

**Factors influencing customer participation and engagement in
Social media groups and networks- an empirical investigation of the
retailing companies of Ireland**

Ansas Thiruvattu Thodi

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of MSc Marketing

Submitted to National College of Ireland August 2020

Abstract

This dissertation aimed to find answers to three critical research questions, notably including, what factors or motivators prompt consumers to participate and interact within social media groups and communities; how such consumers can be influenced by retail brands on social media; and is it beneficial for brands to increase levels of engagement with consumers on social media in terms of advancing brand commitment and brand trust. These identified research subjects and questions were addressed mainly through empirically investigating relevant customer experience of consumers of Irish retail brands. Additionally, this research also aimed to find out ways and means that Irish retail brands can use to enhance their engagement with consumers on social media.

To achieve the above research purpose, the study started off with a positivist research philosophy and a deductive approach because of the exploratory nature of the study. The primary research method adopted within this study is a quantitative research method. This is because of the large size of the target population of this study – the users of social media platform in Ireland. Using a purposive sampling method, this study eventually got 103 survey respondents. The research used statistical software SPSS for data analysis.

Revealed from the empirical data collected, the study found that the primary perceived benefits that consumers looked for by participating in social media groups and communities were functional benefits and monetary benefits. Such functional benefits reported from the data collected include greater and easier access to information, brands solving their problems by being supportive and proactive on social media; whereas the reported monetary benefits include providing exclusive offers on social media. Consumers were also reported to have the need and ‘want’ to enjoy a status of being in touch with brands on social media and enjoy recommending appropriate brands to their peers.

The results of this study also found that companies can generate brand commitment and brand trust by being proactive, supportive and responsive to consumers on social media. The study concluded that it was possible to create better consumers engagement on social media by crafting vivid, interesting and interactive content. All these reported empirical findings are believed to contribute to existing knowledge of the focused research subjects.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Ansas Thiruvattu Thodi

Student Number: 18170765

Degree for which thesis is submitted: MSc in International Business

Title of Thesis: Factors influencing customer participation and engagement in Social media groups and networks- an empirical investigation of the retailing companies of Ireland

Date: 18/08/2020

Material submitted for award

- A. I declare that this work submitted has been composed by myself.
- B. I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.
- C. I agree to my thesis being deposited in the NCI Library online open access repository NORMA.
- D. *Either* *I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
Or *I declare that the following material contained in the thesis formed part of a submission for the award of

(State the award and the awarding body and list the material below)

Signature of research student: _____



Date: _____18/08/20__

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I want to convey my sincere thanks to my dissertation supervisor Dr. Yanyi Wang for her continued support and guidance throughout the period of the dissertation. Furthermore, she did spend some valuable time for this dissertation by providing me detailed comments and suggestions which really helped me well for my works and especially she pointed each and every slightest correction which turned out to improve my perception and knowledge in the research topic. Secondly, I would like to convey my sincere thanks to my survey participants who spared their precious time to take part in my thesis.

Lastly, I am also obliged to my institution for allowing me the opportunity of conducting this research as per the mentioned guidelines and thankful to my friends and family who helped me in completing this research by supporting me throughout.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 : Introduction.....	1
1.1: Research Background	1
1.2: Consumer Engagement through Social Media Platforms	3
1.3: Research Rationale	4
1.4: Specific Purpose of the Study.....	5
1.5: Proposed Research Questions.....	5
1.6: Need for the Study	6
1.7: Dissertation Structure.....	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review	8
2.1: Introduction	8
2.2: What is Social Media?	8
2.3: Online Communities and Groups	9
2.3.1 Definition of Online Communities and Groups	9
2.3.2: Online Community Participation Benefits	12
2.3.3: Outcomes of Online Community Participation.....	14
2.4: Theories of Reasons for Social Media Participation.....	16
2.4.1: Economic Theory.....	16
2.4.2: Social Theories	18
2.5: Factors Affecting Customer Engagement	19
2.5.1: Vividness as a factor influencing customer engagement.....	20
2.5.2: Interactivity as a factor influencing customer engagement	21
2.5.3: Description of a product impacting customer engagement	21
2.5.4: Entertainment factor impacting customer engagement	21
2.5.5: Content novelty as a factor influencing customer engagement	22
2.6: Some Evidence of Social Media's Impact on Businesses	22
2.7: Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses.....	24
2.8: Conclusion.....	27
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	28
3.1: Meaning of Research Methodology.....	28

32: Research Philosophy.....	29
3.3: Research Approach.....	29
3.4: Research method.....	30
3.5: Sampling Strategy.....	31
3.6: Data Collection and Survey Design.....	32
3.7: Data analysis	33
3.8: Time Horizon	34
3.9: Research Ethics	34
Chapter 4: Data Analysis, Findings and Discussions	36
4.1: Data Analysis	36
4.2: Hypothesis Testing	56
4.3: Findings and Discussions.....	62
Chapter 5: Research Summary and Conclusion	70
5.1: Conclusion.....	70
5.2: Contribution and Implications.....	73
5.3 Recommendations for Future Research	75
5.4: Limitations of the Research.....	75
References.....	76
Appendices Internet Mediated SurveyQuestionnaire (Google forms).....	87

List of figures

Figure 1: Social media use around the world(Source: smartinsights.com, 2020)	23
Figure 2: Instagram audience overview (Source: wearesocial.com, 2020).....	23
Figure 3 : Twitter audience overview (Source: wearesocial.com, 2020).....	24
Figure 4: Snapchat audience overview (Source: wearesocial.com, 2020).....	24
Figure 5: Motivators for participation of individuals on social media networks	25
Figure 6: Factors contributing to enhanced user engagement on social media networks	26

List of Tables

Table 1: List of definitions for ‘Online Community’	10
Table 2: Frequency Table of Gender Distribution of respondents (Source: SPSS).....	36
Table 3: Frequency Table of Age Distribution of respondents (Source: SPSS).....	36
Table 4: Frequency Table of Regular shopping habit among respondents (Source: SPSS)	37
Table 5: Frequency Table of percentage of respondents who are regular users of social media (Source: SPSS).....	37
Table 6: Frequency Table of Percentage of respondents who regularly view product reviews on social media (Source: SPSS)	38
Table 7: Frequency Table of Percentage of respondents who consider and give importance to product reviews on social media (Source: SPSS).....	38
Table 8 : Frequency Table of Percentage of respondents who believe what they read about product reviews on social media (Source: SPSS).....	39
Table 9 : Frequency Table of Ratio of respondents who review grocery products on social media and then purchase them (Source: SPSS)	40
Table 10 : Frequency Table of Ratio of respondents who would definitively be inclined to buy a product with positive review on social media by friends and peers (Source: SPSS)	40
Table 11 : Frequency Table of percentage and number of respondents who would definitively reject a product with negative review on social media by friends and peers (Source: SPSS)	41
Table 12 : Frequency Table of Percentage and number of respondents regularly watching ads on social media (Source: SPSS)	43
Table 13: Frequency Table of Percentage and number of respondents more comfortable watching ads on social media compared to TV, etc. (Source: SPSS).....	44
Table 14: Frequency Table of Ratio of respondents often reacting to retail firm messages on social media (Source: SPSS)	45
Table 15: Frequency Table of respondents willing to share interesting messages on social media from firms/retailers (Source: SPSS).....	46
Table 16: Frequency Table of Respondents willing to be approached by retailers on social media (Source: SPSS).....	48

Table 17: Frequency Table of respondents regularly reacting to/posting comments about retailers on the companies' social media pages and handles (Source: SPSS)	49
Table 18: Frequency Table of respondents expecting reactions from retailers to posts by respondents on retailers' social media pages and handles by retailers (Source: SPSS)	50
Table 19: Frequency Table of respondents who are appreciative of retailers that react to and solve issues about products and services by reacting to posts on social media by respondents (Source: SPSS).....	51
Table 20: Frequency Table of respondents readily willing to recommend responsive retailers, as in the previous question, to friends and family (Source: SPSS).....	51
Table 21: Frequency Table of willingness to support retailers supportive and responsible on social media; spread positivity about such brand (Source: SPSS)	52
Table 22: Frequency Table of expectations from retail firms making exclusive offers to respondents on social media who are regulars on firm's social media page and handle (Source: SPSS).....	52
Table 23: Frequency Table of respondents willing to make direct purchase from social media from trusted brand and retailers if such services offered (Source: SPSS)	53
Table 24: Frequency Table of respondents believing social media good platform to gather info about retail firms' products (Source: SPSS).....	55
Table 25: Frequency Table of respondents willing to buy from retailers that are responsive and responsible on social media good platforms (Source: SPSS).....	56

List of Graphs

Graph 1 : Ratio of respondents who would definitively be inclined to purchase product with positive reviews by friends and peers on social media (Source: SPSS)	41
Graph 2: Ratio of respondents who would definitively be inclined to purchase product with positive reviews by friends and peers on social media (Source: SPSS)	42
Graph 3 : Ratio of respondents regularly watching ads on social media (Source: SPSS)	43
Graph 4: Ratio of respondents more comfortable watching ads on social media compared to TV, etc. (Source: SPSS).....	44
Graph 5: Ratio of respondents reacting to messages from retail on social media (Source: SPSS)	46
Graph 6: Ratio of respondents willing to share interesting messages on social media from firms/retailers (Source: SPSS).....	47
Graph 7: Ratio of respondents willing to be approached by retailers on social media (Source: SPSS)	48
Graph 8: Ratio of respondents regularly reacting to/posting comments about retailers on the companies' social media pages and handles (Source: SPSS)	49
Graph 9: Ratio of respondents readily willing to recommend responsive retailers, as in the previous question, to friends and family (Source: SPSS)	52
Graph 10 : Expectations from retail firms making exclusive offers to respondents on social media who are regulars on firm's social media page and handle (Source: SPSS).....	53
Graph 11: Ratio of respondents willing to make direct purchase from social media from trusted brand and retailers if such services offered (Source: SPSS)	54
Graph 12: Frequency Table of respondents believing social media good platform to gather info about retail firms' products	55
Graph 13: Ratio of respondents willing to buy from retailers that are responsive and responsible on social media good platforms (Source: SPSS)	56

Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1: Research Background

The emergence and proliferation of social media and social media networks have not only impacted the manner in which individual people communicate over the internet but also presented an opportunity for businesses to instantly reach out to a large customer base (Lytvynenko and Donetska, 2019). Additionally, users of social media are also known to form virtual online groups or networks or communities where the users or members of such communities create and exchange views and opinions on various issues (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

According to researcher Dhiraj Murty, social media can be defined as follows: *"Social media has been broadly defined to refer to 'the many relatively inexpensive and widely accessible electronic tools that enable anyone to publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort, or build relationships'"* (Strippel, 2014, p-13).

One of the major characteristics of social media, for the research purpose of this study, is the generation of contents for such platforms and groups by the users themselves. Additionally, communicating over social media also provides an opportunity for two-way communication which typically happens in real-time. This allows social media users to comment and express their opinions, views, and ideas to any content on social media. Users are also allowed to modify content on some social media platforms (Kietzmann *et al*, 2011).

According to Gawas *et al.* (2018), the process of companies building and maintaining relationships with consumers has also changed with the emergence and proliferation of social media. The process is not only new but a continuous one and the interactions with customers are no more associated only with theoretical partnerships. The growing importance of social media can also be gauged from its increasing influence as a medium present in the society which allows its users to express views and opinions about social issues - including on their perception about companies and brands (Khalaf Ahmad, 2016). Researchers and practitioners have also tentatively accepted the fact that participation of people on social media can also influence the purchasing behavior and process of such participants, before and during making a purchase. Such influence

is often created by comments and reviews about brands and products by other participants of social media platforms and which can consider being valid and trustable by a consumer (Silvia, 2019). Even comments and suggestions about a product or a brand by unknown participants on social media can leave an impact on the worth of purchase in terms of desired usability (Ashley and Tuten, 2014).

Further, the speed and the scale of impact of social media on people – including consumers, have been enhanced by easy access to social media on smartphones. This technological development has helped users and participants of social media to be able to access them from anywhere and at any time – provided there is a stable internet connection (Tafesse and Wien, 2018). These development have therefore enhanced the reach and scope for companies to connect to and engage with customers and undertake marketing and branding exercises while also allowing the consumers a realistic opportunity to conduct a close examination of a product or a brand prior to deciding on a purchase based on the comments, reviews, and opinions expressed about such products and brands by the other participants of social media (Heinonen, 2011).

Prior to the extensive popularity and use of the internet and social media, word of mouth was the primary source of spreading the reputation of a product or a brand as well as the traditional methods of branding and marketing utilized by companies (Heinonen, 2011). While on one hand, companies could benefit from a positive word of mouth in the form of increased sales, a negative word of mouth had a reverse impact. Some brands and companies currently adopting the same strategy now on social media, trying to influence consumer's perception of their products or brands. The concept of using positive word of mouth to create a favorable attitude of consumers towards a brand is also being followed on social media. One of the major differences or advantages of using social media is the opportunity to instantly reach a very large number of existing and potential customers on social media which is not available in traditional methods (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012).

In that context, therefore, social media platforms present a great opportunity for companies and businesses to directly engage with people – many could be existing or prospective customers, for purposes such as brand awareness and image reinforcement and enhancement, marketing activities, promotional campaigns, or simply addressing consumers issues.

1.2: Consumer Engagement through Social Media Platforms

In the case of communications that are oriented toward the establishment and maintaining relations through social media networks, the commitment of participants in such networks and groups can result in the cultivation of relations as a natural consequence. Companies can showcase their commitment to consumers and vice versa by using the social media platforms. This can be achieved by engaging with customers on such platforms and through actions such as commenting on reactions of social media participants about a company, a brand or its products. Companies can also engage with customers by promoting and patronizing comments of social media network participants that express support and react positively to criticism over posts made by companies. Consumers may also share information about a brand or a product on social media. All of these can also make the participants, who are also stakeholders of companies, make direct commitments with the firm as well as with other consumers (Tafesse and Wien, 2017).

Engaging with customers in the area of relationship, marketing and customer relationship management not only includes relations already established with existing buyers or customers but also with the potential clients as well as non-clients or clients of rival brands (Ebrahim, 2019). Participation of companies on social media networks and platforms are directly engaging with customers over time to help in the development of trust, goodwill and commitment based on the relationship between the individuals and brands, irrespective of whether the participants immediately decide to purchase products or not for the brand (Vivek *et al.* 2012). This means that companies can develop consumer engagement on social media networks through constant interactions with consumers on such platforms. It can also help to generate greater participation of consumers active on social media platforms, with posts of products, services and activities of companies or brands on such platforms. However, such engagement may not be possible if a brand is unable to generate such participation among consumers active on social media networks and platforms (Di Gangi and Wasko, 2016). Stemming from e-word of mouth, relationships thus developed with existing as well as potential customers over social media can have a direct impact on the fortunes of the company or brand (Shoemaker and Lewis, 1999; Kasavana *et al.* 2010). According to Sigala (2018), one of the ways that companies and brands can retain customers in the long term, apart from ensuring direct and repeated sales is by the use of social media communication channels to interact with customers.

Past studies have indicated commitment and participation with brands are sought by companies and brands (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Shawney *et al.* 2005). In the era of modern communication technologies, it is no longer possible to view customers as being passive and only receivers of marketing and branding actions in relation to customer engagement. Rather, customer relationship is much more dynamic than before as there is scope for proactive participation in interactive processes of co-creation that generates value (Shawhney *et al.* 2005). Further, past research has also established that increased levels of customer commitment could generate increased organizational performance, which includes increased sales, superior competitive advantage and profitability (Kumar *et al.* 2010; Hollebeek, 2011), along with higher emotional connections and attachment with a brand (Chan and Li, 2010) and empowerment and consumer value (Schau *et al.* 2009).

Engaging with customers through social media network platforms and groups is possible to intensify the existing brand to consumers and consumer to the firm relationship. Hence it can be said that the ease of contact, volume, speed, and nature of interactions and engagement between companies/brands and customers (existing and potential) has undergone some fundamental changes (Chua and Banerjee, 2013).

1.3: Research Rationale

As addressed above in the previous sections, the opportunities for businesses and brands that can be harnessed through participation on social media platforms have been greatly identified and extensively addressed in the existing literature. However, a few gaps are observed in existing literature that requires further investigation, such as the present study. For instance, while all past literature and researchers who examined the role and importance of social media for businesses and brands seem to have agreed about the growing importance of social media for companies and brands, there was an apparent shortage of any direct theoretical explanation of why this is so. Therefore, it is necessary to dwell on the theoretical aspects to explain the importance of social media usage for brands and companies. Furthermore, while the above phenomena can be explained by some existing theories and models, this study has a research focus on the identification of the factors that induce social media users to participate more in social media networks and groups that are related to or are created by brands and companies. The study is also

focused on exploring the factors that influence companies and brands to better use of social media platforms for attracting consumers. Meanwhile, this research also attempted to help companies actually to understand what factors would drive more consumers to get attracted to and engage with social media content posted by retailers and brands. These were not fully or extensively examined or addressed in the past literature, which primarily drove the conduct of this study. This researcher noted that past studies used theories such as the social and economic theories to explain why people choose to participate in social media networks and groups. However, an apparent dearth of studies was also noticed that used such theories to explain why or why not consumers get attracted and engaged with social media posts by retailers and brands on social media groups created retailers and brands. Further, while consumer engagement was found to be a subject that has been extensively studied in past literature, there was also an apparent shortage of studies that linked consumer engagement to online social media groups and networks created by companies or brands. Hence this study also chose to closely include the factors that can help increase engagement of consumers on social media with retailers and brands. That in turn can see as one of the elements of a successful social media campaign for brands and companies.

1.4: Specific Purpose of the Study

Based on above identification of research gaps and the literature review conducted, this study specifically proposes to examine how, if at all, retailing companies – specifically the supermarket chains and retailers of Ireland, can make use of social media platforms to enhance brand image and brand perception among people – or social media users in this case. The study proposes to achieve this by trying to unravel why people participate in social media platforms— and particularly in social media groups or communities that are virtual. This study also proposes to examine how, if at all, can members of such virtual communities on social media be influenced by companies and decide on their perceptions towards a brand in a positive manner.

1.5: Proposed Research Questions

This proposed study aims to find an answer to the overarching research question as follows:

‘How, if at all, can retailers of Ireland make use of social media platforms with respect to their brand image and perception among consumers by engaging with customers on social media?’

The supporting research questions proposed are:

RQ1: Why do users participate in social media and social media groups and communities?

RQ2: How can businesses influence participants of social media or social media groups and communities?

RQ3: Can engaging consumers on social media help retail brands and businesses to enhance brand commitment and brand trust?

1.6: Need for the Study

One of the most important reasons for undertaking this proposed study is to contribute empirical data and insights on why retailers of Ireland should engage with its existing and potential customers on social media platforms and specifically exploit the online communities and groups related to the industry. The results of this study in this regard are believed to provide useful practical implications for the retailers in Ireland, for instance, to increase their focus on and investment in social media participation and engagement. It is also hoped that the outcomes of the study can also help Irish companies in creating specific strategies for engaging with customers and attempting to increase brand commitment and trust among consumers through social media postings and content.

It is hoped that the factors identified in this study will turn out to be important for Irish retailing brands in both increasing participation of consumers on social media groups and networks created by brands as well as in increasing the levels of engagement of consumers with such brands and companies over social media. That in turn will help in creating better social media strategies for brands in the retail sector of Ireland.

