

An Investigation into the Influence of Social Media  
Message Context on Retailer-Consumer Interaction:  
A Case Study from the Lens of a UK Retailer

Thesis submitted in accordance with the  
requirements of the University of Chester for the  
Degree of Doctor of Business Administration

by Philip Smith

June 2018

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the memory of my parents, who inspired my determination to succeed in life.

## **Acknowledgments**

I am extremely grateful to my supervisory team, Professor Ruth Ashford and Professor Paul Manning, for their guidance and personal support in completing this major research project. I also thank other scholars who have supported me on the way to completing the entire Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme of studies.

The case organisation and those employees who participated in this study cannot be identified, but they know that their support is very much appreciated. Your candidness in our discussions has added value to the research findings.

And not least, thank you to my wife for her tireless support and encouragement on this journey.

## Declaration of Originality

The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another Higher Education Institute (HEI) except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Philip Smith**

**30<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

# Table of Contents

<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
Dedication.....	1
Acknowledgments.....	2
Declaration of Originality.....	3
Table of Contents .....	4
List of Tables .....	8
List of Figures .....	9
Glossary of Terms .....	11
Abstract .....	14
Summary of Portfolio .....	15
 <b>Chapter One: Introduction to the Study</b>	
1.1 Introduction.....	16
1.2 Background to the Study .....	16
1.2.1 The Context of this Research.....	17
1.2.2 The Scope of this Study. ....	17
1.3 The Researcher’s Background .....	18
1.4 Synopsis of Previous Studies .....	18
1.5 Purpose of this Research.....	19
1.5.1 Theoretical Gap and Contribution to Knowledge .....	21
1.5.2 The Research Aim and Objectives .....	21
1.5.3 Details of Collaborating Establishment .....	22
1.6 Overview of the Research Approach .....	22
1.7 Concluding Comment .....	23
 <b>Chapter Two: Literature Review</b>	
2.1 Introduction.....	24
2.2 Mass Media Communication.....	25
2.3 Persuasion Communication .....	28
2.4 Consumer Behaviour .....	32
2.5 Word-of-Mouth Communication .....	34
2.6 Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication.....	36
2.7 The Brand Community.....	38
2.8 Social Networking Sites .....	41

2.9	Understanding Social Media Technology and Human Interaction .....	46
2.10	Uses and Gratification as a Theoretical Framework.....	48
2.11	Concluding Comment .....	50

### **Chapter Three: Methodological Framework**

3.1	Introduction.....	52
3.2	Literature Review Methodology .....	52
3.3	Research Philosophy.....	53
3.4	Research Paradigm .....	55
3.5	Ontology .....	57
3.6	Epistemology.....	58
3.7	Research Site .....	59
3.8	Research Strategy .....	60
3.9	Data Collection Strategy .....	62
3.10	Research Design .....	64
3.11	Research Method .....	66
3.12	Sampling Strategy .....	67
3.13	Data Analysis.....	70
3.14	Reliability and Validity .....	73
3.15	Ethical Considerations .....	75
3.16	Limitations of the Study .....	76
3.17	Concluding Comment .....	76

### **Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings**

4.1	Introduction.....	78
4.2	Analysis of Data Collected .....	78
4.2.1	The Focus of the Secondary Research.....	80
4.2.2	The Focus of the Primary Research.....	82
4.3	Secondary Research Findings .....	85
4.3.1	Primary Twitter Account.....	85
4.3.2	Sub-Community Twitter Account (S1) .....	88
4.3.3	Sub-Community Twitter Account (S2) .....	90
4.3.4	Primary Facebook Account .....	92
4.3.5	Store-Based Facebook Account (S3) .....	93
4.3.6	Sub-Community Facebook Account (S1) .....	94
4.3.7	Sub-Community Facebook Account (S2) .....	95
4.4	Primary Research Findings .....	96

4.4.1	Marketing Communication .....	98
4.4.1.1	Social Media .....	99
4.4.1.1.1	Engaging Content .....	100
4.4.1.1.2	Brand Awareness .....	100
4.4.1.1.3	User Interaction .....	101
4.4.1.1.4	Tone of Voice .....	102
4.4.1.1.5	Training .....	102
4.4.1.2	Print Media .....	103
4.4.1.3	Perceptions of Return on Investment .....	104
4.4.2	Consumer Engagement .....	105
4.4.2.1	National .....	106
4.4.2.2	Local .....	107
4.4.2.3	Uses and Gratification Theory .....	107
4.4.2.4	Facebook .....	108
4.4.2.5	Twitter .....	109
4.4.3	Internal Relationships .....	110
4.4.3.1	Internal Communication .....	110
4.4.3.2	Policy .....	111
4.4.3.3	Staff Involvement .....	112
4.4.4	Brand Community .....	113
4.4.4.1	Prime Community .....	114
4.4.4.2	Sub-Community .....	114
4.4.4.3	Suppliers and Partnerships .....	115
4.4.4.4	Consumer Influence .....	116
4.5	Discussion.....	116
4.6	Concluding Comment.....	120

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

5.1	Introduction.....	122
5.2	The Case Study Approach Related to the Research Enquiry.....	123
5.3	Contribution to Theoretical Knowledge .....	124
5.4	Contribution to Practice .....	126
5.4.1	Consumer Interaction on Twitter.....	127
5.4.2	Consumer Interaction on Facebook.....	129
5.4.3	Traditional Marketing Strategy and Social Media.....	131
5.4.4	The Retailers' Return on Investment in Social Media .....	131
5.4.5	Internal Communication and Relationships .....	132

<b>5.4.6</b>	Emergent Findings .....	133
<b>5.5</b>	Summary Conclusions and Recommendations.....	133
<b>5.6</b>	Recommendations for Further Research .....	134
<b>5.6.1</b>	The Investigation of Other Social Media Channels .....	134
<b>5.6.2</b>	Study Different Retail Formats, and the use of Third-Party Providers.....	135
<b>5.6.3</b>	How Large Retail Organisations Manage Social Media Activity .....	135
<b>5.7</b>	Personal Reflection.....	136
List of References.....		137
Appendix 1: Example of Twitter Posts extracted from Every Posting on Twitter by UGT Need Classification Code over a 12-month period beginning 1st March 2016 .....		157
Appendix 2: Example of Facebook Posts extracted from Every Posting on Facebook by UGT Need Classification Code over a 12-month period beginning 1st March 2016 .....		158
Appendix 3: Planned Research Questions.....		159
Appendix 4: Extracts from responses to interview question 1.....		160
Appendix 5: Extracts from responses to interview question 2.....		161



## List of Tables

Number	Title	Page
1	Taught elements of the DBA programme of study 2013 – 2015.....	15
2	Global Twitter and Facebook Statistics.....	20
3	Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research Strategies .....	61
4	Data collection process.....	63
5	Research Participants at the Case Organisation.....	68
6	Planned Research Questions .....	69
7	Online ethnography on Twitter.....	71
8	Online ethnography on Facebook.....	71
9	Example of Twitter Activity.....	80
10	Example of Facebook Activity.....	80
11	Data originating from unique posts on the case organisation’s primary Twitter account .....	86
12	Data including RTs of other user’s posts on the case organisation’s primary Twitter account .....	87
13	Data originating from unique posts by S1 on Twitter.....	88
14	Data including RTs of other user’s post on S1’s Twitter account.....	89
15	Data originating from unique posts by S2 on Twitter.....	90
16	Data including RTs of other user’s post on S2’s Twitter account.....	91
17	Total number of posts each year on S2’s Twitter account.....	91
18	Data originating from Facebook Posts by the case organisation.....	92
19	Data originating from Facebook Posts by S3.....	93
20	Data originating from Facebook Posts by S1 .....	94
21	Data originating from Facebook Posts by S2.....	95
22	Total number of posts each year on S2’s Facebook account.....	95
23	Participants’ personal experience of social media.....	96
24	Participants’ work experience of social media.....	97
25	Twitter Accounts as at 1st March 2017 .....	117
26	Facebook Accounts as at 1st March 2017 .....	117

## List of Figures

Number	Title	Page
1	The literature that informs this study.....	24
2	Hypodermic Needle Model .....	25
3	Two-Step Flow Model.....	25
4	Muniz et al.'s (2001) Brand Community Triad .....	39
5	Adapted from Muniz et al.'s (2001) Brand Community Triad .....	42
6	Flow chart showing search terms used and results of search for relevant literature.....	53
7	Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory .....	56
8	Qualitative research designs.....	62
9	Secondary and primary research activity .....	70
10	Steps in the template analysis process.....	72
11	Triangulating multiple sources and methods of data collected .....	74
12	Word Cloud generated from interview transcripts using NVivo software.....	83
13	Key Themes and Clusters Elicited from NVivo Analysis.....	84
14(a,b,c)	Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 11 .....	86
15(a,b,c)	Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 12 .....	87
16(a,b,c)	Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 13 .....	88
17(a,b,c)	Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 14 .....	89
18(a,b,c)	Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 15 .....	90
19(a,b,c)	Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 16 .....	91
20(a,b,c)	Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 18 .....	92
21(a,b,c)	Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 19 .....	93
22(a,b,c)	Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 20 .....	94
23(a,b,c)	Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 21 .....	95
24	Marketing Communication Theme and Related Clusters found in the Case Organisation.....	98
25	Customer Engagement Theme and Related Clusters found in the Case Organisation .....	105
26	Internal Relationships Theme and Related Clusters found in the Case Organisation .....	110

27	Brand Community Theme and Related Clusters found in the Case Organisation .....	113
28	Conceptual model applying UGT to Social Media Message Content ..	125
29	Average Number of User Interactions per post – Posts created by the Case Organisation and posted on their Primary Twitter Account .....	128
30	Average Number of User Interactions per post – Posts created by the Case Organisation and including Retweets of Other Users’ Tweets (RTs) and posted on the Case Organisation’s Primary Twitter Account.....	128
31	Average Number of User Interactions per post - Posts created by the Case Organisation and posted on their Primary Facebook Account ...	130
32	Average Number of User Interactions per post - Posts created by Sub-Community (S3) and Posted on their Local Store-Based Facebook Account .....	130

## Glossary of Terms

**Actors** - individuals who are not directly participating in the research.

**Blog** - a regularly updated website or web page, typically one run by an individual or small group, written in an informal or conversational style.

**Clickbait** - marketing or advertising material that employs a sensationalised headline to attract clicks.

**Comment (Facebook)** - a written response to another user's post. (A form of interaction).

**Consumer** - the target market.

**Customer** - an existing user of the retail brand.

**Customer relationship management (CRM)** - systems to provide insight into customer interactions with a brand, and to improve the quality of customer engagement.

**Electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM)** - is any statement made by customers and noncustomers that is available electronically.

**Engagement** - a statistic based on the number of likes, comments and shares received for a specific post.

**Facebook** - a social media platform connecting people with friends, family, acquaintances, and businesses from all over the world and enabling them to post, share, and engage with a variety of content such as photos and status updates.

**Facebook Page** - a public profile specifically created for businesses, brands, celebrities, etc.

**Follow (Facebook)** - a way to hear from people and/or businesses you are interested in, even if you are not friends.

**Followers** - a follower is another Twitter account that has followed you to receive your Tweets in their Home timeline.

**Hashtag** - a hashtag is any word or phrase immediately preceded by the # symbol. Social networks use hashtags to categorise information and make it easily searchable for users.

**Instagram** - Instagram is a photo sharing application that lets users take photos, apply filters to their images, and share the photos instantly on the Instagram network and other social networks.

**Like (Facebook)** - 'liking' is a way to give positive feedback without having to make a written comment. Liking a Page means you're connecting to that Page, and you'll start to see its stories in your News Feed. (A form of interaction).

**Like (Twitter)** – 'liking' a Tweet is a quick way to show approval of it. (A form of interaction).

**Live streaming** - live streaming is the act of delivering content over the internet in real-time.

**Mention** - a mention is a Twitter term used to describe an instance in which a user includes someone else's @username in their tweet to attribute a piece of content or start a discussion.

**Micro-blogs** - microblogging is a broadcast medium that exists in the form of blogging. A microblog differs from a traditional blog in that its content is typically smaller in both actual and aggregated file size.

**Paid Reach** - the number of unique individuals who saw a specific post from a Page through a paid source like a Facebook Ad or Promoted Post.

**Participants/ Respondents** – individuals at the case organisation interviewed for this research.

**Pinterest** - Pinterest is a photo sharing social network that provides users with a platform for uploading, saving, and categorising images ("pins") through collections called "boards".

**Reply (Twitter)** - a response to a comment, allowing for comment threads and conversations.

**Return on Investment (ROI)** - as a performance measure, ROI is used to evaluate the efficiency of an investment. In purely financial accounting terms, it is one way of relating profits to capital invested.

**Retweet (RT) (n.)** - a message that has been shared or forwarded on Twitter.

**Retweet (RT) (v.)** - to share or forward (someone else's message) on the Twitter website, by simply sharing as it is or adding a comment. (A form of interaction). *Retweets always retain original attribution.*

**S1 & S2** - specialist sub-community accounts.

**S3** - store-based sub-community account.

**Share (Facebook)** - a feature that allows users to repost content they enjoy on their timeline, on a friend's timeline, or in a personal message. (A form of interaction).

**Social media** - is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration.

**Social media marketing (SMM)** - takes advantage of social networking to help a company increase brand exposure and broaden consumer reach.

**Social networking sites (SNS)** - online platforms which people use to build social networks or social relations with other individuals and/or organisations.

**The case organisation** – the retailer participating in this research.

**The researcher** – the author of this thesis.

**Timeline** - the area of a profile or page where friends and fans can post their thoughts, views, or criticisms for everyone to see.

**Total Reach** - the number of unique individuals who have seen content related to a Facebook Page. This includes content published on the Page as well as Facebook Ads and Promoted Posts that lead people to the Page.

**Tweet** (n.) - a post on Twitter that may contain photos, images, videos, and text.

**Tweet** (v.) - the act of sending a Tweet. Tweets get shown in Twitter timelines or are embedded in websites and blogs.

**Twitter** - a real-time social network that allows users to share character limited updates (microblogs) with their followers. Users can like and/or retweet the posts of other users, as well as engage in conversations using @ mentions, replies, and hashtags for categorising their content.

**@Username** - how a person/business is identified on Twitter and is always preceded immediately by the @ symbol.

**User-generated content** - content (blogs, videos, photos, quotes, etc.) created by consumers.

**Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)** - is an audience-centred approach to understanding mass communication and to understand why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs.

**Web 2.0 technology** – an advancement in internet technology characterised by greater user interactivity and more pervasive network connectivity and enhanced communication channels.

**Word of Mouth (WoM)** - informal oral communication: given or done by people talking about something or telling people about something: the passing of information from person to person by oral communication.

**Word of Mouth Marketing (WoMM)** - differs from naturally occurring word of mouth, in that it is actively influenced or encouraged by organisations.

## Philip Smith

An Investigation into the Influence of Social Media Message Context on Retailer-Consumer Interaction: A Case Study from the Lens of a UK Retailer.

### Abstract

This thesis investigates social media and retailer-consumer interaction with a research site of a well-established medium sized specialist retailer within the outdoor activities sector (the case organisation), selling goods and services online, and offline from physical retail stores across the United Kingdom (UK). The research investigates the case organisation's response to the development of social media channels, with the purpose of developing understanding of the influence of content posted by the retailer on Twitter and Facebook platforms. The ease of access of these social media communications allowed the researcher to freely view the context of the case organisation's activity and helped shape the questioning of research participants in their face-to-face semi-structured interview. The research aimed to develop understanding, and therefore qualitative methods were most appropriate. The philosophical assumptions were for a subjectivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology. The theoretical framework of uses and gratification theory (UGT), provided *a priori* themes to identify the retailer's postings into social, entertainment or information value to the consumer.

This study demonstrates that the case organisation's posting activity on its primary Twitter and Facebook accounts, were predominantly of information value to the consumer, whereas users appeared to interact more with postings that were of social or entertainment value. The apparent under resourcing of the specialist product sub-community accounts (S1 and S2) appears to be suppressing social media activity, and thereby interaction with community members. But by reassigning management of S1 and S2 activity to generalists within the social media team, these research findings indicate that the case organisation is putting the close ingroup interaction that these sub-communities serve at risk. The one store-based sub-community Facebook account (S3) was achieving a more balanced mix of user interaction than the case organisation's primary account; indicating that local staff involvement was a motivating factor in consumer interaction. These research findings indicate that by re-evaluating the context of messages posted on its primary Twitter and Facebook accounts, and the involvement of local store account activity, consumer interaction on these channels will increase. Furthermore, the research findings suggest that by developing a transparent corporate social media strategy, that includes clear policy and operating procedures, those actors on the periphery of social media activity will benefit from the resultant clarity of understanding. And the call for training in managing social media activity for business by these actors can be addressed and delivered within the framework of a robust social media strategy.

While there are inherent limitations in researching a single-case organisation, the generous access granted to the researcher provided a unique opportunity to investigate the research aim and objectives in a real-world setting. Moreover, this in-depth study of Twitter and Facebook activity at the case organisation contributes to theory and practice by providing new insights and understanding on the influence of message context on consumer interaction from the lens of a specialist retailer.

## Summary of Portfolio

The researcher was unconditionally accepted by the Faculty of Business and Management, and the Graduate School, to enrol on the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programme and commenced study in October 2013 (Cohort 5). On successful completion of a written assignment and oral examination for each module title shown in Table 1, the Graduate School approved the researcher to transfer to the research stage of the DBA in November 2015. This major research project is the final module (BU8003) in completing the programme of study.

Table 1: Taught elements of the DBA programme of study 2013 – 2015

<b>Module</b>	<b>Module Title</b>
BU8002	Global Business Issues
BU8001	Critical Management Studies
BU8002	Critical Systematic Literature Review
BU8001	Research Methods for Business Administration

The final taught module (BU8001) further developed the researcher's understanding of research methods. Moreover, the module assessment enabled him to develop a 6,000-word research proposal for this major research project. That included an early stage literature review that helped shape the researcher's approach and the theoretical foundation of the study, thereby allowing him to start developing the research aim within this learning environment.

The researcher is entirely independent of any business organisations, so in that sense, this study has no third-party objectives imposed on the scope of the research. Whilst completing this part-time programme of study, the researcher continued to work with retail and associated businesses as a freelance consultant; where he advised business owners and/or senior managers on retail operations, business development plans and consumer marketing strategy, including reviewing the firm's web and social media presence. He embarked on completing the DBA programme to further develop his practitioner research skills, and this major research project enabled him to study an important contemporary phenomenon in a real-world retail context, with the academic support of the programme.



# Chapter One

## Introduction to the Study

### 1.1 Introduction

The rapid pace of development in social networking technology poses challenges for researchers and practitioners (Belk, 2013). One challenge is that the academic research “on social media marketing” has not kept pace with these developments (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2017, p. 118) and “much of the existing customer brand engagement research [using social media technology] is limited in scope and design” (Carvalho & Fernandes, 2018, p. 23). In consequence, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of social media interaction among scholars and retail practitioners. This thesis presents new insights on the influence of social media communication on the retailers’ interaction with the consumer.

This chapter introduces the background of the study, detailing the researcher’s practitioner experience and academic expertise which, is argued, adds value to this investigation. The chapter then proceeds with a synopsis of peer reviewed literature found in relation to the area of research. Thereafter, the researcher discusses the purpose of this study together with its aim and objectives. The retail case organisation participating in the empirical research to support the researcher in breaking new ground in contributing to knowledge and practice is then detailed, whilst maintaining its anonymity. The chapter concludes with an overview of the research approach and the researcher’s concluding comment.

### 1.2 Background to the Study

This study investigates the influence of content posted on two established social media channels, namely Twitter and Facebook, on retailer-consumer interaction from the lens of a well-established medium sized specialist retailer within the outdoor activities sector (the case organisation), trading online, and offline from bricks-and-mortar stores in towns and cities across the UK. The research approach adopted was a single in-depth case study to examine the influence of these social media platforms at the case organisation. Investigating this contemporary

phenomenon within its real-world setting was important in determining 'how' and 'why' social media messages influence the retailer's interaction with the consumer and, moreover, to understand what motivated users of Twitter and Facebook to interact with content published by the retailer.

### **1.2.1 The Context of this Research**

The internet, and subsequently social media technology, has increasingly empowered the consumer with ease of access to information (Lichy, 2012; Parsons, Maclaran & Chatzidakis, 2018) about the organisation and its retail offer, progressively shaping the way the case organisation communicates and interacts with its target audience. The impact of social media technology can be seen in changes to job roles (Johns, 2006), which include new competencies. For example, these new job roles include, Web Manager and Social Media Manager, with new teams with specialist knowledge being created around these functions. Similarly, traditional job roles have been affected to a greater or lesser extent by social media technology; while job titles generally reflect the core role responsibility, individuals appear to have adopted related peripheral tasks. Therefore, research participants represent individuals directly and indirectly involved in social media activity at the case organisation. To better understand the context of responses, the researcher asked each participant to explain their personal activity and work involvement in social media (see appendix 4 and 5). Furthermore, when the researcher became aware that one store was autonomously managing its own Facebook account, all Store Managers in the same region were interviewed to understand any effect. There were mixed views on store-based accounts – stores engaging with their local community and conversely the potential negative backlash when stores fail to maintain their account with regular content.

### **1.2.2 The Scope of this Study**

The scope of this study does not evaluate the quality of the message nor the quality of consumer engagement; the focus of this enquiry is the context of the message published and how this influences Twitter and Facebook users to interact with the content the retailer posts on these platforms. Furthermore, for clarification, the researcher tested each research participants' implicit understanding of the return on investment in social media activity to the firm, rather than limiting responses to the explicit notion of financial return on investment. In sum, the aim of this study is to

contextualise and evaluate the influence of Twitter and Facebook postings from the lens of a specialist retailer in the UK.

### **1.3 The Researcher's Background**

The researcher has spent 40 years working in retail and associated businesses across the UK, including international collaboration within highly successful business environments. The researcher also successfully completed the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme at the Institute of Retail Studies, Stirling University, Scotland, over a two-and-a-half-year period of part-time study. Furthermore, practitioner-based experience includes working at independently owned, and large international corporations, to Managing Director level, more recently earning him recognition as a global retail influencer (<https://www.vendhq.com/2018-top-100-retail-influencers>). This progressive career exposure has included a considerable amount of customer contact and involvement in the development of customer relationship management (CRM) strategies, before and after the influence and impact of Web 2.0 technology on the retailer-consumer connectedness. A key feature of Web 2.0 technology being that it allows individuals and businesses to create, share, collaborate and communicate in real-time online (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In sum, the researcher's background of relevant experience, with both practitioner skills and academic knowledge, provides a solid foundation for this major research project to contribute to both academic knowledge and practice.

### **1.4 Synopsis of Previous Studies**

The reviewed literature was consistent in identifying that the introduction of social media has had a considerable influence on the relationship between retailers and their customers and noncustomers. Moreover, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) stated that social media is driving the World Wide Web's purpose of online global communication. Although Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) argued that the development of Web 2.0 technology was envisaged to empower the marketer not the consumer, Schultz and Peltier (2013) disagreed, positing that "social media has taken the world communication systems by storm" (p. 87), arguing

that it is not just another marketing communication channel. Furthermore, Lichy (2012) submitted that “The globalization of the Internet has transformed many aspects of everyday life by providing access to information that was previously withheld or unavailable” (p. 101) to individuals.

The phenomenon of social media has diverted corporate communication power from mass media communication ‘gatekeepers’ to consumers making themselves heard on these contemporary communication channels with or without the company’s approval (Kietzmann et al., 2011). In 2013, Chua and Banerjee found engagement on social media influential in connecting the virtual world of retailing and the physical retail store environment. Thus, Chandy (2014) affirmed marketers to embrace social media networking and develop loyal brand communities, as traditional marketing communication is replaced by customer-to-customer generated content (Chen, Fay & Wang, 2011; Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides & Alarcon-del-Amo, 2013; Schuler & Cording, 2006). Moreover, marketers should elicit the support of online influencers to promote their products and services (Lin, Bruning, & Swarna, 2018).

While brands do not appear to have problems in the development of their social media presence, they struggle to make them engaging and valuable to consumers (Schultz et al., 2013). Additionally, Campbell, Ferraro and Sands (2014) identified differences in consumer motivation to participate in brand-to-consumer interaction ranging from utilitarian to hedonic. In their research findings, there was a perception that social media marketing is on the consumer’s terms, linking back to ‘how’ and ‘why’ individuals select and consume specific media for their specific needs. Furthermore, in 2017, Chung, Andreev, Benyoucef and Duane posited that while social media usage can be extremely beneficial to organisations, mismanagement can trigger an unintended community response. Therefore, the paradigm of UGT to understand what motivates the consumer to interact with brands on social media channels is an area for investigation in the context of the impact of social media on retailer-consumer interaction (Campbell et al., 2014; Huang, 2008; Rohm, Kaltcheva & Milne, 2013).

## **1.5 Purpose of this Research**

The historical position of the retailer in the purchasing cycle was that of pushing information about products and services out to customers and noncustomers. This

dominant position of information power enabled retailers to control their product brand identity (Grint, 2005). Moreover, the retailer could manage customer discontent in a private manner. Whilst the consumer could access information, it was time consuming to collate, and advice from others was, in the main, restricted to family and friends, until the development of social networking technology made information more accessible (Lichy, 2012). This information power relationship started to move away from the retailer on the invention of the World Wide Web, and in more recent years the introduction of social media has firmly shifted information power to the consumer. As Table 2 shows, the global uptake of Twitter and Facebook by millions of people since their inception in 2006 and 2004 respectively has been phenomenal.

Table 2: Global Twitter and Facebook Statistics

<p><b>Twitter Statistics at June 30, 2016:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 500 million tweets sent per day</li> <li>• 313 million monthly active users</li> <li>• 82% active users on mobile</li> </ul> <p>Adapted from <a href="https://about.twitter.com/company">https://about.twitter.com/company</a></p>	<p><b>Facebook Statistics at December 31, 2016:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.23 billion daily active users on average</li> <li>• 1.86 billion monthly active users</li> <li>• 1.74 billion mobile monthly active users</li> </ul> <p>Adapted from <a href="https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/">https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/</a></p>
--	---

These Twitter and Facebook user communications are published in real-time with freedom of voice, an intrinsic value proposition in the mission statement of both platforms:

**Twitter’s mission:** “Give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers.” (<https://about.twitter.com/company>)

**Facebook’s mission:** "Give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together."  
([https://www.facebook.com/pg/facebook/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/facebook/about/?ref=page_internal))

### **1.5.1 Theoretical Gap and Contribution to Knowledge**

The literature review conducted by the researcher (Chapter Two) identified a gap in academic literature on the influence of social media messages on retailer-consumer interaction from the lens of the retailer. The researcher's career background and understanding of social media for business brings relevant tacit knowledge, and a passion to understand how the introduction of social media has impacted the retailer's traditional marketing communication strategy; Twitter and Facebook being the most prominent platforms used by the case organisation. The current gap in this peer reviewed literature will likely be filled over the next few years, as more scholars get their articles published in academic journals.

This study identifies common themes and arguments from the peer reviewed literature found. The researcher has not drawn on grey literature (blogs, trade reports, social media expert opinion papers) for this research project, he has grounded the study on a reliable foundation of peer reviewed journal articles. This study will contribute to the growing academic knowledge, moving the discourse on with new insights that also cross-over to help practitioners in retail businesses.

### **1.5.2 The Research Aim and Objectives**

This investigation will add to and complement retail practitioners', as well as scholars', growing understanding of social media activity in a retail context. The research enquiry is:

An Investigation into the Influence of Social Media Message Context on  
Retailer-Consumer Interaction: A Case Study from the Lens of a UK Retailer.

The aim and objectives of this study:

#### **Aim**

- The researcher will contextualise and evaluate the influence of social media (Twitter and Facebook) message context from the lens of a specialist retailer in the UK.

#### **Objectives**

- To investigate the views of manager stakeholders on the purpose of Twitter and Facebook messages posted by the retail case organisation in terms of gratifying the consumers' social, entertainment or information need;

- To develop a deeper understanding of how social media fits into this retailer's traditional marketing strategy;
- To develop a deeper understanding of this retailer's perception of return on investment in social media activity; and
- To evaluate the impact, if any, of social media communications on this retailer's internal communication and internal relationships.

### **1.5.3 Details of Collaborating Establishment**

The retailer participating in this study is a well-established medium sized specialist retailer within the outdoor activities sector, trading online and from high street stores across the UK. Approval to support this research was obtained from the Managing Director. Though individual consent was obtained from each participant involved in the study. The researcher was mindful of the busy retail working environment and aware of seasonally busy trading periods in the sector, so the primary research was conducted by individual participant agreement. The trading name of the retailer and its employees will not be disclosed by the researcher in relation to this study.

## **1.6 Overview of the Research Approach**

The researcher selected a single retail case organisation to investigate the research enquiry in-depth in a real-world retail setting. While a multiple-case study approach is more suited to the generalisation of research findings (Yin, 2014), studying the influence of social media on the retailer-consumer interaction within a single case organisation, without any preconceived outcomes from the business owner, afforded a unique research opportunity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Additionally, the public nature of social media communication means that the case organisation's Twitter and Facebook activity can be viewed entirely remotely to the researcher's fieldwork. So, an early understanding of this secondary data in a pilot study provided a valuable researcher learning opportunity (Travers, 2001) that supported the researcher's questioning of participants in the fieldwork; likewise, a pilot interview enabled the researcher to test his approach per se, before embarking on the interview process. Furthermore, collecting research data from multiple sources allowed the researcher to validate the research findings (Bryman, 2016; Patton, 2015).

## 1.7 Concluding Comment

This chapter has outlined the purpose of this major research project, and the added value that the researcher's tacit knowledge as a retail practitioner, together with his academic knowhow, benefitted this study. The researcher has presented a synopsis of seminal literature relating to the topic in anticipation of a comprehensive review in Chapter Two. That said, the area of research is still in its infancy, and it is worth noting that the thesis' literature review strategy focussed on peer reviewed papers, as opposed to the large volume of trade and other unregulated opinion papers. The thesis' empirical enquiry focusses on the influence of Twitter and Facebook activity because these are well-established platforms used by retailers and narrowing the field of study allowed the researcher to investigate these two platforms in-depth at the case organisation. Finally, the researcher was given the opportunity of extensive access to one real-world retail organisation. The researcher's view is that this in-depth access gives the opportunity for this thesis to make an important contribution to the developing literature on social media in a retail context, as well as contributing to practitioners in this area.

The forthcoming chapter order is indicative of the phases that the researcher followed in this study. A review of literature that supports this study is outlined in Chapter Two, before setting out the methodological framework adopted in Chapter Three. The data collected is comprehensively presented, analysed and evaluated, along with the research findings in penultimate Chapter Four. The final chapter discusses the research conclusions and recommendations, and critically for this major research project, it explicitly includes the contribution to knowledge; before concluding with recommendations for further research, and a personal reflection statement.



# Chapter Two

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on marketing and mass media communication and identifies a marketing objective to develop a closer relationship with the consumer. The review demonstrates that, chronologically, the literature has developed from pushing a one-way mass media message towards a passive-audience (Bauer, 1963), in favour of more contemporary literature that advocates interacting with the highly active-audience of the twenty-first century on virtual communication platforms.

The review continues by studying the marketers' persuasive attempts to influence the behaviour of the consumer, before investigating traditional word-of-mouth (WoM), and the subsequent impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM) communication mediums on retailer-consumer interaction. This leads to reviewing the development of brand communities, and the arrival of social networking sites (SNS); thereafter the identification of UGT as an appropriate theoretical base in addressing the aim and objectives, stated in the previous chapter, section 1.5.2., is discussed. The research gap stated in Chapter One, 1.5.1 and illustrated in Figure 1, being the influence of the contemporary phenomenon of social media on the retailer-consumer interaction from the lens of a UK retailer.

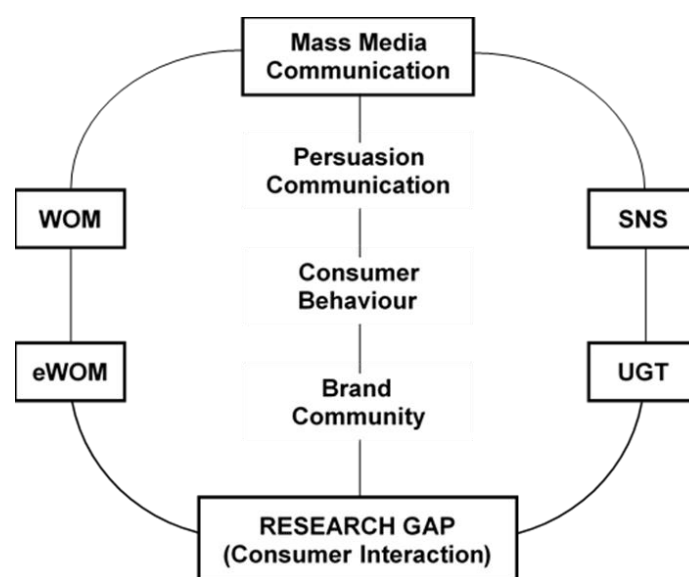


Figure 1: The literature that informs this study

Source: Author

## 2.2 Mass Media Communication

The long-established belief that the marketers' one-way transmitted message had a direct and consuming influence over powerless and passive individuals (Bauer, 1963; Croteau & Hoynes, 2014; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), as illustrated by the 'hypodermic needle' model in Figure 2, was challenged by Lazarsfeld's 'two-step flow' model (Figure 3); a communication hypothesis which he introduced on observing the process of voting decisions in the 1940 Decatur election campaign (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2006; Troidahl, 1966). This heralded the existence of two-way media communication that acknowledges a more discerning active audience rather than passive individuals, and the influence of opinion leaders in the dissemination of media messages.

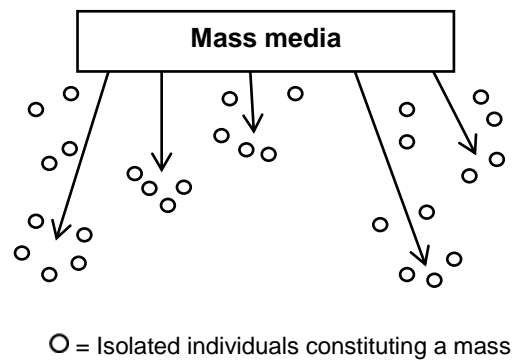


Figure 2: Hypodermic Needle Model

Source: Katz et al. (1955)

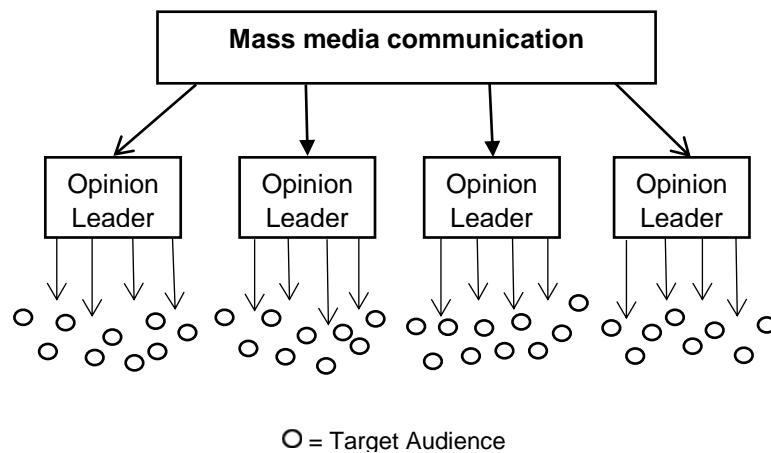


Figure 3: Two-Step Flow Model

Source: Adapted from Katz et al. (1955)

In addition to this hypothesised belief in the empowered and active audience, Bauer (1963) affirmed that a two-way communication process allows the audience's voice to influence the media communicator and potentially shape the initial message. Moreover, Troidahl (1966) subsequently found that a one-way flow of information direct from the media source best facilitated learning, whereas a two-step communication process had more influence on the recipients' beliefs and behaviours. Consequently, the involvement of opinion leaders in the two-step model "is expected to operate only when a person is exposed to mass media content that is inconsistent with their present predisposition" (p. 613), if so, the consumer will initiate the second step and seek out the opinion of a trusted intermediary (Troidahl, 1966). Whereas, Dichter (1966) argued that involvement per se stimulates conversation and motivates the way a mass media message is acted upon by the recipients, furthermore, Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987) suggested that these collaborative interactions generate a long-term relationship between the sender and receiver of the message.

Further supported by Davenport, Harris and Kohli (2001), Glazer (1999), and Schultz and Bailey (2000) is the need for marketers to create these personalised conversations and develop "consumer-centric" marketing communication strategies to engage with their consumer audience (Zhang & Lin, 2015, p. 670) and generate interaction; which stimulate customers to share positive service or product experiences as "pseudo-marketers" (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017, p. 312), rather than the traditional information gathering model of one-to-many promotional orientated communication of mass media campaigns to satisfy the marketers' typical disposition of collecting transactional information found in earlier research by Ray (1973), Hoffman and Novak (1996) and Preston (2000). Nonetheless, in 2002, Peltier, Schibrowsky and Schultz reaffirmed that marketers must understand the psychological traits that motivate their target audience to seek or maintain that relationship.

