e-SMEs could use social media more effectively and be more confident that the effort expended is worthwhile and effective. The findings in this thesis therefore support the concept that e-SMEs are able to develop a comprehensive awareness of consumers' intentions, and behaviours, through social media brand communities. Furthermore they may be able to use these insights in the development and implementation of more effective communication content, in order to attract and retain customers (Ming and Yazdanifard, 2014; Gironda et al., 2014), which fits in with the overall e-SME objectives.

9.4.1 Connection to consumers

Previous research has indicated that conversational human voice can be of added value for brand evaluation (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2011), and candidness in online dialogues enhances trust and familiarity (Lee et al., 2006). In order to develop a connection with new customers and enhance connection with existing ones, the findings argue that e-SMEs need to establish what encourages consumers to connect with an e-SME social media brand community and trust the brand. This approach pushes the capabilities of the e-SME, in terms of demonstrating their enthusiasm and commitment to the customer through engaging and emotional content. The need for consumer connection expressed by the e-SMEs closely ties to the e-literature (Chu, 2011). Developing a consumer connection was perceived to be crucial in the creation of trust for non-customers (Di Pietro and Pantano, 2012) and this was also reflected by respondents. Not only must staff running the social media brand communities be knowledgeable but they must also be afforded a degree of trust from the e-SME owner-manager to react and respond to a customer in a manner that positively reflects the brand. Nevertheless as previously highlighted the connection established must have a business and

objective focus. From the findings, connection is considered to be essential for e-SMEs to engage with consumers to develop trust with numerous respondents highlighting its importance. Therefore this research extends the concept of connection for non-customers in the trust formulation process expanding existing literature (McKnight et al., 2002; Toufaily et al., 2013) into the e-SME domain.

9.4.2 Financial incentives

The results demonstrated that both the amount of financial incentives, and the relative magnitude of the incentives for e-SMEs and consumers, both impact engagement. The findings reinforce Brodie et al. (2011) and Kidd (2011) who argued that consumers are motivated to become engaged the most by the benefits they receive from the organisation. Nevertheless, some respondents indicated that purely adopting this approach would not develop trust due to the amount of other e-SMEs adopting this approach. Therefore this research argues that although financial saving posts get consumer attention, a variety of content is crucial for trust development. Interestingly the findings are in contrast with Fournier and Avery (2011) who argue that brands 'crash' the social media environment which should be restricted for people and their friends. However, this thesis argues that this is not the case and that e-SME SMBCs are there for consumers who wish to engage, and to receive further information on products or an industry that they are passionate about. This research contributes to the current brand community and social media literatures by arguing that if a consumer begins to trust the e-SME they can potentially become advocates at a later stage of the process. This theme was therefore viewed as a strong foundation for the remaining engagement stages and extends these concepts deeper into the social media and e-SME research domains.

9.4.3 Value

The findings support previous literature such as Karpen et al. (2012) and Vargo and Lusch, (2008) which argue that the nature of value is highly contextual and subject to experiences which suggests that value is achieved using a combination of resources and, therefore, cannot be created unilaterally, making the customer a co-creator of value. This study's findings also support research undertaken by Selden and MacMillan (2006), Auh et al. (2007), Rajah et al. (2008) which revealed that both participants in the process benefit from customer engagement into value creation, i.e. the e-SME gains competitive advantage and the customer has greater satisfaction which leads towards trusting the company. Consumer trust and loyalty, as an outcome of engagement through value creation, is important for an e-SME's SMBC activity, however this construct been treated differently in previous research. For instance, Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012) considered value as being a one-dimensional construct through

integrating word-of-mouth recommendations; whereas the other sources (e.g. Auh et al., 2007; Rajah et al., 2008) viewed it as a two-dimensional – attitudinal and behavioural loyalty - construct. This research provides an important contribution by arguing that value as a four dimensional construct for consideration for e-SMEs when strategizing SMBC content. (credibility, service delivery, visuals, security). The findings imply that a knowledge emphasis was crucial to establishing and maintaining consumer engagement and trust on social media. The knowledge theme extended to providing consumers with detailed product and industry knowledge which served as recognition as a source of information, and was also perceived as reward for consumers being a member of the community and having an interest in the e-SME brand. As Ramsey, (2006) and Singh et al. (2008) highlight this shift in the information control needle is dramatically influencing the way consumers receive and react to product knowledge or industry insight. Consequently, this research states that e-SMEs should look to provide regular 'knowledge' posts as part of their SMBC content.

E-SMEs which make continuous efforts in this area retain a strong customer focus and are thus able to differentiate themselves from competitors and form relationships. Successful e-SMEs which make concerted efforts to listen and act upon customer feedback establish a relationship, encouraging the consumer to continue to use the e-SME. This research therefore supports Sashi (2012) and Gustaffson et al. (2005) in terms of utilising emotional content as having crucial aspects in the context of developing and sustaining relationships through social media. Embracing this strategy enables greater content flexibility, however, maintaining a planning framework and following a manageable review process can help avoid the possibility of consumers reacting to the content in a negative manner. This research further supports Mangold and Faulds (2009) and Pham et al. (2013) whereby SMBC interactions can develop high levels of emotional engagement, and that the emotional responses triggered by SMBC content, play a dominant role in explaining trust outcomes. This research also extends the growing evidence that emotional content is an important construct for assessing e-SME-consumer relationships (Bowden, 2009; Ekinci et al., 2005; Fournier, 1998; and Kim et al., 2005), and further extends the literature by demonstrating its relevance for SMBC content.

The results also support findings from other industry sectors that show a positive experience from direct brand interaction via social media which lead to favourable recommendations (Cruz and Mendelsohn, 2010). This finding has important theoretical and practical implications, as it is clearly the emotional bond that consumers develop via a social media interaction that influences the strength of their relationship with the brand. The findings also support the argument made by previous researchers that if e-SMEs intend to build strong brand relationships, they need to incorporate high levels of emotional content in their SMBC content (Heath, 2001, Mangold and Faulds, 2009 and Sashi, 2012).

9.4.4 Consumer satisfaction

Consumer satisfaction has been linked to engagement and trust development in the recent literature (e.g Brodie et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2009). The findings indicated that response speed in relation to consumer satisfaction came out strongly in the analysis along with the supply of effective product service and knowledge. This research therefore fits with Rejon-Guardia and Martinez-Lopez (2014) in terms of aligning product service information with consumer satisfaction. The findings also argue that perceived satisfaction focuses on the consumer's own perceptions about a brand and whether it fulfils its function. Whereby, the concepts of organisational response speed and product knowledge are themes which have begun to appear more strongly in the literature (e.g Trott, 2011) as a key asset for e-SMEs, and a key source of advantage for consumer satisfaction. This research extends these concepts deeper into the e-SME and social media arenas and contextualizes these themes into a more holistic view of consumer satisfaction, and suggests this process provides good foundations for e-SME brand strategy.

Nevertheless, this thesis highlights the difficulty in defining satisfaction due to the subjective nature of a consumer's experience. Satisfaction can also be based on consumers' previous experiences, and brings an aspect of comfort to the consumer when using an e-SME brand. This was supported previously by Kuenzel, (2008) who stated that satisfaction is linked to consumer identification with the brand. This implies that before a consumer can develop satisfaction, they first must have a level of experience with the brand.

This thesis argues that consumers' loyalty toward an e-SME SMBC occurs when the consumer's relative attitude towards the community is favourable and in addition there is repeat usage behaviour. This finding therefore supports Srinivasan et al. (2002) and Anderson and Srinivasan (2003) who state that loyalty to e-retailers results in repeat buying behaviour. Accordingly, this study argues that loyalty to an e-SME SMBC can be defined as the consumer's intention to continue using the SMBC in the future, to recommend it to other users, and continue to purchase products from that organisation.

9.4.5 Social media environment

The ever-changing and complex social media environment requires e-SMEs to plan their SMBC investments with calculation and caution. E-SMEs must appreciate the business environment which they want to address, identify measurable goals, objectives and corresponding analytics before determining which social media platforms are most suitable to leverage these. Before entering into the social media environment e-SMEs require an awareness to what is being said about their brand or their industry, as this can help confirm appropriate goals and may inform the timing of entry into a particular environment. The

findings argue that effective SMBCs require a long-term investment and as the respondents highlighted, e-SMEs should focus on consumer relationships and be prepared to participate in dialogue and open conversation, thereby developing effective relationships with customers in order to ensure trust. Social media measurement can be subjective and potentially unique to the interpretation of the person analysing the results (Owyang and Toll, 2007). When evaluating the benefits, the focus on financial returns must not be lost, although the benefits associated with intangible conversation and participation can also potentially lead to future returns.

9.4.6 Customers and Non-Customers

The findings argue that non-customers and customers have different motives to follow and become engaged in an e-SME's SMBC activity and consequently have different levels of trust for an e-SME brand (i.e. initial or continual trust). This supports Webster (2012) and Blackwell et al. (2006) whereby non-customers may be searching for new organisations to purchase from, and consumers may use SMBC's for product, company, or industry updates. Consequently, this thesis argues that non-customers are at an initial trust phase through SMBC engagement, whereas customers reach a continual trust phase, which is reflected in differences and consequences of brand trust for both groups.

The differences highlighted in the findings between non-customers and customers indicate different considerations for both groups for e-SMEs with regard to SMBC engagement and consumer trust. This thesis provides an important contribution by also underlining the potential of SMBCs for customer service purposes and the development of trust. Customer support in SMBCs can also influence non-customers, who are able to view customers being supported on platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, which can strengthen their perception of the level of credibility the e-SME has. Furthermore, non-customers experience the candid way employees of an e-SME respond with a conversational human voice to several types of online feedback, like questions, compliments, and complaints, which supports previous studies by Kelleher and Miller (2006) and Lee et al. (2006).

9.4.7 Core Themes

This thesis highlighted that the majority of consumer respondents identified eight core themes which are perceived by consumers to create trust. This differentiates from the frameworks identified in the literature detailed in Chapter Two (e.g. Sashi, 2012) by incorporating the trust stages alongside engagement stages within SMBCs.

Eight core themes and seventeen sub themes were generated which were perceived by consumers to create initial and develop continual trust, alongside engagement practices.

Achieving consumer continual trust through consumer engagement requires facilitating consumers' transition through eight stages and the importance of SMBC engagement has primarily been recognised in the recent literature as a method to build enduring consumer relational exchanges with strong emotional connections. By formulating a conceptual framework of trust through SMBC customer engagement this thesis provides a basis for the development of e-SME customer engagement using social media platforms that focus on customers providing value.

9.5. E-SME Social Media Value

The findings highlighted that part of the e-SME value from social media activity related to the return on investment (ROI) e-SMEs receive by utilising social media communities, such as; increasing their audience to acquire and retain customers, enhance their reputation, increase their connection with consumers by providing an additional customer services contact and ultimately increase sales. This highlighted an important consideration, namely the measurement of effective engagement for the organisation's objectives. The value an e-SME experiences by using SMBCs involved five themes which are dependent on the organisation's resources and aligned with their objectives.

