

Gordon Institute of Business Science

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The effect of social media marketing on brand awareness, engagement, and customer value in South Africa: A stimulus-response perspective

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Abstract

With the rise of internet penetration and social media fast becoming one of the most popular online activities, the emergence of social commerce (SC) has become one of the most significant opportunities for marketers and brands. With more consumers using SC to purchase goods and services, socialise and seek information, it has become necessary for brands to understand those aspects within the SC environment and what attracts consumers to their brands. Leveraging those elements effectively will allow brands to remain appealing to their consumers and stay ahead of the competition. Brand awareness and brand engagement have long been used to drive purchase consideration, customer loyalty and innovation for business. However, little has been done to understand the levers that businesses can use to influence customer in the SC environment

The aim of the study is to understand which business levers are most effective in driving consumer engagement and brand awareness. This was done using the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory which mediates (organism) the relationship between the levers that businesses use (stimulus) and the resultant engagement and awareness of customers. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed in the research study with users of SC as the unit of analysis. Data was collected via an online questionnaire. Structural equation modelling was used to analyse data from 230 respondents who are users of SC.

The main findings of the research were that some of the levers employed in the SC environment are effective at influencing perceived customer value. Even more significant was the considerable relationship between customer value on brand awareness and brand engagement. The research indicated that the more a business could improve its value offering within the SC environment, the more likely they are to drive brand awareness and brand engagement. The practical implications of this are that to drive the awareness and engagement that mobilises competitiveness, marketers should utilise those levers that are most likely to increase customer value. It is also important to understand consumers in the market to optimise on the value drivers that are relevant for those customers. The main limitation of the research was the limited

number of respondents; thus, to improve on the data representativeness and generalisability, replications of this study may be needed.

Keywords: Social commerce, social media, brand awareness, brand engagement, customer value

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university. I further submit a declaration that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research

Brian Ntabiso Malanda

Illovo, Johannesburg,

1 December 2020.

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This research is dedicated to my family: my biggest supporters, my north star and the eye that always sees the best in me. I carry the lessons of your sacrifice, especially from my grandparents; individuals, who, despite the times, made the deliberate choice to use education as a vehicle for their family's advancement and worked hard to give it to them. I hope that you are proud.

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CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM DEFINITION

1.1 Introduction

Marketing theorists have predicted the transition of the marketing practice from an evolution to a revolution (Potts, 2018) and the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have significantly accelerated this change (He & Harris, 2020). With restrictions on movement imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19, consumers have relied heavily on social and e-commerce platforms to access basic needs and services. The ascendancy of personal interactions which were already diminishing through online exchanges has further been reduced by government-imposed restrictions that have seen social commerce (SC) suddenly become the dominant consumer channel (Abbruzzese et al., 2020). The communication between brands and consumers immediately changed when lockdowns restrictions were introduced, with the use of Instagram, Whatsapp and Zoom rising exponentially as a result. Consequently, the age of online and social media marketing has gone from infancy to adulthood in a matter of weeks (He & Harris, 2020).

In the recent past, the convergence of social media and electronic commerce (e-commerce) has facilitated a new world for customers, allowing them to shop and socialise, in what is now known as SC (Wang et al., 2019). Social commerce is an extension of the traditional electronic commerce channels and has evolved into a significant opportunity for businesses, marketers, and researchers (Baethge et al., 2016). The development of SC has triggered the need for marketers to understand customers' needs better to enhance their online shopping experience. The ability for SC to facilitate two-way interactions has also enabled customer input in the product development process, which has allowed marketers to cater to their customers' needs and deliver value.

Marketers must understand how to leverage SC better to drive improved awareness and engagement around their brands to create more value for their customers. In SC, big internet shopping platforms such as Amazon have managed to integrate their social media with their traditional electronic commerce platforms (Wan et al., 2019). Such

integration has allowed Amazon to collect millions of data points to develop their product offering better and generate immeasurable value for its customers.

1.2 Purpose of the research

The objective of this study is to replicate and extend a model for SC, its effect on the customer shopping experience, and how it creates engagement and awareness for a brand. The model will encompass the influence of selected marketing levers or components (stimuli) on brand awareness and engagement via consumer value in SC. Ultimately, the model will seek to understand whether the stimulus results in the desired effect, which is brand engagement. Fulfilling customer needs is a primary driver for value creation; hence the study will seek to understand whether SC delivers on customer needs and, consequently, customer value.

This study is a replication and extension of a study by Wu and Li (2018), which sought to develop a model to understand the effect of marketing mix components on customer loyalty, mediated by the value derived by customers in SC. The main gap in the research was that data was collected from predominantly young users of a single SC platform (Facebook) which resulted in the data being largely skewed. Another limitation of the Wu and Li (2018) study was that the stimulus used had weak correlations to customer loyalty. A very inexperienced sampling group hampered this key variable. Therefore, this study will utilise only those variables that showed promise from the original study, which were SC needs, social presence, social media marketing, and brand awareness.

The study will be replicated for the South African SC user. Unlike the original study that only utilised Facebook, this study will be open to including data sources from all SC platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. A variety of social media platforms could improve diversity in the sample collected, which was largely skewed in the original study.

1.3 Theoretical justification

Social commerce has become an increasingly important conversation due to the emergence of the Web 2.0 era. However, there has been very little research about it within emerging economies such as South Africa (Aydin, 2019); thus, this study is an extension of Wu and Li's (2018) model but within the emerging field of South Africa. Currently, there are no clear definitions and consensus about what SC is, as the focus has been on its elements (Zhang et al., 2014). Generally, SC has often been described as an emerging concept that is centred around the interaction of social media and e-commerce (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). Social commerce enables marketers and customers to interact and make purchasing decisions (Liang & Turban, 2011). Past literature supports the notion that the elements of SC; social media and e-commerce, can influence a range of customer behaviours, such as brand engagement (Braojos et al., 2019).

Past literature has also sought to understand customers' behaviour and its effect on their buying decisions (Chen & Shen, 2015). The way that information is shared as well as the ability to interact socially means that SC sites can be effective in influencing buying decisions (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). This study seeks to explore how the use of SC can be leveraged to improve brand engagement.

Previous research has mainly been centred on user behaviour within the SC environment (Zhang et al., 2014) and understanding the impact of user-generated content on customer satisfaction, loyalty and perceptions towards a brand or service (Hilderbrand et al., 2013). Social commerce has often been considered as a driver of brand engagement and is amongst the core focus areas for researchers of online marketing; however, there has been little done in the South African context (Roy et al., 2017). Therefore, the goal of this research is to understand the value that SC can create for marketers and consumers in the African context in a bid to build brand engagement. The key variables that were included in this study were customer value (utilitarian, hedonic and social), social status, brand awareness and brand engagement.

1.4 Business rationale

Since the early 90s, marketing has moved from a focus on customer transactions to a relationship-based approach in a bid to develop relationships with customers that are positive and ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). In the past, the objective of organisations has moved from a relationship-based approach towards better brand engagement. The rationale for this move is based on the knowledge that customer satisfaction alone is not enough to drive loyalty, which ultimately leads to profitability (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). As companies start to rely on social media and SC to drive engagement increasingly, it may be critical for businesses to understand which levers in the social media environment they can leverage to achieved marked growth in brand engagement (Gomez et al., 2019). Social commerce platforms have become a key platform for consumer advertising. As a result, consumer engagement's influence on customer behaviour in the SC environment has increasingly become a topic of interest for businesses (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010). The study, therefore, aims to shed some light on the research area by proposing and testing (empirically) a model of SC. Most businesses are pursuing brand engagement in a bid to promote competitive advantage in driving better sales, profits, and product development (Brodie et al., 2011). This study is relevant for businesses in that it highlights the drivers of SC engagement and may better inform how marketers build these into their SC strategies.

Businesses are constantly in the pursuit of growth and surpassing the competition to win market share of customer spending (Ascarza et al., 2018). Social commerce's growth has primarily been driven by the alignment of e-commerce and social media, which has allowed e-commerce businesses to utilise and adapt to changes and trends as a result of the growth of social media (Kim & Kim, 2018). With the rise in competition in traditional e-commerce, many businesses are now starting to leverage social marketing in e-commerce to gain a competitive advantage in the market (Chen & Wang, 2016). The current COVID-19 pandemic has had lasting implications and has changed the business outlook for many organisations as well as how they operate (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Another consequence of COVID-19 has been an extreme increase in social media usage since people are seeking social interaction during the various levels of

lockdown. Prior research has shown that people now prefer online interaction to personal interaction (Nowland et al., 2018). As social media becomes more prominent in helping deliver goods and services, it becomes even more critical that marketers better understand and leverage the opportunity it provides.

Social commerce has allowed for better communication between marketers and customers, which has resulted in the real-time exchange of information and has driven information transparency (Leong et al., 2020). Not only does this allow users, or “influencers,” to communicate with large numbers of people, but it offers more customer-generated information to these customers as well (Wu & Li, 2018). The purchasing behaviour of consumers is changing. Customers will often rely on social media product reviews before purchasing or consuming a product (Yu et al., 2020), and they are becoming more inclined to taking referrals from other customers, especially their friends and followers in their social media network.

The biggest differentiator between SC and e-commerce is that SC gives customers the ability to connect virtually with each other when making purchase decisions (Akrajindanon et al., 2018). Social commerce allows small businesses to leverage word of mouth marketing on social media to drive consumer focus and allow for the setting of consumer groups for those brands with limited budgets to be established (Akrajindanon et al., 2018). Social media platforms drive SC. It has resulted in many online shops using this vehicle to the extent that it accounts for 50% of SC purchases (Yongjiranon, 2018). Marketers must know how to cater to their customers better to exploit the SC opportunity as businesses move online. SC has seen unprecedented growth in recent years, resulting in more and more customers engaging with this platform to find different products and services (Al-Adwan & Kokash, 2019). In Q1 of 2017, the average sales orders generated from social networks were valued at \$85.21 billion (Statista, 2017). Thus, businesses must start to look at this channel as a source of growth (Sukrat & Papisratorn, 2018). The increased adoption of SC signals the need for businesses to engage their customers better and offer more value than their competitors to grow market share.

Social commerce has provided an online-based approach for how businesses interact with their customers and have thus gained increased attention from marketers. Understanding customer behaviour in a social platform, with different influences, is essential for both academic researchers and marketing specialists. This will allow them to understand better the implementation of effective SC strategies (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). The advanced development of technology suggests that SC will soon become a mainstream channel for marketers and previous literature surveys have shown that there has not been significant research in the field on the effect of SC on the customer shopping experience (Akman, Mishra, 2017).

1.5 Research problem

The challenge for marketers is understanding which tools they can utilise to reach their customers and ultimately drive brand engagement and purchase conversion within SC. This is highlighted by the more limited range of products and services in SC compared to e-commerce (An & Kim, 2018). Social media has better enabled social interaction and the exchange of information among potential customers (both businesses and individuals) and assists them in receiving product information and ultimately a reaching purchasing decision (Yang et al., 2013). Therefore, this could mean that SC is a form of e-commerce that engages in various interactions (not limited to two-way interaction) among the social network's members and business marketing endeavours on the platform.

The economic benefits of SC for business is that SC increases the volume of purchases from customers who have the same demand (Wu & Li, 2018). This means that if a company can identify a strong influence from an individual in that community, they can recruit people to their brand at a much lower cost than through traditional media; which can either be invested back in lower pricing or towards providing better margins for the business. There is an equal risk that a negative perception after a product's purchase can result in harm to that product's brand equity, which can be costly for the marketer to repair. This means that marketers must take a potentially different approach to their social media marketing strategy.

1.5.1 Marketing levers and tools – Marketing Mix

Marketers must adapt their strategies and create differentiation using the levers that they employ to meet the demands of changing customers and growing competition (HR & Aithal, 2020). Marketing Mix variables are levers that a business can use to deliver both value and business revenue (Thabit & Raewf, 2018). Marketing Mix refers to the product, distribution (also known as place), promotion and pricing strategies used to deliver goods or services by a business to its customers (Išoraitė, 2016). Marketing Mix is commonly referred to as the 4Ps and is a framework that identifies the key decisions businesses must make in delivering to their customers' needs (Kotler & Armstrong, 1994).

The 4Ps framework has traditionally been used in mass marketing (McCarthy, 1960). With the advancement of information access, driven primarily by the growth of the internet, the 4Ps framework is becoming less relevant. Marketers are now able to better tailor their messaging to particular groups with very differing profiles. The SC marketer needs to understand the key drivers for driving purchase consideration and tailor their marketing mix to cater for the differences in this profile. With the ability for social media to create communities amongst friends and followers (Waldon, 2018), it becomes much more important to understand how to appeal to different communities with the same products and services. In the study, the effectiveness of the marketing mix in SC and how it differs from the traditional marketing mix is explored. The study also seeks to understand customer value in SC and its effect on brand engagement.

Past research has defined the marketing mix as the combination of tactics used by the business in realising its objectives by adapting its products or services effectively to a customer group (Kotler, 2000). The use of social media has advanced the marketing mix, especially the communication element. The ability to leverage this can lead to a strong return on investment (ROI) for a business (Olaleye et al., 2018). Marketing and sales businesses today are consistently challenged in executing customer-orientated communication strategies to create awareness and engagement for their brands, meet their customers' needs and create value for those customers as well (Wu & Li, 2018). As new sources of data become available, there are increased opportunities for marketers to tailor their marketing mix better to deliver on the potential customer's needs

(Wedel, 2017). Therefore, a business must understand those factors that drive purchase consideration and the tools that they can use to propel those factors.

In other instances, it becomes crucial to create differentiation in products and services to appeal to different customer groups as a change in customers' demands has also resulted in diverse and fractured markets (Dalgic & Leeuw, 1994). The 4Cs concept reverses the focus from the brand or marketer to the customer or consumer, which should result in an advantage for both sides (Thabit & Raewf, 2018). In the 4Cs framework, the marketers see themselves as selling products, while the customers see themselves buying a solution, also known as the customer solution (Paul, 2013). The two-way conversation between marketers and customers has allowed for the customisation of products and services that are better aligned to delivering better customer value. It is advantageous, therefore, for a marketer to build those insights into their marketing mix, particularly in the product element.

Customers prioritise knowing what the total cost of the product is (customer cost) and getting that product as efficiently as possible (convenience); thus, they want two-way communication (customer communication) to influence their product experience (Nezakati et al., 2011). Marketers that better leverage their platforms to deliver on customers' expectations quickly generate value. For example, unorganised retailers in the lifestyle branding market in India grew significantly by understanding the SC marketing mix and applying it to their business models (HR & Aithal, 2020). By leveraging their platforms better, many marketers have moved to the 4Cs framework, which places the customer as the core of any marketing strategy (Nezakati et al., 2011). With fewer brick and mortar stores opening, the customer experience of being able to go to a store and be engaged by a salesperson does not exist in SC (Hajli et al., 2017). This may leave customers feeling disengaged towards the shopping experience and the brands which businesses offer. Research has also indicated that in some instances, online shopping can be a source of social exclusion due to the perception that online products are composed of very high value-added products that the majority of customers cannot access (Valarezo et al., 2019).

1.6 Research scope

In view of the research problem stated in the preceding section, this study seeks to examine the effect of SC on brand awareness, brand engagement and the ability of this channel to deliver on customers' needs, which ultimately drives customer value. The study will also examine the experience of users of social media and SC when interacting with marketing material on social media and various SC platforms, including their interpretations of brand messaging and its effectiveness. It will also examine the drivers that ultimately influence the customer to purchase a product or not.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Section overview

To understand SC and its effect on the customer experience, this literature review will provide an overview of SC today and the opportunity that it presents to businesses. To exploit this opportunity, consumers must be aware of the brands and services that businesses offer. Consequently, this literature review will outline the benefits of good brand awareness and the resultant brand engagement that comes from it.

