

# **THE INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL NETWORKS INTO BRANDING STRATEGY**

**The potential for social media networks as part of brand building and  
marketing strategy.**

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Science in Marketing, Department of Marketing, Tourism and Leisure, School of  
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## DECLARATION

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby declare that the research conducted in this dissertation for the award of Master of Science in Marketing is all my own work with acknowledged exceptions.

Signed:

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**DEDICATION**

*For my Mum and Dad*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>DECLARATION.....</b>	<b>.....</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>.....</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>.....</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>.....</b>
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>.....</b>
<b>IX.</b>	<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>.....</b>
 <b>SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>		<b>1</b>
1.1	Introduction.....	2
1.2	Rationale.....	3
1.3	Research Problem.....	3
1.4	Research Objectives.....	4
1.5	Justification of Research.....	5
1.6	Methodology Overview.....	6
1.7	Time Scale.....	6
1.8	Conclusion.....	7
 <b>SECTION TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>		<b>8</b>
2.1	Introduction.....	9
2.2	Marketing.....	9

2.2.1	Internet Marketing.....	9
2.3	Branding.....	10
2.3.1	Fundamentals of a Brand.....	10
2.3.2	Building a Brand.....	11
2.3.3	Brand Innovation.....	11
2.3.4	Branding on the Internet.....	12
2.3.5	Brand Experience.....	12
2.3.6	Transformation in Branding.....	13
2.4	Social Media.....	13
2.4.1	Social Media Networks.....	14
2.4.2	Online/Virtual Communities.....	15
2.4.3	Virtual Brand Communities.....	16
2.4.4	Social Media Networks in Branding Strategy.....	16
2.4.4.1	Principles of Social Media Networks in Branding Strategy....	17
2.4.5	Conclusion.....	18

**SECTION THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....19**

3.1	Introduction.....	20
3.2	Research Objectives.....	20
3.3	Research Design.....	21
3.3.1	Research Sampling.....	22
3.3.1.1	Sample Selection.....	23

3.4 The Research Instrument.....	25
3.5 Research Ethics.....	26
3.6 Analysis of Primary Data.....	26
3.7 Limitations of Methodology.....	27
3.8 Conclusion.....	27

**SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .....28**

4.1 Introduction.....	29
4.2 Objective One.....	30
4.2.1 Literature Finding's and Analysis.....	30
4.3 Objective Two.....	32
4.3.1 Profile of Respondent.....	32
4.3.2 Interview Findings and Analysis.....	32
4.4 Objective Three.....	41
4.4.1 Profile of Respondent.....	41
4.4.2 Interview Findings and Analysis.....	41
4.4.3 Profile of Respondent.....	51
4.4.4 Interview Findings and Analysis.....	51
4.5 Objective Four.....	60
4.5.1 Profile of Respondent.....	60
4.5.2 Interview Findings and Analysis.....	60
4.6 Objective Five.....	68

4.6.1 Recommendation’s Findings and Analysis.....68

4.7 Evaluation of Research Design.....69

1.8 Conclusion.....70

4.8.1 Objective One.....70

4.8.2 Objective Two.....70

4.8.3 Objective Three.....70

4.8.4 Objective Four.....71

4.8.5 Objective Five.....71

**SECTION FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS .....72**

5.1 Introduction.....73

5.2 List of Recommendations.....74

5.3 Recommendations Discussion.....75

5.4 Research Limitations.....79

5.5 Future Study.....79

5.6 Conclusion.....80

**X. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....**

**XIX. GLOSSARY.....**

**XXI. APPENDICES.....**

- A. Methodology Overview
- B. Time Scale





- C. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Human Motivation Theory)**
- D. Areas discussed with Social Network (Bebo)**
- E. Areas discussed with Brands (Pat the Baker and Coca-Cola)**
- F. Areas discussed with Third Party (Cybercom)**

**LIST OF FIGURES****Page**

**Figure 1: Methodology Overview** **Appendix A**

**Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs  
(Human Motivation Theory)** **Appendix C**

**LIST OF TABLES****Page**

Table 1: List of Recommendations

68

Table 2: Time Scale

Appendix B

## Section One:

### Introduction

## **SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Marketers are continually exploring new ways to ensure their product or service is visible to consumers. The continuous development in marketing media requires that practitioners stay vigilant to avoid missing opportunities. The evolution of the Internet has resulted in a global audience and a diverse range of ways to reach them. This Web savvy audience can also be considered an invaluable resource for marketers.

Branding is an essential aspect of marketing; it differentiates one company's goods from another and establishes an identity for a product or service. A brand uses consumer perceptions and can be built across a number of media. The Internet can create new possibilities for branding.

Companies are constantly looking for ways to get their brands into the right setting, to spread their brand message. The Internet has become a new medium that must be explored by brand owners if they are to develop the brand to its full potential.

Social media networks have become an Internet phenomenon where consumers are moving online to communicate with each other and third parties. These networks provide a sense of community, self-expression and entertainment. They are part of what is termed Web 2.0, allowing for two-way communication.

Brands are designed to connect and interact with consumers; the settings provided by social media allow brands to benefit by tapping into these networks. Social networks may offer the best way for brands to connect with both the discerning audience, and the traditionally difficult to engage younger audiences.

## **1.2 Rationale**

Brands are vital to companies, and brand managers are continuously on the look out for the best means of connecting with consumers in a cost effective manner. This social network media breakthrough offers a powerful social distribution platform for brands. Little research has been carried out to see how brands could appropriately connect with consumers on these social networks; this was the rationale for the following study.

## **1.3 Research Problem**

### The Use of Social Networks in Branding Strategy

The potential for social media networks as part of marketing strategy and the building of brands.

This research is aimed at discovering whether companies can use the emergence of social media networks popularity as a way to support brand building and branding strategy. It will determine whether their two-way nature can provide invaluable communication between brands and consumers.

## **1.4 Research Objectives**

The design of any study is a blueprint to fulfil objectives and answer questions, Cooper and Emory (1995). The primary aim of this paper is to examine whether the use of social networks can aid brand building. To determine this, five key research objectives were identified:

- To analyse what is known and written about branding and social media networks.
- To determine how social media networks encourage brand investment.
- To identify why a brand would choose to invest in social media networks for their brand communication.
- To get an experienced third party perspective on the use of social media networks to brands and the issues involved.
- To arrive at informed conclusions and make recommendations on the use of social media networks in branding strategy.

## 1.5 Justification of Research

Advances in information technology have constantly impacted the global marketing strategies of companies, Melewar and Smith (2003). Sicilia and Palazon (2008) show that a web site can act as a marketing tool to develop a group of loyal consumers around a brand.

The recognition that Internet communities can have a great impact on the reputation and popularity of a brand identifies the need for research into how these networks can be utilised to promote the positive aspects of a brand.

Ceria (2009) found consumers need to be compelled in order to participate in the marketing efforts of a brand. The most rewarding engagement campaigns happen when a firm genuinely connects with a consumer in the communities that surround the brand.

This research intends to discover whether engaging with consumers on social media networks can increase brand equity by improving brand identity and image. There is the potential for consumers to be engaged as co-creators of a brand message as well as creating brand value, possibly resulting in intense levels of loyalty. This could be a cost effective means of building brands for brand managers with restricted marketing budgets.

In utilising social media, segmenting and targeting are in place for the marketer. It could also provide a means of interacting with consumers in a place where they are willing to engage rather than be enraged by brand communications.

It is important to note that there has been little published research on the topic and so it will be exploratory in nature. This research would aim to fill a gap in the knowledge of branding and Internet marketing in assessing whether social networks are a viable method of brand communication. The research field has acquired notable popularity in recent years.



## 1.6 Methodology Overview

Once secondary research was exhausted, it was necessary to conduct substantial primary research to arrive at informed conclusions and make recommendations on the use of social media networks in branding strategy. The use of secondary data alone would be insufficient, so a primary collection method was pursued.

The primary research began by carrying out an in-depth interview with a member of a social network to determine how social media networks encourage brand investment. This was followed by interviews with two brands to understand why a brand would choose to invest in social media networks for their brand communication. Finally an interview was conducted with a third party in order to get an experienced third party perspective on the use of social media networks to brands and the issues involved. Collectively these four interviews produced clear research findings and conclusions.

The process of primary data collection generated research findings, which solved the research objectives it was designed for.

*See appendix A*

## 1.7 Time Scale

This research commenced in February 2009 and finished in August 2009. During the month of March an intense literature review was undertaken. After the literature was exhausted, the month of April involved a critical analysis of the research topic. This involved examining what issues arose from the literature and what gaps needed to be filled in the knowledge. A greater understanding of the research problem was acquired. The month of May was spent preparing the data collection method, drawing up topics and deciding on suitable samples. The first in-depth interview, with the social network, took place in early June and was followed later that month with an analysis of the research findings. July involved interviewing the selected brands and analysing their results. The final interview was conducted with the chosen third party

in the beginning of August. Once these findings had been evaluated, conclusions and recommendations were arrived at.

*See appendix B*

## **1.8 Conclusion**

It is anticipated discover that social networks can now be utilised by brands and be employed in marketing strategy. They have great potential to be leveraged for professional success and exploited as a marketing tool. Research into this area would determine if the necessary levels of brand engagement could be achieved to create brand ambassadors. Is it realistic to create a high performing business, with a focus on building compelling and engaging corporate brands, using social media platforms? If so companies need to be present and ready to engage, arriving too late will result in missed opportunities.

**Section Two:**

**Literature Review**

## **SECTION TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Branding is an essential of marketing and consequently is regularly written about in marketing literature. The development of brands using social media networks has made it a topic, which has also received some attention in marketing literature but to a very limited degree.

### **2.2 Marketing**

McAlear (2008) observes the transformation in marketing media with what he describes as the collapse of communication channels and a conscious avoidance of every form of marketing by the public. Sasser (2008) also admits that marketers are now more likely to enrage, rather than resourcefully engage, the new era of consumer co-creator and critic. Making marketing effective again will require radically altering our perspective, Rayport (2008).

#### **2.2.1 Internet Marketing**

Internet marketing is the process of building and maintaining customer relationships through online activities. Marketers are now facing a wider task due to factors including the Internet and evolving distribution models, which are having a great affect on the way consumers' research and buy products, Court (2007). Consumers sceptical of traditional media are moving to a medium they trust more. Kotler (2008) refers to the real issue being what percentage of budgets should be left in traditional channels and what percent should be assigned to digital channels. When choosing to take advantage of the Internet, it is important for practitioners to be aware that the basic principles of marketing still apply, Chaffey (2000).

## 2.3 Branding

What is a brand? The most commonly used definition of a brand is that of the American Marketing Association:

*“a name, term, sign, 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.”*

According to Holt (2002), a brand is more often than not an undervalued asset. He sees branding as having become one of the most significant aspects of a business strategy. Kotler (2003) describes brands as the cornerstones of marketing. Brands matter for a number of reasons including; identity, trust, reliability and value adding.

### 2.3.1 Fundamentals of a Brand

Brands remain owned by the seller, but several stakeholders nurture them. A brand is a shared value because it is built on a base of relationships Schultz & Schultz (2004). A brand enables a company to establish a unique identity and to increase the prospect of attracting repeat business, Ibeh et al. (2005). An in depth understanding of customer needs is the foundation of any strong brand, Kotler (2003). Simmons (2007) also identifies the need for a better understanding of customers and a brand's identity along with forward-looking market segmentation. For consumers, a brand is thought to suggest a certain personality, Aaker (1991). Often people can be viewed as brands themselves.

*“We navigate our world using symbols and visual expressions that signal our personality and our values and strong brands are one of the means by which we do this.”*

Fog, Budtz and Yakaboylu (2005)

### **2.3.2 Building a Brand**

Brand building does not necessarily mean big investment, Schultz and Schultz (2004), the question is not how much can be spent on brand building, but what the value offer is, how to make that offer to potential consumers, what will be the returns, and then how much is needed to get those returns. Their simple rule for brand budgeting is to invest in a brand based on what a company expects to get back, not what it can afford or has always done. The best means of building a brand, according to Aufreiter, Elzinga & Gordon (2003), is to know exactly what consumers require from it and tailor the brand accordingly.

Within marketing the skill to build brands across a growing number of media will be critical, Court (2007). Clancy & Trout (2002) cite that marketers are behaving in ways that are actually diluting brands rather than building them. Sasser (2008) calls to mind there can be nothing worse than a ‘fickle brand lover’ annoyed. Marketers must continually examine the value propositions of their brands. The goal is to discover the significance of both tangible and intangible brand attributes to consumers that help set it apart from competitors, Aufreiter, Elzinga & Gordon (2003). Hogan, Almquist and Glynn (2005) note that successful brand builders identify touchpoints that will have the most impact and spend aggressively rather than reactively invest everywhere.

