An Investigation into how SMEs use social media to market their products.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Business Information Systems

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Declaration:

“I declare that this dissertation entitled ‘An Investigation into how SMEs use social media to market their products’ has not already been accepted in substance for any other degree neither has it been previously submitted in candidature. I can confirm that this is of my own independent research except where otherwise stated”

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Date:
Abstract

Purpose
The purpose of this research paper is to investigate how SMEs use social media sites to market their products. It examines a number of social media sites in order to gather information on how much of an impact it has to a business in regards to an online marketing strategy.

Methodology
Two forms of research were undertaken. Firstly, primary data collection involved a questionnaire which was given to customers of SMEs, and secondly the Secondary data research concerned doing a review of the existing literature to establish what influence social media has in regards to online marketing strategy. This involved journals, books, reports and the internet, and existing information.

Findings
The findings of this research paper will validate how social media has proven to become a key online marketing strategy and sustain the major impact of competitive advantage. The information gained will show not only that customers trust businesses who have published advertisements on social media but also prefer businesses who have it compared to those who do not.

This research paper will determine whether businesses with social media marketing strategies have a greater advantage than those who do not have a social media strategy. It is acknowledged that businesses with a strong online marketing strategy have a higher chance of attracting more customers and sales. Additionally, social media can have an influence on customer service, making it easier to communicate to a ‘business’ through social media rather than over the telephone or email.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation was the biggest challenge I have faced during my academic career. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Hilary Berger for assisting me throughout this project, it would have not been possible without her. Also I would like to thank my family and friends for the encouragement at all times during this study.
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**Glossary**

SME – Small and Medium Enterprises

SM – Social Media

SEO – Search Engine Optimisation

GNN – Global News Network
Chapter 1 - Background and Information

1.1 Introduction.

More and more SMEs are currently promoting and gaining a lot of success utilising an online marketing strategy, as Jenny Servis states ‘Ten years ago it may have been a choice to jump on the online bandwagon, but now it's an absolute must to survive and thrive as a small business’ (Nicole Leinbach-Reyhle, 2015). This research study aims to investigate how SMEs use social media to market their products and identify which social media sites, marketing is used on. Within this project both primary and secondary research will establish how SMEs use social media in order to boost sales and introduce new customers. There is no doubt that this topic is becoming increasingly popular. The investigation is to essentially gain information about the impact it has on sales and potential customers’ opinions and feedback.

This topic was specifically chosen for the research study as the author has established a keen interest in creating a business in the near future and would like to gain information on the best strategy for sales and marketing. It is believed that the approach to sales online is influenced by advertisements on social media, and that this continues to increase. This investigation will involve potential customers' thoughts about SMEs using social media to market their products and whether they believe that this method is advantageous or not. Data will be gathered to provide information from potential customers to ascertain the majority of peoples view from, which to draw conclusions. This investigation will be an overview from every aspect of the topic in question. Previous research and project work relating to online marketing has enabled me to formulate a basis that will be extended and expanded to increase my understanding.

An increasing percentage of people are using online shopping and it is a continually growing business approach. The value of this study lies in the contribution it makes to the existing body of knowledge and also providing information to others about what the process of online marketing is and the best possible way of gaining the products they want.
1.2 Aims and objectives.

The key aim of this research study is to – ‘investigate how SMEs use social media to market their products.’

The chosen topic is to investigate how SMEs use social media to market their products. It is evident that a lot of sales are now processed online rather than going out and physically shopping about, everything is now computerised. It has become a lot more popular nowadays, as people do not even have to leave their house to acquire products within the next few days. This investigation is not specifically targeting online marketing but aims to investigate online marketing via social media. The idea of attracting people’s attention to products promoted on social media continues to increase a significant amount.

The following objectives are designed to achieve the research aim.

Research Objective 1. Identifying the types of social media currently used by SMEs as an online marketing strategy.

The focus is not on a single social media site but examines the use of Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and also looks at the positioning of the advertisement within. Commonly, it is usually in a place where it catches ‘your’ attention. This will be examined to gain information relative to the SME sector on how it is displayed and on what social media.

Research Objective 2. Identifying the potential barriers of the use of social media to sell products by SMEs.

This could include false advertisements which would try to gain sensitive data and other things such as causing viruses etc. Another barrier could be public nuisance, being published as spam or even the time that social media requires to sustain a strong marketing approach. Within this section I will be investigating in to what people are worried about when being bombarded with advertisements from other websites. This includes things such as spam, fake accounts and time constraints.
**Research Objective 3.** Identifying what the customers want, what they expect to see from an SME using social media.

Objective 3 will analyse the data gathered to identify the social media mechanism preferred by customers (wants). What do the potential customers want to use to gain their products? Whether or not they want something grabbing their attention when they least expect it on social media sites or whether they would prefer to go on to the official website themselves to ensure it is legit.

**Research Objective 4.** Identifying social media users that utilise social media as an online marketing strategy.

This will involve undertaking a review of existing literature to establish the current status of SMEs using social media to market their products. For example identifying users who trust SMEs using social media. This will clearly recognise whether the SME sector is actually being trusted by their potential customers, as well as SMEs using social media to gain sales for their business. This can determine whether or not an SME is utilising social media in the correct context to gain sales or whether customers do not trust this source.
Chapter 2 - Literature review

2.1 Introduction to Literature review.

This chapter set out a review of the current relative literature to use of SM, For example reports, projects and journals which are related to online marketing. Information such as what is online marketing, how it has become popular and when it started being published will be included. This review will critically investigate online marketing, what others believe about the strategy and if it has been used in a strong manor (correctly/successfully).

This review will critically investigate the opinions of others including customers and experts into the use of social media as a marketing strategy. This section will consist of not only a specific social media approach but several, each with different success rates and different outcomes.

2.2 Social media.

There are many different definitions of social media, this is down to the fact that there is not an agreed definition and that some would argue that the forever evolving fast paced technology doesn’t help but develop all these social media platforms.

'Websites and other online means of communication that are used by large groups of people to share information and to develop social and professional contacts; Many businesses are utilizing social media to generate sales.' Dictionary (2017). Another definition taken from Berger and Thomas (2014) tells us that 'SM is an umbrella term that refers to a set of tools, services and applications that allow people to interact with others using an electronic network.' (Page 4) whereas Fernando (2016) states 'Social media are primarily Internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information...' Each of the above definitions are all very similar but all have different aspects of scope.

Social media has different impacts on people, in some cases they are similar and others are different. Within today’s society it is apparent that ‘many of use social media to feel connected to others’ as Steakley (2014) stated and further goes on to say that ‘it can also leave us feeling frustrated, lonely and depressed’. SMEs like to think of it as a promoting site for their products
and do not acknowledge these side effects. It is becoming more and more popular to use a particular social media site to gain the attention of potential customers.

