Masters Theses   Graduate School

12-2014

Consumer Perceptions of a Brand's Social Media Marketing

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To the Graduate Council:

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Consumer Perceptions of a Brand's Social Media Marketing

A Thesis Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Taylor Michelle Smith
December 2014

Abstract

This project seeks to inform corporate marketing efforts, as well as add to the growing body of literature on social media marketing. The purpose of this project is to assess consumer perceptions of a brand's social media marketing. Participants were obtained from the PetSafe® brand Facebook fan page, and a total of 195 respondents completed all measures and were included in the study. The results show that brands must be actively engaging their consumers via social media in order to compete in a competitive marketplace. Engagement can be promoted through entertaining and interactive posts, useful and relevant content, word of mouth communication from other consumers, as well as extrinsic reinforcers such as promotions and giveaways. Social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, is a key platform to build relationships with consumers and for consumers to get information about a brand and its products. Consumers are trustworthy of the information posted by the brand and information posted by other consumers online. The future of social media as a marketing tool is also considered.

Keywords: *communication, marketing, social media, brand, integrated marketing communication*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In a society increasingly influenced by social media and a shift to consumer control of media, brand managers must understand how to effectively use social media in engaging with consumers (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013). Social media is a key component of the marketing mix, affecting the relationship between consumers and brands (Gensler et al., 2012).

The field of marketing is moving toward Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), in which growing power resides with the consumers instead of brand marketers. Consumers are becoming more selective of brands and brand messages, making it easier than ever to tune out messages perceived as irrelevant or unimportant (Gensler et al., 2012). IMC seeks to align communication messages across marketing, public relations, and organizational communication, but reaching the consumer is an increasingly difficult challenge.

A key component of successful IMC is one-to-one communication with consumers (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Consumers expect brands to tailor their messages and target consumers with specific content. Social media is the ultimate way to accomplish this goal. A deep understanding of consumer perceptions of social media activities by brand managers is crucial for consumer engagement and trust of the brand.

The Purpose of this Study

Although social media is a critical component of the marketing mix, research regarding proper use of social media by brands is scant (Gensler et al, 2012; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011; Kim & Ko, 2012). This project seeks to inform corporate marketing efforts, as well as add to the growing body of literature on social media marketing. With the shift to IMC and the use of

social media to disseminate marketing messages, research informing social media marketing efforts needs to be conducted. The purpose of this project is to assess consumer perceptions of a brand's social media marketing. The manuscript will be organized around a literature review/rationale, research questions, methodology, analysis, results, and discussion.

Rationale

With the growing prevalence of Integrated Marketing Communication, and the use of social media as a main channel for this communication, some research has been conducted on which communication messages/social media posts are most influential and engaging (De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang, 2012). Social media platforms enable consumers to reach the brand and other consumers online through brand communities, increasing information sharing. It is critical for the brand to be transparent in its communication in order to establish trust with the consumers and brand loyalty.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Shift to Integrated Marketing Communication

The 2007 definition of marketing from the American Marketing Association is "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (Groom, 2008). With the proliferation of new technologies, namely the Internet, the discipline of marketing is changing. Consumers now have the ability to select marketing messages and content in an increasingly saturated marketplace (Groom, 2008).

Marketing efforts are increasingly being conceptualized as Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), in which the power resides with the consumers instead of marketers. Instead of a one-way direct marketing approach, marketers are now tasked with collaborating and interacting with consumers to create and share marketing content across many different platforms (Groom, 2008). There are five elements of the IMC mix- advertising, personal selling, public relations, direct marketing, and sales promotion (Obal, Burtch, & Kunz, 2011). These disciplines are being combined into one overarching strategy for brands and corporations.

According to Groom (2008) Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is defined as:

strategic business process used to plan, develop, execute, and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communication programs over time with consumers, customers, prospects, and other targeted, relevant external and internal audiences (p. 20-21).

With the rise of IMC, creation and dissemination of marketing content no longer resides solely with marketing professionals. Information technologies enable consumers to choose which content they will engage with online (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Further, in order to build

relationships with consumers, marketers must create a dialogue with these consumers with an "outside-in" orientation (Groom, 2008). That is, consumers now exercise greater control over the marketing environment and marketers must adjust to interacting with consumers on their terms (Mulhern, 2009).

Kitchen and Burgmann (2010) offer guidelines for a successful Integrated Marketing Communication strategy:

- The communication effort should be directed at consumers in order to affect behavior.
- An outside-in approach should be utilized that is, start with the customer first when developing a communication strategy.
- A well-established relationship between the company and the customer is necessary.
- To deliver a message correctly all communication activities should be included with contact points integrated into the strategy.
- To create a competitive brand, coordination between the communication disciplines is needed (p.4)

A key component of successful IMC is one-to-one communication with consumers (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). Consumers expect brands to tailor their messages and target consumers with specific content. It is crucial for marketers to establish relationships with consumers and treat them as individuals. Consumers want to see content that is relevant to their lives. This can be accomplished by going beyond demographics of the consumer base and looking instead at psychographics (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2010).

Social Media as a Component of IMC

A powerful way to communicate IMC messages and create a dialogue with consumers is social media. Social media is comprised of a variety of platforms in which information is created and exchanged by individuals online (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media platforms include blogs, microblogs, email, and social networking websites (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). These

social media platforms provide many benefits for both consumers and marketing professionals. Social media has enabled Integrated Marketing Communication to be possible with much less time and effort than traditional media (Kim & Ko, 2012). Social media enables proper targeting of the key consumers for the brand.