### **2.3.3 Brand Innovation**

Guild (2003) sees brand growth as breathing new life into an existing brand. Aaker (2007) describes brand innovation as not being just a name and logo but being a brand supported by strategy, investment and active management. Logman (2007) advises that when pursuing innovation and growth, brand managers should try to find the right balance between current and new marketing efforts. They must recognise the value of innovation from the customer’s perspective rather than the firms, creating real customer value. Aufreiter, Elzinga & Gordon (2003) suggest they will need to

rediscover how their brands can interact with people. The proliferation in ways to communicate a brand, including the Internet, has made it more difficult get their message across.

#### **2.3.4 Branding on the Internet**

With the evolution of the internet, brands are becoming more important than they have been in other channels or environments, Bergstrom (2000). The Internet for brands offers segmentation, understanding and as a result more accurate targeting, Probaker (2000). There are vast opportunities for well-positioned brands on the Internet. An important rule of thumb for branding on the internet will be the constant monitoring of a company's offline branding strategy; this will ensure consistency and effectiveness throughout the branding activities, Simmons (2007).

The Internet has, however, added its own problems and possibilities when it comes to branding. People are now beginning to shape brand meanings via the Internet, Hagel III & Armstrong (1997). They suggest there will be new levels of loyalty and disloyalty for brands on the internet. The building of trust, through developing strong internet brands, has become critical for marketers, Simmons (2007). Pardy (2007) cited by McKinsey (2007) agrees that brands may now be made or destroyed on the Internet; a key rule for marketers is that of trust and respect.

The Internet, over any other medium is unique, in that it has sensory aspects that provide for strong emotional and affinity connections such as interaction and self-direction. Marketers should take advantage of these unique aspects to create and strengthen what is known as brand affinity; loyalty that builds the brand experience, Bergstrom (2000).

#### **2.3.5 Brand Experience**

Brands are now being defined by experience, Maruca (1999). When it comes to the brand experience prominent issues are the amount of customer control, customisation and customer relationships, Rowley (2004). Using the internet as a medium allows for the increasing emphasis on experience by offering a way to revolutionise the brand

experience. De Chernatony (2009) describes the need for brands to move on from frozen value, stating we are now in an era of co-creating the value of brands, the Internet can allow for this. He identifies we as consumers being more interested in value we have co-created, companies cannot control brand meaning because consumers will always adapt it. The experience is the brand, Dayal et al, (2000). Simmons (2008) reveals that contemporary consumers are now seeking both individualistic and communal brand experiences.

### **2.3.6 Transformation in Branding**

The evolving environment demands a different type of brand value, value that needs to be determined by both parties. There are new breeds of brands, market driving brands, which are driving more value by thinking unconventionally, De Chernatony (2009). According to Travis (2001) the Internet will change all the rules for branding, except one, which is creating an emotional bond with buyers. The core of strong branding still stems from strong emotion. Pitta (2008) explains the idea of “share of heart” as the emotional relationship for example between the consumer and a particular branded product.

Brown (2008) tells how design thinking has encouraged market growth in many areas by improving brand perception through clever and evocative advertising and communication strategies. Carlotti Jr., Coe & Perrey (2004) observe companies are now recognising the possibilities of brand growth through innovation. It will be the brand managers who miss out on emerging opportunities that actually fail, rather than those who fail when trying to exploit them. Kotler (2008) notes, that due to a challenging environment, companies will invest their finances into innovative marketing media to discover their potential. The Internet’s growth has massively increased the importance of user-generated media such as blogs and video-sharing sites Court (2007). The most effective way to generate word of mouth involves using the Internet and targeting its online consumer communities, Pitta (2008).

## **2.4 Social Media**



Chui, Miller and Roberts (2009) identify Web 2.0 tools as providing an infinite range of opportunities for companies who have the capacity and confidence to use them. Web 2.0 covers a range of technologies, of which the most extensively used, are blogs, wikis, podcasts and social networks. Web 2.0, the most recent surge in corporate technology implementations, is predicted to bring about a wider organisational impact than technologies adopted during the 1990's such as customer relationship management or supply chain management. Chi (2008) observes how consumers now use Web 2.0 technologies to facilitate social activities such as information gathering and sharing, and collaboration. Thriving Web 2.0 applications have defied the predictions of many, whom had previously underestimated individual's desire to use the Internet to socially mediate their communication and information environments. Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009) discover a company should address their target audience both directly and indirectly through social media. Hoffman (2009) warns companies to prepare for the day when Web 2.0 will morph into Web 3.0 and consumers themselves will satisfy their need for information about products. Marketing is no longer one-dimensional but has now become a two-way process engaging a brand and its audience, Drury (2008). It is essential that brands begin to test this medium or face the risk of being left behind.

#### **2.4.1 Social Media Networks**

A social media network, in Internet terms, generally refers to a structure, which allows the members of a specific site to learn about each other's preferences, abilities, talents and knowledge. It is the sharing of written, video, photographic content and ideas through an internet-based site, ul- Haq (2007). Weaver & Morrison (2008) distinguish that social networking is a concept, which was around long before the introduction of the internet; human beings are social creatures whom have always had the ability to work in groups to create value greater than the sum of its individual parts.

Court (2008) recommends a social networking site may hold opportunities for marketers in allowing them access to global word of mouth. We are seeing the advent of traditional media declining in relevance as the Internet and social networking achieve meaningful scale. Mangolds & Faulds (2009) identify the development of

Internet-based social media as allowing one person to communicate with hundreds, thousands of other people about products and companies who provide them. This has resulted in the increased importance of consumer-to-consumer communications in the marketplace. Maclaran & Catterall (2002) worry that when focusing on the use of the Internet for one-to-one communications; marketers run the danger of missing the many-to-many communications that are taking place where consumers interact with one another. Sarda (2008) described social networking as a means of targeting your audience.

Casalo et. al (2009) reveal online social networks as a development and distribution channel. They also find that participation in an online network helps to increase the levels of affective commitment and loyalty to the mutual interest of the network, the result being particularly relevant for commercial networks, which are based on the admiration of a brand, firm or product.

#### **2.4.2 Online/Virtual Communities**

Pitta & Fowler (2005) describe a community as “*sustained social interaction, shared attributes, interests and values (community standards)*” which are also present in virtual communities. Lin (2007) recognises substantial advantages of virtual over actual communities as being physical location, anonymity and the logistical and social costs to participate. Virtual communities as a result create a greater sense of belonging for community members.

Maslow (1943) proposed a hierarchy of needs for human motivation. There are five sets of basic needs, which are related to each other and are arranged in a hierarchy of necessity. When the most compelling goal is realized, the next higher need emerges. This hierarchy of needs includes social needs, and the basic human need for a sense of belonging.

*See appendix C*

In understanding why and how virtual communities can be built, Maslow’s theory should be acknowledged. The need for belonging explains why people visit and join online communities and why they chose to support a particular brand, Ray (2008).

Maslow's needs (1943), further recognise self-esteem and self-actualisation needs, which are also sought through virtual communities.

Hersberger et al, (2007) introduce a framework, which proposes that strong virtual communities are established with a foundation made up of factors related to membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection. Hagel III and Armstrong (1997) note that as online communities are beginning to accumulate consumers with common interests and characteristics, they will also be establishing live test beds where marketers can access users of their products in a true market environment even a focus group could not match.

### **2.4.3 Virtual Brand Communities**

Brand communities create the ultimate degree of connectivity between a consumer and a brand. When treating a brand community as a marketing tool it requires an understanding of the structure of its population, Ouwersloot and Odekerken (2008). Pitta & Fowler (2005) accept that marketers do not usually adopt a community perspective of their market; they identify online communities as being essentially market segments whose interests are very similar and much more specific than the population at large. They cite Reichheld (1996), who discovered from his study of brand loyalty, that the most important factor that linked with company growth was a customer's eagerness to recommend a company or brand. He predicted that consumers would only make recommendations if they felt intense loyalty.

There is a trend of communities attracting enthusiasts who will create an almost virtual fan club around a product or service, Hagel III & Armstrong (1997). Maclaran & Catterall (2002) note that significantly for marketers, customers are creating virtual brand communities independently of the company. Communities could help build excitement for a brand and stimulate impulse buying. Third parties, such as those on social networks, are now having greater influence on corporate reputations, Court (2007).

### **2.4.4 Social Media Networks in Branding Strategy**

Dobele, Toleman and Beverland (2005) describe the process of viral marketing as utilising electronic communications in a manner, which prompts brand messages across a wide network of buyers. Pita & Fowler (2005), cite Wind (1976) who showed that the customer-to-customer relationship is critically important to marketers, as these relationships influence brand choice. Hagel III & Armstrong (1997) accept virtual communities as being systems which will give power to consumers. They also identify them as beneficial to marketers, allowing innovative marketers to serve market segments of one. This coincides with the concept that we are living in the age of co-creation; Pardy (2007) agrees that consumers on the Internet are open to exciting ideas and want to co-create content, but warns to remember they are in charge. Sarda (2008) recognises the need to engage customers in relevant conversations where they are and how it suits them, for brands to be applicable to consumer's everyday lives.

Dahlen et. al (2009) show that non-traditional media can enhance the consumer-perceived value of marketing and suggest that consumer-perceived value is important in generating purchase and positive word-of-mouth. They found the effects are greater for low rather than high-reputation brands. High-reputation brands appear to be more sensitive to the appropriateness and expense of the marketing.

#### **2.4.4.1 Principles of Social Media Networks in Branding Strategy**

Guggenheim Shenkan & Sichel (2007) forewarn of the public-relations problems that intense customer involvement can sometimes create. Bringing your brand to a social network brings it as close to customers as it could possibly get. Ul-Haq (2007) notes, that social networking will require an honest engagement between consumer's needs and the product or services' real benefits. Intelligent marketers will encourage community members to communicate with them, Hagel III & Armstrong (1997), as these virtual communities could revolutionize and allow smaller companies to overtake larger ones.

The brand message is co-created, companies can start the message but they must let consumers talk. They do, however, most importantly have control over how the brand reacts, Sarda (2008). Mangold & Faulds (2009) understand that content, timing, and

frequency of the social media conversations of consumers are outside of brand managers' control requiring they learn to shape consumer discussions in a way, which is consistent with the organizations goals.

Consumers are now acting independently of marketers and have begun to create and distribute content that closely resembles advertisements for the brands they like, Muniz & Schau (2007). Social networks can be viewed as 'touchpoints' for the consumer to interact with a brand. The multiplicity of virtual communities on the Internet is a substantial resource for marketers sourcing new ideas and insights, although new research approaches must be developed to tap these resources, Maclaran & Catterall (2002). De Chernatony (2009) acknowledges that the full potential of social networks in aiding brands has yet to be discovered. McWilliam (2000) observes that established online communities could provide the prospective brand community developer with several measures for success.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Examination of pertinent literature signaled a transformation in marketing media and the search for ways to make marketing effective. Internet marketing is now seen to be a significant channel as consumers are increasingly moving online.

Brands, an essential of marketing, can be built in a growing number of ways. There is a pattern of brands, seeking to be innovative, moving online to reach consumers. The brand experience is seen to be crucial in creating a memorable experience and connection, the Internet uniquely facilitates this. A new type of brand is sought by consumers, one possibly co-created developing a stronger attachment.

The Internet has brought about the development of social media; these are described as Web 2.0 tools facilitating social activities such as information gathering, sharing, and collaboration. Part of these social media tools is social media networks, which are generally a structure that allow members to interact. These online communities accumulate consumers with common interests and characteristics, making them a resource for marketers. These communities attract enthusiasts, who may create an almost virtual fan club around a brand.

There is vast potential for the use of these social networks in branding strategy if marketers approach the new channel correctly and learn to utilise the tools available. The prospect of co-creation creates notable promise for marketers.

### **Section Three:**

### **Research Methodology**

## **SECTION THREE: RESEARCH METODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this section is to outline the method used to collect data for the study and the rationale for choosing the research method. The reasons for choosing the particular data collection and analysis method were determined by the nature of what was required, and by the particular characteristics of the research problem and the specific sources of information.

This research is an exploratory study. Exploratory research is appropriate in topic areas where the developed data is limited, Cooper and Emory (1995). Exploratory studies tend towards a loose structure with the objective of discovering future research tasks.

### **3.2 Research Objectives**

The objectives component should evolve naturally from the problem statement, giving the researcher specific, concrete, and achievable goals, Cooper and Emory (1995).

The primary purpose of this paper is to examine whether the use of social networks can aid brand building. To determine this, a number of key research objectives were identified in Section One. The research objectives set, addressed the purpose of the study.

With the research objectives in mind the research methodology was selected and the process designed. The research instrument was chosen with a view to obtaining as much information as possible pertaining to the research objectives and problem.

### **3.3 Research Design**

In undertaking this research and selecting the methodology, the nature of the area being studied and the question being asked, as well as any possible limitations on the study such as time and resources were taken into consideration. Resources included human, monetary and research tools.

This study was exploratory in nature and as such required primary and secondary research. Secondary research involved conducting an exhaustive search of the available literature in the area of branding and the use of the Internet, specifically social networks. Sources included books, academic journals, online sources and newspaper articles. The literature review summarised the views of academics on the subject matter and it provided an academic framework for the primary research.

