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Strategies to Integrate Social Media Into Business Operations

Nicole F. Andrews
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Nicole Andrews

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Review Committee
Dr. Jorge Gaytan, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Edgar Jordan, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

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

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Abstract

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MHSM, Graduate Management Institute, 1999

BS, Union College, 1999

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) are essential to the survival of the Bahamian economy, but only 21% of SMEs are integrating social media into their marketing operations. Some SMEs are not taking advantage of the financial benefits of effectively integrating social media into business operations to avoid financial failure. Grounded in Berry's relationship marketing theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. The participants included six leaders of three SMEs in the Bahamas with successful experience using strategies to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and company documents. Thematic analysis of the data resulted in four themes: employee awareness of social media importance increased social media integration, presence of proper infrastructure and internet facilities increased social media integration, use of various social media platforms increased social media integration, and lack of a formal marketing plan limited social media integration. A key recommendation is for leaders of SMEs to ensure that proper infrastructure and stable internet facilities are available to assist in the integration of social media into business operations by installing fiber optic cabling or broadband and wireless interconnectivity. The implications for positive social change include the potential for SMEs to integrate social media into their marketing operations, leading to more tax revenues and jobs for communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents, Coleman and Diana Andrews, educators for

over 30 years who instilled in me the importance of learning and higher achievement.

Acknowledgments

I give thanks to my Creator, God Almighty who inspired and equipped me with purpose and potential to pursue this divine journey. I would like to also thank my wonderful parents Coleman and Diana Andrews, and my amazing sister D'Andra Andrews for your many sacrifices, continued support and unceasing prayers for me during my studies. Special thanks to Dr. Roseann Christie for your faithful prayers and for continually speaking words of life and encouragement over me during this journey. A very big thank you to my chair, Dr. Jorge Gaytan, and the incredible Walden faculty for your invaluable guidance and assistance to me on this imperative journey. I appreciate each of you.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) essentially account for a major share of the revenue pool of many countries (Bello et al., 2018). It is vital that these SMEs succeed to sustain and grow these economies. The use of social media is an imperative digital marketing component in the success of SMEs (Erlangga, 2021). However, most leaders of SMEs do not realize their full financial potential and general success as a business because they fail to integrate social media into business operations (Akgul, 2018). Several researchers collectively identified various factors, such as lack of education and resources, adaptability of social media to current business model, and perceived difficulty in establishing social media platforms as barriers to the integration of social media into SMEs' operations (Alford & Page, 2015; Brink, 2017; Guha et al., 2018). Inherently, because of these hindering factors, many Bahamian SMEs do not experience significant financial growth. It is imperative that SME leaders identify strategies to foster social media adoption.

Background of the Problem

SMEs are essential to the success of the Bahamian economy, as the government of the Bahamas launched the Access Accelerator Small Business Development Centre (AASBDC) in 2018 ("SBDC data on Micro", 2018). The role of the AASBDC is to assist in the growth and establishment of micro, small, and medium enterprises, thereby enabling these entities to create jobs and help stabilize the economy (AASBDC, 2020). Al-Tit et al. (2019) recognized many solutions and operational factors for the success of SMEs. Rehman et al. (2019) also underscored numerous factors that often hinder the

success of SMEs, and leaders of SMEs may need to identify these factors to achieve

financial success.

The lack of social media adoption is a major hindrance to the success of SMEs.

Many elements that impede social media adoption exist (Akgul, 2018). Brink (2017)

suggested that social media adoption is challenging for businesses because it

fundamentally impacts usual processes and operations for businesses and, therefore, must

be adaptable. Alford and Page (2015) indicated that small business owners fail to adopt

social media platforms because of the difficulty in creating an online presence. Moreover,

Guha et al. (2018) claimed that leaders of SMEs fail to adopt social media because of a

lack of resources, data management, and privacy and control issues. Intrinsically, it is

imperative for leaders of SMEs to take advantage of strategies available to ensure

business success.

Problem Statement

The integration of social media into business operations significantly increased

the competitive advantages of SMEs (Qalati et al., 2021). However, 21% of small

businesses only post once a month or less on social media, resulting in a few business

owners integrating social media into their marketing operations (U.S. Small Business

Administration [SBA], 2020). The general business problem is that business leaders are

not taking advantage of the financial benefits associated with the effective integration of

social media into business operations. The specific business problem is that some leaders

of SMEs in the Bahamas lack strategies to effectively integrate social media into their

business operations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. The target population consisted of six leaders of SMEs, located in the Bahamas, with successful experience using strategies to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. This study's implications for positive social change included enabling leaders of SMEs who achieve financial success could provide more employment opportunities for members of communities, enabling community members to prosper. Leaders of SMEs achieving financial success could bring about social change by increasing current employees' salaries that may assist employees in improving their living conditions and personal well-being to maintain a balance between work and personal lives (Luke & Chu, 2013).

Nature of the Study

There are three major research methodologies: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Froehlich et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Through the qualitative methodology, researchers use semistructured interviews and open-ended questions to facilitate the discovery of a phenomenon that is transpiring or that has happened with interpretative application (Saunders et al., 2016). Additionally, researchers use the qualitative method to ask exploratory questions in a real-life situation (Yin, 2018). I used the qualitative method because my intention was to explore the *what*, *why*, and *how* of a phenomenon in its natural setting, which was social media adoption in SMEs. In contrast, researchers use the quantitative method to understand the correlation between dependent and independent

variables. Researchers employing the quantitative method use certain techniques and statistical tools to measure and analyze data (Saunders et al., 2016). Moreover, quantitative researchers present direct questions and propose hypotheses, namely the null and the alternative hypotheses to examine the significance of correlational or causal relationships (Saunders et al., 2016). I did not select the quantitative method for this study because the goal was not to examine relationships among variables using statistical analyses. Mixed-method researchers employ an amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative methods and use both inductive and deductive reasoning (Yin, 2018). In this study, the goal was not to test hypotheses to address the research question; therefore, I did not select the mixed method.

Qualitative researchers can choose from several research designs for a research study, including narrative, phenomenological, ethnographic, and case study (Durdella, 2019; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). In the narrative approach, researchers capture participants' experiences through participants' personal stories (Dibaba, 2021; Saunders et al., 2016). I did not use the narrative research design because there was not a focus on participants' personal stories for analysis. The purpose of the phenomenological design study is to determine the meaning of an actual lived experience of participants (Frechette et al., 2020; Larkin et al., 2019). I did not focus on undertanding the meaning of participants' lived experiences for this study; therefore, phenomenological design was not selected. Ethnographic research design involves the study of the culture of a particular ethnic group of people (Saunders et al., 2016; Stefaniak & McDonald, 2022). Ethnographic research design was not suitable for this study because I did not focus on

the study of a group's culture. Researchers use case studies to generate results by asking *what*, *how*, and *why* research questions about a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). I used the case study research design because I explored the *what*, *how*, and *why* of a phenomenon which, in this study, was exploring strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas used to effectively integrate social media into their business operations.

Research Question

What strategies do leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their business operations?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

2. How did your employees respond to those strategies?

3. How were strategies to effectively integrate social media into your business operations communicated throughout the organizational ranks and among stakeholders?

4. What were the key barriers to implementing strategies used to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

5. How did you overcome the key barriers to implementing strategies used to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

6. What modifications, if any, did you apply to any strategy used to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

7. What key processes have you used to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

8. What else would you like to add about strategies used to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Berry's (1983) relationship marketing theory. Berry defined relationship marketing as an effective mechanism to enhance the relationship a business organization has with its customers and for obtaining customer loyalty that improves business performance. Relationship marketing represents a system useful to achieve a high-quality marketing interaction with customers, integrating real-time customers' feedback into business performance that builds long-term relationships with customers (Grönroos, 2004). In addition, Grönroos (2004) concluded that business leaders should build marketing relationships with customers to retain them, because retaining customers is less expensive than finding new ones. Kozlenkova et al. (2017) determined that a reciprocal online relationship between companies and customers can increase company sales. Clark and Melancon (2013) argued that organizations achieve increased sales when relationship marketing is integrated into the business organizations' social media marketing efforts. I selected the relationship marketing theory to serve as a likely foundation for understanding strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their business operations.

Operational Definitions

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): SMEs are fundamentally defined in the Bahamas as enterprises making less than $5 million in turnover annually with fewer than 50 employees (AASBDC, 2020). SMEs increase a country's economic condition and tend to be creative and flexible in nature, positioning the enterprise for successful opportunities (Zamrudi & Wicaksono, 2018).

Social media: Social media encompass social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and WordPress (Webb & Roberts, 2016). Social media provide benefits and occasions to attract new customers and cultivate relationships (Shaltoni, 2017).

Internet marketing: Internet marketing is the art of using and adopting internet technologies, such as websites and social media accounts, to accomplish marketing goals, thereby giving organizations a competitive advantage (Shaltoni, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are inherently the foundation of a research study and fundamentally represent anything the researcher deems as factual but lacks the evidence to support (Jackson & Brown, 2021; Martí et al., 2019). This study relied on several assumptions. First, I assumed that readers shared my basic belief system regarding business, economics, social media, and marketing. Second, I assumed that the participants in my interviews were honest in communicating their true experiences in their companies regarding my research topic. Third, I assumed that my research topic, strategies to

integrate social media into business operations, was one that expanded across different types of SMEs, countries, and cultures. Fourth, I assumed that I would recruit enough participants to participate in my study. Lastly, I assumed that organization documentation would be available to facilitate triangulation and that all information I obtained was beneficial in answering my research question.

Limitations

Limitations are elements of a study that threaten the validity of the research but cannot be controlled by the researcher (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). Inherently, all research studies have limitations that the researcher must recognize. One key limitation of my study was that I used only three cases to achieve data saturation. If I had not achieved data saturation with six participants, I would have had to recruit additional participants to interview them to achieve data saturation. A further limitation was that the country of the Bahamas is relatively small compared to other countries, which could have made it difficult for me to gain access to essential data and participants. Another limitation was that participants could have decided to withdraw from my research study and caused major time delays, which would have forced me to recruit additional participants. Finally, another limitation was that study results may not be generalized to the larger population.

Delimitations

Researchers establish delimitations to define the scope of a research study (Gossel, 2022). Generally, researchers constrain the study scope by stating the factors, constructs, or variables that will be used in the study (Preston & Claypool, 2021). I

conducted interviews on the videoconferencing platform Zoom (https://zoom.us) with

leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas meeting the participant's eligibility criteria outlined in

this study. Another delimitation was that I explored only strategies that Bahamian leaders

of SMEs used to effectively integrate social media into their business operations.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies

leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas used to effectively integrate social media into their

business operations. Leaders of SMEs could use the results of this study to increase

organizational productivity and profits from effectively integrating social media into

business operations. In the next subsections, I will discuss the possible contributions of

this study to business practice and for effecting general positive social change.

Contribution to Business Practice

In essence, SMEs are the building blocks of the economies for developing nations

(Bello et al., 2018). Fundamentally, successful SMEs epitomize a key component of

economic stability in that they employ a significant segment of the working population of

modern societies (Bello et al., 2018). SMEs are successful because of their ability to

adapt to various environments (Zighan & Ruel, 2021). It is intrinsically important for

SMEs to succeed to lower unemployment. This study was significant because leaders of

SMEs could use the strategies that may emerge to effectively integrate social media into

their business operations. In addition, the results of this study may include tools, such as

e-commerce, digital marketing, and information and communication technology, leaders

could use to catalyze the success of SMEs.

Implications for Social Change

Individuals could achieve general social change through the success of SMEs because such businesses promote stability and growth in economies, principally by making more jobs available (Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2019). The contribution of SMEs to diminishing unemployment is significant (Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2019). When unemployment decreases, systemic poverty and criminal activities decrease (Feriyanto et al., 2020; Mir Mohamad Tabar & Noghani, 2019). The greater financial success businesses attain, the greater the funding available to support social initiatives and causes (Luke & Chu, 2013). Organizations must recognize the imperative impact of corporate social responsibility and make it a priority (He & Harris, 2020). Sustainable business success is an excellent opportunity to enable SMEs to provide imperative benefits to society and to make a difference in their communities (Samaibekova et al., 2021).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The intention of this literature review is to identify significant and relevant literature regarding strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. I reviewed the literature on the integration of social media into business operations published in numerous journals and seminal academic books, government documents, and dissertations. Walden University has facilities to access numerous databases with journal articles on the integration of social media into business operations. In particular, the databases used to access pertinent information included ABI/INFORM Complete, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Emerald Management, and ProQuest Central. Google Scholar was also

a fundamental source for gaining access to journal articles on social media strategies. Additionally, I used the open journal *ScienceDirect* to access literature on social media strategies. I also used some government websites to identify literature about social media strategies for SME success.

There are numerous strategies available to search for academic and scholarly literature. The key strategy used was using key words within a specific time frame. I also selected certain databases and ensured that most articles used were peer-reviewed sources. I gave preference to articles found in Walden University's Library. The keywords and phrases I used in my search were *social media*, *digital marketing*, *small and medium sized enterprises, relationship marketing theory, business success,* and *strategies*.

Crossref is a major tool used to validate that the literature is peer-reviewed. The 390 references that the study contains include 298 scholarly peer-reviewed articles representing 76% of the total, 11 non-peer-reviewed articles representing 3%, nine government websites representing 2%, and 55 books representing 14%. The total references published within the 2019–2023 period are 270, which is 79% of the total number. The literature review contains 135 references, with 95 references published within the 2019–2023 period, representing 70%, and 103 from scholarly peer-reviewed sources, representing 76%.

Literature Review Organization

The literature review section has three major areas: introduction, application of the literature, and the selected theory. The introduction includes the strategy for selecting

the literature. In the Application to the Applied Business Problem section, I focused on the way other leaders in other locations applied strategies I found in the literature to attain success within their SMEs. The themes discussed in this literature review were marketing and social media, consumer behavior, customer engagement. For the development of the literature review, I identified similarities and differences with past research findings and this study.

The first theme, marketing and social media, contains a thorough review of the conceptual framework chosen for this study, which was the relationship marketing theory. I also used other theories that demonstrated similarity and differences as they related to the integration of social media into business operations. Some of the supporting and contrasting theories are the social exchange theory (Homans, 1961); the brand equity theory (Aaker, 1991); and the diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 2002).

The second theme, consumer behavior, includes an overview of the purchasing tendencies of customers in relation to a company. I discuss common strategies that organization leaders should implement to take advantage of behavior patterns of customers. The third theme for discussion is customer engagement. I explain the importance of companies engaging customers to understand their changing needs as well as to hear their suggestions.

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas used to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. Developing an understanding of such strategies required a

qualitative approach, more specifically a multiple case study. The findings from this study might provide insight into integration of social media into business operations.

The findings of the study may assist with the development of appropriate strategies for integrating social media into business operations. Once an understanding of the underlying meaning emerges, appropriate strategies might equip leaders with the skills to improve social media integration. The findings from the study might improve business practice by identifying appropriate strategies, leading to increased productivity, business sales, and organizational competitiveness. Leaders of SMEs achieving financial success could bring about social change by increasing employees' salaries that may assist employees in improving their living conditions and personal well-being (Sarkodie & Adams, 2020).

Relationship Marketing Theory

Digital marketing emerged in recent decades as a new branch in the marking field. Manuela et al. (2021) and Yang et al. (2021) communicated the importance of managing customer relationships to promote organization success. Wongkitrungrueng et al. (2020) demonstrated that customer relationships have different stages. The relationship marketing discipline has its foundation in the fact that long-term relationships with customers affect business success and stability (Dogan-Sudas et al., 2022). Abeza et al. (2019) communicated the benefits of relationship management in social media, including fostering relationships between an organization and its customers.

Creating a social media account affords SMEs the opportunity to reach a greater number of customers. Gilboa et al. (2019) found that social media is beneficial to SMEs

because it is increasingly used by customers and is useful for improving personal service to customers. Gilboa et. al. highlighted social relationship and personal care as key aspects of relationship marketing in the management of customer relationships. Gilboa et. al.'s study is useful for other leaders of SMEs to implement social media and relationship marketing strategies within their operations.

Lucas (2018) found that small businesses generally fail to use social media marketing strategies to gain new customers and increase sales. Therefore, the growth and profitability potential of these businesses, such as the small family-style restaurant is significantly stunted. Lucas suggested that the success of the social media marketing strategies in small businesses rests in its effectiveness to increase sales and develop consumer relationships.

Lucas (2018) used Berry's (2002) relationship marketing theory as the conceptual framework to conduct a qualitative multiple case study. Business managers use relationship marketing to create and maintain a profitable relationship portfolio (Darmayasa & Yasa, 2021). Lucas concluded that business owners using social media as a communication tool can foster stronger relationships and increase sales with new and potential customers. As social media marketing increases in popularity and preference over traditional marketing methods, its implementation by small businesses has proven to be a key driver for customer retention, attraction, and increased revenues without the outrageous marketing campaign budgets (Lucas, 2018).

Burnside (2018) found that developing innovative strategies is essential in retaining customers. Businesses that lack engaging marketing strategies often struggle to

attract new customers and retain current customers. Burnside suggested that managers should use various means to communicate with both new and existing customers. Burnside used Berry's (2002) relationship marketing theory to examine the way marketing innovation strategies can be applied to improve customer relations, thereby attracting and retaining more customers.