The most popular social networking site, Facebook, has over 1.15 billion users according to the American Marketing Association in 2014. Marketers often engage with consumers and provide a great depth of information on Facebook "fan" pages of a brand or company (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). These "fan" pages serve as brand communities for consumers. For the purpose of this study, Twitter and Facebook will be examined, as they are the two most popular social media websites (The eBusiness Guide, 2014).

Compared with traditional media and direct marketing, social media enables immediate feedback for all revelant parties. Marketers can make strategic changes to address this feedback (Obal, Burch, & Kunz, 2011). What makes social media powerful is that it facilitates listening, information gathering, and engagement by both the consumer and brand managers (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Brands can use social media to communicate information about products, and consumers can post reviews of the products and questions they may have concerning a product (Obal, Burtch, & Kunz, 2011).

From an organizational standpoint, social networks are extremely useful in forming and maintaining relationships with consumers, and should be incorporated into the marketing mix (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). To accomplish successful IMC, brands must coordinate all elements of the promotional strategy (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Mangold and Faulds (2009) recommend that social media be included as a key component of the IMC strategy in order for brands to communicate with their consumers. As an element of brand communication, social

media should incorporate the brand's values and disseminate relevant and engaging content. However, brands must keep in mind that as branding becomes more open source, consumers are choosing which brands to interact with and shaping the brand values themselves (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Brand managers have lost some control of the frequency, timing, and content of branded content to consumers on social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Unlike traditional media where brands send communication directly to consumer, consumers are seeking out brands and companies on social media and choosing whether or not they will engage with them (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Consumers want the ability to engage with brands, and they expect brands and firms to listen to them and respond accordingly (Habibi, Richard, & Laroche, 2013).

Yan (2011) suggests goals for social media use by a brand: building a sense of membership with the organization, communicate brand values, encourage the audience to engage in a dialogue. In turn, this dialogue helps the organization to maintain a competitive advantage, inform the brand's vision, assess whether the brand is being communicated properly, and to build positive brand associations and brand awareness (Yan, 2011). The social media marketer must keep consumers engaged in conversation and ultimately create brand advocated and supporters through this conversation (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011).

Social media use in marketing, however, is not only limited to communication between brands and consumers. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), the second role of social media is to enable word-of-mouth communication from consumer to consumer. This is crucial for brands, as this word of mouth is much faster and more far-reaching than traditional word of mouth (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Word-of-mouth is a critical component of social media marketing and IMC strategy (Obal, Burch, & Kunz, 2011).

Social Media Content

A useful frame for understanding social media and its content is Uses and Gratifications Theory. Uses and Gratifications Theory (Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1985) asserts people are active users of media and seek out media in order to satisfy needs. In order to promote engagement and interaction from consumers, brands need to disseminate valuable content. Zaglia (2013) explored consumer motivations for engaging with a brand online. Reasons for connecting with a brand on the web are passion for the brand, willingness to learn and improve skills, social relation to others, reception of information tailored to specific members' needs, entertainment, and enhancement of one's social position. Consumers are looking for customized content from the brands they care about brands online. Another study by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremner (2004) find four main reasons why consumers engage in word-of-mouth online: social interaction, care for other consumers, strive for self-worth enhancement, or as a response economic incentives (e.g. giveaways, deals). These findings suggest that brands should tailor their communication to individual segments and users, provide entertaining content, and open discussion among all consumers.

In their study of brand post popularity, de Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2012) considered brand post characteristics (e.g., vividness, interactivity), content of the brand post (e.g., information, entertainment), valence of comments (positive or negative) and position of the post on the social media site. Brand post content was characterized as informative, entertaining, or neutral. Brand posts were considered informative when they contained information about the company, brand, and/or products. Entertaining brand posts included content that is unrelated to the brand, but has an entertainment value (e.g. humor). Neutral posts were categorized as non-informative and non-entertaining, such as a question about color preference. de Vries et al.

(2012) suggested consumers engage with brand fan pages for entertainment and information, and found entertaining and informative brand posts to be the most popular.

De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2012) also examined brand post characteristics of interactivity and vividness. Interactivity is characterized by two-way communication between companies and customers, in addition to customer to customer. Vividness is "the extent to which a brand post stimulates the different senses…For example, a video is more vivid than a picture because the former stimulates not only sight, but also hearing" (de Vries et al., 2012, p.85). The researchers found highly interactive and vivid posts to be more popular than those low in interaction and vividness. In order to be successful in social media marketing, marketers need to have an understanding of what kind of content is most popular on the brand's social media outlets.

One aspect of brand post popularity unexamined by de Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang is Facebook "shares." In their study of Facebook fan engagement, Malhotra, Malhotra, and See (2013) assert that audience engagement is most directly measured through the Facebook share, when consumers repost a post by a brand. The Twitter equivalent of the share is the retweet. The researchers examined over 1,000 posts by 98 brands and found that content most likely to be shared (retweeted) are those that are topical, educational, and related to deals and promotions (Malhotra et al., 2013). The authors go on to argue that when a consumer shares a brand post, they are acting as a brand ambassador as the post is shared on their own wall and also their newsfeed for their friends to see (Malhotra, et al., 2013).

