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2016



Declaration of authenticity

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**THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A STRATEGY TOOL WITHIN RAND-
AIR: A SURVEY**

Byrone Thorne

2016

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Abstract

Advertising and communications have changed significantly over the last decade, specifically in the consumer market. The way that people buy and consume products is now closely linked to social media and advertising on social media platforms. Greenberg and Kates (n.d.) refer to 'social media' as a new approach to marketing, which relies on dialogue, storytelling, and long-term relationship-building. These social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube, all of which have shown significant growth over the past 10 years. An example of this can be seen with regard to the growth of Facebook which - at the end of March 2016 - had 1.65 billion users. The benefit of these social networking platforms is that one can easily group users into age, demographic, language, gender and interests.

The challenge in a business-to-business environment is that social media and the abovementioned platforms are seen as only applicable to the business-to-consumer markets. According to Qualman (2009), as of July 2012 70% of big company CEOs do not have a presence on social networks. Kotler and Keller (2006) state that a key goal of marketing is to develop deep, enduring relationships with all people and organisations that could directly or indirectly affect the success of the company's marketing activities. One of the ways in which to build these relationships has historically been to build a brand that is referred by word of mouth or referrals. This has been challenged in the digital era, where the Internet and social media have disrupted the normal campaigns which businesses send out as all individuals can express their opinion about a brand based on their experiences, according to Brown and Fiorella (n.d.). Brown and Fiorella (n.d.) also state that social media uses word-of-mouth marketing as its cornerstone.

Reichheld (2011) states that loyal customers come back more often, refer their friends and are less price sensitive. Also it is cheaper to keep a customer than to acquire a new one. Therefore, maintaining a customer relationship is an effective way of building a brand and ultimately improving one's bottom line.

The objective of this study is to test the practicality of using social networking as a relationship-building tool in a business-to-business environment and how social networking can be used to transform relationship-building to engage with customers in the digital space. The research will also investigate whether social media networking be used as a communication tool in improving marketing return on investment (ROI) in the business-to-business environment, particularly in a service industry such as the plant rental industry. In addition, the question of whether or not social media networks can be used to complement existing customer engagement, such as face-to-face selling, will be investigated.

This study will look at how social media can be incorporated into an existing marketing strategy and how a blended approach - of using multiple media platforms to reach a target audience - will need to be adopted in the future.

In addition, this study will examine the possibility of socially involving all stakeholders of the organisation - such as current employees, previous employees, suppliers, investors, shareholders, customers, future employees and future customers - and their importance in using social media to gain information on the industrial company.

Greenberg and Kates (n.d.) state that social media is important because one's customers prefer to gather, review and share information about the company with people they trust. It is now possible, by means of social media, to track and monetise this behaviour.

The outcome of this research will determine whether further investment is necessary in social networking in order to expand the Rand-Air brand with customers as well as staff and suppliers.

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List of acronyms

AC	Atlas Copco
ASR	Atlas Copco Specialty Rental Division
NPS	Net Promoter Score
GM	General Manager
PR	Public Relations
SHEQ	Safety, Health, Environment, Quality
B2C market	Business-to-consumer market
B2B market	Business-to-business market

Chapter 1

Introduction to the context of the study

1.1 Introduction and background

Rand-Air - part of the Atlas Copco (AC) Group - is a plant-rental company that was started in Johannesburg in 1973. Today, it operates throughout Southern Africa. The company offers compressors and generators for rental to a number of industries such as petrochemical, mining, construction, industrial and events. The plant-rental industry is highly competitive as there are many organisations who offer compressors or generators for hire. Rand-Air has always differentiated itself in the marketplace by focusing on exceeding customers' expectations in terms of customer service. This is evident from the high Net Promoter Scoring (NPS) (Figure 1) which Rand-Air consistently receives (Figure 2) from customer feedback. In order to differentiate itself in terms of customer service, the organisation has emphasised building relationships with new and existing customers in order to remain abreast of their rental requirements.

The marketing and communications manager's role in the organisation has historically been to create and keep customers by using traditional marketing methods such as print advertising, sales reps' visits, online advertising and - more recently - social media interaction.

The net promoter score (NPS) metric is based on a simple question: "Would you refer Rand-Air as a supplier of compressors and generators?" The response rating (from 0-10 with 0 being "not at all likely" and 10 being "most likely") is calculated and the NPS scoring is determined as shown in figures 1 and 2.

Subtracting the sum of customers who are Detractors (give score of six or less) from the sum of customers who are Promoters (give a score of nine and 10).



Figure 1 – Calculation of NPS percentage

- **Promoters**—Loyal enthusiasts who keep buying from a company and urge their friends to do the same. (Scores of 9-10)
- **Neutrals**—Satisfied but unenthusiastic customers who can be easily wooed by the competition. (Scores of 7-8)
- **Detractors**—Unhappy customers trapped in a bad relationship. Detractors add to the cost of doing business financially and mentally. Detractors are also an opportunity. (Scores of 0-6)

Figure 2 - Explanation of Promoters, Neutrals and Detractors

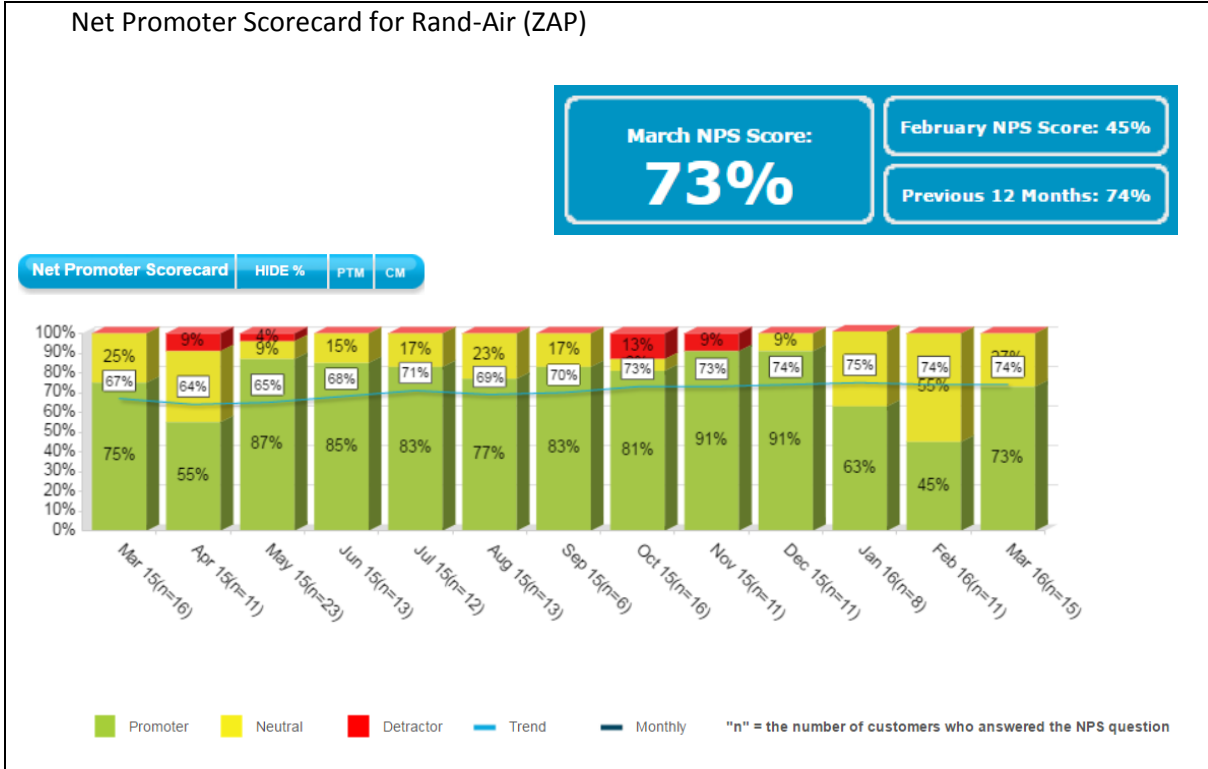


Figure 3 – NPS scorecard

Figure 3 shows the monthly NPS scores over a 12-month period, with the 12-month trend of the scores.

In an ever-changing business and social environment, it is becoming more difficult to assess the effectiveness of conventional media platforms such as print advertising, editorial pieces in magazines and newspapers, e-mail marketing and word of mouth or referrals. This is evident in the fact that companies - such as Rand-Air - spend around 1% of their annual revenue on advertising and promotions yet can only measure the effectiveness of this reach on website platforms and by asking their customers where they heard of Rand-Air.

The compressor and generator rental industry is highly competitive and the strategy of smaller, less-established opposition companies to Rand-Air, has been to undercut on pricing as these companies have lower overheads and can operate at decreased profit margins. This

has caused smaller customers of Rand-Air to utilise these companies only for projects where reliability is important. These factors, along with a tough economic climate, means that historically loyal Rand-Air customers may look elsewhere if the relationship has not been maintained.

1.2 Introduction to the researcher

The researcher has been the marketing manager at the Rand-Air brand since February 2006 and was previously a sales representative for the organisation, working in different areas around South Africa. The researcher also studied marketing management for several years so has a strong background in the marketing and sales area.

Customer service has been a focal area for Rand-Air as an organisation, as well as for the researcher, as it is an area which is constantly changing according to customer requirements and requires team effort. This constant challenge is what keeps the researcher interested in the plant-rental industry in particular. The satisfaction of solving a customer's air or power requirement fulfils this role as well.

The customer requirements do change over time however - according to the SERVQUAL relationship model designed by Zeithaml (1990) - the following customer expectations remain constant and should be measured after every rental interaction to assess the state of the customer's satisfaction with the plant-rental company:

- Reliability,
- Responsiveness,
- Empathy,
- Assurance, and
- Tangibles.

In line with Rand-Air's strategy of keeping in close contact with their customer base, the researcher has registered the Rand-Air brand on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.

1.3 Introduction to AC and the Speciality Rental Division (ASR)

AC is a Swedish multinational company founded in 1873. The company manufactures, sells and rents industrial, mining and construction products such as compressors, generators and mining equipment. It operates in four main business areas:

Compressor Technique, Mining and Rock Excavation, Construction Technique and Industrial Technique. There are a number of different divisions within these business areas and Rand-Air operates as a multi-brand within the AC SRD. The AC organogram is explained in Figure 4.

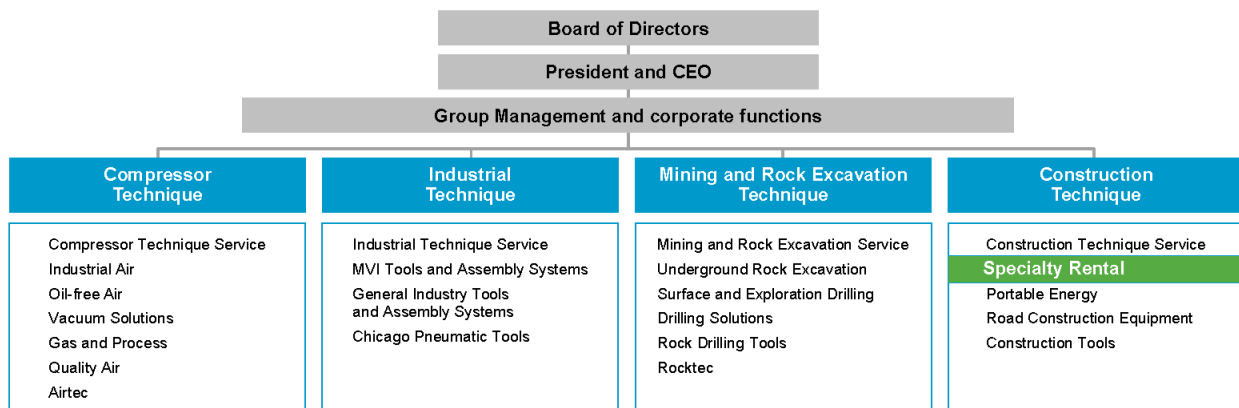


Figure 4 – Organogram of AC divisions

Rand-Air within the AC ASR (Source: The Atlas Copco book)

AC is the leading supplier of compressors and portable generators worldwide and the strategy of the organisation is to grow organically or by means of acquisitions which lead to the company becoming the market leader in the areas within which it operates. One of the reasons for AC acquiring Rand-Air in January 1999 was to become closer to the end-customer as the rental business involves closer contact with the end-customer than the

capital sales business in AC. The main reason for this was to gain market share after AC had lost market share during the 1960s and 1970s to competitors as the Swedish company sanctioned sales to the apartheid government in South Africa.

As a Swedish multinational company, the approach worldwide has historically been to adopt a blueprint of the way that business is conducted with regard to finance, communication, sales and marketing. This approach has been the same throughout the world, including South Africa. This has meant that structure and systems play a key role in the way business is conducted within the group. According to Forbes this has been a key success factor contributing to AC being listed as one of the top 100 sustainable companies in the world (Smith: 2014).

AC is structured in keeping with customer demands. Thus the market within which they operate would determine the structure of the organisation. This means that some countries would have a dedicated marketing and communications manager responsible for communicating to the company's targeted audience. Some countries - such as South Africa - may have more than one marketing and communications manager, responsible for communicating to their business area. This has highlighted the need for a clear communications strategy when implementing a group social media strategy so that the brand or brands speak to the same audience in one common message.

As a corporate communications strategy, AC has adopted Facebook as a means of attracting future staff by positioning itself as an employer of choice. This strategy has been clearly communicated to all individuals responsible for communications in the group and all are encouraged to highlight the company as a balanced employer, where staff are professional yet have fun. This strategy is clearly evident if one looks at Rand-Air's Facebook page.

1.4 Introduction to Rand-Air

The Rand-Air culture is strong on customer service and this has historically been a critical success factor in supplying the strong profits of the organisation over the years. The values of the company are shared internally and externally. This is something which the organisation tries to achieve consistently.

The Rand-Air values have a strong impact on the way customers are treated and dictate the tone, urgency and professionalism with which Rand-Air customers are to be treated. These values should be consistent in all communication especially when dealing with social media networks.

The Rand-Air values are represented as follows, with the rope representing partnership and the importance of relationships with customers, suppliers and stakeholders.



Figure 5 – Rand-Air values

The Rand-Air division of AC has - for the past nine years - measured their performance against customers' expectation using the NPS methodology developed by Reichheld (2006). In this way, the relationship is measured according to a score, and the customers' requirements - according to the SERVQUAL model designed by Zeithaml (1990) - are analysed on a monthly basis to establish where the gaps are in terms of service delivery.

The scores from individual customers are reported monthly to all in the organisation and - in an instance where a customer has specifically praised an individual - this individual is then awarded with a Shining Star Award and a monetary amount. In this way, customer satisfaction is driven and positive progress is reinforced by means of praise.

Recently, the marketing manager has been utilising the company's Public Relations (PR) service provider to share these customer testimonials on social networking platforms to encourage engagement with existing staff and prospecting customers.

Rand-Air was also selected as a pilot case study for launching the NPS methodology as a result of their history with measuring customer satisfaction.

The strategy for the Rand-Air brand on social media has been to highlight instances where a customer has given a positive testimonial for the brand, especially in instances where the customer has needed a compressor or generator in an emergency. These testimonials highlight the integrity of the brand and demonstrate how the organisation lives out its values in practice. Highlighting this on a social media platform, however, does risk damaging the brand if the customer was not totally satisfied. Also, the challenge is to get media approval of situations where the customer has needed air or power in a compromised situation as a result of a mechanical breakdown.

The researcher believes that social media will play a critical role in measuring customer satisfaction in the future and companies which are involved in measuring customer

satisfaction at the moment using online methods, may already be engaging with customers on a social networking site.

1.5 Introduction to social media: Local and international best practices

Social media can be defined as the social interaction among people as they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Often these networks use the Internet, however mobile applications have been developed to facilitate this interaction utilising mobile phones, tablets, computers and cellular devices.

There are a number of companies already involved in social media and networking with their employees, customers and prospecting customers. At the moment, companies locally - such as Johnson Crane Hire - have used social media to highlight how customers have completed projects using their crane products within budget and on time. This demonstrates how the organisation has lived out its values and commitment to their customer. The company also engages with their customers on Facebook and Twitter, and encourages them to give feedback, both positive and negative.

Another company which is involved internationally is Barloworld Rental in Dubai. This organisation has set up a LinkedIn group dedicated to solving compressor and generator technical queries related to rental. This portal acts as a technical resource for their current and prospecting customers where people can engage on technical issues which they are experiencing as well as general technical questions. This portal also advertises any used rental equipment which they have for sale with a service history, as well as a job market portal for acquiring new staff.

