Walden University

ScholarWorks

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection

2021

Social Media Marketing Engagement Strategies to Increase Sales

Teresa Rosanne Carter
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Teresa Rosanne Carter

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Franz Gottleib, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Lisa Cave, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Matthew Knight, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Social Media Marketing Engagement Strategies to Increase Sales

by

Teresa Rosanne Carter

MS, Golden Gate University, 2009

BS, Limestone College, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2021

Abstract

Social media has transformed marketers' communication and engagement with consumers, yet the lack of social media marketing strategies hinders marketers' effectiveness in increasing sales. Marketers who fail to increase sales are at a higher risk of business failure. Grounded in the relationship marketing theory, the purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the strategies social media marketing managers use to engage digital consumers to increase sales. The participants comprised three marketing managers in South Carolina who effectively used social media marketing strategies to engage digital consumers and increase sales. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and a review of the company's social media marketing platforms, media postings, and published performance measurements. A thematic assessment revealed three significant themes: consumer awareness, social relationship management, and performance measurement. A key recommendation for social media marketers is to create brand awareness and foster trust and loyalty to increase sales. The implications for positive social change included the potential for social media marketers to promote business success, which contributes to the local economy and enhances the community to create a better place to live.

Social Media Marketing Engagement Strategies to Increase Sales

by

Teresa Rosanne Carter

MS, Golden Gate University, 2009

BS, Limestone College, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2021

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my study to my granddaughter, Taleah Cumberlander. Taleah spent numerous hours listening as I read my dissertation aloud and sat quietly beside me while putting my thoughts on paper. My immediate family Tressa, Kayce, Pennie, and DJ, who was praying daily, patient, supportive, and made sacrifices to make this process a success, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. To the extended family who continued to push me in my trial times when I felt like throwing in the towel, their motivation was my stimuli to press on. I pray that I set an example before everyone that will demonstrate determination and perseverance denotes success. Thank you all. This dissertation was an incredible journey, and I appreciate the encouragement and motivation from everyone. I love you all very much. God Bless.

Acknowledgments

I am extending my sincere thanks to everyone who has supported and motivated me through this DBA journey. Thank you to my family and friends for their kind words and motivation along the way. A special thanks to Dr. Michael Gottleib, my doctoral chair, for your guidance, patience, and motivation. I want to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Lisa Cave, and Dr. Matthew Knight, for your constructive feedback, which elevated the quality and content of my study. Special gratitude to the business faculty at Limestone University, who reaffirmed my capabilities throughout each step of the journey and assisted me with helpful tips and shared experiences. Above all, thanks to God for the strength and perseverance.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

v

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

Business leaders are looking beyond traditional marketing methods toward technology-driven media for cost-effective and engaging communication opportunities with consumers to build relationships and enhance sales (Tuten & Mintu-Wimsatt, 2018). Social media provides business leaders strategic tools to reach consumers, to create brand awareness, and to strengthen relationships with clients while enhancing buying behavior (Oyza & Edwin, 2016). Social media includes various platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google, and LinkedIn, which allow users to interact and engage with one another regularly (Sihi & Lawson, 2018). Consumers use social media to connect with billions of people around the world to share experiences and opinions and to interact with each other for many different purposes (Sihi & Lawson, 2018).

Social media channels provide marketers with opportunities to communicate in real-time with consumers in ways that would not be possible through traditional media methods (Tuten & Mintu-Wimsatt, 2018). Utilization of social platforms gives marketers the potential to connect with billions of consumers daily, allowing businesses to reach their target markets and engage with potential consumers more effectively (Tuten & Mintu-Wimsatt, 2018). Although many business leaders use social media to reach their target markets and attract potential consumers, not all have sufficient knowledge to assist them in developing strategies to cultivate additional value for their organizations (Oyza & Edwin, 2016). This qualitative multiple case study, included an exploration of strategies social media marketers use to engage with digital consumers to increase sales.

Problem Statement

Poor communication hampers social media marketers (SMM) from reaching their targeted consumers (Tuten & Mintu-Wimsatt, 2018). Conversely, Oyza and Edwin (2016) found that from 2013-2015, SMM using social media as a strategic tool to actively engage in social platforms increased their percentage of loyal customers from 65% to 72% and increased their sales from 43% to 50%. The general business problem was that businesses that lack effective social media communications miss opportunities to increase sales. The specific business problem was that some SMM lack strategies to engage digital consumers to increase sales.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this proposed qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SMM use to engage digital consumers to increase sales. The targeted population was marketing managers in three companies located in upstate South Carolina who have successfully used social media engagement strategies with digital consumers to increase sales. The results of this proposed study could lead to social change by engaging and building relationships between businesses and consumers to increase trust and loyalty. Increasing trust and loyalty may elevate the appreciation of the consumer provider economy, leading to enlightened consumers.

Nature of the Study

The methods used in academic studies consist of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Yin, 2018). Researchers use the qualitative method to explore the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of individuals to understand *what* takes place, and,

how, and *why* a phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2018). Researchers use a quantitative approach to test hypotheses and answer questions by analyzing statistical differences or relationships (Yin, 2018). The mixed method approach is a blend of qualitative and quantitative techniques to achieve a multifaceted view of a phenomenon (Thiele et al., 2018). The intention of my study was not to explore relationships indicating causation or difference; therefore, the quantitative and mixed methods were not appropriate. I selected a qualitative method as my intention was to explore thoughts and opinions to understand marketers' strategies.

Researchers may choose from several designs when using a qualitative methodology, including ethnography, phenomenology, and case study (Yin, 2018). Researchers use ethnography to focus on the culture, beliefs, and lifeways of a culture (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Wallace, 2019). I opted against using ethnography because the focus of my study was not on understanding the culture, beliefs, or lifeways of a society. The phenomenological researcher explores the participants' lived experiences to understand a specific phenomenon (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). I did not use the phenomenology design as my purpose was not to explore lived experiences. Researchers use a case study design to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences of a unique phenomenon (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). According to Yin (2018), researchers use multiple case studies to explore the differences between cases to replicate findings, predict outcomes, and gain an in-depth understanding. I used the multiple case study design to obtain SMM knowledge and strategies for engaging with digital consumers to increase sales.

Research Question

What are the strategies social media marketers use to engage digital consumers to increase sales?

Interview Questions

1. What social media engagement strategies have successfully led to an increase in your sales with digital consumers?

2. How did you measure the success of social media engagement strategies that increased sales with digital consumers?

3. What are some examples of content that supported social media engagement, leading to increased sales with digital consumers?

4. What were the barriers to implementing social media engagement strategies that increased sales with digital consumers?

5. How did you address the barriers to implement social media engagement strategies that increased sales with digital consumers?

6. What social media platforms were most effective at social media engagement strategies that led to increased sales with digital consumers?

7. What other additional information would you like to share about social media engagement strategies that increased sales with digital consumers?

Conceptual Framework

I used relationship marketing as the primary conceptual framework for my study. Berry (1983) explained relationship marketing in 1983 as an essential tool for marketing leaders to attract, maintain, and enhance customer relationships. Given social media's rise

as a paradigm in marketing, social media has become an essential relationship marketing tool for marketing leaders as they expand into the social media technology era (Melancon & Dalakas, 2017). The basic tenets of relationship marketing are (a) embracing communications, (b) creating personal and meaningful experiences, and (c) building long-term and profitable relationships with consumers (Berry, 1983). Social media marketers may use relationship marketing as a framework to build trust and loyalty between consumers to enhance engagement and increase sales (Berry, 1983). Berry believed that trust and loyalty were products of consumer control in choosing alternative products or services and engaging and building relationships with consumers. Therefore, relationship marketing was an appropriate conceptual framework as a lens through which to explore the engagement strategies that SMM can use to communicate, engage, and interact with digital consumers to increase sales.

Operational Definitions

Consumer loyalty: Consumer loyalty is when consumers make repetitious purchases of a specific product or brand as the need or desire arises (Ramli et al., 2017).

Internet marketing: Internet marketing is promotional tactics via the internet to gain exposure to consumers and to enhance buying behaviors (Soule et al., 2019).

Real-time: Real-time consists of optimal engagement using electronic devices to communicate instantaneously (Martin et al., 2015).

Relationship marketing: Relationship marketing is attracting, maintaining, and enhancing the relationship between consumers and companies, frequently through brand loyalty (Jones et al., 2018).

Social media engagement: Social media engagement encompasses consumers directly responding or sharing with other consumers to endorse a product and facilitate brand awareness (Li & Xie, 2019).

Social media marketers: Social media marketers use social media platforms to communicate brand knowledge and the benefits of purchasing products with consumers (Sihi & Lawson, 2018).

Social media marketing: Social media marketing is an internet-related technology that has evolved since the early 2000s to keep consumers connected via the internet (Venciute, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

According to Marti et al. (2019), assumptions are true statements that are not verifiable. Lewis and Molyneux (2018) noted that researchers make assumptions based on beliefs that will help to frame a proposed study and validate the reasoning for conducting the research. Participant honesty is critical to obtaining accurate results. For this study, I assumed that the candidates would provide candid and honest responses for each interview question. I assumed that the participants understood the strategies of social media marketing and represented the target population in the research. To mitigate this assumption, I selected participants based on their primary role in the organizations, their expertise in using social media to increase sales, and the breadth of their knowledge.

Limitations

The limitations of a study are outside the researcher's control (Marti et al., 2019).

A limitation is the lack of consistently valid data, which may be due to the demographics

or segmentation of a population (Marti et al., 2019). The first limitation in this study was

the potentially biased feelings of participants concerning social media and their

encounters with marketers and other social media users. Second, there was the possibility

of limited transferability based on the amount of information obtained and the constraints

evident in researching specific contexts. Another limitation addressed the functional roles

of participants in the organization as they may not have been the primary parties

responsible for the business's social media engagement. Last, participants may have

abstained from sharing information due to concerns about protecting proprietary

knowledge; therefore, the responses may be incomplete, misleading, and unsubstantial as

well as not pertinent to all social media marketing.

Delimitations

Delimitations are controllable factors that limit the scope and create the

boundaries for a study (Simon, 2011). Delimitations include the researcher's choice of

methodology used to conduct the study and the selected population (Sixto-Garcia, 2017).

To explore the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of respondents managing social

media, I selected a qualitative methodology. For this proposed study, I researched SMM

from three companies located in upstate South Carolina who have successfully used

social media engagement strategies with digital consumers to increase sales. Another

delimitation was the choice of participants based on their functional roles as marketing

managers that best aligned with the study purpose. The final delimitation was that my focus was on three social media platforms the respondents used to promote the brand in the marketplace, as not all media channels allow brand promotion. The scope of my study involved SMM from at least three organizations on three social media platforms to produce information that may contribute to social media marketers' engaging with digital consumers to increase sales.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Business leaders face many challenges with online technology. Online technology facilitates easy entry into markets by competitors. A flooded or robust market may blur a unique product or service quality. Social media marketers can encourage engagement and increase a product/service value by utilizing social media channels to enhance their communications with the consumer (Oyza & Edwin, 2016). Consumers recognize social media as a means of obtaining information related to products and making knowledgeable purchasing decisions (Jiang et al., 2017). Social media marketers of an organization may engage with consumers through social media platforms to communicate brand knowledge and the benefits of purchasing products (Sihi & Lawson, 2018). Social media marketers may benefit from this study by obtaining social media technology strategies to engage with consumers, increase brand awareness, promote growth, and increase sales (Jiang et al., 2017). The results of this study could enable businesses to use social media to improve their communication skills and engage consumers while increasing sales.

Social Change Implications

The results of this proposed study might contribute to positive social change in two dimensions. The first dimension is the enlightenment of SMM regarding engagement with consumers. Improved communication skills acquired by SMM may enrich the digital consumer's purchase and decision-making experience. The second dimension is that improved social media platforms could allow consumers to engage with organizations, build relationships that foster trust and loyalty, and create customer satisfaction (Melancon & Dalakas, 2018).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies SMM use to engage digital consumers to increase sales. Researchers conduct literature reviews to ensure a comprehensive review of information related to their topic, as well as to increase credibility (Winchester & Salji, 2016). Furthermore, conducting a comprehensive literature review provides an opportunity to identify new information and to develop new ideas about a chosen topic (Fisch & Block, 2018). Researchers review the literature to identify gaps in the literature and determine potential areas for future study.

The review begins with a detailed review of conceptual frameworks applicable to this study, beginning with relationship marketing theory. A review of the TAM and DOI theories follows. The next section consists of a discussion about competitive advantage as it relates to this study, an examination of low-cost leadership, differentiation, network effect, complexity, and proactive and reactive strategies. I follow with a discussion of marketing evolution, to include production, sales, marketing, relationship marketing, and

social eras. The literature review continues with a discussion of social media marketing strategies and concludes with a review of social media antecedents.

My literature review includes data accumulated from peer-review journals and Walden University Library databases, including ABI/INFORM Complete, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and Sage Publications. I explored books and information located on social media platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Youtube. In the search, I used keyword terms to focus my exploration: *competitive advantage, customer relationship management, relationship marketing, sales, social media engagement, social media marketing theory,* and *social media strategies.* Table 1 is a taxonomy of references used in this study. Included in the literature review were 75 references (85%) published between 2015 and 2020, 86 (98%) of which underwent peer-review.

Table 1

References Content

Reference type	<5 Years	>5 Years	Totals
Peer-reviewed	73	13	86
Not peer-reviewed	2	0	2
Total	75	13	88

Review of the Conceptual Frameworks

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SMM use to engage digital consumers to increase sales. The goal within businesses, regardless of type, is to develop customer relationships and enhance profitability. Businesses include any firm, organization, or individual engaging in an entrepreneurial enterprise to

create value. Businesses seek value by managing the complexity of developing a

profitable framework to compete in a competitive environment (Onetti et al., 2012).

Although businesses may have different classifications, in all classifications, innovative

entrepreneurial enterprises maintain unique operational processes to support

competitiveness and value creation (Carland et al., 1995; Liu & Liang, 2015). As

technology has evolved, the innovation associated with conducting social media

marketing and fostering relationships with consumers has become a vital tool for

marketers to engage with consumers; building trust and loyalty toward a brand (Berry,

1983). Using shared experiences and opinions to demonstrate a cost-effective method to

gain a competitive advantage, marketers need to focus on building loyalty among existing

consumers to assist in reaching potential customers (Berry, 1983).

Relationship marketing theory, TAM, and DOI are applicable frameworks for a

study regarding the implementation of technology-based processes within businesses to

develop customer relationships and enhance profitability. Researchers can use several

conceptual frameworks to affirm acceptance and knowledge of technology as the critical

focus to adopt social media as a communication tool to reach a target market (Lim et al.,

2019). The crux of relationship marketing theory is the development of customer

relationships to elicit brand loyalty (Berry, 1983; Smiee et al., 2015). The theoretical

constructs of the TAM include the perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use

(PEOU) of technology as predictors of user acceptance (Davis, 1989). The theory

underlying DOI involves and how and why new technology spreads (Rogers, 2003). The

following review covers relationship marketing theory, the TAM, and the DOI theory and

why they were appropriate conceptual frameworks for this study.

Relationship Marketing Theory

To maintain business sustainability, SMM must simultaneously maintain the

customer base and attract new customers. Relationship marketing includes attracting,

maintaining, and building customer relationships (Berry, 1983). The use of relationship

marketing provides marketers the opportunity to attract new consumers while

maintaining and enhancing the connection with existing consumers (Elbeltagi & Agag,

2016; Samiee et al., 2015). Under relationship marketing theory, marketers desire to

maintain a successful relational exchange, building trust, and loyalty in the brand

(Elbeltagi & Agag, 2016; Smiee et al., 2015). Intentional communication with consumers

allows marketers to understand the consumers' needs and wishes and foster relational

commitment. Relational commitment is a highly desirable qualitative outcome of efforts

to engage with consumers (Payne & Frow, 2017). Marketers using relationship marketing

focus on managing relationships with existing customers to expand into new markets

(Payne & Frow, 2017). Social media use is one method marketers may use to develop

relationships with existing customers and expand their consumer base.

The use of social media adds value to relationship marketing by providing

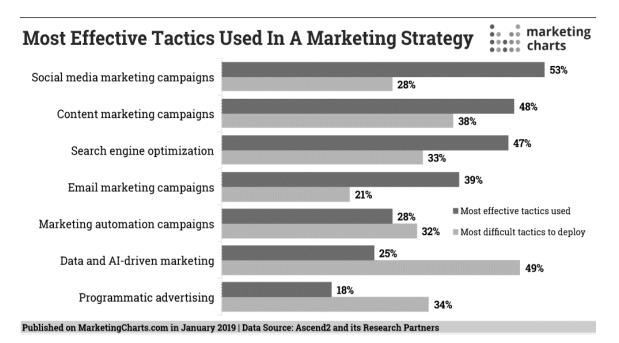communication opportunities and interaction with consumers in real-time.

Communication and interaction can then help companies bridge boundaries between

functions and build communities. Marketers who focus on social media engagement use

critical activities and collaborative efforts to interact with consumers, promote growth,

and increase sales (Chirumalla et al., 2017). Based on the data in Figure 2, 53% of the global marketing participants who completed a marketing survey found social media marketing to be the most effective tactic for their 2018 digital marketing plan (Ascend2, 2019).

Relationship marketing remains the leading approach to attaining the marketing goals to increase sales within an organization (Grönroos, 2015). Marketers use the four *Ps*—product, price, place, and promotion—as a strategy to reach the target market and build relationships with consumers (Grönroos, 2015). Consumers often rely on word-of-mouth from other consumers to make their purchasing decisions, indicating that they trust the purchase and product experiences of other consumers (Grönroos, 2015). Maintaining a good relationship with existing consumers may assist businesses in obtaining new consumers through exceptional customer experiences. The return on investment and the effectiveness of real-time communications efforts to reach the target market drive social media interest for marketers (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). Effective use of social media facilitates a competitive advantage and maximizes the number of consumer contacts while minimizing expenditures (Momany & Alshboul, 2016). The benefits of social media as a form of relationship marketing can include increased visibility and higher sales.

Figure 1

Most Effective Tactics Used in a Marketing Strategy

Note. Most Effective Tactics Used in a Marketing Strategy. From "Effectiveness Versus Difficulty," by Ascend2 and Research Partners, 2019, *Strategies Tactics and Trends for Marketing Resource Effectiveness: Survey Summary Report*, p. 14 (https://ascend2.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Ascend2-Marketing-Resource-Effectiveness-Summary-Report-190102.pdf). Copyright 2019 by Ascend2.

Promise Theory in Relationship Marketing. Promise theory influences the relationship marketing conceptual framework. Promise theory is the concept that businesses make promises to consumers (Grönroos, 2017). Although not phrased specifically as promises, businesses should consider adhering to performance expectations and product quality as unspoken agreements with consumers. Businesses should, therefore, strive to competently manage the promises they make to their

customers and ensure quality products that meet customer needs and expectations

(Siemieniako & Gębarowski, 2017). When businesses adhere to the promises they

indicate as inherent in their product, they can establish trust with consumers and

subsequently increase the longevity of their consumer relationship.

