

2021

## **Social Media Marketing Strategies for Increasing Customer Engagement**

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Joe Umunna

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Social Media Marketing Strategies for Increasing Customer Engagement

by

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MBA, Middlesex University, 1997

PGD Petrochemicals, Oxford, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2021

## Abstract

Some business leaders are not using social media to improve customer engagement resulting in a potential loss of profit. Ineffective social media marketing strategies can negatively impact customer engagement. Grounded in the networking, representation, engagement theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore social media marketing strategies business leaders use to increase customer engagement. The participants comprised of six business leaders located in the northeast region of the United States who effectively used social media marketing strategies to increase customer engagement. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Four themes emerged: marketing strategies used, platforms used for social media marketing, measurement of success, and key challenges and advantages of social media use. A key recommendation is for business leaders to create smart, innovative communication channels on all social platforms to maintain open communication and provide added value for their customer base. The implications for positive social change include the potential for business leaders to create jobs and improve economies in local communities.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my entire family for their continued prayers, patience, support, and sacrifice in making this process bearable. Special thanks to my darling daughter, Stella and her husband, Okagbue, who stood by me and encouraged and pushed me during the beginning of this journey when I wanted to quit, but she motivated my stimuli to stay in the course, and for that, words cannot express my sincere gratitude for her continued encouragement and support.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Social media allows people to freely interact with customers and offers multiple ways for marketers to reach and engage with consumers thereby improving customer engagement and providing opportunities to increase company profit irrespective of their location (Mayank & Zillur, 2018). Social media is used by billions of people around the world and has fast become one of the defining technologies of the time. Facebook, for example, reported having 2.38 billion monthly active users as of March 31, 2019 (Facebook, 2019).

Social media is culturally significant since it has become, for many, the primary domain in which they receive vast amounts of information about the world around them. More recently, the value of advertising on social media continues to be explored, for example (Gordon et al., 2019), as well as how it interacts with other forms of media such as television and affects new product adoption through diffusion of information mechanisms (Appel et al., 2020). Given the high rate of business failure, social media marketing may serve as a valuable tool for business leaders to increase customer engagement thereby improving profitability.

### **Background of the Problem**

Oyza and Agwu (2016) found that 50% of marketers reported that social media use had not helped them improve customer engagement to increase their sales or customer engagement. Social media provides a two-way communication channel between companies and their customers, transforming the way businesses market their goods and services to their consumers. While various literature relating to the social media marketing strategies

exists, little is known of the successful social media strategies used by business leaders to increase profitability (Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Morales et al., 2017). Given the contributions of social media to the U.S. economy (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2018), identifying strategies that contribute to improved customer engagement and increased profitability is essential to assure the continuing vibrancy of the U.S. economy. As a cost-effective marketing tool, social media may be used successfully to define a company's goals and objectives (Chen & DiVall, 2018). Therefore, learning from the success of business leaders that have used social media marketing to increase customer engagement and increase profitability can provide meaningful insights that could be beneficial to the continued growth of local economies (Chen & DiVall, 2018).

### **Problem Statement**

Social media offers marketers an opportunity to engage directly with customers, improving customer engagement, and providing opportunities to increase company profits irrespective of their location (Mayank, & Zillur, 2018). Oyza and Agwu (2016) found that 50% of marketers reported that social media use had not helped them improve customer engagement to increase their sales or customer engagement. The general business problem is that business leaders are not using social media to improve customer engagement resulting in a potential loss of profit. The specific business problem is that some business leaders lack social media marketing strategies to increase customer engagement.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement. The targeted population comprised of business leaders from three corporations located in the northeast region of the United States who implemented successful strategies to improve customer engagement. The business leaders selected for this study have experienced a high return on investment (ROI) of 20% or more in their social media marketing campaigns. The results of this study may contribute to social change by the opportunity for additional business leaders to acquire new strategies for using social media to engage their customers, which could result in job creation and improved economies in local communities.

### **Nature of the Study**

The three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Saunders et al., 2015). Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because using qualitative methodology facilitates the exploration of specific expressions of the participants' business experiences. Researchers use qualitative methods to solicit responses to open-ended questions and to capture accurate data enabling the discovery of new thoughts and individual views (Yin, 2018). Quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study because quantitative researchers examine, present, and describe relationships and trends within data using computational techniques such as tables, graphs, and statistics (see Saunders et al., 2015). Mixed method is not appropriate for this study because mixed method's researchers use both a qualitative element and quantitative

element (Saunders et al., 2015) that include hypotheses testing, which is part of the quantitative or mixed method research (Saunders et al., 2015). Since this study did not involve examining causal relationships and trends within data; therefore, neither a quantitative nor mixed method approach was appropriate.

I considered four qualitative research designs for exploring the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders: (a) miniethnography, (b) narrative, (c) phenomenology (d) and case study (see Saunders et al., 2015). Miniethnography involves a researcher studying a specific or narrow field of research (Hammersley, 2017). Miniethnography research design was not used for this study because miniethnography research is more effective in understanding the detailed nature and complexity of human behavior and perceptions about products, purchasing decisions, and use of products. Narrative research is a study of the way humans experience the world and provides researchers with insights into the specific personal-related phenomenon of study (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). The narrative design approach was not used because narratives tend to focus on personal interpretations of experiences and may ignore broader structural influences. Furthermore, participant narratives capture only a limited number of experiences and may be inconsistent across study participants. This makes its use not very reliable.

Phenomenological research design was not appropriate for the study because researchers that use phenomenological designs focus primarily on interviews to explore the personal meanings of the lived experiences of participants. Phenomenological studies are more relevant for studies where the participants describe their personal experiences



with phenomena (Saunders et al., 2015). Therefore miniethnography, narrative, and phenomenology design were not appropriate for this study.

A case study design was used in this study. Case study design is used for in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings (Yin, 2018). Case study design was chosen for this study to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted understanding of social media marketing for customer engagement. Case studies are particularly useful to employ when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event, or phenomenon of interest within its real-life setting (Yin, 2018).

A case study can be a single or multiple case study (citation). The single case study design is not appropriate for this research because single case studies are used for certain conditions where the case represents a critical test of an existing theory, an extreme or unusual circumstance, a common case or where the case serves a revolutionary or longitudinal purpose (Yin, 2018). Multiple case studies allow for wider exploration of research questions and theoretical evolution. Evidence created from a multiple case study is strong and reliable and is appropriate for this research because it can be used to understand the similarities and differences between cases. Analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases are more powerful than those coming from a single case (Yin, 2018). The analytical benefits from having two (or more) cases makes this design method more appropriate for this research study.

### **Research Question**

One research question guided this study:

What social media marketing strategies do business leaders use to increase customer engagement?

### **Interview Questions**

1. Typically, how do you use social media as part of your marketing strategy to engage customers?
2. How do you measure the success of social media marketing strategy implementation?
3. How did your customers respond to your use of different social media marketing strategies?
4. What did you accomplish through your use of social media marketing strategies?
5. What were some key challenges you experienced when you used social media marketing strategies to engage your customers?
6. What did you do to overcome the key challenges experienced when you used social media marketing strategies to engage your customers?
7. What additional information would you like to share about your use of social media marketing strategies to increase customer engagement?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The networking, representation, engagement, listening-in (N-REL) conceptual framework was used as the basis for my research study. The N-REL conceptual framework originated as a set of comprehensive social media marketing strategic actions by Anandaa et al. (2016) to identify and classify the strategic actions of social media marketing firms. Slater and Olson (2001) defined a marketing strategy as a set of

integrated decisions and actions by which a company expects to achieve its marketing objectives and meet the value requirements of its customers. As indicated by Slater and Olson, marketing actions can be used as a tool by business leaders to improve customer loyalty and satisfaction. Mergel (2016) also noted that marketing action classification could explain social media adoption tactics by institutions and organizations.

The N-REL framework was appropriate for this study because it may be used to explore the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement. An organization leader who adopts the N-REL framework can use the feedback from intelligence actions through social media to make the necessary adjustments to strategic decisions (Anandaa et al., 2016). Strategic decisions are required because the market segmentation, positioning, and marketing techniques must drive the various social media marketing actions to fulfill the marketing goals of a company (Anandaa et al., 2016). The N-Rel framework provides a means to categorize social media marketing actions into three main categories: representation, engagement, and listening in. Representation covers social media activities focusing on company profile and information about products. Engagement, or value-added proposition, covers the interaction with customers. Listening-in aims at monitoring the voices of customers or audiences. The N-REL framework provides a framework that may be used in my study to identify and classify the social media marketing strategic actions used by study participants. Social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement was explored in this study.

## Operational Definitions

The following specialized terms are used in this study:

*Digital marketing:* Digital marketing represents the process of reaching and converting qualified consumers by creating and pursuing organic tactics in online settings (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015).

*Social exchange:* Social exchange refers to a multidimensional relationship originating with an exchange of social ideas in a transaction-oriented style with a certain level of perceived support, affective commitment, trust, and exchange quality (Surma, 2016).

*Social media:* Social media comprises of Internet-based applications and websites that facilitate the sharing of user-generated content and relationship building between users from diverse backgrounds, resulting in a rich social structure (Kapoor et al., 2018).

*Social media marketing:* Social media marketing are the marketing activities that incorporate the use of social media to promote the sharing of user-generated content, communication, and participation. This marketing approach is a two-way communication exchange process and differs somewhat from digital marketing that follows more of a traditional marketing platform of one-way exchanges (Han, 2018).

*Social media marketing strategy:* Social media marketing strategy is the integrated means and set of actions by which a company or organization expects to achieve its marketing objectives and meet the requirements of its target market using social media tools (Anandaa et al., 2016).

## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

Research assumptions are the aspects included in a study that the researcher takes for granted or assumes to be true (Yin, 2018). I made three assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that the participants answered the interview questions truthfully without personal agendas. The second assumption was the participants were well versed in the use of effective social media marketing strategies. The third assumption was that the participants have implemented successful social marketing strategies to improve customer engagement.

### **Limitations**

Research limitations are the factors that limit the implications of the study findings (Yin, 2018). There were three limitations in this study. The first limitation is that one method of research (qualitative) was used. Additional research using a quantitative or mixed method of research could perhaps result in providing a broader understanding of the phenomenon. The second limitation was transferability is limited due to sample size and location. The third limitation was although I introduced the importance of understanding how social media might increase customer engagement and profitability, my study focused only on answers to the use of social media to increase customer engagement.

### **Delimitations**

There were two delimitations in this study. The first delimitation was only business leaders of three corporations who have experienced a high ROI of 20% or more

in their social media marketing campaigns were included in this study. The second delimitation was only business leaders from businesses located in the northeast region of the United States were included in this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The increased social media marketing adoption by organizational leaders has posed challenges due to a constantly changing marketing landscape (Ogbuji & Papazafeiropoulou, 2016). As a cost-effective marketing tool, social media may be used successfully to define a company's goals and objectives (Ogbuji & Papazafeiropoulou, 2016). The findings from this study may be of significance to businesses practice not only because they could provide an in-depth understanding the topic allowing for increased application, but also because business leaders may use the results to apply social media marketing strategies to help improve their businesses' success rates. Also, the findings from this study may contribute to effective business practice by indicating which social media marketing tools are most effective for businesses. Business leaders could use the results to set achievable goals for their social media marketing campaigns. Learning from the success of business leaders who have used social media marketing effectively to increase customer engagement, can provide meaningful insights that could improve business practice and be beneficial to the continued growth of local economies (Ezeife, 2017).

Implementing effective social media marketing strategies is essential for business leaders and could be significant to business practice as companies may review and adapt

strategies identified in this study to develop long-term survival plans to increase their viability. Business leaders in a different organization may use the findings of the study to set business goals and measurable objectives that may increase awareness and branding, promote brand content, increase exposure to generate traffic, leads, and sales, thereby reducing marketing costs and improving profitability.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Business leaders whose goal is to effect positive social change in their communities may find the findings of this study useful since it provides insight into the successful marketing strategies used by business leaders. The results of this study may help business leaders to define their social media marketing strategies, guidelines, and goals to provide more insight into the successful marketing strategies used by business leaders. Addressing the business problem in corporations may provide business leaders with a way to make informed evidence supported, business decisions that may drive social change using behavioral data and insight, mapped against traditionally available data sets.

Zahra and Wright (2015) found that corporations contribute to the larger society in terms of creating financial, environmental, and social wealth. Increased viability of business leaders through effective social media marketing strategy incorporation, may lead to social change through employment generation, reduction in local poverty, improved local economy, and improved quality of life for citizens. Additionally, increased tax revenues for local communities may contribute to positive social change through improvements in social institutions and programs such as schools, libraries, public safety organizations, hospitals, and low-cost healthcare programs (Zahra &

Wright, 2015). The results of this study may provide business leaders with the strategies to develop long-term survival plans to increase their viability thus providing a positive social change in their communities.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to improve customer engagement. A literature review is a method for researchers to provide critical analysis of the critical literature that relates to a research question, existing scholarly work, its limitations, and how their research fits into a broader context (Saunders et al., 2015). This systematic review uses a comprehensive preplanned strategy for locating, critically appraising, analyzing, and synthesizing existing research that is pertinent to my research question on social media strategies used by business leaders to increase profitability. The review also includes a critical analysis and synthesis of existing theoretical and research literature relevant to the conceptual framework on marketing management and general corporate business strategy within the context of social media marketing. I completed an exhaustive review of peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and seminal books.

The search process included the following keywords: *social media marketing, social media, marketing strategies used by business leaders, cost-effective marketing strategies, business marketing, business social media marketing, business online marketing, business failure rate, and business success rate*. Roughly 99% of the 137 articles used were published between 2015 and 2019, and 97% were from peer-reviewed journals. I used the following databases to conduct this exhaustive review: Business Source



Complete, Science Direct Journals, Sage Journals, Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences Journals, Academic Search Complete, Direct, Data, and Digital Marketing Practice, ISI Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

The literature review is organized as follows. First, I provide a brief overview of social media marketing strategies, its effect on the consumer buying behavior and the N-REL (networking, representation, engagement, and listening-in), which is the conceptual framework of this study. Next, I describe the adoption and use of social media marketing strategies (SMMS) by companies and the N-REL theory is described. Then, I address the theoretical components of N-REL theory. such as representation, engagement, and listening-in activities. Next, I apply the conceptual framework to social media marketing through an in-depth exploration of factors such as relationship, content, value creation, innovation, complexity, and influence of social media on consumer behavior. This is followed by a review of the literature on the impact of SMM on sales and financial performance and the importance of small businesses to economic development, and the significance and utilization of small business marketing strategies. The literature review is concluded with a focus on social media marketing strategies used by business leaders.

Table 1

*Literature Review Matrix*

	Number	Percentage (%)
References	140	–
Peer reviewed	137	97
Published within the last 5 years	139	99

## **Social Media Marketing Strategies Overview**

In this section, the existing literature on social media marketing strategies is critically analyzed and synthesized. The topic is organized into four sections.

- Definition of social media marketing strategy and its importance.
- effect of social media marketing on a company's brand and image.
- Presentation of literature regarding attempts to measure the success of social media marketing.
- Presentation of a summary of what scholars currently know about business leaders approach to marketing, including the extent of their use of various marketing strategies.

### **Definition of social media marketing strategy and its importance**

It is essential to understand what social media marketing is and how it differs from traditional marketing to provide a better understanding of its effects on customer engagement. Social media marketing has disrupted the current marketing landscape changing the relationship between marketers and consumers (Mohammad, 2018). The main differences between social media marketing and traditional marketing are that communication is two way in social media marketing as opposed to one way in conventional marketing (Duffett, 2017). Social media communication represents personalized and participatory media in which customers become contributors to content and creators of marketing communication, rather than just passive targets (Adnan & Ahmad, 2017). Social media marketing strategy is defined as the integrated means and set of actions by which a company or organization expects to achieve its marketing objectives

and meet the requirements of its target market using social media tools (Anandaa et al., 2016).

In their quantitative study, Adnan and Ahmad (2017) explored the rationale and theory behind the role of social media advertising on consumer buying behavior. Adnan and Ahmad proposed two hypotheses: (a) there are meaningful relations between social media advertising and consumer buying behavior and (b) there are differences in the way that social media advertising affects consumer buying behavior. Consumers living in Istanbul-Turkey were sent electronic questionnaires. Adnan and Ahmad's study concluded that social media advertising has an impact on consumer buying behavior.

