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***Investigating the power of social  
media in enhancing the brand  
reputation of SME's***

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the Degree of Masters of Science in Marketing Practice  
of Letterkenny Institute of Technology

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## **I. Abstract**

The motivation behind this research was to become aware of the impact that social media has on enhancing the brand reputation of SME's Within Donegal. This research makes a worthwhile contribution to the development of brand reputation strategy through social media for SME's.

The research approach taken represents both a descriptive and an exploratory research design. A Mixed method approach was adapted for the research. The research process involved 10 semi-structured interviews with owner managers of SME's. Depth interviews were used to explore the key issues related to social media and brand reputation.

Ten customer surveys from each of the SME's participating were conducted. Alongside this 150 online interviews were conducted with general consumers. Surveys were used to examine the views of consumers in relation to the brand reputation of SME's through social media.

From this all opinions, perceptions and experiences were analysed and findings were produced.

The key findings of the research uncovered, namely that using social media to enhance the brand reputation of an SME is a viable option. The perceived advantages and disadvantages with using social media to enhance brand reputation were explored. Following this the researched discovered the extent to which SME's within Donegal used social media to enhance brand reputation. From this the most effective tools for the different industries were established along with a set of guidelines for SME's wishing to use social media to enhance brand reputation.

The implications of these findings is that the research allows for a better understanding of the current situation of using social media to enhance brand reputation within SME's in Donegal and efforts can therefore be made to increase social media and branding activity within these companies in order to enhance their brand reputation. The mixed method research carried out enables for further research on a national basis to be carried out in the future.

## **II. Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my family and Brian who have helped me through the difficult times of this dissertation.

Without your support, encouragement and patience I would never have completed this dissertation.

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## **VII. List of Abbreviations**

AMA American Marketing Association

CSO: Central Statistics Office

SEO: Search Engine Optimisation

SME: Small to Medium Enterprises

## **1. Introduction**

Branding has been the foundation of the marketing industry for a century (Young, 2010), however, the introduction of digital media has set higher standards, in effect repositioning the industry's perspectives of established media. The motivation behind this research was to become aware of the impact that social media has on enhancing the brand reputation of SME's within Donegal. This research makes a worthwhile contribution to the development of a brand reputation strategy through social media for SME's.

The overall objectives of the research were to analyse key literature available in the areas of marketing in SME's, branding, the benefits of branding, brand reputation, branding in SME's, social media and branding in social media; and to explore whether using social media to enhance brand reputation is a viable option for SME's; while discovering the perceived advantages and disadvantages. Following this the research aimed to discover the most effective social media tools for different industries and a set of guidelines for SME's who wish to use social media to enhance their brands reputation.

An approach was developed in order to investigate and gather data in these areas. The researcher carried out 10 depth interviews with owner/managers of SME's in Donegal, 100 personal customers surveys with customers of the participating SME's and a further 150 online surveys. Opinions and perceptions were analysed.

Key findings from the research were that using social media to enhance a brands reputation is a viable option for SME's, that SME's within Donegal do not utilise social media to enhance their brands reputation to their advantage. Following this the research uncovered the most effective social media tools for the different industries identified. Also a set of guidelines were established for SME's who wish to use social media to enhance their brands reputation.

The author believes that the objectives outlined in the research were met from the data collection method applied. The data collection process used resulted in informative findings and subsequently some advice can be communicated to SME's on social media and branding.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction:**

Czinkota and Ronkainen (2010), outline that brands are important as they shape consumer decisions and create economic value. Brand reputation is company focused and comes from the success or failure of the company to deliver on that promise (Gunelius, 2013). McCann's Social Media Research (2008) established that social media can have a dramatic impact on brand reputation (Uhrmacher, 2008). Cohen (2011) establishes that brands and their reputations are interconnected.

This chapter focuses on the literature that is available in relation to branding and social media and SME's. The areas of branding discussed are brand strategy, brand equity, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, brand loyalty, brand image and brand reputation. The relationship between branding and social media is also examined. Following this, a review of the social media setting shall be carried out, from this, the author will compile a list of the most influential social networking sites available to SME's. The chapter shall conclude by examining the impact that social media has on the brand reputation of SME's.

### **2.2 Small to Medium Enterprises (SME's):**

As SME's are the central focus of this research it is imperative to clearly define SME's. In January 2005 the European Union established a standardised definition of SME's. In order to be classified as an SME the enterprises must employ fewer than 250 persons and have an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million Euros, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million Euros.

Table 2.1 depicts the standardised definition of micro, small and medium firms in Europe. Both the Central Statistics Office (2012) (CSO) and the Department of Finance (2013) report that SME's account for 99 percent of businesses in Ireland and account for almost 70 percent of people employed in the state; Therefore SME's play a significant role in the Irish economy.

Company category	Employees	Turnover	Balance sheet total
Medium	<250	≤ € 50 m	≤ € 43 m
Small	<50	≤ € 10 m	≤ € 10 m
Micro	<10	≤ € 2 m	≤ € 2 m

Table:2.1

(Source: www.ec.europa.eu 2012)

### 2.3 Marketing in SME's:

Gunasekaran et al.(2011) explain that due to globalisation and technology advances, the competition amongst SME's had rapidly increased, and their survival is dependent on a number of factors including the resilience of SME's to refocus on their strategies and technologies.

Gilmore et al. (2001), Reijonen (2010) and Simpson et al. (2011) state that sales and marketing is one of the most dominant problems found in SME's, yet it is acknowledged as a key business activity essential for survival and growth. Marketing in SME's is expected to be haphazard, unstructured and informal. SME marketing efforts are built upon and generally conform to their industry norms (Simpson et al. 2011 and Gilmore et al. 2001). Simpson et al. (2011) further establishes that there is no clear definition of marketing in SME's that does not relate to large organisations or is linked to entrepreneurial behaviour in small businesses. Mutale (2013) defines marketing in SME's as the management process of identifying, anticipating and satisfying consumer needs and wants, more effectively than a competitor. Mutale (2013) goes on to explain that e-marketing offers opportunities for SME's to develop new products, new markets, new medias, new channels and is vital for the survival of SME's in today's markets.

Carson et al. (1995) suggests that SME's have six advantages which can enhance the marketing performance of the company, these advantages are depicted in table: 2.2

Quality	Advantage
Loyalty	Work environment in small firms is more harmonious leading to increased worker loyalty, pride and commitment.
SME Customer Interface	Owner/ managers know their customers personally, thus, leading to increased customer loyalty and higher levels of customer satisfaction.
Flexibility	SME's due to their size are quicker and more flexible in responding to customer needs and queries.
Speed of Response	SME can recognise and respond to changes in the market place more effectively than larger organisations. Thus, placing the company in a superior position over larger competitors.
Opportunity Focused	Closeness to markets and customers result in SME seeking and exploiting opportunities.
Access to Market Information	The above five attributes of SME's result in the company having access to relatively inexpensive valuable market information. This is a huge advantage over larger competitors.

Table:2.2

(Source: Carson 1995)

#### 2.4 Brand and Branding:

Kotler (2009) explains that a “brand is a name, a term, sign, a symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors”. Kotler (2009) also highlights that branding provides products and services with the power of the brand.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) and Kapferer (2008) have tested the utilitarian focus of conceptualising a brand as a name sign symbol or design, (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007) by adding characteristics of the company, brand personality and the symbolic brand value.

Davis (2010) and the American Marketing Association (AMA) (2011) offer two definition of branding reflecting both the traditional and an updated interpretation. AMA (2011) explains that the traditional definition of a brand is a name, design, symbol or any feature that

distinguishes a seller's goods and services as distinct from competitors. AMA (2011) further highlights a brand may identify an item, a group of items or all items of that seller; if used for the company as a whole. AMA (2011) concludes that the updated definition of a brand as a customer experience characterised by images and ideas, brand recognition and other reactions that are created by the agglomeration of experiences with the product and service, directly relating to its use and through the influence of advertising, design, and media commentary. Kapferer (2012) further emphasises that brands are a direct consequence of market segmentation strategy and product differentiation and that a brand is a long term vision that should have its own explicit point of view on the product category.

Keller (2008) and Kapferer (2008) refers to a brand as something that has actually created a certain amount of prominence, awareness and reputation, thus acting as a selective memory, resulting in the creation of people's perceptions with illusions of permanence and coherence; this is why brands are less elastic than its products. Customer loyalty is created by respecting the brands features that initially seduce the buyers; in order to build customer loyalty and to capitalise on it, brands must stay true to themselves (Kapferer, 2008). Wong and Merrilees (2008) and Pitta and Franzak (2008) convey that brands becomes an inseparable part of a company's value and an imperative strategic asset, resulting in the brand being a personification of the product and company.

Czinkota and Ronkainen (2010), outline that brands are important as they shape consumer decisions and create economic value. Spense and Essoussi (2010) stress that brands offer differentiation and competitive advantage when applied correctly can lead to a positive brand image and thus increases brand equity. When a brand is identified, consumers respond more favourably to marketing activities compared to when a brand is not identified (Spense and Essoussi, 2010). Furthermore, they explain that a successful brand building process involves the development and effective management of a brand identity.

#### **2.4.1 The benefits of branding:**

Aaker (1992) identified benefits of branding for a company. These include the effective marketing, brand loyalty, pricing, brand extension, trade leverage and competitive advantage. Cretu and Brodie (2007) establish that branding positively impacts the perceived quality of the products and services. Also perceived were those brands providing product identity and a

unique and dependable product image (Michell et al. 2001). A strong brand is essential and enables businesses to demand premium prices (Michell et al., 2001; Low and Blois, 2002 and Ohnemus, 2009). Branded products result in competitive products and services being rejected (Low and Blois, 2002 and Ohnemus, 2009).

### **2.5 Brand Strategy:**

A brand strategy is more fundamental than defining and articulating the core meaning behind a brand according to Tait (2012) and if not done effectively, all the execution that flow from the brand strategy is a waste of resources.

It is suggested by Krake (2005) that SME's should concentrate on establishing one or two strong brands instead of stretching limited resources. Spence and Essousi (2010) add that successful branding is due to a well-established brand strategy.

The AMA (2013) explains a brand strategy attempts to establish a strong brand reputation on the internet to increase brand recognition and generate significant impressions. Adding to this Aaker (2013) explains that differentiation is no longer enough, which is why the goal of any brand strategy should be to establish market leadership.

### **2.6 Brand Equity:**

Kapferer (2008) and Keller (2003) both highlight that brand equity is generated through products and services creating value both directly and indirectly.

Brand equity is often mistaken for brand value, brand strength and brand description according to Fanning (2006). Kumar and George (2007) and Kim and Ko (2012) outline that the value of a customer to a business is not solely for profit from transactions, they inform it is the profit generated by the consumer over the duration of the relationship with the company. Brand equity is a consumer's personal evaluation of the brand other than its values (Kim et al. 2008, lemon et al. 2001). Davis (2010) points out that brand equity reflects the consumer's opinion either for or against the brand and correspondingly it can be positive or negative; the accumulation of brand equity is essential to build brand value.

Severi and Ling (2013) highlight that brand equity is an imperative section of marketing that is crucial for companies to create a strong brand experience with core competencies that influence consumer decisions. Pride and Farrel (2003) and Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) define brand equity as the marketing and monetary values associated with a brands strength in the marketplace, including proprietary based assets, name awareness, brand loyalty,

perceived quality and brand association, that effects the value provided by the products or services to a firm and its customers. Severi and Ling (2013) identifies brand image as an important element of brand equity.

### **2.6.1 Proprietary assets:**

Brand assets are most valuable when they are able to prevent competitors from affecting the customer base and customer loyalty of a company (Aaker, 2009). Proprietary brand assets include trademarks, patents and channel relationships (Aaker, 2009 and Keller, 2008).

Trademarks protect the brands equity from competitors that release products or services with similar names, symbols and packaging (Aaker, 2009 and Keller, 2008); patents can prevent direct competition when they are substantial and applicable to customer choice. Aaker (2009) and Keller (2008) also inform that distribution channels have the ability to be controlled by a brand due to the history of brand performance. Aaker (2009) further established that it is essential that assets are relevant to the brand.

### **2.6.2 Brand Awareness:**

Keller (2007) suggests that brand awareness requires connecting the brand to certain association in the memory. The more aware consumers are of a product and a brand, the more likely they are to purchase the product or brand (Gustafon and Chabot, 2007).

According to Aaker (2009) highlights that brand awareness occurs when potential consumers recognise and recall a brand and associate it to a certain product category. Brand awareness follows a process, from feeling uncertain that a particular brand has been recognised to believing the brand is the elite of that product category; the level of brand awareness with brand equity is determined by the achieved level of awareness also by the context of the awareness achieved (Aaker, 2009).

The AMA (2013) defines brand awareness as a marketing theory that enables the levels of consumer knowledge and awareness of a brands existence to be measured; at the aggregate brand level, this indicates the magnitude of consumers who know and recognise the brand. Brand awareness occurs through brand recall and brand recognition, this can happen either directly or indirectly according to Davis (2010). Brand awareness is an essential stage in buying readiness, in order to encourage the customer to develop a preference for the brand

and move to the point of purchase (Ross and Harradine, 2007 and Mac Donald and Sharp, 2000). Valkenburg and Buijzen (2005) established that consumer decisions are affected by their ability to recognise and recall brands and is essential during the brand choice.

### **2.6.3 Perceived Quality:**

Perceived quality is a specific form of connotations that effects brand association in various circumstances and has the ability to affect the profitability of the brand according to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009). Severi and Ling (2013) establish perceived quality to be the overall attitude of consumers in relation to the quality of a product, service or brand compared to competitors. Severi and Ling (2013) and Erenkol and Duygun (2010) emphasise that product quality is different to 'perceived quality' as perceived quality is the consumer's evaluation of the product, service or brand. Strong brands enable customers to understand and recognise the intangible side of the product and service, in turn influences the customer's perception of quality (Kayaman and Arasil, 2007), thus creating a strong brand can help to remove some of the perceived risks associated with purchasing certain products or services.

### **2.6.4 Brand Association:**

Aaker (1991), Severi and Ling (2013) believe brand association and brand equity are strongly interrelated to each other due to brand association enhancing the memory of a specific brand. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) informs that brand association is imagery, product attributes, use of a situation, organisational associations, brand personality or symbols that connects the customer to the brand. They go on to say that it is essential to avoid brand association that would be incompatible with the brand as it may be potentially harmful. As a brand develops and gains acceptance, it stirs emotions, provokes thoughts and connects with people's emotions (Davis, 2010), these associations directly and indirectly affect customer behavior and triggers their desire to purchase a product or service.

### **2.6.5 Brand loyalty:**

Yoo et al. (2000) and Severi and Ling (2013) emphasise that brand loyalty has the ability to influence the customer decision to purchase the same product, service or brand and weaken the move to competitor brands. Yoo et al. (2000) and Severi and Ling (2013) conclude that brand loyalty is central to brand value. Myers (2003) informs that the use of brand names and

symbols are used as a means of enhancing the value of a product and can be used to help build brand loyalty and equity. It is essential for a company to build and retain a positive brand image, to develop loyalty according to Kayaman and Arasil, (2007) and Sweeney and Swait, (2008). Strategic Marketing and Research Techniques (2008) concludes that there is a positive connection among brand image and consumer loyalty.

### **2.6.6 Brand Image:**

Hsieh and Li (2008) and Severi and Ling (2013) inform that a predominant brand image creates a superior brand message over the competitor brand. Subsequently, Burmann et al. (2008) established that customer behavior is effected by and is determined by a brand image. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) inform that a company can create a culture and structure that people can recognise an exceptional idea, thus giving the incentive to support it so that it can succeed. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) further suggest that brands image and its identity are the most important aspect of the brand. Cheng (2011) explains that a brands image has a positive effect on the perceived value, customer loyalty and customer purchasing behavior.

### **2.7 Brand Reputation:**

Ettenson and Knowles (2008) state that many executives acknowledge corporate reputation and a brand to be one; however, they are not, thus leading to costly errors. Ettenson and Knowles (2008) establish that a brand's reputation is a "company-centric" approach that emphasizes on the integrity and respect that the company has established among a large range of individuals, including the workforce, shareholders, regulators, journalists, and local communities and most of all customers. Brand reputation is company focused and comes from the success or failure of the company to deliver on a promise (Gunelius, 2013) also that a critical mistake companies make when developing brand reputation is confusing brand reputation with brand promise. Crain and Schlinke (2013) inform that a negative post can cause dramatic and inestimable repercussions on a brand's reputation, even after post is taken down, it has still been viewed by competitors, potential and existing customers.

## **2.8 Branding and SME:**

Inskip (2004) and Spence and Essousi (2010) suggest that branding is not a priority for SME's; as it is regarded as a reductive concept involving only the product, the service, the technology or the logo being sold. The problem of branding in SME's is related to the lack of clear positioning and distinctiveness to communication according to Inskip (2004). Krake (2005) explains that in many SME's, brand management receives minimal or at worst no attention and they do not give the priority required essential for the development of a strong brand image. He further explains that the responsibility lies with top management as there is no one else to take the responsibility due to the lack of resources.

Wong and Merilees (2005) suggests that brand orientation plays a substantial part in managing a company's growth. Krake (2005) adds to this by discussing guidelines for creating a strong brand. The first is to build one strong brand; secondly it is essential to integrate a mixture of brand elements that support the brand's image and awareness. The third is to establish a desire for the brand within the company.

Ojasalo et al. (2008) argues that SME's and large companies can build brands, however, the way they in which they do this is unlike, it is essential for SME's to think about communication from the beginning, otherwise they have to do it several times later. Wong and Vallaster (2005), Krake (2005), Abimbola and Vallaster (2007) and Spence and Essousi (2010) highlight SME's brand management is an area where SME studies have received little attention; effective brand building and management in SME's requires using creativity and the company focusing on a strong brand association by itself or through partnership, also through a cost effective communication strategy to reinforce the brand. Ojasalo et al (2008) and Spence and Essousi (2010) believe there is real opportunity for SME's to exploit corporate branding strategies. Reijonen et al. (2012) concludes that in the context of SME's, a classification of brand orientation typologies exist (Wong and Merrilee, 2005), it is also suggested that SME's brand and reputation building becomes a key resource over time (Ambimola and Vallaster, 2007).

Branding requires cross functional activities within an SME in order to establish a positive brand reputation in the minds of the stakeholders, according to Abimbola and Vallaster

(2007); correspondingly due to the nature and flexible structures of SME, they portray a clear advantage over large organisation when establishing a positive brand reputation.

## 2.9 Branding and Social Media:

Branding has been the foundation of the advertising industry for a century (Young, 2010), however, the introduction of digital media has set higher standards, in effect repositioning the industry’s perspectives of established media. Young (2010) concludes that for marketers digital media provides insight in to how each consumer converts interests in to intent to purchase, however, the peer to peer connectivity of social media needs to become central to every marketer’s thinking.

