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Abstract

SMEs are a major part of any country's economy thus it is beneficial to study and understand how they conduct their business activities. This paper will focus on marketing and more specifically how small and medium enterprises (SME) utilise online and offline tools in their marketing strategy. Previous studies make it clear that while social media advertising is on the rise, it should not completely replace traditional media, if anything the two should be combined to achieve media synergies. However from studying SMEs it also becomes clear that resource limitations can hold them back. Therefore this paper will try to look into social media advertising in relation to SMEs and the general characteristics of SME marketing at large. The paper also considers what roles do customer behaviour, customer engagement and word of mouth can have on the marketing strategy of SMEs.

Introduction

The past two decades saw a major uptake in the number of users of social media platforms as more and more people joined to socialise with one another. Currently 60% of the world's population is present on social media (SM) (Pour, Hosseinzadeh, and Mahdiraji, 2021), or to be more exact, there are 4.62 billion users around the world where in the course of late 2021 and early 2022 more than 424 million new users have joined a social media platform (Chaffey, 2022). This kind of growth inevitably led to an increasing interest in social media by companies who sought to gain a benefit out of it. Therefore, today it is a common phenomenon to see firms advertising on social media platforms which is evident from the fact that globally companies spend over 181 billion dollars on it (Statista, 2022). As a result of this, there is extensive literature surrounding social media marketing (SMM) revolving around both large and small firms. There are various studies surrounding SMM be it the benefit SM provides (Tal, 2018), the differences between the perceptions of different generations towards SMM (Duffett, 2017), or the strategies for successful SMM (Pour et al., 2021: Todor, 2016). Even though these studies approach the topic from different point of views, all of them seem to agree that no company should abandon traditional marketing in favour of social media marketing just yet. This makes sense as Tal (2018) points out that not all customer segments can be reached with SMM or Duffett (2017) stating that companies can reach many of the younger customers through SM, many from the older generations still predominantly use traditional media such as TV or radio. Therefore, regardless of SMM being relatively cost-effective and easy to use, companies should not neglect traditional media but rather aim to synergise the two (Zahoor and Qureshi, 2017: Rondán-Cataluña, Arenas-Gaitán and Ramírez-Correa, 2015: Kumar, Choi and Greene, 2017). Media synergy is when the combined effects of several marketing media activities is more than the sum of the individual effects (Kumar et al., 2017). Thus all companies should strive to attain media synergies to be able to reap the benefits of multiple media activities (Kumar et al., 2017: Todor, 2016).

However most of the studies exploring media synergies tend to ignore the point of view of small and medium enterprises (SME). Studies around media synergies tend to involve more resource consuming advertising such as TV, radio or magazine advertisements (Zahoor and Qureshi, 2017: Kumar et al., 2017: Todor, 2016). However these require resources such as time, money and knowledge, which many SMEs can lack (Devereux, Grimmer and Grimmer, 2020: Rugova and Prenaj, 2016: Resnick et al., 2016). Therefore SMEs find themselves in an interesting position where they lack the resources to pursue the ideal strategy of media synergies. While there is plenty of literature having an overview of SME marketing habits and SMM, there is very little guidance for SMEs as to what should they do if they lack resources. Can they possibly achieve media synergies with the resources they have at hand or should they go against a widely accepted conclusion and use only SMM as their only major marketing activity. Therefore this paper will look into traditional and social media marketing for SMEs, while exploring how much customers engage with SMM to find out the best strategy an SME can follow.

Literature Review
Media Synergies
As described earlier, media synergy is when the combined effects of several marketing media activities is more than the sum of the individual effects (Kumar et al., 2017). Although one could assume that this is a widely studied and used theory, it is actually fairly ambiguous in the literature. For example Schultz, Block and Raman (2012) found that many previous studies have analysed intra-media distribution patterns which look at the different media tools within a single media category such as TV, radio or magazine advertisements. In comparison Kumar et al. (2017) and Dens et al. (2018) have found that there is much less attention on inter-media distribution patterns which look at the effects of cross media advertising such as combining TV and radio ads. Schultz et al. (2012) has highlighted a possible reason for this negligence, namely that the main goal of media strategies is to deliver the highest number of messages with the least amount of cost.

When reviewing the works of Shultz et al. (2012), Pauwels et al. (2016) and Dong et al. (2018), it becomes evident that large part of the literature around media synergies is focused on reaching as much unduplicated audience as possible. When striving for media synergies, be it intra- or inter-media it is possible that a firm will reach the same audience with repeating messages at which point in many cases the marketing efforts become redundant (Shultz et al., 2012: Pauwels et al., 2016: Dong et al., 2018). As a result, many previous literature focuses on how to reduce audience duplication instead of seeking how to enhance media synergies (Dens et al., 2018). For this reason the potential impact of media synergies have been secondary to achieving cost efficiencies between the different media tools available to a business (Dens et al., 2018). It then becomes evident why the literature around media synergies is fairly ambiguous.

To further add to the uncertainty of media synergies, it has to be highlighted that knowledge about media synergy in a consumer generated content environment is even more lacking (Pauwels et al., 2016: Dong et al., 2018). Most previous studies have only considered the traditional advertisement channels where communication is only one way (Shultz et al., 2012). However, in an environment where the customers can actively engage with firms provides a far different experience. As it is becoming evident that the consumers are in control of which media tools they will engage with, it becomes uncertain whether the traditional marketer-driven media synergy assumptions are still correct (Shultz et al., 2012).

However there are a few theories in media synergies which still hold up and should be understood to be able to best use it. The first is the sequential media where the same message is reinforced trough different media tools (Dens et al., 2018). The basis of the sequential theory is that being exposed to a second advertisement will strengthen the memory from the first advertisement. Dong et al. (2018) also found this by highlighting that people who hear advertisement audio are able to recall images from a previous advertisement. Secondly, Dens et al. (2018) also found that repeating messages in the same media will attract less attention than one message in various media types. Thirdly, Dens et al. (2018) highlights that different messages from multiple media types are much more persuasive than the same message from a single media type. All of these cross media synergies lead to the customers having more positive thoughts and are more likely to be persuaded by the firm's marketing activities. However, to best understand the potential use of media synergies by SMEs first it should be looked at how those SMEs utilise traditional marketing and SMM.

SME marketing

The wider literature surrounding marketing often has the assumption that basic marketing rules can be applied to large and small businesses alike and don't bother to differentiate between the two (Moorman and Rust, 1999: Hair, Bush and Ortinau, 2014) However many authors looking specifically into SMEs and how they market, have noted that SMEs have their own unique way of marketing, different from larger organisations (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001: O'Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson, 2009: Resnick et al., 2016). The reason for this is that SMEs differ from large firms by having limited resources such as finance, manpower or expertise (O'Dwyer et al., 2009: Resnick et al., 2016). The way each SME markets can depend largely on the experiences and the characteristics of the entrepreneur, so marketing practices can widely differ even among SMEs (Gilmore et al., 2001). Gabrielli and Balboni (2010) also came to the same conclusion, while pointing out that as the entrepreneurs make their own decisions and respond to opportunities, marketing can often happen to be haphazard and rather informal. Resnick et al. (2016) further expands upon this by stating that as there is usually an absence of a marketing plan SME managers follow their own individual management style and use self-marketing or self-promotion.

Therefore it becomes evident that in SMEs, the managers are the largest influence on the marketing strategy as it is formulated based on the managers' own beliefs and knowledge.

Interestingly, O'Dwyer et al. (2009) stated that the distinctive leadership style, available resources and the scope of the operations can be combined into unique strategies for SMEs to achieve competitive advantage with and create initiatives. On the other hand Parrott, Roomi and Holliman (2010) found that in many cases SMEs follow marketing strategies in a defensive manner to protect them from their direct competitors and other more efficient producers. This highlights that SMEs are not just scaled down large firms, but rather different businesses, each with their own characteristics which will have a large influence on their priorities and marketing practices.

It also has to be considered how SMEs position themselves within their own business environments. Marketing in SMEs tends to be much more informal, reacting and spontaneous (Gilmore et al., 2001: Resnick et al., 2016). As a result, the marketing strategy of SMEs are usually much more flexible and evolve through the life span of the business to fit the changing customer demands. Resnick et al. (2011) and O'Dwyer et al. (2009) supports this by highlighting that many SMEs do not follow the widely accepted marketing practices such as the four Ps (price, product, place and promotion), but rather focus on word of mouth and the importance of having personal connection with their customers.

On the other hand, as SMEs do not follow the same marketing techniques as larger firms and have more of a haphazard and spontaneous approach to marketing, SMEs can face several challenges (Rugova and Prenaj, 2016). While some are more successful than others, many SMEs fail to properly reach out to their customers and grab their attention. To add to this, Gilmore (2011) highlighted that close to 50% of SMEs go bankrupt within the first five years. This is for two reasons, first that the SME didn't have sufficient marketing in place, and the second is that the marketing by the SME was improper due to the lack of marketing expertise (Gilmore, 2011). Kotler (2004) and Hanafizadeh, Shafia and Bohlin (2021) also pointed out that SMEs often have the necessary information regarding the customer demand and the technical knowledge of their own product or service, but often lack the marketing expertise and capability to gain enough customer attention. Therefore it is evident that SMEs can fail because they don't manage to understand the wider market, or because they can't reach their customers efficiently.

Social Media

As highlighted previously, there are 4.62 billion users on different social media platforms in 2022 (Chaffey, 2022). Therefore it is an ever more important task for all businesses and to understand how to best utilise it. Rugova and Prenaj (2016) describes SMM as the potential to directly notify customers of a product or of a business through different social networking tools. In contrast Dutot and Bergeron (2016) describes SM as a set of online tools which is open to the wider public to use. It is a platform on which content and relationships are created through interactions (Dutot and Bergeron, 2016). As a result

companies are better able to reach their customers than ever before (Dutot and Bergeron, 2016: Tal, 2018).

In the wider literature there are two general perspectives around companies utilising social media. First is that SM is used to either directly or indirectly increase sales and strengthen customer relationships (Dutot and Bergeron, 2016). This is done through communication where the company can achieve increased loyalty, find new customers and improve their customer service (Jacobson, Gruzd and Hernández-Gracía, 2020: Imran and Jian, 2018). The second perspective is that the company uses SM for brand management and personal relations (Dutot and Bergeron, 2016). As the consumers can engage directly with the company they become more visible and are able to generate trust between the consumers and the company (Tal, 2018). Therefore it is clear that SM can be a highly effective tool for any company when it is used correctly.

Many of the literature around SM marketing looks into it as a whole or based on larger firms who are more capable to utilise it than their smaller counterparts. However those studies which looked into SMEs and SM found some key differences in how they use it in comparison to larger firms. Firstly one of the biggest difference is that when larger firms engage in SM marketing it is done to create further brand awareness and generate more sales (Jacobson et al., 2020: Imran and Jian, 2018). In comparison, SMEs often adopt SM as a defensive reaction to changes in the environment (Dutot and Bergeron, 2016: Atanassova and Clark, 2015). While large firms use SM to enhance their capabilities, many SMEs use SM as a substitute for many activities (Atanassova and Clark, 2015). As SM provides a cheap and easy way of connecting to their customers, SMEs do not need to engage in extensive marketing activities for which they wouldn't have the resources or the knowledge (Dutot and Bergeron, 2016).

The unique mark of SMM in comparison to traditional marketing is that on SM marketing can be a two-way communication rather than one-way information sharing (Chen, Harnchamchai and Saeheaw, 2021: Jacobson et al., 2020). As SM gives the possibility to have product recommendations, customer reviews, discussions and ratings, it gives a large amount of information to both other potential customers and to the SME itself in the form of feedback (Chen et al., 2021, Chen, Lu and Wang, 2017). This can be highly attractive to the customers as the access to far more information due to SM increases their post purchase satisfaction (Bartosik-Purgat, 2018). On top of that SM can not only provide increased information to the customers but it can also be responsible for the purchase intention in the first place (Chen et al., 2017). Therefore it is evident that SM provides serious opportunities for SMEs, in fact Chen et al (2021) highlights that in their survey 86% of marketers stated that SM increased the exposure of their business while 59% agreed that SM helped in increasing their sales.

However, it has to be stated that literature around SM and SMM especially around SMEs is still fairly ambiguous (Bartosik-Purgat, 2018). One reason for this is that research around SM comes from widely varying areas such as marketing, psychology and IT which all have a different view on the subject

creating confusion around the overall subject (Li, Larimo and Leonidou, 2021). Furthermore, Li et al. (2021) also summarised that there were several similar terms introduced in different studies such as 'social media strategy', 'online marketing strategy' and 'strategic social media marketing'. While these all build upon the same concepts, they do so with different perspectives and aims which makes it unclear as to which exact strategies are best to follow (Li et al., 2021).

Consumer Behaviour

Before the possible synergistic effects of the traditional and SMM are further explored, consumer behaviour should also be highlighted. The reason for this is that consumer behaviour which determines how the customers buy products is hugely important when determining a marketing strategy as understanding consumer behaviour means that companies will be able to better reach them (Liang and Lai, 2002). Bai, Law and Wen (2008) describes consumer behaviour as a process which is made up of activities aimed at meeting a particular need. Bartosik-Purgat (2018) gives a more detailed definition where consumer behaviour is the process leading up to the decision to buy something, the choice and also its consumption. In their study, Bartosik-Purgat (2018) and Huang and Benyoucef (2017) have highlighted a three part model of pre-consumption, consumption and post-consumption through which they were able to examine the actions of the consumer leading up to the purchase during the purchase and even after the purchase. Bartosik-Purgat (2018) and Huang and Benyoucef (2017) both highlighted that in this model one of the most important component is information about the product. Therefore it becomes evident that it is highly important for companies to be able to communicate to customers effectively.

However, to get a more detailed look into the consumer behaviour, instead of using the three step model, the five stage consumer decision-making process developed by (Liang and Lai, 2002) should be used. This model is broken down into need recognition, searching for information, evaluation of alternatives, purchasing and finally post-purchasing (Liang and Lai, 2002). These five stages follow the same line of thinking as the three step model however it does so with more detail (Bai et al., 2008). Busalim and Ghabban (2021) and Mason, Narcum and Mason (2020) also used the five stage model in their study and found that when customers are buying a product or a service, they go through the customer purchase decision making. In relation to SMEs utilising social media as a marketing tool the need recognition, information gathering and the post purchasing stages are the most relevant as these three steps can be best influenced by social media.

Need recognition simply means that a consumer realises the need for a certain product (Liang and Lai, 2002: Busalim and Ghabban, 2021). It is important to distinguish that in this case the need not only refers to something that a person needs like food and clothes, but that the person wants something. SM can aid this step through increased brand awareness trough consume engagement (Mason et al., 2020).

Due to how social media works, when a company engages with a consumer, the friends of that consumer will be aware of that interaction and made aware of the company and what they offer (Bai et al., 2008).