It is the researcher's view that best practices – exhibited by companies such as Johnson Crane Hire and Maersk Line - on social media platforms will continue to gain momentum in increasing exposure and building relationships in the future with key decision-makers in the

business-to-business space because they are seen as trusted industry experts and a reference for when a customer needs to rent an industrial product.

1.6 The research problem description

In the current tough economic environment, the measurability of current marketing platforms is becoming critical as businesses require a measurable return on investment (ROI). It is clear that traditional print and billboard media is often a hit-and-miss affair as people are bombarded with advertising all the time. There is a need for a communications tool which is measurable with a focused audience separated by age, gender, occupation level and area.

In the business-to-business environment, particularly with high-value capital equipment and in areas of responsibility where millions can be lost as a result of poor service, it is important to deal with reliable service providers. People tend to deal with individuals they know and trust. Therefore, it is important to build a relationship with suppliers. Relationships can - and are - built using social media as you get a good indication of the person based on their social interaction.

With an ageing workforce, the generation gap has meant that baby boomers are moving on. A study was done on Rand-Air customers currently involved in social media and the results showed that 7% of the sample is involved in social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. This figure is very low however, the focus of this study is on the 7% of customers already involved on these platforms and how this will grow in the future.

The current study looks at the potential customers as well and how they deal with relationships, particularly in the plant-rental industry and how social networking platforms play a role in building and maintaining existing relationships. Marston (2011) states that

businesses that adopt new technology and understand the generational differences, and how to use social media tools, will succeed into the future.

1.7 Research objectives

The aim of the research is to show how important social media and networks are in building and maintaining relationships with existing and prospecting customers. The focus will also be on current and past employees, and how they influence the brand engagement. Best practices – both locally and internationally – will be looked at.

The dangers of social media will be discussed, for example, the free airing of emotions by users that is visible to all.

The research will demonstrate whether social media networks could be used as a referral tool, in other words an extension and platform of the NPS model for highlighting a company's best practices.

The researcher will show how brand engagement via social media networks can:

1. Use social media as a social listening tool for establishing customer loyalty levels through the NPS,
2. Use social media networks to build new and existing relationships with customers and staff, and
3. Use social media to attract employees and position Rand-Air as an employer of choice.

1.8 Research questions

1. Can social media be used as a social listening tool for establishing customer loyalty levels, specifically using the NPS?
2. Can social media networks be used effectively to build new and existing relationships with customers and staff?
3. Can social media be used as a channel to attract future employees and position the company as an employer of choice?

1.9 Research design and methodology used

The topic is of a social nature and a mixed method approach will be used, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative surveys, to be done independently but concurrently.

The quantitative survey will use a census of all Rand-Air staff, whereas the qualitative survey will test a purposive sample of x 7 followers of the Rand-Air social media page on LinkedIn and Facebook.

Based on customer feedback, the following tools for assessing involvement will be:

- Facebook,
- LinkedIn,
- Twitter, and
- YouTube.

1.10 Ontology and epistemology

The researcher has adopted a pragmatic philosophy, which focusses on truth in terms of effect, outcome and practicality. Pragmatism, according to Peirce, James and Dewey focuses on what is real, what is true and what is good. It can be used as a philosophy tool for prediction, problem-solving and action. The pragmatist looks at the practical consequences of belief before choosing what to believe. The theory also looks at the context and decides what is best to believe.

Peirce encourages one to see philosophy not as a single chain of arguments but rather as an interconnected web with all of the arguments providing support for a single conclusion.

Pizam and Mansfield (2009) provide the basic differences between Positivism, Interpretivism and Pragmatism in Table 1:

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Data collection Method
<i>Positivist</i>	Hidden rules govern learning process	Focus on reliable and valid tools to uncover rules	Quantitative
<i>Interpretivist</i>	Reality is created by individuals in groups	Discover the underlying meaning of events and activities	Qualitative
<i>Pragmatic</i>	Truth is what is useful	The best method is the one which solves problems	Mixed methods

Table 1 – Comparison of different philosophical approaches

Whereas Positivism focusses on the laws that govern behaviour, Pragmatism focusses on the experience, interactions and their effects in multiple contexts. To a Pragmatist, the mandate of science is not to find truth or reality, the existence of which are perpetually in dispute, but to facilitate human problem-solving.

The main advantage of adopting a pragmatic approach is that it offers the researcher a unique chance to use multiple methods to study the research problem with an experiential view.

1.11 Limitations of the study

The research adopts a management view of social media which - in itself - presents a challenge as staff may not be open and transparent with their feedback as they may not want to compromise themselves and their use of social media.

Owing to social media being still relatively new in the business-to-business industry in South Africa, access to research material was limited, and the researcher had to rely mainly on online material. This did not compromise the quality, validity and reliability of the research.

Owing to time and budgetary constraints, the sample size is limited to Rand-Air customers and the company's followers on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

1.12 Delimitations of the study

The dissertation is limited to the relationship-building aspects of social media and will only consider the most popular social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. There are hundreds of social media networks with many new ones each month but this study will focus on the most popular in the industrial segment for relationship-building. Geographically, the study is limited to Rand-Air customers or potential customers in the Gauteng region of South Africa.

1.13 Assumptions of the study

Social media in the business-to-consumer market is an accepted way of branding with companies such as Red Bull having a community following of over 34 million fans, according

to Greenberg and Kates (n.d.). The assumption of this study is that the business-to-business market will become as greatly involved in social media as the business-to-consumer market. The current downturn in the South African and worldwide economy has meant that many companies have had to reduce their advertising and marketing budgets. The researcher assumes that companies such as Rand-Air will continue to look at alternative ways of engaging with their target market using tools such as social media. The researcher also assumes that those Rand-Air customers already active on social media channels are from a younger generation and use social media as a means of connecting with peers, friends and family.

1.14 Significance of the study – advantages for Rand-Air

This study is conducted at an economically challenging time where many companies in the construction, mining, petrochemical and industrial markets face a tough economic climate, and are being forced to reduce their costs and ultimately their workforce. The challenge of reducing print and media advertising - as a result of the requirement to reduce costs - means that marketing managers need to come up with tools which provide an accurate and immediate ROI. At the same time, these tools need to increase reach, frequency and relevance for a targeted audience.

This research is a work-based challenge for the researcher, and the use of social media tools can offer such advantages, if used correctly and alongside traditional marketing tools. The study will show how social media platforms can be used to engage with those customers on social media platforms to enhance the relationship and ultimately improve revenue.

1.15 Layout of the dissertation

The general outline of the study is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

This chapter provides a background and introduction to the research problem, as well as context to the rental business environment and the challenges experienced in the economy.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter deals with the current knowledge around social media and how different scholars and researchers have used social media for marketing. These methods rely on dialogue, storytelling, and long-term relationship-building.

Chapter 3: Methodology and data collection

The research methodology uses a mixed-method approach. The sample of potential/ current Rand-Air customers is selected based on their following the Rand-Air brand on these social media networks: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

Chapter 4: Research results and interpretation

The results from the research survey are provided, along with an analysis which gives input into how the findings relate back to the research objectives.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Chapter 5 deals with recommendations on how the findings can be implemented in the organisation's social media strategy to gain new customers, employees and monitoring customer loyalty by means of NPS.

1.16 Conclusion

Social media in the business-to-business environment can be detrimental to the company's brand if it is not managed professionally with a clear strategy in place, particularly for a large multinational operating in the industrial segment. However, it is also a powerful tool which can be used to create and maintain customer relationships by improving customer engagement and ultimately increasing revenue.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical framework and overview of relevant literature

2.1 Introduction

Information dissemination is an important aspect of the entire communication process. It is, therefore, necessary for organisations to choose the best platforms that would complement how they effectively communicate. The purpose of this research is to show the significance of social media, its platforms as well as networks in relation to the building and maintaining of constructive relationships with both existing and prospective customers. As a result, the study will give a description of how current and past employees influence brand engagement with regard to their access to social media and networks.

To ensure comprehensive and inclusive coverage, the research will adopt both a local and international approach to best social media and web practices to establish the feasibility of the study. As social media is a vast platform with a lot of information available from diverse sources that cannot be verified, the study will also showcase works published on the dangers and challenges of social media. This chapter will also include the different scholarly work done on the dynamics and impact of using social media networks and its various dynamics.

The focus of this chapter will be to answer the research objective questions in chapter one. This chapter aims at addressing issues based on the various articles and scholarly work highlighted and described. It will be shown how brand engagement, via social media networks, can be used:

1. As a tool for measuring customer loyalty using NPS,
2. To build relationships between industrial business-to business customers and staff,
3. As an employer-branding tool to attract new staff, and
4. To improve business regarding brand engagement.

Through a clear and comprehensive description of previously conducted research in the field of social media and networks, this chapter aims at demonstrating whether or not social media networks could be used as a referral tool, as well as an extension of and platform for, the NPS model for highlighting a company's best practices. Of all the themes in chapter, one will be thoroughly covered to ensure total understanding about what has already been established by other scholars and researchers. This section will use primary as well as secondary sources because of the study revolving around social media networks, which are relatively recent concepts.

Using the chosen secondary and primary sources, the study will show how different authors present their work in an attempt to show how social media can be used for marketing. Social media marketing relies on dialogue, storytelling, and long-term relationship-building. An understanding of how the various participating elements of social media interact will enable the establishment of the influence that using social media as a platform for advertising and communication has on the operations and aims of an organisation. This chapter will also give an account of the strengths and weaknesses of each article used, which will present the reader of the current research study with an in-depth analysis and understanding of the concept of adopting social media to accomplish certain organisational goals.

2.1 Theoretical framework

According to Kombo and Tromp (2011), the term 'theoretical framework' refers to a collection of interrelated ideas based on theories. It is a reasoned set of propositions, which are derived from - and supported by - data or evidence. This study is based on establishing

how the information manipulation theory (IMT) can be incorporated into the use of social media networks for effective communication and advertising purposes.

The IMT involves works aiming at providing an approach to an exclusive area in the process of interpersonal communication. The latter process deals with the sending and receiving of information. According to McCornack (1992), information is packaged for transfer - from the sender to a receiver - during the communication process, which is done in a manner that gives a false impression that is not expressed by the originator.

Social media is a great platform for communication and advertising but careful monitoring is essential. An organisation's message may be manipulated during the communication process, in particular, through sharing and spreading it through word of mouth. This manipulation could cause the organisation's message to be misunderstood. According to the IMT, making an individual believe information that is not true through manipulation, elimination, addition or falsification is deceit (McCornack: 1992). Organisations should ensure effective elimination of fraud for there to be effective communication and advertising on the social media sites. Accuracy and credibility of information are what usually determine the reception and response to that information. Therefore, organisations should ensure credibility in the content they provide on their social media platforms to ensure they attract and maintain a constructive readership and viewership.

Figure 6 is a representation of the social media theoretical framework.

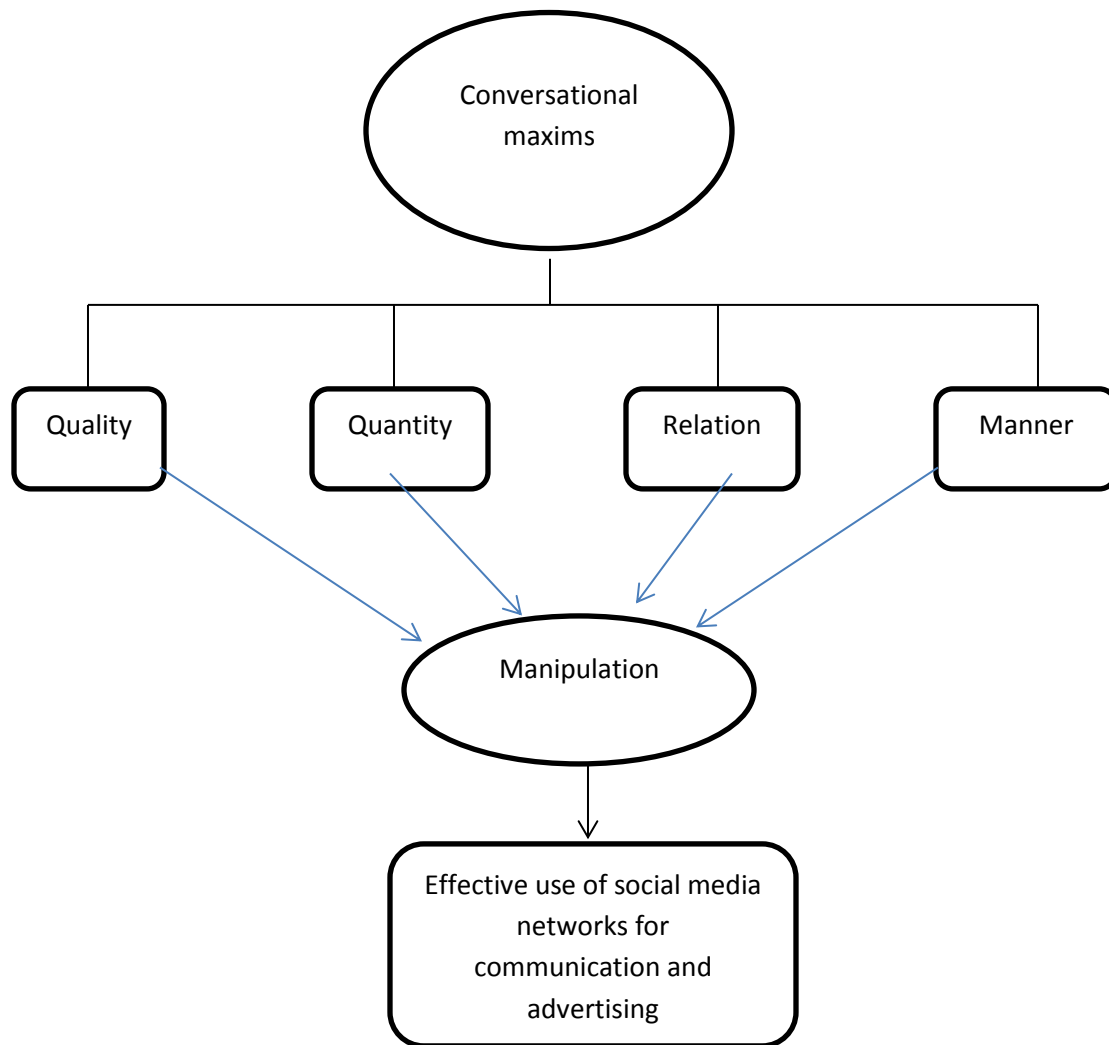


Figure 6 - Social media theoretical framework

According to Figure 6, various factors are involved to ensure the effective use of social media networks for constructive communication and advertising. According to the IMT, the means

through which the four conversation maxims are manipulated is what determines the efficient use of social media networks for organisational communication and advertising. The theory describes quantity as what is expected of an entity with regards to the provision of a reasonable amount of information. Entities should, therefore, ensure they provide just enough information, which means including every necessary detail, without fail, on their social media networks. Manipulation can be done in an attempt to make the information easier to understand and not for it to be deceitful and benefit the entity at the expense of customers (McCornack, Levine, Solowczuk, Torres, and Campbell, 1992). Manipulation includes the conversion of long texts into simplified slides or shorter messages. Such manipulation will not only attract customers but it will also retain them, therefore gaining loyalty and profitability in the long run.

Manipulation of content also influences the quality, which directly affects the perception of those visiting an entity's social media platform. This perception is what determines whether or not the content on the social media sites actually achieve the communication and advertising purpose of the host organisation. Conversation-stimulating content on social media networks enable the acquisition of new customers as well as retaining existing ones. Concerning the third conversational maxim, relation, organisations should ensure the subsequent content on their social media sites is better than the previous one for reinforcement and the display of growth. The theory describes manner as expectations of how something is said. For effective communication and advertising, social media network content should be understood by the potential and current customers, which translates in purchases thus profitability.

2.3 Conceptual framework

The term 'conceptual framework' can be described as what the researcher conceptualises as the relationship between variables in the study and their graphical or diagrammatical relationship. This section presents the main ideas that govern the study.

Figure 7 is a representation of the conceptual framework.