As Ray (1973) predicted, the hardware at the message distribution point has dramatically changed the purpose of mass media communication, continuing to develop from consumer marketing trends, resembling personal selling in the seller and buyer relationship and influencing social good; concurring with Katz's (1987) later argument that the arrival of new communication technologies was connecting people in ways that were independent of their messages. Even when marketers hold valuable customer data, a lack of connectivity prevents its use, so the challenge for

the marketing manager is to identify opportunities to use new media tools, rather than relying on survey research, to become more proficient marketing communicators (Peltier, Schibrowsky & Schultz, 2003). With the impact of social media channels and other forms of electronic media platforms dramatically changing marketing communication, marketers are required to generate new customer engagement strategies that use these media platforms (Bauer, 1963; Bezjian-Avery, Calder & Lacobucci, 1998; Glazer, 1999; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Hoffman et al., 1996; Kaplan et al., 2010; Patterson, 2012). The traditional approach of grouping of customers within databases will not maximise the interactive benefits of learning more about them in the communication process (Peltier et al., 2003).

These predictions are consistent with the evolution of new media technologies that have enabled the development of smart customers, and the need for firms to respond by becoming smarter in their interactivity by creating conversations rather than pushing direct sales promotion messages, and intently listening to customers for ongoing dialogue in future messages. As well as resisting inundating consumers with data collection requests that may create a negative response towards the brand, adversely influencing their behaviour and decision making (Glazer, 1999; Keller, 1993; Peltier et al., 2003). In 1963, Maloney asserted that a mild disbelief in the advertising will be tolerated within an otherwise high-quality communication mix, though Ray's (1973) findings that the consumer sector is biased towards advertising may still be true. Furthermore, in 1973, Katz, Haas and Gurevitch also proposed that consumers bend mass media messages to satisfy their own needs rather than let it overpower them. Thereafter, Keller (1993) reinforced the need to create the right memory of the brand in the consumers' mind, concurring with Starr and Rubinson's (1978) previous idea that consumers are likely to be more accepting of a perceived premium pricing strategy from their favourite brand.

Whilst advancements in marketing communication technologies facilitate a flexible means of influencing consumer perceptions, traditional WoM and other social influencers also play a key role (Keller, 1993). This supports Herr, Kardes and Kim's (1991) and Thomas' (1992) findings that WoM conversations allow actors to collaborate more vividly, and thereby more readily reach agreement, than digesting written communications that can be influenced by the individual readers' comprehension of the information. Further supporting Celsi and Olson (1988) proposal that conversational exchanges can be more persuasive than written information. That said, the source credibility in terms of trustworthiness and

expertise is of utmost importance in the consumers' perception of risk in their buying decision and central to the success of enriching the communication process (Bearden & Shrimp, 1982; Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Previously, Kotler and Zaltman (1971) posited that "it is the communication-persuasion strategy and tactics that will make the product familiar, acceptable, and even desirable to the audience" (p. 7). Which is subsequently supported by Frazier and Summers (1984) asserting that the transmission of a persuasive message is reliant on the process of effective communication. Therefore, although the usefulness of the mass communication message will be determined by the individual, the persuasive impact of the communicator is reduced when the consumer recognises a level of bias (Eagly, Wood & Chaiken, 1978; Wilton & Myers, 1986). This leads on to the need for managers to understand the importance of communication on the marketers' persuasive message (Mohr & Nevin, 1990). For example, in the contemporary marketing environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Fill et al. (2016) proposed "marketing communication is an audience centred activity, designed to engage audiences and promote conversations" (p. 8), rather than one-way messages with the sole purpose of the retailer persuading the consumer to do something. The mass media communication literature reviewed suggests that the message content is key in influencing interaction, especially the persuasive message. This would imply that to understand the implications of this and how it impacts on this research, further investigation into how these persuasive messages, in the form of persuasion communication, is required.

### **2.3 Persuasion Communication**

In this context, persuasion can be described as the use of messages to influence a consumer audience and there are three main aspects concerning persuasion communication, these are the source, the message content and the audience (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The phenomenon of persuasion involves the 'persuader' attempting to change the behaviour of an individual or target group of message recipients, without necessarily evoking an attitudinal change (Rule, Bisanz & Kohn, 1985). These attempts at getting others to comply and change their behaviour has been a societal norm since the beginning of language (Funkhouser & Parker, 1999), and influencing how others act being a common goal of interpersonal communication (Harris & Rosenthal, 1985; Rule et al., 1985). Friestad and Wright

(1995) proposed that sharing persuasive knowledge is an important ongoing socio-cultural process in everyone's everyday life and Kelman (1958) suggested that the more powerful source will influence the change in behaviour, with Rule et al. (1985) finding that marketers consider "compliance-gaining and opinion changing as distinct communicative goals" (p. 33).

Furthermore Lambert, Cronen, Chasteen and Lickel (1996) found that consumers focus on bolstering their beliefs more so when the debate is public, with the possibility of shifting privately held views more closely to public statements (Wood, 2000). Though Stone, Weigand, Cooper and Aronson (1997) reported that conflict occurs when individuals do not behave in a manner consistent with some valued self-standard, reinforcing Prislin and Pool's (1996) statement that conflict emerges when behaviour and its consequences challenge a person's existing ideas about self. As these individuals scan the communication for discrepancies and biases they will attempt to change their stance if they perceive that the initial message has inappropriately influenced them, sometimes overcompensating for this biasing influence (Martin & Achee, 1992; Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999), which can also emerge in the process of correcting the initial assessment of the communication (Meyers-Levy et al., 1999).

Thus, the fundamental route to persuasion occurring is when the recipient carefully processes relevant information in the persuaders message (Areni & Cox, 1994). Although Marsh, Hart-O'Rourke and Julka (1997) found that persuasive messages reporting on a vital product or service feature are processed carefully, they are interpreted defensively, thereby resulting in only marginal influence. Friestad et al. (1995) posited that human beings are adept at referencing their common-sense perceptions to interpret persuasion attempts in everyday interpersonal and media instigated communications; previously "argue[ing] that a persons' persuasive knowledge is an important determinant of how they cope with [and produce] persuasion attempts" (p. 62), sometimes switching between the role of persuader and recipient within the course of an interaction to influence the persuaders behaviour (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

Humans continuously develop this second-sense instinct for assessing the validity of message claims by recognising tactics used in persuasive situations (Chaiken, 1987), instinctively using this heuristic knowledge in assessing the level of manipulation within a marketers' advertising campaign (Campbell, 1995). The

backlash of getting it wrong was noted in Kanter's (1989) survey in which respondents agreed with this questionnaire statement; 'The people who paid for this ad think I am not very smart', resulting in sixty percent of the respondents evaluating the sponsoring company as poor. This corresponds with Kirmani and Wright (1989) positing that under certain circumstances the consumer will use the perceived effort a company invests in its persuasion attempts as an indicator of their strength of belief they have in their products quality. However, Brown and Stayman (1992) argued that the consumers' reactions to an advert was more strongly correlated with beliefs about the qualities of the advertised brand when a durable good or a service was involved, and Scheer and Stern (1992) suggested that the persuasive tactics used will influence the consumers' attitude towards the brand; supporting the notion that tactics that disrupt the consumers' expectations, will trigger consideration of what has caused the use of the new tactic (Wiener, LaForge & Goolsby, 1990). Therefore "persuasion does not rest within an advertising message but rather depends on the mental processes that an ad recipient invokes" (Meyers-Levy et al., 1999, p. 59). Whilst the consumers' capacity to learn from social interactions, and their observations of the tactics used by marketers about persuasion overtime, includes how to manage their own emotional response in persuasion episodes (Friestad et al., 1994).

In their 1989 research, Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel discovered that a consumer tends to rely on the advice of other consumers in their buying decisions. And after exposure to the persuasive attempts of others, consumers' may later retrieve this information without acknowledging the original source and, under some circumstances, adopting it as their own response (Betz, Skowronski & Ostrom, 1996). According to Wood (2000), this is typical of individuals who classify themselves as an 'in-group' member (being part of a social group), adopting the apparent validity of group beliefs as their own. Turner (as cited in Wood, 2000) identified this 'in-group' influence as "referent informational influence" (p. 557), and Kameda, Ohtsubo and Takezawa (1997) argued that shared 'in-group' beliefs and knowledge provide social validation for the position adopted. While individuals strive to achieve and maintain a certain true self-view (Abrams & Hogg, 1988), Pool, Wood and Leck (1998) suggested that they will shift their stance to align with a positively valued group position to maintain a favourable self-image. However, David and Turner (1999) argued, "when an 'in-group' minority attempts to persuade a target, the message recipient becomes pressured to provide a direct and public response within a short period" (p. 612), and in later research Sassenberg and Postmes

(2002) identified that known rather than anonymous group members are more likely to conform to group norms in fear of facing social sanctions. This supports Cialdini and Goldstein's (2004) argument that even in situations where an individual is not directly, whether privately or publicly, the target of others' disapproval, they may feel obliged to conform to the perceived norm to maintain their sense of belonging and their self-esteem. Although this influence is weakened when a biasing attribute is related back to the source's own self-interest (Moskowitz, 1996), supporting earlier findings by Simons, Berkowitz and Moyer (1970) and Wachtler and Counselman (1981), that the effects of credibility may override a person's liking of the source.

While many everyday consumer purchasing decisions are not preceded by such a thoughtful decision process (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979), Rule et al. (1985) found that relationships with salespeople can leave the consumer feeling like unsolicited targets of a one-sided persuasive appeal. Albeit Funkhouser et al. (1999), identified that the closeness of fit between the persuader's message and the receiver's logic, the more effective the persuasion attempt, which concurs with Dolinski, Nawrat and Rudak (2001) stating "certain situational cues activate heuristics that lead us to treat strangers as if they were friends or acquaintances" (p. 599). This supports the notion that message manipulation has more impact on persuasion under greater personal relevance (Chaiken, 1980; Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman, 1981), because it motivates more scrutiny of the arguments presented (Petty et al., 1981), and potentially increases the persuasiveness of a well-presented argument that the recipient has carefully thought about (Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; Petty et al., 1981; Zillmann, 1972).

Conversely, this high involvement can also increase the chance of message rejection (Pallak, Mueller, Dollar & Pallak, 1972), when the recipient is well informed and motivated to offer a strong counterargument to the information presented by the persuader (Petty et al., 1979). Though Herr et al. (1991) demonstrated that negative information can be more helpful to the consumer in buying decisions, and the accessibility of information can also influence judgments (Meyers-Levy et al., 1999).

The emergence of digital technologies has fundamentally changed consumer behaviour (Belk, 2013) in our twenty-first century digital world of high consumer connectivity across many different audiences (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Consumer attitudes and behaviours change because their persuasion knowledge influences how they respond (Friestad et al., 1994), and furthermore, "individuals attempting to



persuade others to engage in a particular behaviour, face the dual challenge of making the norm salient not only immediately following message reception, but in the future as well” (Cialdini et al., 2004, p. 597). Moreover, in 2017, Pappas, Kourouthanassis, Giannakos and Chrissikopoulos postulated that “in order to persuade their customers, businesses should adopt strategies that build on logical arguments, make emotional appeals, or request input or feedback from and for them” (p. 972). These observations regarding the marketers’ persuasive communication are important to the understanding of the outcome of this research. This type of communication precedes experiences that influence the behaviour of the contemporary consumer in the seller-buyer relationship and require investigation under the construct of consumer behaviour.

## **2.4 Consumer Behaviour**

While sharing has always been part of human existence, advancements in communication technologies “help us share more, as well as more broadly, than ever before” (Belk, 2010; 2013, p. 484) since “digital communication...has become part of billions of people’s daily lives” (Stephen, 2016, p. 17). Consumers behave with fewer inhibitions than their physical self, sharing and recommending products and services to strangers within digital communities (Van Doorn et al., 2010), identified as third places, where individuals congregate virtually and share within a brand community of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Oldenburg, 1999). Though, Schau, Muniz and Arnould (2009) argued that active members of the community are more likely to be individuals with a strong commitment to the brand and connect to fulfil their social need to interact with similar others. In 2002, Bagozzi and Dholakia suggested that members are seeking social identity, and develop cultural status within the community (Holt, 1995). Belk (2013) found that a “battle...can take place between the ‘home-self’ [first place] and the ‘work-self’ [second place] as the time and place boundaries that once distinguished the two melts” (p. 483).

Meanwhile, Schau et al. (2009) stated that social networks move beyond brand boundaries in reinforcing member engagement with the community long after members move away from the focal brand, and individuals value the social identity and status they accumulate within the brand community and become reluctant to give it up (Bagozzi et al., 2002; Holt, 1995). So, brand marketers must continuously

evolve their communities by creatively engaging with members in ways that encourage collaboration in establishing a strong and lasting community (Schau et al., 2009; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Additionally, Schau et al. (2009) posited that adopting the accepted jargon of the community breaks down linguistic barriers that inhibit engagement, fostering the similarity of members to stimulate the effectiveness of the community (Festinger, 1954; Wangenheim & Bayon, 2007).

Furthermore, the rapidly evolving digital era of technology driven communication is influencing consumer behaviour with “social media thriving on interaction” (Belk, 2013, p. 487), brand communities are no longer constrained by geographical boundaries, with the exception of societal constraints, members are liberated to form around a brand image as a social entity to “connect consumer to brand, and consumer to consumer...feeling that they ‘sort of know each other’ [in their shared connectedness] ...even if they have never met” (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 418). Although providing a valuable social structure between the marketer and consumer, a strong brand community can pose a threat if they collectively turn against the brand in “anti-brand communities” (Belk, 2013, p. 493), presenting the firm with potentially damaging rumour management problems (Muniz et al., 2001), as seen in a disproportionately higher level of customer disappointment being vented when a highly reputable brand falls below an expected standard (Roehm & Brady, 2007).

Whilst Grégoire, Tripp and Legoux (2009) and Joireman, Grégoire and Tripp (2016) proposed that an extremely negative brand experience can result in a loyal customer behaving exceptionally negatively towards the brand, Van Doorn et al. (2010) suggested others close to the brand may engage in activity to counteract such negative press. Conversely, some customers may decide not to share their dissatisfaction and warn others, in fear of harming their self-image (Van Doorn et al., 2010). But their reluctance to forget the negative incident, can manifest itself in a ‘grudge’ against the firm, leading them to totally disengage and potentially transfer their loyalty to a competitor to avoid any future interaction (Grégoire et al., 2009; McCullough et al., 1998). According to Ward and Ostrom (2006) complainants take this action when firms fail to respond satisfactorily to their private complaints, and strong relationships can be more harmful (Aaker, Fournier & Brasel, 2004), as Grégoire et al. (2009) argued “the revenge of strong-relationship customers decreases more slowly, and their avoidance increases more rapidly than that of weak-relationship customers” (p. 18). Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro and Hannon

(2002) contended that this drive to inflict harm, or to avoid the firm altogether, reflects the customer's reluctance to forget the episode. Though Grégoire et al. (2009) posited that this "desire for revenge is difficult to sustain [overtime]" (p. 25), so the customer's desire to avoid future contact with the firm increases with negative WoM talk in the process of total disengagement.

However, prior research found that, historically, loyal customers are receptive to any recovery, mere social recognition of the wrong, compared to less-engaged others driven in their pursuit of maximum, often financial, compensation to placate their dissatisfaction (Ringberg, Odekerken-Schroder & Christensen, 2007). Furthermore, Joireman et al. (2016) assert that customers loyal to the brand are more likely to forgive an isolated negative experience in the process of reflecting on past and future relationship benefits. Van Doorn et al. (2010) suggested that repeatedly delighting a customer, especially new ones, motivates them to engage in positive WoM, and those whose objective is self-enhancement are more likely to participate in activities that favourably promote the brand. Understanding consumer behaviour in the context of social media is a key determining factor in the result of this research and, in this framework, WoM has surfaced as a key driver in persuading positive consumer behaviour, meriting a further in-depth review and discussion of this theory.

## **2.5 Word-of-Mouth Communication**

Keller (1993) stated that "a firm's most valuable asset for improving marketing productivity is the knowledge that has been created about the brand in the consumers' minds" (p. 2) and Herr et al. (1991) contended that WoM "communications have a strong impact on product judgements, relative to less vivid printed communications" (p. 456). Subsequently, Bone (1995) argued that adverse WoM can be equally, or even more, persuasive than favourable WoM in affecting consumer attitudes.

Furthermore, WoM communication has proven to be effective in influencing consumers' attitudes towards brands and researchers have found WoM more effective in the generation of positive reactions towards a brand than print and radio advertising, with friends and family communications perceived as being most

trustworthy (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Day, 1971; Katz et al., 1955; Murray, 1991). Although in 1967, Arndt suggested that individuals who had already purchased the product or service were more likely to receive positive WoM communications from other satisfied customers, giving something back to the firm by sharing their good experience, and potentially heightening their own self-image as an 'intelligent shopper' (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004). Godes and Mayzlin (2004) concurred that WoM is a reflection on past behaviour and found in their research that its impact can reduce over a product's life cycle, but they posited that loyal customers only engage in negative WoM. Harrison-Walker (2001) identified that researchers have historically focussed on positive postings, with marketers viewing WoM as a promotional activity resulting in a lack of attention shown towards the sender of the WoM communication. The same study also found limited evidence of firms using multiple indicators of favourable WoM feedback, instead only enquiring about a single-item indicator, such as the likeliness of recommending the product or service to others.

These interpersonal communications are often a meaningful part of the consumers' decision-making process, especially for high-risk purchases, and a consumer response that can influence the strategic wellbeing of the firm (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, & Zeithaml, 1993). Worryingly for firms is the level of WoM activity being greatest reporting dissatisfaction, with consumers venting their dissatisfaction to help relieve a negative state-of-mind (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Whilst this negative WoM can be an exaggerated version of the truth by the disgruntled sender, many unfavourable messages about the same issue will not be placated by favourable WoM information - a potentially damaging situation as dissatisfied consumers attempt to 'get back' at the firm. However, Richins (1984) identified an element of reluctance amongst consumers to admit failure by advertising that they had made an unsatisfactory purchase decision, and Chaiken (1979) found that the likeability of a firm may influence attitude and therefore reduce negative WoM in the short-term.

Thus, marketers try to manage WoM to influence their target audience attitudes, engaging in word-of-mouth marketing (WoMM) to elicit positive consumer behaviour in spreading favourable messages, sometimes posing as a consumer, within their social networks to increase the campaign reach (Godes & Mazlin, 2009; Groeger & Buttle, 2014). They warn, however, that the WoMM message may get diluted in exposure amongst weaker social network connections. Brown et al. (1987)

suggested that WoM messages from sources that have some personal insights about the consumer have more influence, reinforced in 2004 by Senecal and Nantel's findings that the consumers' attention is drawn to the source rather than the message platform. Additionally, in their review of the impact of WoM on online book sales, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) discovered that negative reviews have a greater effect on reducing sales than favourable ones have on increasing sales, finding that longer reviews (in terms of word count) depict the motivation of the reviewer, with no evidence that length of review stimulates additional sales.

In their 2009 research, Jansen, Zhang, Sobel & Chowdury analysed over 150,000 microblog postings containing branding comments, sentiments, and opinions. They concluded that consumers increasingly use Web communications and SNS, such as Twitter, for trusted sources of information, insights, and opinions and their brand perceptions and purchasing decisions appear increasingly influenced by these communication technologies. They also suggested that overall sales increased as a result of the retailer having an online customer review site, shaping consumer perceptions via eWoM postings. The literature suggests that WoM communication plays an important part in marketing communication, "compared to product information provided by marketers, customers consider user reviews to be less biased, more credible and authentic" (Balaji, Khong & Chong, 2016, p. 528). Consequently, understanding this form of communication, and the more contemporary adaption in the form of eWoM, is relevant in examining the findings of this research. For this reason and the relevance of microblogging (Twitter in particular) and how these findings relate to this study, eWoM is further examined.

## **2.6 Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication**

In comparison to traditional face-to-face WoM, "eWoM is emerging as a more influential marketing tool than traditional WoM because of its speed" (Wang, Yeh, Chen & Tsydypov, 2016, p. 1034) and users of eWoM show more openness and willingness to share personal information and opinion seekers moderate these online messages with their offline experiences, internet literacy being a prerequisite of participation (Sun, Youn, Wu & Kuntaraporn, 2006). An important outcome of the rise of online social communities is the enabling of observations of consumer-to-consumer eWoM, made without much thought that the firm may be seeing these

messages and drawing inferences from them (Godes et al., 2004). Opinion leaders are viewed as being most influential in these social networks (Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry, & Raman, 2004), and Sun et al. (2006) suggested that proficiency in eWoM may lead to the consumers' involvement in online chat forums, leading to even more activity amongst opinion leaders and opinion seekers in these virtual communities. However, they found that the consumer is looking for wider social interaction and hedonic experiences, likened to online 'window-shopping', compared to the motives of opinion leaders within these social networks. Although previously in 2001, Wolfradt and Doll's research identified online chat forums with social communication needs and a negative correlation with information seeking.

It follows that the credibility of WoM rests with information about the source expertise, often assumptions, and the sharing of unbiased content in brand communities where members are not paid (Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007; Grewal, Gotlieb & Marmorstein, 1994). However, Moran and Muzellec (2017) warned that "the credibility of eWoM is threatened...as marketers increasingly try to manipulate eWoM practices on SNS... [by rewarding customers for sharing] brand-generated messages" (p. 149). Brown et al. (1987) suggested that the strength of the relationship between the seeker and sender of information is influential in spreading the word and sharing ideas, with stronger relationships leading to more eWoM activity. In contrast, Brown et al. (2007) proposed that personal relationships are less relevant in virtual brand communities and found that once a message is shared, the community becomes the focus of attention not the individual source. However, they stressed that marketers need to understand how these messages impact consumer behaviour in both online and offline brand communities. The relatively recent development of eWoM is noteworthy in the postmodern brand community and consumer-to-consumer relationships and, given its contemporary nature, is especially applicable in the development and comprehension of this research. The literature also identified the importance of brand community; this links in to the nature to this study with brand community playing a meaningful part in the research and so it is important to explore this development further.

## 2.7 The Brand Community

Muniz et al.'s (2001) seminal definition of a brand community as “a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (p. 412), is often cited by academic scholars (Cova & Cova, 2002; McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002; Zaglia, 2013; Zhou, Zhang, Su & Zhou, 2012). This is consistent with Wellman's (1979) earlier notion that more accessible mass communication channels have the effect of liberating communities from historical geographical limitations, and with McAlexander et al.'s (2002) subsequent suggestion that brand communities congregate around customer experiences rather than the brand itself. Notwithstanding, members often share common values and behaviours; which can take the form of specific jargon or signs that determine their belonging, providing “a creative repertoire for insider sharing” (Casaló, Flavian & Guinaliu, 2008; Schau et al., 2009, p. 39). Brands also encourage the creation of community subgroups where members represent considerable specialist knowledge, companionship and social differentiation (de Valck, van Bruggen, & Wierenga, 2009; Schau et al., 2009). However, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) warned that widening the appeal of a distinctive subgroup can have a harmful effect on the community's subculture. While firms should support social networking practices that develop strong ties among its brand community members (Schau et al., 2009), Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) posited that this should not be at the cost of exploiting existing member competence.

Therefore, marketers must provide the basic resources to build a brand community, that include “experiences, entertainment and education” (Kozinets, 1999, p. 51) that members value, reinforcing the brand-consumer relationship by creatively creating the context for consumer interaction to occur (McAlexander et al., 2002; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Vargo et al., 2004). But while consumers do want to identify with “people behind the brands” (McAlexander et al., 2002, p. 50), excessive relationship marketing tactics can be overwhelming (Fournier, Dobscha & Mick, 1998) and “imbued with fake spontaneity, orchestrated emotions and crocodile smiles” (Simmons, 2008, p. 302, citing Burton). So, marketers must remember that they “jointly build communities” with their consumer audience and “recognise that [these] relationships are reciprocal” (McAlexander et al., 2002, p. 38, p. 51), and are now weighted toward the empowered postmodern consumer, who pays less attention to firm-driven communications in favour of the new paradigm of a “customer-to-customer-to-brand triad” (McAlexander et al., 2002, p. 39) (Figure 4) publicly sharing

experiences (Baxendale, Macdonald & Wilson, 2015; Muniz et al., 2001). Also, the marketer must listen carefully to overcome the high level of ‘noise’ in the brand community environment (Kozinets, 1999), and learn about customer experiences from the dialogue that transpires (Baxendale et al., 2015; Prahalad et al., 2004).

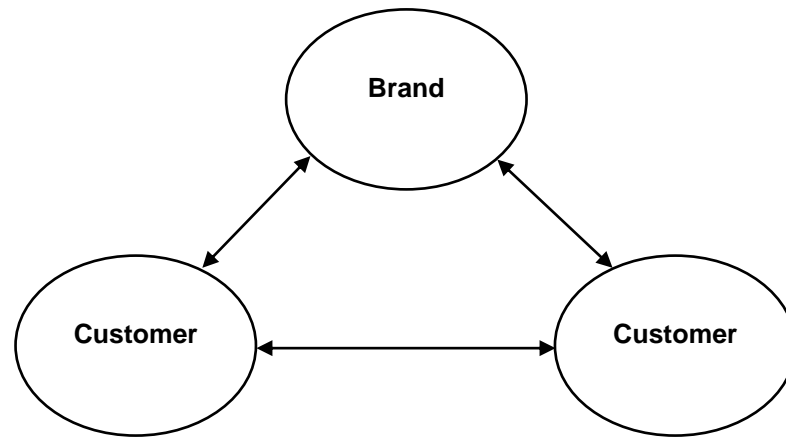


Figure 4: Muniz et al.'s (2001) Brand Community Triad

Source: McAlexander et al. (2002), p. 39

Firms are being evaluated as socialised members of the brand community, and at the same time are expected to comply with its rules and norms, knowing that transgressions risk the public wrath of the community at large (Aggarwal, 2004). However, McAlexander et al. (2002) submitted that stronger brand-consumer relationships can emerge from customer-centric interactions, even if the information shared is negative (Adjei, Noble & Noble, 2010). That said, Neslin et al. (2006) suggested that the postmodern consumer uses “multiple sources” (p. 249) in their learning and search for both individual and shared brand experiences (Cova & Pace, 2006). Hence, marketers need to be adept at identifying the contact points that have the most impact on the consumers’ attitude and behaviour at multiple stages of their journey (Baxendale et al., 2015; Neslin et al., 2006). Furthermore, the commonality of community traits and brand traits strengthen the brand-consumer relationship (Milas & Mlačić, 2007), and brand community sharing increases the social and hedonic value, and the community bond among members (Schau et al., 2009; Zhou et al., 2012). Overtime consumers “become habituated to learning more from the brand community” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 37), so the task of the brand manager is to focus on the quality of the product or service information shared (Adjei, et al., 2010), whilst remaining nonintrusive. Marketers who relinquish control and co-create value with customers, develop enduring relationships that enhances their brand-consumer equity within the community (Cova, Pace & Park, 2007;



Prahalad et al., 2004). In fact, Cova et al. (2002) argued that “the very idea of building a brand community is in fact a... [transformational] dream of marketers” (p. 613).

In addition, following its continued development, the internet, together with Web 2.0 social media technology, has enabled the existence of “online brand communities” without the geographical and time constraints of offline brand communities (Mousavi, Roper & Keeling, 2017, p. 376) and presents the opportunity for direct contact between firms and the “consumer on a one-to-one or many-to-many basis” (Simmons, 2008, p. 304; Thompson & Sinha, 2008; Zaglia, 2013). Moreover “making it possible for customers to share brand stories with others” and “inspire [other social media] users to engage with their favorite [*sic*] brands” (Hajji, Shanmugam, Papagiannidis, Zahay & Richard, 2017, p. 136). The development of social networking and user generated content has prompted marketers to respond to the opportunities created for their brands in a postmodern world, where firms have lost exclusivity over communications about their brand (Simmons, 2008); and are simultaneously challenged by communities of globally connected, well-informed and socially engaged consumers, empowered and active with a freedom of voice (Kozinets, 1999; Prahalad et al., 2004). The importance of this was subsequently reinforced by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) finding “consumers share[ing] their enthusiasm about their favourite brand [on SNS like] ...Twitter... and Facebook...” “[where] user-generated content has become a mass phenomenon” (p. 311, 312), influencing the consumers’ perception of a firms’ brand (Jansen et al., 2009), with the marketer having no control over conversations (Deighton et al., 2009). That said, Carvalho et al. (2018) posit that consumers develop this intensity of “connection to only a small subset” of brands during their lifetime (p. 23).

The literature suggests that building a brand community is an essential part of a firms marketing strategy, with Parsons et al. (2018) identifying social media as a key driver in the formation of “loyal communities surrounding a brand” (p. 38), and as such is fundamental to this study in understanding the findings. It further identified that social networking has influenced a change in the consumers’ behaviour, from isolated individuals to loud, publicly visible communities of likeminded individuals (Patterson, 2012). Although social networks and brand communities share the same premise of their members interacting with each other (Zaglia, 2013), Patterson (2012) found that consumers’ more readily share personal information about themselves on SNS. However, the literature infers that the retailers’ response to the

new paradigm of virtual social networks, and its adoption, is still evolving among retail managers and marketing professionals. This has a direct impact on this research, hence, a more in-depth review of the evolution of social networking and more specifically the influence of social media activity on the retailer-consumer interaction follows.

## **2.8 Social Networking Sites**

Kaplan et al. (2010) stated that social media is driving the World Wide Web's purpose of online global communication and in addition Schultz et al. (2013) contended that "social media has taken the world communication systems by storm" (p. 87), it is not just another marketing communication channel, it "is an integral element of 21<sup>st</sup>-century business... [hitherto scholarly research] on social media marketing remains fragmented" (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2017, p. 118). Whereas Kietzmann et al. (2011) maintained that the development of Web 2.0 technology was envisaged to empower marketers not customers, it is acknowledged that "marketing communication has shifted from traditional media to social media... [and that] today's consumers are active information seekers and disseminators, especially on social media" (Liu, Li, Ji, North & Yang, 2017, p. 605). Despite this, there is little evidence of businesses integrating social media strategy into their plans (Schultz et al., 2013); "mere presence on social media does not guarantee advantageous company-consumer interaction" (Vendemia, 2017, p. 99), so not too surprising is the perception gap found by Heller-Baird and Parasnis (2011) in a survey of 1,056 consumers and 350 executives. This revealed that companies believe that consumers want to connect with their brand, which conflicts with consumers stating that they are interested in obtaining tangible value for their efforts. The survey also found that 70 percent of the executives felt that their company would be viewed as 'out of touch' if they did not engage on social media. Marketers need to accept that social media was made for the consumer, rather than another marketing communication channel for them (Fournier & Avery, 2011). And, De Keyser and Lariviere (2014) agreed that marketers need to understand how these social media channels integrate with traditional marketing communication to develop lasting relationships. Thereby, as illustrated in Figure 5, adopting social media is an important fourth communication link in Muniz et al.'s (2001), previously

noted 'brand community triad' (Figure 4), where brands, customers and noncustomers congregate.

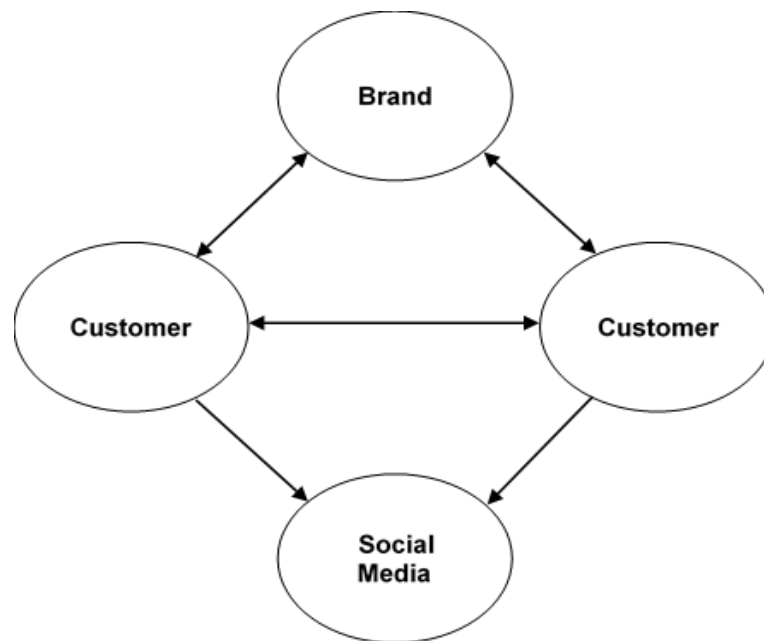


Figure 5: Adapted from Muniz et al.'s (2001) Brand Community Triad  
Source: Author

Furthermore, Chandy (2014) proposed that firms need to embrace SNS and develop loyal communities within these virtual relationships, within a robust social media strategy that capitalises on this “unique opportunity to engage consumers on deep and meaningful levels” (Dessart, 2017, p. 375); that said, Valos, Maplestone, Polonsky and Ewing (2017) acknowledged that social media has proven to be a challenging communication technology for firms to effectively integrate into their traditional marketing communication strategy. Previously Kaplan et al. (2010) suggested that the absence of control brands have over social media user postings leaves them in the uncomfortable position of mere observer of information about them, while Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) contended that the nature of new media marketing communication is like a multidirectional game of pinball, with the consumer playing a dominant role.

In addition, by means of an online survey involving ninety Spanish retailers, Lorenzo-Romero et al. (2013), discovered that more trusted customer-to-customer generated content was rapidly replacing traditional marketing communication. An absence of visible benefits was a common reason for these retailers not using social media in their marketing activities, as well as a lack of understanding of the

phenomena of social media platforms. Additionally, their survey revealed that the size of the company using social media had no bearing on the frequency of use, and customer service focus was consistent regardless of size. Schuler et al. (2006) agreed that peer-to-peer information is perceived as more reliable, and this supports Chen et al.'s (2011) findings that good content will encourage customers to share and interact with the brand. This interaction by others, according to Munzel and Kunz (2014), leaves individuals feeling obliged to participate themselves.

A study of 265 Facebook users by Wallace, Buil and de Chernatony (2014) established that companies need to encourage positive interactions for maximum exposure of their brand on social media. Similarly, an analysis of a Twitter promotion involving a sample of 883 users conducted by Campbell et al. (2014) found that social media engagement can be influential in the consumer purchasing decision. However, Schultz et al. (2013) suggested that “marketers are ‘blinded by the light’, forgetting that the vast majority of shared engagement is still conducted through traditional face-to-face word-of-mouth” (p. 89), and that marketers who pay users for ‘likes’ and/or ‘tweets’ on Facebook and Twitter respectively are potentially damaging their brand, arguing that this is just short-term sales promotion activity.

Similarly, in Rohm et al.'s (2013) study, 58 digital natives (respondents aged 20-35; 59 percent female) maintained a diary of their social media activity over a period of one week, capturing 311 discrete instances of engagement and interaction with brands on Twitter and Facebook – plus email. They found 75 percent of these recorded interactions were classified by respondents as acquiring real-time information, supporting the value of timely customer service engagement via these online channels. They proffered that this younger generation preferred to engage with companies on these virtual communication channels, rather than in physical environments, although they did find that this online interaction can result in an offline purchase and suggested that the tangible value of social media is more than Facebook ‘likes’ and Twitter ‘followers’. Furthermore, Munzel et al. (2014) supported this in their analysis of 693 contributions to an online review site, concluding that increased awareness of a brand via social media can affect a company's financial performance. This confirmed Sashi's (2012) findings from examining practitioner opinions that CRM is important in developing trust and commitment in the retailer-consumer relationship, mirroring internal company relationships.

Accordingly, engagement on Twitter is instrumental in linking the virtual world of online retailing and the physical retail store environment (Chua et al., 2013); “the interactive nature of social media has ultimately changed how consumers engage with brands” (Christodoulides, Dabrowski & Schivinski, 2016, p. 64), encouraging consumers to share more information on social media channels, including detail that they would be more reticent divulging offline; although individuals self-disclose more if they feel their information is secure (Lee, Im & Taylor, 2008). Wien and Olsen (2014) argued that individuals who take more risks are motivated by self-promotion on social networking platforms; which may support the suggestion by Kumar et al. (2010) that customers with weak links to many, are likely to have greater influencer value and customer referral value to the retailer. Wallace et al. (2014) questioned whether individuals who are promoting ‘self-image’ are connecting with the brand itself or others in the community. However, they also revealed that individuals who click ‘like’ on Facebook are more open to engage with the brand than the average Facebook user.

Additionally, Lorenzo-Romero et al. (2013) identified that digital literacy and technical support appear to be determining factors for retailers adopting social media, irrespective of their understanding that customer-to-customer generated content is overriding traditional marketing communication and that consumers are increasingly using social media as part of their everyday social life. And Heller-Baird et al. (2011) would encourage companies to think like a customer on these communication channels and find ways to engage in trusted social networking communities. Nonetheless, Kietzmann et al. (2011), stressed that companies must find the right moment to engage in social conversations to demonstrate that the company cares, and recommended empowering staff involved to develop relationships and solve customer issues with immediacy; albeit brands are not always welcome in social media conversations, appearing intrusive, annoying and out of place (Schultz et al., 2013).