Information gathering is the step following the need recognition. Once the consumers want to buy something they will begin to gather information about the product (Liang and Lai, 2002). The more important the product experience is for the consumer the more they will be involved with searching for information (Mason et al., 2020). According to Busalim and Ghabban (2021) the search process is directly related to the consumer's satisfaction after the purchase, therefore it is vital for a firm to make it as easy for consumers to access information about a product as possible. SM can greatly influence this step as it provides a platform on which the consumers can directly engage with the sellers to gain the information they seek (Baima et al., 2021).

Finally the third relevant stage is post purchase. It is also the last stage in the consumer decision making process where this step involves the activities of the consumers after the purchase is made (Huang and Benyoucef 2017). As the consumer uses the product they will either be satisfied or unsatisfied. Regardless of the outcome consumers will often share their experience with their friends or leave reviews for it to be seen by more people (Busalim and Ghabban, 2021). Companies that are using SM can use this step to gain valuable feedback and perhaps more importantly in the case of receiving negative feedback from unsatisfied consumers, the company can engage with those customers showing a readiness to listen and act on feedback thus building trust with the consumers (Baima e al., 2021: Mason et al., 2020).

Ronadán-Cataluña et al. (2015), Devereux et al. (2020) and Baima et al. (2022) all highlight that nowadays both offline and online customers increasingly use SM as a source of information before their purchase. This is because they can gather information both from the company itself and also from other customers who already reached the post-purchasing stage (Devereux et al., 2020). For this reason SMM is becoming ever more valuable for SMEs to use. Zahoor and Qureshi (2017) and Bartosik-Purgat (2018) adds to the importance of SM by pointing out that one of the most important information sources for customers is word of mouth (WoM) as it derives from the post-purchase experiences of other customers from around the world.

WoM and e-WoM

Word of Mouth (WoM) is when consumers communicate their experiences amongst themselves (Ajiboye, Harvey and Resnick, 2019). Studies argue that WoM is the most important communication channel between different consumers especially when it is done on digital platforms such as SM (Ajiboye et al., 2019: Appel et al., 2020). The reason for this is that this information is seen as more trustworthy as it comes from other customers rather than the company itself (Zahoor and Qureshi, 2017: Bartosik-Purgat, 2018). When consumers use the internet for WoM many in the literature label it as

electronic-word of mouth (e-WoM) (Bartosik-Purgat, 2018). It then becomes evident that SMEs can blend traditional and SMM marketing trough e-WoM as SMEs can engage with the information being shared between the customers online (Zahoor and Qureshi, 2017). Furthermore, another reason this is so important for SMEs is that e-WoM plays a large part in all three steps in the customer purchase decision making process highlighted previously. Many consumers become aware of a company and its offers through WoM while also often gathering information through WoM as well, and finally after the purchase many consumers share their experience of the product in WoM to others (Ajiboye et al., 2019: Bartosik-Purgat, 2018). As a result it would be beneficial for firms to be able to engage consumers to be aware of their opinions and in the case of negative thoughts engage those consumers to solve their problems.

Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2020) adds to this by stating that e-WoM is likely to shape other customers' evaluation of a product before they make their purchase. Although the importance of e-WoM is clear, Azer and Ranaweera (2022) highlights that the research around e-WoM is rather one sided with many studies revolving around the feedback of the dissatisfied customers. Generally it is assumed that negative opinions have a stronger influence over other customers but Azer and Ranaweera (2022) point out that positive feedback hold just as much of an importance to customers as dissatisfied ones. Dessart et al. (2020) supports this as they found that it is highly effective for companies to carry out SM campaigns where they can respond to both positive and negative comments and use that feedback for innovation in their business. Therefore WoM and e-WoM is a great example of how even SMEs can achieve media synergies with their limited resources. On the other hand SMEs will need to gain a certain level of expertise of controlling WoM as due to its nature of being dependent on the customers it tends to be fickle and hard to control (Dessart et al., 2020). In addition the exact success of WoM marketing is difficult to measure as there is no measurements for it, however for e-WoM the level of customer engagement on SM can be used to give a decent image of how successful it is (Li et al, 2021).

Customer Engagement

In the literature surrounding SMM customer engagement seems to be one of the most widely used means of measuring the success of SMM. According to Chawla and Chodak (2021) customer engagement on SM is measured by likes, comments, shares and clicks. While generally high customer engagement is sought after, simply having a high level does not mean anything in itself, it is also important whether the nature of the engagement is positive or negative (Kumar et al., 2017). Kumar et al (2017) also points out that whether the engagement is positive or negative, it can change over time thus it is important to always be aware of how it shifts. Therefore customer engagement allows for the

understanding of the motivations of the customers which is a base necessity for forming an effective SMM strategy (Li et al., 2021).

Customer engagement can be defined as an activity to interact with the customers beyond purchasing, creating motivational drivers (Chawla and Chodak, 2021). In addition to Li et al. (2021) and Kumar et al (2017) other studies have also highlighted the importance of customer engagement by showing that when customers are able to give feedback they and engage with the company they feel a sense of community (Sedalo, Boateng and Kosiba, 2022: Ajiboye et al., 2019). This way there will be higher customer loyalty and satisfaction (Li et al.,2021).

There are plenty of literature around customer engagement and social media however far less focus on customer engagement and SMEs. Ajiboye et al. (2019) highlighted that SMEs customer engagement is unstructured, informal, reactive and often spontaneous. For this reason many SMEs are not able to fully engage their customers (Ajiboye et al., 2019).

Ajiboye et al. (2019) highlighted one factor which is essential for SM customer engagement which is the content being shared online. In order to engage customers content not only needs to be shared frequently but it needs to be able to connect to the customers (Sedalo et al., 2022). Suharto et al. (2022) adds to this point by highlighting that successful customer engagement needs to have these three factors: interactivity, innovation and information.

Interactivity is when the different parties communicating can act on each other based on the communication medium and the types of messages (Stanley and Choudhary, 2021). A simple block of text is not interactive, instead a link to another site is (Stanley and Choudhary, 2021). Stanley and Choudhary (2021) and Suharto et al. (2022) states that interactivity is one of the most important factors in engaging with other people as it can affect attitude, decision making and behavioural outcomes. While interactivity is what keeps people engaged, innovation is what catches their attention (18). When new and uncommon content is created it catches the attention of people who are naturally drawn to new and unique content because it intrigues them (Stanley and Choudhary, 2021). Finally, information given by the company will encourage to the customers to engage with the company (Suharto et al. (2022). It will be an increased chance that people engage with the company when they are motivated to do so, and the best way to do that is to offer information about their products which will drive customers to participate (Stanley and Choudhary, 2021).

It becomes evident that companies need have an understanding of how to create content on SM, but when a company considers these factors then they are more capable to generate consumer engagement thus being able to influence the customer decision making process (Kumar et al., 2017). Customer engagement can also hold another benefit for companies, namely that companies can access valuable information through feedback (Baima et al., 2022). Kotturi et al. (2021) points out that receiving feedback could very well mean the difference between business success and failure. This is because

feedback often shares things which company managers overlooked, allowing them to improve their offering (Kotturi et al., 2021).

However Sedalo et al. (2022), Ajiboye et al. (2019) and Kotturi et al. (2021) points out that many studies around customer engagement on SM fail to consider that creating content which is able to pull in customers requires such as time and knowledge which SMEs can lack. SMEs who lack time will not be able to generate content frequently nor take the time for inspiration of better quality content (Sedalo et al., 2022: Ajiboye et al., 2019). Furthermore those SMEs who lack knowledge will fail to create entertaining SM content thus fail to truly connect to their customers (Sedalo et al., 2022: Busalim and Ghabban, 2021). As a result those SMEs who lack said resource will be hindered in their customer engagement. This leads to the next point of why many SMEs can fail to utilise SM to a greater extent.

Potential Difficulties of Using SM

The literature around SM highlights its many benefits to companies with the main ones being easy to use, relatively cheap and having a wide reach (O'Dwyer et al., 2009: Ali et al., 2020: Suryani, Fauzi and Nurhadi, 2021). However fewer have considered that not all companies are capable of adapting SM effectively, mainly SMEs (Atanassova and Clark, 2015). As pointed out previously, to successfully engage customers, resources such as time and knowledge are required. This is the biggest point of weakness for SMEs as many will not have what is needed (Cheng and Shiu, 2019). Some of the main difficulties of using SM is that the employees who engage on social media need to be highly trained to be able to engage customers effectively (Rugova and Prenaj, 2016).

Furthermore, handling SMM incorrectly can have the opposite effects and result in a negative experience for the customer if the SMM turns out to be annoying and poorly thought out (Rugova and Prenaj, 2016). Thirdly, conducting SMM is not a once off ordeal, customers on SM need to be engaged actively and regularly in order to stay relevant, which is time and effort consuming (Rugova and Prenaj, 2016). Lin et al. (2020) adds to this by stating that SME growth is most often prevented by resource constraints and also because of this SMEs have a high failure rate of 50% within the first five years (Atanassova and Clark, 2015). Not only that but the fact that there are multiple tools and approaches to SMM means that marketers often don't know how to formulate SMM strategies.

As a result SMEs often focus entirely on survival rather than growth in order to compensate for the lacking resources (Atanassova and Clark, 2015). This is the reason why SME marketing practices differ from the traditional marketing literature (Lin et al., 2020). Cheng and Shiu (2019) also support this by stating that different resources are needed to develop and maintain SM and to motivate customers to be more involved with the business. To reinforce the challenge SM provides for SMEs, Hanafizadeh et al. (2021) found that 88% of managers can't accurately gauge the effectiveness of their SMM strategy,

while simultaneously 60% of managers stated that they did not get the expected outcome from SMM. This highlights that many managers have unrealistic expectations of SM (Hanafizadeh et al., 2021).

This in turn creates a barrier to many SMEs on SM as they will be more limited by their resources (Lin et al., 2020: Cheng and Shiu, 2019). Furthermore, not only that SMEs can struggle to engage customers but they can also have trouble using the information they gather from SM (Cheng and Shiu, 2019). SMEs can have limited capabilities to build upon the information that they gained from SM. As a result of this many SMEs will be unmotivated to use SMM or to invest large amount of time and effort into it (Atanassova and Clark, 2015: Cheng and Shiu, 2019).

Media synergy and SMEs

After reviewing the traditional and SM marketing from the point of views of SMEs, it is evident that they have great opportunities which they can exploit and reach more people than ever before. However it is also highlighted that there is no clear way as to how the SMEs could exploit those opportunities. As it was pointed out earlier by Gabrielli and Balboni (2010), most SMEs market in a spontaneous and haphazard manner which makes it near impossible to identify a strategy which would work for a single SME overtime, let alone for multiple SMEs. However, when understanding the concepts of customer behaviour and customer engagements through which a marketer knows how to best reach the target market and gauge the success of marketing, it is perhaps possible to create a guideline as to how to best approach an SMM strategy for SMEs. Now that all of the relevant areas have been touched upon in relation to SME marketing and SMM, it becomes evident that in the literature there is no obvious marketing strategy which SMEs can follow. This is where the research in this paper will be aimed at, to find out whether SMEs can realistically achieve media synergies with offline and online tools.

Research Question

As stated previously the main objective of this paper is to find out whether media synergies is realistic for SMEs, and also to find out how important is social media for the marketing activities of SMEs. The reason for having such a big focus on social media alongside media synergies is because as highlighted by Dens et al. (2018) earlier, media synergies is poorly understood in a consumer driven marketing environment where the communication between the company and its customers is two way. Also for this reason the research will be largely focused on the point of view of the customers. That being said the first research objective of this paper will be to find out if consumers are aware of any instance of seeing SME advertisements from multiple sources.

Thus research question 1:

H1: Consumers recall seeing advertisements of SMEs from multiple media types.

H0: Consumers do not recall seeing advertisements of SMEs from multiple media types.

Although it will be interesting to see if consumers recall any media synergy from SMEs, it is expected that it will mostly not happen for two reasons. The first reason was already highlighted previously, namely that most SMEs lack the resources to achieve effective media synergies. The second reason is highlighted by Pauwels et al. (2016) and Dong et al. (2018) where they stated that media synergy is excellent for strengthening brand awareness but in many cases customers cannot accurately recall from which media types they have come across the advertisement after being exposed to it from multiple ones.

Therefore there is a second research objective for this paper, namely to find out how important is SMM for SMEs. In the case of not being successful in the research around media synergy, understanding more about SMM will give an excellent basis for SMEs to develop effective media synergies in the future. Both the advantages and the disadvantages of SM for SMEs have been explored in the literature review where it is now clear that there are opportunities for SMEs once they overcome some challenges. Zahoor and Qureshi (2017), Rondán-Cataluña et al. (2015) and Kumar et al. (2017) all stated that firms should not fully abandon traditional marketing for SMM as using SM alone will not reach several demographics. Therefore, it will be very interesting to see the results of the research where it can be compared to the statements of Zahoor and Qureshi (2017), Rondán-Cataluña et al. (2015) and Kumar et al. (2017) and see how much customers use SM for in their pre-purchasing stages.

Thus research question 2:

H1: Customers are more aware of SMEs which are active on SM.

H0: Customers are not more aware of SMEs which are active on SM.

To support the primary research questions there will be three areas of secondary interest all of which have been touched upon in the literature review. First is the consumer behaviour which is highly important as it determines how the consumers buy products. The research will involve the need recognition, information gathering and the post-purchase stages of the consumer behaviour process. This will help to gauge the importance of SM for SMEs as depending on how the consumer go about all of those stages, whether online or offline, it can provide valuable insight in how the consumers go about their purchasing habits.

The second area of interest is customer engagement. It was highlighted earlier by Ajiboye et al. (2019), that one of the problems of SMM for SMEs is that they find it difficult to gauge how effective their SMM activities are. Therefore, researching the topic of customer engagement will be greatly beneficial

by putting more context around the primary research questions for a better understanding. Furthermore, ideally not only the importance of customer engagement will be highlighted by the research, but hopefully examples of successful customer engagements will be found as well to provide a better guideline for SMEs. Suharto et al. (2022) pointed out three important factors for customer engagement on SM which should be looked into, namely interactivity, innovation and information. In addition, another reason why customer engagement should be looked into is because it can be both negative and positive therefore it is important to understand it more to have the knowledge to handle customer engagement well.

The third area of interest is WoM and e-WoM. Appel et al., (2020) stated that WoM is the most important communication between customers. As this can happen both offline and online it will be interesting to see how WoM and e-WoM influences the marketing activities of SMEs. Being familiar with the WoM around the firm allows the marketer to know what information customers are predominantly looking for, thus able to provide that information, while also being able to engage with the customers who had negative experiences with the firm.

Thus the research in this paper will focus on these areas.