1.7: Dissertation Structure

The rest of the study is divided into four main sections. The second chapter comprises a critical review of past studies and existing literature on internal communication and strategic employee communications in order to come up with a theoretical model for the gathering of primary data. The following section details the methods and tactics used in this study. That is followed by a chapter where the results of primary data are presented and analyzed and then discussed. The last

chapter of this study summarises in a conclusion form, the outcomes and findings of the research and makes recommendations for the management of companies to use in terms of designing internal communication strategies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: Introduction

This part of the study examines past studies on social media participation, motivation for consumers for such participation, and the ways in which retailers and brands can increase consumer engagement on social media platforms. In that context, this literature review attempted to gain an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of social media platforms and groups and of the existing theories used to explain the participation of people in social media groups and networks. These were then used to create two theoretical frameworks. The first one explored the factors that encourage or discourage social media network participation of consumers – potentially also resulting in an increase in brand trust and commitment. The second was to identify the factors that drive up levels of consumer engagement to social media activities by brands.

2.2: What is Social Media?

Social media is referred to the virtual communities that are based on the internet networks and groups, created by and among various users of platforms that are used to share content, view and ideas. Computer-mediated devices are used to creating, sharing, and exchanging information, views, ideas, and pictures or videos. Further members of social media are also able to create and share content, discuss and talk about common interest topics, communicate with each other, and even edit and change the content at times (Srauy, 2015).

According to Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom, (2015), till about 2007, there was little attempt made at categorizing and properly defining for social media. Among the first to try and create a taxonomy for social media was a former Microsoft employee and blogger - Robert Scoble (Burke, Martin and Cooper, 2011). The primary criteria for the categorization of social media were based on the tools made use of for communicating as well as the services provided along with the popularity of the services offered.

Some classes of social media include Blogs and collaborative tools, events and forums, microblogs (Theinquirer.net, 2018) and photo and video sharing, podcasting and reviews. and ratings.

However, for the purpose of this study, the social media platform where users allowed to create and disseminate content and share and exchange views and ideas is only considered. More specifically, the social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are proposed to be considered for this study. While there are numerous social media networks and platforms all across the world, the above three platforms are the most popular in Ireland. Furthermore, these platforms are the ones that allow its members or participants to extensively express themselves as well as provide opportunities to brands for making use of to connect with customers (statista.com, 2020).

In recent years, companies resort to marketing over social media platforms which have not only gained relevance but also importance in academic and business research. In recent times, a host of research work has been undertaken which provides a large degree of knowledge and insight into how social media marketing has grown in importance. For example, a study by Network Solutions LLC and the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business concluded that economic struggles were the primary reason for the very rapid popularity of social media. The study noted a growth in the incidents of small businesses using social media for marketing purposes and found such incidents rose to about 35 percent in recent times from about 12 percent till about a few years ago. This has gone to an extent that companies include social media expenditure in their annual budgets for marketing (growsmartbusiness.com, 2012).

2.3: Online Communities and Groups

2.3.1 Definition of Online Communities and Groups

In general, online communities are described as those settings where individuals can come, meet and communicate with each other over an online platform (Preece *et al.* 2003). And when that platform is social media, these are referred to as social media communities or groups.

But there are several definitions for the term of social media communities that have been developed and proposed over time. While some researchers consider that online social media

communities as a setting over the internet that creates an environment where participants help in the development of support, empathy, and friendships (Rheingold, 1994), some other researchers and practitioners who have described it on the basis of the analysis, designing and evaluation of the various technologies that allow or make possible online communication and creation of groups (De Souza and Preece 2004; Maloney-Krichmar and Preece 2005; Preece 2000).

For example, Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2005) described online social media communities or groups to be comprised of individuals who come together for a very specific purpose and are typically guided by policies and the activities are supported by the software. On the other hand, Rheingold, (1994) makes use of the term of virtual community and explains it as social amassed groups that are a result of the internet and happens when there is the presence of enough people for carrying on those public discussions for sufficiently long periods, with the presence of sufficient human feeling, so that the result is the formation of “*webs of personal relationships in cyberspace*”. The role of the internet therefore in social media communities is to support the creation, existence and spread of online social media communication.

During the last two decades, researchers and practitioners have been striving to achieve a universally acceptable definition of the term ‘online communities’ and with the rise and the proliferation of online communities – including those on the social media, multiple explanations and definitions of the term have emerged. Table 1 lists a host of them extracted from concurrent literature. As indicated from Table 1, these definitions have thrown up many common points of reference such as the existence of communication technologies, creation of online communities through voluntary memberships, while the main aims identified being communicating and interacting with each other as a consequence of online relationships (Lee, Vogel, and Limayem, 2003).

Table 1: List of definitions for ‘Online Community’

Authors	Definitions
Jones and Rafaeli (2000, p-216)	<i>“A symbolically delineated computer-mediated space where users interact with each other through participation and contributions to the Community”</i>

Williams and Cothrel (2000, p-84)	<i>“Groups of individuals who engage use online medium to engage and interact with multiple persons at the same time”</i>
Preece (2001, p-24)	<i>“A group of individuals who interact over a virtual environment with a purpose and such interactions are supported by technology while being guided by norms and policies.”</i>
Balasubramanian and Mahajan (2001)	Any entity that comprises the elements: A gathering of people, Existence of maximization of rational utility and Interacting with each other without a physical presence .
Ridings, Gefen and Arinze, (2002).	Any group of individuals that possess a common point of interests and practices and those are used to regular communication for some duration which often takes place in an organized manner using the internet as the medium and through a common location or mechanism
Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006)	Social places in the digital world that mediated and which allows forming sustainable groups primarily through continuous communication.
Lee, Vogel and Limayem, (2003)	A cyberspace that is run on computers and aided by information technology facilitating communication and interaction which are the basis of the activities that aim to generate content that is created and posted by members with the outcome of building relationships
Kang <i>et al.</i> (2007)	A voluntarily created social group or organization of people who come together to become members of the groups or communities to participate in interaction and other activities with the other members with the ultimate aim to exchange desired benefits that members want to achieve by participating in a chosen community

2.3.2: Online Community Participation Benefits

A review of existing literature indicates that the users or members or participants of social media communities or groups can gain various benefits from such participation or membership (Wang, Yu and Fesenmaier, 2002).

For online social media communities to be successful, the creators of such communities – which can be individuals or groups of consumers or even companies or brands, will require to attract participants as well as to encourage them to participate and remain loyal to the community. One of the most important strategies to successfully maintain online social media communities and a steady flow of traffic to such communities and groups is to provide the participants and members with some specific benefits. These benefits are also identified as the motivators for individuals to participate in online social media communities and groups (Graziani and Petrini, 2018). According to Kang et al. (2007), such benefits should be offers and delivered consistently.

Those online social media communities and groups that are unable to consistently provide such benefits to its participants and members are most likely to lose the interest of the participants in participation and contribution, commitment, loyalty and traffic to such communities (Graziani and Petrini, 2018). Morgan and Hunt, (1994) have stated that when participants are provided with benefits of participation that are worthwhile and of value to them it is more likely that they will be more active. According to Kang et al. (2007), such perceived benefits need to be offered and delivered frequently. Some of the perceived benefits include:

Functional Benefits - members participating in online social media communities desire such benefits which can include the ease and efficiency of completing a transaction like buying products and services as well as exchanging, gather and share information (Peter, Olson, and Grunert, 1999). The purchasing intent of individual participants of such online communities is also influenced by the other members of the online community think, feel, opine and suggest about a product or a service – which is one form of functional benefit for participants (Nishimura, Waryszak, and King, 2006). Another functional benefit is the information that participants exchange on social media communities and groups (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002).

Social Benefits– this form of benefit comprises of a range of help and support provided to members by other members of online communities (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). Such benefits can be in the form of a change of ideas and opinions of interest, answering other members' questions, etc. (Dholakia, *et al.* 2009; Hapsari, 2018). In the case of those online social media communities that have a large number of contributing members and highly involved members, these activities get enhanced. This can also have the effect of the development of trust between the online social media community members and participants (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004), which often results in flourishing relationships between the online social media community members as well as with the organizers of the community (Preece, 2000). Take the case of a community that was created to get together consumers of fashion, the views, opinions and experience of having used a product as shared within such a community can be of help to one or more members of the community who want to purchase the same or similar products. This is also one of the manifestations of the social impact theory according to which individual members get influenced by what the majority of the members of the community say on social media platforms.

Psychological Benefits – these are those benefits that are sought by members and participants of online social media communities which relates to the desire to achieve a sense of being connected to the other members of an online community – and allowing an individual the chance for identity expression, and development of a sense of affiliation with the other members of social media platforms and online communities (Bressler and Grantham, 2000). Members and participants of online communities also seek to gain information about group norms, specialized language, and circulating within the community apart from gaining knowledge about products and services from other members of the community (Kozinets, 1999). And once members or participants are able to identify themselves with the community and as a member of the community, it is more likely that such participants would be more active and participate in such communities to a greater extent (Anderson and Weits, 1989).

Hedonic Benefits – these benefits are those positive emotional states, such as feeling entertained or amused and experiencing enjoyment by being part of and participating in online communities and social media (Ikegami and Hut, 2008). These benefits are mostly derived from participating in community events and activities which are in addition to the regular acts of exchanging

information and experience about products and services, and which elicit a sense of positivity and positive emotions of happiness, excitement, and enthusiasm (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004).

Monetary Benefits –researchers Harris, O'Malley and Patterson, (2003) and Elsharnouby and Parsons, (2013) stated that one of the primary reasons that consumers want to establish a relationship with a brand is making monetary savings from offers such as discounts or special price breaks. Such intentions are also present when people chose to participate and become members of online social media communities that are created and maintained by companies or brands to engage with customers. Hence, one of the major aims of such participation of existing and potential customers is to gain special financial benefits from companies and brands (Gwinner, Gremler and Bitner, 1998).

2.3.3: Outcomes of Online Community Participation

When consumers make the choice of a unique brand, they undergo a series of various cognitive processes that are used by consumers to evaluate and chose among competing brands (Virzi and Parrington, 2019). However, the information selection process can be influenced by the brand commitment of consumers because commitment to a brand denotes a strong and positive psychological attachment to the particular brand (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012). Those consumers who have some level of commitment to a brand tend to choose that particular brand over other rival brands during a purchase decision making process. The opposite behavior is exhibited by those consumers who are less committed to one or any brand (Rivera and Cox, 2016).

A strong online community or one on social media is comprised of committed members – who are also consumers, since they have common interests and purposes (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). It is predicted that such members of social media will discuss and debate about products and services in details on the on online and social media communities (Casaló, Flavián and Guinalíu, 2007). Members this also tend to develop expertise about the products or brands that are talked about and discussed continuously in such communities or groups on social media and are it is also likely that such members would also help other members within the community (Muniz and O 'Guinn, 2001). It is also possible to develop brand commitment or emotional ties

towards particular brands when such brand or product-related activities abound in an online community or on a particular social media group (Casaló et al., 2007).

Further, this development of emotional ties toward particular brands also indicates a positive attitude towards the brand. This can therefore also help to develop a relationship of trust between the online or social media community member and a company or a brand (Deighton, 1992). And past studies have established that the development of a trust relationship between a brand and consumers is the right recipe for consumers' long-term relationship and commitment to a brand (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Harris and Goode, 2004). Casaló, Flavián and Guinalú, (2007) stated that frequent participation in online social media community activities such as posting and reviewing of messages of other members on social media gives more knowledge about brands is gained by such participants. Such exchange of information and data among members of online communities – particularly those that are able to elicit mostly positive comments and experience, are also able to make individual participants feel satisfied with a particular brand and which can develop into a form of trust in the brand (Ha and Perks, 2005). Moreover, the role of online social media communities is also viewed as being that of bulletin boards used for posting opinions and suggestions by consumers - which have been known to have been recognized and picked up by companies and brands to implement changes, alterations and modification in their products or services (Casaló et al., 2007). With a continuous process of interaction, communication and engagement between brands and online social media community members – that also includes consumers, initiated and maintained by the brands, it is possible for brands to encourage members of such communities to develop trust on brands (Racherla, Mandviwalla and Connolly, 2012). However, it is important for companies and brands, that desire to achieve as an outcome to sustainably deliver what consumers or members of an online community want and to even exceed the expectations of such members or participants. And when consumers or members become satisfied with what they receive in return from companies or brands, as has been discussed in the section on expected benefits from participation in online social media communities, likely, that the level of activities and participation and even trust on the brand would get enhanced (Deighton, 1992). This can lead to the development of a relationship of trust between the online or social media community members and a company or a brand. Further, past studies have also established that the mutual relationship of trust between a brand or a company and online social media community members is a precursor for maintaining of such relationships

in the long-term - potentially also leading to a commitment to a brand (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Harris and Goode, 2004; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). That can be significantly beneficial to a brand and therefore this enhances the trust. On the other hand, another of the possible outcomes of people actively participating in online or social media communities and groups.

2.4: Theories of Reasons for Social Media Participation

To illustrate the definition of online community and group and identifying the various benefits and outcomes of online community participation in the above sections, it is critical to review the existing theories that attempt to explain why people join and participate in online communities or groups. There are a number of existing theories that have been expanded to explain the participation of users or the factors that attract or commit people to become social media users. The following section presents two ranges of theories identified with relevance to this study, notably including the Economic Theory and the Social Theories.

2.4.1: Economic Theory

This section presents the economic theories that are used to explain why consumers participate in online networks and communities such as social media groups.

Economic theories consist of explaining the relationship between companies or brands and consumers based on the perceived power of economics as it affects the power relationship between these two stakeholders of the business. Online and social media communities are a collection of consumers and such groups or communities also tend to show acute interest in specific products or services. Further such communities also include consumers themselves as members or participants. Therefore, it is anticipated that such communities or groups or networks also exhibit a larger intent to buy those products for which the community was created or exists or those products that are widely accepted within the online social media groups or communities and since such communities can also generally comprise of a large number of consumers, therefore there is a shift of power from the companies or brands in favor of consumers. This is because of the much greater overall influencing power of the community on an individual customers' purchasing intent compared to that of a brand or a company on social media platforms (Butler, 2001).

The economic theory of social media which focuses on the economic power wielded by online communities is also used to explain the participation of individuals and businesses on social media platforms. The theory suggests that social media has the power to influence relationships between marketers and consumers (Hagel and Armstrong, 2000). Online communities or communities on social media can also be viewed to essentially comprise of consumers who can be assumed to have a high interest in specific products or services. Hence it is assumed that such users of social media, who are also consumers, have a greater intention to purchase products and services for which an online virtual community is created - often by the users themselves. This economic aspect or power of social media therefore has a bearing on companies. Further, a shift of power on social media from companies to consumers is also possible since consumers are potentially able to amass much larger amounts of data about products and services compared to what they could have from traditional advertising and marketing campaigns of companies (Butler, 2001). This increases the cost-effectiveness of decisions of the consumers and hence also acts as an influencer to join social media platforms.

Multiple researchers have stated that such economic powers and theories related to them are able to explain why individuals participate in online communities (Gu and Jarvenpaa, 2003). For example, Butler, (2001) made use of the resource-based model and the related concepts of perceived value for explaining the existence and motivation to exist for online communities. The researcher stated that consumers seem to derive more value from the usage of a product if such consumers can see a greater degree of benefits from participation in online communities compared to the value of the resources that they expend to gain access to the product. Consumers can easily gather information about such perceived benefits from online communities or social media networks and groups through the exchange and sharing of experiences of others about a particular product. This helps the consumer, who is also a participant in online social media communities, to gain economic value from usage or non-usage of the product (Butler, 2001).

In towing a similar argument, Gu and Jarvenpaas, (2003) even within a physical community, participants tend to contribute anything meaningful only if they could perceive the benefits from participation are greater than the costs of participation. When the benefits are perceived to be more, there can be greater participation and contribution from the members in the community after the recognition of incentives in the form of tangible or intangible returns. This concept has

also been extended to explain participation and contribution motivations in online social media platforms, communities and groups.

Therefore, it should suffice to note that the perceived benefits as viewed by the members are directly and significantly related to the intent of members to participate in an online community. Such benefits are often economic in nature. Participating members such benefits from participating in such online communities and groups and when it is perceived that such benefits can be achieved, it can lead to a greater intent to be part of such online groups and communities.

2.4.2: Social Theories

This part presents the social theories that can be used to explain the reasons or motivators for individuals participating in social media groups and communities.

The basic postulate of social theories that are used to explain why people participate in online social media platforms and communities is a tendency among individuals to largely disregard their personal opinions and being influenced by what the masses in the society think and believe in (Latane, 1981).

One such theoretical explanation is provided by the Herding Effect theory which, according to Huang and Chen, (2006), is the phenomenon that influences the behavior of an individual because of the appeal of the masses in the society. This theory states that individuals or groups tend to follow a decision path that is adopted by the largest section of society. Individuals or groups, therefore, tend to get influenced by the viewpoint of the majority population of a society. While this theory was initially created to account for group decisions and action similarity in societies at large, it can also be expanded to describe why individuals or groups decide to take on to social media usage – by being influenced by what the majority or a large section of the society does (Vasal, 2018).

While this might consider to be a weakness among such individuals by some, a larger proportion of researchers and practitioners think otherwise. This tendency to get influenced is not considered to be a weakness but as a form of logical thinking that is used by people or members of a society to justify a decision or a particular behavior. This also means that individuals could also find it difficult to trust their own viewpoint when almost all of the members or the largest section of society think or believe otherwise. This presumption or premise has also been used for

explaining the activities and behaviors of members of online social media communities and groups. This is because such virtual communities or networks or groups are similar and replicas of the wider society. Hence it can be assumed that those members of such communities or groups or networks who are also consumers can be influenced by the viewpoint or the opinion of the majority of the members or participants about a product or a service (Parsons and Moffat, 2014).

The social exchange theory, on the other hand, postulates a sort of reciprocal interaction among individuals of a society which results in mutually beneficial outcomes for society members (Ekeh, 1974). Those people who participate and get involved in such exchanges do so with the expectation that they will gain social rewards such as approval, status, and respect simply by being part of and contributing to a community. This explanation is also used for explaining the motivation of individuals of being part of and participating in online social media communities.

Another social theory is the social identity theory which describes the need or the desire for individuals in a society to be identified as members of a group or a community (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). According to Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo, (2004), social identity is a psychological state that is laced with cognitive, affective, and evaluative elements. While individual members of society lookout for and desire to have similarities with other members of a community, they also desire to achieve emotional attachment or affective commitment. this can also be extended to describe the motivation behind participation in online social media networks and communities (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). Individuals also seek to assess the value of being a member of an online community (Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo, 2004). But that is determined by the extent to which such individuals can feel a sense of belonging to the community, over and above of gaining perceived benefits from community interactions (Graziani and Petrini, 2018). Therefore, when individuals are able to identify themselves as a part of an online community, it is more likely that they would join and actively participate in the activities of the community (Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo, 2004).

2.5: Factors Affecting Customer Engagement

In addition to the above review of existing literature on social media and online community participation covering their definitions, benefits, outcomes and the relevant theories, this study

also reviews the body of pertinent literature on customer engagement, i.e. another research focus of this study that is addressed in the coming section.

According to existing literature, while those people who are fans of brands will have a tendency to like and adore the contents posted by their favourite brands on social media such as by liking, sharing and commenting (Araujo and Neijens, 2012; Lin and Lu, 2011, Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2014), companies and brands face the challenge to ensure engaging and interesting content so that those can attract the attention of social media participants who are not fans or followers of a particular brand and to persuade them to view and engage with content posted by the brand.