Moreover, according to Rohm et al. (2013) and Parsons et al. (2018), leveraging the value of social media engagement can be seen in customers co-creating products and services; asking customers to participate by voting for their favourite product or service innovation, is what social media is all about (Heller-Baird et al. 2011). It is a company’s moral values that influence consumer brand selection and buying decision (Schuler et al., 2006), nonetheless, regardless of the background reason, brand-to-customer engagement and customer-to-customer interaction can influence

positive outcomes (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Yoon, Choi and Sohn (2008) submitted that this reciprocal communication is important to relationship building in physical and online retail environments. They also proffered that real-time connectivity on social media channels, can replace the traditional face-to-face service experience associated with the bricks-and-mortar retail store environment.

Therefore, fostering these brand-to-consumer relationships on social media is important for both consumer connectivity and helping develop a customer service culture amongst internal employees (Wirtz et al., 2013). In their 2013 survey, Lorenzo-Romero et al. revealed that most retailers reported improvements in their aftersales and customer support functions as a result of social media activity. Though De Keyser et al. (2014) observed from their study of a mail order home appliances retailer, that technical and service quality had a different effect on customer 'happiness' across online and offline purchasing channels. Twitter allows entrepreneurs to 'humanize' the outward image of their company (Fischer & Reuber, 2011) and smaller entrepreneurial business owners have a closeness to their customer that can be replicated on social media channels, further strengthening these personal relationships (Durkin, McGowan & McKeown, 2013). While these business owners fail to fully understand the strategic influence of social media on consumer behaviour, they do instinctively realise that they must adopt it (Durkin et al., 2013). But honesty is paramount, or companies risk the negative backlash of the social community (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011) and consumers need to feel a company is communicating honestly before they will engage with the brand (Heller-Baird et al., 2011). Furthermore, Chen et al. (2011) stressed that individuals are unlikely to share postings that bear a social stigma, and persistence in sharing relevant and quality postings is likely to generate a positive response towards the company (Yoon et al., 2008).

Thus, both larger and smaller companies must use traditional offline and social media marketing communication channels to connect with a target consumer community or the consumer at large, and consistency of message is critical (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Content is public by default, and Starbucks get it right by talking with their consumer audience on Twitter rather than at them (Kaplan et al., 2011). Getting social media communication wrong can be extremely damaging to the brand and brands need to develop a social media strategy to engage with sector influences, not the highest number of 'likes' and 'followers' (Chandy, 2014). Although Heller-Baird et al. (2011) argued that the power of social media community

endorsement revolves around Facebook 'likes' and retweets on Twitter, this supported the view of Ramkumar, Kumar, Janakiraman and Bezawada (as cited in Rohm et al., 2013) that increased participation on social media has a positive effect on retailer-to-consumer relationship intensity.

Consequently, the phenomenon of social media has diverted corporate communication power from marketing and public relations professionals to individuals freely communicating on social platforms, making themselves heard with or without the company's approval (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This concurred with BBC Business Editor Tim Weber chronicling (as cited in Kietzmann et al., 2011) "These days, one witty tweet, one clever blog post, one devastating video, forwarded to hundreds of friends at the click of a mouse, can snowball and kill a product or damage a company's share price" (p. 242). However, Kietzmann et al. (2011) further asserted that an appropriate response to a damaging posting on social media can positively influence the outcome. Additionally, the increase in the use of the hashtag symbol to increase the searchability of information, has vastly influenced message reach (Shin, Chae & Ko, 2018). In 2011, Romaniuk found that social media marketing campaigns resulted in higher uptake from existing loyal customers rather than generating new ones, supported by Schultz et al. (2013) observing that companies do not appear to have problems in the development of their social media presence, but they do struggle to make message content engaging and valuable to consumers. In their review of academic research attempting to measure the influence of social media technology on consumer engagement, they ascertained that the researchers were offering a reward stimulus to existing customers on the brands' database, so concluded that the test was simply measuring the responsiveness of promotional content, and consumer engagement on social media technology remains a paradigm for scholars and marketers to define and measure. It is therefore fitting to further discuss aspects of social media technology acceptance by users.

## **2.9 Understanding Social Media Technology and Human Interaction**

McLuhan (2001) theorised that consumers are influenced by the nature of the media technology, positing that 'the medium is the message', rather than the content of the message being communicated. For illustration, in their 2018 study, Voorveld, van

Noort, Muntinga and Bronner affirmed that the specific social media platform (the medium) rather than the content of the message is a key element of advertising effectiveness on social media. However, contra to this argument Klein (2014) posited that people influence the working of the technology and the technological medium similarly effects the behaviour of people. Scholars have widely studied the interdependence of technology and human interaction. For example, Eason (2014) asserted that “people are resource components [alongside technical resources] in sociotechnical systems” (p. 215), which suggests that the technology is not an independent variable in electronic communication systems (Klein, 2014). Further, Maguire (2014) states that socio-technical systems support a workable interface between social media users and the organisation; stimulating the development of online communities and recognising the importance of speed in disseminating information to consumers (Wastell & White, 2014). Moreover, Doherty (2014) asserts that users of these communication technologies need to explicitly recognise that the medium will “deliver meaningful benefits” (p. 182) to the user community, proffering that ‘socio-material’ thinking is a more meaningful approach to media communications in the contemporary organisational setting.

The context of sociomateriality further supports the argument that both human interaction (i.e., social) and the technology (i.e., material) are profoundly inseparable in information and communication technologies; especially notable since the onset of Web 2.0 technology enabled the growth of online social networking (Denzin et al., 2011; Mingers & Willcocks, 2014; Cecez-Kecmanovic, Galliers, Henfridsson, Newell & Vidgen, 2014). Furthermore, Leonardi (2012) states that it is the materiality in social media tools that enables individual users to edit posts, comment, like and share posts on the sites; and the materiality of social media technology means that content is visible to other users, so individuals and organisations must accept “the fact that their posts, comments and queries, are public”, arguing that “there is no social that is not material, and no material that is not also social” (p. 35, 38). Additionally, McLuhan (2003) emphasised that “the message of any medium...is the change of scale or pace...that it introduces into human affairs” (p. 20). It is with these perspectives that individuals and organisations ultimately decide how they respond to the technology and utilise social media communications (Kautz & Jensen, 2013).

To reiterate, the scope of this research is to understand the influence of message context on user interaction. Accordingly, Katz, Blumler and Gurevich (1973)



recommended UGT as a mass media framework for research scholars to study 'how' and 'why' users select media and content to meet their individual needs. This theoretical framework, used in more recent research by Campbell et al. (2014) and Rohm et al. (2013), to understand what motivates the consumer to interact with brands on SNS, provided a user-level view on the premise that consumers are highly engaged in both offline and online media and self-select media to gratify their needs (Huang, 2008; Stafford, Stafford & Schkade, 2004). Therefore, UGT as an appropriate theoretical base to address this research enquiry and develop its relevance in the context of this study, is subsequently reviewed.

## **2.10 Uses and Gratification as a Theoretical Framework**

In 2013, Rohm et al. found that "the uses and gratifications theory has been applied to factors related to the consumers' choice of new media and level of engagement with websites" (p. 298), facilitating increased awareness of functional needs, social needs and psychological needs covered by mass media communication content and motivations for consumer participation (Curras-Perez, Ruiz-Mafe & Sanz-Blas, 2014). Furthermore, Campbell et al. (2014) identified differences in consumer motivation to participate in brand-to-consumer interaction ranging from utilitarian to hedonic. In their research findings, there was a perception that social media marketing is on the consumers' terms, linking back to 'how' and 'why' individuals select and consume specific media for their specific needs. Correspondingly, Curras-Perez et al. (2014) found that hedonic value increases when audience imagination is stimulated, agreeing with Lin (2007), that entertainment gratification has a positive influence on consumer behaviour. Conversely, message and process irritation can have a negative influence on consumer attitudes, so understanding consumer motivations for media use within the theoretical framework of uses and gratifications (U&G) can help minimise adverse reactions (Huang, 2008).

Nevertheless, in earlier U&G studies into internet use, Dreze and Zufryden (1997) and McDonald (1997) discovered that media site choices are motivated by content more than entertainment surfing, although Stafford et al. (2004) likened internet browsing to the hedonic experiences of window-shopping and in-store browsing. What is more, in their study of Facebook users, Oliveira and Huertas (2015) found that individuals with a positive outlook are more likely to engage in positive message

sharing, asserting that understanding user motivations to engage on social media is a strategic priority for businesses to protect their brand image and relationships with their target audience on these publicly visible platforms. In contrast, Smock, Ellison, Lampe and Wohn (2011) found that focussing on the use of specific features available to users of Facebook, rather than motivations for general use, is a more insightful approach to understand the perceived value of this mass media channel. They comment that a U&G approach allows for greater examination of user behaviours, outcomes, and perceptions when engaging with media; likening user choice to selecting a television programme for relaxation or an internet website to be informed. U&G framework supports the investigation of both social and psychological needs of the target audience, focusing on what consumers do with the media as opposed to what the media does to the consumer (Katz et al., 1973; Swanson, 1979).

Furthermore, from their 2011 survey of 267 Facebook users, Smock et al. (2011) argued that time spent on the medium was not a predictor of media choice and usage, but Chen's (2011) online survey findings from 317 active users did identify that time spent on Twitter had an influence on gratifying the users' basic human need to affiliate with others towards attaining a sense of belonging. Whereas, Maslow (1987) and Murray (2008), supported Homans' (1951) notion, that the more time individuals interact with each other, the stronger their bond; this correlates to Ko, Cho and Roberts (2005) findings that online connectivity can enhance human contact. Additionally, Ko et al.'s (2005) study supports audience participation in advertising effectiveness positively influencing purchasing behaviour in the seller-buyer relationship, with SNS used by consumers to inform each other about products and services available in the global marketplace (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Although in their 2013 study of why individuals use social media, Whiting et al. found 80 percent of interview participants identified information seeking as a reason for using SNS but only 40 percent mentioned sharing information. Hence, consumers interact with media content when they have high information motivation and believe that the mediated content gratifies specific needs (Ko et al., 2005). Blumler (1979) remarked that gratification is a subjective reaction of the person to the media and users are more likely to share their opinions with advertisers and other consumers when they have a need for social interaction.

Resulting from their 1973 research, Katz et al. argued that related needs can be functionally classified into self-fulfilment and/or self-gratification and warn that

presentation of the message can gratify or disconnect the individual. Kim (2014) augmented this notion and reasoned that online media supports an active audience expressing their likes and/or dislikes. However, Katz, Haas et al. (1973) contended that media choice rests with the individual and it is acknowledged that different needs can be gratified by the same media, often with a causal origin. They further posited that the U&G approach emphasised the challenges mass media producers faced in addressing a multiplicity of outcomes. The literature implies that UGT provides an appropriate theoretical base to understand how the consumer interacts with messages published on social media channels, such as Twitter and Facebook; identifying what U&G needs the retailers' message is trying to fulfil. And, thereafter, to understand how different message content motivates the consumer to interact with the retailer (Curras-Perez et al., 2014; Oliveira et al., 2015). By utilising UGT in this study, the researcher was able to identify distinct themes of U&G need and apply these to the research findings.

## **2.11 Concluding Comment**

The literature reviewed critically discussed a change in brand marketers' communication with their target consumer audience. The review also analysed the reason for decline of the persuasive power of firms on consumer purchasing behaviour, which has been dramatically weakened by the activity of the digitally empowered and socially connected consumer (Belk, 2013; Deighton et al., 2009; Kotler et al., 1971; Kozinets, 1999; Prahalad et al., 2004; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Developments in mass communication technology have moved audience engagement from the predominance of the printed medium, in the form of newspaper and magazine advertisements read by a passive-audience, towards the more active-audience potential of radio, television, the internet and, most recently, SNS (Bauer, 1963; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Kaplan et al., 2010; Patterson, 2012). While the literature suggested the relative demise of print in favour of the immediacy of online, access to information on demand is still evolving in the minds of marketing professionals and management executives (De Keyser et al., 2014; Durkin et al., 2013; Fournier et al., 2011; Heller-Baird et al., 2011; Lorenzo-Romero et al., 2013; Schultz et al., 2013). Nevertheless, it is evident that the consumer has widely adopted these new communication technologies in their buying behaviour (Belk, 2013; Rohm et al., 2013; Van Doorn et al., 2010). The challenge for retailers

is to understand 'how' and 'why' consumers interact with them on these interactive SNS.

Using UGT enabled the researcher to fulfil the research objective of investigating the views of manager stakeholders on the purpose of Twitter and Facebook messages posted by the retail case organisation in terms of gratifying the consumers' social, entertainment or information need. Also, by using UGT as a theoretical model to classify the context of the retailer's messages into these U&G *a priori* themes, the motivation of the consumer to engage and interact with the retailer on these social media channels could be evaluated. In addition, a deeper understanding of how the consumer uses these communication channels will inform the retailer on the most effective use of their marketing resource to generate maximum consumer interaction on social media, and a tangible return on the time invested in such activity. This also enabled the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of this retailer's perception of return on investment in social media activity and to evaluate the impact of social media, if any, on this retailer's internal communication and internal relationships.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodological Framework**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The research investigation focussed on Twitter and Facebook activity, within a single case organisation; researching the impact of these two established social media platforms on the retailer-consumer interaction within a commercially active environment (the case organisation). This chapter begins by setting out the researcher's approach in finding and reviewing literature to address the research aim and objectives stated in Chapter One, Section 1.5.2. Thereafter, arguing the philosophical assumptions and the research paradigm adopted, before describing the research site without breaching its anonymity. The chapter proceeds by reviewing the research strategies, design and methods utilised in the study, and then continues by explaining the approach to data analysis. A discussion on the reliability and validity of the research approach and findings follows. The ethical considerations that the researcher has abided by precede the researcher's acknowledgement on the limitations of the study findings, and his concluding comment on the methodological approach to the study.

#### **3.2 Literature Review Methodology**

The flow chart illustrated in Figure 6 depicts the researcher's search for related scholarly literature. The researcher acknowledges there is a wealth of relevant grey literature that has not been included; defined by Booth, Papaioannou and Sutton (2012) as all literature outside of commercial publishing control, such as blogs and some trade press articles not subject to a process of academic validation (Stokes & Wall, 2014). While this publication bias could have influenced the research outcome (Gilbody & Song, 2000), an extensive review of peer reviewed scholarly literature was more appropriate for this major research project.

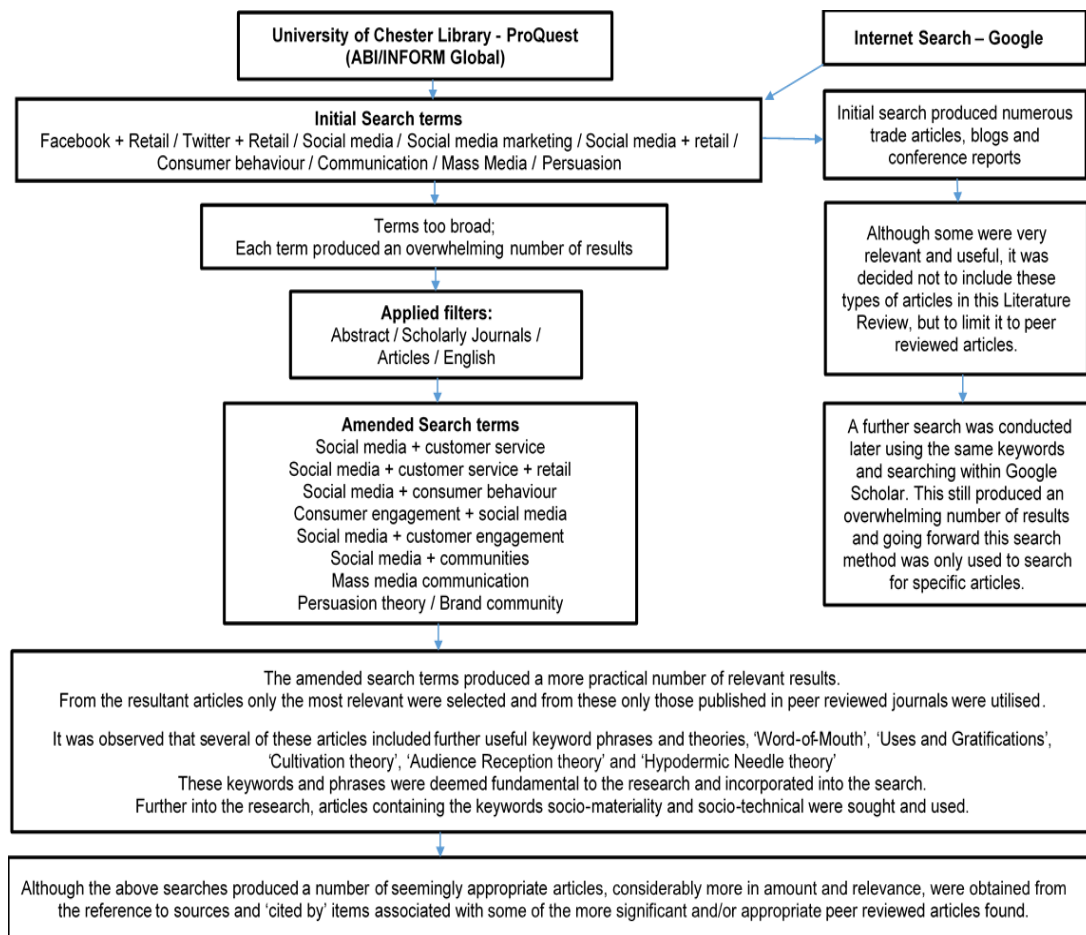


Figure 6: Flow chart showing search terms used and results of search for relevant literature

### 3.3 Research Philosophy

The recent nature and continuing evolution of social networking as a mass communication tool mean that rules of engagement are fluid for the retailer and the consumer in the communication process. Ownership and responsibility of usage rests with the individual or group without prescriptive boundaries of message content. While analytical tools, principally designed with a modernist rational (Boisot & McKelvey, 2010) are available for users to check their performance, they are open to differing epistemological understanding and ontological perceptions which promotes the growing cacophony of social media ‘experts’ offering their voice on what best practice looks like – not specifically reviewed in this research. Moreover, and important to the study, the author has his own ontological views, and “first-hand experience” [of SNS and] “the realities of how things work in [retail] organisations” (Watson, 2011, p. 202, 212).

Therefore, a subjectivist stance allowed the researcher to freely use his own skills and experience in interpreting patterns of human behaviour; in contrast to an objectivist view that would limit him to the epistemological position of focusing on measurable tangible objects (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005; Morgan & Smircich, 1980) within these broadly unregulated social interactions on Twitter and Facebook sites. Furthermore, the potential for researcher bias is acknowledged in the data collection process, so a conscious mind-set of 'disciplined subjectivity' was adopted throughout the study by the researcher (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007; Sandelowski, 2008) along with an "interpretative epistemological position" to support responsiveness to new ideas and findings, but not allowing prior knowledge to overshadow the study by "placing the interpretations that have been elicited into [the] social scientific frame [of users and gratification theory]" (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p. 18; Watson, 2011). As Suddaby (2006) asserted, "you are only human and that what you observe is a function of both who you are and what you hope to see" (p. 635), and Morgan et al. (1980) questioned whether human beings can ever be truly free from a subjectivist position as researchers because of their involvement in designing and analysing their research experiments.

Whilst some quantitative methods may have assisted the researcher's subjectivist epistemological view, care was taken not to pose 'scientific' restrictions on participants by asking them to explain a "presumed-to-be true reality... grounded in mathematical and statistical knowledge" (Gephart, 2004, p. 455) that may be difficult to comprehend and even frustrate open discussion. Therefore, understanding participants' behaviour, within the context of the study, was best captured with an emphasis on qualitative research to gain greater appreciation of the social phenomenon than that of pure quantitative research data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2000). The flexible design incumbent in qualitative research activity allowed the researcher to adapt his approach, while doing the research, to heighten his interaction with those involved in answering the 'how' and 'why' questions from their everyday organisational experiences (Gephart, 2004; Pratt, 2009).

This inductive approach also recognised the researcher's closeness to the investigation and creation of that knowledge. Kilduff (2006) suggested that this personal interest generates an inspirational flow and highlighted that an inductive approach enables patterns to emerge from the data collected to build a theory. In this study, however, the researcher was investigating the behaviour of individuals and specialist groups (communities) within a retail case organisation on these

communication platforms, rather than setting out to build another theory. The selection of UGT, as discussed in the previous chapter, provided a suitable base of *a priori* themes (King & Brooks, 2017; Manning, 2015; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012) to understand and establish reasons why users select the medium, and how they interact on Twitter and Facebook. Further, King et al. (2017) describe *a priori* themes as those that the researcher has identified, “with the intention of focusing on aspects of the phenomena under investigation” (p. 29), at the early stage of the research project.

### **3.4 Research Paradigm**

By adopting an interpretive paradigm—subjectivist perspective, the researcher, with his prior retail practitioner experience and ontological knowledge of the research topic, could interpret symbolic inferences and interactions with people taking part in the research, teasing out their close to reality point of view, in face-to-face discussion. In preference to a more *prima facie* understanding of the phenomena in a positivist paradigm, scientific deductive approach that would leave the researcher as an outsider and more distant observer of activities in the case organisation (Denzin et al., 2011; Gray, 2014; Maylor et al., 2005; Silverman, 2000).

The researcher’s frame of reference can be partially identified within Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) four paradigms for analysis of social theory as shown in Figure 7. They offer distinct approaches to the social science researcher: the interpretivist paradigm as a subjectivist and radical perspective as opposed to a functionalist paradigm as an objective and radical structuralist perspective. However, this structure does not support the postmodernist notion expressed by many scholars, who argued that the four paradigms are too ridged, and an overlap between an inductive and deductive approach can exist (Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Hassard & Wolfram Cox, 2013; Kuhn, 1996; Newton, 2010; Willmott, 1993; Wilson, 2010).



### The Sociology of Radical Change

<b>Subjective</b>	Radical Humanist	Radical Structuralist	<b>Objective</b>
	Interpretivist	Functionalist	

### The Sociology of Regulation

Figure 7: Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory

Source: Burrell et al. (1979)

While Burrell et al. (1979) maintained that the mutual exclusivity of these paradigms is necessary to view the social world, other social science scholars challenged the rigidity of modernism (Calás & Smircich, 1999) to deal with subjectivity and “messy problems” in organisational studies (Stokes, 2011b, p. 83). Kuhn (1996) similarly rejected this pedagogical argument by asserting the acceptance of a partial overlap between paradigms. However, Donaldson (2005) disagreed, saying that “there is no need to leap to a different paradigm” (p. 1082); arguing that “the proliferation of paradigms has [historically] hampered the rapid development of organisational studies” (p. 1085). Willmott (1993) further suggested that the development of new paradigms was linked with technological developments, and Hassard et al. (2013) disputed Donaldson’s (2005) paradigm ‘proliferation’ assertion in arguing that “the epistemological and methodological characteristics of one paradigm may directly influence the development of another” (p. 1708), which has occurred over the last decade with the prolific advancement in mass communication technology reported in the literature review.

The researcher found the insights provided by Burrell et al.’s (1979) four dimensions useful in crystallising the paradigmatic order of his research approach. While taking the ontological stance of the interpretive paradigm–subjectivist perspective, he adopted Kuhn’s (1996) position in crossing the boundaries of Burrell et al.’s (1979)

model, by partially considering the functionalist paradigm in this study. This perspective allowed him to bridge the subjective-objective gap (Barley, 1986) with a modernist focus (passive observer) in investigating organisational policies, operating regularities and structures (Boisot et al., 2010; Riley 1983) that have emerged and become institutionalised as everyday processes and rules (Boisot et al., 2010; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), in response to social media participation. As Gioia et al. (1990) explained, using a single research paradigm in fieldwork can prove to be too limiting to reflect the nature of organisational reality, whereas crossing the boundaries of Burrell et al.'s (1979) paradigm approaches can stimulate a micro level understanding of the realities that the participant-practitioners abide by. Furthermore, while the researcher's experience from many years of working within the retail sector was helpful in developing relationships with research participants within the case organisation, being mindful of the effect of his own epistemological ("beliefs regarding what we can know about reality" (King et al., 2017, p. 17)) and ontological ("beliefs about the nature of reality" (King et al., 2017, p. 17)) assumptions on the research "data and findings" was necessary, to control the impact of reflexivity on the "researcher and research participants" interaction during the entire research process (Cassell & Symon, 2012; King et al., 2017; Stokes, 2011b, p. 108, 109).

### **3.5 Ontology**

A subjectivist ontological perspective allowed the researcher to understand the reality of human experiences at an individual and group level during the fieldwork, noting patterns of behaviour that emerged and "what does not exist in the [case organisation] environment" studied (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick & Robertson, 2013; Maylor et al., 2005, p. 155; Saunders et al., 2012). Moreover, the researcher strove to objectively understand the subjective views of those participating in the study (Bunge, as cited in Gray, 2014). Thereby adopting a relativist ontology in discovering and reporting the multiple attitudes, constructed by these individuals in the real-world setting of the case organisation, about the phenomenon of social media and the influence of Twitter and Facebook on the retailer-consumer interaction - as the scientific approach of the objectivist researcher was inappropriate to understand the different realities and meanings of these social media channels to individuals (Bryman, 2016; Denzin et al., 2011; Gray, 2014).

The goal of the researcher was to meaningfully understand the behaviour of the research participants within the case organisation's environment, rather than trying to explain their behaviour (Maylor et al., 2005). As stated earlier, the literature argued that social media has empowered the consumer with freedom of voice in the retailer-consumer relationship. This research uses UGT *a priori* themes to initially understand the ontological nature of how the case organisation was using Twitter and Facebook postings to gratify the consumers' need for social, entertainment or information interaction, by hand-coding historical posting into these U&G categories. The online ethnographic pilot study on each social networking site, used, in part, to guide the researcher in questioning each participant; without sharing any secondary research findings with them in the semi-structured interviews. The researcher asked open-ended questions to understand the ontological perspective of each research participant (Bryman, 2016; Manning, 2015; Stokes, 2011b).

### **3.6 Epistemology**

The choice of an interpretivist epistemology supported the researcher's intention to study one specialist case in-depth; rather than attempting to generalise the research findings across the retail sector, nevertheless, the aim was to identify new insights that can be shared across a wider population (Wilson, 2010). The researcher anticipated that individual research participants would respond to the researcher's interview questions with different interpretations of Twitter and Facebook postings, which is in keeping with this epistemological orientation (Yin, 2014). Alternatively, viewing these social media channels with a positivist epistemology would have impeded the researcher in capturing differing attitudes and perceptions of reality amongst participants (Cassell et al., 2012).

Therefore, by adopting the philosophical stance of the interpretivist, the information rich narrative data collected from interview responses represented human feelings and attitudes towards social media, with less meaning placed on objects such as, the status, age and gender of participants (Saunders et al., 2012). Additionally, the researcher's insider experiences of retail sector environments facilitated a closeness to the "human experiences" (Boblin et al., 2013, p. 1269) of research participants during the interviews, thereby lessening any potential disruptive researcher-participant gap in epistemological assumptions about the research topic within a

retail context. Thus, supporting the researcher's ability to understand the world from the research participants point of view (Saunders et al., 2012).

### **3.7 The Research Site**

This research investigated the use of social media, namely Twitter and Facebook, from the lens of a medium sized specialist retailer within the outdoor activities sector (the case organisation). The retailer researched is well-established and selected because this firm has actively developed SNS whilst trading online, while maintaining a continued offline profile from physical shops in towns and cities across the UK. The retail sector that the case organisation serves, primarily specialises in selling clothing and equipment to individuals participating in winter sports and other outdoor sports.

The researcher observed a relatively informal hierarchical structure during his early engagement with the case organisation, nevertheless, a structural hierarchy and disciplines in the form of rules based on a general understanding of the norms of business activity were apparent, along with actors seemingly doing what they were employed to do. Furthermore, the organisational culture appeared to support an internal collaborative relationship with its actors, rather than constraining them with a ridged organisational ethos driven by intangible regulatory disciplines (Bryman, 2016).

This informal culture and openness meant that a plethora of company rules, policies and permissions did not silence the researcher's and participants' voices, often found to be the case in more structured organisational environments, that can force regulated responses thereby influencing the research findings. Moreover, the researcher's access, granted without any preconceived constraints on the research process, resulted in a high level of confidence that the responses of participants would be their own opinions, and the researcher could build trusting relationships during fieldwork (Buchanan et al., 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Maylor et al., 2005; Travers, 2001).

This research investigated how the case organisation used Twitter and Facebook to connect and interact with their target consumer audiences. By adopting UGT,

(Campbell et al., 2014; Dreze et al., 1997; Huang, 2008; Katz et al., 1973; McDonald, 1997; Rohm et al., 2013; Stafford et al., 2004; Swanson, 1979) the researcher set out to identify patterns of user behaviour and classify instances of social, entertainment and information needs gratified via interaction on these communication channels from the retailers' perspective. The researcher 'grounds' the study in his own experiences, which spans a 40-year career within independent and multinational retail environments; supported by Saunders et al.'s (2012) suggestion that "management researchers can generate knowledge that is both socially useful and academically rigorous" (p. 10).

### **3.8 Research Strategy**

The researcher's prior experience of social media activity in a retail context, and familiarity with retail environments, together with his academic skill in constructing the literature review, supported a qualitative–inductive approach; which enabled the study to capitalise on the researcher's practitioner-based experience in the interpretation of emergent insights into the phenomena during data collection and analysis. Additionally, qualitative research was more suited to asking the practitioner-participants to describe 'how' they experienced Twitter and Facebook activity on an everyday basis in their organisational setting (Pratt, 2009); in contrast to a relatively dehumanised quantitative–deductive approach, more focussed on discovering tangible facts of 'how many' to establish numerical meanings (Gephart, 2004; Morgan et al., 1980; Pratt, 2009), with the researcher's dispassionate position "from the outside looking in" (Wilson, 2010, p. 12), rather than involvement in gathering words and text that captured insights of how people interpret their worldview (Bryman et al., 2003; Stokes, 2011b). A qualitative research approach was more fitting for face-to-face interaction to understand experiences "and meanings that underlie the phenomena" (Gephart, 2004, p. 455), allowing the researcher to use his axiological skill in developing a position that reflected the reality of social media in the organisational setting (Saunders et al., 2012). This supports Morgan et al. (1980) in their earlier suggestion that "scientists can no longer remain as external observers" (p. 498), reporting what they see from their positivist research paradigm.

The researcher recognised that the explicit distinction between a quantitative and qualitative approach, as depicted by Bryman et al. (2003) in Table 3, was not strictly followed in this study by crossing these theoretical deductive-inductive boundaries. However, the fundamental approach was qualitative research and, despite the correlations shown in Table 3, Bryman et al. (2003) concurred that scholars should not create insurmountable barriers between the antecedents of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Further supported by Buchanan et al. (2007) and Travers (2001) acknowledging the growing acceptance of combined qualitative and quantitative methods in social science research.

Table 3: Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies

	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>
Principal orientation	Deductive	Inductive
Epistemological orientation	Positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological orientation	Objectivism	Subjectivism

Source: Adapted from Bryman et al. (2003)

A statement of the research aim and objectives was issued to participants, in advance when possible and discussed with each interviewee at the start of their interview, before signing the consent document (Boblin et al., 2013). However, to avert rehearsed answers, the participants did not receive a copy of the research questions in advance. Furthermore, questions developed during collection of the primary data; a premise supported by the findings of Maylor et al. (2005) is that questions tend to emerge from observations by the researcher being part of what is being researched. Their model (Figure 8) illustrates the increasing level of researcher involvement, moving from the researcher's relative remoteness to participation in the process.

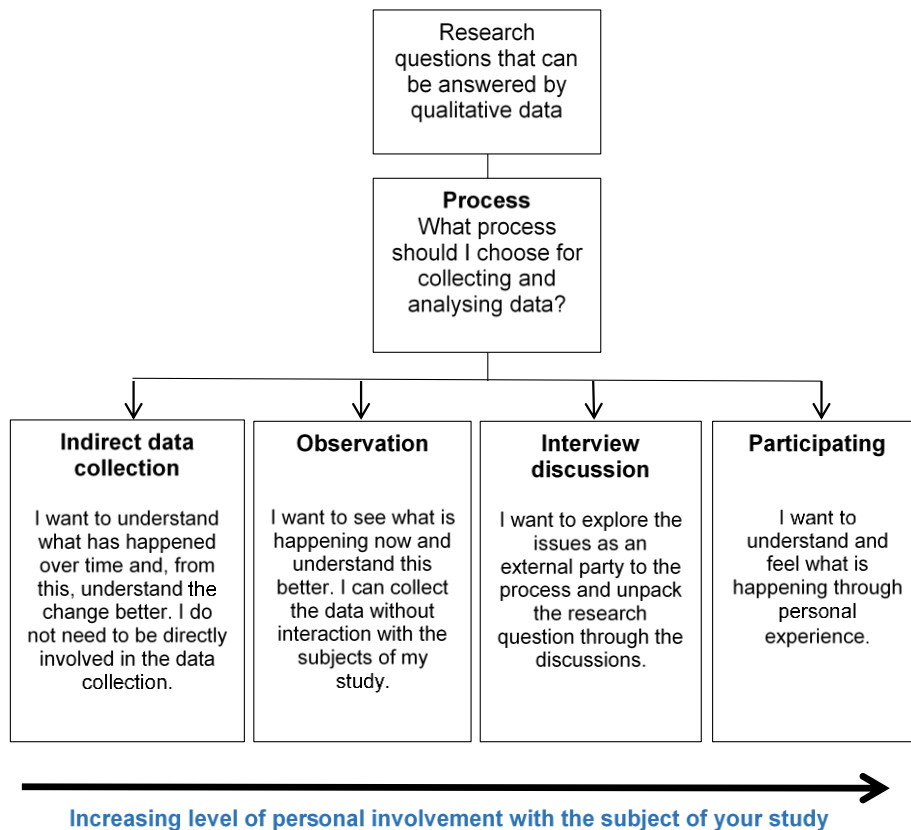


Figure 8: Qualitative research designs

Source: Maylor et al. (2005)

The researcher progressively collected and analysed Twitter and Facebook activity data that is in the public domain, without interacting with participants, before moving along the researcher participation scale, denoted in Figure 8, by developing ‘how’ and ‘why’ research questions in semi-structured interviews. The scarcity of UK based, peer reviewed scholarly literature on the research topic also supported a more exploratory stance (Bryman et al., 2003).

### 3.9 Data Collection Strategy

An inductive methodological approach of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to skilfully listen, and at the same time probe the respondents’ deeper views, by developing questions as they emerged within one-to-one interviews (Saunders et al., 2012). The investigation into the use of social media, namely Twitter and Facebook, in the retail setting “is driven by the [researcher’s] ambition to understand” (Manning, 2015, p. 102) the influence of such publicly visible contact,

on the retailer-consumer interaction from the lens of the specialist retailer. Moreover, the subjectivist perspective adopted enabled the researcher to understand the beliefs of research participants working within the case organisation, whether directly or indirectly involved with the phenomena under investigation (Bryman et al., 2003). By adopting an interpretivist philosophy, the researcher is suggesting that the phenomena studied is about human interactions, rather than the tangible technology platforms used (King et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2012).

The data collection process shown in Table 4, designed to start collecting Twitter and Facebook secondary data online, before engaging with the research participants in the fieldwork at the case organisation.

Table 4: Data collection process

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Phase One</b>	<b>Phase Two</b>
Online Ethnography	A pilot study of the case organisation's activity on all Twitter and Facebook accounts before starting fieldwork.	A study of the case organisation's activity on all Twitter and Facebook accounts over a 12-month period to increase reliability of the research findings.
Analyse Data	Review the data collected from the pilot study to understand the context of the messages posted by the case organisation, and the resultant user interaction before interviewing research participants – including the pilot interview.	Analyse data for comparison with the responses individual participants gave to interview questions. Helping to validate the research findings.
Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with each research participant	Pilot interview with one research participant at the case organisation to test the process before engaging in the full interview schedule.	Interview a further fifteen research participants following the process and audio-recording method tested in the pilot interview.
Observation	Informal meeting with the Managing Director before starting the project, allowed the researcher to gain an initial understanding of the organisation's culture.	General observation at the case organisation's head office and retail store environments, while conducting interviews – allowed the researcher to experience the culture of the case organisation.



This online ethnographic work initially involved systematically reviewing every fifth posting over a 12-month period, which the researcher considered to be a manageable task, on Twitter and Facebook in a pilot study, before the interviewing process, to ensure the research method was appropriate (Bryman, 2016). Additionally, this pilot study informed the researcher on the nature of the case organisation's postings, prior to engaging with research participants in fieldwork, and helped to develop the research questions. Thereafter, the researcher decided to review every posting over an historical twelve-month period to increase the reliability and validity of the research findings.

The observational element of the research was that of the researcher becoming familiar with the culture within the case organisation; for example, the open plan office layout promoted informal engagement (friendly acknowledgement walking through their workspace) with employees not involved in the research, similarly, the layout of the retail store prompted impromptu conversations with members of staff, while the researcher was on site to interview their Store Manager. Moreover, the researcher became familiar with the case organisation environment as a direct consequence of meeting the research participants; gaining valuable first-hand researcher experience of the culture within the workplace environment (Travers, 2001). In sum, this observation allowed the researcher to understand the cultural norms within the business; thereby allowing him to reconcile these researcher feelings (how things are done around here) with related responses made by individuals directly participating in the research.