Over the past couple of years the increase in smartphones have risen exponentially and statistics illustrate that there are a very large amount of smartphone users. According to Steinberg (2016) 'More than 3 billion people worldwide now use the internet, and 80 percent of them access it from smartphones'. With the figures rising year by year, more and more people are using their smartphones to gain access to the internet which then leads to accessing social media sites. Social media is easily accessed via smartphone by simply downloading the app of the users choice, whether it would be Twitter, Facebook etc. This is great for SMEs who are using social media as a marketing strategy to increase their sales.

Some social media users will have come across some sort of advertisement and promotions of products in their time. In some cases social media users will prefer to come across products via social media (unexpectedly) than to go browsing on official websites. For others it can be very annoying as they view social media for specific outcomes and viewing products isn't one.

2.3 Most used social media sites.

Social media is proving to become more and more popular by the day, with some sites being a significantly more active than others. Facebook being the most popular with figures around the 1.8 billion mark (Zephoria, 2017). There are a lot of SMEs in which have created pages, accounts and profiles on certain social media sites to raise awareness of their business. They are very easy to set up, once set up, customers and social media users will either like the official page or register their interest in the correct context. Once the customers registered their interest they can now view the latest information which would be published by the SME.

**Facebook**

According to Zephoria (2017) 'Worldwide, there are over 1.86 billion monthly active Facebook users'. This is a very large amount of interest for a social media site, so for SMEs the best site to get their products out there. SMEs can create a page for their customers on Facebook, to receive customer feedback, gather interest in their products, release new products or even communicate
with customers with issues. Once they have set the page up they can publish the latest information, prices of their products, publish videos and pictures and also speak to customers, which will build a very good relationship and boost the businesses customer service.

**Instagram**

According to Boorstin (2016) Instagram now has over 600 million monthly active users. A significantly lower figure than Facebook (one in three), but still a very large audience. Any business trying to use social media as an online marketing strategy would expect to use Instagram to advertise products on. It is very easy to create an account with Instagram. All you need is basic information such as name, age and email. Once you have created an account you can now decide whether or not the account will be locked (viewed by people who follow only) or unlocked (available to everyone on that specific platform). Instagram is strictly only videos and pictures, which will have an impact for SMEs advertising products as its all visual posts. You are able to post a caption as long as you want which in this case can be very useful to others. Followers are able to comment on posts and also privately send messages which can be very good for customer service, in some situations private messaging is only available if both parties are following each other (SME and user).

**Twitter**

According to Smith (2016) Twitter has around 310 million active users (just half the users of Instagram). Again decreasing the amount from Facebook and Instagram. However, 310 million users (2016) is still a significant amount of people and a beneficial way to advertise an SME to an audience of that size. Twitter is very similar to Facebook in terms of posting information/pictures and other items. Instead of posting, twitter is referred to ‘tweeting’. Also twitter created a very clever method of searching for the public’s tweets via using ‘hashtags’. The public simple types in at the search bar what they want to look for example ‘#worldcup’, all the tweets about the world cup will appear from every user talking about it. SMEs now only have to hashtag their brand name and also important information relating to their products and the public can view it via searching for that specific word. With twitters word limit to a single tweet restricted to 140, a lot of the public dislike this feature. Freeman (2011) states that it can be difficult for the end user to register the intended tone in 140 characters. Especially for an SME trying to promote a product.
Clever ways around this would be creating a notes page (mobile users), writing everything you want on there and then screenshotting it and publishing it on twitter, this is a clever resolution to the 140 character limitation.

**Snapchat**
According to Smith (2017) as of November 2016 there are 301 million monthly active users on Snapchat. The lowest out of the analysed social media sites, but again a very large volume of the public. Unlike Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, Snapchat is the most unlikely to be used by an SME. It does have the lowest amount of monthly active users also. Snapchat is similar to Instagram in the context of what you can post. It is just pictures, videos and private chat only. In order to get people to view your items it must be published on their ‘story’ which means everyone who has added the account can view. Other than story posts it is just private chats using pictures, videos and also text (chat).

An account can be created easily, same as any other social media site requiring basic information such as Full Name, Age, Date of Birth and Email address. Once you have created an account you can chose to make the account private or open. Being open you can have as many people as you want on their.

**2.4 Expansion of Social media.**

Everything these days is social media, and there is no doubt about it that social media is becoming very popular in today's society. It is being used for so many different outcomes, whether it would be to interact with one another on a daily basis, view the latest news and gossip, advertise or even posting your personal information online. There are many of other outcomes but there is no valid discussion about how broad and large it is becoming within our society.

**Figure 1** illustrates that in 2010 the number of total social media users was at 970 million. However, by 2015 it has increased to almost 2 billion, with Facebook taking up 1.5 billion of that.
figure. Instagram having the second highest social media interest with 400 million users in 2015, after 2014 being the same interest as twitter with around the 300 million mark. Twitter has slightly improved its popularity from 2014 with 316 million followed by Snapchat with 200 million users. YouTube also having a high volume audience with 1 billion, some may say YouTube is not a social media platform, yet it allows comments which connect individuals together. According to Foster (2017) YouTube is classed as a social media site as it ‘provides a network of people with a place to make connections’.

With these social media sites becoming more and more popular yearly, there is no doubt about their popularity. This is why SMEs like to use it as an easier way to grab the attention of the public or just to get basic information out in the open.

![Figure 2: Number of social media users (2016)](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Source: Statista.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of social network users worldwide</td>
<td>2.34bn</td>
<td>Details →</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global social network penetration</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>Details →</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of U.S. population with a social network profile</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>Details →</td>
</tr>
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The above **Figure 2** shows that there are 2.34 billion social network users worldwide. This figure is absolutely overwhelming and further research goes to show that it ‘is expected to reach some 2.95 billion by 2020’ which is almost half of the world’s population (7.49 billion) according to worldometers, 2017.

### 2.5 Online marketing.

‘Online marketing refers to a set of powerful tools and methodologies used for promoting products and services through the Internet.’ Words of Techopedia (2017) or as Saulnier (2017) stated that online marketing is ‘The use of the internet to promote goods and service’ further declaring that there are ‘tons of strategies to make a business visible to the target audience’. Online marketing is a clever strategy that brings in customers and sales for specific departments
of work. This can mean things such as Email or Newsletter marketing, social media marketing and Search engine optimisation (SEO). The scope here is the use of social media but there are other strategies to perform an ingenious online marketing.

When was online marketing created? A question which is asked by many, those in the IT industry that is. According to Smarty (2013). ‘The first commercial website ever created was by O’Reilly & Associates in the early days of 1993.’ This website was created for advertisement and was a ‘first example of online content marketing’. It was published for a company called GNN, for ‘mass viewing’. Ever since the first ever website created relating to online marketing, the internet has gone wild with marketing. Online marketing is now performed via Social media, Emails/Newsletters, Interactive marketing, Search Engine Optimisation and Video marketing. Each of those are performed via the internet (Online).

