

2017

Social Media Strategies for Increasing Sales

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Loretta Ezeife

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Social Media Strategies for Increasing Sales

by

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MBA, Golden Gate University, 2002

BS, California State University, Hayward, 1997

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2017

Abstract

Social media have transformed business commerce and consumer communication, yet organizational leaders lack clear strategies for using social media platforms to their advantage. The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore social media marketing strategies for increasing sales. The relationship marketing conceptual framework grounded this study. Data collection included semistructured interviews with 5 organizational leaders from 5 different organizations in the San Francisco, California, Bay Area and a review of participants' documents including marketing materials, social media posts, and published sales reports. Data analysis included coding, categorization, and identification of major themes. The thematic assessment approach revealed 5 major themes from participants' responses that aligned with findings from the literature review. Themes included identifying the target audience, developing a customer roadmap to convert prospects to consumers, managing customer relationships to increase brand loyalty, and developing key performance indicators to measure the success of social media campaigns. Study findings may increase local organizational leaders' knowledge of social media strategies that they can use to increase brand awareness, brand loyalty, and sales for their organizations. Implications for social change include the opportunity for local leaders to increase sales, which could lead to more jobs and improved economies in local communities.

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Dedication

It has been a great journey. I am grateful to God for giving me the determination and perseverance to pursue a doctoral degree. I dedicate this research study to my late father, Chief (Dr.) Augustine Ogonnaya Chuks Orji, for instilling in me the value of education and the belief that I can achieve anything that I put my mind to. I only wish that you were here to see this, but I trust that you are up there smiling down. I did it, DAD! To Dr. Dozie and my four wonderful children, Okechukwu, Ifeoma, Tochi, and Chioma, thank you for your unwavering support and patience during my countless hours on the computer. I hope that through my example you also believe that you can do anything that you put your mind to. Anything is possible, when you believe.

Acknowledgments

I am extending my sincere thanks to everyone who supported me throughout this DBA journey. Thank you, my friends, family, and well-wishers, for your unwavering support and understanding about the missed occasions and invitations that I could not honor. A special thanks to Dr. Steve Roussas, my doctoral chair, for your guidance, patience, and advice throughout this challenging Doctor of Business Administration journey. I would also like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Tim Malone and Dr. Judy Blando, for your constructive feedback, which elevated the quality of my study. Thank you, Dr. Freda Turner, for your work behind the scenes. This study would not have been possible without all your guidance and support. I am blessed to be have been surrounded by such wonderful people.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

The commercial marketplace has expanded beyond the traditional brick-and-mortar to a global shop front that is accessible to billions of users via the Internet (Sadler & Evans, 2016). Social media provide a marketing tool to connect consumers to online businesses. Social media networks provide a marketing tool to connect consumers to online businesses. Social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google, and other networking platforms for blogging, and podcasts. (Kim & Ko, 2012). Billions of people use social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube on a daily basis (Piskorski, 2014). According to Facebook executives, the number of monthly active users surpassed 1.9 billion in March 2017 (Facebook, 2017).

The various outlets have become a channel for marketers to communicate directly to consumers in a manner that was not previously possible with traditional media. The potential to reach billions of consumers directly through social media is significant for businesses, yet some organizational leaders do not know how to engage potential customers effectively using this method (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Even though their organizations use social media in various forms, some organizational leaders lack sufficient knowledge to develop effective social media strategies to create organizational value. In this study, I explored social media strategies that organizational leaders can use to increase sales for their organizations.

Problem Statement

Social media have enhanced how organizational leaders engage, collaborate, and interact with consumers (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013). Oyza and Edwin (2016) found that 62% of marketers identified developing an effective social media strategy as one of the biggest challenges managers face with social media. The general business problem is that organizational leaders lack clear strategies for using their social media platforms. The specific business problem is that some organizational leaders lack marketing strategies for using social media to increase sales.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore social media marketing strategies that organizational leaders use to increase sales. The targeted sample population included marketing leaders of five organizations in the San Francisco, California, Bay Area who successfully increased sales by using social media marketing strategies. The implication for positive social change could be the opportunity for organizations leaders to acquire new strategies for using social media to increase sales, which could result in job creation and improved economies in local communities.

Nature of the Study

The three common approaches to conducting scholarly research are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Researchers use qualitative method to address the *what*, *why*, and *how* of a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). I used qualitative methodology because my purpose was to provide an in-depth understanding of the issue by incorporating participants' interviews. Researchers use a quantitative approach to answer research

questions and test hypotheses by analyzing the statistical significance of variables' relationships or differences (Williams, 2011). Researchers employ the mixed method approach when seeking to use both the qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study (e.g., when one of the methods is not sufficient by itself to understand the phenomenon of interest (Morse, 2016). My study did not involve testing causal relationships; therefore, I opted against using either a quantitative or a mixed-method approach. Instead, I used a qualitative method to explain my research topic.

The three common qualitative research designs are case, ethnography and phenomenological (Williams, 2011). Researchers use case study designs to explore intricate relationships between people, organizations, or programs (Yin, 2013). I applied the case study design because I sought to describe the research topic phenomenon using multiple data sources. Researchers use an ethnography design to describe a group's culture, beliefs, values, knowledge, and skills in their environment (Wall, 2014). Phenomenological researchers explore the meanings of participants' lived experiences (Gallagher, 2012). I opted against using either an ethnography or phenomenological design. Instead, I used a case-study design because I sought to describe the research topic phenomenon using multiple data sources.

Research Question

What are the marketing strategies for using social media to increase sales?

Interview Questions

1. What social media strategies have you used to increase sales?
2. What social media strategies were most effective for increasing sales?

3. How did you assess the effectiveness of your social media strategies for increasing sales?
4. What were the barriers or challenges of leveraging social media strategies to increase sales?
5. How did you address these barriers or challenges?
6. How did you assess the effectiveness of addressing these barriers or challenges?
7. What social media strategies do competitors use?
8. What else would you like to share regarding social media strategies for increasing sales?

Conceptual Framework

I used the relationship marketing theory to understand my study phenomenon, which was organizational leaders' use of social media. Berry (1983) defined relationship marketing as an effective tool for enhancing organizational relationships with consumers. As indicated by Berry, relationship marketing is a tool that leaders can use to secure customer loyalty and subsequently improve their competitiveness and customer satisfaction. Relationship marketing is a systematic approach to interactive marketing and developing quality interactions that incorporates real time customer feedback for building long-term customer relationships (Grönroos, 1994). As Grönroos (1994) noted, customers primarily base purchasing decisions on relationships, and building relationships with customers to retain them is less expensive than finding new customers. Grönroos further suggested that customer relationships based on relationship marketing, is a paradigm shift from the traditional marketing mix. Kanagal (2009) noted that marketing leaders who use

relationship marketing can identify, establish, maintain, enhance, and modify relationships to create value for customers and increase sales for organizations through a series of relational interactions. Clark and Melancon (2013) posited that organizations realize greater benefits when relationship marketing is incorporated within their social media marketing efforts. Because social media is a cost-effective tool for organizations' leaders to use in engaging, building customer relationships, and developing, more effective social media strategies could result in increased sales.

Operational Definitions

Brand loyalty: Brand loyalty is a consumer's commitment to make repeat purchases from the same brand despite other available options. (Cengiz & Akdemir-Cengiz, 2016).

Competitive advantage: Competitive advantages provide an edge over rivals and an ability to generate greater value for a firm and its shareholders (Pansari, & Kumar, 2016).

Content management: Content management refers to the administration of digital content, from creation to storage or deletion (Jacoby, Vishnumurty, & Zhang, 2015).

Customer roadmap: Customer roadmap is a plan that marketers' use to convert prospects to customers; it involves content messaging, brand community, communication, collaboration, and conversion (Simon, An Den DriesT, & Wilms, 2016).

Social customer relationship management: Social customer relationship management involves consumer and firm interactions with the opportunity for consumers

to provide input into product offerings using social media. (Rodriguez, Peterson, & Krishnan, 2012).

Social exchange theory: Social exchange theory refers to a series of sequential transactions where the parties exchange resources through a process of reciprocity (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, & Hall, 2016).

Social media marketing: Social media marketing includes marketing disseminated through various social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube or Instagram (McGrath & O'Connor, 2015).

Social media return on investment: Social media return on investment refers to the measure of the return generated by marketing or selling activities via social media such as sales, consumer engagement, or increased brand awareness (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2013).

Social networking: Social networking involves the process of expanding business and/or social contacts through interactions with individuals, often through social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube (Griffiths, Kuss, & Demetrovics, 2014).

Strategy: A strategy purposefully outlines the path a business must take to achieve its desired results (Ingle, 2013).

Traditional media: Traditional media refers to older media such as films, television, radio, billboards, or newspapers (Geraghty & Conway, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

According to Simon (2011), assumptions are elements that are out of the researcher's control but if they disappear, the study becomes irrelevant. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) argued that assumptions are necessary in research and key to having valid findings. Simon and Goes (2013) posited that researchers make assumptions based on their beliefs and that having assumptions is necessary for them to conduct their studies. For example, since it would take considerable time and effort to validate participants' responses, a researcher might assume that participants' responses are honest. For this study, I assumed that the participants were well versed in the use of effective social media strategies and represented the targeted population of the study. I selected them based on their role within the study organization and their expertise in the use of social media strategies to increase sales I also assumed that participants provided candid and truthful responses. In the interviews that I conducted, these assumptions proved to be true.

Limitations

Limitations are factors that are outside a researcher's control (Simon, 2011). Limitations also refer to external conditions that affect the scope of a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). There were three limitations in this study. First, I used qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research includes the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data that do not involve numbers or statistics (Anderson, 2010). A limitation of using a qualitative research method is that the findings do not include data,

which might affect the reliability or validity of the findings (Elo et al., 2014). Second, participants worked in the San Francisco Bay Area, which might have affected the generalizability of my findings to companies or industries located in other cities. A final limitation is that the participants' personal bias towards social media may have influenced their responses. Response bias stems from participants' tendency to provide the researcher with misleading or socially acceptable responses (Gronlund, Wixted, & Mickes, 2014).

Delimitations

Delimitations are controllable factors that limit the boundaries or scope of the study (Simon, 2011). A researcher controls the delimitations of a study (Merriam, 2014). As such, delimitations include the choices that a researcher makes such as the population, location, or methodology to use and/or analyze (Martínez-Graña, Goy, & Zazo, 2013). These choices help to set the necessary bounds for a study (Martínez-Graña, Goy, & Zazo, 2013). The two delimitations of this study were my choice of geographical location and my decision to limit the study to five firms within this location. I selected study participants from a sample of organizational leaders in the San Francisco Bay Area who had successfully used social media strategies to increase sales for their organizations. The scope of this study included five organizations with 3,000 or more followers across at least two social media platforms.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Organizational leaders face challenges with a changing marketing landscape due to the significant increase in social media adoption (Ogbuji & Papazafeiropoulou, 2016). Social media are a relatively low-cost innovative marketing tool to attract, retain, and monitor customer behaviors leading to increased sales (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). The findings of this study were significant because it addressed the social media strategies that organizational leaders in San Francisco, CA use to increase sales. Local organizational leaders will benefit from acquiring strategies to identify target audiences, develop a customer roadmap to convert prospects to customers, manage customer relationships, align the marketing and sales functions, and establish key performance metrics to assess social media performance to drive sales. These findings will also help local organizational leaders to acquire knowledge of effective social media strategies to improve communication with customers and increase customer loyalty.

Implications for Social Change

The community could benefit economically from increased sales, through more employed consumers, and improved disposable income in the local community. By companies employing locally, members of the community may benefit from greater disposable income, increased home ownership, and lower home foreclosure rates, which contribute to higher standard of living for the community. The findings should contribute to better informed consumers, who when using social media, could provide informed

feedback to business leaders, which could lead to improved products and services benefiting customers, families, and communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A literature review is a systematic method for researchers to identify, review, and analyze existing scholarly work. (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2016). Onwuegbuzie and Weinbaum (2017) posited that the literature review has become the most common way for researchers to acquire knowledge and that it often sets the direction for a study. The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the social media strategies that organizational leaders use to increase sales.

