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A Case Study on Social Media as an Effective Management Tool

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Appolloh Higgs Omolloh

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

A Case Study on Social Media as an Effective Management Tool

by

Appolloh Higgs Omolloh

MA, Dallas Baptist University, 2013

BS, University of Texas, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management—Leadership and Organizational Change

Walden University

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Abstract

In small businesses in the United States, specifically those with fewer than 10 employees, leaders may be skeptical of and resistant to the use of social media in their management operations. Management literature does not indicate clear and effective guidelines and policies detailing small marketing firms use of social media. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of small marketing firm leaders about the resources and knowledge needed for effective use of social media as a management tool. Emerson's social exchange theory grounded the study. The study targeted owners and managers of small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas, with three to five years of experience and firms who use social media in their firm management or operations. Twenty-three participants satisfied the criteria. Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, and document reviews. Yin's 5-phase analysis was used to analyze the data. The primary result of the study is that small businesses that use social media in the Dallas, Texas, area reported various gains, including increased awareness about their business, valuable customer feedback, and customer retention. The study may have a positive social change impact by providing information on strategies and benefits of using social media as a management tool not only to small marketing firms in Texas, but also to very small businesses in other sectors.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father and mother. My father died when I was only 9 years old, but before his demise, he taught me the importance of education. He also taught me the importance of persistence and advised me to fight for whatever I desire persistently without giving up. My mother, on the other side, was the source of my inspiration to her deathbed. My mother dedicated her strength and energy to us after the death of my father and provided all our basic needs. She taught me to believe in God, stay positive, and avoid negative people in life. Even though they are not physically present in this world today to witness my graduation, I owe them for the foundation of knowledge, hope, and love that they instilled in me when I was young.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Leaders of organizations commonly use social media as part of their marketing strategies to gain followers and interact with potential clients (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013; Peters, Chen, Kaplan, Ognibeni, & Pauwels, 2013; Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). From a management perspective, social media can be used to improve the manner of prioritizing goals and producing high levels of performance, affecting business strategies and information technology (IT) budgets to boost returns and minimize risks for the organization (Luo, Zhang, & Duan, 2013). The topic of this study was the use of social media in management. The focus was on social media as a tool in managing very small marketing firms, especially those with fewer than 10 employees, because some of their leaders have little knowledge about the guidelines and strategies for social media usage in the workplace.

In this chapter, I focus on the discussion of social media usage and issues related to it as the topic of the study. Chapter 1 presents the background of the problem addressed in the study, introduces the problem, and contains sections addressing the purpose of the study, the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the nature of the study. Other sections of the chapter include (a) definitions of key terms, (b) assumptions, (c) scope and delimitations, (d) limitations, and (e) the significance of the study.

Background of the Study

Many managers use social media as part of their strategies for managing their organizations (Luo et al., 2013). Researchers have proposed various models for the use of

social media in organizations (Coleman & Heriot, 2013; Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015; Riu, 2015). Hassan et al. (2015) proposed the attention, interest, desire, and action (AIDA) model as a guide for small business leaders when using social media in marketing their products and services. The AIDA model has been applied widely for online marketing strategy. Hassan et al. claimed that business owners could apply the model to create marketing strategies using social media. In another study, Coleman and Heriot (2013) reviewed and critiqued existing approaches to the measurement of social media effectiveness for businesses. They presented a conceptual model of the social media marketing process. The results of their study indicated that measures for awareness, engagement, and performance should be used for influencers, consumers, and customers (Coleman & Heriot, 2013). Riu (2015) focused on the role of social media in media promotion for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Riu concluded that it is important to use social media as a promotional medium for SMEs in a systematic and structured manner, as it is both cost-effective and flexible.

Social media usage began with simple marketing and the creation of awareness about organizations' products and services, which have advanced to public communications and interactions with customers and other stakeholders (Icha & Agwu, 2016). Small businesses can use social media as new investigative tools in market research (Mahajan, 2015). Customers need and want access to social media, which is why it is important for small businesses to engage in online surveys, reviews, and live chats for marketing research. Social media present advantages and disadvantages when used in marketing research, as well as strategies to remain effective for promoting small

businesses' brands, products, and services (Mahajan, 2015). Broekemier, Chau, and Seshadri (2015) indicated that about half (54%) of small businesses use social media for marketing purposes. There are four main ways in which businesses use social media: promoting business to new customers, increasing customer awareness, increasing customer interest, and improving company reputation (Broekemier et al., 2015).

Heyman, DeWolf, and Pierson (2014) determined that users can control their interpersonal information flow; however, they can do so mostly toward other users, rather than service providers or other third parties in relation to privacy. Kumar and Mirchandani (2013) found that 89% of digital marketers reported wanting to know how the use of social media might increase their profitability and enhance their business operations. There is a research gap regarding how to improve the practicality and acceptance of social media sites and how to determine appropriate privacy- and security-related policies for small businesses. There is therefore a need to explore the usage and acceptance of social media as tools in managing and operating small businesses.

Problem Statement

About 50% of small businesses in the United States use social media marketing. Most often, small businesses use social media to connect and engage with other businesses, rather than with customers (Broekemier et al., 2015). The general problem is that leaders in many small businesses in the United States, specifically those with fewer than 10 employees, are skeptical of and resistant to the use of social media in their business operations. There do not appear to be any clear and effective guidelines and policies detailing how social media should be used in the specific context of small

marketing firms (Broekemier et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2015). The specific problem examined in the study was that many small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas, do not have the resources and knowledge to make effective use of social media as management tools for operations (Hassan et al., 2015; Malita, 2011). These firms may need assistance in creating and developing policies for appropriate use. The findings of this study may help leaders in many small businesses in Texas, as well as in other states, to gain adequate knowledge regarding business operations and to develop policies for the appropriate use of social media as effective management tools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of leaders of very small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas, about the resources and knowledge needed for the effective use of social media as management tools. This study involved a three-phase approach to data collection involving face to face interviews, a survey questionnaire, and website analyses. The results of this study may be used to identify key guidelines and strategies regarding social media usage in the workplace and may provide assistance in creating and developing policies for appropriate usage of social media among small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas. I purposively recruited business managers of small businesses in Dallas, Texas, to participate in the study. I examined the perceptions and experiences of these stakeholders by conducting interviews and sending out a survey questionnaire as well as by collecting documents related to the use of social media that were available in the website analyses. I used these data sources to provide an analysis of effective methods of using social media for business operations.

The results of this study could provide support to small marketing businesses in Dallas, Texas, enabling them to make the most out of the advantages and benefits of using social media in managing their operations. With the increasing attention of businesses about operational efficiency, using a channel that provides more gains than the cost to the businesses is warranted. The use of social media as a management tool may increase productivity gains if used properly and appropriately (Coleman & Heriot, 2013). As such, it is important to provide key guidelines and strategies in creating and developing policies for the appropriate use of social media in the context of small marketing firms.

Research Questions

The effective use of social media increases organizational efficiency (Icha & Agwu, 2016; Mahajan, 2015); however, many organizations do not have the resources and knowledge to make effective use of social media as a management tool for operations (Hassan et al., 2015; Malita, 2011). In particular, small businesses are disadvantaged compared to their large business counterparts in using social media, primarily due to their limited resources (Stelzner, 2015). It is important to explore the existing problems and challenges that small businesses are experiencing regarding the use of social media in their operations. The overarching research question for this study was the following: How can social media be used as an effective management tool for small businesses? The following subquestions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the problems and challenges that small businesses experience in their attempt to develop effective methods for using social media as a management tool?

RQ2: How can small businesses make effective use of social media in terms of (a) a direct reward, (b) an expected gain in reputation and influence on others, (c) altruism, and (d) an anticipated reciprocity?

Conceptual Framework

The use of social media is dependent on information provided by users; therefore, a thorough understanding of the motivations for users to participate in information exchange through social media is important. The framework that I used for this qualitative study was Emerson's (1976) social exchange theory. The theory originated from sociological studies in which the researchers examined information exchange between individuals or groups of people. The social exchange theory highlights the concept of cost-benefit in the comparison of a specific set of alternatives to explain why individuals communicate with each other and form relationships, and why certain groups or communities are developed through information exchanges (Homans, 1958). Through social exchange theory, Emerson suggested that individuals are inclined to do things that they see as rewarding for themselves and distance themselves from doing activities that entail more cost and effort than benefits for them. The theory is based on the assumption that social behavior is based on the subjective assessment of the cost-benefit of each actor participating in the social exchange (Emerson, 1976).

Social exchange theory identifies four reasons why individuals engage in a social exchange: (a) direct reward, (b) an expected gain in reputation and influence on others, (c) altruism, and (d) anticipated reciprocity on the part of others (Ward & Berno, 2011). The first three reasons relate to why individuals participate in social media; that is, people make use of social media to obtain a positive benefit, build a higher level of reputation and image, or influence or receive feedback from other people. The fourth reason is considered to be a motivating factor, in that rewards are given to a user if the user performs activities in social media as instructed (Peate, 2015).

Small businesses may make use of social media to understand the needs of their consumers better and establish communication with them. Small businesses can invest in social media sites where consumers can easily communicate with them regarding their concerns and requests (Hassan et al., 2015). By doing so, businesses can easily get consumers' attention and create a loyal base of customers. Prompt responses and easy means to contacting a company have been regarded as important in improving consumer satisfaction (Peate, 2015). Small business owners should take note that the use of social media can be detrimental and may pose a threat to a business's reputation, especially when dissatisfied customers share their negative experiences or feedback with their followers (Adriana & Václav, 2015). Mahajan (2015) suggested that periodic assessment of the information placed in social media (such as websites or feedback forums) is warranted to ensure that business leaders are aware of the current situation and queries of their customers.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative research methodology was used to investigate how small businesses have used social media as an effective management tool from the perspective of managers in small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas. Qualitative researchers use a naturalistic approach to gain an in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon in context-specific settings without the need to manipulate the phenomena of interest (Hodges, 2011; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, a qualitative researcher seeks to produce exhaustive and detailed accounts to present the natural reality wherein the research respondent interacts (Nielsen, 2011; Yin, 2012). Qualitative researchers look to illuminate and understand data, as well as to extrapolate data to similar situations. In a qualitative study, researchers analyze participants' narratives to derive meaning (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2012). In contrast, the quantitative methodology is focused on addressing research questions through the collection of numerical data and subjecting data to statistical analysis (Leedy & Ormond, 2010)—aims that were not applicable to the research questions of the current study. Consequently, the qualitative research methodology was most appropriate for this study, due to the need to investigate participants in their natural setting to examine existing problems and challenges that small businesses are experiencing regarding the use of social media in their operations.

In this study, I followed a case study research design. A case study research design was appropriate because the study focused on a certain case within a bounded system (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011). Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) asserted that a case study research design is appropriate whenever a researcher aims to understand

a bounded case or a set of cases. The study can take place over time through a comprehensive data-collection effort involving various sources of information, such as interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and databases of records (Snyder, 2012; Yin, 2014). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of small marketing firm leaders about the resources and knowledge needed for the effective use of social media as a management tool for operations (Krippendorff, 2013; Moorefield-Lang, 2015). Using a case study research design was therefore effective to address the purpose and answer the research questions of the study through interviews and research data gathering.

I analyzed three sources of data: semistructured interviews, questionnaires, and reflections made during interviews, and company documents (Barratt et al., 2011). I also compiled a report after each interview session, consisting of a summary of the main points of the observation. A questionnaire report was compiled differently from the interview data. The documents for review included company files about the use of social media and business operations.

In case studies, researchers usually combine a minimum of three sources of data to increase the extensiveness and depth of the information used to understand the phenomenon under study. Having multiple data sources enables more in-depth analysis and facilitates triangulation, which ensures data validity for qualitative studies (Hargis, Cavanaugh, Kamali, & Soto, 2014; Yin, 2011). Triangulation is a process of checking data validity by confirming responses, which researchers practice by using two or more data sources for analysis (Hargis et al., 2014; Heale & Forbes, 2013).

Definitions

This section contains the definitions of several terms that are relevant to the study.

These terms are as follows:

Business success: Business success occurs when a company meets or exceeds its goals; earns profits sufficient to cover expenses; and increases its size, scale, or market share (Insah, Mumuni, & Bangiyel, 2013).

Social exchange theory: Social exchange theory identifies four reasons why individuals engage in a social exchange: (a) direct reward, (b) an expected gain in reputation and influence on others, (c) altruism, and (d) an anticipated reciprocity (Ward & Berno, 2011).

Social media: Social media are computer-aided technologies that enable people and organizations to view, create, and share information (Buettner, 2016).

Social media marketing: Social media marketing refers to the process of gaining attention from the market through social media sites (Broekemier et al., 2015).

Small business: Although a small business in the United States is identified as a for-profit organization that is composed of fewer than 500 employees (Gale & Brown, 2013; Small Business Administration, 2018), for this study, this term is used for those with fewer than 10 employees.

Assumptions

Assumptions refer to the characteristics that are inherent in a study that are presumed to be naturally occurring (Crews & Scherron, 2013). I made several assumptions about the foundation of this qualitative case study.

1. I assumed that the participants would provide the needed data willingly for the study. I could not control the perceptions of individuals who might potentially be participants in the study. I incorporated methods that encouraged participants to volunteer to become part of this study, such as providing an explanation of how their potential contribution to the study could result in positive social change.
2. I assumed that the participants were going to provide honest and complete data about the phenomenon being studied. I assumed this because I could not fully ascertain the honesty of participants' answers. Nevertheless, I reminded the participants to provide answers that were as close as possible to the complete truth or actual occurrence. Moreover, I also gathered enough data to ensure that I could verify the information through the answers of other participants.
3. I assumed that the participants had different means of using social media in the workplace. Some of these methods were appropriate and conducive to improved productivity at work, while other methods could be classified as inappropriate for the workplace.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of a study refers to the aspect, concepts, and topics that define the boundaries of the investigation (Jugy, Jacquemin, Villemur, Delaire, & Garnier, 2016). The scope of this study included a focus on the phenomenon of using social media in the management of operations of small businesses. This was included in the scope because it

was central to the problem of the study, which involved the unknown problems and challenges that small businesses are experiencing with regard to the different uses of social media in their business operations (Broekemier et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2015). The participants of the study were managers in small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas. I conducted data collection through three sources: (a) interviews, (b) questionnaires, and (c) document reviews. Other data sources were not included in this study. I analyzed the data using Yin's (2014) five-phase cycle for analyzing case studies.

Delimitations are the constraining aspects of a study that a researcher cannot control (Crews & Scherron, 2013). The focus of this study was limited to small marketing firms within the area of Dallas, Texas, and there were no other types of firms or other cities or areas included in the study. However, the findings of the study could encourage more small businesses to adopt the use of social media as a management tool. Because of the focus on a specific group of individuals, there is a need to address the transferability of the data and findings of the study. Transferability, in this instance, refers to the extent to which the results of the study can be transferred to other nonmarketing firms or larger organizations (Cope, 2014). To improve transferability, I provided a detailed account of the findings of the study. Through a detailed discussion of the findings of the study in Chapter 4, I can provide other researchers with the ability to assess the similarity of the findings with other studies.

Limitations

Limitations of a study refer to uncontrollable aspects of a study that may impact the outcome of the study (Best & Kahn, 2003). The first limitation of the study was that

the findings were based on data from a specific group of individuals selected according to inclusion and exclusion criteria. Based on this limitation, the findings of the study may not be generalizable to another population or social group. To address this limitation, I provide complete details on the methodology in Chapter 3 and findings in Chapter 4, so that other researchers with similar topics may be able to assess the applicability of the results to another population.

The second limitation of the study is that the main source of data were participants' answers to the interview questions. I reminded the participants to answer in as complete and truthful a manner as possible. Moreover, I made sure that the manner of questioning during the interview allowed for repeated and reworded questions to determine if the answers of the participants were consistent.

Another limitation of the study was that I, as the interviewer and analyst, might have introduced personal biases into the study, which might have influenced the output and interpretations made in answering the research questions of the study. To avoid introducing personal biases into the study, I performed bracketing, which is a process that involves acknowledging personal experiences, perceptions, and beliefs that are related to the topic of the study (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Significance of the Study

Significance to Practice

The significance of this study is that it addressed the need of small business owners to have guidelines and strategies in creating and developing policies for the appropriate use of social media as an effective management tool. Because social media

are regarded as powerful tools for communication and information dissemination (Coleman & Heriot, 2013), social media should be used as effective management tools to increase the benefits that small businesses can obtain. The use of social media for managing operations in businesses has attracted increasing interest from both industry practitioners and researchers (Schaupp & Bélanger, 2014). However, I could not find any clear and effective guidelines and policies detailing how social media should be used in the specific context of small marketing firms. With the findings of this study, small marketing firms may learn how Internet-based consumer-business transactions should be conducted and learn how to devise strategies to make use of social media effectively in promoting their businesses in a secure environment.

Significance to Theory

The insights gained from this study could serve as an addition or extension of a theory in the literature concerning social media and business management. The findings of this study contribute to social exchange theory by expanding the application of the theory to the field of small businesses and use of social media, with the influences of external factors in society. Specifically, the findings of this study contribute to empirical evidence about the use of social media not only by small marketing firms, but also by other businesses. Given that Internet-based consumer-business transactions are increasing steadily, more practitioners and researchers are seeking to understand the complexities involved in the transaction processes and how social media can be of use to business (Icha & Agwu, 2016). The current study may extend what is known about social media

and the use of social media for business from the perspectives of small business managers.

Significance to Social Change

Addressing the problems and challenges that small businesses are experiencing associated with the use of social media is relevant to the fields of social networking, management, and IT. The advances of information and technology in society today are increasing rapidly. Though social media advantages are far more important to both businesses and consumers, the disadvantages should still be minimized. The field of IT may use the results of this study, specifically regarding security and privacy measures, in preventing adverse consequences from the inappropriate use of social media. Both consumers and businesses may benefit from the results of this study. Through the identification of problems and hindrances in the use of social media for business operations, small business owners may better understand how to develop an online platform through which business promotion is easy and secure.

Summary and Transition

There is a research gap on how to improve the practicality and acceptance of social media sites and to determine the appropriate privacy- and security-related policies for small businesses (Broekemier et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2015). Therefore, there is a need to explore the usage and acceptance of social media as tools in managing and operating small businesses. The general problem was that leaders in small businesses in the United States, specifically those with fewer than 10 employees, are skeptical and resistant to the use of social media in their business operations. This is because there do

not appear to be any clear and effective guidelines and policies detailing how social media should be used in the specific context of small marketing firms (Broekemier et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2015). The specific problem was that many small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas, do not have the resources and knowledge to make use of social media effectively as management tools for operations (Hassan et al., 2015; Malita, 2011). To address this problem, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of small marketing firm leaders about the resources and knowledge needed for effective use of social media as a management tool for operations. The conceptual framework of the study was based on social exchange theory. Chapter 2 includes more details about this theory, together with a summary and critique of existing literature related to the phenomenon of interest.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Business leaders use social media as a means of managing organizations (Luo et al., 2013). Researchers have proposed various models regarding the use of social media (Coleman & Heriot, 2013; Hassan et al., 2015; Riu, 2015). The AIDA model is a strategy for managing small businesses through social media that many businesses have applied during online marketing. Other researchers have proposed that measures of awareness, engagement, and performance should be used regarding influencers, consumers, and customers (Coleman & Heriot, 2013).

Broekemier et al. (2015) indicated that about half (54%) of small businesses use social media for marketing purposes. This form of marketing can help to promote a business to new customers, increase customer awareness and interest, and improve a company's reputation. While the potential benefits are many, only roughly half of small businesses use social media marketing, and they use it more often to connect to other businesses than to reap benefits from customers (Broekemier et al., 2015). Small businesses for this study were categorized as those employing fewer than 10 employees.

Many of these small business owners remain resistant to the use of social media. Though researchers have pointed out the potential benefits of social media marketing, small business leaders are often unclear about how to go about achieving those benefits (Broekemier et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2015). Specifically, small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas, may lack strategies for implementing social media effectively as part of

their business; such businesses may need assistance in developing the appropriate policies regarding social media use.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of small marketing firm leaders about the resources and knowledge needed for effective use of social media as a management tool for operations. The findings of this study may potentially be significant in that they could help to identify the means for using social media as an effective management tool for small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas. The results of the study may guide small marketing businesses and assist them in maximizing the advantages that have been identified previously as a part of integrating social media as into a small business's strategy (Broekemier et al., 2015). The research also may be significant in that the results may be used as models guiding social media use (Coleman & Heriot, 2013; Hassan et al., 2015; Riu, 2015) and metrics for understanding awareness, engagement, and performance in a small business context (Coleman & Heriot, 2013).

Chapter 2 includes literature on (a) social exchange theory, (b) social media, and (c) the use of social media as a marketing tool. In this literature review, I trace the history of social media individually and as tools used by marketers, describing previous research findings regarding the effectiveness of social media and examples of social media use among businesses to capture customer attention. The goal of the study was to establish best practices for implementing social media into the business strategies of small marketing firms. Chapter 2 is organized into sections addressing the literature search strategy, the theoretical foundation, and literature related to key variables and concepts, ending with a conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched the following online databases: Google Scholar, ProQuest, JSTOR, EBSCOhost, and ERIC. Search terms occurred in an iterative process and included the following: *social media*, *small business*, *small business marketing*, *small business social media*, *social media marketing*, and *small business and social media marketing*. Although the literature chosen for retention was published between 2012 and 2018, I included some earlier works when the work was foundational to the existing literature on the topic. This applied particularly to the conceptual framework and original research into its development. I retained 75 sources for inclusion in the study, with 90% of these studies conducted within the last 5 years.

Conceptual Framework

To be effective, social media require input from users. Exchange of information through social media is important to both business owners and customers. To study this exchange, I employed social exchange theory as the conceptual framework for the study (Emerson, 1976). Originally conceptualized to understand the exchange of information between groups of people and individuals, this theory is rooted in sociology and emphasizes the cost-benefit assessment that occurs when individuals communicate and create relationships (Homans, 1958). It also highlights how communities develop through those same exchanges of information, suggesting that individuals do things individually that benefit themselves, while distancing themselves from activities that exceed a certain threshold in terms of cost and effort (Emerson, 1976). Researchers have used social exchange theory to investigate how humans reciprocate in a number of fields. Studies of

workplace safety perceptions have revealed that increased positive perceptions result in decreased turnover (Huang et al., 2015). Increased perceptions of fairness in the workplace are reciprocated with increased citizenship behavior and productivity (Colquitt et al., 2013). Compassionate, citizenship-style behavior occurs within workplaces when the employing company is socially responsible (Subba & Rao, 2016). Employees reciprocate toward the company through compassionate peer interaction.

In supply chain management, the sharing of high-quality information by professionals is reciprocated by information sharing (Zaheer & Trkman, 2014). Reciprocated knowledge sharing is found also among IT professionals when organizational justice is high (Tsai & Cheng, 2012). Individuals provide information and expected and received information critical for job performance. Among individuals participating in online health communities, information sharing may occur as a result of not only anticipated reciprocation, but also an enhanced sense of self-worth and expected boosts to reputation (Tsai & Cheng, 2012). Knowledge sharing in the form of the cross-hospital exchange of medical records increases when there is an expectation of reciprocated knowledge sharing, as well as when medical professionals are dependent on the destination hospital for knowledge and other support (Tsai & Cheng, 2012).

