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The influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty in the South African retail sector

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Digital Business

Johannesburg, 2024

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary landscape, characterized by the burgeoning influence of social media, this research aims to rigorously examine the effects of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty within the grocery retail sector of South Africa. The study extends beyond a simple analysis of this relationship by exploring the critical function of brand trust as a mediating variable between social media marketing efforts and the development of brand loyalty.

From a methodological perspective, the research utilized online surveys conducted via the Qualtrics platform to collect data, focusing on capturing the intricate dynamics that shape consumer perceptions in social media. The target demographic was comprised of individuals who follow leading grocery retailers in South Africa on social media platforms.

The study adopted a comprehensive analytical approach, employing descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling for multiple regression analysis. This multifaceted methodology facilitated a thorough examination of the identified variables.

Key findings underscore the significant role of brand trust in bridging the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty. Additionally, the research identified that certain aspects of social media marketing are more influential in shaping brand loyalty than others.

By concentrating on the interplay between social media, brand trust, and brand loyalty, the research provides a deeper insight into the intricate network of factors influencing consumer perceptions in South Africa's grocery retail sector. The insights garnered from this study are intended to benefit both academic circles and industry practitioners, offering them valuable knowledge and practical strategies to enhance brand loyalty through effective social media marketing initiatives.

KEYWORDS

Brand loyalty, brand trust, social media marketing

DECLARATION

I, Anashree Hansjee, declare that this research report is my work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Digital Business at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Name:Anashree Hansjee Signature: 

Signed at Johannesburg, South Africa

On the 27th day of February 2024

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work at the lotus feet of my guru and divine master, Bhagawan Shri Sathya Sai Baba.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank everyone who performed a role in completing this study.

Firstly, my sincere thanks go to my supervisor, Professor Nixon Ochara, for his steadfast guidance, invaluable insights, and unwavering support throughout the research journey. His expertise and encouragement were instrumental in defining the direction and enhancing the quality of this study. Additionally, I am grateful to Dr. J.S Nasila for his generous sharing of knowledge and guidance.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

e-WOM – Electronic Word of Mouth

SMMA – Social media marketing activity

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the role of social media marketing on consumer brand loyalty within the South African grocery retail sector. The quantitative study targets individuals living in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal who use social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram. The insights from this study can help marketers by providing a better understanding of the various aspects of marketing on social media and a guide on best practices for building brand loyalty. Additionally, the study can assist retail businesses who intend to develop effective social media marketing strategies by providing insights into how the various dimensions of social media marketing can assist them in building brand loyalty, retaining existing customers and enhancing the value of their brands.

Various studies have established the existence of an association between social media marketing and brand loyalty (Avinash, 2023; Bilgin, 2018; Dani & Susanto, 2023; Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012; Hanaysha et al., 2021; Hossain & Sakib, 2016; Ismail, 2017; Mehrabi et al., 2014; Sohail et al., 2019). Whilst some studies have established that a positive relationship exists between social media marketing activities or dimensions and brand loyalty (Dani & Susanto, 2023; Haudi et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2022; Ismail, 2017), other studies have indicated that not all dimensions of social media marketing behaviour have a positive relationship with brand loyalty (Hanaysha et al., 2021; Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Faisal, 2022). For this study within the South African grocery retail context, the following aspects of social media marketing were adopted: Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customisation, and Word of Mouth, as indicated by Kim and Ko (2012). These five dimensions represent the independent variables in the study, with brand loyalty being the dependent variable. The study examines the relationship between each of the five dimensions and its impact on Brand Loyalty via a

mediating variable, Brand Trust, to provide a view of the findings from a South African retail grocery perspective.

1.2 Background to the study

Social media has changed how companies connect with customers and market their products and services, and it has become a vital aspect of the marketing strategy of businesses across the globe.

Social media is a tool that provides marketers with distinct ways to connect with customers irrespective of their locations (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Social media has received more attention recently due to its accelerated growth and ease of use amongst marketers to reach many individuals cost-effectively. Unlike traditional media like TV, newspaper, radio and billboards, social media marketing offers two-way communication between a company and its customers (Hossain & Sakib, 2016).

The context for this study is South Africa, which has approximately 40.8 million internet users, with internet penetration growing yearly. In addition, South Africa has almost 30 million social media users, approximately 48.8% of the country's total population. In recent years, there has been a significant uptick in social media usage within South Africa, establishing it as an optimal platform for businesses to engage with their customer base. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube have emerged as the predominant channels for this purpose.

Facebook has a user base of 27 million and is seen as an effective marketing tool in South Africa. Results from the Social Media Industry Survey in 2022 revealed a shift in social media use by major brands in South Africa, with Facebook and Instagram showing the lowest usage levels in the past five years. The study also revealed that the usage of TikTok by significant brands is on the rise. Despite these shifts amongst major brands, Facebook and LinkedIn remain the top social media platforms on which major South African brands are active, followed by X

(formerly Twitter) and Instagram. In addition, 58% of major brands in South Africa spend the most considerable portion of their social media advertising budget on Facebook, 22% on LinkedIn, and 15% on Instagram, with the remaining significant brands spending their budget on other platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp (Goldstuck et al., 2022).

The continued growth in social media adoption within South Africa makes it an important topic for businesses to understand, as it directly influences brand loyalty, customer engagement, and, ultimately, organisational success. Whilst research was done on the topic internationally, South Africa's unique socio-cultural landscape with diverse demographics, languages, and consumer behaviours means a gap in understanding South African consumers' specific nuances and preferences regarding social media marketing. Therefore, researching this topic is of great significance as it helps shape the knowledge of marketers, academics, and policymakers and helps advance social media marketing practices in the country.

1.3 South African grocery retail sector

A diverse range of formal and informal retailers characterises the retail industry in South Africa. This research concentrates explicitly on formal retail businesses that operate within the legal framework of South Africa, are registered with the South African Revenue Services (SARs), and adhere to the obligation of paying taxes on their generated income (Lappeman et al., 2020). Given the considerable magnitude of the formal retail sector in South Africa, this study centres on formal grocery retailers such as Game, Makro, SPAR, Pick n Pay, Woolworths, Shoprite, Checkers, and Food Lover's Market.

The South African grocery retail industry is dominated by four major grocery retail chains that make up approximately 90% of the formal grocery retail industry in South Africa. These include Shoprite Holdings Ltd, Pick n Pay Stores Ltd, SPAR Group and Woolworths Holdings. The industry is highly concentrated, with all four

retail chains having stores across all nine provinces in South Africa. The market share within the formal grocery retail industry in South Africa comprises Shoprite with 33% of the market share, followed by Pick n Pay with 25% market share, SPAR with 22%, Woolworths with 10%, Game and Cambridge (Walmart) with 6%, Choppies 2%, and Food Lover's Market with 2% (Vilakazi et al., 2020).

The Shoprite Group, which holds the largest market share, comprises Shoprite, Checkers, Usave, and OK stores. These grocery retailers within the Shoprite Group cater to various demographics across South Africa. Pick n Pay, the second largest grocery retailer, offers various consumer goods, including groceries, clothing, and general merchandise. Pick n Pay historically targeted upper-income customers but has focused on growing its presence within the lower-income segment in South Africa over the years. The SPAR Group, South Africa's third largest grocery retailer, specialises in groceries and general merchandise. SPAR traditionally targeted older customers but shifted its focus to expand store formats catering to middle and younger target markets and rural communities. Woolworths Holdings offers food and clothing and focuses mainly on upper-income customers (das Nair & Chisoro, 2015).

The retail sector in South Africa, which contributes substantially to the nation's economy, is currently facing many persistent challenges. These include rising interest rates, increasing fuel costs, the constant energy crisis, and supply chain disruptions. These challenges have also significantly impacted South African consumers, who are now experiencing higher food costs and more pressure on their finances. Continuous load shedding, weak economic conditions, heavy rainfall at the end of 2022, and rising input costs have contributed to rising food costs. Load shedding has significantly impacted business operations for farmers, food producers and food retailers. Consequently, grocery retailers in the country are cutting back on buying to minimise the risk of wastage due to ongoing power cuts across the country (Jaco Visser, 2023).

Whilst global food prices have dropped, the price of food in South Africa rose to an all-time high in February 2023 by 13.6% compared to the previous year

(Maleke, 2023). Consequently, South Africans are becoming increasingly cash-strapped and are seeking value by turning to house brands, also known as white labels, to stretch their budgets (Fraser, 2023). Loyalty to brands and retailers in the grocery industry has declined, with shoppers switching to cheaper brands. Shoppers are also making fewer trips to grocery stores, which is more planned due to reduced disposable incomes. Impulsive buying is declining, with shoppers focusing more on groceries, household essentials, and staple foods. As a result of the continuous load shedding, South African consumers are also choosing larger retailers with generation capacity, usually found in shopping malls. The rising fuel cost has also motivated shoppers to choose malls where multiple stores can be visited without spending extra on fuel. Several large grocery retailers have had to invest in renewables at stores and distribution centres, and retailers like Shoprite are spending approximately R1 billion a month on diesel for their generators due to load shedding (BizCommunity, 2023).

However, the shift towards more frugal food shopping habits is not limited to South African consumers. Similar trends have emerged in other countries, such as Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, where high inflation rates have recently been observed. While lower-income households in these countries have displayed the highest levels of food frugality, there has also been a noticeable increase in frugal food shopping practices among middle-income households. This trend highlights the mounting financial pressures that consumers are facing, particularly in the current economic climate (Pieters et al., 2023).

Amidst this backdrop, competition among grocery retailers has heightened. Some grocery retailers have developed a deep understanding of customers, what motivates them to purchase at certain grocery retailers, and what would keep them in their stores (Nkgome et al., 2019). In 2022, the grocery retailer SPAR unveiled plans to expand its fresh food offerings in-store, particularly in its deli section, while prioritising environmentally sustainable packaging. SPAR has also

recently launched its e-commerce platform, SPAR2U, enabling customers to shop online (BusinessTech, 2022).

Pick n Pay, a major grocery retailer in South Africa, has revealed intentions to introduce novel store formats that specifically cater to the needs of middle-market consumers who frequent Checkers and SPAR. In contrast, Woolworths has invested in digital infrastructure, specifically enhancing customer engagement on its social media platforms. This has resulted in the development of innovative tools, such as the virtual makeup try-on feature on its Instagram platform. On the other hand, the Shoprite Group, which predominantly caters to the lower end of the market, has recently concentrated on leveraging new shopping technologies and renovating its stores to serve the needs of middle to high-end consumers. This strategic move aims to increase its market share by competing with Woolworths and Pick n Pay (Business Tech, 2022).

Within the context of changing consumer shopping behaviours within the grocery retail landscape in South Africa, brand loyalty becomes even more important as consumers become more frugal. Brand loyalty was widely studied, and it is widely acknowledged that a consumer may be deemed loyal when they exhibit a solid commitment to a particular brand, engage in repeat purchases driven by positive brand associations and have a sense of fulfilment of their needs. The degree of brand loyalty can be regarded as a measure of the likelihood of consumers switching to alternative brands. Loyal consumers are inclined to persist in their consumption of a brand despite the availability of alternative brands offering superior product attributes. Moreover, loyal consumers often voluntarily endorse and recommend the brand to others, generating positive word-of-mouth effects that can ultimately drive company profits (Haudi et al., 2022).

Brand loyalty is a crucial objective for brand owners, so they have resorted to employing diverse marketing strategies. Besides conventional marketing methods, brand owners have increasingly recognised the significance of social media marketing in this regard. Due to its cost-effectiveness and reach, social

media marketing has become a compelling tool for engaging customers and fostering brand loyalty (Huseynov & Abasin, 2020).

Understanding how marketing efforts on social media influence consumer brand loyalty is essential in the context of evolving consumer behaviours and retailer initiatives in the grocery retail sector. Consequently, this study examines the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty in the South African grocery retail industry.

1.4 Research problem

The proliferation of internet access in South Africa has led to a concurrent rise in social media adoption, as evidenced by recent research (Goldstuck, 2022). This trend has prompted regional marketers to allocate more resources toward social media marketing campaigns. However, the extent to which such efforts enhance brand loyalty remains poorly understood.

Despite the mounting significance of social media marketing in South Africa, there is a significant research gap from a local perspective. Previous studies conducted in Turkey (Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012; Huseynov & Abasin, 2020; Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016), Qatar (Fetais et al., 2022), Saudi Arabia (Sohail et al., 2019), India (Yadav & Rahman, 2018), and Indonesia (Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Faisal, 2022), have explored the topic. However, the unique challenges and opportunities of social media marketing in the South African context, particularly within the grocery retail industry, remain understudied. Prior studies in other countries suggest the necessity for future studies to take place across other countries to enrich the generalisability of the findings (Cheung et al., 2021; Yadav & Rahman, 2018) and also include other industry sectors (Yadav & Rahman, 2018), including food (Hilal, 2022). These gaps present a unique opportunity to study this nature within a South African context, where prior research is lacking in the grocery retail sector. In addition, there is an opportunity to include several

social media platforms instead of limiting the study to one platform, as in prior studies (Ahmed & Saeed, 2021; Hilal, 2022).

Addressing these gaps allows researchers, marketers, and retailers to understand this phenomenon better and develop effective strategies to foster customer loyalty in an evolving South African social media and grocery retail landscape. This will provide a unique perspective on the topic.

1.5 Research objectives

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty within the South African grocery retail sector.

Social media marketing activities consist of five dimensions, and therefore, the following sub-objectives relating to each dimension were identified:

i. Determine the influence of Entertainment on Brand Trust on social media
ii. Investigate the influence of Interaction on Brand Trust on social media
iii. Examine the influence of Trendiness on Brand Trust on social media
iv. Determine the influence of Customisation on Brand Trust on social media
v. Explore the effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on Brand Trust on social media
vi. Examine the influence of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty
vii. Analyse the role of Brand Trust in mediating the connection between social media marketing activities and Brand Loyalty.

1.6 Rationale

Social media has become a fundamental platform for businesses to market their products and services, particularly within the retail sector. In South Africa, businesses use social media platforms to engage with their customers, promote their offerings, and enhance brand awareness. Despite this increase in social

media marketing efforts, the impact of these activities on brand loyalty within the South African grocery retail sector remained uncertain.

The significance of this study is anchored in its ability to shed light on the efficacy of social media marketing and its role in fostering brand loyalty within the grocery retail sector. The insights from this research hold considerable implications for retailers considering social media marketing as a vehicle to promote their products and cultivate brand loyalty. As marketers increasingly prioritise social media as a marketing channel, it becomes imperative to assess the effectiveness of these efforts in engendering brand loyalty among consumers.

Furthermore, this study contributes to social media marketing literature and brand loyalty from a South African context. Although several studies have examined the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty, most have focused on other countries, and no studies have explored the topic from a South African grocery retail sector context. Therefore, this study's findings uniquely contribute to the literature and assist in filling some gaps in our understanding of the South African grocery retail sector's marketing practices.

Lastly, research on the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty within the South African grocery retail industry can have significant implications for policymakers, policy decisions, and regulations related to social media marketing and the retail sector. By uncovering how social media marketing activities affect consumer behaviour and brand loyalty, this study can guide policy decisions that seek to regulate and guide retailers' use of social media marketing tactics. The study's findings can also assist policymakers in identifying potential areas of improvement in the current regulations governing social media marketing in South Africa. Additionally, the insights from this study may enable policymakers to create policies that promote consumer protection and encourage retailers to adopt responsible social media marketing practices. Overall, this research study could shape the direction of policy decisions and regulations related to social media marketing and the retail grocery sector in South Africa.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

The following delimitations for the study are outlined below:

i. Geographic scope: This study's focus is South Africa, and other countries and regions have not been included.
ii. Industry focus: The study focuses on the grocery retail industry and has not included other industries, such as manufacturing or services. There is a specific focus on formal grocery retailers and excludes informal retailers like spaza shops.
iii. Target Sample: The scope of the target sample is confined to social media users, which implies that the findings of this study may not be extrapolatable to the broader South African population. Furthermore, this research focuses on social media users active on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X (previously known as Twitter).
iv. Time period: This is a cross-sectional study conducted at a point in time.
v. Theory: The theory relating to social media marketing activities is based on the framework developed by Kim and Ko (2012), which comprises five dimensions of social media marketing activities. Hence, other frameworks on social media marketing activities and other dimensions that make up social media marketing activities from other studies have not formed part of the scope of this study.
vi. Variables: Whilst several variables influence brand loyalty, this study focuses on the effect of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty. More specifically, the five dimensions or activities of social media marketing will be independent variables, and Brand Loyalty will be the dependent variable. Brand trust will mediate between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. Other variables like customer satisfaction or perceived value will not be included in the scope of this study.

1.8 Definition of terms

The following terms that are key to the study were defined below:

a) Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is characterised by a customer's commitment and dedication to a particular brand, reflected in their willingness to repeat purchases of its products or services. This concept is crucial to achieving business success, as it contributes to customer retention, increased sales, and positive word-of-mouth marketing (Sanil, 2023). Brand loyalty results from a strong bond between a customer and a brand, demonstrated through repeated purchases. This behaviour reflects positive attitudes towards the brand, a commitment, and a desire to continue buying from it. Loyal customers will continue to choose the brand despite the availability of competing products with better features, and they may even recommend the brand to others, which can improve profits for the company (Haudi et al., 2022).

This study defines brand loyalty as the consumer's enduring commitment to a brand, manifested through repeated purchases and a consistently positive disposition towards the brand.

b) Social media

Social media is pivotal for engaging with customers and understanding their preferences. It allows customers to convey their endorsement of products or content via likes, votes, and comments. Additionally, social media offers a dynamic platform for consumers to attract attention and participate in collective social initiatives (Puspaningrum, 2020). Defined as an array of applications built on the technological foundation of Web 2.0, social media enables the dissemination of user-generated content. This conceptualisation of social media,

as outlined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), is utilised within the context of this study.

Social media marketing refers to utilising social media platforms to promote products and services as part of digital marketing strategies. This form of marketing involves various activities, including content creation and sharing, customer engagement, and advertising (Sanil, 2023). Social media marketing activities fall into a branch of digital marketing that supports conventional advertising methods (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Social media marketing activities are expanded into five dimensions: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and word of mouth (Kim & Ko, 2012). This study's operation definition for social media marketing activities is based on these five dimensions by Kim and Ko (2012).

c) Grocery retail sector

For this study, the grocery retail sector refers to all formal grocery retail businesses that operate within a South African legal framework, are registered with the South African Revenue Services, and adhere to the obligation of paying taxes on their generated income. This definition was adapted from Lappeman and Egan (2020).

1.9 Assumptions

The following assumptions were made regarding the study:

The first assumption is that all participants have answered the questions set out in the study as honestly and truthfully as possible. To ensure this, participation is voluntary, and respondents can opt out of the survey at any time. An online methodology was used to conduct the survey, and no personally recognisable information was collected, like name, surname, address, telephone, etc. Respondents' IP addresses were removed from the data set to ensure further

anonymity. In addition, respondents were assured in writing of the confidentiality and anonymity of their feedback.

The second assumption is that the research instrument or online questionnaire elicits reliable participant responses. To facilitate this, a pilot test was done before the commencement of fieldwork to assess the research instrument's efficacy in this respect.

The third assumption is that the conceptual framework focuses on how marketing efforts on social media influence brand loyalty, with brand trust being selected as a mediator. However, various factors can influence brand loyalty, including customer experience, perceived value of products and not just social media marketing.

The fourth assumption is that social media marketing activities within the retail grocery sector of South Africa have remained stable and continued unaltered through the study's fieldwork period.

The fifth assumption is that social media marketing approaches adopted by grocery retailers in South Africa vary; hence, their potential to enhance brand loyalty may differ.

The sixth assumption is that some social media marketing activities may be more efficacious in building brand loyalty on specific social media platforms than others. For example, Instagram focuses on image-heavy content, while LinkedIn focuses on professional networking.

1.10 Chapter outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 of this study aims to lay a foundational understanding guided by pertinent theoretical frameworks relevant to the topic at hand. The background information delves into the South African grocery retail sector, contextualising the

research area. Furthermore, the chapter identifies the research problem, outlines the main research objectives, and delineates sub-objectives based on various dimensions of social media marketing activities. The significance of the study is also discussed, along with the scope of the research, key definitions, and underlying assumptions. Finally, a detailed outline of the chapter is presented.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 introduces social media marketing, and a detailed overview of the various social media marketing activities identified in the literature will be provided. The chapter also explores the concept of brand loyalty, a crucial element in the success of any marketing strategy. A thorough examination of the origins of brand loyalty is conducted, drawing on various theoretical frameworks to understand its underlying principles. The chapter then explores the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty, investigating how social media can be leveraged to foster and enhance customer loyalty.