Crain and Schlinke (2013) explain that social media tools are better suited to fulfilling two crucial elements the PR requirements of brand extension and reputation management; as every social media user is required to manage their reputation and protect their unique brand. Four main social media goals and objectives for businesses have been established by Crain and Schlinke (2013). The first is to establish a reputation as the leader in a specific area. The second is to be the source of current and relevant information. The third goal is to ensure all members of the company are more available and to establish a stronger relationship with existing customers. The fourth goal is to extend the existing brand to one that serves a certain demographic. They suggest that there are potential risks involved when not pursuing a social media strategy; these are depicted in table 2.2.

2. Lack of visibility
2. Expectation that a legitimate business has a social media presence
2. Perception that the company is out of sync with its customers
4. The risk that a firm will be defined by competitors for the lack of their social media presence

Table: 2.3

## 2.10 Social Media:

The Social Networking and Media Association (2009) explains that social media is the efficient use of web tools to deliver a collaborative web typically focused around user generated content. User generated content enables people to comment, link, rate, blog and

discuss. A similar conclusion about social media was drawn by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). They define social media as a collection of web based applications that shape the ideological and technological infrastructure of the web and enable the formation and the exchanging of the user generated content.

Agichtein et al (2009) describes social media as ‘popular user generated content domains including social bookmarking sites, photo and video sharing sites, blogs and forums, they also included social media platforms such as Facebook, which comprises of a combination of all of these while highlighting the connection among the users of the community’. Weber (2009) also includes search engines in to the definition of the social web. Due to the development of the web and the spread of internet usage, the web became more sociable. This in turn enabled social media to emerge. The main consequence of this was the transfer of market power from producers to consumers. This development has had a huge impact on companies and their communication strategies. Bakeman and Hanson (2012) describe social media in business as the development of relationships through various communication channels.

Evans (2008) explains social media has numerous characteristics that make it fundamentally different from traditional marketing media such as newspaper and TV advertisements. He notes that it does not mean to use social media instead of traditional media but implies a different set of tools to compliment what the company is already using. Crain and Schlinke (2013) inform that social media and the web enable individuals to align interests and collaborate in contrast to the one way information push that occurs from traditional marketing. Crain and Schlinke (2013) explain that the theory that the young adults are the most engaged on social media is correct as 92 percent of respondents are aged 18-29; however, the actively engaged adoption rates have increased in all adult age groups, the adoption of social media among the 50-64 has increased from 4 percent to 57 percent and the 65+ age group has increased from 1 percent to 38 percent during 2006 and 2012.

### **2.10.1 Social Media setting:**

It is not enough to just name the networking sites it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of them in order to understand their purpose and the function in which they fulfill. Scoble (2007) created a social media starfish which includes all the relevant forms of

social media (appendix 1). Table 2.4 depicts the categories that have shaped the social networking landscape.

Social Media	Characteristics	Example
Video and Photo sharing	Organise and share photograph content.	Instagram, YouTube
Blog	An online diary uploaded frequently to the internet. People can subscribe and receive updates and can contribute if you allow (Clapperton, G 2009).	Word Press
Micro blogs	Evans (2008) explains that micro blogs are different from traditional blogs because the content is short sentences limited to 140 characters.	Twitter
Wikis	A wiki is a site where numerous users to collaborate together, in the form of pictures and text (Evans 2008, Li and Bernoff 2008).	Wikipedia
Personal Social Networks	Weber (2007), Constatinides and Fountain (2008) state that personal social networking sites are applications that allow users of a personal website to connect with other like-minded users. These personal websites enable users to share information, experiences and express opinions.	Facebook
Collaborative Tools	Li and Bernoff (2008) explain that software code is available on an online platform where people can collaboratively develop the software.	Firefox
Events	Evans (2008) informs that people upload music and then the event service provider will send announcements when their desired artists will be holding a performance.	Zvents
Podcast	Scott (2009) highlights that podcasts are video, that are circulated by an RSS feed to subscribers of the service.	RSS Feed

Forums	Li and Bernoff (2008) explain that forums are online discussion sites where people can post and answer other questions.	Community Forums
White label social networks (WLSN)	Evans (2008) explains that WLSN sites are companies or brands own social communities to enhance customer support and engagement and product development.	Apple
Emails (Electronic Mail)	Scoble (2007) informs that an email is the transfer of electronic messages via the web, Emails can send text, images and sound files, as attachments.	Hotmail
SMS	Scoble (2007) explain that SMS are communication channels that allow organisations build SMS into their social media.	Vodafone

Table: 2.4

### 2.10.2 Most Influential Social Networking Sites:

For the following reasons the six most influential social media networks have been chosen to study. Bakeman and Hanson (2012) reports that nearly one in five small business owners are integrating social media into their operations, Facebook and LinkedIn are the primary forms. A survey by Constant Contact (2011) state that 74 percent using twitter , 47 percent using LinkedIn and 73 percent using YouTube found these social media networks to be effective for their business, however, SME's still find emails to be the most frequent tool used; on average SME's check their emails more than 6 time a day.

Hourigan (2012) the president and CEO of Bay Shore Solutions explains that the best place to establish a business profile is on the social networking sites relevant to your target audience such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

Lipsman (2012) informs that analysts at research firm Com Score reports that small businesses, and their larger counterparts, are becoming fond of one of the hottest new social-networking sites known as Pinterest and Instagram.

Given the number of social networks available, Evans (2008) concludes that social media platforms involve numerous different activities which include video content sharing, messaging and blogging. The effectiveness of these activities relies on a consolidation of tools which attract users. Li and Bernoff (2008) established five categories that explain the

activities enabled by social media (appendix 2). These categories determine the use of social media, also by what method businesses can exploit the data for marketing, communication and branding purposes.

Social network site	Features	Members
Facebook	Photos & Videos & Messages	2.06 billion users
Twitter	Real time Information SNS Pictures Information in 140 characters Re tweets	500 million users
YouTube	Discover, watch & share videos	800 million users
Instagram	Share life and experience through photographs	100 million users
LinkedIn	Professional networking site Networks of industry experts	200 million users
Pinterest	Virtual pin board Share pictures found on the internet	25 million users

Table: 2.5

(Source: Digital Marketing Rambling 2013)

## 2.11 Social media and SME's:

Bakeman and Hanson (2012) highlight that social media marketing has become commonplace among large corporations, however, SME's have lagged behind when entering the social media world. Evans (2008) and Bakeman and Hanson (2012) explain that as social media began to progress so did the interest of astute business in order to reach new markets and consumers by various social media platforms that were quickly emerging. These astute companies soon realised that Facebook; YouTube, Twitter and MySpace were a place for formal and informal advertising.

Qualman (2009) believes that due to social media word of mouth has become world of mouth. Qualman (2009) informs that in spite of the niche fragmentation triggered by the web, an understanding of what the people are doing is desired, social media is that mechanism; therefore, the utilisation of social media networks are an effective communication tool that allows interaction. Qualman (2009) further explains that this should be seen as an opportunity

for SME's as there is a large potential customer base searching and interacting on social networks; this requires SME's monitoring social media sites in order to engage with these potential customers. Qualman (2009) concludes that SME's who do not engage with customers on social networking sites risk being left behind as the competition may respond.

Lacho and Marinello (2010) state that computer-generated domains, enable the sharing of information, images, videos, experiences and their purchasing preferences; also their recommendations of products and services. Lacho and Marinello (2010) explain that these recommendations have led to businesses acknowledging social networks and the influence that these virtual word of mouth advertising spaces have on the sale of a company's products and services.

Crain and Schlinke (2013) explain that it is essential for a company to understand its customers, cater to their requirements and expectations; thus social media is an accessible technique for companies to reach and inform their target audience.

## **2.12 The impact Social Media has on Brand Reputation:**

McCann's Social Media Research (2008) established that brand reputation can be dramatically impacted by social media. Cohen (2011) establishes that brands and their reputations are interconnected. When brands make a promise, expectations are generated and a reputation is built based upon those expectations, thus a good reputation builds perceived value. Reffert (2012) explains companies are becoming gradually more web based and mobile and increasing customer confidence is important; thus resulted in companies gaining assistance from online reputation management companies.

Barnes et al (2008) explains that there is an expanding group of extremely desirable target customer: 25-55 years old, college graduates who have desirable buying behavior, they research companies via social media; this group will not support businesses with weak reputations; also they will discuss openly with others via several social media networks. Shandwick (2013) explains that global executives attribute 52 percent of their brands reputation to how social it is, and is up from 45 percent one year ago. Shandwick (2013) further explains that it is projected by executives that 65 percent of the companies brand

reputation will derive from its online social standing in three years, resulting in a 44 percent growth rate in five years.

Reffert (2012) suggests that due to consumers buying products online and they are surrounded by web advertisements and social media, thus meaning consumer trust is increasingly determined by a company's online reputation. Businesses can utilise social media to depict trust and transparency; a business with admirable social media presence can establish meaningful rapport with customers, resulting in customer retention (Reffert, 2012). Cohen (2011) and Reffert (2012) recognise that a business's online reputation is not completely within their own control, in the web based world, the conversation about brands and products are happening with or without the companies' consent; thus meaning a company can choose to be a spectator, a contributor or ambivalent.

### **2.13 Conclusion:**

The literature has highlighted the essential relationship between marketing, branding and social media.

From reviewing the literature the most influential social networking sites for businesses were identified. These are:

- Facebook,
- Twitter,
- Facebook,
- Twitter,
- YouTube,
- LinkedIn,
- Pinterest.

Literature surrounding branding identified essential elements such as brand equity, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, brand loyalty, brand image and brand reputation. These elements were identified by authors such as Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009), Davis (2010) and Severi and Ling (2013). The application of the appropriate tools results in a brand strategy that creates competitive advantage for the company.

From reviewing the literature it has been established that social media can have a dramatic effect on a brand reputation. Such authors as Cohen (2011), Barnes et al (2008), Reffert (2012) have established that a brand and its reputation are interconnected, and consumer trust is increasingly dependent on online reputation.

### 3. Methodology Chapter:

#### 3.1 Introduction:

This chapter will define and justify the primary research methods utilised in the data collection. The chapter aims to evaluate various research methods available to the researcher in order to gather the appropriate information required to meet the established objectives.

#### 3.2 Previous Research:

From reviewing the literature, the researcher has found that many key authors (table 3.1) chose to use either a qualitative or quantitative approach to develop insight in to the subject area. The author believes that there are complex connections between various factors. The researcher found there is an absence of research that examines the impact of social media on brand reputation specifically for SME's. This research aims to sample a number of different industries across Donegal to provide an insight in to any similarities or differences.

Authors	Research Areas	Approach Used
Weber (2009)	Marketing on the social web	Qualitative
Krake (2005)	Brand management in SME's	Qualitative
Kaplan & Haelein (2010)	Challenges and opportunities of social media	Qualitative
Reijonen (2010)	Marketing in SME's	Quantitative
Barnes (2008)	Customer care and brand reputation in the age of social media	Quantitative

Table: 3.1 Previous Research Methodologies

#### 3.3 Research Objectives:

- To explore whether using social media to enhance brand reputation is a viable option for SME's.
- To identify the perceived advantages of using social media to enhance brand reputation.
- To identify the perceived disadvantages of using social media to enhance brand reputation.

- To ascertain the extent to which SME's in Donegal utilise social media tools to increase their brand reputation.
- To determine the most effective social media tools for different industries.
- To develop a set of guidelines for SME's who wish to use social media.

### **3.4 Research Philosophy:**

A pragmatic research philosophy was adopted enabling the researcher to use multiple methods, gain different perspectives, assumptions and also enabling the use of different forms of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2003).

### **3.5 Research Approach:**

Creswell (2003) informs that the deductive model used in quantitative studies enables the researcher to test a theory by examining hypotheses derived from the theory. An inductive approach to qualitative research means getting on the ground floor gathering information in order to get a feel for the situation (Hair et al, 2007). The approach chosen sits in the middle of the continuum between deductive and inductive due to the mixed method approach taken by the researcher.

### **3.6 Research Strategy:**

Choosing the appropriate research strategy increases the quality of the data collected. To determine the appropriate strategy, the researcher carried out an evaluation of the options available.

Quantitative: Creswell (2009) highlights that quantitative methods involve the process of collecting, analysing, interpreting and present a numerical representation of issues and seek to provide definite statements.

Qualitative: Creswell (2009) informs that qualitative data collection is a traditional approach to data collection; through a means of purposeful sampling and collection of open-ended data. Qualitative research methods use methods that give vision rather than a measurement.

Mixed Methods: As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or a series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative

and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011).

The researcher chose mixed methods. The researcher carried out research through a concurrent triangulation strategy depicted in Table 3.2. Concurrent triangulation enables the use of two different research methods in an attempt to confirm well-validated and substantial findings within a single study (Creswell, 2003). The data collection is concurrent and equal priority is given to both methods. While Creswell (2003) informs a limitation associated with the concurrent triangulation strategy is the difficulty of comparing the results from different data collection methods. The author overcame this limitation by analysing the information by industries and using similar themes in the qualitative and quantitative research methods.

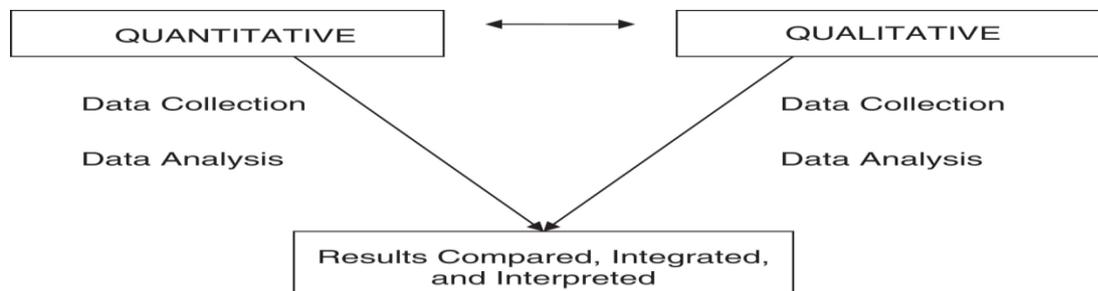


Table: 3.2

Source: [www.emeraldinsight.com](http://www.emeraldinsight.com)

### 3.7 Data Collection Methods:

The research required two methods of data collection. The first was in-depth interviews with owner/ managers of SME's (appendix 3) and the second was survey research with the customer of the SME's and general consumers (appendix 4). The information was collected by exploratory and descriptive measures as they were both essential in order to capture the relevant information.

The exploratory research method was essential due to its flexibility and versatility because formal protocol and procedures are not employed; thus alerting new ideas and insights as the research proceeds (Malhotra, 2007); descriptive research is preplanned and structured with the information required being clearly defined (Malhotra, 2007).

#### 3.7.1 Qualitative Research:

Qualitative research uses techniques that involve a small number of respondents who provide information about their opinions and ideas from which conclusions can be drawn. The first

phase of data collection was exploratory in nature. Interviews were conducted on a one to one basis, involving unstructured and generally open-ended questions and intended to elicit views and opinions (Creswell, 2009) of owner managers of SME's within Donegal across different industries. Interviews have the ability to uncover greater depths of insight than focus groups, depth interviews attribute the responses directly to the respondent and they result in the free exchange of information (Malhotra, 2007), without imposing any bias.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to meet the research objectives, potentially generate new findings and provide more in depth answers by not limiting responses and to seek clarification. The number of interviews conducted with owner managers did not exceed ten in total. The interviews began with questions that were broad in nature; the questions gradually become more specific and detail focused.

A theme sheet was drafted (appendix 5) with open-ended questions, re-occurring phrases and words in order to probe the respondent (Malhotra, 2007), to obtain meaningful responses and uncovering hidden issues.

The interviews took place on the SME's premises and some were conducted over the telephone and Skype if they were unable to meet face to face. The depth interviews flowed according to the respondents' initial response and their willingness to respond to the questions probed by the highly skilled interviewer (Malhotra, 2007).

All interviews were treated in a professional manner and were confidential. To ensure confidentiality the researcher was the only person to see the transcripts and each respondent signed a consent form in the interview (appendix 6). All the data collected was stored in a password protected file for the requisite six-month period required.

Focus groups were not deemed appropriate for this research as you have to organise ten people to be in the same place at the same time and SME owner/managers are under high a level of time constraints (Malhotra, 2007), also focus group results are not representative of the general population and are not projectable.

### **3.7.1.1 Measurement Techniques:**

The researcher used semi-structured interviews due to the flexible and multi-strategy design of the research. The areas discussed in the customer surveys formed the basis for the theme sheet. The areas included social media, branding and brand reputation within SME's. The

researcher recorded each interview using a Dictaphone in order to facilitate the transcribing of interviews to reduce bias. The interviewer required the permission of management and interviewee.

No research should be undertaken without a pre-test (Domegan and Fleming, 2003) the pre-test is a trial run of the questions and should be administrated as close as possible to the actual research conditions. The researcher conducted two pilot interviews with owner/managers of SME's who were part of service and retail industry. The pre-test was conducted to eliminate errors and amended subsequently. The researcher was satisfied with the responses and the interviews lasted on average 40-50 minutes.

### 3.7.1.2 Sampling:

Malhotra (2007) identifies that the sampling design process involves five steps, all of which are interrelated. This can be seen in table 3.3



Table: 3.3

#### **Target population:**

Malhotra (2007) explains that the target population “is the collection of elements or objects that possess the information sought by the researcher and about which inferences are made”. The target population for the research can be defined as male or female, owner/managers of SME's based in Donegal, during July 2012.

#### **Sampling frame:**

A sample frame is a representation of the elements of the target population; it consists of a list of directions for identifying the target population (Malhotra, 2007). The sampling frame for this research was a list of all the micro and SME's in Donegal. The researcher obtained a comprehensive list (appendix 7) from the Chambers of Commerce throughout Donegal and cross checked the information against the Company Registration Office and the CSO website to ensure accuracy.

The sampling frame identified for the research was the four major sectors of SME's in Donegal. These sectors comprise of construction, manufacturing, retail and service.

**Sampling technique:**

Non-probability sampling was employed, by a means of judgement sampling a minimum of 10 SME's in Donegal; to gain an in-depth knowledge as to how the company uses social media and how it effects their brand's reputation. Judgment sampling is a form of convenient sampling which the population elements are purposely selected on the judgment of the researcher (Malhotra, 2007)

**Sample size:**

A total of 10 depth interviews were conducted, based on the information provided above the researcher carried out 3 interviews within the retail industry and service industry. Due to the difficult nature of obtaining interviews with the construction and manufacturing industry, the researcher carried out 2 interviews within each industry.