2.5.1: Vividness as a factor influencing customer engagement

According to De Vries *et al.* (2012), the type of a post or comment on social media is directly related to the level and number of sharing, liking, commenting, etc actions undertaken by users and participants of social media platforms and networks. The content that able to get the attraction of social media participants and users to represent various levels of media richness and this is generally known as the vividness of online content (Coyle and Thorson, 2001)

According to Steuer, (1999), the extent to which various senses are stimulated is decided by the vividness of content. For example, some researchers and practitioners such as Coyle and Thorson, (2001) suggest the use of multimedia content since it has the potential to be much more engaging for users of social media compared to simple pictures or just sentences because it potentially has a direct impact on various senses of individuals.

Past studies have also shown that the presence of a high degree of vividness is apparently among the most effective methods in increasing positive attitude toward a website (Coyle and Thorson, 2001; Fortin and Dholakia, 2005) as well as increasing click-through rates (Lohtia *et al.* 2007). This concept can also be extended to social media posts and content which can increase the effectiveness of messages and posts from companies in engaging customers.

2.5.2: Interactivity as a factor influencing customer engagement

Interactivity is often explained as the level to which two or more members in a communication process influence each other on the communication medium as well as act on the messages. It is also referred to as the degree of synchronization of such actions (Liu and Shrum, 2002).

Fortin and Dholakia, (2005) suggest that social media posts by companies or brands that have only text are not interactive enough while those that have, for example, a link to a website, is more interactive from the users' point of view. Further interactivity is also created when users of social media can comment on posts by companies and brands and participate in direct conversations with the company or the brand. Stewart and Pavlou, (2002), contend that interactivity of messages and posts on social media is widely considered to be an essential element that determines a range of emotional and behavioural outcomes like satisfaction, attitude, decision making and involvement. Therefore, when there are social media messages and posts by companies and brands that are presented along with a high degree of interactivity has the potential to generate a high level of online engagement.

2.5.3: Description of a product impacting customer engagement

If a post on social media by a company or a brand comprises of product information like the dates of new releases and other product descriptions, it is likely that followers or admirers of such brands will get motivated to interact and consume such products or services (De Vries et al., 2012). If users get motivated by such posts, they will likely respond to such posts (Coyle and Thorson, 2001).

2.5.4: Entertainment factor impacting customer engagement

Past studies such as those done by Lin and Lou, (2011) and Sledgianowski and Kulviwat, (2009) claimed entertainment to be amongst the most critical element that has a significant degree of impact on the behaviour of participants of social media networks or platforms or groups. When information about a product or service is also enriched with entertaining elements, is more likely to be evaluated positively by those who view them which can result in a higher intent to re-visit and engage with such posts on social media. That can include sharing, retweeting,

commenting, liking, etc compared to posts that do not have such entertainment elements (Raney et al., 2003).

2.5.5: Content novelty as a factor influencing customer engagement

Unique content and novel have able to generate unique message cues to a greater degree as well as external stimuli (Tokunaga, 2013). The importance of uniqueness and novelty in the social media communication process as a whole lie in its power to capture the attention of the targeted audience (Mendelson, 2001; Tokunaga, 2013). According to Heinonen, (2011), there is a natural tendency of people to get attracted to and drawn by unique and unusual information as such information can spark interest and is intrinsically rewarding. In a study conducted by Rhom *et al.* (2013), five primary motives were identified by the researchers that drive existing and potential consumers to engage with and interact with a brand on social media which includes entertainment, brand engagement, access to consumer services and content, product information and promotions.

2.6: Some Evidence of Social Media's Impact on Businesses

The report titled “The State of Small Business Report”, which has been mentioned previously found that 75 percent the companies that had been included in the study had a company page on a social media platform while 69 percent of them regularly posts status updates or articles on social media platforms. The study also found that 55 percent of the companies make use of social media platforms for networking and for making continuous monitor feedback (Growsmartbusiness.com, 2012).

According to a report by the Chief Marketing Officer Council World Wide, the overall expenditure on social media marketing by companies globally was more than \$16.10 billion in 2014 which was 45 percent more than the previous year (Cmocouncil.org, 2018).

A report by Deloitte Touche's USA found that 62 percent of customers surveyed regularly read customer-generated online reviews and those on social media and within that group, 98 percent believed the peer reviews of products and services to be trustworthy enough to come to a purchasing decision. Further, the study also noted that 80 percent of the consumers participating

in the study were influenced in terms of purchasing intent by reviews and comments on social media (Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011).

The following pictures provide a snap view of the current position of social media platforms globally.

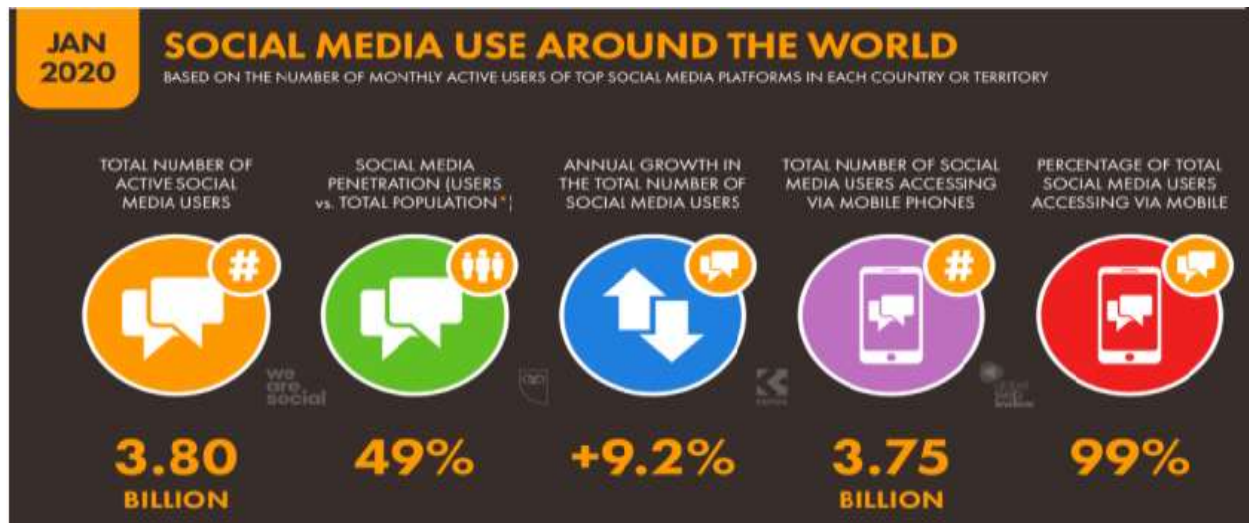


Figure 1: Social media use around the world(Source: smartinsights.com, 2020)

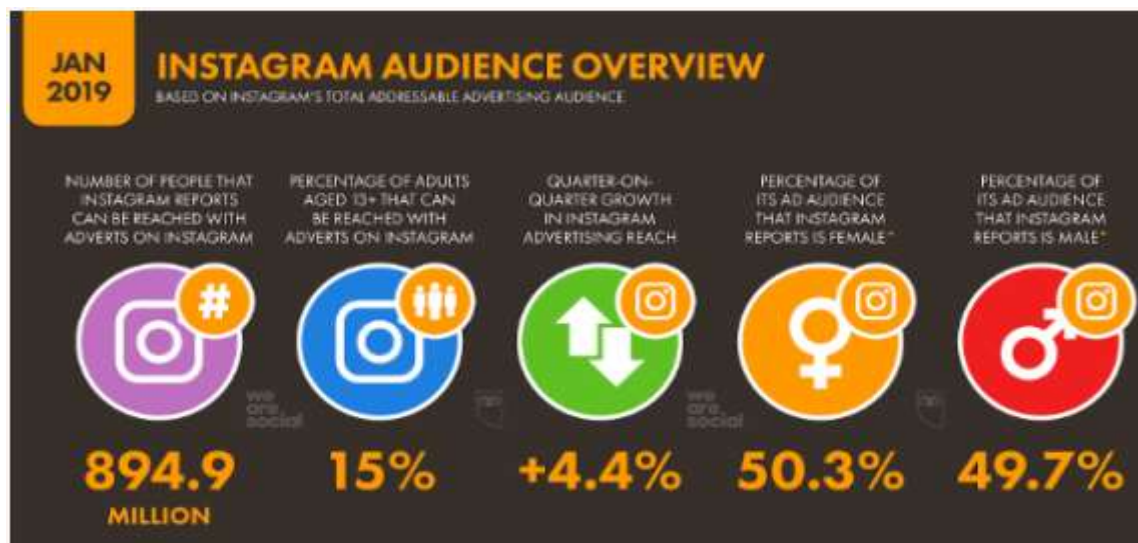


Figure 2: Instagram audience overview (Source: wearesocial.com, 2020)

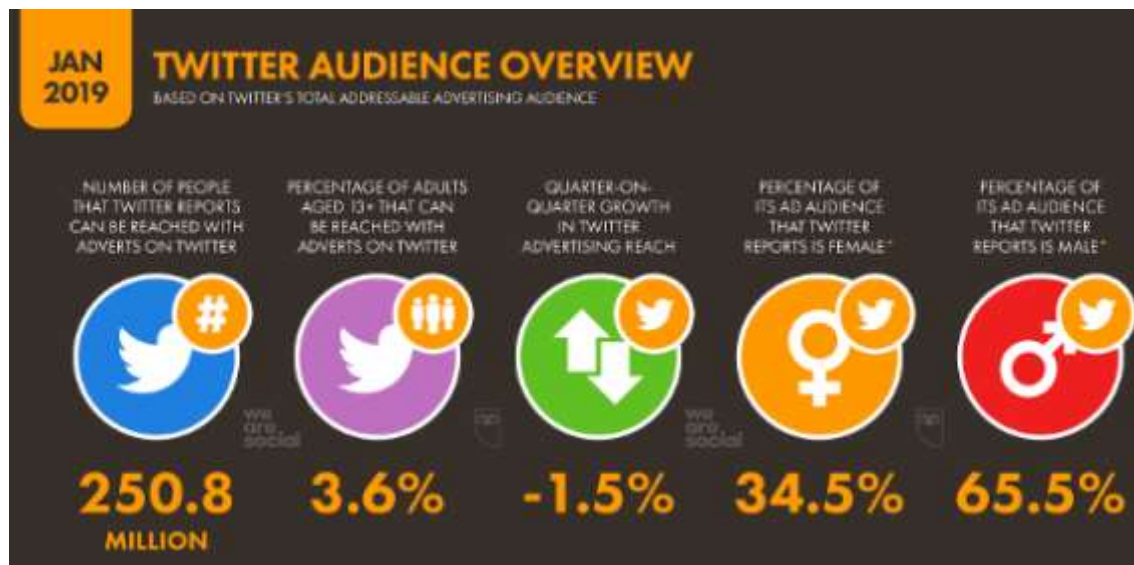


Figure 3 : Twitter audience overview (Source: wearesocial.com, 2020)

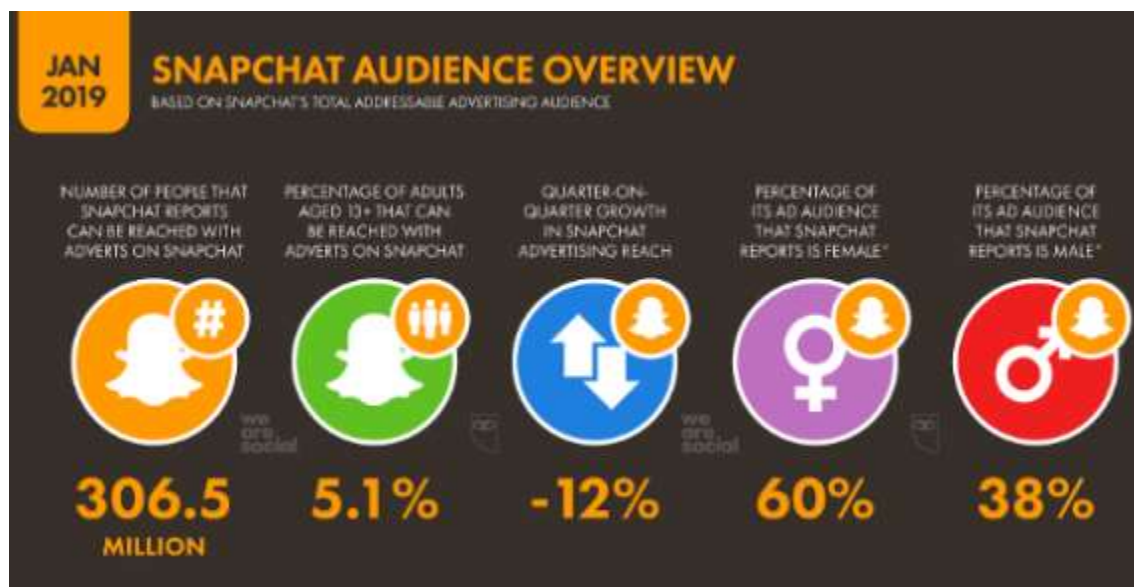


Figure 4: Snapchat audience overview (Source: wearesocial.com, 2020)

2.7: Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The conceptual model or framework for this study was primarily based on examining the perceived benefits that consumers seek to gain from participating in online social media, communities and groups – which has been found from the literature review.

Secondary research also identified a couple of outcomes that can be beneficial for retailers and brands by them participating in on social media and being able to attract more engagement from users of social media through messages and content. Based on these elements, the following pictorial representation of the conceptual framework was created.

MOTIVATORS OF PARTICIPATION

OUTCOMES

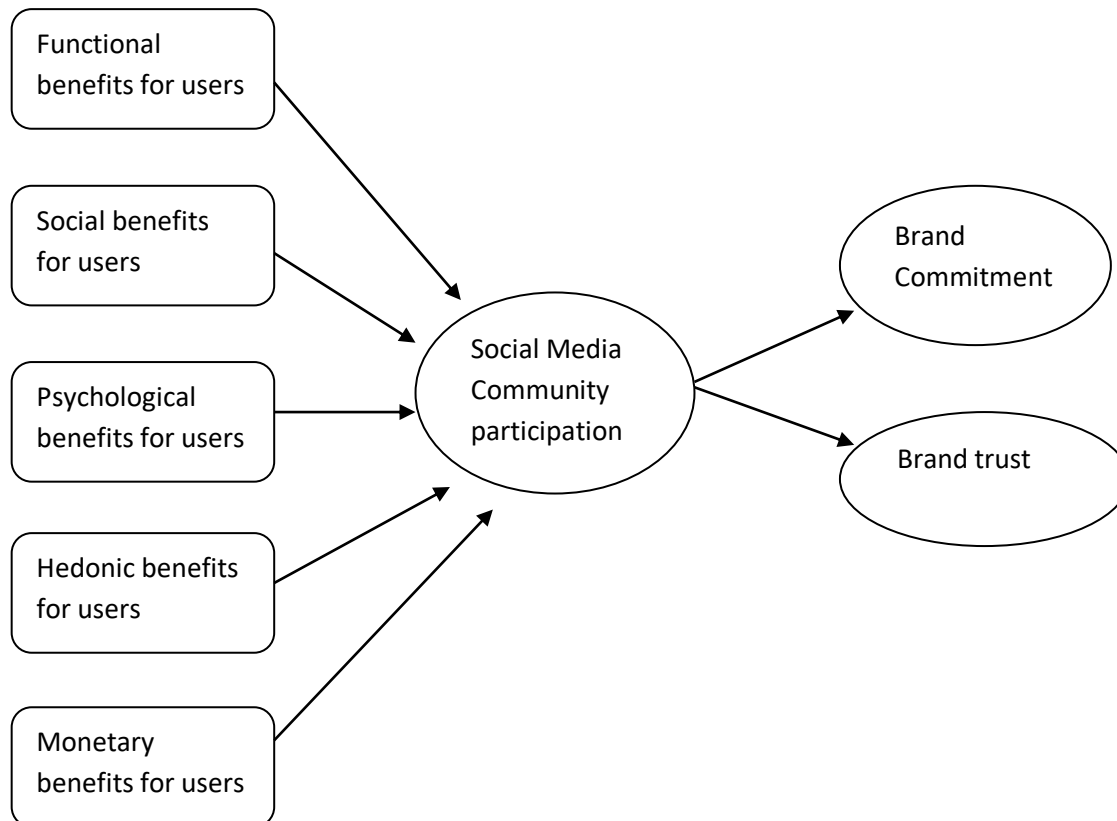


Figure 5: Motivators for participation of individuals on social media networks

The above figure 5 illustrates the five critical factors or motivators that drive consumers to participate in social media communities. In addition, this framework also identifies two potential outcomes of such participation, which are strongly desired and very critical for companies and brands.

Further, customer engagement is another important aspect of encouraging brand endorsement by social media participants, which is depicted in the following theoretical framework that aims at enhancing customer engagement. As indicated from Figure 6, four main factors are reported to

influence the levels of customer engagement on social media by brands, notably including the vividness, interactivity, product description and entertainment value.

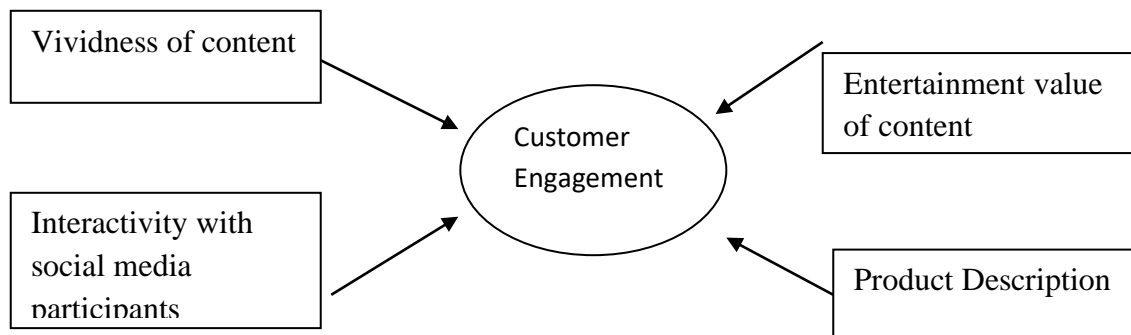


Figure 6: Factors contributing to enhanced user engagement on social media networks

Based on above literature review and the conceptual frameworks developed, this study proposes to test a few hypotheses presented below:

Hypothesis 1: Offering various benefits to consumers (i.e. social media participants) can enhance social media community participation of consumers

As indicated from above figures, the various benefits identified from literature review include functional benefits, social benefits, psychological benefits, hedonic benefits and monetary benefits. All these identified benefits (i.e. variables) will be explored and discussed in this study.

Hypothesis 2: Enhancing customer participation in social media networks and platforms can help enhance brand commitment and brand trust.

Hypothesis 3: Customer engagement can be enhanced by improving the social media contents posted by brands.

As indicated from above figure 6, the focused areas of social media contents derived from literature review and also identified for further investigation in this study include: the vividness, product description, entertainment value and interactivity levels of social media contents posed by brands.

2.8: Conclusion

The literature review helped to generate the two theoretical frameworks as shown in the previous section and draw up three Hypothesis to be examined for this study. The review tried to explain some of the motivators of people participating in social media networks and groups and the factors that can help enhance participation of consumers in social media groups and networks created by brands and companies. The literature review also helped to draw up a theoretical framework for the factors that are likely to affect levels of engagement of consumers with brands through social media groups and networks created by brands and companies.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1: Meaning of Research Methodology

This section of the research explains how the study was conducted and focuses on the multiple approaches, philosophies and methods that were used to successfully complete the research.

