

**Firms' Perspectives of Customer Engagement Behaviours. How do Fashion SMEs use  
Social Media Platforms to Engage with their Customers?**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**SME** Small-Medium Sized Enterprises

**CE** Customer Engagement

**CEB(s)** Customer Engagement Behaviour(s)

**COBRA** Consumer Online Brand Related Activities

**PRISMA** Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

**W.O.M** Word of Mouth

**G.D.P** Gross Domestic Profit

**E.E** Employee Engagement

**LVMH** Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessey

**SPSS** Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

**U&G** Uses and Gratification Theory

**SNS** Social Networking Sites

**VIBE** Value in the Brand Page Experience

**S-D Logic** Service Dominant Logic

**OS** Operating System

**CF** Conceptual Framework

**U.K.** United Kingdom

**API** Application Programming Interface

**TSV** Tab-separated Values

**UAE** United Arab Emirates

**GIF(s)** Graphics Interchange Format

**CEO** Chief Executive Officer

**COVID-19** Coronavirus Disease 2019

**SOCIAL MEDIA ROI** Social Media Return-On-Investment

## GLOSSARY

**SMEs (Small-medium sized enterprises):** small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are made up of enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons, with an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million.

**Social Media Platforms:** These are online applications, platforms and media which aim to facilitate interactions, collaborations and the sharing of content, in order to engage consumers.

**Antecedent(s):** This can be said to be a preceding event, causality, following a cue or a behaviour.

**Customer Engagement Behaviour:** A manifestation that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.

**Systematic Literature Review:** A form of secondary study as a means of identifying, evaluating and interpreting all available research relevant to a particular research question, topic area and phenomenon of interest.

**PRISMA:** It is a preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta analyses which is evidence-based in its approach and originally developed in healthcare research.

**COBRA:** It is referred to as consumers' online brand related activities and relates to a set of online activities on the part of the consumer that is related to a brand, varying in the levels on interaction and engagement with the consumption, contribution and creation of media content.

**Uses & Gratification Theory:** It is a paradigm concerned with media use, inquiring into the reasons why people use certain media, thereby, analysing the gratification derived from media usage and access.

**Social Exchange Theory:** It asserts that individuals evaluate costs and benefits of engaging in relationships, thereby, for the engagement process to persist, customers must achieve a balance in these costs and benefits overtime.

**Social Links:** It is defined as the use of social media primarily through the influence of social relationships, friends/family or close social connections.

**Search for Information:** It can be defined as the active use of social media for the sole purpose of consuming/seeking brand-related information.

**Self-Involvement:** It can be defined as the perceived relevance of an object (e.g. a brand) based on a person's inherent needs, values and interests. It also involves the degree to which an individual feels attached to a brand or product, as well as the loyalty towards it.

**Functionality:** It can be defined as any aspect of social media platform design which has the quality of being suited to serve a particular CEB (customer engagement behaviour) well.

**Ownership-value:** It can be defined as engagement by customers due to post-purchase additional value that emerges after acquisition of the brand/product.

**Focal Service Relationships** These relationships occur within the interaction with user message or through content interaction, human/computer mediated interactions and interpersonal interactions

**Pearson Correlation Co-Efficient** The measure of the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two variables.

## **LIST OF DISSEMINATED WORKS**

### **Journal Publications**

Ajiboye, T., Harvey, J. and Resnick, S., 2019. Customer engagement behaviour on social media platforms: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, 18(3), pp.239-256.

Harvey, J., Poorrezaei, M., Woodall, T., Nica-Avram, G., Smith, G., Ajiboye, T., Kholodova, K. and Zhu, K., 2020. The Smart Home: How Consumers Craft New Service Networks by Combining Heterogeneous Smart Domestic Products. *Journal of Service Research*, 23(4), pp. 504-520.

### **Conference Proceedings**

Ajiboye, T., Harvey, J. and Resnick, S., 2020. Customer Engagement behaviour on social media platforms: How are SMEs fashion retailers engaging? *5th Colloquium on European Research in Retailing (CERR 2020)*, 31 Aug – 2 Sept 2020, University of Valencia, Spain.

### **Symposium papers and poster presentations**

Tolu Ajiboye, 2018. “Customer Engagement through social media platforms in the context of Micro SMEs in the UK Fashion Industry”, *NTU Doctoral School Research Festival*, 27/04/2018, Nottingham Trent University, UK.

Tolu Ajiboye, 2020. “Customer Engagement through social media platforms in the context of SMEs in the UK Fashion Industry”, *Marketing and Consumer Studies Research Group, Doctoral Symposium Day, 24/06/2020, Nottingham Business School, UK.*

## **ABSTRACT**

Customer engagement is a concept that reveals the underlying relationships customers have with firms. The emergence of new forms of media and a rapidly changing business environment has increased the need for firms to engage with their customer base, but to date, there has been little interest in examining the behaviours of customers that leads to the outcome of engagement with firms. A systematic literature review of peer-reviewed articles revealed that three tensions were present; the lack of a clear universal definition of Customer Engagement Behaviour (CEB), an underlying research philosophy, and thirdly methodological pluralism. Guided by these tensions in the literature, a mixed-method research approach was conducted to explore Customer Engagement Behaviour (CEB) from a firm-centric perspective in the context of social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) within Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SME) in the Fashion Industry. The personal nature of relationships, which SMEs have with their customers and the accessibility of social media usage, suggests that social media could be an important means of engaging with their customer base. Following a comparative descriptive analysis of 101 SMEs usage of social media, a further correlation analysis of firm-instigated variables and CEB in the form of consumption, contribution and creation behaviours was undertaken. This second analysis found support for a subsequent framework analysis of small businesses attitudes of Customer Engagement Behaviour engendered on social media. As a final part of the study, social media usage data were revealed to the SME owner-managers in an inductive approach that explored their views of CEB on social media platforms. This thesis contributes to the engagement literature through offering a theoretically grounded view of customer engagement behaviours from a firm-centric perspective and distinguishes the construct from other related constructs in the literature. It also provides small businesses with insights into the effective use of social media.

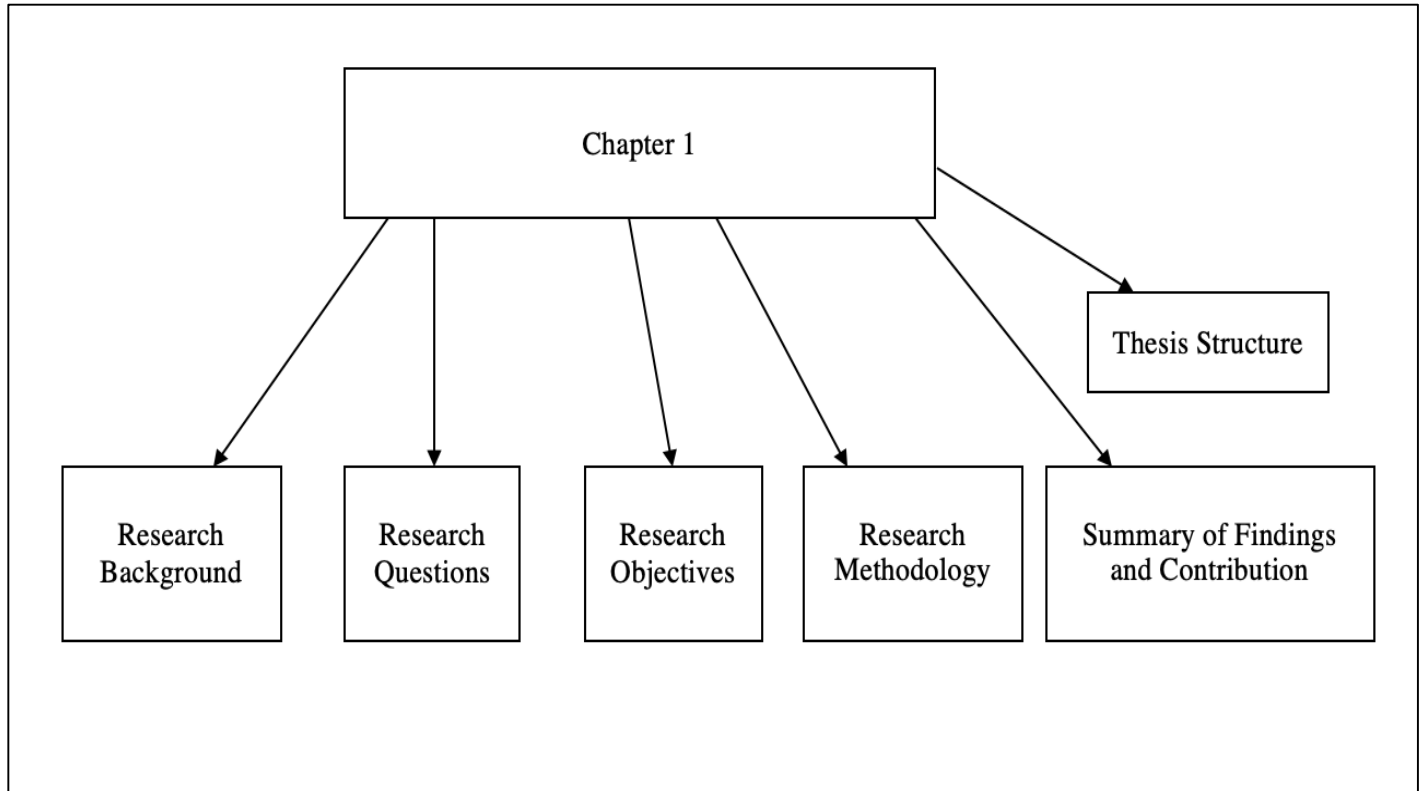


The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to provide an outline of the research study. It also gives a brief description of the subsequent chapters of the Thesis. It begins with an overview of the research background, the rationale for the study and offers a contribution to the gap in the literature. This then leads to the formulation of the research questions and articulation of the research objectives that underpin the study. This is followed by a brief overview of the research methodology. The key findings and contributions of the research are then presented. Finally, the chapter ends with providing a structure of the thesis. Figure 1.1 below reveals the structure of this chapter.



**Figure 1.1 Structure of Chapter One**

## Research Background

In the past few decades, customer engagement (CE) has emerged as a powerful research stream, which accounts for the interaction between consumer/brand dynamics (Brodie et al. 2011a). The CE concept has also gained traction in the broader literature (Calder et al. 2009; van Doorn et al. 2010). It has been placed with consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), service dominant logic (S-D logic) (Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Karpen et al. 2012) and relationship marketing (Vivek et al. 2012).

In the literature, customer engagement is defined as a psychological state that happens by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (Brodie et al. 2011a, b). The theoretical root of the CE concept is noted as drawn from service dominant logic (Brodie et al. 2011a) with four of the eleven foundational premises of S-D logic regarded as determinants of the conceptual foundations of the CE concept (Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Brodie et al. 2011a). The four foundational premises are:

*FP6 The customer is always a co-creator of value*

*FP9 All social and economic actors are resource integrators*

*FP8 A service-centred view is inherently customer-oriented and relational*

*FP10 Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary;*

(Vargo and Lusch, 2008, p.7).

The four premises provide the foundation for CE as it reflects a customer's interactive, co-creative experiences in focal/networked service relationships (Brodie et al. 2011a). Lusch and Vargo (2010) suggests some of these experiences can be considered as *engaging*. The term *engagement* has been included extensively in studies, in the field of psychology, sociology, political science and organizational behaviour (Brodie et al. 2011a). The construct of customer engagement enabled a variety of conceptual papers highlighting the concept in different ways.

In the marketing literature, *consumer engagement* and *customer engagement* are used as a representative term acknowledged by authors, having cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions (Patterson et al. 2006; Mollen and Wilson, 2010; Brodie et al. 2011a; Hollebeek, 2011). Table 1.1 highlights the dimensions of customer engagement explored by key authors in the marketing literature. The cognitive dimension of customer engagement can be said to be reflected through a customer's level of concentration on a brand/organization (Patterson et al. 2006) while Vivek et al. (2010) view the cognitive dimension of CE as a connection.

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Dimensionality</b>
Brodie et al. (2011a)	Multidimensional – Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioural
Patterson et al. (2006)	Multidimensional – Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioural
Vivek et al. (2012)	Multidimensional – Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioural
Mollen and Wilson (2010)	Multidimensional – Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioural
Bowden (2009)	Multidimensional – Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioural
van Doorn et al. (2010)	Unidimensional – Behavioural
Hollebeek (2011)	Multidimensional – Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioural

**Table 1.1 Customer Engagement Dimensions in the Marketing Literature**

This can be determined as the link between the customer and a brand/organization in a focal setting. The emotional dimension of CE is noted to be a customer's sense of belonging for a firm/brand (Patterson et al. 2006). The behavioural dimension of engagement is represented in the literature as the level of energy and mental resilience a customer has in their interaction with an engagement object (Patterson et al. 2006). It is also considered to be the communication between an engagement subject and object (Patterson et al. 2006).

This research study is specifically focused on the behavioural dimension of CE as a theoretical foundation for the research context. van Doorn et al. (2010) define customer engagement behaviour (CEB) as extending beyond purchase, reflected from a customer's behavioural manifestation with a brand/firm focus as a result of motivational drivers. The customer engagement behaviours manifested from customers are noted to be positive and negative for firms/brands (van Doorn et al. 2010). Examples of positive behaviours are positive customer reviews and negative behaviours are manifested through negative feedback/reviews and public actions against firms/brands. van Doorn et al. (2010) propose dimensions of CEB in the literature; valence, form/modality, scope, nature of its impact and customer goals. Valence is explained as positive/negative engagement that have consequences for the firm. Positive consequences can be financial or non-financial, while negative consequences can be adverse recommendations of a brand/firm from one customer to another, or a new potential customer (van Doorn et al. 2010). Form/Modality is referred to how engagement is expressed towards brands/firms (van Doorn et al. 2010). Scope refers to temporal/geographic ways of engagement (van Doorn et al. 2010). Whereas the nature of impact of CEB is broken down into its immediacy, intensity, breadth and longevity (van Doorn et al. 2010). Customer goals are addressed in the response to three main questions; whom is engagement directed? What extent is engagement planned? To what extent are customer goals aligned with the firm's goals? (van Doorn et al. 2010). The CEB dimensions help in understanding the nature of customer

engagement and provides the foundation for the way in which customers choose to engage with brands/firms. The introduction of social media has shifted the landscape of communication between consumers and firms, especially engagement. This shift in communication has enabled consumers to spend more time on social media, enabled brand-related interactions and expose consumers to brand communications (Azar et al. 2016). Thus, firms/brands have acknowledged social media as an important channel for marketing their products/services, raising brand awareness, brand engagement and relevance (Yan, 2011; Hutter et al. 2013; Azar et al. 2016). In the literature, social media is defined as Internet-based applications which are based on the foundations of Web 2.0 allowing the exchange and creation of user-generated content (Azar et al. 2016). The advent of social media technology has enabled the business environment to be more interactive, as customers seek engagement with the products/services/activities offered by brands/firms (Vivek et al. 2012). Thus, academics in the field of marketing have shifted their focus to the concept of engagement within the context of social media platforms (Brodie et al. 2013). Consumers especially have taken an active role in the marketing exchange process, as they are dictating the nature of content, extent of content and context of marketing related exchanges with brands/firms on social media platforms (Hanna et al. 2011). This has created a *social media-driven business model* consisting of customer connectivity and interactivity, enabling users within this sphere to share, create and recommend brand-related information within a wide variety of available social media platforms (Hanna et al. 2011). For small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), this new model of marketing to consumers is regarded as advantageous as it requires few resources in its adaptation for marketing, as well as its low cost and minimal technical requirements (Eid, 2019). Social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube – all attract millions of daily users which makes them an attractive tool for marketing for firms, especially SMEs (Devereux et al. 2019). These platforms provide the space for firms and customers to engage in a co-creative way through various actions such as;

liking, sharing and commenting. Despite the growing number of users on social media and its increasing influence and value in engagement, SMEs are not yet utilising it, as an effective marketing tool (Devereux et al. 2019). Compared to larger organisations, SMEs lack the resources and capabilities. They have limited resources to enable them to adopt social media into their business strategies and they lack the expertise and knowledge to decide which platforms are best suited for marketing their products/services (Alalwan et al. 2017). The importance of adopting social media platforms for business growth has been heightened through the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the retail industry, especially for fashion firms. In the U.K alone, more than 17,500 chain store outlets from the high streets and shopping centres shut their doors to comply with lockdown rules (Butler, 2021) and according to the Office for National Statistics, clothing retailers in the U.K reported a 50.4% decline in sales volumes (ONSa, 2021). The impact of COVID-19 on physical retail stores have shifted the way in which firms can reach their customers. COVID-19 has also accelerated the switch to online sales. As non-essential physical stores were forced to close their doors, customers have turned to online shopping, click-collect services and online platforms. In May 2020, online sales represented 34%, of total retail sales up from 20% in February 2020 (ONSb, 2021). The shift of consumer spending to online services platforms serves as a major indicator for firms, especially SMEs, to adopt new online methods of marketing and selling of their products and services. Thus, social media marketing is an essential tool for SMEs looking to compete in the current business environment. For firms looking to utilize this form of marketing, an understanding of CEBs and the measurement of it is important. CEB is a significant concept that reveals a comprehensive and integrated approach to understand customers and the need for research to identify the antecedents of CEB and their interactive effects is required (van Doorn et al. 2010). This research study aims to address this gap by exploring CEBs in social media platforms in the context of fashion SMEs. As each platform

type to be explored - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram - varies in terms of its use for marketing, content type for engendering customer engagement. By undertaking this research, the author seeks to extend the customer engagement literature by understanding what and how behavioural antecedents influence CEBs from a firm-centric perspective on social media platforms. This research will address calls for additional research exploring firm-initiated CEBs on performance metrics to support existing theoretical/empirical scrutiny (Guesalaga, 2016; So et al. 2016; Beckers et al. 2017). In addition, there has been little attention placed on the consequences of firm-initiated CEBs in social media platforms. Addressing firm-initiated CEBs and its consequences on the firm, is expected to generate further theoretical insights into the concepts of customer engagement and better inform managerial practice.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The lack of a clear unified conceptualisation of customer engagement has prevented scholars and practitioners in the field of marketing from generating an understanding and measurement of customer engagement behaviour. An exploration into reconceptualising and understanding CEB in social media platforms within the context of SMEs grounded on a theoretically sound foundation is needed. This would help to provide a better understanding of the CEB construct, including avenues for understanding the antecedents of CEB and improve the conceptualisation of CEB to better understand and predict the behaviour of consumers. Thus, the following research questions were developed and investigated in this thesis;

- 1. What is the relationship between social media use and customer engagement behaviour?*
- 2. How do SMEs in the UK Fashion Industry use social media to engage with their customers?*
- 3. What are the managerial implications for SMEs in the UK Fashion Industry for engaging with their customers through social media platforms?*

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The aim of this thesis is to explore how SMEs in the UK Fashion Industry are using social media to engage with their customers. To achieve the research aim, four key objectives of the study have been generated:

- To undertake a systematic literature review of the customer engagement behaviour and social media literature.
- To explore the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement behaviour on SMEs use of social media platforms.
- To understand how SMEs are using social media to develop customer engagement
- To provide a significant and original contribution to knowledge that will guide SMEs and organisations alike, and impact both theory and practice.

### **1.4 Research Methodology**

In order for the research to achieve the key objectives, the researcher considered the research methodology and design of an appropriate data collection tool to achieve the research aim. A critical realist philosophy was adopted with a four phase mixed research method involving data collection through; online observation of SMEs social media channels on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and a two-part semi-structured interviews with SME Owner-managers.

The preliminary observation of SMEs social media channels was utilised to inform the interviews, with the interview technique following the style of Spradley (1979). Respondents were asked to give a verbal tour based on parameters set by the research before moving on to questions focused on engagement. This allows engagement behaviours online to be revealed to address the possible bi-directional relationship of the SME owner-manager's conceptualisation and measurement of CEB and the different forms of CEB that are actually enacted by their customers.



Thus, the collected data from observation was sourced, aggregated and processed in relation to SME firm's behaviours and their customer's CEBs. This followed a descriptive summary statistics of the SMEs activity on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Including an analysis of CEBs to establish how the SMEs compare in terms of their social media use. Key themes were drawn out in relation to this – platforms use, branding, frequency of post, engagement metrics. A further correlation analysis involving testing firm-instigated variables between CEB types were conducted. The results showed key insights in the strength of the relationship between using social media platforms and engendering CEBs. A third qualitative phase using framework analysis explored 11 SMEs attitudes towards CEB engendered on social media. In the final phase, social media usage data was revealed to the SME owner-managers in an inductive approach that explored their views of CEB on social media platforms. With the data grouped into themes centred on; SMEs views and opinions on the use of social media platforms for engaging with their customers, i.e. how SMEs perceive CEBs, CEB consequences for the firm, as well as, the measurement of CEBs on social media platforms.

### **1.5 Summary of Findings and Contribution**

The research questions investigated are concerned with the relationships between social media use and CEB, how SMEs use social media for engagement and the implications for SMEs engaging through social media platforms. Thus, through a mixed method approach, the research revealed five broad antecedent causes that influence CEB on social media platforms. These were social links, search for information, self-involvement, functionality and ownership-value.

The data further revealed how SMEs use social media to engage with their customers through a comparative firm data of 101 fashion SMEs Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts. Although Facebook was considered as a valuable tool adopted by the firms for engagement,

firms were revealed to be much more active on Instagram in terms of posting their brand related content. In addition, the firms use a cross-platform approach – this involves using multiple platforms in unison to communicate and engage with their customers.

In assessing the relationship between social media use and CEBs, a correlation analysis between the type of content (photo, video, text), total number of firms post, average daily posts of firms and consumption, contribution, creation behaviours indicated no correlation. This suggested that firm-initiated social media engagement with customers are not as essential as the engagement literature suggests. Further implications for SMEs were revealed through the two-part interviews with SME owner-managers, which suggested there is a firm expectation/customer behavioural outcome gap and which identified involvement/responsibility to customers, social media ROI (return-on-investment), internal factors and limitations to development as the key barriers to customer engagement. Thus, from the research findings, the current study contributes to theory by providing a clear understanding of CEB and its dimensions by distinguishing the construct from customer engagement through a firm-centric lens of CEB in the context of social media platforms. The contribution to practice is through providing recommendations and insights into social media marketing strategies for SMEs seeking to develop and build a long-term beneficially mutual relationship with their customers.

## **1.6 Thesis Structure**

This thesis consists of ten chapters to assist the researcher in fulfilling the overall research aim for the current study. The subsequent sub-sections explain and highlight the structure of the thesis in detail:

### *Chapter 1 – Introduction*

This chapter provides a pre-amble into the thesis. It includes the background to the research of the current study. This is accompanied by the research questions the study seeks to investigate. The key research objectives generated to achieve the research aim are also presented.

### *Chapter 2 – Literature Review (Critical Literature Review)*

This chapter considers the types of literature review for investigating the research topic and highlights the justification for the choice of a critical and systematic review. Then, it proceeds to present the critical literature review of the theories, studies and bodies of work surrounding customer engagement that are relevant to the research.

### *Chapter 3 – Systematic Literature Review*

Following the critical literature review, chapter three is focused on the systematic review of the focus of the study – CEB in the context of social media platforms. Thus, an extensive systematic review through a PRISMA protocol method was utilised to explore how studies have conceptualised and investigated CEB i.e. the relationship between the construct and social media platforms.

### *Chapter 4 – Conceptual Framework*

This chapter highlights the conceptual framework constructed by the researcher in regards to the relationship between CEB and firms, built on the foundations of previous conceptual studies. The context of the study is also considered i.e. SMEs. Based on the framework developed, a series of premises were generated for further exploration in the current study.

### *Chapter 5 – Research Methodology*

Chapter five provides a detailed description of the research methodology adopted for exploring the CEB construct in regards to the research aim. The chapter outlines the research philosophy, research design, sampling procedures and the preliminary pilot study used to test the methodology's validity. A discussion of the data collection methods, data analysis technique and consideration of research ethics is then presented.

### *Chapter 6 – Characterization of Fashion SMEs use of Social Media Platforms*

Chapter six is concerned with the first phase of the sequential data collection used to examine 101 Fashion SMEs and their use of social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). It discussed how the dataset was assembled, sourced, aggregated and processed from each platform.

### *Chapter 7 – Correlation Analysis of CEBs in Social Media Platforms*

Chapter seven further examines the SMEs social media data through a Pearson correlation analysis; exploring the relationship between type of content (photo, video, text), total number of firms post, average daily posts of firms and CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution and creation behaviours.

### *Chapter 8 – Framework Analysis of Phase 1 Interviews with SME owner-managers*

Following the correlation analysis, chapter eight presents the results from the next stage of the sequential-method; phase 1 of the two-part semi-structured interviews with SME owner-managers. It also highlights the challenges faced in securing the final interview sample for the research. From this, it moves on to analysing the transcripts through a framework analysis to address the relationship between SMEs attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms.

### *Chapter 9 – Inductive Analysis of Phase 2 Interviews with SME owner-managers*

Chapter 9 follows from the previous chapter by highlighting the results from phase 2 of the two-part semi-structured interviews with 11 SME owner –managers. It explores the results through a data structure reproduced from Corley and Gioia (2004) to inductively analyse SMEs views on engagement through social media platforms with their customers.

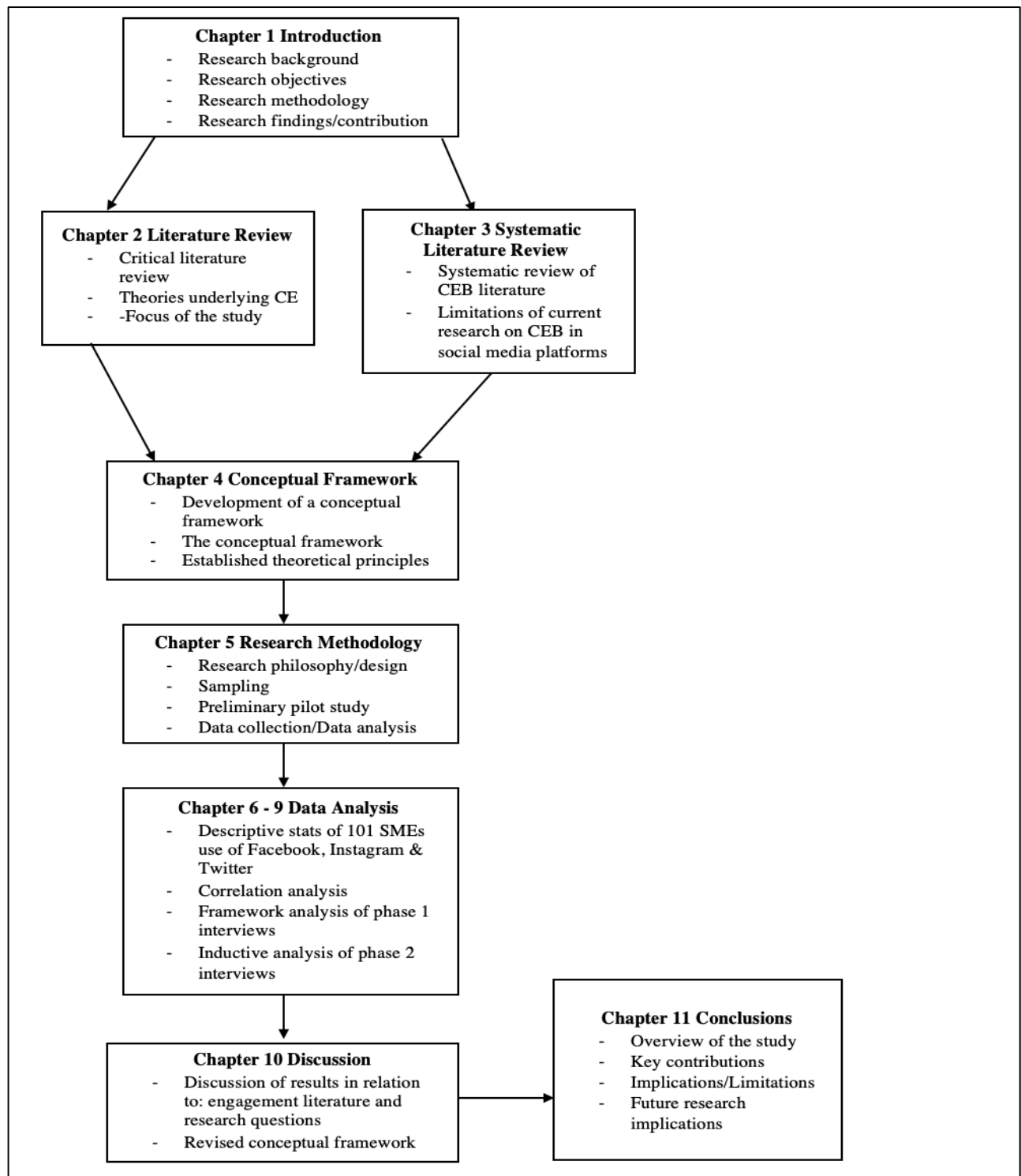
### *Chapter 10 – Discussion*

Following the findings chapters (6 - 9), chapter 10 presents an extensive and critical discussion of the findings in relation to the extent engagement literature, while addressing the research questions formulated in the current study to reach the overall research aim.

### *Chapter 11 – Conclusion*

The final chapter of the thesis presents an overview of the study and its contribution to theory, method and practice. Additionally, the managerial implications suggested for SME owner-managers and firms in general are also highlighted in the chapter.

The subsequent sections explain the research limitations attributed to the study and the direction for future research into CEB/CE (customer engagement behaviour/customer engagement). Figure 1.2 provides the structure of the overall thesis in more detail.



**Figure 1.2 Structure of Thesis**

The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the theories, studies and bodies of work surrounding customer engagement that are relevant to the research question. It also demonstrates the gaps in literature that are evident in previous research around customer engagement and provides a justification for this research. The chapter is grouped into five main sections; the first section discusses a mapping of the literature. The next section then explains the several types of literature reviews, followed by a justification for utilizing a critical and systematic literature review. This is followed by a critical literature review of customer engagement that provides the basis for a focused systematic review of customer engagement behaviour in the following chapter.

As suggested by Hart (2018, p. 3), a literature review is concerned with the critical evaluation, analysis and full synthesis of prior/existing knowledge that is relevant to a research problem. As the research problem of this study is concerned with understanding customer engagement of SMEs in the UK fashion industry and its relation to the use of social media, it is essential to acquire an understanding of each aspect. In research, a familiarity of disciplinary debates and perspectives through analytical reading and investigative search of the literature is essential (Hart, 2018). A literature review differs from an exhaustive list of published documents in the sense that, it provides an informative, subjective and unbiased précis of information.

It helps to reveal a balanced view that includes conflicting results and inconsistencies in the literature, including established and current thought surrounding the subject area (Winchester and Salji, 2016). This study follows the criteria of a literature review as proposed by Steward (2004) in terms of what a good review of the literature should possibly accomplish:

- Comprehensive: evidence gathered should contain the most relevant sources
- Fully referenced
- Selective: appropriate strategies to search for key information
- Relevant: focus should be on the most important data
- A combination of key themes and theories surrounding the subject area
- Balanced: a balance of ideas and opinions
- Critical: an extensive appraisal of the literature
- Analytical: development of new ideas, gaps and understanding from the evidence collected to foster further development of the subject area.

## **2.2 Types of Literature Review**

This section provides an analysis into the different types of literature review prevalent in research in order to choose the most appropriate one for the study in terms of approach, purpose and analysis. The main types of literature reviews are considered in this section and a detailed explanation of each common review types are provided. The two common styles associated with reviewing literature in research are the traditional/narrative literature review and the systematic literature review. However, further insight into review types in research have been put forth by Grant and Booth (2009), in their typology of reviews.

The authors have identified additional review types as illustrated further in table 2.1. They are characterised by review type, definition and their associated method of analysis.



<b>Review Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Method of Analysis</b>
Critical Review	It is a form of review that goes beyond mere description, including a degree of analysis and critical evaluation	Aims to find a conceptual contribution to form new theory
Mapping Review	It is concerned with the categorization of existing literature to employ further reviews/primary research and identify gaps in literature	Characterization of literature by study design and provides a need for further research
Meta-Analysis	A statistical technique of quantitative results combined to produce precise effect of results	Numerical analysis of measures with the absence of heterogeneity
Mixed studies review/Mixed methods review	A combination of quantitative and qualitative research review techniques	Analysis involves seeking a correlation between characteristics or gap analysis
Qualitative systematic review/ Qualitative evidence synthesis	A review method that compares or integrates results from qualitative studies	Involves a thematic analysis approach
Rapid Review	A systematic review method that assesses what is known about a policy involving a search and appraisal of current research	Consists of identifying the overall quantity and quality of literature
Scoping Review	A prior assessment of the scope and potential size of available literature	Attempts to characterize the quality and quantity of literature through study design, etc.
State of the art review	A form of review that addresses current matters and offers a new perspective on areas for future research	Evaluation of current state of knowledge and need for future investigation
Systematic Review	A systematic search, appraisal and synthesis of research evidence	Highlights recommendations for research practice, ambiguity around findings and recommendations for future research
Systematized Review	Includes elements of a systematic review process but does not involve the overall process	Its method of analysis considers the uncertainty of findings and limitations of methodology
Umbrella Review	It deals with a compilation of evidence from a number of reviews into an accessible and usable document	The analysis of this review reveals certain recommendations for practice and future research

(Grant and Booth 2009)

**Table 2.1 The Main Review Types of Literature in Research**

### **2.2.1 Choice of Critical & Systematic Literature Review**

The brief analysis into the main types of literature in research has provided the evidence needed to select a critical and systematic literature review for this study. Unlike other forms of reviews, a critical literature review aims to show the reader, the researchers' understanding of the literature through extensively and critically evaluating the quality of research available on the subject area (Grant and Booth, 2009). A systematic literature review relies upon a rigorous method on the use of a transparent and objective approach so as to minimise any bias and ensure replicability (Mallet et al. 2012). Thus, a combination of a critical and systematic literature review ensures a succinct and analytical review, as well as an objective based reporting of the subject area – customer engagement.

### **2.2.2 Critical Literature Review**

A critical literature review can be defined as a review that is aimed at demonstrating an extensive research of the literature and a critical evaluation of the quality of literature (Grant and Booth, 2009). The perceived strengths of undertaking this type of review lies in the fact that it critiques literature. In turn, this helps in the appraisal and overall synthesis of the current state of knowledge surrounding the topic under investigation. Furthermore, a critical review helps the researcher to identify certain gaps in knowledge the study seeks to address (Carnwell and Daly, 2001). Consequently, it gives the researcher the ability to take an account of the literature and critically evaluate what is valuable from previous bodies of work. Also, it provides a premise to the development of a new concept and subsequent testing of the concept. (Grant and Booth, 2009, p.93).

### 2.2.3 Systematic Literature Review

A systematic literature review involves “identifying, synthesising and assessing all available evidence, quantitative/qualitative in order to generate a robust, empirically derived answer to a focused research question” (Mallet et al. 2012, p.445). Although, originating in medical science in support of the practice of evidence based medicine, systematic reviews have been adopted into a wide range of disciplines (Petticrew, 2001). The strength of a systematic review lies in the fact that it follows a fixed process of rigour, transparency and replicability in the research process, minimising any bias (Mallet et al. 2012). A systematic review is needed in relation to customer engagement as there is yet no existing systematic review of the antecedent causes of the phenomena. Thus, supplementing a systematic approach along with the critical review helps to provide a further explicit exploration of the construct of customer engagement. Table 2.2 provides further evidence as to why the researcher chooses to conduct a systematic review in the current study.

To conclude, the traditional/narrative review approach involves “synthesising primary studies and exploring heterogeneity descriptively, rather than statistically” (Petticrew and Roberts, 2005, p. 19). It is mainly based on a subjective analysis of the literature in a qualitative way. Unlike traditional/narrative review approach, a systematic literature review approach involves a “replicable, scientific and transparent process” (Tranfield et al. 2003, p. 209).

<b>Systematic Literature Review</b>	<b>Traditional/Narrative Review</b>
Precedes with a concise question to be answered or a hypothesis to be tested	May precede with a clear question, however, it involves a general discussion of the topic with no clear hypothesis
Seeks to find all relevant unpublished and published research to limit biases and impact of publications	Attempt to locate all relevant literature is not essential
Provides an inclusion/exclusion criterion that explicitly describes type of study to be included and excluded. Limiting selection bias of studies	Do not usually describe its inclusion and exclusion of certain studies

Considers the differences in studies through examination of a systematic manner of the methods used, investigation of biases and sources of heterogeneity	Often disregards the differences in study quality and methods
Synthesises results on studies that are methodologically sound	Usually does not highlight the difference between methodologically sound and unsound studies

(Petticrew, 2001)

**Table 2.2 A Comparison of the Systematic and Narrative Literature Review**

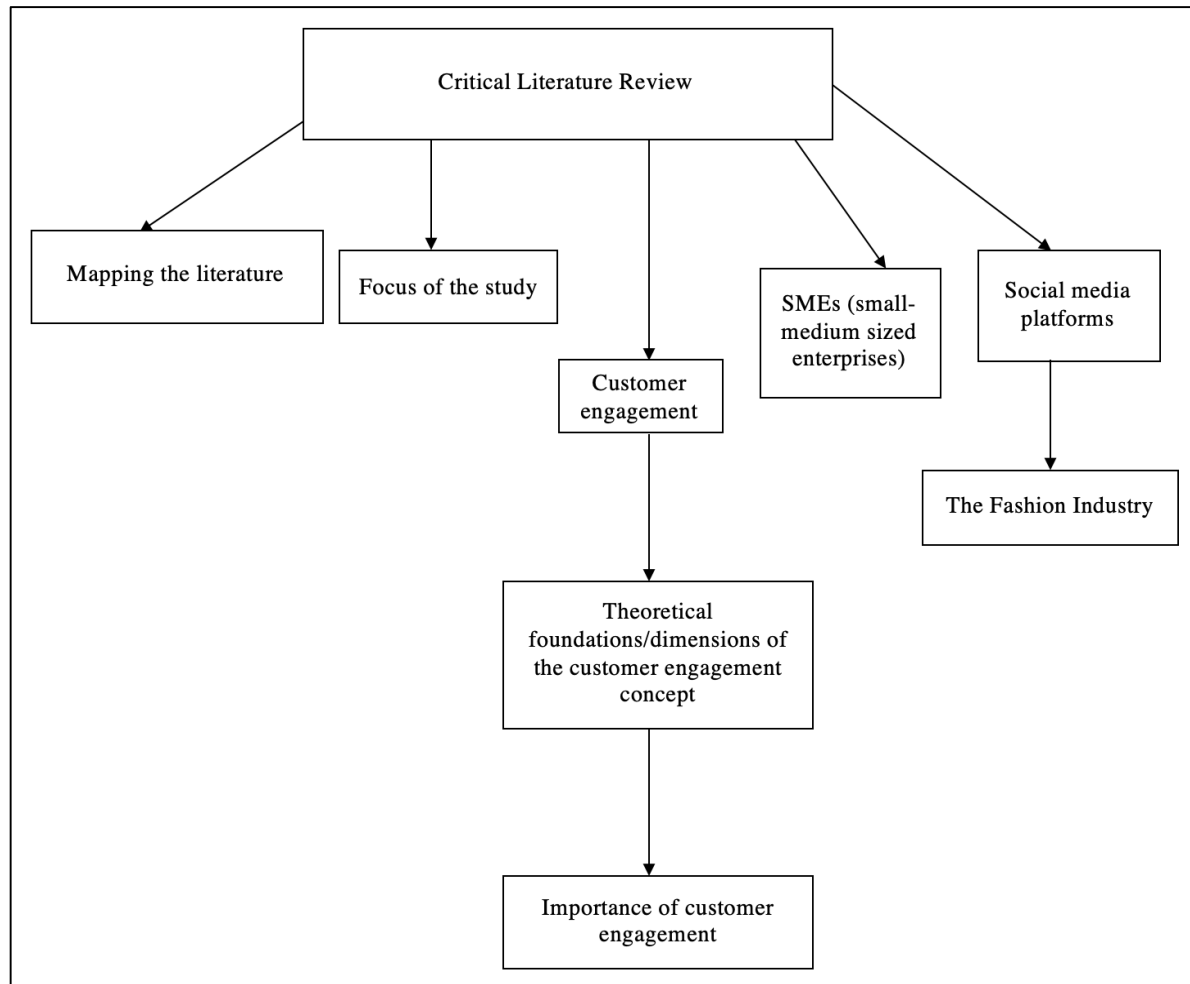
The next section presents the critical literature review of customer engagement, by exploring the main context of the study – SMEs (small-medium sized enterprises), social media platforms and the fashion industry. This ties together in order to address the overall research aims and objectives of the current study.

### **2.3 The Critical Literature Review of Customer Engagement**

As the study chooses to conduct a critical and systematic literature review, this section provides a critical review of the engagement literature. The theoretical background and foundation of this study are discussed. Key research topics related to this study are identified and relevant literature is critically reviewed and synthesised. Three contextual areas are identified as the focus of this study: SMEs (small-medium sized enterprises), social media platforms and the fashion industry. These areas are brought together to form the structure of the study.

This review is then divided into five parts. The first part explains the mapping of the literature followed by the focus of the current research study. The concept/theory of customer engagement is then presented, in terms of its historical development, background and theoretical foundation in the marketing literature. Then, the next section begins with a discussion of SMEs, followed by its importance and relevance to the study.

Finally, the following sections reviews both social media and the fashion industry and provides a justification as to the choice of these contextual areas for the current study. Figure 2.1 below shows how this section is structured.

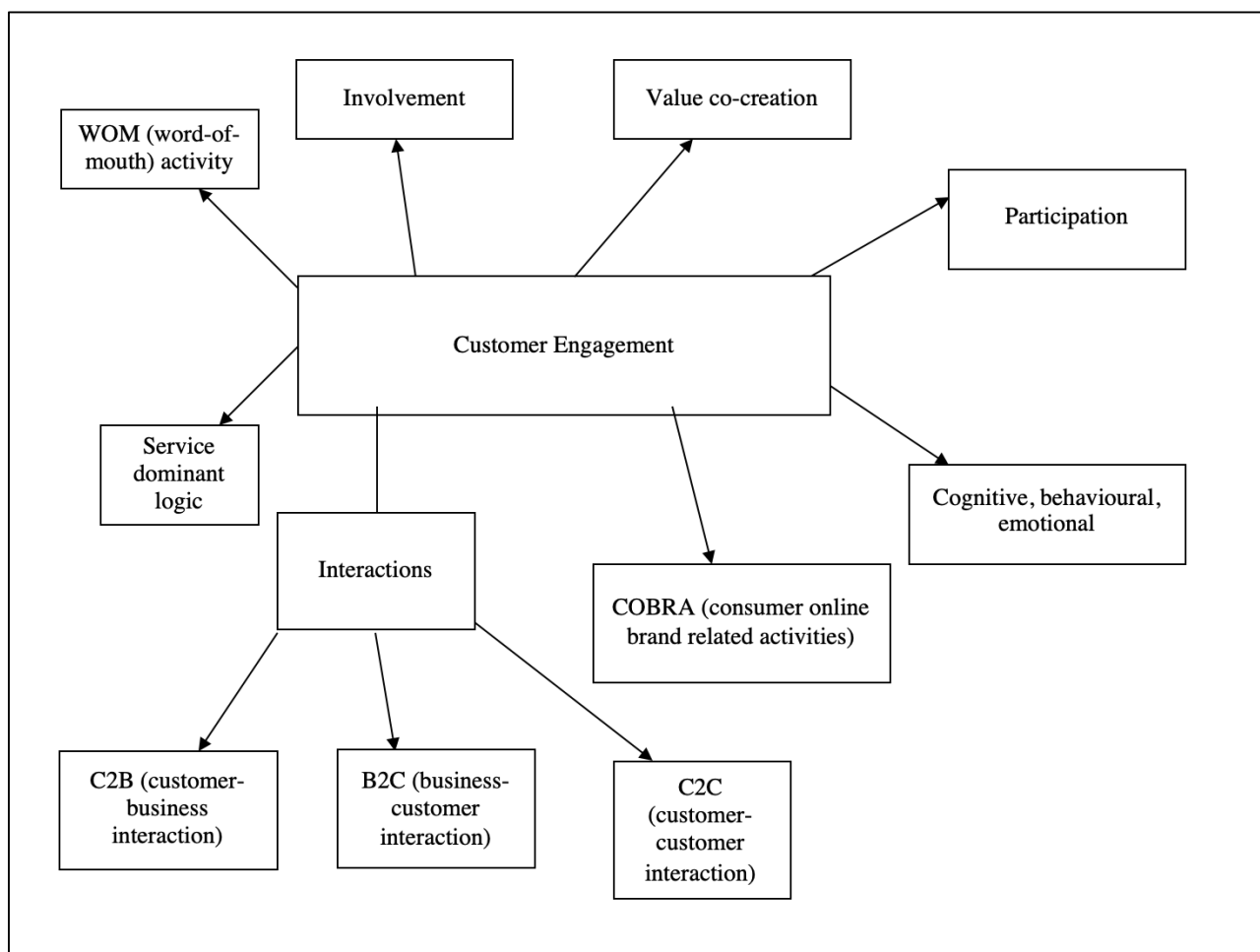


**Figure 2.1 Structure of Critical Literature Review**

## **2.4 Mapping The Literature**

This section of the study provides a broad mapping of customer engagement. The essence of mapping the literature is due to its usefulness in filtering information to succinctly provide a useful illustration for the researcher and reader alike in terms of the connections, relationships and key ideas surrounding the area under review. The study adopts concept mapping as a tool for understanding the subject area better.

Concept mapping has been suggested in the literature as a useful tool to make sense of information during the process of conducting a literature review. It is “a useful way of identifying key concepts in a collection of documents or a research area” (Rowley and Slack, 2004, p.36). Utilising concept mapping of the literature can be used to identify search terms during literature search, understand the concepts, theories and relationships they serve, including, a clarification of thinking about the structure of the literature review (Rowley and Slack, 2004). Figure 2.2 below illustrates this further:



**Figure 2.2 A Concept Map Relating to Customer Engagement**

From the figure above, the concepts related to customer engagement are already established in the literature. These concepts are known from preliminary reading of the customer engagement literature.

Service-dominant logic (Vargo, 2009) relates to the transcending view of relationships. It is centred on customers' interactive experiences in complex and interactive environments that co-create value. In the literature, service-dominant logic is mainly based on ten key foundational premises;

*Service is the fundamental basis of exchange*

*Indirect exchange masks the fundamental basis of exchange*

*Goods are distribution mechanisms for service provision*

*Operant resources are the fundamental source of competitive advantage*

*All economies are service economies*

*The customer is always a co-creator of value*

*The enterprise cannot deliver value, but only offer value propositions*

*A service-centred view is inherently customer-oriented and relational*

*All economic and social actors are resource integrators*

*Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary*

(Source: Adapted from Vargo, 2009).

Thus, in the S-D logic perspective, value is indirectly provided from both the firm and customer i.e. it is co-created by customers through brand and relationship equity (Vargo, 2009). Sashi (2012) notes, value co-creation is derived from the value of engaging with customers through understanding their needs in terms of product, feedback, service delivery. The process of value is moving from a product/firm centric view to a customer centric view with an informed, networked and active group of consumers increasingly co-creating value with firms (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Sashi, 2012).

The process of co-creating value is evidenced in the interaction between the organization, engaged customers, customers and potential customers through generating content, providing feedback and customers becoming supporters for the organization (Sashi, 2012).

Historically, the process of value creation noted consumers as out of the firm's activities with the firm having the role of production and the customer having the role of consumption (Sashi, 2012). Thus, the traditional concept of value co-creation was regarded to be firm-centric. This historical view of value co-creation is challenged by communities of connected, informed and active consumers in the market. Sashi (2012) recommends the basis for this form of firm-customer interaction involves dialogue, access, risk-benefits and transparency. In sum, the co-creation of value involves interactions that are personalized based on individual preference on interaction with the company (Sashi, 2012). From these interactions, the concepts of involvement, participation and WOM (word-of-mouth) activity can be said to have evolved. Involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985) reflects the level of interest a customer has and the relevance of a brand to the customer. It is defined as the perceived relevance of an object, based on the needs, interests and values of the customer (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Participation (Vivek, 2009) is concerned with the intensity of the consumer to the object – that is, brand, firm, etc. On the other hand, WOM (Bowden, 2009) is brought about through the fully engaged customer and can lead to attracting new customers, purchases and loyalty. The fully engaged customer in this sense can be segmented into three dimensions – cognitive, behavioural and emotional (Brodie et al. 2011a). Thereby, the engaged customer is seen through a multi-dimensional lens in their cognitive, emotional and behavioural activities, targeted towards brands in different context. The behavioural dimension of engagement is what the current study is specifically focused on, and it is translated in the literature as consumer online brand-related activities (COBRA). These behavioural activities relate to the engagement behaviours of consumer's activities in regards to brand content (Muntinga et al. 2011). The activities are broken down



into consumption, contribution and creation behaviours, with a link in the concepts of interactions between customer-business and further manifested in customer-customer interactions and business-customer interactions.

The concept of COBRA is used as a unifying framework that helps to understand consumer's activities in relation to brand-related content on social media platforms (Muntinga et al. 2011). The consumption type refers to the minimum level of customer's brand-related activities, involving participation without contribution or creation (Muntinga et al. 2011). The contribution type is the mid-level of customer's brand-related activities involving user-content and user-user interactions pertaining to brands (Muntinga et al. 2011). The creation type is regarded as the maximum level of customer's brand-related activities through the active production and publishing of brand-related content for other users to contribute and consume (Muntinga et al. 2011). Thus, these concepts are all linked to/evolved from customer engagement and provide the researcher some conceptual understanding as to the breadth and conceptual genealogy of the construct that is, customer engagement.

## **2.5 Focus of the Study**

The concepts provided through the mapping of the literature offers an avenue for choosing a contextual focus to investigate the construct of customer engagement. The first contextual focus of the study are SMEs. The industry sector of SMEs is selected due to the fact that SMEs are an important and integral source of financial growth, employment and constant innovation in the UK business environment. A recent shift towards an entrepreneurial economy from a managed economy is reflected in the increasing number of SMEs in the economy (Jaouen and Lasch, 2015).

Social media/social media platforms are the second contextual focus under examination. This medium of marketing can be regarded as highly advantageous for SMEs due to it consisting of several virtual domains which fosters and facilitates engagement and socialisation among its users on a global scale. As the business environment can be complex and competitive, with firms seeking other various strategies for growth, social media can be relied on as a potential source of competitive advantage (Franco et al. 2016).

Finally, the other contextual area, the fashion industry is selected due to its market size. Globally, it represents the world's seventh largest economy ranked alongside individual countries in terms of GDP (McKinney & Company, 2017). Fashion and apparel brands have the largest median audience sizes on Instagram (952, 000 followers), Twitter (545,000 followers) as well as, the third largest median Facebook audience compared to the automotive, restaurant, consumer products, hospitality, entertainment and insurance industry (White, 2019). From this knowledge, the following section delves into reviewing the theoretical focus of the study critically.

## **2.6 Customer Engagement**

Customer engagement has been identified as important in the marketing literature, as several researchers have investigated the term conceptually (Bowden, 2009; van Doorn et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011a; Hollebeek et al. 2014), also termed customer engagement behaviour in the literature. That is, the behavioural manifestation of a customer as a result of motivational drivers that is focused on a brand or firm after purchase (van Doorn et al. 2010). The behavioural manifestations show themselves in two ways; positively e.g. through posting a positive review on a brand page and negatively e.g. through organizing public actions against a brand.

Engaged customers therefore play a key role in marketing activity by providing referrals or recommendations for specific products, services and brands to others. In addition, although customer engagement behaviours have a brand/firm focus, they may be targeted to a much broader network of actors, current and potential customers.

Hollebeek et al. (2014, p. 6) conceptualizes customer brand engagement as “a customer’s positively valenced brand related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity” during or related to consumer/ or brand interactions. In contrast, So et al. (2012, p. 310) proposes customer engagement as the personal connection a customer has to a brand that stems from cognitive, affective and behavioural actions beyond purchase. The distinction here is whether engagement covers the behavioural actions of customers outside of purchase. As there is no universal definition widely accepted in the marketing literature to date, Mollen and Wilson (2010, p.11) identify (3) broad themes; engagement as a mental state, engagement associated with satisfaction and engagement as an impact.

They define engagement as “a cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with a brand” (Mollen and Wilson, 2010, p. 12). Hollebeek (2011) broadens the themes associated with customer engagement to include; immersion, passion and activation.

Engagement represents the degree to which a customer is prepared to exert cognitive, emotional and behavioural resources in specific interactions with a brand. The author conceptualizes customer engagement as a customer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment to brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011). However, Bowden (2009, p. 65) conceptualizes the term engagement as a “psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service brand” as well as, the mechanisms by which “loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a brand”.

From the literature, it can be concluded that customer engagement as a process includes; commitment for new customers, increased levels of involvement, increased levels of trust for repeat purchase customers and the development of affective commitment towards the brand, leading to a state of brand loyalty (Bowden, 2009). Contrary to this, to understand the concept of customer engagement, So et al. (2014) believes that the term engagement is linked to the concept of employee engagement (EE) and this can provide an insight into the concept of customer engagement which is very much in its infancy with little consensus among scholars as to its conceptualization. The organizational behaviour literature defines EE as the “simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s preferred self in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others personal presence, and active, full role performances” (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). Thus, the feelings of enthusiasm, passion, energy are consistent in EE and customer engagement (Patterson et al. 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Hollebeek et al. 2009). However, there is a dilemma that is prevalent, as the context of EE is specifically related to the workplace environment and not consumers of brands. The concept of customer engagement is focused on consumer brands, thereby it is divergent from EE.

Moving on from the EE literature, customer engagement goes beyond attitudinal perspectives, in the sense that there are psychological and behavioural dimensions reflected in the concept of customer engagement. This is presented in Brodie et al. (2011a); Hollebeek et al. (2011) definition of customer engagement as a psychological state that occurs through interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a brand in service relationships. It occurs under specific contexts and exists as a process within service relationships that co-create value. Customer engagement is therefore a multi-dimensional concept subject to a context of relevant cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions (Hollebeek et al. 2011).

Nevertheless, there still remains a range of views in regards to the conceptualization of customer engagement in the marketing literature. As researchers believe it to be a behavioural construct from a result of motivational drivers (Bijmolt et al. 2010; van Doorn et al. 2010; Verhoef et al. 2010), as well as, a multi-dimensional construct made up of psychological and behavioural aspects (Patterson et al. 2006; Vivek, 2009; Hollebeek, 2009; Brodie et al. 2011a; Hollebeek et al. 2011). Despite the lack of consensus on the concept of customer engagement, it can be established that there is likely a psychological connection between a truly engaged customer and the brand as well as some form of behavioural participation. The behavioural approach captures the customer's participation levels in the customer engagement activities, the multidimensional approach captures the full complexities of customer engagement (So et al. 2014).

The concept of customer engagement is used differently in the literature; an overview of associated terminologies is shown below. This ensures there isn't any confusion when terms are used in place of customer engagement in the subsequent chapters. Table 2.3 illustrates this further.

<b>Terminology</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>
<i>Consumer Brand Engagement</i>	A customer's positively valenced brand related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity during or related to consumer/ or brand interactions.	Hollebeek et al. (2014); Kabadayi and Price (2014)
<i>Consumer Engagement</i>	Consumer engagement is a context-dependent, psychological state characterized by levels that occur within dynamic engagement processes.	Brodie et al. (2011a)
<i>Customer Engagement Behaviour</i>	A customer's behavioural manifestation that have a brand/firm focus beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers.	van Doorn et al. (2010)

<i>Customer Brand Engagement</i>	The level of a customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in specific brand interactions.	Hollebeek (2011)
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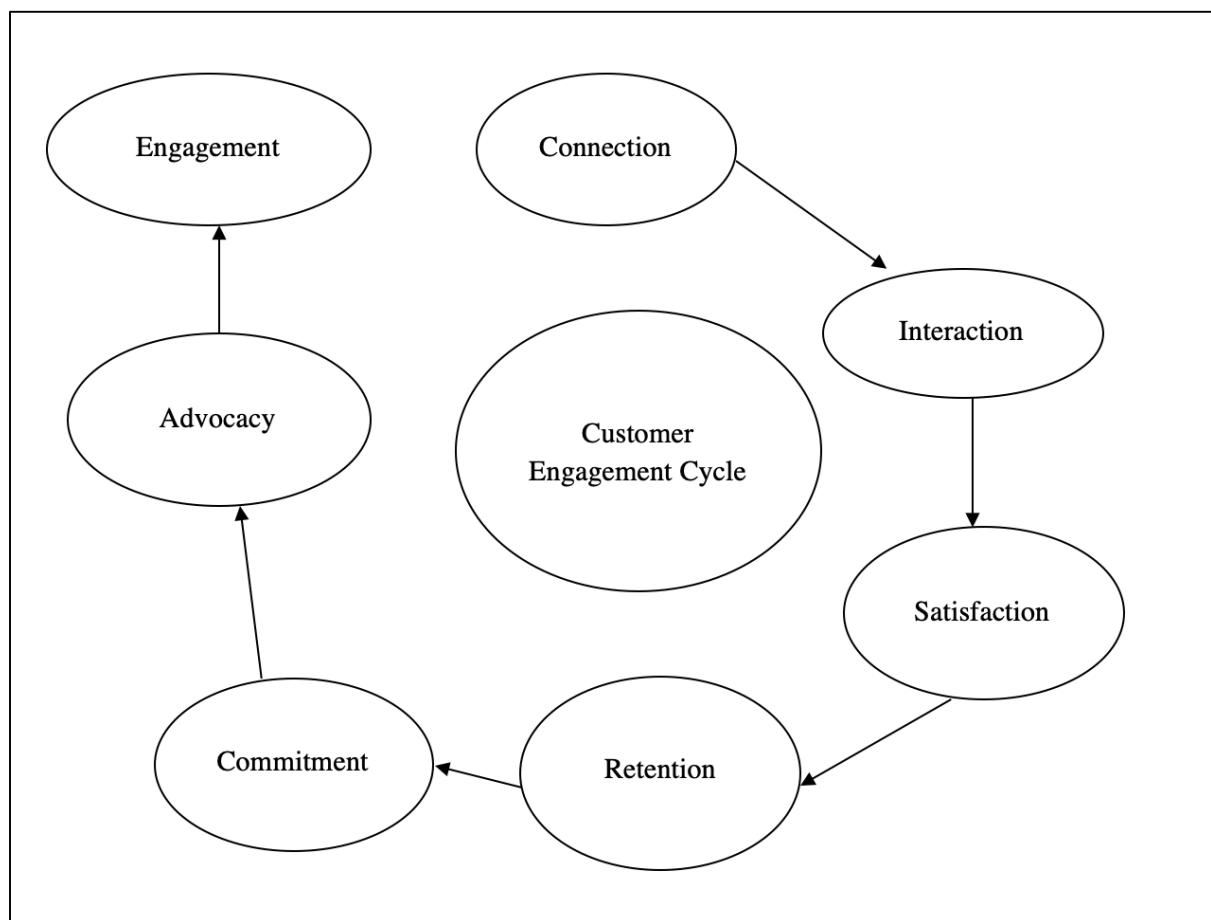
**Table 2.3 Overview – Associated Terminologies of Customer Engagement in the Marketing Literature**

### **2.6.1. Theoretical Foundations/Dimensions of the Customer Engagement Concept**

To understand the concept of customer engagement more clearly, it is useful to consider its theoretical foundations and the several dimensions that guide the concept, proposed by the key authors of customer engagement in the marketing literature.

In their conceptual design of customer engagement – Hollebeek et al. (2014) - referred *customer brand engagement* to how the customer is seen as the *focal engagement* subject, with the brand as the specific *engagement object*. Customer brand engagement is said to involve 3 sets of dimensions – *cognitive processing, affection and activation*. Cognitive processing refers to the level of a consumer's brand-related thought processing in interactions between the consumer and brand. Secondly, affection is related to the degree of a consumer's positive brand-related affect in consumer/brand interactions. Lastly, activation deals with the level of energy, time and effort a consumer spends on a brand in particular, consumer/brand interactions. Sashi (2012) develops a customer engagement cycle which deals with the process of building, developing and maintaining customer engagement. This is useful for practitioners as it puts them in the position to meet the needs of their customers and possibly lead to loyalty and advocacy. As well as researchers, to understand the process of engagement and how it is developed, maintained and reached.

The customer engagement cycle starts from the stages of connection and leads unto interaction, satisfaction, retention, commitment, advocacy and finally, engagement (See Figure 2.3). The connection stages between a seller and potential buyer/customer is crucial. This connection can be established through traditional methods of communication (salespersons) as well as modern methods of communication (social media, digital methods). Once connected, the customer can choose to interact with the seller or other customers.



(Sashi, 2012)

**Figure 2.3 The Customer Engagement Cycle**

With the introduction of new forms of media technologies, restrictions in buyer-seller interactions in terms of geographic location, time, are annulled and real-time interactions are fostered globally (Sashi, 2012). In order to progress through to the cycle of engagement, the interactions have to be mutually satisfying.

Satisfaction in the marketing literature is seen as an intermediate step in the strategies of engagement for an organization (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001).

Customer retention can result from an overall satisfaction or very high positive emotions. As satisfaction occurs from a result of repurchases and relays to a long-term relationship between customer and brand. A high positive emotion relays that a customer does not necessarily have a long-term relationship with the brand. Thus, retention can be said to be the result of an enduring relationship between the two actors (buyer-seller) with any emotional bond or having emotional bond with the long-term relationship (Sashi, 2012).

Commitment on the other hand in the engagement relationship consists of affective and calculative commitment. Calculative commitment relates to the lack of choice and affective commitment results from reciprocity and trust between the customer and the brand/firm.

The result of an affective commitment leads to customer delight while calculative commitment may be considered the result of customer loyalty. Thus, if both results of loyalty and delight are reached, the customer and seller are said to be in an enduring relational exchange bound by strong emotional bonds. In terms of advocacy, due to the lack of emotional bond with the seller, loyal customers are seen as less prone to advocate or offer unsolicited information about their experiences with a brand, product or company to others. However, delighted customers are believed to be more open about their experiences with a brand or company. They are more prone to interact with others in social networks to spread information about their positive experiences.

Therefore, in order to reach the most important step of the cycle – engagement – there needs to be affective and calculative commitment, as well as a strong emotional bond. So, when delighted and loyal customers share their experiences and become advocated for a brand, product or company, the final step in the cycle will be laid (Sashi, 2012).



From explaining the foundation of customer engagement through the customer engagement cycle (Sashi, 2012), van Doorn et al. (2010) introduces the construct of *customer engagement behaviour (CEB)* to capture the underlying reasons, that is, the ways in which customers behave that are relevant to the firm and its stakeholders. The central focus of the customer engagement behaviour construct centres on the behavioural aspects of the relationship between the customer and firm. Customer engagement behaviour is posited as behaviours that go beyond transactions, whereby, customer's behavioural manifestations have a brand/firm focus resulting from motivational drivers (van Doorn et al. 2010). To understand the nature of customer engagement behaviour more extensively, van Doorn et al. (2010) proposes 5 dimensions; valence, form/modality, scope, nature of impact and customer goals. Valence reflects the degree to which the service outcome is perceived as good or bad (Brady et al. 2016, p. 84). It can be categorised as positive or negative. Positive customer engagement includes actions that have short term/long-term positive consequences that are non-financial and financial for the firm. Thereby, actions such as online reviews, WOM activity may turn out to be positive or negative for the firm based on the valence of the content (van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 255). Form/modality refers to the different ways in which customer engagement is expressed by customers. It refers to the type of resources i.e. time vs money, that customers may utilize (van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 255). For example, customers participating in charity events run by firms – thereby donating their time and money into firm activities.

Scope involves temporal/geographic engagement. From the customer's perspective, engagement can be temporal, momentary or ongoing. Firms may develop specific processes to monitor and address the customer engagement in the case of ongoing customer actions. For momentary engagement, firms may assess the brand/firm level outcomes (van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 255).

Alternatively, the geographic scope addresses the level of local and global engagement i.e. whether WOM is delivered in person or posted on a global website. This enables firms to understand their customer base and enables effective engagement strategies. The geographic scope is determined by the modality and form used by consumers.

The nature of impact is conceptualized in terms of its immediacy, intensity, breadth and longevity. Immediacy refers to how quickly CEB affects any of the public especially the target audience. The intensity refers to the level of change affected within the target audience. Breadth refers to the reach/number of people affected.

Finally, the longevity of impact depends on the ability to codify and preserve the activity of engagement in some form (van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 255). The choice of the engagement channel will influence the overall impact of CEB.

The customer goals involve the answers to 3 fundamental questions – *Whom is the engagement directed towards? What extent is the engagement planned? and What extent are the customer's goal aligned with firm's goal?* The customer goals can also be reflected from a goal alignment perspective. That is, do the customer goals align with the firm goals or not (van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 256). In addition to this, extant studies of engagement vary in their proposal of the dimensions of engagement as some authors embrace uni-dimensional and bi-dimensional views of the construct, while others follow a multi-dimensional perspective (See Table 2.4).

Sprott et al. (2009) focuses on the emotional dimension of engagement by exploring brand engagement in self-concept (BESC). In this sense, brand engagement in self-concept refers to consumers view of brands in relation their self-concepts. The authors identify that BESC captures consumer's engagement with brands and noting consumers with a high BESC are not as sensitive towards price and time compared to consumers with a low BESC (Sprott et al. 2009). Kumar et al. (2010) extends the discussion on the emotive dimension of engagement by highlighting the importance of customer's engagement value with a firm.

Author(s)	Dimensions		
	Behavioural	Cognitive	Emotional
Sprott et al. (2009)			✓
Kumar et al. (2010)			✓
Mollen and Wilson (2010)		✓	
van Doorn et al. (2010)	✓		
Verhoef et al. (2010)	✓		
Brodie et al. (2011a); Brodie et al. (2011b)	✓	✓	✓
Hollebeek (2011)	✓	✓	✓
Gummerus et al. (2012)	✓		
Vivek et al. (2012)	✓	✓	✓
So et al. (2012)	✓	✓	

**Table 2.4 Review of Customer Engagement Dimensions**

The authors assert that looking at the value of customers based only on their transactional activities are not sufficient, thus proposing four components (customer lifetime value, customer referral value, customer influencer value, customer knowledge value) which can lead to a more efficient form of marketing, enabling long-term contribution from customers (Kumar et al. 2010).

Mollen and Wilson (2010) shift their focus to the cognitive aspect of engagement as they interpret the construct as cognitive and affective, through the active relationship between customer and brand. The authors characterize the response of consumer's as a perceptual scale that includes telepresence, interactivity and engagement (Mollen and Wilson, 2010). On the other hand, van Doorn et al. (2010) explores the behavioural dimension of engagement through CEBs. This involves the customer's behavioural manifestation beyond purchase, that result from motivational drivers towards firms (van Doorn et al. 2010). The authors construct a conceptual model to represent CEB, that includes several antecedents and consequences of CEBs for the customer and firm. Through this model, firms can manage customer's CEBs while acknowledging its evolution and impact (van Doorn et al. 2010). Similarly, Verhoef et al. (2010) also consider customer engagement from a behavioural lens, as a behavioural manifestation that is directed towards the firm post-purchase. The authors also develop and propose a conceptual model consisting antecedents, barriers and consequences for the firm in terms of engaging with customers (Verhoef et al. 2010). Gummerus et al. (2012) further examines the behavioural dimension of customer engagement by studying the effect of CEBs on perceived relationship benefits and relationship outcomes in a Facebook brand community. The authors investigate community engagement behaviours and transactional engagement behaviours noting social benefits, entertainment benefits and economic benefits (Gummerus et al. 2012). However, Brodie et al. (2011 a, b) consider the multi-dimensionality of customer engagement as involving cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions, subject to specific contexts. The author's conceptualizations build on Hollebeek (2011) approach to customer brand engagement. Customer brand engagement is expressed as the customer's motivational, brand-related state represented through levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activities (Hollebeek, 2011). In line with this, Vivek et al. (2012) also consider customer engagement as multidimensional; cognitive, emotional, behavioural.