Managers should market to the specific location of their target market. Effective innovative marketing strategies will attract the right target market and retain profitable customers (Burnside, 2018). Burnside (2018) used the qualitative research methodology with a multiple case study design to explore marketing innovative strategies managers used to attract and retain customers. Burnside provided insight on the responsiveness of employees to the use of these strategies. Burnside analyzed the collected data and concluded that managers of private country clubs should implement strategies, such as broadening the marketing message, to entice frequency to the clubs and create highly memorable experiences for all stakeholders.

Social media provides a unique marketing tool to connect consumers directly to businesses and creates a unique opportunity for businesses to tailor their operations to become more efficient and profitable. Ezeife (2017) suggested that social media platforms allow businesses to enhance their communication with consumers and target audiences based on demographic and behavioral data. Ezeife used the qualitative research methodology with a multiple case study design, incorporating semistructured interviews to explore social media marketing strategies that business leaders use to increase sales.

Using the relationship marketing theory to explore the way leaders created customer loyalty retention strategies, improved their competitiveness, and increased customer satisfaction, Ezeife (2017) found that social media is a cost-effective tool for business leaders to engage, develop, and build customer relationships with a potential benefit of increased sales when effective social media strategies are implemented. Ezeife noted that business leaders should realign their marketing strategies to focus more on social media marketing, establish online brand communities, and develop performance metrics in customer relationships. Ezeife classified, categorized, and analyzed the data collected and concluded that social media provides businesses with innovative ways to increase sales through the effective marketing of products and services.

The effect of global competition in the maritime business has resulted in increased efficiency by ship management companies to retain the competitive advantage. Duru et al. (2013) suggested that the nature of the ship management industry is service-based and requires that high quality service be delivered and viewed as an intangible resource in retaining and gaining customers. While determining the level of service quality has been a challenge in this industry, Panayides and Gray's (1999) application of the relationship marketing theory in professional ship management companies has provided a resource for developing the strategies and determining key performance indicators on service quality.

The use of the Quality Function Deployment process helped to characterize the impact of key performance indicators on the shipping performance index within third party ship management companies. Duru et al. (2013) analyzed the data based on the satisfaction of the ship owners. The priorities of these owners are reflected in the

shipping performance index of the company. Duru et al. concluded that long-term relationships are imperative for business success.

The role of relationship marketing in business projects is that it is more profitable for firms to create long-term customer relationships rather than conforming to a short-term transaction-based approach. Eze and Ugwuanyi (2012) conducted an empirical study on a sample of Nigerian processing laboratories and used the relationship marketing theory as a grounding framework. Eze and Ugwuanyi suggested that, in the relationship marketing theory, there is a level of indivisible trust and commitment that secures a relationship. The opposing view noted that a relationship that appears unstable and loose is most likely an arrangement where both trust and commitment were not present.

A firm's customer base is categorized by applying CRM concepts such as trust, commitment, and relationships. Eze and Ugwuanyi (2012) used aspects of customer relationship management (CRM) to determine the weak and strong customer relationships in the service laboratories. Eze and Ugwuanyi concluded that active customers defined strong relationships as those relationships that lead to satisfied customers loyal to the brand and with higher levels of trust and favorable intentions for future interactions with the company. In contrast, weak relationships, displayed by passive customers, indicate customers with low levels of trust in the company.

A mutual influence exists between channel relationship and the customer relationship theory, which reflects the manufacturer's non-direct profit relationship investment to end users through brand community power. The integration of these two

factors presents a new perspective in relationship marketing (Wang, 2018). Wang (2018) suggested that knowing the driving forces of relationship performance and identifying key factors of performance leads to marketing managers able to develop prime strategies to promote marketing performance within their firms. Wang integrated a mixed research methodology to analyze the data gathered on the tire market in China. Wang determined that the customer relationship does affect the channel performance through the brand community integration but also highlights the manufacturers influence on channel performance on retails and other non-direct, profit-making investments. The impact of this channel relationship performance also influences the end user's trust and commitment to the brand community. Wang concluded that the relationship marketing theory is evident and significant in the tire industry.

As the financial sector continues to grow exponentially in areas such as Ghana, retail banks are stagnant in improving the customer satisfaction experience. Bank leaders lack an understanding of suitable strategies to implement that will allow bank leaders to attract, retain, and motivate their customers (Dadzie, 2017). Berry (1983) noted that relationship marketing is the objective to attract and win customers and maintain a lifelong relationship. Dadzie suggested that the relationship marketing theory centers on CRM, which focuses on customer feedback. To meet the standard of customer satisfaction, bank leaders must seek to understand customer behavior and create specific solutions to address customer needs. Dadzie conducted a qualitative research study with a case study design to explore various strategies banking leaders employ to increase their customer satisfaction. Dadzie used methodological triangulation to analyze the data and

achieve required validity in testing the data generated from the interviews of six banking leaders in three banks in Ghana. Dadzie employed the relationship marketing theory as a framework and concluded that customers are no longer settling for poor service but rather placing a demand on the banking institutions to provide products with high quality service standards. The development of the customer relationship is a necessity for these firms. As customer satisfaction is now the key driving factor, bank leaders must implement strategies that will encourage loyalty and create a competitive advantage within the industry.

Abeza et al. (2019) found that implementing social media tools within sports organizations is essential in developing relationships with stakeholders. The use of social media tools within National Sports Organizations (NSOs) projects advantages of visibility in the media and the potential of increased financial streams (Abeza et al., 2019). Social media are an ideal and cost-effective channel for creating a dual collaborative relationship between NSOs and their stakeholders (Abeza et al., 2019). Abeza and O'Reilly (2014) found that there is a lack of use of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, which can serve in the advent of a relationship dialogue between NSOs and stakeholders.

Continuous interaction through direct and indirect channels is pivotal to the relationship marketing process (Grönroos, 2004). Abeza and O'Reilly (2014) incorporated relationship marketing into their marketing plan, which aims to create long-term mutual value and examine the success of social media platforms in creating a relationship dialogue with NSOs and stakeholders. Abeza and O'Reilly used content

analysis to examine and compare the content presented on 24 Canadian NSOs' Facebook and Twitter pages. The analysis revealed that the users did not engage in relationship dialogue and NSOs were not responsive to comments and questions posted by users. Abeza and O'Reilly concluded that although communication occurred on these social media platforms, interaction was relatively unused thereby compromising the relationship dialogue.

Fierro et al. (2014) found that an effective service recovery process has the ability to convert a dissatisfied customer into a word-of-mouth messenger, spreading positive information about the company's products and services. Fierro et al. suggested that, in addition to relationship marketing focusing on building lasting relationships with profitable customers, it also incorporates nontransactional customer behaviors, such as word-of-mouth communication that significantly impacts brand image and overall performance. As service failures are an identified operational element in business, planning for these failures requires immediate attention, as the customer relationship is significantly affected. Fierro et al. emphasized that customers become loyal and see value when employees become engaged in the customers' problems and make considerable perceived effort to bring about a suitable resolution.

Fierro et al. (2014) proposed a conceptual model that focused on the impact of service recovery strategies with specific emphasis on the word-of-mouth transmission from a formerly dissatisfied customer of a mobile telecommunication service. Relationship marketing in this context revealed the dissatisfaction experienced by the customer and the continuous effort by the employee to present a service recovery process

that leads to customer satisfaction and the likelihood of the customer becoming a word-of-mouth promoter for the company. Fierro et al. concluded that companies should invest in training their staff on elements of professionalism and attitude, as these are vital to achieving customer satisfaction and leading to great benefits for both the customer and the provider organization.

An organization's cultural perspective has a significant impact on the supplier relationship orientation (SRO) often expressed through the values and behaviors of the firm, as pointed out by Winklhofer et al. (2006). As marketing theory lends focus to the relational exchanges that occur, the relationship orientation is directed towards the culture of the organization with a strategic-centered focus on the buyer-seller relationship (Sin et al., 2005). Winklhofer et al. noted that an effective buy–supply relationship is important in gaining a competitive marketing advantage such that the deployment of an SRO can affect the firm's performance. The supply management perspective reveals that relational orientation has been positively linked to product quality and the buyer's satisfaction with the supplier. Winklhofer et al. noted the depth of an organization's culture can ultimately determine the beneficial extent to the buyer–supplier relationship orientation.

Winklhofer et al. (2006) proposed a conceptualization of the SRO noting that for a firm to be relationship oriented, it must create a proper internal culture. Winklhofer et al. indicated that supplier relationships are indeed a vital factor for overall performance in a firm. Winklhofer et al. highlighted the need for managers to identify and organize the essential cultural elements used to build effective supply relationships while retaining its core values. Winklhofer et al. concluded that a culture that fully supports its suppliers and

shows value is more likely to succeed at high-performing supply relationships, which can make product duplication difficult, thus leading to a competitive advantage.

Supporting Theories

The social exchange theory (SET) that Homans (1961) introduced is commonly used to assess different types of organizational relationships (Cook & Rice, 2003). Intrinsically, when employers are supportive of their employees, this type of social exchange creates a sense of obligation within the employee willing to reciprocate with excellent work performance. Harden et al. (2018) used the SET to investigate the relationship between employers and employees. Several organizational leaders are challenged to find ways to retain their skilled IT professionals, which is ultimately affecting the customer service they are providing to the public.

Harden et al. (2018) found that IT professionals are more committed to their workplaces if they are aware that they are highly skilled and not overloaded with work assignments. In addition, IT professionals are more committed to their places of employment when rewarded for making meaningful contributions. Harden et al. suggested that, once these aspects of a workplace are addressed, employees would assess and come to the conclusion that they are valued and cared for by their employer. Moreover, the employees would in turn work effectively and efficiently and remain loyal to the company, thereby reducing employee turnover rates (Harden et al., 2018).

Özel and Kozak (2016) used the SET to explore and measure the impact of the interactions between visitors and residents regarding the tourism product. Intrinsically, if a positive difference remains when the costs of the interaction is subtracted from the

benefit, the residents will hold a positive attitude towards tourism development. Homans (1961) defined social exchange in terms of tangible or intangible activity exchange between two or more persons. In essence, the SET purports that individuals put into a relationship what they expect to receive from the relationship in turn. Özel and Kozak found that residents have a positive view and support of tourism development and believe that the actual cost can be offset by the benefits.

Aaker (1991) introduced brand equity theory which is fundamentally an amalgamation of brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations, and perceived quality and refers to the strength of the attachment of customers to a brand as well as the opinions and connotations the customer has with the brand. Importantly, sales or consumer perceptions are key measurements of brand equity (González-Mansilla et al., 2019). Fundamentally, brand awareness occurs when a customer remembers that a product or service belongs to a particular brand family (Foroudi, 2019). Customers must be intrinsically aware of a brand before brand association can occur (Jayswal & Vora, 2019). There is a significant correlation between brand awareness and brand performance (Sari Dewi et al., 2020). Brand loyalty refers to the commitment level of customers over an extended period of time (Guest, 1944). Further, perceived quality relates to the view customers have regarding the general excellence of a product or service (Aaker, 1991).

Kalampokis et al. (2016) applied the following brand equity theory marketing metrics to determine brand reputation: brand satisfaction, brand image, and purchase intention. Kalampokis et al. used the social media platforms of Facebook and Twitter and the social media metrics of volume and sentiment to ascertain customers' and potential

customers' experiences and opinions with various brands. The brand information obtained on social media platforms is imperative for companies with regards to strategic planning and execution. Kalampokis et al. found that a large number of tweets for the brands IKEA and Gatorade relates to brand reputation metrics of brand image, brand satisfaction, and purchase intention.

In the past, customer opinions regarding brands were garnered through traditional marketing methods which are now replaced with digital methods (Alwan & Alshurideh, 2022). In 2023, social media is a significant player in facilitating and housing brand-related posts metrics to quantify and qualify customer feedback; the metrics are used to determine the impact of customer feedback on the financial performance of companies (Choi et al., 2020). These metrics can assist companies in making future operational and financial projects. Kalampokis et al. (2016) found that metrics, such as volume and sentiments, can be calculated accurately and automatically for Twitter tweets, using statistics and algorithms to assess customers' opinions.

Contrasting Theories

A rival theory to the relationship marketing theory is Rogers' (2002) diffusion of innovations (DOI) theory. Rogers communicated that there are many factors that determine the rate of adoption for an innovation including compatibility, complexity, and relative advantage. Historically, some innovations were adopted more quickly and readily than others primarily because of the social system users' perceptions. DOI is an imperative theory in academic research namely because examines the how an innovation

is adopted to bring about individual or social change, particularly in technology (Trahan, 2019).

Pickard et al. (2019) used the DOI theory to assess the adoption of the current Internet protocol (IP) operating today. Intrinsically, there are two versions of IP: IPv4 and IPv6. IPv4 is the initial version of the protocol and most organizations use it. IPv6 is the most recent version, which is the version recommended for use in 2019 because it is upgraded with the last enhancements to facilitate business as usual. Pickard et al. found that adoption of IPv6 is at a slow pace, however, the adoption process has reached a critical mass and is expected to increase and grow at a faster rate.

SMEs in the Bahamas

Over the years, entrepreneurship has proven to be the backbone of the Bahamian economy (McKenzie, 2021). Moreover, small businesses in the Bahamas are the main framework of the private sector (Sweeting, 2017). SMEs in the Bahamas are derived using key characteristics and categories from the Department of Inland Revenue's Business License Department (Sweeting, 2017). While SMEs have annual sales that do not exceed $1 million Bahamian dollars, medium-sized enterprises have annual sales of at least $1 million, but do not exceed $10 million Bahamian dollars (Sweeting, 2017).

SMEs are critical to the success of the Bahamian economy because they help provide jobs, produce various wealth streams, and assist in creating a resilient economy (Sweeting, 2017). SMEs account for approximately 80% of the companies in the Bahamas (Hartnell, 2020). Nevertheless, there are many impediments to the growth of businesses in the Bahamas, including access to financing. The government of the

Bahamas, recognizing the great impact of SMEs on the economy, made it a priority to invest at a substantial level into this sector. In September 2018, the AASBDC was established in the Bahamas to assist in the creation of new small businesses and the support of existing small businesses (Thompson, 2018).

Intrinsically, during the years of 2012 to 2017, the Department of Inland Revenue reported that the issuance of business licenses was unstable, noted by a 10% decline in 2015 alone (Sweeting, 2017). The introduction of value added tax, coupled with new business license processes, negatively impacted the registration of new businesses (Sweeting, 2017). However, the Ministry of Finance in the Bahamas has reported a 58% increase in SMEs between the years 2017-2020, representing 13,986 SMEs (Central Communications Unit, 2021). The AASBDC's *Bahamas 2019 Annual Report* indicated that 9,488 clients were registered with the Centre seeking various support for their businesses or business ideas (AASBDC, 2020).

In 2019, many Bahamian islands were impacted by the devastating hurricane Dorian, resulting in approximately a $1.02 billion loss (The Ministry of Finance, n.d.). Subsequently, a government allocation of $10 million was provided to roughly 3,500 SMEs in Grand Bahama and Abaco islands as a rescue and restorative measure (The Ministry of Finance, n.d.). Many Bahamian SMEs have experienced unexpected challenges primarily due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the government of the Bahamas announced its stimulus program to assist SMEs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing $20 million in the form of small business loans ranging from $5,000 to $300,000 (Gilbert, 2020). Nevertheless, despite the challenges of

the pandemic, many opportunities have surfaced during this time for Bahamian SMEs to thrive, particularly in regards to businesses of masks, hand sanitizers, and delivery services. Moreover, several Bahamian businesses have pivoted during this current global crisis with a strategic shift to digitalization and technology (Saunders, 2020).

Social Media

The genesis of social media developed pre-1980s by Bruce and Susan Abelson who founded a social networking site called *Open Diary* (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). *Open Diary* allowed writers to connect online with other writers internationally and the term *blog* emerged from this activity. By early 2003 and 2004, MySpace and Facebook were created and the term social media was born (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Nonetheless, it is difficult to define the term social media without referencing Web 2.0 and user-generated content (UGC).

Web 2.0 is a technology platform where end users and software developers use the World Wide Web to continuously create, edit, and publish content in a collaborative manner (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mabić et al., 2019). Individuals use Web 2.0 technology for data and information exchange globally at any given time. Moreover, the Web 2.0 platform enables data and multimedia storage and exchange (Mabić et al., 2019). Mabić et al. (2019) communicated that Web 2.0 is also beneficial to businesses in assisting with strategic planning and decisions, connecting stakeholders within the supply chain, and producing new business models. Further, Web 2.0 technology facilitates imperative data searches thereby improving day-to-day operations within a business.

UGC refers to information and data an end user creates on a social computing platforms, such as blogs, social networking sites and wikis (Hooper, 2020). On social computing platforms, end users can essentially create personal space and share content immediately to other end users; this ease of creating and transferring digital content is advantageous to various companies and their marketing agenda (Tonietto & Barasch, 2020). In July 2019, approximately 2.1 billion people on average everyday use the family of computing platform services: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, or Messenger (Facebook Investor Relations, 2020). Inherently, the gush of computing platform users has created innumerable user-generated content and captured the attention of marketers. Many businesses are active on platforms where they create content called marketer-generated content to engage customers (Noguti, 2022).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a conglomerate of Internet applications that use Web 2.0 technology groundwork and facilitate the production and sharing of UGC across the globe and at any given time. Intrinsically, there are numerous types of social media include blogs, collaborative projects, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Advances in technology have significantly impacted society from the creation of the telephone in 1876 to the innovation of the computer in 1926 and the development of the World Wide Web in 1990 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Within a decade, LinkedIn was established in May of 2003, Facebook in February 2004, YouTube in April 2005 and Twitter in March 2006 (Carvill & Taylor, 2015). Additional key social media platforms that emerged include Google+, Pinterest, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. Moreover,

the iPhone was launched in 2007 (Carvill & Taylor, 2015), representing the emergence of the smartphone age as a vehicle to facilitate mobile social media use (Mwambakulu & Chikumba, 2021).