### **3.10 Research Design**

The research design utilised was a single in-depth case study, gathering insights from multiple sources of data to generate a deep understanding of the case organisation environment, when examining the relatively new phenomenon of social media in the retailer-customer relationship (Boblin et al., 2013; Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995); supporting Yin's (2014) findings that case study research design is chosen when the intervention being evaluated has no clear outcomes. Further, in support of a single case study design, Stake (1995) stated that case study research is about "a particularisation" (p. 8), suggesting that the researcher gets more insight into the research enquiry by investigating a single case.

The researcher used his retail industry networks and interpersonal skills to purposefully select a single case organisation; an established UK wide specialist retailer, which granted unconditional access for this research project (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006). The case organisation is social media active, offering advice and links to sector related activities via social networking, so investigating the contemporary phenomenon of social media within this single real-world setting was valuable (Denzin et al., 2011; Patton, 2015; Siggelkow, 2007; Yin, 2014). Case study research design is well-suited to this type of exploratory study with a purpose of answering the 'how' and 'why' questions using a qualitative research approach (Stake, 2005; Wilson, 2010; Yin, 2003). The case organisation participating in this study engages within socially connected communities, which tends to be mirrored internally within the organisation, so understanding the influence of social media activity was drawn from people working across different occupations and hierarchical levels within the business, to capture diverse perspectives on the phenomena under investigation (Bryman et al., 2003; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Travers, 2001). The case study approach also benefitted from the researcher being familiar with the retail sector context of issues studied (Buchanan et al., 2007; Denzin et al., 2011; Yin, 2014).

Nevertheless, the researcher's decision to select a single case organisation was primarily threefold: **a)** an in-depth study of one case would yield more information on the holistic understanding and the intricacies of social media activity within the real-world retail setting; **b)** the researcher had a unique opportunity to investigate the phenomena under study within an intrinsically information-rich retail environment; and fundamentally, **c)** attempting more than one case in-depth would overstretch the researcher's time and resource, and jeopardise the quality and impact of the research on the development of knowledge (Boblin et al., 2013; Patton, 2015; Stake, 1995; Travers, 2001; Yin, 2009, 2014). Concurring with Yin (2014) advising that a "multiple-case study can require extensive resources and time beyond the means of an...independent research investigator" (p. 57). Furthermore, the researcher considered that investigating one real-world case organisation in considerable depth, to be a more credible base for sharing specific insights and the inference of that knowledge within similar environments (Denzin et al., 2011; Schofield, 2006; Siggelkow, 2007).

### 3.11 Research Method

A strength of a case study inquiry is the ability to ask research questions that call for a “thick description” (Stake, 1995, p. 43) of a social phenomenon, allowing the researcher to directly probe multiple views as they unfold in the real-world organisational setting (Denzin et al., 2011; Yin, 2014). Further, a single-case study allowed the researcher to investigate the under-researched phenomenon of social media, in-depth from the lens of a data rich organisation (Denzin et al., 2018; Eisenhardt et al., 2007). Additionally, the researcher’s use of multiple sources of data collection, principally in the form of interviews and an online ethnographic study of the case organisation’s Twitter and Facebook postings, was helpful in establishing different views of the phenomena (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012).

Whilst the researcher considered Kozinets’ (2002) netnography, it was rejected in favour of an online ethnographic approach – observing activities in ‘cyberspace’, rather than a netnographic study calling for the researcher to observe and interact with online users over a long period of time (Weijo, Hietanen, & Mattila, 2014); an impracticable option for this limited resource research project. Accordingly, the researcher was ‘lurking’ as an observer to understand the case organisation’s historical Twitter and Facebook activity; not participating in messaging on these platforms for this study; and conducted a pilot study prior to engaging in the fieldwork (Bryman, 2016).

Thereafter, the researcher captured differing views across internal functional roles by interacting with respondents in face-to-face interviews. These interviews, in general, took place at the participants’ place of work, and were electronically recorded (with prior consent) along with any back-up field notes (Boblin et al., 2013; Bryman, 2012). The researcher analysed and interpreted the data collected to identify patterns and causal links between social media user activity on Twitter and Facebook and the retailer-consumer relationship as depicted by the research participants’ interview responses.

### 3.12 Sampling Strategy

The researcher used his informed judgement, grounded in both his practitioner and academic experience, to purposefully select a single information-rich case organisation (Patton, 2015), to engage in-depth with research participants to understand their approach to Twitter and Facebook activity, thereby offering important insights in the context of addressing the research enquiry (Stake, 1995); in contrast to the impracticability of a probability sample, to capture a wider population, imposing access difficulties and potentially overstressing the researcher's limited resource (Saunders et al., 2012; Travers, 2001; Yin, 2014). In addition, the researcher recognised nonprobability (purposeful) sampling as being best suited to case study research, focussing on a smaller population sample to truly capture the reality of a phenomenon, rather than gathering shallow statistical interpretations from a wider population (Patton, 2015; Wilson, 2010). Additionally, Patton (2015) contended that qualitative methodologists are more interested in meaningful insights and "important breakthroughs" (p. 312) in understanding the phenomenon of social media, alleviating any negative concerns about the size of the sample. This supports Glaser and Strauss's (1967) earlier suggestion that probability sampling is inappropriate for a qualitative research design. However, researchers acknowledge that a weakness of purposive sampling is not being able to make wider empirical generalisations about the population of the study area (Bryman et al., 2003; Patton, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012; Wilson, 2010), although scholars argue that lessons learned and insights from a single in-depth case study can be applied to other similar case organisations in the same sector (Patton, 2015; Schofield, 2006; Stake, 1995; Travers, 2001; Yin, 2014).

The purposeful selection of 16 participants within the case organisation, as shown in Table 5, allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of differing perspectives of the phenomena of Twitter and Facebook from individuals within different functional roles and hierarchical levels in the organisational setting (Bryman et al., 2003; Eisenhardt et al., 2007; Wilson, 2010), including participants who are on the peripheral of social media activity (Miles et al., 1994).

Table 5: Research Participants at the Case Organisation

<b>Position</b>	<b>Primary Location</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age Category</b>
Managing Director	Field	Male	35 to 44
Marketing Director	Office	Male	35 to 44
Creative Director	Office	Male	45 to 54
Purchasing Director	Office	Male	55 to 64
Retail Director	Field	Male	35 to 44
Marketing Manager	Office	Male	35 to 44
E-Commerce Marketing Manager	Office	Male	35 to 44
Website Manager	Office	Male	35 to 44
Digital Marketing Executive	Office	Male	22 to 34
Customer Service Manager	Office	Male	22 to 34
Operations Manager	Office	Female	35 to 44
Regional Manager	Field	Male	35 to 44
Store Manager	Retail Store	Male	35 to 44
Store Manager	Retail Store	Male	35 to 44
Store Manager	Retail Store	Male	65+
Store Manager	Retail Store	Male	22 to 34

The researcher used his networking skills to get close to the case organisation; making the purpose of the research explicit to each participant involved in answering the research questions shown in Table 6 and appendix 3. Engaging with varied participants across ‘customer facing’ and ‘back office’ functions, who had the understanding and relevant information to answer the research questions (Bryman, 2016; Dutton et al., 2006), allowed the researcher to tease out and learn different epistemological assumptions and ontological positions on the impact of Twitter and Facebook on their internal functions and the wider business. Bearing-in-mind that access was dependent on who was available and willing to participate at the time of the fieldwork. Pratt (2009) stated that “there is no ‘magic number’ of interviews or observations that should be conducted in a qualitative research project” (p. 856).

Table 6: Planned Research Questions

	Question	Objective	Supporting Literature
1	What is your personal experience of social media?	To understand familiarisation	No relevance to this open question
2	In your role, as...what is your involvement in social media activity?	To understand involvement	No relevance to this open question
3	<p>Is social media an important customer communication channel?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ would you define the main purpose of Twitter activity originated by your organisation as; social engagement, information messages or entertainment value?</li> <li>○ would you define the main purpose of Facebook activity originated by your organisation as; social engagement, information messages or entertainment value?</li> <li>○ how would you categorise postings about products, brands or events?</li> </ul>	<p>To investigate the views of manager stakeholders on the purpose of Twitter and Facebook messages posted by the retail case organisation in terms of gratifying the consumers' social, entertainment or information need.</p> <p>To understand postings that appear to be promotional in nature and validate the classification made by the researcher.</p>	<p>Belk, (2013);</p> <p>Keller, (1993);</p> <p>Ramkumar et al. (as cited in Rohm et al., 2013)</p> <p>Campbell et al., (2014);</p> <p>Rohm et al., (2013);</p> <p>Oliveira et al., (2015)</p> <p>Whiting et al., (2013)</p>
4	<p>How has social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook, influenced the organisation's relationship with its target consumer audience?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ what do you think motivates users to interact with you on these channels?</li> <li>○ is social media an integrated activity across all facets of the business or just a marketing and/or advertising activity?</li> <li>○ is social media activity an integral component of marketing strategy?</li> <li>○ is the return on investment (ROI) in social media measured in any way?</li> </ul>	<p>To develop a deeper understanding of how social media fits into this retailer's traditional marketing strategy</p> <p>To develop a deeper understanding of this retailer's perception of return on investment in social media activity.</p>	<p>Chen et al., (2011); Van Doorn et al., (2010)</p> <p>Chua et al., (2013); Wallace et al., (2014)</p> <p>De Keyser et al., (2014); Schultz et al., (2013)</p> <p>Baines, Fill and Rosengren, (2017)</p> <p>Baines et al., (2017); Munzel et al., (2014)</p>
5	Has social media influenced internal communication and relationships?	To understand internal impact at the case organisation.	Wirtz et al., (2013); Kietzmann et al. (2011)

### 3.13 Data Analysis

Multiple data analysis followed a logical path from the researcher's online ethnographic work to the textual transcripts of semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2015). Although the researcher considered that an observation element was not critical to answering the research question, gaining a first-hand understanding of how this human-technology interaction was managed within the case organisation's workplace settings was a valuable researcher learning opportunity that added value to the overall study findings (Travers, 2001). The sequence of research activity seen in Figure 9; a time-consuming process but essential to understanding real-life unedited interactions.

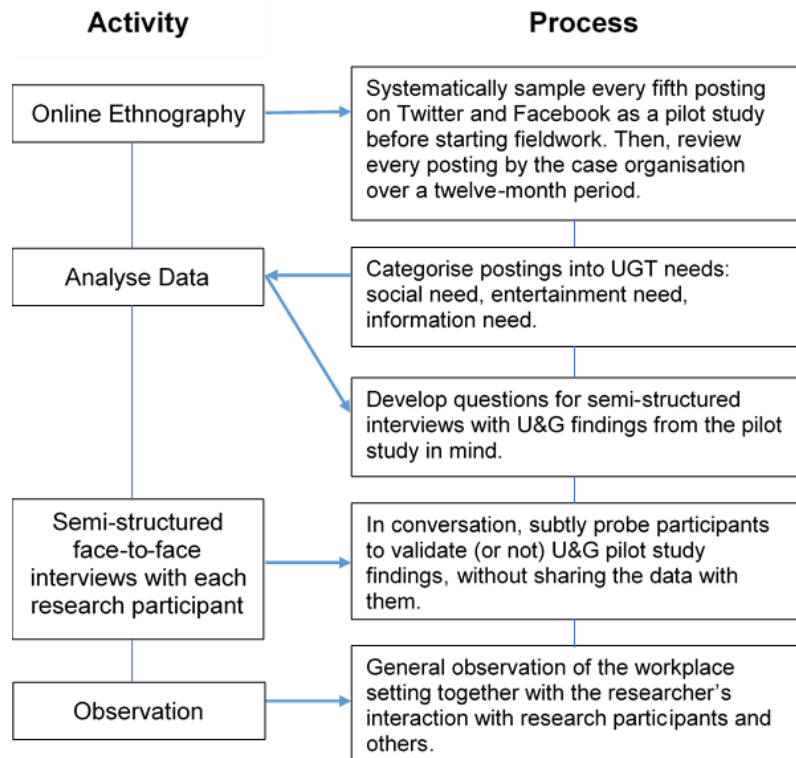


Figure 9: Secondary and primary research activity

Source: Author

Textual message threads from the raw written-data were carefully reviewed and hand-coded to organise the data collected into *a priori* themes (Hahn, 2008; King et al., 2017; Patton, 2015) of social, entertainment and information U&G value in terms of the apparent user need ('other' being postings that did not fit these classifications)

and logged on Tables 7 and 8 respectively; to identify “what is meaningful and useful” (Patton, 2015, p. 552) in terms of understanding the U&G purpose of each posting by the retailer, and what overall pattern emerged.

Table 7: Online ethnography on Twitter

Date	Number of Postings on Twitter by UGT Need Classification Code			
	Social	Entertainment	Information	Other

Source: Author

Table 8: Online ethnography on Facebook

Date	Number of Postings on Facebook by UGT Need Classification Code			
	Social	Entertainment	Information	Other

Source: Author

Audio-recordings from the semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim by a third party, produced a word-processed document, using Microsoft Word software, for each participant (Maylor et al., 2005; Patton, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012; Wilson, 2010). Whilst sending the unedited transcript to the participant may have helped in validating the audio-recorded response, Saunders et al. (2012) warned that interviewees “often want to correct their own grammar and use of language” (p. 550); the researcher evaluated the benefit of this to the research on completion of the interviews and after reviewing the transcripts decided this would be of no benefit to the research findings. The numerical data collected from Tables 7 and 8 was analysed with the aid of Microsoft Excel software to see what U&G patterns emerged from the postings. The researcher deemed a more complex statistical data analysis software package, such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), unnecessary for the basic level of quantitative data analysis needed for this element of data collection. However, the greater volume of textual data collected in the form of participant interview transcripts, was analysed using King et al.’s (2017) ‘Template Analysis’ framework (“a style of thematic analysis” (p. 3))



illustrated in Figure 10, with the aid of NVivo qualitative data analysis software to identify themes (“recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts” (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 150)) and the perspectives of different occupational groups within the context of the research question (King et al., 2017; Patton 2015). This template style analysis was especially helpful in coding large amounts of textual data, so themes could be identified and “assembled in one place to complete the interpretive process” (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p. 166) in analysing the coded data.

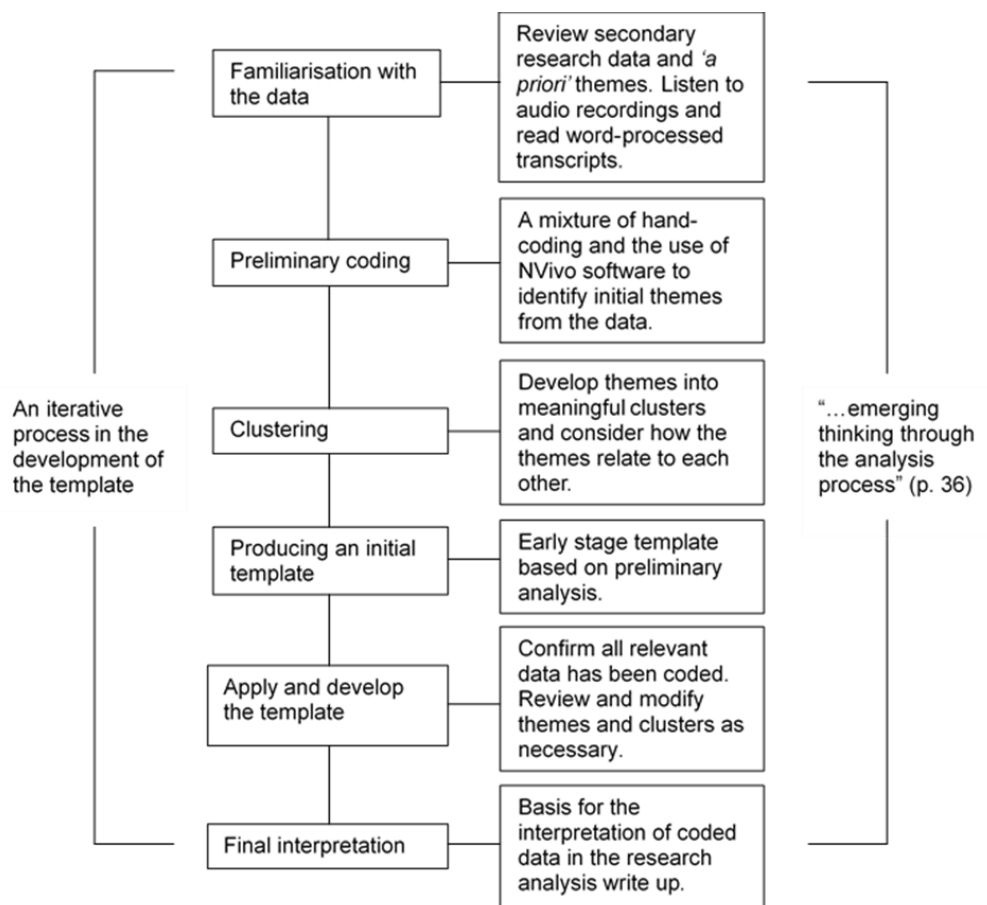


Figure 10: Steps in the template analysis process

Source: Author, elicited by King et al. (2017)

A critical element of interpreting qualitative data comes from the researcher carefully reading the raw data to become very familiar with the content for analysis. Maylor et al. (2005) posited that the difficulty in interpreting qualitative research rests with the multitude of ways to make sense of the data collected, so the researcher used his informed judgement by focussing on what was both relevant and useful in addressing the research enquiry. By analysing the content of the transcribed data,

the researcher identified patterns of responses, drawing comparisons with findings from the online ethnographic coded data (Tables 7 and 8), interviews and fieldnotes. Although inductive analysis rather than a deductive approach is more common in qualitative research, Patton (2015) argued that “the final stage of qualitative analysis may be deductive” (p. 542); with Wilson (2010) stating “there is no definitive approach to carrying out qualitative data analysis” (p. 253). Additionally, Wilson (2010) and Saunders et al. (2012) asserted that research often includes both approaches. The researcher designed the study to partially cross the academic barrier of an inductive-deductive, qualitative-quantitative research approach, so that the data from his face-to-face interviews and online ethnographic activity could be triangulated (Patton, 2015) to support the validation of the research findings.

### **3.14 Reliability and Validity**

The researcher’s retail experience and practitioner-based assumptions of the phenomenon of social media in a retail context was known from the outset, recognising the need to be mindful of any potential researcher bias in the process of data collection and data analysis. That said, Bryman et al. (2003) found that neutrality in research should be replaced by conscious partiality, conceding that the researcher cannot be value free. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier and shown in Figure 9, starting the data collection process with a pilot study of Twitter and Facebook postings before engaging in any fieldwork, provided a reliable base to develop the semi-structured interview approach. In that, the researcher’s understanding of what the case organisation was doing on these social media platforms, provided a factual base when asking research participants open-ended questions to uncover what was really happening in the field. And, a pilot interview gave the researcher some experience of the interviewing process, and helped test the validity of this approach, including the development of pertinent interview questions based on what emerged in the fieldwork (Bryman, 2016; Patton, 2015).

By using multiple sources to collect data, along with the researcher’s general observations on how the workplace setting functioned, and partially combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the researcher triangulated the data collected, as shown in Figure 11, to identify data that appeared to be unreliable (Maylor et al., 2005; Patton, 2015), thereby helping to validate the research findings. Therefore,

becoming familiar with the case organisation's Twitter and Facebook activity beyond the pilot study sample, by studying all posting activity over a twelve-month period, increased the reliability that the data included any seasonal influences on posting activity, and subsequent consumer interaction. In turn, using UGT *a priori* themes to validate message content provided a reliable set of U&G classifications to view consumer interaction with each message posted on both platforms, including retweets of other user's tweets (RTs).

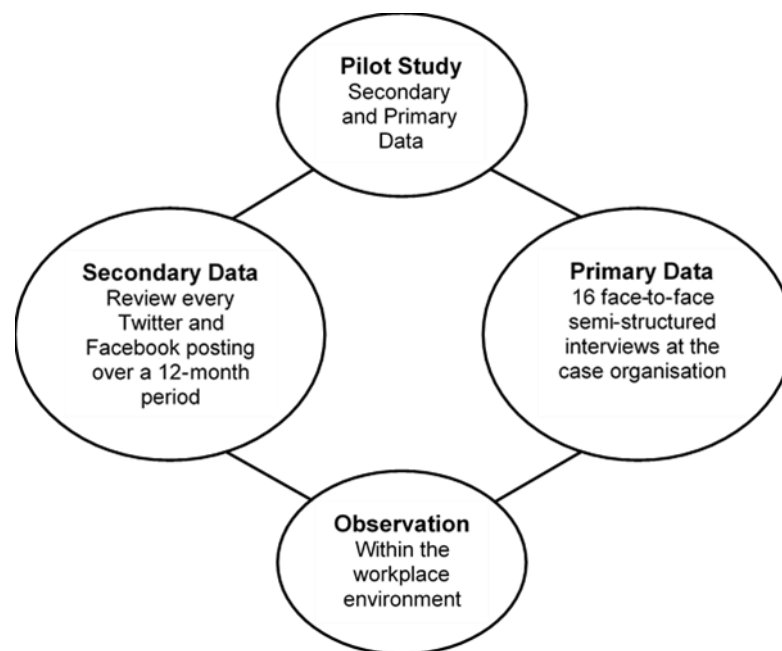


Figure 11: Triangulating multiple sources and methods of data collected

Source: Author

The researcher considered reviewing the record (word-processed document) made, at an interview with the participant involved to validate the resultant transcript, however, the researcher decided that this would not add value to the research findings (Mays & Pope, 2000). Additionally, the researcher was sensitive to the effect of observer influence on participants that can impact on reliability (Wilson, 2010).

### 3.15 Ethical Considerations

The researcher abided by the principles of research ethics at the University of Chester and conducted research according to the ethical code of conduct set out in the British Sociological Association (BSA) Statement of Ethical Practice.

Researcher responsibilities to participants:

- to gain informed consent
- to avoid deception
- to avoid harm
- to take care working with vulnerable groups
- to ensure research activity is not detrimental
- to consider issues of disclosure

*(“An ethical approach to conducting research with human participants”, n.d.)*

The researcher explicitly communicated the purpose of the research project with the Managing Director at the case organisation, who consented to actively participate in the study (Bulmer, 2001). Although access to the business was obtained via this ‘gatekeeper’, the research process was explained to each person involved and they were free to take part or refuse participation. The researcher carefully and consistently explained what the research was about and why it was being undertaken, in meaningful terms to avoid any tone of deception (Bryman, 2012; “Statement of Ethical Practice”, 2002). All reasonable precautions were taken to ensure that participants were not harmed or adversely affected by their involvement in this research project (Bryman et al., 2003). Confidentiality of records and participant anonymity is a fundamental part of the research design. The research did not directly involve young or vulnerable participants. By the nature of the research approach, the researcher remained focussed but flexible in approaching research questions that appeared detrimental to the participant during an interview (Maylor et al., 2005). Closeness to participants in an open, candid and professional manner encouraged them to take an interest in the study; getting this approach wrong was likely to be detrimental to the researcher (Wilson, 2010). The ethical integrity of the research was also paramount in protecting the researcher’s professional status.

The research included online ethnographic analyse of data from Twitter and Facebook postings. The researcher reviewed historical messages and observed activity during the collection of this secondary data without participating. The relative newness of these internet based open communication channels means that the

lines of ethical consideration are blurred in respect of consent. Bryman (2012) argued that: “The more the venue is acknowledged to be public, the less obligation there is on the researcher to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of individuals using the venue, or to seek their informed consent” (p. 679). Although publicly visible, the research did not involve the collection of individual user identities. It did however, with a level of generalisation to protect participants, identify open communities that engaged with the case (Saunders et al., 2012).

### **3.16 Limitations of the Study**

In addressing the research question, the researcher acknowledges that there are inherent generalisation limitations to this study by focussing on one specialist retailer and limiting the inclusion of social media platforms to Twitter and Facebook. Also, the researcher has not included unregulated opinion papers found in non-academic publications or blogs on the research topic. However, by focussing on peer reviewed scholarly literature, the researcher is confident that this study is based on a solid foundation of seminal literature.

Although the relevance of the findings in this study may be limited by the size and specialist nature of the case organisation, the value of the empirical evidence to practitioners and academics is in the new insights that the research reveals, by using UGT to understand how retailers can manage Twitter and Facebook activity to interact with their target consumer audience on these social media channels (Cassell et al., 2012). Thereby, providing a wider population of retail practitioners with useful insights or “petite generalisations” (Stake, 1995, p. 7). Chapter Five concludes with the researcher’s recommendations for future research to address the limitations identified.

### **3.17 Concluding Comment**

This case study research findings breaks new ground in the under-researched area of social media, in the context of the influence of Twitter and Facebook on retailer-consumer interaction, from the lens of a specialist retailer. It is evident, from the scholarly literature reviewed, that the consumer has widely adopted social media as

a preferred communication channel in their shopping behaviour (Belk, 2013; Rohm et al., 2013; Van Doorn et al., 2010). The researcher, granted access to the case organisation without any preconceived outcomes or restrictions on the research process, was presented with a unique opportunity to study the phenomenon of social media in-depth at this data rich specialist retailer (Denzin et al., 2018; Eisenhardt et al., 2007), within the resource limitations of this research project.

Whilst a qualitative-inductive approach allowed themes to emerge from the data collected, the researcher's interpretivist epistemology supports the premise that the study is about human interactions, rather than the tangible technology of the social media platform used (King et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2012). Furthermore, by adopting a subjectivist perspective, the researcher interacted with individuals within the case organisation in semi-structured interviews, across different occupations and hierarchical levels, to directly understand their attitudes and interpretations of Twitter and Facebook postings by the case organisation (Yin, 2014). Additionally, the theoretical perspective of UGT helped the researcher focus on understanding how users interact on Twitter and Facebook by providing a base of *a priori* themes (King et al., 2017). Thus, an online ethnographic study of each site revealed the nature of postings originated by the case organisation, and patterns of user behaviour, by classifying instances of U&G: social, entertainment and information needs, gratified by a post.

Moreover, by designing the study to capture data from multiple sources, the researcher investigated how the case organisation used these SNS to engage with their target consumer audience, and how this technology-based communication was embedded, or not, within a traditional marketing communication strategy.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents secondary and primary data, and the subsequent findings from analysis of the data collected. The researcher's approach was to initially review data, freely accessible to the public at large by default (Kaplan et al., 2011) in the form of the case organisation's activity on Twitter and Facebook, to capture what they had been publishing on these channels and classify postings into *a priori* themes of U&G needs (Manning, 2015). The main purpose of collecting this secondary data before engaging in interviewing any research participants, was to develop interview questions pertinent to the findings within this secondary data. As such, a pilot study of the Twitter and Facebook postings was completed before the first interview (Bryman et al., 2003; Saunders et al., 2012; Stokes, 2011a). The findings from which were not disclosed to participants during the entire interview process, to prevent any influence on responses. The logic of this approach was to give the researcher a good foundation on which to ask each participant probing questions around the case organisation's historical activity.

The chapter proceeds by reviewing the secondary data, leading to an explanation of the link between the secondary data collected and the focus of the primary research. In turn, an in-depth analysis and discussion of the findings ensues, with the aid of Microsoft Excel software to graphically illustrate the antecedents of the posting activity by the case organisation, and the resultant consumer interaction. The themes emerging from the data, identified using NVivo software, are then discussed under parent and related child nodes in the proceeding sections. Thereafter, a discussion and final statement concludes this chapter.

#### **4.2 Analysis of Data Collected**

The primary research data originates from face-to-face interviews with sixteen research participants, as identified in Table 5, (Chapter Three, 3.12) with each individual interview lasting between 40 – 60 minutes. The dominance of male participants and age category 35 to 44 is an outcome of position being prioritised in

terms of relevance to the research topic, and as such, no specific age or gender related findings or conclusions were extracted from the data. Furthermore, in associated data tables, age, gender and position have been omitted to ensure anonymity of the participants.

Although a semi-structured approach was adopted around planned research questions (Table 6, Chapter Three, 3.12 and appendix 3), the researcher needed to frequently ask probing questions during each interview conversation to clarify and develop initial responses, concluding each interview with an open question; “Is there anything else you’d like to tell me”? This final phase was to prompt participants to share more personal insights after they had progressively become more relaxed and open with the researcher in the interview process. All of which was captured in the interview data. (Bryman et al., 2003; Manning, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012; Stokes, 2011b).

The first interview represented a pilot from which the researcher developed subsequent interview questions to explore *a priori* themes. The case organisation has retail stores trading across the UK, but only one has a store specific social media account (identified as S3 here). The researcher interviewed this store manager and the manager of each store in the same region to understand the impact of S3, if any, and capture the attitude of the other three managers trading without direct control of a local social media account, Facebook in this instance, to engage with their local consumer audience. Moreover, the researcher also probed office and field-based participants during interview discussions for their views on store based social media activity. The researcher was informed that all store-based managers and staff personally participate in an outdoor sports activity pertinent to the sectors served by the case organisation; a prerequisite of employment, so they can empathise with the customer locally in the buying process.

The secondary data focussed on manually reviewing 1,588 individual Twitter and Facebook postings; logging the posting date, recording a short-redacted description from the post and noting interactions, as illustrated in example Table 9, Twitter and Table 10, Facebook (Bryman et al., 2003; Patton, 2015). Appendices 1 (Twitter) and 2 (Facebook) provide more detailed examples of the Twitter and Facebook activity.



Table 9: Example of Twitter Activity

Date	Promotion	Retweet of other users'	UGT Need	Retweets	Likes	Posting Description
01-Mar-16	pp		i	3	3	No image - link to...website products page Clearance and Discount Sale / It's SALE time
08-Mar-16		RT	s	1	4	Retweet of other user's tweet @Treelinechalets with image of Morzine Village - March has arrived full of snow!

Table 10: Example of Facebook Activity

Date	Promotion	UGT Need	Likes	Comments	Shares	Video Views	Posting Description
01-Mar-16		s	1	2	0		Shared their album: E... - Your Adventures. / We love getting updates of our customers' latest adventures....
01-Mar-16	pp	i	3	0	1		Updated their cover photo & link to website sale page / We got up to 40% off...

#### 4.2.1 The Focus of the Secondary Research

The researcher became aware from initial interview conversations, that the case organisation maintained primary Twitter and Facebook accounts, two standalone sub-community Twitter accounts and three standalone sub-community Facebook accounts. A sub-community defined as a community subgroup where members represent considerable specialist knowledge, companionship and social differentiation (de Valck et al., 2009; Schau et al., 2009). The researcher initially systematically sampled every fifth posting, as a pilot study, prior to engaging with interview participants, thereafter, to be certain of capturing any seasonal influences, every posting by the case organisation was physically analysed over a twelve-month period starting 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016, thereby capturing the most recent complete calendar year of postings originated by the case organisation for analysis within this research project timescale.

Postings within Twitter are known as 'tweets' and the corresponding interactions are 'likes' (where another Twitter user shows their appreciation and/or approval for a tweet) and 'retweets' (where another Twitter user shares that content with all of their followers - these can be a straight sharing of the content or the user can add a comment of their own). Within Facebook, businesses set up a Business Page; these differ from personal accounts in that another Facebook user can 'like', 'follow' and

'share' the Page as well as any content that the Page posts. Facebook postings are simply 'posts', and like Twitter, these can consist of messages, photos and/or videos. The interactions on these posts can be 'likes' (a way for the user to give positive feedback and the quickest and easiest way to share content); 'comments' (this takes more time and commitment than simply clicking 'like' and is useful for the user to 'have their say' about the content, or to send a message to the business); and 'shares' (users have the option to share the post on their own Timeline for their friends / followers to see and, if they chose, to add a comment).

Silverman's (2014) constant comparison method was used whereby the researcher established "a set of categories and then counts the number of instances that fall into each category" (p. 44). By utilising the researcher's practitioner experience each posting was hand-coded into *a priori* theme of UGT category: social value (s), entertainment value (e) or information value (i) (Hahn, 2008; King et al., 2017; Maylor et al., 2005; Patton, 2015). These three UGT need classifications were interpreted by the researcher and subsequently validated by the Marketing Director at the case organisation:

- **Social value:** the posting of, and the sharing of other user's posts, containing photographs of weather and/or event scenery, athletes and past events relevant to the case organisation's activities with no tangible benefit or purpose other than to be sociable.
- **Entertainment value:** posts with a clear purpose of amusement, and principally intended to be of hedonic value to the consumer – these are often shared video clips of activities of interest to community members.
- **Information value:** posts providing facts about someone and/or something.

Some postings on initial inspection were classified as other (o), but on closer analysis these led users to a website page and therefore were considered promotional in nature, i.e. product promotion (pp), brand promotion (bp) and event promotion (ep), so have been generically classified as potentially gratifying a user's information need about such activity.

Furthermore, the researcher observed that on Twitter, interactions accompanying the posts that are retweets (RTs) of other user's tweets (noted as RT in Table 9) were attributed to the original post and not the retweet. To illustrate the effect of these RTs, two sets of data have been produced for each Twitter account in the

ensuing analysis. In addition, exceptional activity such as a retweet on the case organisation's primary twitter account originating from the astronaut Tim Peake, that generated over thirteen thousand retweets and forty thousand 'likes', was omitted from all datasets to prevent corrupting the interpretation of the data.

#### **4.2.2 The Focus of the Primary Research**

The under-researched nature of the research topic by scholars, especially from the lens of a retailer, within peer reviewed literature necessitated *a posteriori* themes to emerge from the analysis of the research data (Müller-Merbach, 2007). The audio recording from each interview was transcribed and thereafter broken down into preliminary themes with the aid of King et al.'s (2017) Template and NVivo software (shown in Figure 10, Chapter Three, 3.13). While the researcher was initially hesitant in utilising this data analysis software over hand-coding, it proved to be a very helpful tool in categorising and coding the large amount of narrative text collected from the semi-structured interviews. The researcher's immersion in the research enabled the use of the software to identify 'key words' from the textual data in the early stage of analysis. Figure 12 illustrates the outcome of the NVivo word search. Albeit influenced by the process of the researcher manipulating the software by editing out superfluous words, this word cloud shows the proportional occurrence of 'key words' used by interview participants. This indicates the collective strength of a word by its relative size within the image, and clusters of words formed in discussing the research topic with participants. The researcher is confident that these words are a true reflection irrespective of any potential risk of researcher subjectivity in the process of generating them.



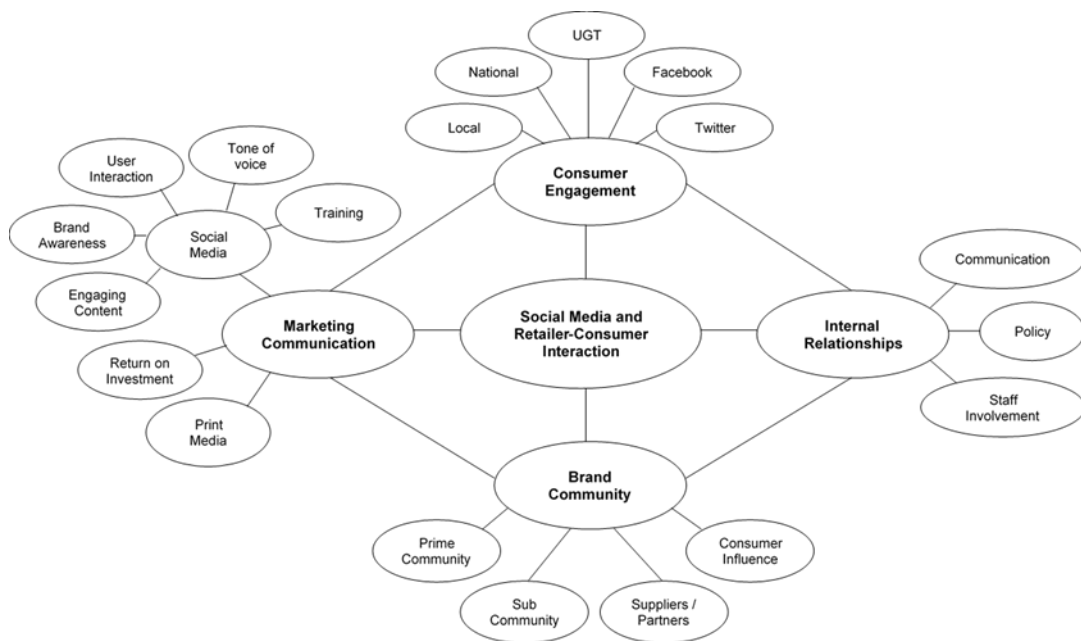


Figure 13: Key Themes and Clusters Elicited from NVivo Analysis

Source: Author

Although by its nature the software is a helpful computerised tool to assist the researcher in managing high levels of qualitative data, unlike software packages for statistical analysis, interpretation always rests with the researcher studying and making sense of the outputs in response to answering the research question (Silverman, 2014; Yin, 2009). As previously stated, the pilot study gave the researcher an early insight into the message content posted by the case organisation. This was not shared with participants but empowered the researcher to ask probing questions to understand their interpretation on the purpose of postings (planned question 3 in Table 6, Chapter Three, 3.12). It is therefore fitting to review the findings of the subsequent detailed analysis of every Twitter and Facebook posting originated by the case organisation over a twelve-month period, before reviewing the primary research findings that includes interview participants' mindsets.