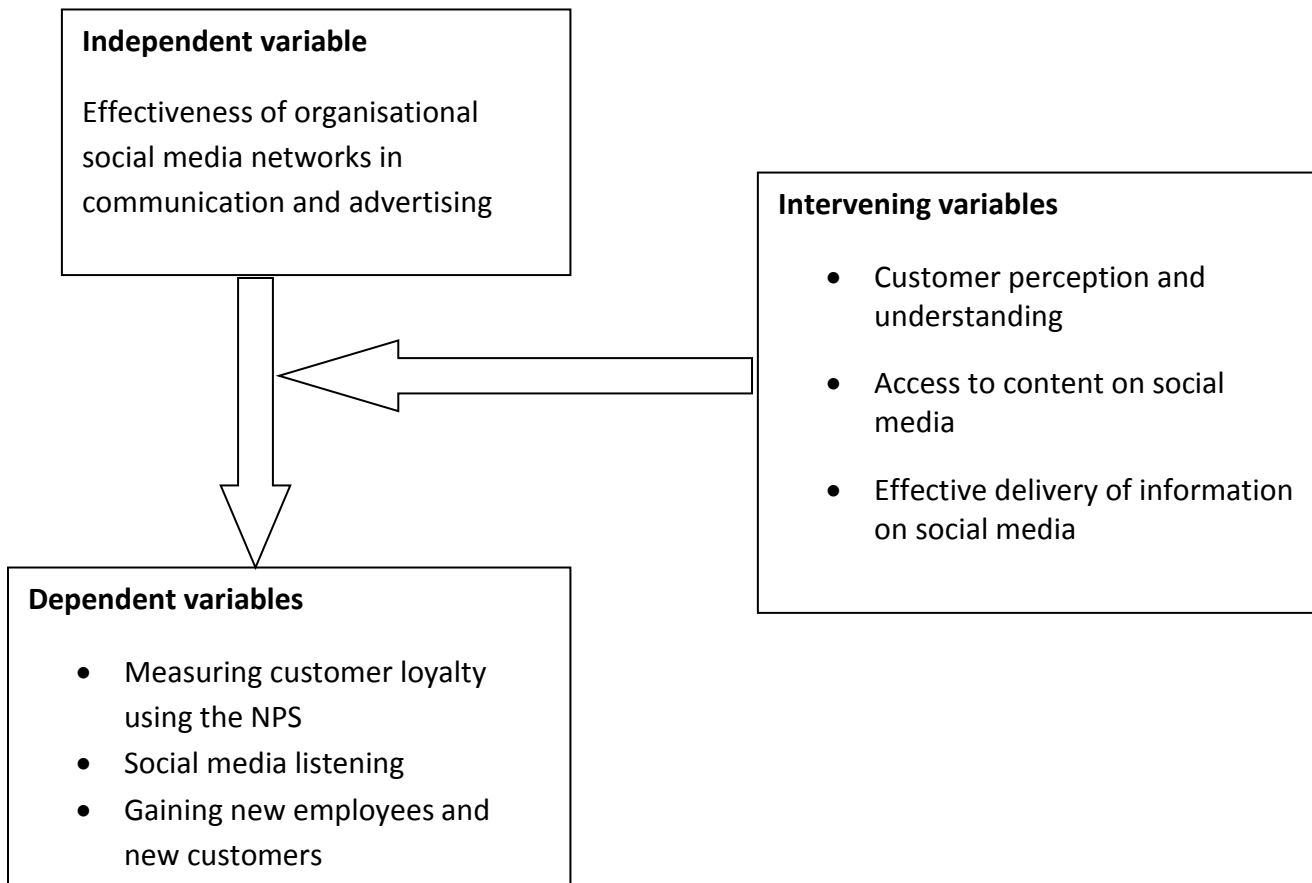


Figure 7- Conceptual framework

In this framework, the independent variable is the effectiveness of organisational social media networks in communication and advertising, while measuring customer loyalty (NPS), social media listening, and the gaining of new employees and new customers are the dependent variables. The intervening variables - which include customer perception and understanding, access to content on social media and effective delivery of information on

social media- influence the dependent variable. The influence of the intervening variables is what determines how the effectiveness of organisational social media networks in communication and advertising affects the dependent variables. For instance, the inability for customers to access social media outlets of a company means that communication and/or advertising is not effective, which results in a negative impact on all the dependents variables.

Favourable conditions for the intervening variables reinforce or complement the effectiveness of organisational social media networks in communication and advertising thus positively impacting dependent variables. Entities that aim at maximising profitability through the use of social media networks should ensure they create conditions favourable for the intervening variables to complement the independent variable so achieving positive impacts on the dependent variables.

2.4 Social media networks as a tool for measuring customer loyalty using the NPS

For a business to grow, there is a need to establish a rapport with customers. This is usually done through communication and advertising. In addition, businesses and organisations carefully monitor customer retention through customer loyalty measuring, which can be done using the organisation's social media handles on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter pages. There is little information on the best means of establishing customer loyalty using social media since it is a vast platform where there are no actual ways of monitoring. There are many times when people visit social media sites, and it goes undetected owing to lack of actual use of the information. A lack of practical ways to establish NPS can be attributed to the challenges faced in trying to establish customer loyalty using social media.

The fact that social media provides a platform, which companies and organisations can use to build lasting relationships with customers, also supplies these companies with the ability to measure customer loyalty through retention. This can be done through monitoring or observation of various customer retention patterns. According to Blanchard (2011), social media can be used as a tool for measuring whether or not an organisation's customers are

loyal. However, the argument put forward by Blanchard (2011) is based on proper aligning of the social media communication with the goals of business. The author gives detailed information on how to measure customer loyalty through observation of frequency, reach and yield.

Blanchard (2011) attempts to show the importance of creating a practical measurement technique for the visits to social media networks by an entity's customers thus measuring customer loyalty. Social media enables an organisation to go beyond the NPS as it enables organisations to access the frequency of visits, thus measuring customer loyalty.

Blanchard (2011) describes loyal customers as those who not only frequent the social media networks of the company but those who use the information to purchase the entity's goods and/or services. The means through which customer loyalty is measured through assessment of the frequent visits, which is an effective and practical measure of customer loyalty. Social media outlets also enable the closing of the loop that is usually experienced in NPS as some sites enable an organisation to establish who recommend its sites, which can be a form of measuring customer loyalty. Loyal customers are more likely to recommend an entity's social media site. Thus the recommendations established can be used to measure customer loyalty.

According to Blanchard (2011), in terms of managing and measuring social media efforts in one's business, reach is also another way through which an organisation can use social media as a tool for measuring customer loyalty. If an entity uses social media networks to disseminate information or conduct advertising, the intention is that the message is passed on to a wider audience. Some of the social media sites - such as Facebook and Twitter - provide room for measuring customer loyalty in response to reach. Once the message reaches the masses, loyal customers will respond by liking and even sharing the information on using their own social media presence. Therefore, measuring of customer loyalty - through response to the reach programmes and strategies via social media networks - is made possible. However, the researcher notes that there are challenges for businesses to

establish customer loyalty conclusively since sometimes even the loyal customers might not share or like information on the social media sites. Also, the researcher is of the opinion that even though a customer may like or share information, this does not mean that this customer would necessarily act as an ambassador of the shared or liked content.

Blanchard (2011) elaborately explains how yield can be interpreted as customer loyalty. As mentioned in the report by Bain and Company (in collaboration with Earl Sasser of Harvard Business School) a company's profitability can increase by 75% with only a 5% increase in customer retention. Blanchard (2011) explains that increased yields can be interpreted as resulting from increased customer loyalty, which can be in the form of regular visits to the social media sites that translate into the actual purchase of the business's goods and/or services. However, an increase in yields does not necessarily mean retention of customers since it could be as a result of attracting new customers. Therefore, this presents Blanchard (2011) with a weakness in his argument, which can be further looked into for formulation and development of solutions, as encouraged by the researcher.

According to Linwright (2016), who is a social media strategist, studies have shown that it is easier to retain a customer than gaining a new one. Thus a retained customer is loyal to the company. The customer's loyalty can be established through an observation and recording of their active participation in the company's social media network(s), which usually translates into the increased revenue or profits of an entity.

According to the statistics presented by Gartner (2016) the future revenue of a company, which amounts to 80%, comes from only 20% of its present customers. If the percentage drops, it is interpreted as a decrease in customer loyalty, which means that some of the loyal customers cease participating in contributing to the company's revenue. However, if the revenue percentage increases, the increase can be interpreted as increased customer loyalty either through referrals or increased participation of current customers, which is monitored on social media networks of that organisation or company.

Linwright (2016) cites the above-mentioned report by Bain and Company (in collaboration with Earl Sasser of Harvard Business School) that a company's profitability can increase by 75% with only a 5% increase in customer retention. Customer loyalty and customer retention are directly proportional and, as such, through the various social media platforms, customer loyalty can be established and measured. If a company's profitability increases, it is interpreted as an increase in customer retention and thus customer loyalty. Conversely, a decrease in profitability indicates a decrease in customer retention, which signals a decrease in loyalty.

Linwright (2016) focuses on Facebook, which means that other more business-focused platforms - such as LinkedIn - may offer alternative findings. The author also describes the success of measuring customer loyalty as dependent on how well a company performs its customer-retention activities. Therefore, Linwright (2016) describes certain ways through which companies can perform customer-retention activities using social media networks, thus measuring customer loyalty on the same.

Linwright (2016) gives a descriptive outline of the means through which companies can conduct customer retention practices through social media outlets, thus a means of measuring customer loyalty. One of the means study applicable is embracing the advocates of company's brand. Linwright (2016) elaborates on the point of embracing the advocates by describing how social media creates a platform. The social media-created platform is where customers air their views and tell their stories, which gives the company an idea of how to gauge customer loyalty based on the form of participation, frequency and period of visitation to the social media sites.

Linwright (2016) gives an example of the Walt Disney Company which - through its act of embracing social media - has enabled measuring of customer loyalty through the observation of particular customers' visits to its social media sites such as YouTube. The Walt Disney Company places content that appeals to its customers on its social media sites and, through that, observes the frequency of customer viewership thus measuring customer

loyalty. The social media sites, through features such as likes and share, enable an organisation to monitor visits to those sites, which further enables measuring of customer loyalty by noting frequency of visitation and actual purchase of goods and/or services.

2.5 Relationships between industrial business-to-business customers and staff

The term 'social media listening' - also referred to as 'social media monitoring' - refers to the procedures used for the identification and assessment of the information provided on the social media of an organisation, brand, person or product. Business customers, also termed as industrial consumers, are involved in the purchase of services or products, which they use for the production of products which they sell to the final consumer. Business customers may also include industries such as construction, mining, petrochemical, agriculture, transportation and manufacturing. The nature of business customers entails dealing with fewer customers who buy large quantities, in other words organisations. Social media - for both industrial and customer businesses – is meant to enhance the relationship between the two parties, as well as industrial businesses' staff. This is of particular importance to heavy industrial markets such as the plant-rental industry where business relationships play a key part of repeat business.

A relationship exists between industrial businesses and customer businesses as well as industrial businesses' staff. Social media can, therefore, be used to create, build and maintain that relationship. The staff of an industrial business are required to be social media savvy so that they can keep up with information which is put out there by customer businesses. An organisation's staff should often take advantage of the information on social media networks of their customer businesses in order to be up to date with new products, change in prices and any other relevant information. There are several ways through which the staff of an industrial business can use social media listening to enhance and profit from the relationship the organisation has with its business customers.

According to Zoe (2015), an organisation can generate leads through problem-solving by its staff, depending on what is contained on the social media networks of customer businesses.

In the event that customer businesses post information on their social media outlets, other consumers of their products and/or services will respond to that information. The staff of an organisation which purchases the customer businesses' products and/or services can establish possible problems depending on the responses on the latter's social media profiles. For instance, if there are complaints about certain services provided by customer businesses, an organisation purchasing those services may want to find alternatives to avoid any loss that may result from the issues. The researcher is of the opinion that even though a company may have a bad or poorly managed social media image, ultimately it is the relationship between the individual(s) in the company, and the relevant sales rep which will affect whether a sale or rental contract will go ahead.

An organisation may also use this relationship information to enhance the relationship it has with the customer business by letting them know of the observations made by the consumer organisation's staff. The act of an industrial business releasing its staff's findings on the social media platforms of the customer business can be seen as an act of good faith, which may enhance the relationship of the two with regard to profitable dealings in the future. The researcher is trying to show industrial businesses how they can take advantage of social media listening, through their staff, to enhance the relationship it has with customer businesses for precaution as well as fostering profitable prospects.

Rappaport (2011) emphasises the fact that listening first enables an organisation to gain perspective of what is happening socially. Organisations, through their staff members, can listen in on the conversations present on the social media networks of customer businesses. Observing how customer businesses present their information and respond to questions enables an organisation to predict or establish future trends in customer businesses.

The staff of an industrial business require training on the specifics of what to look for on the social media networks of customer businesses. Time management is an important aspect of productivity and profitability of an organisation. If the staff were taught how to gather as much information as possible within a given period of time, establishing certain patterns and

trends of the customer businesses would be possible (Safko: 2010). The most important aspect of Safko's (2010) description on fostering of relationships between industrial businesses-to-consumer businesses lies on the social media prowess of the staff in charge of social media networks. However Safko (2010) points out that the relationship between industrial businesses-to-consumer businesses is harder to maintain in organisations with more baby boomers than millennials. Millennials are better equipped at handling social media platforms than their counterpart because of the difference in the technological eras they both live in. In saying this, there are always exceptions to this generalisation, and the researcher believes that whether individuals are willing to learn new ways of how to deal with customers it is more important.

Bradley and McDonald (2011) provide insight into how organisations can also take advantage of social media profiles of their employees. Social media sites are platforms where people share their day-to-day stories, and it is likely that employees would share their work experiences. According to Bradley and McDonald (2011), organisations can establish the problems being experienced by employees at work thus finding ways of solving these and thus increasing productivity. Bradley and McDonald (2011) also suggested that social media could also be used to gather ideas and innovations from employees by observing what they post in relation to improving their work environment. Information from employees' social media platforms enables organisations to improve working conditions, which translates into better production and profitability. Addressing the grievances of employees enables them to perform better thus increasing output. Bradley and McDonald (2011) provide techniques and guidance on how to improve the relationship between industrial businesses and their staff through social media listening for eventual profitability.

2.6 Social media be used as an employer branding tool to attract new staff

Social media has many functions, among them being used as a branding tool used by employers in an attempt to gain new employees (Leekha and Sharma: 2014). A survey conducted by Jobvite in 2015 indicates that 92% of employers seek the information on social

media sites in order to recruit employees. Only 4% of employers do not use social media during recruitment procedures, with the remaining 4% not being sure of whether or not to use social media. Most of the employers search social media sites - such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn - for candidates for in some of the roles that are hard to fill. The survey further reveals that companies not only rely on the information presented by potential employees on their CVs, but also connect and study the aspiring employees.

According to the survey, organisations that have the necessary skills to identify and successfully recruit top-notch employees using information from their social media handles have a competitive advantage. Organisations do not only access information on qualifications and skills of potential employees, but also values, lifestyle and even cultural norms. The survey mentions an article for the entrepreneur, where it indicates that organisations no longer hire employees just for them to work but also participate in the organisation's growth. Therefore, employers look for candidates with possible abilities to contribute to a company's growth using the information on their social media sites to establish their values, lifestyle and even cultural norms.

Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen (2013) present a different approach from that of the survey. According to Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen (2013) of the *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, an organisation also needs to present itself in good light to attract potential employees through its social media networks. An organisation is therefore required to build a uniquely identifiable recruiter/employer identity, resulting in an attractive employer brand that is sure to attract talented and top-notch employees. There are various ways described in the survey, which organisations can use to create unique and identifiable employer brands that will see the organisation attract only the suitable candidates for employment.

One of the ways of creating unique and identifiable employer brands is by creating and promoting a video showing what an organisation's life is like. A quality video with the right amount of content, which should be relevant, will attract interested employees who know they will be up to the task of performing at that level of professionalism. Mediocre

representations of an organisation will only attract average potential employees. Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen (2013) of the *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, therefore, indicates that it is important to focus on what organisations should put on social media networks in an attempt to attract great employees.

An organisation can also encourage its current employees to be advocates of their employer. Current employees painting a good image of the organisation online is likely to attract new employees as the company is seen as credible (Aaker: 2012). Getting likes and shares of an organisation's social media content, by its employees, creates an image that the organisation is reputable and working for it would be rewarding. Great potential employees would thus be attracted simply through proper employer branding. However, the fact that a company may have a good deal of likes and followers does not simply mean that the company is likely to be an employer of choice. It may mean that the company has a great employer branding committee who are good at getting employees to share their social media pages.