Adnan and Ahmad's (2017) research is useful for marketing managers in the retail industry trying to build their brand. However, since the research was specific to one geographical location -Istanbul, more research needs to be done with a larger population. Given the significant impact of social media marketing on the consumer buying behavior and decision making, it is essential that the various types of social media marketing strategies employed by companies are explored in more details to provide an understanding of its effect on customer engagement and company profitability. Social media marketing strategies are classified in several ways. Previous researchers such as De Vries et al., (2017) have devoted considerable attention to understand social media marketing strategy better. De Vries et al. examined the relative effectiveness of traditional advertising and digital marketing (using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter) on brand-building and customer acquisition. The quantitative study by De Vries et al. applied vector autoregressive modeling to a European telecoms

company. De Vries et al. 's study is useful for marketing managers trying to understand the influences social media marketing has on brand building and acquisition. In their research study, De Vries et al. classified social media marketing strategies based on content, engagement, and word of mouth as follows:

- User-generated content - UGC
- Customer engagement – CE,
- Firm generated content – FGC
- Firm-initiated marketing communication in its official social media pages
- Online word-of-mouth - eWOM
- Online brand communities (Schivinski et al., 2016).

Exploring these classifications may provide further insight into understanding the strategies that can be used to build their brand, influence consumer behavior, and stimulate sales.

Creating a social media strategy includes setting marketing goals, choosing the right networks to use, and measuring desired results. Having a well-thought-out strategy might have a positive impact on business by improving customer engagement and increase profitability (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). The primary goals of social media marketing are creating awareness, enhancing brand image, acquiring new customers, cultivating relationships, and increasing awareness (Ismail, 2017). Practitioners and consultants also share this view by arguing that social media is most useful for B2B companies in obtaining new customers (Quinton & Wilson, 2016). Add summary and synthesis throughout the paragraph.

In order to provide more insight into my study's central research question, it is essential to understand how online brand communities create value for companies and customers. Loureiro and Kaufmann's (2018) used a quantitative research approach to examine how online engagement influences positive versus negative consumption. In their study, data were collected from six online brand communities and grouped in pairs with each pair belonging to a different brand and comprising both valences respectively: positive (love or fan) online brand community and negative (hate or antibrand) community. Six hundred participants filled out the online questionnaire. Loureiro and Kaufmann's study concluded that affection (passion/aversion) is the primary motivational factor that leads community members to be active reviewers and commentators of brands (Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2018). Hsieh and Wei (2017) conducted similar studies. In their 2017 study, Hsieh and Wei found that companies are increasingly using online brand-communities (OBCs) to cocreate value for themselves and their consumers. Creating value for themselves is also evidence of the effectiveness of OBCs as a marketing tool remains mostly anecdotal aimed at increasing competitiveness. Hsieh and Wei developed a framework for examining how the co-creation of value in OBCs can extend and improve brand relationships between corporations and consumers through combination with the integration of online and offline relationships. Hsieh and Wei's research provides strong evidence that building online brand identities is essential and may lead to increased profits in competitive markets. Hsieh and Wei stated that company leaders are increasingly using OBC to co-create value for themselves and their consumers; however, evidence of the effectiveness of OBCs as a marketing tool remains mostly anecdotal. Add

summary and synthesis throughout the paragraph to balance out the use of information from the literature with your own analysis to connect back to your study.

Online communities create stronger relationships between consumers and business owners (citation). It is therefore vital that relationship marketing concepts and their advantages are fully explored. Relationship marketing is defined as activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining fruitful relational exchanges involves establishing, developing, and maintaining a network of relationships among suppliers, service personnel, customers, and other stakeholders, which includes problems with partnerships, alliances, intergrowth, and internal marketing (Jones, et al., 2018). The relationship marketing concept has provided a breakthrough for studies on economics and marketing. In relationship marketing, the economic and marketing behaviors of supply-and-demand organizations and stakeholders no longer involve only absolute competition but also useful and diverse competition.

The relationship-marketing model is ideal for describing the complex, continual, and diverse market relationship structures. Moreover, the literature on social psychology and communication assumes that a consumer can be considered an agent that fulfills individual needs (McQuail, 2017). Thus, that consumer-platform interactions resemble member-to-member and consumer-to-consumer (C2C) relationship interactions (Yrjölä, et al., 2017). The units that constitute a community, regardless of whether they are grouped or individual, must be considered participants to understand their interactions. Irrespective of the online or offline brand community (BC), loyalty is a critical outcome variable (Hsieh & Wei, 2017) and commitment is a vital criterion in its development.

The focus of marketers when using digital marketing is on online promotions, campaigns, and advertisements. Carvalho and Fernandes (2018) concluded that most marketers believe that online marketing is the only way to go, and that social media campaigns, email, newsletters, and websites adverts produce the best effect. Traditional marketing has leverage in the marketing world because not everyone is online all the time and observed people still watch television, listen to the radio, or read newspapers (Carvalho & Fernandes, 2018). The product is directly linked to the success rate of marketing campaigns. It is important to remember that some products give better results if marketed online, while others produce better results if sold offline (Buchanan, 2015). Given these research findings, it is safe to say that marketing strategy varies on a case-by-case basis. Using both social media and traditional marketing strategies generated the best effect of marketing campaigns (citation). Add summary and synthesis to connect back to your study.

Social media marketing has introduced many different strategies and tactics in the world of marketing. Aside from being much faster and more efficient than traditional marketing, effective digital marketing can lead to more customers, more traffic, and more engagement (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). As social media marketing is becoming increasingly crucial to an organization's survival, companies are constantly confronted with a variety of possibilities to promote and advertise their brands, products, and services (Alalwan, et al., 2017). With the internet providing consumers with more communication choices to gather, communicate, collaborate, and share content, a power shift has occurred from organizations to customers over time (Nakano & Kondo, 2018). Information sharing on the internet allow consumers to express an opinion, which in turn

has led people to trust peers more than organizations (Nakano & Kondo, 2018). This change has created several challenges for marketers with businesses now acknowledging the need to listen to their customers more, engage them in conversation, be transparent, and communicate with them openly (Alalwan et al., 2017). The changing business landscape has made defining a social media marketing strategy an essential piece of most leading organization's business marketing strategy (Alalwan et al., 2017). It is crucial to understand social media marketing effect on a company's brand and image because social media marketing may have a massive impact on a company's bottom line,

### **Effect of social media marketing on a company's brand and image**

Understanding the effect of social media marketing on branding requires us to understand the various branding techniques. According to Mohammad (2018), branding is the way a company or business enterprise is personalized in the consumers' minds. Functional branding enables a company to differentiate itself by positively reinforcing the value of its brand through design. Intentional branding includes the branding decisions that are made when developing the look and feel of a company to make it create the best identity that reflects its target market. Prior research suggested that social media marketing may be inclined more towards functional branding than intentional branding. The social media marketing strategies, functional branding, and intentional branding phenomenon were studied by Mohammad (2018), and the results are analyzed further in the next paragraph.

Mohammad (2018) examined the relationship between social media marketing strategies, intentional branding, and functional branding to determine whether social



media marketing strategies are more strongly inclined towards intentional than functional branding. Quantitative data was collected from 133 participants from Jordan marketing departments using questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS. The results of the study confirmed the relationship between social media marketing strategies. However, results showed that social media marketing strategies are more strongly inclined towards intentional branding than functional branding, suggesting that social media marketing strategies are oriented towards deliberate branding. Mohammad recommended examining the idea of deliberate branding and its role in controlling the image of the brand among customers. Given the strong link between social media marketing and a company's brand, the possible effect of social media marketing on financial performance can be further explored. Mihai et al., (2018) suggested that social media use emerged from technological and internal organizational resources rather than from external pressure. E-business use contributed positively to a firm's performance through corporate innovation. Also, through cost reduction, they can reach a more extensive market share (Mihai et al., 2018). Company leaders need to adjust their business strategies to face the challenges of the rapid growth of social media. Businesses should focus on setting competitive and reasonable prices to build their reputation and secure customer trust (Mihai et al., 2018). Competitive and fair pricing can be achieved by comparing their prices with competitors on social media, in the local market, or with e-commerce websites to offer rates that are more appealing (Mihai et al., 2018). However, given that the effect of the price advantage on trust is sensitive to the habit of buying on the platform, firms may focus more on the other characteristics such as reputation, language and hedonic efforts that foster trust and

consequently their intent to shop (Ben Yahia et al., 2017). Understanding these price effects may be of value to businesses because business leaders could use the results to improve their social media marketing strategies. Add summary and synthesis to connect back to your study.

Social media marketing can be examined from different perspectives ranging from a brand equity and management perspective (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Lovett & Staelin, 2016; Pham & Gammoh, 2015;) to customer relationships (Wang & Kim, 2017) and employee attraction (Phillips-Wren et al., 2016). For more than a decade, marketing academic and practitioners focus was on the intersection between consumer behavior and interactive marketing, offering a wide range of conceptual and empirical research studies, as well as online marketing case studies (Simona, 2017). For branding, social media has the vital role of strategic importance for reminding, informing, and entertaining consumers (Lovett & Staelin, 2016). Concerning a brand, Lovett and Staelin (2016) appreciated that 54% of consumer's decision processes (and eventually purchases) are affected by social media communications. As a result, social media is a crucial part of the marketing strategy in online settings. Gauging the success of a social media marketing campaign is difficult. Add summary and synthesis throughout the paragraph to connect back to your study.

### **Presentation of literature regarding attempts to measure the success of social media marketing**

In this section, the attributes that are used to measure the success of social media marketing campaigns are explored. Gauging the success of a social media marketing

campaign is difficult as several factors determine success. Brand equity is one of the longer-term intangible effects of social media marketing and is challenging to measure. During the infancy of social media marketing, companies viewed marketing strategy success just as the number of users socially connected to the brand (Schivinski et al., 2016). Firms aggressively acquired fans and followers on platforms, such as Facebook to generate a high volume of user likes, by investing heavily on advertisements (Schivinski et al., 2016). With early audits suggesting that only about 1% of an average firm's Facebook fans show any engagement with the brand by liking, sharing or commenting, attention shifted from acquisition of followers to the design of content that achieves better reach and engagement amongst social media followers (Knoblich et al., 2017). Merely getting a count of the number of followers and user likes is not enough to determine if a social media campaign was effective. Companies must do more in-depth analysis and analyze user-generated content to determine if a marketing strategy is working or not. Gauging the success of a social media marketing campaign is not an easy task that requires companies to understand how digital marketing is classified. The various digital marketing classification is explored in the next paragraph.

Digital marketing can be classified into three categories: paid content (pay-per-click advertisements), owned content (e.g., social media pages and company web site) and earned content (user reviews and media coverage). Earned content is the most difficult to attain and is a vital aspect of how an organization's image is perceived (Thornhill et al., 2017). Voorveld et al., (2018) suggested that the challenge for all brands is to develop social media marketing strategies based on engagement opportunities that keep customers

connected throughout the day. Adopting this marketing strategy pushes owned content out to customers, who in turn, engage in the earned material so eagerly sought by businesses. However, developing branded social content that accomplishes these objectives can be challenging. Ashley and Tuten (2015) found in their study that while social media participants seek entertainment and informativeness, entertainment is a stronger motivator for engagement. Developing content that is informative and entertaining provides the most bang for a company's money, given the high success rate of customer engagement. It is therefore essential that organizations ensure the continuous delivery of valuable news and information to customers.

Researchers have made several attempts to measure the marketing success of social media marketing strategies. Over 250 different measures have been developed by researchers and theorist (Brooks & Simkin, 2017). According to Brooks and Simkin (2017), only a few of those measures have a solid scientific basis. Brooks and Simkin's framework provided a deeper understanding of the available measures. They separated the measures them into four categories: financial measures (e.g., ROI), quantitative measures (e.g., market share), qualitative measures (e.g., brand awareness), and hybrid measures (e.g., brand equity). These types of measures have been used in most traditional and social media marketing studies (Brooks & Simkin, 2017). Utilizing these marketing success metrics could help business owners define their marketing practices and guidelines, thereby addressing the findings of Michopoulou and Moisa (2019) and others related to the importance of strategic marketing.

Past research in social media marketing often focused on digital content, interactivity in marketing communications, the degree to which two-way communication is facilitated, and the changing role of buyer and seller in terms of content creation. Stephen (2016) reviewed the role of digital and social media marketing in consumer behavior. Five themes were identified: consumer digital culture, responses to digital advertising, the effects of digital environments on consumer behavior, mobile environments, and online word of mouth (WOM). Collectively these articles shed light from many different angles on how consumers experience, influence, and are influenced by the digital environments in which they are situated as part of their daily lives (Stephen, 2016). The role of social media in marketing strategies has been the focus of previous research studies. A study by Schivinski et al. (2016) investigated the effect of brand communication on brand equity through social media comparing it with traditional media and found that both conventional and social media communications significantly affect brand equity. Traditional media was found to be stronger in terms of brand awareness, whereas social media communications were discovered to impact brand image strongly. Braojos-Gomez et al., (2015) found that information technology infrastructure capability, social competitor pressure, marketing management, and innovation management are the critical means for firms to learn how to develop social media competence. The emergence of social media has urged marketers to shift their marketing expenditure and instead of investing in traditional channels, has shifted the emphasis to networks that can reach consumers online. Thus, firms need social media marketing competencies on an organizational level that should be deployed to add to firms' competitive advantage.

**Presentation of a summary of what scholars currently know about business leaders' approach to marketing, including the extent of their use of various marketing strategies**

To summarize, building a social media marketing plan is essential to achieve success in a challenging business environment where customers are offered continuously new and innovative communication channels to gather, communicate, collaborate, and share content. Between the years 2010 and 2019, researchers have used various measures to measure the success of social media marketing campaigns. Using financial measures such as return on investment, quantitative measures such as market share, qualitative measures such as brand awareness and a composite measure such as brand equity could help business owners define their marketing practices and guidelines. Financial measures are a great way to determine a company's most successful social media marketing techniques, as well as decide which strategies are not successful. Social media has a significant impact on consumer behavior. To summarize, this section critically analyzed and synthesized the existing literature on social media marketing strategies. It provided a definition of social media marketing strategies, categorized them, and explored its effect on branding and customer engagement. The purchasing behavior of consumers determine the sales and profit of a firm. It is therefore essential to use the next section to provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of social media marketing on brand awareness and consumer behavior.

## **Influence of Social Media Marketing on Brand Awareness**

Social media has changed how businesses respond to consumer needs and want. It is, therefore, essential that we understand the influence of social media marketing on brand awareness. In this section, the existing literature on social media marketing and its effect on brand awareness is critically analyzed and synthesized. Brand pages on social media platforms such as Facebook are an effective platform for customer interaction and brand communication. (Tafesse, 2015). The brand content created by organizations allows brands to connect with their customers on social media platforms (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

Tafesse's (2015) study was based on the fact that the content which is shared can produce favorable consumer responses. Tafesse indicated that brand posting had a significant positive effect on brand post shares. Other researchers such as Elaydi (2018) investigated the impact of social media marketing activities on brand awareness with a focus on the moderating effect of demographics, namely, age and gender. Elaydi's research showed that social media marketing firms about six dimensions as an instrument for their marketing activities: Online Communities, Interaction, Sharing of Content, Accessibility, and credibility. The study is critical because managers may use the results to improve their marketing activities related to social networks, enhancing communication and interaction with their customers and increase their brand awareness circle. Four hundred and two customers participated in the study. Elaydi tested the hypothesis using the correlation analysis, regression analysis using SPSS, and structural equation model using AMOS. Elaydi provides evidence of the relationship between social media marketing activities on Facebook and brand awareness of mobile service providers in Egypt. Benefits of this

research involve an increase of brand Facebook page likes, which builds an online presence and adds to their circle of influence. Other benefits include obtaining high brand reach, enabling individuals to join in brand discussions and increases traffic or number of followers and the feedback that they deliver. Elaydi demonstrated that companies should engage with customers by increasing individuals to like brand posts, which drive content sharing and interaction.

Understanding the effects and challenges of social media marketing on brand awareness can help provide more insight into successful social media strategies that affect a company's bottom line. Hirsch (2017) and Mohammad (2018) studied the effects and challenges of social media marketing on brand awareness. Mohammad (2018) examined the suggestion that social media marketing might be inclined more towards functional branding than intentional branding. Their study empirically examined the relationship between social media marketing strategies, intentional branding, and effective branding to determine where social media marketing strategies are more strongly inclined towards intentional than functional branding. Hirsch, (2017) also examined the extraordinary reputational challenge for brands in social media in an era of heightened political and cultural polarization. In a time when the tension between liberal and conservative consumers have grown significantly, brands are being threatened with boycotts from both the left and right. The author identified some core approaches for brands facing this dilemma. The Hirsch's strategy was to review the experience of various brands which have been the victims of consumer boycotts motivated by political considerations. Brand awareness is important because



it enables customers recall or recognize a brand. The research by Hirsch (2017) and Mohammad (2018) is significant to my research study because it provides measures for understanding the effect of social media marketing on customer engagement and company profitability.