In understanding how SC can be leveraged to deliver value and long-term engagement through the adapted model, the components which enable SC must be realised. The definition of SC is a business that is built on social media that allow users to buy goods and services as well as merchandising in online communities and markets (Tran et al., 2020). The literature is underpinned by the stimulus organism response (SOR) model that stipulates that stimulation and customer behaviour are linked by an organism (Buxbaum, 2016).

The rest of this chapter will explore the variables contained within each of the SOR pillars and how they interact with each other.

2.2 Stimulus organism response theory

The SOR theory defines how an 'organism mediates a relationship between the stimulus and response by assuming different mediating mechanisms are operating in the organism' (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In the original study, the SOR model was used to confirm whether elements around the shopping environment (stimulus) would affect customers' cognitive and emotional state (organism) which would ultimately influence an outcome or response (Eroglu 2013; Wu & Li, 2018). The SC marketing mix was primarily investigated. In the Wu and Li (2018) study, the interest was to develop a model to understand the formation of customer loyalty. This study, however, will be developing a model of explaining how the SOR model within SC can explain brand engagement.

Therefore, this study makes use of a model based on the SOR theory to understand how the SC marketing mix (stimulus) affects the perceived value for a customer (organism), which in turn influences brand engagement (response).

The SOR theory has been used in the past to provide insights into the behaviour of consumers (Jani & Han, 2015). It does this by explaining the relationship between the stimulus and the response through different mechanisms in the organism (Woodworth, 1928). These mechanisms effectively translate the stimulus (marketing mix) into consumer behavioural responses (brand engagement), which ultimately leads to a purchasing decision (Lichtenstein et al., 1988). The organism, in this case, is the customer value that is perceived based on what customer needs are in the SC context. The user experience would trigger elements such as utilitarian and hedonic value, information on the platform, and social value driven by the ability to socialise and connect. Ultimately, these drive brand awareness, brand engagement and purchase consideration (Wu & Li, 2018).

Figure 1 is a basic model depicting the SOR theory (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In the model below the marketing mix are the levers that a business can exploit to drive customer value and ultimately brand engagement.

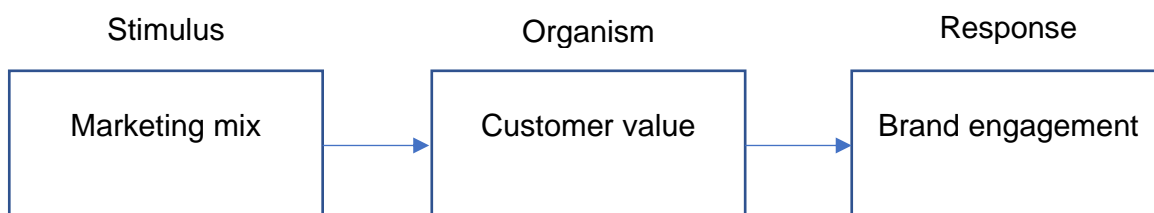


Figure 1: Adapted basic SOR model.

Brand engagement has been proven to drive increased market share for businesses (Liu et al., 2018). However, the lack of physical salespeople in the online shopping environment may leave customers feeling disengaged. The social presence theory describes the value for businesses to create an experience in SC that keeps the customer engaged (Molinillo & Liebana-Cabanillas, 2018). This may be a crucial component in meeting customer needs and ultimately delivering value for the customer.

Customers derive value differently, and this literature review will explore some of the value drivers for customers and how businesses can meet them. In order to have sustained growth, businesses need to create value for their customers consistently.

2.3 Customer value (perceived value) in social commerce

It is argued that for a business to remain ahead of its competitors, it must aim to continuously create and deliver perceived value (Rintamäki et al., 2006). Therefore, marketers need to understand how perceived value influences brand engagement and purchase decisions, which leads to sales growth. Past research has shown that perceived value influences purchase consideration in different contexts, such as shopping centres and malls (Chiu et al., 2014). It has also shown that perceived value drives user satisfaction and engagement (Lin & Wang, 2006).

In choosing to engage and purchase a product or service, there must be some value that the potential customer hopes to derive from the purchase. This value is perceived by the customer based on their assessment of the utility they would derive from a good or service (Zeithaml, 1988). Previous research has revealed that perceived value is a key construct affecting customer behaviour in different contexts (Gan & Wang, 2017). This is not different in the SC environment where customers and potential customers not only seek utilitarian and hedonic value, which is usually characterised by convenience and satisfaction, but social value as well (Gan & Wang, 2017). The social aspect is centred mainly around the interaction with other users and the fulfilment that comes with the experience (Rintamäki et al., 2006).

The most basic value is utilitarian value, which refers to the core and functional benefits of a good or service (Ashraf et al., 2019). In the context of SC, elements such as cost benefits and convenience affect a customer's perception of utilitarian value (Hsu & Lin, 2016). Hedonic value is centred around the enjoyment and happiness that are derived from using SC (Chung et al., 2017). These non-functional benefits are more closely linked to emotional benefit and engagement (Heijden, 2004). Satisfaction from the use of SC is, therefore, linked to the greater perceived utilitarian and hedonic value. The

greater the satisfaction, the higher the likelihood that a business would generate better brand engagement and purchase through SC (Gan & Wang, 2017).

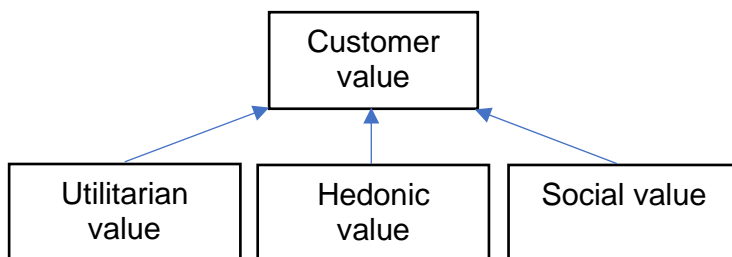


Figure 2: Elements of customer value in social commerce.

2.3.1 Utilitarian value

Utilitarian value (UV) is defined as the functional value that one gets from using a product or service (Lin et al., 2018). Utilitarian value is derived from a product's characteristics and usually refers to its price, reliability, and utility (Kim et al., 2013). Utilitarian value is the primary driver in the purchasing decision, which is coupled with ease of use, flexibility, and convenience of the SC environment (Kleijnen et al., 2007). In SC, UV is a vital variable in that it has a positive relationship with purchase consideration (Avcilar & Özsoy, 2015).

Online customers can better understand the potential utilitarian value of a product before they purchase it, via product information on the packaging, reviews from peers as well as information from consumer protection forums. Generally, this is what drives a purchasing decision (Wu & Li, 2018). The higher the likelihood of an SC site having high utilitarian value, the more customers will engage with it, especially because it delivers on basic needs (Chung et al., 2017).

2.3.2 Hedonistic value

Hedonistic value (HV) refers to the pleasurable experience derived by customers from a product or service and drives usage in the SC environment (Tandon et al., 2018). Hedonic shopper behaviour is linked to pleasure, excitement, and fun. Hedonistic value is driven by the feelings that keep a customer engaged and is, therefore, very subjective,

and personal (Kim et al., 2013). According to previous research, the SC platform user experience, such as the information presented on it or its ease of use, can create HV for the customer.

Hedonistic value is a driver towards the attitude of a customer adopting and using an SC platform. Emotions can be a crucial driver to how customers experience value become a driver of purchase consideration (Tandon et al., 2018). An SC platform with high experiential shopping or the perception of bargains can also drive HV (Utari, 2018). The experience within the SC platform can motivate a customer's attitude towards the brand, product, or service (Anderson et al., 2014), which are drivers of engagement.

2.3.3 Social value

Social value (SV) is the social act of shopping online, which plays an essential role in determining user behaviour. Therefore, the motivation for using SC platforms relies on the way customers view themselves or would like to be viewed. Past research has shown that the use of SC may increase the perception of being an innovative and intelligent member of society and that people that use SC for these reasons are seekers of SV or social status (Kim et al., 2013).

Social value is the value that a customer derives from their ability to enhance their social status amongst their social groups (Broekhuizen, 2006). In making a purchasing decision, a customer will consider not just UV and HV, but also how the decision will be perceived within their social groups. The better the perception, the higher the SV they derive from the experience (Utari, 2018). Social value is seen as a contributor to increased self-esteem and status of users of a product or service (Rintamäki et al., 2006). Previous research has found that SV is a significant driver to user satisfaction and the continued use of SC platforms (Hu et al., 2015).

In the SC environment, UV and HV are strong drivers for the product usage behaviours of customers, while SV is a strong driver for user behaviour (Rintamäki et al., 2006). Thus, it may be necessary for marketers to consider these factors and leverage them to drive the messages that they want to communicate with their customers. Ultimately

perceived value has been shown in past research to lead to satisfaction, which leads to engagement (Hsu & Lin, 2016). When users have a positive experience of an SC platform, it is generally based on the evaluation of how their needs and expectations have been met over the cost of being on the platform (Zhang et al., 2015). The more that users are satisfied with an SC platform, the more likely they are to want to know about the brands (awareness) and engage with them (engagement) (Gan & Wang, 2017).

There are elements which marketers can leverage in driving perceived value. The quality of the information that they place on SC sites can be a driver of UV (Sheng & Zhao, 2019). The ability to communicate effectively allows a user to form an accurate understanding of the SC offer and enables them to make better decisions. As a result of this value, there is an increased likelihood of a purchase.

Value is defined as the benefit that customers receive from buying a good or service (Utari, 2018). Marketers often communicate this as the value proposition of their brand, product, or service. Customers will often view a value proposition as the complete bundle of benefits to be derived from the provision of the good and service and not limit it to the item itself (Utari, 2018). Businesses view value by the ability of their value proposition to generate a profit as well as the sustainability of the value over time (Solomon et al., 2012). Past research determined that the purchase driver for customers of a good or service was determined by whether the perceived cost of buying a product, usually monetary, was exceeded by the perceived gains of purchasing it (Grewal et al., 1998). Since perceived value is a strong motivator for the purchasing of a good or service, understanding it is vital in managing customer relationships on SC platforms (Yen, 2013).

Despite the increased popularity of SC and online shopping, very little is known about how brands and businesses perceive customer value within this environment (Alshibly, 2015). A study by Braojos et al. (2019) also indicated that past literature has focused on the individual and complementary effects of SC while little has been done on the brand's perspective and capabilities' view. The experiential component derived from using a product or service are the most important determinants of value (Lee et al., 2016). It is,

however, easy for competitors to replicate those elements in a product; thus, experiential and emotive elements are required to distinguish a product or service from those of competitors (Lee et al., 2016).

To increase awareness and engagement, marketers must increase the value of their goods and services with customers. The ability to do this will assist a business in retaining long term relationships with customers (customer loyalty), which is a driver of market share growth. The social image of a product may influence its value within the SC space in addition to its functional benefits based on how customers perceive it. Such perception needs to be considered by marketers. Previous studies have emphasised that marketers should consider the amount of UV and HV that their SC platforms provide during the development of the platform (Chiu et al., 2009), as customers' online shopping experience is affected by them both. This study considers customer value beyond the product or service benefits and includes the entire SC experience. Therefore, as the original study proposes, UV and HV should be considered when evaluating and developing customer value in SC.

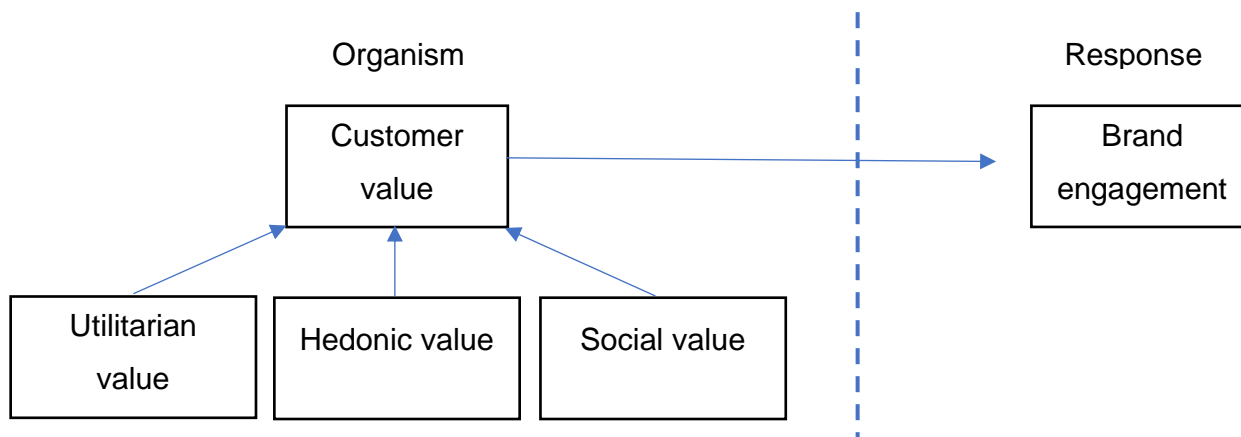


Figure 3: Customer value (organism) in driving brand engagement.

2.4 Brand engagement in social commerce

In a more competitive environment where businesses consistently seek growth, marketers and businesses need to leverage their social media and SC to communicate with their existing customers and develop potential customers. Due to the sheer number

of people on social media, there is an opportunity for businesses to use this channel as part of its brand engagement strategy (Bazi et al., 2019).

High brand engagement is linked to increased purchase consideration, which is the aim of a marketer (Kircova et al., 2018). As social media becomes more integrated into society, past studies have shown it to influence purchasing decisions together with the need to socialise (Abed et al., 2017). Marketers should primarily utilise SC to drive benefits for their brands or products. Purchase consideration, which is also an indicator of customer behaviour, is usually the outcome (Kircova et al., 2018).

As social media sites continue to be in the forefront as the most useful platforms to reach customers on each stage of the customer journey, they are appealing for the co-creation of value for brands (Ahmad & Loche, 2016). This co-creation of value is realised when customers begin to do product assessments and share their experiences of using a product or brand at no cost to the marketer (Bazi et al., 2019). Companies that can co-create value are, in the long term, more likely to increase brand competitiveness (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003). This opportunity has led to consumers becoming drivers of innovation, as marketers can draw insights from the trends coming out of social media (Klink and Athaide, 2010). Research has shown that in some instances, ideas that come from customers tend to outperform those created by marketers (Poetz & Schreier, 2012).

As is the case with traditional business, marketers compete for customers on SC platforms for engagement of customers and users. This is because high engagement creates better purchase consideration, which means growing revenues for the marketer (Kircova et al., 2018). The engagement of a customer is a reflection of their psychological state induced by their interaction or experience of a product or brand (Brodie, et a., 2011). Due to the emergence of social media as a key communication platform, marketers can use it to reach potential customers and direct them to their material via SC platforms (Pongpaew et al., 2017).

Engagement on SC platforms includes how customers use, share, and communicate about a brand and its offerings (Kircova & Enginkaya, 2015). There is an expectation from brands that utilise SC and social media that their users will adapt and contribute to

the content shared and engage with the brand (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). The more that they contribute to the brand and relate to it, the higher the purchase consideration of that brand by the customer (Kircova et al., 2018). Past research has shown that engaging customers and users on SC platforms are essential elements for sales and marketing activities of brands (Smith et al., 2012).

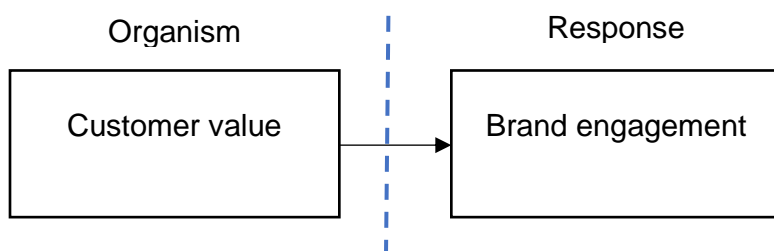


Figure 4: Customer value and its effect on brand engagement.