Brand Communities on Social Media

As of 2011, more than half of consumers followed brands on Facebook (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Social media brand communities fulfill consumers' desire to feel

accepted and create a social identity through the brands with which they interact (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Consumers can find brand communities on social media and build relationships with the brand and similar individuals who also like the brand (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Social media promotes open source branding, in which consumers participate and collaborate with the brand and other consumers to create and share the brand's content (Fournier & Avery, 2011).

Brand communities on social media enable brand marketers to access the brand's current consumers and supporters, as well as reach potential consumers across the globe (Habibi, Richard, & Laroche, 2013). Brands can share photos, videos, and product information with fans on Facebook and followers on Twitter, and in turn these fans can share the information with their friends and followers (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Although marketing is not limited to the web, social media makes it easier to access customers and interact with them more quickly than ever before (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013).

Creating brand fan pages has many benefits for brands. First, it has been shown that those who are involved in brand communities are more emotionally invested in the brand, more committed to the brand, and have more loyalty to the brand (Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme, 2012). Brand loyalty leads to stronger purchase intention, and brand fan pages facilitate the consumer-brand relationship (Gensler et al., 2013). Genseler et al. (2013) found that Twitter and Facebook were the most ideal channels for brands to converse with consumers. They suggest that firms should provide relevant and interesting content for consumers and respond to consumer-generated content (Gensler et al., 2013). Is has been shown that consumers feel more engaged with organizations when they are able to submit feedback, and social media provides an outlet for this feedback (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Expectancy Theory

Expectancy is "an enduring pattern of anticipated behavior" (Burgoon, 1993, p. 31). Expectancy theory views communication as a balance of rewards and costs; for example, if communication is expected to have a reward or desired outcome, an individual is more likely to contribute (Tedjamulia, Olsen, Dean, & Albrecht, 2005). There are individual and social expectancies. Communication expectancies are derived from communicator, relationship, and context characteristics (Burgoon, 1993). Expectancy theory posits that people act based on an expected outcome or attractiveness of the outcome (Tedjamulia, Olsen, Dean, & Albrecht, 2005). These actions can be applied to communicative actions in different contexts, whether face-to-face or online.

Because online interactions are asynchronous, communication rules and expectancies are different from face-to-face communication (Tedjamulia et al., 2005). Members of online communities are often solely consumers of information and do not contribute to online discussion, and individual traits guide how much people choose to communicate online (Tedjamulia, 2005). This creates a challenge for those wanting to build relationships with those consumers who do not wish to participate and actively engage with the brand.

Motivations for consumer contribution on social media sites

Individuals with certain personality traits are more likely to contribute than others (Tedjamulia et al., 2005). Tedjamulia et al. (2005) created a model for motivation to contribute to online communication that includes expectancy theory variables of self-efficacy and need to achieve, and also added trust and intrinsic motivation. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that they will achieve a goal, and need to achieve is an individual's belief that their contributions (in this case, to online communication) are important (Tedjamulia et al., 2005). Thus, in order to

communicate online, consumers need to feel that their contributions will be addressed by the brand managers.

In order to get people to participate online, reinforcers (extrinsic motivation) can be used (Tedjamulia, Olsen, Dean, & Albrecht, 2005). Tedjamulia et al. (2005) identified three types of reinforcers for online communication: *Financial reinforcers* are monetary and other tangible rewards, *performance appraisal reinforcers* refer to information provided for users about the value of their contributions, and *social recognition reinforcers* include attention, recognition, commendations, compliments, and praise. Performance feedback and social recognition are crucial for members of online communities, because they feel as though there individual contributions are important. Presently, contests and giveaways (financial reinforcers) have become increasingly popular on social media sites as a way to engage consumers and get them to participate online. However, there has been little research on expectancy theory's role in online communication, particularly in the realm of social media.
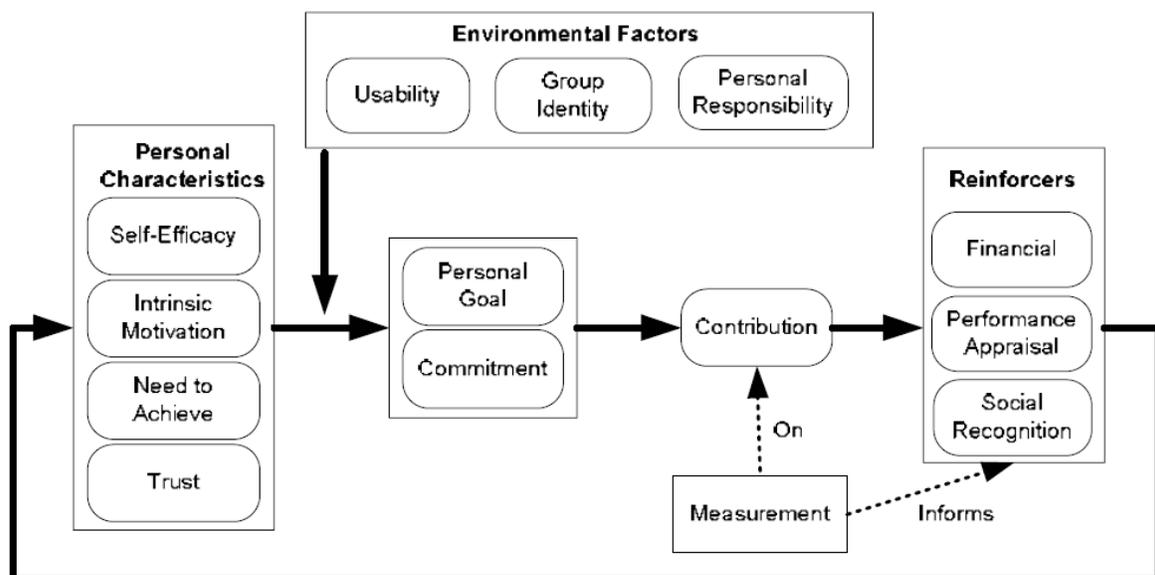
Figure 1. Expectancy Theory Model of Online Communication (Tedjamulia et al., 2005)

Trust of Social Media Posts

Earning the consumer's trust is crucial for brands and companies. Trust decreases uncertainty and enables consumers to feel more comfortable with the brand and rely on its messages (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). Brands can accomplish trust through information sharing, which reduces uncertainty (Laroche et al., 2012). This information sharing is possible with social media.

