2018

Marketing Strategies to Improve Online Sales

Paul Barrie Targett
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Paul Targett

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

Review Committee
Dr. Dina Samora, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. James Glenn, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Carol-Anne Faint, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2018

Abstract

Marketing Strategies to Improve Online Sales

by

Paul Targett

MBA, University of Cumbria (UK), 2013

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2018

Abstract

Marketing executives of traditional retail firms who lack strategies to expand e-commerce business, can experience inhibited growth, higher transaction costs, and a loss of competitive advantage. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore marketing strategies that marketing executives of a traditional retail firm used to improve online sales. Eight purposefully selected marketing executives in the head offices of a large traditional retail business in South Africa who had implemented effective marketing strategies to improve online sales participated in the study. Social exchange theory was the conceptual framework for the study. The data collection process entailed face-to-face semistructured interviews and review of company and industry-specific documentation. Data were coded and analyzed to identify emergent themes: the use of customer relationship management to drive marketing strategies; positive exchange relationships that are primarily measured in economic and benefit-orientated terms; trust that relies on safety, security, and privacy of transactions; and reciprocity in the relationship that is facilitated through electronic word of mouth and social media. The implications for positive social change from increased profitability include increased employment opportunities in the local community, improved working conditions and benefits for employees, and increased charitable contributions locally, thereby improving the quality of life for employees and the community.

Marketing Strategies to Improve Online Sales

by

Paul Targett

MBA, University of Cumbria (UK), 2013

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2018

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my parents, both began this journey with me but never got to see the end. I also dedicate this study to my wife Dr. Shermain Mannah-Targett who provided inspiration, encouragement, motivation, and support, while never once doubting that I would complete this journey, even when at times I was not so sure; I thank you and love you from the bottom of my heart.

To those who think that they may never achieve such high goals in their lives, this is for you. Hopefully, in reading this study, it will inspire you to pursue higher education. Standing on the shoulders of the giants who have come before me, combined with hard work, perseverance, motivation belief and support make all things possible.

Acknowledgments

I thank my wife, Shermain for her wholehearted support and patience during this phase of our journey together. Appropriately, an African proverb says, "it takes a village to raise a child," and this doctoral journey has been one of a thousand steps, taken one day at a time, and I acknowledge the village that guided and supported me through every step. I thank my doctoral study committee comprising of Dr. Dina Samora (Chair), I am thankful for your mentoring and guidance. Dr. James Glenn (Second Committee Member), and Dr. Carol-Anne Faint (URR) who supported and guided me with quality feedback and input, this journey would not have been possible without all of you.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Advances in technology and the internet as pointed out by Fernández-Sabiote and Román (2012) have resulted in firms incorporating both into their operations and marketing efforts and creating multichannel strategies. Blended or hybrid retail combines the functionality of both brick and mortar and e-commerce, and as highlighted by Fernández-Sabiote and Román, is not inhibited by distance and time and subsequently provides enormous convenience to customers. While some firms have been able to benefit from online sales, taking advantage of its full potential has eluded many retail firms in South Africa.

Background of the Problem

South Africa as a middle income, developing country has experienced steady growth in recent years in the retail sector. According to Mavimbela and Dube (2016), benefits to business in South Africa that adopted internet technologies have improved productivity, lowered input costs, eased access to markets, and formed collaborations that benefited them. Mavimbela and Dube further stated that the adoption of the internet by small and medium enterprises characterized them as risk takers but also made these small and medium enterprises innovators that maximized the benefits of changing consumer patterns and new market opportunities. Thus the emergence of new industries is forcing businesses to change their business models, resulting in traditional retail firms transitioning to online retail.

The company in this study was among the top five of the most prominent retail groups in South Africa, listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange for over 60 years.

The company currently has several retail brands ranging from clothing to homeware which targets middle and upper-income groups in over 2,000 stores across South Africa. Similar to other retail groups in the top five, the company's future strategy intends to increase revenue via e-commerce.

The objective of this research was to provide marketing executives of traditional retail firms with marketing strategies that they can use to improve existing online sales. After providing the background to the problem, the focus now shifts to the problem statement.

Problem Statement

Firms that engage in e-commerce gain many benefits, including lower overhead costs, increased consumer accessibility, and potentially enhanced process flows that result in higher efficiencies (Jahanshahi, Zhang, & Brem, 2013). In the United States, the share of online sales in specific categories of retail sales grew in total category value from 5% in 2004 to 23% in 2014; in South Africa however, online retail sales in equivalent categories have never reached more than 3% in the same period (Bronnenberg & Ellickson, 2015). The general business problem was that, when marketing executives of traditional retail firms do not expand their e-commerce business, their firms experience inhibited growth, higher transaction costs, and a loss of their competitive advantage (Agarwal & Wu, 2015). The specific business problem was that some marketing executives of traditional retail firms lack marketing strategies to improve online sales.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore marketing strategies that marketing executives of a traditional retail firm used to improve existing online sales. The target population was marketing executives at the head offices of one large traditional retail business located in South Africa, who had implemented effective marketing strategies to improve online sales. The implication for positive social change was that, if marketing executives implemented strategies to improve existing online sales, their firms could grow and become more profitable. With increased growth and profitability, the firms could offer more employment opportunities to people in the local community and make more charitable contributions to the local community, thereby improving the quality of life for local community members.

Nature of the Study

For this study, I used the qualitative method. According to Yin (2014), qualitative research is exploratory in nature, suited for answering the *how* or *what* of a phenomenon, where there is no predetermined answer. The qualitative method was an appropriate choice for my research question about exploring the marketing strategies that marketing executives in traditional retail firms used to improve existing online sales. Quantitative researchers test a hypothesis, with the goal of identifying cause and effect and examining correlational relationships between variables (Patton, 2015), as well as other potential statistical relationships between variables. I did not choose quantitative research because I was not testing a hypothesis nor seeking to identify statistical relationships among variables. Researchers used the mixed method, combining both qualitative and

quantitative research, to provide a more in-depth, fuller understanding of the subject (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because I had no quantitative component in my study, I did not choose to use the mixed method.

There are several different qualitative research designs, including case study, narrative, phenomenology, and ethnography, among others. A case study design was useful for developing in-depth analysis and description of a bounded phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Njie & Asimiran, 2014). A case study design was an appropriate approach for my study because, by studying a specific case, I was able to explore, identify, and describe successful marketing strategies in use. In a narrative study, the researcher focuses on the life of the individual in the context of a broader social setting that includes interpersonal, cultural, and social relationships (Esin, Fathi, & Squire, 2014). Because I was not studying the life of an individual in the context of a broader social setting, I chose not to use a narrative design. In phenomenological research, the researcher focuses specifically on an individual or group and investigates how they construct and perceive their specific reality from experiencing phenomena (Gupta & Awasthy, 2015). I was not studying how individuals construct and perceive their specific reality. Therefore, I chose not to use phenomenological design. In an ethnographic study, the researcher studies the behavior of members of specific cultures in a field setting (Grossoehme, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because I was not exploring the behavior of a cultural group in a field setting, I did not select an ethnographic design for my study.

Research Question

RQ: What marketing strategies do marketing executives of a traditional retail firm use to improve existing online sales?

Interview Questions

1. What marketing strategies do you use to improve existing online sales?

2. What marketing strategies do you use to build positive exchange relationships with online consumers?

3. What marketing strategies do you use to build customer trust in your online sales activities?

4. What marketing strategies do you use to promote a reciprocal relationship with online customers?

5. What challenges do you encounter in implementing marketing strategies to improve existing online sales?

6. How do you address the challenges of implementing marketing strategies to improve existing online sales?

7. What other information would you like to add or share about the marketing strategies that you use to improve existing online sales, that is not covered in the interview questions?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was social exchange theory (SET), which was first articulated by Homans in 1958. The main premise of SET was that individuals, groups, and firms form, engage in, and maintain relationships with an

implicit or explicit expectation of receiving rewards or benefits (Homans, 1958). Homans

based his work on SET on four central themes: (a) individuals begin and maintain

relationships because of expected outcomes; (b) for the relationship to continue, the

expectation of reciprocity is key; (c) individuals need trust and commitment to build and

maintain exchange relationships; and (d) over time, a positive exchange produces

exchange norms, which increase efficiency and reduce uncertainty. Lambe, Wittman, and

Spekman (2001) pointed out that the act of exchange between parties was fundamental to

the study of marketing. The key to the successful implementation of marketing

relationships was the desire of both parties to build and maintain long-term relationships

with one another, where trust and commitment are the key components (Izogo, Ogba, &

Nwekpa, 2016). Toufaily, Souiden, and Ladhari (2013) noted that online retailers found it

harder to build relationships with consumers as compared to traditional retailers. SET is a

conceptual framework that aligned with the purpose of this study. I planned to explore

the marketing strategies that marketing executives of traditional retail firms used to

improve existing online sales including the relevant concepts of exchange, relationship

building, reciprocity, and trust.

Operational Definitions

Gamification: A tool to increase engagement and loyalty by using commonly

used game mechanics such as points, badges, leaderboards, and levels in a nongame

context (Wang, Gopal, Gunasti, Shankar, & Pancras, 2017).

S-commerce: A form of engagement stemming from e-commerce where the firm

engages the consumer on the social web. Social factors determine this relationship, and

consumers are encouraged and empowered to generate content via social media, using forums, ratings, and recommendations (Yusuf, Che Hussin, & Busalim, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs and paradigms that are inherent in the researcher and often taken for granted by the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Gupta and Awasthy (2015), assumptions influence an individuals perception of how things are and how they work, and they determine the type, scope, and direction of the research. Furthermore, Kudlats, Money, and Hair (2014) contended that reports on the findings of qualitative research included the summarization of the data into themes or the tabulation of the frequency of phrases or words mentioned. Kudlats et al. advised that this interpretation was subjective in nature.

The prevailing assumption was that the thematic generation of the content of the interviews would combine with other data sources used in the study. An assumption in my study was that information gathered from participants was truthful, that they had an in-depth understanding of the marketing activities, and that the information related to and provided answers to the research question. As a critical validity concern, this representativeness influenced the conclusions and interpretations about the theory, setting, and respondents and was an issue that concerns the internal generalisability of the research (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014a).

Limitations

Limitations are issues or conditions that may negatively impact or weaken a study and that are beyond the control of the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Any study, no matter how carefully planned, has limitations; acknowledging these limitations in most instances enables the researcher to address them, control for, and guard against them to the extent possible (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Additionally, Bloomberg and Volpe stated that highlighting limitations situates the study in a specific context allowing readers to decide the research's usefulness in alternative settings. Bloomberg and Volpe emphasized that the reliance on certain techniques to gather data is a limitation; in this regard participants may provide inadequate or misleading responses to interview questions, impacting the reliability and validity of the single case study.

Delimitations

As defined by Bloomberg & Volpe (2012), delimitations represent the boundary of the study and indicate to the reader how the scope of the study was delineated. Setting the boundary, as is recommended by Martínez-Graña, Goy, and Zazo (2013), allowed me to identify the parameters and then plan and manage the research accordingly. The boundary of this research was a traditional retail firm in South Africa. Welch (2014) defined delimitations as what a study does not address. A delimitation of this study was the restriction in both sample size and sample selection. The population comprised a selection of eight marketing executives in the head offices of one large traditional retail business located in South Africa, and thus reflected a limited perception only of the

managers interviewed and not of other managers from the retail firm. Heng-Li and Chien-Liang (2014) discussed this as the interview responses of the interviewees occurring at a particular instance in time, not being generalizable conclusions or being able to predict future behavior or events. Thus, the use of a purposeful selection of eight participants in this single case study limited the scope of potential alternative responses and viewpoints.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The results of this study might assist marketing executives of traditional retail firms to learn marketing strategies to improve online sales. Marketing executives who improve existing online sales might contribute to the effective practice of business by providing their firms with higher customer retention, improved price sensitivity, and potential options for both up- and cross-selling (Jones et al., 2015). Also, marketing executives who improved existing online sales may bring value to their firms by reducing the firms' need to open new brick-and-mortar branches to capture market share, potentially creating a resource-based competitive advantage (Cui & Pan, 2015).

Implications for Social Change

The implication for positive social change is that, if marketing executives successfully implemented marketing strategies to improve online sales, their firms could grow and become more profitable. With increased growth and profitability, the firms could offer more employment opportunities to people in the local community, provide better working conditions and benefits for employees, and make more charitable contributions to local communities, thereby improving the quality of life for employees

and the local community. Another potential implication for positive social change from this study is that, when marketing executives adopted marketing strategies to improve online sales, those executives might help their firms reduce the need to build brick-and-mortar retail stores. By building fewer brick-and-mortar retail stores, businesses might have a positive long-term environmental impact that enhances the quality of life for residents by reducing traffic congestion and other environmental stresses in urban areas (Zhou & Wang, 2014).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

As it related to consumers and their markets, the concept of relationships in mainstream management theory extended beyond the usual business activity of typical selling and buying transactions. As such, mainstream management theory focused on factors that contributed to the business relationship over time and included trust, commitment, and loyalty leading to repeat business (Jeong & Oh, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore marketing strategies that marketing executives of traditional retail firms used to improve existing online sales.

Overview

In line with the precepts of the Walden University Research handbook, the literature review addressed the research purpose statement by exploring themes and ideas as well as thinking about the strategies aligned to SET that management use to achieve their objectives. Although there are other theories, SET provided insight into relationships and social dynamics that evolved out of an exchange interaction. First, I discuss in detail the search criteria, databases, and age analysis of peer-reviewed articles,

along with the work by original authors of relevant books. Conducted second is a

discussion on SET and the work of prominent authors with different constructs separated

and reviewed in detail. The separate treatment of constructs was an attempt to overcome

some of the limitations delineated above. Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, and Hall (2017)

highlighted a lack of theoretical rigor and empirical testing in the use of constructs, and

Jeong and Oh (2017) pointed out that constructs often overlap and are hence

indistinguishable from one another. Colquitt, Baer, Long, and Halvorsen-Ganepola

(2014), in their review of the contemporary SET literature, emphasized this problem

when they discussed content validity surrounding commonly used constructs. Third, the

discussion covers competing and supporting theories while highlighting some criticisms

and including workable solutions to SET. Next, I discuss the evolution of marketing from

transaction to relationships and further develop the relationship marketing (RM)

constructs as discussed in the theoretical framework of SET. Lastly, I discuss the effects

that culture has on SET and marketing activities, with potential theoretical modifications.

I employed a labor-intensive retrieval and search strategy adopted successfully by

Kim and Peterson (2017) in their meta-analysis. First, I used the terms of *trust, loyalty,*

reciprocity, word of mouth, *e-commerce*, *retail* and *online* and combinations of these

terms searched through Google Scholar. Second, I used key phrases such as *social*

exchange theory, exchange theory, transaction marketing, service marketing, and

relationship marketing. I searched for studies in the following databases, ABI/INFORM

Global, Business Source Complete, Emerald, JSTOR, ProQuest Central, Sage,

ScienceDirect, and Springer Link, accessed primarily through the Walden Library. I used

citation chaining and the scanning of retrieved review and reference papers, and I identified additional relevant studies.

Successfully used by Kim and Peterson (2017), the procedure involved scanning for studies in all relevant databases to include in the literature review. Google Scholar alerts also informed me of the availability of relevant new studies. The literature search yielded a total of 90 sources relating to the literature review (see Table 1). The age analysis of resources used as a percentage of resource in the 5 years of the anticipated completion date, or chief academic officer's approval (CAO approval by 2018), or 2014 and later, was 87%, and 92% were from peer-reviewed journals.

Table 1

Sources and Age Analysis of Data for the Literature Review

Type	Number	< 5 years	> 5 years
Books (Reference)	4	0	4
Journals	83	75	8
Conference/Papers	3	3	0

Social Exchange Theory

The action of exchange is crucial in marketing as a field of study. The focus is on the noncontractual obligations of exchange, built up over time (Lambe et al., 2001). As pointed out by Lee, Capella, Taylor, Luo, and Gabler (2014) a relationship inherently involved an exchange, which was a fundamental aspect of marketing.

Social exchange theory as a conceptual framework. SET's origins in sociology, psychology, and economic anthropology explain relational exchange. SET is focused on

the voluntary exchange process between parties that is implicit in nature involving material or symbolic resources (Sharpley, 2014). Both Blau (1964/2008) and Homans (1958) stated that the basis of SET was for parties to enter and maintain exchange relationships based on expectation and belief that this was beneficial and rewarding to both sides, thereby promoting their self-interest. SET includes a social element that is not typical of purely economic exchange.

From the description of SET highlighted above, and discussed by Seeber, Merz, de Vreede, Maier, and Weber (2017), there are three foundational concepts applicable to SET. The first foundation looks at the type of resources exchanged. These resources can vary from money, goods, or symbolic resources like social status and so on. They could also include participant capabilities, with this theory being germane to fields such as organizational theory, human resource theory, and leadership theory. Also, the structure of the exchanges could include negotiated exchange in which the participants enter into a joint decision process, where repayment and an expected outcome is probable; reciprocal exchange based on reciprocity or a hopeful outcome; or productive exchanges that were a once-off social collaboration. In online retail, the type of exchange is of a reciprocal nature as this precludes a contractual obligation, but it is an exchange based on a future expectation.

Homans' general propositions (1958) began by highlighting the reinforcement of human behavior, grounded in the propositions of behavioral psychology. These propositions included the success proposition that underlined the link between reward and action: The more rewards a particular action recieved, the more likely the action

would repeat itself. Another was the stimulus proposition, which is the influence of environmental conditions that act as some stimuli that positively reinforce current and future behavior. Lastly was deprivation-satiation, which is decreasing perceived value of marginal returns: The more often in the "recent past" a reward was received, the less likely the performance of the action would be. There were two additional supporting propositions. Homans's (1958) value proposition used economic theory to reconceptualize rewards to a social, behavioral setting. Redmond (2015) considered rewards and value as the result of an action, or as the degree of reward, being anything that we put an amount on, where what was valuable to one was not always the same for another person. This value according to Redmond followed the fundamental economic principle of profit = reward − cost, where the individual tried to obtain a compensation higher than the cost, or, expressed economically, sought to maximize gains by getting the most returns for any resource. In considering alternative value propositions according to Homans (1974), what was "given up" by an individual was equivalent to the value of its cost; it could also be a reward not given or a form of punishment.

While money exchanged as a cost for goods or services or as a reward would be the simplest example of an exchange relationship, relationships could also involve giving up freedom or independence. The measurement of profit in exchange relationships according to Redmond (2015) was a fair or equitable trade, where the ratio of costs and rewards to both parties was equivalent. The evaluation of equity and fairness to individuals, according to Redmond, has a psychological base, and thus is subject to a bias that results in differences in perception between parties. Emerson (1976) pointed out

value and reward in Homans' (1958) usage were equal to reinforcement. This reinforcement behavior would result in reciprocity between exchanging parties. The second supporting proposition was the rationality proposition that highlighted that the choice between alternative actions was perception based at the moment in time and needed only be rational to the individual but was transitive in nature. Rewards and value also fluctuated over time (Redmond, 2015).

Blau (1964/2008) defined exchange behavior of individuals as voluntary actions motivated by expected returns. As the actions of each party are voluntary, each party trusts that they would receive the expected returns from the other. Blau's form of social exchange was the direct interaction between individuals, distinguished as either negotiated or reciprocal exchange. In negotiated exchange, the actions of the parties relied on the working toward an outcome based on a predetermined joint agreement that was binding and contractually enforceable. However, reciprocal exchange developed over time as an asynchronous contribution by actors to the exchange. The asynchronous nature of the exchange meant that one of the parties initiated the exchange without knowing how the other side would reciprocate in the future.

The central theme of SET was the interdependence of exchange relationships between parties, where, as pointed out by Lambe et al. (2001), the exchange relationships could include both the problem area and unit of study in research. The importance of distinguishing the unit of analysis in SET was that it highlighted explicitly the participants in the relationship, either individuals or corporate entities, who engaged and benefitted from value creation in an exchange relationship (Tanskanen, 2015). The

tourism industry used this approach in research where it was not always the residents per se who benefitted from the advantages of tourism, but the community (Sharpley, 2014). From a cost-benefit analysis, the individual who does not benefit was excluded from the value creation component while experiencing the cost component.

This section discussed the concepts of SET and contrasted the approach by a few prominent authors such as Blau (1964/2008), Emerson (1962), Homans (1958) and Thibaut and Kelley (1959) encompassing the four tenets of SET put forward by Lambe et al. (2001).

Individuals begin and maintained relationships. Expected outcomes maintain relationships. Blau (1964/2008) stated relationships do not always have a value that could be measured purely in monetary terms, and some of the apparent benefits such as emotional satisfaction, social approval, respect, and humanitarian or altruistic drives could be valued more. Their self-interest drives both parties, and they enter and remain in the exchange relationship if the benefits exceed the cost, where Blau stated the cost has both an intrinsic and extrinsic value.

As this related to marketing strategies, the overall goal of using SET is to explain, and then predict in a relationship, the other party's short and long-term commitment to the relationship (Jeong & Oh, 2017). Homans (1958) focused specifically on social behavior as exchange and viewed social exchange as either tangible in the form of money or goods, or intangible, such as with friendship. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) maintained that the exchange was rewarding and focused more on the outcome of both new and existing relationships. More specifically there must be an outcome for the relationship to

continue. Repeated exchanges conducted over time anticipate future costs and benefits of prior exchanges have led to positive outcomes by creating an expectation for positive future outcomes (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959).

Expectation of reciprocity is essential. For the relationship to continue, the expectation of reciprocity is essential. This expectation involves a comparison between alternative outcomes, because of the opportunity cost associated with being in an exchange relationship and forgoing not being in another. Both Blau (1964/2008) and Homans (1958) maintained that in judging outcomes, regardless of economic or social, a relationship was enhanced so long as both parties received a satisfactory outcome. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) stated that, in comparing rewards distinguished between the comparison level that was a deserved benefit in each relationship and the comparison level of alternative relationships, both parties jointly determine the continuity of a relationship. Exchange relationships being noncontractual in nature, often result in different expectations between parties. In consideration of minimized costs or maximized gains when evaluating future anticipated outcomes, both past and future exchanges are considered, and negotiation and reciprocity are crucial elements.

Requirements of trust and commitment. Individuals needed trust and commitment to build and maintain exchange relationships: both Blau (1964/2008) and Homans (1958) stated that trust was significant to the parties' commitment to the exchange. Mutual commitment, according to Thibaut and Kelley (1959) resulted in the effort of both parties to contribute to desirable outcomes, relating to both the comparison

level and its alternative comparison level, that increased the desire to continue or commit to the relationship.

Norm of expected behavior. Finally, exchanges over time resulted in norms of expected behavior. Norms explicitly or tacitly arose because of the interactions between parties over time and thereby served to create mutually agreed upon outcomes, which eliminated the need for contractual obligations which increased efficiency and reduced uncertainty. According to Blau (1964/2008) and Homans (1958), SET relied extensively on these norms while Thibaut and Kelley (1959) stated that these norms, controlled behavior without either party having to resort to the use of power. Emerson (1962) believed the exchange process created a power dynamic according to which, power inequalities existed because of an imbalance between parties because of the dependence in an exchange relationship, and norms mediated its use.

Marinescu (2016) contended that the influence of Newtonian physics (where everything is explained through models and causal mechanisms to create universal laws) resulted in the incorrect representation of the physical world in neoclassical economic theory. The misrepresentation of the real world resulted in the unfounded perception of rational individuals, who operated in a perfectly competitive market, where all information was synchronously known and gave rise to the notion of individuals as *Homo Economicus*. *Homo Economicus*, who were, according to Levine, Chan, and Satterfield (2015) misleadingly described as rational, utility-maximizing individuals, operating in their self-interest. Marinescu described these individuals as rational beings who always sought to optimize, whatever the situation. Another characteristic was that they were fully

informed and had all the information available to them, giving them perfect knowledge in all circumstances (Marinescu, 2016).

In developing marketing strategies that build relationships with individuals and groups, meant that marketing executives should be aware that consumers were not always rational, what consumers value was not always known, and their preferences changed over time and were not homogenous. These equitable outcomes according to Redmond (2015), had an economic as well as a subjective or psychological cost. Supported by the need to shift from a transaction to RM approach Jeong and Oh (2017) stated that the movement in marketing theory from a utilitarian economic perspective to explain consumer transactions had shifted to include a social and psychological approach to understand and predict exchange relationships. This evolution in marketing theory also highlighted the difference between the work of Homans (1958) and Blau (1964/2008). Homans (1958) began with groups at a macro level to reduce their reinforcement behavior to constructs. However, Blau from a micro level highlighted that constructs were an emergent phenomenon from social exchanges. Paraskevaidis and Andriotis (2017) highlighted this difference in approach in their claim that processes at a societal and individual level were fundamentally different.