To date Online marketing is proving to be a very successful and a widespread strategy to use within the business sector. As previously mentioned, there are more than 3 billion people using the internet world wide (Steinberg, 2016), which means there is a high likelihood that the public will come across a method of online marketing that draws them in (as customers). A poor online marketing strategy can lead to a significant influence in withdrawing from business (entering bankrupt), so without a clever strategy your business could be at jeopardy. That is why these days a lot of businesses tend to use social media to advertise their products and use emails for newsletters etc. SMEs cannot attract everyone, especially if they are a new company. The best way to increase customer notice and customer sales is fairly visible to a company and that is to go online, as the vast majority use internet within their daily lives. This is why having a firm online marketing strategy is key to success within a business.
There is no question about it that if you are amongst an SME, there are some crucial and important methods of online marketing, which must be utilised within. Most online marketing strategies will lead to major success, others may not have a large impact. Research taken from the British Business Show reveals that 91% of SMEs are aware of social media as an online marketing strategy (Figure 3.), closely followed by 89% claiming they are aware of email marketing. 79% aware of Search Engine Optimisation and a slightly smaller amount being aware of a paid search (73%). Inbound marketing being the lowest figure of 35% being aware of. This graph (Figure 3.) goes to show that most SMEs are aware of social media as an online marketing strategy as it is the most popular in terms of being aware of online marketing.

2.6 Using social media as an online marketing strategy.

More and more SMEs are using some sort of social media platform to boost sales and to increase company awareness. As 32.0% of the global population and 68.3% of internet users, will access a social network regularly in 2016 according to emarketer (2016, online). That means one in three will use some sort of social media platform regularly which increases the chance for SMEs who are using a social media platform as an online marketing strategy to gather potential customers.

Using social media as an online marketing strategy is very simple and has a lot to offer. Once a social media account/profile is created the online marketing begins. Depending on the type of
account/profile it is can depend on how many viewers/followers you get. As an SME you want the most viewers and followers, this is why making your account open to the public is very important. Viewers can view what type of content is on the profile before actually being a ‘follower’ or ‘supporter’. If the public/social media user likes what they see they can then register their interest further by supporting them by giving them a like or add (Facebook), Follow (Twitter), follow (Instagram) or add (Snapchat).

If the social media user wants to communicate with the account they can comment on posts but if an issue is private then depending on some social media platforms they will have to follow back (Instagram and twitter) in order to have a private conversation, this will also depend on privacy settings of the account.

If an account wants to ‘make it big’ and expand to gain more interest, then they have to influence people to help them by word of mouth or sharing posts (Facebook), retweeting (Twitter), ‘Shouting out’ (Snapchat) and reposting (Instagram). By having social media users publishing to their followers, this will bring in further potential customers/viewers to a SMEs account. This then meaning, down to the fact of being published a lot, an account will keep increasing its followers until people notice the SMEs online platform.

An SME can use social media to share/publish various kinds of content including text, videos and images. As well as sharing information from other accounts for their followers to view from existing sources.

2.7 Advantages of using social media as an online marketing strategy.

The increase in social media is at a high increase, day by day. With more and more social media users every day and no intentions of the figure slowing down, it can now be used for many advantages in accordance to online marketing. ‘There are pros and cons to everything in life’ (Moreau, 2016), within this context, here are a few pinpointed advantages relevant to using social media as an online marketing strategy;
Costs.
Social media is absolutely free. No hidden fees, no bank details or any other costs, just a few clicks and you are live. This is used in opposition to adverts via radio, television and banners (which can come with a heavy cost). This is a big advantage and a key reason as to how social media has become a massive marketing strategy. Profiles are very easily set up and can be viewed by the public right away with no costs what so ever. As well as it not costing a thing it also has another benefit, which is that it is ‘time-saving as it takes less time to find customers and accomplish transactions.’ Saulnier (2017).

Audience.
As previously researched there are around 2.34 billion social media users (Statista, 2016), which means a ‘win win situation’ for businesses using social media as an online marketing strategy. Businesses who use social media for marketing their products have not got a lot to lose when it comes to creating profiles/accounts to publish. A lot of businesses are now using various sites of social media to gain attention to their products and to also build good customer relationships.

Interaction.
The interaction between customers and business is proving to become a good method of sustaining customers and bringing new customers in. A significant advantage for any SME using social media as an online marketing strategy.

With social media the public/customers can share their opinions on items which have been posted and also can interact via private chat to deal with any enquires or further issues they may have.

Loyalty.
If customers are struggling with an issue they have with a particular product, social media accounts are there to put an end to the issue. According to Suk Kwon and Lennon (2010) retailer’s having an online presence creates more brand loyalty as there are more contact points for the consumer. Customers are welcomed to ask any questions and a response could be a matter of seconds away (depending on how big the company is). Sustaining a relationship with customers
is great for loyalty. Customers will keep returning if there is exceptional customer service and that can further lead to recommendations, increasing sales and noticeability for a company.

**Instant.**

Social media is instant, in terms of posting items. This can used in substitute to creating a website or magazine/brochure full of products which may take up to 4 weeks for production. Social media is instant, meaning you can post whatever you want to your audience in a matter of seconds.

**Competitors.**

Using social media for your business can also help you keep an eye on your competition, Windels (2013). This would be an advantage for analysing their data to see if it has an effect on your products. Using information such as prices, their target audience and other key information.

These advantages are all key points in proceeding with a social media platform. Any company trying to create a social media platform should look into advantages and disadvantages before executing this as an online marketing strategy.

### 2.8 Barriers to social media as an online marketing strategy.

Like the majority of things which include advantages, it is more than likely to be followed by disadvantages, *‘There are pros and cons to everything in life’* (Moreau, 2016). In this situation barriers to using a social media platform as an online marketing strategy (disadvantages), which would have a significant impact on users and SME owners. Here are a few barriers which will have a significant impact on SMEs using social media as an online marketing strategy;

**Time.**

The use of social media takes time and *‘is NOT an overnight fix’* (Hendrix, 2015), especially to those who use it for regular updates on a business. Introducing and sustaining a business tends to take up a significant percentage of time, in addition to this using social media to create attention for your business takes even more time. Trying to manage a business itself and the use of social media can be very time consuming and requires time management as well as professionalism. In this situation employing someone who would be dedicated to this sector
would be a very wise solution to this barrier. Time is also needed for the users, according to Stelzner (2016) ‘if a website takes longer than 3 seconds to load, more than 40% of those users will abandon it’. This meaning if a user is trying to reach a social media site and it is not loading, more than 40% will choose to abandon the website. These days’ people are very careful and wise how they spend their time. If it is not worth it then time will not be spent, it ‘is your life’ and ‘the most important thing in your life’ Bloom (2016).