It has been shown that consumers find brand content posted on social media to be more trustworthy than other sources (Habibi, Richard, & Laroche, 2013). Social media is forcing brands to be more transparent and authentic in their communication, as the web provides a plethora of information on companies from a variety of sources. By disclosing product information online, brands are subject to more scrutiny by consumers that can be easily accessed by anyone on social media; therefore, consumers look to brand pages to find credible product information (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Because social media enables one-to-one communication between marketer and consumer, and consumer to consumer, the definition of trust for this study is taken from interpersonal communication literature. Trust will be operationalized in terms of Wheeless & Grotz's (1977) individualized trust definition: "a process of holding certain relevant, favorable perceptions of another person which engender certain types of dependent behaviors in a risky situation where the expected outcomes that are dependent upon that other person(s) are not known with certainty" (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977, p. 251).

Consumers frequently get information from other consumers who have experience with the brands, and the internet is the number one source for this information (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Facebook fan pages are one avenue for consumer reviews of a brand and its products

(Obal, Burch, & Kunz, 2011). Online reviews have been shown to affect firm performance (sales and returns) (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary for brands to monitor consumer posts on social media and respond accordingly to keep consumers satisfied.

Research Questions

Considering the shift to integrated marketing communication and prevalence of social media marketing as a critical component of the IMC mix, the study addressed the following questions:

RQ1: What are consumers' perceptions of a brand's social media marketing activities?
RQ2: What content do consumers expect to see from a brand on social media?
RQ3: Which brand posts are most popular?
RQ4: Which social media outlets should a brand utilize to engage with consumers?
RQ5: Do consumers perceive information posted by the brand and other consumers on brand's social media outlets to be trustworthy?

Chapter 3

Methodology

Overall Method and Design

The study was organized around a survey questionnaire research design. The purpose of this project was to assess consumer perceptions of a brand's social media marketing. Research for this project was conducted at Radio Systems Corporation in Knoxville, TN. The researcher has worked for Radio Systems Corporation as a part of a professional internship as a Social Marketing Specialist, then as a Marketing Research Specialist. The data for this project were collected by Radio Systems and is owned by the corporation. The research focuses specifically on PetSafe® Brand, a brand that strives to communicate the values of training and loving pets. Fans of PetSafe® on Facebook were recruited for this study. Participants were incentivized with a drawing for one of three PetSafe® Lotus Fountains. The Lotus Fountain is a ceramic water fountain for pets that constantly streams and filters the water.

Participants

Over 200 participants were recruited for the survey, but only those who completed the full measure were included in the project. A total of 195 respondents completed all measures and were included in the study. Respondents were obtained from PetSafe® Facebook fan page. The age of the respondents ranged from 18-55 years old, with half of the participants being age 34-55. Ninety percent of the respondents were female. Participants were recruited from a post on PetSafe®'s Facebook fan page and Twitter page with a link to the survey hosted on Qualtrics. The survey screened out respondents indicating they were under the age of 18. Participants were asked to give consent for their responses to be used in the study (see Appendix A). As incentive for completing the survey, respondents were entered in a drawing for one of three PetSafe®

fountains. Names of the respondents were only be used in the drawing for the PetSafe® fountain. All responses remain confidential.

Instruments

To assess the first research question, consumers were asked to answer a modified version of Kim and Ko's (2012) Perception of Social Media Marketing Activities measure. The consumer perceptions were categorized by Entertainment, Interaction, and Word of Mouth regarding a brand's social media activities on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. Sample items include "Using PetSafe® social media is fun" and "PetSafe® social media enables information sharing with others." Kim and Ko (2012) drew from previous research on perception of social media marketing activities by luxury brands, and conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of the data. They reported qualified Cronbach's α for all three constructs (Entertainment- Cronbach's α of .94, Interaction- Cronbach's α of .87, Word of Mouth Cronbach's α-qualified). For the full measure, see Appendix B.

To address the second research question, the following open-ended questions will be asked of PetSafe® consumers:

1. What do you think PetSafe® Brand could do to improve the Facebook fan page?
2. What additional information would you like to see included on PetSafe® Facebook and Twitter page?

These questions were designed to elicit social media content and posts they would find to be rewarding.

To address the third research question, the researcher employed the content analysis used by de Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2012) for Facebook posts, and the coding analysis by Malhotra Malhotra, & See (2013) for Twitter posts. involved brand post popularity. The researcher examined 40 brand posts over a two-week time frame. The content analysis procedure utilized by

de Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2012) examines vividness and interactivity on a scale of no, low, medium, and high (operationalized in Appendix D). The baseline (no) is characterized by a post that is neither vivid nor interactive. The researcher examined Facebook and Twitter posts over a two week period and counted the number of likes, comments, and shares for Facebook, the number of favorites, retweets, and replies for Twitter, as well as the level of interaction and vividness in each post on both social media outlets.