In addition, Chapter 2 also provides a practical analysis of the South African retail industry, focusing on the grocery retail sector and highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities within this industry from a South African perspective.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Chapter 3 delineates the research methodology employed in this study, incorporating established methodologies and drawing from relevant literature. This chapter systematically outlines the research approach, design, population and sampling methodology and explains the research instrument employed for data gathering. It further details the data collection procedures, data analysis and

interpretation methods, identifies study limitations, and discusses measures for quality assurance and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Presentation of research findings.

Chapter 4 offers an in-depth presentation of the research findings, employing descriptive and inferential statistical methods to present and interpret the results. The structure of the chapter is clear and logical, aiming to deliver a thorough and unbiased account of the research outcomes.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the findings

Chapter 5 summarises the study's key findings and interprets the research findings as they relate to the research objectives. The findings are also compared and contrasted to existing literature on the subject.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

Chapter 6 summarises the study's significant findings and recommendations based on those findings. The significance of the study and its implications from a theoretical and managerial perspective were covered in this chapter. The chapter concludes with the research's limitations and highlights areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the evolution of social media marketing research, followed by a discussion on social media marketing. The chapter then discusses the theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the study and the hypotheses that were developed.

2.2 Evolution of social media marketing research

Over the years, scholars have shown a keen interest in social media marketing and how it relates to brands and customers. Such studies have examined how social media marketing activities have influenced various dimensions of a company's brand, including brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand engagement (Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Avinash, 2023; Bilgin, 2018; Dani & Susanto, 2023; Haudi et al., 2022; Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Faisal, 2022; Puspaningrum, 2020; Sohail et al., 2019; Srivastava et al., 2022; Van & Fah, 2022). Previous studies on the topic of the effect of social media marketing activities, specifically on brand loyalty have established that a relationship exists between the two (Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Arif & Tanjung, n.d.; Avinash, 2023; Bilgin, 2018; Dani & Susanto, 2023; Hanaysha et al., 2021; Hilal, 2022; Ibrahim, 2022; Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Akram Faisal, 2022; Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016; Tung et al., n.d.).

In Kim and Ko's (2012) study, a framework relating to activities for social media marketing was developed, and five dimensions that make up social media marketing activities were identified: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and electronic word of mouth or e-WOM. This study took place within the luxury brand market and examined how social media activities

impacted brand equity, value equity, customer equity, and purchase intent. Subsequently, other studies have adopted all or some of the five dimensions of social media marketing (Ahmed, 2022; Alanazi, 2023; Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Avinash, 2023; Bilgin, 2018; Dani & Susanto, 2023; Hanaysha et al., 2021; Ibrahim, 2022; Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Faisal, 2022; Nabi et al., 2021; Sohail et al., 2019).

Other research has recognised the presence of other factors or dimensions of social media marketing and incorporated them into their studies. These dimensions include advantageous campaigns, relevant content, updated content, popular content and online communities (Ahmed & Saeed, 2021; Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012; Hossain & Sakib, 2016; Puspaningrum, 2020; Srivastava et al., 2022; Tung et al., n.d.).

A review of existing literature reveals that most research on this topic has been conducted primarily in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, with a notable concentration of studies from Saudi Arabia. (A Almohaimmeed, 2019; Alanazi, 2023; Sohail et al., 2019), Turkey (Bilgin, 2018; Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012; Huseynov & Abasin, 2020), India (Avinash, 2023; Srivastava et al., 2022; Yadav & Rahman, 2018), Indonesia (Dani & Susanto, 2023; Haudi et al., 2022; Puspaningrum, 2020), and Vietnam (Tung et al., n.d.; Van & Fah, 2022) whilst minimal studies of this nature have taken place within an African context (Alala et al., 2019; Hilal, 2022). The gaps identified in earlier studies prompted the expansion of research on the topic across various markets, intending to improve the generalisability of their findings (Cheung et al., 2021; Huseynov & Abasin, 2020). No study of this nature has taken place in Southern Africa, and this topic presents a unique opportunity to derive insights from a South African perspective and contribute to the topic from an African regional perspective.

Previous research has investigated the direct correlation between social media marketing activities (SMMAs) and brand loyalty.(Ahmed & Saeed, 2021; Alanazi, 2023; Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012; Hanaysha et al., 2021; Hossain & Sakib, 2016; Mehrabi et al., 2014), Others also examined the role of mediating variables in the

relationship between SMMAs and brand loyalty. These mediating variables included store love (Ahmed, 2022), cognitive and emotional engagement (Aljuhmani et al., 2022), brand trust (Avinash, 2023; Dani & Susanto, 2023; Ebrahim, 2020; Sohail et al., 2019; Van & Fah, 2022), brand awareness, brand image (Bilgin, 2018), and psychographics (Hilal, 2022).

The examination of moderating variables in the relationship between social media marketing activities (SMMAs) and brand loyalty has been addressed in prior research, albeit to a lesser extent. These moderators include age, gender, education (Hilal, 2022), culture (Nabi et al., 2021), methodological variables, social variables, and economic variables (Ibrahim, 2022). Several past studies on the topic emphasised younger demographics and targeted mainly university students, urban youth, and millennials (Ahmed & Saeed, 2021; Avinash, 2023; Hossain & Sakib, 2016; Ismail, 2017; Nabi et al., 2021; Van & Fah, 2022; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). A study done in India (Srivastava et al., 2022) argued that social media marketing is a relatively new concept, and despite being adopted mainly by the younger generation, the need to understand how it influences brand loyalty across age groups is essential.

From an industry perspective, past studies have taken place within the luxury goods market (Fetais et al., 2022; Kim & Ko, 2012), fashion products (Alanazi, 2023; Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Faisal, 2022; Van & Fah, 2022), fast foods (Arif & Tanjung, n.d.; Hanaysha et al., 2021; Puspaningrum, 2020), e-commerce (Yadav & Rahman, 2018), the airline industry (Aljuhmani et al., 2022), and studies within the grocery retail sector have been minimal, with one study in Norway examining how SMMAs impact store loyalty of a grocery retailer, with store love as a mediator between SMMAs and store loyalty (Ahmed, 2022).

The grocery retail sector within South Africa is changing. This limited examination of the topic within the grocery retail sector and the changing dynamics of the sector from a South African perspective warrant important focus; hence, a study on the influence of social media marketing within the South African grocery retail perspective contributes to the topic from a sector perspective.

2.3 Social media marketing

While social media marketing was extensively studied in global contexts (A Almohaimmeed, 2019; Ebrahim, 2020; Fetais et al., 2022; Kim & Ko, 2012; Puspaningrum, 2020; Srivastava et al., 2022; Yadav & Rahman, 2018), there is a scarcity of research specifically focused on South Africa. Given the country's unique cultural, economic, and social factors, it is crucial to understand how social media marketing strategies impact brand loyalty differently within South Africa.

The utilisation of social media as a communication platform has undergone significant transformation over the years. At its inception, social media served primarily as a means for individuals to connect with family and friends; however, its growth has led to its increasing use as a communication channel by companies to keep their consumers informed with the latest information regarding their products, offer discounts, provide access to special promotions, and disseminate news relevant to their brand or company (Ismail, 2017).

Unlike in traditional forms of marketing, where brands were restricted to outdated one-way communication, social media allows for two-way communication with customers; hence, time, place, and medium are no longer barriers to reaching customers. This two-way dialogue enables brands and customers to create new innovative products, relevant services, and the latest business models and values collaboratively (Kim & Ko, 2012). Social media marketing provides distinct ways for brands to connect with customers by addressing customer complaints, offering instant chat, and distributing promotional coupons (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Seen as a cost-effective and easy way to reach large numbers of customers (Hossain & Sakib, 2016), social media marketing enables integrated activities at a lower cost and with less effort (Kim & Ko, 2012). The advantage of social media is that it is cheaper than traditional platforms for launching marketing campaigns, it is easier to secure new customers due to the large number of people on social media, and it helps brands maintain successful relationships with customers. It can also create lifelong customers and build long-term loyalty (Ibrahim, 2022).

2.4 Analytical frameworks

2.4.1 Theoretical framework

Social media marketing activities

SMMAs are a subcategory of digital marketing (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). In 2012, Kim and Ko developed a framework for SMMAs and identified five dimensions: entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and electronic word of mouth or e-WOM (Kim & Ko, 2012). The framework is built upon work by Lemon et al. (2001) that looked at the essential elements driving customer equity and categorised customer equity into three main areas: value, brand, and customer relationship. Value equity is based on quality, price and convenience and is the customer's perception of what has to be given up for what is received. The second is relationship equity, which deals with whether a customer wants to remain in a relationship with a specific brand, whilst the third is brand equity, which is an assessment of a brand over and above its actual value (Lemon et al., 2001).

The framework for measuring SMMAs has remained reasonably unchanged across most studies, and more recent studies on the topic have used the original framework (Cheung et al., 2020; Dani & Susanto, 2023; Fetais et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2022). However, some scholars have adapted the framework; for example, Yadav and Raman (2018) used only four dimensions in their study within the e-commerce industry.

The following subsections will look at these five dimensions of SMMAs:

a) Entertainment

Brands creating memorable, fun, and playful social media experiences result in entertainment. Social media content that is enjoyable and exciting is seen as entertaining (Van & Fah, 2022). Entertainment can be created through games,

video sharing, and contests (Cheung et al., 2020). Entertaining content motivates customers to engage with brand-related materials. This engagement can be in the form of reading, viewing, commenting, and sharing content (Cheung et al., 2021). Entertaining content can also help develop a more vital intimacy between the customer and the brand (Ahmed, 2022).

b) Interaction

Interaction is a form of two-way communication and involves the sharing of ideas on social media with others who have similar interests (Ahmed, 2022), and involves sharing information, exchanging opinions with others (Godey et al., 2016) and provides a means for discussions to take place (Sohail et al., 2019). Two interaction levels occur on social media between consumers and brands; the first is content consumption, and the second is content contribution (Qin, 2020). Content consumption refers to browsing or following a brand's social media page, and content contribution includes sharing, commenting on, and publishing posts related to the brand on social media (Qin, 2020).

Social media provides interaction by allowing customers to like, vote, and comment on a brand's products and content, thus providing a strategic means of communicating with customers (Puspaningrum, 2020). Interactions also motivate customers to generate their own content for brands (Cheung et al., 2021). As customers engage more frequently with brands on social media, their needs are more satisfied. Social media platforms facilitate a seamless exchange of content and opinions among customers. Brands should diversify the content on their social media channels to stimulate engagement with their products and services (Ibrahim, 2022).

c) Trendiness

Trendiness pertains to a brand's capacity to share the most current and trendiness information related to the brand. (Bilgin, 2018; Fetais et al., 2022; Godey et al., 2016; Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Faisal, 2022; Yadav & Rahman, 2018). A brand portrays trendiness on social media when it provides brand-

related updates, product reviews, and fresh concepts that customers consider current (Van & Fah, 2022). When brands display trendiness, they create a perception amongst customers that the brand is gaining popularity and recognition (Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Faisal, 2022). Customers perceive social media as valuable and current and use the platform to gain instant access to brand information (Ahmed, 2022). Marketers utilise social media to disseminate brand updates to customers that will build trust (Ibrahim, 2022).

D) Customisation

Customisation refers to the extent to which brands offer tailored services that align with customers' preferences on social media (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Customisation is how brands use social media platforms to offer personalised information and services, typically tailored to a specific individual or a small audience (Godey et al., 2016). Customisation also refers to a brand's ability to offer customised information search or service via social media platforms (Aljuhmani et al., 2022).

Marketers can leverage social media platforms to provide tailored messages and content relating to services, thereby implementing a personalised marketing approach to targeted customer groups that deliver value (Ebrahim, 2020).

d) Electronic Word of Mouth or e-WOM

Electronic Word of Mouth refers to how customers recommend a brand and share experiences about that brand on social media (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Electronic word of mouth is the statement made by potential, previous, and current customers regarding a product or brand that is available to others through social media (Ketaren et al., 2022). It refers to how customers pass along information and upload content on social media (Godey et al., 2016). It is fast and can effortlessly reach people beyond borders, whilst it is also seen as trustable as it comes from customers who do not benefit from it (Huseynov & Abasin, 2020). There are two types of word-of-mouth marketing (Alanazi, 2023). The first occurs naturally, and the second uses marketing and advertising initiatives, and

there is an overlap between the two. Electronic Word of Mouth in the form of reviews and ratings extensively assist and influences customers in decision making (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Peer recommendations through Electronic Word of Mouth are considered credible and trustworthy sources (Hilal, 2022). Unlike traditional word of mouth, Electronic Word of Mouth, through reviews and recommendations, stays longer on social media platforms, and users can read and view these at any time. Electronic Word of Mouth can influence people to buy products and services through referrals shared on social media platforms (Shanmugam & Sulthana, 2019), whilst reviews and ratings help customers in the decision-making process before buying a product or service (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Several scholars suggest that electronic word of mouth is a trustworthy method (Cheung et al., 2020, 2021; Fetais et al., 2022).

Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is the repetitive purchasing of a product by a customer within a competitive environment (Huseynov & Abasin, 2020). Several scholars suggest that loyalty is made up of two components, behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, with behavioural loyalty referring to repeat purchases of a brand or product, whilst attitudinal loyalty refers to commitment and attachment to a brand or product (Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Avinash, 2023; Fetais et al., 2022; Van & Fah, 2022). Additionally, a third form of loyalty is composite loyalty, which encompasses both behavioural and attitudinal aspects (Ibrahim, 2022).

Loyalty is crucial in helping brands nurture customer relationships (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Customers demonstrating loyalty to a brand typically exhibit reduced sensitivity to price changes, frequently advocate positively on behalf of the brand, and remain largely unaffected by competitors' marketing efforts. (Hilal, 2022). When a customer is loyal to a brand, price increases will not make loyal customers discontent (Huseynov & Abasin, 2020). Brand loyalty is, therefore, a solid commitment to consistently making future brand purchases (Puspaningrum, 2020).

In markets with high competition, attracting loyal customers and keeping them loyal is a challenge (Mehrabi et al., 2014). Brand loyalty allows a firm to grow sustainably and have a competitive edge in the market (Ahmed & Saeed, 2021).

Brand trust

Many scholars have emphasised the importance of creating trust in a brand. Brand trust is the customer's readiness to depend on a brand due to the belief that the brand will deliver a favourable outcome for the customer (Chubukova et al., 2019). Brand trust is created when a brand keeps its promises (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016). For trust to be built, a brand must meet or exceed a customer's expectations (Chubukova et al., 2019). Brand trust helps brands build strong customer relationships and is crucial in developing loyalty through social media (Samarah et al., 2022). To create trust, a brand must build reliability and good intentions towards the customer (Srivastava et al., 2022).

2.4.2 Hypothesis development and conceptual framework

Social media marketing activities and brand loyalty

Several scholars have emphasised the importance of SMMAs in building brand loyalty and helping brands to grow (Ahmed, 2022; Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012; Ismail, 2017; Nabi et al., 2021). When a brand includes popular and relevant content across various social media platforms, a notable relationship develops between social media and brand loyalty (Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012). In a study amongst university students, social media marketing significantly impacted brand loyalty (Ismail, 2017). Social media marketing can help people obtain information about brands, pay attention to brands, buy brands, and ultimately generate brand loyalty (Nabi et al., 2021). SMMAs positively impact brand loyalty (Dani & Susanto, 2023). In a study by Sohail et al. (2019), where three aspects relating to marketing on social media were used, namely entertainment, interaction, and customisation, it was found that these aspects positively affected brand loyalty.

Entertainment, interaction, and customisation significantly affect brand awareness, brand image, and customers' loyalty to a brand (Bilgin, 2018). The most significant dimensions were entertainment and customisation (Bilgin, 2018). Electronic word of mouth was also established as a key SMMA positively influencing brand loyalty (Huseynov & Abasin, 2020). Effectively generating positive word-of-mouth on social media and managing negative expressions can bolster customer loyalty towards brands (Hilal, 2022). Two studies on urban youth and university students indicated that electronic word of mouth negatively influenced loyalty (Ahmed & Saeed, 2021; Hossain & Sakib, 2016). With these differences in results for the impact of electronic word of mouth on loyalty, it is vital to understand how this dimension impacts loyalty within the grocery retail sector in South Africa.

Effective interactions and customer connections result in stronger customer-based relationships and stronger brand loyalty (Hanaysha et al., 2021; Ibrahim, 2022). Frequent interactions and communications with customers and brands help create profitable customer relationships, strengthening brand loyalty (Hanaysha et al., 2021).

Social media marketing activities and brand trust

Past studies that have examined the relationship between the five dimensions of social media marketing and their impact on brand trust were limited. A 2020 study in Saudi Arabia examined three dimensions of social media marketing: entertainment, interaction, and customisation, and it found that these dimensions positively impact trust (Sohail et al., 2019). In a 2022 study in Vietnam, four dimensions of social media marketing, namely trendiness, interaction, entertainment, and electronic word of mouth, were examined, and results indicated that all four dimensions impact and trust (Van & Fah, 2022). In a 2020 study in Egypt, three dimensions of social media marketing, namely trendiness, customisation and word of mouth, were examined, and the results indicated that these dimensions had a significant positive impact on brand trust (Ebrahim,

2020). In a 2023 study in Indonesia, all five social media marketing aspects were investigated, and the results indicated that all had a significant positive impact on brand trust (Dani & Susanto, 2023). Social media is deemed more reliable and trustworthy than traditional marketing channels due to its ability to provide interactive communication and instant feedback, thereby allowing consumers to generate content on their own (Sohail et al., 2019). Social media marketing can directly affect trust in a brand (Chubukova et al., 2019).

Based on this, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1a: Entertainment on social media has an impact on Brand Trust

H1b: Interaction on social media has an impact on Brand Trust

H1c: Trendiness on social media has an impact on Brand Trust

H1d: Customisation on social media has an impact on Brand Trust

H1e: Electronic Word of Mouth or e-WOM has an impact on Brand Trust

Brand trust as a mediator

Brand trust can also increase Brand Loyalty (Puspaningrum, 2020). Brand trust is a crucial antecedent to Brand Loyalty (Sohail et al., 2019). Trust impacts loyalty, and brand trust mediates Brand Loyalty (Sohail et al., 2019). Results from a study in the hotel industry also showed that trust acts as a mediator between social media marketing and loyalty (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğmuş, 2016). A study in India argued that it takes time to build trust, and results from this study indicated that brand trust mediates the relationship between social media and brand loyalty (Srivastava et al., 2022).

Based on the above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H2a: Brand Trust has an impact on Brand Loyalty in social media

H2b: Brand Trust mediates the influence of social media marketing activities on Brand Loyalty in social media

Conceptual framework

This study examines the influence of social media marketing initiatives on brand loyalty, with brand trust as a mediating factor, within the South African grocery retail sector. This study examines marketing activities on social media concerning five specific dimensions, namely entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation, and electronic word of mouth drawn from the work done by Kim and Ko (2012). The conceptual framework below provides a graphical representation of the relationships examined in this study.

This study's independent variables consist of Entertainment, Customisation Interaction, Trendiness, and Electronic Word of Mouth (E-Wom), collectively constituting social media marketing activities. Brand Loyalty is identified as the dependent variable, with Brand Trust acting as the mediating variable.