Peters (1999) describes 50 ways in which employees can be transformed into a brand that boasts passion, commitment, and uniqueness. Peters (1999) especially targets baby boomers as well as millennials. Peters (1999) provides guidelines on how baby boomers can learn to incorporate technology into branding and how millennials can use technology to their advantage since they are already familiar with its use. Social media offers a platform where individuals can display their talents, abilities, qualification and skills to attract employers. Peters (1999) distinctly shows that to gain meaningful employment, an employment-seeking individual should not only rely on who they know but also what potential employers know about them.

Peters (1997) encourages any person looking to gain meaningful employment to conduct an evaluation of their personal brand equity as this will enable one to know the relevant information that needs to put out there, such as in social media, for branding purposes, in an attempt to attract reputable employees. The author also gives an outline of what

information to put on social media, and in the right order, to avoid losing the attention of a potential employer. Peters (1997) also encourages employees to brand themselves by advertising rather than just giving information pertaining to their skills and qualifications. Advertising should however be done in an attractive and professional manner to avoid giving the wrong impression. Employers carefully scan and scrutinise social media profiles of potential employees; hence, nothing should imply that a person would be a risky hire. Similarly, disgruntled employees have the potential of tarnishing the name of an organisation by means of social media, and employers need to be wary of this especially when dismissing disgruntled staff.

2.7 Improve business in terms of brand engagement

Various scholars have gone on to point out key issues concerning social media and the ability of it to afford companies the opportunity of customer acquisition (Singh and Sonnenburg: 2012). Organisations operating for profit always have the primary objective of growing the revenues for each financial period. To do so, they must focus on activities that facilitate this activity. A strong example being customer acquisition. This critical process is found under the marketing activities of organisations. However, in this current digital age, marketing has had to adapt to some of the changes that have taken place in the global society such as the increase in human interaction over digital platforms (Labrecque, Vor Dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak and Hofacker: 2013). This brings in the issue of social media and how it is currently regarded as a critical asset to organisational marketing activities. Marketing activities - such as branding, advertising, and promotions among others - have proven compatible with social media and for this reason, these platforms have been used by many companies to carry out marketing activities, and the outcomes have largely been beneficial.

Branding is a key process in marketing as it helps a company distinguish its products and services from its competitors and in the process promote customer acquisition and loyalty (Singh and Sonnenburg: 2012). Identifying the role of social media in this process is not difficult when one understands the primary purpose of branding. For instance, social media

platforms are largely feasible owing to the volume of individuals interacting on them. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter have millions of users and this presents an opportunity for a company to carry out its branding activities (Labrecque et al.: 2013). Therefore, one of the major reasons why social media serves as an important platform for branding and other key marketing activities is the sheer number of people or users interacting on these platforms. To achieve outcomes such as brand recognition or equity, companies must expose themselves as much as possible to a large number of people and this can be easily achieved by taking advantage of elements such as social media.

Branding or brand engagement has the overall objective of improving business by increasing the customer base that a company has. This is built on the strong assumption that if a company can get its presence noticed in the society through approaches such as effective branding, it may eventually attract certain consumers who have not yet used their products or services. Therefore, regarding growing a company's customer base, social media serves a critical role in achieving this.

This process of branding is made up of three critical steps that companies - proficient in using social media for their branding activities - follow. These are: customer acquisition, conversion and retention (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis: 2014). All these serve an important role when it comes to both branding as well as enlarging a company's customer base:

- The first process simply brings the attention of an individual – who is not familiar with the company's products or services - to its brand. This is achieved through avenues such as paid advertisements on social media sites, blogs and videos. It is a critical step and must be approached well for it to be effective.
- The second step - according to Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) which is also crucial - is customer conversion. This entails getting the newly acquired consumer to try out the products and services offered by the company. This can still be done on the social media platforms since there are facilities that allow individuals to order goods online and ask for specifications among other purchasing process such as payment. Owing to this fact, this

decade has seen a continuous increase in online sales and some of this can be directly attributed to the use of social media by companies. This largely demonstrates how social media - when it comes to customer conversion - plays an essential role.

- Finally, the last step in this business-to-customer relationship involves customer retention, which is a critical success factor for any organisation that wishes to continue its operations (Laroche, Habibi & Richard: 2013). 'Customer retention' simply refers to the act of ensuring the consumer stays loyal to the company's brand (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege & Zhang: 2013). This is also another process which can be carried out effectively on social media platforms. Through initiatives such as loyalty programmes, gifts, as well as recognition, companies can seek to enhance loyalty in their consumers by, for example, when a company posts information on social media about its loyalty programme or rewards clients who post reviews, likes or tweets among other forms of social media activity (Laroche et al.: 2013). The above simply shows how companies employing social media find it beneficial for carrying out critical marketing activities (Malthouse et al.: 2013). All these point out to the important role that current digital platforms serve in ensuring the growth and relevance of business.

In addition to this, companies derive other marketing benefits by using social media. Previously, such activities were carried out through avenues such as traditional media forms like television, and print media among many others. One of the largest drawbacks associated with these platforms was that they were expensive and could only reach a limited audience (Evans: 2012). However, with the onset of social media companies can now reach the global society and this has been an active contributor to the worldwide growth of businesses (Evans: 2012). Therefore, the benefits accrued by companies by using social media include cost-savings, reaching a wider audience, flexibility and being able to interact quickly and efficiently with others. All these point to the earlier mentioned premise of the use of social media for marketing activities having a beneficial effect on the companies that do so.

Chapter 3: Methodology and data collection

3.1 General introduction

Chapter 3 deals with the research methodology, rationale and empirical information required to answer questions around social media engagement of customers in the plant-rental industry. Punch (2005: p.5) refers to research as “an organised, systematic and logical process of inquiry”, using empirical information to answer questions. These research findings are based on observations, data collection, data analysis and interpretation.

The researcher decided to adopt an exploratory research design instead of a descriptive or causal research design. The reason for this is that an exploratory design can be used to clarify and define the nature of a problem (Zikmund et al., 2010; Babbie, 2011). Furthermore, it can be used to define a problem precisely in order to identify courses of action to be taken, to develop hypotheses as well as to establish priorities for further research (Malhotra: 2011).

When considering social media use in the plant-rental industry, and looking at the evidence from those using social media, there were general assumptions made, and general principles were induced from these findings. However, the literature review theory was tested by describing phenomena and validating these against conclusions flowing from these phenomena.

The researcher has adopted an abductive logic theory in terms of approach as the researcher has used a mix of inductive and deductive theory in developing the research methodology of choice – in this case a simple mixed methodology case study. The reason for adopting an abductive approach is owing to the nature of the topic since social media’s application in the plant-rental industry is fairly new, with little research having been done. An inductive theory was initially applied with principles emanating mainly from the business-to-consumer market being tested and applied to the plant-rental industry. Deductive theory was also applied as these principles were applied and then tested empirically.

The study aims to establish staff and customer opinions of social media engagement in the plant-rental industry. The research adopts a mixed methodology strategy, with qualitative and quantitative methods used in two population groups to provide feedback from customers and plant rental industry staff to answer the following research questions:

1. Can social media be used as a social listening tool for establishing customer loyalty levels, specifically using the NPS?
2. Can social media networks be used effectively to build new and existing relationships with customers and staff?

3. Can social media be used as a channel to attract future employees and position the company as an employer of choice?

This research use two types of methodologies: qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The focus of this research is on the activities on social media of Rand-Air's staff and customers in the Gauteng region.

Data reliability, validity and ethics are also discussed later in the chapter.

3.2 Qualitative and quantitative research approaches

Before deciding on a mixed methodology for this research, the differences between qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods are considered and compared below in Table 3:

Criteria	Qualitative method	Quantitative method	Mixed method
Goal/Aim	Broad hypothesis and exploratory	Focused or narrowed idea, and conclusive	Elements of both
Usage	Early phase of research	Later phase of research	Both
Data-gathering	Structured or non-structured interviews, observations, focus group narratives, etc.	Surveys, questionnaires, measurements, and other equipment for numerical information	Some elements of both
Type of data	Words (from interviews), images (videos), and objects (such as artefacts)	Tabulated data, expressed in numbers and statistics	Mixed

Approach	Subjective	Objective	Elements of subjectivity and objectivity
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Table 3 – Comparison of different research methodologies

A mixed methodology was chosen for this research because of its profound exploratory capability. Probing for customers' loyalty, social media followership, and the attraction of future employees will entail adopting both subjective and objective approaches, which is the main nature of mixed methodology (Creswell: 2013).

3.3 Interviews for qualitative research

Some followers of Rand-Air on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn were selected for the interviews so as to explore the possibility of using social media as a medium for effective interaction, customer-loyalty building, and for attracting future employees.

The interviews consist of ten open-ended questions used to obtain facts and opinions of the interviewees' current and future interactions with Rand-Air.

The interview questions asked are drawn from the research questions, and are provided below:

1. What do you mainly use social media for?
2. Do you use your social media networks to build business relationships and, if so, which networks do you mainly use for this purpose?
3. In your business dealings with Rand-Air, do you use social media to find out more about the company before renting a compressor or generator?
4. Does the information on social media affect your decision about which company you would rent compressors or generators from? And if so, why?
5. What type of information would you like to see more of when accessing Rand-Air's content on social media?
 - a. Non-technical product information
 - b. Technical product information
 - c. Company and people news
 - d. Leadership and business developments
 - e. Industry news and developments in rental industry
 - f. Vacancies
 - g. Press releases

h. Feedback using the NPS

6. If you were considering Rand-Air as an employer, what type of information would motivate you to consider Rand-Air as an employer of choice?
7. Do you believe that social media networks can be used to attract future employees and to position the company as an employer of choice?
8. Do you use social media networks to express your satisfaction/ dissatisfaction with the rental company you have just used?
9. What are the advantages/ disadvantages of using social media in your opinion?
10. Can you name a plant-rental company which you are familiar with that makes effective use of social media? Could you indicate why you feel that this company effectively uses social media?

3.4 Population for qualitative research

The population for this research was selected from a sample of the company's customer base that follows the Rand-Air brand on LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. The population sample is therefore purposive as these customers are assumed to be already involved in social media, and were selected because they follow Rand-Air on social media channels. They were supplied with 10 survey questions that unpack the depth of their engagement with the company's brand.

3.5 Sampling

The sampling approaches adopted for both the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies are highlighted below.

3.5.1 Sampling for qualitative research

About 20 customers who follow Rand-Air on above-mentioned social media platforms were invited to participate in the interview. Seven interviews were conducted telephonically.

In order to get feedback from customers already involved in social media, a purposive or selective sampling method of Rand-Air's customer base was conducted. This meant that a complete list of followers on social media was extracted and compared against a list of current Rand-Air customers who had rented from the company within the last six months. This ensured that these followers of the Rand-Air brand were involved in social media, and had experience of using the organisation's service.

3.5.2 Sampling for quantitative research

A survey - consisting of 15 questions - was conducted using Survey Monkey. This was sent out to all 77 of Rand-Air's staff members via email. A total of 28 responses were received.

3.6 Sample method

Purposive sampling was employed for the qualitative survey because it gave a sample population of customers who had knowledge of both social media as well as the rental organisation. This meant that these people are the most qualified to give an overview of engagement of Rand-Air customers on social media platforms. Purposive sampling was also chosen because it can reach a targeted sample quickly, is flexible and meets the needs of the survey methodology, which is to assess the depth of engagement of customers with the Rand-Air brand.

A census was conducted to all Rand-Air staff, with an email targeting all 77 staff to complete the survey via Survey Monkey.

3.7 Questionnaires

Two different types of questionnaires were designed.

3.7.1 The staff questionnaire

The questionnaire for this research dig deeper into staff's online behaviour, the benefits of using social media, the use of applications, and access to information. This was compared with the staff questionnaire conducted by AC in 2014, which merely investigated the use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn with regard to the company's media publicity.

There are 15, open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The questions explore the staff's social media expertise or their familiarity with social media. Their online behaviour was investigated as was personal information about social media usage and use of Internet applications.

The staff questionnaire was created in Survey Monkey and a link to the survey was sent via e-mail to all staff. The researcher explained the purpose of the survey, and a deadline was given within which to complete it.

The researcher initially received a low response rate with less than five responses in the first day. The researcher allowed seven days for the survey to be completed, and then sent an e-mail two days before the deadline to remind everyone to complete the survey. The

researcher also sent an e-mail to thank those who had taken the time to complete the survey.

3.7.2 The customer questionnaire

The customer questionnaire – which was conducted through a 15-minute telephonic interview to seven followers of the Rand-Air brand on LinkedIn - investigates customer opinions about social media use, what type of methods were best to reach (and engage with) them, as well as investigating their opinions about their favourite social media platforms, and when these were accessed.

The customer questionnaire was first tested with the researcher's colleague before the interviews took place. No changes were required to be made.

The interview began with the interviewer starting the conversation with a personal introduction as well as an introduction to the purpose of the call. He also advised the Rand-Air customer that their details had been collected from LinkedIn as well as Rand-Air's customer relationship management system so that the customer was aware of how they were contacted, and that they felt secure the interviewer was indeed a representative of Rand-Air. This put the customer at ease in answering the survey. The interviewer then proceeded with the mainly open-ended questions.

Those customers who agreed to participate in the survey were open and honest in their feedback, even though they had busy schedules with many of them involved in engineering, maintenance and production functions. The interviewer reported that those who agreed to the interview were advised that the process would not take longer than 15 minutes and in all cases the interviews were completed within the stipulated time.

The 2013 and 2015 customer questionnaires targeted the extent of customer satisfaction when using social media and looked into the process of using social media in market segments such as mining, government, construction, petrochemical, power/energy and engineering. The areas investigated were Johannesburg, Pretoria, the Free State, Cape Town, Middleburg, and KwaZulu-Natal. The 2015 questionnaire covered newer types of social media such as Instagram, blogs and others that had not been investigated in 2013.

3.8 Pilot study

A pilot study – for the quantitative survey - was conducted with three colleagues, with a request for them to provide constructive criticism. A sample version of the survey was sent via e-mail for completion via Survey Monkey. All 3 of the pilot respondents completed the online

survey with no issues experienced. One of the respondents gave a suggestion of adding a question related to ranking of social media platforms used, which the researcher added.

The outcome of the pilot study was that the survey questions could be completed within a short space of time (less than 10 minutes) and that the questions were relevant, valid and that the links to the survey worked.

A pilot study for the qualitative survey was done with one of the researcher's colleagues to make sure that the survey made sense. There were no changes to be made, and it was decided to continue with the qualitative survey.

3.9 Data analysis

As indicated above, the qualitative survey was conducted telephonically and the results were transcribed for later analysis that involved checking the feedback for common themes and highlighting comments and suggestions. The data obtained from this research was tabulated and presented in bar graphs and pie charts.

The quantitative survey was conducted electronically and data analysis for this involved collecting the data via the online research portal, Survey Monkey. The analysis involved graphically representing the information in pie charts, bar graphs and analysing the trends, and highlighting any comments.

3.10 Measures/instruments for data collection

Some instruments for data collection were used in this research, as detailed below.

3.10.1 Quantitative survey

For the quantitative survey, as indicated previously, Survey Monkey was used as the portal to create the online survey. A link to this was sent out to all 77 of Rand-Air's staff members. The portal allowed the research to track which e-mail addresses had completed the survey, and those which still required completion. The researcher used the online portal to send reminders and thank you e-mails to those who had completed the survey. There were 28 individuals, in total, who completed the survey.

3.10.2 Qualitative survey

The qualitative surveys were conducted telephonically and the conversations were transcribed by the interviewer. The data collector in this case was the interviewer, a colleague of the researcher, who contacted the customers from a list which the researcher provided. The

transcribed notes were e-mailed to the researcher by the interviewer as soon as the surveys were completed. There were seven respondents in total who completed the qualitative survey.

The researcher did not conduct any face-to-face interviews owing to time constraints and the inconvenience of getting customers from the industry in for the interviews. Owing to the nature of the study, it was deemed acceptable that the interviews be conducted telephonically.

3.11 Validity

The concept of validity means that a relational measure is valid to the extent that it actually measures what it is intended to measure (Wasserman and Faust: 1994). In other words, the validity of the research is measured according to whether it gives a true picture of reality.