The introduction of social media into society produced an overwhelming positive response during early 2003 and the forward trend continues. By 2015, the major social media giants reported astronomically high numbers of active users: Facebook with over 1.4 billion active users, Twitter showed over 280 million, LinkedIn identified above 340 million, YouTube boasted over 1 billion, and Google+ housed approximately 300 million (Carvill & Taylor, 2015). Fundamentally, the larger number of social media users relates to the introduction of the smartphone, which allowed Third World and emerging nations to be a part of these networks.

Facebook is a social media platform that grows its user base through its Friends-of-Friend algorithm (Alshammari & Alshammari, 2023). Facebook was initially created to permit Harvard College students to connect with one another but has expanded into producing opportunities for friendships across the globe as well as business opportunities (Statista, 2021). Facebook like most Social Network Sites (SNS) features include sharing photos, videos, likes, comments and status updates (Marengo et al., 2021). The average age group for Facebook users is 35-50 years old (Carvill & Taylor, 2015).

Alternately, Twitter was initially designed as a microblogging site allowing texting in a one-to-many relationship. Unlike Facebook, Twitter was originally designed to be used on a smartphone. This social media giant has evolved into an effective marketing and communications tool and given birth to the notion of real-time news. The

major countries of Twitter users are Canada, United States, Australia, United Kingdome,

Germany, South Africa, India, Brazil, France, and the Netherlands. Moreover,

professionals, such as bloggers and journalists, are currently usingTwitter for work

benefits, as it is the top public relations tool (Carvill & Taylor, 2015). Further, Twitter

also offers advertising and marketing services to businesses and organizations.

LinkedIn is also a powerful SNS, but it is particularly used to help persons search

for and obtain jobs (Johnson & Leo, 2020). This social media platform has a mission

statement of making professionals more productive and successful through connections

(Carvill & Taylor, 2015). One of the major functions of LinkedIn is its recruitment

resource facilities (LinkedIn, n.d.). LinkedIn has transformed the way recruitment and job

searches are conducted (Cubrich et al., 2021). Intrinsically, LinkedIn helps individuals

build their personal brands (Marin & Nilă, 2021). The social media company also offers

unique products that are beneficial for corporate brands, including target advertising,

sales navigator, and showcase pages (Carvill & Taylor, 2015). These products essentially

allow LinkedIn to compete with social media giants, such as Facebook and Twitter.

YouTube is a unique social media platform in that its content is primarily video

based (YouTube for Press, 2019). This media giant has gained success through housing

large numbers of videos and facilitating a beneficial mechanism to help users discover

various other videos (Pinto et al., 2019). Individuals refer to YouTube as a content

community (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Further, this platform underscores the value of

video in marketing, and advertisements (Rehman & Iqbal, 2020). Google owns YouTube

and is the third most visited website globally (Carvill & Taylor, 2015). YouTube is

available in 76 languages and is located in approximately 88 countries (Vagianos &

Messerschmidt, 2019). With the use of Google AdWords and Google analytics, YouTube

is a strong tool for designing organizational sales strategies (Carvill & Taylor, 2015).

Social media has significantly changed the way that consumers think as well as

their purchasing behavior (Špoljarić, 2021). The rise of social media has also impacted

many types of businesses (Bouwman et al., 2019). Fundamentally, the birth of social

media has transformed major aspects of a business, including the supply chain (Chae et

al., 2020) and operations (Chuang, 2020). Company executives are now obligated to

address the inevitable presence of social media in their industries in an effort to remain

competitive in the rapidly changing business landscape (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Zhang et

al. (2020) found that because of pivotal connections between customers and companies

on social media, customers have the potential to play a major and more direct role in the

operations of a business in terms of adding value through co-creation.

There are key information gathering opportunities that social media can bring to a

business or an organization (Moon et al., 2021). Inherently, social media can be used in

business communications to have an impact on business transactions, marketing, and

customer service (Morales et al., 2017). Additionally, social media is an imperative tool

to help businesses communicate to build relationships with each other (Rose et al., 2021).

Social media communications have the potential of reaching more people quicker than

traditional media avenues of television, radio, and newspapers (Morales et al., 2017).

With the use of social media, organizational leaders can interact and communicate with

customers real-time and disseminate company information in a less expensive way,

compared to traditional media methods (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As a communication tool, social media can also be used to protect or defend the reputation of the company as well as to build trust in business relationships by responding openly and honestly to customer assertions and complaints (Morales et al., 2017).

Additionally, social media has pointedly impacted business transactions and internal operations (Morales et al., 2017). Business leaders are using social media networks, including LinkedIn, and Facebook to assist in recruiting individuals for job positions (Hosain, 2023). With social media tools, such as LinkedIn, executives are able to post positions available in their organizations, view the profiles of individuals who may be suitable for the position they are advertising, and make the necessary connections to fulfill their human resource goals. Additionally, company executives must be keen on searching and hiring technology-savvy individuals able to navigate the social media world skillfully because of the move from human performance to e-performance and from IT and Ed tech to social technology (Bernardez, 2017). Another notable trend associated with social media is *social listening*. Businesses use social listening to ascertain what customers are discussing about their brands on social networks (Morales et al., 2017). Social listening positions businesses on the cutting edge, as business leaders can learn about customers' problems and concerns in a real-time basis and provide immediate solutions.

Intrinsically, one of the greatest benefits of social media to a business or organization is marketing. Marketing as a discipline has evolved tremendously over time due significantly to the emergence of electronic CRM (Salah et al., 2021). Initially,

Drucker (1954) suggested that organizations have two major roles, marketing and innovation. Drucker posited that the responsibility of marketing rests on the entire organization and must be focused on the customers' points of view. Baker (1976) argued that marketing involves an exchange in relationships, such as producers and users and suppliers and customers, resulting in mutual benefits to the parties concerned. Gupta and Ramachandran (2021) promoted a shift from a product-centric viewpoint to a customer-centric approach. This customer-focused philosophy supports the buyer with greater power. More recent developments of the definition of marketing suggest that marketing involves developing lucrative customer relationships by connecting in person or online (Armstrong et al., 2018). Marketers must master relationship management, as business executives promote the message throughout the organization that marketing is everyone's job and reward the creation of value exchange for the customer and the organization (Armstrong et al., 2018).

Inherently, social media are now an imperative for business executives preparing marketing strategies (Popescu & Tulbure, 2022). Social media are an inexpensive form of advertising that is significantly lower in cost compared to traditional advertising methods (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Moreover, it is imperative for marketers to understand that using social media has the potential to enhance engagements with customers to strengthen relationships, influence purchasing behavior, and assist in brand management (Ajiboye et al., 2019; Rust et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2019). Other marketing features of social media include data collection, promotion of new products and services, and administration of customer service and complaints (Morales et al., 2017).

Social media for business thrive on the word-of-mouth effect where customers communicate with one another and promote products, services, and brands during these conversations (Morales et al., 2017). Companies are now also integrating viral features into their social media marketing initiatives, which results in great economic benefits because of the peer influence and social contagion they create (Christina et al., 2019). One of the greatest advantages that social media marketing has over traditional marketing is that social media represent an interactive platform allowing a potentially enhanced communication between customers and companies (Bizhanova et al., 2019).

Social Media Adoption Attributes

The growth of social media has imperatively altered the way that business leaders operate and grow their organizations (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). It is almost inconceivable for an SME today to exist without having some form of social media integrated into its operations (Morales et al., 2017). The benefits of social media to a business are countless; nevertheless, many SMEs are challenged with taking advantage of the myriad of opportunities social media affords (Ahmad et al., 2019; Istanto et al., 2022). Inherently, approximately 50% of SMEs struggle to survive 5 years or longer (Carter, 2021). According to Mukherjee (2018), some of the major reasons SMEs fail include poor use of digital and technology platforms, lack of proper human resources, and insufficient access to finances. Moreover, Amjad et al. (2020) indicated that many SMEs fail within the initial years primarily because business leaders are not thoroughly equipped and educated in the area of marketing. Intrinsically, these failure factors, such as ineffective marketing, can be addressed in some aspect with the implementation of social media in business

operations (Morales et al., 2017). Notably, there are many factors that determine the adoption of social media within a small business operation (Elnadi, 2022).

Social Media Cost

One key attribute of social media is that it is an inexpensive business tool (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Intrinsically, business leaders manage a myriad of activities within their operations that carry significant cost implications in their effort to achieve sustainability (Aničić et al., 2020). Nevertheless, business functions including human resource recruitment, customer service, customer relationship building, mass communications, branding, and marketing and most of these business functions are currently being addressed through social media (Morales et al., 2017). Social media is imperatively one of the most inexpensive marketing and communications platforms currently available to SMEs; many business functions, such as marketing, that were traditionally expensive to execute can now be performed in an inexpensive manner using social media (Lepkowska-White & Parsons, 2019).

Marketing began evolving in the early 2000s with the introduction of social media platforms, such as Facebook in 2004 (Carvill & Taylor, 2015). Fundamentally, the primary reason for this evolution in marketing is the shift from transactional experiences alone with customers to include that of relationship building (Arrivé, 2022). Intrinsically, some traditional methods of marketing, such as television, radio, and print material are now being replaced with current social media marketing tools and platforms (Morales et al., 2017). Key social media marketing tools and platforms include social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter (Pan et al., 2019).

SMEs leaders inherently face numerous challenges executing operational functions because of limited resources. Subsequently, SME leaders often pursue creative ways such as social media integration to leverage their limited resources and achieve strategic business goals (Borah et al., 2022). Kirtiş and Karahan (2011) indicated that business leaders use social media liberally for marketing purposes primarily because of key advantages afforded, including time, captive audiences, and cost savings. Intrinsically, the cost of marketing using social media is significantly lower than the cost of traditional marketing because, with social media, the mass media distribution element is eliminated (Kirtiş & Karahan, 2011). Moreover, joining a social media platform is free thereby eliminating cost factors to businesses, allowing business leaders to build relationships with customers and advertise new products.

Social Media Training and Education

Intrinsically, another element of social media adoption is that it is dependent on training and education to be successful (Murire & Cilliers, 2019). Fundamentally, social media is improving employee work-life by improving internal communications (Liu & Bakici, 2019). Lupo and Stroman (2020) suggested that public small business training sessions should address how business leaders can adopt social medial marketing strategies within the organization. Essentially, employee awareness is a function of management and business leaders address it through employee engagement in suggesting and developing ideas for innovation initiatives in the organization (Gode et al., 2019). This engagement has the potential to facilitate greater buy-in from employees regarding social media objectives.

Additionally, Ewing et al. (2019) found that employees must be empowered in the working environment through assistance from employees who are tech-savvy in order for them to be able to participate in social media initiatives. Implementing important training programs require thoughtful planning and organizing. Even though the benefits of social media within an organization are many, there are also various risks, rules, and policies associated with its use that business leaders must consider and address through training and education (Ogilvie et al., 2018). Intrinsically, perhaps the major training goal associated with social media for employees involves disseminating skills and information on how to use social media platforms (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020). Nonetheless, companies active in social media recognize that training is an imperative activity for employees (Muninger et al., 2019). Employees should be trained regarding social media so that they are aware of what is acceptable or not, particularly related to posting (Ewing et al., 2019). Constant monitoring by employees would allow the organization to be relevant and respond timely in addressing customer queries, concerns, and needs.

Social Media Return on Investment

Fundamentally, one of the chief attributes for business leaders to consider when adopting social media is the ability to measure return on investment (ROI) for strategic decision making (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Many business leaders find it difficult to measure ROI with traditional marketing and, therefore, have an even more challenging task calculating social media's ROI (Powell et al., 2011). Social media's ROI is dependent on capturing relevant data and defining the right data sets (Powell et al., 2011). Intrinsically, because of the competitive global market, marketers face challenges

associated with designing successful marketing campaigns that will be successful and securing their organization with a significant piece of the economic market. However, with the introduction of social media as a platform in marketing, campaigns must be designed in such a way to produce a significant ROI. Essentially, the effectiveness of Social Media marketing will determine how much companies will invest and for how long (Silva et al., 2020).

Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior essentially refer to the activities or actions consumers in general execute in relation to the products and services of a company (Korčoková & Loydlová, 2021). Zhao and Li (2019) found that information dissemination by a company can have a major influence on consumer behavior and sales volume. Generally, companies exist to make money; therefore, organizational leaders must capitalize on the avenues available to influence consumer behavior. Traditionally, marketing messages focused on the four Ps, which are product, price, place, and promotion (Rust, 2020). The intention of this historical marketing model was to acquire new customers responding to marketing messages through purchasing products or services. The shift to a relationship management marketing model, with a focus on customer retention and a customer-centric strategy, facilitated long-term customer relationships to produce profits for companies (Melovic et al., 2022).

The introduction of social media platforms and networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter have altered the communication channels and process between companies and customers (Carvill & Taylor, 2015; Chauhan & Abbasi, 2021).

Fundamentally, consumer behavior has evolved with the emergence of social media marketing platforms for communication (Li et al., 2020). Inherently, these new social communication platforms for businesses are termed *social commerce*. Social commerce is an amalgamation of e-commerce platforms and social media platforms that has numerous features that allows customers to interact and share their personal experiences with regards to products and services (Meilatinova, 2021). Intrinsically, it is anticipated that approximately half of future consumer advertising will be executed in digital environments by the end of 2019 (Lee & Saunders, 2017). Organizational leaders must not only increase their use of digital environments, but understand the purchasing-intentions behavior of customers in these environments to remain competitive.

Zhang and Benyoucef (2016) posited that there are five stages in the consumer decision-making process that reveal consumer behavior on social networking sites, which are need recognition, search, evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase stages. During the need recognition stage, the construct is to attract attention, which refers to a consumer's attraction to a social networking site (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). The construct for the search stage is the consumer behavior related to information seeking and browsing where consumers look for information, such as electronic word of mouth (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). Inherently, the evaluation stage pairs with attitude as a response construct based on consumers review of a product. Intrinsically, the purchase stage connects to purchasing behavior; information disclosure; and social commerce intentions where the consumer is willing to collaborate about products, purchase them, and share financial information concerning the purchase (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). The fifth stage relates

to the constructs of website use, involvement, and information allocation; in this active stage, consumers respond to messages, send messages to friends, and recommend products to others on the same networking site (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016).

Generally, there are many factors that can influence consumers' purchasing behavior regarding social commerce. Primarily, information, and the online environment inclusive of social profiles, customer reviews, various blogs and website communications are significant factors influencing purchasing behavior (Štimac et al., 2021). Moreover, the online environment also facilitates social exchange with other consumers, which may influence purchase decisions. Essentially, consumers are conversing with one another about the goods, products, and services of company brands, resulting in a profound impact on purchasing behavior (Morales et al., 2017). One key consumer behavior that can result in a major economic impact is *impulsive purchase behavior* (Hu et al., 2019). Stern (1962) defined impulsive purchase behavior as consumers purchasing when they had not originally intended to make the purchase. Further, consumers inherent trust in product recommendations by other consumers and peers in a digital environment, significantly influencing purchasing intentions (Hu et al., 2019).

Customer Engagement

The relationship between customers and companies is changing (Thakur, 2019). Consequently, the functions of internal operations of businesses are shifting rapidly from a transaction focused model to include significant relationship focused elements (Freudenreich et al., 2020). Instead, businesses are more inclined to pursue relationship management as one of the key focus areas of marketing (Zhang et al., 2016). Until the

emergence of social media in early 2003, the focus on marketing was the acquisition of

customers and not marketing to existing customers to retain and increase their loyalty

(Berry, 1995; Carvill & Taylor, 2015). Essentially, the main focus of companies is to

produce positive customer relationships as well as to guarantee customer satisfaction by

delivering superior products and services (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Inherently, *customer*

engagement is the construct of relationship management that assists companies in

increasing customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Thakur, 2019).

Munjal et al. (2019) defined customer engagement as the process of developing

relationships with customers with the intent to increase organization involvement and

brand loyalty. Intrinsically, customer engagement regarding brands addresses elements of

a customer's nature, including the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral actions relative

to certain brand interactions (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Moreover, other key elements

of successful customer engagement are observed when customers like, share or comment

to social media posts about organization brand information (Munjal et al., 2019). In

essence, customer engagement facilitates a trustworthy environment which progresses to

brand loyalty by customers (Huang & Chen, 2022). Further, customer engagement results

from a type of motivation within the customer, particularly where the product or service

is connected to personal goals (Li & Han, 2021).

Inherently, customer engagement is linked to numerous business benefits

including brand value, brand image, and brand usage intent (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Intrinsically, customer engagement positively influences the performance of companies,

primarily because more engaged customers result in greater revenues (Ho et al., 2020). A

close relationship exists among brand's value, image, and usage intent. Mahmood et al. (2019) noted that descriptive brand logos can significantly impact brand evaluations, purchase intentions, and the performance of a brand. Sangroya et al. (2021) identified a direct relationship between brand connection and brand usage intent in that increased customer engagement strengthened brand connection which augmented purchase preferences and intentions. However, Civelek and Ertemel (2019) suggested that a brand's equity dimensions, awareness, and association as a whole would eventually result in an increase of purchase intentions.