Research Methodology

In this segment of the study the research methodology will be discussed and outlined. This is an essential part of the paper as this will guide the research to obtain the data needed to be able to conduct a conclusion. The research objectives of this study are already clear as they have been outlined in the previous section along with the hypothesis being formed. Therefore the natural next step is to explore how the research objectives will be fulfilled trough highlighting an appropriate research strategy to achieve those objectives. This will include finding an appropriate research instrument along with identifying a sample population and of course outlining how the collected data will be analysed.

After researching this section, it was deemed appropriate to follow the framework of the research onion outlined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019). When looking at the research onion it offers a robust framework for outlining the research methodology for a research paper such as this one, therefore it was deemed to be the best framework to follow for this section. Before the methodology is explored further, the research onion should be given a brief overview to know what to expect. The framework is made up of six parts of philosophy, research approach, research strategy, methodological choice, time horizons and techniques (Saunders et al., 2019).
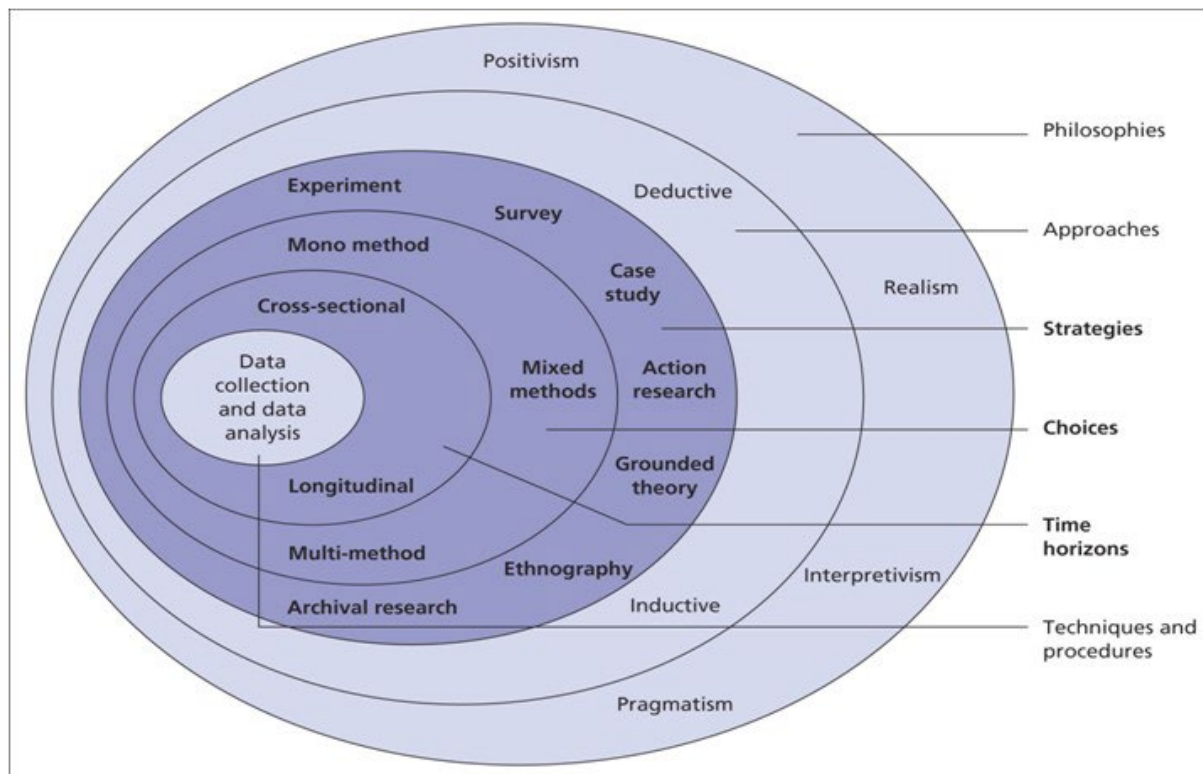
Image sourced from BRM (2022).

In the framework philosophy will outline the nature of the research where it can be broadly broken down into two categories of ontology which is the nature of reality and epistemology where the nature of reality is tested trough sources of knowledge. The second step is the research approach in which also two perspectives are highlighted, the deductive and the intuitive approach. The third step of research strategy will involve selecting an appropriate research instrument such as a survey. In the fourth step of research methods, where it will be explored how to analyse the data, whether in quantitative or qualitative methods. In the fifth step an appropriate time horizon will be chosen for the research and finally for the techniques, it will be explained how the collected data will be processed.

Research Philosophy

As highlighted earlier, the philosophy aspect of the research onion can be broken down into two broad segments, ontology and epistemology (Saunders et al., 2019). Ontology is about studying reality where it aims to describe the nature of reality (Smith, 2012). It is highly useful in researches where it can assist in making a difference between reality and how one perceives reality. In addition it allows the researcher to learn in what way reality influences the behaviour of people. If one would look at ontology in further detail, three philosophical viewpoints could be identified objectivism, constructivism and pragmatism (Smith, 2012).

Although one philosophy is not better than another one, their inherent differences can result in one suiting a research better than the other. This is the case here as well where epistemology suits this research better than ontology. This is because epistemology is used to help find information which can aid to prove a point without a doubt (Albert et al., 2020). In the case of this research it will be sought out as to what extent can SMEs achieve media synergies combining SMM with traditional marketing activities. It should also be highlighted that epistemology includes different viewpoints such as positivism, realism and interpretivism.

To have a better understanding of epistemology the three philosophical viewpoints in it should be explained. Positivism embodies what this study aims to do as it uses a research question which can be tested to help find an answer by using accepted knowledge (Albert et al., 2020). Realism is similar to positivism as it uses methods of research to understand reality, however it differs by not supporting scientific methods to prove a point thus it will not be used as much in this paper as positivism. Finally interpretivism aids in interpreting culture and social life by finding how people see each other's actions including their own (Albert et al., 2020).

As stated previously, the different philosophies are not inherently better or worse than others however positivism suits this research the most as it allows for research questions to develop which it tests and evaluates. Therefore going forward in this paper, the philosophy of positivism will be used to reach a conclusion.

Research Approach

When initially going into the research, there was a level of uncertainty whether to use an inductive or a deductive approach. When the first plans for this research were being made, initially it made more sense to approach the research from an inductive approach when the information around SME SMM was more ambiguous thus it was more ideal to conduct qualitative research through interviews to gain more information from the SMEs themselves and develop a theory. However, after further research it became evident that there are existing theories both around media synergies and SME SMM thus a deductive approach now seems more reasonable.

The deductive approach seems to better suit this study as the way it works is that it develops a hypothesis based on existing theories and formulates research strategies to statistically test whether the hypothesis is correct or not with a certain level of probability (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018) This also falls in line with the positivism philosophy. Therefore this paper will aim to establish a general knowledge in the chosen topic and compare it to the specific knowledge collected from the research to see whether the outlined assumptions are correct. While qualitative studies could also be conducted for the research process, after completing the literature review it now seems more appropriate to use quantitative research to collect data from the customer's pint of view rather than the SMEs themselves. Therefore

as this paper will follow the deductive approach, it will be able to compare different viewpoints and experiences with the use of empirical data which in turn allows for the confirmation or the rejection of the hypothesis.

Research Strategy

This is the next stage in the research onion where it will be outlined how the study aims to collect the data needed to able to test the hypothesis. As explained earlier, initially it was planned to conduct a qualitative research using interviews as a means to collect information from SMEs. However as the deductive approach was chosen for this research the chosen instrument of data gathering was a survey. A survey has several advantages which made it ideal for this study. A survey can gather large amounts of data from a wider sample population while also gathering that data in a systematic manner making it easy to analyse later on (Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore it is a fast, economical and convenient form of collecting data (Saunders et al., 2019). These are also the same reasons why a survey is most often linked with a deductive approach, in addition as the data collected by a survey is in a standard form, easily put into numerical data, it is excellent for providing the specialised knowledge needed to test the hypothesis.

For surveys one major point of consideration is the sample population from who the data is going to be collect from. It would be ideal to do simple random sampling as that would give the biggest probability of having unbiased responses not skewed to either side, however due to limitations on the research, non-probability sampling will be used. To be more exact convenience sampling will be used for this research where those people will take part in the survey who I can reach. This is predominantly because of the limited time frame in which the research has to be completed where convenience sampling is the easiest and the fastest method to collect the required data.

Methodological choice

Next is to determine whether quantities or qualitative methods should be used for this research, or even a mixture of both. After going through the previous segments, it should now be clear that the research heavily leans towards quantitative research over a qualitative one. However it would be interesting to consider having both quantitative and qualitative methods in the research, but not in the form of the mixed method where the two are combined together in a single data, but rather multi method. The multi-method is similar to the mixed method where it uses both quantitative and qualitative however it does not combine the two but rather keeps them separate when analysing the data. The reason why this would suit this research is because quantitative research could be done to collect data from the customers about their pre-purchasing activities while using qualitative research to find out from the SMEs themselves what they are capable in terms of SMM. This would more than likely give a stronger understanding

around this topic, however once again due to limitations only quantitative research will be utilised in this paper.

Therefore the this paper will use the mono-method of only using quantitative method to conduct the research for the study. While it would be more ideal to use a multi-method, this should also provide more than sufficient data to be able to find out if the hypothesis is correct or not.

Time Horizon

Next the time frame of the research will be identified. A research can be long term or short term where different variables are measured over time, or simply measuring variables at a single point in time. As stated previously this study has some limitations, one of the biggest ones being the available time. As a result of this, longitudinal research will be excluded as a possibility for this paper. Therefore a cross-sectional design will suit this research far better. In a cross-sectional research, multiple variables can be measured at the same time which is suitable for a survey highlighted previously (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Cross-sectional research has several advantages as stated previously however it also has a few disadvantages, namely that large sample sizes are needed and also that it cannot establish causation as it is an observational research where the independent variable is not manipulated (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Therefore it is evident that it is suitable for this study however it is not perfect.

Techniques

This step refers to the techniques to be used to analyse the data once it has been gathered. Initially the data was planned to be collected through Survey Monkey as it breaks down the results thoroughly, however the survey couldn't be sent out without a paid subscription therefore Survey Monkey was not used in the end. On the other hand Google forms turned out to be suitable for this research. It allowed for the creation of a free survey while also being easy to create due to the simple structure of Google forms. Once the results are collected they will be further broken down using Microsoft Excel based on the different demographics to be able to compare the responses. This way the data will be organised and outlined in a way which will allow to make a conclusion for this paper.

Ethical Issues

It is understood that a research could run into ethical issues, thus to be completely transparent towards the respondents the survey explained what is the topic of the research, why the research is carried out and the goal of the research to give an explanation to the respondents as to why they are asked to take

part in all this. Furthermore after the explanation a code of conduct was given which highlighted that the survey is completely anonymous, that they can exit the survey at any point and that the results are handled confidentially, among other points. Furthermore, contact information was given to them in the form of an Email address in case that they have any queries. Therefore the participants are able to give their informed consent to use the information they give in the survey.

Limitations

When considering the research it should be said that there are a few limiting factors holding it back. The first of these is that the research and the paper itself is to be completed in a given and fairly limited timeframe where it greatly limits the amount of time in which responses can be collected. This also resulted in picking survey as the research instrument as it is one of the fastest way of collecting responses.

The second limitation is that there were no SMEs found who would readily participate in an interview while also due to the lack of time there is no time to find suitable candidates. As a result, the survey will be able to find correlations in the subject but will struggle to establish causations while interviews would have been more than capable of finding that.

Another limitation is that the survey will only be spread on social media as there is no other suitable method that would fit the time frame. As the survey will only be sent on social media it means that most if not all of the participants will be active on social media thus the results will neglect the viewpoints of those who don't use it as much.

Findings

As the responses from the survey are collected and analysed, they can be used to compare them to the assumptions stated in the research question section. However before that is done, the results of the survey should be highlighted to have a better understanding of the information which will be discussed later on. The survey was constructed to fulfil the research objectives highlighted in the research question section and it also formulated to fit the thought process highlighted in the research methodology. Therefore this section will break down the 117 responses collected from the survey. In many cases demographic questions in a survey are left for last however as one of the questions in the survey instructed those who do not use any SM platforms to skip the remaining questions and submit the survey that way, it made more sense to put the demographic questions at the beginning. Therefore in this section the questions will be looked at in the same order as they were in the survey.

Age groups
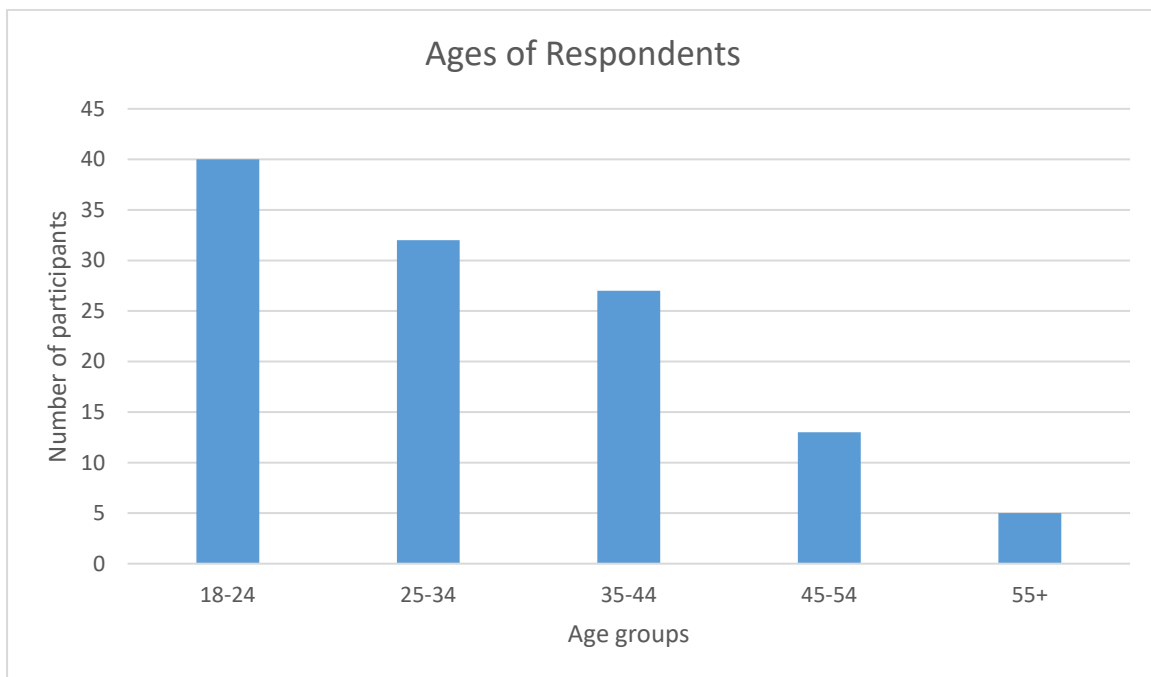
The first demographic question on the survey involved the age group of the respondents to gauge the general ages of the people and to see whether there are any major difference between how people in different age groups responded. The majority of respondents are in the younger age groups, where out of the 117 respondents 40 are under 25, 32 are under 35, 27 are under 45, 13 are under 55 and finally 5 are over 55. Although there are far fewer from the middle age and older groups, at least they are still present in this research.