**3.7.2 Quantitative Research:**

Quantitative research is a method that involves analysing data from a large number of respondents (Page & Meyer, 2000). The aim behind quantitative research is to recommend a final course of action and can either be descriptive or casual (Polonsky and Waller, 2010).

The second data collection method was descriptive research involving survey research. Customer surveys were conducted via personal survey research in order to evaluate the customer's perception of the business and its brand reputation. An online customer survey was carried out to gain an overall perspective of social media and brand reputation. Customer surveys were semi-structured enabling respondents to provide their opinion or to clarify their responses.

The survey was designed in order to meet the research objectives. A well-designed survey is a useful tool and the most flexible means for collecting essential information from respondents, while enabling the collection of data on a large scale (Malhotra, 2007) in a relatively cost effective way as opposed to alternative phone and email survey methods. The results of the surveys can be quickly and easily quantified, and be used to compare and contrast other research. This is vital for research with a large sample size and a large geographic location.

The personal survey research method was chosen, as Domegan and Fleming (2003) inform that the interviewer can clarify complex questions, also they tend to have a less non-response error than other survey methods. Personal survey research poses some limitations (Domegan and Fleming 2003), personal interviews are often impractical due to geographical regions and respondents are not anonymous. The author has overcome these hurdles by using judgement sampling and provided the respondents with a consent form outlining the anonymity of the information provided.

During the online survey data collection process respondents were recruited through social media. Domegan and Fleming (2003) inform that online surveys are generally a cheaper and faster way of undertaking research, also that the internet enables an easier analysis of the data gathered. A clear advantage of online surveys is that they provide complete anonymity.

### **3.7.2.1 Measuring Techniques:**

#### **Questionnaire design:**

Malhotra (2007) identifies a 10-step questionnaire design process (appendix 7). The researcher decided the sections of the questionnaire were the most suitable for obtaining the relevant information and derived from the literature reviewed. The questionnaire includes several different types of questions.

#### **Scaling:**

Structured and semi-structured questions were employed to enable respondents to express their opinions. A direct approach was chosen as the respondents were made aware of the purpose of the research. The questions were in a standardised format with all questions in a prearranged order.

Both comparative and non-comparative scaling techniques were employed in order to gain the relevant information. Non comparative scaling occurs when each stimulus object is scaled independently of the other objects in the stimulus set (Malhotra 2007).

Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 relate to objectives 2 and 3, and use a likert rating scale with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Respondents were required to select the responses that best described their opinion. Likert scales are one of the most widely used attitude scaling techniques and are easy to administer (Domegan and Fleming, 2003).

Seven points semantic differential scaling technique was employed in questions 11 and 13 and a five point semantic differential scaling was used in question 12. These questions relate to objectives 2 and 2. Respondents were required to mark the appropriate blank that best indicated how they would describe the object being rated. Domegan and Fleming (2003) highlight that “semantic differential scaling is widely used to describe the set of beliefs that comprise a person’s image of an organisation or brand”.

Domegan and Fleming (2003) inform that comparative scales are comparative in nature and the result is an ordinal scale that describes the objects from the most to the least favourable. The researcher employed a rank order rating scaling technique in questions 4, 5 and 14. Question 4 and 5 relate to objective 1, while question 14 related to objective 5.

Multiple choice questions were used in questions 1, 2, 3 and 15, respondents were required to select one or more of the responses provided. Question 1, 2 and 3 relate to objective 1 and 15 relates to objective 6. Dichotomous questions were used in questions 16, 17 and 18. Question 16 relates to objective 4 and question 17 and 18 outlined the customer profile.

As highlighted previously in the Qualitative research section, no research should be undertaken without a pre-test (Domegan and Fleming, 2003). The researcher conducted 10 pilot surveys with potential respondents, in order to eliminate errors and amend subsequently.

### **3.7.2.2 Sampling:**

#### **Target population:**

The target population for the research was twofold and can be defined as male or female customer of the participating SME’s. The online target population were male or female consumers. The surveys took place on the premises of the SME’s and online during June and July 2012.

#### **Sampling frame:**

The sampling frame for this research was customers of the participating SME’s; the survey was sent out via three social networking sites – Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn as they were identified in the literature review as three of the most influential social media sites.

**Sampling technique:**

Non-probability sampling was employed by a means of judgement sampling to ensure an adequate representation, the researcher decided to sample a minimum of ten respondents from each business. The researcher used their judgment to circulate surveys via Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Judgement sampling uses the expertise of the researcher to handpick the sample in order to establish adequate representation (Domegan and Fleming, 2003).

**Sample size:**

A total of 250 surveys were conducted, based on the information provided above. The researcher carried out 100 customer survey via a personal survey data collection and alongside this to ensure a representative sample the researcher decided to collect a further 150 responses via online data collection method.

**3.8 Analysis:**

Creswell (2009) highlights, selected strategies of inquiry have a direct influence on the analysis and interpretation procedure. The quantitative data was analysed using the online survey software called Survey Monkey which presented the findings of surveys in graph format. The researcher was then able to run a cross tab between question to show how two different survey items can inter-relate. The personal customer survey analysis was carried out using Excel to enable the researcher to use univariate analysis for each question, resulting in strong analysis.

The qualitative data analysis consisted of preparing and transcribing all information to identify the common themes (Boeije, 2010) and phrases and formulating them in a narrative format. The transcripts were divided into themes and coded based on the research objectives in order to identify the overall views of respondents on the themes discussed.

**3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a synopsis of the research design and described the methods used to answer the research question and achieve the objectives proposed.

## **4. Findings and Analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction:**

The researcher discussed 6 key areas, first of which explored whether using social media to enhance the brand reputation is a viable option for SME's. From the opinion and perception gained enables for further questioning in to the perceived advantages and disadvantages associated with using social media to enhance brand reputation. Highlighting the perceived advantages and disadvantages enabled the researcher to uncover the extent to which SME's in Donegal utilise social media tools to enhance brands reputation. This suggested steps that could be taken to help overcome the perceived disadvantages and use social media to enhance brand reputation. The author analysed the main findings of the depth interviews and consumer surveys under the research objectives as follows.

### **4.2 To explore whether using social media to enhance brand reputation is a viable option for SME's.**

Qualman (2009) highlights that social media should be seen as an opportunity for SME's as there is a large potential customer base searching and interacting on social networks; however, if SME's do not engage with customers on social networking sites they risk being left behind as the competition may respond. This coincides with the research findings

Respondents were asked do they have a profile on social media sites and how often do they visit them. Table 4.1 Indicates that within the service industry 97 percent, in the retail industry 100 percent and in the manufacturing and construction industry 85 percent and 99 percent of general consumers surveyed have a presence on social media sites.

Table 4.2 highlights that 80 percent of service, 77 percent of retail, 59 percent manufacturing, 70 percent of construction and 90 percent of general consumers visit these social media several times daily. While 13 percent service, 29 percent manufacturing and construction and 7 percent retail and general consumers check them once daily. Following this 3 percent service, 13 percent retail, 6 percent manufacturing and construction consumers

check theirs between 2-3 times a week, weekly and monthly. Table 4.1 indicates Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the most popular social media sites amongst respondents.

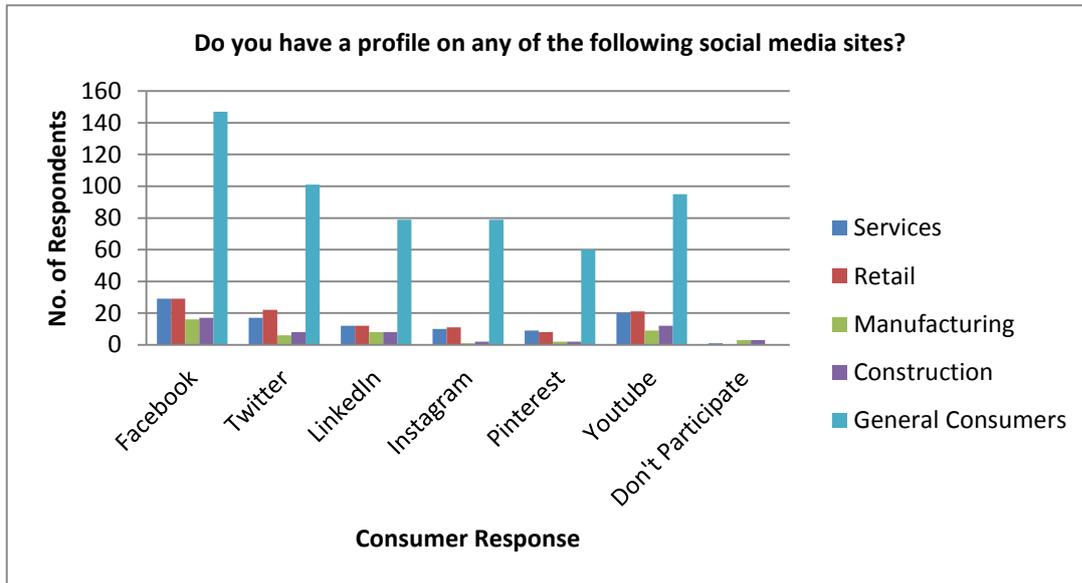


Table:4.1

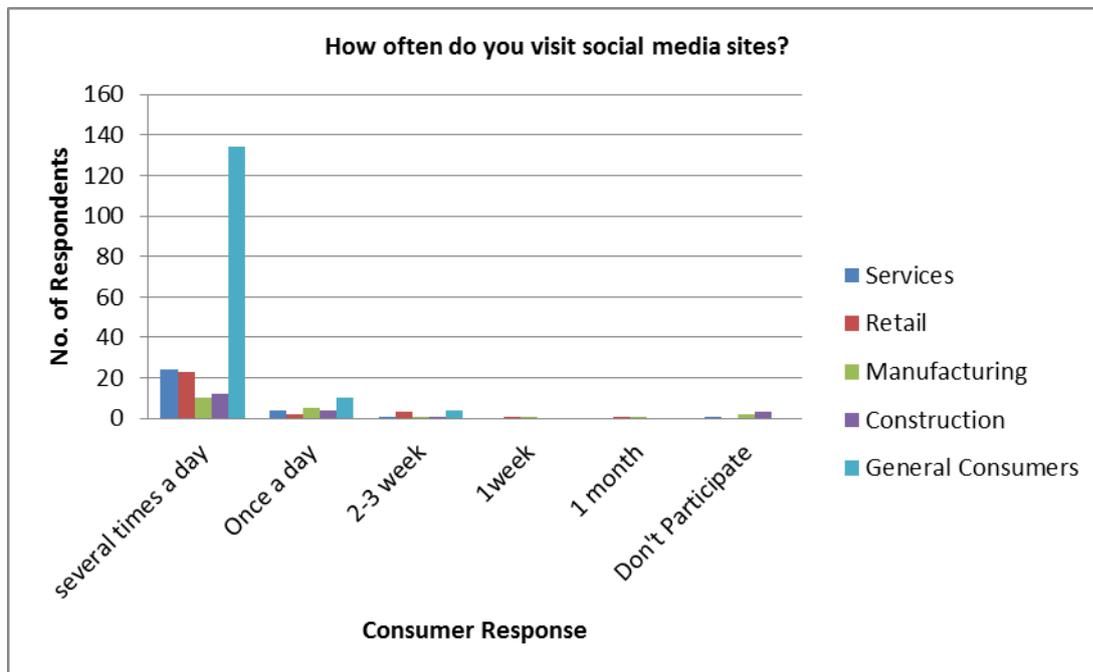


Table:4.2

Across all four industries the primary reason for using social media was to socialise with friends. While sharing photographs and keeping up with events were ranked the other prevalent reasons for using social media sites across the four industries (table 4.3).

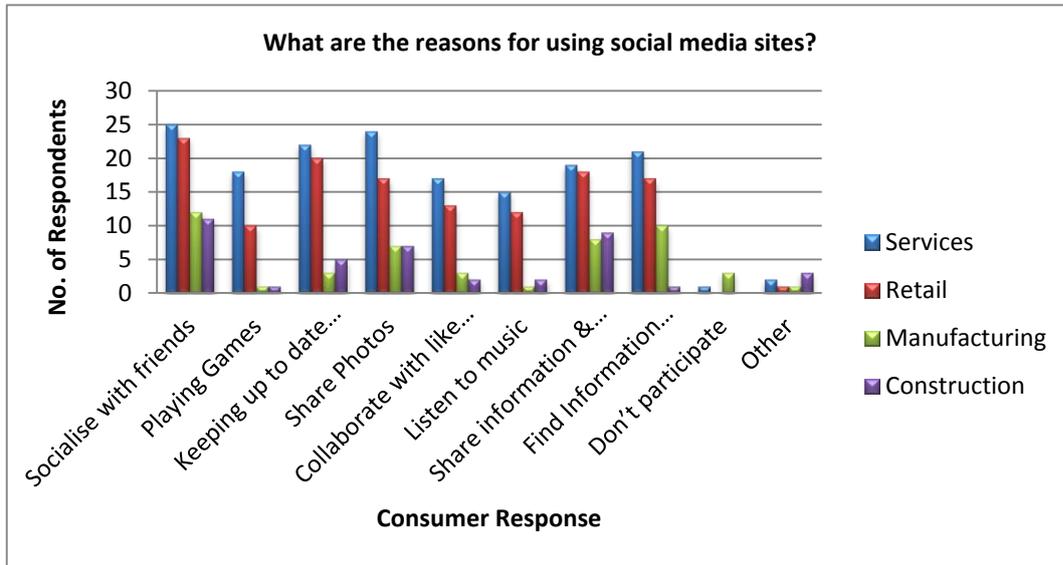


Table:4.3

### Service Industry:

Respondents were asked 'why they visit brand related social media sites?' The primary reason within the service industry was for customer service and to look at brand related images, followed by gaining information about brands and new products, reading reviews and product rankings and seeing brand related images and videos (table 4.4)

Table 4.5 indicates respondents within the service industry informed that posting comments on brand related images and videos as the primary reasons to visit brand related social media sites. Followed by participating in writing reviews of brands and products, engaging in brand related conversations, posting comments about the brand and uploading brand related photographs and submitting new ideas when on social media sites.

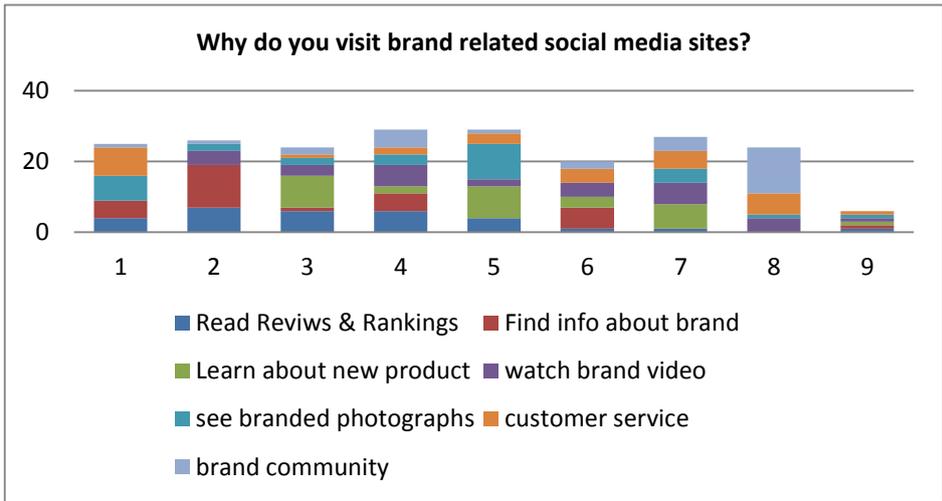


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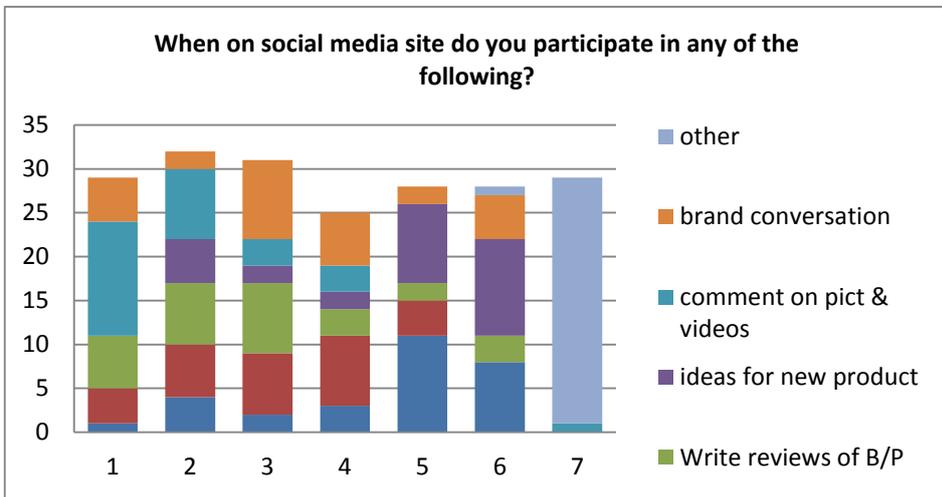


Table:4.5

**Retail Industry:**

Within the retail industry respondents informed the primary reason to visit brand related social media sites was to read reviews and product rankings. Followed by purchasing products, learning about new products, watching brand related videos and respondents wanting to find information about a brand (table 4.6).

Table 4.7 depicts that when on social media respondents from the retail industry ranked writing reviews of the brand and products as their primary action followed by commenting on brand related photographs and videos, post comments about the brand, upload brand related photographs and submitting new product ideas.