Direct rewards, predicted gains in reputation, and the expectation of reciprocity are all relevant in the use of social media today (Peate, 2015). Individuals expect gains along these lines when engaging with others through social media. Individuals expect some form of reciprocity through social media when they perform certain activities. Such an expectation could be used potentially among businesses (Hassan et al., 2015).

Consumers can be engaged through social media and convinced to communicate and provide feedback regarding their needs and concerns. Increased engagement is associated with increased brand trust (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014). Consumers who become highly engaged do so with the expectation that there may be some reciprocity from the business. The engagement introduces the consumer into the information exchange via social media, which can be built upon to create customer loyalty, particularly when businesses reply promptly. This communication results in immediate attempts to satisfy customer concerns, thereby increasing consumer satisfaction (Peate, 2015). Social media also can have a negative impact if misused, which can destroy a business's reputation (Mahajan, 2015). A business's reputation may get ruined, especially when dissatisfied customers share their negative experiences or feedback with their followers (Adriana & Václav 2015). The potentially harmful impact of social media should encourage business leaders to regularly review communications made through social media to keep apprised of consumer concerns (Mahajan, 2015).

Researchers have used social exchange theory previously to investigate how to encourage return business. Researchers studying loyalty programs at hotels such as Marriot and Hilton across 435 locations revealed that such programs operate on principles of social exchange and result in increases in occupancy rates and revenues (Lee, Capella, Taylor, Luo, & Gabler, 2014). Lee et al. (2014) were unable to say initially whether such programs yielded identifiable benefits, as the results were modest but significant. Individuals enrolled in such exchanges have expectations of reciprocity.

Loyalty programs reward that expectation and generate an increased likelihood of customer return as demonstrated in occupancy and profitability rates.

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) highlighted the notion that reciprocity has been conceptualized as more than a linear relationship occurring along a single dimension and has been proposed to be more dynamic than a simple give-and-take. These researchers proposed that acts that generate reciprocity contain a certain saliency and strength. The strength of an act also can determine the strength of the response and may influence the degree to which an individual reciprocates. This conceptualization of reciprocity indicates that companies should take into consideration the perceived strength of their actions when engaging in reciprocal relationships with consumers.

Social exchange theory indicates that people take actions that they feel will get reciprocated or that may lead to an increase in personal standing. This theory has been used previously in studies of business in which researchers revealed that individuals respond positively to the efforts of organizations. Thus, social exchange theory was appropriate for the study. Researchers have used this framework in similar contexts, with the results suggesting that appropriately framed business efforts get reciprocated by consumers.

Social Media

Social media encompass virtual platforms that can be used to connect individuals and engage with new forms of media (Buettner, 2016). Social media are new media that allow for quick communication and interaction (Thompson, Majhail, Wood, Perales, & Chaboissier, 2015). Social media also have been referred to with the term *Web 2.0*

(Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012). These new media deal primarily with online content in the forms of shared videos, blogs, and Internet media (Thompson et al., 2015).

Social networking allows individuals to share not only this type of news but also details of their personal lives, ranging from videos to photos (Thompson et al., 2015). Between 2012 and 2014, the most popular social networks were Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. These networks each possessed a different focus, but all achieved the goal of allowing users to share elements of their lives (Thompson et al., 2015). Given the different focus that different social networks possess, social media also can be categorized into different tools (Berquist, Ljunberg, Zaffar, & Stenmark, 2013).

Facebook is among the oldest social media platform and was originally created to bring college students together; however, it has grown steadily into an extensive platform that joins people of diverse backgrounds and from all walks of life (Seitz, 2015). It has become one of the primary means of advertising for businesses. Businesses can maintain business pages on the website, which allows for free networking among users, the uploading of various media, and the dispersal of messages. This flexibility allows Facebook to be a beneficial platform for businesses, particularly because Internet users use Facebook more than any other existing social media platform (Seitz, 2015).

Certain social networks may have a specific appeal that businesses can use in ways not traditionally thought of (Seitz, 2015). LinkedIn is a social network used heavily within the business community and among working professionals. Its emphasis is less on allowing advertising or casual networking, in that it was designed around facilitating networking for similar-minded professionals, encouraging group discussions regarding

business, and facilitating the hiring process for both job seekers and employers. LinkedIn is not traditionally considered an avenue among marketers attempting to advertise to the wider public. However, LinkedIn's revenue gets generated in ways other than advertising (Seitz, 2015).

Blogging tools include sites such as Blogger, WordPress, and the microblogging site Twitter (Berquist et al., 2013). Microblogging on Twitter requires the use of messages that contain a maximum of 140 characters (Seitz, 2015). Twitter allows for the dispersal of information to wide audiences and is used to share recommendations or even advertise jobs. Messages get sent in a form known as a *Tweet*. When a Twitter user has followers, a single Tweet can reach multiple users (Seitz, 2015).

Sharing of media such as photos and video occurs on sites such as Flickr, Zoomr, and YouTube (Berquist et al., 2013). Heavily media-oriented sites such as Flickr and Pinterest emphasize sharing images (Seitz, 2015). Flickr is oriented around users sharing pictures with friends and with the public. Pinterest, meanwhile, allows users to post images and share them according to categories accompanied by short descriptions. These two sites remain unexploited by businesses currently (Seitz, 2015). To date, businesses have yet to take extensive advantage of them as marketing or advertising platforms, and they remain heavily for private use.

Primarily networking tools include Facebook, LinkedIn, and MySpace (Berquist et al., 2013). News delivery on social media includes other forms such as Digg and Reddit. Reddit can help to share information quickly among a wide set of users, as the sub communities there, or subreddits, allow for users to focus on specific subjects (Seitz,

2015). Joining these communities allows users to receive information about a single specific topic rather than regarding a wide range of subjects. The diversity of social networks illustrates the many ways that information can be distributed among users (Berquist et al., 2013).

Facebook is among the oldest and most popular social networks still in use and remains popular despite the rise of new networks such as Pinterest and Tumblr (Berquist et al., 2013). As a social media platform, it has continued to be used among different segments of the population. Facebook originated as a format on personal computers. However, recent changes in technology have shifted the population toward mobile social networking (Berquist et al., 2013). Mobile devices, including mobile phones and tablets, have become increasingly important for those accessing the Internet (Bergquist et al., 2013).

The growth of mobile devices has led increasingly to individuals choosing to access the Internet using mobile devices rather than computers (Napoli & Obar, 2013). Business and commerce taking place on the Internet have risen at double-digit rates, and businesses have adjusted to changing means of accessing the Internet (Izogo & Jayawardhena, 2018). Businesses have had to tailor their online approach increasingly to accommodate mobile users by providing instant pricing information, discounts, and other promotions (Izogo & Jayawardhena, 2018).

Those who access social networks using mobile platforms are more likely to engage with a business brand not only by reading news about that business, but also by commenting on and sharing the news (Pearce & Rice, 2013). This activity may be limited

to younger generations, as older generations tend not to engage in many activities when using a mobile device (Pearce & Rice, 2013). With those inexperienced in participating in online activities, increased usage and growing expertise encourage further participation in that behavior (Luo et al., 2013). Therefore, in using social media networking, business managers should consider the means by which the targeted audience accesses the Internet. Population subsets likely to gain access through mobile means may provide a softer target for encouraging virality of ad messaging, and even among those audiences inexperienced in online behavior, increased expertise can encourage further participation. Where previous researchers indicated that trust formed a large role in encouraging message-sharing behavior (Botzenhard, Heinrich, & Campbell, 2013), such behavior may more easily be encouraged among mobile platform users.

Social media encompass a diverse number of platforms, each specializing in the delivery of different media. That media can be delivered via a multitude of platforms ranging from Facebook to Pinterest and allow people to collaborate and communicate with one another through both text and media. Over time, these media have extended to mobile devices, and mobile users are the most likely to engage with businesses. Consequently, businesses have some opportunities to interact with consumers across a broad range of platforms. They also have a more readily engaged audience among mobile users. Therefore, businesses have the opportunity to reach out to consumers through text, audio, and visual means. The benefit of social media is that it can allow consumers to exchange these messages with one another and inadvertently serve the purpose of businesses with regard to advertising. Businesses can benefit from considering the

individuals most likely to use social media, including those most likely to engage with a business, and target them with messaging that will then be carried on by the consumers themselves.

Social Media Uses

Social media has been used in a variety of contexts previously, including the areas of general education, language, and healthcare. Second language learners have used it to adapt to English more easily by using social media as a communication tool (Jabbari, Boriack, Barahona, Padron, & Waxman, 2015). Previous research into the use of social media has revealed that its communication element can allow individuals to interact with one another and communicate in a way that facilitates the adoption of English as a second language. The researchers emphasized the importance of social media's ability to extend communication beyond the bounds of one's geographical space, allowing them to communicate with people at a distance and engage language skills they might otherwise not be able to (Jabbari et al., 2015).

Social media has been used within the medical community to increase interactions with the public, including the sharing of important information, increasing support networks, and improving health networks and surveillance (Moorhead et al., 2013; Peate, 2015). A systematic review of the literature found that social media assists health communication in six key ways (Moorehead et al., 2013). Among health practitioners, social media can increase general interactions with others. It also can allow for more expedient sharing of information (including patient-tailored information), increase access to health information among the public, provide emotional support for patients, allow

doctors to survey public health effectively, and influence health policy (Moorehead et al., 2013).

Within the health industry, social media can increase communication between practitioners and patients, as well as allow for information collection and dispersal (Moorehead et al., 2013). Nurses can use this to their advantage by allowing them to share knowledge with one another and remain knowledgeable about the latest medical findings (Peate, 2015). Community nurses also can reach out to the public more effectively with a minimal investment. Social media allows for widespread communication of health knowledge with a minimal investment. Nurses dealing with the public can benefit from the wide reach of social media messaging (Peate, 2015).

Medical patients use social media to increase their knowledge, attain social support, and find advice in challenging circumstances (Antheunis, Tates, & Nieboer, 2013). Twitter is an information-seeking tool among individuals who use it (Hayes, King, & Ramirez, 2016). Similar findings were discovered by Antheunis et al. (2013), who found that patients often used Twitter as a means of increasing their knowledge and providing advice to other patients. Facebook was used far more as a social tool, again consistent with the findings of Hayes et al. (2016).

When patients were concerned about discussing medical circumstances online, it was due to privacy concerns (Antheunis et al., 2013). Concerns about information reliability arose also, making some users hesitant about seeking information using social media as a means of seeking out information. Professionals found themselves unable to communicate using social media even if they wanted to when they lacked the skill to do

so. The researchers concluded that information could be communicated between professionals and patients when the information quality was assured and when individuals felt comfortable in their use of social media, both regarding privacy and skill (Antheunis et al., 2013).

Social media has expedited communications among professionals, often helping to create conference conversations or quickly spread information concerning recent findings within an industry (Salem, Borgmann, & Murphy, 2016). Urologists and urology patients use social media to disseminate information quickly through the use of group tweets, share health education through YouTube videos, and create groups that allow individuals to interact. These tools were used not only for practitioners to discuss findings and results among themselves, but also to communicate with the public (Moorehead et al., 2013; Peate, 2015).

Social media allows for complex information to be dispersed quickly and allows for urologists to interact with a wide portion of the public with a minimal investment (Salem et al., 2016). Social media serves the dual purpose of exchanging information between practitioners as well as reaching to the larger public as necessary. Given the use of social media in these medical communities, it may not be a surprise to know that social media has reached a high saturation point among the education and science communities for the spreading of critical information (Claussen et al., 2013). Previous researchers have illustrated how social media could be used to exchange information among professionals and to interact with the public, thereby serving two purposes (Antheunis et al., 2013; Moorehead et al., 2013; Peate, 2015). It also has been demonstrated to be an information

seeking tool for users (Antheunis et al., 2013; Hayes et al., 2016). Social media, however, is not always effectively used to communicate to the public (Claussen et al., 2013).

Research into small business has revealed that a lack of understanding of social media or appropriate guidelines has limited attempts by these businesses to reach out to the public (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2012). Claussen et al. (2013) found similar results in a study of a scientific community, the American Fisheries Society. While many members used social media, the majority used Facebook. Facebook has been demonstrated previously to be a social communication tool rather than an information sharing tool (Hayes et al., 2016).

The trends among members of the American Fisheries Society was to use social media primarily for communication among each other rather than reaching out to the public (Claussen et al., 2013). While education and outreach did occur, the rate of occurrence was small, limiting the ability for the society to address the public. The researchers recommended that the society attempt to adopt a framework and policy to guide the use of social media and thereby increase public interaction, pushing away from the dominant use of social media as a personal interaction tool.

For students, social media has helped improve knowledge, attitudes, and general academic skills, indicating its value not only for the educator but the student as well (Cheston, Flickinger, & Chisolm, 2013). Researchers studying the use of social media as a tool for educators to address their students did not discover any improved academic outcomes, but it revealed that the general academic skills improved and attitudes toward schoolwork also improved. The findings indicated that the benefit of social media might

sometimes influence attitudes and emotions. Such findings are not unusual, as research into virtual communities also has revealed that such communities can improve perceptions of a company and its brand (Botzenhard et al., 2013). The findings of Cheston et al. (2013) may reflect a similar influence of online interactions among students, as those interactions did result in improved attitudes toward the school and their classwork.

Social media has been used in a number of diverse ways that may serve businesses. Its role as a communication tool has been established both among professionals and users. Medical communities have found it to be an effective way to address a large segment of the population rapidly, allowing them to disseminate information as well as to survey the public. Social media has not effectively been used to transmit information in all cases and findings among both small businesses and the American Fisheries Society revealed that lack of guidelines and familiarity led to reduced attempts to integrate social media as a knowledge spreading tool. Doctors, too, found themselves unwilling to adopt social media when they lacked expertise in its use. Social media can increase positive feelings toward an organization when implemented successfully.

Social communication among virtual community members can create positive feelings toward any business in the community. These findings reveal numerous ways in which social media's use in other industries might be adapted to the area of small business. Increasing the level of information spreading and encouraging communication

among virtual communities may help to keep users knowledgeable regarding the organization and increase positive attitudes toward that organization.

Generational Differences

Though there may be many ways that social media can benefit individuals, different generations respond to and use social media differently (Seitz, 2015). Those born between the 1980s and 2000s, classified as Generation Y grew up with social media to some degree and are receptive to its use. They are the most comfortable with the use of social networks. Members of Generation X, those born between the 1960s and 1980s, did not encounter social media until later in their lives and are less likely to use social media networks, but have an ability to adapt to and use them. Baby Boomers, those who were born between the 1940s and 1960s, often prefer direct communication. They may or may not use social networks and will typically only have a tenuous grasp over its use or the potential importance of social networking. Those born before the 1940s are the least likely to use social networks and, as with Baby Boomers, prefer direct discussions and communication. Many lack knowledge of social media entirely and may even view it with hostility (Seitz, 2015).

Generation Y is the most natural audience for businesses to appeal to when discussing social media. They most likely grew up with computers and mastered their use, are technologically savvy, and are in most cases not older than 34 years old (Bolton et al., 2013). This generation is likely to use social media often, but there are different types that different segments of the generation engage. The most attractive forms of social media to some members of this generation are those that allow collaboration,

participation, and connection. Others, especially toward the younger end of the Generation Y spectrum, prefer consuming content more than collaborating to create it. All subsets of this generation use it as a form of leisure. Given the diverse means by which members of Generation Y use social media, businesses would benefit from understanding subsets of the generation and their patterns of use, and appealing to those usage patterns using tailored strategies (Bolton et al., 2013).

Generation Y is distinguished from other generations by its members' comfort with social media usage. While people of all generations are capable of using social media, members of Generation Y are the most likely to use social media and respond to social media efforts. Social media allows members of this generation to collaborate and engage with one another. Attempts to use social media to address Generation X, Baby Boomers, and individuals born before the 1940s are more difficult in theory given the lack of comfort these generations feel toward the use of social media. The older an individual, the less likely they are familiar with the various types of social media.

In some cases, older generations may be entirely unaware of how social media is used or how messaging occurs through it. Of all generations before Generation Y, members of Generation X are most likely to feel the most comfort adapting to social media. While still less likely to use a social media network to the same degree as those from Generation Y, members of Generation X can adapt relatively easily to its use. Businesses addressing these age groups should consider the ease with which each is likely to access social media, as products tailored to older generations may not effectively be marketed toward those generations if social media makes up the bulk of an advertising

campaign. Businesses believed that it is due to the lack of comfort and the general use of social media among the oldest generations. In contrast, Generation Y, and, to a lesser degree, Generation X, are more likely to be engaged on social media and reachable through messaging (Bolton et al., 2013).

Characteristic Differences

Differing personality types separate users of certain forms of social media from the general public (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010). Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky investigated the relationship between social media personalities given the diverse number of people accessing the Internet using social networks. Relying on self-reports taken from Facebook users, these researchers investigated personality factors using a questionnaire. This distinguished users of Facebook from those of other networks.

Personality types drove different usage patterns in a separate study of users of two of the largest social networks: Twitter and Facebook (Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2012). These researchers studied 300 individuals and their personality types as rated on the Big Five types: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Results revealed that Facebook users were more likely to be neurotic and looking to socialize, indicating some level of loneliness, a characteristic found previously among users who solely used Facebook (Petrocchi, Asnaani, Nadkarni, & Hofmann, 2014).

The study by Hughes et al. (2012) revealed that Facebook users were looking to socialize online and exchanged information through social exchanges. Individuals using Facebook again oriented along the Neuroticism personality type and often reported

increased loneliness, leading to the seeking of social exchanges. These were sociable individuals who were using the Internet as a means of finding some social satisfaction. The study further showed that loneliness also influenced the means by which information was disseminated on the social network, as individuals shared information with one another (Hughes et al., 2012).

Twitter users, on the other hand, were more closely correlated with the qualities of conscientiousness and openness in addition to sociability (Hughes et al., 2012). Twitter users did not see the network as a way of assisting with their loneliness but for utilitarian purposes and for information gathering. The finding that Twitter is more often an informational tool than Facebook may have some consequence for marketers seeking to spread information about their brand or business (Hughes et al., 2012). Hughes et al., (2012) also revealed that Facebook users share information socially might influence how a message was disseminated. Twitter users were far more likely to fall along the Conscientiousness, Openness, and Sociability personality types; they reported less loneliness and were direct information seekers. The study also revealed that Twitter users were more likely to seek out information directly, which indicated that Twitter played the role of a utilitarian tool that served the needs of the user, rather than a means of socializing or replacing social networks in an online context (Hughes et al., 2012). The researchers concluded that users of Facebook were not likely to seek and spread information on Twitter in the same way they did on Facebook.

Personality characteristics were different in a study of university students, however, with the characteristic of neuroticism being unassociated with Facebook use

(Skues, Williams, & Wise, 2012). These authors used the surveys from 393 undergraduate psychology students in the regression analysis to determine openness levels and correlate findings with time spent on Facebook and the number of friends on Facebook (Skues et al., 2012). Hughes et al. (2012) reported that individuals using Facebook were more likely to be lonely, and the study by Skues et al. (2012) revealed that their survey group was most likely to have more friends on Facebook when they had higher levels of loneliness. While neuroticism was not found, the association between loneliness and a higher number of Facebook friends indicated that users on the social network connected with others to deal with loneliness.

The users of Facebook who did not have high levels of loneliness, but had high levels of openness, were likely to discuss a wide range of interests. These results suggested that two different subsets existed within the sample, those with high levels of loneliness and those with high levels of openness and that each used the service for different purposes (Skues et al., 2012). Attempts to market online should take into account that there are at least two different types of users utilizing Facebook for different purposes. Such a finding may indicate the need to differentiate marketing between these groups.

A different approach to Facebook marketing versus Twitter marketing may be necessitated, as Twitter is less dependent on interpersonal exchanges and resulting virality versus sheer information seeking (Hayes et al., 2016). Twitter may help individuals to research a business or product, and researchers have tied such search behavior to an increased likeliness to purchase a product (Hayes et al., 2016). Searching

behavior is often utilized by consumers before making decisions. That ability to conduct research has been expanded as e-commerce has expanded into the mobile sphere; now, more than ever, individuals can use the Internet to search out product information to inform their decisions.

Individuals use social media, particularly Twitter, as a means to seek out information about a product directly (Hayes et al., 2016). Businesses may benefit from using social networks to address consumer questions conveniently as such searching behavior plays a key role in determining whether an individual will make a purchase (Hayes et al., 2016). With regards to marketing messaging, previous researchers had indicated that individuals were likely to share information when a brand was perceived well (Hayes et al., 2016; Hayes & King, 2014). Studies of 404 Facebook users between the ages of 18 and 34 using mock Facebook newsfeed ads, each of which measured perceived risk effects and levels of brand trust, revealed that trust was central in the decision to refer an ad on to friends within the social network (Hayes et al., 2016).

Marketing on Facebook may mean appealing to the audience most likely to share advertisements and business information when the relationship with a brand is positive (Hayes et al., 2016). Consequently, brand recognition may partly explain why people endorse brands as a way of signaling characteristics of their identity (Bernritter, Loermans, Verlegh, & Smit, 2015). Individuals frequently define themselves by their relationships with others. Bernritter et al. (2015) found that how individuals constructed their identity related to their intention to endorse a brand, with individuals interdependent on the brand more likely to make an endorsement. That level of interdependency was

facilitated by the perceived value, creating a positive affection for the brand leading into the endorsement. Trust and value were key to whether an individual would make an online endorsement of a brand (Bernritter et al., 2015).

Individuals with different personality characteristics use different forms of social media for different purposes. Facebook users are more likely to interact to share information, while Twitter users are most likely to seek information directly (Hughes et al., 2012). Measures of the Big Five personality types revealed distinct differences in how Facebook and Twitter users go about sharing information. Facebook draws individuals attempting to socialize, and information is more likely to be shared between users. Twitter does not necessarily draw individuals in need of socialization, and information seeking is typically done directly by going to a Twitter account to find out relevant information. The consequence for marketers is that each group needs to be addressed differently regarding marketing. Messaging targeting a user on Facebook must account for the likelihood of the user sharing that message among their social networks. Twitter users seek information directly, and marketing messages are more likely to be effective if they are easily found and address relevant user needs. In each case, the likeliness of the individual sharing information regarding the marketing message relies on the perception of the brand. Increased sharing is more likely to occur when the brand is perceived well. Sharing is especially critical with Facebook marketing, given the social sharing nature of that network (Hughes et al., 2012).

Social Media and Business

Technology has been increasingly prevalent in all areas of society, and marketers have responded by adopting social media marketing as part of a more comprehensive marketing strategy (Bashar, Ahmad, & Wasiq, 2012). Social media has become increasingly prevalent within a mixture of marketing techniques, and businesses often consider adopting a form of online marketing as critical to maintaining sales and business, particularly when customers need information rapidly regarding a quickly changing market. The technological changes are forcing modern marketers to (a) employ a social media strategy, (b) tailor actions to feedback from among consumers, and (c) deliver content that those consumers are demanding in advertisements and communications that are consistent and appealing (Bashar et al., 2012).

