

Exploring the relationship between customer engagement strategies and brand loyalty

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ABSTRACT

Customer engagement has become more than just a strategy for business or marketing. It empowers the consumer to be engaged throughout their initial interaction and purchase journey. This engagement journey can help a brand to establish and grow due to the continuous support from consumers. The general aim of this study was to determine the nature of the relationship between customer engagement strategies (CES) and brand loyalty. CES identified five antecedents (brand reputation, social media, word-of-mouth, customer experience, and merchandising) for the self-developed questionnaire where 135 social media participants could partake in this study. The value of this investigation lies in determining the most influential antecedents for brand loyalty from a consumer. These findings can contribute to how brands strategize their marketing budgets and which segments of customer engagement consumers find valuable. The study was conducted on the social media platform Instagram, where participants were recruited with the referral from other participants. The data, collected via Google Forms, are reliable ($\alpha \geq 0.70$) and adequate ($KMO \geq 0.70$). Data analysis using exploratory factor analysis suggested that eight antecedents influence consumers' brand loyalty. The study found a positive relationship for most of the antecedents. However, customer experience should be reconsidered because this antecedent did not significantly influence a consumer's loyalty to a brand.

Key Terms:

Customer engagement; Brand reputation; Social media; Word-of-mouth; Brand community; Customer experience; Merchandising; Brand loyalty

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CES	Customer Engagement Strategies
SMP	Social Media Page
WOM	Word-of-mouth
CBE	Customer Brand Engagement
eWOM	Electronic word-of-mouth

CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The modern digital era withholds endless opportunities for companies or brands to connect and engage with current or potential customers. As a result, customer engagement has significantly evolved over the last decade. Various engagements via omni-channels allow brands to interact with their customers, whether person-to-person or person-to-community (Prentice *et al.*, 2019:339).

The term omni-channel refers to a marketing strategy that uses numerous channels to communicate with customers and encourage them to purchase. It has similar characteristics as multichannel marketing, although it is not the same. The goal of omni-channel marketing is to simplify the purchasing process for customers by placing them at the centre of all interactions. Offering multiple options for purchasing as well as removing potential objections to the purchase is what accomplishes this.

The Internet as an engagement platform has promoted countless possibilities to connect and build lasting relationships with customers, thus allowing unrestricted access for a consumer to reach a brand, vice versa. Therefore, business communication with a customer is achieved through various communication channels regarding the brand/product to create an opportunity for sale (Yerpude & Singhal, 2021:92).

A brand should continue to listen and encourage feedback, suggestions, and recommendations from their brand community. An engagement strategy that empowers customers to become the voice of the company or brand. It allows brands to deliver according to the expectation of customers accurately with a competitive advantage.

Customer engagement is characterised in the literature as a psychological process where customer loyalty contributes to a service or brand (Vivek *et al.*, 2012:27; Kumar *et al.*, 2019.141). This enrichment of engagement may also influence customer loyalty; therefore, brands embrace engagement today. Over time, it has been shown to contribute to consumers' behaviour and preference for a specific brand or service.

According to Prentice *et al.* (2019:346), these authors illustrate a positive relationship between customer engagement and customer purchase intentions in their literature research. Hence, a company should consider formulating or developing an appropriate business intelligence strategy to drive customers to engage with its brand. Furthermore, Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos (2019:38) observed that a customer's psychological shopper behaviour might expand and improve current research towards a customer perspective. Customer behaviour can be distinguished by how customers are incentivised during brand activity ventures. Suggesting that customer engagement and customers' judgments in business have a notable positive impact; thus, brands should identify what their businesses centre their attention or attraction is. For a brand to understand and identify the best engagement strategies for its target customers, the business has to use the opportunity to enable the brand to develop new innovative approaches. These approaches will continuously drive brand loyalty through sales by creating a competitive advantage in the market.

Businesses and companies should act rapidly and systematically to ensure that the brand's customer focus is evident to customers. A simple example would be how a brand responds to consumer feedback and how reviews can be an engagement strategy to improve business operations through customer service. Sheng (2019:49-50) suggests that once a company receives many reviews in a certain period, companies should ensure that it can compete with the review update pace and meet customers' expectations by engaging with a customer. As a result, it will be driving an enhanced power in influencing the competence for customer engagement. In addition, the continuous positive outcome of the company's responsiveness creates strategic value for managing or maintaining customers and potentially for financial outcomes (Sheng, 2019:49).

According to Hollebeek (2011:570), proposed customer brand engagement (CBE) themes like brand attitude, image, identity, personality, and experience, can be adapted to guide customer engagement in a company with strategies and campaigns that communicate with consumers.

Customer engagement has become more than just a strategy for business or marketing. It empowers customers to be engaged throughout their initial interaction and purchase

journey. This engagement journey helps to grow customer loyalty and collect valuable customer information (Hollebeek, 2011:570).

CBR has been determined to exhibit both positive and significant influences on brand loyalty. More customer interactions can drive users to find a more relevant or valuable brand, providing potential customers with insight. These customer insights can create an opportunity to formulate a strategy where informed marketing decisions can be made on the available information, such as content or retargeting improvements, which can significantly drive sales through social media channels and outreach methods.

Throughout current years, the synergies between customers and brands have progressed due to increased competition and the surge of various social media platforms. As a result, more organisations have shifted their focus on more engagement with current or potential customers to create a more sustainable long-term competitive advantage through the voice of their customers (Sheng, 2019:49).

Today customers play an incremental role towards how a brand can improve or change its engagement strategies. Consumers expect brands to be one step ahead of service, playing their part in society and acknowledging a customer's experience with a brand. In the end, creating a strategy that incorporates competitive advantage is crucial for a brand to be ahead or retain more brand loyalty.

Through various research, customer engagement has shown a linkage between the firm or brand performance indicators such as brand image, customer involvement, sales growth, referrals, and brand purchase intentions (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017).

It is, therefore, to be expected that engaged customers are expected to progress enduring relationships with the brands by expressing their trust, commitment, satisfaction, or loyalty. The engagement or experience of buying in a store can also follow through on brand loyalty in the consumer. This study will focus on social media users where customers are influenced through various engagement strategies through sharing their insights towards strategies that drive their brand loyalty.

Although digital engagement has become the first step in communicating to the consumer daily, it also empowers the consumer to make an informed decision with the information

given during the engagement, especially if this specific item or brand will solve a particular problem identified by the consumer.

More companies have become aware of the consumer's voice, and therefore companies have created various strategic platforms to listen and encourage feedback or suggestions from their customers. An engagement strategy that empowers customers to share their experience as consumers. Thus, it allows brands to deliver according to the expectation of customers accurately with a competitive advantage.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The predicament reviewed in this research is whether brands benefit from customer engagement strategies to increase and manage customer retention through brand loyalty. Each brand has access to connect with a customer according to a strategy suggestion or research available.

Consumers today are more responsive to trustworthy brands, who pay attention to their interests and preference by not taking advantage of their loyalty. Therefore, brand managers should put more effort into developing effective relationships between brands and consumers. Consequently, brand managers should encourage consumers to evaluate their brand towards brand satisfaction; if the outcome exhibits satisfaction, brand loyalty will be positive (Ekinci *et al.*, 2019:104-105).

For many consumers, social media has become a fundamental part of their everyday lives, allowing them to express their ideas, preferences, and likes on a wide range of topics and share their experiences with others.

Brands end up spending a tremendous number of resources on customer engagement or interaction, assuming that specific strategies will retain brand loyalty. However, literature may suggest several theories or methods; identifying the most effective engagement strategies from a customer's outlook can limit brands to choose more than one strategy. Instead, a business can rather scale down to practices that drive brand loyalty and customer engagement.

In the past decade, the literature upon customer engagement has become an increasingly assertive strategy for companies or brands to retain customer loyalty; however,

customers can have different views on what sort of engagement will conquer their commitment into support.

Although various engagement strategies have been identified, poor execution can influence a customer's behaviour or brand preference. It inflicts a barrier for the brand to expand its customer database and market share. Nevertheless, specific customer engagement strategies that influence brand loyalty may not always be evident due to different consumer categories. Moreover, companies and brands do not always have the antecedents that influence customers' preference of a particular brand.

Suppose the initial engagement took place outside the retail environment. In that case, other instore activities or engagement should also be evaluated to determine if it also contributes to brand loyalty. Through social media branding campaigns, consumers aware and informed will be more loyal to the brand they prefer and value. Therefore, the companies should not exclusively focus on detailed and informative advertisements but should also combine engagement. Today companies should accept and embrace social media platforms being considered as the most valuable brand management tool. It provides engagement, interactivity, and open discussion with the target audience (Ahmed *et al.*, 2019:210). Customer's attitude and perspective towards digital marketing or social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, positively affect brand engagement (Faiz *et al.*, 2017:54).

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

This study explores how different customer engagement strategies of previous literature can be linked to a customer's brand loyalty. The aim is to establish if there is a relationship between specific customer engagement strategies and brand loyalty support; and what the contributing domains of customer engagement are regarding this relationship. Engagement strategies may start from the initial advertisement or media awareness to the personal in-store sales interaction. These engagement milestones can be followed through by the recommendation of a health care professional for particular treatment and brand message communication of merchandising. Consequently, identifying which of these elements might contribute most to a consumer's purchase and brand loyalty. The research is conducted as a quantitative research approach to answer my research question. The study is administered in an electronic survey format to a sample group of customers.

A summary of customer engagement initiatives, issued by Harmeling *et al.* (2016:320-321), mainly consisted of experimental research designs that measured different theories. However, various elements of customer engagement strategies investigate the insights from consumers, thus allowing feedback to be interpreted as an overall consensus to measure if a specific engagement strategy influences their support or loyalty towards a brand. Results are presented with graphs and charts to measure data accordingly.

1.3.3 Primary Objective

Determine which customer engagement strategies are the most effective for a brand or business to gain and retain customers through loyalty.

1.3.2 Secondary Objective

Four secondary objectives have been identified for this study:

1. To develop an in-depth conceptual framework surrounding the core elements of customer engagement, customer engagement strategies, and brand loyalty.
2. To compile a questionnaire using theory and existing validated questionnaires to measure the customer engagement strategies that contribute to brand loyalty.
3. To empirically test the relationships between customer engagement strategies and brand loyalty.
4. To conclude and give recommendations to marketing managers based on the findings of the research.

1.3.3 Covid Protocols

This is an online questionnaire. There is no face-to-face contact; this means that no specific Covid protocols are required to collect the data.

1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this research can be categorised under the subject field of Strategic Marketing Management within the business and organisational domain. This research will explore the relationship between customer engagement strategies and brand loyalty. The focus will be on how these strategies can be executed to formulate the data to recommendations that can be applied as guidelines for organisations to align and adjust

their current engagement strategies with customers. The participation of this topic can be helpful toward the success of a business by retaining customers, offering value to customer's experience, and their support to brand or company.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The hypothesis of customer engagement and brand loyalty has been successfully implemented in a wide range of business sectors, thus enabling the retention of current and new customers.

Many studies have observed the relationship between customers and brands, but this study will focus on the most effective strategy for customers. Therefore, when evaluating the various customer engagement strategies, the research will focus on the customer's input. Various determinants have examined what keeps a customer engaged before purchasing and what impacts their shopping experience. Thus, it is possible that both online and in-store marketing could influence a consumer's decision-making process.

1.5.1 Literature study on research methodology

In today's competitive business environment, word-of-mouth marketing has become an indispensable corporate marketing approach. Additionally emphasised the importance of brand communities, particularly in the era of social media platforms. When businesses develop brand communities, they enhance customer communication and encourage consumers to share valuable insights or information (Pan, 2020:66-70).

Customer engagement strategies or earlier literature frameworks and reviews can help a company reach a consensus on adapting or improving engagement to target age groups and what is relevant for the prospective customer they wish to target (Morgan *et al.*, 2019:4).

Online brand communities' social and communicative components have been tried by companies seeking ways to increase the volume of viral publicity. However, word-of-mouth marketing is a great strategy when it comes to online brand communities. A brand community is known as consumers who are passionate about the same brand and can share their views with other consumers on social media platform networks.

When developing a word-of-mouth marketing plan for a brand community, consumer contact and sharing information and experiences are important factors to consider. Companies should use an online brand community to help their customers better appreciate the importance of customer interaction. An effective customer engagement strategy that encourages consumers to spread the news about a company's products and services online will benefit significantly from this (Pan, 2020:67). The unit of analysis would be in the public domain, preferable customers who use Instagram as one of their social media platforms. There will be no limitations towards any specific geographic population group. The challenge would be to outline a database (through referrals) for participants on a social media platform willing to participate and consent to this research.

This study aims to produce a questionnaire in line with existing research on customer engagement strategies and evaluation or decision frameworks. Similar questionnaires have been used in previous studies. However, these new consumer engagement strategies and how customers perceive them have not been composed or coded.

The questionnaire responses should be honest and transparent so that the participant does not contemplate them. The questionnaire consists of seven sections, including the consumer, the five antecedents, and the outcome of brand loyalty.

The following literature review will investigate previous research findings related to customer engagement strategies such as brand reputation, social media, word-of-mouth, brand community, customer experience, and merchandising / visibility. Thus to evaluate how the strategies mentioned above may influence a consumer's brand loyalty and support.

Regarding quantitative research, primary data are required. The study will be cross-sectional as this examination will observe the outcome of the survey and analyse the data of the selected sample population. The objective of the cross-sectional study would be to use various groups or individuals with a variable background of interest towards intended customer engagement strategies executed.

Targeting a larger audience should provide more insight, feedback, and results; therefore, this study can reach a larger audience without geographic participation. The questionnaire will accumulate consumer feedback and views, which can then be measured to customer engagement strategies. Once results have been processed, a

conclusion can be drawn to determine which strategies are essential for brand loyalty. A conceptual framework model will be formulated from before and after the research has been done. This is to compare the hypotheses of the five antecedents and brand loyalty. Thus, the second framework should represent any changes after the data is collected.

The feedback of these participants will assist in determining if that will illustrate the strategies towards brand loyalty. In addition, these results can also conclude the general view of what brands should implement in their engagement strategies to ensure that these strategies firstly target their desired audience, secondly deliver the preferred key message and finally contribute to future brand loyalty.

The data collection will not include personal infographics such as gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic background. This research only focuses on the engagement strategies that influence an individual's choice of brand and support. Therefore, the focus should not be on the background of individuals but rather on participants' needs and judgments when choosing a brand.

Thus, exploring a consumer preference for engagement and how it influences their choice towards selecting a brand. It is essential to question what influences the individual to select a particular product.

1.5.2 Study population

The study population consists of participants who are mainly active on social media platforms such as Instagram. The researcher has two social media accounts, namely her personal account (Dorothy Grace Flint) and a second social media account called Patron & Niche. Participants were recruited by using electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and they received invitations via Instagram to participate.

The participants should be older than 18 years to participate in the study.

1.5.3 Sample

No sample was drawn. Thus, all the members belonging to the population using Patron and Niche (as the first snowball) received the invitation to participate. It is therefore not possible to determine the population or sample size. Data were collected until suitable

numbers were reached (as determined by the Kaiser, Meyer & Olkin test of sample adequacy).

1.5.4 Research Design

The quantitative study design collected data via a self-administered questionnaire. (See Appendix 1 for the self-developed questionnaire). The questionnaire contains insight and customer engagement strategy questions. The electronic platform (GoogleForms) was used to collect the data. The questionnaire's answers were captured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree".

1.5.5 Data Collection

The social media platform Instagram was used to snowball the invitation to participate in the survey. The following steps clarify the data collection process:

Step 1: An invitation to participate in the survey was placed on the social media platform, i.e., Instagram.

Step 2: This invitation requested respondents to share the invitation with friends, and their friends and so on – thus snowballing the reach of the questionnaire

Step 3: On receipt, the respondent was requested to complete the questionnaire – the first page of the questionnaire contains the Letter of Consent (Appendix 2).

Step 4: After the respondent ticks the box where consent is given, the questionnaire opened. If the consent is not given, the respondent was reminded that consent is required. If still not given, the respondent is thanked and ejected from the survey.

Step 5: On completing the questionnaire, the data were automatically captured and saved in the dataset. It is impossible to isolate any one respondent or identify a specific respondent's data from the dataset.

Step 6: Dataset will be provided electronically to the statistical consultation services at the NWU for analysis.

Step 7: Researcher received the results from statistical services, interprets and writes the report

It is noteworthy that the responses are anonymous, and neither the data, identity or contact details can be identified from the electronic database. The researcher, therefore, has no idea who responded to the questionnaire, even though Instagram participants were invited to partake in the survey.

1.6 THE LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Introduction and problem statement

Chapter 1 will present the context and background of the study itself. This included the introduction, problem statement, and general overview of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

In Chapter 2, a literature review was done to explain the theoretical aspects of the study, explore definitions of the constructs, and look at previous applicable studies already done.

Chapter 3: Empirical research and analysis

In Chapter 3, the overall research approach is addressed. This chapter includes the research design, participants, measuring instruments, procedure, statistical analysis, and the research objectives.

Chapter 4: Conclusion & recommendations

Chapter 4 will provide a conclusion on the study, as well as some recommendations to customer engagement strategies or brand loyalty for future studies

1.7 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 introduced the study. The chapter sets off by defining customer engagement strategies and the relationship with brand loyalty. However, more important is that the chapter highlights the problem statement, objectives and details the research methodology followed in this study. It also precludes the layout of the study. The next chapter examines previous literature and theoretical findings that are relevant to this study.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 is the literature study. In this chapter, the independent and dependant variables of customer engagement and brand loyalty are discussed. The chapter also introduces a theoretical hypothesis model that is developed and the consisting of five antecedents, namely: (1) Brand reputation, (2) Social media, (3) Word-of-Mouth, i.e., Brand Community, and (4) Customer Experience (5) Merchandising / Visibility. This model is a visual representation of how each of these antecedents may or may not influence brand loyalty for consumers. The next section of the chapter will then discuss these variables in context to the study. The structure of the chapter thus follows the theoretical model (see Figure 2.1).

2.2 A THEORETICAL MODEL OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND LOYALTY

The study and the results will support the conceptual model designed according to the segments that may influence customer engagement that contributes to overall brand support or loyalty. In the model, the dependent variable CES is serviced by five independent variables, namely (1) Brand reputation (CES¹), (2) Social media (CES²), (3) Word-of-mouth from the Brand Community (CES³), (4) Customer Experience (CES⁴), and (5) Merchandising / Visibility (CES⁵). Furthermore, the theory also shows that these customer engagement strategies lead to brand loyalty. Therefore, more effective customer engagement strategies serve as a pathway to improve brand loyalty (see Figure 2.1).

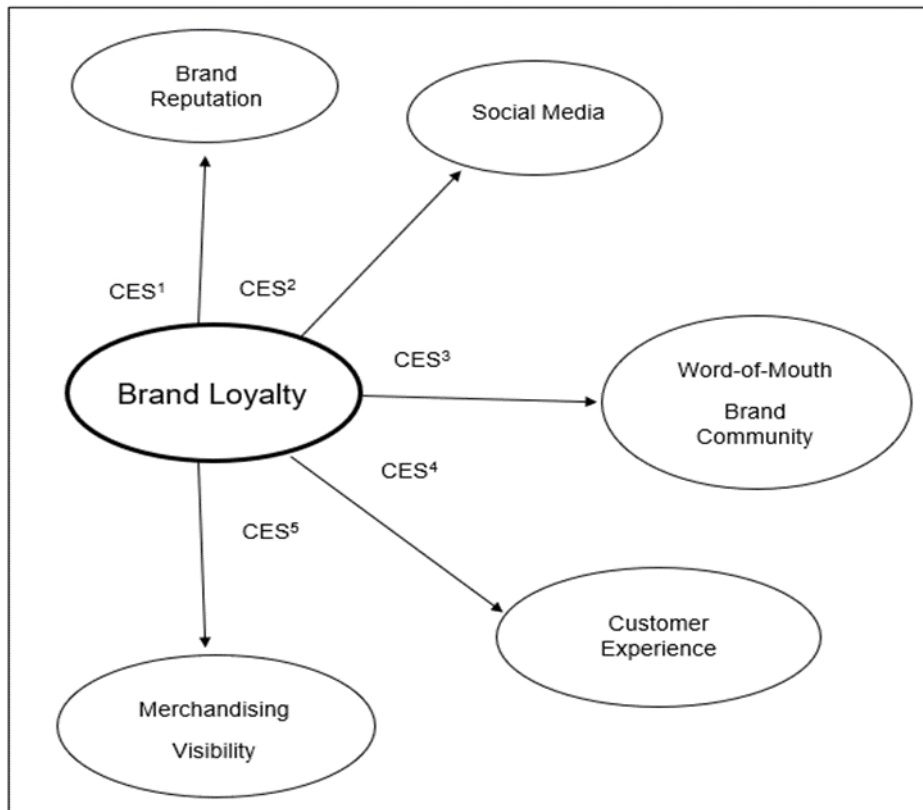


Figure 2.1: Conceptual model of customer engagement strategies and brand loyalty

2.3 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Customer engagement is well-defined in literature as a psychological process where customer loyalty contributes to a service or brand. This contribution also influences the mechanism by which loyalty can be sustained to ensure customers continue their behaviour and preference for a specific brand or service.

Various published research distinguishes CE as a psychological process that adds to a service's or brand's loyalty. Therefore, ensuring customers or clients maintain their purchase behaviour and preference for a particular brand or service. Furthermore, engagement with different market niches is crucial for brand support when it aims to grow and extend its reach and support.

Customer engagement can lead to a stronger emotional bond or connection between the customer and the brand. In addition, highly engaged customers are more likely to buy,

promote, and show greater brand loyalty significantly when brand engagement and experience exceed consumers' expectations.

Prentice *et al.* (2019:346) identified a correlation between a customers' level of engagement and their ability to purchase products. Therefore, it is suggested that businesses should have an effective business intelligence system that encourages customers to interact with the brand.

As a result, due to various psychological motivations or drivers, customer engagement behaviour can be described as the manifestation that a brand or business focuses upon; this is beyond the purchase of the consumer (van Doorn *et al.*, 2010:254). Consumer perception can be favourable or unfavourable, depending on the customer's motive. A brand that wants to grow customer engagement must adapt the old marketing mix to benefit from new technologies and platforms and better understand consumers and service them.

According to the research, customer engagement via Omni-channels requires more consideration due to the inconsistency of the terminology used in the different domains of interaction. However, Boujena *et al.* (2020) identified that most researchers consider and agree that customer engagement is a psychological state that leads to numerous interactions with the focal target (object) that progress beyond a transactional purpose. Customer engagement can be identified as how active or influential a customer's relationship is with a brand. Therefore, measurable benchmarks can define this throughout the customer journey or experience with the brand.

Thus, it represents how a customers' interactions with the brand offerings, responses to advertising efforts, level of participation in marketing communications efforts, and involvement in word-of-mouth (WOM) advertising on social media channels are examples of these customer experiences. They can also provide helpful and insightful feedback for an organisation.

Customers will be satisfied, and brand loyalty will be developed when a company develops its customer engagement methods and ideas (Kumar & Reinartz, 2018). Rather than harming a brand, engagement strategies can support and give a business insight towards the consumer's needs, thus enabling the consumer to share their perspectives and expectations with the brand through feedback and review channels.

Thus, suggesting that new and innovative research platforms should be used to draw CE, enabling a company to employ tactics that can improve overall customer engagement value (Venkatesan, 2017:293). In addition, consumers' brand preferences can be influenced by customer engagement strategies sound and practical concepts.

A business must pay attention to customer engagement and satisfaction. An engaged consumer is more likely to return to their chosen brand to buy more in the future if they have a more personalised and engaging experience than a disengaged customer. In addition, a happy customer is more likely to become an ardent supporter of a company's brand in the future.

Organisations should take consumer expectations into account through the implementation of integrated marketing communication. This concept can be helpful to communicate appropriate vital messages that will allow a consumer to have a preference in their choice of brand. Furthermore, integrating marketing communication encourages an organisation to endure customer relationships and value for their organisation or brand (Mihaela, 2015).

2.3.1 Brand reputation

A brand is generally the name, a term, design/symbol, or any other characteristic that distinguishes differentiates or identifies one seller's goods or services (Saboo *et al.*, 2016:526)

When a brand wants to build relevant and effective frameworks, it may be essential to incorporate ideas from various research findings, such as customer relationship management, customer experience, social media, and customer-oriented enterprises (Venkatesan, 2017:293).

Acharya (2021:41) identified that unfamiliar and established brands might have to work harder to maintain and build brand reputation, which go hand in hand with brand recognition. The authors' findings provide managers with strategic means that will benefit customers to connect with their brand.

According to Prentice *et al.* (2019:346), their literature research illustrates a positive relationship between customer engagement and customer's purchase intentions.

Therefore, it is recommended that a company generate an appropriate business intelligence system and drive customers to engage with the brand.

Customers should experience a level of value and preference, as the association has been identified to have a positive outcome concerning customer engagement. It provides an increased level of value in terms of interest, sign, and pleasure with the product or service delivered (Parihar *et al.*, 2019). Merging insights from the various research findings, including customer relationship management, customer experience, social media, and customer orientated companies, can collectively be essential to develop actionable and practical frameworks that will represent a strong brand reputation (Venkatesan, 2017:293).

Besides brand loyalty, a brand's reputation and history can influence customers' perspectives and enthusiasm to be part of this brand's culture. Therefore, a corporate business legacy, especially towards brand management, indicates that nine mandatory elements must be considered if corporate heritage or their brands are to evolve.

These are the historical identity, longevity; representation; brand leadership or brand stewardship; value proposition; consistency, trust, authenticity, heritage, brand evolution, and legacy of corporate social responsibility (Adegbile & Otubanjo, 2019:8).

For a brand to differentiate itself, Alwi *et al.* (2017:404) suggested using corporate social responsibility elements and the perceived price, product, or service offerings of the company. These authors demonstrate another unique conceptual framework where a company's reputation contributed to brand loyalty from customers. Ideally, engagement with a customer should relate to a brand collaborative relationship and loyalty link, consequently not just with brand choice. Once a company can focus and practice more powerful engagement strategies to strengthen customer support and loyalty towards a brand (Parihar *et al.* 2019:69).

2.3.2 Social media

Brands today are surrounded by multiple social media platforms and channels, which enables brand awareness and engagement more significantly. As mentioned in the above section, many resources are utilised to understand the ecology of social media.

The progression and evolution of social media as an interactive technology has empowered, enabled, and changed millions of lives; it can be personal, organisational, and global. Its impact within the scope of marketing remains unique and is perceived as the primary component of enhancing consumer engagement towards online platforms (Ahmed *et al.*, 2019:202). A theoretical model of Ahmed *et al.* (2019:205) demonstrates the interchanging elements of social media marketing; consumer consciousness, and the impact on brand loyalty.

Faster and more consistent responses from businesses and brands are needed to show customers the managerial effort. In addition, a considerable number of reviews received in a short period suggest that organisations should make sure they can keep up with the rate of review updates (Sheng, 2019:49-50).

According to Saboo *et al.* (2016:524), there is a limited understanding of how consumers engage with brands on social media platforms and how it impacts their purchase journey behaviour. As a result, significant resources are spent on customer engagement, enabling organisations and brands to connect with their target audience. However, this raises concerns about the return of investment if these engagement strategies influence brand awareness and support consumer decision-making.

Quick and frequent responses enhance the likelihood of appearing at the top of a review page, allowing a brand or business to be more visible to review readers and potential reviewers. As a result, the capacity to influence customer engagement competency will be strengthened. According to Sheng (2019:49), due to the company's responsiveness, strategic value is generated for managing or sustaining customers and financial repercussions.

The conventional marketing techniques can harm the company if the main message is not communicated to a possible loyal consumer target group. However, not all positive or innovative marketing strategies are ideal (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017: 332). This can suggest that each consumer or market niche is unique; therefore, how a brand engages or communicates its key message will need additional market research, allowing the brand's objectives to address the target customer's needs.