The exploratory study began with a search of published data, and followed with the compilation of insights of well-informed people. The two main approaches that could have been taken when conducting the primary research were a qualitative approach or a quantitative approach. Qualitative opposed to quantitative is concerned with the meanings and personal experience of individuals and groups. The method used was in-depth interviewing and was descriptive in nature.

Qualitative research has many advantages, Chadwick et. al (1984). It's advantages for this research included that it gave a more realistic view, it was flexible, gained deeper insight into the respondents and emphasised meanings and interpretation. It was necessary to delve into perceptions and identify true feelings on the subject matter.

Based on the research question chosen, the effects of personal experience and the experience of individuals at a social network, brands using social networks and a



digital marketing company involved with social networks, were gathered through in-depth interviews.

This approach was deemed to be the most appropriate for the main focus of the research. With the in-depth interview the respondent is encouraged to share as much information as possible in an unconstrained environment, Cooper and Emory (1995). It provided the ability to uncover more complete answers and allow the chosen respondents to reveal attitudes or motives that they may be reluctant to discuss.

The research procedure took the form of four in-depth interviews, which were carried out to obtain relevant information on the research topic. Each interview was carried out with a view to obtaining specific knowledge.

### **3.3.1 Research Sampling**

A key step in planning the research design was to identify the target population and select samples. It was necessary determine how many people to interview and who they would be. A sample, according to Domegan and Fleming (2007), is a part of the whole population carefully selected to represent that population. Steps were taken so that by selecting a respondent from the larger population, conclusions could be obtained about the entire population.

Purposive (judgemental) was the sampling method utilised. It is a non-probability means of sampling and was based on who would be appropriate for the study. It was used because there are a limited number of people that have expertise in this area. Purposeful sampling was employed to select information rich respondents for the in-depth study. Cooper and Emory (1995), describe purposive sampling as a non-probability sample that is often used in an exploratory study.

The population chosen for this research were defined as representatives from social networks, brands choosing to use social media networks, and third parties who had knowledge and experience of the use of social networks.

In determining the sample size, fixed resources such as time and money were taken into consideration. A small sample size was suitable for this study; it was achievable within the time constraints and provided credibility. The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from the qualitative inquiry were due to the information-rich respondents selected and the analytical capabilities used rather than the sample size.

### **3.3.1.1 Sample Selection**

#### **Interview One**

This interview was conducted to assess how social networks encourage brand investment.

The first in-depth interview was carried out with a representative from the social network, Bebo. Bebo is the most prominent social media network in Ireland and the UK and growing quickly worldwide. Bebo, a global social network, has opened itself up to brands to increase user engagement. Much of Bebo's success is attributed to its ability to sell media agencies and brands on the virtues of its service and what it could do for them. Bebo have developed brand integration, an innovative way for consumers to interact with a brand. Charkin (2008) understands that when distributing content on the Internet, most brands are concerned about losing control. Bebo offer a platform where content can be controlled.

Philip Macartney was the most appropriate representative from the chosen social network as Bebo's Head of Sales for Ireland and a regular speaker on the topic.

#### **Interview Two**

The interview was conducted to identify why a brand would chose to invest in social media networks.

The second in-depth interview was carried out with a representative from a brand, which chose to get involved with social media networks to bring the brand to the

forefront. Pat the Baker, an Irish bread brand, was selected as it has openly discussed its use of these online networks. The brand is a national favourite and one, which is using social networks for their brand communication.

Oliver Durkin was the most informed representative, of the brand's use of social networks in the branding strategy, as the brand manager of Pat the Baker.

### **Interview Three**

This interview was carried out to get a broader perspective on why social networks would be used in branding strategy.

The third in-depth interview carried out was also with a brand. Coca-Cola was the second brand opted for, as a major global brand that uses social networks for their brand communication. The brand has included social networks as part of its overall marketing strategy to communicate with consumers. It has embraced the use of social media in its branding strategy.

The interview was conducted with Siodhna McGowan, as she is a brand manager with Coca-Cola and has previously worked on successful social media campaigns.

### **Interview Four**

The interview was carried out to get a third party perspective on the use of social media networks to brands and the issues involved.

The fourth in-depth interview was carried out with the digital marketing company, Cybercom. Cybercom is a leading full service digital marketing and advertising agency. Cybercom create incisive "ideas to persuade" based on their understanding of people's behaviour. They bring these ideas to life using digital technologies. Their accomplished approach is seen to consistently deliver return on client investment. For the last two years they have held the accolade of "Irish Digital Agency of the Year", and won the award for the Irish "Digital Campaign for the Year" at the DMA Awards. These awards are in addition to over 50 awards they have received over the last

number of years. They are specialists in building brands through digital vehicles by engaging the consumer in a brand experience that encourages acquisition, converts to sale and retains the consumer over time.

Brain Carolan was the selected representative as Media Manager with Cybercom. The company is now widely recognised as the most creative, dynamic and innovative digital agency in Ireland.

### **3.4 The Research Instrument**

When considering the approach that may be used in a research project, the researcher has three options; a quantitative methodology, a qualitative methodology or a mixed approach methodology. Research information can be obtained from both qualitative and quantitative sources. Exploratory study relies more heavily on qualitative techniques.

#### **3.4.1 In-depth interview**

For this study, the in-depth interview was deemed to be the most effective research instrument. In-depth interviews are a means of collecting qualitative data. Because there is greater interaction between the interviewer and respondent, the in-depth interview has greater flexibility. Domegan and Fleming (2007) recognise the possibility to explain and clarify complex questions and to probe for additional information.

The in-depth interview is unstructured and a direct way of obtaining information. They were used as a primary instrument for the exploratory research. The interviews were conducted on a one to one base; Chisnall (2001) identifies the need to develop a relationship with the interviewee to ensure good communication and a successful interview. The in-depth interviews were particularly appropriate when interviewing professional people.

The technique used questioning in the context of a personal interview to get a single respondent to reveal motivations, beliefs, and feelings on the topic. The purpose of

using this technique is to go beyond the superficial answers that are often provided by respondents and try and get to the real reasons for behaviours or attitudes.

A more focused in-depth interview was selected, and additional guidance provided using a set of topics to promote discussion and elaboration by the respondent. Topics were set based on scope, coverage and the respondent's willingness and ability to answer adequately. The topics were discussed in sequence and to as great an extent as time allowed. A minimum of prompts were used. In-depth interviews are seen to be at the unstructured extreme, Cooper and Emory (1995).

### **3.5 Research Ethics**

*'Ethics are norms, or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationships with others. The goal of ethics in research is to ensure that no one is harmed or suffers adverse consequences from research activities.'*

Cooper and Emory (1995)

When conducting academic research, it is important to carry it out in an ethical manner. In doing so the researcher must commit to ethical standards. Researchers have a responsibility to protect the rights of the respondent or subject.

Before commencing research the chosen respondents were contacted. The proposed study was fully disclosed to all four participants, including objectives and research design, before requesting permission to proceed with the interviews. The respondents were given the right to privacy if required and assured information would be accurately portrayed.

### **3.6 Analysis of Primary Data**

Analysis of the primary data began by identifying the most significant findings from each area discussed with respondents. Each finding was then analysed using secondary research, the literature review, and overall knowledge of the topic. The

letter 'F' was used to distinguish the key findings and the letter 'A' was used to note the subsequent analysis.

### **3.7 Limitations of methodology**

All research methods have their own advantages and disadvantages. The use of in-depth interviews had a number of weaknesses. Because the interviews were one-to-one in nature, it allowed only for small sample sizes, they were also more time consuming and exerting than other research instruments such as telephone interviews or group discussions. There was the danger that the interpretation was subjective. With qualitative research difficulties could have arose from the time required to conduct such research, meaningless information being acquired and problems in generalising findings, Chadwick et. al (1984).

The principal limitation encountered in this study was time. When interviewing professional people it is to be expected that there will be time constraints. All respondents dedicated the maximum time available to them during which each topic area was discussed as thoroughly as possible.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

A specific research approach was determined because of the research question this study aims to answer. The study is exploratory in nature and required qualitative research. The in-depth interview was deemed the most appropriate qualitative method for this investigation due to its co-operative and flexible features. It will be carried out with the hope of obtaining as much information as possible.

**Section Four:**

**Findings and Analysis**

## **SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The research objectives established in Section One were used as a foundation to evaluate section four's findings. The findings outlined in this section are as a result of four in-depth interviews carried out to gauge relevant perspectives for this study. The subjects discussed in each interview were developed from the secondary research.

These results were generated by carrying out an in-depth interview with a representative from a social network, representatives from two well-established brands who have chosen to use social networks, and by interviewing an informed third party representative, a leading digital marketing and advertising agency, seeking to ensure findings were not bias or limited.

The results of the research method were an encompassing collection of information on the research topic. The qualitative data obtained from the interviews was recorded using a dictaphone and manually documented using Microsoft Word.

Cooper and Emory (1995) outline the data analysis process as usually involving reducing accumulated data to a manageable size, developing summaries and looking for patterns. This was an appropriate approach, which was taken to summarise the qualitative data of this research. The letter 'F' denotes the most significant findings from each discussion area while the letter 'A' indicates their subsequent analysis.



## **4.2. Objective One**

- To analyse what is known and written about branding and social media networks.

### **4.2.1 Literature Findings and Analysis**

To complete objective one an extensive literature review was carried out. This required sourcing and covering a satisfactory amount of literature pertaining to social media networks and branding strategy. During the literature search it became apparent that the use of social media networks in marketing was an area, which had not received much attention, therefore warranting further research. Branding strategy has been covered thoroughly but not in connection with evolving marketing channels such as social media.

The findings from the literature search are documented in Section Two. These findings are analysed below:

- A:** The most effective ways of marketing are recognised as constantly changing. This is in no small part to the evolution of the Internet and the opportunities it offers marketers. Branding is established as a crucial part of marketing allowing identity for goods or services. Brands must be built across an increasing number of media. In order to stay effective, a brand needs to interact with consumers and the World Wide Web allows for this. The brand experience is becoming essential and the Internet can uniquely facilitate for

this. Consumers seek a fresh, more approachable and interactive form of brand.

Marketing research is currently in an embryonic state regarding the electronic marketplace, both in terms of how consumers interact with each other online and how a firm can exploit the Internet for value creation. Of central concern to marketing is the exploration of the consumer experience and the attitude to interaction within online communities.

Online consumers are more dynamic and discerning, and can provide a wealth of cultural and marketing information, which enables consumers to have a hand in both the design of a product itself and the attachment of meaning to that product.

Social media has now emerged as a means of sharing information and engaging individuals. Social media networks have developed and created a space where individuals can be social and connect with others of similar interests. These networks have created communities of virtual users who are accessible and receptive.

There is the opportunity for brands to use the tools of social media and structure of online social networks to create brand awareness and build a brand. This type of engagement marketing could lead to high levels of loyalty if a brand operates in a manner, which coincides with the channel itself and the consumers who use it.

### **4.3 Objective Two**

- To determine how social media networks encourage brand investment.

#### **4.3.1 Profile of Respondent**

A spokesperson from the most prominent social media network in Ireland and the UK, Bebo, was interviewed. Philip Macartney is Bebo's Head of Sales for Ireland and a regular advocate for the use of social media networks to the success of brands. Philip was Bebo's first Irish appointment, as Head of Sales he is responsible for driving advertising sales and developing content and partnership opportunities. He has over five years experience in the Irish advertising industry and worked in both broadcast media and the world of online. Philip has a strong interest for technology, cross-media advertising and emerging channels such as mobile.

#### **4.3.2 Interview Findings and Analysis**

To achieve objective two, and get the perspective of a representative from a social media network, an interview was carried out with Philip Macartney, Head of Sales Bebo Ireland. The following are the key findings from this interview and their analysis:

- The Bebo social network audience:

**F:** The Bebo social network audience is generally the 15-25 age group. It is primarily made up of youths seeking friends, identity and fun. Facebook, Myspace and Youtube also provide these elements of community, self-expression and entertainment.

**A:** Bebo is seen to provide all three elements and a common sense of togetherness. It coincides with Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs (1943), and individual's need for a sense of belonging. Bebo is a social network that combines community, self-expression and entertainment to enable users to create, discover, participate and share.

- Bebo, the social network, and brands:

**F:** Advertisers face unique opportunities in social media environments. Bebo's proposition for brands include original programming (sponsorships and product integration), video advertising/open media (companion banners) around premium content, "engagement marketing" such as brand profiles, skins, widgets and applications and traditional online ad sales such as MPU's, banners and skyscrapers.

**A:** Bebo provides a number of ways through which marketers can connect to its users. These connections can be achieved in a number of ways and the tools that enable this are becoming richer every day, from branded content, quizzes, polls, skins, widgets/applications, profiles and integrations through to pioneering platforms such as Bebo's Open Media and 'Bebo Originals' (original programming). One of the more recent innovations with the Bebo network is branded content and entertainment.