Gender

Genders

55

62

■ 1. Men ■ 2. Women
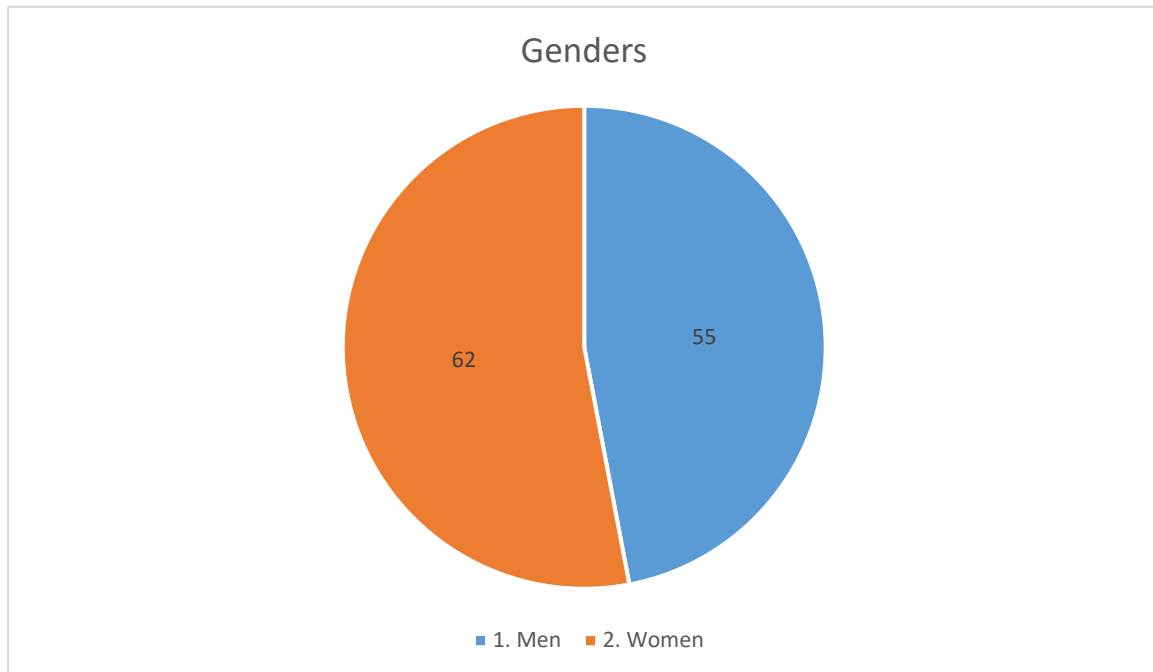
The second demographic question focused on gender. The results show that 62 women (53%) and 55 men (47%) have completed the survey. This puts women into the majority however the difference between the two sides is not large enough where it would skew the responses to one side too much. Although there was a third option of 'prefer not to say' for anyone who would not feel comfortable with choosing either of the first two options, no one has picked this choice. Although it is not a specific objective of this research to find any differences between the two genders, it is beneficial to have this knowledge to spot any interesting answering patterns.

Education

Education of Respondents
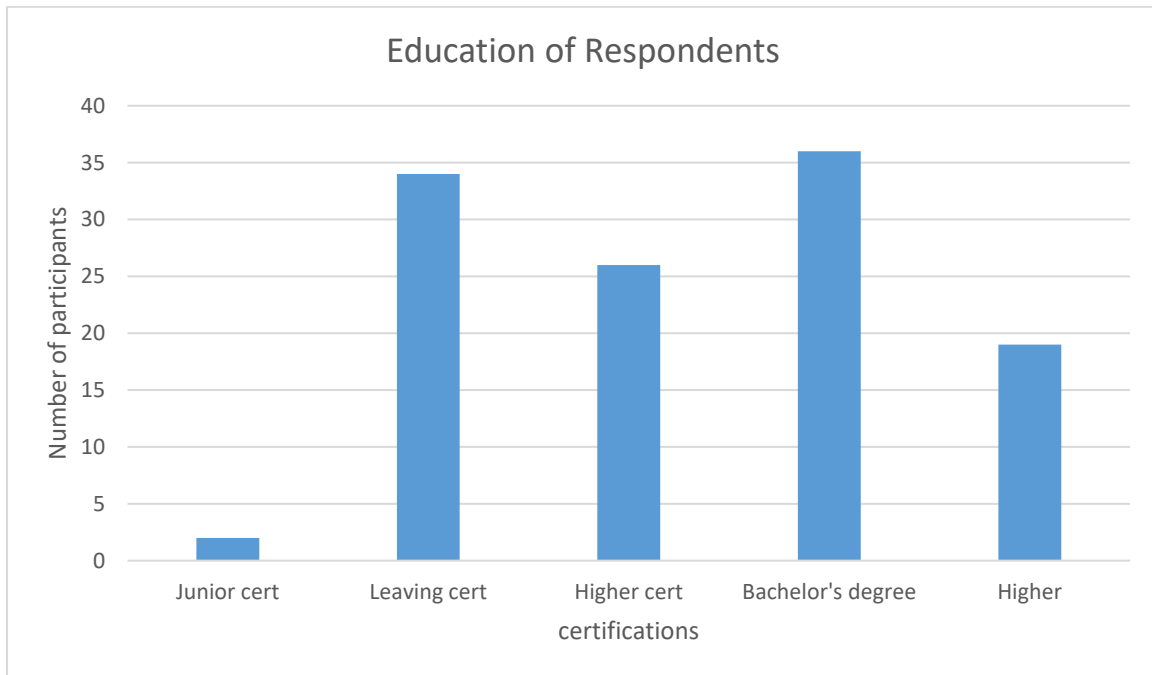
The third demographic question on the survey involved the education of the respondents. The responses show that close to 70% of the people who completed the survey had at least a level 6 or higher education. The results show that only 2 people had junior cert as their highest level of education while 34 had leaving cert, 26 had higher cert, 36 had a bachelor's degree, and finally 17 had something higher than a bachelor's degree. This question could also help in spotting differences between how people with different education levels answered the survey.

Social media accounts
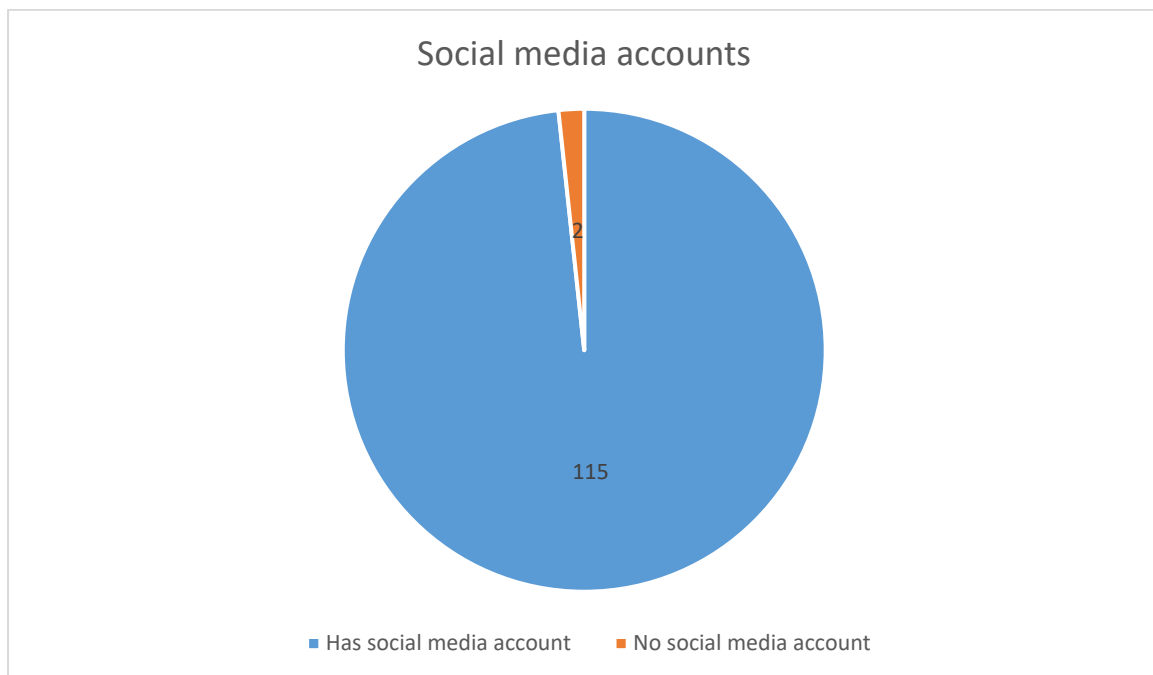
The next question aimed to find out how many people have an active SM account. The results show that an overwhelming majority of 98.3% of the people in the survey had one or more SM account while only 2 out of the 117 did not have any accounts. While it was expected that the majority of the respondents will have a SM account, especially that the majority of the people on the survey are under the age of 35, this is very high difference. Although such a difference seizes to be a surprise when it is considered that the survey was predominantly spread around on SM platforms with some direct Emails to a few people. This will unfortunately likely give a distorted view of media synergies for SMEs, however due to the limitations on the research this was expected. On the other hand when it is considered currently there are 4.62 billion SM users in the world (Chaffey, 2022), it is not that surprising that there are so many people with SM accounts.

Social media platforms
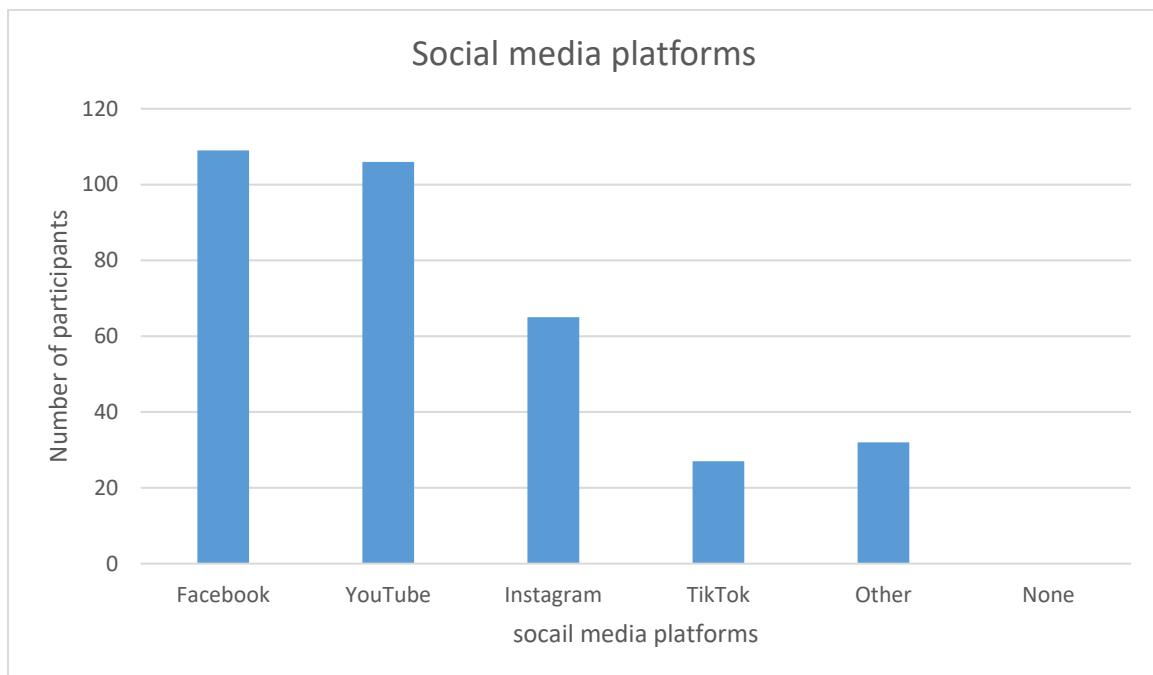
The next question's role was to gauge which SM platforms do people tend to use the most. When looking at the graph it becomes evident that there are only a handful of SM platforms identified in the survey while there are many other fairly large ones such as Twitter and Snapchat are left off. This was done because in Europe those SM platforms are not used as much as in the US market for example, and this survey did not have the capability to reach outside Europe. However seeing that there are relatively few 'other' answers it seems that this was a reasonable choice. When looking at the results it becomes evident that Facebook and YouTube are the two most popular SM platforms where Facebook had 109 users and YouTube had 106 users from this survey. The next ones was Instagram with 65 users, TikTok with 27 and finally any other platforms with 32 users. It should be noted that even the two respondents who previously said that they don't have a SM account use YouTube as it is possible to use some SM platforms without needing to have an account.

Hours on social media
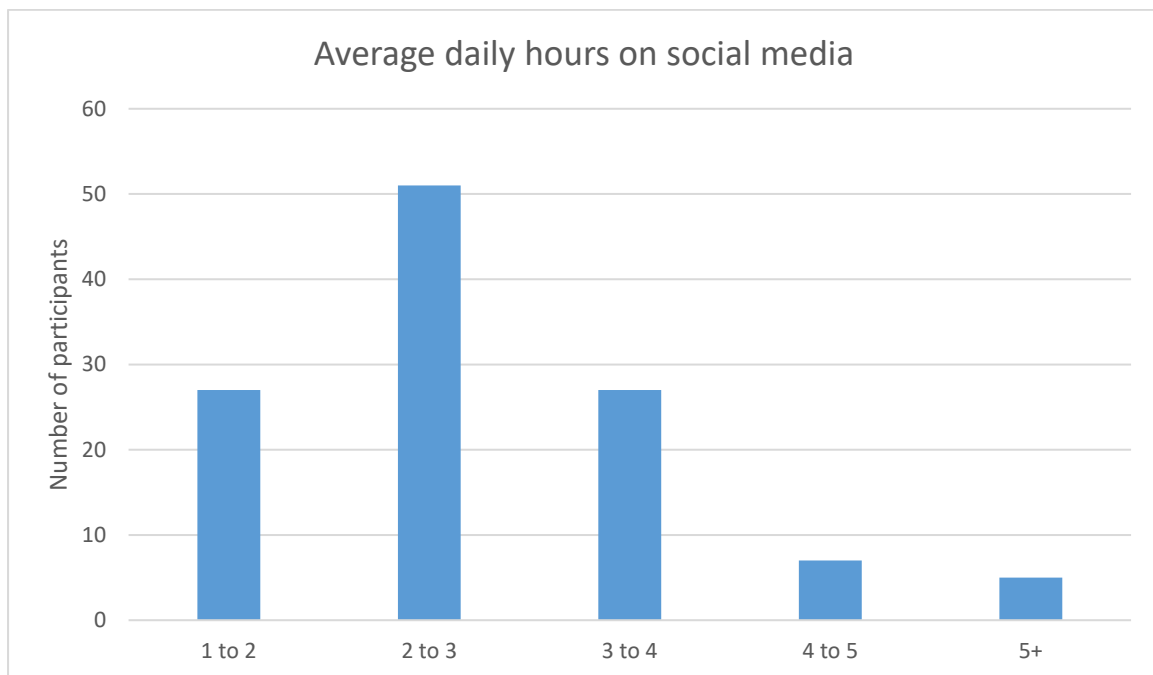
The final question on the survey which seeks to categorise the responses was aiming to find out how much do people use SM. It should be stated that the answers on this question could be ambiguous as it asked the respondents to give their best estimate on how much they use SM on average each day. In addition it is also a possibility that people underestimate the amount of time they actually spend on social media thus choose a lower time amount as their answer. Therefore these answers could be somewhat inaccurate while also simply highlighting a daily average which doesn't show if there are any differences between using SM on different days for example. However, for the purpose of this research it is going to be assumed that these answers are mostly accurate, therefore this question shows that 27 people use SM 1 to 2 hours a day, 51 use it 2 to 3 hours, 27 use it 3 to 4 hours, 7 use it 4 to 5 hours and 5 people use it for more than 5 hours a day.