Trust. Trust had been described as the confidence or belief in an exchange partner's integrity and reliability (Chang, Tsai, Chen, Huang, & Tseng, 2015) as well as a partner's credibility and benevolence (Lambe et al., 2001). Chang et al. suggested it was a function of the belief in an exchange party rather than in their ability to perform a specific action that underpinned trust. In the initial phase of an exchange relationship, it

was subjectively a belief-based view, as opposed to an action based one. Such thinking

was in line with Blau (1964/2008), who stated that trust in a social exchange relationship

relied on the belief that the other party would fulfill their obligation, although not being

enforceable due to the non-contractual and thus non-binding nature of the exchange. Blau

also described the key to exchange as being reciprocal in nature with extrinsic benefits.

Lioukas and Reuer (2015), distinguished between trust that already existed between

exchange partners and trust that was an outcome of various exchanges, the latter being

the one emphasized in SET.

Brand equity, in its positive aspect, was often described as the intangible worth of

a company, those beliefs form part of the firm's relational capital. According to Baños,

Wandosell, and Parra (2016), the relational capital was the relationship the firm has with

its stakeholders. If firms positively managed these perceptions, consumers with a positive

belief in those aspects of a firm were more likely to begin to place their trust in the firm.

Pomponi, Fratocchi, and Rossi Tafuri (2015) supported this view in their work on trust

development and stated it evolved out of the willingness to accept vulnerability and risk

based on the expectations of the behavior of the other.

According to Blau (1964/2008), trust in an exchange relationship was a slow

process that gradually evolved, beginning with small transactions that required little or no

trust. Blau maintained that as trust increased, based on reciprocal discharging of

concomitant obligations, trust was validated and justified, and led to a gradual expansion

of the exchange relationship. Consumers with intent to purchase online would begin with

small transactions, build up trust, and the value of the exchange over time. The more trust

a consumer has in a particular retailer, the more willing he was to increase the value of future transactions. Vanneste, Puranam, and Kretschmer (2014) noted in their meta-analysis of 39 studies of trust in exchange relationships that a standard premise of trust was that it increased over time. Their findings indicated that the correlation was small, varying across studies, and suggested the consideration of other moderating variables from a retailer's perspective.

Trust was fundamental to the exchange process in online spaces and used to overcome transactional uncertainty (Hsu, Yin, & Huang, 2017). Trust as a central element played a vital role for retailers, even more so, according to Pomponi et al. (2015), at the initial stages of a relationship. At this juncture, Vanneste et al. (2014) pointed out that the trustworthiness of the exchange party was not known and was therefore of a subjective nature. This initial view of the trustworthiness of a retailer by a consumer could be, according to Vanneste et al. pessimistic, unbiased or optimistic, and was typically influenced by the individual's propensity to trust and was context-specific dependent on the value of the exchange and varying payoffs. Some consumers were more willing to trust, depending on the context and degree of payoff and influenced by their belief in the retailer when it came to entering an exchange relationship.

This belief, in the customer's view, depended on the success of the exchange with the retailer and could change from pessimistic to optimistic. In this context as Blau (1964/2008) stated, the exchange relationship would gradually expand in a self-adjusting way.

Online retail occurred under conditions of uncertainty and increased perceived

risk by the consumer because of the time-based and physical distance between the

consumer and retailer, which necessitated the need for trust in exchange relationships

(Mou & Cohen, 2014). Lack of trust would reduce the potential uptake of online usage,

while trust influenced the consumer's initial decision to purchase and their choice of the

seller (Wu, Vassileva, Noorian, & Zhao, 2015). Trust became an issue when consumers

had limited prior knowledge and experience of the retailer (Mou & Cohen, 2014), hence

in developing online marketing strategies it was essential for retailers to be aware and

understand the antecedents of trust, so their marketing strategies addressed these areas.

Trust, as predicted by SET was an emergent outcome that resulted from repeated

exchanges (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015). Kim and Peterson (2017) and Mou and Cohen

(2014) used different data sets in their meta-analysis of trust in business-to-consumer e-

commerce and e-service providers respectively and attempted to identify critical

antecedents of trust. Both sets of authors distinguished between trust in the interface,

such as website security, platform reliability, and the ability to exchange information.

Oliveira, Alhinho, Rita, and Dhillon (2017) highlighted these as a source of trust. The e-

service providers relational capital, which Oliveira et al. highlighted as one of the

dimensions of trust.

Antecedents of trust in online retail. The classification of the antecedents of trust

resulted in four categories, vendor and institution-based factors, technology-based

factors, consumer characteristics, and knowledge-based characteristics. First, vendor and

institution-based factors, such as vendor size comprising market share and number of

employees, reputation, benevolence, was the ability of the retailer to put the interests of the consumer first, and ability to supply customized products. With institutional factors focused on perceptions of security that ensured safe online transactions and maintained privacy and structural assurances such as legal recourse, consumer protection, and product guarantees (Kim & Peterson, 2017; Mou & Cohen, 2014). In developing marketing strategies that successfully address these perceived risk factors, Lioukas and Reuer (2015), viewed these institutionalized factors as corresponding to affect-based trust, and dependent on initial perceptions and expectations, with the intended result to reduce the degree to which the consumer needs to trust. In research on anonymous online auction markets where transactions consisted of a one-time exchange, Diekmann, Jann, Przepiorka, and Wehrli (2013), showed reputation was a crucial component to be actively managed and viewed as an investment for future transactions. In cases where buyers selected retailers based on reputation, Diekmann et al. showed that there was a price premium that benefited firms with better reputations.

Second, technology-based factors such as the value-added benefits and ease of use coupled with perceived system quality was a characteristic of the information system, included perceived information quality that is content and service-based (Kim & Peterson, 2017; Mou & Cohen, 2014). Marketing strategies needed to respond to the consumers desire for perceived improved performance or effectiveness such as saving time and comparison of goods that was easy and flexible to use. A high-quality website and service that provided information that was accurate and up to date was also crucial in the initial trust-building phase.

Third, an essential factor and driver in consumer characteristics was how individuals built relationships based on their initial propensity to trust. Finally, knowledge-based characteristics arose out of the repeated interaction between consumer and retailer, with such familiarity reducing uncertainty and improving trust (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015; Mo & Cohen, 2014; Oliveira et al., 2017).

Kim and Peterson (2017) listed some of the investigated consequences of online trust as satisfaction, repeat purchase intention, and loyalty. These consequences were the result of a positive outcome from the exchange relationship. Findings by Oliveira et al. (2017) showed that the sources of trust such as benevolence and integrity significantly influenced trust. Marketing strategies needed to develop, nurture and focus on consumer trust by primarily addressing the sources as opposed to the dimensions of trust to create an initial transaction and long-term relationship. Chakiso (2015) examined the impact of RM on customer loyalty in the banking industry and found trust had a considerable influence on customer loyalty which in turn influenced commitment.

Reciprocity. A norm specifies a person's expected behavior in a situation, and according to Thibaut and Kelley (1959), they could be either tacitly or explicitly agreed on. As pointed out by Schumann, von Wangenheim, and Groene (2014), exchanges based on reciprocal rather than a negotiated exchange implied more people were likely to cooperate. As Homans (1974) stated, there was a stimulus proposition that was contingent on an expected outcome, either a reward or punishment. Homans (1974) highlighted further that it was an expectation created by two parties, and the parties were, however, able to seek higher rewards. According to Thibaut and Kelley SET relied on

norms as they provide mutually agreed upon ways of managing behavior without resorting to the use of power. Blau (1964/2008) described reciprocity as a process that seeks to remove imbalances, where individuals try to balance cost and benefit.

Chakiso (2015) emphasized reciprocity as a pattern of behavior that looked to balance obligations between exchange partners. It could potentially lead to the creation of a feeling of indebtedness or obligation; this, therefore, could build long-term relationships. Schumann et al. (2014) found the norm of reciprocity was very strong and that a dominant social norm worked in most online settings, thus highlighting the indebtedness as argued by Chakiso, as well as the motivational desire to repay a favor. This motivation could be of an altruistic nature, such as a desire to conform socially, promote an individual's self-image as well as to strengthen another people's view of themselves (Schumann et al., 2014). Research into retailer reputation formation and evolution in online markets by Diekmann et al. (2013) showed that firms tried to overcome negative trust issues or bad experiences created by dishonest retailers, that potentially drove consumers out of the online market. Furthermore established discussion forums, or platforms also allowed for the exchange of ratings of the retail experience.

As shown by Schumann et al. (2014), the more people could observe a reciprocal behavior in an online setting, the more likely they were to reciprocate. As empirically shown by Diekmann et al. (2013), reciprocity motivated the desire to punish poor performance or to reward perceived cooperation. Building on this, firms wishing to enter the online market for the first time have no online reputation were therefore at a disadvantage from a trust perspective. To overcome this uncertainty and risk that results

from not having an online reputation these firms must compete by reducing their prices, resulting in lower profits. In this instance, positive reciprocity was a key competitive advantage that was in the firm's best interest to promote, which was facilitated by creating online feedback platforms and actively managed as part of its online marketing strategy.

A significant marketing trend was targeted marketing that relied on collecting user data such as purchasing patterns, behaviors, and demographics. This targeted marketing approach has a positive effect on a firm's revenue and is a valuable marketing tool. Schumann et al. (2014), however, pointed out that most consumers rejected behavioral marketing based on use and online tracking, which many consumers considered illegal. The targeted marketing approach adopted by global firms provided a free service and covered website costs. Schumann et al. illustrated that unlike the relevance approach; the reciprocal exchange approach was the best strategy to overcome resistance to targeted marketing and to promote negotiated exchange.

Rewarding the consumer in the relevance approach for providing personal data, with content and advertising specific to their interests, was more in line with the negotiated exchange approach. However, there was a weak link in disclosing privileged information in this regard (Schumann et al., 2014). Founded on the appeal to reciprocity approach, websites highlighted a free service and benefitted by the user providing personal information and thereby actioned the perceived sense of indebtedness and obligation (Schumann et al., 2014). This reward, highlighted by Pai and Tsai (2016) could be any benefit, which resulted in a positive effect on the norm of reciprocity

illustrated by the consumer information shared. Work by Belous (2014) on understanding what motivated people to provide information online stressed the translation of an individual's economic capital into social capital. The motivational factors were extrinsic, such as social status or recognition and, intrinsic, such as satisfaction and self-esteem. Pai and Tsai pointed out this behavior reinforced an individual's self-esteem and self-concept. In understanding, this subjective evaluation of social exchange Thibaut and Kelley (1959), maintained it related to specific benefits versus costs. These benefits, as well as the fairness of free service, sat in opposition to the relevance strategy.

Word of mouth. If an aspect of the norm of reciprocity was the rewarding of good behavior, then word of mouth (WOM) was the tool to express this reward. As pointed out by Pai and Tsai (2016) reciprocity was most likely a fundamental mechanism that influenced information sharing behavior. Without being able to try products before purchasing them, consumers questioned the quality, the product and the product description provided by online retailers. Consumers were now relying on online word-of-mouth (eWOM) to overcome this problem, at the same time, an increasing number of consumers were relying more and more on online reviews to make an informed purchase decision (Zhao, Stylianou, & Zheng, 2017). Research had shown a clear majority of consumers had chosen a brand that is not of their original choice because of consumer reviews, and the research also indicated an even more significant majority trusted online reviews (Floyd, Freling, Alhoqail, Cho, & Freling, 2014). Zhao et al. supported the view of the positive impact of online reviews on the development of trust.

Traditional WOM was about customers spreading pro-brand messages in their direct social network (Groeger & Buttle, 2014), thereby positively influenced their acquaintance's decision-making process (Chu & Sung, 2015). The retail marketing strategies thus focused on motivating such behavior (Groeger & Buttle, 2014), as people were likely to trust information given by people they know (Chu & Sung, 2015).

A typical marketing strategy that promoted consumers WOM activities was the use of coupons and other incentives that fostered a purchase intention. Tercia and Teichert (2016), discussed the use of coupons as a marketing strategy. The researchers showed that the use of coupons had different impacts due to cultural differences in attitude towards them, and how senders and receivers received different incentives. The proportion of coupons to be used to incentivize and maximize a positive response was not easy to determine. From a behavioral perspective, if individuals received a more significant proportion of the incentive, they were more motivated, reward then became an issue of fairness for both sender and receiver (Fu, Ju, & Hsu, 2015). Additionally, the degree to which individuals were deal prone varies widely between individuals and cultures. Hence marketing managers were not always successful in achieving their objectives (Tercia & Teichert, 2016).

As a result of the internet, traditional WOM as a form of media has evolved to eWOM with numerous advantages. Measuring audience size and exposure was the traditional measure of marketing strategy effectiveness. Exposure to the campaign was the average number of times, during an allocated time frame (Groeger & Buttle, 2014). In this context, the internet could be accessed by anyone, anywhere, diffused by numerous

applications such as blogs, bulletin boards, review, and social network sites. Additionally, as it was global, there was a diverse range of views and opinions based on cultural and demographic differences, it was perceived to be more unbiased and balanced (Floyd et al., 2014). The benefit of creating a feedback platform from a retailer's perspective was that the retailer could decide on what information was available to consumers and suppliers, by whom and in what format was it available. Additionally, from an internal control perspective, retailers could aggregate the required information to develop more focused marketing strategies.

Given the growing number of consumers using online reviews in their decision-making process, retailers were adopting strategies to take advantage of eWOM as a new marketing tool. To achieve this, retailers facilitated consumers on their website, as well as relevant third-party sources, to post personal product reviews or evaluations (Floyd et al., 2014). Groeger and Buttle (2014) in their case study on the influence of WOM as a form of communication in both an offline and online setting, found the reach of the message understated, and its frequency overstated when measuring the marketing effectiveness. Floyd et al. in their meta-analysis of product reviews and impact on retail sales also pointed out retailers were integrating online and offline reviews into their marketing strategies with the belief this would influence purchasing decisions and ultimately increase profits, their research highlighted that this approach had mixed results. Recent studies by Eisingerich, Chun, Liu, Jia, and Bell (2015), into the reasons why brands more readily recommended face-to-face approach rather than via Facebook, was a result of the perceived social risk of the latter. One-to-one oral communication in an individual's

social network carried a limited risk if the recommendation turned out wrong. A written communication that was one-to-many carried greater perceived risk if the message was incorrect.

Two factors contributed significantly to the success of product reviews as an effective marketing strategy. First, was the valence of the message, being whether it was a positive or negative review and second, the volume of the message that increases awareness and perceptions of quality (Floyd et al., 2014). Retailers could develop strategies that increased reach by using multiple social media platforms. The development of brand ambassadors (Groeger & Buttle, 2014) and blog critics (Floyd et al., 2014) strengthened the valence of the message. The research by Eisingerich et al. (2015), showed the importance of overcoming the perceived social risk of eWOM communication. Retailers could manage the consumer's natural desire for self-enhancement while identifying with their self-concept by allowing consumers to show their expertise and manage their reputation. A recent development in encouraging consumers to contribute to eWOM was the incentivizing through the use of gamification (Wang et al., 2017). Using the essential elements of gamification such as badges, points and leveling up, signaled the contributor's depth and breadth of accumulated perceived knowledge, and directly influenced the effectiveness of eWOM contributions, it also allowed retailers to keep track of consumers shopping history (Wang et al., 2017). The research by Wang et al. (2017) highlighted the fact that consumers who showed their broad knowledge and experience with badges were more influential and trusted more than other reviewers.

Commitment, balance, and loyalty. According to Blau (1964/2008), the investment in a relationship required a commitment to the relationship, which provided an inducement for others in the relationship to do the same. This commitment to a relationship represented an opportunity cost because forgoing alternative opportunities, led to a higher commitment. The combination of commitment and opportunity cost as pointed out further by Blau produced attachments, the higher the attachment, the more unlikely the individual was to explore alternative opportunities. By contrast, Homans (1974) in discussing repeated exchanges in a relationship described balance as an emergent phenomenon. The balance in a situation could describe a positive outcome implying a stable and reinforcing relationship, while unbalance described an adverse outcome in an exchange relationship. As it related to an exchange relationship, Homans (1974) pointed out that classical economics did concentrate on permanent and semi-permanent relationships as it took into consideration many traders, consumers in a competitive market as a given, however, as pointed out, these markets were the product of relationships themselves.

Izogo (2017) researched a highly competitive and mature telecommunications market where customer retention was the critical strategic driver and where quality and commitment influenced customer loyalty. Two forms of commitment were identified: affective and continuance commitment. Affective commitment was an emotional attachment that was value, identification, and association based. Continuance commitment was a cognitive assessment of costs and benefits in comparing alternatives and arises out of limited choices, switching costs and termination of the relationship.

In their study to understand factors that influenced attitudes and intentions in a consumer to consumer bartering online setting, Hsu, Yin, and Huang (2017) suggested commitment and trust were separate concepts that are closely interlinked. Trust was necessary for enhancing the commitment to a relationship, and as trust increased, commitment and attitude to the relationship also increased. In the SET framework, trust as an essential construct shaped commitment, which in an online context was the willingness to develop and maintain a relationship that was beneficial to both parties. As pointed out by Hsu et al., the higher the commitment, the more positive the attitude towards the website and the higher the knowledge-sharing. This attitudinal commitment was fundamental in defining true loyalty which led to a consumer consistently repurchasing either a product or service in the future and was a precursor for customer loyalty, while brand loyalty stemmed from the satisfaction obtained from a brand (Izogo, 2017; Miquel-Romero, Caplliure-Giner, & Adame-Sànchez, 2014).

Power and dependence. In discussing power-dependence relations, Emerson (1962) pointed out the sheer scope and depth of the literature on power. In discussing power-dependence relations, Emerson began by defining reciprocal power in a relationship that led to a balance and used this for the input for group formations, which in turn led to the development of group norms and the formation of authority. Homans (1974) discussed power and authority and used this as foundational work for the discussion on leadership and distributive justice. Thibault and Kelley (1959), investigated power in a dyadic relationship using different scenarios in a pay-off or interaction matrix

showing power was the ability to influence another person's cost-benefit outcome thereby influencing or controlling them.

While not entirely relevant to a typical homogenous relationship that developed between retailer and consumer in the retail industry, there were two conditions where the individual experienced power and dependence, and Blau (1964/2008) discussed both. In this regard Blau made a very nuanced statement:

> Imbalances of obligations incurred in social transactions produced differences in power. Unreciprocated, recurrent benefits obligated the recipient to comply with the request of the supplier and thus gave the latter power over the former. (p. 140)

Power and dependence in a monopoly. Monopolies exist where there was a single supplier for a good or service. Blau (1964/2008), expanded the usual definition of power, as the ability to impose a will over the resistance of somebody else. Blau highlighted this condition as the second requirement of power where the aim was to deny access to alternative suppliers, thus creating a dependence rather than the consumer having independence. Monopolies were a source of asymmetrical power, where the supplier could exert power by imposing un-conditional demands over the individual (Blau, 1964/2008). Even when operating outside of monopolies, consumers could find themselves exposed to conditions where demand for a product was inelastic, (price elasticity of demand).

An example was the use of a particular drug where the individual was unable to use alternatives, at its extreme as the price increased the consumer was still dependent on the same quantity. Blau pointed out that as the number of alternative sources increased

the asymmetrical creation of power diminishes and; as Homans (1958) stated, the

dynamic moved to a situation of balance. By extension, reduced asymmetrical power was

where a market was at equilibrium, which was also a characteristic of a competitive

market. The current literature focused First, on the effects of asymmetrical power, where

the buyer exerted power over the supplier in managing their delivery times and so on, and

Second, on dependence in a business-to-business context. For firms to develop their

competitive advantage, it was imperative that they developed successful relationships

with their suppliers, primarily if they also supplied rival firms (Pulles, Veldman, Schiele,

& Sierksma, 2014). Using coercive power to induce behavior by either punishing or

withholding rewards, was a different strategy to achieve an end as opposed to building

trust. According to Lambe et al. (2001) trust was fundamental to building a relationship

where the partners worked towards an end that benefited both parties. This mutual

dependence in a joint relationship benefits both firms in the long-run (Ahamed &

Skallerud, 2015), while in situations where the supplier was dependent on the buyer, this

could lead to inequality and exploitation. Research by Yeniyurt, Henke, and Yalcinkaya

(2014) also showed that an inter-dependent relationship had an essential role in co-

innovation and a buyer's product development. Pulles et al. showed further firms that had

relationships based on trust as opposed to power were in a better position to leverage

innovative strategies together.

Supporting and Contrasting Theories

The use of SET explained and provided insight into social relations and their

associated dynamics. The application of SET and some of its fundamental constructs

such as reciprocity, cost-benefit, trust, loyalty, and commitment described the nature of

social behavior in many settings and disciplines, such as anthropology, social

psychology, and management (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Other theorists or work by

prominent authors attempted to explain the same social interactions using alternative

perspectives and paradigms. As a result of the volume of social theories, choice theories,

utility theories, and lately network theories, the focus was on consumers and how they

made choices and built relationships in an online economic setting.

Behavioral economics. Behavioral economics (BE) studied the complexities of

choice that was neither necessarily rational, utility maximizing or even consistent over

time (Ainslie, 2016). To put this into perspective, traditional economics as a normative

theory discussed the behavior of individuals as rational and utility maximizing. However,

it did not describe human behavior, and the actual choices made under conditions of risk

and uncertainty.

Choices under conditions of uncertainty often involved subjective estimates.

Tversky (1972) in developing a theory of choice under conditions of uncertainty

concluded the rejection of alternatives and choices not meeting a criterion. By adding the

aspect of risk into the decision-making process Kahneman and Tversky (1979) developed

prospect theory. This theory described individuals as being risk-averse and risks seeking

under various conditions, in making choices people reacted differently to losses as

compared to gains.

Identified in rational choice theory were many of the assumptions made in SET,

in the rational choice versions of SET, actors make choices framed in a cost-benefit

consideration (Coulson, MacLaren, McKenzie, & O'Gorman, 2014), which implied a multi-beneficial and contingent on reward process involving economic or straightforward exchanges. Homans (1958) pointed out in his rationality proposition that value was perception based, changed over time, and needed only be rational to the individual concerned. Since SET assumed actors to behave in ways that facilitated desired outcomes, BE in showing individuals were not always rational in their choices, contributed to SET. As stated by Tanskanen (2015) BE did not assume actors' exchanges involved any mental arithmetic, although making such calculations was permissible. In this regard, trust was an emergent process that began under conditions of uncertainty and risk, where the trustor believed a trustee would perform an action that was beneficial. A retailer, as trustee, in establishing this trust would need to be both reliable and predictable.

Behavioral economics studied the choices that did not follow the expected utility theory (Ainslie, 2016). Utility theory posited that individuals were economically rational and that (in economic terms) they would always try to maximize their utility or needs satisfaction during transactions (Wu et al., 2015). Witt (2016) pointed out that the more one attempted to strengthen the theoretical foundation, the more the theory moved away from its real-world content. The central tenet of social exchange theory as put forward by Blau (1964/2008) was that if an individual performed a favor or did something that was of perceived value for somebody, the person receiving would reciprocate with something equally as valuable. Unlike in economic exchange theory which focused on external benefits and involved transactions, SET focused on internal rewards and required trust

(Chang, Tsai, Chen, Huang, & Tseng, 2015). In direct opposite to a cost-benefit or

accounting analysis, equity theory could describe the measure of internal rewards, which

stated that individuals compared inputs and outcomes to their expectation or to some

internalized reference, to determine if their exchange was equitable (Lioukas & Reuer,

2015). From a utilitarian perspective, it symbolized what was more equitable than less

equitable to the individual (Witt, 2016). Equity theory as used in SET was a means of

measuring whether an exchange was equitable or inequitable (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015),

which influenced future behavior. According to Homans (1974) success proposition,

reciprocating an action was more likely the higher the perceived value of a reward.

Combined with the value proposition (Homans, 1974) stated the value was either positive

(reward, or more than), or negative (punishment, or less than) measured in any unit

greater than zero.

BE supported the use of SET in this study as it showed while neither rational nor

utility maximizing, trust developed under conditions of risk and uncertainty, and that the

norm of reciprocity as a just behavior was valid.