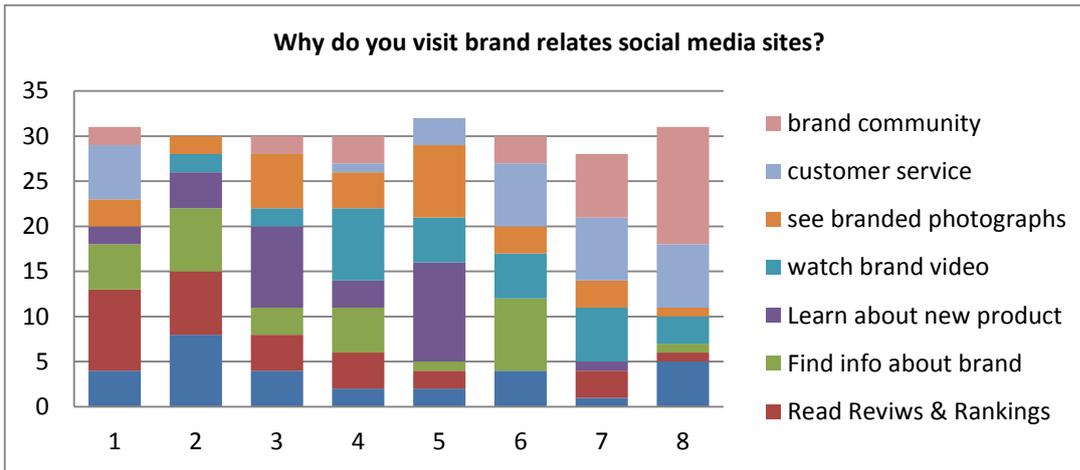


Table:4.6

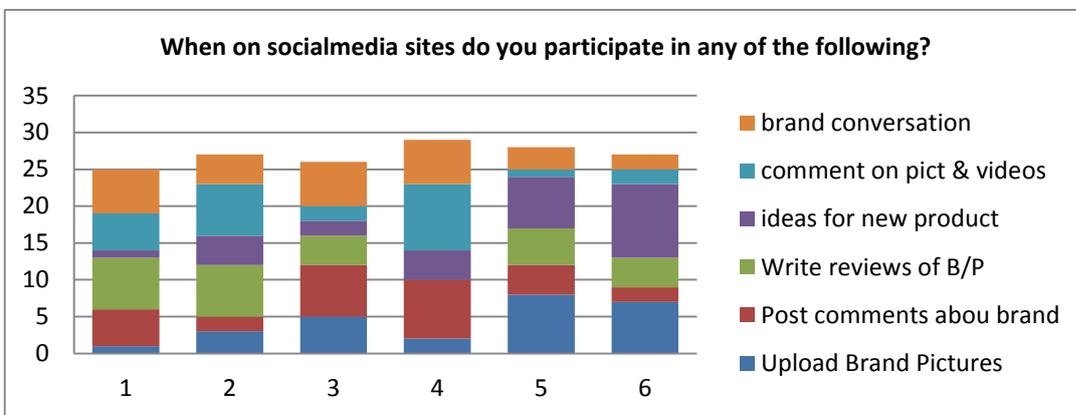


Table:4.7

**Manufacturing Industry:**

Consumers of the manufacturing industry informed the primary reason they visited brand related social media sites was to find out information about the brand, read reviews and rankings, to learn about new products, viewing brand related videos and photographs and customer service (see table 4.8).

Table 4.9 highlights when on social media sites the manufacturing respondents acknowledged they primarily write product and brand reviews, followed by uploading brand related photographs, posting comments about the brand, pictures and videos.

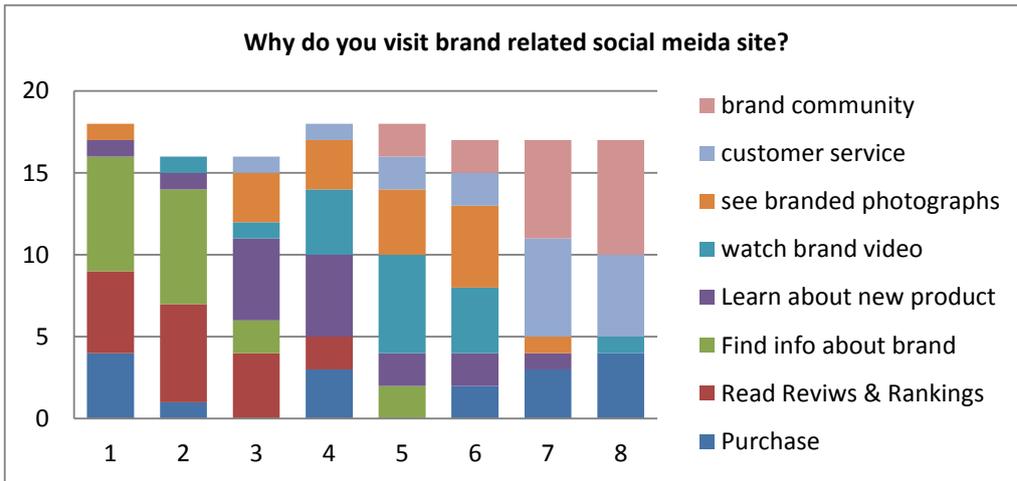


Table:4.8

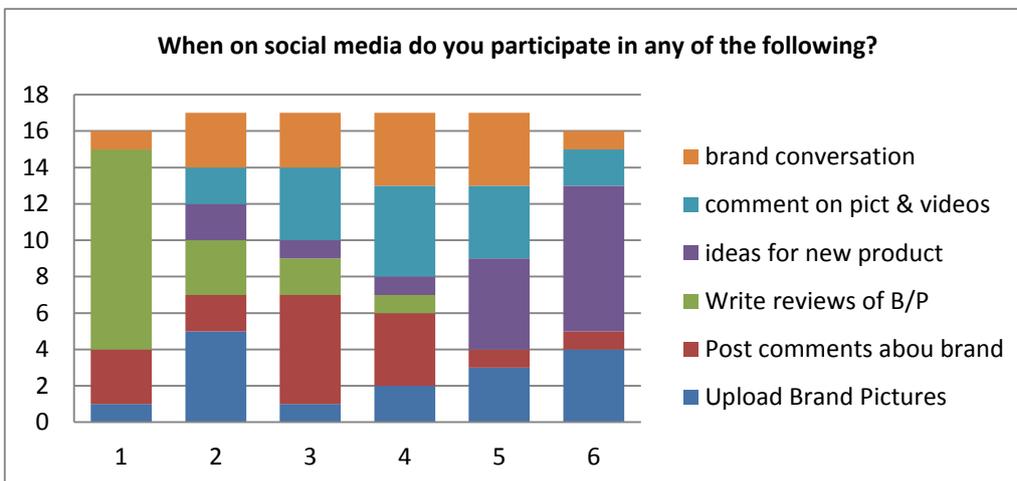


Table:4.9

**Construction Industry:**

Table 4.10 shows the primary focus for the respondents of the construction industry to visit brand relates social media sites was to find information about the brand, read reviews and product ranking, learning about new products and watching brand related images and videos.

Conversely, to the service, retail and manufacturing respondents, when on social media sites reading reviews of the brand and products was the highest ranked by the construction respondents. Following this the respondents ranked commenting about the brand, photographs and videos, submitting new product ideas and engaging in brand conversation, while uploading brand related images were last (table 4.11).

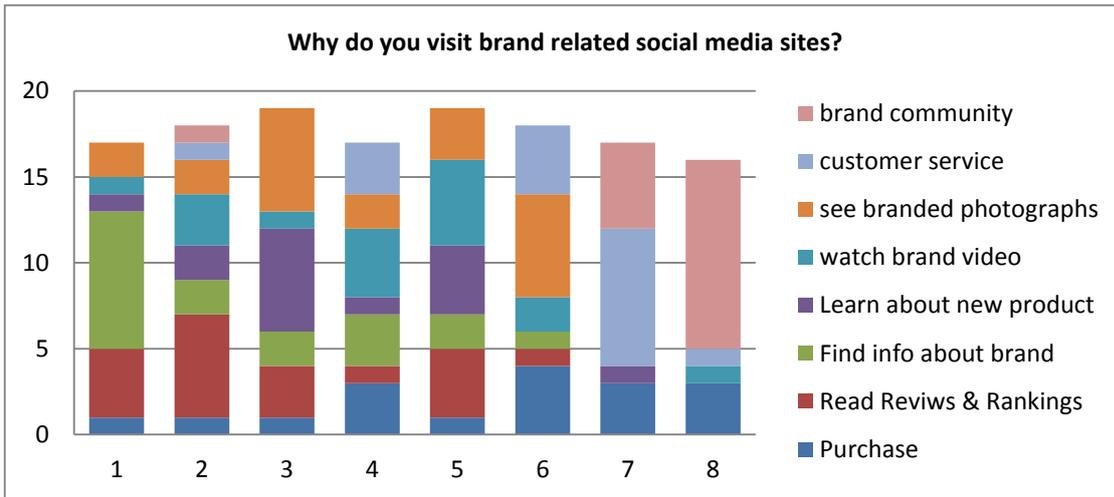


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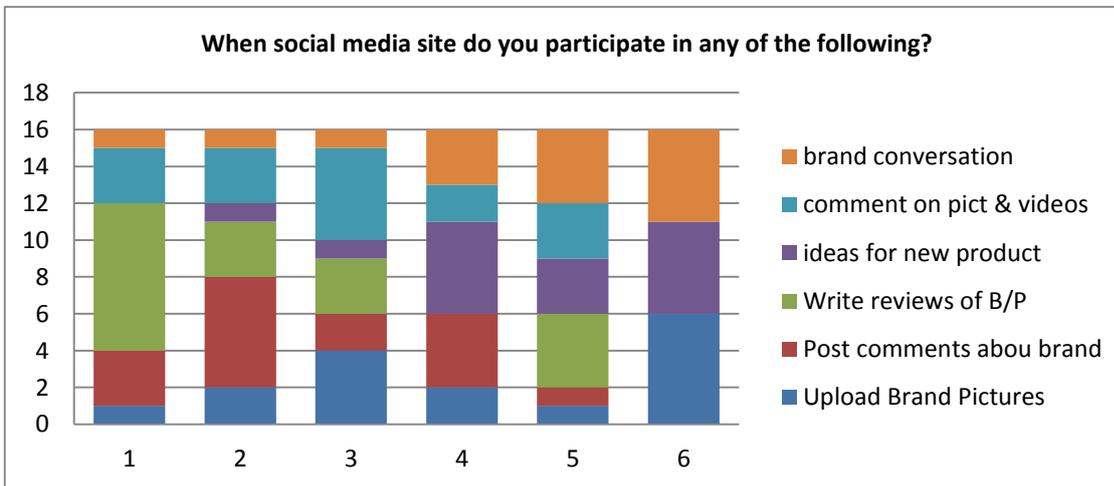


Table:4.11

**General Consumers:**

The general respondent whom participated in the online survey acknowledged the primary reason for visiting branded social media sites was to find out general information about the brand followed by reading reviews and product ranking, to learn about new products, view brand related videos and photographs. Customer service and feeling part of a branded community were recognised as the least reasons to visit brand related social media sites.

Table 4.12 indicates that the online survey respondents primarily participate in writing reviews of the brand and its products, followed by uploading brand related videos and posting comments about the brand, submitting new product ideas, commenting on brand related

photographs and videos. Participating in brand related conversation was the least act participated in by online respondents.

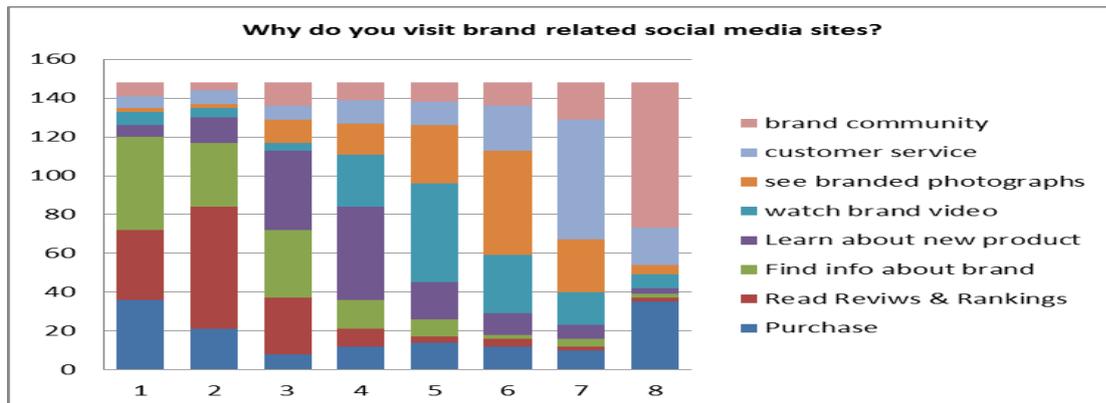


Table:4.12

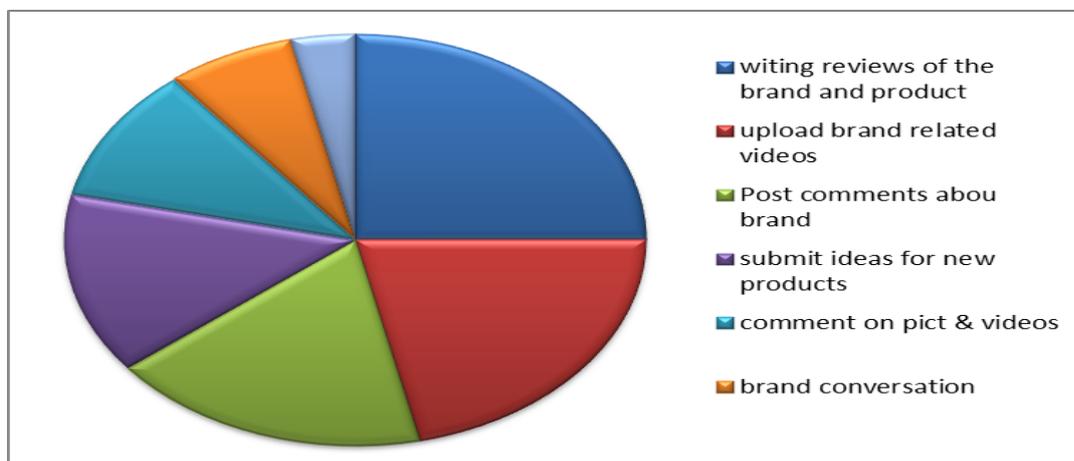


Table:4.13 when on social media sites do you participate in any of the following?

The research indicates that using social media to enhance brand reputation is a viable option for SME's. As indicated above the majority of consumers across four industries and general consumers have a profile one more than one social media site, and access these several times per day.

When respondents were asked what their reasons for using social media sites were, they indicated their priority was to socialise with friends. However, 57 percent in manufacturing and retail, 70 percent in services and 6 percent in construction informed that they visit social media sites to find information out about brands and their products. Following this when asked why they visit brand relates social media sites, the general consensus between consumers was to gain information about the brand, reading and writing reviews, customer

service and viewing brand related images and videos ranked as their priority. Respondents were asked when on brand related social media sites do they participate in any brand related acts. On average the majority of consumers participated in writing reviews of the brand and products, commenting on brand related images and videos as well as commenting on the brand. The participants across four industries and general consumers were consistent in identifying the information above. Thus these findings support the literature findings (Young, 2010) that digital media provides insight into how each consumer converts interests into intent to purchase, and that peer to peer connectivity of social media needs to become central to marketers thinking.

### **4.3 To identify the perceived advantages of using social media to enhance brand reputation.**

Reffert (2012) suggests that due to consumers buying products online and they are surrounded by web advertisements and social media; thus meaning consumer trust is increasingly determined by a company's online reputation. Businesses can utilise social media to depict trust and transparency; a business with an admirable social media presence can establish meaningful rapport with customers, resulting in customer retention (Reffert, 2012).

The in-depth interviews sought to uncover the perceived benefits of using social media to enhance brand reputation. Eight companies informed that using social media has improved their business performance. Nine companies highlighted that their social media efforts have increased their brand reputation. Companies C and E felt their brand loyalty came from being established in the industry for many years and feel they provide a service that gains customer loyalty and not through social media efforts. Nine companies' inform their social media efforts have impacted their companies brand image and in-turn has affected their brand reputation. Seven companies highlight the perceived quality of their brand has increased due to their social media efforts.

#### **Retail Industry:**

The retail sector identified that social media has a positive effect on the SEO rankings due to the brand reputation from Google. Social media influences and humanises brands, enabling a different kind of customer engagement that increases customer confidence in brands and products; thus increasing the brand reputation. Another perceived benefit is the ability to effectively market to a mass target audience at a relatively low cost, while being easily accessible. This enables consumers to gain insight to what the brand is doing continuously. Company A informs "sharing content is a way of life; social media has greatly made an impact on creating and maintaining a positive online reputation".

**Service Industry:**

Perceived benefits highlighted are the increased visibility of the brand due to the extended reach enabled by social media. Three companies inform social media help to build a bigger network of strategic partner for both the company and the brand. Two companies inform they have a huge return on investment from their social media efforts and an increase in sales. One company recognised the SEO benefits of social media for a brand. Three companies interviewed informed that social media is an effective way to increase brand reputation at a relatively low cost.

**Manufacturing Industry:**

The perceived benefits associated with using social media to increase the brand reputation are social media enables 24hour customer service thus enhancing the brand reputation in the minds of consumers and the increase in positive word of mouth associated with social media when managed correctly. Thus increase the brand reputation. Social media can increase the hype around a brand if carried out effectively consequently increasing the brand reputation. Consistent with the retail and service industries, the manufacturing industry also recognised the perceived benefits of Google recognition and SEO rankings associated with social media and brand reputation.

**Construction Industry:**

Neither of the 2 construction companies' interviewed currently have a presence on social media. However, they acknowledge the perceived benefits of increasing brand awareness and the increase in brand identity.

Table 4.14 depicts that 74 percent retail, 60 percent construction, 95 percent of service, 50 percent of manufacturing and 74 percent of general consumers place trust in brands who provide information through social media sites.

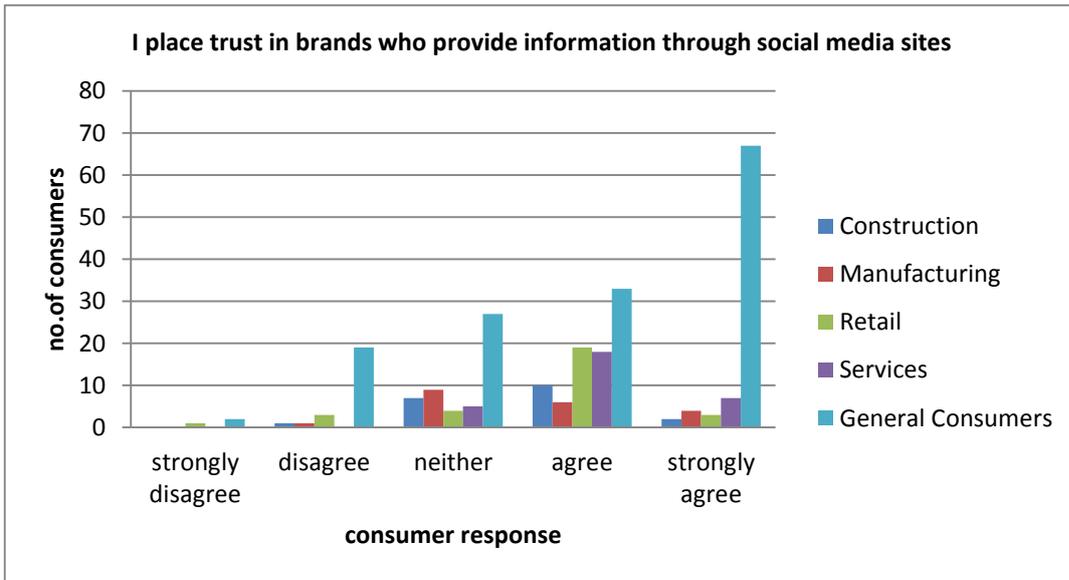


Table:4.14

Table 4.15 shows that 80 percent of manufacturing and retail, 60 percent of construction, 83 percent of service and 84 percent of general consumers agree that they read consumer comments on social media before purchasing a brand.

