Syracuse University

SURFACE

Dissertations - ALL

SURFACE

August 2016

Building Affective Trust among Client-Organization Relationships on Social Media Accounts

Branden D. Birmingham
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/etd

Part of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to determine how consumers relay trust to their favorite brands on social media sites, define affective trust, and how consumers interact with their favorite brands on social media. In-depth interviews were conducted with 22 individuals living across the United States who were in different career fields and stages of life. The findings from this study revealed that not too many of the participants followed Starbucks on mainstream social media sites, but followed them on their propriety application. This application was talked about in multiple interviews where participants talked about the features of the application and how they trust that the content that Starbucks provides will be trustworthy and honored in each one of its cafes. The participants also recognized what trust is but each provided a different definition, which could be combined to allow for the creation of a universal understanding. Each participant was also asked to describe good and bad experiences that they have had with Starbucks or other brands to help them reflect on what can be done better and how trust was developed or broken. Based off of these findings, the researcher further discussed how trust and relationships are important to consumers and brands while making recommendations for the creation of a universal definition for affective trust and recommendations on how to manage a brand's image and credibility among consumers based off of their interactions in stores or online.

Building Affective Trust among

Client-Organization Relationships on Social Media Accounts

by

Branden D. Birmingham

B.S., Syracuse University, 2014
M.S., Syracuse University, 2015

Thesis
Submitted in fulfillment to the requirement for the degree of Master of Science in Public
Relations

Syracuse University
August, 2016

Acknowledgements

When I first started my academic career at Syracuse University five years ago I had always dreamed of obtaining a Master of Science in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. I would not be here today if it were not for all of the people I met along the way and the experiences that Syracuse has given me. Suos Cultores Scientia Coronat, knowledge crowns those who seek her, was one of the most important sayings in my academic career.

I would first like to thank Professor Hua Jiang, who was one of my most influential professors at Newhouse, who has served as a mentor and my thesis advisor while I attended the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to follow my passion.

I would also like to thank Professor Dennis Kinsey who helped me improve my research skills just in time for this thesis. Without his class, Public Relations Research I would not have known how to properly conduct a research study.

I would also like to thank Professor Bill Jasso who introduce me to what public relations is, and provided me with what I can do with a PR degree.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for their support and encouragement through my academic career at Syracuse and beyond. Your support that you have given to me thus far has inspired me to always want to learn and better myself.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Cultivating affective trust on social media has become a popular topic of discussion among most organizations today. As anything that is posted online is able to be seen forever it is crucial that whatever is posted is appropriate and solves customers' concerns. In an article by Jayson DeMers, CEO of AudienceBloom, eight key ways to build trust are featured. In terms of this study the most important item is to actively respond and communicate to your audiences when any questions and concerns are posed (DeMers, 2015). Responsiveness allows for individuals to be the face behind the logo, thus allowing for adequate employee and client communications.

Social Media in Public Relations

Social media has been prevalent in today's public relations practices. As communication is constantly evolving in society today, professionals in public relations, journalism, and other communication fields like to be contacted about events or other correspondence through social media platforms as communications times are quicker. The Institute for Public Relations stated that "approximately one in four journalists prefer public relations professionals used social media platforms for communications" (Supa, 2014, p.6). As society the process in which consumers purchase goods is constantly changing, brands should primarily use social media platforms to help generate an audience base, while providing customer service to current followers. Organizations each have a different definition and meaning of what trust is to them. As trust is one of the key aspects of a brand's online image, an organization must use social media platforms to interact with consumers effectively. The creation of a social media plan can help to build a large online presence, and can be worth millions of dollars in revenue if executed properly as most advertising revenue comes from social media.

Brands such as Netflix, Fox News, and Samsung have each developed their social media accounts into the top brands worth watching. Fox News was the most powerful brand in terms of trust and content creation as it was reported that they created over 40% more content than in previous quarters (Spreadfast, 2015). Samsung was able to develop a following with audiences through the promptness of responses to customers. According to a 2015 Study by Spreadfast, Samsung averaged approximately 80% or higher response times (Spreadfast, 2015). Today most large organizations have recognized the importance that trust plays with their image on social network sites. According to the 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer, an organization who was trusted online had 41% of social media users share positive opinions on social media platforms. Out of the 41% of users, most of them used search engines as their most trusted source (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2016). In 2016 trust among corporations rose among the general public by approximately 5% (53) over 2015 (48) (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2016)..   Research studies from Johnson and Grayson, suggests that the concept of affective trust is developed from client experiences or interactions with different organizations that consumers frequent on a daily basis (Johnson and Grayson, 2005, p.501-502). According to Washington (2013), affective trust is defined by a sense of feeling or opinions that are based on interactions between multiple parties. With affective trust individuals built their opinions of organizations mostly based upon likeness and positive feelings (Washington, 2013, p.11-12). This definition proves what trust is, but it does not describe the building of affective trust in a negative aspect. Trust can easily be crafted or broken due to poor communication plans. The development of a communication plan that allows for clients to interact with organizations effectively will enhance a brand's image and build trust, as interaction should be able to be handled in both an on and offline setting. I selected the definition presented by Washington for this study as it provided key elements of emotion and

social listening. The definition connects to my research study as participants are asked a series of interview questions based off of emotions and interactions that they have encountered with their favorite brands. I wanted to examine "affective trust" in my study as social media and interactions are built around emotion and experience. As I am able to examine "affective trust" from a professional and consumer base I can further develop an understanding and better definition into what "affective trust" is and how reputation is affected by it.

Experiential Learning

As someone who has experience in the information technology and public relations fields, I understand building trust and relationships on a social media platform is crucial to the success of any organization. Previously, I managed an internal IntraConnect site for one of the largest financial institutions in the United States. Employee satisfaction and engagement was measured as a key performance indicator to determine the future success of the online platform. While managing the internal site I had to encourage the collaboration between employees and post relevant, correct information on the site for employees to use. I had to work to build the trust of employees that I was providing relevant and correct information related to a variety of weekly topics. Each month I was required to interpret analytics related to usage, and how long employees were interacting with each other to help determine the overall usefulness of IntraConnect. Where I am a constant social media user I always ponder how organizations use social networks to build affective trust with employees and their clients.

The purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze if consumers trust brands such as Starbucks.com on social media sites to obtain accurate information. Affective trust is defined as one's emotional bonds and sincere concern for the well-being of others and might be seen as more related to the

intentionality process (Hung, 2004). As stated previously affective trust can be defined as developing feeling or opinions that are based on interactions with multiple parties, based off opinions of organizations mostly based upon likeness and positive feelings (Washington, 2013). Based on the literature review below, affective trust is defined as consumer built relationships with organizations based off of positive or negative day-to-day interactions, and how organizations respond to consumer commentary. Building trust with your followers is extremely important due to credibility in the eyes of a consumer.

The objective of this thesis is to analyze how consumers and corporations relay trust to each other on social media sites. This research aims to determine how trust can positively or negatively have an effect on a brand. The following research questions will be addressed:

(1) How do customers define affective trust toward a brand that they are engaged with via social media?

(2) How do customers interact with their favorite brands via social media?

(3) What are the best strategies that organizations need to use to cultivate affective trust with their customers?

(4) What are the outcomes that organizations can accomplish through their trust-building social media initiatives/efforts?

This thesis will help to establish a clearer definition of what affective trust is and its effect on social media relationships. With the results that are found from this study best practices that organizations should follow will be drafted.

This thesis will have a series of five chapters. Chapter one includes an introduction and a brief overview of this study. Chapter two includes a literature review about affective trust and its effect on relationships on social media. Chapter three discusses my research method of choice—

interviews, while providing my interview questions, target audiences and how the study was completed. Chapter four highlights the results of the study completed and helps to determine how social media clients *trust* brands online. Chapter 5 features the conclusion of the study, overall results and best practices that organizations can follow to develop trust.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Organization-public relationship theory is a correlation of organizations and their audiences which have an effect on social and economic issues (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). These relationships are measured on social media and in public relations by analyzing interactions, and correlation with experiences/feelings. Huang (1997) suggests that organization-public relationships are built off of trust and influence presented between audiences and corporations. According to a 2000 study, organization-relationship theory was built off of 5 key terms to help build effective relationships, control, trust, satisfaction, commitment, and goal/metric satisfaction (Grunig and Huang, 2000).

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) found that there are 3 main types of relationships in the organization-relationship theory. These relationships are professional, personal, and community relationships. Professional relationships are created between organizations or certain clientele to help build a trustworthy network where content and data can be shared. Personal relationships are built between an organization and a particular audience member allowing for each individual to feel like they are the most important. Community relationships are built between an organization and a community to allow for community outreach and organizational participation in CSR initiatives.

As communications and social media platforms are constantly changing, the definition of public relations has changed into a management tool that is based on strategic communications.

Earlier studies found that organization-relationship theory is built off of trust and influence which is found today, especially when defining affective trust and studying the use of social media. The organization-relationship theory provides a standard that does correlate with the term "affective trust" which was defined as consumers or other audiences who build their opinions of organizations mostly based upon likeness and positive feelings (Washington, 2013). This definition correlates with organization-relationship theory, but it does not describe the influence or goal/metric satisfaction and how to measure for this information.

The organization-public relationship theory serves as the framework of this thesis as building relationships and the analysis of emotion and experience driven content correlates with the definition of affective trust presented in chapter 1. This study emphasizes trust and more specifically affective trust as the most important management dimension. Affective trust is the backbone of a successful social media campaign where relationships and trust are built due the use of accurate and credible information. Affective trust was also singled out due to emotional appeal and social listening as brands are able to understand consumer buying habits and beliefs as a way to help curate content. In my interview section Chapter 4, you will see that there were a lot of definitions of trust given by participants. Consistencies with the literature proved that consumers look for credible information, and believe that trust is defined as information that is carefully curated and fact-checked by multiple users/sources. This correlates with participant responses in regards to news media, and the inaccuracies of information that is reported on from any social media user.

The below literature review confirms the findings and definition related to the organization-public relationship theory. Each section of literature below presents challenges into "affective trust" and other key issues in regards to social media usage. Based off of the literature

review and organization-relationship theory, four research questions were drafted and then presented to participants when interviewed for the thesis research study.

Introduction to Trust

Trust focuses around the brand of an organization, in which the interaction between the brand and consumers has grown immensely (Nambisan & Watt, 2011). Chaudhri and Holbrook defined trust as the "willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 89-93). Generally, trust is either broken or achieved in a short amount of time. The distribution of accurate information and the level of exposure on social media are related to information posted. Audiences that are more engaged with brands on social media are said to be more exposed to interactions and media which play a large role in determining trust levels (Holmes, 1991). Previous studies have shown that individuals used online communities such as chat rooms to build support, inclusion and overall encouragement (Furlong, 1989; Hiltz & Wellman, 1997).

Organizations need to develop a good reputation as online with the use of a social media plan. This plan will allow for organizations to interact with consumers and become active on social media while working to develop relationships with target audiences. Trust leads to an overall good or poor online reputation. Reputation includes participation, monitoring, and measuring (Jones, Temperly, and Lina, 2009). Social media users enjoy being able to interact in a community with others, as they are able to obtain and share useful, factual information in a matter of seconds (Porter et al., 2011). These practices may be evident of a correlation between reputation and overall trust. Affective trust has become one of the most important practices a brand can follow and has been considered a key factor in building relationships and obtaining a proficient reputation among a brand's audience. Social media users who strongly believe in a

brand will generally have a more positive opinion of trustworthiness than those who do not

(Ridings & Gefen, 2006). As social media and trust are constantly emerging topics, it is evident

that there is currently a low level of academic research and findings dedicated to trust and

practices thus qualitative research needs to be completed (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

The development of relationships helps for organizations and individuals to curate

content that is unique to target markets. As 2009 study by Jones, Temperly, and Lina suggests

reputation and affective trust includes participation, monitoring, and measuring (Jones,

Temperly, and Lina, 2009). Affective trust is the most important aspect to any successful social

media campaign and brand campaign. As affective trust has two components of emotion and

social listening it is imperative that brands use CMS such as Sysomos or Hootsuite to help

develop and gather relevant data, which will help the organization to understand its audience.