Fundamentally, a great focus is placed on digital customer engagement primarily because customers are participating voluntarily in active relationships online with various brands (Hollebeek et al., 2014). The advent of social media and its interactive features facilitates an exchange forum, allowing customer engagement to occur (Sashi, 2012). Conversations between customers and sellers generate in social media. Business leaders are viewing customer engagement as a relationship exchange that is long term and intimate. Intimacy in the buyer-seller relationship allows customers to focus on a buy transaction, as opposed to a make transaction, and also participate in co-creating products and value for the business (Sashi, 2012). Moreover, the concept of customer engagement is prevalent in the business-to-customer model, but is also imperative in the business-to-business model (Hollebeek, 2019). Businesses engage with one another through social media platforms to achieve business objectives. Value-creating processes within a company positively affect performance and the bottom line (Hollebeek, 2019).

Transition

Section 1 included the foundation of my study, strategies to integrate social media into business operations for Bahamian SMEs to achieve financial success. I also provided a background of the problem indicating that lack of SME success in the Bahamas hinders the Bahamian economy and job opportunities for residents. I further expounded that SME leaders fail to adopt social media into their operations because limited resources, difficulty surrounding the installation, and privacy and control issues. Additionally, I provided a problem statement, an overview of the purpose statement, suggesting implications for social change such as SME success would make more job opportunities available. Section 1 also included the nature of the study to support the selection of a qualitative methodology and a case study design for this study; interview questions; operational definitions; assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; significance of the study; and a review of the professional academic literature.

In Section 2, I will restate the purpose of the study; explain the role of the researcher; and describe the participants, the population and sampling methods, and ethical concerns related to this study. I will also provide a justification of the research method and design and discuss my plans for data collection, organization, and analysis. I will conclude Section 2 with a description of reliability and validity concerns as they pertain to this study. Section 3 will contain the (a) introduction, (b) presentation of the findings, (c) application to professional practice, (d) implications for social change, (e) recommendations for action, (f) recommendations for further study, (g) reflections, and (h) conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

In this section, I restate the purpose of the study; explain the role of the researcher; and describe the participants, the population and sampling methods, and ethical concerns related to this study. I provide a justification of the research method and designed and discussed my plans for data collection, organization, and analysis. I conclude this section with a description of reliability and validity concerns as they pertained to this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. The target population consisted of six leaders of SMEs, located in the Bahamas, with successful experience using strategies to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. This study's implications for positive social change included enabling leaders of SMEs who achieved financial success and could provide more employment opportunities for members of communities, enabling community members to prosper. Leaders of SMEs achieving financial success could bring about social change by increasing current employees' salaries that may assist employees in improving their living conditions and personal well-being to maintain a balance between work and personal lives (Luke & Chu, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

In a research study, the researcher is the primary research instrument (Collins & Stockton, 2022; Prasad, 2019; Yin, 2018). The researcher is responsible for securing

participants; organizing the study; and gathering, organizing, and analyzing data collected from study participants (Soh et al., 2020). During this qualitative study, I functioned as the primary research instrument and was ultimately responsible for selecting the business phenomenon to study, choosing a suitable research method and design, selecting participants, executing the study, analyzing and interpreting data collected, and reporting the findings, as Johnson et al. (2020) suggested. Yin (2018) promoted the use of several sources of data including semistructured interviews and organizational documents. My intention was to gather information regarding the perceptions and perspectives of participants through the interviews and also the review of company documents. I connected with industry leaders through publicly available information to build a prospective participant pool for the interviews.

I have over 10 years of experience in establishing and operating small businesses. However, my use of social media has been limited and, as such, I chose my research topic to learn more about the phenomenon and to possibly add to the growing body of knowledge in this area and effect social change. Notably, I live in a small community, nevertheless, I interviewed participants with whom I did not have a personal relationship.

Researchers are required to adhere to various ethical principles, enforced by review boards and professional asssociations, that are accessible in the form of guidelines, common codes of ethics, and protocols (Sharpe & Ziemer, 2022). Researchers are expected to conduct research studies in an ethical manner as Cumyn et al. (2019) indicated and in accordance with protocol (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). As posited by Adashi et

al. (2018), *The Belmont Report* contains three general ethical principles *of respect for persons, beneficence,* and *justice* that researchers must use when involving human participants in their studies (Anabo et al., 2019). Researchers must follow the principle of respect for persons, which ensures that participants are allowed to make autonomous and independent decisions in relation to the research study; moreover, for participants with limited autonomy, the researcher should act in the best interest of the participant (Adashi et al., 2018; Cragoe, 2019). The principle of beneficence fundamentally relates to the researcher acting in good faith, causing no harm, and maximizing potential benefits for participants (Phelps, 2020). With regards to the principle of justice, researchers must ensure that participants are treated fairly and equally with regards to the benefits or burdens associated with the research study Brothers et al. (2019). Additionally, the researcher should ensure that there are no negative repercussions if a participant decides to withdraw from participation in the research study (Josephson & Smale, 2020).

Moreover, *The Belmont Report* also addresses the application of ethical principles by which researchers must abide (Ritchie, 2021). It is paramount, as indicated in *The Belmont Report*, that informed consent is secured before beginning the research and that inherent rights and associated risks are communicated to the participants of a study (Adashi et al., 2018). When a researcher obtains informed consent from a participant, the researcher is applying the ethical principle of respect; at this time, participants should be assured that their participation is voluntary, and any information they communicate will be kept confidential (Brear, 2020). As the researcher, it was my responsibility to follow the three major ethical principles included in *The Belmont Report*, adhere to the Walden

University's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval process requirements, and observe other guidelines from participating organizations before beginning the research and collecting any data from participants. I collected signed informed consent forms from the participants, treated participants fairly and equally, protected participants' confidentiality, and reiterated that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to conclude their participation at any time without receiving any negative consequences or providing a reason.

Fundamentally, it is challenging for a researcher to avoid bias in a research study, namely because of the researcher's preconceived beliefs and notions that can pose a risk to the credibility of the study (Bierema et al., 2021; Gao, 2020; Lai, 2019). Various biases can surface, such as those stemming from dual relationships with participants; therefore, researchers must be careful during the research and ensure that efforts to remove bias are prioritized (Epp & Otnes, 2020). Researchers should employ member checking in an effort to avoid or mitigate bias in a research study (Motulsky, 2021). Member checking refers to researchers giving study participants the researchers' interpretation of participants' answers to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of those interpretations (Hamilton, 2020; Hulme et al., 2021; Prior, 2020). I gave participants in the study my interpretations of their answers to interview questions and them to verify the accuracy of my interpretations. Researchers record the assumptions and limitations of a research study to provide the reader with information to assess the reliabilty and validity of a given study (Faubert, 2020). I recorded the assumptions and

limitations of this study to give the reader the opportunity to assess the reliability and validity of this study.

An interview protocol is imperative for a reliable research study, as it incorporates step-by-step procedures for the interview, the actual interview questions and prompts, participant consent reminders, opening and closing scripts, and the interview analysis coding scheme (Braaten et al., 2020; Veronesi, 2019; Yin, 2018). Additionally, using an interview protocol serves as a guide and allows all participants to be interviewed in a systematic way, facilitating uniformity in gathering information and ensuring objectivity (Adams & Lawrence, 2019). As a researcher, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A), as Bearman et al. (2019) recommended to ensure consistency.

Participants

In qualitative research, the appropriate participants need to be selected first before any data collection can begin (Cypress, 2019). Researchers outline the eligibility criteria that participants must meet to ensure that there is appropriate alignment with the central research question in a research study (Yang et al., 2020). Researchers face many challenges including locating and obtaining the necessary access to organizations for their research studies (Saunders et al., 2016). An additional challenge researchers face consists of obtaining informed consent and agreement from individuals willing to participate in the research study (Douglas et al., 2021; York, 2020). Researchers determine the criteria participants must meet in order to participate in a research study (Campbell et al., 2020; Zong et al., 2021). These eligibility criteria consist of

participants' knowledge and experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Wong et al., 2021).

I established participant eligibility criteria based on Bahamian SME leaders' experience with strategies to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. Eligible participating SME leaders possessed at least 2 years of successful experience in integrating social media into business operations. I purposively selected participants for this study with successful experience in integrating social media into their business operations in the Bahamas. I anticipated that these participants were suitable for the study because of their knowledge and experience in the integration of social media into business operations.

Obtaining the necessary access to participants and organizations for a research study is difficult (Wong et al., 2021). To respond to this challenge, Merriam and Grenier (2019) recommended using several strategies in order to gain access to participants. Lin and Paez (2020) posited that purposeful sampling facilitates the availability of participants who are subject matter experts in the phenomenon being studied. Another key strategy is becoming acquainted with key organization personnel in order to obtain access leadership (Vuban & Eta, 2019). Collaborating with key organizational personnel proved to be an effective approach, as I expressed my goals of conducting my research study with key leadership team members at SMEs that incorporated social media into their operations.

Additionally, researchers must demonstrate clear motives and earn the trust and respect of individuals participating in the study (Turaga, 2019). Further, researchers must

build rapport and establish robust relationships with participants to facilitate a seamless process in collecting rich data necessary for the research study (Cassell et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Connecting often with research participants in their communities is a key strategy in gaining participants' trust and rapport, ultimately resulting in successful participation in the research study (Busetto et al., 2020). I described to participants my motives for conducting this research study to gain their trust and respect. I built rapport with participants and established robust relationships with them to collect rich data. I connected with participants often to gain their trust and rapport.

Researchers are meticulous about aligning the overall research question with participants by selecting a suitable research design (Flick, 2018). Moreover, eligibility criteria for participants should subsequently result in the selection of participants with successful experience related to the phenomenon under study, giving the researchers an opportunity to answer the central research question (Allen, 2017). I chose eligible participants who had the essential knowledge of, and successful experience in, the effective integration of social media into business operations, aligning study participants with the overarching research question, as Campbell et al. (2020) recommended.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

There are three major research methodologies: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Draper et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). Through qualitative methodology, researchers use semistructured interviews and open-ended questions to facilitate the discovery of a phenomenon that is transpiring or that has happened with interpretative application

(Saunders et al., 2016). Additionally, researchers use the qualitative method to explore the *what*, *why*, and *how* of a phenomenon in its natural setting (Awasthy, 2019). Further, researchers use the qualitative method to ask exploratory questions in a real-life situation (Yin, 2018). I used the qualitative method because my intention was to explore the *what*, *why*, and *how* of a phenomenon in its natural setting, which was social media integration into SMEs.

In contrast, researchers use the quantitative method to understand the correlation between dependent and independent variables (Frey, 2018). Generally, quantitative researchers focus on gathering and analyzing data in a structured manner to be reported in a numerical format (Walczyk & Cockrell, 2022). Moreover, quantitative researchers present direct questions and propose hypotheses, namely the null and the alternative hypotheses to examine the significance of correlational or causal relationships (Stockemer, 2019; Saunders et al., 2016). I did not select the quantitative method for my study because I did not examine relationships among variables using statistical analyses. Mixed-method researchers employ an amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative methods and use both inductive and deductive reasoning (Yin, 2018). Generally, the mixed-method is beneficial for enhancing validity in research studies when one method alone is not sufficient; the mixed method is grounded in triangulation where numerous data types are used for validation (Creamer, 2018). In this study, I did not test the hypotheses to address the research question and, therefore, I did not select the mixed method.

Research Design

Qualitative research designs I considered for this study were the narrative, phenomenological, ethnographic, and case study. In the narrative approach, researchers capture participants' experiences through participants' personal stories (Frey, 2018; Maqbool, 2021). The narrative approach generally involves a partnership between the researcher and a single participant or a small group of participants where data are collected through stories, and the stories are retold and reviewed with the participants to ensure validity in their meaning and interpretation (Eichsteller, 2019; Surangi, 2022). I did not use the narrative research design because I did not focus on participants' personal stories for analysis. The purpose of the phenomenological design study is to determine the meaning of an actual lived experience of participants (Larkin et al., 2019). A phenomenological research design encompasses extensive and often lengthy involvement with participants generally through numerous comprehensive interview sessions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I did not focus on understanding the meaning of participants' lived experiences for this study; therefore, phenomenological design was not selected. Ethnographic research design involves the study of the culture of a particular ethnic group of people in an effort to understand that group (Saunders et al., 2016). In ethnography, the research must typically become a part of the social setting of the group being studied; this positioning allows the researcher to know the group better by sharing similar experiences, such as eating, working, and conducting other key daily activities (Cubellis et al., 2021; Ploder & Hamann, 2021; Renjith et al., 2021). Ethnographic research design was not suitable for this study because I did not focus on the study of a

group's culture. Researchers use the case study design to address real-world business problems in business and management research (Yin, 2018). Researchers also use the case study design to investigate a phenomenon, process, or event bounded by time, activities, or contextual conditions (Yin, 2018). In the case study design, the researcher conducts the research in the field in order to gather the essential evidence from various sources; the evidence is relevant to the phenomenon being studied and should provide several perspectives of the case (Lee & Saunders, 2017). I used the case study research design because I explored the *what*, *how*, and *why* of a phenomenon which, in this study, was exploring strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas used to effectively integrate social media into their business operations.

Population and Sampling

It is important to select a suitable sampling method to avoid bias and increase the trustworthiness of the research study (Wienclaw, 2019). Researchers use purposive sampling as a strategy to assist in selecting participants knowledgeable and experienced in the phenomenon being studied (Bazen et al., 2021; Saldana et al., 2019). Purposive sampling is a vital tool for choosing participants rich in information related to the phenomenon under investigation (Sodeify & Tabrizi, 2020). I used purposive sampling primarily because it enabled me to select participants possessing knowledge and experience in the phenomenon under investigation, which in this case study was the effective integration of social media into business operations.

I gathered data from six leaders across three SMEs, located in the Bahamas, with successful experience using strategies to effectively integrate social media into their

business operations. Researchers decide on the sample size for a research study based on the nature of the study, data richness, and whether the number of participants allow researchers to make generalizations about the larger population (Hennink et al., 2019). Hancock et al. (2021) posited that a small sample size of participants is appropriate for a case study. Knechel (2019) suggested that participants must be knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation. Yin (2018) indicated that deciding on the suitable sample size is challenging when conducting a case study. Nevertheless, Yin (2018) postulated that two or three participants would be sufficient for case study research.

In the event that I did not achieve data saturation with six participants, I would have continued interviewing participants until I reached data saturation. A researcher achieves data saturation when no new information arises from interviews with participants (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Zyphur & Pierides, 2019). Typically, there is no fixed threshold to determine when data saturation is achieved; researchers determine that they have reached data saturation when no new themes emerge from the data (Guest et al., 2020). To achieve data saturation, I used semistructured interviews and asked participants eight open-ended interview questions to obtain rich data regarding strategies participants used to effectively integrate social media into business operations. I invited suitable potential participants via email and telephone calls in an effort to obtain their acceptance to participate in this study.

Researchers must ensure that the interview setting is suitable for engaging in open dialogue with study participants (Hong & Cross Francis, 2020; Marhefka et al., 2020). Researchers developing interviews that are convenient to study participants allow

participants to reduce their anxiety, resulting in open dialogue to build rapport with participants (Allen, 2017). Nevertheless, interviews should not be conducted in settings where the noise level is inappropriate or privacy is violated thereby making the participants uncomfortable (Husband, 2020). I ensured that the interview setting was suitable for the development of open dialogue with participants. Additionally, I provided convenience to participants to relax them by selecting an interview setting with an atmosphere suitable for building rapport and establishing rich communication with participants. I reminded participants that the interview had a duration of approximately an hour, which turned out to be true.

Ethical Research

Securing informed consent from participants is an imperative ethical aspect of a research study (Frey, 2018). I ensured that all participants signed the informed consent form as a prerequisite for participating in this research study. According to Yin (2018), the informed consent form contains the potential risks and benefits regarding the research study, researchers' expectations of participants, nature of the research study, and researchers' contact information just in case the participants have questions. I included the following items on the informed consent form that I used in this study: potential risks and benefits regarding the research study, my expectations of participants, nature of this research study, and my contact information just in case the participants had questions. As suggested by numerous researchers, I ensured that participants were aware of the fact that their participation in this research study was voluntary in nature and that they were able to withdraw at any time without providing a reason for such withdrawal or suffering any

negative consequences (Axson et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2020). Yin (2018) indicated that participants have the right to withdraw from a study at will and without any obligation of providing a reason. The consent form is provided to participants to ensure that they are appropriately informed before making a decision to participate in the study (Millum & Bromwich, 2021). The privacy and confidentiality of participants should be paramount in a research study (Kamanzi & Romania, 2019). I apprised all participants that their participation in the research study was voluntary. Participants should only sign the informed consent form after they understand the benefits and risks involved (Barwise et al., 2019). Additionally, I did not provide participants with tangible or in-tangible benefits at any stage of the study.

As a key priority, I only recruited participants at least 18 years of age who met the participant eligibility criteria I established. I began the interview sessions after I received IRB approval. I ensured that I was in compliance with IRB rules and regulations by ensuring study participants' safety and clearly explaining the informed consent process to participants. The IRB approval number for the research study was 04-01-22-0390237.