To address the fourth research question, the following open-ended question were asked:

1. Are there other social media outlets you would like to see PetSafe® Brand utilize? Please explain.

To address the fifth and final research question, participants were asked to complete a modified version of the Individualized Trust Scale. Wheeless and Grotz (1977) reported a reliability of .97 for the 14-item version. The full measure is available in Appendix D.

Procedures

Participants were recruited from the PetSafe® Facebook fan page. All participants will be current fans of PetSafe® on Facebook, and all responses are confidential (see Appendix A). The survey was posted on the PetSafe® Facebook fan page for one week from February 17-24, 2014. A link to the Facebook survey was also posted on the brand's Twitter account. The online survey consisted of demographic information, a modified version of the Social Media Marketing Activities Scale (Kim & Ko, 2012), three open-ended questions, and two versions of the adapted Individualized Trust Scale (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977) to assess trustworthiness of posts by PetSafe® and posts by other consumers on the Facebook fan page.

Analysis

Data analysis for the project involved the following procedures. The mean for each dependent variable was assessed in terms of descriptive statistics. Research question one involved consumers' perception of social media marketing activities. To assess ratings of PetSafe® social media, descriptive statistics were run on the full Social Media Marketing activities (Kim & Ko, 2012) measure then on each of the dependent variables of Entertainment, Interaction, and Word of Mouth. The mean for each dependent variable was examined to assess aggregate consumer perceptions of social media marketing activities.

Research question two involved content consumers expect to see on social media sites. In order to assess preferred Facebook page content a theoretical thematic content analysis was conducted. In this emergent content analysis, the data will be divided into key terms and coded into themes (Neuendorf, 2002).

Research question three involved brand post popularity. To assess brand post popularity, the researcher employed the content analysis procedure utilized by de Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2012). These researchers categorized brand posts are into one of four factors: vividness, interactivity, entertainment, and informative. The researcher examined vividness and interactivity on a scale of no, low, medium, and high (see Appendix D for operationalizations). The baseline (no) is characterized by a post that is neither vivid nor interactive. To assess whether a brand post is entertaining, informative, or neither, the researcher used de Vries et al.'s (2012) operationalizations. Brand posts are considered informative when they contained information about the company, brand, and/or products. Entertaining brand posts contain content that is unrelated to the brand, but has an entertainment value (e.g. humor). Neutral posts are categorized as non-informative and non-entertaining. Finally, brand post popularity is measured

as the number of likes and the number of comments on a brand post, which are count data. The researcher also included the shares of posts as a measure of popularity. The Twitter equivalents of the Facebook count data are: like is favorite, comment is reply, and share is retweet (Malhotra, Malhotra, & See, 2013). The researcher examined PetSafe® posts on Facebook and Twitter over a two-week period to assess popularity of the different posts.

Research question four involved preferred social media outlets. In order to address the open-ended question regarding preferred social media outlets, the researcher utilized descriptive statistics for responses for social media outlets.

Finally, research question five involved trustworthiness of posts by a brand and other consumers. To assess consumers' ratings of trustworthiness of posts by PetSafe® on the Facebook fan page, descriptive statistics were run on the responses to the adapted Individualized Trust Scale. To assess consumers' ratings of trustworthiness of posts by other consumers on the PetSafe® Facebook fan page, descriptive statistics were run on the responses to the adapted Individualized Trust Scale.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this project was to assess consumer perceptions of a brand's social media marketing. The results presented below are organized around the research questions posed for the study.

Results

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 involved perception of social media marketing activities operaltionalized by Entertainment, Interaction, and Word of Mouth on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. The mean for Entertainment was 5.2, the mean for Interaction was 4.4, and the mean for Word of Mouth was 4.1. The standard deviation for responses to each measure was low at 1.2, 1.6, and 1.5.

Entertainment

Table 1. Perception of social media marketing activities- Entertainment

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
entertainment	195	1.00	7.00	5.2308	1.24481
Valid N (listwise)	195				

Interaction

Table 2. Perception of social media marketing activities- Interaction

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
interaction	195	1.00	7.00	4.4154	1.66429
Valid N (listwise)	195				

Word of Mouth

Table 3. Perception of social media marketing activities- Word of Mouth
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
wordofmouth	195	1.00	7.00	4.1385	1.54530
Valid N (listwise)	195				

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 involved content consumers would like to see on brand social media. Consumers were asked "What do you think PetSafe® Brand could do to improve the Facebook fan page?" and "What additional information would you like to see included on PetSafe® Facebook and Twitter page?"

The researcher coded responses to these questions into two coding frames that include Facebook page improvement and Facebook and Twitter information. Six themes were most frequently answered by PetSafe® consumers on the online survey.

Table 4. Desired social media activities

Theme 1	Interactivity with consumers
Theme 2	Pictures and photos
Theme 3	Promotions, contests, giveaways
Theme 4	Pet information
Theme 5	Product information
Theme 6	No change

Facebook page improvement

Regarding Facebook page improvement, the most common answers fell under the themes of interactivity with consumers, pictures and photos, promotions and giveaways, and no change. Consumers indicated they would like to have more interaction from PetSafe® on Facebook, whether conducting polls, encouraging consumers to share photographs of their pet, or asking them to share their experiences with products. For example, "What are your and your pets doing today?" Further, consumers wanted to see more pictures of dogs and cats, and more photographs of pets at work and pets using PetSafe® products. Consumers indicated a desire for more contests, promotions, and giveaways, e.g. "Post more discount offers" and "The occasional giveaway would be fun!" However, many consumers suggested no change at all, for example "Keep up the awesome work" and "I cannot think of anything at this time."