Today many brands are using their own forms of social media (apps, internal networks) to help

develop trust with users as content can be curated and changed to fit the needs of consumers

instantly. Strauss & Corbin did suggest that it is evident that there is a low level of academic

research dedicated to the practices of trust and social media. As social media and the way

individuals communicate today is changing, research needs to be done to help determine how

affective trust and relationships are able to be built when accessing social media on different

platforms such as the Apple Watch or augmented reality.

To fill the gap and based on the above reviewed literature, the first research question is

proposed as follows:

Research Question 1: How do customers define affective trust toward a brand that they

are engaged with via social media?

Access and Interaction

The American Press Institute conducted a survey and found that among participants approximately 50% used social media to access news stories and other content posted by their favorite brands. The survey also found that when news stories were reported over social networks, content that is written about a particular topic is mixed together. Content curation on social platforms is not "unique" and can severely lack credibility due to mixed facts and statements. The study also found that approximately 1 in 4 social media users surveyed trust news or information that they obtain from an individual source. The credibility and trust of a source was found to not be dependent on the reputation of an individual or organization but on the overall popularity of the initial post (American Press Institute, 2016). This study relates to research question one in determining how customers define affective trust toward a brand that they are engaged with via social media. News organizations today are running into credibility issues that are changing the way that customers are interacting in an online setting.

Customer interaction with an organization's social media page is the most important aspect of engagement and trust in social media. As stated earlier, a small percentage of social media users do trust information obtained from an individual source. Organizations can overcome this by becoming accountable for their actions. Jason DeMers, Founder and CEO of AudienceBloom, stated that organizations need to hold themselves accountable for their actions. All events bad or good should be public knowledge and posted by the organization with a statement of how the event will be addressed. Communicating about the events in a manner that is consistent and personal is important to shaping your message in a way that is appealing to audience feelings. DeMers found that by publicly answering questions and responding to

questions is the quickest way to build trust among your followers, and interactions need to be transparent and accurate as events are reported on (DeMers, 2015).

Social media and trust are said to have a lower correlation today than in previous years. In a late 2014 study, only 15 percent of social media users trusted an organization's communication efforts, even where most consumers were actually unfamiliar with a good or service advertised in a store or online by their favorite brand (Nieto, 2014). It was also found that there is a lack of face-to-face interaction which hinders the ability for a brand to prove its product or service to customers. Due to this lack of face-to-face interaction, customer satisfaction can be lower. This study did analyze brands that have both physical stores and an online presence to determine if clients are interacted more in a physical or online setting to build trust. It was found that if these stores incorporated face-to-face and online interactions into operations, trust among consumers would grow within the brand.

As brands are developing social media profiles and online content to interact with clients, customers have seen fake content or reviews posted about a brand (Vizard, 2016). This content can come from internal employees or customers who like or dislike the brand without even being familiar with it. Most of these interactions take place on Facebook and Twitter where having little to no trust in a brand is at a high of approximately 30% (Vizard, 2016). These numbers are extremely shocking as over 60% of people surveyed said that they do use some form of social media in a purchasing decision. The table on the left shows that these levels of little to no trust increased on average about 10% within a two-year timeframe (Vizard, 2016).

Channel	% of people who had little/no trust in 2014	% of people who have little/no trust in 2016
Facebook	20	30
Twitter	15	25
Instagram	11	23
Pinterest	9	21
LinkedIn	8	20

(Vizard, 2016)

The table above analyzes only a few of the most popular social media networks but did not provide any data into why mistrust is taking place. Self-analysis of data from major social networks today has shown that trust issues have arisen from improper data reporting, and scams that are taking place on social media platforms. The literature above does suggest that how users and brands are accessing social media plays a role in affective trust and the credibility of information. Although the credibility of a source was found to not be dependent on accessibility it was found in my below interviews that general social media users who post breaking information on social media generally post inaccurate information which is shared by followers and leads to a large level of mistrust. As stated earlier affective trust is the most important aspect to any successful social media campaign and brand campaign. Access and interaction play large roles as consumers will base their opinions of trust on how they feel when accessing or interacting with any type of social media application or network.

Based on the above reviewed literature, the second research question is proposed as follows:

Research Question 2: How do customers interact with their favorite brands via social media?

Customer and Relationship Management

Many organizations today are investing in social media management and relationship management as a way of building trust among consumers. Organizations are developing social media plans to help determine how to build trust among their target audiences. As corporations are investing time and money into building it's reputation, a customer will base any interaction and sales off of information about a particular brand found on social media or online settings. In a study completed by Calefato, it was determined that approximately 44% of the subjects

interviewed examined an organization's Facebook page to determine how the organization interacted with customers, and how customers perceived the organization as a whole (Calefato, 2015).

During the study participants highlighted their likeness for exposure to feedback and the speed of responses or comments from both parties. Social media allows for more personable and emotion-based
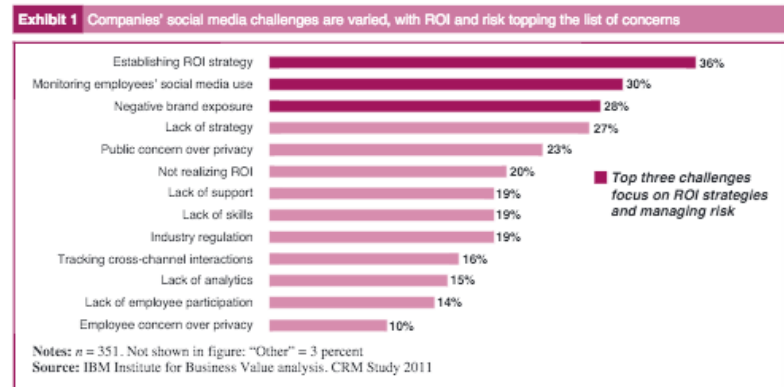
(IBM Institute for Business Value Analysis, 2011)

interaction over traditional websites that provide little to no peer-to-peer interaction, such as blogs or other one-sided sites. Individuals wonder how organizations actually spend money from their fiscal year budgets on social media. Although social media is "free" to use, the management of the platforms can cost a large sum of funding, and thus organizations need to assess risks to determine how to effectively manage content while not missing any opportunities (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Spending resources on content management systems (CMS) such as Hootsuite will allow for organizations to be able to social listen and post messages on a variety of platforms from one place. As the use of CMS is growing, it is becoming much more important to measure customer relationship management (CRM). As CRM is growing, consumers are the most important subjects for management. When planning for CRM, there can be risks associated, such as negative brand reputation or an employee releasing a rogue tweet or status (Heller Baird and Parasnis, 2011). The table below from the IBM Institute for Business

Value Analysis in 2011 highlights some of the most important issues that organizations face while creating a CRM plan (IBM Institute for Business Value Analysis, 2011).

This study showed that when mitigating risk related to CRM approximately half of the respondent organizations monitor their brand on social media, and less than half use monitoring software (Heller Baird and Parasnis, 2011). This issue is easily combatable by using a CMS or service such as Sysomos, as analytical data is integrated within the systems to allow for monitoring of negative or positive correlations from interactions with consumers.

The growth of CMS has also allowed for real-time management of trending hashtags and issues that are affecting the brand directly or their competitors (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011).

Social media monitoring allows for organizations to create a digital notebook of each interaction to help monitor ROI and determine how customers perceive the brand (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011, p. 30). Today this issue can be combatted with the ability to measure analytics and instant monitoring of issues that arise from employees or customers. As these issues do arise it is important for organizations to work by taking a conversation offline and to find a solution through other interactions. The measurement of analytics is important for this matter as organizations can weigh what issues are trending and the solutions that others have used to fix problems. According to the study completed by IBM, the largest challenge that corporations are faced with is establishing a strong strategy that will yield a large return on investment. Most organizations see this as a challenge due to the fact that organizations generally are not in tune with how social media can build a strong ROI. If a brand posts relevant content and interacts properly with consumers, the ROI goal that the organization is hoping for can become a reality. The table above analyzes the top risks when planning for social media strategy one of the largest being establishing an ROI strategy. Establishing a CMR strategy is one of the best ways of

working to improve ROI. As stated. By Heller Baird & Parasnis in a 2011 study, although social media is "free" to use, the management of the platforms can cost a large sum of funding, and thus organizations need to assess risks to determine how to effectively manage content while not missing any opportunities (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011). The literature above does suggest that content needs to be developed and relationships should be built with trusted sources so that a larger ROI is created from proper management. Customer and Relationship management relates to a brand understanding its consumers wants and needs. It was found in my below interviews that customer and relationship management was a key factor that participants highlighted when analyzing different sources and creating their own social media plans. When relationships are built organizations are able to strengthen their ROI as each consumer that follows them on social media is worth money to the organization. As stated earlier affective trust is the most important aspect to any successful social media campaign and brand campaign. Customer and relationship management plays a large role as consumers will want to interact with an organization who tries to build a relationship with them this is especially true when there are experience issues taking place, thus allowing for a brand to build a relationship and regaining of trust.

Based on the above reviewed literature, the third research question is proposed as follows:

Research Question 3: What are the best strategies that organizations need to use to cultivate affective trust with their customers?

Figure 1. Online reputation management in practice: content types and activities
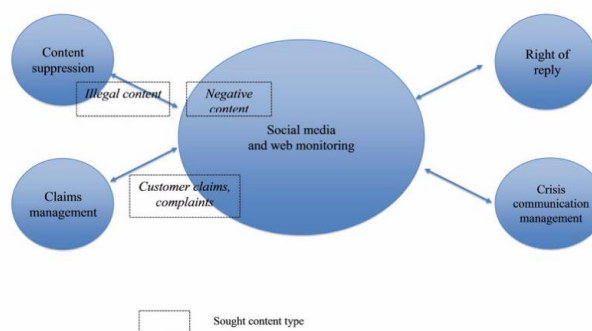
(Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2003)

In a 2003 study by Chevalier and Mayzlin, it was found that a positive or negative evaluation of a good or service led to different

consumer purchasing habits. Online interactions are changing how organizations are interacting with consumers on a personal level. Although advertising and other means of communicating do exist, public opinion is one of the most important aspects of trust in social media (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2003). As shown in the graph (Figure 1), social media monitoring is broken up into four different categories. Each category helps organizations to build trust, but content suppression and right of reply are the most important aspects of social media (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2003).

Social Media and E-Commerce

Social media also plays a large role in retail and e-commerce activities. Facebook and Twitter are the largest and most widely utilized social networks among consumers and organizations. The usage of these networks leads to consumers questioning trust and safety of online interaction and purchasing. A recent study concluded that at least one-quarter of 720 people surveyed felt safe making a purchase on Facebook or an organization's online social media page (Huen, 2012). The reason why this statistic was so low is due to scams and other spam postings that are made to steal a user's information.

As users are browsing and interacting with others online they lose trust in friends and organizations due to fake postings on profiles. Today, we all see an example of this where fake postings for Walmart or other gift cards with large denominations are being "given" to a certain number of people. These posts are mostly scams where you are encouraged to click and "obtain" the card but what really happens is you are allowing for apps and others to access your profile and automatically post on your profile. Online platforms are trying to combat scams, especially when making purchases online by creating new virtual payment services such as Facebook credits or Venmo.