Lepkowska-White (2017) also explored the adoption, challenges, and current uses of social media in small restaurants. The study identified a variety of goals that social media plays in fostering interactions, engagement, relationships, and building communities online. Lepkowska-White's study suggested ways in which social media could be embraced by small restaurants to help them address the challenges they face, so they can go beyond using social media as merely an advertising tool. Other researchers such as Sahika and Irem (2016) examined the effect of social media marketing on brand trust and brand loyalty for hotels. The main aim of their quantitative study was to identify the effect of social media marketing efforts on brand loyalty and brand trust for hotels, especially websites owned by hotels. The effect of social media marketing efforts was tested using a structural equations model. The results showed the positive effects of social media marketing on brand trust and the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty. Their study is significant because it enables marketing managers of hotels to make strategic business decisions and craft right online strategies to compete with other hotel brands.

### **Influence of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Engagement**

In this section, the existing literature on social media marketing and its effect on consumer engagement is critically analyzed and synthesized. The inability to predict

consistent purchase behavior, as well as the tendency of customers to change their mind at any time, offers a unique field of study (Kaveh et al., 2016). Online shopping exchanges are evolving from a transactional exchange to a more relational based exchange. Sellers are increasingly looking to build long term relationships with their consumers through online communities. To facilitate long term relations, online shopping communities offer means to reinsert the shopping experience and personal communication into the current retail purchasing process; when missing, such element often represents the most significant concern consumers express about online retailing (Kaveh et al., 2016). Sellers believe that doing so increased their customer base and improved their profitability in the long term.

Kostyra et al. (2016) used a mixed method approach to study the effect of credible reviews on Brand Image. They saw choosing the right product (including services) online as an exhausting process. The wide variety of products on retailer websites is often overwhelming. To handle such wide-ranging assortments, online customer reviews (OCRs) have emerged as a vital information source for customers to evaluate products before purchase. Understanding the impact of OCRs on customers' decisions is an essential challenge for academics and practitioners. Kostyra et al. applied a choice-based conjoint experiment that combined all relevant levels of the OCR dimensions (valence, volume, and variance) and that estimated the effect of OCRs on choice. The experimental setting allowed the researchers to determine the direct impact but also the interaction effects of the OCR dimensions, which have been largely neglected in previous research. Kostyra et al.'s study is significant because consumers use online reviews to

share their brand-related experiences in various online social media platforms. Their research enables marketers to understand the effects of online reviews on a brand's image. Other researchers like Voorveld et al. (2018) examined how consumer engagement with social media platforms drives engagement with advertising.

Voorveld et al. (2018) research findings showed that engagement is highly context specific. Their quantitative study showed that engagement with social media advertising is the key to explaining how social media engagement is related to advertising evaluations. Calder et al. (2016) provided more insight into engagement and the consequences for advertising embedded in social media platforms by adopting the engagement experience framework. The engagement experience framework suggested that digital engagement is developed from digital experiences. Their flexible approach measured engagement based on context-specific experiences that varies across brands and products. Calder et al. study also examined engagement on various platforms providing evidence that a flexible approach to measuring engagement can help to predict consumer behavior and customer engagement.

The advent of social media has created a new landscape which lays out a new grid of personal connections. Businesses see enormous opportunities and are eager to tap into the trend, whereas consumers are put back to the center in the business world. Consumer buying behavior is the process by which individuals search for, select, purchase, use, and dispose of goods and services to satisfy their required needs (Ertemel & Ammoura, 2017). Researchers have used models to understand consumer buying behavior. The 5 stages of the consumer buying process are: recognition of needs and want, information

search, evaluation of choices, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation (Ertemel & Ammoura, 2017). Social media provides marketers with a new set of tools to interact with consumers and to integrate them into the brands through innovative ways.

It is essential that marketers understand how social media influences consumer buying behavior and its effect on the five steps need recognitions model. Social media plays a vital role in marketing and creating relationships with customers. Buyer behavior as part of consumer psychology is about understanding why and how individuals and groups engage in consumer activities, as well as how they are affected by them. A quantitative research finding by Ertemel and Ammoura (2017) showed a moderate to the strong relationship between paid social media advertising, and the whole 5 step needs model. The 3rd step - evaluate the alternatives, had the strongest relationship with social media advertising compared to other steps. In contracts, the second step - information search had no relationship at all with social media advertising. Ertemel and Ammoura concluded that social media advertising impacts consumer buying behavior. They recommend that marketing managers design their social media advertising as a comparative advertising tool and avoid providing information about the product itself since consumers do not rely on social media advertising as a source of their information search. This distinction is crucial as it helps organizations design their social media marketing strategies appropriately.

To summarize, understanding the effect of social media marketing on consumer buying behavior is essential in determining the social media marketing strategies that improve customer engagement and an organization's profitability. As a marketing tool,

social media has the advantage of low advertising costs, thus providing the benefit of costless business marketing (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016). According to Rugova and Prenaj (2016), small business investment is enough to get a social media strategy started, and the returns can be incredible. In the next section, I provide an in-depth analysis of social media marketing theories and how these theories can be used to predict consumer decision making when new specific research data might be unavailable.

### **The N-REL Framework**

The N-REL (Networking, Representation, Engagement, and Listening-In) framework is the conceptual framework for this study. It is a widely accepted framework and approach to business practices in various sectors that may prove beneficial in developing strategies for customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and thus barriers to competition. Anandaa et al. (2016) defined a comprehensive framework named N-REL framework in which they identified and classified social media marketing strategic actions. Subsequent researchers have used the conceptual model to study the acceptance of technologies of all types (Valos et al., 2017). Across disciplines, the N-REL framework has gained recognition as a decision-making tool that may help marketers overcome decision-making uncertainty regarding the choice and implementation of social media marketing strategies (Valos et al., 2017). The purpose of employing N-REL framework is to allow business owners to use a strategic process to develop and maintain customer engagement. Strengthening ties with consumers and elements of the brand community can enhance relationships and increase contacts between the brand and the customers that influence the brand.

Researchers such as Duffett,( 2017), Voorveld et al., (2018) and Schivinski et al. (2016) presented alternative theories and frameworks to improve the understanding of social media and consumer behavior. Due to the different scholarly approaches to the study of social media marketing, it is essential to consider the research focus and prospective analysis, for example, consumer-focused perspective, organizational-focused perspective (Duffett, 2017). There are three main categories of studies on social media marketing from a business perspective: (a) consumer attitudes and behavior toward social media marketing, (b) adoption and use of social media by companies, and (c) impact of social media marketing on sales and financial performance (Voorveld et al., 2018). Schivinski et al. (2016) measured consumer attitudes and behavior toward social media marketing. Other researchers studied the adoption and use of social media marketing by companies (e.g., Braojos-Gomez et al., 2015; Siamagka et al., 2015). Social media marketing theories may be formulated in several ways and may have a managerial, executive, or decision-making perspectives.

This group of studies pivots around managerial, executive or decision-making perspectives, as well as perceptions of firms, use of social media marketing in their organizations. This category includes studies about the drivers or motivations of firms to implement social media marketing. One prominent example of this kind of study is Rugova and Prenaj (2016) study on social media as a marketing tool for small business enterprise. Rugova and Prenaj stated that social media is a phenomenon that has transformed the interaction and communication of individuals throughout the world. They also explained that social media tools are not only used for amusement, but it is also an essential part of

marketing strategies in business life. Social media tools are often used as a source of information and knowledge spreading, changing people's views and opinions. They belong among critical business marketing tactics, and help to create new business opportunities, develop a stronger market position or modify consumer's behavior. The third group of researchers has studied the impact of social media marketing on sales and financial performance (Kumar et al., 2016). Increased online interactions lead to higher brand loyalty and may result in a dramatic improvement in economic performance.

Companies may enhance relationships with customers, supply chain, or business partners by capitalizing on the potential benefits of social media and their distinctive capabilities. One drawback with social media marketing is the possibility that organizations may fail to react appropriately to consumer or user responses. The inability to respond to consumer complaints may lead to adverse reactions in social media communities. A real-life example is a response by Verizon to a message that an unsatisfied T-Mobile consumer posted on Twitter illustrates, the intervention strategies that firms employ on social media to improve customer relationships. In this example, the T-Mobile customer did not directly address Verizon. However, by actively monitoring customer messages that mention competitors, Verizon was able to proactively intervene in an attempt to convince the customer to switch phone providers (Demmers et al., 2018). The use of the careful design of strategic actions, firms may benefit from boundary spanning social media activities such as activities contributing to industrial or purchasing processes. Companies could also integrate other social media activities into customer value processes such as CRM, SCM, or product innovation – via collaboration with the online brand community.

Researchers and practitioners are using a social media engagement strategy to systematically address various factors related to the social media adoption process (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016; Lacoste, 2016). Cawsey and Rowley (2016) proposed a framework with six components of a social media strategy: monitoring and listening, empowering and engaging employees, creating compelling content, stimulating electronic word of mouth, evaluating and selecting channels, and enhancing brand presence through integrating social media. Previous research has proposed various frameworks, dimensions, or evaluation practices that seem to be linked to the engagement states and processes. For instance, Marcos-Cuevas, Nätti, Palo, and Baumann (2016) presented value co-creation practices divided into 3 overarching categories. *Linking* (i.e., methods related to mobilizing social connections and networks such as co-ideation, co-valuation, and co-diagnosing), *materializing* (i.e. operational practices associated with the production of a value co-creating offering such as co-testing, co-design, and co-launching), and *institutionalizing* (i.e., organizational practices related to the design of institutions and structures to capture and retain value created such as embedding).

Hult (2011) suggested the notion of a marketing organization from a cross-functional activity-based perspective rather than conceptualizing a marketing organization as a distinct functional entity. Anandaa et al. (2016) proposed the N-REL framework using Hult's proposal as a starting point. The N-REL conceptual framework covers activities that support both transactional and relationship marketing. Anandaa et al.'s research also positions social media marketing strategy and strategic actions in the context of the marketing organization theory and discusses the impact of the incorporation of social



media on the concept of the marketing organization. The study offers valuable theoretical insight into social media marketing actions and the deployment of social media marketing strategies in companies. Anandaa et al.'s study is significant because it provides hints about how to maximize the benefits from social media marketing for customer-oriented, market-driven organizations.

Although research has confirmed Anandaa et al.'s (2016) theory, the N-REL framework is not without detractors. For example, some researchers have suggested that it does not cover B2B marketing and it does not elaborate the tactical operationalization of strategic decisions in social media only describing the actions instead (Alalwan et al., 2017). The N-REL framework also has some limitations. For instance, it covers only social media marketing strategic actions initiated by the company. Even the classification of social media actions does not include social media boundary-spanning activities that involve other actors in the social network (Alalwan et al., 2017). It is essential that companies anticipate the impact of boundary-spanning activities such as B2B marketing on their marketing goals.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the N-REL framework is appropriate for exploring the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to improve customer engagement and profitability because it provides theoretical insight on social media marketing actions and deployment in organizations. The two-way interaction of social media allows organizations to create and expand a customer base enhancing their ability to succeed. An organization leader who adopts the N-REL framework can use the feedback from intelligence actions through social media to make the necessary

adjustments to strategic decisions (Anandaa et al., 2016). Strategic choices are required because the market segmentation, positioning, and marketing techniques must drive the various social media marketing actions to fulfill the marketing goals of a company (Anandaa et al., 2016). Anandaa et al.'s (2016) study also provided hints about how to maximize the benefits of social media marketing for customer-oriented, market-driven organizations. Using the N-REL framework for my research on social media marketing techniques used by business leaders might provide knowledge about the requirements for successful social media marketing strategy implementation.

### **N-REL Framework and Social Media Marketing**

Researchers and marketers studying social media strategies and tactics have always been fascinated with the one unifying objective – engagement. The meaning and operationalization of engagement remain a work in progress with researchers studying the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives. In their 2018 study, Syrdal and Briggs (2018) approached the question of what constitutes engagement using a qualitative method. Their studies suggest that engagement is not an outcome of social media marketing stimuli and target response (e.g., brand awareness, for instance); instead, they found that it is a psychological state of mind. Their study finds that engagement operates independently from target response behaviors such as post-interaction and sharing (i.e., pass-along). More importantly, Syrdal and Briggs proposed a formal definition of engagement, which could be instrumental in focusing on future engagement research. Carvalho and Fernandes (2018) also approached the issue of engagement in their study. They proposed and tested a comprehensive model of drivers, outcomes, and moderators

of customer brand engagement (CBE) in the context of social media-based brand communities.

Brand communities can be categorized in the zone of a social community using the zones of social media marketing Framework (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Social community describes channels of social media focused on relationships and the everyday activities people participate in with others who share the same interest or identification. Thus, social communities feature two-way and multi-way communication, conversation, collaboration, and the sharing of experiences and resources (Carvalho & Fernandes, 2018). Carvalho and Fernandes's (2018) model incorporated precursors such as involvement, engagement process constructs (including interactivity and flow), and sequence effects (including community satisfaction), trust, propensity to engage and community commitment. Social media engagement is a vital part of any social media marketing strategy. It increases loyalty and generates word of mouth referrals. It is essential that business leaders have the right tools to measure the impact of social media engagement.

Social media engagement is not the only social media marketing action that is used by organizations. Business leaders deploy and implement their social media marketing strategies to achieve a specific marketing objective. Internal or external motivations often drive the products of their actions (Anandaa et al., 2016). According to Anandaa et al. (2016), there are 3 main categories of SMM actions: representation, engagement, and listening in representation. These are social media activities focusing on the delivery of marketing communications related to the company profile and information

about products (Anandaa et al., 2016). These activities are as follows: (a) engagement: This is a value-added proposition that covers marketing activities focusing on interaction with customers, (b) adding value for them and generating benefits for the company: customer-relationship management, one-to-one marketing, customer empowerment, customer support, personalization of information, product customization, or customer loyalty programs (Anandaa et al., 2016). In the case of B2B, the firms' engagement includes relations along the whole supply-chain – supplier retailers, and business partners (Anandaa et al., 2016); the activities are defined below:

- listening-in activities enable a passive way of social media engagement that aims at market research and intelligence, such as analytics of social media contents and conversations (Anandaa et al., 2016).
- share of voice, sentiment, gaps, trends, opportunities, etc. – as well as the identification of relevant actors and influencers (Anandaa et al., 2016).

These activities are important communications mechanisms between companies and consumers.

Social media listening helps companies identify opportunities to engage in conversations about their brand. Engagement could be anything from someone saying how much they love a company's product to a customer service request. A good example is Purdue University. On its annual Purdue Day of Giving, the University uses social listening to identify donors. They then respond personally to everyone who mentions on social media that they donated (Purdue University, 2016). Appropriate responses create donor engagement and excitement, increasing the odds that people will give the next year

again. It also helps the university keep the momentum going on this critically important fundraising day.

The study and the proposal of the N-REL framework is a significant contribution to the field of social media marketing, regarding advances in the use of social media for strategic business decisions. Anandaa et al.'s (2016) research suggested that SMM activities encompass and interact with the different components of a marketing organization. SMM activities cover a firm's internal and external customer-value business processes. The marketing activities also contribute to the creation of networks whose goal is to fulfill the needs and wants of stakeholders, networks, and stakeholders' roles (Anandaa et al., 2016). The N-REL serves as a guide for companies to assess their marketing strategies by identifying and leveraging their distinctive capabilities. The deployment of social media for marketing purposes is currently a decision that relies more on intuition and trial and error than on strategic thinking. The N-REL framework may facilitate the effective deployment of SMM by helping to understand how companies implement SMMS into activities or actions. The N-REL Framework has applicability in adopting marketing strategy innovation as well as material innovations. Using the framework to understand the adoption of social media marketing strategies used by business leaders may provide valuable insight to businesses leaders looking to increase sales, productivity, and market performance.