Unsure of content.

In some situations too much of the same thing can be very boring and decrease peoples interest. The public and potential customers will like to see a variety of content available so they can view important information and view media which would benefit them and attract them in potentially becoming a customer to an SME. Ambrose (2010) stated that social media is often referred to as an online conversation, so it is important that your page is consistently kept up to date and interesting in order to keep people following. Ensure that the page is full of peoples wants to keep them interested in following. Overcoming this barrier would be to ensure that the content shared is a variety of texts, images and videos. All including important announcements for followers.

Unsure of customer wants.

This barrier is very similar to the content posted. Viewers will all want to see different types of information being published. If viewers see too much of the same thing they might just becoming an ‘unfollower’, cease to follow it. For an SME ‘it can be difficult to know what every customers wants’ according to Whitaker (2017), who goes on further to claim that customers want you to meet their expectations, want options in how they contact you, ‘expect a timely response and want relationships with you’. This is a barrier which can be very easily avoided, ask your followers. Another solution could include creating a poll, the most of a particular content will be made priority in their future posts.
Not everyone uses social media.

Even though previously stated around 1 in 3 people use social media, having taken in to consideration that the world population of 7.49 billion (Worldometers, 2017) compared with the amount of social media users of 2.34 billion (Statista, 2016), which calculates out to be around 1 in 3. If that is the case what about the remaining 2 in 3, who do not have social media. Social media is not for everyone, some people lose interest and some people have never even had social media. A solution to this barrier would be thinking about an alternative marketing strategy such as producing flyers, posters and advertising in big built up areas, to attract those who potentially do not interact with social media.

Fake accounts.

As well as a high number of social media users, comes a very high amount of those who are trying to gain sensitive information from individuals through social media, emails, websites and text messages. Phishing scams are proving to become popular, according to Alvarez (2017) Social media phishing attacks increased by 500% during 2016. The use of fake accounts in order to represent a legit company to then further gain information from innocent individuals is a very inappropriate and devious method of misusing social media. A solution to this is very complicated, but it is possible. Ensuring if an account is legit can be tricky but identifying how many followers they have is a massive giveaway. Reviews can also be a massive impact in ensuring an account is legit. Furthermore, do not give no sensitive data to any unauthorised person.

These barriers all have relevant solutions, a good company would assess the barriers before proceeding with any social media strategy. Using social media as an online marketing strategy can be beneficial but also can be complicated and difficult to sustain.
2.9 Summary of Literature review.

After reviewing a various amount of existing literature, it is very clear to say that the amount of social media users is at an old time high and it is showing no intentions of maintaining or reducing in users (only increasing). Having said this, consuming social media as an online marketing strategy at the correct context can prove to be strong for any type of SME. Those who have a weak or no approach in using social media as a marketing strategy have a considerable disadvantage in oppose to those who have a strong approach. Consuming a strong online marketing strategy can be an advantage to an SME to achieve ambitious business objectives.

From the above literature review, after researching different areas to the topic, it is clear to establish that the highest used social media site is Facebook. Within the research it is evident to state that SMEs are aware of social media as an online marketing strategy and that utilising it brings many advantages. From the existing literature it is also evident to state there are many of advantages and also disadvantages to using social media. The advantages include the costs of using the platform and also how instant the use of the platform was. The disadvantages included time, unsure of what the users want and also the fact that not everyone is using social media.

Furthermore to this section will include the methodology, findings/results and recommendations on the research paper. In summary then go further to conclude the main body of which is the Investigation of how SMEs use social media to market their products.
Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction to methodology.

The aim of this chapter is to set out the research methodology adopted for this research study. According to Kaden (2006) 'choosing the right methodology for your research is crucial' and should be carefully considered. This chapter presents the research methods, details of the sample population, why they was selected and how they was selected for the research and also research approach. In referring to the methodology this study concerns an interpretive approach adopting an inductive research strategy involving qualitative data gathering methods of a questionnaire [which was hand given by consumers of SME products], and analysis will involve quantitative analysis to present statistical data.

The objective of this research is to identify and critically evaluate how SMEs use social media to market their products. The results of this research will be stated from the chapter 4 of this research paper (Results and findings). In conclusion to these results the researcher aims to clearly establish the key uses of a social media platform by a consumer. This will then go to show the benefits of using social media as a company.

Even though this research paper has a main focus on social media, not a specific social media platform is the focus, instead there are multiple which are mentioned throughout. Although justifying what platforms are the most and least popular.

3.2 Research approach

The primary research conducted utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. A qualitative approach was chosen to gather the views and opinions of others within data collection, whereas the quantitative method of data collection was chosen to present numeric analytics. As Wallimam (2010) has stated 'human behaviours and attitudes, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data is needed'.

The least focused research method was the qualitative research, this is down to the fact that having a high number of responses was believed to have a better outcome. The quantitative method was the main focus within the research approach, this is down to using the primary
research and further comparing this to the researcher’s secondary research, which would be concluded later on in chapter 4. The secondary research findings were gathered and critically analysed from a multiple amount of sources, these included academic books, journals, articles and online websites.

3.3 Participants – Sample population

The participants of this research included a sample of users purchasing products from an online service, who were mainly all social media users. The population sample was from age ranging from 18 – 25 years old each being consumers of some kind of SME product as visually identified on arrival of consuming the questionnaire. Before the questionnaire was given to the participants, the researcher asked 2 questions which were relevant to the topic, these were "Do you use social media?" And "Have you ever purchased a product online?". These questions were essential, as if they did not respond correctly, their response would have come back insufficiently and irrelevant.

All participants were reminded that the data will remain confidential and will be stored securely in a password protected computer system and that no third party will have access to the data. As well as remaining anonymous, provide informed consent and be assured that no data provided will be traceable back to them unless specific consent has been given to do so. A total of 30 participants had taken the questionnaire.

3.4 Research method

3.4.1 Questionnaire

This part of the research will refer to the quantitative research method that was in place. These questionnaires were all given out by hand, face-to-face. According to Salmon et al (2009) 'questionnaires can be used to collect a large amount of data of any interest or topic'. Before handing them out two questions were asked these were; "Do you use social media?" And "Have you ever purchased a product offline?" If the potential participant answered "no" to both questions, their response would be irrelevant and therefore not needed. The data gathered by
the researcher from the questionnaires allowed the results and statistics to be evaluated and concluded in the final findings.

In total there was 30 copies collected, those that were aged between 18 –25 and not specifically being targeted by gender. Each questionnaire (see Appendix 3) consisted of 15 questions, which included both closed and opened questions. On decision of given the questionnaire to the correct people for relevant results, there had to be a visual product present which was SME based. As well as basic questions such as age range, more complexed open ended questions such as "Have you ever had a bad experience during following an advertisement on social media?" were asked. 30 questionnaires were distributed in order to get an insight in to what sort of experiences different people have had when viewing products from an advertisement displayed on social media, which would portray the trust they have in accordance to social media platforms.