H1: Consumer value has a positive influence on brand engagement

2.5 Brand awareness in social commerce

The ability for customers to identify or remember that a brand is part of a product category and reflects a consumer's ability to remember and recognise a brand in different environments, has widely been accepted as the definition of brand awareness (Bilgin, 2018). This is different from brand recognition, which is linked with customer familiarity of a brand or product – also known as brand recollection – which is the process of thinking of a brand first when a range of brands are introduced (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). Brand awareness is vital to driving conversion, especially in new innovations or when a brand launches a new variant. A brand, while communicating quality, value, and authenticity, also reduces the risks related to goods and services and allows customers to form social bonds without needing to express their identity (Bilgin, 2018).

The ability for marketers to drive high levels of brand awareness, recollection, and familiarity, can lead to improved equity of a brand, (Keller, 2003). In attempting to improve awareness of their brands, marketers have been trying to understand the usage and efficiency of digital advertisements (Johns & Perrot, 2008). In order to derive a

competitive advantage, businesses need to be aware of the brand awareness of their products or services and devise appropriate advertising strategies to mitigate and improve their brand awareness (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015).

A brand with high awareness will likely result in that brand becoming part of the customer's purchase consideration (Shabbir et al., 2018). Brand awareness, through social media, is a driver of market share growth as it influences repetitive consumer buying (Ansari et al., 2019). Research has further shown that brand awareness also drives brand equity and loyalty, which results in repeat purchases (Shabbir et al., 2017). The rise of SC has increased the opportunities for marketers to showcase their brands in a way that drives awareness of their products, which can ultimately drive their bottom line. If leveraged correctly, the ability to drive awareness within a social media platform may also be an opportunity to drive engagement of a product and ultimately trial.

The quality of information on SC platforms, and the products and services offered, influences customers' decision to purchase through it (Huang & Benyoucef, 2017). Past research has shown that good advertising material relies on the ability of the marketer to provide enough information to facilitate a sale (Wang et al., 2019). Equally, it has been shown that poorly planned, and executed activity may harm a company's sales and reputation (Brynjolfsson & Smith, 2000). Advertising value has different dimensions that can influence a customer's attitude to the message (Waters et al., 2011). This has resulted in customers seeking out more information on a product and its features before making a purchase (Ahmed & Zahid, 2014).

Before social media, brands could not reach their potential customers and deliver information on their brands effectively (Ansari et al., 2019). Previous traditional platforms such as magazines, newspapers, and television were the most prominent communicators of brand and product information. This type of communication was one way, with marketers communicating to customers and potential customers with minimal conversation between them except through customer surveys. This came at a high cost to the business and took a long time to turn around. The ability for customers to customise products was also very limited; thus, brands used to sell "manufactured, highly standardised products" (Ansari et al., 2019), resulting in brands often not catering

to customer needs. In the digital space, particularly in social media, brands can identify trends and customise their products to deliver on those trends and customer needs. The two-way communication channel provided by social media allows for a brand to quickly understand if customers' needs are catered for by a brand and are quickly able to turn around changes if that is not the case. This has enabled brands and marketers to save millions in innovation research costs and write-offs related to products that go unsold.

Trust is critical in driving awareness in the online shopping environment due to the prominent role of peer generated content on users' purchase intentions (Haji, et al., 2017). This presents businesses with an opportunity to be more collaborative in marketing communications and incorporate marketing activity to drive awareness around their brand and ultimately influence sales (Bilgin, 2018). Businesses can also create their brand profiles and product information simply and affordably (Breitsohl, 2015). Past literature has highlighted the benefits of social media marketing but has most often focused on customer satisfaction and its effect on consumers' behavioural intentions (Simona & Tossan, 2018). Once a business can get a good awareness of its brands, it will likely engage better with their customers, which can bring about tangible benefits to the business. Figure 5 below depicts the effect that brand awareness (stimulus) has on the value a customer derives in the SC environment. The quality of information customers are subjected to on SC platforms can influence the level of perceived value that they derive from the shopping experience (Sheng & Zhao, 2019). A marketer's ability to effectively communicate the product information, location, and after-sales support can be a driver of UV (Sheng & Zhao, 2019).

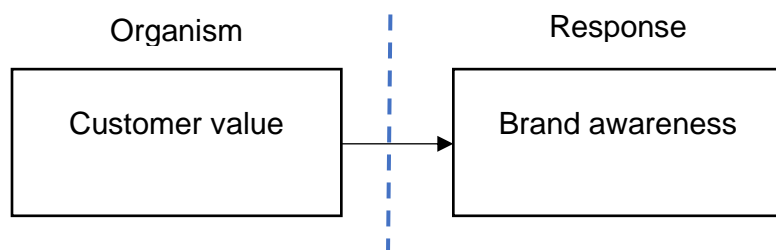


Figure 5: The relationship between brand awareness and customer value.

H2: Consumer value has a positive influence on brand awareness

2.6 Social commerce needs

In understanding what a customer's intentions for using SC are, one usually needs to understand what the customer's needs are. Customer needs are not limited to but include those goods or services a customer wants to purchase (Lauterborn, 1990). When marketers put together campaigns, it is important to understand what customer needs are for those campaigns to speak to those needs (Wu & Li, 2018). In choosing to get onto an SC or to make a purchase, there must be some value that the potential customer hopes to derive from the either. This value is perceived by the customer and is based on their assessment of the utility that they would derive from a good or service or the SC experience (Zeithaml, 1988). Previous research has revealed that perceived value is a key construct affecting customer behaviour in different contexts (Gan & Wang, 2017). This is not different in the SC environment where customers and potential customers not only seek utilitarian and hedonic value, which is usually characterized by convenience and satisfaction but social value as well (Gan & Wang, 2017). The social aspect is centered mainly around the interaction with other users and the fulfilment that comes with the experience (Rintamäki et al., 2006).

As already discussed in the study, the most basic of value is utilitarian value, which refers to the core and functional benefits of a good or service (Ashraf, et al., 2019). In the context of SC, elements such as cost benefits and convenience affect a customer's perception of utilitarian value (Hsu & Lin, 2016). Hedonic value is centered around the enjoyment and happiness that are derived from using SC (Chung, et al., 2017). These non-functional benefits are more closely linked to the emotional benefit (Heijden, 2004). Satisfaction from the use of SC is therefore linked to the greater perceived utilitarian and hedonic value. The greater the satisfaction, the higher the likelihood that they would generate a purchase through SC sites (Gan & Wang, 2017). The perception of value ultimately determines the motivations for customers to use SC in fulfilling their needs.

An important aspect for marketers to consider are the different customer motivations, which drive people to consciously or subconsciously purchase goods or services (Wu & Li, 2018). Understanding what these motivations are will allow a brand to create the right value proposition to match the customers' needs, and ultimately the motivations of those customers (Chiang & Hsiao, 2015). It is therefore important for brands to segment their

customers by the different SC buying needs and in order to use better targeting from a marketing communication and value proposition perspective (Wu & Li, 2018).

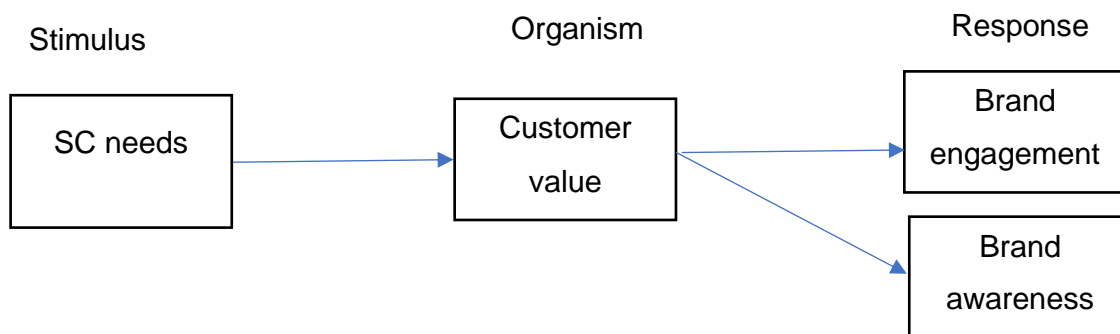


Figure 6: The relationship between brand awareness and engagement and customer value.

H3: The fulfilment of Social Commerce needs positively influences Brand Engagement

H4: The fulfilment of Social Commerce needs positively influences Brand Awareness

2.7 Social Status

Social status is defined ‘as the perception of social self-concept’ resulting from the use of SC (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). The ability to obtain status and self-esteem from an experience can also drive SV (Rintamäki et al., 2006). Shoppers can gain a sense of self-identification from sharing their experiences (Analysys, 2016). Purchase intention is improved when a customer derives high SV, which leads to improved customer satisfaction from SC use. Additionally, research has shown that social status is a driver of customer satisfaction and purchase consideration (Hu et al., 2015), which indicates that social status may, through SV, increase a customer’s intention to use SC.

The ability to connect with friends and followers is a driver for the use of SC platforms (Cho & Son, 2019). This ability to interact through social sharing, for example through a company’s social media page, allows the customer to not only interact with the brand but with the brand’s other customers as well (Liang et al. 2011).

Social status is often realised by the recognition and acknowledgement of an individual within a social group (Chen et al., 2014). The strength of relationships that users of SC

have is a driver to the amount of influence that one would have on another individual and their ability to make them change behaviour (Peng et al., 2017). Social commerce platforms benefit from being able to qualitatively and quantitatively measure the influence that individuals have on others (Huang et al., 2012). The more marketers understand what drives influences, the more they will be able to incorporate these insights into their marketing material on SC platforms to drive social status (Tang & Yang, 2012). Consequently, the ability to understand social status has important application value (Peng et al., 2017).

Understanding what influences social status within social groups or societies is also important in allowing marketers to understand what information, ideas, and experiences circulate in social networks (Peng et al., 2016). Understanding the way information is disseminated also enables marketers to drive the most effective channels of information, which influences the desirability for that status in turn.

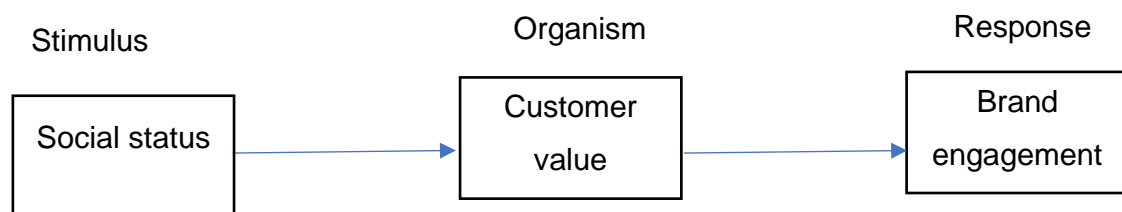


Figure 7: The relationship between social status and brand engagement

H5: there is a positive relationship between Social Status and Brand Awareness

2.8 Social influence

Past research has shown that interpersonal relationships influence individuals' behaviour and, ultimately, the way that they make decisions (Bearden et al., 1989). It has also been argued that a strong driver of a customer's buying behaviour is the social influence in the information-seeking phase of the purchasing decision (Bilgihan et al., 2014). Therefore, younger customers are more likely to be influenced by friends due to the information that they expose themselves to when formulating their purchase decision

(Mangleburg et al., 2004). As already discussed in the literature, perceived value is the result of assessing the costs and benefits related to a purchase. This perceived value for younger people may be driven by social influence which may play a role in the comparison of various options (Hänninen & Karjaluoto, 2017). It could, therefore, be determined that social influences contribute to the perceived value of product or service. Social influence affects the way an individual conforms to or agrees with other members of a social group due to some influence that they have been exposed to (Jahoda, 1959). Therefore, social influence can lead to conformity, a change in people's behaviour, and even their attitudes and beliefs (Aronson et al., 2010). Informational and normative influence are the two types of social influence mostly referred to in literature

Informational influence refers to the extent to which an individual will be influenced to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty based on another's ability to provide accurate information (Winterich & Nenkov, 2015). This has often been referred to as the "bandwagon effect" in past literature (Kuan et al., 2014). Normative influence is sometimes called approval-based conformity and refers to the extent to which individuals seek status or social approval by changing or adapting to the expectations of their friends and family (Winterich & Nenkov, 2015). This behaviour is often driven by social pressure and is a key construct of the theory of planned behaviour (Zhu & Chen 2016).

Social influence theory has long been used to understand consumer behaviour. In the case of SC, social influence can drive the attitudes consumers have of brands and influence purchase consideration (Wang et al. 2012). Additionally, social influence has three main pillars that marketers may want to understand to influence customer behaviour: the compliance process, the internalisation process, and the identification process (Yang, 2019).

The compliance process refers to the behavioural change linked with the expectation of being rewarded or punished (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). In the compliance process behaviour usually reflects the influence of others in terms of how they need to comply (Kelman, 1974). The need for approval is the driver for individuals to adhere to social

norms, but these social norms do not play a significant role in determining an individual's intentions (Bagozzi & Lee, 2002).

The internalisation process refers to when the goals and values of an individual are similar to others, causing the individual to consciously or unconsciously apply them to their behaviour (Thau, 2013). The more an individual's values and goals are aligned to those of the society that they are in, the more their behaviour is influenced by the social context (Kim & Park, 2011).

The identification process occurs when an individual tailors their behaviour to the expectation of others to develop a relationship with the group (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). To identify with a group or society, people will behave in a way that keeps a favourable relationship with the social group (Wang et al., 2013).

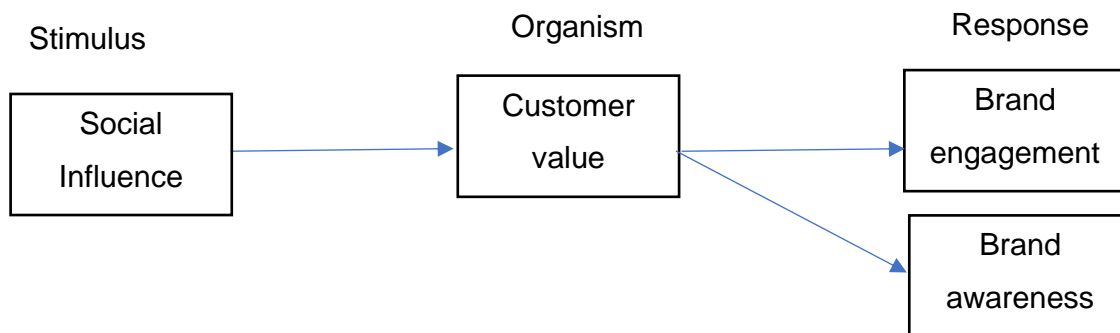


Figure 8: The relationship between social influence and brand engagement and awareness

H6: there is a positive relationship between Social influence and Brand Engagement

H7: there is a positive relationship between Social influence and Brand Awareness

2.9 Social presence theory

Social presence theory (SPT) refers to the extent to which an SC platform can create a personal, warm, intimate, and sociable interaction with other users (Zhang et al., 2014). Unlike a traditional store, and SC site does not have salespeople that customers can speak to or interact with. Therefore, the SPT is defined as the extent to which a person

is perceived to be an actual person in a virtual environment, and how the level of social presence within that online environment influences the quality of the interaction and outcomes (Bickle et al., 2019). Social commerce platforms have limited interaction between the marketer and the customer. (Lu et al., 2016). Successful SC platforms are those that can facilitate an environment as well as communicate a sense of presence and friendliness (Gefen & Straub, 2004).

Effectively leveraging social presence can make customers better experience the business and its brands, which leads to higher shopper satisfaction (Blasco-Arcas, 2014). Previous studies have indicated that shopper satisfaction is a result of cognitive, affective, and behavioural processes and contributes to value (Vivek et al., 2012). Social presence is an essential quality of a communication medium (Lu et al., 2016).