Saboo *et al.* (2016:538) concluded by suggesting that a brand should focus on the number of followers alone, but brand managers should also encourage participation on

social media platforms from consumers. Furthermore, these activities positively influence each other. For example, an increase in a brand's popularity or fame can positively influence other social media activities, implying that brands need to consider combining both activities.

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can help businesses, brands, and customers build stronger relationships with their target customers. However, there has been no systematic investigation of the factors influencing consumer interaction on social media despite the widespread acknowledgment of their importance. When conducting their research, Ajiboye *et al.* (2019: 239) used a systematic strategy that included a thorough review of the empirical literature on consumer interaction behaviour on social media platforms. Five of the most important antecedent causes identified in the research literature include social connections, ownership-value, information-seeking, involvement, and functionality. Using social media by a business requires all of these elements.

Originally social media was proposed to cultivate human-to-human communication, interactions, and brand anthropomorphism. However, Boujena *et al.* (2020:8-9) identified a significant gap according to the social media indicators in their investigation. These authors found that the creation and stimulations of emotions promoted by social media content and the channels used today seem to be excluded by the indicators in practice.

Social media branding efforts that make customers aware and informed will result in greater brand loyalty. Therefore, businesses need to focus on interaction as well as detail and information in their marketing. As a result, businesses must now accept and embrace social media platforms as the most effective means of managing their brands. Interactivity and open conversation with the intended audience result from this interaction and communication (Ahmed *et al.*, 2019:210).

Brand and social media experts should be innovative by creating an incentive system that encourages actively engaged consumers to give their opinions as thought leaders or knowledge contributors. It can be done by creating compelling content that encourages the network to expand or merge with other social networks and mediums. These efforts can strengthen customer synergy, resulting in referral and influencer value on engagement platforms (Prentice *et al.*, 2019:346).

Saboo *et al.* (2016:538) discovered that social following or fans positively impacted brand sales. These authors' analysis suggests a lateral movement of brand attractiveness compared to the number of followers. Therefore, an increase in consumer followers towards a brand will drive an increase in brand attractiveness. Indirectly the more attractive a brand becomes on social media, the more it will attract or recruit new followers for brand engagement.

According to Kross *et al.* (2019:105-106), the literature demonstrated that unstructured emotional data is essential and relevant to monitor a brand's social media reputations. Therefore, practices should go beyond counting the number of smileys or likes on Facebook.

Customer brand relationships have been found to have a favourable effect on consumer purchase intent via social media. A strong desire to purchase is shown among customers who have developed a strong confidence level in a particular brand, which suggests a high level of contentment and commitment. Customers' purchasing intentions can be induced by various brand-related actions by marketing managers who focus on building trust and happiness in their customers (Sharma *et al.*, 2021:614)

Connecting with people is part of social media platforms' functioning. Thus, customers are exposed to it in response to their involvement and interactions with social media platforms (Ajiboye *et al.*, 2019). The above mention promotes the exchange of similar brand interests, values, and ideas, resulting in online brand communities and a sense of social cohesion.

2.3.3 Word-of-mouth / Brand community

According to literature, consumers, creators, and contributors connect with brands or businesses in various means, primarily through brand communities (Ajiboye *et al.*, 2019: 248). Therefore, two decades ago, brand communities were already identified and defined as "social entities that represent the embeddedness of brands in consumers' daily lives" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001:418).

Word-of-mouth is an oral, written, and electronic communication between communities related to the quality/experience of a product or service purchased or used (Kotler & Keller 2009:174; Indrasari *et al.*, 2019:190).

Instead of portraying a customer-incentivised action or venture, Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos (2019:38) observed that consumer recommendation of a brand to other consumers will most likely

expand and improve future purchase behaviour. Prentice *et al.* (2019:345) recommend that new members rely more on the brand community than long-term members, and they must have confidence in the brand and its community to engage in its activities.

Kumar and Reinartz (2018) have suggested different interaction mechanisms between the brand and the consumer. For example, according to the study's findings, customers' actions might reveal their current level of interest, encouraging a positive response to a product or service on social media platforms.

The personalisation or profiling of customers enables a business to create a database of best practices for customer interaction in the corporate and social environment. Therefore, considering each individual's behaviour and preferences according to lifestyle areas instead of simply generalising customers based on sociodemographic statistics (Kumar & Reinartz, 2018).

A positive impact on customer brand engagement is the attitude and perception of customers towards digital marketing or social media networks like Facebook and Twitter (Faiz *et al.*, 2017:54). Venkatesan (2017:293) suggests that integrating various insights and research streams is critical when developing a framework for these initiatives; this can be through various engagement platforms like customer relationship management customers' experiences, social media, and customer-oriented organisations.

Brand managers experience constant pressure to engage with their target audience. A common strategy is to drive and motivate consumers to "follow, like, or share" the brand's key message with other followers, indirectly influencing consumer purchase decisions (Saboo *et al.*, 2016:526).

The value of social word-of-mouth (SWOM) or electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on social media suggests that the advantages of SWOM can increase exponentially at higher levels of SWOM. Consequently, the more SWOM takes place on social media, the larger target or non-target audience will be reached. Thus, SWOM continues to increase at an increasing rate. However, the authors also considered it possible that the outcome of SWOM will reduce once it reaches a certain level of exposure (Saboo *et al.*, 2016:538).

Social media follower count or base can be easily noticeable and, therefore, the most generally tracked social media metric for brand attractiveness. However, a brand's value

can diminish over time with the number of followers. Thus, brands should not build a more extensive fan base but rather emphasise more fan engagement. The right level of consumer engagement drives the value of engaged consumers. Social comments can be an advantage as it creates testimonies of customer experience with the brand. In addition, it can create a positive buzz about the brand, recruiting new consumers to grow the brand community. To gain a more competitive advantage, brands need to evolve and be innovative in their portfolio by introducing new offerings (Saboo *et al.*, 2016:539).

A brand should be memorable, as consumers are given several choices every day; a brand can be forgotten without awareness and consumer visibility. Hence, the focus should be to embed the brand in the consumer's mind and decision-making. The way brands manage their social media page and activity is far more critical than the size of the brand portfolio. For example, a small product portfolio brand can outsell an extensive product portfolio by emphasising how its social media profile is managed (Saboo *et al.*, 2016:539).

Social media can significantly impact customer decision-making, affecting shareholder value. Social media is contributing to an overall positive impact on business performance. This contributes to both the necessary business of offline advertising and WOM and current social media research.

Therefore, a brand should keep in mind that the multidimensional nature of customer engagement may vary depending on the depth of engagement and exposure to the consumer. For example, Boujena *et al.* (2020:8) concluded that the lowest level of customer engagement could be obtained via "views" and "likes" which are natural actions because they require little time investment from the consumer.

Acharya (2021:40) demonstrated that WOM is influenced by self-identification when people shop online. Researchers discovered that self-identification in online buying was positively influenced by customer brand engagement's two components, cognitive processing, and affection. There was no correlation between the CBE activation dimension and self-identification, however. Due to the nature of internet buying, customers may only offer feedback and helpful suggestions on satisfying their needs adequately.

The consumer's participation can reflect a higher level of engagement through "comments", as this entails that consumers take the time to write and share their opinion regarding the brand. Again, this can be highlighted as a more interesting insight to investigate for future interactions. Finally, when it comes to "shares", this represents authentic engagement as consumers become ambassadors obliquely and endorse the brand within their personal or brand community (Boujena *et al.*, 2020:8-9).

The evolution of the number of customers commenting about the brand or an event, the scope of interactions between active participants over time, splitting engagement evolution curves by geographical area or other campaigns objects, or contrasting engagement dynamics with influencers' contributions.

These engagement indicators are expected to bring relevant insights toward engagement patterns, awareness, or brand community size. In addition, the ongoing development of artificial intelligence in this domain can be enhanced with the integrations of chatbots on social media channels that further will contribute to this dynamic outlook of customer engagement.

The perception of consumer reach generally refers to the number of unique or specific niches of individuals who see the content. However, this reach impression is more driven by the exposure consumers see, thus related to the number of times the content is displayed and whether it was clicked on.

Customers' expectations for cognitive value and social value have a beneficial influence upon the customer-brand community participation. With a greater degree of connection between consumers and a brand's online community, there will be more engagement between customers and a brand's online community, which will result in more user-produced word-of-mouth information (Pan, 2020:81).

A brand's consumer is looking for cognitive value can find it in online brand communities, where they can learn about the product and become more efficient in utilising or processing it. In addition, customers are more likely to respond to other individuals' queries, suggest product improvements, and share development insights and recommendations if they follow the exchange feedback system by applying their knowledge to strengthen their online brand community status.

Customers have also become more familiar over the years as the online brand community grows and evolves. As a result, customers may also participate in behaviours such as mutual help, collaboration, and word-of-mouth communication to preserve connections or obligations amongst friends.

However, suppose customers believe that more individuals are embracing the brand or the brand experience. In that case, they may believe that they have a high similarity with others or that the brand has become well-known. As a result, frequent customer interactions in the online brand community may diminish customers' sense of brand prestige value and distinctiveness. Thus, a customer's value appeal in an online brand community may shift from a social quest to a cognitive one. It is a win-win situation for the online brand community and brand symbols that represent social worth.

It has been proposed by Bitter and Grabner-Kräuter (2016:227) that consumers value brand-related advice from close friends more. "Interacting with friends on social networking channels" was found to be an essential precursor of customer engagement behaviour (Bitter *et al.*, 2014:216).

It is possible to establish social links as the predominant utilisation of social media among friends/family or other individuals with whom an organisation or brand has a close social connection. Whether or not individuals engage in social media behaviour is influenced by their experiences and habits via their interactions with friends (Bitter *et al.*, 2014:200).

"Most customers use the brand community primarily as a source of information, reading messages rather than contributing with likes and comments," according to Gummerus *et al.* (2012:87). Halaszovich and Nel (2017:29) propose that two "like" intents can be the engagement through word-of-mouth and connect with a brand to get information are two main intentions driving fan-page like behaviour," back up the antecedent of the source of information. Chiang *et al.* (2017:1457) can add to this finding through behavioural customer learning, which is fundamental to explaining customers' online habits and contributing to customer engagement behaviour.

Global brand companies are making significant investments in providing a platform to customers through the online brand community (Baldus *et al.*, 2015:978). Promoted through an engagement platform, customers can voice to a brand or business by providing feedback; therefore, in return for this can help a brand improve their service

experience and encourage appropriate customer behaviours for other consumers (Hollebeek & Brodie, 2016).

Consumers experience an elevated belief towards their favourite professionals or sports stars; therefore, they are likely to adhere to their attitudes and behaviours when they believe in these role models. Furthermore, they will subsequently act as word-of-mouth ambassadors for the marketed companies and their brands (Wong et al., 2015:321).

2.2.4 Customer experience

Customer experience is defined as "a multidimensional construct that focuses on a customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioural, sensory, and social responses to a firm's offers throughout the customer's whole buying journey" (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016:3).

Customer experience during market research can shift the tactical level towards a more strategic approach. Customer experience provides market research with a different opportunity to explore what drives customer behaviour and business performance (Klaus, 2020:7). However, companies with their brands may find customer experience a complex field regarding measuring or managing it.

Customer engagement and customers' opinions or feedback have a beneficial influence, which means brands and companies should focus on more innovative business models that can drive consumer engagement towards their brand or company.

Various literature and research have sought to define customer engagement behaviour (CEB). However, the most generally referenced definition is based on findings by van Doorn *et al.* (2010:254), who acknowledges that a customer's behavioural manifestation with a brand or business's awareness is beyond purchase intentions, due to motivating factors.

Customer involvement in a company can be influenced by various brand engagement themes, including brand attitude, image, identity, personality, and experience (Hollebeek, 2011:570). Therefore, future research is expected to yield more managerial benefits within the customer brand engagement domain.

Pan (2020:81) identified that further agreement analyses reveal that customer community involvement partially relates to community perceived value and brand endorsement. In

addition, it plays a function in the agreement of social value in the community and brand recommendations.

This research analyses the impact of customer community relationships on the consumers' two community value demands. Consumer community engagement and cognitive value were strongly related, while brand symbolism did not impact the relationship. That being said, it harms both social value and the level of consumer community engagement.

Customers should feel appreciated and preferred for customer involvement because the connection has been a favourable impact. In terms of interest, sign, and enjoyment add more value to the supplied goods or service (Parihar *et al.*, 2019).

Jaakkola and Aarikka-Stenroos (2019:38) observed that customer referring behaviour could expand and improve existing research upon customer viewpoints instead of portraying a customer incentivised activity and venture. This suggests that customer engagement and customer's views in business had a positive impact; therefore, brands and companies should centre their attention towards more innovative approaches. Businesses and companies should respond faster and more systematically to ensure that managerial effort is evident to customers.

According to Sheng (2019:49-50), the author suggests that once a company receives many reviews in a certain period, companies should ensure that it can compete with the review update pace to drive superior customer experience.

Responding promptly and frequently increases the occurrence of responses being revealed at the top of the review page; therefore, it allows more exposure for review readers and potential reviewers to see. The result of this is that it will be driving an enhanced power in influencing the competence for customer engagement.

The constant and positive outcome of the company's responsiveness creates strategic value for managing or maintaining customers and potentially for financial consequences (Sheng, 2019:49). Elements representing customer engagement should be new and exciting research platforms that will allow an organisation to implement strategies that will enhance their customer engagement value for the business (Venkatesan, 2017:293). The robust and practical principles of CES can influence a consumer's choice of brand.

It is key for an organisation to ensure that the engagement and satisfaction of customers are not overlooked. For example, suppose a customer receives a more personalised and engaging experience. In that case, the customer might most likely be willing to return to their preferred brand to purchase more in the future than a disengaged customer in the business environment. Furthermore, customers who have a good experience with a brand is more likely to become a loyal customer and continue brand support in the future.

Brand managers or marketing should formulate social media and engagement strategies distinct and differentiated from the strategies executed in traditional media. For example, instead of spending resources on owned social media to influence consumers to purchase their brand, managers should alter, design and craft their own social media messages to target customers to improve brand awareness and customer satisfaction (Colicev *et al.*, 2018:53).

The active usage of social media for the ultimate goal of consuming/seeking brand-related content is referred to as a search for information. As a result, it entails judging the quality of material found on social media, which affects subsequent customer engagement behaviour.

Customers' pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives has been widely investigated as part of the consumer decision-making paradigm. However, a feedback loop of causation from prior encounters impacts future customer engagement behaviour. Therefore, the search continues until the consumer's needs are met (Blythe, 2013). Specifically, non-transactional CEBs, which do not always follow the previously studied linear consumer decision-making process, should be researched more closely.

Accordingly, Ajiboye *et al.* (2019) recommend that researchers look at the relative impacts of user participation in social media on different degrees of CEB to understand better how CEB emerges on these platforms. Functionality may be described as any component of the design of a social media platform that has the property of being well-suited to a certain CEB. This might include the usability, interface, content, and overall appeal to users to elicit action.

Excellent service quality may, therefore, assist a business in inducing conventional roles (customer loyalty and word-of-mouth), but it may not aid in exhibition other CEBs. It is also clear that individuals who receive a superior quality of customer service are less

likely to assist other customers with their experience regarding service delivery from an organisation. It may prevent them from providing comments, recommendations or suggestions to their business (Roy *et al.*, 2018:301).

Regardless of how consumers purchase items and services, brands will significantly influence consumers' shopping decisions. Therefore, consumers are not choosing one brand over another because of advertising, marketing, persuasion, or branding, which signifies that these elements of brands are not the only influencing factors that cause a consumer to select one brand over another. Since traditional brand-building tools serve the role of customer experience, these elements are intended to create and drive consumer interest, contributing to the journey of customer experience (Klaus, 2020:7).

While a consumer interacts with a brand, they assess their direct and indirect experience with a brand. Therefore, the management of brands should not be managed traditionally, as traditional marketing elements are becoming less influential for a consumers decision-making process and purchase behaviour. A consumer's customer experience is another contributing factor a company should consider to drive a consumer's brand perception (Klaus, 2020:7). Customer experience is why a brand is perceived as positive or negative, as a consumer evaluate brands according to how their expectations and experience were delivered.

2.3.5 Merchandising / Visibility

To be successful in today's connected internet world, merchants must clearly express their identities to customers across different platforms. Consumer-brand relationships are more likely to result in improved customer engagement, increased brand loyalty, and increased readiness to pay if the retailer's brand identity is similar to the consumer's identity. Even though retailers must align their brand identity with their customers' identities, they must also accept that both identities may change over time. Consumer experiences across touchpoints must be identified, crafted, and integrated in a way that connects with consumers if the retailer is to keep the identities congruent.

Engagement strategies should support the brand rather than harm the brand. Although not all positive or innovative marketing strategies are ideal, the wrong marketing communication from a brand can cause more harm, especially if the key message is not

communicated to a potential loyal customer target group when engaging with the brand (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017: 332).

The perceived symbolic value of an online shopping website (sign), interest in a website (cognitive), and pleasure a person expects from purchase can influence brand engagement. Sign and pleasure are the following most effective motivators for keeping a consumer engaged: interest and desire. This favourable association may be a result of consumer involvement with the brand provides expected values like interest, sign, or pleasure for customers from that product or service category (Parihar *et al.*, 2019: 74).

Roggeveen *et al.* (2021:81) identified in their research that the relevance of retailer-consumer identity congruence matches the identity of the retail brand with the identity of the customers. Therefore, brand-consumer interactions can be strengthened by using identity congruence to build more robust engagement, brand loyalty, and a greater desire to pay for products.

Innovative merchandising tactics and innovative product offerings help create a distinct retail brand identity and make that identity more easily communicated to customers. According to Venkatesan (2017:293), integrating several insights and research streams such as customer relationship management (CRM), customer experiences, social media, and customer orientated organisations are powerful fundamentals to develop an executable framework for these strategies. Customer brand engagement has become more than just marketing; companies focus on broadcasting visibility activities to improve brand engagement (Faiz *et al.*, 2017:53).

Customers' attitudes towards outdoor marketing like billboards and posters as a customer engagement platform had a positive and significant impact. Once organisations adopt social media platforms to implement marketing and engagement activities, it is relevant to maintain engagement and communication as a consistent practice.

Roggeveen *et al.* (2021) identified five new merchandising concepts to help retailers better interact with customers by creating themes, reflecting the brand story, being playful, signalling exclusivity, and virtual merchandising. In addition, a consumer is more likely to identify with the retail brand if the retailer is using social and technology tools to enhance the retailer's identity.

2.4 BRAND LOYALTY

2.4.1 Introduction

It has turned into a crucial indicator of the relationship between customer and brand support in determining the sense of consumer engagement. When it comes to brand loyalty, the importance of engaging with customers and building quality customer-brand connections cannot be understated (So *et al.*, 2016:189).

2.4.2 Theory of brand loyalty

Alwi *et al.* (2017:404) proposed in their research that an innovative approach for a brand differentiates itself by incorporating corporate social responsibility features and the perceived price, products, and services of the organisation. Furthermore, customers' brand loyalty is influenced by a company's reputation, as demonstrated by these writers in yet another conceptual framework that was previously undiscovered.

In an ideal situation, consumer involvement should be based on a collaborative connection with the brand and a loyalty link, rather than simply on the customer's brand choice. Once a company can concentrate on and implement more robust engagement tactics that aim to increase not only customer support but also brand loyalty, the organisation will be in a better position to succeed (Parihar *et al.* 2019:6)

To build stronger customer loyalty and retention, companies are looking into ways their customers can support and participate with their brands. Studies on CBE theory have recently been published in the literature, leading to today's limited grasp of the idea due to practitioners' growing interest and curiosity (Hollebeek, 2011:557).

Ownership-value may be described as the degree to which buyers are engaged with a brand or product after they have purchased it. Customers' brand ownership and cultural value orientation drive and limit brand value co-creation (Gong, 2018:294).

Relationship building value is concerned with the customer's experience due to the company's efforts on a social media brand page to provide and create an ongoing relationship and benefit (Carlson *et al.*, 2019:154). Further studies should look into how brand ownership affects the various CEBs displayed on social media platforms after making a purchase.

Consumer behavioural loyalty assessments provide deeper insight into the various reasons for which a consumer exhibits behavioural loyalty than traditional loyalty metrics. Thus, a customer's decision may be influenced by functional characteristics, quality characteristics, or simply by price. Therefore, attitudinal loyalty measures can equip brand managers to understand better why and why customers acquire their brands and those of their competitors and the strengths and weaknesses of their brands compared to their competitors (Bandyopadhyay & Martell, 2007:43).

According to Khamitov *et al.* (2019:450), customer brand loyalty is influenced by relationships with brands. The analysis of five main brand relationship components using aggregate brand relationship elasticity reveals that customer brand loyalty is more strongly linked to love-based and attachment-based brand relationships. Therefore, assets connected to a company's brand are significant value generators. CBRs are already impacting downstream loyalty, and it is expected that this impact will continue to grow in the future. In addition, the above-mentioned indicates a managerial necessity, given a strong time effect, suggesting an increasing relative significance of CBRs as a strategic asset.

Khamitov *et al.* (2019:450) verify the usefulness of brand connections in increasing customer brand loyalty and implies that, on average, a 1% increase in brand relationship strength is related to a 44% rise in customer brand loyalty. This link's strength may be enhanced in specific circumstances, especially with various engagement strategies that drive the consumer's brand relationship.

Khamitov *et al.* (2019:450) discovered that non-status versus status brands and privately versus publicly consumed brands played an essential role in moderating the relationship between status and private consumption patterns. In conclusion, marketers should expect a stronger correlation between brand relationships and customer brand loyalty when dealing with low-status companies or brands widely consumed by the public.

Customers of premium or luxury brands may have to invest more in CBRs, or they may be better off investing in other types of marketing to get equivalent results from customer loyalty. However, brands consumed in public appear to be in a better position (Khamitov *et al.*, 2019:450).

Research implies that more hedonic and experiential brands are positively linked to consumer brand loyalty (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). In addition, the results demonstrate a significant amount of comparable loyalty exhibited in the context of customers' interactions with functional brands (Khamitov *et al.*, 2019:451).

In order to cultivate meaningful customer engagement, brands must be able to tap into the emotions of their customers to tailor their experiences. Technology that makes this possible at scale is fundamental for understanding and responding to those emotions.

Authors Kumar and Reinartz (2018) have developed the conceptuality of different engagement strategies. They found that customer behaviour can indicate their current interest and response to a brand or service.

Customers' individualisation can generate a database based on the best customer engagement practices in the business environment. It is essential to consider individual consumer behaviours towards a strategy and their preference in lifestyle factors, rather than to generalise customers according to social and demographic information (Kumar & Reinartz, 2018).

2.5 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND BRAND LOYALTY

Customer brand engagement (CBE) is becoming more widely discussed in the marketing discipline; corporations emphasise broadcasting activities to increase CBE (Faiz *et al.*, 2017:53). A positive and significant influence was observed in customers' views toward outdoor marketing, such as billboards and posters as an engagement platform for their business.

Grewal *et al.* (2017:62) outlined the various levels of customer engagement that a retailer with conscious foundations may achieve by delivering outstanding customer experience, creating an emotional connection with customers through shared purpose and values, and creating a shared identity towards the brand or organisations conscious foundations.

According to Klaus (2020:7), consumers will have to adjust their judgments of a company's customer experience by relying on interactions with the brand or what other customers experience brand engagement.

Organisations should consider the expectations of their customers when implementing integrated marketing communication strategies. This notion can effectively communicate suitable critical messages to consumers, allowing them to develop a preference for a particular brand of their choosing. Thus, an organisation's ability to maintain customer relationships and create value for its organisation or brand is aided by integrating marketing communication (Mihaela, 2015).

Incorporating customer-specific brand advantages or discounts into a receipt for exceptional service is one option. Since customer relationship management views customer brand exchange from a succession of accumulated perceived brand benefits, rather than being restricted to a single brand contact, customer brand exchange may occur (Hollebeek, 2011:557).

According to Simon *et al.* (2016:417), "internal personal dynamics mainly affect consumers' brand community involvement." In contrast, Kabadayi and Price (2014:217) indicate that other qualities of participation influence CEB; for example, personality factors can influence individuals' method of interaction, which determines whether they like and may comment upon a post on a brand's Facebook page. Furthermore, according to Harrigan *et al.* (2017:605), involvement in social media platforms precedes CEB. Companies should leverage social media using also other Omni-channels to inspire a connection with their brand and the organisation to engage customers successfully. The degree to which a person feels linked to a brand or product and their loyalty toward it can be included (Blythe, 2013).

Leek *et al.* (2019:127) suggest that the language used in communications interacts with company type to influence behavioural engagement regarding likes, tweets, and comments.

As more and more brand communities are created and developed, many businesses migrate their engagement to the consumer via various online platforms. Therefore, a more comprehensive examination of online brand communities is required to consider technological advances and shifts in those communities' demographics. In addition, it is essential to recognise, identify, or speculate which engagement components play a role in online brand communities or individual consumers (Baldus *et al.*, 2015:984).

According to Pereira *et al.* (2021:566), the customer's level of knowledge is of significant relevance to the customer relationship and customer loyalty.

Through social media branding campaigns, consumers who are aware and informed will be more loyal to the brand they prefer and value. Therefore, the companies should not exclusively focus on detailed and informative advertisements but should also combine engagement. Today companies should accept and embrace social media platforms being considered as the most valuable brand management tool, and it provides engagement, interactivity, and open discussion with the target audience (Ahmed *et al.* 2019:210). Customers' attitudes and perspectives towards digital marketing or social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, positively affect CBE (Faiz *et al.*, 2017:54).

Online social networks and word-of-mouth (WOM) influence preferences and purchase decisions for over 80% of worldwide customers beyond geodemographic barriers; therefore, social media such as blogs, forums, and user networks have become increasingly important to marketers (Kumar *et al.*, 2013:194). In addition, unacquainted consumers, particularly those with positive brand perceptions, may be an important target market for brand managers looking to attract new customers (Bandyopadhyay & Martell, 2007:42).

Customers are essential for profit growth in the marketing area, which is one of the fundamental objectives of businesses. However, the traditional approach of simply satisfying clients by providing the correct product or service falls short because many items and services are the same, followed by intense competition between brands (Kumar & Pansari, 2016:498). As a result, a business should engage with customers other than just product purchases, such as promoting recommendations, requesting feedback toward products or services, followed by social media engagement (Kumar *et al.*, 2013:209).

According to Kumar and Pansari (2016), if a customer has an overall favourable experience with a brand, the consumer is more likely to make additional purchases, engage with the company more frequently to provide feedback and referrals, and spread the company's message on social media.

Although consumers may talk about the product for various reasons, current research reveals that self-identification is the most critical factor to consider (Acharya, 2021:41).

Therefore, for a consumer to engage or purchase a brand, a contributing factor is that the consumer can relate and identify the need for the brand.

In context, a brand on its own may influence a consumer to support, yet considering how a consumer experiences a brand can drive brand loyalty for future purchase and recommendation (WOM).

A tremendous amount of capital is invested in celebrity endorsement arrangements each year to connect a company's brands with famous professionals. Marketers nowadays have the challenge of capturing customers' attention in a crowded media environment. One way to accomplish this is to utilise celebrities or public figures since these individuals may become a household name, draw attention to a brand, and influence the brand support through their reach (Wong *et al.*, 2015:313).

According to Wong *et al.* (2015:320), the authors' research suggests three fundamental foundations that influence good word of mouth: a positive role model influence, brand loyalty, and the overall positive influence construct. In addition, the psychological process of internalisation in which attitudes are adopted as a result of a specific event may be illustrated by referencing an influence on persons who have an endorsing role.

In a business context, co-creation starts with input from customers and ends with customers having input into the final product or service design. A high level of brand self-connection supports brand co-creation engagement. Brand support contends that individuals who feel more connected to the brand recognise it as part of their identity, creating more brand participation and engagement. Furthermore, it is more likely that a consumer's eagerness to participate in brand co-creation will increase because of the reward that the brand offers in recognition and an award, increasing brand purchase intention and brand citizenship behavioural intention (Hsieh & Chang, 2016:22). Thus, perceived competency is positively linked to brand co-creation engagement.