### **4.3 Secondary Research Findings**

The purpose of this analysis is to understand and identify the purpose of this virtual communication in terms of gratifying a consumer need that will have a positive influence on the retailer-consumer interaction from the lens of the retailer (the case organisation). The numerical data collected in the following tables was analysed using Microsoft Excel software to show the U&G *a priori* themes from the posts in a diagrammatic format. The reason for including these descriptive statistics in this qualitative research paper is to graphically show postings grouped into the three U&G categories, and thereby understand the proportional representation of each. The main purpose of collecting this secondary data was to understand what the case organisation was saying to the consumer on Twitter and Facebook and understand the resultant user interaction. This provided a factual base of information for the researcher to investigate in the primary research interviews. Further statistical analysis between data sets was unnecessary for this research paper.

#### **4.3.1 Primary Twitter Account**

This is the case organisation's main twitter account, created in February 2009. This account had 10,600 followers and was following 2,954 other users, as at 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017; since going live to this date, the case had posted 7,041 tweets with 4,901 'likes'. Table 11 shows the summary data extracted from the account over the twelve-month period starting 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

Table 11: Data originating from unique posts on the case organisation’s primary Twitter account

UGT Need Category	Number of Posts (Tweets)	Retweets	Likes	Total interaction	Average Retweet per Post	Average Like per Post	Average Interaction per Post
Social	93	134	449	583	1.4	4.8	6.3
Entertainment	89	65	165	230	0.7	1.9	2.6
Information	462	1759	1550	3309	3.8	3.4	7.2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>1958</b>	<b>2164</b>	<b>4122</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>6.4</b>

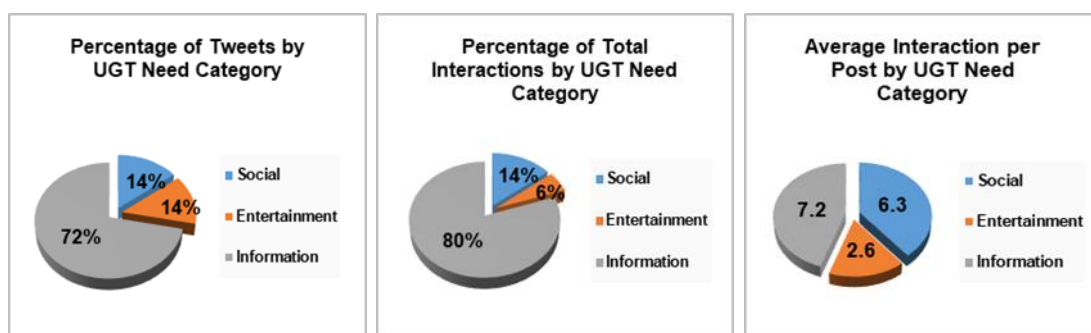


Figure 14a

Figure 14b

Figure 14c

Figures 14a, 14b, 14c: Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 11

The numerical data in Table 11 indicates that the messages posted by the case organisation on this account were predominantly of information value (illustrated in Figure 14a); as was the percentage of total interactions by users, as shown in Figure 14b. Further to this, 72% (332) of these information posts have been classified by the researcher as ‘promotional’. However, in Figure 14c, the average interaction per post shows a more balanced activity between information and social posts, suggesting that users were more prone to interact with social activity, thereby gratifying their social need.

Table 12: Data including RTs of other user’s posts on the case organisation’s primary Twitter account.

UGT Need Category	Number of Posts (Tweets)	Retweets	Likes	Total interaction	Average Retweet per Post	Average Like per Post	Average Interaction per Post
Social	113	827	3110	3937	7.3	27.5	34.8
Entertainment	89	65	165	230	0.7	1.9	2.6
Information	524	2168	2109	4277	4.1	4.0	8.2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>726</b>	<b>3060</b>	<b>5384</b>	<b>8444</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>11.6</b>

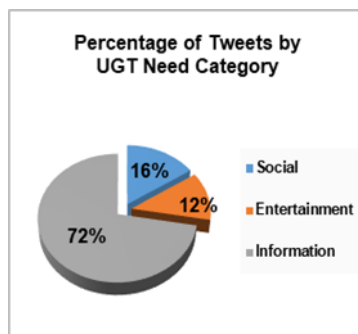


Figure 15a

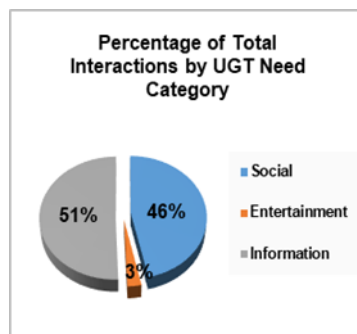


Figure 15b

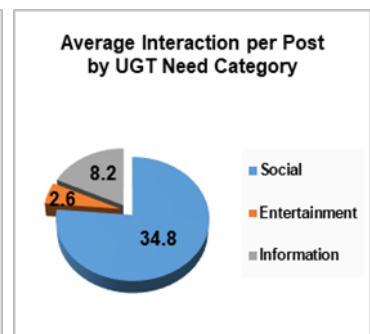


Figure 15c

Figures 15a, 15b, 15c: Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 12

Table 12 clarifies the effects of including the 82 RTs and their corresponding interactions to the data. This number represents 11.3% of the total postings by the case organisation. As seen by the resultant data, although the information posts are still dominant (Figure 15a), the U&G picture changes with a substantial increase in social interactions, as illustrated in Figure 15b. The swing from 14% social interaction (Figure 14b) by the case organisation, to 46% (Figure 15b) by the inclusion of the relatively small amount of other user’s tweets is clearly substantial; this is even more dramatically reflected in the average number of user interactions per post (Figure 15c). An explanation for this might be that this is driven by the volume of posts that the case was posting about ‘promotional’ activity, whereas other users appeared to be sharing more social activity. Regardless of the influence of RTs, postings focussing on entertainment appeared to be less relevant in terms of user interaction. Interestingly, socially engaging messages showed the greatest average number of user interactions per post in Figure 15c.



### 4.3.2 Sub-Community Twitter Account (S1)

This sub-community account (referred to as S1 for reasons of anonymity), created in February 2009, is separate to the primary account in terms of identity and activity. It serves a specialist product and community interest group within the case organisation's retail offer. This account had 7,601 followers and was following 276 other users, as at 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017, and since going live to this date, S1 had posted 1,541 tweets with 153 'likes'. The numerical data in Table 13, extracted from the account over the twelve-month period starting 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016, shows a limited amount of posts originated by S1 over this period.

Table 13: Data originating from unique posts by S1 on Twitter

UGT Need Category	Number of Posts (Tweets)	Retweets	Likes	Total interaction	Average Retweet per Post	Average Like per Post	Average Interaction per Post
Social	5	2	11	13	0.4	2.2	2.6
Entertainment	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Information	27	37	97	134	1.4	3.6	5.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>4.6</b>

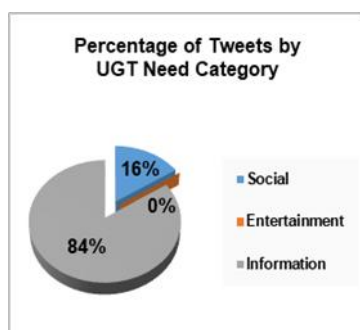


Figure 16a

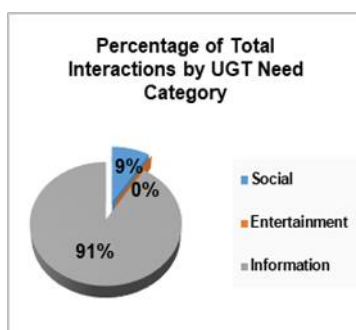


Figure 16b

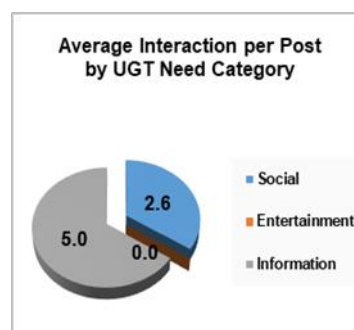


Figure 16c

Figures 16a, 16b, 16c: Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 13

The numerical data presented in Table 13 shows a correlation to the main case organisation's findings, in that the messages posted by S1 were predominantly of information value (Figure 16a), as was the percentage of total interactions by users, as illustrated in Figure 16b. Furthermore, 23 out of the 27 posts (85%) on this account categorised as information were deemed to be 'promotional' by the researcher. Once again, there was an increase in user social interaction per post

(Figure 16c) albeit not as considerable and dramatic as the increase seen with the case organisation's primary data (Table 11).

Table 14: Data including RTs of other user's post on S1's Twitter account

UGT Need Category	Number of Posts (Tweets)	Retweets	Likes	Total interaction	Average Retweet per Post	Average Like per Post	Average Interaction per Post
Social	21	63	342	405	3.0	16.3	19.3
Entertainment	3	12	13	25	4.0	4.3	8.3
Information	37	101	265	366	2.7	7.2	9.9
<b>Totals</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>796</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>13.0</b>

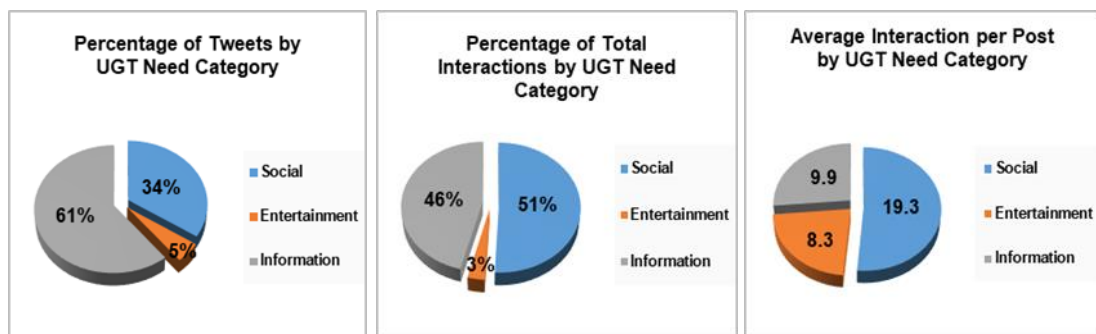


Figure 17a

Figure 17b

Figure 17c

Figures 17a, 17b, 17c: Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 14

In the same manner as the primary account, Table 14 reflects the changes to the data with the inclusion of RTs and their corresponding interactions. These 29 RTs constituted 47.5% of the total posts by S1 and consequently had a considerable effect on the results. The U&G picture changed with a marked percentage increase in social interactions as illustrated in Figure 17a. The increased percentage participation from 9% social interaction (Figure 16b) originated by S1, to 51% (Figure 17b) by the inclusion of RTs and their corresponding interactions is substantial. Again, a possible reason for this could be the volume of 'information' posts, classified as 'promotional' by the researcher, that S1 was posting from this sub-community account, whilst other users appeared to be sharing more social activity. Although S1 had no original posts classified by the researcher as entertainment during this period, with the inclusion of RTs, there was a small increase in postings of entertainment value, but no notable increase in related user interaction (Figure 17b). Nonetheless, with RTs, the average interaction per post as illustrated in Figure 17c, showed a marked increase in social activity by users.

### 4.3.3 Sub-Community Twitter Account (S2)

This sub-community account (referred to as S2 for reasons of anonymity) was created in December 2011 and is separate to the primary account and S1 in terms of identity and activity. It serves a specialist product and community interest group within the case organisation’s retail offer. This account had 198 followers and was following 176 other users as at 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017, and since going live to this date, the case organisation had posted 165 tweets with 239 ‘likes’. The numerical data in Table 15, extracted from the account over the twelve-month period starting 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016, shows a very limited amount of activity by the case organisation over this period.

Table 15: Data originating from unique posts by S2 on Twitter

UGT Need Category	Number of Posts (Tweets)	Retweets	Likes	Total interaction	Average Retweet per Post	Average Like per Post	Average Interaction per Post
Social	2	1	3	4	0.5	1.5	2.0
Entertainment	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Information	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2.0</b>

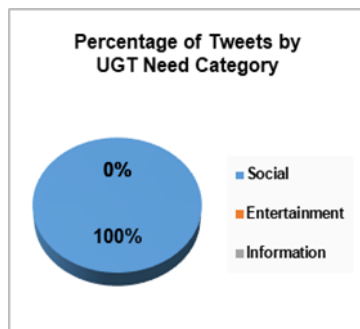


Figure 18a

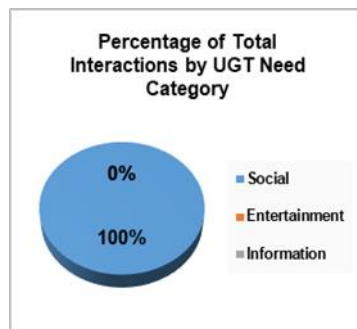


Figure 18b

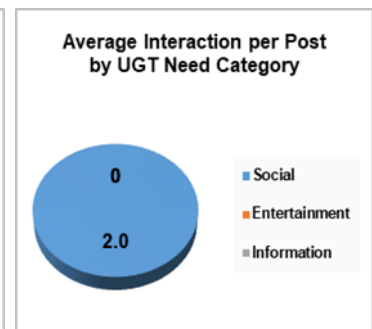


Figure 18c

Figures 18a, 18b, 18c: Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 15

Table 16: Data including RTs of other user's post on S2's Twitter account

UGT Need Category	Number of Posts (Tweets)	Retweets	Likes	Total interaction	Average Retweet per Post	Average Like per Post	Average Interaction per Post
Social	5	7	14	21	1.4	2.8	4.2
Entertainment	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Information	1	3	4	7	3.0	4.0	7.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>4.7</b>

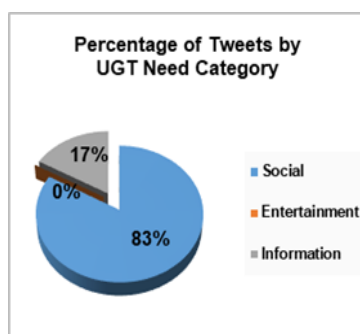


Figure 19a

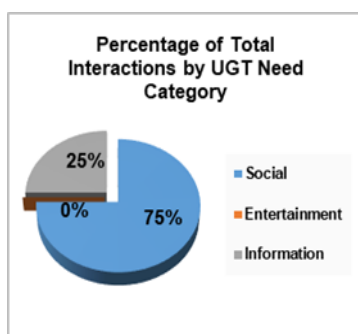


Figure 19b

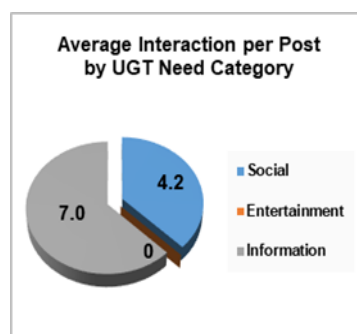


Figure 19c

Figures 19a, 19b, 19c: Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 16

It is evident from the summary data in Tables 15 and 16 that there was very little activity on this account and as such, although this was a live account, visible in the public domain, it appeared to be adding little value to users in this community. However, it is apparent that the account had been sporadically more active in previous years, as seen in Table 17.

Table 17: Total number of posts each year on S2's Twitter account

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Posts Per Year</b>	2	3	0	76	29	10	3

As a result of the number of posts shown in Table 15 and including the limited number of RTs presented in Table 16, it can be considered that the percentage of tweets and total interactions, albeit negligible, are predominately of social value to users (Figures 19a & 19b). But information value appears to be more dominant in average user interaction per post (Figure 19c), which is in direct contrast to the case organisation's primary account and sub-community S1's findings, although the data is too limited to be conclusive.

#### 4.3.4 Primary Facebook Account

This is the case organisation’s main Facebook business page and as at 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017, the page had had 16,439 ‘likes’ and 16,011 ‘follows’. Table 18 shows the summary data extracted from the account over the twelve-month period starting 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

Table 18: Data originating from Facebook Posts by the case organisation

UGT Need Category	Number of Posts	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total interaction	Average Like per Post	Average Comment per Post	Average Share per Post	Average Interaction per Post
<b>Social</b>	50	628	29	4	661	12.6	0.6	0.1	13.2
<b>Entertainment</b>	86	3145	521	80	3746	36.6	6.1	0.9	43.6
<b>Information</b>	428	3724	954	497	5175	8.7	2.2	1.2	12.1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>564</b>	<b>7497</b>	<b>1504</b>	<b>581</b>	<b>9582</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>17.0</b>

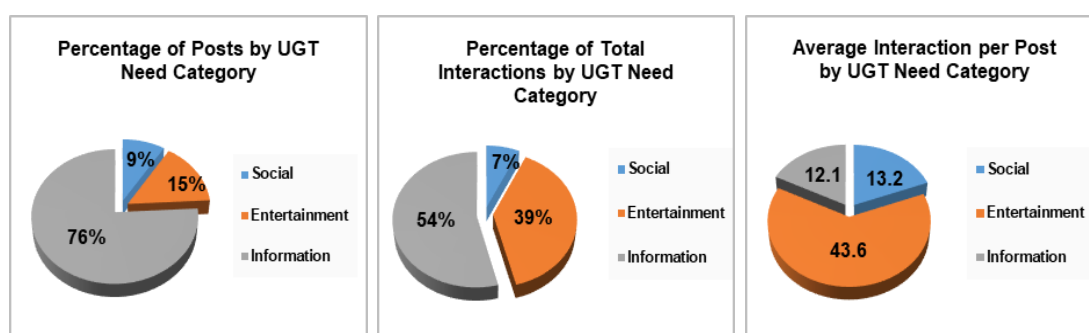


Figure 20a

Figure 20b

Figure 20c

Figures 20a, 20b, 20c: Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 18

The numerical data collected in Table 18 seems to indicate that the messages posted by the case organisation on this account were predominantly of information value to users (Figure 20a). In addition, 66.5% (280) of these information posts were deemed to be ‘promotional’ by the researcher. However, in terms of total user interaction, there was a substantial increase in entertainment value (Figure 20b), and Figure 20c reveals a considerable increase in the average interaction per entertainment post. This number of 43.6 for entertainment in Figure 20c represents a substantial 63% of the total of the number of average interactions per post, leaving information and social with less than a quarter of the share (18% and 19% respectively). Interestingly, these results differ vastly to the Twitter findings and it could be said that the reason for this is the different demographics of the two social

media platforms, but this argument is beyond the objectives of this research so will not be investigated any further.

#### 4.3.5 Store-Based Facebook Account (S3)

This was the only store with a dedicated account (referred to here as S3 for reasons of anonymity) and as at 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017, the page had had 289 ‘likes’ and 288 ‘follows’. Table 19 shows the summary data extracted from the account over the twelve-month period starting 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

Table 19: Data originating from Facebook Posts by S3

UGT Need Category	Number of Posts	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total interaction	Average Like per Post	Average Comment per Post	Average Share per Post	Average Interaction per Post
Social	44	405	17	6	428	9.2	0.4	0.1	9.7
Entertainment	7	31	0	0	31	4.4	0.0	0.0	4.4
Information	64	388	14	10	412	6.1	0.2	0.2	6.4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>824</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>871</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>7.6</b>

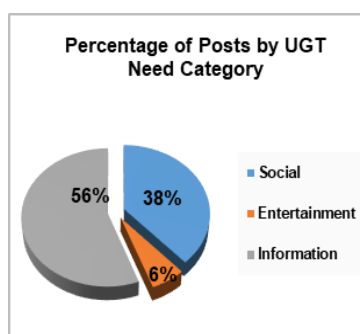


Figure 21a

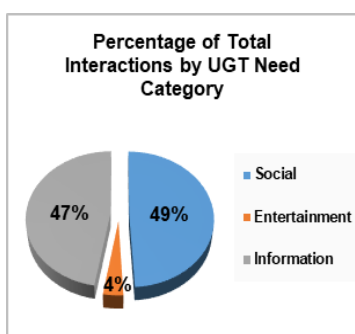


Figure 21b

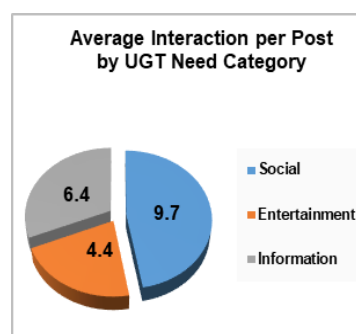


Figure 21c

Figures 21a, 21b, 21c: Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 19

The numerical data collected in Table 19 indicates that the messages posted by S3 on this account were generally split between information and social value to users (Figure 21a), as was, even more so, the percentage of total interactions by users on these two UGT need categories, as illustrated in Figure 21b. Additionally, 89% (57) of these information posts were deemed to be ‘promotional’ by the researcher. However, in terms of the average number of interactions per post, there was a notable increase in entertainment value with a corresponding decrease in the average interaction per information post, while social interaction maintained 47% of

these connections (Figure 21c). These findings contrast with the main case organisation’s results, with social connections once again being dominant.

#### 4.3.6 Sub-Community Facebook Account (S1)

This sub-community Facebook business page (referred to as S1 for reasons of anonymity), as at 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017, had had 16,306 ‘likes’ and 15,765 ‘follows’. Table 20 shows the summary data extracted from the account over the previous twelve-month period to this date.

Table 20: Data originating from Facebook Posts by S1

UGT Need Category	Number of Posts	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total interaction	Average Like per Post	Average Comment per Post	Average Share per Post	Average Interaction per Post
Social	13	454	16	3	473	34.9	1.2	0.2	36.4
Entertainment	13	151	10	18	179	11.6	0.8	1.4	13.8
Information	87	1150	226	172	1548	13.2	2.6	2.0	17.8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>1755</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>2200</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>19</b>

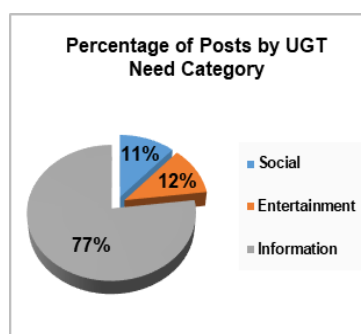


Figure 22a

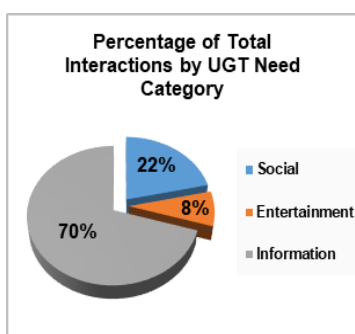


Figure 22b

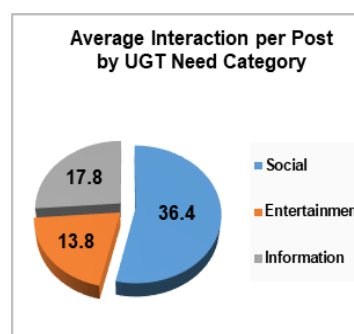


Figure 22c

Figures 22a, 22b, 22c: Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 20

The numerical data collected in Table 20 seems to indicate that the messages posted by S1 on this account were predominantly of information value to users in terms of posts (Figure 22a) and total interactions (Figure 22b). In addition, 77.9% (60) of these information posts were deemed to be ‘promotional’ by the researcher. Conversely, in terms of the average number of interactions per post, there was an increase in entertainment value with a corresponding decrease in the average interaction per information post, whilst social interaction maintained 54% of these connections (Figure 22c). These results are like those of sub-community S3 and are

again in contrast to the case organisation’s primary Facebook account data (Table 18) results with social interaction per post being most prominent.

#### 4.3.7 Sub-Community Facebook Account (S2)

This sub-community’s (referred to as S2 for reasons of anonymity) Facebook business page had, at 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017, had 540 ‘likes’ and 534 ‘follows’. The numerical data extracted from the account (as shown in Table 21) over the previous twelve-month period from this date shows a very limited amount of activity on this account over this period.

Table 21: Data originating from Facebook Posts by S2

UGT Need Category	Number of Posts	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total interaction	Average Like per Post	Average Comment per Post	Average Share per Post	Average Interaction per Post
Social	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Entertainment	1	11	5	0	16	11.0	5.0	0.0	16.0
Information	2	12	0	0	12	6.0	0.0	0.0	6.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>9.3</b>

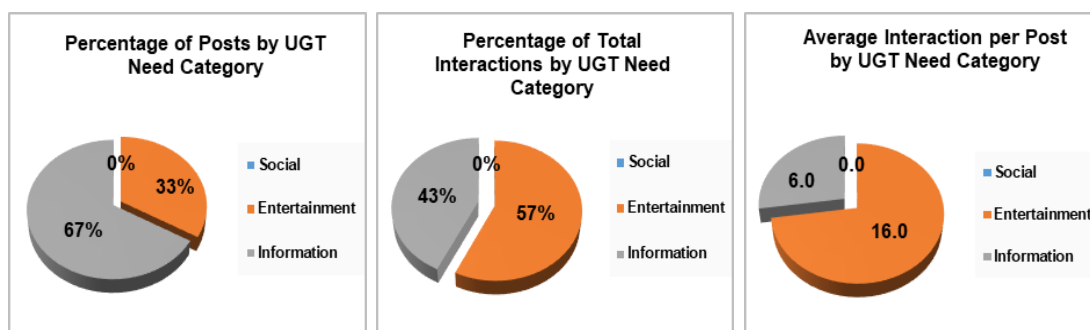


Figure 23a

Figure 23b

Figure 23c

Figures 23a, 23b, 23c: Pie Charts corresponding to data in Table 21

As evidenced from the summary data in Table 21, whilst this was a live account, visible in the public domain, it appeared to be adding little value to users in this community. It is apparent that the account had been sporadically more active in previous years as seen in Table 22.

Table 22: Total number of posts each year on S2’s Facebook account

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Posts Per Year	3	22	63	19	14	1



The limited number of posts were predominately of information value (Figure 23a) and total interactions by U&G need are split between information and entertainment (Figure 23b) with a slight bias towards entertainment. Whereas Figure 23c shows the greater number of average interactions per post to be of entertainment value. Due to the limited data available, any information gathered from this is inconclusive.

#### 4.4 Primary Research Findings

In the first instance, in response to question 1 in Table 6 (Chapter Three, 3.12); “What is your personal experience of social media”? Table 23 shows all but one research participant had a personal Facebook account and 12 had a personal Twitter account, however, seven of these stated that they did not use Twitter much anymore. Shown in appendix 4, are verbatim extracts from each participant’s response to this question.

Table 23: Participants’ personal experience of social media

Participant	Facebook	Twitter	Other	Participants’ Comments
1	✓	✓	✓	I subscribe to the complete social media
2	✓	x	✓	I now find my relationship with social media is very visual
3	✓	✓	✓	I use most social networking platforms and was an early adopter
4	✓	✓	✓	I don’t really use Twitter very much at all
5	x	✓	✓	I use Twitter a lot...I am no longer on Facebook...
6	✓	✓	✓	I use it on a daily basis... Plenty of time on Facebook, Twitter less so...
7	✓	✓	✓	I use Facebook. I don’t really get involved with Twitter that much...
8	✓	✓	x	I’m a reluctant user of Facebook and Twitter
9	✓	x	✓	I use Facebook, Instagram...Twitter...got fed up with it so got rid of it
10	✓	x	x	I have my own personal account on Facebook but that’s it really.
11	✓	x	x	Very little. I have a Facebook ‘presence’...I don’t want to participate really
12	✓	✓	✓	don’t do many tweets and minimal activity on Facebook. I use Instagram the most
13	✓	✓	✓	Twitter...not using it as much as I use to. Facebook...I don’t post much now
14	✓	✓	x	I’m reasonably active on these channels
15	✓	✓	✓	I don’t really use Twitter any more. Facebook...just brings a lot of negativity.
16	✓	✓	✓	I’m quite an active user. I never really got too much involved with Twitter.

Additionally, 12 out of the 16 possessed other social media accounts, such as Instagram and Pinterest. This suggests that most participants are well-informed and familiar with the workings of social media. Albeit 56% of the research participants were in the 35 to 44 age category no conclusions can be drawn on age related experience, although notably the two oldest participants declared they were a “reluctant user” or “don’t want to participate really” in social media.

The interviewees were subsequently asked about their experience and involvement with social media in their working environment. Table 24 reflects the level of involvement revealed from the participants’ answers to question 2 – “What is your work experience of social media”? (Verbatim extracts shown in appendix 5)

Table 24: Participants’ work experience of social media

Participants	Focused Involvement	Non-specific Involvement	No Involvement	Participants’ Comments
1			✓	I’m not particularly involved – purely a sounding board...
2		✓		I’m pushing others to do more...
3	✓			I manage a Twitter and Facebook sub-community
4			✓	I have an overview of how it fits into the business
5		✓		I check certain things...I’m a bit more technical
6	✓			...making sure everything’s in the right place and scheduling it...
7		✓		Nothing directly hands-on
8			✓	I just look at both, but I look at the Facebook more
9		✓		...an awareness of what’s out there and what’s being seen by consumers
10	✓			I manage a Facebook sub-community
11			✓	I’m on the outside looking in...I have no involvement
12		✓		I often take a picture and send that over to [try] and get them to use it
13		✓		I’ll encourage [staff] to take photos and get them posted on the [company] Facebook page
14	✓			I’m involved in defining overall strategy...
15			✓	I don’t really have much involvement...
16		✓		It’s not too much actually within the company...

The responses indicate that only four of the sixteen interviewees had a direct involvement with social media in their working environment, whilst a further five, nearly a third, were not involved at all. This varying level of involvement appears to have a direct influence on the responses to follow-on questions.

Whilst understanding the personal experience of each participant was helpful in putting the respondents at ease in the interview setting, and understanding their opinions in context, the remaining interview questions focussed on relevant business issues. The output being the emergent themes and clusters previously illustrated in Figure 13 (Chapter Four, 4.2.2).

#### 4.4.1 Marketing Communication

*A posteriori* themes linked to marketing communication are discussed directly and indirectly around seven clusters as illustrated in Figure 24. The clusters extending from social media do so because the research questions specifically prompted responses about social media, namely Twitter and Facebook, rather than comments generalising about marketing communication per se. That said, responses about return on investment and print media tended to lean on the impact of social media through the lens of historical marketing communications.



Figure 24: Marketing Communication Theme and Related Clusters found in the Case Organisation

A large amount of information rich narrative was collected from each participant interviewed at the case organisation. The researcher extracted pertinent comments from the interview transcripts that gave a flavour of opinions within *a posteriori* themes and associated clusters.

#### **4.4.1.1 Social Media**

The research participants gave mixed responses to questions about social media, but they unanimously acknowledged that social media channels are integral components in the retailers' marketing communications, "it isn't an isolated channel, it links into every other part of what we're doing, in terms of sales, in terms of other marketing strategies" (director - store operations). This concurs with De Keyser et al. (2014) positing that marketers need to understand how these new media channels integrate with traditional marketing communication, despite Schultz et al. (2013) arguing that there is little evidence of businesses integrating social media strategy into their plans. Nonetheless, at the case organisation the importance of 'doing something' was firmly acknowledged by a product director's response:

"if we hadn't done anything and still don't understand social media, we would have dropped away very quickly because we're a little fish in a big pond... social media was the missing channel on our omni-channel approach and it's worked great because it's just grown as our business has grown".

In the main, any criticism by participants was levelled at the slow pace at which the case organisation had imbedded social media into its consumer communication compared to other retailers and is summed up by a store operations director stating, "We're probably behind the curve in what a lot of other retailers are doing on social media to bring people into their brand communities". Similarly, another director responsible for general management, reported "one of the things that was lagging behind in that regards, was actually stores, so social media and the internet will reflect the same messages at the same time", supported by Yoon et al.'s (2008) findings that reciprocal communication is important to relationship building in both physical and online retail environments. These comments positively reflect the case organisation's awareness of the growing importance of increased participation on social media in terms of the positive effect this has on their interaction with the consumer (Ramkumar et al. as cited in Rohm et al., 2013).

#### **4.4.1.1.1 Engaging Content**

Overwhelmingly, the research participants flagged the quality of content as a key factor in consumers responding to their social media activity and “not posting the same thing over and over or stuff that happened 3 years ago” (manager - operations support), which corresponds with Chen et al.’s (2011) findings that good content will encourage customers to share and interact with the brand, moreover, Van Doorn et al. (2010) argued consistency of message is critical. Nevertheless, one of the product focussed directors at the case organisation asserted “the messages on social media aren’t even important. It’s the mixture of messages...if it’s a very narrow one people get bored of it very quickly, they just want stuff that will attract them, that will tickle their fancy”.

The researcher did detect concern about some of the content published being too staged and somewhat faceless and the fact that the case organisation was quite reserved in treading the balance between annoying people and being an authority, “if you’re very product focussed, the engagement drops off quite quickly...it’s about having that good dynamic crave and good content” (marketing manager). This is endorsed by Schultz et al.’s (2013) notion that brands are not always welcome in social media conversations, appearing intrusive, annoying and somewhat out of place. Thus, finding the balance between these two positions is key, and the task is to focus on the quality of content shared (Adjei, et al., 2010). Nevertheless “you don’t want to lose the fact that you’re a retailer, otherwise you just become like a news outlet” (marketing manager).

#### **4.4.1.1.2 Brand Awareness**

In 2014, Wallace et al. established that companies need to encourage positive interactions for maximum exposure of their brand on social media. The researcher detected from their responses that many participants were aware of this, as affirmed by this manager responsible for digital marketing stating, “social media is an incredibly important channel...in terms of brand awareness and brand loyalty and more so just a big part in the whole buying process for each customer”. Additionally, although the case organisation is a well-established and trusted specialist retailer within the sector and community it serves, it is a retailer of brands rather than having a strong consumer facing brand identity of its own on the high street, “some of the brands that we sell may be followed by people who haven’t heard of [us] and that could bring [our brand name] to the forefront of their minds and therefore convert them into a customer” (manager - operations support).

Albeit the case organisation is a well-established retailer on the UK high street, the sector it serves is quite specialist and dependent on the reputation of the product brands it sells. As one director responsible for product said, “we are very much the sum of the brands that we contain, so we’re using the power and leverage of those brands to drive traffic from the brands to us... we’re quite attractive to a supplier”, indicating that product suppliers provide the case organisation with marketing support to drive brand awareness. Additionally, Keller’s (1993) argument reinforces the need for the retailer to create the right memory of the brand in the consumers’ mind.

#### **4.4.1.1.3 User Interaction**

The case organisation is a specialist retailer serving several unique communities, and for them, a key outcome of posting messages on social media channels is to interact without being too intrusive, “we’re always looking at new ways to interact...competitions and stuff have done reasonably well but I think it’s just this conversational thing about what’s going on in people’s lives really” (director - marketing).

There was a consensus amongst participants that user interaction is a crucial metric in the measurement of success (Ko et al., 2005), however, the retailer must be wary of being too pushy and intrusive in their relationship marketing tactics on these channels (Adjei et al., 2010; Fournier et al., 1998), “it’s a fine line to tread” (director responsible for general management). Furthermore, a Store Manager stated that customers recognise members of his team from interactions on social media “and ask for [name] because they see he’s an end user and ask for his advice”. Conversely, it was also recognised that some users interact with the case organisation to build their own profile, to potentially heighten their own self-image as an ‘intelligent shopper’ (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), enjoying the fact that their conversation can be public. Furthermore, Wallace et al. (2014) questioned whether individuals who are promoting ‘self-image’ are connecting with the brand itself or others in the community. In addition, another Store Manager said, “consumers are motivated to interact on social media channels by response time...you need to follow up an email within 24 hours, you’ve probably got an hour to follow up any kind of social media” (manager - store operations).

#### **4.4.1.1.4 Tone of Voice**

Raised in discussion with participants was how they frame a message to stimulate a positive impact on the consumer (Breugelmans, Köhler, Dellaert, & Ruyter, 2012); in the absence of expressions and other non-verbal traits and artefacts present in the physical store environment, finding the right balance can be difficult. This director responsible for marketing explained the dilemma he would face in describing the case organisation's 'tone of voice' to others:

If someone said to me "what's your tone and how can we replicate it?", I'd find it very difficult to say. Well it's a bit of humour mixed with sensitivity but it's also we want to be on the ball with quick response all the time as well.

As was alluded to by many of the participants, 'tone of voice' is a vital ingredient in the message posted on social media because getting it wrong can trigger an adverse reaction (Chandy, 2014). With one director (product) declaring "We definitely promote on social media but it's the 'tone of voice' that you use to do that promotion. As soon as you're using a hard sell people switch off". Additionally, Kaplan et al. (2011) posited that honesty is paramount, or companies risk the negative backlash of the consumer. Further, in their research, Campbell and Keller (2003) found that the consumers' familiarity with a brand can positively influenced their attitude towards a brand's communication; "We're apolitical, we don't try and have opinions about whether something is good or bad. We just try to showcase what we do" (manager - store operations). Which appears to have influenced the case organisation's decision to keep their social media activity in-house, believing that they understand their brand personality and 'tone of voice' within the apparent 'close-knit communities' it serves.

#### **4.4.1.1.5 Training**

The issue of training individuals in how to use social media for business arose in discussion about stores historically managing their own local social media account. This call for training in the use of social media for business would appear to be important, as one Store Manager explained: "I do feel that if it was given more attention and more education, I think it would just make a whole lot more of it". Lorenzo-Romero et al. (2013) endorse this opinion, identifying that digital literacy and technical support appear to be determining factors for retailers adopting social media. Further required possibly, given that the case organisation has decided to manage its social media in-house, as one director (product) confirmed "rather than

buy in specialist expertise, we try and learn it ourselves and adapt to social media and bring it into our methodology and the way we work”.