The increase in social presence in online material is likely to improve customers' participation in online brand engagements generated by a brand (Osei-Frimpong & McClean, 2018). Marketers may want to understand and leverage social presence as it can be a key driver to customer value and engagement to their online content. Social presence has shown that while online content is informative and allows customers to engage in these social interactions, social media is not restricted to the sharing of content or socialisation. Rather, social media can provide an avenue for brands to form deeper customer brand relationships as well as engagement (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Only once a customer is engaged in a brand and does not feel intimidated by the shopping environment will a business be able to turn that environment into more value for a customer.

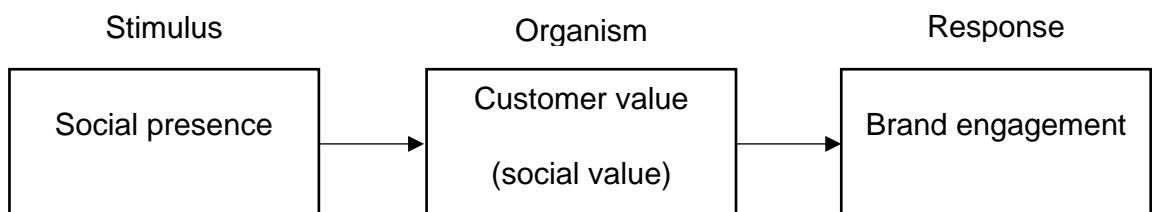


Figure 9: The relationship between social presence and brand engagement

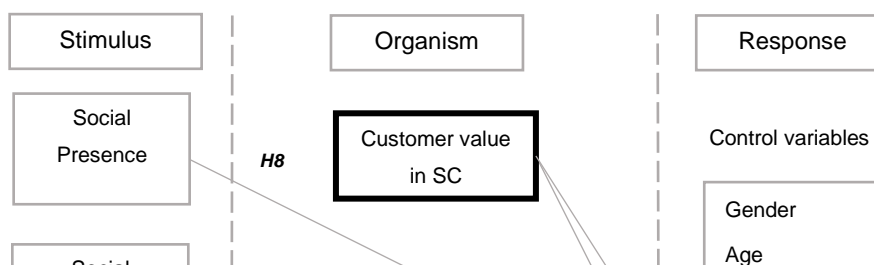


Figure 10: Adapted stimulus organism response model.

Table 1: Primary hypothesis of the study.

H1	CV / BE
H2	CV / BA
H3	SCN / BA
H4	SCN / BE
H5	SS / BE
H6	SI / BA
H7	SI / BE
H8	SP / BE

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research methodology chapter will discuss the methods used to perform the study. It explains what was done and how it was done to ensure the reliability and validity of the study can be evaluated. A quantitative approach that utilised deductive and empirical testing of theory was utilised for this study (Bell & Bryman, 2018). Theories of customer value and brand engagement were empirically tested based on deductive reasoning in the context of South Africa.

3.1 Research paradigm

This research study used the objectivism paradigm as it views social reality as being external and objective (Bell & Bryman, 2018). In other words, the researcher believes that there is a common, objective reality which can be agreed on by everyone (Newman & Ridenour, 1998). The objectivism paradigm supports the use of the quantitative approach, which assumes that reality is a function of fact instead of a social construct (Newman & Ridenour, 1998). The main characteristic of the quantitative approach is its ability to measure phenomena such as behaviour, opinions, knowledge, and attitudes precisely (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). After obtaining measurements, the quantitative approach allows researchers to quantify relationships between variables to describe, explain and predict phenomena (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

This research study is an attempt to determine causality, which cannot be done using a cross-sectional design; therefore, the researcher utilised probability testing to determine the strength of relationships between parameters (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Due to the nature of probability testing, the researcher could not determine the exact causes of consumer engagement. Consequently, a positivist philosophy was selected based on its similarity to the objectivism paradigm (Gray, 2013).

3.2 Research philosophy

Supporters of the positivist philosophy believe that positivism is grounded in observation and experimentation. These processes are effective in generating new knowledge through extensive and thorough scientific inquiry (Rahi, 2017). As the research utilised existing theory to evaluate the effect of customer value on brand engagement, positivism was deemed appropriate. Existing theory was also used to develop and test the study's hypotheses with the expectation that they would be confirmed or refuted (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Lastly, quantitative studies are also grounded in the positivist philosophy (Grinnell & Unrau, 2010), which was a further rationale for the selection of a quantitative approach.

As stated previously, this study is a replication and extension of Wu and Li, (2018). Such replication is beneficial, as the generation of valid knowledge creates a more accurate picture of reality and assessing its accuracy (Pitt et al., 2002). Past research has shown that replicating studies and retesting them can result in previous observations becoming more scientific (Popper, 1959). Since SC is relatively a new field, it was considered important for this study to retest previous observations, but in a different environment. Such continuous replication supports regularity and reproducibility and reduces the likelihood of the fragmentation and isolation of results (Popper, 1959; Pitt et al., 2002).

Furthermore, replication studies convert tentative theory into accepted knowledge (Pitt et al., 2002) which is recognised as being the most critical condition of scientific knowledge (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1984). It is also argued that testing theories are essential to reducing the risk of theories not being supported by empirical research (Miner, 2003). In fact, a previous study by Miner (2003), showed that only 34% of management literature were rated as high regarding scientific validity, which highlights the importance of replication and retesting (Colquitt & Phelan, 2007).

This study attempted to establish validity by gathering facts and structuring hypotheses to provide the basis for hypothesis testing. In carrying out the study, structured methods, such as questionnaires, were used to collect data which further supports the positivist philosophy selection (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). In summary, the study utilised a

quantitative approach which is characteristic of the positivist philosophy (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Furthermore, key parameters from the original study were altered to allow the research to focus on the core variables of the theory (Pitt et al., 2002).

3.3 Approach

A deductive approach was used alongside a quantitative approach in this study. By using the deductive approach, the study sought to test a theory by collecting new data from respondents using different statistical tests to make observations (Rahi, 2017). Consequently, the study was an investigation into the relationship between SC and brand engagement and awareness. This is a key characteristic of the deductive approach, along with collecting and analysing data to answer research questions that can confirm or refute existing theory (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Additionally, the deductive approach is recommended for studies where the researcher makes certain assumptions; thus, it was selected for this study since the study sought to verify several assumptions (Mark et al., 2009). It is for these reasons that researcher developed the research questions in a way that ensured answers would be provided post data analysis (Zikmund et al., 2010).

3.4 Methodological choices

The mono quantitative method was utilised in the study, as quantitative data needed to be collected, analysed and used to answer the research questions (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Additionally, this method is a novel data collection method that can be applied to large populations (Myers & Avison, 2002), while allowing the researcher to describe data through actions and opinions rather than isolated interpretation (Rahi, 2017).

3.5 Type of research

This research is an explanatory research study that incorporates descriptive and inferential analysis to gain insights into and identify the nature, strength and effect of relationships between variables (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The explanatory research method was chosen as it allowed the researcher to gain insight into whether SC influences a customer's online shopping experience. This research method is primarily used to understand the reasons driving different phenomena (Cohen, 2013), and was considered ideal for this study since it builds on an existing theory (Rahi, 2017). It is also relevant to quantitative methodologies (Rahi, 2017). Finally, the study employed questionnaires that were distributed to participants with prior experience on engaging with social media and SC.

3.6 Strategy

Replication and extension are both relative in the sense that stress and time may change the subject and the researcher (Bedeian et al., 1992), which makes replication important in research. Therefore, the survey strategy in this study was the same as in the original study (Wu & Li, 2018). Past research also states that replications must always be relative to some previous work (Pitt et al., 2002), which means that a study can replicate the method of previous research.

There are different degrees of freedom when it comes to the research strategy employed in a replication study. Zero degrees of freedom occur when the dimensions of the research are as close to the original study as possible (Pitt et al., 2002). One degree of freedom entails taking an existing theory and applying it to a different context (Pitt et al., 2002). Past researchers, particularly in marketing, have tested existing theories in different contexts (Kettinger & Lee, 1994). The reason for this is so researchers can test whether theories that have positive predictions in one context will also have positive predictions in different contexts as well. The purpose of this is to assess whether methods that work in one environment will work in a different one (Pitt et al., 2002). Since this study is a replication of a theory originally tested in Wu & Li, (2018) and is now being tested in the South African context, it is a research strategy with one degree of freedom.

The survey strategy of the original study utilised questionnaires. Since this study is a replication, the same survey strategy was used. Furthermore, this strategy is appropriate for business research because managers find it easy to understand and have a lot of confidence in the results obtained through surveys (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). These types of questions make it useful for explanatory research studies such as this one. The ability to easily compare responses from across different locations makes using questionnaires attractive. However, study having good study reliability means ensuring that the sample selected is representative of the population is important, as is ensuring a good response rate from participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

3.7 Time horizon

Time was a limitation in carrying out the research hence, a cross-sectional research design was selected (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Data were collected at a single point in time, which is a core element of cross-sectional research designs (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

3.8 Techniques and procedures

The data for the study were collected through a questionnaire which is associated with the deductive research approach utilised in this study (Mark et al., 2009). A questionnaire allowed for the collection of data in a standardised manner and analyse the data using statistical methods (Taherdoost, 2016). Questionnaires are also cost and time efficient in comparison to face-to-face interviews (McClelland, 1994). Furthermore, a questionnaire that is well structured can produce effective and accurate data (Wilson, 2010), which is vital when conducting a replication study. Questionnaires also allow for the standardisation of questions, which is ideal when testing a theory through explanatory research (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). In this study, data were collected using a pre-designed questionnaire.

3.9 Research design

The study used a cross-sectional design. The researcher deemed this appropriate as the cross-sectional design allowed for data to be collected from multiple respondents at a single point in time (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Additionally, data obtained using a cross-sectional research design is quantifiable, and all the variables utilise scales that have been developed from the literature.

The questionnaire was hosted on Google Forms and WhatsApp was used as the biggest platform for the distribution of the questionnaire. The researcher used WhatsApp because of its popularity and ease of information sharing (Ahad & Lim, 2014). A significant disadvantage of the quantitative research approach is that it requires a large sample size (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Given the limited amount of time in which this study could be conducted, only a reasonable sample size (n=230) could be collected. Regardless of this limitation, WhatsApp has over 1-billion users worldwide (Rozgonjuk et al., 2020), and was deemed a useful tool through which the questionnaire could be administered.

The research questions were structured and targeted, and variables were collected and grouped into two or more mutually exclusive categories (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Thus, the data were normally distributed. This research design was beneficial to the researcher, as it was cost-effective and did not need any preparation from the participants before distributing the questionnaire. The qualifying criteria and definition of SC were sent to participants with the invitation to participate to ensure respondents understood what SC platforms were. The definition sent to the respondents of the questionnaire for SC was:

SC (SC) is defined as the convergence of e-commerce activity and purchases mediated by social media platforms. These platforms often use Web 2.0 software and have been popularised by platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest. SC has enabled the expansion of new businesses and opportunities for brands to communicate with their customers. SC is therefore an extension of that integrates social media as a platform to assist in facilitating e-commerce transactions and activities.

Lastly, the researcher's involvement was limited, in that there were no interviews carried out by the researcher, which helped to remove any bias (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

3.10 Population

The population for this study were all South African consumers who used and accessed social media platforms that incorporated SC such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest at least once a month. Alternatively, the population had to have made use of SC platforms and has experience with SC or e-commerce via social media within the last year. The justification of this time frame was to avoid potentially sampling only those people whose experience with SC was because of COVID-19 restrictions. South Africa's internet penetration is 60%, with about 21,56-million social media users (Clement, 2020), and Twitter alone has about 2.3-million users (Marivate et al., 2020). Therefore, the study population was quite large (Malhotra & Birks, 2009), and is where the study sample was derived from. Consequently, both the population and the sample consisted of individuals who met the criteria defined explicitly for the research and who the research was based on (Alvi, 2016; Yarahmadi, 2020). Additionally, this study used a web-based survey that included filter questions to ensure that oversampling did not occur. Oversampling can often lead to sampling outside of the chosen population, which would make the study less reliable (Yarahmadi, 2020).

3.11 Unit of analysis

The basis on which the measurement of a theory is established is done through the unit of analysis (Van Hook et al., 1999). The unit of analysis in the research was the consumers who used social media incorporating SC such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest. Use was defined as having accessed an SC platform at least once a month. The unit of analysis provided the data for analysis in the research study (Zikmund et al., 2010).

3.12 Sampling method and size

Quota sampling was used as the sampling method in this study. The researcher chose this sampling method to ensure the sample selected would have the right characteristics as per the population that had been chosen (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Quota sampling was instrumental in improving the demographic information from the original study by Wu and Li (2018). Table 2 shows the demographic information of the participants in the Wu & Li study (2018). Additionally, quota sampling is especially effective when the population is heterogeneous (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), and the elements have different characteristics.

Through quota sampling, several limitations in the original study (Wu & Li, 2018) were identified:

- Users of SC were limited to Facebook users only.
- Most of the users had been users of SC platforms for under two years (87.1%).
- The education levels of the respondents are skewed to those with undergraduate education (77.2%).

Table 2: Demographic information of respondents in the original study (Wu & Li, 2018).

Measure	Items	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	268	44.7
	Female	331	55.3
Age	< 18	6	1.0
	19-24	440	73.5
	25-29	120	20.0
	30 and above	33	5.5
Education	High school or less	25	4.1
	Undergraduate	462	77.2
	Graduate/Post-graduate	112	18.7
Social commerce experience (in years)	< 1	314	52.4
	1-2	208	34.7
	2-3	65	10.9
	4 and above	12	2.0

Note: $n = 599$

The original study by Wu and Li (2018) was limited to users of Facebook, which limited the number of respondents who made use of SC to only one platform. Additionally, quota sampling using Facebook meant that the sample was not reflective of the population being tested (Zhang et al., 2020). This limitation is important to note, as a study's results should be able to be generalised to the total population of interest (Rosenzweig et al., 2020). In the Wu and Li (2018) study, a violation of the positivity assumption may have occurred, as users of SC that were not on Facebook were excluded from the sample. Another concern for researchers is the targeting algorithm for Facebook's ad platform, which can increase the risk of bias by the platform directing advertisements to people with similar interests and tastes (Rosenzweig et al., 2020). Thus, respondents in the Wu and Li (2018) study may have been limited to similar advertising material or formats, which could have reduced the diversity of responses when testing for SC user experience.

It is likely that the questionnaire in the Wu and Li (2018) study was mainly circulated to university students, as most of the participants (77.2%) had an undergraduate qualification and were between the ages of 19 and 29 (93.5%). This could have limited the diversity of responses from participants due to the similar age and education demographic; leading to biased results regarding their SC commerce needs and reason for using the platform. Additionally, a large percentage of the sample only had access to

SC platforms for two years or less (87.1%), which could have limited the responses around the value derived from being on SC platforms. This could have led to skewness in the data.

Quota sampling was used in this study because it allowed for data to be collected from a homogenous sample to be more reflective of the total population, which yielded better accuracy of results (Alvi, 2016). Although this non-probability sampling method has advantages, such as being time-efficient and generally requiring less work, it may lead to sampling bias and systematic errors (Panacek & Thompson, 2007).

In this study, surveys were sent to 300 potential respondents, and 230 complete responses were returned. These responses were used for the study as a sample of the population. The sample was smaller than in the original study (Wu & Li, 2018), but the aim is to reach a more diverse population was achieved. Some of the criteria used to diversify the sample were gender, education, and choice of social media platform:

1. The questionnaire was deliberately sent to an equal number of male and female potential participants. The researcher used social and professional networks to ensure this quota.
2. To avoid the sample being skewed from an education perspective, the researcher did not limit the potential respondents to university colleagues. The questionnaire was explicitly circulated amongst the researcher's social and professional networks to ensure that participants with lower levels of education and participants with post-graduate education were included.
3. Participants were not limited to Facebook users but to all users that had access to SC and social media platforms.