Service in Relationship Marketing. Inherent in relationship marketing is the

importance of providing adequate service to consumers. Berry's (1983) development of

relationship marketing involved the provision of a service to consumers. Furthermore,

businesses solidify consumer relationships via the provision of adequate services

(Grönroos, 2017). To attain long-term relationships with consumers, under relationship

management theory, businesses must determine how to provide their services best to

ensure customer satisfaction and continue garnering new customers (Wang et al., 2018).

Businesses striving to increase sales via digital means are not exempt from developing a

service relationship with consumers, and strategies related to this concept applied to this

study.

Technology Acceptance Model

When Davis (1989) first introduced the TAM, he argued that theoretical

constructs related to perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU)

determine a user's acceptance of the technology. Davis hypothesized that PU and PEOU

were significant predictors for a user's overall acceptance, and therefore, were the most

influential factors determining a user's approval or rejection of technology. Among the

constructs, PU refers to the degree to which a user believes that a system is useful to

them, and PEOU measures user acceptance with the ease of use of technology.

Measuring PU and PEOU constructs occurred using six-item scales (Davis, 1989). The six-item scale for PU included (a) accomplish tasks more quickly, (b) improve job performance, (c) increase productivity, (d) enhance job effectiveness, (e) improve ease of job performance, and (f) useful to job performance (Davis, 1989). The six-item scale for PEOU included (a) easy to learn and operate, (b) easy to manipulate, (c) clear and understandable interactions, (d) flexibility of interaction, (e) ability to become skillful, and (f) easy to use (Davis, 1989). The design of Davis' (1989) original study was to measure the user's acceptance based on their attitude, PU, PEOU, and subjective norms. This six-item scale has since been applied to understanding the PU and PEOU of new technology. The study showed that the PU variable was a vital predictor for a user's acceptance and use of a technology (Davis, 1989). Perceived usefulness is a critical factor in technology adoption (Davis, 1989). The study also revealed that PU had a more significant influence on usage than the PEOU construct (Davis, 1989). These results align with research as users are more likely to choose a technology-based on their perception of how the technology may benefit them rather than how easy it is to use (Davis et al., 2018). This does not negate the PEOU construct, as the more comfortable a system is to use, the more likely a user is to continue using it (Davis et al., 2018). The importance of PU and PEOU applies to social media marketing as individuals are more likely to purchase products via online tools when it is both easy to use and useful. As such, the PU and PEOU were appropriate for determining how to increase the use of social media marketing strategies.

Researchers may also use the TAM to determine the PU and PEOU of an innovation. For example, Wu and Chen (2017) used the TAM to measure the acceptance of a user based on their experience and inexperience with technology. Study results showed that user acceptance with technology is higher in experienced technology users than inexperienced users, indicating that similar discrepancies in user acceptance may be prevalent among online marketers (Wu & Chen, 2017). Therefore, an online marketer's level of experience with technology may influence their acceptance of online selling. To ensure adequate use of social media marketing tools, one strategy business leaders who desire to increase social media marketing could use to employ SMM adept at using social media.

Diffusion of Innovation

Researchers have used Rogers' (2003) DOI theory and the outline of the adoption of new ideas and innovations to explore technological, social media strategies marketers use to engage with consumers and increase revenues. A plethora of studies has suggested that marketers who use the internet as part of their selling experiences benefit from engagement with others in an online buying environment in which technology and innovative approaches hold value (Bakri, 2017; Chiang et al., 2019; Chou & Hsu, 2016; Quesenberry, 2019; Soule et al., 2019). The benefits of engagement with consumers in an online environment make it essential that marketers feel they have the power to make decisions concerning how they innovate and provide services.

Decision making takes place when an individual either decides to adopt or not adopt an innovation. The stages outlined within the DOI theory of deciding to adopt an

innovation include: (a) acquiring knowledge, (b) persuasion, (c) making decisions, (d) implementation, and (e) confirmation of methods of technology use (Blank, 2020). Knowledge refers to awareness of innovation, as well as additional information on the method in which it functions (Rogers, 2003). During the persuasive part of the process, an individual is attempting to explore favorability or lack thereof, relevant to innovation (Rogers, 2003). In the implementation part of the decision process, an adopter begins trial use of the innovation (Rogers, 2003). The last part of the process is confirmation. During the confirmation stage, an individual makes a conscious decision whether to continue the use of the innovation or decide against further use based on experience (Rogers, 2003). This process does not require a set amount of time and may take several months for an individual to decipher. Networking with individuals with strong community ties can change the course of how new technologies become used, as well as how older and existing technologies can serve an industry in new ways (Rogers, 2003). The tenets of the DOI model regarding how innovation adoption occurs aligned with the purpose of this study to explore the technological and social media strategies marketers use to engage with consumers and increase revenues.

When applying the DOI to a study, it is advantageous for a researcher to understand the theory components. The four main elements of DOI include: (a) passage of time, (b) innovation, (c) communication (channels), and (d) a social system (Rogers, 2003). Rogers's (2003) DOI theory has largely impacted social acceptance of the way individuals use technology and lends to a discussion regarding online marketing. As the first element involved in the DOI, the passage of time is a component that determines

relativity and aligns innovation adoption with adopter types (i.e., innovators, early adopters, late adopters, and laggards). Time was relevant to this study, as the purpose was to explore how SMM uses technology to engage with consumers and increase revenues, which includes understanding types of adopters. Innovations rarely have instantaneous adoption, which indicates that innovation adoption will occur over time (Rogers, 2003). Understanding how the passage of time interacts with types of adopters may benefit SMM as they determine the best methods for increasing their social media marketing methods. Within the last decade, research has shown that online consuming is growing in popularity (Momany & Alshboul, 2016). The element of time is vital in the context of adopting behaviors associated with online consuming.

Marketers may use innovation as one method to address market needs and increase sales. Innovation relevant to this study may involve internet use and social media tools to inspire consumption. Additionally, innovation, broadly defined as the technology that makes up the internet itself, includes the perception of ideas associated with promoting the innovative technology used by social media marketers to engage with consumers and increase revenues. Innovation becomes defined as a method, idea, product, or technology assumed to address needs, meet new requirements, or offer benefits or advantage to an individual or society (Blank, 2020). Marketers can use the alignment of an innovation to social norms to assess the degree of comfort consumers experience and identify whether innovation adoption is likely to occur (Rogers, 2003). Consumers will likely adopt innovations that coincide and fit into social norms more

quickly than those that do not (Smith et al., 2018). However, the degree to which a new technological innovation becomes embraced also depends on the type of adopter.
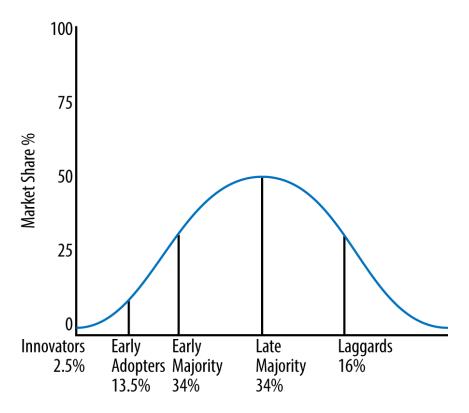
      Types of Adopters. The DOI theory highlights five potential adopter types. The possible examples of adopters include: (a) innovators, (b) early adopters, (c) early majority adopters, (d) late majority adopters, and (e) laggards (Rogers, 2003). Early majority adopters and late majority adopters form the highest point of a bell curve, and both represent a 34% rate of adoption, laggards (the last to adopt innovations) represent 16% of the bell curve representation. The two lowest adopter rates included early adapters at 13.5 % and innovators at 2.5%, illustrated in Figure 2 (Rogers, 2003). In conjunction with the statistics shown in Figure 2, and in relation to Rogers' (2003) theory, fewer individuals take risks early on in adopting new technological processes involved with consuming (Blank, 2020). To increase adoption within markets, it is important to understand what strategies will be effective with the different types of adopters.

      Innovators, the first and rarest of adopters, are risk-takers who enjoy the newness of innovation (Onetti et al., 2012). These are individuals who believe that experiencing innovations is worth the potential risks. They are prominent players in diffusing innovations and technologies. It is through these individuals that early adopters become exposed to innovations via a network or social system (Onetti et al., 2012). According to Rogers's (2003) theory of adoption, early adopters jump-start the diffusion process as they cause and promote expansion in innovation usage. Within the process, early adopters

can become viewed as agents of change (Blank, 2020). In general, these individuals are

optimistic and thus likely to use an innovation if they are aware of others' success.

Figure 2

Diffusion of Innovations

Note: Blank, S. (2020). *The four steps to the epiphany: Successful strategies for products that win*. John Wiley & Sons. Available in the public forum.

To ensure the diffusion of an innovation, innovators desire for all adopter types to

accept their innovation. While early adopters function as opinion leaders in the social

system, early majority adopters do not typically function in a leadership role; rather, they

form a link in the diffusion of an innovation between early adopters and late majority

adopters (Rogers, 2003). However, all five adopter types still contribute to the successful diffusion of innovation (Rogers, 2003). Both early adopters and early majority adopters look to the innovator's experience and use this experience as support regarding innovation acceptance. Late majority adopters have uncertainties regarding the use of new technologies and ideas; however, they can still benefit from innovating (Rogers, 2003). Late majority adopters then are the group that requires support and guidance regarding the acceptance of an innovation (Blank, 2020). Sometimes early and late adopters also aid in DOI, and these individuals take on leadership roles as it is these adopter groups that can cause critical mass and allow for the self-sustainability of innovations (Onetti et al., 2012). Critical mass, a term borrowed from nuclear physics, speaks to a chain reaction or a point of self-sufficiency in innovation (Onetti et al., 2012). It is this critical mass that innovators of new technologies seek to acquire.

Rogers (2003) explained that within the five adopter types, laggards are the least receptive and most resistant to change. Traditional is a word often associated with laggards as they are less open to innovative change (Rogers, 2003). Laggards are the last of a society of social systems to consider innovations. Though influential in their decisions to abstain from innovations, this group of adopters is not usually comprised of leaders.

Adopter Influence. Although there are strategies for reaching all types of adopters, it is more important to reach certain adopters before concentrating on others. For SMM to have successful online businesses by engaging with consumers and increasing revenues, SMM should engage with innovators or early adopters to start up the

diffusion process (Rogers, 2003). However, this is an unlikely scenario if consumers who are innovators and early adopters do not become entirely convinced of the value of social media as a marketplace tool (Onetti et al., 2012). As seen in Figure 1, innovation diffuses from left to right in a bell curve, indicating that it is impossible to skip to a new category until a certain level of success takes place at a prior stage (Rogers, 2003). According to Blank (2020), facilitating successful online marketing strategies entails knowing who the customer is and what it is they intend to purchase. It is useful to recognize what type of customer is the target, or it may be impossible to use innovative marketing strategies correctly or effectively (Blank, 2020).

Consumers who are early adopters, and especially innovators, act as change agents (Rogers, 2003). By being the first to implement a change in a social marketing environment, SMM innovators and early adopters have a competitive advantage (Blank, 2020). The advantage may be from faster time to market, lower product costs, more complete customer service, or another comparable business advantage. Innovators and early adopters anticipate a fundamental discontinuity between the old and the new manner of conducting business, and those with most success can push the limits of any deep-rooted resistance (Blank, 2020). As such, early adoption can be critical to successful implementation and increasing revenue.

Communication Channels. In the context of this study, innovation is an idea or perception held by marketers who have access to communication channels. Communication channels refer to the transmission of information and communication via participants and how individuals share information to create understanding (Rogers,

2003). More specifically, a communication channel refers to an activity that includes both seeking and processing information, resulting in individuals who understand and become comfortable with an innovation (Rogers, 2003). Communication channels include the components of at least one innovation, two or more individuals, and a means of communication, such as interpersonal communication (Franceschinis et al., 2017).

The concept of social system outlines why specific populations are less likely to adopt innovations (Rogers, 2003). Understanding social systems may aid in explaining how marketers can use adoption rates of internet social media strategies to engage with consumers and increase revenues. A marketer's social system may provide insight into their hesitation to adopt new ideas or technologies (Blank, 2020). A study designed to explore marketers' perceptions of social media strategies used to engage consumers and increase revenues may provide innovative approaches to online marketing.

Societal Adoption of Innovations. Rogers (2003) developed the DOI theory to explain and map out how society adopts innovations through interpersonal communication systems. DOI theory aligns with the purpose of this study to explore technological, social media strategies marketers use to engage with consumers and increase revenues. However, adoption rates vary from one society to the next (Rogers, 2003). The process of adoption of innovation for societies differs, depending on the perceived benefit, the way of life, and perception in general. The likelihood of consumer adoption of innovative ideas and technology perceived as beneficial to the individual increases if they align with societal norms (Smith et al., 2018). Innovations should present individuals with some sort of advantages, such as socioeconomic status, location,

compatibility, observability, relative advantage, or complexity (Rogers, 2003). There are

multiple facets involved in securing consumer adoption of innovations and technologies.

Competitive Advantage

Porter (1998) identified competitive advantage as a guide for developing

strategies to increase firm performance and asserted that the critical component of

success or failure in business is overall competitiveness. According to Porter, a firm's

competitive advantage relates to creating value for consumers while managing the costs

necessary to execute it. Additionally, in a global market, ensuring that employees have

the necessary knowledge and understanding of the company can also increase

competitive advantage (Attiq et al., 2017). Under competitive advantage, business leaders

who consider competitive strategies have established goals to maintain a profitable and

sustainable position within their industry (Porter, 1998). Educated employees can then

serve to assist organization leaders in attaining established goals. Online marketers can

use competitive advantage to evaluate whether their marketing decisions will result in

long-term sustainability for their business.

Competitive advantage aligns with the goals of marketers to maintain both

profitability and sustainability. For example, researchers applied the concept of

competitive advantage to a business's marketing and export performance (Tan & Sousa,

2015). The findings supported the use of competitive advantage to understand

multichannel marketing strategies in online businesses (Tan & Sousa, 2015).

Furthermore, when developing a business strategy, online marketers should consider their

marketing resources as crucial components for increasing competitive advantage (Davcik

& Sharma, 2016). Multichannel online marketers should consider their marketing resources when developing strategies to maintain a competitive advantage over online retailers.

Low-Cost Leadership

Cost leadership is one strategy business leaders can use to achieve competitive advantage. The use of a cost leadership strategy helps business leaders distinguish their business or organization from other market competitors strictly on low price or cost of their product or service (Porter, 1998). The low-cost leader develops a competitive advantage initially to attract customers away from their competitors. The advantage becomes short-term should the customer perceive the product or service's quality as subpar when comparing to competitors (Porter, 1998). In an online social marketing setting, to develop a quality product, the marketer must acquire quality resources, which is most beneficial when the production costs accompany early innovation (Blank, 2020). In a low-cost leadership scenario, it is beneficial to establish product quality as well as cost-effectiveness.

Differentiation

The differentiation strategy within competitive advantage relates to how innovation differs from those offered by competitors. The concept of differentiation relies on the basis that some aspect of the business or organization differs from other competitors within the same industry (Porter, 1998). Companies that implement the differentiation strategy strive to introduce quality and innovative products to the market before potential competitors (Semuel et al., 2017). The competitive advantage established

through differentiation then provides a means for companies to achieve financial goals

(Widuri & Sutanto, 2019). Differentiation establishes a uniqueness that provides a

perception of value to customers. This uniqueness exists as products, services, or other

aspects contained within the value chain.

Network Effect

A third strategy business leaders can use to achieve a competitive advantage is the

network effect. The focus of the network effect strategy is to increase the use of a product

or service, as the increase in use will increase the value of the product or service, thus

creating desire or need in consumers to obtain the new product or service (Nagler, 2015).

A prime example of the network effect relevant to this study was social media, including

sites such as Facebook and Instagram. The prevalent use of social networking sites

provides marketers the opportunity to engage with consumers, thereby increasing the use

of a product or service (Dessart, 2017). Consumers identified as influential may benefit

from the network effect as the product or service becomes more prevalent, and market

competition increases. Benefits for influential consumers may take the form of reductions

in costs or incentives for continued product consumption (Fainmesser & Galeotti, 2016).

Business owners benefit from the network effect from knowing that potential additional

sales and revenues exist from an in-demand product (Nagler, 2015). However, although

they contribute, businesses do not drive the network effect phenomenon (Rong et al.,

2018). As such, consumers are the driving force of the network effect strategy.

Consumers drive network effects through their expectations of other consumers,

creating competition among the providers (Nagler, 2015). This competition becomes

tangible only when there are multiple avenues for the consumer to obtain the product

(Dessart, 2017). As with any innovative technological, marketers can benefit from social

media strategies used to engage consumers and increase revenues (Nagler, 2015).

However, Nagler (2015) indicated a diminished network effect when the market

segments resulting in smaller market shares competing for consumers.

Businesses strive to achieve competitive advantage positions within their

respective market to improve their financial situation (Porter, 1998). The advantage,

either through new products, product differentiation, service changes, or product pricing,

serve to increase revenue (Porter, 1998). In addition to products and pricing, changes in

marketing strategies affect the customers' perceptions of product value, which increases

the desire for the product (Caldwell et al., 2015). Regardless of the action, increased sales

generate higher revenues for the business (Caldwell et al., 2015). The complex nature of

business creates a need for complex strategies to achieve a competitive advantage (Liu &

Liang, 2015). Successful businesses incorporate complex strategies in a way that

increases their competitive advantage.

Complexity Strategy

The complexity strategy explains the development of patterns and relationships

created through the nonlinear interactions of system components (Hartmanis & Stearns,

1965; Kauffman, 1996). Complexity strategy relates to how various components in

innovation are interrelated. Hartmanis and Stearns (1965) introduced complexity theory

in 1965 using computational modeling and focused on the difficulty of computing

numerical sequences. However, it was not until Kauffman (1996) examined the

interconnected relationships between members of a biological system that complexity theory or complexity science evolved.

The base concept of complexity theory exists at a micro level, examining the interactions between many individual components within the system (Kauffman, 1996). The constant interactions or relationships among the components create patterns that develop through adaptation to the chaotic environment (Kauffman, 1996). Although limited to biological systems, as complexity science evolved, the application of complexity theory to business environments occurred (Lowell, 2016). Businesses contain individual components that together form complex systems, much like those found in biological systems.

Given the complex structure of business systems, it is important that business leaders develop strategies to ensure they make decisions that will support the organization's financial sustainability. Building a successful business relies on forward-thinking and development and implementation of strategies that create a competitive advantage within its respective industry (Porter, 1998). Implementing the proper strategy hinges on the understanding of: (a) the organizational structures within a firm, (b) the organizational culture developed within an organization, (c) the relationship between leadership and corporate sustainability, (d) appropriate development and measurement of performance indicators, (e) the qualifications and motivations of employees, and (f) internal and external communication (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016). The complexity components include the physical environment, business economics, governmental organizations, people, and behavioral implications (Tong & Arvey, 2015). Incorporating

all components into organizational decisions will help business leaders ensure they are considering all aspects of the complex business system.