The desire, expressed by several influential individuals within the case organisation, to have local store accounts was noted by the researcher, however, store managers said they would welcome some training in how to manage social media for business to make the most of it. As one Store Manager explained;

If there was a plan in place that said, “store managers, we’re going to give you control of a [social media] account for your store, and we’re going to get behind you fully and we’re going to provide you with the training to make sure it is a success, teach you what works and what doesn’t work”, then yes, I’d be behind that.

There also appeared to be resistance amongst others to establish store accounts again, based on historical experiences of social media not being managed well at stores level. The researcher also detected an underlying resistance to local accounts between those more closely involved in the national social media accounts based on past negative experiences; and a feeling that maintaining central control of what is published on these channels is the safest approach in terms of protecting company image, and easier to administer.

#### **4.4.1.2 Print Media**

The ensuing interview responses regarding print media came from the potential influence of social media on the case organisation’s longstanding reliance on a printed media, succinctly confirmed by one director (marketing) revealing;

Before social media our advertising was mostly, which it kind of still is to a certain extent, specialist magazines, public relations for our product, editorial coverage for our products and advertising on specialist websites really. That changed quite a lot with the social media channels. For a small company, it was very hard to communicate to customers on a national level...the kind of behavioural targeting that you can get from Facebook and Twitter.

The extended consumer audience that the case organisation can now reach with social media concurs with Lorenzo-Romero et al.’s (2013) findings that the size of the company has no bearing on frequency of use. There was, however, a notable difference of opinion expressed by research participants, as to how valuable the



printed catalogue is to the consumer in this age of social media marketing communication. A variance in attitude was also detected, between participants with 'lived experience' (Stokes, 2011b) of retailing without social media and younger participants for whom it has always been available, on the importance of the case organisation's traditional seasonal catalogue. Nevertheless, a general recognition of the value of the immediacy of social media channels to the consumer was forthcoming, as a Store Manager explained, "social media has given customers a sort of steady drip feed of information all the time. Whereas the catalogue, when it came out, was just an instantaneous, 'Here it is lads. Get it now'". A message that, according to this long serving manager, would result in customers queuing outside his shop to collect their copy.

Whilst the research indicates that traditional marketing communication is being replaced by more customer-to-customer generated content at the case organisation, there was a sentiment that their wider consumer audience expect social media to be a component of this specialist retailer's communication and comfortably coexist alongside its printed media, demonstrated by a manager (operations support) stating, "the catalogues are still quite inspirational and as a lifestyle choice people like to just pick up a catalogue and have a flick through". Furthermore, the competitive pressure that has subsequently been put on print suppliers, and the resultant decrease in their costs, by the advent of digital media was highlighted by one director (general management) confirming "realising the situation they're in, the print media costs go down".

#### **4.4.1.3 Perceptions of Return on Investment**

Whilst a level of understanding industry wide metrics, such as social media interactions to measure the engagement impact of these channels, was expressed by participants at the case organisation; there appeared to be a mixed comprehension of how these metrics can explicitly translate into return on investment (ROI), with this director's (store operations) comment reflecting a common view among others, "we're certainly looking at click-through rates, we're certainly looking at how Google AdWords work and how much that costs us and what that does for our business. How scientific that is, I don't know".

The definition of ROI in social media appears to be indistinct within the case organisation, corresponding to Baines, Fill and Rosengren's (2017) findings that

businesses struggle to determine the ROI of their social media initiatives. Nevertheless, there was unanimous agreement that social media is an important consumer communication and brand building tool at the case organisation; succinctly expressed by a director (marketing) saying, “you’re sort of saying well it’s about brand building because if you weren’t doing it you’d be at a disadvantage, but you can’t say what that disadvantage would be, so you need to be doing it”. This is not to say that the case organisation was blind to the financial impact of social media activity, as confirmed by this manager’s (store operations) response, “I’d like to think sales increase when a tweet or a Facebook posting goes out, but I don’t think our reporting’s there to be able to say this happened”. These comments concur with findings by Munzel et al. (2014) in their study of “who contributes and who benefits at online review sites” (p. 49), suggesting that a key benefit of the increased awareness of a brand via social media can in turn affect a company’s financial performance.

#### 4.4.2 Consumer Engagement

*A posteriori* themes linked to consumer engagement are discussed directly and indirectly around the five clusters illustrated in Figure 25:

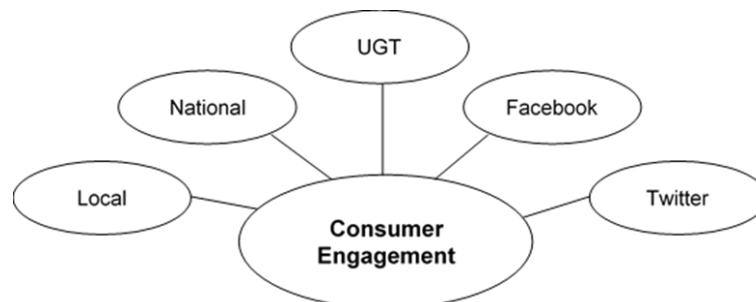


Figure 25: Customer Engagement Theme and Related Clusters found in the Case Organisation

The retail sector’s interaction with the consumer has been influenced by social media, as one manager (operations support) confirmed, “[it’s] played a huge part of everybody wanting to be able to connect to the customer and I think if you don’t you get left behind by the ones who’ve got a lot of contact with their customers”. Furthermore, the rapid pace of development in the technology over the last decade has made social media more accessible to the consumer (Belk, 2013). Though, a

director (marketing) at the case organisation admitted that they made a late start in adopting social media, “I kind of sat on my hands for a while...and watched how other businesses were doing it and then we sort of jumped in” by setting up a company Twitter and Facebook account.

Further, in 2013, Schultz et al. noted that companies do not appear to have problems in the development of their social media presence, but they do struggle to make them engaging and valuable to consumers, concurring with this director’s (store operations) view of the case organisation’s position that “social media has not influenced our relationship with the consumer enough would be my first comment. I think we’re particularly bad about social media and we’re probably behind the curve at engaging with our consumers through social media channels”. A feeling shared with the researcher by some participants, nevertheless, there appeared to be a clear ambition within the case organisation to develop social media channels within its consumer engagement mix.

#### **4.4.2.1 National**

The national social media accounts labelled ‘primary accounts’ in this research paper, are managed by a small team of in-house specialists who, according to some participants, have limited collaboration with the retail side of the business; with one participant commenting, “there’s no direct store interaction with the social media team at head office” (Store Manager). Furthermore, a view ensued that these primary accounts should be used as a platform “just to shout about the direction of the company” (Store Manager), questioning a national Facebook account in terms of “how relevant is that to [a store] particularly for a local event”. This was further emphasised by a director (general management) describing a possible frustrating scenario for the consumer, “what we’ve been concerned about, is going ‘Hey everybody in the country, we’ve got a great sale going on in ‘a’ location. Well, that’s 99% of the people who read that won’t be able to get there”.

Whilst the researcher detected some differences of opinion amongst those interviewed regarding store based social media accounts, there was an underlying appetite for more locally focussed social media activity; as this director (marketing) remarked, “I’d love a lot of the content that’s going on the store [S3’s] Facebook page to be fed through the [primary] one because we really want to show off the expertise of our staff”.

#### 4.4.2.2 Local

There was only one store specific social media account active at the case organisation, and this was a Facebook account known as S3 in this research paper. Purportedly, this is the outcome of previous local managers allowing earlier store accounts to become relatively dormant due to lack of time to find and post content, consequently they had been closed to protect the case organisation's brand image; as this manager (marketing) explained, "we've had various guises of actually stores operating social media accounts and community groups, we've pulled that away because it's easier to administer it from one central point". While the burden of 'monitoring' multiple accounts is likely to be more challenging than restricting social media activity, it may not be in the interest of developing local communities;

I think the next big step is for stores to get involved. We have a community on a national basis now, I think the big plus that we've got going forward is that we've got great shops and they need to be communicating in a similar way to their local communities (director - product).

Senior decision makers interviewed by the researcher appeared to understand the benefit of having local social media accounts, with one Store Manager saying, "I'd love to use it more locally, which in my eyes would impact the customer that I need to come to the store much better...I'd like to show off the staff". Likewise, with this director (marketing) commenting, "I'd love to see social media set up for each shop". However, there appeared to be an operational hurdle in terms of local management of these accounts that needs to be overcome and, to some extent, a training issue that the case organisation needs to address, to maintain local social media accounts on a national scale (Lorenzo-Romero et al., 2013).

#### 4.4.2.3 Uses and Gratification Theory

The researcher applied UGT needs classifications in a pilot study of the case organisation's Twitter and Facebook postings, prior to engaging in the interview process, to gain an early understanding of what motivated the consumer to interact with the case organisation (Campbell et al., 2014; Rohm et al., 2013). This enabled the researcher to ask participants how they would classify posting on these two channels into the UGT *a priori* themes used. Supported by Oliveira et al.'s (2015) study asserting that understanding user motivations to engage on social media is a strategic priority for businesses. The participants gave their opinions solely from memory and without any prompts from the researcher during their interview.

This manager's (store operations) comment captures the essence of other responses to this research question, "Twitter, we kind of use it as almost an information tool. Facebook might be more about us disseminating information about what people are doing". Although there was a consensus on the purpose of tweets, the researcher received mixed opinions towards Facebook being "a bit more social (director - store operations), and another participant firmly saying, "Facebook is entertainment without doubt" (director - product), rather than a channel purely disseminating information to users. However, contra to this argument, "Twitter is information. It's more this is happening here, this is being launched here; Facebook is information. I think there's very little difference between Facebook and Twitter content" (Store Manager).

The researcher recognised the request to explicitly define the purpose of a tweet or Facebook message into the U&G classifications would lead to 'off-the-cuff' responses from participants. However, there was a general agreement on the classifications being weighted towards information messages. This also matched the mindset adopted by the researcher in the pilot study, thereby validating the approach for the more extensive study of Twitter and Facebook postings subsequently completed; corresponding with Whiting et al. (2013) identifying information seeking as a key reason the consumer uses social media channels. There was a general acceptance by participants that postings specifically promoting products, brands and events were information driven, "Postings that are promoting products, brands or events on Twitter or Facebook – well it's all information" (Store Manager), thereby validating the approach adopted by the researcher.

#### **4.4.2.4 Facebook**

The researcher selected Facebook because of its popularity as an established social media channel amongst consumers rather than giving prior consideration of what channels the case organisation used. This manager's (marketing) response also reflects the sentiment expressed by other research participants, "I think that the content we've got to get out is better served on Facebook and it has a bigger audience as well". However, there was some concern that Facebook has grown to "become very saturated with clip bait and full of advertising and so I think that the message within Facebook is being lost" (manager - store operations).

Whilst there were mixed views expressed by participants, and some of these may have stemmed from personal preferences, the researcher found a consensus that Facebook was an appropriate channel for the case organisation to interact with its target consumer. As one director (marketing) explained, “I think you can have a deeper relationship with a customer on Facebook”. Similarly, Wallace et al.’s (2014) exploratory research of consumers who engage with a brand by ‘liking’ on Facebook, revealed that people who click ‘like’ are more open to engage with the brand than the average user of this social network, furthermore, suggesting that brands who are active on Facebook have more opportunity to engage with the friends of those who ‘liked’ them. In addition, the more recent advancement in the platform’s technology that enables brands to ‘live stream’ activities, is a priority at the case organisation, to capture and share activities and events in real time engagement with their target audience, “we’ll be pushing for getting some live streaming going and really trying to develop that audience interaction on Facebook Live” (manager - digital marketing). This ‘live streaming’ could be local talks by key influencers being accessible to a wider audience or filming sector activities, thereby, putting the case organisation’s target consumer at the event virtually.

#### **4.4.2.5 Twitter**

The researcher likewise selected Twitter because of its popularity as an established social media channel amongst consumers rather than giving prior consideration of what channels the case organisation used. It was accepted that Twitter is an important social media channel, but a strong feeling emerged that it is less engaging than Facebook, as one director (marketing) stated, “I’ve always felt with Twitter, there’s a lot of people tweeting and not many people listening and it’s one of those where you’re sifting through and not really engaging...we don’t expect great gains from it”. Nevertheless, it is an important channel for the case organisation according to Chua et al.’s (2013) findings that engagement on Twitter is instrumental in linking the virtual world and the physical retail store environment.

The importance of timeliness in responding to a customer tweeting a customer service or product related query was an issue that appeared to be understood by all research participants. Although the case organisation had purposely decided not to push customer service issues through social media channels, with this manager responsible for customer service saying, “we’ve chatted about if we use it as a customer service channel but... it’s just going to invite abuse and that type of thing”.

It appears that this decision was made because the conversations are in the public domain and because “we’ve got quite a small team and people are expecting responses 24 hours a day” (director - marketing), with a Store Manager reaffirming, “Twitter needs an instant reply”. That said, participants acknowledged that the customer will decide for themselves on whether they choose to use a social media channel to make direct contact with the case organisation. Additionally, there appeared to be an acceptance amongst participants of Campbell et al.’s (2014) findings that engagement on Twitter can be influential in the consumer purchasing decision. And an understanding that “The customer’s not just going to click ‘like’, they’re not going to give you a free ‘like’, they need to look at your page and say...Oh, they do respond” (director - customer service).

#### 4.4.3 Internal Relationships

*A posteriori* themes linked to internal relationships are discussed directly around the three clusters illustrated in Figure 26.

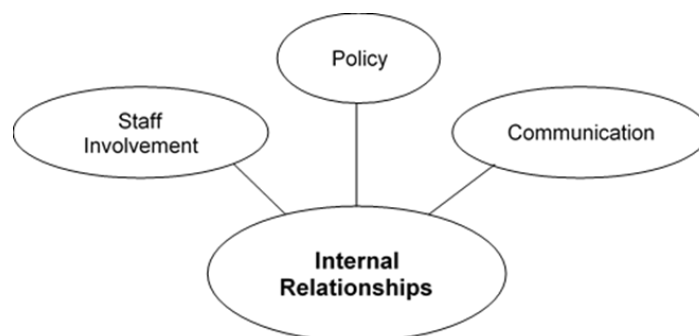


Figure 26: Internal Relationships Theme and Related Clusters found in the Case Organisation

##### 4.4.3.1 Internal Communication

The public accessibility of the case organisation’s postings on Twitter and Facebook means that communications and any resultant interaction on these channels are freely available for all to see (Kaplan et al., 2011). While it is essentially down to individual choice to view such conversations on their personal accounts, the researcher wanted to understand if this had influenced wider internal communications within the case organisation, and found responses to this question ranged from, “In marketing, social media has influenced our internal relationships; stores, to a certain extent; finance and logistics – I wouldn’t say it’s had much of an

influence on that side of things” (director - marketing), to one manager focussed on digital marketing responding, “Perhaps it has had a sort of fairly low level of influence under the radar but it’s not an integral part of internal communications”.

The responses given by the research participants acknowledged the fact that social media has heightened the importance of effective communication between customer facing staff and, to a much lesser extent, others within the organisation. As one director (general management) stressed, “Your communication with staff needs to be up to speed, because there’s nothing worse than; ‘Hey, I’ve been told about this great deal’ and the staff member going; ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about’”. Which supports Wirtz et al.’s (2013) assertion, on studying online brand communities, that brand-to-consumer relationships on social media is important for both consumer connectivity and helping develop a customer service culture amongst internal employees because they can see the consumers’ demands, first-hand, on these publicly open platforms. The most noticeable change in internal communication at the case organisation appeared to be between marketing and the physical retail side of the business. However, on further probing by the researcher, there appeared to be an underlying change in the awareness of “the strength and power and reach of the company a lot more” (director - product) and the consumer’s voice, by staff across the entire organisation.

#### **4.4.3.2 Policy**

The researcher found no evidence of robust policy statements on the use of social media, although there was an unwritten understanding of ‘how things are done’ and who can do what:

There’s some dos and don’ts but generally it’s more of that inspirational ethos...mentoring I guess is the best way to describe it rather than written policies... it’s mainly about locking it down as to who can say something on the company social media channels (director - general management).

This could be a risky position for any organisation to adopt, given that, according to Kietzmann et al. (2011), social media has diverted corporate communication power from marketing and public relations professionals to individuals freely communicating on social platforms, making themselves heard with or without the company’s approval.



An element of frustration about this lack of policy clarity came through in responses from both directors and managers, illustrated by one concise reply, “There are no rules written down, no. There probably ought to be” (director - product), and more succinctly by this manager (marketing) stating, “We need some company rules on what people can post”. The mindset of ‘people can learn from each other’, thus there is no need for written rules and procedures, appears not to be working. Whilst restricting access to company social media channels is a managerial choice, the lack of a company policy statement, visible to all staff, appeared to be allowing elements of individual interpretation of the case organisation’s ‘ethos’ on social media activity. The researcher also found a retailer-consumer marketing initiative at sub-community S2 failing, since this director (marketing) expected “store[s] would take a bit more ownership of it but they haven’t for one reason or another”, possibly stemming from a disconnect between marketing and store operations. An issue that, perhaps, could be averted if the case organisation published a robust social media policy for all to follow.

#### **4.4.3.3 Staff Involvement**

A company policy on recruiting store-based staff is that they must have a background in an outdoor sports activity that the case organisation serves, sharing their common enthusiasm for the sport within the community, and familiarity with “insider jargon and modes of representation, which enhance the consumers’ brand experience” (Schau et al., 2009, p. 38). Moreover, de Valck et al. (2009) suggested that the characteristics of these relationships can affect the consumers’ behaviour. The objective being to promote a level of trusted expertise in the store environment that also extends into social media communities where members represent considerable specialist knowledge, thereby reinforcing the consumer’s purchasing decision (Fill et al., 2016).

This ethos could be seen in “staff putting personal experiences on [social media], so it shows we are a technical company with a good background in the sports and lifestyles we sell” (Store Manager). Although there appeared to be an underlying feeling that staff content was not being valued, with one manager (marketing) saying, “Maybe we lose sight of that really, we think of it as just being to that retail consumer, but we’ve got quite a number of our staff involved in outdoor activities in the industry”. This expertise could and did extend to online social media activity in terms of members of staff being likeminded hobbyists within a community, posting

messages without referencing the case organisation on their personal accounts, as this manager (digital marketing) explained,

we do like to make sure our staff are fairly integrated in the social media process...seeing staff retweeting and sharing posts and stuff like that and engaging with our content that we post, then we reciprocate by sharing some of their stuff which we feel is relevant to our customer.

However, the absence of any written policy statements on social media appeared to be causing some confusion about whether the case organisation wanted managers to encourage staff to interact with the company on its social media accounts or not – there were mixed responses from participants to this question, as depicted by these two responses, “I don’t encourage staff to like or share any postings on Twitter and Facebook from their personal accounts. If they want to do it, then that’s fine” (Store Manager). Whereas another Store Manager affirmed, “I actively encourage all members of staff to repost on their own personal accounts, because it’s a way of getting it to a local market”. This seems like a valuable source of social media content for the case organisation, but this ‘policy’ appears to be open to local interpretation.

#### 4.4.4 Brand Community

*A posteriori* themes linked to brand community are discussed directly around the four clusters illustrated in Figure 27.



Figure 27: Brand Community Theme and Related Clusters found in the Case Organisation

#### **4.4.4.1 Prime Community**

This refers to the case organisation's engagement within its primary Twitter and Facebook accounts. They were both centrally managed by a small team focused on digital marketing. While the researcher observed a desire amongst those interviewed to involve retail stores in the activity posted, there was limited evidence of this happening. Both Twitter and Facebook cover the case organisation's wider product offering, with one director (store operations) commenting that "as the community covers everything, you don't have a community because there's nothing to draw those people together". That said, they were both active accounts in terms of regular content posted but consumer interaction appeared limited.

The researcher detected a desire amongst managers and directors to directly involve stores and staff in local social media activity, as this director (general management) described, "If you can build a good community of customers and staff who are all following you then it almost ends up as an environment in which members communicate and your communications can become secondary". However, resistance was also apparent based on past experiences when a lack of resource and/or training compromised a regular feed of quality content. The researcher noted an implementation blockage between marketing and retail operations in making store based social media accounts work. Nevertheless, a response by one director (marketing) captured an underlying desire to feature content from stores more prominently in national activity, "I'd love a lot of the content that's going on the S3 Facebook page to be fed through the [primary] one because we really want to show off the expertise of our staff".

#### **4.4.4.2 Sub-Community**

This refers to the case organisation's engagement within its sub-community accounts on Twitter and Facebook, called; S1, S2 and S3 to anonymise their identity in this study. While S1, and in part S2, were created for members with specialist knowledge and interest to interact with each other in the brand community (Zaglia, 2013), the researcher was informed that S2's "Facebook page was [primarily] set up really to deal with enquires, as [was] the Twitter channel, and to potentially post pictures of customers [taking part in this activity]" (director - marketing). Whereas S1 was set up to attract "an entirely different customer – a younger demographic" (manager - customer service) than the case organisation's more generalist approach to its primary account users.

The case organisation knew that these 'sub-community' managers were struggling to support the community members of S1 and S2 by consistently sharing engaging content (Adjei et al., 2010). In this regard, they recently reassigned responsibilities within the central social media team to support these two accounts, however, McAlexander et al. (2002) warned that members of these sub-communities will want to identify with fellow enthusiasts behind the brand. In contrast, the researcher found sub-community S3 thriving as a distinctive local community, with the Store Manager explaining that its purpose "is certainly to try and create a bit more of a 'this is who we are, and this is our personality' as a shop, whereas the primary account is a bit more information". However, as one director (store operations) commented, "[store based] social media like we have in S3...it's only as much as we can actually deliver content that warrants that – there's nothing worse than bad content".

#### **4.4.4.3 Suppliers and Partnerships**

The case organisation's retail offer is built around trusted supplier and partner brands rather than the strength of its own retail facia on the high street and according to this director (store operations), "Some of the social media content we show comes directly from brands...those brands are our brand image to a large extent". Therefore, working with these brands on social media is important because collectively they have the potential to reach a much wider consumer audience. Further, the said director (operations support) asserted "brands that we sell may be followed by people who haven't heard of [us]...and therefore convert them into a customer".

While some expressed concern about suppliers that also have their own retail outlets, this was overshadowed by the benefits and access to multiple brands that the consumer wants under one roof at the case organisation's retail stores, so the case organisation is "quite attractive to a supplier" (director - product) and "Twitter and Facebook can help with a lot of partnership building" (director - marketing). Furthermore, opportunities to engage the support of key influencers "who quite often have a large social media following...sometimes we pay these influencers, you could argue by sponsoring them, you're paying them" (manager - digital marketing) to connect. Nonetheless, in 2013, Schultz et al. argued that paying influencers for content engagement on Twitter and Facebook is nothing more than short-term sales promotion and can be damaging to a brand.

#### **4.4.4.4 Consumer Influence**

The case organisation's position in the market as a specialist retailer would appear to draw a consumer audience who are more likely to interact with the brand and each other on social media channels "to be part of the company a bit more" (manager - customer service) than what could be expected in a more generalist retail environment on the high street. Supporting Schau et al.'s (2009) argument, that active members of the community are more likely to be customers with strong commitment to the brand and connect to fulfil their social need to interact with similar others is "what drives people, and I think that's why people stay connected through social media" (director - product). Furthermore, Van Doorn et al. (2010) found consumers behave with fewer inhibitions than their physical self, sharing and recommending products and services to strangers within these social media communities, identified as third places, where people virtually congregate and share within a brand community of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Oldenburg, 1999); correspondingly, "I think the motivation to interact comes from the fact that they like brands and they want to be members of a club" (director - product).

Engaging in Twitter and Facebook activity has further strengthened the customer ties that have been developed over many years of serving specialist product communities, and as one manager (customer service) commented, "[this engagement] doesn't need to be about the product itself but...consumers don't want to give their sale away for free they want something back"; indicating the retailer is sensitive towards the social media empowered consumer of today.

## **4.5 Discussion**

The researcher purposely approached the case organisation for this research project because its retail business targeted distinct communities, within the overall product sector it serves. Hence, the researcher anticipated that this would be a unique data rich environment to study the influence of social media on the consumer from the lens of the specialist retailer. Furthermore, its pedigree as a well-established specialist retailer trading from high street stores across the UK, and online, indicated a potential richness of real-world insights for the investigation of the research enquiry (Eisenhardt et al., 2007; Siggelkow, 2007). The researcher was subsequently granted full access to the case organisation and freedom to conduct

the study without any imposed restrictions. But anonymity is important, so the researcher has been careful not to disclose the identity of the case organisation and its employees.

The pilot study of social media postings provided a good foundation for the researcher to probe participants from the outset of the interview process and gather their impromptu opinions on the purpose of the case organisation’s postings on its Twitter and Facebook accounts. Tables 25 and 26 list the case organisation’s seven social media accounts active at the time of this research.

Table 25: Twitter Accounts as at 1st March 2017

<b>Account</b>	<b>Created</b>	<b>Followers</b> (as at 01/03/17)	<b>Following</b> (as at 01/03/17)	<b>Tweets</b> (since created)	<b>Likes</b> (since created)
<b>Primary</b>	February 2009	10,600	2,954	7,041	4,901
<b>S1</b>	February 2009	7,601	276	1,541	153
<b>S2</b>	December 2011	198	176	165	239

Table 26: Facebook Accounts as at 1st March 2017

<b>Account</b>	<b>Page Likes</b>	<b>Page Follows</b>	<b>Total Posts</b> (over 1 year up to 01.03.17)
<b>Primary</b>	16,439	16,011	564
<b>S1</b>	16,306	15,765	113
<b>S2</b>	540	534	3
<b>S3</b>	289	288	115

The data across the case organisation’s Twitter accounts shows a marked difference in activity between the primary and sub-community accounts. On querying the low level of activity, the researcher was told that the individuals responsible for S1 and S2 were struggling to manage these sub-community accounts on a day-to-day basis due to a lack of time. A situation that needs remedying, because the number of users following S1 indicates that this community appears to be interested in engaging, and therefore the low level of activity by the case organisation may compromise the potential of this specialist sub-community. Whereas S2 has historical shown erratically low levels of activity, as previously

illustrated in Table 17 (Chapter Four, 4.3.3), to become almost dormant again in 2017.

During his interview, a director (marketing) informed the researcher that S1 will be managed by the national social media team in the future to increase activity; being mindful that over widening the appeal of a distinctive subgroup can harm the very subculture they thrive on (de Valck et al., 2009; Schau et al., 2009; Schouten et al., 1995). Additionally, it seemed that the intended purpose, according to the same director, for S2 to serve a special interest group, with user interaction and posting pictures of customers using the facility, was not being realised; requiring a robust managerial decision between retail operations and marketing to effectively engage the stores involved, considering that persisting with a relatively dormant account may be damaging to the brand image (Adjei et al., 2010). This apparent level of managerial indecision may reflect interview responses that the case organisation has been 'behind the curve' in imbedding social media across its consumer communication channels, and the closure of store based social media accounts, apart from S3. In addition, the noticeable lack of clear policy positions and training in the use of social media channels for business, raised by store managers, may also be a contributing factor.

Although, derived from their personal perspectives, most participants did not favour Twitter; there was a consensus that this is an important social media channel for consumer communication. Further, there was a strong opinion that Twitter was used to disseminate information; which concurs with the researcher's findings that a high percentage (72%) of the 644 tweets (Table 11, Chapter Four, 4.3.1) posted by the case organisation on its primary Twitter account to be information in nature. This could be the effect of all 'promotional' posts being classified as 'information' about an event, brand or product. Nevertheless, the inclusion of retweeting other users' postings in the data (Table 12, Chapter Four, 4.3.1) increased social interaction from 14% to 46%, placing postings that were social in nature as the most dominant in terms of average number of user interactions per post by UGT need category. Moreover, posts classified as having entertainment value were less relevant regardless of the impact of this retweeting activity by the case organisation. The swing from information to social interaction demonstrates that other users' posts appear to favour more social content, as previously illustrated in Figures 14c and 15c (Chapter Four, 4.3.1). It could be argued that 'promotional' posts may contain another element of U&G need, however, responses to interview question three: How

would you categorise postings about products, brands or events? (Table 6, Chapter Three, 3.12), supported the researcher's decision to classify them as, primarily, the sharing of information.

Whilst the case organisation's tweets on S1 and S2 have been categorised as mainly information (Tables 13 and 15, Chapter Four, 4.3.2 and 4.3.3 respectively), the effect of other users' tweets changed the dominant U&G category to that of fulfilling a social need. Again, the classification of 'promotional' posts may have influenced the outcome. However, these findings are based on low levels of activity by both sub-communities over the 12-month period investigated by the researcher.

Similarly, to Twitter, the research findings for the case organisation's primary Facebook account in terms of messages posted, were found to be predominantly of information value to users (76%), with a high level (66.5%) being 'promotional' in nature. This contrasts with participants' views that the case organisation's postings on Facebook were more social in nature. Also, users appeared to interact more with postings that were of entertainment value on Facebook, overshadowing both information and social messages combined in average number of user interactions per post (Figure 20c, Chapter Four, 4.3.4), vastly different to Twitter. In contrast, messages posted on sub-community S3 were split between information and social, but again, the average number of interactions per post (Figures 21b and 21c, Chapter Four, 4.3.5) showed a notable increase in postings of entertainment value with a corresponding decrease in information.

The difference between the case organisation's primary Facebook account and sub-community S3, could feasibly be because S3 had a local community focus with greater emphasis on posting social messages that included sharing staff activities to showcase them as fellow enthusiasts (McAlexander et al., 2002), thereby promoting the level of relevant expertise that exists in store. Further, sub-community S1's posts showed a very similar predominance towards information messages, mirroring the case organisation's primary Facebook account posts. But contra to this, there was a notable increase in the average number of user interactions with social posts (Figure 22c, Chapter Four, 4.3.6), comparable with sub-community S3. This appears to reflect the special social relationship that sub-community members share (Zaglia, 2013). That said, sub-community S2's postings, like the primary account, were split between information and entertainment postings with entertainment being the dominant UGT category for average number of user interactions per post (Figure



23c, Chapter Four, 4.3.7). However, the researcher is reluctant to draw any further conclusions on this sub-community's activity over the period of investigation, based on the limited data available.

## 4.6 Concluding Comment

This chapter has reviewed and discussed the case organisation's activity on Twitter and Facebook, to understand motivations that encourage consumers to interact and satisfy their own needs on different media channels (Katz et al., 1973). The classification of each posting originated by the case organisation into the U&G *a priori* themes of social, entertainment and information value (King et al., 2017), has shown mixed results between each of these accounts. This differential is amplified when comparing the primary accounts and the sub-community accounts.

The case organisation's primary Twitter account revealed an emphasis on posting information content, which have been further classified as being predominantly 'promotional' messages. Whereas, on analysing interaction per post, the consumer was more actively engaged in postings that gratified their social needs. While the findings in sub-community S1 correlated to this primary account, the other sub-community account S2 differed with an emphasis on social postings, and further contrast to the primary account findings was consumer interactions per post which focussed on information posts. That said, the posting activity originated by this sub-community (S2) was limited over the period analysed.

The primary Facebook account similarly showed a predominance of information postings by the case organisation but, in complete contrast to Twitter, interactions per post showed a noticeable increase in consumers engaging with posts classified as entertainment; possibly indicative of the differing ethos of these two social media channels. Furthermore, the only physical retail store locally managing a Facebook account (S3), posted a mix of information and social postings and, like the primary account, the average number of interactions per post overwhelmingly shifted to postings of entertainment value. The researcher found sub-community S1 and S2 to have similar results to sub-community S3 in terms of entertainment postings having most impact on consumer interaction.

Whilst, the primary research findings indicate that the case organisation was posting messages predominantly of information value on both Twitter and Facebook; in contrast to this, participants perceived these messages to be more akin to satisfying the consumers' social and/or entertainment needs. Furthermore, the research findings suggest that Twitter postings of social value achieved the greatest interaction per post. However, to achieve similar consumer interaction per post on Facebook, postings gratifying the consumers' entertainment needs achieved more interaction. Which supports scholarly arguments that firms need to focus on creating engaging conversations, rather than pushing 'promotional' messages, to interact with the consumer (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Schultz et al., 2013).

## Chapter Five

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### 5.1 Introduction

The contemporary impact of communication technology on the retailers' relationship with the consumer has been dramatic, not least with the advent of social media channels enhancing the consumer's voice in the seller-buyer relationship (Belk, 2013; Lui et al., 2017; Schultz et al., 2013). This development has enhanced the marketers' role, from the hitherto dominant position of pushing one-way mass media messages out to a passive consumer audience, to one of sharing the brand's voice with an active and smarter consumer in two-way media dialogue (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). The retail marketers' response, however, can often appear limited in embracing this new era of consumer empowerment, of embedding social communication within their marketing strategies (Chandy, 2014; De Keyser et al., 2014; Lorenzo-Romero et al., 2013). Further, based on the scarcity of related peer reviewed journal articles, this is an under-researched topic by academic scholars.

This chapter explicates that the single-case study approach, adopted in addressing the research enquiry, provided an ideal base to investigate the phenomena in-depth, with the generous cooperation of a well-established specialist retailer. Thereafter, discussing the contribution of this research to theoretical knowledge, evidenced in how the researcher used and developed UGT to identify the influence of message content on consumer interaction from the lens of the retailer. The chapter then proceeds by explaining how the theoretical base of UGT providing *a priori* themes, helped the researcher investigate the influence of social media message context on consumer interaction within the real-world retail setting. In the absence of an acknowledged ROI formula, much like the difficulty other firms face, measuring the ROI in social media is undetermined (Baines et al., 2017); therefore, the researcher outlines the mixed opinions research participants offered on the case organisation's return on investing resources in social media activity. The chapter finally concludes and reviews opportunities for much needed peer reviewed academic research on the topic from the lens of the UK retailer.

## 5.2 The Case Study Approach Related to the Research Enquiry

The case study approach was adopted to understand and address the research enquiry, which to reiterate is: An Investigation into the Influence of Social Media Message Context on Retailer-Consumer Interaction: A Case Study from the Lens of a UK Retailer.

And, furthermore, to address the research objectives, which to restate are:

- To investigate the views of manager stakeholders on the purpose of Twitter and Facebook messages posted by the retail case organisation in terms of gratifying the consumers' social, entertainment or information need;
- To develop a deeper understanding of how social media fits into this retailer's traditional marketing strategy;
- To develop a deeper understanding of this retailer's perception of return on investment in social media activity; and
- To evaluate the impact, if any, of social media communications on this retailer's internal communication and internal relationships.

In response, the researcher chose to focus his empirical enquiry on Twitter and Facebook from the lens of a specialist retailer. This purposefully selected single case organisation afforded the researcher a unique opportunity to investigate the influence of social media on this retailer's interaction with their consumer audience (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, the researcher's standpoint of being granted generous access supported his spontaneous interaction with research participants at the case organisation, freely sharing their own opinions in their face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher (Bryman, 2016; Yin, 2014).

The researcher originally set out to conduct a multiple-case study to compare the empirical research findings from two similar retail organisations, serving different retail sectors. On completing a pilot study at one case organisation, the researcher evaluated that the research would benefit from a single in-depth case study; the inherent flexibility of the case study design supporting this early revision (Yin, 2014). Thus, the research design was developed with reference to emergent findings, which led to a refinement of the research plan. Additionally, multiple sources of data within the single-case study design were helpful in capturing different views of the phenomena (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Furthermore, the under-researched

nature of the research topic justified an in-depth study at one information-rich case organisation (Denzin et al., 2018; Eisenhardt et al., 2007). The researcher's decision made against the realisation that attempting more than one case in-depth would overstretch his time and resource, and potentially jeopardise the quality and the impact of the research (Boblin et al., 2013; Patton, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012; Stake, 1995; Travers, 2001; Yin, 2009, 2014).

A strength of case study design as an approach for this major research project surfaced in the researcher's closeness and expertise in the retail sector, and his familiarity with social media in a retail context (Buchanan et al., 2007; Denzin et al., 2011; Yin, 2014). This supported the researcher's ability to probe participants' views as they unfolded in the semi-structured interviews, and in interpreting the case organisation's social media messages into U&G classifications during the online ethnographic study of Twitter and Facebook postings (Denzin et al., 2011, 2018; Yin, 2014). The researcher acknowledges the limitations of a single-case study design inhibiting the wider generalisation of the research findings, but this should not prevent the sharing of new insights across similar retail organisations (Patton, 2015; Schofield, 2006; Stake, 1995; Travers, 2001; Yin, 2014). The single case method research focus provided the opportunity to develop a "thick description" (Stake, 1995, p. 43) of the phenomenon being studied; that is, '...the Influence of Social Media Message Context on Retailer-Consumer Interaction...from the lens of a UK Retailer.'

### **5.3 Contribution to Theoretical Knowledge**

The researcher was motivated to better understand the type of message content that triggers the consumer to interact, or not, with the retailer on social media sites. When reviewing scholarly literature, the researcher found a scarcity of peer reviewed research on this topic. This is not to say that there is a lack of accessible, so called, 'grey' literature (Booth et al., 2012) on social media and its influence on marketing communication, in the form of 'influencer' blogs and some trade press articles. The researcher chose to focus on peer reviewed research papers; primarily to reference peer reviewed research, and therefore exclude literature that had not been subject to academic validation and thereby avoiding the potential 'influencer' bias in academically unregulated opinion papers (Stokes et al., 2014).