3.13 Measurement instrument

The measurement instrument is the method that was used to collect data for the study (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The research instrument used in the study was the quantitative research questionnaire. A questionnaire refers to all methods of data collection where respondents are asked to respond to the same set questions in the same order. A large number of respondents are needed to test a theory; thus, a questionnaire is the most effective data collection method that can be used for this type of study (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). To empirically test the data in this study, a questionnaire which contained users' SC needs, social influence, social presence, social status, social commerce needs, brand awareness, and demographic information was developed. The measurement items in the study were adapted from the literature. Second-order constructs of value were modified from Rintamäki et al. (2006).

The study utilised a self-completion questionnaire that was run from the Google Forms platform and circulated to the users of social media via Whatsapp. The advantage of using a self-completion questionnaire is that it removes the bias resulting from interviewer effects, such as when the respondent is affected by the presence of an interviewer and alters their answers to suit what they think would be the right answer. There is also no variability bias because the questions are the same for all respondents. Both advantages add to the reliability of the study; which is convenient for the respondents as well (Bell & Bryman, 2018).

A self-completion questionnaire has some disadvantages as well. Respondents cannot clarify questions as they would in an interview and have a limited ability to probe the researcher regarding potentially difficult questions. They may answer these questions incorrectly as a result or leave them out entirely, which can cause lower response rates and affect the reliability of the results (Bryman & Bell, 2017). To overcome these disadvantages in this study, the researcher explained complex terms, such as social commerce, to participants on the questionnaire and questions were displayed in sections to remove complexity. Additionally, Page Logic on Google Forms was used to direct participants to questions applicable to them based on their previous answers.

3.14 Questionnaire scales

The questionnaire utilised a Likert scale (six point), The reason that an even number scale was used is since African and Asian respondents tend to be a bit modest and often select the midpoint in their responses more than their counterparts from western countries (Si & Cullen, 1998). The questionnaires were circulated via an online questionnaire that included a context piece for the respondents that would not influence their answers. There is a likelihood that the questionnaire will include marketing material which the respondents need to reflect on and answer accordingly.

3.15 Pilot study

To ensure content validity, we ran a small-scale pre-test with 10 marketers, using their marketing experience to ensure that the questionnaire was correct, easy to understand and had contextual relevance. The aim of the test was to get the opinions of the experts on the content of the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaires and validate the content of the questionnaire. Another aim of the pilot was also to optimise the sample size and review any errors or any limitations that may have been in the survey. Running a pilot allows for the simulation of the proposed procedures and optimisation of the main study (Dillman, 2000).

Preliminary results from the test determined that the survey was too long, which may have resulted in a high drop off rate due to respondent fatigue. Respondent fatigue is a common challenge in data collection and is influenced by factors such as survey length, survey topic and question complexity amongst other aspects (O'Reilly-Shah, 2017). Drop offs are those participants who start a survey or questionnaire but do not finish due to the length of the survey (Galesic & Boznjak, 2009). To reduce the number of non-responses, which can be deemed to be missing data (Albaum, et al., 2011), options such as 'I do not know' and 'prefer not to say' were excluded not included in the questionnaire.

3.16 Data gathering process

The empirical data gathering process ran during the periods of September and October in 2020. The questionnaire was hosted in a web page form (Google Form), which was the platform used to collect data. Data collection using paper-based questionnaires or interviews can take a lot of time and may result in errors or data (Marshall, 2002). Hence, online data collection was preferred for this study. Furthermore, using non-contact methods, such as questionnaires, has become a responsibility due to the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, the subject matter of the study concerns online activity; thus, it was almost a prerequisite that online methods of data collection be utilised, especially since they are effective and efficient.

Due to the assumption that users aged between 20 – 40 years old were the predominant users of social media and SC (CNNIC, 2016) the invitation to complete the survey was sent to this demographic via snowballing where participants were encouraged to share the survey with their personal and professional network in line with the quotas set out initially. In the study three control variables were specified to reduce the effects on brand engagement, namely gender, experience and age. The researcher adapted the control variables from literature.

3.17 Informed consent

Participants were required to provide their consent in the introduction of the survey before proceeding. Respondents could only access the survey after giving consent.

3.18 Analysis approach

Once data were collected from the respondents, it was analysed to make inferences on what was being represented. This study used inferential statistics for data analysis and interpretation. Inferential statistics attempt to infer what the population might think from sample data (William, 2006). This was particularly useful to the researcher, as they wanted to understand the drivers of brand awareness and consumer engagement within

the South African SC context. Additionally, this method allowed for the identification and interpretation of trends in the data and the results.

3.19 Validity and reliability of research

Research validity refers to the ability or extent to which a measurement scale measures exactly what was intended to be measured (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Reliability refers to the degree to which a measure supplies consistent results (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). In this study, validity and reliability apply to the constructs of consumer value, social status, brand awareness, and consumer engagement.

3.19.1 External validity

The ability for data to be used to draw conclusions across different persons, timelines and environments refers to external validity. (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). In this sense, external validity is closely related to sampling technique (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

3.19.2 Internal validity

Internal validity refers to the research instrument's ability to measure what it purports to measure (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). It is usually measured in terms of content, criterion and construct validity (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Construct validity applies to the constructs of consumer value, social status, brand awareness, and consumer engagement. Convergent validity and discriminant validity are mostly used to validate constructs (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

3.19.3 Internal reliability

Reliability of a survey or questionnaire refers to the consistency of a measure, which means that running the test multiple times leads to a consistent result or point of convergence (Zikmund, et al., 2003). In order to ensure that our questionnaire was reliable, a pilot test was run which assisted in ensuring that questions were short, clear

and unbiased. This is to ensure that when there is an aggregation of indicators – the indicators do not relate to the same thing i.e. there are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

Internal Reliability applies to the Cronbach's Alpha measures for Consumer Value, Social Status, Brand Awareness, and Consumer Engagement. Since Consumer Engagement and Brand Awareness are second-order latent factors, the Cronbach's alpha test was carried out on the dimensions and then followed by the composite reliability as measured by the Cronbach's alpha.

Since the research is based on untested measurement model it was necessary and sufficient to employ the Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to determine the underlying patterns in the data so as to achieve dimension reduction as represented by factors (also known as constructs/components). The ensuing model was validated using SEM which inherently includes Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

The ensuing model was validated using a structural model (SEM) which inherently includes a measurement model (CFA). Factor Analysis is a multivariate procedure that attempts to find the underlying variables within a latent construct (Field, 2009). CFA differs from Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in that in CFA, confirms previously tested hypotheses and an EFA explores factor loadings of variables that have not been previously tested (Field, 2009).

In performing an EFA, the steps suggested by Suhr, (2011) were used by the researcher:

- Assumptions used in the test:
 1. The first step was to ensure that variables were continuous i.e. that they were interval or ratio data (Laerd Statistics, 2013b).
 2. In order to ensure that there was linearity between variables; Pearson's correlation coefficient was used (Laerd Statistics, 2013b).
 3. The researcher needed to ensure that there was sampling adequacy (Laerd Statistics, 2013b). The overall data set was tested through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy. A sample

size of 5x to 10x is generally sufficient, where x represents the number of variables per factor (Laerd Statistics, 2013b).

4. Bartlett's test of sphericity was utilised to define that factors were suitable for data reduction (Laerd Statistics, 2013b).
5. To test for any significant outliers, the researcher tested this through component scores that were 3 standard deviations away from the mean (Laerd Statistics, 2013b).

3.19.4 Testing for fit

The researcher used various tests to test for fit to ensure that the data from the sample did indeed fit the distribution from the chosen population (Laerd Statistics, 2013b). These tests therefore indicate whether the sample data is what the researcher would expect to find from the population from which the sample was drawn (Laerd Statistics, 2013b). The following goodness of fit tests were used:

Test for fit	Threshold
1. CFI	> 0.90
2. GFI	> 0.95
3. NFI	> 0.95
4. RMSEA	< 0.07 or less for goodness of fit (Steiger, 2007).
5. SRMR	< 0.08
6. NNFI	> 0.95
7. TLI	> 0.95
8. AGFI	> 0.95
9. RFI	close to 1 indicates a good fit (Stegier, 2007)
10. PNFI	> 0.50
11. IFI	> 0.90
12. Chi-squared	Must be as close to zero as possible (Hu & Bentley, 1999)

3.20 Hypothesis testing

Assumptions for multiple linear regression:

The assumptions for multiple linear regression are as follows:

1. The two variables being used for the test must be continuous in measure i.e. interval or ratio variables (Laerd Statistics, 2014).
2. The two variables must have a linear relationship (Laerd Statistics, 2014). Scatter plots are useful for checking linearity (Laerd Statistics, 2014).
3. No significant outliers must be present (Laerd Statistics, 2014). An outlier will manifest itself as being far away from the regression line vertically (Laerd Statistics, 2014).
4. Observations must have independence (Laerd Statistics, 2014). This is checked through a Durbin-Watson statistic on SPSS Statistics software (Laerd Statistics, 2014).
5. Data should show homoscedasticity (Laerd Statistics, 2014). This means that the variances along the best fit line remain similar when moving along that line (Laerd Statistics, 2014). Again, this can be done using Scatter plots (Laerd Statistics, 2014).
6. The residuals (errors) of the regression line must approximate a normal distribution (Laerd Statistics, 2014). This can be checked through a Histogram or P-P Plot (Laerd Statistics, 2014).

Steps in Performing a Simple Linear Regression

1. Test the above assumptions (Laerd Statistics, 2014).
2. Obtain the Model Summary table which provides the R-Squared values (Laerd Statistics, 2014).
3. Obtain the ANOVA table which reports how well the regression fits; Sig must be less than 0.05 (Laerd Statistics, 2014).

4. Obtain the Coefficients table which allows the modelling of the regression equation and its statistical significance with Sig being less than 0.05 (Laerd Statistics, 2014).

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The research aimed to understand the effect of marketing levers or stimulus on brand awareness and engagement in the South African social commerce environment. As such, this chapter outlines the data preparation, cleaning, coding, and reshaping. It will also unpack the results from the analysis of the respondents, with reference to the literature, as well as the results from inferential statistics. Lastly, it will conclude with a summary of the supported and unsupported hypothesis.

4.2 Data preparation and cleaning

From the invitations sent out for participation, 230 responses were received. All the participants in the study gave consent by responding to the qualifying question in the affirmative. The researcher used Google Forms to formulate and distribute the instrument, which was in the form of a questionnaire.

In collecting the population sample, platforms such as Whatsapp, LinkedIn and Telegram were used. Whatsapp proved to be the most effective medium for the distribution of the questionnaire as respondents generally forwarded it to their friends and family. In total, 231 questionnaire responses were returned with an average completion time of five minutes, taking half the time that was estimated (10 minutes).

The data collected was exported from Google Forms as a .xlsx file that was subsequently imported into SPSS Version 26. Statistical analysis software package IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26 in conjunction with R Version 3.5 was used to perform hypothesis testing. The data were analysed as a .sav file, the default file type for the SPSS software. To ensure that data was fit for analysis, the researcher performed the following:

1. The researcher removed any identifiers in the data, as per the ethical clearance process.
2. The researcher included only those respondents that gave consent to taking the survey. Only one respondent did not give consent.
3. The researcher performed a missing value analysis, as presented below.

4.3 Missing value analysis

Figure 11 below the missing value analysis on in the data for the 230 respondents included in the study. All the data samples are blue, which indicates no missing values. The result was positive, which indicated that the analysis of algorithms on a complete dataset could be conducted.

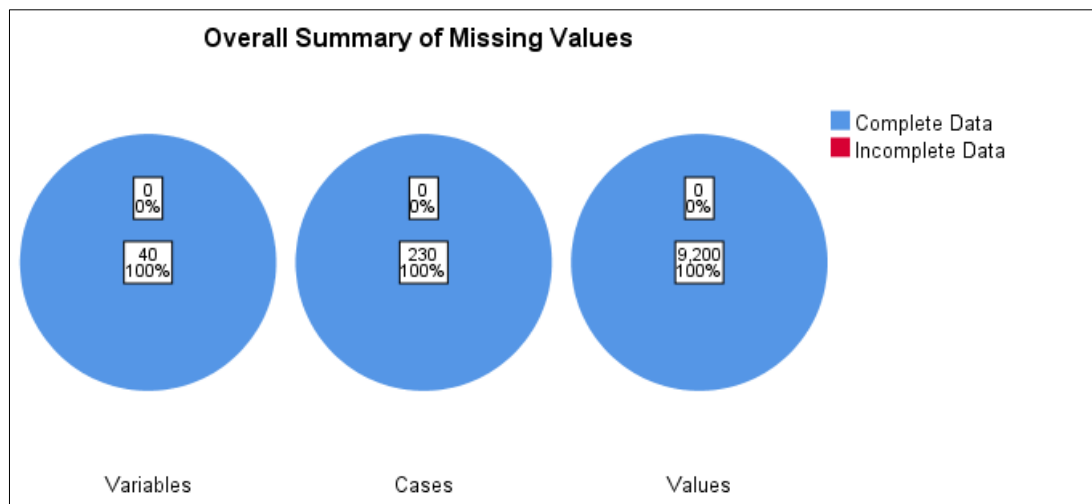


Figure 11: Missing value analysis.

Firstly, the researcher performed descriptive statistics to illustrate how the data was shaped and who the respondents were through a demographic analysis. Secondly, the researcher validated the research instrument through an exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis to ascertain its efficacy for the study. Lastly, inferential statistics were performed to test the statistical significance of the various hypotheses.

4.4 Data coding and reshaping

The sample was pulled from Google forms and the raw data extracted onto a Microsoft Excel sheet. Responses to the questionnaire downloaded in number form. To ensure that the data were coded correctly for the subsequent analysis, the researcher recoded to numbers from the text, and as a result the Likert scale was coded as follows:

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Somewhat disagree
- 4 – Neutral
- 5 – Somewhat agree
- 6 – Agree
- 7 – Strongly agree

Instead of using questions, variables were coded using acronyms to facilitate ease of analysis, and most of the variables had already been coded from the Google Forms platform.

4.5 Descriptive statistics

The researcher analysed the data to cover the major themes of the research through descriptive statistics. Graphs and tables were primarily used to visualise the sample characteristics around the themes below:

1. Social media activity
2. Social media access duration
3. Age
4. Gender
5. Education level
6. Cross-tabulations

4.5.1 Social media activity

The table below depicts how active the respondents were on social media/SC. Being active on SC was defined as having accessed SC as least twice a week. Most of the respondents (92.2%) were frequent users of an SC platform. This was expected, as SC adoption is highest in young and middle-aged individuals (Perin, 2015), which formed the bulk of the respondents (87.0%) The advantage of high activity is that the SC experiences that respondents have are theirs and not formed differently. Ultimately, better personal experience helps to reduce potential external biases.

Table 3: Are you active on social media platforms that make use of social commerce?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	18	7.8	7.8	7.8
	Yes	212	92.2	92.2	100.0
	Total	230	100.0	100.0	

4.5.2 Social media experience

Table 4 below depicts the length of time that respondents had been accessing SC sites. Unsurprisingly 94.4% of the respondents had over two years' experience of SC. The more experience the respondents had of SC, the more likely it was that they would have interacted with more SC material, which enabled them to form a more diverse set of opinions.

In Wu and Li, (2018), 52% of the respondents had less than a year's experience and 87.1% had under 2 years' experience as SC users. The researcher, in this study, deliberately circulated the questionnaire to individuals that had more experience on SC. This was part of the quota set and was meant to ensure that the sample consisted of respondents that had been exposed to different SC material and platforms and would have provided an opinion that was constructed over a longer period of use and experience.