Two key segments to the informed consent process exist, which are the generation of the consent form and the dissemination of its details to study participants (Allen, 2017). I designed an informed consent form using basic English, allowing participants with different educational backgrounds to easily understand its content and the interview questions, as Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) recommended. I gave all qualified participants an informed consent form and reviewed its contents thoroughly with the participants to ensure that they understood the content of the consent form. Researchers should ensure

that participants receive an adequate synopsis of the research as well as and an understanding of their specific role in the research study (Brittain et al., 2020). I used masked names for individuals participating in the research study and their associated organizations to ensure participants' confidentiality. Moreover, I ensured that there were not identifiers that may aid in an indirect discovery or trace of study participants or their organizations.

Once a study is completed, researchers should present results that are ethical, reliable, noteworthy, and achieved with nominal or no harm to the participants (Lester & O'Reilly, 2019). I stored all documents relevant to this research study in a password-protected area of the hard drive of my personal computer. Further, I will secure all physical documents in a locked cabinet at my residence for a duration of 5 years. After 5 years, I will personally destroy all physical and electronic research information to ensure adherence to Walden University's IRB procedures.

Data Collection Instruments

Researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985) were the first to present the idea of the researcher being the primary research instrument. The concept of researchers as the research instrument is widely accepted in qualitative research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Kandade et al., 2021; Lester & O'Reilly, 2019). As the research instrument, case study researchers collect diverse data primarily through interviews, observations, and document review (Caillaud et al., 2019; Carr et al., 2019).

Qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews replete with open-ended questions to gather data (Leko et al., 2021). Interviewing participants allows researchers

to understand participants' experiences with phenomenon under examination and obtain rich data (Brosy et al., 2020). A key benefit of using semistructured interviews is that researchers are able to ask follow-up questions thereby gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Frey, 2018). The primary reason for using semistructured interviews is to obtain data from subject-matter experts of the participating organization about the phenomenon under investigation (Mertler, 2017).

I purposively selected participants from the SME community in the Bahamas to interview them using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to obtain essential data. Researchers enable the gathering of rich data by collecting rich and comprehensive details from participants about the phenomenon under investigation (Ballena, 2021). Researchers may discover new themes when collecting rich data through semistructured interviews (Keen et al., 2022). Researchers incorporate pre-decided questions in semistructured interviews but also allow the opportunity to ask further question to obtain greater explanations (Frey, 2018; Mertler, 2017). As the researcher, I conducted semistructured interviews with purposively selected participants to allow me to ask more probing questions and collect rich data.

I was the primary research instrument and, consequently, I obtained the necessary research data by using semistructured interviews; recording and transcribing the semistructured Zoom interviews; and following an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to manage the process. Further, for the duration of the interview, participants answered the interview questions (see Appendix B) contained in the interview guide. Before closeout of each interview, participants were allowed to express final thoughts on the

integration of social media into business operations. When researchers ask for closing thoughts, researchers create an opportunity for the participants to share details about the phenomenon under investigation that did not surface during the interviews (Lee & Aslam, 2018). Without question, researchers bring some form of bias to a study (Collins, 2021). Researcher bias can be mitigated by exercising researcher reflexivity (Mirhosseini, 2020). During researcher reflexivity, the researcher reflects on thoughts and conclusions about the data that were gathered for the study (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). The process of reflexivity is imperative because it addresses researcher's bias and promotes transparency throughout the research process (Sultan, 2019). To mitigate my personal bias, I exercised reflexivity by reflecting, and later recording, on my thoughts and decisions about the data I gathered.

Researchers use other data gathering techniques, including document analysis (Frey, 2018; Wiresna et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Researchers must have a plan to ensure rigor in the study (Grodal et al., 2021). Document analysis coupled with semistructured interviews empowers researchers to expand the exploration of the phenomenon under investigation (Tight, 2019) and improve a study's rigor because researchers are able to conduct methodological triangulation (Farquhar et al., 2020). Some documents that researchers may select for analysis include annual reports, financial statements, social media pages, workplace websites, training manuals, and budget justifications (Gaudet & Robert, 2018; Karppinen & Moe, 2019; Yin, 2018). Moreover, various organizational documents may be pivotal in providing pertinent case study information, including details of events and the spelling of employees' names (Yin, 2018). I analyzed organizational

documents and artifacts directly related to the phenomenon under investigation, which is the integration of social media into business operations. Examples of documents include annual reports, financial statements, marketing plans, social media plans, and business plans.

Researchers conduct member checking in the research process to enable participants to amend, approve, elaborate, or explain key segments of the data obtained in an effort to produce a highly reliable study (Derrington, 2019; Frey, 2018; Mertler, 2017; Sultan, 2019). During the process of member checking, researchers lead participants in reviewing the researchers' interpretation of what the participants communicated during the interview to ensure the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations (Caretta & Pérez, 2019). I conducted member checking to increase the validity of this study by asking participants to review my interpretations of their answers to interview questions to verify the accuracy of such interpretations.

Data Collection Technique

Using semistructured interviews to collect data related to participants' experiences with the phenomenon under study is one of the activities of qualitative researchers (Frey, 2018). Researches ask participants open-ended questions when conducting semistructured interviews to obtain participants' experiences related to the phenomenon under study (Agarwal, 2019). To control the direction of the interviews, researchers use the study's central question and other related questions to obtain rich data from study participants related to the phenomenon under scrutiny (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). I conducted semistructured interviews with leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas to

collect strategies they employ to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. Researchers also review and analyze organizational documents and artifacts, along with conducting semistructured interviews, to obtain insight regarding the phenomenon under study (Englander, 2020). Researchers collect data using several data collection instruments to conduct methodological triangulation, increasing the rigor of the study and the researchers' understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Nwanna-Nzewunwa et al., 2019). I reviewed and analyzed various documents and artifacts related to strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. I conducted semistructured interviews with leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas to collect strategies they employ to effectively integrate social media into their business operations.

There are numerous advantages and disadvantages of collecting data through conducting semistructured interviews and analyzing organization documentation (Lee & Saunders, 2017). Some advantages of conducting semistructured interviews include enabling researchers to ask participants probing questions allowing greater explanation on previous responses and also allowing researchers to look for nonverbal cues during the session (Allen, 2017; Frey, 2018). Key advantages of using organizational documents to facilitate triangulation include enabling researchers to gather and compare data from numerous sources to determine data alignment and also allowing the researcher to uncover and explore new concepts to generate probable themes (Lee & Saunders, 2017; Tight, 2019). Organization documents are imperative to a research because they house the accurate details of employees' names as well as pertinent accounts of organization

events relative to the phenomenon being studied (Frey, 2018). I conducted semistructured interviews with leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas to collect strategies they employed to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. I asked participants probing questions allowing greater explanations on previous responses. I conducted methodological triangulation by collecting data from several sources, using several data collection instruments, and compared the data to determine if data alignment occurred. Another reason I conducted methodological triangulation is because it increased the rigor of the study and my understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Although there are several advantages of using semistructured interviews and analyzing organization documents and artifacts to collect data, disadvantages do exist (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). One notable disadvantage of conducting semistructured interviews is that they can be time-consuming and laborious (McGrath et al., 2019). An additional disadvantage is that inexperienced researchers may face problems associated with conducting semistructured interviews (Mertler, 2017). Another disadvantage is that participants may distort the reliability of the study by introducing bias through communicating answers they believe that the researcher wants to hear (Allen, 2017; Wilson & Joye, 2017). Researchers can also contribute to the introduction of bias into the research study if they provide their opinion about the phenomenon under study and display nonverbal cues when participants are answering interview questions (Frey, 2018; Gao, 2020). Reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts also has disadvantages, including the possibility of an employee introducing bias, based on own interests, when creating the documents and artifacts (Zapf & Dror, 2017). The employee

preparing the organizational documents could have recorded erroneous details of events or dollar amounts due to own personal biases (Martin et al., 2020). Another key disadvantage of using organization documentation is that researchers may not obtain access to organizational documents and artifacts (Tight, 2019).

Researchers conduct pilot studies for many reasons, including confirming the comprehensive scope and the significance of the topical details of the study (Allen, 2017; Treiman, 2020). Nevertheless, pilot studies are often laborious, time consuming, and not vital when using a myriad of data gathering techniques, namely conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documents and artifacts (Doody & Doody, 2015). I did not conduct a pilot study because it is a time-consuming and labor-intensive activity and not crucial in light of my planned data collection techniques, which were conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts.

Member checking is a process that researchers use to give participants an opportunity to confirm that the researchers' interpretation of the responses the participant provided during the interview is accurate (FitzPatrick, 2019; Mertler, 2017). Researchers use member checking to enhance the credibility and reliability of the data collected (Sultan, 2019). Nonetheless, there are several drawbacks of conducting member checking. For instance, researchers could conclude that not receiving confirmation from participants about the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations of participants' answers may mean that the participants agree with such interpretations, while in reality participants might not have read researchers' interpretations of their answers at all

(Thomas, 2017). Additionally, participants may accept the initial interpretations of the researchers as accurate in an effort to avoid possible challenges with disagreeing with the researchers' interpretation of the participants' responses (Madill & Sullivan, 2018). I conducted member checking by providing participants with my interpretation of their answers to interview questions and asking participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations.

Data Organization Technique

Qualitative researchers should determine a way to organize data because it enhances the reliability and credibility of the study (Lindlof & Tylor, 2019). Research studies are more rigorous if the researchers organize the data effectively (Williams & Moser, 2019). Data are more beneficial when collected in a structured and orderly manner (Antonio et al., 2020). Once the researcher organizes the data, then the stage of analyzing and reporting can commence (Alam, 2021).

I conducted semistructured, interviews on Zoom with leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas using interview questions outlined in Appendix B. Researchers must guarantee the confidentiality of each participant in the study (McKibbin et al., 2021). All six leaders participating in this study had codes that included the letter "C," along with a number between 1 and 3 denoting the company, as well as the letter "P," along with a number between 1 and 3 to denote the participant; any identifying information was deleted from the transcripts. A significant way of ensuring participant confidentiality is to replace their names as well as the names of individuals and places mentioned in the interview (Van den Eynden, 2021). To further ensure participant confidentiality, I personally transcribed

each participant's interview, removed any information that can result in a participant being identified, and assigned a participant identification number.

Additional measures I took include creating a password-protected folder on my hard drive used specifically for storing transcripts, notes, and observations. I ensured that the notes pertaining to each participant were labeled with the associated participant identification number that was unique to each participant. Another important data organization element that I used is data security, which involves protecting and safe keeping data by scanning and converting paper documents into an electronic format, such as PDF images. During the data collection stage of this research study, any organizational documents and artifacts reviewed were assigned a document identifier. There are two key steps to organizing organizational documentation data; firstly, the paper documents must be converted into an electronic format through the scanning process and, secondly, there must be an electronic dedicated folder to house scanned organizational documentation that would allow the data to be easily organized and readily retrieved. Annotated bibliographies will be included in the scanned documents to enhance the indexing and retrieval process, as (Yin, 2018) recommended.

In an effort to increase data organization, I imported raw data from the hard drive into a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program, NVivo. Researchers use computer programs, such as CAQDAS, to more efficiently and effectively organize and analyze the data collected (Rodrigues et al., 2019). However, although researchers use CAQDAS to improve the data analysis process, researchers are still responsible for organizing and analyzing the data (Sanchez-Gomez et al., 2019).

Researchers keep a reflective journal to achieve transparency in research and also to assist in the bracketing process (O'Kane et al., 2019). Researchers also use a reflective journal in the research process to facilitate critical thinking (Yee et al., 2022). I ensured transparency during the research by keeping an electronic reflective journal to enable me to record my thoughts and opinions that arose as I interviewed participants and reviewed company documents.

Researchers store data collected securely and keep them for a required period to ensure compliance with generally accepted data retention and security requirements (Chauvette et al., 2019). Researchers implement numerous legislated best practices to ensure the protection of data at various stages of the research (Bohan & Kellam, 2021). Researchers are required to protect data obtained from participant using established procedures (McKibbin et al., 2021).

I kept the raw data collected on a password-protected folder of my hard drive and store hardcopies in a locked safe with restricted access, as security steps and measures numerous researchers use (Borycz, 2021). Researchers retain hard copies in locked cabinets and electronic copies on their password-protected personal computers with restricted access in order to remain compliant with ethical guidelines regarding data collected during research (Petters et al., 2019). I will keep all data locked in a safe for 5 years after completing my research to remain compliant with Walden University's standards. I will shred the hard copies and erase the electronic folder stored in the hard drive after the 5-year period.

Data Analysis

Researchers conduct triangulation to increase the extensiveness and richness of a study (Moon, 2019; Noble & Heale, 2019; Yarney et al., 2021). Researchers use numerous approaches, such as methodological triangulation, to collect and validate data and research results (Frey, 2018). Methodological triangulation encompasses using several types of data collection techniques to enhance the validity and credibility of the reaseach data (Allen, 2017). When researchers conduct methodological triangulation using several sources of evidence, researchers explore the phenomenon under investigation from various perspectives (Amin et al., 2020; Shapiro et al., 2020). Researchers achieve convergence evidence when they triangulate data collected from conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts (Yin, 2018). When researchers achieve convergence evidence, they increase a case study's construct validity (Yin, 2018). I conducted methodological triangulation to corroborate data collected from various sources, including semistructured interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts and determined that data alignment had occurred. Conducting methodological triangulation ensures the validity, credibility, and accuracy of the data, including data interpretations and analyses. I conducted member checking by giving participants my interpretations of their answers to interview questions and asking them to verify the accuracy of my interpretations. Upon receipt of member-checked data from participants, I compared these data with the data collected from reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts and determined that data alignment had occurred.

Due to the iterative nature of qualitative data analysis, it generally occurs simultaneously with the data collection process (Schneider et al., 2017). There are numerous qualitative data analysis methods, including thematic, content, and discourse analysis (O'Sullivan & Howden-Chapman, 2019). In thematic analysis, the researcher identifies themes and connects those themes to the research question and the framework (Roberts et al., 2019). Researchers classify, organize, and analyze data using a CAQDAS, such as NVivo (Flick, 2018), assisting in identifying themes and the relationships between those themes (Mattimoe, 2021).

Yin (2018) established five key data analysis steps that researchers must take in successive order: (1) compile, (2) disassemble, (3) reassemble, (4) clarify, and (5) conclude. During the first step, researchers collect and organize data to identify emerging patterns and themes across various interview transcripts (Yin, 2018). Researchers code and analyze research data using qualitative data analysis software packages, such as NVivo (Celik et al., 2020). Researchers also use the NVivo software to accelerate the organization, coding, and categorization of big volumes of data (Frey, 2018). During the second step, researchers disassembled the data and designate codes to relevant data to later reassemble and reorganize the data by themes, as part of the third step (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021; Maxwell, 2021). In the fourth step, researchers apply thematic analysis to ensure that any interpreted data can be validated by comparison with the interview transcripts (Roberts et al., 2019). Researchers find thematic analysis beneficial to recognize data themes and patterns in the data to help them answer the study's overarching research question (Lester et al., 2020)

During the data analysis process, I used NVivo to organized the data by recurring themes, codes, as well as to interpret raw data collected from conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts. Additionally, I determined thematic relationships and mapped themes and group codes with NVivo software. When conducting member checking, researchers confirm that their interpreted data align with participants' responses (Candela, 2019). During the member checking process, I ensured the accuracy of my interpretation of participants' responses to interview questions by presenting participants with my interpretation of their interview responses and having them confirm the accuracy of my interpretations.

Case study research has a key feature, which is the use of various data sources (Lee & Saunders, 2017). When researchers triangulate data, they increase the richness of the data (Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation helps researchers validate data collected from various data sources, including semistructured interviews and organizational documentation and artifacts (Ellis, 2019). Researchers use organizational documentation and artifacts as a second data source to conduct methodological triangulation (Yin, 2018). Thematic and content analysis are two of the data analysis approaches for document review and analysis (Tight, 2019). I analyzed organizational documentation and artifacts using content analysis. In document analysis, three distinct phases of the content analysis approach exist, which are preparation, organization, and reporting (Frey, 2018). I conducted methodological triangulation using data collected from conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts. During the fifth step, researchers answer the central research question by

forming conclusions and recommendations from the findings (Yin, 2018). I executed Yin's (2018) five data analysis steps by assembling the data gathered, disassembling the data according to codes, reassembling the data by themes, interpreting the data using thematic analysis, and articulating conclusions and recommendations based on the findings.

One way that researchers answer the overarching research question is by mapping the relationships between the themes that emerged from all data collected, which leads to researchers identifying key emerging themes and correlating these themes with the conceptual framework and the literature (Yin, 2018). Researchers effectively correlate major themes into data categories by coding with data labels (O'Kane et al., 2021). Researchers conduct essential analysis to ascertain how often thematic codes per data category occur (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019; Oluwafemi et al., 2021). I used NVivo to document and code major themes into various data categories in an effort to increase the validity of this study. Researchers identify major themes in the literature related to the conceptual framework (Allen, 2017). I correlated the major themes that emerged from the study with current literature and the conceptual framework.