Today most consumers use these online services as they cut down on fraud and misuse of personal information. In the earlier study conducted, it was also found that approximately 60% of consumers prefer PayPal, as those respondents generally use mobile-banking apps on websites they trust and shop at the most (Huen, 2012). The use of these digital platforms provides social media users with the sense of trust as information provided to organizations is minimal as a virtual profile is created.

The world of social media is changing how consumers purchase goods today. As stated, in a 2012 study by Huen it was concluded that at least one-quarter of 720 people surveyed felt safe making a purchase on Facebook or an organization's online social media page (Huen, 2012). The literature above does suggest today consumers turn to social media more than ever when trying to purchase a good or service to look up reviews, interact with other consumers, or to purchase the good or service. Ecommerce is not only about revenue, but providing a safe and reliable way to provide a good or service to clients. Today many brands on Facebook are victims of scams due to fake "coupons" that are posted online. People do try to use them, so the brand needs to somehow regain the trust of consumers when they are told the coupons are not valid. It was found in my below interviews that consumers are constantly purchasing goods or services online, even though they worry about their security. One participant below was actually targeted by a coupon scam to one of her favorite stores, but actually had her account hacked into. In regards to e-commerce consumers did state that they always check social media to read reviews about products, and the overall organization before making a purchase. As stated earlier affective trust is the most important aspect to any successful social media campaign and brand campaign. E-commerce plays a large role as consumers use social media when purchasing goods or services and sometimes use social media to pay for items purchased.

Connecting Reputation and Trust

As the use of online media is growing, there is a change in the definition of what "reputation" is and how it plays a role in trust on social media. Reputation in an online setting relates to social media monitoring, online interaction, and analytical data measurement of reputation impact (Jones, Temperly, & Lima, 2009).

Trust in social media needs to be monitored with the use of analytical data to get a better understanding of how reputation plays a role in brand management and the overall trust of your organization. Right of reply is a major factor in building a strong social media reputation as customers should be given the right to be able to post their opinions and beliefs on an organization's social media page for others to see. Even if this content is negative, a personalized response from the organization should be encouraged to help build and foster a relationship (See Figure 1).

Today individuals do use social media to develop relationshisps and build trust with others. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, approximately 59% of social media users do recommend brands to friends or colleauges based on trust and an organization's social media accounts (Edleman, 2016). Among this audience, approximately 67% of the population use social media to interact and search for relevant topics. The most used source of media by the surveyed population was approximately 71%, this number was most likely higher due to the credibility of searched sources (Edelman, 2016).

Reputation and trust are correlated as reputation does play a role in trust among consumers and organizations on social media. Reputation in an online setting relates to social media monitoring, online interaction, and analytical data measurement of reputation impact (Jones, Temperly, & Lima, 2009).As stated, in a 2016 study by The Edelman Trust Barometer

approximately 59% of social media users do recommend brands to friends or colleauges based on trust and an organization's social media accounts (Edleman, 2016). The literature above does suggest today reputation is a major aspect of trust, and with a bad reputation a low trust rating may occur from consumers. Reputation is not only about having brand loyalty, but providing a credible information, practicing good CRM, and providing safe and reliable way to provide a good or service to clients. Today many brands are creating social media plans and content to help build reputation and consumer following as trust building initiatives. It was found in my below interviews that consumers are constantly interacting with brands online who have a strong reputation. Participants shared that they believe trust and reputation are the same thing due to the fact that they both are shared with among consumers. As stated earlier affective trust is the most important aspect to any successful social media campaign and brand campaign. Reputation plays a large role as consumers do business with brands that have a strong reputation and use social media interacting with brands in relation to questions, or experience issues.

Maximum Return on Investment

The category of content suppression highlights negative and illegal content. Individuals are free to post whatever they want on social media, but often what is posted is "scrutinized" by others or by brands themselves. Applebee's fell victim to negative content due to events from a waitress posting a picture of a receipt with an insulting tip that was received by a customer. Although the brand did respond to the incident it was believed that the brand had hidden or deleted negative comments that were posted on their social media pages. This event led to a decrease in overall trust where over 19,000 interactions were recorded of people negatively communicating about the brand. Applebee's had not responded well to this and kept defending

their actions which created a backlash and a situation that was hard to recover from (Thompson, 2016).

In terms of ROI, a brand can turn a negative situation into a positive one which helps to rebuild trust within an organization. The American Red Cross experienced events such as this when one of their employees sent out a rogue tweet from the corporate account, and not their personal one. The tweet referenced drinking and partying. Once the tweet was discovered, the American Red Cross responded appropriately by discouraging drinking and driving. The tweet had ended up going viral on social media and had been seen by a multitude of organizations, one being a brewery. Once the tweet was discovered, the brewery shared tweets related to being responsible while driving, and that its followers should donate to the American Red Cross (Wasserman, 2011). Although, it may be argued that this was a poor ROI due to the event that took place the opposite happened. The ROI for the American Red Cross was great as they built trust by responding appropriately within the brand's mission and donations were growing from Twitter users. As stated earlier by Heller Baird and Parasnis (2011), there can be major risks when developing an effective social media plan. These risks were beneficial for the organization because of how the issue was handled. The growth of CMS management played a large role in building trustworthiness due to social monitoring of trending hashtags and issues that affected society directly which allowed for multiple organizations to respond. Organizations today are constantly creating content and interaction as a way of improving ROI. Although a crisis may happen ROI may not actually decrease as shown by the American Red Cross case study. The ROI for the American Red Cross was strong due to donations and interactions around the event that had taken place on social media with an employee. In an information driven society consumers and organizations need to understand that once something ends up online it will be

there forever. In the case study about a former Applebee's employee the tweet posted and responses to it will always be archived. Applebee's could have saved and potentially increased its trust level and ROI if they had properly handled this crisis. The literature above does suggest that content needs to be constantly monitored and responded to if a crisis or event were to occur as ROI will be affected. It was found in my below interviews ROI was a key factor that participants highlighted when creating their own social media plans. When relationships are built organizations are able to strengthen their ROI as each consumer that follows them on social media is worth money to the organization. As stated earlier affective trust is the most important aspect to any successful social media campaign and brand campaign. ROI plays a large role as organizations are always trying to generate content that will make consumers want to interact with and become loyal to their brand. A properly executed and shared advertisement or online video can go a huge way in helping to build ROI and affective trust between an organization and consumers.

Based on the above reviewed literature, the fourth research question is proposed as follows:

Research Question 4: What are the outcomes that organizations can accomplish through their trust-building social media initiatives/efforts?

In summary, based on the above reviewed literature, the current study intends to analyze how consumers relay trust to their favorite brands on social media sites. This research aims to determine how trust can positively or negatively have an effect on a brand investigating the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do customers define affective trust toward a brand that they are engaged with via social media?

Research Question 2: How do customers interact with their favorite brands via social

media?

Research Question 3: What are the best strategies that organizations need to use to

cultivate affective trust with their customers?

Research Question 4: What are the outcomes that organizations can accomplish through

their trust-building social media initiatives/efforts?

Summary

In the sections below, the strengths and weaknesses of the reviewed literature will be

highlighted to provide on the identified trends above. The analysis will hopefully uncover how

organizations could better manage its social media strategy, with a strategic plan and social

media plan based on the literature review section. Knowing the benefits and weaknesses of

following these trends is paramount in understanding why trust is the most important aspect of

social media communication.

Strengths

From the literature review of trust and social media, there are five trends that determine if

an organization is able to cultivate trust with its target audiences. These trends (customer

relationship management, maximizing return on investment, definitions of reputation and trust,

access and interaction, and social media and e-commerce) all correlate to how a public relations

team should draft a social media communication plan and develop strategies to help audiences

cultivate trust among organizations using social media.

In order for consumers to trust organizations using social media all five identified must

be used effectively. The first trend is one of the most important trends due to the fact it requires

that social media teams develop relationships with customers to help build trust and a following

online. If relationships are not built effectively, this will lead to a low CMR causing less audience interactions and trust to fall rapidly due to not being able to obtain appropriate interaction levels.

The second trend, reputation and return on investment correlates with trend one, as CRM plays a role in an organization's reputation and return on investment. It is important to understand that consumers are the key player in reputation and ROI, thus creating a social media plan that encourages interactions will lead to a strong ROI in terms of building trust. Reputation plays a role in ROI as organizations are investing time and money into managing their social media accounts.

The third trend is how the connection between reputation and trust will determine customers' understanding of branding and organizations' use of social media. Every organization is unique and has their own definitions of trust and reputation. The definitions that each organization has should be based off of an industry standard of "affective trust". The best definition based off of literature is that trust correlates with reputation. By developing a plan where organizations communicate with customers and where all interactions are addressed and highlighted, this will lead to a better reputation for organizations while building trust with clients.

The fourth trend is one of the most important. Access and interaction are the two biggest issues within social media today. Most social media users are able to access social media sites, while some are not. By building more accessible social media pages that all customers are able to use, access will be greater. This can lead to an expansion of target audiences and higher interaction levels. Customers want to trust organizations, especially in an online setting. By having organizations interact with customers on a daily basis and responding to positive and

negative feedback, accessibility and interactions will be wide spread allowing for trust to be built on a national or international level.

The last trend is paramount to any organization building trust with their consumers. Social media and e-commerce are two of the newest features in the world today. Organizations are able to sell items on social media platforms directly to consumers, most of the time without having to visit an online store. By having a "trusted" page on social media platforms, organizations are able to show that their pages are legitimate and provide some sort of reviews or interactions with consumers that are visible to public audiences.

Weaknesses

Even though CMR, reputation and return on investment, the definition of reputation and trust, access and interaction, and social media and e-commerce, correlate to consumer trust among organizations on social media, each trend needs special attention. If you focus on just one trend, an organization will be effective in cultivating trust but to only certain target audiences and not to a wider population. All five highlighted trends are part of the foundation for constructing a better definition into how consumers believe an organization can use social media platforms to cultivate trust.

Based on the literature review above and associated research, I have found that organizations that interact on social media with all audiences and provide information to all audiences are trusted more widely on social media. This tactic shows that customers do not want to be left in the dark, and they want to be heard by their favorite brands as they trust them in an offline setting. Achieving trust among consumers and organizations on social media can be achieved by developing a social media plan that encourages interactions from both parties and allows for relationships to be built and fostered.

Building relationships with consumers allows for organizations to regain trust and rebuild reputation in a quick manner if a crisis were to occur. In addition, having a plan to address the crisis or any issue affecting the organization is crucial. In the literature review, an example of this situation took place with the American Red Cross where a rogue tweet was posted and consumers reacted negatively. This would have caused the organization's reputation to be negatively affected but due to quick responses and addressing the situation, trust and reputation were not hindered. Public relations research has concluded that consumers generally may or may not have strong levels of trust in organizations who use social media, but does not look at new factors or market conditions that play a role in the use of social media. This issue seems to provide a non-specific reason as to why trust is either high or low among most organizations.

Most of the research that has been conducted to learn more about social media and protecting trust correlates to overall experiences that a consumer has and rarely provides a true look into what content an organization is posting for its consumers. Many scholarly articles highlight that consumers and organizations who actively interact with each other cultivate higher trust levels than those who do not. Cultivating trust is the most important aspect of building a strong reputation and satisfaction rating among consumers, thus fostering and creating long-term relationships.

