

Dissertation – Proposal

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BA (Hons) Business Management

**University of Wales Trinity Saint David (London
Campus)**

***The Impact of Social Media Platforms on Customer Relationship
Management in M&S***

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The fashion retail business has seen a major shift in its operations due to the pandemic as online interaction became widely popular among both retailers and customers alike. According to Williams (2021), social media platform isn't only being used for selling products and launching promotional campaigns but also as a tool for interacting with customers to further develop their relationship with the company. As per Bazi et al. (2020), interaction with customers has increased among fashion retailers as they are getting faster feedback from customers regarding their products and services. However, this opportunity isn't exclusive to some fashion retailers but available to all retailers in the UK. As a result, all fashion retailers have the opportunity to leave a positive impression on the customers as a part of their CRM practice which reduces any opportunity for using social media platforms for CRM as a competitive advantage. Moreover, the wide application of social media for CRM purposes reduces its effectiveness as the customers can receive the same level of treatment from any other online retailers as well. But McClure and Seock (2020) have argued that social media platforms can improve customer relationships and augment the effectiveness of CRM practices. Due to the contrasting results provided by the various authors, a research gap has been created. The researcher intends to fill the research gap by conducting a study on the impact of social media platforms on the customer relationship management of M&S.

The significance of this research issue can be considered high as fashion retailers in the UK are constantly investing their manpower, technology and funds to support their CRM activities across social media. The development of this study would confirm whether their investments are effectively supporting the companies to build a profitable relationship with the customers. It would also point out new insights that can for improving their CRM practices for gaining a competitive advantage.

The purpose of this study is to provide accurate data regarding the relationship between CRM and social media platforms to the managers of the UK's fashion retail companies so that they can make optimal investment decisions regarding their CRM initiatives across social platforms. The study would also provide valuable pieces of literature for conducting further studies on this research issue.

Proposed Aim

The study aims to investigate the way social media platforms influence customer relationship management in the UK's fashion retail industry.

Objectives

- To determine the current social media marketing strategies implemented by M&S
- ❖ To identify the factors of social media platforms that influence M&S's customer relationship management.
- ❖ To analyse the impact of social media platforms on M&S's customer relationship management.

Research Questions

- What are social media strategies used by M&S for customer relationship management?
- What are the factors of social media platform that affects M&S's customer relationship management?
- How do social media platforms influence M&S's customer relationship management?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social Media Platform

As per Zhang et al. (2019), social media platform refers to the digital mediums that are used by internet users to interact with each other. Social media platforms are also considered distinct online communities across the internet for people to interact with each other. Voramontri and Klieb, (2019) have opined that social media platforms are online societies where people from various walks of life can communicate with each other. It creates opportunities not only for interacting with known friends and facilities but also to make new friends as well. McClure and Seock (2020) have opined that social media platforms aren't only being used for personal purposes but also for business purposes as business organisations are reaching out to online social media users to create new customers while also providing services to their existing customers in a flexible manner.

Customer Relationship Management

According to Foltean et al. (2019), customer relationship management refers to the management system that allows business organisations to establish and maintain a long-term favourable relationship with their customers. It is also used for attracting new customers and improving the loyalty of existing customers. Libai et al. (2020) have pointed out that CRM is vital for fashion retailers to attract and retain new customers as the fashion industry is highly competitive and all the rivals are offering homogenous products at a similar price range. Effective CRM strategy can act as a differential factor against the products and services of rival companies to establish a unique perception among potential customers. But Bazi et al. (2020) have argued that effective implementation of CRM requires experienced employees which insights into the latest market trends which aren't available across all fashion retailers.