3.5 Sample population.

This section refers to the justification and significance of the sample population. For example, who the specific people were, why they were chosen (to conduct the questionnaire) and how they participated. The main goal of the dissertation was to evaluate the statement of 'investigation into how SMEs use social media to market their products' this would be completed by using primary and secondary research. The primary research is essential in this context as other people’s inputs and opinions are key to addressing the research aim and objectives.

In total 30 responses to the questionnaire were returned complete and used for data analysis. Those of who took part was not specifically targeted for one reason only but a few. They were all randomly selected if they ticked one box and that was if a product was visible of an SME. Those who did take part of the questionnaire were students, full/part-time workers and were each asked to spare a few moments to help out for a project. These people were located in universities, schools and shopping centres, and aged between 18–25.

Each of the participants were purposefully selected by the researcher as visually they looked like potential customers due to wearing products available on line, or were in possession of an
existing product they had sourced from an SME. Some of the participants had just previously purchased items from an SME store.

The participants were approached individually and asked to spare a few moments to fill in a questionnaire relating to social media and SMEs. Each of the participants were given a pen to fill in their answers, if there was not a table or flat service available a clipboard was supplied. Each of the participants then filled out the questionnaire as well as being made aware that it is an anonymous questionnaire and that all information was stored securely in a password protected computer system and made aware that they could withdraw any given information at any point.

The questionnaire results will include empirical data which will be used in a thematic analysis technique so that patterns and trends in the data can be identified.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

Prior to the research, it was necessary for the researcher to review the reliability and validity, further more seeking ethics approval in order to make a valid research study. A full ethics form was approved prior to any research conducting for this research paper, resulting in no unethical behaviour at any time during the research. It is also essential for the researcher to consider the reliability of this research in order to ensure no problematic results occurred as a consequence.
Chapter 4 - Findings and results

4.1 Introduction to findings and results.

This section will layout the findings and the discussions involved from the primary research stage of this study. The totaled sufficient results from the questionnaire will be critically evaluated as well as having valid discussions which will relate to any other research previously proposed. A review of the findings will also be based on the findings in terms of the overall aims of objectives to this research paper. This section will also include comparisons and differences amongst both the primary research and existing secondary research that have already been identified throughout previously. A formal discussion is to follow, bringing in both types of research (primary and secondary).

4.2 Questionnaire Results (Quantitative Research)

The questionnaires were distributed personally by the researcher, and aimed to gain critical information about SME customer’s experiences on social media and within purchasing online. All responses were then gathered and graphs and tables were created to display the results. Most of the questions were closed ended question but the questionnaire did supply a few open ended questions. This was to broaden the quality of information gathered.

4.2.1 Important Findings

The following information shows the important findings from the researcher’s quantitative research (questionnaire). These crucial findings were all identified as being the most relevant data gained from the questionnaire. Furthermore the least important questionnaires were not included but will be displayed below amongst appendices, these questions may be referred to in a discussion.
4.2.1.1 Have you ever seen products advertised on social media?

Question 6 of the questionnaire asked the candidate if they had ever seen products advertised on social media. This may be important to SMEs, this is down to maybe posting more advertisements on social media platforms. If the respondents are unaware of products being advertised on social media, this shows that it needs to be implemented as soon as possible, as figures go to show that social media is used by a very large quantity of the public.

![Figure 4. Have you ever seen products advertised on social media?](image)

As you can see from the above Figure 4. That the majority of those who took the questionnaire answered ‘Yes’ to the question of having seen an advertisement on a social media platform. The remaining 5 answered ‘No’. This tells us that the majority of users nowadays are able to view advertisements via social media platforms, this also tells us that advertising via social media is becoming more and more popular. The remaining 5 users which have not seen an advertising product on social media must be users which are not very familiar with social media or are very reluctant to use social media, going by assumptions.

As this question was an open ended question with an extension with a ‘Yes’ answer, some additional information was supplied. The majority of those who selected ‘Yes’ claimed the advertisements were ‘Clothing’ of some kind, additional inputs claimed to be ‘Football items’, ‘Holidays’, ‘Pets’ and ‘DIY products’.

4.2.1.2 On what social media site have you seen an advertisement on?

Question 7 of the questionnaire asked the respondents if they had ever seen an advertisement on social media, and if so what platform of social media it was. This will be important for an SME as they need to assess what social media sites need more advertisements and others which are
in need of less. Preferably SMEs will target social media sites with a bigger audience, so they could reach out to a higher volume of the public, which would benefit their company.

![Bar chart showing social media sites where respondents have seen advertisements.](image)

As shown in Figure 5, the results to question 7 of the question which was if the respondents had ever seen an advertisement on social media and if so state which social media site it was. This question there could be more than one selection as you can see there are a total of 69 responses from 30 respondents. There was no question about it which site was going to be the most popular within this category, as previously stated the most used social media site, Facebook. As you can see there was 22 selections from Facebook, closely followed by Instagram with 15 and then Twitter with 13. Snapchat and Tumblr both matched at 7, whilst 4 respondents claiming they had never saw an advertisement, the remaining ‘other’ was stated to be ‘YouTube’. This doesn’t particularly mean that Facebook has the most advertisements placed on their platform, as it could mean that the respondents only use Facebook or even use it more than other social media platforms (meaning they would not notice advertisements on other platforms of social media). This tells us that there are advertisements being placed on social media platforms as the vast majority of the respondents had seen advertisements on social media.

### 4.2.1.3 Purchasing after seeing advertisement on social media

A major question which was included in the questionnaire was question number 8, which asked if they (respondents) had ever purchased something from an online site after viewing an advertisement on social media. This was important to the research paper as the main focus is to investigate how SMEs use social media to market their products and if it was successful or not, if
the respondent’s feedback was positive and they had purchased a product after viewing an advertisement, this would tell us it was a successful online marketing strategy.

![Figure 6. Have you ever purchased something from online after seeing an advertisement on social media?](image)

As shown in Figure 6, the responses from the question ‘Have you ever purchased something from online after seeing an advertisement on social media?’ a staggering 23 out of the 30 participants had purchased a product of some context after viewing an advertisement from a social media platform. The remaining 7 participants’ purpose did not trust the advertisement that was viewed on social media. This shows that people have trust in the advertisements they see on a day to day basis on social media. Not only that reason it shows that people purchase products online with no intentions of purchasing, their intentions would be browsing social media and not viewing items to purchase.

