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**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRAND AWARENESS, PERCEIVED
QUALITY, BRAND LOYALTY AND PURCHASE INTENTION OF SMARTPHONES
AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

by

TAWANDA MASHAPA

Student number: 214000729

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VAAAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Supervisor: Prof B.A. Mokoena

Co-Supervisor: Prof M. Dhurup

November 2021

DECLARATION

I, Tawanda Mashapa, declare that the contents of this dissertation “The influence of social media on brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention of smartphones among university students” represents my own unaided work, and that all the sources used or quoted in this research study have been adequately identified and acknowledged using references, and that this dissertation has not been previously submitted by a degree at any other academic institution.

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of social media has seen people around the world connect with one another, communicate and share information without boundaries and time limitation. Social media is no myth, neither is it just a trend but a powerful communication medium which presents a fundamental shift in communication that cuts across all cultures, be it social, business, politics, sports, news and more. Social media adoption over the years, has seen billions of people participating on social networking sites and the interaction thereof has considerably influenced marketing related correspondence, public relations as well as modern day business communication. In the connected world, social media interaction is the current word-of-mouth, often referred to as electronic word of mouth and in the connected world, everyone is a content generator. In this social media era, information travels faster, reaching millions of consumers and affecting their perception towards certain products and brands based on the information shared and received. Therefore, social media interaction has proved to be an important contributing factor in consumer's purchase decision process. However, this evolution in communication introduces unprecedented challenges as well as opportunities for organisations as buying decisions are affected significantly by social media interaction, and thus warrants a study of this nature to be carried out.

The aim of this study was to examine the influence of social media on brand awareness as well as the relationships between brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention. To attain the empirical objectives of the study, a quantitative research design was adopted and the respondents were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. For data collection, the researcher used a structured self-administered questionnaire survey. Of the 320 distributed questionnaires, the researcher utilised 304 usable questionnaires for data analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 was used to compute both descriptive and inferential statistics (which includes correlation and regression analysis). In addition, the reliability and validity analysis were carried out in relation to the measuring instrument.

Results from the correlation and regression analysis revealed positive significant relationship between social media and brand awareness, brand awareness and perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention, perceived quality with brand loyalty and purchase intention as well as brand loyalty and purchase intention.

Based on the results of the study, recommendations emanating from the study include the integration of social media marketing in the organisation's overall marketing strategy, creating and maintaining online brand communities to engage with current and potential customers as well as making use of social media platforms for advertising and promotions.

The limitations of the study and the proposed opportunities for further research were also highlighted.

Keywords: social media, brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, purchase intention, smartphones.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Social media is not a fashion, trend or a fad, neither is it a myth, but it is a real fundamental shift in communication and cuts across all cultures, be it social, business, politics or even sports (Phipps 2013:2; Kelm, Dohle & Bernhard 2019:1 & Munsayac 2019:1). Social media has altered the communication landscape in general and its influence extends to business to consumer interaction as well as consumer-to-consumer interaction (Tuten 2020:5). The growth of social media is transforming the way communication is done influencing marketing related correspondence, public relations as well as modern day business communication (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt & Fuller 2013:342; Tuten 2020:5). In the connected world, social media interaction is the current word-of-mouth, often referred to as electronic word-of-mouth.

The presence and significance of network sites like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and LinkedIn in consumers' lives is affecting their interaction customs as an average user tends to have multiple social media accounts with different networks (Tuten 2020:5). The existence of user-friendly devices that support social media have seen consumers spending more time on social networks, which has shown an increase in social media users and interactions (Tuten 2020:5). Thus, brand interactions and marketing communication is being witnessed significantly in the social media sphere (Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson & Seymour 2011:1).

The current hype in communication introduces unprecedented challenges as well as opportunities for organisations as buying decisions are affected significantly by social media interaction. Hence, social media interaction is becoming an important element in the consumers' purchase decision process (Putter, 2017:7; Hinz, Skiera, Barrot & Becker 2011:1). In this era, news and information travel faster on Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and LinkedIn, reaching millions of consumers and affecting their perception towards certain products and brands based on the information shared and received. The marketing fraternity has witnessed the dawn of a new era in communication and is still experiencing the revolution as well as its impact on corporate branding. Social media has become an essential platform for information gathering or distribution about brands and products, including new product introduction, creation and fostering of brand awareness (Putter 2017:7). Despite the contribution that social media is bringing to the business world, its real value is yet to be fully embraced within the academic field, mainly in the way it influences perception amongst consumers.

Social media rose to prominence over a decade ago and its rise has seen the emergence of LinkedIn, MySpace, and Facebook in 2004, and YouTube, Twitter from 2003 to 2006, and recently TikTok in 2019. In a relatively short time period, the online population has seen tremendous growth with billions reported to be on social media daily (We Are Social 2020:8). In 2011, barely seven years after Facebook was launched, it surpassed 500 million users globally, and at that time Twitter's users were averaging 175 million with 90 million for LinkedIn and 57 million for MySpace (Curtis 2013:1). In 2013, YouTube clocked a billion users with an average of four billion views a day, Facebook's total community rose in excess of 1.1 billion, with Twitter reaching 500 million registered users and 225 million users for LinkedIn (Curtis 2013:1). The latest statistics reported 4.6 billion internet users and over 4.2 billion active social media users around the globe (We Are Social 2021:8). These statistics indicate that digital, mobile, and social media are now an indispensable part of everyday life for people across the world (We Are Social 2020:3).

Social media, as explained by Evans (2008:32), are internet platforms which promote natural interaction between individuals about a subject of mutual interest with which the dialogue transcends from thoughts and experiences of the individuals involved that would later nurture relationships. Mathews (2010:17), explained social media as online platforms where individuals converge to interact freely, interchanging intelligence about themselves and their lives, using different message media such as words, pictures, and audio as well as videos. Most notably, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content". Tuten (2020:4), purports that social media are online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration amongst interconnected individuals, communities and organisations freely through messages, pictures and even videos facilitated by technological capabilities and mobility.

Traditional media sources like newspapers, radio and television dominated the communication sphere for centuries and were being utilised for various forms of communication from mere news to business related communication and advertising (Uitz 2012:2). Under traditional media, advertising and marketing communication was one way. Consumers were passive recipients of mass-generated content through TV, newspapers and radios; hence, consumers' voices were not being recognised. More so traditional media was not widely accessible because of its expensive nature. However, with the rise of social media, which complements traditional media, the world has witnessed a drastic shift in the communication landscape. Consumers are no longer passive recipients of messages or generated content but rather co-creators of messages and value (Vargo

& Lusch 2004:11; Kozinets, Hemetsberger & Schau 2008:340; Kim & Choi 2019:3). Organisations are no longer in full control of the communication flow pertaining to their image, quality and brands. The swiftness and quick embrace of social media by consumers is a phenomenon in its class in corporate history, which has resulted in a new look in organisations' communication structure.

Social media presents consumers with an unmatched platform that encourages them search for information, interact freely, and express their minds and feelings with fellow consumers without limitations (Ding, Lin & Zhang 2021:2; O'Brien 2011:34). Rather than using radio, television and newspaper to reach their clientele bases, organisations are now utilising social media where they are guaranteed to reach thousands of recipients at low cost all the time. Under social media, consumers exercise their human nature of interaction by sharing their product knowledge, emotions and consumption experiences (Ding *et al.* 2021:2); while under traditional media, consumer-to-consumer interactions was minimal, rather it was organisations communicating with them mainly through advertising (Uitz 2012:1). The emergence of social media promotes consumer-to-consumer interaction and information is now travelling faster, which empowers organisation to increase their brand awareness (Forrester Consulting 2011:2; Ding *et al.* 2021:2). As a result, consumers have become increasingly influential in brand building.

The rise of social media has shifted away the barriers on communication flow as it presents a virtual network where organisations can build their strong brands and take advantage of possible viral marketing by igniting a positive brand talk on the platform. Nevertheless, the impact of this has not yet been fully realised in South Africa. A vast number of organisations are utilising social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to communicate with consumers around the world, igniting word -of-mouth and viral marketing amongst social media users for various objectives (Divol, Edelman & Sarrazin 2012:1). Social media interactions are fast becoming a key feature in consumer buying decisions. Nevertheless, studies are limited when it comes to social media and its effects to brand awareness as well as purchase intention. The aim of this research was to examine the influence of social media on brand awareness and subsequently the relationships between brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention of smartphone among university students at Vaal University of Technology's Vanderbijlpark Campus.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The evolution of social media has altered the communication landscape between organisations and its clients as well as consumer-to-consumer interaction (Tuten 2020:5). The growth of social

media continues to transform the way communication is done and resultantly influencing marketing related correspondence, public relations as well as modern day business communication (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt & Fuller 2013:342; Tuten 2020:5). As social media continues to take centre stage in the life of consumers, organisations were left with no choice but to incorporate social media in marketing strategy through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn and more. In line with making purchase decisions, consumers are relying considerably on the information and advice they obtain from social media interactions as it is now part of their everyday lives (Meslat 2018:5). Despite the possible benefits that social media is promising to organisations due to active consumer interaction, the dilemma is that in actual practice these benefits are still being disputed.

Rehmani *et al.* (2011:100) argue that despite the exaltation of social media and increase in consumer interaction, the real value of these interactions is yet to be fully researched. Furthermore, the impact of social media on consumer attitudes towards a brand, as well as its influence on the purchase decision process is still to be acknowledged. Consumers' perceptions of quality and brand loyalty are also important in consumer decision making and whether social media influences consumers's perceptions on product quality and or brand loyalty is what this study was aiming to investigate. Several studies have been undertaken to measure the effect of social media on brand awareness and purchase intention (Rehmani *et al.* 2011:100; Hutter *et al.* 2013: 342), as well as the adoption of social media in South African banks (Chikandiwa, Contogiannis & Jembere 2013:365). However, there are insufficient studies done pertaining to social media interactions' influence on consumer / brand loyalty, brand awareness and purchase intention. Hence, this study focused on examining the influence of social media on brand awareness and subsequently the relationships between brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention.

1.3 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

In view of developing a strong theoretical background for the study, the Hierarchy of Effects (HOE) Model in advertising and communication together with the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) were applied so as to extract possible meaning on how social media messages, interactions and advertising has affected consumer reactions towards brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and subsequently purchase intention. The HOE model has similarities with the decision-making process framework in that consumers follow certain stages when making purchase decisions.

According to Barry and Howard (1990:99), the HOE model outlines the order in which individuals evaluate, refine and use marketing communication information and advertising. It transcends

through three main stages, namely, cognitive (thinking); affective (feeling); and conative (doing). This implies that initially consumers are unaware of anything, but due to marketing communication, they acquire knowledge and become aware of the brand. Based on information processed and consumed, consumers' brand attitude will be influenced, thereby triggering a reaction of either ignoring or consuming the product.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) originated from the social-psychology discipline and is used to predict or explain human behaviour or actions both online and offline (Delafronz, Paim & Khatibi 2010:139). Chiou (1998:298) opines that TRA proposed that an individual's behaviour is affected by their behavioural intention, which in turn is influenced by the attitude towards that particular behaviour and subjective norms. Thus, TRA affirms that beliefs like perceived benefits are fully mediated by attitude (Delafronz, Paim & Khatibi 2010:139). An individual's state of readiness to perform a particular behaviour is regarded as intention. Under TRA, behavioural intention, is a function of attitude towards the behaviour as well as subjective norms and both these factors are best in predicting volitional behaviours (Velarde 2014:08); however, it excludes impulsive, habitual and spontaneous buying (Hale, Householder & Greene 2002:259), hence the birth of the Theory of Planned behaviour (TPB).

TPB was proposed to assist in describing behaviours that individuals have no volitional control over (Godin & Kok 1996:82). The main focus of TPB is on individuals' intention to perform a particular behaviour based on their attitude towards that behaviour, subjective behavioural norms together with perceived behavioural control (Chiou 1998:298). TPB is crucial in predicting purchase behaviour and researchers have used it to explore relations between customers' attitudes and purchase intention (Dennis, Jayawardhena & Papamathaiou 2010:412).

In terms of the modelled HOE framework, consumers initially are short of knowledge and less aware about the product, hence the first aim is to increase brand awareness, which can be through social media interaction that comes from organisational communication or consumer interactions. The next stage is when consumers gain more knowledge about the brand offering through different communication forms (Sinh 2013:93). This all happens in the first phase of the purchase decision process called the cognitive or thinking stage. Information and knowledge acquired in the cognitive stage influences consumer perceptions about the quality of the product or brand, positively or negatively, in the affective stage. Lastly, consumers are expected to develop enormous confidence of the efficiency of the purchase, which is the purchase intention signal in the conative or behaviour stage of HOE model.

The implication of the model is that when consumers receive any information about the brand, they react based on the information attained, which makes them move up the model until a positive or negative intent to purchase is realised (Lavidge & Steiner 1961:59). The HOE model shows that brand awareness is key to any consumer who may develop an interest and take a step closer to develop purchase intention. Wijaya (2012:73) purports that brand awareness is achievable through word-of-mouth, advertising or any other marketing communication. As consumers become aware of a brand, they react either way based on information consumed, which may trigger brand preference, likeness or rejection and quality evaluation (Barry & Howard 1990:99). In the connected world, brand related communication is witnessed under social media as consumers exchange information, promoting electronic word-of-mouth, which can positively or negatively affect a consumer's quality perceptions about a brand together with brand credibility (O'Brien 2011:32; Hutter *et al.* 2013:342).

The HOE framework comprises different stages that consumers go through when marketing messages catch their attention, which will trigger reaction, hence this study made use of Lavidge and Steiner's (1961:61) model. For the conceptual framework, the study undertook social media interaction (company generated marketing messages and consumer generated messages), as an independent variable that influences brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and subsequently purchase intention. The conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 1.1 below.

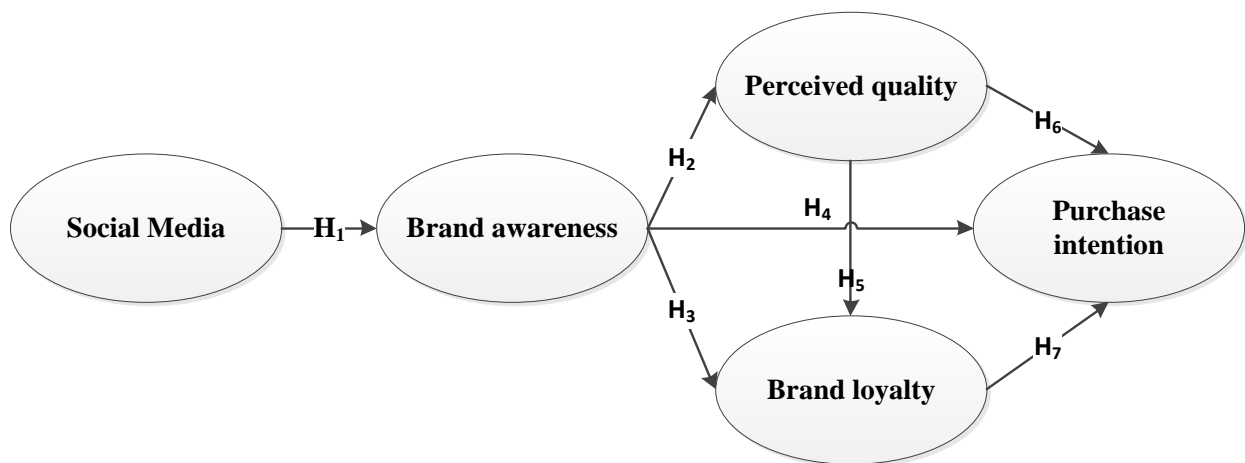


Figure 1.1: Conceptual model

1.3.1 Social media

Social media is a powerful tool for information dissemination amongst consumers and promotes two-way communication, unlike traditional media, which is characteristically one-way communication between organisations and consumers (Stoychef, Liu, Wibowo & Nanni 2017:3;

Wang & Hyun 2017:15; Cha, Perez & Haddadi 2012:249). Social media is increasingly becoming a part of many individuals' and organisations' daily lives as they engage and participate in information creation and dissemination. Investigating the impact of this phenomenon in a South African context is imperative, given that organisational issues and brands are being discussed daily by social media users. The communication landscape has been transformed, as social media becomes a platform that allows broadcasting of information around the globe in an instant as well as gaining unmediated consumer insights as fast as possible (Hudson, Huang, Roth & Madden 2016:28). Social media, is an instrumental means of communication collaboration, conveyance amongst interconnected individuals, communities and organisations freely through messages, pictures and even videos facilitated by technological capabilities and mobility (Tuten 2020:4; Wang & Hyun 2017:15, Carson 2010:01). Hutter *et al.* (2013:342), highlighted that social media growth is transforming the way communication is done, and considerably influencing marketing related correspondence, public relations as well as modern day business communication.

Advertising and marketing communications, as indicated by Lavidge and Steiner's (1961:61) HOE framework, has a significant impact on the awareness, knowledge (cognitive), liking, and preference (affective) stages. The greater the likeness and preference on a brand, the higher the chance that consumers are exposed to positive social media interaction. Social media interaction, or electronic word-of-mouth, is considered a behaviour that triggers attitudes under the HOE model (Hutter *et al.* 2013:345). Social media interaction and electronic word-of-mouth influences a consumer's attitude towards brand offering in the purchase decision process (Hamouda & Tabbane 2013:20). The momentum of word-of-mouth was characteristically slow, but with social media revolution, billions of consumers are being reached with information at much more speed compared to the traditional form of communication (Russ 2010:10).

The fundamental reason for organisations to participate in social media is the mere aspect of communication. Given that awareness and knowledge constitute the initial stage of HOE, it is reflective that positive social media interaction increases the chances of brand exposure. The stronger the online community a company has, the greater is the likelihood for consumers to associate themselves with the brand. Social media interactions are perceived to pose a positive impact on brand awareness due to the notion that thousands of consumers are participating in social media. In this regard, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between social media and brand awareness

1.3.2 Brand awareness

Brand awareness is explained as the consumer's ability to recall the brand from the top of their memory when given a product category as well as the ability to recognise the brand based on prior exposure (Keller 2013:73; Shahid, Hussain & aZafar 2017:36). Brand awareness does not refer only to customers knowing the brand name and their confirmation that they have seen it probably more than once, but also encompasses the customer's ability to link the brand, its name, symbol or logo to certain associations in their minds (Almeida 2011:26; Hoeffler & Keller 2002:79; Altaf, Iqbal, Mokhtar & Sial 2017:221). Almeida (2011:24) and Chierici *et al.* (2019:217) posit that the ultimate power of brands resides in the thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences rooted in consumers' minds as they exert influence on consumer decision-making.

Consumer decision-making brand awareness will affect consumer choices in the consideration set as it influences perceived quality (Azzari & Pelissari 2020:673). A study done by Hoyer and Brown (1990:143) on consumer choice points out that due to the prior exposure and the concept of perceived quality, a considerable number of consumers select a lesser objective quality brand or product from a mixed pool of known and unknown brands. This is attributed to positive perceptions that the consumer has against the chosen brand, which might be as a result of higher brand awareness against the brand that has better technical quality. In a shopping environment, consumers are often exposed to different products and brands of which some are extensively advertised and well known, but some are generic products. Consumers have a habit of expecting widely advertised brands to offer products of higher quality compared to generic products that are unknown (Chow, Ling, Yen, Hwang 2017:73). Positive consumer brand interaction under social media with their peers and brand owners has an effect on brand positioning as well as how the consumer will perceive the quality of that brand. Clark *et al.* (2009:208) further denote that brand awareness and exposure affect consumer's quality perception and, hence, the researcher hypothesises that:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between brand awareness and perceived quality

To stay ahead of competition, organisations invest in getting their brands in the minds of customers so as to aid their recall and also to stay in touch with their clients leading to brand affiliation. Therefore, brand awareness is the initial stage in achieving brand loyalty, or brand equity (Chow *et al.* 2017:73). Brand loyalty is the fundamental result of brand equity and its foundations are rooted in brand awareness (Subhani & Osman 2009:2). Loyalty cannot be achieved without consumers knowing and trusting the brand. This implies that without brand awareness there is no brand. Since consumers are more inclined to buy what they have heard about and consider to be

of better value. Alkhawaldeh *et al.* (2017:39), reiterated that the level of brand loyalty increases when customers are aware of the brand. Organisations stay in touch with global clients on social media as they interact with them constantly, thereby creating an online community (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010:66). Successful social media campaigns positively affect brand awareness, brand loyalty and purchase intention; hence, the following hypotheses were drawn:

H₃: There is a positive relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty

The rising of consumer consciousness has influenced consumers to acquire known and preferred brands with which they frequently interact. It is the duty of every marketing team to ensure that every brand has adequate brand awareness (both recall and recognition), positive perceived quality and command brand loyalty in order to survive against competition. Building a strong brand that sticks in the mind of consumers is crucial in a competitive environment as this is enough to create a brand recall and fuel purchase decision (Khurram *et al.* 2018:220). MacDonald and Sharp, (2000:5) and Alexandra and Cerchia (2018:424) highlighted that the root of purchase intention is brand awareness in that unfamiliar brands will not be considered as a brand of choice compared to well-known brands. Well-positioned brands, as well as widely advertised brands, will dwell in the mind of customers and become the first to be remembered when a need arises, hence influencing the purchase decisions (Chi *et al.* 2009:135; Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:423). The higher the brand awareness in terms of brand depth, the more likely it is for the consumer to develop intent to purchase; hence, in this study it was hypothesised that:

H₄: There is a positive relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention

1.3.3 Perceived quality

The powerful element in consumer buying behaviour is what consumers think and perceive about a brand; thus, how important perceived quality is to organisations (Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:424; Stojanov 2012:5; Chen 2008:24). Understanding the fullness of perceived quality (consumer based) is critical for every organisation if they are to create a strong brand that is memorable in the mind of consumers, given that perceived quality is subjective to consumer perception. Ahn, Park and Hyun (2018: 24) argued that the level of perceived quality is highly proportional, or influenced by the amount of experience and interactivity that a consumer has with a product or service.

Perceived quality is widely regarded as a post-consumption construct (Holbrook & Corfman 1985:35; Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:424), thus product quality can only be evaluated after consumption. However, Rust and Oliver (cited by Tsiotso 2005:2); and Vazifehdoost and Negahdari (2018:47) regard perceived quality as a pre-and post-purchase construct, by arguing

that the actual product consumption is not the only way used to assess product or service quality. This implies that consumers do not necessarily need to consume a product so as to evaluate its quality, but mere association with the product through social media as friends share their experience with the product is also sufficient for them to pass judgement on product or brand quality. Perceived quality is also regarded as a consumer's judgment or perception of quality of a particular brand relative to other brands (Owino, Cherotich, Karuri, Gitonga, Kimuya & Kaumbulu 2016:3; Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:424).

Ratama (2013:2) posit that the pillar of any business is that highly perceived quality results in purchase intention, repeated purchases, as well as brand loyalty. Yen *et al.* (2018:725) put forward that perceived quality is a significant influencer of brand loyalty. Despite the type of interaction that comes between perceived quality and purchase intentions, one thing that is clear is that there is a supposed relationship between the two; hence, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₅: There is a positive relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty

1.3.4 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is one of the key indicators of brand equity and is linked to future business profitability based on the notion that brand loyalty translates into future sales increase (Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:423). Brand loyalty serves as an indication of how consumers are well attached and inclined to the brand of choice, expressed through brand repurchasing regardless of competition (Malik, Ghafoor & Iqbal 2013:168). It measures the likelihood or the intention of consumers to switch to a different brand in case of any notable changes in price, product features (Aaker 1991:39) or persuasive marketing communication that might affect the consumer decision-making process, (Ying 2010:37). In modern day business, organisations need more than just one-time customers, but rather loyal customers to have a sustainable edge against competition. Most marketplaces are flooded with undifferentiated products and services such that the price is almost the same, making it very easy for brand switching (Malik, Ghafoor & Iqbal 2013:167). In a marketplace where product differentiation is minimal, organisations should create a contact point with consumers that make them part of the family in a quest to build brand loyalty.

As cited by Schoenbachler, Gordon and Aurand (2004:488); and Tabish, Hussain and Afshan (2017:152), brand loyalty is not about consumers' frequent repurchase behaviour only but by rather possessing a deep psychological and emotional attachment to the brand that is not swayed easily by price variances or persuasive marketing offerings. Brand loyalty is a testament of how consumers are attached and inclined to a brand of choice which manifests through brand repurchasing, regardless of competition (Malik *et al.* 2013:168; Tabish *et al.*, 2017:152).

Rizwan, Khan, Ghafoor, Ahmad, Humayon and Aslam (2018:349) contend that brand loyalty, in its simplicity, is the goodwill of a brand in customers' minds, or a registered preference of a brand by customers, or rather a confirmation of repeat purchase behaviour by customers in future. Tariq, Nawaz, Nawaz and Butt (2013:344) affirm that brand loyalty exerts a direct influence on purchase intention, which leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H7: There is a positive relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention

1.3.5 Purchase intention

Purchase intention evolves from a behavioural science term intention which is a subjective probability that a person performs a particular action (Kian, Boon, Fong & Ai 2017:209). On the other hand, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975:216) postulate that purchase intention is a state of being which emanates from consumer attitudes towards a given object. The authors further outline that attitude refers to "a person's location on a bipolar evaluative or affective dimension with respect to some object, action or event." In other words, an attitude is an individual's general feelings in relation to a stimuli or object, be it positive or negative. Mamman, Ogunbado and Abu-Bakr (2016:51) posit that intention as how much an individual is motivated and prepared to try and see how many determinants, they can use to perform a particular behaviour. Consumers' buying behaviour reactions are key to identifying or predicting which brand they can purchase in future and those reactions are regarded as purchase intention (Shah *et al.* 2012:107). Purchase intention is interlinked to a consumer's behaviour, perceptions and attitudes (Noorlitaria *et al.* 2020:104).

A consumer's buying behaviour reactions are important in identifying or predicting which brand one can purchase in future, which reactions are regarded as purchase intention (Shah, Aziz, Jaffari, Waris, Ejaz, Fatima & Sherazi 2012:107). Before purchasing any product, consumers are faced with a wide selection of products or brands to choose from. It is worth noting that an unknown brand offered to consumers does not enter a purchase consideration set; a brand perceived to be inferior is eliminated from the consideration set from the onset. The last part of the affective stage on the HOE model reflects on how consumers develop an intention to purchase a brand after they receive and process information pertaining to a brand (Lavidge & Steiner 1961:61). Marketers fuel consumers to develop brand preference through their perceived quality of the product or service and persuade them towards purchase intention. This led to the formation of the following hypothesis:

H6: There is a positive relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention

1.4 OBJECTIVES

1.4.1 Primary objectives

The primary objective of this study was to examine the influence of social media on brand awareness and the relationships between brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention of smartphones among university students.

1.4.2 Theoretical objectives

In order to answer the study's primary objective, the following theoretical objectives were developed:

- to review literature on the hierarchy of effects model, theory of planned behaviour and theory of reasoned action;
- to conduct a literature study on social media;
- to review the literature on the effect of social media on brand awareness and purchase intention;
- to evaluate the literature on the role of social media on consumer purchase decision process; and
- to conduct a literature review on variables such as brand awareness, brand loyalty, social media, perceived quality in consumer purchase decision process and the effect of these variables on purchase intention.

1.4.3 Empirical objectives

In a way to reinforce both primary and theoretical objectives, the following empirical objectives were crafted:

- to examine the relationship between social media and brand awareness;
- to determine the influence of brand awareness on perceived quality under social media;
- to investigate the impact of brand awareness on brand loyalty;
- to examine the influence of brand awareness on purchase intention;
- to investigate the influence of perceived quality on brand loyalty;
- to examine the influence of perceived quality on purchase intention; and

- to investigate the influence of brand loyalty on purchase intention.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A research design is a blueprint that details techniques and procedures for gathering and analysing required data for the research project (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin 2009:66; Leavy 2017:8). Following a quantitative research design, two methods of research were undertaken, namely, a literature review and an empirical study that follows a quantitative research design.

1.5.1 Literature review

The review of the literature was done to assess the influence of social media and its effect on brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention. The study utilised various sources of data such as secondary data like books, academic accredited research journals, electronic databases, as well as the internet.

1.5.2 Empirical Study

The empirical study followed a quantitative approach in gathering and analysing data. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:8) and Leavy (2017:8) describe quantitative research as a method that focuses on evaluation and analysing cause and effect relationships of variables from numerical data, which was the aim of this study.

1.5.3 Target population

Greener (2008:48; Rahi 2017:3) defines population as the entire universe of individuals or elements from which a sample is to be extracted. Target population is a unified cluster of respondents that match a selection criterion consisting of units of analysis to which the researcher made inferences in this particular study (Polit & Hungler 1999:37; Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie 2017:1612). The population group of this study consists of full-time registered VUT students at the Vanderbijlpark campus.

1.5.4 Sampling frame and sampling technique

The sampling frame can be thought of as the realistic version of the study population, which the researcher can identify and access (Gallardo, Davis & Lachlan 2012:162; Rahi 2017:3). It is the total population from which the sample size is extracted. This study's sampling frame comprises both male and female VUT students at the Vanderbijlpark campus who are familiar with smartphones. To select the respondents, this study used a non-probability convenience sampling

design. The major element in identifying the respondents was to adhere to the eligibility criteria, which in this research was the consumers who are familiar with social media and smartphones.

1.5.5 Sample size

A sub-group of respondents selected from total population or sample frame to represent the entire population is regarded as sample size (Kadam & Bhalerao 2010:55; Majid 2018:5). It is the representative portion, part or subset of the population that is selected for the study. Due to the rise of social media in business circles, certain studies were done to focus on the purchase intention on different industries on different variables, mainly emanating from the impact of social media interactions among consumers. Hence, the sample size was based on previous research studies (historical approach). Studies undertaken by Chi *et al.* (2009:139); Homouda and Tabbane (2013:20); Hutter *et al.* (2013:346); Rehmani *et al.* (2011:101) and Benson and Hedren (2013:26) were considered in arriving at the size of the sample. All these studies used sample sizes ranging from 200 to 600, hence the sample size adopted for this study (n= 320) was deemed adequate for the study's purposes.

1.5.6 Measuring instrument and data collection

The research instrument used in this research was a structured questionnaire. It was designed relevant to the problem statement, related research objectives and hypotheses. A survey method was used for data collection. A well-structured questionnaire was developed and used, which was useful in extracting more information from respondents while being cost effective and easy to administer. The questionnaire was self-administered to attain relevant data from the respondents.

1.5.7 Data analysis

Once data is collected, the duty of the researcher is to make sense out of them. In order to achieve this aim, the researcher organised and coded data so that it could be analysed. In describing and presenting data gathered from the research study, descriptive statistics was done on Section A of the questionnaire, which focuses on the demographics of the respondents. In order to make inferences of data obtained, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 was used for testing and confirming relationships among hypothesised variables. In addition, to specify and estimate relationships between variables, non-parametric Spearman correlation coefficients were undertaken.

1.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

If a testing instrument consistently provides similar results on the same variables over time, then the measuring device is to be regarded as reliable or dependable (Kimberlin & Winterstein 2008:2277; Haradhan 2017:10). Reliability is focused mainly on the notion that results do not vary over time. The assessment of internal consistency reliability estimates in this study was done using Cronbach's coefficient alpha, which measures the severity of internal uniformity amongst constructs. The coefficient varies from zero to one, but in this research the acceptable reliability estimate was pegged at 0.70, based on the notion that any coefficient value which is less or equal to 0.6 indicates a poor degree of consistency (Wells & Wollack 2003:05).

Validity is defined as the magnitude in which a yardstick brings forth the results only of what it is supposed to measure without error. An instrument is relevant if it tests only that which it is intended to test (Welman *et al.* 2005:142; Haradhan 2017:10). The study observed content validity, construct validity and predictive validity. Content validity as opined by Mohajan (2017:15) is described as the extent to which the questions on measuring instrument and their scores represent all possible questions that could be asked about the content, thus the extent to which an instrument covers the construct of interest. Also, the study addressed construct validity, given that it demonstrates relationships between the concepts under study and the construct or theory that is relevant to them (Roberts, Priest & Traynor 2006:43). To ensure that construct validity was adhered to, discriminant and convergent validity was done. Convergent validity was observed through correlation analysis, whereas discriminant validity was done through inter-construct correlation matrix. McDaniel and Gates (2012:290), explained predictive validity as "the extent to which a future level of a criterion variable can be predicted by a current measurement on a scale". Predictive validity, as one of the components of criterion validity, was observed by assessing through regression analysis.

1.7 CHAPTER CLASSIFICATION

Chapter 1: Introduction and problem statement

Chapter One covered the background and overview of the study, focusing on the social media evolution in the business world and how organisations are adapting to this phenomenon. It also took note of the problem statement, research objectives, significance of the study, research methodology and data analysis.

Chapter 2: Literature review- social media, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention

This chapter focused in detail on the major elements of the study, *inter alia* social media, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intentions. In addition, it reviewed literature on the Hierarchy of Effects model of advertising, theory of reasoned action as well as theory of planned behaviour. The concepts of brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and purchase intention were all explored in detail. The chapter focused on addressing the theoretical objectives of the study as the researcher examined the effect of social media interaction (user interaction) on brand awareness, effect of brand awareness on perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention

Chapter 3: Research methodology

In this chapter, a clear set of procedures was outlined ranging from the research design, target population and sampling techniques, as well as data collection instruments. It also addressed the issue of data preparation and analysis techniques used as well as the concept of reliability and validity in this study.

Chapter 4: Analysis and interpretation of findings

After the data had been gathered using different data collection instruments, Chapter Four focused on data preparation, data coding, data cleaning and data analysis of results, using different available statistical models, as well as reasonable arguments based on the relevant literature.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and conclusions

This chapter provided the final review of the entire study. After the analysis of data, conclusions were drawn and recommendations were brought forward as the research attempts to address the research objectives. Limitations and implications for further research were discussed while areas for further research were presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter provided a detailed background for this study, the problem statement, research model, primary, theoretical and empirical objectives, research hypothesis and research methodology and design. Issues relating to data analysis procedure, reliability, validity and ethical considerations were addressed briefly.

This chapter provides an overview of social media, focusing on how social media has changed the communication sphere between organisations and their customers. Chapter Two provides a detailed discussion on the underlying theories significant to this study and addresses theoretically the study constructs under investigation (social media, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention). The chapter also discusses the state of social media and smartphone usage in South Africa, social media marketing and consumer behaviour decision making process.