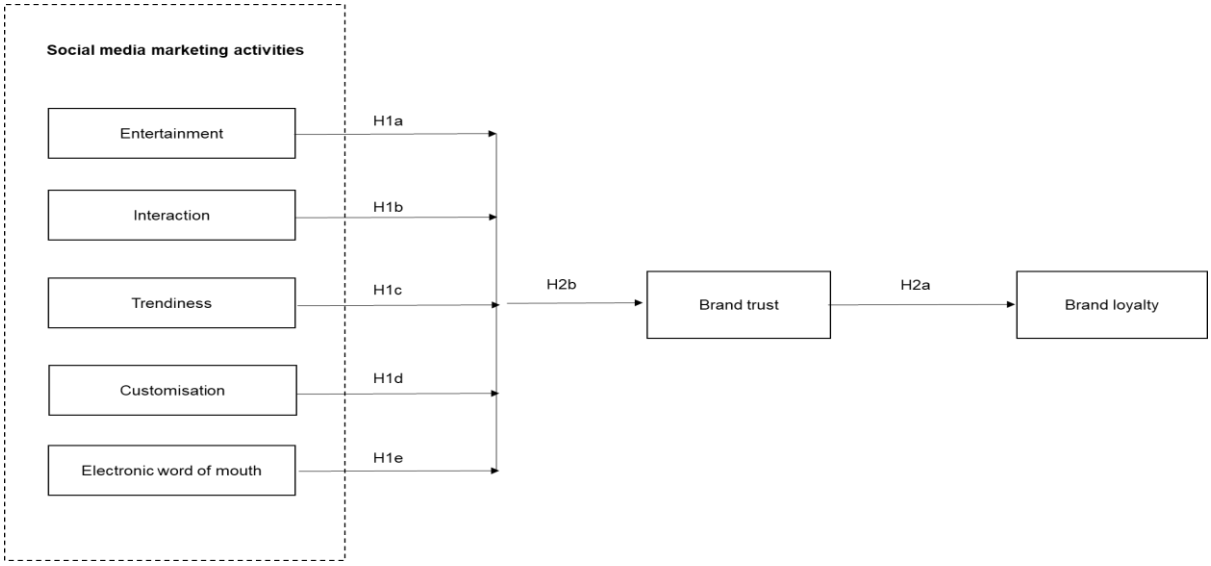


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

2.5 Conclusion of literature review

This chapter laid the foundation for the subsequent empirical investigation by synthesising relevant literature and identifying gaps the present study seeks to address. The review has identified a notable research gap, specifically the limited investigation conducted in the context of South Africa. Given the increasing use of social media in the country, the unique marketing dynamics, and the changing landscape of the retail grocery sector, conducting research in this area becomes even more crucial. Additionally, the expanding focus by marketers on social media marketing spend and investment further emphasises the importance and relevance of conducting this study within the South African context.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is a crucial framework for understanding the approach and techniques employed to accomplish the study's objectives. It outlines the systematic action plan, providing a transparent data collection, analysis, and interpretation roadmap. This chapter outlines the selected research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, and data analysis techniques, ensuring rigour and reliability. The chapter demonstrates the methodological soundness and validity of the research and sets a solid foundation for generating meaningful and trustworthy findings.

3.2 Research approach

The primary objective of this study is to explore the relationship between social media marketing activities and their influence on Brand Loyalty, with Brand Trust serving as a mediating factor. A quantitative methodology was employed to accomplish this goal. Quantitative research requires the gathering and analysis of statistical data using mathematical methods to test hypotheses and delineate the relationship between variables.

This study identifies the five dimensions of SMMAs as independent variables. In addition, Brand Loyalty was identified as the dependent variable and Brand Trust as the mediating variable. Since the aim is to measure the relationship between these variables, a quantitative research approach was seen as most appropriate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, quantitative research methods allow for testing hypotheses through various statistical techniques and add analytical rigour to research findings.

3.3 Research design

This study's primary objective is to explore and understand the connection between social media marketing and Brand Loyalty, investigating how Brand Trust acts as a mediating variable in this relationship. To achieve this objective, an explanatory research design was selected for its capacity to facilitate a systematic exploration and analysis of the relationships between variables, thereby offering a more profound comprehension of the phenomenon under study (Saunders et al., 2007). Utilising this design, the study thoroughly examined the direct correlation between social media marketing and brand loyalty, in addition to investigating the mediating influence of brand trust. This approach has illuminated the fundamental processes influencing customer behaviour within social media marketing.

Moreover, considering the limitations of time constraints, this employed a cross-sectional approach. A cross-sectional study design examines a specific phenomenon at a particular time, capturing data from diverse individuals. This design differs from a longitudinal study, which gathers data from the same individuals multiple times over an extended duration (Saunders et al., 2007). A cross-sectional design allows for a snapshot of the variables under investigation, thus providing valuable insights into their current associations. Although a longitudinal study offers the advantage of observing changes over time, it necessitates a more extended time commitment and is not feasible within the constraints of this study. Therefore, a cross-sectional study was deemed appropriate and practical.

3.4 Methods and Procedures for data collection

Primary data for this study was collected via an online survey and hosted on the Qualtrics survey platform. The main advantage of online surveys is their scalability and ability to reach a large target sample. The increasing ubiquity of internet access in South Africa allows for the distribution of online surveys to

individuals from various geographical locations and backgrounds. This also enables a broader reach, thus ensuring a more representative sample and enhancing the external validity of the study's findings. This ability to obtain a wider reach and larger sample size contributes to increased generalisability of the study's findings. Another advantage of online surveys is that they provide convenience to both the researcher and the participant. Online survey platforms like Qualtrics provide automated skip logic functions and validation checks to reduce errors and enhance data quality. Respondents could also complete the survey at their convenience, eliminating the need for scheduling appointments or face-to-face interactions. Online survey platforms facilitate efficient data handling, with responses being automatically recorded. This automation significantly minimises the necessity for manual data entry and lowers the risk of transcription errors. They also allow for the easy exporting of data in various formats for further statistical analysis. Online surveys are well suited to collect quantitative data. Closed-ended questions with pre-defined responses allow for the collection of structured data that can be readily analysed using statistical techniques.

Prior to commencing fieldwork, the questionnaire was pilot-tested. The main aim of this pilot testing was to test the length of the questionnaire, identify errors in the questionnaire flow, test the questionnaire routings, and identify if there were misunderstandings of the questions. A total of 15 respondents were invited to participate in the pilot and ranged in age from 18 to 55 years.

Once the pilot test was completed, minor adjustments to the questionnaire based on the test findings were implemented. A link to the questionnaire was created and shared via WhatsApp with the researcher's contacts. The survey link was also posted on the researcher's Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (formerly Twitter) pages. Respondents were encouraged to invite their networks to participate by requesting them to share the survey link.

3.5 Population and sample

3.5.1 Population

There are almost 30 million social media users in South Africa that make up approximately 48.8% of the total population in the country (Goldstuck et al., 2022).

The population size for this study is South African grocery retail consumers following any of the formal grocery retailers on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, or LinkedIn. These formal grocery retailers include Game, Makro, Pick n Pay, Shoprite, Woolworths, SPAR, Checkers, and Food Lover's Market. The population for this study is unknown; however, an estimate was derived by adding the number of followers on each of the formal grocery retailers' Facebook pages.

3.5.2 Sample and sampling method

The sampling strategy employed in this research was a hybrid approach, integrating both convenience and snowball sampling techniques. Sampling entails choosing a subset of individuals from a broader population to represent that population in a study. Selecting a representative and suitable sample is crucial to achieving the research objectives, ensuring the findings' generalisability and validity.

Convenience sampling and snowball sampling are categorised as non-probability sampling methods. Convenience sampling is characterised by selecting participants based on their availability and ease of access, implying that this method encompassed individuals who were readily approachable and willing to participate in the study. Through convenience sampling, individuals within the researcher's immediate social network were selected across the various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) and

LinkedIn. Participants were asked and encouraged to refer individuals to participate in the study, creating a ‘snowball’ effect.

Given time and resource constraints, the primary motivation for adopting convenience and snowballing sampling techniques in this study was its practicality and feasibility. These sampling techniques allow for quickly gathering data from readily available groups of participants who can refer others to participate.

Both convenience and snowball sampling have limitations due to their potential to create a lack of representativeness, where participants may not necessarily reflect the characteristics and diversity of the target population; therefore, generalising findings beyond the sampled group is limited and could compromise external validity. In addition, the use of these sampling techniques can introduce bias.

The population for this study was estimated at 9,670,249 and was derived by adding the number of Facebook likes across the six retailers, as per the table below.

Table 1: Population estimates

Formal grocery retailers	**Facebook likes**	**Source**
Game	1, 000, 000	(Game Stores, n.d.)
Makro	665,000	(Makro, n.d.)
Pick n Pay	2,179,076	(Pick n Pay, n.d.)
Woolworths	2,148,609	(Woolworths, n.d.)
Shoprite	1,405,840	(Shoprite, n.d.)
Checkers	1,271,182	(Checkers, n.d.)
SPAR	631,935	(Spar, n.d.)
Food Lover's Market	368,607	(Food Lover’s Market, n.d.)
Total estimated population	9,670,249	

Given the estimated population size, the following formula (Yamane, 1967) was used to calculate sample size:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} = \frac{9\,670\,249}{1 + (9\,670\,249 \times 0.05^2)} = 400$$

n = sample size

N = population size of the study

e = margin of error in the calculation

Using the above formula, a robust sample size for this study is 400; however, a sample size of 300 or more is of excellent quality, and a sample of 150 is acceptable (Siddiqui, 2013). The sample size that was used in this study was 158.

3.6 The research instrument

This study's questionnaire comprises three main sections that collect relevant data. The first section serves as an introduction, providing participants with a clear understanding of the study's purpose. Participants are assured of their anonymity, reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation, and given the option to proceed or decline. Should participants opt to proceed, they were presented with a sequence of screening questions designed to verify their alignment with the predetermined inclusion criteria for the study.

For instance, an age-related question is included to exclude participants below 18 years of age. Additionally, participants were required to indicate that they follow any of the eight designated grocery retailers on Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), or LinkedIn to continue taking the survey. The first and second sections of the questionnaire aimed to ensure that the study reached the right participants.

The third section of the questionnaire focused on the primary constructs of the study. Participants utilised a five-point Likert scale to rate 11 items relating to

social media marketing activities, adapted from the study conducted by Kim and Ko (2012). Additionally, participants provided ratings on their level of Brand Trust using a five-point Likert scale, with four items adapted from a previous study (Ebrahim, 2020). The last set of questions in this section addressed Brand Loyalty, with participants again employing the same five-point Likert scale to rate each statement. These questions were adapted using the scale items from Ebrahim (2020) and Aljuhmani et al. (2022).

The comprehensive questionnaire can be found in Appendix B of this research report. Furthermore, the table below outlines the principal dimensions and variables measured in the survey within each primary construct and their respective items.

Table 2: Survey variables and items

Dimensions/ Variables	**Items**	**Source**
Age	1. Below 18 years 2. 18 – 20 years 3. 21 – 30 years 4. 31 – 40 years 5. 41 – 50 years 6. 51 – 60 years 7. 60+ years	(Ebrahim, 2020)
Entertainment	1. Using my main grocery retailer's social media is fun	(Kim & Ko, 2012)
	2. Contents shown in my main grocery retailers social media seem interesting.	
Interaction	3. My main grocery retailer's social media enables information sharing with others.	
	4. Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through my main grocery retailer's social media.	
	5. It is easy to deliver my opinion through my main grocery retailers' social media	
Trendiness	6. Contents shown in my main grocery retailer's social media is the newest information.	
	7. Using my main grocery retailer's social media is very trendy.	
Customisation	8. My main grocery retailer's social media offers customised information search	
	9. My main grocery retailer's social media provides customised service.	

Electronic Word-of-Mouth	10. I would like to pass along information on brands, products, or services from my main grocery retailer's social media to my friends.	
	11. I would like to upload content from my main grocery retailer's social media on my blog or microblog.	
Brand Trust	1. My main grocery retailer is honest	(Ebrahim, 2020)
	2. My main grocery retailer works for my happiness.	
	3. My main grocery retailer works hard to satisfy me.	
	4. My main grocery retailer's promises are real.	
Brand Loyalty	1. I intend to keep purchasing the services offered by my main grocery retailer	(Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Ebrahim, 2020)
	2. I am loyal to my main grocery retailer	
	3. I consider myself to be loyal to my main grocery retailer.	
	4. I would recommend my main grocery retailer to someone who seeks my advice.	
	5. I would encourage friends and relatives to do business with my main grocery retailer.	

The first section of the questionnaire aimed to introduce the study, inform participants about the voluntary study, and ensure their anonymity. It also included screening questions to ensure the correct participants completed the survey. The next section of the questionnaire aimed to measure participants' perceptions of the various dimensions of social media marketing. This was followed by a question with four statements that measured Brand Trust as a mediating variable. The next question aimed to measure participants' Brand Loyalty using a set of five statements. Lastly, the demographic question at the end aimed to provide more context to the study.

3.7 Data analysis strategies and interpretation

Upon completion of data collection for the study, the dataset was downloaded from Qualtrics and subjected to a data cleaning process. All respondent identifiers and IP addresses were removed from the dataset to ensure anonymity. Subsequently, all variables were coded and entered into the SPSS and JASP software for further analysis. The initial step in the analysis involved utilising descriptive statistics to describe the dataset comprehensively. This encompassed calculating the frequency and percentages of categorical variables

and determining the mean scores, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis of the data. Reliability testing and Pearson chi-square tests were also performed on the data.

Upon completion of the descriptive statistics, multivariate analysis was conducted utilising various statistical tools to examine the hypotheses formulated for this study. In particular, confirmatory factor analysis was used as a pivotal tool to validate the theoretical framework and measurement model used in the study. Its primary purpose was to assess the relationships between observed variables and latent constructs, thereby confirming or refining the proposed structure of these constructs.

In addition, correlation analysis was employed as an additional statistical tool. Specifically, Pearson's correlation coefficient was utilised to assess the strength and direction of the relationships among the variables examined in this study. Pearson's correlation coefficient quantifies the linear relationship between the variables, ranging from -1 to +1. A positive correlation coefficient indicates a positive association, so if one variable increases, the other also tends to increase. Conversely, a negative correlation coefficient signifies a negative association; the other tends to decrease as one variable increases.

Correlation analysis further elucidates whether Brand Trust was a mediating factor in the connection between social media marketing initiatives and Brand Loyalty by scrutinising the patterns of association among these variables. (Saunders et al., 2007). In addition, significance testing was conducted to identify whether the observed correlations were statistically significant.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used in the data analysis to incorporate mediator analysis to unravel indirect relationships among variables. This approach aimed to refine theoretical frameworks by rigorously validating mediation effects and establishing statistical significance. By employing SEM with mediator analysis, the study has delved deeper into understanding complex

variable relationships and provided a robust statistical foundation for the study's findings.

3.8 Limitations of the study

Since this study was conducted exclusively online amongst individuals who follow grocery retailers on social media, this sampling approach may have introduced limitations as it excluded individuals who do not actively engage with grocery retailers on social media. Therefore, this study's findings may not represent the entire grocery retail consumer population in South Africa.

There may also be generalisability limitations to the study as it focuses explicitly on the grocery retail sector. While this sector is essential in South Africa and provides valuable insights, the findings may have limited generalisability to other industries or sectors. Factors unique to the grocery retail sector, such as the frequency of purchases or the nature of customer loyalty, may influence the outcomes in a way that may not apply to other industries or sectors.

The study is online and relies on self-reported data by participants, and this introduces the possibility of response bias, where participants may not accurately recall or report their behaviours, attitudes, or perceptions related to social media marketing and brand loyalty.

Since the study is cross-sectional, this could introduce a causality limitation. Factors other than social media marketing could influence brand loyalty; establishing causality may be complex without a longitudinal research design.

Since this study was conducted online, the researcher has had limited control over external factors that could influence a participant's responses. These factors include the participant's current mood, concurrent marketing campaigns or recent experiences with any grocery retailer that could shape or influence participant perceptions.

While every effort was made to ensure a diverse sample of individuals participates, there may still be inherent biases in the sample composition due to using a hybrid sampling approach through both convenience and snowball sampling methods.

3.9 Quality assurance

3.9.1 External validity

To ensure external validity, multiple grocery retailers were included in the analysis to ensure the insights derived from the study were applied to a range of businesses seeking to leverage social media marketing strategies. In addition, a diverse sample of participation across a range of age groups was included in the study.

3.9.2 Internal validity

In order to enhance internal validity, the researcher employed a reliable and valid measurement instrument with measurement constructs from previous studies (Ebrahim, 2020; Kim & Ko, 2012). Pilot tests were performed to test the research instrument further to enhance internal validity. Consistency in the data collection method was also maintained to ensure internal validity.

3.9.3 Reliability

Assessing the reliability is an essential step in ensuring the consistency and dependability of measurement instruments. To do this, the researcher utilised Cronbach's alpha, which quantifies the internal consistency of a set of items within a scale (Saunders et al., 2007). Cronbach's alpha is employed to quantify the degree of interrelatedness among items within a scale, thereby estimating the consistency with which these items measure the same underlying construct.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations play a crucial role in safeguarding the integrity of the research process, ensuring the protection of participants, and promoting responsible dissemination of the study's findings.

Participation in the study was optional, and prior to engaging in the study, potential participants received a communication containing information about the survey's purpose and benefits. This communication included a hyperlink to access the survey. By clicking the provided link, participants were directed to the initial survey screen, which explicitly outlined the survey's objective. Additionally, a disclaimer was presented, underscoring the voluntary nature of participation and assuring participants of strict confidentiality and anonymity throughout the survey process. Participants were assured that the data collected would be aggregated and analysed at a collective level rather than individually. This approach further ensured the protection of participants' confidentiality. Subsequently, participants were presented with the choice to either proceed with the survey or decline participation by responding to a screening question.

Data was collected using the Qualtrics platform, necessitating authentication via a username and password. The researcher adopted stringent measures to safeguard the confidentiality of the Qualtrics login credentials. After completing the fieldwork phase, the researcher downloaded the Excel file comprising the entire survey dataset onto a personal laptop, password-protected to mitigate unauthorised access. Moreover, the data file itself was encrypted with a password to fortify the security of the dataset, thereby preventing unauthorised individuals from obtaining access.

In order to further ensure participant anonymity, prior to the utilisation of the SPSS and JASP software platforms for data analysis, a meticulous data cleansing process was executed. This process encompassed the removal of all respondents' IP addresses and response IDs, which are automatically collected through the Qualtrics platform. By eliminating these identifying details from the

dataset, the confidentiality and anonymity of participants were effectively maintained.

The online nature of this survey allowed participants to complete the survey within the confines of their environment, guaranteeing both safety and privacy. Additionally, this mode of administration ensured that the survey did not impose any intrusive elements or inflict harm upon the participants. Also, the research topic addressed in this study was characterised as having a low-risk level, preventing respondents' need to disclose personal or sensitive information.

In order to preserve the integrity and objectivity of the research process, it is imperative to note that the researcher harbours no personal, professional, or financial stakes in the outcomes of this study. Consequently, the researcher has committed to upholding the principles of impartiality and integrity throughout the research endeavour, ensuring the absence of any potential conflicts of interest**.**

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we assess the influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty amongst grocery retailers in South Africa. The chapter summarises the demographics and descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. This chapter proceeds to present findings obtained from factor analysis and correlation analysis. Additionally, results from the multiple regression analysis are detailed in this section.

The data collected from the online surveys are analysed using SPSS and JASP statistical software. Prior to analysis, the survey data underwent a thorough review and data cleaning to ensure accuracy. A total of 376 responses were collected from the survey. The data was cleaned, and respondents who did not meet the criteria of using social media and following any of the grocery retailers on social media were excluded from the data set. After data cleaning, only 158 valid responses were used for statistical analysis.

4.2 Demographic characteristics of respondents

The survey consisted of one demographic question relating to the respondent's age. The survey targeted respondents of all age groups aged 18 years and older. The survey also asked respondents about the grocery retailers they follow on social media and which grocery retailers they consider their main outlet. The results from these questions follow the sections below.

4.2.1 Age

The age criteria for respondents to participate in the survey was 18 years and older. Respondents who were younger than 18 years of age were screened out of the questionnaire.

The results indicate that most respondents were aged 31 to 40 (36.1%), followed by 41 to 50 (34.18%). This indicates that the majority of respondents (70.26%) were middle-aged. The smallest proportion of respondents were aged 18 to 20 (0.63%).

The following table and pie chart display the frequency and percentage of respondents from the various age groups included in the study.