My literature review search included information gathered from academic, peer-reviewed journals, Google Scholar, and various Walden University Library databases including Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, ABI/INFORM Complete, Academic Search Complete, and Sage Publications. I also reviewed books and information that I found via social media web platforms such Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn, as well as various blogs and social media studies. I used the following keywords to narrow down the search: *social media strategies, relationship marketing theory, customer relationship management, social media marketing, social exchange theory, sales, brand relationship, online communities, competitive advantage, and qualitative method*. The total number of articles for this study includes 220 references. The literature review has 128 references, 90% of which are peer reviewed. The study contains 88% peer-reviewed sources that were published within 5 years of my study's expected approval by Walden's chief academic officer. This section begins with

an overview of literature focusing on the conceptual framework of relationship marketing, social exchange theory, marketing evolution, defining social media, the role of social media and social media strategies to increase sales.

Relationship Marketing Theory

Berry (1983) introduced relationship marketing theory in the early 1980s. According to Berry, relationship marketing is a tool that leaders can use to secure customer loyalty and, as a result, attain higher competitiveness and enhance customer satisfaction. Payne and Frow (2017) defined relationship management as the strategic management of relationships with all relevant stakeholders including customers, suppliers, and referral sources. Relationship marketing has changed the marketing paradigm from a transactional to a relational perspective, which has led to greater understanding of the lifetime value of customers and partnerships with customers (Sheth, 2015). Social media, when used properly, can provide firms with a long lasting relationship marketing tool they can use to increase sales and customer loyalty and build awareness (Turner & Shah, 2014).

Relationship marketing is a systematic approach to interactive marketing, which enables the development of quality interactions that incorporate real-time customer feedback for building long-term customer relationships (Grönroos, 1994). Grönroos concluded that relationship building provides a lower cost option for customer retention versus customer acquisition costs. Grönroos also asserted that consumers rely on relationships when making purchase decisions and further suggested that relationship marketing represents a paradigm shift from the traditional marketing mix. Kanagal (2009)

noted that, by using relationship marketing, marketing leaders can identify, establish, maintain, enhance, and modify relationships to create value for customers and increase sales for organizations through a series of relational exchanges. Clark and Melancon (2013) posited that organizations benefit when relationship marketing is included within their social media marketing efforts. Social media is a cost effective tool for organizations' leaders to engage and build customer relationships, which could result in increased sales (Clark & Melancon, 2013); as such, its use aligns with tenets of relationship marketing theory.

Social Exchange Theory

A predecessor to Berry's relationship marketing theory is social exchange theory. Homans (1961) defined social exchange theory as the exchange of tangible or intangible transactions between two or more parties that has both a cost and a reward. According to Homans, the transaction usually involves either or both parties trying to obtain a reward that is of superior value to them when compared to the costs that are involved. Blau (1964) defined social exchanges as voluntary actions of the involved parties that are motivated by the rewards that the parties will receive. Blau's definition focuses on individuals willingly incurring a cost with the expectation of receiving a reward when the reward that the party receives produces either profit or at least equity. According to Blau, the rewards received in a social exchange can be either intrinsic (e.g., love) or extrinsic (e.g., helping others). Furthermore, one party's dependence on the other is what prompts the transaction (Blau, 1964) .

Oliver and Swan (1989) argued that the fundamental drivers of social exchange interaction is justice and fairness because, in social exchanges, the party's motivation is to obtain some valued reward although something of value is forfeited. In social exchanges, people seek to maximize rewards, minimize costs, and attain the greatest profit. Redmond (2015) posited that social exchange theory involves four elements: (a) parties aim to attain a valued reward, (b) one party must forfeit something of value, (c) parties seek profit in the exchanges, and (d) both parties are dissatisfied when they perceive inequity in an exchange. Chou and Hsu (2016) asserted that social exchange theory involves social interaction where two parties exchange a reward that is needed by the other person. According to Surma (2016), social exchange theory explains the development and management of interpersonal relationships and suggests that the goal of the exchange is to increase the benefit while reducing the cost.

Marketing Evolution

Individuals have long attempted to sell goods and services or present goods for trading for another item of equal value (Sutton, 2016). However, the concept and definition of marketing has evolved over time. Drucker (1954) defined marketing as a business function that is unique, goes beyond selling, and includes all areas of the organization with the customer's point of view as a guide. Kotler (1972) defined marketing as a set of organizational activities which are aimed at facilitating and consummating exchanges. Similarly, Baker (1976) proposed that the goal of marketing is to create and maintain mutually satisfying exchange relationships. According to Liu, Leach, and Chugh (2015), the goal of marketing is to attain and retain customers.

Marketing requires a combination of strategy and technology, Bång and Roos (2014) noted.

The American Marketing Association (AMA) and the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) are recognized professional marketing boards. AMA (2013) defined marketing as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that provide value for customers, clients, partners, and society” CIM (2017) further defined marketing as the management process for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements for profitability. According to Baker (2016), the definition of marketing will continue to evolve as new technology emerges. Baker further asserted that successful marketing requires firms to integrate marketing as a process, business philosophy, and support function for organizations.

Keith (1960), posited that the production, sales, marketing, and relationship marketing eras led to the present day marketing positions. (see Figure 1). Peppers and Rogers (1993) ushered in the relationship marketing era. Forrester (2009) identified five elements of the social and mobile marketing era.



Figure 1. Marketing eras.

Production Era

The concept of marketing emerged during the industrial revolution beginning from the 18th century and through the 19th century. The industrial revolution represented a time of technological innovations in the scientific and technological field and mass production that led to the creation of many industries and the need for companies to find creative methods to inform consumers of their products (Wilkie & Moore, 2003).

During the production era, demand exceeded supply, buyers had limited choices, and there was little competition, as a result, marketing was not a priority because the products sold themselves (Fullerton, 1988). Durani and Qureshi (2016) asserted that due to product scarcity, manufacturing and cost reduction became a priorities. The product shortage prompted the famous quote by Jean Baptiste that "Supply creates its own demand" because if someone was producing, someone else would want to buy it (Durani & Qureshi, 2016).

Sales Era

The production era was an era of demand over supply where producers focused on providing sufficient supply to meet excess demand (Baker, 2016). After the Industrial Revolution, competition grew, focus turned to selling and firms began to focus on marketing, branding, and sales as they competed for customers as a result of demand exceeding supply (Boone & Kurtz, 2005). Baker (2016) posited that as competition increased and supply started to catch up to demand, sellers started to take a more aggressive selling approach, which ushered in the sales era. Businesses sought ways to increase sales using marketing techniques to remain competitive (Schwarzkopf, 2015).

The increased competition also drove the need for production and market shares increases for all industries and lead to the growing interest for Businesses to develop their brand (Schwarzkopf, 2015). During the sales era, firms became aware of consumer wants and recognized that selling was essential to product disposal (Jones & Richardson, 2007). The increased competition lead firms to turn their focus to branding and sales and marketing became essential when supply exceeded demand, and companies competed for customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Business marketing concepts also shifted to finding better methods to communicate to potential customers about how their product and services were superior to their competitors (Shaw, 2012).

The sales era ushered in a paradigm shift from businesses selling what they make to making what the consumer wants to buy. According to Kotler (2010), this marketing thought still exists, especially with goods that consumers need but do not actively seek them out without prompting such as life insurance. Customer perceived the selling practice of the selling era as aggressive and a turn off, prompting sellers to explore and lean toward better communications, advertising, and branding tools for marketing their products and services (Ingram, Avila, Schwepker, & Williams, 2016).

Marketing Era

The marketing era emerged in the United States during the 1950s after the production and sales eras (Pride & Ferrell, 2016). The era of marketing arose as competition continued to increase among various industries and business leaders sought ways to acquire and retain customers by focusing on the customers' needs. Sellers

realized the need to gain a better understanding of consumer wants and to identify ways to survive the increasing competitive marketplace. Kotler (2012) posited that the marketing era arose from the recognition that customers are unique and firms require different strategies to attract and retain them. As markets became increasingly saturated, companies needed to sell the increasing outputs of production, firms shifted focus from solely selling products to incorporating distribution, communication, and persuading customers. Businesses recognized the value in dedicating company resources solely for marketing their products and services. The role of marketing managers expanded to include strategic planning and businesses increasingly sought their input for pricing, and the appropriate methods to disseminate product and service information to consumers (Schwarzkopf, 2015).

From the mid-20th century and forward, the market saturation of products led companies to advertise their products more strategically, marketers learned about the customer behaviors and became more involved with their company products, distribution channels, and pricing strategy (Cabras & Bamforth, 2016). Organizations encouraged staff to acquire marketing knowledge, to enable a higher level of customer service and enhance the customer brand experience with each contact (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Marketer's perceptions of the marketing era shifted from persuading customers to buy the products they produced to focusing on products based on customer preferences. Kotler (2011) posited that decisions about which products to make and the market went from simply "filling a hole in the factory" to "filling a hole in the market." The marketing era also contributed to the increased role of marketers, as they assumed strategic roles within

the organization including decision support about the right products to produce, distribution channel, pricing and the most effective communication channels based on their knowledge of consumer wants.

From the marketing perspective, leaders attempted to understand consumers' current and potential needs to determine the appropriate resources to allocate to meet the requirements (Lysik, Lopacinski, Kutera, & Machura, 2017). "Selling focuses on the needs of the seller, while marketing focuses on the needs of the buyer. Selling involves the seller's need to convert the product into cash; while, marketing involves understanding the needs of the customer" (Viio & Grönroos, 2016).

Marketing Mix

A marketing mix is the set of marketing tools that organizations' leaders use to develop its marketing goals for the target market (Kotler, Keller, Manceau, & Hémonnet-Goujot, 2015). Kotler, Armstrong, Wong, and Saunders (2008) opined that a marketing mix is the most fundamental concept of marketing and is a set of controllable marketing tools used by a company for creating a desired response from consumers. McCarthy (1960) termed these tools as the four P's of marketing which involve product, place, promotion, and price. Shahhosseini and Ardahaey (2011) summarized the four Ps of marketing as (a) Product refers to the marketed item or service; companies can produce high-quality products by enhancing the features, quality, benefits, and quantities, (b) Place is the distribution channel or location that the company's leaders uses to make the product or service easily accessible to the customer, (c) Promotion is the communication

channel that company's leaders elects to provide information about the product to the consumer and could include direct selling, product or service marketing, events, and (d) Price refers to the price that the company's leaders determined for the product, product variety, product line, price changes and payment methods to remain competitive.

Shahhosseini and Ardahaey (2011) asserted that the marketing mix helps to define the marketing elements for successfully positioning market offers. The elements or tools of a marketing mix are the essential components of a marketing plan, incorporates the primary ingredients of a marketing strategy, and facilitates a means of translating a marketing plan into practice. Leaders could change a product price, size of the sales force and advertising costs temporarily to adjust to market changes. The firm can also develop new products and change the distribution channels as needed in the long run. Kotler et al, (2015) posited that the four Ps refers to the marketer's perception regarding the marketing tools available to attract the consumer, however from the buyer's viewpoint, the tool should be of benefit to the consumer. Leaders can utilize the tool to successfully meet their customer's needs effectively and efficiently (Kotler et al, 2015).

Organizational leaders should develop effective marketing strategies to provide the right products or services to the right consumer at the right time and place to remain competitive (Salam, Inam, & Awan, 2015). Wijaya (2015) posited that in the global market, firms no longer view marketing as just a tool to sell products and services but a process for identifying customer needs and determining the products or services to meet those needs. According to Lee (2013), a marketing tool provides a communication channel for firms to link products and services to the right customer. Advertising is also

an essential part of marketing. Moriarty, Mitchell, and Wells (2009) asserted that advertising involves product marketing using mass communication networks including traditional or social media to reach the intended audiences and provide information about products and services.

Moriarty et al. asserted that leaders could integrate an effective advertising campaign with an established marketing strategy. Leaders should develop marketing strategies that help them to create a distinct image in the consumers' mind. In this connection, leaders need to identify their target audiences and factors influencing decision making (Salam et al., 2015). Grönroos (1994) argued that the simplification of the marketing mix Four Ps model, product, place, price, and placement has limited the marketer's ability to move beyond the marketing paradigm and expand the toolkit to include a multi-faceted social marketing process. According to Gronroos, the marketing theory and customers have fallen victim to traditional marketing tactics and proposed customer relationship building using relationship marketing, as the emerging new marketing paradigm of the future.