2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA: AN OVERVIEW

Social media is increasingly becoming a part of many individuals' and organisations' daily lives as they engage and participate in information creation and dissemination. Investigating the impact of this phenomenon in the South African context is imperative, given that organisational issues and brands are being discussed daily by social media users. The communication landscape has been transformed, as social media becomes a platform that allows broadcasting of information around the globe in an instant, as well as gaining unmediated consumer insights as fast as possible (Hudson, Huang, Roth & Madden 2016:28). Social media is an instrumental means of communication collaboration, a conveyance amongst interconnected individuals, communities and organisations freely through messages, pictures and even videos facilitated by technological capabilities and mobility (Tuten 2020:4; Wang & Hyun 2017:15; Carson 2010:01). Hutter *et al.* (2013:342) highlighted that social media growth is transforming the way communication is done, and considerably influencing marketing related correspondence, public relations as well as modern day business communication.

Historically, organisations and media practitioners were in control of information available concerning themselves by carefully contacting press releases that portray a good image through public relations' practitioners (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010:60). The emergence of social media has

transformed this scenario as consumers cease to be passive recipients but rather the initiators of information flow amongst them (Stoychef, Liu, Wibowo & Nanni 2017:3). The era of bombarding customers with series of advertisements and promotions in mono-communication has gone past as clients are now equipped to discuss their experience with their preferred brands and products which might considerably impact other consumers's buying behaviour (Tuten 2020:12). In this era, it is not a question of whether or not organisations should join social media communities, but a question of what impact this phenomenon brings to organisations' corporate objectives. Even though there is no blueprint of encompassing social media in marketing strategy, numerous organisations were left with no choice but to avail themselves on social media platforms as their brands and products are already being discussed. Social media involves a genuine and natural interaction amongst individuals concerning a subject of mutual interest, a conversation based on experience and views of participants (Tuten 2020:12; Evans 2008:31). The sharing of thoughts and experiences among participants as they come to a collective point plays a pivotal role in making informed decisions (Sztrojiny 2011:4).

Online media has rooted itself in business, societal, economic, cultural, sporting and political environments as well as impacting individuals' communication dynamics and behaviour (Munsayac 2019:1; Basson, Makhasi & Van Vuuren 2009:1). These writers further propel that the digitalisation of personal and mass communication in South African environments has evolved and many individuals are embracing social media in their communication, with Twitter and Facebook being the widely used social networks. Internet access in South Africa has been increasing yearly with 38.19 million users as of January 2021, which is an increase from 36.54 million internet users in January 2020 (WeAreScoal 2021:17); and smartphones being the mostly used devices to access internet and social media, hence the growing demand of smartphones in South Africa (WeAreScoal 2021:26).

The internet world has evolved from being just a search engine for information to collaboration, interactivity and interoperability (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010:61). The global economy is becoming more digital and technologically aligned. The fascinating element about technology is what consumers are doing with technology rather than the attractiveness of it. Apart from internet being a source of information, social media/internet users are now creating information and consuming it (Wang & Hyun 2017:15; Campbell, Pitt, Parent & Berthon 2011:87). Szolnoki, Dolan, Forbes, Thach and Goodman (2018:109) purport that as the internet gained its strides, consumers began to possess control of the messages shared between them as they voice their experiences with products and brands, regardless of whether those brands respond or not. The consumers take

charge from blogs, forums and other interactive channels, exchanging information about brands, products and companies, be it ugly or nice. This consumer-to-consumer interaction, or rather social media interaction, has exerted a huge influence on their buying behaviour or choices as they trust their connection rather than carefully crafted marketing adverts (Ding *et al.* 2021:2; Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, & Krush 2016:172; Chaturvedi & Barbar 2014:108).

2.3 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

2.3.1 The theory of reasoned action (TRA)

One of the most influential and established models in predicting human behaviour is the TRA, which originated in the social-psychology discipline. It was developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), who postulate that human behaviour is determined by their behavioural intention, which in turn is influenced by the individual's attitude towards that particular behaviour and subjective norms. Behavioural intention under TRA is a function of two variables: attitude towards the behaviour and subjective norms, and both factors are best in predicting volitional behaviours (Velarde 2014:08) but it excludes impulsive, habitual and spontaneous buying (Hale, Householder & Greene 2002:259). An individual's state of readiness to perform a given behaviour is regarded as intention and it is the immediate precursor of behaviour. Intentions are a testament of how hard individuals are willing to perform a behaviour and the level of energy to be utilised in performing that behaviour. Usually, it is presumed that the greater the intention to perform a behaviour, the stronger is its performance.



Figure 2.1: Theory of Reasoned Action

Source: Hale, Householder and Greene (2002:261.)

In its rich context, the theory is, however, silent on behaviours that require special skills, unique opportunities, resources or those that require the cooperation of others to be performed, as shown in the figure below (Hale *et al.* 2002:260). Hence, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) came

as a reinforcement for TRA by addressing some limitations in the original model in dealing with peoples' behaviour over which they have incomplete volitional control.

TRA postulates that a particular behaviour is determined by peoples' explicit intentions and/ or plan, motivations to perform that behaviour, whereas the TPB implies that in a situation where there are constraints on action, intention alone is insufficient to predict a behaviour (Armitage & Conner 2001:472). A notable variance between TRA and TPB, as cited by Ajzen (1991:181), is the concept of perceived behaviour control, which has the ability to influence intention similar to attitude and normative constructs, but it goes further to influence behaviour directly, where behaviour is not in total control by an individual.

2.3.2 The theory of planned behaviour (TPB)

The precursor of TPB was more useful when outlining certain behaviours that were under volitional control but it falls short in describing behaviours where individuals have no volitional control (Godin & Kok 1996:82). TPB is more focused and centralised on an individual's intention to perform a certain behaviour based on the individual's attitude towards that behaviour, subjective behavioural norms as well as perceived behavioural control (Ajzen 1991:181). TPB is only focused on rational and volitional behaviours where individuals have some control over it. The theory is instrumental in predicting purchase behaviour and researchers have used it to explore relations between customers' attitudes and purchase intention (Dennis, Jayawardhena & Papamatthaiou 2010:412).

The TPB places more emphasis on the notion that behaviour of individuals is governed by personal attitudes together with social influence and some degree of control (Moss 2016:01). Khumrat (2012:44), asserts that in TPB, actual behaviour is not only determined by behavioural intention as TRA implies, but also with perceived behavioural control. In TPB, attitude towards behaviour and subjective norm are classified as the direct determinants of intention to perform a specific behaviour (Chauke 2014:18).

Perceived behavioural control (PBC) under TPB influences both intentions and actual behaviour. Subjective norm and attitude towards the behaviour are the other two antecedents of intention and subsequently behaviour. Subjective norm is explained as the individual's perception of social pressure to engage (or not to engage) in a particular behaviour (Keat 2009:18), whereas attitude towards the behaviour refers to the extent to which an individual has positive or negative feelings of a particular behaviour of interest (Promotosh & Sajedul 2011:18), which entails that the stronger the feeling of an attitude towards a product, the more the likelihood of the individual's intention

to perform the behaviour (Moss 2016:01). Without demeaning the impact of PBC on intention, Ajzen (1991:188) asserts that “the relative importance of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control in the prediction of intention is expected to vary across behaviours and situations”. This relates to scenarios where attitudes and normative influence exert more influence, PBC will be of less significant in predicting intentions (Armitage & Conner 2001:472), though not necessarily so, as Ajzen (1991:189) further reasoned that in certain situations, attitudes alone may have a significant impact on intention, or that all the constructs may have independent contributions in influencing intention, as indicated on the figure below.

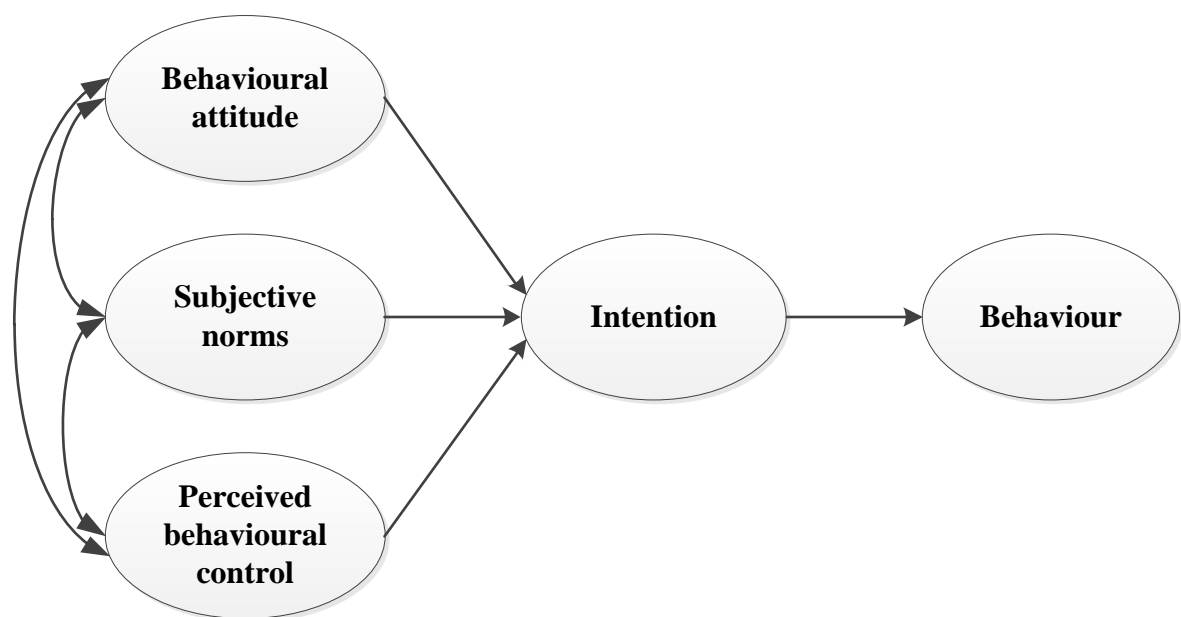


Figure 2.2: Theory of Planned Behaviour

Source: Ajzen (1991:182).

As per TPB and TRA, behaviour is determined by peoples’ explicit intentions and/or planned motivations to perform that behaviour, an intention to buy a particular smartphone brand is determined by the intention to own a smartphone. The intentions of individuals are indicators of their personal attitudes towards that particular behaviour as it reflects the perception that it is more valuable or not to own a specific smartphone brand than the other.

Environment, social pressure and/ or families (subjective norms in TPB) exert influence over an individual to engage in a particular behaviour or not. The more significant individuals exert positive opinions or views towards a particular behaviour or smartphone brand, the more the intention to acquire that brand. The perceived relevance as well as importance of individuals, colleges, family members or friends have, the more the effect on the extent to which their approval

will subsequently shape intentions. The relevance of friends and families varies across contexts such as a household unit, school or workplace.

Perceived behavioural control is regarded as an individual's perception on his or her ability to perform a particular behaviour, which impinges on their intentions and subsequent behaviour. PBC elects the existence of variables that may impede or facilitate the performance of a given behaviour. The extent to which an individual's intentions to perform a certain behaviour is hinged on the resources available and control one has over the behaviour. As shown in the figure above on TPB, perceived behavioural control has a dual effect by directly influencing behavioural intention, together with subjective norms and attitude towards influencing the actual behaviour along with intention.

2.3.3 Hierarchy of Effects Model (HOE) of Advertising

Consumer behaviour is a complex process which can be influenced by a carefully designed and effective communication process. Several models have been developed over the years to clarify communication process so as to impact consumer decision-making, most notable of them being the Hierarchy of Effects Model (HOE) of advertising (Gnanapragash & Sekar 2013:49). The concept of HOE depicted in Figure 2.3 emerged in the academic world over a century ago, the most widely known being the Attention Interest Desire Action model (AIDA) (Hutter *et al.* 2013:344). Lavidge and Steiner (1961:59) developed a model for predictive measurement which includes seven phases, namely, awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and purchase that is often applied in an academic sphere. The work of Lavidge and Steiner (1961:61) brought in three elements in the hierarchical models, which are “cognition”, “affect”, and “conation,” whereby cognition refers to mental states, affect relates to emotional states and conation relates to behavioural states (Cong Li 2007:83). Advertising, as highlighted by Barry and Howard (1990: 99), is a long-term investment that is designed to move its recipients through different stages, starting from a point of product unawareness and moving ultimately to actual purchase.

Over the years, researchers have used the HOE model in trying to explain the role of advertising in the consumer decision-making process, but recently the model has been used in relation to all marketing communication to consumers, based on the notion that any marketing related message is expected to trigger action in consumers. More recently, some study used the concept of HOE to explain the impact of user interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention. Lavidge and Steiner (1961:59) posit that in the advertising world, if something is to happen in the long run it means something should happen in the short run, which will trigger action in the long

run. Cong Li (2007:83) explains that consumers do not just switch from a state of dislike to a zone of making a purchase instantly, but rather they go through various stages until a purchase decision is reached. A consumer decision-making process has various steps involved. Similar to it is the “hierarchy of effects” (HOE) model in communication and advertising, which focus on the mental stages that consumers go through in making purchase decisions (Hutter *et al.* 2013:343).

Hierarchy of effects models describe various steps that consumers undergo while forming or changing brand attitudes as well as purchase intentions (Smith, Chen & Yang 2008:50). Barry and Howard, (1990:98), highlighted that hierarchy of effects refers to an order in which individuals perceive, process, and use advertising and other marketing communication information: first cognitively (thinking), second affectively (feeling), and third conatively (do). This implies that initially consumers are unaware of anything hence they first attain awareness and knowledge about a brand. Based on information attained, consumers will then develop positive or negative feelings towards the brand in question and subsequently react by either consuming or rejecting and avoiding the product.

In Hierarchy of Effect models of communication and advertising, it is posited that all marketing related communication has multiple tasks, as indicated below (Weilbacher 2001:19):

- If the brand is completely new to the consumer, all communication including social media interaction will initially cause brand awareness.
- If the consumer knows the brand but has very little knowledge about it, marketing communication should inform and enlighten consumers so as to arouse interest.
- With a consumer’s interest getting high, marketing communication should convey the brand’s physical and ephemeral characteristics so as to let the consumer appreciate the brand fully.
- In the event that the consumer is fully aware and understands how the brand might perform, marketing communication should strive to convince consumers that the brand is worth purchasing ahead of its competition.
- When consumers are positively interested, they act by purchasing a particular brand, or by getting mentally ready to consume and use the brand.

Lavidge and Steiner’s 1961 model has eight stages, namely. unawareness, awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, purchase and loyalty. In this modelled process, the consumer is unaware of the brand, hence the initial action is to be aware of the product, particularly from user generated information, be it from the organisation or peers within the social media or anywhere

else. The next stage is when consumers gain more knowledge about the brand offering through different communication forms. This all happens in the first phase of purchase decision process called the cognitive or thinking stage. Following this stage, the consumer decides in the affective stage if he/she likes the product or not, and builds preferences based on favourable or unfavourable attitudes towards the brand. Lastly in the affective stage the consumer develops a conviction of the usefulness of the purchase, hence an intention to purchase.

In terms of the modelled HOE framework, consumers initially are short on knowledge and less aware about the product, hence the initial aim is to increase brand awareness, which can be through social media interaction that comes from organisational communication, or consumer interactions. The next stage is when consumers gain more knowledge about the brand offering through different communication forms (Sinh 2013:93). This all happens in the first phase of the purchase decision process called cognitive or thinking stage. Information and knowledge acquired in the cognitive stage will influence consumer perceptions about the quality of the product or brand, positively or negatively, in the affective stage. Lastly, consumers are expected to develop confidence of the efficiency of the purchase, which is a purchase intention signal in the conative or behaviour stage of the HOE model.

This model implies that when consumers receive any information about the brand, they react based on the information attained, which makes them move up the model until a positive or negative intent to purchase is realised. From the model it's clear that brand awareness is key to any consumer so as to develop any interest or not as they take a step closer to developing purchase intention. This might come through word-of-mouth, advertising or any other marketing communication tool, based on different interactions about the brand offering. As consumers become aware of the brand, they react either way, based on information consumed, which may trigger brand preference and likeness, which mostly comes due to familiarity or peer influence. In social media, most of the brand interactions happen there and brand credibility will be developed or worsened, hence the significance of electronic word-of-mouth.

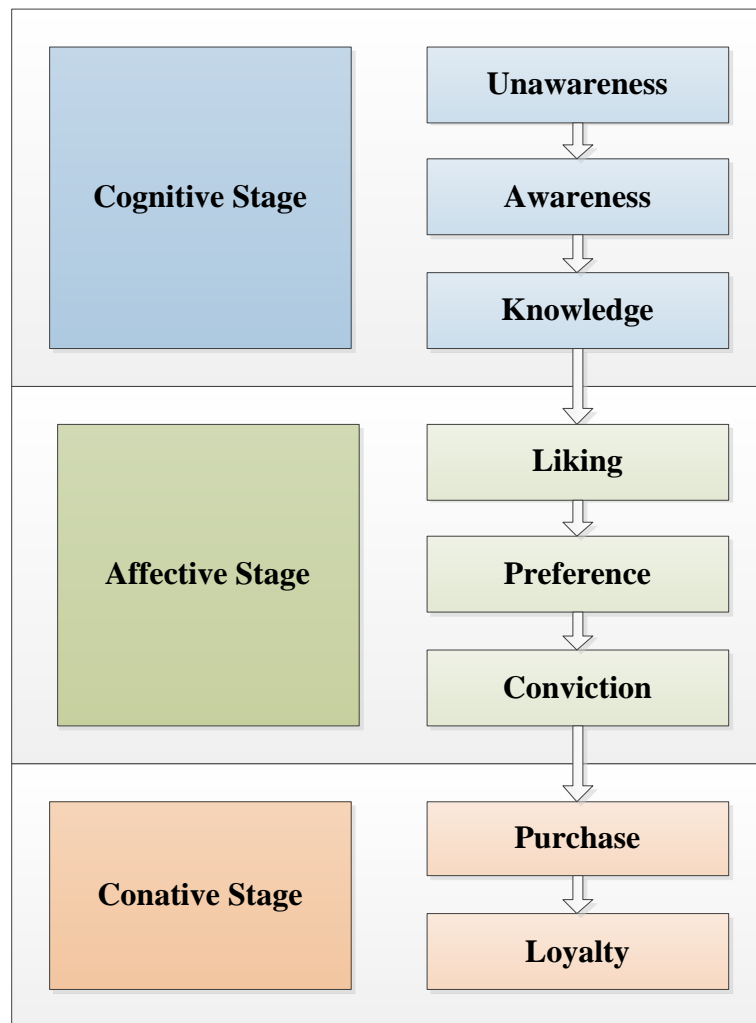


Figure 2.3: Hierarchy of effects (HOE) Model

Source: Hutter *et al.* (2013:344).

2.4 SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINED

Agichtein, Castillo, Donato, Gionis and Mishne (2008:01) simplified social media as media for social converging, which include elements as blogs, video sharing communities, web forums as well as social network sites like Twitter, Google+ LinkedIn, and Facebook. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:61) defined social media as “a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content”. In support of Kaplan and Haenlein’s (2010: 61) definition, Kian, Boon, Fong and Ai (2017:215) defined social media as a group of internet-based applications that enables its user to to create, generate, exchange and consume content. Traditionally, content and information on internet was being created, uploaded and used by technologically skilled professionals, but with the rise of social media, every willing user of internet can create, upload and share information with various participants using a number of devices (Apuke 2016:83; DesAutels 2011:186).

Ahlqvist, Back, Heinonen and Halonen (2008:13) identified three elements that define social media, which are Content, Community and Web 2.0, which are also supported by Stoycheff, Liu, Wibowo and Nanni (2017:2), who explained social media as deinstitutionalised online platforms which depend primarily on user-generated content in a dynamic two-way communication channel enhanced by Web 2.0. These aspects highlighted that, brands and consumer can form online communities in which they converse, interact, engage, share information in various forms, both web-based and on mobile technologies found on Web 2.0. Tuten (2020:4) purports that social media are online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration amongst interconnected individuals, communities and organisations freely through messages, pictures and even videos facilitated by technological capabilities and mobility.

Social media in its embryonic stage was all about social connection with friends and family but is fast becoming a fortress where users connect and educate themselves about their favourite organisations and brands they sell (Taprial & Kanwar 2012:29; Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranayayanan 2012:1757 & Coelhoa, Ritaa, Santos 2018:101). Online communities are becoming consumers' second families, and family is all about trust. Organisations are taking advantage of these social network sites to reach consumers as they present a new shopping and communication experience. The rise of powerful search engines, advanced mobile devices and interfaces, peer-to-peer communication vehicles, and online social networks have extended marketers' ability to reach shoppers through new touch-points (Shankar, Venkatesh, Inman, Mantralla, Kelly & Rizley 2011:30).

Social media presents a platform that allows individuals to freely connect to other individuals across the world on internet, with consumers becoming co-creators of information in a way that traditional media never did (Taprial & Kanwar 2012:06; Langer 2014:03; Wang & Hyun 2017:15). Traditional media characteristically reached out to clients but under social media everyone reaches everyone as and when they feel, and everything is open for discussion. It is a way of feeling connected to a world where work, news and clutter is easily accessible. Social media is a platform for individuals to selectively connect on an emotional level. Individuals are inherently social in nature (Isba, Woolf & Hanneman 2017:82) and it was just a matter of time for a communication platform to emerge and fulfil such a need. The most basic reason that consumers have adopted social media stems from their innate desire to connect with other people as they seek social support and friendship (Perdue 2010:13; Warner-Søderholm, Bertsch, Sawe, Lee, Wolfe, Meyer, Engel & Fatilua 2018:304).

Therefore, businesses must grasp the concept that people enjoy using social media mainly because they succeed in fulfilling their innate desire to connect with other people.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are dynamic tools that facilitate online relationships (Golden 2011:27). It is a relatively low-cost form of marketing and allows organisations to engage in direct and end-user contact (Bilgin 2018:129; Kaplan & Haenlein 2010:62). This social engagement by consumers has significant impact on marketing activities as marketers need to be aware of the factors which affect a consumer's purchase decision (Kian *et al.* 2017:209; Court, Elzinga, Mulder & Vetvik 2009:07).

2.4.1 Social media state in South Africa

The digital landscape of South Africa is quite phenomenal as it shows some fascinating and crucial statistics that is pivotal to modern businesses. Social media usage in South Africa has increased over the years with 22 million active social media users, which is 3.1 million more than 2019 users as reported by We Are Social (2020:18). The research done by World Wide Worx and Ornico (2019), indicates that Facebook has continued to grow exponentially in South Africa with 21 million users in January 2019. Below are social media statistics as of January 2019 in tabular form.

Table 2.1: South Africa Social media statistics 2019

Social Network	Users
Facebook	21.0 million
YouTube	9.0 million
Twitter	8.3 million
LinkedIn	6.8 million
Instagram	6.6 million

Source: World Wide Worx & Ornico (2019:02).

The critical aspect of the research published by World Wide Worx and Ornico reflects that of the 21 million Facebook users, 19 million access the network via mobile networks and the smartphone is the most used type of phone amongst Facebook users. In as much as Facebook has gained momentum, Instagram has recorded the biggest growth of 73%, from 3.8 million users to 6.6 million users. The third largest social media platform of 2019 is Twitter, which recorded 8.3 million users. The social network sites in South Africa are dominated by Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn and they are dubbed the Big Five of social networks in South Africa.

We Are Social and Hootsuite (see Figure 2.4), an international company that collects already existing data and aggregates it as they produce a report on mobile, internet and social media trends for the previous year from around the world, published a separate report which reflects that the total population of South Africa is around 59.67 million and 38.19 million of those are active internet users, while 25 million are active social media users (We Are Social & Hootsuite 2021:17).

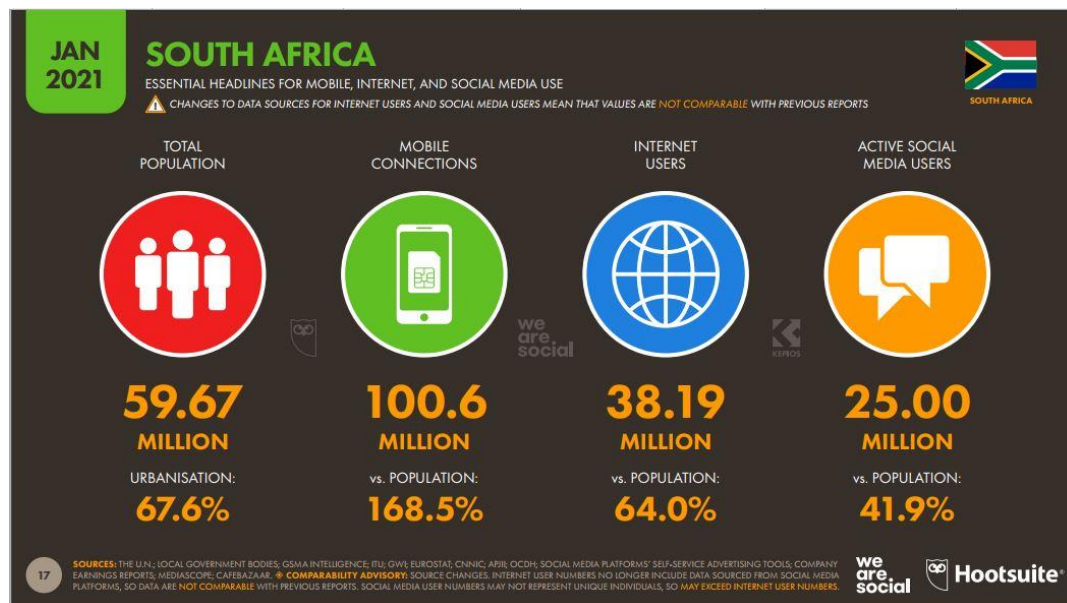


Figure 2.4: South Africa's Digital Landscape 2021

Source: We Are Social and Hootsuite (2021:17).

The report published by We Are Social and Hootsuite (2021:24) points out that the majority of South Africans (64%) are internet users and that the average time each user spends on internet per day is a staggering 10h 06m, while 3h 10m is the average time spent on social media on a daily basis.

The most active or used social media platform in South Africa, including instant messaging application as of January 2021, is WhatsApp followed by YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Facebook Messenger, Twitter with the last being Badoo (We Are Social & Hootsuite 2021:47). The notable inclusion is TikTok with the usage of 37.5% in less than two years. The figures are indicated in Figure 2.5 below:

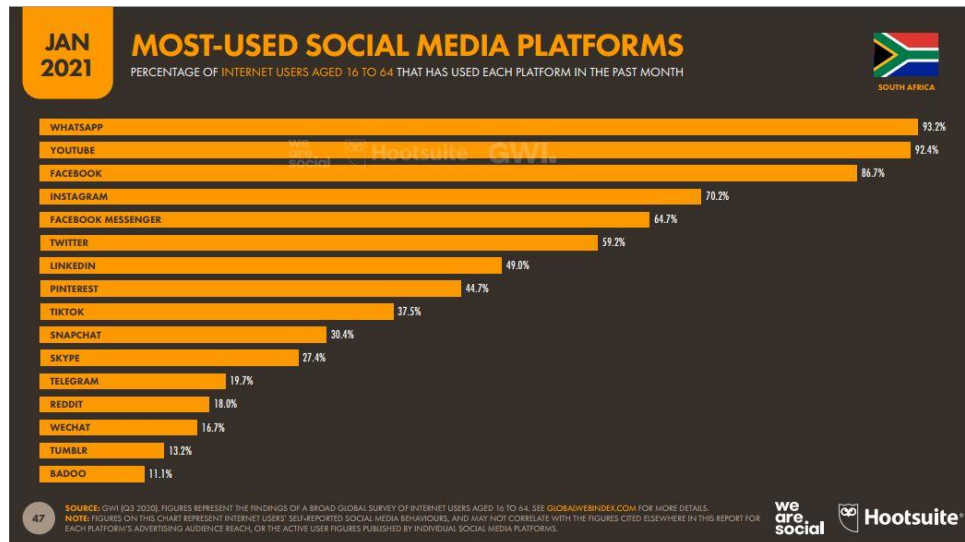


Figure 2.5: South Africa’s top active social media platforms 2021

Source: We Are Social and Hootsuite (2021:47).

In relation to what South Africans are using when accessing internet or rather social media applications, it is interesting to note that mobile phones have changed the face of communication and media consumption in South Africa. Of the 25 million social media users, 24.63 million of those users are accessing social media accounts using their mobile phones (We Are Social & Hootsuite 2021:44). This is phenomenal in relation to the mobile industry, which indicates a potential increase in the demand for smartphones. Figure 2.6 below shows the breakdown in social media use in South Africa.

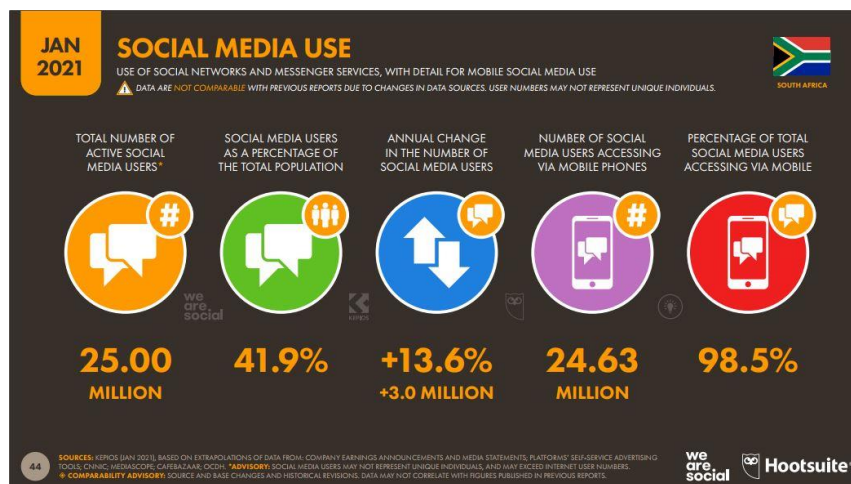


Figure 2.6: South Africa’s Social Media use 2021

Source: We Are Social and Hootsuite (2021:44).

Since the evolution of social media, its adoption and use have been growing year by year with various platforms witnessing billions of subscribers around the world, and millions within South Africa.

2.4.2 Smartphones in South Africa

Globally, the mobile industry continues to grow enormously with 5.1 billion unique mobile subscribers recorded at the end of 2018 (GSMA Intelligence 2019:4). As highlighted by GSMA Intelligence (2019:4), a total of 1 billion subscribers were added since 2013 and they forecast that in seven years' time, 710 million will subscribe to mobile services with 25% of that coming from Sub-Saharan Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa as of 2018, 456 million unique mobile subscribers were recorded, which is an increase of 20 million over the previous year. It is reported that close to 239 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa (23% of the population), use mobile internet on a regular basis (GSMA Intelligence 2019:4). The mobile industry is witnessing a rapid and interesting technological migration as individuals around the world are switching from mere feature phones to smartphones, together with higher speed mobile broadband networks.

The South African mobile industry has also witnessed a significant increase in mobile subscribers over the years, with 100.6 million mobile subscriptions, which is way more than the population of South Africa currently (We Are Social 2021:17), indicating that there are users with multiple mobile subscriptions. As reported by We Are Social (2021:26), there are 36.13 million active mobile internet users in South Africa and 94.6% (34.18 million) are active mobile internet users, and 94.3% (34.07 million) of active internet users access the internet using smartphones, which is quite significant within South Africa's mobile industry. Their research further illustrates that the majority of South African mobile subscribers now own a smartphone compared to feature phones and most of these users are accessing the internet using their smartphones, as graphically illustrated on Figure 2.7 below.

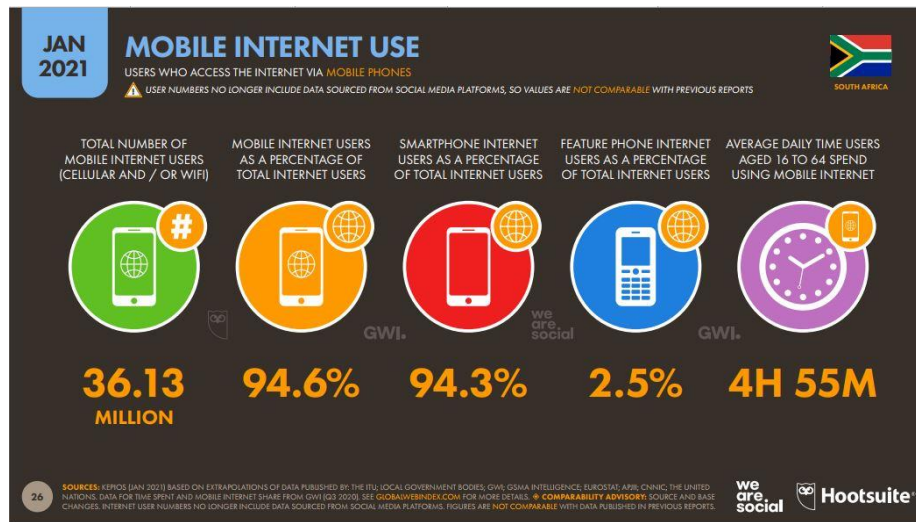


Figure 2.7: Mobile Internet use in South Africa 2021

Source: We Are Social and Hootsuite (2021:26),

According to a report published by Counterpoint Research (2019) on smartphones (Figure 2.8), Samsung has the highest market share of 32 %, followed by Mobicel with 16% as well as Huawei with 15%. Ever since Samsung took away market leadership in the smartphone category from Blackberry a decade ago, it has maintained its market leadership even though the market share has been decreasing. In 2014, its market share was 39.4%, in 2017 it was on 33%, and now it has dropped to 32%. (<https://www.counterpointresearch.com/south-africa-local-smartphone-brands-grew-33-yoy-2018/>).

South Africa Smartphone Market Share –2018		
South Africa Smartphone Shipment Market Share (%)	2017	2018
SAMSUNG	33%	32%
MOBICEL	6%	16%
HUAWEI	9%	15%
HISENSE	8%	10%
APPLE	5%	5%
OTHERS	39%	22%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Source: Counterpoint Research Market Monitor

Figure 2.8: South Africa Smartphone Market Share 2018

Source: CounterPoint Research, (2018:1).

A report published by Qwerty titled Digital Statistics in South Africa 2017, indicated that social media is one of the top activities that smartphone users do when they access internet through their smartphones, apart from instant messaging (Qwerty 2017:9). This is supported by a report done by We Are Social and Hootsuite (2020:40), where 98% (21.5 million) of social media active users access social media using smartphone. This signifies that smart-phones are becoming more and more useful for internet subscribers as they can do a number of activities on the phone as well as access social media, as seen below in Figure 2.9.