Facebook and Twitter information

Two themes emerged within the frame of Facebook and Twitter information— pet information and product information. Pet information includes training tips/advice, pet safety, and wellness, e.g. "Pet training tips and fun facts." Product information includes new products/ innovation, reviews, and how to use, e.g. "Post a product every week with a video on how to use it."

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 involved brand post popularity. The researcher examined 40 brand posts over a two-week time frame. To assess brand post popularity, the researcher employed the content analysis procedure utilized by de Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2012) for Facebook and the coding analysis by Malhotra, Malhotra, and See (2013) for Twitter. The researcher examined vividness and interactivity on a scale of no, low, medium, and high (operationalized in Appendix

D). The baseline (no) is characterized by a post that is neither vivid nor interactive. Of the 40 posts, on the vividness scale 17 were no vividness (all text, no pictures), 19 were low (pictures), 1 was medium (information about offline brand events), and 3 were high vividness (videos). The posts with the most likes, comments, and shares were posts that included pictures (low vividness). On the interactivity scale, 25 were no (text only with information), 10 were low (links to the brands Twitter and blog pages), 4 were medium interactivity (posts indicating a call to like something or a contest), and 1 was high (asking a question of consumers). The posts with the most likes, comments, and shares were those with medium interactivity— encouraging likes and participation in a contest.

To assess whether a brand post is entertaining, informative, or neutral, the researcher used de Vries et al.'s operationalizations. Brand posts are considered informative when they contained information about the company, brand, and/or products. Of the 40 posts, 23 were informative, e.g. "Enter the photo contest" or "check out our new product." Entertaining brand posts contain content that is unrelated to the brand, but has an entertainment value (e.g. humor). Of the 40 posts, 10 fell under the entertainment category (pet memes). Neutral posts are categorized as non-informative and non-entertaining. Of the 40 posts, 7 fell under the neutral category, as they indicated information about a veterinary conference, e.g. "Check out the link to the Western Veterinary Conference below." The posts with the most likes, comments, and shares were informative posts about the brand's products and contest information, e.g. "Have you ever come home to find something your pets did that was cute, funny or just plain wrong? Did you happen to take a picture? Enter our contest!" and entertaining posts with pet humor memes (Figure 1).

Figure 2. Pet meme

The neutral posts received no comments or shares, only likes.

On Twitter, the researcher examined posts over a two-week time frame and looked at the posts with the most retweets. According to the Malhotra, Malhotra, & See (2013) the retweet is analogous to the Facebook share and is indicative of the direct consumer engagement. The posts with the most retweets were posts with links to pet health and training information, e.g. "The benefits of microchipping your pet in today's blog."

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 involved preferred social media outlets. The most preferred social media outlet indicated by consumers was Facebook. The next two social media outlets answered were Pinterest and Instagram. Consumers liked the ability to share photos of their pets on Instagram, and get product information/use ideas on Pinterest.

Preferred Social Media Outlet

Social Outlet	Facebook	Pinterest	Instagram	Twitter	Vine	Tumblr	Other
Freqency of Responses	97	11	12	4	2	2	4

Table 5. Preferred Social Media Outlets

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 involved trust of posts by PetSafe® and other consumers on the brand's Facebook page. The mean for trust of PetSafe® posts on a scale of 1-7 was 6.2.
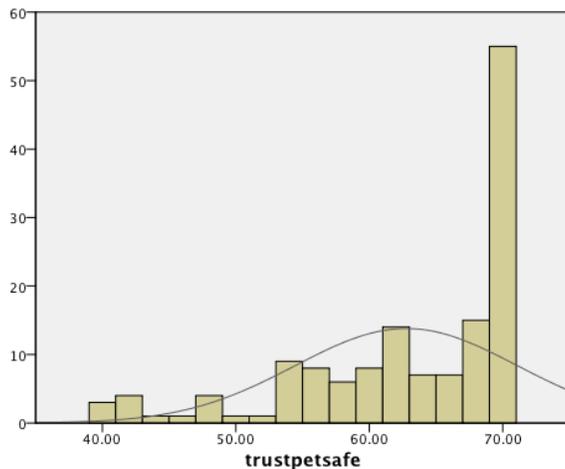

Table 6. Trust of PetSafe® posts

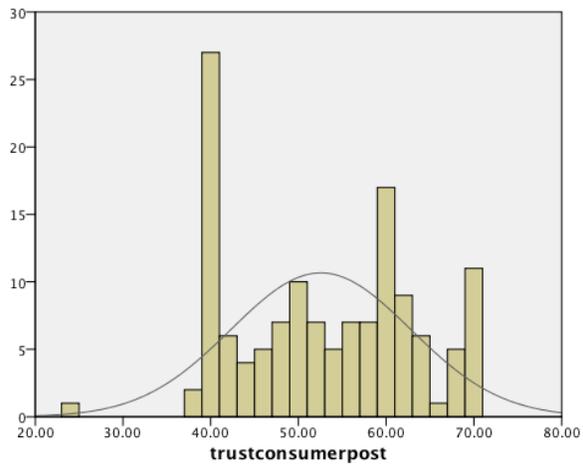The mean of posts by other consumers on a scale of 1-7 was 5.2.