Table 3: Age of respondents

Respondent's age group					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid percent**	**Cumulative percent**
Valid	18 – 20 years	1	.6	.6	.6
	21 – 30 years	12	7.6	7.6	8.2
	31 – 40 years	57	36.1	36.1	44.3
	41 – 50 years	54	34.2	34.2	78.5
	51 – 60 years	23	14.6	14.6	93.0
	60+ years	11	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	158	100.0	100.0	

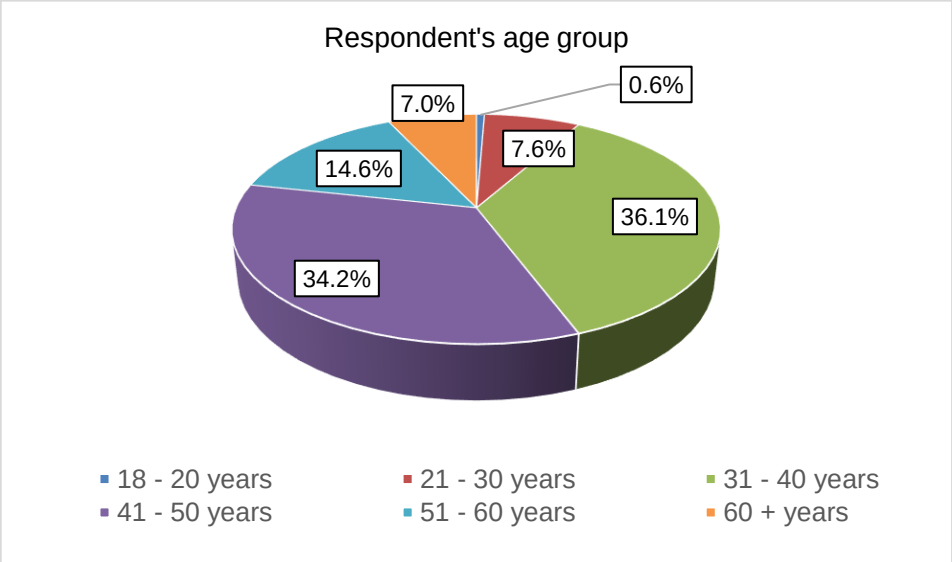


Figure 2: Pie chart of respondent's age

4.2.2 Grocery retailer following on social media

Respondents were inquired about the grocery retailers they follow on social media, such as Facebook and Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), or LinkedIn. The results indicate that Woolworths was the most followed grocery retailer on social media, with 118 (74.4%) of the 158 respondents following Woolworths on social media. Shoprite and SPAR had the lowest followings on social media, with only 26 (16.5%) of the 158 respondents following both grocery retailers on social media. Given these results, SPAR and Shoprite can improve their social media following across their social media platforms. The following table and bar graph show the proportion of respondents following each grocery retailer on social media.

Table 4: Grocery retailer's respondents follow on either Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) or LinkedIn

Grocery retailer's respondent's following on either Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), or LinkedIn.						
Grocery retailers			**Frequency**	**Percent**	**Valid percent**	**Cumulative percent**
Checkers	Valid	Yes	86	54.4	54.4	54.4
		No	72	45.6	45.6	100
		Total	158	100	100	
Food Lover's Market	Valid	Yes	33	20.9	20.9	20.9
		No	125	79.1	79.1	100
		Total	158	100	100	
Game	Valid	Yes	21	13.3	13.3	13.3
		No	137	86.7	86.7	100
		Total	158	100	100	
Makro	Valid	Yes	47	29.7	29.7	29.7
		No	111	70.3	70.3	100
		Total	158	100	100	
Pick n Pay	Valid	Yes	69	43.7	43.7	43.7
		No	89	56.3	56.3	100
		Total	158	100	100	
Shoprite	Valid	Yes	26	16.5	16.5	16.5
		No	132	83.5	83.5	100

		Total	158	100	100	
SPAR	Valid	Yes	26	16.5	16.5	16.5
		No	132	83.5	83.5	100
		Total	158	100	100	
Woolworths	Valid	Yes	118	74.4	74.4	74.4
		No	40	25.3	25.3	100
		Total	158	100	100	

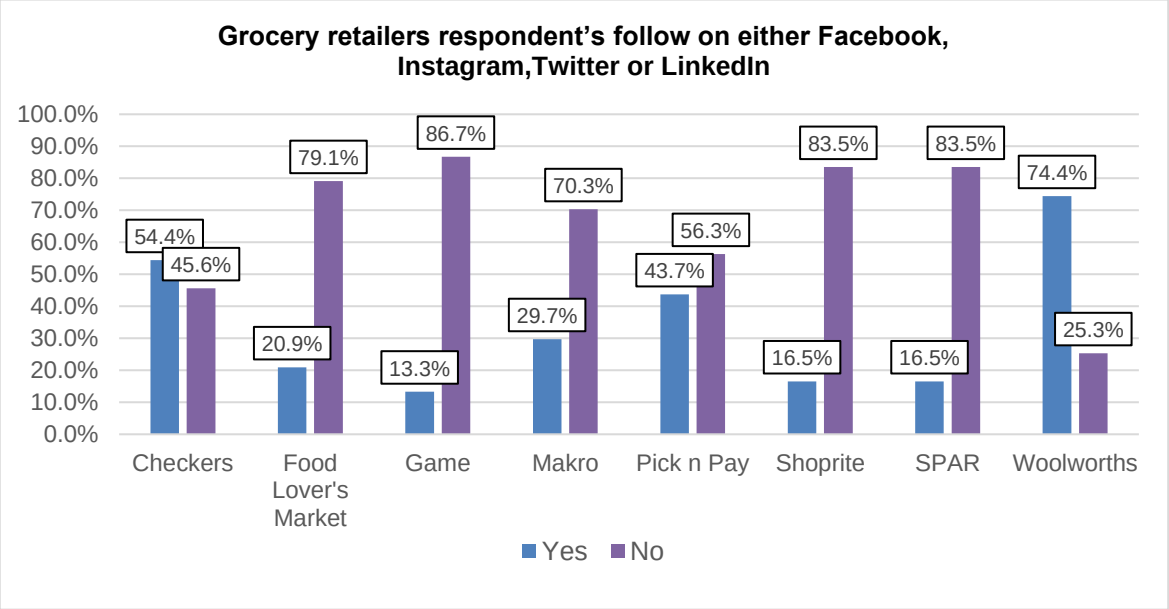


Figure 3: Bar graph of grocery retailer's respondents follow on either Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) or LinkedIn

4.2.3 Main grocery retailer

As this study's primary aim was to investigate how activities on social media impact brand loyalty, it was crucial to ask respondents which grocery retailer they considered their main one. The results reveal that the bulk of the respondents (70.9%) consider either Woolworths (39.9%) or Checkers (31.0%) to be their leading grocery retailer. Since Woolworths targets higher-income shoppers, these proportions indicate that respondents who participated in the survey were likely to be higher-income shoppers.

In contrast, SPAR has the lowest percentage of respondents who design it as their primary grocery retailer. Historical pricing trends at SPAR have consistently positioned it with higher price points than its counterparts. With consumers experiencing increased financial constraints (Fraser, 2023), SPAR might predominantly cater to smaller purchases or serve as a convenient shopping option due to its extended trading hours. Consequently, this propensity toward smaller transactions or convenience shopping could underlie SPAR's relatively diminished representation among respondents as their primary grocery retailer.

Moreover, the study's findings indicate that respondents did not consider Game as their primary grocery retailer. This outcome potentially stems from Game's predominant focus on retailing general merchandise and a limited selection of non-perishable groceries. Consequently, Game may not be a comprehensive one-stop destination for fulfilling consumers' monthly grocery needs. The following table and pie chart show the respondent's main grocery retailers.

Table 5: Main grocery retailer

Main grocery retailer					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid percent**	**Cumulative percent**
Valid	Checkers	49	31.0	31.0	31.0
	Food Lover's Market	5	3.2	3.2	34.2
	Makro	4	2.5	2.5	36.7
	Pick n Pay	28	17.7	17.7	54.4
	Shoprite	6	3.8	3.8	58.2
	SPAR	3	1.9	1.9	60.1
	Woolworths	63	39.9	39.9	100.0
	Total	158	100.0	100.0	

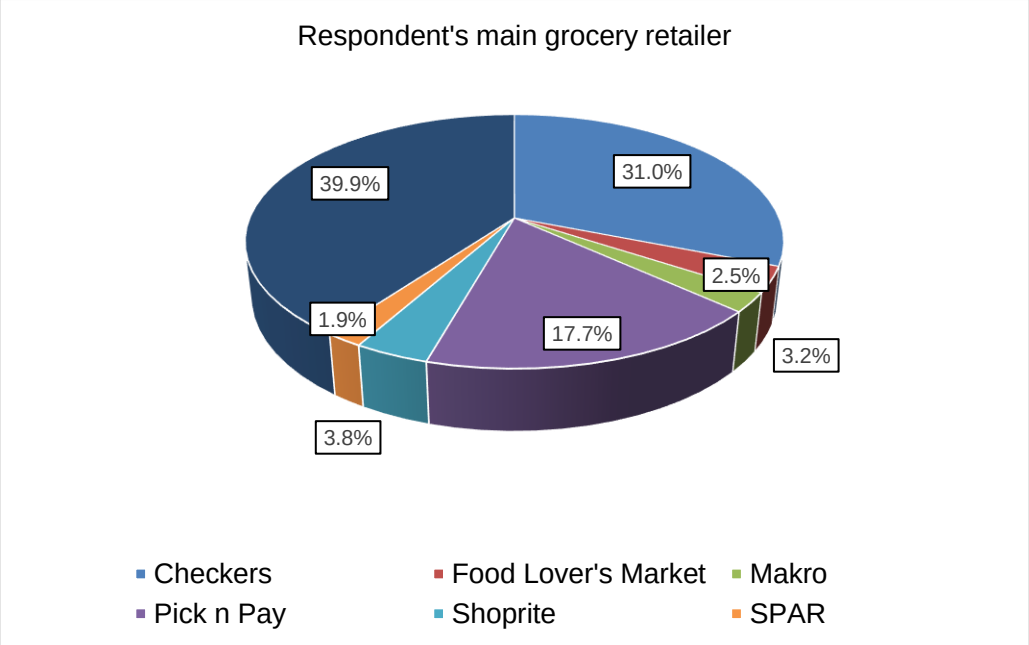


Figure 4: Pie chart of respondent's main grocery retailer

4.3 Descriptive analysis of the variables of the study

In this next section, the researcher reports on the results from the analysis of the data distribution's mean, standard deviation, and normality. The mean was calculated for the seven variables in the study. Additionally, the standard deviation was also calculated for these variables.

4.3.1 Mean and standard deviation results

The mean and standard deviation were used to provide a deeper analysis of the responses. The mean is an essential measure of central tendency and summarises the data distributions. The mean scores were calculated for the seven variables in the study. Respondents were invited to use a five-point Likert scale to rate their experiences, where one strongly disagrees, and five strongly agree. The mean scores for all variables were calculated by assigning equal weights to the mean scores of individual items within each dimension. The mean value for each variable is slightly above the neutral point (neither agree nor

disagree). This indicates that the respondents in the study had mainly neutral perceptions towards the dimensions of social media marketing concerning their main grocery retailer. Respondents also had positive perceptions of trust and loyalty toward their main grocery retailer, with a mean score of 3.897 for Brand Trust and 4.121 for Brand Loyalty.

The standard deviation serves as an assessment of the variability present in the collected data. A lower standard deviation implies that the data points cluster closely around the mean, indicating reduced variability. Alternatively, a high standard deviation indicates greater dispersion or a more scattered data set. A small standard deviation implies a more homogenous data set where making predictions or generalisations is more reliable, whilst a significant standard deviation requires a more cautious interpretation of the results.

The results for standard deviation across all variables indicate that the responses from participants deviate from the mean by less than one unit standard deviation. This implies that the deviation is low, and the data points are very closely aligned with the mean values of the study variables. This also implies that participants had similar perceptions towards each of the study's variables. The following table shows the analysis of the mean and the standard deviation.

Table 6: Mean and standard deviation

Variables	**Descriptive statistics**		
	N	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**
Entertainment	158	3.642	.729
Interaction	158	3.529	.758
Trendiness	158	3.686	.678
Customisation	158	3.382	.865
Electronic Word of Mouth	158	3.072	.825
Brand Trust	158	3.897	.603
Brand Loyalty	158	4.121	.626

4.3.2 Normality Test

To assess the normality of a distribution of scores, an examination of kurtosis and skewness, both accompanied by their respective standard errors, is necessary. In a normal distribution, skewness and kurtosis values should ideally be zero. Positive skewness values suggest an accumulation of scores on the left side of the distribution, while negative values indicate a more flattened distribution. The further the values deviate from zero, the greater the likelihood that the data does not have a normal distribution (Shanmugam & Chattamvelli, 2025). The table above shows the scores for both skewness and kurtosis. These scores across the variables are close to zero, indicating that the data follows a normal distribution. The scores for skewness across the variables are all negative, indicating a flattened distribution of the data.

Table 7: Skewness and kurtosis

Descriptive statistics					
Variables	**N**	**Skewness**		**Kurtosis**	
	Statistic	**Statistic**	**Std. error**	**Statistic**	**Std. error**
Entertainment	158	-.470	.193	.688	.384
Interaction	158	-.237	.193	-.104	.384
Trendiness	158	-.256	.193	.384	.384
Customisation	158	-.364	.193	.022	.384
Electronic Word of Mouth	158	-.115	.193	-.112	.384
Brand Trust	158	-.658	.193	1.350	.384
Brand Loyalty	158	-.497	.193	.611	.384

4.4 Reliability testing

Reliability is one of the primary criteria considered to measure the reliability of the statistics collection instrument. Reliability measures how consistently an instrument provides the exact measurements when used under the same conditions with the same subjects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the reliability of the measures. An alpha

coefficient can range from 0 to 1 and provides valuable insights into the extent to which multiple items in a scale measure the same underlying construct or concept. A high Cronbach's alpha value (typically above 0.7) indicates strong internal reliability among the items, suggesting they measure a cohesive concept. Alternatively, a low Cronbach's alpha suggests that the items within the scale might not be closely related, indicating a need for revision or reconsideration of the items in the measurement instrument. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). When the Cronbach's alpha value exceeds (>) 0.60, the variables in the study are deemed reliable. When the value is less than 0.60, it indicates reliability but to a lesser extent (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The table below shows the Cronbach's alpha scores to be above 0.7 for Entertainment (0.705), Interaction (0.704), Customisation (0.756), Brand Trust (0.874), and Brand Loyalty (0.889). These scores indicate a high level of reliability. The Cronbach's alpha scores for Trendiness (0.531) and Electronic Word of Mouth (0.572) are below 0.6; however, these scores are reliable though to a lesser extent. The items used in the study for each of the variables were adopted from existing instruments used in previous studies conducted by Kim Ko (2012), Ebrahim (2020), and Aljuhmani et al. (2022).

Table 8: Cronbach's alpha for the study's variables

Variables	**Reliability statistics**	
	Cronbach's alpha	**N of items**
Entertainment	.705	2
Interaction	.704	3
Trendiness	.531	2
Customisation	.756	2
Electronic Word of Mouth	.572	2
Brand Trust	.874	4
Brand Loyalty	.889	5

4.5 Correlation analysis

4.5.1 Introduction

The aim of performing correlation analysis was to understand the relationships between the variables within the dataset. This research calculated correlation coefficients to analyse the interrelationships among the principal variables: Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customisation, Electronic Word of Mouth, Brand Trust, and Brand Loyalty. The correlation coefficient symbolised by ‘r’ is a crucial statistical metric that is utilised to provide an assessment of both the magnitude and direction of the linear association between two variables. From -1 to 1, an ‘r’ value of 1 denotes a flawless positive relationship between two variables, meaning that as one variable increases, so does the other. Conversely, an ‘r’ value of -1 indicates a perfect negative relationship between the two variables; where one increases, the other decreases. A zero value indicates no linear association between the variables, and a value close to zero indicates a weak relationship (Saunders et al., 2007).

4.5.2 Results of the correlation analysis

Independent variables vs dependent variable: The results of the correlation analysis show that all independent variables, namely Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customisation, and Electronic Word of Mouth, have a positive relationship with the dependent variable, Brand Loyalty, as all correlation coefficient values were positive. Both Entertainment (r=0.463) and Interaction (r=0.414) indicated a stronger relationship with Brand Loyalty than the other independent variables. Trendiness (r=0,358), Customisation (r=0.256), and Electronic Word of Mouth (r=0.327) have a more moderate relationship with brand loyalty. These findings suggest that if social media marketers have limited marketing spend, they should prioritise marketing efforts on creating content that is entertaining and interactive. These would make a greater contribution to building brand loyalty when compared to the other independent variables.

Independent variables vs mediating variable: The results indicate that all five independent variables have a positive relationship with brand trust, which is the mediating variable. Results show that Entertainment (r=0.310), Trendiness (r=0.341) and Electronic Word of Mouth (r=0.362) have a moderate relationship with Brand Trust, whilst Interaction (r=0.402) specifically has the strongest relationship with Brand Trust. Interestingly, Customisation (r=0.291) weakly contributes to building brand trust in comparison to the other independent variables. These results indicate the importance of social media interaction in strengthening customer relationships. Social media marketers should, therefore, find opportunities to connect with customers on social media as it demonstrates the brand's commitment to building rapport and responding to customers' feedback, which is pivotal to building brand trust.

Mediating variable vs dependent variable: The correlation coefficient between Brand Trust, the mediating variable and Brand Loyalty, the dependent variable, is 0.477. This suggests that a moderately positive relationship exists between the two variables. Since the strength of the relationship is moderate (less than 1), this implies that other factors beyond brand trust might significantly influence brand loyalty. These additional factors could include product quality, customer experience, pricing strategies or even external market influences, all of which do not fall within the scope of this study.

Table 9: Pearson correlation co-efficient results

Correlations								
		Entertainment	**Interaction**	**Trendiness**	**Customisation**	**Electronic Word of Mouth**	**Brand Trust**	**Brand Loyalty**
Entertainment	Pearson correlation	1	.502**	.474**	.236**	.430**	.310**	.463**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<,001	<,001	.003	<,001	<,001	<,001
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Interaction	Pearson correlation	.502**	1	.477**	.360**	.413**	.402**	.414**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001		<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001

	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Trendiness	Pearson correlation	.474**	.477**	1	.407**	.367**	.341**	.358**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001		<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Customisation	Pearson correlation	.236**	.360**	.407**	1	.392**	.291**	.256**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	<,001	<,001		<,001	<,001	.001
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Electronic Word of Mouth	Pearson correlation	.430**	.413**	.367**	.392**	1	.362**	.327**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001		<,001	<,001
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Brand Trust	Pearson correlation	.310**	.402**	.341**	.291**	.362**	1	.477**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001	<,001		<,001
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158
Brand Loyalty (Binned)	Pearson correlation	.463**	.414**	.358**	.256**	.327**	.477**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	<,001	<,001	.001	<,001	<,001	
	N	158	158	158	158	158	158	158

4.6 Confirmatory factor analysis

4.6.1 Introduction

Confirmatory factor analysis offers the advantage of testing various hypotheses, resembling conducting multiple linear regressions to assess several hypotheses simultaneously. Furthermore, it facilitates the creation of indicators directly associated with latent variables. Confirmatory factor analysis also allows for exploring cause-and-effect relationships among latent variables and assessing correlations or covariances between any chosen pair of latent variables. Confirmatory factor analysis condenses extensive analyses into a single step.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were conducted as crucial initial steps in factor analysis to help determine the suitability of the data collected from the study. These tests assess how the variables relate and whether the data meets the criteria to proceed with factor analysis. Completing these tests indicates the data's reliability and suitability for further factor analytic procedures.

Results from the KMO test showed a value of 0.860, demonstrating a high sampling adequacy level. Usually, values above 0.5 are considered acceptable, whilst values closer to 1.0 suggest better suitability for factor analysis. In this study, the high KMO value shows that the variables used in the dataset are sufficiently related for factor analysis to be conducted.

The outcomes from Bartlett's test of sphericity showed that the data is highly significant with a minimal chance (less than 0.001) that the results happened by a random chance. Therefore, the results from both tests conclude that the variables in the dataset are sufficiently correlated to warrant further exploration using factor analysis.

The results from both these tests are shown in the table below.

Table 10: KMO and Bartlett's test

KMO and Bartlett's test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy.		.860
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	1682.308
	df	190
	Sig.	<,001

The total variance explained analysis was also conducted. This was done to understand the proportion of variance in the dataset that could be attributed to the factors extracted during the analysis, and this was used to determine the optimal number of factors to retain. By examining the cumulative percentage of variance explained by each factor, the optimal number of factors to retain can be determined. Total variance explained analysis enhances the validity and utility of the subsequent factor analysis results.

The eigenvalue must be greater than one for the component to be significant. The results indicate that the first five components were more outstanding than one and, therefore, significant. The total variance explained was greater than the threshold of 50%, which means that the extraction of the factors is very good and meets the acceptable criteria.

The result of this analysis is presented in the table below.