When appropriately used, social media has the potential to be an extremely potent tool that maximizes business gains (Coleman & Heriot, 2013). Businesses increasingly have come to consider social media as a foundational part of supporting business development. Firms increasingly have used social media to communicate, collaborate, and share information (Hu & Schlagwein, 2013). The end benefits of using social media as a marketing tool are many and they range from improved sales to loyalty cultivation (Icha & Agwu, 2016). Effective use of social media can lead to greater sales numbers and allow for a company to achieve a higher public profile, create new sales leads, reduce marketing budgets, and connect their business to other businesses in fruitful partnerships. Effective use of social media can increase the organization's ranking in searches, produce higher traffic numbers, develop loyal return consumers, and create marketplace insights

for the organization (Icha & Agwu, 2016). However, care and close supervision is required in the use of social media. When businesses fail to live up to expectations, individuals can air negative public opinions of an organization to a wide audience using social media (Adriana & Václav, 2015).

There has been a significant increase in the use of social media among Fortune 500 companies, with approximately 73% of such companies having corporate Twitter accounts and another approximately 66% possessing corporate Facebook accounts (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Another form of adopted social media among these companies includes company blogs. Company blogs have been part of a long-term shift in corporate strategy to try and embrace the advantages that social media can offer.

Web 2.0 and social media present managers with an opportunity to reach out to new audiences in ways not before conceived; however, they require managers to stay up to date on technology, consumers, and how social media can be implemented (Berthon et al., 2012). Managers also are cautioned to understand that social media operates uniquely in any given country or culture. Local events are safely interpreted within their domestic context, but global occurrences and developments are reinterpreted through a local lens. Messaging and news that deliver desired results in other areas of the globe may be interpreted differently in a local context, and social media can facilitate this misinterpretation (Berthon et al., 2012). This fact requires local business managers to understand how to engage with consumers locally.

The rise of social media and the role that consumers play in shaping and sharing messaging has created difficulties for advertisers rooted in old media (Lee, 2012).

Technology and consumer behavior now impact how advertising agencies deliver their messages to the public. Social media has had an empowering impact on individuals, allowing a degree of interaction with a wide audience that previously would have been impossible. In turn, consumers have taken their role in shaping the messaging and attitudes towards companies and brands. Social media can impact perceptions of an organization, as users have taken to engaging with one another and sharing their thoughts and beliefs regarding an organization. Through various social media channels, attitudes toward organizations have been shaped not only by traditional advertising channels but by consumers messaging other consumers through blogs and other messaging methods as well (Lee, 2012).

Despite the greater empowerment of consumers in shaping messaging, social media continues to be of great benefit to businesses when used effectively (Icha & Agwu, 2016; Mahajan, 2015). Investigative tools that allow for rapid collection of information have become available to businesses (Mahajan, 2015). Businesses interested in understanding more about their consumers can have large chat conversations with multiple users to collect feedback, while businesses pages can be used to collect survey data and other forms of consumer feedback as well. Twitter is particularly well positioned for use by businesses seeking to understand their audiences better. Appropriate use of hashtags specific to a business can reveal to an organization how many individuals are using that hashtag via a simple search on Twitter. The results can inform a business regarding how many individuals are discussing the organization and whether they are discussing it positively or negatively. Software can provide advanced statistics regarding

a tweet's engagement, including details regarding how many people have retweeted the originating tweet. Businesses, therefore, have a number of options for gauging opinions and understanding how high their profile is among general consumers (Mahajan, 2015).

More than at any time in history, businesses and marketers have access to a high level of consumer feedback (Cader & Al Tenaiji, 2013). Surveys of social media consumers have revealed that 29% provided feedback through social media surveys versus 15% who said they responded to questionnaires offered online. Additionally, 22% of individuals stated they provided company feedback using e-mails, while another 12% claimed they had done so through SMS text messages. Despite the willingness to provide feedback, over half (52%) claimed organizations had not reached them through any form of social media network. However, most of the contact was made via Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, and Myspace. (Cader & Al Tenaiji, 2013).

One of the claims regarding the use of social media by businesses is that social media can make businesses more competitive (Hu & Schlagwein, 2013). To study this, Hu and Schlagwein analyzed 20 firms regarding their level of usage of social media and types of social media they engaged in. The researchers employed a qualitative, case-based approach that used in-depth interviews of executives and social media experts followed by an analysis of the usage and stated results. The authors identified five main means of social media use: (a) unidirectional broadcasting of information; (b) facilitating dialogue and connecting users; (c) facilitating the creation of a particular outcome; (d) storage, maintenance, and retrieval of knowledge; and (d) generating fellowship, loyalty, and social relationships between users (Hu & Schlagwein, 2013).

The researchers concluded that to make a business competitive; social media should be used to broadcast information internally (Hu & Schlagwein, 2013). Dedicated teams could take important news and relay it to employees using social media systems such as internal blogs. The consequence of this study was that businesses are faced with two needs: the need to use social media externally to attract consumers, but also the need to use internal forms of social media. The authors found that internal increase of knowledge was consistently tied to increased business competitiveness. Businesses should, therefore, tailor two forms of social media, external and internal, which achieve different purposes (Hu & Schlagwein, 2013).

A separate study conducted among consumers identified six ways that customers perceived social media was used by businesses (Cader & Al Tenaiji, 2013). These included increasing brand awareness, advertising, soliciting feedback on products/services, offering promotions, directing users to the organization's website, and inexpensively contacting consumers and gathering data. The findings of this study represented some overlap with the categories of usage identified by marketers in the study by Hu and Schlagwein (2013).

Brand Communities

Social media can be used as a means of marketing (Bashar et al., 2012). Researchers have studied social media users and found that a company's presence on social media provided concrete information for users. The study by Bashar et al. (2012) encompassed 150 individuals responding to a descriptive questionnaire, followed by regression analysis to determine correlations. Users aware of where to find a business'

information were likely to invite relevant friends to use it as well, creating a form of virality. Previous researchers have discovered that virtual communities, particularly those with experts on a brand, encourage brand loyalty (Botzenhard et al., 2013).

Bashar et al. (2012) indicated similar findings in their study. The authors found that users were encouraged by interactions with fellow consumers and product representatives to buy those products and return for services in the future. The findings were indicative of the need for businesses to encourage interactions with consumers, as well as the role such interactions could play in spreading the word of the brand. The findings also indicated that businesses should invest in creating an online presence that can be used to communicate the necessary information to consumers promptly. Because social media outlets do not allow businesses to respond to individual complaints promptly, businesses should supplement their social networks with other channels that can expedite responses (Bashar et al., 2012).

Surveys of 441 respondents similarly revealed that businesses creating communities increase brand loyalty (Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2012). Following structural equation modeling, Laroche et al. (2012) concluded that online communities have multiple positive effects. The attitudes of consumers toward brands, products, the company, and fellow consumers of the brand all improved, thereby creating increased trust in the brand. Other researchers have indicated that trust is an important part of influencing the decision to share information over social networks regarding a product or business (Botzenhard et al., 2013; Hayes et al., 2016; Hayes & King, 2014).

Laroche et al. (2012) suggested that by constructing online communities, businesses use social media effectively to generate greater virality regarding their brand and products. The researchers hinted at this by concluding that these online communities encouraged brand trust and loyalty. Businesses should be aware that exchanges are important and that they can take an active role in encouraging further trust, which results in increased favorability towards their brands (Botzenhard et al., 2013). Botzenhard et al. surveyed 303 participants and created Pearson's correlation matrixes from the data. The researchers found that a manufacturer who puts in the effort to create a virtual community encourages interpersonal interactions and increased trust, which had the measurable result of increasing purchase intentions and word-of-mouth communications. Businesses hoping to use online space as a means of increasing their consumer base can benefit from increased communication between consumers. The impact on purchase intentions was heightened when experts on the brand interacted with the community, demonstrating that a business should play an active role in its online community to maximize the trust created among consumers (Botzenhard et al., 2013).

Firms can maximize the benefits of a virtual community by initiating the community itself through resources and information (Porter, Devaraj, & Sun, 2014). By increasing the level of engagement among members of the community, businesses can increase the level of consumer loyalty and satisfaction (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). Brand communities help to encourage shared values, networking among consumers of the brand, and increased brand loyalty (Laroche et al., 2012). While consumers may initially enter virtual communities simply to become more informed, a

higher level of engagement leads to higher levels of emotional affection for the brand and business (Laroche et al., 2012). These consumers receive fulfillment from the concept of helping build the brand in tandem with the business itself (Ind, Inglesias, & Schultz, 2013). Within the community, the consumers are allowed to be creative and socialize with like-minded individuals.

Brand communities can increase loyalty by promoting community interactions. Consumers originally become part of communities as information seekers before achieving an emotional affinity for the brand, a process that can be facilitated by socialization and interaction. The presence of brand experts in these communities also helps boost loyalty. Overall engagement with fellow consumers and experts plays a part in creating a strong connection between a consumer and the brand. Businesses hoping to develop a strong following and expand beyond their existing base may benefit from initiating virtual communities and positioning their brand experts as core parts of the consumer experience. Incoming information seekers who are satisfied with their initial questions answered may remain to become ongoing parts of the community. Over time, engagement and interaction may raise brand loyalty and cause individuals to promote the brand among others. Interaction is a critical element to creating increased patronage, and virtual communities can amplify a business' marketing message when individuals feel inclined to carry that message on due to their perception of the brand's value.

Reciprocity

Businesses also should take into consideration the existing relationship they have with consumers, which can influence word-of-mouth advertising and sharing of the brand

with others (Hayes & King, 2014). Studies of advertisement virality have demonstrated that an individual's sharing motivation is influenced by the existing relationships they have with the brand. When a positive relationship existed, the individual reciprocated within the relationship by referring the brand to others. Where companies often emphasize virality and word-of-mouth advertising, they also should remember to build a trusted relationship with the consumers themselves to maximize their marketing efforts. Trust plays a role in virality and business referrals (Hayes et al., 2016). Hayes et al. studied 404 Facebook users between the ages of 18 to 34. These investigators aimed to measure the likelihood of referring an advertisement to friends. Whether a brand created trust with the individual played an important role in the decision to refer the company to others. Marketers hoping to increase brand awareness must first consider their relationship to existing consumers, who will reciprocate trust through advertising referrals (Hayes et al., 2016).

Researchers studying the likelihood of sharing advertisements revealed that brand relationships again played a significant part in sharing behavior (Hayes et al., 2016). Investigations into social networks using a nationally drawn sample revealed that individuals were motivated to share ads across their social network when there was a positive brand relationship. Individuals are motivated to reciprocate toward a brand by sharing the advertisement. These researchers warned that such decision-making was tempered within strong social networks. Within a business' control was the ability to build up its brand within its consumer base to increase the likeliness of sharing behavior, thereby increasing its base.

Consumers respond to reciprocal relationships in which they play a part in the development of a business' product (Prell & Schleich, 2015). Prell and Schleich recruited 12 individuals from the LEGO Ideas community, which contributes ideas to the development of LEGO products. The interviews revealed that customers increasingly wished to influence the decision-making process regarding a product; this allows for the development of a community around the product's brand. Users hope to attain a respectful relationship between themselves and a brand. but if expectations regarding the brand are not satisfied it may lead to disappointments. Companies that attempt to allow their consumers greater input regarding the brand or its products can cultivate trust, and consumers reciprocate through loyalty and patronage.

Reciprocity has been used in online advertising to increase user acceptance of web services (Schumann, von Wangenheim, & Groene, 2014). Many web services are free but depend on advertising revenues to support their business model. In this study of consumer behavior, Schumann et al. noted that targeted advertising can create a negative consumer reaction. Such reactions demand a response from businesses. This is often done through arguments put forward from the business itself. Two forms of argumentation have been used by these businesses: (a) utilitarian arguments, which argue that the ads benefit the consumer, and (b) reciprocity arguments, which argue that the benefits a consumer receives from the business should be reciprocated by accepting advertising.

The powerful role of reciprocity was seen throughout the literature. People anticipate some form of reciprocal behavior from both individuals and businesses. They also may take actions that they feel boost their reputations. Trust has repeatedly emerged

in the literature as a quality that brands should seek to establish. In turn, customers reciprocate with their behavior in the form of brand loyalty and patronage. Small businesses may benefit from understanding how customers will reward their social media efforts, and how to go about earning that return. The power of reciprocity has been seen in consumer responses to appeals by web services. Organizations may be able to use this to their advantage by extending benefits to consumers who feel inclined to reciprocate through ongoing patronage.

Guidelines

Many organizations lack the ability to integrate effective guidelines as part of their marketing operations (Hassan et al., 2015; Malita, 2011). The 21st century has changed the way in which information circulates and has provided greater access to a larger amount of information than was previously possible (Malita, 2011). Organizations still need effective means of delivering information to their consumers. Small businesses are at a disadvantage when compared against their larger business counterparts who already have employed their resources to integrate social media into their marketing (Stelzner, 2015).

The problem of social media adoption is compounded by the reluctance of marketers to address emerging social networks (Stelzner, 2015). Surveys of marketers revealed that 48% were skeptical of such networks and waited to see if the network would mature. Another 19% registered a username but did little else. Twenty-eight percent engaged with others on the network but did little to market using that network. Of all the marketers surveyed, only five percent were willing to engage actively with others

and make active marketing attempts (Stelzner, 2015). Of the marketers surveyed, 45% believed that blogging was the most important means of delivering content in an era when highly visual marketing methods were increasingly available on networks such as Instagram.

The difficulty of adapting to new social networks may be compounded by the fact that for many industries, there remain few steady guidelines for implementing a social media marketing policy (Hays et al., 2012). Researchers have studied destination marketing organizations, which are charged with reaching out to global audiences and encouraging travel to a country, and have found that these companies continue to experiment in hopes of establishing best practices. These findings revealed that there are business markets where social media, although considered to be a potential means of reaching consumers, is still being implemented without steady strategies to optimize outcomes. As a result, many strategies are employed in a haphazard fashion (Hays et al., 2012).

Despite this general haphazard approach to social media, strategies for optimizing social media and producing positive results as measured by return on investment have been devised for specific businesses (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2013). An analysis of a small ice cream chain with limited resources for marketing revealed that methodologies could be implemented to measure return on investment and customer word-of-mouth. This was accomplished by measuring the influence of individuals within a social network to determine the influence they might have on their peers within that network and the

resulting impact on profits. However, guidelines about how to implement social media marketing properly are often lacking (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2013).

Effective Campaigns

Another study on social influence strategies took a broader approach and examined whether businesses broadcasting frequent advertisements with participation incentives experienced a benefit from their investment (Ashley & Tuten, 2014). Ashley and Tuten (2014) drew on the past research indicating that social media channels should maintain fresh content that incentivized consumers to engage with the business. Following an examination of the social media strategies used by businesses, the researchers concluded that those employment strategies that included fresh, incentivized messages produced increased business. The most effective of these messages were often highly engaging and conveyed a sense of exclusivity in the incentivized offer (Ashley & Tuten, 2014).

Also, in another study, Vallaster and Lindgreen (2013) revealed another development of a brand using social interactions. These researchers focused on internal brand building among employees in a physical environment but also emphasized the importance of communication among individuals. The researchers found through interviews and analysis of internal documentation that managers communicating brand information to employees could encourage brand commitment or beliefs about the brand using social interactions. Relationship-building and interaction among individuals can create trust in a brand (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2013).

Effectively designed campaigns can encourage brand loyalty (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012). Erdogmus and Cicek studied 338 customers and found that well-designed social media campaigns were considered relevant to the consumers, offered popular content, appeared to convey an advantage to the consumer, and were dispersed across multiple social media platforms. Utilitarian messages do little to distinguish products that serve similar purposes and necessitated creative messaging (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012).

Marketers should be aware that persuasive messages leading to the sharing of advertisements over social media rely on a high level of argument quality, attractiveness in the post, and existing popularity (Chang, Yu, & Lu, 2014).

Effective campaigns require businesses to meet a number of requirements. Businesses should be frequent and consistent in their advertisements, and those advertisements should provide incentives to consumers to invest in the brand. Keeping content fresh and new helps to increase engagement, while messages that convey a sense of exclusivity help to compound the impact of a marketing message. Messages should be developed in such a way that they are attractive and immediately draw in consumers. As the popularity of an ad increases, it creates increased communication between consumers. Interaction among the public can be positive for organizations. Commitment to the brand can be encouraged when marketing messages encourage interaction among individuals, which helps to elevate positive perceptions and loyalty toward a brand. Businesses that attempt to create social media marketing campaigns that fall along these lines may solidify their existing consumer base and expand it as consumers discuss the brand with others.

Summary and Conclusions

Social exchange theory establishes a framework for understanding how individuals relate to other individuals and groups. It implies that individuals are self-motivated and that they seek reciprocated behavior as well as boosts to their own reputation in return for their actions. Humans tend to reciprocate toward businesses when businesses demonstrate behaviors that increase trust, such as meeting consumer expectations and creating communities in which consumers can provide feedback to the business. Social media provides a format by which to create these virtual communities, but different subsets of the population respond to social media efforts in different ways.

Though researchers have made efforts to examine the impact of social media, even within a social exchange theory framework, little research exists concerning the impact of such efforts on very small businesses, especially marketing firms with fewer than 10 employees. Best practices regarding social media marketing for these businesses have not been established. In this study, I addressed the gap in the literature by determining the existing problems facing the implementation of social media strategies among small businesses in Dallas, Texas, and attempting to identify guidelines for implementation. In the next chapter, I provide the methodology, which was a qualitative case study to find commonalities among those interviewed regarding the struggles of implementing social media into a marketing plan. The next chapter provides descriptions of my role as the researcher; descriptions of the participants and the procedure for their selection; instrumentation; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; and a data analysis plan.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The general problem was that leaders of small businesses in the United States, specifically those with fewer than 10 employees, are skeptical of and resistant to the use of social media in their business operations. This is because there are no clear and effective guidelines and policies detailing how to use social media in the specific context of small marketing firms. The specific problem was that many small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas, do not have the resources and knowledge to make use of social media effectively as a management tool for operations (Hassan et al., 2015; Malita, 2011). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of small marketing firm leaders regarding the resources and knowledge needed for effective use of social media as management tools for operations. To address the problem, answer the research questions, and satisfy the purpose of this study, I used qualitative methodology with a case study research design. In this chapter, I provide details about the methodology. I begin the chapter with the research design and rationale. Next, I describe my role as the researcher, the participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation criteria, the data collection process, and the data analysis procedure. I also address issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

The methodology for this study was qualitative. Using qualitative methodology enables researchers to comprehend and analyze the experiences and perceptions of individuals within the context of a bounded system or phenomenon (Lewis, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study

because I explored the use of social media in the management of operations of small businesses. I gathered and examined in-depth information about a phenomenon within its uncontrolled environment (Mitchell & Jolley, 2012). Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because I aimed to provide a rich explanation through data gathered during in-depth interviews (see Lewis, 2015). I analyzed interview transcripts, questionnaires, and documents as sources of data to answer the research questions.

In quantitative studies, researchers examine relationships (e.g., causative or associative) between two or more variables (Bernard & Bernard, 2012; Mitchell & Jolley, 2012). The goal of the current study did not involve the examination of relationships between two or more variables; therefore, this methodology was not appropriate for this study. A mixed-methods approach was also not appropriate for the study because qualitative data were sufficient to answer the research questions. Quantitative data were not needed to answer the research questions.

A case study was the most appropriate research design for this study because the purpose and problem were focused on exploring perceptions of a homogenous group of individuals to make sense of an important phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) claimed that case study research is appropriate when the researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in a study. Because I did not control any setting in the data collection, this description of case studies was applicable to the current study. Yin also claimed that the phenomenon of interest in a case study has unclear boundaries, which was applicable to the current study.

I considered other research designs; however, these were not aligned with the purpose and research questions of the study. I chose a case study instead of a phenomenological design because the purpose of this study did not involve in-depth exploration of lived experiences of individuals (Moustakas, 1994). Grounded theory was also inappropriate because developing a theory from structured data was not the goal of the study (Glaser, 1978). A narrative research design was also inappropriate for this study because there was no need to gather and present findings in a perfect order and chronological form (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I chose case study over ethnography because fulfilling the purpose of the study did not require performing extensive observations of individuals within the context of their culture (Pink, 2013). I, therefore, chose a case study as the research design for this study.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in this study, I served as the principal recruiter, data collector, and data analyst. I accessed managers in small marketing firms and recruited an appropriate sample that provided data for the study. During this recruitment phase, I ensured that the participants who provided data for the study were not part of my personal and immediate social network (e.g., family members, relatives, friends, coworkers, neighbors, or acquaintances). By doing so, I avoided the possible influence of familiarity between the principal investigator and participants on the findings of the study.

During data collection, I conducted interviews, conducted a questionnaire survey, and collected relevant documents to answer the research questions. In the analysis phase,

I implemented Yin's (2014) cycle of analyzing case studies which has five phases: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding.

Because I had been researching the topic for several months, I had gained a certain level of familiarity with it. As a human being, I developed personal biases and preferences in relation to the topic of the study. These biases may have influenced my interactions with the participants as well as the data collection processes and the analysis outputs that I generated from the data. To minimize the impact of potential biases during the interviews and data analysis, I performed bracketing, which refers to keeping the data analysis and findings focused on the topic by avoiding the introduction of personal opinions, beliefs, and behavior into the process (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Tufford & Newman, 2012). To perform bracketing, I identified any personal experiences, beliefs, preferences, and behaviors that had any relation to the study. Through this process, I did my best to become aware of my personal biases while analyzing the data.

Apart from bracketing, I used guides in collecting and analyzing the data. I used an interview guide and a checklist for the notes taken when conducting the interviews and reviewing documents. With the help of these guides, I remained aligned with the purpose and research questions while maintaining flexibility (see Abdalla et al., 2018). To improve the validity of the data further, I performed member checking (Harper & Cole, 2012). In this process, I provided participants with copies of their respective transcripts and the initial interpretations of their answers. I asked for their feedback regarding the accuracy and completeness of the transcripts and interpretations.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The target population of the study was business owners who managed small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas. More than 7,800 businesses in Dallas are considered small firms (Office of the Trade Representative, 2015); hence, there was a population of at least 7,800 managers of small firms in Dallas. I used LinkedIn as my primary source, which gave me a perfect representation of the population of small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas. Though LinkedIn, I identified over 200 marketing managers and owners of small marketing firms with social media experience. Based on their LinkedIn profiles, I selected participants with relevant knowledge and experiences about the topic of the study (Barratt et al., 2015; Petty et al., 2012). I focused on this population because the members had the knowledge and experience to answer the questions in the interview protocol directly and reliably. The use of social media as a tool in managing and operating a business was identified and explored from the perspectives of the managers who made up the target population for this study.

All participants underwent interviews. For qualitative studies such as this one, the basis for determining the minimum sample size is data saturation, which is a point in the data collection process when there are marginal and insignificant changes in the data with the addition of new samples or participants (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Scholars who have employed qualitative methodology have proposed that the sample size for these studies should be six to 25 participants (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013).