Table 7. Trust of consumer posts

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this project is to assess consumer's perceptions of a brand's social media marketing. Social media is becoming the main source of brand information. Branding has become more than mass messaging. It is now the brand's responsibility to foster a relationship with consumers in order to create loyalty, trust, and ultimately brand ambassadors and evangelists.

Taken together, the research results suggest that brands must be actively engaging their consumers via social media in order to compete in a competitive marketplace. In examining social media through the framework of Uses and Gratifications Theory, consumers are selecting social media as a communication medium with the brand due to its entertainment and interaction value. Further, social media may require a rethinking of Uses and Gratifications Theory, as gratifications are different in this medium. Consumers can actually influence the brands they are communicating with more than with any other medium. From an organizational standpoint, social media is a great tool to use because it is free and promotes brand awareness. However, it will take time to see if social media affects sales and the bottom line. Although it is yet to be seen if social media will actually drive sales, organizations stand to lose awareness and consumer interaction to competing brands by not engaging in social media marketing activities.

Research question one involved consumer's perception of social media marketing activities. Consumers gave PetSafe® high marks on Entertainment, Interaction, and Word of Mouth, but rated Entertainment the highest at 5.2. Interaction was rated 4.4 and Word of Mouth was rated 4.1. These results suggest PetSafe® could promote more interaction and encouragement of consumers to share brand information with others on Facebook.

Research question two involved content consumers would like to see on a brand's social media sites. Regarding Facebook and Twitter page improvement, the most common answers fell under the themes of interactivity with consumers, pictures and photos, promotions and giveaways, and no change. Consumers indicated they would like to have more interaction from PetSafe® on Facebook, whether conducting polls, encouraging consumers to share photographs of their pet, or asking them to share their experiences with products. These results suggest consumers would like to be recognized as equal contributors to a brand's values and identity. These findings are consistent with Tedjamulia, Olsen, Dean, & Albrecht's (2005) findings that consumers interact with brands for a "need to achieve" motivation- they want their contributions to be seen as significant to the brand. Brand managers should consider these findings and make an effort to encourage active participation by their consumers, whether responding to consumer's posts or sharing consumer photos and experiences on their social media pages. Tedjamulia et al. (2005) also highlighted the importance of extrinsic reinforcers, e.g. promotions and giveaways, to encourage participation, as seen in the results of the present study.

Two themes emerged within the frame of Facebook and Twitter information— pet information and product information. Pet information includes training tips/advice, pet safety, and wellness, e.g. "Pet training tips and fun facts." Product information includes new products/ innovation, reviews, and how to use, e.g. "Post a product every week with a video on how to use it." Uses and Gratifications theory asserts people seek out media in order to satisfy needs. (Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1985). The results of the present study suggest in order to promote engagement and desire to participate with a brand, the brand needs to communicate useful, relevant content (as indicated by the desire for product and pet health and training

information). It would be beneficial for brands to post not only information about their products, but also information relevant to their industry and consumers.

Research question three involved brand post popularity. The researcher operationalized brand post popularity as a measure of likes, comments, and shares on Facebook and retweets on Twitter. Interestingly, the most popular Facebook posts were those that are considered entertaining and unrelated to the brand, e.g. humorous pet memes. However, the posts that received the most shares were related to the brand's contest for a product giveaway. This finding further supports the value of extrinsic reinforcers when getting consumers to engage with the brand and share information. The Facebook posts that were the least popular were those that were neutral—neither entertaining nor informative, and neither vivid nor interactive. In this study specifically, these posts were posts about a veterinary conference. This finding suggests that although industry-related information is important, consumers need information that is directly relevant to them. Most of the consumers polled were likely not veterinarians, but pet owners looking for interesting product and pet information.

On Twitter the results were similar. The posts with the most retweets were those that were entertaining (unrelated to the brand itself) or informative posts on pet health and training information. Malhotra, Malhotra, & See (2013) suggested pictures (e.g. posts with vividness) are not as important in order to increase retweets. The present study supported these results, suggesting Facebook is more important as a visual medium than Twitter.

Research question four involved preferred social media outlets. The most preferred social media outlet was Facebook. However, the results were obtained via a Facebook survey and therefore may be biased in that direction. The next two social media outlets answered were Pinterest and Instagram. Consumers liked the ability to share photos of their pets on Instagram,

and get product information/use ideas on Pinterest. These results highlight the importance of social media communication having a high utility and interaction value for consumers.

Research question five involved trust of posts by the brand and posts by other consumers. The mean for trust of PetSafe® posts was very high at 6.2 on a 7-point scale. This news is good for the brand, as consumers believe they can rely on the brand's posts to contain accurate information. The mean for trust of posts by other consumers was 5.2, indicating consumers were more trustworthy of the brand itself rather than what others were saying about the brand. The score was still high for trust of other consumers, so brands must monitor messages posted on their Facebook page about their brand and keep the communication positive.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

The present project sought out to inform brand marketing efforts in a market that has shifted to consumer control of communication. Mass marketing messages are no longer sufficient— brand posts should be useful to the consumer in some way, whether they are entertaining or contain valuable information for the consumer. A key way to get consumer participation with the brand is extrinsic reinforcers, e.g. giveaways and promotions. The findings of this study suggest that consumers view their brands as very trustworthy. The results further suggest that trust builds loyalty. It is crucial to not only communicate with consumers as a brand, but also build relationships and repeat customers who will become ambassadors of the brand. Brand managers need to recognize that consumer participation in brand messaging is here to stay and adjust their actions accordingly.