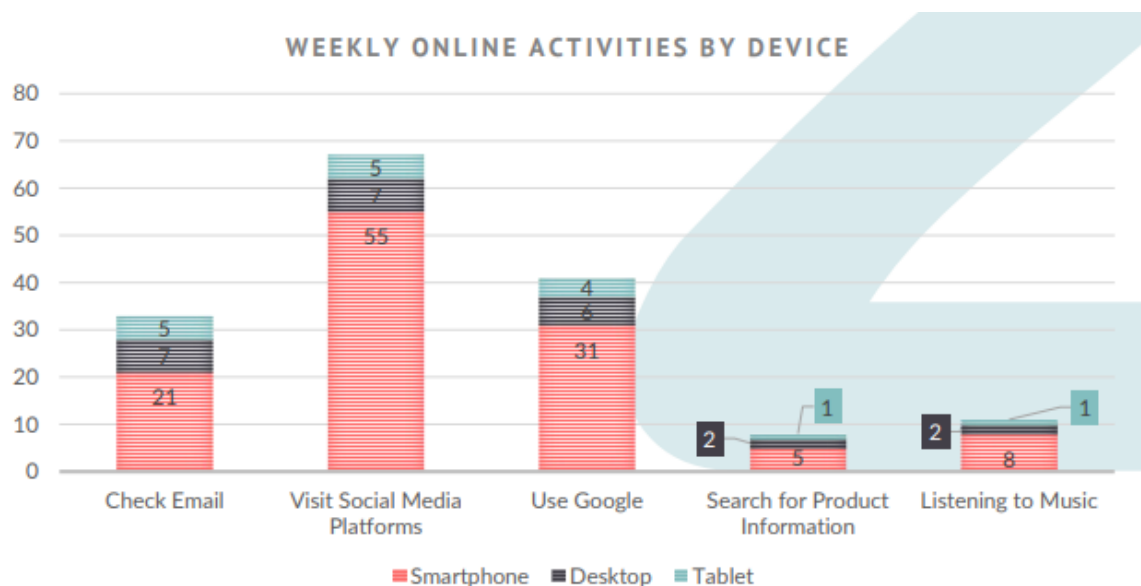


Figure 2.9: Types of activities performed with mobile phones 2017

Source: QWERTY (2017:9).

2.4.3 Social Media Marketing

Social media as it is, has given voice to consumers, which was not present in the traditional media sphere, thus making customers more powerful, sophisticated and difficult to influence, persuade and retain unless satisfied (Constantinides 2014:40; Agnihotri *et al.* 2016:172 & Wang & Kim 2017:15). Consumers are becoming more emotionally and personally attached to social media as they interact with friends and families in online communities (Powell 2009:17; Stephen 2016:17 Ziyadin, Doszhan, Borodin, Omarova & Ilyas 2019:2). Social media is useful in gaining consumer confidence by developing strong personal brand communities where they exchange valuable information about any subject matter. Neti (2011:4) highlighted that trust and goodwill is essential for influencing consumers in social media since they consult fellow members for issues that they are not clear about. The way social media has grown in terms of users as well as how information

is flocking has given birth to the concept of social media marketing, as business cannot afford to sit back without online presence (Lakshmi, Mahboob & Choudhary 2017:64).

Social media marketing is a new business philosophy that allows organisations to reach out to targeted clients across different cultures and geographical locations (Imtiaz, Kazmi, Amjad & Aziz 2019:1094). Social media marketing is all about the use of social networks to promote brands and products by focusing on establishing strong online communities (Yadav & Rahman 2017:1296; Erdogmus & Cicek 2012:1355). The authors further affirm that relationship marketing is the key principle under social media marketing, hence marketers focus on making connections with consumers rather than seeking transactional business (Balaji 2019:5640). Social media marketing is not a paradigm shift but serves as a reinforcement to traditional marketing strategies. Weinberg (2009:3) and Ismail (2017:130) take social media marketing as a strategy for organisations to promote their products and services on online networks as well as reaching out and interacting with a bigger community that was not easily accessible with traditional advertising media. The focus of social media marketing, according to Powell (2009:6), is on creating healthy communication relationship with online communities.

The generic reason for individuals to join social media is the inert desire to communicate, socialise and interact with one another rather than doing business (Sawyer 2011:3; Ismail 2017:129; Ziyadin *et al.* 2019:2). Even though consumers are driven by social connection, it does not necessarily mean that they completely shut their minds from business related content. The fact is that social media is about user interaction and connection, hence one of the objectives of its marketing strategy is to build strong brand communities that capture consumer imagination and attention (Powell 2009:06). In as much as organisations present their products and services in a salivating manner, what matters most in social media are comments, reviews, testimonials and appraisals left by other consumers (Shareef, Mukerji, Dwivedi, Rana, Islam 2019:58 & Arca 2012:4). Under social media, marketers are in a position to learn and gather information about their product/brand performance from consumers as they are sharing information about their consumption experience and also their supposed expectations (Lakshmi *et al.* 2017:65). The challenging aspect of social media to marketers is that there is no control of what message to be posted by users and at what time (Evans 2008:36), hence a strong social media marketing campaign is one that has the power to influence the crowd on what to share online.

Social media marketing lacks a blueprint of how to clearly run a proper social media campaign. In view of developing a viable social media marketing strategy, Perdue (2010:18) highlighted

some principles or characteristics to govern marketing and the organisation's operations under social media. These principles focus on community, content, participation and transparency.

- **Community focus**

Powell (2009:6), and Ismail (2017:131) opine that establishing a healthy mutually beneficial relationship with online communities is key to social media marketing. Organisations should direct their marketing content or efforts to online community and groups rather than just mass communication as witnessed in traditional marketing communication (Loureiro & Kaufmann 2018:2).

- **Content publishing in online communities**

Compared to the monologic transmission system (one source to many receivers), social media operates in a dialogic transmission system (many sources to many receivers), Lakshmi *et al.* (2017:66) and organisations assume the role of publisher in brand communities even though customers are also publishers (Perdue 2010:20). Social media is a platform that encourages and facilitates content creation, distribution and consumption (Maggiani 2012:01; Seo, Park & Choi 2020:6), and it is a challenge to organisations to decide what content to create and post, that will influence consumer perceptions. Content development is essential for an organisation to interact with consumers as well as entertain and educate them. Organisations need not adopt traditional advertising philosophy, but the content should be creative, entertaining and influential enough to trigger electronic word-of-mouth from community members (Scott 2009:160; Jibril, Kwarteng, Chovancova & Pilik, 2019:2). The basic notion is that no one would pay attention to boring content, hence the need for creativity.

- **Participation**

For an organisation to have a strong online presence, it needs to have an active social media platform, not in the sense of frequently publishing content, but rather engaging in meaningful conversation and discussions with consumers to create formidable relationships (Maggiani 2012:01; Kamboj & Rahman 2017:307). Social media is interactive in nature, hence the need for an organisation to encourage participation among communities and be in the midst of conversing with customers about its products and brand (Lakshmi *et al.* 2017:67).

- **Transparency**

Honesty and transparency are key elements of social media marketing to cultivate trust; and organisations need not compromise these under any circumstances (Rafiee & Sarabdeen 2013:936; Kamboj 2020:211). Under social media marketing, organisations should focus on developing authentic online relationships based on trust and transparency at all costs to avoid retaliation from clients in the event of misrepresentation (Lakshmi *et al.* 2017:65). Transparency ensures formidable relationships that will extend to offline platforms, which in turn can cause clients to perform a brand ambassadorial role (Yoo 2014:7; Kamboj 2020:213). Therefore no matter the level of interaction under social media, marketers should invest in reaching out to online groups by creating influential content to share, participating in online discussions while ensuring transparency throughout online interaction (Perdue 2010:21). Social media cannot be social without conversation; conversations are less constructive without transparency, and there is no media if there is no content in social media. Social media will be irrelevant without an online community (Perdue 2010:19).

Contrary to traditional or conventional marketing strategies, there are pivotal advantages that accompany the adoption of social media marketing, as suggested by Neti (2011:6); and Bilaj (2019:5640).

- Firstly, social media marketing allows marketers to listen to customer insights, grievances as well as suggestions on an open platform (Edosomwan *et al.* 2011:8). This allows organisations to gather usefull data from its customers about the product or brand (Lakshmi *et al.* 2017:64). respond to these grievances, or rather suggestions in an interactive manner that would foster beneficial relationships only if marketers handle situations well.
- Secondly, social media marketing gives rise to different online communities and forums based on common intrests, locations, and other characteristics, and when it is easier for marketers to identify these groups for further marketing communication with the intention of establishing brand evangelists (Neti 2011:6).
- Finally, in comparison with traditional advertising and marketing campaigns, social media marketing is extremely cheap and affordable (Edosomwan *et al.* 2011:8; Bandyopadhyay 2016:2 & Bilaj 2019:5641).

In a nutshell, social media plays a pivotal role in marketing by improving the communication between organisations and consumers, as brands and product interaction is improved.

Furthermore, it works best in the creation of putting personalities behind brands as well establishing healthy relationships to promote customer loyalty.

2.4.4 Social media and consumer buying behaviour: An analysis

Social media is an independent entity where no one possesses control over the flow of information as individuals are entirely free to express themselves. Mishra *et al.* (2014:379); Voramontri and Klieb (2018:8) attest that instead of being only a source of information and social interaction, social media is fast becoming a platform of influence where consumers seek vital information from peer reviews before making purchase decisions. Information shared on social media is immortal, hence an unintentional information leak or negative reviews posted are almost impossible to reverse (Mishra *et al.* 2014:379). As the world becomes more and more technologically oriented, the internet is now widely accessible, increasing the accessibility of information to consumers which is affecting their purchase decision process (Lee 2013:11; Bharucha 2018:72).

The growth of internet connectivity around the globe and the rising demand, as well as availability of smartphones, has made it easier for consumers to access vast amounts of information, peer reviews, recommendations about products and brands of choice through social media platforms which have an impact on their buying decisions (Lee 2013:11; Mishra *et al.* 2014:379; Voramontri & Klieb 2018:8; Shivakumar 2018:1). This growing phenomenon and its effect on consumer decision making process requires marketers to look closely into the changes of consumer behaviour. According to Chaturvedi and Barbar (2014:107), consumer behaviour focuses on understanding the process and stages that consumers use to select, consume and use products to fulfil their needs and the stages that they go through constitutes a consumer decision- making process.

A consumer decision-making process is a key factor for every organisation. Marketers need to understand and master this to be able to influence this in order to increase their revenue streams. Frequently, consumers make important decisions, not only important for themselves but for marketers and businesses. In making those decisions consumers are faced with various alternatives due to a large amount of information found on social media, when it is difficult for them to process all the information or reviews before making a decision (Voramontri & Klieb 2018:5). Generally, the consumer decision-making process consists of five steps that consumers go through in making purchase decisions, namely, they need recognition, information search, evaluations of alternatives, purchase and post purchase behaviour (Jashari & Rustem 2017:2; Voramontri & Klieb 2018:5).

The steps in the process are normal but sometimes consumers do not follow these steps sequentially with every purchase.

Consumers are being empowered and well equipped by the vast information they encounter on social media and at the same time marketers are facing a pool of clients from various geographic regions on one platform and need to reach out to and develop meaningful relationships (Bharucha 2018:72). The availability and accessibility of information to consumers from social media whenever there is an internet connection has impacted their attitudes, which have an effect on their buying behaviour (Lee 2013:38; Bharucha 2018:72). A considerable amount of consumer buying decisions are based on the reviews of peers, friends and families (Meslat 2018:5) rather than information obtained from marketing professionals, mainly because their peers often provide actual experiences encountered on social media while consuming the product or service.

Consumers interact with one another on social media, engage in discussions that are of interest to them as well as seek help, knowledge and insights about products and brands of choice before making a purchase (Hayta 2013:66; Meslat 2018:5). Bilal, Ahmed and Shahzad (2014:03) attest that social media is making consumers more aware and well informed about products as they now have a chance to make comparisons and read reviews posted as well as participate in online discussions (Ziyadin *et al.* 2019:2). Since social media allows consumers to post reviews, offer recommendations and insights based on consumption experience, marketers must be concerned with its subsequent influence on the purchase decision process. The social media realm is fast becoming a trusted information source due to consumer reviews in online communities which are similar to the consumer's digest of the previous generation (Forbes & Vespoli 2013:107; Voramontri & Klieb 2018:8).

The fusion and explosion of consumer generated content in recent years has increased the importance of electronic word-of-mouth, fuelled by online consumers in the decision-making process (Kamatchi 2013:667). Consumers no longer play a passive receiving role under social media but are co-creators of content as they no longer wait for marketers to feed them with information, but rather actively seek that which interests them (Imtiaz *et al.* 2019:1094). As they actively seek information online, new needs and interests are generated as they seek to upgrade their current state to that of their online peers, emanating from other consumers who share their consumption experience of certain products on their profile or online communities (Kamatchi 2013:667; Jashari & Rrustem 2017:4). In that instance, social media may influence the need at the recognition stage in the consumer decision-making process.

The connected world has digitally empowered consumers such that there are a range of tools and platforms that enable them to research and consult about the products they need, either from their peers or other experts (Verhoef, Stephen, Kannan, Luo, Abhishek, Andrews, Bart, Datta, Fong, Hoffman, Hu, Novak, Rand & Zhang 2017:3). The information search stage of the consumer decision-making process is made easier and faster under social media. Consumers are in a position to see product reviews and ratings, and evaluate their performance based on consumer testimonials shared by online community members who have had consumer experiences (Jashari & Rustem 2017:4). The platforms also allow consumers to ask questions and discuss with other consumers on any aspect they need clarification on. The evaluation of the alternative stage in the purchase decision-making process seems to be influenced by social media interaction (Kamatchi 2013:667). Jashari and Rustem 2017:4) posited that social media is becoming a trusted form for alternative evaluation as consumers search for consumer reviews (positive and or negative) from those consumers who have consumed their product, service or brand of choice before.

After evaluation of alternatives, a consumer has to make a purchase based on the information acquired and the need to be satisfied. The actual purchase is triggered by many aspects, ranging from financial situations, cultural issues, and the need at hand, depending on what is being bought. Social media interactions do not solely affect this stage but have an influence which emanates from the evaluation of alternatives based on reviews and recommendations available on social media (Gros 2012:37; Jashari & Rustem 2017:4).

Generally, consumers evaluate the outcome of their purchase which might be pure satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Post-purchase evaluation is vital to consumers as it determines future purchase behaviours based on their entire purchase experience (Foxall 2005:20; Kumar & Anjaly 2017:1278). Social media plays a significant role in amplifying consumer purchase experience as they post their concerns on online platforms which is open for everyone to see and by so doing their testimonials also influence their peers who might be considering which product or brand to buy (Gros 2012:37; Jashari & Rustem 2017:4). The power of electronic word-of-mouth or user interaction is instrumental at this stage of the consumer decision-making process.

Traditionally, consumers were in no position to share their purchase experience with one another. However, the interactivity and rise of social media make it easier for consumers to share their consumption experiences (Ziyadin *et al.* 2019:2), be it negative or positive, which in turn influence purchase decision-making processes (Ansari, Ansari, Ghori, & Kazi 2019:7). Gros (2012:38) purports that in as much as social media interaction has an influence on consumers' purchasing

decision-making process, its exact role is still uncertain, given that the influence varies at each and every stage of the process.

2.4.5 Social media interactions and brand awareness

From an inherent need for social connection and interaction with friends and family, social media over the years has progressed to a place where consumers can gain more knowledge about their favourite brands and companies due to user interaction and electronic word-of-mouth (Ziyadin *et al.* 2019:2). The platform for marketers and various organisations to uplift their campaigns to a higher level has increased as new technology emerges every year, with social networks sites becoming widely used (Bharucha 2018:73). The world is becoming more and more connected as years go by and various devices are being developed that enable individuals to gain online access wherever they get internet connection (Meslat 2018:511). The demand for smartphones is increasing as they are portable and enable consumers to access social media platforms, even when they are mobile. Social media marketing is all about bringing the brand to the heart of consumers and creating brand communities where peers will enjoy personal connection and interaction with the brand (Chi 2011:46; Chierici, Del-Bosco, Mazzucchelli & Chiacchierini 2019:216).

The rise of powerful search engines and social media has empowered individuals to voice their experiences with products and share information gathered with anyone they want, about any subject matter of their choice on various online platforms (Shankar, Inman, Mantrala, Kelley & Rizley 2011:30; Chierici *et al.* 2019:217). One positive or negative comment about a concerned brand will initiate a discussion on a forum or within brand communities, which may benefit or destroy the reputation of the brand in question (Pachori.2015:2; Pütter 2017:8). Almeida (2011:24) posits out that the ultimate power of brands resides in the thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences rooted in consumers' minds, as they exert influence on consumer decision making (Chierici *et al.* 2019:217).

In social media marketing, marketers are working on influencing the perceptions of consumers on their brand within the social media realm so as to hold a strong market position and gain social acceptance (Pütter 2017:8; Ziyadin *et al.* 2019:3). Influencing consumers' perceptions about a brand in question is likened to provide consumers with a topic to engage in under social media that creates brand awareness among participants. Social media can either boost or destroy any brand reputation, hence it is important for organisations to pay close attention to customers' views and respond accordingly (Evans 2008:21; Ansari *et al.* 2019:7). In as much as organisations can initiate a discussion on their social media pages, consumer responses are not only limited to that

particular discussion as they are free to express or raise a completely different subject (Evans 2008:27). On social media, consumers share experiences they encounter with the brand, either by using the actual product, or rather by sharing their shopping experience (Ansari *et al.* 2019:6). Brands should not focus on managing the brand through online platforms only because some online conversations are catapulted by brand experiences in an offline environment (Frank 2015:1).

In the connected world, social interaction and/or information exchange is done in different forms like blogs, video sharing, tweets, images and content messages, which becomes the order of life on social media (Meslat 2018:10; Shivakumar 2018:3). A study conducted in the US on customer spending indicated that 75% of the respondents made a purchase based on the information and reviews gathered on social media (DEI Worldwide 2008:4). This shows how powerful peers' insights and recommendations are becoming as brand communities take centre stage on social media. The trust that comes from brand communities has surpassed company generated reviews and advertising, mainly because of how close the peers have become, as well as the fact that they share real experiences they have encountered with the brands in question (MacKinnon 2012:18, Ansari *et al.* 2019:7).

Additionally, another research conducted indicated that consumers are beginning to give more trust and credence to peer reviews, opinions and advice compared to other brand-generated information when making purchase decisions (Bazaarvoice 2012:10; Singh & Sonnenberg 2012:189; Bharucha 2018:74; Ansari *et al.* 2019:7). The resultant scenario is that for a consumer to make a purchase, he or she would have to be well aware of the product, hence in as much as social media interactions contribute to purchase decision-making, it starts with increasing awareness of the brand and familiarity within brand communities.

A brand is no longer the creation of the company, but a testament of consumers based on brand stories they create, emanating from experiences they had with the brand (Buzzetto-More 2013:68). Consumer brand experiences that are shared, trigger online discussions with the resultant factor being brand building or destruction, depending on information given (De La Roche & Mizerski 2019:28; Ansari *et al.* 2019:6). Social media interaction has brought companies to be observers and consumers of shared content about their brands, which foster brand awareness without persuasive adverts from organisations (Chierici *et al.* 2019:217). Brands, products and services are becoming social objects that are discussed, scrutinised and elaborated on amongst participants on social networks, which would fuel brand awareness (Chierici *et al.* 2019:217).

Social media interaction and communication make the communication world more fascinating as it presents the opportunity to interlink with millions of other participants around the world at any time in an instant (Merrill, Latham, Santalesa & Navetta 2011:1; De La Roche & Mizerski 2019:28). The amount of people on social media is more than any company's customer base and the speed with which a tweet or a message can reach billions of participants is mind boggling, such that no company would ignore that hype (De La Roche & Mizerski 2019:28). A single tweet or message about a brand from a consumer can reach billions of other consumers in minutes, generating a discussion which is sufficient to increase brand awareness, or shatter the brand's credibility (Merrill *et al.* 2011:2).

Social media interaction is all about information exchange of any kind, which fuels electronic word-of-mouth that goes beyond the borders of the internet world, thus creating a positive impact on brand awareness as well as affecting the consumers' purchase decision-making process (Pütter 2017:7; Voramontri & Klieb 2018:3; Ansari *et al.* 2019:7). A positive brand, product or shopping experience strongly connects consumers to the brand, which triggers clients to share positive remarks pertaining their experience with it to thousands of consumers on social media (Shojaee & Azman 2013:73; De La Roche & Mizerski 2019:28).

In today's connected world, social media presents the best platform for brands and organisations to connect with current and prospective clients, which has a positive effect of brand awareness (Arora & Sharma 2013:1; Yapa 2017:01). The initial reason generally for consumers to embark on a social media journey is for mere social connection, but now it goes beyond that to business related interactions amongst peers, which in turn have a bearing on brand positioning (Bharucha 2018:73). In this era of technological advancement, social media is fast becoming a divine path to gain or acquire valuable information about brands, thus increasing brand awareness and thereby impacting consumers' purchase decision-making process as they are able to make comparisons between brands based on information gathered (Ansari *et al.* 2019:7).

In as much as social media is characterised by social interaction, with consumers being the main participants as they connect with their friends and families, organisations are also involved as they share and convey messages with their customers (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2013:329; Jamali & Khan 2018:114). Social media offers firms a chance to shift their relationships with customers from a dialogue to a triologue, where consumers engage in valuable conversations with each other and with organisations (Mangold & Faulds 2014:357). This characteristic indicates that brand awareness can be established through social media as firms gain access to millions of consumers who can be influenced to share positive information about the brand amongst themselves (O'Flynn

2012:2; Chierici *et al.* 2019:217). Given that many people are actively involved on social media, the presence of a brand on these platforms will go a long way in informing consumers about it, thus increasing its brand awareness (De La Roche & Mizerski 2019:28).

Smith (2009:559); Ezeife (2017:36), De La Roche and Mizerski (2019:28) assert that opinions, reviews and insights that consumers find on online platforms have an effect on the resulting opinions in the offline space as they transcend to their traditional media sphere. They further argue that that each time consumers get online, they participate and get involved on various social media platforms as they converse with one another (Hruska & Maresova 2020:3). The underlying factor highlighted by the authors is that consumers always get involved whenever there is internet connection. Social media avails an era of consumer-to-consumer interaction within brand communities as they gather and share information about the brand (increasing brand awareness and credibility in the process) and use that information when making purchase decisions (Zollo, Filieri, Rialti, & Yoon 2020:256).

Hutter *et al.* (2013:342), Appel, Grewal, Hadi, and Stephen (2019:79) opine that due to technological advancement, consumers are now spending more time on social network sites than ever before, thereby increasing the flow of information exchange on any subject matter of their choice. Therefore, the rise and boom of social media marketing imply that brand and product related discussions are taking place within the social media realm as brand communities become the more trusted source of information.

2.5 BRAND AWARENESS

Brand awareness is explained as the consumers' ability to recall the brand off the top of their minds when given a product category as well as the ability to recognise the brand based on prior exposure (Keller 2013:73; Shahid, Hussain & aZafar 2017:36). Almeida (2011:26); Chinomona and Maziriri (2017:145) reinforced that notion by indicating that brand awareness refers to the buyer's ability to recognise and recall that a particular brand is part of a given product category under different conditions. Gustafson and Chabot (2007:1); Padhy and Sawlikar (2018:12) explain brand awareness as the state of awareness that consumers and potential clients have about a company's brand and its related products. Brand awareness does not only refer to customers knowing the brand name and their confirmation that they have seen it probably more than once, but it also encompasses the customer's ability to link the brand, its name, symbol or logo to a certain association in their minds (Almeida 2011:26; Hoeffler & Keller 2002:79; Altaf, Iqbal, Mokhtar & Sial 2017:221).

Brand awareness serves as the initial contact or interaction point between consumers and brands (Subhani & Osman 2009:02; Romaniuk, Wight, & Faulkner 2017:470). Branding is a complex but rather an important element in the business world. One main objective for many marketers is to let the organisation's target market believe that their brand is the only one that will solve their problem, or meet their needs and satisfy their wants. A brand plays a significant role in building emotional relationships with its customers, which subsequently brings tangible returns to the organisation at large in terms of customer loyalty (Kathuria & Jit 2009:122). Every organisation wants to build a top-notch brand positioning in the consumer mind as well as strengthen the relationship between brands and consumers. In the marketing fraternity, a strong brand is a tangible asset that yields results for a long period (Padhy & Sawlikar 2018:12) and is certainly difficult to replace if it is tarnished. A strong brand is the ideal ultimatum for many organisations due to the host of possible benefits that come along with it. Chi, Yeh and Yang (2009:135); and Bilgin (2018:129) postulate that the sovereignty of any brand is in what dwells at the heart of consumers' minds, which plays a pivotal role in their purchase decision process, thereby influencing brand performance. One of the main objectives of marketers is to generate and maintain brand awareness (Macdonald & Sharp 2000:5; Maria, Pusriadi, Hakim, & Darma 2019:108), such that its products will be easily recognised amongst its competition.

Brand awareness measures brand accessibility in the mind of the consumer and this can be indicated through brand recognition and brand recall (Shahid, Hussain & aZafar 2017:36). It is related to the consumer's ability to identify a brand under certain conditions without hesitation. The ultimate objective of brand awareness is to develop and establish a growing presence within the target market.

2.5.1 Dimensions and measurement of brand awareness

Brand awareness can be distinguished in terms of two critical dimensions which are: brand depth; and brand breadth (Hoeffler & Keller 2002:79). The depth of brand awareness is the ease in remembering and recognition of a particular brand by consumers, while the breadth of brand awareness is the range of consumption and purchase scenarios when the brand comes to mind (Permana 2019:17; Lee, Goh & Noor 2019:164). Under normal circumstances a brand is expected to have both brand depth and brand breadth.

Basically, there are two main measures of brand awareness, which are brand recognition and brand recall (Rossiter, 2014:4; Patil 2017:16). Brand recognition relates to the ability of consumers to confirm that they have been exposed to the brand before when given the brand as a cue (Patil

2017:16). Almeida (2011:31); Subhani and Osman (2009:04); Khurram, Qadeer and Sheeraz (2018:224) posit that brand recognition requires consumers to correctly discriminate a brand as having been previously seen or heard. On the other hand, brand recall relates to consumers' ability to retrieve a brand and any related information from their memory (Khurram *et al.* 2018:220). Almeida (2011:31); Subhani and Osman (2009:04) added that brand recall requires a consumer to correctly extract a brand from their memory when given a relevant cue. Percy and Rossiter (1992:264) explain awareness as the "buyer's ability to identify a brand within a category in sufficient detail to make a purchase". By having sufficient detail to make a purchase, as the definition points out, it does not necessarily mean that customers should always identify the brand name (brand recall) in question but the visual image of the brand will be useful in stimulating consumer response at the point of purchase (brand recognition) (Percy & Rossiter 1992:264). This implies that brand awareness can happen through recognition, hence in that case there will be no need for brand recall.

Other authors (Laurent, Kapferer and Roussel, 1995) as cited by Moiescu (2009:104) put forward three classical measures of brand awareness within a product category, which are: spontaneous brand recall; top of mind brand recall; and aided brand recall. Spontaneous brand recall is unaided brand awareness, which is seen when consumers are asked to name the brands they know in a certain product category without being prompted (Moiescu 2009:104; Świtała, Gamrot, Reformat, & Bilińska-Reformat 2018:100). Top-of-mind brand recall signifies the most remembered and recalled brand against competing brands (Świtała *et al.* 2018:100; Romaniuk, Wight, & Faulkner 2017:470). Koniewski (2012:3) posits that a brand with top-of-mind recall has a high probability of being picked when making a purchase decision, mainly because when consumers name the brand first ahead of others it reflects the higher emotional link between the consumer and that particular brand. Aided brand recall is a form of brand awareness evident when consumers are presented with various brands with which they will be asked to point out those they know (Moiescu 2009:104; Świtała *et al.* 2018:100). In the face of various communication channels and platforms, it is the duty of the company's marketing team to decide which channels would work best in establishing a healthy brand awareness. The ability of consumers to remember brands is attributed to the effectiveness of a company's marketing campaigns.

2.5.2 Levels of brand awareness

Brand awareness is mainly about communication with consumers and the target market making sure that the consumer has all information about the brand. Brand awareness is a crucial but at times is an undervalued element of brand equity. Brand awareness has the power to influence

perceptions and attitudes of the consumer pertaining a brand in question as it is close to impossible for a company to operate, or a brand to succeed unless it is known by consumers (Padhy & Sawlikar 2018:12). Aaker (1991:63) explained name awareness and recall, saying “A name is like a special file folder in the mind which can be filled with name related facts and feelings. Without such a file readily accessible in memory, the facts and feelings become misfiled, and cannot be readily accessed when needed.” Aaker (1991:62), identified levels of brand awareness, as illustrated in Figure 2.10 below:

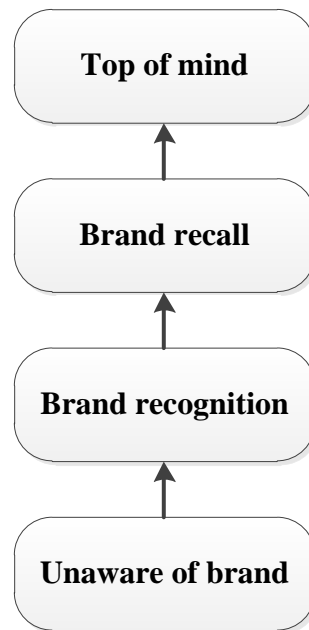


Figure 2.10: Levels of Brand awareness

Source: Aaker (1991:62).

- **Unaware of a brand:** This a stage when customers are totally unaware of the brand at all as they have not heard of it or consumed it.
- **Recognition:** This is the initial stage of brand awareness that every brand will get. Brand recognition is seen when consumers can confirm that they have heard of a particular brand, given a cue or when consumers recognise a certain brand among other brands Świtała *et al.* 2018:100; Romaniuk, Wight & Faulkner 2017:470).
- **Recall:** The ability of consumers to list brands which they know in a product category. This type of brand awareness is unaided, given that no examples of brands or product category are mentioned for the consumer to identify but rather they retrieve the brands they know from their minds and cues (Świtała *et al.* 2018:100; Romaniuk, Wight & Faulkner 2017:470).

- **Top-of-Mind:** This signifies the first brand to be named in a recall list by the consumer. This type of brand awareness is seen when consumers first identify a particular brand ahead of the other with a product category, or when the need to purchase arises (Świtała *et al.* 2018:100; Romaniuk, Wight & Faulkner 2017:470).

Brand awareness reflects the salience of a brand in consumers' minds (Aaker 1996:114; Padhy & Sawlikar 2018:12). Aaker (1996:115), explains that for brands that are new on the market, or that focus on a niche market, brand recognition is key. For established brands, recall as well as top-of-mind are sensitive and meaningful. In his writing about brand equity, Aaker (1996:114) identifies additional levels of brand awareness which were not part of the pyramid, which he devised in 1991. The author mentioned three more levels after top-of-mind brand recall, which are:

- **Brand Dominance:** the only brand named by the customer given a product category.
- **Brand Knowledge:** the consumer knows what the brand signifies, be it quality, status or durability.
- **Brand Opinion:** the consumer has an opinion about the brand in question.

2.5.3 Achieving brand awareness

Bornmark, Goransson and Svensson (2005:33); and Alexandra and Cerchia (2018:424) assert that there is a growing perception among consumers that a well-known brand is of better quality and thus makes brand awareness more important. The authors further proclaim that what is more important is what is known about the brand instead of just mere brand awareness. All these sentiments are far less important if marketing practitioners do not achieve a respected level of brand awareness. Furthermore, Aaker (1991:65) identified the following conditions as necessary towards achieving brand awareness:

- **Be different and memorable (Positioning):** There is a lot of imitation today on several products, making it difficult for consuming clients to remember certain brands. Being unique, different but easy to remember is important in creating a clear impression to the public as well as gaining competitive advantage against competition (Latif, Islam & Noor 2014:73).
- **Involve a slogan or jingle:** A positioning statement or a slogan bring forth the bond between consumers and the brand. In hearing or seeing the slogan, consumers will be able to ascertain which brand is being represented.
- **Symbol exposure:** A well designed and unique symbol is easy to memorise and provides easy identification. A brand should have a clear symbol that represents it, which might be a logo in

this scenario. In addition, marketers should develop a symbol that has no negative attachments to ensure positive influence (Rockute, Minelgaite, Zailskaite-Jakšt & Damaševicius 2018:4).

- **Publicity:** This can be achieved through advertising on various communication platforms such as radio, TV, newspaper and online. The number of potential clients to be reached through advertisements is large, hence brand awareness is prone to be accomplished (Rockute *et al.* 2018:4).
- **Event Sponsorship:** The basic objective for sponsorship is to create brand awareness in the realm of social responsibility. Awareness created by sponsorship has a great impact on consumer behaviour as consumers recall better products or brands that are related to sponsors (Latif *et al.* 2014:73).
- **Consider brand extensions:** Brand extensions are explained as the use of an already existing and established brand name to introduce a product from a different category. This is critical as the new product will benefit from the existing clients that new the brand name (hence brand awareness) is guaranteed (Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:425).
- **Using Cues:** Branded packaging is one form of a cue that is important to add to the brand. The first visual element to be seen on the product is the packaging, hence placing the logo and other notable designs that are associated to the brand will assist consumers to easily identify it and in turn fulfil brand awareness. (Oppong 2018:106).

Bornmark *et al.* (2005:35) and Lama (2017:29) state that for an organisation to achieve brand awareness, it is of great importance for it to have a distinctive feature that consumers recognise. A feature or hallmark make it easier for consumers to identify a brand on the market. On the other hand, Karam and Saydam (2015:67) highlighted that, established brands make use of brand reinforcement techniques to foster their brand awareness campaigns, whereas new products or brands embark on extensive advertising and promotion to increase awareness of their products and brand to the target audience.

2.5.4 Brand awareness and perceived quality

In consumer decision-making, brand awareness will affect consumer choices in the consideration set as it influences perceived quality (Azzari & Pelissari 2020:673). A study done by Hoyer and Brown (1990:143) on consumer choice points out that due to prior exposure and the concept of perceived quality a considerable number of consumers select a lesser objective quality brand or product from a mixed pool of known and unknown brands. This is attributed to positive

perceptions that the consumer has against the chosen brand, which might be a result of higher brand awareness against the brand that has better technical quality. This implies that product quality (technical/manufacturer) is less influential in the initial stages of the consumer purchase decision set since consumers screen brands first, based on awareness and perceived quality, which is seen mostly in low involvement products (Macdonald & Sharp 2003:2; Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:424).

Consumers have a habit of expecting widely advertised brands to offer products of higher quality compared to generic products that are unknown (Chow, Ling, Yen, Hwang 2017:73). This notion is supported by a buyer alternative study done by Hoyer and Brown (1990:142), where a group of consumers chose a renowned brand of peanut butter from three choices available despite one of the unchosen brands being of objectively better quality. Up to 70% of the consumers chose the well-known brand, even though they had never consumed it before. The fact that they were aware of the product due to massive advertising, their quality perception was already positively biased towards the known brand before they even tested the products under study, which is also supported by Azzari and Pelissari (2020:673). In general, the absence of brand awareness on a particular brand erodes any chance of that brand being perceived to be of good quality. Similarly, studies by Aberdeen, Syamsun and Najib (2016: 445); Alexandra and Cerchia (2018:424); Oppong, Yeboah, and Gyawu (2020:03) proved empirically that a significant and positive relationship exists between brand awareness and perceived quality.