### 4.2.1.4 Most popular platform of advertising

A question which was important to this research paper was question 10 of the questionnaire, which asked the respondents what they thought was the most popular area of advertising. This again was important to the research paper as if the respondents thought something other than social media was the most popular, that means that more advertising would need to be implemented on that particular online platform. This question was very important to the research study as it is crucial to discover from the public their opinions of the current advertisements. The participants were asked ‘What do you think the most popular area of advertising is?’, with the possibility of having the answer of TV adverts, Newspaper, Leaflets, SM,
Billboards, Word of Mouth, Radio or Email. This part of the questionnaire the respondents in question were able to select more than one answer.

As you can see from Figure 7 that the participants of the questionnaire thought that social media was the most popular platform of advertising with a figure of 20, closely followed by TV adverts with 14 selections. The least selected option was Leaflets with two selections.

This tells us a lot, it clearly states that the majority of people believe that social media is the most popular form of advertising. Even though social media is the most popular, it does not mean it is the most effective. To this day a lot of the public use technical devices, which means the use of mobile devices, laptop, personal computers and applications. Having access to the internet, the majority will use social media and this is why the majority think it is the most popular form of advertising. Whether or not they tend to view advertisements during browsing their personal social profiles or whether it is their general opinion as they don’t see much advertising elsewhere.
4.3 Further questionnaire results

Further questionnaire results included the other questions from the questionnaire. These questions was not labelled as very important to the study but may be discussed amongst the comparisons within this research paper. These questions may be used in a further discussion at some point, but would not be used to accomplish a specific conclusion within the investigation of the study.

4.3.1 Is social media a good marketing strategy?

This question is reasonably relevant to a discussion as it is important to find out what users find what is best. It is also crucial for users of social media to view what they want and not what other people believe to be a marketing strategy, after all it is their ‘personal profile’.

![Figure 8. Do you think the idea of advertising on SM is a good marketing strategy?](image)

As you can see from the above Figure 8 That 25 out of the 30 respondents answered yes to question 9 of the questionnaire. This tells us that most people believe that social media is a strong marketing strategy. The 5 people that selected ‘No’ could be confident in an alternative strategy and not social media. There are plenty of alternative strategies of marketing but as you can see that the majority do believe that social media is a strong platform of marketing. This tells us that users do believe in advertising on social media, this could be down to the fact of previous experiences or just the knowledge of knowing the large audience of social media.
4.3.2 Is marketing on Social media becoming more popular?

This question will be relevant to a discussion as it is important to listen to users of social media. It could be becoming too much for them to view and what they want to view is being obstructed and bombarded by unwanted advertisements. This study also tells us that what users are noticing from social media but more importantly edges to what they want as users.

As shown in Figure 9 the results from question 13 of the questionnaire. 25 out of the 30 respondents answered ‘Yes’ to the question, which means the vast majority believe that marketing via social media is becoming popular. This could mean that users of SM may become very annoyed at the amount of advertising on their news feed. This tells us that people are definitely viewing more and more advertising on social media.

4.3.3 Viewing more online marketing on Social media?

This question may be relevant as it will tell us how people are feeling towards the amount of online marketing appearing on social media.
From the previous chart (Figure 10.), will be the results to question 14 of the questionnaire, which queried whether or not users would like to see more online marketing on social media. 18 out of 30 respondents responded to ‘Yes’, with 12 selecting ‘No’. This tells us that the slight majority believe that it is a good marketing strategy and that it should carry on to expand. Whereas the remaining 12 respondents may believe there is too much as it positions and what they want from social media is a diverse reason for marketing.

4.4 Discussion

All the above findings and results that have been obtainable in this section of the research paper, will have elements which are similar and sections which differ, amongst the findings and also existing literature. The importance of this section is to label points of similarity and differences. The researcher has identified a various amounts of data which link between both the primary and secondary research carried out within this research paper.

The focus here is social media and with users spending over 700 billion minutes per month (Sheals, 2004) it is a must for an SME of any kind to utilise within the business, to obtain successful business objectives. Within this research paper research goes to show from both perspectives, from the customers and SME owners. Referring back to Figure 3. States that 91% are aware of social media as an online marketing, whereas the primary research conducted states that 20 people selected social media as being the most popular of advertising (marketing) as shown in Figure 7. This shows that the majority of people are aware of social media as being a present marketing strategy.

Earlier within this research paper, we established aims and objectives. One of the objectives was user wants, which would include what SME customers want to see more of. Within the questionnaire, taken from Figure 10 which asked the participant in question if they would want to see more online marketing on social media. The results came back positive in what was assumed and that was that the majority wanted to see more online marketing via social media, 18 out of 30 people said yes. This means that people want to see more online marketing via social media, whilst others may prefer to view it elsewhere.
As expected we seen that from Figure 5 that the most popular advertisements were on Facebook with responses of 22 out of a total of 30. This means that Facebook has a severe amount of advertisements as 22 users have noticed them in some context on the social media site. There is correspondence, which links in with Figure 1 which tells us that Facebook is the most popular social media site with approximately 1.5 billion users in 2015, then expanding to 1.86 billion in 2017 (Zephoria, 2017). From this information, as expected the most popular social media site was always going to be Facebook.

4.5 Summary of findings

As an overall aspect of the findings (both primary research and secondary research), it was apparent that social media is such a fast growing online source with a high amount of different kinds of methods within the business sector.

Within this research paper, it is apparent that using social media as an online marketing strategy is a very strong method, but this is down to the effort that is put within making the advertisements broadcasted to a large audience, ensuring it is what an audience wants and having the time to perform this. As stated within the literature review chapter to this paper, the barriers to using social media. These stated that 'not everyone uses social media' 'time' and 'unsure of content'. To achieve great success within using social media as an online marketing strategy it is key to look at barriers and try to overcome these small sections of complications. After assessing and implemented change to overcome the barriers, a great and successful SME is within your hands as an SME.

The important questions which were collected from the questionnaire have all been greatly assessed and have been discussed within this section, which would have been used to agree a conclusion to this study. All of the questionnaires are available in the appendices (Appendix 3). When utilising social media as an online marketing strategy, there is not much that can go wrong as 'it’s one of the most rapidly changing fields of technology ever' (Hootsuite, 2014). This means if an SME is already utilising this as a method of marketing, they already have a much greater advantage than those who do not, within the business sector.
In the following chapter, the above findings are other issues that were gathered within this study will be formally discussed and conclusions will be outlined in the context of the initial objectives to the research paper.
Chapter 5 - Conclusion

This research paper was initially set out to examine an investigation into how SMEs use social media to market their products, of which includes main aims and objectives. A review of the existing literature in accordance to social media, it has always been a very significant number of users worldwide. Existing literature stated that in 2015 there was 970 million social media users, 5 years later that number increased to 1.96 billion social media users (aki libo-on, 2015), then 2016 there was 2.34 billion (Statista, 2016). This means that down to previous research and the forever fast growing technologies these days, that figure of 2.34 billion in 2016 has increased now (2017). As social media has always had a very high and successful rate of individuals accessing the platform, this only meant one thing for SMEs, an advantageous method of utilisation for online marketing. SMEs have identified the high use of users and have used it to their advantage, using the platform to initiate an online marketing strategy. SMEs are more importantly noticing that social media is a strong method of an online marketing strategy (see Figure 3) and alternatively social media users are aware that social media is being used as a strategy of marketing (see Figure 4) and on which social media platforms (see Figure 5).