Table 11: Total variance explained

Total variance explained				
Component	**Initial eigenvalues**			**Rotation sums of squared loadings[a]**
	Total	**% of variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**
1	7.372	36.860	36.860	4.544
2	2.502	12.508	49.368	4.436
3	1.365	6.826	56.194	2.598
4	1.149	5.743	61.937	5.227
5	1.035	5.174	67.111	2.292
6	.847	4.235	71.346	
7	.804	4.019	75.365	
8	.723	3.616	78.981	
9	.608	3.039	82.020	
10	.582	2.910	84.930	
11	.475	2.377	87.307	
12	.436	2.178	89.485	
13	.395	1.977	91.462	
14	.360	1.799	93.260	
15	.331	1.657	94.917	
16	.292	1.459	96.376	
17	.257	1.283	97.660	
18	.200	1.002	98.662	
19	.164	.821	99.483	
20	.103	.517	100.000	

The scree plot in the figure below shows the eigenvalues of each component plotted against the component number. The scree plot typically shows a steep decline in eigenvalues initially followed by a levelling off. The point on the acre plot where the plot levels off refers to the ‘elbow’, which indicates the optimal number of components to retain. In this analysis, the optimal number of components would be five.

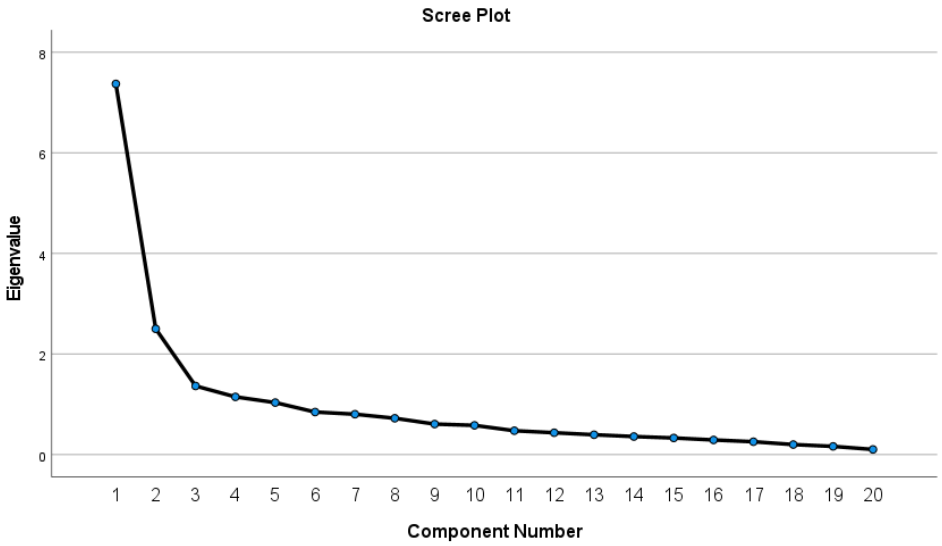


Figure 5: Scree plot

A pattern matrix analysis was performed to illustrate the correlation coefficients between the variables and components. The variables with a correlation coefficient closer to 1 or -1 indicate a stronger relationship with the corresponding component. The indicator loaded on the first component only loaded one component, which represents a good extraction. The same holds for the rest of the components. Variables that load highly on the same component are likely related to or measure similar aspects of the underlying construct. The pattern matrix also determines if any dimensions should be reduced by looking for variables with low loadings, which are values close to zero across all factors or if there are high loadings on multiple factors. The analysis shows that all values are not close to zero, and there are no high loadings on multiple factors. Results from the pattern matrix are shown in the table below.

Table 12: Pattern matrix

Pattern matrix[a]					
	Component				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
BT 2 (Main grocery retailer works for my happiness	.800				

BT 1 (Main grocery retailer is honest	.736				
BT 3 (Main grocery retailer works hard to satisfy me)	.735				
BT 4 (Main grocery retailer promises are real)	.649				
INT 3 (It is easy to deliver my opinion through Main grocery retailer's social media)		.713			
INT 2 (Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through Main grocery retailer's social media)		.699			
ENT 1 (Using [Main grocery retailer's social media is fun)		.692			
TRD 1 (Contents shown in Main grocery retailer's social media is the newest information)		.644			
ENT 2 (Contents shown in Main grocery retailer's social media seem interesting)		.579			
INT 1 (Main grocery retailer's social media enables information sharing with others)		.563			
TRD 2 (Using Main grocery retailer's social media is very trendy)		.446			
CUS 2 (Main grocery retailer's social media provides customised service)			.780		
CUS 1 (Main grocery retailer's social media offers customised information search)			.772		
BL 3 (I consider myself to be loyal to Main grocery retailer)				.910	
BL 2 (I am loyal to Main grocery retailer)				.896	
BL 5 (I would encourage friends and relatives to do business with Main grocery retailer)				.788	
BL 1 (I intend to keep purchasing the services offered by Main grocery retailer)				.738	
BL 4 (I would recommend Main grocery retailer to someone who seeks my advice)				.714	
e-WOM 2 (I would like to upload contents from Main grocery retailer's social media on my blog or micro blog)					.815
e-WOM 1 (I would like to pass along information on brand, product, or services from Main grocery retailer's social media to my friends)					.529

Subsequently, in the forthcoming step-by-step analysis, the following aspects will be examined:

1) **Model fit analysis**
2) **Multiple regression analysis**
3) **Covariance analysis**
4) **Variance**
5) **Squared multiple correlations**

4.6.2 Model fit analysis

The model fit analysis examined the model's fitness relating to social media marketing activities and their impact on Brand Loyalty, with Brand Trust being the mediating variable. To do the analysis, seven constructs were developed using IBM SPSS Amos: Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customisation, Electronic Word of Mouth, Brand Trust, and Brand loyalty. An exploratory factor analysis was performed on the original data, and the seven stated constructs were constructed where two indicators created some of the constructs, whereas others had three indicators. Specifically, constructs Entertainment, Trendiness, Customisation, and Electronic Word of Mouth were constructed by two indicators. Interaction used three constructs, Brand Trust used four, and Brand Loyalty used five.

The chi-square under model fit showed a high significance, resulting from many degrees of freedom against an estimated 489,544. It is always the case that when a chi-square test statistic is based on high degrees of freedom, a significant result is realised. In this case, the p-value was 0.000, less than 0.001. This establishes a highly significant result indicated by ***. See the CMIN table below that shows these results.

Table 13: Normed chi-square table

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	50	489,544	160	,000	3,060
Saturated model	210	,000	0		
Independence model	20	1766,704	190	,000	9,298

The table below shows RMR, GFI, AGFI, and PGFI values. All these values are admissible but are not considered an excellent fit according to IBM SPSS Amos standards. (Collier, 2020). These results imply that there may be room to refine the model and its variables in future studies. The table below shows these results.

Table 14: RMR, GFI, AGFI, and PGFI values

Model	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
Default model	,161	,762	,687	,580
Saturated model	,000	1,000		
Independence model	,229	,292	,217	,264

The table below shows values for the following baseline comparisons: NFI, RFI, IFI, Tucker-Lewis index, and comparative fit index. Once again, all these values are admissible, but they are not very significant according to IBM SPSS Amos standards (Collier, 2020). See the table below that shows these results.

Table 15: Baseline comparisons (NFI, RFI, IFI, Tucker-Lewis index, and comparative fit index)

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	,723	,671	,795	,752	,791
Saturated model	1,000		1,000		1,000
Independence model	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000

4.6.3 Multiple regression analysis

The following table shows multiple regression estimates between pairs of factors or constructs and respective indicators. As shown in the table, six columns indicate the factor, the indicator, the estimates, the standard error, the test statistic, and the p-value. This constitutes hypothesis tests based on the outputs in the table below.

It is observed that since the p-value is symbolised by ***, it indicates that Factor F1 (Entertainment) influences Q5_2 (Contents shown in the Main grocery retailer's social media seem interesting). The *** implies the rejection of the null hypothesis because of the implied smaller p-value, which is less than the level of significance of 0.001.

It is observed that since the p-value is symbolised by ***, it indicates that Factor F2 (Interaction) influences Q5_4 (Conversation or opinion exchange with others

is possible through the main grocery retailer's social media). Similarly, that implies the rejection of the null hypothesis due to the smaller p-value, which is less than the level of significance of 0.001.

The above two interpretations equally apply to the other comparisons in the table below with similar conclusions.

Table 16: Regression weights (Group number 1 – Default model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Q5_2	<---	F1	1,000				
Q5_1	<---	F1	1,114	,168	6,619	***	par_1
Q5_5	<---	F2	1,000				
Q5_4	<---	F2	1,008	,133	7,587	***	par_2
Q5_3	<---	F2	,543	,103	5,253	***	par_3
Q5_7	<---	F3	1,000				
Q5_6	<---	F3	,743	,207	3,593	***	par_4
Q5_9	<---	F4	1,000				
Q5_8	<---	F4	,900	,146	6,175	***	par_5
Q5_10	<---	F5	1,000				
Q5_11	<---	F5	,759	,178	4,258	***	par_6
Q6_1	<---	F7	1,000				
Q6_2	<---	F7	1,459	,148	9,888	***	par_7
Q6_3	<---	F7	1,175	,122	9,660	***	par_8
Q6_4	<---	F7	1,200	,116	10,366	***	par_9
Q7_1	<---	F6	1,000				
Q7_2	<---	F6	2,056	,201	10,214	***	par_10
Q7_3	<---	F6	2,133	,209	10,213	***	par_11
Q7_4	<---	F6	1,212	,153	7,927	***	par_12
Q7_5	<---	F6	1,475	,160	9,202	***	par_13

4.6.4 Standardised regression weights

When F1 increases by one standard deviation, Q5_2 increases by 0.755, which is very high. By any standards, the 0.755 is a high increment. Across all factors, the predication weights are very high. This means that as one increases, the other increases significantly. This further demonstrates the high positive relationship

between the factors and the indicators. The table that follows shows the results for the standardised regression weights.

Table 17: Standardised regression weights (Group Number 1 – default model)

			Estimate					Estimate
Q5_2	<---	F1	,755		Q5_11	<---	F5	,534
Q5_1	<---	F1	,729		Q6_1	<---	F7	,732
Q5_5	<---	F2	,773		Q6_2	<---	F7	,875
Q5_4	<---	F2	,763		Q6_3	<---	F7	,754
Q5_3	<---	F2	,476		Q6_4	<---	F7	,914
Q5_7	<---	F3	,620		Q7_1	<---	F6	,677
Q5_6	<---	F3	,606		Q7_2	<---	F6	,886
Q5_9	<---	F4	,799		Q7_3	<---	F6	,926
Q5_8	<---	F4	,761		Q7_4	<---	F6	,668
Q5_10	<---	F5	,752		Q7_5	<---	F6	,827

4.6.5 Covariance: (Group Number 1 – default model)

Covariance measures the direction of the connection between two variables. A positive covariance means that when one variable is high, the other tends to be high. The opposite is also true, meaning that a negative covariance implies that when one variable is high, the other tends to be low. The table below indicates a relationship between the selected two factors or two errors. The interpretation of any pair of factors or errors follows the abovementioned approach. For example, F1 and F6 have a negative covariance of -0.002 and a p-value of 0.896; hence, when F1 increases, F6 decreases.

Table 18: Covariance results

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
F1	<-->	F6	-,002	,017	-,130	,896	par_16
F3	<-->	F7	,144	,039	3,663	***	par_17
F4	<-->	F5	,399	,081	4,925	***	par_18
F1	<-->	F2	,341	,064	5,325	***	par_19
F2	<-->	F6	,008	,022	,373	,709	par_20

F3	<-->	F6	,074	,027	2,717	,007	par_21
F5	<-->	F6	-,002	,020	-,102	,919	par_22
F7	<-->	F6	,107	,022	4,938	***	par_23
e18	<-->	e20	-,090	,019	-4,772	***	par_14
e13	<-->	e15	-,069	,021	-3,205	,001	par_15

4.6.6 Squared multiple correlations: (Group Number 1 – default model)

Squared multiple correlation refers to the proportion of the total variation explained by the model. The squared multiple correlations can also be computed as the portion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by the independent variables. For example, in the case of Q7_5, an estimate of 0.684 means that the fitting model explained 68.4% of Q7_5, and the remaining 31.6% is attributable to the error factor. The same interpretation applies similarly to the rest of the calculations in the tables below.

Table 19: Squared multiple correlations

				Estimate
Q7_5				,684
Q7_4				,446
Q7_3				,858
Q7_2				,784
Q7_1				,459
Q6_4				,835
Q6_3				,569
Q6_2				,765
Q6_1				,536
Q5_11				,286
Q5_10				,565
Q5_8				,580
Q5_9				,639
Q5_6				,367
Q5_7				,384
Q5_3				,226
Q5_4				,582
Q5_5				,597

Q5_1				,531
Q5_2				,569

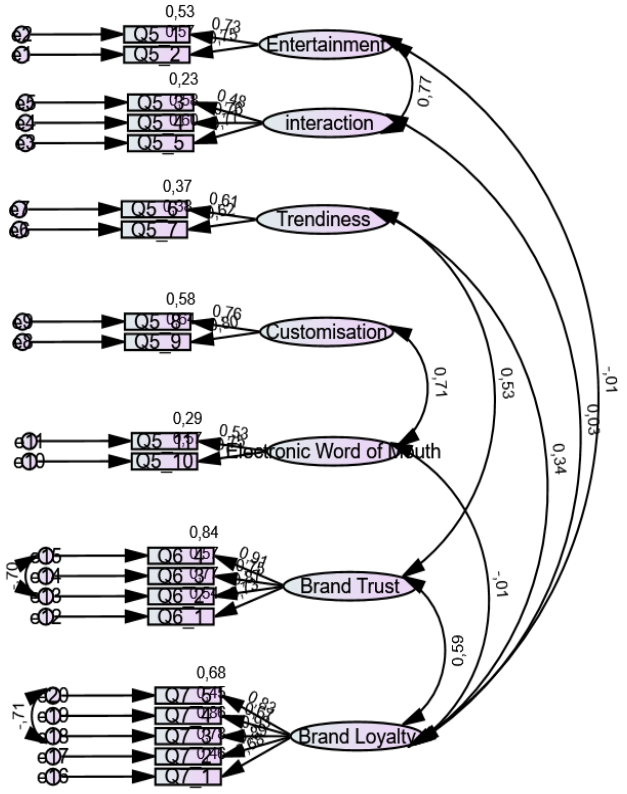


Figure 6: Standardised path diagram for confirmatory factor analysis

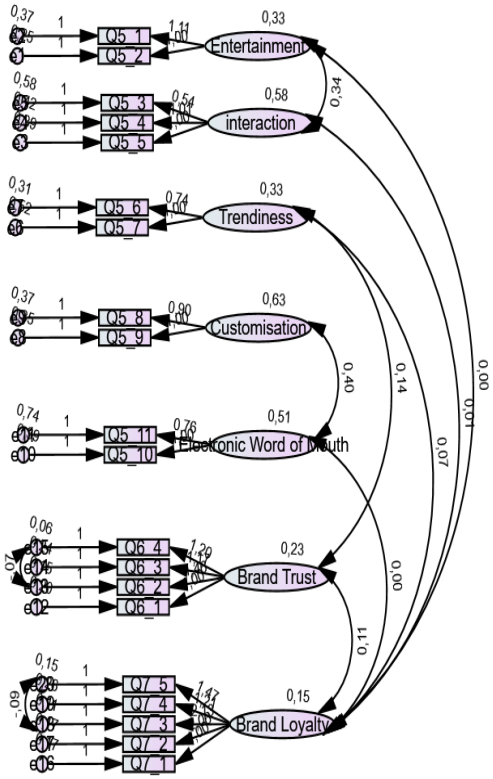


Figure 7: Unstandardised path diagram for confirmatory factor analysis

4.7 Pearson chi-square test

4.7.1 Introduction

In this section, Pearson chi-square test results are reported. The Pearson chi-square test was utilised to establish a statistically significant relationship between age and each dependent variable in the study: Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customisation, Electronic Word of Mouth, Brand Trust, and Brand Loyalty. The researcher will determine the Pearson chi-square statistic and its p-value. Of the two, the p-value will be used to verify the significance of the connection between the two variables. Two hypotheses will be constructed, namely H_0 and H_1. The outcome to reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis will depend on the outcome of the Pearson chi-square test.

4.7.2 Chi-square test for Age versus Entertainment

H_0: Age and Entertainment are not associated

H_1: Age and Entertainment are associated

The level of significance is 0.05

Rejection procedure

If the achieved p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected; otherwise, it will be accepted.

Observed p-value

The observed p-value is 0.787, which is greater than 0.05.

Table 20: Chi-square test for Age and Entertainment

Chi-square test for Age and Entertainment			
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic significance (2-sided)**
Pearson chi-square test	10.506[a]	15	.787
Likelihood ratio	10.207	15	.807
Linear-by-linear association	.065	1	.799
N of valid cases	158		

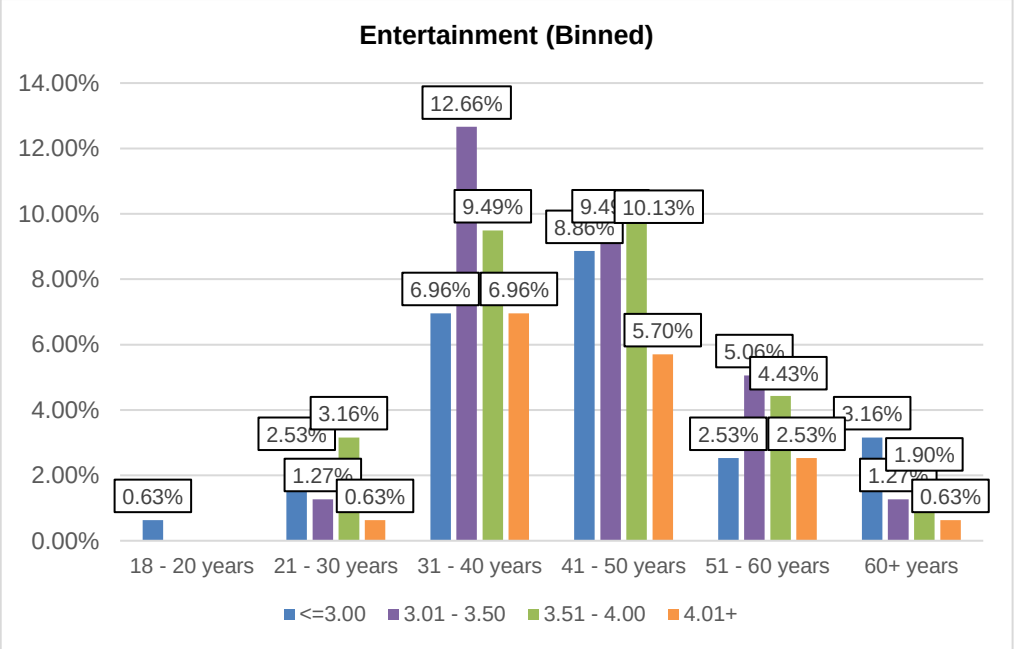


Figure 8: Bar graph for Age and Entertainment

Conclusion

The chi-square test results in the table above indicate that participant perceptions of Entertainment on social media did not significantly differ by age, X^2 (15, N = 158) = 10.506, p = 0.787, as the p-value was more significant than 0.05. All ages enjoy Entertainment on social media without discrimination in terms of age. The table and chart above show the results of the analysis.

4.7.3 Chi-square test for Age versus Interaction

H_0: Age and Interaction are not associated

H_1: Age and Interaction are associated

The level of significance is 0.05

Rejection procedure

If the achieved p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected; otherwise, it will be accepted.

Observed p-value

The observed p-value is 0.880, which is greater than 0.05.