The application of complexity theory in business substantiates the rise of organization and patterns from chaos (Tong & Arvey, 2015). A transition to a stable business environment results from the adaptive nature of people and firms (Tong & Arvey, 2015). In addition, the stable framework exists due to constant system changes (Tong & Arvey, 2015). Complexity exists at the process level or supply chain level within the business framework (Turner et al., 2018). The supply chain's relationship is multidimensional and includes the upstream, downstream, and internal components, which drive business complexity, and during times of chaos, higher levels of complexity results in stability and increased performance (Turner et al., 2018). The complexity found in sustaining a physical business location also applies to online businesses (De Jong & Wu, 2018). It is important to consider the complexity of the systems involved in an online business to maintain stability and ensure sustainability.

Under complexity theory, development and implementation occur with a focus on increasing profits and targeting: (a) product development and improvement for differentiation, (b) supply chain, logistics, and labor for cost reduction to lower product cost, (c) product marketing for generating product interest and sales, and (d) competitor acquisition to expand the customer base and reduce competition (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015; Banks et al., 2016; Molina-Azorín et al., 2015). The focus of these offensive or proactive strategies is on pushing forward with innovation and market disruption by rearranging the complex systems within an organization. In contrast to proactive

strategies, a defensive or reactive stance exists, where focus concentrates on maintaining

market position (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). A reactive approach buffers the highs and

lows in the market, where businesses continuously expand and contract to maintain

profitability and stability (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015).

Proactive and Reactive Strategies

The goal for all businesses and organizations is to maintain financial stability and

develop strategies to sustain profitability for long-term sustainability (Molina-Azorín et

al., 2015). This goal exists within both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. Businesses or

organizations within each sector provide goods or services, employ people, and

contribute to local and global economies. However, the strategies used to generate

revenue do not always provide long-term stability. Enhancing financial strategies become

categorized as either proactive or reactive strategies (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). The

focus of proactive strategies is on increasing revenue through expansion, innovation,

increased efficiencies, and cost reductions (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015; Banks et al.,

2016; Molina-Azorín et al., 2015). Immediate downturns in market conditions do not

influence proactive strategies (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015).

Proactive strategies ultimately center around achieving market leadership, which

dictates the development of strategies centered around core business functions, business

processes, organizational structures, and innovation (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015).

Evaluation of core business functions or products maintains and/or expands profitable

products and services and reduces or eliminates inferior performing products or services

(Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). A focus on core products improves quality and results in

cost reduction and increased productivity (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). For example, SMM could use innovation as a proactive strategy to increase services and long-term sustainability.

Realignment strategies flatten managerial structures and focus on employee integration, which provides higher efficiencies while reducing costs (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). In addition, an examination of internal processes, as well as external processes (supply chain and logistics), leads to increased efficiencies (Liu & Liang, 2015). In all areas of change, cost reduction occurs from process efficiencies, reduction in product costs, and labor changes. Market expansion and product or service innovations generate additional revenue streams by increasing the number of customers (Talib et al., 2016). Since these changes manifest over more extended periods, business disruption becomes minimized. Although proactive strategies may lead to a reduction in labor, business leaders may strive to increase productivity, improve employee satisfaction, and increase customer approval levels, all of which contribute to competitive advantage (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015; Liu & Liang, 2015). In addition, the managing of stakeholder influence becomes equally as important as other proactive strategies to maintain long-term financial stability (Banks et al., 2016). Stakeholders look to realize consistent gains from their investments. Managing the stakeholder relationship, ensuring business competitiveness and profitability alleviates the potential for short-term, reactive changes (Banks et al., 2016). Alleviating short-term, reactive changes provides more opportunity for implementing proactive change.

In contrast, the use of reactive strategies occurs during quick fluctuations in market conditions or when financial stress happens (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). These strategies focus on maintaining the business' market position or profitability. For example, SMM reliance on already established social media channels during times of economic downturn. The use of reactive strategies involves short-term implementation and a concentration on cost reduction or cash generation (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). Cost reductions include not offering pay increases or reduction in pay, as well as reducing personnel. Lower inventory levels and reduction or elimination of services contribute to cost reduction (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). An increase in cash occurs through divestment of investments and business ventures, as well as the selling of assets (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). Proactive strategies, rather than reactive strategies, achieve a competitive advantage even though businesses and organizations realize cost reduction from both proactive and reactive strategies (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). Unlike proactive strategies, reactive strategies are disruptive to the business or organization.

Marketing Evolution

Marketing history began with the exchange of food and goods among families and evolved to extend economic benefits to friends and local communities (Layton, 2015). Marketing evolution increased the width and scope of social phenomena and embraced the expansion of marketing systems theory by answering questions of *when, how,* and *why* (Layton, 2015). By the early 20th century, businesses began applying sophisticated marketing strategies (Jones & Shaw, 2018). Marketing began slowly but grew steadily

and progressed yearly, enhancing the engagement and communications among consumers

(Layton, 2015), becoming a strategic tool that would go beyond the selling process to

communicate with consumers and gain insight on preferences while sharing insights on

products and services (Liu & Liang, 2015). Marketing became defined as the expansion

of consumer activities to consummate exchanges and increase sales (Kotler & Armstrong,

2018). These changes shifted the importance of marketing to acquire goods necessary for

survival in gaining access to address the desires of consumers.

The evolution of marketing led to the establishment of two professional marketing

boards: the American Marketing Association (AMA) and the Chartered Institution of

Marketing (CIM). Each professional institution has a unique definition of marketing. The

AMA (2017) defined marketing as the process for creation, communication, and

exchange among consumers, partners, and society. The CIM (2017) expanded the

marketing definition to identifying, recognizing, anticipating, and meeting consumer

needs to increase profitability. Business success should begin with the evolution of

technology and embrace innovation to meet the needs of consumers and increase sales

(Baker, 2016).

Marketing has evolved diversely over the decades. Researchers identify the eras

of marketing history by the developments that occurred during those times: production,

sales, relationship, and social marketing (Keith, 1960). However, building relationships

and engaging in a one-to-one marketing process in the era of relationship marketing

began before trade industry commercialization (Edwards et al., 2020). The social era and

mobile marketing era have been revolutionary to the marketing industry (Lamberton &

Stephen, 2016). The production era's central concept is the idea that functional products

will sell themselves (Keith, 1960). Although marketing history consists of distinct eras,

these eras contain similar elements.

Production Era

The production of new technologies is vital for maintaining consumer interest in a

brand. The production era lasted from the 1870s through the 1930s and focused on the

production of new technologies to meet consumer supply and demand (Fullerton, 1988).

The marketing concept addressed the business goal of increasing sales and remaining

competitive. Throughout the production era, demand outpaced supply, thereby limiting

consumer choices (Fullerton, 1988). Furthermore, there was little competition, and

marketing was not a priority because many products sold themselves in the absence of

competition (Fullerton, 1988). Marketing evolved in the 19th and 20th centuries through

the industrial revolution (Keith, 1960) the time in history when technology became

prevalent for innovation in the scientific and technological sectors to create engagement

and communication with consumers regarding their need for products (Edwards et al.,

2020). The evidence of marketing evolution is the development of technology and

innovations to communicate about and satisfy consumer needs, thus creating business

profitability (Edwards et al., 2020).

Sales Era

Competitive marketing results from a need to drive sales to increase revenue. The

sales era was a competitive era in which a focus on selling attracted businesses to

marketing, brand awareness, and sales to gain a competitive advantage in the market

(Boone & Kurtz, 2019). As the marketing movement progressed into its second era, consumer and marketing intelligence became more prevalent and increased competition (Keith, 1960). As the technology evolved, businesses pursued innovative ways to sell their products and gain a competitive advantage (Schwarzkopf, 2015). As competition increased, businesses sought to develop marketing objectives that would utilize technology and drive production to enhance growth and increase sales (Schwarzkopf, 2015). Marketers learned that it was essential to understand consumer needs and provide satisfaction if they were to keep pace with their competitors (Armstrong & Kotler, 2016). A desire to understand and provide satisfaction to consumers indicated the importance of understanding the influence of consumer personality to obtain a competitive advantage.

In a seminal study, Aaker (1999) explored the premise that the interaction of the personality traits associated with a brand and those associated with an individual's self-concept influences attitudes. In competing theories, personality model advocates proposed that an individual's personality is the primary determinator of behavior, while personality-versus-situation model advocates proposed that the situation influences behavior. Aaker hypothesized that consumers prefer brands with personality traits that are congruent, and that constitute self-schemas (self-congruity) elicited by situational cues (situation congruity).

Attitudes toward brands highly descriptive on a personality dimension are more favorable for schematic individuals versus a schematic on that personality dimension (Aaker, 1999). In addition, attitudes toward brands highly descriptive on a specific dimension of personality are more favorable when situational cues that elicit that

personality dimension are salient (Aaker, 1999). The insight gained from understanding the malleable self-concept is helpful because it links self-congruity research with prior research in personality and social psychology. The purpose of this study aligned, as an exploration of consumers' decision-making tendencies was beneficial to determining social media strategies SMM can use to engage with consumers and increase revenues. The research suggests that situational cues can influence behavior, which can be very useful for marketers.

Nevertheless, consumers viewed the selling era as a time of increasingly aggressive sales techniques. At the same time, marketers focused on the enhanced engagement with consumers through communication and advertising to attract the consumer to their products and services (Edwards et al., 2020). The strategy of integration focused on consumer engagement and marketing efficiency to generate awareness of products and their benefits (Edwards et al., 2020). A more proactive way to gain consumer loyalty relied on a change in thinking from selling what the provider wanted to sell to a view of selling what the consumer preferred to buy.

Marketing Era

In the marketing era, the consumer remained the driver of innovation, allowing businesses to satisfy consumers to increase growth and profitability (Fullerton, 1988). A focus on marketing spread throughout business industries (Keith, 1960). The marketing concept began to emerge in the 1950s as marketers focused on the consumer's needs (Boone & Kurtz, 2019). Business survival depended on gaining an understanding of consumers' thoughts and the benefits and reliability they expected from products (Kotler

& Armstrong, 2018). Business leaders identified the primary goal of marketing success as the utilization of resources to target specific markets while adhering to consumer needs. As the competitive market evolved, sellers gained an understanding of technology and innovation to meet community needs and gain exposure in the marketplace (Kotler et al., 2015).

Marketing in the Modern Marketplace. In the 1950s, fulfilling the consumers' needs for products was a priority (Fullerton, 1988). Marketers sought out knowledge and innovation to enhance their customer service and communication efforts to promote growth and increase sales (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Following the lead of historical marketing strategies, to gain a competitive advantage in the modern marketplace, marketers should refrain from concentrating on the products to fill the warehouse but rather rely heavily on consumer needs and purchasing habits (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). By focusing on consumers and their preferences, marketers can create and retain buying behaviors.

Understanding how consumers construct buying decisions is essential in deciding what research avenues and marketing strategies to pursue (Hamilton, 2016). A review of consumer-based strategy articles effectively addressed consumer research and marketing theory by understanding the effect that psychological distance has on the decision's consumers make (Hamilton, 2016). As individuals have varying perceptions on factors related to making purchases, it is essential to have an awareness of these perceptions to form the most effective methods that sellers and businesses can use in understanding the needs of their buyers.

Marketing to the Digital Consumer. Recent developments in digital technology

have fundamentally changed consumer behavior (Belk, 2016). As a result, the concept of

the self has shifted (Layton, 2015). In the late 1990s, the self consisted of an inner self

core, as well as aggregate cores ranging from family to neighborhood to nation (Belk,

2016). The result of this confluence of ideas resulted in the emergence of an extended

self. The major categories of the extended self were the body, internal processes, ideas,

experiences, and things to which one feels attached. The digital phenomenon has changed

each of these concepts and needs updating to accommodate the changes (Belk, 2016).

Updating changes to concepts related to the extended self would assist businesses in

developing marketing practices geared toward the digital consumer.

The first concept related to the extended self that marketers should address is

dematerialization (Belk, 2016). In the digital age, words, dates, videos, and music are

primarily immaterial and invisible until individuals choose to access them. What was

once a private act of collecting information is now a group effort, with shared enthusiasm

spread across an imagined community (Wiggins, 2018). However, there is a question

regarding whether digital possessions have the same value as material possessions (Belk,

2016). Digital objects are not unique since data is replicable but still holds value because

when deleted people feel lost (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). Although digital goods are

almost as valuable as material goods, they are not quite the same (Belk, 2016). Digital

goods are easily replicable, thus reducing their uniqueness, while material goods,

although similar, each contain unique attributes, thereby increasing their value.

The second concept about the extended self to receive attention was re-embodiment (Belk, 2016). The internet has become a highly visual experience, and users have the power to create an idealized version of themselves. With tools like Photoshop, physical characteristics can become altered, and with online games, players customize and control avatars. Players become attached to avatars in that while one is managing a digital persona, one feels like they are that character (Belk, 2016; Kirk & Swain, 2018). During play, the Proteus effect occurs, which states that controlling an avatar in a digital world subtly changes the player's characteristics in the real world (Belk, 2016). Massive multiplayer online role-playing games, such as World of Warcraft and Fortnite, provide opportunities for the development of such avatars. For example, if someone controls a tall, strong character in World of Warcraft, they may be more likely to start going to the gym and walking more confidently. An abundance of online role-playing games might lead to a reduction in the singular core self since one can assume and control any number of alternate online avatars with differing appearances and personalities (Belk, 2016). The growing attachment to the digital self has implications for marketing fostered through online relationships and the purchasing of online consumables (Molesworth et al., 2016). Social media marketers can focus marketing strategies on connecting products to consumables attached to the digital selves of consumers.

The third concept addressed regarding the extended self was sharing (Belk, 2016). The internet is a cornucopia of free information, the sharing of which occurs noncommercially (Belk, 2016). Belk (2016) asked the question: How does sharing enhance our individual and aggregate senses of self? In the realm of social media, people

share private information on a broad scale. Sharing information online leads to disinhibition, which leads to greater sharing and a society that becomes more compelled to explore interior lives (Lutz et al., 2018). Sharing leads to self-revelation through self-crafting individual stories and presenting them to the world, and by putting information out in the world, individuals lose control of what others choose to do with it (Belk, 2016; Pera et al., 2016). However, sharing digital possessions and the aggregate self fosters feelings of community inherent to the interactivity of the internet as a publicly shared space, which opens the door to significant marketing opportunities (Belk, 2016). Embracing the plethora of information consumers share via social media provides marketing leaders the opportunity to advance their marketing strategies, thereby increasing their competitive advantage.

Within the concept of the co-construction of self, it is important to acknowledge that many interactions on the internet are social, which increasingly helps individuals construct separate and joint extended selves (Belk, 2016). On social media, friends reaffirm their sense of self through posting, tagging, and commenting. Such extended back and forth of messages become a joint possession between people, which forms a coherent sense of self within a group (Belk, 2016; Kovacheva & Lamberton, 2018). The final point Belk addressed was the concept of distributed memory, asserting that the digital world provides new sets of devices and technologies for recording memories and questions whether human beings are outsourcing their memories to hard drives and search engines. Under the concept of distributed memory, digital clutter becomes created because there is simply so much more information available (Belk, 2016). However,

through data, fragments of memories work together to weave a coherent narrative

(Ahmadi & Wohn, 2018). Distributed digital memory also operates at the level of

collective memory and aggregate past (Belk, 2016). Online photos provide cues linking

individuals to memories constituting both individual and collective senses of the past.

Marketers may then use nostalgia and other links to memories as a marketing agent.

A result of the ability to manifest oneself as multiple online personalities may be

that the sense of core self falls apart (Belk, 2016). However, the illusion of a core self

remains strong and viable. The increased confessions in the digital age shifted previously

considered private information to public information. The quick feedback provided

through digital interactions can affirm or modify one's sense of self, thus resulting in a

shared and co-constructed nature of the self. As technology advances, people are more

likely to turn to shared digital mementos than physical possessions, continuing to open

newer markets and consumables (Belk, 2016; Das, 2019). Therefore, marketing leaders

should continue to expand their strategies related to digital marketing.

Relationship Marketing Era

The relationship era began in the late 20th century, demonstrating the importance

of building relationships in the competitive environment (Tadajewski & Jones, 2016).

Business leaders who focused on building relationships with consumers generated a

community of loyal and trustworthy buyers who were loyal to a successful brand and

increased its sales (Tadajewski & Jones, 2016). The relationship era saw recognition of

branding and consumer loyalty. Furthermore, relationship building was essential to

increasing profitability, enhancing the brand reputation, and assuming a competitive

advantage in the market (Schwarzkopf, 2015). The result of the relationship-building

increased profit margin in comparison with competitors' products (Schwarzkopf, 2015).

Subsequently, business leaders who focused their strategies on building relationships

with consumers found an increase in their competitive advantage.

Consumer relationships are a fundamental part of successful marketing.

Relationship marketing improves the relationships with consumers and partners, enabling

them to target and sell in different areas of the marketplace (Zhang et al., 2016). Social

theory aligns with relationship marketing and is the exchange of activities, either tangible

or intangible, among consumers to benefit themselves and to sustain their lifestyles

(Homans, 1961). Interactions among individuals validate the proposal that human needs

are satisfied by other humans (Homans, 1961). Social exchange theory is the supplying of

benefits that may lead to bonds among consumers based on reciprocity (Blau, 1964).

Expectations and fair exchanges among consumers build trust and loyalty that lead to

social associations. Such expectations may include consumer imposed time constraints

based on demand for products and services, which may result in business leaders' social

reliance on consumers for advice (Blau, 1964). Distributive justice is the most enduring

theoretical contribution and demonstrates the principle that marketers should distribute

rewards in proportion to investment among consumers (Homans, 1961). Business leaders

must consider their most advantageous consumer relationships when developing a

marketing strategy.

Business leaders may choose to focus on reinforcement as a marketing strategy.

Used as a reward, reinforcement in marketing strategy increases the frequency of

behaviors in a consumer's social exchange (Homans, 1961). Utilizing online social

networks provides businesses opportunities to engage and communicate, building social

relations through a cost-effect method of marketing (Surma, 2016). Social exchange

theory involves interactions through online sharing of experiences and opinions

concerning products and services among consumers (Chou & Hsu, 2016). Consumers

may engage in reciprocity, intentionally sharing information with other consumers in the

social community. Social media enhances engagement opportunities, and improves the

performance of businesses, increasing social relations by amplifying the positive impact

on social customer relationship management capabilities (Wang & Kim, 2017). Through

the use of social media, business leaders can gain insight into consumers, which

marketing leaders can then use to develop stronger consumer relationships.

Customer Relationship. The development and rise of new processes and

technologies such as outsourcing, offshoring, open-source software, and wireless

technology transformed international business and national markets into a flat world or

leveled competitive environment (de Haas et al., 2020). The internet, in conjunction with

world flatteners, provides businesses and organizations more opportunities to compete in

a global environment (de Haas et al., 2020). However, as the internet and information

technology flattened global markets, face-to-face communication declined, which gave

rise to rethinking customer interaction and relationship building (de Haas et al., 2020).

Marketing leaders must consider technological means to continue interacting with and

developing relationships with consumers.