Difference between hours on social media
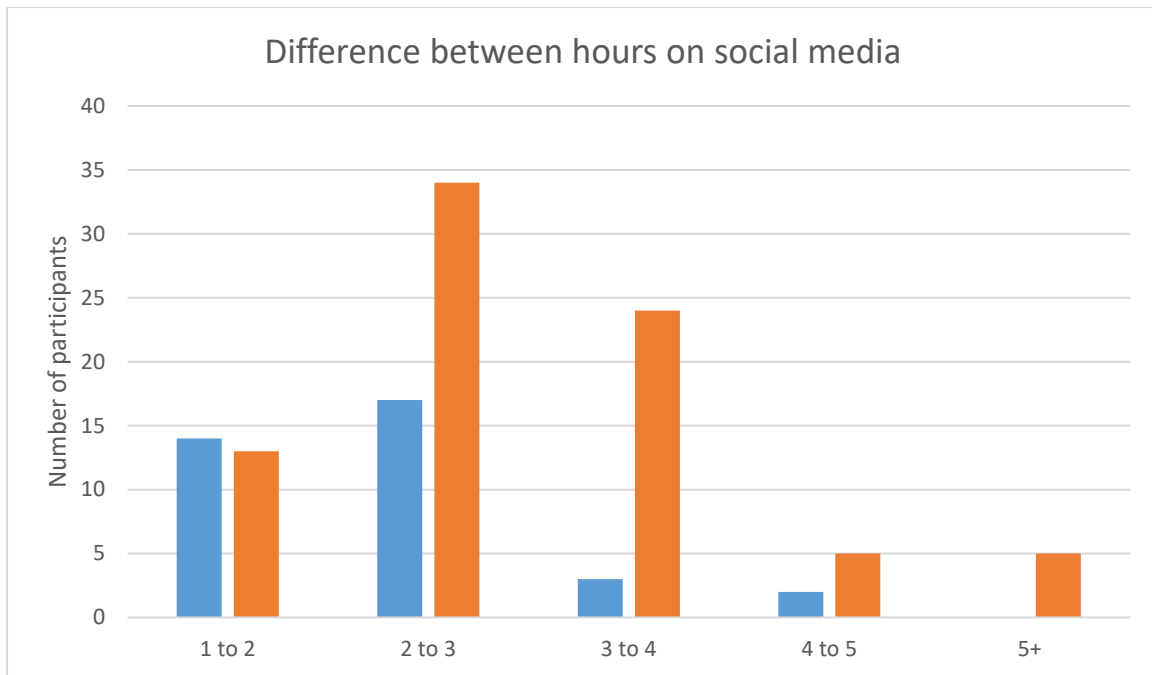
Another point to make in relation to hours spent on social media is that interestingly enough higher educated people tend to spend more time on SM than people with a lower education. This is interesting because it was expected to be the other way around. Although it should be noted that there were more than twice as much people with higher education (81) than people with leaving certs or below (36) which means that the results could be much more different if the numbers were more equal.

The following questions on the survey were statements where the respondents were given number of answers scaling from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Thus the following questions are going to be stated below and the diagrams are going to show how people have answered.

**I regularly encounter advertisements on social media**
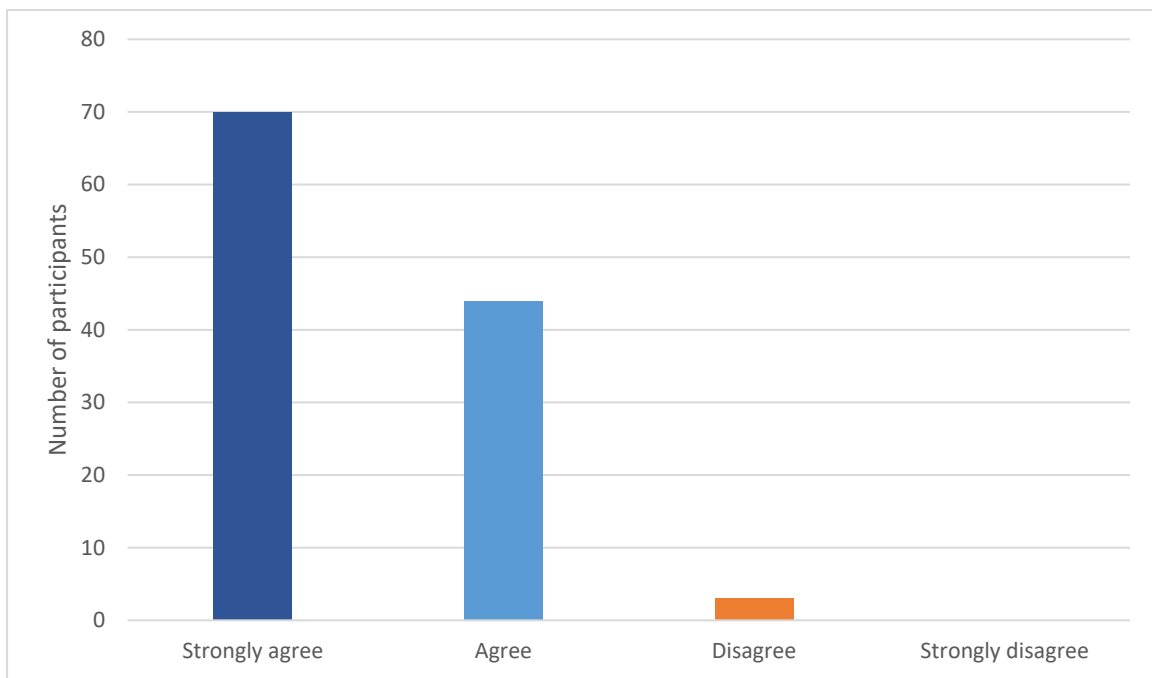
There were no surprises here as basically all SM platforms rely on advertisement revenue for most if not all of their profits. Thus, it was no surprise at all that out of 117 people only 3 disagreed and the rest either all agreed or strongly agreed. Although the results were expected this was still an important question on the survey as the fact that 97.5% of the respondents regularly encounter advertisements show that there are enormous potential for SMEs to exploit trough SM. On the other hand people seeing advertisements does not automatically mean that those ads are successful, but it still shows that there is a place for marketing activities.

I regularly encounter social media advertisements by small and medium enterprises (SME).
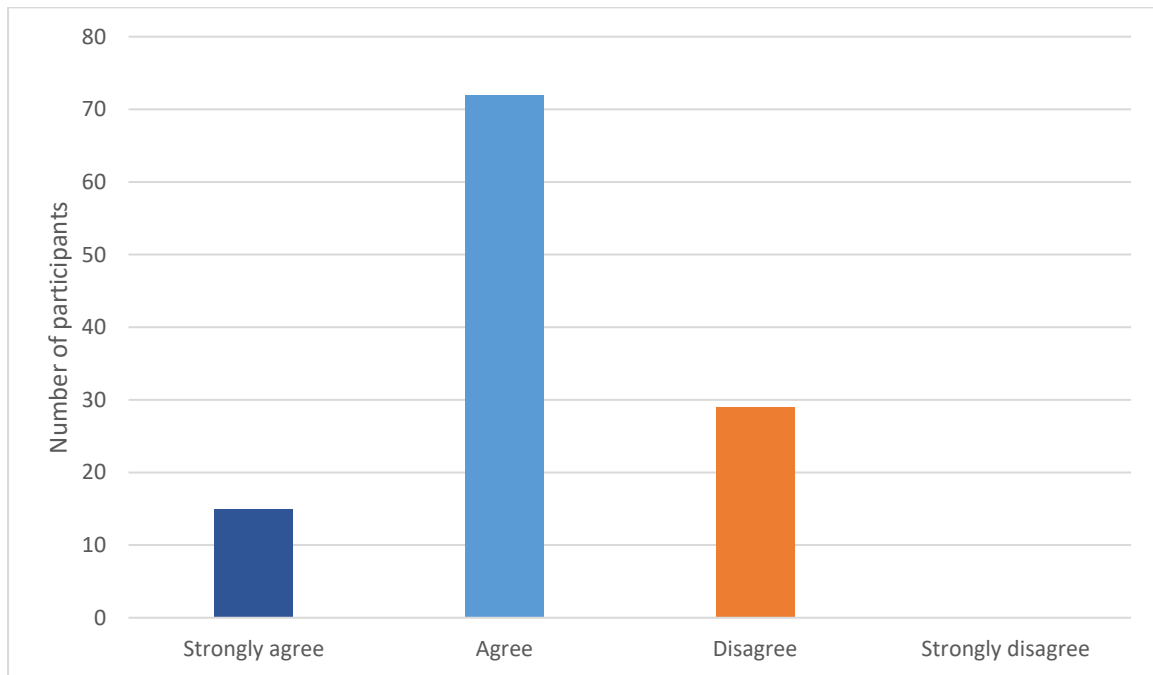

Interestingly enough the responses are similar to the previous questions which asked people about advertisements at large. It is a bit of a surprise to see that 87 people (74%) have either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement of regularly seeing SME advertisements. It was not expected to see such a strong noticing of SME marketing activities. On the other hand it show that there are plenty of SMEs which are capable of catching the attention of their target market. Another thing to point out is that all of the people who use YouTube but don't use either Facebook or Instagram have disagreed with this statement suggesting that Facebook and Instagram are likely a much more suitable platform for SMEs than YouTube. However there were only 6 people in the survey who used YouTube but not Facebook or Instagram thus it might not be enough to make such assumption. This means that this was a possible oversight when creating the survey as identifying which SM platforms are more suitable for SMEs could have been helpful.

I regularly encounter traditional advertisements (such as TV, radio or magazine) by SMEs.
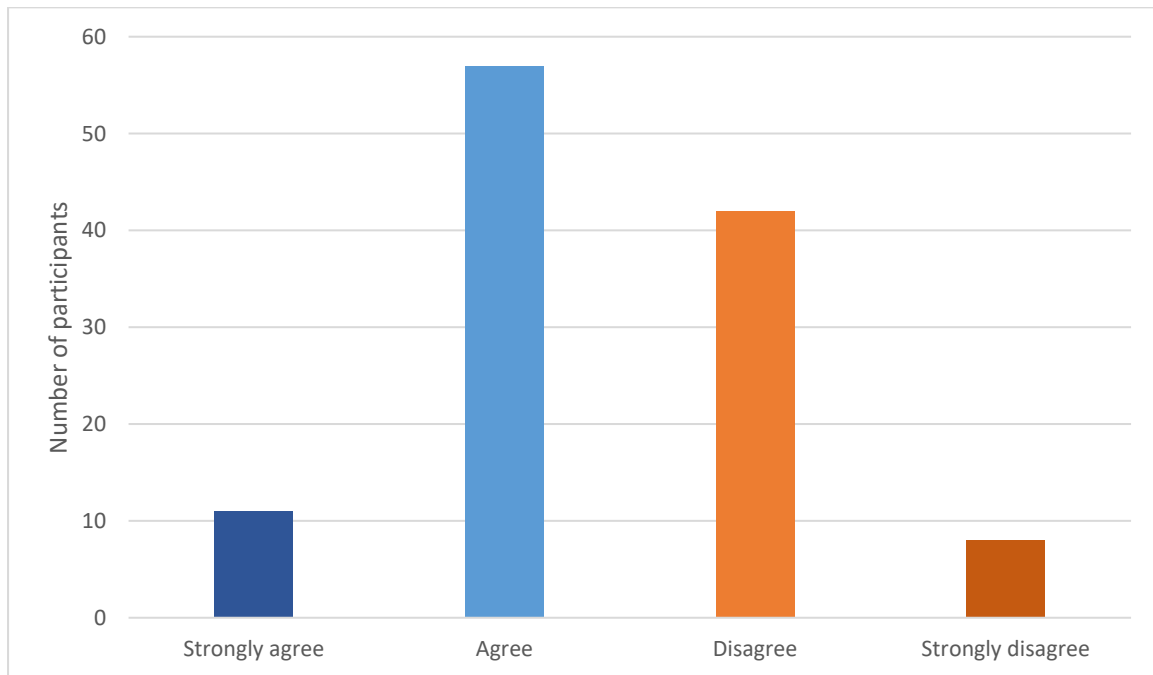

The next statement aimed to gauge the how much people are aware of traditional marketing activities by SMEs. The answers are similar to the previous question concerning SM ads by SMEs, however there is an increase in the number of people who disagreed with this statement. 50 people (42%) of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with regularly encountering traditional ads by SMEs as opposed to only 29 people (25%) disagreeing with regularly encountering SME ads on SM. This means that SME marketing seems to be noticeably more successful on SM than their traditional marketing activities on average. This seems to fall in line with the literature around marketing on SM as it is widely accepted that SM has a much larger reach in comparison to anything SMEs can realistically do with traditional marketing activities.