The review of the literature identified UGT as an appropriate theoretical position to support this study (Campbell et al., 2014; Dreze et al., 1997; Huang, 2008; Katz et al., 1973; McDonald, 1997; Rohm et al., 2013; Stafford et al., 2004; Swanson, 1979). In short, UGT facilitated a suitable base of *a priori* themes (King et al., 2017; Manning, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012) to understand how the retailer uses the medium and establish the influence of different message content on consumer interaction. As illustrated in Figure 28, the researcher has used UGT to hand-code the case organisation's messages into U&G needs categories, to understand the impact that the context of messages posted have on consumer interaction.

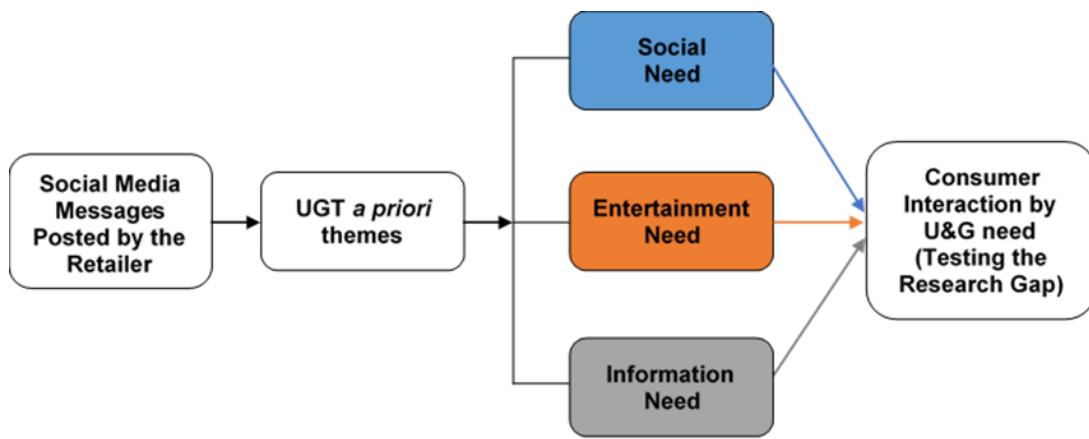


Figure 28: Conceptual model applying UGT to Social Media Message Content  
Source: Author

This application of UGT is original in using this seminal theory in a real-world retail setting, to understand how consumers select media content to meet their individual needs (Katz et al., 1973; Swanson, 1979). Thus showing, both scholars and practitioners, how the consumers' need for social, entertainment or information gratification can motivate them to engage and interact on social media channels, such as Twitter and Facebook (Curras-Perez et al., 2014; Oliveira et al., 2015). In this respect, this research contributes to the ongoing development of existing theoretical knowledge, on how satisfying these psychological and functional needs can motivate the consumer response and interaction that the retailer is seeking from its social media activity. Whilst the retailer may passively note and respond to what other social media users are posting and sharing on these channels; by using UGT to examine and understand the underlying context of the message posted, the researcher has demonstrated the consumers' response to certain content becomes

more visible for the retailer to exploit, by delivering social media message content that encourages positive consumer interaction (Campbell et al., 2014; Rohm et al., 2013; Wallace et al., 2014).

This study provides a solid methodological foundation and theoretical strategy in applying UGT in a contemporary retail setting, to identify how other similar retailers are responding to the emergence of social media in the seller-buyer relationship. By replicating the researcher's approach, to investigate how Twitter and Facebook message context is influencing retailer-consumer interaction, across multiple retail cases, generalisation of the research findings is possible. This will help the retail practitioner and scholars further understand the impact that the context of a social media message has on consumer interaction.

#### **5.4 Contribution to Practice**

Whilst this research revealed a range of responses and results in terms of how social media was used by the case organisation, a consensus emerged that engaging with the consumer on both Twitter and Facebook is influential in the case organisation achieving a wider consumer reach. Further, by serving a specialist product sector, it appears that the consumer is more likely to positively interact with this well-established specialist retailer, and its related brand communities, on social media, in part because the target consumer audience is familiar with the retail brand (Campbell et al., 2003).

At the early stage of the empirical enquiry, the researcher became aware of the existence of multiple sub-community Twitter and Facebook accounts, autonomously publishing content, alongside the case organisation's primary accounts; each of these sub-community accounts focus on a distinctive product sector and/or community. However, research participants' opinions were split on the intended purpose of the message content posted by the case organisation on these sites. Therefore, the researcher's adoption of UGT was helpful in explicitly identifying the context of messages posted by the case organisation on Twitter and Facebook into social, entertainment and information needs to understand what motivates the consumer to interact with the case organisation (Campbell et al., 2014; Rohm et al., 2013).

#### 5.4.1 Consumer Interaction on Twitter

**Objective:** To investigate the views of manager stakeholders on the purpose of Twitter messages posted by the retail case organisation in terms of gratifying the consumers' social, entertainment or information need.

In understanding the level of social media interaction with different message content, the findings, as discussed in Chapter Four, show a marked difference in the gratification of social needs when comparing interaction with Twitter posts originated by the case organisation on its primary account, and the increase in social interaction when a relatively small amount of retweets (RTs) of other users' posts are included in the data, as illustrated in Figures 29 and 30 respectively; indicating that a focus on social content increases consumer interaction. The findings also show that, during the period analysed, the case organisation's Twitter posts were of information value, predominantly. This concurs with the research participants' views on the classification of the messages posted by the case organisation.

By utilising the conceptual model (Figure 28) to illustrate the comparison between the number of postings in the different U&G needs categories (termed effort) and the average number of user interactions per post (termed result), Figures 29 and 30, respectively, demonstrate and evidence the apparent strategic mismatch between what is posted and the understanding of what motivates consumers to engage on social media (Oliveira et al., 2015).



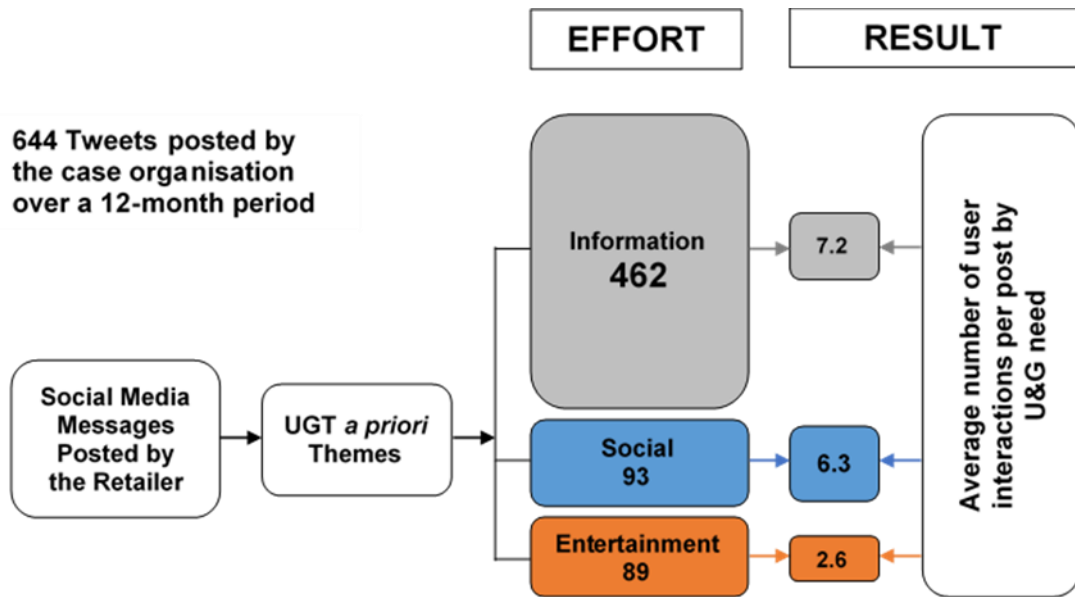


Figure 29: Average number of user interactions per post - Posts created by the case organisation and posted on their primary Twitter account (data taken from Table 11, Chapter Four, 4.3.1)

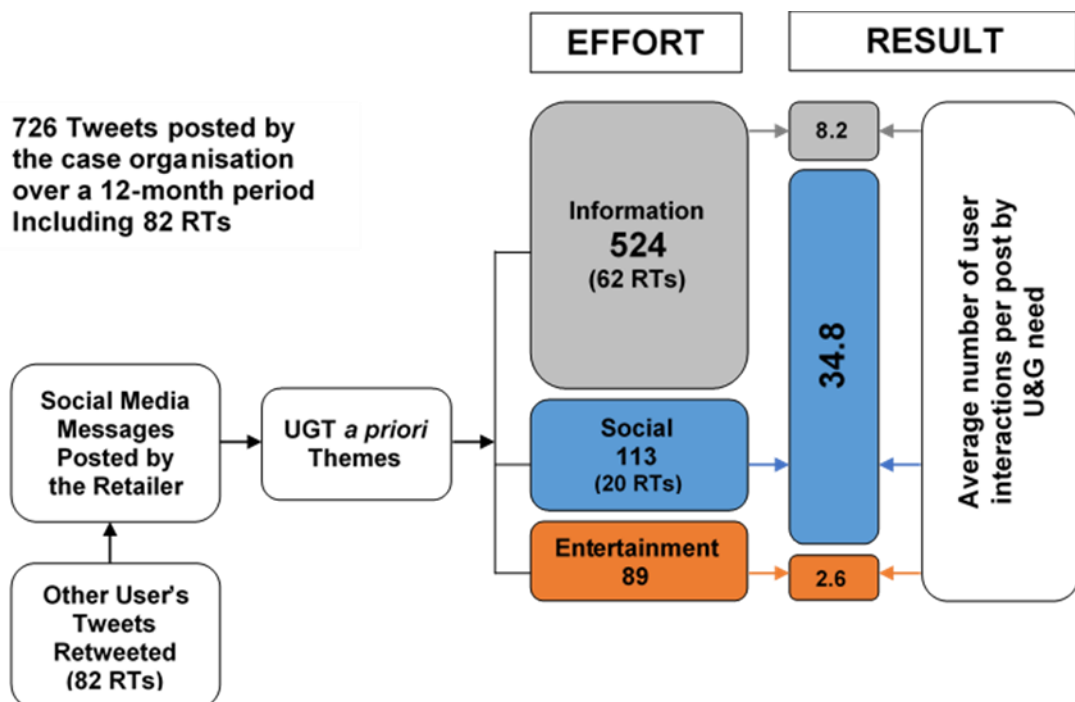


Figure 30: Average number of user interactions per post - Posts created by the case organisation and including retweets of other users' tweets (RTs) and posted on the case organisation's primary Twitter account (data taken from Table 12, Chapter Four, 4.3.1)

#### 5.4.2 Consumer Interaction on Facebook

**Objective:** To investigate the views of manager stakeholders on the purpose of Facebook messages posted by the retail case organisation in terms of gratifying the consumers' social, entertainment or information need.

In terms of Facebook activity on the case organisation's national account, the dominant U&G category by average number of user interactions per post was the one that gratified a user's entertainment need, as illustrated in Figure 31. This matched the research participants' views that Facebook is for postings of entertainment value. Although, as with Twitter, the case organisation focused its national social media resources on postings that were of information value, during the period analysed, which resulted in the weakest level of the average number of user interactions per post.

In comparison, the local store-based account (S3) achieved a more balanced level of average number of user interactions per post across each UGT category, with most coming from postings that were of social value (as illustrated in Figure 32), indicating that users are more likely to interact socially at a local community level than with a nationally focused account.

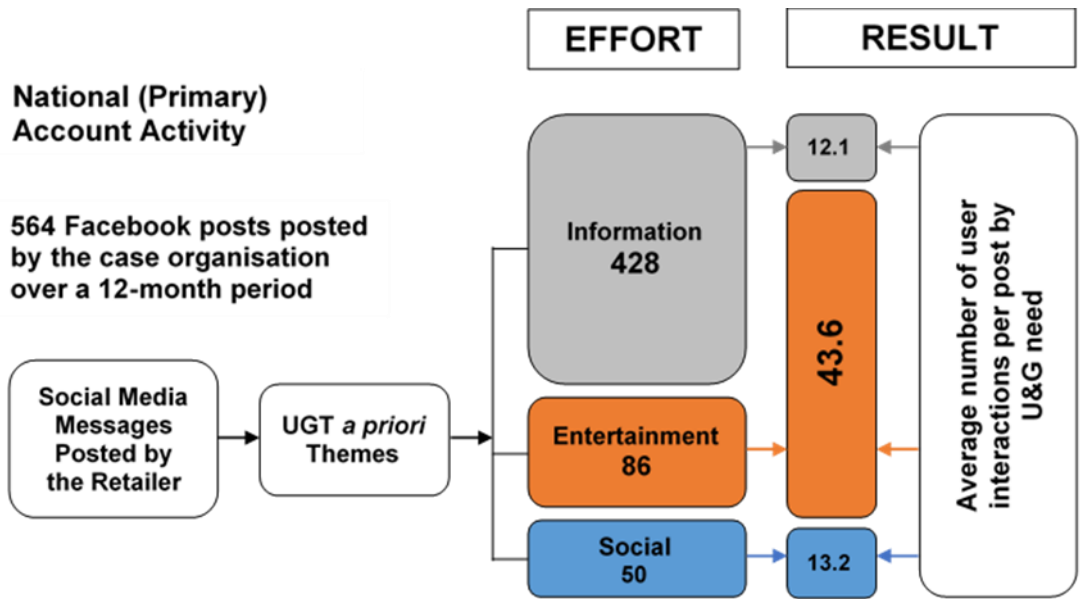


Figure 31: Average number of user interactions per post - Posts created by the case organisation and posted on their primary Facebook account (data taken from Table 18, Chapter Four, 4.3.4)

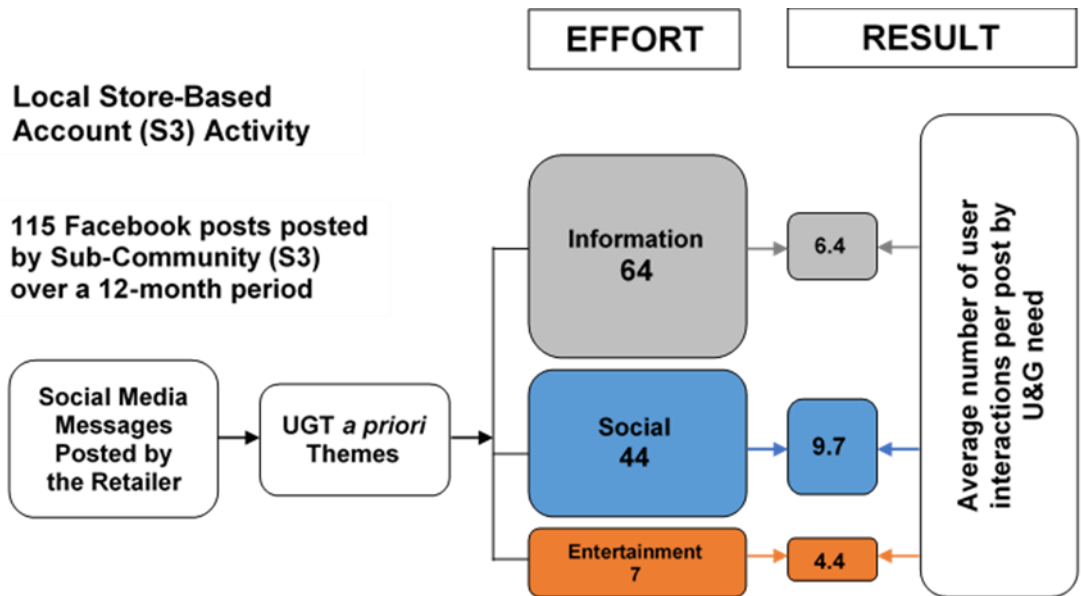


Figure 32: Average number of user interactions per post - Posts created by sub-community (S3) and posted on their local store-based Facebook account (S3) (data taken from Table 19, Chapter Four, 4.3.5)

### 5.4.3 Traditional Marketing Strategy and Social Media

**Objective:** To develop a deeper understanding of how social media fits into this retailer's traditional marketing strategy.

The case organisation admitted being later than other retailers to include social media within its marketing strategy and are still developing their understanding of how best to integrate this communication medium into the business. Furthermore, they appeared to be struggling to reach agreement within the business on how to make social media engaging and valuable to consumers (Chandy, 2014; De Keyser et al., 2014; Schultz et al., 2013). In fact, on both Twitter and Facebook national accounts, the concentration on posting promotional content about events, brands and/or products, fulfilling a U&G need for information, appeared to be disproportionate to the level of consumer interaction generated. Whereas, the local Facebook account (S3), managed at store level, was showing a more proportional balance between postings and consumer interaction. This appears to be the influence of the local manager focusing on posting activity to generate local community involvement.

The strategic position, of having store based social media accounts and sub-community groups, elicited mixed views amongst the research participants but, at the time of this research, the case organisation's decision was to focus on centrally driven national accounts (de Valck et al., 2009; Schau et al., 2009). However, this research agrees with Schultz et al.'s (2013) argument that social media should not be viewed as another retailer-to-consumer marketing communication channel by marketers and found that an emphasis on building local community relationships (McAlexander et al., 2002) and posting more social content increased consumer interaction.

### 5.4.4 The Retailers' Return on Investment in Social Media

**Objective:** To develop a deeper understanding of this retailer's perception of return on investment in social media activity.

Although the research participants had a general level of awareness of the impact of social media activity, and more specifically the importance of measuring user interaction, like many businesses, they struggled to determine a tangible ROI of social media initiatives (Baines et al., 2017). And, whilst all research participants

agreed that social media is an important consumer communication and brand building tool that can result in improved financial performance (Munzel et al., 2014), there was a mixed understanding of the metrics used by the case organisation to measure the consumer engagement impact of these channels. Also, there was a limited level of understanding of how these metrics translate into tangible ROI, again, concurring with Baines et al. (2017) asserting the inability of businesses to identify a ROI model to measure social media activity is a common finding. The apparent confusion at the case organisation may be emphasised by social media being activity restricted to a small team within the business, and the absence of policy and internal processes to share the measured metrics with a wider internal audience.

#### **5.4.5 Internal Communication and Relationships**

**Objective:** To evaluate the impact, if any, of social media communications on this retailer's internal communication and internal relationships.

The researcher was interested to understand the impact, if any, that highly visible social media content had on internal communication and specialist functional relationships at the case organisation. In that employees and other stakeholders have become more aware of what the business is saying to its consumer audience and exposed to consumer responses on these open communication channels (Kaplan et al., 2011). According to the research participants' responses, the idea of social media impacting a wider internal audience outside of those functions directly or indirectly involved in social media, such as marketing, retail operations and, to a lesser extent customer service, at the case organisation, had not been considered. So, in general, respondents initially dismissed the idea that social media activity influences other internal functions. However, there was an acknowledgement that retailer-to-consumer relationships on social media have heightened the importance of internal communication, in developing an effective service culture within the business, in that individuals working in functional disciplines, like Finance and Logistics, may be influenced by this freely available content about consumer activities, and social media user interactions (Kaplan et al., 2011; Wirtz et al., 2013).

#### **5.4.6 Emergent Findings**

The research reveals a number of emergent findings which have potential implications on the retailer-consumer interaction. The research demonstrates the result of including a relatively small amount of message content, originated by other Twitter users (RTs), had on the case organisation's average number of user interactions per post data: which can be seen when comparing Tables 11 and 12 (Chapter Four, 4.3.1). This inclusion of other Twitter users' social posts triggered a marked increase in the average number of user interactions per post. Yet the case organisation was focussing on posting information about something and/or someone, which generated little interaction regardless of the inclusion of RTs. While the research participants connected to the social media team, confirmed that they use analytical tools to track the performance of activity on the platform; the research findings indicate that these tools are not informing them on the effect that the textual content of a message has on consumer interaction. So, the case organisation is putting its resource into creating content that is least effective in generating consumer interaction. Whereas, using UGT to code the classification of postings, enabled a deeper understanding of message context, and its subsequent influence on consumer interaction.

By mostly sharing information content on Facebook (previously shown in Table 18, Chapter Four, 4.3.4), the case organisation appears to be misunderstanding that the consumer is interacting with messages that fulfil an entertainment need on this platform. Another element that analytical software tools and the metrics adopted by the social media team are failing to identify.

### **5.5 Summary Conclusions and Recommendations**

The case organisation has historically engaged in social media activity on national accounts, product specialist sub-community accounts and multiple store-based accounts, the latter of which were discontinued because, according to research participants, store managers failed to post content to the point of them becoming inactive; an unacceptable status for any business (Adjei et al., 2010). The researcher found specialist product sub-community accounts (S1 and S2) with a scarcity of regular content and was informed that these accounts would be managed

by the national social media team in the future. However, the research findings raise the question of whether centrally managed national accounts can influence local consumer interaction; given that the one remaining store-based account (S3) is interacting with its consumer community, due to the store manager focussing on local activity and including customer facing store staff in the conversations (Kietzmann et al., 2011), which the national account appears to struggle to achieve. Further, specialist sub-communities created to address the needs of members similarly need managing by a likeminded sector specialist to stimulate trust and expertise in the relationship (Bearden et al., 1982; Dholakia et al., 1977; Fill et al., 2016), rather than a generalist approach.

If the case organisation wants to capitalise on the local store community, the research findings indicate that a more robust approach to policy and operating procedures should be adopted. In addition, the managers' calls for specific training in how to manage a local social media account for business needs addressing (Lorenzo-Romero et al., 2013). The management decision to centralise activity appeared driven on a premise that national accounts would somehow be administratively easier for the business to manage, and as one director said: "lock down" who says what on these publicly visible channels. But the research findings indicate that a store-based account can be more successful in generating social interaction with a local consumer community.

## **5.6 Recommendations for Further Research**

There is potential to develop this research in several directions, including:

### **5.6.1 The Investigation of Other Social Media Channels**

The next step in developing this research could be to widen the scope of the social media channels used by the specialist retailer, to investigate the relevance, if any, of the other social media platforms on the consumer's responsiveness to message content. Whilst the researcher investigated Twitter and Facebook at the case organisation, and according to research participants these are the most used platforms by the firm, the researcher was informed that other platforms are used to a lesser extent - these have not been reviewed in this study. The continued development of social media channels and the mass adoption of these by the

consumer will dictate what platforms the retailer uses - a future research topic that should be driven alongside technological advancements in social communication, and what platforms the mass consumer audience adopts in their shopping behaviour.

### **5.6.2 Study Different Retail Formats, and the use of Third-Party Providers**

By studying a wider sample of retail organisations, to include non-specialist retailers, large retail businesses, and those that have a structured approach to hierarchical discipline and adherence towards policy and operating procedures; some of these organisations may outsource social media activity to a third-party provider. Firstly, studying a wider population of retailers would identify the impact of different internal organisation cultures on managing social media activity, and how this influences consumer interaction. And, for those organisations who distance themselves from day-to-day management of social media, by outsourcing this activity, how does this third-party involvement effect message content, and subsequently the retailers' relationship with their consumer audience? This research found that the specialist retailer's closeness to the consumer community is important in making social media activity an integral part of their relationship with the consumer, furthermore, customer facing staff involvement in message content was found to be a driver of positive consumer interaction. This raises the question of how a third-party service provider can replicate this scenario – a future research topic using UGT to understand how this unfolds in a real-world setting.

### **5.6.3 How Large Retail Organisations Manage Social Media Activity**

The researcher acknowledges that the practicality of retail store staff members participating in social media activity may be unworkable for larger retailers; an opinion that needs investigating to understand how this is managed and what impact, if any, this has on consumer interaction, and internal staff relationships. A glance at two well-known high street retail brands on Twitter: M&S (<https://twitter.com/marksandspencer>) and John Lewis (<https://twitter.com/JohnLewisRetail>), revealed that both were using this social media platform for sales promotion activity. These retailers appear to have embedded social media into their marketing communication strategy as another sales promotion tool, which is at odds with the findings of this study. A future research topic to understand how this works within these larger retail organisations.



## 5.7 Personal Reflection

The student selected the DBA programme of study because he considered its structured approach to be more fitting for his practitioner profile, and a natural progression on his MBA degree. The learning process during years one and two provided the opportunity for the development of doctoral level research, critical thinking, writing and presentation skills. Therefore, a solid base of knowledge and experience was achieved in these formative years before moving on to this major research element of the DBA. The student collaborated with colleagues within his cohort and developed a network within a wider population of PhD and Professional Doctorate students by attending Research Development Hub (RDH) meetings and seminars hosted by the business school. Furthermore, contact with scholars across a wider internal and external population provided valuable learning perspectives. The student had regular meetings with his supervisors, and underwent a 2015/16 annual progress review, after which the Postgraduate Research Degrees Progression Board confirmed good progress and continuation of the researcher's registration status in July 2016.

In completing the DBA programme of study, and in contrast to the PhD route, this major research project gave the student an opportunity to use the research and doctoral writing skills acquired during the taught element of the DBA programme, by submitting a thesis that adds value to knowledge and practice. The student's background as an internationally experienced senior executive in the retail sector, and his passion to explore the influence of social media networks on the retailers' relationship with the consumer, led to this research enquiry. The initial review of seminal literature shaped the theoretical stance of UGT. While the researcher has faced personal challenges, his organisational skills and the generous cooperation of the case organisation has enabled timely completion of this final element of the DBA programme.

On successful completion of his viva examination, the student has agreed to share the anonymised research findings with senior executives at the case organisation, before engaging with both academic and practitioner audiences. Furthermore, he intends to develop this research methodology with the cooperation of other firms within the retail industry.

## List of References

- Aaker, J., Fournier, S., & Brasel, S. (2004). When good brands do bad. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(1), 1-16. doi:10.1086/383419
- Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (1988). Comments on the motivational status of self-esteem in social identity and intergroup discrimination. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 18(4), 317-334.
- Adjei, M. T., Noble, S. M., & Noble, C. H. (2010). The influence of C2C communications in online brand communities on customer purchase behavior. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38(5), 634-653.
- Aggarwal, P. (2004). The effects of brand relationship norms on consumer attitudes and behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(1), 87-101.
- Areni, C. S., & Cox, K. C. (1994). The persuasive effects of evaluation, expectancy and relevancy dimensions of incongruent visual and verbal information. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 21(1), 337-342.
- Arndt, J. (1967). Role of product-related conversations in the diffusion of a new product. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 4(3), 291-295.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M. (2002). Intentional social action in virtual communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 16(2), 2-21.
- Baines, P., Fill, C. & Rosengren, S. (2017). *Marketing* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Balaji, M. S., Khong, K. W., & Chong, A. Y. L. (2016). Determinants of negative word-of-mouth communication using social networking sites. *Information & Management*, 53(4), 528-540.
- Barley, S. R. (1986). Technology as an occasion for structuring: Evidence from observations of CT scanners and the social order of radiology departments. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 31(1), 78-108.
- Bauer, R. A. (1963). Communication as a transaction: A comment on "on the concept of influence". *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 27(1), 83-86.
- Baxendale, S., Macdonald, E. K., & Wilson, H. N. (2015). The impact of different touchpoints on brand consideration. *Journal of Retailing*, 91(2), 235-253
- Bearden, W. O., Netemeyer, R. G., & Teel, J. E. (1989). Measurement of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(4), 473-481. doi:10.1086/209186
- Bearden, W. O., & Shimp, T. A. (1982). The use of extrinsic cues to facilitate product adoption. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 19(2), 229-239.

- Belk, R. W. (2010). Sharing. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36(5), 715-734.  
doi:10.1086/612649
- Belk, R. W. (2013). Extended self in a digital world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(3), 477-500. doi:10.1086/671052
- Betz, A. L., Skowronski, J. J., & Ostrom, T. M. (1996). Shared realities: Social influence and stimulus memory. *Social Cognition*, 14(2), 113-140.
- Bezjian-Avery, A., Calder, B., & Lacobucci, D. (1998). New media interactive advertising vs. traditional advertising. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 38(4), 23-32.
- Blumler, J. G. (1979). The role of theory in uses and gratifications studies. *Communication Research*, 6(1), 9-36.
- Boblin, S. L., Ireland, S., Kirkpatrick, H., & Robertson, K. (2013). Using Stake's qualitative case study approach to explore implementation of evidence-based practice. *Qualitative Health Research*, 23(9), 1267-1275.
- Boisot, M., & McKelvey, B. (2010). Integrating modernist and postmodernist perspectives on organizations: A complexity science bridge. *The Academy of Management Review*, 35(3), 415-433.
- Bone, P. F. (1995). Word-of-mouth effects on short-term and long-term product judgments. *Journal of Business Research*, 32(3), 213-223.
- Booth, A., Papaioannou, D., & Sutton, A. (2012). *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Boulding, W., Kalra, A., Staelin, R., & Zeithaml, V. A. (1993). A dynamic process model of service quality: From expectations to behavioral intentions. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 30(1), 7-27.
- Breugelmans, E., Köhler, C. F., Dellaert, B. G. C., & de Ruyter, K. (2012). Promoting interactive decision aids on retail websites: A message framing perspective with new versus traditional focal actions. *Journal of Retailing*, 88(2), 226-235
- Brown, J., Broderick, A. J., & Lee, N. (2007). Word of mouth communication within online communities: Conceptualizing the online social network. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 21(3), 2-20. doi:10.1002/dir.20082
- Brown, J. J., & Reingen, P. H. (1987). Social ties and word-of-mouth referral behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(3), 350-362.
- Brown, S. P., & Stayman, D. M. (1992). Antecedents and consequences of attitude toward the ad: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(1), 34-51.

- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2003). *Business research methods*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Buchanan, D. A., & Bryman, A. (2007). Contextualizing methods choice in organizational research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 10(3), 483-501.
- Bulmer, M. (2001). The ethics of social research. In N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching social life* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis: Elements of the sociology of corporate life*. London, United Kingdom: Heinemann Educational.
- Calás, M. B., & Smircich, L. (1999). Past postmodernism? Reflections and tentative directions. *The Academy of Management Review*, 24(4), 649-671.
- Campbell, M. C. (1995). When attention-getting advertising tactics elicit consumer inferences of manipulative intent: The importance of balancing benefits and investments. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 4(3), 225-254.
- Campbell, C., Ferraro, C., & Sands, S. (2014). Segmenting consumer reactions to social network marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(3/4), 432-452.
- Campbell, M., & Keller, K. (2003). Brand familiarity and advertising repetition effects. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(2), 292-304.
- Carvalho, A., & Fernandes, T. (2018). Understanding customer brand engagement with virtual social communities: A comprehensive model of drivers, outcomes and moderators. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 26(1-2), 23-37.
- Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Guinalíu, M. (2008). Promoting consumer's participation in virtual brand communities: A new paradigm in branding strategy. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 14(1), 19-36.
- Cassell, C., & Symon, G. (2012). *Qualitative organizational research: Core methods and current challenges*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Cecez-Kecmanovic, D., Galliers, R. D., Henfridsson, O., Newell, S., & Vidgen, R. (2014). The sociomateriality of information systems: Current status, future directions. *Management Information Systems*, 38(3), 809-830.
- Celsi, R. L., & Olson, J. C. (1988). The role of involvement in attention and comprehension processes. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 210-224.
- Chaiken, S. (1979). Communicator physical attractiveness and persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(8), 1387-1397.

- Chaiken, S. (1980). Heuristic versus systematic information processing and the use of source versus message cues in persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39(5), 752-766. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.39.5.752
- Chaiken, S. (1987). The heuristic model of persuasion, in M. P. Zanna, J. M. Olsen, & C. P. Herman (Eds.), *Social Influence: The Ontario Symposium*, Vol 5, (pp. 3-39). East Sussex, United Kingdom: Psychology Press.
- Chandy, R. (2014). Making your social media strategy work. *Business Strategy Review*, 25(1) 77.
- Chen, Y., Fay, S., & Wang, Q. (2011). The role of marketing in social media: How online consumer reviews evolve. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 25(2), 85-94.
- Chen, G. M. (2011). Tweet this: A uses and gratifications perspective on how active Twitter use gratifies a need to connect with others. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(2), 755-762.
- Chevalier, J. A., & Mayzlin, D. (2006). The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book reviews. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 43(3), 345-354.
- Chua, A. Y. K., & Banerjee, S. (2013). Customer knowledge management via social media: The case of Starbucks. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 17(2), 237-249.
- Chung, A. Q. H., Andreev, P., Benyoucef, M., Duane, A., & O'Reilly, P. (2017). Managing an organisation's social media presence: An empirical stages of growth model. *International Journal of Information Management*, 37(1), 1405-1417.
- Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). Social influence: Compliance and conformity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55(1), 591-621.
- Cova, B., & Cova, V. (2002). Tribal marketing: The tribalisation of society and its impact on the conduct of marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 36(5/6), 595-620.
- Cova, B., & Pace, S. (2006). Brand community of convenience products: New forms of customer empowerment - the case "my Nutella The Community". *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(9/10), 1087-1105.
- Cova, B., Pace, S., & Park, D. J. (2007). Global brand communities across borders: The Warhammer case. *International Marketing Review*, 24(3), 313-329.
- Crabtree, B. F., & Miller, W. L. (1999). *Doing qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.

- Croteau, D., & Hoynes, W. (2014). *Media/society: Industries, images, and audiences* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Curras-Perez, R., Ruiz-Mafe, C., & Sanz-Blas, S. (2014). Determinants of user behaviour and recommendation in social networks. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 114(9), 1477-1498.
- Day, G. S. (1971). Attitude change, media and word of mouth. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 11(6), 31-40.
- Davenport, T. H., Harris, J. G., & Kohli, A. K. (2001). How do they know their customers so well? *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 42(2), 63-73.
- David, B., & Turner, J. C. (1999). Studies in self-categorization and minority conversion: The in-group minority in intragroup and intergroup contexts. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 38(2), 115-134.
- Deighton, J., & Kornfeld, L. (2009). Interactivity's unanticipated consequences for marketers and marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 23(1), 4-10.
- De Keyser, A., & Lariviere, B. (2014) How technical and functional service quality drive consumer happiness: Moderating influences of channel usage. *Journal of Service Management*, 25(1), 30–48.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Dessart, L. (2017). Social media engagement: A model of antecedents and relational outcomes. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(5-6), 375-399.
- de Valck, K., van Bruggen, G. H., & Wierenga, B. (2009). Virtual communities: A marketing perspective. *Decision Support Systems*, 47(3), 185-203.
- Dholakia, R. R., & Sternthal, B. (1977). Highly credible sources: Persuasive facilitators or persuasive liabilities? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 3(4), 223-232.
- Dichter, E. (1966), How word-of-mouth advertising works, *Harvard Business Review*, 44 (6), 147–66.
- Doherty, N. F. (2014). The role of socio-technical principles in leveraging meaningful benefits from IT investments. *Applied Ergonomics*, 45(2), 181-187.
- Dolinski, D., Nawrat, M., & Rudak, I. (2001). Dialogue involvement as a social influence technique. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27(11), 1395-1406.

- Donaldson, L. (2005). Vita contemplativa: Following the scientific method: How I became a committed functionalist and positivist. *Organization Studies*, 26(7), 1071-1088.
- Dreze, X., & Zufryden, F. (1997). Testing web site design and promotional content. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 37(2), 77-91.
- Durkin, M., McGowan, P., & McKeown, N. (2013). Exploring social media adoption in small to medium-sized enterprises in Ireland. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 20(4), 716-734.
- Dutton, J. E., & Dukerich, J. M. (2006). The relational foundation of research: An underappreciated dimension of interesting research. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 49(1), 21-26.
- Dwyer, F. R., Schurr, P. H., & Oh, S. (1987). Developing buyer-seller relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 51(2), 11-27.
- Eagly, A. H., Wood, W., & Chaiken, S. (1978). Causal inferences about communicators and their effect on opinion change. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36(4), 424-435. doi:10.1037//0022-3514.36.4.424.
- Eason, K. (2014). Afterword: The past, present and future of sociotechnical systems theory. *Applied Ergonomics*, 45(2), 213-220.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Jackson, P. (2012). *Management research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25-32.
- Felix, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., & Hinsch, C. (2017). Elements of strategic social media marketing: A holistic framework. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 118-126.
- Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117-140. doi:10.1177/001872675400700202
- Fill, C. & Turnbull, S. (2016), *Marketing Communications*. (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Harlow, United Kingdom: Pearson.
- Finkel, E. J., Rusbult, C. E., Kumashiro, M., & Hannon, P. A. (2002). Dealing with betrayal in close relationships: Does commitment promote forgiveness? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(6), 956-974.
- Firat, A. F., & Venkatesh, A. (1995). Liberatory postmodernism and the reenchantment of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(3), 239-267.