Theory of reasoned action and theory of planned behavior. The theory of

reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB) are contrasting

behavioral theories to SET. SET as a social theory (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016) studied

and predicted behavior in a dyadic relationship and assumed in this relationship that the

individual would weigh the costs and benefits. Initially developed and later re-examined

by Ajzen and Fishbein (2000) TPB was an extension of TRA (Ajzen, 1991) which

focused mainly on an individual's attitude and behavior. Additional inclusions from other

behavioral theories have resulted in the use of the integrated behavioral model (Glanz, Rimer, & Viswanath, 2008).

As a behavioral theory, TRA developed to understand the relationship between attitude and behavior better. Intention was the mediating factor or best predictor of behavior, coupled with a social normative element; intention described by Amaro and Duarte (2015) as an individual's perception of social pressures; regarding the actual conduct (Glanz, Rimer, & Viswanath, 2008). As a transmission mechanism depicted by Montaño & Kasprzyk (2008) to describe behavior, the TRA began with a recognition that external variables such as demographics, personality traits, attitude toward the recipient of the action as well as numerous other individual variables, influenced the behavioral beliefs and evaluations that affected attitude. Hsu et al. (2017) described this attitude as an indication of the amount of like or dislike of an object. These external variables also influenced an individual's subjective norms that stemmed from an individual's normative beliefs and motivation (Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008). This view led to the point that the intent, described by Ajzen (1991) as the degree of effort an individual would exert, to perform a behavior, that was voluntary in-nature (Hsu et al., 2017) was determined by the attitude to carry out the behavior. As well as with how the individual felt about performing the behavior. Additionally, (Glanz et al., 2008) TPB included perceived control, influenced by a person's control beliefs and perceived power (willpower) that also influenced the intent to perform the behavior. Ajzen and Fishbein (2000) highlighted this as circumstances that could prevent or help the performance of the behavior.

Research conducted by Hsu et al. (2017) on internet bartering systems provided insight into the creation of better platforms that increased adoption by consumers. Furthermore, research conducted by Hanafizadeh, Keating, and Khedmatgozar (2014) on internet banking adoption and, Amaro and Duarte (2015) on online travel shopping, identified both TRA and TPB as valuable tools to target consumers and thus influence specific, deliberate behavior. The research findings by Amaro & Duarte; Hsu et al. indicated that positively influencing consumer attitudes directly influenced their behavior, as well as, offered an effective predictor of intent. In consumer decision-making and behavior, Yang, Pang, Liu, Yen, and Michael Tarn (2015) in e-commerce research that explored perceived risk and trust in online payments, identified the factors that influenced intent and attitude as being critical

With the growth of the internet and its subsequent impact on e-commerce, various researchers (Amaro & Duarte, 2015; Yang et al., 2015) had modified the TPB to include the technology acceptance model (TAM) to determine consumers intent and predict behavior successfully. Paul, Modi, and Patel (2016), in recent research, extended the TPB to incorporate environmental concerns that predict green product purchasing intention. The research by Paul et al. successfully showed additional context-specific constructs could be used to aid in understanding the formation of purchasing intention in different settings. Understanding varying consumer preferences, practices, and attitudes and their decision-making processes allowed marketers to specifically tailor-make strategies to influence purchasing behavior (Paul et al., 2016).

Self-determination theory. As a competing theory to a dyadic relationship, self-determination theory (SDT) was, as stated by Ping and Ahmad (2015) a conceptual model, with many predictive capabilities, focusing on the degree to which an individual's self-motivation and self-determination solely influenced their behavior. Motivation, as discussed by White (2015), was a high-level construct that strongly influenced belief, and as they satisfy high-level psychological needs were broad in scope, able to explain wide ranges of behavior, were stable over the long-term and not situation specific. SDT focused on the choices made by individuals without any interference or external influence (Ozturk, Bilgihan, Nusair, & Okumus, 2016). As a motivation theory, it comprised intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation (Ping & Ahmad, 2015). SDT described behavioral regulation as a movement along a continuum of various facets of motivation. The two extremes of motivation were the intrinsic motivation that occurred as a result of the enjoyment of participating in the activity itself or doing something for its sake. Intrinsic motivation resulted from external or instrumental factors outside of the activity (Howard, Gagné, Morin, & Van den Broeck, 2016), or doing something where the consequence of either reward or punishment was separate from the activity (Ozturk et al., 2016). Alternatively, rewards, in the form of money or praise (Mekler, Brühlmann, Tuch, & Opwis, 2017) related to intrinsic motivation in the elements of gamification.

Howard et al. (2016) differed from White (2015) in their research and pointed out the difficulties in determining individual motivational profiles in various domains, such as work, sport and so on. This difference was as a result of sample size. Using cluster analysis and reliance on assumptions that assigned individuals to categories that were not

congruent to real-life experiences (Howard et al., 2016). In research to determine loyalty

in the mobile hotel booking industry, Ozturk et al. (2016) stated convenience, comprising

elements of time, place, use and acquisition in a good or service, from an SDT

perspective was influential in promoting the belief it supported an individual to complete

a task. Further, the level of convenience contributed to loyalty and described the

individual's intent to revisit or repurchase from the online retailer.

Feng, Fu, and Qin (2016) used their understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic

motivation factors, to determine consumers attitudes toward mobile advertising.

Understanding extrinsic motivation factors such as timeliness, localization, and

personalization were critical to retailers as the uptake in the use of mobile communication

provided spatial and temporal opportunities to the consumer. As pointed out by Feng et

al. research into purchasing patterns highlighted many consumers do not have specific

brand preferences and providing time-sensitive advertising, that is locational specific and

personalized in content, could attract customers. Additionally, motivational factors had

resulted in the phenomenon of the consumer, retailer co-creation. Advances in mobile

technology have resulted in consumers becoming increasingly more active in co-creating

and enhancing their own experience, this joint creation allowed for a tailor-made

experience that was context specific (Im & Qu, 2017).

The idea of the customer as a resource for creating value (Im & Qu, 2017), could

also extend to the aspects of eWOM and consumer reviews. WOM was vital for the

retailer as pointed out by Park and Nicolau (2015), and Sweeney, Webb, Mazzarol, and

Souter (2014). WOM is highly credible given the perception that the communicator does

not harbor vested interests, has an informed opinion, and is able to influence product

perceptions. Wang, Yeh, Chen, and Tsydypov (2016) added consumers overwhelmed

with the multitude of product choice used eWOM to make purchase decisions. Research

on traditional WOM based on SDT, by Shen, Huang, and Li (2016) highlighted

autonomy, competence, and relatedness as three motivational factors that led to the

generation of WOM. Sweeney et al. in research on eWOM highlighted the increasing use

of online social media, where communication shifted from the retailer and consumer to

consumer to consumer, with the retailer acting as a facilitator. SDT in this regard posited

competency that showed proficiency; connected to one's peers highlighted as relatedness;

and autonomy as a sense of freedom are critical motivational factors (Sweeney et al.,

2014; Wang et al., 2016). Used extensively eWOM, described by Park and Nicolau was a

type of consumer review in travel decision-making to reduce uncertainty and perceived

risk. Park and Nicolau in this regard analyzed the perceived usefulness, as an extrinsic

motivator and, enjoyment as an intrinsic motivator to measure a consumer's evaluation of

online reviews. Successfully identified as an intrinsic motivator, convenience leads to

loyalty, or the intent to revisit or repurchase from an online retailer, contrasting with SET

that required external factors such as trust, desire to reduce perceived risk and reciprocity

to build loyalty over time. Explained from a SET perspective, both eWOM and consumer

reviews used the norm of reciprocity, while SDT described both just as validly using

intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Combined successfully in research by Aryee,

Walumbwa, Mondejar, and Chu (2015), SDT and SET as aspects of motivation and

human nature determined the influence of overall justice on job performance. Overall

justice in this context meant individuals experienced a perception, based on the overall fairness that included procedural, distributive and interactional in dealing with the firm. Used as the intrinsic motivator was need satisfaction and used as the SET construct was trust in the organization, both influenced by overall justice, that led to job performance.

While exchange was a crucial feature in marketing, the voluntary social relationship created between parties was the main premise of SET (Blau, 1964/2008; Homans, 1958). The key social elements essential to the success of SET were trust, reciprocity, loyalty, and commitment. However, uncertainty and increased perceived risk (Mou & Cohen, 2014) characterized online retail, and this could influence the success of online retail marketing strategies (Toufaily, Souiden, & Ladhari, 2013). Behavioral economics supported SET in its premise that trust could develop under conditions of risk and uncertainty (Chang, Tsai, Chen, Huang, & Tseng, 2015) and that the norm of reciprocity was a just behavior (Lioukas & Reuer, 2015).

In contrast, the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and reasoned action (TRA) focused on an individual's attitude which influenced their behavior (Hsu et al., 2017). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a competing theory focused on the degree to which an individual's self-motivation and self-determination solely influenced their behavior (Ping & Ahmad, 2015). Both theories ignored the social element of exchange relationships. Given the many supporting and contrasting theories available to answer the research question, SET offered a holistic conceptual framework which included social relationships as well as acknowledging the influence of individual and external elements.

Social Exchange Theory Relevance to Marketing, Future Trends, and Gaps in the

Literature

   Relationship marketing. Marketing has transformed from a single-shot, discrete-

transaction to relationship-based, and as pointed out by Ahamed and Skallerud (2015)

RM was based on SET, where the expectation of entering and maintaining a relationship

was rewards-based. A scholarly analysis of the extant marketing literature highlighted

that marketing theory had changed on two fronts, with, according to Gummerus, von

Koskull, and Kowalkowski (2017) RM representing a paradigm shift. First, as a set of

marketing principles, and Second, because of a change in the neoclassical view of the

firm. Marketing, which has its origin in classical economics, has evolved from a

commodity-based approach to the functional approach. The functional approach focused

on transaction efficiencies culminating in the marketing mix of 4Ps of the marketing

management school of the early 1980s (Brunswick & Zinser 2016). The principles of the

marketing mix resulted in the drive for market dominance through mass marketing,

(Chakiso, 2015), mass-manufacturing and distribution, standardized goods (Gummesson,

2017), and customer acquisition was a measure of its success (Chakiso, 2015).

   The early 80s led to a shift in the 4Ps marketing mix to an interactive or social

exchange thought. Simultaneously there was a shift from a neoclassical resource view of

the firm; where tangible goods that included land, labor, and capital; to one where

resources also started becoming intangible in nature, such as skills and knowledge

(Brunswick & Zinser, 2016). Leading to RM, that had become central to current

marketing theory (Gummerus et al., 2017), also developed the sub-discipline of service

marketing, a view that shifted from goods-based to service-based (Brunswick & Zinser, 2016).

At its core, Gummesson (2017) suggested RM was the networks created because of interactions in relationships, Gummerus et al. (2017) added that this, because of a networked economy, was central to value creation. Chakiso (2015), summarized numerous definitions to encapsulate that RM was a planned action, that focused on building and maintaining relationships with existing customers. This focus was because of the cost incurred in attracting new customers, as well as the belief that long-term relationships were more valuable in generating revenue (Chakiso, 2015; Kühn & Mostert, 2016) further, this was a primary focus, and did not eliminate the desire to attract new customers. Jones et al. (2015) and Kühn and Mostert discussed RM as marketing activities that established, developed and maintained exchange relationships, and satisfactorily provided the firm a sustainable competitive advantage, characterized by higher retention, and more significant selling opportunities.

Gummesson (2017) in discussing the definition of RM highlighted that it usually described properties of relationships, such as long-term continuous relationships. Further, enhanced, maintained and terminated as well as being enjoyable, ethical, professional and personal, or at its extreme the locking up and owning of customers. The last, gave rise to the perception by many customers as being merely a tool to manipulate and control customers (Gummesson, 2017), or as (Brunswick & Zinser, 2016) stated, customers where like resources to be captured and firms manipulated their marketing mix to achieve this end.

Relationship quality. Gummerus et al. (2017) pointed out the disjointed nature of RM research into such areas as relationship dynamics, communication and the role of relationships in marketing theory. According to Payne and Frow (2017), there were three broad approaches or schools of thought to RM; the Anglo-Austrian approach focused on multiple stakeholders and quality management, the Nordic approach focused on interacting network theory and the North American approach that focused on dyadic relationships. Numerous researchers additionally argued that RM should focus on the needs of the consumer, while others argued for a holistic approach (Payne & Frow, 2017). Relationship quality influenced the strength of an exchange relationship and depended on an assessment of the constructs that comprised of satisfaction, trust, and commitment (Crosno & Brown, 2015; Kühn & Mostert, 2016). In online retailing research Verma, Sharma, and Sheth (2016) categorized antecedents as being customer, seller or dyadic focused, with the mediating factors being commitment, trust, relationship quality, and satisfaction having the consequences of WOM, loyalty and the expectation of continuity. Kühn & Mostert found that customer intention was a good indicator of relationship quality manifest as customer gratitude, (Huang, 2015) stated this represented the core of reciprocity. Kühn & Mostert pointed out that customers were not likely to experience relationship quality if they had no intention of reciprocating the efforts of the retailer. Central to the research questions in this study and SET were the constructs of trust, reciprocity, loyalty, and commitment, in a dyadic relationship.

Trust. Considered in RM literature, trust was a customer-focused mediator and one of the most studied constructs in RM literature (Verma et al., 2016). Defined as a

construct, it was the belief in specific attributes and actions of the exchange partner (Crosno & Brown, 2015); or reliability and integrity (Verma et al., 2016); reducing risk and uncertainty (Lee, Kim, & Pan, 2014; Miquel-Romero et al., 2014). Often measured by retailers as it distinguished a transaction from a relationship (Kühn & Mostert, 2016). Trust, explained in research by Verma et al. was the most basic construct in relationship continuity in online retail, and replaced the person-person experience that is experienced in outlet retailing. In private label brand research, Beneke (2013), Beneke, Brito, and Garvey (2015) and Miquel-Romero et al. cited trust as a precursor to relationship commitment and loyalty.

Conversely, consumers also trust that retailers would not damage their positive image by engaging in activities that will harm their image (Ahmed & Mustafa, 2017; Ahmed & Soomro, 2016). Retailers could enhance trust by meeting customer expectations (Miquel-Romero et al., 2014) and efficient communication. This communication increased understanding between parties, direct personalized marketing (mail) also gave a clear indication of the retailer motives and led to a feeling of customer gratitude (Huang, 2015). Lee, Capella et al. (2014) advocated the use of a loyalty program that allowed the retailer to display trust to the customer and to develop mutual trust over time. The close relationship between Trust and WOM (Verma et al., 2016) made it vital for retailers to facilitate through social media platforms the spreading of customer satisfaction and experience messages, both of which helped to instill trust in potential customers (Miquel-Romero et al., 2014).

Reciprocity. Huang (2015) in discussing reciprocity in retailing stated that at its core was the emotional feeling of gratitude, that according to Kühn and Mostert (2016) arose as a result of acknowledging the efforts of the firm, resulting in a renewed effort to enhance the relationship connection. This investment by the firm in RM resulted according to Hasan, Lings, Neale, and Mortimer (2014) in future economic exchanges and more positive relationships. Chakiso (2015) highlighted that gratitude as a self-regulating behavior arose because of a feeling of obligation based on a desire to reciprocate.

Research by Dewani, Sinha, and Mathur (2016) found that gratitude in long-term customer relationships arose because of the retailers structural and social investments that promoted customer loyalty. Undertaken by the retailer, social investments aimed to build personal ties and included such activities as individual interactions, treatment, and information. Structural investments were value-added, customized benefits to selected customers and were not readily available anywhere else. Obligations because of a firm's financial investments however reduced customer loyalty, measured in monetary terms any reward was a financial investment. Dewani et al. pointed out this distinction because of the perception of giving; if the giving was a form of benevolence, there was a cost incurred by the giver which generated gratitude. On the other hand, given as a sense of financial cost that lacked benevolence or an ulterior motive was less desirable and generated an obligation.

Chakiso (2015) added that it was crucial from a retailer's perspective to allow customers to reciprocate their gratitude as this converts short-term emotion into a long-

term relationship. An effective strategy of tapping into this emotion was the use of social platforms and WOM. Hasan et al. (2014) in their research into what makes investments into RM successful, advocated for the use by the retailer of loyalty programs. As discussed by Dewani et al. (2016) social investment efforts are categorized into three activities that retail firms could develop. First, communication-based that highlighted a personal and close relationship. Second, preferential treatment fulfilled an individual's desire for recognition, which according to Huang (2015) also had the most significant influence on customer gratitude. Finally, value-free investments that created a lasting impression. Structural investments were those activities where individuals were invited to participate as co-creators of value (Dewani et al., 2016). Such as new product and service development (So, King, Sparks, & Wang, 2016), and receiving customized offers that increased the perception of a higher cost to the retailer (Dewani et al., 2016). In essence, Hasan et al. pointed out, any activity that a retailer promoted such as policies, discounts, unique offers, gifts or personalized communication that went beyond a product or service represented an extra effort that positively added to the consumer's cost-benefit analysis.

Commitment and loyalty. Commitment was considered a high order construct in RM literature and as a measure of relationship quality. Described as the willingness to maintain a relationship that was valued (Crosno & Brown, 2015) and was a precursor to loyalty (Bilgihan & Bujisic, 2015) and the highest stage of relationship formation (Kühn & Mostert, 2016). Trust and intention resulted in affective commitment while calculative commitment arose because of a lack of alternatives and more significantly, switching costs over time became an emotional attachment (Bilgihan & Bujisic, 2015) both related

positively to customer loyalty. Kühn and Mostert importantly pointed out that

commitment was often contingent on the customer and was an inherent characteristic that

often-influenced relationship intention and not necessarily the RM strategy, meaning that

not all customers would respond the same. Trust reinforced Commitment and once trust

broke it removed the commitment to the relationship (Izogo, 2017). Customer

engagement, which related positively to loyalty, influenced the evaluation of the

relationship (So et al., 2016). Retailers could focus on gathering information about

customer relationship intentions which would allow them to focus their investment

resources (Kühn & Mostert, 2016) and customize social and structural strategies such as,

according to So et al. updated product information or addressing other intrinsic needs.

Izogo (2017) recommended that retailers should focus on customer value and deliver

quality service. In an online setting, service quality would translate into delivering the

correct product, safely and securely, in a reasonable time and cost, and would have an

efficient returns-and-claim policy.

      Social media marketing and WOM. As it related to the customer, RM with the

advent of social media platforms had given rise to active participation and engagement

with the consumer considered as the co-creator of value (Quach & Thaichon, 2017).

Retailers could either use the opportunities presented by social media to build

relationships with all stakeholders or merely as a communication tool to push information

to the customer (Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017). Social media platforms increased

the effectiveness and volume of WOM over traditional communication tools (Alalwan,

Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017) and a platform for consumers to share feelings and

relevant knowledge (Quach & Thaichon, 2017). This social media platform also facilitated marketing managers relating to their customers (Verma et al., 2015). Research has discussed the value of facilitating WOM as a form of engagement and long-term relationship enhancement.

Future trends. I believe the ubiquitous nature of technology will change the trend of marketing activities and future direction of research, in support of this view Jackson and Ahuja (2016) provided an insightful paper on the evolution of the marketing mix, to include RM as it evolved to the digital age. Technology has fast outpaced the limits of its application, and this was true for its use in marketing and RM. Jackson and Ahuja highlighted that firms were having to rethink their business environment and develop innovative ideas for marketing in the online medium, using digital tools like blogs, a company related online platform and virtual communities. They stated further that current research had shown that today's consumers were far more knowledgeable, spent more time on entertainment and shopping on the internet. Developing ways that consumers could participate in innovative ways in product development would promote a higher level of customer engagement. Future trends would thus include applications of social media and customer relationship management (CRM) which was a natural advancement in data analytics because of computer processing ability. As pointed out by Alalwan et al. (2017) there was increasing interest in eWOM and CRM using social media. With the rise of social media marketing, future research that linked directly with a trend was the role of regulatory bodies and governance, with firms still wishing to create value (Felix et al., 2017).

Gaps in the literature. There are several gaps in the literature, relating to the generalized methodological approach that relied extensively on the use of survey data in RM research. The use of survey data with a prerequisite for numerical sample size where, as cited by Hasan et al. (2014) structural equation modeling had a typical minimum acceptable size of 250 participants. Thus, surveying consumers/customers created a customer-centric focus in RM. Al-Alak (2014) used survey data in determining the impact of marketing activities on relationship quality in the banking industry. Al-Alak pointed out that numerous customers refused to participate. Hence, the results were not generalizable since avoider information remained uncaptured and not all customers visited banks. In concluding the research, Al-Alak argued for the adoption of multiple data collection methods. Gummesson (2017) discussed developments of RM theory and believed that marketing theory was underdeveloped because of empirical surveys, where the questions posed were degrees of opposites and had no theoretical sensitivity. Demo, Watanabe, Chauvet, and Rozzett (2017) showed in their research across three countries that the applicability of survey scales varied in a cultural context. The results of the analysis of the qualitative data, according to Gummesson, used factor and regression analysis and was presented as a pseudo-scientific fact that included a descriptive statistical presentation. Gummesson pointed out that surveys did not relate well to marketing as an applied science because of marketing's varying degrees of complexity with numerous stakeholders and suggested the use of case studies to provide a more in-depth understanding.

Another gap in the literature involved what a lack of clarity. If, as highlighted by researcher's, consumers are co-creators of value in RM, what was the value? In the cited literature it was stated, or a given that this was what customers did in a dyadic relationship, from a goods-orientated traditional marketing perspective, the value was calculated as an accounting concept. In RM co-creation of value was in stark contrast or as stated by Brodie (2017) an abstract concept and not observable. Brodie highlighted this problem as a lack of practical application and too much theorizing, where there was no attention given to practicing managers' knowledge in making the description of value more concrete. Second, what set successful RM apart from failure? There was no research used in this literature review that answered this question. Dewani, Sinha, and Mathur (2016) highlighted that retailers were investing financial and structural resources into RM activities to increase their customer base, enhance their competitive advantage, create long-term relationships and personal ties. Dewani et al. pointed out that there was no research currently, as to what sets a successful RM strategy apart, while others fail. This failure I believed was in part due to the complexity of measuring RM investment costs and as pointed out by Dewani et al. the calculation of the total RM investment cost, either before or after the purchase, was a summation of economic and non-economic costs.

Another identified gap in the literature was the management of crisis situations (Grönroos, 2017) or adverse incidents (Gummerus et al., 2017) or social media (Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017) in the context of RM research. Grönroos discussed RM as maintaining and enhancing the relationship with customers using promise theory.

According to Grönroos, the fulfilling of promises was essential to maintaining this relationship. However there was no research on how promises were maintained or kept during a crisis, late deliveries, inferior products, unacceptable behavior, or as stated by Payne and Frow (2017) because of negative advertising, or inappropriate use of RM, and so on. According to Grönroos, RM was a promise-making function, in marketing, where keeping promises was a given, as Gummerus et al. highlighted, RM research focused on maintenance as opposed to the initiation of relationships and had no clear understanding of customers initial expectations.

      Summary. There has been a paradigm shift in marketing theory that moved away from the single discreet economic exchange to RM which was part of SET (Gummerus, von Koskull, & Kowalkowski, 2017). The change has encompassed 2 fronts, namely marketing principles and the neoclassical resource view of the firm. Marketing principles have evolved from a commodity-based approach to a functional approach and finally to an interactive or social exchange thought (Brunswick & Zinser, 2016). Similarly, the neoclassical resource view of the firm also experienced change from tangible resources to include those intangibles in nature(Brunswick & Zinser, 2016). Thereby culminating in RMs centrality in current marketing theory which focused on the significance of the relationship networks economy to value creation (Gummerus et al., 2017). Hence, RM activities that successfully established and maintained relationships provided firms with a sustainable competitive advantage over other selling opportunities (Kühn & Mostert, 2016). In contrast, Gummesson (2017) also highlighted the poor research into the

negative aspects of RM which could result in customer manipulation or owning of customers, among others.

An exchange relationship was influenced by relationship quality which comprised of satisfaction, trust, reciprocity, commitment and loyalty (Crosno & Brown, 2015; Kühn & Mostert, 2016). These constructs were central to the research questions in this study. RM had evolved in the digital age Jackson and Ahuja (2016). Consumer engagement through social media platforms had also resulted in considering consumers as the co-creator of value while also facilitating long-term relationship enhancement (Quach & Thaichon, 2017). Hence, future trends would thus include applications of social media and CRM. There were several gaps in the literature, some related to the use of the survey based generalized methodological approach in RM research, others to the applicability of survey scales varying in a cultural context, while Brodie (2017) highlighted the lack of practical application and overemphasis on theorizing, among others.