I regularly encounter both traditional and social media advertisements by the same SMEs
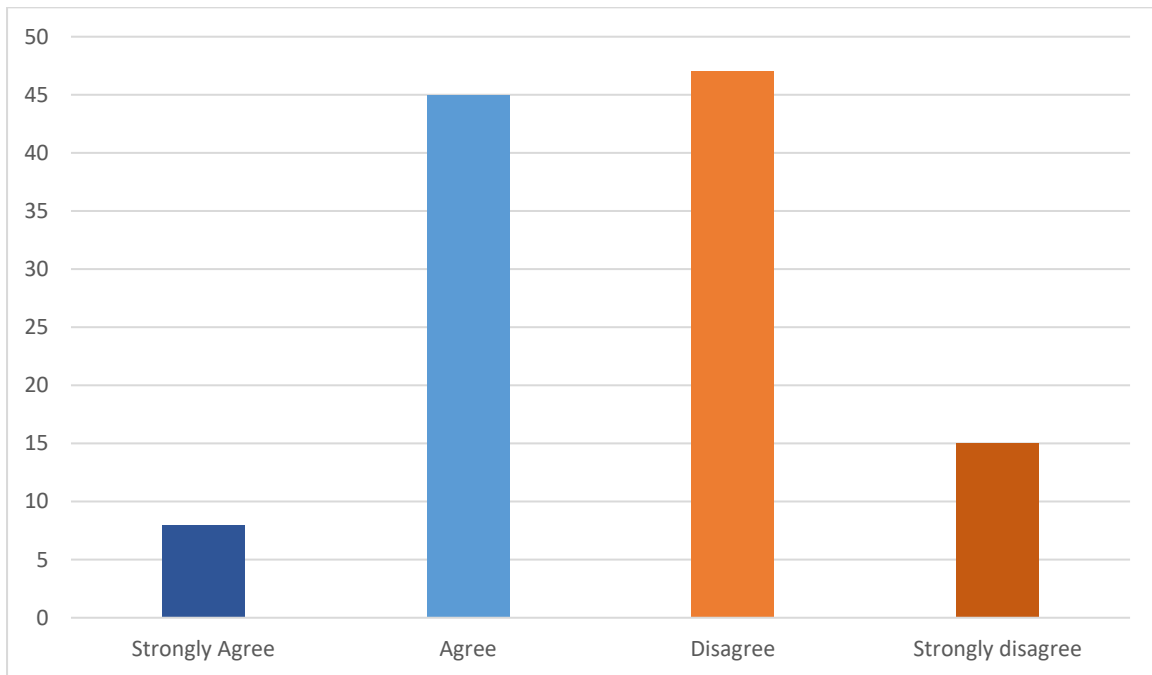

This question aimed to find out if people come across both offline and online advertisements by the same SMEs which could imply if there are any possible media synergies used. Once again the results are quiet surprising as there are nearly as many who either agree or strongly agree with those being 53 people (45%) in comparison to the 64 people (55%) who disagree or strongly disagree. The expectation was that much less people are going to agree with this statement yet the split is nearly in the middle. This implies that SMEs are in a much better position in regards to using media synergies than anticipated. The reason why this response wasn't expected is because most of the literature surrounding media synergies between offline and online marketing usually considers TV and radio ads to be the main tools for traditional marketing. Thus as most SMEs are not going to have their own TV or radio ads it was expected that their marketing efforts will have less of an effect on the customers.

I find the content of SME advertisements either creative, interactive or informative.
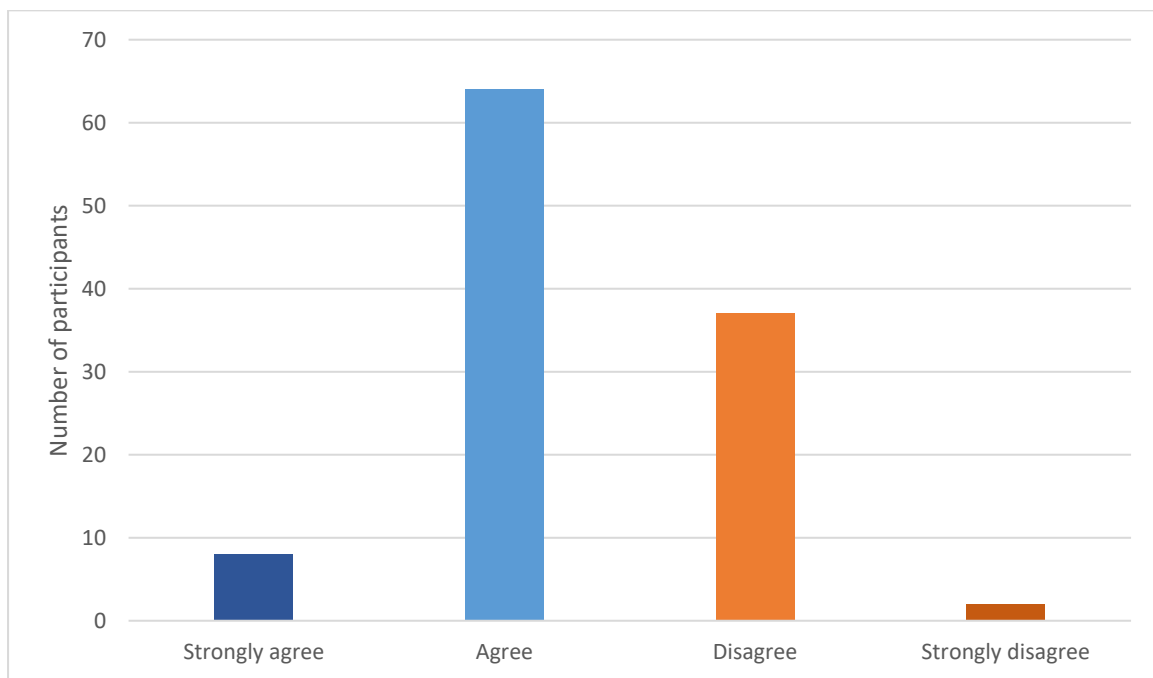

This question aimed to find out the general quality of the SM activities of SMEs. It was explored in the literature review that having creative, interactive and informative content are essential components for creating engaging content online. From the results it becomes evident that 78 people (66.7%) find the content of SMEs engaging in general, while only 39 people (33.3%) did not find SME content informative, creative or interactive. Perhaps there could have been an attempt to differentiate between the three components as for example interactivity drives much more engagement than the other two, however this still supports the point that in general SME content is on the right track. The results from this question could also explain the unexpected results from the previous question. As the people find SMEs' ads engaging trough information, creativity and interactivity, people are more capable of recalling both the offline and online activities of SMEs.

**I regularly engage with SMEs on social media.**
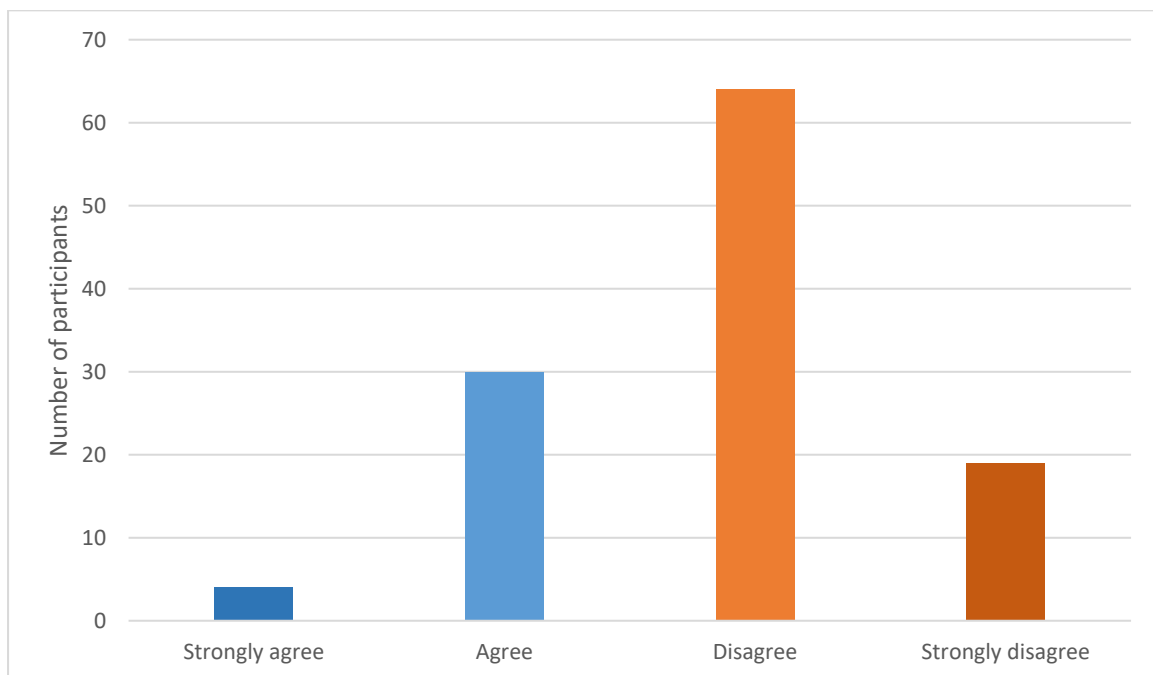
This question highlights why it could have been useful to try to separate interactivity, creativity and information as even though previously 66.7% of the respondents said that they find SME content engaging, here only 34 people (30%) have said that they engage with SMEs on SM. In comparison 64 people (54%) disagreed with this statement meaning they rarely engage with SMEs and 19 people have strongly disagreed (16%) implying that they never engage with SMEs. Now it is known that customers don't engage much with SMEs but there is no implication as to why this is the case. This is why information, interactivity and creativity could have been separated as information in an ad will not generate as much engagement with a firm as interactivity for example. The benefits of customer engagement have been highlighted earlier in the literature review, therefore it would be highly beneficial to have more insight as to why customers may or may not engage with SMEs.

**When I engage with SMEs, they respond to me.**
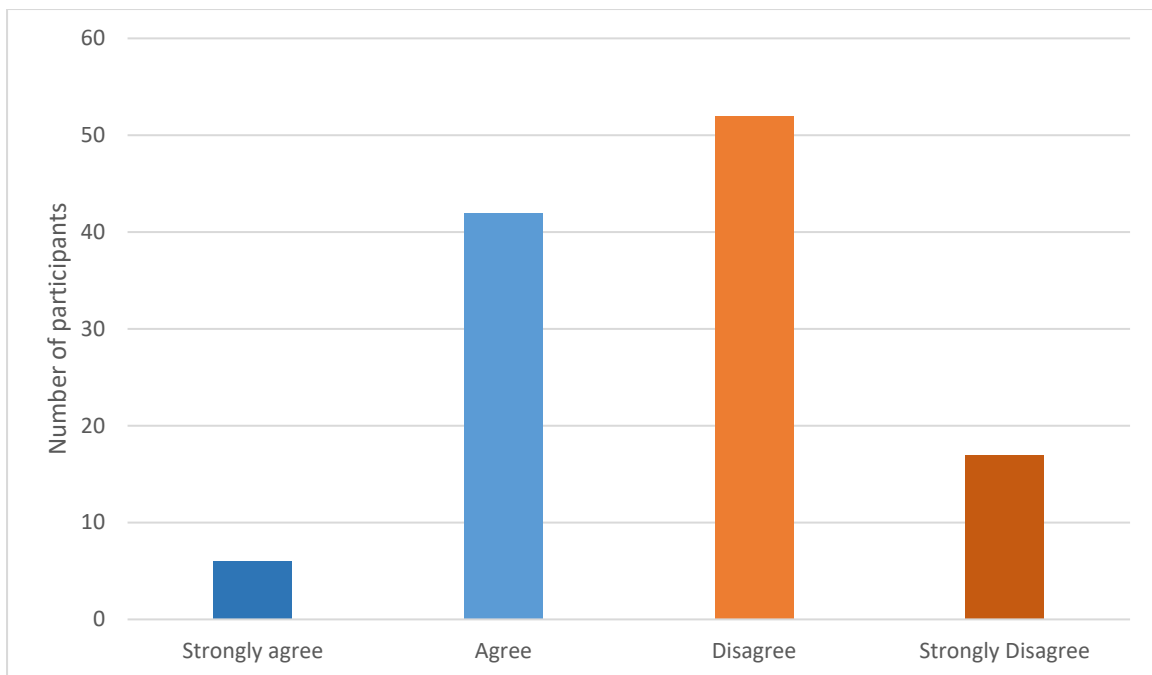
This question on the other hand shows that SMEs do a reasonable job of engaging their customers. It is true that only 48 people (41%) have either agreed or strongly agreed in comparison to the 69 people (59%) who either disagreed or strongly disagreed. However when it is considered that previously 16% never engage while also 54% rarely engage with SMEs, it means that in general SMEs do a reasonable job of engaging not just their regular customers but most of their customer base. However the results of both this question and the previous one highlight that SMEs face challenges when it comes to engaging with their customers. As customer engagement is one of the best tools to measure SM marketing success while also providing other benefits such as receiving feedback, means that SMEs' SM activities still requires improvements.

Social media advertisement regularly raises my interest towards a product.
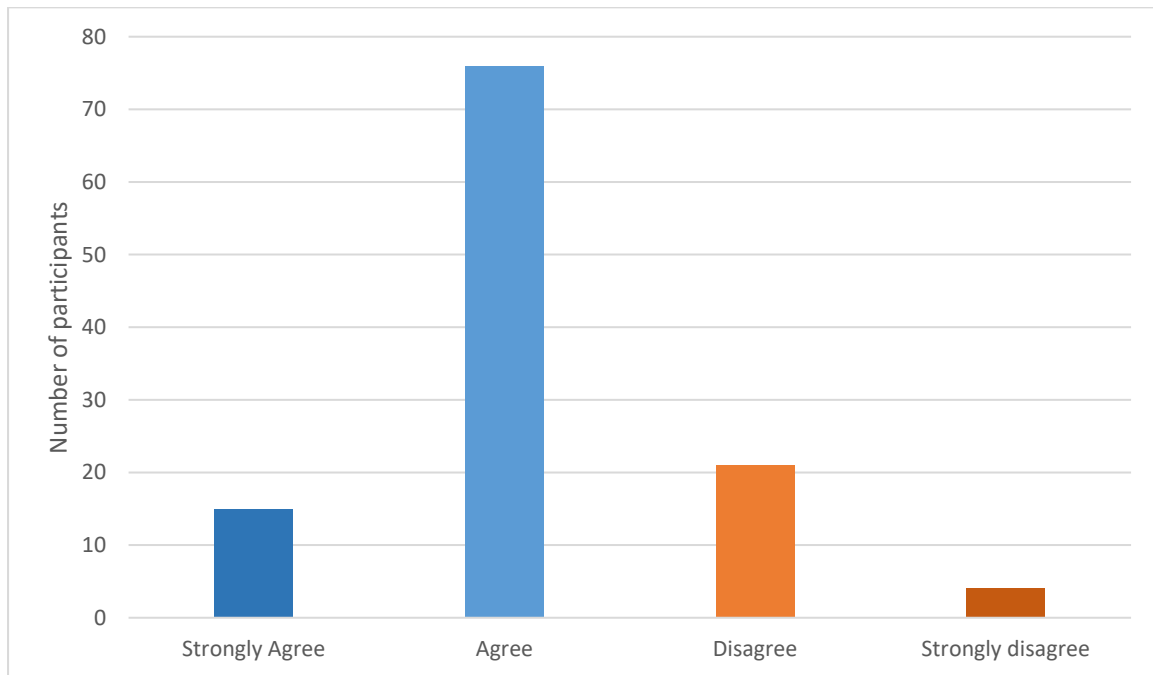

This question also aims to highlight the usefulness of SM advertising for SMEs. This highlights that 91 people (77.8%) agree that SM advertising sometimes if not usually intrigues their interest towards a product while only 26 people (22.2%) said that they rarely or never get any interest towards a product. This makes it clear that engaging content on SM could be a very powerful to for SMEs to use. These results were expected seeing that people on SM are regularly bombarded with ads on all platforms. The fact that 77.8% of people agreed or strongly agreed with this statement could be because many SM platforms such as Facebook offer targeted advertising for any companies wishing to advertise, based on the previous activities and search history of each and every people. This way companies can reach their target market much easier on SM. This also shows that SMM plays an important part in the customer behaviour process highlighted by Liang and Lai (2002), as the first step in the process is need recognition. Based on the results advertisements on SM have a high success rate of raising customers' interest.