Table 21: Chi-square test for Age and Interaction

Chi-square test for Age and Interaction			
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**
Pearson chi-square test	8.951[a]	15	.880
Likelihood ratio	9.198	15	.867
Linear-by-linear association	.978	1	.323
N of valid cases	158		

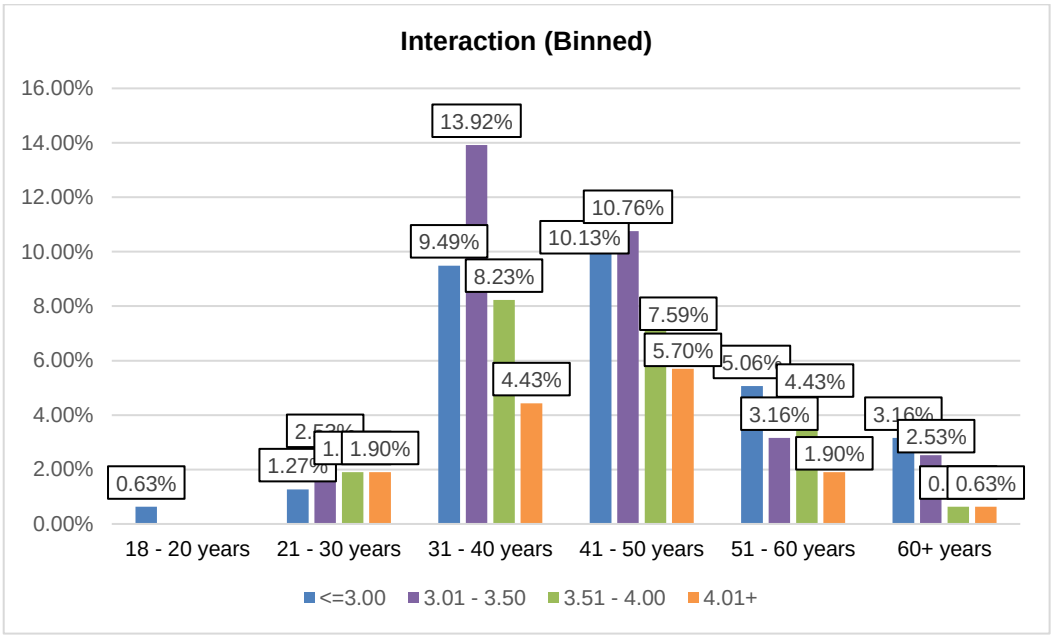


Figure 9: Bar graph for Age and Interaction

Conclusion

The results of the chi-square test for Age and Interaction in the table above indicate that participants' perceptions of Interaction on social media did not significantly differ by age, X^2 (15, N = 158) = 8.951, p = 0.880, as the p-value was more significant than 0.05. All ages Interaction on social media is without discrimination in terms of age. The table and chart above show the results of the analysis.

4.7.4 Chi-square test for Age versus Trendiness

H_0: Age and Trendiness are not associated

H_1: Age and Trendiness are associated

The level of significance is 0.05

Rejection procedure

If the achieved p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected; otherwise, it will be accepted.

Observed p-value

The observed p-value is 0.354, which is greater than 0.05.

Table 22: Chi-square test for Age and Trendiness

Chi-square test for Age and Trendiness			
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**
Pearson chi-square test	11.040a	10	.354
Likelihood ratio	13.782	10	.183
Linear-by-linear association	2.616	1	.106
N of valid cases	158		

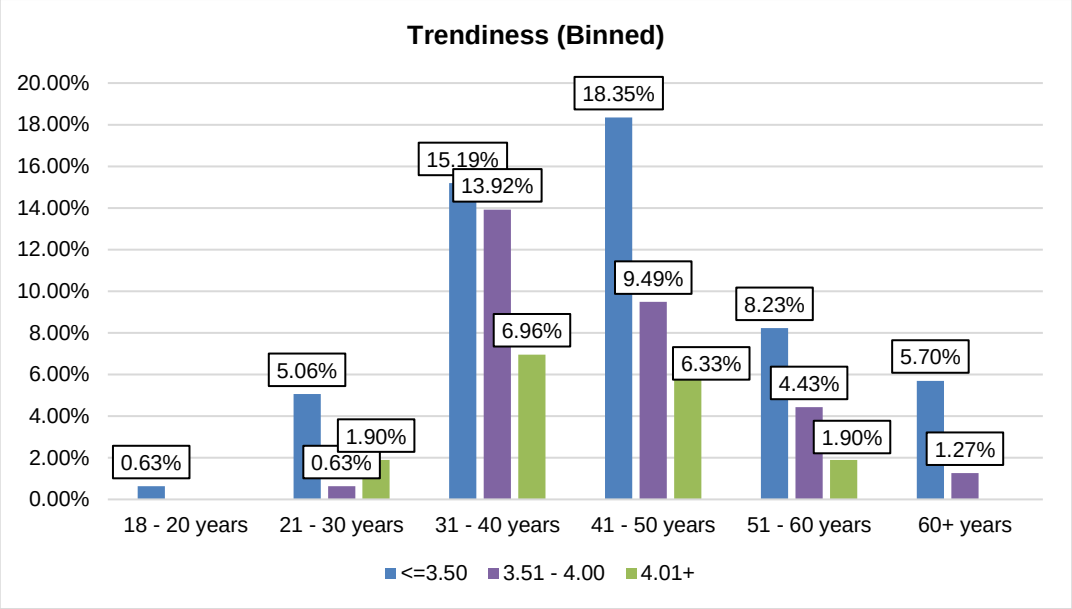


Figure 10: Bar graph for Age and Trendiness

Conclusion

The results of the chi-square test for Age and Trendiness in the table above indicate that participants' perceptions of Trendiness on social media did not significantly differ by age, X^2 (10, N = 158) = 11.040, p = 0.354, as the p-value was more significant than 0.05. This means that both Age and Trendiness are independent of each other. This means that Trendiness on social media is without discrimination in terms of age. The table and chart above show the results of the analysis.

4.7.5 Chi-square test for Age versus Customisation

H_0: Age and Customisation are not associated

H_1: Age and Customisation are associated

The level of significance is 0.05

Rejection procedure

If the achieved p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected; otherwise, it will be accepted.

Observed p-value

The observed p-value is 0.690, which is greater than 0.05.

Table 23: Chi-square test for Age and Customisation

Chi-square test of Age and Customisation			
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**
Pearson chi-square test	11.852[a]	15	.690
Likelihood ratio	12.435	15	.646
Linear-by-linear association	1.780	1	.182
N of valid cases	158		

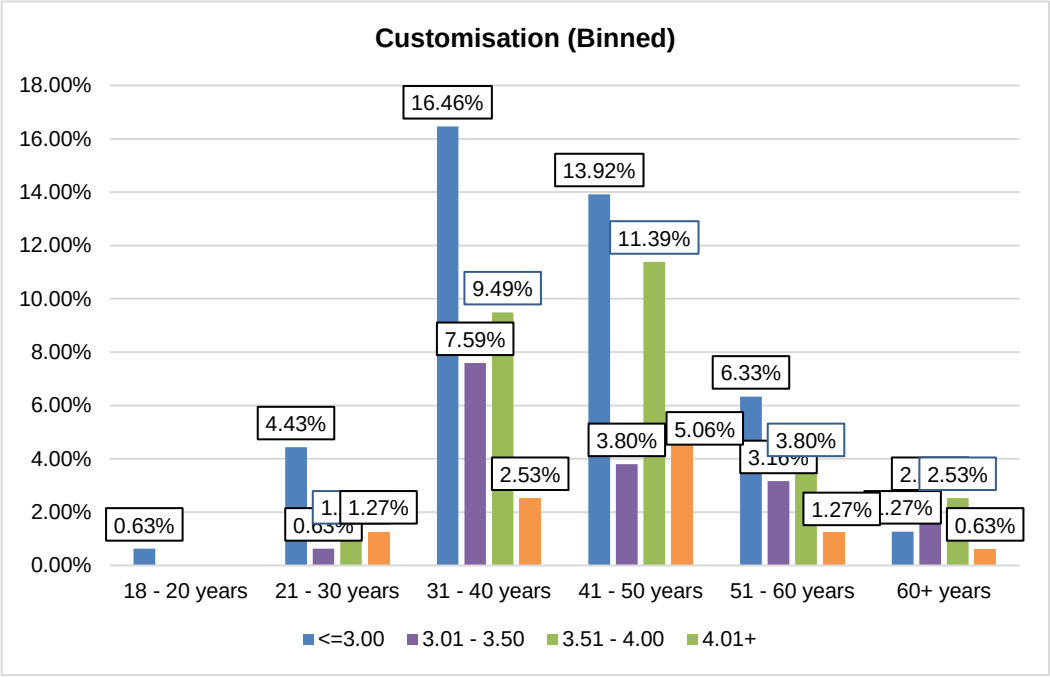


Figure 11: Bar graph for Age and Customisation

Conclusion

The results of the chi-square test for Age and Customisation in the table above indicate that participants' perceptions of Customisation on social media did not significantly differ by age, X^2 (15, N = 158) = 11.852, p = 0.690 as the p-value was more significant than 0.05. This means that both Age and Customisation are independent, and Customisation on social media is without discrimination in terms of age. The table and chart above show the results of the analysis.

4.7.6 Chi-square test for Age versus Electronic Word of Mouth

H_0: Age and Electronic Word of Mouth are not associated

H_1: Age and Electronic Word of Mouth are associated

The level of significance is 0.05

Rejection procedure

If the achieved p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected; otherwise, it will be accepted.

Observed p-value

The observed p-value is 0.197, which is greater than 0.05.

Table 24: Chi-square test for Age and Electronic Word of Mouth

Chi-square test of Age and Electronic Word of Mouth			
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**
Pearson chi-square test	19.374[a]	15	.197
Likelihood ratio	18.960	15	.216
Linear-by-linear association	.586	1	.444
N of valid cases	158		

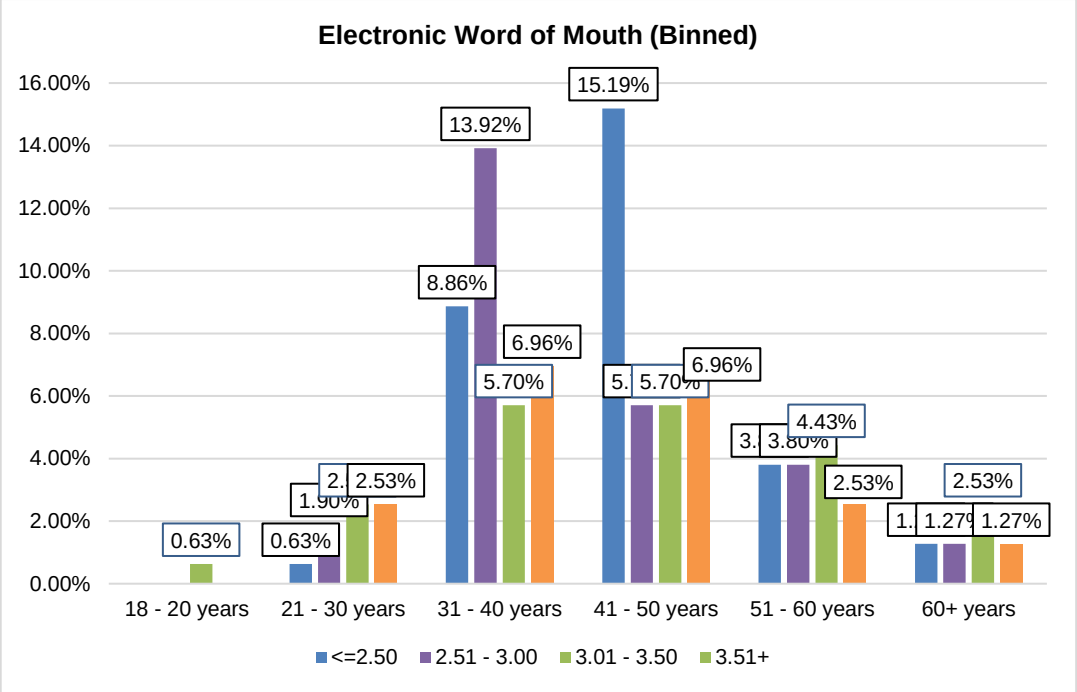


Figure 12: Bar graph for Age and Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Conclusion

The chi-square test results for Age and Electronic Word of Mouth in the table above indicate that participant's perceptions of Electronic Word of Mouth on social media did not significantly differ by age, X^2 (15, N = 158) = 19.374, p = 0.197. The p-value was more significant than 0.05. This means that both Age and Electronic Word of Mouth are independent, and Electronic Word of Mouth on social media is without discrimination in terms of age. The table and chart above show the results of the analysis.

4.7.7 Chi-square test for Age versus Brand Trust

H_0: Age and Brand Trust are not associated

H_1: Age and Brand Trust are associated

The level of significance is 0.05

Rejection procedure

If the achieved p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected; otherwise, it will be accepted.

Observed p-value

The observed p-value is 0.263, which is greater than 0.05.

Table 25: Chi-square test for Age and Brand Trust

Chi-square test of Age and Brand Trust			
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**
Pearson chi-square test	18.001[a]	15	.263
Likelihood ratio	11.449	15	.720
Linear-by-linear association	.379	1	.538
N of valid cases	158		

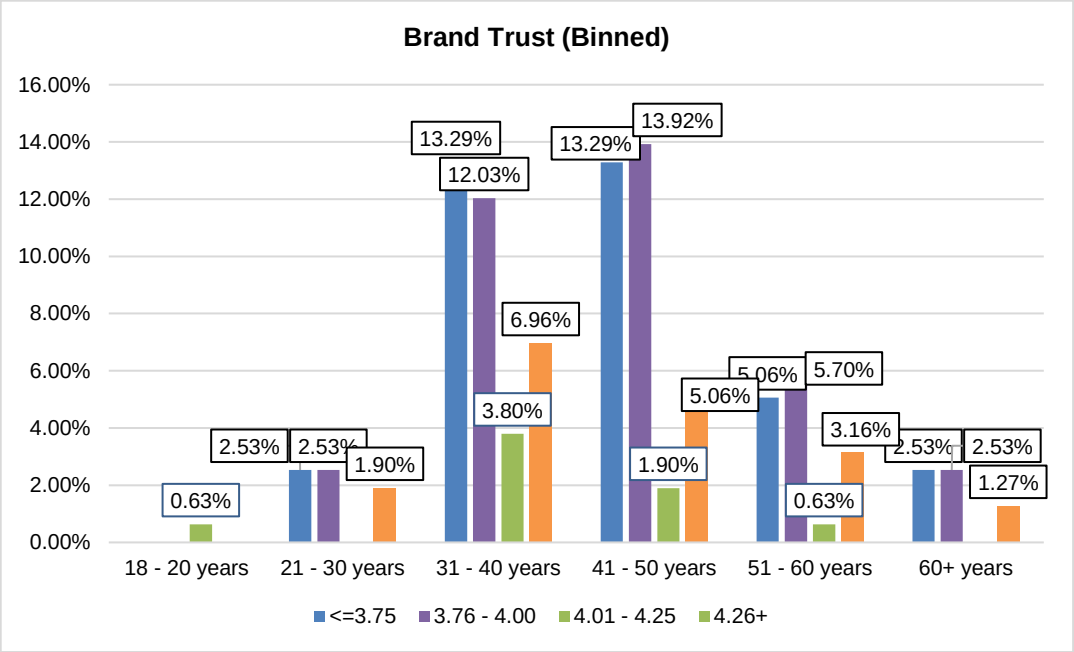


Figure 13: Bar graph for Age and Brand Trust

Conclusion

The chi-square test results for Age and Brand Trust in the table above indicate that participants' perceptions of Brand Trust on social media did not significantly differ by age, X^2 (15, N = 158) = 18.001, p = 0.263. The p-value was more significant than 0.05. This means that both Age and Brand Trust are independent of each other. Brand Trust on social media is without discrimination in terms of age. The table and chart above show the results of the analysis.

4.7.8 Chi-square test for Age versus Brand Loyalty

H_0: Age and Brand Loyalty are not associated

H_1: Age and Brand Loyalty are associated

The level of significance is 0.05

Rejection procedure

If the achieved p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected; otherwise, it will be accepted.

Observed p-value

The observed p-value is 0.423, which is greater than 0.05.

Table 26: Chi-square test for Age and Brand Loyalty

Chi-square test of Age and Brand Loyalty			
	Value	**df**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**
Pearson chi-square test	15.406[a]	15	0.423
Likelihood ratio	14.651	15	0.477
Linear-by-linear association	0.018	1	0.893
N of valid cases	158		

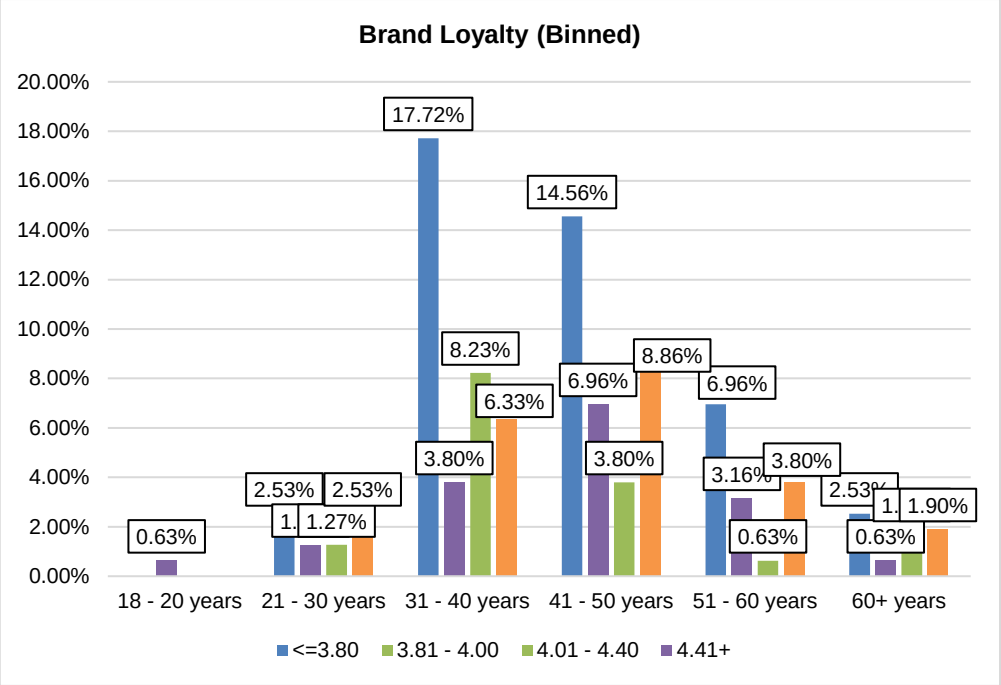


Figure 14: Bar graph for Age and Brand Loyalty

Conclusion

The results of the chi-square test for Age and Brand Loyalty in the table above indicate that participant's perceptions of Brand Loyalty on social media did not significantly differ by age, X^2 (15, N = 158) = 15. 406, p = 0.423. The p-value was greater than 0.05. This means that both Age and Brand Loyalty are independent of each other. Brand Loyalty on social media is without discrimination in terms of age. The table and chart above show the results of the analysis.

4.8 Structural equation modelling

4.8.1 Introduction

This section intends to respond to the seven objectives that were set up to be achieved for this study. Tests were performed using the JASP statistical package.

The following objectives were constructed for this purpose:

1. Determine the influence of Entertainment on Brand Trust on social media
2. Investigate the influence of Interaction on Brand Trust on social media
3. Examine the influence of Trendiness on Brand Trust on social media
4. Determine the influence of Customisation on Brand Trust on social media
5. Examine the influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on Brand Trust on social media
6. Examine the influence of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty
7. Analyse the role of Brand Trust in mediating the link between social media marketing initiatives and Brand Loyalty.

4.8.2 Mediator analysis

The analysis that follows provides a view of the results from the mediation analysis that was performed.

The results from the direct effects table illustrate the association of the five independent variables (Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customisation, and Electronic Word of Mouth) and Brand Loyalty, the dependent variable. The results show no significance at all three levels, i.e., the 0.05 level, the 0.01 level and the 0.001 level. This means that none of the five independent variables directly influence Brand Loyalty.

Table 27: Direct effects for mediation analysis

Direct effects

						95% Confidence interval	
		Estimate	Std. error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
Entertainment_Mean	→ Brand_Loyalty_Mean	-0.049	0.070	-0.695	0.487	-0.187	0.089
Interaction_Mean	→ Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.022	0.069	0.319	0.749	-0.113	0.157
Trendiness_Mean	→ Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.032	0.078	0.407	0.684	-0.121	0.184
Customisation_Mean	→ Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.066	0.056	1.173	0.241	-0.044	0.176
e-WOM_Mean	→ Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.037	0.058	0.632	0.527	-0.077	0.151

The results from the indirect effects table below show the five independent variables (Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customisation, and Electronic Word of Mouth) concerning the dependent variable (Brand Loyalty) via the

mediating variable (Brand Trust). The results indicate a high significance level for both Entertainment and Electronic Word of Mouth with Brand Loyalty, mediated by Brand Trust. The p-values for Entertainment (p-value = 0.017) and Electronic Word of Mouth (p-value = 0.020) are less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance. The remaining independent variables are insignificant. The table below shows these results.