In accordance to meeting the initiative aims and objectives, all of them have been met. The first being identifying the types of social media currently used by SMEs as on online marketing strategy. This research paper has been successful in addressing objective one, this was down to the primary conducted by the author which asked on what platform of social media had they seen advertisements (marketing strategy), to which the responses were all of followed; Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, Snapchat and ‘Other’ (YouTube). You can see this in Figure 5. Although Tumblr and Youtube has been mentioned, these were not a part of the main focus of social media platforms used by SMEs within this study.

This research paper was also successful in achieving objective two, which was identifying the potential barriers of the use of social media to sell products by SMEs. The barriers which covered this objective, stated to be; Time, Unsure of content, Unsure of customer wants, not everyone uses social media and Fake accounts. Even though there was many barriers, there was a lot more...
advantages and this shows within the success SMEs gain from utilising it within their business. Objective number three stated to, identify what the customers want. This would include what they expect to see from an SME using social media. This was stated within the existing research on barriers of 'unsure of customer wants'. It will also be very difficult to gain information off every customer and this is why you cannot please everyone. This objective was met as within the primary research conducted, having asked the participants if they wanted to see more online marketing on social media (as shown in Figure 10). The majority stated yes they did, also following up with that, the majority thought online marketing was a good idea when asked within the questionnaire conducted (see Figure 8).

The final objective was obtained as successful, this was to identify social media users that have utilised social media as an online marketing strategy. This objective was achieved after asking participants of the questionnaire if they had ever purchased something after viewing it as an advert on social media (see Figure 5). The results of this research supports this objective as, the majority claimed that they had purchased a product from an SME after viewing it as an advertisement on social media. This tells us that people trust the advertisements that they view to be legit and are not reluctant to purchase products after viewing advertisements.

After creating initiate aims and objectives, the research had to be taken into account. This research paper consisted of both primary and secondary research, each being thoroughly taking into account of the original study statement. The existing literature helped gather crucial information which would then be concluded in the above chapter. However, the primary research which was the questionnaires produced by the author. These questionnaires were handed to students which were appropriate for the study and were handed out within the Cardiff Metropolitan University library. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open ended questions for a greater collection of information and were completed within minutes. The information gathered was then processed and helped bring in greater conclusions, comparing and contrasting along the way with the existing literature. One of the stand out comparisons between the two research methods was that the significant amount of people that use social media and on which sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat). Question 9 of the
questionnaire which concluded of 25 out of 30 Respondents further go on to say that the idea of advertising on a social media platform is a good idea (see Figure 8).

From the information collected, it was evident that utilising social media as an online marketing strategy is here to stay, as social media is such a significantly impacted influence in many peoples’ lives and not to mention it is forever evolving. It also goes to show that SMEs that utilise this tool earlier rather than later are to gain important knowledge of the variety of social media sites, which therefore are going to have the highest success rate.

In conclusion, from the research gathered it was evident that Social Media and SMEs are very well combined to create such a successful and crucial marketing tool. With referring to addressing the overall aim of the research study ‘An Investigation into how SMEs use social media to market their products’. It can be said that, based on the responses of the participants of this research study, that Social Media has had a significant impact on social media users, with more and more users selecting to purchase after viewing advertisements on social media. With a number of advantages of utilising social media as a marketing strategy, standouts include the costs and the instant access and use for the platform. There is no question about it that using social media as an online marketing strategy is proving to become very popular and very effective. With the numbers of social media users increasing annually and SMEs having an increased level of sales revenue after utilising social media it is evident to say it is successful.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Ethics form

CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY
APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

When undertaking a research or enterprise project, Cardiff Met staff and students are obliged to complete
this form in order that the ethical implications of that project may be considered.

If the project requires ethics approval from an external agency (e.g., NHS), you will not need to seek additional
ethics approval from Cardiff Met. You should however complete Part One of this form and attach a copy of your
ethics letter(s) of approval in order that your School has a record of the project.

The document Ethics application guidance notes will help you complete this form. It is available from the Cardiff
Met website. The School or Unit in which you are based may also have produced some guidance documents, please
consult your supervisor or School Ethics Coordinator.

Once you have completed the form, sign the declaration and forward to the appropriate person(s) in your School or
Unit.

PLEASE NOTE:
Participant recruitment or data collection MUST NOT commence until ethics approval has been obtained.

PART ONE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of applicant:</th>
<th>Iain Roath</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor (if student project):</td>
<td>Dr Hilary Berger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School / Unit:</td>
<td>Cardiff School of Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student number (if applicable):</td>
<td>20065535</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme enrolled on (if applicable):</td>
<td>BSc (Hons) Business Information Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>Investigating how SMEs use social media to market their products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected start date of data collection:</td>
<td>12/11/2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approximate duration of data collection:</td>
<td>8-8 Weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funding Body (if applicable):</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Other researcher(s) working on the project:</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Will the study involve NHS patients or staff?</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Will the study involve human samples and/or human cell lines?</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Does your project fall entirely within one of the following categories:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper-based, involving only documents in the public domain</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laboratory based, not involving human participants or human samples</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice based not involving human participants (eg curatorial, practice audit)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compulsory projects in professional practice (eg Initial Teacher Education)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>A project for which external approval has been obtained (e.g., NHS)</td>
<td>No</td>
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If you have answered YES to any of these questions, expand on your answer in the non-technical summary. No further information regarding your project is required.

If you have answered NO to all of these questions, you must complete Part 2 of this form.

In no more than 150 words, give a non-technical summary of the project.

The project in investigation is about SME's and how they market their products. Things that will be included within the project will be identifying the practice of SME's using social media, what types of social media used, the barriers of using social media and also what the customers prefer/want from SME's.

Within the project I will be gathering information from potential customers of SME's [CSM Students] by giving them a short questionnaire which will have around 10 - 15 questions. From the information received I can then investigate into what some SME's are doing wrong and what they are needing to do to sustain their customers and potentially increasing the target audience.

DECLARATION:
I confirm that this project conforms with the Cardiff Met Research Governance Framework.

I confirm that I will abide by the Cardiff Met requirements regarding confidentiality and anonymity when conducting this project.

STUDENTS: I confirm that I will not disclose any information about this project without the prior approval of my supervisor.