Although these five trends can be considered standards, there is substantial evidence that there is more to be explored in the cultivation of trust on social media platforms. Organizations that construct the five trends into a social media plan are more effective with building relationships and cultivating trust with consumers. Organizations that do not follow these trends may see that their reputation and trust is lost among consumers leading to a negative effect on a brand's image.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The objective of this thesis is to analyze how consumers relay trust to their favorite brands on social media sites. This research aims to determine how trust can positively or negatively have an effect on a brand. To analyze how consumers do relay trust, in-depth interviews with 22 participants were conducted. These interviews were conducted in person and were recorded for data validity. In chapter three, I will outline my research method, how the process was completed, and how data obtained from the interviews were analyzed. Following, I will also outline my role as well as any threats to the validity of the project.

Participants and Procedure

Participants from this study consisted of professionals in various fields stemming mostly from education and communications. Each of these participants had at least 2+ years of experience in their given specialty. A subgroup of my participants were social media experts/professionals as they specialize in curating content related to their job specific duties. Students were also interviewed for this study, each with at least Sophomore standing. All of the participants identified themselves as customers of Starbucks or other major brands that have an online social media presence. On average participants had at least 2 or more years of experience as a Starbucks customer, but each had many more years of experience as a consumer from brands related to their prospective fields. In terms of Starbucks social media use most participants stated that they did not communicate with the brand though traditional social media platforms, but through the Starbucks mobile application. Participants believed that the mobile application served as a form of social media as customers were allowed to interact and share information. The information shared related to e-commerce (payment activity), music selections, promotions, and new items. In my study all of my participants were customers of different

brands, not just Starbucks. Although most of my participants were professionals, I was able to learn about how social media and trust was prevalent in multiple fields and how professionals used social media in purchasing decisions.

I conducted in-depth interviews with 22 individuals who use social media and are knowledgeable about the Starbucks brand. I decided to select Starbucks as they have been in the news recently related to social issues, and major corporate issues. Two main reasons why I wanted to use Starbucks in this study was due to recent controversy around its rewards program and neighborhood barista campaigns, in which employees were engaging in interaction with consumers in regards to issues such as gun control and #BlackLivesMatter.

To recruit participants, the only requirement that I had was that participants must use social media on a daily basis, and be able to analyze how social media is used to build trust. This rationale helped to narrow down my participant pool to target this subgroup of participants. The rationale behind this was that interviews would be more effective and data would be more relevant to this research study. Recruitment of participants was done via email or by posting about the study in Facebook groups and on other social media sites. To schedule interviews, participants were instructed to either contact me directly or book available times through a third party application. Interviews were completed in person or through Skype. Each interview conducted lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, was recorded and later transcribed for further analysis. As stated this study was conducted with 22 participants from a wide variety of fields and interests (Please see Table 1 for a complete participant profile).

Each interview was started by asking participants demographic questions as seen below:

1. How long have you been using social media?

2. What is your current career?

3. What is your educational background?

4. Which social networks are you active on?

    a. What is your purpose for using them?

    b. If not, Why do you not use Social Media?

5. Does your organization/employer have a Facebook page, a twitter account, and any other social media sites?

    a. How does it use the social media for communication purposes? How do you like their social media efforts?

    b. Do you think it has cultivated trust with audiences? Why?

After having participants answer demographic questions I had participants answer the following questions related to RQ1 and RQ2:

Do you use social networks to view content developed by Starbucks?

    c. How do you use the networks to view the content?

    d. Do you interact with the brand?

        i. How do you interact with them?

        ii. Do you only interact with them when experience issues arise? Why?

        iii. Do you trust these brands to provide accurate information? Why?

6. How do you define trust?

    a. Do you trust the brand described above?

    b. Why/ Why Not?

    c. How has the brand gained or lost your trust?

    d. How can the brand cater its content to you?

    e. What can the brand do to gain your trust?

7. Highlight an experience that you had with a brand who you trusted.

8. Highlight an experience that you had with a brand who you did not trust.

After having participants answer questions related to RQ1 and RQ2 had participants answer the following questions related to RQ3 and RQ4:

9. Do you trust content that is developed by Starbucks?

    a. How do you determine whether it is credible?

    b. What do you do if the content you see on Starbucks accounts is not credible?

        i. How do you verify credibility of content?

        ii. Do you only interact with trust different content posted on different platforms? Why?

        iii. Do you trust Starbucks to create a strategy that allows for them to build trust with customers? Why?

10. Do you think that Starbucks success online can be hindered or gained if trust is or is not properly implemented? Why?

   a. What outcomes could happen from a trust related issue? How can Starbucks strategize for this type of event?

   b. Could the loss of trust in the Starbucks brand lead to a poor future for them?

   c. Why/Why not?

   d. What outcomes could happen from a successful/unsuccessful social media campaign?

   e. What can the Starbucks do to have a high trust rating among consumers?

11. Highlight an experience that you had when a trust led to a positive outcome for Starbucks?

12. Highlight an experience that you had that would produce a negative outcome.

For this study I had two types of participants. To understand branding and social media experiences the way questions were asked was altered allowing for me to obtain data relevant to multiple fields/experiences. All participants were able to answer each question related to branding and trust, but some had a difficult time answering questions related to Starbucks, but answered questions relevant to their own brand experiences.

Research Protocol

I developed 13 questions/sub-questions to ask each participant who took part in the research study. Each question was divided among my four main research questions and participant demographics. The first set of questions asked were demographic questions to help better understand each participant. The first research question was aimed at finding out how consumers define affective trust. The second question was aimed at understanding how consumers use social media to interact with their favorite brands on a daily basis. The third question was aimed at determining the best strategies that organizations should use to cultivate affective trust with consumers. Lastly, the fourth question was aimed at determining what outcomes organizations can accomplish through their trust building social media initiatives/efforts.

Table 1: Participant Profile

Participant	Industry	Position	Years of Experience in role	Experience in Social Media
1	Higher Education	Program Manager	15	15
2	Higher Education	Student	3	7
3	Social Work	Intern	2	9
4	Student Housing	Assistant General Manager	6	5
5	Student Housing	General Manager	7	2
6	Public Relations	Account Executive	1.5	6
7	Public Relations	Account Manager	3	6
9	Higher Education	Student	4	7
10	Journalism	TV News Reporter	1.5	9
11	Journalism	Journalist-newspaper reporter	2	8
12	Social Media	Community Manager	4	7
13	Journalism	Reporter	3	8
14	Production	Producer	12	2
15	Higher Education	Professor	10	4
16	Higher Education	Program Manager	15	15
17	Higher Education	Student	4	8
18	Higher Education	Department Head	3	4
19	Higher Education	Professor	10	2
20	Higher Education	Student	2	5
21	Higher Education	Student	3	6
22	Higher Education	Academic Advisor	6	3

Data Analysis

The intended population of participants were individuals who use social media on a daily basis and like the brand Starbucks Coffee Company. There is not a published specific age range of participants who were involved in the study, but a targeted population of students and professionals. Each participant interviewed used social media to some degree and was also college educated. This allowed for a fixed target audience for the interview which targets Starbucks' two largest audiences.

All participants were recruited through an email and Facebook invites that were affiliated within specific geographic areas. Initially, an email or personal message was sent to each interviewee containing a synopsis of the research being conducted and the IRB consent form. Each participant involved in the study was either interviewed in person or was interviewed via Skype or an option of choice. Participants had to sign a waiver stating that their personal identifying information would not be shared and that they agreed to be recorded. At the end of the survey, each participant received compensation, a $5.00 Starbucks Coffee gift card.

In this research study, 22 participants from across the United States were interviewed to gather answers and information related to my research study. Each participant had one or more years of experience in their industry, which provided unique insight into how each field uses social media differently to interact with clients. Although few participants did not know much about how the Starbucks brand, in particular, uses social media, most participants correlated the Starbucks app as social media due to interactions and brand loyalty. Each participant interviewed provided great insight into trust and building relationships.

Chapter 4: Findings

Participant Profile

Answers provided by participants in this study will be analyzed based off of responses from the research questions presented in this process. Questions will be analyzed based off of consistent responses from interviewees. This process will allow for a consistent and consolidated structure based off of consumer experiences and beliefs. Members of this study will represent consumer as well as professional ability to use and interact effectively with social media.

As members of this study make up two audiences consolidation into one participant type will allow for more effective reporting based on ideals of consumer and corporate trust levels on social media. This one audience group will help to answer how consumers and corporations relay trust to each other on social media sites.

Once the results are reported responses from participants will help to determine recommendations, and strengths/weaknesses. Results will then lead to a suggested plan or methodology into how trust will play a role into future social media use.

Over the next several pages, interview questions will be analyzed with quotes from each interview to help develop one answer and key understanding for each research question. The results below will help to answer the overall purpose of this study, to determine how consumers and corporations relay trust to each other on social media sites.

RQ1: Definition of Affective Trust toward a Brand Participants Interact with

Definition of affective trust. Each participant interviewed had a different definition of affective trust on social media based off of how much experience each participant has with social media. Understanding that trust does not have a universal definition is important as seen in the

results below. This allows for brands to develop a social media plan that encompasses trust and relationship building.

A real estate professional stated: "Trust. The social media aspect, it's kind of hard when you just see a couple reviews here and there. I guess, and there's a lot of users that use it, and you see a lot of positive and negative feedback. It makes it more trustworthy if you notice a lot of just positive, basic feedback, so to say. You may want to look in other places and other social medias to follow-up on that trust." A university student stated: "I'd say it's putting faith in something that might not necessarily be visible, but it's basically like having faith in something. A social work intern stated: "Being someone that has integrity, and doesn't lie to you, and that you can expect that they won't lie to you." A reporter stated: "In the media affective trust is the creation of a story with an emotional appeal and credibility". A producer stated: "creating content that consumers can interact with on many platforms. The content should have some sort of appeal to consumer interests and beliefs to be most relevant to them."

Brand interactions and trust. Each participant interviewed had different experiences of interacting with their favorite brands on social media based off of their professional or personal life. Understanding that each participant uses social media differently will play a role in their definition of trust. A program manager stated: "I interact with Starbucks as I go to Starbucks every day and I know of some of the things that they've done with, where you can submit ideas, Starbucks Ideas. I know about that. I'm not a big consumer brand follower on social media so unless there's something big going on that's in the news that they're doing, then I probably wouldn't see it. But yes, if I see an ad on Facebook for, say, the new Flat White, I'm interested in those things If they have a new product and I see that." A university student stated: "I interact with brands on twitter and Facebook to see current events, and brand specific promotions.

Generally, I tend to look highly at interactive social media postings and urgent messages that arise from experience issues." An account manager stated: "If there's something that I find interesting, I will re-tweet it. I am not very active in that complainer kind of way, I am not one of the people who uses Twitter as an avenue to vent my frustration at companies, so when I am tweeting at a company or sharing their news, it is because what they posted, or what they said, is something truly interesting to me".

Credibility. Each participant interviewed had a different definition of credibility, especially on social media. Two of the most helpful responses from this question came from a journalist and public relations practitioner. The term credibility was used by both professionals in highlighting "breaking news" or "fake advertising" on social media.

A public relations professional stated: "A PR Firm will have advisors telling them they need to post everything on the situation out there, to get it out there, to get the truth out, or at least as much of it as will actually be useful to people. They may not be able to do that, because their legal teams may be hesitant to put that kind of information out there, but generally, I would trust the information that they put out there on Twitter or Facebook. Especially because if it turns out not to be true, it will usually be exposed very quickly, because that is one of the beautiful things about the internet. When you put something out there and there's a lot of people who have the time or the resources or the interest, or all three, to check that information and if there's something wrong about it, to make sure that everybody knows that they were not honest." A journalist stated: "In this new social media age credibility especially in news like what I'm often looking at and how my mind often works, it is a very hard thing to necessarily be able to spot on social media especially if it's a breaking news event like what you said. A lot of times it'll be people tweeting out first hand reports of what's happening but those aren't always necessarily

credible because one eyewitness account can vary from another eye witness account. We've seen it so many times that there's twelve different types of stories of twelve different people that were all at the same place and somewhere in the middle of all twelve of those stories is probably the truth. I'd say credibility unfortunately has started to go to the wayside when it comes to social media. If you're looking at single tweets that are unlinked, I would be very hesitant to ... I'd be very hesitant to take the credibility on face value just from reading the tweet. I would need to do back research on who is posting the tweet. If it's something with breaking news, were they actually there, do they have any motive to not tell the truth, like do they know the person that is involved that they want to better the person's image where have you but the credibility really comes and this is a good part of our social media with the news is when all of this can be gathered into an actual story that's written by a news outlet whether it be a small town one like a local paper or a huge mainstream media CNN, Fox News, MSNBC."