The basis for selection of participants was inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were the following: (a) male or female manager in a small marketing firm in Dallas, Texas; (b) owner of a firm for at least 3 years; (c) in the field of small enterprises for at least 5 years; and (d) involved in a firm that had used social media as part of firm management or operations for at least 2 years. The exclusion criteria were the following: (a) those with the intention of leaving the company within the next 30 days, (b) pregnant women, and (c) those with physical disabilities that might hinder the use of social media.

I recruited participants through purposive sampling, which is the recruitment technique most commonly used in the field of qualitative research (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015). Purposive sampling is a technique of selecting participants who are appropriate to answer the research questions of a study (Barratt et al., 2015). Scholars have claimed that purposely selected participants are more likely to provide detailed information about the topic of a study because of their familiarity with the phenomenon of interest (Barratt et al., 2015; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012).

Instrumentation

I used three data sources for the case study. These data sources were (a) interviews, (b) questionnaires, and (c) document reviews. In this section, I discuss these data sources. *Interviews.* The semistructured interviews were the main source of data for the study. In most qualitative studies, researchers choose to conduct interviews because of this method's advantages in enabling collection of in-depth and rich data (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Peters et al., 2013). I developed an interview

protocol to manage the flow of the interview using specific interview questions. All interview questions were based on recent literature regarding management, social media, customer retention, and marketing strategy. The items in the interview protocol were aligned with the purpose and research questions of the study. Addressing each research question required the use of at least three interview questions in the protocol; however, because the interviews were semi structured, I also asked some follow-up questions related to the main interview questions.

To validate the contents of the interview protocol, I asked three experts in the field of social media use and small business management to review the contents of the protocol. The experts evaluated the appropriateness of the structure, content, and wording of the items as means of collecting data to answer the research questions. I made changes to the protocol based on the common issues highlighted in the expert reviews.

Questionnaires: In addition to interviews, I conducted online questionnaires as a source for this study. I used open-ended questions and analyzed responses using qualitative methods that involved discussions and critical analyses without the use of numbers and calculations. Because the interview questions were aligned with the research questions, the answers received provided data that also were aligned with the research questions. I used this method because of its increased speed of data collection, cost-effectiveness, and higher levels of objectivity compared to other data collection methods (Dudovskiy, 2013). To validate the questionnaires, I established face validity by having some experts go through my questionnaire. I requested that they evaluate whether the questions effectively captured the topic under investigation.

Document review. In addition to interviews and questionnaires, I collected relevant documents for review in the study. These documents included company files about the use of social media and business operations. The source of the documents was company websites. I analyzed the documents to identify any information that might support or contradict the information gathered from the interviews and questionnaires. Through these documents, I performed a more in-depth analysis of the surrounding problems and challenges in using social media for business operations. I also considered the aspects of the reports, policies, and procedures to highlight information that was relevant to answer the research questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment and participation. I recruited participants through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a recruitment technique that involves selecting participants whose characteristics and experiences are aligned with the requirements of the research, thus making them knowledgeable about the successful implementation of social media as a management tool for marketing firms (Barratt et al., 2015). To perform purposive sampling, I contacted owners and managers of small marketing firms via LinkedIn (a social media forum) to request that they participate in my study. I identified and connected with over 200 potential participants on LinkedIn who were owners and managers of small marketing firms. I sent 100 emails to individual participants requesting that they participate in a face-to-face interview and to another 100 individuals asking them to answer the research questions by responding to a paper-based questionnaire for

my study. In the letter, I introduced myself and my university, gave an overview of the research, and attached an informed consent form for participants to sign.

The consent form explained the purpose and benefits of the study, in addition to explaining that participation was voluntary and would not place the participant at risk. It also explained to the participants that their identity would remain confidential and that there were no legal implications of taking part in the study. The consent form also stated that participants were at liberty to leave the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable with the process. Once consent was granted, the study was completed and the interviews transcribed, with the tapes of interviews kept in a secure place, where they will remain for 5 years and then be destroyed. Participants were asked to respond via regular mail, email or phone. Then, once the willing participants signed the consent form, it was submitted to me, either through mail or email. I contacted those who submitted the signed copy of the consent form by telephone and scheduled data collection dates for the face-to-face interview and emailed or mailed the research questions.

Data collection. After recruiting the participants, I began data collection. The data collection effort had three phases: (a) interviewing, (b) research questionnaire, and (c) reviewing relevant documents.

Semistructured interviews. The first phase of data collection was conducting the interviews. The interviews took place in a private area chosen by and convenient for the participants, such as the local library or Starbucks. I also had a backup plan for participants to use Skype or video calling if they were unable to meet in person. I organized the materials needed: (a) the interview protocol, (b) a voice recorder, and (c)

pens and papers. Once the participant arrived, I greeted the participant appropriately and introduced the interview, briefly discussed the background of the study and the flow of the interview session. After the introduction stage, I began the next phase by asking questions, using the interview protocol as a guide. Each research question had at least three corresponding questions during the interview. I sometimes asked follow-up questions to collect more relevant data for the study. After all of the questions were exhausted, I informed the participant that there were no more questions to be asked of him or her. The participant had a chance to ask any questions or verbalize any concerns. I acknowledged and addressed any concerns of the participant. After addressing any questions or concerns, I thanked the participant for taking the time to be part of the study.

I recorded the audio for each interview from start to finish, as was explained in the informed consent form that the participants signed. Using the recordings, I transcribed the interviews verbatim. Each interview was expected to last about 30 to 90 minutes, and none of them went beyond 90 minutes.

Questionnaires. The use of questionnaires is data collection method conducted using a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents (Mellenbergh, 2008). I sent out the survey questionnaires to the 15 participants through regular mail and email. Mellenbergh (2008) explained that the questionnaire survey has become an essential research tool for a variety of research fields, including marketing and social and official statistics research. Therefore I used it to help me get the most accurate results without incurring a lot of

expenses. I summarized the results of the survey and incorporated them into my data source.

I used the questionnaire reports to compile the summary of the main points of the research. I compared the results of each questionnaire with the results from the interview sessions and the information gathered from the respondent. Lastly, I related the findings to social exchange theory. I looked for and reflected on the central concepts of the theory and how they were evident in the interviews.

Document review. Aside from interviews and questionnaires, I also reviewed relevant documents related to the use of social media and business operations available on the websites available to the public. Examples of the documents I reviewed included (a) reports, (b) evaluation forms, and (c) operations manual related to social media marketing and relevant to the study. The purpose of the review of the relevant documents was to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of social media usage in small firms, which was the focus of the problem and research questions of the study. Adding the third source was essential in achieving triangulation.

Data Analysis Plan

After conducting each interview, I transcribed and summarized each interview and formalized the initial interpretation of the answers from each interview and the questionnaires. I also member-checked the transcripts and initial interpretations. Member checking refers to a process wherein an analyst or principal investigator asks participants to review their transcripts and initial interview interpretations for accuracy and correctness of the information (Harper & Cole, 2012). To perform member checking, I

sent the participants copies of their transcripts and initial interview interpretations for them to review and evaluate the accuracy of the information. Each participant received these files through email, and they had 14 days to respond. No response from the participant indicated that there were no changes required. Because I did not receive any responses indicating discrepancies, there was no need for me to review the audio recording or discuss potential changes with participants. After the member checking phase, I coded all the data qualitatively with the help of NVivo qualitative data analysis software that assisted me with analysis. I loaded the different documents into the NVivo software. The data analysis method that I used was Yin's (2014) five-phased analysis for case studies.

The five phases for Yin's (2014) analytical process include (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. I began by compiling and sorting the transcripts of the interviews, field notes, and relevant sections of the documents. In this phase, I read the data for familiarization. In the second phase, which includes disassembling, I broke down the data into smaller segments (e.g., words, phrases, sentences). While disassembling, I also assigned new labels or codes to the fragments or pieces. I repeated this step as a part of a trial-and-error process of testing and validating the codes (Yin, 2014). In the reassembling phase, I used substantive themes or clusters of codes to reorganize the disassembled fragments or pieces into different groupings and sequences (Yin, 2014).

I performed the second and third phases in a repeated and alternating manner until all data was processed (Yin, 2014). In the fourth phase, I used the reassembled data to

generate a narrative of the overall interpretation of the data. After the interpretation of the findings, the fifth phase involved the development of conclusions (Yin, 2014). I analyzed data from each source separately, repeating Yin's (2014) five-phased analysis for case study for each of the three data sources. Finally, I performed an analysis of the findings to determine the emergent themes from the convergence of the three data sources to determine the converging themes that formed the final output of the study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The concern for every qualitative study is addressing the issues of trustworthiness (Elo et al., 2014). Researchers promote trustworthiness by establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Elo et al., 2014; Abdalla et al., 2018). Trustworthiness indicates that the researcher used appropriate methodological considerations and rigor throughout the data collection and analysis process. In this section, I discussed the procedures to ensure trustworthiness of the data and methods for the study.

Credibility

Credibility is the qualitative counterpart of internal validity of the data (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, & Gonzalez, 2018). To improve the credibility of the data collection method, I conducted an expert panel review of the interview questions. Experts included professionals in the field of social media usage and small business management with at least 10 years of relevant experience. The reviewers ensured that the items in the protocol were aligned with the research questions, purpose of the study, and the conceptual framework. I also performed member checking with participants for the purpose of

verifying the accuracy of transcripts and initial interpretations (Abdalla et al., 2018).

Participants received copies of the interpretations and conclusions to provide their feedback and impressions throughout data collection and analysis.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the qualitative counterpart of external validity of the data and instruments. Transferability involves the ability to transfer the study findings from one population to a different population from the one used in the original study (Abdalla et al., 2018). In this study, I have provided a complete and detailed description of the methodology that was used and the outputs of the study. I provided the justification for the processes and the findings to ensure that other researchers may understand the methodology and effectively assess the applicability of the findings to other groups or populations (Abdalla et al., 2018; Munhall, 2012). A researcher uses transferability to allow comparisons between the current study and other related studies to assess the applicability of the findings to other small business industries or other sectors (Abdalla et al., 2018).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the qualitative counterpart of reliability of the data and collection method. To improve the dependability of the study, I created an audit trail (Abdalla et al., 2018). An audit trail refers to a collection of tangible documentation of the processes implemented in the study. I documented every step and procedure that occurred in the methodology chapter to enhance the study's dependability (Abdalla et al., 2018). Moreover, I have kept all of the data in the original form without any alterations.

The interview transcripts were verbatim transcriptions of the interview sessions because I used the audio recorders during the interview.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the qualitative counterpart of objectivity (Abdalla et al., 2018). To improve confirmability, I ensured that the interview protocol was an iterative form of questioning, which involved inquiries repeated and reworded to make sure that the participants provided consistent answers. Iterative questioning was helpful in encouraging the participants to provide detailed data and to uncover any detail that was lacking (Abdalla et al., 2018).

Ethical Procedures

As part of conducting studies with human participants, I addressed ethical issues, as was contained in the approval of the university IRB. I maintained the confidentiality of all participants. I used pseudonyms instead of the real names of the participants. In all data sheets and data collection materials, I used these pseudonyms to replace any identifying information. In all cases, I used pseudonyms when writing reports of the data. Participants were informed of these procedures through the informed consent form.

In terms of storage and security, the data was safely stored, including all electronic files, interview transcripts, recorded interviews, questionnaires, and documents, inside a waterproof and fireproof safe in my private office. It will remain there for the next five years after the conclusion of the study. Moreover, I secured all electronic files using passwords and encryptions. I saved all data in a flash disk inside the storage cabinet as well. Only myself, my dissertation team, my Chair, and my committee

members may review the interview data. After five years, all data will be destroyed through burning, breaking, or shredding physical documentation, and through permanent deletion for any data existing on any computing devices.

All participants of the study were volunteers. No one was forced to take part in the study. There were also no consequences for refusing to participate after receiving an invitation. The participants also were allowed to terminate participation upon request through formal writing at any time during the data collection, even after signing the informed consent form. The participants did not gain any direct benefit from the study, except for indirect benefits that may manifest through policy changes and process improvements relating to the phenomenon of interest of the study. Participants did not receive any incentives to participate.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of small marketing firm leaders about the needed resources and knowledge for effective use of social media as a management tool for operations. To address this purpose, I conducted a qualitative case study. The target population of the study was managers in small business firms with fewer than 10 employees in Dallas, Texas. From the total population of at least 7,800 managers of small firms in Dallas, I recruited 23 participants who satisfied the inclusion criteria. Of the 23 participants, I interviewed 12 participants, and 11 participants answered the survey questions. The inclusion criteria were: (a) male or female managers in a small marketing firm in Dallas, Texas, (b) leaders in the firm for at least three years, (c) having been in the field of small enterprises for at least the past five

years, and (d) firms who use social media in their firm management or operations. The exclusion criteria were the following: (a) those with the intention of leaving the company within the next 30 days, (b) pregnant women, and (c) those with physical disabilities that may hinder the use of social media. For triangulation purposes, there were three data sources for the study: (a) interviews, (b) questionnaires, and (c) document reviews. I member checked all the transcripts and initial interpretations. I also performed bracketing and an audit trail to improve the trustworthiness of the study. I have kept all personal information confidential, and participation was voluntary. To analyze the data, I followed Yin's (2014) five-phased analysis for case studies. In Chapter 4, I will provide the complete details and discussion of the results and findings after implementing the methodology discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Results of the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of small marketing firm leaders about resources and knowledge needed for the effective use of social media as a management tool. To fulfill this purpose, I interviewed 12 managers and owners of small marketing firms, submitted a questionnaire to 11 other managers and owners of small marketing firms and analyzed 13 business websites

The overarching research question for the study was the following: How can social media be used as an effective management tool for small businesses? The study included two research subquestions:

RQ1: What are the problems and challenges small businesses experience in their attempt to develop effective methods for using social media as a management tool?

RQ2: How can small businesses make effective use of social media in terms of (a) a direct reward, (b) an expected gain in reputation and influence on others, (c) altruism, and (d) an anticipated reciprocity?

This chapter reports the results of the study. The chapter has nine sections after this introduction. The first three sections present the data collection procedures, setting for the study, and demographics of the participants. The fourth section explains the data analysis procedures, and the fifth section provides evidence of trustworthiness. The sixth through eighth sections present how the study findings can be used to address the three

research questions. The ninth section summarizes the chapter and provides a transition to Chapter 5.

Data Collection

I used a three-phase data collection approach for this study. The three data sources used for the study were interviews, questionnaires, and document reviews. To enlist participants for the study, I first used the social media site LinkedIn to identify over 200 owners and managers of small marketing firms with fewer than 10 employees in the Dallas, Texas, area. The information about the individuals included their email addresses. I randomly sent e-mails to 100 of these individuals requesting their participation in a face-to-face interview and sent e-mails to another 100 individuals asking them to answer a paper-based questionnaire for the study. In the e-mail, I introduced myself and my university, gave an overview of the research, and attached an informed consent form for them to sign. The individuals could respond through either mail or e-mail. By telephone, I contacted those individuals who agreed to a face-to-face interview to schedule the interview. For individuals who agreed to reply to a questionnaire, I mailed a printed questionnaire and a self-addressed stamped envelope for them to return the questionnaire.

Originally, I scheduled 14 audio-recorded interviews, but two prospective participants eventually declined. One came to the interview but decided that she did not want her voice recorded and did not complete the interview. Another did not come to the scheduled interview. When I called that person to arrange another time, there was no answer. Fourteen individuals originally agreed to complete the questionnaire. However, one did not return the questionnaire, and when I tried to contact that individual, there was

no response. Additionally, two individuals returned the questionnaire with questions unanswered.

In November and December 2017, I conducted 12 interviews with managers and owners of small direct marketing firms in the Dallas, Texas, area. The interviews were audio-recorded. I later transcribed each interview into a text document for analysis. In November and December 2017, 11 managers and owners of small direct marketing firms in the Dallas, Texas, area responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire items were the same as those in the interviews. For the questionnaires, participants wrote or typed their responses to the questions. I transcribed these responses into separate text documents for analysis.

Both interview participants and questionnaire participants were identified by number codes only. Interview participants were identified by the letters IP followed by a number from 1 to 12. Questionnaire participants were identified by the letters QP followed by a number from 1 to 11. Later, I examined business website text from 13 of the participants' companies to determine how their website content addressed the overarching research question. In summary, I conducted 12 face-to-face interviews and 11 survey questionnaires and 13 analyzed business websites.

Setting

The settings for the face-to-face interviews varied, with locations chosen that were convenient for the participants. Some interviews were held in the participant's office, some were held in my office, some were held in a local coffee shop, and one was held in a private room in a local library. None of the participants seemed hesitant in their

responses to interview questions. One interview participant, Participant IP8, remarked that later questions in the interview seemed to be asking for the same information as earlier questions. After that comment, the participant seemed to give shorter answers to the questions. This may have affected the completeness or accuracy of the participant's responses.

The setting for participants who answered the mailed questionnaire was whatever settings they chose, which were unknown to me. I assume that the participants responded to the questions in a comfortable setting that allowed them to answer the questions thoughtfully. There was no indication that the setting had any effect on the quality or accuracy of the participants' responses on the questionnaire.

Participant Demographics

Of the 12 interview participants in this study, six were males, and six were females, though this even division between genders was not planned. The males' ages ranged from 48 to 60 years, with an average age of 52.0 years. The females' ages ranged from 35 to 52 years, with an average age of 40.7 years. Thus, the ages of the male interview participants averaged 11 years greater than those of the female interview participants. The average age of all interview participants, male and female, was 46.4 years.

Of the 11 questionnaire participants in this study, eight were female, and three were male. Six questionnaire participants did not report their age, with only four females and one male indicating age. The four females had ages ranging from 30 to 52 years, with an average of 39.5 years. The one male who provided his age reported being 45 years old.

Table 1 provides a summary of the genders and ages of the interview participants and the questionnaire participants.

Table 1

Demographic Profiles of Interviewees and Questionnaire Respondents

Participant	Gender	Age
Interview participants		
IP1	Female	37
IP2	Male	48
IP3	Male	60
IP4	Female	48
IP5	Male	49
IP6	Female	35
IP7	Female	37
IP8	Male	49
IP9	Female	35
IP10	Female	52
IP11	Male	48
IP12	Male	58
Questionnaire participants		
QP1	Female	30
QP2	Female	38
QP3	Male	45
QP4	Female	52
QP5	Female	38
QP6	Male	Declined
QP7	Female	Declined
QP8	Female	Declined
QP9	Male	Declined
QP10	Female	Declined
QP11	Female	Declined

Data Analysis

Five-Stage Analysis

I conducted qualitative data analysis of the responses to the interview and questionnaire instruments separately. I used Yin's (2014) five-phase cycle of analyzing case studies for guidance in each case. The five phases are (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding.

The compiling stage consisted of combining the transcribed audio-recorded interviews and the questionnaire responses into two orderly databases consisting of the two separate sets of documents (Yin, 2014). The set of interview responses included 12 documents, one for each interview participant. The set of questionnaire responses included 11 documents, one for each questionnaire participant. The disassembling stage consisted of reviewing each set of documents in each of the two datasets and coding each document to indicate the observations and ideas that the participants mentioned in their responses to questions (Yin, 2014). The reassembling stage consisted of determining commonalities among the developed codes to identify what thematic patterns were present in the participants' responses for each set of documents (Yin, 2014). I used identified themes in each dataset to construct interpretive narratives regarding the participants' responses to questions in the interpretive phase (Yin, 2014), which enabled me to answer the research questions. I concluded the analyses and made recommendations in the concluding phase (Yin, 2014), which I report in Chapter 5.

Categories, Coding, and Theme Identification

Data from the interview participants and the questionnaire participants were analyzed separately. In each case, the participants' responses were first organized into broad topic areas that were determined by the interview and questionnaire questions. These categories encompassed the participants' responses to questions about various aspects of the marketing companies' use of social media. The categories were challenges, addressing challenges, uses and objectives, outcomes, company guidelines, strategy considerations, gains, altruism/welfare, direct reward, expected reputation and influence gain, anticipated reciprocity, and improvements.

Within each category, I separately examined interview participants' and questionnaire participants' responses to determine repeated ideas or observations that were present in the responses. Repeated ideas or observations were given codes, which were collected in thematic nodes (NVivo, 2017). Thematic nodes in each category were then examined to determine whether any should be considered as themes arising from the data. The criterion for a thematic node to be considered a theme was that at least 25% of the responses in a category repeated the same coded idea or observation (Amon, 2017). For the 12 interview participants, an idea or observation had to be repeated by three (25%) different participants to become a theme within a category. For the 11 questionnaire participants, an idea or observation had to be repeated by three (27.3%) different participants to become a theme within a category.

Discrepant cases consisted of responses indicating that social media results were negative or mixed. These are identified and discussed in the Results section for the

overarching research question. Tables 2 and 3 list categories and codes found in interview participants' responses and questionnaire participants' responses, respectively. Tables 4 and 5 list themes found in each category for the interview participants' responses and the questionnaire participants' responses, respectively.