The title of this part is apt as it presents and describes the specific methods or techniques used in the study as well as a justification for the study. In the context of this study, methodology, therefore, signifies the best choice of methods and techniques used in this study from among a host of options so that the desired outcome of the study was achieved. This part provides details of the approaches and philosophies adopted and used for this study (Morrel-Samuels and Zimmerman, 2010).

At this point in the chapter, it is pertinent to explain what research methodology is. The overall and primary target of all research work is to arrive at a conclusive and objective outcome which can be achieved by the identification and then the application of the aptest research methods for each part or section of the research such as literature review, data gathering, data analysis, etc. research methodology is referred to this entire process – beginning with identification and then selection of the various methods which seem to best suit a study according to the opinion and judgment of the researcher. Every research has two basic methods - primary and secondary methods (Samuels, Biddle and Emmett, 2008).

This study also applied a systematic application of methods for data collection and analysis with the aim of successfully and effectively completing the research and this process is also described to be research methodology by some academics (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). During the course of this research, the basis of selection of a particular method or technique was conducting a thorough consideration and analysis of all of the available methods and techniques for a specific part of the research, such as data collection, and then making the selection on keeping in mind the purpose and perceived potential of the method to deliver the intended outcomes (Salaberry and Comajoan, 2013).

32: Research Philosophy

After a careful analysis of the research philosophies available, the positivist research philosophy is proposed to be adopted for this research because it has a focus on a research concept that essentially breaks it down into small parts that are then analyzed statistically to deliver an outcome of the research in as objective manner as possible (Denscombe, 2014). This philosophical position helps in the achievement of greater objectivity in the research outcome. The focus of this research was on a number of quantifiable facts and laws that were associated with the research topic so that it was possible to determine the social reality of the impact of engaging with customers overusing social media for enhancing brand image and brand perception for supermarkets and retailer of Ireland. This is proposed to be achieved via viewpoints and opinions of the users of social media.

3.3: Research Approach

With respect to the considerations on the chosen research approach, this study proposes to make use of the deductive research approach that entails making use of existing theories related to the topic of research for creating a theoretical framework for collecting primary data (Ng and Coakes, 2014). Therefore, it can be said that the deductive research approach is related to arriving at conclusions based on-premises or propositions. This approach suggests that this study should begin with an expected pattern that is later tested through observations – which is different from an inductive approach that starts with observations and ending with establishment of patterns within the observations (Babbie, 2010).

The primary advantage of adopting a deductive approach is that it allows for explaining the causal relationships between concepts and variables – which in this case are participation in social media platforms and groups/communities and brand image of a company. It also allows quantitative measuring of concepts and has a higher possibility to generalize research findings to a certain extent. This study proposes to use the current and existing theories on the research topic which will form the basis of research hypotheses. Those hypotheses will be tested at the end of the study by comparing them with the outcome from both primary and secondary data. For this study, secondary data was gathered from various literary sources that were available freely in the public domain and formed the basis for this approach. The research also formed a primary

framework for the gathering of data from primary sources by logically following the fact and data collected through secondary sources (Welman *et al.* 2005).

3.4: Research method

The primary research method proposed for this study is the quantitative research method. This is because of the large size of the target population of the proposed study – the users of social media platforms in Ireland, and hence using the quantitative methods helps in providing a representation of the population. Further, since quantitative research primarily involves examining relationships between variables that are numerically measurable and the use of statistical techniques. This makes it easier to summarize, present, compare, contrast and even generalize the data collected. That makes it comfortable and easy for the readers to understand the results of the research.

This was also the intention behind proposing to use a quantitative method for this research (Maxfield and Babbie, 2014). This study used the quantitative research method in which numerical and statistical tests were applied to the data gathered to generate results as well as to present those results in a meaningful manner through graphs, tables and charts for better understanding and comprehension.

The quantitative research approach was adopted in this study for the gathering of primary data related to how communicating over social media by companies in the Irish retail industry impacts the users of social media. This research also examined the manner on which such consumers were influenced by marketing messages on social media and how consumers engage with brands and companies on social media. The retailing industry that was looked at and examined in this study basically included the most popular ones such as groceries and apparel retailing brands that have their presence on social media platforms. These industries were selected because products from these industries are regularly consumed by people and as such, there is presence and evidence of their social media participation.

This part of the study was conducted through a survey among participants from within the users of social media who are regular viewers of marketing messages by companies and are members

of online social media groups and networks – including those created by brands and companies. This research used a set of questionnaires that were sent to the willing participants via e-mail.

3.5: Sampling Strategy

This study used the purposive sampling technique, which involves the use of specific criteria set by the researcher for selecting specific research participants. The criteria set by the researcher were completely based on the researcher's knowledge and judgment skills as well as the research topic (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Sampling for this study mandated that every participant needed to opt be active users of social media platforms and be members of social media groups and networks for a period of 6 months at least in the past in Ireland and was familiar with the retail brands. it also mandated that the participants were also a member of one or more product or services related groups or communities on social media.

While keeping in mind that the number of people in the target population – as described above, was very large, this study chose to create a representative sample from among the target population. This study has decided to approach at least 100 social media users with the qualities as defined in the above paragraph and confirmed that they were also in the habit of reading and reviewing product and service reviews on social media communities. In the end, the study managed to gather responses from a total of 103 respondents in the survey.

As a part of the process of selection of the sample, the researcher approached potential participants through social media platforms with an appeal to join the research. This was done primarily because it was easy to identify groups and communities within the social media itself – which helped to ensure that the approached potential participants were users of social media and because it was not possible to personally and physically approach the potential participants because of the restrictions imposed due to the novel Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher also identified communities and groups on social media such as platforms such as Facebook and Twitter that were directly related to product reviews and usage.

Following this appeal to such potential participants, the researcher defined the purpose of the study. Initially, 115 people responded and agreed to participate in the survey. A questionnaire was sent to all of the participants (attached in Appendix) who were requested to complete the

questionnaire. The study only considered those returned questionnaires that being fully completed or with over 90% questions being completed as valid ones. In accordance with this criterion and also considering the profile of the respondents, the study finally included responses from 103 respondents to the questionnaire.

3.6: Data Collection and Survey Design

The primary data collection method for the proposed research will be through a survey of the social media users and members of social media groups and communities (Leedy and Ormrod, 2020). The survey will comprise of some demography related questions while the rest will relate directly to the research topics. All of the questions will be close-ended ones with multiple answers for the participants to choose from. Each of the answers will also be assigned a numerical value as suggested in the Likert Scale for the transformation of the primary data into statistical formats.

The survey questions were derived from the two theoretical concepts that were presented at the end of the literature review section, and relevant previous studies (insert one or two major references that help the development of survey questions). For example, the respondents of the survey were asked about whether they derived any form of functional benefits – such as gaining additional knowledge about products or gaining ease of purchase by participation on social media networks and groups specific to certain brands or product categories. Another question was linked to any social benefits derived by users such as whether social media users gained any sense of being part of a virtual community and whether this made them feel good. Questions were also related to the perceived monetary and psychological benefits gained by the respondents from participation on social media networks and groups. For example, the respondents were asked whether they have ever received special offers from brands on social media and whether they feel joy and happiness by being part of such groups and networks. The respondents were also asked whether their participation in social media groups specific to any brand or product category had increased their commitment towards the brand such strengthened their brand purchasing intent from the brand. The respondents were also asked about whether such participation had also made them trust more on bands

Further, the respondents were also questioned about their perception of consumer engagement – do they feel more drawn toward or more willing to engage with brands on social media if the content posted by the brands were vivid, with good product descriptions, and had some entertainment value. They were also asked whether their intent to engage more with specific brands was increased by brand content on social media that was more interactive in nature and allowed more participation.

Since the questions were developed directly from the conceptual framework and relevant previous studies, the researcher intends is to collect the views of respondents about the focused research topics and questions. For instance, some survey questions were designed to collect data on why the respondents participate in social media networks and groups were brought out. Further, this questionnaire was also able to collect data about the feelings of the respondents about whether their participation in social media networks and groups had any impact on their brand trust and brand commitment. Further, the questionnaire also helped to collect the perspectives of the respondents about what they felt could help them increase or decrease their engagement with a specific brand through what the brand post on social media networks and groups.

Secondary data will be collected from past studies and research on the topic from sources including published research articles, books and any other form of published and credible sources.

3.7: Data analysis

This study made use of the descriptive data analysis method that essentially examines the relationship between two or more variables in research (Saad, 2001).

This research was based primarily on primary data - that was quantitative in nature. This means that it was important to use statistical methods and techniques for extracting data, trends and inferences from the primary data collected. The results that were obtained with the use of statistical analysis of primary data were then also compared to the overall idea or topic of the study that as stated at the beginning of the research and for estimating the potential answers to the research questions. To allow readers and the audience of this research to be able to better

understand the outcome of the research, the analyzed data was presented in read-easy formats such as with the help of graphs, charts and tables.

Statistical techniques were also utilized for the input of data and its tabulation and its statistical transformation to enable as accurate an interpretation of the data as possible (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2005). The statistical software of SPSS was used for compiling and analyzing primary data.

3.8: Time Horizon

To efficiently complete the research, the various processes and activities of the study were done according to a time plan as has been suggested by academic researchers. According to academics, every part or section of the study should be considered separately and then get them completed within a predetermined time frame. This helped the researcher to complete the entire work in a stipulated time and within the least time required for completing the study efficiently and accurately (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2005).

In order to create an efficient time plan, the researcher divided the entire work into some smaller parts. For example, conducting the initial literature review and deciding on the methodology or methods for the research, the probable theories that were to be used, scouring previous and existing literature so that the best data sources for secondary data were chosen, undertaking an extensive review of the literature and jotting the points found, development of a conceptual framework, creating questionnaire for a survey, sampling, primary data collection, primary data analysis, etc. Each of the tasks was set to be completed within a specific time period for each. Although for better utilization of time at hand for completing the research, the study decided to conduct more than one task at a time which mandated the use of a cross-sectional time horizon for the study. For example, while the researcher was conducting the literature, the possible participants of the survey were being identified and contacted (Salaberry and Comajoan, 2013).

3.9: Research Ethics

This research carefully followed all the established ethical norms that are expected to be followed in academic research work. For example, the research was particularly in obtaining informed consent from the participants of the survey. Such confirmation was however obtained

mostly verbally due to the restrictions of time as well as the reluctance of most of the participants. But the researcher made sure to email a written undertaking to the participants which promised them safety and security of all data that they provided as a part of the survey and this study. The participants were also assured that all efforts will be made on the part of the researcher to keep the data provided by participants safely in the personal digital device of the researcher. The research also assured that such data would be kept for a period of six months or till the publication of the study, whichever was earlier. Following that period, the data would be permanently deleted. It was also assured that the data provided by the participants would be used only for this project and not shared with anyone else (Salaberry and Comajoan, 2013). The participants were also informed that they could leave the study whenever they wished to without to provide any explanation for the same.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis, Findings and Discussions

4.1: Data Analysis

This section presents a synopsis of the important elements after the analysis of primary data gathered through the survey.

4.1.1: Demographics of Respondents

GENDER					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	33	32.0	32.0	32.0
	Male	70	68.0	68.0	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Frequency Table of Gender Distribution of respondents (Source: SPSS)

As indicated from above Table 2, the respondents comprised of 68% males and the rest were females, accounting for 32%.

AGE					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-25	50	48.5	48.5	48.5
	26-35	48	46.6	46.6	95.1
	36-45	5	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Frequency Table of Age Distribution of respondents (Source: SPSS)

As indicated from above Table 3, 48.5% of the respondents were in the age group of 18-25 years, 46.6% in the age group of 26-35 years and 4.9% in the age group of 36-45 years.

4.1.2: Frequency of Social media usage and shopping form retailers

1) Are you a regular shopper from the Irish supermarkets?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	9	8.7	8.7	8.7
	Prefer not to say	1	1.0	1.0	9.7
	Yes	93	90.3	90.3	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Frequency Table of Regular shopping habit among respondents (Source: SPSS)

In responding to the survey question that ‘are you a regular shopper from the Irish supermarkets’, more than 90% of the respondents described themselves as regular shoppers of Irish supermarkets while 8.7% said they were not regular purchases while 1% respondents preferred not to say anything.

I am a regular/daily user of social media platforms

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	24	23.3	23.3	23.3
	disagree	2	1.9	1.9	25.2
	neutral	3	2.9	2.9	28.2
	strongly agree	66	64.1	64.1	92.2
	strongly disagree	8	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Frequency Table of percentage of respondents who are regular users of social media (Source: SPSS)

In responding to the survey question about the frequency of using social media platforms, the above table shows that a large majority of the respondents (almost 88%) were regular users of social media while about 10% were not and about 3% chose not to disclose their usage details.

The above two sets of data which is presented in Table 4 and 5 indicate that the respondents were fit to provide their opinions on social media messaging and postings by Irish retailers.

4.1.3: Social media Influence on purchasing intention

I am in the habit of regularly viewing product reviews on social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	32	31.1	31.1	31.1
	disagree	16	15.5	15.5	46.6
	neutral	14	13.6	13.6	60.2
	strongly agree	33	32.0	32.0	92.2
	strongly disagree	8	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Frequency Table of Percentage of respondents who regularly view product reviews on social media (Source: SPSS)

I usually consider product reviews by other members on social media quite seriously

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	41	39.8	39.8	39.8
	disagree	8	7.8	7.8	47.6
	neutral	21	20.4	20.4	68.0
	strongly agree	27	26.2	26.2	94.2
	strongly disagree	6	5.8	5.8	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: Frequency Table of Percentage of respondents who consider and give importance to product reviews on social media (Source: SPSS)

I generally tend to believe what the majority of my friends and their friends, and so on, on social media say about a product

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	33	32.0	32.0	32.0
	disagree	16	15.5	15.5	47.6
	neutral	17	16.5	16.5	64.1
	strongly agree	31	30.1	30.1	94.2
	strongly disagree	6	5.8	5.8	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 8 : Frequency Table of Percentage of respondents who believe what they read about product reviews on social media (Source: SPSS)

As referring to table no: 6, 7 and 8 it clearly indicates that while about 63% of the respondents regularly view product reviews on social media, about 23% do not and about 13.5% were undecided about their regularity. On the other hand, about 66% of all the respondents give importance to product reviews by other users on social media and only about 14% do not. Notably about 20% remained uncommitted to the question. A similar number of the respondents (about 62%) tend to believe what they read about products as posted by other users on social media, including their friends and peers while about 21% do not. A notable over 16% of the participants chose to say nothing conclusive on this issue.

The three sets of data presented above clearly indicate that majority of the respondents not only regularly view product reviews on social media but also give importance to such reviews by other users and also believe what other co-members say about products and services on social media.

Impact of Peer Reviews of Products on Social Media on Retail Purchasing Decisions

I buy my grocery products after reviewing them on social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	18	17.5	17.5	17.5
	disagree	16	15.5	15.5	33.0
	neutral	29	28.2	28.2	61.2
	strongly agree	15	14.6	14.6	75.7
	strongly disagree	25	24.3	24.3	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 : Frequency Table of Ratio of respondents who review grocery products on social media and then purchase them (Source: SPSS)

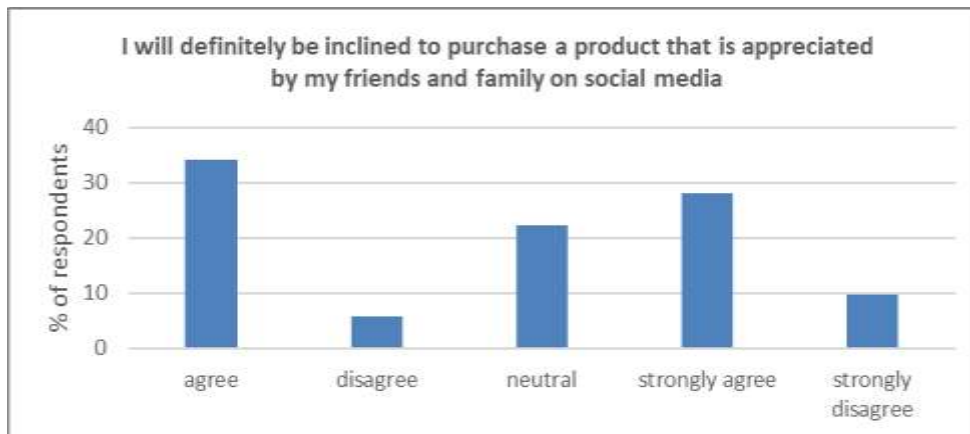
As designated on above table 9, that only about 32% of the respondents are in the habit of going through reviews of grocery products on social media and then purchase them while a much larger (almost 40%) are not into this habit. Interestingly, about 28% of the participants were non-committal to this proposition.

The data above highlights the importance given to reviews by others on social media about products but also considers them while making purchases.

I will definitely be inclined to purchase a product that is appreciated by my friends and family on social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	35	34.0	34.0	34.0
	disagree	6	5.8	5.8	39.8
	neutral	23	22.3	22.3	62.1
	strongly agree	29	28.2	28.2	90.3
	strongly disagree	10	9.7	9.7	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 10 : Frequency Table of Ratio of respondents who would definitively be inclined to buy a product with positive review on social media by friends and peers (Source: SPSS)

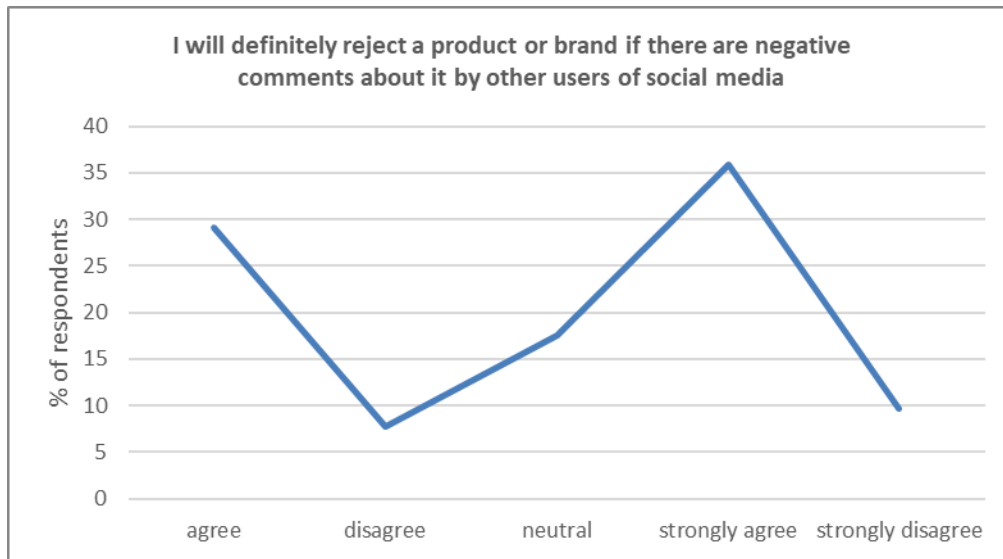


Graph 1 : Ratio of respondents who would definitely be inclined to purchase product with positive reviews by friends and peers on social media (Source: SPSS)

I will definitely reject a product or brand if there are negative comments about it by other users of social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	30	29.1	29.1	29.1
	disagree	8	7.8	7.8	36.9
	neutral	18	17.5	17.5	54.4
	strongly agree	37	35.9	35.9	90.3
	strongly disagree	10	9.7	9.7	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 11 : Frequency Table of percentage and number of respondents who would definitely reject a product with negative review on social media by friends and peers (Source: SPSS)



Graph 2: Ratio of respondents who would definitively be inclined to purchase product with positive reviews by friends and peers on social media (Source: SPSS)

The two sets of charts and graphs (Table 10, 11 and Graph 1, 2) above show that over 62% of the respondents would be willing to actively consider purchasing a product from that has been appreciated by friends and peers on social media while just about 15% of them will not depend on social media reviews while deciding on purchasing. Notably, more than 28% of the respondents chose to stay neutral and potentially could not make up their minds.