Content curation. Each participant interviewed had a different definition of content curation, especially on social media. Two of the most helpful responses from this question came from a reporter and social media professional. The term content curation was used by both professionals in highlighting "how" and "why" content is created and targeted to specific audiences.

A social media professional stated: "For my organization content curation is about creating a unique message and knowing your target audience. To create a unique message relevant to our audience we use a technique called social listening. Social listening is an activity where social media content is monitored for our name or a hashtag related to our brand. Once we find something unique our social media team develops the information into a form of content that we target toward our audiences. Recently we have discovered our audiences like Facebook

ads as they are always using the Facebook news feature, this allows for us to curate content to them in a more traditional fashion." A reporter stated: "Today my job is more challenging than ever as I have to develop my news stories to be accessed and interacted with across many platforms. In news reporting content curation is about creating a unique story or clip in a timely manner that will be used on different platforms of media. To help us with content curation we are always checking credible social media profiles to see if we can get leads on stories or see what has already been reported on. This helps me as a reporter to understand what my audience's interests are and how I can cater to them. My organization looks at ratings and our social media profiles to see what types of content our users like. For us hometown and in state content are the most popular. News media and reporting is not simply black and white anymore, my viewers will trust a story that has some sort of emotional appeal to or some sort of interactive element."

RQ2: How consumers interact with brands over social media

   Social networks are used and their purpose. After analyzing all the responses to which networks participants used, it was found that each participant used different social media networks for a wide variety of purposes. Facebook was sometimes used professionally, but most of the time for personal use. Information provided proved that each participant used social media to interact not only with family or friends but with brands that they work for or follow. Measuring success of social media usage was based on the amount of interactions by each user.

   When posing this question to a program manager, they stated, "They have a variety of different reasons so I utilize LinkedIn mostly for professional networking and also to access content of interest. Twitter, I use to share information about the program that I am running as well as lots of different content that relates to the content of our program, as well as it's one of my main sources of news, Twitter is. I try to keep up with what's happening in the worlds of

journalism and communications. That's where I get that kind of news as well, world news for the most part. Instagram, I just like to look at the pictures and to kind of see what my friends are doing but I don't follow that many people I know. I tend to follow more photographers and ... dogs, animals that I like to look at. On Facebook, it's more, obviously more of my personal network, people both near and far and keeping in touch with some of my students and I also utilize a private Facebook group for my class that I teach." When posing this question to a TV news reporter, they stated, "I have Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, I'm not as active on Twitter as I used to be but I'm still on there. Since I live far away from a lot of my friends and family I use it a lot for connecting with them. I also use it a lot for gathering news, it's a great way to find out what's going on in the rest of the world." When posing this question to an Assistant General Manager at a student housing complex, they stated, "Facebook I use to get in touch with people that I don't see very much. I don't really use Twitter as I don't really have a purpose for it. My Facebook is private. You can find that it exists, but you can't see much of the content on it unless you are one of my friends. LinkedIn I use as basically a permanent online resume, I am constantly connecting with colleagues in the student housing industry to understand how my organization is relevant and stands up to the competition. Instagram is more social, and fun for me. Generally, I only really use Instagram to post photos of events that are taking place in life, or of the food that I cook, as I am into cooking and baking."

How content is shared. Each participant interviewed had different responses to how they share and access content. Most participants use smart devices for accessing social media and share content relevant to their perspective fields. Two of the most helpful responses from this question came from a program manager and real estate professional. Each of these participants

did access and share content through smart devices, laptops, and wearables for consumers to view.

A real estate professional stated: "For my organization how I access social media is key to my job. As someone in real estate I am constantly on the go and must use a smart phone, wearable, or tablet to update listings with photos/videos, and interact with my clients. All of the content that I post is shared on social media sites and with mobile technology I am able to share and stream content without delay. I feel that how I access and share content relevant to my job helps to build trust and relationships with my clients due to how I use technologies to always keep my clients updated. Recently my firm has researched how we can also use augmented reality devices to build trust with clients by being able to show a virtual tour of a property on social media without even having to leave the office. This would open many doors as clients can share virtual tours with others versus a standard online photo." A program manager stated: "Today my job is more challenging than ever as I am always traveling or in events where I meet with perspective clients who want to participate in my organizations training programs. My main duty is to recruit for the program, so social media is a necessity. I use smart devices such as my iPad to update our social media pages with photos and important information relevant to our programs. This is extremely helpful as our program attendees are always traveling and using mobile devices to post and share information in an instant setting. I feel that I am really able to build trust and keep recruiting from my iPad, whereas a standard office hinders my ability to share with participants what events are going on as I would have less multimedia elements to post on the social media platforms that we use. We try to be sure that all of our content is accessible from any device and look at KPI data to see how participants are accessing our social media pages and what content is shared. This has allowed for us to build trust and relationships

by creating a social media plan that is centered around device accessibility and interaction as our success comes from posting multimedia updates from events or workshops as they take place."

Interactions with Starbucks. After analyzing all the responses to consumer interactions with Starbucks, it was found that each participant who frequented Starbucks used Starbucks' application to interact with the brand. It was found that not many participants actually used traditional social media (Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter) to view content that was curated by the brand, or to interact with them.

A university student stated; "I had a good experience on social media with Starbucks when I got my gold card and got free drinks. I kept track of this with the mobile application which was like a social network to me. After receiving my special status, I kept posting on Facebook and Twitter about it and kept got a bonus drink because of it. I think that on a negative aspect the application has reliability issues and sometimes has glitches or will close all of a sudden, due to updates. I don't know. Sometimes their app isn't very reliable. Sometimes they'll have the glitches or it'll just shut down all of a sudden. That's an experience that I've had. It's like I can't access something. Also a lot of people, including myself have had negative experiences with the new rewards program and voiced concerns as they were giving gold status to everyone. They did address the issue, but could have provided each member with a trial membership rather than a handout. I like that they extended the gold level for current members by one year."

Positive interactions. After analyzing all the responses to consumer interactions with Starbucks, it was found that each participant who frequented Starbucks used Starbucks' application to interact with the brand. It was found that not many participants actually used traditional social media (Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter) to view content that was curated by the brand, or to interact with them.

A program manager stated: "If I get a really good box from Stitch Fix, I'll tell people about that or when I received unexpectedly, a $50 coupon from Tiny Prints, which is where I ordered my Christmas party invitations and they came late, so they sent me a $50 coupon to use for another order. I thought that was really awesome of them so I tweeted something about it on Twitter." A Professor stated: "If I get travel and have a good experience with a hotel or airline, I'll tell people about that or post a positive review of my trip with photos, and sometimes the hotel will thank me with free items." A sophomore student stated: "If I get a really good box from my subscription service, Birch Box, I'll tell people about that or when I receive points for reviews from Birch Box they issue me a $10 coupon to use for a future order. I think that getting a monetary award for writing product reviews is unique."

Negative interactions. After analyzing all the responses to consumer interactions with Starbucks, it was found that each participant who frequented Starbucks used Starbucks' application, twitter, or store to interact with the brand. It was found that not many participants actually used traditional social media (Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter) to view content that was curated by the brand, or to interact with them.

A program manager stated: "We tried to switch our Time Warner around. We tried to cancel it and they said, "No. You can keep it but we'll give you this lower price." The only reason we kept it was because my husband wanted the channel where you could watch SU basketball, when they're blacked out everywhere else. As it turned out, what they told us didn't happen. They did respond something like, "Oh, we're sorry that happened. Contact your customer service representative," which we already done several times so that's not very helpful. An academic advisor at a large university talked about her recent experience at Starbucks: "I had placed an order for my coffee and breakfast item which I order every morning. The coffee order

was wrong, and Starbucks has a guarantee to make the order the correct way to keep customers satisfied. The barista wouldn't fix my coffee order. I sent a tweet to Starbucks customer service, who in turn sent me 2 free item coupons." A junior at a large university stated; "A lot of people, including myself have had negative experiences with the new rewards program and voiced concerns as they were giving gold status to everyone. They did address the issue, but could have provided each member with a trial membership rather than a handout. I like that they extended the gold level for current members by one year."

RQ3: Best strategies for organizations to use to cultivate trust with consumers

Audience. After analyzing all the responses to consumer interactions with Starbucks, and credibility as trust, it was found that participants believe that a brand's audience plays a large role in the planning of social media strategy. Participants highlighted that an audience can be one of your most credible or incredible sources for information. It was found that brands study consumer purchasing habits or interactions to help curate content for specific audiences with non-traditional forms of multimedia.

A university department head stated; "Knowing our audience is the most crucial aspect to social media or online interactions. My team has to determine which group of people we want to target, for example donors, or alums and how to curate content that is relevant to them. There are really no credibility issues for us when curating our own content as our office is small and has a team of 5-10 people monitoring our social media pages at all times. We do sometimes question the credibility of our audience if we decide to use a piece of content that they shared or wrote themselves." A journalist stated; "The organization that I work for is a smaller regional station, allowing for us to curate content at a more localized and personable level. I personally get told to go cover a story, but it's up to me as to "how" to cover it to get audience attention. With the

news and all television shows today ratings are extremely important so having content that viewers want to share, and are interacting with on a personal level helps for us to generate better ratings and thus a stronger credibility among our audiences."

Social Listening. After analyzing all the responses to consumer interactions with Starbucks, and how brands sue social listening to develop relevant content it was found that participants believe that a major aspect to social listening is using CMS and tagging when interacting. Participants highlighted that a CMS can be one of your most useful sources for information as filters and other tools allow for users to analytically measure feeling or other metric data. It was found that social listening can help to analyze consumer interactions to help curate content for specific audiences with non-traditional forms of multimedia.

A program manager stated; "Knowing our audience is the most crucial aspect to social media or online interactions. We are constantly using content management systems like Hootsuite or Sysomos to analyze content and generate relevant content to perspective consumers. For us using filters and keywords are a major plus as we can look for specific words or phrases that a consumer used about us without being tagged. Our largest challenge when preforming social listening exercises is finding content that is negative or does not provide credible information. Although this does happen to many organizations we personally will identify areas for improvement and try to address the concerns that were highlighted in a certain timeframe to help build trust and content that we can push to all users." A producer stated; "Content curation and knowledge of what my audiences want are the most important tasks of my job. I have to give people what they want, as for the entertainment industry ratings are the most important metric in terms of trust. A team of 5 people who work for me are using content management systems to watch interactions based around the show or product that I am producing content for. These

interactions can really help me to develop trust with consumers by using emotional appeal and experiences to generate my content."

Content curation. After analyzing all the responses to how content can be curated toward specific audiences it was found that most audiences like being able to interact with multimedia, and some sort of award. Participants highlighted that with Starbucks they can download a free application or song which in turn generates a stronger relationship with consumers. If a brand understands their target audience content curation can be geared toward them and properly implemented in a social media plan.