The authors develop a model of customer engagement noting participation and involvement as antecedents with value, trust, word-of-mouth, loyalty, brand community involvement and affective commitment as consequences of engagement (Vivek et al. 2012). On the contrary, So et al. (2012) proposes customer engagement as a bi-dimensional construct involving identification, enthusiasm, attention, absorption and interaction which represents the psychological (cognitive) and behavioural aspects of customer engagement. In sum, it seems customer engagement is reflected through cognitive, behavioural and emotional dimensions in the literature. Thus, these dimensions of CE can be said to collectively represent an overall comprehensive understanding of the construct.

### **2.6.2. Importance of Customer Engagement**

This section of the study describes the importance of customer engagement in the marketing discipline and for the business community. Recently, there has been an increasing emphasis on customer engagement due to its potential for enhancing relationships, growth and profitability (Hollebeek, 2011). Building customer engagement within an organisation requires adaptation of the existing marketing mix to take advantage of new technologies and platforms and to better understand and serve customers (De Varies and Carlson, 2014). Implicitly, managers in private and public sector companies across the world have indicated that companies are seeking to create high levels of customer engagement within their business strategies (Adobe, 2008). The concept of customer engagement is seen as critical to the success of organizations, as customer engagement deals with customers and their needs in relation with the marketing concept. It aims to provide value relative to competitors by disseminating, responding and generating intelligence in regards to customer needs and seeks to build commitment and trust in the relationships with customers (Sashi, 2012).

The behavioural aspects of engagement i.e. customer engagement behaviours – *CEBs* – are noted in the engagement literature to have financial and reputational outcomes for firms (see van Doorn et al. 2010). Such that, referral behaviours and WOM (word of mouth) activities aimed at generating information about a brand, firm, company also affect the purchase behaviours of customers (van Doorn et al. 2010).

Customers who are actively engaged with a brand/firm can enhance the firm's long-term reputation and its overall recognition through participation in brand communities, as well as supporting company run events such as charities or fundraisers. Thus, when customers maintain and nurture relationships with other firms, customers and brands of the target firm, they can exert a powerful influence over the target firm /brand (van Doorn et al. 2010).

According to market research (Gallup, Inc. 2019), customers who are highly engaged with firms represent a 23% share in terms of profitability, revenue and relationship growth when compared to the average customer. Processes that encourage engaged customers are said to dramatically increase firms' performance as well as their growth and sales in the market (Roberts and Alpert, 2010). An engaged customer is considered to be loyal to the brand, actively participating in recommending products and services. This type of customer is said to be more advantageous for firms in word-of-mouth marketing than television or print advertising (Kirby, 2006). Through fostering a mutual relationship with an engaged customer, valuable feedback is provided and there is less of a risk of litigation as there is commitment (LaMalfa, 2008).

Scholars in the field of marketing have noted the beneficial marketing functions of customer engagement in providing customer acquisition, expansion, retention and product innovation (Brodie et al. 2011b; Vivek et al. 2012; Hollebeek et al. 2016).

Although having an engaged customer can be highly advantageous to organisations, some scholars have argued against firms relinquishing full control over to customers. New tools and platforms for engagement may lead customers to engaging in negative word-of-mouth, detrimental legal actions or policies (van Doorn et al. 2010). Henderson et al. (2014) also argues in line with this, as the disruptiveness of engagement to existing mechanisms for facilitating repurchase behaviours. Likewise, highly engaged customers can tarnish a firm's reputation and create high expectations, as firms that are unresponsive to their customer's feedback risk losing their customers and may lead to lower customer satisfaction.

A firm that enables greater engagement with their customers can experience higher levels of disappointment if it fails (Roehm and Brady, 2007). To summarise, the technological environment has shifted the influence over to customers from firms, altering the requirements for success in the business environment. This shift creates the need for strategic engagement marketing and firm efforts to empower, motivate and measure customer engagement in order to gain a competitive edge amongst competing firms and better perform in the market. This is especially true for small-medium sized enterprises with limited resources to spare across their businesses and compete with their larger counterparts.

## **2.7 SMEs (small-medium sized enterprises)**

The importance of customer engagement for firms suggests that it needs to be considered when developing and maintaining business strategies in order to better serve customers and reach affirmed goals (van Doorn et al. 2010). Especially for SMEs as there is a limited choice for investing in business strategies. SMEs adopt strategies of customer engagement as they have the flexibility in terms of adopting new business strategies, compared to large multinational corporations and conglomerates (Singh et al. 2008).

This is due to the scale and size of SMEs. It is therefore worth considering the particular characteristics of SMEs, their relative significance to the economy, as well as their relationship to customer engagement.

According to the European Commission, SMEs – small-medium sized enterprises are made up of enterprises that employ fewer than 250 persons, including an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million euros and an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million euros (EUR-Lex, 2019). SMEs consist of (3) different categories; micro-enterprises, small enterprises and medium-sized enterprises (see Table 2.5)

<b>Category</b>	<b>Employees</b>	<b>Turnover</b>	<b>Balance sheet</b>
Micro	< 10	< €2million	< €2million
Small	< 50	<€10million	<€10million
Medium-sized	< 250	<€50million	<€43million

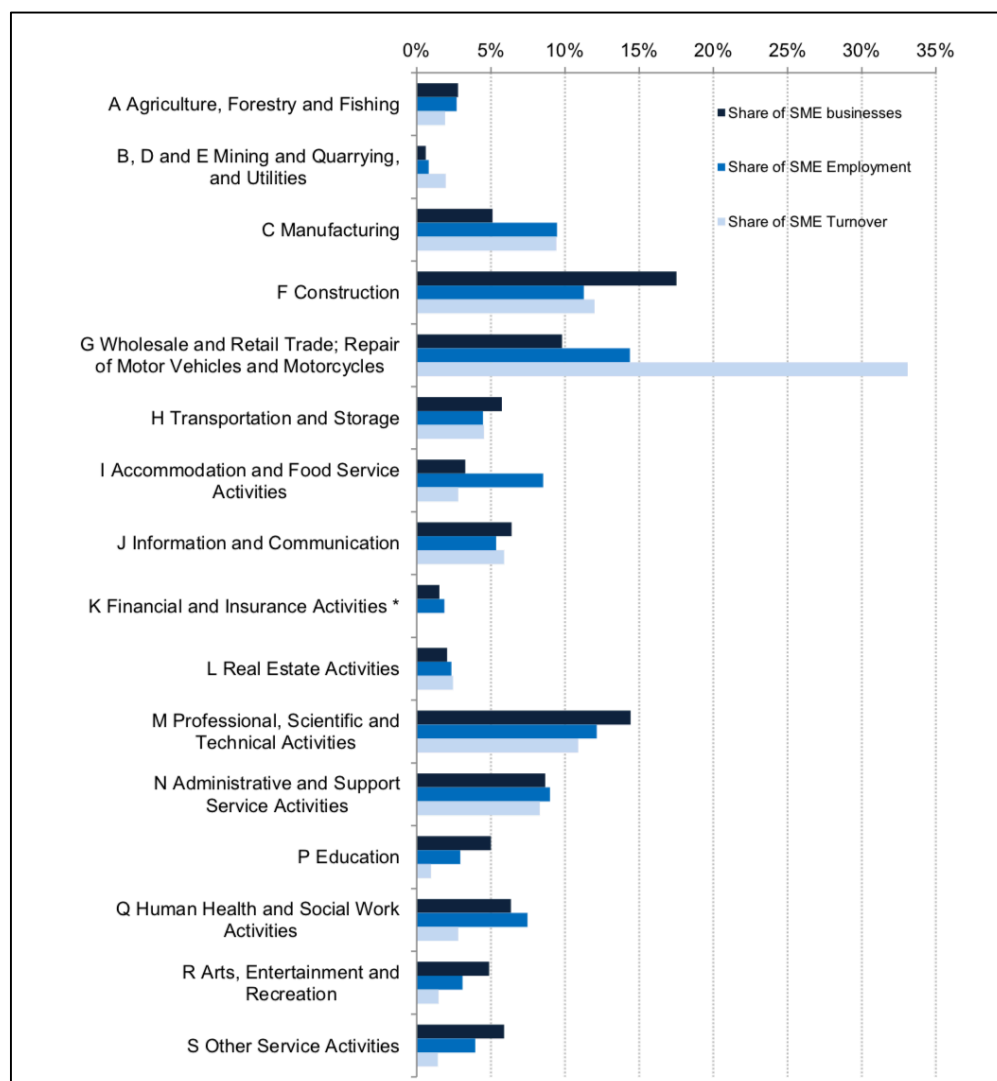
(EUR-Lex, 2019)

**Table 2.5 Categorization of SMEs (small-medium sized enterprises)**

In the UK, at the start of 2018, small businesses accounted for 99.3% of all private sector businesses, with 99.9% being SMEs. Also, SMEs account for at least, 99.5% of the overall population in industry sectors reflecting the overall share of SME numbers, employment and turnover (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2018). When compared to large businesses, SMEs contribute to 60% of all private sector employment in the UK, as well as 52% of all private sector turnover (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2018). Particularly, SMEs in the Fashion industry (wholesale and retail trade) represent a high share of turnover in the UK market (see figure 2.4). SMEs are essential to economies across the world, including developing and emerging economies (Ndiaye et al. 2018). They contribute



to fostering employment, economic growth and dynamics through their capabilities of realising innovations. These innovations are controlled by external variables – opportunities that SMEs take from their environment, as well as, internal variables – characteristics and policies of an SME (Keizer et al. 2002). The variables can have a direct and positive relationship to the innovative efforts of SMEs. External variables can manifest from: collaboration with other firms, companies, aligning with knowledge centres (i.e. professional consultants, university researchers) and utilising financial resources through government financial aid or crowd funding opportunities.



(Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2018).

**Figure 2.4 Overall Share of SME Numbers, Employment & Turnover by Industry Sector in the UK**

Internal variables can result from; the level of education available to the SMEs, in terms of business development and strategies to grow the firm further and investments, business management practices, adopting risk-taking behaviours. However, owing to the globalization of the business world, technological advances and the ever-changing needs of customers. These changes are driving the force of competitiveness among firms in the areas of design and development of product, distribution, communication, manufacturing and marketing (Singh et al. 2008). Therefore, it is important for SMEs to be flexible and adapt to the ever changing global economy in terms of their business strategies. Although, SMEs are beneficial to the economy from a general consensus, there are still constraints that impede on their growth. As reaching their desired economic potential and performance in the market are deterred by certain factors which the following sections, highlights in more detail:

### *Finance*

According to Ndiaye et al. (2018, p.270) “finance is a major constraint facing SMEs”. This is in line with Wang (2016) who notes that SMEs access to finance is one of the most significant factors that restrains their growth. Beck and Demirgüç-Kunt (2006) similarly find that access to finance can serve as a major constraint factor for SMEs. As SMEs have limited resources and are constrained in terms of managing their finance objectives, they are deemed to be risky compared to larger firms consisting of several departments handling finance objectives. SMEs tend to face higher premiums and collateral requirements from lending institutions (Ndiaye et al. 2018). To counter-act the high premiums and requirements placed on SMEs, Kersten et al. (2017) has found that finance programs supporting SMEs have a positive and significant impact on performance measures. However, Beck and Demirgüç-Kunt (2006) argue against this and suggest that provision of subsidies to ease SMEs access to finance opportunities may be counter-productive, if in a weak business environment.

They suggest lending strategies such as leasing, credit-scoring can serve as alternatives to traditional debt financing (Beck and Dermirgüç-Kunt, 2006). Thereby, in regards to financing for SMEs, the type of finance matters to their performance and consequently, growth in the market. Finance also matters in terms of customer engagement, as SMEs with limited resources i.e. financial constraints might be unable to respond to customer's needs due to a focus on keeping the company afloat. An example of this is with the recent case of Thomas Cook (British travel group) demise being unable to respond to their customers' needs effectively due to financial limitations (Georgiadis et al. 2019). The constraints on the company's finances made services for travelling across its constituent firms around the world unable to attend to the needs of its customers. It is important for SMEs to keep finances in check in order to maintain all aspects of the business due to their size, lack of multiple departments (finance, marketing, human-resources, technology, etc.) and number of employees unlike larger companies. Finance for SMEs is a major factor at all stages through their life cycle, to start, develop and grow in order to contribute to the business economy (OECD, 2019).

### *Innovation and Technology*

For growth and performance within SMEs, innovation and technology can be considered to be key prerequisites. As evidenced in the literature, Sok et al. (2013) found that there are complementary effects between innovation and learning capability including substantial individual effects. In line with this, Subrahmanya et al. (2010) also agree on the importance of technological innovation for SME performance and growth. The authors found, compared to non-innovative SMEs, innovative SMEs registered a higher growth index and performance in terms of sales turnover, employment and investment (Subrahmanya et al. 2010). However, Rosenbusch et al. (2011) study' on 21,270 firms observed that the relationship between innovativeness and performance are largely context-dependent, and based on the type of

innovation and culture. Also, the age of the firm, individualistic/collectivism culture can affect the impact of innovation on its performance (Rosenbusch et al. 2011). Furthermore, innovative efforts in SMEs are said to be guided by (3) basic characteristics. As noted by Keizer et al. (2002); links with knowledge centres, entries to governmental innovation subsidy schemes and a relatively high research and development budget all constitute innovation. These characteristics all create an innovative SME. An innovative SME with technological capabilities can be more successful in customer engagement techniques. As these type of firms are more likely to adopt strategies of customer engagement into their ethos unlike non-innovative firms lacking technological know-how. Rather than relying on internal knowledge, innovative SMEs can draw on improving the customer experience through collaborating with their customers and adopting the collaborative economy.

### *Strategy Development*

The strategy for firms, which involves specifying potential products/markets, objectives and policies are paramount for long-term competitive advantage and performance (Singh et al. 2008). The main task of SME strategy is to identify and explore core competencies that can be added to their operations. In line with this, O'Regan et al. (2006a, b) found that firms with high growth have placed a greater focus on strategic orientation and external drivers. Thus, for SMEs to grow, entrepreneurial actions are needed in recognizing and exploiting market opportunities through the use of advanced technologies (Singh et al. 2008).

As SMEs are faced with uncertainty in the market, they can develop themselves through extended networks and diversification (Cagliano et al. 2001). In the SME literature, other authors have also identified several other factors on SMEs that constricts their competitiveness, growth and performance in the market; inadequate technologies and resources (Gunasekaran et al. 2001; Hashim and Wafa, 2002), lack of market research and effective selling techniques

(Hashim and Wafa, 2002), inability to meet the demand for multiple technological competencies (Muscatello et al. 2003; Narula, 2004) and the information gap between marketing and production functions (Xiong et al. 2006).

### *Marketing Issues*

Quinn and Carson (2003) emphasise that the failure of small firms can be largely linked to their marketing strategies. In line with this, Smith (1990) further notes the success of small businesses are dependent on the effectiveness of marketing products within the markets they are based in. Thus, the lack of a sophisticated marketing strategy for small firms is perceived to be a concern, especially for their growth and competition with larger firms in the same market.

The small firm with its flexibility and ability to maintain a relationship with its customers through quick-time responses to customer needs has a marketing orientation that is dependent on the capabilities of the management and employees' backgrounds (Quinn and Carson, 2003). Also, their use of marketing strategies is generally restricted by constrained resources (Stokes, 1994). In addition to this, the characteristics of small firms can have an impact on the adoption of marketing tools into the firms' strategies i.e. the willingness and ability of the owner-manager, competitive circumstances, lack of a strong brand name (Stasch and Ward, 1987; Chen and Hambrick, 1995; Quinn and Carson, 2003). Ong (1997) adds to this, as the major constraint for small firms marketing is their inability to forecast future demand for products in the market. As small firms lack the resources to predict changes due to a lack of resources, which leads to slow reactions to the changing marketing environment.

The internet can be regarded as a useful marketing tool that can enable small firms to compete with their larger counterparts. As it forms the opportunity for an affordable and effective versatile marketing strategy (Poon and Jevons, 1997).

It is also the gateway for small firms in niche markets to access a large number of customers in the market necessary for firm success (Hamill and Gregory, 1997).

Nonetheless, although these constraints and factors may look like an uphill battle for SMEs, the introduction of social media technologies serves as a great tool in combatting some of these constraints if correctly used and implemented into their business strategy. Combined with customer engagement strategies, it provides SMEs an avenue for growth and business development while cutting the costs of reaching their customers through other methods. Such as outsourced marketing, paid advertising, billboards, etc.

The emergence of social media platforms as a medium of marketing can be regarded as highly advantageous for SMEs; as it offers the opportunity for SMEs to engage with customers and extend communication to existing and future customers (De Varies and Carlson, 2014).

As marketing through the web does not require great know-how, using social media platforms helps to overcome SMEs constraint of limited resources, technical knowledge and facilitate communication to niche audiences (Stokes and Nelson, 2013). Also, this medium of marketing can be beneficial for SMEs, due to the low cost of setting up and flexibility to adapt. With the added benefits of greater interaction and brand awareness, social media platforms are a useful resource SMEs can tap into. Compared to large companies, SMEs are well behind in the adoption of innovative technologies (Mesko and Stieglitz, 2013). This is due to limitations in investing into other business activities/strategies and a focus on already established core business principles. Given the absence of limitations (freedom to setup) on social media platforms, SMEs can make well-conceived decisions and new business strategies in seeking growth and compete fairly with large organisations. As the barrier to entry into social media platforms are low, SMEs can adapt them without the use of major resources. In the same way as large firms, SMEs using social media can expand their reach and extend their businesses (Franco et al. 2016).

Consequently, due to their high economic and social importance, there is little research that is devoted to exploring the internal usage of social media platforms in SMEs (Mesko and Stieglitz, 2013). The following section provides an insight into social media platforms and their importance for firms as a viable tool for engaging with customers, especially for SMEs with little or no resources to spare.

## **2.8 Social Media Platforms**

As the importance of SMEs have been highlighted, this section introduces social media and its significance, especially for SMEs. The Internet has provided new opportunities for customer engagement with firms. It has helped remove the necessity of physical person-to-person communication and consequently “word of mouth” has become important as “word of mouse” (Stokes and Nelson, 2013) or “electronic word of mouth” (e-WOM)” (Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010). WoM communications are one of the most ancient mechanisms in the history of human society (Dellarocas, 2003), identified simply as the communication between consumers regarding goods and services, independent of commercial influence (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). Keller (2007) suggests that WoM is the most important and effective channel for communication between consumers, and when communicated over a digital platform, facilitates new ways of capturing, analysing and managing the influence one consumer can have on another (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). This facility has enabled social networking platforms to be developed, which are virtual domains in which participants can interact and socialise with others. Kim and Ko (2012, p. 1481) define social media platforms as “online applications, platforms and media which aim to facilitate interactions, collaborations and the sharing of content”. Social media technologies use mobile and Web-based services to create interactive platforms through which communities, individuals, entities co-create, interact and share user-generated content. As of 1997, social media sites and services are said to have emerged (Boyd and Ellison, 2008).

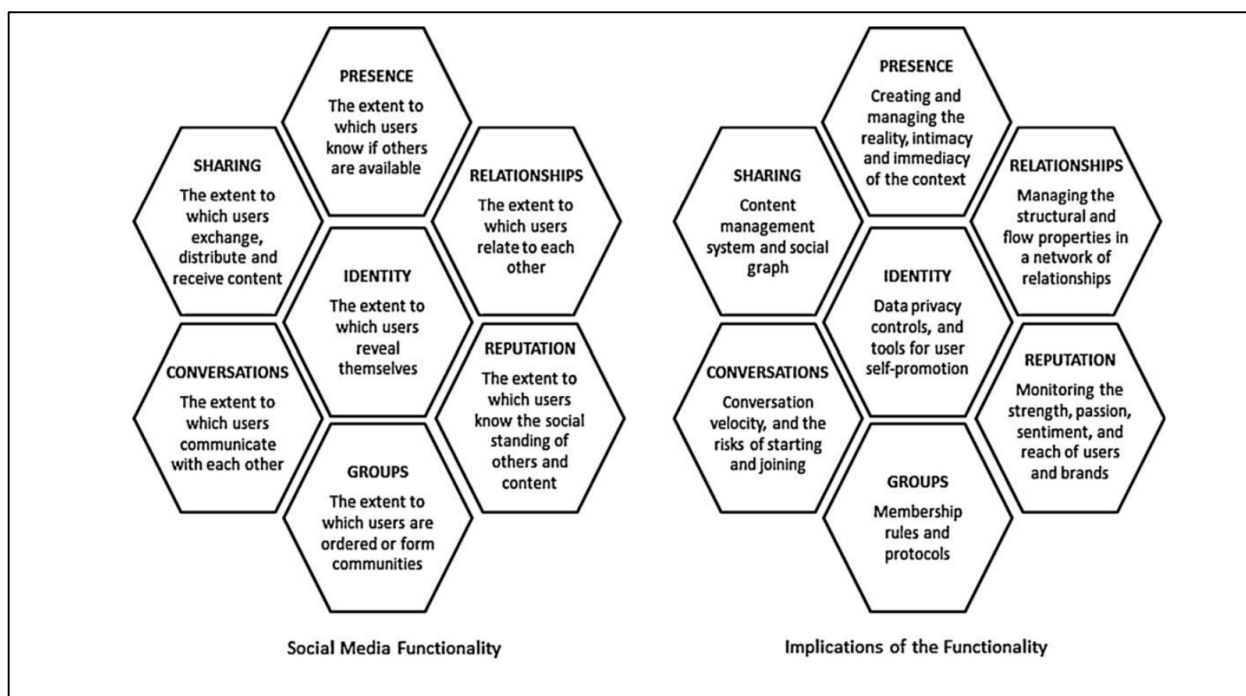
The network, Sixdegrees enabled users to list friends, create profiles and add mutual friends to their list (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Today, there exists a diverse and rich number of social media sites with a variety of scope and functionality. For example, the social network site, Facebook is directed for the general population. LinkedIn is focused on establishing professional networks. YouTube, concentrates on sharing and posting videos. While Instagram, is on the sharing of images and short videos. Facebook sits at the top of all social media sites with over 2 billion monthly active users, LinkedIn with 310 million monthly active users, YouTube reaching 2 billion monthly active users and Instagram amounting to 1 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2019a). With the rise in shared information, access to free communication has been widened and communication has been democratized.

The power of communication has been stripped from centralised marketers and people in public relations by decentralised individuals that foster and maintain social networks through a shared sense of interest, consuming and creating content (Kietzmann et al. 2011).

There are no universally accepted typologies for classifying social media, but Kietzmann et al. (2011) provide a foundation for understanding how social media platforms work by proposing a framework that entails the functional building blocks of social media. This consists of identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. These constructs allow for an understanding on how different levels of social media functionalities vary and can have implications for firms (see figure 2.5). The construct *identity* is concerned with the way in which users reveal their self. This includes disclosing their name, gender, location, profession. In many social media platforms, identity is core and presents the major implication of privacy for companies. On the other hand, *conversations* refer to the extent to which users communicate with other users. The construct of *sharing* represents the level to which users distribute, receive and exchange content.



The implication of this for firms is finding out what their users have in common or identifying objects that can encourage shared interests. As without this, the sharing network will be about connecting people without a significant focal object to connect them (Kietzmann et al. 2011). For example, YouTube's medium of enabling users to share their personal, life experiences, hobbies through video content. There is a shared connection established through the personal *object*. Additionally, *presence* represents users' accessibility to other users. This means knowing where other users are in the world and their availability both offline and online. The implication for firms is that there needs to special attention given to the importance of user's availability and location. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), high levels of social presence are likely to make conversations influential.



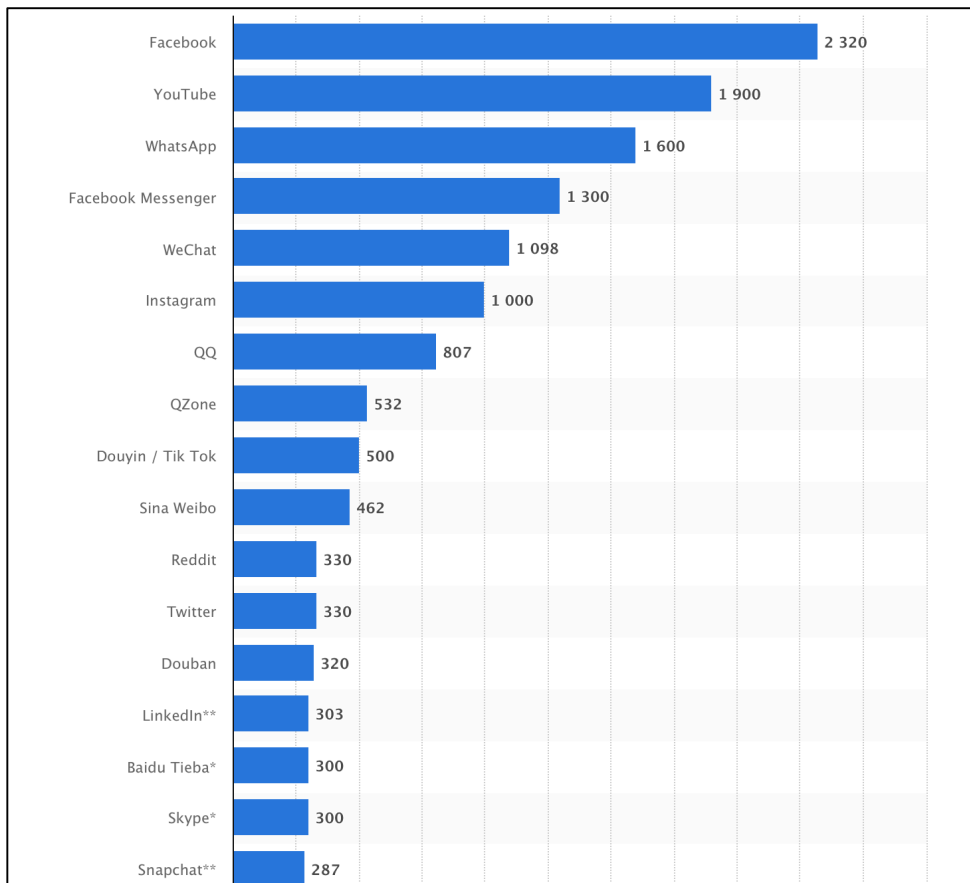
(Kietzmann et al. 2011)

**Figure 2.5 The Building Blocks of Social Media**

The *Relationship* represents users' association to each other, leading to conversations. For example, the social media platform LinkedIn shows users who they are linked to in terms of mutual connections.

Firms hoping to engage with users need to understand how they can maintain or build relationships. *Reputation* refers to the level to which users can identify the standing of their users. For example, the ‘likes’ and ‘views’ on YouTube videos reveals the reputation of the user channel, thus, *reputation* has implications for how firms need to engage effectively on social media platforms. *Groups* relates to the level to which users can form communities. The direct implication of groups can be assumed as several protocol in which a social media community can enjoy a way to group its users (Kietzmann et al. 2010).

With this in mind, the social media model is defined by interactivity and customer connectivity with a wide variety of platforms providing the tools necessary for firm-customer exchanges (Hanna et al. 2011). Accordingly, this radical new way of interacting has provided the conception of hundreds of different social media platforms (Harris, 2009). The most popular social media platforms globally according to the number of active users as of April 2019 are Facebook (2.3 million monthly active users), YouTube (1.9 million monthly active users) and WhatsApp (1.6 million monthly active users) (Statista, 2019a). These platforms enable multiple languages and enable users to connect with their friends and other users across political, economic borders and geographic locations. Nearly 2 billion users are using social media platforms and the number of users are expected to grow as smartphone usage and mobile social networks gain traction (Statista, 2019a).



(Statista, 2019a)

**Figure 2.6 The Most Popular Social Media Platforms Worldwide Ranked by Active Users (in millions)**

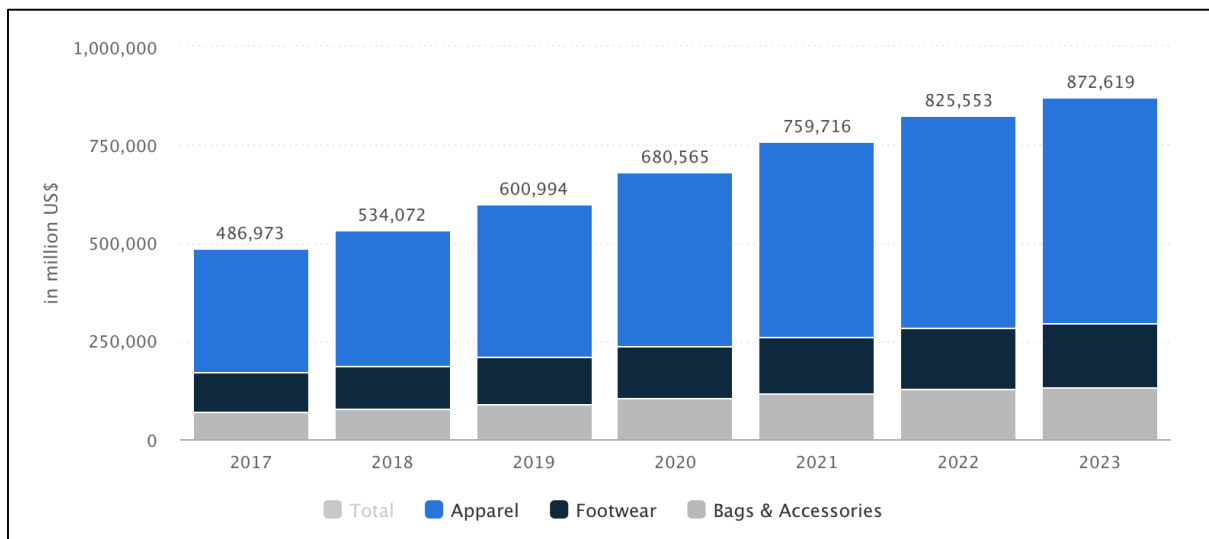
With the growing rate of users on social media, it is essential for firms to use these tools in order to connect with the broad variety of users. For SMEs, due to the competitive nature of the business market, social media platforms can serve as a resource against competitors in the market due to its low-entry barrier and freedom of use across most platforms. Social media can also be beneficial to the SMEs in industries that are specifically reliant on content, such as, the fashion industry. As social media offers fashion brands a cheaper and more effective way to connect with their customers as well as an opportunity to develop and improve customer relationships (Mohr, 2013). This rise in technological advancement i.e. the internet, has enabled the universality of fashion, for example, blogs – personal websites maintained by

individuals – have enabled consumers of fashion to have an unlimited space for sharing brand-related information in all things that deals with the fashion industry (Kozinets, 2006; Mohr, 2013). The fashion industry and social media can be considered to be a perfect match due to the beneficial relationship social media has for businesses in the industry.

The following section provides an overview of the fashion industry and its relationship with social media. As it has been purposefully chosen as the focus for the current study, it is essential to provide justification for the reader and the researcher.

### **2.8.1. The Fashion Industry**

The fashion industry has been argued to be a microcosm of global industrial change (Oxborrow and Brindley, 2014) and compared to other industries, the fashion industry can be considered a perfect fit for social media platforms (Ahmad et al. 2015). Due to the ephemeral nature of fashion, social media platforms can enable firms in the fashion industry to reach their customers on a wider scale, anticipate trends and behaviours in the market from a large consumer base (Ahmad et al. 2015). Social media platforms have become a crucial tool for the fashion industry. The Industry can be segmented into the following; apparel, footwear, bags & accessories. Overall, the apparel sector dominates all other sectors in the market (see figure 2.7). The apparel sector can be considered to cover design, retailing, manufacturing and wholesale of clothing and garments. On the other hand, the footwear sector covers materials and product from men's, women's and children's footwear, to specialised products – snowboard boots (European Commission, 2019b).



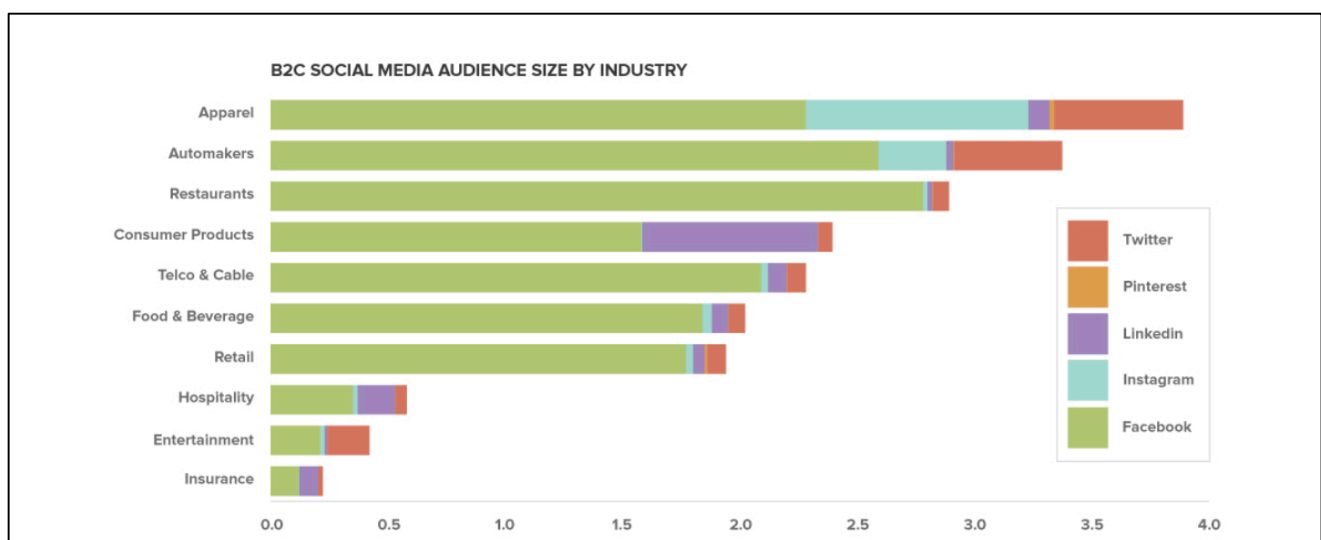
(Statista, 2019b)

**Figure 2.7 The Global Fashion Industry Share**

In the UK, the fashion industry is largely dominated by the Burberry Group Plc., Next Plc., Marks & Spencer and ASOS. These companies have a combined market share of \$29.52 billion (Fashion United, 2019b). Accordingly, with the advent of social media and its many platforms, the world of fashion has gained a beneficial return from the use of it, as it helps by attracting customers to interact with brands. Interactions through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter builds attention, affection and stimulates customers desire for the brand (Kim and Ko, 2012). There is a dominating influence of global fashion companies prevalent in the industry such as, LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessey) a French luxury conglomerate, which dominates the global fashion industry with revenue from the market reaching €46.8billion in 2018 (LVMH, 2019). The U.S based lifestyle and athleisure brand, Nike comes in at second place globally. In its fiscal 2018 report, revenues for the brand rose 6% to \$36.4billion (Nike News, 2019) with 90% of its income from the Nike brand and 10% from its subsidiary, Converse. The Spanish fast-fashion giant, Inditex is the third largest fashion company globally. The company owns brands such as Zara, Pull & Bear and Stradivarius.

It has a market value of nearly \$92 billion (Fashion United, 2019a). Fashion SMEs on the other hand account for over 90% of the workforce and produce almost 60% of the value added (Ditty, 2017). The UK fashion industry is primarily made up of SMEs, as medium-sized enterprises populate the sector, 60% of the sector consists of businesses with 5 employees or less, while 20% consist of sole traders (Malem et al. 2009).

For fashion brands, social media offers an avenue to connect with their customers and cultivate brand loyalty and identity. Fashion brands have a very strong content engagement and a substantial audience growth rate compared to other industries. Most notably, the apparel industry has a 18.62% average follower growth per brand (White, 2019). Also, with the launch of Instagram in October 2010, its focus on curated visual content has become the go-to for fashion brands. Fashion brands are ranked second below the Auto industry in Instagram penetration rate at 98% (Statista, 2019c). Also, fashion brands are leading in terms of audience size on popular social platforms like Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest (see figure 2.8).



(White, 2019)

**Figure 2.8 The Median Audience Size by Platform on Social Media (in millions)**

Across the board, due to the internet and the arrival of social media platforms for communication, fashion is consumed, shared and created everywhere in the digital world. For example, “*Blogs*” – personal websites – offer consumers an unlimited content for fashion related topics involving brands which are uploaded regularly (Mohr, 2013). Blogging has created new opportunities for consumers to connect more deeply with fashion brands they love. Most especially, fashion bloggers – individuals who create fashion content – are key in providing a co-creative relationship with consumers in fashion. They are regarded to be thought leaders and an important voice in the fashion industry (Ahmad et al. 2015). As the industry was formed on its reliance to individuals in terms of design, shooting/promoting fashion campaign and fashion editors. The introduction of social media has shifted the focus, whereby, fashion brands can rely on digital technologies in creating brand awareness and anticipate trends in the market (Ziv, 2010).

Social media has become the link between the brand and the consumer. This has brought about communities, forums and blogs that stimulate communication between the brand and consumer/ consumer and consumer.

Accordingly, Lee (2009) notes, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become valuable tools for fashion brands to observe their customers and present real time customer service. As print, radio and television has now been replaced by social media which serves as an important channel for marketing campaigns for fashion brands (Ahmad et al. 2015). The use of social media connects brands with people on a personal level, affecting the fashion retail industry in turn, in terms of providing a platform where interaction between customers and brands are fostered and chances for promotion of products are boundless (Dorado, 2011).

In their study of the impact of social media on the fashion industry, Ahmad et al. (2015) found social media and the fashion industry are highly interdependent, through regression, if an

increase in social media use is 1%, this leads to an increase in the popularity of the fashion industry by 20.6%.

The significant relationship between social media and the fashion industry is undeniable and agreeable due to their interconnectedness and the latter's reliance on it. This proves the reasoning for the choice of observing the fashion industry as a context for the current study in relation to social media.

### *Coronavirus and The New Urgency of Social Media Engagement Strategies for Fashion SMEs*

Since the start of this study, the world health organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of coronavirus as a public health emergency on 30, January, 2020 and on 11, March, 2020, it was declared a pandemic (WHO, 2021). This has significantly impacted the society and business, in particular the operating climate for retail.

Fashion retail has been adversely affected by COVID-19, as consumer's appetite for clothing declined dramatically since the COVID-19 outbreak, with consumer spending falling by 28% at £42.5 billion in 2020, down from £59.3 billion in 2019 (Mintel, 2021). Multiple lockdowns have accelerated the move to online retailing, due to in-store retail sales plummeting by 32% (see Mintel 2021) as a result of store closures during the lockdown. Reports by Mintel (2021) estimates online retail sales increased by 26% in 2020, reaching £24.5 billion. Due to the lockdown period, the growth in online sales has been driven by stores closing down. Also, according to ONS data, online retail sales increased by 73% year-on-year in June 2020, remaining high at 52% year-on-year in August 2020 (ONSa, 2021). Thus, the importance for fashion SMEs and firms in general, having an online business as well as the role social media plays is crucial to their growth and development in the market.



With store closures, inability to see physical products, social distancing in place, firms can navigate through these obstacles by adopting online resources, for instance, social media platforms. Mintel (2021) reports this shift by consumers towards online shopping for clothing will have a long-lasting impact and firms seeking to sustain themselves through this should focus their attention on investing in the online experience. Thus, for fashion SMEs, social media focused customer engagement can enable the creation of the online experience by developing, maintaining and fostering customer relationships on a much wider scale regardless of geographical restrictions.

## **2.9 Summary**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive critical overview of the customer engagement literature. The contextual focus of the proposed study is explained to provide a concise explanation as to the choice of SMEs, social media platforms and the fashion industry. Reviewing the literature supports the conclusion that there is important research yet to be carried out on the concept of customer engagement in regards to SMEs and social media platforms and in particular, CEBs manifested through SME relationships with their customers and the relationships customers have with SMEs on social media platforms. As social media platforms are a free and effective tool for marketing especially for SMEs with limited resources, investigating their use of these platforms for engagement with their customers is bound to shed light on the evolving topic of customer engagement. As well as, contribute to the topic for further investigation and research in the field of marketing.

The critical review found that despite enormous promise of the potential of customer engagement on social media to improve firm performance, there has as yet, been no systematic overview of the relationship between CEB in relation to social media.

This gap in the literature is important because it highlights the embryonic nature of the field and the challenge of conceptualising clear and robust empirical methods.

In the following chapter, attention is directed towards this ongoing issue by conducting a systematic literature review of research on customer engagement behaviour and social media. The aim is to examine the competing conceptualisations of customer engagement behaviour on social media, measurements of customer engagement behaviour in empirical studies, and the previously associated antecedents and consequences of customer engagement behaviour in this respective form.

The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

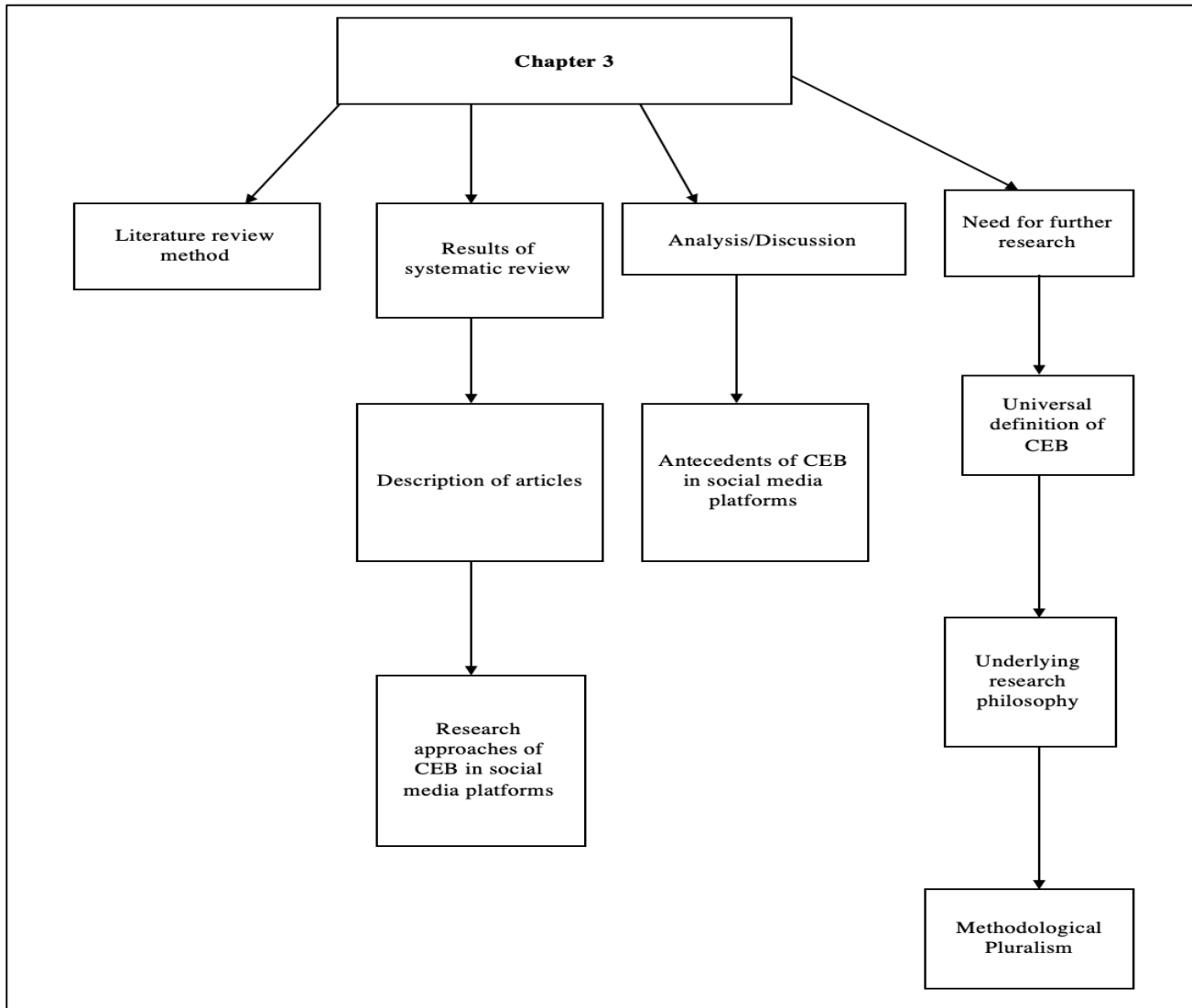
### **SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOUR LITERATURE**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

From the previous chapter, an overview of the customer engagement literature and its theoretical foundation in the marketing discipline have been provided. Including a contextual summary and analysis into SMEs (*Small-medium sized enterprises*), social media and the fashion industry. These concepts have been explained to clarify their linkage and importance in the current research study. In this chapter, an extensive systematic literature review is undertaken to explore how researchers have conceptualised and investigated CEB (*Customer engagement behaviour*) that is, the relationship between social media platforms and the behavioural forms of engagement exhibited.

Specifically, this chapter aims to address the research objective: “*To explore the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement in relation to social media*”. Addressing the aforementioned objective provides a foundation for the subsequent chapters where the other research objectives will be addressed. In organising this chapter, the method used for conducting the systematic literature review is explained. Followed by, the results of this review, more specifically, the ways in which CEB (*Customer engagement behaviour*) is being operationalised in the context of social media platforms. Attention is then directed to an analysis/discussion of the key antecedents found in researchers’ study of CEB in social media platforms.

This then provides the rationale for the next section in identifying the need for further research into the CEB (*Customer engagement behaviour*) construct which the subsequent chapter provides. Figure 3.1 shows the structure of this chapter:



**Figure 3.1 Structure of Chapter Three**

### 3.2 Literature Review Method

Systematic reviews are able to address much broader questions by uncovering connections among research findings. They have the potential to provide the most important practical

findings as it establishes to what extent research has progressed towards clarifying a particular problem (Bem, 1995). Therefore, the value of this systematic review lies in the fact that it provides an in-depth understanding of CEB research in the context of social media. The need for conducting a systematic literature review is supported by Brodie et al (2011a, p. 262) who suggests *“from a theoretical perspective, further systematic, explicit scholarly inquiry addressing the CE concept is required”*.

The objective of this systematic literature review is threefold. First, to present an in-depth summary of CEB research in the digital context; second, to provide a qualitative synthesis of the included studies on engagement literature; finally, to identify the possible influences/effects/causes of the relationship between CEB and social media.

The current research study follows a PRISMA flow diagram of article selection process (preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses). It is an evidence-based approach originally developed in healthcare research (but now also used in management and consumer behaviour research e.g. ter Huurne, 2017) for reporting systematic reviews that documents a clear protocol for inclusion criteria (Moher et al. 2009). Review protocols help protect against arbitrary decision making during the review, and also to enable the reader to assess the presence of selective reporting, by illustrating a clear process which can be replicated. One dominant academic database; Google Scholar, was explored to identify articles on CEB. Google Scholar is regarded to be a common web-based academic search engine that has a catalogue of 2 and 100 million records of academic and grey literature – articles not formally published by commercial academic publishers (Haddaway et al. 2015).

It is particularly relevant to use in the search for grey literature, as required by systematic reviews. Also, Google Scholar is a potentially useful resource for systematic reviews. The reliance on this platform for searches would; offer efficiency of resources, offer cost

efficiencies, allow a rapid link to full texts, provide an access to a substantial amount of grey literature including academic literature and a compatibility with new methods for downloading citations in bulk, which allows for transparency in the approach to searching (Haddaway, 2015). Articles were identified in the “*article title, abstract and keywords*” section of the database using the dependent variable “*Customer engagement behaviour*” OR “*Customer engagement behavior*” (to capture US/UK variations of spelling) and the study context “*Social media*” OR “*Social network*”, as shown in Table 3.1 below:

<b>Block</b>	<b>Search term entered in topic field</b>
<b>Dependent Variable</b>	“ <i>Customer engagement behaviour</i> ” OR “ <i>Customer engagement behavior</i> ”
	AND
<b>Study Context</b>	“ <i>Social media</i> ” OR “ <i>Social network</i> ”

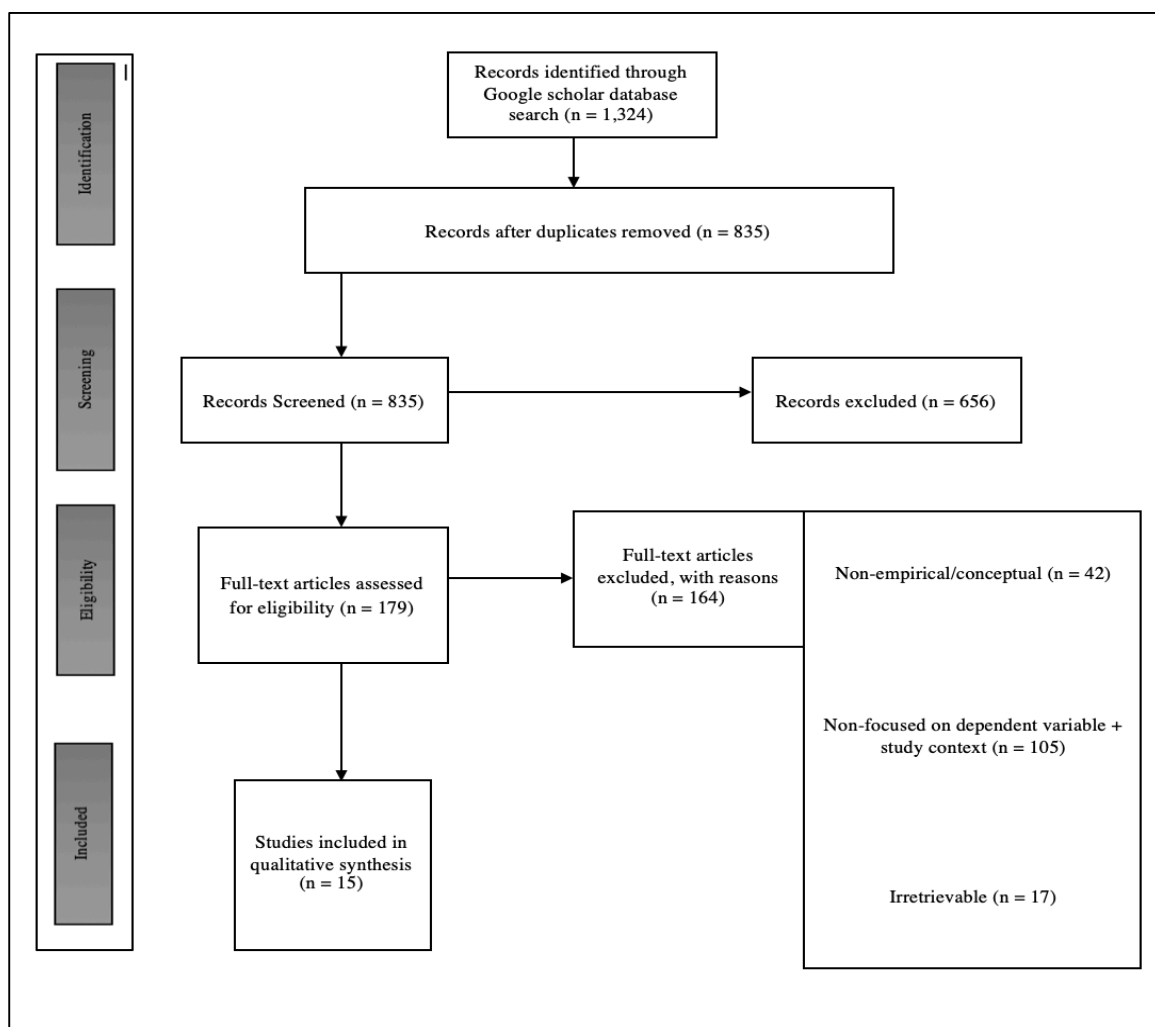
**Table 3.1 Final Search Term Mechanisms**

To keep the research process specific to the theoretical focus of “*CEB*” and “*Social media*”, the above blocks of keywords were used with the criteria of reporting data solely focused on the dependent variable and the study context. As shown in Figure 3.2, a total of 1,324 articles were identified through the selected search criteria, of whom only 15 papers survived to be included in qualitative synthesis for a final analysis. The current research excludes reports, master/doctoral dissertations, textbooks, conference papers and conceptual papers.

The identified 1,324 articles were documented in Microsoft Excel and duplicate articles were removed, leaving 835 articles for further screening. The 835 articles were screened according to the “*Title*”, “*Abstract*” and “*Conclusion*”, guided by the dependent variable and study context. Through the screening of 835 articles, 656 articles were excluded because they were not explicitly relevant, and 179 articles remained.

A detailed eligibility evaluation of 179 articles was conducted (full papers were read) to ascertain the relevance of the articles to the theoretical focus of the review. 164 studies were excluded on assessment of the full-text version of the studies, resulting in a final set of 15 studies for qualitative synthesis. The exclusion of so many articles results from the fact that a broad search strategy was used to ensure no relevant studies were excluded.

Figure 3.2 shown below provides an overview of the process and shows that most of the articles were deemed irrelevant due to the dependent variable and study context ( $n = 105$ ) and the remainder of the studies were non-empirical papers ( $n = 42$ ), irretrievable ( $n = 17$ ).



**Figure 3.2 PRISMA Flow Diagram of Article Selection Process**

A comprehensive classification of the final set of studies was designed in order to analyse the antecedent causes of CEB and the means through which those causes were established (See Table 3.2 for results). The studies are categorised according to: research methodology, research philosophy, type of social media platforms investigated, type of engagement behaviour investigated, independent variable established, conceptualisations of CEB, and the object engagement behaviours are directed towards e.g. ‘brand’, ‘company’, or ‘community’.

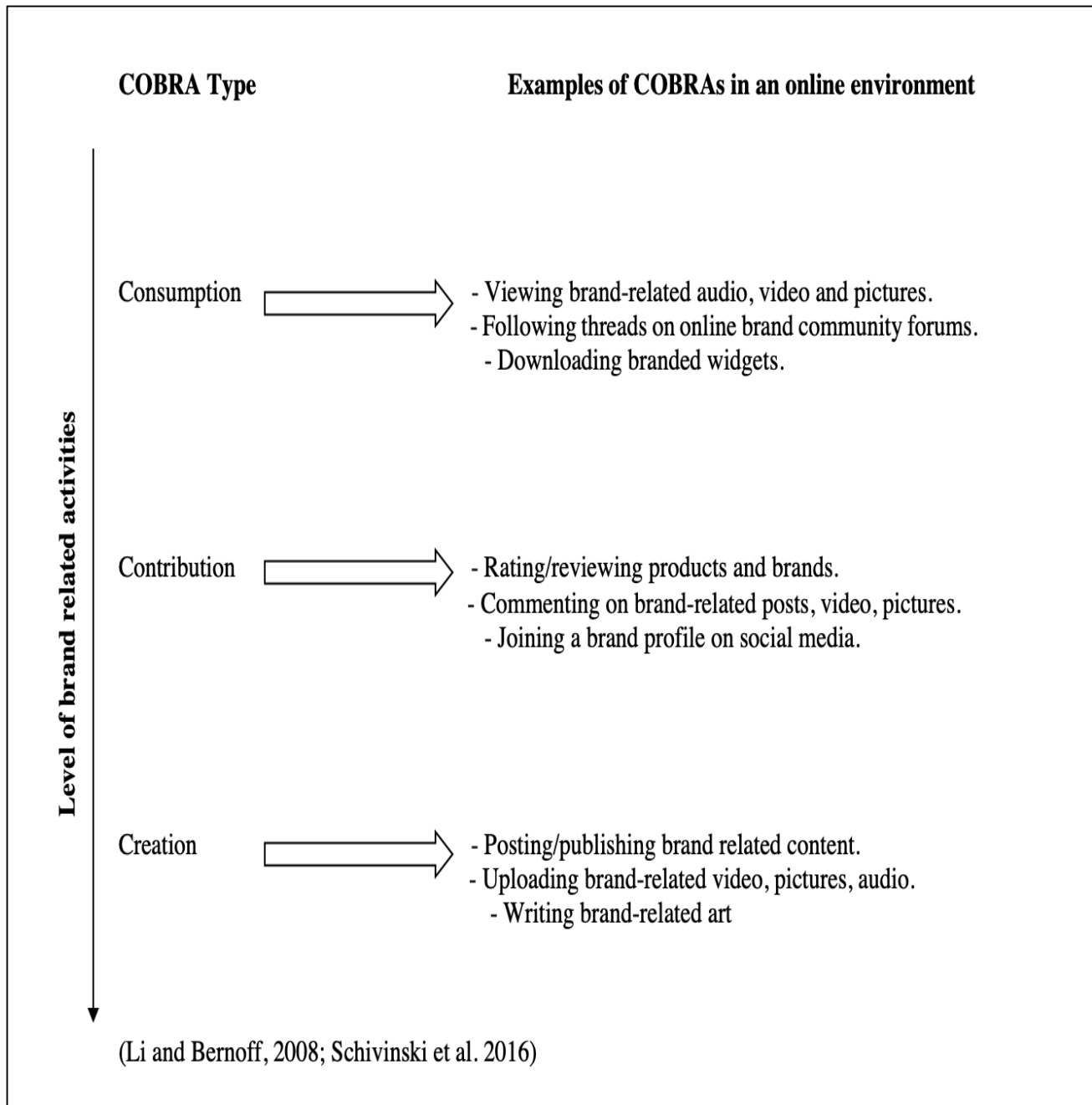
The noteworthy results from the classification table show that; there are several types of behaviours exhibited online and the objects of engagement these behaviours are targeted towards are not necessarily brands. In addition, CEB is conceptualised by the studies in several ways.

The analysis was also guided by the COBRA typology “*consumer online brand related activities*”, which demonstrates that there are qualitatively different forms of CEB which can be exhibited by consumers in an online environment. CEBs can be classified into three types: *Contributing, Consuming* and *Creating*.

COBRA is defined as “*a set of online activities on the part of the consumer that is related to a brand, varying in the levels on interaction and engagement with the consumption, contribution and creation of media content*” (Schivinski et al. 2016, p. 5), (See Figure 3.3 for several examples). When a customer “*comments*” on a post or “*likes*” a piece of brand content, this is represented as contribution (Muntinga et al. 2011; Schivinski et al. 2016). When a customer engages with media online by “*sharing*” a post related to a brand, this is termed as consumption (Muntinga et al. 2011; Schivinski et al. 2016). Finally, when a customer “*posts*” or uploads brand content, e.g. a product, this is highlighted as creation (Muntinga et al. 2011; Schivinski et al. 2016).



These typologies of behaviour online form the basic units of analysis in the review of CEB in the literature. According to the presence/absence of an explicit categorisation of CEB by individual authors, an ethical judgement is made according to the COBRA model.



**Figure 3.3 COBRA Types in an Online Environment**

### 3.3 Results of Systematic Review

#### 3.3.1 Description of Articles

From the included studies, before 2012, CEB in the context of social media was empirically investigated by very few articles, indicating its relative newness. On the basis of the selection criteria of the articles (i.e. the PRISMA flow diagram), the first published article was located in 2012, and was therefore taken as the starting year. As evident from Table 3.2, the research on CEB has nonetheless gained significant pace from 2012. Based on the study orientation, from 2012, it was found that scholarly attention has focused primarily on quantitative and confirmatory studies of the subject.

The reason could be the development of certain customer engagement scales - proposed by Hollebeek et al. 2014; So et al. 2014 – which highlighted the need for scholarly enquiry into the engagement construct and encouraged further empirical scrutiny.

The most commonly investigated type of CEB is *Contribution* i.e. when a customer comments or likes a form of pre-existing brand content. This COBRA type includes both peer-to-content and peer-to-peer interactions with brands (Shao, 2009). Its popularity amongst the studies may be due to its interactive nature of “liking” and “commenting” which can be said to be the most common behaviour exhibited across social media platforms and often one of the easiest interactions on which to obtain data through web scraping.

The high-level results show that engagement behaviours of consumption, contribution and creation are directed towards not only brands or companies, they are also exhibited in online brand communities (See Table 3.2). Brand communities are “social entities that reflect the situated embeddedness of brands in the day-to-day lives of consumers and the ways in which brands connect the consumer to the brand, and the consumer to consumer” (Muniz and O’guinn, 2001, p. 418). Previously, brand communities were largely restricted to offline meetings and thus bounded geographically.

However, the broader spatiotemporal interactions made possible by the web have given previously disparate users new communication channels to establish brand communities (Madupu and Cooley, 2010).

The results demonstrate competing conceptualisations of CEB on social media within the literature, many of which are based on definitions and theoretical foundations already established in the engagement literature. Most notable within the corpus is van Doorn et al.'s (2010, p. 254) conceptualisation in which "CEB go beyond transactions and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioural manifestation that have a brand or firm focus beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers". From the final set, nine studies specifically reference the aforementioned conceptualisation of CEB by van Doorn et al. (2010). Additionally, several studies go a step further by including the multi-dimensionality of the construct as not only behavioural, but cognitive and emotional. The rest of the studies express CEB as transaction-related behaviours beyond transactions and involving actions such as sharing, advocating and co-developing (See Table 3.2). In summary, the conceptualisations of CEB from the final set of studies shows the influence of Bowden's (2009), van Doorn et al.'s (2010) and Hollebeek's (2011) seminal work on the foundations of engagement. The following table presents a classification scheme applied to CEB papers to generate initial coding. This is followed by an in-depth inductive review of the interpretation of antecedent causes of CEB.

Author	Year	Research Method	Research Philosophy	Type of Social Media Platform	Type of engagement behaviour(s)	Independent Variable	Definition of "CEB"	Focal Engagement Object
Oh et al	2017	Ordinary least square regression model	(Irretrievable)	Facebook, YouTube, Twitter	Contribution	Personal and Interactive in U.S movie box office	Consumer's behavioural manifestation toward an organization or a brand as a result of motivational drivers	Brand
Kabadayi and Price	2014	Questionnaire	(Irretrievable)	Facebook	Contribution	Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness to experiences in Generation Y users	A customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers	Brand
Bitter et al	2014	Online Questionnaire	(Irretrievable)	Facebook	Creation, Contribution, Consumption	Attitude, Perceived behavioral control, Subjective norm in users originating from Europe	A customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase	Company/Brand
Bitter and Kräuter	2016	Online Experiment	(Irretrievable)	Facebook	Contribution, Creation	Valence, Tie strength in the restaurant sector	The behavioral dimension of customer engagement	Brand
Gong	2018	Online Survey	(Irretrievable)	Firm-managed online brand community	Contribution, Consumption	Brand ownership in a cross-cultural context	Customer behavior toward a brand that goes beyond mere purchase behavior	Brand
Carlson et al.	2018	Survey	(Irretrievable)	Facebook	Consumption, Contribution	Content Quality, Brand page interactivity, Brand page sociability, Customer contact quality in Innovation development	Customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers that add value to the firm	Brand
Carlson et al.	2017	Online Survey	(Irretrievable)	Weibo	Consumption	Functional value, socialisation value, emotional value, innovativeness value and relationship building value in mobile social media brand pages in China	It includes both transaction-related (e.g. future purchase behaviours, channel preference) and behaviours beyond transactions (e.g. intention to provide feedback to the brand, customer influencer intentions)	Brand
Chiang et al.	2017	Online Questionnaire	(Irretrievable)	Facebook	Contribution	Learning motivation and Collaborative learning in a social network brand community setting in Taiwan	An online user's ongoing and voluntary behaviors that are valuable to a brand company beyond the transaction and that originate from psychologically intrinsic motivation of affect or cognition stimulated by external factors	Brand Community

Leek et al.	2017	Non-participant observation	(Irretrievable)	Twitter	Contribution, Creation, Consumption	Company Type, Linguistic Content, Function in the B2B healthcare sector	It is evidenced via actions such as sharing, advocating and co-developing	Company
Gummerus et al.	2012	Online Survey	(Irretrievable)	Facebook	Contribution, Consumption	Economic benefits, social benefits, entertainment benefits in a gaming brand community	A behavioral manifestation toward the brand or firm that goes beyond transactions, and includes all consumer-to-firm interactions and consumer-to-consumer communications about the brand	Brand Community
Harrigan et al.	2017	Online Survey	(Irretrievable)	Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk)	Contribution, Consumption	Involvement in the Tourism sector	A multi-dimensional construct consisting of three dimensions: cognitive (customer focus and interest in a particular brand), emotional (feelings of inspiration or pride caused by a particular brand) and behavioural (customer effort and energy necessary for interaction with a particular brand)	Crowdsourcing Employment Website
Halaszovich and Nel	2017	Online Questionnaire	(Irretrievable)	Facebook	Contribution	Cognitive processing, affection, activation in students at a tertiary education institution	A consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions	Brand
Lei et al.	2017	Coding Approach	(Irretrievable)	Facebook	Contribution, Consumption	Media type, content type in an integrated resort industry in Macau	It involves specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand, and/or other members of the community	Brand
Jayasingh and Venkatesh	2015	Regression Analysis	(Irretrievable)	Facebook	Creation, Contribution, Consumption	Content, frequency in Indian brands	A customer's behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm	Brand
Simon et al.	2016	Online Survey	(Irretrievable)	Facebook	Contribution	External social forces, internal personal forces in Facebook brand pages	A consumer's behavioural manifestations, such as sharing and socializing with the online brand community on Facebook	Brand

**Table 3.2 Classification Scheme of Included Studies**

### 3.3.2 Research Approaches of CEB in Social Media Platforms

From the review, the study found 11 studies were built using any of the theoretical perspectives that are presented in Table 3.3. The remaining 4 studies did not report any specific theory adopted to exploring CEB in social media. The “*Uses & Gratifications theory*” and the “*Social Exchange theory*” have been broadly utilized as the theoretical prism to study CEB; such as in the works of Simon et al. (2016), Oh et al. (2017), Chiang et al. (2017), Halaszovich and Nel (2017) and Harrigan et al. (2017). Under the uses & gratifications theory, it assumes that users are goal-directed in their behaviour and aware of their own needs (Katz et al. 1974). The social exchange theory posits that consumers engage in interactions with others because they expect that doing so will be rewarding (Emerson, 1976). Another group of social behaviour theories, namely; social network theory, social practice theory and social exchange theory which relate social ties and social interaction, have also been utilized to study customer engagement behaviour in social media (Bitter et al. 2014; Simon et al. 2016; Bitter and Kräuter, 2016 and Harrigan et al. 2017). Other sets of theories from the included studies are also adopted to explore CEB in social media (See Table 3.3); “*service dominant logic*”, “*psychological ownership theory*”, “*regulatory focus theory*”, “*the stimulus organism response paradigm*”, “*consumption values theory*”, “*customer dominant logic theory*” and “*the concept of marketing 4ps*”.

Additionally, among the 15 identified articles obtained from the review process, majority of the studies reported using a quantitative research method to investigate CEB in social media. The most used approaches of data collection adopted by the studies were found to be; Survey (6) and Questionnaire (4).

Data analysis methods adopted by the studies were mostly quantitative approaches; partial least squares, structural equation model, SPSS, ordinary least squares, regression analysis, mediation analysis, analysis of co-variance and binomial regression (See Table 3.3).

<b>Theoretical Background</b>	<b>Study</b>	<b>Methodology (Data Collection)</b>	<b>Methodology (Data Analysis)</b>
Uses & Gratification theory	Oh et al. (2017); Chiang et al. (2017); Halaszovich and Nel (2017)	Automated scripts via Web API (Application programming interface); Online Questionnaire; Online Questionnaire	Ordinary least squares (OLS); Partial least squares (PLS); Structural equation model
Social exchange theory	Simon et al. (2016); Harrigan et al. (2017)	Online Survey	Structural equation model
Social practice theory/ Theory of planned behaviour	Bitter et al. (2014)	Online Questionnaire	Variance based partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM)
Social network theory	Bitter and Kräuter (2016)	Online Experiment	Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA)
Service dominant logic/Psychological ownership theory/Regulatory focus theory	Gong (2018)	Online Survey	Variance based partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM)
Stimulus organism response paradigm	Carlson et al. (2018)	Online Survey	Variance based partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM)
Consumption values theory/ Customer dominant logic theory	Carlson et al. (2017)	Online Survey	Variance based partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM)
The concept of marketing 4ps	Lei et al. (2017)	Facebook Brand Pages	SPSS
Unattainable	Kabadayi and Price (2014)	Online Questionnaire	Structural equation model
Unattainable	Gummerus et al. (2012)	Online Survey	Mediation Analysis
Unattainable	Leek (2017)	Non-participant observation	Thematic Analysis, Linguistic Inquiry and Word

			Count (LIWC), Binomial Regression
Unattainable	Jayasingh and Venkatesh (2015)	Facebook Search	Regression Analysis

**Table 3.3 Research Approaches to CEB in Social Media Platforms**

Thus, as the two theoretical perspectives that are most widely applied across the papers are; uses & gratification theory (U&G theory) and social exchange theory. The current study takes a deeper focus on the salient contributions within each theoretical perspective and their notable characteristics. Given the number of publications applying these two perspectives, the current study focuses on contributions in the identified papers that have made an interesting contribution to CEB in social media research:

#### *Uses & Gratification Theory*

U&G theory is the dominant underpinning theoretical perspective in CEB in social media research, adopted by the following papers; Oh et al. (2017), Chiang et al. (2017) and Halaszovich and Nel (2017). Wimmer and Dominick (1994) proposed U&G began in the 1940s due to researchers' interest in why audiences engaged in various types of media, e.g. listening to the radio, reading the newspaper. Schramm's (1949) immediate reward and delayed reward model of media gratifications (Dozier and Rice, 1984) are also credited with the U&G perspective. The dependency theory (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1982), deprivation theory (Berelson, 1949) and theories of low-level and variable audience activity (Levy and Windahl, 1984) are used to support the elaboration of the U&G theory.