2.5.5 Brand awareness and brand loyalty

To stay ahead of competition, organisations invest in getting their brands in the minds of customers so as to aid their recall and also to stay in touch with their clients, thus leading to brand affiliation. Therefore, brand awareness is the initial stage in achieving brand loyalty or brand equity (Chow *et al.* 2017:73). In addition, due to the rise of consumer consciousness, modern day consumers tend to choose their favourable and familiar brands when they make a purchase decision (Malik *et al.* 2013:167; Patil 2017:17). When consumers develop an interest to buy a product or service, the first brand that they recall in their minds takes precedence, and that brand reflects higher brand awareness (Macdonald & Sharp 2000:5). This implies that without brand awareness there is no brand, since consumers are more inclined to buy what they have heard about and consider to be of better value. Alkhawaldeh *et al.* (2017:39) reiterated that the level of brand loyalty increases when customers are aware of the brand.

Brand awareness is critical to the life of consumers, given that it is an interaction initiation point for a brand (Subhani & Osman 2011:11). The authors revealed that brand awareness affects consumer decision-making and loyalty by influencing the formation and strength of brand associations (Domazet, Djokic & Milovanov 2017:16). Previous research studies alluded to the notion that brand awareness has a positive effect on brand loyalty (Dhurup, Mafini & Dumasi 2014:8).

According to Alkhawaldeh, Al-Salaymeh, Alshare and Eneizan (2017:39), brand awareness positively affects customers' attitudes toward brand loyalty. As emphasised earlier, brand awareness plays a crucial role in positioning a brand in consumers' minds and resultantly consumers may repeatedly purchase the brand as they got assurance of its quality. This implies that brand awareness is related to brand loyalty as they rely on it to make purchase decision.

Aaker (1996:174) posits that brand awareness is an intangible asset that can be immoderately durable and thus sustainable. A brand with a dominant brand awareness can be very challenging to dislodge from consumers' minds, which aids brand loyalty. Previous studies supported the notion that brand awareness is associated with brand loyalty (Cho 2011:110; Altaf *et al.* 2017:222; Chinomona & Maziriri 2017:146).

2.5.6 Brand awareness and purchase decision making

Keller (1998:45), Datta, Ailawadi and Van Heerde (2017:1) outline brand equity from a consumer's perspective as the differential effect that brand knowledge has relative to customer reaction and to marketing communication activity or offering. Aaker (1991:38) describes brand equity as a set of fundamental components which include brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and brand associations. It is the duty of every marketing team to ensure that every brand has adequate brand awareness (both recall and recognition), positive perceived quality and command brand loyalty in order to survive against competition. Building a strong brand that sticks in the minds of consumers is crucial in a competitive environment, as this is enough to create a brand recall and fuel purchase decision (Khurram *et al.* 2018:220). In as much as brand awareness is instrumental in the selection of brands that will be in a consumer consideration set, it is also influential on consumer perceptions and attitudes towards a brand (Moisescu 2009:103; Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:424).

A well-known brand is part of the consumers' consideration set in their endeavour to determine which brand to acquire, and brand awareness represents the first step of a brand being drafted into a consideration set (Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:423). Ideally, the ultimate goal for marketers in an

organisation is to attract and retain clients to the brand as well as encourage repeat purchases, and the first step is to foster brand awareness (Gustafson & Chabot 2007:1; Romaniuk *et al.* 2017:470). A brand with a strong brand awareness is the one where consumers can easily recall it when there is a need, or when they decide to make a purchase and if not recall it, it can easily be recognised when visualised at the time of purchase (MacDonald & Sharp 2000:5; Khurram *et al.* 2018:220). It is crucial and essential for brand differentiation amongst competition. Gustafson and Chabot (2007:1) further posit that the higher the brand is in the memory of the consumer, the greater the possibility for that product or brand being considered for purchase and then actually purchased (Khurram *et al.* 2018:220).

Brand awareness is hypothesised to be instrumental in outlining a consumer purchase consideration set, which is a pool of brands that a consumer gives precedence in making a purchase decision (Padhy & Sawlikar 2018:12). Literally, if a brand is not part of the initial consideration set, the probability of it being selected as a brand of choice is zero, whereas the probability of selection of one which is part of a consideration set depends on the number of brands that are in a subset (Macdonald & Sharp 2003:1).

In the event that the consumer is familiar with a number of brands that suit a given criteria, the consumer is reluctant to spend more time gathering information on unknown or rather unfamiliar brands (Macdonald & Sharp 2003:2), hence they tend to choose known brands (Romaniuk *et al.* 2017:470). A brand with considerable amount of awareness has a better chance of being drafted into the consideration set (Almeida 2011:31; Khurram *et al.* 2018:220), unlike unknown brands, mainly because consumers do not have a point of reference for unknown brands. Of the brands that are in the consideration set, the strength of each brand's awareness is significant in influencing consumer choice. This is where the level of brand awareness comes into effect.

2.6 BRAND LOYALTY

Brand loyalty is one of the key indicators of brand equity and is linked to future business profitability, based on the notion that brand loyalty translates into future sales increase (Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:423). For companies to have a sustainable competitive advantage, or market dominance, they need to acquire brand dominance through loyalty by classifying brands as the most valuable asset a company can have i. e., the mystery is about development of market-dominant brands that command loyalty, which is preferred over owning factories (Aaker 1991:34). Therefore, it is essential for every brand to create a contact point with consumers that makes them part of the family in their quest to build brand loyalty. In view of brand loyalty, it is imperative

for marketers to understand that consumers frequently purchase competing brands and products, and in some cases they consume the same brand frequently, due to convenience shopping, hence repurchase behaviour or purchasing patterns alone do not completely signify loyalty level (Noorlitaria, Pangestu, Fitriansyah, Surapati, & Mahsyar 2020:103).

Brand loyalty serves as an indication of how consumers are well attached and inclined to the brand of choice, expressed through brand repurchasing regardless of competition (Malik, Ghafoor & Iqbal 2013:168). It measures the likelihood or the intention of consumers to switch to a different brand in case of any notable changes in price, product features (Aaker1991:39), or persuasive marketing communication that might affect the consumer decision- making process, (Ying 2010:37). As cited by Schoenbachler, Gordon and Aurand (2004:488); Tabish, Hussain and Afshan 2017:152), brand loyalty is not about consumers' frequent repurchase behaviour only but rather by possessing a deep psychological and emotional attachment to the brand that is not swayed easily by price variances or persuasive marketing offerings. Brand loyalty is a testament of how consumers are attached and inclined to a brand of choice, which manifests through brand repurchasing regardless of competition (Malik *et al.* 2013:168; Tabish *et al.* 2017:152).

Malik *et al.* (2013:166) defined brand loyalty as the degree of closeness that a client has to a particular brand, which is expressed by their repurchase behaviour regardless of marketing efforts by rival brands. Sharma, Bhola, Malyan and Patni (2013:818); and Altaf *et al.* (2017:222) defined brand loyalty as a consumer's conscious or unconscious decisions that are demonstrated through a behaviour or intention to repurchase a distinct brand repeatedly. In this study, brand loyalty is defined as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronise a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour" (Oliver, 1999:34). This definition addresses behavioural and attitudinal elements of the consumer's reaction, and brand loyalty arises only when behaviour is supported by attitude. This signifies that the more consumers are loyal to the brand, the less risk for brand switching, which gives the leading brand a competitive edge over others.

Brand loyalty encompasses attitude and behaviour factors (Abubakar 2014:50). Behaviour brand loyalty is all about consumer repurchase behaviour or their purchase frequency, whereas attitude brand loyalty is based on consumer attachment and affection to the brand (Dickinson 2014:07; Noorlitaria *et al.* 2020:103; Sharma & Jain 2019: 59). Bhatt and Suryawanshi (2014:143) posit that the combination of behavioural with psychological congruencies give the most authentic measure of brand loyalty.

2.6.1 Typology of brand loyalty

Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004:286) differentiate between four main types of brand loyalty based on situational influences: emotional attachment; and purchasing behaviour. This typology comprises premium loyalty, inertia loyalty, covetous loyalty, and no loyalty, as illustrated in Figure 2.11.

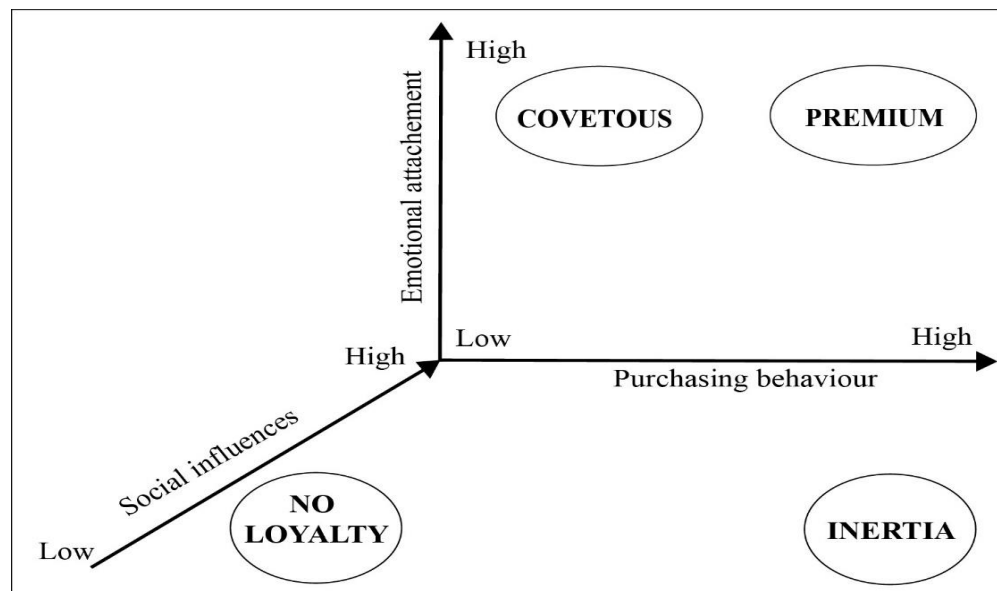


Figure 2.11: Typology of Brand Loyalty

Source: Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (204:286).

No loyalty: This is an undesirable state for every marketer or organisation as it presents a scenario where there are zero brand purchases from consumers and there is total indifference to the brand. (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos 2004:286; Gupta, Tyagi, Siddiquei & Sharma 2020: 7677). The brand in question possesses no reason for consumers to buy it, be it price, accessibility and/or brand image.as there is total indifference to the brand.

Covetous loyalty: Consumers who have this type of loyalty have incredible emotional relationship to the brand, mostly resulting from environmental and social related factors but there is no purchase involved (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos 2004:286; Dimovova 2020:15; Gupta, Tyagi, Siddiquei & Sharma 2020: 7677). In this case, it is difficult for customers to have great loyalty because they lack personal brand experience, which fosters emotional attachment. Denoue and Saykiewicz (2009:37) posit that an earlier purchase and personal experience with the brand is instrumental for loyalty to emerge because consumers in this category have no history of consumption; they lack the brand's contact point, meaning that their emotional attachment is of no use.

Inertia loyalty: This state of loyalty arises when consumers purchase a particular brand but they have absolutely no emotional attachment to it (Denoue & Saykiewicz 2009:37; Dimovova 2020:15; Gupta, Tyagi, Siddiquei & Sharma 2020: 7677). This state of purchase is heavily influenced by price as well as lack of substitutes within the market (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos 2004:286). Brand image and name exert little to no influence in their purchase decision process. In the short run, this state of loyalty is beneficial in terms of sales, but it is very fragile, given that consumers can switch their purchasing patterns instantly and easily. There is absolutely no guarantee that when consumers visit the market again, they will purchase that same brand.

Denoue and Saykiewicz (2009:37) classified inertia loyalty as behavioural loyalty, which is seen when consumers spend a considerable amount of a particular brand time and again, but notably with no ties, connection and emotional attachment with the brand. It is characterised with frequency and repeat purchase behaviour from consumers, which is similar to inertia loyalty, as mentioned by Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004:286).

Premium loyalty: This is the most preferred state of loyalty by every marketer and organisation where consumers have a strong emotional connection to the brand, which they manifest by frequently buying the brand (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos 2004:287; Dimovova 2020:15; Gupta, Tyagi, Siddiquei & Sharma 2020: 7677). This state of loyalty is not shaken by price changes and limited accessibility as consumers are prepared to pay more and even search for the brand when it is not readily available. This level is similar to committed buyer, as cited by Aaker (1991:41). According to Keller (2001:15), “premium loyalty is referred to as an active engagement in which the strongest affirmation of brand loyalty occurs when customers are willing to invest time, energy, money, or other resources into the brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption of the brand”.

2.6.2 Determinants of brand loyalty

Brand loyalty does not exist from nothing but from a number of variables that directly or indirectly affect consumer loyalty which subsequently affect consumer buying behaviour. Srivastava and Rai (2012:52) identified some of the determinants of customer loyalty, highlighted in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2: Determinants of Brand Loyalty

	Determinants	Consequential Behaviour
1	Customer satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future Purchase Intentions (Repeat purchases) • Customers' active participation in terms of buying additional services and spreading favourable word-of-mouth communication • Decrease in customers' sensitivity towards competitive offers • Increased market share from repeat business and referrals
2	Corporate image / Brand Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image congruence • Reinforcement of self-image • Repeat patronage
3	Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repurchase intentions • Reduction in the cost of negotiations and removal of the customer's fear of opportunistic behavior by the service provider • Formation of highly valued exchange relationships • Maintenance of long-term relationships
4	Service Quality / Perceived brand quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer satisfaction confirmation of expectations • Positive behavioral intentions (Repurchase, recommendation, etc.) • Positive word-of-mouth
5	Switching cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat purchase behavior • Impact on customer satisfaction • Dissuade customers' attraction towards competitive brands
6	Brand Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on post-purchase behaviour such as repeat visit, recommendation and repurchase intentions. • Influence the post consumption satisfaction judgement

Source: Rai and Srivastava (2012:61).

2.6.2.1 Customer Satisfaction

A satisfied customer is one that enjoys using a particular brand and post-purchase experience will stimulate a high contentment level despite them being low-priced conscious, and as a result they are more likely to use the same brand in future (Yen *et al.* 2018:726). Customer satisfaction is the “the degree of overall pleasure or contentment felt by the customer, resulting from the ability of

the service to fulfil the customer's desires, expectations and needs in relation to the service”, (Hellier, Geursen, Carr & Rickard 2003:1764). Oliver (1997:10) posits that customer satisfaction “is the consumer’s fulfilment response. It is a judgement that a product and/or service is providing a pleasurable level of consumption related fulfilment, including levels of under-or over-fulfilment.” As the definition implies, satisfaction is customer-centric, given that consumers evaluate a product and/or service following a purchase act, consumption and other consumer product interaction. Loyalty is easier to establish if a service provider can satisfy the needs of the consumer.

Customer satisfaction is a post-purchase variable which is dependent on the performance of products and/ or service relative to consumer expectations. In the event that the performance of the product falls short of expectations, customers tend to be dissatisfied and when the performance meets expectations, consumers will be satisfied (Abubakar 2014:51). In their purchase decision, consumers do not necessarily buy a product, but buy satisfaction, and satisfied customers are more likely to have a long-term relationship with the current brand, whereas unsatisfied customers are willing to look for alternative brands (Forsido 2012:12). Tabish *et al.* (2017:157) reported that customer satisfaction is critical in improving reputation in service industries in which reputation mediates the relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Tabish *et al.* (2017:156) further purported that it is nearly impossible to understand customer satisfaction in the absence of loyalty.

Despite Denoue and Saykiewicz (2009:39) expressing the view that customer satisfaction does not necessarily ensure loyalty at all times due to the various reasons, Chandrashekar, Rotte, Tax and Grewal (2007:156); and Oliver (1999:34) reveal that strong customer satisfaction leads to repeat purchase behaviour and subsequently brand loyalty.

Since brand loyalty is referred to as a commitment to repurchase the same brand in the future and this is possible in the event where consumers are satisfied with their acquisition (Selvarajah 2018:203), it is imperative for organisations to ensure customer satisfaction is realised, since it is linked to repurchase behaviour. Ultimate satisfaction is the road to premium brand loyalty, given that product quality is more superior ahead of competitive brands. Oliver (1999:34) argued that for satisfaction to influence loyalty, cumulative satisfaction is needed, such that individual satisfaction episodes become aggregated and/or blended. For ultimate satisfaction to be realised, organisations need to exceed consumer expectations, which will go a long way in converting that satisfaction into brand loyalty (Chandrashekar *et al.* 2007:156).

2.6.2.2 Brand image

It is most important for a brand to have the ability to create vivid memories in the minds of consumers, therefore it is the duty of all marketers to enhance their brand image. Keller (1993:3) defines brand image as “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory”. Tabish *et al.* 2017:158 explained brand image as a set of concepts, feelings, and attitudes that exist in a consumer’s mind regarding a particular brand. Brand image is regarded as the summation of brand associations in consumer memory, which are channeled towards brand association and perception (Mabkhot, Shaari & Salleh 2017:72). Brand image creates value in various ways as it assists clients in information processing, differentiating the brand, establishing buying reasons, offering positive feelings as well as providing a basis for extensions.

Brand image consists of a consumer’s beliefs and knowledge about the brand’s various products together with its non-product attributes (Lee, Lee & Wu 2009:1093). When brand image is favourable in the minds of consumers, brand related messages exert a stronger influence compared to competitor brand messages, hence the consumer will be inclined to follow the brand with a favourable image (Hsieh and Li, 2008:29; Yen, Rasdi, Rasiah & Ramasamy 2018:725). Brand image enhancement encompasses creating brand meaning, establishing brand characteristics and what the brand stands for in consumer minds; and it is the objective of companies to create a strong brand image in the minds of consumers (Hoeffler & Keller 2002:79; Mabkhot *et al.* 2017:72).

Forsido (2012:15) propounded that when consumers grow positive brand image, they are likely to develop a strong connection with the brand, and the belief in the brand will also increase. A belief in a brand by consumers signifies a deeply rooted brand image in their minds, with the resultant effect that customers easily recognise the brand and are not easily persuaded to shift or change their mind-set by competitive offering because of brand loyalty. Hyun and Kim (2011:430); Yen *et al.* (2018:725) opine that a brand image which has found favour in consumers’ eyes has a positive influence on consumer behaviour in terms of increasing brand loyalty, compelling price premium and provoking positive word-of-mouth. In evaluation of service and product offerings, brand image plays a pivotal role, which is the driving force for customer brand loyalty.

2.6.2.3 Trust

In an ever-changing business environment with increased competition, trust is significant in establishing long-term customer relationship, especially in high involvement products and services, for it is no longer enough to attract new customers for transactional business only (Shirin & Puth 2011:11899; Tabish *et al.* 2017:158). Trust plays a pivotal role in relation to establishing

loyalty, thus consumer trust has to be achieved if brand loyalty is to be ensured through social media.

Morgan and Hunt (1994:23); and Madeline and Sihombing (2019:95) conceptualised that trust comes into being when one individual or partner has confidence in an exchange partner's integrity and reliability. This is also in line with Moorman, Deshpande and Zaltman's (1993:82) view who regard trust as "willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence". One notable element in both definitions is confidence that one partner has towards the exchange partner, which is based on the exchange partner's reliability and integrity and thus triggers behaviour or action (Bennett 2001:55). According to Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001:82), brand trust is explained as the willingness of an every day consumer to trust and rely on the brand's ability to perform its stated function. Tabish *et al.* (2017:158) pointed out that trust is an important determinant of relationship commitment, and brand trust results in to brand loyalty.

In social media, online brand communities have a positive effect on trust and loyalty (Chaudhary, Asthana & Singhal 2015:1). A positive outcome or relationship between a brand and consumer is expected to happen when there is an interaction between two parties which is anchored on trust (Shirin & Puth 2011:11904). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001:82) hypothesised that brands with high consumer trust command both attitudinal and purchase loyalty, when consumers will certainly be willing to pay the premier price. Bidyanand (2014:129); Sohail, Hasan and Sohail (2020:5) propound that online or virtual brand communities enhance brand trust and subsequently loyalty through improving consumer relationships with the brand, and other consumers/users as well as the company itself. One of the main antecedents of consumer brand loyalty is trust (Shirin & Puth 2011:11899).

As indicated earlier, marketing online brand communities have positive effects on trust and loyalty (Ba 2001:325), thus improved consumer relationships in brand communities will impact positively on consumer trust, which has a direct relationship with brand loyalty (Laroche, Habibi & Richard 2013:78). In general, consumers that trust a brand are more likely to remain loyal to that brand, acquire new products introduced under that brand, pay a premium price and even share their consumption experience with other consumers (Mabkhot *et al.* 2017:72).

2.6.2.4 Perceived brand quality

Perceived quality is described as the consumer's views and opinion concerning a brand or a product's status and performance (Zeithaml 1988:3). Cole and Flynn (2009:67); Hoe and Mansori (2018:23) define perceived quality as "the customer's subjective judgment (overall feeling) about

the general excellence of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives”. Perceived quality is entirely determined by consumers’ judgement (Hoe & Mansori 2018:23) and their perceptions are entwined in product quality as well as their degree of awareness around a particular brand (Cole & Flynn 2009:68). A crucial element in consumer buying behaviour is what consumers think, say and perceive about the brand; that is, how important the concept of perceived quality is to organisations (Stojanov 2012:5). Yen *et al.* (2018:725) put forward that perceived quality is a significant influencer of brand loyalty.

Brucks, Zeithaml and Naylor (2000:361) outline five perceived brand quality parameters useful in assessing the quality of durable goods as: ease of use; versatility; durability; serviceability; performance and prestige.

Ease of use: involves whether a consumer is able to use the product after purchase with the assistance of an instruction manual (Yen *et al.* 2018:725). If the product is hard to operate even with the manual, then frustrations will mount, which might lead to consumer dissatisfaction, thus limiting chances of loyalty (Brucks *et al.* 2000:361).

Versatility/Features: this involves certain secondary functions of the product that allows it to appeal to the consumer and function well (Hoe & Mansori 2018:23) e. g., smartphone features like the phone’s ability to work in rainy weather. This allows the consumer more flexibility to use the product, which has an effect on quality perception and satisfaction (Shaharudin, Mansor Hassan, Omar & Harun 2011:8165).

Durability: this involves how long the product will be functioning well before it shuts down (Brucks *et al.* 2000:361; Yen *et al.* 2018:725). Products that are more durable are perceived to be of higher quality, thus having a positive feature in relation to brand image.

Serviceability: in the event of malfunction, it is important for consumers to obtain repair service or adequate help from the manufacturer or supplier (Yen *et al.* 2018:725). How fast, efficient and reliable is the service affect consumer behaviour and perceived product quality (Garvin 1987:106).

Performance: focuses on how the product performs in relation to expectations based on its operating characteristics (Hoe & Mansori 2018:23). The product is expected to do what it has been acquired for, such that it will be regarded as being of high quality (Brucks *et al.* 2000:361). In smartphones, if the main feature is a camera, then how well the camera functions will be important. Performance determines quality and is instrumental in loyalty generation. For quality performance to be attained, a product should perform well, and it must do so consistently.

Prestige/Aesthetics: this involves how the product portrays its super quality to the consumer, which includes how a product looks, feels, sounds, tastes, or smells (Garvin 1987:107; Yen *et al.* 2018:725). This can be seen as product characteristics such as appearance as well as brand image, which is mainly visible in society. Prestige begets satisfaction, which is instrumental in loyalty generation.

2.6.2.5 Switching cost

Across various industries, the marketplace is flooded with undifferentiated products and services to the extent that most product categories have seemingly less price variance, making it a lot easier for price sensitive clients to switch consumption to any brand when the situation arises (Malik, Ghafoor & Iqbal 2013:167). In various markets and/or industries, consumers undergo switching costs when they intend to switch from one product or brand in the same category, or when they change suppliers (Bhattacharya 2013:102). Switching costs are classified as costs that customers or buyers incur as they terminate transaction relationships and initiate a new one (Oyeniya & Abiodun 2009:112). Porter (1980:10); and Yen *et al.* (2018:726) outline switching costs as one-time costs that arise when a customer decided to purchase another product than his/her usual. Switching costs, as outlined by Himanka (2017:11), are the costs that prevent customers from switching from one supplier to the other and are regarded as one of the key elements of establishing a competitive advantage by encouraging brand loyalty.

In their study, Burnham, Frels and Mahajan (2003:111); Barroso and Picón (2012:533), propounded that switching cost is a higher order construct with six dimensions, namely: benefits loss costs; personal relationships loss costs; economic risk costs; cost of searching and evaluation; set-up costs; and monetary loss costs. All these switching cost dimensions are instrumental in influencing the consumer to either change their current brand or not. Furthermore, Zhang, Chen, Zhao and Yao (2014:268) highlighted that switching cost can act as a barrier to consumer switching between brands, thus switching costs promotes loyalty in that consumers will keep on purchasing their usual product in an industry categorised by higher switching costs. On the contrary, Himanka (2017:11) argued that switching costs only reflects loyalty when customers are satisfied, and when there is dissatisfaction, they become a barrier to a customer.

Barriers to customer exodus, such as switching costs as well as development of strong interpersonal relationships, are notable loyalty and retention strategies (Jones, Mothersbaugh & Beatty 2000:260). Overall, switching cost can serve as a strengthening element in a relationship,

the logic being that higher switching cost positively influences customer loyalty (Stan, Caemmerer & Jallet 2013:1545; Lam *et al.* 2004:298; Himanka 2017:11).

2.6.2.6 Brand experience

Across the world, where the market is crowded by brands that are competing to capture customers' attention, brand experience is becoming more and more important to organisations as consumers seek emotional experiences over and above functional brand benefits (Keng, Tran & Le Thi 2013:250). Yen *et al.* (2018:726) defined brand experience as an internal and personal response together with behavioural response upon consuming a product or a service. Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009:53) explains brand experience "as subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments". This exposition points out that brand experience is not solely limited to consumer interaction with the brand but also with the environment in which the brand is stored including store layouts, the package used to store the product and the medium that might be used to relay brand related information (Madeline & Sihombing 2019:93).

Brand experiences vary in strength, intensity and valence, meaning that some experiences are stronger than others, more intense than others and others are more positive or rather negative (Madeline & Sihombing 2019:93). In the long run, strong, intense and positive brand experiences stored in consumer minds will influence consumer satisfaction and loyalty (Forsido 2012:14; Keng, Tran & Le 2013:248; Madeline & Sihombing 2019:93). In a nut shell, brand experience is a unified feeling, and behavioural reaction is triggered by a specific brand-related stimulus; and as a result, a consumer with positive brand experience tends to be productive and loyal compared to others Yen *et al.* (2018:726). Superior brand experiences foster strong emotional responses from consumers, which in turn generate satisfaction, commitment and brand loyalty (Iglesias, Singh & Batista-Foguet 2010:573).

2.6.3 Social media interaction and brand loyalty

Social media offers organisations a convenient two-way communication platform with consumers, who can use it to establish the basis of brand loyalty through brand awareness (Bilgin 2018:134). Social media in its nature offers a convenient platform of consumer-to-consumer interaction, business-to-consumer interaction and business-to-business interaction (Jibril, Kwarteng, Chovancova & Pilik 2019:2). Organisations are likely to promote their products, services and brands on social media as they establish online brand communities full of brand enthusiasts and

advocates (Erdogmus & Cicek 2012:1355). As brands gain exclusive and positive meaning in the hearts and minds of consumers, they become irresistible and irreplaceable as they win their consumer loyalty. One of the important rewards for an organisation to promote online brand communities is to increase brand loyalty, which is the holy grail for business continuity (McAlexander, Schouten <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcDxxWfwYGI> & Koenig 2002:38).

Brand community encompasses like-minded individuals who come together to converge with each other and identify themselves with the brand as well as establishing meaningful relationships. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001:412) define brand community as a "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a "brand" and it resembles a form of association inclined in the consumption context surrounding a single brand." Generally, consumers associate themselves with brand communities in order to identify themselves with their favourite brands in their quest to satisfy their social exchange needs. A brand community is one that focuses on fostering relationships among its members who possess similar traits and interests towards a particular brand (Lee 2009:15; Jibril *et al.* 2019:4).

As cited by Lenhart and Madden (2007:1), Laroche, Habibi, Richard and Sankaranarayanan (2012:1756) and Jibril *et al.* (2019:3) state that individuals engage in online content communities and social media to converse with friends using pictures, words, and videos and stay in touch with them by arguing, debating, brain-storming, participating in intellectual discourse, sharing knowledge, gossiping as well as sharing consumption experiences.

Sankaranarayanan (2011:20) and Jibril *et al.* (2019:4) posit that online brand communities that are established on the basis of sharing and exchanging information, opinions and views rather than for commercial reasons, pose greater influence on participating consumers' views and purchase considerations.

Social media brand communities are becoming a powerful socio-economic phenomenon as they become instrumental in developing aggressive relationships between brands and consumers (Chaudhary, Asthana & Singhal 2015:2). They offer consumers a chance to be co-creators of content (Sankaranarayanan 2011:20), interacting with others and giving feedback to organisations, whereas on the marketer's side it gives them a platform to nurture deeper emotional relationships with all stakeholders, mainly the consumers. In view of developing formidable relationships with consumers, marketers should understand consumer needs and expectations so as to develop suitable social media brand strategies that would satisfy those needs (Lee 2009:11).

Well-developed social media-based brand communities would influence consumer brand loyalty as well as improve the image of the brand itself (Lee 2009:20; Jibril *et al.* (2019:5). Some studies point out that consumers tend to place their faith and trust in consumer generated content such as peer reviews, testimonials, recommendations on social media rather than messages from traditional mass communication crafted by marketers and public relations practitioners (Bidyanand 2014:122). Bidyanand (2014:122) further asserts that consumer reviews and comments about any product or brand on social media, creates either positive or negative word-of-mouth, which influences the consumer purchase decision-making process and their loyalty levels.

2.6.4 Brand loyalty and purchase intention

The positive impact of loyal consumers on business performance in competitive markets dominated by undifferentiated products, where customer switching is easy and customer acquisition is higher is gradually increasing the significance of customer brand loyalty (Bilgin 2018:133). It is of great importance for organisations to ensure that their products are always kept in the minds of consumers such that they become the first choice in the next purchase behaviour. In modern day business, the future of many organisations is dependent not on transactional customers only but rather on repeat business or loyal customers as it offers a competitive edge against competition.

Brand loyalty is linked to future business profitability, based on the notion that brand loyalty translates to future purchase behaviour from the fulfilment of purchase intention. Rizwan, Khan, Ghafoor, Ahmad, Humayon, and Aslam (2018:349) contend that brand loyalty is simply the goodwill of a brand in customers' minds, or a registered preference of a brand by customers, or rather a confirmation of repeat purchase behaviour by future customers. It is important to note that brand loyalty arises only when behaviour is supported by attitude.

A loyal customer is one with a solid long-term registered purchase intention. Tariq, Nawaz, Nawaz and Butt (2013:344) affirm that brand loyalty exerts a direct influence on purchase intention. Across a wide range of literature, it is regarded as one of the determinants of purchase intention, which has been widely seen as a predictor of subsequent purchase behaviour. Hanzaee and Andervazh (2012:5389) revealed that brand loyalty is regarded as repurchase commitment from consumers as they promise to purchase their favourable brands in future. This means that a loyal customer is an indicator of future purchase intention; it is not possible to be loyal without registering an intent to purchase.

2.7 PERCEIVED QUALITY

Quality is an elusive and indistinct construct in that it cannot be fully defined satisfactorily in one definition across all disciplines. In a normal business world, it is very difficult for an organisation to offer inferior quality products to clients and expect to survive the nature of competition as consumers tend to lose trust in organisations that offer sub-standard products (Cole & Flynn 2009:68; Vazire 2017:1). A crucial element in consumer buying behaviour is what consumers think, say and perceive about the brand; that is how important the concept of perceived quality is to organisations (Chen 2008:24; Stojanov 2012:5; Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:424). Understanding the fullness of perceived quality (consumer based) is critical for every organisation if they are to create a strong brand that is memorable in the mind of consumers, given that perceived quality is subjective to consumer perception. Ahn, Park and Hyun (2018: 24) argued that the level of perceived quality is highly proportional or influences the amount of experience and interactivity that a consumer has with a product or service.

Perceived quality is widely regarded as a post-consumption construct (Holbrook & Corfman 1985:35; Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:424), thus product quality can only be evaluated after consumption. However, Rust and Oliver (cited by Tsotsou 2005:2); Vazifehdoost and Negahdari (2018:47) regard perceived quality as a pre-and post-purchase construct, by arguing that the actual product consumption is not the only way used to assess product or service quality. This implies that consumers do not necessarily need to consume a product to evaluate its quality, but mere association with it through social media, as friends share their experience, is also sufficient for them to pass judgement on product or brand quality. Perceived quality is also regarded as a consumer's judgment or perception of quality of a particular brand relative to other brands (Owino, Cherotich, Karuri, Gitonga, Kimuya & Kaumbulu 2016:3; Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:424).

Perceived quality is described as the consumer's views and opinion concerning a brand or product's status and performance (Zeithaml 1988:3). This definition indicates that consumers are the sole evaluators of quality based on experience and association with the brand. Alexandra and Cerchia (2018:424) as well as Vazifehdoost and Negahdari (2018:47) assert that perceived quality is subjective to consumer judgements and evaluations, based on various attributes. Aaker (1991:85) has defined perceived quality as: "the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives". Perceived quality cannot be objectively determined on an objective but rather subjectively as it is a perception in itself, which is difficult to measure; it requires consumer evaluation of a brand's various attributes associated to quality by different consumers (Alexandra & Cerchia 2018:424).

2.7.1 Approaches to perceived quality

The concept of quality is quite important to organisations as it is in the academic field. It can consequently be viewed from five (5) different approaches, proposed by Garvin (1984:26), highlighted in Table 2.3.

These approaches emanating from the extensive nature of quality led scholars from four disciplines (philosophy, economics, marketing and operational management) to explain the concept in relation to their discipline.