Culture, Its Influence on Social Exchange Theory and Relationship Marketing, and Improvements

Kim and Peterson (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of trust relationships in e-commerce and pointed out research into the antecedents and consequences of online trust did not always result in consistent findings, and this potentialy was because of moderating variables and the inherent relationships that existed between them. The discussed potential moderators involved sample type, which involved the constant use of variables, cultural dimensions, and gender. Sample culture used in research, as pointed out by Kim and Peterson influenced research depending on the culture being

individualistic or a collective one. According to Kim and Peterson, collective societies were not as trusting as compared to individualistic societies where e-commerce was more established, advanced and looked upon positively.

SET and RM both relied on the norm of reciprocity as a fundamental component of reciprocal exchange, and as pointed out by numerous researchers the aim was to create a sense of obligation through gratitude (Hasan et al., 2014; Huang, 2017; Lee, 2014). Paraskevaidis and Andriotis (2017) conducted research relating to tourism and altruism in host volunteering where altruism was considered a non-reciprocal type of relationship between non-kin individuals with collective benefits. Research into the tourism industry typically suggested that when costs exceeded benefits that host communities would withdraw, in practice this had not proven to be the case (Sharpley, 2014). SET in this instance was insufficient in understanding community perceptions under conditions where individuals suffered higher losses than benefits and continued to support the activity, at a community level behavior was different from that at an individual level. In some cultural contexts as discussed by Coulson, MacLaren, McKenzie, and O'Gorman (2014) SET was unable to explain exchanges. The research focused on SET and tourism, centered around a tribal society called the Pashtunwali people in Afghanistan having a 5000-year-old complex society having a code of conduct based on honor, revenge, and hospitality. In the cultural context as pointed out by Coulson et al. hospitality as social behavior was an exchange process based on material and non-material goods and not based solely on a cost-benefit consideration but a form of repayment of kind deeds, not necessarily aimed at the original recipient.

Two developments to SET had enhanced its use in different settings. The affect theory of social exchange (Lawler, 2001) focused on the role of emotions and the effect it had on social exchange relationships. In this context, communities and group relations changed because of emotional and affective processes in a social exchange context. The theory stated that the more connected to a social exchange setting an individual felt (degree of jointness) the more difficult it was to separate an individual's effect and individuals assumed more shared responsibility. As added by Ping and Ahmad (2015) the outcome of the exchange relationship that referred to rewards and punishments also had an emotional effect. Cultural Settings, either an individualistic or collective, influenced the degree of jointness. Lioukas and Reuer (2015) in isolating trust outcomes from the exchange relationship highlighted that these emotional attachments had an intrinsic benefit that could form part of the exchange process. Where this was appropriate was in an online retail setting using social media platforms, where retailers could develop strategies that strengthen the degree of jointness. As pointed out by Lawler and Yoon (2014) the pursuit of goals by individuals in the network affected the ties in a group setting, the more positive individuals felt, the more positive and a more significant attachment they are likely to have towards the group.

The use of Max Weber's typology of rationality has strengthened the use of SET to understand entrepreneurship and resident attitudes toward tourism. Weber's theory of formal and substantive rationality (WFSR) posited that human rationality seeks to find a balance between formal and substantive motivations. Formal was economic motivators, while substantive were all the non-economic motivators that existed in an exchange

relationship (Boley, McGehee, Perdue, & Long, 2014). Boley et al. in their research into resident's attitude towards tourism used SET to explain the dyadic economic relationship and WFSR to explain other factors affecting the relationship. Where WFSR was also useful for future research in that it explained the differences in the rationalization process across cultures. Boley et al. in discussing WFSR in understanding culture differences pointed out that Weber found that rationality in all cultures included a rational action and non-market action, that included a spectrum of beliefs, values, and morals, the combination of both led to the maximization of economic gain regardless of emotional factors. The discussion and conclusions in the research by Boley et al. highlighted strategies that could develop tourism participation. The findings also pointed to strategies, apart from economic ones, that retail marketing executives might focus on and include comprehensive social media platforms that empower like-minded individuals to share ideas, concerns, and messages that increased their self-esteem and pride.

Transition

Section 1, included the business problem, relevant background context to the problem, and the subsequent justification for a qualitative, single case study, research design. The purpose of the case study was to explore the strategies that the marketing executive of a traditional retail firm used to improve existing online sales. I included a description of participant selection and location and used semistructured and open-ended interview questions. Discussed were the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations pertinent to this study, as well as the potential positive implications for business practice and society this research might have.

In the literature review, I included peer-reviewed academic articles and material by seminal authors for a comprehensive review of the conceptual framework. Access to the primary databases was through the Walden Library, with more than 87% of the academic literature sourced being under 5 years old. To overcome criticism of a lack of theoretical rigor, and the overlapping of constructs, the constructs were discussed separately in the conceptual framework. I then highlighted the same conceptual framework and its use in current marketing thought and practice. The sheer scope of the conceptual framework necessitated a selective discussion of contrasting and complementing theories, using the consumer as the focal point. I included a discussion of future trends, as well as highlighting some potential improvements or enhancements in recent research using the conceptual framework.

In Section 2, I provided a detailed explanation of the role of the researcher, the selection criteria of participants and research method and design. Of critical importance was the impact that ethical research had and the protection it afforded participants. Finally, section 2 provided details on data collection, organization, and analysis all of which potentially enhanced reliability and demonstrated research validity. Section 3, included a presentation of the findings and applications for professional use of this study. Section 3 also included a discussion on the implications for social change, recommendations for actions and future study, that this research had. Finally, Section 3 concluded with reflections of the researcher's experience in the DBA program, and potential personal biases or preconceived ideas that might have affected the researcher and, or the participants.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore marketing strategies that marketing executives of a traditional retail firm used to improve existing online sales. The target population was marketing executives at the head offices of one large traditional retail business located in South Africa, who had implemented effective marketing strategies to improve online sales. The implication for positive social change is that, if marketing executives implemented strategies to improve existing online sales, their firms could grow and become more profitable. With increased growth and profitability, the firms could offer more employment opportunities to people in the local community and make more charitable contributions to the local community, thereby improving the quality of life for local community members.

Role of the Researcher

As researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and observer (see Patton 2015) to achieve the aim of this qualitative research. Additionally, I shaped the direction and focus of the study through the way I framed the study and developed the sampling strategies (see Patton, 2015). I had no direct relationship with any of the participants, and the topic and research area were not related to my work or personal experience. As an expatriate working in Saudi Arabia with limited access to the local business environment, the firm I identified in South Africa met my requirements for size (representative of the online market), convenience (a central head office), and accessibility (travel from Saudi Arabia). As a researcher, having

considered the study framework, the aims, and the information generated, I adopted a predominantly pragmatic approach. The overarching view was that qualitative research situated the observer in the real world, and with the aid of interpretation, it could make the real world visible to the audience (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The paradigm, or lens, through which I viewed this research, was the one highlighted by Lincoln et al. (2011) as being participatory (plus postmodern). A characteristic of this paradigm is the belief that the nature of knowledge is in the eye of the knower; it is not a function of some fixed reality. This knowledge is socially experienced, specific and local, and the individual who held it gave it meaning. Gupta and Awasthy (2015) described this epistemological approach as interpretive, whereby the construction of knowledge and meaning are an ongoing process of interaction and experience.

Further, I agreed with the viewpoint that this knowledge can be known only through an individual's values, beliefs, and attitudes and that individuals construct their reality (Gupta & Awasthy, 2015). This paradigm found support in the qualitative research approach, and even more so in the case study method. The experience and interaction of the researcher with the object of the research intentionally build the knowledge in this approach (Lincoln et al., 2011).

By the statement of *The Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), which provided for the ethical standards and practices involving research with human subjects, respect for the individual was paramount. The Belmont Report required that I obtain the informed consent of all participants, which included, among other things, that they understood that

they had the right to withdraw, that their participation was voluntary, and that their confidentiality was secure. All secured information including their signed consent, the audios, transcripts, and all correspondence will be available to the respondents at any time for a period not exceeding 5 years.

Acknowledging and reflecting on the biases that emerge from their paradigms means that people make this world visible in different ways. As Lincoln et al. (2011) suggested, research is the site of a multitude of interpretive practices. Avoiding or reducing biases that could occur in the data collection and analysis phase of case study research is just one perspective of the broader set of values that encompass ethical research (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) and Patton (2015) in discussing bias proposed the following steps, which I implemented to mitigate the influence of bias. I used rigorous, explicit procedures, thus establishing an audit trail that verified the rigor of fieldwork and the inclusion of data source triangulation. Also, Yin (2014), regarding documentary evidence, pointed out the potential for biases to exist that threaten the validity and reliability of the research. Yin (2014) emphasized the test of possible bias was the degree of being open to contrary evidence. Therefore I shared with colleagues the preliminary findings during the data collection phase to provide alternative explanations. As espoused by Yin (2014), I was also open to contrary evidence, grasped fully the relevant issues investigated, was a good listener, and, overall, was adaptive. Journaling as a means of self-reflection supported me in reflecting on any biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and made my biases explicit, an idea noted by Patton (2015). I strictly adhered to the characteristics demanded of a good researcher and adopted the highest ethical standards

by avoiding plagiarizing, falsification of collected data, and deception; being honest; and accepting responsibility for my work (Yin, 2014).

Controlling researcher bias, which allows a researcher to investigate the phenomenon of interest, necessitates setting aside personal prejudices and presumptions. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), researchers must set aside or bracket biases and assumptions. To achieve this for the present study, I took personal notes, recorded each interview, and, as illustrated in Rowley (2012), transcribed them verbatim into text form. I then analyzed them and generated critical points and notes. In line with member checking, respondents received the transcription for correction, feedback, and approval.

One of the data collection instruments was semistructured interview questions. I conducted initial semistructured interviews face to face, with follow-up correspondence via Skype or e-mail with the respondents. Passer (2014) discussed the importance of establishing a rapport with each respondent. To that end, I maintained a balance between face-to-face, Skype, and e-mail communication dependent on time and financial constraints. Apart from being a critical source of evidence and a primary source of data collection in qualitative research, the interview also allows for nuanced exploration (Yin, 2014). The interview provides descriptive narratives and observations that are rich and deep in meaning (Gupta & Awasthy, 2015). Interviews are also a way of collecting facts and achieving insight or understanding that is central to the research question. While questionnaires reach a wider audience and have the potential to be transferable, if an interview is well structured and designed, the insight and understanding provided can be more useful (Rowley, 2012). Given the experience needed to conduct unstructured

interviews (Rowley, 2012), and its suitability to the case study approach, I selected a

semistructured approach that provided for a combination of order and an element of

flexibility and which allowed me to probe the topic of interest. Patton (2016)

recommended the interview protocol that entailed asking each participant the same

question in the same manner. This standardization is essential to achieve validity and

reliability in the interview process. Hence, I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) in

my interview process and thereby promoted standardization and enhanced validity and

reliability.

Participants

Sample selection is an opportunity to shed light on a theoretical concept or

principle (Yin, 2014). The viewpoint of Merriam and Tisdell (2016) informed the

purposive sampling of the respondents for this study. They reflected the purpose of the

study and represented the information-rich context that I was trying to obtain. In

implementing Shoup's (2015) approach in this research, I selected participants based on

their knowledge and experience of the firm's online retail marketing strategy, thus

aligning with the specific problem statement.

The criteria for a purposeful sample of participants included that they were

current employees of the firm, over 18 years old, occupied a managerial or executive

position that allowed them a perspective of the retailer's online marketing strategy, were

familiar with the dynamics of operations, and were willing to participate in the research

openly. Following an informal discussion with an acquaintance employed by the retail

firm, I was able to contact the director of the retail firm, who had already agreed to

participate in the research. The director had agreed to provide me with access to relevant staff and furnished me with their names, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers. After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (approval no. 06-22-18-0393657), I was introduced to each participant by the director personally, and after that, I e-mailed each participant an invitation to participate with a copy of the participant consent form as an attachment. I requested each participant to reply to the e-mail indicating their confirmation to participate in the research. After this, I followed up either face-to-face or telephonically with the participants and discussed the interview process, ensured their understanding and agreement of the informed consent form, obtained their signatures, answered any other questions, and then scheduled the initial interview at a private place of their choice.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlighted the importance of building rapport with participants during the data collection phase, as well as how the researcher-participant relationship can affect the other in the research process. Strategies for maintaining a relationship in this regard entailed regular contact, feedback, and support (Adinoff, Conley, Taylor, & Chezem, 2013). I contacted participants regularly via e-mail or telephone and provided feedback and updates. I ensured the confidentiality of each participant through the protection of their details and thereby maintained their trust, which enhanced this relationship (Adinoff et al., 2013). To achieve this, I explained that I would safely store and protect all written data and commit to shredding the data after 5 years. Also, I would delete all electronic data stored on an external password encrypted hard drive by performing a low-level format. Developing and documenting such

strategies also promoted the validity of this research, which relied on each respondent providing accurate and truthful information without fear of disclosure (Adinoff et al., 2013).

Research Method and Design

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore marketing strategies that marketing executives of a traditional retail firm used to improve existing online sales. This section provides the rationale for selecting the research method and design for the study. This section also presents additional background on the population and sampling approach employed.

Research Method

A research method provides the researcher with an appropriate strategy to answer the research question. It is essential to select the method that captures and addresses the study's complexity (Gupta & Awasthy, 2015). The two competing methods of inquiry, as discussed by Patton (2015), are (a) quantitative, which uses experimental methods to generate and test hypothetical generalizations; and (b) qualitative, which is a naturalistic method used to understand context-specific situations holistically. There is also a mixed method inquiry, which combines both qualitative and quantitative research and potentially provides a more vibrant and deeper insight into the phenomena under investigation (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013).

Qualitative research facilitates the naturalistic or interpretive paradigm that is focused on meaning in a setting or phenomenon, and as such requires data collection, analyses, and interpretation that is best suited to humans (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as

opposed to analytical software. This type of research is personal: the researcher is the instrument of inquiry and actively engages in the meaning-making process (Patton, 2015). Quantitative analysis is opposed to this interpretivist view and emphasizes the positivist paradigm in which reality is measurable (Smith, 2014), primarily by numerical data and statistical data analysis (Passer, 2014).

I considered both the quantitative and mixed-method styles but ultimately rejected both as the research method of choice. Quantitative research is suitable when the researcher wants to understand the relationships among variables (dependent and independent), where the statistical relationship is most appropriate (Patton, 2015). Quantitative research does not allow for the rich descriptive data and interpretation associated with human experiences, situations, and perspectives. The mixed-method approach, which involves simultaneous or stage-by-stage processes, could be both time consuming and costly (Venkatesh et al., 2013). However, the overriding rationale for not choosing the mixed-method approach was that I did not need the quantitative portion of data to answer the research question.

Bailey (2014) maintained that qualitative research allows researchers the opportunity of obtaining information from multiple participants, which provides an insight into a phenomenon in answering *what, how,* and *why* questions. More appropriately, qualitative research also provides a knowledge-based framework that could support the implementation of subsequent recommendations. Passer (2014) pointed out that qualitative research aimed at a holistic, theme-generating understanding that is nonstatistical in nature. Hence, as I was not looking to understand the relationship

between variables and required no statistical data, I specifically chose the qualitative research method. The qualitative research method allowed for the rich descriptive data and interpretation associated with human experiences, situations, and perspectives to explore marketing strategies that marketing executives of a traditional retail firm used to improve existing online sales.

Research Design

In discussions on the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher, Gupta and Awasthy (2015) highlighted the interpretivist paradigm that focused on qualitative methods of research. This paradigm depended on emergent themes, contextual understanding, and rich and thick observations that led to narrative descriptions. The narrative descriptions provided a holistic perspective. The researcher also recognized the implications of subjectivity given the closeness to the object of inquiry. These resonated closely with the intention of my research.

In the qualitative approach, which focused on understanding and interpreting individuals, groups and organizations, the most common research designs were phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, story-telling, and case studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Gupta and Awasthy identified some additional methods of research, such as hermeneutics, structuralism, and holism.

Selecting an appropriate research design that would satisfactorily achieve my research objective involved considering alternative designs. Grounded theory, according to Thornberg and Charmaz (2014), was an approach where the data collection process and the data analysis occurred at the same time. Each part informed the subsequent part,

with the goal of extrapolating patterns to form a conceptual framework aimed at constructing a theory out of the phenomenon under-investigated. Since the grounded theory was an inductive approach that focused on theory construction as opposed to the application of current theories, it was not a suitable design for my chosen research. I was not concerned with developing a new theory but rather to explore the marketing strategies of a traditional retail firm.

Narrative or story-telling research design, as highlighted by Esin et al. (2014), used biographical life stories, or the analysis of stories that often generally focused on the meaning generated by the participants. Situated in the context of a broader social setting, the narrative or story-telling research design included interpersonal, cultural and social relationships. Extending narrative analysis as pointed out by Patton (2015) was an approach to researching organizations. In general, narrative research focused on human lives and their stories where the beginning, middle, and end was the story, where the story was the data, and the narrative was the analysis that placed and compared it in context with other stories (Patton, 2015).

Ethnography research aimed at obtaining an insider view of an aspect of a group of people. It typically focused on their cultural and symbolic interactions and the context in which this occurred over a period, either overtly or covertly (Willig, 2014). Gupta and Awasthy (2015) described ethnography in more detail as a means of recreating the shared beliefs, artifacts, folklore and behaviors of a group of people for the reader. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlighted this approach as being central in defining the fundamental characteristic of ethnography. According to Gupta and Awasthy, this type of research was

both labor- and time intensive and relied on participant observation, interviews, and artifact collection. Neither the ethnography nor the narrative inquiry methods were suitable for the study as they required the observation of participants in either their cultural or social setting for an extended period. These research designs, however, were not feasible from a financial and practical perspective.

The phenomenological research approach focused specifically on an individual or group and investigated how they constructed and perceived their specific reality (Gupta & Awasthy, 2015). After selecting a phenomenon, the approach followed ethnography research. According to Willig (2014), a fundamental aspect of phenomenological research was that the participants' accounts, instead of a chosen theoretical framework, were the foundation of the interpretation. As mentioned, the goal was to achieve an understanding of the basic structure of the universal essence of the individual's experience of the phenomenon of interest (Gupta & Awasthy, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach focused on a phenomenon to gain understanding, which was more suited for studying emotional or intense human experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Hence, the research design was not appropriate to adequately answer the research question.

The case study was a systematic (Cronin, 2014) research approach that provided an in-depth descriptive analysis of a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This type of approach was also appropriate for exploring the 'how' and 'why' research questions, as well as research into contemporary phenomenon or events that occurred in a natural setting, and their subsequent contextual factors (Njie & Asimiran 2014; Yin,

2014). I used a qualitative single case study. As pointed out by Maxwell and Chmiel (2014b), the single case study provided a thematic analysis of a single case so that themes and relationships were easier to manage and relate to, bounded by time and location, also pointed out by Yin (2014) as opposed to multiple cases. Cronin (2014) and Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2014) pointed out that this method allowed the researcher to explore everything, from the individual or groups encompassing activities to a specific phenomenon that captured the complexity of the topic. The aim was to explore the strategies that marketing executives of a traditional retail firm used to improve existing online sales thus seeking to answer both the 'how' and 'why' questions with the aim of providing a real world and holistic perspective.

The case study approach included numerous sources of data, such as documentation, interviews, observations, archival data, and artifacts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Yin (2014) stated that using as many sources of information as possible to obtain a detailed explanation of the research question in a study, should provide credible and convincing research. Semistructured interviews provided the primary sources of data in this study, while secondary sources of data included company and industry-specific documentation. Researchers used numerous sources of data to achieve data saturation; failure to reach data saturation had a direct impact on the quality of research (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013) and its content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Achieving redundancy or saturation as stated by Merriam and Tisdell and Fusch and Ness was when no new information from the documentation was forthcoming, or when the researcher began hearing the same responses or no new insights arose during the

interview process. It was impossible to know beforehand when saturation would occur. Therefore, conducting data analysis, and data collection simultaneously, indicated the saturation of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Some additional saturation strategies included using vetted data collection methods and, importantly, documenting the process as a form of evidence. It was possible to accomplish data saturation by asking multiple respondents the same questions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Semistructured, open-ended interview questions accomplished the saturation in the study. The questions focused on the essential components of theories that formed the foundation of this study. Fusch and Ness pointed out the high correlation between saturation and triangulation, where triangulation achieved data saturation. In triangulation, Yin (2014) highlighted that multiple sources of data or evidence needed to converge and that the use of numerous data sources was one of the advantages of the case study approach. Any conclusion made, according to Yin (2014), at the intersection of numerous sources was more convincing and accurate and rated higher in their general quality. I had reached data saturation when no new information appeared from triangulation using multiple sources of data, and the participant's responses to the interview questions had become repetitive. Since I did not know ahead of time when saturation occurred, I performed the data collection and data analysis simultaneously. I had planned to do basic data analysis while collecting data by maintaining field notes and memos to guide each subsequent data collection session.

Population and Sampling

In this qualitative study, I used a single case study design to explore marketing strategies that marketing executives of a traditional retail firm used to improve existing

online sales. I used a purposeful sampling technique discussed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), where I selected participants that potentially provided detailed responses that were first, pertinent to their knowledge and experience, and second, relevant to this study. Patton (2015) also provided support for the design of a purposeful single-case sample strategy which I implemented in this study, that provided a rich and deep understanding of, or insight into, the subject. I was flexible enough to employ what Patton termed as opportunity sampling, where if the situation presented itself I would interview additional participants.

Passer (2014) defined the population as all the cases or observations, while the sample was a subset of cases or observations of the population. In this regard, the sample firm I selected represented an ideal opportunity to explore, in a conceptual model, the marketing strategies that marketing executives of a traditional retail firm used to improve existing online sales. Ravitch and Carl (2016) pointed out that although there were no set rules that determined the number of participants, it was vital to acknowledge the limitations of the research relating to size and strategies. Hence, I documented limitations as encountered in the research. An example of the emergent nature of qualitative research was that the sample size was often unknown, or its question often left open (Patton, 2015). Sampling to the point of redundancy or saturation was an effective strategy in this instance (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Patton, 2015). Ravitch and Carl described saturation as finding no new themes in the data. The data in this case study comprised of interviews, and documentation. I anticipated a sample size between three and eight participants; the participants occupied managerial and operational positions that supported the firms

marketing strategy. I used the strategy discussed by Ravitch and Carl and conducted interviews and follow-up interviews to the point where no new data, themes, patterns, or concepts emerged. Nicks (2016) used purposeful sampling with a small sample size among managers with similar experience and successfully achieved data saturation with three participants.

The selection of the sample in this study was based on the criteria of time and location as discussed by Passer (2014). The location was at a single geographical place in South Africa, and the time was when all participants were available and had time to participate in the study. Thus the opportunity was provided to initially interact with participants at their place of work and at their convenience, which thereby minimized interruptions, with interviews and follow-up interviews not lasting longer than 45 minutes. The initial interview was conducted at a private place of choice, with scheduled follow up interviews either face to face or via Skype. The use of Skype in qualitative research to conduct interviews was a valid data collection technique as discussed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and Ravitch and Carl (2016).

Additionally, the firm engaged in online retail, and I had access to the participants who met the following criteria: that they were current employees of the firm over 18 years old, occupied a managerial or executive position that allowed them a perspective of the retailers online marketing strategy, were familiar with the dynamics of operations, and were willing to participate in the research openly.

Ethical Research

Fulfilling the requirements of ethical research required maintaining ethical standards, respecting human dignity, protecting participants' confidentiality coupled with rigorous academic principles ensured the fulfillment of all safeguards (McCormack, Carr, McCloskey, Keeping-Burke, Furlong, & Doucet, 2012; Yin, 2014). As a researcher who was conducting research involving human subjects, I completed the NIH web-based training course (Certificate Number: 1797018), on the protection of human research participants, conducted under the auspices of The National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The participant consent form (Appendix B) contained information about the study, the research, the criteria for participation, and information on how to contact Walden University representatives. Participation was voluntary, without any compensation. Patton (2015) discussed the use of incentives and highlighted tax complications in using financial incentives. Patton also highlighted what in his view was the misguided belief that people would only respond if offered incentives and urged not to fall into the trap of believing that incentives were either needed or effective. All participants received a copy of the consent form.