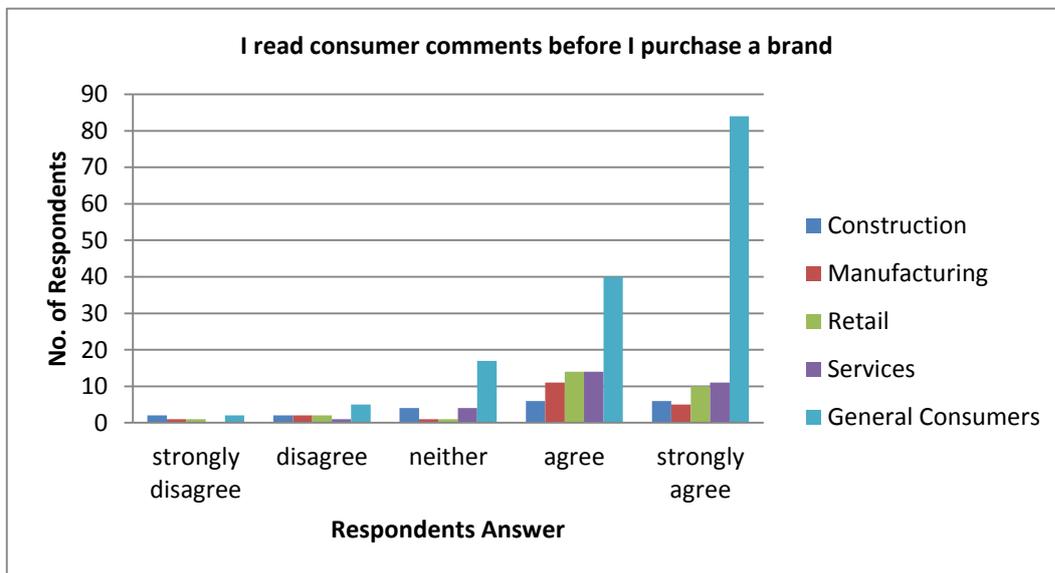


Table:4.15

Table 4.16 depicts that 65 percent of manufacturing, 70 percent of retail, 65 percent of construction, 87 percent of service and 74 percent of general consumers feel their brand

affiliation increases having interacted with through social media.

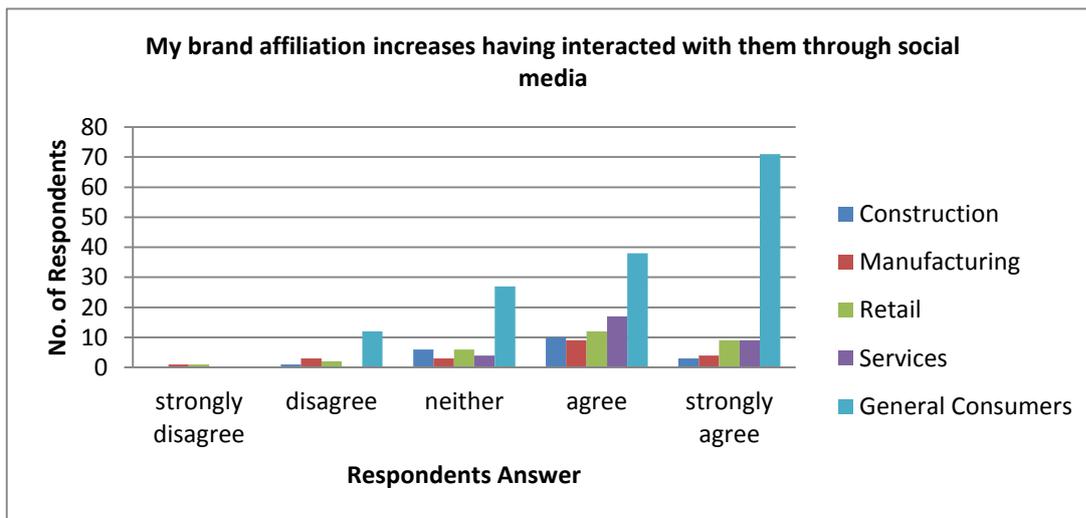


Table:4.16

Fifty-five percent of construction consumers, 70 percent of service consumers, 63 percent of retail consumers and 60 percent of manufacturing consumers inform having interacted with brand on social media has increased their brand loyalty (table 4.17). Sixty-five percent of general consumers informed that their brand loyalty has increased due to interacting with that brand through social media. While 22 percent neither agree or disagree with this statement and 13 percent somewhat disagree with the statement (table4.17).

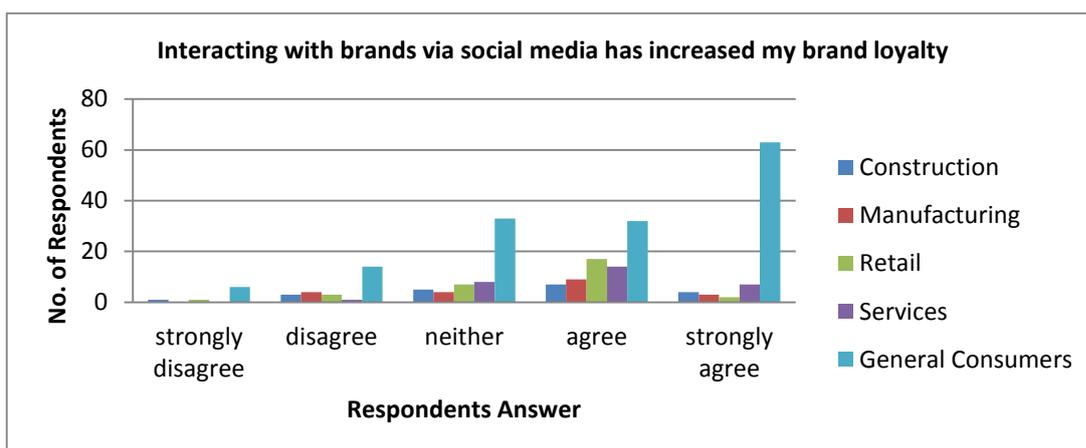


Table:4.17

There is a general consensus that having a positive or negative experience influences consumers purchasing decision. Table 4.18 depicts that 80 percent of construction, 87 percent of service and retail consumers and 90 percent of manufacturing consumers inform that the

quality of their social media experience positive or negative, impacts their intention to purchase the brand.

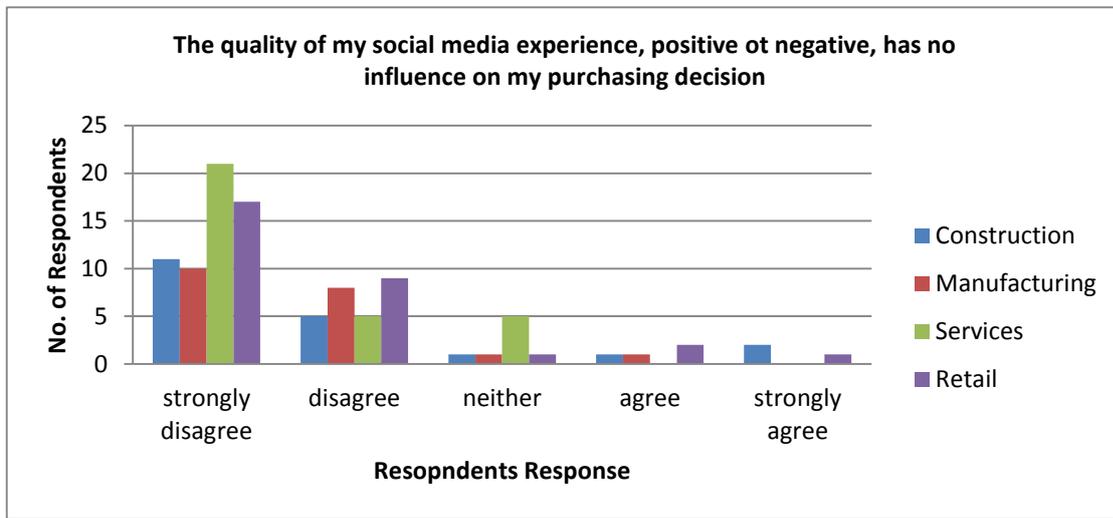


Table:4.18

Table 4.19 highlights that 83 percent of service, 75 percent of construction, 70 percent of manufacturing, 55 percent of retail and 71 percent of general consumers believe interacting with brands through social media increases their intention to purchase the brand.



Table:4.19

Having an enjoyable experience on social media does increase the perceived quality of a brand. Ninety-five percent of the construction, 86 percent of the service, 83 percent of retail, 85 percent of manufacturing and 78 percent of general consumers (table 4.20) inform that

having an enjoyable experience with a brand on social media does increase the perceived quality of the brand.

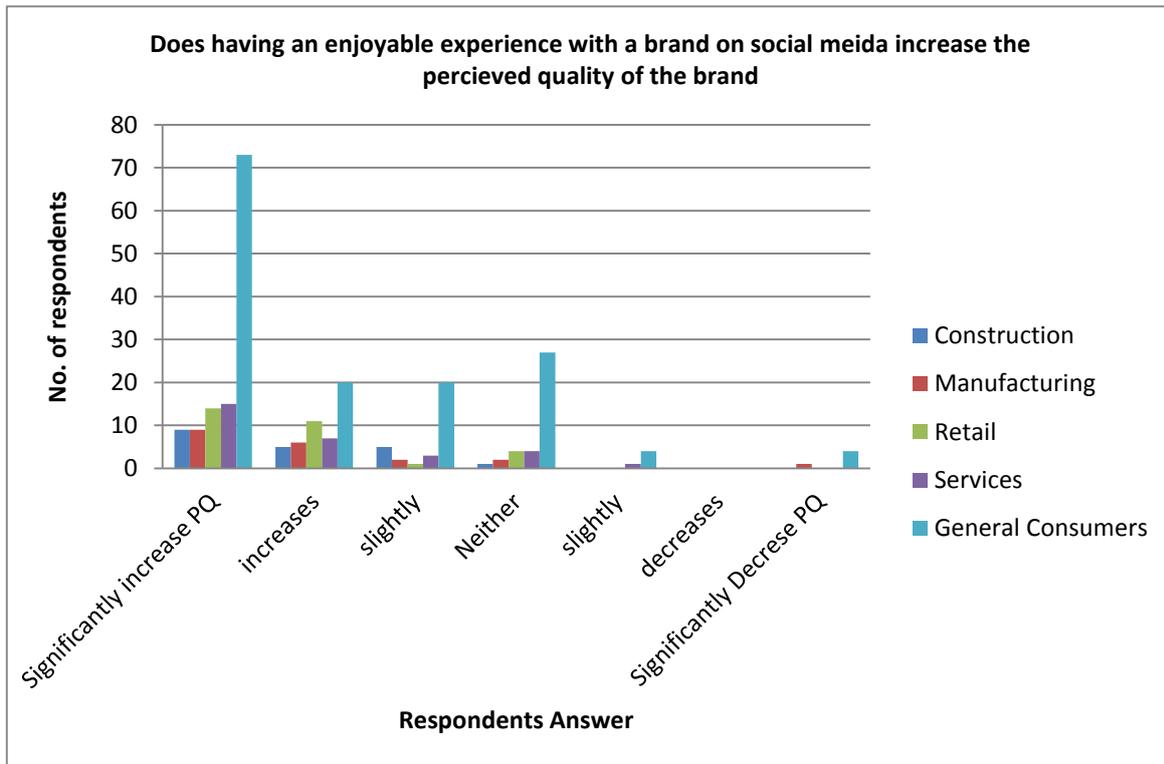


Table:4.20

From the research conducted there are numerous perceived benefits for SME’s using social media to enhance their brand’s reputation. The general consensus amongst owner managers was social media, increases brand image, brand loyalty, positive word of mouth, and also increase the brand’s business performance and in turn all enhance the brand’s reputation. Also acknowledged was that Google recognises the brand reputation due to their social media efforts, and places the brand higher up the Google rankings.

Perceived benefits of using social media to enhance the brand’s reputation obtained from the consumer surveys were that consumers place trust in brands who provide information through social media. Consumer brand affiliation, brand loyalty and their purchase intention increase due to a positive experience and interaction with a brand on social media. Also, the perceived quality of the brand increases due to an enjoyable experience on social media. All these benefits enhance the brand reputation. Thus supports McCanns social media research (2008) that explains that a brand’s reputation is dramatically impacted by social media. Cohen (2011) highlights that when brands make a promise expectations are generated and a

reputation is built, thus a good reputation can be enhanced due to positive social media efforts.

#### **4.4 To identify the perceived disadvantages of using social media to enhance brand reputation.**

As previously indicated Crain and Schlinke (2013) highlight that one negative post can have dramatic repercussions for a brand's reputation, even after post is taken down, as it has still been viewed by competitors, potential and existing customers. The in-depth interviews and consumer surveys sought to uncover the perceived disadvantages associated with using social media to enhance the brand reputation.

##### **Retail Industry:**

The retail sector identified several perceived disadvantages associated with social media and a brand's reputation. The first being people have the ability to post bad reviews on their own profile or your brand's page. Company B informs "one negative experience or comment could ruin our social media campaigns and have a detrimental effect on our brand and company". Company C adds "it is dangerous when they do not give you the opportunity to engage with them". Company A informs that "a single negative experience can have a dramatic effect for the brand reputation due to social media reaching a huge population; a bad experience can reach hundreds or thousands in a matter of minutes". This results in the need for online reputation repair which can take a long time to correct. Another perceived disadvantage to social media to enhance brand reputation is that it can be difficult to measure.

##### **Service Industry:**

Three companies' in the service industry recognise a perceived disadvantage to be if you upload inappropriate or irrelevant content it can do immense damage to the brand. A common perceived disadvantage amongst all companies' interviews is that bad reviews online can have dramatic effects for the brand and business. Company J also recognised that "if the person carrying out the brand's social media does not understand how it works it will result in a poor online reputation". Company H informs "receiving bad comments and reviews will have a detrimental effect on the reputation of a young brand and will be harder to fix than a long running brand with an excellent reputation".

**Manufacturing Industry:**

Company D highlights that “a single error in an advertisement or a post will be spotted immediately and commented on somewhere on social media”. Company E believes that for some businesses, social media is not the most effective tool and the focus could be places on the wrong method of reaching customers and enhancing the brand and its reputation”.

**Construction Industry:**

Neither companies interviewed in the construction sector have a presence on social media; however, they have outlined some of their perceived negativities. Both companies identify the negative impact which social media can have on a brand’s reputation due to errors.

Company G informs “I do think there can be terrible effects of Facebook and the likes for businesses that do not look after the company and brands reputation on those site, they can offend and harm their customer base. This not something we would ever like to do”.

Eighty-five percent of the manufacturing, 87 percent of retail, 77 percent of service, 80 percent of construction and 85 percent of general consumers inform that when they read a negative consumer comment about a brand through social media it decreases their loyalty to that brand (table 4.21).

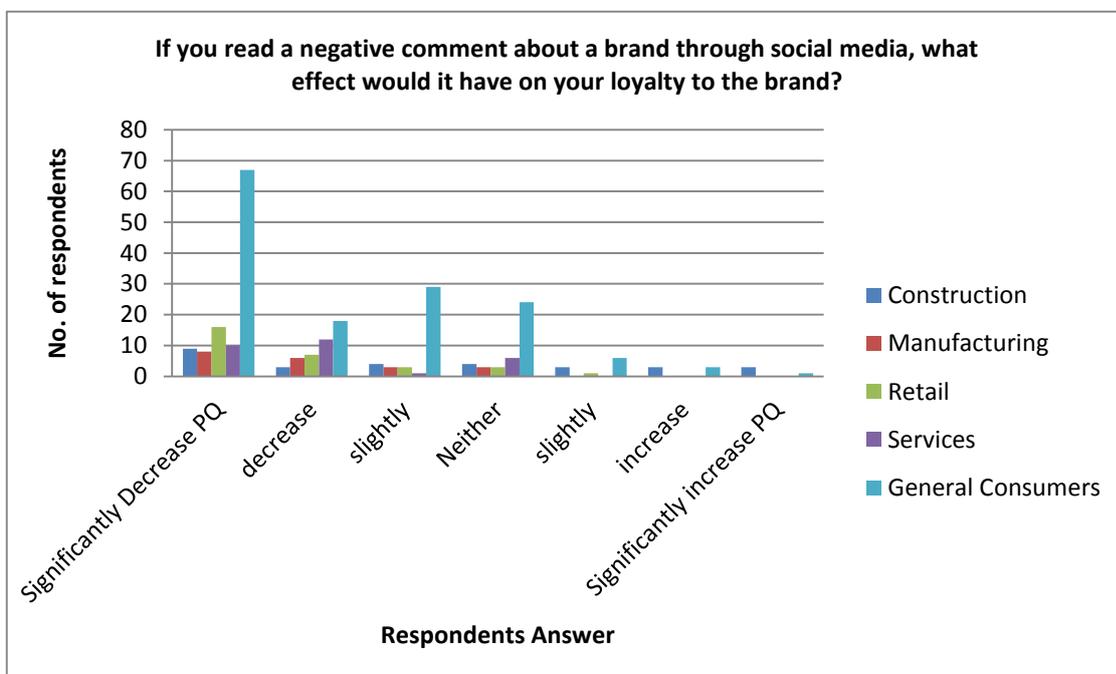


Table:4.21

The research conducted acknowledges that there are some perceived disadvantages for SME's using social media to enhance brand reputation. The general consensus amongst owner managers was people have the ability to comment on the brand with or without your knowledge. This coincides with Cohen (2011) and Reffert (2012) when they inform a business's online reputation is not completely within their own control in the web based world, the conversation about brands are happening with or without companies consent. If the commentary from customers is negative it can affect the brand's reputation dramatically and may require online reputation repair; this can take a long time to correct.

Another perceived disadvantage highlighted was any errors in advertisements or posts are spotted immediately and bad experiences can reach hundreds and thousands in minutes; also that if the brand reputation is not looked after online it can have devastating effects for both the brand and the company.

A perceived disadvantage gained through consumer survey was that a negative experience on social media will in some way decrease consumers' loyalty to the brand. This coincided with Barnes et al (2008) who informs that consumers will not support businesses with weak reputation and they will openly discuss this with others via social media.