A customer relationship strategy focuses on the interaction between the customer and the vendor to build bonds that will create value for the customer and, ultimately, generate sales (Nenonen & Storbacka, 2016). This one-sided, customer-centric perspective puts the burden on the supplier to build a relationship with the customer. The marketing era enhanced the marketer's roles by utilizing a strategic approach to innovation, technology, and production, along with competitive pricing and engagement with consumers through proper channels (Keith, 1960). The enhanced role of marketers thereby shifted the perspective from customer-centric to one that incorporates all facets of the business.

Understanding Customer Needs. Between 1996 and 2004, there was a shift in marketing that emphasized knowledge about customer needs to enhance profitability and organizational resources. Kumar (2015) identified rapid change data technology and social media interaction during that period as a way for researchers to examine customer needs and respond accordingly. Implementing changes in data collection also allowed companies to focus on the effective use of resources (Kumar, 2015). Having new systems to track and manage data, known as content management systems, allowed marketing professionals to improve the effectiveness of their marketing (Kumar, 2015). The result was a deeper understanding of activities, such as what actions will be effective and how customers behave (Kumar, 2015). A better understanding of the customer has resulted in a customer-centric approach to marketing (Kumar, 2015).

The desire to better understand customers has led to changing perspectives about approaching marketing from a business standpoint. This desire resulted in a more

integrated method toward marketing theory (Kumar, 2015). For example, the media is

more responsive to customers, by way of dynamic platforms, with which customers can

interact, such as in social media (Kumar, 2015). Thirty percent of online users were

active participants in the self-created online sharing of information among social

communities, creating social exchanges, and building relationships worldwide (Wang &

Kim, 2017). The use of social media enables consumers to interact and embrace their

empowerment to assume active roles in the cocreation of shared experiences. Using

social exchange theory, marketers identify the process of managing relationships and

expanding opportunities to engage through social interaction by utilizing a cost-effective

method (Surma, 2016). Building relationships with trust and loyalty is an asset because it

is more economical to retain consumers than acquire new prospects in the marketplace

(Melancon & Dalakas, 2018). Approaching marketing as a method for building

relationships provides opportunities for businesses to retain consumers and maintain a

competitive advantage.

All marketing relationships serve functions within the marketplace. Serving

society is a goal of marketing relationships that will change the boundaries and emerging

social perspectives for businesses in the marketplace (Liu, 2017). The organization's

leaders should direct their marketing efforts toward internal and external consumers in

efforts to facilitate knowledge concerning the strategies of relationship marketing (Payne

& Frow, 2017). Internally, marketers and management could integrate marketing

strategies within the operations to respond to changes in the marketplace and enhance the

opportunities to meet the consumers' needs (Kotler et al., 2015). Relationship marketing

builds trust and commitment with consumers, suppliers, and partners, adding to the

organization's overall strategy to promote growth and increase sales (Brown et al., 2019).

Implementing relationship marketing strategies may increase a business's profitability

and competitiveness in the marketplace.

Social Era

Since the 2000s, the internet has increased engagement of and building

relationships with consumers allowing sharing of information and displaying benefits of

products in the marketplace. The internet is a form of socialization for the consumer as

well as an essential tool for commercialization (Page et al., 2018). The activity of the

internet opened continuous communication for marketers through innovative technology

(Kabat-Zinn, 2016). Using the internet's evolution, the growth of websites and social

engagement became a valuable tool for marketers and consumers. Through personal

internet and high-speed broadband connections, many social media platforms have

influenced the behavior of consumers across a variety of market settings (Lamberton &

Stephen, 2016). The possibilities of new marketing communication will change the

buyer-seller relationship through shared information and direct interactions of brands in

the market (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). It is important that SMM focuses on internet

use to increase their marketing strategies.

Advances in digital marketing technology continue to increase methods for

reaching consumers. Utilizing digital marketing technology provides marketers the

opportunity to engage, educate, sell, and communicate effectively with the consumer in

real-time while gathering data to understand the consumer's wants and needs (Kabat-

Zinn, 2016). Social networking sites have grown over the past decade, with Facebook being more popular than Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Page et al., 2018). Chiang et al. (2019) identified that 70% of consumers are active users of social media, with 65% using social sites to seek information about products and services; 53% were advocates for the brands complimenting through the engagement. These statistics indicate the engagement and sharing of information on social media that promoted brand knowledge to increase sales.

As technology evolves and social connections become prominent, businesses should utilize the internet to engage, communicate, and promote their brand to remain competitive and increase sales (Bakri, 2017). Social marketing is a prominent engagement tool to effectively communicate and meet the consumer's needs and achieve personal sales goals utilizing social networks (Lee & Kotler, 2020). During the social marketing era, businesses developed strategies to reach their target audience and produce products and services that will satisfy the consumer needs in the competitive environment through social media and mobile marketing platforms (John & Shyamala, 2019). The use of social media and mobile marketing platforms has thus increased communication avenues within the marketplace.

Communication platforms have expanded in importance throughout marketing research. The social media platforms provide organizations with methods for reaching their primary consumers (Valos et al., 2016). For example, Lamberton and Stephen (2016) discussed digital and social media communications platforms in the article, "A Thematic Exploration of Digital, Social Media, and Mobile Marketing: Research

Evolution from 2000 to 2015 and an Agenda for Future Inquiry." In the article,

Lamberton and Stephen discussed changes and trends in technology as they pertain to

marketing. In addition to the technological portion, the authors discussed the discourse

surrounding the technological advancements in the field, as well as potential topics for

future research, including collective behavior, the regulation of privacy issues for the

digital consumer, online and offline crossover, and the development of mobile marketing

theory (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Continuing technological advancements and

suggested future research topics indicate that communication via digital and social media

platforms will likely continue to expand marketing opportunities for businesses.

Social Media Marketing Strategies

Consumers have power through participation, engagement, openness,

conversation, community, and connectedness on social media that facilitates an

opportunity for marketers to create strategies to meet their needs and increase

profitability (Nistor, 2019). The evolution of social media began rapidly and continually

evolves, leaving marketers striving to see the strategic forest for the social media trees

(Quesenberry, 2019). Businesses must seek a strategic plan for using social media as a

dominant force in marketing and advertising. Social media is the fastest-growing media

in history (Richardson et al., 2016). An estimated 27% of people in the United States now

spend time on social media sites while marketers invest 22% of marketing

communications to digital media, with the expectation that the numbers will increase as

technology evolves (Richardson et al., 2016). Increasing consumer satisfaction then

involves both eliciting feedback and taking action to resolve issues resulting in negative

consumer experiences.

A strategy to increase the results of social media engagement is educating

consumers on the benefits of participation and communication with another consumer to

gain knowledge of products and services (Paswan, 2018). Satisfied consumers become

valuable assets to marketers through word-of-mouth advertising. Marketers often

embrace social media as a strategic tool but struggle with addressing negativity from

consumers who are not satisfied with the products or services rendered (Melancon &

Dalakas, 2018). The fear of negative social media backlash can result in negative press

and lower prices of products. Marketers should facilitate a strategic plan to address all

comments, whether positive or negative, to ensure all consumers understand the

importance of customer satisfaction to the business (Melancon & Dalakas, 2018).

Negative word-of-mouth gives the consumer a dominant opinion in the social platform

providing influential and negative comments in real-time on though networking mediums

(Melancon & Dalakas, 2018). Marketers should consistently engage with consumers

requesting valuable feedback and encourage consumers to address their concerns and

submit suggestions to rectify the issue (Paswan, 2018). Increasing consumer satisfaction

then involves both eliciting feedback and taking action to resolve issues resulting in

negative consumer experiences.

Importance of Social Media Marketing

Leaders of traditionally established businesses may view the rise in social media

marketing as a threat to their current marketing strategies. However, to achieve success in

a 21st-century market, it is beneficial for business leaders to use real-time conversations

on social networks to understand the psychological, cultural, and emotional tendencies of

consumers and how these tendencies impact social media engagement (Zhang et al.,

2018). Businesses should follow the gaps in understanding the communication tendencies

of consumers to communicate effectively (Zhang et al., 2018). Social media is known as

a significant source of news exposure for consumers that seek purposeful information

about products and services (Ahmadi & Wohn, 2018). Incidental news exposure on social

media allows consumers accidental opportunities to create memorable experiences that

will drive purchase decisions and increase business sales (Ahmadi & Wohn, 2018).

Social media engagement is a primary communication strategy to identify trends, and

statistics on engagement across specific time frames to enhance the relationship between

the marketer and the consumer through social media marketing (Dolan et al., 2017).

Therefore, marketers need to consider the importance of developing social media

marketing strategies.

Social media has evolved into the mainstream media platform that keeps

consumers informed and up to date on the latest current events (Dolan et al., 2017). The

future direction of social media is reliant upon innovative technology and the needs of

consumers to stay engaged (Dolan et al., 2017). For instance, social media is an

affordable opportunity for businesses to engage with and garner the attention of

consumers (Dessart, 2017). As technology advances, knowledge regarding the

consumer's role in engaging with businesses through social media environments will

increase (Dessart, 2017). Businesses should transform the uncertainty of technology into

trust and loyalty toward the brand through communication and engagement (Zhang et al., 2018). Consistent exposure to current events via social media could provide new ideas and perspectives to consumers through expanded content and a willingness to consume the information (Ahmadi & Wohn, 2018). Given the continued increase of social media as a communication platform, businesses could benefit from developing their social media marketing strategies to increase sales.

Summary

In this literature review, I explored previous research regarding applicable conceptual frameworks. The primary framework involved relationship marketing theory as a method for attracting and maintaining relationships with consumers. Secondary frameworks included the TAM for understanding how acceptance of technology occurs and the DOI for understanding how innovative technology-based tools become adopted by users. I also discussed competitive advantage as a method for businesses to increase and maintain profitability and sustainability. The use of low-cost leadership, differentiation, and network effect indicated that excessive competition in market segments reduces network effect, which supports the need for differentiation among businesses using social media marketing to sustain a competitive advantage. Although businesses may find they can achieve cost reduction using both proactive and reactive strategies when developing strategies for SMM to engage digital consumers, the use of proactive strategies may alleviate the need to implement short-term reactive strategies. An exploration regarding the evolution of marketing resulted in a deeper understanding of the importance of customer relationships for effective marketing, which spans multiple

marketing eras, thereby indicating the importance of the business-customer relationship.

Furthermore, SMM can use marketing strategies to engage the use of social media and

engage digital consumers to increase sales.

Transition

In Section 1, I identified a business problem regarding strategies that social media

marketers lack to engage in digital communication to increase sales. Section 1 included

the business problem, the purpose of the study, and the question behind the research to

create a foundation for the study. The literature review included discussion regarding

relationship marketing, the TAM, and the DOI as the conceptual frameworks of this

study. Based on the findings in the literature review, using social media, businesses can

build relationships with consumers and increase their competitive advantage. There was

also a discussion regarding the applicability of competitive advantage to this study, as

well as a review of marketing evolution.

In conclusion, the literature review included the critical analysis and synthesis of

sources and content to define the study's intensity. Section 1 also included a detailed

literature review regarding social media marketing strategies and the importance of

educating consumers about the benefits of participating in social media marketing, as

well as how businesses can use social media marketing strategies to remain engaged in

communication to increase profitability. There was also a discussion regarding the

antecedents of social media as they relate to marketing.

In Section 2, I define the researcher's role and process for the selection of

participants utilizing an ethical manner through an in-depth research study to establish

valid and reliable data in this study. In Section 3, I include a presentation of findings,

professional practice, implications for social change, plus any further research

recommendations for the future, and a study conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 provides an explanation of the methodology used to conduct this study about the social media marketing strategies used by marketers to engage and communicate with digital consumers to increase sales. Section 2 begins with a reiteration of the purpose statement, a discussion regarding the role of the researcher, the identification of strategies and criteria used for participant selection, a review of the research method and design, and an explanation of the steps taken to adhere to the ethical research standards. This section also includes an explanation of the data collection method, as well as data organization and data analysis processes. Section 2 includes a discussion of the steps taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the study and concludes with a transition.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SMM use to engage digital consumers to increase sales. The targeted population was marketing managers in three companies located in upstate South Carolina who have successfully used social media engagement strategies with digital consumers to increase sales. The results of this study could lead to social change by engaging and building relationships between businesses and consumers to increase trust and loyalty. Increasing trust and loyalty may elevate the appreciation of the consumer provider economy, leading to enlightened consumers.

Role of the Researcher

Successful qualitative studies contain the essential elements of flexibility and participant-oriented contribution, which results in comprehensive datasets (Alase, 2017). For this study, my role as the researcher was to identify successful social media marketing strategies SMM use to engage digital customers and increase sales. Several skills are crucial to rigorous qualitative research. Qualitative researchers must be able to listen attentively, have in-depth subject-area knowledge, maintain the privacy of participants, follow the standards of ethical research, and be able to link collected data to their study's purpose statement and research question (Yin, 2018).

In qualitative case study research, the method for collecting information often includes using structured interviews, semistructured interviews, organization documents, and collecting archival data. The primary data source for this study came from semistructured interviews with SMM, who have successfully used social media to engage digital consumers to increase sales. Researchers should try to maintain objectivity in the collection and interpretation of data, which they can do by listening attentively and precisely recording conversations with participants to accurately capture the participant's viewpoint (Charlick et al., 2016). As part of the interview process, researchers should acknowledge the voluntary nature of participation and the importance of the participant's willingness to engage in the study and share experiences based on the nature and topics addressed in the interview (Alexander et al., 2018). Attentive listening and respect for each participant can increase the participant's willingness to engage and share personal experiences (Charlick et al., 2016).

As a marketing professor with 10 years of experience in the marketing field, I understand the importance of implementing strategies to increase revenue. However, my experience regarding the implementation of social media marketing strategies is not extensive, which factored into my desire to understand what social media strategies are beneficial to SMM. Although I may have been familiar by name to potential participants, I did not accept participants with whom I had a personal or professional relationship.

Identified in *The Belmont Report* are basic ethical principles that researchers should adhere to when interviewing human subjects (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979). The basic principles outlined in the report are: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (NCPHSBBR, 1979). Respect for persons refers to honoring the demands of the participant. Beneficence means securing the well-being of participants. Justice involves ensuring fairness, equality, and ethical treatment for all participants. As the researcher, to ensure all participants received ethical treatment, I adhered to the basic principles in *The Belmont Report*.

To mitigate bias, I remained cognizant of my personal beliefs and biases regarding the use of social media marketing strategies to engage digital consumers to increase sales. Research bias is the distortion of study results based on influence from the perceptions of the researcher that undermine the researcher's effort to answer the research question (Polit & Beck, 2018). I recognized that although bias exists, it was my responsibility to set aside my preconceived notions regarding the research topic to ensure I was open to all research findings. To help prevent my personal perceptions from

infiltrating the data, I remained objective during the research process and used member checking and data saturation as components of the data collection process.

It is beneficial to utilize interview protocols when collecting data through semistructured interviews. Following an interview protocol allows the researcher to follow the same structure for each interview, leading to consistent data (Bearman et al., 2019). I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) when conducting interviews, which involved discussion with participants that occurred before and after the interview questions began, including explaining the informed consent form and the use of audio recording and member checking to enhance the validity and credibility of the study.

Participants

Gathering data that aligns with the research question involves defining eligibility criteria and selecting only participants who meet the appropriate requirements (Yin, 2018). Establishing eligibility criteria is crucial to warrant the richness of information in data collection (Charlick et al., 2016). The eligibility criteria for this study were that participants must: (a) be SMM, (b) have successfully implemented social media marketing strategies, (c) have at least 3 years of professional experience in their position, (d) be employed at a company located in upstate South Carolina, and (e) be willing to participate in the semistructured and audio recorded interviews. It is essential to meet the criteria of the researcher to ensure the data meets the qualitative rigor needed to achieve a quality study (Nowell & Albrecht, 2019).

An important step in the research process is gaining access to study participants. For this study, I gained access to participants through social media platforms. After I

received approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I used

LinkedIn to find potential participants who have experience with social media marketing.

I then sent an invitation to participate to each potential participant via email (see

Appendix B). Researchers send invitation letters to potential participants to indicate the

intent of and procedure for the study (Alexander et al., 2018). The invitation included the

purpose of the study, interview questions, and timeframe for committing to the interview

process to gain information for the study. I chose the top three participants who aligned

with the eligibility requirements of the study and had the availability to participate. It was

vital I save the remaining participants as backups should something arise, and a

participant withdraws from the study.

  The target population included three marketing managers in companies located in

upstate South Carolina. During the data gathering process, it is important that the

researcher builds rapport and actively maintains relationships with study participants

(Charlick, 2016). Maintaining a good relationship with participants promotes trust and

improves the researcher's ability to acquire useful data during the collection process of

the study (Amundson, 2017). The researcher can build rapport with participants by

openly and transparently sharing information regarding the study purpose (Dempsey et

al., 2016). I built rapport with study participants by demonstrating care for their well-

being and genuine interest in their comfort during the study. To set participants at ease, I

maintained their privacy throughout the research process and ensured they understood

that their participation in the study was voluntary and could be discontinued at any time.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The three approaches in academic research are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method (Yin, 2018). Researchers use qualitative methods to create a deep understanding of and confirm a phenomenon (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). To develop a deep understanding and confirmation of a phenomenon, qualitative research often includes an in-depth exploration of participant experiences (Yousefi Nooraie et al., 2020). Qualitative research emphasizes reality, flexibility, understanding, and exploration of lived experiences (Yin, 2018). Researchers use the qualitative method to gather data through observations, interviews, or a review of material written by participants to report themes and patterns in the study (Christenson & Gutierrez, 2016). I chose to use a qualitative research method as my intention was to explore the experiences of SMM, who have successfully used social media marketing strategies to develop relationships with digital consumers and increase sales.

Researchers use quantitative methods to confirm a hypothesis using numerical data. Using quantitative methods, researchers scientifically examine the relationships between variables to facilitate a hypothesis and establish a theory (Yin, 2018). The central purpose of the quantitative method is then to confirm or reject the theory (Yousefi Nooraie et al., 2020). Researchers apply the quantitative method in the pursuit of answers to questions about a phenomenon based on *how many* or *how much*, instead of *what*, *how*, or *why* (Yin, 2018). Researchers use quantitative research to test conceptual models to understand the relationship between variables (Christenson & Gutierrez, 2016). The

purpose of this study was not to confirm a hypothesis; therefore, the quantitative method was not appropriate.

Researchers use mixed methods to examine and confirm a phenomenon (Molina-Azorín & Fetters, 2020). The use of the mixed method allows the researcher to combine both quantitative and qualitative methods (Headley & Clark, 2020). Researchers who use the mixed method have an opportunity to use qualitative methods to interpret quantitative findings (Shannonhouse et al., 2017). Researchers might choose to use mixed methods to capitalize on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative findings (Yousefi Nooraie et al., 2020). Using mixed methods involves in-depth analysis and statistical testing of the relationship between variables (Molina-Azorín & Fetters, 2020). The goal of my study was to explore life experiences through relationships to understand a phenomenon and not to test variables. Therefore, using a mixed-method approach was not appropriate.