Table 2

Categories and Codes for Face-to-Face Interview Responses

Categories		
Challenges	Addressing challenges	Uses and objectives
Outcomes	Company guidelines	Strategy considerations
Gains	Altruism/welfare	Direct reward
Improvements	Anticipated reciprocity	Promote influence
Reputation/influence gain		
Codes		
Advertising	Inexpensive advertising	Be professional
Business awareness	Business profile	Charity donations
Communication	Community support	Company rewards
Competitors	Customer focus	Customer loyalty/retention
Customer rewards	Diverse audiences	Feedback
Employment opportunities	Inaccurate information	Lack of control of SM
Marketing, promotion	Mixed results	More customers
More followers	More traffic	Sales, revenue, or profit
Negative responses	Little change using SM	Poor results from SM
Post carefully	Product/brand loyalty	Recommendations/referrals
Restrict usage	Security and privacy	Small or no reward program
Supplier relations	Target correctly	Update products

Table 3

Categories and Codes for Questionnaire Responses

Categories		
Challenges	Addressing challenges	Uses and objectives
Outcomes	Company guidelines	Strategy considerations
Gains	Altruism/welfare	Direct reward
Improvements	Anticipated reciprocity	Promote influence
Reputation/influence gain		
Codes		
Advertising	Inexpensive advertising	Be professional
Business awareness	Charity donations	Communication
Community support	Company rewards	Competitors
Customer focus	Customer loyalty/retention	Customer rewards
Diverse audiences	Feedback	Employment opportunities
Marketing, promotion	Mixed results	More customers
Sales, revenue, or profit	Negative responses	Network coverage
Post carefully	Recommendations/referrals	Restrict usage
Security and privacy	Supplier relations	Small or no reward program
Target correctly	Update products	Employee training

Table 4

Themes in Interview Participants' Responses

Categories	Themes (number of interview participants mentioning the theme)
Challenges	Negative responses (6) Lack of control (6)
Addressing challenges	Post carefully (6) Restrict usage (7)
Strategy considerations	None
Uses and objectives	Communication (11); Advertising (8) Inexpensive advertising (5) Increased sales, revenue, or profit (8) Marketing and promotion (7) Increased business awareness (4) Update products (3)
Outcomes	Feedback (6) Increased sales, revenue, or profit (6)
Direct reward	Company rewards (6); Customer rewards (6) No or a small reward program (6)
Gains	Increased Sales, Revenue, or Profit (9)
Altruism/welfare	Community support (7) Charity donations (4)
Expected reputation or influence gain	Increased business awareness (7) Feedback (4); Communication (4) Facilitate supplier relations (4)
Anticipated reciprocity	More traffic (3)
Improvements	None

Table 5

Themes in Questionnaire Participants' Responses

Categories	Themes (number of questionnaire participants mentioning the theme)
Challenges	Negative responses (4) Targeting correctly (5) Security and privacy (4)
Addressing challenges	Post carefully (6)
Strategy considerations	Targeting correctly (5)
Uses and objectives	Communication (6); Advertising (6) Increased sales, revenue, or profit (8) Marketing and promotion (5) Increased business awareness (4) Update products (3)
Outcomes	Feedback (3) Increased sales, revenue, or profit (3)
Direct reward	Company rewards (7); Customer rewards (4) No or a small reward program (4)
Gains	Increased sales, revenue, or profit (7) Increased business awareness (5)
Altruism/welfare	Community support (6) Charity donations (3)
Expected reputation or influence gain	Increased business awareness (4); Feedback (3); Communication (3); Increased sales, revenue, or profit (5); More customers (6); Recommendations and referrals (3)
Anticipated reciprocity	None
Improvements	Customer focus (3)

Analysis of Website Texts

The third data source used for this study was the website texts of a sample of the participants' company websites. I examined 13 such website texts and recorded keywords and ideas presented. Kinds of information provided on the websites also were recorded. These kinds of information included various lists, such as a list of products and services offered, as well social media links, testimonials, and blogs. The number of websites mentioning an idea or having a particular type of information was then determined. If at least four of the websites mentioned the same idea or included the same kind of information, that idea or kind of information was considered to be a theme.

Analysis of website texts revealed several ideas and kinds of information shared by at least four websites. The most common idea mentioned was the theme of *marketing*, which appeared on 12 sites. Eight sites referred to *customer or consumer*, seven referred to *brand or branding*, seven referred to *advertising*, six emphasized *value*, and four each mentioned *communication, selling or sales, strategy, and social media*. Kinds of information that were on at least four of the websites included *lists of products and services, lists of clients, lists of industries served, and team member profiles*. Additionally, four of the websites included *blogs*, and nine included one or more *social media links*. These included links to Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. These themes are used in addressing the study's overarching research question later in this chapter. Table 6 shows a summary of the codes and themes that were revealed in the website texts.

Table 6

Codes and Themes in Websites Analysis

Codes		
<i>Ideas</i>		
Advertising	Customer or consumer	Brand or branding
Clients	Communication	Emphasis on value
Feedback	Goals	Loyalty
New customers	New leads	Online presence
Reputation management	Rewards for customer	ROI or profit
Selling or sales	Social media	Strategy
Target		
<i>Also present on website</i>		
List of clients	List of products/services	List of industries served
Blog	Testimonials	Social media links
Team members' profiles	Pricing information	
<u>Themes (number of sites)</u>		
<i>Ideas</i>		
Customer or consumer (8)	Marketing (12)	Advertising (7)
Brand or branding (7)	Emphasis on value (6)	Communication (4)
Selling or sales (4)	Strategy (4)	Social media (4)
<i>Also present on website</i>		
List of clients (8)	Team member profiles (7)	List of products/services (12)
Blog (4)	List of industries served (4)	Social media links (9)

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility refers to the qualitative counterpart of the internal validity of data that is applied in quantitative studies (Abdalla et al., 2018). To strengthen the credibility of the study, I conducted triangulation during the data collection process (Patton, 1999). One data source consisted of the responses of interview participants to questions in the face-to-face interviews that were conducted with owners and managers of small marketing firms in the Dallas, Texas, area. A second data source consisted of the responses to questionnaire questions submitted to other owners and managers of small marketing firms in the same geographic area. A third data source was the texts of a sample of business websites of participants in the study. These three sources of data enabled the study to address the research questions from three different directions, which added to the study's credibility (Patton, 1999). I also performed member checking to verify the accuracy of the interview participants' transcripts (Abdalla et al., 2018). Participants received copies of interpretations and conclusions to provide their feedback throughout data collection and analysis.

Transferability

Transferability is the qualitative counterpart of external validity of data and instruments and refers to the ability to transfer study findings from the population used in the original study to different populations (Abdalla et al., 2018). In this study, I provided complete and detailed descriptions of the methodology and the outputs of the study. I provided justification for the processes and the findings to enable other researchers to

understand the methodology and effectively assess the applicability of the findings to other groups or populations (Abdalla et al., 2018; Munhall, 2012). Transferability allows comparisons between the current study and other related studies to determine the applicability of the findings to other small business industries or other sectors (Abdalla et al., 2018).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the qualitative counterpart of the reliability of data and data collection (Abdalla et al., 2018). To improve the dependability of the study, I created an audit trail, which is a collection of tangible documentation of the processes implemented in the study. I documented every step and procedure in the methodology chapter to enhance the study's dependability (Abdalla et al., 2018). This tangible documentation included the records of the participants' responses, printed sheets showing the codes and the thematic nodes to which they were assigned for each category, and printed sheets shown in the responses reflecting each code and their number for each theme that I identified. I kept all data in the original form with no alterations. The interview transcripts were verbatim recollections of the interview sessions based on audio recordings made during the interviews.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the qualitative counterpart of objectivity (Abdalla et al., 2018). To improve confirmability, I ensured that the interview protocol had an iterative form of questioning, with repeated and reworded inquiries to make sure the participants provided consistent answers. For example, regarding direct reward, two questions were asked. One

question asked how the participant's company had been able to use social media to gain direct reward, and the other asked the participant how small businesses can use social media effectively regarding direct reward. Iterative questioning may be helpful in encouraging participants to provide detailed data and reveal any detail that may be lacking (Abdalla et al., 2018).

Results for the First Research Subquestion

Results of the study are organized by research question. This section reports the results for the first research subquestion. The next section reports the results for the second research subquestion. The third results section reports the results for the overarching research question.

The study's first research subquestion was the following.

RQ1: What are the problems and challenges small businesses experience in their attempt to develop effective methods for using social media as a management tool?

To answer this first research subquestion, the themes resulting from the analysis of the interview participants' responses are identified first. These themes were used to help answer the research question. The themes resulting from the analysis of the questionnaire participants' responses are then identified and applied to answering the research question.

Analysis of Interview Responses

The first phase of the data collection involved face to face interviews. The interview participants' responses to two questions in the face-to-face interviews helped

provide an answer to the first research subquestion. These two questions asked interview participants to state the challenges they encountered in using social media marketing for their companies. Two themes were identified in the participants' comments.

Six interview participants mentioned the challenge of receiving negative responses from their social media audience. Therefore, *negative responses* was a theme emerging from the interview participants' responses. These six participants complained that they had received a considerable amount of negativity from individuals who accessed the company's social media postings. These negative responses often required efforts to address them.

Regarding the challenges, participant IP12 suggested that he felt that negative comments on social media had hurt his company, commenting, "I have experienced more negative feedback than positive feedback. Social media is full of inaccurate information and rumors and does not do good for our company."

When asked about the company's gains from using social media, participant IP12 further remarked, "More trouble than when we didn't have it."

Participant IP9 mentioned getting "overwhelming" negative feedback on posts that had been made in error. She also commented,

The information turnover is pretty much quick, so information gets passed so quickly that any mishap in communication can have like a snowball effect and have a great reach and impact.

Participant IP7 commented that the information "can make your company go down in a minute."

A second theme found in interview participants' responses to questions about challenges was *lack of control*. This theme refers to the circumstance that social media channels are open to any individuals who can make posts, and what they say cannot be controlled by a business. Six interview participants mentioned the idea.

An example of a remark that reflected this theme was made by participant IP7, who commented,

The first challenge when it comes to social media is that there should be some guidelines and control on social media across the board. It belongs to everyone, so no control.

Participant IP2 stated,

Social media is too wide and confusing, and you wonder where to start from. It is not easy to control the content that goes in and out of social media.

Participant IP4 agreed with this assessment, stating that it was "Not easy to control contents and participants."

The answer to the first research subquestion, based on the analysis of responses of the interview participants, is that one significant challenge for marketing companies making use of social media is dealing with *negative responses*. This finding is in agreement with the claim by Mahajan (2015) that if misused, social media can have a negative impact on a business and may even destroy its reputation. One factor that may increase this problem is the instantaneous transmission nature of social media, with users able to spread ideas quickly. Participant IP9 expressed this aspect in referring to quick sharing of information that can have "a snowball effect and have a great reach or impact."

Analysis of the responses of the interview participants about challenges small businesses face in using social media also revealed that lack of control is a challenge that faces small businesses in their use of social media. The themes of *negative responses* and lack of control may be related by the circumstance that because they are unable to control audience reactions to their social media posts, businesses may receive negative responses from individuals who read the posts.

Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

The second phase of the data collection involved questionnaires. The questionnaire participants' responses to two questions on the questionnaire helped provide an answer to the first research subquestion. The two questions asked questionnaire participants to state the challenges they encountered in using social media marketing for their companies. Three themes emerged from participants' comments.

Analysis of responses by questionnaire participants indicated that *negative responses* from their social media audience was an emergent theme. A total of four questionnaire participants mentioned that receiving *negative responses* from their social media audience was a challenge. For example, participant QP8 mentioned having the challenge of,

Rampant negative responses and a few positive in some and constant sharing of irrelevant ideas and news.

In addition, participant QP11 complained about dealing with negative feedback from customers. Participant QP5 talked of receiving negative as well as positive responses, referring to the negative response of getting blocked by others online.

Responses by questionnaire participants indicated that a second challenge for small business owners using of social media is that there are many social media audiences and it can be a challenge to know which one is best to target. The theme *targeting correctly* captured this challenge. Five questionnaire participants mentioned this idea. For example, when asked about the challenges, participant QP4 referred to the challenge of the breadth of tools and options in the social media category and the knowledge of how to use each successfully given a particular goal.

Participant QP8 remarked,

Different audiences have different preferences and it is not easy to know if you are offering the right product to the right people.

Such responses to questions about the challenges small companies face in using social media suggest that a main problem is selecting which of the various social media sites have an audience that is appropriate for the company's marketing efforts on social media. It is understandable why the different audiences in social media would be a challenge to small business marketers because different social media outlets tend to cater to different kinds of audience. For example, choosing Facebook for marketing purposes may result in reaching a much different audience than choosing LinkedIn. There are also different generations that use social media for different purposes. Bolton et al. (2013) noted the importance of businesses understanding the subsets of usage patterns of just one generation, Generation Y.

Questionnaire participants' responses to questions about challenges they face in their use of social media also indicated that *security and privacy* was a main challenge in

their use of social media. Security, privacy, or both were mentioned by four questionnaire participants. For example, when asked about social media challenges, participant QP10 commented,

Most people are still skeptical sharing on social media. Security of your content on social media is not guaranteed.

Participant QP6 referred to having the challenge of a “lack of privacy policy and guidelines.”

Security and privacy are ongoing concerns in online activities, including usage of social media. In previous research, Antheunis et al. (2013) noted that individuals had privacy and security concerns about social media use in regard to talking about their medical circumstances online. One security and privacy concern individuals may have in using social media sites is the use of their personal information by service providers (Heyman et al., 2014).

The analysis of questionnaire participants’ responses to questions about challenges helps provide an answer to the first research subquestion. The three themes identified in the analysis indicate challenges small businesses face in using social media. These challenges are *negative responses*, *targeting correctly*, and *security and privacy*, overcoming these challenges was a major concern of the participants.

The finding that *negative responses* is a significant challenge for small businesses using social media is in agreement with the claim by Mahajan (2015) that if misused, social media can have a negative impact on a business and may even destroy its reputation. One factor that may increase this problem is the instantaneous transmission

nature of social media, with users who are able to spread ideas quickly across social media platforms. It is notable that the finding that *negative responses* was a theme for questionnaire participants' responses was also true of interview participants' responses. The other two themes found in questionnaire participants' responses about challenges small businesses face in using social media were not found in the interview participants' responses. One of these themes was *targeting correctly*, which refers to the challenge of ensuring that social media efforts are targeted to the correct audience, and the other was Security and Privacy.

Results for the Second Research Subquestion

The second research subquestion for this study was the following:

RQ2: How can small businesses make effective use of social media in terms of (a) a direct reward, (b) an expected gain in reputation and influence on others, (c) altruism, and (d) an anticipated reciprocity?

This research subquestion examined Emerson's (1976) social exchange theory as applied to small marketing firms' use of social media. The social exchange theory considers four reasons why individuals engage in a social exchange: (a) direct reward, (b) an expected gain in reputation and influence on others, (c) altruism, and (d) anticipated reciprocity on the part of others (Ward & Berno, 2011).

To answer this research subquestion, the themes emerging from the analysis of the interview participants' responses are discussed first. Second, the themes resulting from the analysis of the questionnaire participants' responses are identified. In each case, the findings of the analysis are used to answer the second research subquestion.

Analysis of Interview Responses

Interview participants' answers addressed how companies use of use direct reward in social media may increase their effectiveness. Some responses to several other questions, including questions about gains and outcomes, were also relevant to the issue of direct reward. I identified three themes reflected in the interview participants' responses: *company rewards*, *customer rewards*, and *no or small direct reward program*.

The comments of six interview participants reflected the theme of *company rewards* that result from social media use. Interview participants' comments suggested that *customer rewards programs* are a form of marketing. In reply to questions about direct rewards from social media, interview participants mentioned their businesses receiving the rewards of customer loyalty and retention, customer referrals and recommendations, matching their competitors, and gaining customer information. Interview participants' replies to other questions also indicated rewards companies gained from social media. These outcomes included *increased sales; more customers, followers, and website traffic*; and *increased business awareness*, all of which were mentioned as outcomes or gains by participants.

Interview participant IP4 mentioned several direct rewards that resulted from the use of social media. She stated,

Recommending our products, reaching out to our customers, marketing new products.

Interview participant IP3 remarked,

Yes, we did in a way *gain direct reward* by giving loyal customers some incentive. Also, by rewarding returning customers and matching our competition.

Customer rewards was a second theme in interview participants' responses to questions about direct reward. The comments of six interview participants reflected this idea. Interview participants mentioned customers receiving various types of rewards, including incentives based on loyalty, incentives gained from completing challenges, and discount coupons. For instance, Participant IP1 stated,

How we normally do it, you can give challenges to the audience, maybe come up with what you want them to participate in then you reward the person who does best. You make people vote then you reward by giving them a product, a free service of what you do, a discount on a service, or if you have some extra money to give, you can do it in terms of monetary value; like a voucher, or cash, or gift cards.

Some interview participants did not refer to either company or customer rewards when responding to questions about direct rewards. Their comments suggested a third theme about direct reward, which was having *no or a small direct reward program*. Six interview participants made such comments. These participants reported having no program at the time, planning a program, or having "not much" of a program. Participant IP8 stated that direct reward had not been implemented yet for his company. Participant IP2 commented,

We are planning to use direct rewards to give offers to customers. And, also as a way of collecting customers' information.

Regarding reputation and influence gain from use of social media, I asked interview participants how small business could make use of social media for an expected gain in reputation and influence on others and how they had used social media for an expected gain in reputation. I also asked interview participants how they had been able to use social media to promote the influence of their company to others, such as customers, competitors, suppliers, and society in general. Interview participants' responses to these questions reflected four themes.

Increased business awareness was a theme reflected in seven of the interview participants' responses. For example, Participant IP3 remarked,

Many customers now know what we are doing, and we have noticed many customers are checking our websites.

Participant IP11 agreed, remarking that social media helps his website and products become "known to the outside world."

The theme *facilitate supplier relations* was found in four of the interview participants' responses to questions about expected promotion of influence. Participant IP8 commented, "Customers are happy. Suppliers are satisfied. Society knows about us." Participant IP9 remarked that suppliers have "confidence in working together as a result of social media ratings."

Communication was a theme reflected in four of the interview participants' responses when I asked them how they had been able to use social media to promote the influence of their company to others. The participants commented about communicating with customers, suppliers, and competitors. Participant IP3 commented,

Social media has created a two-way communication with our customers. Our customer service has improved. Most of our customers are active users. Social media is perfect for most customers, suppliers, and competitors.

Participant IP6 mentioned that use of social media enabled “*Easy communication with suppliers and customers.*”

A fourth theme found in interview participants’ responses to questions about gaining in reputation and influence was *feedback*, which was mentioned by four of the interview participants. For instance, Participant IP3 said,

We expect other users to give us positive feedback which will help us in promoting our brands based on experience.

The finding that both *communication* and *feedback* were themes in interview participants’ responses to questions about gaining reputation and influence suggests that the communication and feedback businesses receive from social media help them increase their reputations and influence.

Regarding altruism, I considered interview participants’ responses to questions about altruism and how their company used social media for welfare to form the category of *altruism/welfare*. Analysis of interview participants’ responses to these questions revealed two themes. These themes were *community support* and *charity donations*.

Seven interview participants mentioned types of *community support* their companies provided using social media. These types of support included sponsoring community events, offering opportunities for volunteers, making public announcements, mobilizing the community for wellness, doing volunteer work in the community, and

providing links to charitable organizations. Participant IP3 commented that his company had,

Planned social events in the community, became co-sponsors of community events. We also became more actively involved in the community.

Participant IP2 mentioned his company contributing to the welfare of others in the following way:

We use our social media to advertise jobs, and we have been able to offer job opportunities to many in the community

Also, four interview participants mentioned providing donations to charitable organizations, revealing *charity donations* as a theme in interview participants' responses. Participant IP8 responded,

Donations to the community charities. Posting events coming up in the area and sponsoring local events.

These results revealed that a considerable number of the interview participants' small businesses used social media to provide donations to charitable organizations and support the community. Such use of social media may be effective for altruistic actions such as sponsoring and promoting community events because of social media's potentially wide reach. When disasters occur in a community, business use of social media to advertise for volunteers, donations, or other assistance on social media may provide considerable help in strengthening the community's response. Altruistic efforts by businesses using social media also may benefit the business by improving its

reputation in the community. Cases where the business benefits from the community by providing benefits to the community illustrate Emerson's (1976) social exchange theory.

Analysis of interview participants' responses to questions about anticipated reciprocity revealed one theme, which was *more traffic*. Three interview participants mentioned this idea in their responses. Participant IP11 mentioned,

I also get good traffic coming from other sites to my website because of signing up with affiliated programs from those other sites, so the visitors get to hit my site in the process. Increases product traffic and productivity for our company.

Other types of anticipated reciprocity mentioned by interview participants included feedback; customer retention; increased sales, revenue, or profit; and recommendations/referrals. However, none of these ideas was mentioned more than twice in the interview participants' responses, and so they did not emerge as themes.

Analysis of interview participants' responses helps provide an answer to the second research subquestion asking how small businesses can make effective use of social media in terms of (a) a direct reward, (b) an expected gain in reputation and influence on others, (c) altruism, and (d) an anticipated reciprocity. Regarding direct reward, the analysis resulted in three themes: company rewards, customer rewards, and no or small direct reward program. Combining the first two themes suggests that an answer to the second research subquestion regarding direct reward is that businesses can make use of social media effectively for direct rewards by providing rewards and reward programs to their customers and visitors. Providing such direct rewards may lead to rewards for the business as a form of social exchange (Emerson, 1976).

Regarding the second part of the second research subquestion, the analysis of the interview participants' responses suggested that to the firm's reputation and influence can be positively impacted from the effective use of social media through *increased business awareness*. This may include awareness of the business itself, its products or services, and its brand or brands. A business also can use social media for increasing *communication* with customers and potential customers and for gaining *feedback* relevant to their business.

Regarding the third part of the second research subquestion, an analysis of interview participants' responses indicated that regarding altruism, small businesses can make effective use of social media by providing *community support* and *charity donations*. Community support may include efforts such as sponsoring community events, doing volunteer work in the community, and providing public announcements and links to charitable organizations. By engaging in community support activities and donating to charities, the business may build its reputation in the community, as suggested by Emerson's (1976) social exchange theory.

Regarding the fourth part of the second research subquestion, analysis of the interview participants' responses suggested that regarding anticipated reciprocity, small businesses that use social media can anticipate the reciprocity of creating *more traffic*. By producing increased traffic, small businesses may be able to increase the positive effects of their social media efforts. The increased traffic may lead to increased sales and revenue for the business.

Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

The second research subquestion asked how small businesses can make effective use of social media in terms of four issues: direct reward, expected gain in reputation and influence, altruism, and anticipated reciprocity from others. To help answer the first part of this question, I analyzed questionnaire participants' responses to questions about how their companies were able to use direct reward in social media. Two themes emerged from questionnaire participants' responses.

One theme was *company rewards*, which was reflected in the comments of seven questionnaire participants when replying to questions about direct rewards. Questionnaire participants mentioned rewards of customer loyalty and retention, gaining new customers, customer referrals and recommendations, business awareness, and distinguishing the company from the competition. Participants' replies to other questions, especially about outcomes and gains, also indicated rewards companies gained from social media. These gains included *increased sales and revenue*, *customer loyalty*, *more customers*, and *network coverage*, all of which were mentioned as outcomes or gains by questionnaire participants. Participant QP10 mentioned that social media was,

Good for informing customers about your business. Can be used for attracting new customers.

Participant QP1 commented,

Direct rewards have attracted loyal customers, and that can lead to management decreasing the advertisement costs and diminish the impact of price sensitivity.

Additionally, a high level of customer rewards results in recommendations through positive word-of-mouth.

The theme of *customer rewards* also was found in questionnaire participants' responses to questions about direct reward. The comments of four questionnaire participants reflected this idea. Questionnaire participants mentioned customer rewards including discount coupons, personalized service, incentives gained from completing challenges, incentives based on loyalty, helpful content, and providing personalized service to customers. For instance, participant QP3 commented,

Give challenges and reward the audience; that way it entices people's involvement on shared posts.

The comments of four questionnaire participants indicated that they did not have a direct reward program or had a small program. Thus, the theme of *no or small direct reward program* emerged from the questionnaire participants' responses. For example, participant QP8 said,

We have never used direct reward with our customers, and I think it's about time we try.

Participant QP5 revealed that her company did not currently use direct reward and added, "It's a work in progress."

Regarding expected increase in reputation and influence, six themes were found in the questionnaire participants' responses. *Increased business awareness* was a theme directly related to a company's gain in reputation and influence. This is because increases in awareness also may increase the reputation and influence of the business. I found this

theme reflected in the comments of four questionnaire participants. For example, Participant QP3 said that use of social media created a,

Positive impact experienced by more awareness of what we offer as a company led to more sales.

Participant QP5 also remarked that a beneficial result of social media was that her company “created more awareness in what we offer.”