Table 2.3: Approaches to Quality

<p>TRANSCEDENT</p> <p>Scholars in Philosophy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality in this scenario is viewed as inner excellence that is absolute and universally recognizable. Advocates of this approach posits that it is not feasible to accurately define quality, but rather it is a simple component that is recognizable only through experience. "Quality is neither mind nor matter, but a third entity independent of the two ... even though quality cannot be defined, you know what it is,"(Pirsig, Zen & Art 1974:185,213)
<p>PRODUCT BASED</p> <p>Scholars in Economics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality in product based view is an accurately quantified construct which is found in the attributes and components of a product or service, "Quality refers to the amounts of unpriced attributes contained in each unit of the priced attribute" (Lelfler 1982:956). More attributes = Higher quality, Less attributes = Low quality.
<p>USER BASED</p> <p>Scholars in Economics, Operations management & Marketing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality in user based is based on the premise that the user is the one who determines the quality of a product. Quality "lies in the eyes of the beholder" which is the customers (Garvin 1984:27). "Quality is the degree to which a specific product satisfies the wants of a specific customer " (Gilmore 1974:16). "Quality is fitness for use"(Juran 1974:2).
<p>MANUFACTURING BASED</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In manufacturing based a product is manufactured according to set standards and requirements and excellence or quality is ascertained when specifications are met. Any deviation from the target or specifications results in poor or low quality. Set standards are the yardstick of quality (Garvin 1984:28). "Quality is conformance to requirements"(Crosby 1979:15).
<p>VALUE BASED</p> <p>Scholars in Operations management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality is ascertained in relation to costs and prices or benefits, implying that a product of high quality is one that "provides performance at an acceptable price or conformance at an acceptable cost" (Garvin 1984:28). "Quality is the degree of excellence at an acceptable price and the control of variability at an acceptable cost" (Broh 1982:3).

Source: Garvin (1984:26).

The transcendent approach to quality views it as an intrinsic excellence, universally recognised and accepted but rather difficult to accurately define because of the unanalysable attributes than can only be realised through experiencing the offering (Fields, Hague, Koby, Lommel & Melby 2014:406; Garrigos-Simon, Narangajavana-Kaosiri, Narangajavana 2019:3). The products-based

approach views quality through the ingredients and components of the actual products or service offering (Elshaer 2012:4; Garrigos-Simon *et al.* 2019:3). In the product-based approach, higher quality ingredients translate to higher product or service quality. User based quality is quality defined by the end user who is the customer. In this approach, quality is determined by the degree a specific product or service satisfies the needs and wants of the customer (Babac 2011:11). The manufacturing-based approach to quality views quality from the perspective where products should meet set standards or specifications (Fields *et al.* 2014:406; Garrigos-Simon *et al.* 2019:3). A product that does not meet manufacturing standards is regarded to be poor in quality. The value-based approach views a quality product as one where the cost, price and its performance are well aligned and balanced (Garvin 1984:28).

2.7.2 Factors that affect/influence perceived quality

There are a number of variables that affect or influence perceived quality, and the extent of the effect each variable has as perceived quality varies from consumer to consumer. Aaker (1991:86) postulates that the extent to which a brand is considered to offer good quality products and/or services can be ascertained on the basis of the following elements:

- The quality being offered by the brand or a product is a reason to buy it, thus product quality should be of benefit to the consumer as it meets the point of need (Kandasamyd 2014:1).
- The level of differentiation or position is in relation to competing brands. If there is no difference between competing brands at all (homogeneous products) it means the product in question does not offer an incentive to a consumer to buy it, hence it is just an average product or brand (Nolega, Oloko, William & Oteki 2015:102).
- Price will be used as a quality indicator by consumers as it is becoming complex to assess the brand and its status (Ding, Ross Jr & Rao 2010:69).
- Availability in different sales channels, when it is in consumers' minds that widely accessible brands are of better quality compared to brands that are extremely difficult to find (Dimofte, Johansson & Bagozzi 2010:81).
- The number of brand or line extensions signifies that the brand in question stands for a reputable quality guarantee that spans across a wide variety of products, hence the consumer will regard that brand as of high quality (Berger, Draganska & Simonson 2007:460).

2.7.3 The quality quadrant

Ophuis and Van-Trijp (1995:178) developed a quality quadrant that implies that perceived quality is subject to Four (4) P: perception, product, person and place, as illustrated by the figure below.

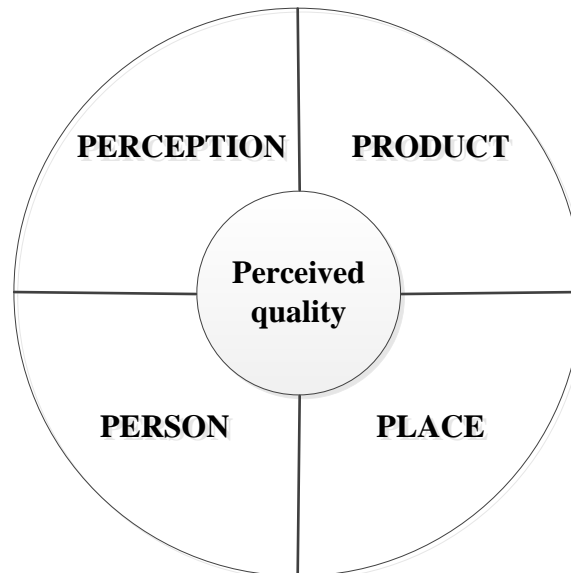


Figure 2.12: The Quality Quadrant

Source: Ophuis & Van-Trijp (1995:77)

The authors expressed that perceived quality is a result of perception, which in this case the judgement is based on intrinsic and extrinsic product traits that a consumer might have experienced, or associate with the product or brand name.

In addition, perceived quality is affected by the person/ consumer itself as different individuals differ in their abilities, preferences and experience.

Also, perceived quality may be in relation to a product itself or product category, like the compatibility with other devices of iPhone that might be regarded as poor quality with other consumers while it's an irrelevant attribute when it comes to smartphones' functionality.

More to perceived quality is the place element, which implies that the intended purpose of usage affects perceived quality; for example, a Sony Xperia Z3 is of great use under water but will be found wanting when it comes to picture quality against iPhone 6.

2.7.4 Quality perception process

Quality indicators are crucial in outlining the concept of perceived quality. Perceived quality is a multifaceted concept which relies on various dimensions that cannot be evaluated by consumers alone. For consumers to pass judgement on perceived product quality, they make use of surrogate or indirect quality indicators from a pool of product related attributes and secondly, the customer integrates consumer evaluations of these quality cues to determine the overall judgement of product quality (Ophuis & Van-Trijp 1995:178; Agyekum, Haifeng, & Agyeiwaa 2015:25).

In support of Olson's views on quality perception, Steenkamp (1990:312) contributed to the concept of perceived quality by advancing a quality perception framework highlighted in Figure 2.13, which distinguishes between quality attributes and quality cues. The quality perception process model developed by Steenkamp (1990:323) provides a useful structure for disentangling the impact of cues and quality attributes on perceived quality. Quality cues can be determined and ascertained by the senses before consumption, whereas quality attributes are the beneficial aspects of a product that cannot be realised prior to consumption (Ophuis & Van Trijp 1995:178).

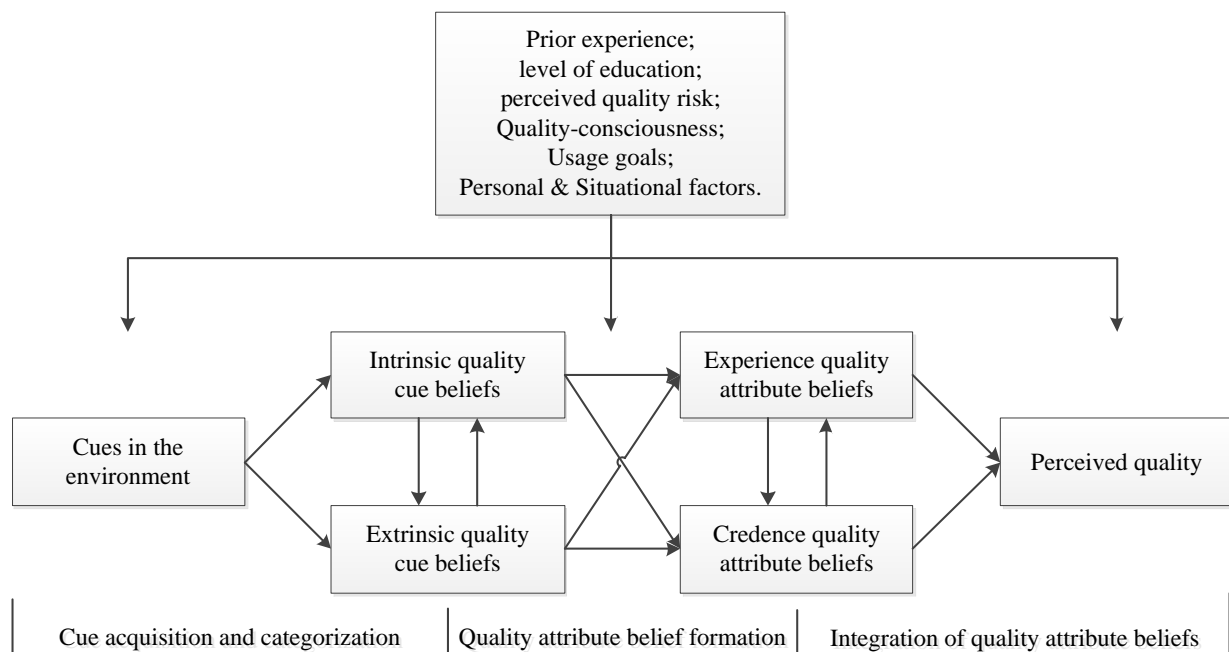


Figure 2.13: Conceptual model of quality perception process

Source: Source: Steenkamp (1990:323)

2.7.5 Quality cues

The left axis of the conceptual model has quality cues which are product characteristics, or informational stimuli that consumers can ascertain by the senses before actual consumption (Migliore, Borsellino, Schifani, DI-Gesaro & Schimmenti 2017:40). The first phase of quality perception framework is cue acquisition and categorisation, which is a practice where consumers elect cues on the basis of which further quality attribute beliefs are created. Consumers select cues in relation to their usefulness and the importance of a cue is influenced by personal and situational factors and other related variables.

The quality indicators are classified as either intrinsic or extrinsic, with intrinsic quality cues being derived from the physical product on aspects such as product colour and appearance (Bernues, Olaizola & Corcoran 2003:266; Migliore *et al.* 2017:40), whereas extrinsic cues are product related elements that are not part of the physical product such as price and brand image (Jaafar, Lalp & Naba 2012:75; Migliore *et al.* 2017:40).

2.7.5.1 Intrinsic quality cues

Steenkamp, Wieringa and Meulenberg (1998:2275); Stojanov (2012:7) postulate that intrinsic quality cues are closely linked to the actual physical product and thus it is impossible to change them without altering the actual product itself. As cited by Henchion, McCarthy and Resconi (2017:01), intrinsic cues are regarded as the inert characteristics of a product which cannot be changed or altered without affecting its existing nature. In this regard, Gellynck, Kuhne, Van-Bockstaele, Van-de-Walle and Dewettinck (2009:16) identified intrinsic quality cues like product appearance, product colour, product shape, product structure and price. These intrinsic quality indicators are also closely related to technical specifications, which also encompass physiological characteristics (Acebron & Dopico 2000:230). In products such as smartphones, intrinsic cues can be referred to attributes like size of the smartphone in terms of its thickness and display size, keypads in terms of manual buttons and touch screen, which are evaluated differently in terms of quality perception by consumers.

2.7.5.2 Extrinsic quality cues

As noted earlier, extrinsic quality cues relate to the external elements of the product attributed to quality perception, which elements are related to the product in question but are not part of its actual physicality (Stojanov 2012:7; Henchion *et al.* 2017:01). Notable extrinsic quality cues are price, brand image, brand name, store outlet and product information (Zethaml 1988:6). Price is the most

notable extrinsic indicator given that in the event when no information is available about two similar products, consumers will most likely conclude that the highest priced alternative is of better quality (Acebron & Dopico 2000:231). Brand name and other extrinsic elements have influence on consumer perception on product quality, be they credence or experience product quality. In the event that intrinsic product cues between two products are similar, then brand image or rather extrinsic cues take more influence in quality evaluation, for example. Marketing has the ability to alter extrinsic quality cues that positively influence consumer perception on quality (Ophuis Van-Trijp 1995:180). As shown in the above framework, extrinsic quality cues have an effect on consumer's judgement of both credence and experience product quality.

Both intrinsic and extrinsic quality indicators are important in assessing a product's perceived quality, but does not necessarily mean that on every product all quality indicators are important. In as much as intrinsic quality cues give a more realistic experience of product quality, mainly because intrinsic cues are part of the physical product, it does not mean that extrinsic cues are far less important.

Extrinsic cues are of greater importance when there is similar, or little or no information about a product's intrinsic attributes (Stojanov 2012:9). Stojanov (2012:8) purports that the amount and value invested by organisations in advertising and promoting brand image signifies how companies are confident in their products and services, which is regarded as a strong extrinsic cue for product quality.

Quality indicators are classified as an informational impetus related to product quality and can be discerned by consumers through the senses before consumption (Lazarova 2010:16). These quality indicators can have varying influence on different quality attributes. Generally, cues do not affect the perceptions on a single attribute. In quality evaluation, it is difficult for one cue to be a perfect index of a particular quality attribute, hence several quality cues should be considered in order to form perception of the product on a certain quality attribute (Lazarova 2010:16). Ultimately, consumers make use of quality cues (intrinsic/extrinsic) to determine the ratings of a product and/ or services and factors that cannot be sensorically articulated at the time of purchase hence attributing to its quality

2.7.6 Quality attributes

On the left axis of the conceptual model of quality perception process lies quality attributes that are difficult to perceive prior to consuming the product or service (Migliore *et al.* 2017:40). The second category of the quality perception framework includes quality attributes' belief formation,

which includes experience and credence quality beliefs. Lazarova (2010:20) asserts that experience quality attributes are given more credit in the formation of perceived quality judgements than credence quality attributes. It is difficult to determine product quality by consumption experience even in the long run, and the final evaluation of perceived quality hinges on quality attribute perceptions. Quality attributes are the important and useful benefits or ramifications provided by the product (Lazarova 2010:16). They signify what the product is perceived to be offering to the consumer. Quality attributes are imperceptible before consumption. By placing everything into perspective, quality cues are what consumers observe, whereas quality attributes are what consumers want.

Quality attributes are divided into experience and credence quality attributes (Migliore *et al.* 2017:40), with the difference being that experience attribute effects can be discerned right after consumption, or during consumption, while credence attribute effects may be realised in the long run (Verdu-Jover, Montes & Fuentes 2004:455). Verdu-Jover *et al.* (2004:455) highlighted that for consumers to be able to evaluate the quality of a specific product or service adequately they should have sufficient know-how on how to do so, otherwise they will not realise these credence quality attributes.

2.7.6.1 Experience quality attributes

Experience quality attributes are those that are feasible to be ascertained by consumers upon consumption, and any quality expectations created prior to consumption are either refuted or affirmed (Henchion *et al.* 2017:01). Experience quality attributes such as convenience, freshness and sensory characteristics can be experienced during or at the time of consumption Gellynck *et al.* 2009:16) Acebron and Dopico (2000:231), in their food quality study, explained that experience quality is ascertained by a consumer's sensory evaluation at the point of consumption by taste (Ophuis & Van Trijp 1995:180); but in other products, consumers will evaluate product quality as they use the product. In products like smartphones, battery lifespan, camera quality, display visibility and touchscreen usability can all be experienced when consuming or rather using a smartphone and consumers can easily evaluate the quality of those features, and subsequently the overall smartphone quality.

2.7.6.2 Credence quality attributes

Credence quality attributes are quite important to consumers in their buying behaviour as they are those attributes that are difficult to evaluate just after normal use or consumption of the product (Migliore *et al.* 2017:41). According to Ophuis and Van Trijp (1995:180), credence quality

attributes such as nutritional benefits in the food industry are of greater importance to consumers despite the notion that they are not experienced directly, and in some instances, they are difficult to evaluate for consumers who lack experience to do so. In certain instances, consumers have to rely on the judgement, information cues (extrinsic cues), or information of others that the product contains certain quality attributes (Migliore *et al.* 2017:41; Henschion *et al.* 2017:01). In the food industry, nutritional attributes and healthy specifications might not be realised by consumers for the entire use of product even though the manufacturer has advised consumers about the product's nutritional benefits. Even though they do not realise the benefits immediately, knowing that information is influential in their quality evaluation. Overall, quality assessment is considered to be based upon the perceptions of the products with regard to quality attributes.

2.7.7 Social media interaction and perceived quality

Consumer experience with a brand shared on social media with other consumers is of more value and influence in a consumer purchase decision as it affects quality perception (Jaakkola, Stenroos & Kimmel 2014:46; Maecker, Barrot & Becker 2016:135). Consumer perceptions about brand or product quality are fundamental for the strength of a brand in relation to competition due to its direct influence on consumer buying behaviour (Chen 2008:24; Stojanov 2012:5). Social media interaction plays a crucial role in influencing consumer perception, both before and after consumption as consumers can freely and openly share information, product experience, and post reviews and opinions about the brand on social media (Habibi, Laroche & Richard 2014:155).

Over the years, social media has grown and established itself as a reputable source of information about a brand or product's performance compared to organisations' advertising information (Hajli 2014:393). This is so because of the nature of social media that allows consumers to post or rather share first-hand information about their experiences with the product on consumption. This ubiquitous dynamic nature of social media interaction has led organisations to integrate social media in their traditional marketing strategies and establish relationships with their potential and existing clients (Gensler, Volckner, Thompkins & Wiertz 2013:244). The idea is to exert influence on consumer perception on quality about the products and/or brand by monitoring consumer reviews and opinions about their brand on social media and respond accordingly (Karamian, Nadoushan & Nadoushan 2015:364).

Hajli (2014:400), Maecker, Barrot and Becker (2016:136) indicated that the growing popularity of social media globally has allowed consumers to seek confirmatory evidence from other users or consumers within their network or virtual community about a brand. In relation to consumer

perception or judgement on quality prior to making a purchase decision, social media offers useful information from other consumers who might have consumption experience, or prior relations with a brand.

Social media contributes significantly to the overall brand performance and consumer perceptions as it allows brands to communicate a positive promise to them as well as respond in real time to their messages posted on social platforms (Hudson, Huang, Roth & Madden 2016:28). Organisations are encouraged to implement a social media communication strategy tailor-made to trigger positive electronic word-of-mouth, which should be supported by an overall objective to provide quality products and services while avoiding negative consumer brand experiences (Owino *et al.* 2016:3).

Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014:38) purport that under social media, the quality of organisational generated brand content and their responsiveness is directly related to the quality of the brand itself. This entails that poor online presence and social media communication indicates poor brand quality. Within the same realm, consumers have placed more value on user-generated brand communication as it substitutes business to consumer communication about brand quality like advertising (Jaakkola, Stenroos & Kimmel 2014:46; Bernoff & Li (2011:36). Chevalier and Mayzlin's (2006:345) study on the impact of user generated content (online reviews) on online book sales, found that online consumer reviews have a significant impact on perception of product quality of other consumers. This is mainly because consumers will regard user generated content (online reviews) as a testament of their satisfaction of product and brand quality, thereby influencing perceptions of brand quality of other consumers seeking the same product (Schivinski & Dabrowski 2014:38).

2.7.8 Perceived quality and purchase intention

Consumer perceptions about quality of a product, service or brand are of great significance in consumer buying behaviour. Perceived quality is one of the areas that plays an important role in the consumer decision making process, mainly through its supposed relationship with purchase intention. Perceived quality is defined as a consumer's judgement or opinion about the product's overall excellence or superiority (Zeithaml 1988:3). In this definition, the consumer is the sole evaluator of quality based on experience and association with the brand. On the other hand, purchase intention is simplified, as the consumer's reaction is close enough to be an actual purchase.

Purchase intention is an important indicator for future commitment to buy a product from consumers, and is of substantial importance to an organisation in its quest to boost sales and maximise profits. Tariq, Nawaz, Musarrat and Butt (2013:341) posit that purchase intention highlights the impression of customer retention.

Rodoula Tsiotsou (2005:1) purports that the pillar of any business is that highly perceived quality results in purchase intention, repeated purchases as well as brand loyalty.

Consumer perception about brand or product quality is fundamental for the success of that particular brand in relation to competition as it has a direct impact on consumer buying behaviour (Chen 2008:24; Stojanov 2012:5). A crucial element in consumer buying behaviour is what consumers think, say and perceive about the brand; thus, how important the concept of perceived quality is to organisations (Chen 2008:24; Stojanov 2012:5). Understanding the fullness of perceived quality (consumer based) is critical for every organisation if they are to create a strong brand that is memorable in the mind of consumers, given that perceived quality is subjective to consumer perception. Consumer perceptions on quality triggers either positive or negative reaction towards the product or brand in question, which will affect consumer brand loyalty and purchase intention (Cole & Flynn 2009:68). Brand exposure is vital for perceived quality, which might come through social media interactions and friends' referrals. Positive brand perceived quality means the customer rates the brand highly in their minds, which will affect their purchase decision-making process.

Before purchasing any product, consumers are faced with a wide selection of products or brands to choose from. It is worth noting that an unknown brand to consumers does not enter a purchase consideration set; and a brand perceived to be inferior is eliminated from the consideration set from the onset. A product's perceived quality which is available to both consumed brand and a new brand to the client due to various cues, triggers an intent to purchase from consumers. If the product lives up to the perception, the resultant purchase intention of that product increases. Furthermore, despite the type of interaction that comes between perceived quality and purchase intentions, one thing that is clear is that there is a supposed relationship between the two constructs.

Perceived quality is of great significance to organisation in many ways as it influences which product or brands are included or excluded in a purchase consideration set, and which brands are likely to be selected. When a product is perceived to be of greater quality it becomes a point of competitive advantage to such an extent that consumers are prepared to pay a premium price for it. Relatedly, when evaluating the concept of purchase intention, the researcher is trying to forecast

the resultant behaviour the consumer is likely to adopt in his/her next imminent purchase decisions.

2.8 PURCHASE INTENTION

In general, customers are crucial as they play a critical role in the economic system by paying for goods and services. It is therefore critical to note that the absence of demand eradicates the motivation for manufacturers to produce any product (Padhy & Sawlikar 2018:14). Consumers are constantly faced with various options that prompt them to make important buying decisions, which is of interest to marketers and businesses. The large flow and exchange of information available to consumers online at any time, is mainly attributed to the rise of social media, which in a way impacts on consumer purchase decisions (Maria *et al.* 2019:108). It is thus rare for consumers to buy products without doing a background check for the brand and product in question. This background check or evaluation of alternatives is a multi-step process where consumers collect information about a preferred brand, evaluate its attributes by assessing if the product will match their intentions and only then will they start thinking about making a purchase decision. In the event that they make a purchase, they evaluate if the product really matches their expectations. Based on actual consumption experience and if the consumer is absolutely satisfied, then they will definitely think of consuming it again or highlight some interest to re-purchase that specific brand, and thus consider purchase intention (Tariq, Nawaz, Musarrat & Butt 2013:341).

The final part of the affective stage of the HOE model reflects how consumers develop an intent to purchase a product or brand after they receive and process information pertaining to that product or brand (Lavidge & Steiner 1961:61). As previously articulated, both TPB and TRA suggest that behaviour is determined by peoples' explicit intentions and/or plan as well as motivations to perform that behaviour. Thus, an intention to buy a particular smartphone brand is determined by the intention to own a smartphone. Therefore, the intention of individuals are indicators of their personal attitudes towards that particular behaviour as it reflects the perception that it is more valuable or not to own a specific smartphone brand than the other. To this end, consumers' buying behaviour reactions are key to identifying or predicting which brand they can purchase in future and those reactions are regarded as purchase intention (Shah, Aziz, Jaffari, Waris, Ejaz, Fatima & Sherazi 2012:107).

2.8.1 Purchase intention defined

Purchase intention evolves from a behavioural science term intention, which is a subjective probability that a person performs a particular action (Kian, Boon, Fong, & Ai 2017:209). On the

other hand, Fishbein & Ajzen (1975:216) postulate that purchase intention is a state of being which emanates from consumer attitudes towards a given object. The authors further outline that attitude refers to “a person’s location on a bipolar evaluative or affective dimension with respect to some object, action or event.” In other words, an attitude is an individual’s general feeling in relation to a stimuli or object, be it positive or negative. Mamman, Ogunbado and Abu-Bakr (2016:51) posit intention as how much an individual is motivated and prepared to try, and how much determinants they can use to perform a particular behaviour. Consumers’ buying behaviour reactions are key to identifying or predicting which brand they can purchase in future and those reactions are regarded as purchase intention (Shah *et al.* 2012:107). Purchase intention is interlinked to a consumer’s behaviour, perceptions and attitudes (Noorlitaria *et al.* 2020:104).

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) emphasises the notion that behaviour of individuals is governed by personal attitudes together with social influence and some degree of control (Moss 2016:01). Khumrat (2012:44) asserts that in TPB, actual behaviour is not only determined by behavioural intention as TRA implies, but also with perceived behavioural control. In TPB, attitude towards behaviour and a subjective norm are classified as the direct determinants of intention to perform a specific behaviour (Chauke 2014:18). Under TPB and TRA, behaviour is determined by peoples’ explicit intentions and/or plan, motivations to perform that behaviour, hence an intention to buy a particular smartphone brand is determined by the intention to own a smartphone. The intentions of individuals are indicators of their personal attitudes towards that particular behaviour as it reflects the perception that it is more valuable or not to own a specific smartphone brand than the other. In summary, purchase intention simply means a visible desire or a plan to purchase a product or attain a service (Padhy & Sawlikar 2018:14; Noorlitaria *et al.* 2020:104).

2.8.2 The significance of purchase intention

Purchase intention is an important indicator for future commitment to buy a product from consumers. It is of great importance to organisations in their quest to boost sales as marketers use purchase intention to predict sales (Morwitz, Steckel & Gupta 2007:347). Tariq *et al.* (2013:341) posit that purchase intention highlights the impression of customer retention. Purchase intention is simplified as the reaction close enough to be an actual purchase. An intention to buy can be useful in forecasting which products or brands will be purchased by customers in the near future (Rehmani, Khan & Ali 2011:101; Kian *et al.* 2017:209), therefore is useful for an organisation to concentrate on perfecting those products to the satisfaction of the consumer. Customer behavioural intentions that emanate from social media interactions are regarded as signs of veritable buying

preference; hence, it is necessary to monitor them. In this regard, purchase intention depicts the impression of customer retention and is seen as an implied promise by an individual to buy a particular product again on the next market trip, or when they need it.

2.8.3 Determinants of purchase intention

There are certain functions of the brand which have a strong influence on consumer purchase intention of smartphones, such as brand image, dependency, convenience, product attributes, price and peers or social influence. These will be addressed in the subsequent subsection.

2.8.3.1 Brand image

The proliferation of brands in modern markets has made it difficult for consumers to easily make purchase decisions, hence the importance of brand image in assisting consumers to make a purchase decision (Zhang 2015:58). Brand image creates value in various ways as it assists clients in information processing, differentiating the brand, establishing buying reasons, offering positive feelings as well as providing a basis for extensions (Chao & Liao 2016:120). Brand image, according to Keller (1993:3), is defined as “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory”. These refer to informational cues that are associated with the brand in consumer’s mind and thus define a brand to consumers. Brand image is regarded as the summation of brand associations in consumer memory which channel them towards brand association and perception (Mabkhot, Shaari & Salleh 2017:72).

Hoeffler and Keller (2002:79) posit that brand image enhancement encompass creating brand meaning, establishing brand characteristics and what the brand stands for in consumers’ minds. One major strategy for many corporate organisations is to influence consumer perception and attitude towards a particular brand, thereby establishing a strong brand image in their minds, which will stimulate consumer purchasing behaviour of that brand (Zhang 2015:58).

Wang and Tsai (2014:28) assert that brand image is not an intrinsic component of the product, but rather it emanates from advertisements, promotions or users’ perception. Brand image is regarded as an extrinsic product cue used to evaluate a product before a purchase decision is made (Zeithaml, 1988:8). Chi, Yeh and Huang (2009:225) outline that a brand that possesses a good image can easily obtain consumers’ preference and favourable purchase decision as they feel safe and trust the brand. When brand image is favourable in the minds of consumers, brand related messages exert a stronger influence compared to competitor brand messages, hence the consumer

will be inclined to follow the brand with the favourable image (Hsieh & Li, 2008:29; Yen, Rasdi, Rasiah & Ramasamy 2018:725).

A product with a good and preferable brand image to its consumers will attain higher purchase intention (Kamins & Marks 1991:180) and customers also have more confidence in buying familiar products (Laroche, Kim, & Zhou, 1996:120). Hsieh, Pan, and Setiono (2004:252) outline that a successful brand image is useful to consumers as it helps them easily differentiate a brand from its competition, evaluate the possible benefits it can offer and subsequently increase consumer purchase intention. Hyun and Kim (2011:430); Yen *et al.* (2018:725) opine that a brand image which has found favour in consumers' eyes has a positive influence on consumer behaviour in terms of increasing brand loyalty, compelling price premium, provoking positive word-of-mouth and stimulating purchase intention. Wong (2017:80) propounded that consumers want to own a widely accepted smartphone brand as they believe that it is of premium quality which thus generates and intent to purchase.

2.8.3.2 Convenience

Convenience is evident where work, functions and or tasks are made easier, are simplified and completed with minimal effort with no difficulty or discomfort (Lay-Yee, Kok-Siew & Yin-Fah 2013:2429; Shabrin, Khandaker, Kashem, Hie & Susila 2017:53). In the smartphone industry, convenience refers to the ability to use a smartphone to do tasks that even a computer can do at any given time and place with ease, without having to be at a fixed workstation (Ding, Lim, Patanmacia, Low & Gay 2011:194; Shabrin *et al.* 2017:53). Previous research outlines that convenience plays a pivotal role in determining the demand and/or purchase intention of smartphones (Lay-Yee, *et al.* 2013:2429; Harun, Soon, Kassim & Sulong 2015:198; Kaushal & Kumar 2016:3).

The order of the day requires communication to be instantly available and smartphones are suitable for that, aided with the availability of internet. Ranson (2009:1) highlighted the importance of smartphones as they possess a number of applications that enable users to document expenses and even process credit cards while in transit. Smartphones are now powered to function as much as the computer as one can access and store documents in various formats, take photos and even play games to refresh the mind (Anthony 2012:2).

In addition, smartphones make it possible for users to perform tasks that were previously not possible to complete while on the road, such as comparing store prices, check store reviews, and social networking anytime and anywhere (Suki & Suki 2013:50).

2.8.3.3 Dependency

Previous studies have reflected that smartphone usage, or rather dependency, is massively correlated with purchase intention (Ding *et al.* 2011:196), (Suki & Suki 2013:50; Lay-Yee *et al.* 2013:2429). In the past, the importance of smartphones has dramatically increased as it is no longer a secondary option for the many consumers but part of their daily life, mainly because of the vast number of applications that are trivial (Suki & Suki 2013:50; Shabrin *et al.* 2017:53). The use of smartphones is no longer limited to calling, instant messaging and passive internet connection, but has extended to perform other tasks such as banking, emailing, documenting, school research, gaming, photo sharing, social networking, video recording, and online shopping which was not possible with an ordinary mobile phone before, and thus has created dependency which leads to purchase intention (Kaushal & Kumar 2016:3; Lay-Yee *et al.* 2013:2429; Shabrin *et al.* 2017:53). Dependency on smartphones or mobile phones is regarded as a strong propensity for continuous access and their high usage in all environments and the unwillingness to be parted from them (Tian, Shi, & Yang 2009:514; Ding *et al.* 2011:195). Lay-Yee *et al.* (2013:2429) asserted that due to the growing dependency on smartphones, people now interact more with their smartphones than with other fellow human beings.

2.8.3.4 Price

In the consumer purchase decision making process, price will always be a key component in influencing purchase intention (Malviya, Saluja & Thakur 2013:15; Shabrin *et al.* 2017:53). Likewise, Kaushal and Kumar (2016:2) assert that price exerts more influence on consumer's choice to purchase a particular product or brand. Kotler and Armstrong (2012:290) further define price as "the amount of money charged for a product or a service, or rather the sum of all the values that customers give up in gaining the benefits of having or using a product or service". As the definition implies, price is generally the value or amount of money that consumers are willing to pay in exchange of a product or service that is valuable to them (Hossain, Islam, Islam, & Mustafi 2017:95; Shabrin *et al.* 2017:53).

Lay-Yee *et al.* (2013:2430); Shahid *et al.* (2017:31) reiterate that the value of money differs between individuals, as some consumers can value a product for a higher price while others think that it is not worth that premium. For example, a higher pricing has a positive effect on consumer purchase intention when price is viewed as an indicator of quality (Tellis & Gaeth 1990), as well as having a negative effect on purchase intention in products that are heterogeneous (Ling *et al.* 2014:17). In their research, Chew, Lee, Lim, Loke and Wong (2012:60) found that price has a

significant impact on smartphone purchase intention among young adults and university students. Shahid *et al.* (2017:31) postulate that consumers who are price sensitive are biased more towards cheaper product offerings, whereas consumers who are quality oriented will prefer quality over price and believe price is an indicator of quality, and hence less likely to buy a lowcost product regardless of its quality.

2.8.3.5 Product features

A product is defined as “anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need which is more than just tangible objects, such as cars, computers, or cell phones” (Kotler & Armstrong 2012:224). Lay-Yee *et al.* (2013:2430) explain a feature as a product attribute designed to meet satisfaction levels of consumer needs and wants, either by owning a product and/or through its consumption. A smartphone is a mobile electronic device with an advanced operating system that permits the installation of secondary applications with internet connection, and which offers a variety of functions to the end user (Cromar 2010:4). Smartphone features are in the form of hardware and software with the hardware being the physical appearance of the device such as the body, size, weight, colour and a lot more, which has a huge impact on influencing purchase intention on modern consumers (Mohammed 2018: 3223; Shabrin *et al.* 2017:53).

A smartphone feature, be it hardware or software, exerts influence on the consumer purchase decision process as they will evaluate these features before making a purchase decision (Shabrin *et al.* 2017:53). This means that in an environment where technology is key, there will be high purchase intention towards the brand that offers highly technological devices. Dziwornu (2013:155) sums it up, with the assertion that the consumer purchase decision towards mobile phones is significantly influenced by product features.

2.8.3.6 Peer or social influence

Social and or peer influence is generally affiliated to the way individuals are influenced by other people’s feelings, attitude, beliefs and behaviour (Suki & Suki 2013:50; Kian *et al.* 2017:209). Social influence is explained as a shift in one’s attitude, feelings, thoughts and/or behaviour emanating from interaction between individuals or a particular group, which change of behaviour is distinct from conformity, power, and authority (Rashotte 2007:4426).