Hsieh and Chang (2015:22) revealed that brand co-creation activities enable the relatedness among co-creation team members, such as those involving brand creation co-creators, effectively facilitating brand co-creation engagement, enhancing brand-creation buying intentions. Furthermore, in a world where consumers can be involved in co-creation, they are encouraged to trust social advantages such as belongingness.

Furthermore, the interaction between consumers in co-creation may alter their affective states, affecting their brand attitudes. Brand co-creation engagement is an emotional state created in co-creation (Hsieh & Chang, 2016:22). The results suggest that the combined sense of competence and relatedness in co-creation activities greatly influences customer engagement.

The findings mentioned above add value to the discussion that brands should implement initiatives to influence the features of tasks in co-creation activities to deliver similar experiences. Thus, concluding that task design features have a significant role in encouraging brand co-creation participation.

It is essential to mention that brand interactions and engagement can influence client brand loyalty differently depending on the type of focus brand (Khamitov *et al.*, 2019:450).

2.6 CONCLUSIONS

As a result, consumer interaction can help create an emotional bond between a company and its customers. Therefore, it is logical to assume that a highly engaged consumer will spend more money, spread the word about the business, and be more loyal to it. The customer's experience can be more important than the engagement for a company's employees and partners. Consequently, customer engagement strategies must be designed in such a way that they make customers feel valued and that they can link customer engagement to a need for the product.

As soon as an organisation begins to use social media platforms to undertake marketing and engagement initiatives, it is critical to keep engagement and communication as a continuous practice going forward.

One of the most important factors to consider while developing competitive intelligence in the corporate environment is distinguishing a brand or business from the competition. In addition, a well-executed strategy enables a company to provide a consistent customer experience which aids in market differentiation while also attracting more customers, resulting in increased customer loyalty.

The use of social media has established the strengthening of emotional links with customers and brand communities through recreational and entertaining content. Ultimately, social media is supposed to serve as an additional touchpoint with the brand.

However, instead, social media execution should be considered an integrated marketing communication strategy, enabling the entire customer experience and journey circle. Hence to keep the customer journey process going on social media, the strategy of consumer interaction or complementary engagement channels should be considered.

With its fundamental nature and dynamic data monitoring approach as given, social media enables brands to reshape their customer engagement dashboards where indicators such as several mentions (eWOM) can be executed.

Indicators are weighted concerning the company's position (brand, advertising agency, and consultants). As a result, social media engagement indicators like the "like, view, share, and comment" quartet do not show the same level of engagement with a consumer as a traditional engagement indicator.

Consumers' value is not limited to purchases but also includes referrals and sharing. To determine the future worth of a client, firms might use engagement indicators. Second, before creating an online community, businesses may want to determine how customers perceive the brand image, whether strong symbolism or weak. Third, corporations may regulate and control community information's sorts and interaction styles by specifying information creation and transmission characteristics and particular website functionalities before publication. Finally, businesses may also determine the worth of online brand communities based on their symbols, making the online brand community more profitable.

As a result, social networks are a collection of social links that allow network members to access the knowledge and resources of other network users. Therefore, social linkages should be investigated more as a situational variable in the formation of CEB in social media platforms in the future.

When it comes to CEB, engagement refers to how much significance, attractiveness, and value a brand projects to its target audience. Research has yet to clarify whether or how participation alters qualitatively various CEBs like consumption, contribution, or production; nevertheless, it is likely that each condition demonstrates a more incredible feeling of engagement.

Market research aims to investigate customer insights, perceptions or thinking, followed by data collection to support and examine a new initiative that can contribute to the organisation's engagement strategy for consumers with brands.

The customer is not inevitably someone who has purchased a product from a brand, yet the customer has actively engaged with the brand in some manner. Therefore, by developing and following metrics linked with customer engagement, a more accurate prediction of future buying behaviour followed by a clear understanding of which customers are the business or brand strongest advocates, and identifying which customers are more at risk of disengagement.

2.7 SUMMARY

When a brand wants to build or create a customer engagement strategy, consumer market research needs to be done to identify and understand the target group of customers. Then, marketing elements can be applied to track a customer's engagement interaction with the brand; therefore, an organisation's brand will understand the complete customer experience by establishing a solid cross-channel marketing strategy.

The first interaction of a customer with a brand or the first engagement may be initiated through WOM. However, digital marketing tools are accessible and readily available to allow a business to track a customer's entire digital footprint.

The first initial step towards engaging with a brand is the need or the curiosity to explore the product or brand. Enabling a customer to engage starts with the customer reach (access channels), driven by the initial act to buy the product, establishing an experience for the customer to convert to support the brand with continuous engagement strategies to retain the customer.

It is essential to track customers touchpoints; this will enable the business to segment its customers according to their experience, driving more personalised paths that will improve the customers experience through the leverage of communication preferences and past interactions with the business brand.

Customers are unique, their needs are different, and they may also prefer different ways of engagement. Therefore, implementing a one-size-fits-all engagement strategy can limit future engagement or retainment of current customers. Instead, a business needs to

understand their customer's needs for their brand or product and how customers want to interact or engage with them.

Customers' interactions with the brand's choices, responses to advertising efforts, level of participation in marketing communications efforts, and involvement in word-of-mouth (WOM) advertising on social media channels are examples of customer experiences that can be used to identify customer engagement. Brands that engage with their consumers can also give an organisation informative insight towards innovation and brand development.

Pursuing unique marketing touchpoints can help a brand measure its customer relationship, supporting factors such as business customer retention, customer loyalty, and customer lifetime value.

Brands need to establish an engaging relationship with their customers. There are countless ways to communicate with clients in today's digital world, whether in person at an event, social media, email marketing, or via the website. However, connecting with customers and developing long-term relationships, social media channels initiate a platform of possibilities.

Deliver excellence while maintaining integrity during the customer experience. Keeping a transparent and honest relationship with consumers is essential, primarily when consumers can communicate their recommendations, feedback and experiences with the brand. By listening and encouraging customer input, the business brand encourages customers to feel engaged and gives them a voice in the brand.

Prioritise the value of maintaining a consistent brand image. Keep the brand consistent so that consumers can always identify it. Improve the business or brand site, representation, communication channels, and brand experience by communicating and keeping devoted brand supporters informed. It is critical to be committed to a business brand over the long term, primarily when it seeks to be successful through evolving.

Consumers can instantly provide helpful feedback by precisely communicating what they want, enabling the business to adapt their strategy to empower the brands to meet those requirements and desires with more accuracy.

CHAPTER 3 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters reviewed the relevant literature on CES and brand loyalty. Thus, the literature created a comprehensive understanding of the variables and highlighted possible theoretical linkages in different contexts. This chapter aims to provide an in-depth description of the research approach, design, and methods used in the study. Detailed explanations of the research methodology and results are provided in this chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The notion of customer engagement and loyalty towards brands has been practised in numerous business sectors with great success, which has helped retain current customers and attract new customers in various business domains.

Although many researchers investigated the context of customer engagement strategies and brand loyalty, this research will specifically determine which strategy is the most effective towards consumers. The research will focus on customer insights when assessing the various customer engagement strategies. Determinants look into what aspects keep a consumer engaged before doing required shopping at a retail store and what influences their experience during their shopping experience. For example, would marketing and sales planning contribute to the engagement process of a consumer experience in-store, and how do brand communities influence a consumer's decision-making process.

3.2.1 Literature study on research methodology

Investigating customer engagement strategies or previous literature frameworks and reviews will help conclude consensus feedback on how a company can implement or improve engagement to target age groups and what will be relevant for the prospective customer they want to target (Morgan *et al.* 2019:4).

A crucial corporate marketing strategy that has evolved significantly is consumer word-of-mouth communication (Pan, 2020:66). Pan (2020:66-67) also identified the importance of brand communities, especially in the era of social media platforms. Companies aspire to strengthen their communication with customers by building brand communities. These

brand communities, in return, helps to support active consumer participation and the sharing of valuable insights or information.

Companies have tried to leverage both online brand communities' social and communicative nature to increase word-of-mouth communication. However, the extent of word-of-mouth marketing by establishing an online brand community can benefit brand engagement.

A brand community is a specialised, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. When it comes to a word-of-mouth marketing strategy for a brand community, consumer interaction and sharing of information and experiences are significant issues for companies to consider. Companies should therefore improve their customer understanding of engagement through the platform of an online brand community. This will strongly contribute to a meaningful customer engagement strategy that will advance consumer sharing and word-of-mouth communication in the online brand community (Pan, 2020:67). The consumer's level of knowledge implies that they recognise the brand and understands its values. Customer intimacy is the only way to build brand knowledge, not exposures alone, as is the case with awareness (Pereira *et al.*, 2021:56)

The unit of analysis would be in the public domain, preferable customers who use a social media platform such as Instagram. No specific geographic location will be allocated. The challenge would be to outline a database for participants on Instagram that will be willing to participate and consent to this research.

Onward, the questionnaire should include age identification, and once participation is concluded in the survey, age participation would be transparent. This can also give data to who are more easily accessible on a social media platform regarding generation X participants (Priporas *et al.*, 2017:374).

The questionnaire should enable the participant to agree or disagree with the questions in the survey freely. The questionnaire's answers will be expressed so that the participant cannot ponder it; it should be honest and answered without a doubt. The ideal medium would be a questionnaire formulated within the customer engagement strategy framework, allocating five questions per strategy with the sixth question that measures brand loyalty directly. The questions should give an evident acumen with no grey areas.

Accomplish the most general preference from customers in these strategies. For example, this research aims to create a conceptual model depicting the connections among customer engagement strategies value, trust, marketing, and social media, sales and promotion, loyalty, customer experience, and word-of-mouth. Furthermore, the research aims to evaluate and measure a direct or indirect relationship between these factors.

The literature review identifies and highlights the most significant conclusions, findings, and judgments discussed by previous researchers on the relevant topic (Welman *et al.*, 2011:250).

These sources used in the literature review should be reliable and credible. The sources or references that were included yet were not limited to the following:

- Accredited academic journals with relevant articles
- Reference material, textbooks, and dictionaries
- Scientific databases such as EBSCOhost, JSTOR, and Science Direct
- Statistic, analytic and database websites
- Social media insight platforms such as Instagram

The following literature review will investigate previous research findings related to customer engagement strategies such as brand reputation, social media, word-of-mouth, brand community, customer experience, and merchandising / visibility. Thus to evaluate how the strategies mentioned above may influence a consumer's brand loyalty and support.

Regarding quantitative research, primary data are required. The study will be cross-sectional as this examination will observe the outcome of the survey and analyse the data of the selected sample population. The objective of the cross-sectional study would be to use various groups or individuals with a variable background of interest towards intended customer engagement strategies executed.

The investigation of the title would be conducted as a quantitative research approach. The research was executed in a survey format to a sample group of customers. According to various theories implemented for customer engagement, customer

engagement platforms issued by Harmeling *et al.* (2016:320-321) are experimental research designs to consider.

Various research elements on customer engagement strategies will be investigated following the antecedents of brand loyalty. Analysing the feedback from consumers will give insight into how a particular engagement strategy can influence a consumer's choice of selection, support, or loyalty to the brand.

Targeting a larger audience will provide more insight, feedback, and results; therefore, this study can reach a larger audience without geographic participation. The questionnaire will accumulate consumer feedback and views, which can then be measured to customer engagement strategies. Once results have been processed, a conclusion can be drawn to determine which strategies are essential for brand loyalty. A conceptual framework model will be formulated from Figure 2.1 in the literature review.

The feedback of these participants will assist in determining if these customer engagement strategies from previous research will support brand or business growth. In addition, these results can also conclude the general view of what brands should implement in their engagement strategies to ensure that these strategies firstly target their desired audience, secondly deliver the preferred key message and finally contribute to future brand loyalty.

Additionally, the research may also investigate the expectations of each age group regarding business and brand engagement. These strategies towards age groups can differ depending on what business is investigated and how their strategies to communicate with consumers will influence their future support for a brand. Therefore, further research can be done to establish a more detailed study regarding generations' views.

The data collection will not include gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic background as this research only focuses on the engagement strategies that influence an individual's choice of brand and support. Therefore, the focus should not be on the background of individuals but rather on participants' needs and judgments when choosing a brand.

Thus, exploring a consumer preference for engagement and how it influences their choice towards selecting a brand. The questionnaire aims to identify and recognise the CES that

enables the consumer to support a brand. The journey of engagement adds value to their decision-making process to support the brand.

A clear understanding of what a consumer wants and expects from a brand can directly influence a business's strategy, contributing to intensifying the customer interest that will enable brand love and brand loyalty from consumers. It is important to question what influences the individual to select a particular product. Thus, does the business meet the requirements towards a specific brand, business, or service they use or want to use? Report and catalogue if past engagement strategies were helpful regarding how consumers are influenced to become brand loyal.

3.2.2 Study population

The study population will be participants who are mainly active on social media platforms such as Instagram. The researcher has two social media accounts, namely the personal; account (Dorothy Grace Flint) and a second social media account called Patron & Niche. Thus, to separate the research from family and close personal friends, Patron & Niche's social media account started the snowball sampling for this study. Participants were recruited by using electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This was through invitations to participate, supported by other successful influencers on the social media domain. Targeting participants on social media was more accessible and responsive platform to engage with different individuals in South Africa. Ideally, it would give a broader perception to understanding a larger volume of participants regarding how they perceive brands and their engagement.

3.2.3 Sample

No sample will be drawn. Thus, all the members belonging to the population using Patron & Niche (as the first snowball) will receive the invitation to participate. This population was invited to partake on these platforms and then requested to share the invitation to partake in the research project with their friends, and they will then share the invitation with their friends, and so on. It is therefore not possible to determine the population or sample size. Data were collected until suitable numbers are reached (as determined by the Kaiser, Meyer and Olkin test of sample adequacy).

3.2.4 Research design

The study is a quantitative study and collects data via a self-administered questionnaire. See Appendix 1 (Self-developed questionnaire) with insight and questions aligned with customer engagement strategies. An electronic platform like GoogleForms is used to collect the data. The questionnaire's answers will be on a scale between 1 to 5, where 1 suggests "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree" to the specific question asked.

3.2.5 Data collection

The social media platform Instagram was used to snowball the invitation to participate in the survey. The following steps clarifies the data collection process:

Step 1: An invitation to take part in the survey was placed on the social media platform i.e., Instagram.

Step 2: This invitation was also requesting the respondents to share the invitation with their friends, and their friends and so on – thus snowballing the reach of the questionnaire

Step 3: On receipt, the respondent will be requested to complete the questionnaire – the first page of the questionnaire contains the Letter of Consent (Appendix 2)

Step 4: After the respondent ticks the box where consent is given, the questionnaire will open. If the consent is not given, the respondent will be reminded that consent is required. If still not given, thanked and not receive the questionnaire

Step 5: On completing the questionnaire, the data will automatically be captured and saved in the dataset. It is impossible to isolate any one respondent or identify a specific respondent's data from the dataset

Step 6: Dataset will be provided electronically to the statistical consultation services at the NWU for analysis.

Step 7: Researched received the results from statistical services, interprets and writes the report

Please note that the responses are anonymous, and neither the data, identity, or contact details were identified from the electronic database. The researcher, therefore, has no idea who responded to the questionnaire, even though Instagram where participants were invited to partake in the survey.

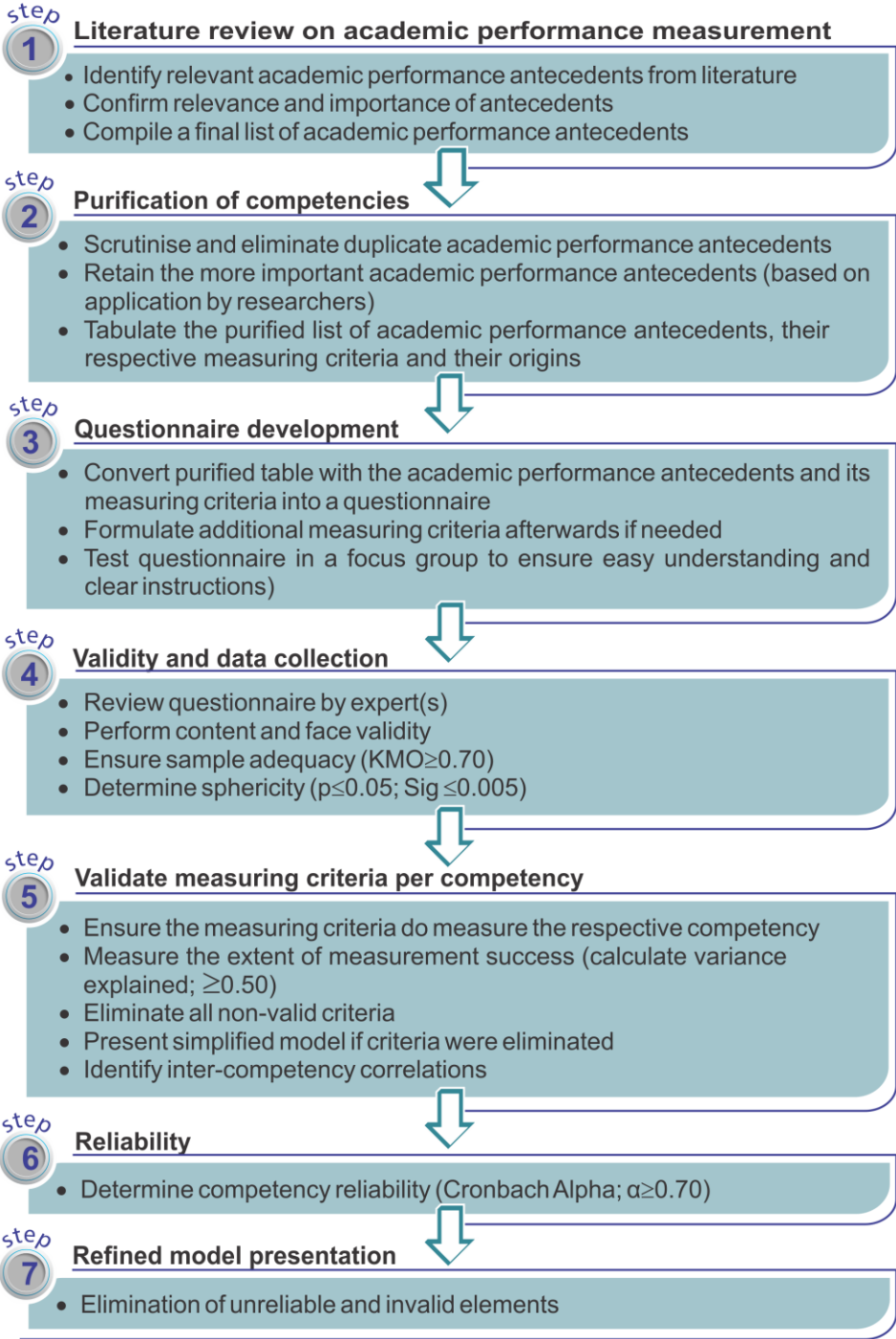


Figure 3.1: Methodology to develop and validate a model to measure brand loyalty

Source: Adapted from Asvat (2018:50)

3.3 RESULTS

3.3.1 Descriptive results

The following results were made available by GoogleForms, the electronic platform used to collect data from the participants. The frequency distribution figures are presented below.

3.3.1.1 The consumer

The figure below confirms that the participants gave consent to participate in the research. Thus, all 135 respondents can be used for data analysis.

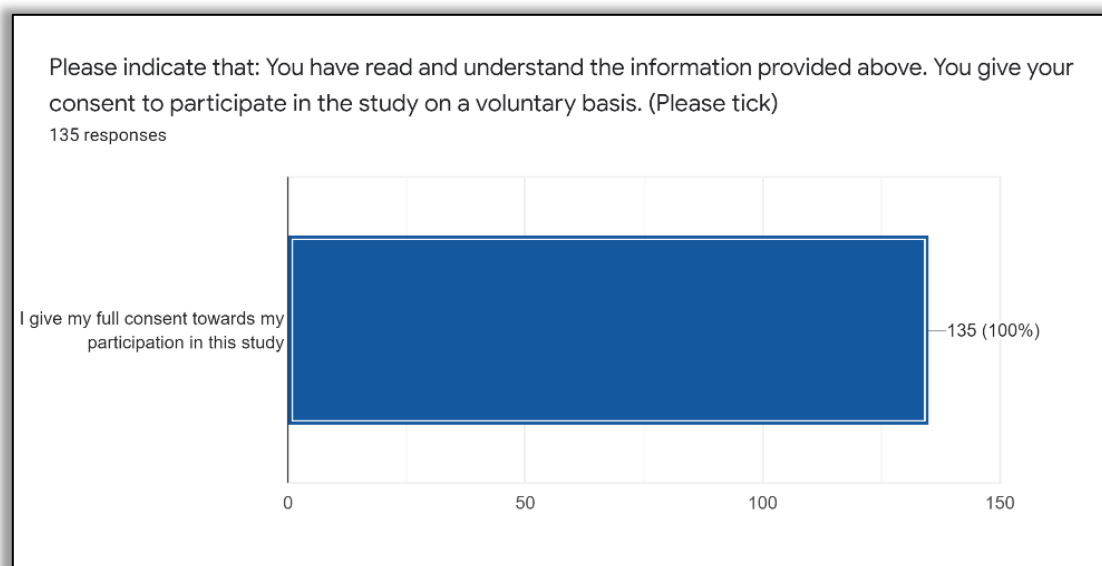


Figure 3.2: Participant consent

Figure 3.2 illustrates that 71.9% of participants first read the reviews of a new product that was launched. Thus, consumers find a way through word-of-mouth or a brand community to make an informed discussion before purchasing the product and listening to what other consumers share on review platforms.

Encouraging customers to review their product experience can be a communication channel to communicate how they experience your brand. This can help a brand to improve shortcomings by listening to what the consumers share. If consumers leave a positive review, other consumers will buy or try the product because of the review.

Positive reviews can drive the brand community and also contribute to the overall customer experience, expectations, and brand reputation (see Figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3: Consumer Reviews

The results in Figure 3.4 demonstrates that a brand's social media page (SMP) the most preferred method of brand communications. This is followed by email, SMS and telephonic communication methods.

Creating informative brand content on an SMP allows your brand community to understand your brand. Thus, when buying the brand online or instore an SMP, a consumer can make an informed decision to support your brand.

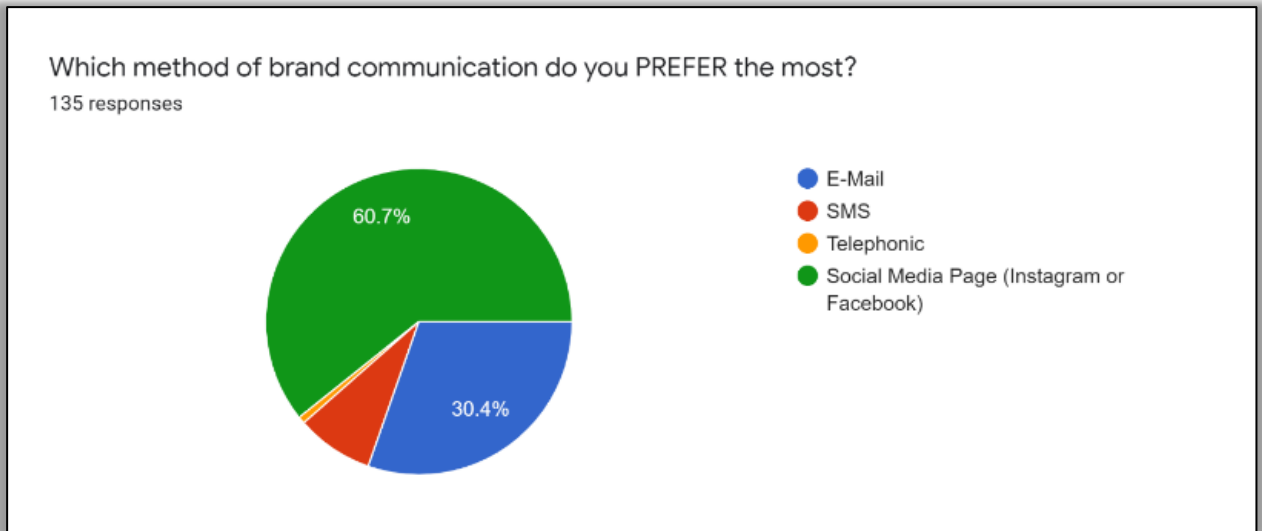


Figure 3.4: Most preferred method of brand communication

Figure 3.5 supports the reverse outcome of Figure 3.4, by illustrating that the most disliked method of communication is Telephonic communication. Participants would rather prefer email, SMS or an SMP than receiving communication via a telephonic conversation.

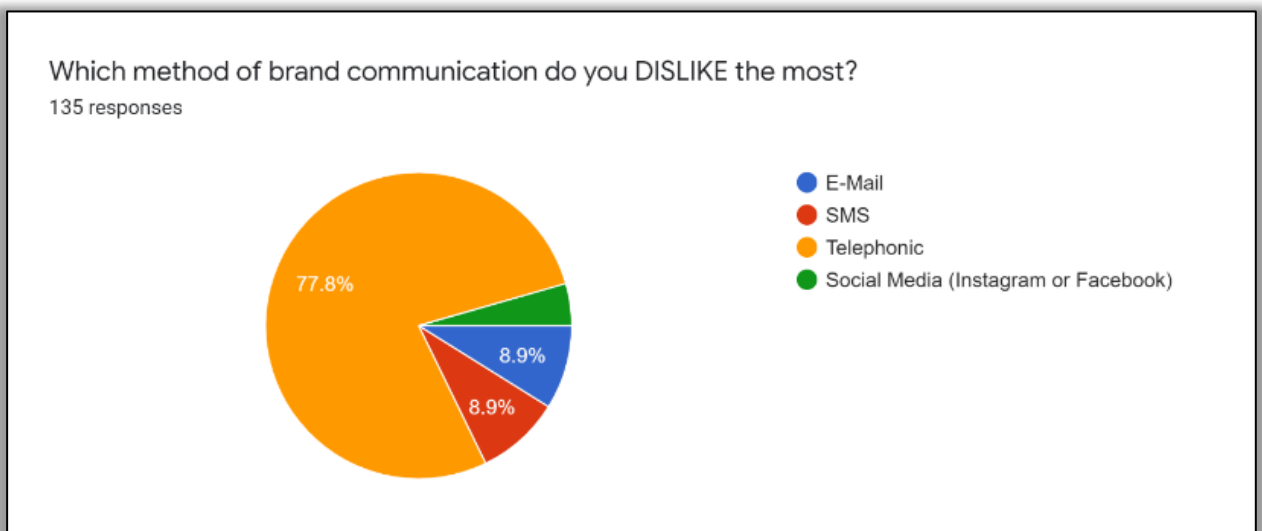


Figure 3.5: Most dislike method of brand communication

The results in Figure 3.6 represent a more even spread between other communication methods. An SMP can be seen as a more relevant method of communication as only 4.4% of respondents disagree. Telephonic and SMS has an even distribution of 35.6%,

thus collectively representing 71.2% of the most irrelevant method of communication followed by email communication with only 22.2%.

