

University of Wales Trinity-Saint David

**BA (Hons) Leadership and Management Skills for the
Workplace**

Module: Research Methods for Business

Module Code: LCLM6004

**Assignment Title: Component 1 – Business Research
Proposal**

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Research Proposal: Optimising Social Media Marketing for Enhanced Customer Retention

In the contemporary digital landscape, social media has evolved from a simple communication tool into a fundamental strategic pillar for business growth. As organisations increasingly rely on digital channels to connect with their audiences, the ability to transform passive social media engagement into long term customer loyalty has become a critical business challenge. This proposal identifies the gap between high levels of social media interaction and the actual conversion of these interactions into sustained customer retention, which is a problem that directly impacts organisational profitability and long term market competitiveness (Yang et al., 2022). By examining the transition from transactional social media presence to relationship based engagement, this study seeks to provide a roadmap for businesses aiming to build enduring consumer bonds.

Furthermore, as digital spaces become increasingly crowded, firms must recognise that the mere volume of digital traffic no longer guarantees commercial sustainability. Consumer behaviour is shifting rapidly, with audiences demanding greater authenticity and transparency from the brands they follow. Consequently, traditional marketing frameworks that rely solely on top of funnel awareness are proving inadequate for modern retention goals. By investigating the specific mechanics of digital relationship building, this research addresses a vital commercial imperative, offering insight into how brands can move past fleeting online visibility to cultivate deep psychological attachment and advocacy (Ascarza., 2018).

This necessity is further amplified by the rapid evolution of algorithmic distribution networks, which continuously alter how corporate content is prioritised and consumed (Ascarza., 2018). In this volatile environment, relying on superficial reach exposes firms to substantial market vulnerability. This study argues that building a dedicated digital community acts as an insulation layer against volatile algorithm changes. By establishing deep rooted emotional equity, brands can maintain direct and meaningful access to their target demographic regardless of external platform adjustments.

Identification of the Business Problem

The core issue facing many modern firms is the engagement retention paradox. While organisations invest significant capital in generating high volume social media

content to increase brand visibility, empirical evidence suggests that high engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments do not always correlate with increased repurchase intention or brand loyalty (Jamil et al., 2022).

This is particularly problematic for organisations operating in competitive markets where customer acquisition costs are rising, and the saturation of digital feeds has led to consumer fatigue. When a business fails to leverage its social media presence to nurture a genuine, trust based relationship with its followers, the investment in digital marketing remains largely superficial, which is often described as vanity metrics (Jamil et al., 2022). Without a clear link to retention, firms risk misallocating resources on content that provides short term visibility but fails to build the emotional or psychological attachment necessary for repeat business. This study aims to investigate how firms can transition from superficial transactional activities to value driven, relationship based strategies.

This disconnect underscores a systemic inefficiency in corporate marketing departments, where key performance indicators (KPIs) remain overly focused on immediate viral reach rather than long term customer lifetime value. When consumers encounter a continuous stream of generic promotional material, brand alienation frequently occurs, accelerating customer churn (Appel., 2020). As a result, the financial return on marketing investment drops sharply over time. This research directly confronts this operational vulnerability by analysing the precise breakdown in the conversion pipeline, pinpointing exactly where engaged followers disconnect and choose competitors instead.

Compounding this issue is the prevalence of clickbait tactics that artificially inflate short term visibility numbers without offering substantive substance. This practice inadvertently erodes brand equity and damages long term consumer trust. When the reality of the consumer brand interaction fails to live up to the expectations set by online marketing, a psychological gap emerges, pushing consumers toward more consistent competitors (Appel., 2020). Consequently, the commercial problem is both financial and reputational, demanding a thorough reassessment of how digital success is quantified internally.

Research Aim and Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to evaluate the strategic effectiveness of current social media marketing activities in driving long term customer retention within the retail sector.

Research Objectives:

- To identify which social media marketing dimensions (personalisation, entertainment, and interaction) most significantly influence customer retention rates.
- To examine the role of customer engagement as a mediator between social media marketing efforts and long term brand loyalty.
- To identify the primary barriers preventing firms from effectively converting social media followers into loyal repeat customers.
- To develop a set of evidence based recommendations for aligning social media strategies with retention focused business outcomes.

Research Questions:

1. Which specific social media marketing dimensions are most effective in fostering long term repurchase intentions?
2. How does consumer perception of brand trust moderate the relationship between social media engagement and actual customer loyalty?

To fully achieve this aim, the study will explicitly focus on the fast paced retail sector, where consumer choices are abundant and switching costs are exceptionally low. By contextualising the research objectives within this highly volatile industry, the study will clarify how distinct consumer segments interact with digital content. Ultimately, the formulation of these questions serves to bridge the existing divide between abstract theoretical models of consumer behaviour and the pragmatic operational strategies required by modern retail marketing executives, establishing a clear framework for empirical evaluation.

Additionally, the established objectives serve to dissect the multifaceted nature of loyalty itself, distinguishing between purely behavioural loyalty, which manifests as repetitive buying out of convenience, and attitudinal loyalty, which represents a deep rooted psychological commitment. Understanding this distinction allows the research to uncover how digital communication strategies can actively convert convenient transactions into dedicated brand advocates.

Critical Literature Review

Recent academic research underscores that social media marketing (SMM) is not a monolithic activity. It is comprised of various dimensions, specifically entertainment, interaction, personalisation, and trendiness, which influence consumer psychology in distinct ways (Hamarat, 2026). While early literature focused heavily on reach and awareness, contemporary scholars argue that modern digital consumers are seeking

value driven, personalised interactions rather than generic, broadcast style content (Novandari et al., 2026).

A consistent gap in existing literature is the lack of focus on the post engagement phase. Much of the current body of knowledge focuses on the acquisition phase, specifically how to get users to follow or click. However, there is limited consensus on the mechanisms that sustain this interest over time (Yang et al., 2022). Furthermore, while the impact of influencers on impulsive purchase behaviour is well documented, the long term impact of influencer driven interactions on customer loyalty remains under explored (Jose, 2026).

This study will apply the Service Dominant Logic (S D Logic) framework, which suggests that value is co created between the firm and the consumer. By applying this lens, the research addresses the inconsistencies in previous studies that treat the consumer as a passive recipient of marketing messages, rather than an active participant in brand development (Novandari et al., 2026). By viewing social media platforms as collaborative ecosystems rather than mere broadcasting channels, S D Logic emphasises that lasting loyalty is a byproduct of continuous relational exchange. Existing studies frequently fail to explain the psychological shifts that occur when a consumer transitions from an impulse buyer into a brand advocate. This literature review highlights the critical need for a unified framework that incorporates modern digital dynamics like real time consumer to brand dialogue. Addressing these theoretical blind spots is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of modern, continuous digital relationships.

Moreover, current scholastic discussions frequently overlook how perceived algorithm manipulation can breed consumer cynicism. When audiences recognise that their feeds are heavily manipulated by commercial interests, their baseline skepticism increases. By exploring this dimension, this literature review lays the necessary theoretical groundwork to analyze how genuine, interactive co creation under S D Logic can actively dismantle these barriers, transforming digital spaces from commercial storefronts into highly valuable social communities.

Research Methodology and Design

This study will adopt a mixed methods approach to capture both the breadth of consumer trends and the depth of managerial challenges.

Method	Purpose
Quantitative Survey	To collect structured data from 200+ retail consumers regarding their social media interaction patterns and loyalty intentions.

Semi structured Interviews	To gain expert insights from 10 social media marketing managers regarding current strategic barriers and internal KPIs.
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The survey data will be analysed using statistical software such as SPSS to perform regression analysis, determining the strength of the relationship between specific SMM activities (independent variables) and customer retention (dependent variable). The qualitative interviews will provide contextual nuance, explaining why certain strategies succeed or fail in the current competitive environment.

Sampling Strategy: Purposive sampling will be used for expert interviews to ensure participants have at least three years of experience in strategic marketing. Random sampling will be employed for the consumer survey to ensure demographic diversity across age groups.

Research Ethics and Validity: All participants will be provided with informed consent forms. Data will be anonymised to comply with GDPR. Validity will be bolstered through triangulation, comparing survey derived statistical trends against the qualitative lived experiences reported by industry managers. The integration of these distinct methodologies ensures that the weaknesses of one approach are offset by the strengths of the other. While the quantitative regression analysis provides statistical validity and generalisable data regarding consumer intentions, it lacks the ability to capture corporate resource constraints. The qualitative interviews resolve this limitation by uncovering the organisational challenges, culture, and KPI structures that shape these marketing campaigns. This dual lens design guarantees a holistic overview, generating findings that are both statistically rigorous and highly applicable to real world corporate settings (Dobakthi., 2020).

To guarantee structural integrity, the quantitative instrumentation will incorporate validated scales adapted from pre existing marketing literature, measuring constructs such as brand trust and perceived relationship quality. At the same time, the qualitative transcripts will undergo rigorous thematic analysis, utilizing a combination of deductive coding based on S D Logic and inductive coding to capture novel market trends. This dual layer framework minimises analytical bias and ensures the final insights are deeply robust.

Business Relevance and Practical Implications

The findings of this research will provide actionable insights for organisations looking to refine their social media spend. By identifying which marketing dimensions yield the highest retention return, businesses can shift their resources away from vanity metrics, like mere follower counts, towards high impact, trust building engagement strategies (Dwivedi., 2015).

Potential Practical Implications:

- Strategic Re alignment: Firms may pivot towards content that emphasises brand authenticity and customer co creation, which are proven to foster stronger psychological bonds (Jose, 2026).
- Operational Innovation: Findings may suggest the implementation of data driven feedback loops, where social media sentiment analysis directly informs product development and customer service recovery protocols.

For my professional development, this project will enhance my ability to apply complex academic theory to real world strategic decision making, providing me with the analytical rigour required for future consultancy roles. By bridging the gap between academic research and corporate application, this study serves as a pilot for more extensive longitudinal research. Ultimately, this research will provide marketing executives with a robust framework to justify budget allocations toward relationship building initiatives rather than short sighted viral campaigns. By demonstrating a quantifiable link between specific digital interaction styles and long term brand loyalty, the study offers a blueprint for reducing customer churn and improving long term profitability. On a broader scale, it encourages an industry wide pivot toward ethical, value driven consumer interactions that benefit both the organisation's bottom line and the consumer's digital experience, modernising how digital success is defined.

Additionally, the research will equip businesses with the specific tools needed to restructure their internal marketing metrics, allowing them to balance short term conversion targets with long term customer value goals. This strategic balance prevents the corporate trap of over-discounting or relying on continuous price promotions, which often erode long term margins. Ultimately, the work serves as a practical guide for building sustainable digital brand assets that remain resilient amid ongoing market shifts.

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