In contrast to the above reactions of the respondents, the second data (Table 11 and Graph 2) set shows that more respondents (65%) would be willing to reject a product or a service that carries negative response and reviews from friends and peers on social media. There were much less participants who were undecided (17.5%) while about 17% answered in the negative. These data set also indicate the importance that consumers give to what other social media users say about a product to the extent that their purchase intention also gets influenced by such views and comments.

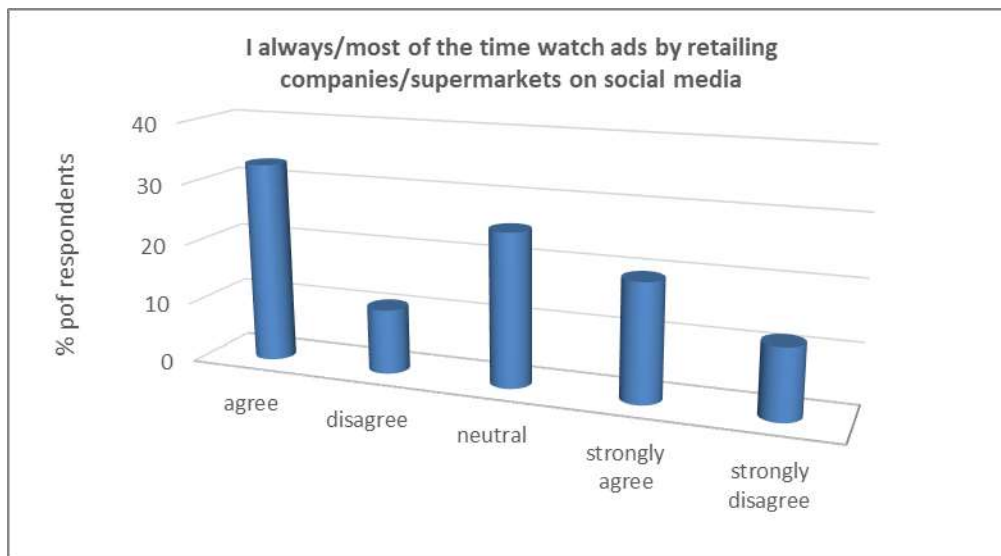
4.1.4: Social Media Marketing Influence on Consumers

Impact of Ads by Retailers on Social Media

I always/most of the time watch ads by retailing companies/supermarkets on social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	34	33.0	33.0	33.0
	disagree	11	10.7	10.7	43.7
	neutral	26	25.2	25.2	68.9
	strongly agree	20	19.4	19.4	88.3
	strongly disagree	12	11.7	11.7	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 12 : Frequency Table of Percentage and number of respondents regularly watching ads on social media (Source: SPSS)

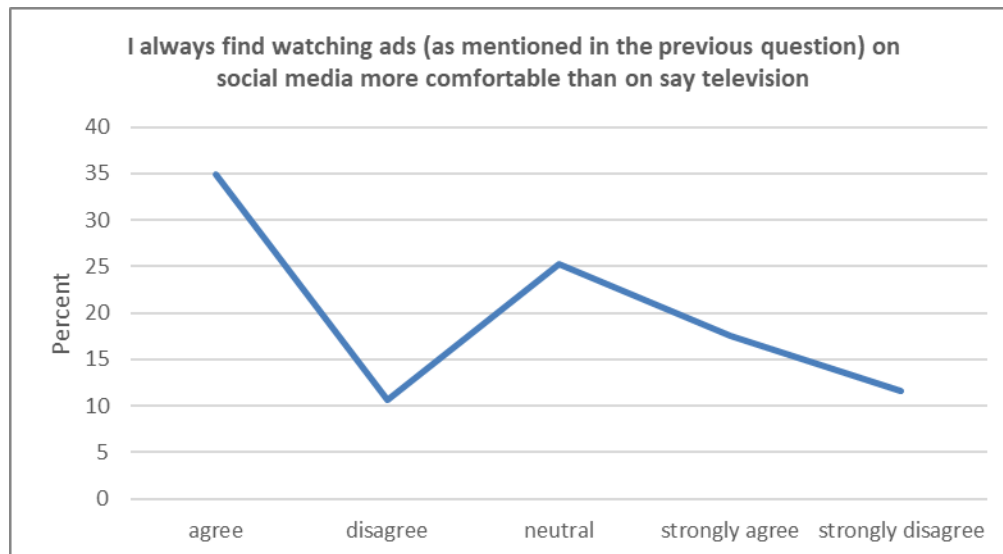


Graph 3 : Ratio of respondents regularly watching ads on social media (Source: SPSS)

**I always find watching ads (as mentioned in the previous question)
on social media more comfortable than on say television**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	36	35.0	35.0	35.0
	disagree	11	10.7	10.7	45.6
	neutral	26	25.2	25.2	70.9
	strongly agree	18	17.5	17.5	88.3
	strongly disagree	12	11.7	11.7	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 13: Frequency Table of Percentage and number of respondents more comfortable watching ads on social media compared to TV, etc. (Source: SPSS)



Graph 4: Ratio of respondents more comfortable watching ads on social media compared to TV, etc. (Source: SPSS)

From the above table 12, 13 and Graph 3,4 it shows that about 54% of the respondent who are in the habit of regularly watching ads form retailers on social media while a sizable (over 22%) said they were uncomfortable. But more than a quarter of the participants did not answer. On the other hand, compared to the previous question almost an equal number of respondents (52.5%) said they enjoyed or felt more comfortable to watch such ads on social media through handheld

devices compared to traditional media such as television. About 22% said they were not comfortable while more than quarter remained silent.

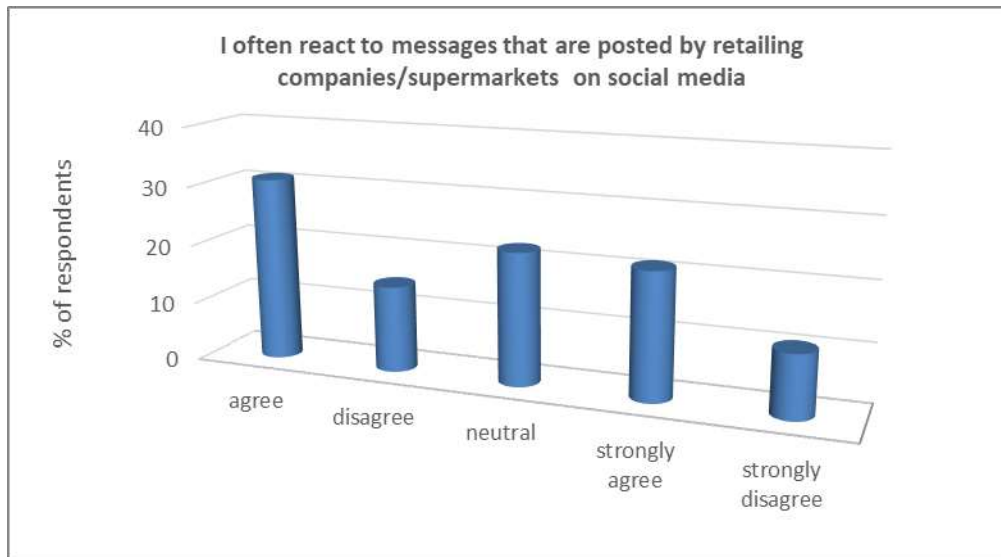
The data presented above indicates that more than half of the consumers surveyed liked to watch ads and other marketing materials on social media and therefore were likely to be influenced by them.

Impact of Messages posted by Retailers on Social Media

I often react to messages that are posted by retailing companies/supermarkets on social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	32	31.1	31.1	31.1
	disagree	15	14.6	14.6	45.6
	neutral	23	22.3	22.3	68.0
	strongly agree	22	21.4	21.4	89.3
	strongly disagree	11	10.7	10.7	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 14: Frequency Table of Ratio of respondents often reacting to retail firm messages on social media (Source: SPSS)

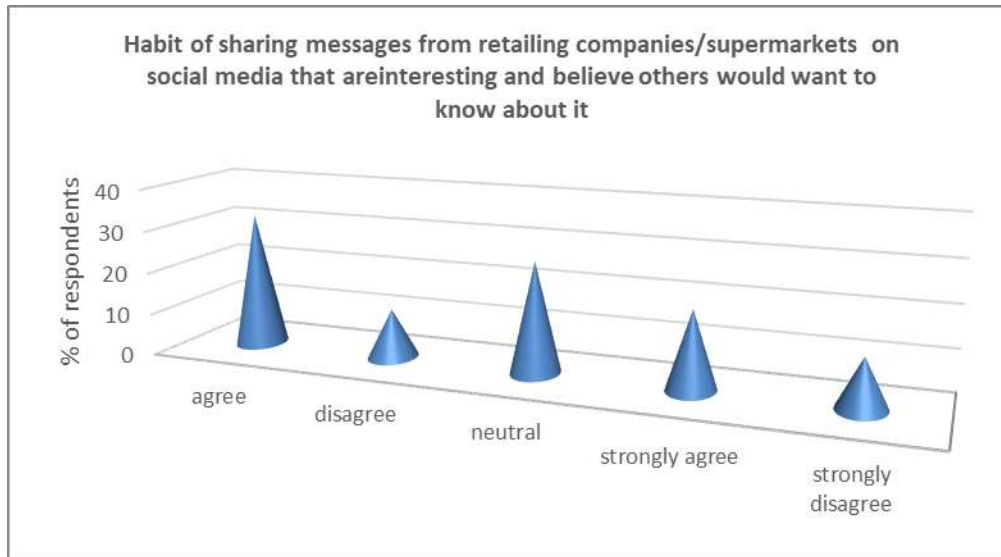


Graph 5: Ratio of respondents reacting to messages from retail on social media (Source: SPSS)

Habit of sharing messages from retailing firms/supermarkets on social media that are interesting and believe that others would want to know about it

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	33	32.0	32.0	32.0
	disagree	12	11.7	11.7	43.7
	neutral	27	26.2	26.2	69.9
	strongly agree	19	18.4	18.4	88.3
	strongly disagree	12	11.7	11.7	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 15: Frequency Table of respondents willing to share interesting messages on social media from firms/retailers (Source: SPSS)



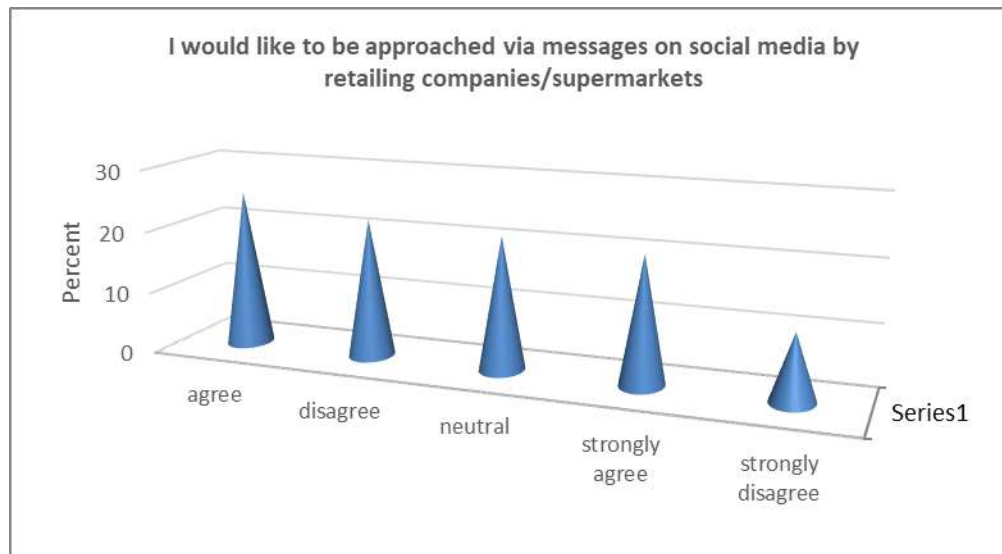
Graph 6: Ratio of respondents willing to share interesting messages on social media from firms/retailers (Source: SPSS)

As indicated in table 14, 15 and Graph 5,6 that more than half of the respondents (52.5%) often react to the messages on social media from firms and retailers while a little more than quarter (26%) hardly react to such messages. Over 22% of the participants remained non-committal. On the other hand, around the same number of respondents (50.4%) were willing to share interesting messages from retailers posted on social media so that their others users could read them while about 23% disagreed and more than a quarter *(over26%) chose not to commit to this proposition. Hence it can be said that currently, Irish retailers and brands can hope that just a little more than half of the consumers regularly react to social media messages posted by brands and retailers and share them for other users to see.

**I would like to be approached via messages on social media by
retailing companies/supermarkets**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	26	25.2	25.2	25.2
	disagree	23	22.3	22.3	47.6
	neutral	22	21.4	21.4	68.9
	strongly agree	21	20.4	20.4	89.3
	strongly disagree	11	10.7	10.7	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 16: Frequency Table of Respondents willing to be approached by retailers on social media (Source: SPSS)



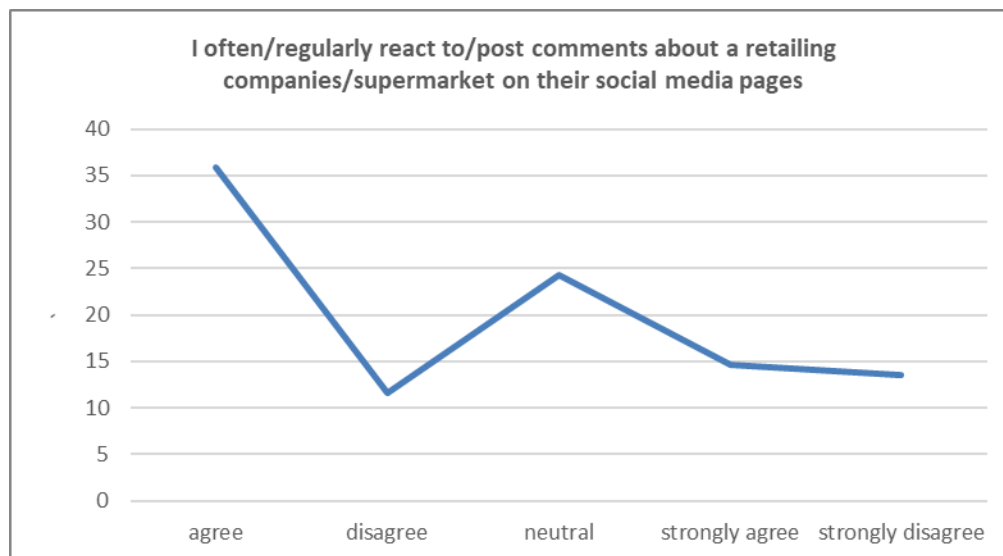
Graph 7: Ratio of respondents willing to be approached by retailers on social media (Source: SPSS)

As shown above in table 16 and graph 7 that more than 45% of the respondents were agreeable to be contacted by retailers on social media while a similar number (43%) would not. 21% of the respondents remained undecided which leaves a lot of scope for Irish retailers to engage further with consumers in a direct manner with consumers on social media.

I often/regularly react to/post comments about a retailing companies/supermarket on their social media pages

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	37	35.9	35.9	35.9
	disagree	12	11.7	11.7	47.6
	neutral	25	24.3	24.3	71.8
	strongly agree	15	14.6	14.6	86.4
	strongly disagree	14	13.6	13.6	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 17: Frequency Table of respondents regularly reacting to/posting comments about retailers on the companies' social media pages and handles (Source: SPSS)



Graph 8: Ratio of respondents regularly reacting to/posting comments about retailers on the companies' social media pages and handles (Source: SPSS)

As indicated from the above table 17 and Graph 8 that over 46% of the participants were in the habit of reacting to posts and commenting on posts made on social media by retailers while about a quarter of the respondents do not. About a quarter of the participants were undecided.

4.1.5: Expectations from retailing companies on Social media

I expect retailing companies/supermarkets to react to my posts and comments on their social media pages/handles

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	36	35.0	35.0	35.0
	disagree	14	13.6	13.6	48.5
	neutral	16	15.5	15.5	64.1
	strongly agree	27	26.2	26.2	90.3
	strongly disagree	10	9.7	9.7	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 18: Frequency Table of respondents expecting reactions from retailers to posts by respondents on retailers' social media pages and handles by retailers (Source: SPSS)

From the above given table 18 shows that more than 61% of the participants also expect retailing firms to react to posts and comments made by them on the social media pages of retailing firms while about 23% do not. More than 15% were non-committal on the issue.

The above data describes that less than half of the consumers were in the habit of reacting to posts and commenting on posts made on social media by retailers but a larger section instead expected that the retailers and brands would react to what the consumers posted on the social media pages and handles of the brands and retailers.

Appreciative if retailing companies/supermarket react to and resolve issues raised by me or others on social media pages/handles

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	33	32.0	32.0	32.0
	disagree	11	10.7	10.7	42.7
	neutral	21	20.4	20.4	63.1
	strongly agree	31	30.1	30.1	93.2
	strongly disagree	7	6.8	6.8	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 19: Frequency Table of respondents who are appreciative of retailers that react to and solve issues about products and services by reacting to posts on social media by respondents (Source: SPSS)

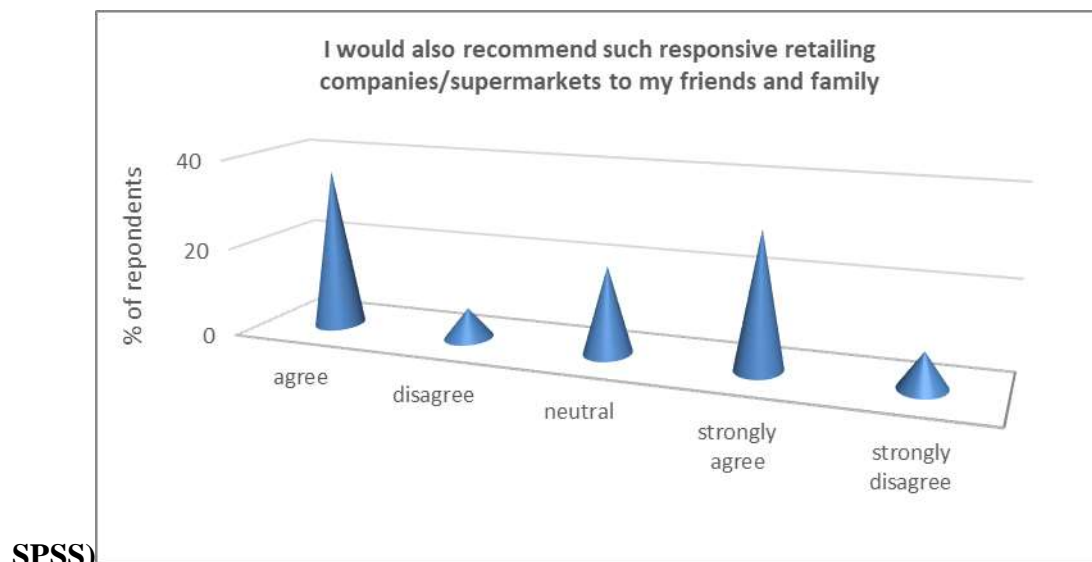
From the above table 19 it indicates that a large majority of the respondent (over 62%) would appreciate if retailers reacted to and solved problems that were raised about products and services of such companies by the respondents on the companies' social media pages and handles. About 18% would not like that while 20% said nothing on the issue. The data indicates that consumers expect companies and brands to be responsible and reactive to consumer issues.