A program manager for an online degree program talked about how she curates content for recruiting purposes. "We have different platforms for our content, but so far the most successful are our Facebook ads. Our ads are pretty straightforward, and highlight our school and new program. We design our advertisements around working professionals and the "online" aspect of the program along with the prestige of the school. This in turn has allowed for us to build our reputation with future students along with other content ideas through word of mouth and reviews or posts on our walls." A social work intern stated; "Content creation can be extremely difficult for our organization due to current events, privacy, and other legal matters. We generally will pick a topic for a month and post videos or infographics to help explain what the issue is and how to help solve it. Our most successful way of curating content is posting about stories from our clients, in the form of photos or videos which allows for us to build credibility and a large audience following as we are able to show how we helped improve an issue that was going on in someone's life."

RQ4: Outcomes from trust-building and social media initiatives

Stronger rating of trust between brands and consumers. After analyzing all the responses to brands having a stronger level of trust with consumers it was found that two of the best ways of building trust were by communication and credibility of facts. Participants highlighted that they generally look for responsiveness and timeliness when interacting with brands.

A producer who owns their own production company talked about how she creates infomercials for companies and must develop a high level of trust between clients and organizations to present products in a unique way with accurate facts and reviews. "I have learned that outcomes stemming from infomercials or social media can be positive if the content that I develop is credible and relevant to viewers tastes and interest. Over the years as a producer I have learned that communications and how we interact with or purchase goods is changing thus leading to the need to plan and develop my content. I have seen many positive outcomes happen from properly creating infomercials and having facts and figures presented that were truthful. This in turn has allowed for me to build my reputation as a producer with clients and future clients." A senior at a top university stated; "Trust matters the most to me personally, I should be able to have a high level of trust with a brand I interact with. As a consumer I personally think that a brand should post accurate and relevant information as it shows that they are trustworthy and able to work to build a relationship with me. As a consumer I like to see how trust is built by looking at an organization's Facebook page if people are complaining or commenting on experiences I hope to see the organization addressing the issues in a public setting, for me this is what builds trust."

Lower rating of trust between brands and consumers. After analyzing all the responses to how an organization may have a lower trust level from social media levels it was

determined that censoring and unresponsiveness were the most devastating to an organizations reputation. Participants highlighted that they generally do not like when there is no response to a post or crisis occurring or when a brand censors posts to make their social media pages look positive.

An Assistant General Manager talked about their own experiences of how they have to follow guidelines put in place by their organization on how to use social media. "Our organization has a policy on how we run our social media accounts, we are not allowed to censor any posts or become unresponsive. Although a negative comment may be posted we are not allowed to delete or hide the post from others who can see it. We are encouraged to be open and like when people post their own opinions or ideas Today many of our clients find out about our organization through social media which is why we have a set number of times and milestones per day that we must meet. As our audience is growing the need to be responsive to our consumers in any situation is extremely important as we need to build trust with them to further our audience base." A senior at a top university stated; "I do not think that it is right to censor someone online based on their own opinion or beliefs. Organizations who attempt to censor someone do have something to hide in my opinion. As a consumer I personally think that a brand should be open to all comments and interactions that are online as it shows that they are trustworthy and able to work to build a relationship with audiences who they may not have been able to target before. Most brands that I interact with online are extremely responsive to my social media posts, but I do believe that brands are generally unresponsive online especially when a crisis or negative event were to occur. If an organization that I do business with ignores my comment in an online setting and does not interact with me the level of trust that I had in the organization will decrease. Although, I do understand that sometimes brands must be

unresponsive as a crisis may be developing, the brand should release a statement or piece of information to let audiences know that they are aware of and working to solve the crisis or issue at hand."

Starbucks in the media. After analyzing all the responses to consumer interactions with Starbucks, and credibility as trust, it was found that participants believe that Starbucks tries to curate content and in-store events based around current events or trends that are taking place during certain times. Participants highlighted two events that the organization tried to curate and create promotions out of, the recent red cup controversy and events geared around gun control. It was found that Starbucks is an organization that tries to gear these interactions around a neighborhood feeling where customers and baristas can come together to talk about issues taking place in society.

An Assistant General Manager stated; "Starbucks had always done an event around the holidays where they would have decorated red cups. Many people including myself liked to take photos with their red cups and post photos on social media to help spread cheer and spark conversations with others. This past holiday season Starbucks tried to be more inclusive to all of its clients and decided to not decorate their cups which upset a lot of their customers as most looked forward to the cups every holiday season. I and others included took to the Starbucks social media page to voice our disappointment, only generating little interactions with the brand." A Sophomore university student stated; "I only come to Starbucks for my coffee, I should not have to hear from baristas about topics going on in society as I personally have my own opinions. I understand what the organization is trying to do by getting customers to interact in store or online about particular issues but it shouldn't be forced on me. After researching this topic, I can tell you that a lot of feedback to this initiative was very poor online. Starbucks did do

right by responding to posts online and even publicly releasing statements from the CEO about

the campaigns." A producer stated; "As someone who works to sell products with interactive

campaigns I completely understand what Starbucks is trying to do by generating knowledge and

collaboration about world issues but it is being done on the wrong channels. Starbucks employs

many Barista's and staff members in its cafes and each one has a different opinion, the

organization as a whole should be the ones to release a statement online and in stores about

policies related to societal issues and not individual employees.

      Crisis and how to resolve. After analyzing all the responses to consumer interactions

with Starbucks, and experiences with other brands, it was found that most organizations may not

have plans in place to help cope with and interact with consumers about a crisis in the

organization. Participants highlighted that they want accurate information that shows responsive

and appropriate voice. This study found that participants wanted crisis to be addressed by the

organization due to trust being built by addressing issues related to the brand or products sold.

A community manager for a large organization stated; "When crisis occurs at our organization

we always address our audiences on social media with an initial statement about the issue first,

this gives us time to research the issue. My team scans social media sites to see if any news

organizations are posting or asking questions to consumers about the crisis affecting us. There

are many credibility issues for us when the media is posting and creating stories without

obtaining a full story or understanding of what happened. As an organization we generally wait

until we have enough accurate facts about an issue before releasing content on social media as it

helps us to build credibility and have less errors. After we respond to concerned consumers

answering whatever questions we can without giving out information that must stay in house." A

General Manger stated; "The organization that I work for is a student housing complex targeting

area college students, allowing for us to create content to post on our Facebook page relevant to

them. We have not had any real "crisis" and have to go through proper channels to release

information if an event were to occur. We do have a social media plan for our complex but any

online communications related to a crisis must be addressed with our main office to allow for

accuracy and legal issues related to any information that is released." A second year university

student stated; "If something happens at an organization that affects me I want to know about it.

Brands should be posting accurate information that addresses the overall issue and any risk to me

that will occur. Having a crisis plan that addresses this will be beneficial to an organization as I

want to be able to trust them and know that the crisis is being addressed."

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

This research study has provided an outline of how consumers and organizations build

and develop trust on social media sites. Even though some of my interviewees did not follow

Starbucks on social media, valuable advice was given on branding and trust which helps to give

a better understanding of how to incorporate a social media plan. The results given in this thesis

are good indicators into how organizations are using social media to build relationships and

develop trustworthy interactions with consumers. The research conducted helps to conclude that

the trends in Chapter 2 (customer relationship management, maximizing return on investment,

definitions of reputation and trust, access and interaction, and social media and e-commerce) all

correlate to how a public relations team should draft a social media communications plan and

develop strategies to help audiences cultivate trust among organizations who use social media.

The biggest piece of information that was taken from this study was that some organizations use

other forms of social media effectively to interact with consumers, thus allowing for sharing of

information, payments, and music capabilities. Today most organizations are developing proprietary social networks for consumers to use rather than traditional forms of social media. This allows for organizations to curate their content specifically to users while giving users the ability to be able to interact with the content through their mobile applications. In the case of Starbucks this was done to provide users with 24/7 content and content that was specific to each location, such as which song was playing, receipts, in stock items, online ordering, and hours of the location that consumers are in. As emerging technologies such as smart watches and augmented reality are becoming prevalent in society today organizations such as Starbucks need to develop their applications and content to be able to be accessed through any type of device. For example, Starbucks has an application/social network on the Apple Watch where users can view the number of stars that they have, the nearest store, and payment methods. Although the Apple Watch application does not have all of the capabilities that the regular application does the development of the application on the watch is key to building trust with users as technology is changing.

The participants who were familiar with Starbucks' social media presence generally had positive things to say about the brand in relation to trust as Starbucks seemed to use social media effectively to promote new products, and address concerns from consumers. The scope of its social media presence seemed to correlate highly with trust as participants found that the brand was able to effectively curate content to specific target audiences. Participants liked that Starbucks used the app effectively, and used multiple social networks to post cross-platform content. Content that was posted included drink specials, urgent information, new drinks, cafes, nutrition facts, photos, and videos created by the Starbucks team. This ability to establish trust with the brand allowed for consumers to establish a high satisfaction rating with the brand and

have positive feedback.

Implications of the Study

As defined in Trust and PR Practice, by Ovaitt and Rawlins, "trust is defined as having credibility and building relationships with audiences based off of the level of trust you have with them. As PR practitioners relationships must be built and maintained over trust and communication as clients and stakeholders are the most important people in any social media campaign." (Ovaitt & Rawlins, 2007, p. 5-7). Organizations seek to build relationships and trust with clients as reputation and social media efforts play a large role in ROI. Social media plans are essential to the overall operation of an organization as communication between stakeholders and consumers will be the most important way of building trust as interactions, and online images will be built.

As social media is changing the way individuals are communicating, the definition of PR is constantly changing. Public relations can be defined as a strategic management strategy, but as communications develop this definition has drastically changed. Today PR would be defined as an organizational strategic management strategy that allows for organizations or community managers to curate content that is reliable and easy for audiences to understand and interact with as content could go viral. This means that a PR practitioner needs to create a social media plan that helps an organization to create content that is interactive and relevant to intended audiences.

Organization-relationship theory plays a large role in this study and future research. As stated earlier, a study by Huang, suggested that organization-public relationships are built off of trust and influence presented between audiences and corporations (Huang ,1998). A later study in 2000 found that the organization-relationship theory was built off of 5 standards which helped build effective relationships; control, trust, satisfaction, commitment, and goal/metric satisfaction

(Grunig and Huang, 2000). The 5 standards presented in the organization-relationship theory and in the literature review in chapter 2 correlate with this study of affective trust. In the literature review, the 5 key terms found include; access and interaction, customer relationship management (CRM), social media and e-commerce, defining reputation and trust, and maximum return on investment.

RQ1: Definition of Affective Trust toward a Brand Participants Interact with

Definition of affective trust. Each participant interviewed had a different definition of affective trust on social media based off of how much experience each participant has with social media. Understanding that trust does not have a universal definition is important as seen in the results below. This allows for brands to develop a social media plan that encompasses trust and relationship building. Today organizations need to understand social media analytics to showcase how a specific campaign or interaction with a consumer provided a return to the organization, as social media can help generate a strong reputation or financial gain. Although positive social media campaigns can generate a positive return on investment, a crisis can generate a positive return if handled properly. As stated earlier in chapter 2 an example of this was with the American Red Cross who had experienced a social media crisis when one of their employees had sent out a rogue tweet from the corporate account, and not their personal one. The tweet referenced drinking and partying. Once the tweet was discovered, the American Red Cross had responded appropriately by discouraging drinking and driving. The tweet had ended up going viral on social media and had been seen by a multitude of organizations, one being a brewery. Once discovered, the brewery had responded to being responsible and that its followers should donate to the American Red Cross (Wasserman, 2011).