- Capabilities of social networks in comparison to other brand communication channels:

**F:** Broadcast media is in danger as it can only really produce content. Social media now provides a lot of content and interaction e.g. Youtube. The audience completely own the Internet as a medium; they never owned others such as

newspapers. Brands get a massive audience from social networks, but that is only the first level, they need to move onto the next level to action and then to engagement. Until brands understand this, they haven't used everything that is available on a Web 2.0 property such as Bebo.

**A:** The functionality of television is better but the paradigm is now any place, anytime, anywhere. Social media produce content which is enjoyable to watch user-generated content and often of a high standard. The embryonic beginnings of two-way communications were there with radio in the form of phone-ins and text-ins but this was emergent and very controlled. This is the first medium where the audience has control of the medium and brands need to respect and understand this. Pardy (2007) agrees that consumers on the Internet are open to exciting ideas and want to co-create content, but warns to remember they are in charge.

**F:** When starting with the base, of what the social network terms the 'triangle', and basing on basic media buy, the Irish media cost per thousand averages would be RTE television 8.54, The Irish Daily Star 20.03, FM104 5.4 and Bebo 1.4. In comparison the Irish media reach would be averaged at 800,000 for Bebo, 600,000 for the Late Late Show television program, 580,000 for RTE 2FM daily reach and 150,000 Irish Independent newspaper daily circulations.

The middle level of the triangle involves what is known as 'call to action'. The Pat the Baker brand analysed under objective three is a prime example of this, asking users to actively get involved by recording their version of the brand's jingle. The top level is of the triangle is engagement, where the Bebo social media network feels it excels. It involves engaging consumers in conversations with the brand.

**A:** The social network homepage is an incredibly valuable place. It has a lower cost per thousand for basic media buy and on average a higher media reach.

- How a social network supports a brand:

**F:** With Web 2.0, consumers can all have their own website now. If a brand has a Bebo homepage, a Facebook site, a Myspace or a Youtube account, then

effectively they have a website. Web 2.0 by its very nature now is communicative. Brands initially thought there was potential due to the large audience sizes and just continued with the traditional digital marketing banners and buttons. However, social media networks such as Bebo, Youtube and Facebook have led the way in this two-way, 'engagement marketing', where a brand can become part of consumers 'life stream' and become part of their everyday communication.

**A:** Before social media came along whenever consumers were trying to identify a brand it was a one-way communication, whether newspaper, television or outdoor. It was the idea of broadcasting the information. All of a sudden then, the development of social media came along. There was greater 'virability'. It was no longer a case of pushing the message out there with very little messaging coming back.

- Social networks as key brand communication:

**F:** Social networks do not envisage 'engagement' media taking over all brand communication sides; there is a need for other mediums like television, flamboyant outdoor displays and explanatory material in print. However, when prepared correctly an engagement media is so strong, that it is brand loyalty for life.

**A:** A brand still requires reminder advertisements; the media mix will always still be there. Engagement media such as social networks are excellent due to the nature of the connection between the consumers and brand, it is an individual identifying with that brand and conceding that brand has all the brand values and DNA that they like. It suits them and is who they use, it is who they want to be seen supporting and is often an entire personality which fits around what the consumer is about and what they do. For consumers, often a brand suggests a certain personality, Aaker (1991). The user who has chosen to engage has appreciated the brand has good content and is deserving of their endorsement.

- Social media network (Bebo), practicality for all brands:

**F:** Youth brands are more likely to experience success. With that said it is difficult to fence in any brand and classify it as not spanning into the youth market. For example an insurance brand, when prepared correctly, can be aimed at youth. Youth are a segment that wants to know about insurance. What social networks are saying to these brands is instead of doing a specified amount of advertising, why don't they create an uncle type personality on Bebo; make his profile about cars and advice. Make it relevant and someone the youth market would want to communicate with, engage with and be loyal to. If it is openly brought by a particular insurance brand then the audience will grasp that. If a company is underhanded to any degree, however, the response could be devastatingly negative. If the brand is upfront and simply suggests the next time a quote is considered to call the number specified or provides a web link, it does not get much simpler than that. Also a bank, which just wants to display rates, that is intrusive but if they tailor content and make it applicable, there is no reason why they should not experience success. If they invite consumers to befriend them or have giveaways and all that is required is engagement of some description e.g. a question needing answering that is appropriate.

**A:** A brand has to provide the content consumers want; again this is the engagement aspect. It is about brands having the confidence in their creative and the brand to let go some control. Traditional media actually works on an idea of lack of brand confidence as they bombard consumers the same advertisements over and over again to try and sway them. The advertisements on mediums such as newspaper should be there for a reminder. For a youth brand particularly, it has to be online to get real usage and traction for the brand.

- Rationalising the brand investment, is it a long-term possibility for brand communication:

**F:** Similar to sponsoring an event or other unique brand communications, it has the initial impact. Social networks have more potential for long-term investment than other media communication.

**A:** Casalo et. al (2009) classify online social networks as a development and distribution channel. There is long-term potential with this channel, as once a brand is on a social network they can repeatedly use it for brand communications.

- Cost effectiveness as a primary advantage of bringing brands to social networks:

**F:** Bebo, for example, have one of the lowest CPT'S (costs per thousand) in the market. They are an inexpensive medium compared to other media; their cost per thousand would be around the Euro mark, even the premium inventory is not much more than three. Newspapers are up at forty to fifty Euro CPT, and when going into Bebo's target audience newspapers are non-existence. Bebo would argue with advertising agencies that consumers should not see a youth brand, anything aimed at below 25, in any newspaper. Their reach and their CPT's compared to digital are incredible. Television works at a CPT of around thirty to thirty-five and has a massive declining audience.

**A:** The money spent on advertisements in newspapers would cover brands on average two months with a social network like Bebo, and would give the brand about ten times the footing. Bebo can only be compared against traditional means in basic media buy; traditional media can be compared vaguely in call to action but certainly not in engagement. Social networks are therefore, in cost terms, compared very favourably.

- How social networks/brands measure success of this medium:

**F:** There are the traditional, click-through rates etc., but engagement measurements are based on how many people have sought to be friends with the brand. It would be estimated for a month long campaign that anything over the acquisition of two thousand friends is very successful. Measuring friends is the most appropriate measurement. The average profile gets twenty-five to thirty thousand views in a month. The brand would get one million unique views because there is site traffic of approximately one million every month. The brand itself and the inventory it is



given will get about one million views, many times over but about one million unique views. From this, it would be filtered down to how many users go to the profile to view it, this is comparable to a direct response campaign, like a consumer picking up the phone and enquiring about the brand's rates for instance. That is direct response mechanism; the users are going into what on Bebo is the shop front and having a look around. The next transition is to friends; if a brand can translate up to two thousand friends on its profile then it is successful.

**A:** Friends are when brands are engaged with consumers, companies have a brand community here. That is when brands are conversing with users, selling a brand. Consumers who chose to go this far are on board with the brand. Now a company has supporters and the communication with them is free unlike having to create continuous advertising for example. There will be no requirement to pay the social network anymore and the customer is acquired. Brands can now speak with followers, have them spread brand message virally (viral the product) and encourage them to bring their own friends.

- Range of brands choosing to communicate with consumers in this way:

**F:** Alone in terms of engagement, without display advertising or other items, brands like Coca Cola (Burn), 3Mobile, Powerade, Xtravision, O2, Club Orange, Eminem (singer), M&M's, MASS, Freshway, Tayto, BurgerKing and UCD are all communicating their brand in this way.

**A:** There is a hugely diverse range of brands engaging on Bebo, they all have profiles and drive consumers to this. They are bringing people to this content and co-creating.

- What makes Bebo users want to engage with a brand:

**F:** Users want to be part of something, to get a response from it.

**A:** In the literature, Hagel III & Armstrong (1997), note there is a trend of communities attracting enthusiasts who will create an almost virtual fan club around a product or service. A brand should endeavour to create a virtual brand community.

- Consumer's view of a brand appearing on social media networks:

**F:** Social networks are aware and appreciate that some consumers may be wary of brands bringing business to their space. Consumers often ask, "*why is this brand coming in on my experience*", however, if a brand brings really good content to them, then they recognise a brand has paid for the content and the audience is fine with that principle.

**A:** The Bebo audience understand that things do not happen for free so they endure display advertising, unless it gets slightly intrusive or does not fit. If it is something that is relevant and fashionable, it's acceptable, only when it is not relevant to the Bebo experience is it received unfavourably. The Bebo social network also understands this and if it is not relevant then it is not included. It is the audience's platform and the audience's medium, if a company wants to be part of that experience that is what an engagement campaign is.

- Loyalties with consumers or brands:

**F:** It is a balancing act for the social media network; dealing with an audience that is potentially fickle and media savvy but essentially needing to continue earning from advertising. The two have to be mutually beneficial. A constant stream of advertising cannot just be put on consumers and not expected to have an affect. Similarly the network needs to pay for the products they are providing so need advertisers. Brands were initially looking at social media networks from a very basic media point of view, the point is pushed by Bebo that the more the brand invest in the creative, the more they will get out of it, again it is different from broadcast media.

**A:** Brands must consistently reinvent and keep the product fresh and sharp. In any media there is a struggle, youth media often more so. The balance is trying to make the creative really good, companies cannot just add content to a social network with no sense of continuation or engagement or worth to the community.

- Guidelines of a social network for brands:

**F:** Pat the Baker was such an unlikely brand to be on Bebo and yet had success by following the very simple rules; Converse, Engage and Understand. The brand cannot be forced on consumers in social network settings, it is essential be light handed with it. The application of the conventional marketing exercise of *'if my brand was a student, for instance, what would it want to say, what would it be interested in, what would it find funny or what music would it like,'* can help brand managers get the brand persona to interact on Bebo right. A company needs to get into the DNA of their brand and understand what the core elements of the brand are, and then project them creating something unique.

**A:** Using social networks, as a channel, requires a different approach. Sarda (2008) recognises the need to engage customers in relevant conversations where they are and how it suits them, for brands to be applicable to consumer's everyday lives.

#### **4.4 Objective Three**

- To identify why a brand would choose to invest in social media networks for their brand communication.

##### **4.4.1 Profile of Respondent**

Oliver Durkin was interviewed; he is the brand manager of a well-known Irish brand, Pat the Baker. He has previously managed various brands and is currently looking to make the Pat the Baker brand more than just bread. He has actively sought to engage consumers using social media networks.

##### **4.4.2 Interview Findings and Analysis**

To achieve objective three, and understand why a brand would choose to utilise social media networks, an interview was carried out with Oliver Durkin, brand manager of Pat the Baker. The following are the key findings from this interview and their analysis:

- How Pat the Baker got involved with social networks:

**F:** In September 2008, the bread company launched a campaign on Bebo to compliment its ongoing press, radio and television campaigns. For Pat the Baker, initially, it was not a case of actively or consciously choosing to use social

networking sites, it was about engaging with people and having a presence on the Internet.

The brand became aware there were only a few advanced Internet users, while the bulk of people in Ireland are what were referred to as “Google-users”. This type of Internet user does not type into the top bar of the browser rather uses the Google search engine and follows on from the link. The brand began to realise that a substantial number of people were not that internet savvy, many did not even have an email account for communication but what soon became apparent was that very few did not have a social networking site such as Bebo, Facebook, MySpace.

The brand used the Web 2.0 tools for their communication, like using email. People choose social networks to engage with others in their own environment. Rather than driving consumers to PattheBaker.com, the company wanted to see how people would actually choose to interact with the brand on the web, and a social network allowed for this. The significance of these sites, having the functionality necessary to aid engagement, was essential.

**A:** Pat the Baker is not what most people would regard as a Web 2.0 company. It became obvious to the brand that they could not do anything on the Internet without using social network sites. With any marketing or advertising the need is to engage with the person and social networking sites allow for this in an Internet environment. Using social networking, for Pat the Baker, was a way of communicating the brand’s message to consumers in their zone. They realised people are quite passionate about their social networking site, and so set about engaging with them on this level.

The bread brand saw it initially as purely a branding exercise, to see what the reaction would be on the web. From a sales point of view, they wanted to be as close to the sale as possible. They immediately realised how successful this type of engagement marketing could be in building brand awareness.

- Does Pat the Baker support the use of social networks by other brands:

**F:** In terms of driving consciousness and changing the perception of the brand, it would be a definite recommendation. For Pat the Baker it has really worked, consumers have enthusiastically engaged. The perception of the brand has positively changed as a result; people were interested in the move. Being able to find the bread brand on Bebo did a lot, evolved the brand, and in addition to other media helped target the growing audience.

**A:** If a brand is looking to connect with an Internet audience, social media networks cannot be ignored. The brand being present on a social network was instrumental in reaching consumers. It was a learning exercise for the brand to determine what the perception was, and what needed to be done from branding and other perspectives.

- Digital marketing succeeding in comparison to traditional marketing:

**F:** Traditional is lacking greatly in comparison to digital. The Internet has added so much more to marketing, new levels of interacting and reaching potential customers. The beauty of the Internet is the immediacy and the honesty of it; Bebo for instance, is similar to a shop counter, where a business can talk to customers daily.

**A:** The brand has acknowledged the promise of Internet marketing. Kotler (2008) also accepts that consumers sceptical of traditional media are now moving to a medium they trust more.