4.1.6: Positive impact of consumer engagement on social media

I would also recommend such responsive retailing companies/supermarkets to my friends and family

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	37	35.9	35.9	35.9
	disagree	7	6.8	6.8	42.7
	neutral	20	19.4	19.4	62.1
	strongly agree	31	30.1	30.1	92.2
	strongly disagree	8	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 20: Frequency Table of respondents readily willing to recommend responsive retailers, as in the previous question, to friends and family (Source:



Graph 9: Ratio of respondents readily willing to recommend responsive retailers, as in the previous question, to friends and family (Source: SPSS)

The table 20 and graph 9 above indicate that a large majority of the participants (more than 65%) would readily recommend those retailers who solve issues of the participants when they are posted on social media in a proactive manner while only about 16% will not. About 19% remained undecided about recommending such companies.

Willingnes to support responsive and responsible retail firms on social media; spread positive elements about them on social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	39	37.9	37.9	37.9
	disagree	13	12.6	12.6	50.5
	neutral	25	24.3	24.3	74.8
	strongly agree	18	17.5	17.5	92.2
	strongly disagree	8	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

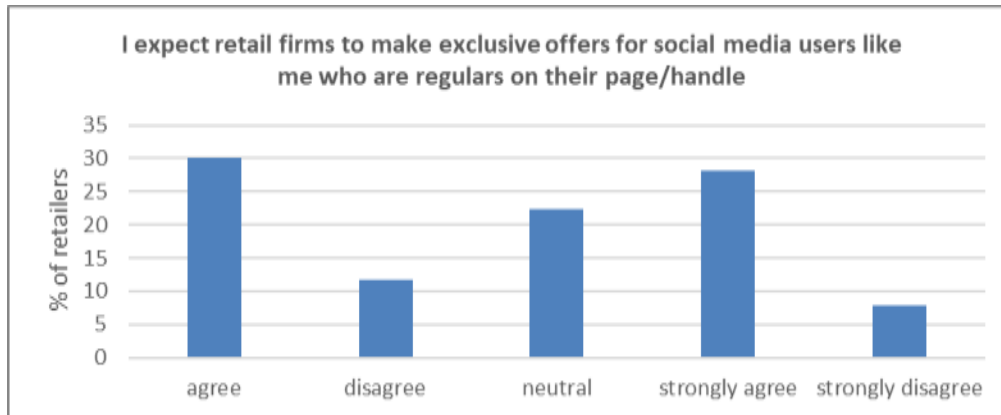
Table 21: Frequency Table of willingness to support retailers supportive and responsible on social med; spread positivity about such brand (Source: SPSS)

The data above from table 21 shows that more than 55% of the participants were willing to support and spread good word about those retailing firms that are responsive and supportive on social media while about 20% were unwilling and about a quarter were undecided.

I expect retail firms to make exclusive offers for social media users like me who are regulars on their page/handle

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	31	30.1	30.1	30.1
	disagree	12	11.7	11.7	41.7
	neutral	23	22.3	22.3	64.1
	strongly agree	29	28.2	28.2	92.2
	strongly disagree	8	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 22: Frequency Table of expectations from retail firms making exclusive offers to respondents on social media who are regulars on firm's social media page and handle (Source: SPSS)



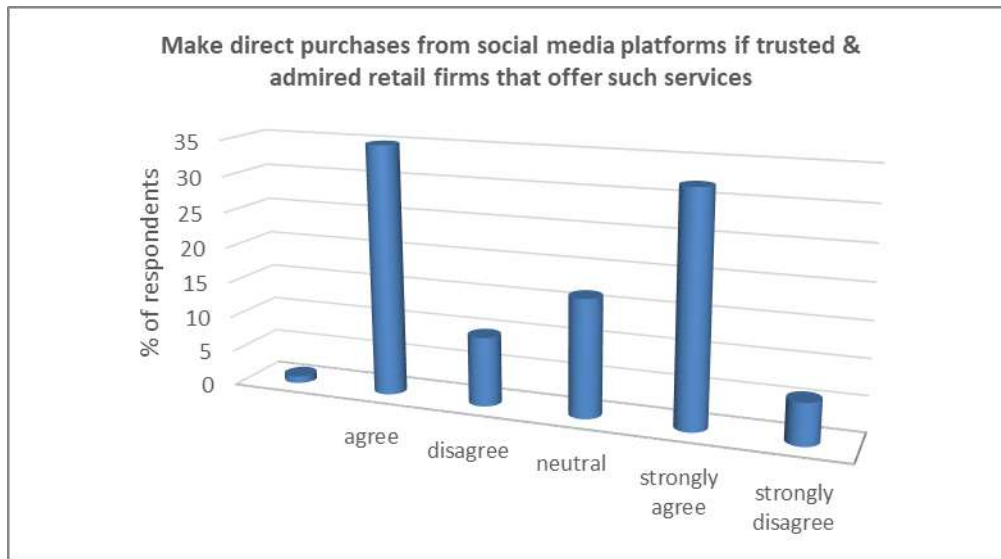
Graph 10 : Expectations from retail firms making exclusive offers to respondents on social media who are regulars on firm’s social media page and handle (Source: SPSS)

The above data from the table 22 and graph 10 shows that about 60% of the participants expect that exclusive offers be made to them on social media by retailers on whose pages and handles the respondents are regulars while about 19% thought otherwise and 22.3% were unresponsive

Make direct purchases from social media platforms if trusted & admired retail firms that offer such services

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
agree	36	35.0	35.0	35.9
disagree	10	9.7	9.7	45.6
neutral	17	16.5	16.5	62.1
strongly agree	33	32.0	32.0	94.2
strongly disagree	6	5.8	5.8	100.0
Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 23: Frequency Table of respondents willing to make direct purchase from social media from trusted brand and retailers if such services offered (Source: SPSS)



Graph 11: Ratio of respondents willing to make direct purchase from social media from trusted brand and retailers if such services offered (Source: SPSS)

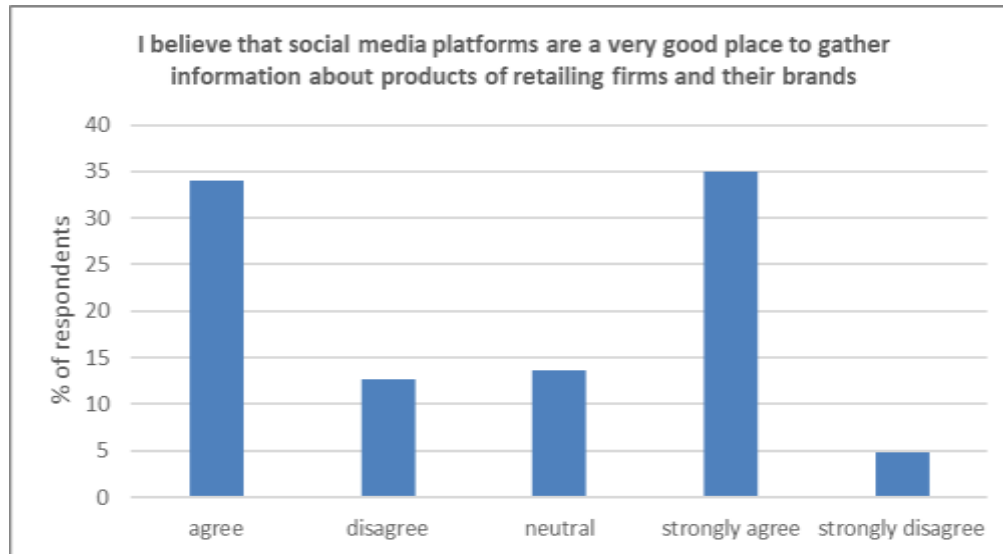
66% of the respondents were ready to make direct purchase from social media pages and handles of retailers that they trust and admire of such companies offer such services while just about 15% disagreed. A notable 17% chose to refrain from commenting.

The table 23 indicates that a large majority of the consumers would be willing to be loyal and committed to those brands and consumers that are responsible and proactive and are attentive to consumer issues as expressed by them on social media.

Belief social media platforms are very good platform to gather information about products of retailing firms companies/supermarkets and brand

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	35	34.0	34.0	34.0
	disagree	13	12.6	12.6	46.6
	neutral	14	13.6	13.6	60.2
	strongly agree	36	35.0	35.0	95.1
	strongly disagree	5	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 24: Frequency Table of respondents believing social media good platform to gather info about retail firms' products (Source: SPSS)



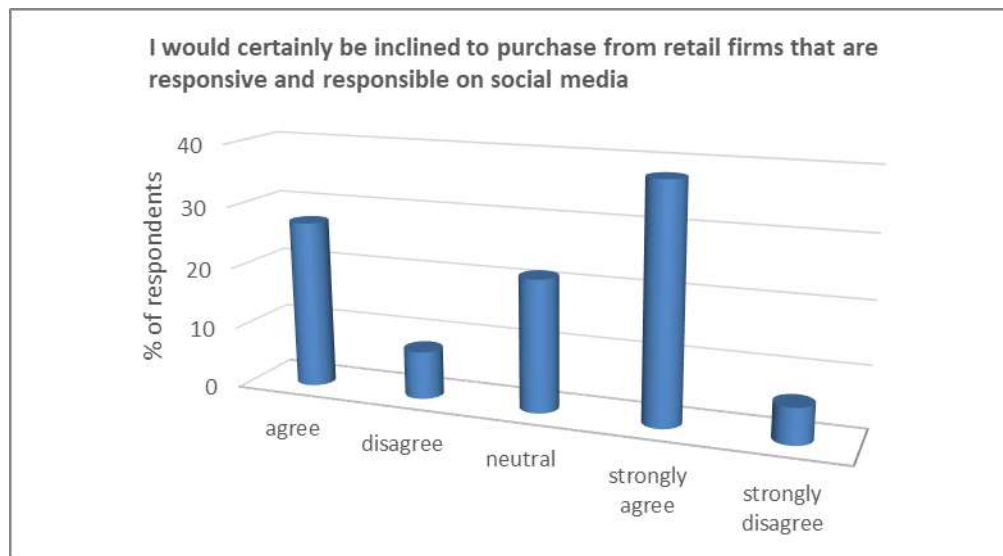
Graph 12: Frequency Table of respondents believing social media good platform to gather info about retail firms' products

As given in the above table 24 and graph 12 it also shows that an overwhelming 69% of the participants believe that social media platforms are a very good source for gathering of product information of products while about 17% opined otherwise and about 14% chose not to commit.

I would certainly be inclined to purchase from retail firms that are responsive and responsible on social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	28	27.2	27.2	27.2
	disagree	8	7.8	7.8	35.0
	neutral	22	21.4	21.4	56.3
	strongly agree	39	37.9	37.9	94.2
	strongly disagree	6	5.8	5.8	100.0
	Total	103	100.0	100.0	

Table 25: Frequency Table of respondents willing to buy from retailers that are responsive and responsible on social media good platforms (Source: SPSS)



Graph 13: Ratio of respondents willing to buy from retailers that are responsive and responsible on social media good platforms (Source: SPSS)

From the above given table 25 and the graph13 that suggests over 65% of the respondents would definitely to make purchase from retail firms that are responsible and responsive on social media while just about 13% said they would not. However, a significant 21% remained noncommittal to the proposition.

4.2: Hypothesis Testing

While the conventional way of testing hypothesis is done by the T-test, in this case however, there were number of elements which got reflected through multiple questions in the survey. Therefore, this hypothesis was tested using the findings from the primary data.

Hypothesis 1: Offering various benefits to consumers (i.e. social media participants) can enhance social media community participation of consumers

This hypothesis corresponds to question 17 and 18 in the survey that talk about providing support to companies and brands that are responsive and supportive on social media. A T-test was performed on the Likert Scale of the answers to the questions with the following results.

T-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances

	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>
Mean	2.27451	2.568627451
Variance	1.409047	1.31702582
Observations	102	102
Pooled Variance	1.363036	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	202	
t Stat	-1.79909	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.036749	
t Critical one-tail	1.652432	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.073497	
t Critical two-tail	1.971777	

In this case the Alpha value was taken at 0.5. The results show that the P value is considerably lower than the Alpha value and hence the null hypothesis can be rejected and **therefore the hypothesis is accepted.**

As analyzed from the above data, both the survey questions ie, 17 and 18 points out the impact in consumers for the responsive and responsible interactions from brand to social media users and as mentioned above in the literature review, the sharing of information among the brand and the customer avails functional benefits. Interacting and trying to help other users like recommending to friends and family which lead to social benefits and the sense of comfort or happiness to a customer when she or he involves in a community or groups direct us towards the psychological benefits as well.

Further the fact that a large majority of the consumers also found it comfortable and enjoyed to watching the ads from the retailers on social media also indicates that hedonic benefits they get from social media groups.

Hypothesis 2: Enhancing customer participation in social media networks and platforms can help enhance brand commitment and brand trust.

For testing this hypothesis, questions 20 and 22 of the survey was considered which reflected consumers' reaction purchasing directly from social media platforms from companies and supermarkets that they trust and admire and of such companies were responsive and responsible on social media.

A T-test was performed on these questions with the following results:

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances

		<i>I</i>
Mean	2.215686275	2.176471
Variance	1.378761406	1.414094
Observations	102	102
Pooled Variance	1.396427878	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	202	
t Stat	0.236993073	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.406451167	
t Critical one-tail	1.652431964	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.812902334	
t Critical two-tail	1.971777338	

In this case the Alpha value was taken at 0.5. The results show that the P value is higher than the Alpha value and therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. It means that enhancing customer participation in social media networks and platforms cannot guarantee an enhancement in brand commitment and brand trust among consumers. This indicates that there are other

factors that play a role in creating brand commitment and brand trust such as quality and price of products, after sale service, additional benefits, etc.

Hypothesis 3: Customer engagement can be enhanced by improving the social media contents posted by brands.

For testing this hypothesis, we considered 3 sets with two questions each of the survey (questions 9 and 10; 11 and 12; 13 and 14).

The first set talks about whether consumers find it interesting to watch ads by retailing companies and supermarkets on social media and find watching them on social media more comfortable than on say television.

A T-test was performed on these questions with the following results:

T-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances

	I	I
Mean	2.637254902	2.656862745
Variance	1.540380509	1.494952436
Observations	102	102
Pooled Variance	1.517666473	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	202	
t Stat	-0.113664996	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.454808125	
t Critical one-tail	1.652431964	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.909616251	
t Critical two-tail	1.971777338	

In this case the Alpha value was taken at 0.5. The results show that the P value is considerably higher than the Alpha value and therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. It means that

vividness, product description, entertainment value and interactivity levels of social media content posted by brands cannot guarantee consumers always watching them and enjoying them

The second set of questions deals with how consumers often react to messages/posts/comments that are posted by retailing companies/supermarkets on social media and about whether the consumer are in the habit of sharing those messages from retailing companies/supermarkets on social media that I find interesting and believe that others would want to know about it.

A T-test was performed on these questions with the following results:

T-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances

	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>
Mean	2.637254902	2.67647059
Variance	1.599786449	1.52795574
Observations	102	102
Pooled Variance	1.563871093	
Hypothesized Mean		
Difference	0	
Df	202	
	-	
t Stat	0.223946578	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.411512604	
t Critical one-tail	1.652431964	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.823025208	
t Critical two-tail	1.971777338	

In this case the Alpha value was taken at 0.5. The results show that the P value is higher than the Alpha value and therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. It means that vividness, product description, entertainment value and interactivity levels of social media content posted by brands cannot guarantee consumers always sharing or reacting to them.

The last set of questions deals with whether consumers would be willing to be approached via messages on social media by retailing supermarkets and whether they often/regularly react to/post comments about a retailing companies/supermarket on their social media pages.

A T-test was performed on these questions with the following results:

T-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances

	<i>I</i>	<i>I</i>
Mean	2.794117647	2.754901961
Variance	1.670064065	1.533391574
Observations	102	102
Pooled Variance	1.60172782	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	202	
t Stat	0.221284273	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.41254731	
t Critical one-tail	1.652431964	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.825094621	
t Critical two-tail	1.971777338	

In this case the Alpha value was taken at 0.5. The results show that the P value is higher than the Alpha value and therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. It means that vividness, product description, entertainment value and interactivity levels of social media content posted by brands cannot ensure that consumers would be willing to be approached via messages on social media by retailing supermarkets regularly react to and post comments about supermarket on their social media pages.

Therefore, since all the related answers to the hypothesis supported the null hypothesis therefore this hypothesis is rejected.

4.3: Findings and Discussions

Figure 5 and Figure 6 formed the basis of the collection of primary data as developed from a review of the literature. In this section, the first diagram is tested to examine whether all of the identified benefits can prompt people to join in social media networks (i.e. improve customer participation); this enhanced customer participation can lead to the generation of brand commitment and brand trust; and eventually this, in turn, can impact the purchasing behavior of social media users.

This section also examines whether primary data has able to illustrate a degree of customer engagement on social media by retailers.

RQ1: Why do users participate in social media and social media groups and communities?

According to Kang et al. (2007), participants in social media communities expect a number of specific benefits. These benefits are also identified as the motivators for individuals to participate in online social media communities and groups to Graziani and Petrini, (2018) and should be offered and delivered on a consistent basis. Morgan and Hunt, (1994) have stated that when participants are provided with benefits of participation that are worthwhile and of value to them it is more likely that they will be more active. Some of the perceived benefits include Functional Benefits, Social Benefits, Psychological Benefits, Hedonic Benefits and Monetary Benefits.

Social media participants seeking such benefits were corroborated by primary data analysis as gathered through the survey. The empirical data collected showed that the majority of the consumers participating in the survey were regular shoppers of Irish supermarkets and were also regular users of social media (see table 1). Data also shows that a comfortable majority of the consumers were also engaged in regular viewing of product reviews on social media and accorded importance to such product reviews by other users (see table 2). This indicated that the product reviews that are done by members of social media networks were important to consumers.

Further, primary data also showed that the purchasing behavior of the majority of the consumers would be positively impacted if a product or a brand is appreciated by friends and peers on social media (see table 10). Similarly, the majority of the consumers would also reject a product or a

service that carries negative responses and reviews from friends and peers on social media (see table 11).

Based on these revelations, it can be said that product reviews on social media by is important for consumers in terms of shaping their purchasing behavior and hence these are functional benefits for consumers who are also regular users of social media.

Consumers also expect other functional benefits such as solving issues brought up by consumers over products and services of retail brands on the social media pages of the brands. For example, in question 16 of the survey in which a large majority of the respondent (over 62%) opined that they would appreciate if retailers reacted to and solved problems that were raised about products and services of such companies by the respondents on the companies' social media pages and handles (see table 19). And primary data analysis also indicated more than 69% of consumers believe that social media platforms are a very good source for the gathering of product information of products (see table 24).