In the consumer purchase decision making process, consumers make refrence to the views, opinions, information and beliefs of other individuals in their social circle or social groups before

deciding what to buy (Bearden & Etzel 1982:184; Goh, Jiang, Hak, & Tee 2016:995). Generally, due to interaction, consumers or individuals alter their behaviours, feelings and thoughts with respect to a reference group to which they feel similar according to their psychological principles such as balance (Rashotte 2007:4426). In consumer behaviour, it is more likely that individuals will adopt thoughts, beliefs and attitudes of reference groups or peers that are close to them, those that they can trust and ones they are willing to be associated with (Childers & Rao 1992:199; Kaushal & Kumar 2016:02). People are indeed influenced by their peers or large groups and are susceptible to social (peer) influence through observations, perceptions and decisions made by a reference group that engage in smartphones (Suki & Suki 2013:50; Shabrin *et al.* 2017:53). Kian *et al.* (2017:209) posited that the source of social influence for Generation Y consumers in purchasing smartphone might come from friends, peers, family members and even from a spouse. Mohammed (2018: 3221) purports that peer and social influence have proven to exert a positive influence on purchase behaviour of university students. Wong (2019:79) revealed that when most consumers in a social circle own a particular smartphone or when the brand becomes popular, it will affect those consumers without that smartphone, and will decide to acquire it to align themselves with others.

The importance of a social network is that in addition to information regarding which best smartphone to acquire, consumers can get product reviews from other consumers who are using that particular brand, or who have previously used it (Rahim, Safin, Kheng, Abas & Ali 2016:248). Rahim *et al.* explain that consumers tend to receive advice and consider opinions carefully from friends and families on the type of brand and smartphone features, and that they subsequently purchase similar smartphones used by their friends and families. Previous studies have indicated that social and/or peer influence significantly affects the consumer purchase decision process (Suki & Suki 2013:50; Lay-Yee *et al.* 2013:2431; Mohammed 2018: 3221).

2.9 SYNOPSIS

This chapter focused on reviewing literature on how social media interaction affects brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and purchase intention. The concepts of brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and purchase intention were explored in detail, and how social media interaction has an impact on all these constructs. In the same vein, the chapter also reviewed the hierarchy of effects model of advertising, theory of reasoned action as well as theory of planned behaviour. The next chapter will focus on research methodology that guides the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology is a precise method or structure which is followed by the researcher to address the research problem at hand (Bilau, Witt & Lill 2018:599). Inclusive in the research methodology are various steps adopted by the researcher to articulate the research problem together with hypotheses drawn as well as the logic behind these steps chosen. A well-designed methodology with clear steps enables the researcher to adhere to the plan and address the objectives using a stated guideline in a reasonable time frame. Considering the above, a specific research design and methods which were applied in this study were established.

A review of literature was done in the previous chapter, where the researcher outlined the theoretical framework of the study to explore social media marketing, user interaction, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention. The chapter focused on answering theoretical objectives of the study as the researcher examined the effect of social media interaction (user interaction) on brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention. It also gave insights on the ownership, use and demand of smartphones in South Africa. In a nutshell, the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter One, the literature review in Chapter Two, as well as the research methodology in this chapter indicate the research approach that was adopted to address the research objectives, as stated in Section 1.4 of this study.

This chapter outlines the procedures employed and techniques used to address research objectives as well the study's hypotheses to address the research problem. The chapter begins by articulating the scope of the study, followed by addressing the concept of research design, research purpose and the discussion of the research approach. Also addressed is the sampling design, target population, sample frame and sampling size. The data collection method and instruments employed, pre-testing and pilot study were addressed. Data preparation and analysis techniques used in this study were also outlined as well as the concept of reliability and validity of this research.

3.2 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on social media and its effects on brand awareness and in turn perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention. Social media is witnessed on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn and YouTube. In conducting the literature review, Section

2.4.1 entails that the most widely used social network site in South Africa is Facebook. What was also evident in the review of literature is the active role of consumers within the social media sphere as they become co-creators of content rather than being passive recipients of advertising messages from an organisation. Consumers on social media have been given freedom of expression, which results in them sharing their consumption experiences and seeking advice from peers on product quality for future purchase decisions. Resultantly the study focuses on the effects of these interactions on brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and ultimately purchase intention of smartphone brands.

The study also reviewed literature on the effect of brand awareness on perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention within the social media realm. It was critical to establish how customers perceive the quality of brands that are on social media as well as how brands can enhance customer loyalty online. This study also focuses on how social media is impacting consumer buying behaviour and purchase decision while brand awareness, loyalty and perceived quality play a mediating role.

Lastly, the study was restricted to students within the Vaal University of Technology's Vanderbijlpark precinct in South Africa, which attributed to financial and time constraints.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a carefully plotted plan that determines the techniques and procedures for gathering and analysing required data (Babin & Zikmund 2016:67). It creates a foundational plan and conceptual structure of conducting the entire research. It focuses on answering the questions what, where, when, how much, by what means concerning the research problem, which the design of this study will focus on answering how much and by what means social media influences brand awareness and subsequently brand loyalty, perceived quality and purchase intention. The major function of research design is to ensure the smooth flow of research activities, thus ensuring the maximum efficiency possible, with the objective of obtaining a solution to the research problem (Bairagi & Munot 2019:17). Research design has a bearing on the reliability of the study's results. As outlined by Abutabenjeh and Jaradat (2018:238), research design is a well-crafted system and strategy put in place for extracting and analysing data as the researcher investigates the research problems in an economical manner.

Lau and Kuziemy (2016:228) classified research into three main categories, which are descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory designs.

3.3.1 Descriptive research

Kumar (2019:15) outlines that descriptive research is done when the focus is on describing and providing information about a situation, phenomenon or variable rather than examining relationships or associations. It is usually structured and well designed so as to describe the characteristics of a phenomenon. Descriptive research studies are all about obtaining and describing what is prevalent in respect to the phenomenon or problem under study (Rahi 2017:2). This study seeks to explore the relationship amongst a number of variables, and as such, the descriptive research design will be employed.

3.3.2 Exploratory research

When little or none is known of the research problem based on the scarcity of research that underpins a desired field, that research will be exploratory. Kumar (2019:15) explained that exploratory studies are done to better understand the essence of the problem given that little is known about the phenomenon. In that scenario, extensive work and findings need to be gathered initially to gain familiarity on the problem. The major emphasis in exploratory research studies is on discovering of new ideas and insights (Rahi 2017:2).

3.3.3 Explanatory research

Explanatory research focuses on addressing the why questions of the research that would have developed when doing descriptive research. Kumar (2019:15), opines that when explanatory research focuses on seeking clarity on the why and how there is a relationship between two aspects of a phenomenon. The researcher wants to understand so as to draw meanings and ideas to understand the connection between two variables pertaining to a research problem. According to Rahi (2017:2), in addressing the “why” aspect of the research, explanatory research is there to obtain the reasons behind the occurrence of a particular phenomenon and explain it in the form of casual relationships that argue that variable X has an effect on variable Y, be it positive or negative.

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

Various authors classified research into a number of approaches, the dominating ones being quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Mansourian & Maddan 2007:94; Creswell 2008:3), MacDonald & Headlam 2009:9; Leavy 2017:9; Rahi 2017:2). Table 3.1 below points out the distinction among three approaches identified by Creswell (2003:18).

Table 3.1: Research approaches

Tend to/ Typically	Qualitative Approach	Quantitative Approach	Mixed Methods Approach
Use these philosophical assumptions. Employ these strategies of inquiry	Constructivist/Advocacy/Participatory Knowledge claims. Phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study and narrative.	Post positivist knowledge claims. Surveys and experiments.	Pragmatic knowledge claims. Sequential, concurrent and transformative.
Employ these methods	Open-ended questions, emerging approaches, text or image data.	Closed-ended questions, predetermined approaches, numeric data.	Both open and closed-ended questions. Both emerging and predetermined approaches and both quantitative and qualitative data analysis.
Use these practices of research, as the researcher.	Positions himself or herself. Collects participant meanings. Focuses on a single concept or phenomenon. Brings personal values into the study. Studies the context or setting of participants. Validates the accuracy of findings. Makes interpretations of the data. Creates and agenda for change or reform. Collaborates with participants.	Tests or verifies theories or explanations. Identifies variables to study. Relates variables in questions or hypothesis. Uses standards of validity and reliability. Observes and measures information numerically. Uses unbiased approaches. Employs statistical procedures.	Collects both quantitative and qualitative data. Develops a rationale for mixing. Integrates data at different stages of inquiry. Presents visual pictures of the procedures in the study. Employs the practices of both quantitative and qualitative research.

Source: Creswell (2003:19).

Creswell (2008:03) attests that the problem statement plays a pivotal role in selecting a suitable research approach together with the personal experiences of the researcher. This study utilised a quantitative research approach, which Leavy (2017:9); Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:8)

described as a method that focuses on evaluation, analysing cause and effect relationship amongst variables attested from quantitative data obtained. The approach was more suitable given that the research investigated the phenomena by extracting numerical data, which was analysed statistically. The decision to take the quantitative research approach in this study was further reinforced by the desire to use objective information to ascertain relationships between given variables (Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel & Page (2013:154). Thus, a quantitative research approach is suitable for this study as it allows the researcher to test relationships between variables, as indicated in the conceptual model presented in Section 1.3. Moreover, a quantitative approach is more descriptive in nature, and calls for large samples for data gathering with which population results may be generalised (Kumar 2019:16).

3.5 SAMPLING DESIGN

Research quality is assured not only by the effectiveness of methodology and instrumentation adopted but also on the relevance and appropriateness of the sampling strategy used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007:4). A sample design is a framework or a concise plan for drawing a suitable sample, ensuring that accurate data is obtained that represents the whole population (Cant, Strydom, Jooste & Du Plessis 2009:171).

Most researchers hardly study the entire population due to a number of reasons. Rather, they focus on a representation of the whole population where the results drawn will be believed to portray the nature of the population. A poorly selected sample will have reliability and validity problems, since the results will not reflect the true picture of the population under study. A sample design as illustrated in figure 3.1, consists of a step-by-step process to be followed, which includes defining a target population, identifying a sample frame, choosing a sampling method, determining sample size, developing a data collection method, and developing and executing the operational plan for sample elements (Cant *et al.* 2009:171).

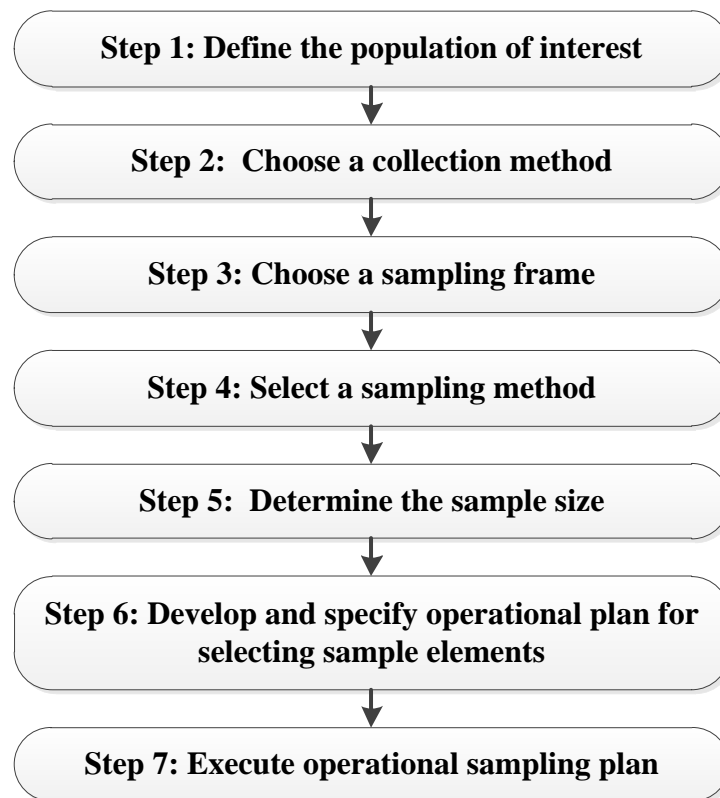


Figure 3.1: Steps in sampling plan

Source: Cant, Strydom, Jooste & Du Plessis (2009:171).

3.5.1 Defining target population

A population as outlined by Greener (2008:48); Rahi (2017:3) is defined as the entire universe of individuals or elements from which a sample will be extracted, thus relating it to the full mass of elements, which is the source group from which a sample is drawn. As outlined by these authors, it implies that a research population is the entire group of people in a bigger context which are of interest to the research study. Target population is a unified cluster of respondents that match a selection criterion, consisting of units of analysis to which the researcher wants to make inference in a particular study (Asiamah, Mensah & Oteng-Abayie 2017:1612). Thus, the population group of this study consists of full-time registered VUT students at the Vanderbijlpark campus. Full time students were selected due to easy access as part time students were not fully available at the time of the study, as such due to the time constraint, full time students were the best respondent group to use.

3.5.2 Determining the sample frame

It is essential for the researcher to carefully draw a sampling frame from the defined target population, given that the sampling frame's quality affects the quality of the sample (Mohadjer,

Krenzke & Kerckhove 2006:03). The sampling frame generally is the total population from which the actual study sample is extracted. It is regarded as the true version of study population, which the researcher can easily identify and access (Gallardo *et al.* 2012:162; Rahi 2017:3). Additionally, Lohr (2010:03) defines a sampling frame as a list of members, elements or specification of sampling units in the population from which a sample will be obtained. This study's sampling frame comprises VUT students at the Vanderbijlpark campus who are familiar with social media as well as smartphones.

3.5.3 Sampling method

Sampling is a key factor of the research as it affects the quality, validity, and credibility of the research study (Gallardo *et al.* 2012:160). Sampling is the process, technique of selecting a precise sample or representative of a population for predicting a fact and determining characteristics of the population (Babikir *et al.* 2011:18). The research study's objectives, hypotheses, or research questions determine which sampling method is suitable for the research (Gallardo *et al.* 2012:162). Elfil and Negida (2017:01) outlines that there are two main sampling methods or categories, which are probability sampling (random) and non-probability sampling (non-random) methods.

Probability sampling is a method based on the notion that each unit of analysis or each individual in the sampling frame possesses an equal opportunity to be selected (Etikan & Bala 2017:216; Elfil & Negida 2017:1). Hence, probability sampling is free from the researcher's influence as each element possesses an equal chance to be selected. On the contrary is the non-probability sampling, in which the probability of units or elements of the sample is not known and units are deliberately and carefully selected by the researcher based on various reasons but not limited to convenience and accessibility (Rahi 2017:3).

Convenience sampling as one of the non-probability sampling techniques is the most applicable and widely used method in clinical and quantitative research (Elfil & Negida 2017:2). Under convenience sampling, subjects or respondents are drawn based on their accessibility and availability (Rahi 2017:3). To select the respondents, this study employed a non-probability convenience sampling design due the accessibility and availability of respondents as well as time and resource constraints.

3.5.4 Determining sample size

Sample size should neither be too small nor unnecessarily large but rather it should observe the requirements of efficiency, flexibility, representativeness and reliability (Pan, Liu, Miao & Yuan

2018:1). It is the representative portion, part or subset of the population whose properties are studied to gain insights about the entire population (Majid 2018:5). In determining the sample size, a number of studies done in the field of social media that focused on the effects presented by social media marketing on purchasing intention and other variables in certain industries were reviewed as indicated in Table 3.2 below. In determining this study's sample size, the researcher used the historical approach by reviewing sample sizes for previous studies. Table 3.2 below shows previous research used as basis for sample selection.

Table 3.2: Sample Size determination based on empirical procedure

Year	Authors	Scope of the Study	Sample Size Used
2009	Chi <i>et al.</i>	Study of brand awareness effect on consumer purchase intention.	315
2011	Rehmani <i>et al.</i>	Study of e-media effect on customer purchase intention.	600
2013	Benson & Hedren	Study on online brand communities: a route to brand loyalty.	208
2013	Hutter <i>et al.</i>	Study on user interactions effect on brand awareness and purchase intention.	311
2013	Homouda & Tabbane	Study on electronic word-of-mouth evaluation on purchase intention.	204

Source: Author's compilation

All these studies used sample sizes within the range of 200 to 600, hence this research study used a sample size of 320 which is in the range of the previous studies. In addition, the researcher also considered other elements such as the size of the population to be studied, the cost of data collection, cost of sampling, time frame as well as population variability.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The choice of a data collection technique to use in a research study is based on a data collection strategy, types of variables, information accuracy required, a collection point as well as the enumerator's skills (Wilczynski 2017:72). Of the various techniques available, this study made use of survey method in the form of a self-administered structured questionnaire to attain relevant data from the respondents. The survey method of questionnaire was used in this study based on the following reasons:

- The inexpensive and easy nature in administering the instrument.

- Its ability to extract substantial and accurate information.
- The instrument was cost-effective for this study.
- Its ability solicits information on behavioural attitude, perceptions, and opinions of respondents.

3.6.1 Questionnaire design

A questionnaire is a series of structured questions designed to extract information from respondents which can be gathered either by a written questionnaire or oral interviews (Etikan & Bala 2017:219). Farooq (2018:50) defines a questionnaire as a formal set of questions that are drafted to extract information pertaining to a particular study from the respondents and is the main method used to collect quantitative primary data. Maholtra (2006:176) further purports that the use of a structured questionnaire enables quantitative data to be extracted in a more standardised manner, which ensures that data gathered is internally consistent and coherent for analysis. Martin (2006:3) highlighted that for a questionnaire to obtain accurate useful information, the researcher has to craft the questions carefully, how to ask them, the order that asks them and its overall layout. In developing the questionnaire for this study, the questions were derived from literature (Arora & Sharma 2013:12; Chikandiwa *et al.* 2013:174; Almeida 2011:94; Chen 2008:105; Ying 2010:147 & Yan 2014:136) in relation to research objectives and the hypotheses and it was instrumental in generating useful data that assisted in achieving the empirical research objectives of this study.

Two main objectives in designing a questionnaire considered in this study were to:

- maximise the response rate of respondents answering the questionnaire; and
- obtain accurate relevant information for our survey.

To maximise the effectiveness of data collection, a questionnaire should be clear and simple to understand to the respondent.

3.6.2 Questionnaire phrasing

A questionnaire can either be open-ended, where respondents are asked to respond in their own words or closed-ended, where a set of predetermined responses are set for respondents to choose from. The choice between the two is based on a number of factors such as the type of information to be gathered and availability of resources (Pushpanjali, Piddennavar, & Mohan 2011:154). The questionnaire should not be too long to the point of overburdening the respondents. Closed-ended

questions with predetermined responses were preferred in this study given the size of the sample and the volume of the questions, making the analysis process manageable. Hyman and Sierra (2016:2) outline that closed-ended questions are easier and quicker to respond to as they require minimal writing from the respondent, and offer uniformity and consistency on research findings. Given that there are predetermined responses to be selected by respondents, closed-ended questions reduce chances of obtaining irrelevant responses and ensures easy encoding of data. The study made use of closed ended questions.

3.6.3 Questionnaire format

The questionnaire was divided into six sections, from Section A to F as seen on Annexure 1. Section A consists of demographic information such as gender and age, together with basic social media questions adapted from (Arora & Sharma 2013:12). Section B focused on social media usage (interaction) and the questions were adopted from Chikandiwa *et al.* (2013:174). Section C focused on brand awareness, using questions adapted from Almeida (2011:94). Section D focused on perceived quality of consumers and the questions were adopted from Chen (2008:105). Section E comprised questions on brand loyalty derived from Ying (2010:147). Finally, questions adopted from Yan (2014:136) were used to gather information on respondents' purchase intention under Section F. Section B, C, D and F made use of the five-point Likert scales with scale items denoting 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither disagree nor agree, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

3.7 PRE-TESTING AND PILOT STUDY

Pre-testing is a very important process or stage in questionnaire designing and construction in a research study (Babonea & Voicu 2011:1323). It involves testing the research instruments under similar conditions as the main study but with no intention of reporting the results but rather to check any glitches in the wording of questions, clarity of questions and their ability to solicit data in a systematic and economical manner (Adolphus 2016:02). Maholtra (2007:319) puts forward that the process of pre-testing must cover all aspects of the questionnaire which includes wording, content, sequence, layout, format, language, simplicity and instructions.

A number of procedures can be employed in research instrument pre-testing such as focus groups interviews, cognitive interviews, respondent debriefing and behaviour coding. In respondent debriefing, after the respondent has answered the questions, the researcher asks specific follow-up questions to assess the respondent's understanding of survey questions, whereas in cognitive interviews the researcher conducts an in-depth interview process to try to understand the cognitive/mental/thought process used by respondents in answering survey questions (Chaudhary

& Israel 2014:4). In this research the researcher adopted a respondent debriefing technique where a questionnaire was distributed to five respondents and debriefing was done to try and assess their understanding of the questions, they answered and other aspects of the questionnaire. The researcher took the liberty of informing the respondents about the pre-testing process and informed them that apart from their response to the questions, they should also focus on the phrasing of questions, their flow, wording, instructions and other aspects of the questionnaire that might pose some difficulty for the respondents. The pre-test was useful as certain questions on Section A and D were adjusted before a pilot study was carried out.

A pilot study is a prefatory small-scale study which is done prior to the main research study with the intention of assessing quality, usability and the reliability of the research instrument in the data collection. The questionnaire was piloted on a convenience sample of 45 respondents and reliability testing was done on the resultant data. To test the reliability of the questionnaire scales, the Cronbach alpha (α) was calculated with the resultant scales over 0.70, which is the general guideline of reliable scale (Malhotra 2007:285), reported in Section 4.2 of Chapter Four. These respondents were excluded from the main study.

3.8 ADMINISTRATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

For questionnaire administration, the researcher made use of three fieldworkers trained in data collection techniques to distribute self-administered questionnaires to the respondents at Vaal University of Technology in South Africa. Before they were dispatched, a two-hour training was done to ensure they fully understood the contents of the questionnaire and could also follow the basic research ethics when engaging with the respondents. Upon questionnaire distribution, consent was sought for each respondent and fieldworkers explained the purpose of the research. Respondents who were not familiar with or had not participated in any social media and had no first-hand smartphone experience were excluded in the distribution process. All respondents that participated in completing the questionnaire did so on their own volition, without any coercion or receiving any reward.

3.9 DATA PREPARATION

The first step in data analysis is data preparation, which is a process that involves data manipulation in a format that is suitable for data analysis and processing. (Maholtra 2007:11; Farooq 2018:57; Aguinis, Hill & Bailey 2019:8). Raw data extracted from respondents through questionnaires or interviews will be of high value after data preparation, which consequently

improves the quality of data mining results. Data preparation involves aspects such as data editing, coding, capturing and cleaning (Farooq 2018:57).

3.9.1 Data editing

Editing is a process where the completed questionnaire is cross checked for overall accuracy, completeness, consistency, legibility and general usability in preparation for coding and capturing (Churchill & Iacobucci 2005:407; Farooq 2018:58). All the collected raw data was examined to determine its accuracy and authenticity. The editing process might lead the researcher to discover some illegible, incomplete, inconsistent or ambiguous responses from the respondent and thus prompt him/her to take corrective measures that would increase data value/accuracy, which is what the researcher did in this study. As the researcher was proceeding with the editing process, unsatisfactory responses or questions were discovered and then discarded.

3.9.2 Data coding

Coding, as explained by Zikmund and Babin (2007:485), is the process of allocating or assigning numerical or symbol classification or codes to responses recorded in words or edited data. The resultant codes in the coding process, as the definition implies, can be in symbols or numeric and is essential and necessary for efficient data analysis (Sreejesh; Mohapatra & Anusree 2013:167). Codes or coding permits smooth data transfer from questionnaires to computers and are useful for computer data processing. Sreejesh *et al.* (2013:168) states that coding for structured closed-ended questions is comparatively less complicated, given that response options are already predetermined and the codes are fixed and filled, thus the record number for all respondents is the same and same data appear in the same pattern and column for all respondents, as it was the case in this study. Data coding was done by a statistician.

3.9.3 Data capturing

Data capturing, as cited by Maholtra (2010:459), is the process of transferring coded data or information from questionnaires or coded sheets directly into the computer through key-punching for further processing. Microsoft Excel was used to capture data by the statistician of this research.

3.9.4 Data cleaning

Data cleaning is a critical aspect of data preparation as it is the final error checking process, after which data is deemed clean and ready for tabulation and statistical analysis (Sreejesh *et al.* 2013:173) but it should never be a remedy for poor study design or study conduct (Van den

Broeck, Cunningham, Eeckels & Herbst 2005:966). Data cleaning is a more thorough and extensive process of diagnosing and checking data inconsistencies, errors and taking corrective action on missing responses and data abnormalities, either by substitution of neutral value, substituting imputed responses and a case-wise and pair-wise deletion done with a computer (Abdallah, Du & Webb 2017:4; Farooq 2018:58). Zikmund and Babin (2007:479) put forward that it will be riskier and more difficult to transform data into useful intelligence if the data in question still has errors, hence the importance of the data cleaning process. Data cleaning was successfully done by the statistician and the researcher and the resultant data was deemed clean and ready for tabulation and analysis.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS

After completing the data preparation process from editing to cleaning, the resultant data was deemed clean and ready for data analysis. Malhotra (2010:410) defines data analysis as the process of manipulating, ordering, summarising, categorising and describing mass collected data in more meaningful ways or terms, thus bringing logic to the research. To statistically analyse data available, a statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (Version 25.0 for windows) was used and the following data analysis techniques exercised, guided by the research objectives and hypotheses given, as well as past research in social media.

- Descriptive analysis.
- Correlation analysis.
- Multiple regression analysis.
- Reliability and validity analysis.

3.10.1 Descriptive statistics

Jaggi (2011:01) postulates that descriptive statistics gives graphical and numerical procedures in summarising a collection of data in a clearer and more understandable manner, and is mainly used to describe basic features that provide summaries about sample characteristics and measures. The numerical procedure adopted in this study for descriptive statistics allows the researcher to calculate aspects such as the mean and standard deviation, whereas a graphical approach is more descriptive in nature in classifying sample characteristics. Churchill, Brown and Sutter (2010: 429) described such statistics as measures of location (mean, median and mode), dispersion of variability (variance, standard deviation, range, interquartile range and coefficient of variation) and the various measures of distribution (i. e., skewness and kurtosis). For the purposes of this

study, the descriptive results are presented in Chapter Four, Section 4.5, 4.6, 4.6.1, 4.6.2, 4.6.3, 4.6.4 and 4.6.5. respectively. In the foregoing sections, only those descriptive statistics used in the study are described.

3.10.2 Measures of central location

3.10.2.1 Mean

The arithmetic average of the scores in a sample is the mean (Isotalo 2014:28), used to summarise interval or ratio data in situations when the distribution is symmetrical and unimodal; the mean is the score located at the mathematical centre of a distribution. The mean is ascertained by dividing the sum of the values of all observations by the number of observations and is usually denoted by:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

Where $\sum X$ = sum of all observations and N = total number of observations.

3.10.3 Measures of variability

These are statistical procedures that describe how dispersed or spread out the data is. Most frequently used are statistical measures of variability, namely: range, interquartile range, variance, and standard deviation (Maholtra, 2010:487).

3.10.3.1 Standard deviation

The standard deviation seeks to summarise or measure the amount by which every value within a dataset deviate from the mean (Illowsky & Dean 2013:112). Churchill *et al.* (2010:430) defined standard deviation as the square root of the arithmetically calculated variance on a variable. Standard deviation is the mostly used measure of dispersion compared to range and variance as it takes into consideration every variable in the dataset and was used in this study. Sample standard deviation was used as a sample to observe the behaviour of the larger population in this study. Sample standard deviation is computed as follows:

$$S = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (x - \bar{x})^2}{n - 1}}$$

Where,

S = Standard deviation

Σ = Sum of

\bar{x} = Sample mean

n = number of scores in a sample

3.10.4 Frequency distribution

A frequency distribution is a statistical way of indicating the number of instances there are of each value of a variable, or how frequently each value of a variable occurs in a dataset (Illowsky & Dean 2013:28). Frequency distribution is quite instrumental in summarising data over and above describing it in order to identify some notable trends or effects that are prominent within a given data set. In this research, frequency distribution tables were drawn to summarise and illustrate data values effectively, and reported in Section 4.4.4.

3.10.5 Use of charts and graphs

In addition to the use of frequency distribution tables to display, present and summarise the research findings or data, the researcher also uses graphs, and various chart types, as seen in Section 4.5.1. Graphical and chart presentation are best suited when dealing with ordinal or nominal variables and in most instances results for data analysis are well presented in graphical forms which are instrumental in pointing out notable trends and magnitudes in data values (Hair *et al.* 2000:254).

3.10.6 Correlation analysis

There are two fundamental types of correlation coefficients, namely, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The right usage of correlation coefficient type relies on the types of variables being examined (Mukaka 2012:69). Despite the type of correlation used, the correlation coefficients are scaled so that they range from -1 to +1, where 0 indicates that there is no direct or monotonic association, and the relationship strengthens and at last approaches a straight line (Pearson correlation) or always with an increasing or diminishing curve (Spearman correlation) as the coefficient moves towards an absolute value of 1.

3.10.6.1 Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation

Spearman's correlation coefficient (sometimes alluded to as Spearman's rho or r_s where the sub (s) is in tribute of Spearman) determines the level of relationship for ranked data (Coolidge 2012:243). Spearman's Coefficient of Rank Correlation entails that when data are estimated on, at least on an ordinal scale, the ordered classifications can be replaced by their ranks, and Pearson's correlation coefficient calculated on these ranks. The resultant is called Spearman's rank correlation

coefficient (r_s) and gives a measure of how closely two sets of rankings concur with each other. Schober, Boer and Schwarte (2018:1767) put forward that a Spearman rank correlation describes the monotonic relationship between two variables and is useful for non-normally distributed continuous data. It is also used on ordinal data and is relatively robust to outliers. Under Spearman's Coefficient, Schober *et al.* (2018:1767) explained that hypothesis tests are used to ascertain the null hypothesis of no correlation while confidence intervals give a range of plausible values of the estimate.

3.10.6.2 Pearson's correlation coefficient

Pearson's correlation coefficient, is a technique for investigating a relationship between two quantitative, continuous variables with the Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) measuring the strength of association between two variables (Coolidge 2012:221). Schober *et al.* (2018:1763) explain that Pearson's correlation as a measure of a monotonic association between two random variables. A relationship is regarded as monotonic between two variables when either (1) the value of 1 variable increases, so does the value of another variable; or (2) when the value of 1 variable increases, the value for another variable decreases. A Pearson correlation is used to measure linear association between two normally distributed random variables and is typically utilised on data which is jointly normally distributed (data that follows a bivariate normal distribution).

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient is used to measure the strength of the linear relationships when variables are normally distributed while Spearman rank correlation method is used when the variables are not normally distributed or rather when the relationship between variables is non-linear. This study made use of the Pearson's Correlation Coefficient as it is there to determine the relationship between variables. Higgins (2005:01), posits that correlation analysis attempts to address three important elements in between variables which are: Does a relationship exist, if so, is it a positive or a negative relationship and how strong or weak is the relationship? In correlation analysis, Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient denoted r , ranges between -1 and +1 and it quantifies two variables' direction and strength of their linear association. The correlation between two variables can be positive or negative. A correlation coefficient of +1.00 represent a perfect positive relationship which implies that as one variable increases in value, so does the other and coefficient of -1.00 denotes a perfect negative correlation thus as the value of one variable increases, the other decreases. In the event where the coefficient value is 0.00, it implies that there is no relationship between two variables in question.

3.10.7 Regression analysis

Regression analysis is a statistical technique related to correlation analysis which is used to assess and explore the relationship between an outcome variable and one or more confounding variables (Malhotra 2007:554). Additionally, regression analysis is also used to assess the strength of the supposed relationship between given variables and for modelling the future relationship between these variables. Regression analysis's purpose is to construct a model equation useful in describing the statistical relationship between the outcome variable and one or more independent variables (Gogtay, Deshpande & Thatte 2017:49). The primary use for regression is mainly for prediction and causal inference amongst variables. A regression model examines changes in one variable as a function of changes in values of other variable(s). Resultantly, regression analysis determines how and to what extent the criterion variable varies as a function of variance in independent variable.

Malhotra and Peterson (2006:503) point out various reasons for performing regression analysis as stated below:

- to determine whether the predictor variables account for a significant variation in the dependant variable, inter alia whether a relationship exists;
- to ascertain how much of a variation in the resultant variable could be explained by independent variables, inter alia strength of relationships;
- to ascertain the structure and/or form of the relationships; and
- to predict the importance or value of predictor variables on independent variables.

The above assumptions were also supported by Mooi (2014:194), who also revealed the benefits that are brought about by regression analysis in data analysis:

- Regression analysis indicates if independent variables have a significant relationship with a dependent variable.
- Regression analysis indicates the relative strength of different independent variables' effects on a dependent variable.
- Regression analysis allows the researcher to make predictions.

Regression analysis has different models; the most commonly used are simple linear (bivariate) and multiple linear regression (Gogtay *et al.* 2017:49).

3.10.7.1 Simple linear regression analysis (Bivariate regression model)

Simple linear regression is used where there is a single dependent and a single predictor variable and both variables should be continuous (quantitative data) and the line describing the relationship would be linear (Gogtay *et al.* 2017:49).

The mathematical equation for the general linear model using population parameters is:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \epsilon$$

Where:

- Y and X represent the scores for *individual_i* on the criterion and predictor variable respectively.
- The parameters β_0 and β_1 are constants describing the functional relationship in the population.
- The value of β_1 identifies the change along the Y scale expected for every unit changed in fixed values of X (represents the **slope** or degree of steepness).
- The values of β_0 identifies an adjustment constant due to scale differences in measuring X and Y (the intercept or the place on the Y axis through which the straight-line passes. It is the value of Y when $X = 0$).
- \sum (Epsilon) represents an error component for each individual. The portion of Y score that cannot be accounted for by its systematic relationship with values of X .

3.10.7.2 Multiple linear regression analysis

This model is used when the researcher has one continuous dependent variable and two or more predictor variables. Multiple linear regression is an extension of bivariate linear regression in that it incorporates multiple independent variables (predictors). Likewise, a linear relationship should be evident between dependent and independent variables. Multiple Regression Analysis is a statistical technique that allows for the assessment of the relationship between one Dependent Variable (DV) and several Independent Variables (IVs) (Gogtay *et al.* 2017:49).

When adding a second or more predictor from simple linear regression above, the multiple regression model will be expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \epsilon$$

When adding more than 2 predictors, the model is expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \dots + \beta_p X_p + \varepsilon$$

In this study, both simple linear regression and multiple regression analysis were used to examine various relations between the predictor variable and dependent variable. Linear regression was used to examine relationship between social media interaction and brand awareness as well the relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty whereas the multiple regression model was used to ascertain the amount of influence that brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty have on purchase intention. This was reported in Section 4.3.5 of Chapter Four in this study.

3.11 RELIABILITY

Reliability is regarded as the degree to which one can expect relatively constant deviation scores of respondents across testing situations over time on the same or parallel research instruments (Heale & Twycross 2015:66). Reliability is all about consistency of test score over time using the same test instruments. Kimberlin and Winterstein 2008:2277 described reliability simply as the degree to which a test instrument is dependable and reliable over time. When a measuring instrument consistently provides similar results for the same variables over time, then the measuring instrument is regarded as reliable and dependable (Haradhan 2017:10). Different types of reliability are explained in Figure 3.2 below.