Reliability and Validity

Researchers promote Lincoln and Guba's (1985) generally accepted principles of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability to establish reliability and validity in qualitative research. Researchers term these four principles collectively as trustworthiness (Sultan, 2019). Qualitative researchers establish the trustworthiness of a research study as a high priority (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Reliability

Researchers conducting qualitative case studies prioritize reliability as a major goal (Lee & Saunders, 2017). Researchers achieve reliable results by implementing imperative practices such as triangulation and member checking (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). For my research, I followed researchers' recommendation to use multiple sources of evidence, which were semistructured interviews and organizational documents and artifacts (Heesen et al., 2019). Researchers should conduct research with the understanding that a single source of evidence will not suffice and is not more important than all other sources and that all sources complement each other (Yin, 2018). When researchers use many sources of evidence, researchers produce more reliable results (Bevacqua et al., 2020; Yin, 2018).

Dependability focuses on ensuring consistency in research findings (Frey, 2018). I increased the dependability of this study by using the same interview questions with all participants, as Zairul (2021), and Aguinis and Solarino (2019) recommended. I ensured data dependability through the member checking process, as Candela (2019) recommended. Researchers conduct the member checking process by providing participants with researchers' interpretation of the participants' interview responses and having the participants confirm the accuracy (Mertler, 2017). Researchers enhance the data dependability of a study by mitigating and eliminating biases through the member checking process (Allen, 2017; Khan and MacEachen, 2022).

Researchers record interview sessions, which allows them to create dependable transcripts and themes after thoughtfully reviewing interviewees' responses (Lee &

Saunders, 2017). In an effort to avoid researcher's bias, I asked all participants to provide full details in their responses and, where necessary, I asked them to elaborate to ensure relevance. I refrained from communicating study details before conducting the interviews to prevent tainting the perceptions and responses of study participants, resulting in a more reliable study, as Ummel and Achille (2016) recommended. I adhered to expert recommendations and only ask the same interview questions with all participants to achieve consistency and enhance this study's reliability, as Allen (2017) and Hair et al. (2019) recommended.

Validity

Research validation or trustworthiness consists of several key pillars: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Natow, 2020). Case study researchers ensure credibility in their studies by using a myriad of data collection approaches and comparing them to determine if data alignment occurs (Creamer, 2018). Researchers working alone ensure the credibility of data analysis in their studies based on the inclusiveness and representativeness of the entire data collected (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Another technique researchers use to ensure credibility is reading the interview transcripts meticulously (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). I methodically reviewed the interview transcripts to fully capture the entire perspectives of participants. Further, I assessed and analyze similarities and differences among study participants' responses. I ensured the validity of the responses I receive from participants during interviews by conducting member checking after transcribing and before analyzing participant responses, as Rossman and Rallis (2017) recommended. To successfully conduct member

checking, I provided participants with my interpretation of their responses to interview questions and had them confirm the correctness of my interpretations.

Researchers desire that their studies will apply to other studies and settings, which researchers refer to as transferability (Rheinhardt et al., 2018). Case study researchers aim to obtain superior research results and increase transferability by focusing on four major objectives, which are recruiting suitable participants, giving detailed demographic information, conducting a thorough data analysis, and presenting results in an easy-to-follow format (Yin, 2018). I increased transferability of this research study by recruiting suitable participants, giving detailed demographic information, conducting a thorough data analysis, and presenting results in an easy-to-follow format.

Researchers establish confirmability in their studies by ensuring that their interpretation of participants' responses is accurate and free of bias (Frey, 2018). Confirmability generally occurs after researchers establish dependability, credibility, and transferability in a study (Sultan, 2019). I was attentive during the interviews and documented my opinions, perceptions, and personal biases. I used current literature to increase the confirmability of the results and meticulously transcribed participants' responses to establish a relationship between the data and the results.

Researchers use methodological triangulation to increase the validity of a case study, as recommended by various experts (Bergen & Labonté, 2019; Mwita, 2022). During the process of methodological triangulation, researchers compare various data sources to determine data alignment (Ellis, 2019). I conducted semistructured interviews and reviewed organizational documentation and artifacts to satisfy methodological

triangulation requirements by comparing data collected from various sources and determined that data alignment had occurred. Researchers use methodological triangulation as the primary strategy of ensuring validity in case study research because case study research design fundamentally entails collecting data from various sources (Heesen et al., 2019).

I achieved data saturation by continually collecting and analyzing data. Researchers achieve data saturation when no new meaningful information surfaces despite additional data collection and analysis (Audenhove, 2019; Chitac, 2022; Hlady-Rispal et al., 2021). Researchers are unable to produce conclusive findings unless researchers reach data saturation (Sebele-Mpofu & Serpa, 2020). I reached data saturation by collecting and analyzing data until no new meaningful information emerged.

Transition and Summary

Section 1 included the problem statement, purpose statement, and the nature of the study to support the selection of a qualitative methodology and a case study design for this study. In Section 1, I also presented the interview questions; operational definitions; and assumptions, limitations, and delimitations for the study. The last two components of Section 1 are the significance of the study and a review of the professional academic literature. In the literature review, I presented a comprehensive analysis of research relevant to the integration of social media into business practices and other related topics.

In Section 2, I provided a restatement of the purpose of the study, an explanation of the role of the researcher, a description of the participants, the population and sampling methods, and ethical concerns related to this study. Additionally, I provided a justification of the research method and design and discussed my plans for data collection, organization, and analysis. I concluded Section 2 with a description of reliability and validity concerns as they pertain to this study. Section 3 will include the following subsections: (a) introduction, (b) presentation of the findings, (c) application to professional practice, (d) implications for social change, (e) recommendations for action, (f) recommendations for further study, (g) reflections, and (h) conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In this final section, I present a synopsis of the aim of the study, restate the research question, and communicate findings following data analysis. Additionally, I include in this section the applications to professional practice, implications for positive social change, recommendations for action and additional study, and my overall reflections. Lastly, I present the concluding remarks related to this study.

Introduction

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas used to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. I successfully completed this exploration by collecting data from semistructured interviews with six leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas possessing at least 2 years of successful experience integrating social media into their business operations. Additionally, I collected essential data by reviewing organizational documentation and artifacts, such as marketing plans, social media posts, and details from websites. After I analyzed all data collected, the following four themes emerged: (a) employee awareness of social media importance increased social media integration, (b) presence of proper infrastructure and internet facilities increased social media integration, (c) use of various social media platforms increased social media integration, and (d) lack of a formal marketing plan limited social media integration.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question for this qualitative multiple case study was, *What strategies do leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media*

into their business operations? I conducted semistructured interviews with six SMEs'

leaders to assist me in answering the central research question. I obtained consent from

the participants via email before scheduling and conducting the interviews. Moreover, the

interviews were executed remotely using Zoom in light of the COVID-19 restrictions.

Further, in order to conduct methodological triangulation, I reviewed organization

documents and artifacts and compared these findings with interview results, allowing me

to determine that data alignment had occurred. I used NVivo to help me identify themes

from the data. Additionally, to ensure confidentiality, I assigned the codes C1, C2, and

C3 for the three participating companies and P1, P2, and P3 for leaders at those

companies. Each company had two leaders who were interviewed, for a total of six

participants: C1P1, C1P2, C2P1, C2P2, C3P1, and C3P2. All participants expressed that

social media is imperative for successful business operations.

Theme 1: Employee Awareness of Social Media Importance Increased Social Media

Integration

The first theme that emerged from analyzing data collected was that employee

awareness of the importance of social media use within the organization increased the

integration of social media into their operations. All six participants communicated that

awareness of social media use within the organization increased the integration of social

media into their business operations. In addition, three subthemes emerged, which are

that communicating the importance of social media to employees increased integration;

incentivizing, policing, and involving employees in the use of social media increased

integration; and educating and training employees on the use of social media increased

integration.

Communicating the Importance of Social Media to Employees Increased Integration

One of the major ways of making employees aware of the importance of social

media in the participating organizations was through formal and informal

communication. C2P1 indicated that at the genesis stages of integrating social media into

their business operations, they hosted a staff meeting where plans were explained.

Fundamentally, C2P1 also delivered a general overview of the steps that would be taken

to explain the importance of having a social media presence in the organization.

Additionally, C2P1 also communicated the overall strategies to employees at the staff

meeting.

An additional way that employees are made aware of the importance of social

media in the organization is through informal communication. C1P2 indicated that they

communicated to their staff about using social media in an informal way as the

instructions were not written. C2P2 indicated that they also communicated to the staff

informally stating that communication "was more so just from verbal communication and

understanding. It was not necessarily being written." C2P2 further articulated that no

consent forms were signed by employees indicating that they will adhere to the use of

social media, primarily because of the way relationships are established within the

organization; in essence, employees' agreement to adhere to social media was informal.

Moreover, C3P2 also purported that their staff was informed informally about social

media use within the organization. Qalati et al. (2022) deduced that direct communication

from top management is a critical factor regarding the integration of social media into an organization's business practices. Ali Abbasi et al. (2022) found that top management support was critical in the adoption of social media within an organization.

Incentivizing, Policing, and Involving Employees in the Use of Social Media Increased Integration

C2P1 and C3P2 communicated that incentivizing employees to use social media for work purposes assisted with the integration of social media into the business operations. C2P1 explained that they constantly need to create content involving employees to post on social media and at time employees may be reluctant to do so; however, incentivizing helped to encourage employees to embrace the social media initiatives. C2P1 stated that "it's really not overly complicated with incentivizing them." C2P1 further indicated that incentives included giving employees credit or extra time off.

Inherently, C3P1 and C3P2 introduced policies to encourage employees in their organization to adhere to the use of social media for work purposes. C3P1 indicated that after creating the social media platforms, rules and regulations regarding the effective use of the platforms were communicated to the employees. C3P1 stated that "staff was advised of the types of communication, how they are to communicate on the social media platforms, and how they were to respond based on certain questions." C3P1 also indicated that employees were mandated to not use any derogatory remarks. C3P1 advised that the rules were communicated through a staff meeting and also in the employee handbook. Moreover, the employees had an opportunity for questions and answers regarding the information. Additionally, employees signed an agreement to

adhere to the policies. C3P2 indicated that they encouraged staff to use the various work social media platforms to engage customers.

C1P1 articulated that their employees were engaged and involved and actually recommended many of the social media platforms used in the organization. Moreover, C1P1 indicated that their employees are very open to social media and the employees suggested many of the strategies that were employed in the organization. Further, C1P1 opined that some of their employees "prefer certain social media outlets over others and they are always looking and experimenting with new tools on the internet that we can use to help to enhance our work." C3P2 indicated that employees recommended different social media platforms and even encouraged the organization to have a stronger social media presence. Additionally, C2P2 articulated that "they were hesitant at first," but once they saw their photos on the social media platforms, they were excited. C2P2 further stated that "there is sense of pride when they see our end product being displayed throughout the various social media platforms." Soens and Claeys (2021) found that incentives increased employee branding behavior with social media more than with restrictions. Further, Al-adaileh et al. (2022) articulated that management support was a key factor in the adoption of social media.

Educating and Training Employees on the Use of Social Media Increased Integration

C1P1, C2P2, and C3P1 communicated that education and training were pivotal in integrating social media into their business operations. C1P1 expressed that "my associates are all social media savvy." C2P2 indicated that understanding how to use social media to reach an overseas market is "a learning process." C3P1 further articulated

that one of the primary strategies for integrating social media within the organization is providing education and training related to social media. C3P1 articulated that "being knowledgeable about how to effectively use each of the social media platforms" is paramount. In essence, C3P1 pronounced that providing education and training related to the platforms enables organizational leaders to better tailor strategies that will produce the type of results they are seeking. C3P1 further expounded that each social media platform, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram is unique in that each has different target audiences and, therefore, the approach to using each is different and must be taught. Likewise, C1P1 expressed that it is "a matter of knowing who your focus audience is, then using a strategy to reach out."

Moreover, C1P2, C2P1, C2P2, and C3P1 articulated that it is almost expected that one would use social media within the organization. C1P2 expressed that social media is "one of the things that you have to do if you really want to be able to access [reach] people." C2P1 communicated that the actual skill of using social media, such as posting and scheduling, was fundamentally handled by key staff assigned with those tasks. Further, C1P2 indicated that the initial details of an assignment would be communicated to them and they would create the associated visuals and would then be instructed to post on social media along with the length of time. Notably, participant C2P2 expressed that they do not have a policy and procedures manual that can guide employees on how and when to use social media within the organization. C3P1 expressed that there is a "team of professionals that are prepared to work with us to not only train persons, but to also help us through the process." Korcsmáros and Csinger (2022) recommended that SMEs should

focus on training employees about the proper use of social media, which will be beneficial over an extended period. Moreover, Chatterjee et al. (2021) supported the idea that managers should design appropriate social media training for employees.

After reviewing company documents entitled, *Sales and Marketing Report July 2020,* provided by C3P1, I gained a greater understanding of employee awareness as a strategy for integrating social media into business operations. The report featured the performance of two of the major social media platforms that were used in the organization regarding sales and likes: Facebook and Instagram. Once employees have an understanding of the impact of integrating social media into the organization, they can further adopt and increase usage. After I reviewed the Instagram account of C2, it was evident that employees have been made aware of social media use and the importance in the organization, as many employees are featured on Instagram. As C2P2 indicated during the interview, once employees were aware and understood the importance of social media use within the organization, their participation increased in activities, such as content creation for Instagram and Facebook, which promoted social media integration. Moreover, several employees were featured in the company's internal marketing presentation called "The [C1] Content Strategy." Additionally, C1P1 featured a LinkedIn handle on the company website, particularly as the company promotes LinkedIn as one of the standard platforms for employees to use for regular business operations. Ababneh (2022) recommended that organizations should promote consciousness in the workforce concerning internet marketing. Further, Ali Abbasi

(2022) suggested that the more top leaders are aware of the benefits of using social media, the more employees increase the use of social media.

Correlation to the Current Literature

The assertion of Theme 1 is that employee awareness of social media importance increased social media integration within the organization. Bodhi et al. (2022) communicated that work-related social media use positively impacts innovated work-related performance. Moreover, Pekkala and van Zoonen (2022) indicated that social media is indispensable to current work environments and found that several factors, including social media training, clarity of roles, and previous experience with social media, are imperative in integrating social media and related activities within the organization. Further, similar to this study's Theme 1, Osakwe and Ikhide (2022) found that applying coercive and noncoercive pressure at different times positively impacts adoption and integration. Additionally, Bakar and Zaini (2022) discovered that several variables, including the propensity to share information, may positively influence social media adoption and integration.

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework

Theme 1, employee awareness of social media importance increased social media integration, aligns with Berry's (1983) relationship marketing theory in a significant way. Fundamentally, Berry defined relationship marketing as a pivotal tool to improve and develop relationships between businesses and customers. Intrinsically, relationship marketing can lead to loyal and long-term relationships with customers and have a positive impact on companies because of the potential to retain customers (Mohamed et

al., 2022). Sedalo et al. (2022) found that with regards to relationship marketing, several social media affordances, including relationship building, increase customer acquisition. In essence, the use of social media could help a company build relationships that may have positive outcomes for the entire company. Therefore, employees' awareness of social media importance positively impacts integration and can result in long-term and loyal customer relationships, a direct alignment to the relationship marketing theory.

Theme 2: Presence of Proper Infrastructure and Internet Facilities Increased Social Media Integration

The second theme that emerged from analyzing the data is that the presence of proper infrastructure and internet facilities increased social media integration. C1P1 expounded on the barriers that existed related to implementing social media into their business operations. C1P1 expressed that as leaders they need to ensure that the right level of communication infrastructure is in place for the organization. C1P1 articulated that "having direct access to fiber optic cabling, or broadband interconnectivity, or wireless interconnectivity" was imperative to integrating social media into their business operations. C1P1 also conveyed that it is imperative to ensure that "the utilities are consistent and sustainable" to effectively integrate social media into business operations. C1P1 also indicated that it is important for social media integration to make sure that C1 is not "losing power in the middle of the day trying to get work done or losing latency in internet connectivity." C1P1 further expressed that there is not a barrier to accessing the internet or virtual platforms; however, challenges experienced were related to "the backbone and infrastructure that supports the internet."

Similarly, C1P2 articulated that there were many issues regarding the "cyber infrastructure" at C1. In addition, C1P2 communicated that "sometimes the internet access is not the best." Fundamentally, C1P1 intimated that they collaborated to overcome these barriers to implementing social media in their business operations by ensuring that they obtained "the most robust internet services that you are able to afford, meaning that you get the best in quality and speed for internet services." Additionally, C1P1 indicated that one can overcome connectivity issues by "not relying entirely on wireless broadband, but getting fiber optic connectivity into your premises." C1P2 stated that "we couldn't trust the internet access." C1P2 further stated that "one of the things we ended up having to do was sometimes outsource" and use another company to provide connectivity support because their "internet access is a lot better than just average" to ensure stability in operations. C3P1 communicated that one of the barriers to implementing social media into the organization was attempting to "manage the amount of users on social media at the same time," primarily because there is "a particular bandwidth; you don't want that to be overcrowded for whatever reasons." Moreover, C3P1 expressed that they had to ensure that they had "the correct gateway software for making sure that there were no spams," particularly while people were "engaging in using our social media platform." Susanto et al. (2021) communicated that various activities that were hindered during the COVID-19 pandemic could now continue through social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram by using the internet. Moreover, Puriwat and Tripopsakul (2021) underscored the importance of internet

infrastructure by highlighting internet technologies changing the way business is conducted, resulting in an increased use of social media in SMEs.

A review of company documents and artifacts revealed that all three companies possess a website. A review of the three websites showed various social media handles displayed. C1's website displays the LinkedIn icon. C2's website exhibits the Instagram and Facebook handles. C3's website arrays Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Additionally, websites for all of the companies displayed the email address of each company. Further, after reviewing the marketing document named "[C1] Brochure," the email facility is noted. Moreover, the email addresses for C2 and C3 are visible on their Facebook pages. Qalati et al. (2022) found that there is a significant and positive effect of compatibility of social media platforms with current technology infrastructure on social media integration. Moreover, Dolega et al. (2021) found that the implementation of social media leads to escalated web traffic.

Correlation to the Current Literature

The premise of Theme 2 is that the presence of proper infrastructure and internet facilities increases social media integration. Essentially, if the internet is not functioning at an optimal speed for a company, social media integration goals are difficult to achieve, ultimately impacting the success of the company. Tiwasing (2021) found that SMEs in rural areas that belong to social media business networks have a higher turnover than their nonmember counterparts; however, rural SMEs in social media business networks experience lower sales growth when compared to urban SMEs in social media business networks. Tiwasing suggested that rural SMEs need increased online support for their

businesses as well as better connectivity and digital infrastructure. Further, Falola et al. (2021) found that some business owners faced key challenges with regards to completely integrating social media into their businesses, such as high internet costs and unstable power supply. Additionally, Nwoye et al. (2022) found that limited internet access, poor power supply, and high-priced Wi-Fi connections were also factors impeding the implementation of digital marketing tools and strategies such as social media into business operations.

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework

Theme 2, the presence of proper infrastructure and internet facilities increased social media integration, aligns with Berry's (1983) relationship marketing theory in key ways. Berry underscored the importance of relationship marketing to enhance relationships and communication with customers. Fundamentally, access to proper infrastructure and internet facilities creates an environment for businesses to fully adopt social media within the organization. Social media is dependent on internet facilities and some organizational devices for social media use are dependent on stable power supply. Social media has proven to be a useful tool to facilitate relationship marketing. Suharto et al. (2022) found that the use of social media to interact with customers had a significant effect on both customer loyalty and customer satisfaction. Sedalo et al. (2022) identified three key benefits that social media provides to an organization with regards to relationship marketing: relationship, sharing, and brand visibility. Therefore, the presence of proper infrastructure and internet facilities increases social media integration and facilitates an environment for relationship marketing to thrive.

Theme 3: Use of Various Social Media Platforms Increased Social Media Integration

The third theme that emerged from analyzing data collected was that the use of various social media platforms increased social media integration. All six participants expressed the importance and benefits of using social media in their organizations, provided detailed accounts of the various platforms that they were using, and underscored the importance of selecting the most appropriate social media platforms for their respective organizations. C1P1 communicated that they use LinkedIn social media platform. C1P1 expressed that most of their "communication is done via WhatsApp." C1P1 further indicated the following ideas:

Communication to staff, associates, and clients is done first and foremost via WhatsApp, or [by] placing telephone calls and if we have to exchange documents for signature then those are shared by email and also shared in platforms like Google docs.

C1P1 indicated that "some social media outlets are more appropriate than others." C1P1 further indicated that "you really have to decide which ones [social media platforms] are going to be the most effective, [and] which ones [social media platforms] are going to be the most appropriate for the kind of business we run." C1P1 further indicated that there is not a great demand for Facebook as before, primarily because of the introduction of platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. C1P1 expressed that it is important to use a social media platform that is relevant to their operations mainly because this practice will lead to the kinds of networks and groups in which they want to

engage. C1P1 also indicated that they use different kinds of platforms to ensure that work is done, particularly when conducting online meetings or hosting conferences or workshops. C1P1 articulated that they use LinkedIn to communicate their story to potential clients because it is "where most professionals go to find other professionals." C1P1 stated that they also use LinkedIn for postings and to find business opportunities. C1P1 indicated that they mostly use WhatsApp or Signal to communicate with clients and staff; however, Facebook, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp are the principal social media platforms used in their organization.

Similarly, C1P2 communicated that Facebook and WhatsApp are key social media platforms used at the organization. C1P2 expressed that if some of their target audiences do not like to use Facebook, they could easily communicate with them on WhatsApp. C1P2 stated that WhatsApp is very personal because it is accessible on one's mobile. Generally, Facebook and WhatsApp are used to raise awareness of a project that C1 may be overseeing to the targeted audience. C1P2 also expressed that they also use LinkedIn when it is necessary to reach an individual but are not certain how to do it.

C2P1 communicated that the primary social media platforms used by their organization include LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook. C2P1 stated that before they started implementing social media platforms, they established a website for the organization and incorporated a search engine optimization strategy. Following the website establishment, C2P1 expressed that they ventured into implementing social media platforms, creating a LinkedIn profiled because most of our clients are really business to business (B2B), as opposed to business to customer (B2C)." C2P1 further

expressed that "having a presence on LinkedIn really helped us build a lot of relationships with persons who were in the industry" because in the industry they operate a word-of-mouth experience is very effective. Moreover, C2P1 communicated the importance of "connecting to Instagram and Facebook as an additional means for persons to understand who we are and the services we provide and give them a glimpse into who we are as an organization." Similarly, C2P2 expressed that they use social media platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook. C2P2 expressed that YouTube is not a priority for them as they adhere to the B2C approach. C2P2 stated that "for our particular company, we feel that YouTube might not be the best avenue because with YouTube and YouTube ads, it is chiefly a business to customer tactic."

C3P1 communicated that they use Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and WhatsApp, which allowed them to increase their "brand awareness and to basically stay on the top of people's mind when they have choices." C3P1 expounded that the integration of social media in their organization has also increase their website traffic. C3P1 indicated that they use WhatsApp to receive customer orders and also to share motivational content with customers. C3P1 expressed that their largest following is on Facebook, with approximately 8,000 followers. C3P2 also corroborated that they have integrated Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram into their organization. C3P2 expressed that "we have reached the maximum capacity [of followers] as it relates to our social media." C3P2 communicated that they were compelled to establish an ecommerce and social media presence due to the demand for their products. C3P2 also indicated that they facilitate a motivational and testimonial group through WhatsApp. C3P2 expounded

that they also conducted a junk food challenge through their Facebook group. Moreover, C3P2 expressed that numerous customers world-wide have located the founder of C3 using social media. Additionally, a particular famous person had found the founder of C3 on LinkedIn, to which C3P2 stated, "that's the power of social media."

After reviewing the organization documents and artifacts, namely the company websites for the three companies, C1, C2, and C3, there is evidence of the integration of social media into the business operations of all companies. After analyzing the website for C1, a link to the social media platform LinkedIn was noted, as referenced by C1P1. Additionally, after assessing a marketing flyer for C1, named *C1 Brochure*, the LinkedIn details were noted at the footer of the flyer. After reviewing the website for C2, two social media handles were displayed: Instagram, and Facebook. As I delved into the Instagram platform, I observed several hundred posts and a couple thousand followers. Moreover, the posts included videos and photos depicting work that C2 performed. Similarly, after examining the Facebook page of C2, over 2,000 likes and over 2,000 followers were exhibited. Additionally, various posts of video and photos are displayed on the Facebook platform for C2, showcasing various jobs completed for customers locally and internationally. Moreover, C2 also uses Facebook to post available career opportunities, to share the various types of services offered, and to thank their partners. After exploring the website of C3, I saw evidence of the integration of three social media platforms: Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. After examining each of C3's social media platforms, I observed that over 5,000 persons follow and like the Facebook platform. Similar to C2, the posts to the platform for C3 include the products being

offered, customers testimonies, and speaking engagements where C3 is involved or featured. Viewing the YouTube page showed 159 subscribers; 12,585 views; and a joined date of 2015. The Instagram page of C3 featured post related to products posts and motivational quotes. Moreover, there are approximately 500 followers and 79 posts on the Instagram page of C3. The use of multiple social media platforms in business is imperative. Anggarini and Naufa (2022) communicated that social media platforms allow businesses to interact with customers in an inexpensive way. Czarnecka et al. (2022) found that social media users employ various platforms to conduct communication; therefore, it is important for companies to integrate various platforms into their operations to ensure effective business results.

Correlation to the Current Literature

The foundation of Theme 3 is that the use of various social media platforms increased social media integration. Aggarwal et al. (2022) communicated that the COVID-19 crisis resulted in a significant growth of social media users world-wide and by extension, increased the use of various social media digital platforms in corporate settings. Jamil et al. (2022) found that the intentions of the users of Facebook and Instagram platforms were significantly impacted by social media marketing activities. Xiang et al. (2022) also found that people use social media for a variety of purposes and communicated that using multiple social media platforms has the potential to create numerous business opportunities. Gbandi and Iyamu (2022) found that multiple social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube all produced significant and positive results in growing SMEs. These positive impacts of social media

have the potential to guide SMEs in integrating multiple social media platforms into their

organizations.

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework

Theme 3, the use of various social media platforms increased social media

integration, aligns with Berry's (1983) relationship marketing theory significantly.

Berry's assertion was that business owners can build and enhance customer relationships

through relationship marketing. Nemati and Weber (2022) posited that relationship

marketing involves building deeper and more meaningful relationships with customers to

secure life-time support. Moreover, Infante and Mardikaningsih (2022) found that a

significant benefit of social media is that it facilitates building good relationships with

customers. The use of multiple social media platforms within a company is pivotal in

building relationships with customers who also use various social media platforms for

communicating.

Theme 4: Lack of a Formal Marketing Plan Limited Social Media Integration

The fourth theme that emerged from analyzing data collected was that a lack of a

formal marketing plan limited social media integration. C1P2, C2P1, C2P2, C3P1, and

C3P2 communicated the importance of social media as a marketing tool. C1P2 expressed

that social media is a significant tool for awareness. C2P1 communicated that they use

social media to disseminate information to potential customers regarding the services

they offer and the problems they solve. Nevertheless, C2P1 indicated that "social media

has not played a major role in our business development and our ability to garner

customers." C2P1 posited that most of their customers were derived from "word of

mouth, and past customer referrals." C3P1 expressed that when they looked at branding

and expansion for the business, they realized that "without the presence of social media,

it was more challenging to market our product within the environment today." C3P1

further communicated that what would have taken them a week or two to accomplish,

"social media now does it in seconds." C3P1 indicated that social media platforms, such

as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, have allowed them to increase their

"brand awareness and to basically stay on top of people's mind when they have choices."

C3P1 communicated that "social media has really helped us to capitalize on [and] to use

it to establish our brand.'' Additionally, C3P1 stated that "social media marketing "makes

it easier for us to establish our brand awareness. We agreed that through social media, our

brand awareness was pretty much straightforward."

C3P1 also shared that "marketing helps you to gauge what your audiences are all

about. Are they students, adults, individuals within a certain age bracket? And [to] see

who was [is] really our greater target audience." Further, C3P1 indicated that they also

used social media outlets to communicate to customers and potential customers about

coupon specials they are operating. Additionally, C3P1 stated that they would "pay for

boosters" to help in "increasing our awareness." Moreover, C3P1 communicated that

they also partnered with companies that had a large social media base to send out blasts

on their behalf. C3P1 also posited that social media allows them to address reputation

management. In essence, C3P1 expressed that if there is any negative content about the

business from individuals in the marketplace, social media facilitates avenues for

mitigation. C3P1 also purported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, using social media

"boosted sales because through social media people were able to find out that within seconds, we were open and know what hours we were open." Moreover, C3P1 expressed that there is competition in the market and "social media also helps us to just keep an eye on competition." Similarly, C3P2 indicated the importance of social media to the success of the organization stating that he was able to conduct activities to benefit the company because of invitations he received through social media.

However, while all six study participants communicated the importance of social media as a marketing tool, they expressed the lack of a formal marketing plan within their organization. All six participants stated that marketing is imperative to the success of most companies and, therefore, the creation and execution of a marketing plan is paramount to the accomplishment of any marketing goal. C1P2 communicated that there is not a social media marketing plan or a content marketing plan that supports social media within their organization. Moreover, C1P2 indicated concerning social media marketing that "we didn't have a strategy." C1P2 expressed that they worked with social media according to the knowledge they had, in an effort to "get the word out" concerning the services of the company. C2P1 indicated that the Instagram and Facebook strategy for posting is "not defined at the moment," primarily because "we've had to start and stop." C2P1 further expressed that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a delay in the establishment and progress of social media in the organization.

Nevertheless, C2P1 communicated that they have made strides in using various social media platforms stating that "with more of a focus on Instagram and Facebook now, our targeting in part is done through our hashtag strategy that we implemented for

our posts." Further, C2P1 communicated that they have implemented a process to ensure that they are able to obtain content such as photos and videos to post on the various social media platforms. Additionally, C2P1 expressed that they are "creating a digital marketing plan for the company that would more clearly define the elements of social media, what our brand representation [is], [and] our brand voice." Further C2P1 communicated that the creation of the digital marketing plan is a project that is currently a priority for the company and stated that the marketing plan would

> Outline processes a little bit more for what we're doing because it creates like the overall arching goal or focus on whether or not we're just trying to bring brand awareness, [and] whether or not we are actually trying to educate.

C2P2 specified that in regards to a social media marketing plan, "there are no formal processes per se that's documented right now outside of the communication of the work that we have upcoming." C2P2 asserted that haphazardly implementing social media "is not a good idea." C2P2 further expressed that

> Without a clear direction or purpose, it makes it very hard because you can get lost in just trying to determine what you need to do when you need to do it, if you're haphazardly doing it. But if you do have a plan, it makes the process a little bit less overwhelming and less challenging to get it started. And in general, and this is my personal feeling, companies need to make that investment in someone to work with them. A lot of times, it's an afterthought and people don't see the value in it until business returns. But with social media, it's a long game strategy. But we live in such an instantaneous environment that people want to see

results within a month [and] within three months, when really truly, an effective

social media strategy, in terms of integration needs, at least six months to really

work.

Similarly, C2P2 expressed,

At one point we were using a social media management company, but we decided

to go in house with it, just because we felt that we could market our company

much better internally, and so we created our division in the company.

Additionally, C2P2 expressed that for social media, they have certain goals that they

want to achieve in terms of the number of persons following them or engaging with them

on the various social media platforms. Further, C2P2 communicated that "it's a learning

process, especially within our particular market and niche." C2P2 further expressed that

"most of our marketing is overseas because that's where most of our business is coming

from." C2P2 also communicated that because of their social media efforts, "followers

increased on Instagram to about 500 followers." Additionally, C2P2 indicated that their

B2B customers generally provide written testimonials regarding the service they

received; therefore, the leaders of C2 would like to work on obtaining more visual

testimonials that can be placed on social media platforms and the website to produce a

greater impact.

C3P1 expressed that management generally assists with social media activities.

Additionally, C3P1 indicated that "we have engaged a social media consultancy company

that helps us to not only integrate new strategies, but also to help [helps to] read the

feedback that we're getting from the platform itself." C3P1 also stated that they will be

trying to establish a "system or pattern" as an effort toward a marketing plan and strategy. C3P1 further indicated that "we established that we have to do blogs every month, so we have to be able to put content together to make sure that we send out a blog every month." C3P1 expressed also that "we try to stay engaged with WhatsApp as long as the customer is engaged." C3P1 also communicated that they have approximately four to five persons along with management monitoring the social media platforms to ensure that customers are responded to in a timely manner. Additionally, the social media consultants for C3 have advised that C3 leaders need to budget "a reasonable amount for basically just marketing and branding." Moreover, C3P1 expressed that their social media consultants are

> Working on a proposal now that we should have before the end of the month that helps us to see how we can use all these different social media platforms more effectively. And of course, they've put together not only a strategy but also [a] budget, and they have a team of professionals that are prepared to work with us to not only train persons, but to also help us through the process.

C3P2 also supported the concept of having dedicated employees for social media and stated "now, if we were to have a person personally dedicated to engaging and pushing the company to a different level from a social media perspective, I think the company can exponentially grow to a whole other level." C3P2 informed that "our mission now would be to probably perhaps, get a person who we can hire to specifically work on [our] social media page to take it to the next level." Additionally, C3P2 expressed that they did have a

dedicated social media employee, but "now that position is void." C3P2 further communicated the following message:

> Social media in this era, is necessary it's critical. If any business does not have a social presence, a business that is offering service to the public, if they don't have a social media presence, they're not serious, because you have 7 billion people in the world and if you are offering especially someone like me that ships, that has a product that internationally has a demand, [with] just one post, one person sees my post can change my life, [and] can change the whole direction of the company.

Moreover, C3P2 posited, "I want to establish a social media marketing plan, that's something that we have to do, and I think once we do that, the company will have a next leg up."

After reviewing company documents for all three companies, I confirmed that there are no formal marketing plans. Nevertheless, after reviewing a marketing flyer for C1, named *C1 Brochure*, I found that marketing efforts to promote the company and its services were made. Additionally, another marketing effort was noted by evidence of a flyer named *C1 Overview Promo*. This flyer listed all the major services offered and methods of contacting the company. Further, another flyer was noted for C1, named *C1 Ad*, which displayed various services and contact information. Moreover, when reviewing the website named *C1.com*, I note that the various expertise and myriad of services were displayed and communicated. Further, the website communicated a call to action and contact details, such as an email and telephone contact that were visible. The LinkedIn

profile for C1 also displayed services offered and contact details. I reviewed a C2's

marketing document, named *Marketing Presentation - C2 Content Strategy*, and found

evidence of a marketing thrust, though not a formal marketing plan or social media plan

for the organization. The marketing presentation contained a focus on engaging

customers on a couple of the social media platforms. Moreover, after reviewing the

document named *Digital Marketing Weekly Report,* I found further evidence of

marketing activity for C1's social media postings as well as social media operational

tasks to be completed. Further, I observed evidence of C1 advertising on the Facebook

social media platforms through the respective documents and artifacts, named

business.facebook.com/campaigns, *Insights for C1,* where results for paid, Facebook

Page, and Instagram reach.