The recent literature highlights how important a comprehensive planning process is to the success of an SMBC, particularly if it is to result in a positive ROI (Stockdale et al., 2012; Nair, 2011; Sexsmith and Angel, 2011; Bernoff and Li, 2008; Constantinides et al., 2008). The findings from this thesis argue that an effective SMBC strategy should not only cover the objectives for SMBC use, such as engaging with customers and developing trust, but also how an e-SME will measure the economic value and business benefits. This approach reinforces Hoffman and Fodor (2010) who argued that the focus of an organisation should be the objectives that need to be achieved and which SMBCs with corresponding metrics are best to achieve them. Five key themes were identified from the findings which create social media corporate value for e-SMEs: Audience, Reputation, Sales, Customer Services, and Evaluation.

9.5.1 Audience

The findings indicated that having clear social media objectives helped e-SMEs focus on the content they provide and encourage. Adopting this approach and having a close control of objectives could provide a buffer and advantage for e-SMEs against larger firms. Furthermore, the importance of awareness for effective engagement for e-SMEs is acknowledged in the literature (Habibi et al., 2014) which suggests that organisations need to continuously monitor consumer opinion and respond to their changing needs. This thesis argues that consumer awareness effectiveness is demonstrated not only by having a clear focus of an e-SMEs target

audience and brand personality, but also by the suitability of the chosen platform and resource available. Consequently this research supports Tuten (2008); Bughin et al. (2009) and Evans (2011) stating that organisations should develop open processes to increase their awareness of consumers' needs and wants.

9.5.2 Reputational Value

Previously, the use of social media use amongst e-SME brands has raised questions about the effects of their social media activity, especially with regard to the effects on corporate reputation. This research sought to provide further insight on the extent which an e-SME brand's social media activities are related to perceptions of corporate reputation among customers and non-customers. Part of the positive association between engagement and reputation might be the result of emotional contagion with the tendency to feel and be influenced by others' emotions (Barsade, 2002). Consumers who follow e-SME brands through their social media communities are exposed to both content placed by the brand as well as the responses to these posts, and to the questions, complaints and remarks posted mostly by fellow consumers.

The key informant respondents' findings suggest that most consumer brand advocates have developed a passion to play an active role in promoting the brand. This is demonstrated by advocates sharing their knowledge and experience, and what consumers expect in return from e-SMEs. The risk of no social media policy or established process in place was also highlighted by respondents which could affect reputation. In the era of social media, e-SME staff 'voice' can be a valuable resource, due to their product knowledge or passion for the brand (Brodie et al., 2011) but it can also be a significant risk for e-SMEs. As employees who have traditionally had limited choices in voicing their on-the-job experiences can now communicate with hundreds or even thousands of people outside the organisation with a few keystrokes (Miles and Mangold, 2014). This thesis expands the work of Hirschman (1970) and Dundon et al. (2004) to conceptualise employee voice as an employee's attempt to use either organisationally sanctioned or unsanctioned media or methods for the purpose of articulating organisational experiences and issues or influencing the organisation, its members, or other stakeholders. Under these circumstances, effective e-SME management of employee 'voice' in the social media era is crucial for SMBC successful engagement and reputational development. This can potentially be achieved by the establishment of an appropriate organisational context, communication mechanisms that are appropriate for each purpose of voice, support and guidelines that enable employees to make good voice-related decisions supporting the desired brand image, and engagement in what employees are saying.

9.5.3 Sales

Extending the theme of return on investment (ROI), an e-SME's ROI is the relationship between profit and the investment that generates that profit, and is widely used to examine the performance of an investment. However, the recent literature concerning social media ROI measurement has garnered negative opinions (Powell et al., 2011) and as a result some e-SME's have ignored the idea of ROI as a success measurement for social media (Crosti, 2013). Nevertheless, due to the volume of consumers on social media, it is clearly an attractive environment for e-SME brands and sales can be viewed as a key indicator of ROI. However, when it comes to selling specialised services that e-SMEs can provide, the value of social media monitoring can be a difficult concept for e-SMEs to understand and utilise.

9.5.4 Customer service

The findings argue that customer service through a SMBC, particularly as a trust mechanism, is a key aspect of successful e-SME engagement. Therefore, establishing a social media customer service process is imperative for facilitating consumer transactions and for indicating trustworthy e-business (Razi et al., 2004), in terms of efficiency, speed of service and as a reassuring factor to consumers. Resources represent an e-SMEs ability to assemble, integrate, and deploy resources in combination to achieve a competitive advantage (Hooley et al., 2005; Roberts and Grover, 2012; Vorhies and Morgan, 2005). Expanding this further this thesis argues that resources alone are not always sufficient to provide significant performance gains and, instead, must be transformed into distinctive capabilities that an e-SME can provide, not just in terms of staff monitoring SMBCs but also have the required knowledge to deal with the query. Accordingly, this thesis supports Coltman, (2007) and Srinivasan and Moorman (2005) who recognised that the combination and integration of human and business resources positively affect customer relationships, e-SME performance, and consumer trust.

9.5.5 Evaluation

Evaluating and measuring business value from SMBCs has long been a problematic area for organisations (Melville et al., 2004) and remains a difficult challenge in the domain of social media for e-SMEs. Indeed, Geho et al., (2010) recognise the lack of quantitative measures, such as return on investment of time and money, to be a hindrance to the continued use of social media by e-SMEs who require evidence of value in both the short and longer term (Prananto et al., 2003). The findings within this thesis reinforce Bernoff and Li, (2008) who state that applying metrics enables the capturing of some levels of information and the measurements are often given as evidence of success within organisations. Nevertheless, this research is in agreement with Angel and Sexsmith (2011) and Bernoff and Li, (2008)

whereby more qualitative measures are required to fully capture the extent of value to be derived from social media use. Social media is different from traditional means of face-to-face and online communication, and arguably requires a different approach to measurement. While the impact of traditional online activity can be measured using defined quantitative metrics, social media generates a huge amount of qualitative data which traditional metrics alone do not address or quantify in monetary terms (Stockdale et al., 2012; Sexsmith and Angel, 2011; Crawford and Pollack, 2004, in Mangiuc, 2009; Fisher, 2009). The findings support Blanchard (2011) and Owyang and Toll (2007) and argue that the key to unlocking the value of an e-SME SMBC relies on consumer conversation which requires the ability to track the tone, perception and nuances of comments making it extremely difficult for e-SMEs to measure and quantify. Although it can be suggested that only financial gains can be measured in monetary value, non-financial gains from SMBCs may be equally beneficial for e-SMEs resulting in a range of benefits such as increased awareness and trust. Despite reported successes, the ongoing measurement debate highlighted in this research, shows there is a need for e-SMEs to adopt a transparent, standardised yet flexible measurement framework.

9.6 E-SME Social media brand trust

A number of inter-relationships exist within the frameworks presented as trust is not created from any one theme in isolation, but as a combination of themes working together. This relationship is demonstrated by the sequential stages of social media brand trust and engagement put forward in this thesis, and represented in figure 8.2.

Figure 8.2 Consumer Trust Framework
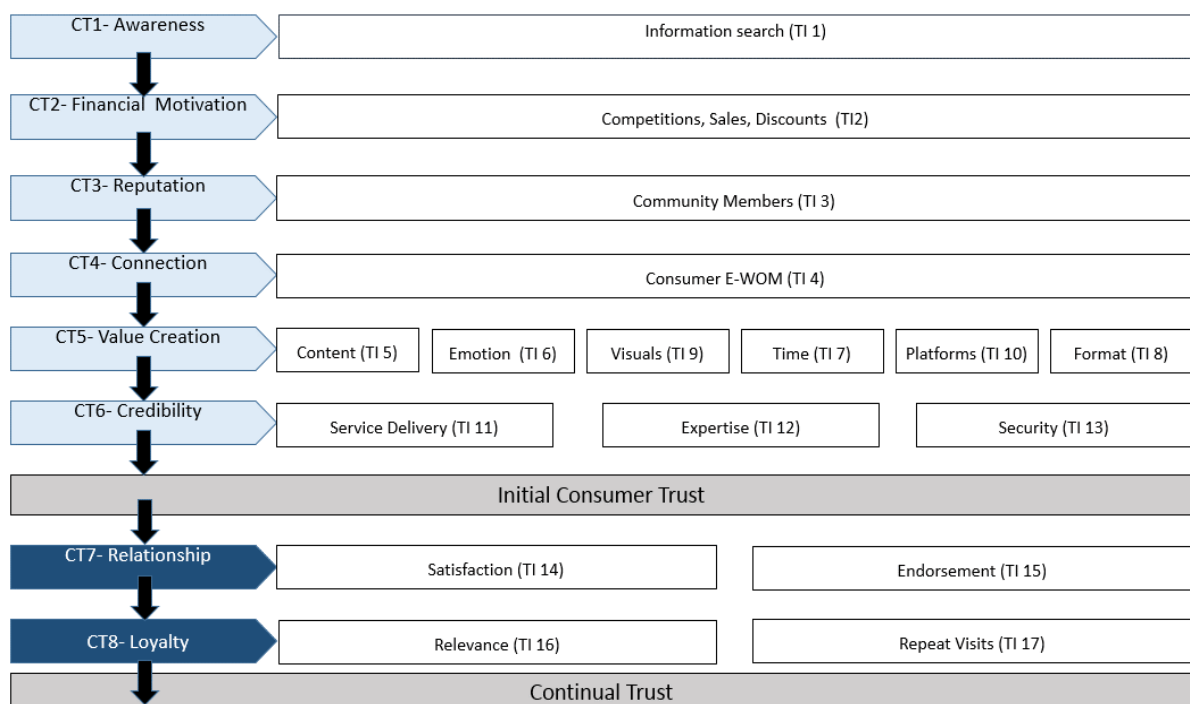
The literature reviewed in chapter two identified the significance of trust creation from a number of recent studies, and further academic research was called for as a result, this research in contrast, has found that eight themes are perceived by consumers that collectively create initial and sustain continual consumer trust in an e-SME brand. As well as 17 sub themes that comprise consumer engagement. This thesis presents a rich picture of current social media consumer perception providing a holistic representation to the online trust creation literature and e-SME managerial practice. Accordingly, the findings and analysis support that future research explore this area from a wider perspective. In contrast to existing publications (e.g. Sashi, 2012; Brodie et al., 2011), this study provides frameworks which demonstrate the prominence of the trust thematic indicators from consumer perceptions of e-SME SMBCs. A framework of this nature could be a useful tool for e-SMEs in relation to their strategic focus for social media content across different stages of trust and customer acquisition and retention.