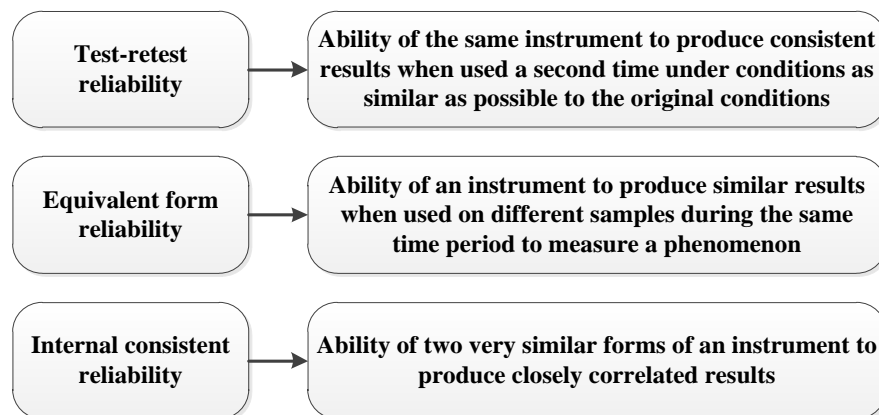


Figure 3.2: Types of Reliability

Source: McDaniel and Gaes (2012:286-289).

The assessment of internal consistency reliability estimates in this study was done on both the pilot study and main study using Cronbach's coefficient alpha, which measures the severity of internal uniformity amongst constructs. The coefficient varies from zero to one, but in this research the acceptable reliability estimate benchmark started from 0.70 based on the notion that any

coefficient value which is less or equal to 0.6 indicates a poor degree of consistency (Wells & Wollack 2003:05). Reliability results were reported in Chapter Four, Section 4.3.6.1.

3.12 VALIDITY

Validity is defined as the magnitude in which a yardstick or a measurement tool brings forth the results only of what it is supposed to measure without error. Andrade (2018:498) posits that an instrument is relevant and valid if it tests only that which it is intended to test. Instrument validity determines the truthfulness of the research findings based on what the researcher intends to find out initially (Beardedn, Netemeyer & Haws 2011: 60; Haradhan 2017:14).

The concept of validity addresses the issue of whether the researcher was intending to measure was actually measured. McDaniel and Gates (2012:289) explained that the validity of an instrument refers to the extent to which the measurement instrument and procedure are free from both systematic and random error. Validity can be determined through different perspectives, including face, content, criterion-related, and construct validity. Validity results were reported in Chapter Four Section 4.3.6.2.

Table 3.3: Types of validity

Face validity	The degree to which a measurement instrument seems to measure what it is supposed to, as judged by researchers.
Content validity	The degree to which measurement items represent the universe of the concept under study.
Criterion-related validity	<p>The degree to which a measurement instrument can predict a variable that is designated as a criterion.</p> <p>a. Predictive validity: The extent to which a future level of a criterion variable can be predicted by a current measurement on a scale.</p> <p>b. Concurrent validity: The extent to which a criterion variable measured at the same point in time as the variable of interest can be predicted by the measurement instrument.</p>
Construct validity	<p>The degree to which a measurement instrument confirms a hypothesis created from a theory based on the concepts under study.</p> <p>a. Convergent validity: The degree of association among different measurement instruments that purport to measure the same concept.</p> <p>b. Discriminant validity: A measure of the lack of association among constructs that are supposed to be different.</p>

Source: McDaniel and Gates (2012:290).

3.12.1 Content validity

Content validity is explained as the ability of the measuring instrument to reflect the variables of the construct to be measured (Zamanzadeh, Ghahramanian, Rassouli, Abbaszadeh, AlaviMajd & Nikanfar 2015:165). Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:258) described content validity as the degree of sufficiency with which a scale grasps the theoretical constructs under study. To ascertain content validity in this study, literature exploration together with opinions of experts during pre-testing stage was instrumental in identifying all scale items to be included in the study, as reported in Section 4.3.6.2.2. After that, the researcher conducted a pilot study on a conveniently selected sample of 45 respondents.

3.12.2 Construct validity

Construct validity examines the link between a measure and the underlying theory (Twycross & Shields 2004:28; Haradhan 2017:17). In a scenario where a test instrument has construct validity, the expectation is that there should be a reasonable correlation with tests measuring related areas. Construct validity demonstrates relationships between the concepts under study and the construct or theory that is relevant to them (Roberts, Priest & Traynor 2006:43). The assessment of construct validity calls for the understanding of theoretical foundations underlying the obtained measurements and when an instrument or scale relates to the theory behind the predication it is said to be construct valid.

3.12.3 Convergent validity

McDaniel and Gates (2012:293) explain convergent validity as the degree of correlation between or among different research instruments that purport to measure the same variable or construct. Maholtra (2007:287) outlines that convergent validity related to the extent to which the measurement positively correlates with the measure of the same construct. To ascertain convergent validity in this study, correlation analysis was done as reported in Section 4.3.6.2.4.

3.12.4 Predictive validity

Predictive validity, as one of the components of criterion validity, entails that if the correlation between two measures (or events) is higher, the initial measure is said to have predictive validity (Feinberg *et al.* 2013:131). Predictive validity was assessed in this study through regression analysis as reported in Section 4. 3.6.2.5.

3.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics in research is regarded as a norm of conduct, distinguishing between right and wrong as well as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour when conducting a research study (Parveen & Showkat 2017:3). In conducting any type of research, researchers should ensure that everything they do is morally and legally right. The study undertook appropriate steps to protect the rights of individuals acting as subjects in the research by observing ethical procedures and principles governing research with humans. The following ethical considerations were observed:

- Full consent was obtained from the participants prior to the study.
- Respondents were not coerced to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary.
- There was strict confidentiality of respondents' data. Data gathered was used solely for the purpose of the research.
- Names of respondents were not required in the questionnaire to ensure confidentiality.
- Data analysis and interpretation of results was upheld objectively without prejudice.
- Professionalism was adhered to in data collection and analysis.

3.14 SYNOPSIS

This chapter addressed various steps that were undertaken to carry out the practical part of this research study. It provided a detailed blueprint or discussion of the research design explored, as well as the sampling design strategy, which includes target population, sample frame and sampling techniques. Also, the data collection techniques were discussed, which also includes the explanation of questionnaire design and how it was administered.

The chapter also discussed data collection and analysis procedures, elaborating on the statistical procedures used and the aspect of reliability of validity or measuring instruments was discussed. Chapter Four covered the actual statistical analysis on data gathered and presentation of those results, together with the report on empirical research findings.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter focused on outlining the research design and methodology components as well as data analysis techniques used by the researcher to articulate the research objectives. The current chapter focuses on the results and the findings emanating from the survey employed in the study. It also describes the pilot study undertaken and illustrates the demographic profiles of the sample through graphs, charts and tables. Furthermore, it provides both the descriptive and inferential statistics of the study and concludes by addressing the common method bias.

4.2 PILOT STUDY RESULTS

The adaption of the questionnaire from previous studies may have affected the reliability and validity of the original measuring scales, which is another reason that influenced the researcher to conduct a pilot study. A total of 50 questionnaires were analysed after conducting the pilot study. Table 4.1 outlines the results of the pilot study in terms of the reliability of the pilot questionnaire.

Table 4.1: Summary of the pilot study results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient	No. of Items
Section B: social media	0.850	6
Section C: Brand awareness	0.735	5
Section D: Perceived quality	0.783	5
Section E: Brand loyalty	0.891	7
Section F: Purchase intention	0.913	6

The results in Table 4.1 indicate satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability i. e., Cronbach alpha coefficient that was greater than the recommended threshold of 0.7. Of note is that at this stage, no changes were made to the questionnaire.

4.3 MAIN SURVEY RESULTS

Questionnaires totalling 320 were distributed, 316 were returned and 12 were discarded because of incompleteness resulting in the final analysis of 304 questionnaires. A discussion of the analysis of data is presented as follows:

- Demographical information of the respondents.
- Test for uni-dimensionality of study constructs.
- Descriptive statistics.
- Correlational analysis.
- Regression analysis.
- Reliability and validity assessments.

4.3.1 Demographics of the respondents (Section A)

This section reports on the general demographic information of the respondents. Information such as gender, age, educational status, social media usage and smartphone brand ownership of respondents was gathered.

4.3.1.1 Gender composition of the sample

Figure 4.1 depicts the gender distribution of respondents.

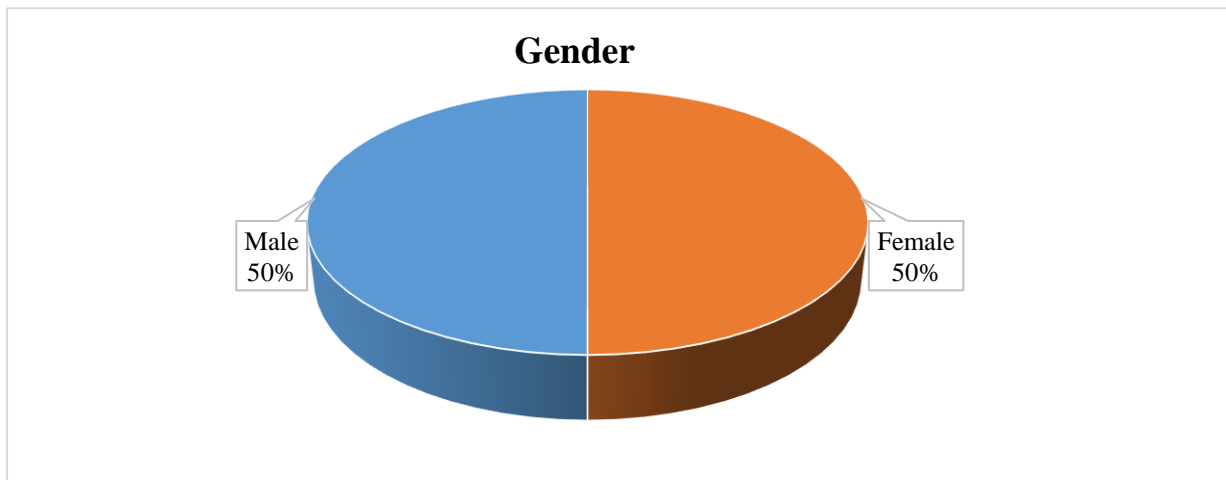


Figure 4.1: Gender composition

The diagrammatic representation of the gender composition of the sample depicted that there were equal number of males ($n=152$; 50%) and females ($n=152$; 50%) who participated in the study.

4.3.1.2 Age distribution of the sample

Figure 4.2 shows a data representation of the age composition of the respondents.

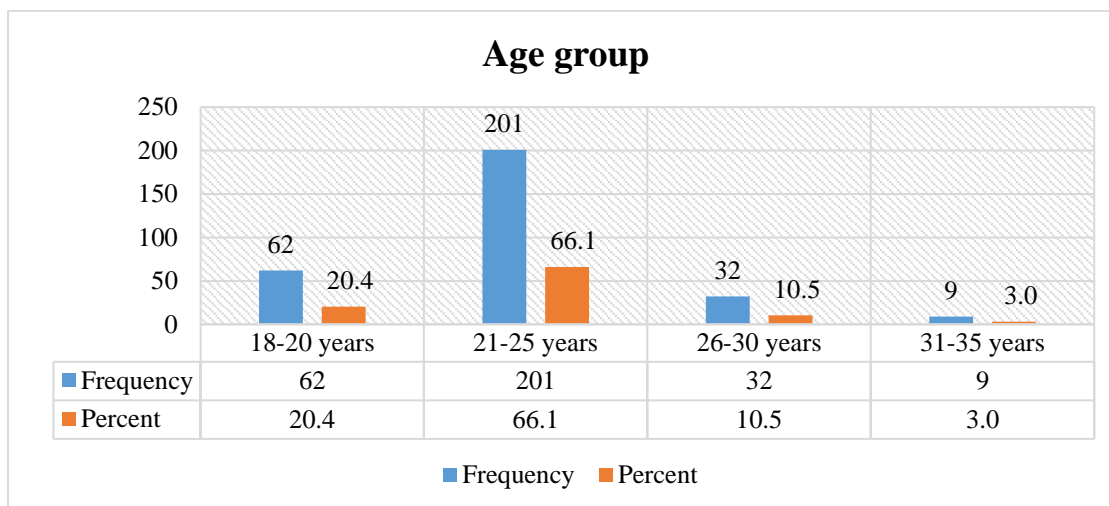


Figure 4.2: Age

The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 21-25 years (n=201;66.1%), followed by those who were between the ages of 18-20 years (n=62;20.4%), followed by those who were between the ages of 26-30 years (n=32;10.5%), and those who were between the ages of 31-35 years (n= 9;3%).

4.3.1.3 Educational status of the sample

Figure 4.3 indicates the educational level of the respondents.

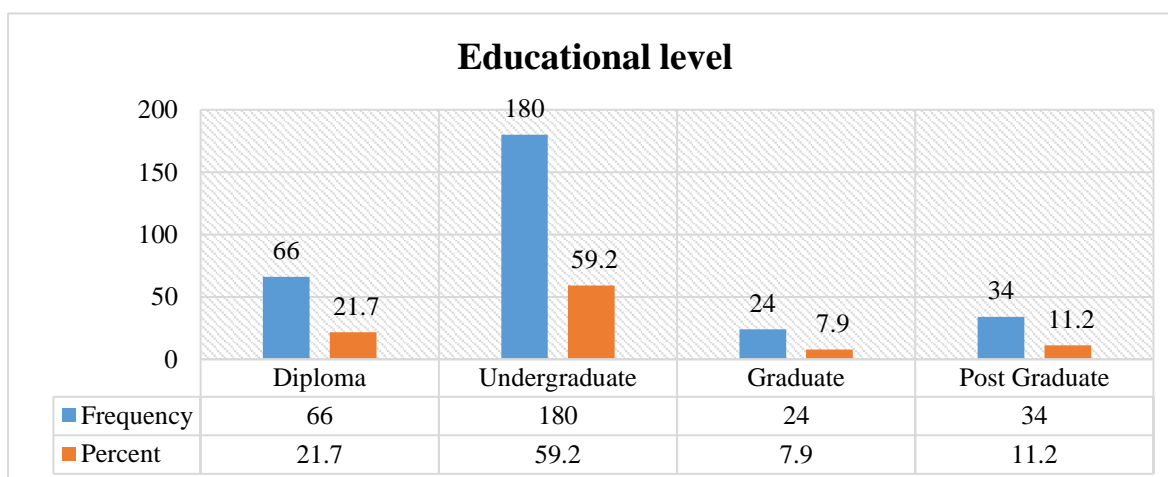


Figure 4.3: Level of education

The majority of respondents were in possession of undergraduate qualifications (n=180;59.2%), followed by those who were in possession of diploma qualifications (n=66;21.7%), followed by those in possession of a post-graduate qualification (n=34;11.2 %) and lastly those who were in possession of graduate qualifications (n=24;7.9%).

4.3.1.4 Social media usage

Figure 4.4 indicates the social media usage of the respondents.

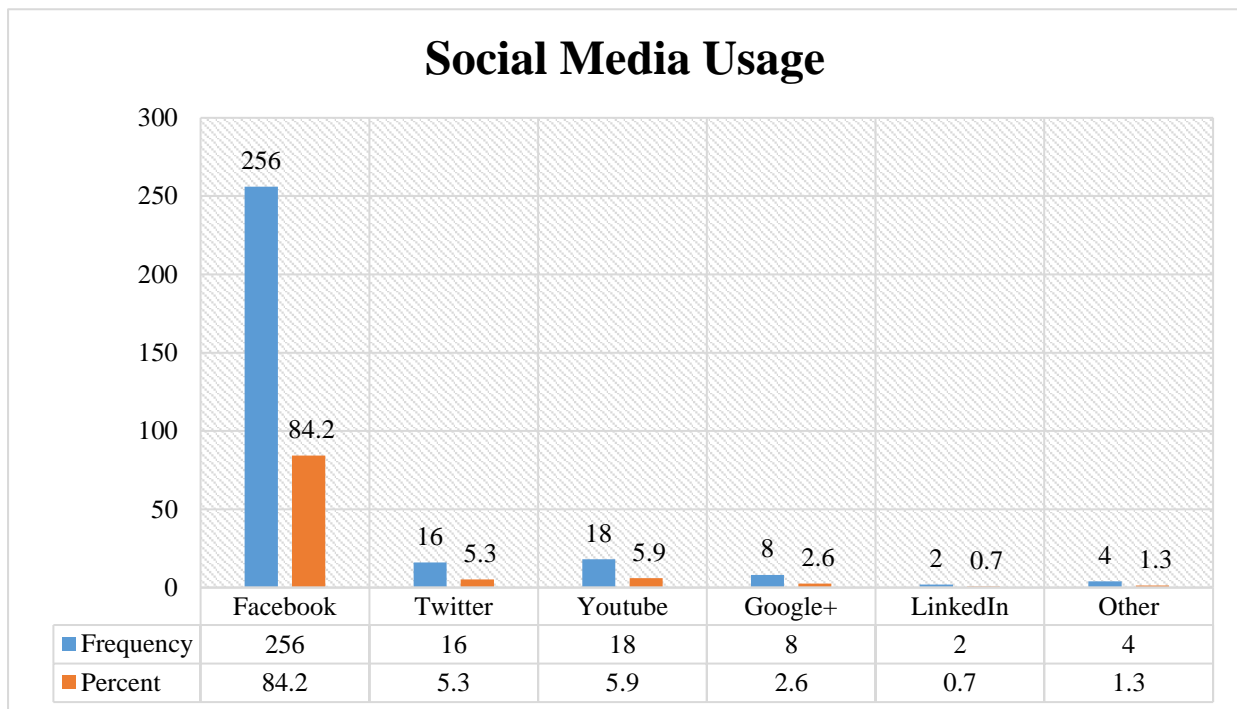


Figure 4.4: Social media usage.

The majority of the respondents used Facebook (n=256;84.2%), followed by those who were using YouTube (n=18;5.9%), followed by those who were using Twitter (n=16;5.3%), followed by those who were using Google+ (n=8;2.6%), followed by those who were using “other” social media platforms (n=4;1.3%) and lastly, those who were using LinkedIn (n=2;0.7%).

4.3.1.5 Smartphone brand ownership

Table 4.2 provides the respondents’ smartphone brand ownership.

Table 4.2: Smartphone Brand Ownership

Smartphone brand ownership	Frequency	Percent
Samsung	221	72.7
Nokia	12	3.9
Sony	7	2.3
Blackberry	12	3.9
HTC	1	0.3

Smartphone brand ownership	Frequency	Percent
LG	1	0.3
Other	50	16.4

In terms of the respondents' smartphone brand ownership, the majority of respondents owned a Samsung brand (n=221;72.7%), followed by those who were represented by "other" brands (n=50;16.4%), followed by those who owned Nokia and Blackberry brands having similar number of respondents (n=12 ;3.9%), followed by those who owned Sony brand (n=7;2.3%) and lastly, both HTC and LG being the least owned smartphone brands (n=1;0.3%) respondents.

4.3.2 Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

The study constructs were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) procedure prior to the descriptive analysis stage. The EFA was utilised to assess the uni-dimensionality of the constructs and the results are reported in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: EFA results

Total variance explained – Social media						
Components Factors	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% variance of	Cumulative %	Total	% variance of	Cumulative %
1	3.410	56.841	56.841	3.410	56.841	56.841
Total variance explained – Brand awareness						
Components Factors	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% variance of	Cumulative %	Total	% variance of	Cumulative %
1	2.150	71.681	71.681	2.150	71.681	71.681
Total variance explained – Perceived quality						
Components Factors	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% variance of	Cumulative %	Total	% variance of	Cumulative %
1	2.689	53.772	53.772	2.689	53.772	53.772

Total variance explained – Brand loyalty						
Components Factors	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	3.956	56.514	56.514	3.956	56.514	56.514
Total variance explained – Purchase intention						
Components Factors	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	3.870	64.697	64.697	3.870	64.497	64.497

The five study constructs demonstrated loading on one factor each with total variance explained ranging from 53% to 71%. The following section addresses the descriptive analysis of the collected data.

4.3.3 Descriptive analysis: means and standard deviation of the sample

Descriptive statistics are used to organise, describe and summarise the characteristics of a collection of data (Salkind 2017:8). The mean scores and the standard deviation scores of the items in Sections B, C, D, E, and F of the questionnaire are discussed in the next sub-sections.

4.3.3.1 Section B: Social media

Table 4.4: Mean scores and standard deviation scores for social media

Scale description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
B1: I get more informed and equipped about my preferred smartphone brand on social media.	304	1	5	4.08	.990
B2: social media plays a pivotal role in spreading information about my preferred smartphone brand.	304	1	5	4.22	.719
B3: I feel proud to be associated with my smartphone brand on social media. Explanation is clear of what has to be done	304	1	5	4.31	.790

Scale description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
B4: Social media posts and reviews changes my perception about my preferred brand either positively or negatively	304	1	5	4.26	.822
B5: I survey and seek more details on social media about my preferred brand’s new model before I make a purchase	304	1	5	4.34	.821
B6: My interaction with my smartphone brand and positive social media interactions makes me gain more interest on the brand.	304	1	5	4.39	.736
Overall mean score	4.28				
Scale item rating: 1=Strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=Neither disagree nor agree; 4=Disagree; 5=Strongly Disagree					

Item B6 recorded the highest mean score of 4.39, which indicated that the majority of the respondents agreed that their interaction with their smartphone brand and positive social media interactions makes them gain more interest on the brand. The next highest score was recorded by item B5 with a mean value of 4.34, which reflected that the majority of the respondents agreed that they survey and seek more details on social media about their preferred brand's new model before they make a purchase. Items B3 (mean =4.31), B4 (mean = 4.26), B2 (mean = 4.22) and B1(mean = 4.08). The overall mean score of 4.28, further indicated that respondents were mostly in agreement in their responses to the statements. The standard deviations in all statements are close to 1 (range 0.719 – 0.990), indicating that respondents did not deviate much from the average in their responses.

4.3.3.2 Section C: Brand awareness

Table 4.5: Mean scores and standard deviation scores for brand awareness

Scale description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
C1: I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of different smartphone brands on social media.	304	1	5	4.27	.708
C2: Social media interaction and discussions have increased my knowledge base about different smartphone brands.	304	1	4	4.24	.683
C3: It is simple to imagine and align different smartphone brands on social media.	304	1	5	4.30	.725

Scale description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
C4: Social media reviews and opinions are making me aware of how good my preferred brand is.	304	1	5	4.32	.750
C5: Social media interaction allows me to ask information and opinions about smartphones brands before making any purchase considerations.	304	1	5	4.40	.701
Overall mean score	4.34				
Scale item rating: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither disagree nor agree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree					

Respondents mostly agree with the statements that they “can quickly recall the symbol or logo of different smartphone brands on social media”, “social media interaction and discussions have increased my knowledge base about different smartphone brands”, “it is simple to imagine and align different smartphones brands on social media”, “social media reviews and opinions are making me aware of how good my preferred brand is” and “social media interaction allows me to ask information and opinions about smartphone brands before making any purchase considerations”. The overall mean score of 4.34, further indicated that respondents were strongly in agreement in their responses to the statements. The standard deviations in all five statements are below 1 (range 0.683-0.750), indicating that respondents did not deviate much on average, in their responses.

4.3.3.3 Section D: Perceived quality

Table 4.6: Mean scores and standard deviation scores for perceived quality

Scale description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
D1: Smartphone brands on social media are of high quality.	304	1	5	4.28	.719
D2: I regard my smartphone brand as of high quality	304	1	4	4.33	.698
D3: Positive comments about my smartphone brand on social media increase my quality perception about the brand.	304	1	5	4.35	.701
D4: Social media interaction, posts and other customer experience testimonies on	304	1	5	4.23	.705

Scale description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
social media, influence my quality perception towards the brand either positively or negatively					
D5: My smartphone brand has a distinct differentiated image, easily identifiable in comparison with the other brands	304	1	5	4.27	.732
Overall mean score	4.30				
Scale item rating: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither disagree nor agree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree					

All the recorded means in Table 4.6 reflect that respondents' responses are closer to 4.5 on all five statements. The responses show greater inclination towards total agreement with the statements that "my smartphone brands on social media are of high quality", "I regard my smartphone brand as of high quality", "positive comments about my smartphone brand on social media increase my quality perception about the brand", "social media interaction, posts and other customer experience testimonies on social media, influence my quality perception towards the brand either positively or negatively" and "my smartphone brand has a distinct differentiated image, easily identifiable in comparison with the other brands". The overall mean score of 4.30, further indicated that respondents were highly in agreement in their responses to the statements. The standard deviations in all statements is close to 1 (range 0.698-0.732), indicating that respondents did not deviate much on average, in responses.

4.3.3.4 Section E: Brand loyalty

Table 4.7: Mean scores and standard deviation scores for brand loyalty

Scale description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
E1. I feel proud to be part of my favourite brand's online community	304	1	5	4.42	.700
E2 I am willing to say and post positive messages online and offline about my smartphone brand to other people.	304	1	4	4.34	.736
E3 I will encourage friends, colleagues and social media participants to join my preferred smartphone brand's online community.	304	1	5	4.40	.701

Scale description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
E4: I will encourage friends, colleagues and social media participants to use my preferred smartphone brand.	304	1	5	4.38	.717
E5: I would watch videos, follow posts and news about my preferred smartphone brand.	304	1	5	4.39	.754
E6: I intend to continue associating myself with my preferred brand on social media.	304	1	5	4.38	.704
E7: I would continue to buy my favourite smartphone brand even if the price increases.	304	1	5	4.26	.732
Overall mean score	4.37				
Scale item rating: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither disagree nor agree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree					

With regard to the brand loyalty construct (Table 4.7), respondents were in consensus with the statement that they “feel proud to be part of their favourite brand’s online community”, “willing to say and post positive messages online and offline about their smartphone brand to other people”, “willing to encourage friends, colleagues and social media participants to join their preferred smartphone brand’s online community”, “willing to encourage friends, colleagues and social media participants to use their preferred smartphone brand”, “would watch videos, follow posts and news about their preferred smartphone brand”, “intend to continue associating with their preferred brand on social media”, and “would continue to buy their favourite smartphone brand even if the price increases”. The overall mean score of 4.37 further indicated that respondents were strongly in agreement in their responses to the statements. The means in this category were all close to 4.5. The standard deviations in all statements are close to 1 (range 0.700-0.754) indicating that respondents did not deviate much on average, in their responses.

4.3.3.5 Section F: Purchase intention

Table 4.8: Mean scores and standard deviation scores for purchase intention

Scale description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
F1: The content of a brand or smartphone page on social media can influence my purchase intention.	304	1	5	4.34	.898

Scale description	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard deviation
F2: The richer the content is, the higher the purchase intention.	304	1	5	4.41	.689
F3: The frequency of updates of a brand or smartphone page on social media can influence my purchase intention	304	1	5	4.40	.747
F4: My involvement with smartphone brands on fan pages and brand communities on social media can influence my purchase intention	304	1	5	4.40	.764
F5: The positive comments of other users about a brand or smartphone product on social media can arouse my purchase intention	304	1	5	4.44	.724
F6: I think social media interaction and discussions about the smartphones brands with other uses will trigger purchase intention	304	1	5	4.45	.697
Overall mean score	4.41				
Scale item rating: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither disagree nor agree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree					

On assessing the means regarding purchase intention construct, respondents seem to be totally in agreement with all the statements pertaining to purchase intention towards smartphone. Overall, the recorded mean score of 4.41 provides a clear indication that respondents in this study have high propensity to purchase a smartphone of their choice. The standard deviations in all statements are close to 1 (range 0.689-0.764) indicating that respondents did not deviate much from average, in their responses.

The following section provides a discussion on correlation analysis as it demonstrates the formulated relationships between the study constructs.

4.3.4 Correlation analysis

In this study, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to describe the strength and direction of the relationship between the study constructs (Leedy & Ormrod 2013:291). The degree or strength of the relationship between variables is reflected by the Pearson correlation coefficient or product moment correlation (r) while the size of the relationship reflects the strength of the relationship. To this end, Pallant (2016:137) suggest the following guidelines:

Table 4.9: Strength of the relationship between constructs

Weak	$r=.10$ to $.29$
Medium or moderate	$r=.30$ to $.49$
Strong	$r=.50$ to 1.0

Source: Pallant (2016:137).

Table 4.10 reflects the results of the correlation analysis that was undertaken for this study.

Table 4.10: Correlation analysis

	Social Media	Brand Awareness	Perceived Quality	Brand Loyalty	Purchase Intention
Social Media	1.000	.399**	.528**	.546**	.546**
Brand Awareness	.399**	1.000	.456**	.373**	.422**
Perceived Quality	.528**	.456**	1.000	.608**	.519**
Brand Loyalty	.546**	.373**	.608**	1.000	.544**
Purchase Intention	.546**	.422**	.519**	.544**	1.000
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)					

All the correlational combinations in Table 4.10 showed that all possible combinations of variables were significant at the 0.01 level.

4.3.4.1 Correlation between social media and brand awareness.

Social media shows a moderate positive association towards brand awareness ($r=0.399$, $p<0.01$), which provides an indication that social media is associated with brand awareness. ElAydi (2018:11), provides further evidence that social media shows an inclination of being associated with brand awareness

4.3.4.2 Correlation between brand awareness and perceived quality.

A moderate relationship between brand awareness and perceived quality was recorded ($r = 0.456$, $p < 0.01$), signifying that increasing brand awareness will moderately increase a consumer's

perception of quality. This moderate association could possibly indicate that brand awareness has a significant positive effect on perceived quality (Chi *et al.* 2009:141; Clark *et al.* 2009:227).

4.3.4.3 Correlation between brand awareness and brand loyalty.

Brand awareness shows a moderate positive association with brand loyalty ($r=0.373$, $p<0.01$), meaning that an upsurge in brand awareness is allied with an upsurge in brand loyalty. It is interesting to note that some research revealed a significant relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty (Tsang *et al.* 2011; Valavi, 2014).

4.3.4.4 Correlation between brand awareness and purchase intention.

Brand awareness also demonstrated a moderate association ($r = 0.422$, $p < 0.01$) with purchase intention. This implies that increasing brand awareness will moderately increase consumers purchase intentions in line with the previous studies completed by Chi *et al.* (2009:141) and Malik *et al.* (2013:170), which attests that brand awareness influences purchase intentions.

4.3.4.5 Correlation between perceived quality and brand loyalty.

There is a strong positive association between perceived quality and brand loyalty ($r=0.608$, $p<0.01$) suggesting that increased levels of perceived quality may have a strong positive link with consumers' brand loyalty. Venkates (2015:11) attests that perceived quality significantly influences brand loyalty.

4.3.4.6 Correlation between perceived quality and purchase intention.

Perceived quality revealed a strong association with purchase intention ($r = 0.519$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that when marketers reinforce high perception of quality then customers' purchase intention will be high. These results affirm Tsotsou (2006:213), who concluded that perceived product quality had a direct positive effect on purchase intention.

4.3.4.7 Correlation between brand loyalty and purchase intention.

Furthermore, an association between brand loyalty and purchase intention ($r = 0.544$; $p < 0.01$) was found to be strong and significant. This suggests that when marketers focus on building brand loyalty, customers' purchase intention will be high. Previous research studies (Chi *et al.* 2009:141) also reported brand loyalty to be significantly associated with purchase intention.

The following section provides a detailed report on the regression analysis results.

4.3.5 Regression analysis

Before regression analysis was done, a multi-collinearity test was undertaken to determine if the data was suitable for regression analysis. In this study, multi-collinearity was assessed and the results in Tables 4.11- 4.15 below indicate that all the independent variables had VIF values of <10 and tolerance value of >0.10, thus dismissing any multicollinearity threat (Pallant 2016:152). Furthermore, collinearity diagnostics were also considered as part of the multiple regression procedure. On examining Table 4.10, there is no evidence of multicollinearity in this study as all associations among the study constructs are lower than +0.80 and -0.80, as advocated by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013:90). Based on these values, multicollinearity does not pose a problem in this study.

The conceptual framework of the study, which was presented in Chapter One, is presented here as a means to provide better understanding of the results.

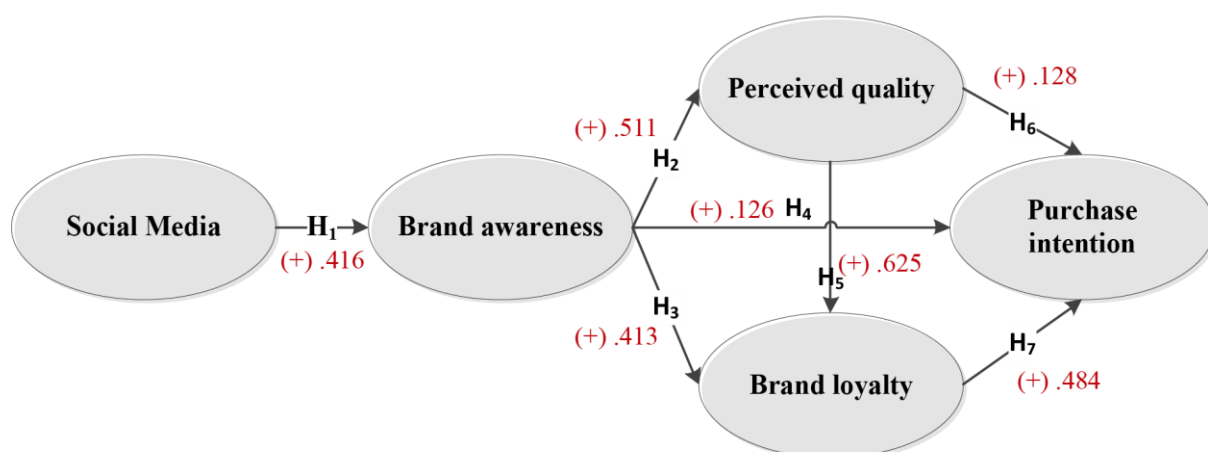


Figure 4.5: Conceptual framework as presented in Chapter One

In the first regression model, social media was entered as the independent variable while brand awareness was entered as the dependent variable. Table 4.11 reports the results from the regression analysis procedure conducted for the first regression model.