A second identified theme was in the responses of questionnaire participants to questions about increased reputation or influence was *more customers*. An increase in customers may be a sign of a business having an increased influence in the market with a possible increase in market share. Six questionnaire participants mentioned the idea of *more customers*. Participant QP10 remarked, “More customers got attracted to our services.” Participant QP3 commented, “Got more customers and returning customers.”

When they were asked about gain in reputation or influence, five questionnaire participants indicated the idea of *increased sales, revenue, or profit*, which was a third identified theme within questionnaire participants’ responses. For instance, Participant QP8 responded, “Increased recurring sales from the returning customers.” Participant QP2 remarked,

More customers, more sales, more inventory out of the door, and more revenue and instant growth over time and prosperity of business.

Two other themes I found in questionnaire participants’ responses to questions about gains in reputation and influence were *communication* and *feedback*. Three questionnaire participants mentioned *feedback*. Participant QP2 referred to receiving

“instant positive feedback, which helps us improve.” Participant QP7 remarked, “We have improved our services based on the feedback from customers.”

The theme of *communication* was mentioned by three questionnaire participants when they were asked how they had been able to use social media to promote the reputation or influence of their company to others. Participants commented about communicating with customers and competitors. Participant QP9 commented, “customer improved communication channel.” Participant QP8 spoke of “networking with other customers and competitors.”

Finally, a sixth theme that emerged from the questionnaire participants’ responses to questions about the expected gain in reputation and influence was *recommendations and referrals*. Three questionnaire participants mentioned this idea. For example, participant QP8 referred to,

More referrals from customers who love our products and the positive experience.

Questionnaire participants’ responses to questions about altruism and welfare revealed two themes: *community support* and *charity donations*. Six questionnaire participants mentioned types of community support. These included participating in community activities, helping when needed, providing public announcements, promoting small business in the community, and leading by example. For example, in response to being asked how businesses can make use of social media for altruism, participant QP6 stated,

Creating services that may improve others. Be an example to the community by becoming good leaders who lead by example.

Participant QP3 commented, “participating in community activities and help when there is a catastrophic need.”

Three questionnaire participants mentioned *charity donations*, which was a second identified theme in their responses. Participant QP7 commented, “Gave out rewards to the local charity to improve the quality of life for all citizens.” Participant QP2 stated,

Sharing profits with the local church, soup clinics, donating to the local homeless shelter.

The questionnaire participants’ responses suggested that the use of social media by small businesses to support the community and charities is advantageous. Due to the potentially wide reach of social media, such altruistic efforts may have a substantial effect. In the case of a disastrous event such as a flood, the use of social media to provide information and advertise for volunteers and donations may be especially valuable. Such altruistic efforts toward the community also may benefit the business, providing an example of Emerson’s (1976) social exchange theory at work.

In their responses to questions about anticipated reciprocity, questionnaire participants mentioned several ideas, including feedback on how to improve, business and employment inquiries, and forming a bond between the company and customers. However, the questionnaire participants did not mention the same idea as many as three

times. Therefore, no themes were identified in their responses to questions about anticipated reciprocity.

Analysis of questionnaire participants' responses to questions asking how small businesses can make effective use of social media regarding direct reward, expected gain in reputation and influence on others, altruism, and anticipated reciprocity from others provided an answer to the second research subquestion. Regarding the first part of the second research subquestion, the themes of *company rewards* and *customer rewards* were identified. These themes suggest that an answer to the question of how businesses can make effective use of social media in terms of direct reward is to provide *customer rewards* to website visitors and gain *company rewards* such as customer loyalty and retention, new customers, referrals and recommendations, and business awareness.

The second part of the second research subquestion asked how businesses can make effective use of social media in terms of an expected gain in reputation and influence. Analysis of the questionnaire participants' responses indicated six themes. These six themes suggested that businesses can make effective use of social media to gain *increased business awareness; more customers; increased sales, revenue, or profit; recommendations and referrals; communication; and feedback*.

Concerning the third part of the second research subquestion, the analysis of questionnaire participants' responses provided two themes for how businesses can use social media effectively for altruism. These themes indicated that two ways businesses can use social media effectively for altruism are *community support* and *charity donations*. By providing *community support* and *charity donations*, businesses may use

social media altruistically while also increasing the business's status as an asset within the community.

The fourth part of the second research subquestion concerned anticipated reciprocity from others. Analysis of questionnaire participants' responses to questions about anticipated reciprocity revealed no themes. Therefore, the questionnaire participants' responses did not provide any thematic answer to the fourth part of the second research subquestion.

Results for the Overarching Research Question

The overarching research question for the study was, "How can social media be used as an effective management tool for small businesses?" To answer this overarching research question, themes that resulted from the analysis of interview participants' responses were identified. Secondly, themes that resulted from the analysis of the questionnaire participants' responses were identified and were used to help answer the research question. Finally, themes identified in the analysis of business websites were applied to answer the overarching research question.

Analysis of Interview Responses

In answering the overarching research question based on interview participants' responses, it is valuable first to understand the ways the interview participants reported using social media. Responses to questions about their uses and objectives for social media reflected several themes that revealed how the participants made use of social media in their businesses. The most cited use for social media was for *communication*,

which was mentioned by 11 interview participants. Participant IP3 remarked, in response to the question about uses and objectives,

Our company uses social media mostly for communication and advertisement purposes. It is the easiest way of connecting with our suppliers and customers.

The main purpose why our company uses social media is to connect with other people and promote our services. I want to say; it is the most widely used method of communications and advertisements.

Eight interview participants indicated they used social media for *increased sales, revenue, or profit*. For example, Participant IP7 remarked, “more income generation.... to generate more income.” Participant IP8 commented,

“Customers find it easy to connect with us, instant feedback, more sales, and profit.”

Eight interview participants mentioned *advertising* when reporting on their uses and objectives for social media. Comments illustrating this theme were simple and to the point. For example, when asked how social media was used in her company, participant IP7 replied, “*advertise our products.*”

Regarding advertising, five of the interview participants also mentioned that advertising was inexpensive on social media. Therefore, *inexpensive advertising* was the fourth theme under uses and objectives. For example, participant IP6 stated about uses and objectives of using social media, “*run targeted ads with real-time results at a lower cost.*”

A fifth theme, *marketing and promotion*, was present in the responses of seven interview participants to questions about uses and objectives. For example, participant IP10 mentioned using social media to,

Market our products, look for more sales, means of communication with customers and advertisement.

A sixth theme reflected in interview participants' responses was *increased business awareness*. Four interview participants mentioned this idea. For example, participant IP1 mentioned using posts "to create awareness of the existing business." Participant IP4 remarked that use of social media "creates awareness of what is going on."

The seventh theme from the interview participants, based on responses to questions about uses and objectives, was *update products*. Three interview participants shared this idea. For example, participant IP1 commented about social media,

In my company, we use social media to advertise our products and services. We also use it to update any new product coming in, or we expect to receive.

Before further answering the overarching research question, it is important to point out that even though interview participants sometimes spoke of challenges such as negative responses from customers, the responses of most of them indicated that their views of their company's use of social media were positive. For example, nine interview participants mentioned *increased sales, revenue, or profit* when asked about the gains they had received from using social media. Participant IP2 responded when asked about gains,

We have been able to gain more revenue from social media marketing. Our sales have increased in all areas.

In addition, seven interview participants referred to *increased business awareness* when asked about expected reputation or influence gain. Participant IP1 commented,

Regarding positive impacts, I would say that at least we've had, we've created more awareness of what we offer as a company.

Further attesting to interview participants' generally positive view of social media, six interview participants referred to *company rewards* coming from the use of social media when asked about direct reward, as reported in the section on the second research subquestion.

There was one exception to the finding that interview participants were generally positive about social media. When asked about the challenges of using social media, Participant IP12 remarked,

As I said earlier, I have experienced more negative feedback than positive feedback. Social media is full of inaccurate information and rumors and does not do good for our company.

When asked about gains from using social media, IP12 later responded, "more trouble than when we didn't have it."

One interview participant spoke of mixed returns from the use of social media. In response to a question about outcomes, participant IP1 explained,

I would say we have different seasons in the year, so the outcome so far, we

experienced low and high returns based on the advertisements. So, there are periods that we had good returns, high returns, and there are seasons we had low returns where you plan, advertise, make let's say an event, but you end up losing.

Given interview participants' reports of how they used social media and their mostly positive views about social media, the overarching research question of how businesses can use social media as an effective management tool can be addressed. An answer to this question can be based on themes that were mainly found from interview participants' responses to questions about how they address challenges, their guidelines for social media marketing, and what they think should be considered when developing strategies for social media marketing.

In responses to questions about addressing challenges, six interview participants indicated that it was important to *post carefully*, which referred to being careful about what is posted on social media and where it is posted. In answer to the question of guidelines for social media marketing, participant IP7 commented, "*All the information posted must be verified before it goes public.*" Participant IP10 added, "*Post only what is important.*"

It is understandable that six interview participants would report that taking care in posts was a way they addressed challenges, given that several of these participants reported that a challenge in using social media was *negative responses* to their posts, as reported in the section on the first research subquestion. Posting carefully also may help

reduce the challenge of *lack of control*, which was another theme found in interview participants' responses to questions about challenges.

Interview participants specified several ways of taking care in posts, including checking for accuracy and checking that the post is made on the correct channel or forum. From these comments, it appears that taking care in posts can be an important ingredient in effective use of social media.

Another theme reflected in interview participants' responses when asked how they addressed challenges was to *restrict usage*. Seven interview participants mentioned this way of addressing challenges. These participants commented on several types of restrictions. One type of restriction mentioned was to limit those who can use social media in a company by authorizing only one or a few people to make social media posts. Another restriction was to use social media only for business purposes and not for personal communication. When asked how his company addressed challenges, participant IP5 commented, "Restrictions on the usage. Appointed one person as social media correspondent." Participant IP7 remarked,

Directed the usage to one department so we have more control and can answer customers' queries without any delay.

The interview participants' suggestion to *restrict usage* is understandable because companies may receive negative responses to postings by employees who are not qualified to determine appropriate content or who post on the wrong social media channel. Restricting usage to only authorized employees trained in appropriate posting

may minimize negative responses. Additionally, limiting social media usage to certain channels that are well understood may reduce the likelihood of posting inappropriately.

Interview participants' responses suggest that paying close attention to the *feedback* they receive from customers and followers is a strategy that may help small businesses use social media as an effective management tool. The theme of *feedback* was found in six interview participants' replies to questions about their business outcomes from using social media. Interview participants referred to receiving various kinds of feedback, including "good," "positive," and "negative." Participant IP11 commented,

I get really good feedback. It helps me craft a better way of presenting my products and my services.

Participant IP12 said,

For the time I have been with this company, I have seen more negative feedback. And a lot of criticism about our products and services by our customers and competitors.

Participants' comments indicated that positive feedback helped businesses to know that their social media efforts were appreciated. At the same time, negative feedback may provide an opportunity for a business to learn and improve. Attending to and learning from feedback, both positive and negative, may help businesses to use social media effectively.

As reported in the section on research subquestion 2, interview participants' responses to questions about direct reward revealed the two themes of *customer rewards* and *company rewards*. When asked how he was able to use social media to gain direct

reward for his company, participant IP3 suggested that his company benefitted by providing customer rewards:

Yes, we did in a way by giving loyal customers some incentive. Also, by rewarding returning customers and matching our competition.

Using customer rewards in marketing efforts may be an effective way for a business to use social media. Interview participants mentioned providing rewards for their customers and followers in the form of discount coupons, prizes, or other incentives.

The two themes *charity donations* and *community support* that were reflected in interview participants' responses to questions about altruism and welfare suggest that community involvement may be an effective way for a small business to use social media for marketing. By using social media to help them be a good neighbor in the community, businesses demonstrate to actual and potential customers that they are not focused only on gaining sales and revenue. They may build goodwill and increase their reputation by performing altruistic actions sincerely.

To review, the above analysis of interview participants' responses to several questions provides an answer to the overarching research question. The analysis suggests that small businesses can use social media as an effective management tool by attending to several matters. These are to:

- Take care in their online posts, including ensuring the accuracy of their posts and posting in an appropriate online location.
- Restrict social media usage by assigning social media responsibilities to one or a few people or departments.

- Pay close attention to both positive and negative feedback to help guide social media efforts.
- Develop a customer rewards program to help increase customer retention and interest.
- Support the local community in various ways, including donating to charitable organizations.

Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

To find how the questionnaire participants' responses may be used to answer the overarching research question, it is helpful to understand how they reported using social media. Questionnaire participants' responses to questions about uses and objectives and outcomes reflected several themes. These themes indicate some of the main ways the participants used social media.

Six questionnaire participants mentioned using social media for *communication*. This use included communicating with customers and followers. Participant QP1 stated, "Share content faster and easier, communicate with your community and followers, advocate and appeal to your followers."

Regarding the question about outcomes, participant QP1 added,

The communication and interaction improved with key audiences. Important feedback received from clients. Made communication more healthy and fast.

Eight questionnaire respondents indicated they used social media for *increased sales, revenue, or profit*. Participant QP2 remarked, "To increase sales. To attract a wider audience and spread out into new markets."

Six questionnaire participants referred to using social media for *advertising*. For example, when he was asked how his business used social media, participant QP3 commented,

To advertise products and services. Update on new products. Advertise upcoming events.

A fourth theme, *marketing and promotion* was reflected in the responses of five questionnaire participants. For example, participant QP4 stated,

Business accounts used for client promotion, to achieve client business goals....
Brand promotion.... We use social media to promote our company culture.

A fifth theme reflected in responses about uses and objectives was *increased business awareness*. Four questionnaire participants mentioned this idea. Participant QP8 said,

To increase awareness about my company. To increase awareness about my company and make a profit. To be more competitive amongst other companies.

Update products was the sixth theme reflected in questionnaire participants' responses to questions about uses and objectives. Three questionnaire participants shared this idea. Participant QP8 remarked,

We use social media to advertise our products and services. We also use it to update any new product coming in, or we expect to receive.

Generally, questionnaire participants' views of social media were positive, with 10 of the participants indicating such a view. Questionnaire participants' positive views about social media were especially exhibited in themes found in the categories of uses

and objectives, outcomes, gains, direct reward, and reputation/influence gain. For instance, seven questionnaire participants mentioned *increased sales, revenue, or profit* in reference to gains received from using social media. In reply to the question about outcomes, QP6 remarked, “Our company has realized more sales, and more leads were generated.”

Additionally, seven questionnaire participants talked about receiving *company rewards* when they were asked about direct rewards. Six questionnaire participants commented on gaining *more customers* when asked about expected reputation or influence gain.

Participant QP10 remarked, “More customers got attracted to our services.”

One exception to the finding that questionnaire participants were positive about social media may have been a participant who spoke of mixed returns. When asked about outcomes, participant QP3 commented,

It’s unpredictable in that sometimes we experienced high returns and other times low returns.

The overarching research question of how businesses can use social media as an effective management tool can be addressed now based on the analysis of questionnaire participants’ responses to several questions. These include questions asking about how they addressed challenges, their guidelines for social media marketing, and what should be considered when developing strategies for social media marketing.

In response to questions about addressing challenges, six questionnaire participants emphasized that it was important to *post carefully*. Participant QP6 remarked,

Stay focused, open-minded, and transparent, checking the content before posting and staying in your lane.

Participant QP8 remarked, “Only share about business, and what they do as a company.”

The emphasis on being careful in posts is understandable because by taking care in the content and placement of posts, small businesses may avoid negative responses by their readers on social media. Questionnaire participants talked about making customer friendly posts and checking for accuracy before posting. Avoiding areas where posting may be restricted also was mentioned.

Some questionnaire participants’ comments showed they were aware that some different social media channels reach different audiences. Knowing which ones are right for the audience a business wants to target may be an important key to using social media successfully. The theme *targeting correctly* was reflected in five questionnaire participants’ responses to questions about what should be considered when developing social media strategies. For instance, when asked what should be considered when developing social media strategies, Questionnaire Responder 10 commented, “Use only social media channels that target your customers.” When asked the same question, Questionnaire Responder 6 replied, “Identify your target market. Create a content that works for them.”

Such comments reflecting the theme of *targeting correctly* indicated that the questionnaire participants believed that it is important for businesses to have a clear idea of the audience they want to reach, and which social media channels would be best for reaching that audience. The theme of *targeting correctly* addresses the challenge of knowing which audience to target. By determining what should be the target of marketing, advertising, or brand development efforts, the social media marketer is better able to deal effectively with the challenge of knowing which audience to target. The marketer also may be able to deal better with the challenge of *negative responses*.

Five questionnaire participants' responses to questions about outcomes and expected reputation or influence gain revealed the theme of *feedback*. By attending to the feedback they receive from their posts and other social media efforts, small businesses may be able to determine how well they are doing in those efforts and correct some mistakes they may be making. Participant QP10 referred to "Important feedback received from clients." Participant QP2 commented on "instant positive feedback which helps us improve."

Questionnaire participants' responses to questions about direct reward reflected the themes of *company rewards and customer rewards*, as reported in the section on the first research subquestion. A comment by participant QP1 reflected both themes and suggested that providing rewards to customers may result in rewards to the business:

Direct rewards have attracted loyal customers, and that can lead to management decreasing the advertisement costs and diminish the impact of price sensitivity.

Additionally, a high level of customer rewards results in recommendations through positive word-of-mouth.

This finding suggests that providing rewards to customers may be an effective way for small businesses to use social media. Rewards may take the form of various incentives. Questionnaire participants referred to coupons and rewards for online challenges.

The themes of *community support* and *charity donations* were reflected in questionnaire participants' responses to questions asking about altruism and welfare. This finding suggests that supporting the community may be an effective way for small businesses to use social media. Reaching out to the community by performing actions such as sponsoring local events, volunteering, or donating to charities may enable a business to increase its reputation in the community, which may in turn help increase customers and sales. However, participant QP1 claimed that a business should provide donations or rewards for truly altruistic reasons and not because the owner expects reciprocation from others. This questionnaire participant commented,

When small businesses are giving rewards or donations effort, it should be done without expectations of reciprocity. Altruism is a powerful force for effective leadership.

In summary, analysis of questionnaire participants' responses to several questions provided an answer to the overarching research question by suggesting several ways small businesses can use social media as an effective management tool. The thematic analysis indicates that these ways are to:

- Take care in making online posts.

- Target social media efforts to the right audience.
- Pay close attention to feedback to help guide social media efforts.
- Develop a customer rewards program.
- Support the local community and donate to charitable organizations.

Analysis of Website Texts

The third phase of the data collection involves website analyses. The texts of a sample of 13 business websites of study participants were examined to determine how they could help answer the study's overarching research question of how small businesses can use social media as an effective management tool. This third source of data was valuable for answering the overarching research question for two reasons. First, the websites can be considered a form of social media the businesses use to reach out to customers and potential customers. Second, it is likely that the businesses tried to develop their website texts as effective ways to advance their business and management goals. Therefore, analysis of the texts might reveal some of the ideas and tools that the businesses used in their social media efforts. The analysis of the website texts revealed 15 ideas that were mentioned on four or more websites and thus emerged as themes.

The first theme and the most prevalent of these shared ideas was *marketing* which was reflected in 12 of the 13 website texts. *Customer or consumer* was mentioned on eight websites, *advertising* was mentioned on seven, and *brand or branding* also was mentioned on seven sites. These results indicate that a majority of the businesses were using their websites to make clear what kind of business they were in, which was predominantly *marketing*. The majority of businesses also were announcing that they

were in the business of *advertising*, were focused on the *customer or consumer*, and were concerned with clients' *brand or branding*.

The second set of themes found on the analyzed websites included particular kinds of content that may be useful tools for small business websites in their social media efforts. These kinds of content included *lists of industries served, lists of products and services offered by the business, and lists of clients*. Such lists further made clear the nature of the business. In addition, having a *list of clients* helped validate the marketing business because it showed that other businesses had been or were clients. Therefore, including such lists on marketing websites may be an effective way for small businesses to use social media.

The third set of themes found were *emphasis on value, communication, strategy, selling and sales, and social media references*. All these themes indicate ways the businesses used their websites as tools to clarify that their business focus was *marketing and advertising* to help other businesses in their efforts to further their *brands, strategy, and use of social media*. Thus, one way the small businesses can use the social media tool consisting of their website is to clarify what they can do for other businesses, as these websites were doing.

The fourth set of themes found on seven of the websites analyzed was *team member profiles*, and four of the websites had a *blog*. Having such profiles may help to personalize a website, leading visitors to be more attracted to the business. In addition, a well-kept blog may be an asset to a business in its social media efforts because it may

provide useful information to a client or potential client that, in turn, may help legitimize the business and result in more sales.

Finally, nine of the examined websites included *social media links* to their activity on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Having such links may further legitimize a small marketing business in visitors' perceptions. They also provide other ways in which customers, clients, and potential customers and clients can contact the business and keep track of what is happening in the business.

The importance of small businesses creating a website that clarifies its products and services was noted by Kloefkorn (2018), who held that including such information should be a main element of constructing a business website. The value of a small business projecting its personality on its website was noted by Feldman (2015), who held that visitors prefer websites with a human face, which creates interest in the business, fosters trust, and gives website visitors a reason to return. One way to do this is by posting *profiles of the small business's employees*, including photographs and short biographical profiles, thereby giving a human touch the website.

Regarding including an informative blog on a business website, Feldman (2015) claimed that a blog can generate traffic for the site, demonstrate legitimacy and authority, engage customers, and foster valuable exchange of information. When it comes to including social media links on the website, being present on and linking to social media allows businesses to connect with visitors at lower costs, with these visitors promoting the business through virtual word-of-mouth. Overall, the use of social media as a

marketing tool is considered to be the most cost-effective way of marketing for small businesses (Hassana et al., 2015).

The analysis of website texts, therefore, addresses the overarching research question in several ways. The results suggest that one way to use social media effectively as a management tool is to first, *construct a website that clarifies the business's nature and goals*. A second way is to include a *list of products and services* that further clarify the nature of the business. A third way is to include a *list of clients*, which may help give confidence to other potential clients. A fourth and fifth way are to include *team member profiles* and to have a *blog*, both of which build legitimacy. A final way is to have a presence on popular social media sites and include *social media links* to those profiles, which may build legitimacy and provide other ways consumers can learn about and contact the business.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the study. Twelve managers and owners of small marketing businesses in the Dallas, Texas, area who used social media answered a set of questions in face-to-face interviews. Eleven managers and owners of small marketing businesses in the Dallas, Texas, area answered the same questions on an e-mailed questionnaire. In both cases, participants were asked the same questions about their use of social media. After collecting the data, I conducted thematic analyses of the interview participants' and questionnaire participants' responses. In the final analysis based on the participants' responses, I identified emerging themes. Thirteen websites of small marketing companies also were examined to determine any themes. For the

websites' analysis, the results related only to answering the study's overarching research question.