- Rationalising brand investment in such recent media:

**F:** The brand sees bread, being an essential food product, as particularly difficult to justify the investment. The main way they have justified marketing spend is their continuous growth in market share over the last few years. It is the summation of a number of marketing programs; the brand maintains pinning down success to one thing can limit experimentation. Using a social network allows a brand be a little

more active, particularly a brand for bread. It can bring a little bit of twenty first century to the product.

**A:** Marketing practices often are difficult to justify. A good brand is brave and willing to test its success, it has to be willing to challenge the brands perception. Dahlen et. al (2009) show that non-traditional media can enhance the consumer-perceived value of marketing.

- Is it a long-term possibility for brand communication:

**F:** Yes, besides the website it is a good corporate site which will always allow consumers give feedback, upload videos. A big plus is that a brand is not relying on a third party for its communication; it brings a brand as close to consumers as it will possibly ever be. It can be built upon; will be there in some form or other for a long time to come. It allows interaction in a safe way for a brand.

**A:** A presence on a social network creates a place consumers want to communicate. De Chernatony (2009) acknowledges that the full potential of social networks in aiding brands has yet to be discovered.

- Social networks being used as primary brand communication:

**F:** It is about building brand coverage, being in many places and hitting as many consumers as possible. A social network has a wide array of people to reach. It is then just a case of learning what is fitting in each environment.

**A:** This concurs with the findings from objective two. Social networks agree that the media mix needs to be right; they suggest their use to brands as part of an overall marketing strategy.

- Social networks practicality for all brands:

**F:** A social media network is a communication tool for all ages, the brand just needs to adapt to the community accordingly. Almost every brand can be aimed at a youth market.

**A:** Youth will eventually be chief purchasers and they will be targeted early. The youth markets also have a large influence on many brand purchases.

- Consumer's perceptions of brands emerging on social media networks:

**F:** Consumers have responded very well. They come and engage if they want to, it is not done in an intrusive way as the brand is just saying it is available to engage. Pat the Baker saw it as key not to do this kind of marketing in an aggressive way; they did not approach it in an advertisement manner. The brand just simply said we are here if you want us. Everything was of high-value.

**A:** Consumers get the two-way element of Web 2.0. Pat the Baker was peer-to-peer because it was approached, as one friend would do to another, it was not very gimmicky. Brands need to be aware that it is a media, which has to be approached in a new way; consumers do not appreciate if a brand gets in their face or is intrusive.

- What makes users of virtual communities want to engage with a brand, and how can brands appropriately connect with consumers on a social network:

**F:** Entertainment and gifts; people need incentives to get them interested and draw them to the brand's page. Pat the Baker created pens, t-shirts and generated the motivation for consumers to engage. Bread buyers are not known to be particularly brand loyal, a little incentive can make a big difference when it comes to making their next bread brand purchase.



A brand needs to have compelling, motivating content to keep people interested and commenting. Businesses can easily find out if their page is working by looking at the number of page views, connections and the amount of people who have ‘shared the love’. Employees who have spent time developing their own personal sites are a great resource.

**A:** Pat the Baker being present on Bebo created something unique and made users want to engage. They became able to characterise the bread. Aufreiter, Elzinga & Gordon (2003) suggest a company needs rediscover how their brand can interact with people.

- Potential of consumers to be engaged as co-creators:

**F:** The brand has used the enthusiasm of consumers to create content which has been included in its marketing strategy.

**A:** De Chernatony (2009) believes the current environment demands a different type of brand value, one that needs to be determined by both parties. Brand value created by both brand owner and consumer can establish a connection.

- The type of brand experience created:

**F:** The interaction that occurs on a social network between a brand and consumers creates an experience, which stays with the consumer long after they go off-line.

**A:** An experience involving a brand is much more powerful than conventional advertising when it comes to brand recall. Maruca (1999), recognises brands are now being defined by experience.

- Can social networks create significant brand ambassadors:

**F:** *'Thanks a million for the t-shirt, I got my boyfriend to wear it around'*, according to the brand this kind of brand advocacy is invaluable and is what really gets social network members involved. Consumer's comments are positive word of mouth, shared on a global platform.

Social networking sites work on the principle of having connections or friends who link to each other's pages. Users also participate in groups, the membership of which can stretch into thousands, such as the alumni groups of third-level institutions. Businesses can join these groups or they can set up one more relevant to their customers.

**A:** Advocacy ultimately leads to the bottom line; consider social media not as a moneymaker but as a relationship builder. Money will not be made through social media activity, but because of it. There is a need for return on investment, but how the return is measured needs to change to reflect this new way of connecting with customers. Court (2007) identifies third parties, such as those on social networks, as having great influence on corporate reputations.

- Social networks as a cost effective way to communicate with consumers:

**F:** At present there is nothing as affordable as social networks, as long as the company has the content. To generate content for the Web generally is expensive; the user-generated content element of a social network helps the brand keep costs down. In terms of allowing the brand engage with an audience and get feedback it succeeds every time. The feedback element is what makes it extremely effective. Immediate feedback is available from this community and is invaluable.

**A:** Maclaran & Catterall (2002) view social networks as touchpoints for the consumer to interact with a brand. These touchpoints allow for feedback and create a very cost effective means of communicating with consumers.

- Impact of virtual communities on the reputation and popularity of a brand:

**F:** Pat the Baker is now seen to be a brand built on the reputation of being close to consumers and its popularity can be seen. People recognise the effort and content created and appreciate that it does not just happen. It is difficult put a price on the interest it has created about the brand.

**A:** Virtual communities cannot be ignored, discussion will happen with or without the brand. Without leaves the brand lacking.

- Segmenting and targeting when using social media networks:

**F:** The audience is there, a clever brand finds a way to connect with the users of any network relevantly.

**A:** A social networking site can be an effective market research tool for business. Hagel III and Armstrong (1997) identify the possibilities of establishing live test beds where marketers can access users of their products in a true market environment.

- Control a company has when deciding to bring their brand to the social network setting:

**F:** Within the social network framework a company can do what it likes, which is one of the reasons Pat the Baker employed it. It is an interface people are familiar with. There is ultimate control with what goes up on the site, the network do not regulate the brand. There is also complete control in that it is the brand's page and it can add as well as review comments, pictures. There is the ability to delete if necessary.

The only item Pat the Baker really seeks to censor is consumers attacking competing brands, eg. “Brennans bread is crap”, as this does nothing to add to the site or brand. Inviting feedback means also accepting it. A manager cannot completely control a brand; brands are fundamentally what consumers allow them to be. A brand’s image, mantra etc. are created through consumer’s perception, feelings, and ideas of what it represents.

**A:** It is really important on social networks, not to take censorship to too high a level. If it is used, it must be accepted that a certain amount of power will be given to consumers. Taking that power from them is what stops them wanting to engage with the brand. A rule of thumb is to avoid interfering with the open communication unless it is essential, it may be a brand’s page but the content is often primarily user-generated and changing it is seen as interfering.

- Brands measuring success:

**F:** The Bebo campaign cost 1.2 per cent of the bread maker's overall marketing budget and its impact on the brand's visibility has been a phenomenal success. Assessing how many people are deciding to interact with the brand everyday s a good measurement. When people make the effort to respond or add as a friend, they are actively choosing to support the brand.

**A:** Once someone wants to be a friend of the brand, takes the time to comment, either good or bad, the medium has been successful in engaging consumers with the brand.

- Web 2.0 allows for two ways communication, the importance of this to companies:

**F:** Communication is vital for a brand; two-way communication adds the extra advantage of feedback. The brand is readily available to communicate with people and take criticism. People need to feel that there is no third party between them and the brand. Connectivity is what creates real brand ambassadors. These technologies are what separate successful brands from others.

**A:** Consumers have an accessible outlet for giving feedback. It is all about making the brand accessible. Drury (2008) notes marketing as no longer one-dimensional but now becoming a two-way process engaging a brand and its audience.

- Issues to consider when using social networks:

**F:** Start off small, test the capabilities and limits of the brand, and get a sense of what the reaction will be. It is putting the brand out there and showing it is available to be approached. When looking to engage their audience, consumers were never really going to go to PattheBaker.com, there was no desire to, but then social networks created a desire. Consumers have felt more comfortable to ask questions or make contact on these networks as opposed to going to the website to communicate. In one month there would be six people making contact via the corporate website, in comparison to one thousand, six hundred on Bebo over the same period.

**A:** A lot has been learnt by the brand from using a social network. The need for consumer-generated content that is good and relevant is essential for the brand. The best thing for a brand to use is consumer-generated content as it attracts interest and engages consumers on a level other mediums cannot.

Guggenheim Shenkan & Sichel (2007) warn that bringing a brand to a social network brings it as close to customers as it could possibly get. A brand should start with basics on the social network and work on a trial and error bases.

- The brands experience from using social networks:

**F:** Social networks allow a brand to reach all levels of Internet users, they do not have to be an expert but at the same time the simplicity of it all does not deter advanced users.

The best element is the interface; it cannot be got anywhere else. There is not the pressure of great web design; it is relaxed for a company. The level of web design needed for other Internet communications is very expensive.

The perception of the brand should be challenged. People now have this abstract notion of Pat the Baker being a little bit more than bread. This is what comes from having good content and really engaging. Engaging people in a very subtle manner within in a framework where both parties can be comfortable.

**A:** The Internet adds vast opportunities all the time. This is the next appropriate step. Firstly there were banners etc. but people started to ignore them. This allows for more, it allows the brand to interact freely within a structure. Social networks permit different levels of engagement.

#### **4.4.3 Profile of Respondent**

Siodhna McGowan agreed to be interviewed; she is a brand manager at Coca Cola Ireland. Siodhna was previously Brand Manager/Product Group Manager at Nestle and Marketing Manager at Napier and Blakeley. Siodhna is specialised in brand marketing, communications, strategic planning, consumer insights and budget management. She has worked on successful social media campaigns for Powerade, Coca Cola and Sprite.

#### **4.4.4 Interview Findings and Analysis**

To achieve objective three, and understand why a brand would chose to utilise social media networks, an interview was carried out with Siodhna McGowan, brand manager for Coca-Cola Ireland. It was carried out in conjunction with interview two to get a more extensive perspective. The following are the key findings from this interview and their analysis:

- How Coca-Cola got involved with social networks:

**F:** For Coca-Cola it was basically finding the target market. When they found them they were using digital and more specifically social networks. The statistics speak for themselves in showing how much time is spent online using these networks.

**A:** People love the interaction that can be got from peers and companies online. Social networks create this space for interaction, they facilitate interaction between a brand and it's followers. Social network sites are receiving more traffic than anything else on the Internet; the likes of Bebo, Facebook and other social networks are becoming number one on Internet searches.

- Does Coca-Cola support the use of social networks by brands:

**F:** Yes, definitely so. Social networks provide for interaction, which makes a brand more authentic to consumers. It is currently the best avenue for talking to a target audience, whoever they are. It has great potential for new brands. It can particularly be a great tool when looking to launch a new product or service. It suits long-standing brands better to couple it with traditional marketing methods, but fresher brands can use it as an innovative means of getting brand recognition. Marketing managers should continuously challenge themselves by embracing the new and testing the brand's perception.

**A:** From their practice of using social networks in branding strategy, both brand representatives interviewed under objective three are positive about the experience.

- Digital marketing succeeding in comparison to traditional marketing:

**F:** The use of a marketing media mix requires a brand cover all areas and ensures audiences are reached. Success depends on the media mix chosen. Digital is rapidly moving up in the marketing media stakes; there is a very high attraction to digital.

**A:** Marketing is progressing from traditional media to digital and all parties are welcoming this move. Even shifts are occurring on digital from networks like Bebo to Facebook, it is all about the accepted transition of things.

- Rationalising brand investment in such recent media:

**F:** Digital, including social networks, is very good when compared to the traditional marketing because it is comfortably tracked. Investment can be clearly justified using digital methods.

Besides the statistics, a brand can clearly identify whether the campaign has traction by the users who chose to engage. These people become members of a loyal community; users who decide to be 'friends' are openly supporting the brand. These 'friends' are more loyal than channel hopping television viewers.

With any media the need for a good campaign is there, Coca-Cola are very particular about the standard of their marketing no matter where it is going. The brand is fortunate to have a very good tracking system in operation.

**A:** Both brands researched under objective three, suggest the amount of users who communicate with the brand and add the brand as friend, as a good measure of success.

- Is it a long-term possibility for brand communication:

**F:** Consumers will move on from different social networking sites but a new generation will be there to move consequently onto these networks.

**A:** The use of social networks by consumers is expected to be a long-term occurrence. Hagel III & Armstrong (1997) the communication channel as beneficial in allowing innovative marketers to serve market segments of one.

- Social networks being used as key brand communication:



**F:** With television and other media it is often difficult ensure marketing is seen and absorbed. Digital marketing and social networks allow the confidence that consumers are exposed to a brand's marketing.

For a new brand it could possibly be the initial form of brand communication, the non-traditional is often received better for introductory products. There will still be a need for the big campaign to get a brand to the top level.