By analysing the findings from all the data sets this research argues that in order to achieve consumer continual trust, through social media consumer engagement, requires facilitating consumers' transition through the previously discussed eight stages and continuing to provide value. This is represented in the form of an updated version of figure 5.18 in figure 9.1 below

Figure 9.1 Social Media Consumer Engagement For Initial and Continual Trust Framework:
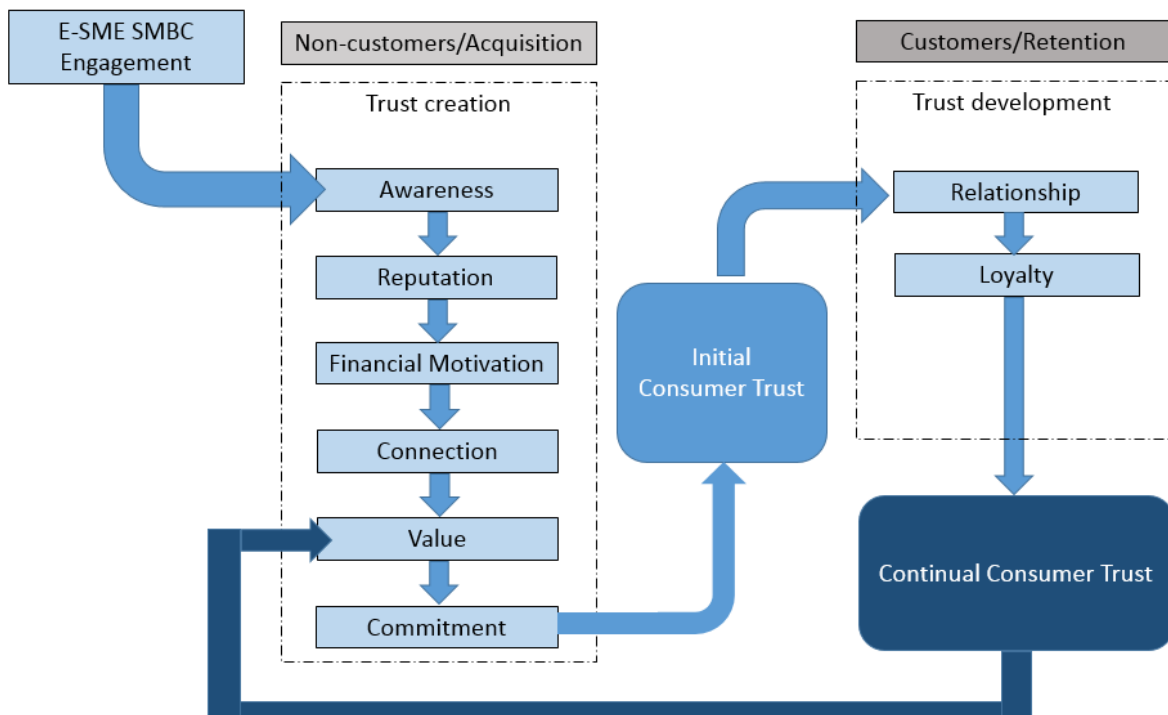
In this updated model, the consumer findings indicated that the 'knowledge' construct formed part of the 'value' offering, therefore the model was condensed to eight stages, and continual consumer trust can be achieved by continuing to provide value to consumers. The significance of SMBC engagement has mostly been recognised in the recent literature as a way to build enduring consumer relational exchanges with strong emotional connections.

This thesis also helps e-SME practitioners in their involvement with social media. The vast reach, being placeless, having low cost, and the popularity of social media motivate e-SMEs to try to take advantage of this medium in numerous ways. The framework and findings demonstrate that by creating and enhancing brand communities on social media, and by facilitating feelings of value, information sharing, as well as financial rewards, e-SMEs can strengthen the social bonds among non-customers and customers to increase brand continual trust. As highlighted in the engagement and trust framework model this results in consumer continual trust. However the findings from this research caution that in order for trust to be continual and engagement to be consistent, e-SMEs must consistently provide value to consumers.

Chapter Ten-Conclusions

Contribution to Knowledge, Research Agenda and Implications

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10. Introduction

This chapter addresses the research objectives and each is evaluated in association with the key findings and conclusions drawn. A summary of the key contributions to knowledge engaged within this thesis is provided. The contributions include a review of the current literature, a methodology for analysing social media content, plus new academic and strategic theory for e-SMEs. Limitations and the potential to replicate this research study are also reviewed. The final part of the chapter discusses future research areas and their impacts to academic theory and e-SME strategic and managerial practice. Social constructionist research into social media is an evolving area and as Carson et al.(2001) stated, a main task for marketing research is to investigate the different constructions and perceptions people place upon their individual experience. Which is why e-SMEs, key informants, and consumer insight was investigated in this thesis in order to provide a holistic view of the research objectives.

As social media is a dynamic platform, social constructionist research was utilised in order to develop a deeper understanding of online engagement, which is an approach advocated by Burr (2003). By adopting this approach, this thesis has addressed the research objectives identified in Chapter One, by providing further insight into the research gaps identified in Chapter two covering social media engagement strategy to develop and sustain trust for new and existing customers. Each of these areas are reviewed in the following sections.

10.1 Research Objective One: To identify the constructs that develop consumer online trust for e-SME brands using social media communities.

This research sought to explore the constructs that develop consumer online trust and build reputation for e-SME brands using social media platforms. As highlighted in the literature (Gap consideration 1, Table 2.17) gaps still exist within the academic literature regarding, social media content to create online brand trust for new and existing customers, as well as the separation of trust into benevolence and competence. However, in contrast with the literature which typically defines online trust through two core constructs i.e. credibility and benevolence (Ganesan and Hess, 1997; Walsh et al., 2010). This thesis research finds e-

SME trust to be defined through seven core constructs with 23 sub constructs (see Figure 4.19).

In summary, this thesis extends the trust and social media literature and argues that although the netnography findings support previous online trust constructs research (e.g. Alam and Yasin, 2010) this research makes an important contribution to knowledge highlighting the importance of visuals, incentives, and co-creation of social media value for consumers to develop e-SME brand trust through social media platforms. The result of Objective One is that there is now new information concerning the development of consumer trust and reputation building for e-SMEs using social media engagement.

10.1.1 Theoretical Contribution

This thesis provides a framework for understanding the trust constructs. Altogether seven core constructs comprise trust across social media communities. This framework provides a holistic view of how trust is perceived in an e-SME social media context.

Figure 4.19: Social Media E-SME Trust and Reputation Constructs
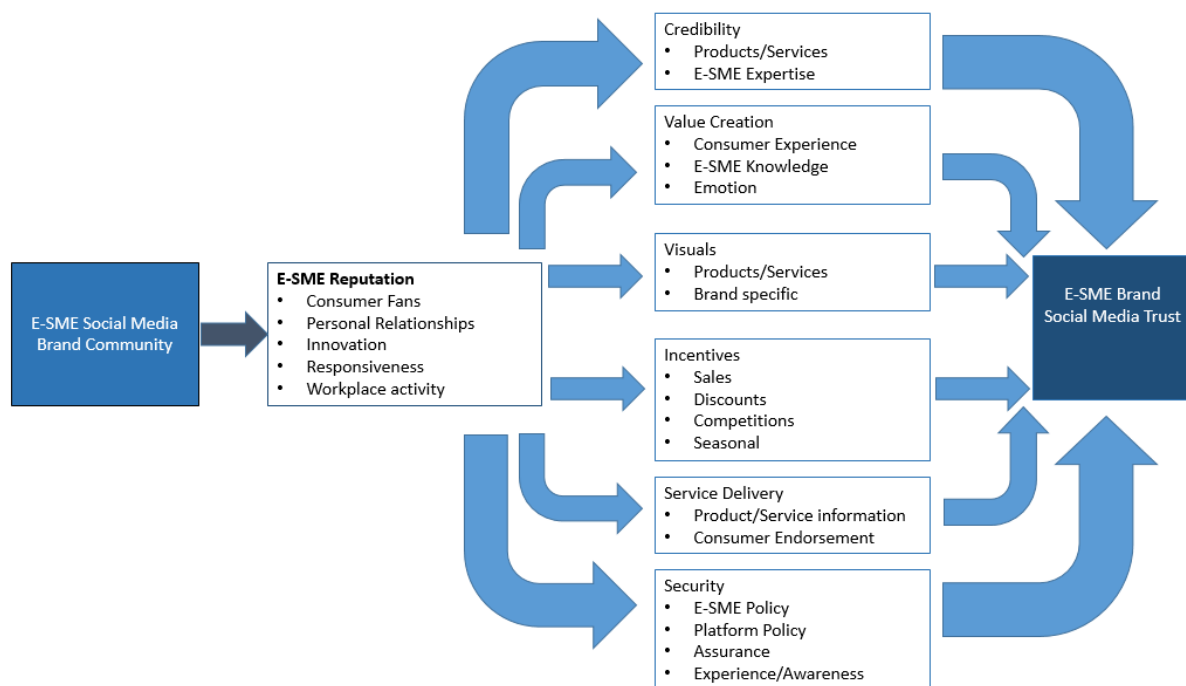
This differs from the existing trust framework put forward by Banyte and Dovaliene (2014) by including themes that encourage consumer engagement into value creation and eventual SMBC trust for e-SMEs. The framework also expands the model put forward by Toufaily et al.

(2013) by identifying the six constructs/strategic areas that e-SMEs should focus on when creating trust.

10.2 Research Objective Two: To identify the constructs that build reputation for e-SME brands using social media communities.

The literature review identified the strategic gap reviewing the strategic reputational approach to consumer engagement that e-SMEs may take, displayed in literature Gap 2. In satisfying Objective Two (see Chapter Two and Three), this research makes a theoretical contribution by establishing a theoretical framework (Figure 4.9) comprised of six core constructs. This thesis also contributes, first, to the extant corporate reputation and corporate branding literature (e.g Balmer and Greyson, 2006; King and Grace, 2008; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006) by demonstrating that the social-media challenges observed by Fournier and Avery (2011) for brand management are also prominent for corporate reputation management (presented in Figure 4.9)

Figure 4.9: Reputation Constructs Conceptual Model
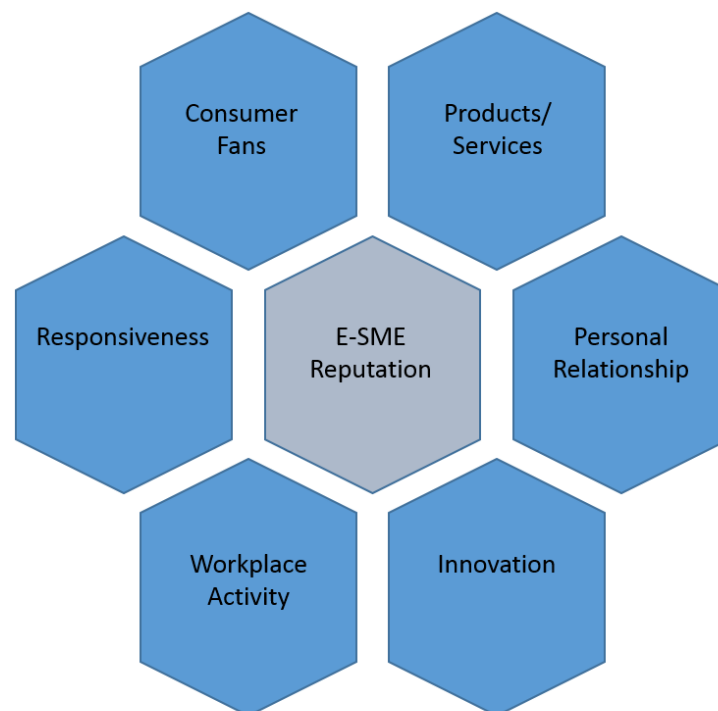
10.2.1 Theoretical Contribution

This research also argues that e-SMEs must recognise the important role employees' play as reputation builders within SMBCs for consumers. The findings suggest that achieving

transparency is more important for reputation enhancement than seeking to avoid negative perceptions or risks. An e-SME's acceptance of negative posts or comments may be seen as a sign of openness and trustworthiness towards consumers, and should be a strategic consideration for e-SMEs.

10.3 Research Objective Three- To analyse the engagement strategies used by sports retail e-SME brand social media communities.

The third objective focussed on analysing the communication strategies used by sports retail e-SME brands to create consumer brand engagement in social media communities.

10.3.1 Theoretical Contribution

Gap Three from the literature review (See Table 2.17) highlighted the branding approach adopted by e-SMEs, particularly if the brand social media content is influenced by the industry or organisation's characteristics and how this is demonstrated. This linked with Gap Four which highlighted the gap concerning indicators of consumer trust in an e-SME. The netnography empirical results (Chapter Five) identified nine key strategic concepts which e-SMEs demonstrated when posting social media content were developed into a strategic framework. The findings contributed to a framework for trust development for non-customers and existing customers, which conceptualised the engagement process for initial and continual trust. This thesis therefore provides an important contribution by aligning the disparate trust literature themes to provide an understanding of strategic considerations for social media engagement.

The research also supports a number of academic studies when reviewing engagement strategies (e.g Brodie et al., 2011; Sashi, 2012). In contrast with the previous engagement models put forward (e.g Sashi, 2012) the Social Media Consumer Engagement and Trust Framework (Figure 5.18) incorporates the trust development processes that a consumer experiences during initial and continual trust phases. This highlights the requirement for e-SMEs to develop content which is focussed on engaging with consumers at different stages of the engagement and trust model.

10.4 Research Objective Four – To investigate the e-SME brand and consumer perspective of using social media engagement to create trust and build reputation with potential and current consumers.

The fourth objective sought to investigate the e-SME brand and consumer perspective of using social media engagement to create trust and build reputation with potential and current consumers. Gap Five identified from the literature review (see Table 2.17) highlighted that further insight was required concerning:

- E-SME consideration how to react when their brand is talked about by consumers
- Resource to run multiple SMBCs, create different content for each platform and when to join the conversation
- Methods to instigate conversations with consumers, instead of a one-way communication network.

Satisfying Objective Four has demonstrated that from the e-SME perspective a social media strategic engagement roadmap is required to provide owner-managers with a framework with which to plan their approach. This is represented in Figure 6.9.

Figure 6.9 E-SME Social Media strategic engagement roadmap
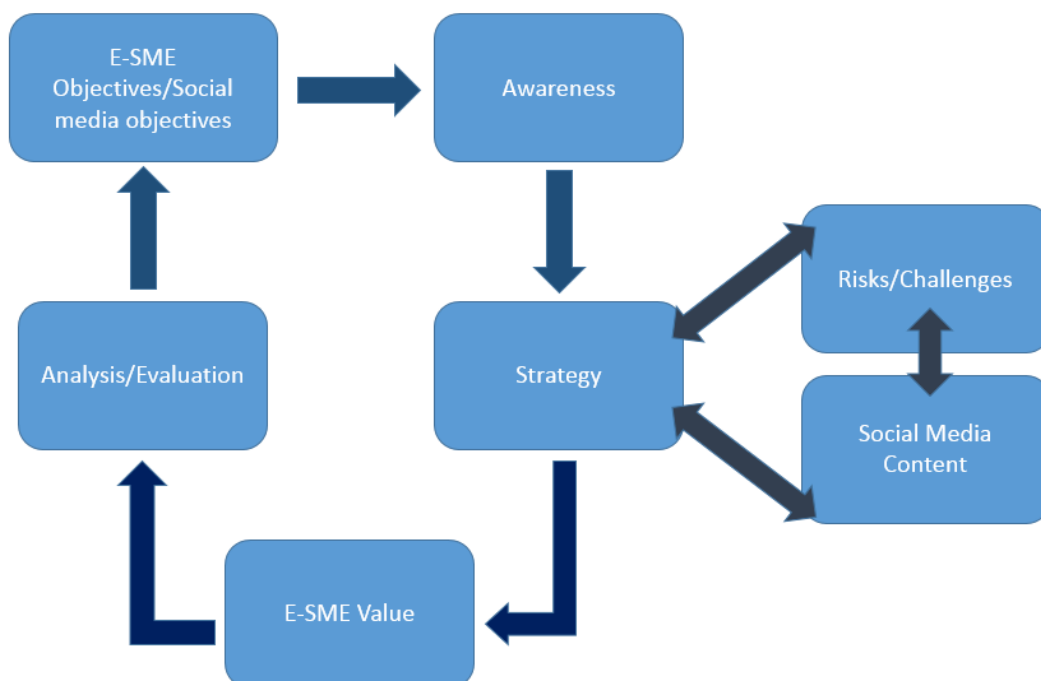
Source inductively developed from the data

10.4.1 Theoretical contribution

The engagement framework represents the launch of e-SME social media strategy and outlines how the e-SME will be positioned and represented through their social media brand communities. The firm conducts an awareness review, determines their objectives which in turn influence strategy which ultimately provides value to the organisation. Thereby providing an opportunity to analyse and evaluate the effective of social media engagement against their objectives, leading to a continuous awareness review of consumer needs and opinion. The framework also contributes to the existing SME literature (e.g Dyerson et al., 2009) by highlighting the importance of e-SMEs planning and strategising how the firm will engage with customers and set expectations for customer service and engagement. This is traditionally not an area in which SMEs excel (Dyerson et al., 2009) and the recognition of strategic planning reflected in this thesis may provide further guidance to e-SMEs.

Consistent across the literature is that existing publications and studies focus on organisations identifying broader market (Culnan et al., 2010) aspects in describing effective engagement rather as opposed to taking a more holistic consumer view. This may be appropriate for large organisations, however this approach is unlikely to reflect the multiple roles and responsibilities that e-SME staff are involved with due to their size and resource limitations. Therefore whilst this thesis supports the engagement themes from Brodie et al., (2011) it also argues that nine core themes are perceived by industry practitioners to help drive consumer engagement on social media.

Gergen (1994) previously highlighted the importance of analysing multiple voices for social constructionist research, Objective Five sought to explore the consumer perspective of e-SME brands using social media engagement to create trust and build reputation with non-customers and customers. This objective was aligned with the literature review gap 6 (see Table 2.17), which highlighted that further analysis is required into the part that an SMBC has when consumers begin to research a new company or product. The findings indicated that e-SMEs need to consistently monitor consumer attitudes and motives toward searching and visiting their SMBC to view the products or services they offer.

Objective Four also aligned with Gap 7 from the literature review (see Table 2.17) which indicated that further analysis was required into the relationships that can be developed from SMBC engagement and how they can positively influence brand trust.

This thesis argues that different engagement practices impact the stages of consumer trust. This meets the call for future studies to consider diverse options to capture the variation in

online customer trust among different channels (Toufaily et al.,2013) as well as analysing the effects of different types of content that consumers are exposed to when they engage in an e-SME brand social media community Dijkmans et al., (2014).

Satisfying Objective Four has demonstrated that consumers consider value creation, connection and credibility as key to initial trust, and loyal relationships as key to continual trust. The findings from the consumer interviews therefore argue that in order to sustain continual trust, e-SMEs must consistently provide 'value' to customers and non-customers. Consequently an updated version of the Social Media Consumer Engagement and Trust Framework (Figure 5.18) is provided in Figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1 Social Media Consumer Engagement For Initial and Continual Trust Framework:
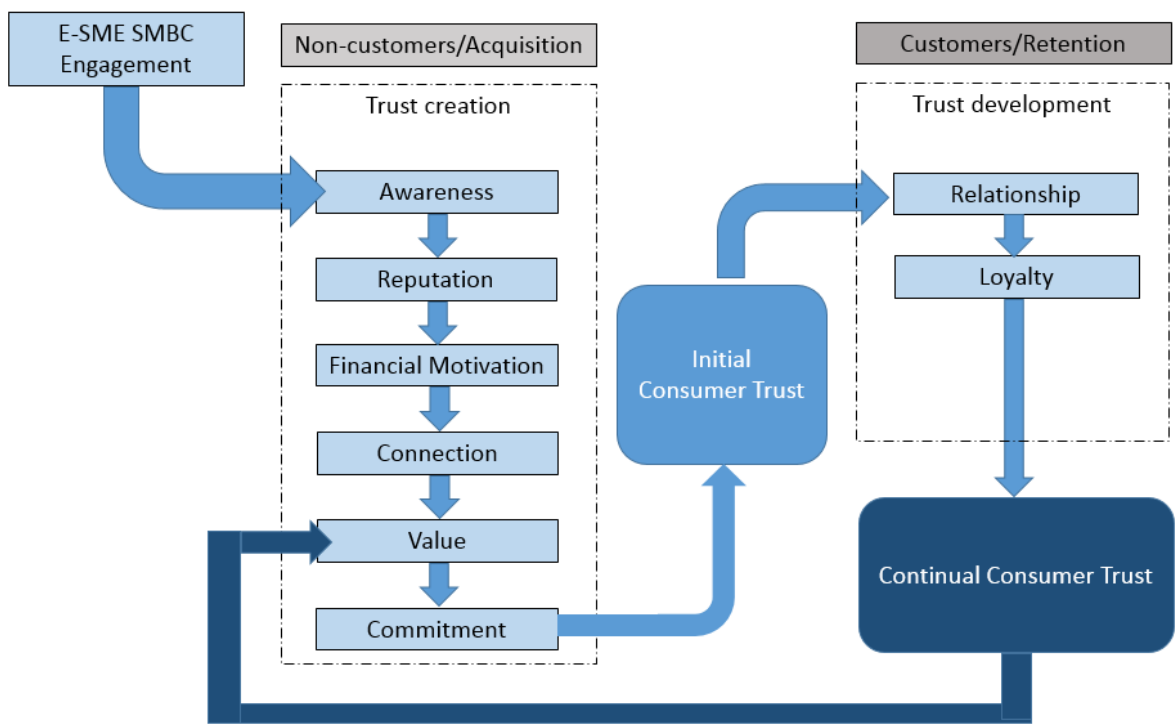
Source: Inductively Developed from the Data

The framework emphasises the need for e-SMEs to focus on these areas adopting customer-focus, plus a flexible, and adaptable approach. Unlike existing frameworks like Sashi's (2012) engagement cycle, the roadmap adopts and retains a trust focus throughout the development process. Having created initial trust with transactions, the focus then turns to continual trust and customer retention for e-SMEs. The findings also highlight the potential for e-SMEs to

focus SMBC engagement efforts on the trust aspects which consumers consider to be vital as part of the trust creation and development process.

10.5 Research Objective Five: To analyse the perceived corporate value of social media engagement from key informants working with e-SMEs

In fulfilling Objective Five, a number of findings are presented when investigating the value of SMBCs to e-SMEs for consumer acquisition and retention. The fifth objective aligned with Gap 8 from the literature review (see Table 2.17).Reviewing the control that e-SMEs have over information flows and how this can affect their brand and their perception of social media value. This research found that the e-SME perceived value of social media is comprised of four key constructs focusing on target audience, corporate reputation, sales, enhancing customer service and evaluation.

Theoretical models and a reputation framework are presented which describe the value that e-SMEs experience by creating and managing social media communities, and advance the current knowledge on how social media risk can be managed by e-SMEs. This thesis is also one of the earliest studies exploring the relationship between e-SME corporate value and social media to acquire and retain customers, and therefore provides a significant contribution to the existing social media value literature for SMEs (e.g Angel and Sexsmith, 2011). The research also answers calls from Stockdale et al. (2012) an Kim et al. (2012) by examining industry context specific cases (i.e. the sports retail industry) and how different engagement methods may be suited to different business needs.

Satisfying Objective Five has demonstrated that there is a lack of research in studying how those factors affect the e-SME perspective in corporate value. This study advances our understanding on how social media affects e-SME strategy. While prior theoretical research suggests that value can be added to an SME using social media (e.g. Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010; Chua et al., 2009) little empirical research work has been conducted into 'pure-play' e-SMEs for this proposition. The models proposed provide the foundation for conducting future research which can use empirical data from other industries to support this argument.

10.5.1 Theoretical contribution

This section of the research argues that value in the form of ROI for social media can be analysed in two forms for e-SMEs, financial and non-financial. As previously highlighted (Chapter Seven), social media can aid the generation of revenue for organisations, as communities can be used as promotional platforms for products or services. In respect of the

potential non-financial ROI, respondents highlighted increased engagement and developing brand reputation. Therefore this research supports Gay et al. (2007) whereby social media is capable of both providing platforms that contribute to the interactions and transactions between consumers and businesses. A contribution to marketing literature is also made by answering calls from Mitchell et al. (2013) to develop further understanding of how retailers become engendered with brand significance through retail brand management techniques, both from a consumer and practitioner perspective. By proposing an e-SME social media corporate value framework (Figure 7.3) as an associated diagnostic tool, this research provides a number of exploratory insights into the nature and dimensionality of this emerging concept.

Figure 7.3: Social Media Corporate Value
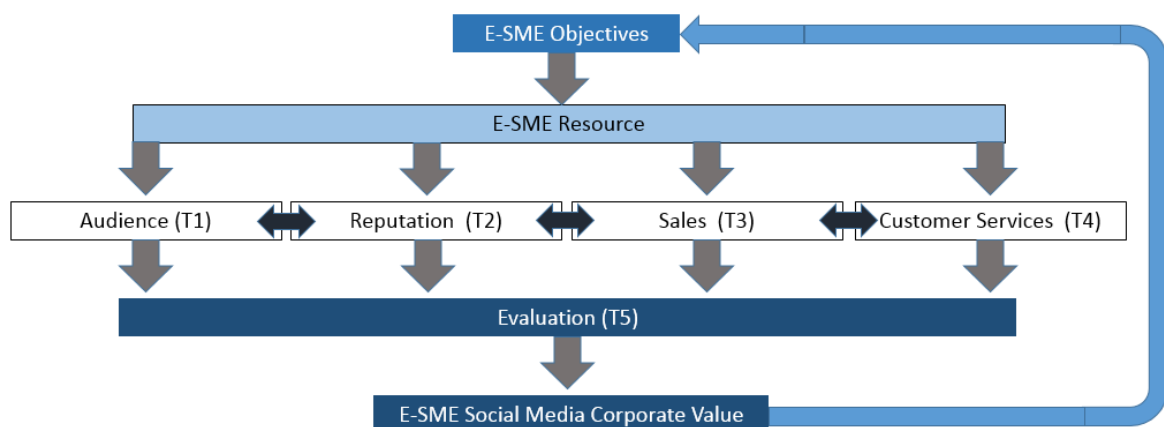
10.6 Objective Six- Research Objective Six covered the development of a conceptual framework (Figure 8.2) for e-SMEs with the aim of demonstrating how effective social media engagement can potentially create and develop brand trust and reputation to acquire and retain customers.

10.6.1 Theoretical contribution

From the consumer trust perception findings a roadmap for trust was developed extending the core trust concepts alongside consumer engagement practices.

Figure 8.2 Consumer Trust Framework
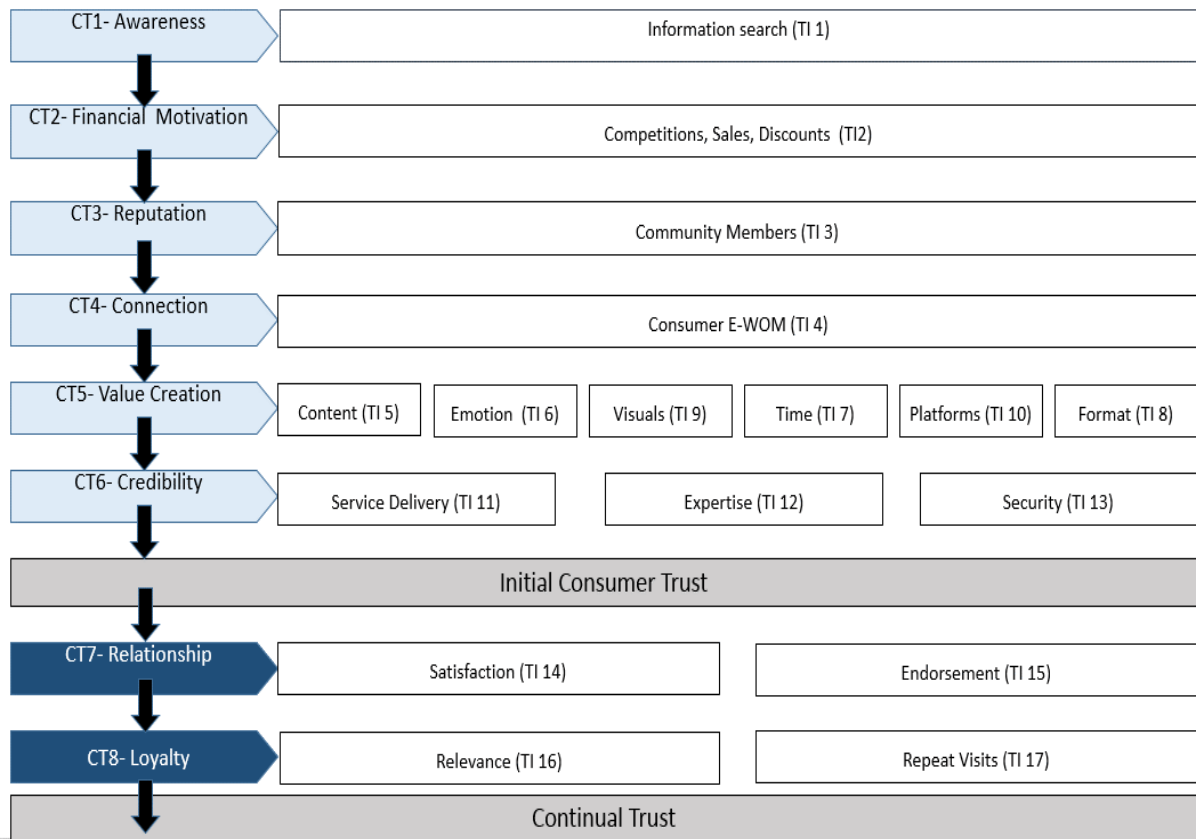
The framework supports the Social Media Consumer Engagement for Initial and Continual Trust Framework (Figure 9.1) the trust and engagement stages framework displaying the core themes developed from the netnography and key informant findings to drive engagement and develop trust amongst customers are non-customers are conceptualised and constructed into a roadmap for trust through engagement.

Therefore the thesis provides further insights into the nature and dimensionality of the 'engagement' concept within the broader theoretical area of interactive consumer/ e-SME brand relationships on social media. Overall, the research reported in this thesis provides the first known empirical investigation of e-SME brand consumer trust and engagement within social media communities.

10.7 Contribution to Knowledge

This research presents a comprehensive view of the current academic theory and findings developed from the data. It reviews themes, definitions and drivers of effective engagement from studies which have analysed, trust, e-commerce and social media which impact e-SMEs.

This thesis therefore provides a contribution to knowledge on a number of levels highlighted:

- Updated review of the literature
- Innovative social media research methodology
- New findings which have enabled extension of the literature and new academic and e-SME strategic theory

10.7.1 Trust and Engagement Frameworks

This thesis provides a framework for understanding how trust and reputation are developed by consumers when engaging with e-SMEs using social media brand communities. Altogether eight core themes and 17 sub-themes combine to demonstrate how initial and continual trust can occur during consumer engagement stages. The various strategic methods (Figure 4.19) to achieve this engagement are also presented which can assist e-SMEs when creating content to acquire non-customers and also retain customers. Based on the findings the framework also indicates how e-SMEs can sustain continual trust and customer loyalty by reflecting the necessity to consistently combine 'value' focussed and 'financial' content. The framework provide a holistic view of how engagement and trust is perceived in an e-SME context. This contrasts directly with the current online engagement and trust literature (e.g, Banyte and Dovaliene, 2014; Brodie et al., 2011, Sashi, 2012) which does not reflect the trust stages consumers may be experiencing when engaging with brands on social media.

10.7.2 Contribution to Methodology

This section outlines contributions to research methodology within this thesis. This research adopted a multiple voices approach advocated by Gergen (1994) investigating three perspectives (e-SME, key informant and consumer) and combining the findings to present a rich picture of social media engagement and consumer trust.

10.7.3 Netnography

The netnography approach utilised in this thesis was found to have a number of advantages, particularly the rich data available from the SMBCs as well as the relatively easy access to the data. However, the sheer volume of information can be off putting for some researchers which may put them off this method (Kozinets, 2006). Nevertheless, this thesis used an approach where central and less central texts were identified prior to the netnography commencement and a set time period was also put in place. This helped keep the data recording and analysis more manageable for researchers with time and resource constraints. Therefore this thesis

provides future researcher with a potential framework with which to conduct online brand research using social media.

10.7.4 Key informant telephone interview/Consumer face to face and telephone

This research adopted a combined in-depth interview approach, whereby interviews were conducted both face-to-face and via telephone. Disadvantages of using this approach include the absence of visual cues (Garbett and McCormack, 2001), as well as the potential for distraction of participants by activities in their environments (McCoyd and Kerson, 2006; Opdenakker, 2006),

One further disadvantage is that telephone interviews must be kept short compared to face-to-face interviews (Chapple, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Garbett and McCormack; Sturges and Hanrahan; Sweet, 2002), thereby reducing the possibility of in-depth discussion. However, little evidence is presented for this claim, and McCoyd and Kerson (2006) arguethat their telephone interviews typically lasted 1.5–2 hours, with little participant fatigue. This thesis supports this claim, with key informant and consumer interviews typically lasting between 45 minutes- 1 hour.

This methodology provides practical suggestions offered for conducting telephone interviews by establishing contact or rapport prior to conducting telephone interviews. This was achieved by conducting an initial phone call and providing an email overview of the questions to participants which supports Burke and Miller (2001) and Carr and Worth, (2001).

To summarise the literature criticises the telephone approach for long-form interviews (Chapple, 1999; Creswell, 1998) yet this research has shown the telephone method to be an effective approach to securing in-depth access to key informants that work with e-SMEs and therefore extends this research strategy beyond the survey method and into the field of in-depth key informant and consumer research. Nevertheless, face-to face interviews appear to be viewed as the "gold standard" for qualitative research (McCoyd and Kerson, 2006, p. 389) and were adopted whenever possible within this thesis. The methodology presented within this thesis has applied a contemporary approach to conducting case research for e-SMEs using social media platforms.

10.8 Findings

10.8.1 Expands Trust Literature to E-SME social media domain

Concepts of social media trust, from an e-SME brand perspective, are defined and explained in this thesis. As the literature focuses on trust from the consumer perspective (Habibi et al., 2014; Eren and Cicek, 2012) this research provides insight into both engagement and social media brand communities to contribute to definitions of trust from an e-SME, key informant, and consumer perspectives. This allows for the development of the growing social media and e-SME literature (e.g.To and Ho, 2014) which emphasises the need for further trust research into the e-SME domain.

10.8.2 Extends branding Literature to e-SME social media domain

This research has enabled extension of the emergent online branding literature (Razeghi et al., 2014; Russell et al., 2013) into the concept of social media throughout the e-SME online retail domain.

The presence of value co-creation with consumers was confirmed in this research. As a result, this thesis identifies utilising this approach as a method to enhance brand reputation. Potentially, e-SMEs are able to react and adapt resources such as customer service, position and performance of the company which could help the consumers distinguish and trust their brand. By adopting this approach, SMEs can achieve a unique and distinctive brand which can flourish (Russell et al., 2013). Therefore this thesis argues that e-SMEs should prioritise values such as innovation and have a clear focus on the distinctive characteristics of their brand, in order to ensure consistency and alignment of brand message to achieve consumer trust.

10.8.3 Expands Engagement literature to e-SME social media domain

The findings allow extension of existing engagement theory regarding the nature of social media activity from e-SMEs (Sashi, 2012, Brodie et al., 2011). This provides a new stream of research to be created which can analyse engagement theory over more industries over a longer period of time. This is of particular importance given the evolving nature of social media technology and how this can impact e-SME strategy.

10.9 Contribution to Knowledge Summary

Chapter Nine has highlighted the contributions to knowledge asserted within this thesis. For ease of comprehension the contributions to knowledge claimed in this thesis are briefly highlighted in table 9.1.

Table 10.1 Contribution to Knowledge Summary

Contribution Indicator	Contribution
1. Literature	• **Extends existing trust models from the literature which support two key trust constructs to seven key constructs.** • **Expands Trust Literature to e-SME social media domain.** • **Extends branding Literature to e-SME social media domain.** • **Expands Engagement literature to e-SME social media domain.**
2. Methodology	• **Social media netnography to provide thematic basis for key informant and consumer interviews.**
3. New theory and findings	• **Framework for engagement to create initial trust and develop continual trust.** • **Corporate value and Reputation thematic indicators highlighted.**

10.10 Implications for practice

Following on from the empirical investigation and analysis, a number of practical or operational implications are highlighted below:

10.10.1 Engagement Managerial Implications

By providing a consumer engagement framework, this thesis provides e-SMEs with an enhanced understanding of the 'engagement' concept (Fournier and Avery 2011), which can assist e-SMEs developing consumer relationships and loyalty. In today's highly competitive online retail sports environment, e-SMEs are faced with the challenge of retaining customers that may display brand switching behaviours. Therefore e-SMEs ability to measure and quantify continual trust against their organisational objectives and key performance indicators is expected to generate enhanced understanding of an e-SMEs target audience and its objectives and its outcomes, including consumer-perceived brand trust and loyalty.

Since engagement is key to the continuation of an e-SME brand's social media presence, organisations should encourage active commentators and 'Fans' of their SMBCs, in such a

way that leads not only to more commenting and liking, but to the development of relationships and influence purchase behaviour (e.g. value focussed content). Along with handling consumer user-generated content, e-SME brands should create their own content which adds value for consumers visiting the social media brand community and encourage them to engage in transactional behaviours. Finally, e-SMEs should consistently monitor what motivates consumers to 'follow' or 'like' a community, the type of content they enjoy, and what benefits they perceive in order to find ways to create added value for consumers to meet and exceed their expected benefits.

All e-SMEs should have the objective of increasing engagement with their customers through their social media activity (Hanna et al., 2011). However, consumers' social media activity can vary in terms of their engagement with social media platforms, spending minutes or even hours each day viewing content. Consumers engagement levels with the e-SME social media communities vary due to their attitudes toward the brand, which is dependent on their motivations to become a member on social media. Lapointe (2012) highlighted that some fans or followers may even post negative comments, all the while remaining members who continue to use the brand. Whereas some consumers join the platform to receive assistance, gain product knowledge and information, share their ideas and concerns or simply for entertainment (Zaglia, 2013). Furthermore, consumers may decide to become fans as the community was recommended to them by other connections in their network, by way of a direct recommendation or even the influence of a retweet on Twitter or share on Facebook. These differing levels of engagement highlight that an e-SME's social media communities do not have the same impact for all consumers. Social media engagement provides a variety of potential connections for consumers, as a result by providing a variety of engagement options for consumers. This should result in highly engaged consumers, forming positive relationships with an e-SME brand.

10.10.2 Reputation- Managerial Implications

The challenge of transparency takes various forms in e-SME brand social media communities. Fournier and Avery (2011) recommended that the future of brand management may lie in systematic brand protection and relatively passive reputation management rather than in active brand building.

Alternatively, e-SMEs may decide to adopt a more proactive strategy, where knowledgeable staff monitor the brand social media communities. However, in order to be successful, e-SME

staff must be able to empathise with bloggers and posters and also create authentic engaging content, and build 'buzz' (Fournier and Avery, 2011).

Other methods of maintaining transparency online include creating organisational policies, guidelines, and practices for social media in general, as well as for specific forms of communication such as organisational blogging (Culnan et al., 2010; Gallaugher and Ransbotham, 2010). However, Culnan et al. (2010) argued that in adopting social media as a part of their daily processes, organisations should be mindful of the associated risks, emphasising that formal rules and systems need to be created for employees to use in responding to social-media posts. However, too much control may result in inauthentic brand communication (Fournier and Avery, 2011) and lead to a sense of alienation and resistance among employees (Rudin et al., 2009). A balance between control and trust is therefore likely to be a crucial management challenge for e-SMEs.

10.10.3 E-WOM Managerial Implications for E-SMEs

Recent studies (e.g. Dekay, 2012) have indicated that many organisation do not respond to negative social media comments and/or just delete them. Indeed, even those companies that do respond to negative comments do not adopt explicit strategies that transform these comments into useful opportunities to create and develop trust (Dekay, 2012). Handling these instances poorly, may result in further negative e-WOM amongst consumers. Consequently, a major challenge for e-SMEs is to develop appropriate response strategies to negative word of mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Roehm and Tybout, 2006); otherwise their SMBC may have negative impacts on a firm's brand image and sales (Corstjens and Umblijs, 2012).

E-SMEs should be aware of the high likelihood that consumers primarily visit a social media community for its supply of unique, trustworthy information, making the communication platforms avenues with enormous potential to spread influence. Therefore better knowledge of the SMBC users is required for e-SMEs to fully utilise the commercial potential of social media. One of the main benefits of e-WOM for businesses is the generation of positive social media posts, which is a highly desirable result. To achieve this, organisations are presented with the important challenge of being capable of processing and managing e-WOM in a manner that generates messages and content favourable to new and existing customers.

As a result, social media platforms that are useful and easy to use should be employed. Moreover, e-SMEs ought to promote the possibility of linking and sharing the information created by integration of links from additional social networks. For instance comments from a company blog that can also be shared on Twitter, Facebook, etc. The objective of e-SMEs

that want to benefit from the effects of social media engagement should focus on platforms that tend to the informational needs of their target audience and that have influential users.

Techniques to incentivize the participation of prescribers within a social network could also be used. Monitoring the distinct users of social communities, through the use of key words, number of visits to the comment sections, number of comments, number of videos created, etc. is also a consideration for e-SMEs. Once identified, special attention may be given to them in order to convince them of the positive qualities of promoting the brand's products or services.

However, Smith et al. (2007) argued that new users and experienced users are equally as likely to share marketing messages with other consumers as e-WOM's behaviour emerges from the basic human needs to be useful and to give advice. Therefore, e-SMEs should not underestimate the large potential for recommendation about products, held not only by individuals who are considered key influencers, but also by the majority of consumers. Furthermore, Lee and Youn (2009) have observed that reading e-WOM-related comments posted by unknown people is common practice among those consumers with a situational, low-involvement online shopping process. This suggests that e-SMEs are aware consumer-to-consumer recommendations carry much more credibility with consumers than brand generated content.

10.10.4 Value-E-SME Managerial Implications

A number of factors may lead to an e-SME creating SMBCs such as fast growth and popularity of social media, their viral nature, the competitors' presence on social media, and the low-cost solutions offered by social media platforms. The organisation's strategy and target audience may also be a factor. For example, if a brand's consumer target audience is comprised of a relatively young demographic, they may decide to have a strong social media presence. Or if e-SMEs sell technological products they may feel that the product capabilities are best displayed using social media.