Before engaging participants in the study, I followed the steps as discussed by Ravitch and Carl (2016). Hence, I provided each participant with an overview of the participant consent form (Appendix B), highlighted the nature of the study, potential significance, and benefits, as well as any risks involved and gave them the opportunity to ask questions related to the process and the study. I emphasized both orally and in writing that they could withdraw from the study by merely not showing up, or by contacting the

researcher telephonically, via email, or during the interview, at any time without consequence.

The data collection process entailed field notes, audio recordings, and transcriptions of the interviews, as the primary sources of data in this study. Participants have the right to expect protection from harm, and the right to privacy (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), this necessitated the interview transcriber signing the confidentiality agreement form (Appendix C). Secondary sources of data included company and industry-specific documentation. Participants wishing to leave would receive their relevant audio and transcripts to destroy.

As pointed out by Patton (2015) participants in a study had the right to privacy, confidentiality and the protection from harm. I accomplished this by keeping any information provided as confidential, the presentation of findings coming out of this study did not include the identities of any participant. I did not share details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study. Participants upon request had access to a copy of the conclusions. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) emphasized that every effort should be made to ensure confidentiality, and that data could be coded. I coded each participant's identity with a unique code to ensure that their identity was confidential, and to maintain the company's anonymity. Yin (2014) and Ravitch and Carl (2016) discussed in detail the necessity of, and strategies to securely store all research material. I accomplished this by keeping all electronic data in a password-protected, external hard-drive, stored in an access controlled, lockable cabinet. Apart from the researcher, nobody had access to the stored information. I safely stored and protected all

written data from the semistructured interviews and transcripts, including company and industry-specific documents. After 5 years the data would be deleted, including all stored electronic data on an external password encrypted hard drive by performing a low-level format

Data Collection Instruments

Where it was essential to understand the context, the researcher became the primary data collection instrument (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In the case study approach, the researcher conducted the interviews and the data analysis, reviewed company and industry-specific documentation and archival data, noted respondent observations and directly affected the outcome of the research (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Furthermore, it was the researcher who, in conducting the above steps, discovered the underlying themes and ideas in the research (Yin, 2014). Hence, I was the primary data collection instrument for this study. In practical terms, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) pointed out that data collection was not out there, but rather the researcher acknowledged the relevant information as data by asking, watching, and reviewing the data emerging through interviews, documents, and observations.

Most qualitative research designs make use of interviews as a primary source of data to collect some or all data, with secondary sources of data including company and industry-specific documentation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and archival data (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Patton (2015) stated that its purpose and focus was to capture information, themes or an idea as it related specifically to the research

questions. Interviews were useful for finding out things from individuals that we were unable to observe ourselves (Patton, 2015). I used the semistructured interview to ask open-ended questions as opposed to highly structured formal or unstructured, informal interviews during the interview process. The semistructured interview, which used a mix of structured, prepared interview questions, and unstructured follow-up questions were used to obtain clarity when I required specific data from respondents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It distinguishes this approach from open-ended questions where the questions were exploratory – more like a conversation – and where not enough is known about the phenomenon to ask the right questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In increasing reliability aimed at minimizing errors and biases in the case study, as well as making the research repeatable, Yin (2014) suggested the use of a case study protocol. This protocol consisted of four sections aimed at maintaining focus throughout the research process. The protocol comprised an overview of the case, the data collection procedures, the questions and a guide to the reporting that included outline, format, and presentation.

I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) that provided structure, guidance, and methodological transparency (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012), and as stated by Houghton et al. (2013), provided an audit trail that was a valid strategy to enhancing rigor. I used audio recordings for each interview session, which according to Yin (2014) promoted trustworthiness and credibility. By exposing all participants to the same protocol in the interview, the protocol also ensured a consistent method of collecting the interview data, which could reduce bias.

Accomplishing validity and reliability as noted by Fusch and Ness (2015), and Morse (2015) involved achievement of successful data saturation through the use of multiple sources of primary and secondary data. I specifically achieved validity and reliability through the interview data collection process, and by reviewing company and industry-specific documentation. In verifying and enhancing the reliability of data, I had, after the transcription of the audio recording of the interviews, emailed each participant a copy of the transcript and invited comment, input, and feedback, in a one-week timeframe. Some of the potential questions were discussed in Ravitch and Carl and included, asking specifically whether the transcribed interview reflected their perspective? Was everything captured? Or if there was anything problematic in the interview or any concerns? I also summarized the appropriate comments, notes, and participants responses made during the interview process, and invited the participant to provide clarity on any point. I then made use of member checking, as described by Patton (2015). Member checking was a process of verification of findings and interpretations with the participants; or, as Harvey (2014) described, the validation and confirmation of data by taking the transcribed ideas back to the participants for verifying and enhancing the reliability of data. At the end of the interview process, I discussed the member checking process with the participant, explained that this highlighted key points or themes and verified them with the participants. Furthermore, as part of member checking, also called participant validation by Ravitch and Carl (2016) involved participants engaged in numerous stages throughout the research process.

A final strategy relating to the integrity of the data collection process was necessary given the centrality of the researcher to the study which affected him and ultimately affected the research process. The use of journaling, or reflective journaling, highlighted the researcher's position in the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This reflexive journaling had multiple purposes and included the explanation of biases and assumptions that influenced the interpretation of data, to own the researcher's effects in the research process and how the researcher managed it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I kept a record of my self-reflection, assumptions, and awareness of biases while conducting the research. This reflexivity was an ongoing and active practice, which began at the start of the research and led to a positive research habit (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It provided an opportunity to reflect on the research question and aided in keeping valuable references and documents, and the researcher's changing framework for thinking about issues (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Collection Technique

The primary data collection technique was the semistructured interview, using a mix of structured, prepared interview questions, and unstructured follow-up questions. The interviews were either be face to face or via Skype. An interview protocol (Appendix A) supported the data collection process that only commenced after IRB approval from Walden University. The secondary form of data collection included company and industry-specific documentation.

Multiple data sources, which included interviews, observations, and documentation, all formed part of the data collection process in qualitative research

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014). In discussing the case study

protocol, Yin (2014) divided it into four distinct sections: (1) the case study overview; (2)

the data collection procedures, (3) the data collection questions; and (4) the case study

report. The data collection or interview protocol used in this research (Appendix A)

followed the guidelines highlighted by Yin (2014) ; that was, the protocol formed the

structure of the inquiry and not the literal questions asked of participants. Qualitative data

gained in the interview process focused on people's experiences, opinions, beliefs and –

importantly – their knowledge while recording the description of people's activities and

behaviors were observations. Therefore, data collection was fundamentally about asking,

watching and then reviewing (Merriam & Tisdell).

The interview was the most common and primary data collection method in

qualitative research (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described it as

where the researcher and participant engaged in conversation focused on the research

question. Doody and Noonan emphasized the value of interviews in uncovering the

details of each participant's experience. The interviews allowed for a line of questioning

that uncovered information about the topic of interest. The most common determination

in choosing an interview method depended on the amount of structure required (Merriam

& Tisdell). The level of structure moved from highly structured to unstructured (Doody

& Noonan, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). I used the semistructured

approach as I looked for specific data from all the respondents, and the central part of the

interview focused on a list of questions and issues that I wanted to be explored.

The unstructured approach was open-ended, exploratory and more like a conversation where the aim was to find out as much information of a phenomenon with which the researcher was unfamiliar (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The semistructured interview was flexible and spontaneous; the researcher could ask follow-up questions to clarify information and the data were similar from all participants with enough flexibility to explore issues as they come up. The option to ask probing questions in the semistructured interview increased the validity of the research (Doody & Noonan, 2013) due to the amount of rich data made available for analysis. The main disadvantage of semistructured interviews was that it took practice and experience to know when to prompt, or probe, questions, and responses (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) to obtain interview data from participants. An abridged version entailed the following: (1) I began by introducing the interview, indicated the time required for the interview questions, and highlighted the method of recording the interview; (2) The voluntary consent form was given to the participant; (3) When the interview started by turning on the voice recorder, I informed the participant and first state the date and time; (4) I took additional notes and watched for non-verbal cues, paraphrased as needed, and followed-up with additional probing questions; (5) Last interview question was a wrap up question; (6) Wrapped up interview and thanked the participant and scheduled a follow-up member checking interview.

Numerous other data collection techniques could be used in qualitative research apart from interviews. Such data collection techniques included focus groups, observations, documentation from conversations or discourses, news media, visual data

that included images, film, and virtual data, and (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) specifically addressed the mining of data from documentation and artifacts. According to Anyan (2013), the type of research question usually dictated the choice of the data collection technique. In discussing secondary data sources as they related to documentation, Hacklin and Wallnöfer (2012) highlighted two sources: archival data, such as company-specific data, which included strategy documents, internal records and annual reports; and market-specific data, such as market research, technical documents, and newspaper articles, which were all collected throughout the duration of the research. The use of extensive documentation in this case study supported the idea by Coffey (2014) that research takes place in well-documented settings. Documentation was a record or a physical trace of how individuals, groups, and institutions represented and gave an account of themselves (Coffey, 2014).

I made extensive use of company and industry-specific documentation. Yin (2014) emphasized much care when using documents since they were not always accurate nor lacked in bias, but they were a critical means to augment and corroborate information from other sources. Coffey (2014) emphasized that an understanding of how, for what purpose or end informed documents generation and consumption, and therefore close, careful and critical reading was essential when using documents in qualitative research. In using multiple data, such as various sources of documentation, such as company and industry-specific documentation, and interviews, I had conducted a case study that was more representative of reality, and as Yin (2014) described when successfully using multiple data sources, a case study was more believable and accurate.

Data Organization Technique

Data gathered for this study comprised of a combination of the electronic recording material and subsequent transcription into Word, which I analyzed with the aid of NVivo12® software. Additional material included personal and field notes, and reflexivity journal. The secondary data source comprised of the company and industry-specific documentation.

Data organization was a key element of data analysis that contributed to quality research (De Waal, Goedegebuure, & Tan Akaraborworn, 2014). In discussions on data management, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised the creation of an inventory of the entire data set, either by hand, using software or a combination of both. I used a combination of manual hand and software approaches to organizing raw data. The process involved coding, described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as assigning a shorthand designation to various components of the research making it easy to retrieve at a later stage, Patton (2015) stated that coding as a strategy allowed for sense-making of large amounts of data during qualitative analysis. Merriam and Tisdell further highlighted that the designation could be either a single word, phrase, color or number. I used a sequential numbering system in order of the first participant to last participant, in order of interview conducted. I linked all other data and information relating to participants to this number. Merriam & Tisdell highlighted the importance of creating an inventory of the entire data set. I created an inventory using an Excel spreadsheet to index by code, interviews, participant observations, field notes, and other collected data. Mendeley Desktop software maintained the secondary data, which was indexed by topic, all

company, and industry-specific documentation. I used NVivo12® software for coding

data around themes with key themes being color coded for importance, which also

assisted in the data analysis, and offered an additional advantage as discussed by Yin

(2014) of aiding in the storage and organization of data.

To enhance both the security and confidentiality of data and as pointed out by Yin

(2014) to protect e privacy and confidentiality of participants, all electronic devices, and

data files were password protected. As highlighted by Ravitch and Carl (2016), storing a

copy of the material on an external hard drive safeguarded against loss or data damage, I,

therefore, backed up all data on a password protected external hard drive. I stored all data

relating to the study in an access controlled lockable cabinet that ensured only I as the

researcher had access to the stored information and shredded after 5 years. Similarly, I

deleted all electronic data stored on an external password encrypted hard drive by

performing a low-level format.

Data Analysis

Triangulation was the way in which the researcher could examine different

perspectives of a phenomenon, and according to Fusch and Ness (2015), there was a

direct link between triangulation and saturation, with triangulation often ensuring

saturation. Triangulation of the data resulted from the comparison of interviews,

company and industry-specific documentation in the confines of the study's specific

research questions. This convergence of data, as pointed out by Yin (2013) allowed for

greater confidence in the overall findings. Morse (2015), suggested that validity occurred

when two or more sets of data answered the same question. Morse pointed out that

triangulation was just one of numerous strategies that achieved rigor, such as prolonged

engagement and observation, rich description, peer review, and negative case analysis.

According to Yin (2013), the use of triangulation strengthened validity with the aim of

being able to generalize from case studies; however, no benchmark defined the strength

or weakness of triangulation. Both Yin (2013) and Yilmaz (2013) pointed out there were

at least five possible types of triangulation that enhanced the validity of the qualitative

analysis. For example (1) the data source; (2) the data analysis; (3) the theory; (4) the

perspective; and (5) the methods and methodological triangulation. The data source and

methods were the ones most likely to enhance the validity of the case study research

(Yin, 2014).

Using multiple methods of triangulation was a method of enhancing the

credibility of evidence (Patton, 2015). I used methodological triangulation in this study

by showing converging evidence or themes between interview data and multiple data

sources or sources of evidence (Yin, 2014). I achieved this data analysis as discussed by

Merriam and Tisdell (2016), by comparison, and cross-checking of interviews with

transcripts, company and industry-specific documentation, relating to the specific

research question. The data analysis structured around themes with key themes, identified

in the literature; before and after the writing of the proposal, and being color coded for

importance. The goal of triangulation as discussed by Ravitch and Carl (2016), was to

ensure that the right kind and quantity of data was collected to answer the research

question appropriately.

Data collection and analysis was an iterative process where analysis began with the very first document read, the first interview conducted, and the first observation made (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This process resulted in new ideas and approaches that directed the data collection approach, and again influenced the formulation and reformulation of the interview questions and so on (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Flick (2014), data analysis was the primary activity in qualitative research; and according to Cleary, Horsfall, and Hayter (2014) and Yin (2014), it encompassed the collection, analysis, interpretation, and sense-making of data and the eventual reporting of findings. Data analysis formed the outcome of the research; it was the hardest part (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and the least developed part of the case study (Yin, 2014). Patton (2015) stated that the analysis depended on who was making the judgment, what was the purpose and what was the criteria used – all of which could be ambiguous. Flick highlighted the numerous reasons for data analysis with several aims: describing a phenomenon, comparing between and among individual cases, and explaining or developing a theory of the phenomenon researched.

Qualitative data analysis was a process of sense-making that was inductive and comparative in nature and involved consolidating, reducing and interpreting verbal responses, observations or information obtained through documentation, with the aim of answering the research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As it related to data analysis and the multiple sources of data in case study research, Merriam and Tisdell pointed out that conveying an understanding of the case was the paramount objective. According to Flick (2014), data analysis unfolded either in series, as one of many steps, or in parallel,

and began with the collection of data. According to Patton (2015), data analysis should

begin during the fieldwork. The research question coupled with the researcher's

ontological and epistemological viewpoint guided the selection of this single case study

where the data collection methods of semistructured interviews and various documented

sources were selected and analyzed.

As Patton (2015) pointed out, the challenge of qualitative analysis was in

managing and making sense of a considerable amount of data, with the goal of being able

to make sense of it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). From this point of view, it was evident

that data analysis required initial preparation, organization, and management of data (Yu,

Abdullah & Saat, 2014). Data analysis required some form of coding, was a method of

assigning shorthand designation to the interview, field notes, observations, artifacts,

memos and the various documents of the data collected to quickly retrieve and keep track

of specific data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Yin (2014) highlighted five techniques to

analyze data, which included pattern matching, explanation building, logic models, cross-

case analysis and time-series analysis – all of which helped to achieve this goal. To

achieve high-quality research required due consideration of all the forms of data

collected.

I proceeded with the data analysis and data collection as a parallel process, by (a)

organizing and transcribing data sources, which allowed me to (b) code each data source,

that enabled me to (c) code identified themes segments, or units, in the raw data that

addressed part of my research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I then categorized this

into themes or common views, a strategy discussed by Yin (2014). Category construction

that began with assigning codes to data to generate themes was data analysis (Roulston, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The use of software packages was a personal preference based on individual style, ability, and dexterity in using new software (Patton, 2015). I used NVivo12® software, which was a computer-assisted analysis software package to aid me in the analysis of transcribed interviews, and was a useful tool that coded, categorized, and managed large amounts of data (Yin, 2014). Software packages had the advantage of saving time and effort while giving the researcher more time to give meaning to the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Both Patton and Merriam and Tisdell critically emphasized the caveat that the software assisted and did not replace the analysis by the researcher. Patton insisted that data analysis was a unique process that involved creativity and analytical rigor, which software cannot provide.

Manually, data analysis also consisted of analyzing the verbatim transcription of interview data to reduce, reorganize and subsequently represent the data (Roulston, 2014). And additionally, compared themes that emerged from the company and industry-specific documentation. Data analysis of documentary data that aligned with the research questions was an appropriate approach (Coffey, 2014).

I used the keywords identified in the literature review, conceptual framework, and research questions that included the concepts of exchange, relationship building, reciprocity, commitment, loyalty, word of mouth, and trust and identified categories and themes from the raw data, which allowed me to merge data. This approach was the preferred strategy of data analysis that relied on following the theoretical propositions that led to the study in the first place and provided theoretical orientation and focus (Yin,

2014). I compared these themes with any new themes that emerged from any relevant peer-reviewed study published since the completion of the proposal.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity were critical criteria for determining the quality of qualitative research, or, according to Morse (2015), made the research rigorous (or trustworthy). Since the direct measurement of reliability and validity was not possible, the researcher employed various other methods to establish reliability and validity. Striving for the highest quality research possible was a significant challenge during all facets of the research (Cope, 2014). Yin (2014) contended that to enhance reliability and validity, the researcher should implement methods and strategies according to specific logically conducted tests, during various phases of the research.

Reliability

Reliability in case study research aimed at demonstrating that the specific operations that make up the study were repeatable and could consistently provide the same results. Supporting this approach, Cleary et al. (2014) and Morse (2015) stated that reliability measures that improved the rigor and consistency, focused specifically on all elements of the data collection, coding, and data analysis process. Additionally, Barry, Chaney, Piazza-Gardner, and Chavarria (2014) state that reliability and validity ensured the integrity of data collected, while Cope (2014) referred to this as dependability that the data was constant in similar conditions. The goal of reliability after minimizing potential errors and biases was that in repeating the same case, a different researcher should be able to arrive at similar conclusions (Yin, 2014).

To specifically address the issue of dependability in the data analysis I used member checking to verify the data interpretation. Such a verification process would either reject or confirm findings (Grossoehme, 2014; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013) and facilitated reader and reviewer comprehension of the what, how and why of the research, with a high degree of transparency (Cleary et al., 2014). The reliability of the study hinged on the principle outlined by Yin (2014) for making each step as operational as possible. Both Cope (2014) and Lee (2014) suggested that the researcher maintained an audit trail and a record of as many steps as possible, as additional strategies to enhance reliability. Lee pointed out the benefit of doing this was that they were simple techniques that were implementable and easy to demonstrate. From a study perspective I documented the steps of my study, made each step as operational as possible, used a study database containing all the raw data that I collected, and an audit trail documented my steps and field notes. I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) that described the process for conducting the semistructured, face-to-face interviews, discussed the consent form and rights of the individual, with the interview questions as a guidepost for the researcher (Yin, 2014).

Validity

Qualitative studies make use of validity checks to address data analysis and credibility of findings (Lee, 2014; Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2014) and research design (Yin, 2014), which may negatively impact the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of findings. Credibility addressed the degree to which the inferences or relationships identified in the study were accurate and representative of the phenomenon

under investigation (Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014). I addressed validity during the data analysis phase by identifying the research propositions and relating them to competing theories or rival explanations (Yin, 2014). Credibility was a process of identifying the measures used that define the concept under question (Yin, 2014). Both Cope (2014) and Morse referred to this as credibility, where the truth of the data and subsequent interpretation by the researcher were consistent. To achieve this, Yin (2014) suggested using multiple sources and the establishment of a chain of evidence. To achieve credibility, I used member checking of the data interpretation and methodological triangulation.

Methodological triangulation in qualitative research referred to using multiple sources, performed in numerous ways, such as through the investigator or among different evaluators, data sources, theory or perspectives, and finally by using different methods (Morse, 2015; Patton, 2015). Successful triangulation was when more than one type of data answered the same question (Morse, 2015; Patton, 2015). Using a combination of real-time data (e.g., observations and interviews) and retrospective data (e.g., documents) was a valid method of triangulation, which provided a chain of evidence (Hacklin & Wallnöfer, 2012), and enhanced construct validity (Yin 2014). This data triangulation was a robust strategy to enhance the case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the data collection phase, I used multiple sources of data, such as company and industry-specific records, semistructured interviews which supported the research question and study. Furthermore, my chair, the second committee member, and my peers regularly reviewed and evaluated my study.

I made use of member checking to verify and enhance the reliability of the data. Member checking was described by Patton (2015) as a process of verification of findings and interpretations with participants; or, as Harvey (2014) described, the validation and confirmation of data by taking the transcribed ideas back to the participants. While noting that member checking gave an air of trustworthiness and ethicality to the transcribed interview, Harvey also pointed out the limitation of participants remembering the interview in sufficient detail and taking the time to check the transcripts. Opposing this view, Onwuegbuzie, Leech, Slate, Stark, Sharma, Frels, Harris, and Combs (2012) argued that as a second strategy to ensure credibility, member checking increased the validity of the interpretations. Similarly, Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, and Robertson (2013) contended that member checking substantiates credibility. From a credibility perspective, the respondent validation, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) was the single most critical way of ensuring that there has been no misrepresentation of meaning and inclusion of the researcher's bias.

Transferability was the extent to which a study's findings or results were generalizable or transferable (Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014) to another setting or time, other than the immediate study (Morse, 2015). Transferability highlighted the effort that the study and results generalized to a broader theory (Yin, 2014). The research design phase addressed transferability in both the data collection and analysis techniques (Yin, 2014). Morse emphasized the importance of rich description, which allowed the transfer of findings to a different context verified by regular multiple peer reviews through all phases of the study. To facilitate the transferability of the study, I provided a detailed

explanation of the purposive sampling criteria. I used member checking as a method to authenticate the interview and findings with the participants, and maintained a record of the steps followed throughout the study, thus providing an audit trail. I used the interview protocol in Appendix A to provide consistency and guidelines for conducting the interview process.

The chain of evidence process, as described by Yin (2014), was also referred to as the extent of alignment or confirmability (Cleary et al., 2014; Petrova et al., 2014). The process allowed for an external observer or participant to follow the data used to support the conclusion, from the research question to the case study conclusion. I implemented the chain of evidence or confirmability process by maintaining accurate document citations, documentation management and consistency with the research question, implementing strategies as highlighted by Yin (2014).

Saturation was a result of continued data collection and arose when no new information or insights occurred from the data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Failure to reach saturation had a negative impact and influenced the validity of the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Adopting the strategy discussed by Merriam and Tisdell and analyzing the data at the same time helped to identify saturation, thereby saving time, effort and energy. In ensuring data saturation, described by Cleary et al. (2014) as occurring when the researcher obtained similar answers to the same questions, I conducted all interviews using the same interview protocol, and the participants responded to the same open-ended questions. After participants had reviewed the transcript, I conducted member checking as a review of the data interpretation or theme

generation material by the participant; this enhanced the validity of the knowledge that grounded the study (Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2014). I achieved data saturation as discussed by Ravitch and Carl (2016) when no new data, themes, patterns, or concepts emerged. The final step that supported and addressed all the above elements was the maintenance of the reflexive journal by me as the researcher (Morse, 2015).

Transition and Summary

In Section 2 I provided an overview of the critical role that the researcher has in the selection and design of the type of research that answered a research question, and the personal involvement in the data collection, organization, and analysis. Also covered were the key elements of qualitative case study research that included the design and approaches that incorporated the use of data triangulation from numerous sources of data, and a documented audit trail that potentially enhance the reliability and demonstrate content validity. Discussed in detail was the importance of ethical research. Covered in detail were the documented policies, procedures and required steps by the IRB and Walden University that enforced the rights, confidentiality, and protection of all participants in this study. The interview protocol, participant's consent form and transcribers confidentiality agreement, and are in appendix A, B, and C respectively.