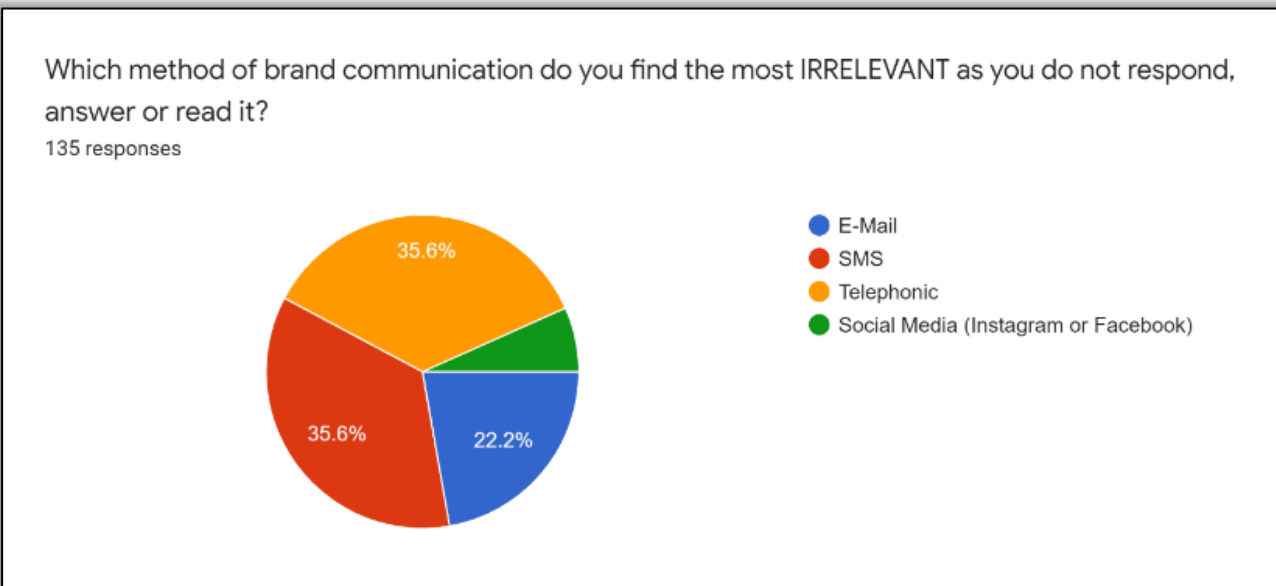


Figure 3.6: Most irrelevant method of brand communication

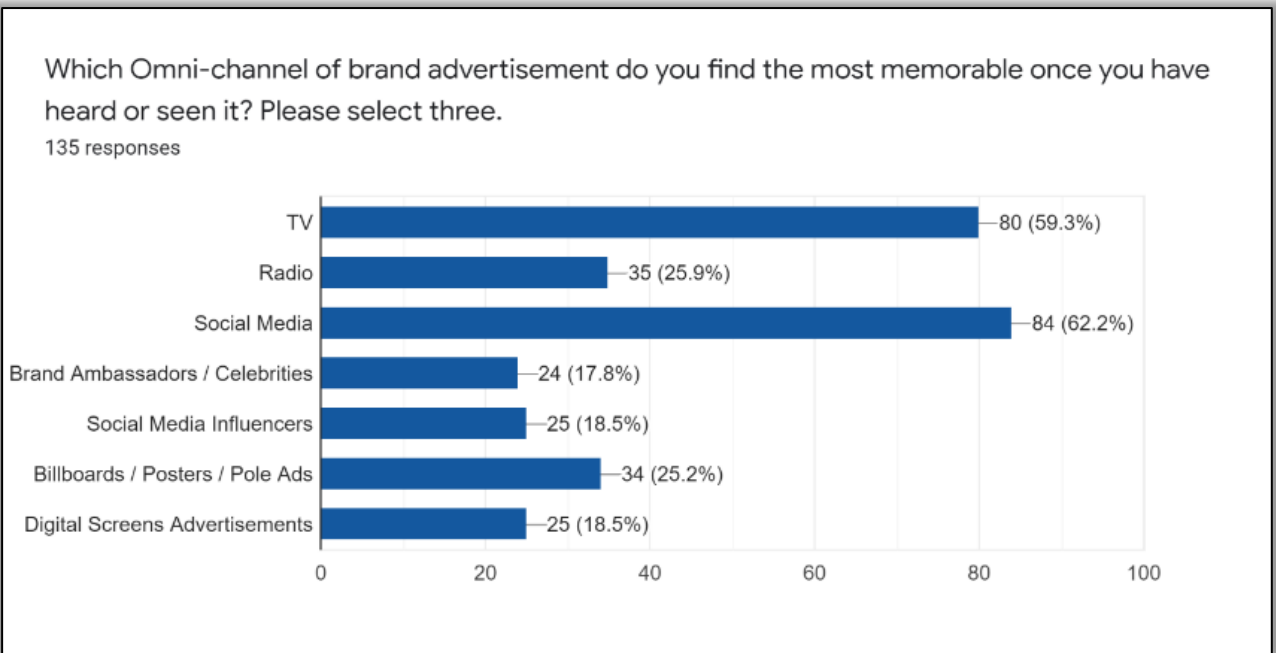


Figure 3.7: Most memorable omni-channel of brand advertisement

Figure 3.7 represents various omni-channels where consumers find brand advertisements memorable once they have seen them on these different platforms or channels of communication.

The most memorable channel is social media, with a 62.2% correspondence from participants.

Table 3.1 below represents the various omni-channels under “Social Media Advertisement” and “Traditional Advertisement”. The table includes Social Media, Brand Ambassadors/ Celebrities, and Social Media Influencers as on collective method.

Table 3.1: Modern advertisement vs Traditional advertisement

Modern Advertisement			Traditional Advertisement		
Total	133	43.32%	Total	174	56.68%
Social Media	84	62.2%	TV	80	59.3%
Brand Ambassadors or Celebrities	24	17.6%	Radio	35	25.9%
Social Media Influencers	25	18.5%	Billboards / Posters / Pole Advertisements	34	25.2%
			Digital Screens Advertisements	25	18.5%

Table 3.1 illustrates that “Traditional advertisement” omni-channels contributes to 56.68% of memorable brand communication, where “Modern advertisement” on its own contributes to 43.32%. Therefore, both of these channels collectively can be significant for brand advertisement and engagement. “Modern advertisement” shows that a brand should use social media omni-channels to communicate to consumers.

Table 3. 2: Brand communication method

Prefer		Dislike		Irrelevant	
Social Media	60.7%	Telephonic	77.8%	Telephonic	35.6%
Email	30.4	SMS	8.9%	SMS	35.6%
SMS	8.1%	Email	8.9%	Email	22.2
Telephonic	0.7%	Social Media	4.4	Social Media	6.7%

3.3.1.2 *Antecedent 1 – Brand reputation*

The following graphs will demonstrate the results found to how the participants responded towards brand reputation.

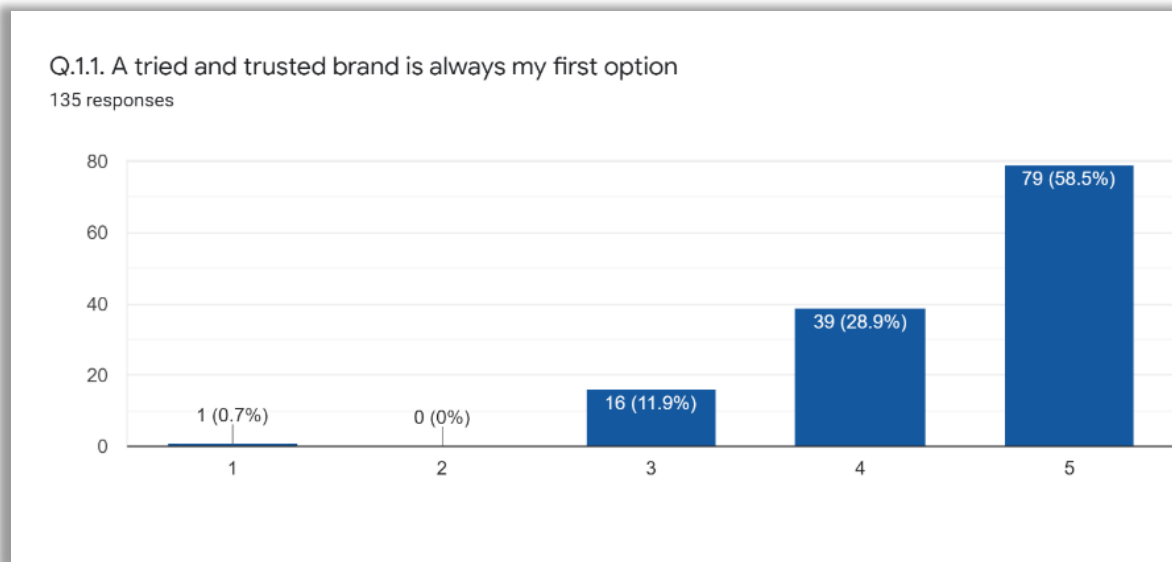


Figure 3. 8: Tried and trusted brand

Most participants strongly agree that their first option when choosing a brand is a tried and trusted brand in Figure 3.8.

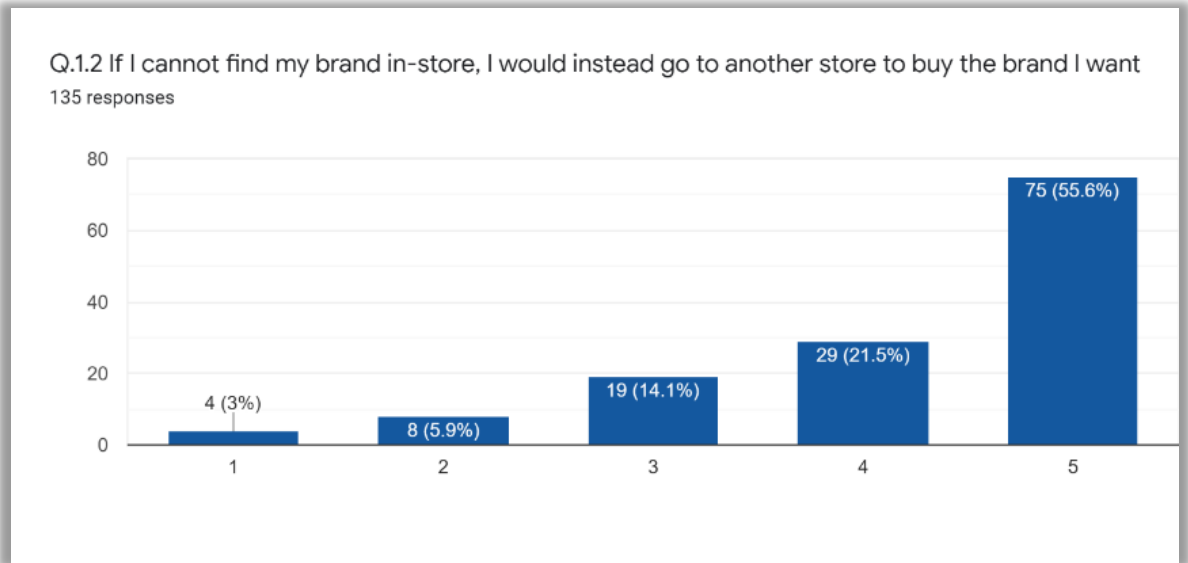


Figure 3.9: Wherever I can find my brand, I will buy it.

Supporting Figure 3.9, the above consensus of participants, consumers choose to go to another store instead if they could not find their preferred brand instore.

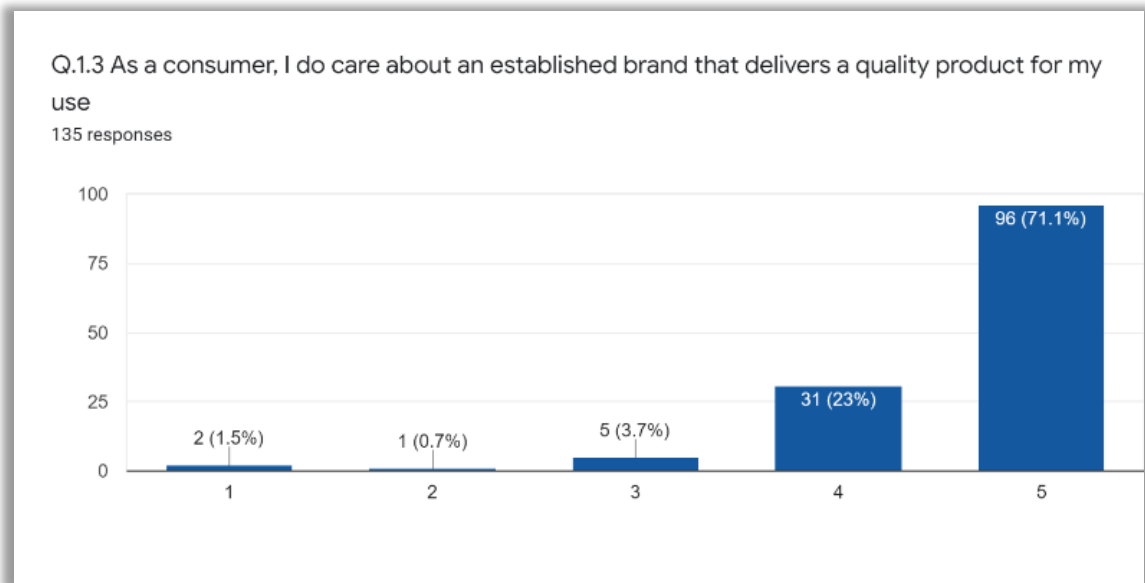


Figure 3. 10: I value a trusted brand that delivers a quality product

Thus, Figure 3.10 shows that most consumers care about an established brand that delivers a quality product for their use.

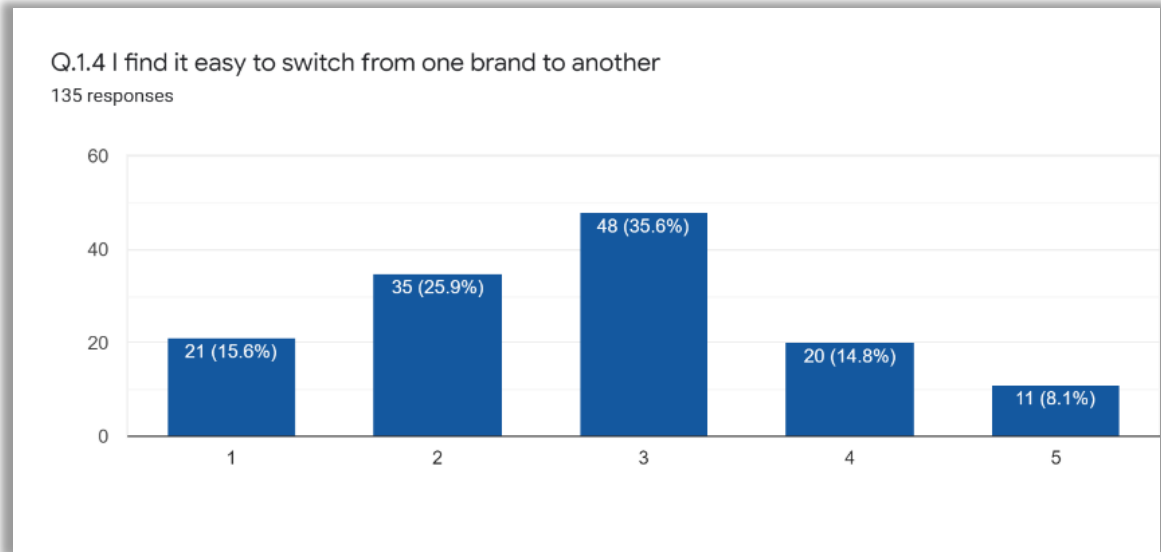


Figure 3.11: I easily switch brands

In Figure 3.11, consumers disagree or are unsure whether they would switch from one brand to another. Therefore, the figure mentioned above shows that consumers are committed to a selected brand.

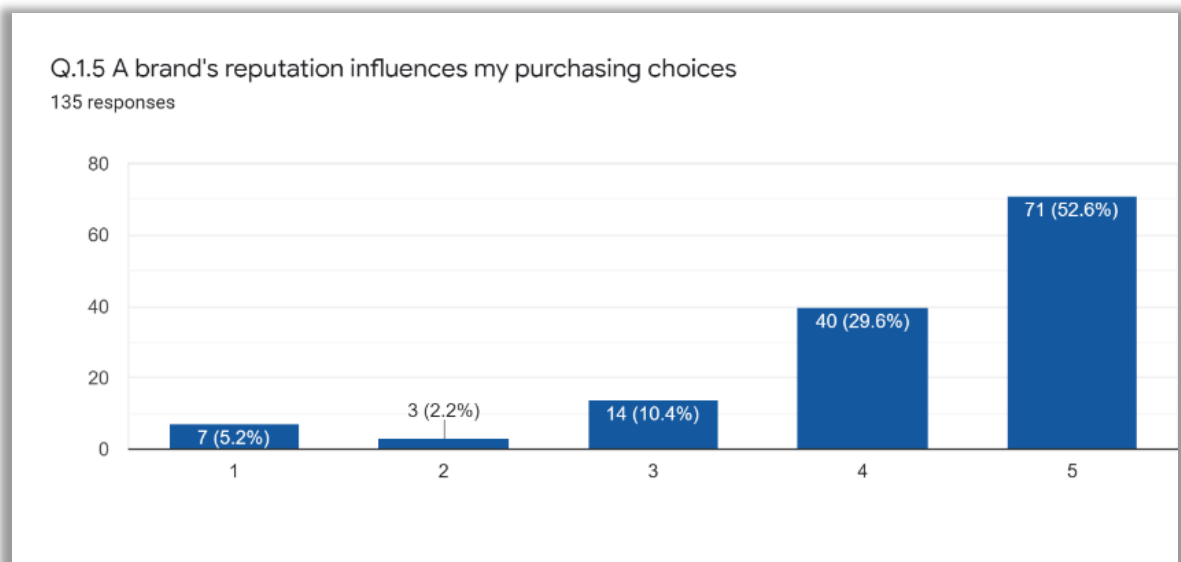


Figure 3. 12: My buying habits are influenced by a brand

It is evident that in Figure 3.12 that a brand's reputation does impact consumers purchasing behaviour towards a brand. This is supported in Figure 3.13 below, that consumers agree they buy brands with a good reputation. Brand reputation represents

an overall consensus from consumers that this antecedent is an important, influential contributing factor regarding their support for a brand.

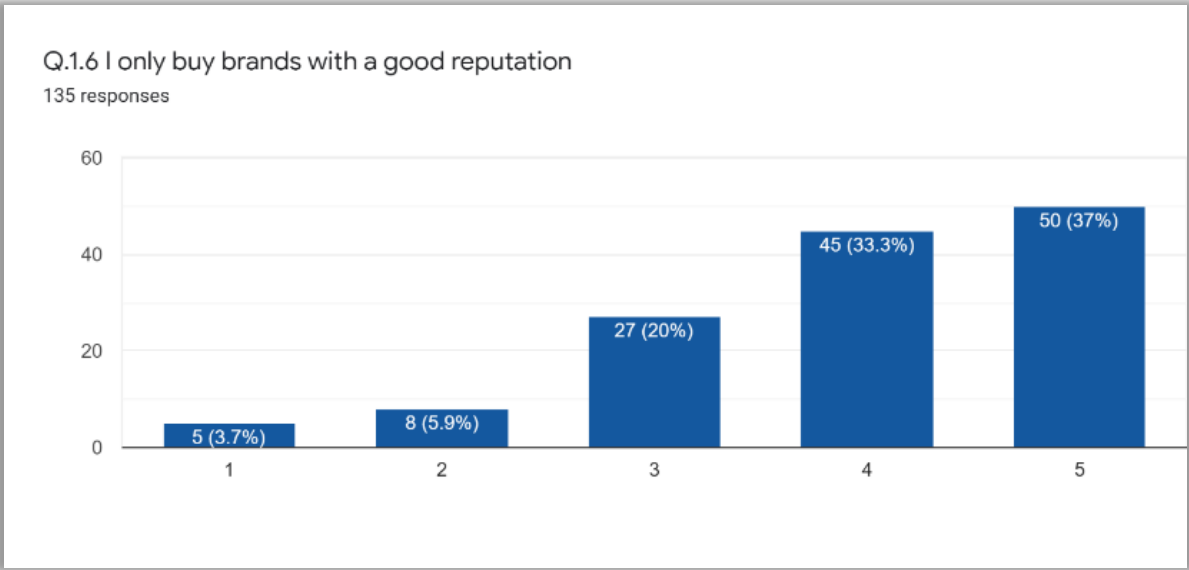


Figure 3.13: I only buy reputable brands

3.3.1.3 Antecedent 2 – Social Media

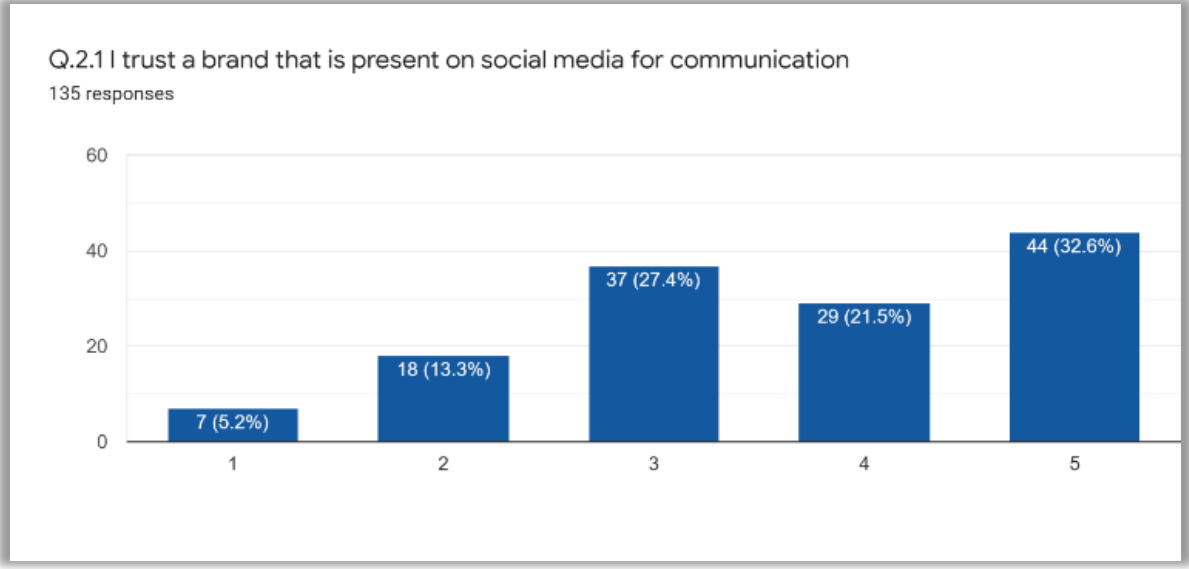


Figure 3.14: I trust a brand that communicates via social media

The social media presence does initiate the consumer to trust the brand, as shown in Figure 3.14.

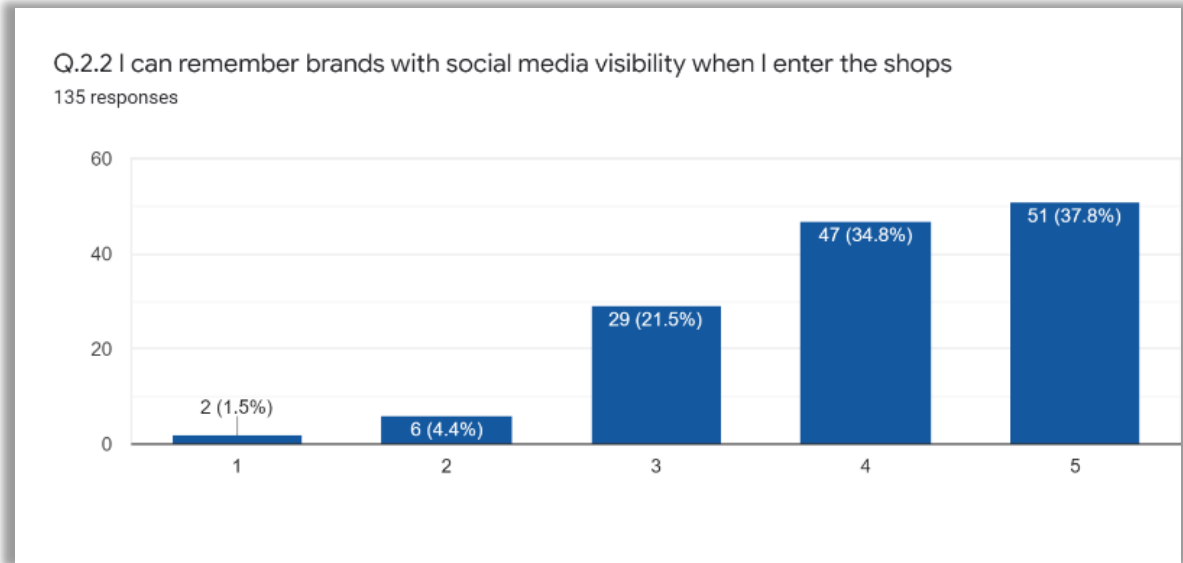


Figure 3.15: I recall brands with social media visibility in stores

It is verified in Figure 3.15 that social media presence enables most consumers to remember the brand when they go to stores for shopping.

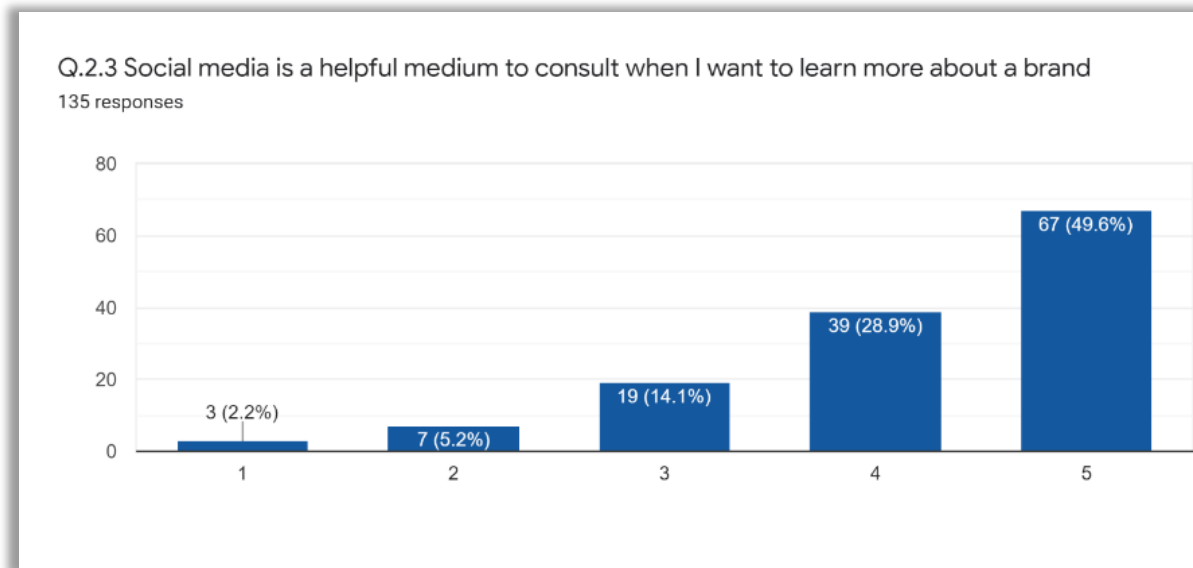


Figure 3.16: I use social media to learn more about a brand

More than 50% of consumers agree that social media is a helpful medium to learn more about a brand, illustrated in Figure 3.16.

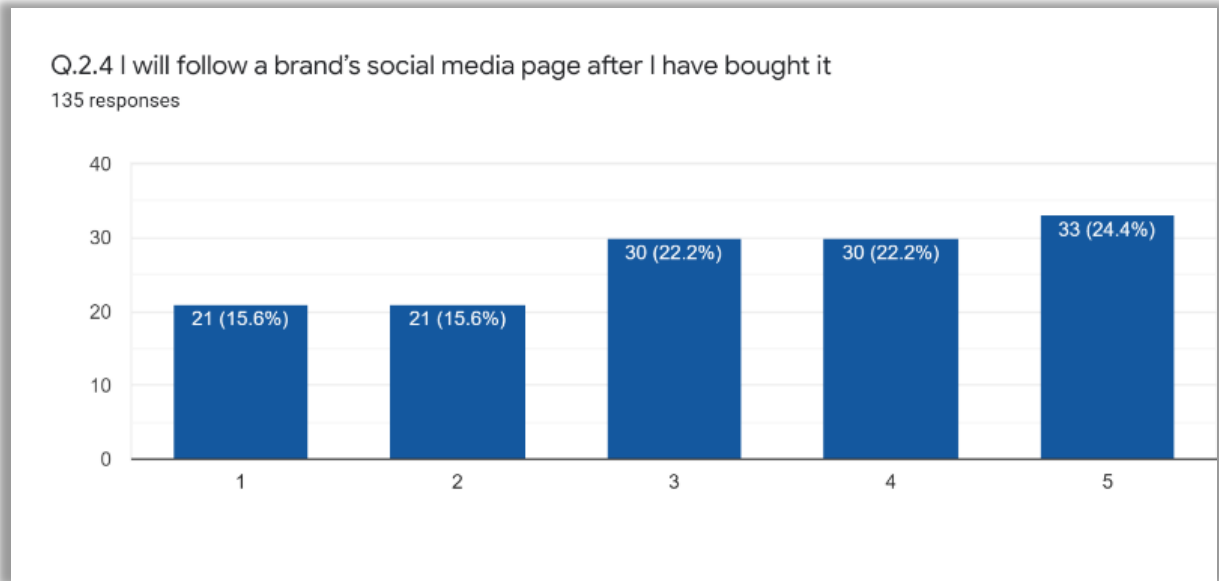


Figure 3.17: I'll follow a brand's social media after I buy it

Consumers have different perspectives on whether they will follow a brand's social media page after buying it in Figure 3.17. Therefore, in Figure 3.18, most consumers are not concerned if a brand's social media page follows them back.