With the developing Coke Zero brand, CocCa-Cola has considered whether all digital to start off with might be best. Using new, exciting media could be better than traditional, give the brand an edge.

**A:** The point made corresponds with that of Dahlen et. al (2009) found in the literature search. They found that non-traditional media enhances the consumer-perceived value of marketing and that the effects are greater for low rather than high-reputation brands. High-reputation brands appear to be more sensitive to the appropriateness and expense of the marketing.

- Social networks practicality for all brands:

**F:** All brands can benefit from the use of social media networks. It is the idea that a brand can build its consumer relationships by connecting their consumers to the brand image on a platform that provides them relative content and elements of participation.

**A** In the literature, Brown (2008) explains how brand perception can be improved through clever and evocative advertising and communication strategies.

- Consumer's perceptions of brands emerging on social media networks:

**F:** The beauty of social networks is the interaction; consumers actively come onto social networks to say how they have interacted with the brand and their

experience, this is generally good for Coca-Cola. They are then telling others about this experience and positively promoting the brand, often without even knowing they are helping with marketing.

**A:** There is a lot of conversing between consumers, the brand and three ways. People now love self-publicising and love to broadcast what they have to say. Social networks allow for the self-publication consumers like as well as publicising the brand.

- What makes users of virtual communities want to engage with the brand, and how can brands appropriately connect with consumers on a social network:

**F:** Coca-Cola is at the stage where they are lucky to be a brand people seek to engage with in any case. Most brand communications are openly received and loved. Prizes and giveaways are always great to entice consumers.

With all brands it is the content that brings people to the brand. All content used on social networks has to be of the Coca-Cola standard, it is researched first to see how consumers like and react to it. It is important to try something out before fully exploiting it. The medium allows targeting; this can ensure the right elements are used to encourage people to engage. The timing of communications is also vital.

Coca-Cola has looked to set an impressive Bebo profile. This has become the best way to engage interactively. Especially when it is dealing with younger consumers who love technology and all it allows, it is a place where they are open and eager to be a part of something.

**A:** It is not enough to currently be a brand consumer's love; regular superior brand communications are necessary to ensure the brand stays a favourite. Findings from both brand interviews propose incentives, such as prize giveaways, to attract consumers to a brand. Consumers love to interact, so a company must find out what they like and use it to encourage them to interact. It all comes down to understanding a target market.

- Potential of consumers to be engaged as co-creators:

**F:** The Coca-Cola brand sees great value in engaging consumers as co-creators. They will inevitably decide how they want to engage. For competitions they have designed the prizes for Coca-Cola. The bottom up approach of these networks can accomplish a lot.

**A:** Social media networks are a substantial resource for marketers sourcing new ideas and insights, although new research approaches must be developed to tap these resources, Maclaran & Catterall (2002).

- The type of brand experience created:

**F:** An experience is created when a consumer actually interacts with a brand. With other media people often forget which brand the advertisement was for. It is all about 'dwell time', the amount of communication and time spent creates a significant experience. With other media it would only be about three minutes if at all, while with social networks it is averaged for Coca-Cola to be ten minutes.

**A:** Communicating on a social network allows for a coupled experience. Rowley (2004) agrees when using the internet as a medium, it allows for the increasing emphasis on experience.

- Can social networks create significant brand ambassadors:

**F:** The brand connects with consumers on a level it does not with other media, this creates significant brand ambassadors. With the use of social networks the consumer comes to the brand instead of the brand going in search of them, in doing so they immediately show a preference toward the brand. Because of its

viral nature, these consumers then promote the brand and site to other users who then come to engage.

**A:** According to Pitta (2008), the most effective way to generate word of mouth involves using the Internet and targeting its online consumer communities.

- Social networks as a cost effective way to communicate with consumers:

**F:** They are very cost effective in comparison to other media. Television is the most expensive media because of its vast audience and the ability to select certain program advertisement breaks to target. Digital media is extremely targeted also and very cost efficient considering it reaches a wide and varied audience.

**A:** The cost of a social network for brand communication is established as being very low. High investment would not be required to get started.

- Impact of virtual communities on the reputation and popularity of a brand:

**F:** The feedback from these networks is unrivalled as it is real-time feedback. A brand can simply ask users how they are doing, if a campaign is going well and they will without question have an opinion.

**A:** Being engaged by a brand makes consumers feel they own campaigns since they had an input, this holds their interest. In real-time means feedback is got directly and can be reacted to immediately rather than having ineffective marketing.

- Segmenting and targeting when using social media networks:

**F:** There are groups of online communities applicable to every brand. Aiming a brand correctly requires knowledge of who a brand's target market is and what they like.

**A:** Sarda (2008) distinguishes social networking as a means of targeting a brand's audience.

- Control a company has when deciding to bring their brand to the social network setting:

**F:** A brand approves all the information displayed on the network. It gives them unrivalled control because if there is something that must be changed, it can be done immediately as opposed to print or television, which takes more time and money to adjust.

**A:** A brand, most importantly, always has control over how they react to consumers. The immediacy of the communication on social networks means a brand's marketing can be modified if necessary.

- Brands measuring success:

**F:** Coca-Cola measures success in a number of ways, the number of people who chose to visit and number of them who actually chose to interact. How long a user actually spends interacting is a very revealing indicator of success. Once measures are set they are monitored.

**A:** A brand should set key bench indicators. It should set metrics and kept them consistent. If employing an agency, however, it will have its own technical measures.

- Web 2.0 allows for two ways communication, the importance of this to companies:

**F:** A brand is created through the perceptions and feelings of consumers. Two-way communication is necessary to understand what the consumer wants from, and likes about a brand.

**A:** Social networks provide an ideal channel for two-way communication.

- Issues to consider when using social networks:

**F:** The Coca-Cola brand strongly believes in allowing the communication on these networks to be the way consumers genuinely talk; this is the ‘social’ element of the media. The need to monitor the networks is essential, whether it is someone within the brand or a digital company on their behalf.

**A:** It is not a case of regulating to an extreme degree but appropriately monitoring the content. When feedback is invited, and the medium is this open, it must be monitored. Mangold & Faulds (2009) understand that content, timing, and frequency of the social media conversations of consumers are outside of a brands control requiring they learn to shape consumer discussions in a way, which is consistent with an organisations goals.

- The brands experience from using social networks:

**F:** It is perfect for today’s shrewd and Internet savvy audience. It is undoubtedly the evolution of a new media. It allows the younger market do what they like best in terms of self-publicising and subsequently encourages brand advocacy. It is the future of marketing, a way of really engaging.

**A:** Kotler (2003) states an in-depth understanding of customers is the foundation of any strong brand. The Coca-Cola brand understands this and has distinguished social networks as a valuable means of communication.

#### **4.5 Objective Four**

- To get an experienced third party perspective on the use of social media networks to brands and the issues involved.

##### **4.5.1 Profile of Respondent**

Brian Carolan was chosen to carry out an interview with; he is the Media Manager with Cybercom, an Irish digital marketing company. Brian is part of the expert company whose success has been reflected by many accolades, Best Digital Communications Campaign in the World at the MAA Globes in 2008, Best Digital Advertising Marketing Agency at the Digital Media Awards in 2009 and Best Digital Advertising Marketing Campaign at the Digital Media Awards three years running in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

##### **4.5.2 Interview Findings and Analysis**

To achieve objective four and attain an expert opinion on the use of social media networks to brands and the issues involved, an interview was carried out with Brian Carolan, Media Manager with Cybercom. The following are the key findings from this interview and their analysis:

- Digital marketing in comparison to traditional marketing:

**F:** In the last five years, the last three to four years in particular, with the increase in broadband penetration, digital marketing is beginning to come into its own. Its success ultimately is based on its targeting opportunities and the engagement possibilities a brand has with consumers. The tracking of campaigns has become central; a digital campaign can be tracked right down to the individual actions of individual consumers.

**A:** This kind of tracking cannot be done with traditional marketing. This tracking ability is one, which makes marketing via digital so important.

- The Internet as a brand communication method:

**F:** The power of digital in its ability to deliver a brand's message is immense.

**A:** Research is picking up on digital as being a very strong channel at the moment in terms of delivering and creating brand awareness.

- Importance of global word of mouth to brands:

**F:** A brand can make a fool of itself very quickly by ignoring the problem or having a proposition that does not wash well with the consumer; this kind of word spreads very quickly on the Internet and brands need to be aware of that. Brands that ignore consumers on the Internet should be prepared for the ramifications.

**A:** Court (2008) recommends that a social networking site may hold opportunities for marketers in allowing them access to the global word of mouth.



- Web 2.0 allows for two-way communication, importance of this:

**F:** It is very important, but only if the company is set up to manage the communication. There is little point in initiating two-way communications if it cannot be sustained.

**A:** A company must be present and ready to engage if using social network.

- How Cybercom utilise social networks:

**F:** Social networks and social media generally are integrated into all the company's campaigns. This could range anything from Bebo to Facebook to Twitter. It is an integral part of everything they do.

**A:** The use of social networks by such a successful digital marketing company is a great endorsement.

- Would Cybercom recommend the use of social networks to clients:

**F:** Yes, where it is relevant. Social media plays a role in most of the campaigns the digital marketing company does.

**A:** An organisation cannot ignore social networks because consumers now use social media elements as part of their overall digital media.

- Rationalising brand investment in such a recent media:

**F:** It is not a difficult investment to justify because there are two types of clients, clients who understand digital and clients who do not. There may be reluctance by clients who do not understand digital marketing to get involved in social media because they do not understand themselves. Clients whom do use social media personally appreciate it and it is easier get them involved.

**A:** A company needs to have an individual who understands social media and is able to avail of the tools available.

- Social networks being used as key brand communication:

**F:** Entire digital media budgets cannot be put into these. For example, Cybercom worked with the Coca-Cola brand, television is still a big medium for them but for digital they use a lot of social media.

**A:** The use of social media networks should be as part of an overall media mix strategy.

- Capabilities of social networks in comparison to other brand communication channels:

**F:** Primarily it is the advantage of two-way communication. The ability to build a community around a brand, letting consumers have their share in the brand experience, allowing consumers to share directly with the brand through their friends.

**A:** Intelligent marketers will encourage these community members to communicate with them, Hagel III & Armstrong (1997).

- Social networks as the correct setting to spread a brand message:

**F:** It only makes sense if the content is right. It all depends on a brand's campaign objectives and its target audience.

**A:** There is no point in running a campaign on a social network if the target audience is not present. It is all about who the desired audience is and where they are.

- Social media practicality for all brands:

**F:** All brands have the potential to be successful on these networks. When looking at the top sites in Ireland, of the top sites two of those are social networks sites, one being Bebo and the other being Facebook. Bebo focused on a younger age group while Facebook is aimed at adults.

**A:** Every brand has the potential to be successful using social networks in their branding practice.

- Social networks as cost effective means to engage consumers:

**F:** Absolutely, it is extremely more cost effective than other channels. It is very cost efficient because a brand is not physically buying the media it is earning the media. If getting positive messages out there, other people are spreading that word; a brand does not have to buy airtime or advertising space.

**A:** Social networks are efficient because of the low initial cost to join and the word-of-mouth marketing generated as a result of joining. According to Schultz and Schultz (2004), brand building does not necessarily mean big investment.

- Impact of virtual communities on the reputation and popularity of a brand:

**F:** They can have an extremely positive impact on a brand's reputation, but in addition can have a very negative impact on that reputation if not managed correctly. It is all about how the company manages relationships

**A:** Companies must efficiently manage relationships; if they leave them redundant and do not work toward them it can have a very negative impact. A brand is a shared value because it is built on the base of relationships, Schultz & Schultz (2004).

- Appropriately connecting with consumers on a social network:

**F:** It is all about adding value to the brand experience. This could be directing them to material, providing them with music they desire or other forms of entertainment. The brand should aspire to building a community around that.

**A:** The tools available on Web 2.0 facilitate social activities. A brand should use these to assist consumers in information gathering, sharing, and collaboration.

- Potential for consumers to be engaged as co-creators of a brand message as well as creating brand value:

**F:** There is massive potential with social media networks; an individual only has to look at a brand like Doritos where the brand had consumers create the adverts for the half time interval at the American Superbowl. The possibilities for co-creation are unlimited.

**A:** A brand should take full advantage of social network users willingness to get involved.

- Co-creation result in high levels of loyalty, create brand ambassadors:

**F:** It is unclear whether co-creation can create high levels of loyalty. It will vary from product to product, campaign to campaign. It certainly has the potential to do so with consumers feeling an allegiance toward the brand. The only way to get a straight answer with an issue like this would be through brand tracking over a period of time.

**A:** Further study would be required to ascertain whether co-creation leads to high levels of brand loyalty.

- Segmenting and targeting on social media networks:

**F:** Across digital media as a whole, social networks included, it is very easy find target markets very accurately. This is done through registered users on websites and social networks like Bebo and Facebook.