- Fischer, E., & Reuber, A. R. (2011) Social interaction via new social media: (How) can interactions on Twitter affect effectual thinking and behavior? *Journal of Business Venturing*, 26(1), 1-18.
- Fournier, S., & Avery, J. (2011). The uninvited brand. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 193–207.
- Fournier, S., Dobscha, S., & Mick, D. G. (1998). Preventing the premature death of relationship marketing. *Harvard Business Review* 76(1) 42-51
- Frazier, G. L., & Summers, J. O. (1984). Interfirm influence strategies and their application within distribution channels. *Journal of Marketing*, 48(3), 43-55.
- Friestad, M., & Wright, P. (1994). The persuasion knowledge model: How people cope with persuasion attempts. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(1), 1-31.
- Friestad, M., & Wright, P. (1995). Persuasion knowledge: Lay people's and researchers' beliefs about the psychology of advertising. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1), 62-74.
- Funkhouser, G. R., & Parker, R. (1999). An action-based theory of persuasion in marketing. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 7(3), 27-40.
- Gephart, R. P. (2004). Qualitative research and the academy of management journal. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(4), 454-462.
- Gilbody, S. M., & Song, F. (2000). Publication bias and the integrity of psychiatry research. *Psychological Medicine*, 30(2), 253-258.
- Gioia, D. A., & Pitre, E. (1990). Multiparadigm perspectives on theory building. *The Academy of Management Review*, 15(4), 584-602.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Glazer, R. (1999). Winning in smart markets. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 40(4), 59-69.
- Godes, D., & Mayzlin, D. (2004). Using online conversations to study word-of-mouth communication. *Marketing Science*, 23(4), 545-560.
- Godes, D., & Mayzlin, D. (2009). Firm-created word-of-mouth communication: Evidence from a field test. *Marketing Science*, 28(4), 721-739.
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360-1380. doi:10.1086/225469
- Gray, D. E. (2014). *Doing research in the real world* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Grégoire, Y., Tripp, T. M., & Legoux, R. (2009). When customer love turns into lasting hate: The effects of relationship strength and time on customer revenge and avoidance. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(6), 18-32.



- Grewal, D., Gotlieb, J., & Marmorstein, H. (1994). The moderating effects of message framing and source credibility on the price-perceived risk relationship. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(1), 145-153.
- Grint, K. (2005). *Leadership: Limits and possibilities*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Groeger, L., & Buttle, F. (2014). Word-of-mouth marketing: Towards an improved understanding of multi-generational campaign reach. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(7/8), 1186-1208.
- Hahn, C. (2008). *Doing qualitative research using your computer: A practical guide*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Hajli, N., Shanmugam, M., Papagiannidis, S., Zahay, D., & Richard, M. (2017). Branding co-creation with members of online brand communities. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 136-144.
- Hammersley, M., Foster, P., & Gomm, R. (2000). *Case study method: Key issues, key texts*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Harmeling, C. M., Moffett, J. W., Arnold, M. J., & Carlson, B. D. (2017). Toward a theory of customer engagement marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(3), 312-335.
- Harris, M. J., & Rosenthal, R. (1985). Mediation of interpersonal expectancy effects: 31 meta-analyses. *Psychological Bulletin*, 97(3), 363-386.
- Harrison-Walker, L. J. (2001). The measurement of word-of-mouth communication and an investigation of service quality and customer commitment as potential antecedents. *Journal of Service Research*, 4(1), 60-75.
- Hassard, J., & Wolfram Cox, J. (2013). Can sociological paradigms still inform organizational analysis? A paradigm model for post-paradigm times. *Organization Studies*, 34(11), 1701-1728.
- Heller-Baird, C., & Parasnis, G. (2011). From social media to social customer relationship management. *Strategy & Leadership*, 39(5), 30-37
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(1), 38-52.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Malhotra, E. C., Frieger, C., Gensler, S., Lobschat, L., Rangaswamy, A., & Skiera, B. (2010). The impact of new media on customer relationships. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 311-330.

- Herr, P. M., Kardes, F. R., & Kim, J. (1991). Effects of word-of-mouth and product-attribute information on persuasion: An accessibility-diagnostics perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17(4), 454-462.
- Hoffman, D. L., & Novak, T. P. (1996). Marketing in hypermedia computer-mediated environments: Conceptual foundations. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(3), 50-68.
- Holt, D. B. (1995). How consumers consume: A typology of consumption practices. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1), 1-16. doi:10.1086/209431
- Homans, G. C. (1951). *The human group*. Oxen, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Huang, E. (2008). Use and gratification in e-consumers. *Internet Research*, 18(4), 405-426.
- Jansen, B. J., Zhang, M., Sobel, K., & Chowdury, A. (2009). Twitter power: Tweets as electronic word of mouth. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 60(11), 2169-20. doi:10.1002/asi.21149
- Johns, G. (2006). The essential impact of context on organizational behavior. *The Academy of Management Review*, 31(2), 386-408.
- Joireman, J., Grégoire, Y., & Tripp, T. M. (2016). Customer forgiveness following service failures. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 10, 76-82.
- Kameda, T., Ohtsubo, Y., & Takezawa, M. (1997). Centrality in sociocognitive networks and social influence: An illustration in a group decision-making context. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(2), 296-309.
- Kanter, D. L. (1989). Cynical marketers at work. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 28(6), 28-34.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2011). The early bird catches the news: Nine things you should know about micro-blogging. *Business Horizons*, 54(2), 105-113.
- Katz, E. (1987). Communications research since Lazarsfeld. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 51(4), 25-45.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509-523. doi:10.1086/268109.
- Katz, E., Haas, H., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). On the use of the mass media for important things. *American Sociological Review*, 38(2), 164-181.
- Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press.
- Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (2006). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. New Brunswick, NJ: Free Press.

- Kautz, K., & Jensen, T. B. (2013). Sociomateriality at the royal court of IS. A jester's monologue. *Information and Organization*, 23(1), 15-27.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1-22.
- Kelman, H. C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization: Three processes of attitude change. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2(1), 51-60
- Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241-251.
- Kilduff, M. (2006). Editor's comments: Publishing theory. *The Academy of Management Review*, 31(2), 252-255.
- Kim, J. W. (2014). Scan and click: The uses and gratifications of social recommendation systems. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 33(4), 184-191.
- King, N., & Brooks, J. M., 2017. *Template Analysis for Business and Management Students*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Kirmani, A., & Wright, P. (1989). Money talks: Perceived advertising expense and expected product quality. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), 344-353.
- Klein, L. (2014). What do we actually mean by 'sociotechnical'? On values, boundaries and the problems of language. *Applied Ergonomics*, 45(2), 137-142.
- Ko, H., Cho, C., & Roberts, M. S. (2005). Internet uses and gratifications: A structural equation model of interactive advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 34(2), 57-70.
- Kotler, P., & Zaltman, G. (1971). Social marketing: An approach to planned social change. *Journal of Marketing*, 35(3), 3-12.
- Kozinets, R. V. (1999). E-tribalized marketing? The strategic implications of virtual communities of consumption. *European Management Journal*, 17(3), 252-264.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61-72.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1996). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press.

- Kumar, V., Aksoy, L., Donkers, B., Venkatesan, R., Wiesel, T., & Tillmanns, S. (2010). Undervalued or overvalued customers: Capturing total customer engagement value. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 297-310.
- Lambert, A. J., Cronen, S., Chasteen, A. L., & Lickel, B. (1996). Private vs public expressions of racial prejudice. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 32(5), 437-459. doi:10.1006/jesp.1996.0020
- Lee, D.-H., Im, S., & Taylor, C. R. (2008). Voluntary self-disclosure of information on the Internet: A multimethod study of the motivations and consequences of disclosing information on blogs. *Psychology & Marketing*, 25(7), 692–710.
- Lee, N., & Kotler, P. (2016). *Social marketing: Changing behaviors for good* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Leonardi, P. M. (2012). Materiality, sociomateriality, and socio-technical systems: What do these terms mean? How are they different? Do we need them? In P. M. Leonardi, B. A. Nardi, & J. Kallinikos (Eds.), *Materiality and organizing: Social interaction in a technological world* (pp. 25-48). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Lichy, J. (2012). Towards an international culture: Gen Y students and SNS? *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 13(2), 101-116.
- Lin, H. (2007). The role of online and offline features in sustaining virtual communities: An empirical study. *Internet Research*, 17(2), 119-138.
- Lin, H., Bruning, P. F., & Swarna, H. (2018). Using online opinion leaders to promote the hedonic and utilitarian value of products and services. *Business Horizons*, 61(3), 431-442.
- Liu, J., Li, C., Ji, Y. G., North, M., & Yang, F. (2017). Like it or not: The fortune 500's Facebook strategies to generate users' electronic word-of-mouth. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 73, 605-613.
- Lorenzo-Romero, C., Constantinides, E., & Alarcón-del-Amo, M. (2013). Social media as marketing strategy: An explorative study on adoption and use by retailers. *Social Media in Strategic Management*, 11(11), 197-215.
- Maguire, M. (2014). Socio-technical systems and interaction design – 21st century relevance. *Applied Ergonomics*, 45(2), 162-170.
- Maloney, J. C. (1963). Is advertising believability really important? *Journal of Marketing*, 27(4), 1-8.
- Manning, P. C. (2015). *The human factor in social capital management: The owner-manager perspective*. Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Group

- Marsh, K. L., Hart-O'Rourke, D. M., & Julka, D. L. (1997). The persuasive effects of verbal and nonverbal information in a context of value relevance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23(6), 563-579.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Martin, L. L., & Achee, J. W., (1992). Beyond accessibility: The role of processing objectives in judgment. In L. L. Martin, & A. Tesser (Eds.), *The Construction of Social Judgments* (pp. 195-216). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Maslow, A. H. (1987). *Motivation and personality*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Mays, N., & Pope, C. (2000). Qualitative research in health care: Assessing quality in qualitative research. *British Medical Journal*, 320(7226), 50-52.
- Maylor, H., & Blackmon, K. L. (2005). *Researching business and management*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McAlexander, J. H., Schouten, J. W., & Koenig, H. F. (2002). Building brand community. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(1), 38-54. 10.1509/jmkg.66.1.38.18451
- McCullough, M. E., Rachal, K. C., Sandage, S. J., Worthington, E. L., Brown, S. W., & Hight, T. L. (1998). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships: II. Theoretical elaboration and measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(6), 1586-1603.
- McDonald, S. C. (1997). The once and future web: Scenarios for advertisers. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 37(2), 21-28.
- McLuhan, M., Fiore, Q., & Agel, J. (2001). *The medium is the message: An inventory of effects*. Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press.
- McLuhan, M., & Gordon, W. T. (2003). *Understanding media: The extensions of man* (Critical ed.). Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press.
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2), 340-363.
- Meyers-Levy, J., & Malaviya, P. (1999). Consumers' processing of persuasive advertisements: An integrative framework of persuasion theories. *Journal of Marketing*, 63, 45-60.
- Milas, G., & Mlačić, B. (2007). Brand personality and human personality: Findings from ratings of familiar Croatian brands. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(6), 620-626.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

- Mingers, J., & Willcocks, L. (2014). An integrative semiotic framework for information systems: The social, personal and material worlds. *Information and Organization*, 24(1), 48-70.
- Mohr, J., & Nevin, J. R. (1990). Communication strategies in marketing channels: A theoretical perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(4), 36-51.
- Moran, G., & Muzellec, L. (2017). eWOM credibility on social networking sites: A framework. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 23(2), 149-161.
- Morgan, G., & Smircich, L. (1980). The Case for Qualitative Research. *The Academy of Management Review*, 5(4), 491-500.
- Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), 20-38.
- Moskowitz, G. B. (1996). The mediational effects of attributions and information processing in minority social influence. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 35(1), 47-66.
- Mousavi, S., Roper, S., & Keeling, K. A. (2017). Interpreting social identity in online brand communities: Considering posters and lurkers. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34(4), 376-393.
- Müller-Merbach, H. (2007). A system of five object types of a posteriori knowledge. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 5(2), 151-153.
- Muniz, A. M., & O'Guinn, T. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), 412-432. doi:10.1086/319618
- Munzel, A., & Kunz, W. H. (2014). Creators, multipliers, and lurkers: Who contributes and who benefits at online review sites, *Journal of Service Management*, 25(1), 49-74.
- Murray, H. A. (2008). *Explorations in personality* (70th anniversary ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Murray, K. B. (1991). A test of services marketing theory: Consumer information acquisition activities. *Journal of Marketing*, 55(1), 10-25.
- Neslin, S. A., Grewal, D., Leghorn, R., Shankar, V., Teerling, M. L., Thomas, J. S., & Verhoef, P. C. (2006). Challenges and opportunities in multichannel customer management. *Journal of Service Research*, 9(2), 95-112.
- Newton, N. (2010). The use of semi-structured interviews in qualitative research: Strengths and weaknesses. *Exploring Qualitative Methods*, 1(1):1-11.
- Oliveira, M. J. D., & Huertas, M. K. Z. (2015). Does life satisfaction influence the intention (we-intention) to use Facebook? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 50(9), 205-210.

- Oldenburg, R. (1999). *The great good place: Cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community*. New York, NY: Marlow.
- Olshavsky, R. W., & Granbois, D. H. (1979). Consumer decision making—fact or fiction? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 6(2), 93-100. doi:10.1086/208753
- Pallak, M. S., Mueller, M., Dollar, K., & Pallak, J. (1972). Effect of commitment on responsiveness to an extreme consonant communication. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 23(3), 429-436. doi:10.1037/h0033363
- Pappas, I. O., Kourouthanassis, P. E., Giannakos, M. N., & Chrissikopoulos, V. (2017). Sense and sensibility in personalized e-commerce: How emotions rebalance the purchase intentions of persuaded customers. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34(10), 972-986.
- Parsons, E., Maclaran, P., & Chatzidakis, A. (2015). *Contemporary issues in marketing and consumer behaviour* (2nd ed.). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Patterson, A. (2012). Social-networkers of the world, unite and take over: A meta-introspective perspective on the Facebook brand. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(4), 527-534.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE
- Peltier, J. W., Schibrowsky, J. A., & Schultz, D. E. (2002). Leveraging customer information to develop sequential communication strategies: A case study of charitable-giving behavior. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 42(4), 23-41.
- Peltier, J. W., Schibrowsky, J. A., & Schultz, D. E. (2003). Interactive integrated marketing communication: Combining the power of IMC, the new media and database marketing. *International Journal of Advertising*, 22(1), 93-115.
- Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1979). Issue involvement can increase or decrease persuasion by enhancing message-relevant cognitive responses. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(10), 1915-1926.
- Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 19, pp. 123-205). New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T., & Goldman, R. (1981). Personal involvement as a determinant of argument-based persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 41(5), 847-855. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.41.5.847
- Phelps, J. E., Lewis, R., Mobilio, L., Perry, D., & Raman, N. (2004). Viral marketing or electronic word-of-mouth advertising: Examining consumer responses

- and motivations to pass along email. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 44(4), 333-348.
- Pool, G. J., Wood, W., & Leck, K. (1998). The self-esteem motive in social influence: Agreement with valued majorities and disagreement with derogated minorities. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(4), 967-975.
- Prahalad, C. K., & Ramaswamy, V. (2004). Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5-14.
- Pratt, M. G. (2009). From the Editors: For the lack of a boilerplate: Tips on writing up (and reviewing) qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5), 856-862.
- Preston, C. (2000). The problem with micro-marketing. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 40(4), 55-58.
- Prislin, R., & Pool, G. J. (1996). Behavior, consequences, and the self: Is all well that ends well? *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22(9), 933-948.
- Ray, M. L. (1973). A decision sequence analysis of developments in marketing communication. *Journal of Marketing*, 37(1), 29-38. doi:10.2307/1250772
- Richins, M. L. (1984). Word of mouth communications as negative information. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 11, 697-702.
- Riley, P. (1983). A structurationist account of political culture. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28(3), 414-437.
- Ringberg, T., Odekerken-Schröder, G., & Christensen, G. L. (2007). A cultural models approach to service recovery. *Journal of Marketing*, 71(3), 194-214.
- Roehm, M., & Brady, M. (2007). Consumer responses to performance failures by high-equity brands. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(4), 537-545.
- Rohm, A., Kaltcheva, V. D., & Milne, G. R. (2013). A mixed-method approach to examining brand-consumer interactions driven by social media. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 7(4), 295-311.
- Romaniuk, J. (2011). Are you blinded by the heavy (buyer): Or are you seeing the light? *Journal of Advertising Research*, 51(4), 561-563
- Rule, B. G., Bisanz, G. L., & Kohn, M. (1985). Anatomy of a persuasion schema: Targets, goals, and strategies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48(5), 1127-1140. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.48.5.1127.
- Sandelowski, M. J. (2008). Justifying qualitative research. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 31(3), 193-195. 10.1002/nur.20272.
- Sashi, C. M. (2012). Customer engagement, buyer-seller relationships, and social media. *Management Decision*, 50(2), 253-272.



- Sassenberg, K., & Postmes, T. (2002). Cognitive and strategic processes in small groups: Effects of anonymity of the self and anonymity of the group on social influence. *The British Journal of Social Psychology*, 41(3), 463-480.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2012). *Research Methods for Business Students*. (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) Harlow, United Kingdom: Pearson Education
- Schau, H. J., Muñiz, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 30-51.
- Scheer, L. K., & Stern, L. W. (1992). The effect of influence type and performance outcomes on attitude toward the influencer. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 29(1), 128-142.
- Schivinski, B., Christodoulides, G., & Dabrowski, D. (2016). Measuring consumers' engagement with brand-related social-media content: Development and validation of a scale that identifies levels of social-media engagement with brands. *Journal of Advertising Research*. 56(1), 64-80.
- Schofield, J. W. (2006). Increasing the generalizability of qualitative research. In R. Gomm, M. Hammersley & P. Foster (Eds.), *Case study method*. (pp. 69-98). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Schouten, J. W., & McAlexander, J. H. (1995). Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1), 43-61.
- Schuler, D. A., & Cording, M. (2006). A corporate social performance-corporate financial performance behavioral model for consumers. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(3), 540-558
- Schultz, D. E., & Bailey, S. (2000). Customer/brand loyalty in an interactive marketplace. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 40(3), 41-52.
- Schultz, D. E., & Peltier, J. (2013). Social media's slippery slope: Challenges, opportunities and future research directions. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 7(2), 86-99. doi:10.1108/JRIM-12-2012-0054
- Senecal, S., & Nantel, J. (2004). The influence of online product recommendations on consumers' online choices. *Journal of Retailing*, 80(2), 159-169.
- Shin, J., Chae, H., & Ko, E. (2018). The power of e-WOM using the hashtag: Focusing on SNS advertising of SPA brands. *International Journal of Advertising*, 37(1), 71-85.
- Siggelkow, N. (2007). Persuasion with case studies. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 20-24.
- Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.

- Silverman, D. (2014). *Interpreting qualitative data* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Simmons, G. (2008). Marketing to postmodern consumers: Introducing the internet chameleon. *European Journal of Marketing*, 42(3/4), 299-310.
- Simons, H. W., Berkowitz, N. N., & Moyer, R. J. (1970). Similarity, credibility, and attitude change: A review and a theory. *Psychological Bulletin*, 73(1), 1-16.
- Smock, A. D., Ellison, N. B., Lampe, C., & Wohn, D. Y. (2011). Facebook as a toolkit: A uses and gratification approach to unbundling feature use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(6), 2322-2329.
- Stafford, T. F., Stafford, M. R., & Schkade, L. L. (2004). Determining uses and gratifications for the internet. *Decision Sciences*, 35(2), 259-288.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Starr, M. K., & Rubinson, J. R. (1978). A loyalty group segmentation model for brand purchasing simulation. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 15(3), 378-383.
- Stephen, A. T. (2016). The role of digital and social media marketing in consumer behavior. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 10, 17-21.
- Stokes, P. (2011a). *Critical concepts in management and organization studies: Key terms and concepts*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stokes, P. (2011b). *Key concepts in business and management research methods*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stokes, P., & Wall, T. (2014). *Research methods*. London, United Kingdom: Palgrave.
- Stone, J., Wiegand, A. W., Cooper, J., & Aronson, E. (1997). When exemplification fails: Hypocrisy and the motive for self-integrity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(1), 54-65. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.72.1.54
- Suddaby, R. (2006). From the editors: What grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), 633-642.
- Sun, T., Youn, S., Wu, G., & Kuntaraporn, M. (2006). Online word-of-mouth (or mouse): An exploration of its antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(4), 1104-1127
- Swanson, D. L. (1979). Political communication research and the uses and gratifications model: A critique. *Communication Research*, 6(1), 37-53.
- Thomas, G. P. (1992). The influence of processing conversational information on inference, argument elaboration, and memory. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(1), 83-92. 10.1086/209288

- Thompson, S. A., & Sinha, R. K. (2008). Brand communities and new product adoption: The influence and limits of oppositional loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 72(6), 65–80.
- Travers, M. (2001). *Qualitative research through case studies*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Troldahl, V. C. (1966). A field test of a modified "two-step flow of communication" model. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 30(4), 609-623. 10.1086/267459
- Tsimonis, G., & Dimitriadis, S. (2014). Brand strategies in social media. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 32(3), 328–344
- Valos, M. J., Maplestone, V. L., Polonsky, M. J., & Ewing, M. (2017). Integrating social media within an integrated marketing communication decision-making framework. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(17-18), 1522-1558.
- Van Doorn, J., Lemon, K. N., Mittal, V., Nass, S., Pick, D., Pirner, P., & Verhoef, P. C. (2010). Customer engagement behavior: Theoretical foundations and research directions. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 253-266.
- v. Wangenheim, F., & Bayón, T. (2007). The chain from customer satisfaction via word-of-mouth referrals to new customer acquisition. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 35(2), 233-249
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 1-17. doi:10.1509/jmkg.68.1.1.24036
- Vendemia, M. A. (2017). When do consumers buy the company? Perceptions of interactivity in company-consumer interactions on social networking sites. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 71, 99-109.
- Voorveld, H. A. M., van Noort, G., Muntinga, D. G., & Bronner, F. (2018). Engagement with social media and social media advertising: The differentiating role of platform type. *Journal of Advertising*, 47(1), 38-54.
- Wachtler, J., & Counselman, E. (1981). When increasing liking for a communicator decreases opinion change: An attribution analysis of attractiveness. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 17(4), 386-395.
- Wallace, E., Buil, I., & de Chernatony, L. (2014). Consumer engagement with self-expressive brands: Brand love and WoM outcomes. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 23(1), 33-42.
- Wang, T., Yeh, R. K., Chen, C., & Tsydypov, Z. (2016). What drives electronic word-of-mouth on social networking sites? Perspectives of social capital and self-determination. *Telematics and Informatics*, 33(4), 1034-1047.

- Ward, J., & Ostrom, A. (2006). Complaining to the masses: The role of protest framing in Customer-Created complaint web sites. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 33(2), 220-230. doi:10.1086/506303
- Wastell, D., & White, S. (2014). Making sense of complex electronic records: Socio-technical design in social care. *Applied Ergonomics*, 45(2), 143-149.
- Watson, T. J. (2011). Ethnography, reality, and truth: The vital need for studies of "how things work" in organizations and management. *Journal of Management Studies*, 48(1), 202-217.
- Weijo, H., Hietanen, J., & Mattila, P. (2014). New insights into online consumption communities and netnography. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(10), 2072-2078.
- Wellman, B. (1979). The community question: The intimate networks of East Yorkers. *American Journal of Sociology*, 84(5), 1201-1231. 10.1086/226906
- Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: A uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research*, 16(4), 362-369.
- Wien, A. H., & Olsen, S. O. (2014). Understanding the relationship between individualism and word of mouth: A self-enhancement explanation. *Psychology & Marketing*, 31(6), 416-425.
- Wiener, J. L., LaForge, R. W., & Goolsby, J. R. (1990). Personal communication in marketing: An examination of self-interest contingency relationships. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27(2), 227-231.
- Willmott, H. (1993). Breaking the paradigm mentality. *Organization Studies*, 14(5), 681-719.
- Wilson, J. (2010). *Essentials of Business Research: A guide to doing your research project*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Wilton, P. C., & Myers, J. G. (1986). Task, expectancy, and information assessment effects in information utilization processes. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12(4), 469-486.
- Wirtz, J., den Ambtman, A., Bloemer, J., Horváth, C., Ramaseshan, B., van, d. K., . . . Kandampully, J. (2013). Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(3), 223-244.
- Wolfradt, U., & Doll, J. (2001). Motives of adolescents to use the internet as a function of personality traits, personal and social factors. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 24(1), 13-27.
- Wood, W. (2000). Attitude change: Persuasion and social influence. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51(1), 539-570.

- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Yoon, D., Choi, S. M., & Sohn, D. (2008). Building customer relationships in an electronic age: The role of interactivity of e-commerce web sites. *Psychology & Marketing*, 25(7), 602–618.
- Zaglia, M. E. (2013). Brand communities embedded in social networks. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(2), 216-223. 10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.07.015
- Zhang, C. B., & Lin, Y. H. (2015). Exploring interactive communication using social media. *The Service Industries Journal*, 35(11-12), 670-693.
- Zhou, Z., Zhang, Q., Su, C., & Zhou, N. (2012). How do brand communities generate brand relationships? Intermediate mechanisms. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(7), 890-895. 10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.06.034
- Zillmann, D. (1972). Rhetorical elicitation of agreement in persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 21(2), 159-165. 10.1037/h0032316

Example of Twitter Posts extracted from Every Posting on Twitter by UGT Need Classification Code over a 12-month period beginning 1st March 2016

Date	Promotion	Retweet of other user's tweet	UGT Need	Retweets	Likes	Posting Description
01-Feb-17			s	3	4	Photo of funny messages on chalk board "Mountains aren't funny, they are Hill areas" / Spotted this pls RT for all to enjoy #wednesdaywisdom
01-Feb-17	pp		i	2	2	Photo & link to ** website blog page - Essential Ski Safety Equipment For Kids / Check out our 'Essential Ski Safety Equipment For Kids!' Keep your little ones safe and having fun on the mountain
01-Feb-17		RT	i	6	10	Retweet of other user's tweet @jasonrawles - The 5 C's of Adventure Planning BLOG...pls RT @OrdnanceSurvey @** @Team_BMC @metoffice @FORIHQ
02-Feb-17			e	2	1	Image link to ** skiing video / Head Supershape i.Magnum 2016/2017 slopeside review - "Very agile but easy to turn for a high end ski. KERs gives a kick out of the turn."
03-Feb-17			i	2	3	Image & link to bbc.co.uk - Weekend camping resets body clock / New research says 'weekend camping resets body clock' get out there and enjoy the weekend everyone!
03-Feb-17			e	0	0	Image & link to main ** FB page - shared Eric M-Space's post - skiing video / Skiing into the weekend like...@ChrisBenchetler. Check out his super smooth drone vid here:
03-Feb-17			s	2	4	Commented on other users tweet @jasonrawles / Stunning photos of North Wales from fellow adventurer @jasonrawles! #makethedayscount #getoutdoors
04-Feb-17	pp		i	1	0	Image & link to ** website blog page - 5 Ways To Conquer Cold Hands / '5 ways to conquer cold hands' - Find out the most effective way to keep the chill off and those hands toasty below
04-Feb-17	bp		i	0	1	Image no link / Throwing out your mucky old running shoes? Wait! Snap a pic and share using #bareyoursoul & #** for a chance to a win a new pair! (image shows inov8 brand)
05-Feb-17	ep		i	0	0	Image & link to ** website event page - Aviemore Adventure Festival 2017 / The Aviemore Adventure Festival is BACK, Bigger & Better on 9-12 MARCH 2017! All info below: @AAAdventureFest
05-Feb-17			e	1	2	Commented on other users tweet @TheSkiAcademy - Warren Smith Ski Academy - The Jump 4 /Watching Channel 4's @TheJumpC4 tonight? Check out @TheSkiAcademy behind the scenes training from the #Tirol
06-Feb-17			s	1	5	Commented on other users tweet @jasonrawles / Adventurer @jasonrawles has been making the most of recent weather! Did you #GetOutside this weekend? Let us know...
06-Feb-17			e	1	0	Image & link to main ** FB page - shared WHAT WE SEEE's video. / 'Tourists have close call with massive avalanche' How long would you stick around for? Watch the video here:
07-Feb-17	ep		i	2	1	Image & link to ** website event page - Dave Macleod Ice Climbing Masterclass & Talk / The first of our 'Ice Age' talks with Dave MacLeod kicks off tonight in our Covent Garden store
07-Feb-17			e	0	1	Image & link to main ** FB page - shared Teton Gravity Research's video. / We just can't seem to stop watching this...#sosatisfying #crackingeggs
07-Feb-17		RT	s	39	64	Retweet of other user's tweet @jasonrawles - Image - What walkers say and what they mean... - True words #GetOutside @OrdnanceSurvey @OSleisure
08-Feb-17			e	1	3	Image & link to main ** FB page - shared Huffington Post UK's video. When ice climbing goes wrong... / When ice climbing goes wrong... 'Here's the reason you don't climb giant icicles.' Check out the video below:

APPENDIX 1

Example of Facebook Posts extracted from Every Posting on Facebook by UGT Need Classification Code over a 12-month period beginning 1st March 2016

Date	Promotion	UGT Need	Likes	Comments	Shares	Video Views	Posting Description
22-Jan-17		s	18	0	0		Image no link / Freezing cold with blue skies and good snow conditions - report and pic from Mark in St Anton Visit Tirol, Austria right now. #livebreatheski
22-Jan-17		e	47	33	0	6.8m	shared The LAD Bible's video. -clip of snowboarder w leg caught up in snowboard hanging from ski lift / When it just isn't your day...
23-Jan-17	bp	i	5	9	0		Image & link to ** website competition page - Share Your Goggle Selfie And Win A Pair Of Oakley Flight Decks / ...upload or share your best goggle selfie below with #goggleselfie and #**
23-Jan-17		s	43	0	0		shared Dave Ryding - Skier's post. 2nd Kitzbuehel Slalom.... beyond a dream! / Awesome stuff - congratulations Dave Ryding!
24-Jan-17		i	4	0	0		Image & link to ** website blog page - Essential Advice From Our Backcountry Experts / ...We speak to some of our most experienced backcountry skiers and asked them to share their wisdom and how they get the most out of the backcountry.
24-Jan-17		s	11	0	0		feeling happy at Lech Zürs am Arlberg - Snowy mountain image / A good spot for lunch and perfect conditions in the Alps this week.
24-Jan-17		s	1	0	0		shared James Machon's photo / ** freeski athlete James Machon making the most the pow stateside
25-Jan-17		i	8	5	1		Image & link to ** website competition page - Win A Winter Skills Weekend With Glenmore Lodge / We've teamed up with our friends at Glenmore Lodge to offer you chance to win a Winter Skills Weekend!...
25-Jan-17	pp	i	3	4	0		Image & link to ** website blog page - 5 of our favourite ski boots 2017 / When it comes to ski boots we've got a huge choice!..
26-Jan-17	ep	i	0	0	0		Photo & link to ** website event page - Dave Macleod Ice Climbing Masterclass & Talk / ...London and Manchester stores this February
26-Jan-17		s	38	0	0		shared Millie Knight's post./ Huge congrats to British Parasnowsport athlete Millie Knight and her guide Brett Wild on a UK first, winning gold in the British Para-Alpine Skiing World Championship
26-Jan-17	bp	i	1	0	0		Image & link to ** website competition page - Bare Your Sole And Win A Pair Of Trail Running Shoes / ...Show us the state of your current shoes (the muddier, the better!), upload it below or share it via Twitter, Instagram or Facebook... for a chance to win a new pair! (image shows inov8 brand)
27-Jan-17		s	9	0	0		shared GB Park and Pipe's photo. / Big congrats to GB Park and Pipe and The Snowboard Asylum's Jamie Nicholls...second place...at the FIS Snowboard World Cup
27-Jan-17		e	71	14	0	1.4m	shared Protest Sportswear's video. (numerous video clip of snowboarding on treadmill mishap) / How could this possibly go wrong...?
28-Jan-17	pp	i	6	0	0		Photo & link to ** website blog page - 10 Pieces Of Essential Ice Climbing Gear / Getting into ice climbing can be a pretty big investment...To get you started we've compiled some essentials, but this list is by no means exhaustive!
28-Jan-17	ep	i	2	0	0		Photo & link to ** website event page - Icefall Talks With Alex Staniforth. / ..We've just got a handful of tickets left..
28-Jan-17		i	2	0	0		Image & link to ** website competition page - Win An Ice Climbing Masterclass With Dave Macleod./ Simply enter below for a chance to win...
29-Jan-17		i	8	0	0		shared X Games's post - Photo & link to xgames.espn.com / The Brits are blazing a trail of successes this month and here's another outstanding result from James 'Woodsy' Woods - Gold in the X Games last night
29-Jan-17		e	37	3	0	781k	shared Mammut Deutschland's video. - short clip of skier doing 'tricks' with skis / Who fancies having a crack at this?
30-Jan-17		i	2	0	0		Image & link to ** website competition page -Win A Week's Family Ski Holiday. / We've teamed up with Visit Tirol and ..ski holiday specialist Esprit Ski for the ultimate ski holiday competition.

## APPENDIX 3

### Planned Research Questions

1. What is your personal experience of social media?
2. In your role, as...what is your involvement in social media activity?
3. Is social media an important customer communication channel? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ would you define the main purpose of Twitter activity originated by your organisation as; social engagement, information messages or entertainment value?</li><li>○ would you define the main purpose of Facebook activity originated by your organisation as; social engagement, information messages or entertainment value?</li><li>○ how would you categorise postings about products, brands or events?</li></ul>
4. How has social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook, influenced the organisation's relationship with its target consumer audience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ what do you think motivates users to interact with you on these channels?</li><li>○ is social media an integrated activity across all facets of the business or just a marketing and/or advertising activity?</li><li>○ is social media activity an integral component of marketing strategy?</li><li>○ is the return on investment (ROI) in social media measured in any way?</li></ul>
5. Has social media influenced internal communication and relationships?



## APPENDIX 4

Participant	Extracts from responses to interview question 1: what is your <i>personal</i> experience of social media?
1	"I subscribe to the complete social media so I can see what is going on with it"
2	"Social media just meant Facebook to me... Twitter kind of passed me by because I was using Blackberry phones for years. I have got a more modern phone and I now find that my relationship with social media is very visual... so I'm looking at Pinterest and Instagram..."
3	"I use most social networking platforms... it's just a kind of modern tool for living..."
4	"I've got Facebook, Twitter, Instagram accounts. I don't really use Twitter very much, I use Facebook a little bit, Instagram is something I've started to use more recently"
5	"I'm a big football fan and sports fan so I tweet my own thoughts and experiences on Twitter. I am no longer on Facebook. Instagram's another good one for me"
6	"I use it daily... Instagram, SnapChat and... plenty of time on Facebook, Twitter less so"
7	"I use Facebook. I don't really get involved with Twitter that much... I don't tweet. Instagram is a new thing to me"
8	"I'm a reluctant user of Facebook and Twitter... both annoy me, it's a case of how intrusive they are more than anything"
9	"I use Facebook, Instagram... I've had minimal use of Twitter, then got fed up with it, so got rid of it... so mostly Facebook and Instagram"
10	"I use Facebook about a couple of times a day. It's almost a decision to be there so I can interact with people who I don't see for a long time. Twitter, Instagram... I generally don't do that"
11	"I have a Facebook 'presence' but I don't have pictures or anything like that on it. I'm interested in what's going on but I don't want to participate..."
12	"I have a Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts... more active on my Instagram account. Twitter mainly from a stalking kind of view..."
13	"I probably started using Facebook initially 9 years ago... Twitter, again, maybe I've been on Twitter for 5/6 years... It's one that I don't use so much anymore. Instagram is probably one I use more than others..."
14	"I have a Twitter and Facebook account... and I'm reasonably active on those channels... Twitter... to communicate with companies..."
15	"The one I use mostly is Instagram. I also have a Facebook account... a Twitter account... I haven't used for probably a couple of years. Facebook, I find, these days just brings a lot of negativity"
16	"I think I'm quite an active user, especially on Instagram would be my main one. I've got Facebook, Twitter, I never really got too much involved with Twitter. Pinterest, I quite like as well"

## APPENDIX 5

Participant	Extracts from responses to interview question 2: what is your work experience of social media?
1	"I'm not particularly involved... purely a sounding board, from let's say, one of the retail sides of the team..."
2	"I'm pushing others to do more... making sure the team that do put out those social media messages are aware of what's best practice"
3	"I essentially manage all the company's [sub-community 's'] social media platforms..."
4	"I have an overview of it and understand how it fits into the business, so that's the kind of level really, it's not something that I spend a lot of time on"
5	"I check certain things, obviously, but it's all to do with how we run the actual site... I'm a bit more technical..."
6	"I'm essentially responsible for planning a social media strategy and making sure that fits within the overall marketing strategy..."
7	"Social media was a toughie to take on-board originally, because for me everything was print, print, print...not so much better than print but they coexist very comfortably"
8	"Supplier support... the needles gone very much over onto online rather than anything in print and they want to be able to measure everything that they do"
9	"I keep an eye on it, what we're doing and what our competitors are doing just... awareness of what's actually out there and what's being seen by consumers"
10	"... a great tool to use in building a whole community around the hub of [store]. You do have to schedule in time to get good content..."
11	"I don't do much on social media... probably a failing on my part but that's the way I've grown up. I'm on the outside looking in rather than on the inside looking out"
12	"I've only ever been a store manager while social media's been at the peak that it is today. It's not something I think about every day, it's just there"
13	It's difficult, I think with [case organisation]. I'll encourage [staff] to take photos and get them posted on the [company's primary] Facebook page, but really that is kind of where my involvement with social media ends"
14	"I'm involved in defining overall strategy... I kind of sat on my hands for a while as to how we'd approach it and whether we had the resources, and watched how other businesses were doing it, and then we sort of jumped in"
15	"I don't really have much involvement. I'll often read posts that [the case organisation] has posted. The only way it did impact, and this is terrible, is when I was interviewing new staff, I would always do a Facebook stalk"
16	"It's not too much actually within the company. Every once in a while, if I've seen something, I'll have a chat with... [name] informally, just to say, "I've seen this, this is cool, can we do something similar?"