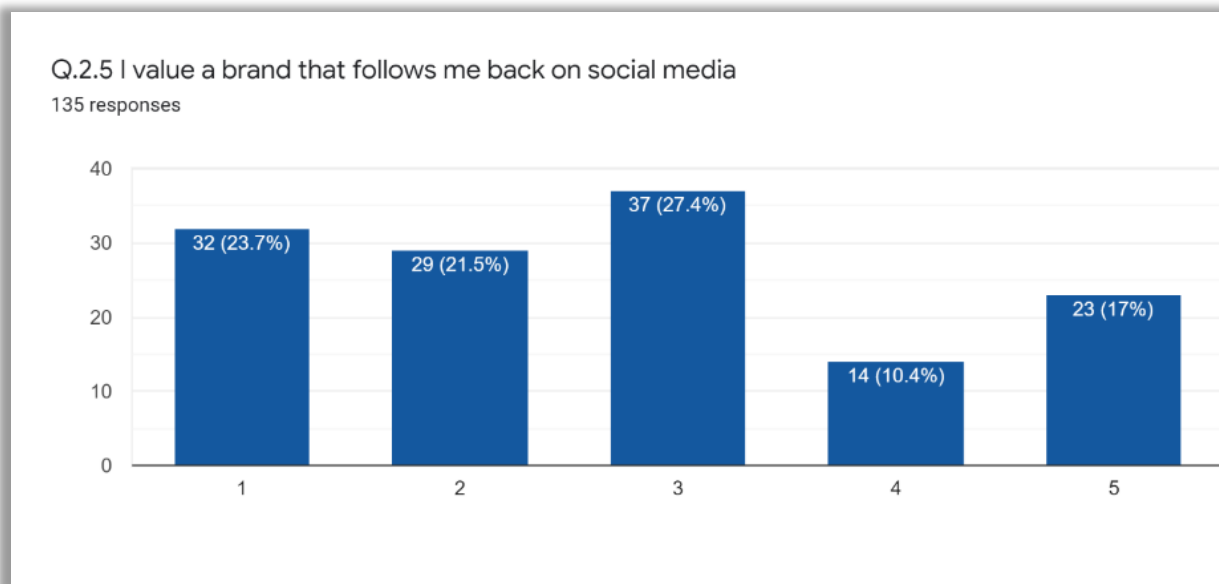


Figure 3. 18: I value a brand that follows me on social media

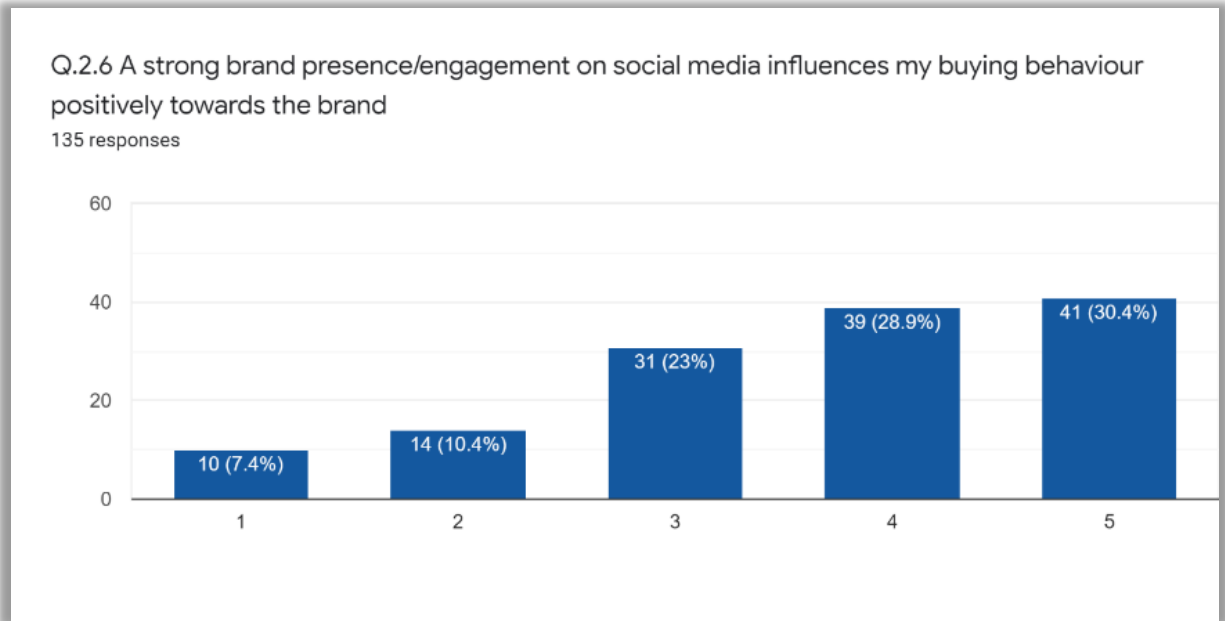


Figure 3. 19: A strong social media presence or engagement influences my buying behaviour positively

Thus, Figure 3.19 illustrates that social media presence or engagement positively influences a consumer's buying behaviour.

3.3.1.4 Antecedent 3 – Word-of-Mouth / Brand Community

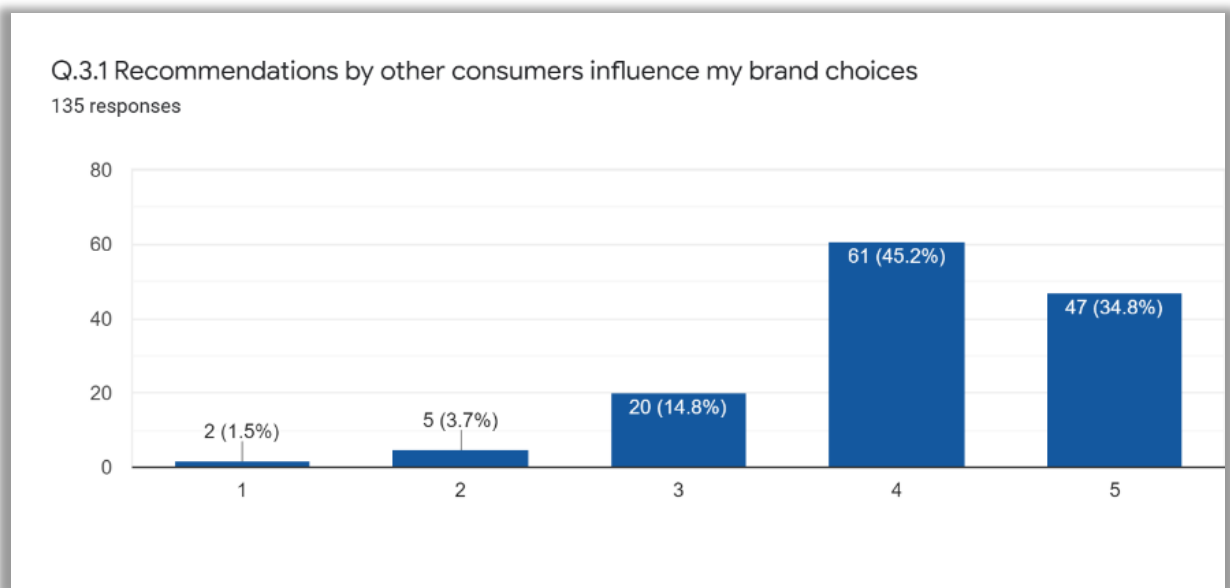


Figure 3. 20: Consumer feedback influences my brand selection

Consumer feedback and recommendations in Figure 3.20 do influence other consumers to support a brand. Another consensus supported in Figure 3.21 explains that consumers value brand reviews and feedback from other consumers.

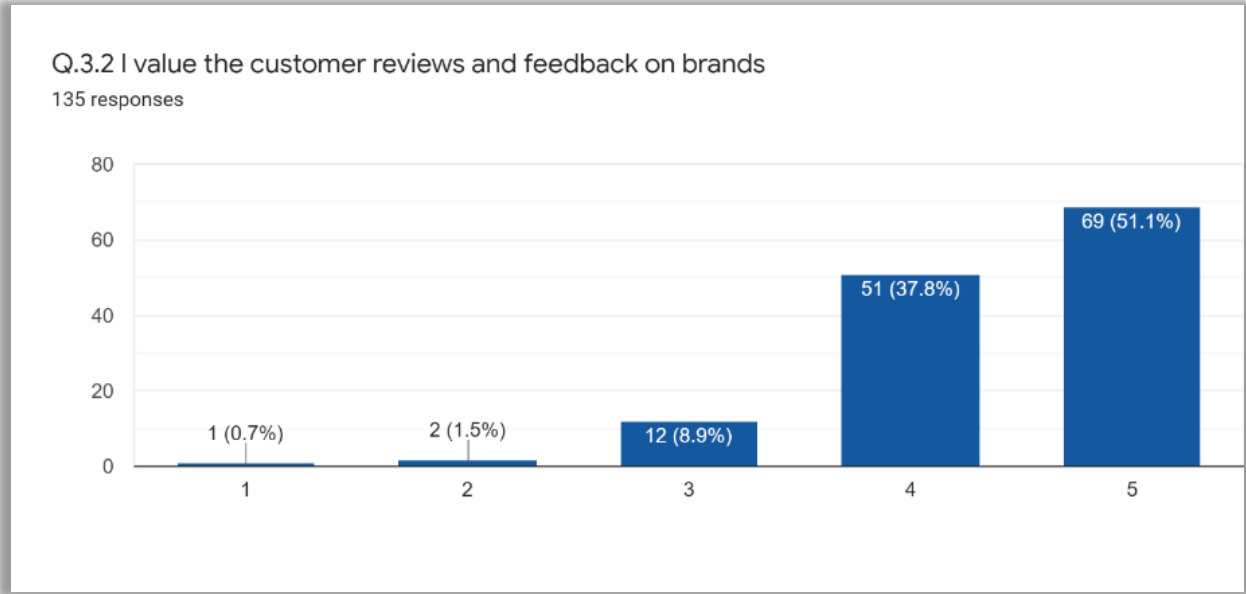


Figure 3. 21: I value brand reviews and customer feedback

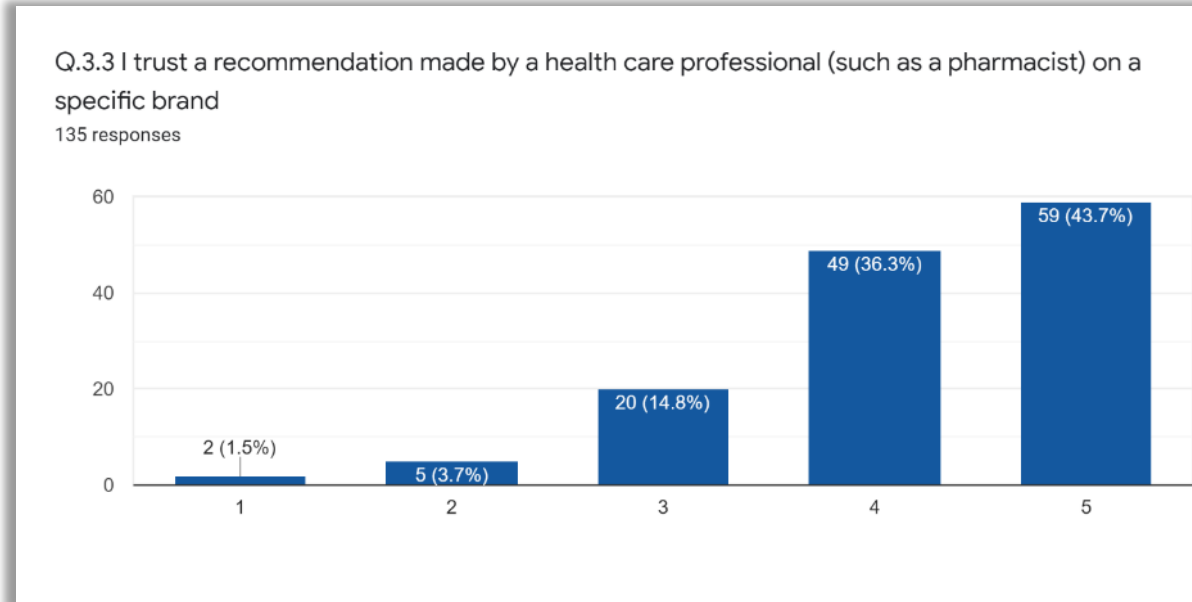


Figure 3.22:1 I trust a medical opinion on a particular brand

Professional assistance is valued by consumers, as seen in Figure 3.22, suggesting that consumers trust a recommendation for a specific from a health care professional.

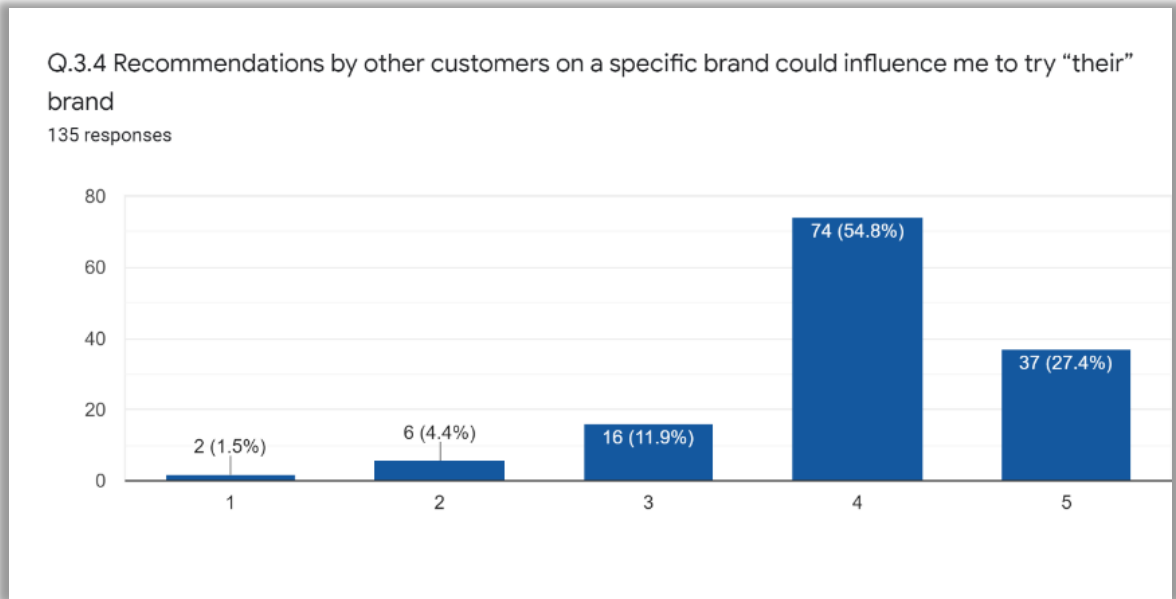


Figure 3.23: Customer recommendations could influence me to try a new brand

Word of mouth from other consumers who recommend a brand could influence the majority of the consumer to try advised brands from fellow consumers, displayed in Figure 3.23.

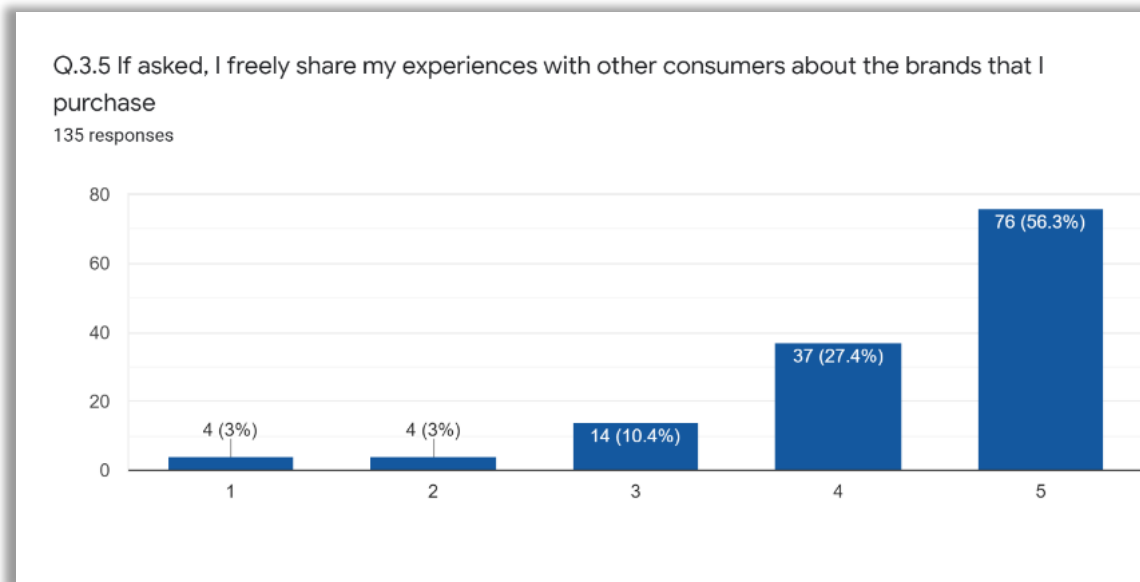


Figure 3.24: I freely share my brand experiences with other consumers

Consumers in Figure 3.24 strongly agree that they will share their experience with other consumers when asked. Although in Figure 3.25, consumers have different perspectives on whether they will spontaneously share their brand experience with other consumers.

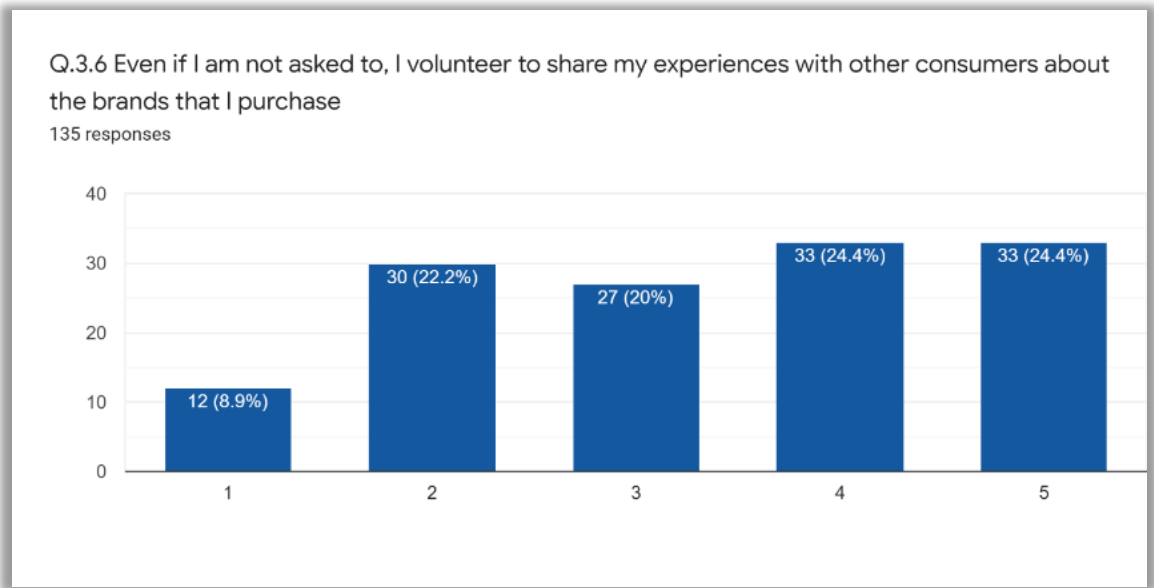


Figure 3.25: I spontaneously share my brand experience with other consumers

3.3.1.5 Antecedent 4 – Customer Experience

Illustrated in Figure 3.26, most consumers agree that when they are unsure about a brand, a knowledge aisle manager can assist them with making a decision. Consumers strongly agree in Figure 3.27 that they get irritated when their favourite brand is out of stock.

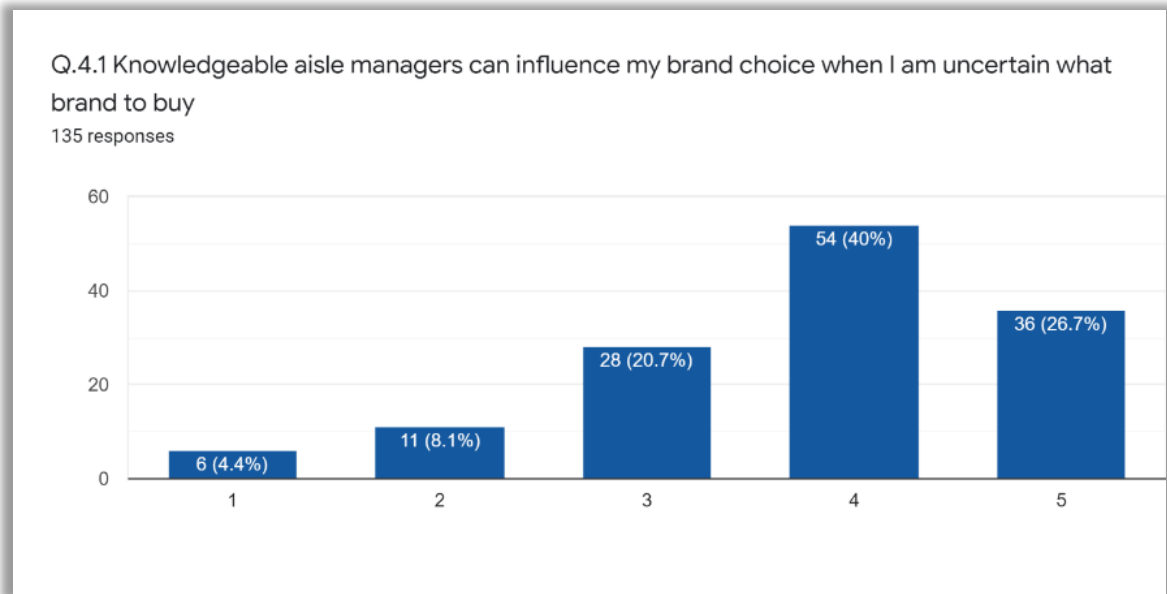


Figure 3.26: When I am unsure about a brand, knowledgeable aisle managers can help me decide

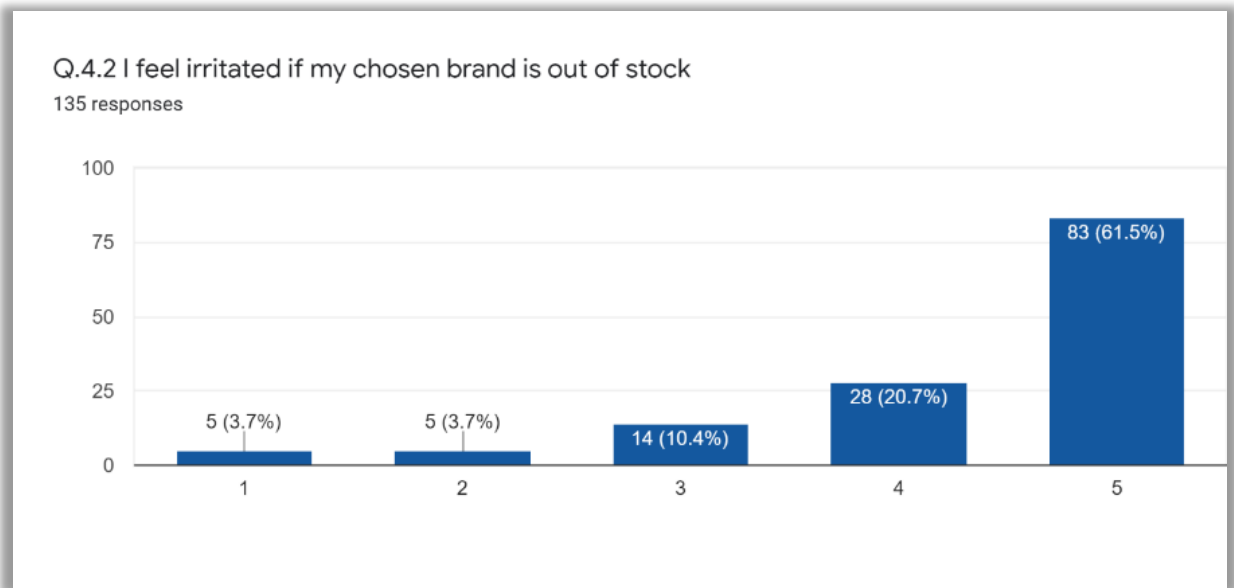


Figure 3. 27: I get irritated if my favourite brand is out

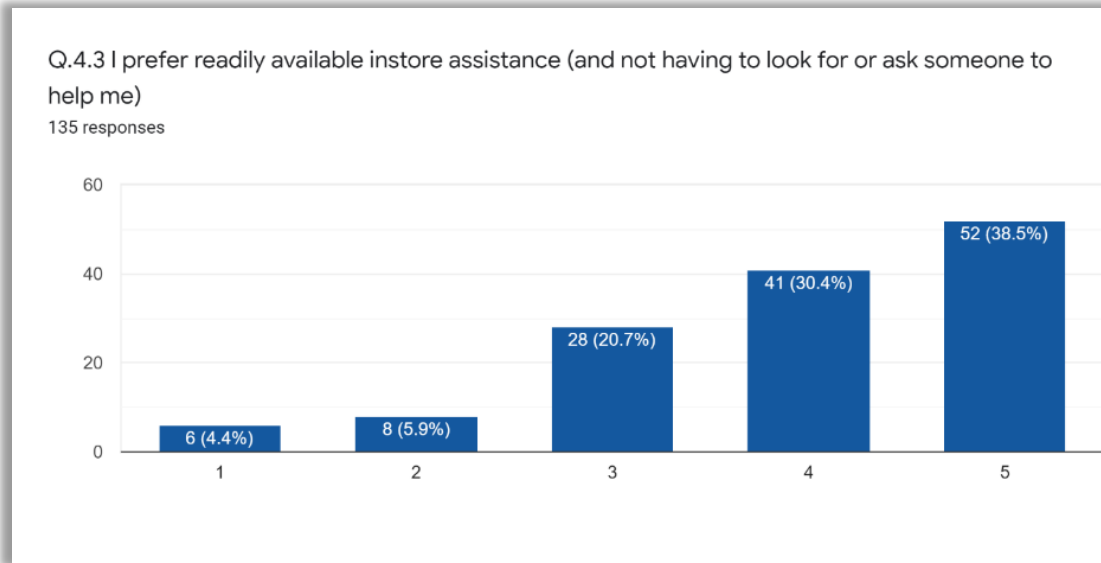


Figure 3. 28: I prefer in-store assistance without asking anyone

When shopping in a retail environment, consumers agree that they favour in-store assistance without asking for anyone demonstrated in Figure 3.8. Most consumers value the opinion of a knowledgeable person, such as a pharmacist in Figure 3.29.