## **Alternative Theories and Frameworks – Social Media Management Marketing framework, Adoption and Social Exchange Theories**

There are several alternative social media marketing frameworks and theories that outline the actions required to implement each aspect of social media marketing. One such framework is the social media management marketing framework proposed by Parsons and Lepkowska-White, (2018) to assist managers in developing and using social media as a marketing tool. This framework may be used by businesses with different strategic orientations. The framework consists of four dimensions that sum up the action's managers perform when implementing and engaging with consumers on social media. These actions can be grouped into four categories: messaging/projecting, monitoring, assessing, and responding. Each dimension of the framework may be applied to a different extent based on the firm's strategic focus. A firm's messaging/projecting, monitoring, and assessment strategies may change over time based on how they respond in social media (Parsons, & Lepkowska-White, 2018).

Other alternative theories to the N-REL framework are the adoption and social exchange theories. The adoption theory is used by researchers to focus on how the adoption process and subsequent utilization of social media marketing tools business leaders occurred (Setiowati et al., 2015). Social exchange theory is a theoretical lens used to explore the multidimensional relationship originating with an exchange of social ideas in a transaction-oriented style with the expectation of an economic goal and a mutually reciprocal relationship and includes consideration of the impact of larger environmental factors as well as the complexity of exchanges (Duane, Domegan et al., 2016). Social

exchange theory emerged within family sciences in the latter part of the twentieth century, first being considered in a meaningful way in the early 1960s (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

According to Thibaut and Kelley (1959), people engage in behavioral sequence or a series of actions designed to achieve their goal. When people engage in these behavioral sequences, they are dependent to some extent on their relational partner. Fate control is the ability to affect a partner's outcomes. Behavior control is the power to cause another's behavior to change by changing one's own behavior (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959),

Mergel (2016) used the adoption theory as their base theory in their ethnographic study to explore social media adoption in U.S. government agencies. Mergel's study concluded that social media is often developed and hosted by third parties, leaving government organizations a limited role in aligning social media utilization with their existing routines. The social exchange theory has been criticized for focusing too much on the individual's perspective and ignoring social aspects of the relationship, such as how partners communicate and interest in shared events (Duck & Sants, 1983). To summarize even though the adoption and social exchange theory have been used by prior researchers to study social media engagement strategies, the N-REL framework is more appropriate because it provides tools and parameters for measuring customer engagement and feedback. In the next section, I discuss the effect of social media marketing on sales and financial performance.

### **Effect of Social Media Marketing (SMM) on Sales and Financial Performance**

Companies may capitalize on the potential benefits of social media and their distinctive capabilities to enhance relationships with customers, supply chain, or business partners. Social media marketing influences how social network actors or users interact with each other (Duffett, 2017). There is always the possibility to fail to react appropriately to consumer or user responses. Consumers are spending more time online, and their involvement in social media is also growing. Furthermore, consumers truly trust the information they find online. It is expected that positive social media mentions of a given brand will influence a consumer's awareness, attitudes, affection, etc. towards that brand. The brand value chain model suggests that such a change in consumer mindset should translate into improved marketplace performance and, ultimately, better firm financial performance (Duffett, 2017). Digital technologies, such as social media, are acknowledged as an effective and efficient means to connect consumers to a product or service (Kennedy, 2016). Raudeliuniene's et al. (2018) research study shows that companies that use lead generation social media strategies achieve better results by building brand awareness and generating conversions, making better sales productivity, producing higher revenue growth, and creating a sense of community for advocates and followers provided (Raudeliuniene et al., 2018). Advertising campaigns on social media networks develop prerequisites for organizations to not only inform users more effectively but also understand their changing informational and knowledge needs, receive feedback, observe users' interest and involvement into activities carried out by organization and products (services) provided (Raudeliuniene et al., 2018).



Social media marketing is an effective and efficient means to connect consumers to a product or service. Blerta and Burim (2016), provided a case study of social media marketing benefits and challenges for SME (Small Medium Enterprises) and defined the different types of social media channels and their role. Blerta and Burim identified the main benefits as increased brand exposure, and reputation management increased targeted traffic and search engine optimization, word-of-mouth and leads generation, market insights, related to the target audience and competition. Blerta and Burim's research findings indicate that social media is relatively cost-effective depending on which type of social media channel is used as SME can begin with free options like opening a Facebook page or creating a page on Twitter or other sites. The central research question of the study was: How do SME's view the World through the customer's eyes and continuously seek ways to create more value via social media for the customer satisfaction and produce fewer complaints? A qualitative–exploratory approach was chosen to uncover how companies utilize social media to gain practical insights into the perception of social media as a useful marketing tool. As a part of the case study, Blerta and Burim randomly chose four companies according to their operation areas in the United States and Turkey to make a comparison with their social media activities. This research is significant and provides a better understanding of the social media marketing strategies that may increase customer engage and improve a company's bottom line.

Interpersonal relationships are a vital factor to understand social media marketing strategies that directly affect customer engagement. Blerta and Burim (2016) followed

research carried out by other researchers who have identified the role of play in supporting cognition and interpersonal relationships. This case study is relevant to the current conversation surrounding the emerging trend of social media popularity. However, Blerta and Burim acknowledged that the investigation had its limitations. The Target population used in the study was mostly from Turkey, which is a developing nation. Social media presence is still far from the level of SMEs from developed countries. Also, only two social media channels (Facebook and Twitter were used). Blerta and Burim research study is significant because it can be used by SMEs to find out what types of social network marketing endeavors enhance a firms' performance. It also aids companies in designing their social media activities for different social media followers' clusters to increase the effectiveness of reaching marketing. Finally, researching the impact of social network marketing efforts on the financial (i.e., ROI) and market (i.e., sales revenue) performances might be beneficial for SMEs to decide how much they should invest and spend their time and management efforts.

Hussain (2018) and Karjaluoto et al. (2015) conducted studies on the effect of social media marketing on the financial performance of companies. Hussain (2018) used quantitative methods to examine the effectiveness of social media marketing in Saudi small to medium size enterprises (SMEs') ability to promote their goods and services and remain financially sustainable. Hussain (2018) attempted to explore the effectiveness of marketing communication through Social Media on Small to Medium Size Enterprises to fill the gap in social media marketing for SMEs in Saudi Arabia through in-depth analysis and studies of SMEs social media marketing strategies. The desired results from this

study are that marketing through social media has a positive and productive impact on small and medium-sized enterprises in Saudi Arabia. The study used both primary and secondary qualitative sources of data. The primary data collection procedures were involved in recording interviews with the beauty center owners, managers, workers, and customers, visiting and observing the businesses. Hussain's 2018 study was based on an ethnographic approach. Karjaluoto et al. (2015) examined the current state of digital marketing communications (DMC) in 6 industrial firms. Results indicate that firms use DMC to improve customer relationship communications, support sales, and create awareness. Karjaluoto et al. investigated industrial marketing communication tools and the role of digital channels. It draws from the literature on industrial marketing communications to examine its goals and intended utilization in industrial firms. The research examined three research insights. First, although DMC is one of the most critical industrial marketing communication tools, firms have not yet used it to its full potential. Second, firms use DMC to enhance customer relationship communications, support sales, and create awareness. Third, firms have not employed social media tools as part of DMC as widely as traditional digital tools. The growing number of stakeholders and the fragmentation of the media landscape have led to a rethinking of marketing communications in industrial firms. Digital marketing communication, mainly when linked to corporate branding and in support of personal selling, has begun attracting the interests of both practitioners and academics. Every company faces the question of how to maximize the potential gains from digital media channels. As a result, effective

marketing communication has become a strategic management objective for successful firms.

Hongzhi et al. (2018) used a qualitative approach to gain an understanding of the nature of the marketing communication processes and how digital channels are intertwined. To better capture the variety of industrial marketing contexts, the multiple case-study approaches were used. Although the study is quite recent, it has some limitations. The findings are based on extensive empirical data, they represent only six industrial companies, and so the results cannot be generalized to other settings.

Considering these limitations, future studies in the field would be required. Hongzhi et al.'s research study found that brand difference is an essential component of international marketing strategy. Hongzhi et al. identified global consumer culture positioning, foreign consumer culture positioning, and local consumer culture positioning as critical positioning strategies to achieve brand differentiation in the international market.

Makhitha (2016) was able to determine that the use of social media would help craft producers to overcome some of the challenges they currently face, such as lack of branding of their business and product. Marketing executives and other senior marketers in a different organization can use digital marketing strategies to set business goals and measurable objectives that may increase awareness and branding, promote brand content, increase exposure to generate traffic, leads, and sales, thereby reducing marketing costs and improving profitability.

Figueiredo and Scaraboto's (2016) research study found that social media marketing has emerged as a useful marketing tool used by companies to influence and

track consumer behavior providing benefits such as value and content creation through the adoption of a circulation-centric perspective. Aspects of social media can be effectively used to improve customer loyalty and brand culture creation (Lacoste, 2016; Raab et al., 2016; Schivinski et al., 2016). Social media is a useful tool for consumer empowerment to complement offline consumer activity (Yuksel et al., 2016). Although a cooperative effect is present, social media marketing has the overall positive most significant impact not only on increasing sale profitability but also positively influenced the purchase of high-margin products (Kumar et al., 2016). Also, social media's ability to allow customers a voice, regarding comments and likes, enabled a high level of effectiveness. Jochims (2016) indicated the importance of social reciprocity as a small business success factor. To summarize, social media marketing has transformed the marketing landscape, providing a two-way communication channel between consumers and companies. When customers are more engaged, they become brand advocates leading to increased profits for companies. Understanding and adopting the right social media strategy has a huge social impact as it can reduce the failure rates of corporations.

### **Transition**

Section 1 of this study includes the foundation and background for the study as it relates to (a) the problem and purpose statements, (b) nature of the study, (c) research question, (d) the conceptual framework, (e) definition of terms, (f) significance of the study, and (g) academic literature review. The section's focus was to explore the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement. The detailed literature review was split into 5 parts. First, I provided a brief overview of

social media marketing strategies, its effect on the consumer buying behavior and the N-REL (networking, representation, engagement, and listening-in), which is the conceptual framework of this study. Next, I described the adoption and use of social media marketing strategies (SMM) by companies and the N-REL theory was described. Then, I addressed the theoretical components of N-REL theory. such as representation, engagement, and listening-in activities.

Next, I applied the conceptual framework to social media marketing through an in-depth exploration of factors such as relationship, content, value creation, innovation, complexity, and influence of social media on consumer behavior. This was followed by a review of the literature on the impact of SMM on sales and financial performance and the importance of small businesses to economic development, and the significance and utilization of small business marketing strategies. The literature review was concluded with a focus on social media marketing strategies used by business leaders.

In Section 2, I provide more details of the research project, including the role of the researcher, the participants, the research method and design, data collection and analysis procedures, ethical considerations, reliability, and validity. Section 3 includes a detailed presentation of the findings and a description of the application to professional practice and implications for change.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes a detailed plan about specific aspects of the research methodology and design used in this study to explore how business leaders successfully use social media marketing strategies to ensure business viability. I describe my role as the researcher and the primary research instrument, in-depth details of participants, ethical guidelines for consideration, the research method and design for the study, data analysis, and the establishment of reliability and validity in the study. Section 3 includes an explanation of the data collection process. This section also contains the findings, application to professional practice, the implication for social change, recommendations, ethical, reliability, and validity considerations.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement. The targeted population comprised of business leaders from three corporations located in the northeast region of the United States who implemented successful strategies to improve customer engagement. The business leaders selected for this study had experienced a high ROI of 20% or more in their social media marketing campaigns. The results of this study may contribute to social change by the opportunity for additional business leaders to acquire new strategies for using social media to engage their customers, which could result in job creation and improved economies in local communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in the data collection phase of a qualitative study involves a wide range of procedural tasks, including recruiting participants, obtaining informed consent, and scheduling baseline and follow-up interviews (LeCroix et al., 2019). I served as the primary researcher in this study. My first task as the primary researcher in this study was to identify participants for this study. The participants were successful business leaders who have used social media marketing strategies to increase customer engagement. My primary role was to ensure that the data collection instruments were valid and accurate.

For this study, I had no relationship with the topic or participants; therefore, reducing the risk of bias. One way I identified bias was to perform a test of the degree to which I am open to contrary evidence I also reported my findings to two or more colleagues so that they can offer alternative explanations for data collection. Another popular way of seeking confirmation in qualitative research is through the strategy of triangulation, which among other aspects, advocates the use of multiple methods to collect data, analyzing such data with different methods, or even including the participation of other researchers who study the same phenomenon (Abdalla et al., 2018). I used triangulation in my research study to ensure that participant responses are analyzed from various perspectives, devoid of my personal views.

My central role as the researcher was to minimize bias by remaining objective and maintaining neutrality, as well as adhering to the ethics guidelines outlined in the *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of



Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The *Belmont Report* guidelines include obtaining consent from individual participants, ensuring benefits were maximized and risks minimized and ensuring participant safety and confidentiality throughout the research process (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). According to Vollmer and Howard (2010), the Belmont Report allows for a positive solution, which at times may be challenging to find, to future subjects who are not capable of making independent decisions.

I also aimed to follow the ethical principles and guidelines in the *Belmont Report* (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016). The ethical guidelines included obtaining consent from individual participants, ensuring benefits were maximized and risks minimized and ensuring participant safety and confidentiality throughout the research process. To help me adhere to the ethical principles and guidelines, I completed the Protecting Human Research Subjects training. Once my study was completed, I submitted my proposal to the Walden University Institutional Review Board for approval.

Yin (2018) noted the importance of identifying personal experiences relevant to the topic and relationships with the participants. I have no relationship with the topic or study participants. Therefore, potential bias was mitigated even before the research began. Triangulation is also an essential component of reducing bias during the data collection phase (Yin, 2018). Given my limited prior experience in social media marketing, my focus was on mitigating potential bias by conducting a comprehensive literature review before the data collection phase of my research study. Member checking also helps to reduce bias by ensuring that the participant interview data used in the study

is what the participant meant to say (Birt et al., 2016). In this study, I used member checking to minimize bias by having participants review their responses for accuracy.

My research on social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement was guided by the interview protocol outlined in Appendix A. Interview protocol or guides are useful in qualitative research for outlining the research topic background, summaries, and structure of the interview (Abdel Latif, 2019). I adhered to a semistructured interview protocol by relaying essential bits of information during the interview such as stating what the purpose of the interview was, what will happen to the information obtained, allaying any confidentiality concerns my study participants may have and allowing participants to review their responses for accuracy.

### **Participants**

Study participants included business leaders in the northeast region of the United States who have experienced a high ROI of 20% or more in their social media marketing campaigns. My research participants were identified in LinkedIn. First, I created a LinkedIn profile that clearly indicated that I was a researcher using LinkedIn for research purposes and to recruit members of my targeted companies. I then identified participants on LinkedIn by searching using the keyword "social media marketing manager" and specifying country as "United States". I sent out 100 invitations to managers to join my LinkedIn research network. Accepted requests were limited to persons in my target population, which was six business leaders working for three companies located in the northeast region of the United States. This strategy was to ensure that my study is aligned

with current recommendations for multiple case study (see Rule & John, 2015; Yin, 2018). This method is called targeted snowball sampling where a qualified participant shares an invitation with other subjects like them who fulfill the qualifications defined for the targeted population (Dusek et al., 2015).

I sent a letter to owners of those companies that met the criteria for the research asking them to participate in my research study. I got responses from more than three companies and retained their names and contact information in case some participants drop out of the study (see Rule & John, 2015; Yin, 2018). I was ready to expand my research criteria to the whole of the United States if I was unable to get enough responses. To establish working relationships with participants, I built a rapport through casual conversation with my study participants and introduce myself before beginning formal interviews.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

I used a qualitative method to explore the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement. Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because using qualitative methodology facilitated the exploration of specific expressions of the participants' business experiences. Researchers use qualitative methods to solicit responses to open-ended questions and to capture accurate data enabling the discovery of new thoughts and individual views (Yin, 2018). Quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study because quantitative researchers examine, present, and describe relationships and trends within data using

computational techniques such as tables, graphs, and statistics (Saunders et al., 2015). A mixed methodology was not appropriate for this study because mixed methods' researchers use both a qualitative element and quantitative element that include hypotheses testing, which is part of the quantitative or mixed method research (Saunders et al., 2015). Since this study did not involve examining causal relationships and trends within data; therefore, neither a quantitative nor mixed method approach was appropriate. A quantitative method would have been appropriate if the focus were on whether social media marketing is used, or if the study was dependent on another quantifiable factor. However, the study's focus was to gain an in-depth understanding of how business leaders use social media marketing strategies to increase customer engagement. Therefore, a qualitative method was more appropriate than a quantitative method for this study (Yin, 2018).