**I regularly buy a product after seeing it advertised on social media.**
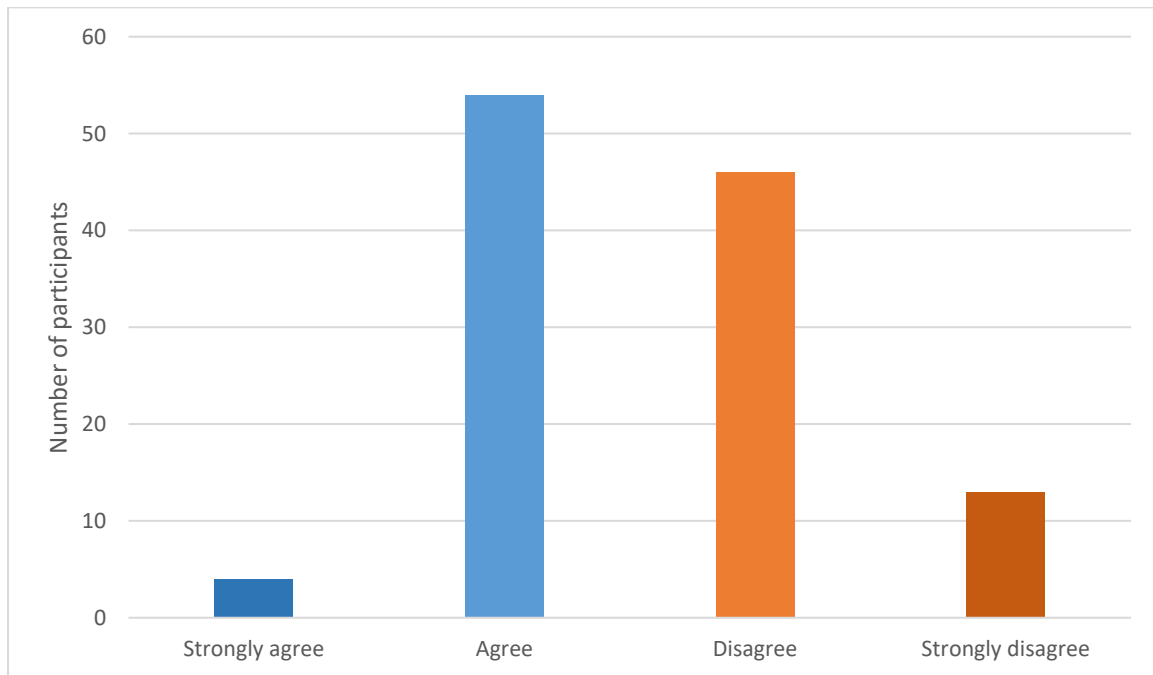
This question has the role to support the previous one and to further help to reinforce the potential that SM holds for SMEs. Something interesting happened in this question as compared to previously where 77.8% of people said that they are usually intrigued by advertisements on SM, here only 58 people (48.5%) said that they would buy a product after seeing it advertised while 59 people (51.5%) said that they rarely if ever buy a product after seeing it advertised on SM. This means that while companies can get their customers interested, much less are actually persuaded to actually buy something. Although the good news is that still nearly half of the people would actually buy something which is still a considerable number.

**If I look to find more information about a product I use social media.**
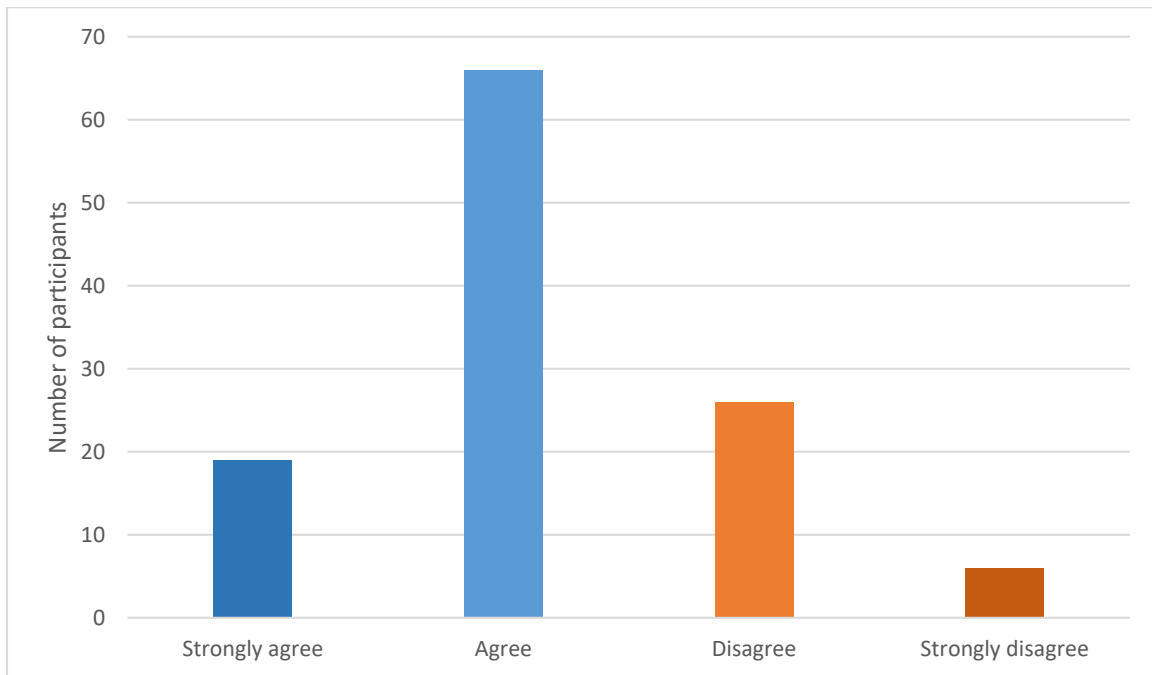
This question further reinforces the usefulness of SM platforms for businesses. It was unexpected to see 85 people (72.6%) agree or strongly agree with this statement as there are dedicated discussion forums for different products outside of SM platforms. Therefore it is a bit surprising to see such a high number of people using SM for more knowledge about a product. However this further highlights the importance of using SM for businesses as being present on it means they can have access to see what people are thinking of their products and collect it as valuable feedback. This is once again important due to the customer behaviour process as Liang and Lai (2002) pointed out that information gathering is the most important stage in the process as this has the largest impact on customer satisfaction in the post purchase stage. Therefore, the fact that 72.6% of the responses say that they use social media to access more information means that being active on SM platforms is vital for SMEs and any companies at large.

I regularly leave a review after having bought a product.
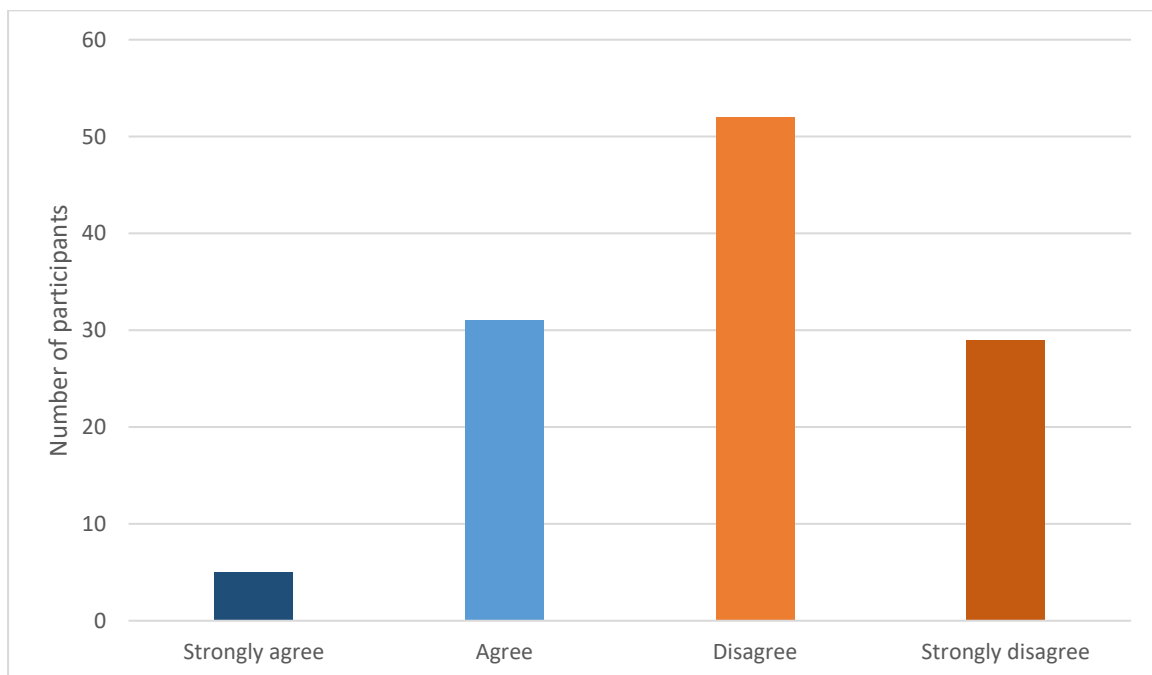
This question highlights roughly how many opinions can companies expect to see. The results show that 81 people (69.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this question meaning that they rarely if ever leave any reviews. This means that as only a relatively small number of people is likely to share their opinion, companies will not be having access to a lot of feedback without direct engagement. This further reinforces the importance of customer engagement, however it was found earlier that it is one of the biggest challenges for SMEs to generate large scale customer engagement.

I regularly seek the experiences of other people before buying a product.
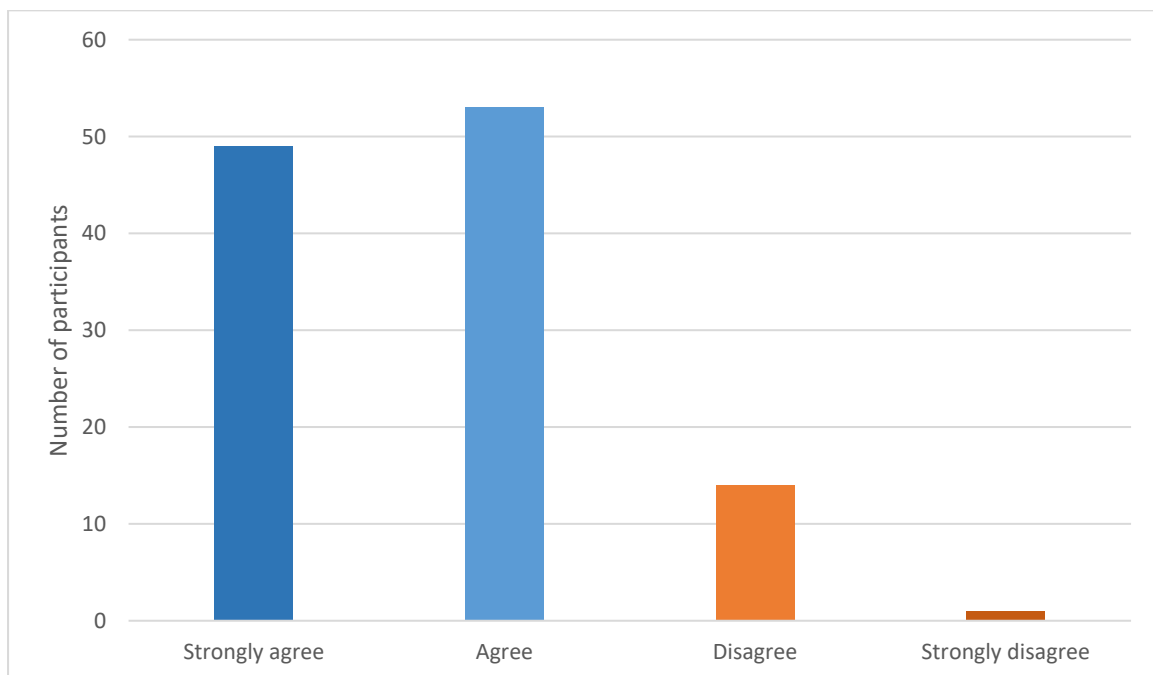
It is already clear that feedback is highly valuable for companies as they can use it to improve themselves with it. In turn this question aimed to find out how much do people value the opinions and experiences of other customers themselves. Although this question Is directly related to the previous one, it interestingly shows the exact opposite result compared to it. Here, 102 people (87.2%) agreed or strongly agreed with the question meaning that they prefer to see the experiences of other people before they buy a product themselves. This shows that previous customers' experiences are hugely important to potential customers and likely play an important part when deciding to buy a product. Furthermore as the results are so strikingly different to the previous one, it creates an interesting dynamic where the relatively few people who share their reviews can influence a comparatively large number of people's decisions. Therefore, this question strongly emphasises why it is important to first leave a good impression with their customers and second to be familiar with what the people are sharing online in relation to the firm. Lastly this question falls in line with the theory around WoM from the literature review stating that WoM and by extension e-WoM are the most important communication methods amongst customers.