Impact of Social Media Platforms on Customer Relationship Management

Anshari et al. (2019) have mentioned customer relationship management can be carried out through social media platforms as it consists of online communities of actual and potential customers. CRM conducted through social media platforms can also be called Social CRM. In such cases, social media-based CRM software is used by fashion retailers to interact with customers. Dhanesh and Duthler, (2019) have pointed out several advantages of social media-based CRM to develop a positive impression among customers. One major advantage of Social media-based CRM is consistent and repeated brand mentions across social media platforms to increase overall brand awareness. Foltean et al. (2019) has opined that social media provides greater opportunities for fashion retailers to interact with customers across the online platform which create more opportunities for either generating sales or improving customer relationship. Itani et al. (2020) have argued that social media provides opportunities for customers with the opportunity to share issues and needs to the customers in a flexible manner which in return allows companies to resolve them at a fast pace to establish a favourable impression among the customers. Gil-Gomez et al. (2020) have pointed out that customer interaction through social media allows companies to improve customer profiles as well as collect valuable market data that are necessary for fulfilling customer demands and needs to establish and maintain a positive relationship with the customers in the long run.

Challenges of Using Social Media Platforms for Customer Relationship Management

As per Castagna et al. (2020), ensuring effective CRM through social media can be challenging for fashion retailers as it is widely applied by competitors as well. Itani et al. (2020) have supported and stated that unique digital contents and creative ideas are necessary to establish a strong position in social media platforms which is difficult to achieve and maintain in the long run. Libai et al. (2020) have argued that social media can be used by customers to share negative remarks regarding the company's products and services which can instantly leave a bad impression on its existing customers as well. Gil-Gomez et al. (2020) have mentioned that majority of the retailers use chatbots across social media platforms for dealing with customer inquiries which aren't perceived positively by customers. McClure and Seock (2020) have argued that in-person CRM across social media platforms can be costly and time-consuming as customers have the flexibility to communicate with the company at any moment through social media.

Chapter 3: Research Methods and Methodology

A research methodology is defined as a set of research methods that are used by researchers to carry out a study. It's a systematic process of perceiving, collecting and processing research data to develop a specific outcome.

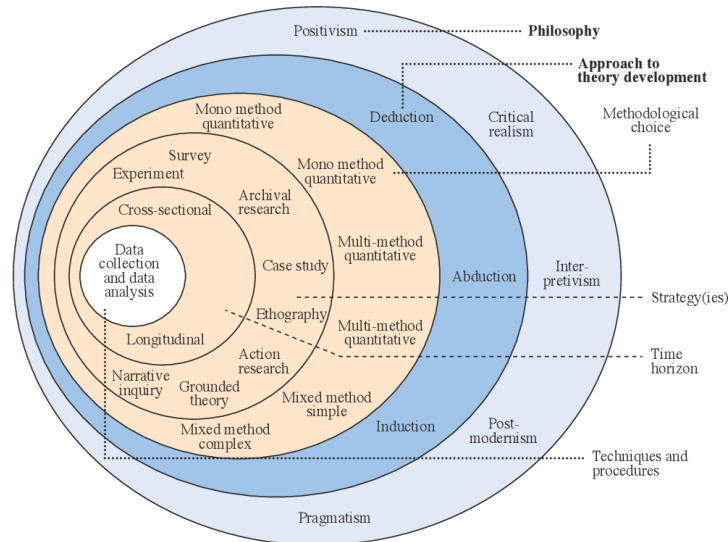


Figure 1: Research Onion model (Saunders et al., 2019)

Saunders et al. (2019) has developed a research framework call research onion model which demonstrated the relationship between various methodologies. The onion model demonstrates which particular methods are mutually exclusive or complementary by nature for ensuring consistency between chosen research methods.

Research Philosophy

The study will be implemented by making use of the positivism philosophy as it enables the opportunity to interact with research information from a neutral viewpoint. The positivist philosophy would also support the use of scientific techniques and factual data that are necessary for developing accurate research results (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020). The alternative interpretivism philosophy would be applied as it was most suitable for social research which would be business research.