#### **4.5 To ascertain the extent to which SME's in Donegal utilise social media tools to increase their brand reputation.**

Crain and Schlinke (2013) explain that it is essential for a company to understand its customers, cater to their requirements and expectations; thus social media is an accessible technique for the company's to reach and inform their target audience.

This area sought to ascertain the extent to which SME's in Donegal utilise social media to increase their brands reputation.

##### **Retail Industry:**

Three companies establish branding as important to their business in order to gain competitive advantage; however, their main focuses are different. Company A informs branding means "getting our prospects to see us as the only one who provides a solution to their needs". Company B believes "getting branding correct from the start is imperative" and company C associates their brand with "choice, hard work and attention to detail". The 3 companies acknowledge their brand reputation is important and a positive brand reputation reinforces to customers that they are superior to competitors and that having a brand reputation increases the perceived quality and the brand image.

Two companies currently have branding strategies. Company C does not have a branding strategy however they are aware and conscious of where they position themselves. Three companies recognise social media to be a long term branding strategy for their business and believing that they could improve and increase the customer interaction of their social media sites. Three companies have a presence on Facebook and Twitter. Company B has a presence on Google+ and LinkedIn and Company C having a presence on Pinterest and YouTube. Company A spends 10 hours per week, Company B spends 20 hours a week and company C spends 8 hours per week dedicated to their social media efforts.

The social media efforts in Company A is carried out by external marketing consultants who do not possess formal marketing qualification, Company B social media is carried out by marketing manager who has a MA in Marketing and Company C's social media is a team effort as there is 14 different department and product buyers, none of which possess any marketing qualifications.

**Service Industry:**

Three companies recognise that branding and their brand reputation is extremely important to their company. They feel without a brand and an excellent brand reputation you would have nothing to promote to customers. Three companies invest a lot of time and resources in branding. Company I informs “branding has been the real game changer for the company, our branding is now recognised and it stands out”. Three companies feel their branding efforts added recognition, value, purpose and trust to the brand and. Two companies currently have a branding strategy, Company I are aware and conscious of their branding efforts but do not have a branding strategy. Three companies have a presence on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, Company I and J also has a presence on LinkedIn also. Company J has a presence on Instagram, Google +, Pinterest and also has a branded blog.

Two of the companies social media efforts are carried out by a person that poses industry experience and have formal marketing qualification, these 2 companies find their social media profiles to be extremely interactive with current and potential customers. Two of the companies spend between 1-3 hours per week, and 1 company spends on average 15 hours per week. Three companies measure their social media efforts through analytics where available otherwise through likes and shares. Company J informs they “measure inbound calls based on the content uploaded on to the sites and we measure our brand profile by word of mouth”.

**Manufacturing Industry:**

Both companies highlight that branding is important. Company D have built their business around their brand and currently do little other marketing. Brand reputation is massively important to the company because the business would not be as successful without the brand and it is essential to make customers associate it with being a premium brand that provides consistency and portrays trustworthiness. Company E does not brand their products, however, their company name is their brand, and therefore it is essential to sustain a positive brand reputation. Both companies acknowledge benefits of branding and the importance of having a positive brand reputation that increases the positive word of mouth associated with their brand. This reinforces the trust and quality factor associated with brand and the brand reputation of the product. Neither company currently has a branding strategy. However, company D use social media to build their brand and its reputation, as their brand and product are heavily linked to Donegal and social media provides the reach to their target audience

across the world. Where Company E are more focused on sales and building relationships in person. They feel social media is a good networking opportunity.

Company D have a presence on Facebook and YouTube for the past 4-5 years and spend on average 2-3 hours per week on it; Compared to company E who have a presence on LinkedIn for the past year and spend on average 30 minutes per week networking. The social media efforts of Company E are carried out by their marketing and sales manager who has a MSc in marketing compared to Company D whose marketing is carried out by the head of sales and the head of product development neither of which have a marketing background.

### **Construction Industry:**

Both companies have established that branding is important to their companies. They feel brand reputation is essential due to the specialised nature of the business. Both companies inform brand reputation is vital for obtaining contracts and building relationships with current and potential clients while ensuring they are seen as trustworthy and dependable.

Neither businesses have a formal branding strategy, however, are conscious to deliver on their brands promise to clients and to show they are trustworthy, honest and guarantee customer satisfaction and feel this will increase brand reputation. Also neither company participates in social media.

Highlighted above, 8 companies participate in social media efforts to increase the brand reputation of their company. However, table 2.22 depicts that consumers from the 4 industries and general consumers, feel that SME's within Donegal are not utilising social media sites to enhance their brand reputation to the best of their advantage.

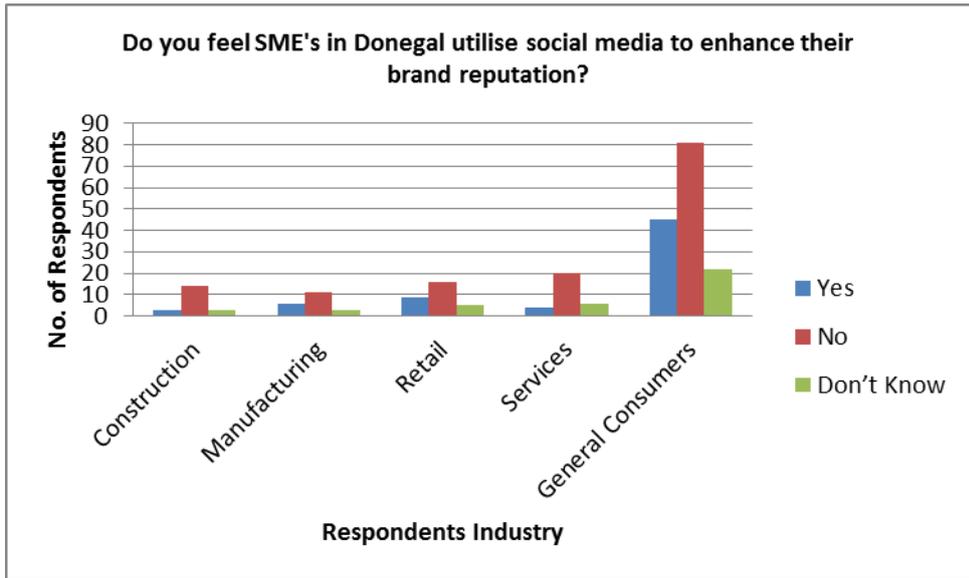


Table:4.22

Eight companies have a presence on social media and all 10 companies acknowledge branding and brand reputation are vital to their business. Six companies currently do not have a branding strategy; However, recognise social media to be a long term business strategy. Four companies inform that their social media is being carried out by people with no formal marketing qualifications. This coincides with Simpson et al. (2011) who informs that SME marketing efforts are haphazard, unstructured, and informal and built upon industry norms. Eight companies recognise that they could improve social media efforts and increase interaction with current and potential customers. Four of the companies measure their social media efforts.

When consumers were asked do they feel SME's within Donegal utilise social media to enhance their brand reputation the general consensus was SME's do not utilise social media to enhance their brand reputation effectively. Reffert (2012) recognise that conversations about brands are happening with or without their consent, thus meaning companies can choose to be spectator, contributors or ambivalent. The research has discovered that SME's are not currently utilising social media to increase the brands reputation to their full advantage. Companies need to become contributors rather than spectators.

#### 4.6 To determine the most effective social media tools for different industries.

Evans (2008) and Bakeman and Hanson (2012) explain that as social media began to progress so did the interest of astute business in order to reach new markets and consumers by various social media platforms that were quickly emerging. The 250 consumer surveys sought to determine the most effective social media tools for different industries.

##### Retail Industry:

Ninety percent of consumers with in the retail industry ranked Facebook to be the most suitable social media site for SME, followed by Twitter, while YouTube was ranked third, followed by LinkedIn and instagram (table 4.23).

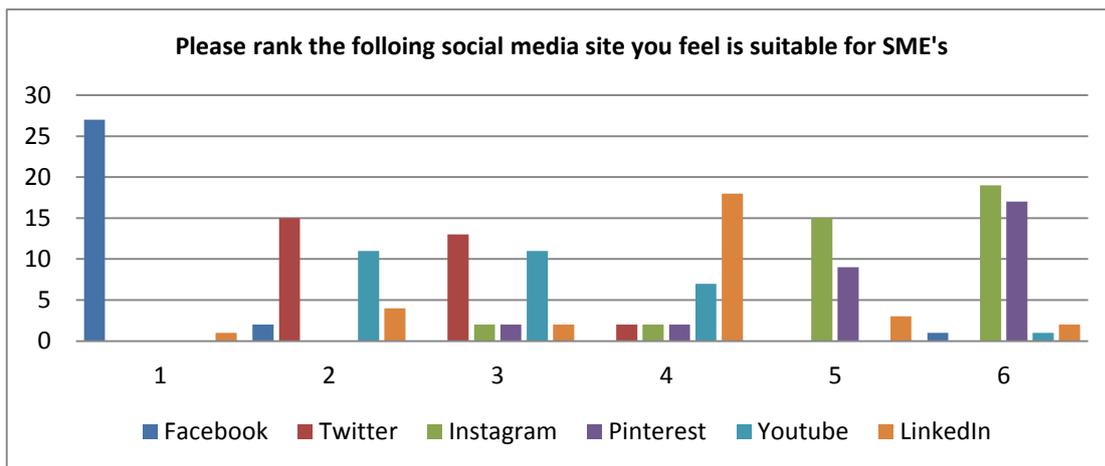


Table:4.23

##### Service Industry:

Table 4.24 indicates that Facebook is found to be the most appropriate social media site for SME within the service industry followed by YouTube, then twitter, LinkedIn and instagram.

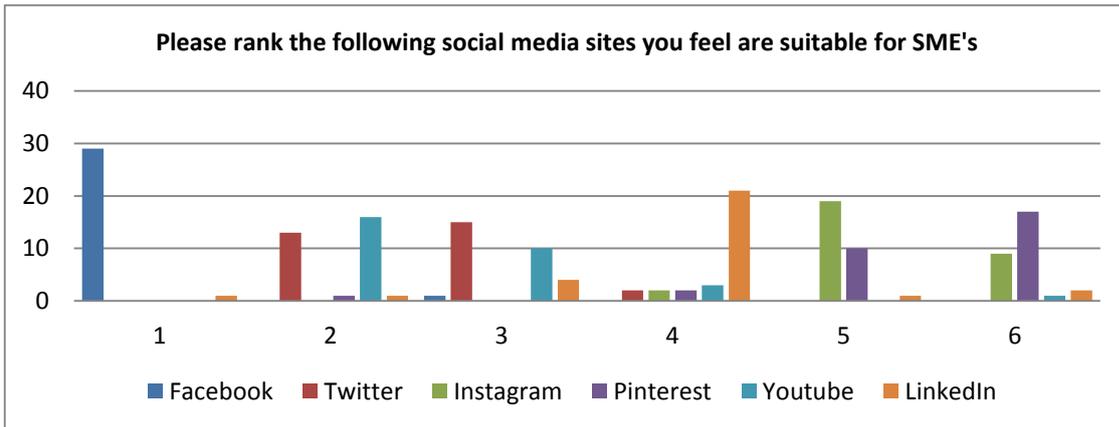


Table:4.24

**Manufacturing Industry:**

Highlighted in table 4.25, consumers in the manufacturing industry feel that Facebook is the most appropriate social media site for Manufacturing SME’s to establish a presence on. Subsequent to this is twitter followed by LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest and instagram.

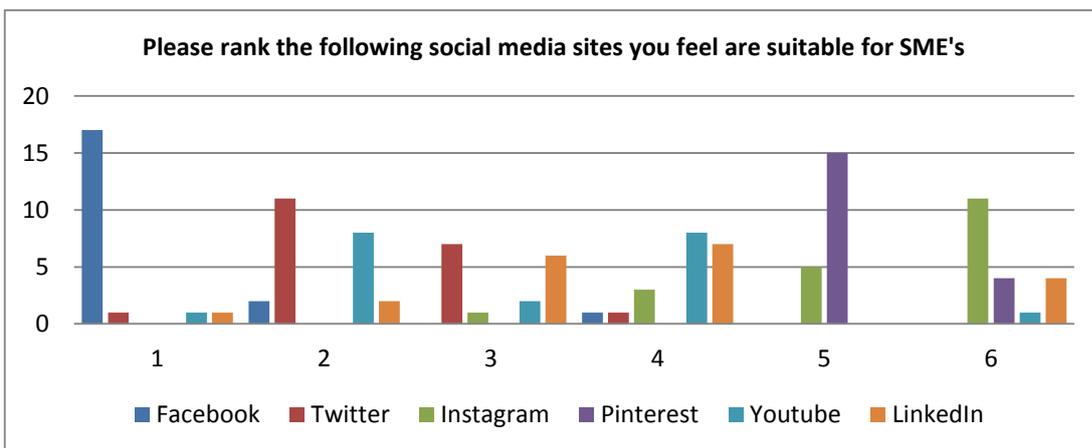


Table:4.25

**Construction Industry:**

Within the construction industry, 85 percent indicated that they Facebook was the most appropriate for SME’s followed by YouTube, twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Pinterest (table 4.26).

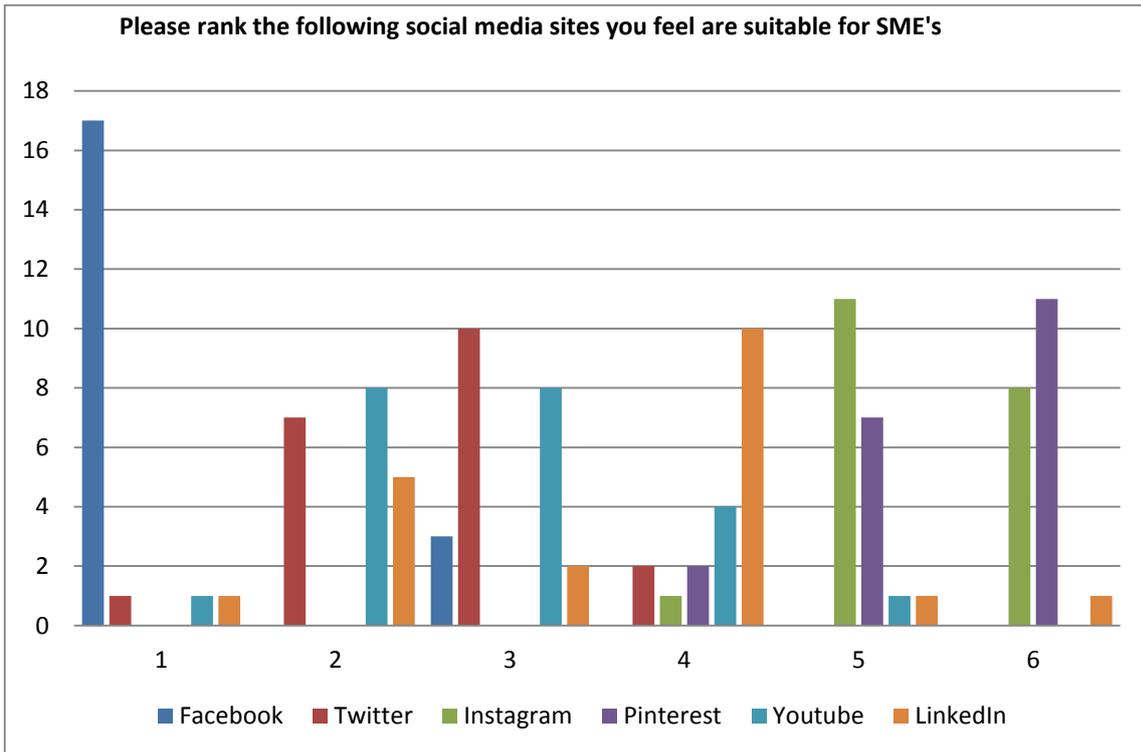


Table:4.26

#### **4.7: To develop a set of guidelines for SME's who wish to use social media.**

Given the number of social networks available, Evans (2008) concludes that social media platforms involve numerous different activities which include video content sharing, messaging and blogging. The effectiveness of these activities relies on a consolidation of tools which attract users.

Eight companies suggest establishing yourself on one social media site relevant to your target audience and once established branch out to other social media sites. Facebook was suggested by all 8 companies as a starting point for companies wishing to use social media to enhance their brand reputation. Eight companies interviewed informed it is essential to plan your content efficiently. Six companies suggest having clear objectives for what you want your social media effort to achieve. Four companies informed it is vital to measure your social media. Six companies highlighted it is essential to be on social media sites that are relevant to your target audience and provide them with interesting and relevant content. Company C state "if you are going to clog up a person's news feed it needs to be relevant to them and your brand". Four companies inform of the importance of employing the correct staff with the relevant industry knowledge and pose ample knowledge of marketing and social media and enable these people sufficient amount of time and resources required for social media efforts. Three companies stress that social media should be used in conjunction with other marketing and advertising initiatives. Also to try and engage and with customers and have two way interaction between the brands and consumers. One company informs that you should create a social media policy for your organisation and to push all your social media efforts back to your website.

The companies interviewed also highlighted some negativities associated with using social media to enhance the brand reputation of the SME's. However, they provided some suggestion on how these negativities could be avoided. Eight companies highlighted in order to avoid social media negativities occurring brands need to constantly be looking at all areas of social media and engaging with customer constantly. Six companies suggested answering customer complaints that may arise on social media and not ignore or delete them; it shows the brand is open to feedback and value customer opinions. Five companies informed planning content in advance reduced the risk of negativities occurring. Three companies

suggested brands should be consistent both online and offline as it will reduce negativities dramatically. One company suggests up skilling in social media to avoid any negativities from occurring.

Consumers were asked what form of interaction with brands they feel is acceptable on social media. Two way conversations are preferred over one way interaction (table 4.27). Brand related images and videos were ranked highly in terms of acceptable forms of interaction with brands on social media.