In the case of social media in the plant-rental industry, the research design was such that it included the main stakeholders of the business, customers and staff, and sought to get an understanding of how they engage with the brand in order to build customer loyalty, gain information regarding products and services, seek future employment and interact in general with the company. The sample populations selected for the surveys are representative of the larger group of customers and staff, so the surveys can be considered to be valid in giving a true picture of the larger population of stakeholders involved in the plant-rental industry.

Also, according to Baumgarten (2013), adopting mixed methods is a good way to achieve a high degree of validity, in the sense that there is no conflict of interests in over-dependence on a paradigm, whether it is a positivist or pragmatic view.

3.12 Reliability

Reliability of the measurements can be defined as the accuracy of the results in terms of if the surveys are to be repeated in a similar successive group, would similar results be achieved.

The research design conformed to accuracy levels by ensuring that only Rand-Air customers and staff involved in social media were questioned so as to give an accurate overview of these stakeholders.

Baumgarten (2013) is of the opinion that with a high degree of validity comes a deserved reliability. This shows that the outcomes of the research are both subjective and objective because of the mixed methods employed.

3.13 Triangulation

The researcher has used a mixed method approach in this study, and one of the ways in which to converge different measurement methods is to use triangulation. Cohen and Manion

(2000:p254) define 'triangulation' as an "attempt to map out, or explain fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying from it from more than one standpoint."

Methodological triangulation involves using more than one method to gather data. In this research, the researcher uses quantitative interviews, a qualitative questionnaire and supporting surveys which had been done within AC. The validation of both the quantitative and qualitative data is supported by these supporting surveys conducted by AC, as well as by a third party market research company in 2013 and again in 2015. The results of these surveys are discussed further in Chapter 4.

3.14 Bias

'Bias' can be defined as any tendency which prevents unprejudiced consideration of a question, and in this case - since the researcher is employed as the marketing manager of the organisation and is responsible for the marketing communications of the Rand-Air brand on social media - it was assumed that colleagues and customers would be reluctant to give honest feedback about their use and engagement of social media. The reason for this is that the topic involves use of a personal nature, i.e. posting of pictures and updates of family and personal opinions and views. Bias in this sense was avoided as it was explained - by means of an e-mail to staff - that the information would be kept anonymous and the purpose of the study was to give insight to the use of social media in order to engage with customers, improve communication and ultimately build a new customer base. The quantitative survey was well received and staff gave honest feedback.

In the case of the qualitative survey, bias was avoided by using a neutral party to conduct the interviews. This individual still explained the reason for the survey, that the information would be kept anonymous and would not be used in any way to harm the customer's reputation.

3.15 Ethical considerations

The following ethical considerations were kept in mind during the course of this research:

1. Staff and customers voluntarily participated in the surveys and interviews.
2. There is a great deal of informed consent, meaning that each participant understands the purpose of the research.
3. The issue of confidentiality was handled professionally. This is why the surveys and interviews were conducted anonymously.

4. There are no risks associated to this research which means that staff will not lose their jobs for being candid about their company during the interviews or surveys.
5. The customers were not compelled to keep using Rand-Air's services after the research.

3.16 Conclusion

The mixed methodology is ideal for this research because it allows both the staff and customers of Rand-Air to voice out their opinions freely. Efforts were made to adhere to the above ethical considerations so as to produce results that are valid and reliable.

Chapter 4: Research findings and analysis

4.1 General introduction

For the purpose of investigating Rand-Air's engagement with customers and staff, a case study into social media was conducted. The qualitative and quantitative research findings from two population groups were used to provide feedback from customers and plant rental industry staff in order to answer the following questions:

1. Can social media be used as a social listening tool for establishing customer loyalty levels, specifically using the NPS?
2. Can social media networks be used effectively to build new and existing relationships with customers and staff?
3. Can social media be used as a channel to attract future employees and position the company as an employer of choice?

The research, survey and interview questions were informed by the research objectives as well as the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

4.2 Data analysis

These are the most common types of analyses done for surveys are descriptions, relationships, comparisons and predications (Fink: 1995). These will be discussed in this chapter.

The trend of Rand-Air customers and non-customers on social media has been decreasing. This is compared with the results of a quantitative survey conducted in 2013, with the same survey repeated in 2015 (Figure 8). These results prompted the researcher to conduct his own surveys among customers, and the data is presented in this chapter.

	2013				2015			
	Total	Customer	Non - Customer	Percentage of Total	Total	Customer	Non - Customer	Percentage of Total
TOTAL	254	198	56		151	111	40	
Facebook	45	33	12	18%	16	10	6	11%
Twitter	15	12	3	6%	3	3	-	2%
Linkedin	17	12	5	7%	17	12	5	11%
Bloggs	3	3	-	1%	2	2	-	1%
Other	14	13	1	6%	7	6	1	5%
None	189	148	41	74%	115	86	29	76%
Youtube					3	3	-	
Instagram					2	2	-	

Figure 8 – Comparison of supporting quantitative results 2013 vs 2015

4.2.1 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis of the staff survey involved interpreting the data and coming to meaningful conclusions with regard to how it relates to relationships with the company, as well as how these relationships would impact the organisation. One of the challenges encountered in analysing the quantitative data included finding the trends and common themes between the quantitative data and the qualitative data.

4.2.2 Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis of customers involved finding common trends with regard to feedback and highlighting interesting or common answers. When analysing the qualitative data, the challenges encountered included interpreting the information and presenting this information in a meaningful way. Another challenge was knowing when to exclude information which did not relate to the survey objectives.

4.2.3 Description of the survey

The quantitative survey was sent out to all 77 staff members at Rand-Air. They were asked the following questions in order to put the perspective of the person completing the survey into context: their age, gender, highest education level and decision-making level in the organisation. None of the questions were mandatory, however most people completed all the questions.

The results of these questions are shown below in Figures 9 – 12:

Q1: Please indicate your age?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0

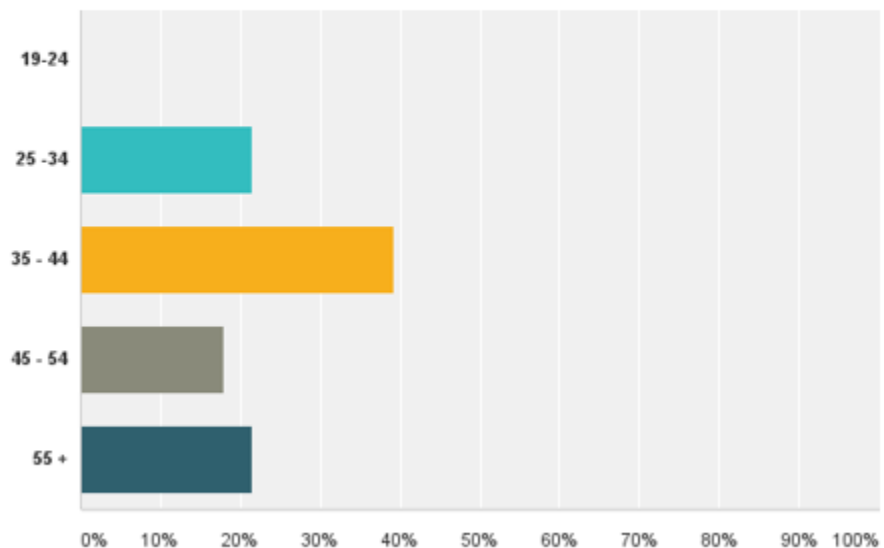


Figure 9 – Age of the respondents

Respondents were asked their age so that the researcher could evaluate the general age of the staff involved in social media. The average age of the quantitative survey completed by staff is 35-44 (Figure 9), which is surprising to the researcher as one of his assumptions was that the younger age group (25-34) would be more active on social media. This is a positive sign as it indicates that social media is becoming more accepted among the middle-aged generation.

Q2: Gender

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0

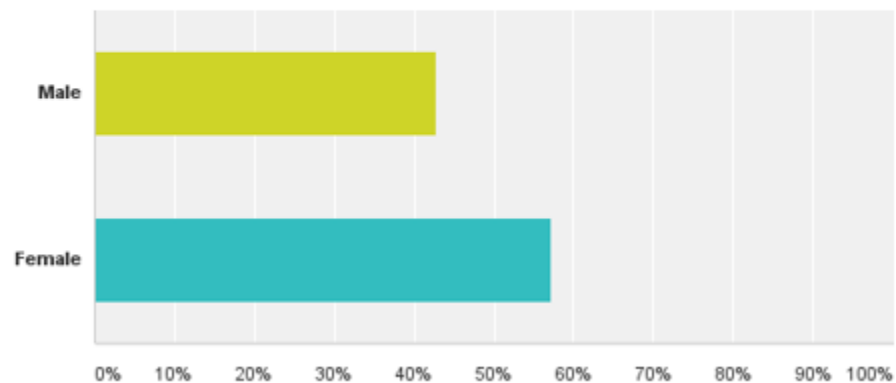


Figure 10 – Gender of the respondent

Also worth noting is that the majority of the respondents (almost 60%) completing the quantitative survey are female (Figure 10). This is interesting because it may indicate that men are less interested in engaging with colleagues and friends on social media networks.

Q3: Please indicate your highest education level

Answered: 27 Skipped: 1

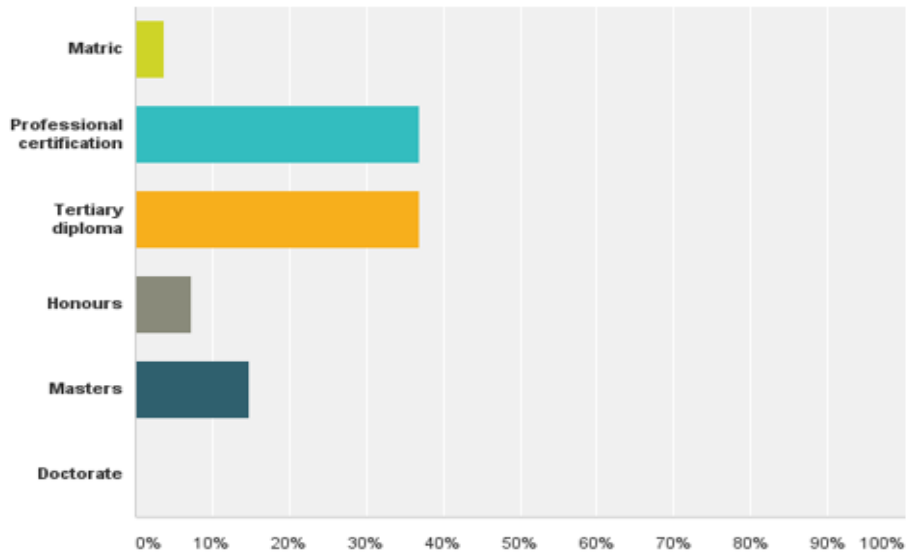


Figure 11 – Highest education level of the respondent

Another point, which is interesting, is that the staff mainly on social media have a professional qualification or higher as shown in Figure 11. This reflects general overview of the company which has similar education levels.

Q4: Your decision-making level in the company?

Answered: 27 Skipped: 1

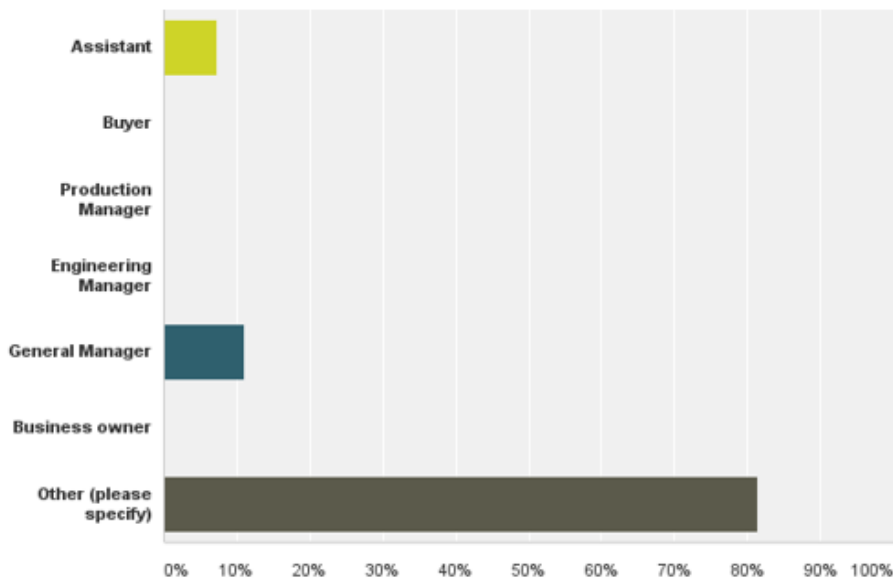


Figure 12 - Decision-level making level in the company

The decision-making level in the company (Figure 12) is a good indicator of the seniority of the people involved in social media, and 80% of the staff involved in social media activities are non-management. This is fairly high and the researcher expected the percentage of staff versus management ratio to be lower.

4.3. Analysing the research questions

The survey questions were analysed individually and compared to the objectives of the study as well as to the literature review. The three general themes which were created in the survey relate to customer loyalty, engagement with the brand to build new and existing relationships with customers and staff, and using social media in order to attract employees and position the brand as an employer of choice.

4.3.1 Establishing customer loyalty levels

Research question 1: Can social media be used as a social listening tool for establishing customer loyalty levels, specifically using the NPS?

Customer loyalty levels are built on a number of factors, some of which are highlighted below.

According to Reicheld (2006), the higher the percentage of customers expressing satisfaction in a company's products and services, the greater their loyalty will be to that company.

In the **qualitative** survey, Question 8 deals with whether customers would express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the rental company they have just used. The results of this are shown below in Figure 13, with four out of the seven customers agreeing that they would use social media to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the rental company which they had just used. However, two of those who did not wish to express their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the rental company expressed that "they would prefer to directly communicate with the company/ employee in question".

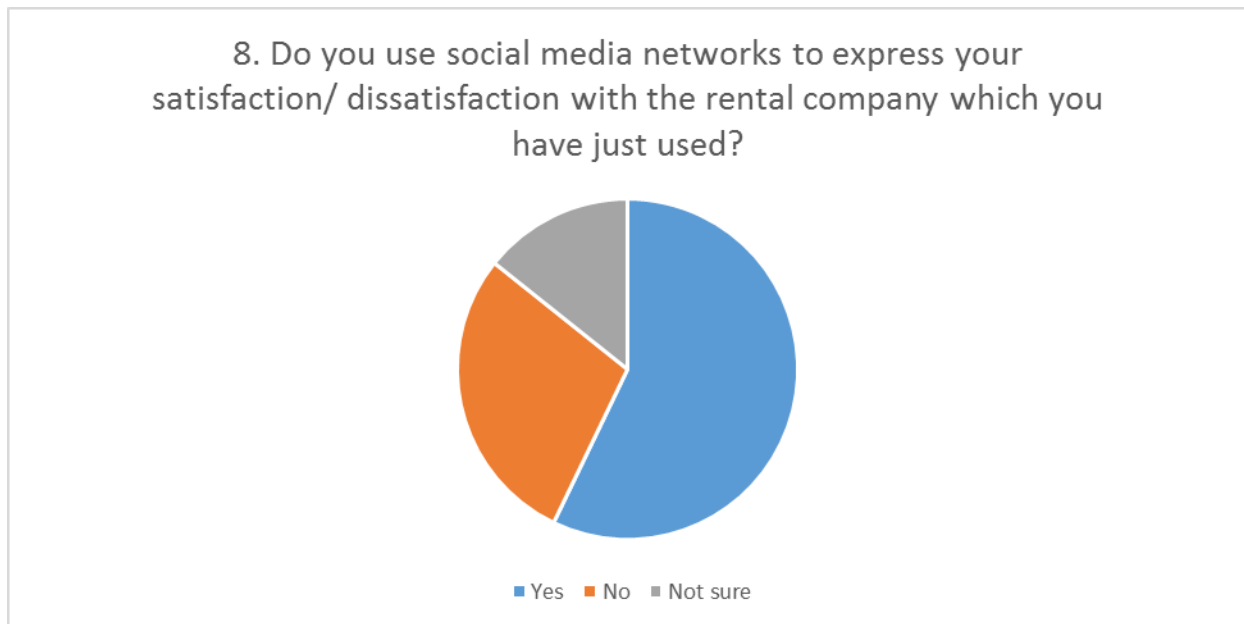


Figure 13 – Expression of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction by customers of rental company using social media networks

The same question was posed to Rand-Air staff in the **quantitative** survey, in other words whether they would express their satisfaction/dissatisfaction about the rental company. The results are shown in Figure 14 below. It is clear that the majority would not use social media to influence their employer negatively, however this may be different if the individual is no longer employed by the company. In fact, if the employee was dismissed or left under negative circumstances, they may use social media to express their anger. The researcher was therefore indifferent about the results for this question as there was no commonality between the qualitative and quantitative surveys for this question.