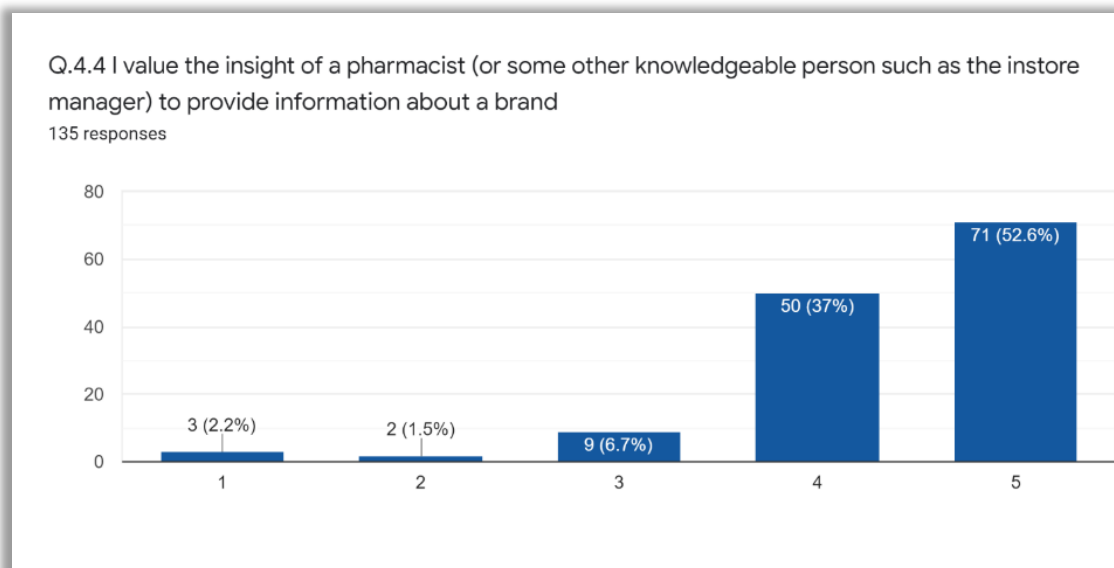


Figure 3.29: I value a pharmacist's (or other knowledgeable person's) opinion on a brand

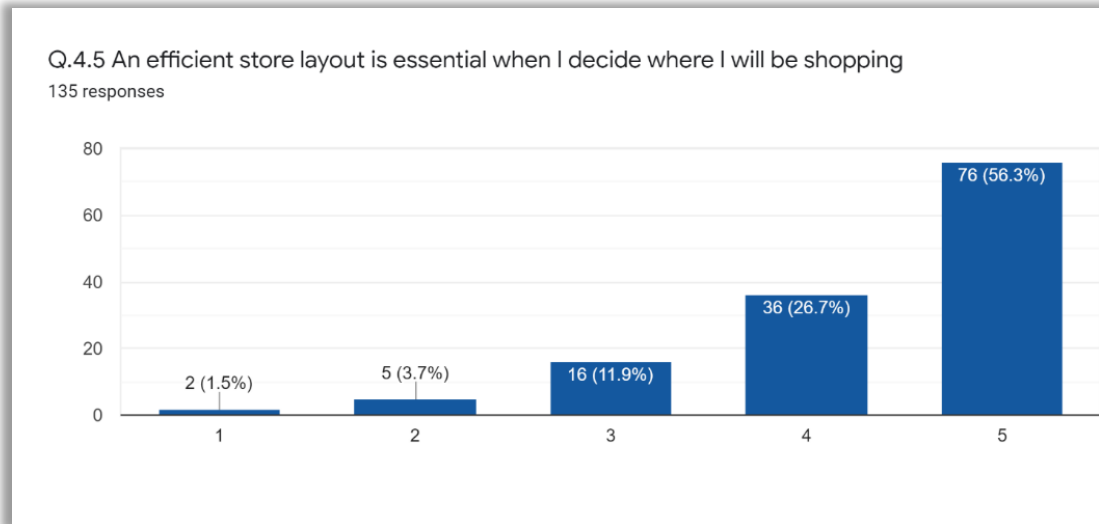


Figure 3. 30: An efficient store layout is important to me when shopping

When consumers visit a store in Figure 3.30, they strongly agree that an efficient store layout is essential to them when visiting a store. Thus, in Figure 3.31, a delightful customer experience influences most consumers to support that particular store that stocks their fancied brand.

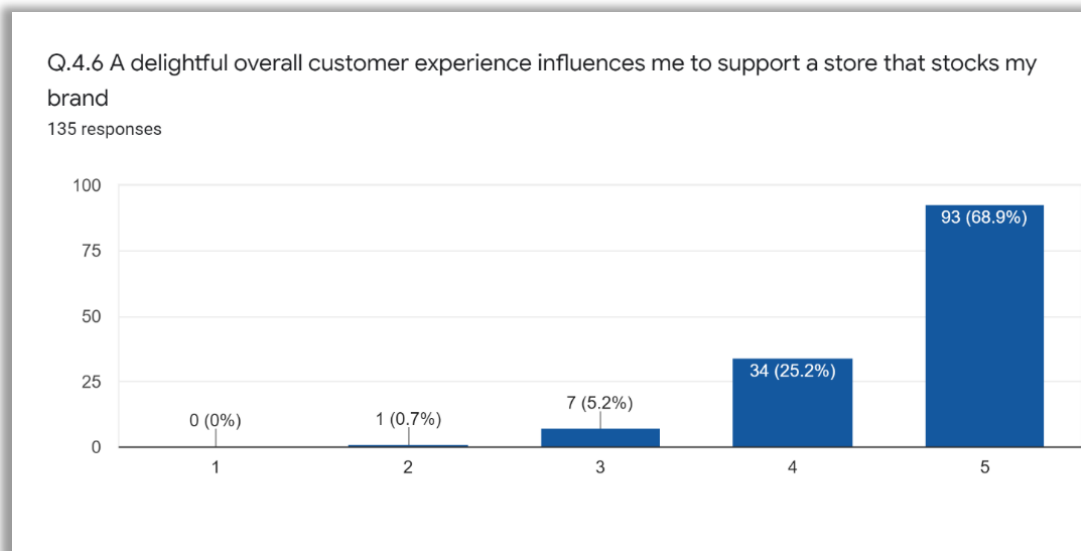


Figure 3.31: A pleasant shopping experience encourages me to support a retailer who stocks my brand

3.3.1.6 Antecedent 5 – Merchandising / Visibility

Consumers agree in Figure 3.32 that a supreme display that shows clear visibility of a brand indicates it is worth their purchase. Thus, Figure 3.33 explains that consumers are more tempted to buy the brand when they see it more than once in-store.

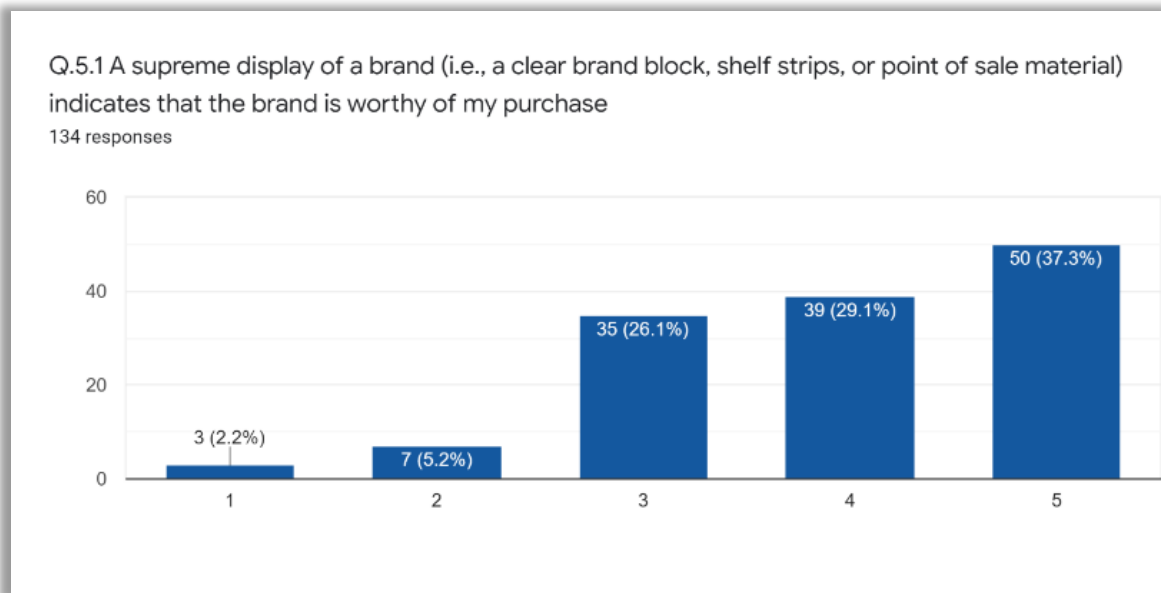


Figure 3.32: A supreme display of a brand indicates it is worth my purchase



Figure 3.33: I am more tempted to buy the brand in the store when I see it twice

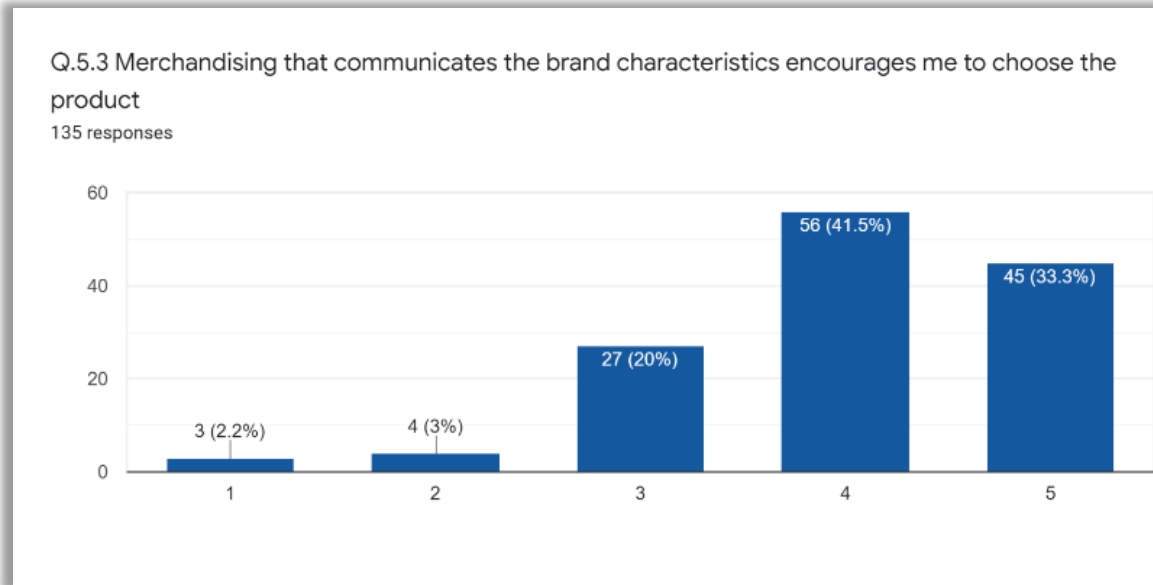


Figure 3.34: Brand-related merchandise encourages me to buy the product

Consumers in Figure 3.34 agree that brand-related merchandise that communicates the brand's characteristics supports their buying decision. As demonstrated in Figure 3.35, consumers agree that it would be challenging to find their brand in-store if no merchandising is done.



Figure 3. 35: It will be difficult to find my brand if I do not use instore brand merchandising

Figure 3.36 shows that most consumers agree that a brand with excellent visibility and merchandising in-store demonstrates that this particular brand values the buyer's shopping experience.

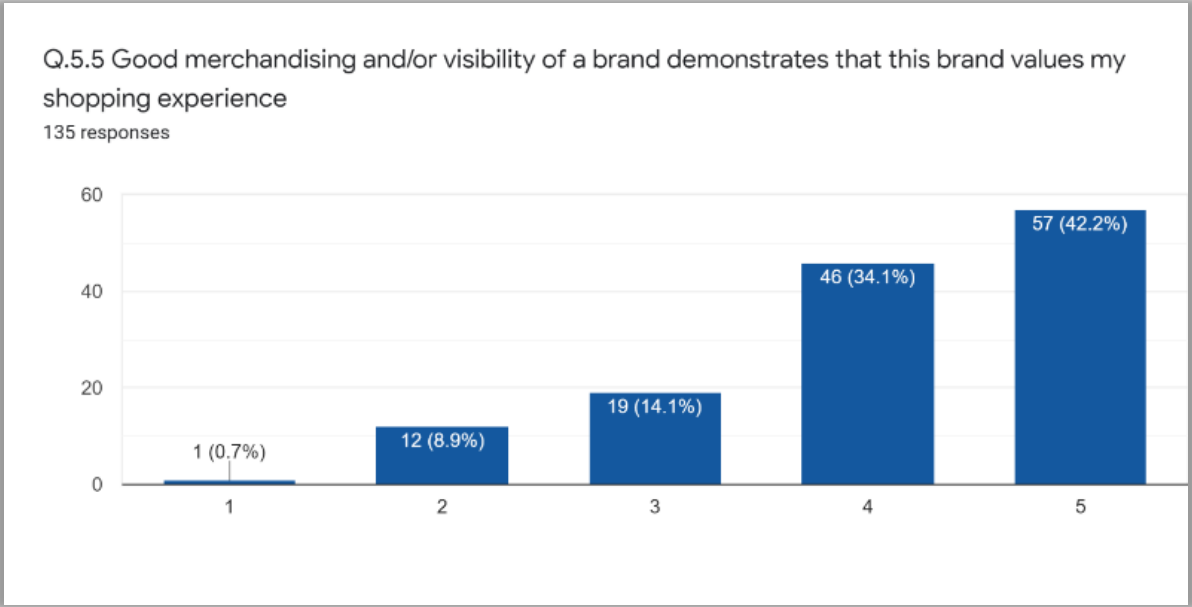


Figure 3.36: Brands that value my shopping experience have good merchandising or visibility

Corresponding with the outcome in Figure 3.35, consumers agree in Figure 3.37 that a well-executed brand on display may influence their decision to support the brand.

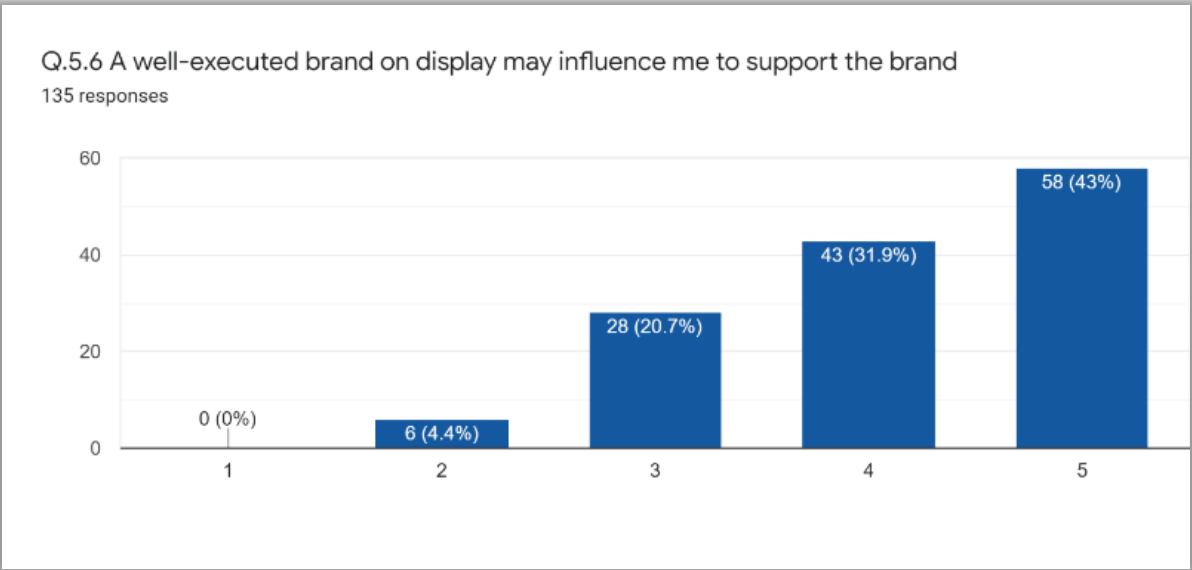


Figure 3.37: Good brand execution may persuade me to support it

3.3.1.7 Outcome - Brand Loyalty

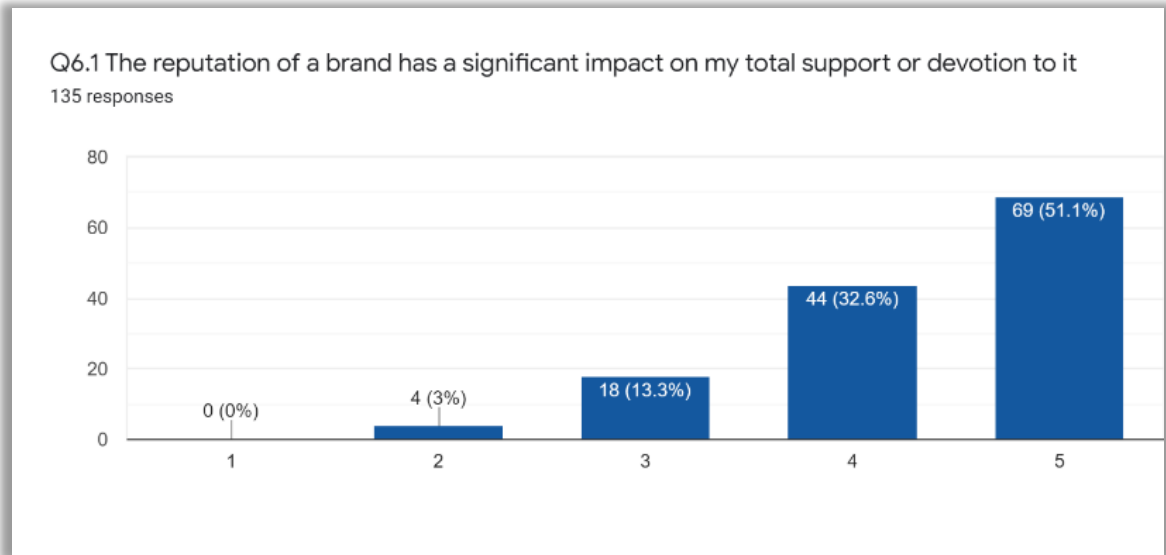


Figure 3.38: My total devotion to a brand is influenced by its reputation

A strong consensus from consumers agrees that a brand's reputation in Figure 3.38 influences their full devotion to support or be loyal to a brand. Thus, Figure 3.39 demonstrates that social presence and engagement on social media significantly influence their overall brand loyalty and support.

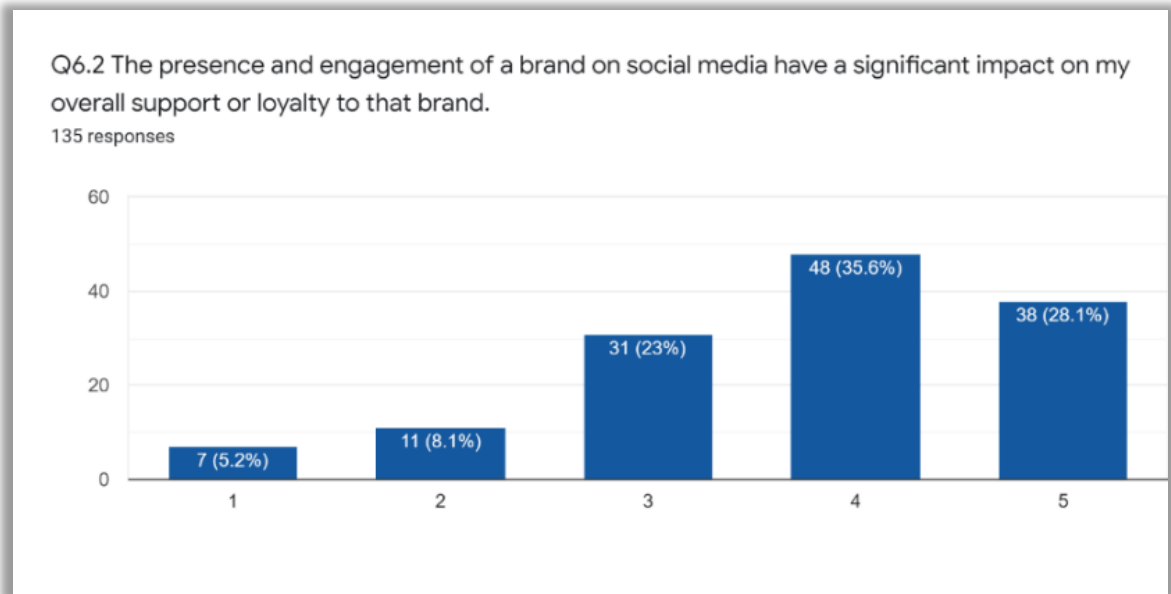


Figure 3.39: My social media presence and engagement influence my support or loyalty to a brand.

Consumer acknowledges in Figure 3.40 that the opinion of others does influence their total devotion towards supporting the support of a brand.

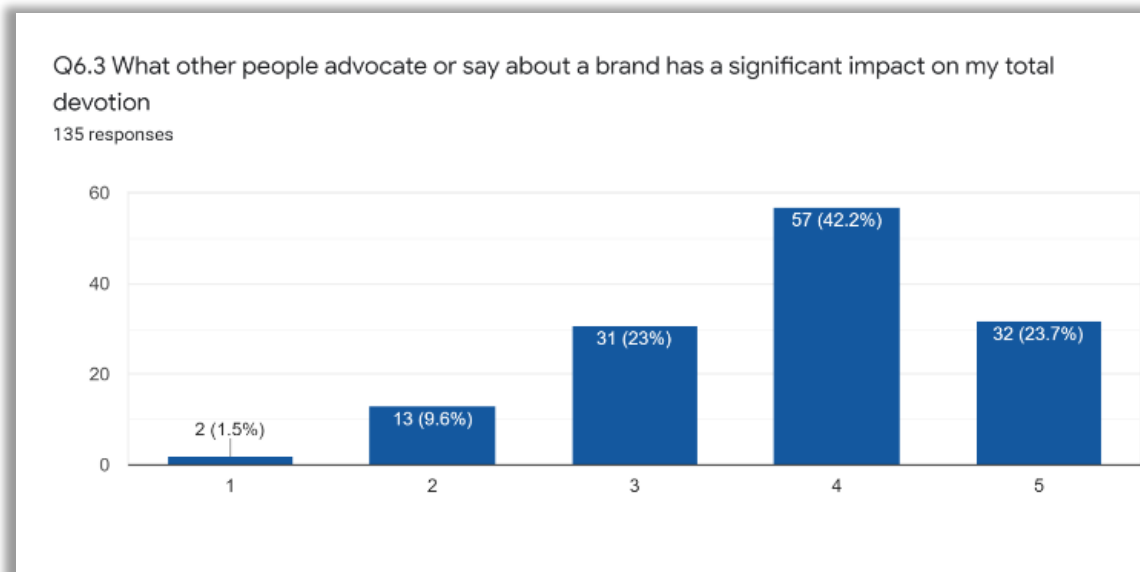


Figure 3. 40: What others say about a brand influences my total devotion

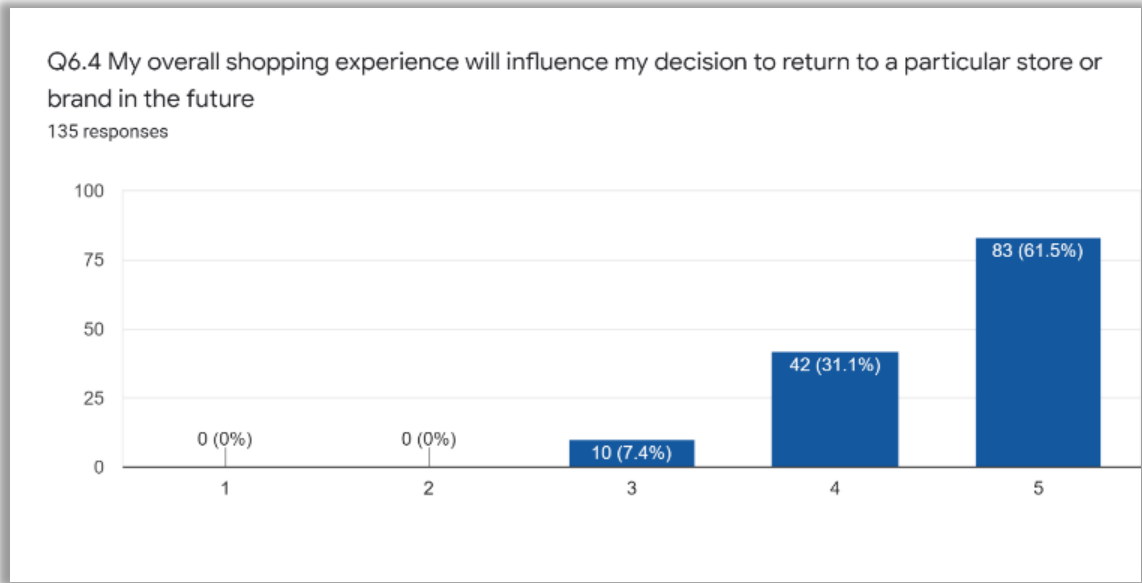


Figure 3.41: My overall shopping experience will influence my future shopping decisions

Most consumers agree that their overall shopping experience will influence their decision to return to a specific store to shop for their favourite brand in Figure 3.41. Therefore, in Figure 3.42, when visiting a store, store branding and visibility matter to most consumers when deciding to support their favourite brand.

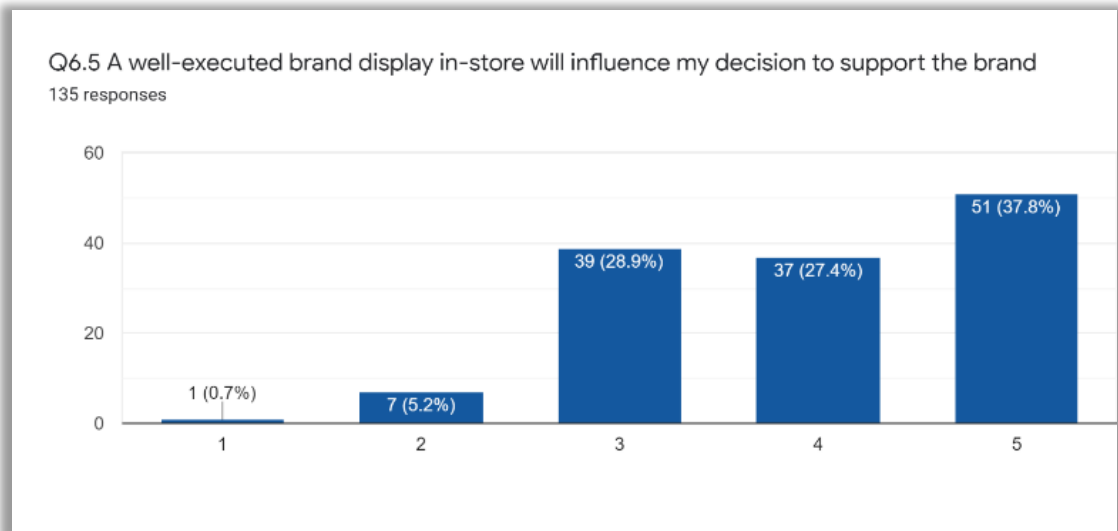


Figure 3.42: Store branding will influence my decision to buy the brand

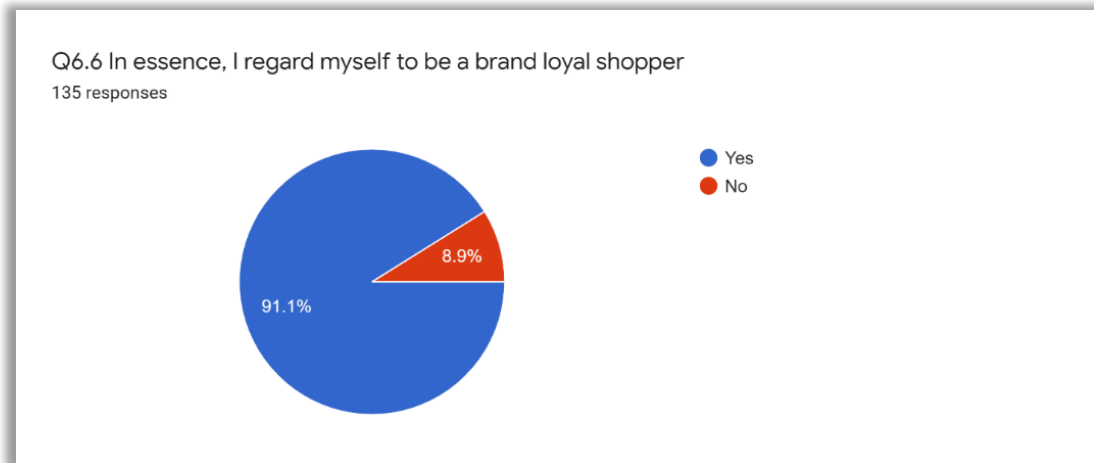


Figure 3.43: In essence, I am a loyal customer

It is evident in Figure 3.43 those consumers consider themselves to be loyal brand supporters.