Research Design

Researchers using a qualitative approach can choose from various research designs to explore the research question. There are several broad designs used in qualitative research, including phenomenology, ethnography, and case study (Molina-Azorín & Fetters, 2020). A multiple case study design was the most appropriate design for answering this study's central research question. Researchers using a multiple case study design collect data from multiple sources, including interviews (Alpi & Evans, 2019). The purpose of this research study was to identify successful social media marketing strategies for engaging digital consumers and increasing sales. Examining

multiple companies with SMM who have successfully used social media marketing strategies increased the likelihood that the findings were comprehensive.

Researchers use phenomenological studies to provide a detailed description and analysis of a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2018). Phenomenological studies involve collecting data from multiple participants who have the same experience to generalize findings about that experience (Yin, 2018). The goal of this study was to identify and describe successful social media marketing strategies, and in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of SMM is not necessary for this study. Researchers may also choose to use an ethnographic design, which involves the exploration of cultures, groups, and organizations (Wallace, 2019). Ethnographic researchers obtain a full understanding of a culture through immersion in the culture (Yin, 2018). Since the focus of this study was on strategies SMMs use and not social media marketing culture, ethnography was not an appropriate design for this study. Furthermore, as this research study was only concerned with SSM strategies, an immersion in the company's respective cultures was not necessary. Therefore, a multiple case study design was the best option for this research study.

It is essential to achieve data saturation in a qualitative study to ensure researcher efficiency and to support the evidence presented in a study's conclusion (Nowell & Albrecht, 2019). Data saturation is important for ensuring the dependability, credibility, and transferability of the study (Saunders et al., 2016). Researchers achieve data saturation when no new information emerges from data collection (Lowe et al., 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). If I did not achieve data saturation via three SMM interviews,

I planned to expand the sample until I achieved data saturation. I knew that I had achieved data saturation when no new applicable information arose from the participants

Population and Sampling

The population of this study included three SMM who have successfully implemented marketing strategies to engage digital consumers and increase sales. Data saturation with a small number of participants is possible when conducting in-depth qualitative research practices (Boddy, 2016). Rather than choose participants to fulfill a quota, I used the eligibility criterion and chose only those participants with expertise in social media marketing to ensure I could attain in-depth information. van Rijnsoever (2017) asserted that researchers who include few participants with a depth of knowledge regarding a topic could ensure the acquisition of meaningful information related to the phenomenon being studied. Purposeful sampling was used to select study participants. Benoot et al. (2016) noted that purposeful sampling involves participants with expertise in the area under study to elicit information that will yield insights related to the phenomena. Therefore, purposeful sampling was appropriate to gain an in-depth understanding of the social media strategies SMM use to successfully increase sales.

Participant knowledge and experience related to a phenomenon are essential components of a successful study. The use of purposeful sampling requires the researcher to gain access to key informants regarding the study topic and gather data to conclude a detailed study (Patton, 2015). The researcher then uses the acquired data to provide future readers with in-depth knowledge regarding the study topic (Benoot et al., 2016). Researchers using purposeful sampling identify participants with both the knowledge of

information and desire to contribute said information to answer the research question

(Yin, 2018). Researchers should explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences

concerning the topic of the study to determine the uniqueness of each phenomenon

(Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). Criteria for eligibility required that participants: (a) be

SMM, (b) have successfully implemented social media marketing strategies, (c) have at

least 3 years of professional experience in their position, (d) be employed at a company

located in upstate South Carolina, and (e) be willing to participate in the semistructured

and audio recorded interviews. All interviews were scheduled at a time and place

amenable to the participant and located in the upstate of South Carolina, regardless of

whether the interviews occurred face-to-face or via video conferencing.

Researchers seek to attain data saturation during their research process. To ensure

data saturation, I used member checking and methodological triangulation. Researchers

conducting qualitative studies with purposive sampling can use member checking to

review their interpretation of participant responses to ensure accuracy, increase clarity,

and achieve data saturation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using member checking, I

reviewed the information obtained during each interview with the participant by email to

ensure that I garnered as much detailed and accurate information as possible.

Furthermore, I conducted methodological triangulation to gather additional information

and increase the depth of information gathered from the participants. Triangulation

involves using data from multiple sources to develop a thorough answer to the research

question (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Ethical Research

The qualitative research process includes following ethical principles. Researchers are responsible for protecting participants and using a process that entails ethical review, formalization, and focus (Greenwood, 2016). Adherence to an IRB approval process ensures that studies meet the regulatory guidelines and denote the protection of participants' rights (Cook et al., 2013). It is vital to obtain the approval of the IRB to ensure that data collection complies with ethical standards. I obtained approval from Walden University's IRB (12-03-20-0851472) before beginning the data collection process. I sent an email to all potential participants that included the purpose of the study, the interview protocol (see Appendix A), and the interview questions. This email also included an explanation regarding the intended use of the data gathered and all necessary contact information.

Informing the participants of their rights and guidelines of the study is vital to the research and a component of the informed consent process. *The Belmont Report* noted the process of ensuring and understanding of participants to participate is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time (NCPHSBBR, 1979). The participant could withdraw through contact with me via the phone number or email provided. Before beginning the interviews, researchers should provide affirmation concerning the withdrawal process without repercussion and the protection of participant identity outlined in the IRB process (Cook et al., 2013). The participants in this study did not receive any gifts or monetary incentives but may obtain a copy of the completed study with results. To protect the participants' identities, I coded each participant's name with letters, such as Participant A,

Participant B, and so forth, as an identity tag. All data collected remained confidential, with all paper documents stored in a locked file cabinet and all digital documents stored on a password-protected external drive at my residence. All paper documents will be destroyed, and all digital files deleted 5 years after the completion of this study.

Data Collection Instruments

The goal of my study was to examine SMM strategies to engage digital consumers and increase sales. I was the primary data collection instrument for this study and used semistructured interviews to gather information related to the study topic. The use of semistructured interviews and archival documents piloted the collection of data for review and exploration of strategies to enhance sales. Researchers conducting qualitative research use semistructured interviews with key research questions to encourage participants to share detailed information and gain a deeper understanding of the research topic (Peesker et al., 2019). The use of interviews reduces the risk of bias and researchers' preconceptions and increases the in-depth understanding of the participant's unique contributions (Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

To enhance the reliability of the research study, I followed an interview protocol (Appendix A). Researchers can use interview protocols to gain an in-depth understanding of the research topic and reduce the likelihood of researcher bias (Yin, 2018). The potential for research bias exists in any research study (Zanin & Piercy, 2019) and can threaten the reliability of the study (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Using an interview protocol (Appendix A) and attentive engagement with the participants' responses helped me to remain objective and prevent bias during the study.

The use of triangulation to align the data collection process ensures the validity of the study. Triangulation is a strategy used by researchers to test validity through the convergence of data from diverse sources (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). To triangulate the data and gain a deep understanding of the study, researchers might draw from multiple data sources gathered from different periods, locations, and perspectives (Natow, 2020). For this study, the data collection consisted of semistructured interviews of three SMM who met the study criteria and through the documentation of marketing materials, social media interactions, and web analytics. The participants reviewed a summary of the interview for approval of my interpretation and accuracy. I used a narrative format for my findings, and I developed tables and figures to represent the study process.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection is important in understanding the phenomenon of a study. Conducting a thorough data collection process requires a comprehensive technique and documentation of the research process (McKenna et al., 2017). For this study, I employed an interview protocol (Appendix A) to conduct semistructured interviews and review marketing materials, SMM participation with online forums, and web analytics that support the use of SMM strategies to increase sales. The purpose of an interview protocol was to reduce researcher bias and increase in-depth understanding of the study topic (Yin, 2018). The interview protocol for this study consisted of reiterating to participants the research question and purpose for the interview, as well as the voluntary nature of the study. Each participant received a copy of the interview protocol (Appendix A) and interview questions. I reviewed with participants the timeframe for the interview, which

should not exceed 30 minutes, and asked them seven open-ended questions and follow-up

questions that arose and posed requests for any related documentation they wish to share.

During the interviews, I paid attention to the body language of each participant and took

notes on details not captured in an audio recording. At the end of the interview, I thanked

participants for their time and let them know that within 48 hours, I would send them, via

email, a summary of key points from the interview, which they should review for

accuracy.

The researcher's objective when using semistructured interviews is to pursue the

interview with open-ended questions to gather in-depth responses and conclude with

follow-up questions. An advantage of using a semistructured interview is the ability of

the researcher to prepare questions and secure a face-to-face meeting place with privacy

to create a pleasant environment (Adams, 2016). Researchers should allow participants to

talk, which may increase the information shared and enhance the researcher's depth of

understanding about the topic (Kaliber, 2019; Yin, 2018). One disadvantage in

conducting semistructured interviews is the need for the researcher to maintain focus,

professionalism, and refrain from making biased comments (Brown & Danaher, 2019).

Researchers should allow participants to guide the conversation and employ active

listening by taking notes and capturing all elements of the conversation (DeJonckheere &

Vaughn, 2019). Researchers who listen and allow participants to express their

experiences and perspectives about a study topic can gather the data necessary to answer

their research question.

During the interviews, I asked participants seven questions concerning social media engagement strategies used to increase the sales of the organization. I kept a reflective journal, in which I took in-depth notes during each interview, recording the nonverbal cues and key points to integrate into data analysis. It is vital researchers review participants' responses through a paraphrase of each question to gain understanding, and using this approach to data collection can reduce opportunities for bias related to researcher preconceptions (Golder et al., 2017). I remained courteous and respectful of the time the participant took to attend the interview and contribute data for the study, and the interview period ranged from 25 to 45 minutes based on the information received from each participant. Within 7 days after the conclusion of each interview, I conducted member checking and emailed each participant a summary of the key points obtained during the interview to review and confirm the accuracy of my interpretation of the interview. I waited for this response from each participant and made changes accordingly to ensure the accuracy of each interview. After completing my initial data analysis, I reconnected with all participants to request sales data. Each declined to share proprietary company information.

I also examined social media platforms, testimonials, newsletters, and web analytics to explore all information related to the research question. Researchers examine documents to collect information on the background, elaborate on their understanding, and expand on the research problem (Bretschneider et al., 2017). A disadvantage of a review of company documents is that they do not provide the researcher with information about the participants' opinions regarding the study topic (Yin, 2018). However, an

advantage is that this process allows the researcher to corroborate information they ascertained during participant interviews (Clark & Vealé, 2018). The document review included a review of marketing materials, social media posts, communications and engagement, and web analytics.

Data Organization Technique

To obtain and track data, I audio-recorded interviews, maintained a reflective journal, and created digital transcripts of the interviews. Using the interview transcripts and my reflective journal, I created summary notes of key points as my member check data. I transferred my member check data to a digital file, which I submitted to participants asking for them to conduct a validity check. Upon the return of the member check data from the participants, I updated my interview data. I also used NVivo to assist in organizing all data collected. The use of a data organization process assists the researcher in effectively creating a systematic method for securing confidentially and deleting files within the appropriate timeframe (Marshall et al., 2018). The audio recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Word, and the data was stored on a password-protected external drive at my residence. Researchers must organize, code, and identify themes from interviews to ensure the collection of all applicable data relevant to the study's conclusion (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Participant protection remains the obligation of the researcher to protect and adhere to the ethical principles of research (Alexander et al., 2018). Each participant's interview was coded and stored on a password-protected external drive at my residence. I will delete electronic data and shred all documents 5 years after the approval of this study.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected for this study, I conducted methodological triangulation. Qualitative data analysis encompasses methods of classification in which the researcher interprets themes, statements, and codes to enable a structured approach that describes a phenomenon (Cassell & Bishop, 2019). Researchers use data analysis to gain traction in a research study by labeling, categorizing, and grouping data with codes to detect themes. To collect data for this study I used semistructured interviews, took notes in a journal as participants shared, and gathered information concerning activities on social media platforms and websites.

Triangulation of data to the conceptual framework contributes to a broader understanding of the data to formulate a research analysis roadmap (Turner et al., 2017). Wilson (2016) noted that triangulation using multiple approaches allows the researcher to retrieve more sufficient data to confirm the results of the research. My approach was to use methodological triangulation to enhance rigor through the data analyzing process using the semistructured interviews, audio recordings, reflective journal, newsletters, testimonials, review of social media engagement, and web analytics to support my findings.

Additionally, I conducted a thematic analysis of the data. The thematic analysis consists of five steps, which include (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) drawing conclusions about the data (Yin, 2018). The first step in the thematic analysis is compiling the data (Woods et al., 2016). Once the semistructured interviews were completed, I considered the

participants' information and the information recorded in my reflective journals, participants' emotional responses, or the participants' underlying tones as they discussed a topic. I used Microsoft Word to transcribe the audio recording to create digital transcripts. I also compiled all information found in the organizations' archival documents and maintained a reflective journal. During the thematic analysis process, I used data analysis software. I reviewed various software to analyze data, such as EndNote, NVivo, Microsoft, and STATA. I chose to use NVivo because it was user-friendly and helped to identify themes and trends.

The second step, disassembling the data, also occurred using NVivo to code the data and develop groupings. Researchers use NVivo to categorize responses from the participant, connect themes, and assist in the coding process (Marshall et al., 2018). NVivo assisted me in uploading all documents from interviews, recording files, marketing materials, and web analytics to create nodes for themes, and categorize and code all data for straightforward interpretation and conclusion of the study. Researchers use coding to establish meaning for collected data (Clark & Vealé, 2018).

Following the disassemble phase, I reassembled the data. Tuapawa (2017) identified reassembling as a method for researchers to identify prominent patterns and themes in their research. To determine the most prominent themes, I looked for words and phrases repeated in the semistructured interview transcripts and the archival documents. Using thematic analysis, I identified themes related to information found in the literature review, such as brand loyalty, strategies, growth in sales, and reflect the

conceptual framework. Furthermore, I was attentive to the potential emergence of themes not previously addressed in the literature.

The fourth step was to interpret the findings. During this phase, researchers examine their findings to develop meaning and correlate the information found with the study's conceptual framework (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). I confirmed the alignment by examining the data, previous literature, and relationship marketing theory. Yin (2018) asserted that researchers could establish meaning from data to conclude a study successfully. Once I completed the interpretation step in the process, I concluded the study by presenting and discussing the data's findings.

<div align="center">**Reliability and Validity**</div>

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research encompasses data dependability to duplicate the study's findings (MacPhail et al., 2016). Replication of the results obtained from previous studies conducted using the same rigor identifies the data's reliability. Strategies used to confirm the dependability includes member checking (Thomas, 2017). Researchers achieve dependability by ensuring consistency during the data collection process (Mohajan, 2017). I achieved dependability and verified the accuracy of the responses from the interviews through member checking. The study's accuracy was enhanced by using an interview protocol, coding system, and constant data comparisons as a strategy that enriched the study's dependability and credibility. The researcher's objective is to continually verify the accuracy of context and form (Joslin & Muller, 2016).

Validity

Validity in qualitative research involves trustworthiness, transferability, and confirmability of the study's findings (FitzPatrick, 2019). I aimed to strengthen the trustworthiness through validity checks for the credibility of the study. Validity is dependent on the purpose and context of the study to make a valid inference or conclusion. Researchers may use methodological triangulation, such as semistructured interviews, review of public data, observations, and analysis of previous studies, to enhance the study's credibility (Natow, 2020). Through this process, researchers strive to unveil rich data that will decrease bias and increase the study's validity and reliability (Joslin & Muller, 2016). I used multiple sources to gather data that attested to the credibility of authenticating the results and providing a study phenomenon.

Transferability can be obtained if the findings can be applied to other groups (Morse, 2015). Researchers must use strategies to provide sufficient information that will enable the reader to assess the data's capability to be transferrable (Cypress, 2017). To obtain transferability, I provided thick descriptions of the research process, including participant selection, data collection, and the thematic analysis process. Confirmability identifies the researcher's ability to describe the conclusion and interpretation of the findings from the data collected (Yazan, 2015). The strategies used to enhance validity include triangulation, member checks, observations, and peer examinations (Yazan, 2015). I achieved confirmability through member checking and methodological triangulation.

Researchers use data saturation to ensure transferability and confirmability (Yin, 2018). Data saturation is vital in the display of rigor for qualitative research (Cypress, 2017). To achieve data saturation, I obtained in-depth data by adhering to an interview protocol and applying methodological triangulation. I knew that I obtained data saturation when no additional information, data, or theme was evident.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included a detailed summary of the methodology for this research project. I began with my purpose statement and then explained my role as the researcher and the participant selection process. Following this, I provided detailed reasoning for selecting the qualitative research method and the multiple case study design, including my plan to adhere to ethical standards throughout the study. This section also included a detailed review of the data collection instruments and technique and the organization and analysis processes. Section 3 includes a presentation of the findings and their professional practice. Section 3 closes with my reflections and a concluding statement.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies SMM use to engage digital consumers to increase sales. I gathered information from three SMMs in three businesses who outlined strategies used to engage with customers and increase sales. I used methodological triangulation and collected data from semistructured interviews, social media postings, and web analytics.

I compiled and organized data on a spreadsheet with information retrieved from the NVivo software to code themes. I reviewed the interview responses using thematic analysis to identify the reoccurrence of themes. Documentation and observations supported the contextualized findings of the study. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis included: (a) consumer awareness, (b) social relationship management, and (c) measurement of performance. In the following discussion, I identify the social media strategies marketers use to increase sales based on the study's findings.

Presentation of Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What are the strategies social media marketers use to engage digital consumers to increase sales? To gather data to answer this question, I interviewed three participants from three different businesses using semistructured interviews. The participants had differing levels and types of experience. Participant 1 was a digital and brand strategist director with 6 years of experience in the industry. Participant 2 was a director of marketing with 26 years of experience, and Participant 3 was a director of marketing working with dual operations in

two businesses for 17 years. Each participant answered seven open-ended questions referencing the strategies used on social media to increase sales. Additionally, I reviewed social media activities for media platforms to review the level of engagement through consumer likes and communication. I intended to collect sales data, but each participant declined to share proprietary company information, and instead, they shared web analytics to determine the increase in sales. To complement the research, each participant noted the vital role social media played in their success with engagement and increased sales.

In this study, the conceptual framework I used was relationship marketing theory (Berry, 1983). Social media provides marketers with a relationship marketing tool to engage consumers in developing brand awareness and fostering consumer loyalty, leading to increased sales (Richardson et al., 2016). Marketers can use social media as a relationship marketing tool to facilitate engagement and real-time communications with consumers to understand consumers' lifetime value and importance. The process of relationship marketing theory guides marketers to develop a strategy of interactive marketing for communicating with consumers in real-time, generating feedback that facilitates a relationship with customers, and increasing sales (Groonos, 1994). Social media provides a platform for SMM to interact and communicate with consumers to build relationships and learn about the product to assist in purchasing decisions.

This study's findings supported Clark and Veale's (2018) assertion that businesses that use social media engagement strategies can benefit from combining relationship marketing as a strategic tool to communicate, engage, and build relationships to increase

sales. Using Nvivo software, I conducted content analysis and identified themes aligning

with each participant's responses to the relationship marketing theory. The following

themes emerged from the semistructured interviews, social media postings, and websites,

and my journal notes taken based on the participants' experiences: (a) consumer

awareness, (b) social relationship management, (c) measurement of performance (see

Table 2).