Table 4: How long have you had access to social media platforms that make use of social commerce?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	< 1 year	2	.9	.9	.9
	> 5 years	158	68.7	68.7	69.6
	1 - 2 years	11	4.8	4.8	74.3
	2 - 3 years	15	6.5	6.5	80.9
	3 - 4 years	19	8.3	8.3	89.1
	4 - 5 years	25	10.9	10.9	100.0
	Total	230	100.0	100.0	

4.5.3 Age

Table 5 below indicates that 92.1% of the respondents were above the age of 25. The questionnaire was circulated to the researcher's network, and the result was, therefore, skewed to the researcher's age group (30 – 35). The intention was to get an equal spread to diversify the data points. The study, however, did have a better distribution than in Wu & Li (2018), where 94.5% of the sample was under the age of 30. This would've potentially skewed variables around usage, where age plays a significant role. In this regard the sample in this study was considered to be more diverse (Perin, 2015).

Table 5: What is your age?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	> 50	2	.9	.9	.9

18 - 25	16	7.0	7.0	7.8
25 - 30	45	19.6	19.6	27.4
30 - 35	96	41.7	41.7	69.1
35 - 40	41	17.8	17.8	87.0
40 - 45	24	10.4	10.4	97.4
45 - 50	6	2.6	2.6	100.0
Total	230	100.0	100.0	

4.5.4 Gender

The survey was intentionally distributed to an equal number of potential female and male participants to improve the diversity from the original study (Wu & Li, 2018). Table 4 below indicates that the responses received almost achieved equal diversity (56.5% female and 43.5% male). The response rate for women was higher than that of men, which confirms previous research that has found that the response rates from women are more likely to be higher than those of men (Curtin et al., 2000), which is indicated in the response rate below.

Table 6: What is your gender?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	130	56.5	56.5	56.5
	Male	100	43.5	43.5	100.0
	Total	230	100.0	100.0	

4.5.5 Education level

Table 7 below indicates that 97.8% of the respondents had a university education. As the result of circulating the questionnaire within the researcher's social network, the bulk of the respondents would have been fellow students in the MBA programme of which the majority had a university education already. The survey was also circulated amongst

work colleagues who, as professionals, would have at least an undergraduate-level qualification.

Table 7: What is your education level?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid High School or Less	5	2.2	2.2	2.2
Undergraduate Level	34	14.8	14.8	17.0
Graduate Level	142	61.7	61.7	78.7
Masters Level	49	21.3	21.3	100.0
Total	230	100.0	100.0	

4.6 Cross tabulations

The results found that women had more common shopping and buying interests on SC platforms than men. This stems from shopping having been a social event where women compared and shared ideas on shopping items with their friends to a greater extent than men (Perin, 2015).

Table 8: My friends have common buying interests on social commerce platforms.

	Female	Male	Grand Total
Strongly Disagree	7	3	10
Disagree	24	15	39
Somewhat Disagree	4	6	10
Neutral	32	39	71
Somewhat Agree	17	13	30
Agree	29	24	53
Strongly Agree	18		18
Grand Total	131	100	231

Age and social media usage are strongly correlated (Perin, 2015). Older people generally use SC for its convenience while younger people use it to socialise more. Older people are shown to use SC for fewer hours on average, in general than younger

people, which means that SC is a big driver for convenience for them. Younger adults (18 – 29) spend more time on social media, socializing (Perin, 2015).

Table 9: I find it convenient to buy products via SC platforms.

Age	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
18 - 25		2	2	5	2	2	3	16
25 - 30	1	5		12	2	13	12	45
30 - 35	3	6	6	13	17	34	18	97
35 - 40	1	2		11	9	16	2	41
40 - 45	2	2		1	5	6	8	24
45 - 50		1		2			3	6
> 50		1				1		2
Total	7	19	8	44	35	72	46	231

4.6.1 Cost of data

The cost of data limits the amount of time young people spend on SC sites. This is because young adults may be school going still and cannot afford data, in comparison to middle aged adults that have jobs and can afford data (Perin, 2015).

Table 10: The cost of data influences the amount of time I spend on SC platforms.

Age	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
18 - 25	1		1	3	1	4	6	16
25 - 30	9	11	2	2	5	8	8	45
30 - 35	39	13	1	14	7	14	9	97
35 - 40	12	12	1	5	5	3	3	41
40 - 45	6	7		1	2	5	3	24
45 - 50	2	3					1	6
> 50						2		2
Total	69	46	5	25	20	36	30	231

Table 11: My gender is a driver on my social networks' ability to influence what I purchase on SC sites.

	Female	Male	Grand Total
Strongly Disagree	16	21	37
Disagree	21	29	50
Somewhat Disagree	5	13	18
Neutral	19	8	27
Somewhat Agree	22	15	37
Agree	39	14	53
Strongly Agree	9	9	9
Grand Total	131	100	231

Friends and followers on social media have an influence on the purchases that women make on SC platforms. Again, due to the social aspect related to women when they shop, it is unsurprising that shopping preferences may be influenced by the social groups that women are part of.

Table 12: My age is a driver to how much my social network can influence my purchases on SC sites.

Age	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
18 - 25	1	3	1	7	1	2	1	16
25 - 30	4	8	3	5	4	17	4	45
30 - 35	23	24	7	9	15	18	1	97
35 - 40	5	10	6	3	10	5	2	41
40 - 45	4	3	1	2	5	9		24
45 - 50		2			2	2		6
> 50				1			1	2
Total	37	50	18	27	37	53	9	231

Friends and followers on social media have an influence on what younger people purchase on SC platforms. Research has shown younger people logging onto preferred social media sites where they meet new people, socialise and get exposed to material that friends and followers share (Hamm, et al., 2015).

4.6.2 Testing the measurement model

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Having decided that the research is a replication and an extension, the researcher validated the composition of the constructs and to validate the dimensionality of the data through exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Items that did not empirically belong to the constructs of interest were removed from the scale. And the dimensionality of the constructs was explored through the EFA.

The Principal Components Analysis algorithm was run to achieve optimal dimension reduction that ensures that there is intra-construct internal consistency and inter-construct mutual discrimination.

Table 14 below depicts a positive definite for the variables used in the EFA's correlation matrix, with a determinant value of 0.016. This implies that the data passed the determinant test.

Table 13: Correlation matrix.

a. Determinant =
.016

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.739, which passed the recommended minimum value of 0.7.

To test the suitability of EFA as a dimension reduction method, the researcher used Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which recorded a p-value of 0.000 and therefore passed the test.

Table 14: KMO and Bartlett's Test.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.739
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	926.297
	df	91

Sig.	.000
------	------

The table below, shows that four constructs had eigenvalues that were more than 1 and they contributed 61.10% of the variance in the data.

Table 15: Total variance explained.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.734	26.672	26.672	3.734	26.672	26.672	2.414	17.246	17.246
2	1.962	14.016	40.688	1.962	14.016	40.688	2.284	16.316	33.562
3	1.501	10.724	51.412	1.501	10.724	51.412	1.944	13.888	47.450
4	1.356	9.689	61.101	1.356	9.689	61.101	1.911	13.651	61.101
5	.987	7.047	68.148						
6	.760	5.429	73.577						
7	.626	4.469	78.046						
8	.594	4.241	82.287						
9	.575	4.104	86.391						
10	.497	3.548	89.939						
11	.450	3.213	93.152						
12	.398	2.843	95.995						
13	.343	2.452	98.447						
14	.217	1.553	100.000						

Extraction model: Principal component analysis

Because the first factor loads less than 50% (26.7%), we can assume that Harman's single factor test has passed.

Using Varimax rotation method and a minimum of 0.5 for all factor loading, the principal components analysis produced four constructs that contributed the most to the variance in the data. The four constructs were:

1. Customer value
2. Social Status
3. Brand Engagement

4. Brand Awareness

4.6.3 Composite reliability

In order to measure if the scale items were consistent, the researcher tested for Composite reliability, which is also known as construct reliability. This measure is similar Cronbach's alpha (Netemeyer, 2003) and is equal 'the total amount of true score variance relative to the total scale score variance' (Brunner & Süß, 2005).

The Composite Reliability (CR), also can approximate the degree to which 'a set of latent construct indicators share in their measurement of a construct, whilst the average variance extracted is the amount of common variance among latent construct indicators' (Hair et al., 1998). The data in Table 16 indicates that three constructs had a CR of less than 0.7. Past research, accepts a range for CR between 0.6 and 0.7 (Hair et al., 1998), therefore the researcher proceeded with analysis

4.6.4 Discriminant reliability challenges

In testing for reliability, the researcher had challenges, particularly with discriminant reliability. In attempting to improve this, the researcher removed as many outliers as possible from the data set.

The challenges around Brand engagement may have come from the questions being generic. Upon reflection, the respondents perhaps needed to be exposed to a brand's material, which may have improved the discriminant reliability scores. A particularly effective suite of brands could have been consumer brands such as washing powder, which the respondents would have had high familiarity with.

Table 16: Correlation Matrix for observed variables.

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Brand_aware	Social_Pres	Social_influ	Social_com_need
Brand_aware	0.693	0.278	0.826	0.709	0.528			
Social_Pres	0.809	0.519	0.947	0.841	0.678	0.720		
Social_influ	0.656	0.325	0.817	0.663	0.904	0.670	0.570	
Social_com_need	0.628	0.206	0.947	0.747	0.814	0.973	0.695	0.454
Soc_status	0.864	0.620	0.575	0.901	0.642	0.677	0.758	0.591
Brand_engage	0.790	0.351	0.826	0.795	0.909	0.683	0.815	0.728

The researcher acknowledges that there are challenges with reliability also highlighting that the data has been optimised as far as possible. The researcher proceeded to use the data with caution due to these challenges.

4.7 Internal reliability

In testing for consistency of each of the constructs, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha was used to check that the questions to the construct were valid and reliable (Field, 2013). The primary purpose for testing for internal consistency was to ensure that the study could be replicated, independent of the researcher.

According to Field (2013), a result that is greater than 0.7 is an acceptable Cronbach's alpha. Ursachi, et al. (2015), however, indicated an α of between 0.6 and 0.7 is deemed as an acceptable measure. In this case it would mean that all the constructs passed the internal consistency measure. However, given the difference in opinion in the literature about what is acceptable, the researcher proceeded to use the data with caution.

Table 17: Internal consistency measures.

$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Questionable
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Poor
$0.5 < \alpha$	Unacceptable

Source (Field, 2013).

4.7.1 Consumer Value

Cronbach's Alpha value for C1 was .757 which is above .7. This passed the test for which the recommended minimum is 0.7 for internal consistency. The variables that make up the construct are therefore adequately contributing to it.

Table 18: Reliability statistics for consumer value.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.757	4

4.7.2 Social Status

Cronbach's Alpha value for C2 was .815, which was above the recommended minimum of .7 for internal consistency; thus, the researcher was able to conclude that the variables that constituted the construct were contributing to it adequately.

Table 19: Reliability statistics for social status.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.815	3

4.7.3 Brand Engagement

Cronbach's Alpha value for C1 was .678 which is below .7 the recommended minimum for internal consistency, according to Field (2013). Although it does not meet Field's acceptance score, past research has shown that a range between .6 and .7 is acceptable (Hair, et al., 1998). As a result, the researcher was able to conclude that the variables that constituted the construct were contributing to it adequately.

Table 20: Reliability statistics for brand engagement.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.678	4

4.7.4 Brand Awareness

The Cronbach's Alpha for C1 was 0.606 which is below 0.7 the recommended minimum for internal consistency according to Field (2013). As with engagement before, past research has shown that a range between .6 and .7 is acceptable (Hair, et al., 1998). As a result, the researcher was able to conclude that the variables that constituted the construct were contributing to it adequately.

Table 21: Reliability statistics for brand awareness.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items

Another challenge with the data was the nonnormality in it. Some of the variables in the sample were bi modal, which drove the non-normality of the data. One of the major concerns when running an SEM is that the data be normal as it drives the estimation methods as well as the extent to which the estimation methods are trustworthy (Gao & Mokhtarian, 2008). Hair et al. (1998) found that after investigating bias and standard error of parameter estimates, these were not materially affected by nonnormality conditions of data. The data was analysed using a two-way method process of utilising a measurement model (CFA) and a structural model (SEM) as recommended in previous literature (Anderson & Gerbing 1988).

4.8 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Using the constructs that exhibited internal consistency, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis CFA was performed. The objective was to specify how variables in the constructs are related to these underlying latent factors.

Goodness of fit

The parameters in the model were estimated and the goodness of model fit was assessed (Suhr, 2011). The researcher went through several CFA runs, pruning and optimising each variable to strengthen the model fit and attempting to improve discriminant validity. Eventually the researcher got to a point that any additional adjustment led to decreased model fit. The fit indices were as follows in Table 22 after this process.

Table 22: Model Fit Summary - CFA.

CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF	RMR	AGFI	RMSEA	AIC
1,592.36	520.00	-	3.06	0.33	0.64	0.10	1,742.36

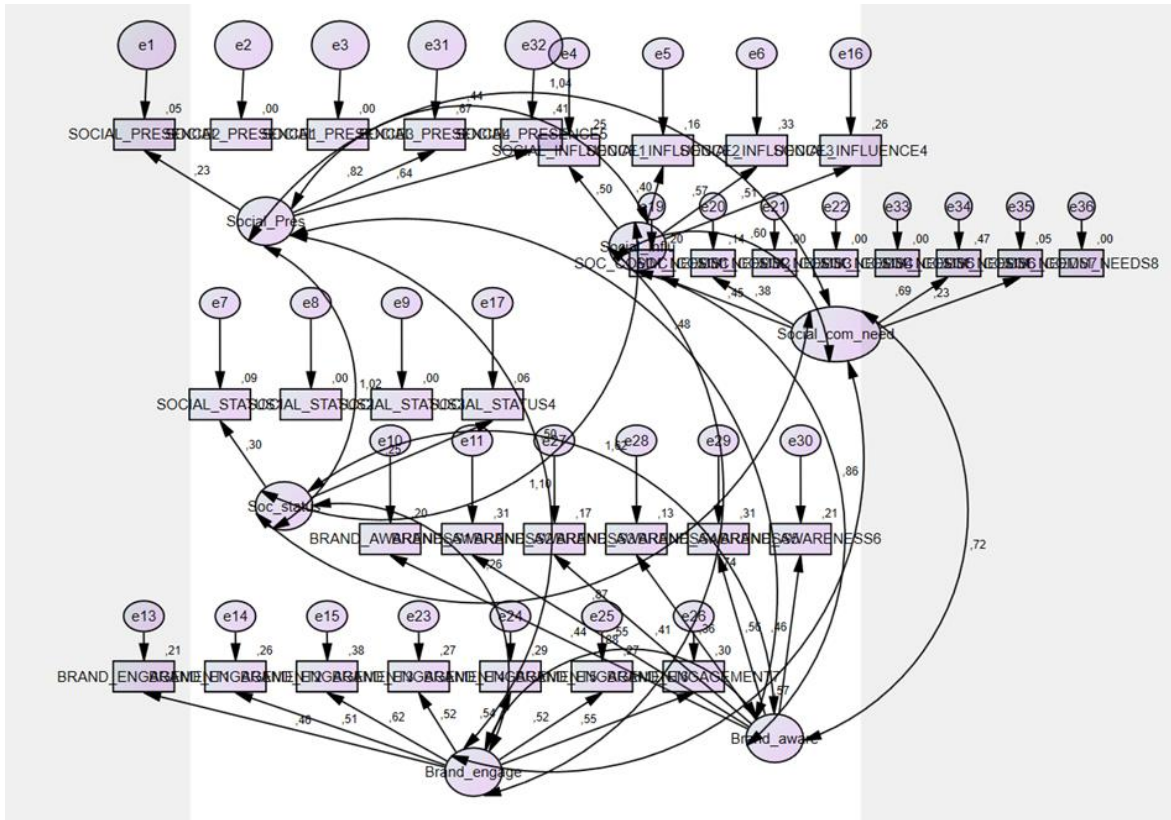


Figure 12: Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

The researcher, based on the model meeting the minimum criteria for Cronbach's consistency measures and the reliability being optimised as best as possible, proceeded to enter the model into a Structural Equation Model (SEM).