RQ2: How consumers interact with brands over social media

Social networks are used and their purpose. After analyzing all the responses to which networks participants used, it was found that each participant used different social media networks for a wide variety of purposes. Facebook was sometimes used professionally, but most of the time for personal use. Information provided proved that each participant used social media to interact not only with family or friends but with brands that they work for or follow. Access and interaction correlate with the organization-relationship theory as control is the most important aspect of this term. As stated earlier, in 2014, only 15 percent of social media users trusted an organization's communication efforts, even where most consumers were actually unfamiliar with a good or service advertised in a store or online by their favorite brand (Nieto, 2014). It was also found that there is a lack of face-to-face interaction which hinders the ability for a brand to prove its product or service to customers. Due to this lack of face-to-face interaction, customer satisfaction can be lower.

RQ3: Best strategies for organizations to use to cultivate trust with consumers

Content curation. After analyzing all the responses to how content can be curated toward specific audiences it was found that most audiences like being able to interact with multimedia, and some sort of award. Participants highlighted that with Starbucks they can download a free application or song which in turn generates a stronger relationship with consumers. If a brand understands their target audience content curation can be geared toward them and properly implemented in a social media plan. Participants stated that their organizations used CRM to interact with consumers through various channels such as Hootsuite, or Sysomos. Customer relationship management (CRM) correlates with organization-relationship theory as trust is the most important aspect of relationship management. Today organizations need to use social media to interact with consumers as communications platforms

are widely driven on the use of technology and online interactions. Social media plans are incorporating the organization-relationship theory and affective trust to help build relationships as consumer interaction can play a role in overall reputation of an organization. As stated earlier in a research study by Calefato, it was determined that approximately 44% of the subjects interviewed examined an organization's Facebook page to determine how the organization interacted with customers, and how customers perceived the organization as a whole (Calefato, 2015). This question helped to answer and provide reasoning for further research to determine how consumer relationships and trust are used in the overall development of relationship building and the definition of public relations.

RQ4: Outcomes from trust-building and social media initiatives

  Stronger rating of trust between brands and consumers. After analyzing all the responses to brands having a stronger level of trust with consumers it was found that two of the best ways of building trust were by communication and credibility of an e-commerce campaign. Participants highlighted that they generally look for responsiveness and timeliness when interacting with brands. **S**ocial media and e-commerce correlates with organization-relationship theory as satisfaction is a large aspect of relationship management. Today organizations need to use social media to showcase products sold in an online setting, with accurate information to attract consumers to their store or online shop. Social platforms are widely used to sell goods due to satisfaction ratings and online interactions. In a 2012 study completed by Huen, it was found that least one-quarter of 720 people surveyed felt safe making a purchase on Facebook or an organizations online social media page (Huen, 2012). The statistic was lower due to recent scams on social media by rogue social media accounts trying to steal user information. As corporations incorporate the 5 key terms of organization-relationship management into social media plans

trust levels will improve. Reputation and trust correlates with organization-relationship theory as commitment is the most important to consumers. Today organizations need to use social media to show consumers that they are committed to them and their products. Social media is widely used today to allow for interaction between organizations and consumers to share experiences or information about a new good or service. These interactions are important for an organization to respond to as any sort of response in a public setting will help to build reputation and relationships among consumers. As stated earlier, according to a study published in the Edelman Trust Barometer, approximately 59% of social media users do recommend brands to friends or colleagues based on trust and an organization's social media accounts (Edleman, 2016). Among this audience, approximately 67% of the population use social media to interact and search for relevant topics. The most used source of media by the surveyed population was approximately 71%, this number was most likely higher due to the credibility of searched sources (Edelman, 2016).

This study observed how brands use social media platforms and curate content that is credible and relevant to audiences and provided examples of where social media efforts went wrong, and what some organizations implemented to regain lost trust from audiences. By looking at a social media page or content created by many top brands levels of trust and consumer involvement can be found by completing a content analysis of interactions and emotional data on social media pages.

In this completed study I found that consistency, credibility, and interaction are the most important aspects of social media and trust. Organizations should implement a social media strategy that allows for consumer interaction and brands to develop their own image and create a loyalty to any product backed by a logo. PR must evolve to further develop a definition and

understanding of trust that is more versatile and further adapted with technological advancements.

Takeaways from the Study

Findings from this research study suggested that Starbucks has too many sub-pages for each one of its products thus making it hard for audiences to fully understand and trust the brand. Based off of these findings it is suggested that Starbucks starts to terminate the per product pages and have one main page for the whole brand where users can go to interact. Lately Starbucks has been in the news due to their stances on social beliefs and how they are trying to make Starbucks into a small town local community. This has taken a toll on trust with social media as the brand highlights these events on their social media pages which has stirred controversy. Based off of the findings from this study it is suggested that if the brand does continue to run campaigns in this fashion that they address all concerns that their consumers have via social media. Quite a few participants had mentioned the changes to the Starbucks Rewards Program during the individual interviews and that Starbucks seemed to devalue customers and slowly released fine details into how the program was going to work. This led to credibility issues where news sites or online blogs/journals broadcast false details about the program and the brand. This ultimately led to backlash on the Starbucks Facebook page. Due to the issues stated above I do believe that the brand should shy away from the mainstream social media accounts that it does have as the following and interactions are a lot less as the personability and customization is hindered in these online settings.

After completing this research study, I would suggest that Starbucks focus its social media efforts on its mobile application. This application a large social network created internally by the brand. It was found that most participants loved the ability to customize content, and have

everything all in one place for easy access. In terms of cultivating affective trust and building relationships the brand so far has done well through its app as they are constantly updating and curating relevant content that their consumers want. The brand has used the application to effectively curate content and release information to certain audiences in a timely fashion. The application also allows for consumers to customize some settings for content, payments, and location. These features have allowed for relationship building and trust as Starbucks is able to focus on social media customization. To improve the current application Starbucks should implement a feature where live feedback and suggestions section should be added and monitored in real time at each Starbucks location to respond to customer concerns and inquiries in a timely manner. Starbucks could also allow for better music sharing and allow for easier purchasing of instore music via the application, which would promote social media and e-commerce as a new category for the brand.

Consumers develop purchasing habits and brand loyalty based off of emotions and experiences if Starbucks were to allow further customization of the application each user would be able to obtain content relevant to them allowing to build relationship and trust levels. The best example of this was based off of data from my research study. Consumers love to customize the application with information related to their birthday as it allows for them to see what products are offered, obtain brand specific content, and even a birthday message. Every year during your birthday month Starbucks uses its application to showcase birthday related content and products, while awarding the customer with a free birthday item of their choosing. This is one of the largest and most successful ways that the brand develops relationships and trust with consumers.

Overall, I do believe that Starbucks is on the right track with using its mobile application to interact and build trust with consumers. The brand should shy away from the mainstream

social media accounts that it does have as the following and interactions are a lot less as the personability and customization is hindered in these online settings. As earlier findings suggest credibility and emotion are two of the key aspects of affective trust. If Starbucks were to discontinue traditional social media efforts, it would be beneficial as the brand is able to control and curate content which allows for high credibility levels.

As I completed my literature review I was able to gain a new understanding of how relationships can be built on social media, and how trust plays a large role in not only customer satisfaction but loyalty and social media efforts. This study found that:

- Organizations define trust in different ways, and may not have a proper communication channel that allows for un-biased consumer and brand interactions.

- Consumers are having a difficult time putting trust into brands that do utilize social media as credibility is an issue when any sort of crisis or event does occur.

- Future studies could help to further determine how trust is linked to relationships and following, especially in relation to an organizations image on social media sites.

Limitations and Future Research

While completing this study attracting participants who knew about Starbucks social media presence was difficult as some participants stated that they only found themselves interacting with the brand while in store. At first, this caused some issues with participant numbers but when I realized that their application can be considered a form of social media it allowed for me to target participants in a different way, and allowed for me to ask why they didn't follow the brand on social media. This then led to one of my research questions about how brands can cater content to build a following with consumers. Based off of research results it seemed that at least for Starbucks social media was underutilized in multiple markets, which is

not a problem for other brands. I expected that more participants would be familiar with Starbucks social media efforts, but soon realized that not all mainstream brands have a social media following that people are familiar with. These themes identified in the interviews confirmed previous research in the literature reviews, that for a brand to be mainstream consumers don't have to follow or trust content on its social media accounts. The research was limited on trust and social media, whereas most data reported overlapped thus causing information accessibility to become an issue. Most of the research that was present were pieces of data that stated the percentage of brand trustworthiness on social media and why, but few documents dove deeply into why results were reported in such a manner.

One of the major gaps that was identified in the literature review and interviews was that although consumers used social media to interact with organizations, credibility and responsiveness played a large role in how consumers analyzed trustworthiness of brands online. This meant that there is no one definition as to affective trust, and whereas most brands are using social media effectively, there has not been a standard developed in regards to consumer trust and the building of online relationships.

Future research is needed to develop a definition and standard of affective trust and universal guidelines that can be incorporated into any social media plan to help build levels of trust and relationships with consumers.

Appendix I: Consent Form

Department of Public Relations

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

215 University Place

Syracuse, NY, 13210

Consent Form

Project Title: Building affective trust among customer-organization relationships on social media accounts.

Hello! My name is Branden Birmingham, a graduate student in the Department of Public Relations at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. I along with Hua Jiang, Assistant Professor, will conduct interviews to explore how participants trust organizations on social media accounts. You are invited to participate in this interview session because of your knowledge of social media.

Involvement in this study is voluntary, so you may choose not to participate in it. This sheet will explain the study to you and please feel free to ask questions about the research if you have any. I will be happy to explain if you wish.

As you know, the main purpose of this research study is to understand practices of trust in social

project attempts to examine how people define trust, how trust is built on social media, how a

brand is interacted with, and how a brand such as Starbucks can develop a trusted relationship

with customers, the affect (positive and negative) when content (credible, or non-credible) is

generated, and perceptions of brand commitment and brand loyalty. To fulfill the purpose of the

research participants will be recruited to participate in in-depth interviews. Through

interviewing, I will garner a better understanding of how brands use social media to build trust

and relationships with clients.

Department of Public Relations

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

215 University Place

Syracuse, NY, 13210

This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes of your time. All identifying information will be kept strictly confidential. This means that your name and other personally identifying information will not appear anywhere and will not be linked to your identity in any way.

If you give us your permission, I will audio-record the interview. If you don't agree that we do so, your interview will <u>NOT</u> be recorded in any means.

The purpose for the recording is that we want to have an accurate and complete record of information that you will share with me during the interview. The interview will be transcribed verbatim for data analysis. Moreover, in my written report and/or oral presentations of my findings at an academic and professional conferences and workshops, the text version of the interview may be quoted. Confidentiality will be highly respected. While I will use the text version of the transcribed interview in any occasions, your affiliation and your organizations identity will <u>NOT</u> be revealed unless you give us permission to do so. The audio version of your interview will NEVER be shared with anyone in any occasion. Only the PI Branden Birmingham, and Professor Hua Jiang will have access to the recording and its transcribed text

version. When the study is complete, the interview recording and its text version will be

destroyed.

The results of your interview will help public relations scholars and practitioners understand how

corporations build trust with customers on social media accounts, how a brand is interacted with,

and how a brand such as Starbucks can develop a trusted relationship with customers, the affect

(positive and negative) when content (credible, or non-credible) is generated, and perceptions of

brand commitment and brand loyalty.

Department of Public Relations

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

215 University Place

Syracuse, NY, 13210

The risks to you of participating in this study are that the researcher (interviewer) knows who the

participants are. It is not anonymous. But your personal information will be kept strictly

confidential. All your contact information will <u>NOT</u> be linked to your answers in my report

unless you give me permission to do so.