The study had two research subquestions and an overarching research question. The first research subquestion was, "What are the problems and challenges small businesses experience in their attempt to develop effective methods for using social media as a management tool?" Analysis of the interview participants' responses to questions about challenges provided an answer to this research question. The two challenges that emerged as themes for the interview participants were, *negative responses* and *lack of control*. Analysis of questionnaire participants' responses to questions about challenges also provided an answer to this research question. The three challenges that emerged as themes for the questionnaire participants were *negative responses*, *targeting correctly*, and *security and privacy*.

The second research subquestion was, "How can small businesses make effective use of social media regarding (a) a direct reward, (b) an expected gain in reputation and influence on others, (c) altruism, and (d) an anticipated reciprocity?"

The themes identified in interview participants' responses to several questions provided an answer to this research question. These themes were:

- Regarding direct reward: *Provide customer rewards and gain company rewards.*
- Regarding expected gain in reputation and influence: *Increased business awareness, feedback, communication, and facilitate supplier relations.*
- Concerning altruism: *Provide community support and charity donations.*

- On the question of an anticipated reciprocity: *More traffic.*

Themes identified in questionnaire participants' responses also provided an answer to this research question. These themes were:

- Regarding direct reward: *provide customer rewards and gain company rewards.*
- On the expected gain in reputation and influence: *Increased business awareness; feedback; communication; increased sales, revenue, or profit; more customers; and recommendations and referrals.*
- On altruism: *Provide community support and charity donations.*
- Regarding an anticipated reciprocity: There were no themes found.

The analysis of website texts suggested that small businesses can use social media as an effective management tool by constructing a website that:

- Clarifies the business' products, services, and goals.
- Includes lists of the products and services offered, a list of clients, and profiles of team members.
- Includes an a well maintained and informative blog.
- Has links to the business's presence on other social media sites.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the study results. The chapter includes sections addressing interpretation and implications of the results. It also provides several recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of leaders of very small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas, about the resources and knowledge needed for the effective use of social media as a management tool. The study was conducted to address the problem that owners of very small businesses in the United States, specifically those with fewer than 10 employees, are skeptical of and resistant to the use of social media in their business operations. This is because of a lack of clear and effective guidelines and policies detailing how social media should be used in the specific context of small marketing firms (Broekemier et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2015). The specific problem for the study was that many leaders of very small marketing firms in the Dallas, Texas, area do not have the resources and knowledge to make effective use of social media as a management tool (Hassan et al., 2015; Malita, 2011). These firms may need assistance in creating and developing policies for the appropriate use of social media. In this study, I sought to identify key guidelines and strategies regarding social media usage in the workplace and provide assistance in creating and developing policies for the appropriate usage of social media among small marketing firms in the Dallas, Texas, area.

To fulfill the study's purpose, I purposively recruited owners and business managers of small marketing firms in the Dallas, Texas, area to participate in the study. I interviewed 12 managers and owners of small marketing firms and submitted a questionnaire to 11 other managers and owners of small marketing firms. I analyzed interview and questionnaire responses separately using qualitative methods to provide an

understanding of how the managers used social media, the challenges that social media presented to them, and their strategies for using social media effectively for business operations. I also examined the texts of 13 of the participants' business websites to determine if the content on those sites could provide information about how small businesses can use social media effectively.

The study's two research subquestions were the following:

RQ1: What are the problems and challenges small businesses experience in their attempt to develop effective methods for using social media as a management tool?

RQ2: How can small businesses make effective use of social media in terms of (a) a direct reward, (b) an expected gain in reputation and influence on others, (c) altruism, and (d) an anticipated reciprocity?

There were several key findings of the study to answer the research subquestions. In answer to RQ1, thematic analysis of the interview participants' responses revealed the two challenges of negative responses and lack of control. Analysis of questionnaire participants' responses revealed the challenges of negative responses, targeting correctly, and security and privacy.

The findings regarding RQ2 were categorized into four aspects of social media use. Regarding direct reward, interview participants reported that their businesses had gained a variety of rewards from social media use. The findings suggested that businesses can make use of social media effectively by providing rewards and reward programs to their customers and visitors. Interview participants' responses also suggested that small

businesses can use social media to gain in reputation and influence on others through increased business awareness, feedback, and communication, and to facilitate supplier relations. Interview participants' responses suggested that regarding altruism, small businesses can use social media for community support and charity donations, and their responses suggested that small businesses can use social media for anticipated reciprocity by gaining more traffic.

Analysis of questionnaire participants' responses suggested that when it comes to direct reward, small businesses can use social media to provide customer rewards and gain company rewards. Regarding the expected gain in reputation and influence, small businesses can use social media to gain increased business awareness, feedback, communication, more customers, and recommendations. When it comes to altruism, businesses can use social media for increased business awareness, feedback, communication, more customers, recommendations and referrals, community support, and charity donations. Regarding anticipated reciprocity, the analysis of questionnaire participants' responses resulted in no themes found.

The study also had an overarching research question that was formulated to address the primary purpose of the study, which was to explore small business leaders' perceptions regarding the effective use of social media as a management tool. The overarching research question was the following: How can social media be used as an effective management tool for small businesses? The analysis of interview participants' responses suggested that small businesses can use social media as an effective management tool by taking care in the placement and content of posts, restricting social

media usage, paying attention to feedback, providing customer rewards, and supporting the local community and charities. The analysis of questionnaire participants' responses suggested that small businesses can use social media as an effective management tool by targeting the correct audience, being careful in the placement and content of posts, restricting social media usage, paying attention to feedback, providing customer rewards, and supporting the community and donating to charities.

The analysis of website texts suggested that small businesses can use social media as an effective management tool by constructing a website that clarifies the business's products, services, and goals. The analysis also suggested that to be more effective; such websites may include lists of products and services offered, clients served, and team members. Results of the analysis also suggested the website having an informative blog and links to the business's presence on popular social media sites.

This chapter provides a discussion of the results. The chapter is divided into five sections following this introduction. The first section provides an interpretation of the findings. The second section identifies and discusses the limitations of the study. The third section details recommendations for further research. The fourth section contains a discussion of implications of the study's findings for positive social change. The fifth section provides a conclusion for the chapter and the study.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study produced important information by focusing on managers of small businesses to learn their perceptions of the challenges, gains, and strategies associated with their business use of social media. Social media are powerful tools that are

increasingly used by businesses of all sizes, including small businesses with 10 or fewer employees. It is important for these businesses to have practical information about how to use these relatively new platforms effectively for advertising, marketing, increasing brand, and business awareness, communicating with customers and potential customers, and increasing their sales and profits. Organization of the study's findings was in terms of the three research questions. In this section, I organize the interpretations of findings in the same order. In discussing interpretations, I relate the findings for each research question to the literature.

RQ1: Challenges to Effective Business Use of Social Media

The first research question asked what issues the participants found most challenging in making effective business use of social media. Though the majority of the participants expressed positive views about the use of social media, some participants also spoke of the challenges they encountered in using social media for their business. The findings for questions about challenges showed that the interview participants' comments reflected two main challenges: negative responses made by online visitors and lack of control. Regarding negative responses, Participant IP9 said, "any mishap in communication can have like a snowball effect and have a great reach and impact." In talking about lack of control, Participant IP7 remarked about social media: "It belongs to everyone, so no control."

Analysis of the questionnaire participants' responses revealed the challenges of negative responses, targeting correctly, and security and privacy. Participant QP8 referred to "rampant negative responses." Participant QP4 commented on the challenge of

knowing how to use successfully the “breadth of tools and options in the social media category.” Participant QP10 mentioned that a challenge in using social media was that “security of your content on social media is not guaranteed.”

Dealing with negative comments by online visitors was a challenge mentioned by both interview participants and questionnaire participants. This finding corroborates the views of a few researchers concerning the business use of social media. One of those researchers, Mahajan (2015), maintained that social media can have such a negative impact on a business that it may destroy the business’s reputation. In this study, Participant IP7 agreed with Mahajan’s statement, saying that negative feedback from customers on social media “can make your company go down in a minute.”

Icha and Agwu (2016) also maintained that a main challenge for businesses using social media consists of negative remarks by users commenting on business postings. The challenge arises because of the unique nature of social media. Marketing on social media reaches consumers also connected to several other social networks. Personal networks may include hundreds or even thousands of other people, and some social media sites allow users to broadcast their statements to even greater numbers of people. The result is that a consumer may immediately publish a review of a company or its products or services to millions of potential customers (Icha & Agwu, 2016). Because positive reviews may be very valuable, in their social media marketing companies typically attempt to develop online content that attracts the attention of their readers and encourages them to share the content with their social networks. However, a negative review may seriously damage a company’s reputation if a disappointed consumer spreads

negative comments to people on his or her online networks. Depending on the size of those networks, the detrimental effect of just one negative message may quickly get multiplied many times (Icha & Agwu, 2016). Participant IP9 in this study showed that she recognized that consumers on social media can spread a negative message about a business quickly and far, remarking that “any mishap in communication can have like a snowball effect and have a great reach and impact.”

The damage done by negative comments on social media can outweigh greatly the benefits of any positive responses. In research on the use of social media in two types of industries, Corstjens and Umblus (2012) found that negative social media ratings about a television company caused a 4.4 times greater sales decline than a sales increase caused by positive ratings. Negative ratings also had a relatively stronger effect on sales than positive ratings for a broadband services company, for which negative ratings showed a 10% decrease in new and renewing subscriptions, while positive ratings showed no effect. In the present study, Participant IP12’s reported experience provided evidence for such damage from negative ratings from consumers. In particular, IP12 told of experiencing more negative feedback than positive feedback on social media. Referring to the effect of the negative feedback on his business, he remarked that it “does not do good for our company.”

Negative responses may arise from posting to the wrong online areas. Participant IP1 mentioned violating posting restrictions on Facebook groups and getting banned from groups. The same participant then mentioned the importance of knowing the policies of groups before posting. Schumann et al. (2014) pointed out that negative responses from

online users may arise from targeted ads that they object to. Other negative responses may arise from consumers' evaluations of product functionality and quality, the sourcing of products or ingredients, service quality, or concerns about the industry (Cortsjens & Umblus, 2012).

Both interview participants and questionnaire participants mentioned ways of responding to negative comments. Participants IP8 and QP11 talked about apologizing for a post that received unwanted feedback. Participant QP11 remarked that in response to negativity, her company "worked on the feedback and apologizing where necessary." Participant IP8 advised not to get into arguments with customers who may get disgruntled by saying, "Avoid back and forth with customers while dissolving conflict." This remark was in agreement with Icha and Agwu's (2016) advice never to get into a word conflict with online users.

Interview participants mentioned two strategies that could help small businesses reduce the possibility of publishing posts that might result in negative responses. One strategy was to restrict social media efforts to making business postings only. Another strategy was to be careful in making posts to ensure that they are accurate. Questionnaire participants mentioned targeting the correct audience, restricting social media usage, and taking care in making posts. In developing a strategy for dealing with negative responses, Icha and Agwu (2016) suggested that social media managers appoint a damage control team to deal with the negative reception of any marketing effort that generates a public backlash. Such a team is needed because it is important for an organization to handle negative remarks on social media correctly. For small businesses, limiting the number of

people in charge of social media efforts, as was suggested by some of this study's participants, would amount to having such a team.

In summary, it is clear from the comments of both interview participants and questionnaire participants in this study and the literature that a major challenge for businesses that make use of social media is negative comments and evaluations from users. Such comments may have very damaging effects on a business's success. The effective use of social media for small businesses involves effort to minimize the potential to receive negative responses and then having to deal with their effects.

A second challenge in using social media that was identified by interview participants was the business's inability to control what occurs on social media. Participant IP8 remarked that social media were "too wide to control effectively." Participant IP7 commented that social media "belongs to everyone, so no control."

The literature on social media provides some understanding of what it is about the nature of social media that may have led interview participants to report *lack of control* as a challenge. The reason is that in using social media, businesses are entering a much different marketing environment than is customary for traditional marketing efforts. Traditional advertising and marketing use one-way communication methods that target consumers with print, television, and radio advertisements. The social media environment differs because it encompasses two-way communication between businesses and consumers (Corstjens & Umblus, 2012). Consumers have a voice on social media that they lacked when companies used only traditional marketing. This new voice may lead consumers to provide negative product or service evaluations that may do damage to a

business. The fact that businesses are subject to negative feedback from users is one reason that they may regret that they lack control of social media.

Moreover, social media allow for or even encourage consumer-to-consumer interactions as individuals can communicate and share almost instantaneously with one another their positive or negative assessments of companies, products, and services (Icha & Agwu, 2016). This ability amounts to consumers undertaking social media activities that are not paid for or induced by company efforts but are rather generated by consumers and their online communities. The consequence is that for companies to get positive results from their social media efforts, they must earn them from the public rather than pay for them financially (Corstjens & Umblus, 2012). Icha and Agwu (2016) stated that the social media environment makes consumers into a driving force in business, and companies must take that new power of the customer into account in their online marketing. Therefore, if small businesses are to make the most effective use of social media, they must learn how to operate best in an environment in which they have less control than in the traditional marketing environment, in that consumers have a new and powerful voice.

A challenge identified by questionnaire participants in this study was that of a business correctly identifying its target audience. Correct targeting was viewed as a challenge because of the breadth and complexity of the social media environment, with numerous different social media sites available for businesses to consider. These different sites may have different kinds of users, with different interests and needs. Participant QP8 mentioned the different types of audiences on different social media platforms,

remarking, “It is not easy to know if you are offering the right product to the right people.”

The finding that questionnaire participants believed that a challenge of using social media for small business is to target efforts correctly was in agreement with the findings of other researchers who indicated that social media includes a wide range of sites that serve different purposes and tend to attract different groups of users. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) pointed out that there are numerous, possibly hundreds, of social media platforms, with new ones coming online every day. This abundance of options presents a problem for businesses because they cannot be on every one of those social media sites because they have a core business to run. The fact that companies must be active on the sites it chooses also restricts how many social media sites a business can take part in. As a result, choosing the right social media platform or platforms to engage in is very important. This choice should be based on identifying the target group for the firm’s message and understanding what needs to be communicated to that group. Choices should be made after understanding which social media platforms are frequented by the consumers the business wants to reach (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Companies should attempt to ensure that their business brand is represented on popular social media platforms that are aligned with consumers’ needs and with the company’s strategic goals (Killian and McManus, 2015). In this study, participant QP4 agreed with Killian and McManus. After mentioning the challenge of the “breadth of tools/options in the social media category,” Participant, QP4 remarked that in developing

strategies for social media use, businesses should take into account, “*business goals, audience, internal personnel, resources, product/service.*”

Choosing the right social media platforms includes the type of consumers a business wants to target, and also depends on some other variables. Bolton et al. (2013) pointed out that user age is one variable that can determine usage patterns on social media, with the possibility being subsets of usage within a single generation. Other variables related to the usage of particular social media sites may include differences in gender, interests, marital status, education, and profession. The popular social media sites of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest all have different focuses, with different user make-ups, making them differ in the ways a business may use them as marketing tools (Berquist et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2015). For instance, research by Hayes et al. (2016) showed that consumers tend to use Facebook and Twitter for different purposes. Whereas a higher proportion of consumers use Facebook for online relationships, Twitter users are more inclined to be information seekers. As a result, many individuals use Twitter as a utilitarian tool for gathering information, while they use Facebook as a tool for socializing with others (Hughes, 2012). Such differences may be relevant to the purposes of a small business to ensure its efforts are made on the social media sites where they are most effective.

To recapitulate regarding the challenge of *targeting correctly*, the results of the analysis of questionnaire participants’ responses align with the findings of other researchers. Businesses that use social media face the challenge of choosing the right audience among the abundance of social media platforms that serve different purposes

and different audiences. To face that challenge, participants remarked on the importance of businesses being aware of the target they are trying to reach and of choosing the right social media platform for reaching that audience. Participant QP3 advised, “Study your target market beforehand.”

Another major challenge found in the analysis of the responses of questionnaire participants was *security and privacy* concerns in social media. Participant QP11 talked about the challenge of “convincing people that social media is safe.” Participant QP10 commented, “Most people are still skeptical sharing on social media. Security of your content on social media is not guaranteed.”

Users’ distrust of the security presence in a social media site or the privacy of any shared information is important for businesses because distrust among customers or potential customers may lead them to avoid the site or be skeptical of any postings the business may make on the site.

That security and privacy are issues businesses face in using social media is corroborated in the literature. Users of social media are concerned about retaining their privacy and controlling information they share on social media sites (Hajli & Lin, 2014). The fact that users have privacy and security concerns about the use of their information online has been noted by Antheunis et al. (2013) and Heyman et al. (2014). The concern is because social media sites typically collect volumes of information about their users. Sites may collect information about users’ identity and other facts about them such as their interests and political leanings. This information may be shared with other organizations without the active consent of the user. After collecting the information,

these organizations can use and further share the information with yet other organizations. Furthermore, the presence of their personal information on social media sites can make users susceptible to identity theft and various online scams (Hajli & Lin, 2014).

The privacy and security concerns revealed by the participants in this study can be addressed. First, it is important for social media sites to protect users' personal information. Doing so can increase users' trust in the social media platform (Hajli & Lin, 2014). Trust is important because degree of trust is linked to willingness to share information over social networks about a product or company (Botzenhard et al., 2013; Hayes et al., 2016; Hayes & King, 2014). User trust also increases when social media sites provide information to their users about how any personal information they have shared gets protected.

Researchers have found that the predisposition to reveal information is correlated positively with trust (Benson, Saridakis, & Tennakoon, 2015). On social media sites, the trust that occurs between members linked in the network encourages them to disclose their personal information, and if users know how the site uses their information, they are more likely to post information. It is thus a key to trust for social media sites to reveal to their users how their information is collected and shared with their legal partners in data sharing. It is also important for sites to reveal how user information is protected from malicious operators who may use theft, hacking, or other cybercrime acts to steal data that has been gathered by the social media sites (Benson et al., 2015).

In summary, the challenge of social media security and privacy that was voiced by questionnaire participants in this study also was reflected in the literature. To address this challenge may require businesses to make sure they only use social media sites where security is a high priority and that they inform their visitors of the site's reported safety policies. Addressing the challenge also requires social media platforms to ensure that information the users reveal on the site is protected and that the site discloses any uses they may make of the information.

RQ2: Direct Reward, Reputation/Influence, Altruism, and Reciprocity

I formulated the second research question to ask participants their views on the use of social media in relation to four motivations underlying the social exchange theory. The theory maintains that people engage in a social exchange because they view the exchange as being personally rewarding based on their subjective evaluation of the benefits they may gain (Emerson, 1976). The theory further maintains that there are four basic motivations for engaging in social behavior: (a) direct reward, (b) expected gain in reputation and influence on others, (c) altruism, and (d) anticipated reciprocity on the part of others (Ward & Berno, 2011). I asked the interview participants and questionnaire participants how small businesses can make effective use of social media in relation to each of these motivations and analyzed the two groups' answers separately

Concerning the questions about direct reward, thematic analysis of the interview participants' responses regarding direct reward revealed two themes: *customer rewards* and *company rewards*. Interview participants mentioned such company rewards as customer loyalty and retention, customer referrals and recommendations, matching their

competitors, and gaining customer information. Customer rewards mentioned by interview participants included incentives based on loyalty, incentives gained from completing challenges, and discount coupons.

Analysis of the questionnaire participants' responses also showed the themes of *customer rewards* and *company rewards*. Company rewards mentioned by questionnaire participants included customer loyalty and retention, gaining new customers, customer referrals and recommendations, business awareness, and distinguishing the company from the competition. Customer rewards mentioned by the questionnaire participants included discount coupons, personalized service, incentives gained from completing challenges, incentives based on loyalty, helpful content, and providing personalized service to customers.

Concerning expected increase in reputation and influence, thematic analysis of interview participants' responses revealed the themes of *increased business awareness*, *facilitate supplier relations*, *communication*, and *feedback*. Questionnaire participants' responses to questions about anticipated increases in reputation and influence from the use of social media revealed the five themes of *increased business awareness*; *more customers*; *increased sales, revenue, or profit*; *communication*; and *feedback*.

These findings about expected gains in reputation and influence corroborate the findings of numerous other researchers about the rewards businesses may gain by using social media and what businesses can expect regarding gains in reputation and influence. For example, Coleman and Heriot (2013) maintained that with appropriate use, social media can be a very powerful tool to help maximize business gains. Broekemier et al.

(2015) stated that the use of social media for marketing can provide benefits to small businesses in the form of new customers, increasing interest in and awareness of the company, and an improvement in the company's reputation. Use of social media for marketing may result in improved sales, new sales leads, increased customer loyalty, greater public awareness, increased website traffic, and a reduction in marketing expenses. Social media also may allow a company to cultivate connections and form beneficial partnerships with other businesses and may result in the company achieving new insights about their marketplace (Icha & Agwu, 2016).

The findings showed that both interview participants and questionnaire participants in this study reported a variety of rewards they had gained from social media use and expected gains in increased reputation and influence. These findings are significant considering research indicating that many small businesses resist the use of social media (Broekemier et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2015) and that small businesses are at a disadvantage in comparison to large businesses due to having fewer resources (Stelzner, 2015). The results of this study suggest that many small businesses using social media are achieving a variety of rewards from their efforts and expect social media to result in various increases in their reputation and influence, illustrating Emerson's (1976) social exchange theory. In contrast, a few of the study participants reported poor or mixed effects from their social media use. It was not clear what factors might have led to those results, but participant comments suggested that one problem might have been negative reviews or comments from users.

Regarding altruism, the analysis of the interview participants' responses revealed the two themes of *community support* and *charity donations*. Types of community support mentioned by interview participants included sponsoring community events, offering opportunities for volunteers, making public announcements, mobilizing the community for wellness, doing volunteer work in the community, and providing links to charitable organizations. The analysis of questionnaire participants' responses to questions about altruism and welfare also revealed the themes of *community support* and *charity donations*. Questionnaire participants mentioned support including participating in community activities, helping when needed, providing public announcements, promoting small business in the community, and leading by example.

These findings suggest that small businesses can make effective use of social media by providing donations to charitable organizations and supporting the community (Carroll, 1991). Businesses providing various types of community support and charitable donations is a form of corporate social performance (CSP), which includes activities that a firm undertakes that provide social benefits (Carroll, 1991). The literature indicates that increasingly, firms are making CSP an important feature of their online marketing programs. Cha, Yi, and Bagozzi (2016) stressed that companies are increasingly investing significant funds in corporate social responsibility activities. Similarly, large companies such as Starbucks and Delta Airlines are publicizing their socially beneficial efforts. These efforts can be beneficial to companies because when consumers perceive a link between a social cause and a brand, this perception increases the consumer's personal and

social brand identification, which then may strengthen the consumer's brand loyalty (Cha et al., 2016).

While large companies use social media to support social causes (Cha et al., 2016), it is evident from the present study that the same is true for several small business enterprises. This indicates that smaller businesses may strengthen their brand among consumers who approve of those social causes, just as Cha et al. (2016) found to be the case for the brand of a large coffee company that consumers perceived to be socially responsible.