3.3.2 Validity and reliability

A total of five antecedents were found from the literature in the first two steps. The literature yielded a total of 135 suitable measuring criteria for each antecedent. In Step 3, the questionnaire discovered that a 5-point Likert scale would best gather data for the study outcome. Statistical data confirmation from the empirical investigation is required for steps 4, 5, 6, and 7. The measuring criteria of the antecedents, sample adequacy, variance explained, and reliability is computed in these stages. Each antecedent's measuring criteria are set to an exploratory factor analysis to establish if these criteria truly measure the antecedent. All criteria should ideally load onto the antecedent identified in the literature; this indicates validity and that the antecedent is a pure construct with no embedded sub-constructs. This suggests that the relevant criteria only assess one construct (Field 2009:786).

Various researchers (including Shaikh *et al.*, 2017, Asvat 2018, Rehman *et al.*, 2019, and others) have effectively validated their models' antecedents. When two factors are extracted, it signifies that the antecedent consists of two sub-antecedents. As a result, the antecedent measures not one but two or more academic performance constructs.

According to authors Rehman *et al.* (2019:79), the measuring criteria were also grouped into meaningful factors with embedded intelligence. Thus, the cut of factor loading of less

than 0.40 suggests that the criterion has a reduced impact on the measurement of antecedent (Field 2009:631). Only criteria with factor loadings of 0.40 or higher were retained for interpretation (Rehman *et al.*, 2019:79). Suggesting that the criteria with low loadings were removed from the subsequent analysis.

This data is shown in Table 3.3 as a measure of sample size, sphericity, and consistency. Table 3.4 displays the exploratory factor analysis results for each antecedent in Table 3.3. Thus, Table 3.4 also shows the criteria and their factor loadings.

Table 3.3: Customer engagement antecedents' suitability statistics

Antecedents	Sample adequacy (KMO)	Sphericity (Bartlett)	Reliability (α)	Variance explained (σ^2)
Antecedent 1: Brand Reputation	0.77	0.00	0.43	63.56%
Antecedent 2: Social Media	0.87	0.00	0.86	61.59%
Antecedent 3: Word-of-Mouth / Brand Community	0.69	0.00	0.63	58.24%
Antecedent 4: Customer Experience	0.64	0.00	0.61	53.89%
Antecedent 5: Merchandising / Visibility	0.85	0.00	0.87	61.45%
Outcome: Brand loyalty	0.78	0.00	0.75	51.08%
Total data set	0.84	0.00	0.91	63.50%

The statistical evaluation of the five antecedents and the outcome is shown in the table above. Kaiser, Meyer, and Olin's test of sample adequacy ($KMO \geq 0.60$) indicates that the sample is adequate. All of the tests for sphericity are acceptable because the p-values are below 0.05 in Bartlett's test for sphericity. To say that all five antecedents explain more than half of the variance was to say that the data were in a "good fit". All but Antecedent 1 ($\alpha = 0.43$) have acceptable ($\alpha \geq 0.60$) to excellent ($\alpha \geq 0.701$) reliability in the data (Field 2009:658). As a result, even though the data can be used in this study, the antecedent is less likely than more reliable antecedents to appear as an antecedent in

other studies of a similar nature." In light of Cortina (1993), the antecedent is retained for further investigation. According to Cortina, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.57 is preferred, but data with alpha coefficients of as low as 0.31 can still be usefully analysed. A valid and reliable model can be concluded from the results of Table 3.4. This means that the criteria identified do measure what they are supposed to. (In this case, the antecedents) (Asvat *et al.* 2018:60; Shaikh *et al.* 2017:135). According to this research, a private university's academic performance can be measured using the criteria and their antecedents.

From the results in Table 3.4 it is then concluded that antecedents and their criteria postulate a valid and reliable model. The criteria identified do measure what it is supposed to measure (in this case, the respective antecedents) (Asvat *et al.* 2018:60; Shaikh *et al.* 2017:135). It is also concluded that the measuring criteria and their respective antecedents can be applied in practice to measure brand loyalty.

Table 3.3 above should be read in conjunction with Table 3.4 below. Table 3.3 showed the results on evaluating the antecedents' reliability and ensuring that the data is suitable for use in validating a model. Table 3.4 below shows the details on the measuring criteria and their validity towards the antecedents.

Table 3.4: Antecedents, measuring criteria and factor scores

Antecedent 1: Brand Reputation	Factor 1 loadings	Factor 2 loadings
Q.1.1. A tried and trusted brand is always my first option	.600	***
Q.1.2 If I cannot find my brand in-store, I would instead go to another store to buy the brand I want	.794	***
Q.1.3 As a consumer, I do care about an established brand that delivers a quality product for my use	.918	***
Q.1.4 I find it easy to switch from one brand to another	-.771	***
Q.1.5 A brand's reputation influences my purchasing choices	.647	***
Q.1.6 I only buy brands with a good reputation	.691	***
Antecedent 2: Social Media	Factor loadings	Factor loadings
Q.2.1 I trust a brand that is present on social media for communication	.825	***
Q.2.2 I can remember brands with social media visibility when I enter the shops	.837	***
Q.2.3 Social media is a helpful medium to consult when I want to learn more about a brand	.811	***
Q.2.4 I will follow a brand's social media page after I have bought it	.719	***
Q.2.5 I value a brand that follows me back on social media	.632	***
Q.2.6 A strong brand presence/engagement on social media influences my buying behaviour positively towards the brand	.861	***
Antecedent 3: Word-of-Mouth / Brand Community	Factor 1 loadings	Factor 2 loadings
	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Sharing</i>
Q.3.1 Recommendations by other consumers influence my brand choices	.796	
Q.3.2 I value the customer reviews and feedback on brands	.701	
Q.3.3 I trust a recommendation made by a health care professional (such as a pharmacist) on a specific brand	.522	
Q.3.4 Recommendations by other customers on a specific brand could influence me to try their brand	.784	
Q.3.6 Even if I am not asked to, I volunteer to share my experiences with other consumers about the brands that I purchase		.873

Antecedent 4: Customer Experience	Factor 1 loadings	Factor 2 loadings
	Support	Store
Q.4.1 Knowledgeable aisle managers can influence my brand choice when I am uncertain what brand to buy	.672	
Q.4.2 I feel irritated if my chosen brand is out of stock	.534	
Q.4.3 I prefer readily available instore assistance (and not having to look for or ask someone to help me)	.692	
Q.4.4 I value the insight of a pharmacist (or some other knowledgeable person such as the instore manager) to provide information about a brand	.747	
Q.4.5 An efficient store layout is essential when I decide where I will be shopping		.832
Q.4.6 A delightful overall customer experience influences me to support a store that stocks my brand		.813
Antecedent 5 Merchandising & Visibility	Factor 1 loading	Factor 2 loadings
Q.5.1 A supreme display of a brand (i.e., a clear brand block, shelf strips, or point of sale material) indicates that the brand is worthy of my purchase	.853	***
Q.5.2 The more I see the brand in-store at various points, the more I get encouraged to purchase the brand	.814	***
Q.5.3 Merchandising that communicates the brand characteristics encourages me to choose the product	.671	***
Q.5.4 If my brand does not make use of in-store brand merchandising, the low visibility will make it difficult to locate my brands	.720	***
Q.5.5 Good merchandising and/or visibility of a brand demonstrates that this brand values my shopping experience	.837	***
Q.5.6 A well-executed brand on display may influence me to support the brand	.793	***

Outcome: Brand loyalty	Factor 1 loadings	Factor 2 loadings
Q6.1 The reputation of a brand has a significant impact on my total support or devotion to it	.713	***
Q6.2 The presence and engagement of a brand on social media have a significant impact on my overall support or loyalty to that brand.	.715	***
Q6.3 What other people advocate or say about a brand has a significant impact on my total devotion	.706	***
Q6.4 My overall shopping experience will influence my decision to return to a particular store or brand in the future	.655	***
Q6.5 A well-executed brand display in-store will influence my decision to support the brand	.779	***

Table 3.5 tested the validity of 35 questions across five antecedents and the outcome to ensure the validity of the questionnaire statistically. Antecedents 1 (Brand reputation), 2 (Social media) and 5 (Merchandising & visibility) are validated as is. All the questions measuring these antecedents respectively, load as one construct indicating that these questions indeed measure the specific antecedent. Antecedents 3 (Word-of-mouth & Brand community) and 4 (Customer experience), however, measures two constructs each; this means that sub-factors exist within each antecedent.

In the case of Antecedent 3, the questions show that questions Q3.1-Q3.4 and Q3.6 all deal with the advice received from other parties on products and brands, thus entailing receiving information. This sub-factor is thus labelled as “Listening to word-of-mouth advice”. Contrary, Q3.6 deals with sharing one’s experiences with other customers, and as such, the sub-factor is labelled as “Sharing advice via word-of-mouth”. Question 3.5 was discarded because it returned a factor loading lower than the required 0.40.

Antecedent 5 also identified two sub-factors. Three questions (Q4.1, Q4.2 and Q4.4) deals with advice in the shop, while Q4.3 deals with irritation on out-of-stock products. Since most of the questions deal with advice and support concerns, this sub-factor is labelled “Support”. The other two questions (Q4.5 & Q4.6) deal with store-specific issues. Hence, the sub-factor is labelled as “Store selection.”

3.3.3 Measuring brand loyalty

Table 3.5 measures brand loyalty according to the five antecedents through their mean and standard deviation.

Table 3.5: Antecedents, measuring mean and standard deviation

Antecedent 1: Brand Reputation	MEAN	STD DEV
Q.1.1. A tried and trusted brand is always my first option	4.44	.760
Q.1.2 If I cannot find my brand in-store, I would instead go to another store to buy the brand I want	4.21	1.080
Q.1.4 I find it easy to switch from one brand to another	4.61	.733
Q.1.5 A brand's reputation influences my purchasing choices	2.74	1.139
Q.1.6 I only buy brands with a good reputation	4.22	1.070
Mean value Antecedent 1	3.37	0.797
Antecedent 2: Social Media	MEAN	STD DEV
Q.2.1 I trust a brand that is present on social media for communication	3.63	1.214
Q.2.2 I can remember brands with social media visibility when I enter the shops	4.03	0.954
Q.2.3 Social media is a helpful medium to consult when I want to learn more about a brand	4.19	1.009
Q.2.4 I will follow a brand's social media page after I have bought it	3.24	1.390
Q.2.5 I value a brand that follows me back on social media	2.76	1.379
Q.2.6 A strong brand presence/engagement on social media influences my buying behaviour positively towards the brand	3.64	1.225
Mean Value Antecedent 2	3.581	1.195

Antecedent 3: Word-of-Mouth / Brand Community	MEAN	STD DEV
Q.3.1 Recommendations by other consumers influence my brand choices	4.08	0.881
Q.3.2 I value the customer reviews and feedback on brands	4.37	0.770
Q.3.3 I trust a recommendation made by a health care professional (such as a pharmacist) on a specific brand	4.17	0.919
Q.3.4 Recommendations by other customers on a specific brand could influence me to try their brand	4.02	0.842
Q.3.5 If asked, I freely share my experiences with other consumers about the brands that I purchase	4.31	0.981
Q.3.6 Even if I am not asked to, I volunteer to share my experiences with other consumers about the brands that I purchase	3.33	1.304
Mean Value Antecedent 3	4.04	0.946
Mean Sub factor 1 (Listening) (Q3.1-Q3.4)	2.78	0.853
Mean Sub factor 2 (Sharing) (Q.3.5-Q3.6)	3.82	1.143
Antecedent 4: Customer Experience	MEAN	STD DEV
Q.4.1 Knowledgeable aisle managers can influence my brand choice when I am uncertain what brand to buy	3.76	1.073
Q.4.2 I feel irritated if my chosen brand is out of stock	4.33	1.050
Q.4.3 I prefer readily available instore assistance (and not having to look for or ask someone to help me)	3.93	1.111
Q.4.4 I value the insight of a pharmacist (or some other knowledgeable person such as the instore manager) to provide information about a brand	4.36	0.852
Q.4.5 An efficient store layout is essential when I decide where I will be shopping	4.33	0.929
Q.4.6 A delightful overall customer experience influences me to support a store that stocks my brand	4.62	0.621
Mean Antecedent 4	4.23	0.939
Mean Sub factor 1 (Support Q.4.1-Q4.4)	4.10	1.022
Mean Sub factor 2 (Store Q.4.5-Q4.6)	4.28	0.775

Antecedent 5 Merchandising & Visibility	MEAN	STD DEV
Q.5.1 A supreme display of a brand (i.e., a clear brand block, shelf strips, or point of sale material) indicates that the brand is worthy of my purchase	3.94	1.024
Q.5.2 The more I see the brand in-store at various points, the more I get encouraged to purchase the brand	3.84	1.094
Q.5.3 Merchandising that communicates the brand characteristics encourages me to choose the product	4.01	0.926
Q.5.4 If my brand does not make use of in-store brand merchandising, the low visibility will make it difficult to locate my brands	3.70	1.154
Q.5.5 Good merchandising and/or visibility of a brand demonstrates that this brand values my shopping experience	4.08	0.993
Q.5.6 A well-executed brand on display may influence me to support the brand	4.13	0.896
Mean Antecedent 5	3.95	1.046
Outcome: Brand loyalty		
Q6.1 The reputation of a brand has a significant impact on my total support or devotion to it	4.32	0.816
Q6.2 The presence and engagement of a brand on social media have a significant impact on my overall support or loyalty to that brand.	3.73	1.114
Q6.3 What other people advocate or say about a brand has a significant impact on my total devotion	3.77	0.969
Q6.4 My overall shopping experience will influence my decision to return to a particular store or brand in the future	4.45	0.632
Q6.5 A well-executed brand display in-store will influence my decision to support the brand	3.96	0.973
Mean Brand Loyalty	4.046	0.901

3.3.4 Regression analysis of antecedents

The five antecedents and their relationships towards the dependent variable Brand loyalty were tested using linear regression to determine if the model signifies a good fit and to what extent each of the antecedents contributes towards brand loyalty. This was done by using the AMOS software of IBM SPSS (Version 27). The regression structural equation model is shown in Figure 3.44. The standardized regression weights and the significance ($p \leq .05$) appear in Table 3.6 directly below the model. The model summary portraying the R-statistics are shown in Table 3.6

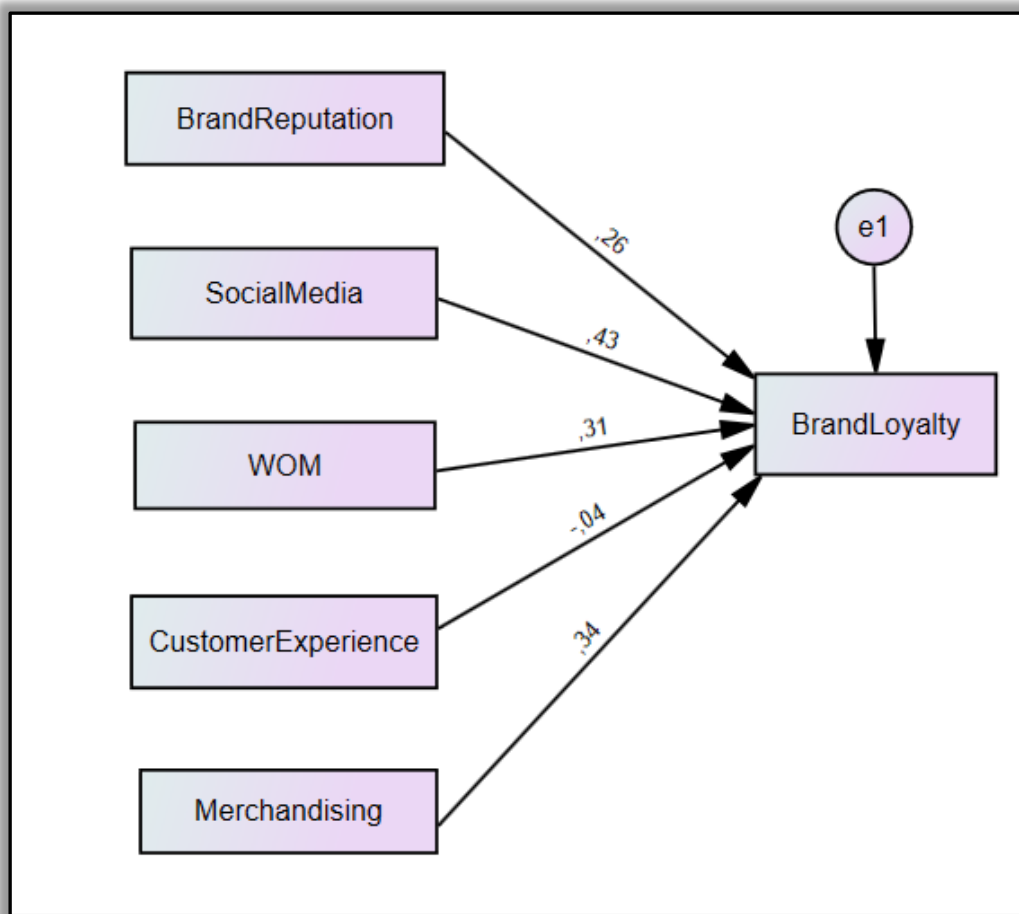


Figure 3.44: Structural equation regression model of brand loyalty antecedents

Table 3.6: Standardized regression weights, intercept and model summary

Variable description		Estimate	P-Value
BrandLoyalty <---	BrandReputation	.262	***
BrandLoyalty <---	SocialMedia	.430	***
BrandLoyalty <---	WOM	.309	***
BrandLoyalty <---	CustomerExperience	-.039	.535
BrandLoyalty <---	Merchandising	.340	***
Intercept		.217	

The analysis shows that all the independent variables except Customer experience are significant at the 95% confidence level) ($p \leq .05$). It is also noteworthy that Customer experience has a negative and low regression weight; this indicates that this independent variable (even if it was significant) would have minimal effect on the brand loyalty of the respondent in this study.

Table 3.7: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.807 ^a	.651	.638	.39073

a. Predictors: (Constant), Merchandising, BrandReputation, WOM, CustomerExperience, SocialMedia

The adjusted R^2 is .638, meaning that the data fit the regression model well ($R^2 \geq .60$) (Frost, 2021). This means that the model explains a variance of 63.8%. Also evident from the tables and figure above, the regression model ($y = a + b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + \dots + b_5x_5$) then shows that the antecedents and their predictive properties towards Brand loyalty are:

<p>Brand loyalty (y) = .217 + .262(Brand reputation) + .430(Social media) + .309(WOM) + .340(Merchandising)</p>

3.3.5 Exploratory factor analysis

The data was also subjected to exploratory factor analysis to determine if underlying intelligence or “other factors” were embedded in the data. The results show that eight factors (contrary to the original five antecedents identified from the literature) are present. (This observation is supported by identifying sub-factors in the antecedents’ word-of-mouth/brand community and customer experience (see Table 3.3).

These factors explain a cumulative variance of 63.5%, and all eight factors have eigenvalues larger than one. As per the Kaiser criterion, these factors should thus all be retained., However, Patil et al. (2008) indicated that a secondary measure should confirm the retention of factors. Patil *et al.*’s “Parallel analysis engine” serves as a more scientific method to more accurately determine the number of factors to retain. Research by Patil *et al.* (2008a) indicated that factors should be retained only if both of the following conditions are met. The conditions are:

1. the eigenvalue exceeds 1
2. the eigenvalue is also larger than the value calculated by the Parallel analysis engine software.

The analysis to determine the retention of factors appears in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8: Retained factors as per the parallel analysis engine

Factor	Parallel Analysis Engine	Eigenvalue	Retain or discard factor
1	1.439	9.759	Retain
2	1.273	2.886	Retain
3	1.154	2.457	Retain
4	1.051	1.769	Retain
5	0.963	1.673	Retain
6	0.879	1.448	Retain
7	0.805	1.137	Retain
8	0.739	1.097	Retain

Generated from Patil *et al.* (2008b).

The parallel analysis engine confirms that all eight factors can be retained confidently in this study. The Varimax rotated factor matrix appears in the table below.

Table 3.9: Varimax rotated factor matrix

Measuring criteria	Component							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Q.5.5 Good merchandising and/or visibility of a brand demonstrates that this brand values my shopping experience	.849							
Q.5.1 A supreme display of a brand (i.e., a clear brand block, shelf strips, or point of sale material) indicates that the brand is worthy of my purchase	.821							
Q.5.2 The more I see the brand in-store at various points, the more I get encouraged to purchase the brand	.732							
Q.5.4 If my brand does not make use of in-store brand merchandising, the low visibility will make it difficult to locate my brands	.706							
Q.5.6 A well-executed brand on display may influence me to support the brand	.695							
Q6.5 A well-executed brand display in-store will influence my decision to support the brand	.670							
Q.4.5 An efficient store layout is essential when I decide where I will be shopping	.622							
Q.5.3 Merchandising that communicates the brand characteristics encourages me to choose the product	.520							
Q.2.2 I can remember brands with social media visibility when I enter the shops		.749						
Q.2.6 A strong brand presence/engagement on social media influences my buying behaviour positively towards the brand		.749						

Q.2.1 I trust a brand that is present on social media for communication		.738						
Q.2.3 Social media is a helpful medium to consult when I want to learn more about a brand		.730						
Q.2.4 I will follow a brands social media page after I have bought it		.721						
Q6.2 The presence and engagement of a brand on social media have a significant impact on my overall support or loyalty to that brand.		.688						
Q.2.5 I value a brand that follows me back on social media		.626						
Q.1.2 If I cannot find my brand in-store, I would instead go to another store to buy the brand I want			.764					
Q.1.6 I only buy brands with a good reputation			.721					
Q.1.1. A tried and trusted brand is always my first option			.679					
Q.1.5 A brand's reputation influences my purchasing choices			.661					
Q.1.4 I find it easy to switch from one brand to another			-.631					
Q.4.2 I feel irritated if my chosen brand is out of stock			.492					
Q.3.1 Recommendations by other consumers influence my brand choices				.760				
Q.3.4 Recommendations by other customers on a specific brand could influence me to try their brand				.714				
Q6.3 What other people advocate or say about a brand has a significant impact on my total devotion				.650				
Q.3.2 I value the customer reviews and feedback on brands				.460				

Q6.1 The reputation of a brand has a significant impact on my total support or devotion to it				.408				
Q.4.3 I prefer readily available instore assistance (and not having to look for or ask someone to help me)					.735			
Q.4.4 I value the insight of a pharmacist (or some other knowledgeable person such as the instore manager) to provide information about a brand					.717			
Q.3.3 I trust a recommendation made by a health care professional (such as a pharmacist) on a specific brand					.540			
Q.3.5 If asked, I freely share my experiences with other consumers about the brands that I purchase						.679		
Q.4.6 A delightful overall customer experience influences me to support a store that stocks my brand						.462		
Q.3.6 Even if I am not asked to, I volunteer to share my experiences with other consumers about the brands that I purchase							.703	
Q.1.3 As a consumer, I do care about an established brand that delivers a quality product for my use							.547	
Q.4.1 Knowledgeable aisle managers can influence my brand choice when I am uncertain what brand to buy								-.662
Q6.4 My overall shopping experience will influence my decision to return to a particular store or brand in the future								.606

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.^a
a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations.

The data were tested for sample adequacy (using the test developed by Kaiser, Meyer and Olkin (KMO=.871), Bartlett's sphericity test showed significance (χ^2 (595) = 2264.119, $p < 0.05$), and the data possess excellent reliability according to the Cronbach alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.907$) (Field, 2009:658-659; 675). The first two factors dovetail nicely with the antecedents identified from the literature. In this regard, **Factor 1** is labelled *Merchandising and Visibility* (Antecedent 5), while **Factor 2** is labelled as *Brand reputation* (Antecedent 1). These factors explain 27.9% and 8.23% of the variance, respectively. However, the other factors identified new underlying constructs, namely:

Factor 3: Brand trust and reputation (7.02%)

According to Rust *et al.* (2021:22-23), a brand's reputation is the overall total of how its stakeholders perceive, feel, and discuss it. Therefore, a brand's financial performance might be adversely affected by brand incidents. The following are the characteristics of this definition: All stakeholders (current and potential customers, employees, partners, and investors) are considered rather than just the current or potential clients; (2) thinking, feeling, and talking components (rather than just brand knowledge); (3) actual brand events (e.g., controllable marketing activities, uncontrollable public events); and (4) links to the financial performance of the firm are included.

An organisation's reputation is an asset that can help it differentiate itself from its competitors and create obstacles to new competitors entering the market. As a result of long-term behaviour, a company's reputation is based on its capacity to produce value for customers and other stakeholders. Credibility and trustworthiness are closely tied to the implementation of rules and practices that have been explicitly declared. Therefore, the terms "reputation" and "judgment" or "credibility" are often used interchangeably (Pereira *et al.*, 2021:559).

Brand popularity and knowledge have a favourable impact on customer loyalty. Thus, in contrast, familiarity has a detrimental effect on the user. Although customer loyalty increases as a company's popularity and recognition rise, this impact is reversed as people become more acquainted with the brand.

Factor 4: Out-of-store recommendations (5.06%)

Various factors can significantly affect customers' behaviour, including price, brand awareness, and brand image. According to De Toni *et al.* (2021:633), there is a strong correlation between price and brand when customers have limited information about what they are considering purchasing. In addition, customers' perceptions of fairness and value (cognitive factors) and, in some cases, a higher social status are influenced by well-known brands with higher prices and higher quality (affective factors). Thus, the information consumers obtain before in-store purchase may influence their decision making according to what they know about the brand. Items priced at a high rate, yet brand or quality unknown can be perceived as an "expense" item to purchase.

What a brand communicates to their market is critical; the key messages they want to share with consumers can direct consumers towards finding a need or a want for the desired brand.

Factor 5: In-store advice (4.78%)

Personal selling, according to Indrasari *et al.* (2019:191), these sales are found to be more successful as it places a higher emphasis on direct contact with customers face to face are more successful. This is primarily to promote their services or introduce new products. It is expected that face-to-face interactions will significantly impact customers' perceptions of and interest in the product

Personal selling directly impacts the consumers' buying behaviour, which is an essential tool of marketing. Personal selling changes the negative attitudes of the customer to positive ones. According to Azeez and Abeyratna (2020:48), their research explains how personal selling affects customers' buying behaviour relating to clothes retail shops. Therefore, a salesperson's advice can change customers' attitudes and, ultimately, the customers' buying behaviour.

Factor 6: Shopping experience (4.14%)

According to Hu and Jasper (2018:153), these authors defined a consumer's shopping experience as the "totality of things that a consumer encounters or lives through as he or she makes consumption-oriented movement in a retail setting, with or without the possibility of making purchases". Thus, the definition mentioned above is also in line with how retail professionals perceive the shopping experience.