Confidentiality will be strictly respected in the study. Interviewing data and results will be stored

as digital files in PI (Principle Investigator) Branden Birmingham's encrypted personal laptop.

Only the PI and Hua Jiang will have access to the data.

Department of Public Relations

S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

215 University Place

Syracuse, NY, 13210

If you do not want to take part, you have the right to refuse to take part in the study without penalty. If you decide to take part but no longer wish to continue, you have a right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions, concerns, complaints about the research, contact Branden Birmingham, at bdbirmin@syr.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you have questions, concerns or complaints that you wish to address with someone other than the investigator or you cannot reach the investigator, contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study. I understand I can print a copy for my own record.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Investigator's Name (Printed): _____

Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Recording Statement (Please select one):

_____ Yes, I agree to be audio-recorded in the interview.

_____ No, I DO NOT agree to be audio-recorded. I understand since I don't give my permission

to the investigator to do so, my interview will NOT be recorded in ANY means.

Appendix II: Research Questions

Research Questions:

1) How do customers define affective trust toward a brand that they are engaged with via social media?

2) How do customers interact with their favorite brands via social media?

3) What are the best strategies that organizations need to use to cultivate affective trust with their customers?

4) What are the outcomes that organizations can accomplish through their trust-building social media initiatives/efforts?

Interview Questions:

Background information:

    13. How long have you been using social media?

    14. What is your current career?

    15. What is your educational background?

    16. Which social networks are you active on?

        a.   What is your purpose for using them?

        b.   If not, Why do you not use Social Media?

    17. Does your organization/employer have a Facebook page, a twitter account, and any other social media sites?

a. How does it use the social media for communication purposes? How do you like their social media efforts?

b. Do you think it has cultivated trust with audiences? Why?

Research Question 1: How do customers define affective trust toward a brand that they are engaged with via social media?

Research Question 2: How do customers interact with their favorite brands via social media?

18. Do you use social networks to view content developed by Starbucks?

a. How do you use the networks to view the content?

b. Do you interact with the brand?

    i. How do you interact with them?

    ii. Do you only interact with them when experience issues arise? Why?

    iii. Do you trust these brands to provide accurate information? Why?

19. How do you define trust?

a. Do you trust the brand described above?

b. Why/ Why Not?

c. How has the brand gained or lost your trust?

d. How can the brand cater its content to you?

e. What can the brand do to gain your trust?

20. Highlight an experience that you had with a brand who you trusted.

21. Highlight an experience that you had with a brand who you did not trust.

Research Question 3: What are the best strategies that organizations need to use to cultivate affective trust with their customers?

Research question 4: What are the outcomes that organizations can accomplish through their trust-building social media initiatives/efforts?

22. Do you trust content that is developed by Starbucks?
    a. How do you determine whether it is credible?
    b. What do you do if the content you see on Starbucks accounts is not credible?
        i. How do you verify credibility of content?
        ii. Do you only interact with trust different content posted on different platforms? Why?
        iii. Do you trust Starbucks to create a strategy that allows for them to build trust with customers? Why?

23. Do you think that Starbucks success online can be hindered or gained if trust is or is not properly implemented? Why?
    a. What outcomes could happen from a trust related issue? How can Starbucks strategize for this type of event?
    b. Could the loss of trust in the Starbucks brand lead to a poor future for them?
    c. Why/Why not?

    d.   What outcomes could happen from a successful/unsuccessful social media

       campaign?

    e.   What can the Starbucks do to have a high trust rating among consumers?

24. Highlight an experience that you had when a trust led to a positive outcome for

Starbucks?

25. Highlight an experience that you had that would produce a negative outcome.

References

2016 Edelman Trust Barometer. (n.d.). Retrieved July 09, 2016, from

http://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/2016-edelman-trust-barometer/

Baird, C. H., & Parasnis, G. (2011). From social media to Social CRM: Reinventing the

customer relationship. *Strategy &; Leadership, 39*(6), 27-34.

doi:10.1108/10878571111176600

Baird, C., & Parasnis, G. (2013). From social media to social customer relationship management.

IEEE Engineering Management Review, 41(3), 48-55. doi:10.1109/emr.2013.6596548

Boon, S. D., & Holmes, J. G. (1991). The dynamics of interpersonal trust: Resolving uncertainty

in the face of risk. In R. A. Hinde & J. Groebel (Eds.), *Cooperation and prosocial*

behaviour (pp.190-211). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Calefato, F., Lanubile, F., & Novielli, N. (2015). The role of social media in affective trust

building in customer–supplier relationships. *Electronic Commerce Research, 15*(4), 453-

482. doi:10.1007/s10660-015-9194-3

Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect

to brand performance: The role of brand loyalty. *Journal of Marketing, 65*(2), 81-93.

doi:10.1509/jmkg.65.2.81.18255

Chevalier, J. A., & Mayzlin, D. (2003). *The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book*

reviews. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008*). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for*

developing grounded theory (3rd ed.). doi:10.4135/9781452230153

DeMers, J. (2015, January 21). *8 ways to build trust on social media*. Retrieved July 09, 2016,

from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jayson-demers/8-ways-to-build-trust-on-

_b_6515768.html

Friedrichsen, M., & Mühl-Benninghaus, W. (n.d.). *Handbook of social media management: Value chain and business models in changing media markets*.

From social media to social CRM. (n.d.). Retrieved August 04, 2016, from http://www-935.ibm.com/services/us/gbs/thoughtleadership/ibv-social-crm-whitepaper.html

Furlong, M. S. (1989). An electronic community for older adults: The SeniorNet Network. *Journal of Communication, 39*(3), 145-153. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1989.tb01048.x

Grunig, J. E., & Huang, Y. (2000). From organizational effectiveness to relationship indicators: Antecedents of relationships, public relations strategies, and relationship outcomes. In J. A. Ledingham & S. D. Bruning (Eds.), *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to public relations* (pp. 23-54). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hiltz, S. R., & Wellman, B. (1997). Asynchronous learning networks as a virtual classroom. *Communications of the ACM, 40*(9), 44-49. doi:10.1145/260750.260764

How people decide what to trust on social media and online. (2016, April 17). Retrieved August 04, 2016, from https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/survey-research/news-trust-digital-social-media/

Huang, Y. H. (1997). *Public relations strategies, relational outcomes, and conflict management strategies*. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

Huen, D. (2012, January 11). Consumers lack trust in social media payment options: Survey. *American Banker*.

Hung, Y., Dennis, A., & Robert, L. (2004). Trust in virtual teams: Towards an integrative model

of trust formation. *37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2004. Proceedings of the*. doi:10.1109/hicss.2004.1265156

Jo, S. (2006). Measurement of organization–public relationships: Validation of measurement using a manufacturer–retailer relationship. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 18*(3), 225-248. doi:10.1207/s1532754xjprr1803_2

Johnson, D., & Grayson, K. (2005). Cognitive and affective trust in service relationships. *Journal of Business Research, 58*(4), 500-507. doi:10.1016/s0148-2963(03)00140-1

Jones, B., Temperley, J., & Lima, A. (2009). Corporate reputation in the era of Web 2.0: The case of Primark. *Journal of Marketing Management, 25*(9-10), 927-939. doi:10.1362/026725709x479309

Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (1998). Relationship management in public relations: Dimensions of an organization-public relationship. *Public Relations Review, 24*(1), 55-65. doi:10.1016/s0363-8111(98)80020-9

Nambisan, P., & Watt, J. H. (2011). Managing customer experiences in online product communities. *Journal of Business Research, 64*(8), 889-895. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2010.09.006

Nieto, D. V. (2014, August 20). Social media has undermined peoples' trust in brands. Retrieved August 04, 2016, from https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/aug/20/social-media-has-undermined-peoples-trust-in-brands

Ridings, C. M., & Gefen, D. (2006). Virtual community attraction: Why people hang out online. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 10*(1), 00-00. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2004.tb00229.x

Supa, D. W., Ph.D. (2014, September 17). The academic inquiry of media relations as both a

tactical and strategic function of public relations. *The Institute for Public Relations,* 1-15. Retrieved from http://www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/OrgSupa1stIssue1.pdf

The Smart Social. (2015). Retrieved August 04, 2016, from https://www.spredfast.com/sites/default/files/The-Smart-Social-Report-2.pdf

Thompson, H. (2016, February 28). *6 examples of social media crises: What can we learn?* |Our Social Times - Social Media Agency, Social Media Training. Retrieved August 04, 2016, from http://oursocialtimes.com/6-examples-of-social-media-crises-what-can-we-learn/

Trust and PR Practice | Institute for Public Relations. (2007). Retrieved August 04, 2016, from http://www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Rawlins-Trust-formatted-for-IPR-12-10.pdf

Vizard, S. (2016, June 8). *Consumer trust in brands on social media falls as line between marketing and non-commercial blurs*. Retrieved July 09, 2016, from https://www.marketingweek.com/2016/06/08/consumer-trust-in-brands-on-social-media-falls-as-line-between-marketing-and-non-commercial-blurs/

Washington, M. G. (2013, November 1). *Trust and project Performance: The effects of cognitive-based and affective-based trust on client-project manager engagements*. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1068&context=od_theses_msod

Wasserman, T. (2011). Red Cross does PR disaster recovery on rogue tweet. Retrieved August 04, 2016, from http://mashable.com/2011/02/16/red-cross-tweet/

Curriculum Vitae

BRANDEN BIRMINGHAM

bdbirmin@syr.edu

EDUCATION

Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

M.S. Public Relations   2016

Thesis: Building Affective Trust Among Client-Organization Relationships on Social Media

Accounts

Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

M.S. Information Management   2015

Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

B.S. Information Management and Technology   2014

Areas of Concentration: Emerging Technologies, Social media

AWARDS

Imagining America Engagement Scholar   August 2014 – August 2015

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

Instructional Assistant – "Communications Law"   2016

Assist in draft of weekly quizzes • Graded and provided feedback on student essays • Create

PowerPoint on "Copyright Law" and Lecture • Assisted students during office hours • Proctored

exams

Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

Instructional Assistant – "Social Media for Public Communicators"   2015

Created quiz questions • Graded submitted student assignments • Assisted in execution of lecture

• Assisted students during office hours • Proctored exams • Monitored class hashtag for weekly

interaction report

Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

Graduate Assistant – "Professional Reporting and presentation"   2015

Taught students about professional presentation skills with weekly lectures and practical's •

Coordinated with professor in planning of weekly lectures • Critiqued students and gave

feedback to presentations using rubric developed by university department • Coached students in

weekly office hours to assist students individually with weekly assignments and topics as needed

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Park Point Syracuse, Syracuse, NY

Community Assistant, August 2015 – July 2016

Assisted with apartment leasing process • Assisted in the execution of $606,000 in leases for

2016-17 school year • Assisted in bi-weekly lease audits • Collected delinquent funds • Assisted

as on-call staff member as needed • Provided customer service to parents or residents in need •

Promoted Park Point Syracuse at university events

Administrative Computing Services, Syracuse, NY

Help Desk Associate, June 2014 – August 2015

Aided and diagnosed software and hardware issues presented by university staff • Collaborated

in building desktops to Syracuse University standards, including imaging, encryption, software

integration, updates, and patching • Assisted technicians with in field support issues including

hardware installations, malfunctions, and general IT questions

J.P. Morgan Chase

Business Systems Analyst Intern, June 2013 – November 2013

Reviewed and analyzed weekly on key performance metrics for application security • Extracted

and input data from security vulnerability reports into database • Assisted in development and

overhaul of internal IntraConnect site for employee certifications

PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS

"Building Affective Trust Among Client-Organization Relationships on Social Media Accounts"

   2016

MEMBERSHIPS

Delta Chi Fraternity