### **Research Design**

For this study, I used a qualitative exploratory multiple case study design to explore the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement. The rationale for using a qualitative case study design was to obtain an in-depth understanding of how business leaders use social media marketing strategies to increase customer engagement. Researchers use multiple sources of evidence in a case study to answer their research questions (Gog, 2015). A qualitative exploratory multiple case study design is most appropriate for this study because various sources of evidence can be used to understand the business problem better. Exploratory case studies

are adequate when little information is available (Yin, 2018). Results generated from exploratory case studies may serve as a basis for subsequent research studies (Yin, 2018).

Methodological triangulation goes a long way towards ensuring data saturation through multiple data sources. Triangulation ensures that data is rich in depth and may provide more answers the research question. (Yin, 2018). Data saturation is achieved by the researcher when similar patterns repeat, and no new information has emerged (Saunders et al., 2018). I achieved data saturation in my research study through member checking. A synthesis of my study participant's responses was provided to ensure their intended responses are presented. I then continued the member checking follow-up process until no new information was obtained. Multiple case studies can result in more analytic conclusions (Tumele, 2015). For this study, a multiple case study approach is more appropriate to answer the research question than a single case study.

The phenomenological design methodology was not appropriate for the study because researchers that use this design approach focus primarily on interviews to explore the lived experiences of participants (see citation). Phenomenological studies are more relevant for studies where the participants describe their experiences (citation). The research study is more interested in participant opinion and not their experiences. Similarly, researchers use miniethnographic designs to explore the cultural elements of a given phenomenon (Hammersley, 2017). The miniethnography research design was not appropriate for this study. This approach is more effective in understanding the complicated nature and complexity of human behavior and perceptions about products, purchasing decisions, and the use of products (Hammersley, 2017). Narrative research is

a study of the ways humans experience the world and provides researchers with insights into their phenomenon of study (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). The narrative design approach was not used because the research design is more effective when a study has more than one participant providing a personal account of a given context.

### **Population and Sampling**

For this qualitative multiple case study, the population comprised of businesses leaders that had effectively implemented social media marketing strategies to improve customer engagement. According to Yin (2018), qualitative researchers using multiple case study approaches, can expect to obtain rich data from multiple sources, with a sample of three to five participants. Based on these guidelines, my study participants for this research included six business leaders of three corporations located in the northeast region of the United States who experienced a high ROI of 20% or more in their social media marketing campaigns. In selecting my sample size, my goal was to estimate the number of participants that were necessary to reach data saturation. Data saturation is achieved when there is no longer any new information emerging from the new data collected (Yin, 2018).

My first step was to create a LinkedIn profile clearly indicating that I am a researcher using LinkedIn for research purposes and to recruit members of my targeted companies. I then ascertained the qualifications of the participants to ensure that they met the established criteria of being business leaders who have used social media marketing strategies successfully. This was done by identifying the individual members of the targeted population on LinkedIn by searching using the keyword "social media marketing

manager" and specifying country as "United States". I then sent out 100 invitations to managers to join my LinkedIn research network. I also asked participants to recommend other social media marketers. Accepted requests were limited to persons in my target population, which was six business leaders working for three companies located in the northeast region of the United States.

Researchers can use snowball sampling to select the participants who can provide information relevant to the research purpose (Dusek et al., 2015). The advantage of snowball sampling is that the method allows the researcher to build a trusting relationship with their study participants who might not want to reveal their winning social media marketing strategies for fear of competition. The process provides a cheap, simple, and cost-efficient sampling technique and needs little planning and fewer workforce compared to other sampling techniques (Dusek et al., 2015). In such an approach, a qualified participant shares an invitation with other subjects like them who fulfill the qualifications defined for the targeted population (Dusek et al., 2015).

Historically, snowball sampling has been used by researchers in qualitative studies to contact qualified subjects and develop a social relationship (Dusek et al., 2015). This design methodology was more appropriate because it ensured that I achieve data saturation by allowing me to capture and analyze rich data from multiple participants. Having various participants' s data provided more substantial data for comprehensive analysis and pattern repetition (Tumele, 2015).

### **Ethical Research**

When I received approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board, an approval number: 07-31-20-0748063 was generated for this study. It is essential to include a written consent form and confidentiality statement so that participants understand that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any (Yin, 2018). A written consent form and confidentiality statement was provided to my research study participants. A clear outline of the study withdrawal process was provided to ensure participants' understanding. The first step of the study withdrawal process was for the participant to call or email me, indicating that they were no longer interested in participating in the study. Once this was received, I deleted all information related to the participant.

No incentive was provided to study participants as I hoped to recruit from populations who could benefit from the research. According to a 2015 study by Williams and Walter, monetary compensation for a study may exert an undue influence on those who would otherwise not consent to participate in it. Wong et al. (2018) discussed the importance of giving participants a copy of the study findings. I offered a copy of the study findings to all participants. The company, individual names or personal identifiers were not included in the study documents, notes from interviews, and social media content analysis to ensure confidentiality. Instead, I assigned participant case numbers to all documents to protect the identity of participants. Names of individuals and organizations were coded using alphanumeric codes to protect the identities of the owners and businesses. Data containing only participant numbers were stored in a password



protected online file and a locked computer at my place of residence. I intend to delete all electronic files after 5 years to ensure the confidentiality of participants and minimize any potential risk to participants. This includes shredding and disposal of paper files.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Yin (2018) noted that in qualitative research studies, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument. Since my research was a qualitative multiple case study, I served as the primary data collection instrument. The data collection for the study included semistructured interviews of six business leaders of three corporations located in the northeast region of the United States who implemented successful strategies to improve customer engagement. I used member checking to ensure reliability and validity by providing a synthesis of the participants' responses. Member checking ensured that the synthesis represents the participants' intended responses. The member checking follow-up process continued until no new information was obtained, and I achieved data saturation.

My research data collection took place through in-depth semistructured qualitative interviews with business leaders that have used social media marketing strategies to improve customer engagement. I conducted these interviews over the phone and over email depending on the availability of the participants. Telephone interviews provided insight from participants due to the added participant comfort relative to face-to-face interviews (see Mazar et al., 2015). All interviews were recorded using a voice recorder with the permission of the participants.

Saunders et al. (2015) stated that the most used method for qualitative data collection is the participant interview, from which data can be collected using notes, audio recording, or video recording. I allocated between 60 and 90 minutes for each interview. During the interview I stayed neutral and showed no emotional or personal feelings (Saunders et al., 2015). The interviews detailed the marketing professionals' social media marketing experiences used to increase customer engagement. Data compilation involved examining existing data to derive new information (Breidbach & Maglio, 2016). I organized the compiled data in Microsoft Word and Excel and then imported the information into NVivo for disassembly.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The intended data collection technique for this research study was semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews are a recognized qualitative data collection technique where a researcher uses preset interview questions to prompt responses and provide a participant with the opportunity to elaborate on interview questions and subject matter (Kallio et al., 2016). I used semistructured interviews of six business leaders of three corporations located in the northeast region of the United States who implemented successful strategies to improve customer engagement. Given that this is a social media marketing study, it was important to understand the level of online two-way engagement of the participants. For this reason, I made the first contact with my potential participants through their personal social media (LinkedIn page). This also had its disadvantages as I might have potentially missed out on participants that do not respond to their personal social media requests.

Participants that responded to my personal social media requests were asked to acknowledge their interest in taking part in my research study. My research interview began with each participant reading and signing a consent form. The interview protocol included an introduction of the purpose of the study and an explanation of the interview process to the participants. Semistructured interviews have the advantage of giving the researcher the ability to unearth rich descriptions, learn in-depth strategies, and engage in detail with each participant (Kallio et al., 2016). The disadvantages of collecting data through semistructured interviews is that the findings are not generalizable and are restricted to the participants within the study. Due to the Corona virus health pandemic, I conducted each interview by phone, email, or messaging on participant's personal social media websites. Once the interview began, I paid close attention to nonverbal cues and asked follow-up questions ensuring appropriate depth in the participant's responses. At the end of the interview, I thanked the participant for their time in allowing me the opportunity to interview them.

I arranged for appropriate follow-up dates for member checking to take place to ensure the accuracy, credibility, and validity of the interview data. I also arranged additional communications as deemed appropriate by the participants. A copy of the summary composed of their responses, asking if the summary is accurate, ensuring that all participants are aware of IRB approval, that interpretations of their responses are accurate, and valid and that no key information was omitted was shared with participants. Participants had the opportunity to add additional information to their semistructured

interviews. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was represented as an unidentifiable label such as: participant 1 (P1), participant 2 (P2), and so on.

I ensured that the data was kept properly and logged correctly. Each interview was recorded using an electronic audio recording device. Appropriate extensive notes of each participant interview and a summary of those notes were maintained. These notes were converted into a cataloguing/labeling system. The cataloguing/labeling system were used to keep track of the interview and artifact data. All raw data was stored in a safe and secure location for a minimum of 5 years. Researchers using a case-study approach construct validity through data collection and composition via the utilization of multiple sources of evidence and establishing a chain of evidence (Yin, 2018). In this study, I collected multiple sources of data to ensure construct validity. I also achieved credibility through data triangulation. Researchers incorporate internal validity in the data analysis phase through proper coding, pattern matching, and explanation building (Saunders et al., 2015).

### **Data Organization Technique**

Researchers use thematic analysis to analyze large qualitative data sets leading to rich descriptions, explanations, and theorizing (Saunders et al., 2015). I electronically organized data collected from participants into groups by participants using NVivo, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) tool. NVivo is used by researchers to code themes from research study interviews (Zamawe, 2015). Data was then sorted later into common themes. By completing this analysis, I was able to make sense of the information and reported the data for my research study. To protect the

identity of study participants, the names of individuals and organization were coded using an alpha numeric system.

My original notes were kept on file to ensure a backup of information. All raw data was stored securely for 5 years. I destroyed the data after 5 years and did not provide access to the raw data (with participant identities) to anyone else. Data saturation is achieved by the researcher when similar patterns repeat, and no new information has emerged (Saunders et al., 2015). I used member checking to provide a synthesis of the participant responses to ensure the synthesis represents the participant's intended responses and any additional information necessary. The member checking follow-up process continued until no new information was obtained. Multiple case studies can result in more powerful analytic conclusions (Yin, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis phase enables a researcher to discover patterns, descriptions, and themes to answer the research questions (Stewart et al., 2017). I used Yin's (2018) 5-step data analysis process for my study. This enabled me to examine, categorize, and test the evidence. The 5-step process requires following a series of activities in sequence, which include compiling, disassembling, reassembling, or arranging, and interpreting the data and then presenting conclusions (Yin, 2018). The systematic and rigorous preparation and analysis of qualitative research data is usually time consuming and labor intensive. To lessen this burden, it is important that researchers use Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) such as ATLAS.ti, MAXqda, NVivo and N6 (Zamawe, 2015) to analyze their data. I used NVivo for my research study because

the tool has features such as character-based coding, rich text capabilities and multimedia functions that are crucial for qualitative data management.

Data Triangulation involved the use of multiple and different methods, researchers, sources, and theories to obtain corroborating evidence (Yin, 2018). Anney (2015) noted the importance of using triangulation to improve data analysis, reduce bias and cross examine the integrity of participant responses. Data compilation involves examining existing data to derive new information (Breidbach & Maglio, 2016). In this study, I collected data from semistructured interviews. Data was organized and compiled in Microsoft Word and Excel and then imported into NVivo for disassembly. I collected multiple sources of data to ensure construct validity. Using data triangulation in my study may help my study achieve credibility. Researchers incorporate internal validity in the data analysis phase through thematic coding, pattern matching, and explanation building (Saunders et al., 2015).

Yin (2018) outlined a post-data collection process of organizing and coding data, identifying themes, and drawing conclusions. As part of the interpretation process, I looked for common themes within the coded data in NVivo. I cross referenced key themes that emerged from the data against theoretical material outlined in the literature themes (Oliveira et al., 2016). I then explored the potential existence of common themes first within each case, and, next, across multiple cases.

Disassembling is the act of separating data into fragments of information and is the second phase of the data analysis process (Yin, 2018). After compiling data, a researcher separates the information to look for hidden clues (Castleberry & Nolen,

2018). Coding involves processing raw data and then disassembling the data into fragments with the use of codes (Firmin et al., 2017). Thematic coding allows the researcher to find clues and cluster related segments together (Stuckey, 2015). When disassembling data, a researcher should crosscheck collected data with research logs, observations, audio recordings, and transcripts (Panteli et al., 2019). I disassembled the data by reviewing all personal notes, recordings, and interview transcripts, subsequently using NVivo to support the coding process.

Reassembling and rearranging hidden clues to classify into themes is the third phase of the data analysis process (Yin, 2018). Identifying themes is necessary for researchers to answer the research questions (Ganapathy, 2016). Many qualitative researchers use NVivo to detect, classify, and organize data to develop themes (Oliveira et al., 2016).

The fourth step in Yin's (2018) 5-step data analysis process is to interpret the data according to the themes uncovered. Interpretation involves understanding and making sense of the collected data (Haines et al., 2015). I interpreted the study findings based on the previously identified themes.

The final step in data analysis is concluding the study (Yin, 2018). In qualitative studies, researchers connect the themes to answer the research questions (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure the appropriate interpretation of results, I applied the member checking process to support accurate data interpretation (Stansen & Chambers, 2019). My research developed key themes and Yin's (2018) 5-step process was used to ensure appropriate data analysis and rigor. This led to accurate and reliable research results.

## **Reliability and Validity**

### **Reliability**

Reliability and validity are essential criteria for determining quality in research projects. They are used to measure how well a method or technique works. Reliability is about the consistency of a measure, and validity is about the accuracy of a measure (Saunders et al., 2015). Researchers can achieve reliability and validity in several ways during each phase of the research project. During the data collection process, reliability can be achieved by setting up and following a case-study interview protocol and organizing data in a database (Yin, 2018). For my research study, I ensured reliability by creating an interview protocol and database for data collected to ensure that all data was collected and stored utilizing the same coding and collection process.

Member checking is a process in which study participants are invited to check, comment on, or approve the researchers' data or interpretations (Iivari, 2018). It is used to ensure that the data is correct or meaningful from the viewpoint of the study participants. I used member checking in my study to minimize bias thereby improving the study's accuracy. Yin (2018) noted the importance of documenting each step in the research process and data collection to ensure reliability.

### **Validity**

Validity can be achieved in qualitative research by ensuring data saturation (Yin, 2018). Researchers using a case-study approach construct validity through data collection and composition via the utilization of multiple sources of evidence and establishing a chain of evidence (Yin, 2018). In this study, I collected multiple sources of data to ensure



construct validity. I also achieved credibility through data triangulation. Researchers incorporate internal validity in the data analysis phase through proper coding, pattern matching, and explanation building (Saunders et al., 2015). In this study, my aim was to ensure internal validity by creating a coding process in Excel to ensure data is accurately coded using a set protocol.

### **Credibility**

In qualitative studies, credibility indicates validity (Yin, 2018). Credibility is the degree to which research results are believable (Yin, 2018). Member checking constitutes a check of credibility. Rich descriptions of business contexts will be included in my final report. Rich description contributes to credibility (Yin, 2018). Also, participant confidentiality is of the utmost importance and should not be compromised. I achieved this by masking participant names and using unique identifiers. Process documentation is useful for discussing other points of view to show that I have taken them into account (Yin, 2018).

### **Transferability**

Transferability enables researchers to apply research results to other settings. I ensured that my research study showed transferability by clearly identifying the research study limitations, outlining interview protocol and adhering to it (Saunders et al., 2015). I also addressed issues of transferability by clearly detailing the sample, data collection, and coding process.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is a study free from researcher bias (Spiers et al., 2018). According to Vogt and Johnson, (2016), keeping a reflective journal provides the researcher an opportunity to audit the study and achieve. In this study, I maintained an audit trail and reflective journal and ensured the responses are those of participants and not my personal bias. I used bracketing throughout data collection and analysis, suspending assumptions and became aware of any preconceived notions to minimize bias (Mertens et al., 2017).