Table 28: Indirect effects for mediation analysis

Indirect effects

						95% Confidence interval	
		Estimate	Std. error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
Entertainment_Mean	→ Brand_Trust_Mean → Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.104	0.043	2.387	0.017	0.019	0.189
Interaction_Mean	→ Brand_Trust_Mean → Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.053	0.041	1.276	0.202	-0.028	0.134
Trendiness_Mean	→ Brand_Trust_Mean → Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.017	0.046	0.363	0.717	-0.074	0.108
Customisation_Mean	→ Brand_Trust_Mean → Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.055	0.034	1.612	0.107	-0.012	0.121
e-WOM_Mean	→ Brand_Trust_Mean → Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.084	0.036	2.332	0.020	0.013	0.154

The results below indicate the total effects of the relationship between the five independent variables and the dependent variable when mediated through the variable Brand Trust. The results indicate no significance for Entertainment, Interaction, and Trendiness, as the p-values are higher than 0.05. The two remaining variables, Customisation and Electronic Word of Mouth are close to 0.05 and hence are borderline values where they come close to 0.05.

Table 29: Total effects for mediation analysis

Total effects

						95% Confidence interval	
		Estimate	Std. error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
Entertainment_Mean	→ Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.055	0.080	0.681	0.496	-0.103	0.213
Interaction_Mean	→ Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.075	0.080	0.939	0.348	-0.081	0.231
Trendiness_Mean	→ Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.049	0.091	0.536	0.592	-0.129	0.226
Customisation_Mean	→ Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.121	0.065	1.862	0.063	-0.006	0.248
e-WOM_Mean	→ Brand_Loyalty_Mean	0.121	0.067	1.810	0.070	-0.010	0.251

The path diagram below represents the various relationships that were discussed above.

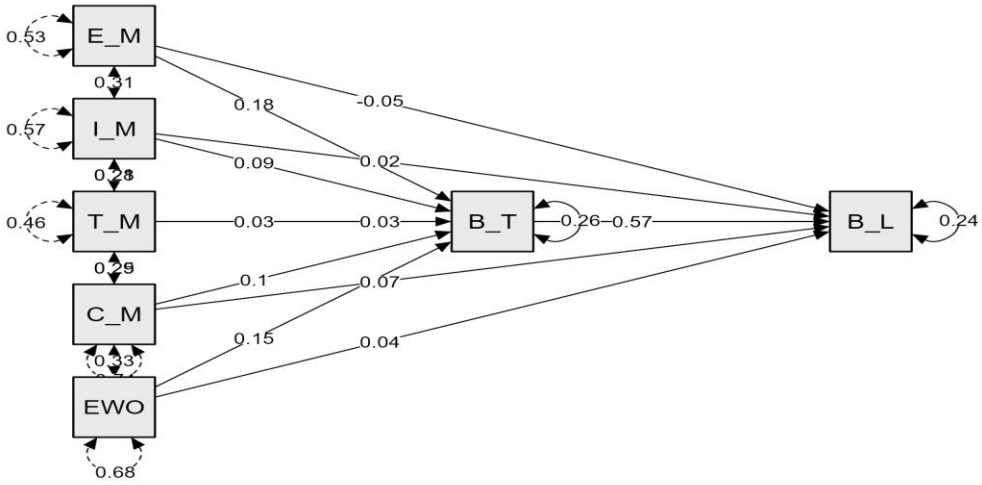


Figure 15: Path diagram for the relationship between the variables

In conclusion, these results indicate that some independent variables directly impact the dependent variables, while others exert their influence through the mediating variable. This is evident from the findings. While some independent variables directly connect to the dependent variable (Brand Loyalty), others are interconnected solely through the mediator (Brand Trust).

4.9 Conclusion

In this comprehensive data analysis chapter, a meticulous examination of diverse variables was conducted to unveil their influence on each other. Through an intricate series of methodologies, each section was purposefully designed to understand these influences. The results show respondents' positive perceptions of trust and loyalty towards their main grocery retailer. The Cronbach's alpha analysis showed reliability at an acceptable level, and results for the Pearson chi-square test revealed that perceptions of social media marketing activity did not differ by age, nor did Brand Trust or Brand Loyalty differ by age.

The correlation analysis between the independent and mediating variables revealed a positive relationship between both. Confirmatory factor analysis tested

the model's fit, and results confirmed the reliability of the model’s fit to the data, though it was not perfect and hence suggested room for further model refinements in future studies.

Lastly, mediator analysis was performed using structural equation modelling, which revealed that none of the five dimensions of social media marketing activities directly influenced Brand Loyalty. The results, however, showed a high significance level for both Entertainment and Electronic Word of Mouth with Brand Loyalty when mediated by Brand Trust. Thus, this chapter highlights pivotal outcomes and serves as a compass for future directions in bolstering brand loyalty strategies.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a crucial juncture where hypotheses formulated in chapter two undergo thorough scrutiny and discussion. The evaluation of these hypotheses hinges upon the outcomes derived from meticulous data analysis. It is within this chapter that the fate of the proposed hypotheses unfolds, shaping the trajectory of the study. This chapter acts as a bridge, elucidating how the findings intersect with the study's theoretical framework, illuminating connections and discrepancies.

5.2 Summary of main findings

The study's primary aim was to investigate the impact that marketing activities on social media have on customers' loyalty towards grocery retailers in South Africa.

The study looked specifically at five aspects relating to marketing on social media platforms, namely, Entertainment, Interaction, Trendiness, Customisation, and Electronic Word of Mouth and how these influence Brand Loyalty through a mediating variable, Brand Trust.

The figure below is the conceptual framework around which the study was built.

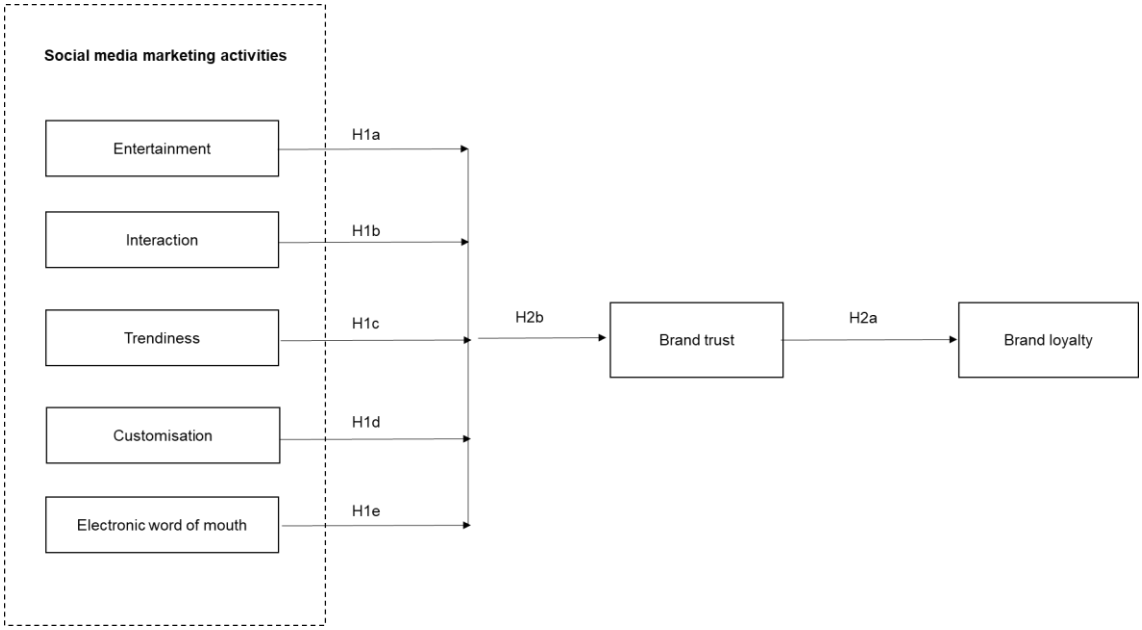


Figure 16: Conceptual framework

This section summarises the main findings, and conclusions are drawn for each hypothesis and objectives outlined in Chapter 2.

H1a: Entertainment on social media has an impact on Brand Trust

Hypothesis 1a is linked to Objective 1, which investigates how Entertainment influences Brand Trust on social media. Results from the correlation analysis between Entertainment and Brand Trust indicate a moderate positive relationship (r=0.310). The mediator analysis results suggest that Entertainment has a statistically significant impact on Brand Trust. The indirect effect of Entertainment on Brand Loyalty through Brand Trust was estimated at 0.104, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.017. This implies that the influence of Entertainment on Brand Trust is significant enough to affect Brand Loyalty indirectly.

This finding is comparable to those of previous studies where it was found that Entertainment positively impacted Brand Trust, which in turn also positively impacted Brand Loyalty. A study in Saudi Arabia showed that Entertainment positively impacted trust (Sohail et al., 2019), and other studies confirmed this (Dani & Susanto, 2023; Van & Fah, 2022). Therefore, entertainment plays a vital

role in shaping consumers' perceptions of a brand on social media. Having entertaining content can help create positive perceptions of the brand and help brand trust.

H1b: Interaction on social media has an impact on Brand Trust

H1b is linked to Objective 2, which aimed to analyse whether interaction influences brand trust on social media platforms. The correlation analysis between Interaction (r=0.402) and Brand Trust indicates a strong positive relationship. Interaction has the strongest correlation to Brand Trust among all five independent variables in the study. The mediator analysis suggests that Interaction has no statistically significant impact on Brand Trust due to a p-value of 0.202. The indirect effect of Interaction on Brand Loyalty through Brand Trust was estimated at 0.053, which is relatively smaller than the extent to which Entertainment influences Brand Trust. The findings suggest that Interaction might not significantly impact Brand Trust, at least in the context evaluated in this specific study.

In contrast with this study's findings that indicated that Interaction does not have a statistically significant impact on Brand Trust, previous studies showed that Interaction positively impacted Brand Trust (Dani & Susanto, 2023; Sohail et al., 2019; Van & Fah, 2022). These differences in findings suggest that the context within which each of these studies has taken place should be considered. For example, the study in Saudi Arabia (Sohail et al., 2019) centred on a broader target of social media users in the country irrespective of which brand they followed on social media, whilst the current study focused specifically on social media users following grocery retailers on social media. It is, therefore, essential for marketers to explore interaction within the context of the markets in which they operate, as these nuances could play a role in helping to understand the role that interaction plays in building Brand Trust. Whilst Interaction might not have shown a significant direct impact on Brand Trust in this study, it is essential to consider its potential combined influence with other factors for a more holistic understanding of its nature.

H1c: Trendiness on social media has an impact on Brand Trust

Hypothesis H1c is linked to Objective 3, which examined Trendiness's effect on Brand Trust on social media. The measurement from the correlation analysis revealed that a moderate positive relationship exists between Trendiness (r=0.341) and Brand Trust. The mediation analysis results of Trendiness and its impact on Brand Trust suggest that, similar to Interaction, the effect is not statistically significant in influencing Brand Loyalty through Brand Trust. The estimated indirect effect of 0.017 indicates a minimal influence of Trendiness on Brand Trust. Previous studies have, however, indicated that Trendiness positively influences Trust and provides the perception that the brand is gaining popularity and recognition (Ebrahim, 2020; Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Faisal, 2022; Van & Fah, 2022). Whilst Trendiness, as indicated by these previous studies, might be an aspect valued by consumers, its direct impact on fostering Brand Trust within the context of this analysis does not seem to be pronounced. Therefore, it is crucial to consider these various contexts, like target market and industry, as trendiness within these contexts may be valuable in building brand trust. An example would be the study on fashion products amongst students, where trendiness was necessary for building brand trust (Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Faisal, 2022).

H1d: Customisation on social media has an impact on Brand Trust

This hypothesis is linked to Objective 4, which aimed to investigate how Customisation influences Brand Trust on social media. The correlation analysis between these variables showed a weak positive relationship between Customisation (r= 0.291) and Brand Trust. The mediator analysis revealed that the estimated indirect effect of 0.055 suggests a moderate influence of customisation on brand trust, although it is not strong enough to establish a statistically significant influence on brand loyalty through the mediating variable brand trust. The p-value slightly above the conventional threshold suggests that Customisation might have an observable impact on Brand Trust, but this effect is not deemed statistically significant within the context of this study. Previous

studies show slightly different findings where customisation positively impacted trust (Ebrahim, 2020; Sohail et al., 2019). This study's lack of direct significance does not necessarily negate customisation's potential contribution to brand trust. In recent times, through the advancement of technology, the growth of customisation has increased, allowing firms to offer personalised solutions (Guo, 2021).

According to (Zhu & Chen, 2015), customisation on social media comes in two forms. The first is a customised post targeting specific individuals and smaller groups. The second is a broadcast post targeting a wider group of people. With this in mind, customisation is vital for specific brands. An example would be within the luxury goods market, where brands send customers customised messages to gather information about design preferences to create value (Zhu & Chen, 2015). Hence, brands must demonstrate an understanding of their specific market needs and the extent to which customers require customisation.

H1e: Electronic Word of Mouth has an impact on Brand Trust

Hypothesis H1e is linked to Objective 5 of this study, which investigates the influence of word of mouth on Brand Trust on social media platforms. The correlation analysis indicated a moderate positive association between Electronic Word of Mouth (r=0.362) and Brand Trust. The mediator analysis reveals that Electronic Word of Mouth significantly impacts Brand Trust, subsequently influencing Brand Loyalty. The indirect effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Brand Loyalty through Brand Trust was estimated at 0.084 with a statistically significant p-value of 0.020. These findings align with previous scholars suggesting that electronic word of mouth is a trustworthy form of communication (Cheung et al., 2020; Fetais et al., 2022). The results indicate that managing positive electronic word of mouth through various online social media platforms could be an effective strategy for building and maintaining brand trust.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of electronic word of mouth in playing a vital role in the customer's decision-making process. Customers seek

word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and acquaintances before purchasing a product (Yang et al., 2015). This highlights the importance of online conversations, reviews, and recommendations in shaping consumers' trust in a brand. Therefore, electronic word of mouth should be an essential element as it creates a positive narrative for the brand and produces positive sentiment towards the brand that contributes to brand building.

H2a: Brand Trust has an impact on Brand Loyalty in social media

Hypothesis H2a is linked to Objective 6, which examines how Brand Trust influences Brand Loyalty. The correlation analysis between Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty indicates a moderate positive relationship (r=0.477). The indirect effects analysis discussed in H1a and H1e highlighted that Brand Trust impacts Brand Loyalty. Factors like Entertainment and Electronic Word of Mouth showed statistically significant indirect effects on Brand Loyalty through their influence on the variable Brand Trust. Therefore, Brand Trust plays a significant role in influencing Brand Loyalty, as highlighted by these findings. Previous studies show similar results where an increase in brand trust positively correlates with higher brand loyalty (Puspaningrum, 2020). Brand trust was seen as a crucial precursor to brand loyalty, as highlighted in the study by Sohail et al. (2019). Their findings indicate a direct impact of trust on brand loyalty, positioning brand trust as a pivotal mediator for brand loyalty (Sohail et al., 2019). In the hospitality sector, research by Tatar and Eren-Erdoğmuş (2016) illustrated its vital role in mediating the relationship between marketing on social media and customer loyalty towards a brand. Similarly, an Indian study emphasised the time-intensive nature of trust-building, revealing brand trust as a mediator between social media usage and brand loyalty (Srivastava et al., 2022).

Other studies have also demonstrated that Brand Trust is crucial in a customer’s buying behaviour, positively affecting overall loyalty towards a brand (Rudzewicz & Strychalska-Rudzewicz, 2021).

Brand trust is a vital dimension that a brand should focus on, as it can create long-term brand loyalty.

H2b: Brand trust mediates the influence of social media marketing activities on brand loyalty in social media

H2b is linked to Objective 7 of this study, which is to analyse the role of brand trust in mediating the relationship between social media marketing activities and brand loyalty. The results of the mediator analysis revealed a nuanced perspective on the impact of various dimensions within social media marketing activities on the studied outcomes. Among these dimensions, Entertainment and Electronic Word of Mouth emerged as statistically significant influencers, with p-values below the 0.05 benchmark. This suggests a substantial and quantifiable influence of Entertainment and Electronic Word of Mouth on the variables under observation.

In contrast, the analysis also indicated a lack of statistical significance for the other dimensions of social media marketing, namely Interaction, Trendiness and Customisation, thereby highlighting their lesser impact within this context. While not meeting the minimum requirements for statistical significance, these dimensions might still offer valuable insights or require further exploration in different contexts or under varied conditions to understand their full impact. Further exploration and context-specific investigations could elucidate their distinct roles in influencing the studied variables.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter's analysis of social media marketing dimensions and their influence on the studied outcomes revealed a multifaceted relationship. The mediator analysis underscored the nuanced impact of various dimensions within social media marketing activities on the observed variables. Among these dimensions, Entertainment and Electronic Word of Mouth emerged as statistically significant influencers, indicating their substantial impact on the outcomes under

study. Their significance emphasises the pivotal role of engaging content and electronic word-of-mouth in shaping the observed variables.

Conversely, Interaction, Trendiness, and Customisation did not demonstrate statistical significance in this context. While not meeting the statistical threshold, these dimensions might offer insights worthy of further exploration in different contexts or under varied conditions to comprehensively understand their impact.

The chapter's findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics within social media marketing and offer valuable insights for marketers aiming to optimise strategies by prioritising influential dimensions while considering the broader context in which they operate. Further research and context-specific investigations could provide additional clarity on the roles and impacts of these dimensions, enhancing our understanding of their contributions to desired outcomes in diverse settings.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter discusses the conclusions and recommendations based on the study's results. It delves into insightful recommendations derived from these conclusions. It then unpacks the theoretical implications by dissecting how the study's outcomes align with existing theories or contribute to new perspectives. This chapter also includes the managerial implications that provide actionable insights tailored for social media marketers. Lastly, the chapter concludes with limitations and recommendations for future studies.

This study's primary objective was to investigate how marketing on social media influences brand loyalty in the retail sector in South Africa, with a specific focus on grocery retailers. The study reviewed existing theories related to social media and its impact on brand loyalty. Based on this, a conceptual framework was designed to look at five aspects of social media marketing: entertainment, interaction, customization, trendiness, and e-WOM. The study examined how each dimension influenced Brand Loyalty through a mediating variable, Brand Trust. The study was quantitative, and surveys were completed online via the Qualtrics survey platform. A total of 158 responses were used in the analysis of the results. Various statistical tools were used to analyse the data, including descriptive statistics and more advanced statistical methods like factor analysis and structural equation modelling. The results from the analysis were discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

In the subsequent sections, key conclusions and recommendations are provided, each aligned with the study's specific objectives.

6.2 Conclusions and recommendations based on the objectives of the study

6.2.1 Conclusions and Recommendations for Objective 1

The results from the study showed that Entertainment on social media significantly impacts Brand Loyalty through the mediator, Brand Trust. This suggests that the influence of entertaining experiences on Brand Loyalty is partially explained or mediated by consumers' trust in the brand. Social media marketers should, therefore, endeavour to create entertaining experiences on social media that resonate positively with customers. These would lead customers to perceive their brand as being reliable and authentic.

Providing entertaining social media content and diverse content formats like videos, infographics, memes, interactive polls, and tailored stories can enhance consumers' perceptions of a brand and build trust. Social media marketers can also consider crafting compelling narratives or stories about the brand that captivate and emotionally resonate with their followers. Social media marketers should maintain a consistent posting schedule to ensure audiences are engaged and look forward to regular, new, entertaining content. Understanding this indirect relationship allows social media marketers to strategically leverage entertainment-related content or elements in brand-building initiatives on social media. This emphasises the importance of providing entertaining experiences and ensuring that these experiences align with building and maintaining consumer trust in the brand.

6.2.2 Conclusions and Recommendations for Objective 2

Based on the findings, Interaction did not significantly influence Brand Loyalty through Brand Trust. This suggests that interactions that brands have with customers on social media platforms may not be enough to play a significant role in fostering loyalty towards a brand. Simply engaging with customers on social

media or providing positive interactions may not be sufficient. Further analysis may be required to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons for the lack of significance and could indicate that other factors (like product quality and pricing) may play a more pivotal role in contributing to brand loyalty.

Social media marketers should delve deeper into the various facets of interaction on social media to identify if certain forms of interaction hold more influence over brand trust or brand loyalty. Social media marketers can also experiment with diverse engagement tactics like polls, direct queries, or even interactive stories to encourage active participation and measure whether these tactics influence brand perceptions of trust or create brand loyalty. Introducing omni-channel interactions, where interactions extend beyond one platform, is another option for social media marketers to explore. Despite this study's findings showing that Interaction is not significant in influencing Brand Trust and Loyalty, Interaction allows brands to connect with customers, making customers feel heard, valued, and involved in brand conversations. Therefore, this is still important in building a more profound sense of customer connection.