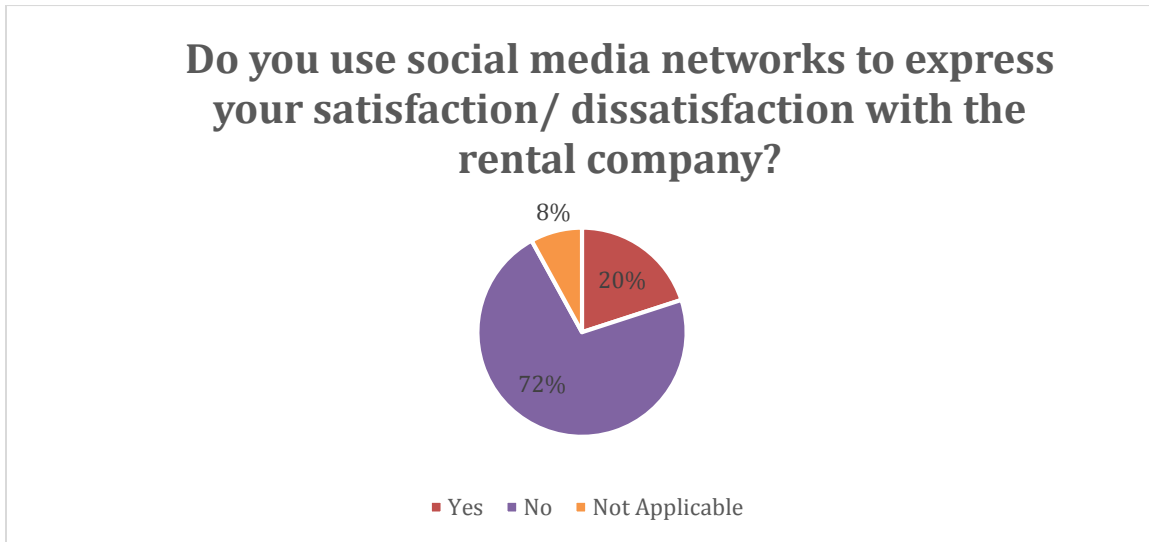


Figure 14 – Staff expressing dissatisfaction with rental company

Staff were then asked whether they would use social media to refer Rand-Air to friends and followers on social media. The results of this question are shown below in Figure 15.

How likely is it that you would refer Rand-Air to your social media friends using Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In or Youtube?

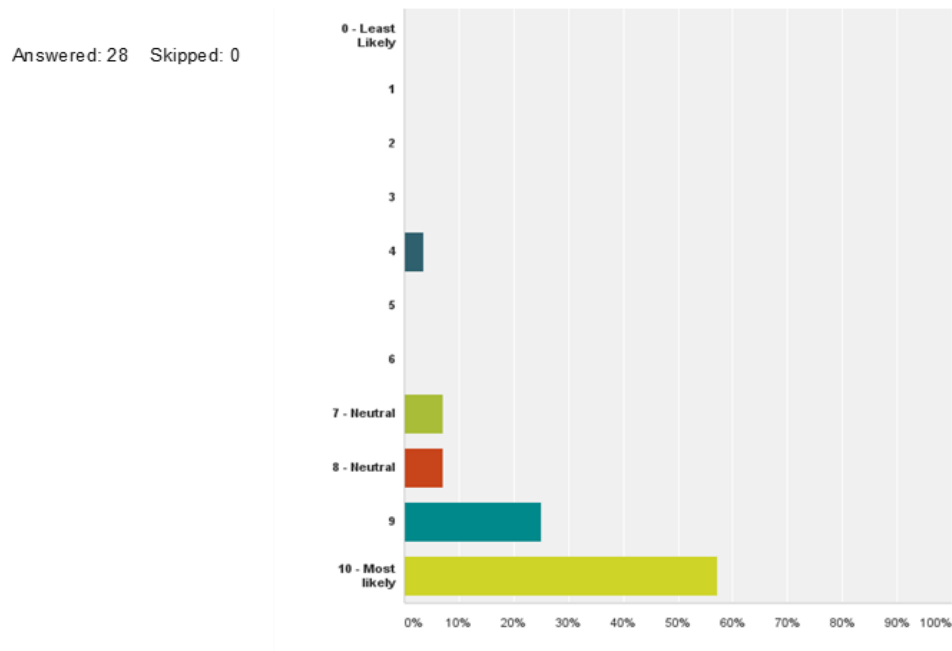


Figure 15 – Likelihood of referring Rand-Air using social media

The results of the **quantitative** survey were convincingly high showing that Rand-Air staff would refer their company to friends and followers on social media, with 58.62% of them rating a 10 on the Likert Scale. The response rate was also fairly high with 28 out of 77 staff completing the survey. The results of all three surveys indicate that staff and customers would use social media to express their satisfaction to their friends on social media.

Also in line with customer loyalty, Question 10 of the **qualitative** survey asked customers whether they knew of a rental company which made effective use of social media, in their opinion, and if so why did they answer this? Out of the seven respondents, four of them answered that they also use and follow other plant rental companies such as Talisman, Atlas Plant Hire and Coastal Tools.

The researcher further validated this information by means of triangulation and comparing the information from the **quantitative** survey where staff were asked whether they felt that social media would affect their decision about which rental company they would rent compressors or generators from. The results from this question are plotted below in Figure 16 with 20% of the respondents saying that their decision - as to which company to rent compressors or generators from - would be influenced by social media. Although this is not a high percentage, it does give an indication that social media would influence a customer's decision as to which company they should use. This common trend among staff and customers is an indication that there is a link between referral of a rental company and the likelihood that this individual would engage with the plant rental company on social media platforms. However, there is still some uncertainty related to whether staff would use social media to express their dissatisfaction on social media channels should that staff member be dissatisfied with the company.

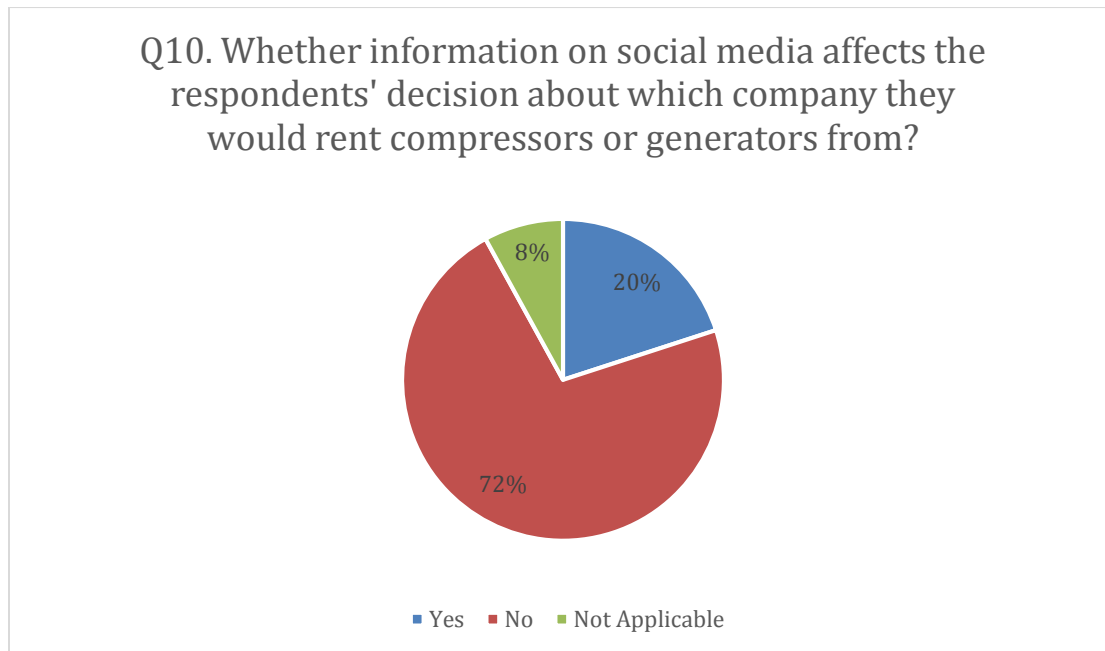


Figure 16 - Whether information on social media would affect decision-making

In keeping with the theme of loyalty, Question 4 of the **qualitative** survey asked whether the information on social media affected the social media follower about which rental company they would rent compressors or generators from and, if so, why.

The results from this varied, with five of the respondents stating that their decision as to which rental company to use would be influenced by comments (positive or negative) made on social media as well as a professional image of that rental company. There were two respondents who said that their decisions as to which rental company to use would not be influenced by social media, and one of the comments given in the survey was as follows: “Comments given on social media are not always fact, sometimes opinion of the customer.” This highlights the fact that not everything which is posted on social media is truth and that the majority of the public have an opinion that is not necessarily correct.

The results from the questions in this survey relating to customer loyalty gave the same information as the literature review, in other words that those customers and staff who follow the Rand-Air brand on social media channels are more likely to engage with the brand, however they may not always act as ambassadors of the brand. This being said they definitely seek

information on social media channels before making a decision, and this ultimately would influence customer loyalty.

4.3.2 Analysing relationship-building with customers and staff using social media

Research question 2: Can social media networks be used effectively to build new and existing relationships with customers and staff?

A great deal of the information presented above reveals an encouraging trend in the level and quality of relationship between Rand-Air and its customers and staff. The high frequency of social media engagement shows that the customers and staff are always in the habit of connecting with the company and freely expressing their satisfaction with its services.

From the **qualitative** survey, it is very interesting to notice that more than 80% of the respondents use social media to obtain some important information about a service/product, with most customers wanting to see more product information on social media, and one commenting that they would like to see company and people news updated on social media. Reflecting on this idea, it is possible to postulate that 86% of Rand-Air's customers are constantly exploring new information about the company's compressor rental services. This population represents, to a certain degree, the most loyal customers, and they frequently use social media to obtain the latest information about their desired plant rental requirements.

The above information is validated by the literature review presented in Chapter 2. Specifically, Rappaport (2011) emphasises that social media listening is an invaluable resource for marketing the organisation's products and services. This means that plant-rental companies can use social media to establish the type of information which customers frequently speak about, or request information about. This is established in Question 5 of the qualitative survey. According to the results of the survey (shown in Figure 17), the following areas are highlighted as important information which customers are interested in.

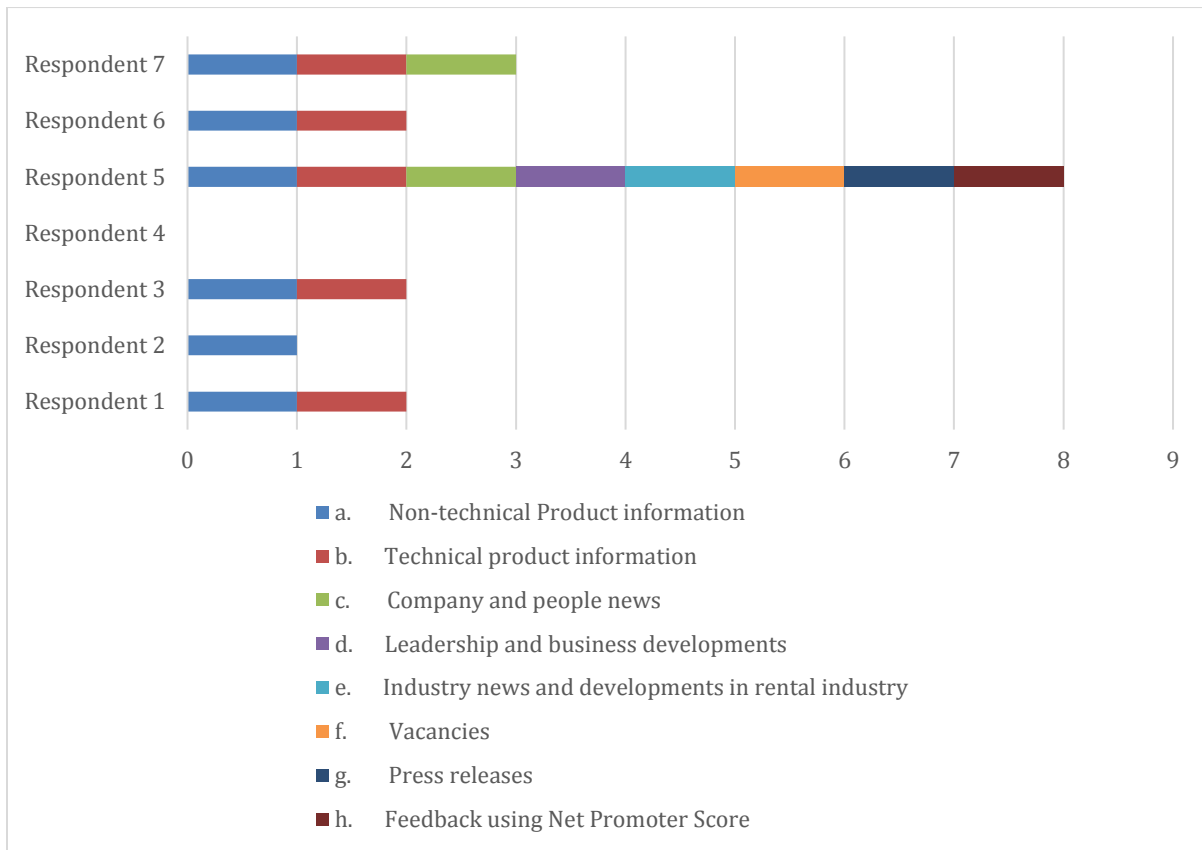


Figure 17 - Information which customers are interested in seeing on social media

Based on the feedback, most customers (six out of the seven surveyed) are interested in seeing non-technical product information on social media as well as technical product information. Some customers also commented that they would like to see more new products, and one respondent commented that he was interested to see staff development, the company's fleet size and how Rand-Air does business.

Customers in the plant-rental industry definitely use social media as a source of information with over 80% of them indicating - in Figure 18 below - that social media is seen as an important source of information about the rental company.

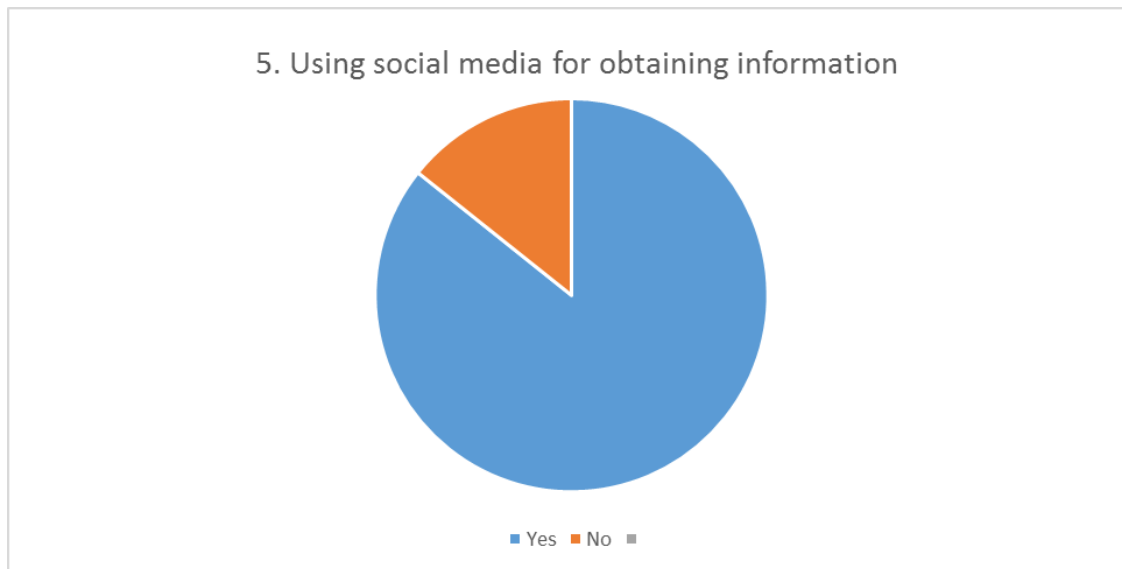


Figure 18 – Customer's using social media for obtaining information

When looking at staff usage of social media in the quantitative survey, the graph below in Figure 19 indicates that more than 20% of the respondents use social media as a source of information. When compared to the responses from customers via the qualitative survey (shown in Figure 20), 29% of customers indicated that they use social media for business purposes and mainly for networking. A total of 29% also displayed mixed use, for both personal and business reasons. It is also worth noting that more than 50% use social media at least daily, as shown in Figure 19.