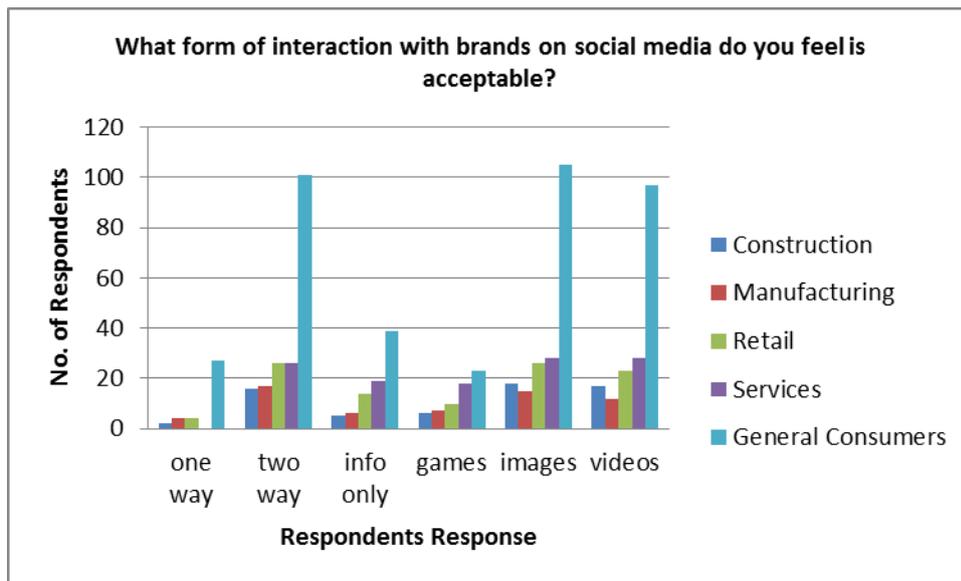


Table:4.27

The research has enabled a set of brief guideline to be developed in order to provide guidance for SME's who wish to establish their brand on social media.

1. Establish the brand on one social media site, then branch out to other forms of social media. Facebook was suggested by the companies interviewed. Hourigan (2012) explains the best place to establish a brand profile is on the social networking site relevant to your target audience such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Youtube.
2. Set clear measurable objectives for your social media efforts and establish measuring techniques for your social media campaigns.
3. Establish a social media policy for the company and push content back to the website.

4. Plan your content, incorporate different types of content. Make sure the content is relevant to both the brand and your target audience. Allocating sufficient time and resources is essential. Evans (2008) highlights that social media platforms involves different activities which includes images, videos, messaging and blogging.
5. Use social media in conjunction with other marketing activities. Evans (2008) informs that social media should not be used instead of traditional media but implies a different set of tools to compliment what the company is already using.
6. Engage with customers continuously with brand related images and videos. Qualman (2009) informs it is essential for SME's to monitor social media sites regularly and engage with potential customers.
7. Answer customer queries and complaints.
8. Crain and Schlinke (2013) add to establish your reputation as industry experts.
9. Be the source of relevant and up to date information (Crain and Schlinke, 2013)

## **4.8 Conclusion:**

The 10 in-depth interviews, 150 online and 100 personal surveys yield for some interesting findings. The research established that using social media to enhance brand reputation is a viable option for SME's, while recognising the perceived advantages and disadvantages.

Following this the research conducted concludes that SME's in Donegal do not utilise social media to enhance brand reputation to its full potential. From this the most effective social media tools were identified and guidelines were developed for SME's who wish to use social media to enhance brand reputation.

The findings of this research agree with the key authors in the literature review around the issues of social media and brand reputation.

## **5. Recommendation and Conclusion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The overall aim of this study was to investigate the power of social media to enhance brand reputation of SMEs. The literature reviewed in the secondary research surrounding areas such as brand, branding and brand reputation. The relationship between branding and social media is also examined. Following this, a review of the social media setting was carried out.

The author compiled a list of the most influential social networking sites available to SME's. The primary research involved a mixed method approach using both consumer surveys and depth-interviews with owner managers. This chapter aims to provide recommendations and an overall conclusion of the research.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

Although the 10 companies interviewed recognise branding and brand reputation to be important to their brand and business, the degree to which they do is not enough. Companies should try to create a short and long term branding strategy to become more competitive within their industry. Although a brand name and logo may exist, the brand should develop a message and communicate this message to current and potential customers to enhance the brand reputation.

Social media strategies need to be established and social media efforts need to become more structured in order to be competitive and enhance the brands reputation. Companies who currently do not have a presence on social media should establish themselves on one that is most relevant to their brand and target audience and employ an interactive social media strategy. Also SME's should use social media monitoring tools to measure the reach of their campaigns.

The perceived advantages of enhancing brand reputation through social media, as found in the findings should be communicated to all SME's. Acknowledging the advantages that are attainable, the increase in commitment and resources are more likely. Also the perceived disadvantages and the steps to overcome these disadvantages should be communicated to all SME's.

SME owners should up skill in the area of social media to fully understand the potential and true marketing worth of social media. Following this SME's should establish a crisis management plan in the event an error should occur.

### **5.3 Limitations**

The author felt the main limitations encountered in the research were time and finances. More time would have enabled for the selection of a larger sample of respondents. Due to financial restraints the research was restricted to County Donegal. Also due to the large amount of SME's in the country it would not have been feasible to interview them all. If time and finances enabled the research could be extended to a larger geographical location. Taking all the limitations in to account the sample for the dissertation was chosen.

## **5.4 Conclusions**

This research has been successful in answering the research objectives to investigate the power of social media has on enhancing brand reputation. The author gained a full understanding of the perceived advantages and disadvantages associated with using social media to enhance brand reputation of SME's. The main findings showed that using social media to enhance brand reputation is a viable option for SME's, however, SME's in Donegal are not utilising this to its full potential. Fifty five percent of consumers indicated that SME's in Donegal do not utilise social media to enhance brand reputation.

Another issue that is echoed throughout the literature and coincides with the findings is that SME's should use numerous different activities to interact with consumers that conversations about brands are occurring with or without the brands consent.

The opinions of the owner managers interviewed coincides with Crain and Schlike (2013) who inform that a negative post can cause dramatic and inestimable effects on a brands reputation even after it has been taken down. Another issue echoed in the literature review and concurs with finding is that the quality of the social media experience influences the consumers purchasing decision and effects the perceived quality of the brand. A positive social media experience also enhances the brands reputation.

## **5.5 Further Research**

There is an opportunity to develop this research further and to possibly conduct the research on a nation basis. This would enable SME's nationwide to effectively enhance their brand reputation through social media.

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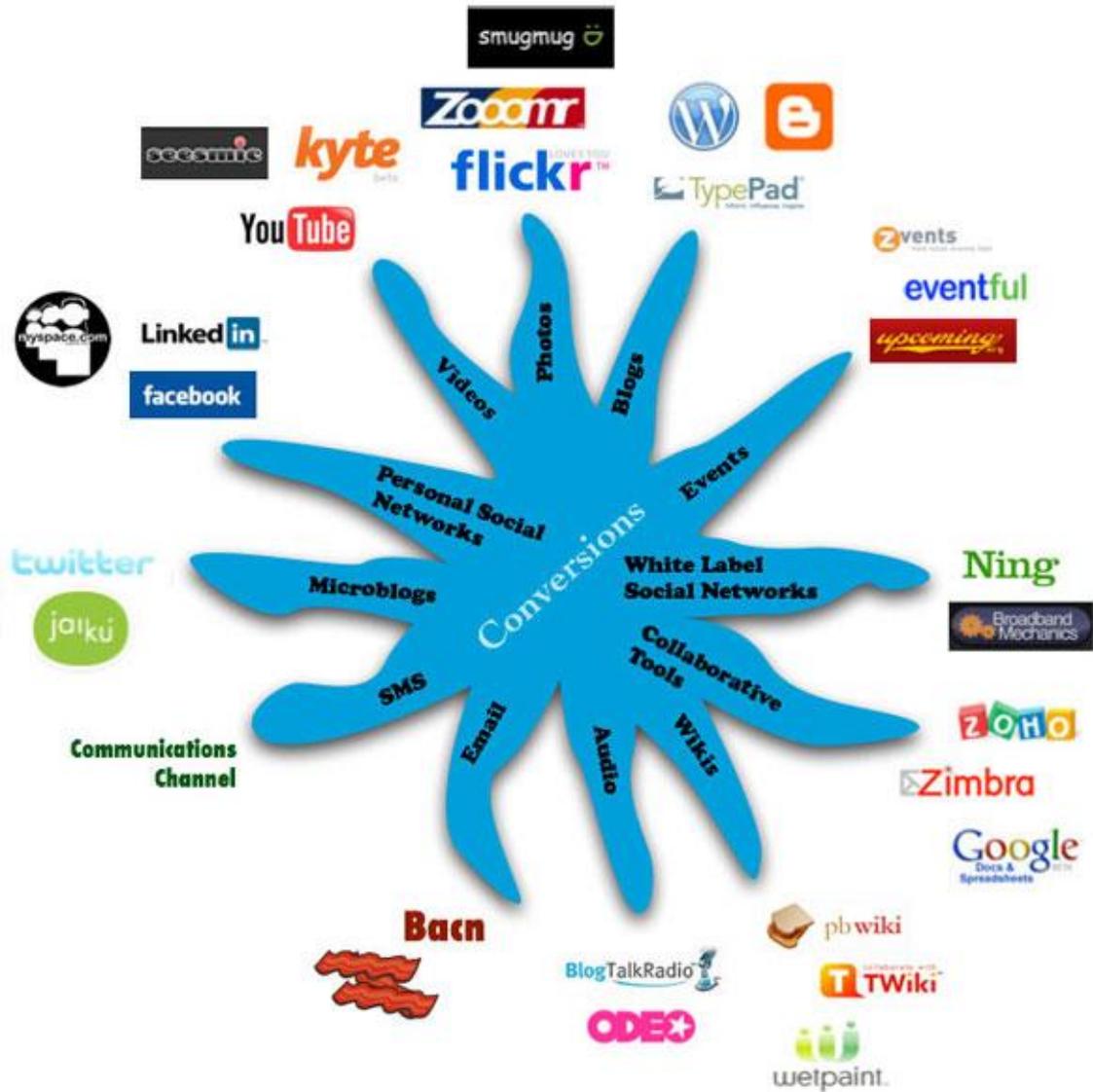
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## 7. Appendices

### Appendix One: Scoble Social Media Starfish



**Appendix Two:** Li and Bernoff five categories to explain activities enabled by social media.

<p>1. People Creating</p>	<p>People create text, images and videos in order to express themselves, to endorse brand association and also to seek consumer opinions (Scahu and Gilly 2003). Social media has a valuable solution for businesses, that enables them to monitor consumer opinions and conversations about their brand (Scott, 2009 and Li and Bernoff, 2008).</p>
<p>2. People Connecting</p>	<p>People join social media site to connect and interact with like-minded people and build relationships and share information and opinions. Li and Bernoff (2008) inform companies can join the social media sites to connect with consumers and in turn increase their brand awareness.</p>
<p>3. People Collaborating</p>	<p>Participants of social media are able to collaborate and work towards a common goal.</p>
<p>4. People Reacting</p>	<p>Participants in social media react to each other by providing reviews, comments and their opinions around certain topics of interest. Li and Bernoff (2008) highlight this is extremely useful for businesses to gain customer feedback and insights in to new ideas.</p>
<p>5. People Organising Content</p>	<p>By tagging content on social media enables the user to categorise and organise images, videos and blogs content.</p>

### **Appendix Three: Interviewee Information**

**Company:** McElhinneys Department Store

**Industry:** Retail

**Interviewee:** Roisin Woods

**Position Held:** Marketing Manager

**Date:** 23/ 7/13

**Time:** 11am

#### **Company Description:**

McElhinneys opened in 1971 and has grown into a premier retailer for fashion and affordable luxury goods. It is a family owned business who prides themselves in offering the customers exactly what they want. John McElhinney is still very much involved in the day to day running of the store.

McElhinneys pride themselves in offering collections of goods in women's clothing, menswear, children's, footwear, lingerie and home- ware. McElhinneys ensure that they have the most sought after items from leading designers and cater for all their customer needs. They are renowned for bridal gowns, mother of bride and occasion wear.

**Company:** Greenes Shoes

**Industry:** Retail

**Interviewee:** Grace Korbel

**Position Held:** Manager

**Date:** 17/7/13

**Time:** 1pm

**Company Description:**

Greene's Shoes is an SME located along the west coast of Ireland. They employ 40 people in 6 retail stores – Falcarragh, Letterkenny Marketing Sq., Letterkenny Shopping Centre, Galway Eyre Sq. Shopping Centre, Limerick Crescent Shopping Centre and Gosh Shoes, Eyre Sq. Shopping Centre, Galway. We have recently also set up an e-commerce store, <http://www.greenesshoes.com/>.

**Company:** Lone Star Sole

**Industry:** Retail

**Interviewee:** Catherine Browne

**Position Held:** Marketing Manager

**Date:** 18/7/13

**Time:** 10am

**Company Description:**

Lone star soul is Multi-Platform Graphic Novel experience available in the traditional hardcopy but is also available as a downloadable Digital Edition, on iOS, Android, and Kindle. It is also available as an Interactive Digital App.

A unique Sci-Fi Western epic, the lone star sole story-line will kick-off with the release of first graphic novel, lone star sole book one. It will then continue to be told in chronological instalments across apps, Games, and an animated series.

The First publication from Lone Star State Ltd is truly unique to the world of graphic novels. It marries together Si-Fi and Western in a beautiful package. It is alluring and compelling with the main character Leroy Soulo being everything you want in an action Hero. The paramount entertainment brand offering from Lone Star State Ltd is a truly epic Si-Fi western that is sure to leave readers young and old wanting more.

**Company:** McDaid's Football Special

**Industry:** Manufacturing

**Interviewee:** Seamus McDaid

**Position Held:** Export Manager

**Date:** 27 /7/13

**Time:** 6.30pm

**Company Description:**

McDaid's Football Special is a soft drink produced by James McDaid & Sons Ltd. in Ramelton. Their products consist of football special and banana juice, pineapple juice, red and white lemonade, American cream soda, cloudy lemonade and creamy cola. The products are produced using their own private water source. Football special mimics beer with its 'foamy head'. Football Special won two awards in 1984 and 1989 from the London Beverage Society.

Edward McDaid, wanted to celebrate winning football by filling the cup with a non-alcoholic drink which was originally called 'Football Cup', and was then changes to Football Special.

Football Special can be found in County Donegal, Derry, Tyrone, and Belfast and has recently been introduced in to New York.

**Company:** Irish Pressing

**Industry:** Manufacturing

**Interviewee:** Karen Campbell

**Position Held:** Marketing Manager

**Date:** 26/7/213

**Time:** 12pm

**Company Description:**

Manufacturing of pressed metal components and tooling for the automotive industry. We sell to various countries throughout Europe. We take drawings supplied by the customer and design the press tool needed to produce the components. Our parts are used in BMW models, Rolls Royce, Opel Zafira and Range Rover. We do as much as possible in-house but do outsource some things like heat treatment and painting.

**Company:** Genesis Salon

**Industry:** Service

**Interviewee:** Mary Ferry

**Position Held:** Owner

**Date:** 18/7/13

**Time:** 2.15pm

**Company Description:**

Genesis Skincare & Laser Clinic is located in North West Donegal. The business consists of a training college, hairdressers and a skincare & laser clinic. The training college runs an I.T.E.C beauty therapy course and are funded by FAS. The courses vary in a number of professional development courses. The clinic provides advanced medical laser, cosmetic treatments and skincare for men and women with a wide range of beauty treatments also available.

**Company:** Customer Service Excellent Ireland

**Industry:** Services

**Interviewee:** Charlie Boyle

**Position Held:** Owner

**Time:** 12pm

**Date:** 25/7/13

**Company Description:**

Customer Service Excellence Ireland is a National recognition programme for those who are aspiring towards excellence in customer service. CSEI seek out companies and services in the Public, Private and Voluntary sectors who are aiming for excellent customer service.

CSEI have worked with many companies in the area of customer service excellence over the years; the CSEI team work with a company in achieving sales and profit growth. Satisfied customers are converted to loyal customers resulting in;

**Company:** Media Box

**Industry:** Services

**Interviewee:** Joanne Sweeney Burke

**Position Held:** Owner

**Time:** 1pm

**Date:** 2 /8/13

**Company Description:**

Media Box is a multi-media agency based in Letterkenny and Galway. The company is owned by Joanne Sweeney-Burke who has a background in communications, lecturing, and event management and also in the Chamber of Commerce movement.

The Media Box business strategy enables them to create and combine strategies for their clients.

**Company:** PDC LTD

**Interviewee:** Patrick Devenney

**Industry:** Construction

**Position Held:** owner

**Time:** 3pm

**Date:** 26/ 7/13

**Company Description:**

PDC provides an array of construction, civil engineering and tunnelling services. These services range from general construction to tunnelling, micro-tunnelling, piling, pipe-jacking, segmental-shafts, auger-boring, foundations, underground concrete structures, and underpinning. We have built a strong reputation among clients, contractors, and consultants. We strive to maintain strong client relationships and have a strong focus on achieving client satisfaction.

**Company:** Meenamara Development

**Industry:** Construction

**Interviewee:** Pauric O'Donnell

**Position Held:** Owner

**Time:** 2pm

**Date:** 27/7/13

**Company Description:**

Meenamara Development is a construction company. I took over the family run business in January 2012. We offer a list of comprehensive services that enable us to allow complete a job from start to finish. Some of these services include; building houses, extension, remodelling and alterations, site preparation, roofing and carpentry, the laying of foundations, plumbing and painting if required. No job is too big or too small for us.