Given these factors, it could be suggested that if an e-SME create an SMBC the platform has to be an appropriate and represent the e-SMEs products or strategy. For example a Facebook brand community would be more appropriate for an e-SME that desires full interactive communication with its target audience. Whereas a Twitter feed can spread short informational messages. E-SME Brands that have visualized messages such as product demonstrations are more likely to prefer a YouTube channel. However, most of the e-SMEs reviewed in the

netnography prefer a combination of several SMBCs, utilizing each one according to the needs of their social media strategy or target audience.

By utilising the daily and direct communication offered by social media communities, e-SMEs are able to keep non-customers and customers close to the brand name and are provided with the opportunity of turning them into a fan and a loyal customer. Thereby increasing sales potential for the organisation. Further sales strategies could also include discounts, offers, and competitions to increase sales.

Recent research by Lipsman et al. (2012) argue that organisation's marketing budgets for social media are constantly growing. This could be due to a number of operational factors previously highlighted by Gillin (2007) such as low cost, demographic shifts, technological developments and consumer preference. This implies that brands are becoming increasingly focussed on establishing a presence within social media, creating value for consumers and developing long term relationships. Given these issues and the high potential for marketing and creating trust through social media, a key challenge for e-SMEs is how to take full advantage of social media and find ways in which social media can contribute to organisational objectives and support communications and marketing strategies.

The findings from this thesis support previous work by Fanion (2011) and O'Flynn, (2012) which argue that social media can establish and raise brand awareness. This is due to the huge amount of consumers on social media and an e-SME brand's presence on those networks can help inform customers about their offerings and become familiar with the firm. As reflected in the key informant interview findings social media relationships can improve sales for e-SMEs, with the community membership and exposure to content leading to traffic to the main retail site, resulting in increased sales. However, e-SMEs need to be wary of the constant evolution of social media technology and the applications that they provide to enhance their product and service offering. Consequently this research recommends that e-SMEs experiment constantly by testing various ways of using social media and observing their use by competitors. By taking advantage of the frequent and direct communication provided by social media communities, e-SMEs can keep customers and non-customers close to the brand and have the opportunity of turning a consumer into a fan and a loyal customer. Activities such as discounts, offers, competitions, marketing messages, or even using the page as a direct selling channel can increase trust, brand reputation and ultimately sales. Customers with strong emotional bonds can become advocates for sellers in interactions with other customers and non-customers.

E-SMEs need a clear understanding of the purpose of social media for their organisation. Whether it is a substitute or a supplementary tool to the rest of their communication activities. Possible synergies of social media with other online and offline actions should be carefully examined and systematically managed. Such synergies can for instance increase an e-SME's website or store visits. Also, the development of KPIs would provide organisations with the ability to analyse and review the performance of their social media activity. Since engagement is a key benefit for an e-SME brand's social media presence, firms should encourage active commentators and "likers" in their pages, in such a way that lead not only to more commenting and liking, but also to purchase behaviour. Together with handling this user-generated content, e-SMEs should create content that adds value for social media brand community users and encourages them to engage in transactional behaviours. Creating and maintaining a highly engaged fan base on social media may appear to be a daunting undertaking for e-SMEs, but the benefits for brands and their fans may just be worth the effort. One of the first consequences of having a highly involved consumer base is converting consumers to 'fans'. Rather than looking for short-term engagements that spikes then fade away, by asking consumers to share experiences, fans help shape the evolution of the brand and e-SMEs can strengthen their connection with fans. Thereby creating brand enthusiasm and building consumer trust and loyalty in the long term for e-SMEs and expanding their customer base.

By shaping content to focus on the experience for consumers when they visit or become part of a SMBC, e-SME brands can engage with customers and potential customers on a large scale, driving advocacy and e-WOM.

The findings have shown the positive impact of asking consumers to share the experiences of the industry. However, another potential avenue for e-SMEs to explore is encouraging users to create content about the brand itself. This encourages consumers to not just be fans, but share stories which involve the brand, which could play a significant big role in the brand's storytelling, providing value, adding credibility and igniting consumer interest in the brand.

It would perhaps be unrealistic for this research to highlight a platform which guarantees success. But rather e-SMEs may decide to bear in mind demographics and the interests of their target audience as the first criteria to consider when looking for the best place share experiences. Also e-SMEs may be mindful of creating the right content for the right platform, and in doing so, strengthen its relationship with its community. This strategy has also delivered a strong user-generated element, with the community highly involved in content creation for the brand. Generally speaking, Facebook and Twitter are the main platforms used for the e-SMEs which adopted this approach and has worked well for Sportshoes.com for example, as

this brand actively engages with its fans and followers on a daily basis, looking to find the best ways to respond to the changing needs and social behaviours of its consumer base.

10.11 Practical Conceptual Transferability

Methods and theoretical aspects developed in this thesis have implications and widespread applications for e-SMEs in particular.

10.11.1 Implications and Application

If e-SMEs strive to engage with new and existing consumers to create and sustain trust then they are required to incorporate a staged process in order to acquire and retain consumers from SMBCs. E-SMEs would be wise to review the proposed stages within the process in order to develop engaging strategies which align with the organisations social media and organisational objectives, as well as consumer preferences.

A staged approach within the sports online retail sector could be used as a learning and development tool for e-SMEs. The engagement process can be used as a practical tool to enable e-SMEs to establish a comprehensive variety of strategic content to demonstrate the brands commitment to encouraging consumer trust. The process could also be used as a framework to review the strengths and weaknesses of social media campaigns.

Evaluating social media engagement campaigns will not only indicate whether or not they have met their objectives, but could also generate fresh ideas and new opportunities for e-SMEs. A further significant advantage of utilising this framework is the flexible approach it provides to e-SMEs over larger competitors with larger resources. An e-SME possesses the potential for gaining competitive advantage by reacting quickly and being more flexible in terms of their creative facilitation for including up to date and relevant content into their postings. However, SMBCs can be redundant in this key role if e-SMEs do not develop the necessary procedures to utilise its potential.

10.11.2 Implications and Application: Consumer Trust

This research has shown that consumers identify with a number of e-SME activities that create and sustain consumer trust. The consumer trust roadmap may allow e-SMEs to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in relation to the potential for developing relationships with consumers. The roadmap may also be used as a strategic social media content planning tool to evaluate and establish competitive positioning within the sports online

retail sector as a method of identifying and developing competitiveness. This supports previous work by Habibi et al. (2014) which called for future research to focus on a few specific brand communities and demonstrate the existence of community markers, which could be used to apply the roadmap to other industries.

Adopting a strategic plan to building initial trust and sustaining continual trust in this manner could also aid industry researchers, in order to better understand online purchasing behaviour. Taking a holistic view on consumer trust for social media brand communities can assist e-SMEs with consumer acquisition and retention. However, the strength of this approach is that it provides e-SMEs with a planning tool that facilitates developing long lasting trusting relationships with consumers.

10.11.3 Implications: Reputation Model

This thesis extends existing research by Eren and Cicek (2012) which answers the call for further research into the effects of different types of social media marketing campaigns on brand awareness, image, and loyalty as well as the impact of word-of-mouth on reputation. It also provides the strategic options available to e-SMEs for developing corporate brand reputation in a social media context.

These findings add multiple perspectives to corporate brand reputation research which argue that reviewing and updating all of these elements are key to enhancing reputation through social media. Therefore this thesis is in agreement with Van Noort and Willemsen, (2011) and Weinberg and Pehlivan (2011) who argue that the most prevalent motives for companies to use social media are enhancing trustworthiness, brand attitude, and customer commitment. Key informants confirmed that managing SMBCs in this way increases customer retention, e-WOM, and ultimately loyalty, thus extending extant reputation literature.

10.12 Education and Research – Implications

This thesis has identified a number of implications for education and research. Currently there are few academic courses which focus on social media or e-SME organisations, educational implications could focus on the development of social media communications courses for organisations with limited resources.

10.12.1 Academic Considerations

In terms of methodology, the challenge for this type of research is whether access can be gained to a wider spectrum of e-SMEs in order to provide further data to inform the body of theoretical knowledge and industry practitioners in this domain.

In this thesis, a social media netnography was successfully used as a means to provide an e-SME perspective and also to provide a foundation for the consumer and key informant interviews. From a research perspective, this process could provide a suitable strategy across a broader field of social media agendas that require numerous stakeholder perspectives. An effective approach would be to combine KPI's with thematic analysis in order to develop templates for comparative analysis to evaluate content strategies.

Theoretical frameworks and methods presented in this study can be used to research more widely across the sport retail industry. They can also be used to investigate trust and brand relationships in various online retail industries and different sizes of organisations. The frameworks could also be used for comparative analysis and in order to ascertain a more holistic understanding of social media engagement. Furthermore, the frameworks could also be used for case study examples to encourage further academic discussion.

10.12.2 Future Research areas

This study contributes to social media value literature by developing theoretical models, which future research can be conducted to collect empirical data for measuring how value. Future research areas could include a longitudinal examination of social media community practices, in order to analyse how organisations adjust their strategies over time and technology upgrades. Future research may also wish to investigate the nature of specific constructs in relation to trust across multiple brand interactions, and/or over time. Similarly this research could be replicated looking at brand trust and engagement for 'Bricks and Clicks' organisations, or other sectors.

10.13 Limitations of Research

This thesis is a preliminary attempt to understand how e-SME brands use social media communities and how they expect to benefit from them. Given the qualitative nature of this thesis and the fact that social media is an emerging field of research which is continuously developing, findings should be considered as exploratory.

Despite the contributions, this research is also subject to several limitations. In particular the number of case e-SMEs, the number of interview respondents (consumer and practitioner), UK emphasis, and the netnography method.

Given the vast presence of online retailers supplying sports products this study is limited by the number of cases (twelve e-SME cases, fifteen key informant interviews, fifteen consumer interviews). Therefore the findings are not expected to generalise across the online sports retail sector as a whole.

Nevertheless, theme saturation across cases and respondents enabled a 'good fit' and 'reliability' for the theoretical constructs derived from this qualitative research (Ashworth, 2007; Creswell and Miller, 2000; Gummesson, 2000; Cepeda and Martin, 2005). The limited number of cases and respondents is redressed by the netnography period (eight months) as well as the cumulative experience (industry knowledge) of the key informants' (Johnson and Weller, 2002). Whereas the rich descriptions from the consumer respondents provides validity and credibility to the research (Creswell and Miller, 2000). This study puts forward the perceptions of a small number of e-SMEs based in the UK. However, this limitation is counter balanced by the number of SMBCs examined, the number of different types of sports products provided and the varying strategic approaches of the e-SMEs, which increases the research validity. (Richardson, 2000). From a social construction perspective, validity and reliability are present where the research investigates what it set out to explore (Gummesson, 2000) and the objectives of this study are achieved.