**Data Saturation**

According to Cope (2015), data saturation occurs when the researcher obtains sufficient information to answer the research questions and no new themes emerge from additional data collection or sampling. Saldana (2016) further identified data saturation as the point when no new information, properties, conditions, dimensions, consequences, or actions emerge during the coding process. Data saturation strengthens confirmability in a case study (Yazan, 2015). To achieve data saturation, I conduct face-to-face, semistructured interviews with follow-up questions as needed. When respondents began to give the same answers, saturation had occurred and the interviews ended (Bedwell et al., 2015). To ensure data saturation, I continued to conduct interviews until no new themes emerge. I achieved saturation with the business leader participants from 3 corporations located in the northeast region of the United States; thus, no further sampling was needed.

### **Transition and Summary**

In this research, I explored the social media marketing strategies to improve customer engagement. The section describes the detailed data collection, management, and analysis procedures and addressed the appropriateness of the research design for this study. Additionally, I discuss the population and sample, the recruitment and participant protection procedures. By contributing an understanding of social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to improve customer service, the results of the study, may help businesses practitioners and researchers develop strategies that business leaders can implement to increase market share and improve profit. In section 3, I present the findings of this research, describe their application to professional practice, discuss implications for social change, recommend actions and future research, and reflect on the study.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement. Data collection was from semistructured interviews with six business leaders working for three corporations located in the northeast region of the United States who experienced a high ROI of 20% or more in their social media marketing campaigns. The participants read, signed, and returned a signed consent form to take part in the research study. The consent form comprised information about the study, confidentiality, and the process for voluntarily withdrawing from the study.

Study participants included six business leaders of three corporations located in the northeast region of the United States who experienced a ROI of 20% or more in their social media marketing campaigns. The study participants responded to open-ended interview questions based on the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Data saturation was achieved after the fifth participant interview and ensured after the sixth. Member checking was employed to aid in ensuring proper interpretation of the participant's responses and in the data saturation process. With the use of thematic content analysis and auto coding in NVIVO, four themes emerged: (a) social media marketing strategies used, (b) platforms used for social media marketing, (c) measurement of success, and (d) key challenges and advantages of social media use. I present the findings in this section namely: social media marketing strategies used by business leaders, type of social media used, social media content and the advantages and challenges of social media use. I also

discuss its application to professional practice and implications for social change and how the results of this study are applicable to business practice. Finally, I offer suggestions for future research and provide a final reflection of this study and an overall conclusion.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The research question for this qualitative study was “What social media marketing strategies do business leaders use to increase customer engagement?” The data collection process included conducting interviews with six business leaders of three corporations located in the northeast region of the United States who experienced a high ROI of 20% or more in their social media marketing campaign. Participants were eligible to participate if they (a) were social media marketing managers, (b) were located in the northeast region of the United States, and (c) had an ROI of 20% or more in their social media marketing campaign. I conducted all interviews between September 01, 2020 and November 15, 2020.

Table 2 provides information about participant’s ROI eligibility. As part of member checking and to determine social media marketing ROI, participants were asked about their profit from social media marketing and their total investment. Fu et al., (2018) defined marketing ROI as the practice of attributing profit and revenue growth to the impact of marketing initiatives. The researchers provided a simple formula to calculate marketing ROI enabling organizations to measure the degree to which marketing efforts either holistically, or on a campaign-basis, contribute to revenue growth. Table 2 provides an overview of participants and their social media marketing ROI percentages. The table uses the alphanumeric codes of P1 to P6 to ensure confidentiality.

Table 2

*Summary of Participant Revenue, Investment and ROI*

Requirement	ROI details in USD per annum					
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Total Revenue from social media marketing campaigns	100,000	40,000	200,000	90,000	60,000	65,000
Total campaign Investment	1,800	1,200	10,200	5,400	1,500	1,900
ROI Percentage (%) (Total Revenue – Investment) / Total Investment * 100	5,455%	3,233%	1,860%	1566%	3,900%	3,321%

Note: Total Revenue and Campaign Investment displayed in US dollars. ROI is a percentage.

I followed the interview protocol outlined in Appendix A. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 virus pandemic, interviews were conducted using LinkedIn messenger and email. After I received the responses, I conducted member checking by drafting a one- to two-page summary of each interview, along with additional clarifications on questions answered and emailed those to the participant. I followed up with a phone call to ensure that I captured all the interview answers accurately. All six participants replied to my email confirming that I had interpreted the information from the interviews accurately. I continued the member checking process until there was no new information received from the participants.

Once the member checking process was completed and all data was checked for accuracy, I uploaded the data into NVivo, a qualitative analysis tool. I subsequently analyzed the data using Yin's (2018) guidelines. These guidelines included (a) a review

of the collected data, (b) data organization, (c) data coding, and (d) themes development to draw inferences and conclusions. The analysis of all data sources advanced four main themes: (a) social media marketing strategies used, (b) platforms used for social media marketing, (c) measuring social media marketing success, and (d) key challenges and advantages of social media use. These themes align with the different marketing actions defined in the N-Rel conceptual framework which focuses on how the four marketing actions networking, representation, engagement, and listening-in increase customer engagement (see Anandaa et al., 2016).

In the following sections, the four themes and 12 subthemes are explained in more details and linked to previous literature as well as the N-Rel framework - the conceptual framework of this study. Participant quotes are used to support claims, and frequency tables are used to represent the importance of key findings.

### **Theme 1: Social Media Marketing Strategies Used**

The first theme related to the social media marketing strategies used by participants to increase customer engagement is linked to questions 1, 2, 4 and 7. Before discussing the various social media marketing strategies that business leaders use, I will introduce the factors that may lead to an increase in customer engagement. It is essential that business leaders are fully aware of the needs of their audiences. In this regard, participants highlighted having knowledge of the right social media marketing strategies to use to increase customer engagement. Similarly, previous studies have shown the importance of marketing actions on customer engagement. Social media marketing strategies comprise of the four-layered abilities to connect, engage, co-ordinate and

collaborate with customers. It rests on marketing activities to create actions and interactions with customers and businesses (Drummond et al., 2020). These marketing activities may range from a simple connection to a customer or the cocreation of a new service or product using customer feedback and interactions on social media.

Statements made about factors that contributed to increasing customer engagement regarding social media marketing resulted in the development of 12 subthemes: (a) providing personalized customer experience, (b) efficient content marketing, (c) community group creations, (d) measuring campaign success, (e) use of brand advocates, (f) creation of profiles on relevant channels, (g) paid advertising, (h) setting social media marketing budgets, (i) content creation, (j) live streaming, (k) defining target customers. and (l) face to face marketing. I have provided further description and explanation for each theme in several succeeding paragraphs.

The social media marketing strategies used, varied by case with content creation and campaign success measurement being the most popular strategies used. For example, Participant 1 relied mostly on creating engaging content and noted “I find engaging topics to post on my social media platforms that are either trending or relevant to a subject”. Participant 5 also emphasized the importance of measuring ROI noting that “Consistent content delivery with clear, concise direction over the course of a year will bring you to a point where you can begin to achieve an ROI”. Participant 2 also stated:

The key is to keep the social media engagement friendly and relatable. Very few people want everything to be all business all the time. It is important to sound like



a real human and relate to the audience on a personal level. It should be fun and even entertaining at times!

Add summary and synthesis to fully integrate the quote into the paragraph. Avoid ending paragraphs in a direct quote.

Table C1 provides a list of 12 subthemes associated with social media marketing strategies from all interviews. I explored these subthemes further in the following subsections, and support this with direct participant quotes. Additionally, a thorough explanation is provided regarding how these subthemes are linked to existing literature and the conceptual framework of this study.

### ***Theme 1, Subtheme 1: Personalized Customer Experiences***

In the first subtheme business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of providing personalized customer experiences to increase customer engagement. This is supported by research by Chang et al. (2019), who suggested that consumers respond more to personalized advertising. Companies can use warm and competent images combined with appropriate narrative person to present their brands. In this regard, two participants in my study, mentioned peer connections and personal relationships frequently. For example, Participant 3 emphasized this by noting,

The key is to keep the social media engagement friendly and relatable. Very few people want everything to be all business all the time. It is important to sound like a real human and relate to the audience on a personal level. It should be fun and even entertaining at times!

Participant 1 uses Twitter to connect with peers and promote projects relevant to customers.

All these statements and actions indicated that personalizing customer experiences could increase customer engagement and gain more customers. In alignment with this finding, Chang et al. (2019) similarly highlighted that customer engagement through narrative person and customer-brand interactions could increase customer likes. This links directly to the engagement action of the N-REL framework the conceptual framework for this study.

***Theme 1, Subtheme 2: Efficient Content Marketing***

In the second subtheme, business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of using efficient content marketing to increase customer engagement. Efficient content marketing is about creating relevant content, meaningful conversations, and the development of long-term relationships. In this regard, four participants (9.76%) in my study, mentioned powerful content promotion, call to action, sharing success stories, valuable content promotion, consistent content delivery and content awareness. For example, Participant 4 emphasized this by noting “We post health information that targets our patient population. Remind patients when it’s time for annual physicals vaccinations and promotional events at the clinic. Patients are able to reach us via social media and we respond immediately”. Participant 3 also noted, “ Overall, social media is about giving your audience something to talk about”. Participant 6 emphasized this stating,

I use social media to create a much-needed awareness for my content. I would send out fliers on my social media platforms to inform of impending interviews to be featured on my YouTube channel and any of my streaming platforms.

Add summary and synthesis to fully conclude the paragraph.

All the statements mentioned above indicated that efficient content promotion could increase customer engagement and strengthen customer branding. This study aligns with findings by Ahmad et al. (2016) who highlighted the importance of social media content marketing towards brand health. They emphasized that the main point in sharing the information through the social media is about the content itself to attract more consumers to engage with their brands. Social media content marketing (SMCM) also plays an important role in conveying effective information to the consumers thus attracting them to keep engaging with the brands (Ahmad et al., 2016). This links directly to the engagement action of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study.

### ***Theme 1, Subtheme 3: Community Creation***

In the third subtheme, business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of community creation to increase customer engagement. Social media brand communities are electronic communities initiated on the platform of social media. Matthews (2016) emphasised this by indicating that social media communities can bring about community engagement and the development of social capital within deprived neighbourhoods. In this regard, three participants (3.9%) in my study, mentioned groups, cohorts, special audiences. For example, Participant 1 emphasized this by noting “I use Facebook groups

to create cohorts of professionals to engage in group learning (low cost or free) so that I can qualify them for higher ticket classes.”. Participant 2 also noted, “ We use Facebook’s Ad Manager, to create a reach campaign to reach a special audience - parents that live within 3 to 4 miles radius of our Center”. Add summary and synthesis.

All the statements mentioned above indicated that community creation could increase customer engagement and develop communities. Mathews (2016) highlighted the importance of social media brand communities towards the creation of new networks, skill building, and engaging with a wider range of people. They emphasized that the main point in building communities through the social media is giving local people a stronger voice to make the neighbourhood better (Mathews, 2016). This links directly to the networking and representing actions of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study.

#### ***Theme 1, Subtheme 4: Measure***

In the fourth subtheme, business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of measuring social media marketing success to increase customer engagement. To determine if a social media marketing campaign is successful it is essential to measure the key performance indicators. This enables business leaders to adjust social media strategies for optimum customer engagement. Jan-Frederik (2019) emphasised this by their findings indicating that professionals generally rely on a social media influencer’s reach and number of interactions as success metrics. In this regard, four participants in my study mentioned measures, social media audits, sales, revenue goals, call tracking, calls received, number of customer reviews, lead conversion, convert leads to sales,

customer reach, feedback, RO), pixels and insight codes, growth or increase of channels, and number of subscriptions. For example, Participant 1 emphasized this by noting “I measure social media campaign success through sales to private fireside chats, social media audits, discovery calls, strategy sessions and speaking engagements”. Participant 2 also noted,

” When a customer on Facebook encounters our ad and calls the daycare, the call is tracked. The success of the Ad is measured by the number of calls received”.

Add summary and synthesis.

All the statements mentioned above indicated that measuring campaign success could increase customer engagement and improve marketing efficiencies, which aligns with Jan-Frederik’s (2019) findings. Jan-Frederik emphasized that firms need some way to evaluate the content quality and to measure the advertising effectiveness of the sponsored content in the context in which they appear. This links directly to the listening-in action of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study.

***Theme 1, Subtheme 5: Use of Brand Advocates***

In the fifth subtheme, business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of using brand advocates to increase customer engagement. Brand advocates have acquired large audiences of thousands or even millions of followers on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram, and can communicate to and influence many people with their messages. Jan-Frederik, (2019) emphasised this by their findings indicating that these large audiences also attract the attention of brand marketers, which enter into paid collaborations with brand influencers for advertising or product placement

purposes, in a tactic called influencer marketing. In this regard, one participant (3.41%) in my study, mentioned influencers, customer mentions and customer reviews. For example, Participant 1 emphasized this by noting “We sometimes get the help of media professionals/bloggers/influencers looking to pivot and build businesses where they are paid for content not time”. Add summary/synthesis.

The statements mentioned above indicated that use of brand advocates could increase customer engagement and improve brand awareness. Jan-Frederik, (2019) highlighted this by emphasizing that brand influencers are more likely to adopt a professional communication approach that enables them to design appealing, appropriate posts that evoke positive responses by the audience. This links directly to the relationship and engagement action of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study. The responses of my study’s participants aligned with Jan-Frederik.

***Theme 1, Subtheme 6: Creation of Profiles on the Relevant Channels***

In the sixth subtheme business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of creating profiles on relevant social media channels. Creating profiles on the right social media channels is dependent on the product. For consumer products, Facebook and Instagram may be the better social media platforms for reaching consumers. Enterprise products require reaching businesses and professionals so LinkedIn might be the better social media platform for advertising. Voorveld et al. (2018) emphasised this by their findings indicating that on social media the context (i.e., the platform), not the content, of advertising is a key determinant of its effectiveness. In this regard, three participants in

my study, mentioned cross-channel campaigns, avatars, profiles, and social platforms.

For example, Participant 1 emphasized this by noting,

Our social media use really depends on the platform. We use primarily Twitter to connect with peers and promote high level projects. We use the small feature to share resources with peers. On Instagram, we rely heavily on stories to talk about our day to day which normally revolves around our work. We also use the sticker features to ask questions, do question and answer sessions and to get signups for coaching classes, special events and to alert brands we are talking about them. We use Facebook groups to create cohorts of professionals to engage in group learning (low cost or free) so that we can qualify them for higher ticket classes.

### **Summary and Synthesis**

The statement mentioned above indicated that the use of various social media platforms could increase customer engagement and improve marketing efficiencies. In alignment with this finding, Voorveld et al. (2018) highlighted this by emphasizing that engagement with a social media platform spills over into how people engage with advertising within the platform. They demonstrated that digital engagement is highly platform specific, and engagement comprises of various types of experiences for every social media platform. This links directly to the engagement and listening-in action of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study.

***Theme 1, Subtheme 7: Paid Advertising.*** In the seventh subtheme business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of paid advertising on relevant social media channels. Paid advertising is used to reach those audiences with digital content and

marketing communications. Appel et al. (2020) emphasised this by their findings indicating that social media has become highly culturally relevant, a dominant form of communication and expression, a major media type used by companies for advertising and other forms of communication, and even has geopolitical ramifications. In this regard, two participants (4.39%) in my study, mentioned incentives, paid content, ads, advertising, search engine optimization (SEO), daily outreach, paid lead gen campaigns. For example, Participant 3 emphasized this by noting “We have become very creative with our paid advertising by trying out different campaign variations. When something is not working, it is important to reevaluate why the audience is not engaging, and make adjustments based off of that.”.

The statement mentioned above indicated that the use of paid advertising could increase customer engagement and improve marketing actions. In alignment with this finding, Appel et al. (2020) highlighted this by emphasizing that online promotions and advertisements increase consumer responses and engagement. This links directly to the engagement and listening-in action of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study.

***Theme 1, Subtheme 8: Social Media Marketing Budget.*** In the eight subtheme business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of setting the right social media marketing budget. A company’s social media marketing budget depends on its goals, cash flow, target audience, and product or service. According to the 2018 CMO Survey, the longest-running noncommercial survey among top marketers in the field of marketing, social media spending now accounts for 13.8% of brands’ total marketing



budgets (Voorveld et al., 2018). In this regard, one participant (0.98%) in my study, mentioned numbers, budget and significant budget. For example, Participant 5 emphasized this by noting “It is difficult to find the perfect combination of copy length, creative type, video length, image dimensions, color scheme, design, etc. that works the best for the intended audience. Oftentimes, it takes weeks of testing and trial and error to conclude. You must have a significant budget in place”.