## Appendix Four: Questionnaire

### 2. Do you have a profile on any of the following social media services? (Select all appropriate)

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- YouTube

### 2. How often do you visit social networking websites?

- Several times a day
- Once a day
- 2-3 times a week
- once a week
- Once a month
- Don't participate

### 2. What are your reasons for using social media sites? (Select all appropriate)

- socialise with friends
- play games
- keep up to date with social events
- Share photograph content
- collaborate with like-minded people
- listen and share music
- share experiences and information
- find information out about brands and products
- Other (please specify)

**4. Why do you visit brand related social media sites?  
(Please rank in order of relevance)**

- To purchase products
- To read reviews and product rankings
- To find general information about a brand
- To learn about new products
- To watch brand related videos
- To see brand related photography
- To contact customer service
- To feel part of the branded community

**5. When on social media sites do you participate in any of the following?  
(Please rank in order of relevance)**

- Uploading brand related videos
- Posting comments about the brand
- Writing reviews of the brand and its products
- Submit ideas for new products
- Posting comments of photographs and videos
- Engaging in branded conversation
- Other

**6. I place trust in brands that provide information through their social media site.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**7. I read consumer's comments on social media sites before i purchase a brand.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**8. My brand affiliation increases having interacted with them through social media.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**9. Interacting with brands via social media has increased my brand loyalty.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**10. The quality of my social media experience, positive or negative, has no influence on my purchasing decision.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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**12. If you read a negative consumer comment about a brand through a social media site, what effect would it have on your loyalty to that brand?**

Significantly decreases my loyalty	-	-	-	-	-	Significantly increased my loyalty
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**12. What effect do you believe interacting with brands through social media has on your intention to purchase the brand?**

Significantly increases my purchase intention	-	-	-	-	Significantly decreases my purchase intention
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**12. Does having an enjoyable experience with a brand on social media increase the perceived quality of the brand?**

Significantly increases perceived quality of the brand	-	-	-	-	-	Significantly decrease perceived quality of the brand
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**14. Please rank the following social media site you feel are suitable for small to medium businesses.**

Facebook

Twitter

Instagram

Pinterest

YouTube

LinkedIn

**15. What form of interaction with brands on social media do you feel is acceptable?**

**(Select all appropriate)**

- One way interaction
- Two way conversation
- Only information provided
- Games
- Images
- Videos

Other (please specify)

**16. Do you feel small to medium businesses in Donegal utilise social media to enhance their brand reputation?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**17. What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male

**18. Which category below includes your age?**

- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.**

**Appendix Five: Theme Sheet**

<p><b>COMPANY:</b>          How many people does your company currently employ?          &lt;5 &lt;10 &lt;20 &lt;35 &lt;50 &lt;100 &lt;250</p>	
<p>What sector is your company in?          Retail, services, manufacturing or construction.</p> <p>Please provide an overview of you company?</p>	
<p><b>BRANDING:</b>          What does branding mean to your company?</p>	
<p>Do you feel brand reputation is important to your company?</p>	
<p>What are the benefits of having a brand reputation for your company?</p>	
<p>Does your company currently have a branding strategy?</p>	
<p>Is social media part of your company's long term branding strategy?</p>	
<p><b>SOCIAL MEDIA:</b>          Does your company have a presence on social media?</p> <p>If not what is the reason for not having a presence on social media?</p> <p>How long have you been using these tools?</p>	
<p>Please outline the main reasons you use social media sites?</p>	

Typically, how long do you spend on social media sites per week/ month?	
Who conducts the social media for your company and do the poses any marketing qualifications?	
How interactive is your social media site?	
Do you think that your company social media enhanced your business performance?	
Do you believe that your social media efforts increase your brand reputation?	
Do you think that having a presence on social media increases the brand loyalty of your customers?	
Do you think that your social media efforts impacts you company's brand image, and in turn effects your brands reputation? Do you think that the perceived quality of your brand increases due to your social media efforts?	
How are your social media efforts measured?	
Do you believe a negative experience of your brand via social media will affect your brand reputation?	
Do you have any advice for other companies who wish to use social media to enhance their brand reputation?	
<b>BENEFITS:</b> In your opinion what are the benefits of using social media to enhance brand reputation? Describe some of those benefits.	
<b>LIMITATIONS:</b> Do you think there are negatives to using	

social media to enhance brand reputation? Describe some of these negativities.	
Can you see ways that these negativities can be avoided?	

## Appendix Six: Participants Consent Forms

### Department of Business Studies, LYIT – Research Projects

#### CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

##### Information Sheet

**Purpose of the Study.** As part of the requirements for MSC Marketing Practice at LYIT, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with investigating the power of social media on enhancing the brand reputation for small to medium enterprises.

**What will the study involve?** The study will involve a semi structure questionnaire or interview to gain your thoughts and opinions on social media and brands and your opinions on companies using social media. The semi structured questionnaires will take approx 5 minutes to complete. The interviews will take approximately 50 minutes to complete.

**Why have you been asked to take part?** You have been asked because you are suitable to provide data for your study.

**Do you have to take part?** You do not have to participate as participation is voluntary. The participant is required to sign a consent form. However the participant can keep the information sheet and is entitled to a copy of the consent form. Participants have the option of withdrawing before the study commences (even if they have agreed to participate) or discontinuing after data collection has started. Participants are eligible to withdraw within two weeks of participation and ask to have their data destroyed.

**Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?** I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous.

**What will happen to the information which you give?** The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed.

**What will happen to the results?** The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may be read by future students on the course. The study may be published in a research journal.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?** I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

**What if there is a problem?** At the end of the interview / semi structured questionnaire, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling.

**Who has reviewed this study?** Approval must be given by the Department of Business Studies before studies like this can take place.

**Any further queries?** If you need any further information, you can contact me:  
Ciara Devenney, L00105323@student.lyit.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form.

**Consent Form**

I.....agree to participate in this research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Ciara Devenney to be tape-recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity if I wish.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed.....

Date.....

**Appendix Seven:** Comprehensive list of companies obtained.

A&N Fuels	B.O.S.S
A.D. Meenan (Architect)	Baby Zone
A.M. Motors	Barbara McGroary Photography
Aanees Flowers	B-Bobs Hair Salon
ABC School Supply Centre	Beatty Fuels
Aine's Inspirations	Begley's Chemist
Alexander's (General Goods Store)	Ben Sweeney Gas & Electrical
Allan Curran Associates	Bernard Dillon
An Chúirt	Big Bite Takeaway
An Clachan	Black's Centra
An Grianan Theatre	Blueberry Tearoom
An Lathaigh B & B	Bluestack Bar
Anderson Auctioneers	BM Blinds
Andies Bar & Lounge	Boland's Newsagents
Andies Superstore	Bonnar Engineering
Angel Hair	Bonner, Gill & Co.
Angela Ward School of Motoring	Bonner's Garage
Anne L Mc Laughlin Opticians	Books Direct
Arena 7	Boyd & Associates
Aroma	Boylan Cleaning Services
Ashtree Garden Centre	Bradley Tyres
Atlantic Guest House	Bradley's Filling Station
Avellana (formerly Acupuncture Clinic & Chinese Herbs)	Brendan McGlynn
B. Reid (Osteopath)	Brennans Pharmacy

Brian McCormick Sports	Castle School of Motoring
Brian McDaid & Co., Accountants	Cathleen Dolan
Brittons Jewellers	Cavern Design
Brittons Pharmacy	CBM Signs
Brogans The Blacksmiths	Central Bar
Browne & Co. Solicitors	Champions Travel
Browne Printers	Chandpur Indian Resturant
Bumble Bees	CHEZ SHAZ Hair Saloon
Bustard's Plumbing & Heating Ltd	Chic Boutique
C&M Embroidery	China Town
C.S. Kelly	Christina J. Irwin Photography
Cafe Kitty	CK Locksmiths
Caisleáin Óir Hotel	Cladyknit
Callaghan Jewellers	Clarkes Newsagents
Callaghans XL	Clinic Ríomhaire [PC & Satellite Repairs + Internet Access]
Canal Developments	Clive Wasson Photography
Career Wear Ltd.	Coach House
Carey's Amusements	Coastal Signs
Carlin McLaughlin	Cois Farraiige Cakes
Caroline's Alterations	Colm Harvey Building Construction
Cassidy Bros Topmix Ltd.	Complete Computing Solutions
Cassidy Bros.	Compusat
Cassidy Electrical	Con Friel & Co.
Cassidy's Newsagents	Connolly Doyle
Cassies Cove (Beauty Parlour)	Copperhead (Hairdressers)

Coyle's Arro	Deborah Lacey
Coyles Coaches Ltd	Declan Gallagher Financial Services Ltd
Credit Union	Declan McCabe - Architects
Crest Catering	Denis Gorman Barber Shop
Crolly Dolls	Diamond Lodgings
Cronan Mac Coach Hire	DMG Motors Ltd
Crossans Town Jewellers	Doherty Architects
Cruiskeen Lawn Bar & Off Licence	Doherty Tiling
CT Ball	Doherty Wood Products
Cuba	Doherty's Fishing Tackle
Customer Service Excellent Ireland	Dom Breslins Pier 1
Cut Above Hair Salon	Donegal Camera Centre
D Greene	Donegal Drinks Distributers
D P Barry	Donegal Estuary Homes
D S Environmental	Donegal Famous Chipper
Danny Doogan & Gweedore Decorating Centre	Donegal Flowers
David James Hairdressers	Donegal Heating & Plumbing
De Bháirds	Donegal Hire & Sell
Donegal Marquees	Donegal Town Hardware
Donegal Oil Company	Donegal Town Hostel
Donegal Orthodontics	Donegal Tyre Centre
Donegal Pens	Donnelly's (Newsagent & General Store)
Donegal Precision Engineering	Donohue Studios
Donegal Properties	Duds & Suds
Donegal Tool Hire	Duffys Bar

Duffy's Chemist	Flatly's Chemist
Duke Associates	Fleming Steel
Dunlevy & Barry	FM Services Group
Dunlevy Distributers	Foodland Wholesalers
Dunnion's Garage	Foot & Ankle Clinic
Eamonn Stevenson Financial Services	Footsteps
Eamonn Tinney & Sons	Forget-Me-Not
Earigail Health Club	Fou Tees Printing
Ecopure Environmental Ltd	Four Masters Bookshop
Edwin Foley & Co. Chartered Accountants	Frances's Beauty Salon
Elle	Frank Kelly & Co.
Encore Performing Arts Academy	Funky Flowers
Eske Gutters	G. Barrett & Sons
Eske Windscreens	Gailearí 2000 [Art Gallery]
Evolve Menswear	Gallagher Cleaning Systems
F Gallagher & Co	Gallagher McCartney
Fabric Centre	Gallagher's Butchers
Fantasy Ladies Fashions	Gallaghers Food Store & Petrol Station
Farrah's (Hairdressers)	Gallen's Bar, Lounge and Off Sales
Feda O'Donnell Buses	Garden Maintenance and Landscaping Services
Ferm Engineering Limited	Garry Clarke Solicitors
Finn Snack Bar	Garry Office Supplies
Fintan Moloney	Gary's Pet World & Garden Centre
First Aid Plus	Genesis Laser & Skin Clinic
Fit Finesse	George Irwin & Sons

Gerard McCool Bookmaker	Headers
Gerard McHugh, Photographer	Heeney's Dry Cleaners
Gillespie Ready Mix	Heeney's U-Drop-Inn
Glebe Builders	Hegarty's Furniture & Gift Shop
Glencar Pharmacy	Heike Thiele Freelens Photography
Glenside Bacon	Heneghan Toys & Gifts Ltd
Global Tiles and Bathrooms	Herron Auto/Car Rental
Golden Dragon	Hickey Clarke & Langan
Good Taste Bakers	HML Plant Hire
Gorman & Co. Accountants	Holey Shoes
Gortlee Tool Hire	Home Thoughts
Grant Connections	Irish Pressing
Grants Shoes	Inis Communications
Greenes Shoes	Inishowen Art
Greg's Fruit & Veg	Inishowen Consultancy
Grove Furnishings	Inishowen Development Partnership
Gweedore Furniture Ltd	Inishowen Motors-Letterkenny Kia/Nissan
H.R. Team	ISS Facility Services
Hair For You	J. Gillespie Engineering
Hanna Hats	J.Hendersons & Sons
Hannon Green	J.K Image Consultant
Harbour Restaurant	Jackson's Hotel
Harley's Cheers Bar	James Canney
Harry's Restaurant, Bridgend	James Cassidy (Coal Merchant)
Harvey McCrossan & Co.	James Sweeney [Building & Carpentry Services]

Jeremy Worth Orthodontics  
JF Coaching Services  
Jim Owen Car Sales  
Joe Bonnar Metalcraft Ltd.  
Joe's Butchers  
John Crossan & Sons  
John F Loughrey  
John Harley Electrical Services Ltd  
John O'Doherty 'The Lieu's Bar  
Julie's Beauty Salon  
K Style Ltd  
Kee's Hotel  
Kelly Cleaning Ltd  
Kellys Centra & Restaurant Mountain Top  
Kevin Barron Accountants  
Kieran Roarty – Funeral Director  
Kiln Time  
Knockalla Consulting  
La Bella Donna-Italian  
Lafferty's Butchers  
Leo's Tavern  
Letterkenny Skip Hire  
LF Tyres [Servicing - Tyres - Valeting]  
Liam Boylan Plumbing & Heating Contractors  
Liberty Properties  
Liberty Travel  
Lights & Shades  
Linda's Crusty Kitchen  
Lorraine Boyce Chartered Physiotherapist  
Lone Star Sole  
M & N Launderette & Dry Cleaning  
M.J's  
M.M.Mulrine (Solicitors)  
MABS  
Mac's Bookshop  
MacGabhann Architects  
MacMahon Computers  
Mad About Flowers  
Magees Chemist  
Mangan Tours  
Manhattan Steakhouse Restaurant  
Marine Harvest Ireland  
Martin Boyle Haulage Ltd  
Martin Mannion [Oil Burner Servicing]  
Marys Of Donegal  
Master Shoe Co.  
Mc Ginty's Donegal Fruit Importers  
Mc Intyre O' Brien Solicitors  
McBride Auctioneers  
McCallions Bar

McClay's of Stranorlar (The Baby Corner)	Media Box
McConnell's Butchers	Meenamara Development
McDaid's Football Special	Meenan's (Heating & Plumbing)
McDaid's Superstore	Mella Britton - Skin Therapy
McDevitt Oil	Melody Maker
McEleney Doherty Associates	MH Associates
McElhinney Metal Recycling Ltd	Mhaire
McElhinney's of Ballybofey (Large Department Store)	Mhatt Bonners Convenience Store
McFadden Tiles	MICAD Security
McFadden's Garage	Michel Communications
McFadden's Gift & Home	Michelle's Beauty & Injury Clinic
McGarrigle Framing	Millennium Forum
McGee's Bar	Milltown House
McGeough Financial Consultants Ltd.	Moll Ireland
McGettigans Butchers	Moore Properties
McGinley Sofas	Morna's Patch
McGinley's Pub & Next.Door Off Licence	Moto'minder Ltd
McGonigle Oil	Motoworld
McGroarty's TV Centre Ltd	Mourne Antiques
McGuinness O'Neill Accounting	Movie Madness
McIntyre's Filling Station	Mr G's (Discount Store)
McKelvey's Bar	Mullins Shop
McLaughlin Motor Factors	Mulrines Furniture
McMullin Associates	Murphy's (Drapers and Magee of Donegal Agent)
McPhilemy's Furniture	Navenny Grill (Restaurant & Take Away)

Navenny Lane, Ballybofey

Niall Quinn & Co

No Angels Hair Salon

North West Alarms

Northern Garage

O'Dochartaigh Florist

O'Donnell and Sweeney Solicitors

O'Dowd Donnelly Carbin

O'Flaherty's Bar

O'Connor's Home Bakery

O'Donnell Electrical

O'Donnell McKenna

O'Gorman Cunningham & Co.

Olde Castle Bar

Orbit Security

O'Riain Estate Agents

Oscar's Restaurant

Ostan Gweedore

Outside the Box

P & G Taylor

P. McRory (Solicitors)

Paddy Carr (Architects)

Padraig Gallagher Buses

Pamela Bloe Photography

Patrick McDermott & Co.

Patrick Tinney & Sons

Pats on the Square

Pats Pizza

Paul A. Roarty [Electrical Contractor]

Paul Greene & Co

Paul's Party Shop

Paula's Hair Affair

PC Clean

PDC Construction Ltd

Peppers Diner

Pete's Bar

Peter's Man Shop

Phillips Medisize

Picture Moulding

Pixel Crush

Planet Baby

Porter Computer Repairs

Print Supplies

Proper Price

Pryal School of Motoring

Public Image (Hairdressers)

Quiet Moment

Quigley's Barbers

Quinlans Newsagents

Quinn Kennedy & Co

Quinn Meehan Accountants	Shapes 'n' Hair
R McCullagh Jewellers	Sharkey Waste Recycling & Skip Hire
Rainey Gibson Ltd.	Sharon Hearty: Hearty Marketing
Reid's Mace	Sheridan Security Alarms and Fire Ltd
Reko Cartridges	Sherry FitzGerald McLoughlin
Riverside House B & B	Siopa Framala (The Frame Shop)
Roarty's Service Station	Siopa Ó Dochartaigh
Rory's Autospare Ltd	Smallworld
Rosewoods	Solar Lounge
Rosses Bar	Speers Locksmiths
Ruby Rose Creative Services	Stateside American Restaurant Ltd
Ruths Pharmacy	Stewart & MacLochlainn
S & R Motors	Stitch Express
Safetech Safety Professionals	Studio 5 Hairdressers
Sam Chan's Takeaway	Summer Palace
Seamus MacRory & Co.	Sunrise Takeaway
Sean McGee	Swilly Print
Sean Ógs	Switch
Seaview Hotel	Switch Business Systems Ltd
SecureLAN Systems	T Cassidy & Co
Sendmode	T. Meehan & Son (Auctioneers and Valuers)
Serenity Hair & Beauty	Taylor's Pantry
Service Sells	Teac Campbell Guest House
Shannagh's Beauty Clinic	Teac Jack Hotel
Shape 'n' Style	Teach Hiudai Beag

Teach Paidi Oigs Bar & New York Pizza	The Lunch Box
TECHIE2U [Mobile Computer Repairs]	The Mortgage Centre
The Bagel Bar	The Peak Bar
The Beach House Restaurant	The Peak Bar & Restaurant
The Bike Shop	The Quiet Moment
The Brewery	The Red Door Country House & Restaurant
The Bridges B & B	The Reel Inn
The Claddagh Bar	The Reveller
The Computer Store	The Salon
The Cope	The Shoe Box
The Cosy @ The Town Clock	The Sign Place @ Callaghans
The Cove Coffee House	The Style Room
The Craze Menswear	The Tax Clinic
The Dealer "Free Ads" Paper	The Tower Bar
The Derg Finn Partnership (Advice Centre)	The Video Shop
The Diamond Edge	The Waterbus
The Diamond Grill	The Yellow Pepper
The Drift Inn	TICN Ltd
The Flower Shop	Tierney's Chemist
The Forge	Timoney Electric
The Gift Box	Timony's News
The Good Luck Jewellers	Tirconnail Bar
The Jewel Casket	Tobins Filling Station
The John Dory (Restaurant & Take Away)	Toni's Bistro
The Just Rewards Sticker Co.	Topline Fashions

Tor Glas Teo [Garden Centre]

Total Splicing Solutions East End House

Tots & Tassles Clothing

Twist Design

Ubiquitous Restaurant

UnaVerse (Fashion Boutique)

Upper Cut Barbers

V P McMullin

Verve Fashions

Victor Company

View With McHugh (Electrical & Audio-Visual)

Voodoo Lounge

VP McMullen & Son (Solicitors)

Watson Hire

Watson Home, Hire & Hardware

Watson Menswear

Wedding Chair Covers Donegal

Westend Dental Surgery

WH Raitt & Son

**Appendix Eight:** Malhotra (2007) 10 steps questionnaire design process.

1. Specify the Information Needed
2. Specify the type of interview method
3. Determine the content of the individual questions
4. Design the questionnaire to overcome the respondent's inability and unwillingness to answer.
5. Decide on the question structure
6. Determine the question wording
7. Arrange the questions in proper order
8. Identify the form and layout
9. Reproduce the questionnaire
10. Eliminate bugs by pretesting