6.2.3 Conclusions and Recommendations for Objective 3

Within this study, Trendiness did not exhibit statistical significance in influencing Brand Loyalty through Brand Trust; hence, its importance might seem relatively lessened within this context. This suggests that in this study, trendiness may not significantly enhance brand loyalty through brand trust on social media. A study on luxury brands within the Korean market found that consumers within that context were more trend-sensitive (Kim & Ko, 2012). In another study, trendiness was also seen as a significant component of attracting consumers to follow luxury brands (Fetais et al., 2022). Since this study focused on the grocery retail category, this difference in consumer preferences could explain these findings. Additional analysis is required to gain a deeper understanding of these differences. This implies that trendiness could be significant in broader social media marketing strategies within specific industries or contexts. In contexts

where trendiness is relevant, incorporating trendy content on social media can help convey a sense of brand relevance and help position a brand as being up-to-date with current topics (Fetais et al., 2022). Given this, interaction may still play a vital role in brand building going into the future and should still be explored as a crucial dimension included in social media marketing strategies.

6.2.4 Conclusions and Recommendations for Objective 4

The findings from this study indicated that Customisation does not significantly influence Brand Loyalty via Brand Trust within the study context. This suggests that within the study context, the effort to customise a customer's social media interaction and experience may not necessarily contribute to brand loyalty through brand trust. Therefore, brands may need first to understand whether customisation is necessary within the context of their industries.

Trends have shown that when done right, customisation can yield positive outcomes for a brand. For example, customisation using personalised experiences has several benefits. When done on a large scale, it can deliver a 1% to 2% increase in sales for grocery retailers (Lindecrantz et al., 2020).

Within other contexts, the need for customisation may be an essential contributor to brand building. Since the ability to provide customisation can be costly, it is recommended that social media marketers conduct market research amongst customers to understand whether there is a need for customised content or online experiences for customers. By understanding customer preferences, a brand may be able to provide more targeted and relevant customisations. When brands incorporate customer feedback into their customisation, they position the brand as responsive, dynamic, and adaptable, which could go a long way to building more positive brand perceptions. Customisation may be crucial within specific industries and product offerings, so despite its diminished importance within the context of grocery retailers in South Africa, its importance may hold in other industries and contexts.

6.2.5 Conclusions and recommendations for Objective 5

The results from the study showed that Electronic Word of Mouth on social media significantly impacts Brand Loyalty through the mediator, Brand Trust. This points to the importance of positive reviews and recommendations from others online, which serve as social proof, influencing potential customers and fostering loyalty amongst existing ones. Social media marketers should, therefore, design strategies that foster engagement with consumers, encouraging them to have discussions and provide reviews. Research consistently demonstrates that customers who experience favourable interactions with a brand and maintain ongoing engagement with it are significantly more inclined to advocate for the brand. This underscores a robust correlation between customer engagement levels and the establishment of brand loyalty (Putri et al., 2023).

Engagement can also be encouraged by incentivising consumers with positive user-generated content. Offering rewards and incentives to customers who share positive experiences will encourage positive word-of-mouth. Social media marketers can also identify loyal customers and influencers who endorse the brand and empower these individuals as brand advocates, encouraging them to share their positive experiences and recommendations. Moreover, social media marketers can effectively cultivate and maintain positive word-of-mouth promotion across various digital channels by actively engaging with customers on social media platforms through prompt responses to inquiries, resolution of customer concerns, and recognition of positive feedback.

Through the use of digital technologies, customer engagement can be further enhanced. Using big data can assist brands in creating effective engagement strategies with customers. Artificial intelligence brands can access real-time customer data, and deep insights can be gained from the customer. The creative use of augmented reality has also changed how brands interact and engage with customers online (Bansal & Pruthi, 2021).

6.2.6 Conclusions and Recommendations for Objective 6

Results from this study revealed a positive and substantial impact of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty; therefore, when customers perceive a higher level of trust in a brand, they are more inclined to exhibit loyalty through repeat purchases, recommendations, and the willingness to engage further with a brand. Therefore, social media marketers must communicate transparently and honestly with their audiences. By telling brand stories, brands will be able to humanise the brand and build authenticity, creating trust towards the brand. It is also vital for brands to maintain consistency in their brand messaging across social media platforms and regularly communicate the brand's values. It is also essential to be responsive to customer queries and concerns on social media, as these will further build brand trust. A key component to building trust on social media is branding, showcasing user-generated testimonials, reviews and stories that highlight positive experiences with the brand, thereby contributing further to trust building. Reviews play an essential role in the consumer decision-making process. However, brands must note that as consumers become more digitally savvy, the number of fake reviews increases (Shan, 2023). Consumers may seem more trusting of reviews, but this may change as they become more aware of detecting fake versus honest reviews.

Other ways to enhance trust on social media include sharing informative content that adds value to customer’s lives and helps position the brand as a trustworthy source of information.

6.2.7 Conclusions and Recommendations for Objective 7

This study indicated that Brand Trust mediates the relationship between specific aspects of marketing on social media and Brand Loyalty. These dimensions include Entertainment and Electronic Word of Mouth. This highlights the crucial role of entertaining content in building positive brand perceptions. Social media feeds have evolved and have not only become more entertaining but also more algorithmic. As social media users express interest in specific content, social

media platforms gather this data to suggest content, advertisements, and recommendations highly personalised to the user (Deloitte, 2023). Brands that can leverage these features on social media and provide entertaining content that is relevant and at the right moment will, therefore, have the ability to create positive perceptions about their respective brands.

In addition, this finding highlights the critical role of electronic word of mouth in brand building. Given this, it is therefore essential for social media marketers to strike a balance between providing content that intertwines entertainment with trust-building elements. Crafting authentic and transparent storytelling content alongside user-generated testimonials becomes a powerful vehicle to create trust on social media platforms. Amplifying positive user reviews and feedback across social media platforms can further solidify brand trust.

6.3 Theoretical implications

This research contributes to the current theory on marketing within social media platforms and their impact on customers' loyalty towards a brand by providing a South African view. Previous studies focused on other geographic regions, including the Middle East and Asia; however, little to no research was done in South Africa. This is pertinent given the importance placed on social media and the increase in investment by marketers in the area. Identifying specific dimensions such as entertainment and electronic word of mouth as significant influencers within social media marketing activities adds granularity to existing theories. This also highlights the differential impact of various dimensions, possibly requiring adaptations or expansions of the existing theoretical models. These differences could point to the constant evolution of consumer needs and expectations within the social media landscape. Hence, regularly testing and enhancing existing theoretical models is necessary. The role of each dimension of social media marketing activities varies across studies. Entertainment has emerged as a distinct factor recognised for its substantial positive influence on brand loyalty, a finding substantiated by numerous studies conducted across

diverse industry sectors and market environments (Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012; Kim & Ko, 2012; Sohail et al., 2019).

The research underscores the pivotal role of brand trust in social media marketing strategies within the grocery retail sector. It offers empirical evidence explaining how brand trust mediates between social media marketing efforts and brand loyalty. This highlights the critical importance of brand trust, enhancing the model's depth in explaining the interplay between social media marketing initiatives and customers' loyalty to grocery retailers.

6.4 Managerial implications

Findings from the study point to a need to ensure that social media marketing strategies play an essential role in the overall marketing strategy of brands. This means that marketing plans and strategies must integrate social media, which should be a core element of the broader marketing mix, reflecting its influence on brand loyalty. Therefore, brands must also ensure that human expertise is dedicated to the discipline. Hiring the right talent and expertise to drive the social media marketing agenda becomes vital to embedding it into the fabric of a brand. In light of the evolving landscape of social media platforms, managers must remain vigilant and proactive in monitoring emerging trends and shifts in user behaviour. Adapting strategies to align with the latest platform features and user preferences is essential for maintaining and enhancing brand loyalty. An example of this is the increasing use of both human and virtual social media influencers. When adopting influencers, social media managers would be required to take note of customers' attitudes towards human versus virtual influencers. Prior research has consistently demonstrated a notable disparity in trust levels between virtual influencers and their human counterparts (Liu & Lee, 2024). Managers would be required to understand the impact of both these types of influencers on their social media following and also the impact that these may have on future brand building.

In addition, marketing budgets must also cater to marketing initiatives on social media due to their influence on building loyalty towards brands. Social media's direct engagement capabilities and cost-effectiveness in reaching large target audiences make it a compelling investment. Additionally, its real-time analytics allows social media marketers to gather insightful data about their audiences that can serve as important input into social media marketing strategies and plans that contribute significantly to building brand loyalty.

The study also reveals insights into the types of content and engagement strategies that are most effective in fostering brand loyalty. Managers can optimise their content creation by providing entertaining content that fosters user-generated content to build brand loyalty further. Given the influence of social media on brand loyalty, managers may be required to focus on enhancing their current customer relationship management strategies to better engage with customers on social platforms. Building and maintaining strong relationships through personalised interactions can positively impact brand loyalty.

Recognising the impact of social media activities on influencing brand loyalty, managers may use social media as a platform to implement or enhance brand advocacy programs. Encouraging and incentivising satisfied customers to become brand advocates on social media can amplify positive brand sentiments and extend a positive narrative around the brand. Using user-generated content that is entertaining and interactive, social media can be a crucial platform for spreading positive word-of-mouth and enhancing positive perceptions towards a brand. An example of a brand that leverages the power of user-generated content on social media is Crocs, the global footwear brand that encourages its global community of followers to share and showcase how they style their Crocs. These initiatives have contributed to customer retention and purchase confidence for the brand (Taylor, 2023).

Implementing robust monitoring and analytics systems for social media metrics becomes crucial. Managers may be required to invest in tools to track and analyse social media performance metrics and sentiment analysis to gauge the

impact on brand trust and loyalty. An important consideration when monitoring social media metrics is actively incorporating customer feedback received through social media into product/service development and improvement processes. Responding to customer concerns and suggestions on these platforms can enhance brand loyalty. In addition, acknowledging the influential role of social media, managers may be required to enhance crisis management plans, ensuring a swift and effective response to any negative sentiments or issues that may arise on social platforms to mitigate potential impacts on brand trust and loyalty. An example of a problematic situation on social media was in 2017 when the global brand Dove launched a Facebook advertisement that showed a woman turning from black to white after using its product. The advertisement was met with negative sentiment, and the brand was accused of being racist. As a swift response, the brand apologised and removed the advertisement from Facebook (Slawson, 2017). In summary, the managerial implications involve adapting strategies, allocating resources effectively, and leveraging social media to grow and sustain customers' trust and loyalty in alignment with the study's findings.

6.5 Limitations and recommendations for future research

The study was purely quantitative and only catered for closed-ended questions. Using a mixed methodology by including open-ended questions could have provided a deeper understanding of why respondents gave specific ratings to questions. Respondents providing textual feedback can better understand the topic in future studies.

This study focused specifically on social media users following grocery retailers within the South African retail sector. This limits the generalisability of the study's findings. Future research can consider including other types of retailers within South Africa to provide more holistic findings for the sector. Future research can also investigate the research topic in other sectors (like banking and telecommunications) within the South African context. The study also focused on

social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and LinkedIn. Further research can include TikTok and other more recently launched social media platforms.

This study only collected demographic information about respondents' ages. Future research could include other demographic variables (like gender, education level, and income) to understand the target respondents better and determine their relative importance in contributing to loyalty towards a brand within social media.

As this study only focused on brand trust as a mediating variable, future research could examine the impact of other mediating variables on brand loyalty. Examples of these mediators include perceived quality, where higher perceived quality could lead to higher levels of loyalty. Other mediating variables to consider include customer satisfaction with a brand, where higher levels of customer satisfaction could lead to higher brand loyalty. Consumers' perceptions of the brand's value in terms of product quality, price, and overall experience could also mediate the relationship between factors like customisation and brand loyalty.

Future research can also focus on a more comprehensive geographic footprint within South Africa to include all nine provinces. This future study could highlight differences from a geographic perspective regarding how social media marketing activities impact brand loyalty. Therefore, a study of this nature would have to consider larger sample sizes to report at a provincial level in South Africa.

As digital technologies evolve, future research can look at how the use of technologies like artificial intelligence or augmented reality in social media marketing and the impact that these have on brand loyalty. In addition, future research can look at the impact of other artificial intelligence-powered technologies like chatbots on social media and how these influence perceptions of a brand concerning trust and loyalty.

6.6 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the study has delved into the intricate relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty, uncovering valuable insights that hold implications for academic discourse and managerial practices. The findings, as elucidated throughout this research, underscore the substantial impact of social media marketing on shaping consumer perceptions, fostering engagement, and ultimately influencing brand loyalty.

This study lays the groundwork for ongoing investigation into the convergence of social media marketing and consumer brand loyalty. As we stand at the precipice of a digitally driven future, the knowledge from this study offers a foundation for future scholars and practitioners to build, innovate, and propel the discourse forward. The journey into the dynamics of social media marketing and brand loyalty is ongoing, and this study contributes a meaningful chapter to the ever-expanding narrative of social media marketing in contemporary business landscapes.

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APPENDIX A (Participant information sheet)



Good day

My name is Anashree Hansjee, and I am currently pursuing a Master's degree at the Wits Business School, located at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Under the guidance of Prof. Nixon Ochara, I am conducting a research study on the topic of social media marketing. The specific focus of my study is the "Influence of Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty in the South African Retail Sector."

I would like to extend an invitation to you to participate in an online survey for this research study. The survey is designed to be completed within approximately 10 minutes of your time.

Please rest assured that the online survey is completely confidential and anonymous. Any information you provide will be treated with the utmost privacy. Your name and any other personally identifiable details will not be included in the research results. With your permission, other researchers may utilise the data collected from this study, but rest assured that your name and personal information will not be disclosed or shared.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and confidential. There will be no cost associated with your involvement. You have the freedom to discontinue the survey at any point if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions. Moreover, opting out of the survey will not result in any loss of services, benefits, or rights that you would typically have.

The findings of this research study will be presented in the form of a comprehensive research report, which will be made available on the university

library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I would be delighted to send it to you.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor using the contact information provided below. Additionally, if you have any ethical concerns or complaints regarding the procedures followed in this study, you are welcome to reach out to the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) at telephone number +27(0) 11 717 1408 or via email at hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Thank you for considering my invitation, and I sincerely appreciate your time and participation.

Yours sincerely,

Anashree

Researcher:

Anashree Hansjee, 2633288@students.wits.ac.za, 079 876 3223

Supervisor:

Professor Nixon Ochara, Nixon.Ochara@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX B (Survey)

Introduction on Qualtrics landing page

Dear respondent, my name is Anashree Hansjee, a postgraduate student from Wits Business School. I am conducting a research study to examine how social media marketing influences brand loyalty amongst grocery retailers in South Africa. The purpose of this study is to understand your perceptions about the social media marketing activities of grocery retailers. Please note that participation in this survey is voluntary and confidential. All responses are anonymous and will only be analysed at an aggregated level. Your personal detailers will not be used in any reporting and findings from this study will be used purely for academic purposes. If you have any questions regarding this research, please feel free to contact my supervisor Professor Ochara at Nixon.Ochara@wits.ac.za

Screener questions

1) To start the survey, please click on the CONTINUE button below. Should you prefer not to participate in the survey, please click the DECLINE button below:

a) Continue
b) Decline

SCREENER INSTRUCTION: Respondents that choose option b) will be screened out of the survey and the following message will be displayed on their survey screen: 'Thank you for your time and have a great day further. You may now close this screen.'

2) Please tell us, what is your age?

a) Below 18 years
b) 18 – 20 years
c) 21 – 30 years
d) 31 – 40 years

e) 41 – 50 years
f) 51 – 60 years
g) 60+ years

SCREENER INSTRUCTION: Respondents that choose option a) will be screened out of the survey and the following message will be displayed on their survey screen: 'Thank you for taking the time to participant in our survey. We are looking for participants 18 years and above and since you do not meet the criteria, we will now end the survey. We do however appreciate your time you have taken to participate. Have a good day and you may now close this screen.

3. Please tell us, which of the following grocery retailers do you follow on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or LinkedIn? You may choose more than one option from the list of grocery retailers below.

a) Checkers
b) Food Lover's Market
c) Game
d) Makro
e) Pick n Pay
f) Shoprite
h) SPAR
i) Woolworths
j) None of the above
k) I do not use any social media

SCREENER INSTRUCTION: Respondents that choose option i) or j) will be screened out of the survey and the following message will be displayed on their survey screen: 'Thank you for taking the time to participant in our survey. We are specifically looking for participants who follow grocery retailers on social media and since you do not meet the criteria, we will now end the survey. We do however appreciate the time you have taken to participate. Have a good day and you may now close this screen.

Main survey questions

4. From the list of grocery retailers you follow on social media, which one would you say is your main grocery retailer? Please choose only one option from the list below.

a) Checkers
b) Food Lover's Market
c) Game
d) Makro
e) Pick n Pay
f) Shoprite
g) SPAR
h) Woolworths

5. The following questions deal specifically with your main grocery retailer you follow on social media, (main grocery retailer) and your perceptions regarding their social media marketing activities. Using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the statements below: (If you have not seen any marketing activities from your main grocery retailer, please select 1 which is strongly disagree)

INTERVIEW CODING INSTRUCTION: The piped text function on Qualtrics will be used to display the main grocery retailers name in Questions 5, 6 and 7

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
5_1 Using (main grocery retailer's) social media is fun					
5_2 Contents shown in (main grocery retailers) social media seem interesting					
5_3 Main grocery retailer's) social media enables information sharing with others					
5_4 Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through (main grocery retailer's) social media					
5_5 It is easy to deliver my opinion through (main grocery retailers) social media					
5_6 Contents shown in (main grocery retailer's) social media is the newest information					
5_7 Using (main grocery retailers) social media is very trendy					
5_8 (Main grocery retailer's) social media offers customised information search					
5_9 (Main grocery retailer's) social media provides customised service					
5_10 I would like to pass along information on brand, product, or services from (main grocery retailer's) social media to my friends					
5_11 I would like to upload contents from (main grocery retailer's) social media on my blog or micro blog					

6) Now still thinking about your main grocery retailer and how you perceive them, please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the statements below.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
6_1 (Main grocery retailer) is honest					
6_2 (Main grocery retailer) works for my happiness					
6_3 (Main grocery retailer) works hard to satisfy me					
6_4 (Main grocery retailer's) promises are real					

7) The following question related to how loyal or not you are to your main grocery retailer. Using the same scale from 1 to 5 please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the statements below:

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
7_1 I intend to keep purchasing the services offered by my main grocery retailer					
7_2 I am loyal to my main grocery retailer					
7_3 I consider myself to be loyal to my main grocery retail provider					
7_4 I would recommend my main grocery retailer to someone who seeks my advice					
7_5 I would encourage friends and relatives to do business with my main grocery retailer					

Survey End message

The following message will be displayed on the respondent's screen once the last survey question has been completed, 'You have now come to the end of this survey. We appreciate the time you have taken to give us your valuable feedback. Have a great day and you may now close this screen.'

APPENDIX C (Consent Letter)

Title of Project: The influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty in the South African retail sector

Name of researcher: Anashree Hansjee

I, ……. agree to participate in this research project. I agree to the following:

(Please answer yes or no by placing an X in the relevant boxes below)

	YES	NO
This research study has been explained to me and I understand what the research study is about.		
I understand that this study is voluntary and that I can decline to take part in it should I wish.		
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous and that my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report.		
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my survey (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) however my name and any of my personal information will not be used or passed on.		

…….. (Signature)

…….. (Name of participant)

…….. (Date)

…….. (Signature)

…….. (Name of researcher)

…….. (Date)

APPENDIX D (Copy of Research Ethics Training certificate)



Zertifikat
Certificat
Certificado
Certificate

TRREE

Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale
Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants

Certificat de formation - Training Certificate

Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that

Clinical Trials Centre
The University of Hong Kong

Anashree Hansjee

a complété avec succès - has successfully completed

Introduction to Research Ethics

du programme de formation TRREE en évaluation éthique de la recherche
of the TRREE training programme in research ethics evaluation

Release Date: 2023/06/29

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[REV : 20220217]

APPENDIX E (Ethics Clearance)

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/DB2633288/808
This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).

Project title	The influence of social media marketing on brand loyalty in the South African retail sector
Investigator / Researcher	Mrs Anashree Hansjee
Nature of Project	MM (Digital Business)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed confidentialty.
Issue Date of Certificate	14/08/2023
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project / research report
Chairperson	Dr Pius Oba ☎ +27 11 717 3976 +27 82 733 6587 pius.oba@wits.ac.za

Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

25/08/2023
Date: