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Effects of social media marketing on consumer behaviour in South Africa

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300234

A research article 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 Business Administration

Johannesburg, 2018

DECLARATION

I, Rachana Dhananjay Bedekar, declare that this research article is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the Graduate School of Business Administration, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Rachana Dhananjay Bedekar

Signed at Johannesburg

On the 19th day of October 2018

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- Letsema Consulting for their financial support towards this research. However, it is to be noted that opinions expressed, and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to Letsema Consulting.
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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

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	Appendix B: Literature
	Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire
	Appendix D: Detailed Results of Survey Analysis by Demographics
	Appendix E: Detailed Results of Content Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This paper aims to develop a conceptual model that explains the effects of social media marketing on consumer behaviour at each stage of the consumer buying process and validate the model in the South African context. It also assesses the influence of selected factors on consumer engagement; and provide marketers with a view of the type of content that is the most effective in engaging consumers in three different industries.

Design/methodology/approach – A mixed method approach, comprising of both qualitative and quantitative research, was chosen to analyse impacts of social media marketing on consumer behaviour. The qualitative research formed the basis of identifying indicative factors that affect consumer behaviour across the consumer decision-making process, to develop a conceptual model. The model was then assessed through quantitative analysis of a consumer-based survey completed by 222 respondents. Furthermore, quantitative analysis of content posted on three pre-selected Facebook pages was carried out.

Findings – Analysis of the survey responses validated three out of the ten hypotheses articulated within the model, while four were rejected, and three were assessed to require further investigation before a decision could be made. It was also found that responses differed according to respondent groups generated using demographics and social media activity. However, all respondent groups were most influenced by situational and personal factors throughout the consumer buying process. The content analysis also revealed that content media type and content topic influence consumer engagement which varies from company-to-company depending on the frequency of interaction a consumer has with the brand in the form of its product or services, and brand representatives, rather than the type of industry the company belonged to.

Practical implications – The findings and discussions in this paper provide businesses, marketers, and content developers with a guideline of how to structure their marketing strategy to engage customers more effectively given that the South African population may not be as influenced by social media marketing as it has

been perceived to be considering that the results revealed that South African consumers are more prone to situational buying and that their own personal lifestyle choices have a huge impact on how their buying habits.

Originality/value – The paper contributes to the body of literature by proposing and testing a conceptual model of consumer behaviour in the context of social media across various consumer groups, while simultaneously identifying specific content driving consumer engagement on Facebook pages.

Keywords: Consumer buying process, Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Engagement, Social media marketing

Paper Type: Research paper

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a vital part of the modernised society today (Bosari, 2012). Historically, the use of the internet as a tool to disseminate and gain information was of primary interest, but the advent of social media has revolutionised the way modern society uses the internet. Social media has taken globalisation to the next level by removing spatial and time constraints apparent in outdated methods of communications; facilitating sharing of different types of content; employing user-friendly interfaces that allows anyone to connect and collaborate, contributing to the body of knowledge that the internet holds (Yigit & Tarman, 2013; Bieber, 2014).

During the 2014-2016 period, the number of people using social media has increased by 19%, from 1.91 to 2.28 billion (Statista, 2017). The increasing number of users on social media has resulted in marketers recognising social media as an indispensable tool to reach their consumers in future. In 2012, a global survey of 700 marketers by Wildfire App revealed that nearly all marketers perceived social media as being value-adding (Mershon, 2012). The ability to increase brand awareness and engage in a conversation directly with their consumers, were top benefits identified by these marketers. Moreover, in 2014, social media marketing

budgets globally were reported to be USD 16 billion. This number has doubled in two years, to USD 31 billion in 2016 (LePage, 2016).

Within the South African context, an average person spends 14 hours a day on digital media, with social media and internet accounting for 12 hours. This means that marketers in South Africa (SA) also need to slowly shift away from the traditional forms of marketing to the more modern digital ways. Research conducted by World Wide Worx and Ornico - The SA Social Media Landscape 2018, shows that Facebook is the most popular social media platform amongst consumers and marketers with 16 million South Africans using Facebook in 2017; and 97% of brands utilising social media to reach existing and potential customers (Patricios & Goldstuck, 2017). Other popular platforms in SA are Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube; however, marketers do not find the same percentage of value for money through social advertising on these platforms – 86% for Facebook, 45% for Twitter, 40% for Instagram, and 35% for LinkedIn (Patricios et al., 2017). Additionally, the study also ranks the most successful social brands in Africa by using a proprietary Africa Brand Index developed by scanning key metrics across these sites. Table 1 shows the Top 20 brands according to this study.

Table 1: Africa's social media champions (Ornico Media, 2017)

Rank	Brand	Score	Rank	Brand	Score
1	SuperSport	90.15	**11**	Nedbank	80.44
2	Express Show	88.70	**12**	McDonald’s	78.72
3	Woolworths	87.39	**13**	SABC3	78.47
4	Vodacom	84.61	**14**	Capitec	77.83
5	CellC	82.21	**15**	kykNET	77.82
6	MTN	81.76	**16**	Mzansi Magic	77.50
7	DStv	81.69	**17**	East Coast Radio	77.19
8	e.tv	81.53	**18**	DHL-Africa	76.87
9	JacarandaFM	81.46	**19**	Vuzu TV	76.24
10	KFC-SA	81.14	**20**	Samsung-SA	75.96

This indicates that not all social media marketing efforts are equally successful. Considering this, the current research study was conducted to establish the key

elements of social media marketing that result in a successful campaign by exploring the ties between consumer behaviour and various elements of social media marketing.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Social Media

Social media can be understood as any online platform that is a subset of Web 2.0, and allows for the creation, interaction, collaboration, and sharing of various types of digital content (Chan -Olmsted, Cho, & Lee, 2013). The exact definition however varies from an instrumental aspect to a behavioural aspect to a more generalised view. These definitions and the limitations of each are presented in Table 1, Appendix A. The following definition, adapted from the definition of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) formed the basis of this study:

> "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation, initiation, circulation and use of information by consumers and organisations to facilitate communication regarding products, brands, services, personalities and issues"

Five key characteristics emerge from this definition (Mayfield, 2008):

- Participation – Allowing users to actively engage in dialogue with one another (e.g. likes on Facebook).
- Conversational capability – A two-way communications channel where there may be a primary speaker, but the audience can interact with the speaker and provide their views instantaneously. The difference between participation and conversational capability is that the former refers to the behaviour/action-oriented interactivity, whereas the latter is the communicational aspect (Chan -Olmsted, Cho, & Lee, 2013).
- Connectedness - Allowing users to feel connected to the outside world and to the lives of others, through viewing the content (e.g. travel photos, current affairs) that is being shared by other users on the platforms. (Teixeira, 1992)

- Community and Commonality – Refers to the functionality of the platforms that allows users to form communities on the platform and to quickly find other users who share common interests.
- Openness – On social media, everyone's lives becomes an "open book" where anything that a user posts can be viewed by other users on the platform.

Various social media platforms conform to the above characteristic capabilities to a varying extent; however, it can be assumed that any platform that does not conform to the above characteristics, nor the definition, cannot be referred to as a social media platform. Barring this, Table 2 in Appendix A lists the types of platforms falling under the social media umbrella.

2.2 Consumer behaviour

Many researchers have attempted to define consumer behaviour in the past, but a 2015 study synthesises these definitions into one (Fotis 2015, p 91):

> *"the physical and mental activities that individuals undertake either as part of processes, or as independent acts, when they dream, search, evaluate, obtain, consume, or dispose goods, services, ideas and experiences, within physical or virtual environments."*

This definition was used as a framework to filter existing literature according to the activities that are undertaken individually or as part of a process, more specifically the consumer buying process; and the influence of the environment on these activities. To understand the above two areas, various relevant consumer behaviour models, and environmental and consumer factors affecting consumer behaviour were investigated.

The first theory of consumer behaviour, particularly with respect to decision-making, called the Classical Economic theory, was developed 300 years ago by early economists, led by Bernoulli, Neumann and Morgenstern. Most of the early models of consumer behaviour were based on this theory of viewing consumers as rational thinkers that would make decisions that would fulfil their own self-

interest. However, many other models and theories were developed post the Classical Economic theory. Table 3 in Appendix A presents the various models and theories identified in the literature and the limitations of each thereof.

The ‘Theory of Buyer Behaviour’ model, or the Howard and Sheth model was developed in 1969 by Howard and Sheth. This model was particularly chosen to be detailed further because it is a widely accepted model and has been described as “a sophisticated integration of the various social, psychological and marketing influences on consumer choice into a coherent sequence of information processing” (Foxall 1990 p.10). Figure 1 shows a schematic of this model with its four major components, inputs, outputs, exogenous variables, and hypothetical constructs.

The inputs of the model are environmental stimuli that affect the consumer’s decisions upon exposure and internalisation. Significative stimuli are the factors related to the actual product or service, while symbolic stimuli are the factors that represent the actual product or service e.g. branding. The outputs are the various levels of possible responses that a buyer or consumer may have once they have processed the inputs. The ultimate result of any input is the decision of the buyer to purchase a product or service and may be the result of the buyer going through all the other sequential outputs of the model. Hypothetical constructs are intervening variables or the “processing unit” of the model which processes the inputs to decide on the possible output. There are two types of hypothetical constructs; perceptual constructs, which are variables which directly deal with processing and controlling the inputs received, and learning constructs are variables that affect the extent to which the consumer considers future purchases, and seeks new information (Bray, 2009). Lastly, exogenous variables are external variables that have the potential to affect the outputs. These were not considered by this model because they are dependent on each individual buyer to a certain extent.

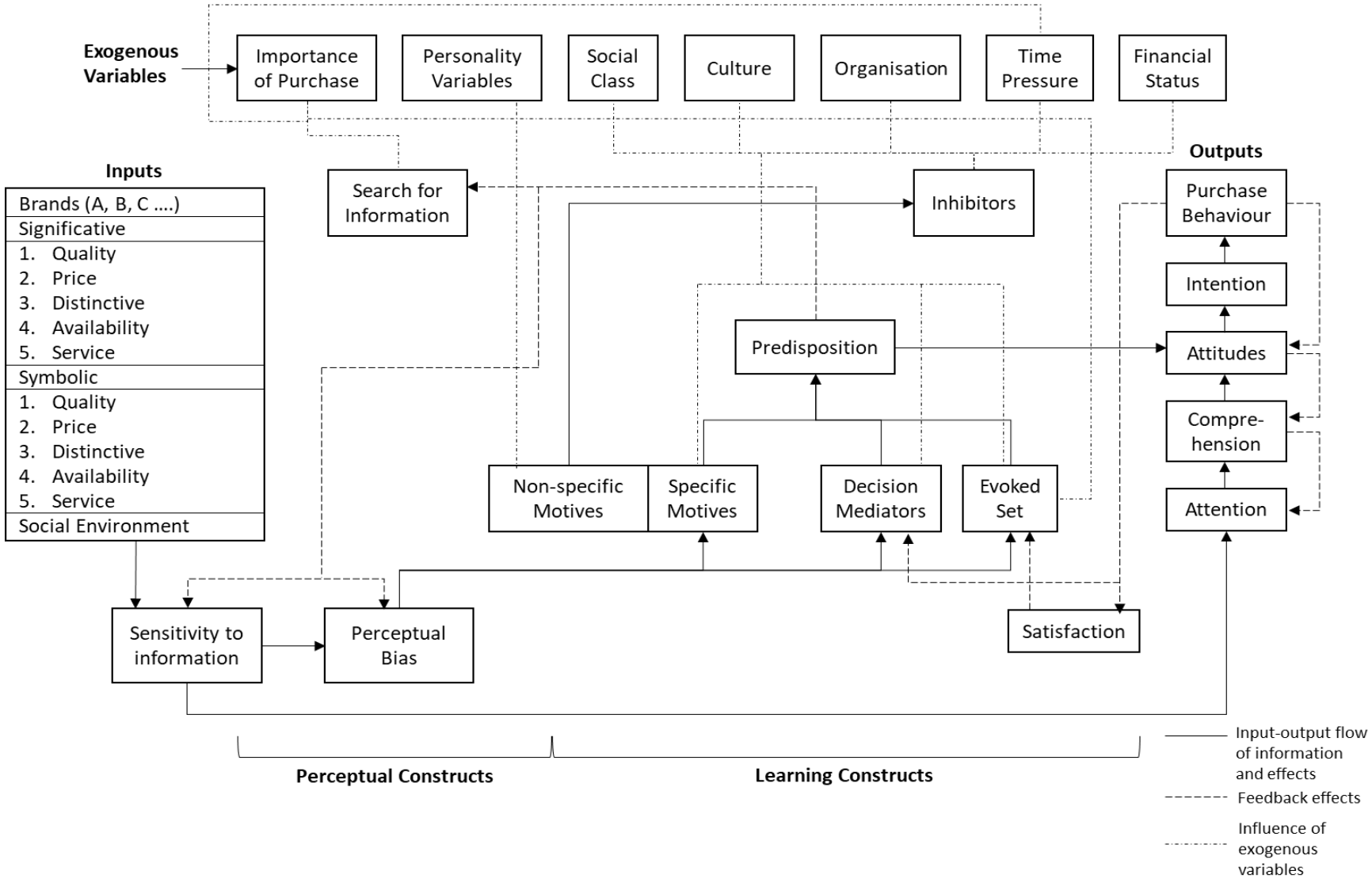


Figure 1: Schematic of Howard and Sheth's model (Bray, 2009)

The strength of this model is in the linkages that it provides between the different variables identified; however, it has been criticised for being too linear and non-scientific, as quantitative measurement of the variables and their linkages to one another is difficult. In terms of its applicability to the current study, the author believes that social media could form part of the various hypothetical constructs that assist the consumer in deciding on purchasing a product or service.

The next most influential study which investigated the effects of the internet on consumer behaviour at each stage of the buying process was by Darley, Blankson and Luethge in 2010, who modified the Engel-Blackwell-Miniard model by adding the impact of beliefs, attitudes and intentions on the process (Karimi, 2013). The modified model, presented in Figure 2, was developed by qualitatively reviewing various journals on the topic, and the limitation therefore is again the lack of empirical evidence.

Another influential model is the one developed by Smith and Rupp in 2003. The two researchers propose a modified version of a model proposed by Kanuk and Schiffman in 2000, which includes three stages: the operational input stage, the process stage, and the output stage (Smith & Rupp, 2003). The input stage is where a consumer recognises a product need and seeks information from two major sources: the internet, and peers. The process stage of the model shows how decisions are made by consumers. The output stage illustrates online purchase activities. The model is shown in Figure 3.

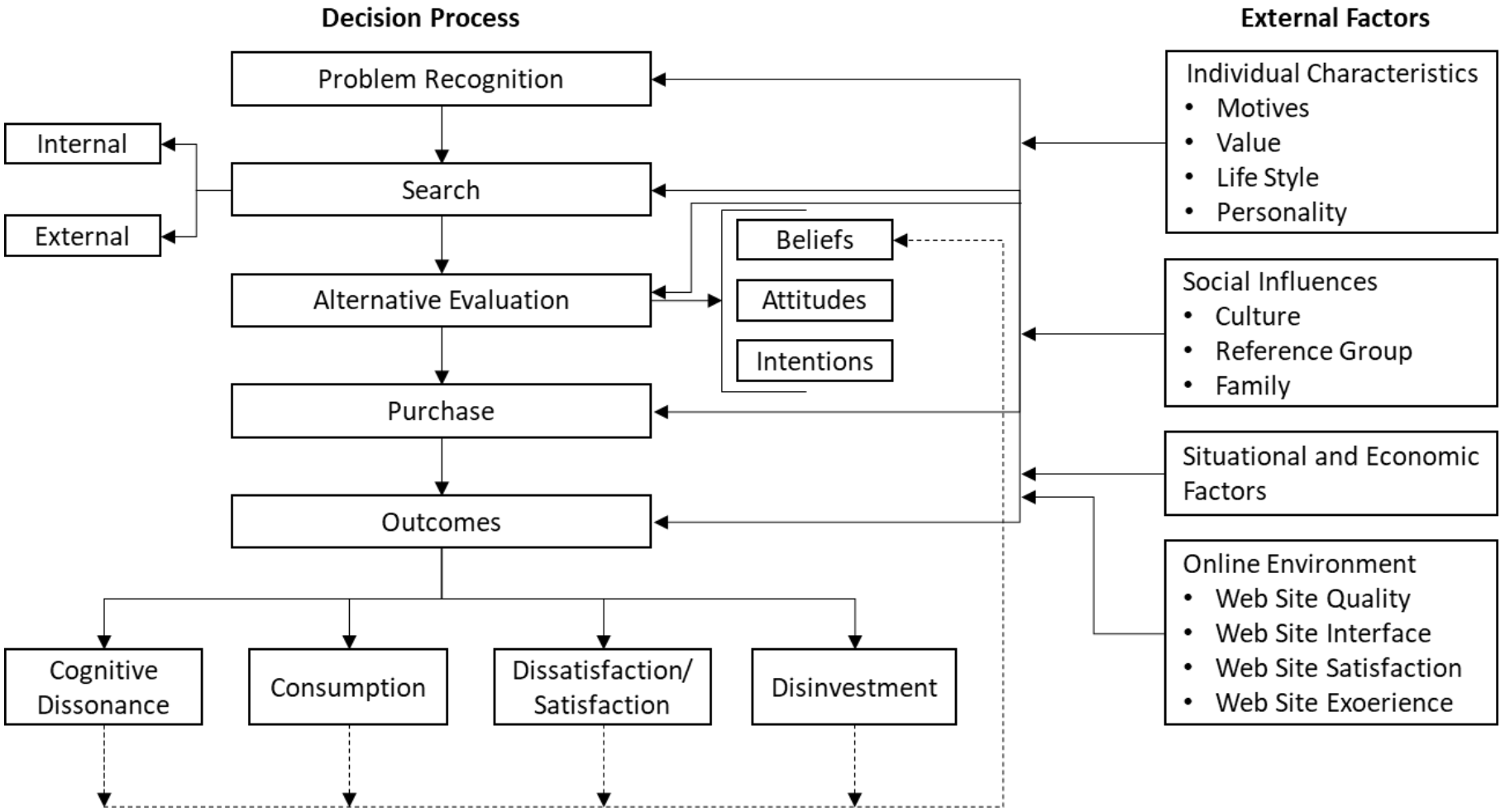


Figure 2: Darley, Blankson and Luethge's model of online consumer behaviour and decision making (Darley, Blankson, & Luethge, 2010)

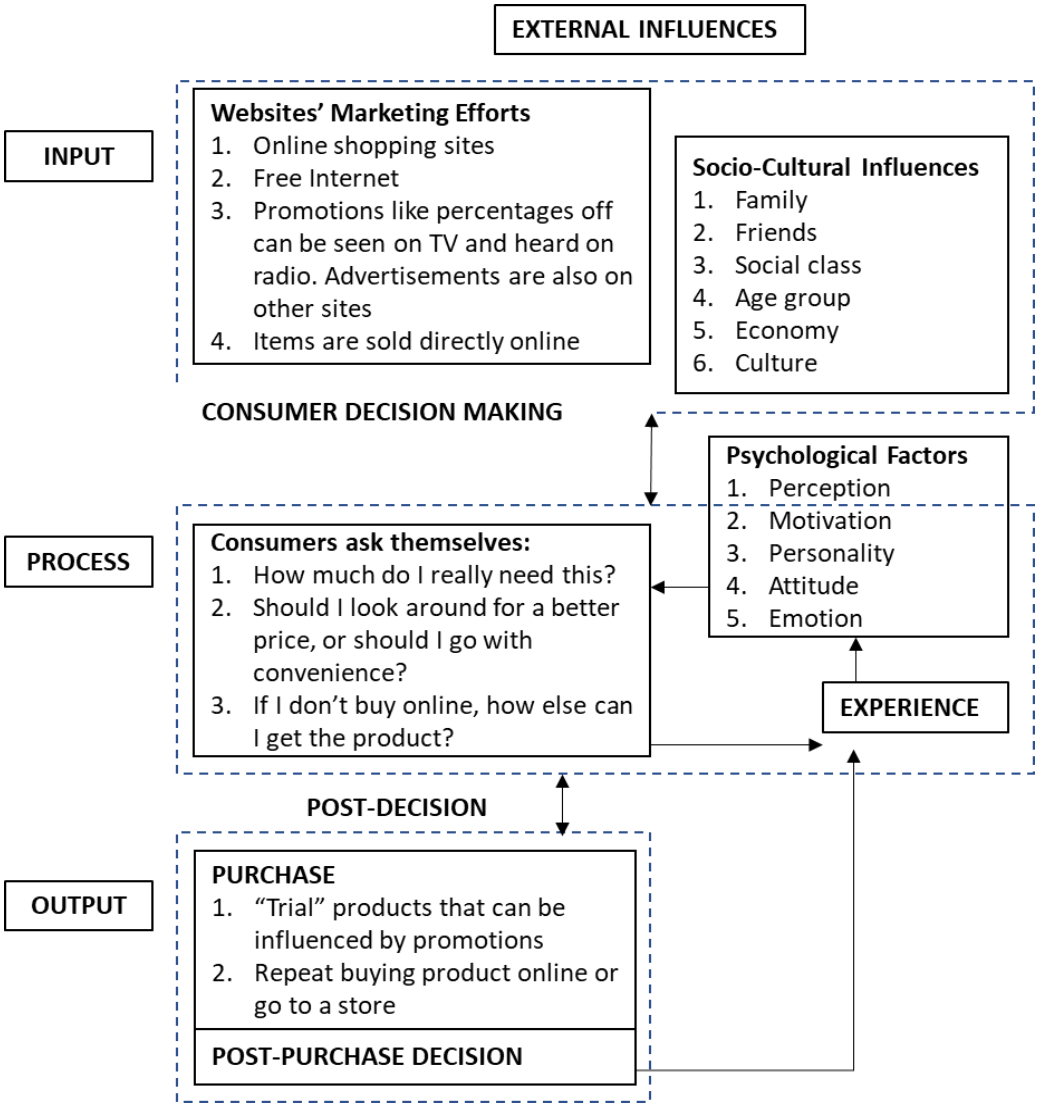


Figure 3: Smith and Rupp consumer decision-making model for online shopping behaviour (Smith & Rupp, 2003)

The models and various literature presented also allude to four (4) factors that affect consumer behaviour: Situational factors, Personal factors, Psychological factors, and Societal factors. Table 2 provides an overview of each of these factors, which is detailed out further in Appendix A, Table 4.

Table 2: High-level overview of factors affecting consumer behaviour (Saylor.org)

Factor	Description
Situational	Temporary environmental conditions that affect an individual consumer, and that are harder to control from a marketing perspective
Personal	These are various attributes that define an individual customer and what he/she stands for
Psychological	These are mental factors that drive an individual's actions to seek satisfaction

Table 2: High-level overview of factors affecting consumer behaviour

Societal	These are outward factors that affect an individual's lifestyle, personality, and attitudes

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Consumer behaviour is a well-researched topic with an exhaustive list of research studies qualitatively and quantitatively exploring this topic (Emerald Publishing, 2016). The role of consumers at all levels (i.e. individual and organisational), families and groups, and cultures and subcultures have been explored in the past. Through these exploratory studies, many models and theories have been developed which draw on dimensions such as psychology, sociology, communications, history, anthropology and religion (Emerald Publishing, 2016).

Recent studies have focussed on the application of the large amount of literature on traditional consumer behaviour to explain the online behaviour of consumers. However, consumer behaviour online is different, and traditional models and theories of consumer behaviour do not adequately provide an explanation for the online behaviour of a consumer (Karimi, 2013; Dennis, Merrilees, Jayawardhena, & Wright, 2009). Although the influence of certain features of social media, like the ability to interact with each other, spread electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), and rate and review products and services is being explored, it is still considered to be an under-studied area (Brynjolfsson, Dick, & Smith, 2010), that is considered to be "poor and in its infancy" (Del, 2011). Furthermore, majority of the studies adopt a micro-approach focussing on; consumer behaviour in specific social media applications, specific consumer groups, specific industry, and in specific stages of the consumer buying and decision-making process, particularly the purchasing and research stage.

Therefore, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the effects of social media on consumer behaviour in each stage of the consumer buying process. This will be achieved through development and validation of a model using qualitative and quantitative research methods across three different industries in SA, with consumers across various cultures and age groups.

4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Having reviewed literature relating to all the consumer-behaviour related models in the previous section, the hypotheses were developed around the five fundamental stages of the consumer decision-making process due to it being a widely accepted process, as evidenced in many marketing textbooks (Darley, Blankson, & Luethge, 2010). Furthermore, a more detailed process was followed to identify the influencing factors or the indicator variable for the hypotheses around the conceptual model.

Firstly, the mixture of traditional and social media specific models, presented in the previous section, were used to inform the development of the conceptual model. These theories and concepts were selected on the following bases:

- They showed linkages between the consumer buying process and various factors affecting consumer behaviour
- They have been widely accepted in literature and have been empirically tested to a certain extent by other researchers.
- They provide a good mix of traditional and online models that can serve to fulfil the objectives of the current study
- They were more comprehensive, and had elements of theories from various historical research approaches

Secondly, a literature search was carried out within the Emerald Insights and Science Direct databases, accessible through the Wits Online Library. For the literature search, keywords such as “online consumer behaviour”, and “social media and consumer behaviour” were used to find all relevant journal titles, resulting in a list of over a 1000 peer-reviewed articles. A total of 52 articles, sourced from 34 journals (Table 5, Appendix B) were then chosen out of these to inform the development of the conceptual model, based on the following criteria:

- The articles had to be published during the 2000-2018 period
- The studies had to be empirical

- The studies needed to be focussed on at least one of the following elements: decision-making process, internal and external factors, social media marketing influence, and consumer profiling or segmentation

Table 6, Appendix B lists the 52 articles chosen with information on the empirical method(s) employed, the target group of the study and the findings. Content analysis of these showed that the two most common methods of analysing online consumer behaviour were surveys (75%) and content/sentiment analysis (13%). However, surveys are often not considered to yield the most accurate information as the findings from surveys only reveal what people know about their own behaviour and can be limited by people's willingness to fully disclose this information (Sternthal, Tybout, & Calder, 1994). Therefore, the current study employs both surveys and content analysis to validate the conceptual model developed through qualitative analysis. Content analysis of the studies also revealed that most studies investigated online consumer engagement, utilitarian and hedonic values, consumer loyalty, trust factors, and social influence on consumer purchase behaviour. While most studies investigated at least one element of the consumer buying process (mostly the purchase stage) and at least one internal or external factor (mostly social influence), there was only one study that investigated the link between the consumer buying process and the internal or external factors. This study was conducted by Jashari and Rrustemi in 2017, as highlighted in yellow in Appendix B.

The study employs a survey method to investigate in which stage of the consumer buying process do consumers in Kosovo use social media the most. As seen in Figure 4, it was found that the "Search" and "Alternative evaluation" stages are where social media is used the most by consumers. The study also investigated the elements that impact three psychographic variables, namely Attention, Motivation, and Memory, in the context of Social Media. Table 3: Elements that impact psychographic variables in social media . These findings are summarised in Table 3.

	0 (1)		1 (2)		2 (3)		3 (4)		4 (5)		5 (6)			
	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Ø	±
Identification of a need t...	14x	13.33	18x	17.14	18x	17.14	23x	21.90	15x	14.29	17x	16.19	3.55	1.63
Searching information b...	3x	2.94	10x	9.80	10x	9.80	18x	17.65	23x	22.55	38x	37.25	4.59	1.46
Evaluation of alternative...	3x	3.13	12x	12.50	8x	8.33	23x	23.96	25x	26.04	25x	26.04	4.35	1.44
Purchasing	8x	8.42	12x	12.63	16x	16.84	26x	27.37	21x	22.11	12x	12.63	3.80	1.46
Post - purchasing evalua...	13x	13.27	11x	11.22	20x	20.41	17x	17.35	15x	15.31	22x	22.45	3.78	1.70

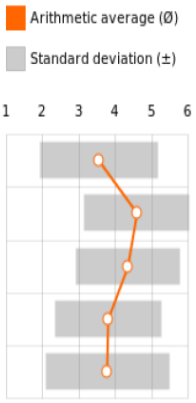


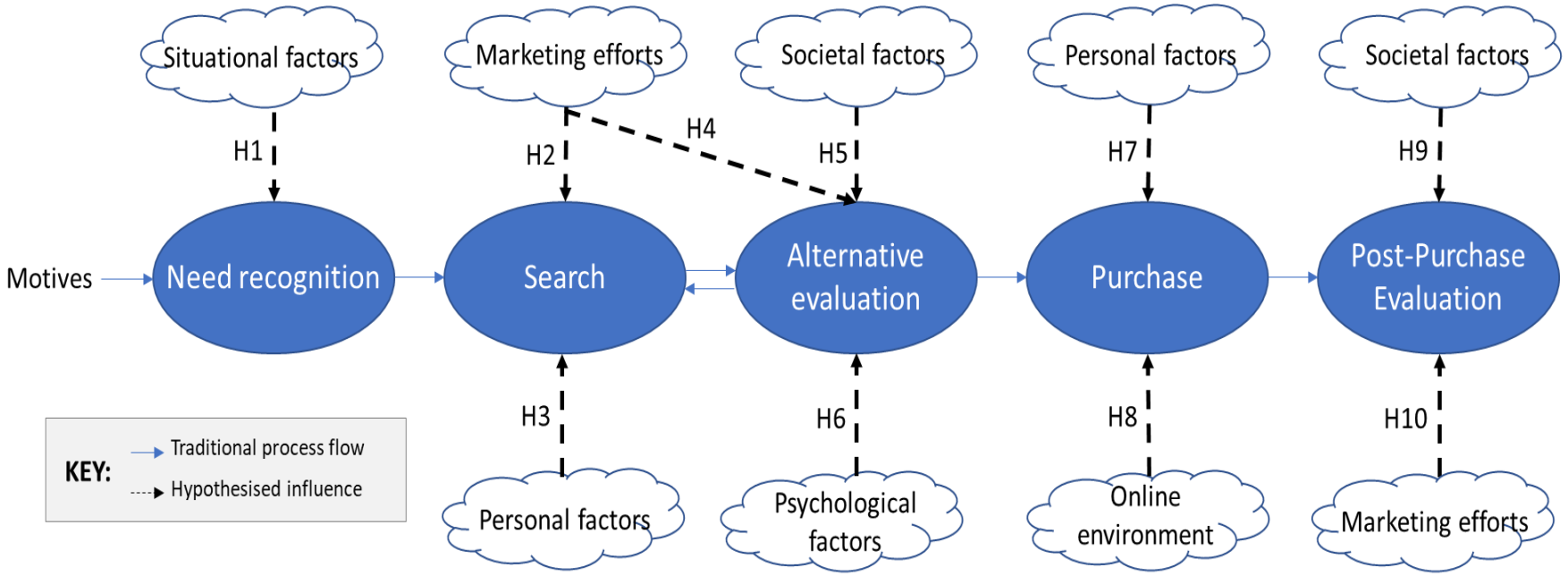
Figure 4: Impact of social media in decision making process stages (Jashari & Rrustemi, 2017)

Table 3: Elements that impact psychographic variables in social media (Jashari & Rrustemi, 2017)

ATTENTION	**Respondent %**
The importance of product	65.1%
Visual elements of products/ads	45.30%
The frequent exposure of products/ads	29.20%
How much a product is liked, commented or shared by others	21.70%
MOTIVATION	
Friends and acquaintances reviews	61.50%
Posted product photos/videos	51%
Positive comments of previous users	38.50%
Number and type of people that like/follow/comment products	12.50%
The desire to be like others	2.90%
To change others opinion about them	2.90%
MEMORY	
Visual elements (colour, shape, light, sounds)	55.70%
Other reviews	36.80%
The frequent exposure	32.10%
How much is shared by others	17%
Inclusion of celebrities in ads	14.20%

It is to be noted that most of the studies also examined the interrelationships among external and internal factors, i.e. relationship between online environmental factors and unique individual factors. This was out of scope for the current study.

Finally, by combining and synthesising the insights from theoretical models, with the findings from the empirical studies, particularly the one conducted by Jashari and Rrustemi, a conceptual model was developed. The model, with the accompanying hypotheses, is shown in Figure 5.



H1: Situational factors such as a person's mood, social and time situation result in the recognition of a need	H6: Positive Motivation, Perception, Learning & Attitude will result in a positive evaluation of a product or service
H2: Good marketing efforts can positively affect a brand's visibility	H7: A consumer's personality can positively or negatively affect their decision to Purchase
H3: A consumer's personality can positively or negatively affect where he/she gathers information from	H8: A positive online experience (e.g. ease of navigation, payment process, risk factor) can result in a Purchase
H4: Good marketing efforts (including complaint handling) can positively affect a consumer's evaluation of a product/service	H9: The social group a consumer belongs to can positively or negatively affect their product/service evaluation post-purchase
H5: The social group a consumer belongs to can positively or negatively affect how he/she evaluates the product/service	H10: A brand with a good presence i.e. good reviews/complaint handling will generally have positive post-purchase evaluations

Figure 5: Phase 2 Conceptual model for predicting consumer behaviour on social media

5. METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach, comprising both qualitative and quantitative research, was chosen to analyse impacts of social media on consumer behaviour and achieve the purpose of the research by providing a more comprehensive view of the topic. The qualitative research, as presented in the theoretical background section, formed the basis of identifying all previously stated indicative factors that affect consumer behaviour across the consumer decision-making process, and identifying any potential limitations, challenges or gaps that the literature presents. It was intended to guide the research and narrow down the factors that need further exploration and quantitative evidence to verify their effect on consumer behaviour. The various insights were then combined to form various hypotheses to develop a model that links the consumer buying process with factors that affect consumer behaviour to provide a guideline of determining the outcome of exposing a consumer to various types of content on social media.

The model was then empirically tested using a survey-based quantitative assessment consisting of a mixture of open-ended, multiple-choice, and Likert scale grading questions. The survey was structured in a way that allowed the various factors proposed in the model to be thoroughly investigated. Finally, content analysis was also carried out to test the applicability of the model to three (3) chosen industries to validate the model in a more comprehensive manner. The Manufacturing, Retail, and Telecommunication industries were chosen, as Manufacturing is typically perceived as a pure product industry, Retail as a mixture of product and service, and Telecommunication as a pure service industry. Organisations with the most popular and successful social media pages were chosen for each industry. These pages being of ToyotaSA for Manufacturing, Pick n Pay (PnP) SA for Retail, and VodacomSA for Telecommunications. Monitoring of Facebook pages of these companies over two (2) months to draw content-specific conclusions was the main purpose of this phase. The detailed methodology related to collection of data for the two quantitative assessments, i.e. survey and content analysis, is provided in the rest of this section.

5.1 Survey Analysis

Considering the study was exploratory in nature, the snowball sampling method was used to draw a non-probability sample from the target population, being all social media users in SA. The sampling frame used was aimed to comprise of a random population of all ages and races, living in all nine provinces. The method was effective as it enabled the author to collect 400 responses to a survey designed and distributed through Qualtrics. However, after eliminating incomplete responses, and responses of people that did not permanently reside in SA, the sample size was reduced to 222.

The survey (Appendix C) consisted of several questions within the following five sections:

a. Demographic information – Gathered information on consumers' age, gender, culture, and geographic location,
b. Social media usage – Identified consumers' preferred social media platform, amount of usage on the chosen platform, and the main reasons of usage,
c. Generic social media promotion – Identified whether the consumers are open to social media marketing by seeking information on the number of companies being followed on social media by the consumer, top companies being followed, and the consumer's reasons for following a company
d. Sector specific social media promotion – Focusing on three sectors, namely Retail, Manufacturing, and Banking, identified whether consumers follow any companies within these sectors and the reasons for following a company
e. Consumer buying process related information – Identified the type of content consumers relate to or look for in each stage of the consumer buying process

5.2 Content Analysis

Organisations with the most popular and successful social media pages were chosen for each industry. These pages being of Toyota for Manufacturing i.e. product-focussed industry, PnP for Retail i.e. mixed industry, and Vodacom for Telecommunications i.e. service-focussed industry. Content that was posted by

the page and the users on the page was then extracted for two months, March and April 2018. The content was extracted using a point-in-time methodology which meant that any comments, reactions and shares on a page were only included if they were made during the month in concern. Considering the long duration of the data collection period, an automated content extraction tool, called Netvizz, was used to reduce the time required to extract the posts by the pages and the users on the pages. Netvizz, designed by Bernhard Rieder, a professor at the University of Amsterdam, is an application that can be found using the search tool on Facebook and allows the user to extract various forms of data for groups and pages using six modules that are developed and available for researchers. The modules that were used for this study are as follows:

- “page posts” – for extracting posts by the page and user within a selected timeframe and the user engagement per post
- “page like network” – for, on a high-level, determining the pages that a chosen page has liked and the connections between them. This simply provides a view of how integrated the chosen pages are with their industry and other industries

Figure 6 show the parameters that were inputted in both the modules to extract the datasets. The first module generated a downloadable .csv file as an output, while the second module generated a network diagram within the application.

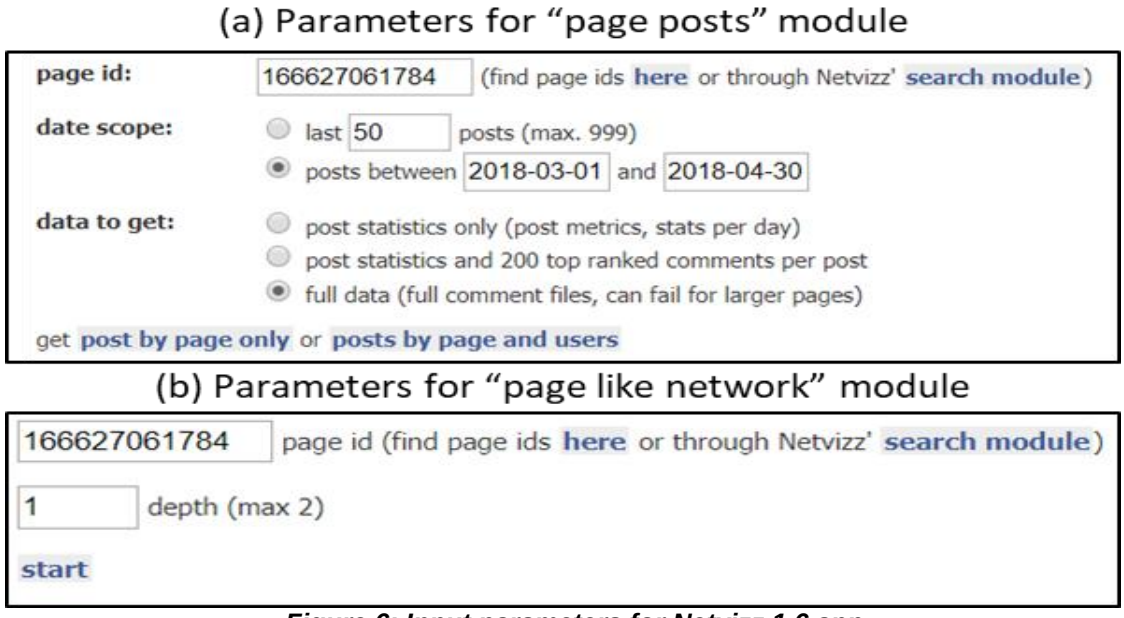


Figure 6: Input parameters for Netvizz 1.6 app

6. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

6.1 Survey Analysis

Demographics

Table 4 shows the respondents' demographic profile frequency and percentage. Respondents were almost evenly distributed by gender; however, majority of the respondents were between the ages of 25-34 (63%) and lived in Gauteng (73%). With respect to race, majority of the respondents were Indian or Asian (43%); however, Black African and White respondents were of a considerable number, representing 29% and 20% of the sample size respectively. Most respondents were also employed (88%) and lived with family (46%) or a partner (27%).

Table 4: Summary of Respondents' Demographic profile

Demographic	Groups	Frequency (n=222)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	113	51%
	Male	109	49%
Age	<18	2	0.9%
	18-24	8	3.6%
	25-34	140	63.1%
	35-44	49	22.1%
	45-54	14	6.3%
	55-64	8	3.6%
	65-74	1	0.5%
Race	Black African	64	29%
	Coloured	11	5%
	Indian/Asian	95	43%
	White	45	20%
	Other	4	2%
	Prefer not to answer	3	1%
Location	Gauteng	163	73.4%
	KZN	31	14.0%
	Western Cape	20	9.0%
	Limpopo	3	1.4%
	Free State	2	0.9%
	Mpumalanga	1	0.5%
	North West	1	0.5%
	Eastern Cape	1	0.5%
Living status	Living alone	48	22%
	Living with a partner	61	27%
	Living with family	103	46%
	Living with friends/room mates	10	5%

Table 4: Summary of Respondents' Demographic profile

Employment status	Employed	196	88%
	Not Employed	26	12%

Social Media preferences

Table 5 shows the respondents' social media preferences by frequencies and percentages. The most common social media platform used was social network sites, with Facebook being the most common, which corresponds with the statistics found in previous sections that state Facebook being the most popular platform in SA. It also validates the choice of using Facebook for content analysis in Phase 4. Most respondents spent between 1-2 hours on social media per day to stay up-to-date with news and current events and stay in touch with family and friends. Only 38% of the respondents used social media to research products or services, and only around 9% wrote reviews on social media.

Table 5: Summary of Respondents' Social Media Preferences

Social profile element	Groups	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Platform preference	Blogs/Microblogs	2	1%
	Consumer Review Sites	5	2%
	Content Community Sites	19	9%
	Forums/online message boards	5	2%
	Social Network Sites	183	82%
	Wikis	8	4%
Time spent on social media	1-2 hours	92	41%
	2-3 hours	41	18%
	>3 hours	27	12%
	<1 hour	62	28%
Popular social sites preference	Facebook	173	78%
	LinkedIn	124	56%
	Instagram	110	50%
	Twitter	56	25%
	YouTube	112	50%
Time spent on popular sites	1-2 hours	95	43%
	2-3 hours	33	15%
	>3 hours	19	9%
	<1 hour	75	34%
Reason for using social media	To stay in touch with friends and family	150	68%
	To stay up-to-date with news and current events	161	73%
	To fill up spare time	79	36%
	General networking with new people	71	32%

Table 5: Summary of Respondents' Social Media Preferences

	To find and share funny or entertaining content	88	40%
	To research/find products/services	85	38%
	To write reviews about products/ services/brands	20	9%

Table 6 shows the respondents' behaviour towards social media marketing. Most of the respondents do not follow brands on social media (55%). Moreover, majority of those that do follow brands on social media, do not follow more than 10 brands. They also do not tend to unfollow brands which shows that most of the sample group does not tend to get affected by marketing activity. The top three reasons for following brands is for promotions & discounts, product/service information and to show support for their favourite brand. However, when the respondents were asked the same question with respect to product-focussed, service-focussed and mixed brands, the top reasons for following differed for service-focussed brands. Service-focussed brands were also followed to receive customer service or support. It is also to be noted that respondents were not consistent in their responses. For example, brand following for product-focussed, service-focussed, and mixed brands individually had a greater frequency than total brand following.

Table 6: Summary of respondents' behaviour towards social media marketing

		Overall		**Product-focussed**		**Service-focussed**		**Mixed**	
Promotion element	**Groups**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
Brand following	Yes	99	45%	109	49%	105	47%	114	51%
	No	123	55%	113	51%	117	53%	108	49%
No. of brands followed	1-5	54	55%						
	6-10	27	27%						
	11-15	3	3%						
	>20	15	15%						
Brands unfollowed	Yes	66	30%						
	No	156	70%						
Time spent on popular sites	Promotions & Discounts	54	55%	1	1%	5	5%	1	1%
	Product/service information	74	75%	8	7%	1	1%	1	1%
	Receive exclusive content	24	24%	14	13%	13	12%	11	10%
	Receive Customer Service/Support	17	17%	45	41%	52	50%	34	30%

Table 6: Summary of respondents' behaviour towards social media marketing

	Entertaining Content	25	25%	24	22%	9	9%	52	46%
	Ability to offer feedback	15	15%	6	6%	13	12%	6	5%
	To show your support for your favourite company/brand/product/service	42	42%	3	3%	3	3%	8	7%
	Your family/friends are following it	7	7%	6	6%	8	8%	1	1%
	Other	30	30%	2	2%	1	1%	0	0%

The fact that the sample group was largely not affected by social media marketing based on their responses alluded to the fact that to draw useful conclusions with respect to the model presented in Phase 2, the sample group had to be segmented. Based on the responses summarised in Table 5 and 6, the sample was segmented into 5 groups:

- Time passers: Respondents that do not follow any brands on social media, and if they do, it is mostly to pass time and stay up to date with news and current events. They may also like sharing entertaining content on social media and can spend any amount of time on social media.
- Connectors: Respondents that do not follow any brands on social media, and if they do, it is because their friends/family are following these brands. They use social media to stay in touch with family and friends and/or network with new people.
- Informed shoppers: Respondents that use social media to find products and services, follow between 1-10 brands, for Product/Service information and Promotions & Discounts.
- Engaged shoppers: Respondents that use social media to review products and services, follow more than 10 brands and may unfollow them, for showing their support for the brand, receiving exclusive content, offering feedback, and receiving customer service/support.
- Non-Active: Respondents that do not fall under any of the other categories.

Consumer Buying Process

Question 26 of the survey in Appendix C asked respondents to state their agreement with the buying process on a Likert scale, with 1 being strong agreement and 5 being strong disagreement. Table 7 shows the frequency and percentages of the responses per option chosen. The mean of this data set is 1.68, and the standard deviation 0.68, verifying that most respondents did agree to the statement to a certain extent.

Table 7: Summary of respondents' agreement with the consumer buying process on a Likert scale

Likert Scale Options	Freq(n=222)	%
Strongly agree	90	41%
Somewhat agree	117	53%
Neither agree nor disagree	12	5%
Somewhat disagree	1	0%
Strongly disagree	2	1%

The 15 people that rated the process 3 or higher on the Likert scale were asked a reason for not agreeing with the process and the following reasons were found to be the most common:

1. The process, as depicted, is too linear and while it represents all steps of a consumer decision-making process, the exact number and order of steps followed depends on the product or service in concern (e.g. some products are necessities and are typically purchased without much thought)
2. The “Need Recognition” step is not always deliberately followed, as purchases are often made on a whim, while others are based on a want
3. The “Alternative Evaluation” step is sometimes skipped, depending on the product being purchased
4. The process is idealistic in that it helps one purchase only what they truly need
5. External influences such as social groups or marketing may lead to skipping several steps of the process

Points 2 and 5 were reinforced by the respondents when they were asked whether social factors or situational factors made them buy products or services on a whim, without following the process. While only 49.5% of respondents were affected by

social factors, majority (72%) were affected by situational factors in their purchase-on-a-whim decisions. This also indicates certain characteristics of the sample group i.e. situational buyers, typically not affected by the social group they belong to.

The respondents were also asked their motives behind realising the need for buying a product (Table 8), which also point to certain characteristics of the sample group, which would help decode their responses pertaining to model validation questions.

Table 8: Summary of respondents' motives behind recognition of a need

Motives	**Freq**	**%**
Optimise satisfaction by buying the best you can within your economic means	170	48%
Prevent possible future problems	112	32%
Escape from a problem	25	7%
Resolve conflict	8	2%
Maintain your status quo	38	11%

Model Validation

The respondents were asked to rank the various factors in Table 2 according to the level of influence each factor has on each stage of the consumer buying process, with the factor ranked 1 being the most influential in helping them come to a decision regarding the particular stage of the process. An average of these was taken for all respondents, as well as for each respondent group i.e. time passers, connectors, informed shoppers, engaged shoppers, and other. Moreover, time taken to complete the survey was also considered to determine whether the ranking was dependent on the presentation order of the questionnaire. The assumption was that any respondent that took shorter than 20 minutes may not have had the time to think through the process in detail and may have relied on the order the question was presented to them in. This group of respondents was labelled “Deep thinkers”. These average scores have been plotted for each respondent group in Figure 7 to Figure 11, with the hypothesised influencing factors for the stage in consideration highlighted in blue.

Figure 7 shows that all respondent groups chose situational factors as the second most influential factor in needs recognition which indicates that hypothesis H1 is true.

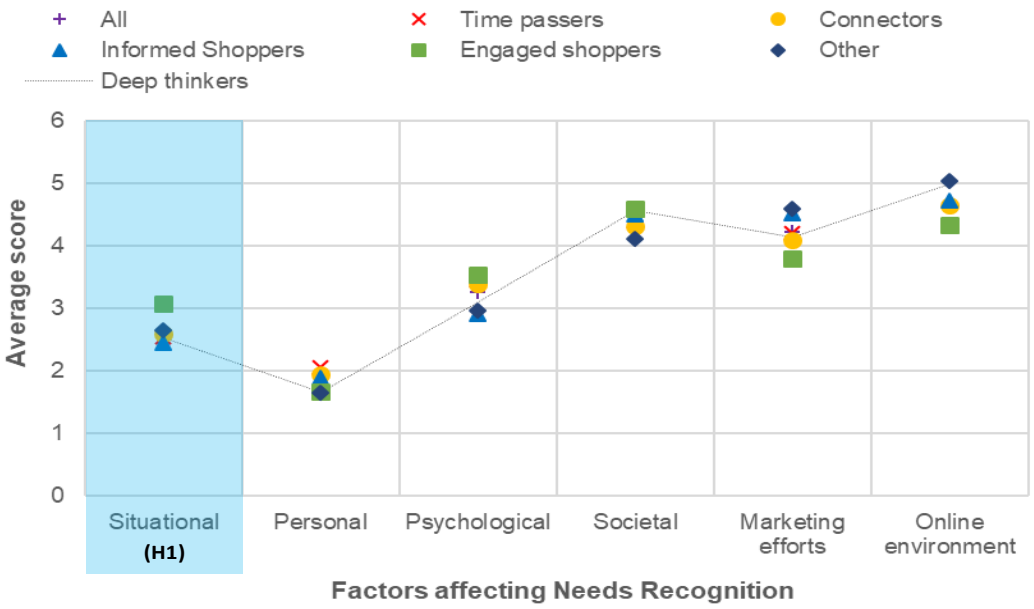


Figure 7: Average rank scores of respondent groups per factor for the Needs Recognition stage

Figure 8 shows that while Personal factors are the most influential for most consumers in the Search stage, marketing efforts have minimal effects. Therefore, hypothesis H2 is rejected, while H3 is accepted.

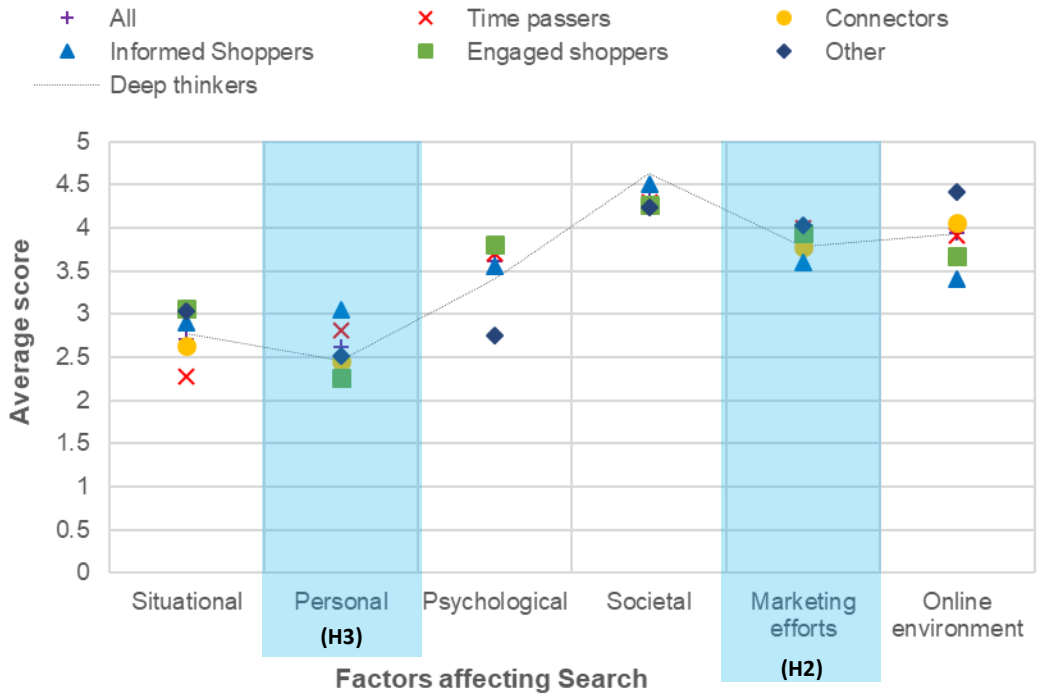


Figure 8: Average rank scores of respondent groups per factor for the Search stage

Figure 9 shows that Societal factors have the least effect on Alternative Evaluation and therefore H5 is rejected. On the other hand, the effect of Psychological factors and Marketing efforts cannot be ignored and therefore H4 and H6 need further investigation.

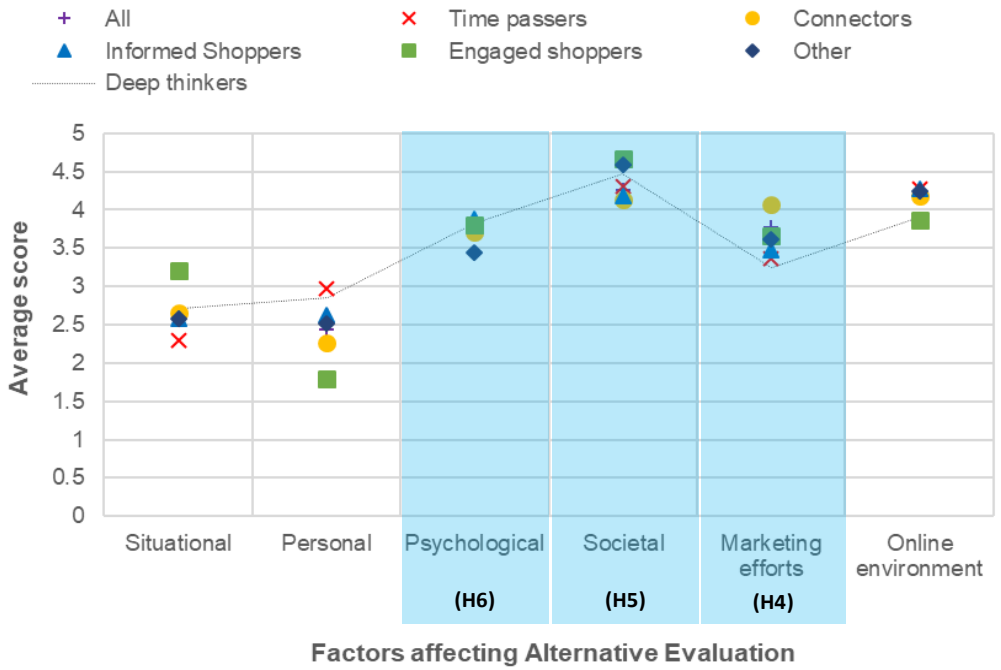


Figure 9: Average rank scores of respondent groups per factor for the Alternative Evaluation stage

Hypotheses H7 and H8 are accepted and rejected respectively based on the average scores plotted for Personal factors and Online Environment in Figure 10.



Figure 10: Average rank scores of respondent groups per factor for the Purchase Decision stage

Average ranking orders for both Societal and Marketing efforts were too high as outlined in Figure 11, indicating hypotheses H9 and H10 are false.



Figure 11: Average rank scores of respondent groups per factor for the Post-Purchase Evaluation stage

Table 9 summarises these conclusions drawn regarding the various hypotheses based on the average ranking scores. If the factor was found to be in the top two choices, the hypothesis regarding the factor was accepted, while the hypothesis associated with the third factor was labelled as a factor that needed further investigation because the influence of the factor was not clear. All other hypotheses were rejected.

Table 9: Hypotheses summary developed for the conceptual model in Figure 6

Hypothesis	Decision
H1	Accepted
H2	Rejected
H3	Accepted
H4	Further investigation needed
H5	Rejected
H6	Further investigation needed
H7	Accepted
H8	Rejected
H9	Rejected
H10	Rejected

Further to the group findings above, individual responses were also categorised and analysed according to respondents' demographics such as gender, age groups, ethnic group, living choices, and their province of residence in SA. The conditions for acceptance, rejection and need for further investigation for the hypotheses remained the same as the one used to formulate Table 9. Table 12, Appendix D summarises the conclusions drawn regarding the various hypotheses based on the average ranking scores of the demographic groups.

Consolidating the results of Table 9 and Table 12 in Appendix D, hypotheses H1, H3 and H7 can be accepted, H5, H8, H9, and H10 rejected, and the rest need further investigation before a decision can be made. Therefore, overall the model cannot be validated, however various conclusions can be drawn for the influence of various factors on each of the process stage, as summarised in Table 10.

Table 10: Summary of findings regarding the factors influencing the respondent groups across each stage of the consumer buying process

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Need Recognition</th><th>Search</th><th>Alternative Evaluation</th><th>Purchase</th><th>Post-Purchase</th></tr>
<tr><td>Situational</td><td>Engaged shoppers least affected</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">All groups greatly affected by both, but while time passers are more affected by situational factors, engaged shoppers are affected by personal factors</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">All groups greatly affected</td></tr>
<tr><td>Personal</td><td>All groups greatly affected</td></tr>
<tr><td>Psychological</td><td>All groups moderately affected</td><td>Moderate effects except for high effect on inactive users</td><td colspan="3">All groups moderately affected</td></tr>
<tr><td>Societal</td><td colspan="3">All groups not affected</td><td>All groups not affected</td><td>Not affected, but higher effect of social factor on this stage compared to other stages</td></tr>
<tr><td>Marketing efforts</td><td>Only Engaged shoppers somewhat affected</td><td>All groups moderately affected</td><td>All groups, except connectors, moderately affected</td><td>Only Engaged shoppers somewhat affected,</td><td>All groups not affected, with engaged shoppers being least affected</td></tr>
<tr><td>Online environment</td><td>All groups not affected</td><td>Informed and engaged shoppers moderately affected</td><td>All groups not affected</td><td>All groups not affected</td><td>Only Engaged shoppers affected</td></tr>
</table>

Other peripheral findings were as follows:

- Taking more time to complete the questionnaire did not affect the respondents' choices. This indicates that the presentation order of the factor should not have had an influence on the ranks, however situational factors which was presented as the first option in the questionnaire, and hypothesised to affect only needs recognition, was found to affect all stages of the process. This was found to be true for personal factors as well, which was presented as the second option in the questionnaire. Therefore, the presentation order may have affected the responses.
- While the survey established a clear preference of one influential factor over another by respondents, it does not necessarily mean that the less preferred factor had no influence on them. This was a survey design limitation as the respondents were asked to rank one above another, instead of scoring the influence of each factor on a Likert scale using the direct hypothesised statements.
- Respondents were least affected by societal factors and online environment, and situational and personal factors were the most influential factors. If it is assumed that this was representative of the sample's honest choices, i.e. not influenced by the presentation order, it ties in with the finding in section 7.3.1 regarding the sample group being more inclined towards situational buying, rather than social buying.

6.2 Content Analysis

The objective of the content analysis was to test the applicability of the model to three (3) chosen industries to validate the model in a more comprehensive manner. However, from the model could not be validated from the survey results in Phase 3, and a high-level analysis of the type of content that was posted, revealed the following:

- The content posted was not in direct correlation with the consumer decision making process cannot be drawn
- While the effect of time-dependent situational factors on consumer engagement could be drawn from correlating the time content was posted to

the level of engagement, the effect of other situational factors, such as consumer's mood, physical and social position cannot be determined

- The other influencing factors i.e. psychological, social, and personal varied from person to person and to understand consumer responses to a particular post, one would have had to analyse profiles of every person who engaged with the post, which was out of scope for a 6-month research project

Based on these insights, and the fact that the model could not be validated in Phase 3, it was decided that instead of making several assumptions to relate the content to the consumer buying process and the influencing factors, it would be more beneficial to do a marketing-focussed content analysis. A marketing-focussed analysis was aimed at providing insights into how different types of posts affect consumer engagement and whether this differs with the type of industry the selected firms operate within.

High-level company and page analytics

To ensure that the pages chosen were comparable with respect to the activity levels and fan following, a high-level analysis of the pages was conducted using the Netvizz "page like network" module in conjunction with observations made by the author regarding the pages through further research. The information regarding the companies, provided in Table 11, therefore consists of the following categories:

- General information – information related to the operations of the chosen companies, such as:
    - Sector that the company operates in
    - Focus – Product/Service/Mixed
    - Competition, which determines the level of marketing is required by the company to reach customers
    - Revenue, EBIT, and margins, which are an indicator of the size of the company but are also useful in determining industry dynamics which would drive consumer behaviour. An industry with high profit margins may have a lower customer base and therefore the

Facebook activity may be lower than a company in an industry with lower profit margins and higher competition.

- Consumer related information
    - Buying frequency – the amount of times a consumer pays the company, and may have a direct effect on the frequency of promotional activity that companies need to undertake
    - Ease of switching – the level of difficulty experienced by a consumer to switch to the company's competitor
    - Price sensitivity – one of the factors that results in switching
- Facebook-specific information
    - Fan count – number of Facebook users that have liked the page
    - Talking about count – a Facebook provided metric relating to user engagement on the page
    - Post activity – Number of posts posted per hour on a page, based on the last 50 posts

Table 11: A summary of high-level information on the three companies (Vodacom , 2018; Pick n Pay, 2018; Toyota, 2018; Kooverjee, 2017)

	Toyota	**Vodacom**	**PnP**
General insights			
Sector	Manufacturing	Telecommunications	Retail
Service/product-focussed?	Product	Service	Mixed
Competition	High	High	High
Revenue	*R110bn	R70bn	R80bn
EBIT	*R17.3bn	R21.1bn	R1.48bn
Margins	16%	30%	2%
Consumer-related insights			
Buying frequency	Not frequent	Everyday	Everyday
Switching ease	Moderate - consumers can easily change next purchase	Difficult - consumers do not like changing numbers	Easy
Price sensitivity	Varies with type of consumer	Very sensitive	Sensitive, but quality is important
Facebook-specific insights			
Fan count	846,647	1,804,590	1,943,520
Talking about count	47,088	28,713	48,901
Post activity (/hr)	0.12	8.92	0.66

**SA figures assumed to be 5% of group figures based on the "Other" segment being 6% of the total*

Network diagrams

The Netvizz “page like network module” was used to determine the pages that a chosen page has liked and the connections between them. The degree of analysis or the crawl depth was kept at 1, with the maximum degree being 2, because the intension of creating network diagrams was only to see how integrated the chosen companies were with the rest of the companies in their industry and peripheral industries due to potential partnership opportunities. Appendix E shows the Level 1 network diagrams extracted from Netvizz for Toyota, Vodacom and PnP. With a crawl depth of 1, the application retrieved 52, 113, and 15 pages liked by Toyota, Vodacom and PnP respectively. Moreover, each of the pages had a different number of total seeds, i.e. pages that were connected to them, at the maximum crawl depth. These were 167 billion, 22 billion, and 204 billion for Toyota, Vodacom and PnP respectively. Several observations were made regarding the network diagrams and the corresponding statistics stated above, which combined with the results of the content analysis reveal critical insights into consumer behaviour. These observations are:

- PnP, and many of its competitors in the retail industry are very integrated and follow many of their product brands that they offer in stores, and other companies and individual pages that they may be partnered with, they sponsor or causes that they believe in
- Vodacom, and many of its competitors in the telecommunications industry are relatively less integrated and generally follow phone manufacturers and other sponsorship related pages
- Toyota, and other car manufacturing companies in SA follow any transport related events pages, pages of their brand ambassadors, and the pages of their regional and international counterparts
- Mixed industries are the most integrated with other industries, while the service-focussed industries are the least integrated in SA based on observing the retail, telecommunications, and automobile manufacturing industries

Page and User Post Analysis

Using the Netvizz application, content posted by the page, its users, and the engagement, defined by the number of likes, reactions, comments and shares, was extracted in a Microsoft Excel file. The data related to the page posts and the user posts was then analysed separately using the research done by Boon-Long and Wongsurawat (2015) as a guideline for coding data prior to analysis. Boon-Long and Wongsurawat, as referred to in Appendix B, recorded the comments made on Samsung Mobile Thailand's Facebook by its users and categorised these into various latent variables that were associated with four (4) defined primary indicator variables, in order to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the aim of proving the existence of a relationship between the indicator variables and consumer purchase decision. While the current research study does not aim to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis, the same categorising methodology was used to gain insights into consumer engagement with respect to the different content categories. Another difference between the current study and that conducted by Boon-Long and Wongsurawat (2015) is that both the page posts and user posts were categorised using different categories. The page post categorisation was developed with the aim of finding relationships between engagement levels, content type and the type of industry. Table 12 lists the categories and the characteristics posts that fall within these, for the page.

Table 12: Categorisation of content posted by the pages

Category	Characteristics of posts	Sub-category	Key
Brand presence	Peripheral content that is intended to create brand awareness (e.g. blogs, tips, recipes, event information, product/service facts, CSI initiatives)	Recipes, blogs etc.	BP1
		Product/Service-related information/CSI Initiatives/ Supplier info	BP2
		Events	BP3
Promotions	Content intended to communicate information regarding discounts, price drops, offers, limited edition products and competitions to attract customers into buying their product/service	Prizes/Surprises/Limited edition/Buy-1-get-1	PP1
		Price drops/Vouchers	PP2
		Competitions	PP3
Information	Content that simply disseminates important information such as technical issues that the company may be experiencing or generic company-related information to its customers	Technical issues	I1
		Generic info	I2

Table 12: Categorisation of content posted by the pages

Wishes	Wishes posted over public holidays, religious days and festivals to create a sense of social belonging	None	W
Special	Content intended to educate consumers about the company's effort into creating safe, environmentally friendly products, through innovation	None	EP1

The user post categorisation was developed with the aim of identifying factors such as brand presence and the users' perception of the brand in SA, which could also indirectly affect the engagement levels observed for a page. Table 13 lists the categories and the characteristics posts that fall within these, for the user.

Table 13: Categorisation of content posted by the users of the pages

Category	Characteristics of posts	Sub-category	Key
Complaints	Consumers' way to provide negative feedback on business practice issues such as customer services and sales representatives quality, availability and quality of products/services, which includes usage experience issues, pricing-specific issues, generic issues and promotional campaign related issues	Pricing	C1
		Product/Service Quality	C2
		Business practice issues	C3
		Availability	C4
		General	C5
		Promotion	C6
Compliments	Consumers' way of providing positive feedback on all the above	Pricing	CO1
		Product/Service Quality	CO2
		Business practice	CO3
		Availability	CO4
		General	CO5
Information	Questions or comments posted by consumers to seek or provide information regarding details of products/services they wish to buy, pricing, promotions, careers or generic information regarding the brand	General	I1
		Careers	I2
		Product/Service	I3
		Pricing	I4
		Promotion	I5
		Business Practice	I6
Random	Consumers posting unrelated content on to a page; typically spam	None	R

The content was also categorised with respect to the following:

- Type of media – photo, video, status or link
- Day posted – in an ascending order, from Sunday to Monday, with Sunday being categorised as "1", Monday as "7", and a public holiday as "8"
- Time posted – Four categories: Morning from 5:01 am to 12 pm ("1"); Afternoon from 12:01 pm to 6 pm ("2"); Evening from 6:01 pm to 11:59 pm ("3"); and Night from 00:00 am to 5:00 am ("4")

The purpose of this phase is to provide marketers insights into how different types of posts affect consumer engagement and whether this differs with the type of industry the selected firms operate within. Therefore, the next set of results are divided into four sections, based on the various categorisations provided in the previous section. The first section, combined with the network and company and page analytics provided previously is aimed at assessing the customer perceptions of the three brands as these would also influence engagement. The next three sections tie up the first section with the first section to provide a holistic view of the factors affecting consumer engagement on social media. The second section provides an assessment of the effect of the media type on consumer engagement; the second section provides an assessment of the effect of content topic on consumer engagement; and the last section provides insight into whether situational factors, related to time, affect the level of engagement.

Customer Perceptions

As illustrated in the data analysis section, the PnP page, from a network analysis perspective, is the most connected with other industries. It also has the greatest number of fans and talking about count than the other two pages. On the other hand, the Vodacom page is the least connected with other industries, has the second highest fan count, the highest page activity, and the least talking about count. Toyota is in the middle with respect to all of these metrics. Therefore, in order to distinguish which brand is better perceived by its customers, the following results were analysed:

- User post activity per month and engagement per post as shown by Figure 12 per page
- A breakdown of the type of posts posted on the respective pages as shown by Figure 13 per page

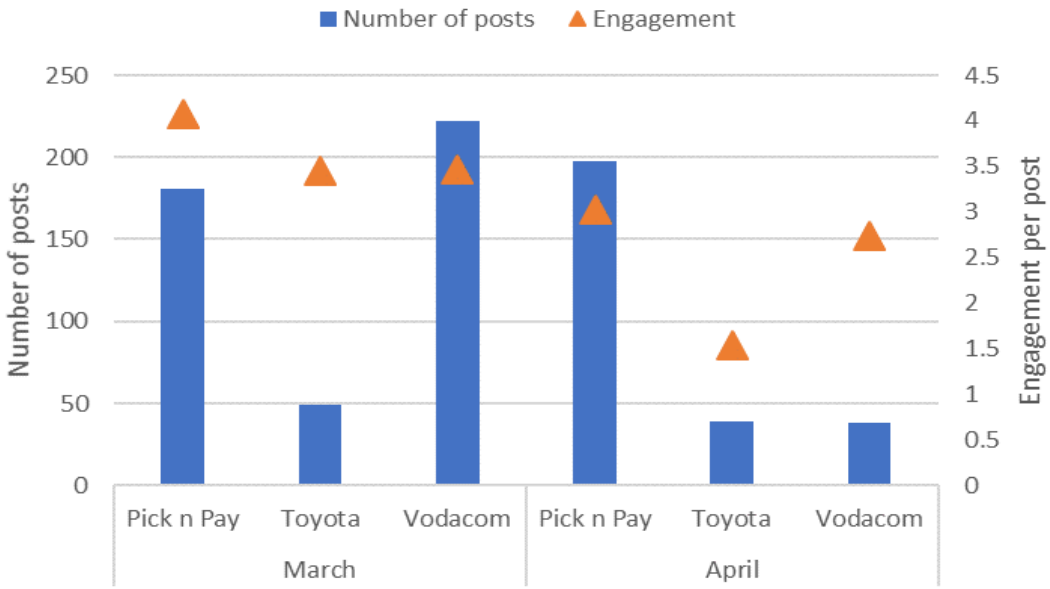


Figure 12: Number of user posts and Engagement per user post

Figure 12 shows that PnP users are consistently active on the page in the two months observed, while Toyota users are consistently less active on the page with a monthly number of posts being less than 50 for both months. Vodacom users have sporadically active on the page as illustrated by the highest number of posts in March and the lowest number of posts in April. Furthermore, for all three pages the engagement on the user posts, although varying slightly, is generally very low which shows that other users generally do not comment, like, react or share content posted by other users. It is also to be noted that all three pages respond within one hour of a user posting content on their pages, which shows that the engagement per post is due to the conversation that the page and the user of the original post generally engage in and not due to engagement from other users. A conclusion regarding consumer perception, however, cannot be drawn merely based on the number of posts and therefore the user-generated content analysis, shown in Figure 13, becomes critical.

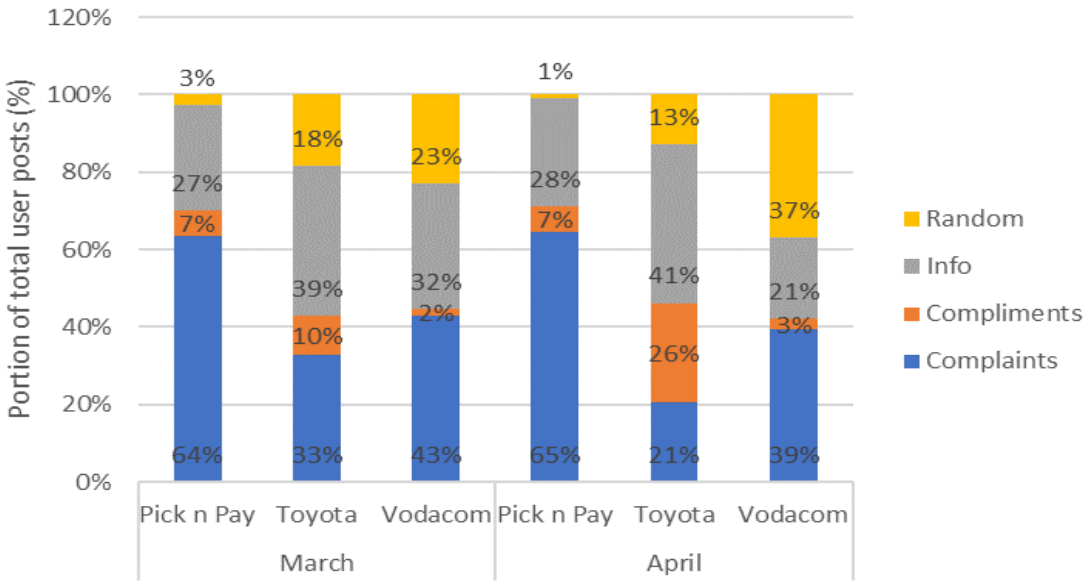


Figure 13: A breakdown of the type of posts posted by users

For both PnP and Vodacom, the highest percentage of posts were related to complaints. While not shown in Figure 13, majority of these complaints were either related to product or service quality and business practice issues referring to the quality of the sales and service representatives. It is also interesting to note that for both PnP and Vodacom, these percentages do not change significantly from March to April, which shows that while the brands may have a large brand presence indicated by a large number of follows, the customers perception of the brand may not be all positive, and some customers may only be following the brand to be informed about it as they still remain customers of the company due to other reasons. Most of the negative perceptions are based on their post-purchase experience of their products or the experience they have had in interacting with the company representatives during purchase. Therefore, it provides insight into how psychological factors affect consumer engagement on a social media page. Toyota, on the other hand, have the highest percentage of posts seeking product-related information in both months, while the second highest percentage of complaints in March, and compliments in April. The following insights were drawn from these observations:

- Toyota sells cars which are more expensive than everyday usage products and services provided by PnP and Vodacom and therefore customers

require detailed technical and pricing information before a purchase is made

- Opportunities of interacting with the company staff are higher for PnP and Vodacom than Toyota as purchases with the former two are made on a daily basis while car purchases are made once in many years, therefore affording users the opportunity to assess staff more frequently, leading to higher number of complaints for PnP and Vodacom, as the staff may also get frustrated with interacting with millions of customers every day, and a higher number of compliments for Toyota as the staff is less frustrated with a continuous flow of clients
- Opportunities of experiencing the product or the service itself is almost equal for all three brands, as users eat, drive, and communicate daily. Therefore, a higher number of product quality related compliments for Toyota would have indicated that Toyota produces vehicles that are genuinely perceived to be of good quality. However, a detailed analysis of the compliments shows that the they are all related to their business practice, which shows all three companies need to focus on product/service quality which is perceived to be poor either due to personal experiences or word-of-mouth that fuels consumers' negative experiences

Lastly, the percentages of random comments posted by users is the highest for Vodacom for both months, followed by Toyota which also indicates that the followers of these two brands may not necessarily be following them due to relating to the brands, and indicates that they may have a lower brand presence than PnP, in SA.

Effect of media type on consumer engagement

Figure 15 illustrates the frequency of the type of media utilised by the three pages for their posts and the associated engagement per post. The following insights can be drawn from the figure:

- All three pages most commonly utilise photos and videos for their posts
- Photos for PnP, representative of the mixed industry, are the most effective in engaging consumers overall; however, the listeriosis product update

done through a status post in March was the cause of the spike in the status-related engagement per post, the particular status being shared, liked, reacted, and commented upon 32383 times

- Videos have also had a big effect on driving engagement for Toyota in March, which was attributed to the fact that it is a product-focussed industry, and considering a product is an item that can be touched and seen, users of the product would be more engaged if they can see the performance and technical specifications of the vehicles through videos. However, videos were not as engaging in April; the reason for this could not be determined
- Vodacom is the only page that utilises links for their posts as well. All three media types result in approximately the same engagement level. However, Vodacom prefers to however use photos as their preferred media for post, which is attributed to the lower effort and marketing spend required to generate images compared to videos and links that are more detailed forms of posts.
- PnP generates the highest user engagement. Considering all three companies use the same type of media, the reason for the differing engagement levels may be attributed to the content topic and is explored in detail in the next section.