### **Summary and Synthesis**

The statement mentioned above indicated that setting the right social media marketing budget could increase customer engagement and improve marketing actions. This study, aligns with the findings of Voorveld et al., (2018) that highlighted this by emphasizing that setting an appropriate market budget should be one piece of a larger marketing pie. This links directly to the listening-in action of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study.

***Theme 1, Subtheme 9: Content Creation.*** In the ninth subtheme business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of content creation. Content creation on social media is the contribution of information to digital media for an end-user or audiences in specific platforms. This is highlighted by a popular saying by Microsoft founder, Bill Gates that states “Content is King”. This phrase emphasises the future of the Internet as a marketplace for content. A 2015 study by Huotari et al. found that Business to Business (B2B) companies can influence content creation in social media directly by adding new content, participating in discussions and removing content through corporate user accounts and controlling employee social media behavior or indirectly by training

employees to create desired content and performing marketing activities that influence other users to create content that is favorable for the company. In this regard, all six participants (28.29%) in my study, mentioned talk about, question and answer sessions, stories, story sharing, keep customers informed, friendly and relatable content, fun and entertaining content, lighthearted content, shared content, commented on content, viral social content, business announcements, voice development, event promotion, success stories, free content, promotions, promo offers, send out flyers, trending content, and relevant content. For example, Participant 3 emphasized this by noting “We want our audience to relate our marketing agency with viral social content. Sometimes though, we must post strictly business announcements. We try to keep them as fun and lighthearted as possible, but the difference in engagement shows. There’s definitely a balance to aim for”.

### **Summary and Synthesis**

The statement mentioned above indicated that creating the right content on social media could increase customer engagement and improve branding. The study aligns with the findings of Huotari et al., (2015) who highlighted this by emphasizing that marketing communications and branding have emerged as important areas of management in B2B marketing. This links directly to the networking, representation, engagement and listening-in actions of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study.

***Theme 1, Subtheme 10: Live Streaming.*** In the tenth subtheme business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of live streaming. Chen, and Lin, (2018), defined live streaming as the real-time audio and video transmission of an event over the Internet.

In this regard, one participant (2.42%) in my study, mentioned Facebook live. For example, Participant 1 emphasized this by noting “I teach Facebook live classes on a variety of topics along the line of entrepreneurship, financial literacy, marketing strategies and overall business acumen. I repurpose those talks as podcasts or segments within the learning modules in my private group”.

### **Summary and Synthesis**

The statement mentioned above indicated that live streaming could increase customer engagement and improve branding. This aligns the finding of Chen, & Lin, (2018), who highlighted this by emphasizing that live streaming has a favorable impression on consumers because they made people happy relieved stress. The researchers also found that people were attracted by the charm of the streamers with young people tending to like live streaming because it gave them a sense of flow. This links directly to the engagement action of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study.

***Theme 1, Subtheme 11: Target Customer Definition.*** In the eleventh subtheme, business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of defining target customers. Target customer definition involves defining the common set of consumer characteristics that will be interested in buying a company’s product. Voorveld et al. (2018) emphasized this by stating that data can be used to make brand content more relevant for targeted or specific groups. This phenomenon is known as personalized advertising, defined as advertising that is tailored to an individual’s characteristics and/or interests or tastes. In this regard, all six participants (15.46%) in my study, mentioned specific audiences,

customer base, re-target audience, multiple audiences, target audience. For example, Participant 3 emphasized this by noting “When something is not working, it's important to re-evaluate why the audience isn't engaging, and make adjustments based off of that. Sometimes, it's the targeting of the demographic, and other times it may just be that the photo we're advertising isn't genuinely engaging. In each different case scenario though, it's important to be flexible and ready to adapt”.

### **Summary and Synthesis**

The statement mentioned above indicated that defining the target audience could increase customer engagement. This aligns with the findings of Voorveld et al. (2018), who highlighted this by emphasizing that knowing the characteristics of the social media platforms would be most suitable or effective regarding different brands, communication objectives, and target groups. This links directly to the listening-in action of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study.

***Theme 1, Subtheme 12: Word of Mouth Marketing.*** In the twelfth subtheme, business leaders in my study highlighted the importance of word-of-mouth marketing. Word-of-mouth marketing, one of the oldest forms of marketing, is widely regarded as one of the most influential factors affecting consumer behavior. This is due to the high reliability and credibility transmitted by family and friends (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). In this regard, three participants (1.45%) in my study, mentioned word of mouth marketing. For example, Participant 2 emphasized this by noting “We encourage our Parents to mention us on Social Media”. Participant 5 also emphasised the use of word-of-mouth marketing with the statement, "We encourage our customers to share their success stories. The goal

is, that over time, the page followers/visitors become familiar with my brand and develop a trust, so that when the time comes for them to need one of my services, it is an easy decision to make a purchase". Participant 4 laid emphasis on the fact that social media and word of mouth has been a major factor in their business development, noting, "Our business has primarily grown through social media all on its own as well as word-of-mouth. If you think about it, social media and word-of-mouth are so related anymore. People are seeing content online and talking about it in-person the next day. And vice versa, people are talking with their friends in-person, and then sharing their thoughts or feelings online".

### **Summary and Synthesis**

The statements mentioned above indicated that word of moth marketing was important to creating positive customer reviews and trust building as it related to customer engagement and customer base expansion. This aligns with the findings of Huete-Alcocer, (2017) who's study highlighted this by emphasizing that Electronic word of mouth also provides companies with an advantage over traditional word of mouth insofar as it allows them both to try to understand what factors motivate consumers to post their opinions online and to gauge the impact of those comments on other people. This links directly to the listening-in actions of the N-REL framework, the conceptual framework for this study. In the next two sections I will be discussing how the social media marketing theme links to existing literature and the link to the N-Rel conceptual framework.

***Links to literature.*** All participants identified personalized customer experience empowerment, content creation, building communities, measuring campaign success, defining target customers, efficient content marketing, paid advertising, use of brand advocates, livestreaming and setting a social media marketing budget as important contributors to customer engagement. Ashley and Tuten (2015) found in their study that while social media participants seek entertainment and informativeness, entertainment is a stronger motivator for engagement. Developing content that is informative and entertaining provides the most bang for a company's money, given the high success rate of customer engagement. It is therefore essential that organizations ensure the continuous delivery of valuable news and information to customers. Building online communities also has a positive effect on customer engagement. This was highlighted in Loureiro and Kaufmann's, 2018 study which concluded that affection (passion/aversion) is the primary motivational factor that leads community members to be active reviewers and commentators of brands. Hsieh and Wei (2017) conducted similar studies. In their 2017 study, Hsieh and Wei found that companies are increasingly using online brand-communities (OBCs) to co-create value for themselves and their consumers. Creating a social media strategy includes setting marketing goals, choosing the right networks to use, and measuring desired results. Having a well-thought-out strategy might have a positive impact on business by improving customer engagement and increase profitability (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016).

***Links to conceptual framework.*** The conceptual framework for this study supported the information provided by participants. The N-Rel framework focuses on

how the 4 marketing actions networking, representation, engagement, and listening-in increase customer engagement (Anandaa et al., 2016). Applying the N-Rel framework to customer engagement supports the notion that social media marketing actions increases customer engagement. Applying all 4 elements of networking, representation, engagement, and listening-in supports the understanding of customer satisfaction and therefore customer engagement within organizations (Anandaa et al., 2016). Networking and mingling, marketing actions aim at keeping a measured voice and listening to customers. Representation is a tactic related with the representation of the marketing agencies on social media channels. It resembles a more traditional approach of “push” strategies. Engagement, a marketing action that aims at the interaction between the audiences and the organization, reflecting “pull” strategies. Listening-in, implies the use of social media applications as a source of customer voice and market information. All twelve social media marketing strategy sub-themes identified in my study had a link to each of these marketing actions.

Table C2 in Appendix C displays the social media marketing subthemes and their link to the N-Rel conceptual framework marketing actions.

## **Theme 2: Platforms Used for Social Media Marketing**

The business leaders in my research study used various platforms for their social media marketing. The types of social media platforms used included Facebook, Twitter, Google, WhatsApp, YouTube, a company website, and Instagram. However, the extent to which each social media platform was used varied by case. Each social media platform satisfied a particular purpose. For example, participant 1 noted, “I primarily use Twitter

to connect with peers and promote high level projects. I use the small feature to share resources with peers. On Instagram, I rely heavily on stories to talk about my day to day which normally revolves around my work. I use the sticker features to ask questions, do question and answer sessions and to get signups for coaching classes, special events and to alert brands I am talking about them. I use Facebook groups to create cohorts of professionals to engage in group learning (low cost or free) so that I can qualify them for higher ticket classes. I also teach Facebook live classes on a variety of topics along the line of entrepreneurship, financial literacy, marketing strategies and overall business acumen. I repurpose those talks as podcasts or segments within the learning modules in my private group”. Table 3 illustrates results that revealed that five out of the six participants used Facebook to do their social media marketing.

Table 3

*References to Social Media Platforms Used*

Participant	Google Ads	Facebook	Website	Twitter	Instagram	YouTube	WhatsApp
Participant 1		X		X	X		
Participant 2		X					
Participant 3		X			X		
Participant 4	X	X	X	X			
Participant 5		X					
Participant 6					X	X	X

\*X indicates use

Participant 2 also emphasised their use of the Facebook Ad manager to define target audiences as noted in the comment, “We use Facebook Ad Manager, to create a



Reach Campaign to reach a special audience - Parents that live within 3 to 4 miles radius of our Center”. The least used platforms for social media marketing were Google Ads and Company Websites. As noted by participant 4, “We use Google Ad word campaign, Facebook, Twitter postings and Search Engine Optimization (SEO). We post health information that targets our patient population. Remind patients when its time for annual physicals vaccinations and promotional events at the clinic. Patients can reach us via social media, and we respond immediately”. Social media allows people to freely interact with others and offers multiple ways for marketers to reach and engage with consumers (Appel et al., 2020). Choosing the right social media platform might have have a positive impact on business by improving customer engagement and increase profitability (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016).

*Links to literature.* All participants identified Facebook, Twitter, Google ads, YouTube, Website, and Instagram as important platforms for their social media marketing needs. Gordon et al. (2019) found that the value of advertising on social media and its interactions with other forms of media such a television, affects new product adoption through diffusion of information mechanisms (Appel, et.al., 2020). Buchanan’s (2015) research study found that the product and marketing platform are directly linked to the success rate of marketing campaigns. Given these research findings, it is safe to say that marketing strategy varies on a case-by-case basis. Using a variety of social media marketing platforms will generate the best effect on marketing campaigns. Given the high rate of business failure, social media marketing may serve as a valuable tool for business leaders to increase customer engagement thereby improving profitability.

*Links to conceptual framework.* Slater and Olson (2001) defined a marketing strategy as a set of integrated decisions and actions by which a company expects to achieve its marketing objectives and meet the value requirements of its customers. As indicated by Slater and Olson (2001), marketing actions can be used as a tool by business leaders to improve customer loyalty and satisfaction. Mergel (2016) also noted that marketing action classification could explain social media adoption tactics by institutions and organizations. The N-REL framework may be used to explore the social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement. An organization leader who adopts the N-REL framework can use the feedback from intelligence actions through social media to make the necessary adjustments to strategic decisions (Anandaa et al., 2016). Strategic decisions are required because the market segmentation, positioning, and marketing techniques must drive the various social media marketing actions to fulfill the marketing goals of a company (Anandaa et al., 2016).

### **Theme 3: Measuring Social Media Marketing Success**

The theme of measuring social media marketing success links to the body of literature and the conceptual framework. In order to determine social media marketing success, business leaders must set clear objective and achievable goals. Brooks and Simkin (2016) developed a framework that provided a deeper understanding of the available measures. They separated the measures into four categories: financial measures (e.g., ROI), quantitative measures (e.g., market share), qualitative measures (e.g., brand awareness), and hybrid measures (e.g., brand equity). All six participants in my study acknowledged the need for measuring social media strategy success. They all measured

success in various ways. Participant 2 and 3 used a quantitative measure by keeping track of the number of leads converted and calls received based on social media advertising. As noted by participant 3, “We measure success by keeping track of the leads to sales conversion and the total reach of our ad campaigns.”. Participant 2 also noted “We create a Reach Campaign to reach a special audience. The Reach Campaign is setup to call the daycare. When a customer on Facebook encounters our ad and calls the daycare, the call is tracked. The success of the Ad is measured by the number of calls received”.

Other participants used qualitative measures to improve brand awareness. For example, Participant 6 noted that “We are content creators and measure success by brand awareness and the growth of subscribers of our social media channels”. Participant 3 also noted that “Overall, social media is about giving your audience something to talk about. So, if they continue to talk about it and remember your message or call to action, I will say it is a success”.

Participant 5 used financial measures, ROI to measure success. The participant noted, “Typically, ROI is the best measure. However, in the early stages, one should not expect an immediate return. Building a social media presence with a solid following takes time. Consistent content delivery with clear, concise direction over the course of a year will bring you to a point where you can begin to achieve an ROI”.

Given these research findings, it is safe to say that measuring marketing strategy success varies on a case-by-case basis. As demonstrated by my participants, the success of a social media campaign involves setting overall goals such as brand awareness and product adoption, community growth and engagement, reputation building and lead

generation and revenue growth. It is essential to measure the success of the marketing campaign to ensure that all goals are met. The next section describes the measuring of success link to literature and the conceptual framework of this study.

***Links to literature.*** All participants acknowledged that measuring the success of a social media's marketing campaign is essential. Brand equity is one of the longer-term intangible effects of social media marketing and is challenging to measure. During the infancy of social media marketing, companies viewed marketing strategy success just as the number of users socially connected to the brand (Schivinski et al., 2016). With early audits suggesting that only about 1% of an average firm's Facebook fans show any engagement with the brand by liking, sharing, or commenting, attention shifted from acquisition of followers to the design of content that achieves better reach and engagement amongst social media followers (Knoblich et al., 2017). Merely getting a count of the number of followers and user likes is not enough to determine if a social media campaign was effective. Companies must do more in-depth analysis and analyze user-generated content to determine if a marketing strategy is working or not. Gauging the success of a social media marketing campaign is not an easy task and requires companies to understand how digital marketing is classified.

***Links to conceptual framework.*** Anandaa et al.'s (2016) N-Rel framework provides business leaders with the tools to measure the success of a social media campaign. The listening-in activities enable a passive way of social media engagement that aims at market research and intelligence, such as analytics of social media contents and conversation. Activities in the framework can also be used to for marketing actions

such as voice sharing, sentiment, gaps, trends, opportunities, etc. – as well as the identification of relevant actors and influencers (Anandaa et al., 2016). These activities are important communications mechanisms between companies and consumers. The theme of measuring social media marketing success is closely linked to the listening-in marketing action of the N-Rel conceptual framework.

#### **Theme 4: Key Challenges and Advantages Of Social Media Use**

Social media allows consumers to express an opinion, which in turn has led people to trust peers more than organizations (Nakano & Kondo, 2018). This change has created several challenges for marketers with businesses now acknowledging the need to listen to their customers more, engage them in conversation, be transparent, and communicate with them openly (Alalwan et al., 2017). The major challenges faced by participants in my study included creating engaging content and identifying target audiences. There is a need for businesses leaders to focus on creating content for a smaller audience that provides more depth, making it higher quality content that customers can engage with. For example, participant 5 noted, "I constantly face the challenge of how to get users to stop on my posts and consider what I have to say, instead of just scrolling through. It is difficult to find the perfect combination of copy length, creative type, video length, image dimensions, color scheme, design, etc. that works the best for the intended audience. Oftentimes, it takes weeks of testing and trial and error to conclude. You must have a significant budget in place". Table C3 in Appendix C lists the various social media challenges faced by my study participants.

My study participants used several techniques to overcome the challenges listed in Table C3. For example, to overcome the challenges of negative reviews, participant 2 recommended encouraging customers to leave positive reviews by stating, “Whenever we get a negative review, we ask for positive reviews from other Parents.”. To overcome the challenge of reaching the right audience, participant 3 recommends being more creative stating, “To overcome the challenges of reaching the right audience, you just have to get creative with your advertising and try different campaign variations. When something is not working, it is important to re-evaluate why the audience is not engaging, and plan based off that. Sometimes, it is the targeting of the demographic, and other times it may just be that the photo we are advertising is not genuinely engaging. In each different case scenario though, it is important to be flexible and ready to adapt”.