Q9: What is your main use of social media?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0

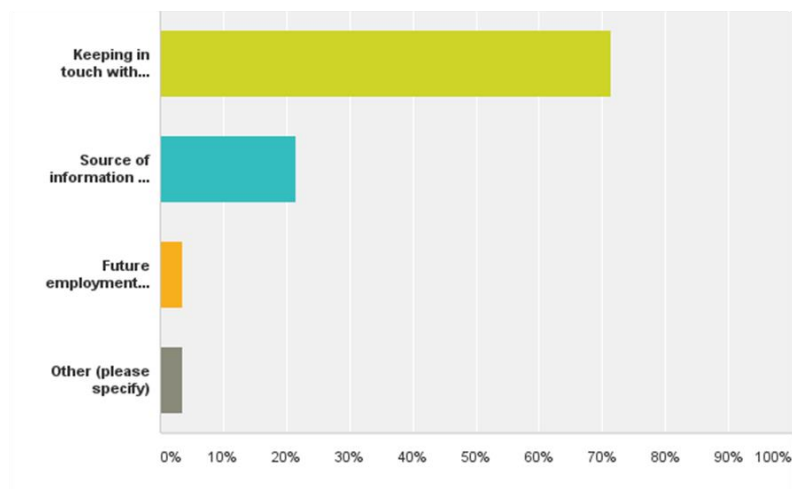


Figure 19 – Staff main use of social media

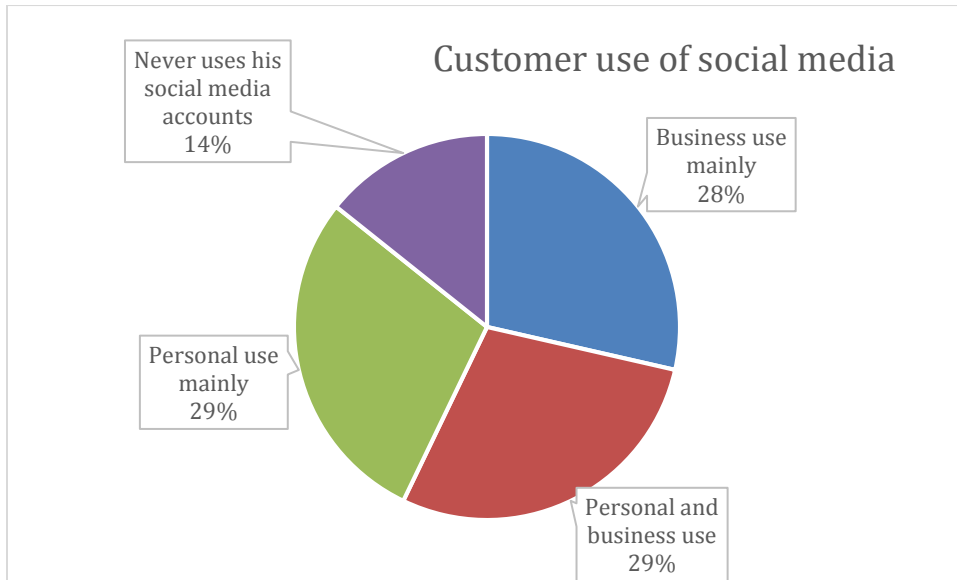


Figure 20 – Customer’s main use of social media

Q6: Frequency of use of social media:

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0

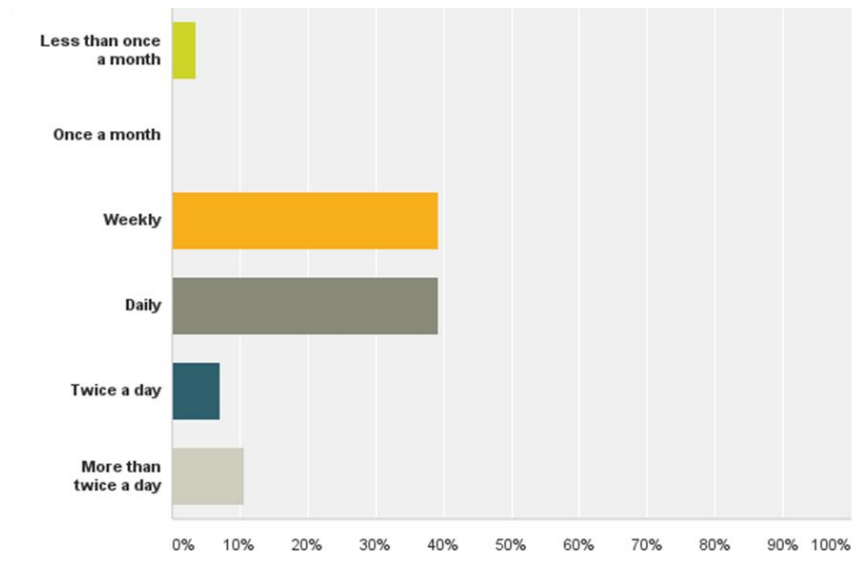


Figure 21 - Frequency of use of social media

The graph below in Figure 22 indicates that over 80% of respondents to the **quantitative** survey access their social media platforms in the evening, possibly after work. In the case of Rand-Air’s staff, going on social media after work to stay in touch with the happenings at their company is

a sign of robust customer loyalty. Not every employee wants to have anything to do with their company once they had finished work for the day.

Q7: The most frequent time which you access social media?

Answered: 28 Skipped: 0

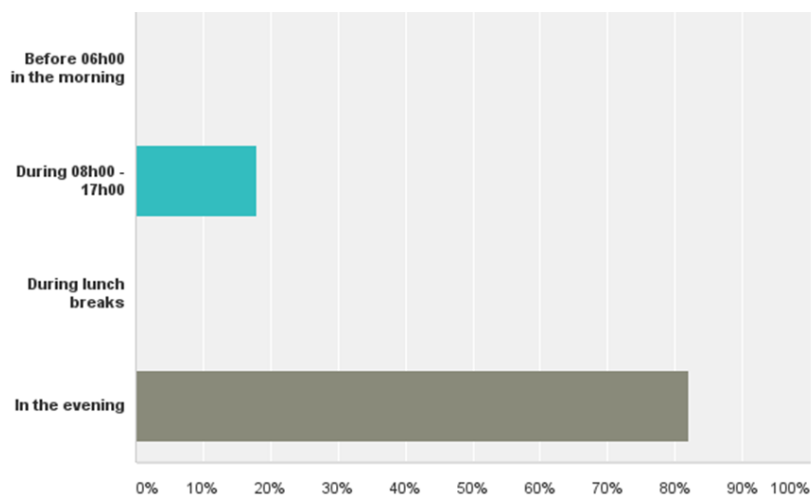


Figure 22 – Most frequent time accessing social media

Based on the information from customers in the **qualitative** survey - related to their use of social media - 29% of them use the platforms for business use mainly (Figure 20). When this is investigated further, of this 29% all of them used LinkedIn and one of the comments given is as follows: “Use LinkedIn for professional use”. This information is in line with the quantitative results from staff, where around 20% of them use social media platforms (also LinkedIn) to build business networks. This is shown in Figure 23 below.

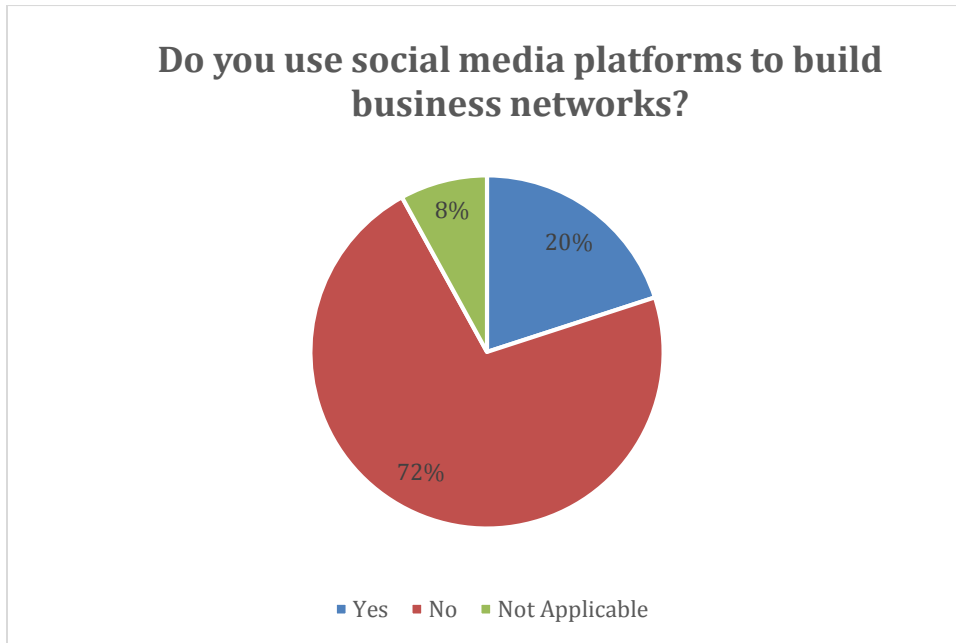


Figure 23 – Staff use of social media to build business networks

When staff were asked which social media platform was the best for connecting with business customers, the highest-ranked platform was Facebook, with LinkedIn being a very close second (Figure 24). The fact that LinkedIn is so high on the ranking is in line with what customers stated in their qualitative survey response. For business purposes - such as recruiting, connecting with customers and spreading the corporate brand – for the respondents, LinkedIn stood out among all other social media platforms

Facebook, on the other hand, is used mainly for connecting with the company's social and corporate journey. The story of a company's advancement is better told on Facebook where fans or followers (customers and staff) can freely interact with the content generated on the company's Facebook page.

Q15: Of the social media platforms used, which is the best platform in your opinion for connecting with business customers?

Answered: 18 Skipped: 10

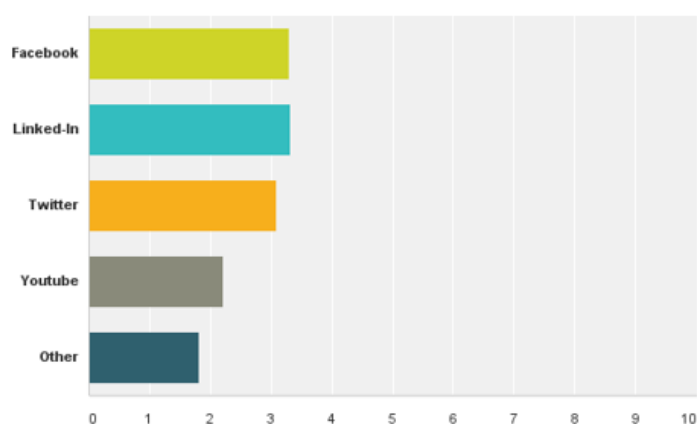


Figure 24 – Best social media platform used to connect with business customers according to staff

When it comes to engagement, staff of the rental company were asked their opinion of what the advantages and disadvantages are of being active on social media. Some of the responses given - and the advantages of being active on social media - were stated as follows:

“Keeping up with technology and information, keeping in contact with people in other countries and different industries, having contact with customers and passing on of information, showing charitable deeds, used to bring people together, assisting with research, is fairly inexpensive and can be used as a recruitment tool.”

Some of the disadvantages of being active on social media - according to staff - are that it can bring negative publicity to the organisation should it not be managed with clear guidelines to staff. One must be careful of what is posted as one's opinion regarding political views, religion

and race is not just seen as one's own but is linked to the company one works for and any associations one represents. Negative comments and opinions cannot always be controlled. One's privacy can be compromised and – as a result - the organisation's strategy is easily shown to competitors. One respondent gave some interesting comments that not everything which is read is true. A lot of the time it is general public sentiment, which may not be fact.

4.3.3 Analysing the use of social media as a channel for attracting future employees

Research question 3: Can social media be used as a channel to attract future employees and position the company as an employer of choice?

When Rand-Air customers were asked their opinion as to whether social media could be used as a channel to attract future staff, and position the company as an employer of choice, 75% agreed. This is shown in Figure 25 below.

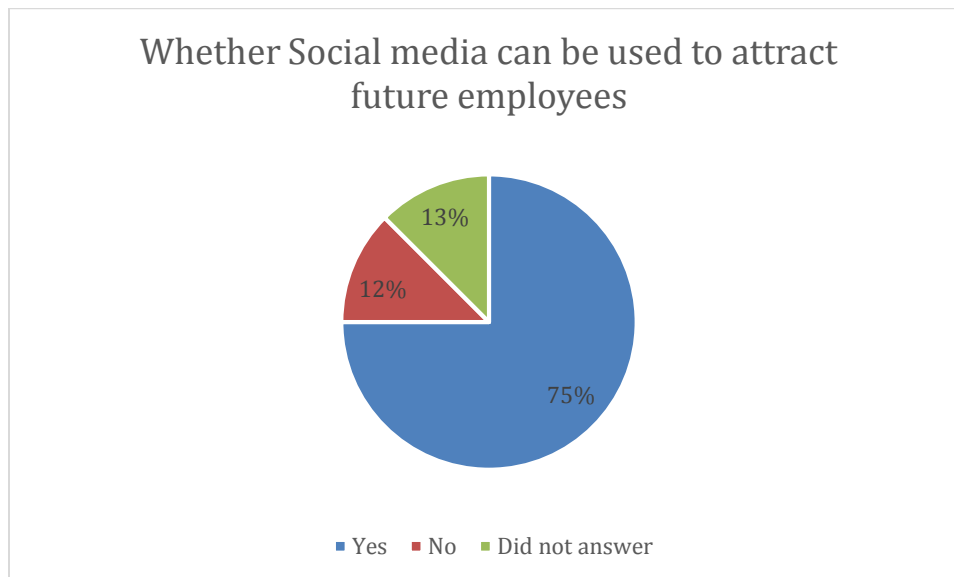


Figure 25 – Customer feedback as to whether social media can be used to attract future employees

When comparing this information with the literature review in Chapter 2, it is clear that customers are aware that the company's reputation on social media is crucial. Sivertzen, Nilsen

and Olafsen (2013) who advise that organisations pay as much attention to their own corporate image of the company as they do when they are interviewing a future employee.

When asking staff of the organisation about their opinion with regards to their use of social media, only 5% of them (Figure 19) advised that they use social media as a means for future employment for themselves. This response gave a different view to what customers and the general literature review gave. It is the researcher's opinion that Rand-Air staff are largely satisfied in the organisation and, in general, are not looking for other employment. This is based on a relatively high employee NPS over the years, as well as a fairly low staff turnover ratio in the industry. Another reason why the question received such a low score could be because the researcher may be seen as biased, as a result of him being a manager in the organisation. This bias is further explored in Chapter of the research.

Some of the comments received from the open-ended question - related to what was important when considering Rand-Air as an employer of choice - included good communication, demonstration of their customer and people centricity, demonstration of training and upskilling, diversity of gender and culture and their promotion of learning and growth. Other comments included providing a safe working environment, having a good reputation in the community, and offering opportunities for growth and development. One of the most interesting comments related to testimonials from employees - which would motivate them to seek employment with that organisation - relates to the referral question (Reichheld: 2016).

4.6 The most liked social media platforms

AC conducted an internal survey among communications professionals worldwide in the organisation to establish the social media platforms that are most actively used by these employees in the organisation. The results - which are shown below in Figure 26 - are fairly identical to those generated in the research findings, with the exception of YouTube which was not as popular among Rand-Air staff and customers. One of the reasons for this may be because Internet speeds, bandwidth and costs related to the Internet are much higher in South Africa

than in other parts of the world. The researcher believes that this trend will change as bandwidth becomes cheaper, faster and more accessible to the majority of South Africans.

Also, the use of media-rich platforms such as YouTube have not been fully exploited in South Africa, but this is a key area which the researcher as marketing manager wishes to improve on, based on the feedback of customers wishing to see more non-technical and technical product updates. One of the ways in which this can be improved is by using videos to support new product releases.