Retail stores would benefit significantly from knowing which specific aspects of their offerings affect customer satisfaction of unexpected buyers. Consumer insight information could develop ad hoc strategies for reaching these customers and building profitable long-term relationships with them. Satisfied unplanned buyers can return to the store where they purchased their unplanned item(s) and positively discuss it with other customers (Martínez-Ruiz *et al.*, 2017: 277). As many purchases are made in the store, new technologies can help store managers leverage the economic potential of unplanned purchases. For example, mobile applications could inform consumers about special in-store promotions connected with their planned purchases, thus inducing them to purchase unplanned items. Customers are more likely to return, spend, and recommend the product if they have a positive shopping experience (Hu & Jasper, 2018:155).

As a result, understanding which store attributes are most important to customers' satisfaction who tend to make impulsive purchases may help retailer managers better set their offerings, effectively deliver value to these customers, and ultimately increase their profits (Martínez-Ruiz *et al.*, 2017: 278).

Factor 7: Brand ambassador (3.25%)

A "famous person" is a celebrity or a brand ambassador. A well-known person for accomplishments outside of the product category in which they are endorsing is an expert in their profession. Thus, celebrities have a disproportionately high level of public recognition among a particular set of people. They have unique characteristics, such as their attractiveness, extravagant lifestyle, or ability to master a particular talent (Olugbenga & Oluwafemi, 2018:456).

Kim *et al.* (2020: 8) found that endorsements, including their attractiveness and expertise, were linked to brand loyalty through brand passion. Previous studies found connections between consumers' satisfaction with their relatedness needs and their brand passion for sporting goods. Therefore, consumers develop a strong emotional attachment for a brand when exposed to an endorsement, especially by an attractive star athlete with the image of an expert in their field. Individuals may have a basic psychological need for relatedness, and when that need is met, a strong emotional attachment develops with the related entity.

According to Olugbenga and Aluwafemi (2018:456), there has been a dramatic increase in celebrity endorsements as a marketing tactic in recent years; celebrities have been utilized for anything from sports to beverages to all kinds of electronic devices to a wide range of other things. However, despite celebrity endorsers becoming prevalent across many industries, this trend is not restricted to just one.

Researchers suggested that the employment of celebrities in TV commercials provokes the interest of customers, particularly when their favourite celebrities are involved. Celebrity endorsements are an excellent method to draw attention to a brand or product and enhance consumers' likelihood of buying it. As a result, advertisers are increasingly using celebrities in their campaigns.

Factor 8: Personal choices (3.13%)

There are several reasons why consumers like to experiment with new personal choices from a marketing and psychological standpoint.

In psychology, individual elements like satiation, the need for stimulation, and ambiguity about future preferences are examined to understand the phenomenon.

Various factors have been shown to encourage consumers to make more diverse purchases over time. However, internal or personal motivation is the first reason customers desire variety in their personal choices (Stasiuk *et al.*, 2021:1121).

3.4 THE MODEL TO MEASURE AND MANAGE BRAND LOYALTY

The brand loyalty model is presented in Figure 3.45.

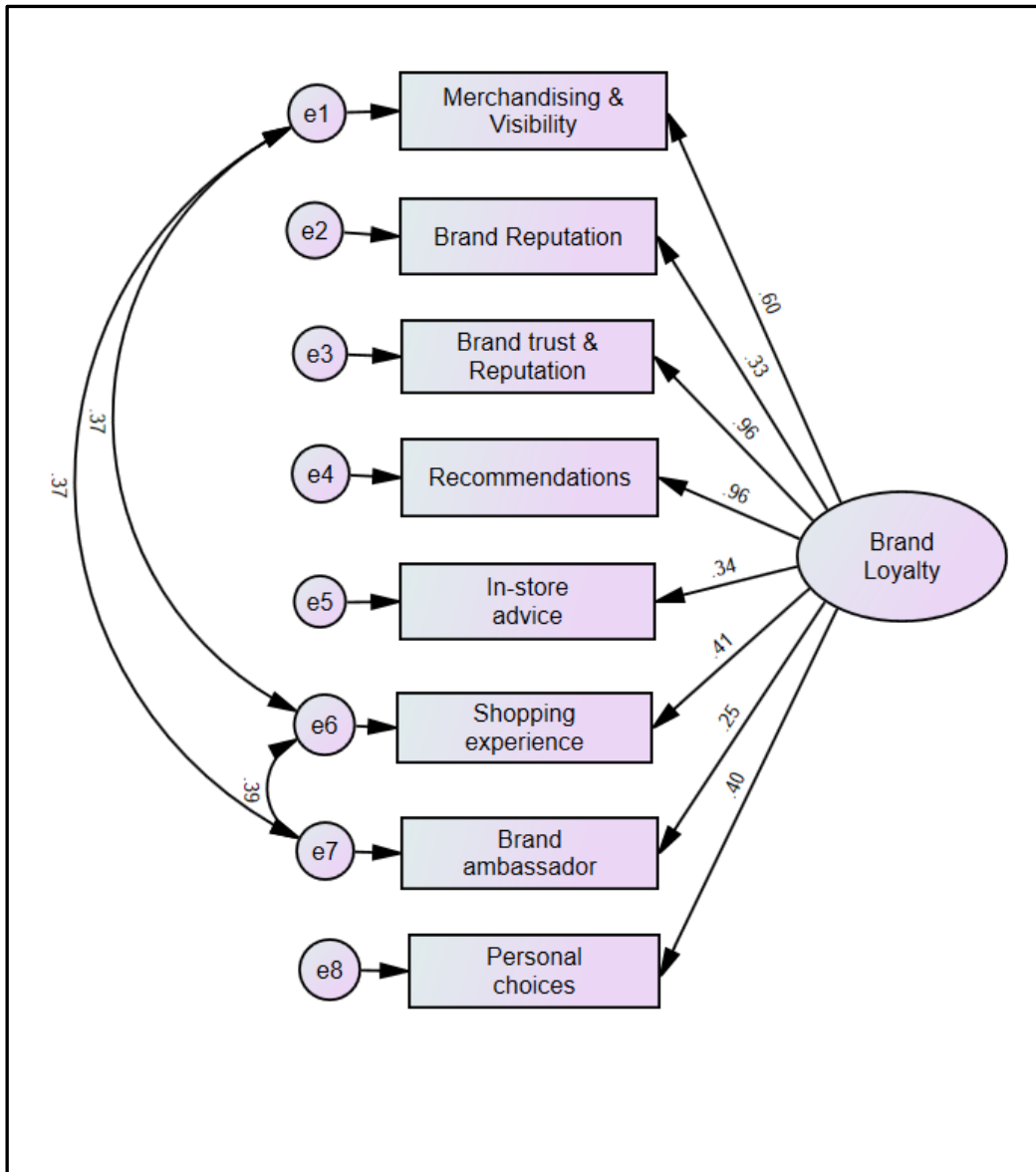


Figure 3.45: Brand loyalty model

3.4.1 Reliability and reliability of the model

The measurement model possesses a satisfactory composite reliability coefficient (.695) (Kumar, 2019). Construct validity is achieved when the model possesses both discriminant and convergent validity. Convergent validity ($AVE \geq .5$) tests if the constructs that are expected to be related are, in fact, related. Discriminant validity ($AVE^2 \leq R^2$) tests if the constructs that should not have relationships don't have any relationships (Shuttleworth, 2019). The table below shows that although the model does not possess

convergent validity (AVE=.351), it possesses discriminant validity (AVE²=.593; R²=.638). Table 3.10 shows the convergent and discriminant validity of the model.

Table 3.10: Construct and discriminant validity

Indicator variable	Regression weights	(Regression weights) ²	∑ (Regression weights) ²	No. of indicators	AVE	Sqrt AVE	Correlations (r)	Convergent validity	Discriminant validity
F1	0.327	0.107							
F2	0.960	0.921							
F3	0.957	0.915							
F4	0.336	0.112							
F5	0.411	0.169							
F6	0.255	0.065							
F7	0.405	0.164							
F8	0.597	0.356	2.811	8	0.351	0.593	0,638	NO	YES

3.4.2 Model fit analysis

This study employs five goodness-of-model-fit indices, including indices measuring incremental fit, non-normed fit, and absolute fit (Kumar, 2019). They are the *Degrees of freedom* (CMIN/df), the *Comparative fit index* (CFI), the *Normed Fit index* (NFI), the *Tucker-Lewis index* (TLI), and the *Root Mean Square Error of Approximation* (RMSEA) (Kumar 2019). The indices, CFI and TLI measure the model's incremental fit in comparison to the baseline model (a baseline model is a model with the worst possible fit) (Xia & Yang, 2019). The NFI is a normed fit index, while the TLI is a non-normed index (Kumar 2019). RMSEA is an absolute fit index that determines whether the deviation of the hypothesized model differs from a perfect model (DiStefano and Morgan, 2014). The decision rules and model fit analysis are shown in the table below.

Table 3.11: Goodness of fit indices

Index	Decision rule (preferred; minimum)	Model score	Outcome	Source
CMIN/df	≤ 5	3.566	Good fit	Kumar (2019)
CFI	≥ 0.95; ≥ 0.85	0.908	Fair fit	Bentler (1990)
NFI	≥ 0.90; ≥ 0.80	0.879	Fair fit	Kumar (2019)
TLI	≥ 0.95; ≥ 0.85	0.849	Fair fit	Xia and Yang (2019) Tucker and Lewis (1973)
RMSEA	≤ 0.08; ≤ 0.10	0.138	Poor fit	DiStefano and Morgan (2014); Brown and Cudeck (1997)

Source: Bisschoff (2021)

All but one of the model fit indices are satisfactory. They have indices larger than the required values as stipulated by the decision rules in the table. Three of the indices (CFI, NFI and TLI) show fair fit indices with values that exceed only the lower margins of good model fit. In this model, the CFI (.908) serves as the primary fit index, and it is supported by fair fit indices from the NFI (.879). These indicators signify a fair model fit (Kumar, 2019; Bentler, 1990). The CMIN/df index (3.566) shows a very good fit (Kumar 2019). The RMSEA has a poor model fit, and it indicates that the model deviates 38% from an ideal model; this is more than the acceptable 10% deviation (Xia & Yang, 2019). However, in the model's defence, it is noteworthy that this is an exploratory model. Moolla and Bisschoff (2013:5) state that it is optimistic to expect a superb model fit on all the indices. The model is exploratory and developmental and not yet a final, fully operationalized model. This view is supported by Bisschoff (2021) in his research on a business ethics model. It is thus concluded that the model has a satisfactory fit.

3.5 SUMMARY

A quantitative research methodology was used in the research. Consumers were recruited via social media, where the link to the questionnaire was sent to ten participants. This evolved in a snowball response of participants who referred other consumers to

create a more diverse geographical population group. This was to understand how consumers would participate and share their insights regarding engagement strategies and brand loyalty. Considering the study's units of analysis, sample size, and time constraints, a quantitative method was the best option.

A new questionnaire was developed by the author and her supervisor for this specific research dissertation. The questionnaire looks into five antecedents and the overall outcome of brand loyalty. The results will be compared to the self-developed customer engagement model to evaluate whether these outcomes contribute to brand loyalty and support.

CHAPTER 4 - CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focussed on the results and analysis of the study, and this is the final chapter of the study. In this chapter, the conclusion and recommendations derived from the results are presented. The chapter also offers some recommendations to future researches and highlights the main findings of the study in summary.

4.2 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The summarised results in the research show that the statistical evaluation of the five antecedents demonstrated the following outcome. Brand reputation, social media, and merchandising/visibility are validated as is. Thus, word-of-mouth/brand community and customer experience, however, measures two constructs each. Therefore, both these antecedents have two subfactors. Word-of-mouth deals with a "give and take" phenomenon, namely a) advice received from other parties on a product and b) receiving information from others. These factors can be identified as "Listening to advice" and "Sharing advice" via a brand community.

From the outcome mentioned above, it becomes clear that there is a relationship between customer engagement strategies and brand loyalty. In addition, using social media as a platform for data collection can assist one in collecting data quickly and responsively.

The five antecedents used in the first questionnaire may also be used for future research. However, as an outcome, eight antecedents can be used for future research to explore the relationship between the different engagement strategies and brand loyalty.

The research revealed eight antecedents, namely Merchandising / Visibility; Brand reputation; Brand trust and Reputation; Recommendations; In-store advice; Shopping experience; Brand ambassadors and Personal choices, which positively influence brand loyalty.

When investigating Word-of-mouth or a brand community, it is known that two sub-factors contribute to this antecedent, namely "listening to others" and "sharing with others". Merchandising / Visibility also has two sub-factors, namely "advice or instore recommendations" and "support/store related issues".

Merchandising and visibility also identified two sub-factors that were a) advice or information in the store and b) support and store-related issues.

Brand loyalty was measured with the regression analysis, which showed that all the independent variables expect antecedent 4, customer experience was significant in the regression analysis. This indicates that this independent variable would have minimal effect on the brand loyalty of the respondent in this study.

Exploratory factor analysis distinguished that there are eight-factor present instead of only five. This observation was evident with the identification of subfactors classified within antecedents three and four. The parallel analysis confirms that all eight factors can be retained confidently in this study. This study employs five goodness-of-model-fit indices; it is concluded that the model has a satisfactory fit.

Merchandising/visibility (Factor 1), Brand reputation (Factor 2), Brand trust and reputation (Factor 3), Out-of-store recommendations (Factor 4), Instore advice (Factor 5), Shopping experience (Factor 6), Brand ambassador (Factor 7) and Personal choices (Factor 8) can confidently be retained in this study.

4.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions are first drawn on the research methodology, and second, on the results.

4.2.1 Research methodology

Conclusion 1:

The study performed a rigorous theoretical review of brand loyalty and its antecedents. From this study, a proven model was selected as the foundation for the empirical research. Likewise, theory guides the researcher to relevant questions to compile the online questionnaire. It is thus concluded that doing a sound theoretical study resulted in a relevant and quality research instrument.

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that future researchers take note of the value of a sound theoretical study; this would guide them towards a solid foundation based on relevant literature. These researchers could duplicate or mould their research on similar theoretical principles.

Conclusion 2:

Regarding data collection, the response rate from participants was quick and effective using both the social media platform as well as an electronic questionnaire on GoogleForms.

Regarding analysis, sound research and consultation with statistical experts (such as the NWU Statistical Consultation Services) are imperative to select proper analytics procedures. In addition, using recent and specialised software to analyse the data are also required. These methodological guidelines assisted the study greatly, and it can thus be concluded that the proper analysis and data mining provided more than just the apparent intelligence in the data. Furthermore, it is concluded that the methodology followed suited this study well. More specifically, it can be concluded that the data were:

- 1) Adequate, meaning that a “sufficient” number of respondents participated (the Kaiser, Meyer and Olkin measurement exceeds 9.70)
- 2) Suitable for multivariate analysis because Bartlett’s test showed significance ($p \leq 0.05$)
- 3) Reliable as per Cronbach alpha’s coefficient ($\alpha \geq 0.70$).

Therefore, it is concluded that the data are fit to use in analysis and the results, therefore, suitable for managerial decision-making. It is also concluded that electronic platforms can be used to quickly and effectively collect data, albeit the target population needs to be selected effectively to get a good response.

Recommendation 2:

It is therefore recommended (based on Conclusion 2) that other researchers:

- 1) Ensure their data is suitable for analysis by performing the tests mentioned above
- 2) Make use of knowledgeable statistician to analyse the data
- 3) Use specialised statistical software to correctly analyse the data.

4.2.2 Results

Conclusion 3:

The analysis not only measured the respondents’ views on the initial theoretical model (the measuring criteria and the antecedents), but also identified underlying factors (or

intelligence) in the data. Furthermore, the analysis confirmed these factors with confirmatory factor analysis, and measured model fit indices. Based on the thorough analysis of the data, it is concluded that the antecedents of brand loyalty and the identified factors are relevant and valid constructs to manage brand loyalty. More specifically, it is concluded that:

- 1) The results remained valid when tested on the original five antecedents of CES
- 2) The antecedents could be used to manage and influence brand loyalty in consumers
- 3) The underlying intelligence (factors) provides a secondary and good indication of what drives brand loyalty. In this case, eight factors have been identified, and these factors are more specific than the original five antecedents identified from the literature.
- 4) The confirmed model shows a fair fit to the brand loyalty data. This means the model can be used with confidence.

Recommendation 3:

The results of this study can assist and guide managers towards improving their brand loyalty managerial decisions. It is thus recommended that:

- 1) Managers peruse the results and internalise knowledge specifically relevant to their brands and customers.
- 2) The confirmed model be operationalised and used in brand loyalty decision-making because industry and management can benefit from the results in practice.
- 3) Academia and other researchers also take note of the results as it adds to the body of brand-loyalty knowledge while also forming a basis for further research.

4.4 AREAS OF FURTHER STUDY

In this section, recommendations are made for future researchers. Possible areas for future research are:

- Investigating the age and demographic areas with regards to how the participant could have viewed their opinions. A more centralised focus towards different ages groups or generations such as Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silent Generation can also be investigated to compare or illustrate which engagement strategy is most influential towards their brand loyalty.

- Expand the study to a wider geographical area and also use more social media platforms.

4.5 LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations to this study. The limitation is that his study used only one facet of social media, namely Instagram, to recruit participants. More social media platforms could have yielded a better response. The sample size was 135 participants, and a larger sample size on various social media platforms can reach a larger target population with a more comprehensive view regarding research.

4.6 SUMMARY

This study consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the study. The chapter sets off by defining customer engagement strategies and the relationship with brand loyalty. However, more important is that the chapter highlighted the problem statement, objectives, and details of the research methodology followed in this study. It also precludes the layout of the study. The next chapter examines previous literature and theoretical findings that are relevant to this study.

In Chapter 2, a literature review was done to explain the theoretical aspects of the study investigate the CES, such as Brand reputation, Social Media, Word-of-Mouth / Brand Community, Customer experience, and Merchandising / Visibility, followed by exploring the definitions of the constructs and reviewing previous literature according to the research title.

In Chapter 3, the general research strategy was discussed. This chapter discusses the research design, participants, measurement devices, technique, statistical analysis, and the research objectives. In this chapter, the questionnaire was a good fit for future research, and eight antecedents were discovered from the research data.

Chapter 4 provided a conclusion for the research, followed by limitations and recommendations to customer engagement strategies or brand loyalty for future research investigations.

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APPENDIX A – SELF DEVELOPED QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: THE CONSUMER

The following information is needed to enable meaningful data analysis of the consumer's participation in the research. Mark the applicable block. Please complete all information and criteria for research sample group

Age Group (Years)

- <18 years
- 18-21 years
- 22 - 29 years
- 30 - 39 years
- 40 - 49 years
- 50 - 59
- >60

Demographic Area

- Northern Cape
- Western Cape
- Eastern Cape
- Free State
- Gauteng
- Limpopo
- Mpumalanga
- Kwa-Zulu Natal
- North-West

When a NEW product is launched, do you first read the reviews or do you try it for yourself? *

- I first read the reviews
- I try new products without reading reviews

Which method of brand communication do you PREFER the most? *

- E-Mail
- SMS
- Telephonic
- Social Media Page (Instagram or Facebook)

Which method of brand communication do you DISLIKE the most? *

- E-Mail
- SMS
- Telephonic
- Social Media (Instagram or Facebook)

Which method of brand communication do you find the most IRRELEVANT as you do not respond, answer or read it? *

- E-Mail
- SMS
- Telephonic
- Social Media (Instagram or Facebook)

Which Omni-channel of brand advertisement do you find the most memorable once you have heard or seen it? Please select three. *

- TV
- Radio
- Social Media
- Brand Ambassadors / Celebrities
- Social Media Influencers
- Billboards / Posters / Pole Ads
- Digital Screens Advertisements

Which method of shopping do you prefer? *

- Online
- Retail (Instore)
- Both

SECTION B: ANTECEDENT 1 – BRAND REPUTATION

The next section of the questionnaire will explore BRAND REPUTATION as a customer engagement strategy toward brand loyalty. Please answer the question that indicates your own experience, insights and expectations. This will be according to a scale of 1-5

Q.1.1. A tried and trusted brand is always my first option *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.1.2 If I cannot find my brand in-store, I would instead go to another store to buy the brand I want

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.1.3 As a consumer, I do care about an established brand that delivers a quality product for my use *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree

- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.1.4 I find it easy to switch from one brand to another *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.1.5 A brand's reputation influences my purchasing choices *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.1.6 I only buy brands with a good reputation *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

SECTION C: ANTECEDENT 2 – SOCIAL MEDIA

The next section of the questionnaire will explore SOCIAL MEDIA as a customer engagement strategy toward brand loyalty.

Please answer the question that indicates your own experience, insights and expectations. This will be according to a scale of 1-5

Q.2.1 I trust a brand that is present on social media for communication *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.2.2 I can remember brands with social media visibility when I enter the shops *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree

- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.2.3 Social media is a helpful medium to consult when I want to learn more about a brand *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.2.4 I will follow a brand's social media page after I have bought it *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.2.5 I value a brand that follows me back on social media *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.2.6 A strong brand presence/engagement on social media influences my buying behaviour positively towards the brand *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

SECTION 4: ANTECEDENT 3 – WORD-OF-MOUTH / BRAND COMMUNITY

The next section of the questionnaire will explore WORD-OF-MOUTH / BRAND COMMUNITY as a customer engagement strategy toward brand loyalty.

Please answer the question that indicates your own experience, insights and expectations. This will be according to a scale of 1-5

Q.3.1 Recommendations by other consumers influence my brand choices *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.3.2 I value the customer reviews and feedback on brands *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.3.3 I trust a recommendation made by a health care professional (such as a pharmacist) on a specific brand *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.3.4 Recommendations by other customers on a specific brand could influence me to try “their” brand *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.3.5 If asked, I freely share my experiences with other consumers about the brands that I purchase *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.3.6 Even if I am not asked to, I volunteer to share my experiences with other consumers about the brands that I purchase *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

SECTION 5: ANTECEDENT 4 – CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The next section of the questionnaire will explore CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE as a customer engagement strategy toward brand loyalty. Please answer the question that indicates your own experience, insights and expectations. This will be according to a scale of 1-5

Q.4.1 Knowledgeable aisle managers can influence my brand choice when I am uncertain what brand to buy *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.4.2 I feel irritated if my chosen brand is out of stock *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.4.3 I prefer readily available instore assistance (and not having to look for or ask someone to help me) *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.4.4 I value the insight of a pharmacist (or some other knowledgeable person such as the instore manager) to provide information about a brand *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.4.5 An efficient store layout is essential when I decide where I will be shopping *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.4.6 A delightful overall customer experience influences me to support a store that stocks my brand *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

SECTION 6: ANTECEDENT 5 – MERCHANDISING / VISIBILITY

The next section of the questionnaire will explore MERCHANDISING / VISIBILITY as a customer engagement strategy toward brand loyalty. Please answer the question that indicates your own experience, insights and expectations. This will be according to a scale of 1-5

Q.5.1 A supreme display of a brand (i.e., a clear brand block, shelf strips, or point of sale material) indicates that the brand is worthy of my purchase *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.5.2 The more I see the brand in-store at various points, the more I get encouraged to purchase the brand *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.5.3 Merchandising that communicates the brand characteristics encourages me to choose the product

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.5.4 If my brand does not make use of in-store brand merchandising, the low visibility will make it difficult to locate my brands *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.5.5 Good merchandising and/or visibility of a brand demonstrates that this brand values my shopping experience *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q.5.6 A well-executed brand on display may influence me to support the brand *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

SECTION 7: OUTCOME – BRAND LOYALTY

The next section of the questionnaire will explore customer engagement segments that drives the outcome of BRAND LOYALTY.

Please answer the question that indicates your own experience, insights and expectations.

This will be according to a scale of 1-5

Q6.1 The reputation of a brand has a significant impact on my total support or devotion to it *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q6.2 The presence and engagement of a brand on social media have a significant impact on my overall support or loyalty to that brand. *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q6.3 What other people advocate or say about a brand has a significant impact on my total devotion *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q6.4 My overall shopping experience will influence my decision to return to a particular store or brand in the future *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q6.5 A well-executed brand display in-store will influence my decision to support the brand *

- 1 - Strongly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Q6.6 In essence, I regard myself to be a brand loyal shopper *

- Yes
- No

APPENDIX B – INFORMED CONSENT

QUESTIONNAIRE: CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND BRAND LOYALTY

<https://forms.gle/6v6q2yE8zW4Cqr4y8>

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Dorothy Grace Flint, Masters Student from Business School at the North-West University.

The study aims to explore different segments of customer engagement strategies and their contribution towards a consumer's brand loyalty and support.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You have been chosen to participate in the study as a consumer who engages with various brands of choice. Your insight towards engagement strategies can help conclude which strategy of brand engagement you as consumer prefer the most.

IS THIS STUDY ENDORSED OR SPONSORED BY A BRAND?

This study is only for academic research. Therefore, no brand or organisation will be mentioned in the questionnaire.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

There are no foreseeable negative consequences as no names will be mentioned; thus all participants information will be anonymised.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

- You have the right to request that your name not be recorded anywhere and that your participation in this research is known only to the researcher and other specified members of the research team.

- This code number or pseudonym will be used to identify your responses in any publications or other research reporting methods like conference proceedings. Your replies will be kept strictly confidential.
- The transcriber, an external coder, and the Research Ethics Review Committee members may go over your responses.
- Unless you permit others to examine your records, only research participants will have access to any records that identify you.
- Personal data will not be included in referral information to other participants.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No payment or reward will be offered, financial or otherwise.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval in the form of ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the North-West University. Copies of the approval letters can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Dorothy Grace Flint at flint.dorothy12connect@gmail.com

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Prof Christo Bisschoff at Christo.Bisschoff@nwu.ac.za

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING:

This is an anonymous study survey as your name will not appear or will be asked on the questionnaire. The answers you give will be treated as strictly confidential as you cannot be identified in person based on your answers.

However, you may choose not to participate, and you may also stop participating at any time with any negative consequences.

Please answer the questions in the attached questionnaire as completely and honestly as possible this should not take more than 15 minutes of your time.

The study results will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. Thus by selecting I consent, you may continue with the questionnaire.

Please indicate that: You have read and understand the information provided above. You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. (Please tick)

I give my full consent towards my participation in this study

APPENDIX C – ETHICAL CLEARANCE



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Economic and Management Sciences Research
Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)

2 November 2021

Prof C Bisschoff
Per e-mail
Dear Prof Bisschoff,

EMS-REC FEEDBACK: 29102021 (Round Robin)
Student: Flint, DG (22224920)(NWU-00966-21-A4)
Study leader: Prof C Bisschoff - MBA

Your ethics application on, *Exploring the relationship between customer engagement strategies and brand loyalty*, which served via Round Robin, refers.

Outcome:

Approved as a minimal risk study. A number **NWU-00966-21-A4** is given for one year of ethics clearance.

Please note that the ethics approval of this application is subject to the Covid-19 protocols.

Kind regards,

Mark
Rathbone

Digitally signed by Mark Rathbone
DN: cn=Mark Rathbone, o=North-
West University, ou=Business
management,
email=mark.rathbone@nwu.ac.za,
c=ZA
Date: 2021.11.03 10:25:40 +02'00'

Prof Mark Rathbone

Chairperson: Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee
(EMS-REC)

APPENDIX D – LANGUAGE EDITOR’S LETTER



Antoinette Bisschoff
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Tel: 018 293 3046
Cell: 082 878 5183
Language@dlts.co.za
CC No: 1995/017794/23

Monday, 29 November 2021

To whom it may concern

Re: Confirmation of language edit, typography and technical precision

The MBA dissertation “**Exploring the relationship between customer engagement strategies and brand loyalty**” by **D Flint** (22224920) was edited for language and technical precision. The referencing and sources were checked and comply with the Harvard guidelines specified by the 2020 NWU Reference guide.

Final, last-minute corrections remain the responsibility of the author.



Antoinette Bisschoff

BA Languages (UPE – now NMU); MBA (PU for CHE – now NWU); Translation and Linguistic Studies (NWU)

Officially approved language editor of the NWU since 1998
Member of SA Translators Institute (no. 100181)