**A:** It is crucial a brand establishes and defines its target audience before directing brand communication.

- What makes the users of virtual communities want to engage with a brand:

**F:** Entertainment is key. People will engage with brands on different levels; an entertainment level, information level, loyalty level and research level. Consumers also seek to engage with a brand on social networks on a customer service level, instead of using the corporate site, for pre and post-purchase.

**A:** The brands researched under objective three found that people were more likely to come to their social network site rather than their corporate website.

- Consumer's perception of brands appearing on social media:

**F:** No negative feedback experienced about brands appearing on social networks.

**A:** Consumers are satisfied to be engaged. A study exploring the topic from consumer's point of view could verify this.

- Amount of control a company has when deciding to bring their brand to the social network setting:

**F:** They have the majority of control. The brand has control of its presence but it will never have control over consumers.

**A:** A brand has control in regards the social network but should avoid trying to control consumers, as this is there medium.

- Rationalising the brand investment, a long term possibility for brand communication:

**F:** Without doubt long-term, what will be seen is the convergence of various aspects of social media into more personal interfaces on the Internet. For example, not too long from now consumers will have their own registered space on the Internet where they can bring in their social media profiles, their Skype functionality and email into one that they can manage and control.

**A:** The capabilities of social media will be available to brands for the foreseeable future.

- Range of brands choosing to communicate with consumers in this way:

**F:** All range of brands, finance and car brands. Brands from all categories have recognised the potential.

**A:** It is a medium for all brands provided it is approached correctly.

- How are social networks and brands measuring success:

**F:** It is relatively difficult to measure. There is software, however, to track the type of comments and conversations that the digital communities are having about a brand.

**A:** A global brand can purchase software that tracks throughout the world the positive and negative comments about the brand, where these conversations are happening and the timing of these conversations.

- Issues brands should consider when using social networks:

**F:** What is the brand using this social media for? When are they using it? What target audience do they want to communicate with and what message do they want to convey.

**A:** A strategy should be developed before initial use of social networks. The strategy should be in line with the overall brand and marketing strategies.

#### **4.6 Objective Five**

- To arrive at informed conclusions and make recommendations on the use of social media networks in branding strategy.

##### **4.6.1 Recommendation's Findings and Analysis**

To realise this objective it was essential to carry out the above primary research. The findings of the primary research are detailed under objectives two, three and four. In connection with the secondary research, carried out to fulfil objective one, certain conclusions and recommendations became evident.

**A:** From the findings it emerged that marketing practitioners supported the use of social networks. All respondents were enthusiastic about the use of these networks by brands and identified the benefits of them. It was felt that

involvement in digital marketing was essential as it has the potential of overtaking traditional channels; social networks were seen as a good way of doing so.

It is believed the best way of getting involved is to adapt to the new tool, it is a channel that requires a different mind set to the traditional push-strategy. The respondents highlight the importance of two-way communication and listening to the global word of mouth. There are vast opportunities for co-creation but the necessity to know your audience was emphasised. Consumers are tolerable of brands present on a social network as long as it is felt to be relevant engagement.

There are a number of sufficient means to measure whether brand communications are successful on this medium. A lot of control is also maintained by the brand. It is a communication channel, which is anticipated to be available for some time. The use of social media networks is not suggested as a stand-alone means of brand communication, rather as part of an overall winning media mix. The cost effectiveness of this type of brand interaction cannot be overstated.

#### **4.7 Evaluation of Research Design**

The design of the research process allowed research findings be obtained, developed and analysed before further information gathering proceeded. This helped ensure research objectives were both fulfilled satisfactorily and fulfilled in order.

The employment of in-depth interviews was monumental to the success of the research findings and analysis. It allowed for all respondents to speak unreservedly on the research topic and avoided limiting their response. The findings generated reflected the open and exploratory nature of the choice of research method.



## **4.8 Conclusion**

To understand the research problem it became necessary to fulfil five objectives. These objectives were determined by the research problem and the information that was desired. The findings in this section were generated by the research method selected in Section Three and were displayed and analysed under the research objective they concern.

### **4.8.1 Objective One**

There is a limited source of knowledge and literature pertaining to the use of social media networks and branding. Social networks are recognised as a tool, which allow for information sharing and interaction. The possibility for marketers to engage these virtual communities is acknowledged, as well as the potential to create brand

awareness and build a brand. This type of marketing is considered to create high levels of loyalty if approached in a way that suits the consumer.

#### **4.8.2 Objective Two**

Social networks believe brand investment with them is well warranted. They see the medium as being adaptable by all brands and surpassing many traditional marketing methods. To be successful on a social network the capacity to “converse, engage and understand” is advised. A social network sees its use as essential to a successful marketing media mix.

#### **4.8.3 Objective Three**

Both brands were positive about their investment in social media networks for their brand communication. It was deemed the best means of having a real Internet presence. Social networks are foreseen as a long-term method of brand communication as part of an overall media mix. The researched brands did the engagement elements, which social media networks facilitate for, well. They gave the users content, engaged in conversations with them, involved the consumer in competitions and consequently made the brand applicable. It was an original feature to be seen to be involved in.

#### **4.8.4 Objective Four**

Feedback from a third party endorsed the use of social media networks in branding strategy and identified the prominent issues. It is all about how a brand uses social media and how it links and communicates with individuals on social networks. It is about getting involved with users, and setting a strategy on how best to do so.

#### **4.8.5 Objective Five**

The primary research, supported by secondary research, allowed for informed conclusions and subsequent recommendations to be made. The recommendations listed in Section Five were developed from objective five’s findings and analysis.

**Section Five:**

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

## **SECTION FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The basis for this study was to discover whether the use of social media networks had a place in branding strategy and if so how it could be appropriately adapted. To achieve this it was necessary carry out both secondary and primary research. Secondary research shaped an academic foundation from which the primary research followed on.

Based on the research, this study can conclude that social media networks should be integrated into marketing strategy. It is a tool that is used by a number of successful brands and is gaining support from both marketing practitioners and academics.

The use of social media networks, by brands to connect with consumers, is what can be described as engagement marketing. This type of marketing seeks to engage consumers, where and when they are willing and eager to connect. Marketers originally employed push-strategies to ensure consumers were made aware of their brand. In push marketing; the product or brand is ‘pushed ‘ toward the audience. This hard-hitting approach, however, does not always agree with consumers. There then came about the practice of a more understated approach, the pull-strategy. Conversely, in a pull marketing situation, the customer ‘pulls’ the product or brand toward them because they are interested in learning more. This often leaves brands lacking though, as consumers generally do not go out of their way to make contact with brands. Social media networks are part of an innovative style of marketing, engagement marketing, which brings both the marketer and consumer together to willingly and resourcefully engage.

From the systematic research, findings were uncovered that allow informed recommendations to be made. The research produced findings, which were developed into recommendations to give guidance to brands choosing to use social networks.

## 5.2 List of Recommendations

**Table 1:**

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
<b>1</b>	Establish whether it is the right channel
<b>2</b>	Create good content
<b>3</b>	Be prepared to put in the effort
<b>4</b>	Cost is time rather than money
<b>5</b>	Know the brand’s target audience
<b>6</b>	The audience is in charge
<b>7</b>	Decide how the brand will interact
<b>8</b>	Test what works for the brand
<b>9</b>	Resist the temptation to just sell

<b>10</b>	Let consumers aid the brand
<b>11</b>	Ensure the brand has someone who can use the tools
<b>12</b>	Be present and ready
<b>13</b>	Decide on metrics, be consistent and measure by them
<b>14</b>	Build a strategy
<b>15</b>	Social networks as part of a media mix

### **5.3 Recommendations Discussion**

The following are a list of recommendations, which can be made on the completion of this research, discussed:

- 1) Establish whether it is the right channel

A company endeavouring to get involved with social media networks must firstly establish whether this is the right medium for the brand. The impulse to just ‘jump on the bandwagon’ should not be the deciding factor as to whether a brand uses social media networks. The brand portfolio and all it entails should be suited to this distinctive, extreme channel for brand communications. According to Schultz and Schultz (2004), a simple rule for brand budgeting is to invest in a brand based on what a company expects to get back, not what it can afford or has always done

## 2) Create good content

A social network is a channel, which can be used by all brands. All brands can benefit as long as they create the right content. It must be of high value and add to the users experience. Both the Pat the Baker and Coca-Cola brands, interviewed in Section Four, were successful on a social network because they gave users relevant content.

## 3) Be prepared to put in the effort

It is not simply enough to just be on a social network. It is an object, which demands effort and a desire to build relationships to be of any real value. A company is inviting feedback so must be prepared to accept it and act on it.

## 4) Cost is time rather than money

The use of social networks is very cost efficient in comparison to other media. It is an inexpensive way of having a Web presence. Time is the actual price of this channel rather than money. A brand does not pay anything to use most of these tools so it has a lot to gain. Time needs to be invested, it is necessary to create good content and respond to consumers.

## 5) Know the brand's target audience

Consideration must be taken as to whom the target audience is and how they chose to use social media. A brand must consider what motivates its audience and act accordingly. Consumers generally love to interact and discuss, providing this will create favour. Sarda (2008) described social networking as a good way of targeting a brand's audience. However, the brand must firstly know and understand their audience.

## 6) The audience is in charge

This is a marketing tool, which requires relinquishing some control to consumers. It is their medium and a brand must be prepared to engage on their terms. The audience ultimately decide the success of a brand's communication. The social network, under objective two, advises only when marketing is part of the overall social media experience is it received favourably.

7) Decide how the brand will interact

When the decision is made to utilise social networks, a company must then decide how it is going to converse on these sites. It must prepare how it will share information with users. Information must be shared on a peer-to-peer basis rather than a corporate footing. The communication should also be designed in a way which information adds something of value to users. Coca-Cola, under objective three, was adamant about the need to communicate on these networks in an informal manner.

8) Test what works for the brand

Trial and error is important. A company would be wise in testing different aspects on these networks, find out what works for the brand and gradually build from there. It is key resist the temptation to start doing everything straight away. The Pat the Baker brand, under objective three, suggests testing the capabilities and limits of a brand as an issue, which should be considered before moving onto social networks.

9) Resist the temptation to just sell

A different attitude to marketing is required for this setting. The social media network setting is a place to have a conversation with consumers, not a place to simply push and sell goods. It can be more valuable than a basic single transaction when approached as a situation to converse with consumers. The 'social' element is key to social media. Philip Macartney of Bebo, warned a brand cannot force itself on consumers in social network settings, a light-handed manner is required.

10) Let consumers aid the brand



Allow them to create content, engage them as brand designers and they will become advocates. It is part of creating an experience they will remember. Cybercom, under objective four, maintains there is huge potential for co-creation and brands should avail of this. Both brands researched for objective three, have utilised user-generated content for their marketing.

#### 11) Ensure the brand has someone who can use the tools

When using these networks, it is fundamental a brand can use all they offer. A company needs to be able use the social media tools and exploit what suits the brand.

#### 12) Be present and ready

Putting a company and its brand on a social media network requires being present and up to date. There is no great advantage to joining if not willing to ensure this. A brand must monitor the engagement and conversations taking place. These networks have the possibility for long-term communication and a brand will get back what it puts in. The third party perspective, acquired under objective four, reiterated the need for a company to be set-up to manage two-way communication. There is little point in initiating communication if it cannot be sustained.

#### 13) Decide on metrics, be consistent and measure by them

Whether it is statistical measures provided by a digital marketing agency or recording the number of friends, interactions, time spent engaging etc., the important thing is to set metrics which the brand will record. Tracking is very feasible with digital marketing and is vital in determining a company's success with these tools.

#### 14) Build a strategy

All marketing activities require a strategy and this tool is no different. Making the brand available on a network is a start but for genuine success a company and its brand need to have a strategy and build the brand supported by this.

Brian Carolan of Cybercom, interviewed under objective four, proposed distinguishing what the brand is using social media for? When are they using it? What target audience they want to communicate with and what message they want to convey?

A company will typically have a strategy for the brand; social media networks should fit in with the overall brand strategy. The strategy when getting involved with social media networks must include who will be contributing to the site, what the objectives are for moving onto this medium, what elements of social media the brand will be opting to use, how often the brand will chose to engage and how it will be measured.

#### 15) Social networks as part of a media mix

Social media networks alone cannot build a brand. They must be used in conjunction with other suitable marketing activities. As with this medium, audiences move but do not move altogether. A brand's marketing budget needs to be diversified to reflect this fact. A brand should use outbound, for instance direct mail, and inbound, such as social media networks, marketing strategy to create cover.

### **5.3 Research Limitations**

This research would have benefited from the inclusion of consumer's perspectives. It was taken from a business point of view as it aspired to obtain expert opinions. The addition, however, of social media network users and brand followers would have strengthened the study. This additional research was challenging due to time constraints and the infinite amount of brand and social media network users making satisfactory sample selection difficult.

### **5.4 Future Study**

The conducting of this research is not seen to be conclusive; rather it brought about several possible avenues for further study. This paper points to the need for further and more detailed analysis of the role of social networks in branding strategy.