Table 4.11: Regression coefficients of the first regression model

Dependent variable: Brand awareness		Standardised coefficients Beta	T	Sig	TOL	VIF
Social media		0.416	11.258	0.000	1.000	1.000
R= 0.416	R ² = 0.173	Adjusted R ² = 0.170	R ² change=0.173		F change =63.025	

Dependent variable: Brand awareness	Standardised coefficients Beta	T	Sig	TOL	VIF
Independent variable: Social media Dependent variable: Brand awareness ** significant at p<0.05 TOL=Tolerance value VIF= Variance inflation factor					

Source: Author's own compilation (2020)

The result of the regression model 1 indicated an adjusted R^2 of 0.170. This suggests that approximately 17 per cent of the variance in brand awareness is accounted for by social media. Social media revealed a co-efficient of ($\beta=0.416$) with the p value of <0.05 on brand awareness. This suggests that social media (independent variable) contributes towards explaining the variation in brand awareness (dependent variable). Moreover, the correlation analysis further revealed a moderate relationship between social media and brand awareness ($r=0.399$). Previous research such as Tritama and Tarigan (2016:13), obtained a positive significant relationship between social media and brand awareness, which is in consensus with the empirical outcomes of the research. The hypothesis (H_1) which states that there is a positive significant relationship between social media and brand awareness is therefore supported.

In the second regression model, brand awareness was entered as the independent variable while perceived quality was entered as the dependant variable. Table 4.12 reports the results from the regression analysis procedure conducted for the second regression model.

Table 4.12: Regression coefficients for the second regression model

Dependent variable: Perceived quality		Standardised coefficients Beta	T	Sig	TOL	VIF
Brand Awareness		0.511	13.121	0.000	1.000	1.000
R= 0.511	R ² = 0.261	Adjusted R ² = 0.259	R ² change=0.261		F change =106.931	
Independent variables: Brand awareness						
Dependent variable: Perceived quality ** significant at p<0.05						
TOL=Tolerance value						
VIF= Variance inflation factor						

Source: Author's own compilation (2020)

The result of the regression model 2 indicated an adjusted $R^2 = 0.259$. This suggests that approximately 26 per cent of the variance in perceived quality is accounted for by brand awareness. Brand awareness revealed a co-efficient of ($\beta=0.511$) with the p value of <0.05 on perceived quality. This suggests that brand awareness (independent variable) contributes towards explaining the variation in perceived quality (dependent variable). The correlation analysis, in addition, revealed a moderate relationship between brand awareness and perceived quality ($r=0.456$). The results in this study corroborate with findings from previous studies on this relationship whereby Alexandra and Cerchia (2018:424) as well as Dib and Alhaddad, (2014:190) established that perceived quality is positively affected by brand awareness. The hypothesis (H_2) *that states that there is a positive significant relationship between brand awareness and perceived quality is therefore supported.*

In the third regression model, brand awareness was entered as the independent variable while brand loyalty was entered as the dependant variable. Table 4.13 reports the results from the regression analysis procedure conducted for the third regression model.

Table 4.13: Regression coefficients for the third regression model

Dependent variable: Brand loyalty		Standardised coefficients Beta	T	Sig	TOL	VIF
Brand Awareness		0.413	13.862	0.000	1.000	1.000
R= 0.413	R ² = 0.170	Adjusted R ² = 0.168	R ² change=0.170		F change =61.996	
Independent variables: Brand awareness						
Dependent variable: Brand loyalty ** significant at p<0.05						
TOL= Tolerance value						
VIF= Variance inflation factor						

Source: Author's own compilation (2020)

The result of the regression model 3 indicated an adjusted R^2 of 0.168. This suggests that approximately 17 per cent of the variance in brand loyalty can be accounted for by brand awareness. Brand awareness revealed a co-efficient of ($\beta=0.416$) with the p value of <0.05 on brand loyalty. This suggests that brand awareness (independent variable) contributes towards explaining the variation in brand loyalty (dependent variable). The correlation analysis further revealed a moderate relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty ($r=0.373$). The findings affirm earlier studies completed by Alkhawaldeh *et al.* (2017:41) as well as Dhurup *et al.*

(2014:7), which asserts that there is a significant positive and predictive relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty. The hypothesis (H_3) which state that there is a positive relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty is supported.

In the fourth regression model, perceived quality was entered as the independent variable while brand loyalty was entered as the dependant variable. Table 4.14 reports the results from the regression analysis procedure conducted for the fourth regression model.

Table 4.14: Regression coefficients for the fourth regression model

Dependent variable: Brand loyalty		Standardised coefficients Beta	T	Sig	TOL	VIF
Perceived quality		0.625	7.911	0.000	1.000	1.000
R= 0.625	R²= 0.390	Adjusted R²= 0.388	R² change=0.306		F change =193.204	
Independent variables: Perceived quality						
Dependent variable: Brand loyalty ** significant at p<0.05						
TOL= Tolerance value						
VIF= Variance inflation factor						

Source: Author's own compilation (2021)

The result of the regression model 4 indicated an adjusted R^2 of 0.388. This suggests that approximately 39 percent of the variance in brand loyalty is accounted for by perceived quality. Perceived quality revealed a co-efficient of ($\beta=0.625$) with the p-value of <0.05 on brand loyalty. This suggests that perceived quality (independent variable) contributes towards explaining the variation in brand loyalty (dependent variable). Moreover, the correlation analysis further revealed a strong relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty($r=0.608$). Based on the empirical data, these findings are consistent with previous studies of Dib and Alhaddad (2014:190; and Alhaddad 2015:6), which provided similar results. Therefore, the hypothesis (H_5) stating that there is a positive significant relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty is supported.

In the fifth regression model, purchase intention was entered as the dependent variable while brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty were entered as the independent variables. Table 4.15 reports the results from the regression analysis procedure conducted for the fifth regression model.

Table 4.15: Regression coefficients for the fifth regression model

Dependent variable: Purchase intention		Standardised coefficients Beta	T	Sig	TOL	VIF
Brand awareness		0.127	2.453	0.015	0.727	1.375
Perceived quality		0.128	2.158	0.032	0.562	1.780
Brand loyalty		0.484	8.352	0.000	0.585	1.711
R= 0.644	R ² = 0.415	Adjusted R ² = 0.409	R ² change=0.434		F change =70.468	
Independent variables: Brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty						
Dependent variable: Purchase intention ** significant at p<0.05						
VIF= Variance inflation factor						
TOL= Tolerance value						

Source: Author's own compilation (2020)

Overall, the results of the regression model 5 indicated an adjusted R² of 0.409. This suggests that approximately 41 percent of the variance in purchase intention can be accounted for primarily by three factors, namely, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty.

Brand awareness revealed a co-efficient of ($\beta=0.127$) with the p value of <0.05 on purchase intention. This implies that brand awareness (independent variable) contributes towards explaining the variation in purchase intention (dependent variable). The correlation analysis further revealed a moderate relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention ($r=0.422$). A study by Yaseen, Tahira, Gulzar and Anwar (2011:837) also concluded that there was a significant influence of brand awareness on purchase intension. The study finding is also in agreement with the findings of Macdonald and Sharp (2000:12) who also concluded that brand awareness plays a positive role in consumer purchase decisions. These results support the hypothesis (*H4*) that states that, *there is a positive significant relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention.*

Perceived quality revealed a co-efficient of ($\beta=0.128$) with the p value of <0.05 on purchase intention. This suggests that perceived quality (independent variable) contributes towards explaining the variation in purchase intention (dependent variable). The correlation analysis further revealed a strong relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention ($r=0.519$). Customers who perceive a brand to be of high quality will be inclined to possess a high propensity to purchase that brand (Saleem, Ghafar, Ibrahim, Yousuf & Ahmed 2015:25). This study's results

confirm the findings of earlier studies conducted by Tsiotsou (2006:213), which concluded that perceived product quality had a direct positive effect on purchase intention. The hypothesis (H_6), *that state that there is a significant relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention is supported*.

Brand loyalty revealed a co-efficient of ($\beta=0.484$) with the p value of <0.05 on purchase intention. This suggests that brand loyalty (independent variable) contributes towards explaining the variation in purchase intention (dependent variable). Furthermore, a strong relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention was revealed, as there was evidence of associations as shown by correlations ($r=0.544$, $p < 0.01$). This outcome corroborates with the study undertaken by Jung and Sung (2008:32), which revealed that brand loyalty has a strong positive association with purchase intention. Previous research has further shown that purchase intention is an outcome of brand loyalty (Malik *et al.* 2013:170). These results support hypothesis (H_7) *there is a positive significant relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention*.

The following section discusses the internal consistency and validity concerns relating to the measurement instrument.

4.3.6 Reliability and validity assessment

4.3.6.1 Reliability assessment

The Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the measuring instrument. According to Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008:2277), reliability coefficients range from 0.00 to 1.00, with higher coefficients translating to a higher degree of reliability. Table 4.16 reflects the internal reliability statistics for the study.

Table 4.16: Internal reliability results

Scale	No. of Items	Item-to-total	Cronbach's Alpha(α)
Social Media (Section B)	6	0.62	0.841
Brand Awareness (Section C)	3	0.58	0.802
Perceived Quality (Section D)	5	0.49	0.785
Brand Loyalty (Section E)	7	0.64	0.869
Purchase Intention (Section F)	6	0.67	0.889
Overall Reliability (All scales)	27	0.74	0.936

Source: Author's Compilation 2020.

As shown in Table 4.16, the Cronbach alpha values recorded for all the study constructs were above the acceptable threshold value of 0.7, which implied that the measuring instrument had a high degree of internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011:53). Furthermore, the item-to-total values were all above the recommended benchmark of 0.30, thus affirming that the measuring items were well formulated (Tapsir, Pa & Zamir 2018:40).

4.3.6.2 Validity assessment

The validity of the research instrument was ascertained through face validity, content validity, construct validity, convergent validity and predictive validity, which are discussed in the following sub-sections.

4.3.6.2.1 Face validity

Face validity was achieved through the evaluation of the questionnaire items by the supervisor, co-supervisor and two other experts in the field of social media marketing to confirm appropriateness of the measuring instrument.

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4.3.6.2.2 Content validity

Content validity was attained through a pilot study. The questionnaire was administered to a conveniently selected sample of (n=50) respondents from the target population which were excluded in the main study. Refer to Table 4.1 for the pilot study results.

4.3.6.2.3 Construct validity

The assessment of construct validity of the scale was done through the computation of Cronbach alpha coefficient of scale items. The results reported in Table 4.16, indicated acceptable reliability values which are above the 0.7 threshold.

4.3.6.2.4 Convergent validity

Convergent validity was confirmed through the assessment of inter-correlation values for all paired variables. As presented in Table 4.10, the inter-correlation coefficients among the study constructs were less than 1 (one), thus providing evidence of convergent validity among the study constructs (Nunnally 1978:246).

4.3.6.2.5 Predictive validity

Predictive validity, as a component of criterion validity, was ascertained through the various regression models, As reported in various sub-sections of Section 4.3.5 on regression analysis, it revealed positive significant relationships between the dependent and independent variables within the study.

4.4 ADDRESSING COMMON METHOD BIAS

Common method bias is defined as a systematic error variance that is shared among variables measured when introduced as a function of the same resource and is attributed to the measurement method rather than to the construct of interest (Jakobsen & Jensen 2015:5). Firstly, to minimise the effect of method biases, the researcher carefully designed the study procedures during the data collection process (Liang, Saraf, Hu & Xue, 2007:67). Due to the data for the study which was collected via a self-administered questionnaire and distributed to conveniently selected respondents, a pilot study was conducted to identify unnecessary items and improve the scale items. In addition, the ethical research requirements were upheld in that anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents was guaranteed. The respondents were further assured that there is no wrong or right answer, and that they should answer questions honestly. Secondly, an application of statistical remedies to regulate the influence subsequent to data collection procedure

was employed using Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee & Podsakoff 2003:881). The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was done by loading all variables and examining the unrotated factor solution. The results of the un-rotated factor analysis reported in Table 4.3 showed that bias was not a major issue.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a brief discussion regarding the outcomes of the pilot study and also reported on the empirical findings of the study. This was made possible using correlations and regression analysis where various regression models were presented to establish predictive relationships in terms of the hypothesised relationships. The internal reliability of the measuring instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient values, whereas various validity techniques were employed to assess the validity of the instrument. The next chapter addresses the research objectives of the study as well as the recommendations, limitations and future research possibilities with a view to draw conclusions for the study.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter reported on the analysis and interpretation of empirical data obtained from the main survey completed for this study through descriptive statistics, correlations and regression analysis. Reliability and validity assessment was discussed as well. This chapter commences with an overview of the study and thereafter examines how the objectives that were developed in Chapter One were achieved. Based on the review of the literature and empirical study, recommendations are proffered. The chapter concludes with limitations of the study, future research possibilities and concluding remarks.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study is organised into five chapters. The first chapter provided the introduction and research background of the study, described the problem statement and stated the hypotheses. In addition, the chapter presented a brief overview on the research design and methodology followed in the study as well as reliability and validity assessments of the research instrument. The second chapter focused on reviewing literature on the evolution of social media, theoretical perspective of the study as well as the study constructs under investigation. In chapter three, the research design and methodology were described, with particular reference to empirical design procedures. This included target population, sampling strategy, data collection process, data analysis and ethical guidelines to be observed in conducting the data collection process. In Chapter Four, the quantitative data analysis was completed and the results thereof were also interpreted. The final chapter (five) provides a discussion on the conclusion, realisation of the study objectives, recommendations, limitations and identifying potential areas for future studies.

The following section provides the achievement of the research objectives which were formulated for the study.

5.3 ACHIEVEMENTS OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study was to examine the influence of social media on brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention of smartphones. To achieve this objective, the theoretical objectives and empirical objectives were formulated.

5.3.1 Theoretical objectives

Theoretical objectives as a section in Chapter One should be reviewed and derive meaningful connotations based on data generated from the study. This would help organisations and future researchers to make informed decisions regarding the influence of social media interactions on brand awareness and the effect on perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention of smartphone brands. Table 5.1 highlights how the theoretical objectives were achieved.

Table 5.1: Achievement of the theoretical research objectives

Theoretical objective	Theoretical research objective being addressed	Section where the research objective was addressed
1	To review the literature on the underlying theories of the constructs under investigation	Sections 2.3, 2.3.1, 2.3.2 and 2.3.3.
2	To conduct a literature review on social media construct.	Sections 2.4, 2.4.1, 2.4.2, 2.4.3 and 2.4.4.
3	To undertake a literature review on the effect of social media on brand awareness.	Sections 2.5, 2.5.1, 2.5.2, 2.5.3, and 2.5.5.
4	To undertake the literature review on the role of social media on consumer purchase decision process.	Sections 2.4.3
5	To conduct a literature review on brand awareness construct and its effect on purchase intention.	Section 2.5 and 2.5.4.
6	To conduct a literature review on brand loyalty construct and its effect on purchase intention.	2.6, 2.6.1, 2.6.2, 2.6.3, 2.6.4 and 2.6.5.
7	To conduct a literature review on perceived quality construct and its effect on purchase intention.	Section 2.7.1, 2.7.2, 2.7.3, 2.7.4, 2.7.5, and 2.7.6.
8	To conduct a literature review on purchase intention construct.	Sections 2.8 and 2.8.1

Source: Author's compilation (2020).

5.3.1.1 Theoretical objective 1: To review the literature on the underlying theories of the constructs under investigation

The objective was addressed in Chapter Two from section 2.3, 2.3.1, 2.3.2, and 2.3.3. The sections cover three theories relating to predicting human behaviour, intention to perform a particular behaviour as well as the effects of various forms of consumer communication to consumer behaviour.

5.3.1.2 Theoretical objective 2: To conduct a literature review on social media construct.

This objective was achieved in various sections of Chapter Two which are section 2.4, 2.4.1, 2.4.2, 2.4.3 and 2.4.4. The sections cover definitions of social media, social media usage in South Africa, social media and consumer buying behaviour as well as social media marketing. Section 2.4.3 focuses on the role of social media interaction in the consumer purchase decision-making process.

5.3.1.3 Theoretical objective 3: To undertake a literature study on brand awareness construct and the effect of social media on brand awareness

This objective was addressed from Section 2.5 to 2.5.5. These sections discuss the concept of brand awareness, levels of brand awareness, dimensions and measurement of brand awareness, achieving brand awareness, brand awareness and consumer decision-making as well as social media interactions and brand awareness. Section 2.5.5 also reviewed literature on consumer-to-consumer interaction; business to consumer interaction on social media on brand awareness. The significance of consumers being co-creators of content of social media was also discussed.

5.3.1.4 Theoretical objective 4: To undertake literature review on the role of social media construct and its effect on consumer purchase decision process

The objective was addressed in Section 2.4.3 of Chapter Two of this research. The section explored in detail the concept of consumer buying behaviour and how the evolution of social media has affected this concept.

5.3.1.5 Theoretical objective 5: To conduct a literature review on brand awareness construct and its effect on purchase intention.

This objective was dealt with under Section 2.5 and 2.5.4. Section 2.5 explained the concept of brand awareness while Section 2.5.4 covered in detail the concept of consumer purchase decision-making and how brand awareness affects this phenomenon.

5.3.1.6 Theoretical objective 6: To conduct a literature review on brand loyalty construct and its effect on purchase intention

The theoretical objective was articulated from Section 2.6, 2.6.1 up to 2.6.5. These sections explored the construct of brand loyalty, types of brand loyalty, loyalty development, antecedents of brand loyalty, social media interaction and brand loyalty with Section 2.6.5 focusing on brand loyalty and purchase intention.

5.3.1.7 Theoretical objective 7: To carry out literature review on perceived quality and its effect on purchase intention

This objective was dealt with from Section 2.7 up to 2.7.6. These sections explained the concept of perceived quality, determinants of perceived quality, quality perception process, quality cues, quality attributes, social media interaction and perceived quality as well as perceived quality and purchase intention.

5.3.1.8 Theoretical objective 8: To conduct a literature review on purchase intention

The objective was achieved by conducting an extensive literature review from Sections 2.8 to 2.8.1.6. The sections discussed in detail purchase intention, determinants of purchase intention as well as social media and consumer buying behaviour.

5.3.2 Empirical objectives

The empirical objectives as set out in Chapter One of this study are revisited in the next sections:

The first empirical research objective for this study was intended to determine the association and influence of social media on brand awareness towards purchase intentions of smartphones. The association between social media and brand awareness towards purchase intentions is outlined in Section 4.3.4 of Chapter Four (correlation analysis) and Section 4.3.5 of Chapter Four (regression analysis). Correlation analysis (Pearson correlation coefficient) was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between social media and brand awareness and brand awareness towards purchase intentions. In addition, regression analysis was used to assess the extent to which social media predicts brand awareness. Furthermore, regression analysis was employed to assess the extent to which brand awareness predicts purchase intentions.

The second empirical research objective for this study was intended to determine the association and influence of brand awareness on perceived quality towards purchase intentions of smartphones. The association between brand awareness on perceived quality towards purchase intentions is outlined in Section 4.3.4 of Chapter Four (correlation analysis) and Section 4.3.5 of Chapter Four (regression analysis). Correlation analysis (Pearson correlation coefficient) was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between brand awareness and perceived quality as well as between perceived quality and purchase intentions. In addition, regression analysis was used to assess the extent to which brand awareness predicts perceived quality. Furthermore, regression analysis was employed to assess the extent to which perceived quality brand predicts purchase intentions.

The third empirical research objective for this study was intended to determine the association and influence of brand awareness on brand loyalty towards purchase intentions of smartphones. The association between brand awareness and brand loyalty towards purchase intentions is outlined in Section 4.3.4 of Chapter Four (correlation analysis) and Section 4.3.5 of Chapter Four (regression analysis). Correlation analysis (Pearson correlation coefficient) was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty as well as between brand loyalty and purchase intentions. In addition, regression analysis was used to assess the extent to which brand awareness predicts brand loyalty. Furthermore, regression analysis was employed to assess the extent to which brand loyalty predicts purchase intentions.

The fourth empirical research objective for this study was intended to determine the association and influence of brand awareness on purchase intentions of smartphones. The association between brand awareness and purchase intentions is outlined in Section 4.3.4 of Chapter Four (correlation analysis) and Section 4.3.5 of the chapter (regression analysis). Correlation analysis (Pearson correlation coefficient) was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intentions. In addition, regression analysis was used to assess the extent to which brand awareness predicts purchase intentions.

The fifth empirical research objective for this study was intended to determine the association and influence of perceived quality on brand loyalty towards purchase intentions of smartphones. The association between perceived quality and brand loyalty towards purchase intentions is outlined in Section 4.3.4 of Chapter Four (correlation analysis) and Section 4.3.5 of the chapter (regression analysis). Correlation analysis (Pearson correlation coefficient) was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty. In addition, regression analysis was used to assess the extent to which brand loyalty predicts purchase intentions.

The sixth empirical research objective for this study was intended to determine the association and influence of perceived quality on purchase intentions of smartphones. The association between perceived quality and purchase intentions is outlined in Section 4.3.4 of Chapter Four (correlation analysis) and Section 4.3.5 of the chapter (regression analysis). Correlation analysis (Pearson correlation coefficient) was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between perceived quality and purchase intentions. In addition, regression analysis was used to assess the extent to which perceived quality predicts purchase intentions.

The seventh empirical research objective for this study was intended to determine the association and influence of brand loyalty on purchase intentions of smartphones. The association between brand loyalty and purchase intentions is outlined in Section 4.3.4 of Chapter Four (correlation analysis) and Section 4.3.5 of the chapter (regression analysis). Correlation analysis (Pearson correlation coefficient) was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intentions. In addition, regression analysis was used to assess the extent to which brand loyalty predicts purchase intentions.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STUDY

Based on literature review together with the findings of empirical research, several recommendations for marketers, organisations and academics are pointed out in this research.

5.4.1 Recommendations regarding the relationship/association and influence of social media towards brand awareness on smartphones

The study's results show that there is a positive association between social media and brand awareness. Organisations can serve the moment of the day and direct communication presented by social media by maintaining brand relationship with current and possible customers (ElAydi 2018:11). With a growing increase in social media users and communication, the researcher recommends that organisations should make use of social media to constantly engage with its clients. Marketers and digital managers should make use of social networks to promote their brand, products and services. The use of social media to spread information pertaining a brand name provides a greater opportunity for organisations to increase brand awareness (ElAydi 2018:11). Social media marketing should be incorporated into corporate marketing strategy.

5.4.2 Recommendations regarding the significance of the study constructs towards consumer behaviour/decision making on smartphones

The literature review indicated that social media has transformed the communication sphere in more unanticipated ways and becomes part of consumers' daily routines. The study reveals that consumers seek advice and information from peers on social media before making purchase decisions, which affects their purchase decision process. The researcher recommends that organisations must make sure that information and content shared on social media as well as customer experiences both online and offline is always satisfactory in such a way that it will trigger positive sharing of brand related information within social media realm (Luu 2019:15).

The rise of social media platforms has greatly encouraged the creation of user-generated content as customers cease to be passive recipients of firm generated communication. In the digital sphere, customers are at liberty to post anything in relation to any product or brand and of great importance is that customers often share the experience they get while shopping or consuming a product and/or service. Customer experience shared is proving to have an impact in the purchase decision process of potential customers. The study further revealed that positive comments of other users on social media about a brand or smartphone product arouse purchase intention. This entails that to influence consumer purchase decision process and purchase intention of their products, organisations need to make sure that customer (user) experience is exceptional and content shared on brand communities is encouraging so as to stir up positive word of mouth (ElAydi 2018:6).

Social media is still growing, together with instant messaging platforms. Their influence to business goes beyond affecting brand awareness, brand loyalty and purchase intention. More studies should be done on the contribution of social media and instant messaging on aspects such as customer satisfaction, business success and profitability. Also, it is critical for other studies to do this research with different population group and other industries.

5.4.3 Recommendations regarding the relationships between brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty towards purchase intention

The research results put forward that smartphone organisation should focus more on the influences that brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty has on purchase intention. The basic preposition from this study is that if consumers can identify a brand name upon purchasing or consumption it means that the particular smartphone brand holds higher brand awareness. A product with higher brand awareness or rather a well-known brand name wins consumers' preferences and increases purchase intention. It is recommended that smartphone brand owners ought to establish a brand with which they will promote its brand awareness through sales promotion, advertising, and other social media marketing activities (Chi *et al.* 2009:141).

Brand loyalty as one of the pillars of brand equity is perceived to have a significant influence on the consumer's decision-making process both in online and offline environments. The results of this study supported the notion that there is a direct positive relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention (Nora 2018:38). The researcher recommends that organisations should invest in creating customised interactive social media campaigns targeting loyal consumers with the objective of enhancing the behavioural motivation to 'Like' in order to engage WOM, as it can more effectively generate a higher purchase intention (Nora 2018:39; Laksamana 2018:15).

In an attempt to influence purchase intention of smartphones among social media users, the researcher recommends that marketers should focus on enhancing brand visibility and awareness through advertising frequently on social media platforms as well as creating healthy platforms for consumers to share their consumption experience, given that consumers seek peer reviews for brands before making a purchase (Mobil, Kasuma, Adenan, Mejri & Rajan 2019:79).

5.4.4 Recommendations regarding the impact of consumer shared experience in the digital word to purchase intention

The rise of social media platforms has greatly encouraged the creation of user-generated content as customers cease to be passive recipients of firm generated communication. In the digital sphere, customers are at liberty to post anything in relation to any product or brand and of great importance is that customers often share the experience they get while shopping or consuming a product and/or service. Customer experience shared is proving to have an impact in the purchase decision process of potential customers. The full impact of customer reviews on business needs to be assessed more, hence the recommendation that more extensive research about the impact of consumer shared experience online on the overall businesses' growth strategy is necessary.

5.5 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

There is a sharp increase on the amount of research on the subject of social media marketing's impact and supposed influence to brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention as well as its overall impact to the consumer purchase decision making process. The results of this study are believed to be contributing significantly to the marketing and social media marketing literature, more so on the influence of social media to brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention (Thu & Phuong 2021:63).

Working through this study, the researcher was able to gain more insights and understanding about how social media marketing can be utilised by marketers to enhance brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention (Luu 2019:57). Additionally, the researcher gained more understanding on consumer behaviour and the factors that impact brand users' attitudes specifically on how social media influences a consumer's purchase decision making process based on information consumed on the platform (Azzari & Pelissari 2020:16).

This study contributes immensely to the continuously evolving and popular subject of social media marketing in the field of marketing management. Of importance is that the research study contributes to researchers' efforts trying to gain understanding on the relationships amongst the

different constructs, mainly of brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and purchase intention.

5.6 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As a result of limited access to resources and scope of the study, the target population sample was restricted to students within one university and therefore the results of the study should be interpreted cautiously as they may not be generalised to a larger population other than the sampled one. Future research may focus on broadening the scope of the study by including students from other universities, or consumers from other situations.

The sample size on $n=320$ respondents involved in the study also needs to be taken in cognisance regarding the ultimate generalisation of research findings as this is not the universal representation of all university students. It is further suggested that a larger sample be considered for future studies in order to achieve better response rates and decrease the margin of error. This may improve generalisation of results to draw conclusions.

The study relied on a quantitative research approach which is deemed restrictive by researchers as it is not in itself adequate to provide a more intensive and conclusive data. Therefore, a mixed method research approach is recommended for future studies as it could probe for answers that needed further clarity (detailed response) and triangulate the data.

A non-probability convenience sampling design which can be susceptible to sampling error was undertaken in selecting the respondents. It is therefore recommended that future studies explore other effective data collection procedures such as probability sampling methods.

The study also focused on respondents with smartphones that are utilising social media. Future studies can opt to expand the context of research and consider other users or consumers not necessarily using smartphone brands but are active on social media.

5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The evolution of social media has changed the way consumers communicate and interact as well as organisations. The traditional way of communication from organisations is no longer the only effective way as in some instances it might not yield desired results. Organisations were left with no choice but to adopt social media in their marketing strategies than regarding it as a social platform intended for pleasure rather than business. The study indicated that consumers spend more time on online platforms using their mobile phones than reading newspapers.

The study also pointed out that social media interaction has an influence on the consumer purchase decision process. Consumers are keen to ask or entertain peer advice regarding products of interest and they use social media to engage with their peers and other consumers. In general, consumers share product experiences online without being asked, whether the experience is positive or negative. Research findings also pointed out that social media has a positive influence on brand awareness, brand loyalty and purchase intention.

The study further revealed that positive comments of other users on social media about a brand or smartphone product arouse purchase intention. Also, of significance in increasing purchase intention on social media is content shared on online brand communities. This entails that if organisations are geared in increasing purchase intention of their products, they should make sure that customer (user) experience is exceptional and content shared on brand communities is encouraging so as to stir up positive word of mouth (WOM).

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ANNEXURE A: COVER LETTER FOR MAIN SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE



VAAAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND SPORTS MANAGEMENT

Dear Participant

RESEARCH PROJECT

Good day, I am a student at Vaal University of Technology. I (Tawanda Mashapa) am conducting a research project based on Social media influence on brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention of smartphones among university students in order to complete my M.Tech degree (Masters).

There are no wrong or right answers; I would just like to hear your views. Your opinion will be very helpful to me. If you have owned a smartphone and have social media experience, please read the following questions carefully and tick the options that you consider correct and appropriate.

I therefore request you to complete the enclosed questionnaire yourself and confidentially. I assure you that the survey data are only for academic research purposes and will not be used for any commercial purposes. The questionnaire completion will take approximately 5-10 minutes.

I thank you for your time and effort in completing the questionnaire enclosed.

Enquiries: Tawanda Mashapa

Cell No: 073 334 8115.

Email: mashapatjm@gmail.com

ANNEXURE B: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON BRAND AWARENESS, PERCEIVED QUALITY, BRAND LOYALTY AND PURCHASE INTENTION OF SMARTPHONES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The aim of this questionnaire is to test the impact of social media interactions on brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention of smartphones among university students. All information will be strictly used for the purpose of this research only.

The questionnaire is divided into six parts, and your response will make this research a success.

SECTION A - Demographic and consumer profile

This section seeks to obtain general information about you and your social media usage. Please mark your answer by placing an (x) in the appropriate block.

A1	Gender	Male	Female
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A2	Age group	18 - 20 years	21-25 years	25-30 years	31-35 years	35 - 50 years
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A3	Educational Level	Diploma	Undergraduate	Graduate	Post graduated	Other (specify)
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A4	Are you familiar with social media sites? (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+ LinkedIn)	Yes	No
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A5	Which social media sites are you participating in?	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Google+	LinkedIn	Other (Specify)
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A6	Are you using a Smartphone?	Yes	No
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A7	Which brand of smartphone are you using?	Samsung	Nokia	Sony	Blackberry	HTC	LG	Others (Specify)
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SECTION B (Social Media)

The purpose of this section is to determine if social media usage influences your attitude and perceptions towards your choice of brand using a five-point Likert scale. The scale is anchored along:

1=strongly disagree

2=Disagree

3=neither agree nor disagree

4=Agree and 5=strongly agree.

Please indicate using a cross (X) the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements:

B1	I get more informed and equipped about my preferred smartphone brand on social media.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
B2	Social media plays a pivotal role in spreading information about my preferred smartphone brand.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
B3	I feel proud to be associated with my smartphone brand on social media.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
B4	Social media posts and reviews change my perception about my preferred brand either positively or negatively.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
B5	I survey and seek more details on social media about my preferred brand's new model before I make a purchase.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
B6	My interaction with my smartphone brand and positive social media interactions makes me gain more interest on the brand.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree

SECTION C (Brand Awareness)

The purpose of this section is to examine if social media interactions and usage positively influence your level of brand awareness of smartphone brands. The scale is anchored along:

1=strongly disagree

2=Disagree

3=neither agree nor disagree

4=Agree and

5=strongly agree.

Please indicate using a cross (X) the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements:

C1	I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of different smartphone brands on social media.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C2	Social media and discussions has increased my knowledge base about different smartphone brands.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C3	It is simple to imagine and align different smartphones brands on social media.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C4	Social media reviews and opinions are making me aware of how good my preferred brand is.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C5	Social media allows me to ask information and opinions about smartphone brands before making any purchase considerations.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree

SECTION D (Perceived Quality)

The purpose of this section is to examine if social media and brands' online community can change consumers' perceived quality about their preferred smartphone brand. The scale is anchored along:

1=strongly disagree

2=Disagree

3=neither agree nor disagree

4=Agree and 5=strongly agree.

Please indicate using a cross (X) the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements:

D1	Smartphone brands on social media are of high quality.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
D2	I regard my smartphone brand as of high quality.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
D3	Positive comments about my smartphone brand on social media increase my quality perception about the brand.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
D4	Social media interaction, posts and other customer experience testimonies on social media, influence my quality perception towards the brand either positively or negatively.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
D5	My smartphone brand has a distinct differentiated image, easily identifiable in comparison with the other brands.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree

SECTION E (Brand Loyalty)

The purpose of this section is to examine if social media interactions positively influence brand loyalty. The scale is anchored along:

1=strongly disagree

2=Disagree

3=neither agree nor disagree

4=Agree and 5=strongly agree.

Please indicate using a cross (X) the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements:

E1	I feel proud to be part of my favourite brand's online community.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
E2	I am willing to say and post positive messages online and offline about my smartphone brand to other people.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
E3	I will encourage friends, colleagues and social media participants to join my preferred smartphone brand's online community.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
E4	I will encourage friends, colleagues and social media participants to use my preferred smartphone brand.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
E5	I would watch videos, follow posts and news about my preferred smartphone brand.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
E6	I intend to continue associating myself with my preferred brand on social media.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
E7	I would continue to buy my favourite smartphone brand even if the price increase.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree

SECTION F (Purchase Intention)

The purpose of this section is to examine your purchase intention emanating from social media interactions. The scale is anchored along:

1=strongly disagree

2=Disagree

3=neither agree nor disagree

4=Agree and 5=strongly agree.

Please indicate using a cross (X) the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements:

F1	The content of a brand or smartphone page on social media can influence my purchase intention.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
F2	The richer the content is, the higher the purchase intention.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
F3	The frequency of updates of a brand or smartphone page on social media can influence my purchase intention	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
F4	My involvement with smartphone brands on fan pages and brand communities on social media can influence my purchase intention.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
F5	The positive comments of other users about a brand or smartphone product on social media can arouse my purchase intention.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
F6	I think social media interaction and discussions about the smartphones brands with other uses will trigger purchase intention.	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree

-THANK YOU-

ANNEXURE C: LETTER FROM THE LANGUAGE EDITOR

8 Belle Ombre Road
Tamboerskloof
Cape Town. 8001.

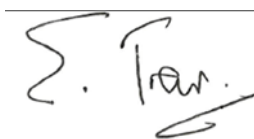
9 September 2021.

To whom it may concern

This serves as a confirmation that, I the undersigned have language edited a Masters in Technology thesis entitled: *The influnce of social media on brand awareness and its influence on perceived quality, brand loyalty and purchase intention of smartphones among university students* done by Tawanda Mashapa.

The final responsibility of implementing the recommended language changes fully rests with the author of the thesis.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Trew', is written over a horizontal line.

Elizabeth Trew
073 235 1147
021424 6136
Trew.eliz@gmail.com