

2015

# Social Media Strategies Used in Marketing Custom Bicycle Framebuilding Companies

Angela Au  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Angela Au

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Walden University  
2015

Abstract

Social Media Strategies Used in Marketing Custom Bicycle Framebuilding Companies

by

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2003

BA, Seattle University, 1998

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

November 2015

## Abstract

Social media is a cost-effective marketing tool, and in a 2014 survey, 75% of small business owners reported that they used social media to market. However, many of these businesses merely set up social media profiles and do not use social media to its full potential. Microenterprise owners face barriers such as lack of time, financial resources, and marketing knowledge, preventing them from adopting social media as a marketing tool. This multiple case study explored what strategies microenterprise owners in the artisan economy need to market using social media. Data were collected from 5 custom bicycle framebuilders in a Southwestern U.S. state through semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. Company documents and social media reviews were also used for data collection and triangulation. The diffusion of innovations theory was the conceptual framework of this study to aid understanding of framebuilders' social media adoption process and social media usage. Thematic analysis identified 7 themes that emerged from the data: technological competence, the establishment of social media presence, effective utilization of social media platforms, effective communication skills, the establishment of brand identity, time management, and acquisition of external support. The study findings are expected to help artisan microenterprise owners harness social media and, in turn, improve business practices, increase sales, and promote their crafts, which may lead to positive social outcomes. The results of the study will assist artisan microenterprise owners source materials locally from other small businesses, a process that prevents money from leaving the local economy and helps to build strong communities.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my mother. Growing up, she was deprived of education, but it did not stop her from becoming a sophisticated and independent woman.

## Acknowledgments

First, I would like to show my extreme gratitude to my chair, Dr. Peter Anthony, for supporting me at every step in this doctoral journey. I would also like to acknowledge the Second Committee Member, Dr. Richard Snyder, and the University Research Reviewer, Dr. Patricia Fusch, for their critical eyes. Lastly, I want to thank my colleagues Dr. Jan Tucker, Dr. Pat Neely, and Dr. Trevor Belcher, for their advice, mentorship, and encouragement.

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| List of Tables .....                                      | v  |
| List of Figures .....                                     | vi |
| Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....                   | 1  |
| Background of the Problem .....                           | 1  |
| Problem Statement .....                                   | 2  |
| Purpose Statement.....                                    | 3  |
| Nature of the Study .....                                 | 3  |
| Research Question .....                                   | 4  |
| Interview Questions .....                                 | 4  |
| Conceptual Framework.....                                 | 5  |
| Definition of Terms.....                                  | 6  |
| Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....          | 7  |
| Assumptions.....  | 7  |
| Limitations .....   | 8  |
| Delimitations.....  | 9  |
| Significance of the Study .....                           | 9  |
| Contribution to Business Practice .....                   | 9  |
| Implications for Social Change.....                       | 10 |
| A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature..... | 10 |
| Diffusion of Innovations Conceptual Framework .....       | 14 |
| Social Media Marketing.....                               | 17 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Small Business Operations .....   | 26 |
| Artisan Economy .....   | 34 |
| Transition and Summary .....  | 43 |
| Section 2: The Project .....  | 45 |
| Purpose Statement.....  | 45 |
| Role of the Researcher .....  | 46 |
| Participants.....   | 48 |
| Research Method and Design .....  | 49 |
| Method .....  | 49 |
| Research Design.....  | 51 |
| Population and Sampling .....   | 54 |
| Ethical Research.....   | 56 |
| Data Collection Instruments .....   | 58 |
| Data Collection Technique .....   | 60 |
| Data Organization Technique .....   | 63 |
| Data Analysis .....   | 64 |
| Reliability and Validity.....   | 66 |
| Reliability.....  | 66 |
| Validity .....  | 68 |
| Transition and Summary.....   | 69 |
| Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change ..... | 71 |
| Introduction.....   | 71 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Presentation of the Findings.....                                       | 72  |
| Participant Demographics.....   | 73  |
| Semistructured Interviews .....   | 73  |
| Social Media Page and Document Review .....                             | 74  |
| Emergent Theme 1: Technological Competence .....                        | 74  |
| Emergent Theme 2: The Establishment of a Social Media Presence .....    | 76  |
| Emergent Theme 3: Effective Utilization of Social Media Platforms ..... | 81  |
| Emergent Theme 5: Effective Communication Skills .....                  | 83  |
| Emergent Theme 5: The Establishment of Brand Identity .....             | 85  |
| Emergent Theme 6: Time Management .....                                 | 87  |
| Emergent Theme 7: Acquisition of External Support.....                  | 89  |
| Application to Professional Practice.....                               | 91  |
| Implications for Social Change.....                                     | 92  |
| Recommendations for Action .....  | 93  |
| Recommendations for Further Research.....                               | 95  |
| Reflections .....   | 96  |
| Summary and Study Conclusions .....                                     | 97  |
| References.....   | 98  |
| Appendix A: Interview Questions .....                                   | 121 |
| Appendix B: Invitation Cover Letter .....                               | 122 |
| Appendix C: Participant Consent Form.....                               | 123 |
| Appendix D: Interview Protocol.....                                     | 125 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Appendix E: Social Media Review Data .....   | 127 |
| Appendix F: Timeline of Social Media Presence for Each of the Five Businesses..... | 129 |
| Appendix G: Relative Use for Social Media Platforms.....                           | 131 |
| Appendix H: Public Engagement Across Platforms .....                               | 133 |
| Appendix I: Social Media Content .....   | 134 |

## List of Tables

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Table 1 Frequency of Themes for Technological Competence .....                        | 75  |
| Table 2 Frequency of Themes for the Establishment of a Social Media Presence .....    | 77  |
| Table 3 Social Media Presence .....   | 79  |
| Table 4 Frequency of Themes for Effective Utilization of Social Media Platforms ..... | 82  |
| Table 5 Frequency of Themes for Effective Communication Skills .....                  | 83  |
| Table 6 Frequency of Themes for the Establishment of Brand Identity .....             | 85  |
| Table 7 Frequency of Themes for Time Management.....                                  | 88  |
| Table 8 Frequency of Themes for Acquisition of External Support.....                  | 89  |
| Table I1 Social Media Content .....   | 134 |
| Table I2 Business-Related Social Media Content. ....                                  | 134 |
| Table I3 Nonbusiness-Related Social Media Content .....                               | 135 |
| Table I4 Facebook Likes, Comments, and Shares .....                                   | 135 |

## List of Figures

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <i>Figure 1.</i> Literature review organization for the role of social media in marketing custom bicycle framebuilding companies. .... | 12  |
| <i>Figure F1.</i> Participant 1 social media timeline.....   | 129 |
| <i>Figure F2.</i> Participant 2 social media timeline.....   | 129 |
| <i>Figure F3.</i> Participant 3 social media timeline.....   | 129 |
| <i>Figure F4.</i> Participant 4 social media timeline.....   | 130 |
| <i>Figure F5.</i> Participant 5 social media timeline.....   | 130 |
| <i>Figure G1.</i> Relative Facebook usage.....   | 131 |
| <i>Figure G2.</i> Relative Instagram usage. ....   | 132 |
| <i>Figure G3.</i> Relative Twitter usage.....  | 132 |
| <i>Figure H1.</i> Social media follower comparison.....  | 133 |
| <i>Figure H2.</i> Relative engagement with the public as measured by sum of social media followers across all participants.....        | 133 |

## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The majority of the custom bicycle framebuilding companies in the United States are microenterprises with fewer than five employees, in which the owners are in charge of marketing (Torres, 2002; Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Framebuilders are craftspeople who create bicycle frames by hand, and like other craftspeople in the artisan economy, framebuilders face unique marketing challenges (Holmes, McLean, & Green, 2012). Craftspeople's marketing needs are different from other small businesses, shops, and service providers. The crafts are labor intensive, and the production levels are low (Lihra, Buehlmann, & Graf, 2012). This creates significant potential difficulty for microenterprise owners, who may not have formal marketing training and may not know how to promote effectively.

Craftspeople are not only selling the products they make, but also their experiences making the products, since craftspeople work with customers during production (Micken, Roberts, & McKenzie, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2010). Artisan owners have to promote their experiences and expertise as well as the products they are making (Luckman, 2013). These factors affect how framebuilders and craftspeople market their companies. Social media offers an inexpensive way of addressing these challenges to successfully market a product. Framebuilders can benefit from using social media to market, but they need to use approaches that match their needs.

### **Background of the Problem**

Social media marketing is still a new and rapidly changing environment (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012). Larger companies seeking to reduce their marketing costs

have benefitted significantly from the use of social media, and small businesses have also found similar success with the utilization of social media services (Kirtis & Kalahan, 2011). When small businesses are limited in staff and budget, they can utilize free social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to market their businesses and promote sales as well as brand awareness. Small business owners can showcase their products and communicate with customers using free social media platforms. Although social media marketing is more cost effective than a media department, it still requires a certain amount of attention and maintenance (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012). This time requirement is a significant potential negative factor for most custom bicycle framebuilding companies, which are microfirms with fewer than five employees (Nair & Chelliah, 2012). With such a small staff, these companies often do not feel as if they have the time or staff to tend to social media (Blackburn, Hart, & Wainwright, 2013).

### **Problem Statement**

More than 50% of small business owners realize the benefits of social media but do not actively engage in social media marketing to increase sales and brand awareness, even though they (Holmes et al., 2012). Kumor and Mirchandani (2012) reported that over a period of 16 months, small businesses using social media had a 40% increase in sales and a 49% increase in brand awareness. The general business problem is that not all small business owners utilize social media when promoting their companies, which may result in a lack of financial gain. The specific business problem is that some small business owners lack strategies to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what strategies small business owners need to market their microenterprise custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media. The target population for this study was the framebuilders in a Southwestern U.S. state. Artisan microenterprises are sustainable businesses, and the growth of artisan microenterprises may lead to strong communities. Five bicycle framebuilders participated in semistructured interviews to share their experiences using social media to market their brands. The study might produce social change by assisting artisan microenterprise owners in acquiring more customers, growing their businesses, and building strong communities by buying from other local microenterprises.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study was a qualitative study designed to explore the real-life, complex business issue of how bicycle framebuilders use social media marketing. While the quantitative research method is advantageous for testing theories and comparing variables, it does not take participants' verbal descriptions of their experiences into consideration (Harrison & Reilly, 2011). A mixed methods approach, where researcher utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Harrison & Reilly, 2011) was an option if not for time constraints for me as a doctoral student. Because the study took place in a natural setting and I collected participants' opinions and observed behaviors, the qualitative method was well-suited for this type of research.

The specific research design for this study was the case study, which enabled me to collect data from different sources of evidence such as interviews and document

reviews. The case study design was more appropriate than other qualitative research designs that I considered and rejected. An ethnographic design requires extensive field observation, and it is a good way for researchers to gain knowledge on a topic (Higginbottom, Pillay, & Boadu, 2013). However, such extensive field observation was not ideal for this study since the focus is on social media marketing strategies, which are reflected online. Phenomenology researchers focus on participants' lived experiences (Vagle, 2009). Since this was a social media marketing study, it was essential to investigate the framebuilding companies' operations and to examine the social networking sites, which are not the types of data collected for a phenomenological study. The case study method allows scholars to explore a business issue holistically from multiple sources, such as participant interviews and document reviews (Yin, 2013). I needed to collect both types of data to address the research question, so a qualitative case study was the optimal choice for this study.

### **Research Question**

The central research question was: What strategies do small business owners need to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media?

### **Interview Questions**

I asked framebuilders to answer the following questions via face-to-face interviews. The interview questions are the following (see Appendix A):

1. What social media sites are you using to promote your company?
2. What motivated you in choosing these social media sites?
3. What time (early or late in your business development) did you adopt these social

media sites?

4. What impact, if any, has your previous technology usage had on your social media adoption rate?
5. What help did you receive in starting these social media sites?
6. What specific strategies are you utilizing in using social media to market your company?
7. What effect, if any, has your social media usage had on your communications with your customers?
8. What overall benefits have you seen because of your social media usage?
9. What are the most challenging aspects of using social media for your company?
10. What would you recommend other framebuilders do to develop social media marketing strategies?
11. What additional information, if any, do you feel is pertinent to this study that may not have been addressed in the interview questions?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovations theory. Rogers (2003) designed the diffusion of innovations theory to analyze how quickly technologies spread through culture. Rogers (2003) determined five attributes that influence an individual's adoption rate to an innovation: (a) the user-perceived usefulness of a technology, (b) compatibility between user experience and a technology, (c) complexity of a technology, (d) whether a user can test the technology prior to adoption, and (e) results a user gets from the technology. Individuals adopt a new

technology at different rates, which are reflected in Rogers' (2003) classification of technology users into five categories: "(a) innovators, (b) early adopters, (c) early majority, (d) late majority, and (e) laggards" (p. 279).

Many social media scholars have used Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation theory as a framework for examining how individuals are using social networking tools (Ifinedo, 2011; Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013; Mustaffa et al., 2011). The theory identifies several factors that influence a person's adoption of innovations (Rogers, 2003). Some of these factors stem from prior experience in using similar technologies, external pressure, and social support (Ifinedo, 2011; Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013), which cause technology users to adopt innovations at different rates (Ifinedo, 2011; Rogers, 2003). For example, some social media users have used Web 2.0 sites since the early introductory stages of those sites, while others accept social media more slowly (Mustaffa et al., 2011). Users who are the first to adopt a technology are termed innovators, while users who adopt a technology last are termed laggards (Rogers, 2003). I used the diffusion of innovations theory to understand how framebuilders were adopting social media and what strategies they were using, including their different levels of involvement and factors influencing their social media usage.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Bicycle frame:* The main body of a bicycle, which is generally made of metal or carbon fiber. A bicycle frame consists of six parts: top tube, down tube, seat tube, head tube, seat stays, and chain stays. These parts are joined together to form the front and back triangles. All other bicycle components such as wheels, cranks, and handlebars,

attach to the frames (Covill et al., 2014).

*Brand trust:* A quality acquired by customers when they receive products and services that meet or exceed their expectations. Customers believe that they can trust a brand because the brand is credible and dependable (Wang & Hsu, 2012).

*Customer loyalty:* A long-term relationship between customers and companies. Customer loyalty is a product of brand trust; when customers trust a brand, they are likely to return for future business (Taleghani, Gilaninia, & Mousavian, 2011).

*Custom:* A unique, one of a kind, product made to a customer's specifications. Customers order a custom product with specific specifications because people have different needs. Customers cannot fill these needs with massproduced products; therefore, they have a product custom made (Franke, Keinz, & Steger, 2009).

*Framebuilder:* A person who constructs bicycle frames. A custom framebuilder also designs the geometry of the bicycle and chooses the right materials (Owens & Simonds, 2010).

*Framebuilding:* The act of making bicycle frames. A framebuilder creates a metal bicycle frame by welding the six parts together to form the front and back triangles (Owens & Simonds, 2010).

*Microenterprise:* An organization with fewer than five employees, which is also called a microfirm (Nair & Chelliah, 2012).

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

### **Assumptions**

Ellis and Levy (2009) described assumptions as the believed truths that the

researcher brings to the study. The basis of this study involved several assumptions about the custom bicycle industry and the participants. One assumption was that the research participants were successful in using social media to market. I reported framebuilders' experiences and involvement in social media marketing, but I did not measure the success of the social media marketing campaigns. The next assumption was that all framebuilding companies in the study area employed fewer than five employees, and these companies operated in similar manners. Some framebuilders maintained their company's social networking accounts instead of hiring a marketing employee to do so; however, this might not be true for all framebuilding businesses. Another assumption was that all participants understood the interview questions and were honest with the answers. This included participants providing accurate views of a company's social media usage and results.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are the constraints that arise because of the researcher's methodological approach (Ellis & Levy, 2009). The study was limited to custom bicycle framebuilding owners in a Southwestern U.S. state who were using social media to market. The study did not include framebuilding owners in other states or other countries. This study did not address the marketing challenges that framebuilders outside of this Southwestern state face. The methods for data collection present another limitation. I recruited participants through two public framebuilding electronic email lists. Any framebuilders who did not belong to these lists were automatically excluded.

## **Delimitations**

Ellis and Levy (2009) defined delimitations as the factors that the researcher is not going to cover in his or her study. The study scope was limited to custom bicycle framebuilders in a Southwestern U.S. state. I recruited participants through two online framebuilding discussion forums. These public electronic email lists were open to the public as membership was not limited to framebuilders. Some hobbyists and bicycle enthusiasts belonged to the lists, but participation was limited to professional framebuilders who were over the age of 18. I recruited five framebuilders for the study in order to capture their viewpoints regarding marketing in the framebuilding industry. This study did not include mass-manufacturers, frame distributors, or bicycle retailers.

## **Significance of the Study**

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Small business management and marketing are well-studied topics, but little information exists on custom bicycle framebuilders or the artisan economy. Craftspeople depend heavily on labor, and if they do not work, they do not produce products; hence, they do not generate income (Hwang, 2013; Torres, 2002). Custom bicycle framebuilders, being craftspeople, face the same challenge, and some craftspeople would rather produce products than invest the time in marketing (Hwang, 2013; Torres, 2002). Artistic microenterprises such as custom bicycle framebuilding companies are underresearched, and this study may help them to use social media to generate more business by reaching more customers.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Businesses in the artisan economy possess a more advantageous business model for their local economy and community than large firms, (Chang, 2011; Rosenfeld, 2010). Locally owned and locally run shops that produce their goods in-house generally employ local people and prevent money from leaving the local economy (Torres, 2002; Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Bicycle framebuilders and other craftspeople also preserve the art of handmade goods, which is disappearing. However, craftspeople are part of a small business community; therefore, they often have less monetary resources than their larger competitors (Luckman, 2013; Torres, 2002). Social media allows these artists to overcome this negative factor and market inexpensively so they can compete against larger manufacturers, ensuring that they are able to promote their businesses competitively and effectively. This study was designed to help framebuilders and artists to keep their businesses alive, indirectly helping to build strong communities.

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

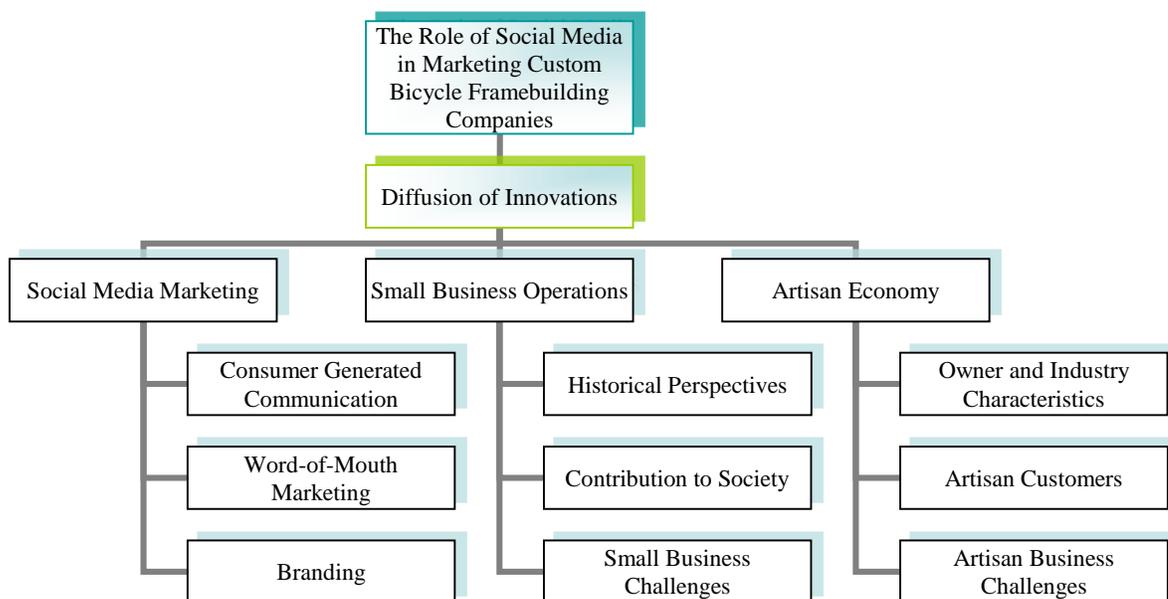
The purpose of this study was to explore what strategies custom bicycle framebuilders in the United States need to promote their businesses using social media. Social media is an especially viable marketing tool for small business owners because it is cost effective (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012). Social media allows business owners to stay in touch with existing customers and reach out to potential customers through free social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Kirtis & Karahan, 2011). Furthermore, some business owners use social media to establish brands for their companies (Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Kumar and Mirchandani (2012) argued

that a Facebook fan page might increase a small business' sales by 40%. However, not all small business owners utilize social media or utilize all features of the sites (Holmes et al., 2012).

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the contents of over 75 peer-reviewed articles as they pertain to the use of social media marketing strategies of small businesses. Among these articles, 11 pertain to the diffusion of innovations theory concerning the growth and success of many small and medium enterprises (SMEs,) including those within the artisan community.

The peer-reviewed article research process began with key-word searches using the following databases: Business Source Complete/Premier, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Management Journals, SAGE Premier, ProQuest Central, Thoreau, and Google Scholar. I accessed these databases through the Walden University library. I used different combinations of keywords related to the three sections of the literature review to locate research studies. Some of these keywords included: *social media, social networking, Web 2.0, Facebook, Twitter, word-of-mouth marketing, electronic marketing, branding, customer loyalty, relationship marketing, small business marketing, small-and-medium enterprises, microenterprise challenges, bicycle, custom built, specialty bicycles, bike manufacturing, bicycle geometry, framebuilding, artisan economy, custom, handmade, bespoke, cottage industry, and crafts*. Eighty-seven percent of the articles were published between 2011 and 2015, and 95% of the articles were from peer-reviewed journals. This was to ensure I had current research studies and findings to support this study.

The review of professional and academic literature included four main sections: diffusion of innovations, social media marketing, small business operations, and the artisan economy. The first topic covered, diffusion of innovations, was the conceptual framework for this study. The three other topics directly related to this study on the role of social media to market custom bicycle framebuilding companies. Figure 1 shows the organized research topics.



*Figure 1.* Literature review organization for the role of social media in marketing custom bicycle framebuilding companies.

First, this project is a marketing study, and after reading journal articles on social media marketing, I recognized three main themes: consumer generated communication, word-of-mouth (WOM), and branding. These three themes related to social media marketing with consumer generated communication as a characteristic. WOM is a product of consumer generated communication, and WOM can help marketers create strong brands (Kawakami, Kishiya, & Parry, 2013; Wang, 2011). These three themes

were the subsections under social media marketing. Secondly, most framebuilding companies were small- and medium-size enterprises, so a literature review section was on small business operations. In this small business operations section, I discussed the historical perspectives, owners' contributions to society, and challenges small business owners face. Understanding of these small business topics may help readers get a general view of the framebuilding industry and operations.

The last literature review topic was the artisan economy because custom bicycle framebuilding belongs to this sector. Originally, I wanted to specifically explore literature about the custom bicycle industry, but this was not possible because there were not any peer-reviewed articles on it. I searched for articles related to bicycles, but the majority of the results were on unrelated topics such as city planning, exercise science, engineering, and material science. Other previous research studies and dissertations on bicycle marketing focused on corporate owned mass-manufacturers. These topics did not help in explaining custom bicycle framebuilding business operations. After further research, I learned custom framebuilding companies have more in common with microbrewers and craft-makers than with bicycle retailers. Researchers used the term *artisan economy* to describe the rise of handmade, do-it-yourself, and custom product companies (Chang, 2011; Micken et al., 2010), which led me to find more articles on this phenomenon.

Companies in the artisan economy were notably different from other small businesses such as restaurants, shops, and service providers. Artisan owners' needs were similar to those of framebuilders. Therefore, the third section of the literature review was on this segment. The artisan economy was under-researched, and some of the articles did

not address the artisan economy directly. However, studies on related topics such as craft, cottage industry, and freelancing may help understand the artisan economy phenomenon. The three subsections under the artisan economy were owner and industry characteristics, artisan customers, and artisan business challenges.

The lack of peer-reviewed studies on the custom bicycle framebuilding industry also demonstrated a challenge. The custom bicycle framebuilding industry and social media marketing in the artisan economy were under-researched, and I intended to offer suggestions for improvement to this business problem with this study.

### **Diffusion of Innovations Conceptual Framework**

Rogers conceived the diffusion of innovations theory in 1962 to understand how individuals adopt innovations and to use the theory to analyze the sociological factors in influencing a person's acceptance in new innovations (Archibald & Clark, 2014). Since the 1990s, researchers are using the diffusion of innovations theory to understand technology adoption rates (Bobkowski & Smith, 2013). The five attributes that influence an individual's adoption rate to an innovation were "(a) relative advantage, (b) compatibility, (c) complexity, (d) triability, and (e) observability" (Rogers, 2003, p. 208). These five elements affect how an individual views an innovation (Rogers, Chapman, & Giotsas, 2012).

New innovations range from products, technologies, to ideas, and social media is an example of such innovation. Social media is a technology that is changing how people connect and communicate with each other (Kawakami, Kishiya, & Parry, 2013; Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Social media also plays a role in marketing, and many small business

owners are utilizing social media to promote their businesses (Campbell, Pitt, Parent, & Berthon, 2011; Kwok & Yu, 2013). Some social media users have been using Web 2.0 sites since their early introductory stages, while others are accepting social media more slowly. The diffusion of innovations theory will help me understand why social media users have different levels of involvement.

Innovation theories, to date, indicate the positive use of social media marketing as a means to increase sales, reduce cost, and connect with customers (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012). Studies reported contradictory results regarding the level of growth within small businesses and their rate of adoption of innovations as a means to improve sales and brand awareness through social media outlets (de Jong, 2011; Rogers et al., 2012). Owners of SMEs lack the resources of larger companies; therefore, they often struggle with the implementation of new business technologies (Ifinedo, 2011). Many owners of SMEs, with their small organizational structures, also struggle with scheduling time and finding ambition for the adoption of new business ideas and technologies that promote growth (de Jong & Hulsink, 2012; Nijssen, Hillebrand, de Jong, & Kemp, 2012; Thompson, Williams, & Thomas, 2013).

Twitter is an example of the opportunities and challenges of social media. Although this platform is relatively new in the social media scene, it has acquired 550 million users and has another 135,000 new users joining daily, making it one of the fastest growing markets available to use as a business platform (Archibald & Clark, 2014). Facebook is another venue that can perform as a crucial tool available to SMEs. With over 900 million active users, Facebook allows brands to connect with users all

over the world, in real time (Rogers et al., 2012). Despite the amount of work business owners feel they have to commit to, marketing via social media will positively affect and increase sales (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012). However, in order to embrace and apply social media as a marketing technology, owners of SMEs must be open to change (Mustaffa et al., 2011). Though the literature is limited, some studies showed that the lack of growth among SMEs is a direct correlation to owners' lack of adapting to new technologies (Anderson & Ullah, 2014; Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2012).

The rate of adoption of innovations may be an indication as to why some small businesses start small and stay small while others grow and thrive (Rogers, 2003). Rogers (2003) categorized technology users into five groups. Innovators are risk takers who are first to adopt a new technology, and early adopters, early majority, and late majority follow innovators (Rogers, 2003). Laggards are the last to adopt a new technology because they are risk adverse (Rogers, 2003). The diffusion of innovations theory may be a key factor in understanding how small business owners adopt new technologies (Babkowski & Smith, 2013; Thompson et al., 2013).

Technologies users like framebuilders experience different combinations of the diffusion of innovations attributes. The reasons preventing business owners from engaging in social media marketing include lack of time and expertise (Blackburn et al., 2013; Eagleman, 2013). Business owners accept social media at different rates and therefore owners have different levels of engagement (Ifinedo, 2011; Mustaffa et al., 2011). The diffusion of innovations theory explains the different adoption rates (Ifinedo, 2011; Rogers, 2003). The five elements that influence business owners' adoption rates to

a new technology such as social media are perceived value, needs, difficulty in using a technology, experimentation, and results (Rogers, 2003). Mergel and Bretschneider (2013) summarized the two key factors in the social networking implementation process as economic and communication. Social media users are motivated by the potential financial rewards they might receive (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013). Social media training helps users operate social media sites (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013).

Mustaffa et al. (2011) explained the importance of peer support in Facebook adoption. Facebook users learned how to use the technology from their friends, and this type of peer support accelerated the usage process (Mustaffa et al., 2011). Another factor that increases social media adoption rate is competition pressure (Ifinedo, 2011). Small business owners in Canada began using electronic commerce functions and social media when their competitors implemented these technologies (Ifinedo, 2011). The diffusion of innovations theory explains elements such as potential rewards and peer pressure, which motivate social media users (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013). This conceptual framework will explain the findings of this study.

### **Social Media Marketing**

Web 2.0 is an Internet revolution that started in the mid-2000s and encompassed advances in computer programming (Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2012; Reyneke, Pitt, & Berthon, 2011). Prior to Web 2.0, during the Web 1.0 era, web site owners and administrators were the only ones who could add information to a web page, and the process was cumbersome (Billington & Billington, 2012). Changing web page content was a substantial upgrade, and page owners did not conduct such upgrades often

(Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010). In addition, Web 1.0 sites were stagnated with infrequent updates, and communication was one directional – from the site owner to the audience. Web 2.0 web sites are different since communication is two-dimensional (Billington & Billington, 2012). Hughes et al. (2012) summarized Web 2.0 application characteristics as web-based, content and data driven, collaborative, and flexible. Web 2.0 is more interactive than Web 1.0 since users can add content and feedback.

Social media is a product of Web 2.0 as it has many similar characteristics such as user-friendliness and interactivity (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Reyneke et al., 2011). The major types of social media are social networking, social bookmarking, social news, media sharing, blogs, microblogging, wikis, social reviews, and geo tagging (Castronovo & Huang, 2012; Svatosova, 2012). Social networking is the most popular form of social media, and two well-known sites are Facebook and LinkedIn. In 2010, there were more than 500 million Facebook members across the globe (Schmidt & Ralph, 2011). While some Facebook members use the site for leisure and personal connections, LinkedIn members use the site for professional networking and job searching (Svatosova, 2012; Tariq & Wahid, 2011).

Other popular forms of social media are blogs and microblogs. A blog is a web page that users can update without much difficulty (Tariq & Wahid, 2011). Because of this, bloggers can post content frequently. Twitter is a form of microblogging, which is similar to blogging, but the messages are shorter. Fischer and Reuber (2011) posited that Twitter users were communicating with other users in real time because it was fast and easy to upload a message. Twitter, Facebook, and other social media sites are platforms

where people come together to share information and to have conversations.

**Consumer generated communication.** Consumer generated communication, or consumer-to-consumer (C2C) communication, is a key feature of social media (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schafer, 2012; Furlow, 2011; Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). Compared to Web 1.0, social media is an interactive platform that allows users to create content (Onishi & Manchanda, 2012; Wang et al., 2012). Some social networking sites have a discussion forum area where users leave comments. For blogs and microblogs, user comments are the main feature. Other members see the comments, and the comments can show up on Internet searches. C2C is a benefit of many social networking sites (Wang, Ting, & Wu, 2012).

Campbell et al. (2011) described social media consumer generated communication as one-to-many or many-to-many. For social review sites, many-to-many C2C communication is the main attribute (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012; Wang et al., 2012). For example, restaurant customers review their experiences on Yelp, and travelers share hotel insights on TripAdvisor. Many customers research these sites during the prepurchase phase of the decision making process (Wang et al., 2012). Blogs and YouTube let members post written materials and video messages, and members are free to express their opinions on various subjects. Blogs and YouTube are many-to-many C2C communications because members are interacting with multiple users. Social media sites allow users to generate communication that other users can see, and these messages may change other customers' perspectives on a company.

**Word-of-mouth marketing.** Some marketers believe social media is a powerful tool because of consumer generated communication, which creates word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing (Campbell et al., 2011; Wang & Chang, 2013; Wang et al., 2012). WOM is an informal promotion when one person tells another about an experience with a company (Kawakami et al., 2013; Williams & Buttle, 2011). Meuter, McCabe, and Curran (2013) described the evolution of WOM since the 1940s in their study. Historically, WOM happens when one consumer recommends a product or a service to another, such as between friends, family members, and coworkers. During the 1970s, marketing researchers introduced the marketer influence model, through which an opinion leader spread WOM to multiple consumers, and marketers influenced the opinion leader indirectly (Meuter et al., 2013). An opinion leader could be an influential person, community leader, or an expert in a specific subject. The next WOM evolution was the network coproduction model, in which a consumer spread WOM to other consumers, and these consumers influenced each other. Under this model, marketers directly influenced and interacted with all consumers (Meuter et al., 2013). Social media WOM is under the network coproduction model because marketers, opinion leaders, and consumers are influencing each other on social networking sites (Campbell et al., 2011; Wang & Chang, 2013; Wang et al., 2012).

Word of mouth is an effective marketing method because it is credible and trustworthy. Customers are more likely to be persuaded by a WOM recommendation than the traditional forms of marketing communications such as advertising, commercials, and personal selling (Chen et al., 2011; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Traditional WOM

emanates from close sources like friends, family members, and neighbors (Feng & Papatla, 2011). Customers share experiences with, and opinions about, a company without compensation from the company. They may do so because they are satisfied and happy with the purchase (Campbell et al., 2011; Wang & Chang, 2013). Since the customers are spreading positive WOM freely, this makes WOM trustworthy. However, dissatisfied customers are spreading negative WOM, and that can hurt a business (Utz, Kerkhof, & van den Bos, 2011). Customers find WOM sincere and realistic, and they are likely to follow WOM recommendations (Kim & Ko, 2012; Wang et al., 2012). These reasons make WOM a good marketing tool.

Social media is intensifying with how fast and how wide WOM is spreading. Consumers, no longer bound by their social connections, utilize social media WOM (Chen et al., 2011). Consumers share WOM even with people they do not know because of social media, and this is different from the traditional WOM model. Sites like Twitter and Facebook are platforms for WOM; users can post comments easily and they can link these comments to a specific business (Chen, Yen, & Hwang, 2012; Kwok & Yu, 2013). Social review sites are also vehicles of WOM since customers are reviewing their experiences with companies. Many shoppers are using these review sites prior to making purchases (Wang et al., 2012). Social media users are transforming WOM to the network coproduction model, as described by Meuter et al. (2013), since company representatives and customers are influencing a product or service.

Social media WOM may help business owners promote their companies since it is an effective marketing tool. Social media is immediate, fast reaching, and can be widely

received (Bruhn et al., 2012). Besides using C2C communication as a WOM model, owners can also create positive buzz on their brands through Web 2.0 sites by producing viral videos and public relation events (Castronovo & Huang, 2012; Furlow, 2011). To acquire an audience's attention, marketers create videos that are eye-catching and often outrageous (Feng & Papatla, 2011; Wang et al., 2012). Since these videos are extreme and entertaining, viewers may forward the videos to their friends, and these friends forward to their friends (Feng & Papatla, 2011; Wang et al., 2012). A person forwarding viral videos to their friends is another example of WOM (Castronovo & Huang, 2012; Furlow, 2011).

WOM is an effective marketing tool and owners should encourage satisfied customers to post positive reviews by offering incentives such as discounts and gifts (Feng & Papatla, 2011; Kumar, 2012; Schmitt, Skiera, & Van de Bulte, 2011). Positive reviews posted on these review sites can help companies increase their popularity, but negative reviews can hurt a company's reputation. Unfortunately, business owners have little control over what reviewers will say. Feng and Papatla (2011) recommended business owners to have a strong social review site presence, and be proactive with customer complaints. Customers value WOM and WOM can affect a company positively or negatively. Business owners should use these strategies to manage a company's online reputation.

**Branding.** Branding is a notable marketing concept for business owners. Branding includes logos, packaging, images, and slogans that customers associate with a company (Kim & Ko, 2011; Kumar, 2012). A strong brand also appeals to customers'

emotions and improves their perceptions of a company (Zauner, Koller, & Fink, 2012). If a brand has a trendy, urban, and innovative appeal, it attracts customers who want the same image that the brand is portraying (Zauner et al., 2012).

Marketers use different techniques to build brand awareness, improve brand image, and increase a company's brand equity (Bruhn et al., 2012). Social media WOM is one of the techniques marketers use to establish strong brands (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012). Social media WOM is effective in communicating a company's brand value by encouraging conversations between customers and companies. However, because of consumer generated communication and social media WOM, marketers are no longer the ones who are in control of a brand (Booth & Matic, 2011; De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012; Fischer & Reuber, 2011).

Bruhn et al. (2012) argued that Web 2.0 users not only posted their experience with a company on social networking sites but also thoughts about a brand. These Web 2.0 users' thoughts did not necessarily align with the company's brand image (Bruhn et al., 2012). Some customers even create online fan pages that the company is not sponsoring (Kim & Ko, 2011). These customers connect with each other and exchange information such as alternate use of a product through these unsponsored fan pages. Hede and Kellett (2012) studied counter brand communities, which dissatisfied customers created. These dissatisfied customers voiced their opinions via these unsponsored social media pages, and the pages changed how other customers viewed the featured brand (Hede & Kellett, 2012; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). These communities were not part of a company's brand, and company marketers were not

involved in maintaining them. Yet, these sites were changing how customers would view a brand (Booth & Matic, 2011; Patino, Pitta & Quinones, 2012). Business owners need to understand the power of social media when they are managing their brands.

Business owners can provide relationship marketing and build a strong brand by using social networking sites. Some characteristics of relationship marketing are trust, commitment, communication, and respect (Gilal, Jatoi, & Soomro, 2011; Pentina, Zhang, & Basmanova, 2013; Taleghani et al., 2011; Wang & Hsu, 2012). Having long-term relationships with customers is a good business practice since it costs more to acquire new customers (Wang & Hsu, 2012). Moreover, loyal customers help increase sales by returning for more business and spreading positive WOM (Romero, 2011; Wang & Hsu, 2012). Managers and business owners can use social media as a platform to conduct relationship-marketing activities, and these include expressing good will, providing excellent service, and showing respect (Sarringhaus, 2011).

A key component of relationship marketing is two-way communication (Witkemper, Lim, & Waldburger, 2012), and managers can use social networking sites to dialogue with customers (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012; Sarringhaus, 2011). Managers can use social media to announce new promotions, collect feedback, and to handle issues. Kirtis and Karahan (2011) recommended using social media as a customer-relationship management system since customers' information was on those sites. Business owners could use social media to keep track of customer contact information, transaction history, and communication records. A strong brand can enhance long-term relationships and loyalty with customers through relationship marketing.

Many prior studies have separately focused on individual Web 2.0 tools, but not social media marketing in general. For example, Witkemper et al. (2012) looked at Twitter's effectiveness as a brand-building tool, while Kwok & Yu (2013) examined how marketers built customer relationships using Facebook. These researchers emphasized on one site and analyzed marketing usage on this one social networking application. However, one site does not represent social media as a whole. There are many types of social media, and a microblogging site like Tumblr has different features than a social sharing site like Pinterest. Each type of social media has its advantages and disadvantages, and marketers can use them for different purposes. De Vries et al. (2012) recommended further research on how small business owners are using social media in general, and how they leverage different sites for different marketing needs.

Social media is a new innovation, so the technology is changing rapidly with new applications and new feature updates. Computer programmers create new social networking applications frequently, and often, these new applications take over the Web 2.0 market share. Blogs and wikis were the main Web 2.0 tools in the mid-2000s, but Facebook and Twitter surpassed their popularity in the late 2000s (Svatosova, 2012). Even with the same social networking site, programmers introduce new features on a regular basis. Facebook layout and functions have changed drastically since its inception in the early 2000s (Furlow, 2011). New Web 2.0 applications and new features alter how business owners are using the sites for marketing. There are many existing peer-reviewed articles on social media, but with all the changes, there is a need for more up-to-date research.

Zauner et al. (2012) recommended more qualitative studies on the use of social networking as the majority of the studies are quantitative. While quantitative studies are useful in measuring Web 2.0 usage, they tend to provide limited viewpoints. For example, Reyneke et al. (2011) used a matrix to track the social media visibility of luxury wine brands. Reyneke et al. (2011) documented what type of social networking sites these wine companies had, how often marketers updated the sites, and what the customer response rates were. The findings offered a quantitative view of these wine brands' social media presence. However, the findings did not explain how successful the social media marketing campaigns were, or what challenges the marketers faced when implementing these campaigns. Reyneke et al. (2011) did not explore these areas because of methodology limitations. Marketing researchers can use the qualitative method to explore how Web 2.0 users are adapting the tools, and how business owners are using social media to market. More qualitative studies will fill this last social media research gap.

### **Small Business Operations**

A small business is an independently owned for-profit entity that has fewer than 500 employees (Small Business Administration, 2013). The two subcategories of small businesses are SMEs that have 100 or fewer employees (Cader & Leatherman, 2011), and microenterprises that have 1 to 5 employees (Nair & Chelliah, 2012). Hurst and Pugsley (2011) stated there are microfirms in different sectors, ranging from convenience stores, clothing shops, restaurants, hairdressing shops, to fitness training services. In addition, microenterprise owners provide professional services like accounting, law, and dental care.

**Historical perspectives.** Small business ownership has changed in the past 50 years as many more women and minorities have started businesses (Marchesnay, 2011; Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). In the United States prior to the 1970s, the majority of small business owners were white men, since women had limited work opportunities (Deutsch, 2010). Men operated the business or worked for a company, while women were primarily homemakers who cared for the children (Deutsch, 2010). Additionally, very few women had formal education on business operations, and they did not have funding to start a business (Deutsch, 2010). However, female business ownership has been increasing, and in 2007, women started more than one third of new firms (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011).

**Contribution to society.** Small businesses are the main source of employment for workers, and owners contribute to the global economy. In the United States, 99% of all companies have the designation of a small business, and many of these companies are in retail and service sectors (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Small firms account for 99.9% of all companies in the United Kingdom (Blackburn et al., 2013). The Swedish economy is similar to the United States, with 74.7% sole proprietors and 21.5% microenterprises (Tariq & Wahid, 2011). Small business owners play an important role in the United States' economy as they hired more than 50% of private sector employees, created 64% of all new jobs between 1990 and 2005, and exported 97% of goods in 2007 (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). In rural areas, where jobs are scarce, small company owners are the main employers, and they help ease high unemployment rates (Rosenfeld, 2010). Without small firms, these small communities might not exist since people would

have to move to metropolitan areas for employment. Owners play a key role in keeping these towns alive.

Small business ownership is an opportunity for workers to be financially independent, especially during economic recessions (Marchesnay, 2011). Marchesnay (2011) described the rise of small company creation in France during the global economic crisis of 1973 and 1975, when many French employees lost their jobs with large corporations. These accidental entrepreneurs started businesses to earn income instead of being unemployed or taking jobs in a different industry that had lower pay (Marchesnay, 2011). Becoming a microfirm owner is a way to earn an income when it is hard to find employment.

Starting a company is also a way to earn a living for someone who is facing social or political hardships (Deutsch, 2010; Marchesnay, 2011). Immigrants and ethnic minorities often face workplace discrimination, and they have limited employment opportunities due to cultural barriers. Deutsch (2010) described a high number of minority-owned retail shops in rural areas during the 1950s and 1960s, and these owners served minority customers who could not shop in white-owned stores. Likewise, there is a high percentage of immigrants operating small retailers, restaurants, and trading companies in Sweden (Tariq & Wahid, 2011). Immigrants face cultural and language challenges and some have difficulty obtaining employment from large corporations in a new country (Gill & Biger, 2012; Tariq & Wahid, 2011). Being entrepreneurs is an attractive option for some immigrants and ethnic minorities.

Small firm owners also contribute to the economy by filling in niche markets that

large corporations are not serving (Marchesnay, 2011). Mass retailers tend to carry popular and common items for wide audiences. They often disregard subsegments and consumers with special needs, but small business owners are flexible enough to fill these niches (Deutsch, 2010; Marchesnay, 2011). Another contribution owners bring is creative ways to make products. Craft makers such as framebuilders, hand make custom products, and many of them incorporate original designs. Craft makers use innovative methods to make products since they have extensive knowledge on different materials, and they feel comfortable experimenting (Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Owning the business allows craftspeople the flexibility to change the production schedule and to introduce new product lines in a short period of time (Holmes et al., 2012; Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Framebuilders and craftspeople bring new ideas and alternative products to the market.

**Small business challenges.** A challenge for small business owners is a shortage of staff because owners have limited budgets to hire a sufficient number of employees to run a company (Bakeman & Hanson, 2012; Cader & Leatherman, 2011). Some small businesses' profit margins are narrow, and owners do not wish to increase operational costs by hiring additional staff. Some framebuilders would rather spend time making bicycles than marketing the company or performing other business functions. Without marketing and other management tasks, owners have difficulty running a business efficiently (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Lack of staff contributes to poor customer service and slow growth, which can lead to business failure (Parry, Jones, Rowley, & Kupiec-Teahan, 2012).

Another challenge some owners face is lack of management expertise such as

supervising, delegating, collaborating, and leading (Bakeman & Hanson, 2012; Parry et al., 2012; Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). Some owners do not have formal business education, and they do not understand how to run a company effectively (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011). These business skills are essential in running an organization, no matter how big or small it is. Owners who do not have these skills are not developing employees to their fullest potential, and some face high staff turnover rates. Training new employees takes time and money, and new hires are not as proficient as experienced staff members (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011). High staff turnover slows growth, and business owners should avoid it (Yallapragada & Bhuiyah, 2011). Owners who do not delegate get overwhelmed and distracted by small tasks, and these tasks take owners' time away from focusing on strategic planning (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011). These management skills are necessary for owners to generate revenue and to sustain a business (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). The general lack of management expertise in microfirms is a disadvantage for these owners (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011).

Research studies show small business owners do not favor any form of planning, including short-term goal setting and strategic planning (Parry et al., 2012). Coyte, Ricceri, and Guthrie (2012) found small firms operated informally, and owners made decisions on impulse without prior research. Some business owners did not think strategically, and they only composed a business plan when they were seeking funding, but not for internal operation (Coyte et al., 2012). Some owners, including framebuilders, fail to keep proper records and documentation, so they cannot use past performance to forecast sales and plan for the future (Blackburn et al., 2013; Parry et al., 2012).

Forecasting is crucial for a business to allow owners to anticipate needs, so they can keep the right inventory level with minimal waste. Blackburn et al. (2013) recommended owners draft a business plan and review it annually to help with sales goals, marketing techniques, and staffing needs.

Another obstacle that owners of small firms encounter is lack of funding. Many traditional financial institutions do not lend to small start-ups because of high risk, lack of financial records, and lack of collateral (Gill & Biger, 2012; Hurst & Pugsley, 2011; Nair & Chelliab, 2012). Often, owners have to use personal properties to guarantee a loan or use personal credit cards (Gill & Biger, 2012; Hurst & Pugsley, 2011). Minority business owners have hard times obtaining loans since a high percentage of them do not own properties or have good credit (Deutsch, 2010). A lack of funding alternatives may prevent minority entrepreneurs from starting a business. Once owners establish a firm, they continue to struggle with having enough cash to hire staff, promote the business, and to upgrade the facility (Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). If sales are down, owners may face financial delinquencies, and possibly the risk of losing the business. Gill and Biger (2012) argued the need for microfinancing in the United States and Canada to help entrepreneurs with start-up funding and cash flow. Alternative funding programs may help microenterprise owners such as framebuilders because they face many of the same financial challenges.

The marketing function within a small business includes promotional strategies, brand building, customer service, and product placement (Jones & Rowley, 2011). Many small business owners do not have adequate marketing programs, which prevents the

companies from growing (Handaria & Iskandar, 2012). Owners do not have such programs because they do not understand the importance of branding, or they do not know how to create a branding program (Rye & Swinney, 2013). A reputable brand helps customers recognize a company, which can lead to customer loyalty and increase sales (Zauner et al., 2012). Additionally, good customer service, including client relationships, timely delivery of products, and conflict resolutions, is essential to a successful firm. Without good service, customers will not return or recommend the business to their friends. Dissatisfied customers spread negative WOM about a company, and that can hurt a business' reputation (Feng & Papatla, 2011). Parry et al. (2012) studied the failure of a small English software company, the principal reason the company failed was the lack of strong relationships with its customers. The failed firm did not have a customer-relationship management system to keep track of contact information and support records. Without that information, employees in this firm could not provide meaningful service and software solutions to customers (Parry et al., 2012). It is essential for framebuilders to provide good customer service and branding, so their companies succeed. This lack of marketing planning creates a challenge for owners.

A plethora of research articles exist that are associated with small businesses (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011). Some case studies focus on specific organizations or sectors. Parry et al. (2012) studied two software companies in the United Kingdom and compared their operations. One firm failed while the other firm was successful because the owners used different management practices. The thriving company had an integrated marketing plan and customer-relationship management system, which helped the owner to be

successful (Parry et al., 2012). This case study by Parry et al. (2012) provided analysis on the importance of marketing, but the findings only applied to these two software companies. Other software companies or small firm owners might not have the same experiences. The research study by Kumar and Mirchandani (2012) on small businesses had a limited sample of organizations, and this created the same narrow scope issue. While Kumar and Mirchandani (2012) gave business scholars views of what happened to the participating companies, this did not represent all SMEs.

The limited scope of existing research studies poses another problem for framebuilders, since small business management is diverse and dynamic. Small businesses in different industries have different ownership formats, and serve different customers. Hurst and Pugsley (2011) explained there are SMEs in retail, manufacturing, service, medical, and other professional service fields. Companies in each of these industries have different needs, and two small firms within the same sector can have different operations (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011). Additionally, external business factors such as legal, environmental, economic, and technologic are changing. These elements influence small companies directly, and a change can alter how owners conduct business (Deutsch, 2010). Because of the distinctive small business types and the dynamic nature of the marketplace, there is a need for more current research on small businesses.

Another gap in small business research is a lack of studies on microenterprises (Tariq & Wahid, 2011). Microenterprises are different from other small businesses and SMEs, since microenterprises have fewer than five employees (Nair & Chelliah, 2012). The owners are the only staff in these microfirms, and they are in charge of all aspects of

the business (Nair & Chelliah, 2012; Tariq & Wahid, 2011). When there is only one person in a company, it can limit business growth due to the lack of resources. The owners might not have time to complete all the tasks, nor have the knowledge to handle all operations (Tariq & Wahid, 2011). These are some unique challenges microenterprise owners face. Microenterprises are different from SMEs and other types of organizations, and there is a need for further research.

### **Artisan Economy**

Custom bicycle framebuilders face some of the same challenges as other small business owners, but framebuilders have unique needs because they belong to the artisan economy (Institute for the Future for Intuit, 2008). The artisan economy is a new phenomenon that explains the increasing number of craft makers, small-scale manufacturers, gourmet food producers, and small farmers who have started their own businesses since 2008 (Institute for the Future for Intuit, 2008). Management theorists use the term *artisan* to describe small-scale businesses and manufactures that specialize in niche goods (Chang, 2011). Custom bicycle framebuilders belong to the artisan economy because they hand build bicycle frames, and framebuilders share many similar characteristics and challenges as other artisan owners.

**Owner and industry characteristics.** The artisan economy consists of craftspeople, art makers, farmers, and food producers (Holmes et al., 2012). These artisan owners create a variety of products, ranging from paintings, jewelries, custom shoes, bicycle frames, machines, to homemade cheese, microbrew beer, and other food items (Chang, 2011; Holmes et al., 2012). Many of these artisan business owners work by

themselves as freelancers, or are operating as microenterprises (Fuller, Hamilton, & Seale, 2013; Kitching & Smallbone, 2012; Torres, 2002). A common characteristic of these artisan makers is that they have to be resourceful when it comes to employment opportunities in order to make a living (Luckman, 2013; Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Yair and Schwarz (2011) pointed out that many of artisan makers do not have regular streams of income, unlike office employees who receive pay every 2 weeks. Makers, such as bicycle framebuilders only receive payments when they complete the work, and they often take one to three months to finish a bicycle (Aghdaie & Zardeini, 2012; Lihra et al., 2012). This means framebuilders can go without pay for up to three months. Craftspeople produce goods in batches, but they do not receive payments until customers buy the goods. Sales can be unpredictable. Some craftspeople have to maintain part-time jobs or teach others their craft skills to supplement income (Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Even though artisan owners work in different fields, they share similar features such as being resourceful.

Companies in the artisan economy are more environmentally friendly and community oriented compared to large corporations (Rosenfeld, 2010). Rosenfeld (2010) argued that companies in the artisan economy are sustainable because artists and craftspeople generally operate on small scales. Therefore, owners are more aware of waste, energy use, and other environmental impacts of their productions (Chang, 2011; Mason, Carter, & Tagg, 2011; Micken et al., 2010). Some owners also choose to use less-harmful natural products and greener processes (Chang, 2011; Mason et al., 2011; Micken et al., 2010). Moreover, Chang (2011) summarized that some artisan owners take

a sustainable approach to running their businesses. For these owners, growth and increased profit are not the only goals. These artisan owners decided to focus on their crafts and refine the production process instead of making more money (Chang, 2011). Moreover, artisan owners are supportive of the local economies because most of them buy from other independent stores in the community (Mason et al., 2011). Artisan owners involve themselves with local community events as well, since these owners have connections to the other microenterprise business owners, customers, and community leaders (Luckman, 2013; Rosenfeld, 2010). Craftspeople's environmental awareness, business approach, and connection to others make artisan companies more sustainable than mass production factories (Chang, 2011; Mason et al., 2011; Micken et al., 2010).

**Artisan customers.** Customers buy from craftspeople and custom product makers instead of retailers for various reasons. One reason is that many customers want unique products that are different from mass-produced goods from stores (Fuller et al., 2013; Luckman, 2013). Customers buy from artisan owners because they want authentic experiences (Micken et al., 2010; Rosenfeld, 2010; Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Customers receive authentic experiences from artisan companies because custom makers work closely with customers during the entire process, from design and material selection, to production (Franke et al., 2009; Franke, Schreier, & Kaiser, 2010; Noor & Nordin, 2012). Customers cannot get this type of relationship when they buy from retailers. Even when a customer is purchasing a noncustom product, the customer can still get the authentic experience from talking to the art maker about the process (Holmes et al., 2012; Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Customers buy from small farmers, cheese makers, or microbrewers

because they like to know where the food comes from, who makes it, and the techniques used to make it (Micken et al., 2010; Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Furthermore, customers are satisfied with the product when they are part of the process (Franke et al., 2010; Lihra et al., 2012). Specialized products, authentic experiences, and higher satisfaction are reasons customers buy from artisan owners (Franke et al., 2009; Franke et al., 2010; Noor & Nordin, 2012).

Customers are willing to pay higher prices for artisan products compared to mass produced goods. Crafts, such as custom bicycle frames, jewelries, and handmade shoes are labor intensive, so craftspeople are not able to produce as many units compared to large factories. However, the profit margin for each unit is higher than mass-produced products (Hwang, 2013). Artisan owners are able to charge premium prices because the crafts are custom made, one of a kind, and the artisan owners make the crafts with high quality materials (Franke et al., 2010; Lihra et al., 2012; Luckman, 2013). Moreover, the artists are not just selling the products, but also their knowledge about the goods as well (Fuller et al., 2013; Holmes et al., 2012). Artists know about why a certain material is better for a certain design, and customers find these topics interesting. Customers cannot get this experience from normal retailers, and they are willing to pay more for the unique experience (Franke et al., 2010). Owners of artisan companies, including framebuilders, should understand their customers' purchasing behaviors so they can better serve these customers.

**Artisan business challenges.** A challenge that owners in the artisan economy face is lack of funding to start businesses and to sustain operations in the beginning

(Aghdaie & Zardeini, 2012; Nair & Chelliah, 2012). Some craftspeople start out as hobbyists while still maintaining full time jobs elsewhere. Later, these craftspeople transition into professional crafts makers, but many do not have established sales records (Fuller et al., 2013; Torres, 2002). Bankers are reluctant to lend money to informal companies that do not have years of sales statements (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011; Tariq & Wahid, 2011). Lack of funding prevents artisan enterprises from growing and expanding (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011; Tariq & Wahid, 2011).

Artisan enterprise owners face challenges that are different from other small business owners such as shopkeepers, service providers, and restaurateurs (Aghdaie & Zardeini, 2012; Holmes et al., 2012). Custom goods makers have to deal with different customer service issues, including wait times and customer expectations (Franke et al., 2010; Lihra et al., 2012). Producing a custom product is labor intensive and time consuming, and some craftspeople have difficulty accurately projecting the completion date. Craftspeople have to deal with customers who are tired of the long wait (Franke et al., 2009; Lihra et al., 2012). Moreover, some customers have unrealistic expectations with the custom products. Artisan owners have to work with these customers during the design process in order to finalize a product that is within the customers' budgets and delivery timeframes (Aghdaie & Zardeini, 2012; Lihra et al., 2011). Furthermore, the final products might not be the same as what the customers imagined. In a retail environment, customers see the products first, and buy when these products meet their expectations. However, in artisan companies, customers do not see the products until the makers complete them (Franke et al., 2010; Luckman, 2013). Artisan owners have to

make sure customers are satisfied when they deliver the final products (Franke et al., 2010; Lihra et al., 2011). This challenge is different from what small retailers and shopkeepers face.

Artisan owners also face other business challenges and competitions. According to Torres (2002), craftspeople have to balance between being artists and business owners. The artistic part of craftspeople might want to create visionary products, but these products might not sell (Torres, 2002). Moreover, artisan business owners have to compete against large corporations, which often offer similar products for much lower prices (Luckman, 2013; Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Big retailers have financial and human resources and small artisan owners have hard times keeping up with the competition (Hurst & Pugsley, 2011). Companies in the artisan economy are different from other microenterprises, and owners have to face different challenges. Artisan owners may use social media marketing to gain competitive advantages over some of the big retailers. Social media may be a viable solution to address some of these unique artisan economy problems.

There are minimal research studies on the artisan economy since it is a new phenomenon. Researchers from the Institute for the Future for Intuit first used the term artisan economy in 2008 (Institute for the Future for Intuit, 2008), and since 2008, there have not been many peer-reviewed articles on this topic. The artisan economy represents a wide range of industries, ranging from handmade soap makers, small batch coffee bean roasters, custom tailors, to metal artists (Institute for the Future for Intuit, 2008). Even though these artisan makers share some similar characteristics, each industry has unique

operations and challenges (Micken et al., 2010; Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Custom bicycle framebuilders have different needs than microbrewers, and both are worthy of scholarly research. There is a need for more research on the artisan economy because of the lack of studies.

It is vital for scholars to study the artisan economy. The popularity of home-based, craft, handmade, and do-it-yourself businesses such as custom bicycle framebuilding is increasing (Institute for the Future for Intuit, 2008). Some craft hobbyists are setting up businesses to display their skills. These craftspeople are selling their products in art fairs, specialty shops, and on the Internet through sites such as Etsy (Luckman, 2013). More consumers are buying handmade products because they are unique, and the products are different from mass-produced goods from corporate retailers (Holmes et al., 2012; Micken et al., 2010; Yair & Schwarz, 2011). Artisan customers choose handmade goods for a variety of reasons, such as high product quality, lower production environmental impact, and product uniqueness (Fuller et al., 2013). Since the artisan economy is becoming more popular, there is a need for more studies. Further research may help artisan owners be more efficient in running their businesses and understanding their customers.

Another reason that business scholars should study the artisan economy is that artisan firms are environmentally sustainable, and leaders of artisan firms can provide an alternate understanding of management practices. Compared to large corporations, artisan organizations create fewer wastes, have lower energy consumption, better business practices, and have closer ties to local communities (Rosenfeld, 2010). Torres (2002)

argued that artisan organizations have better business models because of these sustainability practices. Furthermore, Chang (2011) found that artisan owners focus on making quality products, but not about maximizing profits for their companies. This belief is different from conventional business operations, and these artisan owners may offer corporate managers different management viewpoints. Companies in the artisan economy have distinctive practices and business goals, and they may provide business researchers opportunities to create new management theories.

The conceptual framework for this study, the diffusion of innovations theory, is a useful concept to base this study upon because it allowed me a sound foundation from which to study why social media users have different levels of involvement. Scholars use the diffusion of innovations theory to examine factors influencing a technology user's adoption rate (Rogers, 2003). Some of these factors are social support, peer pressure, and prior knowledge in using technology (Mustaffa et al., 2011). Ifinedo (2011) studied electronic commerce and social media usage by small-and-medium size enterprise (SME) owners in Canada and found relative advantage was the most influential variable. The Canadian SME owners who recognized the importance of technologies were more motivated to use them compared to owners who did not value the technologies (Ifinedo, 2011). Other researchers who used the diffusion of innovations theory to conduct social media usage studies found communication from other social media users and social support were two other key variables (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013; Mustaffa et al., 2011). Individuals with friends who were active on social media were accepting social media at a faster rate (Mustaffa et al., 2011). Mustaffa et al. (2011) concluded that

individuals whose friends were using Facebook adopted the tool at a faster rate than individuals who did not have close friends using Facebook. These friends helped the individuals in learning the functions of Facebook, and the interactions these individuals had with their friends on Facebook was an incentive (Mustaffa et al., 2011). These factors might encourage or prevent a technology user in accepting an innovation (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013). Rogers (2003) categorized the users depending on the adoption rates, and the groups are: (a) innovators, (b) early adopters, (c) early majority, (d) late majority, and (e) laggards. Framebuilders, like the social media users in these studies, face a variety of factors that influence their social media usage. I can use the diffusion of innovations theory to gain insights into framebuilders' social media adoption and strategies.

The diffusion of innovations theory helped me analyze framebuilders' social media adoption and strategies. Social media challenges like lack of technical knowledge, lack of social support, and lack of incentives might prevent technology users like framebuilders from quickly adapting to technology and utilizing social media (Ifinedo, 2011; Mustaffa et al., 2011). Social media is a user-friendly and interactive way to increase WOM marketing, which consumers find more persuasive than traditional marketing strategies (Chen et al., 2011; Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Framebuilders are also able to use social media to expose masses of consumers to their brand quickly and economically (Kirtis & Karahan, 2011).

Not only framebuilders, but also the artisan community as a whole can use social media marketing despite staff shortages, lack of expertise, and lack of funding (Bakeman

& Hanson, 2012; Parry et al., 2012; Yallapragada & Bhuiyan, 2011). The use of social media marketing can assist framebuilders with addressing customer service issues as well as to extend authentic experiences to potential customers during the pre-purchase phase (Wang et al., 2012). Exploring how quickly framebuilders can overcome challenges and adapt to using social media as a marketing tool for their small businesses can help prevent failure and lack of growth.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 1 covered key foundational and background components of this study. These components included the problem statement, purpose statement, conceptual framework, and literature review. The focus of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what strategies some small business owners need to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media. Some small business owners did not have formal marketing plans for their businesses, and this contributes to business failure or lack of growth (Tariq & Wahid, 2011). There were advantages in using social media to market, but some small business owners, including framebuilders, did not utilize social media (Nair & Chelliah, 2012; Tariq & Wahid, 2011).

The literature review section covered topics such as the diffusion of innovations theory, which was the conceptual framework, small business operations, social media marketing, and the artisan economy. Numerous research articles on social media marketing and small business operations exist, but these articles are dated, and few focus on the custom framebuilding industry and the artisan economy. An examination of scholarly articles on these topics helped me build the foundation knowledge for this

study.

In Section 2, I described the methodology to conduct this study including population, sampling, data collection, data analysis, validity, and reliability. In Section 3, I presented research findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations.

## Section 2: The Project

In this study, bicycle framebuilders answered questions related to their social media marketing usage in face-to-face interviews. I observed the participants' social media accounts and reviewed company documents, including company websites, during the data collection stage. Social media is a cost-effective way for business owners to communicate with customers, build trust, and establish brand loyalty (De Vries et al., 2012). However, some framebuilders did not use social media marketing because of different obstacles. The intent of this multiple case study was to explore what strategies framebuilders need to market with social media.

This section includes such areas as the purpose statement, role of the researcher and participants, methodology, sampling, ethical research, data collection, reliability, and validity. In this section, I explain how I collected, organized, and analyzed data. I used NVivo 10 software to process the raw data, and will store both digital and printed files in secured locations for 5 years. I also discuss the importance of following Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols when working with research participants, in addition to the different elements of ethical research.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what strategies small business owners need to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media. The target population for this study consisted of framebuilders in a Southwestern U.S. state. Five framebuilders participated in semistructured interviews to share their experiences using social media to market their brands. This study was

designed to facilitate positive social change by producing findings to help artisan microenterprise owners to reach out to more customers. Artisan microenterprises are sustainable businesses, and supporting the growth of artisan microenterprises will reinforce the development of strong communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this study, I was the data collection instrument and assumed the role of the observer as participant. Bloomer, Cross, Endacott, O’Conner, and Moss (2012) stated that it is common for qualitative researchers to assume the roles of observer as participant. Although I had some limited contact with participants in the context of individual interviews, I did not attempt to participate in activities of the participants’ lives or to immerse myself in their environments. The study focus was on gathering data through the semistructured interviews and a review of social media pages rather than gathering data through the experience of participating in their group activities. The observer as participant role is advantageous for researchers in that it prevents the development of a conflict of interest that can arise from the researcher’s over-identification with participants (Higginbottom et al., 2013).

I took several steps to mitigate potential concerns regarding researcher bias and participant confidentiality. Since I have worked in the custom bicycle framebuilding industry since 2005, I knew some of the participants in advance. However, the participant identities were kept confidential, and I did not use any names or organizations when presenting findings. I adhered to the ethics requirement identified in the Belmont Report such as following IRB requirements and respecting participants (U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services, 1979). Participant confidentiality was an important issue, and I made sure that the framebuilders understood this so that they felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me. In addition to my involvement in the industry, I was an advocate of using social networking sites to market, so I may have assumptions and biases on this topic. I exercised care in maintaining an open and objective stance as the researcher. I did not inform participants of my personal views concerning the topic of study.

A researcher must mitigate bias by understanding what bias is and how it affects research findings (Chenail, 2011; Norlyk, Dreyer, Haahr, & Martinsen, 2011). As a qualitative researcher, I found out what my biases were on the topic and kept them in mind when designing the interview questions, conducting interviews, analyzing data, and interpreting results. The use of Husserl's concept of epoché, or bracketing, is effective in limiting the effects of personal biases in qualitative studies (Snelgrove, 2014). During the semistructured face-to-face interviews, I did not interfere with or influence participants when they are answering the questions. It was essential for me to maintain a professional presence and keep an open mind. Moreover, it was necessary to disclose my assumptions and attitudes in the study so readers are aware of them. In these ways, I aimed to mitigate the effect of researcher bias on the collection and interpretation of results.

Researchers cite interview protocols as a useful and efficacious tool for data collection tool in qualitative inquiry (Chenail, 2011; Englander, 2012; Rossetto, 2014). Through interviews, researchers are able to collect in-depth data from the perspective of the participant (Rossetto, 2014). Interview protocols aid qualitative researchers in

collecting rich descriptions from participants (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Rossetto, 2014). In this study, I explored the strategies of custom bicycle framebuilders in using social media marketing, and specifically used an interview protocol (Appendix D), I acquired a rich, detailed account from each respondent to explicate the subject of study.

### **Participants**

The target population for this study consisted of professional custom bicycle framebuilders in a Southwestern U.S. state who used social media. The inclusion criteria in this study were that the participants must have: (a) been the owner of a custom bicycle framebuilding business at the time of the study, (b) been operating in the selected Southwestern state at the time of the study, (c) utilized social media for marketing purposes, and (d) been over the age of 18. The production and selling of custom bicycle frames is a niche market and there were not many framebuilders in the area or the United States as a whole at the time of this study. As a result, there were no academic journals on the custom bicycle framebuilding industry, so an official count of framebuilding companies in the United States was not attainable. However, Schultz (2012) conducted an informal count on an electronic mailing list and estimated there were five custom bicycle framebuilding companies in this Southwestern state in 2012. Due to the fact that my research identified only five custom bicycle framebuilders in this Southwestern state, a study of five represented a census of the population.

Establishing positive working relationships with participants is an important aspect of qualitative research (Kelly, Harrison, Schaughency & Green, 2014). Since I had previously met some framebuilders through trade shows and sporting events, they knew I

was part of the framebuilding community. Thus, my acquaintance with this community facilitated the process of gaining access to potential participants. Further, my credibility in the field assisted with the development of a positive working relationship between the participants and myself. Informing participants with research intent is an effective way for qualitative researchers to build credibility (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). I made the objectives of my research known to the participants to decrease the influence of researcher bias and to increase my trustworthiness with the participants.

### **Research Method and Design**

This study was a qualitative multiple case study of the custom bicycle framebuilding industry in a Southwestern state. I explored what strategies framebuilders need to promote their businesses using social media marketing. The research instrument consisted of a list of interview questions that I crafted and which the framebuilders answered during face-to-face interviews. I further reviewed and documented the framebuilders' social media profiles.

### **Method**

Some social science researchers prefer conducting studies qualitatively because they can use this method to explore real-life situations accurately (Bailey, 2014). Through the qualitative method, researchers interact with participants directly so they interpret a scenario through the participants' experiences. Researchers do so by interviewing participants and capturing their experiences from the participants' words (Norlyk et al., 2011). During the data collection process, qualitative researchers focus on interviewees' words and emotions (Norlyk et al., 2011). Researchers then use the collected data to

analyze real-life social issues.

When choosing a research technique, it is crucial for researchers to start with a central research question, and then select a method that can address the central research question (Kramer-Kile, 2012). The research question for this study was: What strategies do small business owners need to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media? The goal in this study was to explore the strategies employed in framebuilders' usage of social media marketing, and qualitative research as an appropriate method to study this business issue. Social media such as Facebook fan pages may be an effective marketing tool, but many small business owners, such as custom bicycle framebuilders, experienced difficulty using it.

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies custom bicycle framebuilding owners use Web 2.0 tools to market their products and services. In choosing a research method, three principle options exist: (a) quantitative, (b) qualitative, and (c) mixed methods. Quantitative research is a good choice for comparing variables, showing these variables' relationship, and measuring outcomes (Harrison & Reilly, 2011). Quantitative research would enable me to answer the *what* and *how* of this issue, that is, what social media outlets participants use and with what frequency (Bailey, 2014; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). However, it would not enable me to explore the strategies employed in the use of social media marketing, the framebuilders' narratives, nor the processes by which this phenomenon operates over time. Zivkovic (2012) cited an example which researchers used the qualitative method to explore a company's management practices. The qualitative researchers collected in-depth data through employees' words that

described the essence of the company's operations (Zivkovic, 2012). The researchers could not have captured the narratives using the quantitative design (Zivkovic, 2012). I explored these small business owners' use of social media marketing in their own words using a qualitative research method, a feat that would be difficult to accomplish quantitatively.

The mixed methods approach involves using both qualitative and quantitative designs. Doyle, Brady, and Byrne (2009) pointed out a number of critiques to the mixed methods approach. Chief among these criticisms is the argument that quantitative and qualitative data have a fundamentally distinct epistemological and ontological basis. Terrell (2012) maintained that comparing qualitative and quantitative data could be problematic because mixed methods researchers need to transform data to allow integration, and this may lead to discrepancies. Researchers must be highly skilled to effectively explore a single phenomenon utilizing two different methods (Doyle et al., 2012). Mixed methods research can be prohibitively time-consuming and resource-intensive to conduct (Terrell, 2012). For these reasons, mixed methods is not a good approach for this study. Furthermore, Zauner et al. (2012) discussed the lack of qualitative studies concerning social media marketing. To address the central research question concerning the strategies framebuilders employ in using social media marketing, and to address this understudied area in the research, a qualitative research method was the appropriate choice.

### **Research Design**

For this study, I chose the case study research design. Qualitative researchers use

case studies to capture the how and what of a situation (Sangster-Gromley, 2013; Zivkovic, 2012). Case study research involves the study of one or more entities, or cases, which possess a shared factor such as function, location, or condition (Snyder, 2012). In case studies, researchers aim to acquire a holistic depiction of the cases being studied (Radley & Chamberlain, 2012). It is common for social science researchers to use the case study method to examine real life situations such as business challenges (Snyder, 2012; Zivkovic, 2012). Case study research takes place in participants' natural surroundings, but not in a controlled environment (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). In addition, case study researchers collect evidence from different sources such as interviews and documentation so findings are from different perspectives (Yin, 2013; Zivkovic, 2012). I was exploring what strategies bicycle framebuilders need to use social media, and this is an applied business situation, so I needed to collect data from multiple sources. I collected rich text through semistructured interviews. To enhance data richness, I included documentation through review of participants' social networking accounts. Additionally, the case study method allowed me to explore the how and what of a situation. Asking the how and what questions were essential in understanding framebuilders' social media usage and challenges. Therefore, it was more effective to use the case study method than other qualitative designs for a marketing issue.

Other qualitative research designs such as ethnography and phenomenology were not suitable for this study on social media marketing. Ethnography is for exploring cultures, and researchers observe and interview participants to find common values, beliefs, languages, and behaviors (Higginbottom et al., 2013). Observation is one data

collection method in ethnography, in addition to interviews (Higginbottom et al., 2013). Researchers may need to spend an extended period in the field with participants in order to gain knowledge (Higginbottom et al., 2013). However, observation does not fit the scope of this study and since framebuilders perform social media marketing tasks online, in-person field observations do not add value to the study. Framebuilders, like other artisan owners, work in home-based studios (Luckman, 2013). Framebuilders might find having a researcher in their homes for any length of time intrusive. I was not able to complete ethnographic research without field observations, and therefore, ethnography was not a viable choice.

Phenomenology was also not an appropriate choice for this study. Many researchers use phenomenology to examine *lived experiences* (Drost, 2011). The term lived experiences refers to the direct, intimate interaction of the individual with the phenomenon of interest (Pereira, 2012). The central research question of this study was: What strategies do small business owners need to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media? Framebuilders have different opinions and viewpoints on this issue, even though they belong to the same industry, and phenomenology's scope is too narrow. The focus of phenomenology is on the human experience (Norlyk et al., 2011). With the phenomenological design, I did not have the option to review the companies' operations and social media pages as part of data collection. Case study was the appropriate design to address this study's central research question, rather than ethnography or phenomenology.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population for this study was professional custom bicycle framebuilders in a Southwestern state. The sampling of this study was limited to those framebuilders who operate in this Southwestern state. Custom bicycle framebuilders are different from mass-manufacturers, bicycle mechanics, or bike retailers. Custom framebuilders produce one bicycle frame at a time, and make the frames specifically for a particular customer. Framebuilders face different business needs and challenges compared to large-scale factories or bicycle retailers. This is because custom bicycle framebuilding belongs to the artisan industry, and builders have more in common with painters and small cheese makers than large retailers or manufacturers (Institute for the Future for Intuit, 2008). Though this study, I explored what strategies framebuilders need to promote their businesses using social media. Schultz (2012) estimated there were five framebuilding companies in this Southwestern state. Assuming this estimate was correct and all five framebuilders used social media, the study population was a census of five.

The sampling method is purposive, and it is a common method for qualitative research projects (Suri, 2011). Case study researchers aim to explore holistic perspectives of an issue, so researchers need to look for interviewees with specific requirements (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). Some of these requirements are demographic background, geographic restriction, socio-economic status, or industry specific experience (Acharya et al., 2013).

For this study, the participants were operating custom bicycle framebuilding companies and promoting their companies using social networking sites. I located these

framebuilders using the purposive sampling method. I identified two framebuilding electronic mailing lists where many potential participants are members. I sent invitations through these two public electronic mailing lists to recruit participants. The initial contact with participants was through email, and I scheduled face-to-face interview time with them.

The sample size for this case study was five, which was the census sample. In determining the sample size to in this study, the concept of saturation is a chief requirement. In qualitative studies, sampling should continue until the researcher has determined that the data has reached saturation (Trotter, 2012). Saturation means that researchers have reached the point at which the inclusion of more participants no longer offers new themes, and researchers have captured all accurate information through the data collection process (Trotter, 2012). Researchers have offered different recommendations for determining a suitable sample size to reach saturation. Dworkin (2012) maintained that a sample size of 25 to 30 is necessary to achieve saturation in studying a large population. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) argued that case study researchers should use a minimum sample of four participants. Some researchers have varied their suggestions of sample size based upon the specific qualitative methodology the researcher intends to use. For case study research, Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) presented three to five participants as the minimum adequate sample size. I utilized a sample of five participants, which was the total census sample.

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

small business owners need to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media. The eligibility criteria for participation in this study were: (a) the participant was the owner of a custom framebuilding business, (b) the participant operated in a Southwestern state, (c) the participant utilized social media for marketing purposes, and (d) the participant was over the age of 18.

### **Ethical Research**

Researchers, whether they are using quantitative or qualitative methods, must follow ethical guidelines when they are conducting studies. In the US, the Belmont Report of 1979 stipulates the rules and regulations involving human subjects in research (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The contents of the informed consent form comply with the principles stated in the Belmont Report, which include beneficence, respect for persons, and research ethics (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). According to the Belmont Report, these ethical guidelines include procedures for informed consent, the withdrawal process, incentives for participation in the study, the storage of data, and privacy concerns.

All research participants participated in the informed consent process as required by Walden University's IRB. After a participant agreed to be part of this research study, I emailed the participant an informed consent form (Appendix C). The form contains information such as (a) the purpose of the study, (b) interview structure, (c) consent for the audio recording of the interview, (d) sample interview questions, (e) how I will use the data, (f) withdrawal process, and (g) contact information. When participants agreed

with the terms and conditions, they emailed, mailed, or faxed the signed consent form to me, and I scheduled the semistructured face-to-face interview.

Participants signed an informed consent form acknowledging their willing consent to participate in the study. I informed participants of their rights including the right to confidentiality and their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any point prior to the publication of the study. Prior to each interview, I verbally explained this process again so participants were aware of their role and their rights in this study. I reminded participants that the interview was audio recorded, and again asked for their permission to record. I provided participants with the opportunity to ask questions or express any concerns about the research. On the informed consent form, I provided my email address, phone number, and information concerning the withdrawal process. Participants were able to withdraw from the study by contacting me via email, and expressing their desire to withdraw from participation without penalty.

I asked participants to participate in the study voluntarily. I will offer a copy of the study findings upon request as an incentive to participation. However, this will be the only offered incentive for participation. After completing the interview, I provided participants with my contact information to address any further questions or concerns in relation to the study. At the beginning of the interview, I informed participants that I would provide them a summary of the findings upon the completion of the study.

I will store data from this study, including digital recordings of the interviews, transcripts, and other documents, in secured locations for 5 years following completion of the study. The secured locations are password-protected data storage for digital files, and

a locked cabinet for printed documents. I am the only person who has access to the data, and after 5 years, I will delete the digital files by electronic erasure and shred the printed documents.

I did not disclose any participants' names or organizations in order to protect their privacy. I assigned a code, such as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5, for each participant, and listed this information on a spreadsheet document to protect his or her identity. This is the only document that lists interviewee names and companies. All other files and documents had codes as identifiers. I store this spreadsheet in a password-protected secured storage for 5 years. I am the only individual with access to the data. After the 5-year period, I will destroy the file along with other documents.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

As the case study researcher, I was the data collection instrument for this study (Pereira, 2012). It is common for qualitative scholars to use themselves as research instruments since researchers interview and observe participants in their natural environments (Pereira, 2012). Qualitative researchers may use a list of questions to interview participants, or a list of criteria to observe (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012; Rossetto, 2014). The researchers are data collection instruments in these cases. I collected data from three sources of evidence for this case study: (a) face-to-face interviews, (b) social media pages reviews, and (c) company documents. I conducted semistructured interviews guided by open-ended questions with framebuilders face-to-face (see Appendix A). I have audio recordings of the interviews, and the recordings helped me to ensure the transcripts are accurate. The documentation of this case study included review of

framebuilders' social networking pages and company documents.

The instrument for this study was a list of semistructured interview questions on framebuilding operations and social media marketing. The interview protocol (Appendix D) began with an introduction, in which I explained the purpose of this study, participant rights, and data confidentiality. I asked participants whether they desired a summary of the findings of the study. The interview began after the introduction. I used the list of interview questions as a guide to ensure I asked participants the same questions in the same order. Framebuilders answered questions related to social media usage, business operations, marketing goals and objectives, and marketing theories, such as WOM, branding, and relationship marketing. Moreover, participants addressed topics such as small business operations, microenterprise challenges, and the artisan economy. I conducted standardized open-ended interviews using the interview protocol.

There are steps to confirm the validity of the research instrument and the reliability of the data collection process. For data reliability, I recorded the face-to-face interviews and transcribed them immediately. I used voice-to-text software to transcribe the interviews. This software transcribed the interviews automatically, and it captured the recordings. However, the transcriptions are not always accurate, and the software does not document everything. I compared the audio recordings with the transcriptions to ensure reliability. To improve validity, I asked participants to review the recording transcripts to make sure they were correct. After this step, I compared the voice recordings with the transcriptions again to ensure reliability. Having a 3-step transcription process is a way to maintain high level of data reliability (Yin, 2013).

I used the same list of questions for all participants to improve the validity and reliability of the data. Participants did not necessarily answer the questions in the same order listed since the interviews were semistructured. I made sure participants covered all topics by utilizing an interview protocol (Appendix D) during the interviews. Further, I utilized a transcript review process to ask participants to examine the interview transcripts to verify the accuracy of the transcripts. I stored all data in a password-protected storage. Individuals who were interested in obtaining a summary of the findings from the study could send the requests to me by email.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The data collection process consisted of face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions and social media pages reviews. After framebuilders gave me their consent to participate, I scheduled an interview time with them. Framebuilders, like other microenterprise owners, are busy, and I was accommodating with appointment times. For example, I was available in the evenings and during the weekends. I arranged a quiet setting for the interview to avoid any interruptions.

Semistructured interviews have ample support within the literature as a malleable and open tool for qualitative researchers (Chenail, 2011; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Some quantitative researchers have criticized interviews as less objective, less reliable, and more reactive than quantitative data collection methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qu and Dumay (2011) pointed out that practical time and accessibility limitations often constrain sample sizes in qualitative interview-based research. However, Qu and Dumay (2011) maintained that the qualitative interview is an effective and convenient way to

collect data. Chenail (2011) held that interviews are effective in eliciting detailed information from participants relative to their experiences and perspectives of a particular topic. Face-to-face interviewing allows for the recognition of body language and other non-verbal cues. Qu and Dumay (2011) argued that through interviewing, researchers are able to discover hidden facts of organizational behaviors.

Researchers commonly use document review in combination with other qualitative data collection methods as a means of achieving methodological triangulation (Bowen, 2009). Yin (2013) held that document analysis is especially appropriate for qualitative case study research. Through the analysis of documents, the researcher is able to expose meaning, deepen comprehension, and reveal insights in relation to the research problem (Yin, 2013). Bowen (2009) conceded that utilization of documents as a data source is constrained by the quality and accessibility of the material. However, the lack of reactivity found with documents stands as a major point of recommendation for the use of document review as a data collection method (Bowen, 2009).

In the beginning of the interview, I reminded participants of the informed consent process and asked their permission to record the interview. Participants signed the informed consent form (Appendix C) prior to the interview, but I verbally reminded them of their rights. Then, I started asking the questions. The questions relate to the interviewee's custom bicycle company and social media usage. Participants could contact me any time before or after the interview with their concerns.

The interview followed a semistructured design (Appendix A). Semistructured interviews are more informal and interactive, compared to structured interviews, as

participants are also in control of interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Vagle, 2009).

Semistructured interviews are an effective data collection technique because they allow participants to tell their stories freely (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Using this interviewing method, I strived to create a relaxed environment so participants are comfortable sharing their experiences. Before the end of an interview, I asked participants if they had any questions, and reminded them that they were free to contact me anytime with their concerns.

I utilized transcript review to verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts. I sent participants a copy of the transcription after I completed the interviews. I asked participants to review the transcript and confirmed that the transcript correctly expresses the conversation that transpired during the interview. I asked participants to approve the transcript in its current form, or to submit notes to me with recommendations for corrections or additions to the interview transcript. Based upon the recommendations submitted by the participants, I made notes within the transcripts as necessary. Participants also performed member checking where they reviewed my interpretations of the interviews. Participants shared additional information with me during the member checking stage.

Another data collection method is documentation. I reviewed the participants' social media pages. Some examples of these pages are Facebook fan pages, Twitter accounts, LinkedIn profiles, and blogs. During this stage of the data collection process, I observed different features of these pages. I made note of two primary factors: (a) how many followers or subscribers the page had during the observation period, and (b) how

active the owner was on the site, as measured by the number of postings created within one month preceding the data collection. I also reviewed the participants' company web pages during the documentation stage. A computerized spreadsheet contains this collected information.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Case study researchers conduct many interviews during the data collection process, and it is crucial for them to stay organized to capture accurately all participants' perspectives (Radley & Chamberlain, 2012; Snyder, 2012). Yin (2013) stated the three principles of case study data collection are (a) collecting data from multiple sources, (b) creating a database, and (c) documenting all evidence. To follow the first principle, I used two different sources of data, interviews and documentation, during the data collection. Then, I recorded all interviews and transcribed them immediately. I then saved the transcriptions as Word formatted documents on password-protected computer. I recorded data from the social networking accounts reviews on a password-protected Word formatted document. The document with social networking accounts review notes does not contain the organization or framebuilder names in order to protect participants' privacy. I then loaded the interview scripts into the NVivo 10 software program to assist me in organizing the data. NVivo software utilizes a system of *Nodes*, or categorical labels, to allow for the organization of data and development of thematic categories. I utilized this node structure when coding and thematizing the data. This documentation and transcription procedure helped me stay organized. To ensure data confidentiality, I stored both voice and text interview files in a password-protected data storage. I am the

only person with access to the files. I will securely store all data for a period of 5 years and destroy it at the end of the 5-year period by shredding printed documents and electronically erasing digitized information.

### **Data Analysis**

In analyzing the data in this qualitative multiple case study, I used a method based upon the constant comparison method described by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011). The method described by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011) specifically includes the use of NVivo software to organize data, which I also used in this study. In this case study, I incorporated methodological triangulation into the study design. Methodological triangulation entails the use of multiple data collection methods to establish greater substantiation of the researcher findings (Tracy, 2010). I incorporated triangulation by comparing interview transcripts, company documents, and social media accounts.

Yin (2013) stated case study researchers should use a standard process to analyze data in order to maintain reliability. The process includes three steps post data-collection: (a) divide the data into groups, (b) identify themes, and (c) draw conclusions. I used the three-step data analysis process to code the data and identify common themes (Yin, 2013). After I completed the interviews and the documentation reviews, I used NVivo 10 to organize the data. NVivo 10 software assists researchers in organizing qualitative data throughout the process of qualitative analysis. It is vital for qualitative researchers to read and reread transcripts in order to immerse themselves in the data (Smith & Firth, 2011; Vagle, 2009). I went through each interview transcript and the social media documentation several times using NVivo 10 to familiarize myself with the overall

content of the information. NVivo 10 software provided the opportunity to meet the last two principles of case study data collection that Yin (2013) described, which are creating a database and organizing all documents.

During the next step in the analysis process, I organized the data by question, grouping together all responses to the same question. This organization technique allowed me to focus on each question separately in order to start the coding process. I performed a quick review to ensure the information was in the correct category. The quick review was a way to familiarize myself with the answers to a specific question.

Then, I performed a detailed review. I used the same data analysis method to evaluate all raw data in order to identify common themes. In this step of the analysis, I began writing down keywords. I looked closely at the keywords and grouped them into common themes. I also analyzed the identified themes to identify any interthematic relationships that emerge. This enabled me to recognize broader explanatory patterns within the data.

Lastly, a final review of the data helped to ensure the reliability of the analysis, and the veracity of the identified themes. After I identified the themes, I presented the results of the study. I also discussed the meaning of the results within the context of the literature. The conceptual framework for this study included the diffusion of innovations theory. Rogers (2003) designed the diffusion of innovations theory to analyze how quickly technologies spread through culture. Some social media users have used Web 2.0 sites since the early introductory stages of those sites, while others accept social media more slowly (Mustaffa et al., 2011). I used the diffusion of innovations theory as a

framework by which to interpret the insights about framebuilders' social media participation and usage challenges. The themes identified from the analysis of data will add to the current body of knowledge concerning social media adoption and extend the diffusion of innovations theory to the context of social media use.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Validity and reliability are two important elements in any study (Drost, 2011; Houghton et al., 2013). Since this study was following a qualitative methodology, I conceptualized considerations of reliability and validity through the analogous concepts of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I outlined the measures that I employed to improve the trustworthiness of the study.

#### **Reliability**

Dependability concerns the extent to which an independent researcher can replicate the study (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). To improve the dependability of the study I utilized transcript review. Reilly (2013) described transcript review as a tool to ensure dependability. I sent participants a copy of their transcribed interview for the purpose of transcript review. Chenail (2011) noted the widespread use of transcript review as a strategy for improving rigor in interview-based studies. I asked participants to review the transcript and verify that the transcript accurately conveys the exchanges during the interview. I invited participants to approve the transcript in its current form, or to submit notes to me concerning their suggestions for corrections or additions to the interview transcript.

Further, I improved dependability in this study by offering a detailed account of the methodological steps I employed in carrying out this study. The provision of these steps helped to guarantee that an independent researcher can audit and repeat the methodology used in a study (Hanson et al., 2011). Another method to ensure dependability is to use the same data processing and analysis steps. Houghton et al. (2013) suggested using the same processing and analysis steps for all participants to ensure data dependability.

Credibility denotes the degree to which the research findings are trustworthy (Odena, 2013). I employed many strategies to support the credibility of the study. Houghton et al. (2013) recommended that researchers build relationships with participants through providing comfortable interviewing environments, disclosing how the research will use the data, and letting participants review the notes after the interviews. Participants feel safer with these steps, and they are likely to provide open and honest answers during the interviews (Vagle, 2009). I built trusting professional relationships with participants by explaining the purpose of this study and participants' involvement. I clarified how much time it took to participate, how I would use the data, and how participants could withdraw from the study. I provided a summary of findings at the end of the study to interviewees. Participants and I built trust through disclosing details and communicating expectations. Establishing trust and credibility with interviewees is one way of maintaining data reliability (Houghton et al., 2013). The member checking employed in this study further served to increase the credibility of the study findings by confirming that the collected data accurately reflects what the

participants intended to express.

Further, the use of triangulation improved the credibility of the study (Denzin, 1984). I used methodological triangulation in the analysis of the collected data by using both interviews and review of social media pages and company documents as the methods of data collection. Methodological triangulation serves to improve the reliability of the data and to offer further support for the conclusions drawn from the data (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011; Odena, 2013). Methodological triangulation entails the use of multiple methods of data collection in the study of the same phenomenon (Barratt et al., 2011). In this study, I collected data through interviewing participants, and through the examination of participants' social media profiles and usage.

Data saturation is another assurance to the credibility of a study (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014; Odena, 2013). The sample was a census sample, and since I interviewed the entire population of custom bicycle framebuilders in a Southwestern state, this met the saturation requirement. Participants reviewed the interview transcripts to ensure information was correct. After the data analysis stage, participants discussed the results with me through member checking interviews.

### **Validity**

Transferability is similar in meaning to the quantitative concept of external validity (Petty, et al., 2012). Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study are transferrable to other contexts. In qualitative research, the reader determines the degree of transferability, not the researcher (Petty, et al., 2012). Through the provision of rich detailed description, the researcher enables the reader to determine for him or herself

how applicable the study is to other settings. Yin (2013) stated researchers could improve transferability by describing all details of a case so the reader could determine if study findings were transferable. I used rich thick description in the data analysis section and in the reporting of the results of the study.

Confirmability concerns the degree to which the findings of the study are a reflection of the sentiments of the participants, and not a reflection of the researcher's personal biases (Hanson, Balmer, & Giardino, 2011; Siemiatycki, 2012). To increase the confirmability of this study, I also used bracketing. Through bracketing, researchers are able to set aside personal biases and experiences to the degree possible, and to collect and analyze the data from an unbiased perspective (Bowtell, Sawyer, Aroni, Green, & Duncan, 2013; Nelson, Onwuegbuzie, Wines, & Frels, 2013).

I provided an in-depth account of the data collection and analysis processes in this study. The provision of these details allows for an audit trail that enables the reader to examine and judge the logic utilized in analyzing the collected data and reaching the conclusions noted by the researcher (Hanson et al., 2011). The creation of an audit trail improved the confirmability of the study.

### **Transition and Summary**

The goal of this study is was explore what strategies custom bicycle framebuilders need to use social media marketing. Many microenterprise owners such as framebuilders did not have formal marketing plans for their companies, but they may benefit from having one (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012). Social media was a cost-effective marketing platform, but owners may have difficulties implementing promotional strategies. The

qualitative method and case study research design were the ideal techniques to explore the strategies with which framebuilders are using social media. The target population of this study was custom bicycle framebuilders in a Southwestern state. The sampling method was purposive so that I could locate participants with specific experiences. I performed an analysis on five framebuilding companies by asking framebuilders interview questions, reviewing their social media accounts, and analyzing company documents. Moreover, I used NVivo 10 software to organize the data so that I found common themes. I followed Walden University's IRB ethical standards to ensure data confidentiality. In Section 3, I presented the common themes participants identified from the collected data. Moreover, I discussed applications to professional practices, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further study. I continued Section 3 with a discussion of my reflections upon the research findings and the conclusions drawn from the research. The section concluded with relevant appendices and documentation.

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

This section presents the study findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, and reflections of social media use by microenterprise owners. Five custom bicycle framebuilders in a Southwestern state participated in face-to-face interviews, answering questions on to social media usage and the custom bicycle framebuilding business. After analyzing the data, I identified seven themes related to the conceptual framework and literature review. I applied these themes to identify professional practices that were relevant to bicycle framebuilders and other artisan microenterprise owners. I also created a set of recommended actions for framebuilders and artisan owners, as well as topics for further research.

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what strategies small business owners require to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media. The general business problem was that not all small business owners utilize social media when promoting their companies, which may result in a lack of financial gain. The specific business problem was that some small business owners lack strategies to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media.

I used semistructured interviews with the owners of five small framebuilding businesses, and a review of their businesses' social media pages and company documents to acquire the data needed to answer the central research question guiding this study. This question was "What strategies do small business owners need to market their custom

bicycle framebuilding brands via social media?” To collect the data, I completed face-to-face semistructured interviews with the five business owners, using an audio recorder to capture the dialogue and facilitate more accurate data collection. Through the interviews, I determined that Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook were the most widely used social media platforms cited by the participants. As such, I conducted a review of the pages on these platforms for each of the respective companies. I also reviewed the companies’ standalone websites as part of the document review process. After recording usage data for each of the pages, I collected the information in a spreadsheet to enable cross-case comparisons.

Using thematic analysis, I examined the interviews to identify recurring central themes and utilized the social media page reviews to corroborate and contextualize the findings. A total of seven themes emerged from the analysis: (a) technological competence, (b) the establishment of a social media presence, (c) effective utilization of social media platforms, (d) effective communication skills, (e) the establishment of brand identity, (f) time management, and (g) acquisition of external support.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

In this section, I present the research findings of this study. Semistructured interviews and a review of social media pages and websites for the participating companies were the data to address the research question: What strategies do small business owners need to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media? Through the use of thematic analysis, contextualized by the social media page and website information, I analyzed the collected data to explore the strategies that small

business owners need to market their custom bicycle framebuilding brands via social media.

### **Participant Demographics**

The five participants in this study were each owners of bicycle framebuilding businesses in a Southwestern state. I gathered participant demographic data and company background from the framebuilding websites as part of the document review process. The number of years each company had been in business ranged from 1 year to 21 years, with a mean of 7.8 years in business. All five participants were Caucasian men, with an age range from 36 to 49 years. All five of these business owners were also sole proprietors who did not have any employees.

### **Semistructured Interviews**

One component of the data collection for this study consisted of semistructured face-to-face interviews with the participants. The interviews were comprised of 11 open-ended questions, which probed participants to explore their use of social media in marketing their custom framebuilding businesses. I met with the participants from May 3 to May 16, 2015 to conduct the interviews. Using the interview guide, I completed individual interviews with the owners of five small custom bicycling businesses. I used an audio recorder to capture the interview dialogue and enable transcription of the data. After transcribing the interviews, I imported the transcripts into the NVivo 10 analysis software to facilitate the organization and thematic analysis of the data.

### **Social Media Page and Document Review**

A review of the participants' social media pages served as a supplementary data source for this study. During the individual interviews, I obtained information from the participants about the web addresses of their social media pages. As Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were the most consistently reported platforms, I limited the review to these three platforms. I reviewed these platforms and the company websites on May 2, 2015. Using an Excel spreadsheet, I reviewed each company's pages on the three platforms and recorded information pertaining to usage including the date of the first post, the number of monthly posts made, and the number of individuals who followed the respective pages (Appendix E). I also reviewed, during the timeframe of the study, the corresponding company websites to obtain demographic information. These data provided detailed information to contextualize the participants' social media use and allowed for the comparison of the participants' usage patterns.

### **Emergent Theme 1: Technological Competence**

The first theme to emerge from the analysis was the need for custom bicycle business owners to be comfortable and competent with using technology in order to successfully market their businesses via social media. All participants reported a high level of technological proficiency, which allowed them to use social media platforms effectively. While some level of proficiency in computer use was identified as a key skill, advanced computer knowledge was not deemed necessary to successfully utilize social media for marketing. All of these findings confirmed that framebuilders depend heavily on online and social media marketing. Participants 2, 3, and 4 had brochures, flyers, and

posters made for promotional purposes, but they could not provide copies since they were made many years ago; none of the participants had produced similar materials recently. Participant 4 mentioned not creating printed materials for more than 7 years since customers can get information on his company and pictures of his bicycles electronically through websites and social media. All participants echoed the finding during member checking that investing in printed marketing materials did not fit the marketing needs.

Table 1

## Frequency of Themes for Technological Competence

| Theme                   | <i>n</i> | % frequency of occurrences |
|-------------------------|----------|----------------------------|
| Comfort with technology | 4        | 13                         |
| Computer skills         | 3        | 10                         |
| Earlier adopter         | 4        | 13                         |
| Technological knowledge | 20       | 65                         |

*Note.* *n* = frequency of theme.

Although the participants presented with varying levels of technological capabilities, the consensus was that business owners need to be familiar with some degree of technological skill to utilize social media for marketing their businesses. Custom bicycle framebuilding is a home-based business, and framebuilders rarely interact with customers in person. All five participants agreed during member checking that business owners should have basic computer knowledge. Technical capabilities might play a role in determining if framebuilders were innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, or laggards.

A technology user's experience in technology influences the user's adoption of a new tool (Rogers, 2003). Rogers (2003) called this compatibility, and compatibility is one of the attributes in the diffusion of innovations theory. Many social media users self-identify as good computer users who can operate software programs with ease (Celik, Sahim, & Aydin, 2014; Rusaneanu, 2014). Social media users' knowledge in information technology helps with their social media adoption process (Celik et al., 2014). Under the diffusion of innovations theory, innovators are the first adopters, laggards are the last to adopt a new technology, and the level of technical competence is a factor in the adoption rate (Rogers, 2003). Social media users with prior computer usage or software knowledge are likely to adopt social media at a faster rate than users who are not technologically savvy (Celik et al., 2014; Claudy, Garcia, & D'Driscoll, 2014).

### **Emergent Theme 2: The Establishment of a Social Media Presence**

The second theme to emerge from the analysis was the belief that custom bicycle business owners must develop an online social media presence in order to market their businesses via social media. This theme is another consensus agreement during the social media review and member checking processes. All participants stated that the use of social media was a growing trend, and that business owners must adapt to this trend in order to remain competitive in the marketplace. Table 2 illustrates the nodes that emerged from the data analysis.

Table 2

## Frequency of Themes for the Establishment of a Social Media Presence

| Theme               | <i>n</i> | % frequency of occurrences |
|---------------------|----------|----------------------------|
| Following the trend | 7        | 5                          |
| Platforms           |          |                            |
| Blogs               | 5        | 4                          |
| Facebook            | 46       | 34                         |
| Flickr              | 4        | 3                          |
| Instagram           | 41       | 30                         |
| Integral            | 4        | 3                          |
| Tumblr              | 1        | < 1                        |
| Twitter             | 12       | 9                          |
| Webpage management  | 17       | 12                         |

*Note.* *n* = frequency of theme.

I also examined all five companies' social media presence, and found that within these platforms, the participants all used Facebook first for brand marketing, though the period between the establishment of the company and the creation of a company Facebook page differed for each participant. This number ranged from less than 1 year to 8 years, with an average of approximately 3 years. The creation of Instagram and Twitter pages occurred in a different sequence for each participant, and only Participant 4 and Participant 5 used of all three platforms. Appendix F displays the timeline of social media presence for each of the five businesses.

This was confirmed through the interview data as the participants noted many different platforms. Four participants (Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5) discussed the use of blogs. For example, Participant 1 observed, "A lot of [framebuilders] have blogs. But it seems like blogs are kind of outdated now." All participants except Participant 4 reported

having an active company website. Participants 2 and 4 mentioned Flickr, with Participant 4 sharing, “I think I have a Flickr site somewhere but I haven’t downloaded a picture in like four years.” Participant 1 also put forth Integral as a popular social media site he used, though no other participants discussed use of the platform. Participants selected social media platform based on the tool’s popularity among their peers and customers. The relative advantage of the social media tools, as theorized by Rogers (2003), played a role in the participants’ decision-making process. Business owners choose popular social networking sites because they can envision the benefits (Saenz-Royo et al., 2015; Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Participants saw their competitors’ success in using social media and were motivated to start using the sites.

Of the many platforms mentioned by the participants, triangulation of the site reviews and the interview data indicated that the most popular three sites were Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Table 3 displays the social media presence reported by the five participants. While all participants reported having a Facebook page for their respective businesses, only few of the participants established Instagram and Twitter pages. I reviewed the website data and confirmed that P2 and P4 appeared to be the earliest adopters of Facebook, creating their first postings in 2010. P1 was the most recent Facebook adopter, publishing the first post in 2014. Interview data confirmed the social media review findings.

Table 3

## Social Media Presence

|           | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 |
|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Facebook  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Instagram | Y  | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  |
| Twitter   | N  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  |

*Note.* Social media presence refers to the current existence of a social media page established by a representative of the company, specifically to represent the company as a professional entity.

Rogers (2003) categorized technology users using a scale of five, from the quickest to adopt to an innovation to the slowest, and they are: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Among the group, Participants 1 and 4 are early adopters of Facebook since they established their companies' Facebook fan pages in 2010. Participants 3 and 5 began the Facebook fan pages in 2013, and Participant 1 started the page in 2014. Participants 3, 4, and 5 are Facebook early majorities using the data. Similarly, Participants 2 and 4 started posting on Instagram in 2012, a year earlier than Participant 5, and 2 years earlier than Participant 1. Participants 2 and 4 are also early Instagram adopters. Only Participants 3, 4, and 5 use Twitter for their companies, and these Participants began tweeting during 2013 and 2014. With the limited data, I was not able to determine the participants' Twitter adoption rate.

The adoption rate findings are inconclusive because of several limitations. First, Participants 2 and 4 have been in business longer than Participants 1, 3, and 5, and it is logical that Participants 2 and 4 have earlier Facebook and Instagram activities. The later Facebook and Instagram involvement does not mean Participants 1, 3, and 5 adopted the tools late. Second, the findings are based on the participants' current company, and I did

not take the participants' past business social media data into consideration. Participant 5 started another framebuilder company in 2012, and he had a Facebook fan page and Instagram for this business. The data for this study are not an accurate assessment of Participant 5's social media adoption rate. Lastly, the data did not take participants' personal social media usage into consideration. Participant 1 has personally been using Facebook since 2010, and he signed up for a fan page as soon as he established his framebuilding company in 2014. Therefore, the study finding on Participant 1's social media adoption rate is flawed. The scope of this study did not take participants' personal and other professional social media usage into consideration, and therefore, the data were not good indicators of the participants' social media adoption rate.

Participant 5 shared that the popularity of other companies' social media pages inspired him to create an online presence for his company. Similarly, Participant 3 divulged that the exposure generated from other companies' social media pages served as a motivator for him to begin using social media for marketing. Social media review confirmed both Participants 3 and 5 have social media pages. Rogers (2003) stated that the role of social influence, whether as negative pressure or positive encouragement from peers, influenced the adoption rates. Owners are motivated to use social media when their peers and competitors are using social media (Saenz-Royo et al., 2015; Taneja & Toombs, 2014). These business owners do not want to feel left behind, and they feel the pressure to be like their peers (Celik et al., 2014).

Participants felt the pressure to use social media as they saw success from other business owners. Rogers (2003) called this phenomenon relative advantage, and relative

advantage was part of the diffusion of innovations attributes. Technology users are motivated to learn an innovation when they can envision the results (Rogers, 2003), and this theme confirms Rogers's finding. Most small business owners choose social networking sites based on peer recommendations or industry benchmarking (Claudy et al., 2014; Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Owners often find out what social networking sites their peers or competitors are using prior to making the decision (Saenz-Royo, Garcia-Lazaro, & Moreno, 2015). Peer pressure plays key roles in many social media users' adoption process (Celik et al., 2014). Celik et al. (2014) described the key motivation behind a group's new technology adoption process as not wanting to feel left behind. Business owners begin using social media after seeing success from their competitors (Saenz-Royo et al., 2015).

### **Emergent Theme 3: Effective Utilization of Social Media Platforms**

The third theme identified in the analysis was that business owners must learn effective methods to utilize various social media platforms to successfully market their custom bicycle building businesses via social media. In addition to simply establishing an online presence, the participants highlighted the need to learn to use the sites effectively to achieve the maximum promotional benefit. This was reflected when reviewing each participant's activity on their social media platforms, where each participant made consistent use of each platform. However, each participant differed in the frequency with which they posted, as seen in Appendix G. Beyond familiarizing oneself with the features of the various platforms, understanding how individuals interact with the site was cited as

important as well. This theme is derived from several nodes I identified during data analysis as listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency of Themes for Effective Utilization of Social Media Platforms

| Theme                         | <i>n</i> | % frequency of occurrences |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|
| Regular posting               | 4        | 13                         |
| Discerning viewing patterns   | 3        | 10                         |
| Dynamic                       | 2        | 6                          |
| Generating interest           | 15       | 49                         |
| Underutilization of platforms | 3        | 10                         |

*Note.* *n* = frequency of theme.

Beyond the aforementioned aspects of effective utilization of social media, the participants emphasized the importance of regular posting. As seen in Appendix G, the relative utilization of each of the social media platforms of interest during the observation period was highly variable. Examination of these charts did not indicate that participants who excelled in consistent posting on one platform would also consistently post in each of the available platforms. Examination of the relative use of each platform suggested that participants seemed to focus on one platform and were not consistently active among them all.

During the member checking interview, Participant 1 disagreed with the need of a formal marketing plan. Yet, framebuilders should have a basic plan such as how often to post and what to post. Research indicated that many small business owners do not have formal marketing plans, and that the lack of formal plans can negatively affect sales

(Tariq & Wahid, 2011). Most microenterprise owners lack resources and knowledge to draft formal marketing plans, and the lack of plans might lead to business failure (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Toombs and Harlow (2014) described the importance of having clear social media objectives such as posting regularly so customers would come back to the sites. The lack of a formal marketing plan among microenterprise owners is an area I explored in the literary review section, and Participants 2 and 3 confirmed this concept. By developing an understanding of how the public interacts with these platforms, and how the features of these platforms are suited for marketing, the study participants could promote their companies online more successfully.

#### **Emergent Theme 4: Effective Communication Skills**

The fourth emergent theme in the analysis was that custom bicycle business owners must develop skills in effective communication to market their businesses successfully via social media. Table 5 outlines the occurrence of nodes revealed the importance of effective communication skills.

Table 5

#### Frequency of Themes for Effective Communication Skills

| <u>Theme</u>                        | <u><i>n</i></u> | <u>% frequency of occurrences</u> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Communicating ideas with the public |                 |                                   |
| Keeping people happy                | 2               | 6                                 |
| Not taking things personally        | 7               | 23                                |
| Facilitates communication           | 7               | 23                                |
| Increased customer contact          | 9               | 29                                |
| Keeping people informed             | 6               | 19                                |

*Note.* *n* = frequency of theme.

The social media review results echoed the interview findings. In this study, I assessed public engagement in terms of the number of *fans* or *followers* each company boasted on their respective pages. In order to gain *fans* or *followers*, participants need to communicate effectively with customers. Appendix H presents a comparison of the follower counts for each of the five participants. The social media review results were confirmed by the interview data; Participant 4 was able to maintain communication with his customers without the significant time losses associated with other forms of communication. This type of meaningful communication fosters trust between Participant 4 and his customers. Other participants agreed communication with customers is the basis of a trusting relationship during the member checking.

Social media presence did not always indicate active utilization of the platform. Despite reporting a company Twitter page, Participant 3 had no observed use of the site during the period of observation. In addition to the frequency of platform use, engagement with the public via these platforms was another review criterion. As measured by follower count, Participant 4 appeared to be engaging with the largest audience on each of the three platforms. Across participants, Facebook seemed to be the preferred platform for engaging the public, followed second by Instagram.

The participants indicated that social media can facilitate communication and allow for increased contact with customers. By striving to communicate with customers in a manner likely to capture their interest, business owners are better able to attract the online traffic needed to market their businesses successfully via social media (Miranda et al., 2015; Toombs & Harlow, 2014). Providing relevant communication to target

customers is also a key to relationship marketing (Witkemper et al., 2012).

Microenterprise owners are building trust with their customers by providing informative and applicable content (Rusaneanu, 2014; Toombs & Harlow, 2014; VanAuken, 2014).

In addition to the content of communication, the timeliness of communication is a significant consideration when using social media (Valerio, Herrera-Murillo, Villanueva-Puente, Herrera-Murillo, & Rodriguez-Martinez, 2015).

### **Emergent Theme 5: The Establishment of Brand Identity**

The fifth identified theme was the necessity of establishing a brand identity, and communicating this identity to customers, to successfully market custom bicycle building businesses via social media. Branding is an integral part of a marketing plan as it differentiates a company among its competitors, and it creates a sense of pride for customers (Zauner et al., 2012). Companies need strong brands in order to stand out in competitive environments so customers can distinguish the companies from their competitors (Kaur, Sharma, Kaur, & Sharma, 2015; Reichart Smith & Sanderson, 2015). Adriel (2015) stated Instagram was an effective tool for small businesses to create brands by using images to share experience and to show business values. Table 6 shows the themes that emerged from the data analysis regarding the establishment of brand identity.

Table 6

Frequency of Themes for the Establishment of Brand Identity

| Theme                               | <i>n</i> | % frequency of occurrences |
|-------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|
| Communicating identity to customers | 17       | 61                         |
| Developing distinct goals           | 1        | 4                          |

|                                 |   |    |
|---------------------------------|---|----|
| Differentiating yourself online | 6 | 21 |
| Expressing your personality     | 4 | 14 |

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*Note.* *n* = frequency of theme.

As confirmation of the idea that a company's brand can be portrayed through social media, a majority of content posted by Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 in the was tied to their framebuilding businesses during the month-long social media observation. This business related content included depictions of bicycle frames made by the framebuilders, bicycle parts that go on the frames, merchandise with company logos, and happy customers. However, in establishing this brand identity, participants also saw it necessary to include non-business related social media content. This was confirmed through the interview results. Participant 1 maintained, "I do feel like it's [social media] a very significant piece of, of um, getting one's awareness, having a public presence, of creating a public presence for your brand." Participant 4 boasted, "It's funny that social media and everything I've done has gotten me to a point where it's like people call me from Hollywood. It's really weird." Participant 5 affirmed the efficacy of social media in establishing a brand identity saying, "I think it's been great, widening our audience, more people know what we're doing. Other people will repost the stuff that we post so it gets out there further." Website posts confirmed participant statements. Non-business related posts consisted of four categories, including lifestyle, partnerships, news, and miscellaneous posts. Lifestyle posts included snapshots of framebuilders' lives, such as their friends, family members, pets, and food they consumed.

By distinguishing themselves from competitors and allowing customers to

identify with the builder's unique personality, business owners are able to establish a distinct brand identity to facilitate the marketing of their businesses via social media (Fuchs et al., 2015; Gedikoglu & Parcell, 2014). All participants confirmed the importance of branding during the member checking process, although they remained different in how to achieve the branding goal.

To increase their companies' presence using WOM, many framebuilders re-tweeted or *shared* posts by other organizations, such as community non-profits, local businesses, and bicycle businesses. These re-tweets and *shares* fall under the partnership category. Examples of these news stores were bicycle events, bike industry updates, and new bike products. The last category is miscellaneous such as jokes and references to popular culture. The purpose of these posts was to garner attention from followers, and potentially spread from one customer to another via *shares* or *likes*. A summary of this activity for each participant's company is in Appendix I, which indicates the degree to which each participant was successful with garnering shares, likes, or comments.

#### **Emergent Theme 6: Time Management**

The sixth recognized theme was the need for custom bicycle business owners to be efficient in time management to market their businesses successfully via social media. Many microenterprise owners, like the study participants, do not have employees, and the participants are busy with other business tasks. Table 7 indicates the occurrence of core nodes revealed the role time management plays in social media marketing.

Table 7

## Frequency of Themes for Time Management

| Theme         | <i>n</i> | % frequency of occurrences |
|---------------|----------|----------------------------|
| Managing time | 6        | 75                         |
| Saves time    | 2        | 25                         |

*Note.* *n* = frequency of theme.

However, the findings from a review of social media posts support the importance of time management and devoting more time to social media. Examination of these figures suggested that there may be a relationship between the numbers of posts and the number of *fans* or *followers*. For example, Participant 2 did not make any social media posting during the observation period, and had the lowest number of Facebook *fans* and Twitter *followers*. On the other hand, Participants 4 and 5 were highly active during April 2015, and they had the largest numbers of *fans* and *followers*. These findings are directly aligned with Participant 3's perception of time management, where he cited social media networks as a worthwhile time expenditure with the outcome of more time effective marketing. This supports the sample's overall opinion that it is necessary to fit time for social media into their schedules.

Many microenterprise owners are busy with daily business tasks but not strategic plans like marketing (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Marketing is often not a priority for microenterprise owners because they lack time, financial resources, and expertise (Bakeman & Hanson, 2012; Cader & Leatherman, 2011). Taneja and Toombs (2014) outlined the key barriers microenterprise owners face when using social media, and they

were lack of technical skills, lack of security, lack of customer engagement, and lack of time. Not having time management skills is a threat to microenterprise owners' success (Taneja & Toombs, 2014). I explored the lack of time and resources among business owners in the literature review section. Business owners must learn to manage the time-consuming aspects of maintaining their social media accounts in order to be effective in the use of these platforms for marketing purposes.

### **Emergent Theme 7: Acquisition of External Support**

The final theme identified in the analysis was the need for custom bicycle business owners to solicit the support from others outside of their company to market their businesses successfully via social media. The participants shared that they have utilized the support of many contacts, both professional and personal, to help market their businesses via social media. This theme is derived from nodes I identified during data analysis as illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8

Frequency of Themes for Acquisition of External Support

| Theme                     | <i>n</i> | % frequency of occurrences |
|---------------------------|----------|----------------------------|
| Professional tech support | 2        | 20                         |
| Support from others       | 8        | 80                         |

*Note.* *n* = frequency of theme.

By asking for advice and assistance from individuals outside of the company, the participants were able to leverage their knowledge to successfully market their businesses via social media. I obtained social media review data to triangulate the results as I did not

have administrator access to view the social media profiles. I observed the social media accounts as a *fan* or a *follower*, which did not provide information on whether friends made the posts on the participants' behalf. Upon reviewing my interpretation of the findings during member checking, all participants agreed help from others was crucial in their social media adoption process.

Formal and informal networks are important for small business owners like framebuilders as they support each other with suggestions and referrals (Shabaya, 2014). Microenterprise owners benefit professionally and personally from informal friendships and formal business networks (Kuhn & Galloway, 2013). Kuhn and Galloway (2013) discussed peer networking among artisan microenterprise owners and found artisan owners had strong associations with their peers. Artisan owners shared business ideas, best practices, and provided morale support among the group even when they were competitors, but owners saw the need to maintain a close association (Kuhn & Galloway, 2013). Upon reviewing my interpretation of the findings during member checking, all participants agreed help from others was crucial in their social media adoption process.

Peer support or pressure influences a social media user's motivation in using the technology (Mustaffa et al., 2011). When friends and family members are using Facebook, social media users feel the need to sign up to be part of the inner circle (Shi, Rui, & Whinston, 2014). The ability to try an innovation affects the likelihood that a person will adopt a technology (Rogers, 2003), and this theme relates to another diffusion of innovations attribute, trialability. In this case, in order to try a particular innovation, the framebuilders needed some assistance.

### **Application to Professional Practice**

The lessons learned from this multiple case study may help custom bicycle framebuilders in a Southwestern state to market more effectively through the use of new innovations such as social media. Factors influenced framebuilders' social media adoption rate were technology skills, peer support, competitor pressure, and relative advantages in using social media. All participants agreed it was important to have a social media presence. Taneja and Toombs (2014) outlined the key benefits for microenterprise owners to marketing using social media, and the benefits were visibility to current and potential customers, capability to maintain relationships with customers, financial sustainability, and the ability to gain competitive advantages. Social media and the adoption of new innovations helped framebuilders establish brand images, communicate with customers, and stay connected with others in the industry. These are important functions business owners should perform, and social networking sites are allowing business owners to conduct these tasks cost-effectively. Second, framebuilders should have objectives in mind when starting a social media marketing campaign. The objectives include what social media platform to use, what content to post, and how often to post. Toombs and Harlow (2014) cited having simple plans like determining what content to post and how often to post would improve microenterprise marketing.

In regards to creating a brand image, framebuilders should examine their mission and product line to find an image that reflects these elements. Customers choose custom products because of the maker's skills, knowledge, and passion (Fuchs et al., 2015), and framebuilders should display these qualities as their brands through social media. As

Participants 2 and 5 stated, it was important to bring out their own personalities through social media postings. Framebuilders can show their personalities by capturing their lifestyle through social media, such as pictures of their favorite restaurants, news stores that interested them, and objectives that inspired them. A useful example is how professional athletes have used Instagram to reshape their images by posting pictures of their daily lives (Reichart et al., 2015). Framebuilders represent their company's brands, and it was crucial to show their interests in social media.

The last lesson learned from this multiple case study is the communication with customers. Social media is an effective tool to stay in touch with customers, send out promotional messages, and resolve customer service issues (VanAuken, 2014).

Framebuilders use social media as a communication tool as it is dynamic. Facebook and Instagram comments are quick and informal ways for framebuilders to answer customer questions. Participants 2, 3, and 4 described how social networking sites increased their communications with their customers.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implication for social change is that custom bicycle framebuilding companies, like many other artisan microenterprises, are sustainable business (Chang, 2011; Mason et al., 2011; Micken et al., 2010). Framebuilders and microenterprise owners favor other local business when it comes to purchasing materials and services. Framebuilders and owners support other small businesses, and the growth of artisan microenterprises may lead to strong communities. Framebuilders are using social media to market their businesses and the art of crafting custom bicycles. Like many artisan

microenterprise owners, framebuilders do not have an abundance of resources to maintain branding and promotion campaigns (Luckman, 2013; Torres, 2002). However, without branding and promotional programs, the business failure rate is high (Tariq & Wahid, 2011). Framebuilders are creating sustainable marketing strategies with social media as they have increased interactions with potential and existing customers. Framebuilders may improve their businesses with the study findings, which may lead to positive outcomes, and hence social change.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Based on the study findings, there are several recommendations for custom bicycle framebuilders to consider. First, it is helpful to have intermediate technology knowledge before engaging in social media. All participants implied they were comfortable with computers, but they did not need to know complex computing programming to operate their social media sites. The participants had help from friends and family members when setting up the social media profiles, but they learned by trial and error. The ability to self-teach and an attitude open to trying new things contributed to the framebuilders' success.

The participants uniformly agreed it was important to have a social media presence. Although the participants did not fully understand the functions of each social networking site, they believed it was necessary for a business owner to participate in at least one social networking site. Participants 1 and 3 called social media a “necessary evil.” I recommend framebuilders start with one site and learn how to operate it.

Having a plan or some strategies in mind when starting a social media marketing program is another recommendation. Framebuilders can allocate their resources effectively when they have specific marketing objectives. Participant 3 expressed his regret for not posting more regularly and not having a clear goal of what to achieve.

Framebuilders should encourage potential and existing customers to *like* their social media profiles so framebuilders can stay in contact with these customers.

Framebuilders post pictures of the latest projects and bicycles on social media sites, and this serves three main purposes. First, these pictures showcase their skills and design ability, and they can attract potential customers. Second, when existing customers see the progress of their bikes, they are satisfied with their experiences. Participant 4 routinely notify his customers on these posts as a way to update the customers on the progress. Lastly, when social media fans see a post they enjoy, they *share* it with their friends, and this creates WOM marketing.

Another recommendation for custom bicycle framebuilders is to utilize social media to create brand images for their companies. Framebuilders can create brand images by posting pictures of their products and updates on projects. However, posts should not be limited to events that are directly related to the companies. Participants 1, 4, and 5 mentioned framebuilders should show their personalities through the posts by posting images that inspire framebuilders. Framebuilders can also post snapshots of their lives, such as where they are vacationing, food they enjoy, their pets, and time with their families.

Time management is a key to successful business owners, including framebuilders. Owners should allocate time each day to maintain social media pages, which include posting new content, responding to messages and comments. Customers enjoy interactions with framebuilders on social media pages, and the interactions lead to strong customer relationships (Sarringhaus, 2011).

Custom bicycle framebuilders in other states and around the world might find the study findings helpful. Other artisan microenterprise owners such as jewelry makers, microbrewers, cheesemakers, metal artists, and craftspeople might also find the findings useful in improving social media strategies for their companies. I plan to share the findings with other framebuilders during trade shows upon graduation. I also plan to publish the findings in peer-reviewed journals.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings from this study provided further learning in the area of social media marketing, the artisan economy, and microenterprise operations. Researchers should expand this study to include a large number of framebuilders throughout the United States. The expansion of this study might validate the findings of this study. Another topic of interest is social media marketing in other artisan economy industries. Artisan microenterprise owners share similar experience as custom bicycle framebuilders (Chang, 2011; Holmes et al., 2012), but little information exists on these artisan owners' social media marketing experience.

All participants expressed confusion on not understanding what triggers their social media fans to *like* a post. Chin, Lu, and Wu (2015) concluded in their study that

Facebook users *like* a post based on whether the users agreed with the poster's opinion, whether the post has been *liked* by others, and whether the *like* would trigger negative comments from others. A recommendation is to use the findings by Chin, Lu, and Wu to examine framebuilders' Facebook activities. The last recommendation is to study whether there is a correlation between social media activities and business revenue. Table 5 illustrates the numbers of *likes*, *shares*, and *comments* occurred during a month-long observation period. Examining the numbers of orders framebuilders received and revenue during the same period of time would also be very useful.

### **Reflections**

Interviewing the five framebuilders face-to-face was educational and inspiring. Hearing these framebuilders' experiences using social media helped me understand the challenges and excitements they went through. The framebuilders shared their insights on social media marketing and their experiences in dealing with customers.

Another valuable lesson I learned was how to develop a research study. I evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of each research design and selected a qualitative multiple case study as the research method and design. I drafted the research questions and the interview questions, and learned the importance of problem statement alignment. These skills will aid me in conducting future research.

The participants shared my view on the importance of social media for marketing a custom bicycle framebuilding company, but not all of them shared my enthusiasm in using the sites. All participants found it difficult to take time from their duties to post on

social media sites. Participants 1 and 3 called social media marketing a “necessary evil.” I had to keep my opposing viewpoint in mind when interviewing the framebuilders.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

Social media is a popular marketing tool for businesses, including microenterprises (Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Reyneke et al., 2011). The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore what strategies framebuilders need in order to market successfully using social media. The themes were technical competency, social media presence, effective utilization of social media, effective communication skills, brand identify, time management, and utilization of external help. It is essential for custom bicycle framebuilders, and other artisan microenterprise owners, to have a social media presence, as social media helps framebuilders and owners create positive brand images. Social media provides a cost-effective platform for microenterprise owners to establish brand images and to communicate with customers, which might increase sales and revenues of the artisan microenterprises.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What social media sites are you using to promote your company?
2. What motivated you in choosing these social media sites?
3. What time (early or late in your business development) did you adopt these social media sites?
4. What impact, if any, has your previous technology usage had on your social media adoption rate?
5. What help did you receive in starting these social media sites?
6. What specific strategies are you utilizing in using social media to market your company?
7. What effect, if any, has your social media usage had on your communications with your customers?
8. What overall benefits have you seen because of your social media usage?
9. What are the most challenging aspects of using social media for your company?
10. What would you recommend other framebuilders do to develop social media marketing strategies?
11. What additional information, if any, do you feel is pertinent to this study that may not have been addressed in the interview questions?

## Appendix B: Invitation Cover Letter

Dear Framebuilder:

I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am request that you participate in my doctoral study on small business marketing by owners of custom bicycle framebuilding companies. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, FlickrR, blogs, and YouTube, in marketing custom bicycle framebuilding companies.

The study involves a 2-hour face-to-face interview. In addition to the interview, I will review your company's social networking profiles. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

All information, including your name, your interview responses, and the name and location of your organization, will be kept confidential. I will provide you a copy of the findings at the end of the study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Angela Au

## Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study on social media marketing. The researcher is inviting custom bicycle framebuilders in a Southwestern state to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Angela Au, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already have knowledge of the researcher as a member of the framebuilding community, but participating in this study is separate from that role. Participating in this study is voluntary and does not present any conflict of interest between the participants and the researcher. You will be provided a 1 to 2 page synopsis of the research upon completion.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine how framebuilders are using social media to market, and what challenges they are facing.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a 2-hour interview
- Extra time might be needed in order to go through all the interview questions
- The interview will be recorded using an audio recorder

Here are some sample questions:

1. What do you expect to gain from using social media marketing?
2. What are the most challenging aspects of using social media for your company?

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the various organizations will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may stop at any time.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves minimum risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

**Payment:**

There is not a payment or compensation associated with participating in this doctoral study.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure in locked cabinets or password-protected hard drives. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via [angela.au@waldenu.edu](mailto:angela.au@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **04-28-15-0184103** and it expires on **April 27, 2016**.

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, "I consent." I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

## Appendix D: Interview Protocol

### **Introduction**

Thank you for being part of this study. I would like to audio tape this interview today. Any information you provide, including the audio recording, will be kept confidential. I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure in locked cabinets or password-protected hard drives. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

If you would like a summary of the study, please provide your email address. At the end of the study and I will provide you a 1 to 2-page synopsis of the findings. This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. You can still change your mind during or after the study. You may stop at any time by contacting me at [angela.au@waldenu.edu](mailto:angela.au@waldenu.edu).

This interview will take approximately 2 hours. Extra time might be needed to go through all interview questions.

### **Interview Questions**

1. What social media sites are you using to promote your company?
2. What motivated you in choosing these social media sites?
3. What time (early or late in your business development) did you adopt these social media sites?

4. What impact, if any, has your previous technology usage had on your social media adoption rate?
5. What help did you receive in starting these social media sites?
6. What specific strategies are you utilizing in using social media to market your company?
7. What effect, if any, has your social media usage had on your communications with your customers?
8. What overall benefits have you seen because of your social media usage?
9. What are the most challenging aspects of using social media for your company?
10. What would you recommend other framebuilders do to develop social media marketing strategies?
11. What additional information, if any, do you feel is pertinent to this study that may not have been addressed in the interview questions?

## Appendix E: Social Media Review Data

Table E1

*Facebook Activity as of April 2015*

|    | First post | Followers | Monthly posts |
|----|------------|-----------|---------------|
| P1 | 8/1/14     | 249       | 2             |
| P2 | 4/15/10    | 1042      | 14            |
| P3 | 11/16/13   | 176       | 0             |
| P4 | 1/19/10    | 3335      | 3             |
| P5 | 4/23/13    | 1140      | 9             |

*Note.* *First post* refers to the earliest visible posting at the time of review. *Followers* refers to the number of individuals listed as *Friends* of the company's Facebook page. *Monthly posts* was calculated by counting the number of unique postings produced by the company, from the period of April 1, 2015 to April 30, 2015. This count included only postings hosted on the company's page.

Table E2

*Instagram Activity as of April 2015*

|    | First post | Followers | Monthly posts |
|----|------------|-----------|---------------|
| P1 | 8/14/14    | 570       | 8             |
| P2 | 8/20/12    | 111       | 4             |
| P3 |            |           |               |
| P4 | 1/25/14    | 2439      | 70            |
| P5 | 7/24/13    | 914       | 2             |

*Note.* *First post* refers to the earliest visible posting at the time of review. *Followers* refers to the number of individuals listed as *Followers* of the company's Instagram page. *Monthly posts* was calculated by counting the number of unique postings produced by the company, from the period of April 1, 2015 to April 30, 2015. This count included only postings hosted on the company's page. P3 reported no Instagram page for the business.

Table E3

*Twitter Activity as of April 2015*

|    | First post | Followers | Monthly posts |
|----|------------|-----------|---------------|
| P1 |            |           |               |
| P2 |            |           |               |
| P3 | 2/27/14    | 59        | 0             |
| P4 | 2/19/12    | 691       | 3             |
| P5 | 12/31/13   | 233       | 8             |

*Note.* *First post* refers to the earliest visible posting at the time of review. *Followers* refers to the number of individuals listed as *Followers* of the company's Twitter page. *Monthly posts* was calculated by counting the number of unique postings produced by the company, from the period of April 1, 2015 to April 30, 2015. This count included only postings hosted on the company's page. P1 and P2 reported no Twitter pages for their respective businesses.

## Appendix F: Timeline of Social Media Presence for Each of the Five Businesses



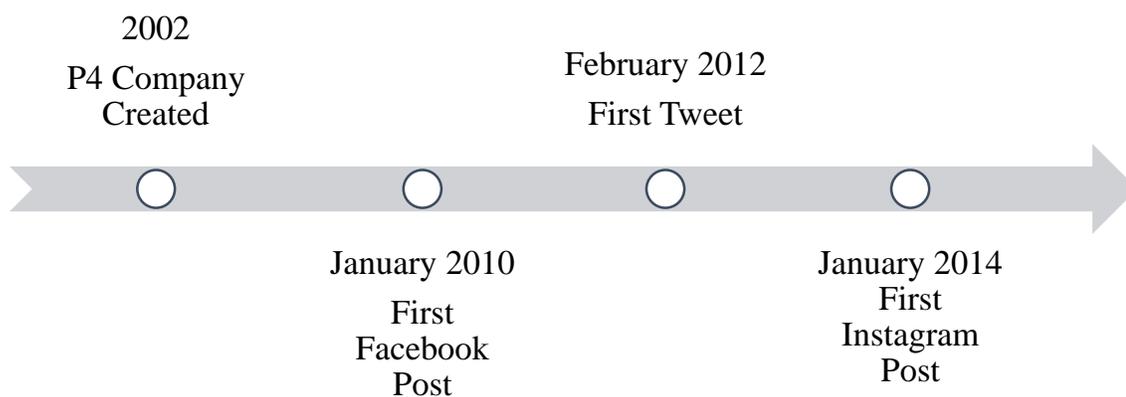
*Figure F1.* Participant 1 social media timeline.



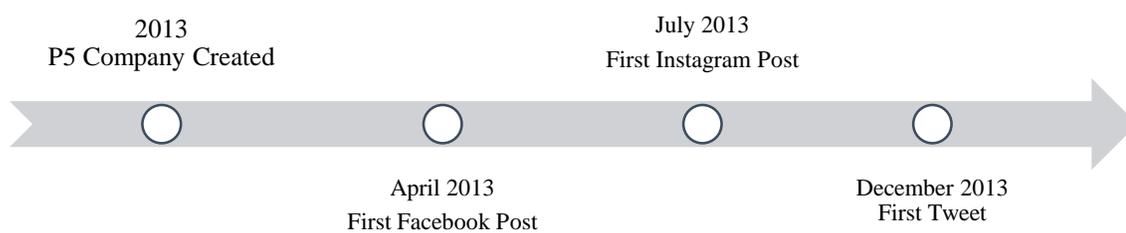
*Figure F2.* Participant 2 social media timeline.



*Figure F3.* Participant 3 social media timeline.



*Figure F4.* Participant 4 social media timeline.



*Figure F5.* Participant 5 social media timeline.

## Appendix G: Relative Use for Social Media Platforms

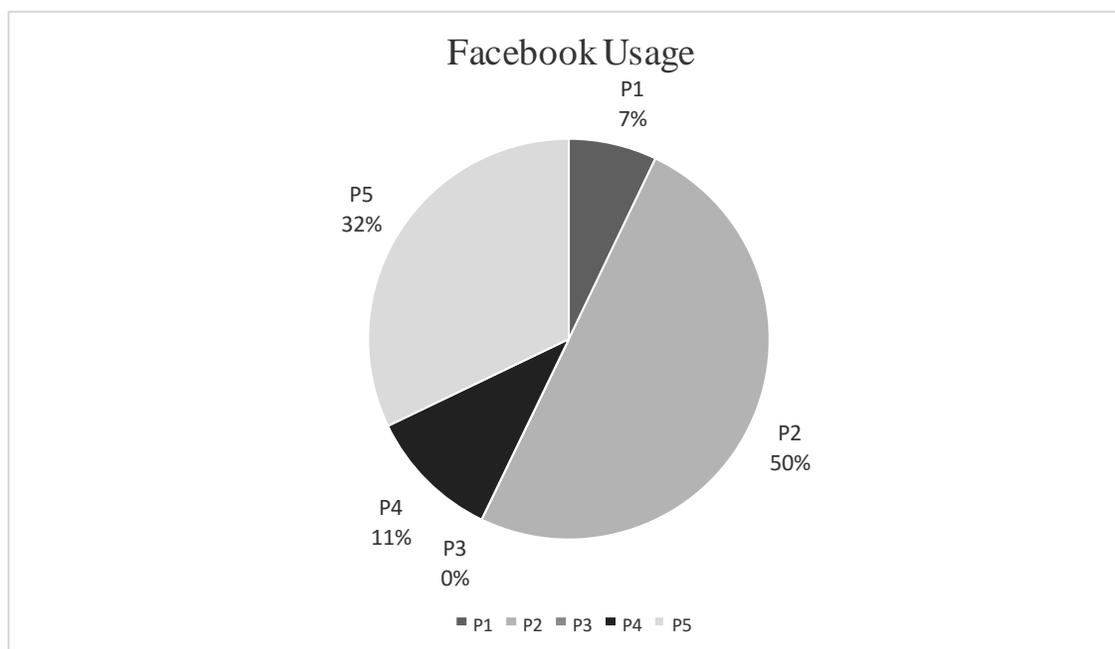


Figure G1. Relative Facebook usage.

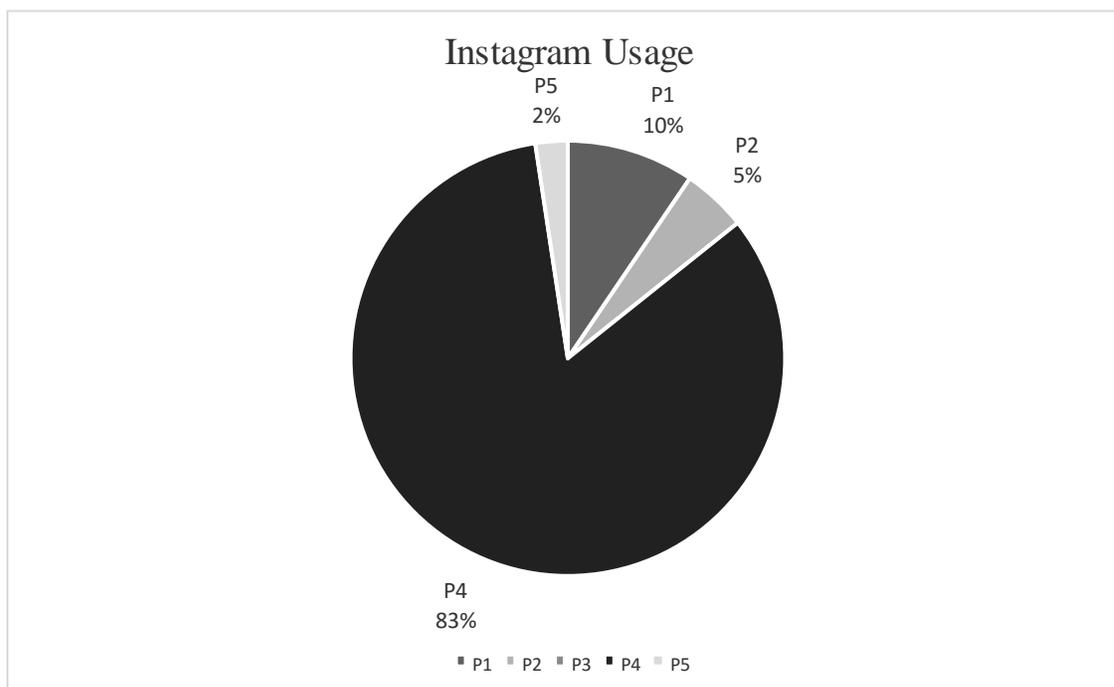


Figure G2. Relative Instagram usage.

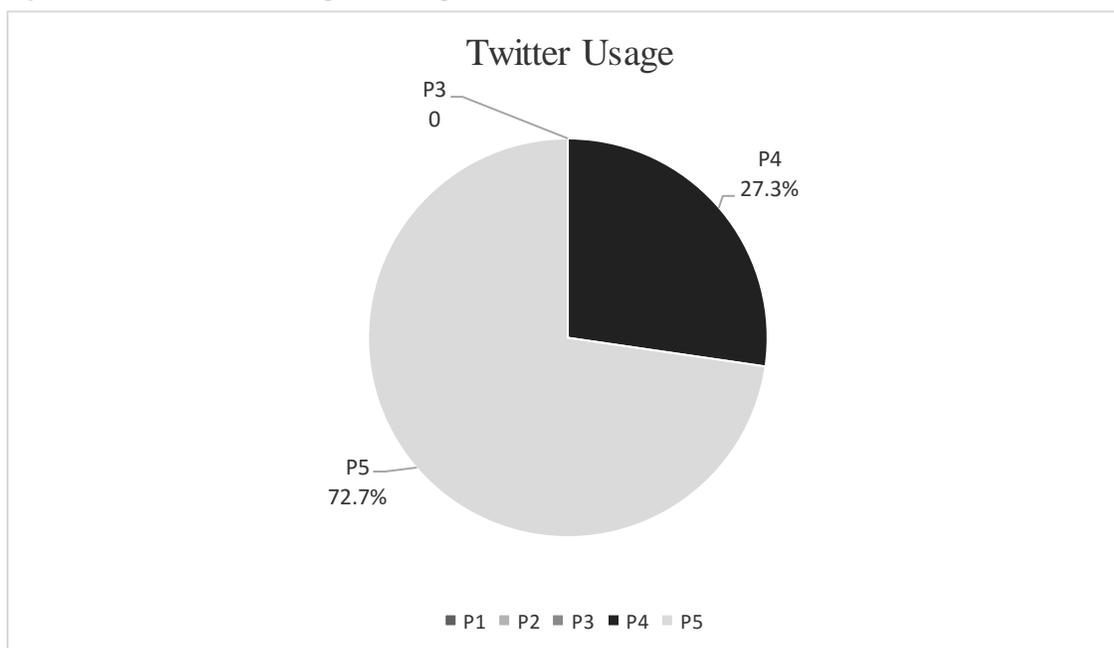
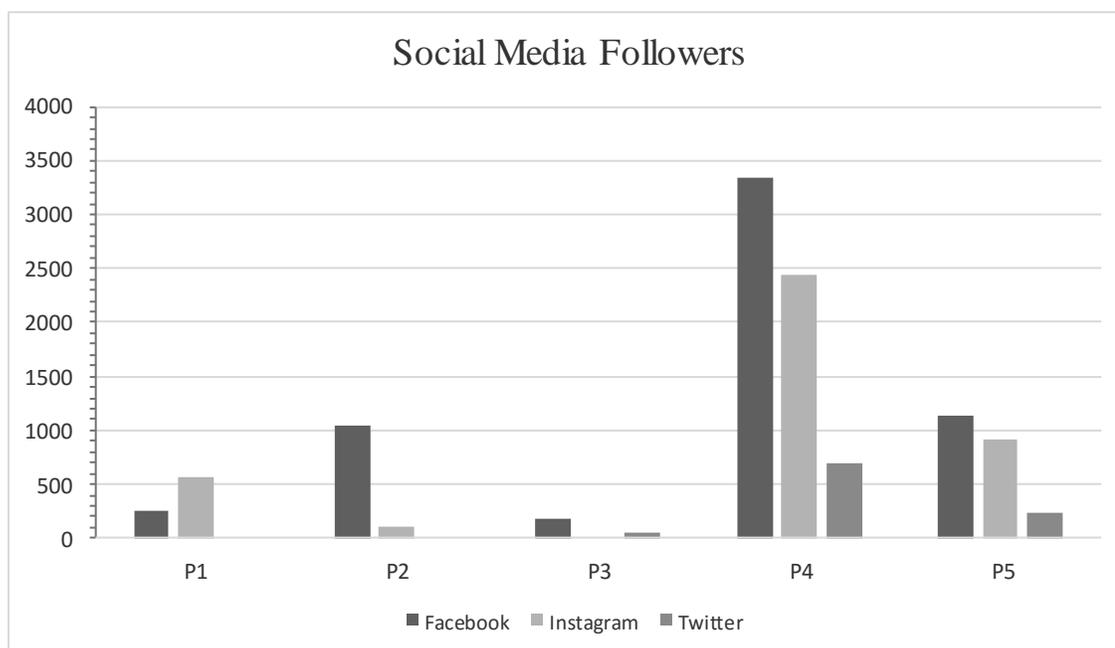
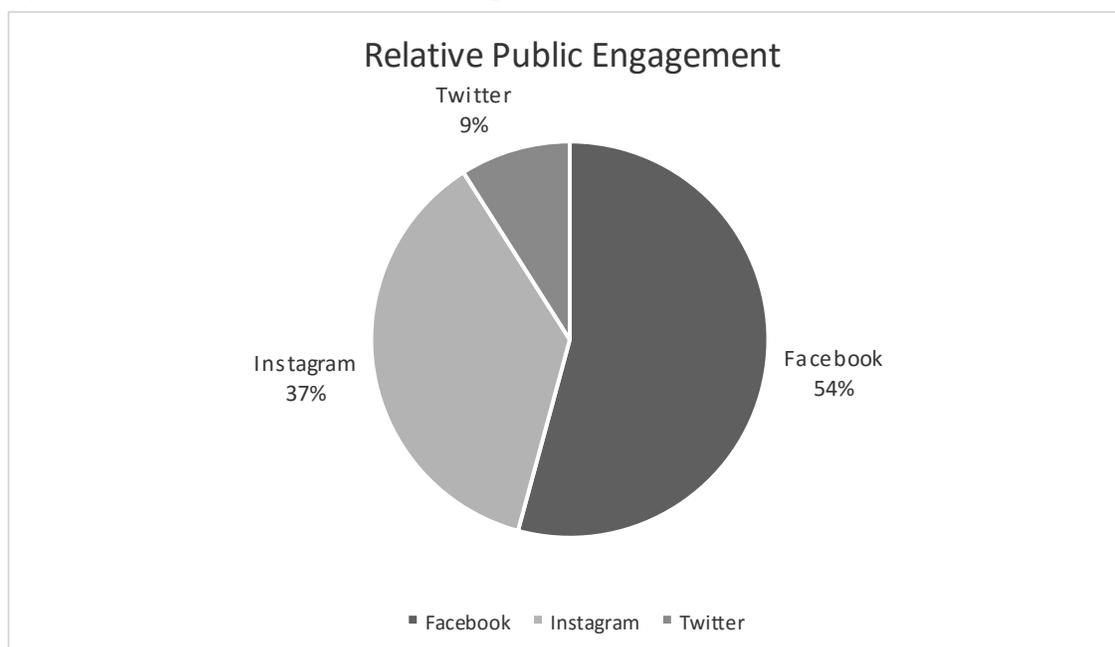


Figure G3. Relative Twitter usage.

## Appendix H: Public Engagement Across Platforms



*Figure H1.* Social media follower comparison.



*Figure H2.* Relative engagement with the public as measured by sum of social media followers across all participants.

## Appendix I: Social Media Content

Table I1

## Social Media Content

|           | P1   | P2  | P3 | P4  | P5   |
|-----------|------|-----|----|-----|------|
| Facebook  | 100% | 93% |    | 66% | 55%  |
| Instagram | 75%  | 75% |    | 74% | 100% |
| Twitter   |      |     |    | 66% | 50%  |

*Note.* Social media content refers to percentage of posts that are business related.

Table I2

## Business-Related Social Media Content.

| Types         | Descriptions of content                         |
|---------------|---|
| Products      | Completed bicycle frames                        |
|               | Bicycle frames in various stages of production  |
| Bicycle parts | Raw materials (tubes, head badges, chain stays) |
|               | Components (wheels, seats, hubs)                |
| Merchandise   | Logo t-shirts                                   |
| Customers     | Customers riding bicycles                       |
|               | Customers without bicycles                      |

Table I3

## Nonbusiness-Related Social Media Content

| Types         | Descriptions of content             |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| Lifestyle     | Food                                |
|               | Friends                             |
|               | Pets                                |
|               | Travels (landscape, city buildings) |
| Partnerships  | Community events                    |
|               | Promoting local businesses          |
|               | Promoting partner businesses        |
| News          | Industry related news               |
|               | News related to local community     |
| Miscellaneous | Humor                               |
|               | Popular culture (movies, cartons)   |

Table I4

## Facebook Likes, Comments, and Shares

|          | P1 | P2  | P3 | P4 | P5 |
|----------|----|-----|----|----|----|
| Posts    | 2  | 14  |    | 3  | 9  |
| Likes    | 57 | 395 |    | 51 | 89 |
| Comments | 4  | 34  |    | 4  | 7  |
| Shares   | 0  | 3   |    | 1  | 11 |