4.9 Structural Equation Model (SEM)

In order to test the hypothesis that were proposed in this model, the researcher used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Past research has recommended the use of SEM for research that is objective and developing theory, which this is (Hair, et al., 1998).

Goodness of fit

The parameters in the model were estimated and the goodness of model fit was assessed (Suhr, 2011). The fit indices were as follows in Table 23.

Table 23: Model Fit Summary - SEM.

CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF	RMR	AGFI	RMSEA	AIC
1,459.23	520.00	-	2.81	0.34	0.68	0.09	1,609.23

In creating the structural model, the researcher created another unobserved variable to capture the social constructs to link them the brand engagement and brand awareness. The model fit was poor, however and therefore discarded those constructs. All first order constructs were intended to be different and distinguishable from each other as not theoretically related to each other to avoid any correlation.

In order to test for model adequacy, composite reliability was used, with a threshold of 0.7 as recommended by Field (2013). Table 24 below shows that in some regards, the CR was above 1, which means that they may be measuring the same idea and may therefore be an invalid measure of the construct (Hair, et al., 2017).

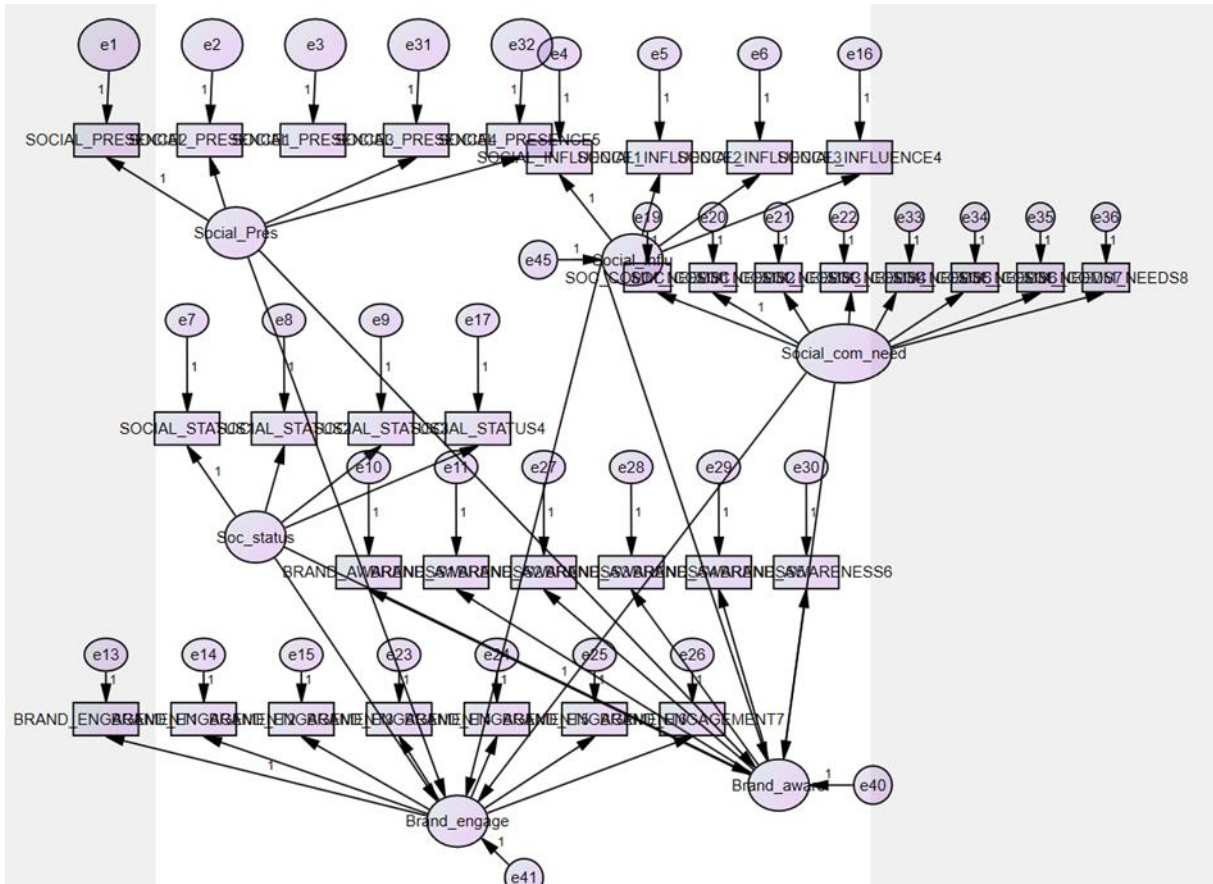


Figure 13: Structural Equation Model (SEM).

Table 24: Results of the Structural Equation Model

			Standardised Estimate	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Brand_engage	<-	Soc_status	0.084	1.934	7.3	0.265	0.791
Brand_aware	<-	Soc_status	0.054	1.082	4.269	0.253	0.8
Brand_engage	<-	Social_Pres	0.253	0.371	0.174	2.129	0.033
Brand_aware	<-	Social_Pres	0.158	0.202	0.131	1.539	0.124
Brand_aware	<-	Social_com_need	0.459	0.259	0.077	3.379	***
Brand_engage	<-	Social_com_need	0.289	0.186	0.07	2.681	0.007
Brand_engage	<-	Social_influ	0.716	0.693	0.189	3.676	***
Brand_aware	<-	Social_influ	0.847	0.716	0.191	3.749	***

Table 25: Hypothesis table.

H1	SS / BE
H2	SS / BA
H3	SP / BE
H4	SP / BA
H5	SCN / BA
H6	SCN / BE
H7	SI / BE
H8	SI / BA

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The objectives of the research study were to understand the effect of marketing levers on brand engagement and brand awareness within the South African SC space. This results section will be a discussion of the outcomes from the previous chapter, which precedes the overall conclusion.

5.2 Discussion on Hypothesis 1 and 2

H1: There is a positive relationship between social status and brand engagement.

$$\beta = 0.084, p < .791$$

The result shows that Social commerce has a weak and insignificant relationship with Brand engagement.

Hypothesis is therefore rejected.

H2: There is a positive relationship between social status and brand awareness.

$$\beta = 0.054, p < .800$$

The result shows that Social commerce has a weak and insignificant relationship with Brand awareness.

Hypothesis is therefore rejected.

The results in Table 24 show that social status (SS) does not have any influence on brand awareness and engagement. This result was not expected as social status is often realised by the recognition and acknowledgement of an individual within a social group (Chen, et al., 2014) and this social value leads to engagement. The expectation was that higher levels of social status would increase the HV and SV in the SC environment. Past research has also shown that the use of SC may increase an individual's perception as being an innovative and intelligent member of society and that people that use social commerce for this are seekers of social value or social status (Kim, et al., 2013). The

ability to create the perception that products offered on SC were more niche and exclusive compared to traditional shops was one of the variables tested as part of the social status construct. The expectation was that social commerce creates exclusivity for users. This was then expected to generate the same level of brand engagement generally associated with exclusive brands and experiences for example designer bags or expensive sports cars

Our demographic results from our sample indicate that 83% of the sample had a graduate degree or qualification. This indicates a high likelihood that those individuals have jobs and careers and already have high social status. This could explain the fact that they would not need SC to validate their social status. This also means that social status would not play a role in driving value for them or driving purchase consideration. This is supported by the fact that 67% use SC for the convenience that it offers.

Social status was also a new construct introduced as part of the extension from Wu & Li, (2018). The construct did not test well for reliability ($\alpha = .265$). The reason may have been the negative connotations that could have been formed by variables testing social status. Some of the questions required respondents to give an account of how the use of social status affects the perception of others on them. Being a sample with individuals with high levels of education and validation, this may have resulted in responses being unfavourable in some instances. In this case a business would need to find a different lever that would drive value for this group of people. This speaks to the discussion around understanding the different users of SC, segmenting them and then driving different value adding initiatives that speak to their value set. In the case of the respondents, convenience came out strongly, which can be influenced by both utilitarian and hedonic value.

5.3 Discussion on Hypothesis 3 and 4

H3: Social presence has a positive relationship with brand engagement.

$\beta = 0.253, p < .033$

The result shows that social presence has a moderately strong and significant relationship with brand engagement.

Hypothesis is therefore accepted.

H4: Social presence has a positive relationship with brand awareness.

$\beta = 0.158, p < .124$

The result shows that social presence has a weak and insignificant relationship with brand awareness.

Hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Based on the results presented in Table 16 and 24 above, a few conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, Social presence (SP) positively affects Brand engagement ($\alpha = .252, p < .0033$) supporting H3. This result was expected, in that the ability to create a less intimidating environment in SC can drive better usage of the SC platform. HV is the value most derived when there is high social presence. Due to there not being an 'human' salesperson to address any questions or concerns as in a traditional store, the ability to increase social presence will likely influence satisfaction customers get from using the platform. An increase in Hedonic value will likely improve the usage of the SC platform.

However, the same cannot be said for SP and brand awareness. This to an extent was expected because social presence is based on the experiential element of SC. The more a business can improve the usability of its platform, with better access and ease of transaction, customers would be drawn to it. This speaks more to Hedonic value and Utilitarian value which drive engagement. H4 was therefore rejected.

5.4 Discussion on Hypothesis 5 and 6

H5: The fulfilment of social commerce needs positively influences brand awareness

$\beta = 0.459, p < .000$

The result shows that Social commerce needs have a moderate and significant relationship with Brand engagement.

Hypothesis is therefore supported

H6: The fulfilment of social commerce needs positively influences brand engagement.

$\beta = 0.289, p < .007$

The result shows that social commerce needs have a moderate and significant relationship with brand engagement.

Hypothesis is therefore supported

The results in Table 24 show that there is a relationship between fulfilling customer needs and deriving brand awareness and engagement. The fulfilment of social commerce needs embodies all three aspects of value (Wu & Li, 2018). This result was therefore expected, although the researcher did expect a stronger relationship between social commerce need and brand awareness. The result on social commerce needs and brand engagement was unsurprising because the ability to satisfy the needs of a customer, i.e. deliver value for them, is likely to result in the customer wanting to interact and engage a brand. A good example of this is when customers post reviews on a brand or product. That review is to a large extent driven by their experience of a purchase. The inverse can also be true for social commerce. As discussed in the literature, the satisfaction of the customer is based on the delivery of the expected utility from using the good or service (Zeithaml, 1988). Should the brand not deliver on this, there is a high likelihood that not fulfilling social commerce needs for customers could negatively influence brand engagement.

Social commerce needs are driven by consumer motivation (Chiang & Hsiao, 2015). For companies to successfully meet those motivators, they must put together a compelling value proposition to attract consumers to their goods or services. Meeting those consumer expectations results in consumers deriving value and therefore having their SC needs met. As shown by the results in Table 24, the relationship between the fulfilment of social commerce needs and brand engagement is significant. This therefore supports the notion that customer value is a mediator of SCN and Brand engagement. H5 is therefore supported.

As discussed in the literature, brand awareness is driven by the ability of a brand to communicate quality and authenticity, thus reducing the risks related to goods and services (Bilgin, 2018). The ability to deliver on the value aspect, i.e. fulfilment of social commerce needs is therefore expected to result in improvement of Brand awareness. CV is a big driver of awareness in this regard as it influences a customer's attitude towards the adoption and usage in SC (Tandon, et al, 2018). When a customer uses a product or service and derives high value from it, they tend to socialise that, which then becomes word of mouth advertising for a business. As discussed in the literature, SC allows for the interaction and social sharing by customers and users will tend to recommend products and share their experiences of the products. These all drive brand awareness (Gan & Wang, 2017).

The more a brand can deliver on social commerce needs the likelier that it will get good reviews, which increases word of mouth and ultimately brand awareness. As already discussed in the literature, SC platforms that can harness this word of mouth have successfully driven brand awareness. Again, as with brand engagement, the inability to fulfil social commerce needs could have negative implications for a brand. Brands are limited in the ability to influence the narrative should it be negative, again due to the speed and reach that social commerce has. An example would be the Clicks and Tresemme scandal in South Africa (News42, 2020). Insensitive and offensive images were posted on their platforms, which resulted in protestors destroying property and the brands of both entities being damaged. H6 is therefore supported.

5.5 Discussion on Hypothesis 7 and 8

H7: social influence and brand awareness are positively related

SI / BE

$\beta = 0.716, p < .000$

The result shows that Social Influence has a positively strong and significant relationship with Brand engagement.

Hypothesis is therefore accepted.

H8: social influence and brand awareness are positively related

SI / BA

$\beta = 0.847, p < .000$

The result shows that social influence has a positively strong and significant relationship with brand awareness.

Hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Based on the results in Table 24, there is a relationship between social influence, brand engagement and awareness. This is consistent to behavioural marketing theory that advocates for the creation of communities in which 'citizenship' is built to create influence and people identifying with each other in a brand to enhance value creation for all those involved (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Past research has shown that customers buy products endorsed by influential people and that businesses can use this in strategies to influence customer value (Wu & Li, 2018).

This result was therefore expected due to the high level of influence that friends and followers have on a purchasing decision, especially with younger adults and women. 53% of the respondents indicated that their social networks did have an influence on their purchases. This was expected to come out strongly for younger people that have a higher likelihood of being influenced by friends due to the information that they expose themselves to in informing the purchase decision (Mangleburg et al., 2004).

Social commerce also has social communication aspect as a significant component, where customers can communicate and engage one another about products and services. As social influence speaks to the way individuals conform to their social network, harnessing the influence of individuals can result in companies deriving strong engagement within the social network. Research has shown that informational influence can aid decision making under conditions of uncertainty, which is popularly known as the 'bandwagon effect' (Kuan et al., 2014).

In the case of both brand awareness and engagement, social influence comes through strongly in driving both. Social influence theory has long been used to understand

consumer behaviour. In the case of social commerce, social influence can drive the attitudes consumers have of brands and ultimately influence purchase consideration (Wang et al. 2012).

5.6 Customer value

Although customer value did not come up as a construct, the three dimensions of value are significant in the formation of value. Past research has shown that these dimensions are strongly linked to any shopping experience (Rintamäki et al. (2006),

The literature has shown that organisations that are able to deliver to the customers' needs and expectations are likely to improve customer satisfaction (Lin & Wang, 2006). It goes further in stating that businesses that have retained a competitive advantage have done so by creating and delivering perceived value (Rintamäki et al. (2006).

It was therefore expected that the ability to create value will increase the level of brand engagement in the SC environment. Customers on SC sites are influenced to purchase through the quality of information on the platforms, as well as the products and services offered on the platform (Huang, & Benyoucef, 2017). The results have already shown that the respondents from the survey have a strong affinity to UV, which is driven by the convenience that they seek from SC sites. The ability for brands to optimise the information on their SC sites allows customers to better engage the brands and information presented to them. Past research has shown that good brand communication is a driver of a customer's attitude to a brand (Waters et al., 2011).

Convenience and utility are part of the utilitarian value that customers seek in buying a good or service (Kleijnen, et al., 2007). It is not surprising that most of the respondents sought convenience due to the demographic of the sample. Young adults are more likely to spend time on SC sites than their older counterparts who access SC fewer times and spend less time on there (Perin, 2015). It therefore could be important for brands to understand the value drivers for different customers and thereafter tailor marketing levers that drive value for them. In the case of utilitarian value, it is important for an SC site to provide good information around the products and services (Wu & Li, 2018). If a

consumer is using SC for convenience and not spending lots of time online, it is important that the information on the SC site is clear, impactful and gives the customer the right level of information to make a purchasing decision (Rintamäki et al., 2006).