The ready access to and availability of social media has uncovered a wealth of data that marketers are leveraging for strategic insight and digital marketing (Jacobson et al., 2020). Social media marketing has various advantages that include business growth, increased revenue, added customer value, social impact, increased customer engagement, new customer acquisition and brand awareness. Table 4 lists the advantages to the use of social media by my study participants.

Table 4  
*References to Advantages of Social Media marketing*

Participant	Business Growth	Increased Revenue	Added Customer Value	Social Impact	Increased Customer Engagement	Brand Awareness	New Customer acquisition
Participant 1		X	X	X			
Participant 2	X						
Participant 3					X	X	X
Participant 4					X	X	

Participant 5		X	
Participant 6	X	X	X

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\*X indicates advantage.

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Brand awareness is important because it enables customers recall or recognize a brand. The research by Hirsch (2017) and Mohammad (2018) provided measures for understanding the effect of social media marketing on customer engagement and brand awareness. My study participants listed brand awareness and increased customer engagement as one of the most important benefits of social media marketing. This is emphasized by participant 3 by noting, “Tell a story, and develop a voice. The voice of your brand should match up with the values that your business practices and the mission it aims for. Social media engagement is the best way to tell that story with how connected you can be to your audience. Take time to consider how you want to portray your brand online. The best brands and most successful companies out there all follow their own formula when it comes to voicing their announcements and happenings across social networks. Even small businesses should do the same thing! Start developing your voice on social early. You’ll be thankful you did”. The importance of increased customer engagement is also emphasized by participant 5 who stated, “Infuse your entire brand with a unified strategy, voice and look to maximize your return on investment. Create smart, innovative communication channels on all social platforms. Whether it is for daily

outreach or paid lead gen campaigns, try to generate engaging content and ensure that pages are optimized to reach the best audience”.

As demonstrated by my study participants, social media marketing has its challenges and advantages. The next section links the challenges and advantages of social media marketing theme to the existing literature and the N-Rel conceptual framework.

*Links to literature.* All participants acknowledged that there are benefits and challenges to social media marketing. The main benefits of social media marketing for participants in my study were business growth, increased revenue, added customer value, positive social impact, increased customer engagement, brand awareness and new customer acquisition. The key challenges identified in my study were handling negative reviews, creating engaging content, identifying target audiences, difficulty getting customer contact data, and setting an appropriate budget as challenges faced in their social media marketing campaigns. Blerta and Burim (2016), identified the main benefits of social media marketing as increased brand exposure, and reputation management increased targeted traffic and search engine optimization, word-of-mouth and leads generation, market insights, related to the target audience and competition. Blerta and Burim’s research findings indicate that social media is relatively cost-effective depending on which type of social media channel is used as SME can begin with free options like opening a Facebook page or creating a page on Twitter or other sites. Their research was significant and provides a better understanding of the social media marketing strategies that may increase customer engage and improve a company’s bottom line.



Interpersonal relationships are a vital factor to understand social media marketing strategies that directly affect customer engagement. Blerta and Burim (2016) followed research carried out by other researchers who have identified the role of play in supporting cognition and interpersonal relationships. Blerta and Burim research study is significant because it can be used by SMEs to find out what types of social network marketing endeavors enhance a firms' performance. It also aids companies in designing their social media activities for different social media followers' clusters to increase the effectiveness of reaching marketing. Researching the impact of social network marketing efforts on the financial (i.e., ROI) and market (i.e., sales revenue) performances might be beneficial for SMEs to decide how much they should invest and spend their time and management efforts.

*Links to conceptual framework.* The conceptual framework for this study supported the information provided by participants. The N-Rel framework focuses on how the 4 marketing actions networking, representation, engagement, and listening-in increase customer engagement (Anandaa et al., 2016). Elaydi's (2018) research showed that social media marketing firms use about six dimensions as an instrument for their marketing activities: Online Communities, Interaction, Sharing of Content, Accessibility, and credibility. Elaydi provided evidence of the relationship between social media marketing activities on Facebook and brand awareness of mobile service providers in Egypt. Elaydi demonstrated that companies should engage with customers by encouraging individuals to like brand posts, which drive content sharing and interaction. The challenges and advantages of social media marketing theme links directly to the listening action of the N-

Rel framework. In the next section, I explore the application of my study to professional practice.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The increased social media marketing adoption by organizational leaders has posed challenges due to a constantly changing marketing landscape (Ogbuji & Papazafeiropoulou, 2016). As a cost-effective marketing tool, social media may be used successfully to define a company's goals and objectives (Ogbuji & Papazafeiropoulou, 2016).

Business leaders can benefit from this study by increasing the effectiveness of their social media marketing strategies and providing a deeper understanding of the ways of measuring the success of their social media marketing strategies. The participants' responses in this study lead the following recommendations for social media business leaders:

- The participant responses in my research study may give business leaders a better understanding of which social media marketing strategies are most effective in increasing customer engagement. The study provided twelve subthemes of marketing strategies used to increase customer engagement
- The study provided a better understanding of the social media platforms used by business leaders for target audiences
- The study may provide business leaders with a better understanding of the ways to measure social media marketing success

- The study may also provide a better understanding of the challenges and advantages of the use of social media marketing strategies

The findings from this study may be of significance to businesses practice not only because they could provide an in-depth understanding the topic allowing for increased application, but also because business leaders may use the results to apply social media marketing strategies to help improve their businesses' success rates. Also, the findings from this study may contribute to effective business practice by indicating which social media marketing tools are most effective for businesses. Business leaders could use the results to set achievable goals for their social media marketing campaigns. Learning from the success of business leaders who have used social media marketing effectively to increase customer engagement, can provide meaningful insights that could improve business practice and be beneficial to the continued growth of local economies (Ezeife, 2017).

The findings of this study contribute to the academic body of knowledge of social media marketing strategies used by business leaders. There is a strong body of literature on social media marketing in general. In contrast this research study focused on the experiences of social media marketing by business leaders to increase customer engagement. By focusing on their experiences, it allowed for a different perspective to be added to the body of literature.

Implementing effective social media marketing strategies is essential for business leaders and could be significant to business practice as companies may review and adapt strategies identified in this study to develop long-term survival plans to increase their

viability. Business leaders in a different organization may use the findings of the study to set business goals and measurable objectives that may increase awareness and branding, promote brand content, increase exposure to generate traffic, leads, and sales, thereby reducing marketing costs and improving profitability. The themes presented in this section indicate various social media marketing strategies useful for increasing customer engagement.

### **Implications for Social Change**

According to research study by Ezeife (2017), implications for social change might include the creation of marketing strategies to improve customer engagement which may lead to an increase in company profitability and socioeconomic development. This study may contribute to positive social change by helping to improve the relationships between business leaders and communities. Knowing the right marketing strategies to use to increase customer engagement, enables business leaders to provide customer value and satisfaction which may lead to increased performance of sales, word of mouth, brand loyalty, market share and profitability. The findings of this study may provide companies the tools to develop and implement a systematic process for acquiring the information needed to keep managers informed of customers' needs and perceptions. Communities can support the sustainability of companies; accordingly, business leaders should ensure positive social change by providing opportunities for individuals in the community. The results of this study may contribute to social change through the creation of marketing strategies that increase customer engagement, which could result in job creation and improved economies in local communities.

Zahra and Wright (2015) found that corporations contribute to the larger society in terms of creating financial, environmental, and social wealth. Increased viability of organizations through effective social media marketing strategy incorporation, may lead to social change through employment generation, reduction in local poverty, improved local economy, and improved quality of life for citizens. Additionally, an increase in customer engagement may lead to increased tax revenues for local communities and may contribute to positive social change through improvements in social institutions and programs such as schools, libraries, public safety organizations, hospitals, and low-cost healthcare programs (Zahra & Wright, 2015). The results of this study may provide business leaders with the strategies to increase customer engagement which may lead to increased profits may increase a company's viability thus providing a positive social change in their communities.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Business leaders can apply various strategies to support increased customer engagement. Specific recommendations that may be of use for business leaders of corporations in the northeast region of the United States include the following: (a) create smart, innovative communication channels on all social platforms, (b) maintain open communication between business leaders and customers, (c) implement content creation strategies for achieving increased customer engagement, (d) infuse your company's entire brand with a unified strategy that will lead to brand awareness, (e) provide added value for your customer base and (f) ensure that your social media pages are optimized to

reach the best audience for your business. These recommendations provide opportunities to increase customer engagement and possibly improve profitability for the companies.

I will disseminate the findings of this study to business leaders and organizational managers who have an interest in improving customer engagement strategies. Means of dissemination include publishing and sharing the results of this study with various business leaders of corporations located in the northeast region of the United states who may benefit from the findings. I will distribute findings to specific groups, such as social media marketing groups or generalized organizations. I will also seek to present my findings at marketing conferences.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore social media marketing strategies used by business leaders to increase customer engagement. Four themes emerged from the use of thematic analysis: (a) social media marketing strategies used, (b) social media platforms used, (c) measuring social media marketing success, and (d) key challenges and advantages of social media marketing use. The study had 3 limitations. The first limitation is that one method of research (qualitative) was used. Additional research using a quantitative or mixed method of research could perhaps result in providing a broader understanding of the phenomenon. The second limitation is transferability will be limited due to sample size and location. Six social media marketing managers participated in the study, a small sample size that may have limited the findings and interpretations. The third limitation is although in the background I introduce the importance of understanding how social media might increase customer engagement and

profitability, my study only seeks answers to the use of social media to increase customer engagement. The study should be expanded to understanding how social media marketing strategies can increase profitability.

Four specific recommendations merit discussion as potentially useful for future research. First, in this study, there was no comparison and analysis of the profitability of companies and the impact of customer engagement. This gap may be an opportunity for future researchers to explore reduced customer engagement and impacts on company profitability. Second, further studies should involve a broader selection of participants from varying organizations and geographical locations. There may be an opportunity to explore whether increased customer engagement is needed outside the United States. Third, later scholars may use a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between low customer engagement compared to the loss of profit. Statistical findings may enable further understanding of the variables with the greatest impact on company profit and viability.

### **Reflections**

The Doctor of Business Administration program was an important milestone in my life and made me learn more about social media marketing, academic writing, data collection and data analysis. I now have a greater appreciation about the amount of time and hard work it takes to complete a doctoral research program. The literature review helped me to increase my critical thinking, reviewing and retention skills. The DBA program gave me the skills to identify a business problem and provide a solution. This will prepare me for the next stage in my life and enable me to view issues from many

different perspectives both as an individual and as a businessperson. I now have the right skills to be a problem solver instead of seeking problems. The program has also helped my time management and prioritization skills. This will enable me to balance my life as a father and entrepreneur. The weekly discussions in the discussion forum helped me to sharpen my writing and debating skills.

I had huge support from my friends and family throughout the doctoral study process. My doctoral study chair demonstrated support and respect, making me feel that I am not alone during in this journey. He was always available to answer all my questions and for that I am profoundly grateful. I am also very appreciative to my family who stood with me at every step of the process. The program has changed me as an individual. I now have more confidence in my writing and analytical abilities becoming more of a goal-oriented person. The most difficult and challenging aspect of the doctoral study was finding social media marketing managers to voluntarily participate in the research. It took almost 3 months to find willing participants. Ultimately, though, my research findings may be an asset to the business community, providing strategies to improve customer engagement.

### **Conclusion**

Social media provides business leaders the opportunity to reach millions of customers. Applying the N-Rel conceptual framework, the data gathered in this study was a result of semistructured, qualitative interviews of six business leaders of three corporations located in the northeast region of the United States. The data were gathered to understand social media marketing strategies that were used by business leaders to



increase customer engagement. The data resulted in emerging themes that allowed for recommendations for business leaders to best capitalize on social media efforts targeted to increase customer engagement. With the use of thematic analysis, four themes emerged to include (a) social media marketing strategies used, (b) social media platforms used, (c) measurement of social media marketing success, and (d) key challenges and advantages of social media marketing.

Furthermore, the study revealed twelve social media marketing strategies subthemes namely (a) providing personalized customer experience, (b) efficient content marketing, (c) community group creations, (d) measuring campaign success, (e) use of brand advocates, (f) creation of profiles on relevant channels, (g) paid advertising, (h) setting social media marketing budgets, (i) content creation, (j) live streaming, and (k) defining target customers. and (l) face to face marketing.

I thoroughly explored these themes and subthemes, and I discussed recommendations and implications. In conclusion, the findings of this study indicated the need for business leaders to implement social media marketing strategies such as powerful content creation and marketing, using brand advocates, providing personalized customer experiences, creating communities, measuring marketing success, cross channel campaigns, paid advertising, having a significant marketing budget, live streaming and defining a target customer.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

### **Guidelines**

1. Potential participants will first be contacted through LinkedIn (see LinkedIn email displayed in Appendix B).
2. Each Participant will be asked to review and acknowledge the Consent form displayed in Appendix C.
3. All interviews will be conducted via LinkedIn and email due to the current COVID-19 pandemic.
4. The interview questions will require about 45 to 60 minutes to complete.
5. I will conduct member checking by drafting a one-to-two-page summary email following each interview.
6. I will be respectful of my participant's time by giving them enough notice and time to respond to my questions.

### **Interview Questions**

1. Typically, how do you use social media as part of your marketing strategy to engage customers?  
  
I will ask follow-up questions.
2. How do you measure the success of social media marketing strategy implementation?  
  
I will ask follow-up questions.
3. How did your customers respond to your use of different social media marketing strategies?

I will ask follow-up questions.

4. What did you accomplish through your use of social media marketing strategies?

I will ask follow-up questions.

5. What were some key challenges you experienced when you used social media marketing strategies to engage your customers?

I will ask follow-up questions.

6. What did you do to overcome the key challenges experienced when you used social media marketing strategies to engage your customers?

I will ask follow-up questions.

7. What additional information would you like to share about your use of social media marketing strategies to increase customer engagement?

I will ask follow-up questions.



## Appendix B: Invitation E-mail

(Date)

Re: Research Study of Interest

Dear Sir/Madam:

My name is Joe Umunna, and I am a doctoral candidate seeking business leaders who have successfully used social media marketing to increase customer engagement. As part of my doctoral dissertation research at Walden University, I would like to extend an invitation for you to participate in a research study on the Social Media Marketing Strategies for Increasing Customer Engagement. I have invited you to participate in my doctoral study because of your professional experience and expertise. Please be assured that your participation is voluntary and confidential.

Enclosed is a consent form. Kindly review and feel free to ask any questions before acting on this invitation to participate. I will respond promptly to set up a date and time to conduct a phone interview. Alternatively, I can send you my interview questions via LinkedIn or email. The information gathered from the interview will be forwarded via email for your review and confirmation of completeness and accuracy. Feel free to contact me at any time with any questions. I appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedule to consider my request and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Joe Umunna

## Appendix C: Tables

Table C1

*Social Media Marketing Strategies Used to Increase Customer Engagement*

Subtheme/Key finding	Participant Code	Percentage (%; n=6)	Frequency
Personalized customer experience	P1,P3	2.42	5
Efficient content marketing	P1,P3,P5,P6	9.66	20
Community Creation	P1,P2,P5	3.86	8
Measure	P2,P3,P5,P6	17.87	37
Use of Brand advocates	P1	3.38	7
Creation of profiles on the relevant channels	P4,P5,P6	10.14	21
Paid Advertising	P3,P5	4.35	9
Social Media Marketing Budget	P5	0.97	2
Content creation	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6	28.02	58
Live streaming	P1	2.42	5
Target Customer definition	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6	15.46	32
Word of mouth marketing	P2, P4, P5	1.45	3

Table C2

*Social Media Marketing Strategies Subtheme Link to the N-Rel Conceptual Framework Marketing Actions*

Subtheme/Key finding	N-Rel conceptual framework marketing action
Personalized customer experience	engagement, listening-in
Efficient content marketing	representation and listening-in
Community Creation	networking engagement and listening-in
Measure	networking and listening-in
Use of Brand advocates	networking and representation
Creation of profiles on the relevant channels	networking, listening-in
Paid Advertising	representation ad listening-in
Social Media Marketing Budget	representation and listening-in
Content creation	representation, engagement and listening-in
Live streaming	representation and engagement
Word of mouth marketing	networking, engagement and listening-in
Target Customer definition	listening-in

Table C3

*References to Challenges Faced*

Participant	Identifying Target Customers	Handling Negative Customer Reviews	Creating engaging content	Difficulty getting Customer Contact Data	Appropriate Budgets
Participant 1	X				
Participant 2		X			
Participant 3	X		X		
Participant 4				X	
Participant 5			X		X
Participant 6			X		

\*X indicates challenge faced