Table 2

Participants' Responses by Theme

	Themes		
Participant	Consumer awareness	Social relationship management	Measurement of performance
Participant 1	17	7	12
Participant 2	22	7	15
Participant 3	18	17	11
No. of Occurrences	57	31	38

Theme 1: Consumer Awareness

Consumer awareness encompasses strategies to identify the target market, and

attract, maintain, and build relationships with consumers to increase sales. Berry (1983)

described a tenet of relationship marketing, the conceptual framework for this study, as

understanding consumer behavior, achieved by engaging, communicating, and building

long-term, meaningful relationships. All participants expressed that developing effective

social media strategies requires knowledge of the target audience and the platform needed

to engage with consumers in real-time. According to Lee and Kotler (2020), social media

is a prominent strategic tool to reach consumers in real-time. According to Participant 1,

understanding the target market and communicating with consumers through paid media,

such as LinkedIn and Facebook, creates a broad awareness approach to consumers' needs.

Participant 2 noted that connecting with the target market through social media on

Facebook and Instagram platforms embed the brand in the consumers' minds. Participant

3 added that "using online chats and engagement with consumers via social media

platforms allows consumers to ask questions and communicate in real-time for a prompt

response." Keegan and Rowley (2017) identified the return on investments and

effectiveness of real-time engagement as a critical driver of the social media marketers'

strategy to increase sales. All participants indicated that it is essential to engage

consumers' visual imagery to reflect consumers' lifestyles. Visual stimulation connects

consumers to the brand and increases sales (Kirk & Swain, 2018). According to Berry

(1983), communication with consumers through social media creates awareness for the

brand, builds relationships, and fosters trust and loyalty. Rhein and Schmid (2020)

asserted that engagement strategies gain social acceptance that informs and empower

consumers to make buying decisions. Consumers respond to people who appear to have a

similar lifestyle, which creates a more vivid reflection of the brand. Additionally,

Participant 2 outlined that community involvement and relationship building were vital to

embedding the brand in consumers' minds and increasing sales. Furthermore, it is

beneficial for SMM to identify which social media platform is prominent for their

business and monitor it regularly to solidify if the platform can provide comprehensive

services.

Using Testimonials

Participant 3 shared that "testimonials were vital to creating a connection with

consumers trying to make decisions on investing in the product but are unsure of the

probability of success." The testimonials then become the motivator that encourages

other consumers to purchase the product, which then provides a return on social media

investment. Each participant noted that using testimonials on social media to attract

consumers toward the product helps consumers relate to the business's content. I visited

each website, and all businesses positioned testimonials for viewer connection on their

websites. Each site contained testimonials advertising its products to highlight unique

content and benefits. The testimonials brought awareness to other consumers of the

success people have experienced with the product. Participant 1 asserted, "people believe

other people and will react when they trust their judgment." Participant 3 identified

"veterans were a primary target market, and their support resonated with other consumers

who are supporters also." Martin et al. (2015) noted testimonials on social media and

various website areas present success stories to gain exposure and awareness for other

consumers looking for specific products and benefits. Each participant's social website

and platform included testimonials, and each identified the satisfaction the consumer

gained from their purchase and the benefits provided. Participant 3 noted, "testimonials

and photos of partnering businesses are used for advertising on their website and social

platforms to gain awareness." Participant 2 and Participant 3 were adamant about using

testimonials and photos of satisfied consumers to create a visual to connect with potential

consumers to increase their client base and enhance sales. Employing visual tools aligns

with the literature concerning consumers trusting experienced users who have proven the

benefits of the product (Oyza & Edwin, 2016).

Paying for a Presence

Social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram offered paid

media services used by each participant. Lamberton and Stephen (2016) identified social

media platforms as the driving force to reach consumers through interactive

communication, images, and call to action purchases. Marketers should focus on

relationship building to generate a community of loyal and trustworthy buyers to increase

sales (Tadajewski & Jones, 2016). Participant 1 had an interactive Facebook presence

with over 450 likes and 500 followers that outlined special pricing and the contest to

attract consumers and increase sales. Participant 1 noted that the "usage of paid media on

social media platforms bolsters the connection to 100% audience reach and a more

significant net of people interested in the product." Participants 1, 2, and 3 synchronized

their Facebook and Instagram to intensify their reach. Participant 2 had a presence on

Facebook with 250 likes and over 300 followers with offers to entice first-time

partnerships to help businesses start-up and maintain customer service levels to be

successful. Participant 3 had less than 100 followers and 75 likes on Facebook but has a

greater focus on maintaining a presence on LinkedIn. Although Participant 3 actively

engages with LinkedIn more than the other two participants, all three have attractive

LinkedIn platforms transparently outlining the business history, products offered, and

future goals. Participant 3 engages with other businesses through seminars to enhance

customer engagement and social media content to increase sales.

Theme 2: Social Relationship Management

The second theme to emerge in my study was social relationship management, a

strategy to build trust and loyalty to enhance engagement and increase sales. Social

relationship management is a tenet of the conceptual framework used for this study that

integrates interaction, communication, and engagement that involve two-way

communication driving a positive impact to increase sales (Berry, 1983). Businesses

strive to reach their target market and impact a mass market through social relationships

to increase brand awareness (Lim et al., 2019). According to Participant 2, it is essential

to cultivate relationships with consumers to generate repeat purchases that increase sales.

Rooney et al. (2021) noted the importance of building relationships through social media

as a consumer-led and technology-driven process. Engagement on social media platforms

is a strategy an organization can use to identify trends and communicate with consumers

over time to enhance the relationship between the marketer and consumer (Dolan et al.,

2017). Participant 2 also noted their community involvement. Participant 2's social

platform included pictures of consumer involvement with mobile campaigns to

demonstrate a desire to meet others' needs. Many consumers are loyal to businesses that

care about the surrounding community (Oyza & Edwin, 2016). Social media campaigns

often include content chosen to engage with consumers through brand connections

fostered by a shared social cause (Oyza & Edwin, 2016). Participant 2 further stated,

"community campaigns generate awareness from the surrounding area through word-of-

mouth marketing." Social media campaigns are the drivers for increased sales with digital

consumers due to interactions between consumers creating brand awareness. According

to Tuten and Mintu-Wimsatt (2018), social media platforms allow marketers to connect,

communicate, and engage with their target market to facilitate trust and loyalty through

brand awareness. Participants 2 and 3 noted engagement with the target market through

social media platforms create trust and loyalty to amplify the message to a broad

audience and increase sales.

According to Wang and Kim (2017), consumer and business relationships are

improved through social interactions, engaging conversations that involve two-way

communication to achieve customer retention, and increased sales growth. Participant 2

commented that digital consumers' involvement on social media platforms through which

organizations communicate new products and services generates awareness and allows

consumers to question and receive feedback that drives sales. Belk (2019) noted

developments in digital technology have fundamentally changed consumer behavior.

According to Participant 3, building relationships and becoming a trustworthy company

generates loyalty from consumers, reinforcing exceptional customer service as the basis

for purchase decisions. Participant 1 stated, "relationship building begins with identifying

the brand with a person" and asserted that "consumers trust people more than a brand;

they experience reality." Berry (1983) asserted building consumer relationships was

essential to increasing profitability, enhancing the brand reputation, and assuming a

competitive advantage in the market. Participants 1, 2, and 3's actions aligned well with

the relationship theory of communication as a tool identified by Lim et al. (2019), using

consumer desire for a relational exchange to build trust and loyalty for the brand. All three participants asserted that achieving a competitive advantage would occur because people can identify with another tangible object than a brand name. Specifically, Participant 3 stated that "relationship management creates loyalty in consumers that will drive an increase in sales."

All participants indicated that a timely response creates a loyal consumer who uses word-of-mouth marketing to create brand awareness in the socially connected world. Each participant's response aligned with Grönroos (2015), who asserted that consumers rely on word-of-mouth marketing to assist in their purchasing decisions. Understanding the importance of word-of-mouth marketing can help SMM use social media platforms effectively (Grönroos, 2015; Melancon & Dalakas, 2018). Such customer relationship interactions reposition individuals from viewing their purchases from a transactional perspective to an engagement perspective. Transitioning to an engagement perspective requires social relationship management through interaction and communication, increasing engagement and growth in sales and partnerships with consumers.

Theme 3: Measurement of Performance

The measure of performance is vital to understanding the success of social media engagement on different platforms. Berry's (1983) relational marketing theory, the conceptual framework for this study, underlies the importance of measuring performance to maintain a relationship with the consumer to enhance its trust, loyalty, and profitability. According to Participant 3, consumers frequently respond to internet surveys, answering the question about "how did you hear about us" that identifies which

social media platforms are the most prevalent contact method for the target market. The

consumer has a choice, and loyalty to the brand will drive the consumer to respond

(Fullerton, 1988). Engert and Baumgartner (2016) noted businesses with the appropriate

development and measurement of the performance indicators could guide their success

using social media. Participant 1 further identified that monitoring social media content

through web analytics identified enhanced engagement with likes and click-through rates

and increased sales. Emailed data from P1 supported this assertion.

The click-through rate measured what the consumer found interesting in their

website and social platforms. The time spent on online platforms reviewing specific

products indicated their interest. Google analytics and click-through rate recognize the

number of consumers using the platform and their interest in the product. The participants

noted that higher sales are associated with higher click-through rates. In alignment with

Page et al. (2018), SMM's high click-through rates lead to higher sales. Participant 2

stated, "Google analytics usage identified consumers' responses, reactions, and

interactions to increase sales." Furthermore, Participant 1 indicated that when marketers

use an "organic approach with algorithms, the platforms can cap the reach, but social

media reaches 100% of a target audience in real-time. Therefore, it is possible to receive

a more significant net of consumers interested in the product." Participant 1 noted,

"social media is an enhancement for marketers to increase their customer base and sales."

Participant 2 disclosed that: "actual consumer photos with their company logo generate a

visual of a relationship with the consumer and denoted trust and loyalty to the product."

Payne and Frow (2017) asserted that brand awareness

focuses on building relationships to engage with consumers and increase sales.

Social media provides an advantageous opportunity to expand reach, increase brand awareness and traffic, receive more clicks, and is an essential revenue growth component. To fully use social media platforms effectively, organizations must measure their performance on each platform and ascertain how they can improve or maintain their performance (Fullerton, 1988). When businesses measure performance, they can adjust their strategies to engage consumers better. Businesses use performance measurements to increase engagement and profitability based on the consumer actions and behavior of the social platform (Saura et al., 2021). Businesses remain competitive through minor changes in marketing and gauging consumers' reactions based on the modifications (Momany & Alshboul, 2016). Participant 1 noted that likes and comments indicate the engagement of people with a product. Participant 2 indicated that "photos of people in the community using products help create a visualization for consumers and embed the brand in their minds based on their affiliation." Almad and Wohn (2018) noted that marketers' strategy to increase sales included data usage, such as fragments of memories that work together to stay fresh in the consumer's minds. Participant 2 stated that "community involvement is a campaign to get consumers involved and react positively toward the brand." Participant 2 further stated, "purchases may not be instantaneous but posting on social media keeps the brand relevant and in consumers' minds." Measuring performance through customer engagement to increase sales can be executed through key performance indicators such as likes, click-throughs, and website visits. Measurements promote the correlational business focus on relationship building, as discussed in Theme 2. The

following table delineates the measurement methods used by Participants 1-3 to increase

sales (see Table 3).

Table 3

Measurements to Increase Sales

Participant	Click/views	Likes	CTR	Reach	Profits
Participant 1	X	X	X		X
Participant 2	X	X		X	
Participant 3	X	X	X	X	

The size of the business has a considerable effect on the methods used to reach

consumers and increase sales. Participant 1 worked for a larger business and was better

positioned with a sizable budget to invest financial resources to reach and acquire new

consumers. Participant 1 discovered measuring click-through rates, likes, and views were

the best methods to understanding how to reach their target market best and engage with

new consumers. Participant 2 used community involvement and campaigns to increase

their engagement and sales. Participant 3 saw a considerable increase in sales after their

newsletter post on social media websites. Depending on the size of the business, the

profitability and return on investment will vary. Each participant's marketing reports

revealed which method they used to measure their performance. As noted in the web

analytics, larger businesses spent more relative to the others to increase their traffic and

sales. In smaller businesses, web analytics identified building relationships as a more

profitable method to increase their reach and sales through word-of-mouth and shared

experiences. Participants 2 and 3 posted testimonials on their website to gain exposure, which is noted in the views, clicks, and likes on social platforms.

Application for Professional Practice

This study's findings can increase SMM understanding regarding social media strategies to effectively engage consumers and increase sales. Businesses focus primarily on increasing sales, the strategies needed to remain competitive in their market, and reaching their target market for survival and sustainability (Jablonski, 2016). Social media platforms employ opportunities for businesses to engage, communicate, and attract consumers to their products. Businesses can target their audience based on geographical, demographical, and behavioral data through social media engagement. According to Jones et al. (2018), marketing has evolved into strategic activities to build relationships, retain a loyal consumer base, and facilitate a relationship management role to increase sales. Social media is a low-cost innovative marketing tool to attract, retain, and manage consumer relationships to enhance sales (Venciute, 2018). As technology evolves and traditional media declines, this study may guide marketers to communicate, engage, and increase sales using social media marketing as a strategic tool.

The participants in this study identified social media as a valuable tool for marketers and how to utilize strategies to use social platforms effectively. Participant 2 noted social media as a strategic tool to generate leads that help build consumer trust and generate believability in the product. When consumers can connect with real people, they tend to trust their advice about the product knowledge they display on social platforms. Furthermore, Participant 3 identified that news stories and letters posted on social

platforms attract consumers who show interest in the product but are unsure of making a purchase. Therefore, SMM use testimonial outlines in news stories to facilitate an experience with the product to guide the decision-making process and increase sales. Marketers can use the knowledge resulting from this study to understand social media strategies, increase brand awareness, generate trust and loyalty, and increase sales for long-term sustainability. The use of paid media can help marketers convert social media communication and engagement into sales and a return on social media investment.

This study's findings aligned with the relationship marketing theory because social media serves as a strategic tool to help build relationships that reposition individuals from a transactional perspective to an engaging perspective. This reposition can then increase sales and create a greater understanding of partnering with consumers, which generates lifetime value. Social media is a tool SMM can use to gain knowledge, generate followers, and instill trust. Applying social media as a marketing tool is thus beneficial for SMM to increase relationships with consumers and increase sales.

Implications for Social Change

This study's social change implications include knowledge of social media marketing strategies that will enhance communications skills and enlighten SMM about new opportunities to engage more effectively with consumers to increase sales. Social media marketing skills can enhance the digital consumer's purchase and decision-making process, thereby generating trust and loyalty to create lifetime consumers. The improved use of social media platforms could allow consumers to engage with businesses to build relationships that foster trust and loyalty and facilitate customer satisfaction (Melancon &

Dalakas, 2018). Successful businesses can then contribute to the local economy and enhance the community to create a better place to live.

This study's findings can enhance consumers' knowledge of using social media to assist in their decision-making and purchasing process to increase sales. The result of higher sales will then boost the economy that contributes to increasing tax income for the local government, thereby enhancing funds to distribute in different areas to improve the lives of those in the community. Furthermore, increasing local community members' employment could generate more disposable income, increased homeownership, and lower foreclosure rates to enhance the community's standard of living.

Recommendations for Action

Using methodological triangulation of semistructured interviews, social media postings and website information, and notes taken during the participants' interviews, I identified three themes related to SMM strategies to engage digital consumers to increase sales. Given my findings, I would recommend that marketers: (a) make use of social media marketing as a strategic tool for communication, (b) create brand communities for social engagement to create brand awareness, and (c) execute software programs to measure the performance of social media. Marketers should use their financial resources to invest in software programs or media to generate brand awareness and increase sales. Social media is a low-cost strategic marketing tool SMM can use to reach millions of consumers. Employing paid media services, software, and investing time to build brand communities will help marketers understand the need to use social media platforms to increase sales.

Paid Media Investment

Businesses strive to identify strategies to enhance sales volume. Social media marketing requires consistent monitoring to build relationships and increase sales. Marketers can recognize the return on social media marketing investments and apply their resources to invest in paid media as a social media strategy to increase their exposure and sales. Social media is a phenomenon that influences all consumers' lives, and marketers are strategically changing their behavior to engage and communicate effectively with consumers (Alabdulkarim, 2017). Marketers that use their resources properly communicate, engage, and monitor their social media marketing will benefit from increased product awareness, engagement with a broader consumer base, and possible elevation in sales.

Create Online Brand Communities

Creating a social brand community gives marketers opportunities to engage, discuss product potentials, recommend products in social networks, and amplify word-of-mouth advertising. Social communities offer online forums for engagement with consumers and allow other consumers to share experiences and testimonials to enhance product awareness and brand loyalty (Islam & Rahman, 2017). Consumers use the information they receive from online social communities to generate research to compare product offerings and prices to help them make the right purchasing decisions. The creation of online social communities offers marketers an opportunity to attract, engage, and communicate with potential consumers providing a forum for continuous feedback, active engagement, and brand loyalty. Social brand communities can influence

purchasing decisions for existing and potential consumers interested in products but seek

assurance of present satisfaction with purchases.

Performance Measurement

Developing and implementing social media strategies is time-consuming (Rogers,

2003). Thus, to increase sales SMM should employ software to monitor engagement,

communicate with, and deliver customer satisfaction on social platforms, as well as

identify consumers' needs. Social media marketers should use software to measure

consumers' engagement on social media websites or platforms to confirm their wants and

needs. For example, identifying the click-through rate on a social media site will help the

marketer create brand awareness and reach their target market to increase sales. Social

media marketers should understand the key performance indicators to identify consumers'

desires and meet their needs.

The recommendations for action will assist businesses with the knowledge to

engage in effective social media strategies to increase sales. I plan to share my findings in

this study through scholarly journals and publishing in peer-reviewed organizations. I

plan to publish on LinkedIn, Google Scholar, and Facebook for business professionals to

review. I will also present my finding at conferences and seminars.

Recommendations for Further Research

For this study, I employed a qualitative research methodology and multiple case

study to explore social media engagement strategies to increase sales. Qualitative

research encompasses collecting, analyzing, and explaining data that do not involve

numbers or statistical analysis (Alase, 2017). Therefore, a limitation to all qualitative

research is that it is subjective and may include data that could affect a study finding validity (Yin, 2018). The sample consisted of marketing directors who answered open-ended questions through virtual interviews, and a potential limitation existed due to the nature of self-reporting. I assumed that all participants answered truthfully. To the extent possible, company documents supported their assertions. Second, the participants were marketing directors in the upstate South Carolina area, which generalized the findings from other industries that are not part of the surrounding area, possibly resulting in different findings based on the businesses located in other cities. The final limitation was the potential bias of each participant toward social media that could have influenced their responses.