When I seek the experiences of other people I do it mostly online.
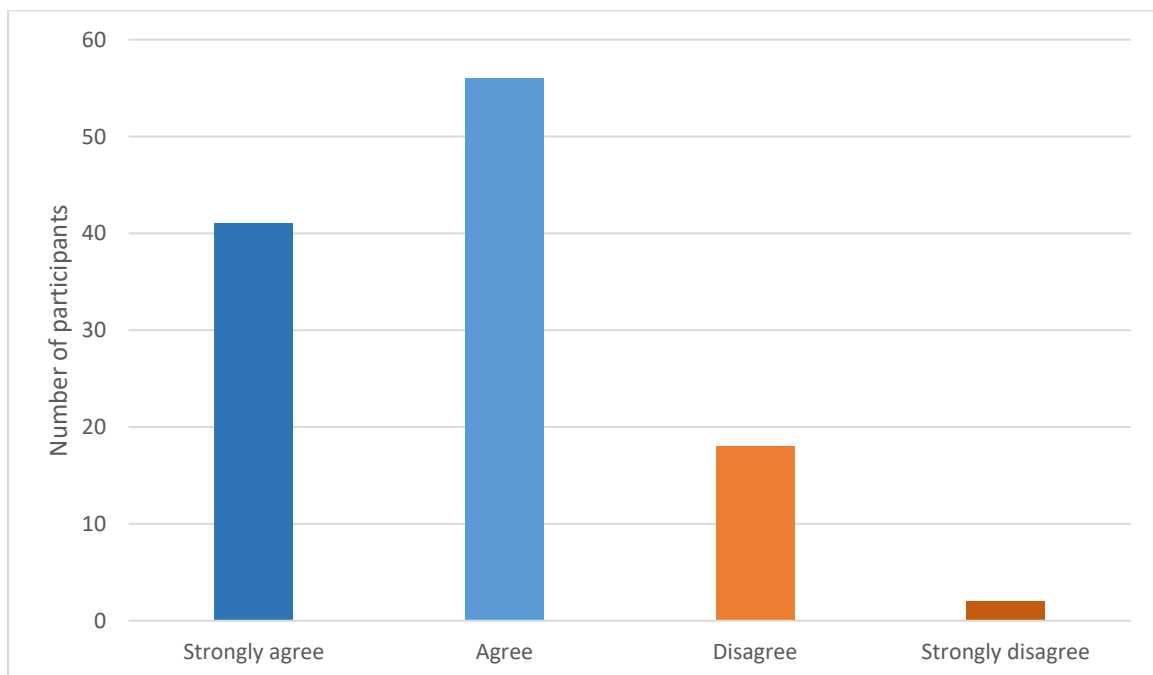
This question seeks to compare if WoM or e-WoM is used more often by different people. The results show a rather one sided preference towards e-WoM where people predominantly use the internet to share things amongst one another. As 97 people (82.9%) agreed or strongly agreed with this question, the importance of having an online presence by firms is further pronounced. Although it was expected that e-WoM will be more widely used simply because more people's opinions can be seen, even people who are unknown to you and would normally never be able to ask their opinion, but such a difference wasn't expected.

I feel that SMEs could do a better job of engaging with people on social media.
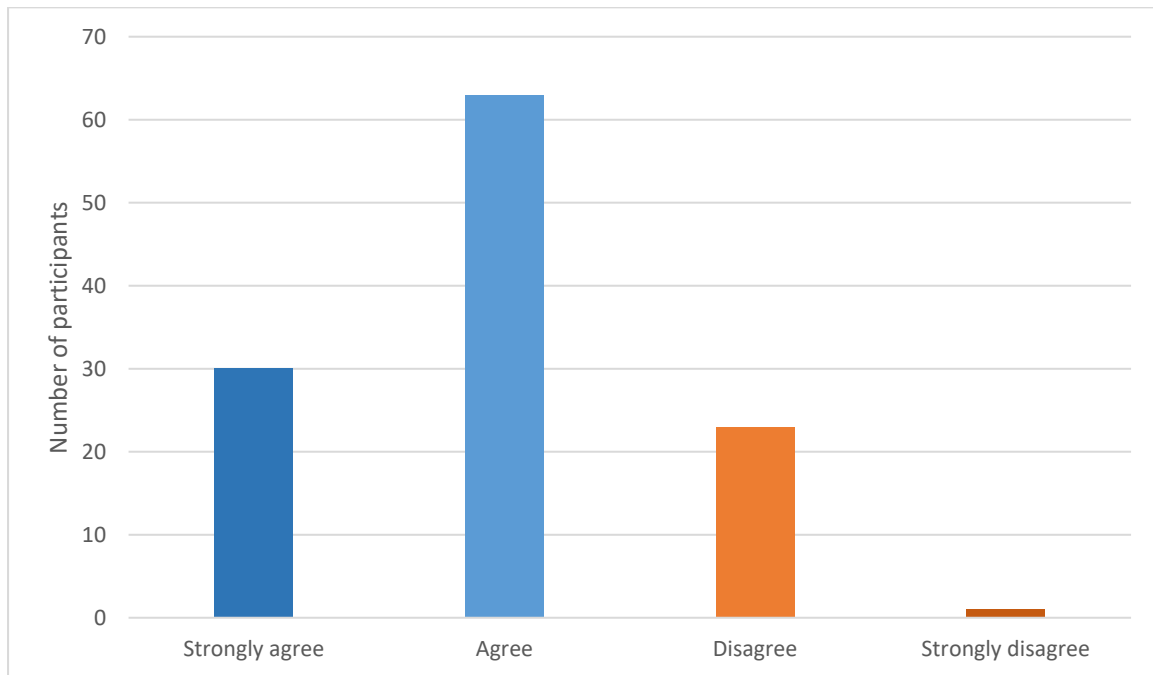
There were other question previously which aimed to see the level of engagement SMEs have managed to garner, however this question' purpose was not to see the level of engagement SMEs have but rather the attitude of the people towards customer engagement. Previously it was found that one of the biggest challenges for SMEs is to generate customer engagement. In response to that this question was seeking to gauge the general attitude of the people. The results show that 93 people (79.5%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that SMEs have space where they can improve on their customer engagement. This implies that in general people would be open to engaging with SMEs therefore the relative lack of customer engagement is not due to people not willing to engage with SMEs but rather that the people don't have a motivation to do so.

Discussion

Hypothesis 1

Now that the results have been explained, the next step is to discuss what they mean for the research. The results will be applied to the literature review and also any unexpected or interesting results will be emphasised. In the research question it was stated that the main objective of this paper is to find out if media synergies is realistic for SMEs. Again the reason for having such a big emphasis on media synergies and SMM is because as Dens et al. (2018) highlighted media synergies are poorly understood when considering a consumer driven marketing environment. The results from the finding section was that 45% of people recall seeing both online and offline advertising from the same SMEs. Although this is a higher number than expected, it is not enough to accept the alternate hypothesis, thus the null hypothesis appears to be accurate where consumers do not recall seeing advertisements of SMEs from multiple media types.

There are two main reasons why it was expected that the alternate hypothesis will be rejected. First is that most SMEs lack the resources to achieve effective media synergies where Atanassova and Clark (2015) explained that SMEs rarely if ever utilise TV and Radio advertisements, which happens to be the main tools in previous researches around media synergies. The second reason why this was expected is highlighted by Pauwels et al. (2016) and Dong et al. (2018) where they both stated that customers often are unable to accurately recall which media types they came across after seeing multiple ones.

Although the end result was not surprising the number of responses which did agree with the statement is surprising. The reason why this research was done from the customers' perspective is because Dens et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of understanding a customer driven marketing environment. However, due the reason pointed out by Pauwels et al. (2016) and Dong et al. (2018) the logical next step would be to find out more from the SMEs themselves. That way it could be seen how they conduct their marketing activities and find where they are successful or where they could improve.

Hypothesis 2

In the literature review it was explained that many researches such as Zahoor and Qureshi (2017), Rondán-Cataluña et al. (2015) and Kumar et al. (2017) found that firms should not rely solely on SMM but also use traditional marketing. However it was also explained that SMEs have limited resources thus cannot invest in multiple marketing activities simultaneously. In addition when it is also considered that SM usage is continuing to increase in the world, it was attempted to find out how successful SMM is for SMEs. When comparing the results of how much people recall seeing SM ads compared to traditional ads from SMEs it becomes evident that SMM has a stronger presence as 74% of people see

SM ads regularly as opposed to 58% recalling traditional ads from SMEs. Although this shows the success of SMM the difference is not large enough to invalidate the point made by Zahoor and Qureshi (2017), Rondán-Cataluña et al. (2015) and Kumar et al. (2017). In fact it falls perfectly in line with what they were saying as SMM is successful but it fails to gain perfect attention while traditional marketing is not too far behind. Although the results do show that people are more aware of SME SMM thus the alternate hypothesis appears to be correct.

If there would be future research around this topic, it could go into much more detail. First of all in the findings section it appeared that not all SM platforms garnered the same amount of attention towards SME ads where Facebook and Instagram appears to be much more suitable for SME SMM than YouTube for example. However there were not enough difference between the answers to confidently state that some platforms are more suitable than others, but the difference in the layout and average content of these platforms it would be worth looking into it in the future to have widen the understanding of SMM for SMEs.

Customer behaviour

Besides the two main research objectives there were a few other areas of interest as well. First of these is customer behaviour with which the importance of SM can be further assessed. There are three stages from Liang and Lai's (2002) model which are important for this discussion, these are the need recognition, information gathering and post-purchase stages. It was found that 77.8% of people agreed that SM ads intrigued their interest while also 48.5% of people said that they often buy products after seeing them advertised on SM. These two result show that SM is highly effective in creating need recognition presumably thanks to targeted advertising on those platforms. Furthermore SM was also found to be highly relevant for information gathering as 72.6% said that they use SM to find more information about a product. Just as in the literature review, it should be emphasised here as well that information gathering is the most important step in the customer behaviour process since it is directly related to customer satisfaction as customers form their expectations based on the information available to them.

Since the responses for both need recognition and information gathering heavily favoured SM, its importance for SMEs is very clear now. However, the responses in relation the post-purchase stage are not as clear. This is because 69.2% said that they don't leave reviews after purchasing a product which means that firms are left with very little feedback which also ties in with customer engagement.

Customer engagement

This is one of the best ways to measure the effectiveness of SMM while also providing benefits such as giving feedback to the firm. Therefore the second area of interest was this where it was attempted to find out how much people engage with SMEs. Unfortunately, 70% of people rarely engage with SMEs which deprives SMEs of a lot of valuable knowledge. Ajiboye et al. (2019) highlighted that creativity, information and interactivity are essential parts of creating engaging content for customers, thus when it is considered that 66.7% found SME content creative and such, it is interesting to see that 70% do not engage with SMEs. Therefore from the research it seems that this is the biggest problem SMEs face around SMM. The importance of customer engagement is clear, why customers engage so little is not as much. Therefore if any future research were to be done in around SME SMM, then more emphasis would need to put on customer engagement. SMEs would hugely benefit if they knew how to motivate their customers to engage with them.

WoM and e-WoM

The final are revolved around communication between customers and to find out whether it is more prevalent online or offline. First of all it was attempted to find out how much people tend to seek out the experiences of other people with the product they are interested in. The results overwhelmingly showed that people usually look up what other people think as 87.2% said that they seek the experiences of others before a purchase. This supports Appel et al. (2020) who stated that WoM and by extension e-WoM are the most widespread and important communication between customers. In addition 82.9% said that they look for previous experience mostly on SM. This means that SM is a vital communication tool between customers which firms can access if they are present on those platforms. This therefore also supports that SM is highly important for any company's marketing activities. However, just like previously the fact that so few people leave reviews after purchasing a product also limits e-WoM as there are fewer opinions available. This once again leads to the conclusion that any future research around the topic would need to have a heavy focus on customer engagement and to find out how to motivate people to share their opinions as it can benefit both the firm and other customers.

Conclusion

The main objective of this paper was to find out more about SMEs and media synergies as most studies mostly ignored SMEs in this topic. As SMEs generally lack resources such as time money and knowledge they are in a position where thy simply don't have the means to follow in ideal strategy where they combine multiple media tools. Therefore the objective of this paper was to learn more about SMEs along with offline and online marketing. From the literature review it became clear that while opportunities were present for SMEs there was no clear way of exploiting them. This was in large part due to the spontaneous and haphazard manner in which SMEs approach their marketing strategies which makes it difficult to identify a single strategy that would fit most SMEs. The results from the research seem to support this as the majority of the people do not come across an SME's online and offline marketing activities. Unfortunately this paper has to come to the same conclusion as Dens et al. (2020) who said that media synergies are poorly understood when considering a consumer driven marketing environment.

However, the research managed to find results which strongly suggest that SM will, and already is hugely important for marketing activities. The results showed that using SM can have positive influence on creating need recognition for customers simply due to the sheer number of targeted advertisements on SM platforms. In addition it was also found that SM is quiet relevant when customers wish to gather more information about a product they are interested in. These highlight that being active on SM not only gives more brand awareness but can also directly influence the customer behaviour process. Furthermore perhaps the biggest reason why SM is so important is due to e-WoM as there are countless instances of people engaging each other and communicating their experiences about products. Firms do not have access to in person conversations but on SM they not only have access to it but they can actively engage with consumers if they want to. Therefore the importance of SM for SMEs was more than emphasised in this paper. However, when comparing the results of how much people recall seeing ads on SM and traditional ads it is evident that SM ads are more common, but not by a large margin. This does not succeed in invalidating the point made by previous papers which say that companies should not abandon traditional media just yet. In fact the results show exactly what they say where SM is becoming more prevalent but traditional media still has a strong presence thus companies should not ignore it.

Therefore in this paper it was made clear that SM is highly important for marketing activities and is only going to become more important in the future, while it also became apparent that traditional media is still vital. Therefore it is evident that synergising the two holds many opportunities for SMEs however unfortunately the topic still is ambiguous. To make a final point, during the research it was noticed that the lack of customer feedback influenced several parts of the research such as customer engagement, customer behaviour and WoM all of which add value to SMM. Therefore if any future strides are to be

made to gain a better understanding of media synergies, looking further into customer engagement can be beneficial.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

1. What is your age group?
   18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55+

2. What is your gender?
   Male   Female   Prefer not to say

3. What is your education?

Junior certificate   Leaving certificate   Higher certificate   Bachelor's degree   Higher

4. Do you have a social media account?
   Yes   no

5. What social media platforms do you use?
   Facebook YouTube Instagram TikTok other none
   *If you do not use any social media platforms you can skip the rest of the questions below
   and press the 'done' button.

6. On average how many hours do you use social media a day?
   1-2 2-3 3-4 4-5 5+

7. I regularly encounter advertisements on social media
   Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

8. I regularly encounter social media advertisements by small and medium enterprises (SME).
   Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

9. I regularly encounter traditional advertisements (such as TV, radio or magazine) by SMEs.
   Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

10. I regularly encounter both traditional and social media advertisements by SMEs
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

11. I find the content of SME advertisements either creative, interactive or informative.
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

12. I regularly engage with SMEs on social media.
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

13. When I engage with SMEs, they respond to me.
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

14. Social media advertisement regularly raises my interest towards a product.
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

15. I regularly buy a product after seeing it advertised on social media.
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

16. If I look to find more information about a product I use social media.
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

17. I regularly leave a review after having bought a product.
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

18. I regularly seek the experiences of other people before buying a product.
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

19. When I seek the experiences of other people I do it mostly online.
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree

20. I feel that SMEs could do a better job of engaging with people on social media.
    Strongly agree agree   Disagree strongly disagree