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<thead>
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<th>Date: 09/12/2016</th>
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FOR STUDENT PROJECTS ONLY

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<th>Name of supervisor:</th>
<th>Date: 09/12/2016</th>
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<td>Dr Hilary Berger</td>
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<th>Signature of supervisor:</th>
<th>Date: 09/12/2016</th>
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<td>Dr Hilary Berger</td>
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Research Ethics Committee use only

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<td>Project approved</td>
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<td>Project approved in principle</td>
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<th>Name:</th>
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<td>Dr Jason Williams</td>
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Signature: Dr Jason Williams

Details of any conditions upon which approval is dependent
None

PART TWO

A RESEARCH DESIGN

A1 Will you be using an approved protocol in your project? No
A2 If yes, please state the name and code of the approved protocol to be used
N/A

A3 Describe the research design to be used in your project
This study concerns an interpretative approach adopting an inductive research strategy involving qualitative data gathering methods.

Questionnaire:
30 semi-structured questionnaires using open and closed questions to gather a range of data for analysis will be distributed manually to CSM Students as customers of SMEs in South Wales utilising a purposeful sampling technique. The population sample will target 18–25 year olds who are wearing upcoming branded clothing (such as gym kings, bee inspired, kings will dream) bought from the identified SMEs.

Analysis:
- The empirical data will use a thematic analysis technique so that patterns and trends in the data can be identified concerning how SMEs currently market their products and their use of social media i.e. what types of social media are used, what the barriers of using social media are, and also how the customers prefer to purchase products from SMEs.

Consent:
- All data will remain confidential and will be stored securely in a password protected computer system, no third party will have access to the data.
- All participants will remain anonymous, provide informed consent and be assured that no data provided will be traceable back to them unless specific consent has been given to do so.

A4 Will the project involve deceptive or covert research? No
A5 If yes, provide a rationale for the use of deceptive or covert research
N/A
A6 Will the project have security sensitive implications? No
A7 If yes, please explain what they are and the measures that are proposed to address them
N/A

B PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

B1 What previous experience of research involving human participants relevant to this project do you have?
I have previously conducted interviews, questionnaires and meetings to various individuals and groups in the past. In my last year modules, I conducted a questionnaire on a client’s product, where I had to gain

1 An Approved Protocol is one which has been approved by Cardiff Met to be used under supervision of designated members of staff; a list of approved protocols can be found on the Cardiff Met website here
Information from an individual or what they wanted. I have also conducted a few interviews; these were for another module I did. I had to gain information from an external organization, enquiring about the system and software they used within the business.

R2: Student project only
What previous experience of research involving human participants relevant to this project does your supervisor have?
Dr Hilary Berger has 14+ years of researching involving human participants relevant to this project.

C. POTENTIAL RISKS
Q1. What potential risks do you foresee?
Questionnaire
1. Some questions may cause offence to participants
2. Very few responses due to people’s availability.

Q2. How will you deal with the potential risks?
1. Make sure I am always polite when approaching participants.
   Make the participants aware that they don’t have to go ahead with the questionnaire.
2. Always be organised and punctual, don’t waste peoples time.
Make participants aware that they can also withdraw their data at any given moment.

When submitting your application you MUST attach a copy of the following:
- All information sheets
- Consent/assent form(s)

An exemplar information sheet and participant consent form are available from the Research section of the Cardiff Met website.

Approved ethics no. 2016D0282

Application for ethics approval v6 October 2016
Appendix 2 – Participant information sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Investigate how SME’s use social media to market their products

Cardiff Metropolitan University Protocol Number:

Project summary
The purpose of this research project is to investigate how SME’s use social media to market their products to potential customers. Your participation will enable the collection of data which will then form part of a study being undertaken at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Why have you been asked to participate?
You have been asked to participate because you fit the profile of the population being studied. This is the age from 18 and 35 and potentially purchase products from SME’s. Within the questionnaire you will be asked 15 questions, both open and closed end questions. These questions will all include your opinions and facts on your experiences with SME’s and feedback on things you want to see from SME’s. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Project risks
The research involves the completion of only a questionnaire. We are not looking to gather any sensitive data from you; this study is investigating into how social media has an impact on products, so sensitive data is irrelevant.
We do not believe that there are any significant risks to this study. However, if you feel that any of the questions are inappropriate and/or irrelevant and you do not wish to answer, you can reject to take part. Furthermore, if you have submitted a questionnaire you can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study at any given moment – we will respect your decision.

How we protect your privacy
All the information you provide will be held securely. From the questionnaire we have ensured that you cannot be directly recognised from the information you return to us. Your personal details (Signature on consent form) will be kept in a secure location and have no access to it other than the research team. Once the study has come to a finish and we have finished analysing the information, the documentation used to gather the information will all be destroyed except from the signed consent form which will be held securely for an additional 5 years.
Appendix 3 – Participant Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

Investigate how SME’s use social media to market their products

The purpose of this research is to collect primary information in relation to how SME’s market their products on social media. This data will form part of an individual project which will be studied at Cardiff Metropolitan University. If you would prefer not to take part in the project, then I thank you for your time. If you are happy to participate in this project, please can you complete the questionnaire accurately. All information given will be treated confidentially. Submission of completed questionnaires will be taken as informed consent.

1. Gender
   Male [ ] Female [ ]

2. Age
   18 - 22 [ ] 20 - 25 [ ] 25 - 30 [ ]

3. How often do you purchase items online?
   Once a month [ ] Twice or more a month [ ] Once every 2 months [ ] Twice or more every 2 months [ ] Once a year [ ] 1 - 2 times a year [ ] 3 - 4 times a year [ ] Never [ ]

4. How much do you spend at one moment online shopping?
   Below £20 [ ] £20 - £50 [ ] £50 - £100 [ ] £100 - £150 [ ] £150 - £250 [ ] £250 [ ]

5. Is this influenced by an advertisement?
   Yes [ ] No [ ] Sometimes [ ]

6. Have you ever seen products advertised on social media? (if yes state what the product was)
   Yes [ ]

7. If you have ever seen an advertisement on social media, state what social media site it was
   Facebook [ ] Instagram [ ] Twitter [ ] Snapchat [ ] Tumblr [ ] Never seen an advertisement on social media [ ]

8. Have you ever purchased something from online after seeing an advertisement on social media?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]

9. Do you think the idea of advertising on social media is a good marketing strategy?
   Yes [ ] No [ ]

10. What do you think the most popular area of advertising is?
    TV advert [ ] Newspaper [ ] Leaflets [ ] Social media [ ] Billboard [ ] Word of mouth [ ] Radio [ ] Email [ ]

11. Have you ever had a bad experience during following an advertisement on social media?
    Yes [ ] No [ ]

12. Is there anything that put you off viewing the items being advertised on social media online?
    Yes [ ] No [ ]

13. Do you think that marketing on social media is becoming more popular?
    Yes [ ] No [ ]

14. Would you like to see more online marketing on social media?
    Yes [ ] No [ ]

15. Please state below any other information you would like to return to us on any experiences, ideas or facts on online marketing that you have

Thank you for your time.