In this study, I presented findings for SMM engagement strategies to increase sales. Future research could include: (a) conducting a quantitative study to identify the potential impact of social media advertising has on increasing sales on a larger scale, (b) identifying which social media platform is most relevant for specific industries and geographical locations, (c) exploring the potential effect social media has on a buyer's purchase intention, (d) completing a study regarding the applicability of social media marketing in other industries, and (e) conducting a study of social media engagement in other geographic locations.

Reflections

My knowledge of social media as a tool for engagement has increased through this study, as I relied on each participant's responses to facilitate and conclude this study. I used social media for my data collection, and the connection with SMM unequivocally

contributed to the study that might not have been feasible without the medium. It was challenging to locate participants who met the requirements and were eager to accept the invitation to participate in my study. Social media made it possible to review the participant's profile and vice versa, to get familiar with each other before the interview. My understanding of social media engagement strategies to increase sales has grown and become more vivid through the participants' experience and wealth of knowledge concerning each platform and potential use to increase sales. I am thankful for each participant and their willingness to interview and benefit from this study's results.

Conclusion

Social media is an internet platform that consumers, marketers, and businesses can use to create brand awareness, share experiences, engage, communicate, and receive real-time feedback. Social media platforms offer opportunities to reach billions of consumers globally through low-cost nontraditional media. With the application of relationship marketing theory, the study's purpose was to explore the engagement strategies used by marketers on social media platforms to increase sales and build trust and loyalty with consumers. The results and knowledge gained from this study's findings could help marketers impact their interactions with consumers on social platforms to increase social media investments. The implications of social change in acquiring strategies to use on social media can increase sales, leading to more jobs and improvement in the local economy.

The results from the three participants who successfully used social media to engage with consumers and increase sales revealed three themes: (a) consumer

awareness, which includes identifying the target market and knowing the platforms

consumers are using; (b) social relationship management, which includes managing

relationships with consumers through engagement, communication, and brand loyalty;

and (c) measurement of performance, which includes monitoring social media usage and

consumer engagement. With the evolution of technology and the increase of consumers

using social media, marketers should utilize their budget to increase social media

exposure or reallocate funds to an outsourced expert to help create, align, and manage

their social media engagement. The use of social media can increase brand awareness,

facilitate communication, build relationships, and increase sales for marketers. This

study's findings indicated that social media is a strategic tool for innovative ways to

market products and services to consumers worldwide to increase sales.

References

Aaker, J. L. (1999). The malleable self: The role of self-expression in persuasion. *Journal of Marketing Research, 36*(1), 45–57. https://doi.org/10.2307/3151914

Adams, E. (2016). The joys and challenges of semi-structured interviewing. *Researchgate Publication, 83*(7), 18–21. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/45628115

Ahmadi, M., & Wohn, D. Y. (2018). The antecedents of incidental news exposure on social media. *Social Media + Society*, *4*(2), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118772827

Alabdulkarim, A. (2017). Measuring the impact of social marketing on individuals: Students theses, papers, and projects. *Computer Science*, 9, 1-47. https://digitalcommons.wou.edu

Alase, A. (2017). The interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies, 5*(2), 9–19. http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.2p.9

Alexander, S., Pillay, R., & Smith, B. (2018). A systematic review of the experiences of vulnerable people participating in research on sensitive topics. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, *88*, 85–96. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2018.08.013

Alonso-Almeida, M. del M., Bremser, K., & Llach, J. (2015). Proactive and reactive strategies deployed by restaurants in times of crisis: Effects on capabilities, organization, and competitive advantage. *International Journal of Contemporary*

Hospitality Management, *27*(7), 1641–1661.

https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-03-2014-0117

Alpi, K. M., & Evans, J. J. (2019). Distinguishing case study as a research method from

case reports as a publication type. *Journal of the Medical Library*

Association, *107*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2019.615

American Marketing Association. (2017). *Definition of marketing*.

https://www.ama.org/aboutama/pages/definition-of-marketing.aspx

Amundson, E. (2017). European transnational migration and homelessness in

Scandinavia. *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care, 13*(1),

26–38. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMHSC-12-2015-0053

Armstrong, G., & Kotler, P. (2016). *Marketing: An introduction* (13th ed.). Pearson.

Ascend2. (2019). *Strategies Tactics and Trends for Marketing Resource Effectiveness:*

Survey Summary Report. https://ascend2.com/wp-

content/uploads/2018/12/Ascend2-Marketing-Resource-Effectiveness-Summary-

Report-190102.pdf

Attiq, S., Rasool, H., & Iqbal, S. (2017). The impact of supportive work environment,

trust, and self-efficacy on organizational learning and its effectiveness: A

stimulus-organism approach. *Business & Economic Review, 9*(2) 73–100.

https://dx.doi.org/10.22547/BER/9.2.4

Baker, M. J. (2016). What is marketing? In M. J. Baker & S. Hart (Eds.), *The marketing*

book (7th ed.; pp. 25–42). Routledge.

Bakri, A. A. A. (2017). The impact of social media adoption on competitive advantage in

the small and medium enterprises. *International Journal of Business Innovation and Research, 13*(2), 255–269. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBIR.2017.083542

Banks, M. A., Vera, D., Pathak, S., & Ballard, K. (2016). Stakeholder management as a source of competitive advantage. *Organizational Dynamics*, *45*(1), 18–27. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2015.12.003

Belk, R. (2016). Extended self and the digital world. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 10*, 50–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.11.003

Benoot, C., Hannes, K., & Bilsen, J. (2016). The use of purposeful sampling in a qualitative evidence synthesis: A worked example on sexual adjustment to a cancer trajectory. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *16*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-016-0114-6

Berry, L. L. (1983). Relationship marketing. In L. L. Berry, G. L. Shostack, & G. Upah. (Eds.)*, Emerging perspectives on service marketing* (pp. 25–28). American Marketing Association.

Bearman, M., Brubacher, S. P., Timms, L., & Powell, M. (2019). Trial of three investigative interview techniques with minimally verbal adults reporting about occurrences of a staged repeated event. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 25*(4), 239–252. https://doi.org/10.1037/law0000206

Blank, S. (2020). *The four steps to the epiphany: Successful strategies for products that win*. John Wiley & Sons.

Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life.* John Wiley & Sons.

Boddy, C. R. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. *Qualitative Market Research:*

An International Journal, 19(4), 426–432.

https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1108/QMR-06-2016-0053

Boone, L. E., & Kurtz, D. L. (2019). *Contemporary marketing*. (18th ed.). Cengage

Learning.

Bretschneider, P., Cirilli, S., Jones, T., Lynch, S., & Wilson, N. (2017). *Document review*

as a qualitative research data collection method for teacher research. Sage.

https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957435

Brown, A., & Danaher, P. A. (2019). CHE Principles: Facilitating authentic and

dialogical semi-structured interviews in educational research. *International*

Journal of Research &Method in Education, *42*(1), 76–90.

https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2017.1379987

Brown, J. R., Crosno, J. L., & Tong, P. Y. (2019). Is the theory of trust and commitment

in marketing relationships incomplete? *Industrial Marketing Management*, *77*,

155–169. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2018.10.005

Caldwell, C., Licona, B., & Floyd, L. A. (2015). Internal marketing to achieve

competitive advantage. *International Business and Management*, *10*(1), 1–8.

Carland, J. W. Jr., Carland, J. A. C., & Carland III, J. W. T. (1995). Self-actualization:

The zenith of entrepreneurship. *Journal of Small Business Strategy*, *6*(1), 53–66.

https://libjournals.mtsu.edu/index.php/jsbs/article/view/306/286

Cassell, C., & Bishop, V. (2019). Qualitative data analysis: Exploring themes, metaphors

and stories. *European Management Review*, *16*(1), 195–207.

https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12176

Castleberry, A., & Nolen, A. (2018). Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: Is it as easy as it sounds? *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, *10*(6), 807–815. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019

Charlick, S., Pincombe, J., McKellar, L., & Fielder, A. (2016). Making sense of participant experiences: Interpretative phenomenological analysis in midwifery research. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 11*, 205–216. http://www.informingscience.org/Publications/3486

Chartered Institute of Marketing. (2017). *What is marketing?* https://cim.co.uk/

Chiang, I., Wong, R., & Huang, C. (2019). Exploring the benefits of social media marketing for brands and communities. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce Studies*, *10*(2), 113–139. https://doi.org/10.7903/ijecs.1547

Chirumalla, K., Oghazi, P., & Parida, V. (2017). Social media engagement strategy: Investigation of marketing and R&D interfaces in manufacturing industry. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *74*, 138–149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.10.001

Chou, S. W., & Hsu, C. S. (2016). Understanding online repurchase intention: Social exchange theory and shopping habit. *Information Systems & E-Business Management*, *14*(1), 19–45. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10257-015-0272-9

Christenson, J. D., & Gutierrez, D. M. (2016). Using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research to promote family therapy with adolescents in residential settings. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, *38*(1), 52–61. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-016-9374-x

Clark, K. R., & Vealé, B. L. (2018). Strategies to enhance data collection and analysis in qualitative research. *Radiologic Technology, 89*(5), 482–485. http://www.radiologictechnology.org

Cook, A. F., Hoas, H., Joyner, J. C. (2013). The protectors and the protected: What regulators and researchers can learn from IRB members and subjects. *Narrat Inq Bioeth, 3*(1), 51–65. https://doi.org/10.1353/nib.2013.0014

Cypress, B. S. (2017). Rigor or reliability and validity in qualitative research: Perspectives, strategies, reconceptualization, and recommendations. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, *36*(4), 253–263. https://doi.org/10.1097/DCC.0000000000000253

Das, M. (2019). Digitally extended self: Are we happy or sad? *International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Sciences, 9*(4), 35–45. http://euroasiapub.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/3ESS-April-19-Digitally-extended-self-6508-3.pdf

Davcik, N., & Sharma, P. (2016). Marketing resources, performance, and competitive advantage: A review and future research directions. *Journal of Business Research, 69*(12), 5547–5552. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.169

Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly, 13*(3), 319–340. https://doi.org/10.2307/249008

Davis, G., Rojas-Méndez, J. I., Whelan, S., Mete, M., & Loo, T. (2018). Brand personality: Theory and dimensionality. *Journal of Product & Brand*

Management, 27(2), 115–127. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-06-2017-1499

de Haas, H., Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (2020). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world* (6th ed.). Guilford.

DeJonckheere, M., & Vaughn, L. M. (2019). Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: A balance of relationship and rigor. *Family Medicine and Community Health, 7*(2), e000057. https://dx.doi.org/10.1136%2Ffmch-2018-000057

De Jong, M. D. T., & Wu, Y. (2018). Functional complexity and web site design: Evaluating the online presence of UNESCO World Heritage sites. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 32*(3), 347–372. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651918762029

Dempsey, L., Dowling, M., Larkin, P., & Murphy, K. (2016). Sensitive interviewing in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing & Health, 39*(6), 480–490. https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.21743

Dessart, L. (2017). Social media engagement: A model of antecedents and relational outcomes. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *33*(5/6), 375–399. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2017.1302975

Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Fahy, J., & Goodman, S. (2017). Social media: Communication strategies, engagement, and future research directions. *International Journal of Wine Business Research*, *29*(1), 2–19. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJWBR-04-2016-0013

Edwards, C. J., Bendickson, J. S., Baker, B. L., & Solomon, S. J. (2020). Entrepreneurship within the history of marketing. *Journal of Business Research,*

108, 259–267. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.10.040

Elbeltagi, I., & Agag, G. (2016). E-retailing ethics and its impact on customer satisfaction and repurchase intention: A cultural and commitment-trust theory perspective. *Internet Research, 26*(1)*,* 288–310. https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-10-2014-0244

Engert, S., & Baumgartner, R. J. (2016). Corporate sustainability – Bridging the gap between formulation and implementation. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 113*(C), 822–834. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.11.094

Fainmesser, I. P., & Galeotti, A. (2016). Pricing network effects. *The Review of Economic Studies, 83*(1), 165–198. https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdv032

Fisch, C., & Block, J. (2018). Six tips for your (systematic) literature review in business and management research. *Management Review Quarterly, 68*(2), 103–106. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-018-0142-x

FitzPatrick, B. (2019). Validity in qualitative health education research. *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, *11*(2), 211–217. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.11.014

Flynn, S. V., & Korcuska, J. S. (2018). Credible phenomenological research: A mixed-methods study. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 57*(1), 34–50. https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12092

Franceschinis, C., Thiene, M., Scarpa, R., Rose, J., Moretto, M., & Cavalli, R. (2017). Adoption of renewable heating systems: An empirical test of the diffusion of innovation theory. *Energy, 125*, 313–326. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.energy.2017.02.060

Fullerton, R. A. (1988). How modern is modern marketing? Marketing's evolution and

the myth of the "Production Era." *Journal of Marketing, 52*(1), 108–125.

https://doi.org/10.1177/002224298805200109

Fusch, P., & Ness, L. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research.

Q*ualitative Report, 20*(9), 1408–1416.

https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2281&context=tqr

Golder, S., Ahmed, S., Norman, G., & Booth, A. (2017). Attitudes toward the ethics of

research using social media: A systematic review. *Journal of Medical Internet

Research*, *19*(6), e195. https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.7082

Greenwood, M. (2016). Approving or improving research ethics in management

journals. *Journal of Business Ethics, 137*(3), 507–520.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2564-x

Grönroos, C. (2015). *Service management and marketing: Managing the service profit

logic* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Grönroos, C. (2017). Relationship marketing readiness: Theoretical background and

measurement directions, *Journal of Services Marketing, 31*(3), 218–225.

https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-02-2017-0056

Guetterman, T. C., & Fetters, M. D. (2018). Two methodological approaches to the

integration of mixed methods and case study designs: A systematic

review. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *62*(7), 900–918.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218772641

Hamilton, R. (2016). Consumer-based strategy: Using multiple methods to generate

consumer insights that inform strategy. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing*

   Science, 44(3)*,* 281–285. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-016-0476-7

Hartmanis, J., & Stearns, R. E. (1965). On the computational complexity of algorithms.

   Transactions of the American Mathematical Society, *117*, 285–306.

   https://www.ams.org/journals/tran/1965-117-00/S0002-9947-1965-0170805-

   7/S0002-9947-1965-0170805-7.pdf

Headley, M. G., & Clark, V. L. P. (2020). Multilevel mixed methods research designs:

   Advancing a refined definition. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *14*(2), 145–

   163. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689819844417

Homans, G. C. (1961). *Social behavior*. Harcourt Brace.

Jablonski, A. (2016). Scalability of sustainable business models in hybrid organizations.

   Sustainability, 8, 194. https://doi:10.3390/su8030194

Jiang, H., Lou, Y., & Kulemeka, O. (2017). Strategic social media use in public relations

   professionals' perceived social media impact, leadership behaviors, and work-life

   conflict. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *11*(1), 18–41.

   https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1226842

John, A. M., & Shyamala, K. (2019). The role of social media influencers in digital

   marketing era – An analytical study. *Journal of The Gujarat Research Society,*

   21(16s), 125–130.

   http://gujaratresearchsociety.in/index.php/JGRS/article/view/2300/1913

Jones, D. G. B., & Shaw, E. H. (2018). Avoiding academic irrelevance in the marketing

   discipline: The promise of the history of marketing thought. *Journal of Marketing*

Management, 34(1-2), 52–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2017.1398771

Jones, T., Ranaweera, C., Murray, J., & Bansal, H. (2018). A prototyping analysis of

relationship marketing constructs: What constructs to use when. *Journal of*

Marketing Management, *34*(9-10), 865–901.

https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2018.1520281

Joslin, R., & Muller, R. (2016). Identifying interesting project phenomena using

philosophical and methodological triangulation. *International Journal of Project*

Management, *34*(6), 1043–1056. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2016.05.005

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2016). 24/7 Connectivity. *Mindfulness, 7*(4), 1000–1002.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-016-0510-3

Kaliber, A. (2019). Reflecting on the reflectivist approach to qualitative interviewing. *All*

Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy & Peace, 8(2), 339–357.

https://dx.doi.org/10.20991/allazimuth.477335

Kauffman, S. A. (1996). *At home in the universe: The search for laws of self-*

organization and complexity. Oxford University Press.

Keegan, B. J., & Rowley, J. (2017). Evaluation and decision making in social media

marketing. *Management Decision*, *55*(1), 15–31.

https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-10-2015-0450

Keith, R. J. (1960). The marketing revolution. *The Journal of Marketing, 24*(3), 35–38.

https://doi.org/10.1177/002224296002400306

Kirk, C. P., & Swain, S. D. (2018). Consumer psychological ownership of digital

technology. In J. Peck & S. B. Shu (Eds.) *Psychological Ownership and*

Consumer Behavior (pp. 69–90). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77158-8

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2017). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 2: Context, research questions, and designs. *The European Journal of General Practice, 23*(1), 274–279. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375090

Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2018). *Principles of Marketing* (17th ed.). Pearson Education.

Kotler, P., Keller, K. L., Manceau, D., & Hemonnet-Goukot, A. (2015). *Marketing management.* Prentice-Hall.

Kovacheva, A., & Lamberton, C. (2018). Whose experience is it anyway? Psychological ownership and enjoyment of shared experiences. In J. Peck & S. B. Shu (Eds.) *Psychological Ownership and Consumer Behavior* (pp. 195–210). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77158-8

Kumar, V. (2015). Evolution of marketing as a discipline: What has happened and what to look out for. *Journal of Marketing, 79*(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1509%2Fjm.79.1.1

Lamberton, C., & Stephen, A. T. (2016). A thematic exploration of digital, social media, and mobile marketing: Research evolution from 2000 to 2015 and an agenda for future inquiry. *Journal of Marketing*, *80*(6), 146–172. https://doi.org/10.1509%2Fjm.15.0415

Layton, R. (2015). Marketing, marketing systems, and the framing of marketing history. *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing, 7*(4), 549–572.

https://doi.org/10.1108/JHRM-02-2015-0008

Lee, N. R., & Kotler, P. (2020). *Social marketing: Behavior change for social good* (6th ed.). Sage.

Lemon, L. L., & Hayes, J. (2020). Enhancing trustworthiness of qualitative findings: Using leximancer for qualitative data analysis triangulation. *Qualitative Report*, *25*(3), 604-614.

https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4222&context=tqr

Lewis, S. C., & Molyneux, L. (2018). A decade of research on social media and journalism: Assumptions, blind spots, and a way forward. *Media and Communication*, *6*(4), 11–23. http://dx.doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i4.1562

Li, Y., & Xie, Y. (2019). Is a picture worth a thousand words? An empirical study of image content and social media engagement. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *57*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243719881113

Lim, W. M., Lim, A. L., & Phang, C. S. C. (2019). Toward a conceptual framework for social media adoption by non-urban communities for non-profit activities: Insights from an integration of grand theories of technology acceptance. *Australasian Journal of Information Systems, 23*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.3127/ajis.v23i0.1835

Liu, R. (2017). A reappraisal of marketing definition and theory. *Journal of Eastern Europe and Central Asian Research, 4*(2), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.15549/jeecar.v4i2.170

Liu, Y., & Liang, L. (2015). Evaluating and developing resource-based operations

strategy for competitive advantage: An exploratory study of Finnish high-tech

manufacturing industries. *International Journal of Production Research*, *53*(4),

1019–1037. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2014.932936

Lowe, A., Norris, A. C., Farris, A. J., & Babbage, D. R. (2018). Quantifying thematic

saturation in qualitative data analysis. *Field Methods, 30*(3), 191–207.

https://doi-.org./10.1177/1525822X17749386

Lowell, K. R. (2016). An application of complexity theory for guiding organizational

change. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal, 19*(3-4), 148–181.

https://doi.org/10.1037/mgr0000044

Lutz, C., Hoffman, C. P., Bucher, E., & Fieseler, C. (2018). The role of privacy concerns

in the sharing economy. *Information, Communication & Society, 21*(10),

1472–1492. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1339726

MacPhail, C., Khoza, N., Abler, L., & Ranganathan, M. (2016). Process guidelines for

establishing intercoder reliability in qualitative studies. *Qualitative

Research*, *16*(2), 198–212. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794115577012

Marshall, C., Kitchenham, B., & Brereton, P. (2018). Tool features to support systematic

reviews in software engineering – A cross domain study. *E-Informatica Software

Engineering Journal*, *12*(1), 79–115. https://doi.org/10.5277/e-Inf180104

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage.