Primary data analysis has shown that a large majority of consumers participating in the survey would readily recommend those retailers who solve issues of the participants when they are proactively posted on social media. For example, a large majority of the participants (more than 65%) were ready to recommend those retailers who solve issues of the participants when they are posted on social media in a proactive manner (see table 20)and more than 55% of the consumers were willing to support and spread good word about those retailing firms that are responsive and supportive on social media (see table 21).

Additionally, consumers were also willing to exhibit their commitment and trust in such retail brands by supporting and spreading the good word about the firms that provided those who were responsive and supportive on social media. For example, primary data showed that 66% of the respondents were willing to purchase products directly from the social media pages and handles of retailers and brands that they trust and admire if such services were offered and particularly from those companies and brands that they perceive to be responsible and responsive on social media (see table 23).

The majority of consumers also were looking to get exclusive offers by retail brands, on whose social media pages and handles consumers are active and regular, through social media and they were even readily willing to make direct purchases from social media from trusted brands and retailers if such services offered. For example, more than 60% of the consumers expect to get exclusive offers on social media from retailers on whose pages and handles the consumers were regulars (see table 22).

RQ2: How can businesses influence/impact participants/members of social media or social media groups/communities?

According to Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan, (2012), consumers who have some level of commitment to a brand tend to choose that particular brand over other rival brands during a purchase decision making process while the opposite behavior is exhibited by those consumers who are less committed to one or any brand, found Rivera and Cox, (2016). Participants of the online community or social media discuss and debate about products and services in detail, and according to Casaló, Flavián and Guinalú, (2007), such consumers may develop expertise about the products or brands and also help other members within the community. Further, this development of emotional ties toward particular brands also indicates a positive attitude towards the brand. This can therefore also help to develop a relationship of trust between the online or social media community member and a company or a brand (Deighton, 1992). And past studies have established that the development of a trust relationship between a brand and consumers is the right recipe for consumers' long-term relationship and commitment to a brand (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Harris and Goode, 2004). Casaló, Flavián and Guinalú, (2007) stated that frequent participation in online social media community activities such as through posting and reviewing of messages of other members on social media, more knowledge about brands is gained by such participants. Such exchange of information and data among members of online communities – particularly those that are able to elicit mostly positive comments and experience, are also able to make individual participants feel satisfied with a particular brand and which can develop into a form of trust in the brand (Ha and Perks, 2005). Moreover, the role of online social media communities is also viewed as being that of bulletin boards used for posting opinions and suggestions by consumers - which have been known to have been recognized and picked up by companies and brands to implement changes, alterations and modification in their

products or services (Casaló et al., 2007). With a continuous process of interaction, communication and engagement between brands and online social media community members – that also includes consumers, initiated and maintained by the brands, it is possible for brands to encourage members of such communities to develop trust on brands (Racherla, Mandviwalla and Connolly, 2012). However, it is important for companies and brands, that desire to achieve as an outcome to sustainably deliver what consumers or members of an online community want and to even exceed the expectations of such members or participants. And when consumers or members become satisfied with what they receive in return from companies or brands, as has been discussed in the section on expected benefits from participation in online social media communities, it is likely that the level of activities and participation and even trust on the brand would get enhanced (Deighton, 1992). This can lead to the development of a relationship of trust between the online or social media community members and a company or a brand. Further, Harris and Goode, (2004) and other previous researchers have suggested the business can establish a mutual relationship of trust between a brand or a company and online social media community members. These findings from social media were also illustrated through primary data analysis as below.

Primary data has indicated several ways that businesses can influence consumers over social media because about 54% of the respondent was in the habit of regularly watching ads from retailers on social media (see table 12) and a similar number of them enjoyed or felt more comfortable to watch such ads on social media through handheld devices compared to traditional media such as television (see table 13). Good content on social media can also help firms and brands to induce consumers to share marketing and other interesting messages over social media. For example, about half of the consumers would be ready to share interesting messages from retailers posted on social media so that other users could read them, as discovered from primary data (see table 15).

Further by solving issues of consumers that are posted on social media in a proactive manner as desired by the majority of consumer, can prompt those consumers to spread the good word about the specific brand. For example, according to primary data more than 65% of consumers would happily recommend such retailers and brands to other users of social media (see table 21) and would also be willing to support and spread good word about those brands(see table 23).

With sufficient incentives and engagement over social media, retailers and brands may also prompt consumers to purchase their products directly from social media pages and handles of retailers, provided that they are able to build up a relationship of trust and admiration with consumers as shown by primary data where 66% of the respondents were agreeable to make such direct purchases(see table 23). That indicated the possibility of creating a form of loyalty and commitment of consumers towards those retailers and brands that are perceived by them to be responsible and proactive and are attentive to consumer issues – particularly on social media.

RQ3: Can engaging consumers on social media help brands to and retail businesses to enhance brand commitment and brand trust?

Businesses can influence social media users by providing them the benefits mentioned previously in a sustained manner. Secondary data has also indicated the possible results of the offering of such benefits. For example, Casaló et al., (2007) predicted that positively influencing social media participants by businesses and brands can result in such users developing brand commitment or emotional ties toward particular brands when such brand or product-related activities abound in an online community or on a particular social media group.

Further, Casaló, Flavián and Guinalíu, (2007) stated that frequent participation in online social media community activities such as through posting and reviewing of messages of other members on social media, more knowledge about brands is gained by such participants. Such exchange of information and data among members of online communities – particularly those that can elicit mostly positive comments and experience, are also able to make individual participants feel satisfied with a particular brand and which can develop into a form of trust in the brand. That can ultimately lead to the development of a relationship of trust between the online or social media community members and a company or a brand, which is a precursor for maintaining of such relationships in the long-term. That, according to Harris and Goode, (2004), can help to develop brand commitment and trust on a brand, these secondary data findings were corroborated from the analysis of primary data.

The empirical data collected has shown that 63% of the respondents regularly view product reviews on social media while about 54% of the respondent was in the habit of regularly watching ads from retailers on social media (see table 12) and a similar number were also

comfortable in watching them on social media - potentially through handheld devices, compared to traditional media such as television (see table 13).

However, a sizable number of consumers were either not used to or felt uncomfortable watching advertisements on social media. This meant that broadcasting simple advertisements on social media will not serve the purpose of engaging consumers. Rather the focus is the need for rich and interesting content that is exclusively available on social media. This aspect was explored in the later sections of the survey.

Primary data has also shown that while more than half of the consumers often react to the messages on social media from firms and retailers (see table 14), they were also willing to share interesting messages from retailers so that their other users could read them (see table 15). But almost half of the consumers also were not willing to do so and one of the factors could be the lack of interesting messages or content posted by retailers on social media. Therefore, the field for encouraging more consumers to messages and content from retailers is wide open, and hence the more engaging, entertaining and interesting the content is the higher the chance of such messages being interacted with by consumers and users of social media networks.

Primary data has also indicated that retailers and brands may even be able to generate loyalty and commitment towards those brands by being perceived as responsible and proactive and are attentive to consumer issues as expressed by them on social media. For example, the survey data analysis has shown that 66% consumers in the survey would be making a direct purchase from social media pages and handles of retailers, if such services were offered to them provided such retailers were perceived by them as being responsible and responsive on social media, such as by solving consumer issues posted on social media (see table 23).

Engaging Consumers on Social Media

In addition to finding answers to the research questions, primary data also shed light on how retailers and brands can better engage with consumers on social media.

One of the elements of engaging more consumers on social media, as found in secondary data, was the interactivity of the social media posts. Primary data gathered from the survey showed that a little less than half of the consumers (45%) of the consumers participating in the survey

were agreeable to be contacted by retailers on social media but a similar number of consumers (43%) were also unwilling. Therefore, combined with the consumers who were neutral or undecided (21%), it can be said that a large number of people were already willing to get more engaged with retailers and brands. It is hence the responsibility of retailers to encourage and convince more consumers to interact directly with the companies and be open to being contacted by the companies for marketing and other purposes.

Further, the wide scope for Irish retailers to engage consumers through their posts on social media can be gauged from the survey finding that less than half of the consumers are in the habit of reacting to and commenting on such posts (46%) while a majority of the consumers who participated in the survey (more than 61%) also expect retailing firms to react to posts and comments made by them on the social media pages of retailing firms.

Therefore, while there is a dearth of Irish retailers being able to excite consumers enough on social media to make them react to posts by brands, there are also expectations that retail companies also acknowledge and react to posts by consumers on brands' social media pages and handles. This, therefore, indicates a gap between expectations and delivery by Irish retail brands on social media.

Retailers and brands can also better engage with consumers by providing detailed and accurate product information. This is also what emerged from primary data wherein about 69% of the consumers participating in the survey believe that social media platforms are a very good source for the gathering of product information of products and just about 17% tended to depend more on other sources of information for products.

Another element of consumer engagement is *Entertainment value* of the messages and content posted by retailers and brands on social media. Secondary data showed that higher the entertainment value the more is the chance of engaging consumers. This was also reflected in the primary data which showed that majority of the consumers (54%) regularly watch ads from retailers on social media and a similar number (52.5%) found watching such ads on social media to be more comfortable for them through handheld devices compared to traditional media such as television. The entertainment value aspect is further supported by primary data which found that more than half of the consumers (52.5%) often react to the messages on social media from firms

and retailers and 50.4% of them were also willing to share interesting messages from retailers on social media so that their others users could read them.

Chapter 5: Research Summary and Conclusion

5.1: Conclusion

The dissertation primarily glances into two aspects. The first is the factors that induce or motivate people to become members of online groups and communities – specifically on social media platforms, and the outcomes of brands and companies managing to meet those motivators. The second aspect was investigating the elements that can create greater customer engagement of consumers on social media platforms by brands and companies.

“Why do users participate in social media and social media groups and communities?”

The study found out that number of primary factors which prompt or motivate people to become part of social media groups. Past studies have identified these are perceived benefits that the users seek to obtain from participation in online communities and groups such as those that are present on social media platforms, includes functional benefits, social benefits, psychological benefits, hedonic benefits, and monetary benefits.

The empirical data collected during this research showed that functional benefits such as product reviews by other users by regular viewing of product reviews on social media by other users and according to importance to such product reviews were considered important motivators for the majority of the consumers. The importance of this functional benefit was further illustrated in primary data from the finding that a majority of the consumers get positively impacted if a product or a brand is appreciated by their friends and peers on social media while they reject a product or a service that carries negative comments from the same. Other functional benefits expected by consumers, as indicated in empirical data, include retailers and brands reacting to and solved consumer’s problems were by them in social media pages and handles of the retailers and brands as well as using social media platforms as a very good source for gathering of product information. Reviews and interactions with brand pages along with other users provide consumers a social benefit and can be represented as one of a psychological benefit

And finally, a vast majority of consumers expecting special and exclusive offers being made to them because of their activeness on the social media pages and handles of retailers, also reflect the monetary benefits that they seek to gain by being part of social media groups

‘Ways in which businesses can influence/impact participants/members of social media or social media groups/communities’

Further, secondary research has also found that when there are a commitment and loyalty towards a social media group, including those created by brands, there is also a higher chance of consumers developing brand commitment and brand trust as well. While studying this aspect, secondary research also found that brand commitment and brand trust of consumers can influence the purchase-decision making process because those denote a strong and positive psychological attachment to the particular brand as stated by Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan, (2012).

Empirical data also concluded that if the social media content posted by retailers were good and interesting, there was a high chance of consumers sharing such messages and content with other users. Retailers can also encourage and even prompt consumers to spread the good word about their brand by being proactive and responsive on social media such as by solving issues of consumers that are posted on social media. Consumers can also be motivated to make direct purchases from social media pages and handles of retailers through the incentives and engagement with consumers, primary data indicated. And lastly, if a retailer or a brand able to build up a relationship of trust and admiration with consumers, it can also make consumers loyal and committed.

‘Engaging consumers on social media and enhancement of brand commitment and trust’

Secondary data has shown that members of strong online communities tend to develop expertise about products or brands talked about and discussed continuously within such communities (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). Therefore, it is likely with positive discussions about products or brands, members of such social media communities could also develop a liking for the brand – ultimately resulting in develop brand commitment or emotional ties towards a brand (Muniz and O ‘Guinn, 2001).

This was partially corroborated by primary data that showed signs of possible commitment, fondness, and positive attitude and trust towards a brand. Empirical data showed that such feelings of trust and commitment can be expressed in the form of regular watching and sharing of ads from retailers on social media. This was reflected in consumers expressing interest to make direct purchase from social media pages and handles of retailers if such services were offered to them.

Therefore, it can be concluded that retailers and brands can generate brand commitment and trust among consumers through social media provided they also fulfill several conditions such as being proactive, responsible and reactive to consumers' needs and wants and issues that are expressed by them on social media and presenting interesting and engaging content on social media.

Further, this study also investigated the elements that can create greater customer engagement of consumers on social media platforms by brands and companies. In that context, the study defined consumer engagement as the greater interaction of consumers with brands on social media. A host of researchers such as Araujo and Neijens, (2012), Lin and Lu, (2011) and Ruiz-Mafe et al., (2014) have suggested that there is a higher tendency among participants in social media groups and pages to like, share and comment on interesting content posted by brands. The study identified a number of elements that the social media messages by brands should have to be able to engage consumers to a greater extent on social media. These include:

- Vividness of content
- High interactivity of message content
- An Efficient and detailed description of a product
- The Entertainment quotient of content on social media and
- Novel content

While secondary data has managed to establish a relationship between high participation of consumers on social media groups created and maintained by brands and the brand commitment and trust, primary data helped to establish the factors that can better engage consumers with brands on social media. However, Hypothesis 3 has been rejected statistically, empirical data questions signs that it is possible to generate some degree brand commitment and trust as

consumers were willing to make a direct purchase from brands' social media pages and handle provided the brands can better engage consumers on social media.

Empirical data also showed that consumers were engaged with social media posts and content from brands and are willing to exhibit brand commitment and brand trust such as through recommend those retailers to others and supporting and spreading the good word about the brands. However, the rider for such expression of commitment and trust was that brands should be able to fulfill as many of the perceived benefits of participation or consumers on social media groups.

Based on the above, it can be said that if brands are able to create engaging content on social media, they will be able to engage more consumers and those brands that can meet or offer more of such perceived benefits to consumers, it is more likely to increase chances of creating brand commitment and brand trust among such consumers over social media.

5.2: Contribution and Implications

The results of this study can potentially make divergent contributions through the empirical data gathered and the statistical analysis conducted.

The importance of social media as a medium of communication and reaching out to consumers over social media has been underscored in this research. The research results point out how retailers and brands can use social media to engage with consumers.

Secondly, this study contributes useful insights and knowledge about the importance of the content of messages posted by retailers and brands on social media aimed at users – who could comprise of current and potential consumers. The study highlights four important elements that such content and messages should contain to better engage with social media users.

The results of the study also bring out the importance of being responsive and proactive in identifying issues raised by consumers and being supportive to react to them and possibly solve them.

Finally, this study provides some important practical implications for Irish retailers. Based on the outcomes of this study the following specific recommendations are made for a consideration by Irish retailers interested in using social media to their benefit.

Offering benefits to customers of participating in social media pages and handles of brands

- ✓ Retailers should give great importance to consumer comments on social primary data shows that it is important for consumers in terms of shaping their purchasing behavior and Social media Content
- ✓ Brands need to focus on identifying comments related to complaints about products and services on the social media pages of the brands and solve such issues. There is a need for brands to be proactively responsive and supportive of social media. This can lead to consumers actively and readily recommending those retailers who solve issues of the participants. Additionally, consumers would also likely exhibit a commitment to such retail brands by supporting and spreading the good word about the brand's firms provided that those were responsive and supportive on social media.
- ✓ Brands need to provide exclusive offers on social media pages and handles who are active consumers and regulars on such social media pages and handles
- ✓ Brands can also consider making direct purchasing offers and systems from their social media pages and handles for the aforementioned group of consumers.

Enhancing Consumer Engagement on Social Media by Brands

- ✓ Satisfy information needs with elaborate product information on social media with rich data in content posted
- ✓ Do not engage in simply putting up TV or newspaper ads on social media. Rather focus on creating and posting rich and interesting content that is exclusively available on social media. This can enhance the habit of consumers to watch ads from retailers on social media
- ✓ Engaging and interactive content such as holding some form of a contest or an opportunity to be creative for consumers on social media.
- ✓ Such engaging and interesting content on social media can lead to consumers sharing such messages with other users.

- ✓ Not all customers prefer to be directly contacted on social media and therefore those should be carefully considered prior to being very proactive in engaging consumers on social media. Rather retailers need to try and encourage and convince more consumers to interact directly and be open to being contacted for marketing and other purposes.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

While this study brought out some interesting findings, it also highlighted some areas which can be researched in the future. This researcher feels that more research needs to be done on the specific issue of what contributes to an engaging and interesting content on social media that retailers and brands can post. While this study has identified four core elements of engaging social media content, there is potentially scope for identifying more such crucial elements for content.

Secondly, there is also scope in future studies to examine in greater detail the specific perceived benefits that consumers seek to achieve when they participate in online social media communities and groups. Further studies can be done on specific benefits that retailers and brands can provide consumers over social media, in addition to the few that have been identified here, that can help attract more social media users to retailers and brands.

5.4: Limitations of the Research

One of the major limitations of this research was the limited number of respondents that the researcher managed to gather for the survey with 103 people responding and completing the survey. This research was also limited by restrictions on movements because of the Covid-19 pandemic which prevented the researcher to have face-to-face interactions with the respondents. In that context, therefore, social media and emails were the only modes of any comprehensive communication. Given the limitations of the pandemic therefore, this research tried its best to get as large a sample size as possible for the primary data collection process. Further, since the sample size was small and limitations on communication due to the pandemic, therefore, greater focus was given on making the survey questionnaire as small as possible but as specific as possible so that all or most of the elements of the conceptual framework were incorporated.