The literature also suggested that community-support efforts made on social media can have a considerable social value. This may be especially evident when the local area has suffered some calamitous event. A survey of over one thousand individuals who used social media during a natural disaster in the South Pacific showed that they used social media to access informational posts about the disaster and that they often re-posted or re-tweeted this information (Taylor, Wells, Howell, & Raphael, 2012). In doing so, they acted as amplifiers of the information. The exchange of information and fostering of a sense of connectedness during the disaster were sources of psychological support and added to the community's resilience. While the social media postings that users accessed primarily were government sponsored, the results of the present study indicate that small businesses also can post useful information to the public in the case of a natural disaster. Participant QP3 commented on offering "help when there is a catastrophic need." This remark may have been in reference to a catastrophic need that

was present in Houston, Texas, which is only 240 miles from Dallas, as a result of the devastation created by Hurricane Harvey in August and September 2017.

To summarize the study's findings in respect to altruism, both interview participants and questionnaire participants in this study mentioned various ways they supported the community, including providing donations. The literature shows increasingly that large companies are involved in socially worthwhile activities and that these activities may result in increased brand loyalty among consumers (Cha et al., 2016). Similarly, small businesses may not only benefit the community but also may strengthen their brand by performing socially responsible activities using social media.

The fourth part of the second research question concerned anticipated reciprocity. Based on social exchange theory, people's anticipation of how an action is reciprocated by others is a main consideration when they are deciding whether to perform the action (Ward & Berno, 2011). In this study, interview participants were asked to report how they anticipated their social media activities would be reciprocated by others. Analysis of their responses revealed the theme of *more traffic*, indicating that several of the interview participants anticipated that by using social media, they would gain increased traffic from website visitors. However, in responding to questions about their expected gains in reputation and influence, four or more interview participants provided answers suggesting that by using social media, they anticipated *increased business awareness, facilitation of supplier relations, feedback, and communication*.

Questionnaire participants also were asked about anticipated reciprocity from using social media, but analysis of their responses did not reveal any themes. However,

their responses to questions about expected gains in reputation and influence can be viewed as also pertaining to anticipated reciprocity, and those gains included several themes that were reported above. These included important types of reciprocity including *increased business awareness* and *more customers*.

The finding that questionnaire participants expected *increased business awareness* and *more customers* from their social media efforts agrees with researchers' reports of social media use. If used effectively, social media marketing provides new customers and increases business awareness (Broekemier et al., 2015). Small businesses can anticipate such results because social media is increasing in popularity, with sites such as Facebook continuing to grow (Seitz, 2015). Social media marketing messages can reach many potential customers initially, and recipients of these messages may spread them to others in recipient networks (Icha & Agwu, 2016). It is thus reasonable for a small business to anticipate an increase in customers and business awareness based on effective use of social media as a marketing tool. These increases would reflect again Emerson's (1976) social exchange theory as online users respond to the information and opportunities businesses provide.

Overarching RQ: Effective Small Business Use of Social Media

Several themes that are relevant to answering the overarching research question emerged from the analyses of the interview participants' and the questionnaire participants' responses, which were the first two phases of the data collection approach. The first of these themes was present in both the interview participants' and the questionnaire participants' responses. This was to *post carefully*. To be careful in what

and where posts are made in social media is a way small business can address the challenges of negative responses from users and *lack of control* of social media.

Posting carefully by making sure the posts are accurate and not offensive and that they are not posted in restricted online areas can be considered an obvious best-practices approach in using social media. Inaccurate or inappropriate posts may lead to negative comments by users, as was suggested by participants' comments. Besides, inaccurate or inappropriate posts may result in the lowering of the company's reputation. Participant IP8 mentioned addressing the challenges of damaging comments and lack of control of social media by "*verifying all statements to be factual before posting them is important.*"

The second theme relevant to answering the overarching research question was found in the analysis of interview participants' responses. This was to *restrict usage* of social media. Interview participants referred to restricting employee use of social media to business only, restricting who in the business was allowed to post, and limiting which social media platforms were used. Participant IP7 viewed restricting usage to certain individuals in the company as a way of having more control, remarking, "directed the usage to one department so we have more control and can answer customers' queries without any delay."

Regarding restricting usage, the literature shows that one main dimension of social media strategy consists of firms' decisions about who should be able to post on social media. The decision is made in different ways, ranging from restricting social media postings to only certain employees to having social media efforts distributed among various departments (Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017). Large companies may

assign a social media director, as the federal government does for its departments (Mergel, 2013). In the present study, which focused on small businesses, restricting the ability to post social media comments to only one or a few employees may substitute for naming a social media director. Limiting who can post may minimize the possibility of mis-posts that result in negative comments. To reduce negative comments, it is also important that clear guidelines are set for posting efforts. The importance of this increases with the number of individuals in a company that are allowed to create posts (Felix et al., 2017).

A third strategy relevant to small businesses using social media effectively was found in the analysis of questionnaire participants' responses to questions about strategy considerations, which was *targeting correctly* to ensure that the business is reaching the audience it wants to reach. Correct targeting may require limiting the number of social media platforms used because different social media platforms may attract different audiences. Questionnaire participants recognized the need to choose the correct social media platform for reaching their intended audience. The importance of a business finding the best social media sites for its message has been recognized in the literature. Due to the great number social media sites available, a company cannot be on all the social media forums. Therefore, the business' leaders must choose which sites allow them to reach the consumers they hope to reach (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The objective should be to find the social media platforms that are aligned with the business' strategic goals and consumer needs (Killian and McManus, 2015).

A fourth strategy for the effective use of social media by small businesses was suggested by the analyses of both interview participants' and questionnaire participants' responses to questions about outcomes. The analyses of both sets of responses revealed the theme of *feedback*. Interview participants referred to receiving both "negative feedback" and "positive feedback." Questionnaire participants referred to "positive" and "important" feedback. The responses suggest that gaining customer feedback, whether positive or negative, may help improve social media operations and is another effective way small businesses may use social media. These findings illustrate the social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) because consumer feedback can be a valuable outcome for the business in exchange for the business providing consumers with information about its products and services and opportunities for engagement.

The literature reflects the importance of feedback for companies using social media. Businesses now have access to more consumer feedback than ever before (Cader & Al Tenaiji, 2013). Bashar et al. (2012) recommended that marketers use consumer feedback to help determine how they should approach the market. Strategies for gaining increased feedback in social media include having chat conversations with multiple users at the same time, collecting survey data from users, and making short posts on Twitter and then measuring the results (Mahajan, 2015). Developing online communities centered on brands can help the business gain feedback. Such communities may encourage greater brand trust and loyalty (Laroche et al., 2012).

A fifth strategy for the effective use of social media is to provide rewards to customers, which was suggested by the analyses of both the interview participants' and

the questionnaire participants' responses. The theme of *customer rewards* emerged from both of these analyses. It was clear from both sets of participants' comments about customer rewards that they believed that such rewards helped engage users on social media and resulted in reciprocation in the form of more interest in and awareness of the business. Participant IP1 remarked on providing customer rewards to encourage customers to participate in marketing endeavors, saying, "... you can give challenges to the audience, maybe come up with what you want them to participate in then you reward the person who does best." Participant QP3 commented, "Give challenges and reward the audience, that way it entices people's involvement on shared posts."

The literature reflects the value of providing incentives to customers and potential customers on social media. Ashley and Tuten (2014) found that businesses that post frequent advertisements with incentives to participate experienced benefits. By giving incentives to encourage user involvement, the small business may increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (Brodie et al., 2013). Resulting interactions with consumers may help lead them to spread information about the business (Bashar et al., 2012). Overall, providing rewards to customers and potential customers may improve their relations with the business. As a result, users may be encouraged to reciprocate by referring the business to others (Hayes et al., 2016).

A sixth strategy for the effective use of social media is to use social media for *community involvement*. Both the interview participants and the questionnaire participants in this study referred to various *community support activities* and *making donations to charitable organizations*. Individuals in the public who are aware of such

altruistic actions by businesses may view the business as being more than a profit-making enterprise. Large companies are increasingly involved in socially directed activities (Cha et al., 2016), and smaller businesses can do likewise. As discussed previously, researchers have found that for larger companies that support a social cause, if consumers perceive a link between the cause and the company, the perception tends to increase the consumer's social identification with the brand. This increased identification may then increase the consumer's brand loyalty (Cha et al., 2016).

Small businesses that use social media have an excellent opportunity to provide various kinds of community support. By publishing information and links about local community needs and activities on social media, the business may help raise awareness of those needs and activities. In the case of calamitous events, the business can augment the efforts of local governments and aid organizations by re-posting accurate information about the situation. By supporting the community in such ways on social media, the business indicates to consumers that it identifies itself with the community, which may strengthen the business's reputation and influence.

To review, the findings from the analyses of interview participants' and questionnaire participants' responses to questions suggest several strategies for small businesses to make effective use of social media. The first strategy is to *take care in making posts*. Businesses should check posts for accuracy and appropriateness, and make sure to post on sites where the posts are welcome. Second, businesses may do well by *restricting the use of social media* by naming only one or a few people to make posts and

limiting how many social media platforms they use. Following these first two strategies may help minimize the challenges of negative responses and lack of control.

The third strategy is to *target correctly*. Small businesses should decide on the audience they want to reach and determine which social media platforms can best reach that audience. Fourth, businesses may be wise to *pay close attention to feedback from their social media users*. Both positive and negative feedback can be useful in letting the business know if its social media efforts are succeeding and what they should be doing on social media. Fifth, small businesses can *increase interest and business awareness* by providing incentives for engagement to customers and potential customers. Finally, small businesses may increase their reputation, influence, and loyalty by *engaging in the local community and providing various kinds of community support*.

The third phase of the data collection involves the analyses of the websites text. This analysis also provides suggestions that may help small businesses with less than 10 employees to use social media effectively as a management tool. A main finding from the analysis of website content was that the business *websites themselves were social media tools that helped clarify the nature of the business and its objectives*. The analysis also revealed that some websites included particular types of content that helped clarify the nature of the business and may have helped provide legitimacy to the business. These types of content were *information about the business' product and services, the kinds of industries they served, clients, and the business's team members*. Another type of content that four of the websites contained was *informative blogs*, which may have increased perceptions of legitimacy. Finally, most of the websites included *links to social media*

websites on which they had a presence. These links provided additional methods to follow and contact the business and may have helped provide legitimacy.

Findings from the analysis of website texts were supported by Kloefkorn (2018), who held that including information about a business's products and services should be a main element of constructing business websites. Feldman (2015) held that businesses should humanize websites to foster trust, which can be done by posting profiles of the business's employees, and that having a blog can demonstrate authority. Hassana et al. (2015) supported having social media links by noting that using social media is a cost-effective way of marketing for small businesses.

Based on the findings of the analysis of the websites, the overarching research question can be answered. The effective use of social media by small businesses may be aided by constructing a business website that includes the following strategies:

- Clarifies the business's products, services, and goals.
- Includes lists of products and services offered, clients, and team members.
- Has an informative blog.
- Has links to the business's presence on other social media sites.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to the study. One limitation was that the study was restricted to learning the perceptions of small business leaders of marketing firms in the Dallas, Texas, area about using social media. The perceptions, views, and attitudes toward social media of the participants may differ from those of small business owners and managers in other parts of the country or in different industries. Therefore, the results

of the study are only suggestive but cannot be generalized to other small businesses. To attend to this limitation, I described details of the methodology in Chapter 3 and the findings in Chapter 4, so other researchers studying small business use of social media can evaluate how well the study's results apply to different populations in other areas of the country.

A second limitation was that the study did not include any quantitative data from the participants concerning the degree of their social media use. For example, I did not collect quantitative data on issues such as how long participants had been using social media, how many social media platforms they used, and how many posts they made on various platforms. Also, the study did not include any financial information that might have been informative about businesses' financial returns from social media use. I did not ask for such data because asking for detailed financial data about their businesses or social usage data might have made it less likely that participants would take part in the study.

A third limitation of the study was the possibility that as the interviewer and analyst, I may have introduced personal biases into the study, thereby influencing the findings. To avoid introducing any such personal biases, I strived to ask questions in the interviews with the same wording as used in the questionnaire and to use the same wording and order of questions in all interviews. I also engaged in bracketing, which involves understanding and acknowledging any personal experiences, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes related to the study's purposes and questions and setting those aside so they do not enter into data collection or analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

A fourth limitation of the study was the fact that the sources of data were interviews and questionnaires, and it is possible that some participants provided inaccurate responses or that some of their responses were affected by giving socially desirable answers. To forestall any such inaccuracies or biases, I reminded participants to answer questions as completely and truthfully as possible as there was no way their identities could be discovered. I also repeated many of the same questions in different words to help ensure that participants were consistent in their answers to the questions.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for further research follow from this study. The first recommendation is to repeat the study in different areas of the country. The message from most of the representatives of small businesses in the Dallas, Texas, area was that despite several challenges, social media has provided them with a number of gains. These include new customers, greater awareness of their business, and increased sales and revenue. Further research could attempt to find whether such results have been gained by small businesses using social media in other areas of the country.

A second recommendation is to conduct research that gathers quantitative information about the costs versus benefits of the usage of social media by small businesses. Such a study could attempt to determine the employee and production costs of social media usage during a certain period in comparison to any gains or losses of customers, sales, revenue, or social media followers during the same time. A period before a business's use of social media in which information regarding changes in customers and other measures are available could be a baseline for the comparison.

A third recommendation is to investigate more closely the kinds of posts that small businesses make that result in negative comments from social media users. Participants in this study identified negative comments as a main challenge. It could be valuable to classify the kinds of posts that result in such comments so that businesses could better understand what kinds of posts are questionable. Such research also might attempt to measure the strength of negative reactions to various kinds of posts regarding how many users react negatively or their degree of negativity. The research also might include information on the kinds of responses small business make to various kinds of negative reactions.

A fourth recommendation is to research the best kinds of social media for businesses to use given the audience they want to reach and their objectives in reaching that audience. Different audiences tend to use different social media platforms (Hayes et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2012), and detailed guidance on which social media sites are best for the audience the business wants to reach could be valuable in helping the business to develop an effective social media strategy (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Implications

This study has implications for positive social change at the organizational level, especially for small businesses. While the use of social media by large businesses is increasing, many very small businesses resist the use of social media (Broekemier et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2015). Similarly, small businesses are at a disadvantage compared to large businesses in their use of social media due to having fewer resources (Stelzner, 2015). Furthermore, in many industries, there are few clear guidelines for implementing

effective social media marketing, and many of the strategies employed are not systematic and purposeful (Hays et al., 2012). As a result, businesses and especially very small businesses are in need of guidelines that may help them use social media effectively in their social media efforts.

In this study, small business managers and owners responded to questions that helped pinpoint some of the major challenges they faced in using social media. Other small business leaders may profit by understanding what those challenges were so they can determine how such challenges might affect their own business. The participants also provided information about how they addressed the challenges, which may help other small business leaders to develop strategies for dealing with the same or similar challenges.

The study also identified several practices that may increase the effectiveness of social media marketing, provide direct rewards, and increase a business's reputation and influence. The strategies of *taking care in posts*, *restricting social media usage*, *targeting correctly*, *paying close attention to feedback*, *providing customer rewards*, and *using social media for community involvement* all reflect findings and recommendations that have been given by other researchers. The strategies arising from this study have social change implications for small businesses by possibly helping them to make effective use of social media as a marketing tool.

Consumers also may benefit from this study. With social media, today's consumers have become a driving force for businesses (Icha & Agwu, 2016). As consumer assessments of companies and brands travel by electronic word of mouth from

consumer to consumer, these assessments may resonate strongly with recipients (Ozyra & Edwin, 2015). As a result, businesses may pay greater attention than ever before to consumer assessments of their products and services. Businesses that create an effective social media presence that pleases and engages customers benefit both themselves and the customers they serve.

A theoretical implication of this study is that the findings reflect the social exchange theory of Emerson (1976). It seems evident from the study that businesses that use social media are performing a social exchange with their online users. In exchange for various marketing efforts, which may include contests, incentives, and product and service information, businesses receive rewards from customers and potential customers in various forms, including increased business awareness, engagement, feedback, and sales. The idea behind developing effective social media marketing efforts is to provide online users with valuable information, experiences, and opportunities so they may reward the business with greater interest, awareness, reputation, and revenue. These relations between businesses and online users appear to be clear illustrations of Emerson's (1976) social exchange theory.

Based on the study's findings, a practical recommendation for small businesses is to attempt to incorporate the study's findings about effective social media strategies into their operations. I believe it is especially important to *target the appropriate audience, take care in posts, and pay close attention to customer feedback*, both positive and negative. The decision whether to assign one or a few people to handle social media duties or to allow all employees to make social media posts depends on the company

culture. In any case, it is important to develop clear guidelines for employees to follow in their social media usage (Felix et al., 2017).

Conclusion

In this study, I found that for the most part, small businesses that use social media in the Dallas, Texas, area have seen various kinds of gains from their usage. Study participants spoke about gaining increased awareness about their business, valuable customer feedback, new customers, and customer retention. Many referred to increases in sales, revenue, or profit and were positive about its value as an effective management tool. These results support the findings of other researchers about the business value of social media including Hassan et al. (2015), Icha and Agwu (2016), Mahajan (2015), and Riu (2015).

Based on participants' responses to questions, I identified challenges they faced in implementing social media. The challenges included, negative responses made by online visitors, lack of control, negative responses, targeting correctly, and security and privacy and was able to determine a set of strategies for the effective use of social media by small businesses. Social media and business engagement in social media are here to stay. There are growing pains as small businesses attempt to learn how best to use social media effectively. Mistakes are sometimes made, but it seems likely that businesses increasingly find ways to adjust to the new environment in which consumers have a stronger voice than ever before. Adjustment means seeking the best possible social exchanges with the customer so both business and customer benefit. Although the study identified the

challenges that small business with fewer than 10 face using social media, overcoming these challenges was not a focus of this study but should be a focus of future study.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

RQ1: What are the problems and challenges small businesses experience in their attempt to develop guidelines and strategies regarding proper social media usage in the workplace?

1. What do you know about social media marketing?
2. How is social media used it in your company?
 - a. How?
 - b. For what use/purpose?
 - c. What was the outcome?
3. What are your guidelines for using social media marketing?
4. What were the challenges encountered when developing strategies for social media marketing for your company?
 - a. How did you address these challenges?
 - b. What do you think should get considered when developing strategies for social media marketing for small businesses?

RQ2: How can small businesses make effective use of social media in terms of (a) direct reward; (b) an expected gain in reputation and influence on others; (c) altruism; and (d) an anticipated reciprocity?

1. What were your objectives/goals of using social media marketing in your company?
 - a. Please explore?

2. How were you able to use social media to gain direct reward for the company?
 - a. Please explain how.
3. How has the usage of social media you realize an expected gain in the reputation of the company?
 - a. Please explain your answer
4. Were you able to use social media in the company to promote the influence of the company to others (e.g., customers, competitors, suppliers, society in general)?
 - a. Please explain your answer
5. How were you able to use social media in the company to promote welfare of others?
 - a. What were some of the improve do you think should get implemented to make it better
6. What are some of the gains were you able to realize from using social media in the company
 - a. What were some of the anticipated reciprocity from others

Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

Dear Mr. Omolloh,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "**A Case Study on Social Media as an Effective Management Tool.**"

Your approval # is 10-02-17-0492516. You will need to reference this number in your dissertation and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on October 1st, 2018. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application document that has been submitted as of this date. This includes maintaining your current status with the university. Your IRB approval is only valid while you are an actively enrolled student at Walden University. If you need to take a leave of absence or are otherwise unable to remain actively enrolled, your IRB approval is suspended. Absolutely NO participant recruitment or data collection may occur while a student is not actively enrolled.

If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will

receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the IRB section of the Walden

website:<http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec>

Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period of time they retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d

Congratulations!

Bryn Saunders

Research Ethics Support Specialist

Office of Research Ethics and Compliance

Email: irb@mail.waldenu.edu

Phone: (612-)312-1336

Fax: (626-)605-0472

Walden University

100 Washington Ave. S, Suite 900

Minneapolis, MN 55401

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this link: <http://academicg>

Appendix B: Approval Form

FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study by conducting a face to face interview.

The study will explore the perceptions of small marketing firm leaders about the needed resources and knowledge for effective use of social media as a management tool.

The title of my study is: How **social media can be used as an effective management tool.**

The inclusion Criterion

- a) Male or female managers in small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas;
- b) Business owners who have operated their small marketing firms for at least three years.
- c) Participants must also have been in the field of small enterprises for at least five years;
- d) Small marketing firms who use social media as part of their firm management or operations for at least two years.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Appolloh Omolloh, who is a doctoral student at Walden University

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of small marketing firm leaders about the needed resources and knowledge for the effective use of social media as a management tool for their operations. The results of this study will identify key guidelines and strategies regarding social media usage in the workplace. It will also

provide guidance and assistance in creating and developing policies for appropriate use of social media among small marketing firms in Dallas, Texas.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you are kindly requested to,

- Read and sign this consent form after reading and understating all the content
- Participate in a face to face interview which is expected to last for about 30 to 90 minutes
- Face to face interviews will be scheduled by phone or email and will be conducted in a private area and time convenient to the participant
- I will record the audio for face to face interview from start to finish
- Each research question will have at least three corresponding main questions
- At the end of the interview, feel free to ask any questions or concern
- I will respond back to you with any questions asked, and that will mark the end of the interview.
- I will also send you the interview transcripts to review for accuracy.
- You will have 7 to 14 days to review the interview transcripts
- In case you notice any inaccuracy on the transcript, please contact me immediately.

Here are some sample questions:

Q. What are the problems and challenges small businesses experience in their attempt to develop guidelines and strategies regarding proper social media usage in the workplace?

1. What do you know about social media marketing?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary and will take about 30 to 60 minutes. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time or withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

This type will not pose a risk to your safety or well-being. The participants will not gain any monetary benefit from the study; however, after the study is completed, I will send a two-paragraph summary of the result to all the participants. I will also have a link to your study from the ProQuest database to the participants who want to read the entire study. From a positive social change perspective, this study could contribute to improving and addressing the problems and challenges small businesses are experiencing associated with the use of social media.

Payment:

There is **No payment** or compensation to the participants.

Privacy:

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. To protect participant privacy and assure that study participation is truly voluntary the researcher will not use your information for any purpose outside of this research project. I will securely keep all the data including electronic files, interview

transcripts, recorded interviews, questionnaires, and documents review notes inside a waterproof and fireproof safe in my private office for five years after the conclusion of the study. Moreover, I will secure all electronic files using passwords and encryption. I will save all data in a flash disk inside the storage cabinet as well. Data will be kept for at least five years, as required by Walden University.

The accuracy of the Interview/ Member-check:

To confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts, you will receive copies of your transcripts and initial interview interpretations for you to review and evaluate the accuracy of the information. I will send these files through email, and you will have 14 days to respond. No response from you indicates that there are no changes needed. If you notice any inaccuracy in the transcript, please contact me immediately. I will review the audio recording and discuss any potential changes with you immediately.

Contacts and Questions:

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have by contacting me via email, appolloh.omolloh@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter an expiration date.**

Once you have signed this form, please email it back to me. I will sign the original and mail you a copy of so that you can keep it for your records.

Obtaining your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to decide it, please indicate your consent by signing below.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature



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