UV, however, must be complimented by HV and SV. It is apparent from the results that convenience is a big driver for SC use but increasing the level of HV in the SC sites increases the likelihood of brand engagement (Kim et al, 2013). Because customer satisfaction and engagement are primarily driven hedonic value (Gan & Wang, 2017), brands with a presence must seek to improve the level of SC. HV is also a driver of usage, which can result in the number of times that customers access the SC site (Utari, 2018). An increase in usage can result in a higher likelihood of a sale.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Theoretical contribution

This study builds on the marketing levers and their effects on brand awareness and engagement in the SC environment. Current literature is abundant with views on the individual and complimentary effects of SC and value, but little has been done on the brand or business perspective and capabilities on value in SC (Braojos et al., 2019). This study is a reconfirmation of the Wu and Li (2018) study that indicated that brands could effectively leverage the three components of value (UV, HV and SV) in order to drive differentiation, customer satisfaction and ultimately purchase consideration, by choosing the right levers to influence value.

This study also builds on Wu and Li (2018) by confirming that while social influence, social presence and the fulfilment of social commerce needs does drive buyer behaviour in SC, the SC sites that are likelier to be more successful are those that are able to drive convenience (UV), complimented by strong HV and SV in an effort to drive strong brand engagement and brand awareness. This research aims to contribute to the better understanding of the role of marketing stimulus in the SC environment.

Previous literature on brand engagement from the brand's perspective has been largely descriptive, focussing on the traditional marketing mix as a driver for engagement. This study proposes a model of brand engagement and brand awareness within the SC environment in which marketing components or levers are the inputs to the process of value generation which ultimately drive brand awareness and brand engagement. The study further validates the SOR concept regarding marketing levers and their influence on customer value. Further studies should seek to examine the relationship and impacts of brand awareness and brand engagement on purchase consideration in the SC environment.

6.2 Managerial contribution

6.2.1 Social Influence

The results show that social influence and social referrals do increase desirability for products on SC. Besides using brand pages on social media for social shopping, more and more businesses in South Africa are partnering with individuals who have the power to influence their network. For example, brands such as Johnnie Walker have partnered with South African born comedian, Trevor Noah. They have combined various marketing elements which include social media platforms to drive awareness and engagement of the brand.

The importance of consumer generated influence cannot be understated. The literature and results show that a significant number of people are influenced by their social networks in making purchasing decisions online. The ability to harness that by brands can drive better consideration. In terms of brand engagement and awareness, the ability to use this to drive positive word of mouth at a significantly lower cost to traditional advertising, which can deliver financial benefit and deliver to marketing strategy. Marketing campaigns therefore must be deliberate in incorporating the influences of the target consumer and incorporating that to communication and activation strategies. Being deliberate at this will ensure in better utilisation of marketing budget and better satisfaction from customers.

6.2.2 Social Presence

The results of the study shows that the ability to project friendliness, improve usability and trust within the SC environment can lead to increased adoption and usage of SC platforms. Businesses should seek to create an environment that is as 'personable' as possible to make it as less intimidating as possible to adopt and use SC. An effective way business has done this is through have agents, that would be traditionally salespeople in an actual store on hand to answer questions online. This allows new users to better navigate the SC platform, asking questions that they typically would in a traditional store.

The ability to leverage the positive perceptions of other buyers regarding the use of the SC platform can be a lever that SC businesses can use. It is likely that information from individuals that have used an SC platform therefore reviews should not be limited to brand or products reviews but to the SC experience as well.

Trust remains an important component of transacting in SC. Past research has shown that, even with high UV, HV and SV, SC is still considered to have risks associated with transaction security, privacy and customer information. SC platforms therefore have to mitigate for that in order to enhance value on that platform and reduce perceived risk.

6.2.3 Social Commerce Needs and value delivery

This study offers the implications for tailoring marketing strategies to include an effective SC lever that proactively incorporates perceived customer value and its effect on brand awareness and brand engagement. Our results suggest that marketers should consider compiling SC strategies that incorporate levers that they can use to influence the level of UV, HV and SV on their platforms.

Customer value is a mediator of both brand awareness and brand engagement – the more a customer deems the SC platform to be a good value offering, the more will be more engaged. Past research has shown that the ability to satisfy a consumer's motivation to access an SC platform, will result in better engagement and the sharing of positive experiences of the brand. As such businesses may need to better understand consumer value and how they integrate it into their brand strategies.

UV is the primary driver of value, but is usually not a big differentiator, except for value seeking consumers (Rinatamaki, et al., 2006). As such, the key to unlocking marked gains would be to complement UV with strong HV and SV, which are seen to create emotional attachment between customers and brands. The ability to leverage information communicated via SC platforms as well as framing the information that is being discussed by consumers is where the real edge is. Utilising the two-way conversation with customers and using data to understand trends is an effective way of sustainably delivering value to customers. Brands can also use positive feedback from

customers to drive word of mouth advertising at very little cost, which speaks to both engagement and brand awareness.

The ability to create an environment that is perceived to be fun and playful will likely drive hedonic value (Sindhav & Adidam, 2012) and HV is a function of the experience of an SC platform. In order to drive HV, a brand is likely to concentrate on the service aspect of its marketing levers, with focus on the following:

1. Awareness of the platform and its offerings – the brand needs to create the right awareness of the platform by leveraging social media and advertising. Brand awareness and equity are crucial in creating conversation within social media that connect consumers to the SC platform.
2. Access your platform – it is important for there to be a flawless interaction of the social media and SC platforms. The easier it is to access the more consumers will be willing to try the platform
3. After sales support – this is important again for the customer experience and ensuring that all the consumer expectations are satisfied. It is even more important in SC where bad reviews can have wider repercussions, than in traditional stores.

This study further confirms the need for businesses to create strategies that are value based and are focussed on the relationships with customers. Past research has shown that brands that offer better overall value are able to better motivate consumers to engage more on their SC platforms (Itani, et al., 2019). This is likely to transform into knowledge sharing, which is a driver of brand awareness, referrals and increased purchase consideration, which is a favourable outcome for both the brand and the bottom line.

Marketers should also consider the innovation opportunity that an effective SC strategy can present. The ability to collect customer feedback and collaborate with them in creating content, feedback about products or services, is an opportunity for a brand. These opportunities could be to engage with their customer and create ‘talkability’ at little cost and to improve their product offering and experience.

6.2.4 Social Status in the social commerce environment

What the research indicates, however, is that social status does not drive awareness and engagement within the SC environment. A limitation in the research is that a large proportion of the sample had graduate level degrees, had careers and had high levels of validation and social status. This means that this group of people will not be driven to engage with a brand on SC on the perception that it gives them social status. Utility and convenience are big drivers for this type of user, mostly because they are people with careers and typically spend less time on SC on average than other individuals. This result may be different in other consumer groups.

An opportunity for future research would be testing what the different motivators for different consumer groups in the SC environment would be. Aspects such as age, gender and geography can be tested to help improve how businesses segments consumers in SC and improve their value offering. Some segments of consumers in South Africa have a high uptake of trends and is sometimes expressed through brands and materialistic ways (Mnisi, 2015) and understanding these groups can potentially aid in the understanding of the effect of social status.

6.4 Limitations and further research

The biggest limitation from the research was the sample size, which is a common challenge when data is collected via a questionnaire. Although the data from 230 were collected and are deemed to be usable and large enough to validate the model for this study, there is a high likelihood that the sample may not have been not representative of the SC population in SA. Future replications of this study with different data points may be needed in the future to improve the generalizability of the data.

The second challenge was that the study was a cross-sectional study. This may have potentially resulted the inability of the study to infer that hypothesized causal relationships can exist among the underlying constructs. In order to counter for this limitation a future study could longitudinally assess the proposed model in a way that verifies that there is causality amongst the constructs in the SC environment.

There has been little research done about the effect of social value, with the bulk of the studies based on the roles of UV and HV. The results of this study must therefore be

used to enrich future studies related to user behaviour within SC. The results of the study can further expand the studies of drivers of perceived value in SC, particularly Social Influence, Social presence, which came out as strong themes in this research.

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Appendix 3: Pilot study questionnaire

Part 1

1. Do you have access to social media or social commerce platforms?	Y	N					
2. Are you active on social media or social commerce platforms?	Y	N					
3. Social media / social commerce experience	< 1	1 - 2	2 - 3	3 - 4	4 -5	> 5	
4. What is your age?	18 - 25	25 - 30	30 - 35	35 - 40	40 - 45	45 - 50	> 50
5. What is your gender?	M	F					
6. What is your education level?	High school or less	Undergraduate	Graduate/Post-graduate				

Please rank your answer from 1 to 7, with 1 being least likely to agree and 7 being most likely to agree

Part 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I use social commerce for shopping, for basic household products, clothes, and gadgets							
8. I would like to try different products through social shopping on social media							
9. I look for friends who have common buying interests through social shopping on social media							
10. I spend a lot of time on social shopping sites even if I do not intend on purchasing items							
11. I look to see what the highest purchased product is							
12. Safety around payment methods on social shopping platforms is important to me							

13. Social commerce allows me to access products that are not in my physical geographic area							
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Part 3

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. The ability to connect with friends, family and peers is a driver to why I use social shopping to shop							
15. My social connections influence what I purchase on social media							
16. I have found out about different products from friends, family, or peers on social shopping sites							
17. I have used social shopping to validate a potential purchase							

Part 4

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. I use my social media as a platform to advertise my products or business							
19. I see more advertising on social shopping platforms than on any other media							
20. I use social media to generate business ideas based on trends							
21. Social media allows people and brands to express themselves authentically.							

Part 5

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I find it convenient to buy products via social shopping platforms							

23. I believe that the price I am paying on social shopping sites is warranted							
24. I am worried that what I get delivered is different from what I ordered on a social shopping site							
25. There are many more options to pick from on social shopping platforms than in a traditional store							
26. The items I have seen on social shopping sites are of better quality than in traditional stores							
27. The items on social shopping sites are good products for the price while social shopping							

Part 6

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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28. I enjoy shopping on social shopping sites							
29. Shopping on social shopping sites is where I go to feel good							
30. The experience of shopping on social shopping sites is much more pleasurable than shopping in a traditional store							
31. Shopping on social sites offers me access to niche products versus mass products usually found in traditional stores							

Part 7

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. Social shopping helps me with my social relationships							

33. Social shopping has improved the way I am perceived							
34. Social shopping has allowed me to make a good impression on other people							
35. Shopping on social shopping allows me to tag the stores I purchased on with a higher chance of being noticed/acknowledged/validated by other people							

Part 8

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. I find out about new brands and products from social shopping platforms							

37. When a brand launches on a social shopping platform, I get to know about it faster							
38. The best brands are available on social shopping platforms							
39. I have found out more about a product's intrinsic value on social shopping platforms							

Part 9

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40. I enjoy the marketing material shown on social shopping platforms							
41. I know the brand that is shown on the marketing material							
42. The marketing material has taught me something new about the brand							

43. Good marketing material can influence me to buy a product							
44. I speak favourably about brands on social shopping platforms to friends, family, and peers							
45. The ability to address social issues will lead me to engage a brand better							
46. I am better engaged in a brand that I can relate to							
47. Brands on social shopping have a faster turnaround time when responding to product questions							
48. Ease of the platform can influence my engagement to marketing material							
49. Amount of data needed influences the amount of time I spend on a social platform							

Appendix 4: Revised study questionnaire

Research Questionnaire

Part 1

a) Do you have access to social commerce platforms?	Y	N					
b) Are you active on social commerce platforms?	Y	N					
c) How long have you had access to social commerce	< 1	1 - 2	2 - 3	3 - 4	4 -5	> 5	
d) What is your age?	18 - 25	25 - 30	30 - 35	35 - 40	40 - 45	45 - 50	> 50
e) What is your gender?	M	F					
f) What is your education level?	High school or less	Undergraduate	Graduate/Post-graduate				

Please rank your answer from 1 to 7, with 1 being least likely to agree and 7 being most likely to agree

Part 2

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. I use social commerce to shop for basic household products, clothes, and gadgets							
2. Social commerce gives me exposure to products and services I otherwise would not access from traditional stores and media							
3. I spend a lot of time on social commerce platforms even if I do not intend on purchasing items							
4. I often scan social commerce platforms to see what the most purchased product is							
5. Social commerce allows me to access products that are not in my physical geography							
6. The cost of data influences the amount of time I spend on social commerce platforms							

Part 3

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. My friends have common buying interests on social commerce platforms							
8. The ability to connect with friends, family and peers is a reason for using social commerce							
9. My friends and followers on social media influence what I purchase							
10. I have discovered different products through my friends or followers by seeing it on their social media feed							

Part 4

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I find it convenient to buy products via social commerce platforms							

12. I believe that the price I am paying on social commerce platforms is worth it							
13. I am worried that what gets delivered is different from what I ordered on social commerce platforms							
14. There are more options to choose from on social commerce platforms than in a traditional store							
15. The items I have seen on social commerce platforms are of better quality than in traditional stores							
16. Brands on social commerce platforms have a faster turnaround time when responding to product questions							

Part 5

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. I enjoy the social commerce shopping experience							

18. The experience on social commerce platforms is much more pleasurable than shopping in a traditional store							
19. Social commerce offers me access to niche products versus mass products usually found in traditional stores							
20. I see more advertising on social commerce platforms than on any other media							

Part 6

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Social commerce helps me with my social relationships							
22. Social commerce has improved the way I am perceived							
23. Social commerce has allowed me to make a good impression on other people							

Part 7

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. I find out about new brands and products from social commerce platforms							
25. When a brand launches on a social commerce platform, I get to know about it faster							
26. The best brands are available on social commerce platforms							

Part 8

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. I enjoy the marketing material shown on social commerce platforms							
28. I tend to remember brands that advertise on social commerce platforms							

29. Marketing material on social commerce platforms is better engaging							
30. Good marketing material can influence me to buy a product							
31. I speak favourably about brands on social commerce platforms to friends, family, and peers							
32. I am better engaged in a brand that I can relate to							
33. I often discuss advertisements that I see on social commerce platforms with other people							
34. Ease of use of a social commerce platform can influence my engagement to a brands products and services							
35. Brands can build or destroy their reputations much faster with social commerce							

Appendix 5: Ethical clearance

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

Ethical Clearance
Approved

Dear Brian Malanda,

Please be advised that your application for **Ethical Clearance** has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

Appendix 5: Consent Letter

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMATION CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR ANONYMOUS QUESTIONS

Researcher's name: **Brian Malanda**

Student Number: **19385804**

Department of: **Business Science**

University of Pretoria: **Gordon's Institute of Business Science**

Dear Participant

The effect of social media marketing on brand awareness, engagement and customer value in South Africa: A stimulus-response perspective

I Brian Malanda, am a second year Masters' student in Business Management in the Department of Business Science, University of Pretoria. You are invited to volunteer to participate in our research project: **The effect of social media marketing on brand awareness, engagement and customer value in South Africa: A stimulus-response perspective.**

This letter gives information to help you to decide if you want to take part in this study. Before you agree you should fully understand what is involved. If you do not understand the information or have any other questions, do not hesitate to ask us. You should not agree to take part unless you are completely happy about what we expect of you.

The purpose of the study is to examine a model for social commerce and its effect on the customer shopping experience. The model will encompass the effects of selected marketing mix components (stimuli) on customer engagement, brand awareness and engagement via consumer value in social commerce.



We would like you to complete a questionnaire. The time invested in completing this questionnaire will approximately be 25 minutes. Please do not write your name on the questionnaire. This will ensure confidentiality.

The Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Health Sciences, telephone numbers 012 3541677 / 012 3541330 granted written approval for this study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or stop at any time without giving any reason and without incurring any penalty. As you do not write your name on the questionnaire, you give us the information anonymously. Once you have given the questionnaire back to us, you cannot recall your consent. We will not be able to trace your information. Therefore, you will also not be identified as a participant in any publication that comes from this study.

Note: The implication of completing the questionnaire is that informed consent has been obtained from you. Thus, any information derived from your form (which will be totally anonymous) may be used for e.g. publication, by the researchers.

We sincerely appreciate your help.

Yours truly,

Brian Malanda