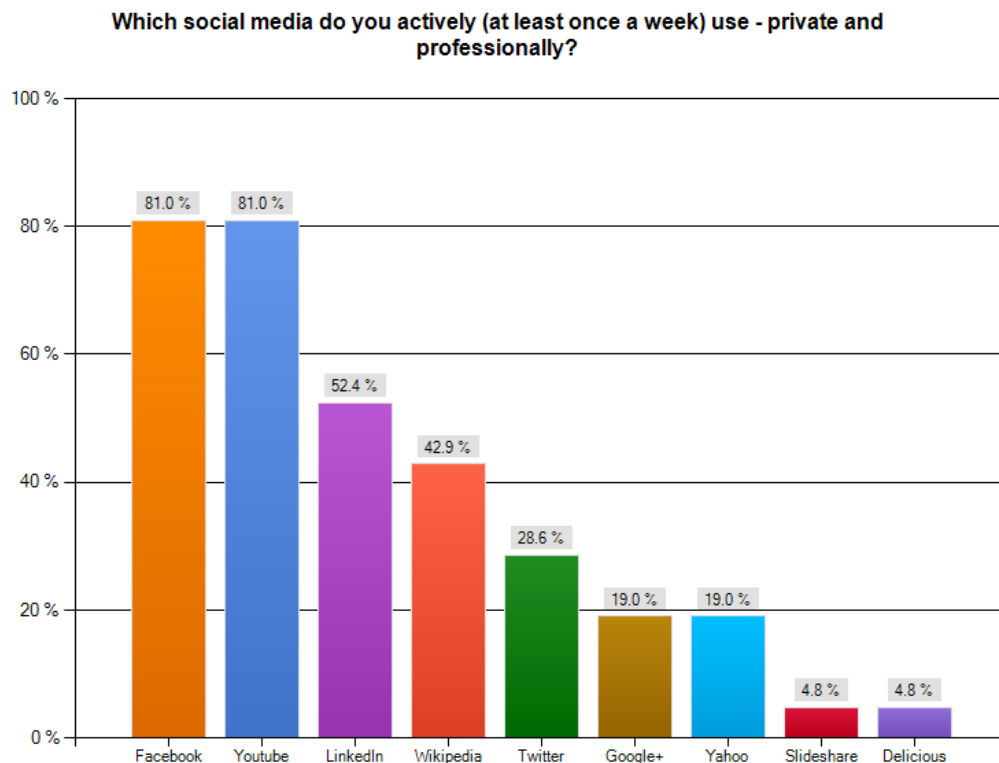


Figure 26 – Social media platforms most actively involved in by AC Staff

The staff were then asked which social media channels their customers were most active on (shown in Figure 27). As can be seen on the chart below, they are most active on Facebook, followed by YouTube, LinkedIn and then Twitter. These results are very similar to the research responses, apart from YouTube and Wikipedia.

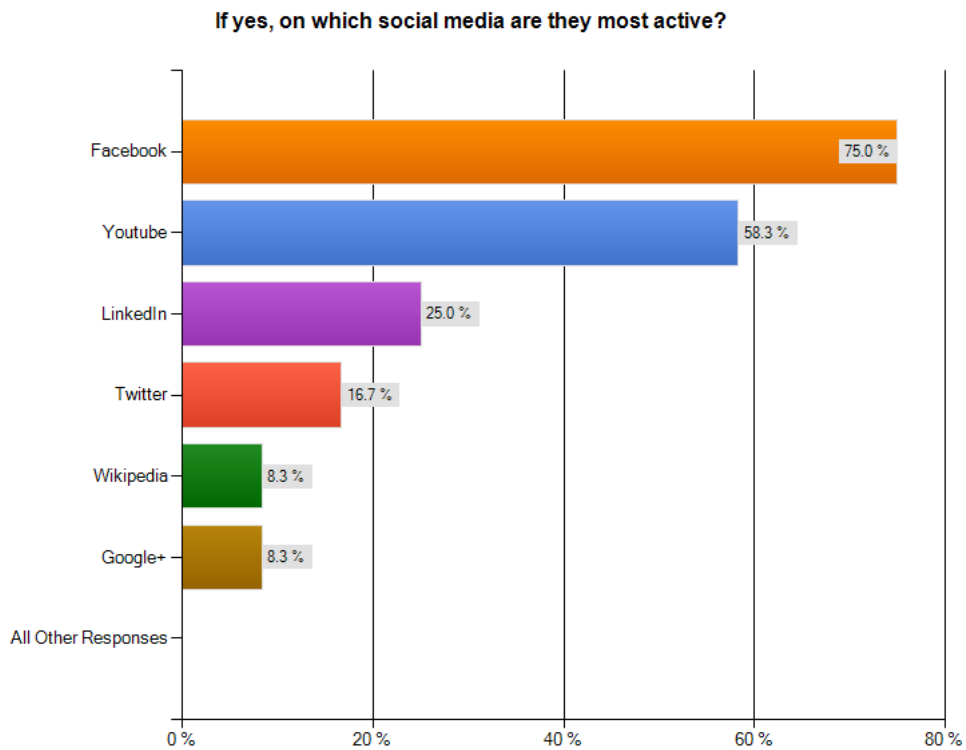


Figure 27 – Most active social media channels of customers according to AC staff

4.7 Conclusion

Based on the findings from the research and comparing the qualitative and quantitative surveys with the literature review, the research findings support the literature review in general. There are some instances, such as the staff use of social media for finding new employment via platforms such as LinkedIn, which differ from the literature review. The researcher will explore this further in Chapter 5 of the research.

One of the areas which have been highlighted for the researcher is the fact that staff will be attracted to an employer which shares and lives the same values as that of the individual. In line with values, it is also interesting that staff enjoy working for organisations which demonstrate their values - such as integrity - and communicate this to others within the

organisation and outside the organisation via platforms such as social media. The true power of social media comes when others start talking about how well things are done in an organisation using the referral power of social media.

Chapter 5 Summary, conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of social media as an engagement tool in the plant-rental industry. The following objectives were investigated:

1. Use social media as a social listening tool for establishing customer loyalty levels using the NPS.,
2. Use social media networks to build new and existing relationships with customers and staff, and
3. Use social media to attract employees, and position Rand-Air as an employer of choice.

The reason for the study is to solve the problem that there is a need for connecting and engaging with target market customers on an individual basis with focussed marketing tools which allow marketers - in the plant-rental industry - to separate their target audience by age, gender, occupation level and geographical area in order to adapt their marketing message to their unique needs. This would allow the plant rental company to be more relevant and measure their return on marketing investment, especially in a tough economic climate where all costs need to be reduced, and marketing to customers' needs to be done smarter.

The study also considered the dangers of social media as it is an open platform often with emotions attached and very little control is exercised by communications professionals in terms of handling emotions. One of the qualitative respondents commented about the disadvantages of social media is that it can be a venting platform for disgruntled ex-staff members which can be a deterrent for future staff.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 Social media as a tool for social listening and establishing customer loyalty levels by means of the NPS

Based on the feedback, Rand-Air customers do indeed use social media to engage with the company as a great number of social media users agreed that the information on social media would affect their decisions about which company they would rent compressors or generators from. This conclusion supports the literature review from Chapter 2 in that social media has been proven to be a loyalty-measuring tool in that one can measure customer's loyalty by observing their NPS and willingness to refer the organisation to their social media friends and followers.

Many of the respondents use social media for obtaining information about the plant-rental company, with many of them wanting to see more product information, both technical and non-technical updates, posted on social media.

Comparing this information with the staff referral question, it can be seen that the results were very high, with a NPS of around 78%. It is thus convincing that staff would use social media platforms to refer friends and colleagues to the plant-rental company.

5.2.2 Social media as a tool to build new and existing relationships with customers and staff

For Rand-Air customers, the research gives a good indicator of where the researcher needs to focus more in his role as marketing manager when it comes to social media.

Based on the feedback from customers, they would like to see more information on Facebook and LinkedIn related to product information, both technical and non-technical. There was also feedback given with regard to seeing more information about company and people news.

It is encouraging to note that Rand-Air staff are so actively involved in social media, and the large majority of them would refer Rand-Air to the social media friends and followers. As mentioned before, it is better for others to relay the success stories of the plant-rental company and in order to do this, the right environment needs to be created by management to facilitate staff relaying the organisation's success stories in the digital space.

The research findings also support the literature review in that social media can indeed be used to build on existing relationships with customers, as well as staff, and can be used as a referral tool for building new business for the organisation.

5.2.3 Social media as a tool to attract employees and position Rand-Air as an employer of choice

Using social media to attract future employees would indeed be a viable option for companies such as Rand-Air operating in the plant-rental industry. This is based on the research - both from customers and staff - and there were useful comments received from the open-ended question related to what is important when considering Rand-Air as an employer of choice. These comments included having good communication, demonstration of their customer and people centricity, demonstration of training and upskilling, diversity of gender and culture and their promotion of learning and growth. Other comments included providing a safe working environment, having a good reputation in the community, and offering opportunities for growth and development.

The research supports the literature review findings in that social media can be used as a means of attracting new talent to the organisation if the correct and relevant positioning is done to attract the right talent required.

The feedback from staff and customers also gives the researcher relevant information and topics to plan for future social media content.

The following was uncovered after completing the research:

- The assumption of younger generation being more active in plant rental industry population was tested, however it is the 35-44 age group who are the most active on social media.
- Social media platforms offer much more than connecting with industry peers or colleagues. One has the ability to connect with customers and use it as a prospecting tool for find new business and really drill down to individual levels in a specific market segment or target market.
- LinkedIn also allows individuals to track their competitor activity and monitor which functions they are investing in that give an indication on their competitor strategy. This information can be used to anticipate future strategies and activity.

5.3 Limitations

The researcher would have liked to have had a greater number of qualitative responses, however many of those approached on social media were reluctant to be involved in the survey, possibly because they view social media as only having a use in the business-to-consumer market. Another reason may be that they view social media as only having personal uses.

5.4 Recommendations for Rand-Air

5.4.1 Short-term recommendations

In order to develop the NPS index further, more investigation is required for adapting measures to engage with customers in the plant-rental industry specifically in the following areas:

- **Availability** of the correctly sized compressors and generators in the right location,
- **Responsiveness** of staff to the needs of rental customers,
- **Reliability** of staff with regard to the technical needs of customers and their ability to answer customers' questions,

- **Responsiveness** in terms of time to get customers' technical requirements corrected in terms of breakdown of hired plant, and
- **Assurance** in terms of giving customer's peace of mind, the staff's ability to answer questions and whether the customer believes that staff act with integrity.

The above measures are adapted from the SERVQUAL relationship model by Zeithaml (1990), and can be used on social media after a rental contract to assess the state of the customer's satisfaction with the plant-rental company. Further investigation is required to assess the feasibility of adapting the above measures to fit the social media platform, as well as to reach the correct target audience.

With regard to social media listening and engaging with stakeholders, company guidelines and principles should be set by a communications committee in large organisations such as AC, with an emphasis on creating the guidelines and giving staff access to the tools so that they are ambassadors of the brand, instead of limiting use. In this way managers and leaders in the company will encourage brand engagement with staff and customers so creating the environment for further engagement with staff and customers.

However, it is also important that guidelines be created around the do's and don'ts of engaging with stakeholders on social media. One of the ways AC has done this in the past is to create a social media guideline which is distributed to communications professionals globally. The researcher believes that this can further be developed as - if instead of creating this guideline which is only distributed to the communications professionals globally – a short acknowledgement of terms and conditions is created whereby the follower of the page agrees only to post information which is non-political, non-racial, not discriminatory in terms of disability or gender, and that the social media follower complies with the terms and conditions set by the organisation. This can also be communicated in a short video instead of written terms and conditions as the latter are normally overlooked.

5.4.2 Long-term recommendations

Research and development should take place with rental fleet managers getting in contact with customers so that there is a streamlined innovation process taking place. This has worked successfully in the business-to-consumer market with companies such as Nivea reporting massive success with new product launches owing to engagement via social media listening to understand what their customers want.

In order for the organisation to gain strategic input, one of the areas often neglected is feedback from customers. Using the NPS on social media platforms can assist organisations in gaining valuable input from rental customers. Customer feedback and input will affect the short-term and long-term strategy, however in the long term, one of the areas which companies interested in getting involved in social media should place emphasis on improving is linking their staff with customers using social media. This would involve keeping track of all their current customers in their CR system and provide those customers - who are already on social media - with live information. This will give a much better starting point for a new sales person who is - for example - contacting this customer for this first time. They will have better insight as to the likes and dislikes, hobbies and interests of the person without having to ask the customer for this information. This is one of the best ways a sales person would be able to do pre-call investigation without having to spend many hours on trying to get this personal information.

5.6 Implementation

In order to generate new business in the digital age, the results from the previous chapter's survey have shown that it is essential to communicate constantly with customers, not only to keep in close contact with existing customers but also to create and keep customers in the future. The other reason for this is to demonstrate and manage the image of the organisation so that it attracts the best employees in the marketplace.

It is important that an organisation such as Rand-Air has a digital plan which involves the complete digital sphere of stakeholders in the organisation. In a company such as Rand-Air this involves the advertising agency, PR agency, website designer and Good Adwords vendor and the focus of all of these should be to drive customer engagement with the organisation. This could mean driving online traffic to the website, action calls to get customers to contact the organisation or merely to get a call back request to get in contact with that customer.

5.6 Risks involved for the organisation

There are many risks in being a leader in the industry as it often involves learning from mistakes, and using customer feedback as the compass for strategy. In this sense, it is very easy for Rand-Air's plant-rental competitors to follow and imitate their social media strategy and do whatever the market leader has done. The key differentiator is keeping in close contact with customers and providing information which they seek so that there is no need to look at alternatives. This is a strategy which has worked for the organisation over the past 43 years.

Another risk involved with social media is the proven ability of social media to bring customers closer to the organisation. In this there is always a risk that the actions or opinions of one or more individuals can bring the company into disrepute by individuals airing their own personal biases and opinions. This is a risk which now exists with social media as everyone has the ability of connecting with someone regardless of their seniority or title, which means that companies have less control of the exact message or image which they wish to portray. This could be seen as an advantage or disadvantage, however it is important to train staff frequently to make them aware of the dangers of expressing or even aligning their opinions in the public space.

As with any tool there is also always the risk that staff will abuse social media and spend many hours on personal activities instead of prospecting, acting as ambassadors of the brand or

engaging with customers. This is one of the risks which would need to be managed and the perpetrators redirected to use social media responsibly, as most organisations no longer block social media platforms, as they can see the benefits of staff engaging with relevant business activities.

5.7 Resources required

As more people become involved in social media, it will become more of a requirement to implement a CRM system which is capable of combining the NPS process and CRM customer information with social media channel information per contact. One of the leading CRM systems, Salesforce, is already investigating this and fortunately it has just been implemented in Rand-Air.

The implementation of a CRM system which combines customer information and their social media information will encourage those staff on social media to become involved and engaged with customers in order to share their success stories.

5.8 Social media as a tool in achieving strategy:

As shown in the research and from feedback from customers and staff, there were many suggestions on content which they would like to see posted on social media channels.

However, in completing this case study, the researcher has discovered that each social media channel has its own specific strengths which can be utilised for precise actions. Each social media platform can be used to assist in specific strategic actions and the appropriate social media platform needs to be used to achieve this goal. These goals are listed below:

- For creating brand awareness: Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are more popular than the other platforms.
- Customer engagement and prospecting: LinkedIn and Facebook seem to be better suited.
- Technical and product information: YouTube and LinkedIn are great to create product videos and updates on new products.

- Company news and people/staff development: Facebook and Twitter.

By using the appropriate social media channel, marketers of plant-rental companies can save time and money by focusing their efforts on the best social media platform to use for a specific function or task.

5.9 Recommendations for further research

There are a number of areas which can be further investigated by those wishing to further their research in the field of social media, particularly in the industrial and mining business-to-business market. One of the areas which the researcher feels needs further exploration is the use of social media in the communication of safety in the industrial market segments. Safety remains one of the biggest challenges in the industrial markets, particularly in the mining segment where serious accidents or fatalities can cause production to stop temporarily or even permanently in severe cases. The widespread use of social media can be used to explore improving safety in this market segment.

5.10 Conclusion

The writer of this dissertation is of the opinion that print media will eventually disappear as the advantages of digital and social media advertising become more apparent.

Social media is changing rapidly and there are new tools being introduced mainly to the business-to-consumer market constantly. These tools can be adapted to suit the needs of business-to-business industries such as the plant-rental industry. Marketers need to be aware of these tools in order to engage with current and future customers, staff and suppliers, as well as all relevant stakeholders of the business.

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