References

- Anderson, E. and Weitz, B.(1989) Determinants of Continuity in Conventional Industrial Channel Dyads, *Marketing Science*, 8(4), pp.310-323
- Araujo, T. and Neijens, P.(2012) Friend me: which factors influence top global brands participation in social network sites, *Internet Research*, 22(5), pp.626-640.
- Ashley, C. and Tuten, T.(2014) Creative Strategies in Social Media Marketing: An Exploratory Study of Branded Social Content and Consumer Engagement, *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(1), pp.15-27.
- Babbie, E.(2010) *The Practice Of Social Research*. 1st ed. Cengage Learning.
- Bagozzi, R. and Dholakia, U.(2002) Intentional social action in virtual communities, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 16(2), pp.2-21.
- Bagozzi, R. and Dholakia, U.(2006) Antecedents and purchase consequences of customer participation in small group brand communities, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 23(1), pp.45-61.
- Balasubramanian, S. and Mahajan, V.(2001) The economic leverage of the virtual community. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 5(3), pp.103-138.
- Bressler, S. and Grantham, C.(2000) *Communities Of Commerce*. New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.
- Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2011) *Business Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burke, R., Martin, G. and Cooper, C. (2011) *Corporate reputation*. Farnham, Surrey: Gower
- Butler, B.(2001). Membership Size, Communication Activity, and Sustainability: A Resource-Based Model of Online Social Structures. *Information Systems Research*, 12(4), pp.346-362.
- Butler, B., Sproull, L., Kiesler, S. and Kraut, R.(2002) Community Effort in Online Groups: Who Does the Work and Why. In: S. Weisband and L. Atwater, ed., *Leadership at a distance*, 1st ed. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Casaló, L., Flavián, C. and Guinalíu, M.(2007) The impact of participation in virtual brand communities on consumer trust and loyalty. *Online Information Review*, 31(6), pp.775-792.
- Chan, K. and Li, S.(2010) Understanding consumer-to-consumer interactions in virtual communities: The salience of reciprocity. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(9-10), pp.1033-1040.
- Chua, A. and Banerjee, S.(2013) Customer knowledge management via social media: the case of Starbucks. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 17(2), pp.237-249.
- Coyle, J. and Thorson, E.(2001) The Effects of Progressive Levels of Interactivity and Vividness in Web Marketing Sites. *Journal of Advertising*, 30(3), pp.65-77.
- de Souza, C. and Preece, J.(2004) A framework for analyzing and understanding online communities. *Interacting with Computers*, 16(3), pp.579-610.
- de Vries, L., Gensler, S. and Leeflang, P.(2012) Popularity of Brand Posts on Brand Fan Pages: An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(2), pp.83-91.
- Deighton, J.(2007) *Dove: Evolution Of A Brand*. 1st ed. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Denscombe, M. (2014). *Good Research Guide*. London: McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Dholakia, U., Bagozzi, R. and Pearo, L.(2004) A social influence model of consumer participation in network- and small-group-based virtual communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 21(3), pp.241-263
- Dholakia, U., Blazevic, V., Wiertz, C. and Algesheimer, R.(2009) Communal Service Delivery: How Customers Benefit from Participation in Firm-Hosted Virtual P3 Communities. *SSRN Electronic Journal*
- Di Gangi, P. and Wasko, M.(2016) Social Media Engagement Theory. *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing*, 28(2), pp.53-73.

- Dijkmans, C., Kerkhof, P. and Beukeboom, C. (2015). A stage to engage: Social media use and corporate reputation. *Tourism Management*, 47, pp.58-67.
- Dong-Hun, L., 2010. Growing popularity of social media and business strategy. *SERI Quarterly*, 3(4), pp.112-117.
- Ebrahim, R., 2019. The Role of Trust in Understanding the Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Equity and Brand Loyalty. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, pp.1-22.
- Ekeh, P., 1974. Social Exchange Theory. London: Heinemann Educational.
- Elsharnouby, T. and Parsons, E., 2013. When Relationship Marketing Goes Wrong: Opportunism and Consumer Well-Being in Consumer-Bank Relationships. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 12(2), pp.141-163.
- Fortin, D. and Dholakia, R., 2005. Interactivity and vividness effects on social presence and involvement with a web-based advertisement. *Journal of Business Research*, 58(3), pp.387-396.
- Garbarino, E. and Johnson, M., 1999. The Different Roles of Satisfaction, Trust, and Commitment in Customer Relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(2), p.70.
- Gawas, A., Niyati, N., Kulkarni, P. and Mehendale, S. (2018). The Role of Social Media Marketing In Customer Purchase Intent-A Methodological and Thematic Review. *Asian Journal of Management*, 9(1), p.761.
- Goldsmith, R. and Horowitz, D. (2006). Measuring Motivations for Online Opinion Seeking. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 6(2), pp.2-14.
- Gray, M. (2015). Putting Social Media in Its Place: A Curatorial Theory for Media's Noisy Social Worlds. *Social Media + Society*, 1(1), p.205630511557868.
- Graziani, E. and Petrini, F., 2018. Online Communities. Benefits and Risks. *International Journal of User-Driven Healthcare*, 8(2), pp.1-13.
- growsmartbusiness.com. (2012). *The State of Small Business Report*. [online] Available at: http://growsmartbusiness.com/smallbusiness/wp-content/files/State_of_Small_Business_Report_Wave_5.pdf [Accessed 21 May 2020].

- Gu, B. and Jarvenpaa, S., 2003. Online Discussion Boards for Technical Support: The Effect of Token Recognition on Customer Contributions. In: ICIS 2003 Proceedings. [online] Association for Information Systems. Available at: <<https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis2003/10/>> [Accessed 11 June 2020].
- Gwinner, K., Gremler, D. and Bitner, M., 1998. Relational Benefits in Services Industries: The Customer's Perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 26(2), pp.101-114
- Ha, H. and Perks, H., 2005. Effects of consumer perceptions of brand experience on the web: brand familiarity, satisfaction and brand trust. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 4(6), pp.438-452.
- Hagel, J. and Armstrong, A., 2000. Net Gain: Expanding Markets Through Virtual Communities. 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press; McKinsey & Company, Inc.
- Hapsari, R., 2018. Enhancing Brand Loyalty Through Online Brand Community: The Role of Value Creation Process, Brand Love, and Trust. *KnE Social Sciences*, 3(10).
- Harris, L. and Goode, M., 2004. The four levels of loyalty and the pivotal role of trust: a study of online service dynamics. *Journal of Retailing*, 80(2), pp.139-158.
- Harris, L., O'Malley, L. and Patterson, M., 2003. Professional Interaction: Exploring the Concept of Attraction. *Marketing Theory*, 3(1), pp.9-36.
- Heinonen, K. (2011). Consumer activity in social media: Managerial approaches to consumers' social media behavior. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 10(6), pp.356-364.
- Hollebeek, L., 2011. Demystifying customer brand engagement: Exploring the loyalty nexus. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(7-8), pp.785-807.
- TheINQUIRER*. [online] Available at: <http://www.theinquirer.net/inquirer/news/1589058/there-75-million-twitter-users> <http://www.theinquirer.net>. (2018). *There are 75 million Twitter users* / [Accessed 21 May 2020].
- Huang, J. and Chen, Y. (2006). Herding in online product choice. *Psychology and Marketing*, 23(5), pp.413-428

- Ikegami, E. and Hut, P., 2008. Avatars Are For Real: Virtual Communities and Public Spheres. *Journal For Virtual Worlds Research*, 1(1).
- Jones, Q. and Rafaeli, S., 2000. Time to split, virtually: Discourse architecture' and 'community building' create vibrant virtual publics. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce and Business Media*, 10(4), pp.214-223.
- Kang, I., Lee, K., Lee, S. and Choi, J., 2007. Investigation of online community voluntary behavior using cognitive map. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23(1), pp.111-126.
- Kaplan, A. and Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), pp.59-68.
- Kasavana, M., Nusair, K. and Teodosic, K., 2010. Online social networking: redefining the human web. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 1(1), pp.68-82.
- Kietzmann, J., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. and Silvestre, B. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), pp.241-251.
- Kim, K., Sin, S. and He, Y., 2013. Information seeking through social media: Impact of user characteristics on social media use. *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 50(1), pp.1-4.
- Kozinets, R., 1999. E-tribalized marketing?: the strategic implications of virtual communities of consumption. *European Management Journal*, 17(3), pp.252-264.
- Kumar, V., Aksoy, L., Donkers, B., Venkatesan, R., Wiesel, T. and Tillmanns, S., 2010. Undervalued or Overvalued Customers: Capturing Total Customer Engagement Value. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), pp.297-310.
- Latane, B., 1981. The psychology of social impact. *American Psychologist*, 36(4), pp.343-356.
- Lee, F., Vogel, D. and Limayem, M., 2003. Virtual community informatics: A review and research agenda. *The Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application*, 5(1), pp.47-61.

- Leedy, P. and Ormrod, J., 2020. *Practical Research*. Harlow, United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited.
- Lin, K. and Lu, H., 2011. Intention to Continue Using Facebook Fan Pages from the Perspective of Social Capital Theory. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14(10), pp.565-570.
- Lin, K. and Lu, H., 2011. Why people use social networking sites: An empirical study integrating network externalities and motivation theory. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(3), pp.1152-1161.
- Lingel, J., 2017. Networked Field Studies: Comparative Inquiry and Online Communities. *Social Media + Society*, 3(4), p.205630511774313.
- Liu, Y. and Shrum, L., 2002. What is Interactivity and is it Always Such a Good Thing? Implications of Definition, Person, and Situation for the Influence of Interactivity on Advertising Effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 31(4), pp.53-64.
- Lohtia, R., Donthu, N. and Yaveroglu, I., 2007. Evaluating the efficiency of Internet banner advertisements. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(4), pp.365-370.
- Lytvynenko, K. and Donetska, A., 2019. SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT ON HRM DEVELOPMENT. *Efektivna ekonomika*, (11).
- Maloney-Krichmar, D. and Preece, J., 2005. A multilevel analysis of sociability, usability, and community dynamics in an online health community. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI)*, 12(2), pp.201-232.
- Maxfield, M. and Babbie, E. (2014). *Research methods for criminal justice and criminology*. 7th ed. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth.
- Mendelson, A., 2001. Effects of Novelty in News Photographs on Attention and Memory. *Media Psychology*, 3(2), pp.119-157.
- Morgan, R. and Hunt, S., 1994. The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), p.20.

- Morrel-Samuels, P. and Zimmerman, M., 2010. Research Methodology: An Innovative Approach to a Venerable Course. *Clinical and Translational Science*, 3(6), pp.309-311.
- Muniz, A. and O'Guinn, T., 2001. Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), pp.412-432.
- Newman, M., 2003. The Structure and Function of Complex Networks. *SIAM Review*, 45(2), pp.167-256.
- Ng, W. and Coakes, E., 2014. *Business Research*. London: Kogan Page.
- Nishimura, S., Waryszak, R. and King, B., 2006. Guidebook use by Japanese tourists: a qualitative study of Australia inbound travellers. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 8(1), pp.13-26
- Parsons, R. and Moffat, K. (2014). Integrating impact and relational dimensions of social licence and social impact assessment. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 32(4), pp.273-282.
- Parsons, R. and Moffat, K. (2014). Integrating impact and relational dimensions of social licence and social impact assessment. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 32(4), pp.273-282.
- Peter, J., Olson, J. and Grunert, K., 1999. *Consumer Behavior And Marketing Strategy (European Edition)*. 1st ed. Berkshire: European edition. McGraw-Hill.
- Peter, J., Olson, J. and Grunert, K., 1999. *Consumer Behavior And Marketing Strategy (European Edition)*. 1st ed. Berkshire: European edition. McGraw-Hill.
- Pookulangara, S. and Koesler, K. (2011). Cultural influence on consumers' usage of social networks and its' impact on online purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 18(4), pp.348-354.
- Prahalad, C. and Ramaswamy, V., 2004. Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), pp.5-14.
- Preece, J. and Maloney-Krichmar, D., 2005. Online Communities: Design, Theory, and Practice. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10(4), pp.00-00.

- Preece, J., 2000. *Online Communities*. 1st ed. Chichester: Wiley.
- Preece, J., 2000. *Online Communities: Designing Usability, Supporting Sociability*. 1st ed. Chichester: Wiley.
- Preece, J., Maloney-Krichmar, D. and Abras, C., 2003. History and emergence of online communities. In: B. Wellman, ed., *In Encyclopedia of Community*, 1st ed. Berkshire Publishing Group.
- Racherla, P., Mandviwalla, M. and Connolly, D., 2012. Factors affecting consumers' trust in online product reviews. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 11(2), pp.94-104.
- Raney, A., Arpan, L., Pashupati, K. and Brill, D., 2003. At the movies, on the Web: An investigation of the effects of entertaining and interactive Web content on site and brand evaluations. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 17(4), pp.38-53.
- Rheingold, H., 1994. *The Virtual Community*. 1st ed. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Ridings, C., Gefen, D. and Arinze, B., 2002. Some antecedents and effects of trust in virtual communities. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 11(3-4), pp.271-295.
- Rivera, G. and Cox, A., 2016. A Practice-Based Approach to Understanding Participation in Online Communities. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 21(1), pp.17-32.
- Rohm, A., D. Kaltcheva, V. and R. Milne, G., 2013. A mixed-method approach to examining brand-consumer interactions driven by social media. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 7(4), pp.295-311.
- Ruiz-Mafe, C., Martí-Parreño, J. and Sanz-Blas, S., 2014. Key drivers of consumer loyalty to Facebook fan pages. *Online Information Review*, 38(3), pp.362-380.
- Saad, G., 2001. Strategic performance evaluation: descriptive and prescriptive analysis. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, 101(8), pp.390-399.
- Salaberry, M. and Comajoan, L., 2013. *Research Design And Methodology In Studies On L2 Tense And Aspect*. Boston: De Gruyter.

Samuels, W., Biddle, J. and Emmett, R., 2008. *Research In The History Of Economic Thought And Methodology*. Bingley: Emerald JAI.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2016. *Research Methods For Business Students*. Harlow (Essex): Pearson.

Sawhney, M., Verona, G. and Prandelli, E., 2005. Collaborating to create: The Internet as a platform for customer engagement in product innovation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 19(4), pp.4-17.

Schau, H., Muñiz, A. and Arnould, E., 2009. How Brand Community Practices Create Value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), pp.30-51.

Shoemaker, S. and Lewis, R., 1999. Customer loyalty: the future of hospitality marketing. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 18(4), pp.345-370.

Sigala, M., 2018. THE LOYALTY IMPLICATIONS OF CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT IN NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT: FINDINGS FROM THE MOGUL CO-CREATION COMMUNITY. *Global Fashion Management Conference*, 2018, pp.243-243.

Sledgianowski, D. and Kulviwat, S., 2009. Using social network sites: the effects of playfulness, critical mass and trust in a hedonic context, *Journal of computer information systems*. *Using social network sites: the effects of playfulness, critical mass and trust in a hedonic context*, *Journal of computer information systems*, 49(4), pp.74-83.

smartinsights.com, 2020. *Global Social Media Research Summary 2020 | Smart Insights*. [online] Smart Insights. Available at: <<https://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/>> [Accessed 21 May 2020].

Srauy, S., 2015. The Limits of Social Media: What Social Media Can Be, and What We Should Hope They Never Become. *Social Media + Society*, 1(1), p.205630511557867.

Steuer, J., 1992. Defining Virtual Reality: Dimensions Determining Telepresence. *Journal of Communication*, 42(4), pp.73-93.

- Stewart, D. and Pavlou, P., 2002. From Consumer Response to Active Consumer: Measuring the Effectiveness of Interactive Media. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 30(4), pp.376-396.
- Strippel, C. (2014). Dhiraj Murthy (2013): Twitter. Social Communication in the Twitter Age. Cambridge: Polity Press. M&K, pp.110-111.
- Tafesse, W. and Wien, A., 2017. Using Message Strategy to Drive Consumer Behavioral Engagement on Social Media. *SSRN Electronic Journal*,.
- Tafesse, W. and Wien, A., 2018. Using message strategy to drive consumer behavioral engagement on social media. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 35(3), pp.241-253.
- Tokunaga, R., 2013. Engagement With Novel Virtual Environments: The Role of Perceived Novelty and Flow in the Development of the Deficient Self-Regulation of Internet Use and Media Habits. *Human Communication Research*, 39(3), pp.365-393.
- Vasal, D. (2018). Impact of Social Connectivity on the Herding Behavior. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.
- Virzi, K. and Parrington, C., 2019. Identifying Factors That Hinder the Acceptance of Chinese Brands among US Consumers. *OALib*, 06(07), pp.1-12.
- Vivek, S., Beatty, S. and Morgan, R., 2012. Customer Engagement: Exploring Customer Relationships Beyond Purchase. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 20(2), pp.122-146.
- Wang, X., Yu, C. and Wei, Y. (2012). Social Media Peer Communication and Impacts on Purchase Intentions: A Consumer Socialization Framework. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(4), pp.198-208.
- Wang, Y. and Fesenmaier, D., 2004. Towards understanding members' general participation in and active contribution to an online travel community. *Tourism Management*, 25(6), pp.709-722.
- Wang, Y., Yu, Q. and Fesenmaier, D., 2002. Defining the virtual tourist community: implications for tourism marketing. *Tourism Management*, 23(4), pp.407-417.

wearesocial.com, 2020. *Digital 2019: Global Internet Use Accelerates - We Are Social*. [online] We Are Social. Available at: <<https://wearesocial.com/blog/2019/01/digital-2019-global-internet-use-accelerates>> [Accessed 21 May 2020].

Wellman, B. and Gulia, M., 1999. Net Surfers don't ride alone: Virtual communities as 29 communities. In: B. Wellman, ed., *Networks in the Global Village*, 1st ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press., pp.331-366.

Welman, C., Kruger, F., Mitchell, B. and Huysamen, G. (2005). *Research methodology*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press

Williams, R. and Cothrel, J., 2000. Four smart ways to run online communities. *Sloan Management Review*, 41(4), pp.81-91.

www.cmocouncil.org. (2018). *Facts - Resources - Chief Marketing Office (CMO) Council*. [online] Available at: <https://www.cmocouncil.org/resources/facts> [Accessed 25 Apr. 2018].

Appendices

Internet Mediated Survey Questionnaire (Google forms)

Exploring the possible impact of social media on brand loyalty and trust within the Irish Retail Industry from the perspective of customers

* Required

Personal Data

(Please indicate appropriately)

GENDER *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say

AGE *

- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 46-60
- ☐ Over 60

Exploring the possible impact of social media on brand loyalty and trust within the Irish Retail Industry from the perspective of customers

* Required

Details about influence of social media on purchasing behavior of the respondent

1) Are you a regular shopper from the Irish supermarkets? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

2) I am a regular/daily user of social media platforms *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

3) I am in the habit of regularly viewing product reviews on social media *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

4) I usually consider product reviews by other members on social media quite seriously *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

5) I generally tend to believe what the majority of my friends and their friends, and so on, on social media say about a product *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

6) I buy my grocery products after reviewing them on social *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

7) I will definitely be inclined to purchase a product that is appreciated by my friends and family on social media *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

8) I will definitely reject a product or brand if there are negative comments about it by other users of social media *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

9) I always/most of the time watch ads by retailing companies/supermarkets on social media? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

10) I always find watching ads (as mentioned in the previous question) on social media more comfortable than on say television *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

11) I often react to messages that are posted by retailing companies/supermarkets on social media *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

12) I am in the habit of sharing those messages from retailing companies/supermarkets on social media that I find interesting and believe that others would want to know about it *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

13) I would like to be approached via messages on social media by retailing companies/supermarkets *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

14) I often/regularly react to/post comments about a retailing companies/supermarket on their social media pages *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

15) I expect retailing companies/supermarkets to react to my posts and comments on their social media pages/handles *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

16) I will certainly be quite appreciative if representatives of retailing companies/supermarket react to and resolve issues that are raised by me or others on retailing companies/supermarket's social media pages/handles *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

17) I would also recommend such responsive retailing companies/supermarkets to my friends and family *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

18) I will be willing to support such responsive and responsible retail companies/supermarkets on social media and spread positive elements about them on social media *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

19) I expect retail companies/supermarkets to make exclusive offers for social media users like me who are regulars on their page/handle and follow them. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly disagree

20) I would make purchases directly from social media platforms if the retail companies and supermarkets that I trust and admire provide such services *

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly agree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly disagree

21) I believe that social media platforms are a very good place to gather information about products of retailing companies/supermarkets and their brand *

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly agree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly disagree

22) I would certainly be inclined to purchase from retail companies/supermarkets are responsive and responsible on social media *

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly agree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly disagree

Thank you for your participation.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me on x18170765@student.ncirl.ie

[Back](#)

[Submit](#)

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google. [Report Abuse](#) - [Terms of Service](#) - [Privacy Policy](#)

Google Forms