The Relationship Marketing Era

During the 1990s, marketing shifted to an era known as relationship marketing where the emphasis was on establishing relationships between the customer and the organization and less emphasis on the product, itself (Cohen, 2014). According to Cohen, company leaders seek to obtain brand recognition, acquire, and retain customers, and for customers to choose their product over a competitor's product. Customers who form a

relationship with a product tend to build a community of loyal buyers and contribute to making the brand successful and profitable for the company (Cohen, 2014). Relationship marketing evolved from the growth in the service industry along with the marketer's willingness to establish mutually beneficial customer relationships, improve consumer brand interactions, and incorporate consumer feedback into product and service development (Gummerus, von Koskull, & Kowalkowski, 2017). During the relationship marketing era, companies began to realize the importance of branding and customer association with the brand. The focus shifted to producing high-quality products and building a brand so that consumers could realize the value of the brand. The result was positive, and companies began to see increased margins and establish a brand reputation. Successful companies differentiated their products from the competition with private labels and improved their market share by more than 49% (Schwarzkopf, 2015).

The era of relationship marketing replaced the previous eras, including the production era, sales era, and marketing era, and gave rise to the transition in marketing from warfare (sellers versus buyers) to collaboration (buyer-seller partnerships) (Palmer, Palmer, Bijou, & Bejou, 2016). Koga (2013) opined that relationship marketing consists of the following five steps (a) identifying the individual customer, (b) gathering, and storing customer purchase history, (c) analyzing consumer personal behavior, values, and potential profitability, (d) developing measures to retain the customer and (e) implementing rank up programs for customers (Koga, 2013).

The development of the relationship marketing theory and practice was a paradigm shift from a transactional to a relationship orientation (Hollensen, 2015). The

goal of relationship marketing is to build a long-term mutually beneficial relationship with the customer and maximize the lifetime customer value and customer loyalty (Peck, Clark, & Payne, 2013). Businesses underwent a cultural shift from the mass marketing, product focused thinking of the industrial age to the customer-empowered a culture of the Information age and the age of transparency, where the goal was building relationships with individual customers to become more valuable to the organization. In the relationship marketing era, managing individual customer relationships requires organizations to use the knowledge gained from customer relationships to enhance customer experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The concept contributes to companies shifting their marketing efforts toward building customer loyalty and developing relationships with clients and requires firms to understand what constitutes a seller-customer relationship, how those relationships formed, and how to strengthen the relationships (Peppers & Rogers, 2016).

Peppers and Rogers (1993) were the proponents of creating bonds with customers because it is more economical to retain existing consumers than to acquire a new customer. Company leaders should direct their marketing efforts externally and internally so that both consumers and staff in the organization are knowledgeable about the company's relationship marketing strategies (Peppers & Rogers, 1993). Leaders should also integrate their marketing strategies into the organization's day to day operations, product development, logistics, and marketing so that the organization can effectively respond to marketplace changes and maximize opportunities (Kotler, Keller, Manceau, & Hémonnet-Goujot, 2015). Relationship marketing involves maximizing a company's

financial return along with the company leaders acting in the customers' best interest (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Relationship marketing aims to build a connection between the organization, consumers, suppliers, and other key partners that contribute to a firm's overall marketing strategic activities (Shani & Chalasani, 1991).

The Social Marketing Era

The Internet became a popular marketing platform in the late 1990s and early 2000s, companies established websites to post information about their products, and services where consumers can directly access the information as the web became an essential tool for commercialization (Ryan, 2016). Current and potential consumers became accessible to marketers 24/7 because of technological advances (Kabat-Zinn, 2016). As the internet grew, simple company websites initially employed to provide information began to evolve as a powerful marketing tool. Bristol Meyers was among the first company to use their website for an online marketing campaign for Excedrin, pain medication. The success of the campaign increased the customer database for the company (Woodburn, 1999). Woodburn quoted Peggy Kelly, Vice President of Advertising Services at Bristol Meyers, who stated that "Our online campaign demonstrated the power of the Web as an efficient and cost-effective marketing tool; we were able to reach a vast audience, and calculate the effectiveness of our campaign" (Woodburn, 1999).

Digital media platforms have revolutionized marketing by providing new tools to reach, educate, engage, sell, gather data, and provide better products and services to

consumers (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). The Internet has become an important marketplace for transactions of goods and services. Management spent billions of dollars on Internet marketing including social media (Schwarzkopf, 2015). In 2015, online sales of physical goods in the United States totaled \$294.45 billion and Statista (2017) estimated that sales could increase to over \$485 billion by 2021. In May 2017, the Census Bureau of the Department of Commerce announced that the total retail sales for the first quarter of 2017 totaled \$1,250 billion, which accounted for 8.5% of total sales (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017).

Forrester (2009) identified five areas of the social marketing era that led to the paradigm shift from the relationship marketing era to social marketing era to include; (a) social relationships in which, parties could connect and share opinions, (b) social functionality, with social networks functioning like operating systems, (c) social colonization, when every experience could be social, (d) social context, this contributed to personalized and accurate content, and (e) social commerce, in which consumers could define future products and services. According to Sashi (2012), social marketing is important in customer engagement because for sellers to meet their needs and achieve sales goals, they must first meet the customer needs. The social marketing era is the newest era in the marketing evolution and focuses on organization's leaders developing strategies to identify the target audience's preferences and how to satisfy these consumers more than the competitors do by using Internet communication channels like social media and mobile platforms (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2014).

Social Media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a group of online-based applications allowing management to create and exchange content. Social media content includes words, pictures, videos, and audios to facilitate communication, collaboration, education and entertainment (Safko, 2010). Social media research is an emerging area, and at a time when most organizations' management are struggling with how to adapt to social media, few scholarly guides provide principles, best practices, or differentiate fact from fiction (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Piskorski (2014) provided an understanding of the purpose of various social media platforms and privacy needs, while Qualman (2009) concluded that social media was not a fad, but represented a fundamental shift in the way individuals, consumers, and companies' management communicate.

Li and Bernoff (2008) examined 25 real world cases regarding how companies have used social media to increase their market knowledge, generate sales, save money. The authors also expressed the need to understand the profound effect of social media on personal relationships. Zolkepli and Kamarulzaman (2015) found that there were three main levels of need that contribute to individual adoption of social media (a) personal (includes leisure and personal connections), (b) social (includes of friendship, influence and social interaction), and (c) stress release (includes a sense of belonging, relief, unwinding). The focus of social networking platforms is communicate directly on the platforms where the audience has presence in order for the company to collect more data and increase advertising activities (Kane, 2015). Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas (2015) expressed similar views suggesting that consumers are not only engaging

with others but with brands using online communities. The deficiencies in the above studies are the failure to discuss how organizational leaders can develop effective social media strategies to increase sales.

The value of social media is evident in many organizations. According to Auffermann (2010), Toyota anticipates a future with social media that includes both maintaining its reputation as well as extending into innovation of its products. When asked if the community of users and customers could provide insight into design, the Toyota executive replied, "In my opinion, it's only a matter of time." (Auffermann, 2010) Social media is a tool to generate growth in sales, return on investment, and positive word of mouth and can spread brand knowledge further (Kumar, Bhaskaran, Mirchandani, & Shah, 2013). Results show that organizations with a high level of use of social media give more importance to social media channels, the influence of social media on internal and external stakeholders and relevance of gatekeepers and stakeholders along with a better self-estimation of competencies (Moreno, Navarro, Tench, & Zerfass, 2015). Barnes and Lescaul (2013) concluded that marketers turned to social media platforms in large numbers to find new customers, retain existing customers, generate sales, create an identity, and disseminate company and product information. Organization's leaders can use social media to communicate directly and in real time with target audiences at a much lower cost and greater efficiency than traditional advertising media tools (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social Media Networks

Social networking sites are Internet services that enable individuals or businesses to create a profile, add or follow users and receive updates on the posts or activities of users within their network (Boyd & Ellison, 2015). The use of social media networks offered users the opportunity to connect with others and to share information, similar to traditional networking; they also offered indispensable resources for leaders looking to promote their products online (Safko, 2010). Ninety percent of advertisers indicated that social media was critical to their business and outlined higher product exposure from increased social media platform traffic, growing loyal customers, brand awareness, gathering market intelligence, and improved sales as some of the primary benefits derived from social marketing (Stelzner, 2016). Khan (2017) proposed that leaders should develop effective social media strategies and maintain a presence across the top social media platforms to drive the highest amount of traffic to their sites. According to Khan, this requires marketers to learn about the various social media sites, how each platform works, the target audiences and strategically align their social media strategy to support existing marketing objectives.

Social Media Platforms

Facebook. Facebook is a popular social networking site with nearly 1.8 billion active monthly users and offers a platform for connecting businesses with potential customers (Facebook, 2017). Ramsaran-Fowdar and Fowdar (2013) asserted that Facebook is an effective social media network that can provide real-time interactive responses to marketing questions and address problems quickly. Organization's leaders

can derive the following benefits from using Facebook (a) reduced advertising costs, (b) customized and targeted advertising, (c) real time feedback from consumers, (d) electronic word-of-mouth referrals, and (e) contribution to buyer purchase intentions (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). The advent of targeted advertisements geared toward demographics including age, gender, education, location, interests, and behaviors makes Facebook an advertising tool that large and small business owners could use to increase web traffic and an effective marketing platform option (Yang, Kim, & Dhalwani, 2008). Marketers should create brand communities, use blogs to engage customers, create content that attracts customer interest, appeals to the customer's affiliation, and use storytelling to hold potential customer attention as an effective Facebook marketing strategy (Mangold & Faulds 2009).

Twitter. Twitter is a microblogging platform with 313 million active monthly users, around 1 billion unique monthly visits in which users can share short messages with 140 characters or fewer known as tweets (Twitter, 2016). Barnes and Lescault (2013) found that Business executives perceived Twitter as the platform with the greatest potential than any other social media networks to increase sales. Soboleva, Burton, and Khan (2015) asserted that Twitter is an attractive marketing tool for businesses to reach and attract large audiences in a short period. Soboleva et al. recommended the following strategies used by companies who have successfully used Twitter to attract consumer interest in their brand and product (a) weblinks and images are effective in attracting attention and increasing customer traffic to a firm's website, (b) polls and questions allows firms to pose questions and track their votes or responses. Tweets with questions

can achieve high retweet and response rates, and (c) call to action asking followers to 'retweet' can increase response rates.

Marketers can increase sales by using Twitter as a tool to spread the word about their product, build a large following, and working with influencers with large followings to retweet contents advertising (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). O'Flynn (2012) cited examples of companies who have successfully used Twitter to increase sales including Sony, which announced in February 2012 that the company earned an additional 1 million pounds in sales from its Twitter campaigns. O'Flynn also cited Dell, who announced in June 2012 that company sales increased by 3 million dollars since advertising on Twitter.

YouTube. YouTube is a video sharing platform with over "one billion monthly visitors who watch more than six billion hours of video monthly" (YouTube, 2016). YouTube is the third most visited website worldwide where users can upload, view, comment, link videos to the site and engage in liking, sharing, and commenting as well as upload up to 100 hours of new video every minute to the site (Bradshaw & Garrahan, 2008). "YouTube is a popular site among adolescents, with 50% of teenagers citing YouTube as their favorite website" (Barry et al., 2015). In addition, "58% of generation X (1961- 1979), 70% of generation Y (1980-1995) and 83% of generation Z (1995-2012) access YouTube monthly" (Barry et al., 2015). The two types of advertising on YouTube are stream video and in-video, with streaming, viewers can choose to watch the advertisement, or they can skip the adverts after 5 seconds of play unlike the in-video

advertisements that is seen at the lower section of the screen when the main video is playing (Pikas & Sorrentino, 2014).

LinkedIn. LinkedIn is estimated to have over 238 million members and is the world's largest professional social networking platform (LinkedIn, 2017). Von Rosen (2012) described LinkedIn as a social networking platform for connecting, engaging and doing business with other professionals by offering the tools to connect and build business relationships. Advertisers can use LinkedIn as a platform to reach professionals audiences and specifically target them using rich profile and behavioral data, making LinkedIn an attractive platform for online advertising (Agarwal, 2013). Marketers that use LinkedIn can access detailed information provided by the target audience such as educational background, work history, life events (Von Rosen, 2012). The level of information enables LinkedIn to offer advertisers the option to target precisely to the audience mostly like to purchase their product by filtering on occupation, education level, and skills. Xia, Guha, and Muthukrishnan (2016) found that advertisers that use data analysis targeting subsets of users could reach 40% more of the desired audience than non-targeted marketing.

Schaffer (2013) posited that LinkedIn is an important part of social networking digital marketing plan and strategy because marketing on LinkedIn requires a different approach because unlike other social media outlets, LinkedIn is a professional network that calls for a high-quality marketing and sales channel. According to Schaffer (2013), the LinkedIn social network suited for smart and indirect campaigns for image and brand

awareness. Marketers that use LinkedIn successfully often create new content and regularly update company page with news and useful information.