Additionally, after exploring the website of C3, I saw evidence of marketing

initiative related to the display of products and a call to action. I also observed products

displayed on the Instagram page of C3. Moreover, I observed similar marketing activities

on the Facebook page of C3. Additionally, I can also see marketing evidence through

videos and customer testimonials displayed on Facebook. Further, I also reviewed the

company document of C3, entitled *Sales and Marketing Report July 2020*, and noted

marketing evidence conducted by the social media consultant to boost C3's online

presence and branding surrounding various social media platforms. Ofori-Amanfo and

Akonsi (2022) found that marketing capability was one of the key predictors of SME

success. Additionally, Lim et al. (2022) found that advertising on social media platforms

such as Facebook on a frequent basis increases website visits, which in turn may increase

purchases, and therefore reveals implications for managers when creating marketing plans.

Correlation to the Current Literature

The assertion of Theme 4 is that a lack of formal marketing plan limited social media integration within the organization. Olazo (2022) found that there are great opportunities for SMEs to adopt digital marketing for business success, nevertheless, producing a viable digital marketing plan is hindered because of the lack of technical expertise. Similarly, Attaallah (2022) found that social media is a constructive avenue for marketing for SMEs. Jasin (2022) studied the impact of social media marketing on customer purchases through brand image and suggested that a marketing plan is needed to ensure that a strong brand is created and that the brand can be marketed on social media.

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework

Theme 4, a lack of formal marketing plan limited social media integration, aligns with Berry's (1983) relationship marketing theory in key ways. Berry's view of relationship marketing is that relationship marketing is imperative in creating and strengthening relationships between customers and businesses. In the framework of this study, marketing is imperative to the overall success of organizations. Additionally, marketing makes a company visible to potential customers who normally would not have known about its existence. In essence, marketing is a pivotal tool in attracting customers to an organization (Nemati & Weber, 2022). Moreover, a formal marketing plan is paramount to the accomplishment of marketing initiatives, as it is a roadmap for

companies to reach marketing goals, including attracting new customers. Mitreva et al.
(2022) found that SME performance increases when marketing planning is understood.
Once customers are attracted to the organization, leaders can use relationship marketing
to develop committed and long-standing relationships with potential customers to achieve
organizational success (Sedalo et al., 2022).

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies
leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their
business operations. Digital marketing plays a powerful role in the operations of SMEs,
as they seek to effectively showcase their products in a competitive market (Tomala,
2022). The participants in the study were SME leaders in the Bahamas who used social
media within their organization for at least 2 years. The results from this study can be
used by SME leaders to develop strategies to effectively integrate social media into their
organizations to increase overall success, using numerous social media platforms as a
part of their marketing strategy, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

Social media is an important marketing tool for SMEs (Rasul, 2018). Social
media integration enables SMEs to become more competitive in the market. The
emergence of digital technologies has changed the landscape of the business world in
significant ways (Michopoulou & Moisa, 2019). Marketing activities are occurring more
rapidly, frequently, and efficiently with digital technologies, such as social media
platforms. SME leaders must pivot in their operational approach and embrace the
communication power of social media in order to thrive in this new business landscape

(Becker & Lee, 2019). Moreover, Berry's (1983) relationship marketing theory is imperative for SME leaders to understand and apply. Berry asserted that building long-term relationships with customers improves communication and increases business financial success. SME leaders can facilitate long-term relationships through the use of social media tools.

The four themes that emerged from analyzing the data were (a) employee awareness of social media importance increased social media integration, (b) presence of proper infrastructure and internet facilities increased social media integration, (c) use of various social media platforms increased social media integration, and (d) lack of a formal marketing plan limited social media integration. SME leaders should be very intentional in their approach to integrating social media into their organizations. SME leaders could be more effective in making employees aware of social media by establishing company-wide objectives related to social media and developing a communication plan to roll out details to employees. Moreover, SME leaders can introduce creative ways to obtain employee buy-in and appoint social media influencers from within the organization to champion the social media integration cause.

Additionally, SME leaders can foster integration of social media by ensuring that they have top-of-the-line internet facilities and proper infrastructure. Avoiding these limitations of power outages and slow internet access could propel organizations in using social media tools more readily to achieve business objectives and success. Such limitations can also cause frustrations and low morale for employees trying to execute business objectives related to social media. Additionally, SME leaders should use a

variety of social media platforms to increase integration. Different demographics of customers use different social media platforms. By understanding the demographics, SME leaders can foster greater success in the use of social media platforms. Moreover, developing a formal marketing plan with a social media strategy is pivotal to the success of integrating social media within the organization. Without a formal marketing plan, organizational leaders tend to be haphazard in their approach to integrating social media within the organization (Amin, 2021). Additionally, a formal marketing plan may also incorporate guidance regarding which social media platforms to use for which product, period of time, and customer demographics to obtain optimal success.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of the study highlight various strategies SME leaders can employ to integrate social media into their businesses. These strategies include developing a formal marketing plan and social media strategy and eliminating barriers to awareness and infrastructure. Increased integration of social media can result in improved revenue for businesses. The findings of this study can contribute to positive social change by growing the overall economy of the Bahamas when SMEs succeed.

SMEs are critical to the success of an economy (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2020). The findings from this study may be beneficial to SME leaders by providing them with strategies to effectively integrate social media within their organizations and subsequently experience the success of social media marketing. The successful integration of social media into businesses has the potential to increase SME revenue and result in stabilizing and expanding small business community. A growing business

community can lead to increased job opportunities. SMEs increase in an economy when entrepreneurship increases. Musah and Padi (2022) found that generally, entrepreneurship is an imperative tool that decreases unemployment. When a community experiences job increases through increased small businesses, the following benefits are generated: unemployment decreases, poverty decreases, living conditions increase, and spending increases, resulting in economic growth for a nation (Musah & Padi, 2022).

The integration of social media into the business operations of SMEs has the potential of stabilizing SMEs. Stable SME sectors assist in decreasing unemployment in various economies (Boukedjane, 2022). El-Sahli et al. (2022) also posited that SMEs are pivotal in the creation of jobs. Simkiv et al. (2022) also indicated that SMEs are important in decreasing unemployment and generating new jobs. Increased jobs through a stable SME sector also presents opportunities to reduce poverty. Nusratovich and Muhammadyusuf (2022) communicated that SMEs are imperative in reducing poverty and underscored the importance of entrepreneurship training and development to achieve this goal. Further, Soegoto et al. (2022) found that an increase in small businesses was fundamental in decreasing poverty. Valle et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of entrepreneurship education, including an understanding of access and management of finances to attain business success, thereby reducing poverty. Bhattacharyya and Kumar (2022) communicated that SMEs are a key driver of economic growth, hiring approximately 40% of the workforce and comprising around 30% of GDP in India. Batrancea et al. (2022) also posited that SMEs are significant to the economic growth of a nation providing almost 50% of the jobs in the workforce.

Moreover, a growing SME community as a result of the integration of social media into business operations can also lead to a reduction in social problems in communities. Some SMEs choose to address various societal problems that are not being addressed through traditional channels. SMEs that are cause-based in nature have the potential to alleviate social issues and make significant changes in their communities by ensuring that the mission of the cause is clearly defined and that proper planning of associated responsibilities is conducted (Ceesay et al., 2022). An increased number of SMEs increases the opportunity for social causes to be addressed through these unique business vehicles.

Recommendations for Action

Leaders of business organizations are encouraged to review the findings of this study and consider implementing the strategies used to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. Based on the results of this study, I propose the following recommendations for action for business leaders to become more successful in integrating social media into their business operations.

1. Develop a comprehensive awareness plan regarding the importance of social media and associated organization objectives in an effort to increase integration. Leaders of SMEs may consider creating an awareness plan that addresses three key components with regards to increasing social media integration: communicating the importance of social media to employees; incentivizing, policing, and involving employees in the use of social media; and educating and training employees on the use of social media. The

communication component should focus on more formal methods of

disseminating information, such as documentation outlining social media

benefits in an effort to gain buy-in from employees. SME top-tier leaders can

also host formal meetings to communicate the importance of social media at

all levels in the organization to underscore its necessity. Additionally, SME

leaders can have employees sign an agreement that they will adhere to the

social media integration plan and objectives in an effort to foster a sense of

commitment. With regards to the next critical component, incentivizing,

policing, and involving employees in the use of social media, SME leaders

can develop incentive programs with various benefits such as time off,

financial bonuses, and recognition opportunities to encourage greater buy-in

and participation by employees. Additionally, making some aspects of the

social media integration plan mandatory may also prove helpful in increasing

social media integration and in meeting target goals. Further, including

employees in the use of social media for various work-related activities could

provide an opportunity to increase integration such as identifying social media

specialists to champion the integration cause. Moreover, for the third key

component in the awareness plan, education and training, SME leaders should

ensure that employees are trained on how to use the various social media

platforms because each platform is unique and has various target audiences;

the training can be facilitated by external experts ensuring greater accuracy of

use by employees. SME leaders should assign certain social media tasks to

employees with associated skills for greater proficiency. The creation of a

policy and procedure manual for social media may prove beneficial in the

integration of social media into the organization creating greater

accountability.

2. Ensure that proper infrastructure and stable internet facilities are available to

assist in the integration of social media into business operations. Primarily,

leaders of SMEs should ensure access to fiber optic cabling or broadband

interconnectivity, or wireless interconnectivity allowing for quality and speed

in internet services to support the use of social media in business operations.

Designing and implementing a company website is imperative also as it can

be used to display the various social media handles and potentially increase

brand visibility and loyalty. SME leaders should ensure that utilities are

consistent and power is readily available to allow seamless use of social media

within the organization.

3. Use various social media platforms to accomplish various organizational

objectives. SME leaders should assess their business models and decide which

social media platforms are more beneficial for the type of business they lead.

Additionally, SME leaders should also use different social media platforms

based on the various target audiences connected to the business to facilitate

more effective marketing and communication. Moreover, SME leaders should

select social media platforms based on the tasks they want to accomplish,

whether it is brand awareness, relationship building, or another organization objective to increase organization competency.

4. Create and implement a formal marketing plan to help SME leaders strategically use social media as a marketing tool within the organization. Leaders of SMEs may consider developing a comprehensive marketing plan that will provide the guidance and step-by-step pathway regarding effectively implementing social media within the organization. Some of these steps include determining which social media platforms to use, when to use various platforms, who to target on each platform, and what action to take on each platform. SME leaders may consider implementing a marketing team along with a social media segment or outsource this responsibility in order to harness social media opportunities available to the organization.

I will ensure that each participant receives a 1–2-page summary of the results of my research study. Additionally, I plan to publish my study on the ProQuest database of dissertations and theses upon completion. Further, I intend to submit my study to an academic journal for publication consideration.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. Four themes surfaced after analyzing the data: (a) employee awareness of social media importance increased social media integration, (b) presence of proper infrastructure and internet facilities increased social media integration, (c) use of

various social media platforms increased social media integration, and (d) lack of a formal marketing plan limited social media integration. There were a few limitations in the study that present opportunities for further research, including sample size, geographic constraints, potential participant withdrawal, and the possibility of results not being generalized to a larger population. The findings of this study support the current research foundation regarding social media marketing strategies. Based upon this study's findings, I offer the following recommendations for future research:

1. One limitation of my study was the geographic constraint. The participants from my study were selected from SMEs located in the Bahamas, with successful strategies in implementing social media into business operations. The results are representative of only one geographic location, limiting the generalizability of the study findings; perhaps more rich information can be gleaned if the geographical area is expanded. I recommend that future research be conducted to include SMEs across various Caribbean countries and developing nations to provide a more comprehensive view of strategies for implementing social media into business operations. These results can be compared to results from similar studies with SMEs' social media integration strategies in developed countries.

2. Another limitation of this study included using a small sample size. The sample population for my study comprised of two leaders each, from three companies, with successful strategies in implementing social media into business operations. Future researchers may consider expanding the

participant pool to include more SMEs in the sample pool, and by extension, more leaders to increase transferability. This approach has the potential of mitigating challenges associated with participant withdrawal.

3. Additionally, future researchers can study successful social media implementation strategies in SME across specific industries in the Bahamas to gather rich data related to strategies used to implement social media into business operations. Moreover, this additional study can be expanded to research specific industries across the Caribbean.

4. Another limitation of the study is the results not being generalized to a larger population. One recommendation for increasing generalization is for future researchers to use the quantitative research method to analyze the relationship between strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their business operations and other variables, such as (a) employee awareness of social media importance increased social media integration, (b) presence of proper infrastructure and internet facilities increased social media integration, (c) use of various social media platforms increased social media integration, and (d) lack of a formal marketing plan limited social media integration. This approach would allow for a more complete understanding of the phenomenon explored in this study.

Reflections

My pursuit of a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree has been a pivotal and rewarding experience in my life. I am very passionate about the success of

businesses at large, and desire to see the small business sector within the Bahamas grow exponentially and impact the global scene. Achieving my doctorate degree has been a key goal for me, and I am elated to have come this far and be equipped to pursue my passion. During my journey, I experienced many challenges of various kinds, but I resolved to never give up on my higher education pursuit. Through faith and patience, I persevered and was able to overcome the obstacles, which have made me a stronger individual today.

Researchers have to be intentional about ensuring that their personal biases do not impact their doctoral research study. I was careful to avoid personal biases by using member checking and an interview protocol with a standard set of interview questions. Additionally, I refrained from interviewing family or friends of work colleagues to eliminate any personal bias. I have gained an immense knowledge of social media as a marketing tool in SMEs that will be imperative for practical application in my role as a business consultant. I believe the benefits of social media in SMEs will be an area of continuous growth and research, as there are regularly new features emerging on current social media platforms, as well as new social media platforms being introduced to the market that may prove advantageous for businesses.

I am forever grateful to family and friends who encouraged and supported me through my doctoral journey. I am very appreciative of my doctoral study chair who supported me and was understanding through many difficult challenges on this journey. My chair also pulled out the very best in me and pushed me to go to the next level. Most importantly, I am thankful to my Creator who designed and made this all possible.

Conclusion

Social media afford business leaders the opportunity to embrace effective marketing tools. This qualitative multiple-case study explored strategies Bahamian business leaders used to effectively integrate social media into their business operations. Six business leaders across three SMEs in the Bahamas that had integrated social media for at least 2 years participated in semistructured interviews, providing valuable insights regarding the research question. The research study also facilitated a review of organization documents and artifacts to corroborate rich data from the interviews. Following the interviews, I conducted member checking.

The data analysis techniques used in the study were thematic analysis and triangulation. The study results revealed four major themes surrounding the effective integration of social media into business operations: (a) employee awareness of social media importance increased social media integration, (b) presence of proper infrastructure and internet facilities increased social media integration, (c) use of various social media platforms increased social media integration, and (d) lack of a formal marketing plan limited social media integration. After exploring these themes in depth, I proposed several recommendations for action and further research.

The findings of this study may be a useful addition to the developing body of knowledge regarding effective strategies to implement social media into SME business operations. Numerous strategies for effectively integrating social media into business operations emerged from communications with the participants and an analysis of the data collected. Firstly, a comprehensive awareness plan indicating the importance of

social media should be developed and implemented across the organization with

consideration of communication strategy, incentives and policing, and training and

education. Additionally, organization leaders must ensure that proper infrastructure and

consistent internet facilities are available across the organization, Moreover, various

social media platforms should be used to increase integration. Lastly, organization

leaders should create and implement a formal marketing plan to increase integration of

social media, as this plan would provide an organized road map in achieving this purpose.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Strategies to Integrate Social Media into Business Operations

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies leaders of SMEs in the Bahamas use to effectively integrate social media into their business operations.

Participant Code: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Notes:

1. Greet interviewee and introduce yourself.

2. Provide overview of the study and indicate the usefulness of the outcome.

3. Obtain consent from participant by receiving an email reply with the words "I consent" prior to the interview. Offer to answer any questions that interviewee may have.

4. Remind interviewee about their volunteer efforts to participate in the study.

5. Remind interviewee about recording the interview and start the recording.

6. Start the interview by recording interviewee's pre-assigned coded name, date, and time.

7. Start asking interview questions. Allow enough time to answer those questions.

8. Listen carefully to interviewee. Ask probing and follow-up questions, if needed.

9. At the end of the interview, thank interviewee for their participation and time.

10. Provide participant my contact information in case any questions arise.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

2. How did your employees respond to those strategies?

3. How were strategies to effectively integrate social media into your business operations communicated throughout the organizational ranks and among stakeholders?

4. What were the key barriers to implementing strategies used to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

5. How did you overcome the key barriers to implementing strategies used to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

6. What modifications, if any, did you apply to any strategy used to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

7. What key processes have you used to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?

8. What else would you like to add about strategies used to effectively integrate social media into your business operations?