Originating from the mass communications field, U&G theory is generally known to be a sub tradition of the effects of media research (Mcquail, 1994). Accordingly, the U&G thinking asserts that an individual's media use is purposeful and users actively seek to satisfy their information needs. Thus, when individuals select a media channel, they evaluate the potential benefits of using the media (Lee and Ma, 2012). Also, with the introduction of new media i.e. the internet, there are (3) attributes of data most commonly associated under the U&G perspective: "*interactivity*", "*demassification*" and "*asynchronicity*".

Interactivity has been identified as "*the degree whereby, participants in the communication process have control over and exchange roles in their mutual discourse*" (Williams et al. 1988, p. 10). Demassification is defined as "*the control of the individual over the medium*" (Williams et al. 1988, p. 12). Asynchronicity can refer to the ability of an individual to send, receive, save, or retrieve messages at their convenience (Chamberlain, 1994). Thereby, these attributes of data in new media – interactivity, demassification and asynchronicity – offers a vast array of communication behaviours to examine.

Furthermore, in a social media context, there are (4) dimensions that have been confirmed by studies under the U&G approach: information, personal identity, integration/social interaction and entertainment (see Park et al. 2009). Information can refer to seeking relevant events, opinions and learning and gaining a sense of security through knowledge. Personal identity refers to reinforcing personal values, gaining a personal insight and identifying with others. Integration/social interaction refers to gaining a sense of belonging and identifying with others, social conversing and interacting with others. Finally, entertainment refers to gaining enjoyment and escaping from challenges, and seeking emotional release. (Oh et al. 2017, p. 28).

As new media technologies emerge such as social media, it can be argued that the emergence of these technologies fostering communication have strengthened the theoretical importance of the U&G theory. Lin (1996, p. 574) argues in line with this, that the strength of the U&G approach lies in its ability to allow researchers to investigate communications through a single set, multiple sets of communication channels, content, psychological needs and motives, within a particular cross-cultural context. The flexibility of the U&G theory is particularly important with the information age whereby technology-mediated communications permeate across every facet of individuals and the society.

### *Social Exchange Theory*

The study identified 2 papers that adopt a social exchange perspective; Simon et al. (2016) and Harrigan et al. (2017). A fundamental premise of social exchange theory highlights the notion that exchanges are “*limited to actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others*” (Blau, 1964). Both studies see the social exchange view as a way of explaining CEB – in that, the mutual interactions between a customer and organisation are weighed through a cost benefit/tangible and intangible costs underpinned by the evaluation of rewards in the form of certain benefits i.e. product news, a sense of belonging and gaining recognition. Social exchange theory can be traced back to at least the 1920s (See Malinowski, 1922) linked with several other disciplines; anthropology (Firth, 1967), social psychology (Homans, 1958) and sociology (Blau, 1964). Although, four figures are largely credited for the approach; George Homans, John Thibaut, Harold Kelley and Peter Blau (Emerson, 1976). The view of social exchange theory notes that interactions are interdependent and dependent on the actions of others. Thereby, the basic principle of social exchange theory asserts that relationships evolve over time into trust, loyalty and mutual commitments.

For this to be enabled, parties involved must abide by certain “*rules of exchange*” – it forms a normative definition of the guidelines of the exchange processes (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005, p. 875).

These rules of exchange involve; reciprocity, negotiated rules, altruism, group gain, status consistency or rank equilibration and competition. In the context of engagement, social exchange theory holds that individuals evaluate costs and benefits of engaging in relationships, for the engagement process to persist, customers must achieve a balance in these costs and benefits overtime (Harrigan et al. 2017, p. 598). As, consumers can invest their enthusiasm and attention via engaging with brands in order to gain information about a product, product development and offers (Blau, 1964).

This emphasises the tenet of social exchange theory in that, social exchanges (interactions, engagement) comprises certain actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions, which overtime can provide for a mutually and rewarding benefit, and relationship (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005, p.889).

### **3.4 Analysis/Discussion**

This section of the study provides an analysis/discussion of the results from the systematic review: From this, five broad antecedent causes were found to influence the exhibition of CEB on social media platforms from the identified corpus of studies: (1) Social links; (2) Search for information; (3) Self-involvement; (4) Functionality; and (5) Ownership-value.

#### **3.4.1 Antecedents of CEB in Social Media Platforms**

##### *Social Links*

Two articles (Bitter et al. 2014; Bitter and Kräuter, 2016) suggest that the concept of social links is an important factor in the emergence of CEB in social media platforms.

This stream of research recognises that customer engagement behaviour, as with all human behaviour, is always embedded in a broader network of social connections than those exhibited in a single transaction. As Bitter and Krauter (2016, p. 227) suggest “brand-related information from close friends is seen as more valuable” to customers. Similarly, Bitter et al. (2014, p. 216) agree from the findings of their study that “interacting with friends ... is a significant antecedent of CEB on social networking sites”. Social links can be defined as the use of social media primarily through the influence of social relationships, friends/family or close social connections. The experiences users have, and the practices users acquire through interacting with friends, have a positive influence on whether users engage behaviourally on social media (Bitter et al. 2014, p. 200). Additionally, businesses/firms and customers are embedded in an ongoing interconnected social relationship or “Tie”- Bitter and Kräuter (2016, p. 222). Thus, social networks are a combination of social connections/ties, through which members of the network obtain access to information and resources of other users on the network. Future empirical scrutiny should be directed toward social links as a situational determinant in the emergence of CEB in social media platforms.

### *Search for Information*

Three articles (Gummerus et al. 2012; Halaszovich and Nel, 2017; Chiang et al. 2017) suggest that search of information is an important factor in the emergence of CEB. As Gummerus et al. (2012, p. 87) points out “most customers use the brand community mainly as a source of information, reading messages rather than contributing with likes and comments”. Further support is given to the antecedent of search of information by Halaszovich and Nel (2017, p. 129) who suggest that “two like intentions-engage in WOM and to connect with a brand to receive information are two salient intentions underpinning fan-page like behaviour”.

Chiang et al. (2017, p. 1457) further support this conclusion in their study suggesting that “customer learning is critical to explaining both customer’s online behaviour and the formation of CEB’s”. Search for information can be defined as the active use of social media for the sole purpose of consuming/seeking brand-related information. It therefore involves a judgement about the quality of information seen on social media, which thus influences subsequent CEBs. The search for information has been studied extensively as part of the consumer decision making model alongside the pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives by customers (see Blackwell et al. 2005). The information search consists of external factors (reading about products) or internal factors (remembering product information) about products (Blythe, 2013), so there is a feedback loop of causality from previous interactions that influence future CEBs. Searches are carried out until relevant information is found to meet the need of the consumer (Blythe, 2013). Further attention should be given to how the search for information on social media platforms influences subsequent CEBs, particularly non-transactional CEBs which do not necessarily follow the traditionally-studied linear consumer decision making process.

### *Self-Involvement*

Three articles (Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Simon et al. 2016; Harrigan et al. 2017) suggest that self-involvement is an important factor in the emergence of CEB. From their study, Simon et al. (2016, p. 417) note that “internal personal forces predominantly influence consumers brand community engagement”. Additionally, other traits of self-involvement are shown by Kabadayi and Price (2014, p. 217) to influence CEB, for example “personality traits affect individuals’ mode of interaction which in turn determines if they like and/or comment on a post in a brand’s Facebook page”.

The concept of self-involvement as an antecedent of CEB in social media platforms is further supported by Harrigan et al. (2017, p. 605) “brands must use social media among other

channels to elicit involvement with their brand if they seek to engage with consumers effectively”. Self-involvement can be defined as the perceived relevance of an object (e.g. a brand) based on a person’s inherent needs, values and interests (Zaichowsky, 1985). It also involves the degree to which an individual feels attached to a brand or product, as well as the loyalty felt towards it (Blythe, 2013). In relation to CEB, self-involvement consists of a brand’s level of meaning, appeal and value projected to its customers. What is unclear from the research is how self-involvement modifies qualitatively distinct CEBs such as consumption, contribution or creation, though it is possible that each respective state exhibits a heightened sense of self-involvement. It can be suggested that future studies should identify the relative effects self-involvement has on facilitating different levels of CEB in customers on social media.

### *Functionality*

Three articles (Lei et al. 2017; Leek et al. 2017; Carlson et al. 2018) suggest that functionality is an important factor in the emergence of CEB in social media platforms. As Carlson et al. (2018, p.89) note “four online-service characteristics; content quality, brand page interactivity, brand page sociability and customer contact quality, indirectly drive CEB intentions”. This finding is supported by Lei et al. (2017, p.326) who suggest “the use of either images or videos in branded content in SNS (social networking sites) can drive a higher level of customer engagement in terms of number of likes”. In line with this, Leek et al. (2017, p. 12) concludes that “tweet functions and the language used in the content of messages interacts with company type to affect behavioral engagement in terms of likes, tweets and comments”.

Functionality can be defined as any aspect of social media platform design which has the quality of being suited to serve a particular CEB well. This can involve the usability, interface, content and attractiveness to users in order to enable some form of engagement from customers.

Sociability is one notable characteristic of functionality found in social media platforms. It is experienced by customers through mutual interactions on platforms. This facilitates the communication of shared interests, values and discussions pertaining to a brand leading to the formation of online brand communities and a form of social cohesiveness (Zhang et al. 2015).

Additionally, personal and interactive engagement are also key in the functionality of a social media channel in the formation of CEB. Personal engagement is shown to form through subscribing, liking brand-content through stimulation, or as inspiration that affirms self-worth. Interactive engagement involves participating and socializing e.g. call to win posts (Oh et al. 2017). Further attention should be directed toward exploring how different social media platform functionalities (e.g. Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook) enables the formation of CEBs based on varying sentiment and valence of consumer emotional responses.

#### *Ownership-Value*

Two articles (Carlson et al. 2017; Gong, 2018) suggest that ownership-value are important factors in the emergence of CEB. Ownership-value can be defined as engagement by customers due to post-purchase additional value that emerges after acquisition of the brand/product. As Gong (2018, p. 294) suggests “brand value co-creation, which is conceptualized as customer brand engagement behavior, is driven by customer brand ownership and bounded by customers’ cultural value orientation”.

Additionally, Carlson et al. (2017, p. 10) supports the antecedent of ownership-value in their study and assert that the formation of VIBE (‘value in the brand page experience’) “has a positive direct effect on satisfaction and CEBs”. The VIBE construct refers to the various affective and utilitarian components that emerge from the interactions between the brand and

the consumer, including interactions with customer's social network and other customers (Carlson et al. 2017, p. 3).

The functional value of the VIBE construct includes a customer having the right of access to helpful, useful and practical content. The socialisation value component involves the utility derived by a customer from meeting, communicating and interacting with other members of a social media brand page (Carlson et al. 2017, p. 4). Aspects of the emotional value are gained by the customer from generating affective responses during the consumption experience (Carlson et al. 2017, p. 4). Innovativeness value manifests through consumers' observation of company activities to form a judgement of a brand's overall innovativeness. This can have an impact on the consumer's perceived quality judgements, satisfaction and consumer loyalty (Kunz et al, 2011). Finally, relationship building value deals with the experience derived by the customer from the brand's efforts in a social media brand page to deliver and create an ongoing relational and beneficial experience (Carlson et al. 2017, p. 5). Further research should examine how brand ownership influences different post-purchase CEBs exhibited in social media platforms.

Overall, the five broad antecedent causes shown to influence CEBs in social media platforms prove to be an important finding in the engagement literature. It is suggested that further enquiry into the relationship between antecedents should be undertaken in order to further develop the CEB construct.

### **3.5 Need for Further Research**

This section of the review provides the direction for research to explore in regards to CEB, through highlighting the need for further research in the aspect of; a universal definition of CEB, an underlying research philosophy of CEB and a methodological pluralism.



As this systematic review highlights, CEB is a vital research area for researchers in the field of marketing interested in adopting an integrative and extensive approach to understand customer behaviour. However, there exists no systematic review that could describe the present state of CEB research and advance future research by highlighting the exigent issues that research should look into.

The review addresses this by making a practical and theoretical contribution. On the practical front, this review shows the favourable outcomes firms can derive by having an engaged customer base. As well as, the importance of understanding CEB and its various consequences in relation to the firm. On the theoretical front, the review presents a comprehensive view of 15 identified articles in the field of marketing to reveal how researchers have investigated the concept of CEB and presents a route for future research.

The review highlights that CEB is a burgeoning and vital subject for researchers interested in adopting an integrative and extensive approach to understanding consumer behaviour. However, three epistemological tensions have been identified within the literature by analysing the results across the classification scheme shown in Table 2. These tensions need to be explicitly addressed if the CEB construct is to be properly operationalised for consistent further study:

### **3.5.1 Universal Definition of CEB**

Various attempts have been made by researchers to define CEB, however the most commonly cited definition in the corpus relies upon the work of van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254) as “a customer’s behavioural manifestation that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers”.

Additionally, only two studies from the included papers highlight the multi-dimensionality of the engagement construct involving a cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimension (Harrigan et al. 2017; Halaszovich and Nel, 2017). Although, definitions acknowledging the existence of cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions are widely used in other work on customer engagement. Carlson et al. (2017, p. 2) base their definition of CEB on Kumar et al.'s (2010) argument, that engagement behaviours include both transaction-related and behaviours beyond transaction. Deviating from van Doorn et al. (2010) as not only “beyond purchase” but including transaction-related behaviours such as future purchase behaviours and channel preference. Leek et al. (2017), Lei et al. (2017) and Chiang et al. (2017) definitions are all guided by Brodie et al. (2013) in that CEB consists of “specific interactive experiences”, “sharing, advocating and co-developing” and “ongoing and voluntary behaviours that originate from psychologically intrinsic motivation”.

From the assessment of the included papers, it can be concluded that there is a need to develop a single, universal definition of CEB that can be generalized across multiple contexts. The failure of the discipline to achieve consensus is perhaps due to a deeper issue: a lack of explicit engagement with research philosophy.

### **3.5.2 Underlying Research Philosophy**

The corpus highlights different factors that drive CEB and its outcomes, but most papers identified in this review have not emphasised a philosophical position in their writing.

It is therefore suggested that future research should consider developing a deeper philosophical perspective for the engagement paradigm. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) draw attention to the fact that different research paradigms can encourage researchers to study a phenomenon from different perspectives.

Table 3.2 shows unequivocally that research philosophy is not seriously considered by CEB researchers. This is likely what causes a failure to achieve consensus in definition because researchers are not defining their philosophical position and are consequently importing their presuppositions tacitly into selected research methods. For example, the idea of behavioural engagement presupposes an ‘object’ which a customer can engage with. The corpus illustrates that these engagement objects are variously conceptualised in the literature as ‘brands’, ‘companies’, ‘communities’, and ‘websites’. These objects are treated as though they have the same ontological, epistemological, aetiological, and ethical status as each other.

It is important to consider these issues for the CEB research paradigm, because these presuppositions are fundamental to the interpretation of broader claims about reality and truth. As Blaikie (2000) argues, if meta-theoretical consensus is not achieved within scientific discourse, the broader field of results will be undermined through lack of coherence.

### **3.5.3 Methodological Pluralism**

The lack of research philosophy integration into CEB research has the added consequence that contemporary work has not benefitted from the breadth of methodological innovation that such a recent phenomenon as social media might permit.

The majority of the studies included in the review that have explored CEB in the context of social media are based solely on quantitative research reflecting only a statistical, non-exploratory snapshot of CEB. This is likely due to the favouring of positivist and behaviourist research methods across those journals that have published research on CEB. As the concept of CEB evolves and intensifies overtime (Bowden, 2009), it is suggested that future research should consider conducting an explorative method of research to expand the CEB literature, as well as to provide further longitudinal insight into the causal determinants of CEB emergence and habitual behaviour formation.

### **3.6 Summary**

Following a systematic review of relevant empirical articles published between 2012 and 2018 found via one major dominant academic database (Google scholar), this review discussed the following: a preliminary introduction to CEB, the systematic review method adopted by the study, the results of the process of conducting a systematic review of CEB in social media platforms. Overall, the review helps readers understand the state of CEB in social media research done so far and demonstrates a number of research limitations that are worthy of further exploration for future research. However, the results of the review have identified 3 epistemological tensions within the literature that need to be explicitly addressed if the CEB construct is to be properly operationalised for further study; a.) no universal definition, b.) no clear research philosophy, c.) complete absence of qualitative work. These tensions will all be responded to in the subsequent chapters.

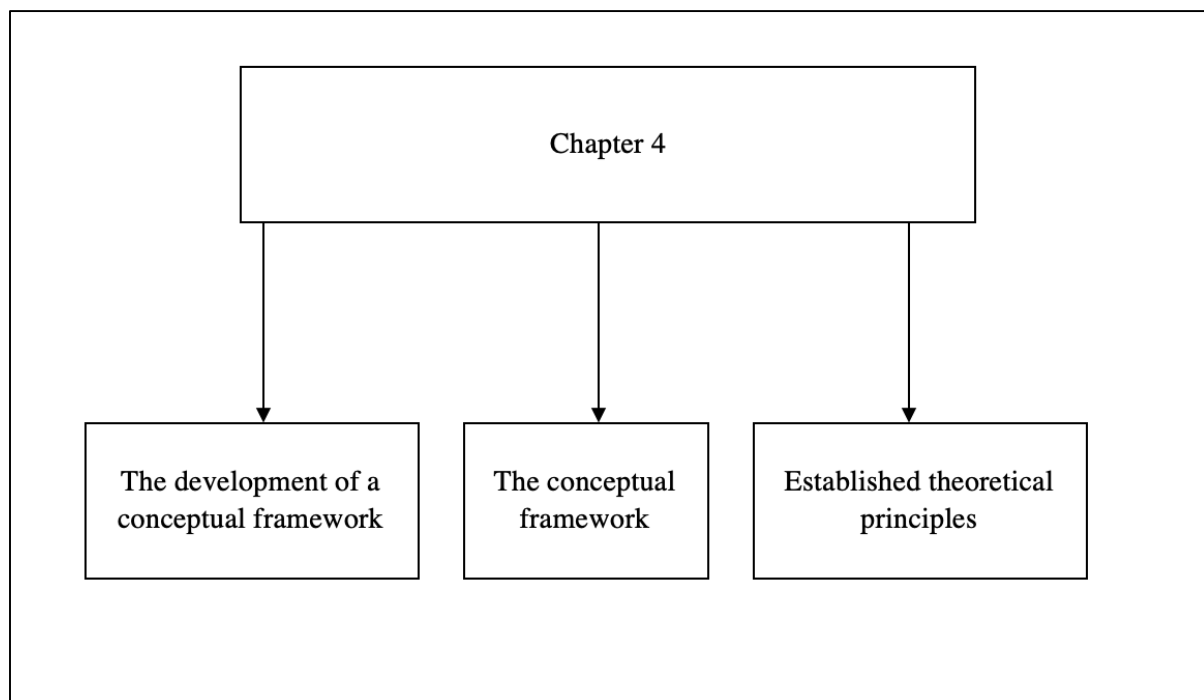
The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with presenting a conceptual framework of the relationship between customer engagement behaviour (CEB) and firms i.e. a firm-centric perspective of CEB. It also provides the potential antecedents and consequences that can result from a firm's use of social media platforms in regards to the CEB construct. The chapter is organised as follows; it begins with an overview of how the conceptual framework has been developed and constructed. Next the conceptual framework is presented and discussed. Finally, attention is then given to the established theoretical principles which will form the key areas of exploration for the study. Figure 4.1 highlights the structure of this chapter further.



**Figure 4.1 Structure of Chapter Four**

## **4.2 The Development of a Conceptual Framework**

The literature (see van Doorn et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011a) suggests there are antecedents, which encourage CEB. These are firm reputation, brand characteristics and focal service relationships. This section provides an overview of how the antecedents are established as well as the consequences of each of the antecedents for firms. This discussion will provide an overview of how the conceptual framework has been constructed from the understanding of the literature.

### **4.2.1 Firm Reputation**

Firm reputation refers to the way in which customers can recognize and correctly interpret a firm's identity (Walsh et al. 2009). It reflects the firms' success in fulfilling the expectations of its most important stakeholders - its customers (Freeman, 1984). In regards to firm reputation, customers can impact each other through word of mouth communication, in addition to a company's publicity materials or advertising campaigns (Walsh et al. 2009). The scale of this impact has been facilitated through social media and online communications. According to the literature, a firm's reputation is a key prerequisite for engendering high levels of customer engagement behaviour (van Doorn et al. 2010). These types of firms are already known by customers either through word of mouth communication, brand presence and brand familiarity. However, in comparison to firms with a lower reputation, firms with a high reputation have a higher chance of failure if they disappoint their customers in terms of facilitating and fostering positive engagement and outcomes.

The challenge for firms with high reputation amongst customers can be to support CEBs through a specific platform/channel that provides support to specific customer actions and needs.

For example, large firms such as Google and Apple spend resources and effort on engaging their customers on new products, testing products and providing information through events and conferences. Through this, brands with a strong reputation can engender a stronger brand commitment and brand attachment (van Doorn et al. 2010). This leads to higher customer participation in brand communities and encourages customers to seek out brand information and share their experiences with the brand to others (Schau et al. 2009).

It can be concluded that, a firm with a good reputation can have a positive impact on its financial performance (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990) and enable customer retention (Andreassen and Lindestad, 1998), as well as encourage positive word of mouth behaviour (Groenland, 2002).

#### **4.2.2 Brand Characteristics**

Brand characteristics involve certain features of a firm that influences customer engagement behaviours. This consists of the actual and perceived characteristics by the customer (van Doorn et al. 2010). The brand characteristics can consist of high reputation and high levels of brand equity. In the literature, these characteristics are said to prompt high levels of positive CEBs from customers (Keller, 1998; de Matos and Rossi, 2008; Walsh et al. 2009). It is also acknowledged in the literature that a brand's reputation and identity can enable competitive advantage, contributing to the profits of a firm (Walsh et al. 2009). Walsh et al. (2009) notes, the more a firm/brand is favoured by customers, the more positive the impact of customer's behaviours are exhibited towards the firm/brand. Thereby, a good firm reputation positively impacts the overall performance of a firm as explained in the previous section. Firms/brands with a strong equity can also influence brand commitment and brand attachment – which can create the motivation for customers to engage with the firm/brand (van Doorn et al. 2010).

However, in cases of marketing failure, a firm/brand with a high reputation/high equity can face a significantly difficult fallout in terms of customer engagement behaviours (van Doorn et al. 2010). There may be higher levels of disappointment from customers towards these firms/brands compared to firms/brands with significantly lower levels of brand reputation/brand equity. Thereby, the characteristics of the brand – e.g. brand reputation, brand equity – strongly influences customer's behavioural engagement as the actual and perceived labels placed on brands by customers motivates engagement from customers.

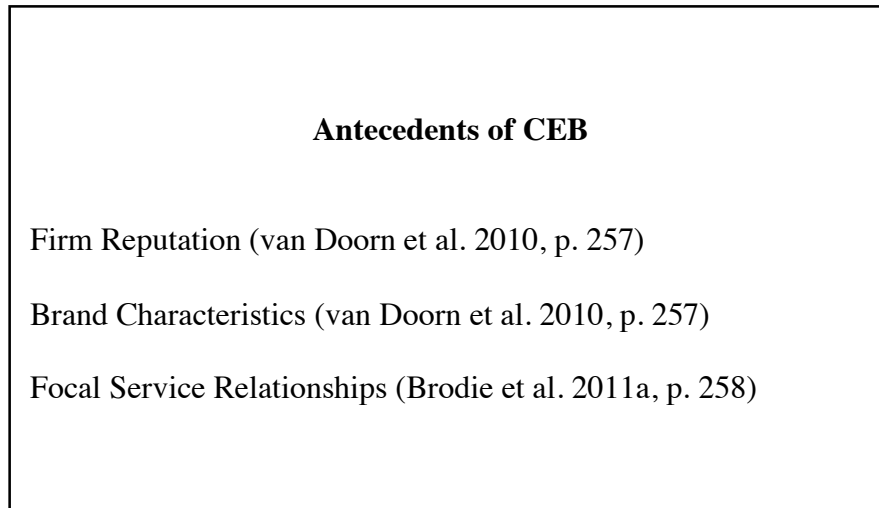
#### **4.2.3 Focal Service Relationships**

In the literature, customer engagement as a concept is said to be a result of a specific interactive, experiential nature in service relationships (Brodie et al. 2011a). These relationships occur within the interaction with user message or through content interaction (Cho and Leckensy, 1997), human/computer mediated interactions (Burgoon et al. 1999) and interpersonal interactions (Brodie et al. 2011a). This perspective emphasises customer behaviour outcomes are generated by means of customer's interactive, value co-creative experiences with firms/stakeholders (Brodie et al. 2011a). The conceptual roots of the focal service relationship stems from the service dominant logic perspective, i.e. S-D logic. The S-D logic asserts service as an application of specialized competences such as operant resources, knowledge, skills through performances, processes and deeds for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself (Vargo and Lusch, 2007). Thereby, in the focal service relationship – service refers to the process involved in doing something beneficial for and in relation with some entity. The central premise is that service is the fundamental basis of exchange – service is exchanged for service in the relationship between entities. This can be between the firm-consumer, consumer-firm, consumer-consumer relationships, etc. Through these relationships, the service provided leads to value-creating activities – value creation – which is mutual and reciprocal.



Value creation is achieved through the firm providing a contribution to the customer's value creating activities through communication. Equally, value is provided from the customer to the firm, usually through money (Vargo, 2009). Additionally, customers create value with firms through enhancing brand and relationship equity by establishing communities. Through these communities – customers add meaning to the brand/firm and can create loyalty programs for firms (McAlexander et al. 2002). An example of this is highlighted in Apple user community activities and social-networking fan communities that develop around Apple products, news and new product announcements. In the focal service relationship, the co-creational nature of the relationship between the customer and the brand/firm are relational.

In the sense that, activities of both entities independently and interactively combine over time to create value. It is through the joint, collaborative, interactive and reciprocal roles of value that the relationship is conceptualized under the S-D logic perspective (Vargo, 2009). Hence, the focal service relationship involves co-creation between entities and a service exchange that implies a value-creating relationship or a complex web of value-creating relationships between different users. The relationship between firm reputation, brand characteristics and focal service relationships on customer engagement behaviours have been empirically established in the literature. They are manifested through dimensions of customer engagement behaviour – consumption, contribution and creation. The dimensions of CEB are exhibited through the behaviours associated with using social media platforms – posting, commenting, sharing and liking.



**Figure 4.2 Antecedents of CEB**

#### **4.2.4 Consumption**

Consumption deals with the behavioural consumer activities that are related to “sharing” content. This aspect of consumer behaviour is known to represent a minimal level of online-brand related activity. This is because, consumption consists of participating without any active contribution or creation of brand related content on social media platforms (Muntinga et al. 2011). Examples of this type of behavioural activity are consumers who watch brand-related content created by other users or brands/firms. As well as, viewing product reviews, ratings and information on online brand forums.

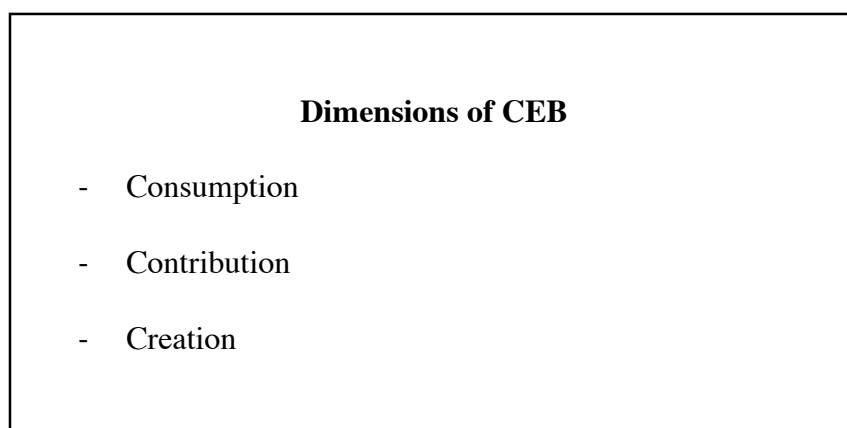
#### **4.2.5 Contribution**

Contribution in the social media environment deals with consumer’s behaviour of “commenting” or “liking” brand-related content. This activity is determined as the mid-level of online brand related activities. As it is related to both user-content and user-user interactions regarding a brand/firm (Muntinga et al. 2011).

Certain examples of this type of activity is denoted as users who converse on brand's firm pages, forums and commenting on blogs, pictures and other brand-related content created by other users online.

#### **4.2.6 Creation**

Creation is related to users posting or uploading brand content online. In the literature, creation is represented as the ultimate level of online brand activity (Muntinga et al. 2011). As creation relates to an active production and publication of brand related content for other consumers to consume and contribute to. The creation activity on social media platforms can be denoted as writing weblogs, posting product reviews, producing branded videos, pictures and music.



**Figure 4.3 Dimensions of CEB**

These three dimensions already established in the literature provide a richer understanding of customer's behaviour prevalent on social media platforms. However, it should be noted that users may act as all three for the same brand– a contributor, creator and consumer of brand related content. Likewise, this can be interchangeable, as consumers may act as a contributor for one brand, consumer for another brand and a creator for another brand.

This shows the scope of the different types of behavioural activities that are represented in social media platforms.

Consequently, these behaviours are linked to several consequences that can affect firms. In the literature, there are consequences that have been established prior for firms in terms of engagement; financial consequences, reputational consequences and consumer knowledge. These consequences are considered in the following sections and their relationship to the framework are established.

#### **4.2.7 Financial Consequences**

From the firm perspective, direct/indirect customer engagement behaviours may lead to financial consequences. This can manifest in the form of firm performance – higher profits, revenue and market share (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). For example, discussions online by customers about a brand/firm on social media can create a ripple effect reaching a wide range of potential customers into experiencing a brand/firm's product or service offering. These discussions can vary into ratings, personal experiences, review of a product/service and feedback from customers. Likewise, the feedback provided by customers can help firms in improving their product/service and generate new and better products (Kumar and Bhagwat, 2010). This contributes to firm performance, as firms can generate a new/better improved product/service which they can offer to customers in the market. Further to this, other types of customer engagement behaviours – referral, word-of-mouth activities and general activities with the purpose of disseminating information about a firm/brand are likely to affect the purchase behaviour of customers and potential customers (van Doorn et al. 2010).

#### **4.2.8 Reputational Consequences**

Besides financial consequences for firms in regards to customer engagement behaviours exhibited in social media platforms, there are also reputational consequences discussed in the literature. Through engaged customers participating in brand communities and showing

support to events related to a brand, they can contribute to the long-term reputation and recognition of a brand (van Doorn et al. 2010). By providing feedback, reviews and creating brand communities for other users online to utilize, this also builds a reputation for the brand. In the long run, the generated information from customers regarding the brand can create a very strong reputation that can be used by new customers as well as potential customers (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990). The reputation of a brand/firm enables the general consumer to know about a brand/firm's offering of a product or service compared to competing brand/firms. In essence, this can serve as a major competitive advantage for a brand/firm with a high reputation among consumers. Likewise, a brand/firm with a high reputation can generate excess returns by inhibiting the reach of competing rivals in the industry.

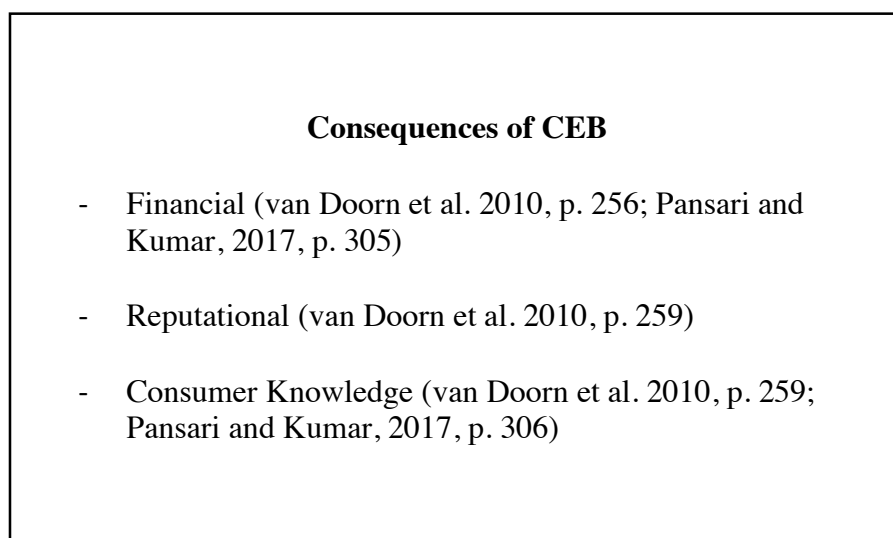
#### **4.2.9 Consumer Knowledge**

Another consequence of customer engagement behaviour established through previous work is consumer knowledge. This is manifested through a customer's active involvement in improving a brand/firm's product or service through the means of providing feedback, reviews or suggestions (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Usually, this type of customer is highly engaged with aspects related to brand activities by helping with developing ideas for product design and development of new products. As well as suggesting ideas for modifying products and an involvement in trials for testing of new product samples to be introduced into the market. In most cases, this leads to a large lead user group of customers for the brand/firm.

That is, a large base of customers who help the brand/firm to try out new product ideas – termed in the literature as 'lead user groups' (see Birkinshaw et al. 2007). For example, Apple customers who use the iPhone are engaged with the brand by providing suggestions on improving their applications and OS (operating system).

This has further expanded the usefulness, usability and longevity of the iPhone for its users and in expanding Apple's network of consumers (van Doorn et al. 2010). Customer engagement behaviours can also have broader consequences beyond the firm to the engaged customer. As the suggestions made by the customers leading to firm efficiency can in turn lead to customer satisfaction, increasing customer welfare. Also, negative responses from customers in areas that are related to the environment, sustainability and general health or wellbeing of the public can lead to the enforcement of regulatory and legal rules on brands/firms within related industries.

Thus, engaged customers play a major role in the financial aspects of a brand/firm as well as their reputation. Including providing useful, tangible knowledge to brand/firms for use in enhancing their growth and longevity within the business community.



**Figure 4.4 Consequences of CEB**

### **4.3 SME Constraints**

There are several constraints on SMEs that affect their growth, development and competitiveness in the market which are identified in the literature. These can be identified as finance, innovation and technology, strategy & development and marketing issues.

In regards to the conceptual framework, these constraints are already established in the SME literature, however, this section provides more detail as to why these concepts are closely related to the research study.

#### **4.3.1 Finance**

In comparison to larger organisations, finance is a major constraint which can impact an SMEs performance. In terms of lending opportunities, SMEs are deemed as *informationally opaque*-they are classed as riskier compared to larger organisations; facing higher premiums, higher collateral requirements from financial institutions (Ndiaye et al. 2018). In line with the literature, Wang (2016) notes, the access to finance serves as a major obstacle that curbs growth for SMEs. This is consistent with Beck and Dermiguc-Kunt (2006), who found that access to finance is a major constraint particularly for SMEs, as they are less likely to have access to formal finance. In the developing/developed economies, SMEs have been noted to have less access to finance and are more constrained in their business operation and development (Berger and Udell, 1998; Galindo and Schiantarelli, 2003). Although, SMEs constitute to employment in many markets, finance plays an important role in impeding their further contribution to economic growth and their further development in the business environment. Beck and Demirguc-Kunt (2006), suggests improvements on legal and financial institutions can help in providing SMEs access to finance for growth in the market and enable their contribution to the economy.

#### **4.3.2 Innovation and Technology**

Innovation and technology serves as a major contribution to the performance of firms, as it helps in further product development to meet the ever changing needs and demands of consumers. According to Li and Mitchell (2009); Rosenbusch et al. (2011), SMEs with

innovative capabilities gain a competitive advantage against their competitors, enabling superior performance in the market. However, innovation demands the use of substantial resources and for SMEs with carried resources, innovation projects can strain their possibilities (Acs and Andretsch, 1988). In addition, uncertainty and risks are linked to innovative efforts, SMEs are much less reactive to the failure of an innovative product, posing existential risks (Nohria and Gulati, 1996). The literature also notes larger firms as more likely to have the experiences linked with innovative projects, which leads to *organizational innovation capabilities* (Galunic and Rodan, 1998; Danneels, 2002; Majchrzak et al. 2004). Thus, SMEs engaging in innovative projects lack experience and run the risks of being involved in innovative undertakings which might not lead to organizational innovation capabilities (Rosenbusch et al. 2011). Innovation is considered to be a task linked with high failure rates and temporary unprofitability (Crawford, 1987; Block and MacMillan, 1993; Berggren and Nacher, 2001). For SMEs, it can be considered an opportunity to stand out from their competitors, as the introduction of innovative products/services can encourage the loyalty of customers due to the value customers give to the uniqueness of the innovative product/service (Rosenbusch et al. 2011). With the high risks and uncertainty linked to innovation, the benefits for SMEs in particular – differentiation from competitors, customer loyalty, entry barriers, premium prices for products – outweigh the overall costs (Rosenbusch et al. 2011).

#### **4.3.3 Strategy Development**

According to the literature, a successful firm is made up of strategic behaviours in terms of relationship management, innovation, internationalization processes and the ability to manage and organize business networks (Chiarvesio et al. 2004). As SMEs are considered to be a major source of economic growth, attention needs to be given to the development of their business strategies for sustaining their competitiveness in the market. Singh et al. (2008) notes that, a



firm's competitive strategy indicates the potential product and markets, certain long-term objectives, including the policies for achieving the objectives. Thus, the task for firms to develop their business strategies is to identify and explore core competencies that can be added to their practices (Singh et al. 2008). It has been suggested in the literature, that SMEs linking their operations to business strategies usually outperform their competitors (Singh et al. 2008). This is also linked to O'Regan et al. (2006 a, b) observing high growth firms place more of an emphasis on the orientation of strategies dealing with their business operations. Lai-yu (2001), suggest the development of internal and external capabilities. Thus, for SMEs to grow, strategic actions involving recognizing/exploiting market opportunities, creating distribution channels, products, services and customer segments need to be undertaken (Sambamurthy et al. 2003; Singh et al. 2008). As SMEs face many constraints because of the lack of resources/limited resources available to them, the formulation of business strategies with clear achievable goals enables their further growth, development and competitiveness in the business environment.

#### **4.3.4 Marketing Issues**

In comparison to larger organisations, SMEs are generally predisposed to face many challenges in the business environment due to their small nature – limited resources, workforce, knowledge/expertise, etc. The integration of marketing practices into an SMEs business practices are said to help increase their chances of success (Kenny and Dyson, 1989). Thereby, the success of SMEs are dependent not just on their products/services but also on the marketing strategies of their products/services in the market (Smith, 1990).

In regards to, closeness to customers, flexibility in responsiveness to customer's needs and the operationalisation of an effective marketing orientation. The introduction of the internet into the business environment is said to be one of the most effective marketing tools available for SMEs to compete with larger organisations. Quinn and Carson (2003), note that due to the

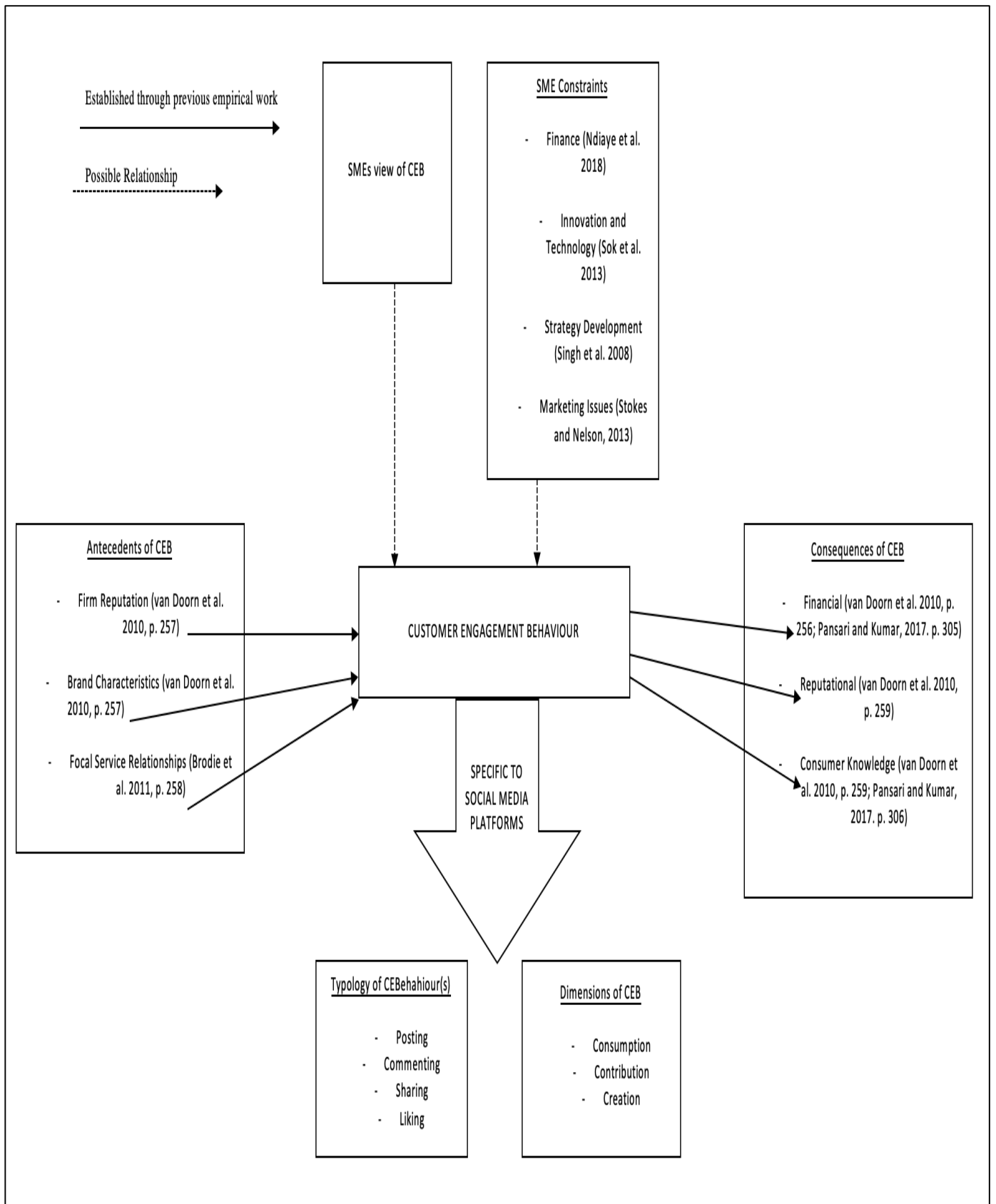
constraints limiting SMEs, marketing tools should be integrated into their business practices to effectively enhance their marketing practices. However, SMEs face many issues related to adopting and implementing marketing into their business practices; limited customer base/limited marketing activity, limited expertise, reactive marketing (LaBarbera and Rosenberg, 1989); challenges in utilizing marketing opportunities (Stokes and Fitchew, 1997). Also, marketing activities related to pricing poses a significant issue for SMEs, as they usually rely on industry standards for assistance (Carson et al. 1998). Marketing activities within small firms are mostly linked to the experience and expertise of the owner-manager (Quinn and Carson, 2003). Thus, SMEs are more vulnerable to the risks involved in marketing strategies due to their inadequacies/limitations in marketing practices compared to their larger counterparts with more experience in the market. SMEs need to formally establish and understand their goals and objectives for effectively marketing their products/services.

#### **4.4 The Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework in figure 4.5 represents the established causal relationships drawn from previous empirical work within the context of SMEs. It proposes a possible relationship, which will be explored through primary research. The antecedents of CEB (firm reputation, brand characteristics) are adapted from van Doorn et al.'s (2010) conceptual model of customer engagement behaviour. These antecedents represented in the framework are said to engender high levels of CEB (van Doorn et al. 2010).

The focal service relationship, affects CEB through favourably perceived customer/firm communications, service delivery and dialogue, which can lead to customer loyalty (Brodie et al. 2011a). Thus, customer engagement behaviours go beyond transactions and result from motivational drivers. These motivational drivers are represented in the conceptual framework (CF) as specific to social media platforms. They are highlighted as; posting, commenting,

sharing and liking (Schivinski et al. 2016). These actions are described through typologies of CEB behaviour(s). Also represented are the dimensions of CEB described in the previous chapter; consumption, contribution and creation i.e. a consumer's online brand-related activity (COBRA). When a customer engages with media online by "Sharing" a post related to a brand, this is termed as consumption (Muntinga et al. 2011; Schivinski et al. 2016). When a customer "Comments" on a post or "Likes" a piece of brand content, this is represented as contribution (Muntinga et al. 2011; Schivinski et al. 2016). Finally, when a customer "Posts"/ upload brand content, e.g. a product, this is highlighted as creation (Muntinga et al. 2011; Schivinski et al. 2016). Thereby, COBRA is defined as "a set of online activities on the part of the consumer that is related to a brand, varying in the levels on interaction and engagement with the consumption, contribution and creation of media content" (Schivinski et al. 2016, p. 5). There are various CEB consequences for the firm, which can be financial (i.e. referrals/electronic word-of-mouth, affecting purchasing behaviours leading to sales). Highly engaged customers can contribute to the long term reputation/recognition of the firm and become a source of knowledge in terms of new product development (van Doorn et al. 2010). Reputation and consumer knowledge also have negative consequences for the firm. As customers with negative experiences can lead to legal or regulatory channels for relief (van Doorn et al. 2010). The empirical focus of the conceptual framework is on the possible bi-directional relationship of a firm's own conceptualisation and measurement of CEB and the qualitatively different forms of CEB that are actually enacted by their customers. As well as the possible relationship between the constraints placed on SMEs that inspire the adoption of social media platforms into their base marketing strategy.



**Figure 4.5 The Conceptual Framework**

## 4.5 Established Theoretical Principles

From the systematic literature review, there were five premises identified in regards to the influences of CEBs on social media platforms; social links, search for information, self-involvement, functionality, ownership/value. These premises provide the theoretical underpinning for this study as it seeks to explore its relationship in engendering CEBs (consumption, contribution, creation) on social media platforms.

### 4.5.1 Social Links

*Premise 1: Social links moderate the emergence of CEBs in the form of consumption and contribution on social media platforms*

In the emergence of CEB in social media platforms, the concept of social links is an important factor. The concept recognises that customer engagement behaviour is embedded in a broader network of social connections than those exhibited in a single transaction (Bitter et al. 2014; Bitter and Kräuter, 2016). Social links involve the use of social media platforms through the influence of social relationships, friends/family and close social connections. The experiences of users and the practices acquired through interaction with friends have a positive influence on behavioural engagement on social media (Bitter et al. 2014). Most especially, this influences CEBs involving the behaviours of *consumption* and *contribution* on social media platforms. As users are influenced by their respective social links, they will be more inclined to consume and contribute to brand-related content rather than create content of their own. These behaviours can be exhibited through; watching brand-content tagged by close friends, family and commenting on brand-content from a close social connection. Thus, it can be proposed that social links moderate the emergence of CEBs – consumption, contribution – on social media platforms.

#### **4.4.2 Search for Information**

*Premise 2: Pre-purchase information searching during the consumer decision making process is an antecedent to the emergence of consumption CEBs on social media platforms*

The engagement literature suggests the search for information as an important concept in engendering CEB (Gummerus et al. 2012; Halaszovich and Nel, 2017; Chiang et al. 2017).

The search for information consists of the active use of social media platforms for the purpose of the consumption of brand related information. The information searched for can be broken down into external factors (i.e. reading about products) and internal factors (i.e. seeking product information) about a product or brand (Blythe, 2013). This therefore involves a judgement about the quality of information seen on social media platforms influencing subsequent customer engagement behaviours. As search for information involves actively using social media for the sole purpose of seeking for and consumption of brand-related content and information. The presence of this can be said to exhibit the engagement behaviours of *consumption* i.e. reading reviews, watching brand-related content. Following this reasoning, it can be proposed that the search for information is an antecedent to the emergence of CEBs in the form of consumption on social media platforms.

#### **4.4.3 Self-Involvement**

*Premise 3: Self-Involvement increases the likelihood of CEBs manifesting in the form of consumption, contribution and creation on social media platforms*

Self-involvement is another important factor that can give rise to CEBs. This relates to a perceived relevance of a brand based on the consumer's needs, values and interests, involving the degree of attachment and loyalty towards the brand (Zaichowsky, 1985; Blythe, 2013).

The traits of self-involvement identified in the literature are made up of internal personal forces and personality traits (Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Simon et al. 2016). These traits are evident in social media platforms as affecting the mode of interaction of users, determining if they like and/or comment on a post in brand's pages on Facebook (Kabadayi and Price, 2014). The concept of self-involvement is important for firms/brands alike, as noted by Harrigan et al. (2017), among other channels, brands must use social media platforms to prompt involvement if they seek to engage with their customers effectively. Self-involvement can be said to influence *consumption*, *contribution* and *creation* on social media platforms. As users with a perceived relevance/attachment and loyalty towards a particular brand are most likely to exhibit the behaviours of consumption, creation and contribution to the brand as opposed to another brand on social media without said attributes. Hence, it can be proposed that self-involvement as a concept under social media platforms increases the likelihood of customer engagement behaviours in the form of consumption, contribution and creation.

#### **4.4.4 Functionality**

*Premise 4: The prevalence and specific manifestation of CEBs on social media, whether consumption, contribution, or creation, depends on functionality made possible by the specific technical implementation of the respective platform*

Functionality can be said to be all or any aspects of the social media platform design with the specific quality of being primarily suited to serve a particular customer engagement behaviour – contribution, consumption, creation. It can consist of the usability, interface, content and attractiveness that enables some form of engagement from users.

In the literature, functionality is said to be an important factor in the emergence of CEB in social media platforms (Lei et al. 2017; Leek et al. 2017; Carlson et al. 2018). The presence of

varied functionality on social media platforms can influence the CEBs of *consumption*, *creation* and *contribution*. As the variable serves to enable all forms of CEB activities.

#### **4.4.5 Ownership-Value**

*Premise 5: Post-purchase Ownership-Value increases the likelihood of CEBs manifesting in the form of contribution and creation on social media platforms*

The final premise is concerned with the concept of ownership-value established in the literature to engender CEBs in social media platforms. Ownership-value involves engagement from customers as a result of post-purchase additional value that stems after the acquisition of a brand or product. Accordingly, the literature suggest ownership-value are important factors in the emergence of CEB (Carlson et al. 2017; Gong, 2018). Carlson et al. (2017) agrees further by asserting that the formation of value in the brand page experience has a positive direct effect on CEBs. In addition to this, Gong, (2018) further points out that customer brand engagement behaviour is driven by customer brand ownership and bounded by customers' cultural value orientation. This variable can be said to influence CEBs of *contribution* and *creation* as it is concerned with post-purchase customers/customers with an attached value placed on the brand. Contribution can be manifested through leaving reviews (positive/negative) about the product acquired as well as leaving comments about a particular product, sharing their experience. Creation can involve posting content on social media platforms (video, picture, text format) concerning the product acquired post-purchase or about a particular brand/firm.



## **4.5 Summary**

This chapter provided an overview into the main constructs developed in the conceptual model. The theoretical debates and empirical evidence behind the hypothesised relationships between concepts surrounding engagement in the conceptual model were highlighted. Before moving on to the empirical exploration of the conceptual model represented in this chapter, as well as, verifying the proposed premises. These premises will be used to help support the development of a universal definition of customer CEB on social media platforms, through mixed methods that go beyond the limited scope of philosophically-averse, methodologically-homogeneous approaches to CEB, to instead develop an exploratory and sequential mixed-method studies grounded in the philosophy of critical realism. The approach will be elaborated in further depth in the following chapter.

The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

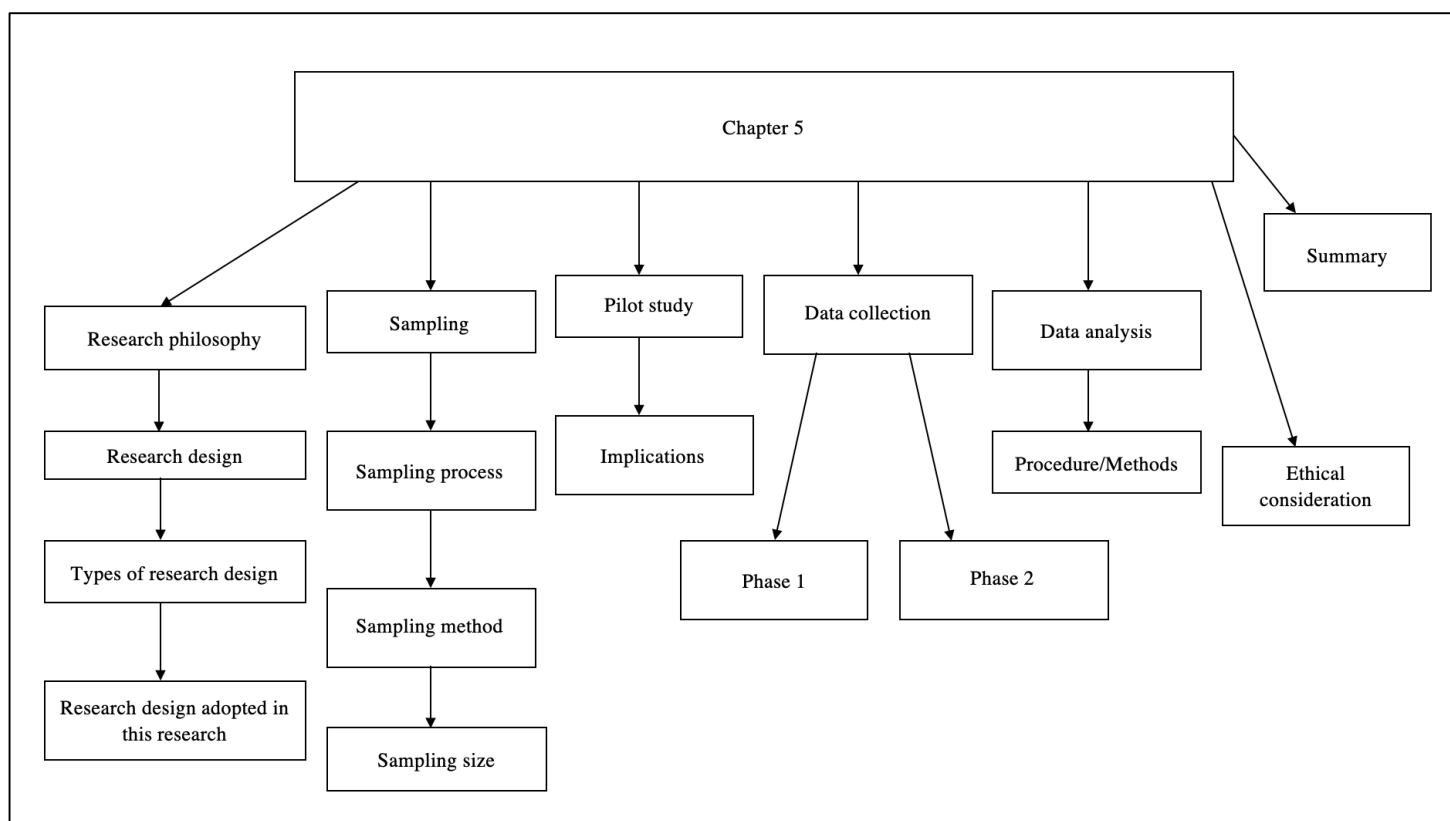
#### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the study's conceptual framework. Empirical evidence and theoretical arguments already established in the literature, which outline the relationship between customer engagement behaviour and social media platforms were highlighted and presented. This chapter outlines and justifies the research methodology employed in the study for exploring CEB and empirically investigating the concept in the context of social media platforms. The principal methods will be guided by a critical realist research philosophy, which follows abductive reasoning i.e. it involves reasoning from data to a hypothesis that explains the data (Walton, 2014). This approach also involves variations of deductive and inductive reasoning in that field research begins with a set of individual observations (observation of SMEs social media channels) which provides the framework for interviews with SME owner-managers. Following the philosophy of critical realism, the current study reconstitutes positivist and constructivist paradigms to provide a detailed account of ontology and epistemology, which makes critical realism a comprehensive philosophy of science (Brown et al. 2002). Critical realism aims to understand the causation of, and provide an explanation for, social events (in this case SMEs use of social media platforms to successfully engage with their customers). The aim is to suggest practical policy and managerial recommendations through investigation.

The proposed research approach adopts a sequential mixed method research approach involving data collection through online observation and quantitative analysis of SMEs social media channels and two-part qualitative interviews with SME owner-managers.

The chapter commences with an overview of the research philosophy of social science and its application to the current study, providing insight to the positioning of the proposed research. This is followed by a discussion of the research design and the rationale justifying the design. Next, a description of the data collection process is outlined. The data collection process is comprised of 2 respective phases, where each phase seeks to explore the relationship between customer engagement behaviour and social media platforms within SME settings.

Phase one involves collecting data through the observation of CEBs in SMEs social media channels. Phase two includes, two-part semi-structured interviews with SME owner-managers. The phases are followed sequentially in the study. Additionally, this chapter provides a detailed discussion of the chosen data analysis method. Figure 5.1 shows how the chapter is structured in detail.

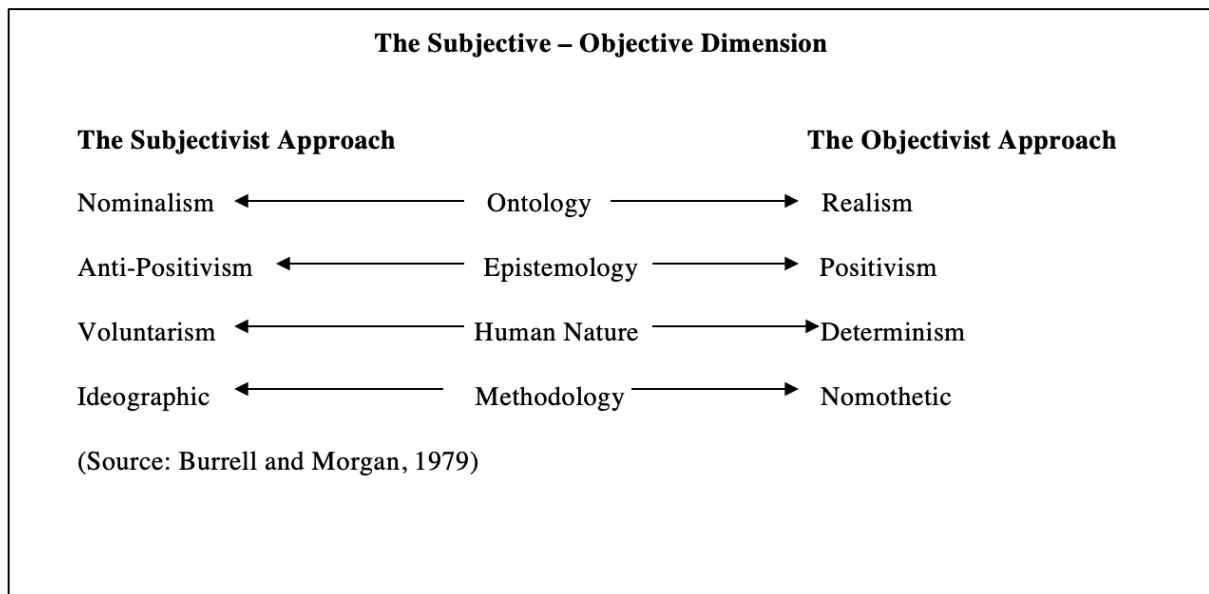


**Figure 5.1 Structure of Chapter Five**

## 5.2 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy, also referred to as a worldview or paradigm (see Creswell, 2009) is concerned with a set of basic beliefs known as metaphysics, which deals with principles. It is generally represented as a worldview that defines for the researcher, the nature of the world, an individual's place within it and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). These beliefs are simply accepted by the researcher based on principle. The choice of a research philosophy helps to inform and guide the research question (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). As well as, underpin the research design and methodology (Saunders et al. 2007). In relation to this, before a researcher selects a research philosophy about the philosophical assumption and belief of the nature of the social world, there are three fundamental questions to be fulfilled. The ontological, epistemological and methodological

question (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). These three questions serve as the major determinants for the choice of a philosophy for the researcher in social sciences. Firstly, the ontological question is concerned with seeking an answer to the form and nature of reality – what is there that can be known about it? (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). It is concerned with the very essence of the phenomena that is under investigation. Associated with the ontological question, is the second set of question of epistemology. This refers to the assumption about the grounds of knowledge. It searches the answer to how the researcher might begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The answer given to this question will be determined by the answer given to the ontological question. For example, if a researcher assumes an objectivist nature in light of the ontological question raised, thereby, the objectivist position suggests the existence of an objective world. Associated with the ontological and epistemological assumption is the methodological question. This deals with how the researcher/inquirer can go about finding out whatever they believe can be known (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Thus, the research philosophy represents the most sophisticated and informed view that the researcher has been able to determine, given the response to three basic sets of questions. Each question determines for the researcher how to investigate and acquire knowledge. Following this, there are two dimensions set out in the literature for analysing the assumptions about the nature of the world – subject/objective dimension (see figure 5.2). This was proposed by Burrell and Morgan (1979), it shows the standpoints that characterize the approaches to one's understanding of social sciences. The subjective/objective philosophical positions help the researcher in the choice of investigation on the field of topic.



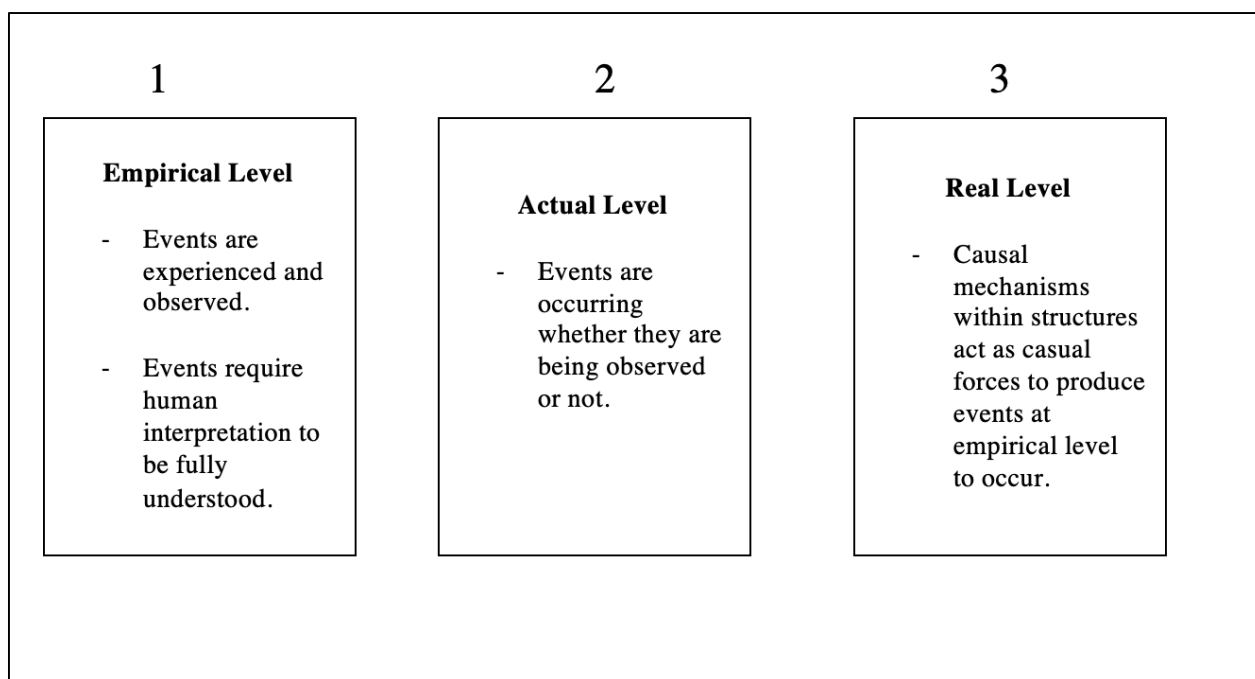
**Figure 5.2 The Major Philosophical Standpoints in Social Sciences**

The standpoints shown above, provide a schematic for analysing certain assumptions about the nature of social science. From what can be understood, the objectivist approach to the social world is focused on independently conducting studies outside of what is being observed, with the interests, values and beliefs having no influence on the study or the method to be used (Holden and Lynch, 2004). The research choice and methodological choice are decided upon objectively as the objectivist researcher sets aside their interests, values and beliefs. The major goal for an objectivist researcher is to identify causality and the fundamental laws that identify regularities in society (Easterby et al. 1991). In contrast to objectivists, the subjectivist approach to the social world is concentrated on identifying the meaning behind a social phenomenon and not the measurement of it (Holden and Lynch, 2004). The major goal of a subjectivist researcher is to explain and understand a research problem in its contextual setting, disregarding any relation to causality but rather the meaning attached to a given situation (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997; Holden and Lynch, 2004).

Therefore, for subjectivists, a phenomena cannot be categorised into causes and effects as – “It is engaged in a process of continuous creation” (Hirschmann, 1986, p. 238).

Subjectivists perceive that the understanding of a problem can only be grasped through an investigation of the problem in its entirety (Holden and Lynch, 2004).

As Johnson and Clark (2006) suggests - as researchers, one needs to be aware of his/her philosophical commitments since this has a significant impact on the research as well as how it is investigated. From examining the approaches to adopting a research philosophy, the research question highlighted in the introductory chapter suggests the study follows the philosophical position of critical realism. This philosophy emerged from the positivist/constructivist debate in the 1980s (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). It uses both approaches to provide a detailed account of epistemology and ontology and its search for causality helps in explaining phenomena and suggest practical recommendations (Fletcher, 2016). Critical realism emerged from the work of Bhaskar, starting from the 1970s. The tenets of this assumption of nature expresses that what is real i.e. ontology, is not equal to our knowledge of reality i.e. epistemology (Fletcher, 2016). The world is not theory-determined but rather laden with theories in identifying causal mechanisms regarding phenomena. In the ontological assumption of critical realism, the social world is stratified into three levels – empirical, actual and real (see figure 5.3). The empirical level suggests events and objects can be measured and explained through common sense. However, it is facilitated through human experience and interpretation (Fletcher, 2016). The actual level consists of events that occur without one’s experience or interpretation. There is no filter at this experience. The real level is filled with casual structures and mechanisms (Fletcher, 2016). All levels are existent in the same reality.



(Source: Fletcher, 2016)

**Figure 5.3 The Three Levels of Reality in Critical Realism**

Equally, Bhaskar (1979), further notes that causal mechanisms can only exist in light of the activities that they govern and they can't be empirically identified independently. Thus, causal mechanisms can only be understood through human actions and ideas generated by said mechanisms.