Section 3, included a presentation of the findings, and a detailed analysis of the structured interview responses and emergent themes. Discussed are applications for professional use of this study. Section 3 also included a discussion on the implications for social change, recommendations for actions and future study, that this research might have. Finally, Section 3 concluded with reflections from the researcher of the experience

in the DBA program, and potential personal biases or preconceived ideas that might have affected the researcher and, or the participants.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 contains the results of the study. It begins with an introduction,

followed by sections on (a) presentation of findings, (b) application to professional

practice, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, (e)

recommendations for further research, and, in closing, (f) reflections.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore marketing

strategies that marketing executives of a traditional retail firm used to improve existing

online sales. The selected sample firm represented an ideal opportunity to explore, in a

conceptual model, these marketing strategies. The study participants were purposefully

selected based on their knowledge and experience of the firm's online retail marketing

strategy, thus aligning with the specific problem statement. The purposeful sample

criteria specified that they were current employees of the firm, over 18 years old,

occupied a managerial or executive position, were familiar with the dynamics of

operations, and were willing to participate in the research openly.

I collected data by first conducting semistructured face-to-face interviews with

eight participants. Before the interviews, I reiterated the voluntary nature of the

participation and then collected the signed consent forms. Second, I collated archival data

such as company-specific information consisting of annual reports, and market-specific

data consisting of market research, technical documents, and newspaper articles. Follow

up communication was arranged with participants via either e-mail or Skype. The

verbatim transcripts were e-mailed to each participant to verify the accuracy and confirm

the clarity, and a week was given to elicit feedback or comments. I analyzed the data with the aid of NVivo12® software, and four major themes and two additional themes from the interviews became apparent: (a) customer relationship management, (b) exchange relationships, (c) trust, (d) reciprocal relationship, (e) data, and, (f) innovation. The presentation of findings was sent to participants for member checking to verify the accuracy and clarity, and a week was provided to elicit feedback or comments

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question that guided this study was: What marketing strategies do marketing executives of a traditional retail firm use to improve existing online sales? I conducted eight interviews ($N = 8$) of marketing executives from one company representing numerous brands, which enabled an in-depth exploration of the research question. To ensure the confidentiality of the study participants, I replaced each name with the following codes: P1, P2, P3, and so on, in the order the interviews were conducted. After I transcribed the interviews, I e-mailed the transcripts to each participant, giving them a week to add, change, comment, or provide additional feedback on the contents. I then identified themes with the aid of NVivo12® software and presented these findings to participants for member checking to confirm the findings, again giving them a week to provide feedback or input.

There are numerous perspectives or paradigms that marketing executives could use in developing marketing strategies to accomplish the firm's overall strategic objectives. In 2014, the company articulated a phased approach to developing its online retailing strategy across all their brands that emphasized the objective of providing the

customer the ability to interact with the company at any time, place, or through any channel. As of 2018, according to that year's integrated annual report, the company now offered a portfolio of 28 different retail brands across three continents with Africa representing 70.3% of its e-commerce turnover and with e-commerce contributing 6.5% to total turnover. The focus was now one of a customer-centric mindset, where the belief was that the customer always came first with improved customer experience and engagement. The firm stated explicitly in its growth strategy that it would deliver a customer-focused digital omnichannel experience.

Theme 1: Customer Relationship Management

The marketing strategies identified by six of the participants (P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8) were in line with the firm's strategic vision of a customer-centric focus. P3 specifically began with the firm's business strategy, looking at what the overall business was trying to achieve, interpreting it, and then adapting it in a digital world. P6 operated in a tiny niche online market that focused only on brand awareness and brand growth, stating that the customer was always at the center of all activities, focusing on long-term relationships with high-end customers using CRM. This approach was corroborated by recent research conducted by Dalir, Zarch, Aghajanzadeh, and Eshghi (2017) in the banking industry, where CRM was used to support current business activities, create profitable long-term relationships, and increase relationship quality with valued customers. Table 2 highlights the overall marketing approach of the interviewed marketing executives.

Table 2

Marketing Approach Adopted by Marketing Executives Interviewed

Theme	Reference	% of the frequency of occurrence
Customer Relationship	6 (P3,4,5,6,7,8)	75.0
Brand Equity	3(P1,2,6)	37.5

Note. ($N = 8$).

Regarding brand equity, P4 explained that having a heritage, sizeable visible foot-print, and being around for over 40 years allowed for the leveraging of the firm's brand capital without actively worrying about it. P5 explained the approach as thinking about what did the customer want from us? To what did the customer respond? What resonated with them now, and what's going to resonate with them in a years' time?

SET is focused on the voluntary exchange between parties, involving either material or symbolic resources (Sharpley, 2014), based on Homans' (1958) points on expectation and belief that this relationship is beneficial and rewarding to both parties. RM as an online marketing strategy falls in SET, where the expectation of entering and maintaining relationships is rewards-based (Ahamed & Skallerud, 2015). RM can also be either customer-, seller-, or dyadic-focused, with mediating factors being commitment, trust, relationship quality, and satisfaction (Verma et al., 2016), with the strength of this exchange relationship dependent on an assessment of these mediating factors (Crosno & Brown, 2015; Kühn & Mostert, 2016). Payne and Frow (2017) emphasized the interchangeable use of RM and CRM. While both were about relationships, RM was typically about relationships with all relevant stakeholders, whereas CRM emphasized

the appropriate use of technology as an enabler to build relationships with customers (Payne & Frow, 2017).

Six of the eight participants discussed their marketing strategies as one of CRM, which as pointed out by Verma et al. (2016), was considered an instrument in aiding RM objectives. P5 specifically highlighted the use of CRM as an aid to streamlining and personalizing marketing activities, P7 emphasized the personalized touch, while P4 used it to evaluate who the existing customers were and their purchasing behavior. The value of a well-designed CRM database was that it allowed for the tracking of preferences of customers and facilitated customized engagement and recommendations, which promoted long-term relationships (Lee, Kim, et al., 2014). P4 described this tracking of preferences as brand loyalty and emphasized the reciprocal relationship of this behavior, where if you were loyal to the brand the brand was loyal to you. This description in follow-up discussions was further clarified to mean that loyal customers received specialized offers and discounts and were notified earlier about promotions and sales. Current research in the evolution of RM by Sheth (2017) highlighted the important practice of personalized offerings, loyalty programs, and bundled offerings and its ubiquitous use in the online industry. P1, while not discussing CRM explicitly, highlighted the marketing strategy as engaging more, adding value to the relationship, and becoming a brand friend. In discussing RM, Sheth stated that RM moved beyond providing economic or functional value to connecting at an emotional level, moving from a business to a friendship with customers.

Theme 2: Positive Exchange Relationships.

Blau (1964/2008) maintained that SET defined exchange behavior as a voluntary action between individuals, motivated by expected returns. One of the foundational concepts applicable to SET was the type of resources to be exchanged, which can vary from money, goods, or symbolic resources such as social status (Seeber et al., 2017). An equitable positive exchange relationship as pointed out by Redmond (2015) was where the ratio of costs and rewards as perceived by both parties are equivalent. Driven by self-interest, both parties would enter into and remain in an exchange relationship if the benefit exceeds the cost, where cost has both an intrinsic and extrinsic value (Blau, 1964/2008).

Thibaut and Kelley (1959) focused on outcomes in a SET setting and discussed repeated exchanges as where one party had a particular anticipated outcome, measured regarding value and benefit, relative to other potential options. Repeated exchanges over time had led to the anticipation of future costs and benefits before the exchange (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). From an online retail perspective, where the consumer measures choice from both a value and benefit viewpoint amongst alternatives, the outcome had to be positive for the relationship to continue. Table 3 highlights the creating of positive relationships as discussed by participants regarding perceived value and benefit.

Table 3

Creating Positive Relationships

Theme	Reference	% of the frequency of occurrence
Value	7 (P1,2,3,5,6,7,8)	87.5
Benefit	5(P2,5,6,7,8)	62.5

Note. ($N = 8$).

The company in its integrated report for 2018 identified the delivering of

increased value as one of its strategic pillars. The delivering of increased value in

economic terms was considered a tool to grow the customer base by positioning the latest

brands as fashion-forward and essential for value creation. Marketing executives, in

translating this strategic drive as part of their online marketing strategy, emphasized both

the value and benefit of the exchange relationship. Seven of the participants emphasized

the value of the relationship, with five discussing economic value as the use of special

offers, promotions, and discounts. P2 highlighted that everybody loves a discount, while

P3 stated that online people specifically look for discounts while searching multiple sites.

P6, positioned in the niche market, felt that among affluent customers who had more

disposable income, the value was not economic but rather the status or *conspicuous*

consumption that was important, and by delivering faster, making delivery free and

improving the ease of navigating from checking in online to checking out offered the

consumer additional value. P7 pointed out that value for money was one factor in

building a positive relationship, where the other was also about selling a lifestyle or an

aspirational experience. Recent research by Huré, Picot-Coupey, and Ackermann (2017)

investigated omnichannel shopping value and distinguished between consumer and firm value, highlighting the fact that retailers engaged in numerous interrelated initiatives to enhance customer satisfaction and promote loyalty.

The importance of noneconomic value was supported by both Homans (1958) using symbolic resources, and Blau (1964/2008) using apparent benefits such as emotional satisfaction and social approval in which the measurement of the value was not in monetary terms. P1 explained both approaches and highlighted the difficulty of such efforts in driving sales and creating a conversation as being where the consumer was always getting and yet continuing to say, "Give me, give me." P3 stated that while striving to meet this continual demand, it was not the whole aim, they also tried to create a conversation as well as give product information and knowledge on how better to use a particular product. The competing goals by both parties, one in economic terms and the other in wanting a conversation, as explained by Blau (1964/2008) is driven by the self-interest of both parties, and they remain in the relationship for as long as the benefit exceeds the cost.

Moving from a value perspective to include benefits was in line with Thibaut and Kelley (1959), who stated in their work on SET that in judging outcomes, maintaining a relationship was dependent on both parties receiving a satisfactory outcome. The comparison of reward or positive outcome had two components, the deserved benefit and the alternative relationship (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Marketing executives emphasized that the deserved benefit related to competing products and price, and the alternative relationship to product information, knowledge, and additional benefits. Both P3 and P6

discussed customers looking for discounts and the discount environment where consumers were always comparing different prices, and they highlighted the importance of providing product knowledge, tips, and how-to guides as a means of adding to the exchange. P5 discussed a loyalty program that according to the 2017 integrated report, provides benefits to 2.7 million active customers and considered it as the ultimate choice for both the firm and consumer, as the consumer had opted to shop with the firm, and after that, both received repeat benefits. Furthermore, P7 argued that a loyalty program drove education with a customer on product benefits, thus enriching the relationship. This functionality was reinforced by Yrjölä, Spence, and Saarijärvi (2018), who underscored the importance of allowing customers to compare prices, which was pointed out as a benefit by P5 in providing comparative information and pricing to consumers, and allowing for a subjective assessment of value for money.

Theme 3: Trust

Homans (1958) and Blau (1964/2008) highlighted that individuals needed trust to build and maintain a relationship. The antecedents of trust in an online retail relationship were highlighted by Kim and Peterson (2017), and Mou and Cohen (2014) and shown in table 4. There was a degree of overlap between the various antecedents as expressed by the participants. Vendor based factors were the characteristics of the firm as seen in its industry, and institutional based factors were the characteristics that the consumer experienced or perceived when interacting with the firm.

Table 4

Trust Factors in an On-line Exchange Relationship

Theme	Reference	% of the frequency of occurrence
Vendor & institution based	7 (P1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8)	100
Technology	4(P1,4,5,7)	50
Consumer characteristics	1(P1)	12.5
Knowledge	5(P3,4,5,6,8)	62.5

Note. ($N = 8$).

Technology related to the ease of use, system quality, and information quality,

and institution-based factors were factors that affected the consumers trust in the interface

such as perceptions of website security, platform reliability and the ability to exchange

information (privacy), all being critical in building trust in e-commerce (Kim & Peterson,

2017; Mou & Cohen, 2014). Technology was a consistent point among all participants

and pointed out as being critical to building online trust in the relationship. Industry

research into the African retail industry by Deloitte (2015b) pointed to cyber-security,

fraud, systemic corruption coupled with infrastructure difficulties inhibited growth in the

industry but provided internet and e-commerce firms opportunities to meet these

challenges. P2 described the influence of security as a massive barrier to online sales and

unique to the South African market. P5 clarified this point further "there is an endemic

distrust of banking in South Africa……handed down from generation to generation,

therefore to get someone to use the bank in a nonphysical way, is quite a challenge". The

practical manifestation of this was, as pointed out by P6, that a large part of the economy

was still cash-based, with a significant portion of customers not having bank accounts. To overcome this phenomenon, the company as part of its online strategic initiative provided for all its account members, across all of its brand platforms, the ability to buy online, and pay with their account cards, which required no details, detailed in it integrated report for 2018.

P1 focused on technology factors relating primarily to two facets of information quality, First, as it related to selling what you say you are selling, or the clarity of the message, which underpinned building brand trust. Second, that information relating to promotions should tie up to brick and mortar promotions, thus creating a seamless message and transition between the two platforms. Industry research conducted by Deloitte (2015a) discuss the issue that consumers wanted the message, price and product information to be consistent across all platforms. Follow-up discussions on this point highlighted the issue of a product being a standard price and then discounted to 75% the next day. The person buying at full price felt cheated, and this broke the trust relationship. An occurrence of this disjointed action occurred just before this interview, as explained by P8, where the product was not available in sufficient quantity in-store as well as online. Transparency in handling the incident, and communication coupled with leveraging the firm's reputation, described as one of the vendor-based factors (Kim & Peterson, 2017; Mou & Cohen, 2014) helped to rebuild a degree of trust.

P3 discussed trust using the term *trust signals* that emphasized at each of the consumer touch points that this is secure and providing continuous *trust signals* throughout the consumer online journey, which was supported by Mou and Cohen (2014)

that reducing uncertainty was critical in the online domain. P3 believed educating the customer throughout the entire journey helped to reduce this uncertainty, while P4 discussed educating user awareness campaigns. P6 emphasized in-store education, with pamphlets and banners emphasizing *how* and the benefits of online, and continued education mailers with existing account holders. P5 believed educating the consumer on to how to shop online, in the safest possible way, as well as what and how the company operated online, made its online operation more visible. Also providing comparative product information also builds trust. Additional comments on trust included the company's footprint and physical presence at the major stores across the country, *just by being there* people could trust what they could see (P3), this vendor factor (Mou & Cohen, 2014) where the firm was visible, and tangible helped build trust. This approach by participants of providing or sharing knowledge in a relationship across the platforms and products was dependent on the existence of an element of trust which Tabrizi (2013) highlighted as critical to the knowledge sharing process. Chang, Hsu, Shiau, and Tsai (2015) suggested that trust was a function of the belief in an exchange party rather than their ability to perform a specific action. Recent research of trust in RM in the telecoms industry by Mahmoud, Hinson, and Adika (2018) identified trust as the most critical element in an online relationship, with a high level of trust having an impact on satisfaction and then customer retention in the relationship.

Theme 4: Reciprocal Relationships.

Exchanges over time resulted in norms of expected behavior, and according to Blau (1964/2008) and Homans (1958) SET relied extensively on these norms. As pointed

out by Homans (1974), for the relationship to continue, the expectation of reciprocity was vital. Reciprocity in an exchange partnership was a pattern of behavior that looked to balance obligations or perceived indebtedness and could build long-term relationships (Chakiso, 2015). As pointed out by Schumann et al. (2014) the more people could observe a reciprocal behavior in an online setting, the more likely they were to reciprocate. Pai and Tsai (2016) pointed out reciprocity was most likely a fundamental mechanism that influenced information sharing behavior. Table 5 highlighted the various discussion forums, platforms, and approaches that allowed for a description or rating of the retail experience. In a reciprocal relationship, this was the platform where, according to Diekmann et al. (2013) good behavior was rewarded, and poor behavior punished.

Table 5

Strategies to Build a Reciprocal Relationship

Theme	Reference	% of the frequency of occurrence
Social Media	8 (P1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8)	100
Blogs/discussion forums	4 (P1,3,4,7)	50
User generated content	7 (P1,2,3,5,6,7,8)	87.5
Ratings/Reviews	8(P1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8)	100

Note. ($N = 8$).

The company in its integrated report for 2018 underscored the importance of the following factors: its digital platform, the meeting of customer expectations and providing a platform for the communication of positive experiences. These important

factors, as described by Homans (1974), was a stimulus proposition leading to a norm of expected behavior over time.

The ubiquitous influence of technology on communication was no more apparent than in the online, e-commerce environment. P1 pointed out how everything on the digital platform fed into each other, all aimed at having conversations, providing knowledge and building relationships with the consumer; and where appropriate with the supplier. In this regard, communication could be two-way, between customer and retailer, such as ratings; three-way between customers, retailer, and supplier, such as reviews; or many to many such as social media platforms that also allowed and included user-generated content (UGC). New research by Dong, Chang, Liang, and Fan (2018) into how online media influenced consumers purchase intention described interaction as being either I speak, and you listen (one to one), or we all speak, listen, and respond (one to many and many to many). All participants discussed approaches and focus areas in building communication to enable various aspects of this reciprocal relationship. As discussed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) firms were uncomfortable in an environment where consumers were free to speak to one another, and firms had less control over the information about them and their product or service that users exchanged among themselves. From a firm's perspective, they could either manage the communication or take a hands-off approach. In discussing corporate governance, the company in its integrated report for 2016 highlighted the effectiveness of social media in promoting and informing the consumer but believed, however, that it should be managed to protect the company's reputation. P1 dismissed the managing of social media approach and argued

that in having a reciprocal relationship "we want to be in their space, we want them to feel comfortable talking to and about us, to their friends and people they grew up with" and added that for their brand social media *translated into* the traditional eWOM. Melancon and Dalakas (2018) stated that social media was a powerful RM tool. P7 highlighted the huge potential for positive rewards when the appropriate positive content was on social media. P7 considered social media the largest content platform used to promote themselves, and positively affirms it as *gold*. Recent research (Yusuf et al., 2018) highlighted this transition of traditional eWOM (defined broadly as communication by consumers about a product, retailer or service made electronically available, that is available to numerous people via the internet) to social collaborations and social commerce (s-commerce) where 80% of customers would only purchase online after reading reviews. P3 discussed the interchangeability between social media as a platform, and eWOM as a marketing strategy, discussing both simultaneously as a way to build a two-way relationship.

Recent research by Wang, Du, and Olsen (2018) underscored the significance of a feedback mechanism, and its positive influence on trust. Without being able to try products before purchasing them, consumers questioned the quality of both the product and product description provided by online retailers. Consumers were now relying on online word-of-mouth (eWOM) to overcome this problem, while at the same time, an increasing number of consumers were relying more and more on online reviews to make an informed purchase decision (Zhao, Stylianou, & Zheng, 2017). New empirical research by (Yusuf et al., 2018) supported the fact that these numbers are increasing. The

commitment to the relationship was a fundamental construct of SET (Blau 1964/2008) and emphasized the importance of promoting online reviews feedback mechanism. P3 discussed that WOM and eWOM submitted by a knowledgeable person could positively influence sales in the brand. The fact that traditional WOM was about customers spreading pro-brand messages in their direct social network (Groeger & Buttle, 2014) which positively influenced their acquaintance's decision-making process (Chu & Sung, 2015) supported the viewpoint of P3.

Forums, blogs, ratings, and product reviews were more in line with the traditional definition of eWOM and used by all participants in varying degrees as a feedback mechanism. As highlighted by Liu and Tang (2018) they were growing as a source of information and were replacing mainstream marketing. Research had shown the influence of consumer reviews on most consumers, to choose a brand that was not of their original choice, and that a significant majority of consumers trusted online reviews (Floyd, Freling, Alhoqail, Cho, & Freling, 2014). Zhao et al. (2017) supported the view of the positive impact of online reviews on the development of trust. P7 comments on forums concurred with most participants on the characteristics and uses of forums, notably that forums were brand dependent and, used to share knowledge and information among consumers, between the firm and consumer and between customer and supplier. P4 clarified that the latter was facilitated by the firm when issues arose, that could benefit more customers, such as innovative ways to use a new product. The strategic use of forums as elaborated by P7 from the RM perspective supported recent research by Melancon and Dalakas (2018), The research maintained that forums allowed the

company to interact, engage and provide specific customer content, maintain commitment and profitability in long-term relationships. The research conducted by Dong, Chang, Liang, and Fan (2018) supported the view that forums were a valuable strategy for the one to one, and one too many approaches to communication. Current research by Liu and Tang (2018) also illustrated that a belief in the knowledge of the many replaced previous reliance on specialist knowledge.

Ratings and reviews were two feedback mechanisms that directly rewarded or punished positive or negative, experience, service or product and directly impacted the retailer. This feedback mechanism was viewed as an expression of the commitment to the long-term relationship, as posited in SET by Blau (1964/2008). As emphasized by P5, reviews were *incredibly important,* and *a powerful tool* where customers were encouraged to give reviews at a product level (P3) or brand level (P2). The overall philosophy of participants was summed up best by P4 and P5 who agreed that "we don't incentivize our customers to submit reviews, we don't want to buy or reward a review, the least we can do is respond though." Customers were also encouraged to become part of the online community (P2), and as pointed out by P2, P3 and P4 reviews were product or brand focused, aimed at providing customers with relevant knowledge-based content. In discussing knowledge sharing in online communities from a SET perspective Yan, Wang, Chen, and Zhang (2016) emphasized that individuals in an online community exchanged resources with others. Adding that the exchange of resources stemmed from the desire to receive something in return, such as maximizing benefits and minimizing costs, and that both extrinsic and extrinsic benefits accordingly drove knowledge sharing.

P2 highlighted the use of reviews as free marketing material, while P4 explained where products received poor reviews the company actively facilitated interaction between the customer and supplier to address issues. P3 echoed this approach and added that transparency was important. As stated earlier the firm in its integrated report for 2016 documented the management of communication content as it was worried about negative communication harming its reputation. If the firm adopted a strategy that addressed and resolved negative communication timelessly, actively and transparently, it would effectively negate the firm's concern and make this an effective marketing strategy, which showed the firms commitment to the long-term relationship. This approach to managing online customer complaints was discussed in recent research by Stevens, Spaid, Breazeale, and Esmark Jones (2018) who pointed out that online negative reviews and complaints were not always bad news. But rather customer complaints had the potential to improve customer loyalty and improve relationships, as long as the complaints were responded to quickly, handled with transparency and encouraged customer interaction, where the firm was seen to act ethically. Ratings, being one to five stars, discussed by P5 and P8 are service focused and fed back into an internal company scorecard to measure marketing effectiveness, and as stated by P2 used as a tool to *tweak* existing marketing strategies, and P3 added, *there is a strategy that sits there*.

Social media and user generated content (UGC) was a many-to-many means of communication aimed at a general audience, which extended beyond the relationship with the firm. As pointed out by P3, after a while campaigning through social media worked almost organically without borders. P6 described campaigning through social

media as accessing customers that were not currently in the fan base, while P1 explained

that social media acted as a cushion between the firm and consumer, more in-line with a

pre-conversation. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media marketing was

becoming vital for business, and a survey of marketing executives (Stelzener, 2012)

found 86% believed social media influenced their business. The collaboration between a

supplier and consumer leads to value co-creation, this collaborative approach was used

by P2 who used social media as a way of showcasing the brand and from P6 perspective

using *brand loyalists,* and the UGC strengthened the remarketing of the brand. Recent

research by Yu, Tsai, Wang, Lai, and Tajvidi (2018) into building value co-creation in

social commerce, a development out of RM studies, emphasized that trust and

commitment were pivotal to this co-creation collaboration. Given the numerous

motivational factors from a SET perspective, Blau (1964/2008) pointed out that trust and

commitment were vital to building the long-term relationship. While the retailer and

product required trust, creating content required commitment in time, effort and energy.

P7 pointed out that remarketing UGC that tagged a brand, as long as it was positive, was

more valuable than paid media.

Application to Professional Practice

Based on the constructs of trust, reciprocity, commitment, and positive

relationships found in SET, RM, as pointed out by Sheth (2018), had moved marketing

from a transactional paradigm to one of long-term relationships. Stemming from the

research question, the analysis of interview answers with the aid of NVivo12® software,

and reading industry and company documentation, I identified four main themes (a)

CRM, (b) exchange relationships, (c) trust, (d) reciprocal relationship. These findings may be relevant to marketing executives of traditional retail firms wanting to improve existing online sales.