Limitations

As with any study, there were several limitations to this project. First, the study examined only one brand in a world of many. One could argue that consumers engaging with brands other than those in the pet industry may have different perceptions. The Social Media Marketing Activities measure (Kim & Ko, 2012) was used in a study of luxury brands, and the argument can be made that a pet product brand is vastly different from a luxury brand.

Another limitation of this study is a potentially biased sample. Those studied were already engaged with the brand online, as they had to have been fans of the brand on Facebook before they participated in the study.

Further, the most preferred social media outlet indicated by consumers was Facebook. However, the responses were gathered from a Facebook survey, so this is a likely answer for a sample of already active Facebook users.

Finally, a major limitation of this study is the nature of the media environment. Trends in social media are evolving constantly, and there are new platforms being introduced frequently. Facebook and Twitter may not always be the most popular platforms for consumers to engage with their brands. However, the researcher would argue the present findings can be applied to all social media outlets, including those yet to be popularized.

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Appendices

Appendix A

PetSafe® Social Media Study Informed Consent Form

INTRODUCTION
You are invited to participate in a research study by PetSafe® Brand social media. The purpose of the research is to assess consumers' perception of our social media marketing activities. The research will inform marketing objectives and goals, and enhance user experience of our social media outlets.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY
You will be asked to complete a scale and 5 open-ended questions about your use of PetSafe® social media. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

RISKS
There are no risks for participating in the study. All responses will remain confidential.

BENEFITS
The research will contribute to the body of knowledge on social media marketing activities, and enhance the consumer's experience with PetSafe® Brand online.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study. Personally identifiable information on individuals will not be sold or otherwise transferred to unaffiliated third parties but may be used by to contact individuals in the future with offers and announcements that we feel may be of interest. If an entrant does not wish to be contacted by us, the entrant should opt-out of such contact by sending written notice to: PetSafe Marketing – Opt Out; 10427 PetSafe Way; Knoxville, TN 37932.

COMPENSATION
By completing this study, you will be entered into a drawing for a PetSafe® Lotus pet fountain.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Taylor Smith, at 10427 PetSafe Way, Knoxville, TN 37932 and taylor.smith@petsafe.net

PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed, but you will not be entered into the prize drawing.

Appendix B

Perception of Social Media Marketing Activities (Kim & Ko, 2012)
5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree); 7 items

Entertainment Using PetSafe® social media is fun.
Content shown in PetSafe® social media seem interesting.

Interaction PetSafe® social media enables information sharing with others.
Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through PetSafe social media.
It is easy to deliver my opinion through PetSafe® social media.

Word of mouth I would like to pass along information on brand, product, or services from PetSafe® social media to my friends.
I would like to upload contents from PetSafe® social media on my blog or micro blog.

Appendix C

Individualized Trust Scale² (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977)
On the scales that follow, please indicate your reaction to **information posted by PetSafe Brand** on Facebook. Rate the brand from 1-7, clicking in the direction of the end of the scale that seems to be most characteristic of social media posts by PetSafe Brand.

Trustworthy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Untrustworthy
Distrustful of the brand's posts	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Trustful of this brand's posts
Deceptive	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Candid
Not deceitful	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Deceitful
Tricky	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Straightforward
Respectful	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Disrespectful
Inconsiderate	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Considerate
Honest	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Dishonest
Unreliable	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Reliable
Insincere	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Sincere

On the scales that follow, please indicate your reaction to **information posted by other consumers** on PetSafe Brand's Facebook. Rate these posts by others from 1-7, clicking in the direction of the end of the scale that seems to be most characteristic of posts by other consumers on PetSafe Brand social media.

Trustworthy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Untrustworthy
Distrustful of the brand's posts	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Trustful of this brand's posts
Deceptive	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Candid
Not deceitful	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Deceitful
Tricky	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Straightforward
Respectful	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Disrespectful
Inconsiderate	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Considerate
Honest	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Dishonest
Unreliable	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Reliable
Insincere	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Sincere

Appendix D

Operationalizations of Vivid and Interactive Brand Post Characteristics

Level	Vividness	Interactivity
Low	Pictorial (photo or image)	Link to a website (mainly to news sites or blogs, but never to the company website)
		Voting (brand fans are able to vote for alternatives (e.g., which taste or design they think is best))
Medium	Event (application at the brand page and announces an upcoming (offline) event of the brand)	Call to act (urges brand fans to do something (e.g., go to certain website, liking, or commenting) Contest (brand fans are requested to do something (e.g., Tweet or like a website) for which they can win prizes)
High	Video (mainly videos from YouTube)	Question
		Quiz (similar to question, but now brand fans can win prizes)

De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang (2012) Brand Post Popularity

Vita

Taylor Michelle Smith was born in Memphis, Tennessee, to Buz and Michelle Smith. She has a twin sister named Austin. She attended White Station High School in Memphis where she was a member of the swim team as well as a local competitive swim team. After graduation she attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where she double majored in Communication Studies and Psychology and was a member of Alpha Omicron Pi sorority. She pursued a master's degree at the University of Tennessee and obtained graduate teaching assistantship through which she taught undergraduate public speaking. Taylor will graduate with a Master's of Science degree in 2014.