In the study of behaviour, a realist philosophy assumes that all behaviour is shaped and learned through a dynamic interplay with the environment. This is in contradistinction to behaviourism, formulated by J.B Watson and studied further by B.F. Skinner (Giddens and Turner, 1987). The fundamental insight from this perspective can be linked to the actions of humans and the observable states of people and their environment and the actions within the relationships. There are two important facets of the behaviourist perspective – respondent (reflex) behaviour and operant behaviour. Respondent behaviour relates to behaviours produced automatically



through the application of a stimulus to the subject (Giddens and Turner, 1987). A decent example of this can be linked to a “knee-jerk response” and the Ivan Pavlov’s dog experiment in the 1890s – that is how behaviour is learned through association. However, operant behaviour refers to associations made between reward/punishment. It is met by two conditions; (1) it is freely emitted with no obvious trigger (2) It is susceptible to reinforcement and punishment by its consequences (Seel, 2012). The notion of operant behaviour is tied to operant conditioning (see Skinner, 1938).

Therefore, in behaviourism, there are several propositions: the first being “the law of effect”. In that if a person’s action is followed by a reward, the person is more likely to repeat the action or some approximation of it (Giddens and Turner, 1987). The second asserts that a person is likely to repeat an action if similar circumstances are recurred from the previous rewarded action (Giddens and Turner, 1987). Finally, rewards can be acquired not native – a long chain of actions can be learned to leading up to an ultimate reward (Giddens and Turner, 1987). In the realist account, the learner can affect their own ‘agency’, but their learning is ‘structured’ by the environment that they inhabit. The dynamic interplay of structure and agency is framed as non-deterministic, unlike the behaviourist desire to deduce pre-determined behaviour through cues.

The following sub-sections provide the ideological positioning of the current study in terms of the ontological (the nature of reality), epistemological (the relationship between the inquirer and the knowable) and methodological (how the inquirer should go about finding out knowledge) stance of the critical realist philosophy the researcher chooses to adapt to the research study;

*Ontology:* Several entities exist, but they are independent of each other through their construction. There is a single reality of society but there are multiple interpretations of it. These interpretations are consistent in a stratified reality i.e. the empirical, actual and real level.

*Epistemology:* There is a fragility of knowledge with many competing theories of the social world. Knowledge is derived from uncovering casual mechanisms. Also, objects and generative mechanisms that make up the world have casual powers which are sometimes exercised, but exist independently of human cognition (Scott, 2014).

*Methodology:* To develop knowledge, there is an established casual-explanatory concept. This implies, the reason for a phenomenon (in the current study's case – CEB in social media platforms) can be construed as deriving from a cause. The methodological approach is then guided through explanation/uncovering and understanding causal relationships/mechanisms behind the phenomena to be investigated. Critical realism encourages methodological pluralism, which as shown in the previous chapter is not common in the CEB literature, where an emphasis on positivist confirmatory approaches dominate. From this understanding, the research design was formulated to assist the researcher in developing knowledge concerning the CEB in social media platforms. The consequent sections highlight the research methods adopted in the study, in terms of data collection and analysis.

### **5.2.1 Research Design**

To conduct a research study, it is important to choose an appropriate research design. A research design consists of “quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches that provide a specific direction for procedures” (Creswell, 2009, p.41). Also, it is used as a plan that guides the research in collecting and analysing data (Churchill, 1999, p. 98).

Authors have called them *strategies of inquiry* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) or a *framework/blueprint* (Malhotra and Birks, 2006). The reasoning behind a choice for a research design is based upon the research question, research objectives and a consistency with the research philosophy (Saunders et al. 2007). The research design enforces the researcher to choose and have a general plan of how the study is going to answer the research question formulated in the study. As well as, it shows to the reader how the study is to be investigated in order to find a conclusion to the research question. Most importantly, an appropriate and defined research design enables the researcher to conduct an efficient and effective study (Malhotra and Birks, 2006). This is because, the research design specifies the data to be collected, how the data is to be collected and the process of sampling in the research (Hair et al. 2003).

### **5.2.2 Types of Research Design**

The classification of a research design can be broken down into three different types: The quantitative research design, qualitative research design and mixed method research design (See Table 5.1). The quantitative research design is attributed to the late 19th and 20th century in which inquiries were comprised of a post-positivist paradigm, originating from psychology (Creswell, 2009). They are usually manifested as casual types. A conclusive research type that reaches to assess cause and effect of independent and dependent relationships (Churchill, 1999).

They are comprised of experiments, which include; true experiments, quasi-experiments, applied behavioural analysis and single-subject experiments (Campbell and Stanley, 1963; Neuman and McCormick, 1995; Cooper et al. 2008). They also fall into non-experimental designs such as the causal-comparative research. This is the comparison of two or more groups in relation to a cause which has been developed (Creswell, 2009).

As well as, surveys, which is a numeric quantitative information on the attitudes, trends and opinions from the study of a sample population (Creswell, 2009). It varies from cross-sectional and longitudinal studies that use questionnaires or structured interviews. The sole intent of conducting a survey is to make a generalization about a population from the sample (Fowler, 2009). Experimental design on the other hand is done in way of establishing the influence of a treatment on an outcome (Creswell, 2009). This is done by giving a treatment to a group and refusing the same treatment to another group set. The results are decided from what is obtained from both group sets.

In contrast to the quantitative research design, qualitative research designs are regarded as systematic inquiries into developing a holistic, narrative description to inform the understanding of the researcher in regards to a social or cultural phenomenon (Astalin, 2013, p. 118). They are an inductive way of compiling data into categories and finding relationships among said categories (Mcmillan and Schumacher, 1993). The qualitative research design attempts to gather data and meaning *organically* through the research context under the use of interviews, observations and review of documents (Astalin, 2013). It greatly differs from the objective methods used in quantitative design of comparisons, relations and predictions. The origin of this design is formed from sociology, anthropology, the humanities and evaluation (Creswell, 2009). The methods and structures used are much more flexible, comprising of; narrative research, phenomenological research, ethnography, grounded theory and case study. Narrative research stemmed from the humanities, involving studies about lived individuals (Reissman, 2008). On the other hand, phenomenological research comes from psychology and philosophy. It is concerned with describing individual's experiences of a phenomena – events, situations, experiences or concepts (Creswell, 2009; Astalin, 2013). Ethnography stems from sociology and anthropology.

It inquiries about “shared patterns of behaviours, language and actions of a group over a period of time” (Creswell, 2009, p.42). The term itself refers to the *portrait of a people* (Astalin, 2013). It is methodologically used for describing cultures and group sets of individuals. Grounded theory however is focused on generating a theory from an interaction, action or process from the views of participants involved (Creswell, 2009). It allows for a theory or sets of theories to be generated from the data collected (Astalin, 2013).

This process stems from sociology, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the authors note research is to be done by collecting data through systematic methods and theories developed from research, which is grounded in the data. The main feature of grounded theory is that, the results that emerge are considered to be new knowledge as a “new theory” is developed from the data about a phenomenon (Astalin, 2013).

Case studies however are existent in many fields, they can be used in quantitative and qualitative research designs. They involve the researcher developing an in-depth analysis of an event, institution, case, process or other systems bounded by time and activity (Creswell, 2009; Astalin, 2013).

Thus, the mixed methods research design is a combination of the quantitative and qualitative design. As quantitative data tends to be close-ended responses and qualitative data tends to be open-ended without a set response. The idea behind the mixed method research design lies on the basis that, from collecting both sets of data (quantitative/qualitative) there is an elimination of bias and weakness of each form of data (Creswell, 2009). It originated in 1959, whereby multiple methods were used to study psychological traits – prompting collection of multiple forms of data through a qualitative (interviews, observations) and quantitative (surveys) process (Sieber, 1973).

The common types of mixed method research designs are; triangulation design, embedded design, explanatory design and exploratory design. Triangulation design seeks to “obtain

different but complementary data” (Morse, 1991, p.122) about a topic in order to understand the research question. The goal of a triangulation design is to integrate the strengths of the structures of quantitative methods and qualitative methods together (Patton, 1990). It is mostly used to compare and contrast both results from the two methods used so as to validate the results obtained from both. On the other hand, the embedded design uses one set of data to facilitate a secondary role in a study that is based on another data type (Creswell et al. 2003). That is, when a researcher needs to include quantitative/qualitative data to answer a research question in a quantitative/qualitative research study, an embedded design is usually adopted. A single set of data is not enough in this design and different research questions require different sets of data. The procedure follows a mix of data sets with one type of data embedded in the methodology, framed by another data type (Caracelli and Greene, 1993). Moving on, the explanatory design is conducted initially through quantitative means with results obtained from it explained in more detail through qualitative methods (Creswell, 2009). It is considered to be a two-phase method as qualitative data helps to explain the initial quantitative results (Creswell et al. 2003).

In contrast, the exploratory design builds upon qualitative research followed by a quantitative phase. It is the *reverse sequence* of the explanatory research design (Creswell, 2009). The intent lies on the qualitative results to help in developing the second method in a quantitative nature (Greene et al. 1989). The exploratory design is useful in developing or testing an instrument or when measures are not available (Creswell et al. 2003). Compared to other approaches, the exploratory approach assists the researcher to further investigate firm’s views on CEB and social media by revealing the inner-workings of how firms actually use their social media channels to engage with their customers.

<b>Design</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Philosophy</b>
Quantitative	Experimental (true experiments, quasi-experiments, applied behavioural analysis, single-subject experiments).  Non-experimental (causal-comparative research, survey)	Tend to be post-positivist
Qualitative	Narrative research, phenomenological research, ethnography, grounded theory, case study	Tend to be constructivists and transformative knowledge claims.
Mixed-methods	Triangulation, embedded, explanatory, exploratory	Tend to have pragmatic knowledge claims

(Source: Creswell, 2009)

**Table 5.1 Classification of Research Designs**

### **5.2.3 Research Design Adopted in this Research**

To achieve the research objectives, the study will conduct three phases of research. The first phase involves employing an exploratory research design. This will be used to develop the researcher's understanding and insight of CEB in social media platforms, in the context of SMEs and to form the basis for further investigation.

The second phase of the research design involves an observation of CEBs (customer engagement behaviours) on SMEs social media channels – Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. This allows for engagement behaviours online to be revealed through observation in order to address the possible bi-directional relationship of a firm's conceptualisation and measurement of CEB and the different forms of CEB that are actually enacted by their customers (see conceptual framework – figure 4.5). The third phase of the research design will be focused on addressing the phenomenological perspective i.e. how SMEs perceive CEBs. This will be done through conducting a two-part semi-structured interview with SME owner-managers. Semi-

structured interviews are well suited to elicit the perceptions and opinions of the respondents regarding complex and sensitive issues, enabling probing for further clarification (Bariball and While, 1994). Thus, it is a suitable approach in addressing the phenomenological component of engagement experienced by SME owner-managers.

### **5.3 Sampling**

To effectively conduct the research, a consideration of the sample design is needed for the study. This is addressed through the sampling process, as well as, the method utilized in the study to collect the samples. Finally, the sample size for the research is considered and the final number of prospective samples to be involved in the research are presented. In this thesis the proposed methods are sequential and involve a sample of organisations that remain consistent in multiple phases to help observe (a) how a firm is using social media in relation to CEBs; (b) illicit and understand how those same firms view their own actions. By retaining the sample throughout, this supports multiple methods which can be subsequently integrated.

#### **5.3.1 Sampling Process**

The process of sampling involves selecting a small number of elements from a large target group to gain information that allows for a judgement to be made about the target group (Hair *et al.*, 2003). It plays the role of helping the researcher in the process of understanding, developing and identifying a construct that is to be investigated (Hair *et al.* 2003). Generally, there are two types of sampling processes involved in research: probability and non-probability sampling. The probability sampling technique is the preferred process for representative samples. It builds on careful reasoning about the population in question, to support natural sciences and quantitative social sciences. The probability sampling technique tries to develop



an accurate representative sample with predictable errors, drawing a sample from a large collection of cases i.e. a unit of analysis or case in a population (Neuman, 2014).

Several boundaries such as, geographic and temporal boundaries are applied in this sampling technique. On the other hand, non-probability sampling is perceived to be a simple alternative to create a representative sample. It is usually used instead of probability sampling when there are matters concerning impracticality, cost or time. In non-probability sampling, most cases do not represent the target population. It involves a process whereby, the probability of selection of each unit is unknown (Hair et al. 2003). Considering this, probability and non-probability sampling techniques involve several different types. This is highlighted in Table 5.2.

<b>Probability Sampling Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Simple random sampling	A sampling procedure which ensures the sampling unit of the target population has a known/equal non-zero chance of selection.	-Easily understood and data results can be generalized.  -Allows for unbiased estimates of the population's characteristics.	-Difficulty of obtaining an accurate list of target population elements.
Systematic random sampling	The process follows simple random sampling procedure, however, the target population have to be ordered in the form of; a customer list, membership roster or taxpayer roll.	-Easy way to draw a sample and ensures randomness.	-Potential for hidden patterns in the data that can be overlooked by the researcher.
Stratified random sampling	A sampling method that requires the target population to be divided into groups – strata and samples are selected from each – stratum.	-Provides the opportunity to study each stratum and make comparisons between strata.	-Difficulty in determining the basis for stratifying.

Cluster sampling	A method whereby, sampling units are divided into mutually exclusive and exhaustive sub-populations, called clusters.	-Cost effective and feasibility of implementation.	-Tendency for cluster to be homogenous leading to less precise estimates of samples representing the target population.
<b>Non-Probability Sampling Type</b>			
Convenience sampling	A sampling procedure whereby samples are drawn at the convenience of the researcher	-Allows for a large group of respondents to be interviewed in a short period of time.	-Use of convenience sampling in construct/scale measurement can have an impact on the reliability and validity of the study.
Purposive sampling	The samples are selected based on the belief of the researcher that the requirements of the study will be met by said participants.	-If the judgement is correct, the sample generated can provide some interesting information.	-The possibility of measuring the representativeness of the sample is not certain.
Quota sampling	A sampling method that involves selecting participants based on pre-specified quotas such as; demographics, attitudes and behaviours.	-The sample drawn contains the specific sub-groups desired by the researcher.  -Eliminates/reduces selection bias.	-Incapability of measuring the representativeness of the sample due to the subjective aspect of the method.
Snowball sampling	This involves choosing a set of respondents and in turn, said respondents help the researcher to identify additional respondents for inclusion in the research.	-Reduced sample size and cost-effective.	-The data structures are limited in generalizing the results to members of the target population.

(Hair et al. 2003)

**Table 5.2 Probability/Non-Probability Sample Types**

Following this, before selecting an appropriate sampling design for the current study, Hair et al. (2003) notes a number of critical factors to be considered by the researcher. First of all, the research objectives guide the researcher's choice. Secondly, the degree of accuracy of the research is also an important factor. This is followed by, the availability of resources obtainable for the research project. Next, the time frame adjudicated to the research in terms of completion. Also, the knowledge of the target population is an important variable in the selection of a sampling design. Finally, the scope of the research whether it is local, regional, national or international is a key factor in the selection process. Considering these critical factors, the consequent sections involving sampling method and sampling size adopted in the research are discussed.

### **5.3.2 Sampling Method**

The defined target population for the current study are SMEs (small-medium sized enterprises) based in the UK fashion industry. The UK fashion industry is mostly made up of SMEs as these firms populate the sector with 60% consisting of firms with 5 employees or less and 20% consisting of sole traders (Malem et al. 2009). The high level of SMEs within the fashion industry using social media platforms help the research in addressing the key objectives highlighted in the study; *to explore the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement behaviour on SMEs use of social media platforms* and *to understand how SMEs are using social media platforms to develop customer engagement*. The phases of data collection of the current study target the same population – SMEs in the UK fashion industry. The study is mainly concerned with SMEs who have adopted social media platforms into their marketing strategies. The main social media channels the study is focused on – Instagram, Facebook, Twitter – enable interactivity and customer connectivity across all political, economical borders as well as geographic location. The population elements consisting of SMEs are

typically run by owner-managers. Thus, the choice of a sampling method is based on the choice of the two sampling orientations; probability and non-probability sampling. As Hair et al. (2003) suggest, this should be dependent on the size/scale to which the raw data collected will be used to form a judgement about the target population.

The sampling method will be purposive and guided initially by a convenience non-probability sampling technique leading to further snowball sampling – referrals from initial respondents in order to generate additional respondents. The two methods – convenience non-probability sampling and snowball sampling was adopted in the study for the following reasons.

Firstly, the resources available to the project are limited as well as the time frame allocated for conducting the study. Studies that are involved in short-term projects are better off selecting a simple and less time consuming sampling design (Hair et al. 2003). Secondly, the list of the population elements to be involved in the study is difficult to obtain – SMEs in the fashion sector based in the East Midlands region in the UK. As suggested by Hair et al. (2003, p.364) “If the researcher’s financial and human resources are restricted, these limitations will most certainly eliminate some of the more time-consuming, complex probability sampling methods”. As probability sampling methods require a number of preparations, it is avoided due to its difficulty and costs (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In the proposed methods there is a necessity to pair large observed social media datasets associated with particular organisations that can then be used to inform 2-part interviews from those same organisations. It is therefore necessary to choose organisations that are local and potentially accessible for the interview phase and harmonise that across the initial observation phase. Next, utilizing snowball sampling alongside convenience non-probability sampling helps the researcher further in collating the sampling elements. As the target population is small and unique, and compiling a list of the sampling elements is an impossible task without the adequate resources.

The snowball method yields a better result at a low cost (Hair et al. 2003). Therefore, considering the reasons aforementioned, convenience non-probability sampling along with snowball sampling was adopted as an appropriate method for compiling the sampling elements of SMEs based in the UK fashion industry.

Nonetheless, it is important to mention the limitations attributed to these two methods of sampling. Firstly, the use of convenience non-probability sampling leads to results that cannot necessarily be generalizable to the broader population (Hair et al. 2003). The focus of the study is to develop an exploratory understanding of CEB in social media platforms rather than make a generalisation to the target population. Regarding the premises generated (see Chapter Four), the research seeks to validate this through the data collection process with the sampling elements. Thus, convenience non-probability sampling is a suitable method for the study. Secondly, regarding utilizing snowball sampling, a selection bias might limit the validity of the sample as it is dependent on the subjective choice of the respondents (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). However, snowball sampling provides an advantage for concealed populations where access depends on interpersonal contacts i.e. SME owner-managers.

### **5.3.3 Sampling Size**

From selecting an appropriate sampling method, a consideration of the size of the sample is necessary for the study. This is especially important as the sequential nature of the research design is liable to experience sample attrition i.e. some of those firms whose CEBs are observed on social media in the first phase, may not be available to participate in the two part interviews which follow, and thus limit the available sample pool from which to draw. Clark and Watson (1995), suggest that a sample size of 100-200 is deemed appropriate. According to Hair et al. (2003), the researcher needs to consider the variability of the characteristics of the population,

the level of confidence desired in the results and the degree of generalizability of the population. Also, Hair et al. (2010) further categorize the requirements for selecting a sample size in terms of the number of items, constructs and communalities in the study. This is highlighted in Table 5.3.

<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Number of Observed Variables</b>	<b>Number of Constructs</b>	<b>Item Communalities</b>
100	More than three	Five or fewer	0.6 or higher
150	Not significant	Seven or less	0.5 modest communalities
300	Not significant	Seven or less	Below 0.45
500	Fewer than three	Huge number of constructs	Some fewer communalities

(Hair et al. 2010)

**Table 5.3 Sample Size Requirements**

Based on these considerations in the literature, an estimated sample size of at least 100 was deemed adequate for the study. This is due to the five constructs (5 premises proposed in the conceptual framework of the study). The 101 SMEs initially observed were identified through purposive sampling based on the following criteria; matched the requirement as a SME, using either one or all – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, based in the East midlands region, operating in the Fashion Industry. The researcher conducted a raw search through the Google directory guided by the above criteria. A list of 101 SMEs was then compiled from this.

The 11 SMEs interviewed from the 101 SME social media analysis sample were recruited through convenience sampling. There were difficulties in recruiting SMEs because of the COVID-19 pandemic, as detailed in chapter 8, section 8.2.

Some SMEs had gone into administration and many did not respond to interview requests. The final sample of 11 SMEs were approached through email pitches containing an incentive of a £20 Amazon voucher for participation in the interviews.

Thus, the recruited 101 samples from the East Midlands were based in; Nottinghamshire (28 SMEs), Derbyshire (16 SMEs), Leicestershire (12 SMEs), Northamptonshire (13 SMEs), Lincolnshire (21 SMEs), Loughborough (4 SMEs), Rutland (7 SMEs), (see Table 5.4).

<b>SME</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>SME/Firm Type</b>	<b>Social Media Channel(s)</b>
Wild Clothing	Nottinghamshire	Vintage clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
One-BC	Nottinghamshire	Bespoke clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Universal Works	Nottinghamshire	Men's' clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Braveries	Nottinghamshire	Vintage clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Montana	Nottinghamshire	Clothing store (design, art)	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Cow	Nottinghamshire	Vintage clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Relic Vintage	Nottinghamshire	Vintage clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
Mime Store	Nottinghamshire	Independent clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
It's Simple Clothing Ltd.	Nottinghamshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Rohan	Nottinghamshire	Outdoor clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Stick & Ribbon	Nottinghamshire	Boutique ladies clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Platypus UK	Nottinghamshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
Gigi Bodega	Nottinghamshire	Designer clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Forty-Two	Nottinghamshire	Independent clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
Fifty Foot Drop	Nottinghamshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
TUTU	Nottinghamshire	Boutique store	Facebook, Twitter
&BLANC	Nottinghamshire	Men's designer store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Void Clothing	Nottinghamshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Oxygen	Nottinghamshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Laddie Boutique	Nottinghamshire	Bridal store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Jane Young	Nottinghamshire	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
Ragusa	Nottinghamshire	Women's clothing store	Facebook
Shirt Sleeves	Nottinghamshire	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Twitter

Just Silver Apparel	Nottinghamshire	Fashion accessories store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
No Angel Boutique	Nottinghamshire	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Giles & Bella	Nottinghamshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
Vintage Vixen	Nottinghamshire	Vintage clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Chickadee-boo	Nottinghamshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Twitter
Cruise Fashion	Derbyshire	Designer clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Young Ideas	Derbyshire	Luxury fashion retailer	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Lapel	Derbyshire	Designer clothing store	Facebook, Twitter
Brig dens	Derbyshire	Luxury clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
Ribbon	Derbyshire	Independent women's online boutique	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Canopy	Derbyshire	Independent fashion store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Pearls & Scarlett	Derbyshire	Dress store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
White Wardrobe	Derbyshire	Women's boutique store	Facebook, Instagram
The Amber Room	Derbyshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Twitter
Roller snakes	Derbyshire	Skate shop	Facebook, Instagram
Leren Connor	Derbyshire	Independent fashion designer	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
She Fashion	Derbyshire	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
Zebra Menswear	Derbyshire	Designer clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Moo Fashions	Derbyshire	Women's independent boutique	Facebook, Twitter
Liholiho Clothing	Derbyshire	Clothing store	Facebook
Dominque	Derbyshire	Women's independent boutique	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
CONDOTTI	Leicestershire	Clothing store	Twitter
The Wardrobe	Leicestershire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
MyPilot	Leicestershire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Magic Toast	Leicestershire	Surf shop	Facebook, Instagram
Jelly Rolls	Leicestershire	Designer kidswear	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
The Vintage Scene	Leicestershire	Vintage clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Well gosh	Leicestershire	Designer clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
The Business Fashion	Leicestershire	Men's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Trafford Knitwear	Leicestershire	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter



Phillip James Menswear	Leicestershire	Men's clothing store	Facebook, Twitter
Hole in the Wall	Leicestershire	Clothing store	Facebook
Aaliyah Collections	Leicestershire	Online modest fashion brand	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
32 The Guild	Northamptonshire	Women's designer store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
TS2	Northamptonshire	Men's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Thackeray's	Northamptonshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Voni Blu	Northamptonshire	Women's boutique store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Berries	Northamptonshire	Women's boutique store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Story Boutique	Northamptonshire	Women's boutique store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
The Wootton Village Boutique	Northamptonshire	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Twitter
Clues Menswear	Northamptonshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Roberto Clothing	Northamptonshire	Men's clothing store	Facebook
Krystal Clear	Northamptonshire	Fashion group	Facebook
Storm Clothing	Northamptonshire	Men's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Aimee's	Northamptonshire	Dress Shop	Facebook, Instagram
Mary & Me	Northamptonshire	Boutique store	Facebook
EQVVS	Lincolnshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Pretty little	Lincolnshire	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
Bo Peep Boutique	Lincolnshire	Children's clothing store	Facebook, Twitter
Harmony Boutique	Lincolnshire	Women's clothing store	Facebook
Tasty Vintage	Lincolnshire	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Twitter
NO.5 Ladieswear Boutique	Lincolnshire	Clothing store	Facebook
Cahoots	Lincolnshire	Men's clothing store	Facebook
Gere Menswear	Lincolnshire	Men's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Yak Clothing	Lincolnshire	Independent clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
Ego	Lincolnshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Twitter
Agatha Boutique	Lincolnshire	Boutique store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Lucks of Louth	Lincolnshire	Shoe store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Grants.1856	Lincolnshire	Independent clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Energy Clothing	Lincolnshire	Independent clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter

23 Seven Clothing	Lincolnshire	Clothing store	Facebook
Coneys	Lincolnshire	Clothing store	Facebook, Twitter
Kwirky Kow Vintage	Lincolnshire	Vintage clothing store	Facebook
Togs	Lincolnshire	Independent boutique	Facebook
The Boutique	Lincolnshire	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Empire Menswear	Lincolnshire	Designer clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Kays of Grantham	Lincolnshire	Independent ladies' boutique	Facebook, Twitter
Lulu & Nix	Loughborough	Designer dress agency	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Snooks	Loughborough	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Nine Yards Store	Loughborough	Clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
Crowned by Grace Boutique	Loughborough	Women's luxury boutique	Facebook
Cavells	Rutland	Independent store	Facebook, Instagram
Duo Boutique	Rutland	Women's clothing store	Facebook
Ball Gown Heaven	Rutland	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram
Impact	Rutland	Clothing store	Facebook, Twitter
Vanilla Boutique	Rutland	Women's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
**Win or Lose	Rutland	Men's clothing store	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
T-Lab Original Clothing	Rutland	Clothing brand	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter

\*\*reported as permanently closed as of 21/06/2019

**Table 5.4 List of Samples for the Current Study**

## **5.4 Pilot Study**

Before collecting extensive data, a small-scale pilot study was conducted to investigate the feasibility of the various components integrated in the study. As well as to validate the design of the full-scale study, to see if there is a need for alteration of the research design. The overall aim of conducting the pilot study was to assess the efficacy of the research design for its use in the research project.

In that, the pilot study will better inform and prepare the researcher in facing any challenges which may arise in the substantive study. As well as provide, the confidence in using the research instruments proposed to be used for data collection.

Pilot studies are mostly associated with quantitative studies in medicine and nursing (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002). However, in social sciences, there are two main types of pilot studies – feasibility studies and “pre-testing/trying out a particular research instrument” (see Baker, 1994). Feasibility studies are used in assessing the practicality of the research in terms of its utility and implementation, including an assessment of time and costs for the research (Gudmundsdottir and Brock-Utne, 2010).

From this understanding, the pilot study conducted for the purpose of this research can be viewed as a combination of the two types aforementioned. But it is within a research project based on a comparative research study whereby, the collection of qualitative data is the main objective. The preliminary findings are based on the pilot study of an initial individual observational analysis of SMEs social media channel (Facebook) and a series of two clean transcripts collected from conducting semi-structured interviews with SME owner-managers. The main findings that emerged from the pilot study have helped to refine the research design further to ensure validity. In the sense that, the observation of SMEs social media channel – Facebook and interviews with SME owner-managers provided useful insight into understanding the research question. The results show how the SMEs included in the pilot study use Facebook to engage with their customers. As well as, their views on using social media platforms to engage with their customers. Several themes for further research and exploration were also highlighted from the interviews in terms of the dimensions that influence SMEs use of social media platforms; external social triggers, feasibility/accountability, role and responsibility to customers. The themes also shed some light on the research objective *to understand how SMEs are using social media platforms to develop customer engagement.*

Also, in conducting the interviews, observation beforehand of SMEs Facebook page proved helpful in formulating interview questions as well as conducting the interviews. This is because through observation, understanding of how they use their Facebook brand-pages was constructed prior.

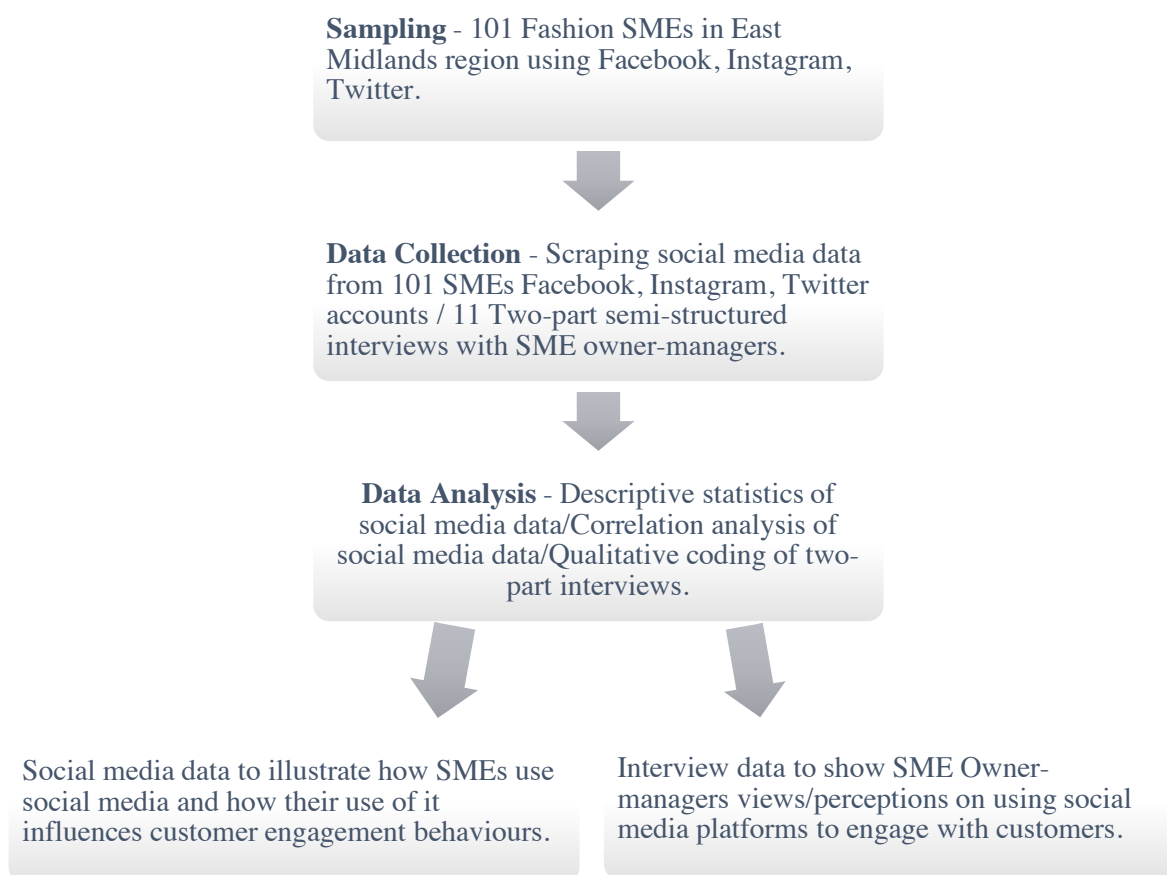
To continue the study, the observation of SMEs social media channels are conducted prior to interviewing SME owner-managers. In addition, although Facebook was only observed, further observation of other platforms such as Twitter and Instagram would prove beneficial to the knowledge of CEBs. As these platforms differ in terms of use, communication and format. Instagram is a visual (photo) focused platform and Twitter a text focused platform. The overlap in communicating for SMEs between all three platforms can be said to provide very insightful findings for further development of the customer engagement literature. Nonetheless, minor setbacks were met in the pilot study, in terms of; time limit of the interview with owner-managers, phrases used in the interview questions being misconstrued by the owner-managers. These details were easily modified in the further data collection stage after testing of the pilot study. The subsequent chapters outline the iterated design implemented after conducting the pilot study, in terms of data collection and data analysis.

## **5.5 Data Collection**

The data collection process will involve; individual observation of SMEs social media channels on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and two-part semi-structured interviews with SME owner-managers. At least 20 UK SMEs operating in the fashion retail sector will be recruited for the interviews. This will be concentrated on the East Midlands region; Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Loughborough, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland. The East Midlands are a growing medium sized UK region mainly consisting of SMEs (European Commission, 2019a).

Since the recession in the 1980s, due to larger firms going out of business, there has been a high cluster of small firms making the East Midlands region mainly characterised by SMEs (Oxborrow and Brindley, 2014).

The process of data collection will be guided by the following flow chart presented in Figure 5.4:



**Figure 5.4 Flowchart of Data Collection Process**

### 5.5.1 Phase 1(Observation of SME social media channels)

The first phase of data collection involves the observation of SMEs social media channels on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This will be utilised through the COBRA (consumer online brand related activities) framework (see Schivinski et al. 2016). Engagement behaviours across all three platforms manifested through the consumption, contribution and creation of brand-related content will be observed. The aim of this phase of the data collection is to address the research objective - *To understand how SMEs are using social media platforms to develop customer engagement.*

Observation of behaviours online can be said to reveal both engagement patterns- from the firm and customer perspective. The observation will be guided by the following:

<b><i>COBRA</i></b>	<b><i>Facebook</i></b>	<b><i>Instagram</i></b>	<b><i>Twitter</i></b>
<b><i>Behaviour</i></b>			
<b><i>Contribution</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>likes</li> <li>comments</li> <li>reactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>likes</li> <li>comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>like/favourite</li> <li>comments</li> </ul>
<b><i>Consumption</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>follower count</li> <li>shares</li> <li>engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>follower count</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>follower count</li> </ul>
<b><i>Creation</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uploading/posting brand content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uploading/posting brand content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uploading/posting brand content</li> </ul>

**Table 5.5 Data Types to be Captured on Social Media in Relation to the COBRA Framework**

Table 5.5 provides an insight into how behaviours on social media will be observed according to the contribution, consumption and creation of brand related content. Contribution refers to the consumer behaviour of liking/commenting brand content related to user-content and user-user interactions regarding a brand (Muntinga et al. 2011). Consumption deals with the behavioural consumer activities that are involved in sharing content (Muntinga et al. 2011), whereas creation regards an active production and publication of brand related content (Muntinga et al. 2011; Schivinski et al. 2016). As all three platforms differ in use, the activities of the COBRA framework will be manifested differently as evidenced in Table 5.5. The observation of SMEs social media channels addresses the bi-directional relationship of a firm's conceptualisation and measurement of CEB and the different forms of CEB that are actually enacted by their customers.

### **5.5.2 Phase 2 (Two-part Semi-structured interview)**

After observation of SMEs social media channels, two-part semi-structured interviews will be conducted with at least 11 SME owner-managers from the samples obtained. The aim is to explore their opinions on customer engagement through social media platforms. The aim of conducting this interview is to address the research objective – *To explore the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement behaviour on SMEs use of social media platforms* from a firm-centric perspective. In the first part of the interview, SME owner-managers will be asked to describe their organisation's activities on their social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) and will begin with grand tour style questions (see Spradley, 1979) before moving on to questions focused on engagement. Grand tour style questions ask the respondents to give a verbal tour of something they are familiar with, in this case SME owner-manager's activities on their social media channels.

Grand tour style questions assist the researcher to enquire from the respondents to give a verbal tour based on parameters decided by the interviewer (Leech, 2002, p. 667).

The second part of the interview will be focused on revealing the social media analysis from initial observation (see phase 1) of the SMEs actual engagement activities on their respective social media channels. Then, SME owner-managers will be asked questions involving their use of social media from the results obtained as well as their perceptions and views on the consequences and measurement of engagement. This sets up an opportunity to explore the view of firms on their social media engagement performance based on their experience first, and then to use observational data which is compared against a sample of their peers, to provoke a reflective dialogue with the interviewer in real time. As semi-structured interviews aid in eliciting the opinions of the owner-managers, it is an effective approach in addressing the phenomenological component of engagement.

## **5.6 Data Analysis**

This section outlines the qualitative data analysis techniques utilised in the study according to the sequence of the data collection process; phase 1 (observation of SMEs social media channels), phase 2 (two-part semi-structured interviews with SME owner-managers). The analysis of the data adopts 4 phases in sequence; comparative analysis of the observation of SME social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), correlation analysis of firm-instigated variables against CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution and creation, framework analysis of the first part of the interviews with SME owner-managers and an inductive analysis of the second part of the interviews with SME owner-managers



### **5.6.1 Procedure/Methods**

#### *Phase 1 (Observation of SMEs social media channels)*

The first phase of data collection will be analysed according to each of the platforms observed: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The Facebook analysis of SMEs brand page will be utilised through the Netvizz tool. Netvizz is a tool that extracts data from the Facebook platform, whereby, file outputs are easily analysed through the software. Information on brand page data will be extracted and a tabular file for user activity around the posts on pages will be created. The software enables extraction of the previous 999 posts and posts by page and users can also be extracted into a spreadsheet as a .csv file. This data can then be interrogated further and visualised in graphics representing the population level behavioural data of SMEs use of Facebook for engagement with their customers. Twitter will be analysed through the Docteur-Tweety software. This helps in collating and accessing large Twitter datasets. It provides a list of contacts (followers, following, member list, interests, suggestions, search results), list of tweets (updates, mentions, search, timeline, member list, favourites and direct messages received and sent). Finally, the Instagram platform will be analysed through scraping SMEs brand pages on the Phantombuster software– posts, followers, following, number of posts, likes/comments as well as tagged posts. The software is primarily used to extract data from websites through a number of simple automated actions. Web-scraping involves the processes aimed at extracting information primarily from a website (Vargiu and Urru, 2012). Web-scraping serves to transform unstructured data on the web (in HTML format) into structured data that can be easily stored and analysed on a spreadsheet (Vargiu and Urru, 2012). The data from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram is used to form and develop a comprehensive descriptive/statistical analysis of the SMEs use of social media as well as, a further correlation analysis of a number of variables in relation to the CEBs (consumption, creation, contribution).

Each dataset is analysed using statistical tools in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, and additional manually coded variables are included and represented visually in graph format to provide comparative illustration of each SME and their use of the respective channels. A descriptive analysis follows, focused on establishing how the SMEs in the sample use social media to engage with their customers with several conclusions drawn in respect to the engagement literature.

*Phase 2 (Correlation analysis of firm-instigated variables against CEBs)*

Following the descriptive analysis, a correlation analysis is conducted on the data extracted from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to gain further insight into the actions of the firms and the CEBs that they subsequently have encouraged. A number of variables related to SMEs usage of social media are tested against consumption, contribution and creation behaviours.

These variables are firm-instigated and are focused on; the type of content posted by the SMEs (text, photo, video), total number of posts and average daily posts of the SMEs. Each variable is examined against CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution and creation. The correlation test utilizes a Pearson correlation co-efficient method, this approach measures the strength and direction of a linear relationship between the variables that are to be tested (Balboas and Jentech, 2006; Lund, 2018a). Following the analysis, results from the test are presented and an extensive discussion of the results are provided in regards to the engagement literature. Practical implications for owner-managers' are also highlighted in regards to using social media platforms as an avenue for engendering CEBs.

### *Phase 3 and 4 (Two-part semi-structured interviews with SME owner-managers)*

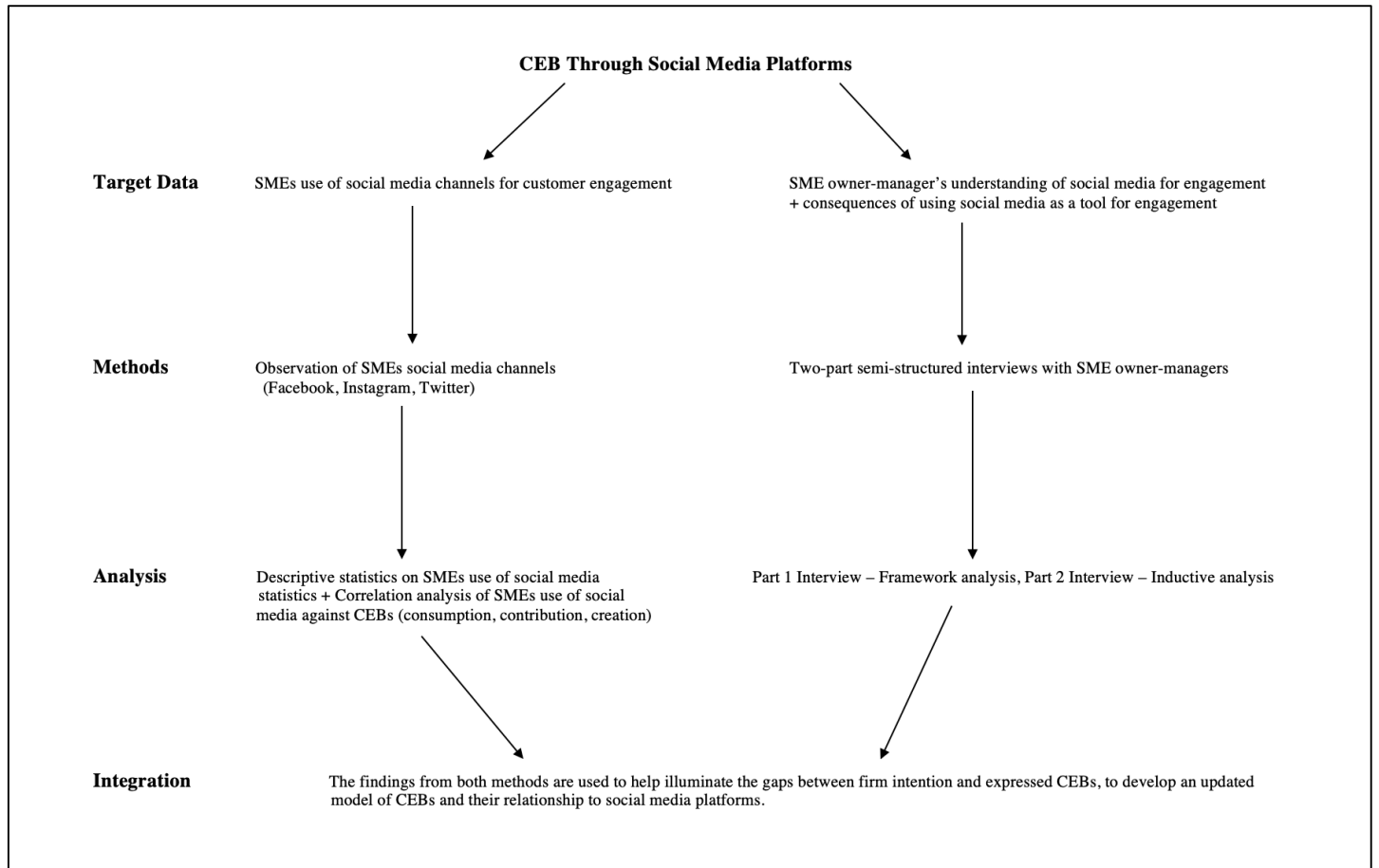
Following the documentation of transcripts from the audio-recorded two-part interviews with SME owner-managers. The method of data analysis will involve a framework analysis of the first part of the interviews and an inductive analysis of the second part of the interviews.

The framework analysis will use the data collected from the initial observation of 101 SMEs social media channels integrated with SME owner-manager's attitudes towards CEBs in the first part of the interviews. This will be centred on addressing the relationship between SMEs attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms. SMEs attitudes will be coded manually using specific attitudinal indicators; Enthusiastic/Positive, Indifferent, Inactive/Negative. The attitudes captured will then be compared with the CEBs engendered on their social media channels to address firms' attitudes in relation to CEBs on social media platforms.

The second part of the interview will be analysed inductively using a data structure reproduced from Corley and Gioia (2011).

This will be centred on revealing the key motivations and limitations of SMEs engagement with social media platforms in regards to the research questions. The data structure enables the construction of a visual aid that represents how the interview data progressed from transcripts, to terms and eventually key themes to extend the understanding of the construct under investigation i.e. CEB.

Figure 5.5 provides a visual representation of the structure of the data for the study. It begins with the overall focus of the research study, then moves on to the target data the research seeks to collect to aid in addressing the research objective. The coinciding methods for each target data are then revealed, followed by the process of analysis for each phases. The data structure serves to provide the reader a fully detailed visual representation of the methods for conducting the study.



**Figure 5.5 Data Structure**

## 5.7 Ethical Consideration

For conducting research, it is important for the researcher to consider the ethics and privacy of samples involved. As Mason and Suri (2012) notes, the researcher is responsible for ensuring there are necessary steps to be taken to conduct ethical research. The main issues to be considered are the collection of social media data and seeking consent for voluntary participation and informed consent of SME owner-managers in the interviews to be conducted. Thus, privacy and confidentiality issues need addressing. To address the issue of privacy and confidentiality of the samples (SME owner-managers), the study is designed to conduct ethically sensitive research.

Thus, the study is focused on the research goals with honesty and openness to ensure that informed consent will be realised throughout the data collection process.

This means that, the research participants will be fully informed of the research aims and objectives prior to agreeing to be interviewed. In addition to being advised of any particular question(s) and can decide to terminate the interview if they choose to do so. The use of electronic data on social media platforms from observation will be in the public domain of Instagram, Facebook and Twitter feeds. Necessary steps and procedures will be taken to ensure that the confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants are met through providing consent forms. Though all posts included in the study appeared on public fora, all social media data is analysed at an aggregate level to remove any issues of consumer identity revelation that could be created. The consent form will highlight the aims and objectives of the research and provide a detailed information of the process involved in observing the sample's social media channels.

In response to incentivising the samples for the interviews, each respondent will be offered £20 in the form of Amazon gift cards to reduce non-response bias and to increase the sample quality (Groves and Peytcheva 2008). The gift card will be sent to the respondents after the interview via email addresses provided. Respondents will be informed, prior to starting the interview, that they can refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study at any time without losing their gift card. The amount offered is nominal and judged low enough that the incentive would not be expected to be the reason for participating.

To conduct the research, an ethical approval application was filed and sent to the Schools of Business, Law and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BLSS REC).

There were no objections on ethical grounds by the ethics panel. This research is therefore conducted in line with the ethics panel approval provided by Nottingham Trent University.

## **5.8 Summary**

This chapter has outlined a consideration of the research methodology. It began with discussing the philosophical paradigm and the research method to be adopted for the study. As well as, the research design utilised for conducting the study. Next, the following section involved the pilot study conducted to validate the research design proposed for conducting the research. The implications of the pilot study aid the researcher to consider several issues regarding; observation of social media platforms, questions formulated for the interviews and time constraints. This was followed by a discussion of the data collection and data analysis techniques. Next, the chapter ends with a section on the issue of ethics for the research regarding the methods used. In the following chapter attention turns to the first empirical study, which introduces a large customer engagement behavioural dataset of observations scraped from the social media web activity of fashion SMEs and the customers with whom they interact.

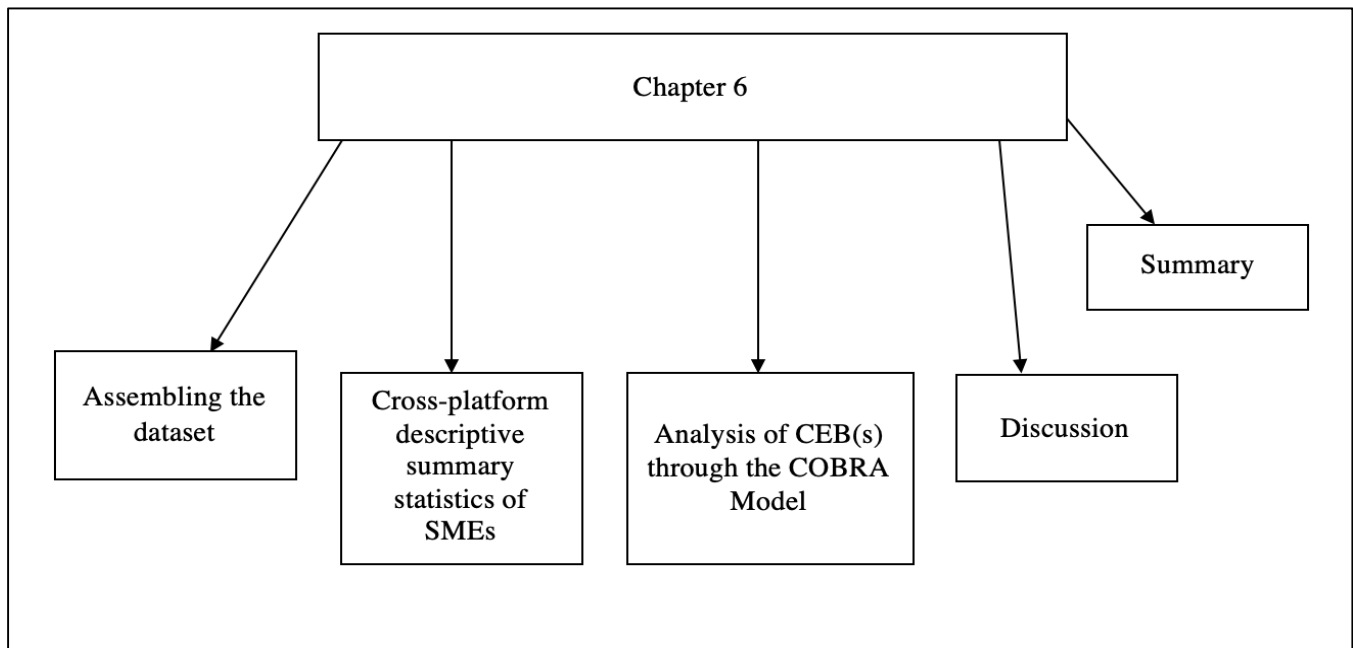
The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CHARACTERISATION OF FASHION SMEs USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

Previous chapters have provided an in-depth review of customer engagement, its relationship between social media platforms and its importance for SMEs. An extensive systematic review of customer engagement behaviour and its antecedents on social media platforms has been conducted and a conceptual framework developed. Chapter five then outlined the appropriate research philosophy, research design and research methodology to conduct the primary data collection for the study. The main focus of this chapter is to present the results from the first of four sequential methods used to examine fashion SMEs and their use of social media platforms. The first section explains how the dataset from each platform was assembled and how the data was sourced, aggregated and processed in relation to SME firm behaviours and customer engagement behaviours. This is followed by a series of exploratory summary statistics of the SMEs activity on three platforms, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Next, a detailed analysis of customer engagement behaviours is provided to establish how the SMEs compare in terms of their social media use of the platforms. The following section discusses the results from the dataset compiled in terms of how SME fashion companies use social media as well as, how customer behaviours vary in relation to firm social media activity. The section also reflects back to the engagement literature for confirmatory/differing evidence regarding firms' social media usage. The final section concludes with a summary of the chapter. Figure 6.1 provides the structure of the chapter in further detail.



**Figure 6.1 Structure of Chapter Six**

## **6.2 Assembling The Data Set**

This section details the process involved in assembling the dataset from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram from 101 SMEs in the East Midlands region. The data from 101 SMEs were scraped using three different tools focused on each of the respective social media platforms: Netvizz (Facebook) (Rieder, 2020), Phantombuster (Instagram) (Phantombuster, 2020) and DocteurTweety (Twitter) (DocteurTweety, 2020). Historical data was collected from each of the services depending on; the social media output of the respective firms and the sampling limits of the web scraping APIs. Most posts collated date over 2018-2019, but some range as far back as 2011.

Netvizz is an application used on the Facebook platform to extract data from different sections – in particular, *groups*, *profiles* and *pages* – for research purposes. Through this tool, file outputs can be easily analysed using other software. Netvizz offers the ability to extract basic data, such as content, frequency of posts, likes, shares and comments from public Facebook



pages. At present, there are no freely available software equivalents to Netvizz that enable a quantitative analysis of engagement metrics and qualitative content analysis of public content on Facebook (Spry, 2019). Phantombuster is a code free automation and data extraction software that can be used to scrape useful data from LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and all over the web. The Instagram scraper extracts available public data from Instagram profiles rapidly and provides the results in a .tsv file. Docteur-Tweety is a subscription based software that provides a service to export data from public/private Twitter profiles, lists, followers, following, mentions of any Twitter account. From the three scraping tools utilised on each platform, the data scraped was aggregated using Microsoft Excel for each respective SME included in the sample. The raw data collected from the scraping tools were compiled in excel spreadsheets grouped in respect to the corresponding firm the data belonged to across all three platforms observed. The data was then processed and analysed according to whether it exhibited either (1) firm behaviour on social media platforms, or (2) customer engagement behaviours on social media platforms. Firm behaviour was analysed and compared at scale across the three social media platforms. The customer engagement behaviours were analysed according to the COBRA (consumer online brand related activities) model (Schivinski et al. 2016).

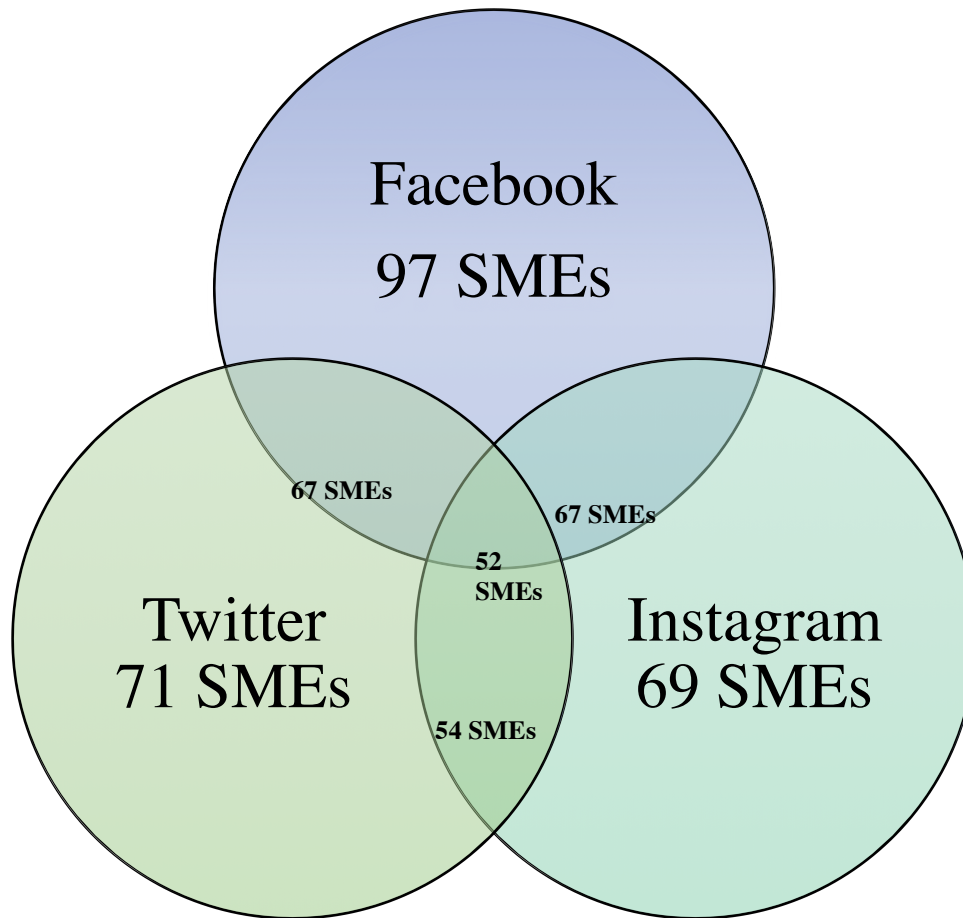
Table 6.1 shows the higher order categories taken from the literature (see Schivinski et al. 2016). These categories are representative of the behaviours to be observed by the researcher on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

<b>COBRA</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Instagram</b>	<b>Twitter</b>
<b>Contribution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• likes</li> <li>• comments</li> <li>• reactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• likes</li> <li>• comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• like/favourite</li> <li>• comments</li> </ul>
<b>Consumption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• follower count</li> <li>• shares</li> <li>• engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• follower count</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• follower count</li> </ul>
<b>Creation</b>	uploading/posting brand content	uploading/posting brand content	uploading/posting brand content

**Table 6.1 Analysis of CEBs on Social Media Platforms in Relation to the COBRA Model**

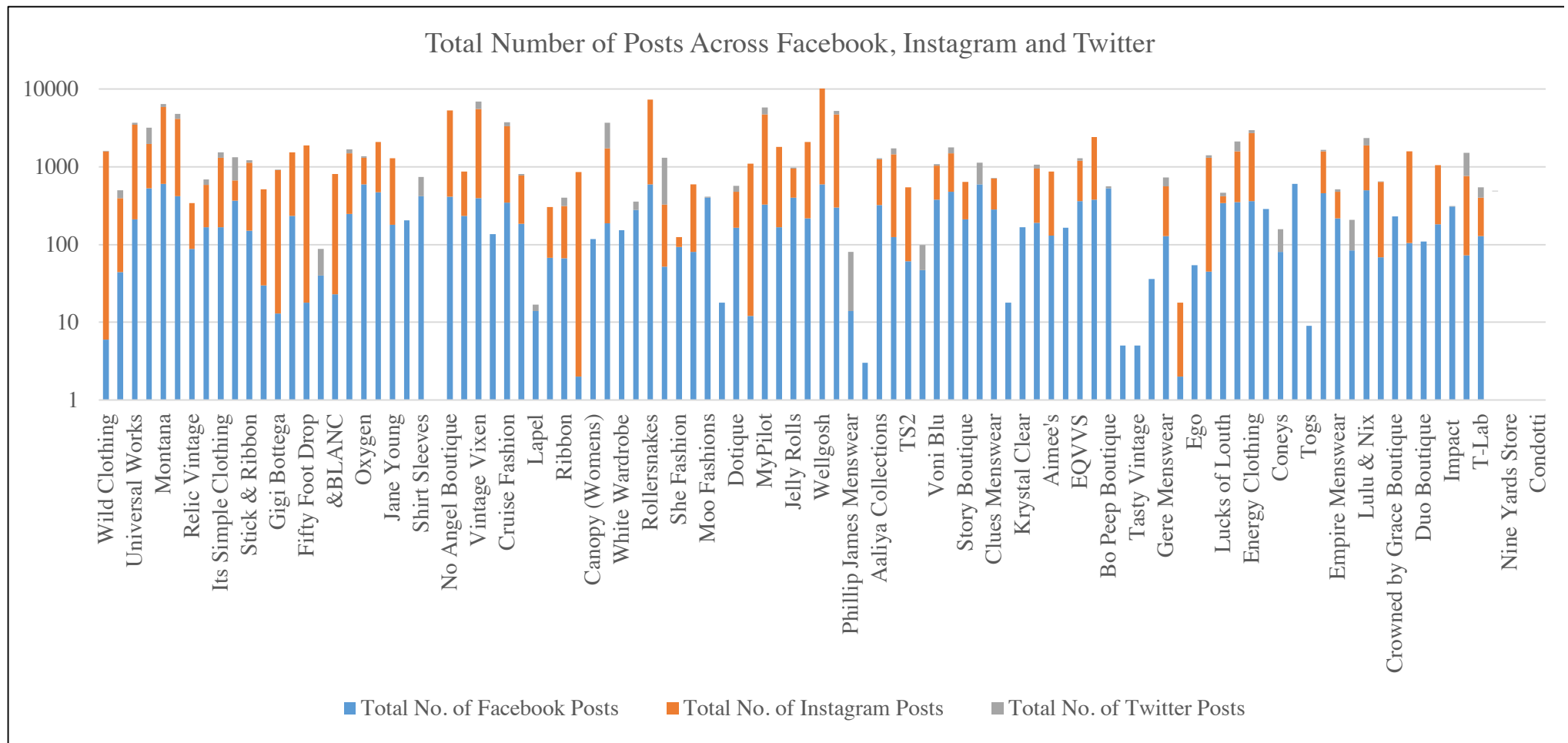
### **6.3 Cross-Platform Descriptive Summary Statistics of SMEs**

The aggregate cross-platform data compiled across the three social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are presented below. As previously mentioned, 101 SMEs were involved in the study, with the criteria of using these platforms for engagement with their customers. Figure 6.2 presents a Venn diagram of the social media platforms used by SMEs for customer engagement. There are clear overlaps in the use of different platforms, 15 firms were found to be using one platform as a standalone tool for customer engagement on social media, while 30 were found to be using two platforms in unison and 56 using all three platforms to engage with their customers.



**Figure 6.2 Venn Diagram of Firms using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram**

In addition to the overlaps found from the data, to further understand the firms' behaviour across the platforms, the total number of posts on each platform for each firm were also compiled. This provides an overview of how each firm compares across the platforms in terms of their use of social media for engaging with their customers. Figure 6.3 illustrates this further.



**Figure 6.3 Total Number of Posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter** (shown on common logarithmic scale)

<b>Platform</b>	<b>No. of SMEs observed using platform</b>	<b>Total no. of observed posts (all SMEs)</b>	<b>Mean Average of Posts per SME</b>	<b>Median average of posts per SME</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Facebook	97	20493	211.2680412	167	177.1398056
Instagram	69	100402	1455.101449	875	1776.765751
Twitter	71	16323	229.9014085	77	375.4591914

**Table 6.2 Summary Statistics of Firm Activities on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter**

The comparative firm data shows insightful results concerning SMEs use of social media platforms to engage with their customers. Firstly, 97 SMEs were observed to be using Facebook, 69 SMEs using Instagram and 71 SMEs using Twitter. With the total number of posts observed for each platform at; 20,493 (Facebook), 100,402 (Instagram), 16,323 (Twitter). Secondly, the mean average of firms posts for each platforms were observed to be; 211.3 (Facebook), 1,455.102 (Instagram), 229.902 (Twitter). The mid-range of firm's posts were observed to be; 167 posts on Facebook, 875 posts on Instagram and 77 posts on Twitter. In respect to the variation of firm's posts, these were observed to be; 177.14 (Facebook), 1776.8 (Instagram) and 375.5 (Twitter). Instagram is the most active platform for the SMEs, with the highest count of brand-related posts – 10,263 and the lowest count observed at just 3 posts. Compared to Facebook with the highest count at 608 and lowest at 0, as well as Twitter at 1933 and 0 posts. This is also evident with firms using all three platforms as there is a disparity in their use of Instagram in contrast to Facebook and Twitter. The number of brand-related posts are not evenly distributed across the three platforms. Although, for firms using two platforms, there appears to be some relatively similar distributions in the number of content posted (see

figure 6.3). Although Facebook is the most popular platform adopted by the firms (see figure 6.2), the comparative data showing total number of posts across the three platforms prove otherwise – with Instagram observed to be the most used/active platforms for all the firms. Despite this, Facebook is still the most popular platform adopted by the entire sample. As 97 SMEs are found to adopt Facebook more than Instagram and Twitter. Instagram was found to be the least adopted platform from the sample, with 69 SMEs making use of it for their business activity.

The finding from the comparative data showing Facebook as the most commonly adopted platform by firms is consistent with Eid et al.'s (2019) study. In their study of B2B (business-business) SMEs on the use of social media sites – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. Facebook was observed to be used by over 70% of the firms involved in the study (Eid et al. 2019). Furthermore, this is also evident in Ahmad et al.'s (2019) study of social media adoption in firms based in the UAE (United Arab Emirates). The usage patterns and frequency of intensity of social media platforms reflected in their study support Facebook as the most used and adopted compared to the following observed social media types; LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google+, Pinterest, Blogs, WhatsApp (Ahmad et al. 2019). These results are also consistent with previous research in the literature, indicating Facebook as the most commonly adopted platforms by SMEs (Franco et al. 2016; Odoom et al. 2017). The use of Facebook by firms is also supported by empirical studies. Wong (2012) purported the use of Facebook having a positive impact on SMEs performance. Kwok and Yu (2013), reported a link between the increase of sales with the use of Facebook and Ainin et al. (2015) suggested the use of Facebook has a strong positive impact on firm performance.

However, these results are contradicted by the findings of McCann and Barlow (2015). These authors observed Twitter as the most commonly used platform by 81% of the SMEs involved in their study (McCann and Barlow, 2015). This is also supported by Eid et al. (2019), who observed 79.1% of the sample of SMEs were found to be using Twitter for marketing purposes compared to other platforms available on social media. In addition to the adoption of Facebook observed from the results, the use of more than one social media platform in tandem by firms is also relevant in previous research. As similarities were found in Odoom et al. (2017) study of SMEs social media usage. The authors found links with performance benefits to SMEs who use a blend of platforms. Their findings suggest that SMEs who use Facebook and Twitter reaped improved benefits compared to other SMEs who adopt each social media separately (Odoom et al. 2017).

Also, the data shows more than one half of the total population of the firms using all three platforms in unison (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) for engaging with their customers. There is a consistency in the number of content posted by 52% of SMEs using a *cross-platform strategy* (use of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) and 7% of the firms falling short of producing content on Twitter. Two novel findings were revealed in the data; Instagram is the most actively used platform and SMEs adopt a *cross-platform strategy* – that is, they use a combination of all 3 platforms for engaging with their customers on their products/services offered. These results prove insightful in the understanding of firms (especially SMEs) behaviour on social media platforms.

#### 6.4 Analysis of CEB(s) Through The COBRA Model

The previous section has provided the data retrieved from observing firm's social media use across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. In this section, the firms' specific observed customer engagement behaviours are the main focus. The results from this analysis are now presented. CEBs of the sample's customers were observed through data obtained via the use of scraping tools; Netvizz (Facebook), Phantombuster (Instagram), Docteur-Tweety (Twitter), raw statistics were aggregated and coded according to the CEBs prevalent on each platform as were outlined in table 6.1. The summary statistics for each platform are shown in Figures 6.4, 6.5, 6.6.

The findings observed on Facebook regarding CEBs reveal customers are much less likely to actively engage with brand-related content in terms of writing *comments* – expressing opinions and remarks. Also, *Engagement* and *Like* behaviours on Facebook seem to be more common behaviours exhibited by customers. In the case of Instagram, the highest number of behaviours exhibited by customers fall into *like* and *following*.

The customers on Instagram were observed to be less active in terms of writing *comments* on brand-related content. However, customers on Twitter seem to be more actively engaged with content posted by SME brands compared to Facebook and Instagram. They are observed to exhibit higher behaviours of *retweet* (re-posting, sharing) of brand-related content rather than exhibiting behaviours of *like/favourite*. This seems to be that there might be a higher value placed on the content of SME brand pages on Twitter, due to the high numbers of *retweet* behaviours exhibited. Also, it was found that with the number of varied behavioural responses to content available on Facebook – *likes, comments, reactions, shares, engagement*, it fails to



generate higher numbers of customer behaviours for the firms in comparison to the limited features on Instagram – *likes, comments* and Twitter – *retweet, favourite*.

Customers were observed to exhibit higher behavioural responses on Instagram and Twitter. Another key observation from the results reveal the *like* behaviour as a strong indicator for the exhibition of other behaviours on Facebook and Instagram. This indicates that the higher the number of *likes* exhibited by customers, the higher the likelihood of other types of behaviours are manifested. In comparison, for Twitter it is the opposite, as customers who exhibit higher numbers of *retweet* behaviours on firm-content seem to manifest higher numbers of *like/favourite* behaviours. Finally, the results also reveal that across all three platforms observed, a high number of customers were revealed to be *followers* of SME brand pages with a high number of engagement metrics compared to their counterparts with lower/less engagement metrics. That is, SMEs with a high number of *likes, comments, shares, retweet, engagement*, etc. garner the attention of customers across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

<b>CEB Type</b>	<b>Total number of observations (across all SMEs)</b>	<b>Mean average of CEBs per company</b>	<b>Median average of CEBs per company</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Creation	1550419	15820.60204	11	87741.88483
Consumption	2050675	20506.75	7058	41601.51152
Contribution	837329	8544.173469	4290.5	13133.38608

**Table 6.3 Summary Statistics of CEBs on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter**

The findings presented in terms of CEBs on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter reflects previous empirical studies related with customer engagement/customer engagement behaviours on social media. Hollebeek et al. (2014) in their study of consumer brand engagement in social media revealed brand involvement to have a positive effect on consumer brand engagement. This involves the personal relevance of a brand and the level of interest exhibited by the customer (Hollebeek et al. 2014). This is in agreement with the observation across all platforms observed that firm's customers were found to be following brands with a higher engagement metric compared to their counterparts. Other scholars also point out the importance of engagement metrics for CEB in social media. Oh et al. (2017) notes the number of likes/comments a brand receives is a strong proxy for CEB. This is further supported by Jayasingh and Venkatesh (2015), noting the total number of followers, number of videos posted and total number of posts have a direct association with customer engagement on Facebook.