Marketing executives in traditional brick and mortar retail focus on RM, however, in an online environment the RM transitions to CRM used technology and data is knowledge. However, the firm has 28 retail brands, 20 omnichannel brands, trading out of 4,034 outlets and customers could purchase across the Africa online brands with over 12.3 million cash and credit customers, requiring clarity on the how data of data collection. Each customer could buy separately across numerous brands; creating a customer for each brand, or there was one customer profiled over multiple brands, making identification of buying patterns and preferences easier. As pointed out by participants, data was at the core of everything the firm did and change in data would lead to immediate change in the strategy. Using data to craft and determine the message, being responsive and able to market to customers more effectively based on customized needs builds a stronger relationship, as supported by Hendriyani and Auliana (2018), optimizing customer data, allows the firm to understand customer behavior and ability to provide a different individualized customer experience.

With the reach and speed of social media, and the desire of the firm to build online communities, customers were, as pointed out by Sheth (2018) becoming either ambassadors or vigilantes of brands, products, or services, with everybody watching the company and by extension management practices. Service or product failures were now managed or handled in full view on the social media stage (Melancon & Dalakas, 2018).

As experienced by one of the participants, resolving this was a visible indication of the firm's trust and commitment to the long-term relationship.

Marketing executives wishing to create reciprocal relationships which rewarded good experiences, products or services and punished poor experiences, needed to facilitate the relationship through the appropriate feedback platform, with a high-quality website, that was responsive and reliable, that allowed for comparative information, relevant product information and the exchange of information seamlessly and consistently across all platforms. As emphasized by Liu and Tang (2018) these sources of information acted as valuable mechanisms for building trust. Marketing executives wishing to use social media and UGC to promote reciprocal relationships should be aware that comprised of two components, a social, and a media component, each requiring different strategies, having inconsistent messages across multiple platforms, as has been experienced and empirically shown by Liu and Tang (2018) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) damaged the trust relationship.

Implications for Social Change

Any discussion on the potential implication to social change needs to examine the context, which in this research was post-apartheid, democratic South Africa. As a developing country and emerging democracy, the country has many challenges. A major challenge has been highlighted by Statistics South Africa (2018) that revealed that in the first quarter of 2018 the unemployment rate of people aged between 15-34 was 38.2%, that is one in every three youth do not have a job. The demographics of most of the unemployed youth in South Africa are black, and they resided in townships and rural

parts of South Africa. Statistics South Africa (2018) also highlighted that the youth were facing immense difficulties in achieving employment, with a large percentage of discouraged youth not building on their skills through education or training. Clark and Worger (2016) in their examination of apartheid South Africa from 1948, explained that apartheid-era townships arose because of racial segregation. These townships are apartheid government designated areas located on the outskirts of the major cities where non-white, working-class communities who worked in areas previously designated as *white-only* live. Twenty-four years after its democratic dispensation, the spatial geography of the different races under the apartheid government persists. These townships still have limited entries and are poorly developed in services and infrastructure. The firm, as stated in its integrated reports (2017;2018) targets two areas, youth education and the uplifting of local communities as part of its corporate social investment.

Against the backdrop of these challenges, the firm should consider a corporate social investment (CSI) program that targets unemployed township youth to support the improvement of their online sales. Such a program will have a positive influence on unemployed township youth which will also indirectly uplift local communities. As pointed out by participants (P5 and P7) and mentioned in the integrated report for 2018, the firm paid for the delivery and collection costs of online goods. As part of its CSI program, the firm should employ unemployed township youth for the collections and deliveries of online goods for consumers located in these areas. Youth from the many different townships will have little difficulty navigating their specific townships, where

they grew up or live, and where there might be no residential addresses. P4 discussed the use of the app What3words which aimes at providing an optional and affordable delivery service. The app was a geocoding system that divided the world into a grid of 3m x 3m with each one assigned unique three words. The proposed CSI program for unemployed township youth could utilize the app to assist the youth in the delivery of online purchases. Coupling such a program with the firm's buy online pick-up instore program that was implemented this year, as discussed in its integrated report for 2018, will be beneficial. Recent research by Jin, Li, and Cheng into this mode of order completion highlighted that 42% of retailers were using this method. Conversely, the main drawback was that most customers could not decide on which store to use to pick up their delivery.

Highlighting the potential growth across omnichannel markets, and changing trends in retail, the firm stated in its integrated report for 2018 that flexibility in engaging customers, satisfying expectations and creating positive experiences is vital. Nistor and Nyer (2018) in recent research highlighted that retailers were adopting showrooming as a new retail format. Consumers compare prices online, try on products instore, order online; generally at a discounted price, and then have the items delivered at home. Making use of its Retail Academy (launched in 2016) the firm could create virtual showrooms and localized virtual mini-stores in the townships, by providing training in dressmaking, basic sewing including measurements, IT training for online account applications, online shopping, purchases and queries, and creating a flexible, positive virtual online shopping experience. Thereby creating what Nistor and Nyer (2018) described as pop-up stores, a new trend for retailers to experiment in low-cost retail. As

Deloitte (2015a) highlighted in their industry research on retailing, online retail was about overcoming that initial barrier to purchasing online and forming long-term relationships that, as pointed out by Blau (1964/2008), where incremental trust begins.

Recommendations for Action

Marketing executives of traditional retail firms that have not expanded their e-commerce business experienced inhibited growth, higher transaction costs, and a loss of their competitive advantage (Agarwal & Wu, 2015). Findings from this study that focused on trust, commitment and building positive long-term exchange relationships might benefit marketing executives wishing to improve online sales; the study had highlighted some potential recommendations that marketing executives might consider.

The outcome of this study showed that data was fundamental to CRM and that it drove all marketing activities, changing the data changed the marketing strategy. The data should reflect the buying patterns of an individual across all platforms and all brands. The data generated should be maintained, managed, responsive and accurate, in a centralized data management department. This data should be accessible to allow marketing executives to build responsive; tailor-made offerings to customers was shown by Hendriyani and Auliana (2018) to enhance the long-term relationship.

To maintain trust and commitment in the firm and the brand marketing executives that developed strategies to timelessly and effectively address complaints could benefit from the fact that satisfied customers were more likely to recommend the brand via social media and an increased purchase intention of consumers (Melancon & Dalakas, 2018). Having received a complaint, the potential strategy would be to have the right trained

personnel respond promptly, be transparent, and act ethically (Stevens et al., 2018). Transparency was also crucial in this regard, as has been cited previously, consumers trust online reviews, deleting them looks like there is something to hide. However, being open and honest and maintaining the record for future reviews as highlighted by both Stevens et al. (2018) and Floyd et al. (2014) lends credibility to the feedback process, and consumers were more trusting of reviews that have positive and negative comments.

From a social perspective, the firm has a hands-off approach and respects the space of the individual, and media (UGC) used as remarketing content. As highlighted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) marketing executives, managing specific brands should ensure that there was access to all; that included employees, was honest, did not mislead and kept the message consistent across all platforms, steps that the participants already attempted to take.

The findings of this study are valuable to all marketing executives who are interested in developing marketing strategies in an online environment. All participants, as well as people involved in facilitating this study, have requested a copy of the completed study, which would be sent to them via email after the study approval process. I had also indicated my willingness to discuss the study, and the findings of the study with interested stakeholders, at their premises. Dissemination of the study would proceed the after approval on the ProQuest platform and through business and scholarly journals.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this study, I found that using the conceptual framework of SET and the constructs of trust, commitment, and reciprocity to build mutually beneficial long-term

relationships had been a valid approach. While the language might not be clear, as pointed out by P5 *It's kind of fascinating as a language I don't quite understand, but everything about it I understand* the desired outcome of building long-term relationships is. RM uses the tenants of SET, and CRM evolved out of RM to include the use of technology. With marketing executives operating in an online environment using technology as a platform for online activities, interaction, and communication focusing specifically on the consumer; it seemed logical that data will be central to their marketing efforts. Future research could use the results from this study to research into the application of data in developing strategies in the conceptual framework of SET. Future research could be extended to include other industries and other geographical locations. Also using data, future researchers may use the results from this study as a foundation for the determination, in financial terms whether the incremental trust is a valid proposition in SET.

Future researchers may include aspects of innovation that directly impact the use of technology, which influence multiple forms of communication such as social media and improve the ease and efficiency of the click-through rate and ultimate delivery in developing and developed economies. Marketing executives and researchers could also use this study to identify marketing strategies in their industries and geographical location.

Reflections

I am 55 years old, working as a MetCal specialist in Saudi Arabia, while this DBA might not contribute a positive career move in my current field of employment, it

has helped me grow as an individual, and I feel privileged that I have been able to finish this journey. I had what could only be described politely as a misguided childhood, which had become progressively worse after my family immigrated to South Africa. The strange new country and the schooling system disappointed me, so much so that I would often drop out of school. Hence my true potential was not actualized, and as an adult, I have strived to make up for my lost opportunities. Too often, I believe, individuals focus on what they are good at and tend to become our careers, creating undeveloped aspects of ourselves. Although I am successful in my current career, I viewed the DBA as a personal challenge to all the negative experiences and disappointments of my childhood and youth. Interestingly, my work as a MetCal specialist allowed me to logically and practically model the complexities of this study.

The overriding bias and my fundamental world-view that framed this study are that I believe in the significance of good relationships. Throughout my 35-year career, I have been in the service industry in some way, shape or form. I firmly believe people enter into and maintain a relationship for their own reason, if it adds value or a benefit to them, requiring commitment and trust to maintain the relationship. This is why SET theory, of which I initially knew very little about, resonated with me and the constructs seem to flow logically out of it. A DBA has two components, each with their challenges and best epitomized in the book by William Easterly in *The White Man's Burden*, as the Planners and the Searchers. Up until the completion of the proposal, I was the Planner, only worried and focused on the academic content, vaguely seeing the big picture. The identification of key search words, coupled with constructs from SET, that flow

throughout the study, and direct the interview questions seemed to create bounded rationality, that to a certain degree precludes other outcomes, and honed my focus. Once I received my IRB approval I became a Searcher, and then the practicalities and associated worries came, with the "What if's…." "What happens if my conceptual framework fails?", "what if I didn't get enough interviews or participants?", "What if I never achieved data saturation?", "What if I lost my data, had a malfunction with my recorder?". The completion of the study is indicative that the "what if's" never carried the day.

Conclusion

The action of exchange is a crucial feature of marketing as a field of study. SET is a valid conceptual framework to explore marketing strategies, and while the language might not be familiar, the intended process and outcome is. The purpose of this study using SET as the conceptual framework was on the voluntary, non-contractual obligation exchange process between parties that involved material or symbolic resources of exchange, built up over time. Both parties enter into and maintain exchange relationships based on expectation and belief that this is beneficial, and rewarding to both sides, thereby promoting their self-interest. SET included a social element that is not typical of purely economic exchange.

The outcome of this study showed that positive exchange relationships were primarily measured in economic terms by individuals on both sides, while the benefits focused on various types of knowledge transferred, marketing executives needed to continually seek to maximize both tangible and non-tangible benefits for the consumer.

The building of trust was an incremental process and was critical in the early phases of an

exchange relationship. Marketing executives needed to overcome time-based and

physical distance obstacles for the consumer. Then marketing executives could focus on

online institutional factors such as, a high-quality website that was time-saving, easy to

use that facilitated information sharing, perceptions of security, the safety of transactions

that maintained privacy, in all instances providing knowledge that was relevant and

accurate while being transparent. Finally, marketing executives could promote a

reciprocal relationship, by engaging with the consumer timeously and honestly while

respecting the individual's space. Negative experiences might occur, how marketing

executives managed this, could become one of their most valuable competitive

advantages that ultimately would build trust and long-term mutual relationships. There

was an implication for positive social change for firms that achieved their marketing

objectives, which potentially included the reduction of youth unemployment, creating job

opportunities in local communities and the transferring of knowledge and skills.

References

Adinoff, B., Conley, R. R., Taylor, S. F., & Chezem, L. L. (2013). Protecting confidentiality in human research. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 170*, 466–470. Retrieved from http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/

Agarwal, J., & Wu, T. (2015). Factors influencing growth potential of e-commerce in emerging economies: An institution-based N-OLI framework and research propositions. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, *57*, 197–215. doi:10.1002/tie.21694

Ahmed, S., & Mustafa, N. (2017). Determinants of hotel's service standard, reputation and relationship orientation. *Journal of Tourism & Hospitality, 6*, 261–269. doi:10.4172/2167-0269.1000262

Ahamed, J., & Skallerud, K. (2015). The link between export relationship quality, performance and expectation of continuing the relationship. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, *10*, 16–31. doi:10.1108/IJOEM-04-2012-0036

Ahmed, S. & Soomro, N. (2017). Determinants of hotel's service standard: Reputation and relationship orientation. *Journal of Tourism & Hospitality, 6*, 262–269. doi:10.4172/2167-0269.1000262

Ainslie. G. (2016). The cardinal anomalies that led to behavioral economics: Cognitive or motivational? *Managerial and Decision Economics*, *37,* 261–273. doi:10.1002/mde.2715

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50*, 179-211. doi:10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T

Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (2000). Attitudes and the attitude-behavior relation: Reasoned and automatic processes. *European Review of Social Psychology, 11,* 1–33. doi:10.1080/14792779943000116

Alalwan, A. A., Rana, N. P., Dwivedi, Y. K., & Algharabat, R. (2017). Social media in marketing: A review and analysis of the existing literature. *Telematics and Informatics*, *34*, 1177–1190. doi:10.1016/j.tele.2017.05.008 0736-5853/? 2017

Al-Alak, B. A. (2014). Impact of marketing activities on relationship quality in the Malaysian banking sector. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *21*, 347–356. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2013.07.001

Amaro, S., & Duarte, P. (2015). An integrative model of consumers' intentions to purchase travel online. *Tourism Management*, *46*, 64–79. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2014.06.006

Anyan, F. (2013). The influence of power shifts in data collection and analysis stages: A focus on qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Report, 18*, 1–9. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr

Aryee, S., Walumbwa, F. O., Mondejar, R., & Chu, C. W. L. (2015). Accounting for the influence of overall justice on job performance: Integrating self-determination and social exchange theories. *Journal of Management Studies*, *52*, 231–252. doi:10.1111/joms.12067

Bailey, L. F. (2014). The origin and success of qualitative research. *International Journal of Market Research, 56*, 167-184. doi:10.2501/IJMR-2014-013

Baños, R., Wandosell, G., & Parra, M. C. (2016). Web GIS to enhance relational capital: The case of general merchandise retailers. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *20*, 578–593. doi:10.1108/JKM-06-2015-0218

Barry, A. E., Chaney, B., Piazza-Gardner, A. K., & Chavarria, E. A. (2014). Validity and reliability reporting practices in the field of health education and behavior: A review of seven journals. *Health Education & Behavior, 41*, 12–18. doi:10.1177/1090198113483139

Belous, Y. (2014). Why do we share information online? A study of motivations. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, *7*(4), 383–400. Retrieved from https://www.internationaljournal.org/

Beneke, J. (2013). The influence of perceived product quality, relative price and risk on customer value and willingness to buy: a study of private label merchandise. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 22*, 218–228. doi:10.1108/JPBM-02-2013-0262

Beneke, J., Brito, A., & Garvey, K-A. (2015). Propensity to buy private label merchandise. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 43*, 43–62. doi:10.1108/ijrdm-09-2013-0175

Bilgihan, A., & Bujisic, M. (2015). The effect of website features in online relationship marketing: A case of online hotel booking. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *14*, 222–232. doi:10.1016/j.elerap.2014.09.001 1567-4223/?

Blau, P. M. (2008). *Exchange and power in social life*. London, United Kingdom: Transaction Publishers. (Original work published 1964)

Bloomberg, L. D. & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation.* (2nd ed.) London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Boblin, S. L., Ireland, S., Kirkpatrick, H., & Robertson, K. (2013). Using Stake's qualitative case study approach to explore implementation of evidence-based practice. *Qualitative Health Research, 23,* 1267–1275. doi:10.1177/1049732313502128

Boley, B. B., McGehee, N. G., Perdue, R. R., & Long, P. (2014). Empowerment and resident attitudes toward tourism: Strengthening the theoretical foundation through a Weberian lens. *Annals of Tourism Research, 49,* 33–50. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2014.08.005

Brodie, R. J. (2017). Enhancing theory development in the domain of relationship marketing: How to avoid the danger of getting stuck in the middle. *Journal of Services Marketing, 31,* 29–23. doi:10.1108/JSM-05-2016-0179

Bronnenberg, B. J., & Ellickson, P. B. (2015). Adolescence and the path to maturity in global retail. *Journal of Economic Perspectives, 29,* 113–134. doi:10.1257/jep.29.4.113

Brunswick, G, J., & Zinser, B, A. (2016). The evolution of service-dominant logic and its impact on marketing theory and practice: a review. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal, 20,* 120–137. Retrieved from https://www.abacademies.org

Chakiso, C. B. (2015). The effect of relationship marketing on customers' loyalty (Evidence from Zemen Bank). *EMAJ: Emerging Markets Journal, 5,* 58–70. doi:10.5195/emaj.2015.84

Chang, Y.-W., Hsu, P.-Y., Shiau, W.-L., & Tsai, C.-C. (2015). Knowledge sharing

intention in the United States and China: a cross-cultural study. *European Journal

of Information Systems*, *24*, 262–277. doi:10.1057/ejis.2014.28

Chang, H. H., Tsai, Y-C., Chen, S-H., Huang, G-H., & Tseng, Y. H. (2015). Building

long-term partnerships by certificate implementation: a social exchange theory

perspective. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 30*, 867–879.

doi:10.1108/JBIM-08-2013-0190

Chu, S. C., & Sung, Y. (2015). Using a consumer socialization framework to understand

electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) group membership among brand followers on

Twitter. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *14*, 251–260.

doi:10.1016/j.elerap.2015.04.002

Clark, N. L., & Worger, W. H. (2016). *South Africa: The rise and fall of apartheid.*

London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Cleary, M., Horsfall, J., & Hayter, M. (2014). Data collection and sampling in qualitative

research: Does size matter? *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *70*,

473–475. doi:10.1111/jan.12163

Coffey, A. (2014). Analysing documents. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of

Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 367–379). London, United Kingdom: SAGE

Publications.

Colquitt, J. A., Baer, M. D., Long, D. M., & Halvorsen-Ganepola, M. D. K. (2014). Scale

indicators of social exchange relationships: A comparison of relative content

validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *99*, 599–618. doi:10.1037/a0036374

Cope, D. G., (2014). Methods and meanings: Credibility and trustworthiness of

    qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, *41*, 89–91.

    doi:10.1188/14.ONF.89-91

Coulson, A. B., MacLaren, A. C., McKenzie, S., & O'Gorman, K. D. (2014). Hospitality

    codes and social exchange theory: The Pashtunwali and tourism in Afghanistan.

    Tourism Management, *45*, 134–141. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2014.03.019

Cronin, C. (2014). Using case study research as a rigorous form of inquiry. *Nurse

    Researcher, 21*, 19–27. doi:10.7748/nr.21.5.19.e1240

Cropanzano, R., Anthony, E. L., Daniels, S. R., & Hall, A. V. (2017). Social exchange

    theory: a critical review with theoretical remedies. *Academy of Management

    Annals*, *11*, 479–516. doi:10.5465/annals.2015.0099

Crosno, J. L., & Brown, J. R. (2015). A meta-analytic review of the effects of

    organizational control in marketing exchange relationships. *Journal of the

    Academy of Marketing Science*, *43*, 297–314. doi:10.1007/s11747-014-0386-5

Cui, M., & Pan, S. L. (2015). Developing focal capabilities for e-commerce adoption: A

    resource orchestration perspective. *Information and Management, 52*, 200–209.

    doi:10.1016/j.im.2014.08.006

Demo, G., Watanabe, E. A. D. M., Chauvet, D. C. V., & Rozzett, K. (2017). Customer

    relationship management scale for the b2c market: A cross-cultural comparison.

    RAM. Revista de Administração Mackenzie, *18*, 42–69. doi:10.1590/1678-

    69712017/administracao.v18n3p42-69

Dalir, M., Zarch, M. E., Aghajanzadeh, R., & Eshghi, S. (2017). The role of e-CRM in the quality of customer-bank relationship. *International Academic Journal of Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management, 4*, 12–22. Retrieved from www.iaiest.com

Deloitte. (2015a). *Global powers of retailing 2015: Embracing innovation*. Retrieved from https://www2.deloitte.com/be/en/pages/consumer-business/articles/global-powers-of-retailing.html

Deloitte. (2015b). *African powers of retailing new horizons for growth*. Retrieved from https://www2.deloitte.com/ng/en/pages/consumer-business/articles/ng-african-powers-of-retailing-new-horizons-for-growth.html

Dewani, P. P., Sinha, P. K., & Mathur, S. (2016). Role of gratitude and obligation in long-term customer relationships. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 31*, 143–156. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.01.005

De Waal, A. A., Goedegebuure, R., & Tan Akaraborworn, C. (2014). Adapting the high-performance organization framework to the Thai context. *Measuring Business Excellence, 18,* 28–38. doi:10.1108/mbe-08-2013-0043

Diekmann, A., Jann, B., Przepiorka, W., & Wehrli, S. (2013). Reputation formation and the evolution of cooperation in anonymous online markets. *American Sociological Review, 79*, 65–85. doi:10.1177/0003122413512316

Dong, X., Chang, Y., Liang, S., & Fan, X. (2018). How online media synergy influences consumers' purchase intention. *Internet Research, 28*, 946–964. doi:10.1108/IntR-08-2017-0298

Doody, O., & Noonan, M. (2013). Preparing and conducting interviews to collect data.

> *Nurse Researcher*, *20*, 28–32. doi:10.7748/nr2013.05.20.5.28.e327

Economic Analysis Unit of SRM. (2012). *The Retail Industry on the Rise in South Africa,*

> (Quarterly Bulletin, 1-39). Gauteng Province, Provincial Treasury, Republic of

> South Africa.

Eisingerich, A. B., Chun, H. H., Liu, Y., Jia, H. M., & Bell, S. J. (2015). Why

> recommend a brand face-to-face but not on Facebook? How word-of-mouth on

> online social sites differs from traditional word-of-mouth. *Journal of Consumer*

> *Psychology*, *25*, 120–128. doi:10.1016/j.jcps.2014.05.004

Emerson, R. M. (1962). Power-Dependence relations, *Annual Sociological Review*, *27,*

> 31–41. doi:10.2307/2089716

Emerson, R. M. (1976). Social exchange theory, *Annual Review of Sociology*, *2,* 335–

> 362. doi:10.1146/annurev.so.02.080176.002003

Esin, C., Fathi, M., & Squire, C. (2014). Narrative analysis: The constructionist approach.

> In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 203–216).

> London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Felix, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., & Hinsch, C. (2017). Elements of strategic social media

> marketing: A holistic framework. *Journal of Business Research*, *70*, 118–126.

> doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.05.001

Feng, X., Fu, S., & Qin, J. (2016). Determinants of consumers' attitudes toward mobile advertising: The mediating roles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *63*, 334–341. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.024

Fernández-Sabiote, E., & Román, S. (2012). Adding clicks to bricks: A study of the consequences on customer loyalty in a service context. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *11*, 36–48. doi:10.1016/j.elerap.2011.07.007

Flick, U. (2014). Mapping the field. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 3–18). London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Floyd, K., Freling, R., Alhoqail, S., Cho, H. Y., & Freling, T. (2014). How online product reviews affect retail sales: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Retailing*, *90*, 217–232. doi:10.1016/j.jretai.2014.04.004

Fu, J. R., Ju, P. H., & Hsu, C. W. (2015). Understanding why consumers engage in electronic word-of-mouth communication: Perspectives from theory of planned behavior and justice theory. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *14*, 616–630. doi:10.1016/j.elerap.2015.09.003

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *Qualitative Report*, *20*(9), 1408–1416. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu

Glanz, K., Rimer, B. K., & Viswanath, K. (2008). *Health behavior and health education: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Grönroos, C. (2017). Relationship marketing readiness: theoretical background and measurement directions. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 218–225. doi:10.1108/JSM-02-2017-0056

Groeger, L., & Buttle, F. (2014). Word-of-mouth marketing influence on offline and online communications: Evidence from case study research. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *20*, 1–21. doi:10.1080/13527266.2013.797736

Grossoehme, D. H. (2014). Overview of qualitative research. *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, *20*, 109–122. doi:10.1080/08854726.2014.925660

Gummerus, J., von Koskull, C., & Kowalkowski, C. (2017). Guest editorial: Relationship marketing – past, present and future. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *31*, 1–5. doi:10.1108/JSM-12-2016-0424

Gummesson, E. (2017) From relationship marketing to total relationship marketing and beyond. *Journal of Services Marketing, 31*, 1–7, doi:10.1108/JSM-11-2016-0398

Gupta, R. K., & Awasthy, R. (2015). Qualitative research: An introduction. In R. Gupta & R. Awasthy (Eds.), *Qualitative research in management: Methods and experience* (pp. 3–37). London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Hacklin, F., & Wallnöfer, M. (2012). The business model in the practice of strategic decision making: insights from a case study. *Management Decision*, *50*, 166–188. doi:10.1108/00251741211203515

Hanafizadeh, P., Keating, B. W., & Khedmatgozar, H. R. (2014). A systematic review of Internet banking adoption. *Telematics and Informatics*, *31*, 492–510. doi:10.1016/j.tele.2013.04.003

Harvey, L. (2014). Beyond member-checking: a dialogic approach to the research interview. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *38*, 23–38. doi:10.1080/1743727X.2014.914487

Hendriyani, C., & Auliana, L. (2018). Transformation from relationship marketing to electronic customer relationship management: A literature study. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research, 7*, 116–125. Retrieved from http://buscompress.com/journal-home.html

Hasan, S. F., Lings, I., Neale, L., & Mortimer, G. (2014). The role of customer gratitude in making relationship marketing investments successful. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 21*, 788–796. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2014.06.007

Heng-Li, Y., & Chien-Liang, L. (2014). Why do people stick to Facebook web site? A value theory-based view. *Information Technology & People, 27*, 21–37. doi:10.1108/ITP-11-2012-0130

Homans, G. (1958). Social behavior as exchange. *American Journal of Sociology, 63*, 597–606. doi:10.1086/222355

Homans, G. (1974). *Social behavior, its elementary forms* (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Houghton, C., Casey, D., Shaw, D., & Murphy, K. (2013). Rigour in qualitative case study research. *Nurse Researcher, 20*, 12–17. doi:10.7748/nr2013.03.20.4.12.e326 Hsu,

Howard, J., Gagné, M., Morin, A. J. S., & Van den Broeck, A. (2016). Motivation

profiles at work: A self-determination theory approach. *Journal of Vocational*

Behavior, 74–89. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2016.07.004

Hsu, C.-W., Yin, C.-P., & Huang, L.-T. (2017). Understanding exchangers' attitudes and

intentions to engage in internet bartering based on social exchange theory (SET)

and the theory of reasoned action (TRA). *International Journal of Business and*

Information, *12*, 149–182. doi:10.6702/ijbi.2017.12.2.3

Huang, M. H. (2015). The influence of relationship marketing investments on customer

gratitude in retailing. *Journal of Business Research, 68*, 1318–1323.

doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.12.001

Huré, E., Picot-Coupey, K., & Ackermann, C. L. (2017). Understanding omnichannel

shopping value: A mixed-method study. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer*

Services, 39, 314–330. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2017.08.011

Hyett, N., Kenny, A., & Dickson-Swift, V. (2014). Methodology or method? A critical

review of qualitative case study reports. *International Journal of Qualitative*

Studies on Health and Well-being, 9, 1–12. doi:10.3402/qhw.v9.23606

Im, J., & Qu, H. (2017). Drivers and resources of customer co-creation: A scenario-based

case in the restaurant industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*,

64, 31–40. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.03.007

Izogo, E. E. (2017). Customer loyalty in telecom service sector: the role of service quality

and customer commitment. *TQM Journal*, *29*(1), 19–36. doi:10.1108/TQM-10-

2014-0089

Izogo, E. E., Ogba, I., & Nwekpa, K. C. (2016). Correlates of the determinants of relationship marketing in the retail sector: The Nigerian case. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, *7*, 30–53. doi:10.1108/09574090910954864

Jackson, G., & Ahuja, V. (2016). Dawn of the digital age and the evolution of the marketing mix. *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice*, *17*, 170–186. doi:10.1057/dddmp.2016.3

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *Qualitative Report, 17*, 1–10. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu

Jahanshahi, A., Zhang, S., & Brem, A. (2013). E-commerce for SMEs: Empirical insights from three countries. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, *20*, 849–865. doi:10.1108/JSBED-03-2012-0039

Jeong, M., & Oh, H. (2017). Business-to-business social exchange relationship beyond trust and commitment. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *65*, 115–124. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.06.004

Jin, M., Li, G., & Cheng, T. C. E. (2018). Buy online and pick up in-store: Design of the service area. *European Journal of Operational Research, 268*, 613–623. doi:10.1016/j.ejor.2018.02.002

Jones, M. A., Reynolds, K. E., Arnold, M. J., Gabler, C. B., Gillison, S. T., & Landers, V. M. (2015). Exploring consumers' attitude towards relationship marketing. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *29*, 188–199. doi:10.1108/JSM-04-2014-0134

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1979). Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk. *Econometrica*, *47*, 263–279. doi:10.21236/ada045771

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons, 53*(1), 59–68. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003

Kim, Y., & Peterson, R. A. (2017). A meta-analysis of online trust relationships in e-commerce. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *38*, 44–54. doi:10.1016/j.intmar.2017.01.001

Kühn, S., & Mostert, P. (2016). Relationship intention as a predictor of clothing retail customers' satisfaction, trust, commitment and relationship quality. *Management Dynamics*, *25*, 16–34. Retrieved from https://journals.co.za

Kudlats, J., Money, A., & Hair, J. F. (2014). Correspondence analysis: A promising technique to interpret qualitative data in family business research. *Journal of Family Business Strategy, 5*, 30–40. doi:10.1016/j.jfbs.2014.01.005

Lambe, J. C., Wittman, M., & Spekman, R. E. (2001). Social exchange theory and research on business to business relational exchange. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing, 8*, 1–36. doi:10.1300/j033v08n03_01

Lawler, E. J. (2001). An affect theory of social exchange. *American Journal of Sociology*, *107*, 321–352. doi:10.1086/324071

Lawler, E. J., & Yoon, J. (2014). The emergence of collective emotions in social exchange. *Collective Emotions,* 189–203. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199659180.003.0013

Lee, J. (2014). Genre-appropriate judgments of qualitative research. *Philosophy of Social Sciences, 44,* 316–348. doi:10.1177/0048393113479142

Lee, J. J., Capella, M. L., Taylor, C. R., Luo, M. M., & Gabler, C. B. (2014). The financial impact of loyalty programs in the hotel industry: A social exchange theory perspective. *Journal of Business Research, 67*, 2139–2146. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.04.023

Lee, J.-S., Kim, S., & Pan, S. (2014). The role of relationship marketing investments in customer reciprocity. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 26*, 1200–1224. doi:10.1108/ijchm-04-2013-0166

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2010) Practical research: Planning and design (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Levine, J., Chan, K. M. A., & Satterfield, T. (2015). From rational actor to efficient complexity manager: Exorcising the ghost of homo economicus with a unified synthesis of cognition research. *Ecological Economics*, *114*, 22–32. doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2015.03.010

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K Denzin & Y. S Lincoln. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.) [Kindle digital version]. Retrieved from http://www.amazon.co.uk

Lioukas, C. S., & Reuer, J. J. (2015). Isolating trust outcomes from exchange relationships: Social exchange and learning benefits of prior ties in alliances. *Academy of Management Journal*, *58*, 1826–1847. doi:10.5465/amj.2011.0934

Liu, Y., & Tang, X. (2018). The effects of online trust-building mechanisms on trust and repurchase intentions: An empirical study on eBay. *Information Technology and People, 31*, 666–687. doi:10.1108/ITP-10-2016-0242

Mahmoud, M. A., Hinson, R. E., & Adika, M. K. (2018). The Effect of Trust, Commitment, and Conflict Handling on Customer Retention: The Mediating Role of Customer Satisfaction. *Journal of Relationship Marketing, 1–20.* doi:10.1080/15332667.2018.1440146

Mangioni, V., & McKerchar, M. (2013). Strengthening the validity and reliability of the focus group as a method in tax research. *eJournal of Tax Research, 11*, 176–190. Retrieved from www.business.unsw.edu

Marinescu, A. (2016). Human nature in the economic behavior based on the neoclassical economic model. *Theoretical and Applied Economics, XXIII*(4), 203–214. Retrieved from https://econpapers.repec.org/

Martínez-Graña, A. M., Goy, J. L., & Zazo, C. (2013). Cartographic-environmental analysis of the landscape in natural protected parks for his management using GIS. Application to the natural parks of the "las Batuecas-Sierra de Francia" and "quilamas" (central system, Spain). *Journal of Geographic Information System, 5*(1), 54-68. doi:10.4236/jgis.2013.51006

Mavimbela, R., & Dube, E. (2016). Can an internet adoption framework be developed for SMEs in South Africa? *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Emerging Economies, 2*(2), 120–135. doi:10.1177/2393957516647250

Maxwell, J. A., & Chmiel, M. (2014a). Generalization in and from qualitative analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 540–553). London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Maxwell, J. A., & Chmiel, M. (2014b). Notes toward a theory of qualitative analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 21–34). London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

McCormack, D., Carr, T., McCloskey, R., Keeping-Burke, L., Furlong, K. E., & Doucet, S. (2012). Getting Through Ethics: The fit between research ethics board assessments and qualitative research. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, *7*, 30–6. doi:10.1525/jer.2012.7.5.30

Mekler, E. D., Brühlmann, F., Tuch, A. N., & Opwis, K. (2017). Towards understanding the effects of individual gamification elements on intrinsic motivation and performance. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *71*, 525–534. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2015.08.048

Melancon, J. P., & Dalakas, V. (2018). Consumer social voice in the age of social media: Segmentation profiles and relationship marketing strategies. *Business Horizons, 61*, 157–167. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2017.09.015

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: John Willey & Sons.

Miquel-Romero, M. J., Caplliure-Giner, E. M., & Adame-Sànchez, C. (2014). Relationship marketing management: Its importance in private label extension. *Journal of Business Research*, *67*, 667–672. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.11.025

Montaño, D. E., & Kasprzyk, D. (2008). Theory of reasoned action, theory of planned behavior, and the integrated behavioral model. In K. Glanz, B. K. Rimer & K. Viswanath (Eds*.), Health behavior and health education: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 67–96). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Morse, J. M. (2015). Critical analysis of strategies for determining rigor in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Health Research, 25*, 1212–1222. doi:10.1177/1049732315588501

Njie, B., & Asimiran, S. (2014). Case study as a choice in qualitative methodology. IOSR *Journal of Research & Method in Education, 4*, 35–40. doi:2320–7388

Mou, J., & Cohen, J. (2014). Trust in electronic-service providers: A meta-analysis of antecedents. *Proceedings of the 18th Pacific Asia Conference.* Retrieved from http://aisel.aisnet.org

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1979). *The Belmont report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Nicks, L. (2015). *Expatriate Retention: A Challenging Goal for Global Corporations* (Doctoral study). Retrieved from Walden University Library. (ProQuest Number: 3746869)

Nistor, C., & Nyer, P. (2018). The case for showrooming. *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management, 8,* 1684–1692. doi:10.4236/ajibm.2018.87112

Oliveira, T., Alhinho, M., Rita, P., & Dhillon, G. (2017). Modelling and testing consumer trust dimensions in e-commerce. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *71*, 153–164. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.050

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Leech, N. L., Slate, J. R., Stark, M., Sharma, B., Frels, R., . . . Combs, J. P. (2012). An Exemplar for Teaching and Learning Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Report, 17*, 16–77. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu

O'Reilly, M., & Parker, N. (2013). "Unsatisfactory Saturation": a critical exploration of the notion of saturated sample sizes in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, *13*, 190–197. doi:10.1177/1468794112446106

Ozturk, A. B., Bilgihan, A., Nusair, K., & Okumus, F. (2016). What keeps the mobile hotel booking users loyal? Investigating the roles of self-efficacy, compatibility, perceived ease of use, and perceived convenience. *International Journal of Information Management*, *36*, 1350–1359. doi:10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2016.04.005

Pai, P., & Tsai, H. T. (2016). Reciprocity norms and information-sharing behavior in online consumption communities: An empirical investigation of antecedents and moderators. *Information and Management*, *53*, 38–52. doi:10.1016/j.im.2015.08.002

Paraskevaidis, P., & Andriotis, K. (2017). Altruism in tourism: Social Exchange Theory vs Altruistic Surplus Phenomenon in host volunteering. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *62*, 26–37. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2016.11.002

Park, S., & Nicolau, J. L. (2015). Asymmetric effects of online consumer reviews. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *50*, 67–83. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2014.10.007

Passer, M. W. (2014). *Research methods, concepts and connections*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Paul, J., Modi, A., & Patel, J. (2016). Predicting green product consumption using theory of planned behavior and reasoned action. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 29*, 123–134. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2015.11.006

Payne, A., & Frow, P. (2017). Relationship marketing: looking backwards towards the future. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *31,* 11–15. doi:10.1108/JSM-11-2016-0380

Petrova, E., Dewing, J., & Camilleri, M. (2014). Confidentiality in participatory research: Challenges from one study. *Nursing Ethics*, 1–13. doi:10.1177/0969733014564909

Ping, L. L., & Ahmad, U. (2015). A conceptual analysis of nurses' customer-oriented behavior, job satisfaction and affective commitment in Malaysia*. International Journal of Caring Sciences, 8*, 774–782. Retrieved from http://internationaljournalofcaringsciences.org

Pomponi, F., Fratocchi, L., & Rossi Tafuri, S. (2015). Trust development and horizontal collaboration in logistics: a theory based evolutionary framework. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal,* 20, 83–97. doi:10.1108/SCM-02-2014-0078

Pulles, N. J., Veldman, J., Schiele, H., & Sierksma, H. (2014). Pressure or pamper? The effects of power and trust dimensions on supplier resource allocation. *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, *50*, 16–36. doi:10.1111/jscm.12049

PwC (2015). *Total Retail 2015: Retailers and the age of disruption.* Retrieved from http://pwc.com/totalretail

Quach, S., & Thaichon, P. (2017). From connoisseur luxury to mass luxury: Value co-creation and co-destruction in the online environment. *Journal of Business Research*, *81*, 163–172. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.06.015

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Redmond, M. (2015). Social exchange theory. *English Technical Reports and White Papers, 5*. Retrieved from https://lib.dr.iastate.edu

Roulston, K. (2014). Analyzing interviews. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 297–312). London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Rowley, J. (2012). Conducting research interviews. *Management Research Review, 35*, 260–271. doi:10.1108/01409171211210154

Schumann, J. H., von Wangenheim, F., & Groene, N. (2014). Targeted online advertising: Using reciprocity appeals to increase acceptance among users of free web services. *Journal of Marketing*, *78*, 59–75. doi:10.1509/jm.11.0316

Seeber, I., Merz, A., de Vreede, G.-J., Maier, R., & Weber, B. (2017). Convergence on self-generated vs. crowdsourced ideas in crisis response: Comparing social exchange processes and satisfaction with process. *Proceedings of the 50th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (2017). doi:10.24251/hicss.2017.083

Sharpley, R. (2014). Host perceptions of tourism: A review of the research. *Tourism Management*, *42*, 37–49. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2013.10.007

Shen, W., Huang, J., & Li, D. (2016). The research of motivation for word-of-mouth: based on the self-determination theory. *Journal of Business & Retail Management Research*, *10*,75–84. Retrieved from https://liverpool.idm.oclc.org

Sheth, J. (2017). Revitalizing relationship marketing. *Journal of Services Marketing, 31*, 6–10. doi:10.1108/JSM-11-2016-0397

Shoup, V. A. (2015). One hospital's patient satisfaction plans in response to a changing healthcare environment (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (1666453495)

Smith, T. A. (2014). Testing theory and related factors for influencing proficiency in quantitative research. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal, 18*, 117– 128. Retrieved from https://www.abacademies.org

So, K. K. F., King, C., Sparks, B. A., & Wang, Y. (2016). Enhancing customer relationships with retail service brands. Journal of Service Management, 27, 170– 193. doi: 10.1108/josm-05-2015-0176

Statistics South Africa (2018). *Statistics Release P11129: Youth unemployment still high in Q1: 2018*, Retrieved August 21, 2018 from http://www.statssa.gov.za

Stelzener, M. (2012). *Social media marketing industry report: How marketers are using social media to grow their business*. Retrieved from http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com

Stevens, J. L., Spaid, B. I., Breazeale, M., & Esmark Jones, C. L. (2018). Timeliness, transparency, and trust: A framework for managing online customer complaints. *Business Horizons, 61*, 375–384. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2018.01.007

Sweeney, J. C., Webb, D., Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2014). Self-determination theory and word of mouth about energy-saving behaviors: An online experiment. *Psychology & Marketing, 31*, 698–716. doi:10.1002/mar.20729

Tanskanen, K. (2015). Who wins in a complex buyer-supplier relationship? A social exchange theory based dyadic study. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management, 35*, 577–603. doi:10.1108/IJOPM-10-2012-0432

Tercia, C. Y., & Teichert, T. (2016). Cultural context in word-of-mouth activity. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics, 28,* 827–840. doi:10.1108/APJML-12-2015-0186

Thibaut, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. (1959). *The social psychology of groups*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Thornberg, R., & Charmaz, K. (2014). Grounded theory and theoretical coding from qualitative analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 153–169). London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Toufaily, E., Souiden, N., & Ladhari, R. (2013). Consumer trust toward retail websites: Comparison between pure click and click-and-brick retailers. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *20*, 538–548. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2013.05.001

Tversky, A. (1972). Elimination by aspects: A theory of choice. *Psychological Review*, *79*, 281–299. doi:10.1037/h0032955

Vanneste, B., Puranam, P., & Kretschmer, T. (2014). Trust over time in exchange relationships: Theory and meta-analysis. *Strategic Management Journal, 35,* 1891–1902. doi:10.1002/smj.2198

Venkatesh, V., Brown, S. A., & Bala, H. (2013). Bridging the qualitative-quantitative divide: Guidelines for conducting mixed methods research in information systems. *MIS Quarterly, 37,* 21–54. Retrieved from http://misq.org

Verma, V., Sharma, D., & Sheth, J. (2016). Does relationship marketing matter in online retailing? A meta-analytic approach. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *44*, 206–217. doi:10.1007/s11747-015-0429-6

Wang, H., Du, R., & Olsen, T. (2018). Feedback mechanisms and consumer satisfaction, trust and repurchase intention in online retail. *Information Systems Management, 35*, 201–219. doi:10.1080/10580530.2018.1477301

Wang, L., Gopal, R., Gunasti, K., Shankar, R., & Pancras, J. (2017). The impact of gamification on word-of-mouth effectiveness: Evidence from Foursquare, 743–752. Proceedings of the 50th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.

Wang, T., Yeh, R. K.-J., Chen, C., & Tsydypov, Z. (2016). What drives electronic word-of-mouth on social networking sites? Perspectives of social capital and self-determination. *Telematics and Informatics*, *33*, 1034–1047. doi:10.1016/j.tele.2016.03.005

Welch, M. (2014). Exploring the impact of communication technologies on business air travel. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications & Conflict, 18*(1), 187-213. Retrieved from http://www.alliedacademies.org

White, C. (2015). The impact of motivation on customer satisfaction formation: a self-determination perspective. *European Journal of Marketing, 49*, 1923–1940. doi:10.1108/EJM-08-2014-0501

Willig, C. (2014). Interpretation and analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 132–149). London, England: SAGE Publications.

Witt, U. (2016). The transformations of utility theory: A behavioral perspective. *Journal of Bioeconomics*, *18*(3), 211–228. doi:10.1007/s10818-016-9235-6

Wu, K., Vassileva, J., Noorian, Z., & Zhao, Y. (2015). How do you feel when you see a list of prices? The interplay among price dispersion, perceived risk and initial trust in Chinese C2C market. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *25*, 36–46. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2015.03.007

Yan, Z., Wang, T., Chen, Y., & Zhang, H. (2016). Knowledge sharing in online health communities: A social exchange theory perspective. *Information & Management, 53,*643–653. doi:10.1016/j.im.2016.02.001

Yang, Q., Pang, C., Liu, L., Yen, D. C., & Michael Tarn, J. (2015). Exploring consumer perceived risk and trust for online payments: An empirical study in China's younger generation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *50*, 9–24. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2015.03.058

Yeniyurt, S., Henke, J. W., & Yalcinkaya, G. (2014). A longitudinal analysis of supplier involvement in buyers' new product development: Working relations, inter-dependence, co-innovation, and performance outcomes. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *42*, 291–308. doi:10.1007/s11747-013-0360-7

Yilmaz, K. (2013). Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Traditions: epistemological , theoretical. *European Journal of Education*, *48*, 311–325. doi:10.1111/ejed.12014

Yin, R. K. (2013). Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations. *Evaluation*, *19*(3), 321–332. doi:10.1177/1356389013497081

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Yrjölä, M., Spence, M. T., & Saarijärvi, H. (2018). Omni-channel retailing: propositions, examples and solutions. *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research, 3969,* 1–18. doi:10.1080/09593969.2018.1445657

Yu, C.-H., Tsai, C.-C., Wang, Y., Lai, K.-K., & Tajvidi, M. (2018). Towards building a value co-creation circle in social commerce. *Computers in Human Behavior, xxx,* 1–10. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2018.04.021

Yu, H., Abdullah, A., & Saat, R. M. (2014). Overcoming time and ethical constraints in the qualitative data collection process: A case of information literacy research. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science,* 46, 243–257. doi:10.1177/0961000614526610

Yusuf, A. S., Che Hussin, A. R., & Busalim, A. H. (2018). Influence of e-WOM engagement on consumer purchase intention in social commerce. *Journal of Services Marketing, 32*, 493–504. doi:10.1108/JSM-01-2017-0031

Zhang, K. Z., & Benyoucef, M. (2016). Consumer behavior in social commerce: A literature review. *Decision Support Systems*, *86*, 95–108. doi:10.1016/j.dss.2016.04.001

Zhao, K., Stylianou, A. C., & Zheng, Y. (2017). Sources and impacts of social influence from online anonymous user reviews. *Information & Management*, (2016), 1–15. doi:10.1016/j.im.2017.03.006

Zhou, Y., & Wang, X. (2014). Explore the relationship between online shopping and shopping trips: An analysis with the 2009 NHTS data. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, *70*, 1–9. doi:10.1016/j.tra.2014.09.014

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The purpose of this interview is to explore marketing strategies that marketing executives of traditional retail firms use to improve existing online sales.

1. An introduction that includes providing details as a Walden University student, program that I am in and the purpose of the study. An indication of the time required for the interview questions and highlighting the method of recording the interview.

2. The voluntary consent form will be given to the participant. I will ask if the participant has read it, has any questions or concerns and emphasize that they may withdraw at any time during the interview or at any stage throughout the study. I will specifically be asking if the participant is over 18 years old.

3. I will provide a signed copy of the confidentiality agreement (Appendix B) and will ask the participant to sign the consent form and provide the participant with a copy.

4. When the interview starts, by turning on the voice recorder, I will inform the participant and first state the date and time.

5. I will introduce the participant by using a pseudonym for coding purposes and begin with question 1 until the final question.

The list of interview questions are as follows:

- What marketing strategies do you use to improve existing online sales?
- What marketing strategies do you use to build positive exchange relationships with online consumers?
- What marketing strategies do you use to build customer trust in your online sales activities?
- What marketing strategies do you use to promote a reciprocal relationship with online customers?
- What challenges do you encounter in implementing marketing strategies to improve existing online sales?
- How do you address the challenges to implementing marketing strategies to improve existing online sales?

- What other information would you like to add or share, about the marketing strategies that you use to improve existing online sales, that is not covered in the interview questions?

6. Each participant has as much time as necessary to answer each semistructured interview question in detail

7. While taking additional notes and watching for non-verbal queues follow-up with additional questions.

8. At the end of the interview process discuss the member checking process with the participant, explaining that this highlights key points or themes that are subsequently verified by the participant.

8. End of interview protocol and thank the participant for their time.

Appendix B: Confidentiality Agreement for Interview Transcriber

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in transcribing interviews for this research: "Marketing Strategies to Improve Existing Online Sales" I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.

2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.

3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation.

4. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.

5. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.

6. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.

7. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.

8. I will only access or use systems or devices I am officially authorized to access, and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: **Date:**

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

7 June 2018

Dear Paul Targett,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled "Marketing Strategies to Improve Existing Online Sales" on our premises or using Skype with our employees. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct audio recorded interviews, collect data, conduct follow-up discussions, transcript review and member checking with employees, relating to their interview responses. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: providing a conference room (if needed) to conduct interviews and authorize employees to participate in the study on a date and time convenient to our employees and organization. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).