Marti, P., Serrano-Estrada, L., & Nolasco-Cirugeda, A. (2019). Social media data:

Challenges, opportunities, and limitations in urban studies. *Computers,

Environment and Urban Systems*, *74*, 161–174.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compenvurbsys.2018.11.001

Martin, A. J., Papworth, B., Ginns, P., Malmberg, L. E., Collie, R., & Calvo, R. A.
(2015). Real-time motivation and engagement during a month at school: Every
moment of every day for every student matters. *Learning and Individual
Differences, 38,* 26–35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2015.01.014

McKenna, B., Myers, M. D., & Newman, M. (2017). Social media in qualitative
research: Challenges and recommendations. *Information and Organization*, *27*(2),
87–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infoandorg.2017.03.001

Melancon, J. P., & Dalakas, V. (2018). Consumer social voice in the age of social media:
Segmentation profiles and relationship marketing strategies. *Business
Horizons*, *61*(1), 157–167. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2017.09.015

Mohajan, H. K. (2017). Two criteria for good measurements in research: Validity and
reliability. *Annals of Spiru Haret University, 17*(4), 56–82.
https://doi.org/10.26458/1746

Molesworth, M., Watkins, R., & Denegri-Knott, J. (2016). Possession work on hosted
digital consumption objects as consumer ensnarement. *Journal of the Association
for Consumer Research, 1*(1), 246–261. https://doi.org/10.1086/685474

Molina-Azorín, J. F., & Fetters, M. D. (2020). In this issue: Mixed methods and
interventional evaluations, multilevel mixed methods designs, full integration in
case study research, mixed methods-grounded theory, mixed methods evaluation
through cost-effectiveness analysis, and action research in mixed methods

research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 14*(2), 127–130.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689820912852

Molina-Azorín, J. F., Tarí, J. J., Pereira-Moliner, J., López-Gamero, M. D., & Pertusa-

Ortega, E. M. (2015). The effects of quality and environmental management on

competitive advantage: A mixed methods study in the hotel industry. *Tourism

Management*, *50*(C), 41–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.01.008

Momany, M., & Alshboul, A. (2016). Social media marketing: Utilizing social media to

advance brand. *International Journal of Business, Marketing, and Decision

Science*, *9*(1), 33–54. http://www.iabpad.com/social-media-marketing-utilizing-

social-media-to-advance-brand/

Morse, J. M. (2015). Critical analysis of strategies for determining rigor in qualitative

inquiry. *Qualitative Health Research*, *25*(9), 1212–1222.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315588501

Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part

3: Sampling, data collection, and analysis. *The European Journal of General

Practice*, *24*(1), 9–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375091

 Nagler, M. G. (2015). Negative externalities, network effects, and compatibility.

International Journal of Economics and Finance, *7*(6), 1–16.

https://doi.org/10.5539/ijef.v7n6p1

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and

Behavioral Research, B., MD. (1979). *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles

and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. https://hhs.gov

Natow, R. S. (2020). The use of triangulation in qualitative studies employing elite

    interviews. *Qualitative Research*, *20*(2), 160–173.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119830077

Nenonen, S., & Storbacka, K. (2016). Driving shareholder value with customer asset

    management: Moving beyond customer lifetime value. *Industrial Marketing*

    Management, 52, 140–150. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.05.019

Nistor, G. C. (2019). An extended technology acceptance model for marketing strategies

    in social media. *Review of Economic and Business Studies*, *12*(1), 127–136.

    https://doi.org/10.1515/rebs-2019-0086

Nowell, B., & Albrecht, K. (2019). A reviewer's guide to qualitative rigor. *Journal of*

    Public Administration Research & Theory, *29*(2), 348–363.

    https://doi.org./10.1093/jopart/muy052

Onetti, A., Zucchella, A., Jones, M. V., & McDougall-Covin, P. P. (2012).

    Internationalization, innovation and entrepreneurship: Business models for new

    technology-based firms. *Journal of Management & Governance*, *16*(3), 337–368.

    https://doi.org/10.1007/s10997-010-9154-1

Oyza, I., & Edwin, A. M. (2016). Effectiveness of social media networks as a strategic

    tool for organizational marketing management. *The Journal of Internet Banking*

    and Commerce, 21(S2), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.4172/1204-5357.S2-006

Page, X., Wisniewski, P., Knijnenburg, B. P., & Namara, M. (2018). Social media's

    have-nots: An era of social disenfranchisement. *Internet Research*, *28*(5), 1253–

    1274. https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-03-2017-0123

Paswan, A. (2018). Social media marketing strategies. *DAWN: Journal for Contemporary Research in Management*, *5*(1), 8–11.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.

Payne, A., & Frow, P. (2017). Relationship marketing: Looking backwards towards the future. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *31*(1), 11–15. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-11-2016-0380

Peesker, K. M., Ryals, L. J., Rich, G. A., & Boehnke, S. E. (2019). A qualitative study of leader behaviors perceived to enable salesperson performance. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, *39*(4), 319–333. https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2019.1596816

Pera, R., Viglia, G., & Furlan, R. (2016). Who am I? How compelling self-storytelling builds digital personal reputation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 35*, 44–55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2015.11.002

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2018). *Essentials of nursing research: Appraising evidence for nursing practice* (9th ed.). Wolters Kluwer.

Porter, M. E. (1998). *Competitive advantage: Creating and sustaining superior performance: With a new introduction*. Free Press.

Quesenberry, K. A. (2019). *Social media strategy: Marketing and advertising in the consumer revolution* (2nd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Ramli, I., Suryadilaga, M. A., Sofyan, H., & Faisal, F. (2017). The relationship of perceived value, service quality, brand trust, and brand loyalty. A literature review. *Expert Journal of Marketing, 5*(2), 72–77.

http://marketing.expertjournals.com/23446773-509/

Rhein, S., & Schmid, M. (2020). Consumers' awareness of plastic packaging: More than just environmental concerns. *Resources, Conservation & Recycling*, *162*. https://doi-org./10.1016/j.resconrec.2020.105063

Richardson, P. S., Choong, P., & Parker, M. (2016). Social media marketing strategy: Theory and research propositions. *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*, *10*(2), 24–34. https://doi.org/10.33423/jmdc.v10i2

Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.

Rong, K., Ren, Q., & Shi, X. (2018). The determinants of network effects: Evidence from online games business ecosystems. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 134*(C), 45–60. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2018.05.007

Rooney, T., Krolikowska, E., & Bruce, H. L. (2021). Rethinking relationship marketing as consumer-led and technology-driven: Propositions for research and practice. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, *20*(1), 42–61. https://doi-org./10.1080/15332667.2020.1717276

Roulston, K., & Shelton, S. A. (2015). Reconceptualization bias in teaching qualitative research methods. *Qualitative Inquiry, 21*(4), 332–342. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414563803

Samiee, S., Chabowski, B. R., & Hult, G. T. M. (2015). International relationship marketing: Intellectual foundations and avenues for future research. *Journal of International Marketing, 23*(4), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1509/jim.15.0027

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2016). *Research methods for business students*.

Pearson.

Saura, J. R., Palacios-Marques, D., & Iturricha-Fernandez, A. (2021). Ethical design in

social media: Assessing the main performance measurements of user online

behavior modification. *Journal of Business Research*, *129*, 271–281.

https://doi-org./10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.03.001

Schwarzkopf, S. (2015). Marketing history from below: Towards a paradigm shift in

marketing historical research. *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, *7*(3),

295–309. https://doi.org/10.1108/JHRM-06-2015-0021

Semuel, H., Siagian, H., & Octavia, S. (2017). The effect of leadership and innovation

on differentiation strategy and company performance. *Procedia – Social and

Behavioral Sciences, 237*, 1152–1159.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2017.02.171

Shannonhouse, L. R., Barden, S. M., & McDonald, C. P. (2017). Mixed methodology in

group research: Lessons learned. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, *42*(1),

7–107. https://doi.org./10.1080/01933922.2016.1264521

Siemieniako, D., & Gębarowski, M. (2017). B2B trade fairs and promise management as

a relationship marketing concept. *Journal of Customer Behavior, 16*(3), 237–261.

https://doi.org/10.1362/147539217X15071081721116

Sihi, D., & Lawson, K. (2018). Marketing leaders and social media: Blending personal

and professional identities. *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice, 26*(1-2), 38–

54. https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2017.1389240

Simon, M. (2011). *The role of the researcher*. Dissertation recipes.

> http://dissertationrecipes.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Role-of-the-
>
> Researcher.pdf

Sixto-Garcia, J. (2017). Community manager vs. social media manager. A theoretical

> delimitation necessary in the business communication space. *Perspectives*
>
> *Magazine, 2*(2), 95–107. https://doi.org/10.22463/25909215.1309

Smith, R. A., Kim, Y., Zhu, X., Doudou, D. T., Sternberg, E. D., & Thomas, M. B.

> (2018). Integrating models of diffusion and behavior to predict innovation
>
> adoption, maintenance, and social diffusion. *Journal of Health Communication,*
>
> *23*(3), 264–271. https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2018.1434259

Soule, E. K., Sakuma, K. L. K., Palafox, S., Pokhrel, P., Herzog, T. A., Thompson, N., &

> Fagan, P. (2019). Content analysis of internet marketing strategies used to
>
> promote flavored electronic cigarettes. *Addictive Behaviors*, *91*, 128–135.
>
> https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2018.11.012

Surma, J. (2016). Social exchange in online social networks. The reciprocity

> phenomenon on Facebook. *Computer Communications*, *73*(Part B), 342–346.
>
> https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2015.06.017

Tadajewski, M., & Jones, D. G. (2016). The history of marketing practice. In D. G. Jones

> & M. Tadajewski (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to marketing history* (pp. 1–
>
> 22). Routledge.

Talib, M. S. A., Hamid, A. B. A., & Ai Chin, T. (2016). Can Halal certification influence

> logistics performance? *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, *7*(4), 461–475.

https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-02-2015-0015

Tan, Q., & Sousa, C. M. P. (2015). Leveraging marketing capabilities into competitive advantage and export performance. *International Marketing Review, 32*(1), 78–102. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IMR-12-2013-0279

Thiele, T., Pope, D., Singleton, A., & Stanistreet, D. (2018). Exploring the use of mixed methods in research and evaluation of widening participation interventions: Guidance for practitioners. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 20*(4), 7–38. https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.20.4.7

Thomas, D. R. (2017). Feedback from research participants: are member checks useful in qualitative research? *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 14*(1), 23–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2016.1219435

Tong, Y.K., & Arvey. R. D. (2015). Managing complexity via the competing values framework. *Journal of Management Development*, 34(6), 653-673. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-04-2014-0029

Tuapawa, K. (2017). Interpreting experiences of students using educational online technologies to interact with teachers in blended tertiary environments: A phenomenological study. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 33*(1), 163–175. https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.2964

Turner, N., Aitken, J., & Bozarth, C. (2018). A framework for understanding managerial

    responses to supply chain complexity. *International Journal of Operations &*

    Production Management, 38(6), 1433–1466.

    https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOPM-01-2017-0062

Turner, S. F., Cardinal, L. B., & Burton, R. M. (2017). Research design for mixed

    methods: A triangulation-based framework and roadmap. *Organizational*

    Research Methods, *20*(2), 243–267. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428115610808

Tuten, T., & Mintu-Wimsatt, A. (2018). Advancing our understanding of the theory and

    practice of social media marketing: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of*

    Marketing Theory & Practice, 26(1-2), 1–3.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2018.1393277

UI Islam, J., & Rahman, Z. (2017). The impact of online brand communitycharacteristics

    on customer engagement: An application of Stimulus-Organism-Response

    paradigm. *Teleematics and Informatics*, 34(4), 96-109

    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2017.01.004

Valos, M. J., Habibi, F. H., Casidy, R., Driesener, C. B., & Maplestone, V. L. (2016).

    Exploring the integration of social media within integrated marketing

    communication frameworks: Perspectives of services marketers. *Marketing*

    Intelligence and Planning, 34(1), 19–40.

    https://www.dx.doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2014-0169

van Rijnsoever, F. J. (2017). (I can't get no) saturation: A simulation and guidelines for

    sample sizes in qualitative research. *PLoS ONE, 12*(7), 1–17.

    https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0181689

Vaughn, P., & Turner, C. (2016). Decoding via coding: Analyzing qualitative text data

    through thematic coding and survey methodologies, *Journal of Library*

    Administration, 56(1)*,* 41–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2015.1105035

Venciute, D. (2018). Social media marketing – from tool to capability. *Management of*

    Organizations: Systematic Research, *79*(1)*,* 131–145.

    https://doi.org/10.1515/mosr-2018-0009

Wallace, J. (2019). Ethics and inscription in social robot design. A visual

    ethnography. *Paladyn: Journal of Behavioral Robotics, 10*(1), 66–76.

    https://doi.org/10.1515/pjbr-2019-0003Wang, S. W., Hsu, M. K., Scheinbaum, A.

    C., & Tsai, F. (2018). Brand loyalty in the cruise sector: Age cohorts, gender, and

    travel attributes as key moderators for relationship marketing theory. *Journal of*

    Marine Science and Technology, 26(6), 764–776.

    https://doi.org/10.6119/JMST.201812_26(6).0002

Wang, Z., & Kim, H. G. (2017). Can social media marketing improve customer

    relationship capabilities and firm performance? Dynamic capability

    perspective. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *39*(C), 15–26.

    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2017.02.004

Widuri, R., & Sutanto, J. E. (2019). Differentiation strategy and market competition as

    determinants of earnings management. In F. Jie, G. A. Yuniarta, I. W., Widiana,

& I G. N. A. Suryaputra (Eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Tourism, Economics, Accounting, Management, and Social Science (TEAMS 2018)* (Vol. 69; pp. 171–176). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/teams-18.2019.30

Wiggins, J. (2018). Can consumers perceive collective psychological ownership of an organization? In J. Peck & S. B. Shu (Eds.) *Psychological Ownership and Consumer Behavior* (pp. 177–194). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77158-8

Wilson, V. (2016). Research methods: Triangulation. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, *11*(1S), 66–68. https://doi.org/10.18438/b86s5f

Winchester, C. L., & Salji, M. (2016). Writing a literature review. *Journal of Clinical Urology, 9*(5), 308–312. https://doi.org/10.1177/2051415816650133

Woods, M., Paulus, T., Atkins, D. P., & Macklin, R. (2016). Advancing qualitative research using qualitative data analysis software (QDAS)? Reviewing potential versus practice in published studies using ATLAS.ti and NVivo, 1994-2013. *Social Science Computer Review, 34* (5)*,* 597–617. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0894439315596311

Wu, B., & Chen, X. (2017). Continuance intention to use MOOCs: Integrating the technology acceptance model (TAM) and task technology fit (TTF) model. *Computers in Human Behavior, 67*(C), 221–232. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.10.028

Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *Qualitative Report*, *20*(2), 134–152.

http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR20.2/yzan1.pdf

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage.

Yousefi Nooraie, R., Sale, J. E. M., Marin, A., & Ross, L. E. (2020). Social network analysis: An example of fusion between quantitative and qualitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 14*(1), 110–124.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689818804060

Zanin, A. C., & Piercy, C. W. (2019). The structuration of community-based mental health care: A duality analysis of a volunteer group's local agency. *Qualitative Health Research, 29*(2), 184–197. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1049732318786945

Zhang, J. Z., Watson IV, G. F., Palmatier, R. W., & Dant, R. P. (2016). Dynamic relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, *80*(5), 53–90.

https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0066

Zhang, X. A., Borden, J., & Kim, S. (2018). Understanding publics' post-crisis social media engagement behaviors: An examination of antecedents and mediators. *Telematics and Informatics*, *35*(8), 2133–2146.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2018.07.014

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Research question: What are the strategies social media marketers use to engage digital consumers to increase sales?

Interview purpose: The data collected will identify the social media strategies needed for marketers to engage with consumers and increase organizational sales. The interview will include seven open-ended interview questions and follow-up questions to determine the strategies participants used to engage and increase sales. During each interview, I will review the purpose and voluntary nature of the study and adhere to the following terms:

1. Participants in the interview process are voluntary and have the right to withdraw at any time.

2. Participants will receive a copy of the consent form, which we will review and answer any questions they present before signing.

3. Ask participants if they have any questions before the interview begins.

4. Review the interview timeframe by outlining that I will ask seven open-ended questions, and interviews should take between 30-60 minutes, which includes follow-up questions.

5. Remind the interviewee that within 7 days after the conclusion of the interview, I will email them a summary of the key points from the interview to review and ensure that my interpretation of the interview is correct.

6. Pay attention to the participants, take notes, observe their body language, and pose a request for any related documentation they want to share that is related to the study.

7. Thank the participant for their time and provide them with contact information for additional questions after the interview.

Appendix B: Email Invitation to Participate

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Teresa Carter, a doctoral student at Walden University. I am currently reaching out for your assistance as part of a research study to explore social media engagement strategies to increase sales. As a Walden DBA candidate, I am eligible to conduct this study after completing the required training. The criteria for participating in the study include (a) a social media marketer, (b) have successfully implemented social media marketing engagement strategies to increase sales, (c) have 3 years of professional experience in the position, and (d) be employed at a company located in upstate South Carolina. If you agree to the interview, the interviews will take between 30-60 minutes. An additional follow-up conversation, which may take between 15-20 minutes, will be conducted after the initial interview to clarify interview responses.

For the interviews, we can meet at a secure, private location where you would feel comfortable and comply with existing COVID-19 social distancing criteria. Should you feel uncomfortable with a face-to-face interview due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we can set-up a video conference instead. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. There is no compensation for participating in this study, and you can withdraw at any time. Your participation will be a valuable addition to this research.

If you feel you understand the study sufficiently well enough to participate, meet the criteria and are available to participate, please contact me via email at teresa.carter4@waldenu.edu or phone 864-490-4921. I will respond promptly and set up

a date, time, and a convenient place to conduct a face-to-face or video conference interview. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. I appreciate your taking the time out of your busy schedule to consider my request and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Teresa Carter