The finding expressing *like* as a strong indicator for other behaviours to manifest is also related to Azal et al. (2016) study on consumer interactions on Facebook. The authors propose that there is a positive connotation of the word *like*, implying a positive word-of-mouth. Thereby, users on Facebook are much more likely to have an association with brands they like (Azar et al. 2016). Oh et al. (2017) also points out the importance of *like*. The authors conclude that users on Facebook who like posts are more engaged, connected and active when compared to average users of Facebook (Oh et al. 2017).

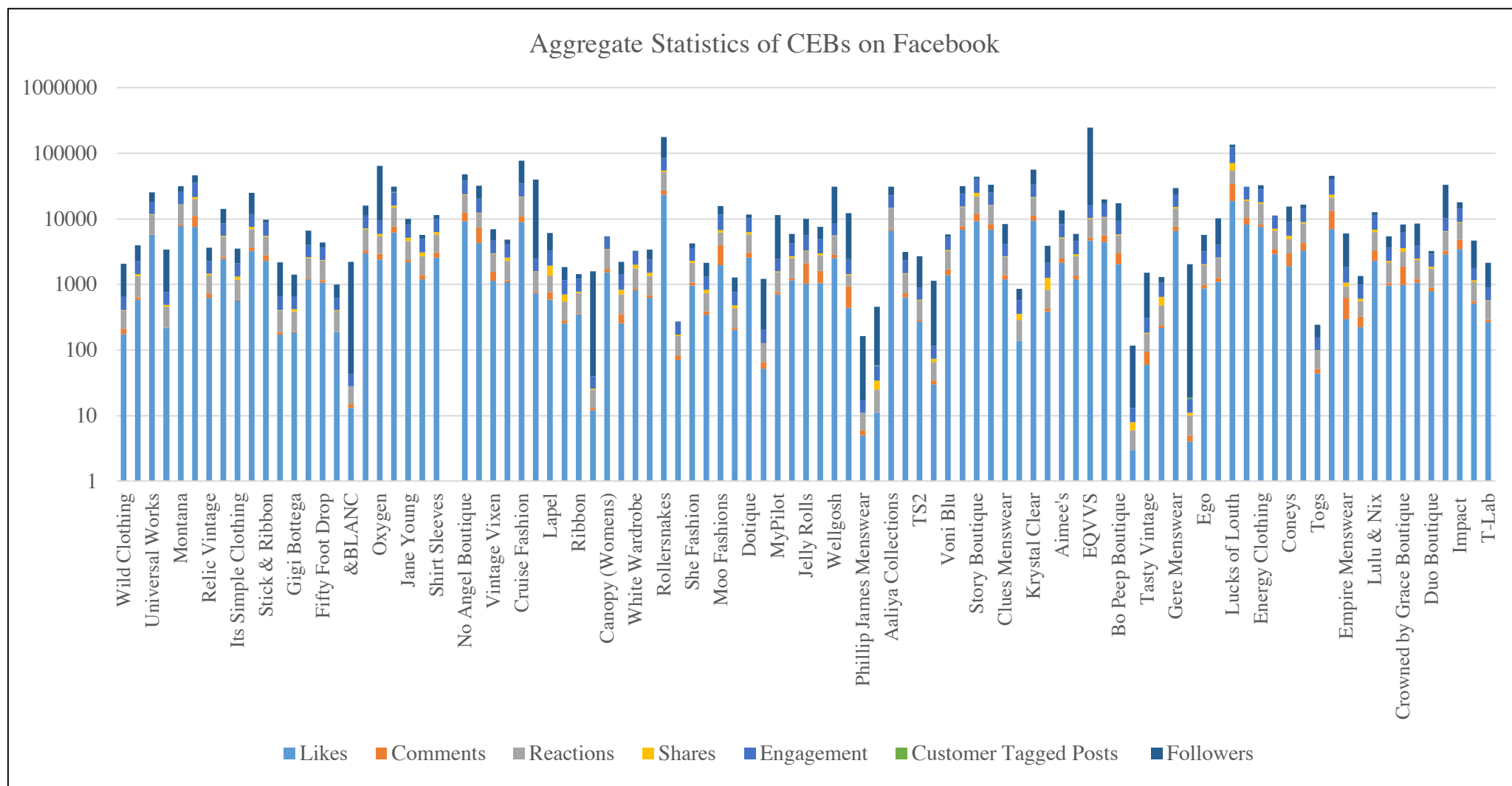
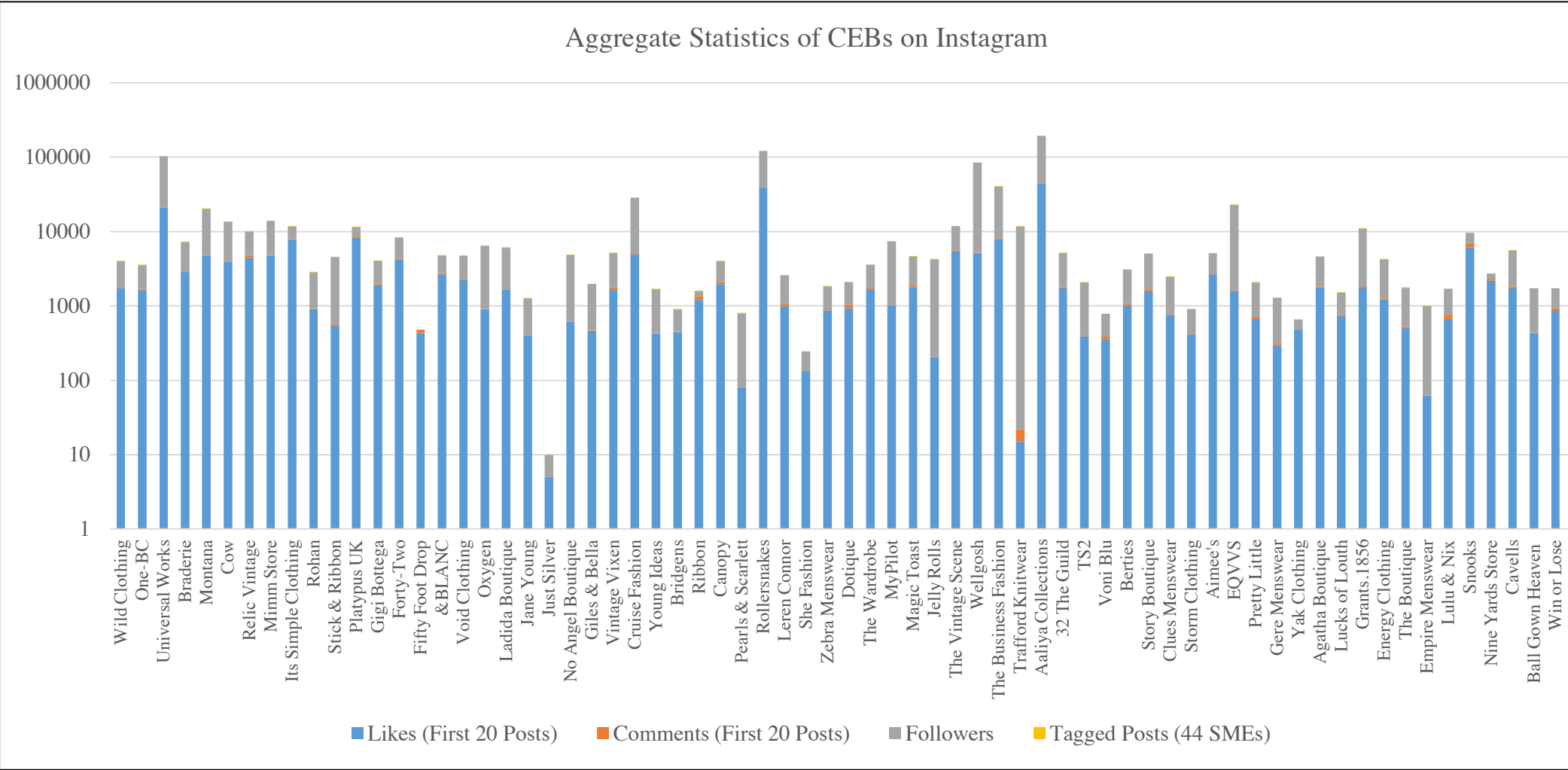
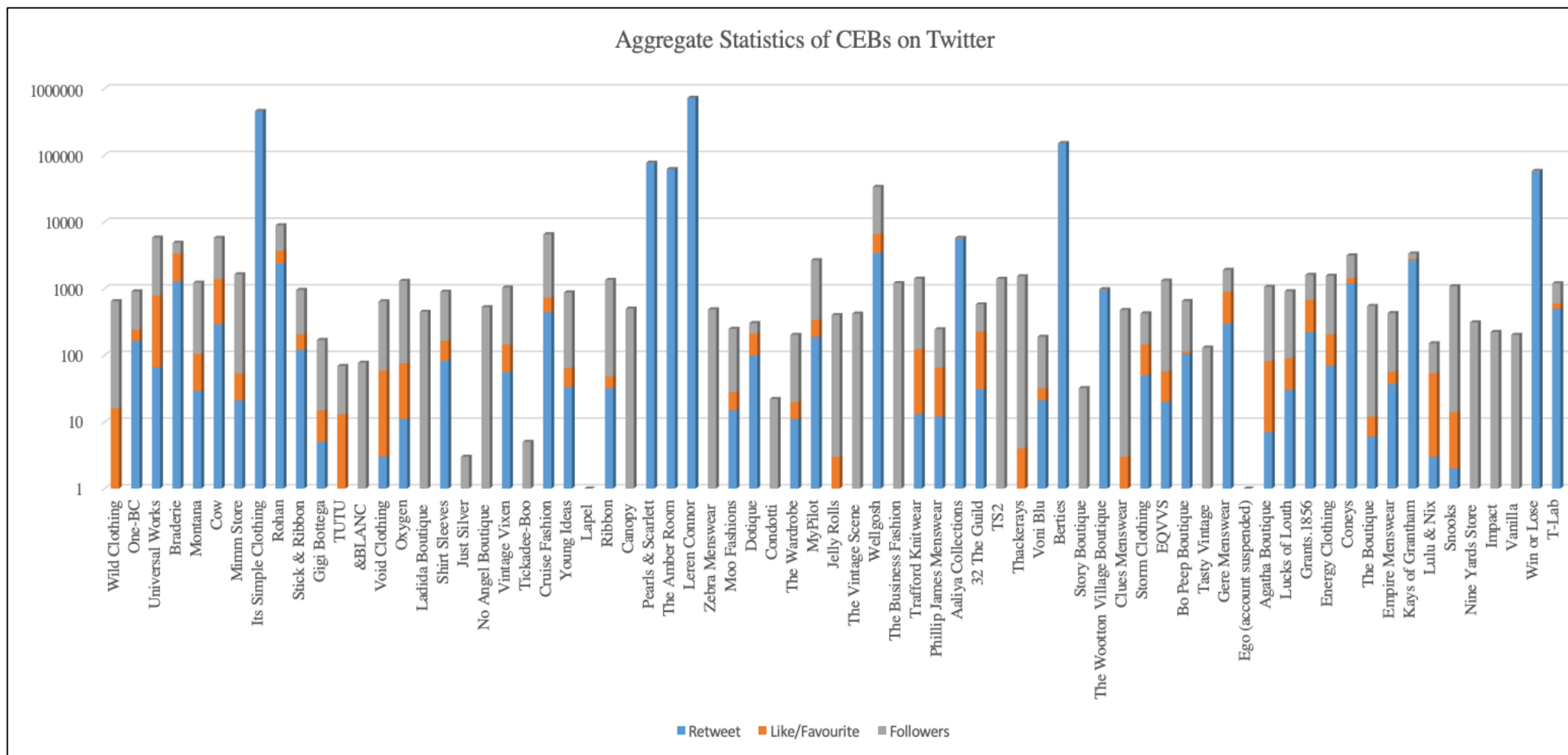


Figure 6.4 Aggregate Statistics of CEBs on Facebook (log scale)



**Figure 6.5 Aggregate Statistics of CEBs on Instagram (log scale)**



**Figure 6.6 Aggregate Statistics of CEBs on Twitter (log scale)**

In addition, the findings reveal customers on Facebook exhibit a higher number of behaviours of *like* compared to writing *comments* also ties in with Azar et al. (2016) characterising these customers as *brand profiteers*. They are said to mainly exhibit *like* behaviours on brand posts that involve; announcements, special offers, promotion of products and posts related to special dates (Azar et al. 2016). In consumer-brand interactions *brand profiteers* exhibit behaviours such as *like*, *sharing* of content but do not usually *comment* on content (Azar et al. 2016). This is further expressed by Halaszovich and Nel (2017) as *opinion-giving*, that is, word-of-mouth on Facebook whereby individuals share information and influence the behaviours of others. The authors determined that *like* coincides with the intention to engage in word-of-mouth rather than connecting with a brand (Halaszovich and Nel, 2017). The results from the samples on Facebook revealing SME customers exhibiting higher behaviours of *like* reflects this. Importantly, the customers were observed to be less connected with the SME brands through exhibiting less commentary on content and more actively exhibiting *like* behaviours. In the case of Twitter, revealing SME customers to be more actively engaged, exhibiting higher behaviours and higher numbers of *retweet* behaviours. This is related to Carlson *et al.*'s (2017) account of relationship building value on social media. The authors express that customers seek interactions with brands to foster and develop an on-going relationship. This is typically then enhanced through the brand's social media page involving real-time interactions, relevant and personalised to the customer (Carlson et al. 2017). For some of the SMEs customers on Twitter, this is revealed in the high number of *retweet* behaviours exhibited across Figure 6.6.

Following the establishment of a relationship between the findings of CEBs across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter with previous research, the raw statistics presented were aggregated into their corresponding COBRA category – consumption, contribution, creation. This is done across the three platforms, including a graph drawn up to visually represent the distributions

of each COBRA behaviours across all three platforms. This is presented in the following figures below.

### *Facebook*

The consumption behaviours on Facebook represented on the graph shows an uneven distribution in terms of the number of SMEs that these behaviours are exhibited towards. For contribution behaviours, this is revealed to be almost evenly distributed across the graph forming the same downward slope as the creation behaviours represented. Also, the graphs show consumption behaviours exhibited more commonly compared to contribution and creation behaviours.

The high distribution of consumption behaviours towards the firms reveal that customers on Facebook are more prone to exhibit behaviours of sharing, following, etc. on firm's brand pages. Thus, rather than contributing to brand content by liking, commenting or creating brand-related content on their user-page, consumers on Facebook seem more inclined to digest the content posted by brands they follow. It can be posited here that consumers on Facebook are not particularly interested in actively engaging with brand pages on Facebook. This is represented in the mean average of CEBs for each firms, as consumption behaviours were averaged at 20,506.75 compared to contribution behaviours at an average of 8,544.2 (see Table 6.3). They are more interested in consuming brand-related content they follow.

Aggregate Consumption/Contribution/Creation Behaviours on Facebook

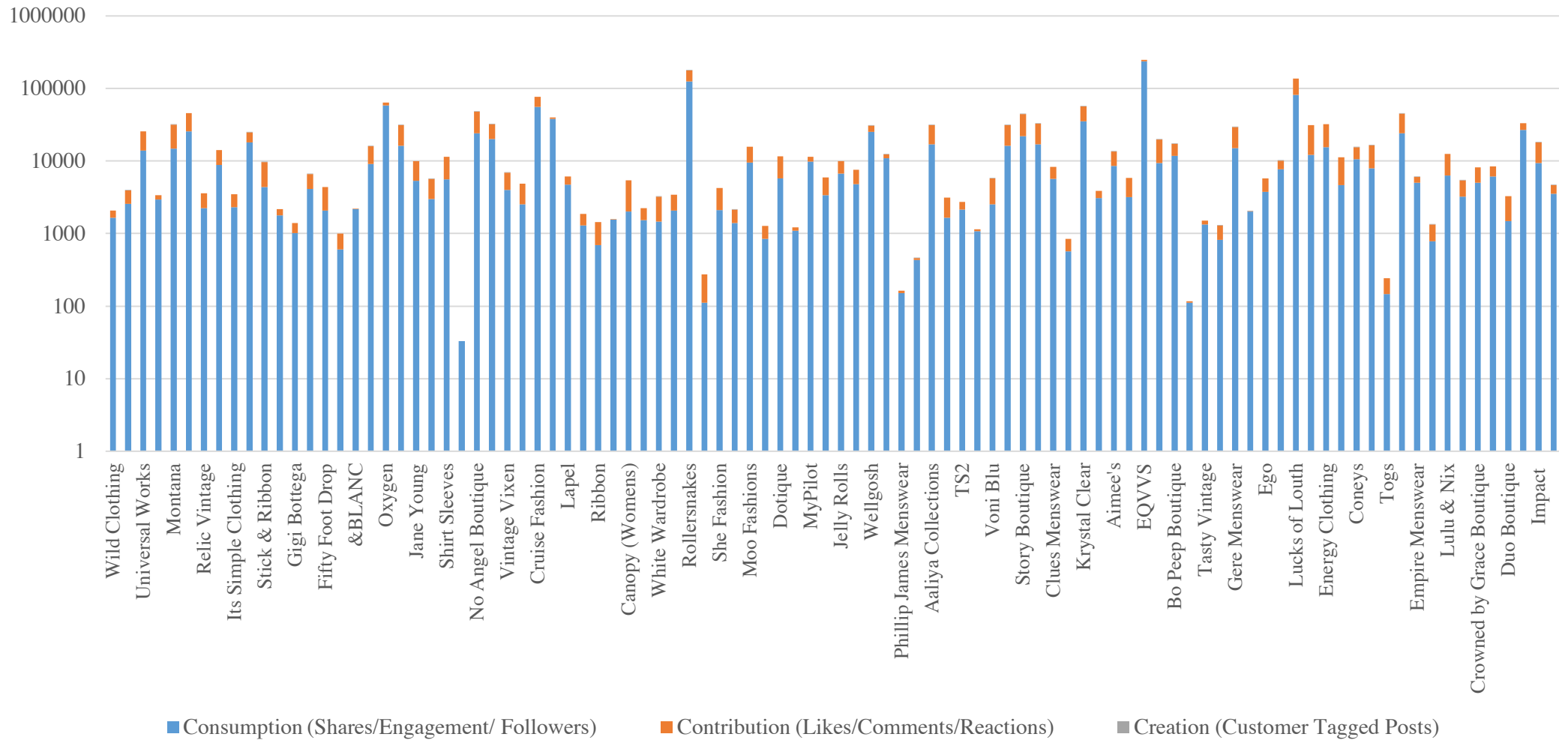


Figure 6.7 Aggregate Consumption/Contribution/Creation Behaviours on Facebook



The distribution of contribution behaviours on the graph presented are evenly distributed, but there is a low distribution in terms of the behaviours exhibited by the customers – like, comments, etc. This could be linked to the fact that brand content posted on Facebook do not engender contribution behaviours from their customers or customers on Facebook are not active in terms of exhibiting contribution behaviour types towards brands they follow. This is clearly revealed in the low distribution of creation behaviours exhibited in Figure 6.8. Due to the customer's in-activity in exhibiting high contribution behaviours to brand-related content on Facebook, their creation behaviours (customer tagged posts) are in turn affected, as customers on Facebook will not be prone to post brand-related content on their user-pages, because of the low count of contribution behaviours. For example, if a customer does not *like* a brand's content/brand-related content, they are much more likely not to exhibit creation behaviour types – posting about the brand, tagging the brand on their user page.

Figure 6.8 shows the distribution of CEBs on Facebook. Each behavioural type – consumption, contribution, creation are carefully explored and visually represented on the graphs. The figure presents a representation of the responses from each behavioural type and a comparison of each on the Facebook platform.



**Figure 6.8 Distribution of Consumption, Contribution and Creation Behaviours on Facebook**

## Instagram

In the case of Instagram, contribution is found to be more commonly exhibited by customers. With the distribution of contribution and consumption revealing a similar shape across the graphs. Surprisingly, creation behaviours on Instagram show an upwards slope across the graph. In Devereux et al. (2019) study of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, the authors found Instagram to receive more *likes* on picture and video posts due to the visual characteristics of the platform.



**Figure 6.9 Distribution of Consumption, Contribution and Creation Behaviours on Instagram**

The results in the current study however, shows that customers on Instagram are more inclined to posting/creating their own brand-related content (i.e. *tagged posts*) rather than actively engaging with brand/firm content (i.e. *brand/firm posts*) on Instagram.

Thus, this improves understanding of the platforms, as Instagram is regarded as solely a visual platform, *likes* and *comments* are not necessarily the only main form of engagement behaviours. Firms can also focus their efforts and place resources on customers creating brand-related content independently through *tagged posts*.

Customers on Instagram are also revealed to be actively exhibiting all three COBRA types. The relative proportion of the three CEB types on Instagram were observed at; 2331.37 contribution, 6463.01 consumption, 4.23 creation. In comparison to Facebook at; 5922.55 contribution, 12261.74 consumption, 1.36 creation and Twitter at; 142.67 contribution, 892.68 consumption, 15498.6 creation. The average number of CEB types exhibited also reveal this; Instagram (3378.8 contribution, 9504.43 consumption, 9.614 creation), Facebook (6105.722 contribution, 12640.97 consumption, 1.4021 creation), Twitter (200.944 contribution, 1293.74 consumption, 21829.01408 creation). Also, the variation in the number of CEB types exhibited on each platform reveal Instagram's activeness. These were observed at; Instagram (29072.1241 consumption, 9263.1 contribution, 4.155 creation), Facebook (7326.622 consumption, 23970.00009 contribution, 1.234 creation), Twitter (3337.444 consumption, 498.733 contribution, 102640.3023 creation). Although, with the results of the distribution of behaviours on Facebook revealing consumption as a more commonly exhibited behaviour in comparison to contribution and creation, this is also the case on Instagram. Figure 6.9 reveals the high distribution of consumption behaviours exhibited by customers – following a brand page. Despite this, customers on Instagram are more active in terms of contributing to brand-related content and in turn exhibiting higher forms of creation behaviours – this is revealed in figure 6.9. The high distribution behaviours revealed here could be linked to the fact that Instagram is a user-friendly interface and the application is mainly focused on showcasing imagery first above other content types – videos, text, gifs, etc. (see Kaperonis, 2019).

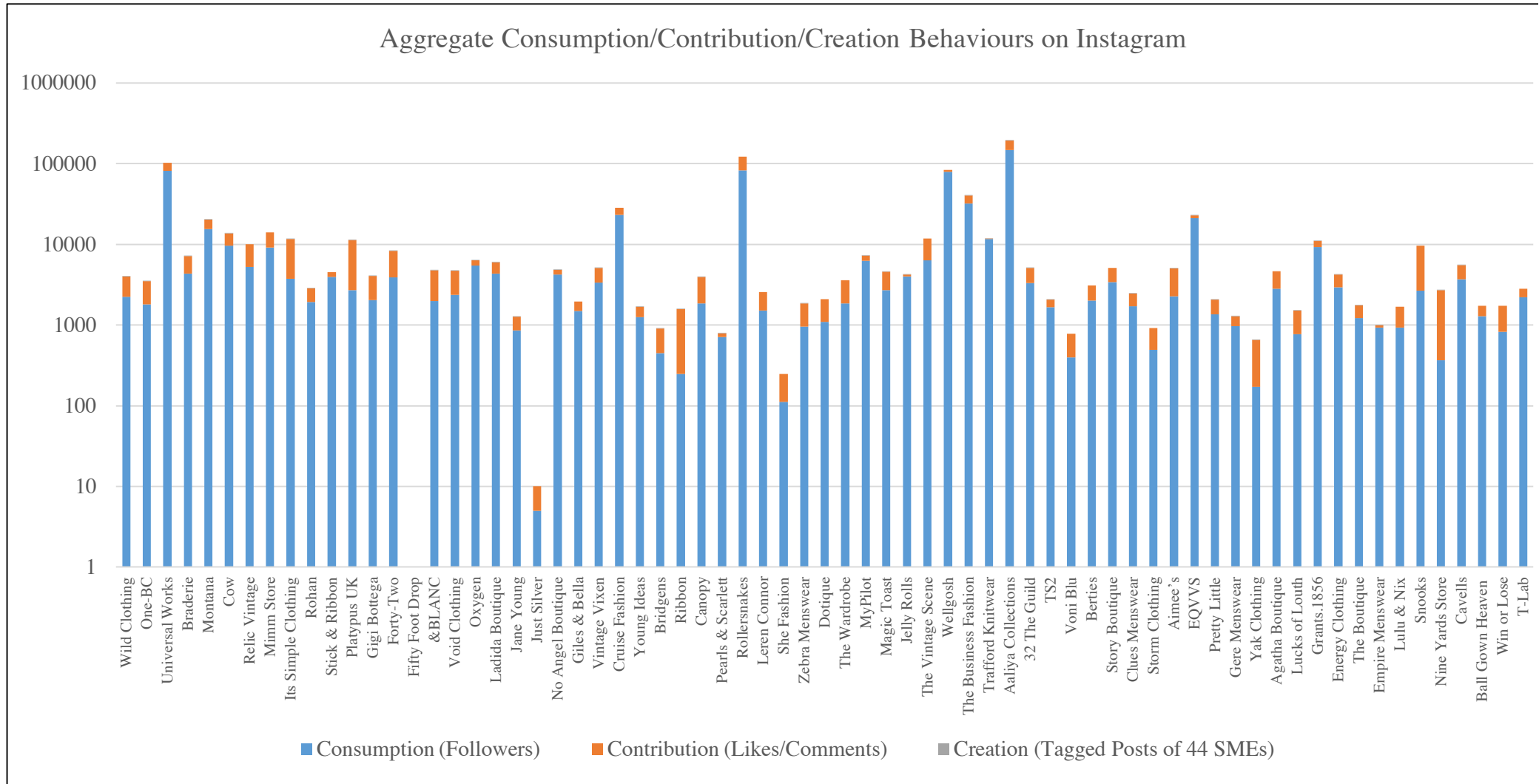
Compared to Facebook, customers are revealed to be more active in exhibiting creation behaviours towards brands. Although, the graph captured minimal results of creation behaviours on Instagram, the distribution is skewed upwards compared to Facebook's downward sloping distribution of creation behaviours captured.

The graphs also suggest the customers to be most actively engaged on Instagram, as all behaviour types – consumption, contribution and creation reveal a seemingly high distribution of behaviours exhibited. This can be linked to the sample's industry – Fashion. Compared to other social media types, Fashion brands on Instagram have a 98% penetration rate, ranking second below the Auto Industry (Statista, 2019c). Thereby, customers on Instagram are much more likely to exhibit all COBRA behaviours or some form of COBRA behaviour towards a fashion brand they follow. Additionally, social media platforms allow the ease of diverting resources from expensive fashion campaigns on popular fashion magazines, television and billboard advertisements, making it a very important tool for fashion brands due to the content promoted on Instagram – photos, videos. Mohr (2013), notes that unlike fashion-focused related media, the emergence of social media platforms, has boosted the industry through word-of-mouth and viral marketing. Kim et al. (2012) also noted the importance of social media platforms for fashion brands due to its friendly attention, affection from customers towards brands and the ability to stimulate customer's desire for fashion brands. Likewise, Chu and Seock (2020) recognise the importance of Instagram as the most influential source for insight into the fashion industry. The fashion industry has benefited from the emergence of social media platforms through posting pictures, videos, text about the products and services offered to attract customers and increase brand awareness (Chu and Seock, 2020).

## *Twitter*

For Twitter, creation behaviours are more commonly exhibited, this is consistent with the raw data extracted from initial observation. Although, the shape of the graph is seen to represent a downward slope compared to the consumption behaviours which show an even distribution and upwards slope. However, contribution behaviours follow the same downwards slope as creation behaviours.

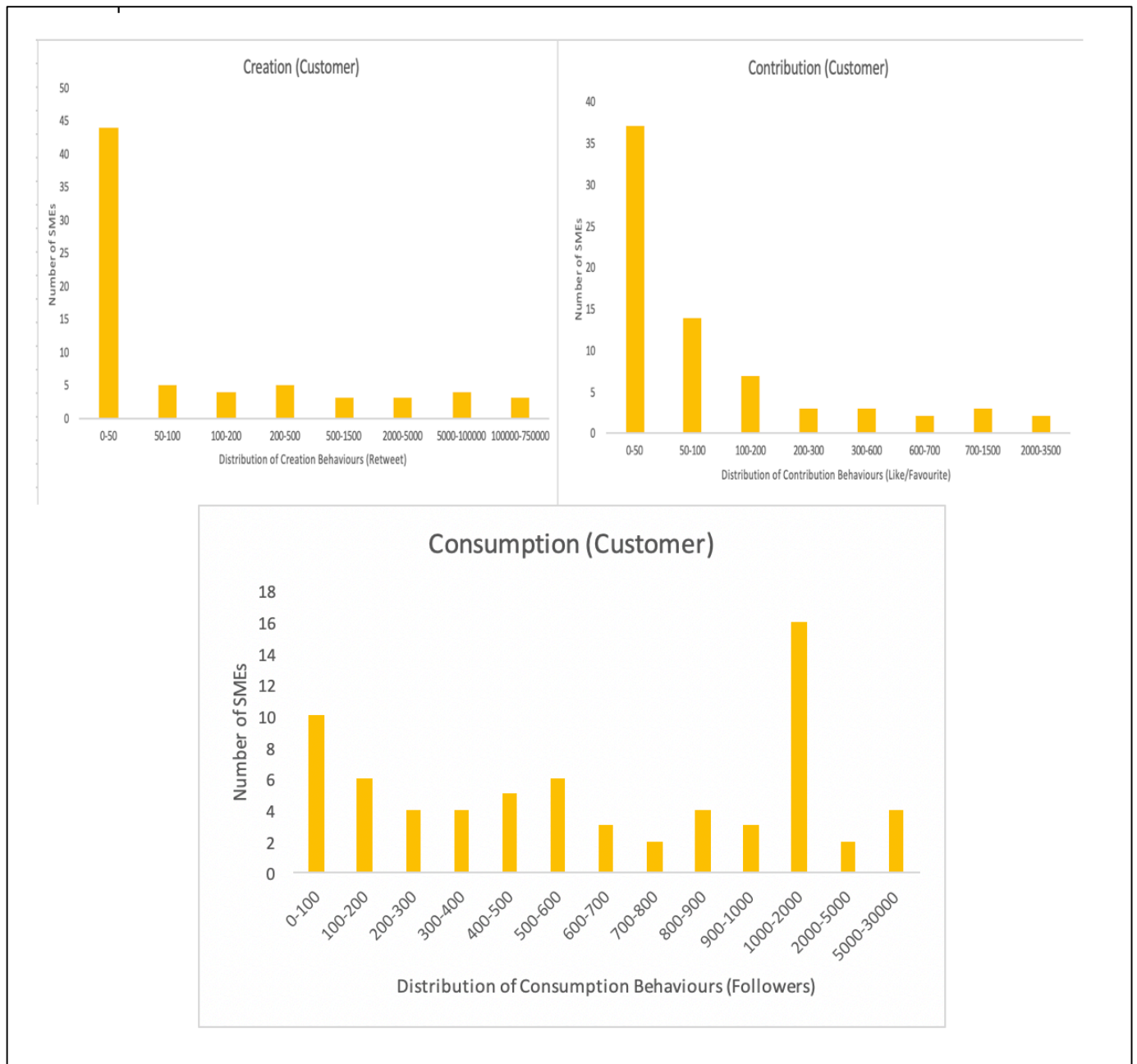
The distribution across all three behaviour types also reveal that customers are disengaged with firms in terms of exhibiting contribution, consumption and creation towards them. This also means for the firms that the platform is less active in terms of engendering these behaviours. That is, Twitter has a low engagement rate for the firms across all the behaviours observed. The reason behind this can be that the firm's do not simply understand the use of Twitter for engaging with their customers or the medium doesn't suit the products/services offered – this is clearly revealed in the uneven distribution in figure 6.11. The low distribution rate of behaviours across all three behaviours also reveals SMEs general lack of awareness of the tools available for helping business development in terms of marketing strategies.



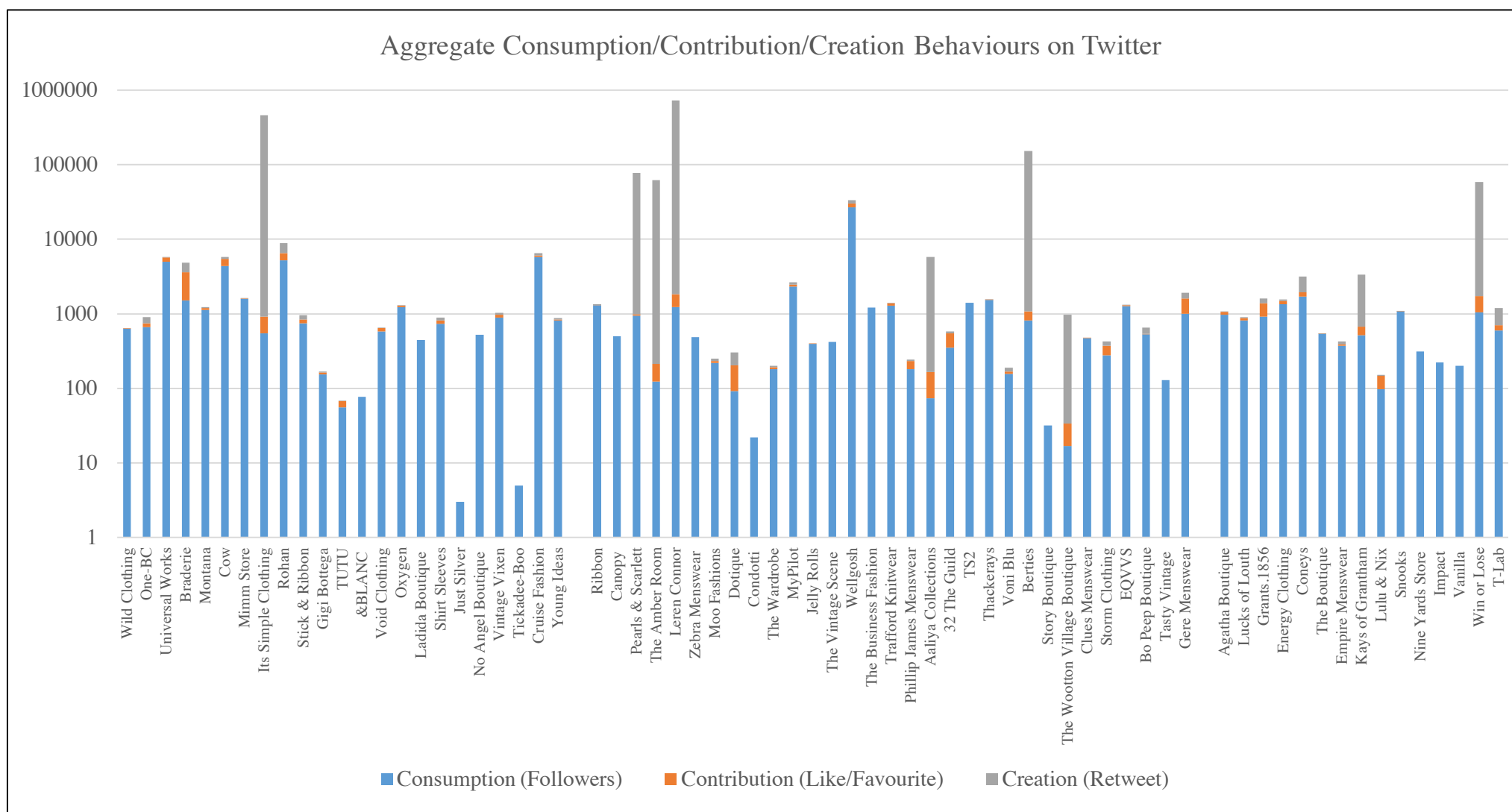
**Figure 6.10 Aggregate Consumption/Contribution/Creation Behaviours on Instagram**

The distribution shows consumption behaviours are the highest behaviour exhibited, although the results are uneven in terms of the shape formed across the graph – see figure 6.11. This is also the same case in the other platforms observed, consumption behaviours can be said to be the most commonly exhibited behaviours by the brand's customers. The results of this suggests SMEs need a better understanding of how to utilize these platforms better in order to engage with their customers and engender contribution and creation types more commonly as consumption behaviours are being exhibited across all three platforms observed. The graphs clearly reveal their customers as passively engaging with their content – consuming brand-related content on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Active behaviours do not seem to be the most common type of behaviours across all the platforms. This is important to note for SMEs as they do not have a large resource base compared to larger organisations with a marketing team and budget assigned to their business strategies.



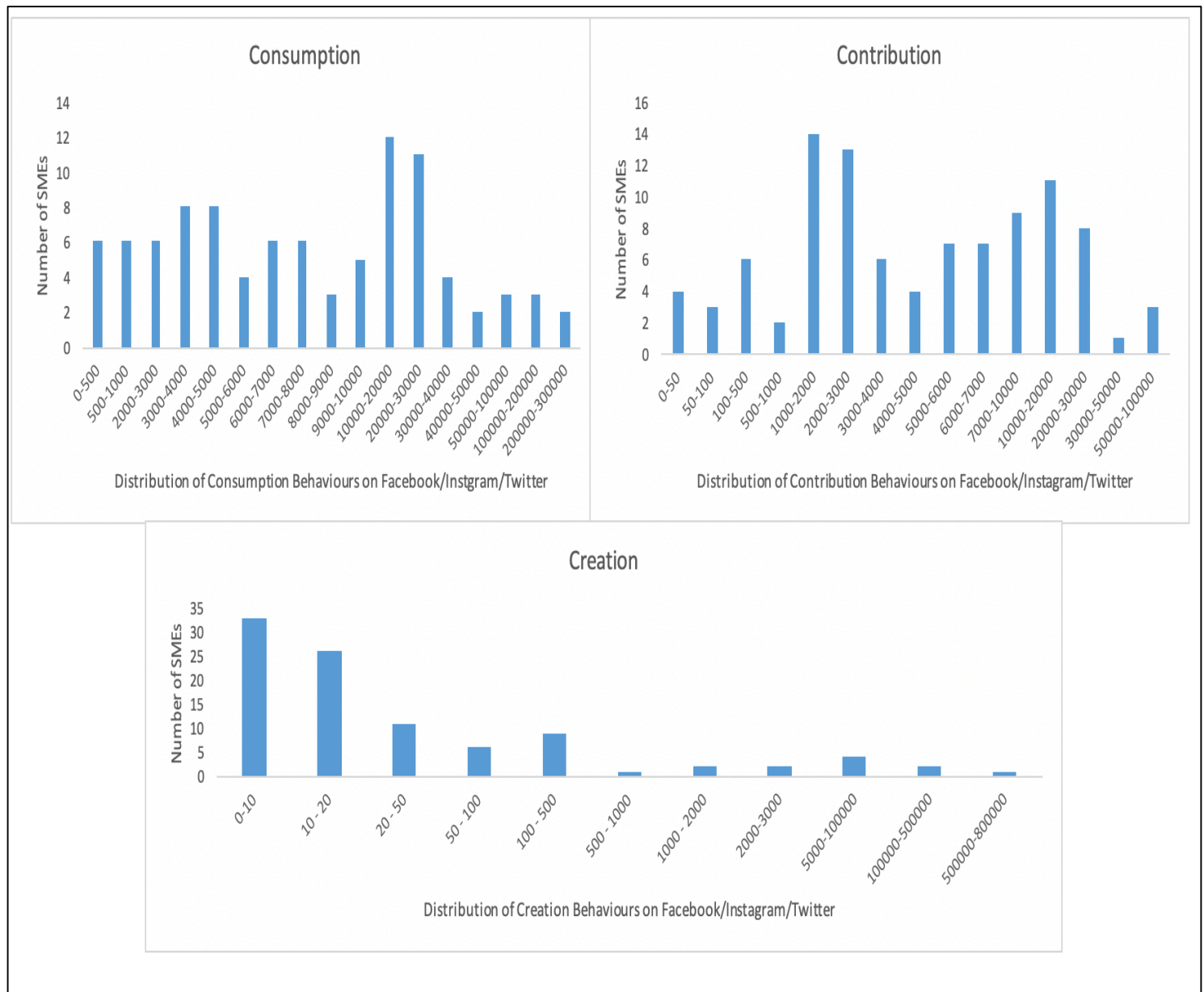


**Figure 6.11 Distribution of Consumption, Contribution and Creation Behaviours on Twitter**



**Figure 6.12 Aggregate Consumption/Contribution/Creation Behaviours on Twitter**

In order to have a better understanding of the COBRA behaviours exhibited on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, a comparison of the distribution of consumption, contribution and creation behaviours across all three platforms were compiled. That is, all consumption, contribution and creation behaviours observed on each platform were plotted into a distribution graph. The results obtained from this are presented further below.



**Figure 6.13 Distribution of Consumption, Contribution and Creation Behaviours on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter**

The comparison of COBRA behaviours across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter show a number of findings. First of all, consumption and contribution behaviours are exhibited more commonly across all three platforms. Creation behaviours are revealed to be far less commonly exhibited (See Figure 6.13).

Also, the distribution of consumption and contribution behaviours are found to form the same shape. With the number of behaviours exhibited evenly across the graph. This can be understood as consumption and contribution behaviours i.e. *likes, comments, follower count* all signify a behavioural response to brand-content. Whereas, for creation behaviours, the distribution of behaviours are heavily skewed. This can be understood in terms of customers actively creating/posting content, as there would be more of an effort from customer's behavioural responses to brand-related content through *tagging* firms/brands on social media platforms.

With consumption and contribution behaviours having the highest distribution of behaviours across all three platforms, this shows that customers are more prone to consume and contribute to brand-related content across social media platforms. The low spread of creation behaviours across Figure 6.13 point to the fact that customers aren't fully engaged with these firms enough to post brand-related content on their user pages that promote the brand to their followers, other customers and potential customers. This also means for the firms, there needs to be more of an awareness on the necessity of these platforms for their businesses. As they do not seem to engender critical engagement behaviours from their customers, the use of the platforms seems to be a *follow the crowd* strategy. This is noted in Mesko and Stieglitz (2013) study of the adoption and use of social media in SMEs. The authors found approximately 28% of the SMEs studied reveal that they had adopted and implemented social media platforms solely because of the current social media trend in IT (information technology) (Mesko and Stieglitz, 2013).

Thus, these type of firms incorporate social media platforms into their businesses without the understanding or basis as to the potential it serves for businesses in terms of communicating, engaging with customers about business offerings, new products, maximising profit, reputation, loyalty etc.

Besides this, compared to other behaviours, contribution behaviours are found to have a high distribution in terms of the evenly spread shape it forms across the graph. This could possibly be that customers initial/first engagement with a brand's page on social media are manifested through exhibiting contribution behaviours – likes, comments etc. Then leading on to exhibiting consumption and creation behaviour types on brand-related content. Also, the similarity between contribution and consumption behaviours in terms of the shape of the distribution across the platforms can be assumed that these types of behaviours are the most popularly manifested types on social media platforms. Thereby, customers are more inclined to share, follow etc. (consumption) and like, comment (contribution) on brand-related content rather than exhibit behaviours of creation on social media platforms.

## **6.5 Discussion**

The comparative firm data shows that Fashion SMEs adopt Facebook as a valuable tool for engagement. Although, they are much more active in their use of Instagram in terms of communicating, posting their content compared to other social media types. The data also shows Fashion SMEs using multiple platforms in unison to communicate their brand offerings to their customers. In this sense, for Fashion SMEs, there is an awareness of the importance of reachability of the content they create when more than one platform is utilised to engage with their customers.

This analysis provides further understanding into the advantages social media platform provides for SMEs in combatting constraints they face in terms of marketing issues and strategy development - in line with this evaluation, De Vries and Carlson (2014), suggest social media platforms offers the opportunity for SMEs to extend communication to existing and future customers. This is also supported by Stokes and Nelson (2013), expressing social media platforms as an avenue for SMEs to overcome the constraints of limited resources, technical knowledge to communicate with niche audiences. Given these limitations on SMEs, the freedom to set up social media platforms and adopt it into their business strategy can help them make well-conceived decisions. Franco et al. (2016) further notes that SMEs can expand their reach and extend their businesses using these forms of media.

For customers, the comparative COBRA results shows that customer behaviour varies between consumption and contribution behaviours. Consumption/Contribution behaviours were revealed to be more commonly exhibited across the social media platforms observed. This is similar to the customer engagement cycle proposed by Sashi (2012). In this sense, for a firm's social media activity to fully complete the engagement cycle with customers, the initial stages of engagement are reflected through exhibiting consumption/contribution behaviours to the firm's content. Sashi (2012), argues in order to progress through the cycle of engagement, the interactions have to be mutually satisfying. Mittal and Kamakura (2001) point out that satisfaction is an intermediate step in the strategies of engagement for organizations. Thus, for firms' social media activities to fully generate customer behaviours, there needs to be an *affective* and *calculative* commitment- strong emotional bond (Sashi, 2012). This is in line with van Doorn et al. (2010) suggesting the impact of engagement depends on the firms' ability to codify and preserve the engagement activity in some form. Customer behaviour can be said to be dependent on the firms' social media activity, in terms of the ability to guide the customer from the initial stage of posting/creating content to a beneficial final stage of engagement.

## **6.6 Implication for the next stage of the research**

From the conclusive results drawn out from observing the samples, the data have revealed a number of questions, which will require an in-depth discussion with SME owner-managers through a semi-structured interview. The discussion will be centred around topics involving the owner-manager's awareness of the use of their social media channels, their awareness of the behavioural responses from their customers on their brand posts. Also, how/if the owner-managers review their social media strategies to better inform their social media engagement practices. The data revealed here will also better inform the researcher in preparing and conducting the interviews with SME owner-managers to fulfil the overall aim of the research.

## **6.7 Summary**

This chapter presented the empirical results of the observation phase of the research. The results showed that for Fashion SMEs, Instagram is the most actively used type of platform and Facebook is the most commonly adopted type of platform for all firms. Also, Fashion SMEs adopt the use of a combination of platforms to engage with their customers i.e. a *cross-platform strategy*. For Fashion SME customers, contribution and consumption behaviours are more commonly exhibited across social media platforms. With contribution behaviours revealed to be the most common type of behaviour exhibited by their customers on all platforms observed. In the next chapter, the results will be further examined through conducting a correlation analysis of firm-instigated variables against consumption, contribution and creation behaviours. In particular, the data is used to support further analysis of the relation between firm behaviours and customer engagement behaviours. The subsequent results then inform the next phase of the research involving two-part semi-structured interviews with the SME owner-managers themselves.

The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

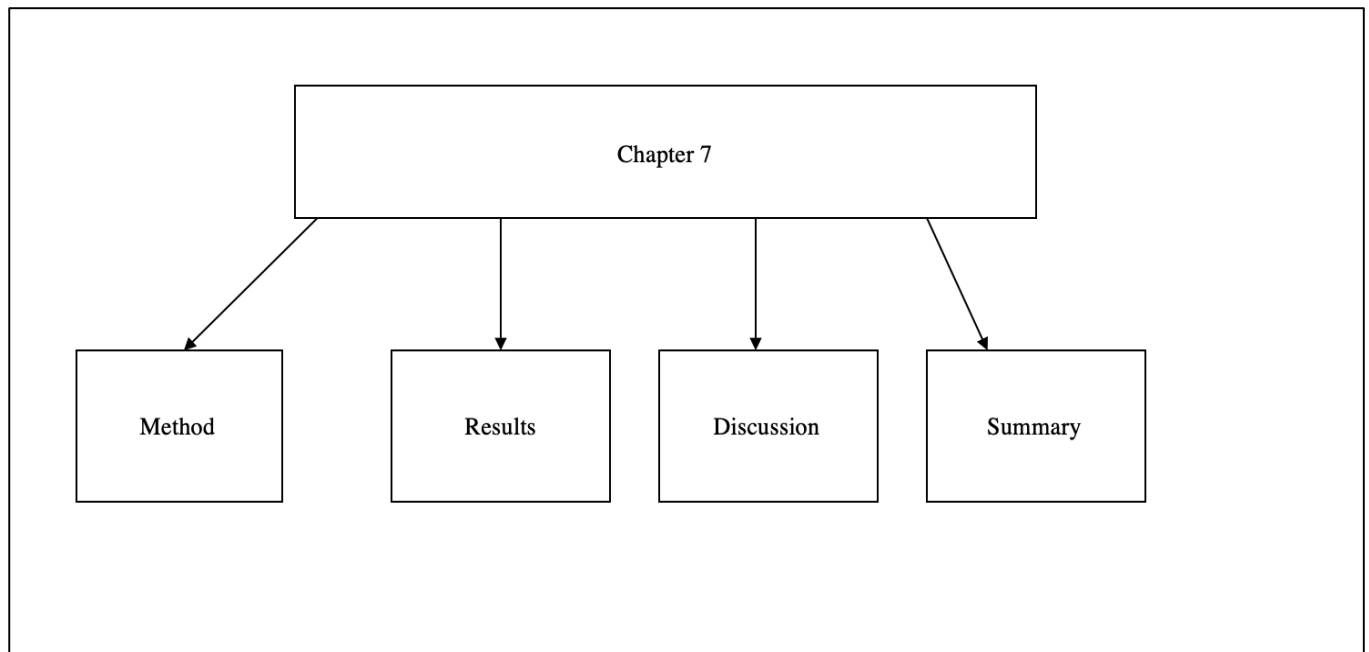
## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CORRELATION ANALYSIS OF CEBs IN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS (FACEBOOK, TWITTER, INSTAGRAM)**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter is focused on a correlation analysis between CEBs and a range of variables that describe how firms actually use social media. The chapter begins by discussing the method; outlining how the analysis was conducted, the variables chosen in the analysis and a justification as to the type of correlation test used in the analysis. This is followed by the results captured from the correlation analysis, as well as some descriptive summary statistics. Next, a discussion of the results is presented in regards to what key authors have discussed in terms of the relationship between CEBs in social media platforms and firm's usage of it. Including, what the data from the correlation analysis shows in terms of the relationship between the two constructs and how this informs the research. The chapter ends with an overall summary. Figure 7.1 presents the structure of the chapter in further detail.





**Figure 7.1 Structure of Chapter 7**

## **7.2 Method**

The data used for the correlation analysis were captured and compiled in excel spreadsheets as outlined in the previous chapters. The focus is on exploring a number of firm-instigated variables that can help explain how firm performance affects the manifestation of particular CEBs. The variables tested in the analysis were focused on; the type of content posted by the firm (text, photo, video), total number of posts by the firm, and the average daily posts by the firm. These variables were examined against the three CEBs – consumption, contribution and creation behaviours. In order to conduct the correlation analysis on the variables against the CEBs, a consideration of the most common types of correlation were covered - Pearson, Spearman, Kendall, Gamma correlation co-efficient.

This was done primarily to assess the correlation type that fits best with testing the data appropriately in the research. Table 7.1 presents this further.

<b>Correlation Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>
Pearson correlation co-efficient	The measure of the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two variables	Data/variables are interval or ratio.  Well approximated, normal distribution/line not a curved/parabolic shape.  Data needs to be normally distributed/linear.
Spearman correlation co-efficient	A non-parametric measure of correlation which assess how well a monotonic function describes the relationship between two variables without making assumptions about the frequency distribution of the variables.	Data must be ordinal/interval, ratio level.  Data must be monotonically related.  No requirement of; frequency distribution of variables and linearity between variables.
Kendall's rank correlation co-efficient	A non-parametric correlation used to assess and test correlations with ordinal or continuous data.	Variables to be measured on an ordinal or continuous scale.  Data to follow a monotonic relationship.
Goodman and Kreskas's gamma correlation co-efficient	A non-parametric correlation used to measure the strength and direction of association between two variables on an ordinal scale.	Variables to be measured on an ordinal scale.  A monotonic relationship between variables.

(Balboas and Jentech, 2006; Lund, 2018a)

**Table 7.1 Consideration of Correlation Co-Efficient Types**

Following a consideration of the various correlation co-efficient types in regards to their fit for the data. The Pearson correlation co-efficient informed the correlation analysis. As previously discussed, it measures the strength of a linear association between variables. It varies on the values between +1 to -1. This means that the value of zero indicates no association between

the two variables. A value greater than zero indicates a positive association and a value less than zero indicates a negative association (Lund, 2018b). Thereby, the stronger the association between the two variables, the closer the correlation will be to the values of +1 or -1 depending on if the relationship is positive or negative. There are assumptions that underpin the Pearson correlation co-efficient and these assumptions were carefully considered before analysing the data to check the appropriateness of using the statistical test. See Table 7.2.

<b>Pearson Correlation Co-Efficient Assumptions</b>	<b>Research Data</b>
The two variables should be measured on a continuous scale i.e. at the interval/ratio level	Variables are measured on a continuous scale ranging from zero.
The two continuous variables should be paired, i.e. two values.	Each SME case has two values e.g. <i>Total no. of text posts</i> and <i>Total no. of consumption behaviours</i>
There should be an independence of cases	Each cases for the 101 SMEs are independent as the observations – SME usage of their social media channels against CEBs are independent for each SME in the test.

(Lund, 2018b)

**Table 7.2 Validity Check of Pearson Correlation Co-Efficient Assumptions**

As the assumptions were met for the Pearson correlation co-efficient in regards to the study design and how the variables are measured, the researcher conducted a Pearson correlation co-efficient for the further correlation analysis of social media data captured from 101 SMEs. The results of this are presented in the following section.

### 7.3 Results

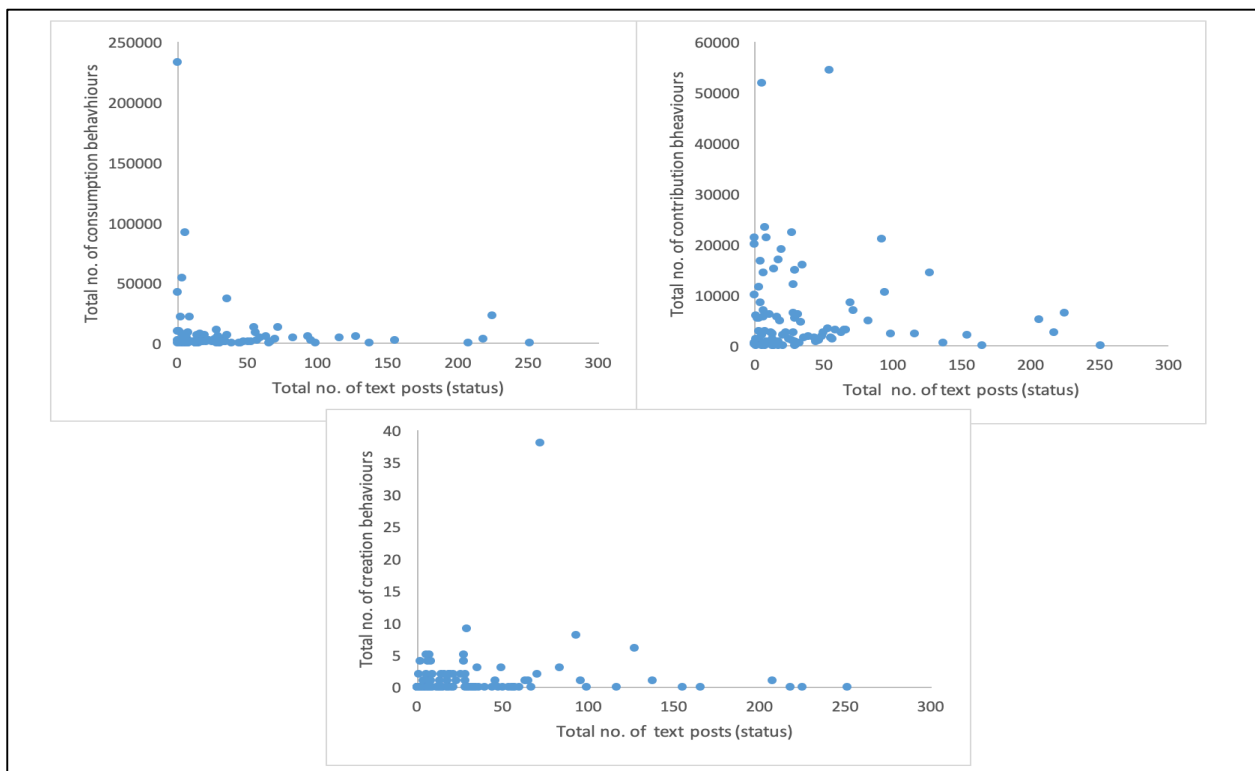
This section is focused on presenting a descriptive summary of the results from conducting a Pearson correlation co-efficient of a number of variables against CEBs (consumption, contribution, creation) on social media platforms. They are classified as; type of content (text, photo and video), total number of firm posts and average daily posts of firms. The type of content (text, photo, video) enables further insights into the importance of the content of the post, similarly to prior studies on the relationship between content/type of content and customer engagement. In Devereux et al. (2019) study of 2,607 posts across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, the authors investigated the relationship between text, picture, video posts and the level of engagement. The study revealed a significant relationship between the two variables. Additionally, photo posts were found to engender more *likes* than text and video posts (Devereux et al. 2019). This is consistent with De Vries et al. (2012) study revealing vivid and interactive posts enhance the number of likes. Thus, this correlation test will aim to provide more of an understanding of how firms engage more effectively with their customers on social media platforms. In the case of total number of posts, testing the relationship between the amount of brand-related content firms push to engage with their customers and the behavioural responses from their customers is sure to generate some understanding into how these firms engage on social media platforms. Also, testing the average daily posts of firms ensures understanding of how these firms perform on a daily basis in promoting their brand-related content for engagement with their customers, etc. These two correlation tests – total number of posts and average daily posts – also reveals if these firms are actually benefitting from their adoption of social media platforms.

Likewise, in Ahmad et al. (2019) study investigating the effects of social media adoption on SME performance. The study revealed no significant effect suggesting these firms were not benefitting from their adoption of social media platforms (Ahmad et al. 2019). Thus,

conducting these two correlation tests extends further understanding of how/if firms are actually benefitting from their investment into adopting social media platforms. As McCann and Barlow (2015) suggest, for the measurement of success in social media to be meaningful, the measurement must be linked to its original objective – social media adoption. In this case, the original objective can be interpreted as the firms’ strategies in engendering behavioural engagement – i.e. their total number of posts and average daily posts.

### *Type of content (Text, Photo, Video)*

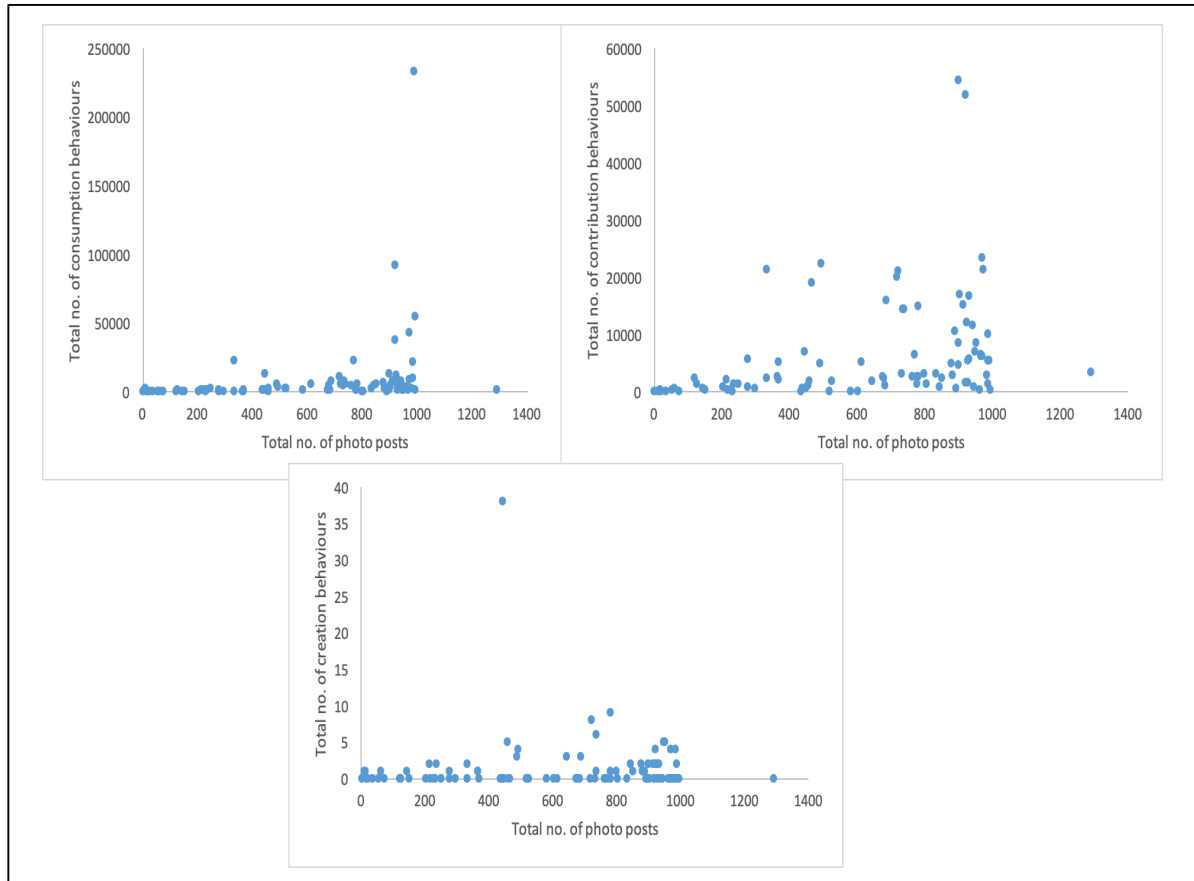
The first analysis in regards to the *type of content* were the text posts of firms against CEBs on Facebook. Following a scatterplot of the data, the test revealed a negative correlation between the total no. of text posts by a firm in engendering CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution and creation on Facebook. Figure 7.2 shows evidence of this further.



**Figure 7.2 Total no. of Text posts/ Total no. of Consumption, Contribution & Creation Behaviours on Facebook**

In Figure 7.2, the total no. of text posts (status) were placed on the x axis and the corresponding total no. of CEBs (consumption, contribution, creation) were placed on the y axis. Each data point from the scatter plot conducted for the CEBs revealed no significant relationship between the variables as evidenced in Figure 7.2. With the correlation revealed to be; consumption ( $r = -0.098392878$ ), contribution ( $r = -0.067618847$ ), creation ( $r = 0.055952837$ ) and the r-squared; consumption (0.00968), contribution (0.00457), creation (0.00313).

Following this, the total no. of firm's photo posts was tested against the 3c's on Facebook. This showed no correlation between the amount of photo posts by a firm in regards to the behavioural responses of their customers i.e. consumption, contribution and creation behaviours. The results from the scatterplot are presented in Figure 7.3. The correlation revealed to be; consumption ( $r = 0.252513533$ ), contribution ( $r = 0.338168915$ ), creation ( $r = 0.025930908$ ) and the r-squared; consumption (0.06376), contribution (0.11436), creation (0.00067)



**Figure 7.3 Total no. of Photo posts/Total no. of Consumption, Contribution & Creation Behaviours on Facebook**

The lack of correlation between text posts and photo posts by the firms in encouraging consumption, contribution and creation behaviours on Facebook proves very beneficial in understanding social media usage by firms for engaging with customers. As Facebook's interface comprises of the sharing of text, photo posts between its users.

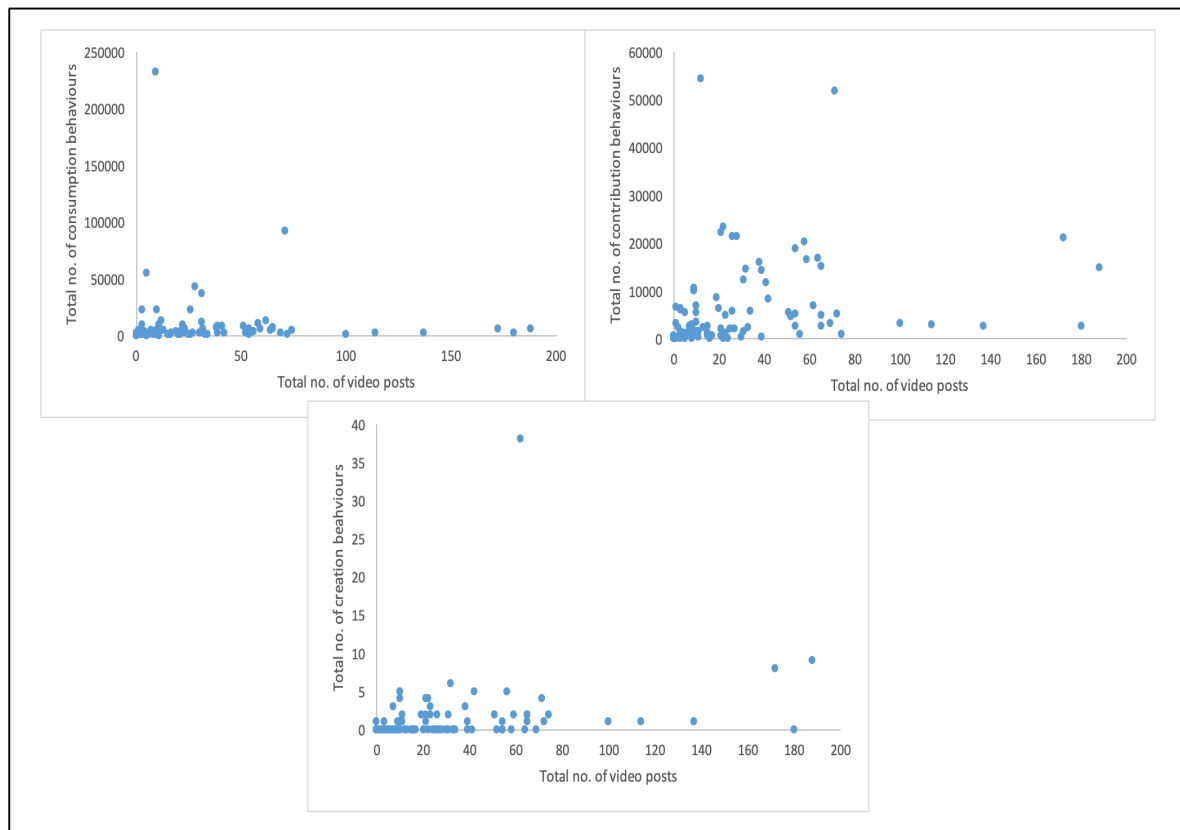
The lack of correlation revealed in the results here, suggest that firms need to have a better understanding of how to properly utilise social media platforms for marketing purposes.

The implication of this suggests to firms, especially SMEs with limited/no resources to spare need to make important decisions on what platforms might be best suited for marketing their products/services. Thus, SMEs need to think strategically in terms of adopting a specific social

media channel as well as, a business goal/objective to aim for when utilising their social media marketing. This result is consistent with existing literature in SMEs adoption of social media platforms, revealing firms adopt new technology i.e. social media because their counterparts are doing the same in the market. Thus, SMEs are unaware or unsure of the benefits of social media, simply because they have adopted it to their business practices due to its popularity or fear of lagging behind their competitors in the market (Rogers, 2010; Ahmad et al. 2019).

The results also reveal no correlation between video posts by the firms and contribution, creation behaviours from their customers on Facebook. There was a negative correlation found between video posts and consumption behaviours (see Figure 7.4). The correlation revealed; consumption ( $r = -0.019312011$ ), contribution ( $r = 0.25209734$ ), creation ( $r = 0.276077752$ ) and the r-squared; consumption (0.00037), contribution (0.06355), creation (0.07622). The lack of correlation here is very surprising. According to a 2019 social media report of 777 million Facebook posts, video content on Facebook performs better than all other content types on Facebook posts (see Peters, 2019). With the lack of correlation revealed here between video posts and the three forms of behaviours on Facebook, a revamp of firms understanding and appropriate usage of social media is needed. Especially in terms of the type of content posted for promoting their products/services. Strategic thinking into what would fit their promotional content is important for engaging their customers – for example, new products/offers would best fit in a photo type content, whereas posting new products/offers in a video content would not be applicable.

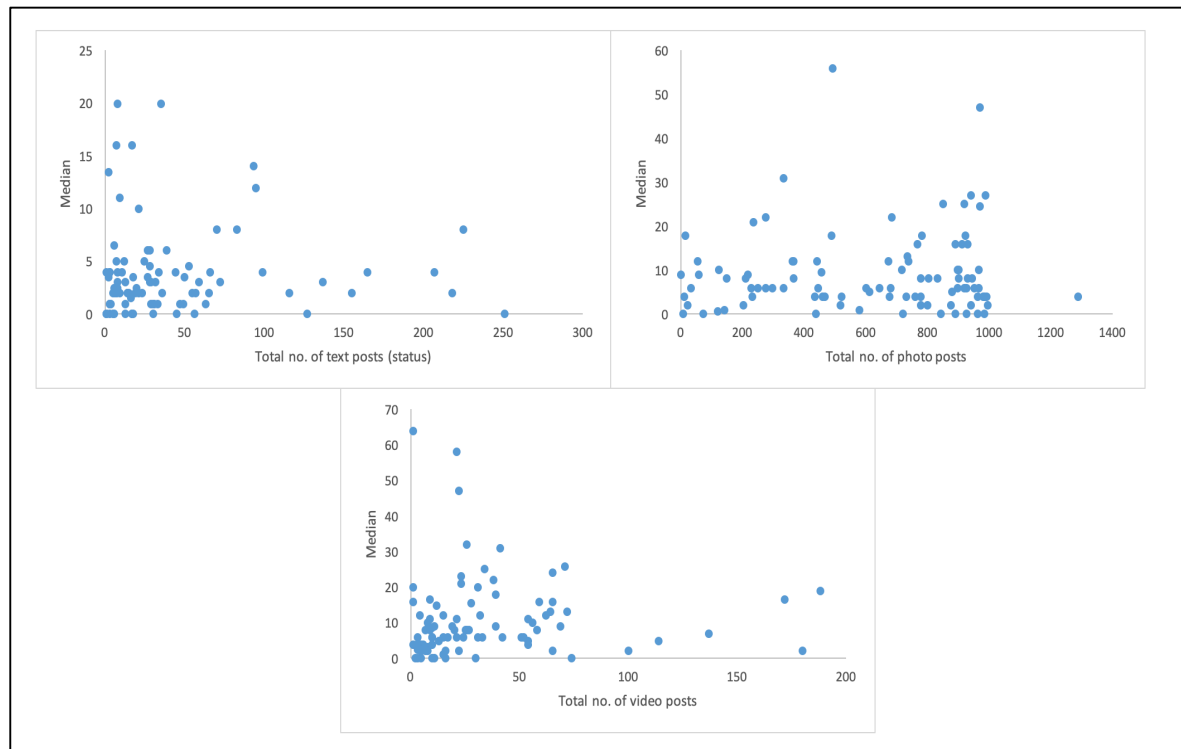




**Figure 7.4 Total no. of Video Posts/Total no. of Consumption, Contribution & Creation Behaviours on Facebook**

A further analysis was conducted on the correlation between the total number of text, photo, video posts by the firms and the median number of contribution behaviours on Facebook (see Figure 7.5). The correlation revealed; text ( $r = 0.00357974$ ), photo ( $r = 0.0759416$ ), video ( $r = 0.04275914$ ) and the r-squared; text (0.000013), photo (0.00577), video (0.00183). Contribution behaviours - likes, comments, were specifically targeted as these types of behaviours are sufficient measures of the degree of engagement on a post on social media platforms. In the sense that, a high degree of contribution behaviours on a post can resonate more with a wider audience as they indicate to users a high degree of user interaction to the post.

The median value of contribution behaviours for each firm were tested for correlation as the median indicates a reasonable representative value of the total number of contribution behaviours towards each firm. The median values also give a more realistic picture of the data as it is not affected by outliers i.e. the median values are robust against outliers. The results from this show no correlation between the two variables.

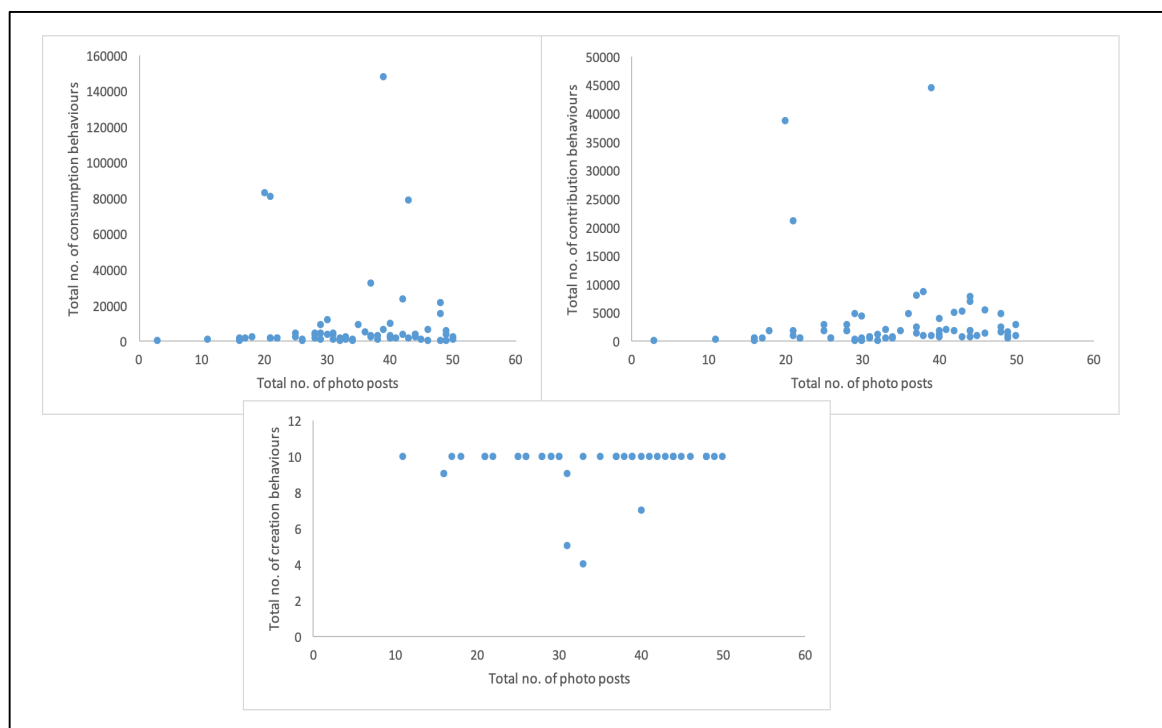


**Figure 7.5 Total no. of Text, Photo, Video Posts/Median no. of Contribution Behaviours on Facebook**

Thus, there was no correlation between text, photo, video content posted by firms and the median number of contribution behaviours on Facebook. Further tests were also conducted between the total number of photo posts and the total number of consumption, contribution and creation behaviours on Instagram (see figure 7.6). The correlation revealed; consumption ( $r = 0.016083934$ ), contribution ( $r = -0.005136554$ ), creation ( $r = 0.06440217$ ) and the r-squared; consumption (0.00026), contribution (0.000026), creation (0.00415). As Instagram's interface is mainly focused on visual content i.e. the sharing of images/pictures between its users.

Although, other content types are featured and encouraged on the platform – short videos, text, etc. The platform emphasizes the sharing of mainly photos and videos on its mobile application. Thus, testing the correlation between photo posts by firms and consumption, contribution, creation behaviours should prove insightful into understanding firm's use of social media platforms for engagement. The results also show no correlation between photo posts by the firms and consumption/creation behaviours.

A negative correlation was found between photo posts and contribution behaviours. It should be noted, in Figure 7.6, the number of creation behaviours are artificially capped due to a scraping limit on the tool utilised. Thus, the correlation measure is skewed due to the limit placed on scraping the data. However, the results for creation behaviours show some insight into CEBs on Instagram.

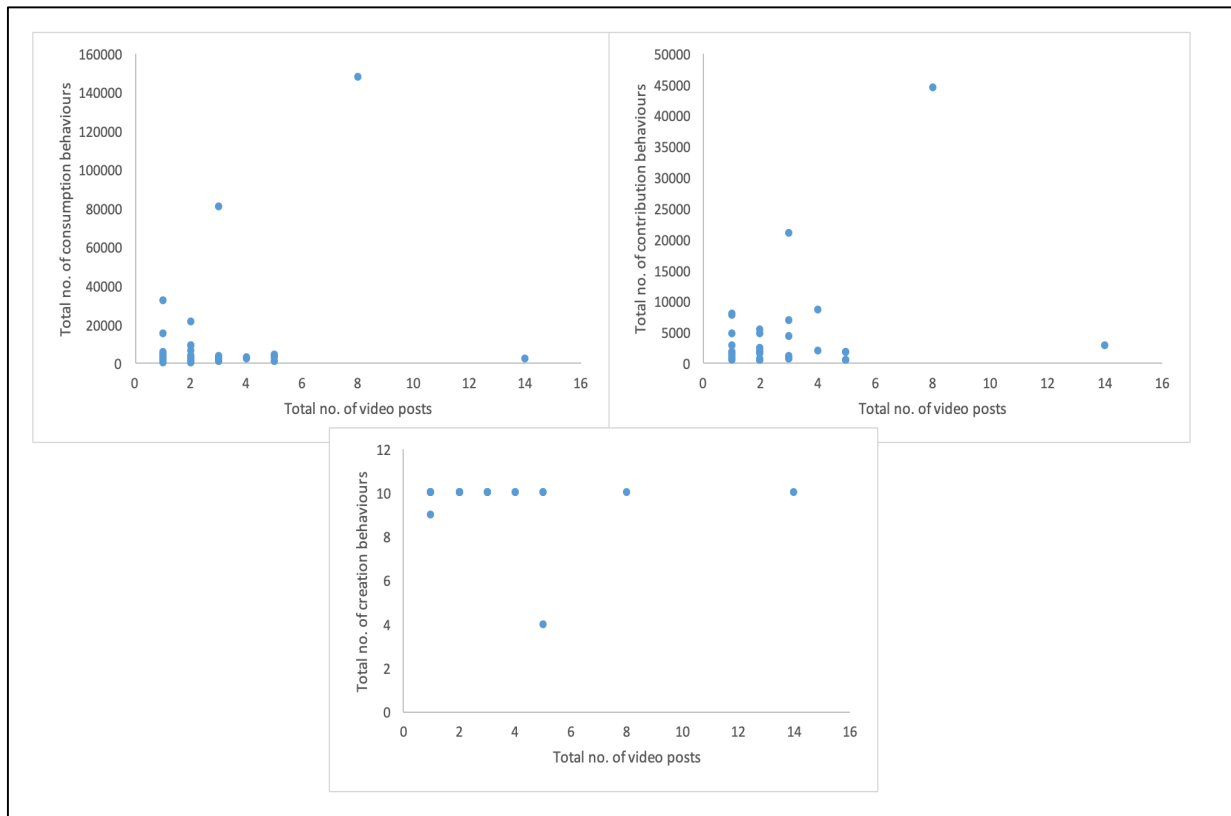


**Figure 7.6 Total no. of Photo posts/Total no. of Consumption, Contribution & Creation Behaviours on Instagram**

The lack of correlation revealed here is a key finding. As Instagram is a social media platform with an emphasis on the sharing of photos between its users, no correlation between photos and behavioural engagement in the form of consumption, contribution and creation show that these firms might unknowingly be pushing out brand-related content with a false understanding that this will return greater behavioural engagement. Also, the lack of correlation might mean these firms get other benefits from their posts not evident in the 3C's tested, for example, traffic to their web-store, in-app purchase on their respective brand pages. The results also show visual content posted on the platforms do not necessarily encourage behavioural engagement, from a firm perspective. Finally, video content posted by the firms were also tested between consumption, contribution and creation behaviours (see Figure 7.7). The correlation revealed; consumption ( $r = 0.27897493$ ), contribution ( $r = 0.314729027$ ), creation ( $r = -0.1217825$ ) and the r-squared; consumption (0.07783), contribution (0.09905), creation (0.01483).

As previously mentioned, videos are one of the main types of content emphasized on Instagram's mobile application/interface through e.g. Instagram stories, IGTV (reels), Instagram live, etc. The results also show no correlation between video posts and consumption/contribution behaviours. While a negative correlation was found between video posts and creation behaviours. Video posts enable users to share in-depth, more complex moving images that cannot be conveyed in a photo post. The lack of correlation between firms posting video content and their customer's behavioural engagement on Instagram suggest that, the sharing of brand information through video posts on their respective brand pages might not lead to a successful marketing outcome. However, in the literature, Devereux et al. (2019) found Instagram to be the more successful platform for firms to post in the aspect of engagement of a higher volume compared to other platforms – Facebook and Twitter. Also, Instagram is noted to receive more *likes* on picture and video posts (Devereux et al. 2019).

The results found in the correlation test reveal quite the opposite and act as a disconfirmation to the overall literature on firm engagement on social media platforms, especially Instagram. It should be noted, in Figure 7.7, the sample for the creation behaviours on Instagram were artificially capped due to a scraping limit on the tool utilised in collecting the data. Thus, the results should be interpreted with caution.

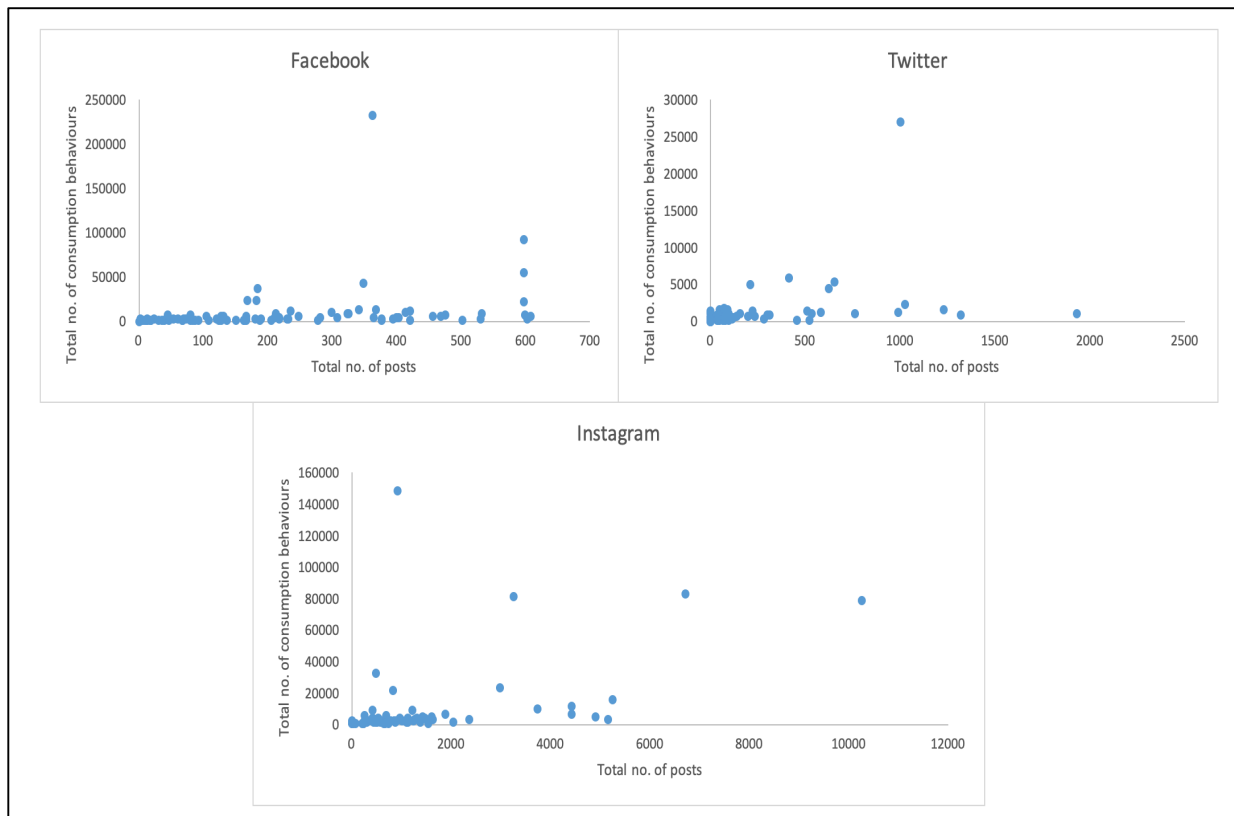


**Figure 7.7 Total no. of Video Posts/Total no. of Consumption, Contribution & Creation Behaviours on Instagram**

### *Total No. of Posts*

The total number of firm posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram against the total number of consumption behaviours were also considered in the analysis. The premise of this is, if firms have more content/posts a lot of content on their respective brand pages, does this engender consumption behaviours from their customers? i.e. more followers.

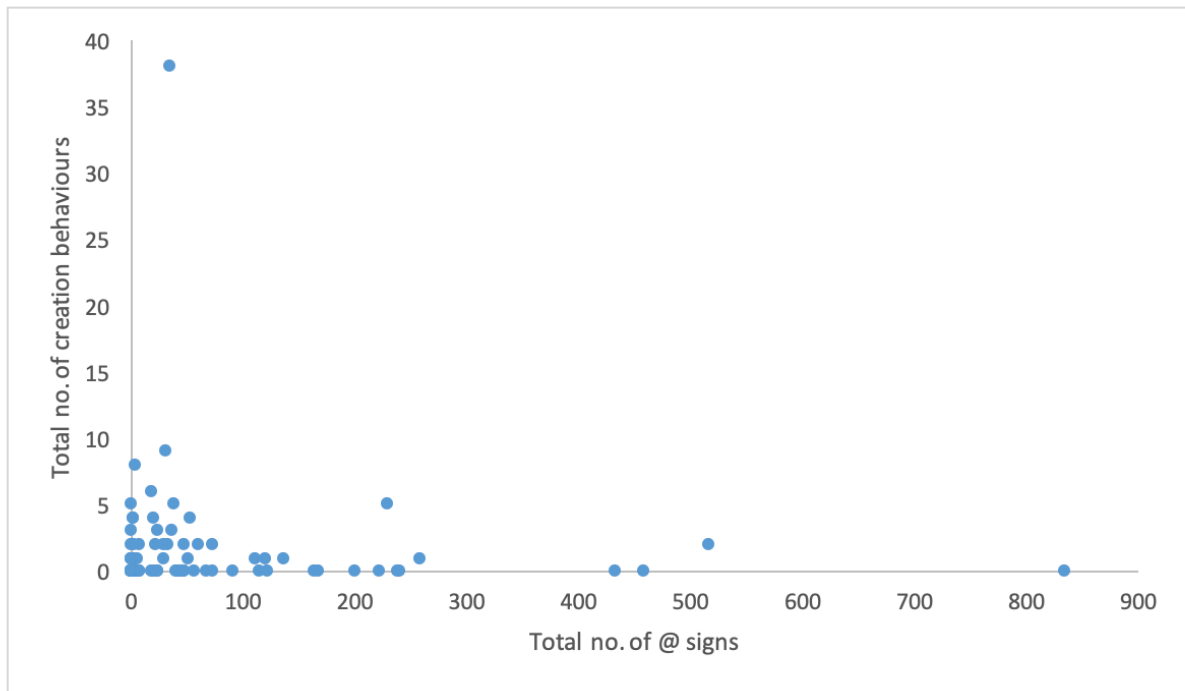
An active brand page posting content on a consistent basis should surely encourage more consumption behaviours across its social media channels, as indicated by Brodie et al. (2013), noting popular platforms where information flows with high volumes is surely to satisfy users information-seeking needs. However, the results reveal quite the opposite of this. The analysis shows no correlation whatsoever between the number of posts across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and consumption behaviours (see figure 7.8). The correlation revealed; Facebook ( $r = 0.279139604$ ), Twitter ( $r = 0.343128014$ ), Instagram ( $r = 0.451757198$ ) and the r-squared; Facebook (0.07792), Twitter (0.11774), Instagram (0.20408). It can be posited here that firms with more posts/posting brand-related content consistently do not necessarily encourage more consumption behaviours on social media platforms. Thus, from the researcher's point of view, it is possible the results shown could mean that the distribution formed here reveals that the firm's customers might be fatigued from the brand-related content they consume on the platforms and in turn unfollow these brand pages. Thus, it seems there is a limited effectiveness to a brute force approach by the firms to posting on their respective social media channels, focused simply on posting more brand-related content rather than posting more engaging content.



**Figure 7.8 Total no. of Posts on Facebook, Twitter & Instagram  
/Total no. of Consumption Behaviours**

The correlation between total number of @ signs used by the firms and total number of creation posts (i.e. customer tagged posts) were also considered in the analysis, because the @ sign represents an explicit attempt by the firm to create a dialogue with their customers, thus the results will be expected to show a concomitant rise in the number of creation CEBs. That is, the more firms tag users in their brand-related posts, the more customer tagged posts are engendered on Facebook. The results show a negative correlation in the relationship between the two variables (see figure 7.9). The correlation revealed ( $r = -0.0506674$ ) and r-squared (0.00257) Thereby, firms using @ signs on their posts do not necessarily encourage customer's creation behaviours on Facebook.

It can be said that other forms of posting brand-related content might be useful in place of this e.g. a call to action involving rewards designed to prompt an immediate response from customers.



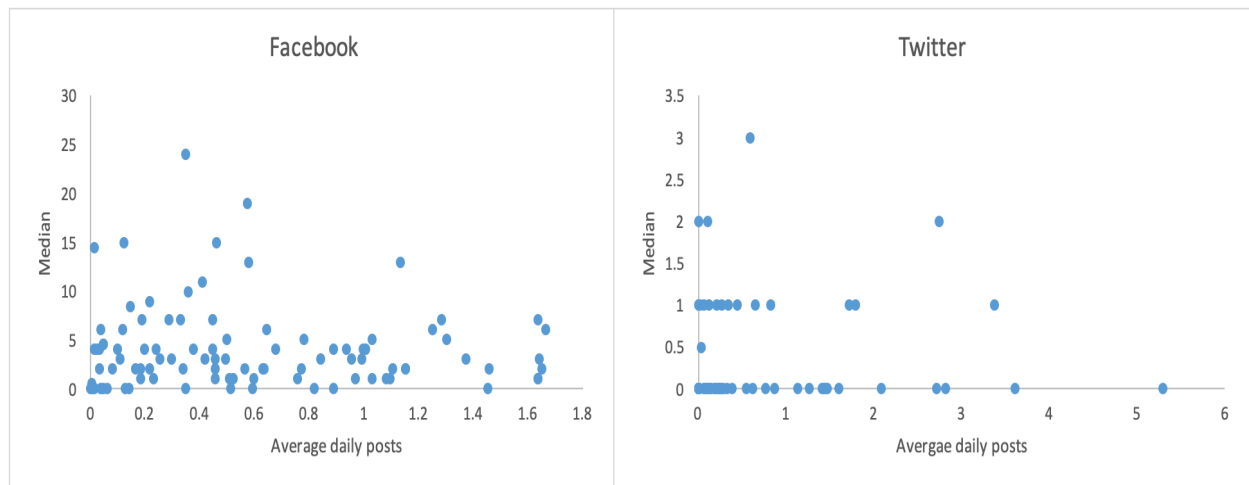
**Figure 7.9 Total no. of @ signs on Facebook/Total no. of Creation Posts**

### *Averages*

The correlation between average daily posts of the firms against CEBs (consumption, contribution, creation) were conducted in order to further test the data and provide a clearer picture of the relationship between firm's social media use and CEBs. The importance of this test lies in the fact that as opposed to testing the relationship between the total number of firm's posts. The average daily posts of these firms shows that, where the average is greater than 1 this should represent the firm posting more than once every day and bombarding customers with content in a push to drive engagement.



Whereas, less than 1 indicates a more curatorial approach which is focused on generating time or event dependent content, which might have greater situational meaning. Thus, in theory, both strategies could be sensible for improving the total amount of engagement. The averages of each firm's posts are considered as a singular value taken to represent the amount of times content is posted on a daily basis. Thereby, the first test was to determine the correlation between average daily posts and the median number of contribution behaviours on Facebook and Twitter. The results shown illustrate a negative correlation between average daily posts and the median number of contributions on Facebook. Also, no correlation was found between average daily posts and the median number of contribution behaviours on Twitter (see Figure 7.10). The correlation revealed; Facebook ( $r = -0.070975376$ ), Twitter ( $r = 0.05534952$ ) and the r-squared; Facebook (0.00433), Twitter (0.00306). This reveals that, on average the firms do not seem to engender contribution behaviours on their respective channels across Facebook and Twitter, daily. It also reports, that these firms might receive other benefits outside of consumption, contribution and creation behaviours such as referrals, webstore traffic, etc. Thus, suggesting they might not have fully grasped the usefulness of posting brand-related content for engendering behavioural engagement with their customers specifically. Firms need to consider their social media strategies before posting brand-related content on their respective social media channels. For Instance, there are technical restrictions on various platforms in terms of how brand-related posts are being promoted and can be hidden in the newsfeed on the platforms. Firms need a firm grasp and understanding on the strategies involved in engaging with their customers as well as the knowledge of technicalities of the social media platforms they choose to adopt.

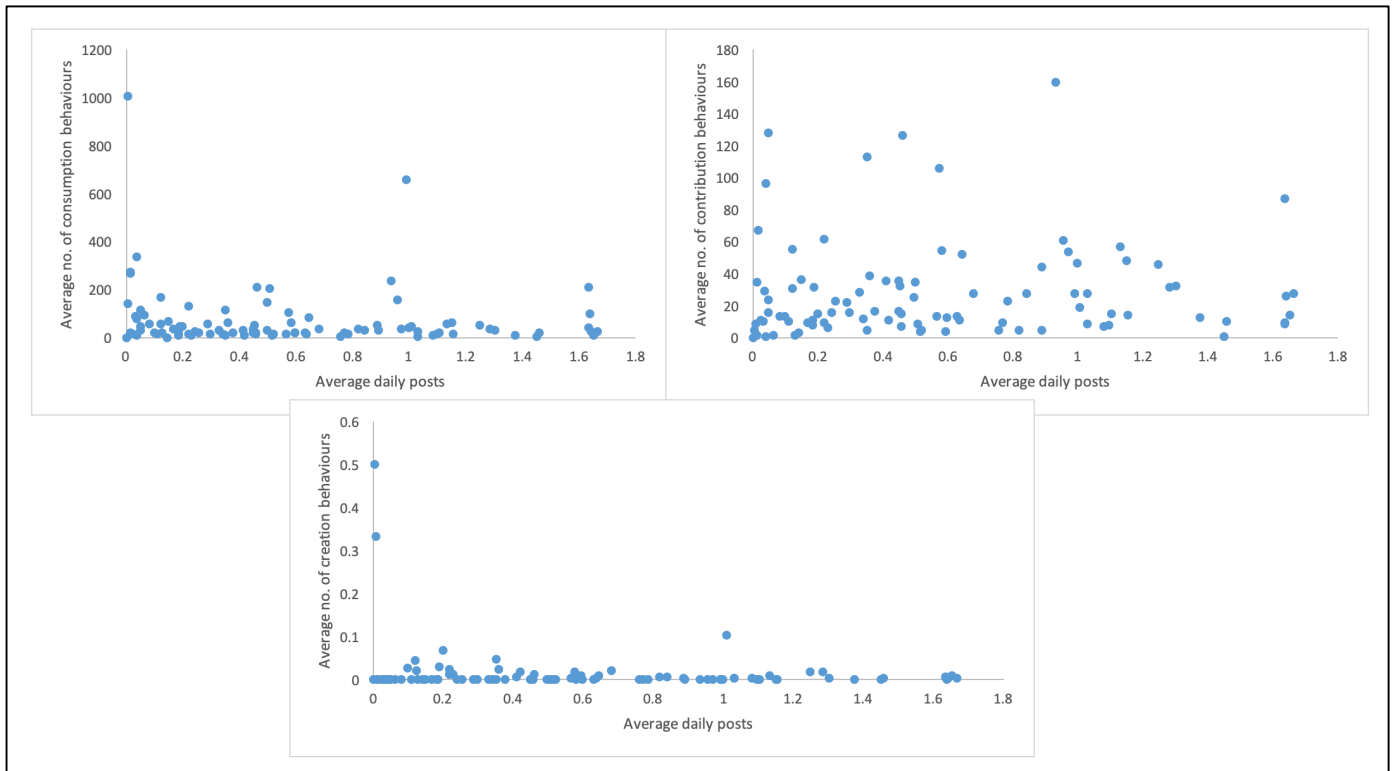


**Figure 7.10 Average Daily Posts/Median no. of Contribution Behaviours on Facebook & Twitter**

Also considered in the analysis is the correlation between average daily posts and the average number of consumption, contribution and creation behaviours on Facebook. The results show a negative correlation between average daily posts and consumption, creation behaviours. While, no correlation was found between average daily posts and contribution behaviours (see Figure 7.11). The correlation revealed; consumption ( $r = -0.122264719$ ), contribution ( $r = 0.04228683$ ), creation ( $r = -0.1691645$ ) and the r-squared; consumption (0.01495), contribution (0.00179), creation (0.02862).

This suggests further, the ineffectiveness of the firm's strategies in engendering customer engagement behaviours on their respective social media channels. Thus, the daily frequency of firm's post does not necessarily have a major impact in generating CEBs. From the result, it can be interpreted that time/resources might be wasted by the firms that post too often yet receive limited benefits.

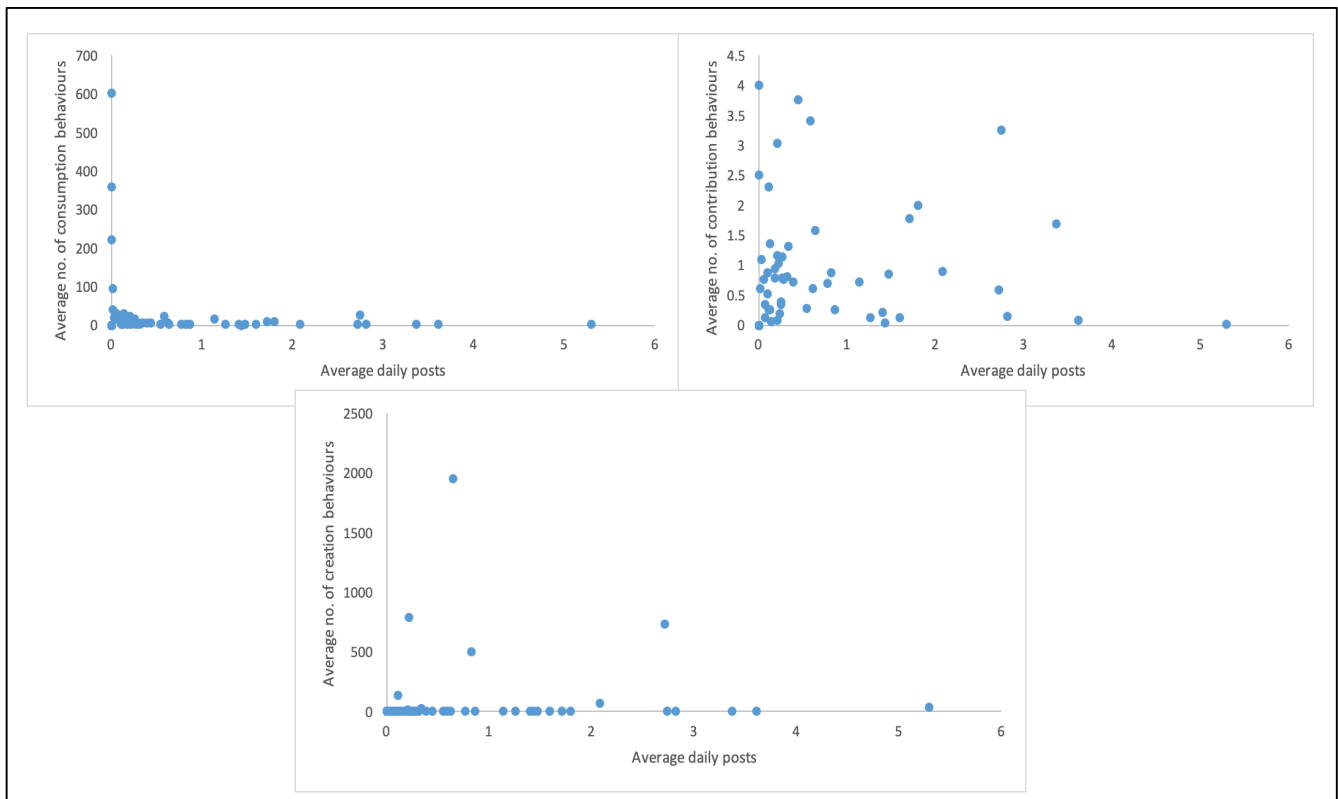
To address their overproduction of posts, firms need to carefully curate their brand-related posts according to the marketing strategies and goals they hope to achieve on their social media channels rather than flood their customer's newsfeeds with unrelated posts.



**Figure 7.11 Average Daily Posts/Average no. of Consumption, Contribution & Creation Behaviours on Facebook**

A final correlation analysis between average daily posts and the average number of consumption, contribution and creation behaviours on Twitter was conducted. The results illustrate no correlation between average daily posts and the average number of contribution and creation behaviours. A negative correlation between average daily posts and the average number of consumption behaviours were also found (see figure 7.12). With the correlation revealed; consumption ( $r = -0.1394543$ ), contribution ( $r = 0.08689952$ ), creation ( $r =$

0.0796337) and the r-squared revealed; consumption (0.01945), contribution (0.00755), creation (0.00634).



**Figure 7.12 Average Daily Posts/Average Consumption, Contribution & Creation Behaviours on Twitter**

The lack of correlation between the type of content posted by firms (text, photo, video), total number of posts, average daily posts and CEBs provide further understanding to the relationship between firm's use of social media and engagement. It shows that wasteful social media practices are prevalent throughout fashion SMEs and the lack of awareness firms have of using social media platforms as an effective marketing and engagement tool.

Further to this, it proves simple/default strategies by firms do not necessarily encourage customer's contribution, consumption and creation behaviours on social media platforms.

The results from this are discussed in the next section in relation to the engagement literature on social media platforms and key authors are considered.

## **7.4 Discussion**

This section includes the interpretation of findings from the correlation analysis in relation to the extant literature. It addresses the findings through breaking down the discussion into three parts, to reflect the three correlation tests that have been conducted. In each of these, the contribution to literature in theory and practical contributions are revealed.

In the first correlation analysis; type of content (text, photo, video) against CEBs, the results showed no correlation between the different forms of content posted by firms on social media platforms and CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution and creation. Although in the literature, studies have found a significant relationship between content type/platform type and customer's responses on social media platforms (Peters, 2019; Devereux et al. 2019). In addition, theoretical studies have noted the outcomes from customer engagement as loyalty, satisfaction (Brodie et al. 2011b; So et al. 2012; Dessert et al. 2015). The findings revealing no relationship in the correlation test between type of content and CEBs on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pushes theoretical and practical understanding of CEBs on social media platforms. In that, studies can further investigate specific content types in various other platforms in terms of a firm-centric perspective of engagement. In addition, the results provide practical implications for firms, especially SME owner-manager's and the need for them to make strategic decisions on what type of social media channels they choose to adopt in fulfilling their marketing goals.

The second correlation test – total number of firm posts against CEBs reveal no significant relationship between the amount of content firms posts unto their brand pages and the CEBs generated from their customers. Thus, it seems that the firm's investigated push content to their

customers regardless of the objectives they serve in engaging with their customers. This shows SME owner-manager's need to have a curatorial approach in their posting strategies i.e. a two-way conversational approach rather than a one-way conversational approach with their customers. This extends further studies into CEBs from a firm perspective (van Doorn et al. 2010).

The third correlation test – average daily posts of firms against CEBs also revealing no significant relationship, shows how SMEs are not taking full advantages of capabilities of social media for marketing purposes. This finding provides further evidence for firms to have a strategic approach to their engagement with customers. As with previous studies, Mesko and Stieglitz (2013), report SMEs use of social media involves a *top-down process* – it is essentially controlled and initiated by higher management. With the responsibility for managing and control of social media channels in SMEs mostly relying on the CEO/Owner-manager. This is in line with Franco et al. (2016), suggesting the management of firm's profile on social networks falls on the *entrepreneur/manager*. However, they report that a small number of SMEs investigated resort to outsourcing the management of their profiles (Franco et al. 2016). Hollebeek et al. (2014), provides an empirical understanding of firm's activities through a content analysis of consumer's responses to the difference between highly engaging and non-engaging brands. The authors assert that *highly engaging* brands on social media platforms have the intent of exerting cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity from consumers in their brand-related actions. In comparison to larger organisations, SMEs do not have enough resources to extend across every sector of their business. Thus, having a clear and concise strategy for using either one or more social media platform type in their businesses for engagement is of utmost importance.

## **7.5 Summary**

This chapter has presented the approach used in conducting a correlation analysis of firm-instigated variables against CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution, creation behaviours. Three correlation tests were conducted; type of content (text, photo, video), total number of firm posts, average daily posts, revealing no correlation between the variables and CEBs in the context of social media platforms. Following this, the findings are discussed further in relation to their contribution to literature in terms of theory, as well as, their practical contributions for owner-managers. Although, the responses of customers were analysed, the consequences for firm's strategies were not established in the correlation analysis. This is broadly discussed in the next chapter as it seeks to establish SME owner-manager's view of CEBs on social media platforms through an analysis of two phases of semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 SME owner-managers out of the sample of SMEs in the research study.

The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

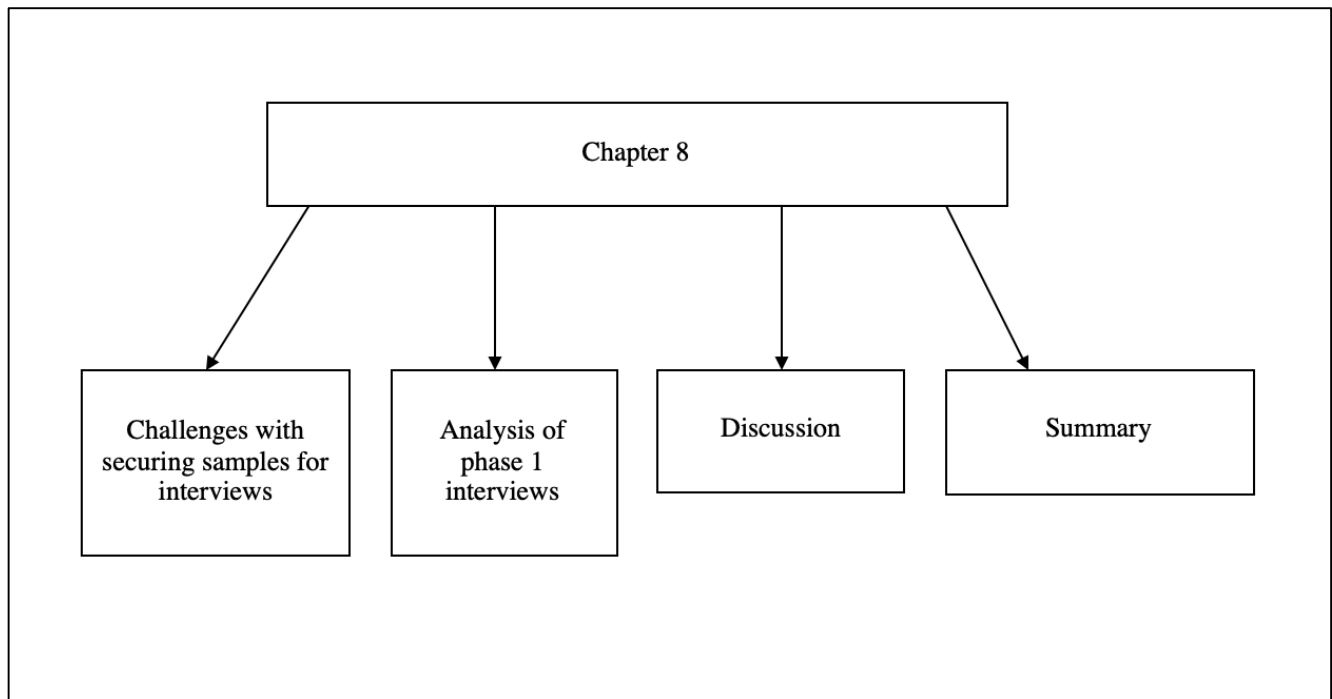
### **FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS OF PHASE 1 INTERVIEWS WITH SME OWNER-MANAGERS**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

Chapters 6 and 7 have provided an analysis of how 101 SME fashion retailers in the East Midlands use their social media channels to engage with their customers and provided similar social media data analysis for their customer's behavioural responses to the social media activities of the SME sample. This data analysis has provided the background to this chapter, as it seeks to explore SME fashion retail owner-managers view of customer engagement behaviour on social media platforms.

The focus of this chapter is to provide the analysis of the first phase of the interviews conducted with SME owner-managers. The chapter begins with the challenges faced by the researcher in securing samples for the interviews. It highlights how the study reached the final sample of 11 interviews out of an overall sample of 101 SMEs in the East Midlands region. In addition, the impact of the current crisis – COVID-19 – on the overall field data collection process and the researcher's response to it are also addressed in the chapter. Next, the discussion of the results from phase 1 interviews with SME owner-managers are presented. The chapter is then concluded with an overall summary. Figure 8.1 outlines the structure of chapter eight in detail.





**Figure 8.1 Structure of Chapter 8**

## **8.2 Challenges with Securing Samples for Interviews**

This section is concerned with providing an overview of the process involved in obtaining the sample of SME owner-managers for the two phase semi-structured interviews as outlined in the research methodology.

Due to the pandemic in the United Kingdom (see Gov.UK. 2020), face-face interviews were restricted to ensure the safety of the researcher as well as the SME business owners. The initial interview sampling strategy identified 20 SMEs, purposefully selected to represent a range of engagement behaviours from the sample. The researcher had intended to approach these companies in person to maximise interview participation. Because of the difficulties associated with COVID-19 and subsequent data collection restrictions, the researcher adopted a convenience sampling method as a contingent measure. The interview sample was finally obtained on the basis of convenient accessibility, proximity and willingness to participate in an interview (see Hair et al. 2003). Face-to-face interviews were substituted by online methods

through video conference software applications available to the SME owner-manager. Revised ethical protocols were adopted to meet a virtual interview setting. The revised process to obtain interviews was through email communication, consisting of a short ‘pitch’ containing the research information and relevant ethical compliance instructions. The email was initially sent out to 40 SMEs of the overall sample of 101 SMEs (See Table 8.1).

<b>SME</b>	<b>Location</b>
Wild Clothing (Vintage Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
One-BC (Bespoke Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Universal Works (Men’s Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Montana (Arts & Craft Store)	Nottinghamshire
Relic Vintage (Vintage Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Mime Store (Independent Menswear & Streetwear)	Nottinghamshire
It’s Simple Clothing Ltd. (Luxury Streetwear Brand)	Nottinghamshire
Pretty Little (Women’s Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Stick & Ribbon (Boutique Ladies Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Gigi Bodega (Designer Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Cow (Vintage Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Aaliyah Collections (Online Modest Fashion Brand)	Leicestershire
TUTU (Boutique Store)	Nottinghamshire
&BLANC (Men’s Designer Retail Store)	Nottinghamshire
Void Clothing (Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Oxygen (Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Braveries (Vintage Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Jane Young (Women’s Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Aimee’s (Dress Shop)	Northamptonshire
Giles & Bella (Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Chickadee-boo (Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Ribbon (Independent Women’s Online Boutique)	Derbyshire
White Wardrobe (Women’s Boutique Store)	Derbyshire
Pearls & Scarlett (Dress Store)	Derbyshire
The Amber Room (Clothing Store)	Derbyshire
She Fashion (Women’s Clothing Store)	Derbyshire

Zebra Menswear (Designer Clothing Store)	Derbyshire
Moo Fashions (Women's Independent Boutique)	Derbyshire
Dominique (Women's Independent Boutique)	Derbyshire
Jelly Rolls (Designer Kid swear Store)	Leicestershire
The Vintage Scene (Vintage Clothing Store)	Leicestershire
Well gosh (Designer Clothing Store)	Leicestershire
The Business Fashion (Men's Clothing Store)	Leicestershire
Trafford Knitwear (Women's Clothing Store)	Leicestershire
Phillip James Menswear (Men's Clothing Store)	Leicestershire
32 The Guild (Women's Designer Clothing Store)	Northamptonshire
TS2 (Men's Clothing Store)	Northamptonshire
EQVVS (Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Von Blue (Wormiens Boutique Store)	Northamptonshire
Berries (Women's Boutique Store)	Northamptonshire

**Table 8.1 List of 40 SMEs Contacted**

Emailing to the 40 SMEs listed in Table 8.1 elicited only one positive response. This was not entirely unexpected. The UK had just enforced a national lockdown with the closure of all non-essential retail stores. Further emails were then sent out to a further 20 SMEs with requests for interviews for the research. (See Table 8.2).

<b>SME</b>	<b>Location</b>
Cruise Fashion (Designer Clothing Store)	Derbyshire
Just Silver Apparel (Fashion Accessories Store)	Nottinghamshire
Brig dens (Luxury Clothing Store)	Derbyshire
Thackeray's (Clothing Store)	Northamptonshire
Roller snakes	Derbyshire
Bo Peep Boutique (Children's Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Harmony Boutique (Women's Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Tasty Vintage (Women's Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire

Agatha Boutique (Boutique Store)	Lincolnshire
Lucks of Louth (Shoe Store)	Lincolnshire
Grants.1856 (Independent Men's Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Energy Clothing (Independent Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Gere Menswear (Men's Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Yak Clothing (Independent Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Togs (Independent Boutique)	Lincolnshire
The Boutique (Women's Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
23 Seven Clothing (Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Nine Yards Store (Clothing Store)	Loughborough
Duo Boutique (Women's Clothing Store)	Rutland
Ball Gown Heaven (Women's Clothing Store)	Rutland

**Table 8.2 List of 20 SMEs Contacted**

There were no positive responses for interviews from any of the SMEs listed in Table 8.2. Further analysis of the 101 SMEs suggested that the following SMEs were noted to have either shutdown permanently or taken over by another proprietor:

<b>SME</b>	<b>Effect of COVID-19</b>
Wild Clothing	New ownership
23 Seven Clothing	Permanently closed
Vanilla Boutique	Website shutdown
Impact	Permanently closed
Duo Boutique	Permanently closed
Crowned by Grace Boutique	Permanently closed
Grants.1856	Closed for business
Harmony Boutique	Permanently closed
Story Boutique	Permanently closed
Chickadee-boo	Permanently closed

**Table 8.3 SMEs Affected by COVID-19**

The companies noted to be closed for business were then marked off the list of the SMEs to approach through mass emailing. A further list of 30 SMEs was then constructed to be approached for the next set of mass emailing for interview requests.

<b>SME</b>	<b>Location</b>
Rohan (Outdoor Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Platypus UK (Streetwear Brand)	Nottinghamshire
Forty-Two (Independent Store)	Nottinghamshire
Laddie Boutique (Bridal Shop)	Nottinghamshire
Ragusa (Women's Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Shirt Sleeves (Women's Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
No Angel Boutique (Women's Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Vintage Vixen (Vintage Clothing Store)	Nottinghamshire
Young Ideas (Luxury Fashion Retailer)	Derbyshire
Lapel (Designer Clothing Store)	Derbyshire
Canopy (Independent Fashion Store)	Derbyshire
Liholiho Clothing (Clothing Store)	Derbyshire
CONDOTTI (Clothing Store)	Leicestershire
The Wardrobe (Clothing Store)	Leicestershire
MyPilot (Clothing Store)	Leicestershire
Magic Toast (Surf Shop)	Leicestershire
Hole in the Wall (Clothing Store)	Leicestershire
The Wootton Village Boutique (Women's Clothing Store)	Northamptonshire
Clues Menswear (Clothing Store)	Northamptonshire
Roberto Clothing (Men's Clothing Store)	Northamptonshire
Krystal Clear Fashion (Fashion Group)	Northamptonshire
Storm Clothing (Men's Clothing Store)	Northamptonshire
Mary & Me (Boutique Store)	Northamptonshire
N0.5 Ladies wear Boutique (Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire

Cahoots (Men's Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Ego (Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Coneys (Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Kwirky Kow Vintage (Vintage Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Empire Menswear (Designer Clothing Store)	Lincolnshire
Kays of Grantham (Independent Ladies Boutique)	Lincolnshire

**Table 8.4 List of 30 SMEs Contacted**

The response from the further 30 email requests elicited only one SME positive response (Table 8.4) and out of the 90 SMEs approached through email for interviews, only 2 SMEs responded positively. The researcher was now forced to consider other ways to obtain the interview sample. Thus, incentives containing rewards of a £20 Amazon voucher for participating in the interviews were attached in the emails, which were sent out again to the sample of 90 SMEs. From this, 9 SMEs responded positively to participating in the research. Overall, the final interview sample obtained was 11 SMEs.

### **8.3 Analysis of Phase 1 Interviews**

This section provides an analysis of the first phase of the semi-structured interviews with 11 SME owner-managers. Further to this, an integration of data from mixed sources – qualitative (interviews), quantitative (SMEs social media statistics) is then undertaken to evaluate the relationship between firm's attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms from both data sets. For both phases of the interviews, 11 SMEs out of the 101 samples were included.

The main objective of phase 1 is aimed at addressing the following question; *What is the relationship between SMEs attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms?* 11 SME owner-managers were asked a series of questions around their usage of social media. Appendix 8 details an outline of the questions, centred on their overall views of social media, its effectiveness and their understanding of the medium. These questions were aimed at gathering the views (attitudes) of the SME owner manager on their CEBs (consumption, contribution, creation) in social media platforms.

The process of this analysis involved using a template analysis (see Crabtree and Miller, 1999). This form of analysis is considered to be an appropriate fit for effectively analysing the data. It is most suited to comparatively evaluate different groups, individuals within a specific context (King, 2004). Thus, template analysis is considered to be a useful form of analysis for evaluating the different SME owner-manager's views included in the interview. Following this, the data were grouped accordingly into representative scales – *codes* – which assists the researcher in making sense of the interview data through using a structured and systematic analytical method (Blackley et al. 2017). SMEs responses were then thematically analysed into scales which represent the attitudes of each SME; *enthusiastic/positive* (showing great interest), *indifferent* (showing no interest or disinterest), *inactive/negative* (showing no interest at all). The attitudinal scales formed the basis for analysing SMEs attitudes towards social media platforms, as well as, SMEs attitudes towards CEBs. The scales were categorised according to consumption, contribution and creation behaviours present on social media platforms. Table 8.5 illustrates this further.

SME	Consumption (E/P-Enthusiastic/Positive, I-Indifferent, I/N-Inactive/Negative)	Contribution (E/P-Enthusiastic/Positive, I-Indifferent, I/N-Inactive/Negative)	Creation (E/P-Enthusiastic/Positive, I-Indifferent, I/N-Inactive/Negative)
SME 1	<i>E/P: I think my customers are more engaging on videos, short videos, brand videos and moving images like GIFS and things rather than just a photo.</i>	<i>E/P: It's more on Instagram stories we get comments than the actual posts.</i>	<i>E/P: Yes, whenever we run a contest or campaign and mostly I would say, students, local students in Nottingham before. Mostly on Instagram.</i>
SME 2	<i>E/P: I think, content which is personalised a little bit, it can be photo or video. Probably video gets more attention but we've noticed when there's a bit of personal association with the post. Let's say when it is a member of staff or something it gets more response than saying here's some clothes.</i>	<i>E/P: I mean people are always tagging us into stuff they're trying on at home that they've bought or in changing rooms but in terms of responding to our posts I really can't remember. But sometimes you got questions, don't think we get that many critiques unless they're deleted before I've seen them. I don't think we get that many comments, it's just more likes I think. I think when we closed on lockdown, we got comments just wishing us well and stuff.</i>	<i>I: I don't recall any sort of videos. On Instagram we get customers tagging us into stuff that they're wearing, elsewhere, I'm not really too sure.</i>
SME 3	<i>E/P: It's great for the new season stuff that we put in (photos), that seems to be the best for us. Just a reminder that we've got new stock. We get the best response when someone is wearing the product as well rather than just the product. Actually, we don't do many videos but the ones we've done have always been pretty good, they've been better actually (than photos). I'd say probably because we don't</i>	<i>E/P: That happens quite a lot. I think people comment on most posts.</i>	<i>E/P: That happens a lot, particularly people on holiday when they're wearing something from the store (well when we used to go on holiday – Pre COVID 19). So that happens as well.</i>



	<i>so many videos, that's why they sort of stand out a little bit more.</i>		
SME 4	<i><b>E/P:</b> Photos, for definite! Because people can see the stock, they don't have to read anything, it's just there, they can see it and its eye catching. 100% photos have got to be right; it's got to stand out. So, that's for us by far the most important. If you get the lighting wrong, people can see it in real life and say "it's wrong". It's got to be bang on! The other thing that we do very well is a competition, a giveaway and that reaches a lot of people. It's so easy to do rather than just like or share, tag a couple of people. That builds our base of customers and it builds our outreach. It reaches the people that it wouldn't have perhaps reached before.</i>	<i><b>E/P:</b> Like I said, just this morning. I got a phone call of somebody asking me about a specific thing that they'd seen pop up on Facebook. He actually said to me this morning when I spoke to him – "If it wasn't for that, I wouldn't have called". So, it is important to keep on top of. Especially now, you know, when maybe a lot of people are not at work and have more time to browse social media.</i>	<i><b>E/P:</b> So, we did a competition in which we said, share your best outfits that you've bought from here. So, people were uploading pictures wearing the outfits that they've bought from us. Again we did a giveaway for a free shirt, free jeans. It's just a nice way to engage with customers but also, them putting their own pictures on. So, they obviously felt happy enough with their outfits that they've bought then upload unto our Facebook. Again, a nice way of interacting with customers.</i>
SME 5	<i><b>E/P:</b> I think it's nice to see lifestyle pictures. So pictures where the clothes have been worn in nice surroundings. So it's aspirational i.e. where customers would think I'd look really nice if I buy that.</i>	<i><b>E/P:</b> They like the things that are not selling. We know that. When its personal, when it's something about me, something I've achieved or something that's happened to me. It's when it's real rather than just posting. They like personal touch.</i>	<i><b>I/N:</b> No they don't do that very often. I mean a couple of products they will tag us. But they don't do it very often.</i>
SME 6	<i><b>E/P:</b> I would say, they look a little bit on video clips because we have fashion shows in the shop. If we put anything out, a little video clip, they do enjoy that sort of thing. We'd probably get more comments and interaction on that type of thing.</i>	<i><b>E/P:</b> I'd probably go back to the last one, if we had fashion shows and that sort of thing. They'd probably comment more on that or "mother of the bride stuff", special occasion, where it's sort of really targeting a particular audience.</i>	<i><b>I/N:</b> To be quite honest, I don't get that terribly involved.</i>

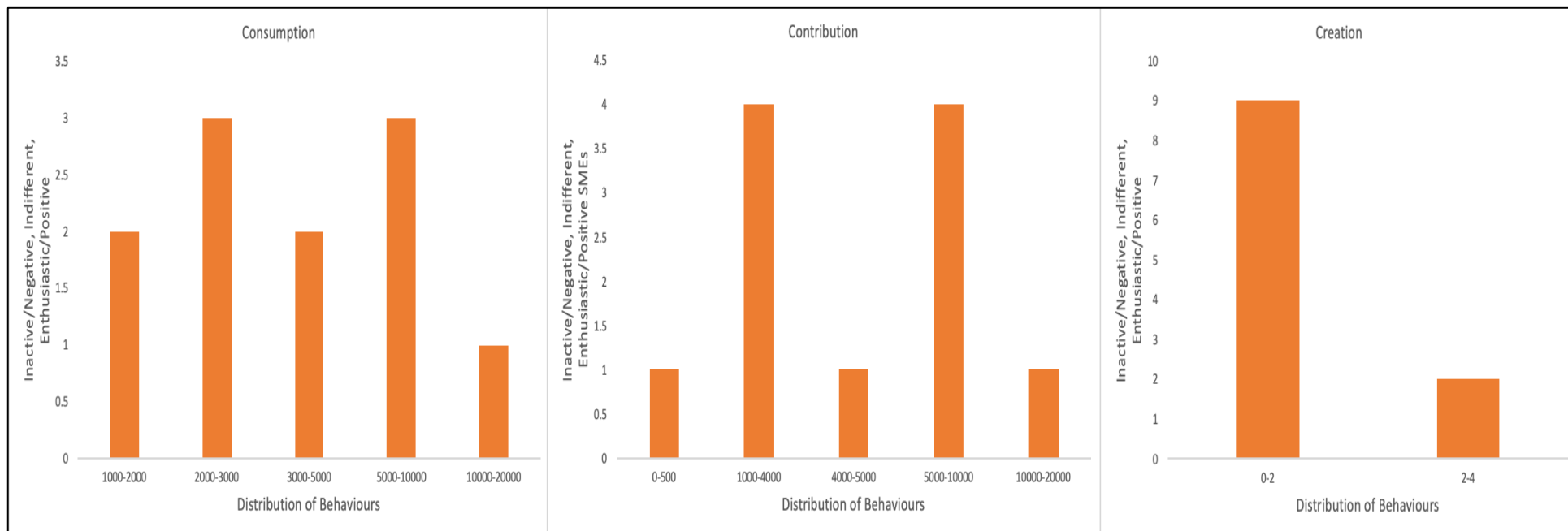
SME 7	<p><b>E/P:</b> Video really, so obviously you can put text in there but as soon as there's something that's got a video or certainly something someone can just enjoy and watch for 10, 20 seconds or longer. I'd say video is the one that attracts and keeps people more entertained for longer. Definitely.</p>	<p><b>E/P:</b> It depends on what it is, people like free stuff, people like things for free. During the very first lockdown, it hit us pretty hard like it did lots of people. We were just told, no work, no shop, no retail and everybody was off for about four or five weeks and then we gradually came back. The second and third lockdown now, things are different, we're still carrying on working doing click and collect, still doing online orders. But the very first lockdown, the way we interacted with our customers is we put a competition together, fortunately it was summer, so it was bright and sunny, so you could be outside in your back garden. So we were doing trick of the week, we basically got people to interact, send in a video of their trick and then we pick a winner and send the prize. That was probably one of the best responses we had. Because it gave someone, something to look forward to. So that was probably the last thing that stands out in the last 12 months.</p>	<p><b>E/P:</b> It happens all the time to be honest with you. We sponsor a few skateboarders, we sponsor a few snowboarders, so whenever they do a film sequence, we'll get tagged in it. If we get a new board or new equipment for some of our riders, they'll tag us in it. It generally happens, even when someone buys something from us. I think we give a good service and we get quite a few customers that will thank us on a post and show what they've bought. So, it happens relatively regularly that, to be honest.</p>
SME 8	<p><b>E/P:</b> It's all three, because when we post any videos... it might be a snippet of a fashion show or it might be an animation that another artist has done, collaborated with us. A lot of our social media platforms in the way we use it is all different content. It's not just</p>	<p><b>I:</b> No, but I think it's important to have lots of followers, because people say their thoughts. But I'm more interested in having the right content and what our brand is about. So we have the right people. If we are doing an</p>	<p><b>E/P:</b> They do that all the time, especially with weddings. We've done so many weddings at the moment (in the summer) and they've all been tagging us. Then afterwards with some</p>

	<i>visuals, text, video. We don't want to bore ourselves either, so it is whatever inspires us.</i>	<i>event for instance, we have the right people that attend because it's a whole waste of time. We have been doing this a long time so we know how it works for us.</i>	<i>clients, we bring them in here for photoshoots then they share them and tag us and vice-versa.</i>
SME 9	<b>E/P:</b> <i>I found in the past that concise bullet points with pictures. We try and keep it punchy and to the point and we also have a lot of stock so I couldn't sit all day and write very fashionable, descriptive posts.</i>	<b>E/P:</b> <i>I suppose we always get a great reaction with specific products. So we do get loads of really great feedback on specific products.</i>	<b>E/P:</b> <i>We've got quite a good/loyal customer base; we're always asking people to share. So we do try and bully people into interacting as much as possible. We do find if we don't get shares, likes we find our posts invisible. I'd like to say our customers do it willingly but we have to push them in the right direction.</i>
SME 10	<b>E/P:</b> <i>So, like up until now we've really been focused on, well we use a lot photo, imagery obviously because we are in Fashion and people want to see the new clothes and models and stuff. We're shifting, well trying to start getting more videos because we just think it's a really valuable channel. You know lots of people are getting really good and our interaction rate is with videos so we're trying to lean towards that now. Well we're just dipping our toe in but yeah.</i>	<b>E/P:</b> <i>I mean there's all sorts of times people tend to see I think mainly pictures. We seem to get more interactions and comments when they're seeing sort of us buying and doing bits in the shop and all sorts.</i>	<b>I/N:</b> <i>I'm not really sure, I don't think a lot of people have been. I mean people share our posts but off the top of my head I can't really think.</i>
SME 11	<b>E/P:</b> <i>We have ascertained that customers are not interested in text but only pictures and if the pictures contain a person they are far more popular than if it's just an image of an item of clothing.</i>	<b>E/P:</b> <i>I think that if we get 50 or more responses to any post that we put out, then that would be termed as being a success for us.</i>	<b>I:</b> <i>Maybe not that regularly, perhaps every fortnight somebody would tag us on Instagram.</i>

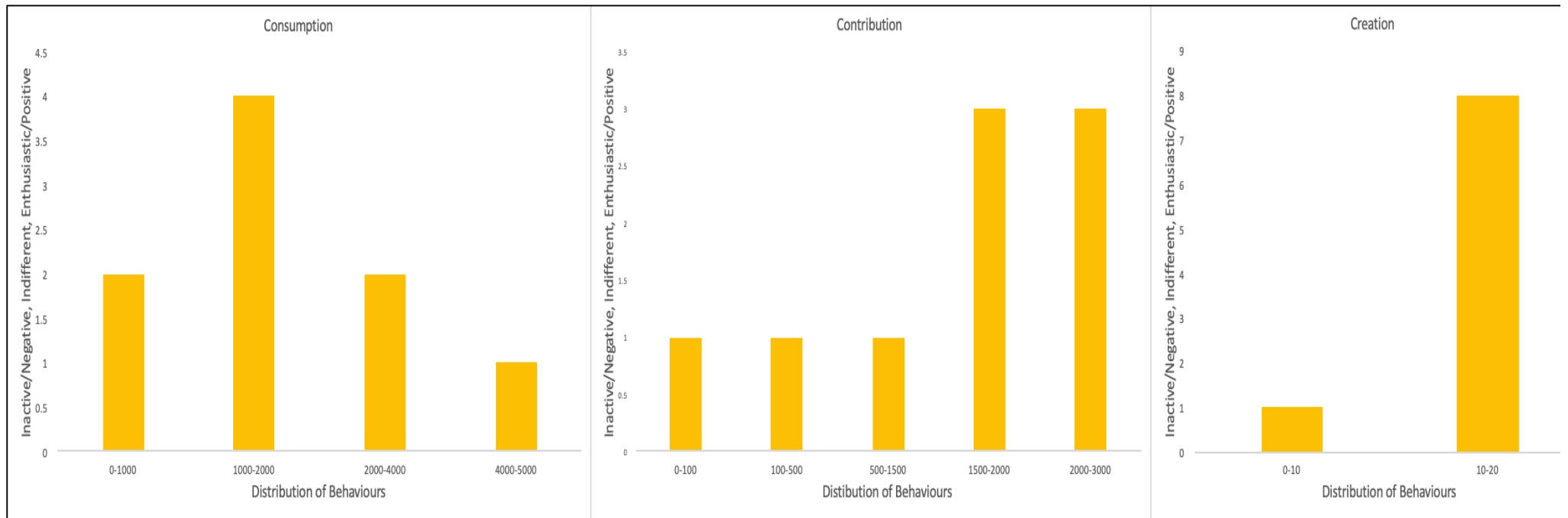
**Table 8.5 SME Owner-manger's Attitudes Towards Social Media Platforms**

From the phase 1 interviews, which were focused on gathering the attitudes of the sample SME owner-managers on their attitudes to their CEB on social media, the findings show that majority of SME owner-manager's interviewed express *enthusiastic/positive* attitudes towards CEBs on social media platforms. However, *indifferent* and *inactive/negative* attitudes were found in respect to creation behaviours. Thus, it can be considered that the SMEs have a generally positive pre-conceived attitudinal response towards their use of social media platforms in respect to engendering CEBs. Also, these SMEs do not utilise their social media channels properly in terms of engendering CEBs as evidenced from the results.

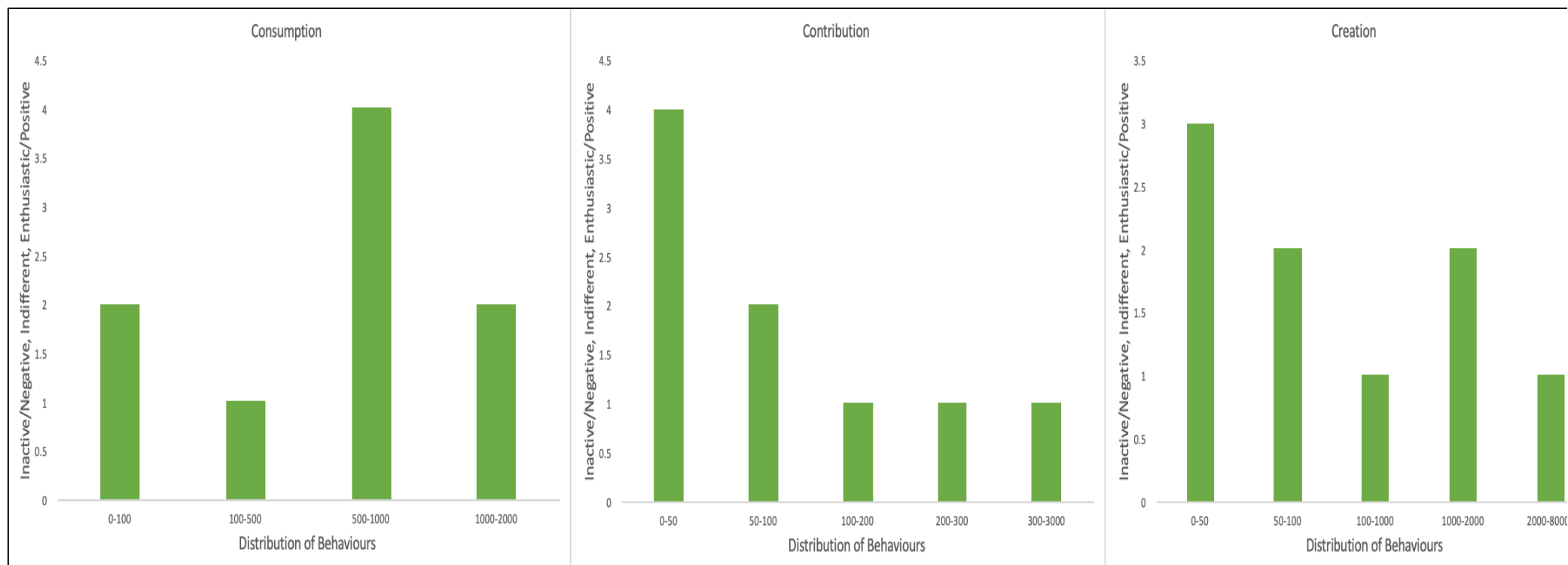
Following the assessment of SMEs attitudes from phase 1, a comparison with their behavioural intentions on social media platforms were analysed. The comparison of SME attitudes against their customers' behaviours addresses the relationship between SMEs attitudes and CEBs. The distribution of the SMEs behaviours on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were compiled from the data scraped on their respective channels. These behaviours were plotted against the scales representing SMEs attitudes in respect to CEBs (see Figure 8.2, 8.3, 8.4).



**Figure 8.2 SME Attitudinal/Behavioural Intentions on Facebook**



**Figure 8.3 SME Attitudinal/Behavioural Intentions on Instagram**

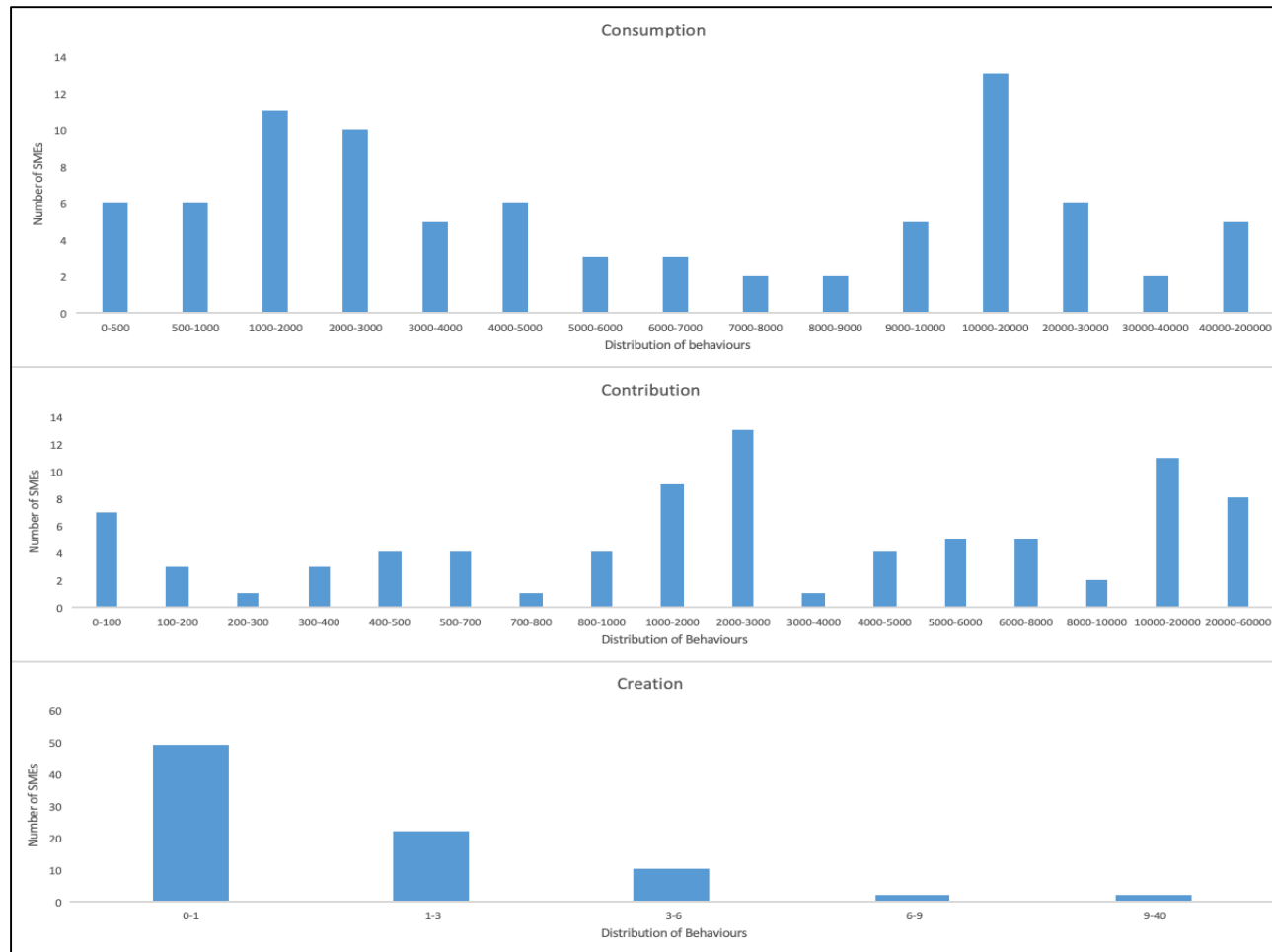


**Figure 8.4 SME Attitudinal/Behavioural Intentions on Twitter**

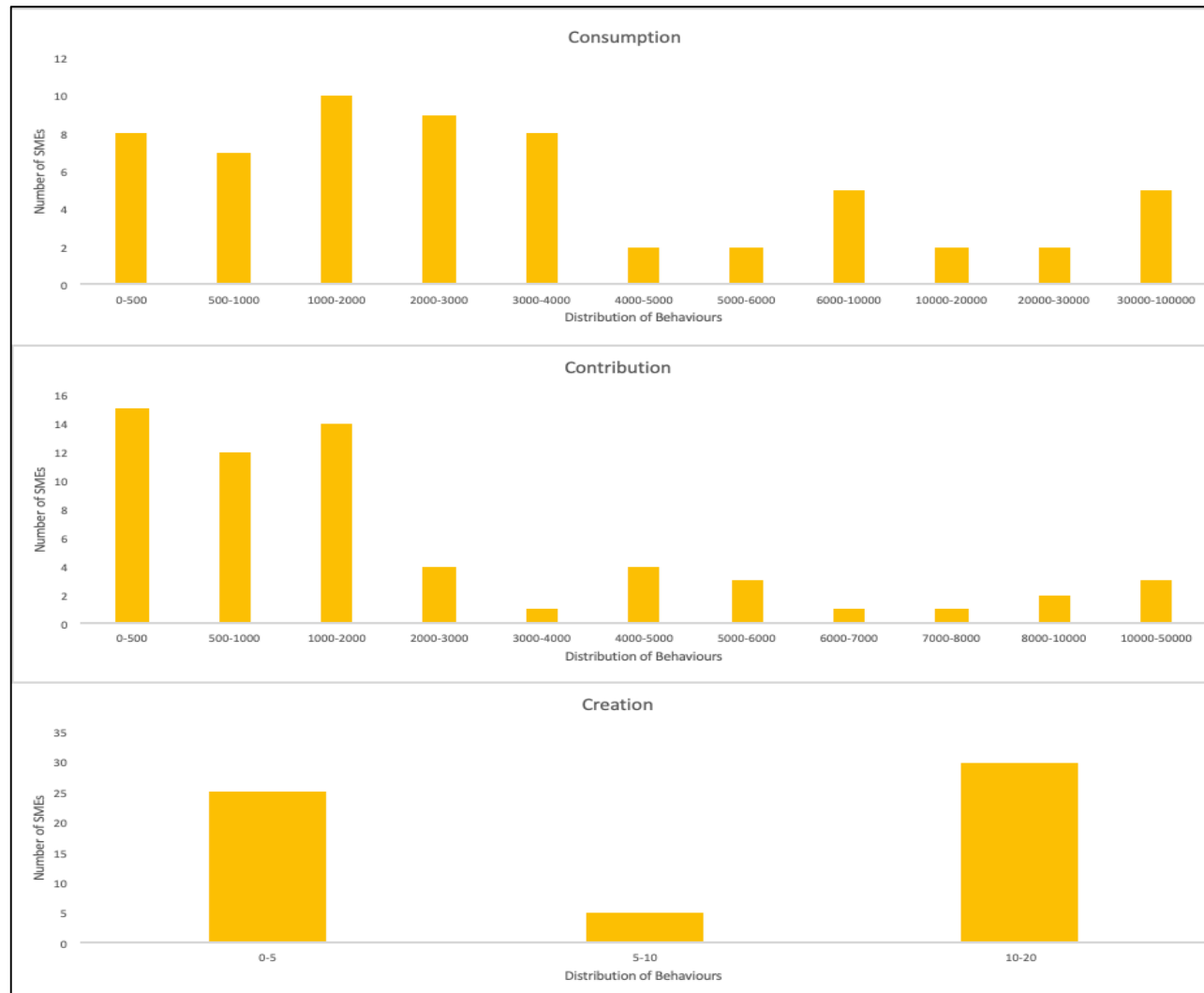
Although SME attitudes were found to be *enthusiastic/positive*, the comparison with their behavioural intentions show these SMEs to be generally *inactive/negative* and *indifferent* across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter in engendering CEBs. For Facebook activities in engendering consumption behaviours, 4 SMEs were found to be *enthusiastic/positive*. While 5 SMEs were found to be *enthusiastic/positive* in engendering contribution behaviours (see Figure 8.2).

Only 1 SME was found to be *enthusiastic/positive* in engendering creation behaviours on Twitter (see Figure 8.4). Thus, it can be posited that although SMEs display *enthusiastic/positive* attitudes towards engendering CEBs on social media platforms, their behavioural intentions do not fit their attitudinal responses. SMEs were found to be overwhelmingly *inactive/negative* across the social media platforms analysed in the research study. The results were also compared to the rest of the sample (90 SMEs) not included in the interviews. The behaviours for the rest of the samples across the social media channels are more evenly distributed in terms of the share of consumption, contribution, creation behaviours engendered. Although their attitudinal responses were not captured, the comparison between the two sets of data suggest that SMEs attitudes do not necessarily predict their behavioural intentions to generate CEBs- consumption, contribution, creation (See Figure 8.5, 8.6, 8.7). It can be summarised from the results that, although SMEs attitudes towards CEBs on social media platforms tend to be *enthusiastic/positive* – showing great interest – their behavioural intentions do not tend to be *enthusiastic/positive* in engendering CEBs – consumption, contribution, creation. Thus, SMEs need to focus on their behavioural intentions to encourage CEBs on their respective social media channels.

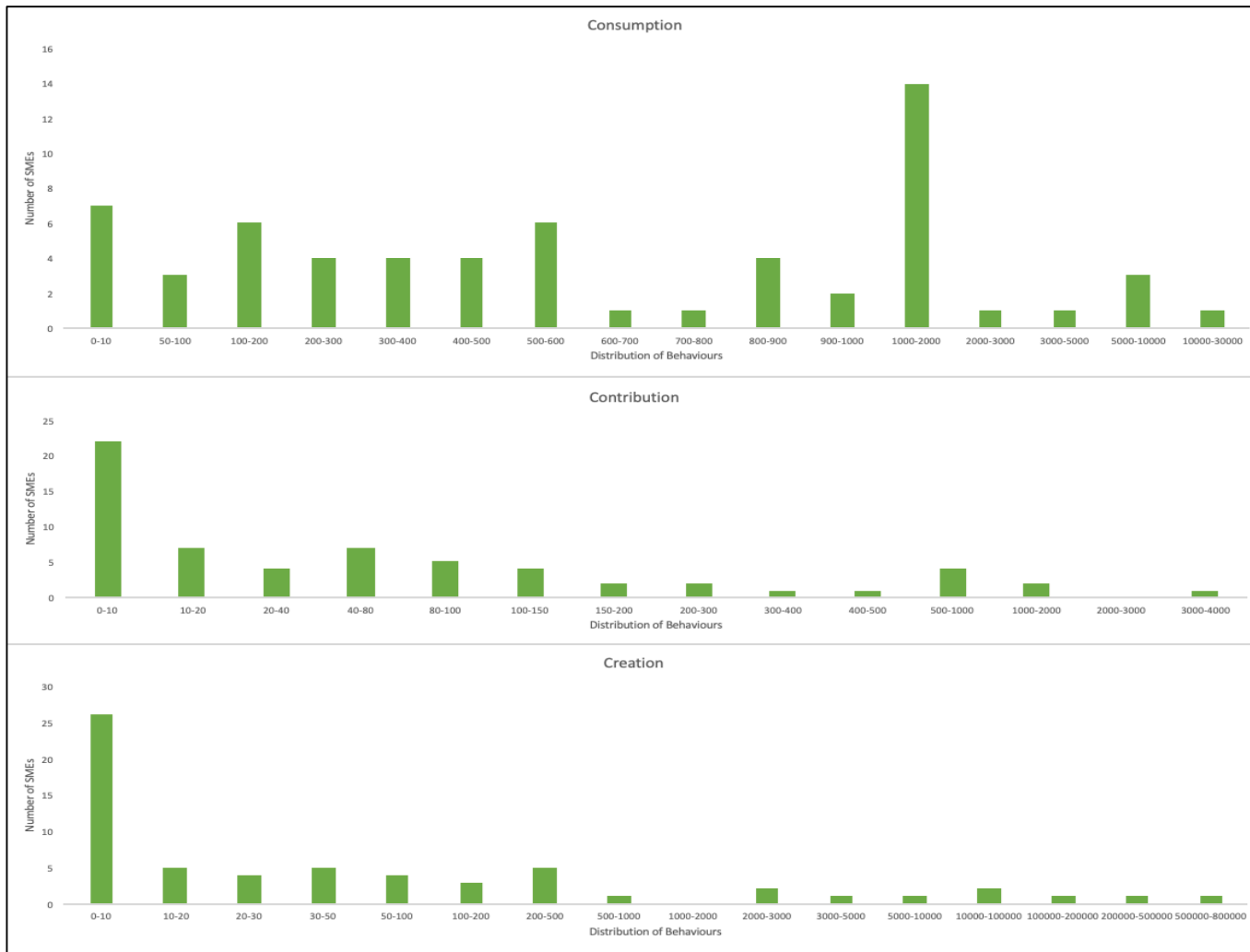




**Figure 8.5 Distribution of 90 SME Behaviours on Facebook**



**Figure 8.6 Distribution of 90 SME Behaviours on Instagram**



**Figure 8.7 Distribution of 90 SME Behaviours on Twitter**

The current section has explored SMEs views/opinions on using social media platforms to engage with their customers. It addressed this by analysing SME owner-manager's responses (attitudes) from the first phase of the interviews and then comparing these responses to actual engagement behaviours on social media. The results show a positive attitudinal relationship between SMEs and CEBs on social media platforms, while a negative relationship was found in their behavioural intentions. Therefore, SMEs need to focus more on their behavioural intentions, in terms of strategic marketing on their respective social media channels, adopting and sticking to a social media platform that sufficiently suits their business goals as well as, satisfying their customers' needs and implementing an effective measurement of their social media marketing.

#### **8.4 Discussion**

The first phase of the interview process was focused on investigating the relationship between SMEs attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms. The results from the interviews revealed a positive relationship between SMEs attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms. However, after reviewing the social media data usage for the 11 SMEs, a negative relationship was found between the firm's actual use of social media platforms suggesting a disconnect between attitude and behaviour. The results found here contribute to both theory and practice.

For theory, it extends the overall literature on CEBs and customer engagement (van Doorn et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011a, b; Hollebeek, 2013) by revealing a firm expectation – customer behavioural outcome gap in the context of SMEs using social media platforms to engage with their customers. The implication for practitioners and SME owner-managers asserts that they need to focus more extensively on the behavioural intentions of their brand pages through strategic based marketing. In addition, SMEs need to understand the specific social media channel they are adopting and how it fits with their business practices and goals while satisfying their customer's needs.

In addition, attributing an effective form of measurement for gauging their performance for using these respective social media channels for marketing i.e. financial or non-financial measurements, will help develop their understanding and usage of social media

## **8.5 Summary**

This chapter presented the empirical results from the framework analysis of the first phase of interviews with 11 SME owner-managers. It initially discussed the challenges faced by the researcher in securing the final sample of 11 SMEs from the overall 101 sampling frame. Through this, the first phase of the interview was conducted to address the following question; *What is the relationship between SMEs attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms.* The results from this revealed a positive relationship between SMEs attitudes and their use of social media platforms for engendering CEBs. However, a negative relationship was found between SMEs attitudes and their use of social media platforms for engendering CEBs. Chapter nine presents the next stage of the data analysis method – phase 2 interviews with SME owner-managers – from the sequential multi-method of the current study.

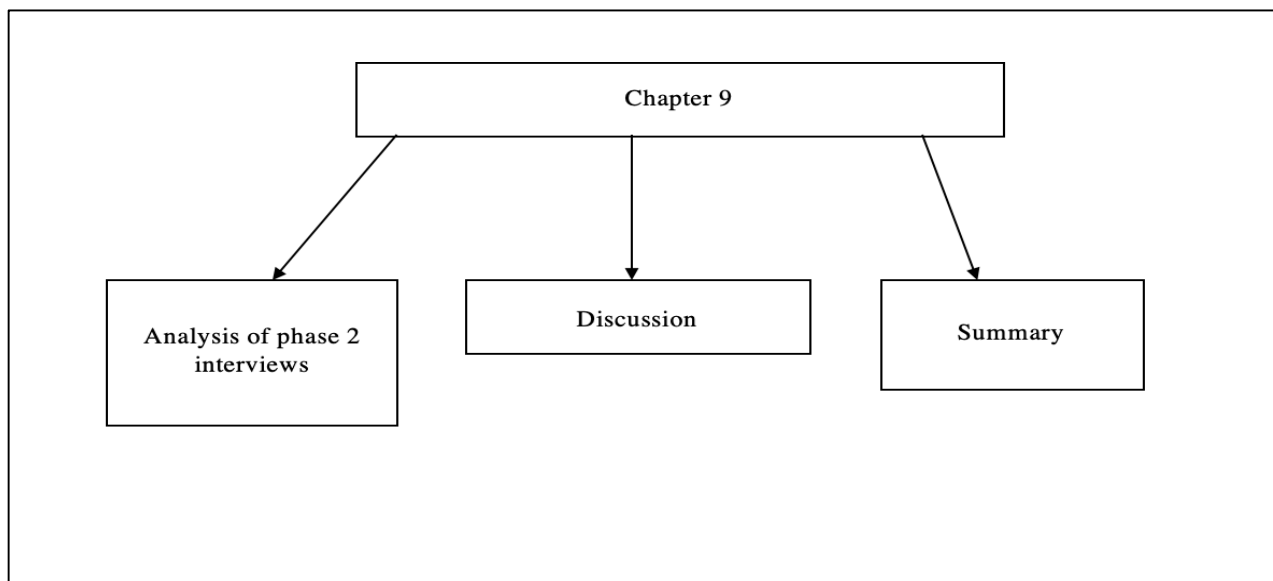
The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

## CHAPTER NINE

### INDUCTIVE ANALYSIS OF PHASE 2 INTERVIEWS WITH SME OWNER-MANAGER'S

#### 9.1 Introduction

Following phase 1 of the interviews, the next phase of the data analysis of the study involved an inductive approach whereby firms' data on how well they use their social media channels for engagement were revealed and their responses transcribed. These views were then discussed against the context of their social media usage behaviours. This chapter begins with highlighting the process involved in the inductive method used in phase 2, followed by the analysis of transcripts. Next an extensive discussion of the results in relation to both practice and theory are presented. The chapter then ends with an overall summary. Figure 9.1 shows the structure of the chapter in more detail.



**Figure 9.1 Structure of Chapter 9**

## 9.2 Analysis of Phase 2 Interviews

The two phase structure to the interviews was designed to enable the analysis of convergence and divergence between CEB as expected by the firm and CEBs actually observed through social media analysis. In the second part of the interview, attention is directed towards SME views on social media marketing and gaining phenomenological insight into the ways CEBs are understood as part of broader marketing management practices. This reveals discrepancies in how SMEs talk about CEBs and how their social media marketing actually generates CEBs. This can be considered to be a firm's expectation – customer behavioural outcome.

Thus, this section provides an analysis of phase 2 of the interviews with SME owner-managers. It seeks to address the sub-question: *What are SMEs views on using social media to engage with their customers* and is focused on SME owner-manager's responses to their use of social media and consequences of it for engagement.

Following questions around the sample's routines/strategies on their respective social media channels, SME owner-managers were shown data on their usage of their social media channels on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter in engendering CEBs (consumption, contribution, creation) and these were compared with their competitors. After the reveal, the data was carefully explained to SME owner-managers in the interviews and questions were centred on; how well their content performed in engendering CEBs, firm intentions of engendering CEBs, review of their social media content in engendering CEBs and implications of social media engagement for the firms.

Therefore, in order for a clear analysis and reflection from the transcribed views and opinions from SME owner-managers, a data structure reproduced from Corley and Gioia (2004) was adapted. The data structure allows for a configuration of data into a comprehensive visual aid while providing a representation of how the analysis progressed from raw data (interview transcripts) to concepts, themes and eventually dimensions. This method of interpretation can be regarded as a key component of demonstrating rigor in qualitative research (Tracy, 2010; Gioia et al. 2012). The act of constructing a data structure compels a theoretical and methodological way of thinking about the data.

From this, the first order analysis involves the use of *informant-centric* terms captured from the data (Gioia et al. 2012). The second order analysis involves the use of themes that encapsulates the terms captured. The themes considered here suggest answers, which might help to explain the phenomena. Finally, the combination of both the terms and themes developed leads to a *theoretical saturation* – the aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al. 2012).

The method of constructing a data structure allows the researcher to think theoretically and not methodologically about the data. As the aggregate dimensions emerging from the raw data can be compared to the literature to check if the terms found are precedents established in the literature or new emerging concepts for further development in the literature. Thus, the research process involved in the data structure method can be seen as a process of inductive research moving on to abductive research, as the data and existing literature are considered (Gioia et al. 2012). From this understanding, a data structure was developed from the 11 interview transcripts secured through phase 2 of the interviews with SME owner-managers. In the first order analysis, concepts found to have similarities in their responses were captured and arranged in order. Following the categorical order of similarities found in the transcripts, the analysis moved to the second order analysis. The second order analysis involved developing themes from the concepts that help to describe and explain each of the concepts best.



Thus, once a definitive set of concepts and themes were found to emerge from the transcripts, this led to a further investigation of filtering into a final analysis of the transcript data – the aggregate dimensions. From this process, 4 aggregate dimensions were found from the data; involvement/responsibility to customers, social media ROI, internal factors and limitations to development. In response to the target data; SMEs use of social media and consequences of it for engagement, the aggregate dimensions found here represent the responses from SMEs in regards to their individual use of social media and consequences from it.

The initial findings from the transcripts revealed that majority of the SME owner-managers interviewed assumed their social media marketing in engendering CEBs (consumption, contribution, creation) were quite successful. However, the curtain reveal (revealing firms' social media usage data) contradicts their initial beliefs on how well they actually perform in comparison with their competitors. From this understanding, a reflection by the SME owner-managers following the reveal, on their views on social media allowed the researcher to inductively capture key themes from the transcripts. The following sub-sections highlights the key themes captured from the transcripts.

#### *Involvement/Responsibility to Customers*

*“The content we write and everything we put up is tailored to our target customer in mind”*

(SME owner-manager 1)

*“There are loads of places our customers can go, everybody does it so you just got to remind them that you're there because they will forget about you if you don't”* (SME owner-

manager 2)

*“Because it is the only form of relationship, if you’d like, with our customers”* (SME owner-manager 3).

The prior codes identified from the transcripts are *brand familiarity* and *fostering long term relationships with customers*. These codes were used to inductively guide the researcher to determine involvement/responsibility to customers as one of the key aggregate dimensions. Similarities in the transcripts were drawn in relation to the SME owner-managers’ views and understanding of engagement through social media platforms in the first order concepts. Thus, from the arrangement of similar concepts, themes that best encapsulate the concepts were inductively constructed. Following this, a further investigation of distilling an aggregate dimension from the 2nd order themes was implemented. The reasoning behind developing key aggregate dimensions are to provide underlying concepts that represent SME owner-managers’ views and opinions captured from the interviews in response to the overall conceptual framework of the research. Involvement/Responsibility to customers can be described as the relationship between brands and customers. It can be said to be the fostering of relationships brands nurture with their customers pre/post purchase stage on social media platforms. For SMEs, this is a crucial concept as evidenced in the illustrative quotes from interviews with SME owner-managers. This is also evidenced in prior literature as Sheng (2019), finds a positive relationship between managerial responsiveness and customer reviews. In that, firms with a response volume (in this case, an involvement/responsibility to their customers) engender future review volume in the form of customer reviews (Sheng, 2019). Thus, this also contributes to the overall engagement literature as it expresses CEBs are influenced by firm’s engagement (Pansari and Kumar, 2017; van Doorn et al. 2010).

## *Social Media ROI*

*“I mainly look at the numbers, the sales numbers. Like I’m more sales figures focused so that’s pretty much how I see if it’s successful or not”* (SME owner-manager 1)

*“Mainly based on the likes, shares and interactions we get. So, obviously if a post has received more interactions we consider it more successful”* (SME owner-manager 2);

*“I don’t think its successful, because it would be successful in my eyes if it leads to sales, but it’s not leading to sales”* (SME owner-manager 3).

The prior codes captured in revealing social media ROI as a key aggregate dimension are; *financial outcomes* and *engagement metrics*. The arrangement of the transcripts followed the similar structure, whereby similarities in SME owner-managers’ views and opinions were placed together, forming the basis of the analysis. The similarities in the transcripts enabled the formation of second order themes – *financial outcomes* and *engagement metrics*. From the quotes represented above, most SME owner-managers were largely concerned with the input from their social media use in engaging with their customers. Thus, this lead to the inductive formation of financial outcomes and engagement metrics which are grouped under social media ROI. Social media ROI (return-on-investment) can be explained as the returns of any brand-related activities from the perspective of the firm. For SMEs, their social media ROI can be measured as financial and non-financial, as illustrated from the data collected through the interviews. SMEs regard their returns on their social media channels to their business practices as a firm measure of their performance in the market and how well they stack up against their competitors. This finding extends van Doorn et al. (2010) study of firm-centric CEB consequences. van Doorn et al. (2010) reveals there are consequences for firms through

financial, reputational, regulatory, competitive, employee, product aspects. This is also in line with Pansari and Kumar (2017) who found tangible (direct) and intangible (indirect) benefits to the firm as a consequence of customer engagement. Thus, it is important for companies to understand the consequences of their social media activities for their businesses, especially SMEs with limited resources to spare for marketing purposes.

### *Internal Factors*

*“I’m just playing at it because I don’t have the skills or expertise or know-how to post. I’m not brilliant at wording things or thinking of the customer when I’m trying to make it relevant to them”* (SME owner-manager 1);

*“Maybe I need to allocate more time and concentrate on social media each day and not be spontaneous with it. I think people like regular content and that’s maybe where we fall short”*  
(SME owner-manager 2);

*“We’re only a small independent company, so we can’t afford to dedicate someone that specialises purely on social media”* (SME owner-manager 3).

The prior codes captured to reveal internal factors as a key dimension are *lack of resources* and *time constraints*. Following the represented similarities in the transcripts, the data revealed SME owner-managers’ noting their frustrations within their businesses due to its size and capacity to fully compete in the market. The lack of resources and time constraints were mostly echoed by the SME owner-managers’. These themes were expected in the analysis as constraints to SMEs, their limitations to growth and development in the market are already evidenced in the literature, in terms of; finance (see Ndiaye et al. 2018); marketing issues

(Stokes and Nelson, 2013). Thus, the internal factors seemed to be a best fit in representing the many constraints and limitations of SMEs. Internal factors are related to certain factors that restrict SME brands in their implementation and use of social media for business purposes. Compared to larger firms, internal factors such as time constraints, lack of resources affect SMEs much more due to their size and the limited resources available to SMEs. Additionally, several authors note the constraints of internal factors, particularly for SMEs in the literature. Quinn and Carson (2003), notes the high failure rates for SMEs are attributed to their weakness in the management of finances and marketing. Also, the limitations to their marketing capabilities are expressed in the literature as a result of the characteristics of SMEs; limited customer base/marketing activity, limited expertise, over-dependence on the ability of the owner-manager, reactive marketing and challenges in exploiting the market for new opportunities (Stokes and Fitchew, 1997; LaBarbera and Rosenberg, 1989; Quinn and Carson, 2003).

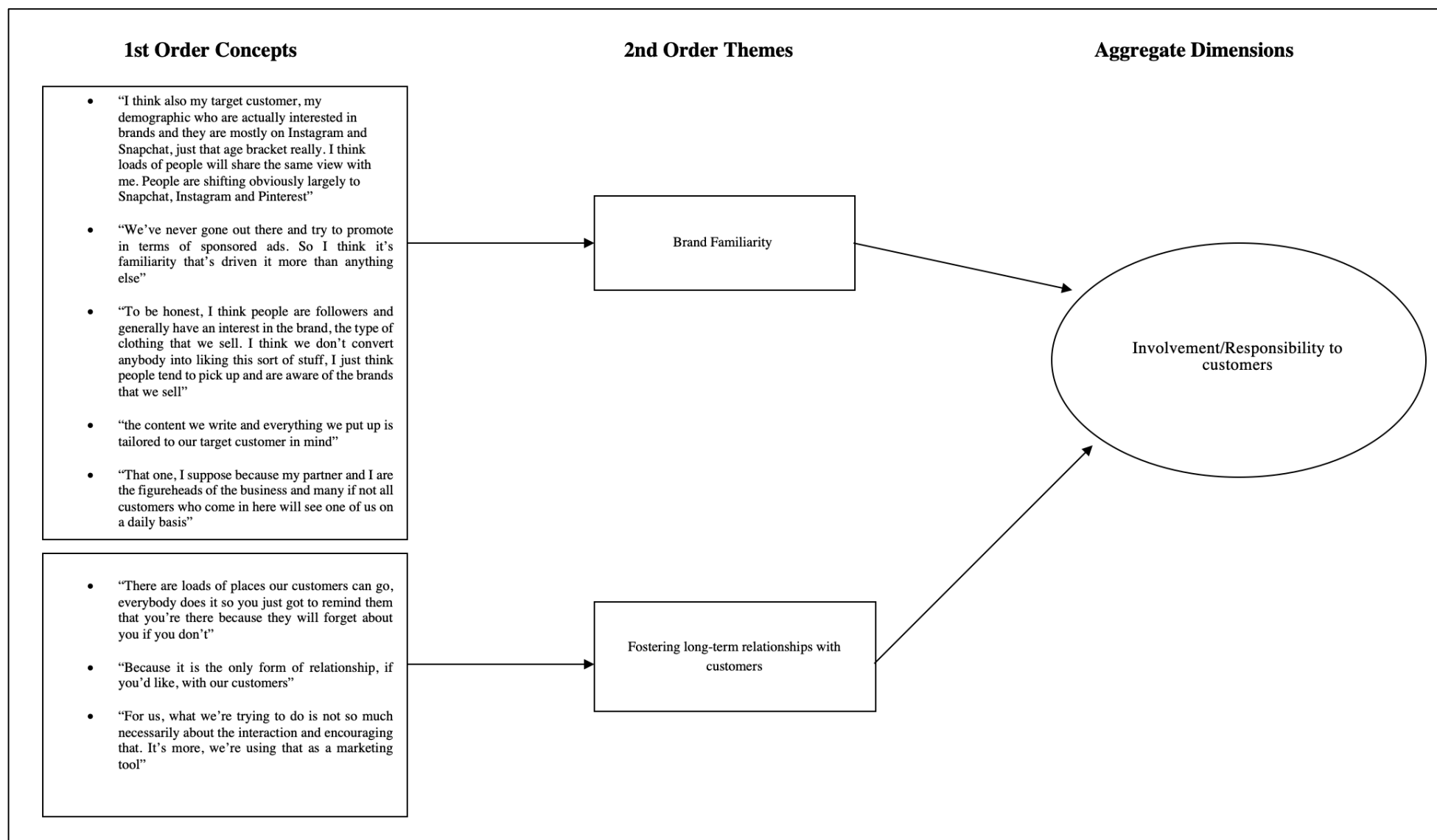
#### *Limitations to Development*

*“We’re better off staying quite small and knowing what we can manage”* (SME owner-manager 1);

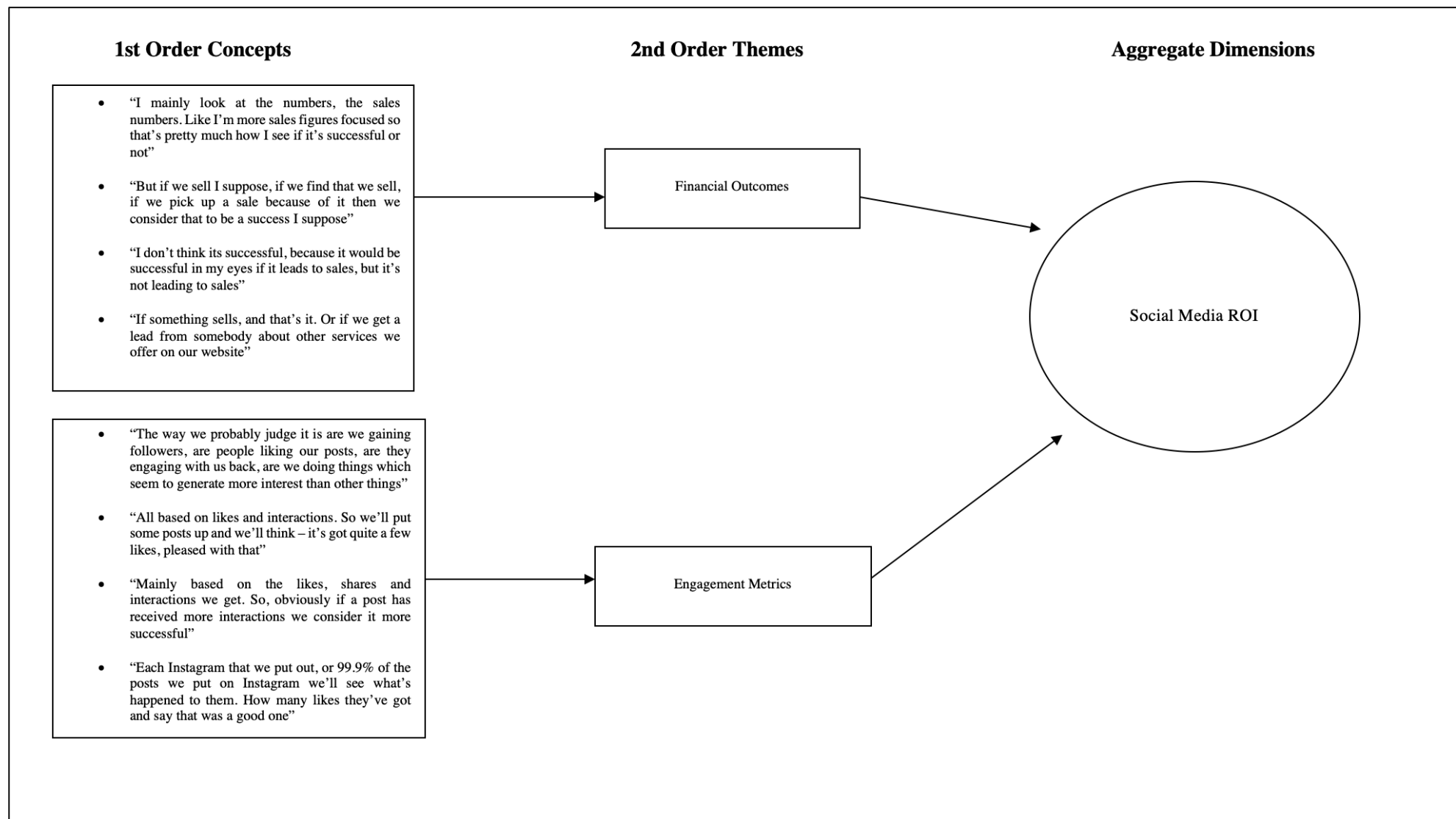
*“We have paid loads of money for ads on Facebook and we don’t see the point. It’s absolutely dead and we find it a lot better to do it on Google and sometimes, Instagram”*  
(SME owner-manager 2).

The prior codes obtained to reveal limitations to development as a key dimension are *self-complacency* and *self-satisfaction*. Following the arrangement of the transcripts into similarities, the researcher noticed emergent concepts from SME owner-managers’ views on using social media platforms for their marketing. Some of the owner-managers were not as

reliant on their social media channels compared to their counter-parts, social media platforms were viewed as another possible means of marketing but not an important means of marketing. SME owner-managers' were already implementing other methods to their marketing strategies and sticking to what works for their businesses. The quotes above highlights this further. From this understanding, the concepts emerging from the transcripts lead to the formation of the themes; *self-complacency* and *self-satisfaction*. From these themes, the dimension – limitations to development was formed. Limitations to development refer to constraints that are self-implicated by the SMEs in terms of their competitiveness and further expansion. For a number of SMEs, due to their self-complacency/self-satisfaction, this can lead to a restriction to their growth in terms of their further development or expansion in the business environment. Especially, in the aspect of marketing, due to their lack of resources i.e. inability to afford a large marketing team unlike larger firms and most of their marketing knowledge limited to what the SME owner-manager knows. Quinn and Carson (2003) note that the marketing activities within SMEs are mainly linked to the owner-manager's attitude, experience and expertise in marketing. Thus, this affects their future strategies in adopting new technological capabilities available for marketing, causing SMEs to lag behind their competitors in adopting strategies to assist with their growth and development. This is in line with Jennings and Beaver (1995), who assert the SME owner-manager's competence is the most important significant determinant of the success or failure of the firm. Thus, the limitations to the development of SMEs is largely based on the principals, experience, preferences, knowledge and expertise of the SME owner-manager (Stasch and Ward, 1987; Stokes, 1995; Quinn and Carson, 2003).

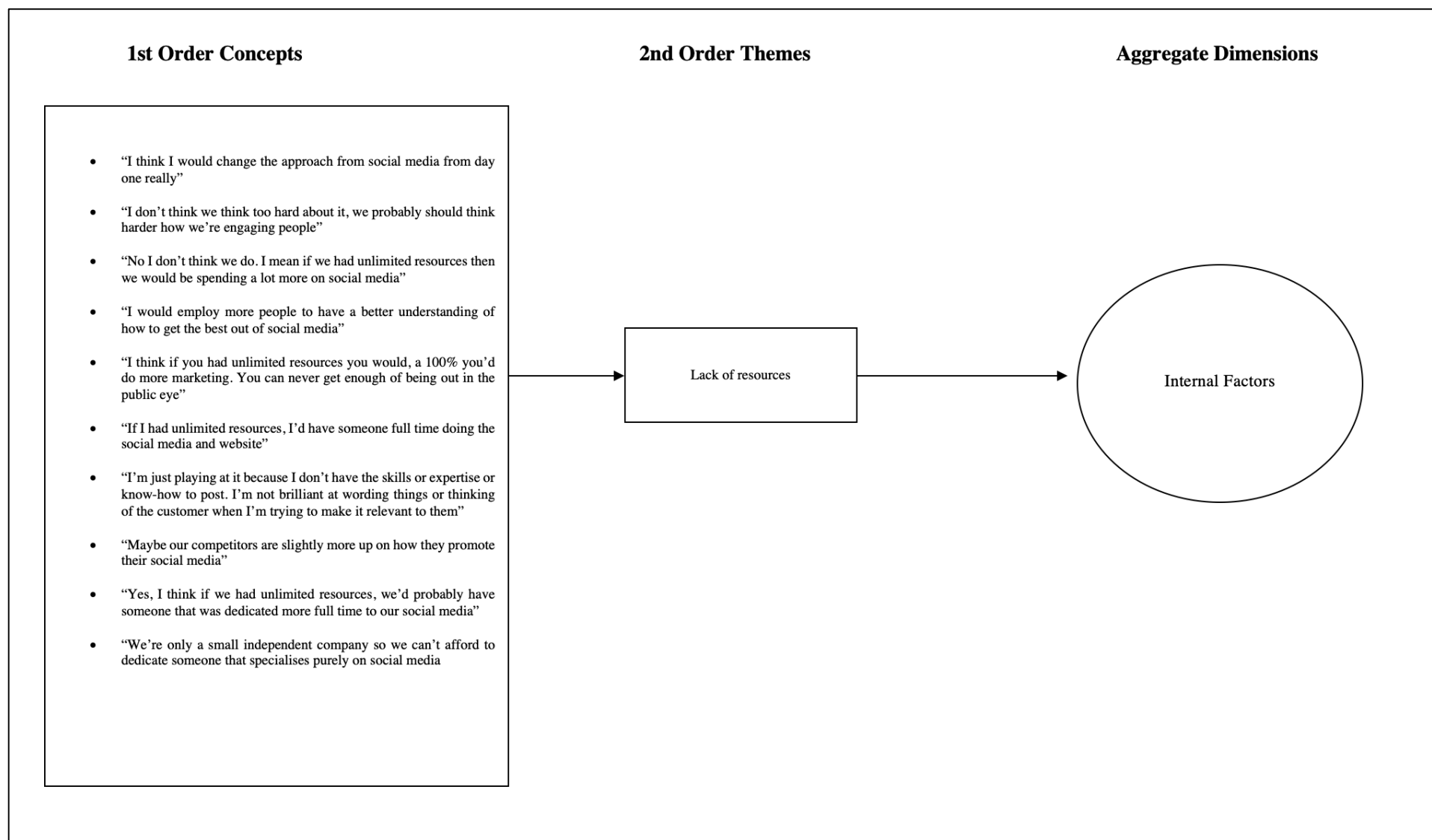


**Figure 9.2 Data Structure of Phase 2 Interviews**

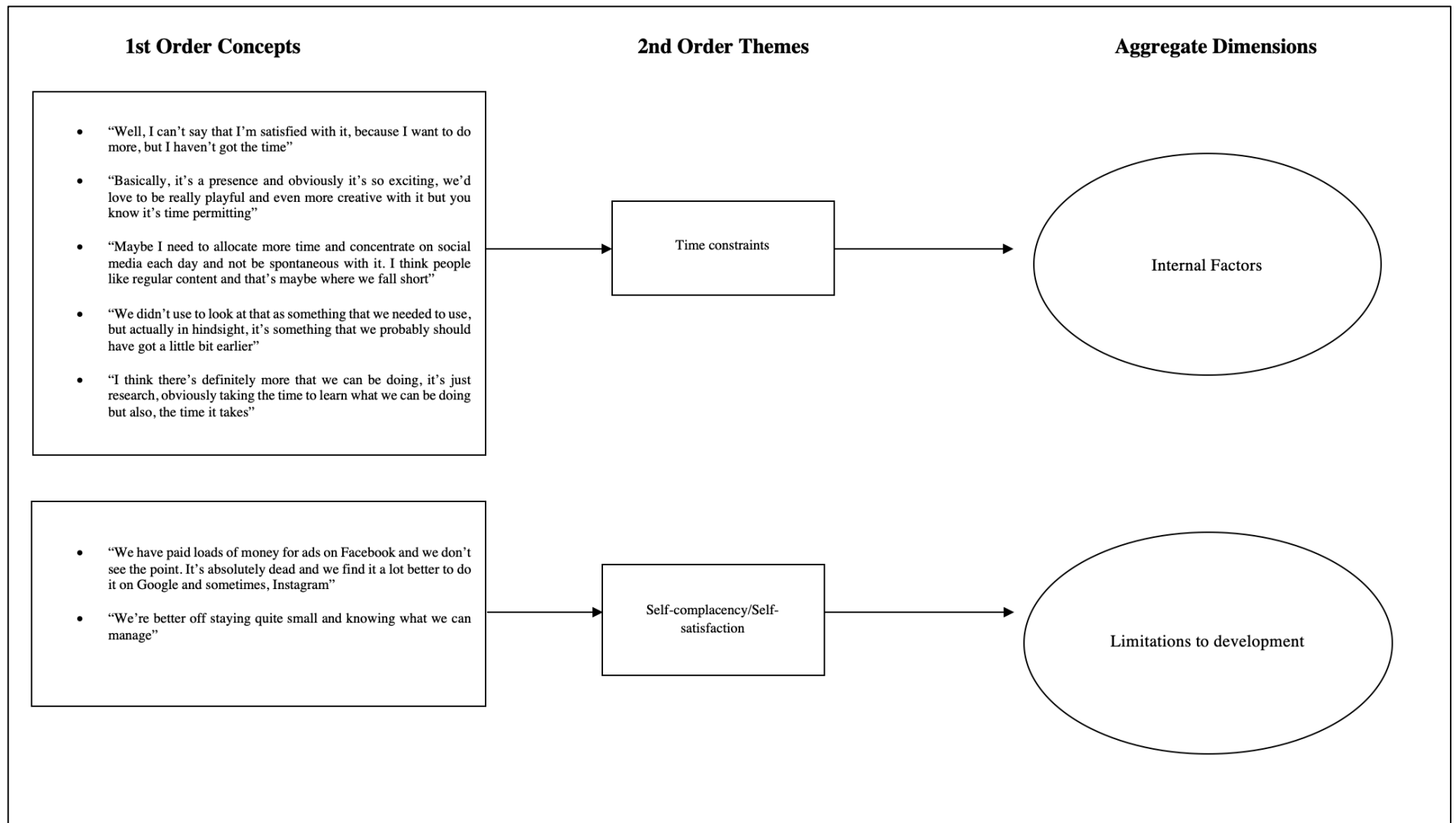


**Figure 9.3 Data Structure of Phase 2 Interviews**





**Figure 9.4 Data Structure of Phase 2 Interviews**



**Figure 9.5 Data Structure of Phase 2 Interviews**

### 9.3 Discussion

The second phase of the interview was focused on investigating the following; *What are SMEs views on using social media to engage with their customers?* After revealing the social media data usage of the firms on their respective channels, the results from the second phase of the interview revealed 4 key aggregate dimensions captured from the transcripts through a data structure (see Corley and Gioia, 2004); Involvement/responsibility to customers, social media ROI, internal factors and limitations to development. These four dimensions underpin the key motivations and limitations of SME engagement with social media. From the conceptual framework, the consequences of CEB already established in the literature reveal some overlap in one of the aggregate dimensions found. As van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 256, 259); Pansari and Kumar, (2017, p. 305), have already found financial consequences for firms in their study of engagement. Thus, the social media ROI dimension captured from the results can be said to be a precedent already established in the literature. van Doorn et al. (2010) suggests CEBs involving referral, word-of-mouth and other related actions focused on producing and spreading brand-related information can affect the purchase behaviour of customers. While Pansari and Kumar (2017) note customer's contributions having tangible benefits in the form of higher profits, revenue and market share. From this understanding, involvement/responsibility to customers, internal factors and limitations to development can be said to be new emerging precedents in regards to the engagement literature, in the context of social media platforms. Thus, this extends the literature on the firm-centric perspective of engagement (van Doorn et al. 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Additionally, it aids SME owner-managers and managerial practitioners in their understanding and use of social media platforms by providing several aggregate dimensions from an empirical context, especially for SMEs competing in the business environment.

## **9.4 Summary**

This chapter presented the results from the empirical investigation of SMEs views on using social media platforms to engage with their customers. From this, a data structure reproduced from Corley and Gioia (2004) was employed to inductively analyse SMEs views and perceptions on engagement with their customers through their respective brand-pages on social media platforms. As demonstrated in the findings, this resulted in the establishment of four aggregate dimensions; involvement/responsibility to customers, social media ROI, internal factors, limitations to development. With one of the dimensions found to be supported in the literature by van Doorn et al. (2010); Pansari and Kumar (2017). Next, chapter ten presents the discussion from the overall research study. Specifically, the chapter highlights the contributions of the overall study to extending the CEB literature as well as an extensive discussion of the results from the study in respect to the conceptual framework.

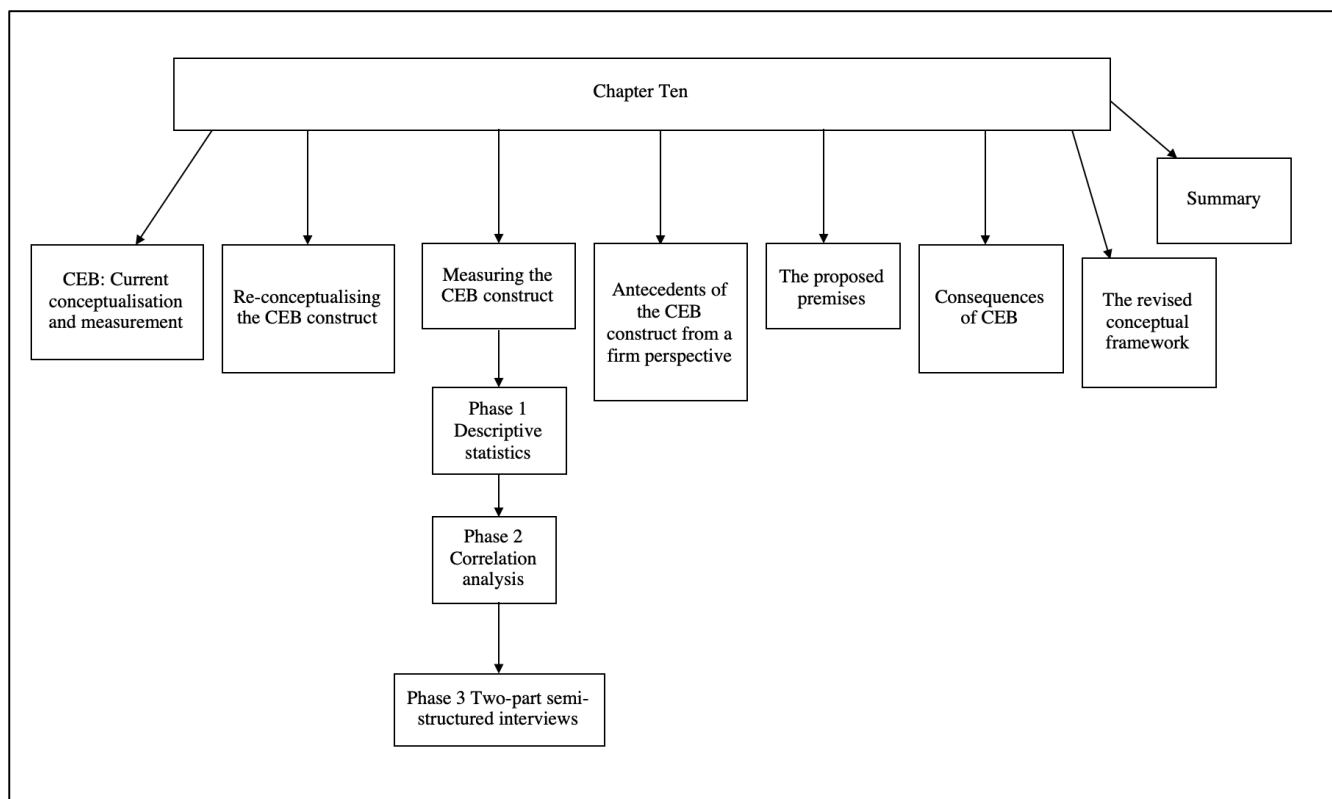
The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **10.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an extensive discussion of the findings from the analysis undertaken in chapters 6 – 9 – in relation to the extant literature and the overarching research questions. The first section begins by discussing the current conceptualisations and measurement of customer engagement behaviour. This is followed by providing a concurrent definition of CEB in relation to the various dimensions revealed in the study. Next, the development of a reliable measurement for CEB is presented in relation to the sequential research phases contained in the thesis, followed by the dimensions of CEB, which materialised through the empirical analysis of the literature. The final sections focus on discussing the outcomes – the antecedents of CEB in relation to the conceptual framework and the consequences of CEB focused on the firm's perspective – the SME context of the study, and on addressing the three research questions detailed in Chapter 1. The chapter ends with a revised conceptual framework and provides a summary. Figure 10.1 highlights the structure of the chapter in detail.



**Figure 10.1 Structure of Chapter Ten**

## 10.2 CEB: Current Conceptualisation and Measurement

This section addresses the first research question of the study- *what is the relationship between social media use and CEB?* The response to this is addressed through the findings from the correlation analysis testing firm-instigated variables and CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution and creation. As the results revealed no correlation between – type of content (text, photo, video), total number of firm posts, average daily posts and CEBs, it can be suggested that no significant relationship was found between firms use of social media and CEBs. This finding is consistent with that of Ahmad et al. (2019) noting no significant effect of SMEs social media adoption on their business performance. This can also suggest that SMEs are not greatly benefitting from social media platforms and their investments into this marketing tool. It is possible that SMEs lack the expertise, knowledge and know-how compared to their larger company counterparts who have greater numbers of resources as well as a marketing team

whose main focus is on utilising social media platforms and developing new media types for maintaining customer relationships. As emphasised in the literature review, the characteristics of SMEs impacts the adoption of marketing tools on their marketing strategies due to the willingness and ability of the owner-manager (Stasch and Ward, 1987; Chen and Hambrick, 1995; Quinn and Carson, 2003). Thus, for SMEs it is possible that there is no significant relationship between their social media use and CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution and creation behaviours. SMEs need to be strategically aware of the marketing tools they adopt for their business practice. McCann and Barlow (2015) suggest that the success of adopting social media platforms must relate to the objectives of why it was initially adopted.

From conducting a comprehensive systematic literature review of CEBs conceptualisation and measurement in the engagement literature, it was revealed that there is very little agreement in how CEB is conceptualised and in particular the uncertainties surrounding the definition of CEB, the underlying research philosophy and methodological pluralism. Thus, one of the main areas that lack consensus in the engagement literature is how customer engagement behaviour should be conceptualised. The approaches used in conceptualising CEB were revealed to be; multi-dimensionality of the construct involving a cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimension (Harrigan et al. 2017; Halaszovich and Nel, 2017); behavioural manifestation beyond purchase resulting from motivational drivers (van Doorn et al. 2010); transaction-related and behaviours beyond transaction (Kumar et al. 2010; Carlson et al. 2017). Current research suggests that these streams of studies into CEB do not accurately capture the behavioural domain of the construct.

The exploration of customer engagement behaviour as a uni-dimensional construct enables a much better understanding of the relationship between customers and firms. However, these studies (Guesalaga, 2016; So et al. 2016; Beckers et al. 2017) and their conceptualisations of CEB are dated and fail to note the recent changes in interaction between firms and their

customers through advancements in technology. Therefore, it is suggested, following the conceptualisation of van Doorn et al. (2010), a firm-centric perspective of CEB as well as a uni-dimensional scale that reflects the construct are important factors to consider in capturing the customer engagement behaviour construct.

### **10.3 Reconceptualising the CEB Construct**

According to van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254); '*Customer engagement behaviours go beyond transactions and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers*'. In the study undertaken in this thesis, CEB is regarded as a uni-dimensional construct that plays a major role in the process of firm-customer engagement. Thus, the study was guided by the above conceptualisation of customer engagement behaviour. According to the analysis presented in the previous chapters, the CEB construct in the context of social media platforms comprised 3 distinct behaviours; consumption, creation, contribution. The construct's dimensionality has been supported through a series of analyses with the results showing similar regularity in the sample for the research. Thus, based on the analysis, the study proposes the following definition for CEB in social media platforms as; *A uni-dimensional behavioural construct resulting from a behavioural state of association with a brand/brand-related activity in the context of social media platforms.*

As the identified dimensions of behaviour on social media platforms are related to CEBs in social media platforms, the current research suggests using uni-dimensional behaviour to describe this form of engagement. Similarly to van Doorn' et al. (2010) uni-dimensional view of CEB, the definition suggests that CEB is a different construct from similar terms such as; consumer brand engagement, consumer engagement, customer brand engagement and customer engagement.



## **10.4 Measuring the CEB Construct**

This section addresses the second research question of the study *How do SMEs in the UK Fashion industry use social media to engage with their customers?* In order for the study to explore and measure the CEB construct, the construct was measured in four phases including a two-part qualitative phase. These phases were specifically focused on the firm's customer behaviours on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Table 10.1 highlights the contribution of each phase of the data analysis in guiding the research to answer the formulated research questions, the key results observed, implication for theory/practice and the novelty of each method used in the research.

### **10.4.1 Phase 1 – Descriptive Statistics of Fashion SMEs use of Social Media**

The objective of the first phase was to present SMEs activity on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and undertake an analysis of how the SMEs compare in terms of their social media use for engendering CEBs. Data from 101 SMEs were assembled through scraping tools and analysed according to the COBRA (consumer online brand related activities) model (see Schivinski et al. 2016). Then, the aggregate cross-platform data compiled across the three social media platforms were presented. With 15 firms found to be using one platform as a standalone for engagement; 30 firms found to be using two platforms for engagement and 56 firms using all three platforms in unison for engagement. Following this, a comparison of how each firm uses social media for engaging with their customers were highlighted.

<b>Data Analysis</b>	<b>Key results</b>	<b>Response to research question?</b>	<b>Why this matters for the way CEB is studied? Whose work it extends/contradict?</b>	<b>Why this matters for managers? What should they do differently in future?</b>	<b>Novelty of Method</b>
Descriptive Statistics  Phase 1	<p>Fashion SMEs adopt Facebook as a valuable tool for engagement compared to other platforms.</p> <p>Fashion SMEs are much more active on Instagram compared to other platforms, in terms of posting their brand-related content.</p> <p>The data revealed that Fashion SMEs use multiple platforms in unison to communicate their brand offerings i.e. a cross platform strategy</p>	<p>The findings help in answering the RQs by facilitating the understanding of how SMEs use social media to engage with their customers through an empirical study, by revealing; a descriptive summary of Fashion SMEs use of social media platforms and a comparative analysis of fashion SMEs use of their social media channels i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.</p>	<p>The findings extend further works of literature in relation to the advantages social media platforms provides for SMEs to aid them in facing some of the constraints they face in the business environment (Stokes and Nelson, 2013; De Varies and Carlson, 2014; Franco et al. 2016).</p>	<p>For SME owner-managers, the results provide some insight into how they can effectively adopt and utilize social media channels for engaging with their customers as well as provide a synopsis into how social media platforms are used by firms in the market. For future use of social media platforms, SME owner-managers need to have an awareness of the importance of reachability of content they create through utilising either a cross-</p>	<p>The way the data was assembled and interpreted show some novelty, as data from 101 SMEs were scraped through three different web scrapping APIs; Netvizz, Phantombuster, Docteur-Tweety. The historical data was then used in conducting a cross-platform descriptive summary statistics of SMEs use of their social media channels. To the researcher's knowledge, this is the first such study that utilizes web scrapping APIs to</p>

				platform (3 platforms), bi-platform (2 platforms) uni-platform (one platform) strategy. The results revealing contribution and consumption behaviours as the more commonly exhibited behaviours among the platforms guides the focus of SME owner-managers to target these behaviours respectively in their creation of brand content.	enable an analysis into SMEs use of social media platforms.
Correlation Analysis Phase 2	The first correlation analysis - type of content – text, photo, video against CEBs showed no correlation between the different forms of content and consumption, contribution, creation behaviours.	The correlation test helps to provide some understanding as to the first research question proposed in the study <i>what is the relationship between social</i>	The results from the correlation analysis extends the way in which CEB should be studied as it contradicts previous works in the literature highlighting a significant relationship between content type/platform type and customer's responses	For SME owner-managers, the results show that their strategies in engendering CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution, creation behaviours are not	To the researcher's knowledge, the way the method was constructed show some novelty as it uses the same data from 101 SMEs in the descriptive statistics conducted

	<p>The second correlation analysis – total number of firm posts against CEBs revealed no significant relationship between the amount of content firms posts on their respective pages and consumption, contribution, creation behaviours.</p> <p>The third correlation analysis – average daily posts of firms against CEBs also revealed no significant relationship in relation to consumption, contribution, creation behaviours.</p>	<p><i>media use and customer engagement behaviour?</i> The three correlation tests reveal the relationship between SMEs activities on social media and how/if it engenders CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution, creation behaviours.</p>	<p>on social media platforms (Peters, 2019; Devereux et al. 2019). Additionally, it also extends further studies of CEBs from a firm-centric perspective (van Doorn et al. 2010).</p>	<p>necessarily as effective. Thus, as they do not have enough resources to extend across every sector of their businesses compared to larger firms, having a clear and concise strategy for using either one or more social media platform type in their businesses for engagement purposes is important.</p>	<p>prior to further conduct a correlation analysis of the firm's data for further validation.</p>
Framework Analysis Phase 3	<p>The results from the framework analysis revealed a positive relationship in Fashion SMEs attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms.</p> <p>A negative relationship was found between the firm's actual use of social media platforms, suggesting a disconnect</p>	<p>The results revealed here help to address the relationship between SMEs attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms, in turn, it also explains how fashion SMEs use social media to engage with their</p>	<p>The results extend the overall literature on CEBs and customer engagement (van Doorn et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011a, b; Hollebeek, 2013) through revealing a firm expectation-customer behavioural outcome gap in the context of social media platforms.</p>	<p>The results highlight the importance for SME owner-managers to focus more extensively on the behavioural intentions of their brand pages' through strategic based marketing. Thus, SME owner-managers</p>	<p>To the researcher's knowledge, the framework analysis conducted through integrating both quantitative and qualitative data show some novelty in the way both forms of data were used and integrated to address the</p>

	between SMEs attitudes and their customer's CEBs.	customers through the comparative data of SMEs use of social media platforms and their attitudes towards using social media platforms.		need to understand and have an awareness of the specific social media channels they are adopting and how it fits with their business practices and goals while satisfying the needs of their customers.	research question(s).
Part two interview Phase 4	<p>The results revealed four key aggregate dimensions captured from the transcripts through a data structure that underpin the key motivations and limitations of SMEs engagement with social media platforms;</p> <p>Involvement/Responsibility to customers</p> <p>Social media ROI (return-on-investment)</p> <p>Internal factors</p> <p>Limitations to development</p>	<p>The four aggregate dimensions reveal some insight into the initial research questions as to the relationship between social media use and CEB, as well as the implications for fashion SMEs using social media to engage with their customers by inductively revealing SMEs views and opinions through the interviews conducted with</p>	<p>The results highlighted, extends studies in CEBs from a firm-centric perspective (van Doorn et al. 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017) by revealing new emerging precedents of CEBs in social media platforms unconfirmed in the literature i.e. the aggregate dimensions of; involvement/responsibility to customers, internal factors and limitations to development.</p>	<p>The results revealed here helps to assist SME owner-managers in understanding the motivations and limitations of using social media platforms for engaging with their customers, by providing key dimensions from an empirical context. Thus, SME owner-managers need to consider these concepts in their</p>	<p>To the researcher's knowledge, the construction of the method for investigating the interviews show some novelty. As the data initially observed prior in the descriptive stats and correlation analysis were also used in the interviews. SME owner-managers were shown how they use/how they perform on their respective</p>

		SME fashion owner-managers		use of social media platforms to prevent – the misuse of their limited resources, to assist in reaching their social media marketing goals and aid in their overall development and growth.	channels, following reveal of firm data, the interview questions were then asked in relation to their responses to the aforementioned with the objective of addressing their views on using social media to engage with their customers.
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**Table 10.1 Summary of Data Analysis**

The comparative firm data showed 97 SMEs using Facebook, 69 SMEs using Instagram and 71 SMEs using Twitter. The comparative data showing Facebook as the most commonly adopted platform is consistent with studies in the literature (Eid et al. 2019; Ahmad et al. 2019). In addition, firm's specific observed CEBs were also observed through data obtained via the use of scraping tools, with the raw statistics aggregated and coded according to the CEBs prevalent on each platform. The results revealed consumption and contribution behaviours are exhibited more commonly across all three platforms, while creation behaviours are revealed to be far less commonly exhibited.

#### **10.4.2 Phase 2 Correlation Analysis**

The second phase of the study was to further test the scraped data using a Pearson correlation test. The objective of this phase was focused on exploring a number of firm-instigated variables to explain how firm performance affects the manifestation of particular CEBs. The variables tested were focused on; the type of content (text, photo, video), total number of posts by the firm and the average daily posts by the firm. Next, a Pearson correlation co-efficient test was conducted on each of the variables against CEBs on each platform – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. In all three correlation tests conducted, the results showed no correlation whatsoever between the variables mentioned and CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution and creation. The findings revealed here extends further studies into CEBs from a firm perspective (van Doorn et al. 2010) in that SMEs/SME owner-manager's need to have an awareness of their online marketing strategies in engendering engagement with beneficial consequences for them and their customers.

### **10.4.3 Phase 3 Two-part Semi-Structured Interviews**

The objective of the third phase was to explore SME fashion retail owner-managers view of customer engagement behaviour on social media platforms. This is broken down into two parts each with their own objective in relation to achieving the research aim;

#### *First Phase*

For the first phase of the interview with 11 SME owner-managers, an integration of data from mixed sources – qualitative (interviews), quantitative (SMEs social media statistics) was undertaken to evaluate the relationship between firm's attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms from both data sets. The main objective of phase 1 was aimed at addressing the following question; what is the relationship between SMEs attitudes and CEBs on social media platforms? The process of analysis followed a template analysis (see Crabtree and Miller, 1999) in which the data was grouped into scales, representing the attitudes of each SME; enthusiastic/positive (showing great interest), indifferent (showing no interest or disinterest), inactive/negative (showing no interest at all). The attitudinal scales formed the basis for analysing SMEs attitudes towards social media, as well as, towards CEBs. The results revealed that SMEs were overwhelmingly inactive/negative across the social media platforms. Although the SMEs display enthusiastic/positive attitudes towards their social media use, their behavioural intentions do not fit their attitudinal responses.

#### *Second Phase*

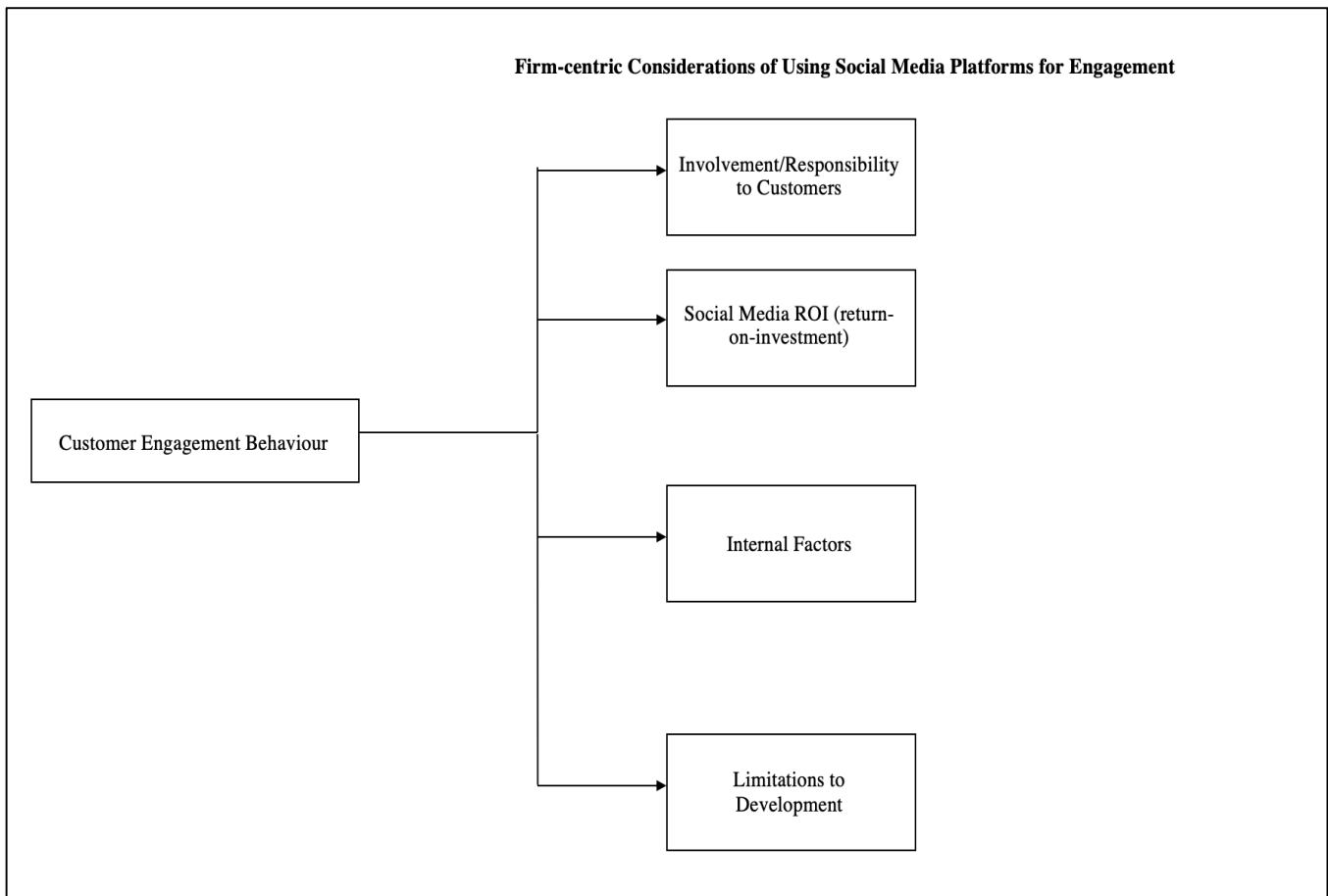
For the second phase of the interviews also with 11 SME owner-managers, this was focused on addressing the following question; what are SMEs views on using social media to engage with their customers? Focused on SME owner-manager's responses to their use of social media and consequences of it for engagement.



Through this understanding, the SMEs data on their social media usage was revealed to them and questions around their responses to the data shown used to develop themes inductively from the data. A data structure (reproduced from Corley and Gioia, 2004) was adapted to draw out 4 key aggregate dimensions from the interview transcripts; involvement/responsibility to customers, social media ROI, internal factors and limitations to development. These dimensions underpin the key motivations and limitations of SME engagement with social media platforms. The social media ROI dimension captured from the results are precedent established in the literature (van Doorn et al. 2010, p. 256, 259; Pansari and Kumar, 2017, p. 305). While involvement/responsibility to customers, internal factors and limitations to development can be said to be new emerging precedents in the engagement literature. The findings from this also extends the literature on the firm-centric perspective of engagement (van Doorn et al. 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017).

### **10.5 Antecedents of the CEB Construct from a Firm Perspective**

Following exploratory research (Muntinga et al. 2011; Schivinski et al. 2016) customer engagement behaviour was proposed to comprise three dimensions of behaviours; consumption, contribution, creation. However, after a series of analyses, the previous chapters demonstrated that any specific manifestation of CEB will also be influenced by four aggregated factors representative of a firm-centric perspective of CEB; involvement/responsibility to customers, social media ROI, internal factors, limitations to development (see Figure 10.2).



**Figure 10.2 Firm-centric Considerations of Using Social Media Platforms for Engagement**

The four considerations reported from conducting the second part of the interviews with SME owner-managers' are primarily concerned with the factors that SMEs place as important/integral when considering social media platforms for engagement/marketing purposes in their business practices.

#### *Involvement/Responsibility*

This antecedent can be described as the relationship between brands and customers. It can be said to be the fostering of relationships brands nurture with their customers pre/post purchase stage on social media platforms. Through a literature review, a similar dimension is found in

line with Sheng (2019). It also contributes to the overall engagement literature as it expresses CEBs influenced by firm's engagement (van Doorn et al. 2010; Pansari and Kumar, 2017).

#### *Social Media ROI (return-on-investment)*

This antecedent can be explained as the returns of any brand-related activities from the perspective of the firm. These can be financial and non-financial. Also, the dimension extends van Doorn et al. (2010) study of firm-centric CEB consequences.

As firms adopt and utilise any form of media for marketing purposes; especially social media platforms, some type of return that benefits their growth and performance needs to be assessed. With the competitive nature of the business environment, firms need to have a useful measurement of the marketing tools they adopt in their business practices, as it ensures the efficient use of their resources. This is especially useful for SMEs with limited resources and the ability to efficiently use available resources in their practices compared to their larger counterparts (see Kraus et al. 2019). Thus, recognising the financial and non-financial benefits social media platforms offers to their businesses helps combat some of the pressures SMEs face in the market.

#### *Internal Factors*

The internal factors are related to certain factors that restrict SME brands in their implementation and use of social media for business purposes. These factors – time constraints, lack of resources – affect SMEs much more due to their size and limited resources. This is evident in the literature by LaBarbera and Rosenberg (1989); Stokes and Fitchew (1997); Quinn and Carson (2003). These internal factors recognised in the research highlight some of the issues SMEs face in their businesses, although social media platforms serve as a useful avenue for SMEs to market their brand offerings at no cost, there are still factors in the inner

workings of these firms that limit them to fully utilise social media platforms into their business practices. Thus, SMEs need to have an awareness of these factors in order for them to successfully compete alongside their counterparts in the business environment.

#### *Limitations to Development*

This antecedent refers to constraints that are self-implicated by the SMEs in terms of their competitiveness and further expansion. This is linked to the SME owner-manager's own knowledge and expertise.

As evidenced in the literature by Quinn and Carson (2003) noting the marketing activities within SMEs are mainly linked to the owner-manager's attitude, experience and expertise in marketing.

Thus, this affects their future strategies in adopting new technological capabilities available for marketing, causing SMEs to lag behind their competitors in adopting strategies to assist with their growth and development. This is also evidenced in the literature, as Centeno et al. (2019) notes that SME owner-managers are mainly guided by their personality traits, tastes and preferences, abilities/knowledge and values when making informed decisions on the strategies for their businesses. Thus, the pathway for most SMEs in the market is largely restricted to the decision-making of the SME owner-manager.

### **10.6 The Proposed Premises**

The conceptual framework of the current study in chapter four proposed five premises which were all focused on engendering CEBs in social media platforms. The first was concerned with the relationship between social links and CEBs (consumption and contribution), the second addressed the link between search for information and CEBs (consumption), and the third examined the relationship between self-involvement and CEBs (consumption, creation, contribution). The fourth addressed the relationship between functionality and CEBs

(consumption, creation, contribution), and the fifth addressed the link between ownership-value and CEBs (contribution and creation).

Premise 1-4 (see conceptual framework) have not been conclusively validated in the research as it will need to be determined from a customer lens;

- **Social links** moderate the emergence of CEBs in the form of consumption and contribution on social media platforms.
- **Pre-purchase information** searching during the consumer decision making process is an antecedent to the emergence of consumption CEBs on social media platforms.
- **Self-involvement** increases the likelihood of CEBs manifesting in the form of consumption, contribution and creation on social media platforms.
- The prevalence and specific manifestation of CEBs on social media, whether consumption, contribution, or creation, depends on **functionality** made possible by the specific technical implementation of the respective platform.

Each premise (1-4) is concerned with variables that involve a customer-centric perspective in regard to influences of CEBs on social media platforms. Thus, it was premised that all four antecedents; social links, search for information, self-involvement, functionality are positively related to CEB. However, the empirical results partially supported the assertions, as ownership-value was deemed to be an antecedent of CEB when considering the variables which influence the firm perspective on CEBs. However, the results suggested social links, search for information, self-involvement and functionality do not relate to CEBs from a firm-centric perspective.

## **10.7 Consequences of CEB**

This section is concerned with addressing the final research question of the study *What are the managerial implications for SMEs in the UK Fashion Industry for engaging with their customers through social media platforms?* According to the conceptual framework proposed in chapter four, three constructs already established through previous empirical work were suggested by which to examine the impact of CEB on potential consequences. The current study suggested three important consequences of CEB in social media platforms; financial, reputational and consumer knowledge. These results are supported through the second part of the two-part interviews with SME owner-managers on their views on how they use social media platforms to engage with their customers. It is expressed in one of the aggregate dimensions found – social media ROI. In that, the returns of brand-related activities from the perspective of the firm can be financial or non-financial – reputational, consumer knowledge.

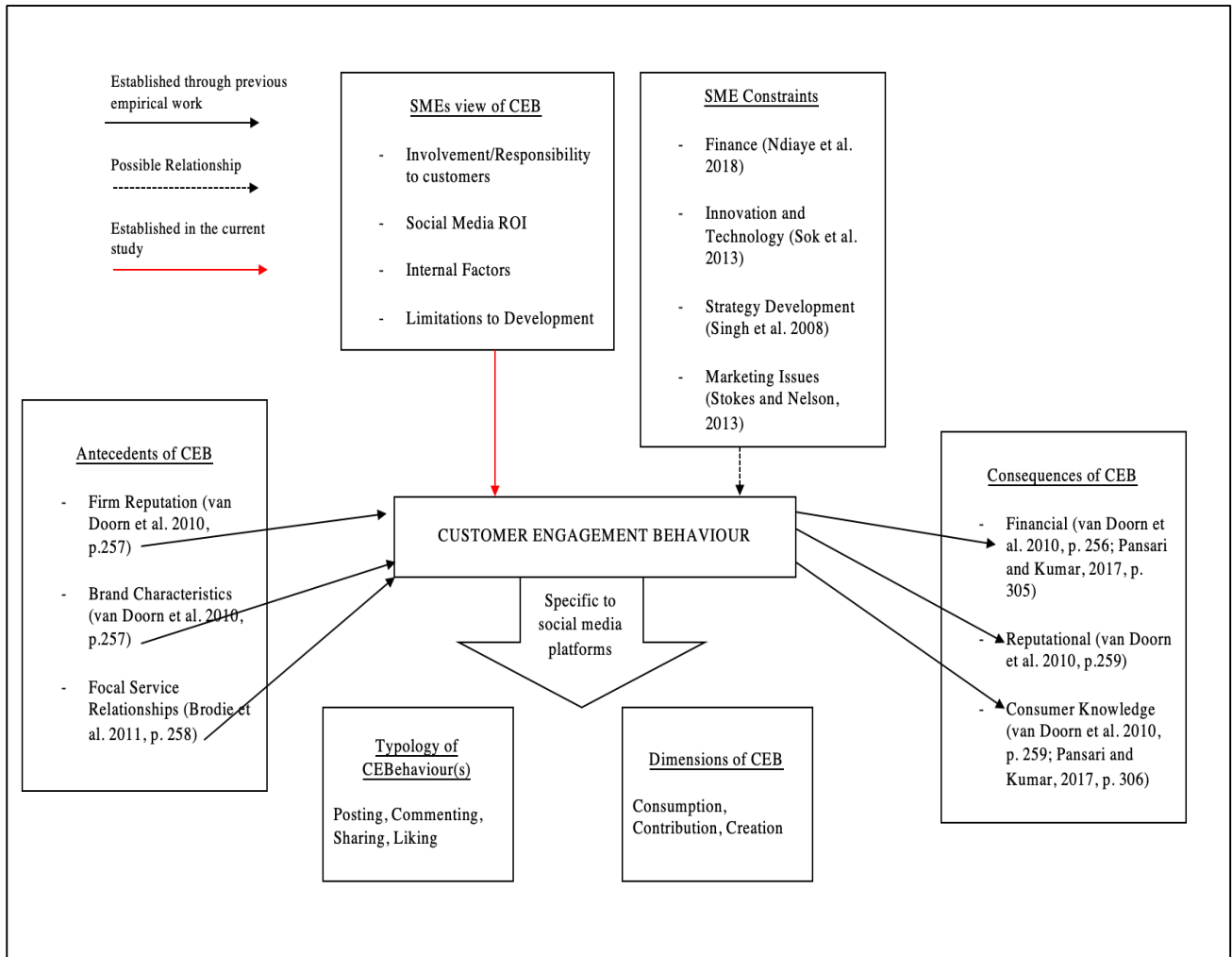
## **10.8 The Revised Conceptual Framework**

Following the results from the current study, a revised conceptual framework (see Figure 10.3) was constructed in regards to the possible relationship of SMEs views of CEB specific to social media platforms. Thus, SMEs view of CEB can be regarded to be an involvement/responsibility to customers, a form of social media returns in their use of the platforms albeit financial or non-financial, internal factors restricting their optimal use of social media for marketing and reaching their business goals/objectives, finally, limitations to their development in terms of the SME owner-managers' knowledge and expertise of social media marketing.

The implications of these findings for SMEs are heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has increased customer online shopping habits and created a shift away from physical

stores. The personal relationships which SME owner-managers have traditionally shared with their customers (Resnick et al. 2016) will become less important and engaging with their customers through social media marketing will become crucial. As Sayyida et al. (2021) notes in their study of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on retail, significant changes include a shift in consumer behaviour that relies on the use of digital forms of information (e.g. social media platforms) in making online purchases, the ease of access of information online coupled with the conditions affecting retail businesses.

The pandemic is considered to be an indicator for the acceleration of the structural change in the way consumers shop and the digital transformation in the business environment (Kim, 2020). According to a report by Deloitte (2020), similar patterns from the recession of 2008-2009 in the marketplace are expected; whereby, there was a growth in e-commerce and decline in brick-and-mortar retailing. The new marketplace is expected to be shaped by new trends driven largely by the pandemic (Deloitte, 2020). It is therefore important for SMEs to be aware of the changes in the market and seek strategic avenues to combat this, i.e. social media platforms – which are relatively low cost and if used effectively can achieve high reachability and access to a large database of consumers.



**Figure 10.3 A Revised Conceptual Framework**

## 10.9 Summary

This chapter discussed the results of the data analyses presented in the previous chapters in relation to the overarching research questions of the study. The first research question *what is the relationship between social media use and customer engagement behaviour?* was addressed through the correlation analysis of firm-instigated variables and CEBs showing no significant relationship between firms' social media use and CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution and creation.



The second research question *how do SMEs in the UK fashion industry use social media to engage with their customers?* was addressed through the analysis of the 101 Fashion SMEs Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts. This showed that the majority of the SMEs adopt Facebook as a primary tool for marketing, whereas, most of the firms' are noted to be more active in their brand-related communications on Instagram. Additionally, further analysis showed a firm expectation/customer behavioural gap whereby, firms are noted to have a positive attitude towards engendering CEBs on their respective social media channels. However, a negative relationship was revealed in their use of engendering CEB behaviours in the form of consumption, contribution and creation. The final research question *what are the managerial implications for SMEs in the UK fashion industry for engaging with their customers through social media platforms* was addressed in the final analysis whereby, firm-centric considerations of CEBs were revealed inductively; involvement/responsibility to customers, social media ROI (return-on-investment), internal factors and limitations to development.

Thus, the implication of the study highlights the importance of social media platforms particularly for SMEs, which is especially important in the current climate due to the changing business environment impacted greatly by the COVID-19 pandemic. The final chapter of the thesis presents the contributions of the research, limitations of the study and finally, suggestions for future research.

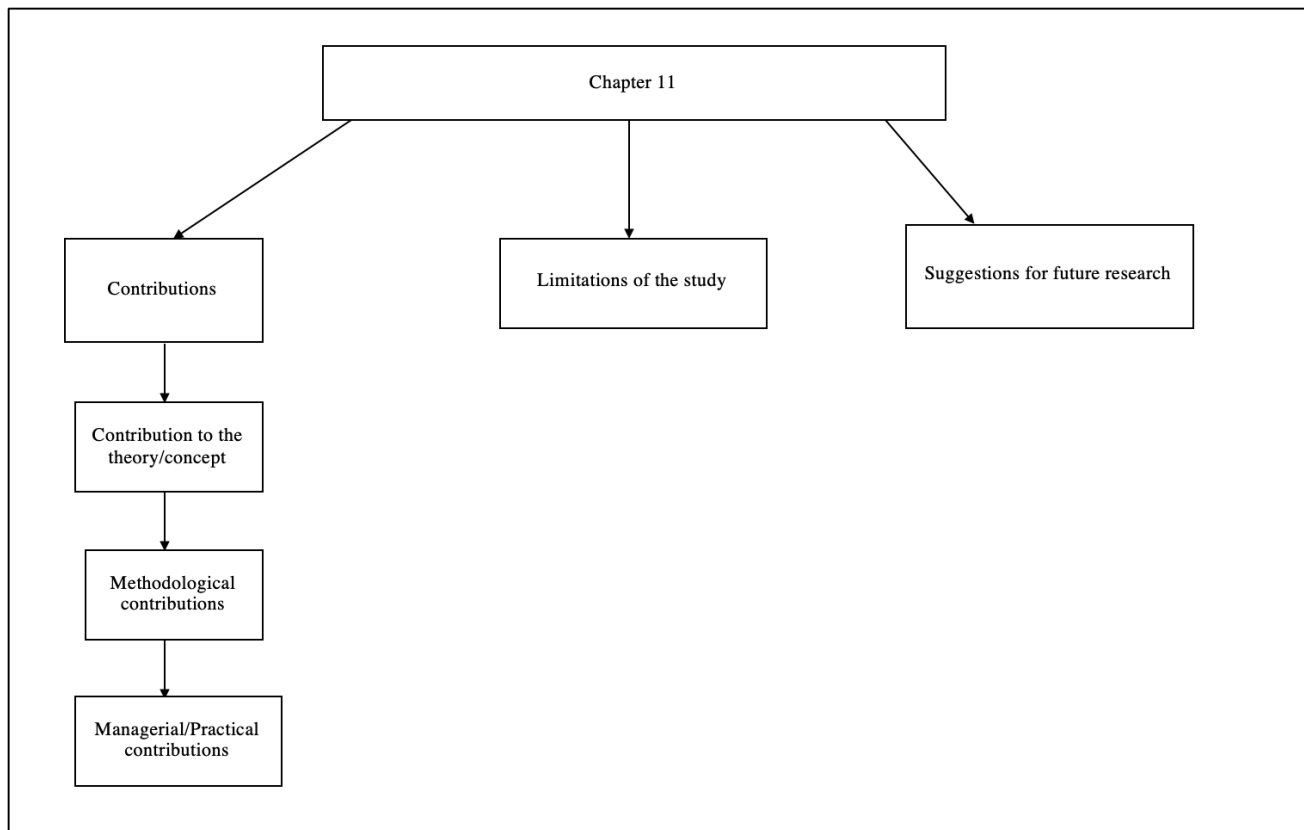
The aim of this study is to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media to engage with their customers.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### CONCLUSION

#### 11.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to present the conclusions of the current study and make some suggestions for the direction of future research. The chapter begins with providing the contributions to theory, method and managerial/practical contributions from this research. This is followed by the limitations of the study and the directions for future research. Figure 11.1 details how the chapter is structured.



**Figure 11.1 Structure of Chapter Eleven**

## **11.2 Contributions**

To address the contribution of the current study, the research is guided by Corley and Gioia (2011) views on ‘what constitutes a theoretical contribution?’ in the academic literature. The authors provide two dimensions – originality and utility. Originality can involve two categories for contributing to theory; the advancement of understanding in a way that creates a change in thinking about the phenomenon in question and the advancement of understanding to show some aspect of revelation to the reader in question (Corley and Gioia, 2011). The dimension of utility is explained to involve practically and scientifically useful contributions to research (Corley and Gioia, 2011). The sub-categories for originality – revelatory/incremental and utility – practically/scientifically useful are important categories in which the field of research values theoretical contributions. Revelatory is concerned with revealing what the reader had not seen, known or conceived while incremental is concerned with advancing theoretical understanding (Corley and Gioia, 2011). The practically useful category is perceived as being applicable to the challenges of practitioners and in this case the challenges SMEs face, while the scientifically useful category is expressed as advancing/improving conceptual rigor or an idea, while enhancing the potential for its operationalisation and testing in research (Corley and Gioia, 2011). From this understanding, the current study falls within the dimensions of originality and utility in presenting its contributions to research, in the subsequent sections.

### **11.2.1 Contribution to the theorisation of customer engagement behaviour**

In the aspect of the incremental sub-category of originality, the current study advances research on customer engagement in the marketing literature by providing a clear understanding of the CEB construct and its dimensions, offering a theoretically grounded conceptualisation, in turn providing an original-incremental (Corley and Gioia, 2011) understanding to the extant research on customer engagement.

The current study also contributes to the enhancement of academic insight into CEBs in social media platforms by distinguishing CEB from the CE concept and other related concepts in the marketing literature i.e. consumer brand engagement (Hollebeek et al. 2014; Kabadayi and Price, 2014), consumer engagement (Brodie et al. 2011b), customer brand engagement (Hollebeek, 2011). Another significant contribution with regards to incremental sub-category of originality, is related to the use of the COBRA model to specifically categorise CEBs in social media platforms. The current study provides insights into the application of the COBRA model which can be applied to the context of social media platforms by specifying customer CEBs within major platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter.

Additionally, the current study addresses the calls for further research from marketing scholars to explore firm-initiated CEBs and identify the antecedents of CEB and their interactive effects (van Doorn et al. 2010; Guesalaga, 2016; So et al. 2016; Beckers et al. 2017). Regarding the revelatory sub-category of originality, the current study followed a systematic literature review of the engagement literature by uncovering connections among research findings into the CEB concept through an in-depth qualitative synthesis of identified 1,324 records surrounding *customer engagement behaviour* and *customer engagement behavior*. To the best of the author's knowledge, the current study provides the first empirical study that uses a systematic literature review exploring CEBs in social media platforms. Until now, there exists no systematic literature review that could describe the present state of CEB research to advance future research by highlighting the exigent issues that research should look into, through revealing epistemological tensions within the literature that need to be explicitly addressed if the CEB construct is to be properly operationalised for further study.

Following the systematic literature review process, the current study has identified five broad antecedent causes which were found to influence the exhibition of CEBs on social media platforms; social links, search for information, self-involvement, functionality and ownership-value. This contributes insights into the nature of CEBs and enables future researchers to further investigate the construct and its relationship within social media platforms.

The current study contributes to the growing body of research on engagement from the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) and the American Marketing Association (AMA) by identifying the need for further research into the construct, in the aspect of; a universal definition of CEB, an underlying research philosophy of CEB and a methodological pluralism. In line with the findings, the current study suggests the conceptualisation of CEB in social media platforms as; the behaviours resulting from a behavioural state of association with a brand/brand-related activity in the context of social media platforms. The development of a definition of CEB allows researchers/scholars to study the concept independently on an overall level, without incurring into any overlap of constructs. Thus, researchers can further determine the dimensions of CEBs that are important for firms and consequently lead to positive outcomes which are beneficial for the firm/brand.

Lastly, alongside other studies (van Doorn et al. 2010; So et al. 2016; Guesalaga, 2016; Beckers et al. 2017), this research focuses the attention on a firm-centric perspective. Specifically, the findings revealed a firm expectation/customer behavioural outcome gap. In that, firms focused on engagement through their social media channels have a negative customer behavioural outcome. Thus, highlighting the need for firms to have a more efficient means of approaching engagement with their customers through social media platforms. It extends these works aforementioned by identifying specific antecedents of CEB and their interactive effects on the firm and on SMEs in particular.

### **11.2.2 Methodological Contributions**

In regard to methodology, the current study contributes to knowledge within two ways; providing an underlying research philosophy and methodological pluralism. In the aspect of the research philosophy, to the researcher's knowledge, most studies of CEB in the context of social media platforms have not emphasised a philosophical positioning in their investigation of the concept. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) note that a research paradigm encourages researchers to study a phenomenon from different perspectives. Thus, the research contributes to the methodological approach of CEB from a critical realist perspective. By following an abductive reasoning and a variation of deductive and inductive reasoning, the research provides a different perspective of CEB with the aim to understand the causation of and provide an explanation for SMEs use of social media platforms to successfully engage with their customers. Thus, this approach constitutes as a novelty amongst other studies that have investigated CEB in social media platforms. The importance of providing an underlying research philosophy for investigating CEB is echoed by Blaikie (2000), noting that if meta theoretical consensus is not achieved within scientific discourse, the broader field of results will be undermined through lack of coherence. In addition, the significance of providing a CEB research paradigm is linked to the assumption that the presuppositions are important to the interpretation of broader claims about reality and truth. Regarding methodological pluralism, the current study followed a mixed-method technique involving scraping 101 firm's customer CEBs from Facebook, Instagram and Twitter; 11 two-part semi-structured interviews with SME owner-managers, analysed through a Pearson correlation method, framework analysis and an inductive analysis. As majority of studies exploring CEB in the context of social media are predominantly investigating the concept through quantitative research – a statistical, non-exploratory snapshot of CEB, the application of a sequential mixed method approach provides the statistical and exploratory investigation of CEBs in social media platforms, including the

novelty of a firm-centric perspective (SMEs). This approach enables the researcher to explicitly delve into understanding CEBs while gaining an insight of CEBs from practitioners (SME owner-managers) to contribute to extending the construct for its further development and provide theoretical, practical/managerial implications.

### **11.2.3 Managerial/Practical Contributions**

Corley and Gioia (2011) assert that the practical usefulness of a research study is understood when it can be applied directly to the problems that practitioners face. Thus, as long term enduring relationships with customers are a significant objective for firms, especially SMEs, new knowledge considering fostering and maintaining customer relationship through a CEB perspective from this study is sure to have value to SME owner-managers and practitioners alike. From this understanding, this research provides three important practical useful insights.

#### *Awareness of Customer Behaviours on Social Media Platforms*

For SME owner-managers to develop and build long-term relationships with their customers, an understanding of CEB and its related dimensions in the context of social media platforms is required. This research serves as one of the multiple resources that provides SME owner-managers with a deeper understanding of the role CEBs play in social media platforms. As well as, its dimensions – consumption, contribution, creation behaviours with specific categories, enabling SME owner-managers to specifically target either one or all behaviours depending on their marketing goals. Thus, SME owner-managers' equipped with an understanding of CEBs and the dimensions of CEBs in social media platforms can adapt this to their practice when initiating firm engagement with their customers to engender consumption, contribution and creation behaviours.

For SME owner-managers', knowing how their customers behave on social media platforms will better assist them in targeting their customers and potential customers through whichever social media marketing strategy they choose to adopt in their business practice.

### *Strategic Based Social Media Marketing*

From the first phase of interviews conducted with SME owner-managers, the results revealed SME owner-managers need to focus more exhaustively on the behavioural intentions of their customers on their respective brand pages through strategic based marketing. In the sense that, the firms investigated seem to follow the majority in their use of social media platforms, disregarding any form of strategy due to their lack of knowledge and expertise. A careful consideration of their main underlying goal and direction of their social media channels needs to be highlighted before adopting any form of social media to their business practice. Thus, SME owner-managers' need to understand the specific social media channels they choose to adopt to their business and how the channel fits with their business practices and goals to meet their needs as well as their customers' needs. SME owner-managers' need to have a clear directive of their use of social media prior to adoption. The research suggests SME owner-managers' must understand the particular area of their business that they need to address, including having measurable and achievable goals/objectives as well as, corresponding metrics which can be tracked to guide their choice of adopting the most suitable social media platform. This is recognised by Noone et al. (2011), noting that with the ever evolving and complex environment of social media, having a reasonable plan for its adoption is very important.

### *Conversational Approach*

The results have provided useful building blocks in which SME owner-managers' can engender CEBs and increase their chances of better fostering these behaviours long-term.



In terms of social media usage for firms, the results revealed that SME owner-managers' need to have a conversational approach in their posting strategies on social media platforms. Thus, SME owner-managers' need to understand that social media platforms in general demands a long-term investment and it is made up of people and mutually beneficial relationships. SME owner-managers' should be aware of this principle when using social media platforms for their business practices by participating in dialogues and open conversations with their customers and spend more of their resources on developing and maintaining these relationships. This can in turn enable more engagement in terms of consumption, contribution and creation behaviours while maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship. The research revealed that posting more brand-related content doesn't necessarily mean more engagement for the firm, but taking a conversational approach to social media platforms enables SME owner-managers to better understand the needs of their customers in order to meet these needs.

For fashion SMEs, the immediacy of pushing content is important due to the industry's ever evolving seasonality (spring/summer, autumn/winter) to reach new type of consumers seeking information. Thus, fashion SMEs are tasked with creating and promoting content on new product launches and campaigns, on a fast deadline to enable seamless and ongoing communication with their customers. Social media platforms enable fashion SMEs to reach consumers on a global scale while providing useful features for tracking and measuring the performance of their content. For example, Instagram's business accounts enable firms to create ads to promote their posts and link their content to their websites to push customer traffic. Also, the platform has a dedicated insights feature for firms that allows them to view analytics related to their profile and content.

Fashion SMEs with limited marketing opportunities can make use of these free analytics features to enable them in identifying what their customer “likes” and engages with most to improve their strategies through tracking activity, content and audience.

### **11.3 Limitations of the Study**

Although there are various contributions highlighted in the current study, the research is also subject to a number of limitations. The first limitation is linked to the sampling and recruitment of SME owner-managers for the two-part interviews. Thus, the total sample used in the interviews do not necessarily represent the population, particularly the SME population. However, the current study attempted to reduce the potential limitation through collating the dataset from the transcripts which were found to be diverse due to the two-part interviews. The dataset compiled from the interviews altogether were revealed to be 22 sets of data. As 11 sets of data were each captured from the first and second phases of the interviews. The limitation of compiling the dataset can be somewhat attributed to the challenges involved in undertaking the research during the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures implemented in the U.K.

The sample frame (fashion retailers) were significantly affected as some businesses were forced to close down, in turn affecting the ability of the researcher to collect data through face-face interviews with some of the samples. However, these limitations were addressed as other measures of collecting the data through interviews were put in place i.e. online interviews.

The second limitation of the study is due to the types of social media platform adopted to investigate the construct; Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

There are many various types of social media platforms available for firms to constantly engage with customers, mark their brand presence and foster a long-term beneficial relationship with their customers.

For example; TikTok, Pinterest, Snapchat, etc. Future research exploring CEB in social media platforms can exploit this and reveal more aspects of the construct to provide a clearer image of customer behaviours in different social media contexts.

Additionally, future research can also explore how new forms of interaction functionality can change engagement. For example, virtual/augmented reality, internet of things, deep fakes, etc. Kietzmann et al. (2020) note the importance of deep fakes – fake content which are manipulated, including pictures, videos, audio – for organizations as well as its societal impact.

The third potential limitation of the current study is subject to the focus of SMEs in the Fashion industry. Larger corporations in the fashion industry are able to generate more results as well as extend understanding of the construct. Additionally, exploring other industries with a link to high social media usage could be beneficial to develop the construct further i.e. the service industry, hospitality, tourism, automotive. A final potential limitation of the study is concerned with the general limitations linked to a non-longitudinal type of research.

As the data collection of the sample's social media channels are limited to a specific point in time, Hollebeek et al. (2014) suggests that research using a longitudinal type of design serves to contribute insights into customer engagement by showing patterns of change, which can be investigated using a time series or latent growth curve analysis.

#### *Impact of The Sample Recruited/Effects of its Demographics*

The 11 samples interviewed i.e. the sub-sample, represents the broader sample of 101 SMEs observed in the research. Table 11.1,11.2,11.3 highlights the sub-samples' social media use in regard to the 3c's (consumption, contribution, creation), as well as the lowest and highest count

of customer responses to show a broad spectrum of the sub-sample in relation to the broader sample of 101 SMEs.

<b>SME</b>	<b>Consumption</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>Creation</b>
&BLANC	2177	28	0
Braderie	2943	455	0
Canopy	3568	3447	0
Coneys	10592	4941	2
Dotique	5759	5804	0
Jane Young	5345	4608	0
Magic Toast	3374	2537	0
One-Bc	2583	1344	2
Pearls & Scarlett	1523	700	0
Shirt Sleeves	5613	5830	0
Wild Clothing	1660	402	0
<b>Mean</b>	4103.363636	2736	0.363636364
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	2635.90422	2279.555483	0.809039835
<b>Highest count</b>	10592	5830	2
<b>Lowest count</b>	1523	28	0

**Table 11.1 Sub-Samples' Consumption, Contribution, Creation Behaviours on Facebook**

<b>SME</b>	<b>Consumption</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>Creation</b>
&BLANC	1992	2765	10
Braderie	4311	2883	10
Canopy	1862	2085	10
Coneys			
Dotique	1098	1003	0
Jane Young	856	408	10
Magic Toast	2702	1880	10
One-Bc	1794	1711	10
Pearls & Scarlett	712	80	10
Shirt Sleeves			
Wild Clothing	2225	1756	10

<b>Mean</b>	1950.222222	1619	8.888888889
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	1101.401241	964.2367448	3.333333333
<b>Highest count</b>	4311	2883	10
<b>Lowest count</b>	712	80	0

**Table 11.2 Sub-Samples' Consumption, Contribution, Creation Behaviours on Instagram**

<b>SME</b>	<b>Consumption</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>Creation</b>
&BLANC	77	0	0
Braderie	1522	2076	1268
Canopy	498	0	0
Coneys	1698	234	1204
Dotique	92	112	99
Jane Young			
Magic Toast			
One-Bc	666	79	163
Pearls & Scarlett	949	35	76489
Shirt Sleeves	731	82	83
Wild Clothing	630	16	0
<b>Mean</b>	762.5555556	292.6666667	8811.777778
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	559.473438	672.7404775	25384.15099
<b>Highest count</b>	1698	2076	76489
<b>Lowest count</b>	77	0	0

**Table 11.3 Sub-Samples' Consumption, Contribution, Creation Behaviours on Twitter**

The demographic makeup of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter is a vast/varied representation that captures the overall population. Table 11.4 highlights the population of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter users, which represents a comprehensive view of the general population. Therefore, the effects of the samples' demographics are unlikely to have any direct effect on the results.

<b>Platform</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Facebook	18-29	86%
	30-49	77%
	50-65	51%
	65+	34%
Instagram	18-29	67%
	30-49	47%
	50-65	23%
	65+	8%
Twitter	18-29	38%
	30-49	26%
	50-65	17%
	65+	7%

(Data reproduced from Khoros, 2021)

**Table 11.4 The Demographic Makeup of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter**

#### **11.4 Suggestions for Future Research**

The limitations of the current study should be regarded as not a restriction to the insights and significance of the findings highlighted in the current study but as providing a number of suggestions in need of further investigation.

Firstly, the research was restricted in terms of the focus of the industry. Future research is required to further explore CEBs in relation to other types of industries and how engagement is engendered, fostered and measured from the firm-perspective. Also, future research should also explore other platform types such as Pinterest, TikTok, Snapchat, to further extend understanding of the construct.

Secondly, from conducting a systematic literature review, the results revealed that all the studies were mainly reporting confirmatory studies, definitions and theoretical foundations already established in the engagement literature. More research is needed to extensively shed further light on the CEB construct and to increase the understanding of it in the context of firms, especially SMEs to aid their development and growth in the market, in turn aiding the economy. Finally, the study also revealed many overlaps in the conceptualisation of CEB and other existing constructs in the literature which highlights the broad lack of validity of the construct. The current study highlighted CEB as a conceptually and empirically different construct from similarly used constructs in the literature. Thus, for the overall literature, it will be valuable for research to further establish the distinctiveness of CEB amongst other related constructs as it is important for researchers to have a clear understanding of how the construct is significantly different.

Similarly, it is important for owner-managers to have a clear distinction of these constructs and their consequences on firm performance, growth and development. Future researchers can consider the following questions in expanding the concept of customer engagement;

- *What are the major consequences for firms solely determined on social media platforms for engagement?* Research focusing on firms that are mainly communicating their marketing through social media platforms can further extend the understanding of the use of these platforms as an alternative to traditional marketing communications e.g. advertising, campaigns, broadcasting, print and digital marketing communications e.g. email marketing, content marketing, search engine marketing, pay per click marketing. The consequences of simply using social media platforms can help practitioners to understand how/why this form of new media can either be a benefit or an obstacle in reaching their respective marketing goals in the business environment.

- *What are the longitudinal effects of engagement for firms using social media platforms for engagement?* Research studying the long-term effects of engagement through social media platforms can provide unique insights of how engagement changes in the context of social media in respect to certain variables, such as – other new forms of media, longevity of using social media platforms, resource effectiveness of social media. These variables can be considered individually or mutually in the longitudinal study to help provide researchers and practitioners an understanding of the efficiency of the use of social media platforms for businesses in the broader sense.
- *How can SMEs effectively use social media platforms to benefit their business development and growth in the market?* Research specifically focused on the use of social media platforms to boost or aid in business performance can guide practitioners as to the best practices that can be implemented in their businesses when deciding to use social media platforms. It can also extend the literature on what social media practices are actually essential for businesses to thrive and compete in the market as the current study has already recognised that the literature on engagement in the context of social media platforms is already lacking. Thus, studies that explore and investigate the “how?”, of the effective use of social media platforms for business performance is surely bound to benefit both theory and practice.

The aim of this thesis was to explore how SMEs in the UK fashion industry are using social media platforms to engage with their customers. The thesis has explored this through initially investigating the engagement literature through a critical and systematic literature. The systematic literature revealed five broad antecedent causes found to influence the exhibition of CEB on social media platforms; social links, search for information, self-involvement, functionality and ownership-value. Further to revealing the antecedents, three epistemological



tensions were also identified within the literature which will need to be addressed in order for the CEB construct to be further operationalised; universal definition of CEB, underlying research philosophy and methodological pluralism. Following the review, the research adopted a sequential mixed-method approach each aimed at addressing the research questions;

*A comparative descriptive analysis of Fashion SMEs use of social media platforms*

*(Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)*

*A Correlation Analysis of Firm-initiated engagement and CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution, creation*

*A two-part semi-structured interviews with SME owner-managers'*

The comparative analysis revealed how Fashion SMEs actually use their social media channels and engage with their customers, with some of the results contradicting major studies in the field of CEB. The correlation analysis tested a number of firm-instigated variables to explain how firm performance affects the manifestation of CEBs in the form of consumption, contribution and creation. The results revealed here also contradicts major studies in regards to how firms should use social media platforms to engender engagement behaviours.

The first part of the interviews with the sample revealed a firm expectation/customer behavioural outcome gap. In that, there is a positive relationship between the SMEs attitudes and their use of social media platforms for engendering CEBs and a negative relationship was found between the firm's actual use of social media platforms suggesting a disconnect between attitude and behaviour. The final analysis – phase two of the interviews with SME owner-managers' revealed four key aggregate dimensions that underpin the key motivations and limitations of SME engagement with social media platforms – involvement/responsibility to customers, social media ROI (return-on-investment), internal factors and limitations to development.

Thus, the insights gained from conducting this thesis helps to extend further research on CEB from a firm-centric perspective in the context of social media platforms. As the research has shown, there are insufficient studies that delve deeply enough into a firm-centric perspective of CEB, distinguishing the CEB construct from CE (customer engagement) and other related concepts in the literature. The thesis gives researchers and practitioners alike, empirical and useful insights into CEBs from an SME (firm) lens to further guide the understanding of theory and aid practice.

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**APPENDIX 1**  
**Total Number of Posts Across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram**

<b>SME</b>	<b>Total No. of Facebook Posts</b>	<b>Total No. of Instagram Posts</b>	<b>Total No. of Twitter Posts</b>	<b>Total (Sum)</b>
Wild Clothing	6	1572	21	1599
One-BC	44	349	104	497
Universal Works	212	3258	213	3683
Braveries	530	1439	1231	3200
Montana	608	5263	583	6454
Cow	420	3750	625	4795
Relic Vintage	88	253		341
Mime Store	166	424	94	684
It's Simple Clothing	167	1139	235	1541
Rohan	368	299	656	1323
Stick & Ribbon	150	976	83	1209
Platypus UK	30	485		515
Gigi Bodega	13	898	4	915
Forty-Two	232	1314		1546
Fifty Foot Drop	18	1862		1880
TUTU	40		48	88
&BLANC	23	781	0	804
Void Clothing	248	1235	201	1684
Oxygen	598	705	69	1372
Laddie Boutique	469	1622	0	2091
Jane Young	181	1110		1291
Ragusa	206			206
Shirt Sleeves	421		316	737
Just Silver	0	3	0	3
No Angel Boutique	413	4919	0	5332
Giles & Bella	235	637		872
Vintage Vixen	395	5154	1318	6867
Chickadee-boo	137		0	137
Cruise Fashion	349	2997	414	3760
Young Ideas	185	592	36	813
Lapel	14		3	17
Bridgens	68	236		304
Ribbon	67	244	88	399
Canopy - (Men's)	2	854	0	856
Canopy (Women's)	118			118
Pearls & Scarlett	188	1542	1933	3663
White Wardrobe	153			153
The Amber Room	277		78	355
Roller snakes	597	6727		7324

Leren Connor	52	273	990	1315
She Fashion	93	32		125
Zebra Menswear	80	518	0	598
Moo Fashions	403		12	415
Liholiho	18			18
Dominique	164	311	98	573
The Wardrobe	12	1092	0	1104
MyPilot	325	4422	1029	5776
Magic Toast	167	1628		1795
Jelly Rolls	400	546	25	971
The Vintage Scene	218	1884	0	2102
Well gosh	597	10263	1001	11861
Trafford Knitwear	299	4422	513	5234
Phillip James Menswear	14		67	81
Hole in the Wall	3			3
Aaliyah Collections	324	920	40	1284
32 The Guild	124	1329	282	1735
TS2	61	482	0	543
Thackeray's	47		52	99
Voni Blu	376	662	44	1082
Berries	475	1011	301	1787
Story Boutique	210	431	0	641
The Wootton Village Boutique	599		524	1123
Clues Menswear	281	429	5	715
Roberto Clothing	18			18
Krystal Clear	168			168
Storm Clothing	190	754	117	1061
Aimee's	131	743		874
Mary & Me	164			164
EQVVS	362	836	94	1292
Pretty Little	376	2042		2418
Bo Peep Boutique	532		27	559
Harmony Boutique	5			5
Tasty Vintage	5		0	5
No.5 Ladieswear Boutique	36			36
Gere Menswear	128	436	161	725
Yak Clothing	2	16		18
Ego	54		0	54
Agatha Boutique	45	1260	96	1401
Lucks of Louth	341	75	45	461

Grants.1856	354	1227	538	2119
Energy Clothing	364	2357	226	2947
23 Seven Clothing	286			286
Coneys	80		77	157
Kwirky Kow Vintage	603			603
Togs	9			9
The Boutique	456	1130	77	1663
Empire Menswear	217	260	38	515
Kays of Grantham	84		123	207
Lulu & Nix	502	1388	459	2349
Snooks	69	570	3	642
Crowned by Grace Boutique	230			230
Cavells	105	1474		1579
Duo Boutique	109			109
Ball Gown Heaven	182	875		1057
Impact	307		1	308
Win or Lose	73	684	761	1518
T-Lab	128	272	142	542
The Business Fashion		482	2	484
Nine Yards Store		227	0	227
Vanilla			0	0
Condotti			0	0
<b>Total (Sum)</b>	20493	100402	16323	
<b>Mean</b>	211.2680412	1455.101449	229.9014085	
<b>Median</b>	167	875	77	
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	177.1398056	1776.765751	375.4591914	

**APPENDIX 2**  
**Raw Statistics of CEBs on Facebook**

<b>SME</b>	<b>Likes</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Reactions</b>	<b>Shares</b>	<b>Engagement</b>	<b>Customer Tagged Posts</b>	<b>Followers</b>	<b>Total (Sum)</b>
Wild Clothing	174	38	190	7	235	0	1418	2062
One-BC	586	48	710	99	857	2	1627	3929
Universal Works	5688	108	5859	100	6067	0	7708	25530
Braveries	216	5	234	35	274	0	2634	3398
Montana	7826	354	8466	119	8939	2	5831	31537
Cow	7502	3551	9085	1188	13824	0	10685	45835
Relic Vintage	629	84	664	78	826	0	1331	3612
Mime Store	2442	201	2687	150	3038	0	5566	14084
It's Simple Clothing	566	16	602	145	763	0	1406	3498
Rohan	3228	424	3329	518	4271	38	13220	25028
Stick & Ribbon	2294	504	2504	237	3245	1	922	9707
Platypus UK	171	16	211	9	236	0	1527	2170
Gigi Bodega	186	5	194	32	231	0	758	1406
Forty-Two	1201	44	1276	104	1424	1	2580	6630
Fifty Foot Drop	1065	86	1161	51	1298	0	714	4375
TUTU	188	3	205	10	218	0	377	1001
&BLANC	13	2	13	0	15	0	2162	2205
Void Clothing	2993	307	3609	245	4161	5	4710	16030
Oxygen	2402	545	2465	504	3514	0	54381	63811
Laddie Boutique	6138	1575	7123	1022	9720	9	5567	31154
Jane Young	2169	189	2250	515	2954	0	1876	9953
Ragusa	1191	205	1312	377	1894	1	698	5678
Shirt Sleeves	2557	530	2743	474	3747	0	1392	11443
Just Silver	0	0	0	0	0	0	33	33
No Angel Boutique	9194	3162	11143	243	14548	4	9302	47596
Giles & Bella	4322	3054	4834	224	8112	2	11643	32191
Vintage Vixen	1143	423	1355	35	1813	1	2165	6935
Chickadee-boo	1074	92	1122	295	1509	0	745	4837

Cruise Fashion	8910	2237	10183	376	12796	0	42595	77097
Young Ideas	742	35	772	50	857	0	37254	39710
Lapel	590	168	597	586	1351	0	2807	6099
Bridgens	257	24	267	160	451	0	693	1852
Ribbon	352	8	380	42	430	0	221	1433
Canopy (Men's)	12	1	12	1	14	0	1533	1573
Canopy (Women's)	1530	202	1690	64	1956	0		5442
Pearls & Scarlett	255	95	350	132	577	0	814	2223
White Wardrobe	810	45	897	264	1206	3		3225
The Amber Room	624	52	661	175	888	0	1020	3420
Roller snakes	23205	3727	24954	2576	31257	4	91762	177485
Leren Connor	71	11	80	10	101	0		273
She Fashion	959	98	1069	143	1310	0	647	4226
Zebra Menswear	347	41	350	97	488	1	811	2135
Moo Fashions	1957	1979	2226	616	4821	0	4062	15661
Liholiho	201	16	215	48	279	0	519	1278
Dominque	2569	514	2721	533	3768	0	1458	11563
The Wardrobe	52	13	62	1	76	0	1016	1220
MyPilot	703	62	762	54	878	0	8905	11364
Magic Toast	1152	91	1294	143	1528	0	1703	5911
Jelly Rolls	1036	1066	1115	91	2272	0	4381	9961
The Vintage Scene	1039	567	1189	182	1938	0	2688	7603
Well gosh	2524	320	2651	103	3074	4	22037	30713
Trafford Knitwear	443	491	465	41	997	2	9860	12299
Phillip James Menswear	5	1	5	0	6	0	146	163
Hole in the Wall	11	0	14	9	23	1	402	460
Aaliyah Collections	6641	273	7440	433	8146	1	8283	31217
32 The Guild	638	101	728	13	842	0	805	3127
TS2	273	13	276	19	308	0	1823	2712
Thackeray's	30	4	32	7	43	0	1024	1140
Voni Blu	1393	309	1528	117	1954	1	475	5777

Berries	6780	889	7611	108	8608	2	7428	31426
Story Boutique	9221	2855	10247	2697	15799	4	3352	44175
The Wootton Village Boutique	6877	1476	7503	328	9307	3	7343	32837
Clues Menswear	1199	195	1259	33	1487	0	4108	8281
Roberto Clothing	139	0	147	71	218	0	276	851
Krystal Clear	9317	1967	9978	316	12261	2	22530	56371
Storm Clothing	384	47	401	432	880	0	1756	3900
Aimee's	2150	316	2568	218	3102	3	5177	13534
Mary & Me	1200	174	1312	207	1693	0	1275	5861
EQVVS	4704	488	4830	251	5569	0	232558	248400
Pretty Little	4431	1126	4976	248	6350	1	2786	19918
Bo Peep Boutique	2048	997	2535	167	3699	2	7839	17287
Harmony Boutique	3	0	3	2	5	0	104	117
Tasty Vintage	59	36	81	6	123	0	1206	1511
No.5 Ladieswear Boutique	218	18	245	162	425	1	228	1297
Gere Menswear	6533	1180	6810	670	8660	6	5680	29539
Yak Clothing	4	1	5	1	7	1	2009	2028
Ego	871	115	984	48	1147	0	2570	5735
Agatha Boutique	1104	153	1248	55	1456	1	6157	10174
Lucks of Louth	18947	15049	20453	16417	51919	0	13146	135931
Grants.1856	8266	2097	8593	772	11462	0		31190
Energy Clothing	7516	670	8763	878	10311	0	4225	32363
23 Seven Clothing	2898	536	3149	480	4165	0		11228
Coneys	1896	1091	1954	553	3598	2	6441	15535
Kwirky Kow Vintage	3291	1035	4111	435	5581	5	1919	16377

Togs	44	7	46	2	55	0	90	244
The Boutique	6915	6301	7849	2167	16317	8	5722	45279
Empire Menswear	299	330	311	130	771	2	4140	5983
Kays of Grantham	222	100	235	52	387	1	342	1339
Lulu & Nix	2299	1014	2949	589	4552	0	1131	12534
Snooks	961	80	1146	113	1339	2	1785	5426
Crowned by Grace Boutique	988	885	1269	462	2616	0	1963	8183
Cavells	1072	141	1133	128	1402	0	4576	8452
Duo Boutique	791	91	880	104	1075	0	312	3253
Ball Gown Heaven	2873	351	3160	148	3659	0	23048	33239
Impact	3444	1399	3740	362	5501	2	3537	17985
Win or Lose	517	36	523	76	635	5	2836	4628
T-Lab	270	23	273	10	306	0	1242	2124
<b>Total (Sum)</b>	247240	71404	273611	43800	388815	136	793559	
<b>Mean</b>	2548.865979	736.1237113	2820.731959	451.5463918	4008.402062	1.402061856	8625.641304	
<b>Median</b>	1072	168	1189	132	1487	0	2085.5	
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	3755.972052	1783.30043	4118.326682	1701.673062	6913.136765	4.15496639	26735.22871	



**APPENDIX 3**  
**Raw Statistics of CEBs on Instagram**

<b>SME</b>	<b>Likes (First 20 Posts)</b>	<b>Comments (First 20 Posts)</b>	<b>Followers</b>	<b>Tagged Posts (44 SMEs)</b>	<b>Total (Sum)</b>
Wild Clothing	1713	43	2225	10	3991
One-BC	1630	81	1794	10	3515
Universal Works	20733	343	81000		102076
Braveries	2867	16	4311	10	7204
Montana	4670	87	15500	10	20267
Cow	3928	39	9625	7	13599
Relic Vintage	4432	355	5276		10063
Mime Store	4740	80	9168		13988
It's Simple Clothing	7680	176	3727	10	11593
Rohan	904	16	1918	10	2848
Stick & Ribbon	547	29	3965		4541
Platypus UK	8260	429	2694	10	11393
Gigi Bodega	1910	102	2038	10	4060
Forty-Two	4217	159	3901	10	8287
Fifty Foot Drop	433	44			477
&BLANC	2664	101	1992	10	4767
Void Clothing	2270	58	2358	10	4696
Oxygen	889	16	5456	10	6371
Laddie Boutique	1660	17	4353	10	6040
Jane Young	402	6	856	10	1274
Just Silver	5	0	5		10
No Angel Boutique	609	12	4216	9	4846
Giles & Bella	460	15	1491		1966
Vintage Vixen	1639	141	3344	10	5134
Cruise Fashion	4928	99	23300		28327
Young Ideas	423	6	1252	10	1691
Bridgens	446	6	449	10	911
Ribbon	1215	115	249	10	1589
Canopy	1968	117	1862	10	3957
Pearls & Scarlett	80	0	712	10	802
Roller snakes	38404	163	82900		121467
Leren Connor	998	68	1502		2568
She Fashion	134	1	111		246

Zebra Menswear	864	27	952	10	1853
Dominique	917	86	1098		2101
The Wardrobe	1677	43	1862		3582
MyPilot	1008	15	6268	10	7301
Magic Toast	1777	103	2702	10	4592
Jelly Rolls	206	3	3991	10	4210
The Vintage Scene	5429	72	6354		11855
Well gosh	5082	95	78900		84077
The Business Fashion	7935	105	32200	10	40250
Trafford Knitwear	15	7	11600	10	11632
Aaliyah Collections	44023	402	148000	10	192435
32 The Guild	1715	74	3327	10	5126
TS2	389	6	1669	10	2074
Voni Blu	357	33	395		785
Berries	1021	51	2014		3086
Story Boutique	1585	68	3423		5076
Clues Menswear	745	15	1715	10	2485
Storm Clothing	412	10	493		915
Aimee's	2672	86	2265	10	5033
EQVVS	1580	33	21200	10	22823
Pretty Little	662	32	1358	10	2062
Gere Menswear	293	14	972	10	1289
Yak Clothing	480	6	172	9	667
Agatha Boutique	1772	67	2799		4638
Lucks of Louth	724	27	767	5	1523
Grants.1856	1719	98	9194	10	11021
Energy Clothing	1206	60	2951	10	4227
The Boutique	511	20	1217	4	1752
Empire Menswear	62	0	928	9	999
Lulu & Nix	665	90	936		1691
Snooks	6082	873	2671		9626
Nine Yards Store	2199	131	366	10	2706
Cavells	1721	97	3683	10	5511

Ball Gown Heaven	434	3	1291		1728
Win or Lose	853	63	820		1736
T-Lab	613	19	2198		2830
<b>Total (Sum)</b>	227263	5874	646301	423	
<b>Mean</b>	3293.666667	85.13043478	9504.426471	9.613636364	
<b>Median</b>	1215	51	2245	10	
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	7263.137522	131.4758883	23970.00009	1.242950524	

**APPENDIX 4**  
**Raw Statistics of CEBs on Twitter**

<b>SME</b>	<b>Retweet</b>	<b>Like/Favourite</b>	<b>Followers</b>	<b>Total (Sum)</b>
Wild Clothing	0	16	630	646
One-BC	163	79	666	908
Universal Works	66	725	5010	5801
Braveries	1268	2076	1522	4866
Montana	29	76	1120	1225
Cow	292	1104	4369	5765
Mime Store	21	32	1582	1635
It's Simple Clothing	459603	372	545	460520
Rohan	2377	1305	5204	8886
Stick & Ribbon	120	85	748	953
Gigi Bodega	5	10	154	169
TUTU	1	12	56	69
&BLANC	0	0	77	77
Void Clothing	3	56	583	642
Oxygen	11	65	1225	1301
Laddie Boutique	0	0	446	446
Shirt Sleeves	83	82	731	896
Just Silver	0	0	3	3
No Angel Boutique	0	0	525	525
Vintage Vixen	56	89	888	1033
Chickadee-Boo	0	0	5	5
Cruise Fashion	440	294	5784	6518
Young Ideas	33	31	809	873
Lapel (Account doesn't exist)	0	0		0
Ribbon	32	16	1297	1345
Canopy	0	0	498	498
Pearls & Scarlett	76489	35	949	77473
The Amber Room	61892	90	124	62106
Leren Connor	724150	589	1229	725968

Zebra Menswear	0	0	487	487
Moo Fashions	15	13	221	249
Dominique	99	112	92	303
Condotti	0	0	22	22
The Wardrobe	11	9	182	202
MyPilot	189	147	2319	2655
Jelly Rolls	0	3	397	400
The Vintage Scene	0	0	420	420
Well gosh	3407	3248	26900	33555
The Business Fashion	0	0	1207	1207
Trafford Knitwear	13	110	1282	1405
Phillip James Menswear	12	53	180	245
Aaliyah Collections	5588	92	74	5754
32 The Guild	31	196	352	579
TS2	0	0	1398	1398
Thackeray's	1	3	1524	1528
Voni Blu	21	11	157	189
Berries	150773	261	810	151844
Story Boutique	0	0	32	32
The Wootton Village Boutique	943	17	17	977
Clues Menswear	0	3	474	477
Storm Clothing	50	95	279	424
EQVVS	20	37	1260	1317
Bo Peep Boutique	106	9	534	649
Tasty Vintage	0	0	130	130
Gere Menswear	297	606	1003	1906
Ego (account suspended)	0	0		0
Agatha Boutique	7	75	979	1061
Lucks of Louth	30	61	818	909

Grants.1856	220	460	920	1600
Energy Clothing	69	135	1350	1554
Coneys	1204	234	1698	3136
The Boutique	6	6	536	548
Empire Menswear	37	20	372	429
Kays of Grantham	2667	161	515	3343
Lulu & Nix	3	51	97	151
Snooks	2	12	1071	1085
Nine Yards Store	0	0	311	311
Impact	0	0	223	223
Vanilla	0	0	202	202
Win or Lose	56409	686	1043	58138
T-Lab	496	102	601	1199
<b>Total (Sum)</b>	1549860	14267	89268	
<b>Mean</b>	21829.01408	200.943662	1293.73913	
<b>Median</b>	21	35	583	
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	102640.3023	498.7330774	3337.443688	

**APPENDIX 5**  
**Aggregate Consumption/Contribution/Creation Behaviours on Facebook**

<b>SME</b>	<b>Consumption (Shares/Engagement/ Followers)</b>	<b>Contribution (Likes/Comments/Reactions)</b>	<b>Creation (Customer Tagged Posts)</b>	<b>Total (Sum)</b>
Wild Clothing	1660	402	0	2062
One-BC	2583	1344	2	3929
Universal Works	13875	11655	0	25530
Braveries	2943	455	0	3398
Montana	14889	16646	2	31537
Cow	25697	20138	0	45835
Relic Vintage	2235	1377	0	3612
Mime Store	8754	5330	0	14084
It's Simple Clothing	2314	1184	0	3498
Rohan	18009	6981	38	25028
Stick & Ribbon	4404	5302	1	9707
Platypus UK	1772	398	0	2170
Gigi Bodega	1021	385	0	1406
Forty-Two	4108	2521	1	6630
Fifty Foot Drop	2063	2312	0	4375
TUTU	605	396	0	1001
&BLANC	2177	28	0	2205
Void Clothing	9116	6909	5	16030
Oxygen	58399	5412	0	63811
Laddie Boutique	16309	14836	9	31154
Jane Young	5345	4608	0	9953
Ragusa	2969	2708	1	5678
Shirt Sleeves	5613	5830	0	11443
Just Silver	33	0	0	33
No Angel Boutique	24093	23499	4	47596
Giles & Bella	19979	12210	2	32191
Vintage Vixen	4013	2921	1	6935
Chickadee-boo	2549	2288	0	4837

Cruise Fashion	55767	21330	0	77097
Young Ideas	38161	1549	0	39710
Lapel	4744	1355	0	6099
Bridgens	1304	548	0	1852
Ribbon	693	740	0	1433
Canopy (Men's)	1548	25	0	1573
Canopy (Women's)	2020	3422	0	5442
Pearls & Scarlett	1523	700	0	2223
White Wardrobe	1470	1752	3	3225
The Amber Room	2083	1337	0	3420
Roller snakes	125595	51886	4	177485
Leren Connor	111	162	0	273
She Fashion	2100	2126	0	4226
Zebra Menswear	1396	738	1	2135
Moo Fashions	9499	6162	0	15661
Liholiho	846	432	0	1278
Dominique	5759	5804	0	11563
The Wardrobe	1093	127	0	1220
MyPilot	9837	1527	0	11364
Magic Toast	3374	2537	0	5911
Jelly Rolls	6744	3217	0	9961
The Vintage Scene	4808	2795	0	7603
Well gosh	25214	5495	4	30713
Trafford Knitwear	10898	1399	2	12299
Phillip James Menswear	152	11	0	163
Hole in the Wall	434	25	1	460
Aaliyah Collections	16862	14354	1	31217
32 The Guild	1660	1467	0	3127
TS2	2150	562	0	2712
Thackeray's	1074	66	0	1140
Voni Blu	2546	3230	1	5777



Berries	16144	15280	2	31426
Story Boutique	21848	22323	4	44175
The Wootton Village Boutique	16978	15856	3	32837
Clues Menswear	5628	2653	0	8281
Roberto Clothing	565	286	0	851
Krystal Clear	35107	21262	2	56371
Storm Clothing	3068	832	0	3900
Aimee's	8497	5034	3	13534
Mary & Me	3175	2686	0	5861
EQVVS	238378	10022	0	248400
Pretty Little	9384	10533	1	19918
Bo Peep Boutique	11705	5580	2	17287
Harmony Boutique	111	6	0	117
Tasty Vintage	1335	176	0	1511
No.5 Ladieswear Boutique	815	481	1	1297
Gere Menswear	15010	14523	6	29539
Yak Clothing	2017	10	1	2028
Ego	3765	1970	0	5735
Agatha Boutique	7668	2505	1	10174
Lucks of Louth	81482	54449	0	135931
Grants.1856	12234	18956	0	31190
Energy Clothing	15414	16949	0	32363
23 Seven Clothing	4645	6583	0	11228
Coneys	10592	4941	2	15535
Kwirky Kow Vintage	7935	8437	5	16377
Togs	147	97	0	244
The Boutique	24206	21065	8	45279

Empire Menswear	5041	940	2	5983
Kays of Grantham	781	557	1	1339
Lulu & Nix	6272	6262	0	12534
Snooks	3237	2187	2	5426
Crowned by Grace Boutique	5041	3142	0	8183
Cavells	6106	2346	0	8452
Duo Boutique	1491	1762	0	3253
Ball Gown Heaven	26855	6384	0	33239
Impact	9400	8583	2	17985
Win or Lose	3547	1076	5	4628
T-Lab	1558	566	0	2124
<b>Total (Sum)</b>	1226174	592255	136	
<b>Mean</b>	12640.96907	6105.721649	1.402061856	
<b>Median</b>	4404	2521	0	
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	29072.12405	9263.078205	4.15496639	

**APPENDIX 6**  
**Aggregate Consumption/Contribution/Creation Behaviours on Instagram**

<b>SME</b>	<b>Consumption (Followers)</b>	<b>Contribution (Likes/Comments)</b>	<b>Creation (Tagged Posts of 44 SMEs)</b>	<b>Total (Sum)</b>
Wild Clothing	2225	1756	10	3991
One-BC	1794	1711	10	3515
Universal Works	81000	21076		102076
Braveries	4311	2883	10	7204
Montana	15500	4757	10	20267
Cow	9625	3967	7	13599
Relic Vintage	5276	4787		10063
Mime Store	9168	4820		13988
It's Simple Clothing	3727	7856	10	11593
Rohan	1918	920	10	2848
Stick & Ribbon	3965	576		4541
Platypus UK	2694	8689	10	11393
Gigi Bodega	2038	2012	10	4060
Forty-Two	3901	4376	10	8287
Fifty Foot Drop		477		477
&BLANC	1992	2765	10	4767
Void Clothing	2358	2328	10	4696
Oxygen	5456	905	10	6371
Laddie Boutique	4353	1677	10	6040
Jane Young	856	408	10	1274
Just Silver	5	5		10
No Angel Boutique	4216	621	9	4846
Giles & Bella	1491	475		1966
Vintage Vixen	3344	1780	10	5134
Cruise Fashion	23300	5027		28327
Young Ideas	1252	429	10	1691
Bridgens	449	452	10	911
Ribbon	249	1330	10	1589
Canopy	1862	2085	10	3957
Pearls & Scarlett	712	80	10	802
Roller snakes	82900	38567		121467
Leren Connor	1502	1066		2568
She Fashion	111	135		246
Zebra Menswear	952	891	10	1853
Dominque	1098	1003		2101
The Wardrobe	1862	1720		3582
MyPilot	6268	1023	10	7301
Magic Toast	2702	1880	10	4592
Jelly Rolls	3991	209	10	4210

The Vintage Scene	6354	5501		11855
Well gosh	78900	5177		84077
The Business Fashion	32200	8040	10	40250
Trafford Knitwear	11600	22	10	11632
Aaliyah Collections	148000	44425	10	192435
32 The Guild	3327	1789	10	5126
TS2	1669	395	10	2074
Voni Blu	395	390		785
Berries	2014	1072		3086
Story Boutique	3423	1653		5076
Clues Menswear	1715	760	10	2485
Storm Clothing	493	422		915
Aimee's	2265	2758	10	5033
EQVVS	21200	1613	10	22823
Pretty Little	1358	694	10	2062
Gere Menswear	972	307	10	1289
Yak Clothing	172	486	9	667
Agatha Boutique	2799	1839		4638
Lucks of Louth	767	751	5	1523
Grants.1856	9194	1817	10	11021
Energy Clothing	2951	1266	10	4227
The Boutique	1217	531	4	1752
Empire Menswear	928	62	9	999
Lulu & Nix	936	755		1691
Snooks	2671	6955		9626
Nine Yards Store	366	2330	10	2706
Cavells	3683	1818	10	5511
Ball Gown Heaven	1291	437		1728
Win or Lose	820	916		1736
T-Lab	2198	632		2830
<b>Total (Sum)</b>	646301	233137	423	
<b>Mean</b>	9504.426471	3378.797101	9.613636364	
<b>Median</b>	2245	1330	10	
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	23970.00009	7326.621733	1.242950524	

**APPENDIX 7**  
**Aggregate Consumption/Contribution/Creation Behaviours on Twitter**

<b>SME</b>	<b>Consumption (Followers)</b>	<b>Contribution (Like/Favourite)</b>	<b>Creation (Retweet)</b>	<b>Total (Sum)</b>
Wild Clothing	630	16	0	646
One-BC	666	79	163	908
Universal Works	5010	725	66	5801
Braveries	1522	2076	1268	4866
Montana	1120	76	29	1225
Cow	4369	1104	292	5765
Mime Store	1582	32	21	1635
It's Simple Clothing	545	372	459603	460520
Rohan	5204	1305	2377	8886
Stick & Ribbon	748	85	120	953
Gigi Bodega	154	10	5	169
TUTU	56	12	1	69
&BLANC	77	0	0	77
Void Clothing	583	56	3	642
Oxygen	1225	65	11	1301
Laddie Boutique	446	0	0	446
Shirt Sleeves	731	82	83	896
Just Silver	3	0	0	3
No Angel Boutique	525	0	0	525
Vintage Vixen	888	89	56	1033
Chickadee-Boo	5	0	0	5
Cruise Fashion	5784	294	440	6518
Young Ideas	809	31	33	873
Lapel (Account doesn't exist)	-	-	-	0
Ribbon	1297	16	32	1345
Canopy	498	0	0	498
Pearls & Scarlett	949	35	76489	77473
The Amber Room	124	90	61892	62106
Leren Connor	1229	589	724150	725968
Zebra Menswear	487	0	0	487
Moo Fashions	221	13	15	249
Dominque	92	112	99	303
Condotti	22	0	0	22
The Wardrobe	182	9	11	202

MyPilot	2319	147	189	2655
Jelly Rolls	397	3	0	400
The Vintage Scene	420	0	0	420
Well gosh	26900	3248	3407	33555
The Business Fashion	1207	0	0	1207
Trafford Knitwear	1282	110	13	1405
Phillip James Menswear	180	53	12	245
Aaliyah Collections	74	92	5588	5754
32 The Guild	352	196	31	579
TS2	1398	0	0	1398
Thackeray's	1524	3	1	1528
Voni Blu	157	11	21	189
Berries	810	261	150773	151844
Story Boutique	32	0	0	32
The Wootton Village Boutique	17	17	943	977
Clues Menswear	474	3	0	477
Storm Clothing	279	95	50	424
EQVVS	1260	37	20	1317
Bo Peep Boutique	534	9	106	649
Tasty Vintage	130	0	0	130
Gere Menswear	1003	606	297	1906
Ego (account suspended)	-	-	-	0
Agatha Boutique	979	75	7	1061
Lucks of Louth	818	61	30	909
Grants.1856	920	460	220	1600
Energy Clothing	1350	135	69	1554
Coneys	1698	234	1204	3136
The Boutique	536	6	6	548
Empire Menswear	372	20	37	429
Kays of Grantham	515	161	2667	3343
Lulu & Nix	97	51	3	151
Snooks	1071	12	2	1085

Nine Yards Store	311	0	0	311
Impact	223	0	0	223
Vanilla	202	0	0	202
Win or Lose	1043	686	56409	58138
T-Lab	601	102	496	1199
<b>Total (Sum)</b>	89268	14267	1549860	
<b>Mean</b>	1293.73913	206.7681159	22461.73913	
<b>Median</b>	583	37	21	
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	3337.443688	504.8052957	104069.5173	

## **APPENDIX 8**

### **PHASE 1 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **Grand tour introductory questions - Company/Person specific**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your role and responsibilities?
2. Who manages marketing in the company?
3. Do you have a marketing budget? If so, what do you spend it on?
4. Can you tell me how you prioritise your budget spending?

#### **Grand tour guided questions - Social media**

1. What social media platforms do you use?
2. Why do you use them? (this might require some extra probing questions if response is limited)
3. There are a lot of social media channels available for marketing, how do you select which specific channels to use?

#### **Questions around customer-related activities on social media platforms**

##### **Consumption**

1. Can you describe what content (photo, video, text) you think interests your customers on any of your channels?

##### **Contribution**

1. Can you describe a time your customers commented/liked your content on social media?

##### **Creation**

1. Can you describe a time when a customer/your customers have tagged/uploaded their own content (photo, video, text) onto your social media channels?



## **APPENDIX 9**

### **PHASE 2 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Can you describe your routine/strategy for uploading content on your social media channels?
2. Do you upload different types of content on your social media channels (text, picture, video, sound, polls, geo-located tags, hashtags)? Can you describe why you upload different types of content on your social media channels?
3. Who do you follow on social media?
4. Can you describe why you follow them?
5. Why do you think your customers use social media to interact with and follow you?  
Do you think people are positive or negative toward your brand on your social media channels?

#### **Reveal Social Media Analysis.**

Pre COVID-19, I analysed your social media channels for content posted by you and your customers. These were compared with your competitors in terms of; the distribution of your brand-related activities across your social media channels and the distribution of the behavioural responses enacted by your customers classified into 3c's (Consumption, Creation, Contribution).

On average your content gets x no of responses distributed in the respective 3c's classification. However, I have found that you're better at encouraging the behaviour of x (contribution, consumption, creation) and not so well at encouraging the behaviour of x (contribution, consumption, creation) when compared to your competitors.

#### **(SHOW DISTRIBUTION GRAPHS)**

- Why do you think your content was successful/unsuccessful in encouraging the behaviour of x (contribution, consumption, creation)? (answers will require further probing)
- Do you deliberately try to create these types of customer interactions?
- How do you judge the success or failure of your social media marketing? Do you review your channel's success and does it impact your future social media strategies?
- Do you think you get the best out of the social media channels that you use? Is there anything you would like to do differently? If you had unlimited resources?

That brings the interview to a close. If you have any further questions, you can contact me at the details on the consent form. Thank you very much for letting me interview you.