(a)

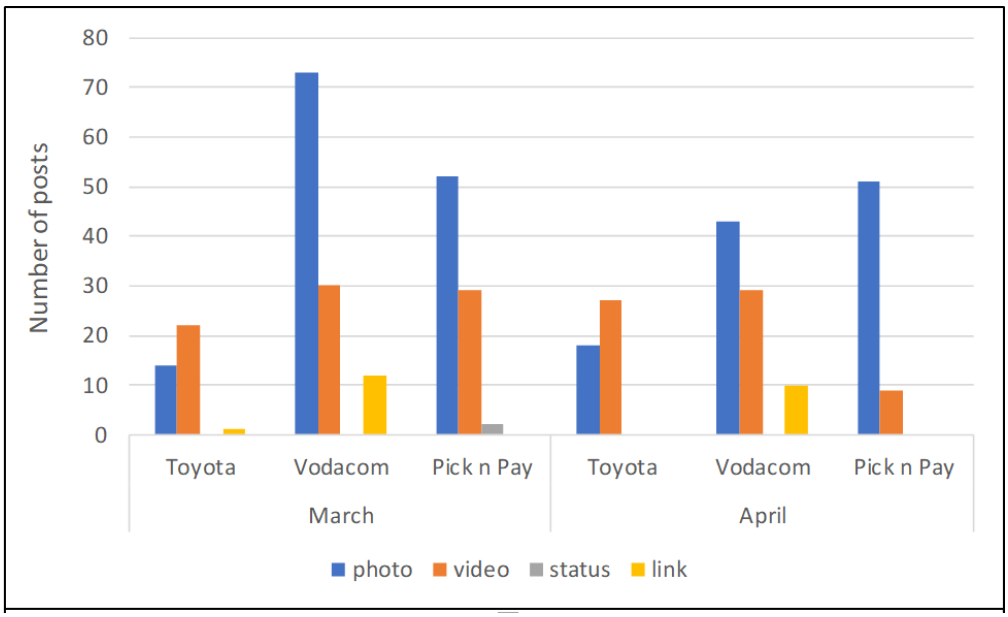


Figure 14: (a) Number of posts by media type

(b)

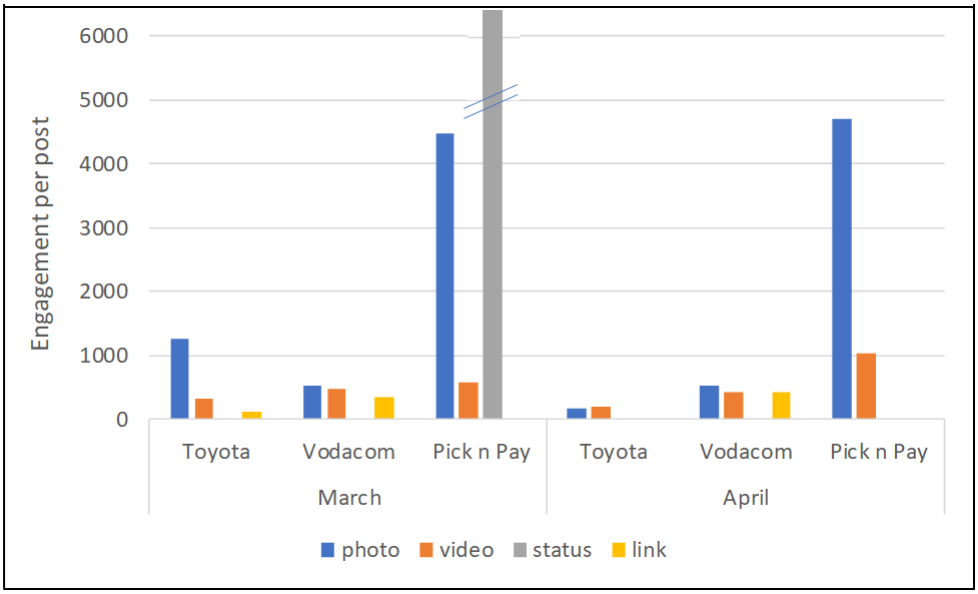


Figure 15: (b) Engagement per post by media type

Effect of content topic on consumer engagement

Figure 16 is a high-level overview of the number of posts generated by each page and the level of engagement achieved per post by the pages which confirms the observation made in the previous section regarding PnP being the most successful in engaging its customers. Vodacom, on the other hand, generates the most amount of posts, but has the least level of engagement in the month of March, which stayed constant in April, despite the decrease in number of posts. This section is aimed at assessing engagement with respect to the type of content shared to identify the most preferred topic by customers in different industries.

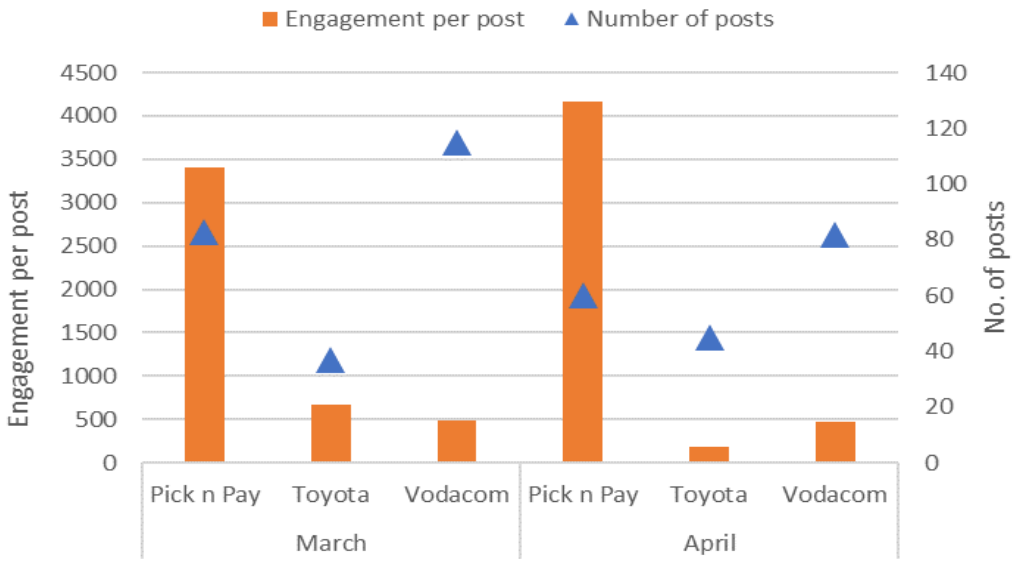


Figure 16: Number of page posts and Engagement per user post

Figure 17 shows the predominant topics of the content posted by the three pages. All three pages predominantly post content intended to increase brand presence and drive sales through promotions. The product-focussed company Toyota is highly focussed on creating brand presence rather than promoting its products, which can once again be attributed to the frequency of purchase rather than the fact than the product-focussed industry characteristics itself. However, most product-focussed companies either sell their products through retailers such as PnP or through their own shops. The hypothesis therefore is that product-focussed companies that sell high-end products with a niche market that do not buy the product every day put greater emphasis on creating brand awareness such that at the time of purchase, its target customers are aware of its brand. PnP, a company belonging to the mixed industry, also focusses on making sure customers resonate with their brand and remain loyal towards the company. However, PnP's target customers are price conscious customers that need groceries daily, and consequently there is no "sticky" factor when it comes to its brand. Therefore, it must lure customers through promotions that beat their competitors' pricing, which explains the high percentage of promotional posts as well. Lastly, Vodacom is also focussed on maintaining its brand presence rather than peripheral posts or promotional posts, even if not as aggressively as Toyota. While this is counterintuitive of the above argument regarding frequency of purchase and the larger target customer base correlating with the frequency of promotional posts, some of the statistics presented previously for Vodacom explain the scenario. Firstly, Vodacom, as shown in Table 11, has the highest profit margin out of the three companies which means that to maintain high profit margins, it cannot afford to offer too many promotional products. Secondly, Vodacom, unlike PnP, has a "sticky" factor of many consumers not wanting to lose their phone numbers they have had for years, and many others not wanting to go through tedious paperwork to change their service provider, which also indicates that it need not promote its service offerings as often as PnP. Lastly, as seen by the type of posts posted by users on the Vodacom page, it is clear that Vodacom consumers are not particularly happy regarding its service offerings nor its promotional offerings, particularly related to data, such as their "Shake Everyday" campaign, and the greater focus on brand presence may be a strategy to divert

customers' attentions and provide them tips on how they are in control of the services such as data usage. It is to be noted that this is a hypothesis rather than a proven fact as the author has not interviewed any of the companies to gain insight into their marketing strategies.

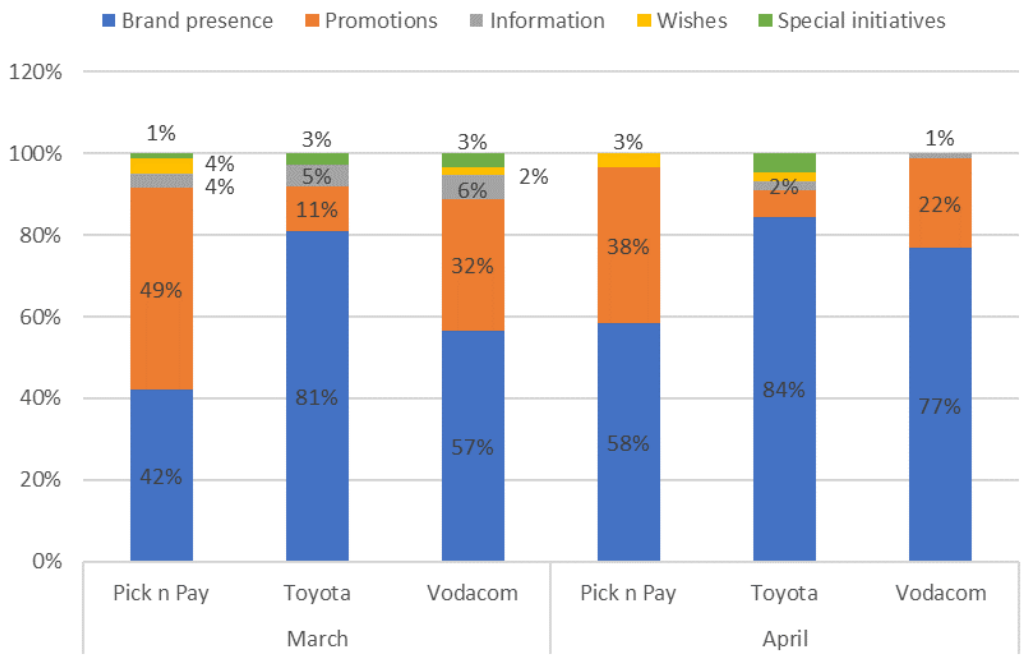


Figure 17: A breakdown of the type of posts posted by PnP, Toyota & Vodacom

Figure 18 shows the level of engagement for each of the broader categories of content per brand page. The following insights regarding consumer engagement can be drawn:

- Consumer engagement is the highest for PnP in categories which is attributed to the fact that PnP has the biggest customer base, due to it being a retail store that caters for daily consumer needs, and the highest number of fan following
- PnP has the most optimised content category breakdown based on the engagement level. Its customers engage the most with brand presence related content, followed by wishes-related content and promotional content. However, public holidays and religious days do not occur very frequently, therefore placing more importance on brand presence and promotions is an appropriate marketing strategy. The spike in engagement caused by information-related content was due to the listeriosis post, as

mentioned previously. There is also an opportunity for them to post about their environmental initiatives as the consumers become increasingly conscious of the environment

- Vodacom, as seen in Figure 16, and a post activity of 8.92 posts per hour, is a very content heavy page; however, consumers are not as engaged, regardless of the content topic. However, the author believes this is due to the effects of word-of-mouth that has resulted in bad perceptions about the brand, which can be seen through the number of negative comments posted by users through user posts and comments on every page post that is completely unrelated to the page post itself. This shows that social and psychological factors are inter-related and do play a role in consumer engagement, contradictory to the results of the survey, which may affect any stage of the consumer buying or decision-making process.
- Toyota's low-level of engagement could be attributed to its low frequency of posts, a lower fan base compared to the other two pages, and a lower customer base overall as its target base is a niche market that can firstly afford a car, and secondly have an affinity towards the brand. Test drives and new product launches however do spike engagement, as seen by the spike in March which was due to a post regarding a test drive for their new range of SUV called the C-HR range.

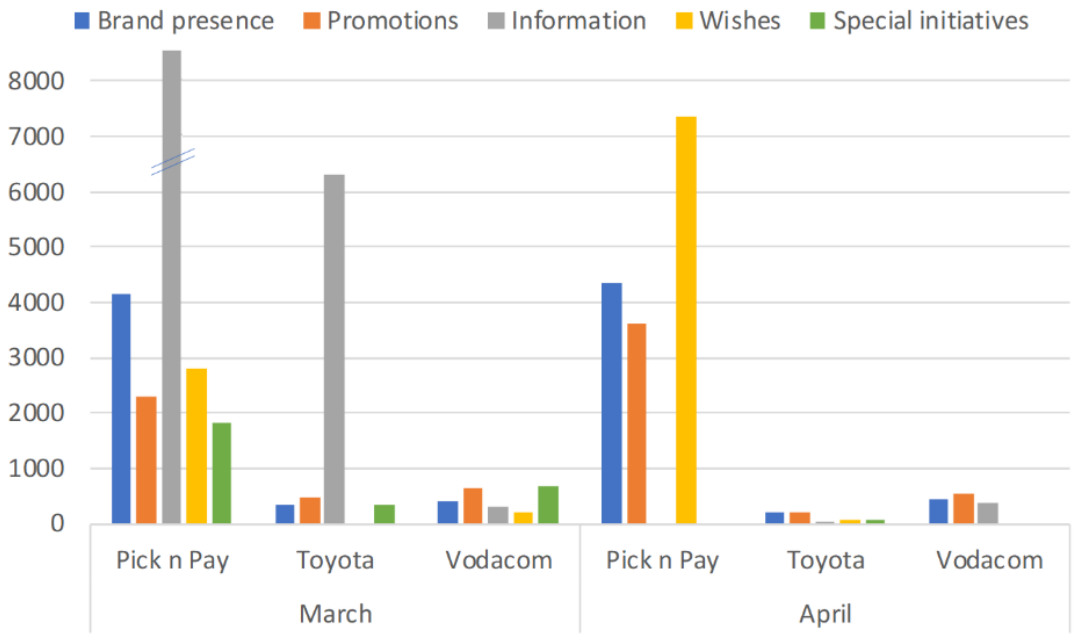


Figure 18: Engagement per post by content category

Table 14 below presents the effect of the various content sub-categories on engagement, with the sub-categories that resulted in the greatest consumer engagement consistently over the two months for the each of the three pages highlighted in red. Competitions and product or service-related information are the most engaging across all three pages. The detailed graphs are illustrated in Appendix E.

Key	Toyota	Vodacom	PnP
PP1	Low	Low	High
PP2	Low	Moderate	Low
PP3	High	High	Moderate
BP1	Low	Low	Moderate
BP2	High	High	High
BP3	Low	Moderate	Low
I1	N/A	Low	Moderate
I2	High	Moderate	Low
EP1	Moderate	Moderate	Low
W	Low	Moderate	Moderate

Table 14: Effect of sub-categories on consumer engagement

Effect of situational factors on consumer engagement

The effect of time on consumer engagement was assessed with respect to the day of the week and the time of the day. Initially, a correlation matrix was generated for each page over each month, however no correlations were found in this data set (Appendix E). Therefore, a decision was made to increase the number of data points by combining the data over the two months and analysing the data for trends using charts rather than statistical measures. It is also to be noted that the assessment is made by using the time stamp on the content posted by the page itself, as time stamps for engagement, except for comments, cannot be retrieved on Facebook. Therefore, engagement over the night period (00:00 am to 5:00 am) could not be assessed as no content was posted by the page during this time. Figure 19 and Figure 20 illustrate the effect of post time on consumer engagement.

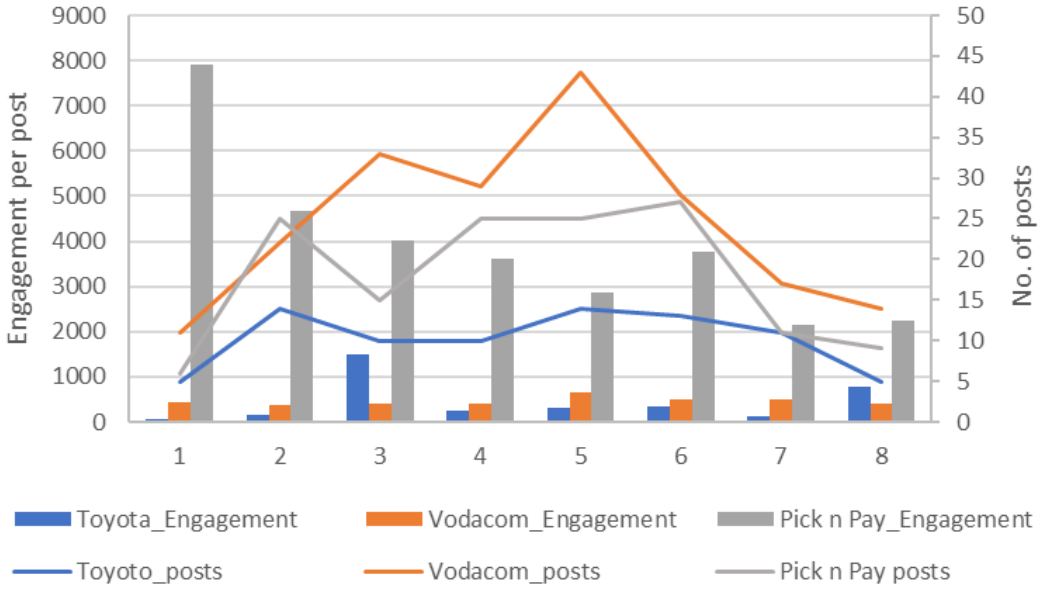


Figure 19: Time assessment – Effect of post day on consumer engagement

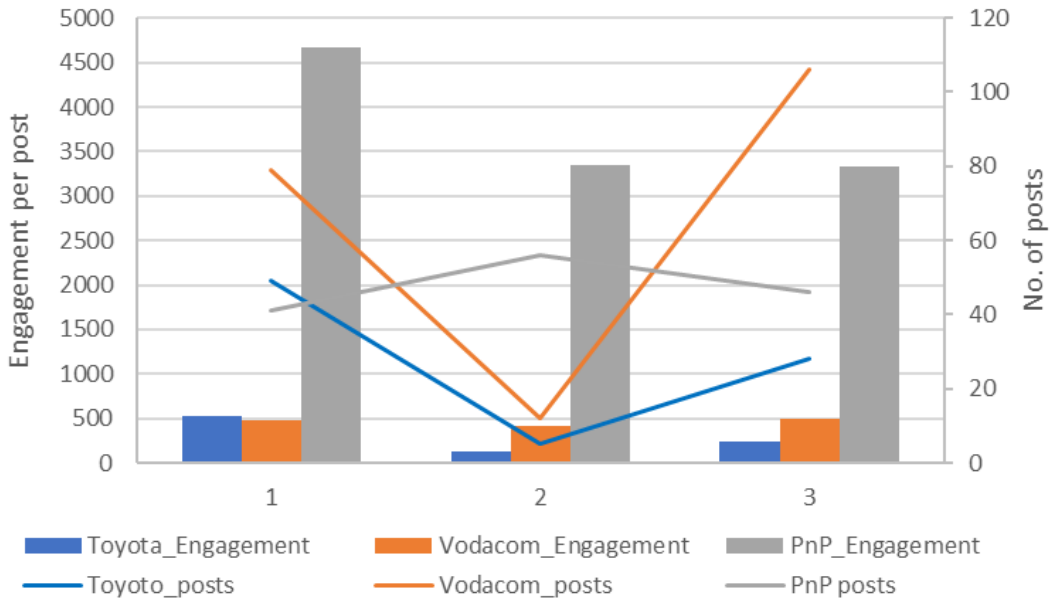


Figure 20: Time assessment – Effect of post time on consumer engagement

The following insights can be drawn from the above graphs:

- All three pages generate a high number of posts during the week (Monday to Friday) which decreases over the weekend which may be attributed to a lower number of staff working over the weekend to administer marketing activities

- Consumer engagement over PnP posts is the highest on a Sunday which is believed to be because most consumers do grocery shopping for the week over the weekend and are generally vigilant of any specials in stores
- Vodacom has a consistently low level of engagement throughout the week. The reasons of which have been explored extensively in previous sections.
- Toyota also has a low level of engagement; however, it peaks slightly on a Tuesday and a public holiday. The Tuesday peak may be attributed to a peak in number of posts on a Monday having a lagging effect on engagement, while the peak in engagement over public holidays may be due to people having more time to engaging in special activities such as window-shopping cars or going on test drives or simply reading interesting content on their favourite brand pages
- With respect to the time of the day, both Toyota and Vodacom are the most active during the morning and the evening, which also correlates with the highest level of engagement during these periods. PnP on the other hand, has relatively steady activity levels during the day with a slight peak during the afternoon period; the reason for which could not be determined. The engagement levels for PnP are highest during the morning period, as consumers possibly visit their shops, particularly the convenience stores at garages, to grab regular items for the day

Therefore, analyses of content validate the hypothesis regarding time-related situational factors influencing consumer behaviour. However, the effect could not be related to the specific stages of the consumer buying process.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusions

The current study explored the effects of social media marketing on consumer behaviour by developing a model through qualitative analysis and validating it through quantitative methods using an online consumer survey as a data collection medium. The results not only validated a few of the hypotheses associated with the model, but it also provided key insights into how the various

influencing factors found in literature, namely personal, psychological, societal, situational, marketing efforts, and online environment affect consumers of various social media usage and preferences, and demographic profiles. A summary of these insights is as follows:

- Hypotheses H1, H3, and H7 regarding influence of personal and situational factors were accepted based on consistent scores across various respondent groups
- Hypotheses H5, H8, H9, and H10 regarding influence of social factors, marketing efforts and online environment were rejected based on consistent scores across various respondent groups
- All other hypotheses could not be accepted or rejected due to varying responses across all respondent groups and therefore a more focussed survey will need to be developed to validate these
- 80% of all groups, demographic and segments generated in this study based on social media usage, were greatly affected by situational and personal factors in all stages of the consumer buying process. The “Engaged shopper” group was the only significantly large group that was not affected by situational factors in the “Needs Recognition” stage
- 80% of all groups are not affected by the online environment at all stages of the consumer buying process. The “Engaged shopper” group is the only group that is affected by the online environment in the “Search” and “Post Purchase Evaluation” stages. This was because situational buying resonated more with the respondents in the sample group
- None of the study-generated respondent segments are affected by social factors; however, within the five stages of the consumer buying process, social factors have the most influence during the post-purchase evaluation stage
- Most of the respondents do not follow brands on social media (55%). Moreover, majority of those that do follow brands on social media, do not follow more than 10 brands. They also do not tend to unfollow brands which shows that most of the sample group does not tend to get affected by

marketing activity. However, marketing efforts do moderately affect the "Engagement shopper" segment, as well as, some demographic groups

- 94% of respondents agreed to following the consumer buying process to a large extent, validating the actual process itself with respect to the conceptual model developed
- 80% of respondents' buying need recognition motives were to optimise satisfaction by buying the best they could within their economic means, or to prevent possible future problems

Since the model could not be holistically validated with the survey, content analysis was used to quantitatively assess consumer engagement for three company pages, representing three different industries, and provide marketing insights considering the plethora of advertising that is seen through social media and the fact that the survey suggested a moderate effect of marketing efforts on the consumers that are active on social media. Moreover, considering the profound effect of situational factors, as suggested by the survey, a time study was done to assess whether time-related situational factors affected consumer engagement levels. The following insights were gained through this analysis:

- All brand pages focussed on facilitating a perceptual experience to its consumers by using photos and videos that created prevailing sensory impressions and drove attained higher levels of consumer engagement. The effect of photos and videos on engagement was stronger than other types of media for all three brand pages.
- Situational (time-related) factors do influence consumer engagement. However, a more detailed study is required which looks at the time stamp on each type of engagement a consumer has with a Facebook post to determine which day or time during the week is the most effective. It was also observed that this differs from company-to-company and depends on the frequency at which a consumer buys the product or service that the company is selling
- Psychological factors, such as consumer perception, greatly affects consumer engagement. A brand that is generally not perceived to be a

good brand will generally receive poor engagement levels or unrelated engagement on a post due to the customers continuously having a certain perception about the brand e.g. Vodacom is perceived to have data issues and consumers continuously complain about these or do not engage at all on all related and unrelated posts

- Brand presence related posts received greater consumer engagement due to these facilitating the creation of interactive experiences that enable co-creation and relatability.
- Engagement levels differed for the three chosen brands, but this was not because of the industry type, but rather a function of the frequency of the consumers' interaction with the product/service and the brand's representatives. The more frequently the consumers interacted with the brand (e.g. grocery shopping daily), the more the consumers engaged with the brand posts

Overall, the study was unique in the sense that it provides a threefold contribution to the literature. Firstly, it scans all theories and models underpinning consumer behaviour in and out of the social media context that have not been comprehensively tested, and develops a single model incorporating many of these models. Secondly, it provides a comprehensive quantitative analysis of the effects of social media on consumer behaviour in each stage of the consumer buying process through validation of the proposed model. Lastly, it provides practical implications for marketing departments within organisations, with social media being increasingly seen as a core marketing strategy, through linking consumer engagement with content topics, media types, and time-related situational factors.

7.2 Limitations and recommendations for further research

This section highlights certain limitations of the current study which provides an opportunity to build upon the key findings through further research. Firstly, the survey design, particularly that of Section E, could be significantly improved. In this section respondents were asked to rank various influencing factors according to their order of influence in each stage of the process. However, there was a

natural presentation order of the factors which may have influenced responses as situational factors which was presented as the first option in the questionnaire, and hypothesised to affect only needs recognition, was found to affect all stages of the process. This was found to be true for personal factors as well, which was presented as the second option in the questionnaire. Ranking also forced respondents to establish a clear preference of one influential factor over another by respondents. However, all factors may have had equal influence on the respondent's buying behaviour, but they simply could not indicate this. Therefore, the study cannot conclude with a 100% confidence level, that the less preferred factors did not have any influence on the respondents.

Secondly, a snowball sampling method was used to disseminate the survey to willing participants through the author's direct network which mostly consisted of consumers within her age category that resided in major cities of SA. Therefore, the sample itself was not representative of all geographical locations, ages, and ethnical groups. The snowballing method also implied that the author did not have control over who the respondents were and whether they were active on social media. Consequently, generalisation of the results across the all social media users in SA cannot be made. To overcome this limitation, future studies should consider targeting members of specific social networking sites or partnering with a brand to get their consumers to complete a survey through launching a competition to get a more focussed or a larger sample size, representative of the different population groups in SA.

Lastly, conducting content analysis of pages across three different industries added too many variables that could be associated with the variances in engagement levels (e.g. industry, frequency of purchase, fan following, size of company, number of customers, historic performance). Therefore, the confidence level for the conclusions drawn was low. It is recommended to have a more focussed approach towards content analysis by ensuring two to three variables are kept constant when comparing content from different brand pages to one another.

7.3 Managerial Implications

With increasing penetration of social media, organisations have increasingly started to place a greater focus on social media marketing and engaging consumers through various types of content across the entire spectrum of social media channels. However, the study shows that simply “jumping onto the social media bandwagon” and allocating large amounts of marketing budget to social media campaigns may not necessarily be beneficial to organisations mainly because consumers in SA, due to the nation’s cultural diversity, may be more prone to personal factors than the marketing efforts of these organisations. Furthermore, the study also highlights that many consumers in the market may also be situational buyers, which may also mean that brand loyalty in the market may be poor and organisations must continuously think of smart ways to build a positive customer perception about their brand. To summarise, generic social media marketing strategies are less likely to drive consumer engagement in the SA market and, based on the product/service that an organisation is selling, it needs to segment its consumers according to how receptive they are to various forms of marketing, and design focussed content that appeals to the respective target consumer segments.

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