The Role of Social Media

Social Media represents the most transformative information technology innovations in business both internally and externally (Aral et al., 2013). The platform is no longer just a communication tool for personal amusement but an important part of marketing strategies in business (Öztamur & Karakadılar, 2014). Social media offers an extensive range of applications for organizations, such as increasing communication, building trust, and maintaining relevancy (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, and Krush (2016) asserted that the use of Social Networking sites also influences how sellers and buyers interact by providing a tool for consumers to become better connected to companies and more knowledgeable about product selections. The increased interaction may lead to positive outcomes when sellers use it effectively to build more powerful buyer and seller relationships (Agnihotri et al., 2016).

Social media has evolved beyond interpersonal relationship to become a major source of information that has a global reach that businesses cannot afford to ignore, yet few studies exist in academic literature regarding social media's effectiveness from a business perspective (Barreto, 2015). The need for organizational leaders to acquire the sufficient knowledge to develop effective social media strategies for increasing sales and creating value for their organization warrants further research. Tang, Gu, and Whinston (2012) asserted that the benefits of participating in social media include social communication, a powerful marketing tool for building brand reputations, attracting new

customers, and generating sales. According to Jue, Marr, and Kassotakis (2010), social media can create both short- and long-term benefits for an organization. The use of social media by firms, aids in generating brand awareness, increasing traffic, and providing marketplace insight (Stelzner, 2014).

Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing is any form of marketing communication using social media platforms as social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn), microblogging platforms (Twitter), video and photo sharing platforms (YouTube, Instagram), consumer review platforms (Yelp), blogging platforms (Tumblr) or search-and-discovery based services (Foursquare) (McGrath & O'Connor, 2015). The traditional marketing media platforms such as television and print advertisements that marketers used to advertise or launch their products and services or to acquire new buyers are no longer sustainable (McGrath & O'Connor, 2015). The advantage of social media marketing over traditional marketing is that social media offers an interactive marketing tool which allows the audience to communicate directly with firms and for firms to engage with the consumers, with traditional marketing, the audience is passive (Huotari, Ulkuniemi, Saraniemi, & Mäläskä, 2015). Social media use enables consumers to access sellers at their fingertips without leaving their homes, and marketers can receive real-time feedback and can tailor their marketing strategies or offer products and services that meet the consumers' needs (Singla & Durga, 2015).

It is no longer an option but a strategic requirement for business leaders to use social media in the current technological environment (Constantinides, 2014). Social

Media has changed how business leaders interact with consumers, which presents both challenges and new opportunities for organizations (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014).

Companies that do not understand social media fundamentals could fail to attract or retain customers (Durkin & McGowan, 2013). Social media contributed to the transformation of traditional marketing activities and the need for leaders to develop new marketing business models (Scheid, Vaillant, & De Montaigne, 2012). Kissane (2016) posited that social media is the marketing avenue for businesses seeking to expand their reach online, attract new customers, and convert more of their traffic into sales.

Leaders are increasingly shifting from the traditional marketing channels to social media marketing (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Gillin (2007) posited that this shift toward social media contributes to (a) lower consumer response rates to traditional marketing, (b) enhanced social media experience, (c) demographics shifts, (d) word of mouth referrals, and (e) low or no cost advertising. According to Gillin (2007), a viral advertising video on social media has the potential to reach more customers faster and attract highly engaged customers at a lower cost than a traditional television advertisement. Considering these factors, organizational leaders must understand this changing landscape so that they can develop effective social media strategies and allocate the appropriate amount of resources to social media marketing (McGrath, & O'Connor, 2015).

Social Customer Relationship Management

The 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the widespread implementation of customer relationship management (CRM) technologies that were mildly successful at

best, as a result, managers are integrating social media applications with existing systems to foster stronger relationships with customers (Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp, & Agnihotri, 2014). The goal of social customer relationship management is customer retention by fostering a mutually beneficial interactive relationship between the consumer and firm where consumer input into marketing activities and product development is welcomed (Rodriguez, Peterson, & Krishnan, 2012). Leaders who use social customer relationship management effectively could maximize new entry market opportunities, trends, and development (Warfield, 2009). According to Choudhury and Harrigan (2014), organizations should use data collected from consumers through social media engagement as a resource to shape their future marketing strategies.

Elena (2016) examined the impact of social media strategies for developing customer relationship management and defined social media as a tool to manage relationships with customers and keep them closer. The purpose of Elena's study was to analyze how social media supports the development of customer relationship management. The author asserted that social media is necessary for an organization to remain competitive in a global market. According to Elena, although social customer relationship management is a relatively new domain, marketers can benefit from the use of social media for growing sales and profitability, creating advertisements, acquiring new customers, retaining them and gain brand loyalty. Elena (2016) concluded that the use of social media is an important factor when marketers create a customer relationship strategy and is also a crucial for moving from the traditional customer relationship management to social customer relationship management.

Social Media Strategies

Colicev, Connor, and Vinzi (2016) conducted a study to address the question of whether social media investment is worth it for firms. The purpose of the study was to examine the research gap on the impact of social media on brand performance versus traditional media using data from 87 firms across 17 industries and users of three social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube). The findings suggested that user actions on YouTube and brand actions on Facebook have a positive influence on brand value. Colicev et al. also included word-of-mouth as a mediator, finding that the effect of social media goes beyond word-of-mouth among social media users. Colicev et al. concluded based on the study findings that social media use has a positive influence on brand value, as well as provides objective metrics to measure return on investment (Colicev, Connor, & Vinzi, 2016).

Liu and Lopez (2016) examined the impact of social media discussions on consumer buying decisions. The purpose of the study was to estimate the effect of social media interactions on customer brand preference focusing on demand for carbonated soft drinks. The authors analyzed customer demand derived from social media engagement based on the Nielson sales measurement of carbonated soft drinks to social media interactions on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The findings indicated that consumers' conversations about soft drink brands had a significant impact on their valuation and on buying decision. Lui and Lopez concluded that the study revealed the connection between firms that strategically use social media for product promotion, design, or public health policy compliance and a decrease in the consumption of carbonated beverages or

other high calorie foods. I reviewed some social media strategies that firms have used to increase sales including online consumer reviews, brand online communities, content management to build brand trust and loyalty.

Online Consumer Reviews

Social media plays an important role in influencing consumer preferences when choosing products and services based on the customer's likes, dislikes, and feedbacks on social media sites (Raman, 2015). Duan, Gu, and Whinston (2008) argued that word of mouth is a powerful tool in delivering the information about consumer preferences. Lim et al. (2015) described word of mouth communicated on social media as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) which includes consumer reviews on products, services and experiences on social media channels such as Yelp and TripAdvisor. Lim et al. posited that e-WOM influences customer purchase intentions because social media provides a public platform to share customer experiences with brands, products, or services which other consumers can review prior to deciding whether or not to buy. Research conducted by Nielsen in 2013, revealed that 84% of the customers rely e-WOM to make a decision on purchase or services (Nielsen, 2013).

Word of mouth involves consumers' opinion of a product or service based on their experience that could influence the receiver's behavior or purchase decision (Ismagilova, Dwivedi, Slade, & Williams, 2017). Consumers use Social media to express their opinions on various topics including goods and services, this type of user-generated content, online consumer reviews influence buyer decisions. Gesenhues (2013) found that 90% of buyers surveyed cited online reviews for influencing their purchase decisions.

Lim and Van Der Heide (2015) asserted that with the emergence of social media, consumers are expressing their opinion online, which influences consumer purchase intentions. Wang, Cunningham and Eastin, (2015) concluded that online consumer reviews have the potential to increase sales and it is important for marketers to understand the impact and develop a strategy to leverage the influence of reviews on purchase decisions.

Hajli (2014) asserted that social media facilitates consumers' social interactions which could lead to increased trust and intention to buy. The study also showed that trust has a significant direct effect on intention to buy. Online review is a social media tool for consumers to voice their opinions about a product, service, or brand. Gu and Ye (2014) posited that managing and responding to customer comments has become an essential element of a firm's online social media strategy. Among the growing diversity in online social media, consumer review forums remain the most important social media source for product information, as over 60% of consumers read customer reviews online prior to making purchases (Lightspeed Research 2011). Existing studies consistently show that consumer reviews have significant impacts on consumer purchase decisions (Wang, et al, 2015). Severi, Ling, and Nasermodeli (2014) found that with electronic word of mouth using social media, companies could create, enhance brand equity of products and services, and subsequently lead to attracting customers.

Online Communities

Social media online communities provide an avenue for customers to communicate directly with businesses and to voice their opinion about their preferences.

According to Manchanda, Packard, and Pattabhiramaiah (2015), customer expenditures have increased significantly from customers joining firm created an online community. The results of their study also revealed that brand community influences brand loyalty. Munnukka, Karjaluoto, and Tikkanen (2015) posited that firms with online or social media brand communities and promotional activities realized higher levels of word of mouth advertising. They argued that positive feedback from consumers to friends regarding a product could lead to higher sales and revenues. Brown, Broderick, and Lee (2007) suggested that buyers value peer to peer product feedback based on personal experience from other consumers as more valuable than product information from companies. Mazzarol, Sweeney, and Soutar (2007) asserted that peer opinion or referral is more valuable when the sender has no connection to the brand. Sashi (2012) explained that organizations could use social media online brand communities to develop relationships with both current and potential customers, who collaborate, identify problems, and develop solutions. According to Sashi, consumers who interact in online communities could add value to Brands by generating content, which can influence purchase decisions.

Content Management

Content management is an important component of an effective social media strategy. Ashley and Tuten (2015) suggested that social media content management strategies should not only aim to give information about a brand but also help to develop innovative connections and relationships with potential consumers. According to Ashley and Tuten (2015), brand marketers must adopt a consumer engagement perspective that

shifts the brand's communication from a transactional to an interactive perspective so that the consumer views the product as part of their own identity. A firm's social media content messaging strategy should include communications that engage the target audience and meets the needs and wants of the consumer. Lwin, Phau, Huang, and Lim (2014) revealed that social media websites with emotional content contributed to firms gaining, retaining consumer interest, attention, and positive purchase intention. Effective social media content incorporates the brand's uniqueness, differentiation from competitors and appeals to the consumer at an emotional level rather than rational messages (Jiao, Gao, & Yang, 2015).

Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, and Kannan (2016) examined the effect of firm-generated content in social media based on three customer metrics (a) spending, (b) cross buying, and (c) customer profitability. The results of the study indicated that Firm Generated Content had a positive and significant effect on customers' purchasing behavior. Ashley and Tuten (2015) proposed that firms provide frequent content updates, using creative content as imagery, exclusivity messages, and incentives to the consumer to increase customer engagement with their social media platforms.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a consumer's commitment to make repeat purchases from the same brand despite other available options (Cengiz & Akdemir-Cengiz, 2016). Similarly, Khan (2013) defined brand loyalty as a non random biased consumer commitment to purchases and repurchase from a brand or brands over time despite competitor's efforts to induce switching. Brand loyalty is influenced by Brand trust and

requires a voluntary action or willingness for a consumer to believe in the brand ability to perform as advertised (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Furthermore, Chaudhuri and Holbrook posited that developing brand loyalty involves various factors including brand commitment and community affiliation leading to greater positive product referrals and consumer repurchase decisions.

Social media is a platform that firms could use for online product marketing, electronic word of mouth referrals, building online brand communities, and targeted advertisement which could influence consumer purchase decisions and increase brand loyalty (Balakrishnan, Dahnil, & Yi, 2014). The use of Social media offers an effective tool that marketers can use to increase sales by building brand loyalty through advertising, online communities and consumer direct feedback (Harde & Heyman, 2009). Laroche, Habibi, and Richard (2013) concluded when firms use social media to build online brand communities, consumers view their products, services, and brands positively, which could lead to positive effects on brand trust, and brand loyalty. Nisar and Whitehead (2016) investigated how user loyalty is achieved and maintained through social networking sites. The result revealed that brand trust has a large impact on brand loyalty, and perceived social presence also contributes substantially. Lim, Hwang, Kim, and Biocca (2015) opined that consumers who engage on social networks with a brand developed brand loyalty and purchase intent among peers. According to Lim et al. (2015), a study conducted by comScore revealed that there was a 15% greater likelihood of a consumer purchasing a product when a friend refers the product than from other sources.

Marketers recognize that real brand loyalty and consumer connection with a brand is more valuable than other marketing, advertising or promotional activities (Barnet & Ferris, 2016). Laroche, Habibi, and Richard (2013) found that social media brand communities benefit members, and facilitates information sharing and helps to solidify the customers' relationships with the product or service, organization's brand, and fellow consumers leading to brand loyalty especially when brand trust exists. The result indicated that brand loyalty and consumer purchase decisions are enhanced when firms use their social media platforms effectively to establish online brand communities, increase electronic word of mouth referrals, and product advertisement (Laroche et al., 2013).

Transition

In Section 1, I provided a brief introduction of the research topic of social media strategies for increasing sales in the foundation, and background of the study. The section also included the problem and purpose statements, the nature of the study, research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and the delimitations of the study and significance of the study including contribution to the business practice and implications for social changes. The section concluded with a review of the professional and academic literature.

Section 2 includes the purpose statement, the researcher's role, description of participants' selection method, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research procedure, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data analysis, reliability, and validity. In Section 3, I present the research findings, the

implication to professional practice and social changes. I conclude with recommendations for action and areas for future research.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore social media marketing strategies that organizational leaders use to increase sales. The targeted sample population included marketing leaders of five organizations in the San Francisco, California, Bay Area who successfully increased sales by using social media marketing strategies. The implication for positive social change could be the opportunity for organizations leaders to acquire new strategies for using social media to increase sales, which could result in job creation and improved economies in local communities.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, the researcher plays a primary role in the research process to ensure that the data collection instruments are valid and accurate (Parker, 2012). The researcher also engages participants to collect data in order to understand the research topic (Tsang, 2013.). I was the instrument of data collection. It was my responsibility to inform the reader of any biases, assumptions and my qualifications as the researcher.

My role as the researcher required that I was objective and to ensure that data collected and interpretation were those of the participants. It was, therefore, essential that I listened and recorded participant responses precisely and from their perspectives, devoid of my personal views. I conducted semistructured interviews. During the interview stage, it was important to keep in mind that I was dependent on the participants' willingness not only to take part in the study but also to share their

experiences and thoughts about the topics in question. I listened and was respectful of the participants so that they would be comfortable in candidly sharing information with me.

According to Simon (2011), in qualitative research, readers of a study need to know about the researcher as the human instrument of data collection. It was my responsibility to inform the reader of any biases, I might have had in carrying out my research as well as my assumptions and qualifications as a researcher. Thus, I described relevant information about myself along with experiences that qualified me to conduct this study. My affiliation with the research topic, participants, and geographical area included searching various social media sites to identify which companies to contact in the San Francisco Bay Area. I have experience working with social media in my previous position as the communication manager for the University of California Berkeley's Recreational Sports Department where I successfully used social media advertising to promote various programs. Interview protocol or guides are useful in qualitative research for outlining the research topic background, summaries, and structure of the interview (Boehm & Hogan, 2014). I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) for the face-to-face interview to ensure that I asked relevant questions and audio recorded participants' responses.

Participants

Researchers should establish a rationale or criterion for participant selection to improve both the breadth and depth of data (Charlick, Pincombe, McKellar, & Fielder, 2016). Participants who meet or exceed specific criteria possess greater knowledge of the phenomenon of study (Palinkas et al., 2013). An important factor that affects population

representativeness is a study's eligibility criteria. As Sen et al. (2016) suggested, ensuring that data are information rich requires that researchers establish eligibility criteria. The participant eligibility criteria for this study included (a) that participants were social media managers and professionals in top performing companies in the San Francisco Bay Area, (b) with at least 3 years professional experience in the industry, (c) who had successfully used social media to increase sales, and (d) were willing to participate in a semistructured, audio-recorded interview.

Researchers need access to participants to conduct the study, and gaining access involves finding and securing participants for research (Peticca-Harris, deGama, & Elias, 2016). Depending on the size of the business, gatekeepers play a key role in granting researchers access to potential participants along with monitoring the activities of the researcher throughout the data collection process (Davies & Peters, 2014). Gatekeepers can be employees, leaders of the organization, or individuals who belong to the group of interest for the study (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016). I did not need permission from gatekeepers for this study because the participants were business leaders and I had direct access with them via social media. After receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board, I sent an invitation to participate letter (see Appendix B) via e-mail to 40 potential participants informing them of the purpose of the study. An invitation letter includes the purpose and procedures of the study (Alexander, 2017). In the invitation e-mail, I described the purpose of the study, the interview questions, and estimated time commitments for the interview.

The target population included five participants across five organizations. The success of data gathering depends directly on how well the researcher can build rapport, maintain relationships with the participants, and hold them to agreements (Kondowe & Booyens, 2014). Researchers should build a good relationship with potential participants to increase trust and confidence and enhance the success of the data collection process (Flurey, 2015). They can establish a positive relationship with potential participants by findings topics of interests to both parties (Kral, 2014). I established rapport with potential participants by demonstrating flexibility to address their concerns. I also explained the purpose of the study, informed participants of the voluntary nature of participation in the study and their ability to opt out using the informed consent form, and assured them that confidentiality was a top priority of mine.

Research Method and Design

This study was a qualitative multicase study of social media strategies for increasing sales for the organization in the San Francisco Bay Area. I conducted semistructured interviews with business leaders in organizations that have successfully used social media to increase sales based on sales reports and the organization's social media activities. I used a qualitative research method and multicase research design to explore my research topic. Researchers use qualitative research methods to explore, explain, and describe a phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). A case study design is appropriate when a researcher is seeking to explore individuals or groups, for an in-depth analysis of complex relationships, communities, or organizations (Yin, 2013).

Research Method

The three common approaches to conducting academic research are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Venkatesh, Brown, and Bala (2013) posited that researchers use qualitative methods for exploratory research to develop a deep understanding of a phenomenon; in contrast, researchers used quantitative methods to confirm or test a hypothesis using numerical data. Researchers seeking to both explore and confirm a phenomenon use a mixed methods approach in the same research inquiry (Molina-Azorin, 2016).

Researchers use the quantitative approach to examine causal relationships and consider valid arguments in a scientific manner in order to generate theories or test hypotheses (Pluye & Hong, 2014). According to McCusker and Gunaydin (2015), researchers use quantitative method seeking to answer questions centering on *how many* or *how much* rather than on the *what*, *how*, or *why* of a phenomenon; also, the data to be collected will be in the form of numbers and statistics. Leedy (1993) posited that researchers use the quantitative method to address questions related to possible relationships between variables in order test, confirm, or control a phenomenon. Researchers also use a quantitative study approach when seeking to confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis (Kumar, 2005). The data collection instrument for researchers using the quantitative method include testing and closed-ended questionnaires to gather, analyze and interpret the data, therefore I did not use the quantitative method, because I collected data for my study using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions

and reviewed company documents to obtain, analyze, and interpret the data (Zohrabi, 2013).

The mixed methods research is a research approach in which the researcher combines (a) both qualitative and quantitative research questions, (b) both qualitative research and quantitative research methods and designs, (c) qualitative and quantitative data techniques for collecting and analyzing, and (d) qualitative and quantitative data findings and results (Pluye & Hong, 2014). According to Pluye and Hong, the three main reasons for mixing methods include researchers seeking to use qualitative methods to interpret quantitative results, apply quantitative methods to generalize qualitative findings or to explore a new phenomenon using the qualitative methods and explore causes, and effects using the quantitative methods. McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) concluded that although researchers use the mixed methods approach to draw on the strengths of both the qualitative and quantitative methods, ultimately, the mixed methods applies when the in-depth analysis needed for a qualitative study or statistical testing of a quantitative study are not required due the time and cost involved. With the mixed method approaches, researchers combine both the qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments such as closed-ended questionnaires to gather numerical data and interviews for text data (Zohrabi, 2013). I rejected the mixed method approach because I used only text data for my research. I applied the qualitative research method to explore the social media strategies that organization use for increasing sales. Marshall et al. (2015) asserted that researchers use the qualitative research method when seeking to uncover the

unexpected or explore new avenues because the researcher has more flexibility to gather comprehensive data.

Research Design

The three common qualitative research designs are case, ethnography and phenomenological (Williams, 2011). I applied the case study design because my goal was to describe the research topic phenomenon using multiple data sources. According to Yin (2003), researchers use the case study research design when seeking to conduct an empirical investigation of a phenomenon using multiple sources of evidence. Hancock and Algozzine (2015) opined that the case study design is a bounded system that researchers use to conduct in-depth descriptive analysis grounded in deep and multiple data sources such as participants' interviews, document reviews, and observation.

I reviewed and rejected the ethnography and phenomenological research designs. Researchers use the ethnography design to describe a group's culture, beliefs, values, knowledge, and skills in their environment (Wall, 2014). Ethnography answers the question, what's it like to be this person (Grossoehme, 2014). Brewer (2000) defined ethnography as the study of people in their natural settings or involving the researcher participating directly in the setting to collect data. According to Atkinson and Hammersley (1994), researchers use the ethnography design when the objective is to observe participants in real-life situations for a set amount of time to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject's behavior.

Phenomenological researchers explore the meanings of participants' lived experiences (Gallagher, 2012). Researchers select the phenomenological approach when

seeking to gather a detailed examination of the participants' actual life experiences based on the participants' perception or record of the event, rather than the researcher trying to develop an objective statement (Smith, 2015). The objective of researchers who use the phenomenological design is to gain a greater understanding of the participant's experiences through the mind of the subject or point of view (Giorgi, 2009). Todres and Holloway (2006) opined that the phenomenological researcher's goal is to describe or to interpret the human experience as lived by the experiencer, and to use qualitative data collection techniques to obtain examples of everyday experiences. My study was to explore the social media strategies for increasing sales using the bounded system, hence, understanding the culture of an organization or lived experience will not be necessary. Therefore, I did not use the ethnography or phenomenological designs.

Data saturation is an important aspect of a qualitative study. Saturation ensures that the researcher has sufficient and quality data to support a study (Walker, 2012). The researcher achieves data saturation when there is adequate data to replicate the study and when gathering additional data or coding will not yield new information about the phenomenon (Fusch & Ness, 2015). According to Fusch and Ness, a researcher's failure to reach data saturation affects the dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the study. To ensure dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability Morse (2002) suggested that qualitative researchers implement strategies during the study to demonstrate rigor and quality verification by maintaining an audit trail, incorporating member checks when coding, or confirming results with participants,

and peer reviews. To ensure data saturation in my study, I collected data until no additional information or themes arose.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study included five business managers working in five organizations who successfully used social media strategies to increase sales. I used purposeful sampling to select the participants. Researchers use purposeful sampling in qualitative research for gathering information related to the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling involves participants' or groups' selection based that on their expertise, position, or years of experience with the study topic (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

In addition to knowledge and experience, Patton (2015) asserted that strength of purposeful sampling is in the participant selection and gathering rich information for a detailed study. Patton posited that the resulting data should provide the reader with in depth data and knowledge about the research study. Purposeful sampling is the process of selecting participants or data sources for a study based on their knowledge of the research topic or expected relevant data that the participant will contribute to the study (Yin, 2011). The guiding principle for sample size selection is data saturation (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). I collected data from five different organizations, and used a database management system for coding and categorizing similar themes.

Ethical Research

The protection of research participants is paramount in research, therefore; the research process requires ethical scrutiny, formalization, and focus (Greenwood, 2016). IRB approval ensures that a study meets regulatory criteria and protects participant rights

and welfare (Heflin, DeMeo, Nagler, & Hockenberry, 2016). The IRB application process is important prior to data collection to address compliance. I obtained approval from the Walden University's IRB prior to data collection. Walden University's approval number for this study is 08-08-17- 0544644. Participants received the informed consent form (see Appendix C) before they participated in the study. After participants agreed to be part of the study, I emailed informed consent forms. The form complied with IRB requirements and include the purpose of the study, interview structure, and consent to audio record the interview, sample questions that I asked during the interview, how I planned use the data gathered from the interview, and my contact information.

In academic research, it is important that participants know that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time before or during the study (Mealer & Jones, 2014). The emailed consent form included language informing interviewees that their participation in the study is voluntary, and participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Greaney et al. (2012) recommended that researchers include a procedure to withdraw a participant in a transparent process without repercussions and protect their identity. Before starting the interview, I reminded participants of their withdrawal rights. I did not offer incentives to participants. I informed the participants that the study findings were available to them upon request. Participants received my contact information, if they had any questions or concerns after the interview. To protect the participant's identity, I coded each participant names as Participants (1 to 5). I secured and kept all data confidential by storing all documents and digital recordings on a

password protected drive in a secure location in my home. I will delete all digital files and shred paper documents 5 years after completion of this study.

Data Collection Instruments

The objective of my study was to explore social media strategies for increasing sales. I used the semistructured interview guide for data collection and reviewed company documents. I scheduled interviews via telephone at a meeting place of the participant's choosing in San Francisco, CA bay area. Researchers use the semistructured interviews when seeking the flexibility to structure the interview and to ask open-ended questions, for in-depth responses and follow up. With semistructured interviews, researchers develop the questions prior to the interview, and the interviewees express their views in their own words (Galletta, 2013). This approach to data collection helps to reduce the risk of bias relating to the researcher's preconceptions (Marshall, Brereton, & Kitchenham, 2015). I remained objective and removed my own bias for this study by using the interview protocol (see Appendix A) and listening to the participants' responses.

I also used data triangulation and member checking in the data collection process to ensure validity. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to gain an in-depth understanding of the research topic (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). According to Carter et al. (2014), supplementing qualitative text with multiple sources of information helps with triangulation and trust in the reliability and validity of the study's findings. For this study, the data collection sources included semistructured interviews of five company leaders

who accepted the invitation to participate (see Appendix B) and review of company documents including marketing materials, social media posts and published sales reports. With member checking, the participants reviewed my interpretation of their responses for accuracy. I used NVivo for coding and categorizing similar themes. I summarized the findings in a narrative format and used tables and figures to depict processes.

Data Collection Technique

Qualitative research requires a comprehensive data collection technique and documentation of employed research procedures (Bowen, 2009). I used the semistructured interviews for data collection, reviewed marketing materials, posts on the participants' social media pages and published sales reports for supporting documentation. To access participants, I searched for prospects using Facebook and LinkedIn social media platforms using key words as social media, influencer, job title and limited the location search to San Francisco, CA bay area. I viewed potential participants' profiles for years of experience with social media. I narrowed down the search by those with a mutual friend or connection. Forty potential participants met the eligibility criteria. I sent a request to connect with the 40 participants along with invitation to participate (see Appendix B) informing them of the purpose of the study. I received responses from 15 participants, 7 indicated that they were not available to participate. I requested and received confirmation of participant's willingness to participate in the study via email within 48 hours. I then selected the top five participants to interview who best met the eligibility criteria and availability. The remaining

participants were backups in case the top five participants could not participate in the study.

Researchers use semistructured interviews when seeking the flexibility to structure the interview, ask open-ended questions (see Appendix D) receive in-depth responses, and ask follow up questions. This approach of data collection helps to reduce the risk of bias relating to the researcher's preconceptions (Marshall, Brereton, & Kitchenham, 2015). I was objective and removed bias by using the interview protocol (see Appendix A) and listening to the participants' responses. Williams and Pigeot (2016) asserted that researchers obtain consent from potential participants for confidentiality and protecting the integrity of the study. I obtained a signed consent forms from the five participants through email. I also obtained consent from the participants prior to starting the interview to audio record the interview using a LG Stylo built in cell phone digital recorder. The participants did not receive incentives to participate in the study. I confirmed interview times via email and scheduled interview times using Google calendar. Five organizational leaders from five different organizations participated in semistructured interviews at a location of their choosing in the San Francisco, California, Bay Area and addressed eight questions in depth questions about social media strategies to increase sales. Each participant showed enthusiasm for social media and were excited to share their experiences and the social media strategies for their respective business. I took notes during the interview process to record nonverbal cues and key points that I incorporated in the data analysis. The interview times ranged from 25 minutes to 45 minutes.

Researchers review documents to gather background information, develop understanding, and gain insight to the research problem (Bretschneider, Cirilli, & Jones, 2017). Document review, included marketing materials from participants' social media marketing activities, social media posts, and published sales reports. After each interview, I performed member checking by paraphrasing the participant's responses for each question. I emailed the documents to the participants to confirm the accuracy of my interpretation within 48 hours. Two participants did not have changes and three participants responded with changes. I incorporated the changes and emailed the information back for final confirmation.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization techniques helps researchers achieve effective data analysis (De Waal, Goedegebuure, & Tan Akaraborworn, 2014). For this study I used Google Calender, Microsoft Excel and Word for data organization. Researchers organize, encode, and identify major themes from data collection using various forms and techniques, to allow ease of extraction of the study conclusions (Bumbuc, 2016). Data collection included semistructured interviews, review of marketing materials from participants' social media sites and published sales reports. I audio recorded the interviews and immediately transcribed them using Microsoft Word. I maintained records of interview dates and locations using password protected Google calendar and kept track of participant names notes taken during the interview to record nonverbal cues and key points and marketing materials using an Excel spreadsheet. I coded participant names to protect their identity. For data organization, I compiled participants' responses by

interview questions, audio recording and interview notes, and saved the file by participant number. After receiving final member checking confirmation from participants, I transferred the data into a Microsoft Excel to consolidate the participants' data under in one spreadsheet. Mealer and Jones (2014) concluded that researchers should protect participant privacy and disclosure of sensitive information to minimize the risk of psychological harm. I assigned numerical values to each participant, saved the information in an Excel document, using a password protected USB drive, stored in a locked cabinet in my home. I will delete digital files and shred all paper documents 5 years after the approval of this study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves classification and interpretation of statements, various materials, or cases to describe a phenomenon (Flick, 2014). Data analysis included labeling, categorizing and grouping collected data using codes rather than a large variety of diverse phenomenon. For this study, the data analysis involved three main processes: (a) coding, (b) categorization, and (c) identification of major themes. Flick (2007) recommended triangulation for analysis of multiple types of data. I used the semistructured interview guide for data collection, viewed published marketing materials from participants' websites, marketing activities on social media sites, and reviewed published sales reports. I transcribed participants' responses from the semistructured interviews; incorporated relevant data gathered from the document review and assigned numerical values to participants (participants as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). I identified major themes focusing on social media marketing strategies, brand loyalty, and sales growth

and correlated the major themes to the research question, relationship marketing conceptual framework and literature review.

Flick (2007) recommended triangulation for analysis of multiple types of data. According to Wilson (2016), researchers use triangulation to analyze data using multiple approaches to collect, interpret and analyze data for richer perspectives on the study.

I applied triangulation to enhance rigor when analyzing data collected from semistructured interviews, audio recording transcription, and document review (participant social media marketing materials, social media posts and published sales reports) to support my findings. Researchers use data analysis software to analyze data gathered through interviews, documents, observation to enhance transparency and support research findings (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2015). I compared Atlas Ti data analysis software and NVivo version 11 and rejected Atlas Ti because the software lacked the ability to integrate text searches with searches for coded data. I selected NVivo because the software was user friendly. Researchers use NVivo to categorize participant responses, identify themes, and for coding (Zamawe, 2015). I used NVivo qualitative data analysis software to categorize, code, and sort collected data. I uploaded participant responses stored in the Excel spreadsheet, audio recordings files, notes taken during the interview, and images of marketing materials obtained from participant social media sites in Nvivo 11. I created nodes for each theme, categorized and coded data to analyze related themes focusing on the central research question and conceptual framework for this study.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research involves dependability, credibility and the ability to replicate the study's data analysis (Miller, 2008). Repeatability is the ability for another researcher to achieve the same results if the researcher conducted the study with the same rigor. According to Morse (2015), the three major strategies to ensure dependability and credibility include a good coding system, member checks, peer review, triangulation, and external audits.

I achieved dependability and credibility for this study by applying methodological triangulation in my data collection. Hussein (2015) defined methodological triangulation as the use of multiple methods or data sources such as semistructured interviews, document analysis, reviewing public data, and participant observations in the same study to enhance dependability and credibility. Triangulation of sources strengthens the research study because it serves as evidence that research has increased in dependability and credibility (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). I gathered data using multiple sources, including semistructured interviews, marketing materials, and social media posts to enhance the dependability and credibility of the research findings. Bryman (2015) asserted that researchers can enhance the dependability and credibility of their research study by gathering data from multiple sources including face to face interviews, participant observation, document review, surveys, or questionnaires. I addressed dependability and credibility by using an interview protocol, auditable coding system (participants and themes), member checks, and constant data comparison. Silverman

(2009) recommended constant data comparison as a strategy to enhance dependability and credibility; this means that the researcher extracts the data from the original sources. A researcher must also constantly verify their accuracy in terms of form and context either alone or with peers as a form of triangulation (Leung, 2015). I verified the accuracy of the interview responses through member checking, I emailed my interpretation of the participants' response by sending for review, verification, and confirmation.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research involves transferability and confirmability; transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of qualitative study are transferable to other contexts with other respondents (Anney, 2014). Researchers achieve transferability when the qualitative theories are applicable and useful in other contexts when applied by another researcher or reader (Morse, 2015). According to Morse (2015), strategies to ensure transferability include extended research period, observing participants, detailed and quality description; review by another researcher or peer; explaining researcher bias; member checking researcher's interpretation of gathered data and triangulation by validating with two or more methods or sources.

Leung (2015) described confirmability in qualitative research as the appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data. This includes whether (a) the research question is valid for the desired outcome, (b) methodology is appropriate for the research question, (c) research design is valid for the methodology, (d) the sampling and data analysis is appropriate, and (e) the findings are valid for the sample and context (Leung, 2015). To enhance transferability and confirmability for this study, I documented the data

collection instruments to ensure proper audit trail, ask participants to confirm their responses, and peer review. I also used qualitative data analysis software for analysis.

Researchers also use data saturation to ensure transferability and confirmability (Yin, 2014). Morse (2015) posited that data saturation is an essential element for researchers to demonstrate rigor in qualitative research. I reached data saturation by obtaining data until no additional information, data or theme arose. Additionally, triangulation helps to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to gain an in-depth understanding of the research topic (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). According to Carter et al. (2014), supplementing qualitative text with multiple sources of information helps with triangulation to enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I collected data from five different organizations, using semistructured interviews, document review, and social media activities to gather data for this study. I also used a database management system for coding and categorizing similar themes.

Transition and Summary

For Section 2, I provided detailed information regarding the research project. I started with a restatement of the purpose statement. I then explained my role as the researcher and described participants' selection process. I also provided the justification for selecting the qualitative research method and case study design and explained how to ensure ethical standards in the research process. In Section 3, I provided the findings of the research study on the social media strategies for increasing sales. The section began

with the introduction of the research topic starting with a restatement of the purpose statement, research method and design and data collection techniques. The section also included the presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, implication for social changes, recommendation for action and reflection on the experience conducting the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore social media marketing strategies that organizational leaders use to increase sales. Applying methodological triangulation, I collected data from semistructured interviews, document review, and field notes from participant observation. Organizational leaders from five different organizations served as participants for this study. The participants cited LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook as the top social media sites on which they actively have a presence. I reviewed each participant's activities on those platforms along with their organization's website as part of the document review process. I also took notes during interviews to record nonverbal cues observed during the interview to support data collected.

Table 1

Participants' Social Media Platform Presence

Participant	Social media platform			
	LinkedIn	Facebook	Twitter	Other
Participant 1	X	X		x
Participant 2	X	X	x	x
Participant 3	X	X	x	
Participant 4	X	X	x	x
Participant 5	X	X	x	x

I compiled and organized data in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and, then, used NVivo software to code the data into themes. Using thematic analysis, I examined the interview responses to identify recurring central themes. I analyzed the document reviews and observation to support and contextualize the findings. The five major themes that emerged from the data analysis included (a) audience knowledge, (b) customer roadmap, (c) customer relationship management, (d) marketing and sales alignment, and (e) measuring performance. In the Presentation of Findings section, I reveal the social media marketing strategies that organizations' leaders can use to increase sales, based on my study findings.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was what are the social media marketing strategies that organizations' leaders use to increase sales? I interviewed five participants from five organizations for the study using semistructured interviews. Each participant answered eight open ended questions concerning social media strategies to increase sales. I also reviewed social media activities for each participant I also reviewed the social media pages for each participant and observed the level of engagement by the audience based on comments and likes on the postings. In addition, I recorded my observations during each interview. Participant 1 is the founder, president, and chief executive officer of his company and, at the time of the study, had been involved with social media for approximately 15 years. Participant 2 is a program manager and digital marketer with 8 years of industry experience. Participant 3 is a digital marketing manager and social media strategist with 10 years of industry experience. Participant 4 is a top

producer real estate professional with 13 years of industry experience and Participant 5 is an industry principal for social selling with 7 years of industry experience. Each participant indicated that social media play an important role in increasing sales for their businesses.

The conceptual framework used in this study was relationship marketing theory (Berry, 1983). Social media can provide business leaders with a long lasting relationship marketing tool they can use to develop brand awareness and build customer loyalty, which could lead to increased sales (Turner & Shah, 2014). Social media can also serve as a relationship marketing tool for business leaders to use in shifting from a transactional to a relational perspective and gain a greater understanding of the lifetime value of partnering with customers. The constructs of the relationship marketing theory serve as a guide for business leaders to develop a systematic approach of interactive marketing for higher quality interactions using social media to incorporate real-time customer feedback for building long-term customer relationships and increase sales (Gronos, 1994).

The findings of this study supported Clark and Melancon (2013) assertion that organizations can benefit from incorporating relationship marketing with their social media activities hence, developing social media strategies aligns with the relationship marketing theory because social media provides a tool for organizational leaders to engage and build customer relationships, which could result in increased sales. The participants' responses and themes also aligned with the relationship marketing theory. The following themes emerged from my analysis of the semistructured interviews, document reviews, and social media page reviews: (a) audience knowledge, (b) customer

roadmap, (c) customer relationship management, (d) marketing and sales alignment, and, (e) measuring performance(See Table 2)

Table 2

Participants' Responses by Theme

Participant	Theme				
	Audience knowledge	Customer Roadmap	Customer relationship management	Marketing and sales alignment	Measure performance
Participant 1	X		x		x
Participant 2	X	x		x	x
Participant 3	X		x		x
Participant 4	X	x	x		x
Participant 5	X	x	x	x	

Theme 1: Audience Knowledge

All participants expressed that developing effective social media strategies requires knowledge of the target audience. This includes identification of which social media platforms that the target audiences are actively engaging. According to Participant 3, knowing your audience involves “having conversations with the customer, asking for feedback, and using online chats, questions, or surveys.” Participant 1 recommended that companies conduct research to identify the right market and competitors and discern what differentiates their products or services and marketing strategy. Participant 2 added, “It is important to do your research and make the connection and have a presence in the main platforms that your buyers are using.” Identifying where the clients are and the social media platforms where they obtain information helps to inform marketers about the right

strategy to use in marketing to the target audience and maximizing reach (Racz-Akacosi, 2017). As Participant 3 stated, “a company could deploy a marketing campaign on Reddit; however, if most of the target audiences are using Facebook, then the company would miss reaching the appropriate market.” Participant 2 stated “companies should listen to the buyer persona to understand process specific strategies and ensure that they are addressing the top channels and they are comfortable with those channels” and suggested that firms conduct extensive research to understand their customer’s persona including what their needs are and how to fill those needs. The buyer’s persona refers to a firm’s ideal customer (location, age, and preferences) and is identified by conducting research, surveys, and interviews of target audiences (Kelly, Johnston, & Danheiser, 2017).

Social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn also offer paid services for customer information based on company specifications. According to Participant 2, the first step in having social media presence is to (a) identify where your buyer persona is having conversations, (b) post content that provide value to them, (c) get them into your pipeline by offering a link to a your landing page or offering freebies, and (d) customize offerings for sale. Participant 3 supported this view and stated, “Using compelling imagery, good content, and being consistent were key factors in establishing and cultivating relationships with the audience.”

Participant 1 expressed that knowledge of company culture, products, and understanding of marketing strategies are also essential to audience knowledge.

Participants 5 indicated that companies tend to hire marketing staff that are familiar with

a specific platform rather than focusing on the potential customers, for example, if a company has presence on 4square and the target audiences are on Facebook, they run the risk of not reaching the right target audience. It is important for marketers to do research, identify the main platforms that their potential buyers are using, understand how the buyers make purchase decisions and develop social media content to attract their attention to increase sales.

Theme 2: Customer Roadmap

Developing a customer roadmap involves creating a clear path for prospects to follow to purchase a product or service. Participant 2 noted that leaders should focus on social media strategies that maximize the customer's experience by creating a roadmap and guiding the customer through the roadmap. The customer's experience with a firm starts from the initial contact on the social media platform. Marketers should have a call to action through a link that will take the customer to the company's landing page to learn more about the product or to subscribe to a newsletter or future promotions and then follow up with a customized offer to close the sale. It is important to create a roadmap for the prospect that makes it easy for the customer to purchase your product. Participant 1 agreed and stated, "Strategies include posting relevant content to my target audience to lure them to read and/or click to a landing page that will convert to a sale." A review of the participants' social media marketing material and posts supported that the participants were customer focused and geared towards target audiences. Participant 4 stated that effective strategies include "Clarity in content, consistent messaging and posting, align your mission/goal/programs with social media images/campaign and do not be static and

just post images, posting videos that tells people how to use your products is a good way to engage.”

Participant 5 asserted that most companies make the mistake of focusing on their product rather than their customer persona. According to participant 2, creating a roadmap for the potential customers and ensuring that they follow the roadmap, helps to understand the customer’s experience and converting leads into sales and making them prosumers (“producer” and “consumers” combined). Social media has influenced the shift from being consumers who only consume products to becoming prosumers who openly share their product/service experiences on various social media platforms and thereby drive sales through electronic word of mouth (Fine, Gironda, & Petrescu, 2017). Participant 2 realized success with creating a customer roadmap and stated, “I also worked with a new Robotics company and helped them to grow revenue from 0% to 6 % through social media within 6 months with only 500 Euros/month in adverting cost.” Developing a customer roadmap aligns with relationship marketing conceptual framework of this study because with social media, marketers could move their target audience up the relationship marketing ladder by going from a prospect, to becoming a customer, then a supporter, advocate and a partner.

Theme 3: Social Customer Relationship Management

Social customer relationship management integrates customer interactions, processes, and messaging with social media platforms to involve customers in two way communication with the goal of improving relationships, customer retention, and driving sales growth (Wang & Kim, 2017). Participant 1 suggested that firms avoid

marketing campaigns that are inauthentic to what they are selling, it is important to know yourself, cultivate relationships of the potential buyer and how the firm's product can be of value to the customer. Participant 4 echoed the importance of authenticity and stated, "I spent time developing my brand, added a logo working with a designer and personalized my brand as an Entrepreneur. I noticed that when my brand evolved, social media traffic, volume, and type of engagement changed positively." She also added, "It is important to be transparent, authentic and be who I am and not let the brand take over."

Participant 3 suggests that providing excellent customer service involves being responsive to customer comments including negative feedback on social media.

Participant 1 recommended developing a personalized customer service strategy for example, "When I visit a hotel and they anticipate my needs before I arrive that makes me want to return." Participant 2 has automated responses that provides 24/7 response to the customer or connects automatically through a link to landing page, gather important information such as email address, and other information from the leads to add to the customer relationship management software. This strategy allows the seller to have control of the customer information rather than the social media platform so they can begin nurture the relationship. Participant 5 noted that listening to the customer, developing a specific strategy that is customer focused, incorporating a call of action, and having the flexibility to shift are effective strategies for managing customer relationships.

Participant 3 stated, "Companies should also be responsive to customers and provide superior customer service. This will differentiate them from their competitors and increase word of mouth about the company which can lead to more likes or followers."

Participant 2 added, “Companies should listen to the buyer persona to understand process specific strategies and ensure that they are addressing the top channels and they are comfortable with those channels then move on to other challenges.” Participant 1 and 2 agreed that rather than cold calling, LinkedIn allows them to dig for specific data to understand prospects better and once there is a connection, they move forward with the business development. Participant 1 noted that his use of social media is not sale focused because “people do not want to be sold.” Participant 4 added, “I created educational videos on real estate investing and focused on creating a vision about opportunities in Real Estate by educating rather than selling.” According to participant 1, this strategy has proved to be successful and resulted in better customer relationships that led increased sales.

Participant 3 recommends that firms develop, custom links to encourage new subscriptions and establish community groups to help with managing customer relationships. It is important to be active on the social media channels listen to the customer and build strong relationships. It is also important to deliver the right product and give the customer what they expect, which will lead to good reviews, good feedback, and a good reputation. Participant 5 asserted that salespeople often make the mistake of not asking current customers or connections about whom they know that they introduce. This type of referral is often more effective and a larger acceptance rate than cold calling. Social media provides a great opportunity to manage customer relationships and increase customer loyalty, leaders can use social media monitoring tools to keep track of both positive and negative feedback, and respond quickly. Marketers could also use social

media to develop positive interactions with target audiences which increases repeat purchases and fosters long term buyer seller relationships (Mandal, 2017). Participant 4 agreed that customer relationship marketing is effective and expressed, “The majority of clients that I put under contract this year were generated through social media.”

Theme 4: Marketing and Sales Alignment

In many organizations, the sales and marketing functions are separate and each role’s performance measured differently. Collaboration between sales and marketing is an important element in meeting sales goals. Participant 5 stated “Social media marries sales and marketing better than any other platform”. Marketers need to think as salespeople and salespeople should think as marketers and leaders should measure both roles the same so they have an incentive to communicate. With social media both sales and marketing have a unique opportunity to communicate directly with the customer, it is essential for both to understand each other roles and coordinate the messaging to align with the customer’s need. Aligning sales and marketing teams has been a challenge for most companies because the perception is that marketing’s job is to generate leads, and sales’ job is to turn those leads into clients. In practice, marketing and sales need to work together, aligning their roles and goals to ensure that social media marketing sales growth becomes the responsibility of both functions. The first step in aligning the sales and marketing teams is to make sure the goal comes from on high within the company. According to participant 5, it is important to gain buy in from Executives, otherwise it will be difficult to get sign off. Participant 5 stated, “By getting Executive buy in and finding out the “What” and “Why” of what they are trying to achieve. Educating the

decision maker on why is worthwhile to invest, quantifying the benefit of social media using internal case studies on what a great sales person/marketer that uses social media looks like.” Participant 2 also supported sales and marketing alignment as a strategy for increasing sales through social media and stated, “There needs to be more connection between digital marketers and sales people.” Most companies have these roles as separate functions, but both need to understand each other’s role. The marketer needs to understand the sales person’s goals and the sales person should understand the message that the marketer is communicating. Participant 5 stated, “visibility creates opportunity,” companies need to ensure both marketing and sales efforts are customer focused. Aligning sales and marketing will contribute to more customer focused messaging where both functions can leverage social media to engage effectively with potential consumers to drive sales growth.

Theme 5: Measure Performance

Measuring the performance of social media activities is essential for firms to gauge the success of their social media efforts. Participant 2 stated, “This is where most companies get lost” and suggested that leaders develop key performance indicators (KPI) to assess the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns. Business leaders use KPIs to measure and evaluate factors that are critical to success (Ahmed et al., 2017). Participant 2 measures success by the number of prospects obtained from social media into his sales pipeline and customer information obtained. Having control of customer information rather than the 3rd party platform is important because if LinkedIn or Twitter decides to change their algorithms or access then useful lead data is lost. Once the

customer data is in the company's pipeline, they can manage them through the CRM, customize offers, and close the sale.

Participant 2 and 5 recommended measuring performance by making small changes in the marketing strategy and seeing the effect of the change to gauge the reaction from the change, such as new subscriptions. Companies tend to view likes or comments to measure performance. Participant 1 stated, "Although likes and comments is an indicator that people are engaging with your post it does not always translate to sales." He recommended that firms include a custom link in their social media posts to take potential customers to a landing page as a way create a pipeline of consumers who subscribe to your marketing material, promotions or newsletter to learn more about the customer products or join the online community group. This provides a captive audience that you can market to, build relationship, and become a repeat customer. Participant 5 measures new business from social selling using CRM or social media analytics for e.g. salesforce workflow allows you to log lead sources from social activities, so you can run reports on how many referrals converted to the sales pipeline, to determine how you are leveraging existing connections. Participant 3 asserted that social media is a platform for collecting leads which can drive sales. Marketers can use conversion rate from social media leads to sales as a key performance indicator. Social media KPIs also helps to track specific social media campaign goals using product mentions, custom hashtags, sign ups, and subscriptions. Participant 4 used creative methods to measure performance and stated that "I consolidated images of all written, sold and listed properties for Q2 on one image which, created a visual and served as a way to thank my social media connections for all

their support in achieving this my goals”. Participant 4 continued to state, “This created a powerful visual of not just my efforts but all of my social media followers and their engagement and the impact on my business outcomes.” Participant 5 recommends using social media tools and metrics to measure adoption, there are reports that can show whether salespeople are posting updates and the level of audience engagement. Marketers can also view index scores, new connections, and profile views using sales navigator. Leaders can then compile the data to assess whether the social media campaign is achieving its sales goals.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of this study may contribute to greater understanding of the social media marketing strategies that organizations’ leaders could use to increase sales. Businesses rely on the ability to generate sales for survival, sustainability, and scalability (Jabłoński, 2016). The use of social media platforms contributes to businesses striving to enhance communication with consumers and provides the ability to target audiences based on geographic, demographic, and behavioral data. The literature review on the topic of social media strategies for increasing sales addressed various aspects of the role of social media marketing for businesses. According to Beck, Chapman, and Palmatier (2015), the marketing process is becoming a strategic activity with the intention of building and maintaining long-term buyer seller relationships and as a result, the seller’s role has evolved from order takers to relationship managers. The use of social media offers leaders a relatively low-cost innovative marketing tool to attract, retain, and manage customer relationships leading to increased sales (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis,

2014). As traditional media continues to lose its effectiveness, the findings of this study could serve as a guide to organizational leaders in developing effective strategies using social media as a low cost relationship marketing tool to increase sales.

The information gathered from the participants revealed that although businesses have social media presence, some organizations leaders lack the knowledge to engage effectively using this platform. As participant 4 expressed, the “what” of social media is self-explanatory, it is the “how” that most organizations struggle with. Organizational leaders would benefit from the results of this study by acquiring the knowledge to develop effective social media strategies to increase visibility among target audiences. The findings could also serve as a guide for leaders to gain greater understanding of the social media strategies to increase brand awareness, brand loyalty that could lead to increased sales for long term sustainability. The knowledge gained from this study’s findings could also help leaders to convert more social media interactions into sales and increase return on social media investment.

The findings from this study aligns with the relationship marketing theory because social media could serve as a relationship marketing tool to help business leaders to shift from a transactional perspective to a relational perspective and gain greater understanding of the lifetime value of partnering with customers. With social media, leaders could move their target audience up the relationship marketing ladder by going from (a) prospect, (b) customer, (c) supporter, (d) advocate and, (e) partner leading to opportunities for repeat buyers and increased sales (Lilleker & Jackson, 2014).

Implications for Social Change

The implication for positive social change could be the opportunity for organizations' leaders to acquire new strategies for using social media to increase sales, which could lead to more jobs and thus, improve the local community's economy. Successful companies employ people from the community who earn more, purchase homes so they can reside near the companies where they work, and benefit educationally from the public schools in the local community. Successful companies also contribute to the local economy and make the community a better place to live. By employing locally, members of the local community could benefit from greater disposable income, increased home ownership, and lower home foreclosure rates, which contribute to higher standard of living for the community.

Businesses in the local economy with higher sales could also contribute to higher tax income for local governments, increasing funds for road repairs, building new or maintaining existing schools and other public services to raise the standard of living for the local community. The findings of this study could also lead to better informed consumers, who when using social media, could provide informed feedback to business leaders, which could lead to improved products and services benefiting customers, families, and communities.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the five themes identified from the methodological triangulation of semistructured interviews, analyzing participants' responses, and document review, I recommend that organizations leaders: a) reallocate a portion of marketing budget to

social media, (b) create online brand communities, (c) develop metrics and, (d) outsource social media activities to social media experts as part of a comprehensive social media marketing strategy to increase sales.

Re-allocate Marketing Budget

Firm leaders should reallocate marketing budget from traditional media advertising to social media marketing. Advertising on social media does not always require additional resources, organizations that have annual budgets for marketing can shift a portion of the budget to incorporate social media marketing at a lower cost. This means that leaders allocate a portion of the amounts they used to spend on radio, television, or newspaper advertisement to social media marketing. As leaders recognize the return of investment from social media marketing, the shift from traditional media budgets to social media advertising will continue to grow. According to BIA/Kelsey, a media advisory firm, social media advertising revenue in the US was \$4.7 billion in 2012, and the expectations are for revenue to be nearly double with about \$11 billion by 2017, and the five-year growth rate to reach 18.6%, while print, radio, and television will see a net decrease in total marketing (Alabdulkarim, 2017). Firm leaders that allocate resources to social media marketing will benefit from the increased visibility to a wider audience, brand awareness, and possible increased sales.

Create an Online Brand Community

Creating an online brand community provides existing and potential customers a platform to discuss and recommend company products to their social networks and increases word of mouth referrals. Organizations that create online communities offer

audiences a forum to engage with customers and customers to engage with each other to enhance brand loyalty (Ul Islam & Rahman, 2017). Consumers tend to conduct research online to compare costs, view online product reviews to determine the value or benefits that the products offer before making purchases. Creating an online brand community using social media offers marketers the opportunity to attract, interact, and keep potential consumers attention by providing a forum for active customer engagement, continuous feedback, and brand loyalty. An online brand community helps to define a brand and gives the customer the opportunity to associate with the brand and not just the product. Online brand communities can influence buyer purchase intention for both existing and new customers and positively impacts repeat purchases to drive sales.

Develop Social Media Performance Metrics

Firms should develop social media performance metrics to track the effectiveness of social media campaigns and return on social media investment. Social media return on investment (SROI) is an important metric for assessing the success of social media business activities (Arogyaswamy, 2017). ROI calculation includes two primary metrics: cost incurred, compared to the outcomes such sales or profit (Gascón, Bernal, López, & Rodríguez, 2016). A good marketing return ratio is 5:1, which means that for \$1 spent, should return \$5 in sales, increase traffic etc. Social media metric could also include, bounce rate, which is the percentage of visitors to a particular website who leave the landing page without any interaction. Average Click through Rate (CTR) refers to the percentage of people visiting a web page who access a URL link to a particular advertisement. Google Analytics provides free practical ways for marketers to measure

social media marketing ROI and the success of the marketing campaigns by analyzing the social media users' interaction with the marketing campaigns and traffic to the company's website from social media. Marketing software platforms such as Hootsuite, Salesforce, and Hubspot, provide paid services to help markets measure early social media engagement to final sale. This will allow marketers to determine which social media platforms or campaigns yield the highest return and make adjustments for less successful campaigns.

Employ Social Media Experts

Developing social media strategies and implementation can be a full-time job. Firms that do not have resources internally to develop effective social media strategies should consider outsourcing their social media activities. Outsourcing provides the marketers with opportunity to achieve their social media goals while saving time and money. Developing effective strategies requires a high level of expertise and some companies cannot afford to make investments in house therefore, the firm need to hire experts to help develop effective social media strategies. An outside agency that specializes in social media strategies could help leaders to identify the most effective strategies to implement, monitor, and measure performance on social media so they can focus on core functions. It can also improve the firms messaging and influence because the firms can leverage the expertise and knowledge of specialists whose sole focus is on developing successful social media strategies and return on investment. A good agency can also help organizations to avoid costly mistakes that organizations make through trial and error. Outside agencies work with many companies and have knowledge of what

works and what does not. The best agencies will be able to integrate a firm's social media efforts with their overall marketing strategy for increases sales. Compared to hiring an employee who requires a fixed salary, benefits, and overhead costs, hiring an agency can be much more cost effective.

The recommendations for action will help firms to acquire the required knowledge to develop effective social media marketing strategies for increasing sales. I plan to share the findings of the study by publishing on peer reviewed business and scholarly journals. I also plan to publish on social media sites as In LinkedIn publishing, Google Scholar and Facebook. I will also present the findings at social media conferences and seminars.

Recommendations for Further Research

There were three limitations in this study. First, I employed the qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research includes the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data that do not involve numbers or statistics (Anderson, 2010). A limitation of the qualitative research method is that the findings do not include data, which might affect the reliability or validity of the findings (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014). Second, the potential participants worked in the San Francisco, Bay Area, which could affect the generalizability of the findings across other companies or industries that are not part of the study or companies located in other cities. A final limitation is the participants' personal bias towards social media may influence the participants' response.

This study presented some preliminary findings on the social media marketing strategies to help organizational leaders to develop effective strategies to increase sales. Future research should focus on three main areas: a) quantitative study to quantify the impact of social media advertising on sales, (b) exploring the effects of social media on individual's consumer purchase intentions and, (c) which social media platforms are most effective for increasing sales for specific industries and other geographical locations.

Reflections

My knowledge of social media increased by conducting this study, I remained objective and relied on the participant's responses to guide the results of the study's findings. My data collection included the use of social media, through social media; I connected with social media influencers who greatly contributed to the study, which would not have been possible without this medium. Finding participants who met the eligibility was a challenge; however, social media provided the best source information. Social media made it possible for me to view participant profiles and they viewed mine which help both parties feel at ease because both participants could put a face to the researcher and feel comfortable agreeing to participate. My understanding of social media strategies to increase sales grew because of this study. I am deeply grateful for the participants' willingness to share information that formed the research findings.

Conclusion

Social media is an internet platform which individuals and business leaders can use to create, share, exchange information and receive instant feedback. These platforms offer the opportunity for business leaders and marketers to reach billions of consumers

both domestically and globally with just a few clicks and a lower cost than was previously possible with traditional media. Applying the relationship marketing theory, the purpose of this study was to explore social media marketing those organizational leaders to increase sales. The knowledge gained from this study's findings could help leaders to convert more social media interactions into sales and increase return on social media investment. The implication for social change include organizations' leaders acquiring new strategies for using social media to increase sales, which could lead to more jobs and as a result, improve the local community's economy.

The findings from interviewing five participants who successfully used social media to increase sales revealed five themes: (a) audience knowledge and knowing which platforms that the target audience are using, (b) developing a customer roadmap by providing a clear path for customer to purchase products, (c) managing customer relationships include brand loyalty, (d) aligning the marketing and sales roles to ensure shared goals, and (e) developing key performance indicators to track the effect of social media campaigns for driving sales for firms. With increasing number of consumers connected to social media, businesses leaders should take action to reallocate marketing budget to social media marketing, establish online brand communities, and develop performance metrics in order to leverage to reach their customers to strengthen customer relationships. The findings from this study reinforced that social media provides companies with innovative ways to market their products and services to consumers to increase sales.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview purpose: Data collections on the social media strategies organizational leaders use to increase their organizations' sales.

I will be on time for the interview. When the interviewee arrives, I will introduce myself and thank him/her for taking the time to participate in the interview. I will review the purpose of the interview and explain the following terms:

1. Participation in the interview is voluntary and the interviewee has the right to withdraw at any time.
2. Present the interviewee with the consent form, review the terms and answer any questions before they sign.
3. Provide a copy of the consent for the interview's record.
4. Review the interview procedures and obtain permission to audio record the interview.
5. Review timeline for the interview and explain that I will ask 7 open ended and depending on the length of the response, the interview time should not exceed 30 to 45 minutes including following up questions.
6. Inform the interviewee that the interview transcripts will be emailed to them for review and confirmation of their responses to ensure that their responses were captured accurately
7. Listen attentively, take notes, observe them at work, and request any related

documentation that they are willing to share.

8. Thank the participants for their time and answer any additional questions that they may have about the research study.
9. Provide my contact information, if they have additional questions about the study after the interview.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

<Date>

<Address Block>

Dear Sir/Madam,

As part of my doctoral dissertation research at Walden University, I would like to extend an invitation for you to participate in a research study on the Social Media Strategies that organizational leaders use to increasing sales. I have selected you to participate in my doctoral study because of your professional experience and expertise. Please be assured that your participation is voluntary and confidential. Enclosed is a consent form. Please review and feel free to ask any questions before acting on this invitation to participate.

Your participation depends on satisfying the following criteria: (a) Marketing professional with 3 years or more professional and industry experience, (b) Well versed in Social Media for increasing sales (c) Organization has presence in at least two social media platforms with 5K or more followers d) and willingness to participate in an audio-recorded interview. If you meet one or more of the criterias and available to participate, please contact me via email at [redacted] or [redacted]. I will respond promptly to set up a date, time, and convenient meeting place to conduct a face-to-face interview. Please note that the interview is expected to last between 30-45 minutes and will be audio

recorded with your permission. The interview responses will be transcribed by me and will be kept confidential, your personal information will not be revealed. The information gathered from the interview will be forwarded via email for your review and confirmation of completeness and accuracy.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with any questions. I appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedule to consider my request and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Loretta Ezeife

Appendix C: Interview Questions

I used open-ended semistructured interview as the data instrument for data collection. The interview questions were, as follows:

1. What social media strategies have you used to increase sales?
2. What social media strategies were most effective for increasing sales?
3. How did you assess the effectiveness of your social media strategies for increasing sales?
4. What were the barriers or challenges of leveraging social media strategies to increase sales?
5. How did you address these barriers or challenges?
6. How did you assess the effectiveness of addressing these barriers or challenges?
7. What social media strategies do competitors use?
8. What else would you like to share regarding social media strategies for increasing sales?