Research Paradigm

The study will make of epistemology-based empirical source of knowledge regarding the research issue for developing a research outcome. The epistemology paradigm will be used to seek new knowledge regarding the impact of social media platforms on customer relationship management through the use of multiple research methods (Booth, Colomb and Willian, 2014). The alternative paradigm known as ontology will be disregarded as it focuses on the nature of reality or the research issue which isn't the purpose of the study.

Research Approach

The deductive approach will be utilised along with the positivism philosophy in accordance with the research onion model developed by Saunders et al. (2019). The deductive approach has similar properties as the positivism philosophy as both encourage the presentation of objective information. The inductive will be disregarded as it complements the interpretivism philosophy which isn't applied to this research and may result in consistency among the chosen methods.

Research Methodology

The research will be completed by using a mixed methodology consisting of both numerical and non-numerical information that can be collected through quantitative and qualitative methods at the same time. Numerical information is highly accurate by nature while on-numerical information can be used for developing vital insights related to the research problem (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2019). A mono method consisting of a single method will not be considered as it may either reduce data accuracy or development of insights depending on the chosen method.

Type of Investigation

Primary research is conducted by creating data from the origin source of information. For this research, primary research will be carried out through a survey. Secondary research refers to the use of existing research data developed by others for developing a research solution. The development of the literature review within this study will be considered as secondary research (Booth, Colomb and Willian, 2014).

Research Strategy

An online desk research strategy will be used to collect the necessary information for the study. Online desk research strategy provides opportunities to collect research data from any location at any moment through the internet in a flexible manner which facilitates more time for data analysis (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Survey will be conducted via online for collecting primary data.

Sampling

The researcher will utilise the non-probabilistic judgemental sampling technique for collecting necessary information from the internet. The judgmental sampling technique will be chosen due to the nature of the research issue which requires the researchers to use personal judgment to collect the most credible and up-to-date information on social media and CRM from various reliable sources (Saunders et al., 2019). Simple random sampling technique will be used for collecting primary data from the participants. Sample size would be 50 consisting of customers of M&S.

Data Collection Methods/Tools

The research data will use secondary sources for the literature review that are available on the internet using the search engine Google and Bing (Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2019). An online survey will be conducted for primary research using Google forms and it would contain 10 questions where 8 would be close-ended and 2 will be open-ended questions and each respondent would be given 1 minutes per question. The close ended questionnaire would be developed using the Likert 5 scale system.

Ways of Interpreting Data

Research data can be interpreted through several means which are dependent on the nature of the information. Raw primary data will be analysed using MS Excel which will be presented using charts and graphs as appropriate. This would enable the researcher to present high volume of quantitative data within a short time. However, the collected secondary information for this study is processed information which can be interpreted in the form of a literature review (Booth, Colomb and Willian, 2014).

Time Prospects of the Research (Gantt Chart)

Task Name	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
Research Proposal										
Research Permission										
Research Background										
Literature Review										
Methodology										
Reviewing the Project										
Collecting Data										
Data Analysis										
Findings and Discussions										
Conclusions and Recommendations										

Ethical Consideration of the Research

The study will be completed by adhering to the instructions provided by the university to illustrate personal ethical integrity as a researcher. The study will include proper referencing and citations for all secondary sources and the researcher will refrain from all forms of academic misconduct that may generate a risk of failure to complete the requirements of the module (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020). Consent form will be attached and provided along the survey form to receive permission for data collection from the respondents. The research data will be stored in a password-protected laptop for storage and security purpose for the next six months and it will be destroyed after the completion of the module.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The use of social media for CRM purposes has become widespread among the UK's fashion retailers. As a result, it's uncertain whether retailers can establish a long-term relationship with customers using social media-based CRM which is applied by their competitors as well. The study will analyse the impact of social media platforms on customer relationship management to remove this uncertainty. The study will be carried out using primary and secondary data that will be collected through survey, online journals, newspapers and articles through the personal judgment of the researcher. All research data will be collected and analysed from a neutral perspective and information will be stored in a password-protected computer for data security.

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