- It is felt that research should be conducted from a consumer's perspective to discover their opinion on social networks being used as a marketing strategy.
- Research could be carried out to determine a satisfactory method of measuring brand success with social networks.
- An investigation could be conducted to align the stage of the product life cycle to the use of innovative marketing methods.
- A study carried out to determine how best to engage consumers, as co-creators and brand ambassadors, would be beneficial to the numerous brands choosing to utilise social networks.
- Research to establish a balance between traditional marketing methods and contemporary digital channels would be valuable.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to examine whether social media networks could be used as part of brand communications and if so, how best they could be utilised. The author is satisfied that the research question, 'The potential for social media networks as part of marketing strategy and the building of brands', has been adequately addressed.

The findings in Section Four, and analysis of them, made it possible for informed, rational conclusions to be drawn and significant recommendations to be made. It was concluded that social media networks should be integrated into marketing strategy and utilised by brands, and recommendations for their use were given. The key issue is

what percentage of budgets should be left in traditional marketing channels and what percent should be assigned to innovative digital channels, Kotler (2008).

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## GLOSSARY

## GLOSSARY

**Banner ads:** A graphical web-advertising unit.

**Bebo Originals:** Original programme productions

**Bebo Open Media:** The Bebo Open Media Platform is for professional content creators and media companies to create community and distribute content to the Bebo audience.

**Buttons:** Graphical advertising units, smaller than a banner advertisement.

**Call to action:** Once a brand has established it has something to offer, it asks consumers to take the next step and act, for example 'click here'.

**Engagement marketing:** A marketing strategy that directly engages consumers and invites and encourages consumers to participate with a brand.

**MPU:** Multimedia Placement Unit

**Share the love:** On the Bebo social network, this facility allows users show each other affection, support.

**Skins:** Every user can chose a homepage layout (skin) to put on their profile.

**Skype:** This is a social networking software for making free calls over the Internet to anyone else who has Skype ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)).

**Skyscrapers:** An online advertisement, significantly taller than a vertical banner.

**Social media networks/social networks:** Online communities where people meet, socialise, exchange digital files.



**Viralability:** A marketing phenomenon that facilitates and encourages people to pass along a marketing message.

**Web 2.0:** This refers to web development and design that facilitates interactive information sharing and collaboration on the World Wide Web.

**Widgets:** Refers to any icon or graphical interface element that is manipulated by an Internet user to perform a desired function online or on their computer.

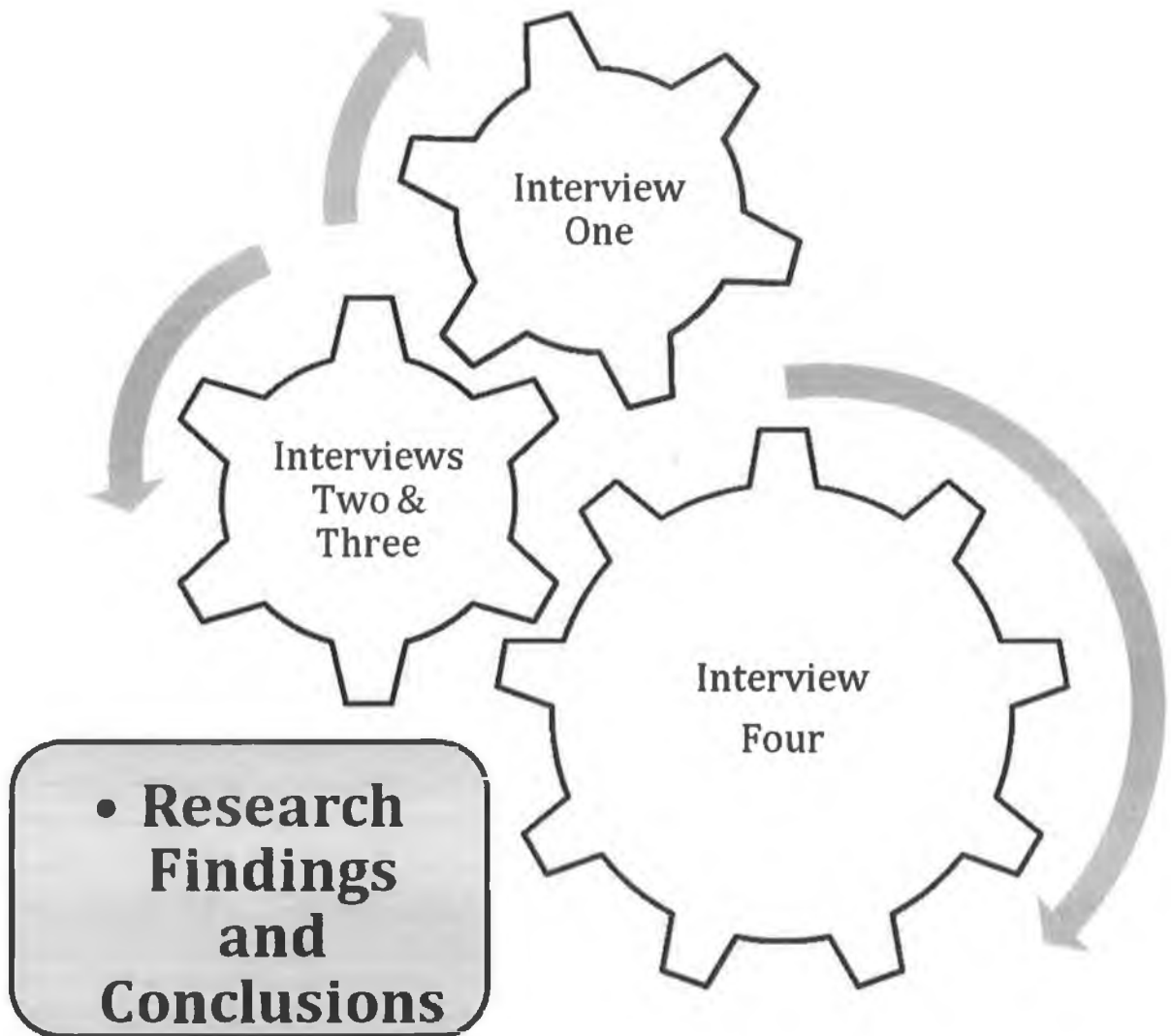
## APPENDICES

**Appendix**

**A**

**Figure 1:**

**Methodology Overview**



**Table 2:**

**Time Scale 2009**

*Time Scale 2009*

February

March

April

May

Commencement of  
Research

Literature  
Review

Critical  
Analysis  
of  
Research  
Topic

Preparation  
of  
Research  
Methodology

## June

Interview  
One

Research  
Analysis

## July

Interviews  
Two  
& Three

Research  
Analysis

## August

Interview  
Four

Research Analysis

Conclusions  
& Recommendations

**Appendix**

**B**

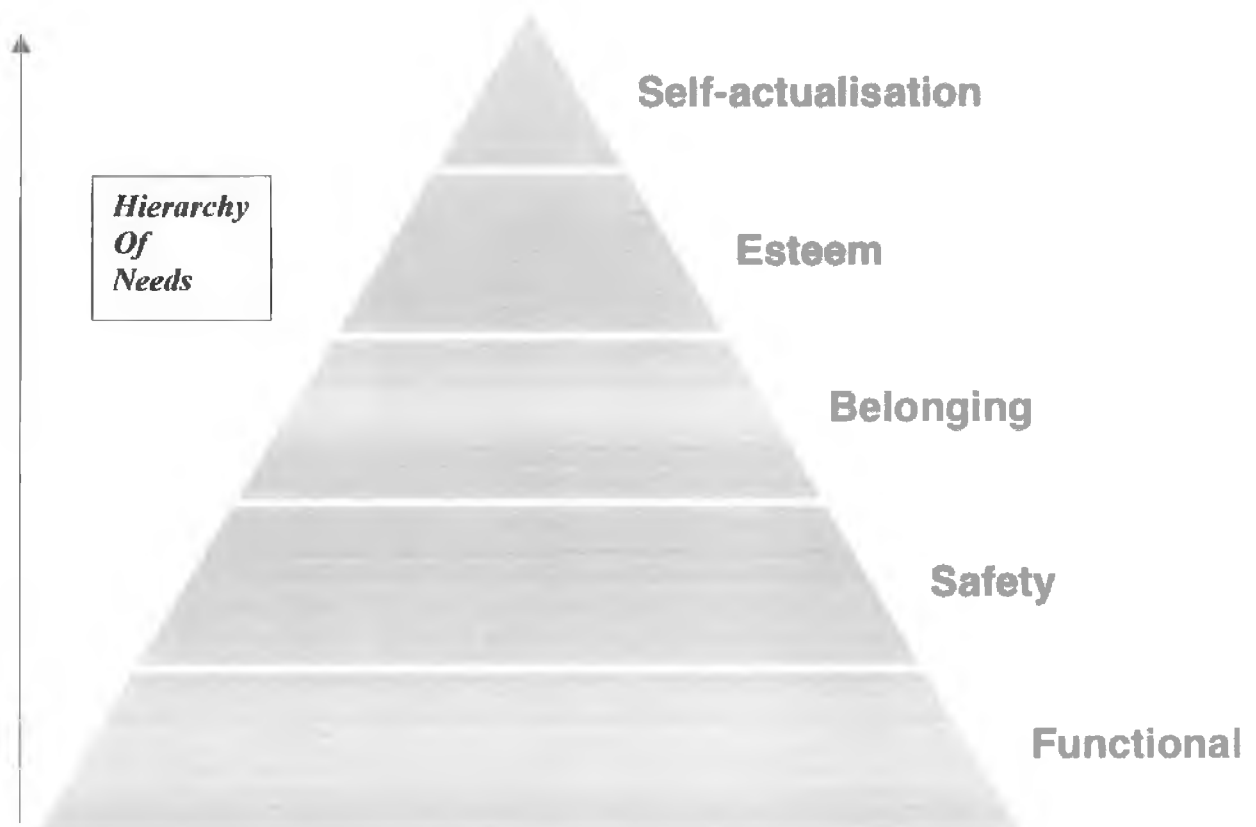
**Appendix**

**C**



**Figure 2:**

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Human Motivation Theory)**



## Appendix

D

## **Areas discussed with Social Network (Bebo)**

- The Bebo social network audience.
- Bebo, the social network, and brands.
- Capabilities of social networks in comparison to other brand communication channels.
- How a social network supports a brand.
- Social networks as key brand communication.
- Social media network (Bebo), practicality for all brands.
- Rationalising the brand investment, is it a long-term possibility for brand communication.
- Cost effectiveness as a primary advantage of bringing brands to social networks.
- How social network/brand measure success of this medium.
- Range of brands choosing to communicate with consumers in this way.
- What makes Bebo users want to engage with a brand.
- Consumer's view of a brand appearing on social networks.
- Loyalties with consumers or brands.

- Guidelines of a social network for brands.

## Appendix

E

## **Areas discussed with Brands (Pat the Baker and CoCa-Cola)**

- How the brand got involved with social networks
- Does the brand support the use of social networks by other brands
- Digital marketing succeeding in comparison to traditional marketing
- Rationalising brand investment in such recent media
- Is it a long-term possibility for brand communication
- Social networks being used as key brand communication
- Social networks practicality for all brands
- Consumer's perceptions of brands emerging on social media networks
- What makes users of virtual communities want to engage with the brand, and how can a brand appropriately connect with consumers on a social network.
- Potential of consumers to be engaged as co-creators
- The type of brand experience created
- Can social networks create significant brand ambassadors
- Social networks as a cost effective way to communicate with consumers
- Impact of virtual communities on the reputation and popularity of a brand

- Segmenting and targeting when using social media networks
- Control a company has when deciding to bring their brand to the social network setting
- Brands measuring success
- Web 2.0 allows for two ways communication, the importance of this to companies
- Issues to consider when using social networks
- The brands experience from using social networks

## Appendix

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### **Areas discussed with Third Party (Cybercom)**

- Digital marketing in comparison to traditional marketing.
- The Internet as a brand communication method.
- Importance of global word of mouth to brands.
- Web 2.0 allows for two-way communication, importance of this.
- How Cybercom utilise social networks.
- Would Cybercom recommend the use of social networks to clients.
- Rationalising brand investment in such a recent media.
- Social networks being used as key brand communication.
- Capabilities of social networks in comparison to other brand communication channels.
- Social networks as the correct setting to spread a brand message.
- Social network practicality for all brands
- Social networks as cost effective means to engage consumers.
- Impact of virtual communities on the reputation and popularity of a brand.
- Appropriately connecting with consumers on a social network.

- Potential for consumers to be engaged as co-creators of a brand message as well as creating brand value.
- Co-creation resulting in high levels of loyalty, create brand ambassadors.
- Segmenting and targeting on social media networks.
- What makes the users of virtual communities want to engage with a brand.
- Consumer's perception of brands appearing on social media.
- Amount of control a company has when deciding to bring their brand to the social network setting.
- Rationalising the brand investment, a long-term possibility for brand communication.
- Range of brands choosing to communicate with consumers in this way.
- How are social networks and brands measuring success.
- Issues brands should consider when using social networks.