10.14 Replication

There is significant opportunity for academics to replicate this study and the methodology adopted. However, as the nature of social media is evolving and highly dynamic, it is likely that the technological applications of these platforms will have changed, should future research be conducted investigating similar areas. However, e-SME and social media engagement literature is still at a fledgling stage, with regard to theoretical understanding of the strategic elements that come together to create 'initial trust' and sustain 'continual trust'. As a consequence a number of research streams are worthy of further research (See future research areas 10.12.2).

10.15 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate social media consumer engagement and how it can be used by e-SME brands to develop trust and build brand reputation, with new and

existing customers. The findings within this thesis are believed to provide a significant contribution to e-SME practice and business literature, as social media is continuously playing an integral role to smaller organisations marketing focus. Therefore, this research is timely and needed to ensure some direction for e-SMEs.

Following calls from the literature for further research (e.g Habibi et al., 2014; Laroche et al., 2013; Toufaily et al., 2013) this study represents the first study to explore and integrate findings in relation to consumer trust development, engagement and reputation for UK e-SME sports retailers through social media brand communities. Incorporating findings from a social media netnography reviewing twelve e-SMEs, and thirty respondent interviews. The theoretical findings provided in this research also have implications/applications in relation to the fields of practice and further education.

An e-SME must decide whether to participate on social media, and which social media platforms are more appropriate for its campaign or target audience. For instance, if an e-SME brand's target group is young consumers, it is more likely to feel compelled to place their brand on social media. Also, brands which provide technological products are more likely to join social media. Consequently, this feeds into the appropriate platforms that an organisation decides to use for its SMBCs. For example a Facebook community would be suitable for a firm that wishes to have a full interactive communication with its audience, whereas a Twitter account would more likely be utilised by brands looking to promote short messages. E-SME sports brands that focus on visualised messages to promote products could focus on a YouTube channel.

However, as the findings demonstrated, most of the case e-SMEs used a combination of several SMBCs. Should a firm use this approach then, it has to define, implement and follow up specific activities on the selected social media in line with the organisation's overall objectives. Mainstream activity includes the creation of competitions which will offer prizes, (which this research argues is one of the first stages of engagement and initial trust) communication with fellow consumers, new products/service information, provision of guidance and useful information, as well as a customer service platform.

As indicated in the key informant findings, this activity should be in accordance with other online and offline marketing activities that the e-SME may have and create synergies among them with the overall objectives (Stockdale et al., 2012). This research also considered e-WOM as an important benefit which requires careful management due to the viral distribution of information (Chan and Ngai, 2011; Dellarocas, 2003; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012) which can enhance consumer trust but also damage it (Neff, 2010). E-WOM can also be used to

monitor consumer opinion to gain market insight as well as correct factual inaccuracies. The emergence of the customer engagement concept acknowledges the opportunities offered by the interactive aspects of SMBCs to develop relationships between customers and e-SMEs. Its significance has been highlighted in previous research seeking to investigate social media to develop enduring relational exchanges with strong emotional connections and improve business performance (Mitic and Kapoulas, 2012; Pagani and Mirabello, 2011; Sashi, 2012) and this thesis reinforces its potential value to e-SMEs.

Adopting a social constructionist approach allowed the integration of data derived from e-SMEs, with further insight the key informants (industry practitioners) and consumers, which helped identify consumer trust and engagement constructs from a social media perspective.

This thesis has highlighted that following a staged approach to consumer trust and leveraging the engagement constructs contributes to the enhancement of brand reputation, initial and continual consumer trust for non-customers and customers. The theoretical frameworks presented in this research can now be used to further research in alternative e-SME industries looking to utilise social media to connect with their target audience.

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Appendix 1: Key Informant Background

Key Informants	Professional Background
Jill Quick-Quick Marketing Consultancy	Founder at Quick Marketing Consultancy Limited, experience of integrated B2C marketing communications. Social Media agency experience with e-SMEs, agencies, start-ups and multi-site organisations in the private, public and non-profit sectors
Nicky Kriel-Nicky Kriel Social Media	Social Media Trainer, Consultant & Author helping Business Owners to use Social Media as a Marketing tool for business.
Jocelyn Kirby-Metakinetic Ltd	Head of Marketing for Metakinetic Ltd-e-commerce solution provider. Author for Fourth Source Online-Digital Media Marketing in the UK.
Kay Harding-Metakinetic Ltd	Head of Search Marketing- Internet marketing background Devise and implement social media strategies
Andy Farmer-Weapon 7	Head of Customer Experience-Digital director with 21 year record of creating, developing and managing commercially successful multichannel businesses, through a combination of brand, strategic planning, marketing, analytics, customer experience & commercial expertise.
Liz Willder-TeamSpirit Public Relations	Email Marketing and Communications Director-Devise and implement social media strategies for SMEs
Annie Boyd-Annie Boyd Social Media Consultancy	Freelance social media consultant- Create & deliver online campaigns using social media for SMEs
Rachel Robinson- Social Revolution Marketing	Director at Social Revolution Marketing, social media consultant specialising in Customer engagement Brand promotion Marketing strategy and delivery, Content Management Twitter & Facebook Management
Eileen Brown-CEO Amastra	Social Business, Social Media, Online Branding & Crisis Management Expert. Consultant, Author, Speaker,
Adam Smith- TeamSpirit PR	Account Director at TeamSpirit PR-specialisms include Social media marketing and PR including blogging, micro blogging and corporate facebook pages,
Paul Wolferstan-Teamspirit Public Relations	Head of Organic Media at Teamspirit-Senior digital marketer specialising in social media strategy, planning and execution across owned and earned media for large organisations in both B2C sectors
Helene Hall	Digital Marketing Director-Gravytrain, specialising in social media and digital marketing
Leslie Hickmott-CapitalSpace	Marketing Facilitator at CapitalSpace, specialises in Social Enterprise, Media Marketing Management, Integrated Communications Strategy, Event Management, Direct Marketing and Digital Marketing.
Joseph Faul- We are Social	Research and Insight Director at We are Social-experience of providing social media analytics to a variety of brands.
Paul Chatterton-talkingholstic.com	Co-founder of talkingholstic.com -Provides Social Media strategies for clients in multiple sectors.

Appendix 2 Consumer Background

Consumers	Background/Sports Interest	Social media used to follow brands
Jane Roberts	Solicitor, running, rugby	Facebook, Twitter
Daniel Hooton	Graphic Designer, football, golf	Facebook, Twitter
Wendy Bailey	Communcatons Manager, running	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Sam Rore	Solicitor, running	Facebook, Twitter
Vicky Clayton	Journalist, badminton	Facebook, Twitter
Paul Turner	Youth Worker, golf, football	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Lauren Johnston-Smith	Communcatons Manager, running	Facebook, Twitter
Ewen Amos	Engineer, football, golf, rugby	Facebook, Twitter
Jill Turner	Purchaser, running	Facebook, Twitter
Roxy Wallace	Radiographer, running	Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest
Matthew Duckworth	Surveyor, football, golf, rugby	Facebook, Twitter
Michelle Amos	Business Manager, running, badminton	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube
Paul McNicol	Teacher, golf	Facebook, Twitter
Mary Matherson	Procurement, running, badminton	Facebook, Twitter
Tom Grantham	Teacher, Athletics	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

Appendix 3: Consumer Interview Protocol Form

Date:…………
Time…..
Interview Type (phone/face to face)…
Interviewee:..
Consent for responses to be published:…
Interview Length:…

Notes to interviewee:

Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research in helping expand theory and practice brand social media engagement.

Interview length could last from 30mins-1 hour

Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and sent back to you to confirm you are content with the responses.

Purpose of research:

An Investigation Into How Social Media Consumer Engagement Can Be Used By E-SME Brands To Develop Trust And Build Brand Reputation, With New And Existing Customers.

General question areas covering your experience of:
- Social media
- Brand engagement
- E-SMEs/Online brands
- Brand trust
- Brand reputation
- Social media strategy/risk

Question areas

1. Can you tell me about the process by which you search for new products and companies when you shop online?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

2. Where does social media come into the process when you research new products and online organisations?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

3. How much do you trust the content on social media? What aspects of social media make you trust the brand?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

4. What are your main motivations to engage with brands on social media?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

5. Does the amount of followers that a brand has impact your opinion of them, in terms of trust or reputation?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

6. Is there anything that brands do on social media that you don't enjoy or care for? Does this influence your opinion of them?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

7. In your opinion what makes brands stand out on social media?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

8. Do you feel that reputation can be enhanced or damaged through brand engagement?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

9. What do you feel are the main sources of value for you by going on social media?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

10. Do you read product reviews on social media?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

11. How much do you trust other consumer opinion or even brand product opinion on social media?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

12. What type of content excites or entertains you on social media? Does it encourage you to continue to follow or trust the brand?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

13. Do you ever complain to brands through social media? Do you ever read complaints from other consumers?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

14. What/If any security features do you look for on social media?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

15. Do you have any relationships with brands through social media? Are you loyal to them? If so, why?

Appendix 4: Key Informant Interview Protocol Form

Date:…………
Time…..
Interview Type (phone/face to face)…
Interviewee:..
Consent for responses to be published:…
Interview Length:…

Notes to interviewee:

Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research in helping expand theory and practice brand social media engagement.

Interview length could last from 30mins-1 hour

Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and sent back to you to confirm you are content with the responses.

Purpose of research:

An Investigation Into How Social Media Consumer Engagement Can Be Used By E-SME Brands To Develop Trust And Build Brand Reputation, With New And Existing Customers.

General question areas covering your experience of:
- Social media
- Brand engagement
- E-SMEs/Consumers
- Brand trust
- Brand reputation
- Social media strategy/risk

Question areas

1. Can you tell me about your current role and previous experience? (Professional background, organizations worked with, responsibilities etc.)

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

2. Can you tell me your thoughts on online brand trust and social media?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

3. Can you tell me what you think are the key considerations for e-SME social media strategy?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

4. Do these considerations present any further challenges?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

5. In your opinion what type of social media content makes consumers trust and engage to the e-SME SMBC?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

6. What do you feel are the most appropriate engagement strategies for e-SMEs?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

7. What do you feel are the main motivations for consumers to engage with e-SMEs through social media?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

8. Do you feel that reputation can be enhanced or damaged through SMBC engagement?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

9. What do you feel are the main sources of value for an e-SME engaging with consumers through SMBCs?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

10. What benefits can e-SMEs realize by creating a SMBC?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

11. Are there any risks involved with such activity?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

12. Can relationships be formed through SMBCs?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

13. Can these trusting relationships be sustained through SMBCs?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

14. How effective are consumer advocates on SMBCs?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer