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#mrpmystyle as Brand Communication: An analysis of Mr Price Brand
Image as reflected through Facebook

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in the School of Media and Cultural Studies,
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Declaration

I declare that this entire research study is my own work and has not been submitted in part or whole to any academic institution. Secondary information used from additional sources is properly acknowledged and referenced.

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Abstract

This study investigates the hashtag #mrpmystyle as brand communication. Through observation of Mr Price's Facebook page, and its activities over a period, to evaluate the effectiveness of the Mr Price Facebook page in directing consumers to its website. The main aim of this research study was to evaluate the social media platform 'Facebook', in order to understand how the Mr Price brand used the platform to communicate with its consumers and vice versa.

The study made reference to secondary sources to support the phenomenon that brand communication on social media can be effective. However it required constant engagement and encouragement between a brand and its consumers in order for the brand's image to be positively perceived. This study adopted a thematic analysis as to analysing data drawn from the Facebook activities, observed from Mr Price page. Information from the Mr Price Facebook page was then coded and interpreted through qualitative themes which were influenced by the study's objectives.

The data was collected through e-observation where a total number of seventy posts were analysed for data collected from the Mr Price Facebook page. These posts were critically analysed through a thematic analysis in order to determine the level of communication that occurred between the Mr Price brand and its consumers on a daily basis. The information was interpreted qualitatively in order to get a holistic understanding of the communication patterns and whether this communication could be classed as 'effective'.

The study formulated recommendations in order for brands to improve the manner in which they used social media platforms (specifically Facebook) as a communication tool between them and their consumers.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Background

Introduction

Media has evolved from the traditional platforms, that is, radio, television and newspapers, to new media, that is, the internet and social media platforms. This shapes the manner in which brands communicate with their consumers. The increase in popularity and usage of social media, specifically Facebook, has shown an evident shift in the platforms brands use to communicate in attempt to stay 'engaged' with and pass information on to their consumers (Sandeep, 2011). Mr Price is a South African brand and through this study its apparel Facebook page posts were analysed. This assisted in determining the bond between the brand and consumers who interact and communicate on the Mr Price Facebook page.

This study sought to investigate how Mr Price's daily posts on its Facebook page and its #mrpmystyle hashtag could be seen as a strategy to communicate with its consumers.

The objectives of this study, firstly aimed to analyse the appearance of the Mr Price brand image through Facebook. Secondly it sought to determine how Mr Price utilised Facebook to communicate with its consumers. Thirdly it explored the use of hashtag (#mrpmystyle) by Mr Price to reach its consumers and lastly investigated how the Mr Price Facebook page contributed to the consumer-brand relationship.

Key research Questions that assisted this study were:

- Firstly, how did the Mr Price brand image appear on Facebook versus its website?
- Secondly, how did Mr Price use Facebook to communicate with its consumers?
- Thirdly, how was the hashtag, #mrpmystyle, used to assist consumers to engage with the Mr Price brand image?

- And finally, to determine, what extent has Mr Price Facebook communication contributed to an active consumer-brand relationship?

Background

Mr Price is an affordable brand that provides its consumers with the latest fashion trends at affordable prices. The establishment of Mr Price stretches back to 1885; in 1986 history was made for this retail group. The change in control of John Orr Holdings transformed Mr Price from a credit-based department store to a largely cash driven value retailer (Mr Price Annual Report, 2009). Fashion brands need to know the importance of adding value to their brand's image and online shopping presence by growing their consumer-brand relationship on social media platforms (Siddiqui et al., 2003). Mr Price has 1 170 525 consumers who associate themselves with the brand on the brand Facebook page, by liking the page. The Mr Price group was chosen as a case study as it is a popular brand that claims to deliver on value retail, the brands use of social media evoked interest to gain more insight into how they use Facebook to engage and communicate with their consumers.

To get a more holistic view of what social media is two terms need to be unpacked namely Web 2.0 and new media. Firstly Web 2.0 can be described as the technological advances that are found in computer hardware and software; while new media is the mass communication or social networking sites which are as a result of digital technologies such as the internet (i.e Facebook) Berthon et al. (2012). New media contributes to the shift from passive to active consumers, allowing consumers to become part of a community, create information and voice their opinions alongside the brand. Interactivity is the consumer's attitude towards engaging with brands online, through user-generated content public reviews, posts, blogs or uploading of photographs, add to the many comments which are published by general users who show interest in a particular topic (Vernuccio et al, 2012). The simultaneous production and usage of content can be defined as produsage, this concept blurs boundaries between passive consumption and active production (Bruns, 2007).

Facebook was developed by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 (Facebook, 2010); it is an internet-based community which allows people to communicate more effectively and efficiently with their friends, families and co-workers. Through access to Facebook one is able to interact with other people in this environment. Once a profile is created people are able to share and engage in information, they can join groups of interest and connect with people anywhere in the world. Facebook includes applications, which can be identified as photos, videos, events, groups and pages. Through these applications people are able to connect and share information in many engaging ways (Facebook, 2010).

This platform provides users with the ability to create groups and pages for personal benefit or to create a fan page that supports a brand or a celebrity. The creation of pages is a new feature to the Facebook platform and is mainly aimed at public figures, organisations and businesses. This feature on Facebook is a tool to assist with engaging with audiences, sharing stories and participating in conversations which take place in real time in a quick and easy manner (Bouvier, 2012).

Facebook pages allow a user to create a profile and search for friends since the user is able to send out friend requests. Once a friend request is accepted, users are able to connect with each other no matter their geographical location. Friends' activities can be added to the newsfeed option in order for users to stay informed. Hence Facebook pages function as an online application where users can see and be seen (Stroud, 2008). Facebook pages give users the opportunity to become prosumers, meaning they are able to both produce and consume the content on the page (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

Facebook pages play an important role in maintaining a successful social media presence. Facebook pages encourage people to participate and interact with brands and vice versa; through Facebook pages people are able to offer opportunities and gain exclusive information (Smith, 2009). The layout of the Facebook page remains the same for each user; on the left hand side users can place a profile picture and some brief information below that. When people update posts, these are outlined with boxes; this is where the number of fans, brand information, links or images that are uploaded either by brand or fans are displayed. There are several tabs which are

available to users where information to chosen applications can be reached (Facebook, 2010).

Facebook is a dominant platform in the social media landscape (Patterson, 2015). This could be the reason for the average number of users in June 2016 which showed the total number of daily users was 1.3 billion and a monthly average totalling 1.71 billion users (Facebook, 2010). Facebook can be seen as a powerful tool for social media marketing and a platform for advertising (Lipsman et al., 2012). Therefore many brands have tagged along and have created Facebook pages, in order to use the opportunity to be able to capitalise on this new way of interacting with consumers; this is evident by the 15 million brands on Facebook (Koetsier, 2013).

Facebook introduced its 'like' button in April 2010. This button is said to receive over one billion clicks on a daily basis and allows the users of Facebook to communicate approval of pages, photos and statuses (Bushelow, 2012). Social media brand impressions are easier to reach when individuals engage in liking a brand's Facebook page. In addition, brands are able to engage with their consumers. This is possible because of the associations that are formed through this virtual space, where links between brands and users' profiles are created (Hyllegard et al., 2011).

Interaction that occurs between brand and consumer in a virtual space contributes to the consumers' shift from passive to active, possibly because brand and consumers are able to find common interest within the information which is passed back and forth within these communities (Berthon et al., 2012). Hence, Facebook can be identified as a platform within virtual space, which allows for the formation of a community. The Mr Price brand can be found in this virtual space, and can be identified by the colours of the brand. Consumers are able to share opinions, interests and lifestyle choices around the brand more freely (Miller & Lammas, 2010).

Colours form a vital part of the representation of a brand and should be carefully considered in order for a brand to transmit its desired image to consumers (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006). Colours are important as they represent feelings; however it can be a complex process because colours tend to represent things that are more personal than universal and are often embedded with messages (Marks et

al., 2009). The colours representing the Mr Price brand are red, black and white. These colours symbolise the different perceptions carried by each. Red symbolises excitement, energy, passion, love, desire, speed, strength, power, heat, aggression, danger, fire, blood, war and violence, all things intense and passionate. While black symbolises power, sexuality, sophistication, formality, elegance, wealth, mystery, fear, evil, unhappiness, depth, style, sadness, remorse, anger, anonymity, underground, , mourning and death (Western cultures). Finally white symbolises reverence, purity, birth, simplicity, cleanliness, peace, humility, precision, innocence, youth, winter, snow, good, sterility, marriage (Western cultures), death (Eastern cultures), it is cold and clinical. These colours allow consumers to be able to distinguish the Mr Price brand from that of its competitors (The Incredible Art Department, 2011).

Hashtags are also used as a means of identifying a brand. Hashtags can be identified as a string of words which follow the hash sign '#', there is no need for punctuation or spaces. Hashtags often form part of a topic and comprise different categories; they are used as tools to generate conversations (UKNetMonitor, 2013). The hashtag has a close link to Twitter, but today it is used across all social media platforms. The use of hashtags allows for an easier discovery of content uploaded by the brand or a consumer. This allows for content to be placed in appropriate streams, so that anyone who is following those streams will have access to any photos appearing there.

A hashtag is useful in the sense that it assists people with access to a certain area of interest. Consumers of a brand are able to gain information about latest advertising campaigns, competitions and to be part of the brand by tagging them. Hashtags have the power to take over conversations and promote their content accordingly. Has tags can be seen as a way to get consumers and the brand to interact. A brand creates a hashtag and all consumers and interested parties use the hashtag when they are engaging on any social media platform; it creates a space for all consumers with common interests to actively engage (UKNetMonitor, 2013).

UKNetMonitor (2013) points out a few reasons why people engage in the use of hashtags. The first reason is that hashtags increase engagement, by stimulating conversation around a brand, its product or service. The belief is that people become

inspired by a certain hashtag because it allows them to join the conversation with friends and other consumers. Secondly, it assists with tracking conversations, but many question the impact tracking conversations has on driving the sales of a brand. Thirdly, hashtags can increase a brand's visibility when they are utilised to promote something of value, i.e. competitions, product or service information, to see images or a concept that is shared with others. The main benefit is that this tool increases the visibility of a brand, because if the information contains value, it is more likely that the content will be shared amongst consumers and potential consumers.

There are three reasons why it is crucial for brands to strategise: Firstly, hashtags will allow for the brand to become more searchable on Facebook. No matter the number of people following the brand, there is enormous opportunity for consumers to find and engage with original content. However, whether a brand uses hashtags or not, it should be searchable in order to effectively and actively engage with consumers.

Secondly, hashtags assist brands with reaching their target audience and enable future research. For example if consumers are able to search and engage with specific hashtags, a brand should be able to find those consumers and essentially be able to more easily segment the existing consumer base. Brands should consider research important and look at hashtags as a tool to making the process more efficient. Hashtags allow for the everyday consumer to become a brand ambassador and for a brand this is an important point as it needs to produce content which is valuable enough for existing and potential consumers to share.

Finally, hashtags allow for social media managers to expand their reach to their target market. Social media is an effective tool which allows brands to identify current trends and use the platform to become more visible. Facebook as a platform allows for brands to produce content which fits with the conversations that are already happening online. This allows for brands to produce content and reach their exact target market.

It is important for brands to consider these three reasons as to why hashtags should be used in their strategy to improve overall brand communication between the brand and its consumers. A sub-trend uncovered that Facebook has 14 million users in South Africa, these users now access Facebook via their mobile devices. It is clear

that the mobile phone has become the primary form of accessing this social media platform (SA Social Media Landscape, 2017).

As a starting point, there is a large variety of interaction between the Mr Price brand and its consumers. The brand image of Mr Price can be described as youthful, colourful, fun and trendy all of which can be obtained at a lower price.

A logo is an emblem or device which is used by a brand for recognition and for consumers to be able to distinguish one brand from another. The logo is a representation of a brand and is not the brand itself. A logo is characterised according to its use for a brand; it can be the name of the brand only, the name and symbol of the brand or an acronym or monogram (Egan, 2007). A logo needs to be consistent; simple, so that the consumer is able to easily remember it; memorable, it should be attractive, eye catching and original; timeless, a logo should be easily transformable to keep up with the times so that consumers are not lost when a completely new logo is designed; versatile, it should be adaptable even if it is printed in black and white; and appropriate, it should fully represent the brand, translating the purpose of the brand in the design of the logo (Cass, 2008).

The colours of a brand are a vital part of brand representation and need to be carefully considered in order to transmit the desired image to the consumer (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006). Colours are important as they represent feelings and carry personal and universal connotations which are often embedded with various messages (Marks et al., 2009).

Symbols are used in a logo to represent the brand and make it easy for consumers to identify. The MRP Mr Price logo consists of the letters mrp in white, following a red cap all in a little black box. This box symbolises reliability, strength and stability (Joannès 2008).



Image 1: MRP Logo

Source: Mr Price Facebook page, 2017

Typography is the arrangement of letters, words and text used in all contexts involving a brand (Dabner et al., 2009). If the typeface matches the target market then it is part of the brand's visual identity which represents the value of the brand (Hart & Murphy, 1998). Typography has three main elements, namely the typeface, spacing and layout (McCarthy & Mothersbaugh, 2002).

Finally, a brand's slogan is a statement that gives credit to what product or service is being sold; it is always attached to the brand when it is being advertised in order for the public to remember it (Foster, 2001). A slogan needs to be memorable, should recall the brand's name, include all benefits, differentiate the brand, communicate positive feelings, reflect brand's personality, be strategic, competitive, original and believable (Foster, 2001). All the fundamental elements mentioned above holistically define a brand, each of them playing a vital role in the branding.

A brand strives to have daily interaction with its consumers. This engagement should be as immediate as possible in order to achieve the following key principles: transparency and openness, mutual respect, and an interaction which is both supportive and responsive. Engagement should be regular and structured and recognise that any interaction could involve potential as well as existing consumers.

The Mr Price brand is aligned to fashionable merchandise which it retails at low prices. Social Media allows the Mr Price brand to market its brand and respond to its

consumers' ever changing needs. This retailer believes in lower mark ups on its merchandise in order for the brand to fund its growth without becoming indebted. Part of its identity is about Mr Price providing trendy fashion at a lower price and this can be seen on its Facebook page (Mr Price Annual Report, 2017).

The Mr Price brand is committed to inclusivity of consumers and the brand's use of social media promotes a platform for active engagement to occur. In order to get a better view of the Mr Price brand communication, information was taken from the 2016 Annual Integrated Report from the Mr Price group limited web page. Mr Price encourages its staff to approach each day with a smile while projecting a positive image, in the belief that work is fun. Mr Price values quality and provides consumers with the latest trends in fashion.

Table 1: Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder	Why we engage	How we engage	What we engage in
Customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •To meet our Customers' needs and increase long-term loyalty •To enhance the group's brand and thereby grow market share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional and social media • Customer and market surveys and panels • Advertising campaigns and competitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand perceptions and expectations • Fashion trends • Product and quality feedback • Customer service levels • E-commerce technical assistance, orders and queries • Community support and fundraising through MRP Foundation •Account queries and payment

Source: Mr Price Annual Report, 2017

The information shown in the above stakeholder engagement table is relevant to this research study.

Through traditional and social media Mr Price engages in customer and market surveys, product testing, inbound and outbound call centres, advertising and competitions, live chat feedback on e-commerce sites, mystery shopper programmes, and feedback from partners in foreign markets. This study focused on how Mr Price engaged with its consumers on Facebook and how social media, through this platform, was used as a tool to communicate with society at large.

The Mr Price brand adheres to the International Integrated Reporting Council's Framework of reporting and as stated in the Mr Price 2016 Annual Integrated Report value is created through the use of capitals, which can be described as resources or relationships and interdependencies between the two. Mr Price has six of these capitals, namely financial, manufacture, intellectual, human, natural and social and relationship. For the purpose of this study only social and relationship capital will be looked at.

The Mr Price brand culture emphasises the importance of mutual respect, this is to assist the brand with forging long term relationships with co-workers, partners and specifically consumers as they are the business and most valued partners. In the process of trying to keep up the level of value between stakeholders, the Mr Price brand acknowledges the power and influence that stakeholders have over decision-making (Mr Price Annual Report, 2017). This engagement aims be as immediate as possible in order to achieve the following key principles: transparency and openness, mutual respect, interaction which is supportive and responsive; regular and structured engagement in order to show construction and co-operation and recognising that all stakeholders are either existing or potential consumers.

Social and relationship capitals consist of stakeholder relationships and engagement. The brand's reputation and values also form part of this capital. The Mr Price input to this capital is the long-term relationships that have been developed with consumers, suppliers and other business partners. As a result the Mr Price brand relationship with suppliers and consumers continues to grow. A total of R27.6

million has been donated to the Mr Price foundation; R3.5 billion worth of merchandise has been sourced from South Africa and a total of R21.6 million in dividends has been paid to the Partners Share Scheme (2016 Annual Integrated Report Apr 2015 – March 2016).

The development of Facebook from Web 2.0 infrastructure means that there is now a virtual space where two-way communication has become more effective and efficient for both brand and consumer. The popularity around Facebook means that the platform encourages active consumer-brand engagement, given its current position as market leader (Wauters, 2011).

The importance of this study is in the production of knowledge around the use of social media platforms (specifically Facebook) for brand communication. Mr Price has a Facebook presence; however the communication that was exchanged between brand and consumer was directed to its website. This communication was therefore evaluated in order to determine whether the brand's website provided the information sought on its Facebook page, or whether the consumer was being directed to an invalid source of information and what that meant for the brand's overall image.

Old media branding simply meant that the brand manager would use the "one-to-many" tools, where consumers were given the brand's story and culture from the brand's perspective and no interaction between the two was possible (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Metaphorically speaking, the consumers had no voice in that space, their voices were simply not strong enough to be heard by brands. However with new media, brands and consumers can create a platform for not only story tellers but active consumers, who can choose to be part of content creation (Kuksov et al., 2013). The Mr Price brand allows consumers to receive the brand's perspective of apparel being marketed; however, in addition, a space is provided on its Facebook page where consumers are able to voice their opinions and be more interactive with the brand.

The main objective of any brand is to build a strong and long-term relationship with its consumers. This is dependent on the manner in which the brand chooses to communicate with its consumers. Therefore, brand communication forms an integral part of brand image as it includes the creation of multiple connections with the

consumer, specifically in the online environment (Platon, 2014). It has been proven that social media platforms are an effective way of linking brands with consumers online, therefore it should be incorporated into a brand communication strategy (Platon, 2014).

Brands capitalise on the opportunity provided by social media to converse with consumers, as it allows for better communication, which in turn assists with monitoring trends in the marketplace (Assaf et al., 2012). Through investigation it was found that the Mr Price brand engaged in this opportunity and had an active Facebook page. The brand's page displayed evident communication between the brand and its consumers. Brands have started to show interest and understanding towards the use of the internet and because of this change of mind-set more brands have become involved in online communities (Berthon et al., 2012).

Online amenities such as the Mr Price Facebook can be seen as an aspect of empowering individuals, allowing them to become active participants with a specific brand (Garretson & Burton, 2005). This can be viewed as bottom-up marketing, where consumers are described through marketing messages, as intelligent, organised, more trusting towards their peers and having their own opinions (Karpinski, 2005). Bottom-up marketing was coined by the many people who created millions of connections through social media on a daily basis (Hansen et al., 2011). These connections influence the building of relationships, which are vast in nature, especially on social networks. Therefore, through the use of social media, brands are able to gain insight into the consumer market place and if strategic enough, can use this space to grow consumer/brand relationships, which was once impossible. An analysis of the Mr Price social media platform (Facebook) was undertaken in order to gain insight into the online community. This analysis was guided by the purpose and objectives of this study.

Chapter Outline

Chapter two is the conceptual chapter, which explains the functionality of Facebook as a social media platform and how this can benefit a brand's image. Information was sourced from the following fields of expertise: branding, communication and

social media. Different views were discussed and adapted to this research study. Debates around how brands use Facebook to communicate with their consumers and what that means for their brand image were unpacked so that better insight could be gained around the chosen phenomenon.

Through exploring what brand image entails, two factors (consumer service and personalisation) were identified and their influences (marketing communication, consumption experience and social influence) unpacked in order to generally better understand brand communication and brand image and relate it to the Mr Price Facebook page. Branding was adapted onto the social media platform (Facebook), where literature around the benefits of using social media as a communication tool was explored.

Chapter three discusses the research methodology for this study. By adopting a thematic analysis of the Mr Price Facebook Page the researcher was able to gain insight into the type of information exchanged between a brand and its consumers and whether it can be considered effective when the information provided directs consumers to the brand's website. Through the adoption of thematic analysis the researcher was able to focus on the information found in seventy posts which were collected by the researcher from the 1st May 2017 to the 30th April 2018. This was used as a means of assistance in the generation of perspectives on trends across a spectrum of texts, as a bigger sample group was used (Deacon et al., 2007). Thematic analysis is often used in the media and communications fields and is beneficial as it offers researchers the opportunity to make valid inferences from the text analysed (Deacon et al., 2007).

All the secondary data collected during this research study was categorised through a coding scheme, resulting in eleven categories containing information. These were the post number; date of post; positive and negative comments; types of likes; account queries; return/refund queries; career information; modelling queries; promotional sales and garment information; lay-bye; store information.

It is worth reiterating the purpose of the study which was to analyse how Mr Price used social media (Facebook) to communicate with its consumers and how this platform reflected its brand image. This research study hoped to gain a better understanding into why social media is considered an important tool for brands to

consider when looking at ways to communicate with their consumers. By adopting thematic analysis the researcher was able to discover and describe what individuals, groups and brand communication focused on (Weber, 1990). The data collected during the thematic analysis of the Mr Price Facebook page, was acquired by analysing the communication between the brand and its consumers.

Chapter four the objectives of the study were used as a guide for the themes which were unpacked during the analysis of the data collected through the communication between the Mr Price brand and its consumers on Facebook and what that meant for its brand image. Data was collected from e-observation and thematically analysed of the seventy posts collected from the Mr Price Facebook page from 01 May 2017 to 30 April 2018. The method of collecting data was important as it assisted the researcher with selecting the appropriate approach for analysis, which made the findings around this collected data more accurate. . The main aim was to answer how the Mr Price brand image appeared on Facebook; how Mr Price used Facebook to communicate with its consumers; how Mr Price used #mrpmystyle to reach its consumers and to understand how Mr Price Facebook page contributed to its consumer-brand relationship. Information was qualitatively analysed and screenshots were provided to support the information.

Furthermore, this study was driven by ideas around brand communication on Facebook and how it affected brand image. The themes are as follows: the appearance of the Mr Price brand image on Facebook; the use of #mrpmystyle to assist consumer-brand engagement and Mr Price Facebook communication contribution to consumer-brand relationship.

Chapter five gives a summary of findings, overall conclusion of the research study, recommendations and concludes the study as whole.

Validity, Reliability and Rigour

In order to achieve validity and reliability this study used different tools for the data collection (Rolfe, 2006). Secondary data was the only source of information, as the researcher was denied access to primary data by Mr Price. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the information collected from Mr Price Annual reports, journals,

dissertations and the Mr Price Facebook page. These sources provided the researcher with reliable and valid data.

The researcher ensured this research study was reliable, by using trustworthy sources of information, which is crucial in qualitative research (Seale, 1999). The information obtained for this research study is validated through the quality and rigour it holds. Hence the researcher was able to provide reliable and valid information which spoke to the objectives of this study.

Limitations of the Study

Firstly, a gate keeper's letter was not obtained, therefore permission was not granted by Mr Price head office to conduct this study. The researcher was unable to engage in interviews with brand and social media managers to gain primary information around the chosen phenomenon. The researcher used this stumbling block as a stepping stone and chose to conduct the research study in the digital space in which the data was found.

Secondly, as a result of being unable to obtain a gate keeper's letter and spending time re-working the proposal, the submission and ethical clearance process of this study was delayed. This is because the researcher had submitted a proposal to gain ethical clearance and had to then do a submission for exclusion of ethical clearance as there were no longer participants in the study.

Counter Measures for Limitations

Although Mr Price did not provide a gatekeeper's letter, the researcher used the digital space which the research was investigating (Facebook) as the main source of information about the brand's communication. The platform was able to provide sufficient information in order to reach the objectives of this study. Because the proposal had to be submitted numerous times, whilst waiting for approval the available time was used to collect the data from the Mr Price Facebook page.

Chapter Two

Contemporary Brand Theory: Communicating through Social Media

Introduction

This chapter will unpack what branding is and how brands communicate either through firm- or user-generated content. The manner in which brands choose to communicate with consumers has an impact on their brand Identity and Brand Image and by unpacking convergence culture, the study seeks to determine how two-way communication occurs on social media. Social media presence and interaction (on Facebook) is investigated in order to determine how branding is reflected on social media and what that means for fashion brands. Using Mr Price as a case study, the above concepts will be unpacked in order to determine the Mr Price consumer-brand engagement on social media.

Branding

A brand is a unique name, term, word, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these which makes a product identifiable or differentiates it from the competition (American Marketing Association, 2016). Mr Price is a retail store, whose brand produces trendy clothing at lower prices, offering its consumers value. Branding can be seen as a way of adding value to products or services and often consumers prefer to associate themselves with brands whose products or services are well identifiable, well marketed and well established (Batra et al., 1996).

Furthermore, the cultural approach to branding adopted by Douglas Holt (2002) describes brands as a myth which is often constructed by authors in an organisation (i.e. companies, cultural industries, critics, salespeople and consumers) and often these constructed meanings are attached to the product or service. The myth (i.e. brand story) which organisations attach to products or services can be seen as a way of giving meaning and adding value to a brand's logo, name and design which is vital to grabbing the attention of consumers (Holt, 2004). As demonstrated by Holt,

brands defined in the cultural form assist in evaluating branding in its historical, geographical and social context, which is often used as a way of reproducing what the brand stands for (Samios & Wang, 2014). This can be identified under promotional culture, which is known as more than the professional activities associated with promotion (Wernick, 1991). He further states that 'culture' has a heavy influence in the medium of promotion; it is for this reason that the promotion of objects (e.g images, products or forms of communication) can not be separated from the promotion of itself and other objects that are linked to it through communication (Wernick, 1991).

Cultural reproduction allows consumers to differentiate between the unconsumed, emerging, resistant and unconventional, in the same way the modes of production are viewed. Culture is transferred into everyday lives through the objects consumed; this is a commanding way of gaining in-depth and practical understanding of the ideological structure of a brand or its consumers which allows for the development of brand culture to a great extent (Slater, 1997). The Mr Price brand retails apparel allowing consumers to purchase these and wear them in different ways in everyday life. According to a qualitative study completed on the brand culture of a Turkish airway, cultural values (age, race and gender) are what differentiate one brand from another (Grancay & Szikorova, 2013).

An example is drawn from the well-known brands Adidas and Nike; these two brands share very similar product categories; both of which relate to consumers who work on their physical appearance. However they are differentiated by the consumers' interpretation of what cultural values are attached to the brand. When describing brands from a business perspective, Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2000) agrees that a brand is more than the product or service being sold.

There are several other factors that represent a brand, namely, brand personality, symbols, brand-consumer relationship, emotional benefits, self-expressive benefits, user imagery, country of origin and organisational associations (Holt, 2002). Some branding experts assume that the principles needed to build a strong brand remain the same across all cultures. Although culture has a vital role to play in achieving a successful and holistic system of meaning (Schroeder, 2009); networks cannot be analysed without considering their cultural context. Ultimately branding and

marketing are not solely business processes as assumed by many business experts, but are also influenced by cultural processes (Holt, 2003a). Brands are driven by the culture which they create and often this culture is transferred to consumers (Firat & Dholakia, 2006).

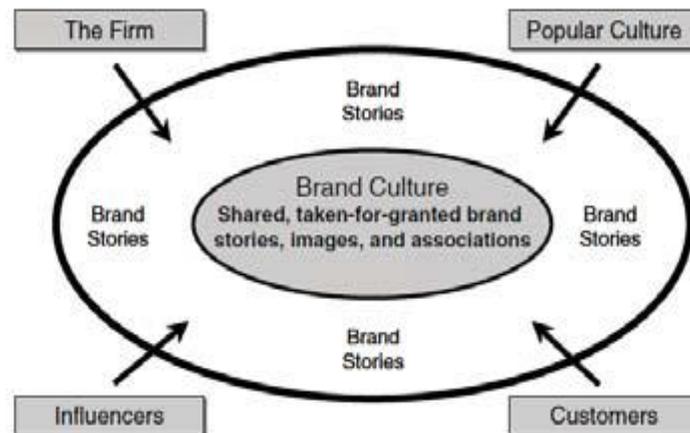


Figure 1: The formation of a brand's culture

Source: Douglas Holt, 2003a

A brand's culture is influenced by four factors which are identified in figure 1 above namely, the firm, popular culture, influencers and consumers. All four factors have an influence on a brand's story, which ultimately influences the brand's culture.

Firstly the firm is the creator of a brand's culture, the influence of the brand's story is made possible by the manner in which the product or service being sold is marketed. This includes the place where the product or service is being sold; the manner in which a brand promotes its items (advertising on social media or on the radio) and the price of the item (Holt, 2003b).

The second factor is popular culture, which gives meaning and adds to the manner in which a brand is perceived by its consumers. Trends portrayed through television, films, magazines and social media, further influence the cultural assets of a brand and impact the overall culture of the brand (Holt, 2003a). However, the perception of

the brand's engagement with popular culture is seen in the manner in which consumers interact with the brand's content (Aaker, 2012).

The third factor is the influencers. These are the people who have the ability to influence the next person's decision about the brand. These influencers are shown to others through experiences and opinions which impact on a brand's culture and the manner in which it is perceived (Holt, 2003c). The influence that social media has is more pervasive than that of conventional media. This is because social media has the ability to deliver rich information and requires minimal effort from the individual. Hence the influencers come in the guise of blogs and the social media platforms of other consumers (Guo, 2014).

The last factor is the consumers themselves; they are one of the most important factors as they experience the product or service first hand. Through their interaction with the brand, the brand's stories are created, shared and consumed. Interaction allows others to view the experiences and gain insight into the deemed value of the brand. Therefore consumers are a very active factor in the creation of a brand's culture (Holt, 2003b). Consumers interact with the Mr Price brand by commenting and sharing posts. Through this action interaction occurs between the brand and consumer, as well as between consumer and other consumers who wish to associate themselves with the brand.

People who associate themselves with certain brands often do so as a way of expressing or identifying with the brand's image (Solomon, 2007). If an individual is able to perceive a brand's culture as one which reflects their self-identity, then the brand becomes a tool for reinforcing that idea which creates a relationship. Hence consumer behaviour research has acknowledged that brands are used as a way of symbolising consumption; by selecting brands with a specific brand personality, consumers are able to express who they are by simply engaging with the brand (Heding et al., 2009). Therefore, considering the above statement it can be said that people use Facebook as a way of communicating through the action of liking, commenting or sharing information (Heding et al., 2009). This action gives a direct link between the brand and consumer, allowing everyone on the platform access to the information. Hence social media becomes a communication tool through which

consumers are able to interact and identify with the cultural codes of a specific brands products and services.

Through these cultural codes a brand's identity and image is created where its values are represented and influence a consumer's choice to engage with a brand or not (Kapferer, 2008). According to a qualitative study completed on the brand culture of a Turkish airway, cultural values are what differentiate one brand from another (Kapferer, 2008). Therefore, brands play a vital role in transmitting culture to the consumer; which culture is often infused with meaning to which many consumers are able to relate (Schroeder, 2009). The transfer of brand culture to consumer is created through brand communication, which has an impact on the consumer-brand relationship.

Brand Communication

One of the most important objectives of any brand is to build a long-term relationship with its consumers (Aaker, 2012). This is achieved by the manner in which communication occurs between brand and consumer; whether this communication actually results in change for that consumer and if the consumer can benefit from it. Brand communication results from multiple activities with consumers, which influence the opinions around a brand's product or service (Platon, 2014). This is inclusive of the online environment, which is an effective way of linking brands with consumers; the brand's image is also created through brand communication (Platon, 2014).

On social media there are two forms of brand communication, namely firm-created and user-generated; brand managers assume that brand communication can increase through utilising user-generated communication (Smith et al., 2012). This study looked at the #mrpmystyle as a source of user-generated content; as well as the type of content the firm generates on social media.

Brands are provided with the opportunity to converse with consumers through new media channels and all brands are able to communicate in different and effective ways; this assists brands with monitoring trends in the marketplace (Assaf et al.,

2012). New media allows consumers to become aware of what a brand has to offer and therefore influences the decision to buy into the brand at a more efficient rate than that of old media. It allows for a boost in sales as new media directs consumers to the brand's website and e-commerce site for further interaction (New Media Age, 2010). The Mr Price brand engages in new media through the creation of a Facebook page which accommodates communication and consumers are given links to other components of the brand, such as their website, e-commerce site or customer self-service.

New media allows consumers to share information with other consumers who have common interests. Through common interests online communities are formed and various topics are shared, ranging from business to family matters or customer service (Samios & Wang, 2014). The interactivity provided by new media assists with the growth of knowledge amongst these communities and influences the information value that is generated (Patino et al, 2012). Looking at communication from a historically perspective, promotional culture cannot be separated from mass media and culture. This is because advertising has been identified as an integral part of the evolution of mass communications (Curran, 1986).

Online communities often formed on social media platforms have provided a space for brands to be able to transfer their messages to their consumers. This new form of media has provided brands with an alternative communication channel which can be used in many innovative ways resulting in the creation of complex and varied connections between brand and consumer (Platon, 2014). The type of content which is created on social media platforms often involves different topics which both brand and consumer are able to create. As a result brands are no longer the primary source of brand communication (Berthon et al., 2008). For the fulfilment of this study, the content which was posted on the Mr Price Facebook page engaging the hashtag #mrpmystyle was analysed in order to gain insight into the type of information the brand attached to those posts and what interaction it sparked from the users of the Facebook page, allowing the researcher to gain insight into the use of user-generated content and whether it encouraged consumer-brand engagement.

However, it is important to note that the promotion of goods and services is crucial during the production and consumption of commodities and culture; as it impacts the shaping of media and cultural formats. It is where fashion, trends and guidelines become influenced and have an impact on the choices made by the consumer (Davis, 2003). Therefore the manner in which communication occurs can be as a result of the commodity being sold or the message that needs to be given to the consumer.

Firm-Generated and User-Generated Brand Communication

It is important to distinguish between these two types of brand communication which can be reflected through social media. Firstly, firm-created brand communication and user-generated brand communication (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009) are fundamentally different although both constitute brand communication. Firm-created can be defined as the communication which is formulated by the management of companies or organisations; whereas user-generated is defined as communication which is independent of the control of the company or organisation (Vanden Bergh et al., 2011). Both firm-generated and user-generated content results from word of mouth and electronic word of mouth where consumers are able to gain information from the brand or other consumers (Chu & Kim, 2011).

Word of mouth can be created by a firm and often contains a mixture of traditional advertising and consumer's word of mouth, this is when content is created by the firm itself but initiated by the consumers' interaction and opinion with the information (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). When word of mouth is applied to online communication between a brand and its consumers, social media is seen as the source for the circulation of information (Dellarocas et al., 2007). Social media, according to Godes & Mayzlin (2009) is a cost-effective alternative for brands to be able to access and gather consumer-to-consumer communication; however, this is still seen as a new practice amongst brand managers (Nielsen, 2013). For the purpose of this study, the type of information that was circulated amongst the consumers was analysed, which allowed the researcher to gain insight into how the Mr Price brand was involved in word of mouth or electronic word of mouth on its Facebook page.

User-generated brand communication via electronic word of mouth can be as a result of the empowerment a consumer receives from the internet; consumers have the ability to develop a proactive attitude towards brands (Burmam & Arnhold, 2008). User-generated brand communication has become well known and is used by consumers who have become part of the growth of online brand communities on social media platforms. This is possible through the consumers' ability to add to the content which is circulated by either the consumer or the brand (Gangadharbatla, 2008). This type of communication is also referred to as user-generated content (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012).

Word of Mouth holds greater power than traditional media as it is responsible for two-thirds of sales (Solomon, 2011). Often the information shared between individuals is seen as more reliable and trustworthy when it is shared through formal marketing channels such as Facebook. Word of mouth allows communication between a brand and its consumer; this communication is in the form of news and opinions which are formed around a brand's product or service (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004). According to Solomon (2011) it is imperative for consumers to be made aware of a brand's product or service that is being advertised; this is integral for brand awareness, especially amongst consumers and is used at a later stage when consumers make purchasing choices.

To highlight some of the reasons why consumers engage in word of mouth Solomon (2011) elaborates that the reasons include consumers' enjoyment of conversing about certain products or services. For example soccer fans engage in information concerning the sport because they find enjoyment in the sport. Another reason can simply be because consumers sharing their knowledge with other individuals are seen as a way of boosting their egos or impressing others by sharing this information. Word of mouth can have an impact on how consumers judge a product or service before personally engaging with it, which can have a much greater impact on a brand's image when compared to traditional media (i.e. print and television) (Herr et al., 1991). Word of mouth is related to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of previous purchase experiences (Richins & Bloch, 1991). Richins and Bloch further state that consumers search for online word of mouth and often accept what is said,

especially if it is negative, this is because other consumers' experiences are seen as valuable, compared to the lack of information and self-experience with a product or service offered by the brand. Brands need to be aware that through engagement emotional bonds are developed with the consumer; therefore brands need to consider incorporating word of mouth to encourage active engagement with consumers (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). Active engagement can be achieved by allowing consumers to engage in user-generated content (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012).

User-generated content can be identified as public reviews, posts, blogs or uploading of photographs, all of which add to the many comments which are published by general users who show interest in a particular topic. User-generated content is unstructured and can often contain misrepresented information which is added to and edited by general users who have access to the internet (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012). It is important to note that user-generated content becomes an important means through which consumers are able to fully express themselves through communication with other consumers to become part of the brand. User-generated content that is brand-related has the potential to influence the perceptions of other consumers as well as challenge professionals in the marketing environment; one of these challenges is the reaction to negative posts about a brand through user-generated content. A brand's approach to a negative situation can be detrimental for its image. Therefore it is imperative for brands to engage in co-creation on social media, as it is important for a brand to build and encourage connections between itself and its consumers. This will ensure that consumers gain a sense of belonging and feel encouraged to interact with the brand (Smith et al., 2012).

User-generated content from a cultural perspective provides an obvious shift in the manner in which content is produced and circulated, because consumers are greatly empowered by technology and demand to take an active part in the culture (Jenkins, 2006). In order to gain a cultural perspective of branding on social media, consumer culture needs to be described and it is here where it is seen as a culture of consumption. It is unique and specific to those who engage with this dominant mode of cultural reproduction, which was established in the west over the years (Slater,

1997). Consumer culture can also be seen as a system, where the consumption of commodities is influenced by cultural reproduction which can be understood and displayed through the exercise of free personal choice in the private sphere of everyday lives (Slater, 1997). The cultural factors in consumer culture include values, belief systems, communication and symbols, all of which influence the way a person makes a decision thereby influencing a person's behaviour and participation in the engagement with a brand (Craig & Douglas, 2005).

As a result a participatory culture is created, which demands people to engage in media technologies. Whereas old media did not allow for any other person to influence or shape another consumer's decisions as the media content and entry to the marketplace was solely controlled by the brand (Jenkins, 2006). However, new media (digital environment) allows for people to engage in different activities, such as sharing posts, liking information they find relevant and engaging with other users through chatting (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins and many other media theorists are appreciative of the opportunities that technology provides to those at grassroots level; people are able to express their individualism and provide a diverse voice about their experiences or opinions on products and services (Deuze, 2007).

Consumers, who engaged in cultural content, were able to do so in the old media (radio, television or film) as it has always been involved in engaging activities such as game shows, talk shows or make-over programmes. However with new media (social media, i.e. Facebook) which is part of the digital era, users have better access to communication platforms, which allow for conversations to take place around a product or service (Jenkins, 1992). This digital era allows consumers to give voice to their experiences and opinions around a brand. However, it should not be presumed that everyone is an active participant on social media. As stated by Arthur (2006) out of one hundred people, one will create content, ten others will interact with this content (commenting, liking or sharing) and the other eight-nine percent will just view posts (Arthur, 2006).

Interactive digital media changes the manner in which information is shared and the manner in which connectivity is established between the consumer and brand (Jenkins, 2006). In the space provided by digital media not everyone understands

how to create engaging posts and as a result there can be a lack of driving action towards post engagement thereby hindering the improvement of a website (Garretson & Burton, 2005). However when consumers respond to a post they are engaging with other consumers as well as the brand; by using the product as a conversation starter it is argued that consumer engagement expands beyond the website boundary.

Technology is an evolutionary phenomenon that has the potential to empower individual consumers to become active engagers (Garretson & Burton, 2005). This empowerment according to Karpinski (2005) can be described as bottom-up marketing, where consumers engage in marketing messages as intelligent, organised and more trusting towards their peers' opinions and their own. Bottom-up marketing is a result of many people creating millions of connections through social media on a daily basis (Hansen et al., 2011). These connections influence the building of the many relationships on social networks, allowing for insight into the consumers' preferred market place, something that was once impossible.

Mr Price's primary use of the internet is to communicate, obtain information and engage in content that is of interest to the consumers. Furthermore, the internet is used as a vehicle for commercial transactions through marketing (Thompson, 2002). The Internet provides a platform to reach a world-wide audience and create valuable propositions that was not possible before the revolutionary Web 2.0. Moreover it provides new tools for promotion, interaction and relationship building (Thompson, 2002), and simultaneously creating a well-informed consumer base, as information is shared easier via electronic connectivity.

Cleland (2000) describes communication and sharing of information as a way to develop brand-building strategies and tools to improve the brand presence and overall product. The internet adds to change which is fundamental for a consumer-brand relationship; hence the emergence of the internet has encouraged and required brands to follow the trends and to exploit the opportunities on the internet, such as mobility and new technologies. Therefore, consumers should be provided with reliable information which will assist them in identifying and evaluating the product or service they want to purchase (Pan and Crotts, 2012).

Brands that aspire to become part of the digital market need to know that social media has become a key aspect of gaining entry. Brands need to know that it provides enormous exposure to not only their target market, but to potential consumers as well (Angelova, 2013). Consumers expect to be active participants in the media process. For a business this means involving new media into their communication strategies, however, brands should not replace traditional media but rather use social media to capture and reach intimacy and engagement with their consumers.

Although brands in a virtual space are not owned by the consumers who 'like' the content posted on social media they are used as a way of representing the self-identity of the consumers. As a result consumers (individuals) who want to link themselves to the positive outcomes in the offline domain often engage in word of mouth (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). To further elaborate, Wallace et al. (2014) state that consumers consider engaging with brands when the brand produces products or services which appeal to their social self, thereby encouraging them to engage in word of mouth. Word of mouth on social media can be influenced by the use of hashtags '#'; hashtags can be described as a word or numerous words that follow the '#' symbol (UKNetMonitor, 2013). Hashtags are used as a way of categorising certain topics, as well as a tool whereby conversations are grouped together in order to assist with the overall search for a certain idea or topic.

The hashtag originated on Internet Relay Chat (IRC) but it is thanks to Twitter that the hashtag has become main stream and has been adopted by other social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (UKNetMonitor, 2013). The hashtag has changed the way in which people use Facebook; more specifically for marketers, the hashtag assists with the way in which consumers engage with a brand (UKNetMonitor, 2013). For this research study the hashtag #mrpmystyle was analysed, in order to gain a better understanding of how consumers engaged with the Mr Price brand via its hashtag. Pre-hashtags, brands were only alerted to consumer engagement through consumers commenting on brand pages or by tagging a specific brand in their status.

The use of the hashtag on Facebook now provides brands and consumers with a way of engaging in real time conversations. Amongst the variety of reasons why people use hashtags there are three main reasons; Firstly to increase engagement; a hashtag is used by both brand and consumer in order to stimulate conversation and allow others to be a part of it as well. Secondly, in order to track conversations that are taking place between the brand and its consumers and thirdly, to increase brand online visibility by providing valuable information to consumers, generating buzz and allowing consumers to actively engage not only with the brand, but with other consumers as well (UKNetMonitor, 2013). The hashtag has brought a change in the way in which consumers engage and interact with a brand, allowing the process to be more specific and better classified on social media.

Social media is “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 60). To get a more holistic view of what social media is, two terms need to be unpacked namely Web 2.0 and new media. Firstly Web 2.0 can be described as the technological advances that are found in computer hardware and software. Berthon et al. (2012) state that it allows for user-generated content to spark interaction with between users and facilitates the ability to engage. This contributes to the shift from passive to active consumers, allowing consumers to become part of a community, create information and voice their opinions alongside the brand.

The provision of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter just to name a few, allows brands to interact with consumers to fulfil many purposes. However the focus of this research study was to analyse how social media was used to interact with consumers, what this meant for consumer-brand relationship and the influence it had on the overall brand image. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), social media consists of internet-based applications that are built on the ideological foundations of web 2.0 and allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Therefore social media allows for the facilitation of interactions, collaborations and sharing of content (Richter & Koch, 2007). However, the view of Russel (2009) differs from the above statement in that as the media environment is now cluttered it impedes communication.

Assumptions around people wanting attention and interacting on social media as stated by Li & Bernoff (2008) show that active participants are divided into five categories namely: the creators who publish and maintain content; the critics who comment or rate; the collectors who save and share; the joiners who connect and unite and lastly, the spectators who only read the content. Social media has become a vital part of most people's everyday life, using social media as a tool for staying connected to things that interest them like a favourite clothing store or celebrity and active communication with friends and family. Social Media allows for the latest trends to be placed at the fingertips or simply being influenced by thoughts and experiences of a brand. It is evident that as a result of the internet, digital media has taken a lead in companies as a new way of communicating with their consumers (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). The Mr Price brand has made its presence known on Facebook; its daily posts mean that it is active as a brand, uploading something informative for its consumers to either comment on or simply view.

It is important to remember that consumers are seen as an intangible asset to a business. As explained by Blatterberg et al. (2001) the consumer should be acquired, maintained and maximised just like any other financial assets. Social media can be seen as a way of understanding texts that are interpreted according to an individual's experiences. Therefore, when exposed to a brand's Facebook page, it is important to note that it is not isolated by only the brand's stories and messages, but rather comprises an array of users' experiences (Grint & Woolgar, 1997).

Passive respondents are eliminated and given the opportunity to be active members of a brand community. The dramatic array in the tools and approaches used by brands during the communication process can include social networks, social blogs, pictures and podcasts. Active dialogue between brand and consumer and between consumers themselves has begun to flourish. Harris & Rae (2010) elaborate that online communities are seen as key role players in marketing, because they will replace consumer annoyance with consumer engagement and the control of content with collaboration.

The importance of social media as a communication tool is emphasised by Patino et al. (2012); who identify four reasons why social media is more important than traditional media, firstly: it satisfies an impulse; consumers often connect when they

wish to and need not connect when they wish to remain unconnected; connections are often quick and do not require much effort. Secondly, the excitement of sharing; the internet provides social media platforms where consumers are able to share their experiences with other consumers or brands; expanding the communication reach between brand and consumer as well as consumer and consumer. Thirdly, seeking advice; social media is exploited by users in order to gain information from others; trust plays a major factor here. Fourthly, social media has an influence on how people behave online, how they search, converse, form communities, build and maintain relationships, it also extends into how they create content, tag other users, modify and share content on these platforms.

Social media platforms provide brands and consumers with the ability to advertise, communicate and engage with each other (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Relationships can be defined as how two or more consumers form a relationship and through this relationship converse, share content with each other or list each other as friends or fans on the platform (Miranda & Saunders, 2003). The presence of both the brand and the consumer, assisted the research study in determining how many consumers interacted/engaged with the Mr Price Facebook page and what that engagement meant for the Mr Price brand image.

Companies engage on social media not only to digitally advertise, but also to extend into the sphere of consumer service, the development of innovative ideas and creation of communities which become actively engaged with the brand (Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014). The above statements point out the importance of social media for consumer-brand relationship, hence the investigation approach of this research study.

Social media equips consumers with their own voice and allows them to become active members in the brand community; on average, consumers use almost one third of their time on social media (Lang, 2010). This is a statistic that brands can use to their advantage. Better insight has been gained into how marketers currently utilise social media as a means of growing and promoting their brands. It is also reported that eighty-six percent of marketers consider social media as an important factor in the daily running of their businesses (Stelzner, 2013). The characteristics of

social media are what allows it to be so consumable, the ability to partake, be open, engage in conversation, be part of a community, connect with brands and consumers is what all brands and consumers strive for during communication (Mayfield, 2008).

The ability to communicate often triggers interaction between brand and consumer, especially if the consumer finds truth and satisfaction in a brand's messages. When questions or queries around a product or service are answered timeously and are informative, especially when compared to other brands products and services, this engagement becomes a positive brand perception (Yoo et al., 2000). A specific brand image is created when consumers become aware of a brand and gain strong associations with it (Yoo et al., 2000). Consumers choose to associate themselves with brands because of ideas, instances, experiences and facts which contribute to the consumer's knowledge about a brand (Yoo et al, 2000). These associations are not only important for the consumer, but are crucial for brand marketers and managers, as they contribute to the positioning of a brand, how brands are differentiated from one another and most importantly how a positive attitude is created towards a brand (Low & Lamb, 2000). Brand associations become stronger when there are a number of experiences communicated around a brand that are similar and positive in nature (Aaker, 1991). Consumers of the Mr Price brand often associated with the brand to express experiences around online purchases, store experiences and information on advertised items on the Facebook page. Most of these experiences received a response from the brand, but many were left unattended.

Previous research conducted on brand communication on Facebook pages pointed out that content of fifty-five Facebook pages were analysed and from the number of brands chosen, fifty were active on Facebook. Eighty percent of the fifty did not have recent posts; in terms of the type of content posted sixty-five percent of the fifty used photos (McCorkindale, 2010). Brands who posted videos made up thirty-one percent and only thirty-six percent provided consumers with links. It was concluded that brands lacked the ability to create dialogue with their consumers; therefore communication remained one sided (McCorkindale, 2010).

In another study, the content of the official Facebook pages of seventy global brands was evaluated and ninety-two percent of the seventy brands had a Facebook presence (Parsons, 2013). These brands were more willing to assist in establishing relationships with their consumers, rather than just providing consumers with information. However, the brands messages were still being controlled, as these brands prevented consumers from posting directly onto their walls. The seventy brands also used traditional media advertising, by sharing commercial videos with their consumers (Parsons, 2013).

In yet another research study twelve UK university libraries were analysed to see how effective Facebook was as a marketing communication tool for promotions (Calvi et al., 2010). It was concluded that Facebook may be an effective communication tool. However, only fifty percent of the UK libraries were using their wall and only posted once a month, therefore consumers were also not posting on a regular basis. Most of the information that was found on their walls was related to library activities, opening hours and availability of study rooms.

The three above mentioned studies were identified in order to gain insight into previous research conducted on the use of Facebook as a communication tool. Furthermore, the researcher was able to gain an understanding on whether the Facebook platform was a viable source of information and whether it encouraged two-way communication.

Similar research can be applied to Mr Price Facebook to determine whether the platform posted relevant information and how consumers' information was received by the brand. This was done in order to get an understanding of the Mr Price brand image through its Facebook page and how effective was the communication found on its Facebook page once directed to the brand's website.

Websites

Open Graph is a new initiative which was introduced to Facebook. This initiative allows users to express their approval by 'liking' specific content on a website (e.g.

an advertisement). A marketing research company, Nielsen Research, expressed that advertisements were found to have achieved thirty per cent higher engagement from users, because users were able to see their friends' interaction once they had liked or commented on the content (Stone, 2008).

Although brands place content on their Facebook pages and gain interaction from users, many consumers place great emphasis on browsing and gathering information from the brand's website while shopping online (Choi et al., 2005). During this time consumers are able to consider a website as an effective and efficient place to gain information on particular matters. There are two types of consumers that can be found while browsing brands content. The utilitarian browser is the consumer who seeks to acquire information about a product, while a hedonistic browser tends to focus on entertainment and the enjoyable aspects of shopping, whether they are purchasing or not (Lim & Dubinsky, 2004).

During the time that consumers browse and gather information when shopping online, there are various actors that are sought by the consumer (Smith et al, 2012). These actors include product attributes such as the price of the product, the sensory aesthetics and the visual elements; both utilitarian and hedonistic consumers are influenced by the aesthetics and visual elements (Kim et al., 2007). While consumers browse websites of a chosen brand, they may encounter special offers, various colours or an attractive design and these factors could trigger a purchase (Rowley, 2004). It is therefore emphasised by researchers that a variety in selection, good prices and promotions and sensory attributes are the key actors for encouraging consumers to purchase apparel via the Internet (Lim & Dubinsky, 2004).

Consumers who regularly purchase online are more likely to enjoy website browsing which offers a wider selection; this is because they tend to be variety-seekers (Lim and Dubinsky, 2004). In addition, consumers' encounters with a variety of items enhances efficiency, as it allows them to compare items by offering a better choice through extended browsing on the Internet (Sharma et al., 2006). A variety of selection also provides consumers with a change in routine when shopping online, which is typically appreciated by consumers who are investigative searchers (Blythe, 2006).

Monthly web traffic has increased by twenty-two point eighty-six percent; however, the percentage of browsers who actually become buyers has decreased (Brohan & Thornicroft, 2010). Consumers are said to visit websites when they have a strong desire to purchase an item, however online shoppers often browse web pages without a specific reason. According to Chu and Kim (2011) websites are where consumers browse for leisure and do so voluntarily, rather than planned and for a purpose. Online shoppers can easily make decisions and take action in moving from website to website by simply clicking buttons and can engage with other consumers whether on social media or through websites (Chu & Kim, 2011).

The visual appeal which a website portrays is very important, as it can influence whether consumers engage on the website or not (Lindgaard et al., 2006). The manner in which a brand is perceived could also explain how some consumers have an immediate attraction to a website; therefore a website should be current, functional and enjoyable. Kim et al. (2007) further state that enjoyment from the use of a website can be a positive contributor to a consumer's overall online experience with a brand. Looking at the online shopping environment, when consumers are able to find pleasure in the use of a website it creates a positive perception of the overall website and the brand (Im et al., 2010). When consumers are able to engage with the brand through an effective website, their attitude and intentions towards the brand are more active and involved (Kim et al, 2007). Therefore, it is critical that brands (especially online retailers) revisit their websites in order to check if their texts, pictures and information is readable, so that consumers are able to have an enjoyable experience with the brand (Chu & Kim, 2011).

When consumers are able to enjoy what a brand has to offer, it increases the consumer brand trust; usability, informative, visual appeal, brand identity and image are all factors that influence the online shopping experience of consumers (Jones & Kim, 2010).

Brand Identity

Brand Identity is how a brand wants to be viewed by its consumers and is the foundation on which all communication activities are built; therefore a brand should

have a clear and precise identity (Martensson, 2009). Brand identity is important in this study as the Mr Price brand identity will be interrogated to provide insight into the brand's image. Brand identity also defines a brand's character, its aim or focus and values which represent the overall sense of individuality, which is what differentiates one brand from another (de Chernatony, 1999). Brands are used as a symbol whereby consumers are able to easily identify and separate one from another, according to the quality and value of the product or service (Koehn, 2001). According to Aaker (1991) and Kapferer (2004) brands adopt different characteristics which serve as a strategic approach in their growth and success in the market.

One of the strategic approaches that brand identity can adopt is the use of social media which allows information to be conveniently shared and exchanged. Brands are able to shift communication from dialogue to triologue, which enhances the interaction between brand and consumers as well as between consumers (Mangold & Fauld, 2009). Through the interaction created on social media, the traditional roles of the brand and consumer have changed (Sashi, 2012). Consumers share their views and this adds value to the brand by generating content and being able to influence the purchase decisions of other consumers (Sashi, 2012).

When brands are able to develop a brand presence on social media, it can assist in raising brand awareness (Fanion, 2011). Once a consumer is directed to the website and e-commerce site and is made aware of what a brand has to offer and then makes a decision to buy into the brand, sales are boosted (New Media Age, 2010).

Brands need to pay attention to their brand identity as it should be used to enlighten consumers about their products or services, so consumers and potential consumers are able to identify with the brand in future (Kapferer, 2004). Brand identity is a crucial fundamental concept as it influences a consumer's choice to buy a particular brand by identifying with aspects of the product or service. It also allows brand managers to build their brand's equity so that interaction is encouraged (Wheeler, 2010). Looking at it from Aaker (1996), de Chernatony (1999) and Kapferer's (2004) point of view a brand's identity comprises different characteristics, values and brand promise. This will assist in the development of brand communication in order to convey a brand's core message to its consumers or potential consumers.

Brand identity is the outreach which guides the actions and activities of a brand (Aaker, 1996). This simply means that brand identity is a representation of how a brand wants to be known by the consumer. Drawing an example from the Mr Price brand, the brand is said to be trendy and vibrant, providing consumers with the latest fashion trends at affordable prices. This is reflected on its Facebook page by the type of posts it posts and the use of hashtag #mrpmystyle. The above view is reiterated by Kapferer (2008), that brand identity assists brands in gaining a feeling of true existence and that their personal goal as a brand is often resistant to change. It is also important to note that Kapferer and Aaker's views of brand identity, somewhat differ. Kapferer views brand identity as the core identity, which is often unchanged and is resistant to change; it normally comprises a brand's core traits which are unlikely to change. Whereas Aaker (1996) views brand identity as an extended identity, which adds texture and completeness to the overall brand; this is achieved through the daily marketing actions which are taken to create awareness around the brand. Therefore brand identity is the foundation on which all communication activities are built between brand and consumer and should therefore be a clear and precise reflection of the brand (Martensson, 2009).

Brands exist as a tool whereby consumers are able to express their self-image and at the same time validate their identity (Aaker, 1997). Brands often represent and are represented by a certain target group (Escalas, 2004). In the case of the Mr Price brand it is all the consumers who engage on its Facebook page. The people who interact with the brand vary in age, gender and race. A consumer-brand relationship is also a way of expressing the brand and the consumer; it is used as an emotional bond between these two entities (Fournier, 1998).

Brands play a role in displaying a consumer's consumption habits and in the process also their social status and knowledge of culture or style (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005). In today's world branding is involved with the association between brand and consumer. This demonstrates a move from passive communication to outward and visible action between brands and consumers.

Brands have to differentiate themselves from one another in order to keep their consumers engaged while increasing their consumer base in the process. This can be achieved through providing products that spark emotion through a promise of

value made to the consumer (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). A brand's identity can be represented by the quality of the products offered to its consumers and often the value is beyond the intrinsic features of the product (Fournier, 1998). Brands convey a message of trust that influences a consumer's decision to purchase and this contributes to time and risk reduction for the consumer (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

Everything that makes a brand unique to its consumers is a reflection of the brand's core values, benefits and legacy and it is through these attributes that consumers are able to identify with a particular brand (Kapferer, 2004). Brands promise consumers value in their product or service and it is through this promise that trust is built between the two entities and this contributes to the overall consumer-brand relationship (Aaker, 1996). Through the analysis of the Mr Price Facebook page, the relationship between the brand and its consumers was sought. Analysing daily posts assisted the researcher in determining the type of information the brand placed on its page and whether these posts were relevant by gauging the interaction formed around them.

Terms such as brand personality, brand image, brand equity and brand identity all form an integral role in building a consumer-brand relationship. Strong brand personality and identity are crucial to building brand image and equity (Geuns et al., 2009). Brand identity encompasses four elements namely, brand as product, brand as organisation, brand as person and brand as symbol, all of which are important to creating brand identity (Aaker, 2012).

Firstly, a brand as a product can be described as the scope of the brand, i.e. the type of product the brand is associated with; there is a strong link between a brand and its product, especially when it is mentioned amongst brands or consumers. According to Aaker (2012) the attributes in relation to the product have functional and emotional benefits, which consumers often derive from purchasing a particular product. This perspective is important for gaining competitive advantage and pricing of the product because consumers associate themselves with a brand by agreeing to the product price and the competitive advantage compared to other brands. The core identity of a brand is the country of origin and that will not change; as a result a brand becomes more credible to those who have a positive attitude around a brand's origin.

Secondly, brand as an organisation is associated more with the firm and what it wants to be seen as. How innovative the brand is, its drive for quality and considerations made towards the environment, but it also focuses on the consumer, value, programmes and culture of the brand. The brand as an organisation assists a brand with receiving queries and experiences that may arise from consumers regarding the product or service they have purchased or want to purchase (Aaker, 2012). The success of the brand is analysed through brand quality, environmental consideration, community orientation and perceived quality. The type of innovation and technology used by the brand is also crucial, as an innovative brand can become a more credible one and has an influence on the local and global elements.

The Mr Price brand as an organisation can be considered innovative considering the fact that it has a good online presence. This allows for consumers to engage with the brand identity in real time no matter where they are located geographically.

The above perspectives contribute to a brand's credibility; the organisation perspective offers a more holistic approach to brand identity and the image of an organisation. The organisation as a whole is comprised of many factors and not only one part such as the product or service. Organisation associations have a long term objective, which is seen as more durable than the product-related attributes since organisation associations are difficult to replicate.

Thirdly, brand as a person comprises the brand's personality and the brand-consumer relationship. The brand's personality acts as an agent of differentiation between brands, it makes a brand interesting which makes it memorable to consumers, and as a result the relationship between brand and consumer is developed (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). The Mr Price brand on Facebook is represented as vibrant, trendy and informative to all its consumers. For the consumer Facebook is a way of developing a relationship with a brand by engaging through comments, likes and shares.

Building brand personality can be done through the actions and communications of the brand; the type of communication chosen by a brand reflects the type of person the brand would be if it were human (Kapferer, 2008). Brand personality can also be defined having 'human' like characteristics which become a representation of the brand; brand personality becomes symbolic and creates a conversation between a

brand and its consumers. A brand plays an essential role in contributing towards its consumers' construction and expression of their own views, as well as in the representation of their own identities (Heding et al., 2009). For the Mr Price brand this means that the consumers who choose to engage with the brand have found commonality with the brand's image, which is its personality. This can be anything from the language used in the posts, the type of information placed on its page or the engagement with the brand. Hence, when a brand does not respond it can have an impact on the brand's image, as consumers want a response and active social media page in order to associate themselves with a brand.

Fourthly, brand as a symbol is the visual image, metaphors and heritage of a brand. Brands become well recognised and remembered through the symbols used to represent them. A symbol is anything that represents a brand; it can be the colours used by the brand or the packaging of its products. It is important to note the great impact a combination of symbols and metaphors have on assisting with expressing the benefits of using a certain brand, which can be emotional, self-expressional or self-identifying (Aaker, 2012).

The Mr Price brand identity is recognised by the black box, with a red cap and white 'mrp'. The letters 'mrp' are also easy to remember and are trendy since consumers recognise many acronyms, e.g. 'outfit of the day' (ootd) and 'oh my gosh' (omg) moments, especially in the online environment.

Brand Image

Brand image can be defined as how a brand is perceived by the consumer; this is key to a consumer's decision-making, as the consumer gains information about a brand and alternatives before making the decision to engage or to become a part of a brand (Ataman & Ulengin, 2003).

What makes a brand unique to its consumers is a reflection of the brand's core values, benefits and legacy and it is through these attributes that consumers are able to identify with a particular brand (Kapferer, 2004). Brands promise consumers value in their product or service and it is through this promise that trust is built between the two entities, developing an overall consumer-brand relationship (Aaker, 1996).

Terms such as brand personality, brand image, brand equity and brand identity all form an integral role in building a brand. Strong brand personality and identity are crucial to building brand equity. Brand personality is also considered important in defining brand identity and brand image (Geuns et al., 2009).

In order to get a better understanding of a brand's image in an online environment, two factors contribute to obtaining an effective brand image (Rui, 2008). Firstly, consumer service is the brand's ability to respond to the problems, questions or queries which consumers voice on the brand's social media platform (Rui et al., 2008). This is a crucial point adopted in this research study, as it assisted with determining how the Mr Price brand interacted with its consumers' problems, questions and queries and provided the researcher with an overall understanding of the brand's image through analysing the consumer service on its Facebook page. The insight gained from the above analyses, assisted with gaining insight into the consumers' satisfaction and overall engagement with the brand (Rui, 2008).

Secondly, personalisation was an important aspect when analysing the internet and branding during the past as many previous research studies had taken a conceptual rather than empirical approach (Merrilees & Fry, 2003). Previous research confirmed that it is crucial for brands to build relationships online, as consumers are co-creators of online content and brands need to listen to what these consumers place in this virtual space (Ind & Riondino, 2001). When a brand listens to and interacts with its consumers' voices, the brand's image is perceived as making an effort in building a relationship with its consumers, hence brands should exploit the potential that the internet and social media platforms offer. In doing so, a brand can be seen as engaging with consumers and is interested in developing a consumer-brand relationship (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004).

Consumer service is seen as critical for brands as it enables them to answer any questions or queries posed by the consumer and personalisation is how the brand is able to recommend the items sought by the consumer, thereby matching the needs of the consumer online (Rui, 2008). The two above mentioned aspects were considered by the researcher in order to assist in understanding the Mr Price online brand image. It is important to remember that brand image faces similar implications

whether in the online or offline environment as the brand's attributes are physically and tangibly expressed in both environments (Rui, 2008). Hence, both consumer service and personalisation are important aspects in driving brand image whether they are positive or negative perceptions about the brand; these perceptions are often shaped by consumers' experiences (Rui, 2008).

The manner in which the Mr Price brand image appears through Facebook was analysed by looking at its logo, tone, tagline, typeface, colours and shape in order to get a better view of the brand's overall image. Brand image assists in developing a consumer-brand relationship where the functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits are grown and maintained (Aaker, 1996). There are also graphic elements that assist in identifying a specific brand, these elements are known as a brand's visual identity and consist of the following: logo, symbol, colours and typeface (Clifton et al., 2009). Although a brand's slogan is not included in this list it should really also be considered a graphic element as it has been used as a marketing tool since the 1960s (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Visual identity is used in all communication material, which allows for recognition of a brand by its consumers (Joannès, 2008). Through this pictorial element, brands are able to represent their characteristics during marketing, so that the brand is identified by the consumer and is memorable. Visual identity provides for intermediate engagement between the brand and consumer (Haig & Harper, 1997).

A brand's image is made recognisable and influential through the following three processes, namely marketing communication, consumption experiences and social influence as seen in figure 2 below. This model was used by the researcher as it allowed for the information, which was available through communication, to be sorted accordingly. It allowed the researcher to analyse how the information communicated influenced brand image. These variables are explained further below.

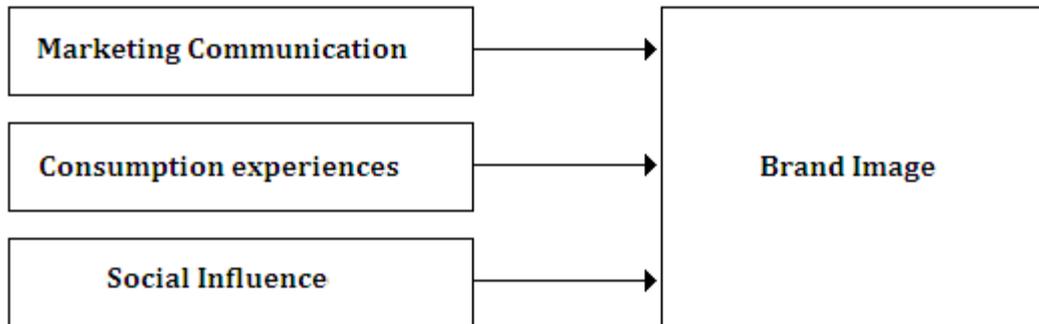


Figure 2: The process of inductive inference on brand image,

Source: Riezebos, 2003

Marketing communication is the one aspect which a brand has complete control over through the expression and implementation of its brand identity. As a brand engages in advertising it is able to modify the consumers' perception of the brand's image and steer them towards what the brand considers its true identity; brand's do this in order to align brand identity and brand image (Riezebos, 2003). During brand marketing communication, the brand needs to critically consider its brand messages as it can influence the perception of its image (Baker & Hart, 2008).

Once marketing communication is established, it becomes difficult for the brand to change because first impressions tend to stick. It is for this reason that brands need to pay attention to the formation of their marketing communication in order for the best impact to be made on the consumer (Riezebos, 2003). During the formation stage, the brand needs to take competitors' advertisements into consideration (Blythe, 2006) because advertisements need to be able to reach the intended consumer who is surrounded by multiple advertisements from competitors. In order for brands to achieve this they need to engage in creative advertising (Ghodeswar, 2008). In order for their opinions to be shared and voiced consumers need to be exposed to attractive marketing (Riezebos, 2003).

Consumption experiences play an integral role in the way a consumer perceives a brand, even if the marketing communication is strong and has a positive effect on the consumer (Riezebos, 2003). It is crucial that marketing communication and

consumption experiences do not contradict each other in order for the consumer to have a clear image of the brand (Riezebos, 2003). The brand image can be wrongly perceived by consumers and potential consumers if the marketing communication is different to the consumption experiences; hence marketing communication needs to be truthful in order to minimise the gap between marketing and consumer experience (Riezebos, 2003).

Social influence points to the fact that word of mouth is a powerful communication tool, which can influence many consumers. Word of mouth is powerful because it is a discussion between two or more people. In the online domain many opinions are stated and often have more credibility than other communication methods (Blythe, 2006). Opinions which are shared amongst consumers can have an impact on brand image and it is for this reason that word of mouth is seen as a way of influencing potential consumers' perception and can be considered important for brand image (O'Leary & Sheehan, 2008).

Therefore, in order for brands to grow, despite difficulties they face, their brand identity needs to be reflected in the brand. This assists in building a bond between the brand and consumer as they can be seen as truthful (Roy & Banerjee, 2007). Brands need to constantly work hard to make the brand identity reflect the brand image (Melin, 1997). The Mr Price brand image through Facebook can be identified by the colours and youthfulness. The brand also tries to incorporate their consumers, by using a hashtag, which is a reflection of its brand identity, where they want to use social media as a way of engaging and identifying with their consumers (Mr Price Annual Report, 2017).

Convergence Culture and Two-Way Communication

Convergence culture is the collision of old and new media, while two-way communication is the way information is transmitted between users (Jenkins, 2006). Convergence culture is a buzz word that describes different forms of communication, which affect the way in which audiences receive information (Herbert, 2000). An important aspect that is associated with convergence is the manner in which

products and services are merged; thus convergence is considered a wide-reaching concept as it provides better online performance, lower prices and diverse content (Kung et al., 2008).

Convergence has allowed the internet to become a more publicly accessible platform, made possible by users being granted access to better performing devices that standardise interaction. These devices allow for global access by removing the restriction of location, time and space, while still providing multi-dimensional functions (Lin, 2011). Convergence of communication technologies means that there has been change in the way content is created and distributed, bringing all media together through technology. This dates back to the mid-1990s, thanks to the World Wide Web for bringing consciousness to the communication environment as being a grand system (Gordon, 2003).

It is in the environment created by convergence where brands are able to personalise communication, specifically two-way communication. Brands are able to personalise their web pages and social media, so that consumers are attracted to them and are able to use them (Hoffman et al., 1996) However, because the field of personalisation is still growing, there is no substantial evidence indicating that personalisation can explain a brand's image (Merrilees & Fry, 2003). However, it is used as a mechanism to assist in achieving effective communication.

Social Media Presence and Interaction

Social media presence and interaction means that “consumers may contact brands and other consumers in social networks in more interactive ways than ever before which enables brands to deepen their relations with them” (Enginkaya & Yilmaz, 2014, p.219). The use of social media needs a continuous and focused dialogue between consumer and brand. The timing of this dialogue is important as consumers often use social media to build social capital and contribute to their overall well-being of a brand; this is because social media provides a platform for communication to occur which assists in the identification of social needs. Keller (2009) elaborates that consumer engagement is dependent on the needs of consumers, their motives and

overall goals as individuals. Often consumers are the ones who define the rules of consumer-brand engagement; Schmitt (2012) notes that consumers are participative rather than passive. Therefore, consumer engagement on social media needs a very stable brand online presence, meaning that a post a day is better than one once a month or two months. This reassures consumers that the brand is present and is actively engaging with its consumers whether positive or negative content is put out by the brand or consumer.

A consumer's desire for social interaction is one of the motives for consumers to engage in user-generated content activities in the social media environments (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). It should be remembered that social media has brought extreme change in the circulation of information, making the engagement process between brand and consumer easier and allowing consumers to like, comment and share information (Akrimi & Khemakhem, 2012).

Consumer engagement occurs with the increased time or attention that a potential consumer gives to a brand on its social media page or across multiple electronic media channels (Chaffey & Smith, 2012). Engagement can also be identified as the creation of experiences that allow a brand to build and develop a deeper, more meaningful and sustainable interaction for its consumer-brand relationship (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007). It is important to note that building consumer-brand relationships is a continuous effort which is often reached as the process expands and evolves over time. Marketers are turning to social media as a way of enhancing and improving consumer engagement, which engagement is based on the behaviour of the consumer which extends beyond purchase and is focused on the brand (Doorn et al., 2010).

Building relationships between consumer and brand on social media means that brands need to take advantage of the new technologies and tools which are available to them, in order to better understand and serve their consumers. Social media gives brands the opportunity to connect with consumers by using richer media which has a greater reach (Thackeray et al., 2008). This is made possible because of the interactive nature of digital media, which allows for both the brand and consumers to exchange information. Thackeray et al. (2008) further elaborate that

brands are able to use social media as a way of forging relationships with both existing and new consumers over time. Through the interaction between the two entities problems are presented that assist brands in identifying possible solutions to develop them. The interaction between a brand and its consumers today shows that there is an evident change in the once traditional role played by both the brand and consumer. Value is now added through the generation of content and influencing the purchase decisions of prospective consumers in peer-to-peer interaction via social media.

Social media is said to be a domain with great diversity, which often satisfies a consumer's desire to engage with a brand. The creation of participation, the identifying of external audiences and becoming involved as a brand is a way of strengthening the brand (Yan, 2011). The platform that social media provides to brands has been adopted in the modern era; it is becoming a more stable and measurable environment. Brands are using social media platforms as a way of gaining leverage and becoming actively engaged in their consumer-brand relationships (Yan, 2011).

According to Samios and Wang (2014) consumers are drawn to social media because of the ability to contribute to the communication process and creating a sense of belonging, social connection and interaction with other like-minded consumers. Social media has the power to influence various aspects of a consumer's behaviour such as awareness, the acquisition of information, opinions and attitudes, post-purchase communication and evaluation (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The social media landscape allows for consumers to socially connect with each other. There are three important goals that are fulfilled by social influence: the formation of accurate perceptions of reality; the development of social relationships that can be seen as meaningful; and the maintenance of a favourable self-concept (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

Consumers have a diverse number of reasons why they enjoy exchanging information and by classifying consumers into various groups this diversity is visible. The opinion leaders tend to share information because of an interest they have in a product. It provides these leaders with a platform where they are able to demonstrate

their knowledge and expertise, which as a result enhances their sense of self (Goldsmith et al., 2013). However it is important to note that not all consumers are willing to share their opinions about a brand or product. This research study analysed of the engagement between brand and its consumers as reflected through

Social media platforms provide a space for interaction between various people and companies. Social media assists in the establishment of conversations and as a result often allows for consumers to generate content and contribute to the building of a relationship with a brand. Brand stories play a significant role in the production and distribution of story content which is often controlled by the brand (Woodside et al., 2008). However, there has been an evident development since the emergence of social media (Brown et al, 2003). These social media platforms have numerous ways of portraying generated content as they function as a global medium which encourages communication between brand and consumer; i.e. blogs, hashtags or social blogs. There are three main ingredients to user-generated content namely: networks, relations and interactions (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). These developments include the active engagement between brand and consumer. Mr Price provides consumers with the opportunity to engage with its brand on its Facebook page. Through user-generated content, Mr Price consumers become the creators, receivers and senders of content, which includes or showcases the brand's products.

Brand engagement is the amalgamation of observed and social elements (Gambetti et al., 2012). It is the extent through which consumers are motivated to relate with the brand, drawn in by the type of content produced by the brand, which consumers depend upon and use to fulfil a personal need (Hollebeek, 2011). The consumers' cognitive, emotional and behavioural activities become one with the brand through direct brand interactions and engagement. Analysing brand engagement on social media, specifically Facebook; Wallace et al. (2014) identified this interaction as the number of likes, shares and comments performed by consumers compared to a brand's pages which is seen as the variables for brand engagement.

Social networks are not about the actual website, but rather can be seen as the experiences with the brand (Wyshynski, 2009). The experiences relate to the brand's marketing reach, intimacy and engagement with its consumers. A brand can achieve

this through the integration of social media, together with traditional media, in order to achieve interconnected communication. However, as noted by Wyshynski, there are many companies today who still mistake social media and traditional media as separate from each other. Although they differ from each other and cannot be compared they still need to be utilised concurrently. Social media should be seen as an approach that aims at bringing consumers' experiences to the forefront, all the while acknowledging that this internet-based media does not replace traditional media and what it has to offer.

Recognising that social media is a platform that can expand a marketer's ability from only making consumers aware to engaging, considering and being loyal to its consumers. Wyshynski (2009) states that marketers need both the people and the community at large to engage, in order to expose their experiences so that they are brought to their attention and can influence the engagement. Social media platforms provide a space for consumers to be able to fully express their opinions, views or experiences with a brand; however the down side is the negative comments formed towards a brand. This means that brands need to work harder and more efficiently at rectifying the issues pointed out by consumers without leaving it for too long or not responding at all as the choice to not engage with negative comments could be more detrimental for the brand image.

The social media branding landscape offers marketers several options, which include the following. Firstly, placement and payment of advertising; Secondly, participating as a brand on social media; Thirdly, developing and maintaining consumer engagement and participation within a social network environment as a brand and fourthly, publishing brand content in social channels (Tuten & Solomon, 2013). Social media can be a component that is integrated into a brand's marketing communication, i.e. designing campaigns on social media platforms which will expand a brand's digital exposure not only to their consumers but potential consumers as well.

The result of using social media to market a brand is that engagement is becoming more precise, personal, interesting, interactive and social, allowing brands to reach more consumers, at the right place and time (Jothi et al., 2011). There has been a

dramatic change in the way in which brands communicate and the manner in which consumers engage and the production and interaction with the information on social networks, all thanks to the web. The traditional medium lacked the ability to create a platform for active communication between the consumer and brand, but Facebook is an example of a social media platform used for interactive communication between brand and consumer (Vukasovic, 2013). Consumers are able to log onto the platform and without any effort, receive information about various matters.

Marketers are now utilising social media as a marketing tool for creating and maintaining brand relationships. Social media has become a new medium where products and services are explored, because of the efficiency and effectiveness social media provides to consumers and as a result there has been a reduction in the use of traditional media (Vukasovic, 2013). Marketers are able to explore social media as a new medium where products and services can be advertised to consumers.

There are benefits of Social Media Marketing which include the following: firstly, it is a way of making a brand, idea or service popular amongst the brand's consumer market; secondly, consumers are informed about the brand and its services through brand presence; thirdly, healthy competition is promoted in the market; fourthly, brands are provided with social benefits and finally interaction between consumer and the brand is created (Jothi et al, 2011). According to the 2013 social media marketing industry report eighty-nine percent of marketers have showed effort in placing their brands on social media to generate more exposure for the brand (Stelzner, 2013).

Branding on Social Media

Weber (1990) defines branding through social media as a dialogue between brand and consumer, claiming that the stronger the dialogue, the stronger the brand and vice versa. In today's social media era, social media has influenced the branding and marketing of companies

With the evolution from old media (radio, television and newspapers) to new media (the internet and social media platforms), new ways for people to communicate with each other have been brought to the forefront (Johannessen, 2015). Branding from a traditional perspective meant that brand managers used one-to-many marketing tools to communicate their brand stories and culture to their consumers (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Consumers' voices were not strong enough to be heard and brand managers often ignored their version if they preferred to do so. However, branding today is seen through a different lens; the emergence of social media has really brought about change, especially for brand managers who are no longer solely responsible for their brand stories (Kuksov et al., 2013).

In a demographic study completed on the difference between offline and online engagement, it was suggested that online engagement was the platform that attracted new groups of people (Van Laer, 2010). Hence, digital media provides a platform for stronger and more effective communication between organisations and their consumers (Dahlberg, 2011). Social media is seen as crucial for brands, as it enables the brand to develop better communication (Obar et al., 2012). However, the new media domain is not left without criticism, the main one being that online engagement often results in slacktivism. This means that although consumers 'like' a brand's Facebook page, there is no evident interaction or engagement with the brand (McCafferty, 2011).

Brands need to have a voice on social media and use it to characterise the messages shared between their brands and consumers in order to be as transparent as possible, while still remaining authentic and strong enough to influence and capture other consumers' attention (Macy & Thompson, 2011). This can be achieved by daily posts, where relevant information can be passed between the brands and their consumers.

Regardless of what a brand's goal is, the type of information placed on its social media needs to be relevant to the consumer if the brand seeks active engagement with its consumers (Schmitt, 2012). Brands can engage in different activities on social media in order to interact with their consumers. Social media platforms provide activities such as on-going consumer-brand dialogue, branded content, personal experiences, social media presence and active participation between the brand and

its consumer. The Mr Price brand has a very active engagement between itself and its consumers, posts regarding the latest fashion, international influences (regarding trends) or posts to mark a certain day (national holidays). The FIX Facebook page is another example of an apparel store which engages in active communication with its consumers, as it posts daily and it has posts on women's day, celebrities' birthdays and even user-generated content through #slayingthefix (The Fix Facebook, 2018).

Through social media, consumers become brand storytellers and brand ambassadors, as the consumers are embedded in the circulation of information (Booth & Matic, 2011). In the Mr Price brand, the consumer is invited to send content via various hashtags, which allows ordinary people to become story tellers through photographs they post. Consumers are needed on social media platforms in order for brands to operate fully. It is the consumer of the Mr Price brand who enables information to be circulated on the social media platform. This is because a brand needs its followers in order to make its Facebook page function and for content to be operational and relevant.

For consumers, this means that brand stories are easily and widely spread through social media and their voice can no longer be ignored; this goes for all businesses whether they are active or not on social media. According to Boje (1995) and Deighton et al. (1989) user-generated content is a way of consumers expressing their experiences with a brand. This expression can be in a positive form (generate brand stories that are positive and grab the attention of others) or negative (complaints). User-generated content appears in both online and offline formats. However for the purpose of this research online user-generated content was the main focus, specifically #mrpmystyle on the Mr Price Facebook page. User-generated content on social media platforms has a greater impact than that of traditional channels because of the digital, global, real-time and dynamic attributes it provides (Henning- Thurau et al., 2010).

A perfect example of how influential social media can be is the example of Dave Carroll, who had his guitar damaged by the baggage handlers of a well-known airline. Social media was used to voice his opinion about the whole ordeal and it went viral, reaching consumers across the world, reflecting negatively on the airline. Making choices of which brands to associate oneself with has become more

complex than ever before (Edelman, 2010). Such examples can no longer be ignored by either the brand or other consumers and Dave Carroll's experience could become an influential factor for other consumers who want to use that particular airline. According to Holt (2003) a brand's general association and brand image can be greatly affected by word of mouth because an increase in word of mouth can result in negative energy around the brand. With such changes occurring in the brand landscape, brand managers are slowly losing their control over their brand's image. One of the most strategic approaches is to integrate user-generated content and social media into their communication mix in order to obtain rewarding brand stories and to face negative information head on. Many brands already use the user-generated content as a strategy in order to obtain consumer input which impacts on brand performance.

The importance of brands can be seen in the everyday discourse of contemporary consumer society, where consumers are encouraged to see themselves as a brand. This personal brand must be seen worthy of development the same way commercial brands would be seen worthy (Montoya, 2002). Although social media and new media in general have brought change to the conceptualisation and theoretical understanding of branding, it is still argued that the overall purpose of branding remains unchanged. Branding will always be about the influence on consumers who are able to identify themselves with certain brands over others. However the introduction of new media has made the process tricky and requires brands to be innovative in their approaches on this platform.

Once again promotional culture plays a changing role with production and consumption dynamics and becomes a feature of cultural production (Crane, 2000). This is because promotional culture enables consumers to have greater choice of where to obtain and contribute, hence producers become more responsive to their consumer needs, by keeping prices down and providing support on their news media (Davis, 2003). For this reason a brands representation through new media is a way of identifying with their consumers and providing this target group with relevant and 'needed' information

Fashion Branding on Social Media

Fashion includes garments such as clothing, shoes and accessories all of which form part of the types of objects that consumers can buy and often purchase on line, allowing them to express their individuality and preferences by wearing these garments in unique and interesting ways (McCracken, 1988). It can be noted that consumers buy items either to express their own style or to keep up with trends, or maybe for overall self-satisfaction.

Trends have two influencers, the creators of the trends and the followers of them (Breen, 2003). With the evolution of social media, there is an apparent relationship between the trends and fashion, the fact that this virtual platform is accessible to all consumers, whether to browse or join a conversation means that consumers are able to add to that information by expressing their opinion. Social Media is seen as key to improving the communication between a brand and the consumer. This is because the communication that takes place in this virtual space assists with gaining feedback from consumers and as a result, fashion trends are identified and spread from one person to another, no matter the time or geographical location (Wolny & Muller, 2013). The Mr Price brand has consumers who engage on a daily basis, which consumers are scattered across the country but still manage to engage in real time. This is what platforms such as Facebook allow, real time communication not only between brand and consumer but between consumer and consumer as well.

The social media platform allows individuals to signify their fashion preferences and actively engage with other consumers and brands, as seen on the Mr Price Facebook page. This forms an integral part of a consumer's fashion self or the style they choose to select (Wolny & Muller, 2013). Through social media, information is provided on demand and this provision can be done in a short period of time; hence the relevance and influence of social media cannot be denied when compared to traditional media.

It is important to note that ordinary people and not only brand specific consumers engage in a virtual space; social media offers alternative ways of engaging with consumers while still providing brands with new ways of advertising products and services (Wolny & Muller, 2013). Therefore social media has brought change to the

relationship between brand and consumer, allowing for instant feedback and relevant experience with the brand which influences the overall brand image.

Social media allows consumers to display their preferences, lifestyle and interests to others through the consumption of products and services, which allows for views to be expressed and information to be shared around them (Stone, 2008).

People have a choice to dress so that it either reflects trends, shifts in society or their lifestyle, which can change and be influenced over time. Any changes in consumers' lives, working routines, leisure activities, consumption and other characteristics rely on technology and innovation to assist in making the process more manageable (Stone, 2008).

The internet plays a pivotal role in offering consumers a range of different activities, which will enhance their overall brand experience (Rowley, 2004). Therefore, online branding is an important tool for any brand, as it assists in the development and presence of a brand. When a brand has grown an online presence it is able to create active dialogue between it and its consumers, which contributes to the overall trust between brand and consumer as it allows for each consumer to be seen as an individual (Vernuccio et al, 2012; Simmons, 2008). When a brand has taken the initiative to grow its brand online, it is a step in the right direction, however, when the brand does not actively engage, the trust and loyalty changes and consumers often have a negative view of the brand's overall image.

It is important to note that the more consumers interact with a brand the more committed they become to that company and as a result consumers choose to engage with brands in which they find loyalty (Duffin, 2008). Brands that choose online branding need to be aware of the power it has on rebuilding and refreshing the image of the brand and how it can be beneficial to use as a strategy for driving a business to success (Christodoulides, 2009; Alrawi, 2007). In order for an online brand environment to be successful, there are core elements which brands need to consider such as consumers' experience, emotional and rational values (de Chernatony & Christodulides, 2004) as well as good marketing communication, content, interactivity and understanding the consumer (Simmons, 2007)

Social media has become a new tool for online marketing and is often considered as more important than the traditional channels because of the viral presence as a result of the internet (Hill, 2010). Branding strategies allow brands to learn about specific needs in the market and through their consumers gain valuable information (Edelman, 2010). Digital marketing is an effective communication tool as it captures the attention of the new generation who take advantage of new technologies (Smith, 2011); it also assists in identifying the overall online performance of a brand (Rettori, 2010; Zalicki, 2012).

However, brands do not use the interactive potential of the internet to the full extent (Rettori, 2010). Due to the freedom and choice that all consumers are exposed to, luxury brands have to find a suitable way of maintaining a luxurious atmosphere on their online presence, while making their online and offline messages cohesive (Jones & Kim, 2010). There were a few studies undertaken internationally, which considered online retailing, but there are still opportunities for future studies to investigate the field from the perspective of consumers and brands (Moore & Doyle, 2010).

A study conducted by Vernuccio et al. (2012), which investigated the core factors that influence consumers' attitudes toward engaging with brands online concluded that there are three variables namely interactivity (communication between brand and consumer); personalisation (how each consumer perceives the content) and e-trust (expectations of consumers and intentions of the brand).

Another study focused on the factors that influence consumers to engage with online shopping. It was aimed at webpage elements on interaction between consumers and fashion items (McCormick & Livett, 2012). As a result, it was noted that the online environment allowed for certain points of view to be created and consumers were able to give their reaction to experiences. Consumers' attitudes towards online shopping were influenced by its functionality, experience and the social traits (McCormick & Livett, 2012). Through previous identified studies, a brand's website needs to include the ability to zoom and rotate products which are being viewed and there needs to be sufficient information around the product. Blogs, digital magazines and pages on social media all contribute to better communication

between a brand and its consumers and improve the brand's online branding (McCormick & Livett, 2012).

Online branding also known as e-branding, digital branding or internet branding, has not received much attention and as a result there is limited academic research on it (Ibeh et al., 2005). As Chaffey and Smith (2012) propose, online branding is a way of supporting a brand, by stating the products' characteristics, perceived organisation and the experience of the consumers. It is argued that in view of the overload of information that can be accessed in the digital world, a brand's pages remain more important, because it saves the consumers time, assists with making choices in an environment that is cluttered with information, while reducing the cost of searching timelessly (Rubenstein & Griffiths, 2001).

An alternative point made towards online branding is that consumers have all the information they need at their fingertips, this is thanks to knowledgeable search engines and the power that consumers have to be able to compare brands based on the information on their online presence (Rowley, 2004). There are other factors that may influence the significance of a consumer's online experience such as web experience, the brand market share and product categories (Danaher et al., 2003). Drawing an example from Rowley (2004) an analysis of McDonald's online branding revealed that although branding has to do with the creation and registration of a logo, brand-mark, creating brand awareness and presence, in the long-term branding is actually a process of creating value by providing consumers with captivating and consistent offers (brand promise). This needs to be backed by positive consumer experience with the brand, thereby influencing consumers by encouraging them to return and engage with the brand.

Brands are given the chance to build their consumer-brand relationship, which will allow brands to charge premium prices, making it difficult for competitors in the same area to compete.

A brand's decision to engage in the branding process, will add value to the brand or to the brand equity (Kapferer, 2004). A consumer's online loyalty towards a brand is based on the trust the consumer has towards that brand (Harris & Goode, 2004); this trust is vital in the virtual world; because consumers have a personal interaction with

the brand or the products which are being sold (Ibeh et al, 2005) the trust is very fragile (Varadarajan & Yadav, 2002).

Consumer Engagement on Social Media

Social media provides brands with a platform to be able to interact with their consumers and vice versa (Woodcock et al., 2011). This platform has become a popular way of communicating not only with loved ones, but the brand we love too (Gummerus et al., 2012). Brands, which include clothing stores, supermarkets and small businesses; have many strategies they can employ in order to connect with consumers emotionally and get them to buy into their brand stories on these social media platforms (Vivek et al., 2012). The type of strategies used by fashion retail brands as a way of engaging with their consumers on social media includes the development of e-commerce for that brand as a way of increasing revenue. In addition consumers are given the facility to purchase the brand's product or service and most important it strengthens the brand's recognition through the brand image (Salmeron & Hurtado, 2006). A brand has to go through different stages in order to develop an online presence (Salmeron & Hurtado, 2006). A study completed on fashion retailers showed that most of the retailers used websites as a source of information (Marchiniak & Bruce, 2004).

Communities which are formed on social media add value to a brand; these communities enable better distribution of information between brand and consumer and between consumers and consumers (Shih, 2009). The fact that actual consumers of a product or service are able to post information onto platforms such as Facebook where others can view their opinions or experiences with the brand allows those consumers to get a true reflection of what the brand actually stands for. A significant amount of online research is first undertaken by consumers in order to get a better understanding of what a brand has to offer (Agresta & Bough, 2011). A consumer's decision-making process is easily influenced by information placed by other consumers, so that the decision to engage with a brand or not depends on the brand's information and the information of fellow consumers. As stated by Hutter et

al. (2013), consumer engagement with a brand on Facebook is greatly influenced by the way in which the brand is perceived.

Conclusion

After reviewing literature on branding and social media, the interaction and engagement that occurs between brand and consumer on a social media platform formed the basis of this study. Relevant reviewed literature pointed out that it is important for brands to maintain active interaction and engagement with their consumers, when they adopt social media into their communication strategy. This information provided a background to brand communication on social media and what it means for a brand's image.

The insight gained around the different aspects of brand identity showed how a brand's identity influences brand image, thereby allowing the researcher to have knowledge around the concepts before collecting data from the Mr Price Facebook page and before analysing that data. Brand communication on social media is important and should be adopted by all brands if they want to keep up with trends and their consumers. However it is important for brands to remember that they are not the only brand story tellers anymore and because of the interactive nature of the platform constant engagement is required. This engagement should not only occur when there are positive remarks made about the brand, but should be maintained even when there are negative remarks. It is noted that it is even more important for a brand's image to respond to the negative, as consumers and potential consumers will view the brand as being loyal and trustworthy. This is crucial for brands that want to keep a good brand image amongst their consumers, especially on social media.

Social media communication between brand and consumer occurs through content which the brand places on their social media (firm-generated content) and the content which is placed by their consumer (user-generated content). Both forms of content spark interaction and engagement, allowing other consumers to join in or simply observe. However through promotional culture there is an artificial and unbridgeable gap, where the cultivated demand for and movement and circulation of

commodities is the only point of the exercise (Wernick, 1991). Hence information about commodities circulates to the public, so that goods and services can be received and ultimately consumed, it is the just of the game. From a cultural studies perspective, although consumers use promotional culture, it does not mean they are fooled by it. They still have freedom of choice, between a culture which is increasingly promotional or are influenced in the construction and communication of promotional intermediaries (marketing, advertising and public relations). This could be as a result of promotional intermediaries having the means to employ more people, larger budgets, higher commodity production budgets and are subject to news and cultural connotations (Wernick, 1991).

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Introduction

Research methodology is the manner in which data is collected during a research study (Hennink et al, 2011). For this research study, data was collected from the Mr Price Facebook page, through e-observation. During the time of data collection seventy posts were chosen, as the provided sufficient information for the research objectives to be obtained. This chapter will further unpack the research methodology used in the study by discusses the reasoning for the chosen research methodology; which was guided by the research objectives. The research objectives will be outlined and the research design unpacked, followed by the process which was taken to collect and analyse data.

Research Objectives

The research objectives are listed hereunder:

- To analyse the appearance of the Mr Price brand image through Facebook.
- To determine how Mr Price utilised Facebook to communicate with its consumers.
- The use of hashtag (#mrpmystyle) by Mr Price to reach its consumers.
- How the Mr Price page contributed to the consumer-brand relationship

Research Design

Research design is a detailed outline of the process followed during a studies research in order to achieve the aim and objectives of the study (Burns & Bush, 2010). The purpose is to provide information about how the research questions will be answered. This study adopted a descriptive research design, according to Churchill and Iacobucci (2010) during descriptive research, relationships between variables or the frequency of occurs is identified and is supported by the objectives of the study.

This research study began by browsing the Mr Price Facebook page, with the objectives and research questions in mind. Posts were randomly chosen in a year period (01 May 2017 to 30 April 2018), during the collection of these posts, various factors were considered. These factors included the topic brought up under the comments, whether the information was positive or negative and how the Mr Price brand engaged with them. Information collected from posts became repetitive and often had more or less the same information exchanged between brand and consumer. This information was placed in a table, so that the data analysis process was easier. Data was thematically analysed, these themes were drawn from the research objectives and questions.

The research approach for the data collection and analysis of this study was approached qualitatively. As stated by Yin (2011), qualitative studies allow for insight into a real life setting, allowing the meaning of people's everyday lives to be captured through building a holistic picture. This study focused on the Mr Price Facebook page and the communication that occurs between Mr Price and its consumers in their everyday lives. The five features of qualitative research are: firstly, to get a better understanding of the meaning of people's real life conditions; secondly, to represent the views and perspectives of people; thirdly, to contextualise the conditions people live in; fourthly, to contribute to existing or emerging concepts, which could assist in explaining human behaviour and fifthly using multiple sources of evidence in order to give a diverse point of view (Yin, 2011).

The Mr Price Facebook page was analysed and data was collected through e-observation. E-observation is the collection and analysis of information that is found in virtual communities (Norskov & Rask, 2011), allowing observation to be made of the communication between Mr Price and their consumers through the Mr Price Facebook page. All information collected through the e-observation process was thematically analysed, which is the process of identifying themes and pattern within the qualitative data collected; it is not tied to any epistemological or theoretical view, but rather a flexible method (Clarke and Braun, 2013).

The thematic analysis examined the type of information exchanged between the Mr Price brand and its consumers. A thematic analysis is often used as a way of

observing the occurrences of words, phrases, ideas or themes in written communication (Powell & Connaway, 2004); therefore a thematic analysis was an appropriate approach for the analysis of Mr Price communication with consumers through their Facebook page.

This research adopted a purposive sampling method; this approach does have an influence of the research results of this study. Purposive sampling allows a study to develop a strategic choice of which data to collect (Palys, 2008). The Mr Price Facebook page and website and the objectives of the study influenced the manner in which information was collected and how the research was conducted. In adopting purposive sampling, a sample was drawn from the Mr Price Facebook page and for the purpose of obtaining a fair amount of information, seventy posts were collected and analysed.

Seventy posts were selected over a period of one year, from the 01 May 2017 to 30 April 2018. The researcher attempted to spread the days when data was collected over a reasonable period, using different days of the month, beginning, middle and end (Lewis, 2001).

The unit of analysis was the posts which had been identified on the Mr Price Facebook page; posts were selected according to the type of information they displayed, in order to gain various types of posts. The posts were coded separately according to the information exchanged between the brand and consumer. Data was also collected from secondary sources such as dissertations, journals, websites, Facebook page and Annual reports.

Thematic Analysis: Qualitative Method

The scope for this research study provides for the use of a thematic analysis. A thematic analysis is the method through which written, verbal and visual communication messages is analysed and placing this information into themes, which are influenced by the research objectives (Herring, 2004).

The study used the traditional thematic analysis approach (Krippendorff, 1980, cited in Herring, 2004): the first step included the formulation of research questions by the

researcher. This study had four research questions; how does Mr Price brand image appear on Facebook versus its website? How does Mr Price use Facebook to communicate with its consumers? How is #mrpmystyle used to assist consumers to engage with the Mr Price brand image? And to what extent does Mr Price Facebook communication contribute to an active consumer-brand relationship? The research questions assisted in selecting posts, which could in turn assist answering the questions.

The second step included the selection of a sample by the researcher. For the purpose of this research study the sample was the Mr Price Facebook page and seventy posts were collected and analysed over a one year period (01 May 2017 to 30 April 2018). The third step included the categories which were formed from coding information collected; this study had twelve categories formed from data collected, namely; the post number; date of the post; positive and negative reactions; type of likes; account queries; refund and return queries; career information; modelling queries; promotional sales and garment information; lay-byes; store information and other information.

During the fourth step, the data collected was placed within these codes and checked, so that the data was able to relate to the purpose of the study and appropriate data was able to be gained from the posts selected. The final step included the analysis and interpretation of the data collected during the coding process.

Through the application of the five steps mentioned above, the process of sifting through all the data from the seventy posts collected in the one year period (01 May 2017 to 30 April 2018) was completed in an orderly and systematic manner (Stemler, 2001).

A coding scheme research tool was used for this study as it is a tool used for the analysis of data, where categories are formed in order to draw conclusions on the phenomenon (Jensen, 2002). Codes are then sorted into categories, based on the relation of these different codes. The categories which emerge are organised into groups of meaningful clusters; normally between ten to fifteen clusters are formed (Patton, 2002).

This research study had eleven categories where coded information was sorted into: **the post number**, numbered one to seven according to the post for that month. **Date of the post**, i.e. when was the post posted by the Mr Price brand. **Positive and negative reactions** to gain insight into consumers' complaints or positive remarks around the Mr Price brand. **Type of likes**, the total number of likes for that post, were broken down into smiley, shocked, laughing, sad or crying smiley faces. **Account queries**, any queries that had to do with opening of an account or payment of an account. **Refund and return queries**, consumers who wanted to return a garment or receive a refund for items which were not up to a consumer's standards. **Career information**, consumers who requested more information about employment at Mr Price. **Modeling queries**, consumers who wanted more information about how to become a model for the Mr Price brand. **Promotional sales and garment information**, information requested about how to purchase items or which items were on sale. **Lay-byes**, consumers who wanted more information on Mr Price lay-by option. **Store information**, what time a certain store opened or the nearest store to buy a certain item and **other information**, experiences of consumers' online purchases, how many times a post was shared or what hashtag was used during the post.

This section gave a breakdown of the categories of the coding scheme which described the approach taken to answer the research question, while still considering the theoretical framework of this study. The above mentioned categories resulted from the data collected from the comments on the seventy selected posts of this research study and the relationship between each category.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology of this study. The data was collected according to relevance and this can be noted in the fact that some months there were only two posts analysed, while other months had up to eight. The data collected during the investigation, was coded and analysed so that Facebook was analysed to determine the effectiveness of it as a communication tool. Data was thematically analysed; the thematic analysis was qualitative in nature and data was analysed through a coding scheme. Data collected was to determine whether the

objectives of this study could be achieved. The selection of seventy posts provided the researcher with sufficient information, although observing the communication engagement between the brand and its consumers seemed repetitive. Interactive evidence between the Mr Price brand and its consumers was gained primarily from the Mr Price Facebook page, allowing the researcher to have relevant information to analyse and gain perspective to achieve the overall purpose of this study.

Chapter Four

Research Findings, Data Analysis and Interpretation

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings on communication between Mr Price and its consumers on Facebook, and the possible effect communication via social media had on the brand's image. The purpose of this chapter is to present, discuss and interpret the data collected from the e-observations and thematic analysis of the seventy posts collected from the Mr Price Facebook page over a one year period from 01 May 2017 to 30 April 2018. The sample of posts selected was obtained through reading and re-reading information presented on Facebook, information that best fit obtaining the objectives of this study were then used. Through thematic analysis the data collected was analysed according to the codes identified from recorded data taken from the Mr Price Facebook page. This way a better understanding around the objectives of the study was gained.

The first theme related to Mr Price's brand, specifically on Facebook. The second theme focused on Mr Price's use of Facebook to communicate with its consumers. The third theme was concerned with the use of the #mrpmystyle hashtag to assist consumer-brand communication. Lastly the final theme was concerned with how Mr Price's Facebook page contributed to consumer-brand relationship.

Restating Research Objectives and Research Questions

The study aimed to interrogate the appearance and brand engagement of Mr Price brand within the Facebook social media account to determine how Mr Price utilised Facebook to communicate with its consumers. The exploration of the use of hashtag #mrpricestyle, to enhance Mr Price's communication with its consumers also added to the investigation on how this Facebook account contributed to the consumer-brand relationship.

This study, interrogated the Facebook page of the Mr Price brand in the following manner; firstly, how did the Mr Price brand image appear on Facebook versus its website? Secondly, how did Mr Price use Facebook to communicate with its consumers? Thirdly, how was #mrpstyle used to assist consumers to engage with the Mr Price brand image? Finally, to what extent did Mr Price's Facebook communication contribute to an active consumer-brand relationship? A thematic analysis of the Mr Price Facebook page was conducted over a period of one year from 01 May 2017 to 30 April 2018; data collected during this time was coded and placed into eleven identified categories which are unpacked in this chapter.

Theme 1: Mr Price Facebook Communication versus effectiveness of its website

The Mr Price Facebook page displays different products that are being sold by the brand. Through daily posts, the Mr Price brand advertises the products with a link to its e-commerce store, and this is where consumers can purchase the items. Information on the price and trends of items are also provided with pictures of the garments. Mr Price creates and harvests their brand culture through international research by specialist trend teams; engaging in active communication with consumers via social/digital media; responding to consumers fashion needs; testing products before committing to merchandise; providing lower mark-ups and having a passion for providing ordinary people with extraordinary things (Mr Price Annual Report, 2017).

Through the seventy posts analysed during this study, it became evident that Mr Price often responded to consumers' comments (questions, opinion or queries) with a link to its website. During the analysis of this information the links were followed in order to see whether they were effective. The effectiveness was determined by assessing whether the links contained further information and how functional the website was in this regard.

The type of information sought on the Mr Price website was influenced by the type of questions, opinions and queries that were posed by consumers and received an answer or response from the Mr Price brand in the form of a link to its website.

Firstly, consumers who needed more information about job opportunities under the Mr Price brand were given a link to the Mr Price career page. The link provided did work and once consumers were taken to the website, they were able to access more information in three distinct categories, namely, 'our careers', 'job search' and 'create a profile'. This allowed consumers to view information on job vacancies and also provided them with the opportunity to upload relevant information so that in future they would be able to get information on jobs that were relevant to them.

Secondly, customers seeking information around lay-byes and opening of accounts were directed to the Mr Price money page. When consumers followed the link, they were able to read more about Mr Price money – what was required to open an account and what consumers could be provided with if they intended opening an account. On this page consumers were given access to more information around the Mr Price mobile and insurance options, if they felt like accessing it.

Thirdly, consumers who needed more information about how or where to purchase promotional or advertised clothing were provided with a link to the Mr Price website. On this platform the consumer was able to browse all the apparel which was for sale by the brand. They were also able to purchase the items and have them delivered or collected from the nearest Mr Price store.

It is important to note that when consumers access the actual website of the Mr Price brand (www.mrp.co.za); they are provided with many self-service options which reduce the amount of time it takes to gain information about a specific area of interest. New media (such as the Mr Price website) allows consumers to gain awareness of what a brand has to offer and therefore influences the decision to buy into the brand. It allows for a boost in sales as consumers are directed to the website and e-commerce site for further interaction (New Media Age, 2010). A brand's website needs to include the ability to zoom and rotate products which are being viewed and there needs to be sufficient information around the product, for example pages on social media, all of which contribute to better communication between a brand and its consumers and improves the brand's online branding (McCormick & Livett, 2012).

The Mr Price brand has adapted to the convergence of communication technology, by placing its brand in the social media space and using that technology to interact

and engage with its consumers, while also providing consumers with an online store where shopping can take place in the convenience of their homes. The brand is active in this regard, as consumers are able to access its Facebook page, which also directs consumers to its e-commerce site by providing links so that consumers are able to locate products and services with one click. However, during the study the researcher found a lack of active responses to questions and queries and the brand simply directed consumers to its e-commerce site; the researcher acknowledges the brand's attempt to engage, but the information provided was not sufficient in answering the questions.

Theme 2: Mr Price use of Facebook to communicate with consumers

Mr Price posted on a daily basis, most of the posts occurred between 09h00 and 14h00. The daily posts by Mr Price were seen as the first attempt to communicate with its consumers. Each post received numerous likes, shares and comments by consumers; this indicated that there was interaction occurring between the brand and its consumers. Various screenshots of the Mr Price Facebook page explain the tools provided to Mr Price and its consumers to assist with the interaction and engagement from the communication put out by the brand.

The screenshot one is of the Mr Price Facebook page. It has an image of a female and a male, both of whom look as if they are in their early twenties, which is within Mr Price's stipulated age group (Mr Price Annual Report, 2017). The Mr Price logo can be identified as a black box, with a red cap on the right and 'mrp' in white; Mr Price colours are red, black and white which are evident here. The logo is an emblem or device which is used as a way of distinguishing one brand from another; hence logos are a representation of a brand and not the brand itself (Egan, 2007).

A logo needs to be consistent and simple, so that the consumer is able to easily remember it. It should be attractive, eye catching and original; it should also be timeless, as it should be easily transformable to keep up with the times so that consumers are not lost when a completely new logo is designed. Versatility is also crucial as it should be recognisable even if it is printed in black and white. Finally it

should be appropriate and fully represent the brand, thereby translating the purpose of the brand in the design of the logo (Cass, 2008). The Mr Price brand has kept its logo simple by using the letters mrp (which they are recognised as), the colours are simple and the hat is a symbol that can be identified by consumers.

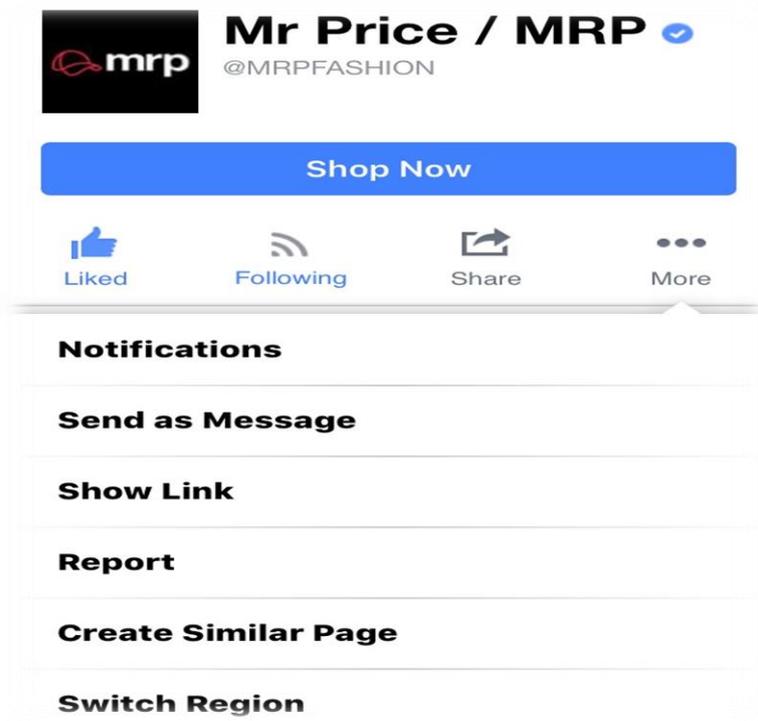


Image 2: Screenshot 1

Source: Mr Price Facebook, 2017

The name of the Mr Price brand page is 'Mr Price/MRP' the type of experience a consumer has is influenced by the type of information brands provide to their consumers; consumers aim to share and co-create content alongside the brand (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This is known as online brand experience, which is measured by the interactivity on brand pages between brand and consumer (Libai et al., 2010).

There is a horizontal blue bar which says 'Shop Now' once the consumer clicks on that bar, they will be transported to the Mr Price e-commerce store, where they are able to purchase garments online and have them delivered or collect from the nearest Mr Price store. In this online store consumers are able to browse the different categories set out for male and female, from children to adolescents.

Screenshot two shows the icons found under the blue 'shop now' bar. There are four icons under this blue bar, firstly the 'liked' and 'following' icons which are activated once the consumer chooses to like or follow the page. Once the consumers have liked or followed the page they will have the Mr Price page updates shown on their personal Facebook page, when there are posts from the brand or any other activity on the page. This is a convenience factor, as consumers do not need to access the actual Mr Price brand page in order to receive updates. Consumers are able to browse their personal page and have exposure to the latest news on their storyline. The share button allows consumers to share the brand's page on their Facebook page, which means that the consumer is able to advertise the brand with their friends, without the brand having to do anything. The sharing icon also appears when comments are placed on a post, which means that the post shared (because of interest in what has been posted) can be shared with others, even if they are not following the Mr Price Facebook page. The share function holds power as it enables awareness to be brought to many people, whether or not they are consumers of the Mr Price brand.

The last icon of the four below the blue bar is the 'more' and once activated there is a drop down tool box which allows consumers to choose the notifications they want to receive from the page. Consumers are able to send the Mr Price brand a private message, while clicking on 'show link' will share the link on the consumer's timeline for other consumers or potential consumers to see. The consumer is also able to actively report the page, the reasons can range from just not liking a post to harassment or not applicable for Facebook, to it is a scam and unauthorized use of intellectual property. The next option for consumers is to create a similar page as it allows pages for businesses, brands and organisations to be created free of charge. The final option is to switch regions and this allows users to change the region they are in. The four icons allow for more activity to take place between the brand and a consumer. The options to keep up to date with certain posts, paste them onto the customer's timeline and report any dubious posts are all actions which contribute to the way the Mr Price brand and its consumers communicate.

Under the 'more' icon, the Mr Price online store link is provided; with one click consumers will be taken directly to the e-commerce store. It also states that the page is a clothing brand and clothing store and the team members of this page are also

provided. This provides consumers with relevant information about the Mr Price brand.

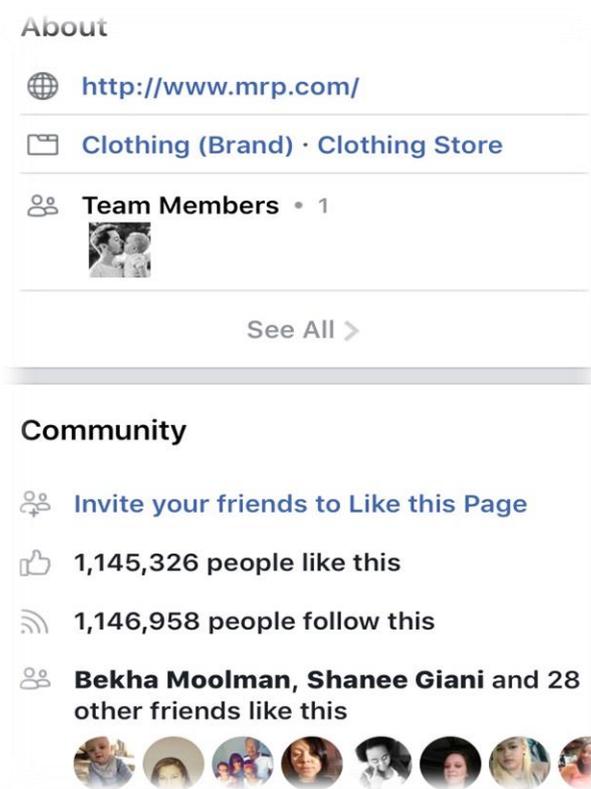


Image 3: Screenshot 2

Source: Mr Price Facebook, 2017

The information provided in Screenshot 2 is the Mr Price community, consumers are able to invite their friends to like the page and it gives the number of people who like the page, which was 1,145,326 and number of people who followed the brand was 1,146,858. The consumer is also able to see which mutual friends have liked the page.

Consumers also have access to all Mr Price videos and photographs; this opinion was available before the latest posts which were posted by the brand. All these features before the posts allowed the consumer to have more information on the Mr Price band and allowed them to communicate with the brand more efficiently, while still engaging with the other consumers.

The Mr Price brand does not have to do much with regards to the tools available on the Facebook page, which encourage consumers to communicate with the brand. However, the tools can become useless if there are consumers who just like the page and do not interact on it. The development of Facebook in virtual space is seen as effective and efficient for both brand and the consumer; as it encourages active brand engagement (Wauters, 2011).

The main objective of any brand is to build a strong and long-term relationship with its consumers. Therefore brand communication forms an integral part of brand image as it includes the creation of multiple connections with the consumers specifically in the online environment (Platon, 2014). It has been proven that social media platforms are an effective way of linking brands with consumers online, therefore it should be incorporated into brand communication strategy (Platon, 2014).

Brands capitalise on the opportunity provided by social media to converse with consumers, as it allows for better communication which in-turn assists with monitoring trends in the marketplace (Assaf et al., 2012). It was found that the Mr Price brand engaged in this opportunity and the brand's Facebook page displayed evidence of communication between the brand and its consumers. Brands that show interest and understanding towards the use of the internet have a changed mind set and are involved in online communities (Berthon et al., 2012).

Theme 3: The use of #mrpstyle to assist Consumer-Brand Engagement

According to Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) engagement on brand pages allows for active engagement between consumer and brand and consumer and other consumers; allowing consumers to co-create brand experiences. However, engagement rates on these brand pages reflect a lower number of likes and comments when compared to the total number of consumers on the brand page. This does not mean that the number of fans leads to success of a brand page. The consumer's perspective of engaging on brand pages is influenced by a critical amount of activity that reflects a great level of value and attractiveness to the brand page (Tsai et al., 2012). Previous research on virtual communities had developed

several types of ways to classify engagement activities. According to Nonnecke et al. (2004) there are the 'lurkers', who are users who visit and consume the information provided by the brand page but never contribute to the brand page and all other consumers are 'posters'.

This research study collected seventy posts which were randomly selected, but a few of them were inspired by the #mrpmystyle. The obvious finding from the data collected was that the number of participants which Mr Price recognised and re-posted on its Facebook page ranged from one person to an average of eight; below are a few examples of these posts.

#MRPMYSTYLE 😊

@pamzokuhle @foyinog @authenticlyalex
@nabbykay @shaun.lyle @jimmyjaycarsen
@tshiamozainy @r_o_z_a_m

If you're rocking MRP today, show us what you got and upload your #ootd, tag us @mrpfashion using #mrpmystyle and you could be featured online next!

#mrp #mrpfashion #mrpmystyle



Image 4: Screenshot 3, #mrpmystyle

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2017

#MRPMYSTYLE all day every day 😎 ✌️ 👕
👖 👗 👚 👠 👑

@thatochandi @leanordasilva @fifimotloun
@keamotloun
@zimbabwe_enhle @keaton_taylor93
@beyoutiful_cr

Rocking MRP today?! Snap a pic of your
#ootd and tag us @mrpfashion using
#mrpmystyle and you could be featured
online next!!

Head online to MRP.com and shop our
newest arrivals online RN!

#mrp #mrpfashion #mrpmystyle
#MRPxEverydaypeoplestories



Image 5: Screenshot 4, #mrpmystyle

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2017

Screenshots three and four were posted in the month of May 2017, which was the first month selected for the data collected. In Screenshot three #mrpmystyle was used by the seven consumers who had their posts posted on the Mr Price Facebook page. These seven consumers wore a Mr Price garment and took a picture tagged @mrpfashion and used #mrpmystyle. Through this action their pictures were used by the Mr Price brand as user-generated content.

Screenshot four had seven consumers' images posted on the Mr Price Facebook page. The images were very trendy and stylish looking and comprised of images from both male and female. This visual appeal is an active actor in grabbing the attention of people browsing the Facebook page. The post did not only advertise the items which could be purchased at any Mr Price store or from its online store but it provided young, trendy and innovative ways of wearing these garments.

The use of the #mrpmystyle allows for other people to view content which is generated by other consumers. This can trigger two effects. Firstly, more people will want to appear on the brand's Facebook page and therefore the number of people posting images with this hashtag will increase, creating more conversation around the brand without the brand having to do anything. Secondly, the choice of language which is used with each post such as 'outfit envy' and emoji of the clothing items attract users to read more into the ad to see what items are so envious and even if people are not purchasing the items, the attention is gained and the brand as a whole is engaging with the consumer.

Most of the engagement occurred around these two posts and other consumers asking Mr Price where certain items could be purchased, how much they retailed for or tagging friends and family members to view the post in order to make them aware of the items which Mr Price had for sale. This is a good strategy for marketing not only the garments but it also allows people to gain insight into the brand and what it has to offer.



Mr Price / MRP

9 May 2017 · ⚙️

#MRPMYSTYLE 🤩 👧 👦 👕 👗 👠

@styledbyrizmosam @michaelaadonis @larnellelewies @carregabyac @rethabile_mendu

We love to see how you styled your fave MRP pieces!
Don't forget to snap a pic of your #ootd and tag @mrpfashion using #mrpmystyle and you could be featured here next!... See More



Image 6: Screenshot 5, #mrpmystyle

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2017



Mr Price / MRP

19 May 2017 · ⚙️

#MRPMYSTYLE GOALS 😍 😎 😏

@maragrams @katieslater_photography

It's getting cold outside! Head online now to MRP.com and shop our latest jacket drops: <http://bit.ly/2qzhRRh>

#fridayfeels #streetstyle #mrpfashion



Image 7: Screenshot 6, #mrpmystyle

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2017

Screenshot five was posted on 09 May 2017. There were five consumers who had their images posted on the Facebook page. The images were fresh and consisted of four females and one male, showing that both genders were considered and posted to attract not only females but males as well.

Screenshot six was posted on 19 May 2017 and there were two female consumers who had their images posted on the Mr Price Facebook. They wore garments in fashionable ways and had people commenting about where to purchase these items.

There is an evident pattern in the results from both screenshot five and screenshot six and that is that they attract other people and they like the images or comment. Most of the comments are regarding information for certain garments, most of the posts have the link to the Mr Price online store, so that consumers are able to go directly onto the website and purchase whichever item they desire. The Mr Price brand allows for consumers to purchase items off the internet and to have the option of delivery to their doorsteps or to the nearest Mr Price store where they can be collected. These posts were also shared with other people; this pushes the engagement with the brand from brand and consumer to consumer and consumer. Once again it was proven that conversations are created and engaged in around content which is posted by the everyday consumer.

The language used in these posts was youthful in nature and grabbed the attention of the target market that consists of males and females, from early teens to adults. It allows for people to identify with the brand understanding the language. Words such as 'street style', 'Mr Price Fashion' and 'Friday feels', all spark emotion in reality and as a result once other people are tagged in the post it shows that the post is relatable and that it can go from one individual to another without the consideration of geographical boundaries or difference in time.

The use of hashtags by Mr Price allows for consumers to type in these hashtags and to be exposed to the content, without worrying about searching or browsing the entire Facebook page, making it more efficient and effective for gaining information.



Image 8: Screenshot 7, #mrpmystyle

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2017

Screenshot seven was posted on 02 June 2017. In this post five consumers were tagged and their images were shared on the Mr Price Facebook page. Most of the activity around this post was tagging friends and family, so that they could see the information. Consumers also asked for more information on the garments which were advertised and there were consumers who liked the page. The above screenshot which was analysed, has five aspects which remained the same in terms of the layout of the posts which were inspired by #mrpmystyle.

Firstly, the date of the post will always appear under the name of the Facebook page, in this case the Mr Price/MRP Facebook page. Secondly, the hashtag which is being used will appear next. For the purpose of this study the #mrpmystyle was analysed as it was a way of generating content that was provided by the consumer. Thirdly, the people who were chosen and images used in the post were tagged in order to be recognised for the image which was posted by tagging Mr Price and using #mrpmystyle. Fourthly, more information was provided regarding how to tag the brand in order for a post to be recognised and possibly used on the next #mrpmystyle post. The information provided also included a link to the online store so that people were able to find the items in which they were interested. Fifthly, the images of the selected consumers were added so that the brand had content and other consumers were able to engage and be exposed to visual aspects of how garments were worn.

It was evident that the occurrence of posts which were inspired by #mrpmystyle, was a way for consumers (specifically target market) to interact with the Mr Price brand. Although these posts were neither continuous, nor occurred a specific number of times in a month, they did occur and provided a view of how garments were utilised by the everyday consumer and how they shaped their lives. Mr Price could just use the images of models to advertise the clothing, but user-generated content made the information more authentic to consumers and the fashion community at large. It was not specific body types or gender but a variety of both, which invited more interaction to occur around the information given on the Mr Price Facebook page. Active engagement could also be achieved by allowing consumers to engage in user-generated content (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012).

User-generated content adds to the many comments which are published by general users who show interest in a particular topic. User-generated content allows for unstructured information, but often information can be misrepresented as it can be edited by general users who have access to the internet (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012). It is important to note that user-generated content becomes an important means of communication between consumers, allowing them to become part of the brand. User-generated content that is brand-related has the potential to influence the perceptions of other consumers as well as challenge professionals in the marketing environment; one of these challenges is the reaction to negative posts about a brand, through user-generated content. A brand's approach to a negative situation can be detrimental for a brand's image. Therefore it is important for brands to engage in co-creation on social media, in order to build and encourage connections between it and its consumers. This will ensure that consumers gain a sense of belonging and feel encouraged to interact with the brand (Smith et al., 2012). The Mr Price brand allowed for co-creation of content through hashtags, such as the #mrpstyle.

From a cultural perspective, the manner in which content is produced and circulated, has been influenced by technology (Jenkins, 2006), which is evident on the Mr Price Facebook page, where consumers are able to be an active part in the culture. The consumer culture of the Mr Price brand is unique and specific to those who engage on its Facebook. A system has been formed where consumers are able to consume those Mr Price's commodities which they have chosen through personal choice, by gaining more information on Facebook or its website, thereby exercising free personal choice in the private sphere of their everyday lives (Slater, 1997).

A consumer's desire for social interaction is one of the motives for consumers to engage in user-generated content activities in the social media environment (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Hence, social media has brought extreme change in the circulation of information making the engagement process between brand and consumer easier, allowing consumers to like, comment and share information (Akrimi and Khemakhem, 2012).

Theme 4: Mr Price Facebook Communication Contribution to Consumer-Brand Relationship

This section refers to the fourth objective of the study. Data was collected from 01 May 2017 to 30 April 2018, where interaction and engagement (i.e. likes, comments and shares) on 70 posts were critically analysed in order to determine the type of communication that occurred between the Mr Price brand and its consumers and what the potential effect would be on the consumer-brand relationship. The brand promise on product and service was analysed to see if the Mr Price Facebook page could be seen as building trust between brand and consumer and whether this interaction contributed to the consumer-brand relationship (Aaker, 1996).

In order to analyse the data in an orderly manner, tables were formulated and the following coding categories were developed, namely, date of post, positive and negative reactions, types of likes, account queries, refund and return queries, career information, modelling queries, promotional sales and garment information, lay-byes, store information and other information. During this stage all information that was added under a Mr Price brand post was placed under one of these themes and analysed.

Products have become very similar in nature and often brands become almost impossible to differentiate, hence a brand's success is impacted by the subjective experiences of its consumers (Gentile et al., 2007). It is the consumer's emotional experience with the brand that impacts on brand differentiation and contributes to brand satisfaction and loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). There are two types of interaction, direct (brand logo) and indirect (marketing and advertising). Brand pages are considered indirect interaction as they have an influence on the type of experience the consumer has. This experience is further influenced by the type of information brands provide to consumers; consumers aim to share and co-create experiences alongside the brand (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). According to Libai et al. (2010), this is characterized as Online Brand Experiences (OBEs) which include interactivity and synchronicity where consumers are given the platforms to engage with the brand and other consumers, whenever they prefer.

To conceptualise online brand experience Brakus et al. (2009), define it as internal subjective responses by consumers which include feelings and sensations towards the brand; it is also the behavioural response that is evoked by the brand's design aspects such as identity, packaging, communication and page environment. Drawing from the above definition, brand experience is a multi-faceted construct which includes sensory, affective, cognitive and engagement dimensions. Brand pages are of a virtual and social nature, and include relational and usability components (Schmitt, 1999). The Mr Price Facebook page is fairly simple and self-explanatory; as the consumers browse they will be introduced to different content (children, teenagers and adults). The consumer is able to respond to this content, by liking, sharing or commenting. The comments which can be found on the various posts show the feelings that consumers have towards the Mr Price brand.

Engagement plays an integral role in creating an active consumer with hopes of influencing continuous interaction between brand and consumers as this is the desired outcome of brand pages (Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013). It has been proven that consumers tend to engage more actively when they are immersed in the online activity of the brand (Hoffman et al., 2000).

Consumers' responses to a brand's stories on its Facebook page are either positive or negative in nature. Hence, brands need to be more considerate about branding fundamentals before entering social media platforms, in order to fully deliver on their brand promises (Barwise & Meehan, 2010). The data collected in the present study is presented in table format and then interpreted, which method was chosen as the information collected contained many similarities. Eleven categories were chosen and the information was placed accordingly. This is because the study sought to understand the type of information that passed between the Mr Price brand and its consumers. The posts collected varied from month to month because posts were collected according to the relevance to the objectives of the study, hence some months there were four posts and other months there were eight.

Table 2: Mr Price's Facebook Posts, May 2017

May 2017				
Post No.	1	2	3	4
5Date of Post	09 May 2017	09 May 2017	14 May 2017	19 May 2017
Positive/Negative Comments	-	-	Negative: Consumer still awaiting online order 4 days later. Mr Price: email provided where online agent will contact consumer.	Negative: Sent an email to contact us and have not received a response. Mr Price: sent email address for help@mrp.com where assistance will be given directly.
Type of Likes	Total – 503 497 like; 5 loves & 1 shocked	Total – 3 469 3,3K likes; 150 loves; 9 shocked; 6 flowers; 2 angry & 2 laugh	Total – 1 622 1,5K likes; 64 laugh; 44 loves & 14 flowers	Total -509 500 likes; 8 loves & 1 angry
Account Queries	Opened an account, still awaiting approval? Mr Price: No response.	How to open an account? Mr Price: no response.	-	-
Refund/Return Queries	-	-	-	-
Career information	-	-	-	-
Modeling Queries	-	-	-	How to become a model? Mr Price: no response.
Promotional Sales & Garment Information	-	Garment available online? Mr Price: responded with link.	-	-
Lay-Bye	-	-	-	-
Store Information	-	-	Stores open on Sunday? Mr Price: yes all stores.	-
Other Information	Shared once #mrpmystyle where five consumers were tagged.	Shared 130 times. Advert for Mother's day. 17 posts, by 17 consumers, who tagged loved ones.	Shared 44 times. Six consumers, wishing people happy Mother's day.	#mrpmystyle tagged two consumers. #fridayfeels; #streetstyle and #mrpfashion also used.

		All together this generated more conversation around the pj's advertised.		Post shared twice.
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Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table two consists of four posts from the 9th to the 19th May 2017. There were two negative comments which were visible from these four posts. Firstly, a consumer stated that they had sent an email to Mr Price requesting that they be contacted; however there had been no response. Mr Price responded with the email address help@mrp.com where a customer care agent would respond. The second negative comment was a consumer who had been waiting for more than four days for their online order; Mr Price responded by providing the contact details of an online agent.

There was a total of 6,103 likes, which was made up of 5,797 likes, 202 loves, three angry; 67 laughs, 20 flower and ten shocked emojis.

Two consumers asked how to open a Mr Price account. Mr Price responded to one by providing a link to the online application but did not respond to the other consumer. There were no comments made about refunds or returns or career information. One consumer asked how they could become a model, however Mr Price did not respond. Another consumer asked about the availability of an item and Mr Price responded by providing the consumer with the link to the online store. There were no comments about lay-byes.

One consumer asked if the store opened on a Sunday and Mr Price responded that all Mr Price stores were open on a Sunday. In the other information column, the posts were shared 177 times. The #mrpmystyle was used by seven consumers who advertised the Mr Price items they were wearing. Seventeen other consumers were tagged in these posts and six used a post to wish all mothers a Happy Mother's Day.

Table 3: Mr Price's Facebook Posts, June 2017

June 2017									
Post No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Date of Post	30 June 2017	18 June 2017	17 June 2017	16 June 2017	11 June 2017	10 June 2017	08 June 2017	06 June 2017	02 June 2017
Positive/Negative Comments	<u>Negative:</u> Hate the words Mr Price, mobile phone is troublesome. Mr Price: no response.	-	-	-	<u>Positive:</u> Four consumers tagged, and featured on the Mr Price Facebook page, showing their Mr Price stuff. <u>Negative:</u> Three consumers requested prices for selected garments. Mr Price: no response to date.	<u>Positive:</u> Expensive looks at affordable rate. Good clothing <u>Negative:</u> Consumer is not happy with online purchases and mix up of goods. An article was written by them. Mr Price: no response. Another consumer complained about looking like a fool, when receiving online purchase. Mr Price, no response.	-	<u>Negative:</u> Online purchase of boots, got two different sizes. Mr Price: apologised and will get online agent to contact consumer immediately.	-
Type of Likes	Total – 595 584 likes & 11 loves	Total – 424 392 likes; 2 loves & 30 laughs	Total – 575 557 likes; 15 loves; 2 shocked & 1 laugh	Total – 113 111 likes & 2 laughs	Total – 579 579 likes	Total – 320 316 likes & 4 loves	Total - 802 784 likes & 18 loves	Total – 186 185 likes & 1 laugh	Total -395 388 likes & 7 loves
Account Queries	-	-	How to open an account? Mr Price: Link provided for online application	-	-	-	-	-	Two consumers, how to open an account? Mr Price: provided online link which gives all relevant information
Refund/Return Query	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Jean zip not working, can I

s									exchange it? Mr Price: go to nearest store for exchange.
Career information	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Modeling Queries	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Promotional Sales & Garment Information	-	-	Five consumers requested prices for garments. Mr Price: responded with all the relevant information.	-	Requesting information about a garment. Mr Price: provided nearest store and online availability.	Price of long sleeve top? Mr Price: no response.	-	-	-
Lay-Bye	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Store Information	What time does Mr Price stores open? Mr Price: we are open seven days a week.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Information	-	Seven consumers commented about why people pay good money for jeans that have holes in them. The responses included, someone gets it, good question,	Shared twice.	#HappyYouthDay #Mr Price #mrpfashion #currentmood All the above hashtags were used in order to get the youth day message across to all consumers The video created to celebrate	#mrpmystyle; #mrp; #mrpfashion; #sundayfunday; #ootd.	Promotional adverts, R20 off all fleece bought from link provided.	170 comments were added to this post, all consumers spoke about their best friends and often tagged the person, who allowed those	Advert for Father's day. R20 off all fleece tops. Confirmation of online order, Mr Price: Responded stating that customer care will	Six consumers tagged for #mrpmystyle. Consumer, how to shop online. Mr Price: provided an explanation and link to online store.

		style!		youth day was viewed 1,6K times.			people to add their view. However, this occurred with 67 of the 170 posts. Post was shared 8 times. #mrp; #mrpfashion and #bestiesday.	contact consumer.	
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Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table three consists of nine posts which were taken from the 2nd to the 30th June 2017 and consists of nine posts. These nine posts had five negative and two positive comments. The first negative comment is a consumer who said that they hated the words Mr Price, because they were having extreme problems with the Mr Price mobile phone. Mr Price did not respond to this comment. The second comment was three consumers who requested prices on garments but had not received a response and who had commented about it more than once. The third comment was a consumer who stated that they were not happy with the mix-up of items they had purchased online. They had an article published against the brand, but Mr Price did not respond to this consumer. The fourth consumer explained how they looked like a fool for receiving their online order when it was not correct. Yet again Mr Price did not respond to this consumer. The final negative comment was from a consumer who received two different size shoes from their online purchase. Mr Price apologised and directed the query to the online agent.

Of the two positive comments, the first was given by four consumers who were tagged and featured on the Facebook page through #mrpmystyle. The second was that Mr Price provided expensive looks at affordable prices; however there was no comment from Mr Price.

There was a total of 4,007 likes generated by these nine posts. They were made up of 3,896 likes, 57 loves, 34 laughs and two shocked emojis.

Three consumers requested information on how to open an account and Mr Price responded by providing consumers with the online link. There was one comment about an item which needed to be exchanged. Mr Price responded stating that it could be exchanged at any Mr Price store. There were no comments made for career information or modelling queries. Seven consumers requested the price and more information about advertised garments. Mr Price responded to six and did not respond to one of the consumers.

There were no comments for lay-byes, but one consumer commented requesting the trading hours for Mr Price stores. Mr Price responded stating that they were open seven days a week. In the other comments seven consumers commented about the ripped jeans which were being advertised, it was more a joke about why people would spend money on jeans that were torn. The post was shared twice so that other consumers were able to view the information. There was a video created to celebrate Youth day, which was viewed 1,600 times and the following hashtags were used #HappyYouthDay, #mp, #mrpfashion and #currentmood.

Through the use of hashtags, consumers were able to contribute by posting pictures of their youth day activities or the clothing items they had used on the day. It was also a way for the Mr Price brand to use user-generated content.

Table 4: Mr Price’s Facebook Posts, July 2017

July 2017							
Post No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Date of Post	28 July 2017	26 July 2017	21 July 2017	20 July 2017	16 July 2017	10 July 2017	07 July 2017
Positive/Negative Comments	<u>Negative:</u> Still waiting for delivery of online purchases. Unhappy consumer. Mr Price: sent post to online team who will assist.	-	-	-	-	<u>Negative:</u> Fix your call centre! Mr Price: how can we assist you? No response.	<u>Negative:</u> Bigger size clothing is becoming smaller. Mr Price: asked which items and apologized. Mr Price: always advertising women’s

							clothing and not men's. Mr Price: will send complaint through to marketing.
Type of Likes	Total – 764 740 likes; 22 loves & 2 shocked	Total – 3693 3,4K likes; 268 loves; 24 shocked & 1 laughing	Total – 481 470 likes & 11 loves	Total – 1382 1,3K likes; 72 loves; 8 shocked; 1 laugh & 1 angry	Total – 699 689 likes; 7 loves; 2 shocked & 1 crying	Total – 310 304 likes; 5 loves & 1 laughing	Total – 650 641 likes & 9 loves
Account Queries	-	-	-	-	How to open an account? Mr Price: link to online applications.	How to open an account? Mr Price: link to online applications.	How to open an account? Mr Price: link to online applications.
Refund/ Return Queries	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Career information	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Modeling Queries	How to become a model? Mr Price: we select models through modelling agencies.	-	-	-	-	How to become a plus size model? Mr Price: contact modelling agency as models are selected through them.	-
Promotional Sales & Garment Information	-	-	Promotion of 50% off? Mr Price: link to online store for promotional deals. Three consumers commented	22 consumers asked where to get a specific item. Mr Price: available at selected	-	-	Item code provided to check availability. Mr Price: gave the stores and online store that has item

			d about items they like. Mr Price: no response.	stores, where are you situated to get a store location closest to you that has them available.			available. Two consumers requested price of items. Mr Price: provided link to online store.
Lay-Bye	Does Mr Price do lay-byes? Mr Price: unfortunately not.	-	-	-	-	-	-
Store Information	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Information	Friend was tagged to view post. Six consumers followed the post by placing emoji icons to the comments.	Over 7,000 comments were made by consumers. During these comments friends were tagged and stories were told as to why they should win the competition. There was a lot of engagement made on this post.	Requesting date for Delivery. Mr Price: no response.	-	Is Mr Price available in Botswana? Mr Price: no response.	-	One consumer tagged #Mr Pricemystyle #Mr Price #mrpfashion

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table four posts were collected from the 7th to 28th July 2017; it comprises seven posts. There were four negative comments made towards the Mr Price brand. First a consumer stated that he/she was still waiting for the delivery of online purchases and voiced that he/she was an unhappy consumer. Mr Price responded by forwarding the

post to the online team. In the second comment a consumer said that Mr Price needed to fix its call centre. Mr Price responded by asking how it could assist the consumer, however the consumer did not respond further. The third negative comment was that larger sized clothing was becoming smaller. Mr Price asked which particular item and apologised. The last negative comment was that the consumer felt that Mr Price always advertised women's clothing and not men's. Mr Price responded that it would send the complaint through to its marketing team.

There was a total of 7,979 likes, made up of 7,544 likes, 394 loves, 36 shocked, three laughing, one angry and one crying emoji.

Three consumers asked about opening an account and Mr Price responded by providing a link to its online applications. There were no comments made for refunds and returns of items, nor for career information. There were two comments asking how to become a model and a plus-size model for Mr Price. Mr Price responded in both cases stating that all models were selected from modelling agencies.

One consumer asked where the promotional items could be found. Mr Price responded and provided the link to the online store. Three consumers wanted more information about certain items. Mr Price did not respond. Twenty-four consumers commented asking for more information about specific items. Mr Price responded providing the link to the online store and mentioned the selected stores that had the items in stock. A consumer provided an item code and Mr Price provided a link to the online store.

One consumer commented asking if Mr Price did lay-byes. Mr Price responded by saying unfortunately not. There were a number of comments which were placed in the other information column. One consumer tagged a friend so that they were able to see the information on the post. Six consumers placed emojis under the comments. Because there was a competition there were over 7,000 people, who were tagged in a post, consumers explaining why they should be the ones chosen as the winners. Another consumer enquired when their products would be delivered, but Mr Price did not respond. A consumer wanted to know if Mr Price was available in Botswana, but Mr Price did not respond. The final comment was a consumer who tagged #mrpmystyle, #mrp and #mrpfashion.

During the month of July, according to the seven posts which were analysed there was a lot of engagement on the Mr Price Facebook page. It was not only between the brand and consumer but there was a lot of consumer to consumer information.

Table 5: Mr Price’s Facebook Posts, August 2017

August 2017				
Post No.	1	2	3	4
Date of Post	30 August 2017	26 August 2017	23 August 2017	16 August 2017
Positive/Negative Comments	-	-	-	-
Type of Likes	Total – 650 636 likes; 11 loves; 2 laugh & 1 shocked	Total – 730 717 likes; 11 loves; 1 laugh & 1 shocked	Total – 1 014 1K likes & 14 loves	Total – 1 014 1K likes & 14 loves
Account Queries	Can a Miladys’ card be used to shop at Mr Price? Mr Price: unfortunately not. How to apply for an account? Mr Price: Link provided to apply for account online.	-	Three consumers, what documents are needed to open an account? Mr Price: provided all information and link to Mr Price money.	-
Refund/Return Queries	-	-	-	-
Career information	-	-	-	-
Modeling Queries	Two consumers, how to become a model? Mr Price: Models are selected through agencies.	*	-	-
Promotional Sales & Garment Information	Six consumers asked for price of certain items? Mr Price: provided consumer with price. Which store has certain heel for sale? Mr Price: provided malls with stock.	Two consumers like certain items. Mr Price: no response.	Four consumers, price of item. Mr Price: link to online store.	Three consumers requesting price of Mr Price clothing. Mr Price: no response.
Lay-Bye	-	-	-	-

Store Information	-	-	-	-
Other Information	Friend tagged into post.	-	-	Placed an order online, when will consumer receive it? Mr Price: requested contact details to assist with tracking item. Fikiles blog for Mr Price is amazing.

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

The fifth table displays posts that were collected from the 16th to the 30th August 2017. It was made up of four posts; there were no positive or negative reactions in these four posts. There was a total of 3,408 likes made up of 3,353 likes, 50 loves, three laughs and two shocked emojis.

Five comments were made about account queries; first a consumer asked whether a Miladys' card could be used to shop at Mr Price, Mr Price responded unfortunately not. The second consumer asked how to apply for an account and Mr Price provided a link to apply online. The final comment was three consumers who asked for more information on what documents were needed to open an account. Mr Price responded by providing all the documents that were needed and a link to the Mr Price money application.

There were no comments regarding refunds and return of garments, nor for career information. Two consumers commented asking how to become a model for Mr Price. Mr Price responded by stating that models were chosen from modelling agencies.

There were 16 comments under the promotional sales and garment information heading. The first six consumers asked for prices of advertised items and Mr Price provided all consumers with the prices. One consumer asked about a high heel shoe, Mr Price provided all malls which had stock of the shoe. Five consumers liked certain items and needed more information, but Mr Price did not respond. The final four consumers requested prices of items and Mr Price provided them with the link to the online store.

There were no comments made about lay-byes or store information. In other information a consumer tagged a friend, so that they were able to have access to the post. While another consumer commented about having placed an order online but had not received it. Mr Price requested contact details so it could assist with tracking the item.

Table 6: Mr Price’s Facebook Posts, September 2017

September 2017				
Post No.	1	2	3	4
Date of Post	27 September 2017	24 September 2017	19 September 2017	14 September 2017
Positive/Negative Comments	-	-	<u>Negative:</u> One consumer, “super bad service. Treated me disrespectfully. Closed my account this week”. Another comment, fashion sucks and don’t like it at all. Another added, you are not forced to like or wear the clothing.	<u>Negative:</u> Bad service, bought clothing at one branch and when tried to return it at another they said it should go back to where the consumer purchased it. Mr Price: requested direct message, so manager could contact them. <u>Positive:</u> Looks like cotton on clothes at an affordable price. Mr Price: you are just the best.
Type of Likes	Total -998 984 likes & 14 loves	Total -218 213 likes; 4 loves & 1 shocked	Total -457 445 likes & 12 loves	Total – 1 435 1,4K likes; 31 loves & 4 shocked
Account Queries	Three consumers had account queries? Mr Price: Gave details on opening an account and link to online application.	How to open an account? Mr Price: provided information and link to online application.	-	Update contact details? Mr Price: provided link to Mr Price money online. Opening of account. Mr Price: provided link.
Refund/Return Queries	-	-	-	Returning an item? Mr Price: Return item to closest store with till slip.
Career informatio	-	How to apply for jobs? Mr Price: link	-	-

n		provided to career site. Or contact store manager at nearest Mr Price store.		
Modeling Queries	-	-	-	-
Promotional Sales & Garment Information	Five consumers requested information regarding a specific garment. Mr Price: Assisted by asking what item and the product code was given.	-		Availability of item? Mr Price: link to online store.
Lay-Bye	-	-	-	Does Mr Price lay-bye? Mr Price: No lay-byes at Mr Price.
Store Information	-	-	-	-
Other Information	Two consumers, how to buy online. Mr Price: step by step explanation and link to online store provided.	Three general comments about the Mr Price brand. Mr Price: no response.	One consumer tagged over ten friends to the post.	One consumer asked for donation of clothing. Mr Price: responded with link to information regarding the pledge or request donation/Mr Price foundation. Link to online store provided.

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table six has four posts which were analysed; these posts were collected from the 14th to the 27th of September 2017. These posts had five negative comments made by consumers. The first two were that the consumer's experienced very bad services were treated disrespectfully and as a result they ended up closing their accounts. The third comment was that people were not forced to like and wear the clothing, but Mr Price did not respond to any of these three consumers. The fourth consumer had a bad experience with trying to return an item which was bought online, when she

was told to take it back to where she got it from. Mr Price requested that the consumer send a direct message with contact details so that the manager could address the issue. The one positive comment amongst all the negative ones was a consumer who stated that the clothing at Mr Price resembled that of Cotton On, Mr Price responded with a 'you are just the best' comment.

These eight posts had a total of 3,102 likes which were made up of, 3,042 likes, 61 loves and five shocked emojis. There were six comments regarding accounts, five consumers needed more information on how to open an account. Mr Price responded providing a link to the online site for more information on how to open an account. Another consumer wanted information on how to update their account information and Mr Price responded by providing a link to Mr Price money online.

One comment was made regarding returning an item; Mr Price responded that the item could be returned to the nearest Mr Price store. Another comment concerned a consumer asking how they could apply for a job and Mr Price provided a link to the online job site and suggested contacting a store manager at the nearest Mr Price store. There were no comments about modelling opportunities. Six consumers asked for more information on garments which they were interested in, whereupon Mr Price asked for the product code so that more information could be provided, and provided the link to the online store.

One consumer asked if Mr Price provided lay-byes and Mr Price responded no. No comments were made about store information. There were six comments which were placed under the other information heading, the first being two consumers who wanted more details of how to buy online; Mr Price responded with step-by-step details and provided the consumers with the link to its online store. There were three general comments made about the Mr Price brand, but Mr Price did not respond. One consumer tagged over ten other friends, so that they were able to see the information placed on the post. The final comment was a consumer asking for a donation of clothing. Mr Price responded by providing a link to more information regarding the pledge or request for donations.

Table 7: Mr Price's Facebook Posts, October 2017

October 2017						
Post No.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Date of Post	23 October 2017	11 October 2017	09 October 2017	08 October 2017	06 October 2017	04 October 2017
Positive/Negative Comments	-	<u>Negative:</u> Mr Price no longer stocks plus size? Account is of no use! Mr Price: Different stores stock different items, link to online store provided.	<u>Negative:</u> Bad experience, opening a Mr Price account and without permission of account holders was joined to insurance scheme. Mr Price: provide contact details for financial services.	-	<u>Negative:</u> Six consumers complained about the service of cashiers and customer care people. Mr Price: apologised and online agent to contact them ASAP. <u>Positive:</u> Good service at a KZN Mr Price store. Mr Price: thank you for good feedback.	-
Type of Likes	Total -764 752 likes; 11 loves & 1 shocked	Total – 1 844 1.8K likes; 43 loves & 1 shocked	Total -319 313 likes & 6 loves	Total – 1 170 1,1K likes; 58 laugh; 10 love ; 1 shocked & 1 crying	Total -610 607 likes & 3 loves	Total – 595 586 likes; 8 loves & 1 angry.
Account Queries	-	Can an account be opened in Zimbabwe? Mr Price: only available to RSA people. Can students open account? Mr Price: no only employed persons. How long to increase credit? It takes 24 hours, number to relevant persons provided. Three	-	-	How to open an account? Mr Price: provided link to online applications.	How to open an account? Mr Price: provided link to online applications.

		consumers, how to open an account? Mr Price: provided link to online applications.				
Refund/Return Queries	-	Skirt to be exchanged? Mr Price: if tag is still on, you may exchange at any store.	-	-	-	-
Career information	Jobs at Mr Price. Mr Price: Link to job site provided	-	-	Any jobs? Mr Price: Link to job site provided.		-
Modeling Queries	How to model for Mr Price? Mr Price: Models sourced through agencies, response to three consumers.	-	-	-	18 consumers asked about graphic design job and how to apply. Mr Price: Link to job site provided.	-
Promotional Sales & Garment Information	Price of shoes? Mr Price: link to online store provided.	Price of advertised shoes, bag and dress? Mr Price: link to online store.	Where to get advertised items? Mr Price: link to online store provided. Silver/black high heel? Mr Price: link to online store.	Request for garment? Mr Price: Link to online store given.	-	-
Lay-Bye	-	-	-	-	-	Why does Mr Price not do lay-byes, all shops do it and all benefit from it? Mr Price: no response.
Store Information	-	-	-	-	-	-

Other Information	-	-	-	Over 150 consumers commented about their friends' rap names. Conversation emerged from this, as friends were tagged.	-	-
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Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table seven is made up of six posts which were collected from the 4th to the 28th of October 2017. There were eight negative comments, the first being a consumer who complained about the fact that Mr Price did not stock plus size clothing. Mr Price responded that different stores tended to stock different items and provided the consumer with the link to check online. Another consumer had a bad experience opening a Mr Price account, where they became a member of an insurance scheme for which they did not grant permission. Mr Price responded by providing the consumer with the contact details for financial services. Six consumers complained about the service they received from cashiers and the customer care workers. Mr Price responded by apologizing and stated that an online agent would contact them as soon as possible. The one positive comment was about good service received at a KwaZulu-Natal branch, to which Mr Price responded and thanked the consumer for the good feedback.

There was a total of 5 302 people interacting on the post; it was made up of 5 158 likes, 81 loves, 58 laughing, 3 shocked 1 angry and 1 crying emoji.

There were a total of eight comments made about account queries, the first being whether people in Zimbabwe could open an account and Mr Price responded that it was only possible for South African citizens. The second consumer asked if students could open accounts and Mr Price responded that accounts were only available for employed people. One consumer asked how long it would take to increase their credit and Mr Price responded that it would take twenty-four hours and provided the consumer with the relevant contact details. The final five comments were consumers asking how to open a Mr Price account. Mr Price responded by providing a link to open an account online.

There was one comment about the exchange of an item. Mr Price responded stating that items could be returned to any Mr Price store, as long as there was a tag or slip for the item. Twenty comments were made requesting details for jobs at Mr Price and Mr Price responded providing these consumers with a link to its online site. One comment requested how to become a model for Mr Price and Mr Price informed the consumer that it chose the models from modelling agencies.

There were five comments made by consumers who requested the details of items that had been advertised and Mr Price responded by providing a link to the online store. There was one comment for lay-byes, the consumer asking why Mr Price did not do lay-byes when all other shops did it and all benefited, Mr Price did not respond to this consumer. There were no comments made about store information. There were over 150 comments made about friends' rap names, as Mr Price requested consumers to do so. Many conversations were sparked as there were many people tagged in that post.

Table 8: Mr Price's Facebook Posts, November 2017

November 2017						
Post No.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Date of Post	28 November 2017	27 November 2017	16 November 2017	13 November 2017	09 November 2017	09 November 2017
Positive/Negative Comments	<u>Negative:</u> Not responding to a person's message, but to someone else's on their post.	<u>Negative:</u> Eight consumers complained about delivery time of online orders. Mr Price: assisted with tracking the order.	Four consumers were not happy with online service and delivery. Mr Price: responded by assisting to locate items.	-	-	-
Type of Likes	Total -475 454 likes; 17 loves & 4 shocked	Total – 298 290 likes & 8 loves	Total -974 936 likes; 34 loves & 4 shocked	Total – 274 262 likes & 12 loves	Total -754 732 likes; 14 loves & 8 shocked	Total -572 561 likes & 11 loves
Account Queries	How to open an account? Mr Price: provided link to online	Credit record? Mr Price: account number requested and sent through	How to open an account? Mr Price: link to open account. Account	How to open account. Mr Price: link to get directions on	-	Opening of account? Mr Price: link to application page. Documents

	information.	to financial services. How to open an account with cell phone? Mr Price: link to Mr Price money	balance? Mr Price: link provided to check balance.	how to open an account.		needed for account payments, Mr Price: send picture of documents to WhatsApp, number provided.
Refund/Return Queries	Three consumers request return of garment? Mr Price: a return to closest store for a refund or exchange.	Exchange of item purchased online. Mr Price: a refund will be given as a gift voucher. Return policy is 30 days.	-	-	-	Return item to any Mr Price store? Mr Price: No response.
Career information	Any jobs available? Mr Price: provided link to job site.	Two consumers requesting employment information. Mr Price: link to job site provided.	Any jobs available? Mr Price: provided link to job site.	Job link provided for three consumers. Sponsors? Mr Price: no new sponsors needed at the moment, please send more info to help@mrp.com	Consumers commented about jobs, learnerships and traineeships through Mr Price. Mr Price: Link to job site provided.	Jobs at Mr Price? Mr Price: Provided link to job site.
Modeling Queries	-	-	-	-	-	-
Promotional Sales & Garment Information	Denim jacket? Mr Price: provided link to sourced denim jackets.	Two consumers, how to use promotion code? Mr Price: Promotional jeans with R50 off, the price after reduction reflected online. Specials on kiddies' clothing? Mr Price: provided link to current	Make jeans in bigger sizes? Mr Price: different stores stock different sizes. Can buy online and have it delivered to you. Link provided for online shopping. Eight consumers query price of items. Mr Price:	-	-	Price of denim jacket? Mr Price: link to online store provided.

		promotions.	provided link to see it online.			
Lay-Bye	-	-	-	-	-	Does Mr Price lay-bye? Mr Price: No lay-byes at Mr Price.
Store Information	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Information	Online delivery query. Mr Price: clarified the delivery query.	Mistake with online order. Mr Price: assisted with details for it to be sorted out. When will winners of competition be announced? Mr Price: more info on Facebook page. Twelve consumers tagged friends for competition.	How to send a call back using Mr Price sim card? Mr Price: *111*number# . Airtime? Mr Price: *130*410#.	Online order? Mr Price: order number tracked where about. Consumer tagged friend in post.	-	How to own a franchise? Mr Price: request contact details to contact him. Can you buy online on black Friday? Mr Price: yes, link provided.

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table eight consists of five posts which were collected from the 9th to the 27th of November 2017. There were three negative comments one of which was a consumer pointing out that their messages were not being responded to. Mr Price did not respond to this comment. The second comment included twelve consumers who all complained about the delivery time of their online purchases. Mr Price assisted with tracking the orders of these consumers.

There was a total of 3,347 likes for these five posts. They were made up of 3,235 likes, 96 loves and 16 shocked.

There were eight comments made about account queries, four of which requested direction in opening a Mr Price account. Mr Price responded by providing a link to find out more and apply online. One comment requested a credit record. Mr Price

responded by requesting account number which was to be sent to the financial department. Another comment asked about account balance and Mr Price responded by providing a link to check balance. The final comment requested more information about the documents needed for paying an account. Mr Price responded stating that pictures of the documents could be sent to the WhatsApp number provided.

There were five comments made about the return and exchange of items. Mr Price responded by stating that items could be exchanged at the nearest Mr Price store as long as there was a tag or slip for the items that needed to be exchanged. If the items were bought online the refund would not be in cash but rather by voucher. Eight consumers requested more information about jobs available at Mr Price. Mr Price responded to all by providing them with a link to the online job site. No comments were made regarding modelling for Mr Price.

There were 11 comments requesting the availability of items and Mr Price responded by providing a link to the online store. Another two comments requested information about how promotions worked and how a promotional code was used. Mr Price responded stating that promotional prices had already been worked out and the price reflected on the online site was the correct price. There was one comment asking about lay-byes at Mr Price. Mr Price responded stating that the Mr Price brand did not have a lay-bye option. No comments were made requesting store information.

The final heading, which is other information, consisted of 20 comments. The first consumer needed more information regarding the delivery of their online order and Mr Price clarified that query. There was a mistake with a consumer's online order and Mr Price assisted with details of the relevant person who could assist. Another consumer wanted to know when the winners of a competition would be announced. Mr Price responded stating that more information would be placed on the Facebook page. There were 13 consumers who tagged other friends in order for them to see the information which was placed on the advertisement. Two comments were made requesting how to give a call back and check item for a Mr Price sim card, to which Mr Price responded with all the relevant information. A consumer requested their online order details; Mr Price responded requesting order number so that they could assist with tracing the item. A consumer wanted more information about opening a

Mr Price franchise and Mr Price requested contact details so that they could be contacted. The final comment, the consumer wanted to know if they were able to purchase online on black Friday. Mr Price responded yes and provided the link to the online store.

Table 9: Mr Price’s Facebook Posts, December 2017

December 2017				
Post No.	1	2	3	4
Date of Post	22 December 2017	06 December 2017	04 December 2017	01 December 2017
Positive/Negative Comments	<u>Negative:</u> Complaint over delivery time not 1-3 days as Mr Price stipulates. Mobile app not working Mr Price: no responses.	-	<u>Negative:</u> Tried contacting through ‘toll free’ number which did not assist as consumer was told to resolve matter online. Mr Price: no response. Seven consumers Complained about waiting time for online delivery. Mr Price: two were given contact details to assist with the matter.	Two consumers placed orders and still awaiting delivery. Mr Price: item numbers and contact details for mater to be sorted.
Type of Likes	Total -309 307 likes & 2 loves	Total -526 515 likes; 10 loves & 1 shocked	Total -706 681 likes; 18 loves; 6 shocked & 1 angry	Total -526 503 likes; 16 loves & 7 shocked
Account Queries	-	-	How to qualify to open an account. Mr Price: supplied all account details. Update contact details. Mr Price: contact financial department for assistance.	-
Refund/Return Queries	Return and refund of pyjamas? Mr Price: return with till slip.	Return of garment? Mr Price: items can be returned to nearest store.	-	-
Career information	Jobs in Pietermaritzburg area? Mr Price: online job page.	-	Any jobs available? Mr Price: provided link to job site.	-
Modeling Queries	-	-	How to model for Mr Price. Mr Price: modelling	-

			agencies are used.	
Promotional Sales & Garment Information	Query for baseball top. Mr Price: contact details given to help source the shirt. When is buy one get one free t-shirt promotion? Mr Price: No response.	Requesting availability of a garment. Mr Price: garments can be purchased online and link provided. Assisted consumer with product details.	Ordering an item online. Mr Price: will contact you as soon as item is in store. Where to get an item in Johannesburg. Mr Price: provided the details.	-
Lay-Bye	-	-	-	-
Store Information	Four consumers requested Mr Price shopping hours? Mr Price: which store? And details were given.	-	-	-
Other Information	How long does delivery take? Mr Price: requested contact details to call to further assist consumer. How long does an EFT take to clear? Mr Price: 48 hours and more details given.	-	When to expect delivery? Mr Price: took item details and stated it would contact the consumers. How to tag Mr Price outfit? Mr Price: no response. Two people tagged to post.	One person tagged in post.

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table nine analysed four posts, from 1st December to 22nd of December. There were five negative comments. Firstly, a consumer complained about the time it took for goods to be delivered once ordered online and another consumer complained about the mobile application to order online not working. Neither of these comments received any response from the Mr Price brand.

Another consumer complained about trying to get hold of the toll free number, but once they got through they were directed to the online site to resolve the matter. Mr Price did not respond to the consumer who had already tried to rectify the matter. There were seven consumers who all complained about waiting for an extremely long time for deliveries of items ordered online. Mr Price responded to two of the seven consumers, requesting contact details in order to contact them. The final two comments were from two different consumers who had both placed orders online but

were still awaiting deliveries. Mr Price responded requesting the item numbers and contact details so that the relevant department could assist in rectifying the problem.

There was a total of 2,067 likes for these four posts comprising 2,006 likes, 46 loves, 14 shocked and one angry. There were two comments regarding account information, the first requesting how to qualify to open a Mr Price account. Mr Price provided the consumer with all the relevant information. The second comment was regarding the updating of account details and Mr Price responded stating that the financial department should be contacted and would be able to assist.

There were two comments regarding the return and exchange of garments. Mr Price responded that the tag or slip should be available and that the items could be returned to the nearest Mr Price store. There were also two comments regarding jobs at Mr Price and these were directed to the online job site by providing the link. There was one comment where the consumer asked how to become a Mr Price model and Mr Price responded that models were sourced from modelling agencies.

There were five comments regarding promotional sales and garment information. The first one requested an item and Mr Price responded with contact details for sourcing the item. The second comment was enquiring where one could purchase the buy one, get one free t-shirts, but Mr Price did not respond to that consumer. The third comment requested the availability of a garment and Mr Price provided a link to the online store where the garment could be purchased. The fourth comment was about ordering an item online; here Mr Price asked for the consumer's contact details so that they can be contacted as soon as the item was available in the nearest store. The final comment requested an item in the Johannesburg area and Mr Price provided the consumer with the nearest store.

There were no comments about the lay-byes. Whereas, there were four consumers who commented under the store information heading, requesting the shopping hours of Mr Price stores, Mr Price responded by providing the consumers with the trading hours of all stores.

There were six comments which were placed under the other information heading. The first of these comments requested the delivery time of items. Mr Price requested the consumer's contact details so that further assistance could be provided. The

second comment was asking how long an electronic financial transfer took and Mr Price responded with 48 hours. In the third comment a consumer asked when they could expect their online order to be delivered. Mr Price responded requesting the item details and contact number so that the consumer could be contacted.

Another consumer wanted to know how to tag Mr Price when they were wearing an outfit, however Mr Price did not respond. The fifth comment was of two people who were tagged by a friend, so that they were able to see the information of that post. The final comment was also another person tagged in the post.

Table 10: Mr Price’s Facebook Posts, January 2018

Post No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Date of Post	23 January 2018	23 January 2018	22 January 2018	22 January 2018	12 January 2018	06 January 2018	01 January 2018
Positive/Negative Comments	-	-	-	<p><u>Negative:</u></p> <p>Pathetic online service, 5-7 days delivery. Mr Price: asked consumer for contact details so that care agent could contact them.</p> <p>Consumer wants their refund. Mr Price: no response.</p>	<p><u>Negative:</u></p> <p>Refund of delivery fee. Eight women all shared the same sentiments of experiencing late deliveries, parcels missing items because of being out of stock and being refunded with vouchers and not cash.</p> <p>Mr Price: assisted by asking for more information on the items.</p>	<p><u>Negative:</u></p> <p>A pair of shoes was bought from a Mr Price store and the shoes were not the correct size, the call agents were called seven times, countless calls to the branch and nine trips to the store. No assistance! Mr Price: no response</p>	<p><u>Positive:</u></p> <p>Love Mr Price, suggestion that you stock more smaller sizes. Mr Price: thanks for feedback, will be forwarded to team.</p> <p><u>Negative:</u></p> <p>Bad service for no notification of holiday closure. Mr Price: apologised and escalated to team.</p>
Type of	Total -772 664 likes; 78	Total -196 192 likes &	Total -418 404 likes; 7	Total -269 258 likes;	Total -343 323 likes; 15	Total -264	Total -352

Likes	crying; 27 loves; 2 shocked & 1 laugh	4 loves	loves; 4 laugh; 2 shocked & 1 crying	10 loves & 1 shocked	loves; 2 shocked; 2 angry & 1 laughing	258 likes 6 loves	343 likes 9 loves
Account Queries	-	-	-	Can students open an account? Mr Price: must have permanent employment and be over 18.	-	-	Two consumers complain about Mr Price money account. No response has been made by Mr Price to date. How to open a Mr Price account? Mr Price: No response
Refund/Return Queries	-	-	Exchange of items? Mr Price: Tag or slip needs to be available on exchange within 30 days at any Mr Price store.	-	-	-	-
Career information	-	-	-	-	-	Email address for recruitment? Mr Price: provided the email address help@mrp.com	Job needed. Mr Price: link to job page
Modeling Queries	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Promotional Sales & Garment Information	-	-	Where can I get promotions advertised? Mr Price: promotional sales can be found online.	Item information requested. Mr Price: provided link to online store.	-	-	-
Lay-Bye	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Store Information	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Information	Acknowledging the passing of Bra Hugh. Many consumers expressed their condolences .	35 comments from entrants. Giving reasons why they should win the competition .	Validation period for a voucher? Mr Price: 36 months and anyone can use it. And explained how to apply online. Eight consumers complementing Mary J Blige dress.	-	The 35 comments were those of the eight consumers complaining.	Price of a Galaxy J1? Mr Price: visit the closest store. 1 other consumer tagged.	Three consumers asked if Mr Price is opening today? Mr Price: no response.

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table ten consists of seven posts which were taken collected from the 1st to the 23rd January 2018 and consisted of seven posts. There were five negative posts where consumers complained about a pathetic online service, where delivery was longer than promised by the brand. Mr Price responded requesting the consumers' contact details so that a care agent could contact them. Another consumer requested a refund, but Mr Price did not respond at all. Regarding the refund of undelivered items purchased online, because the brand was either out of stock or parcels were missing, there were eight women who shared the same sentiments and complained about being refunded with a voucher and not cash. Mr Price responded by providing information on the items, however consumers were not happy about the inconvenience of the online option.

Another consumer shared the experience of purchasing shoes from a Mr Price store, but they were two different sizes, the call agents were called seven times, countless calls to the brand and nine trips to the store and still no assistance. The Mr Price brand did not respond to this comment. The final negative comment was that consumers were not informed about the closure of a store on a national holiday. Mr Price responded by apologizing and informed the Mr Price team about the problem. The one positive comment was a consumer who suggested that Mr Price stock more small sizes. Mr Price responded with thanks for the feedback and stated that the information would be forwarded to the Mr Price team.

There was a total of 2,614 likes, comprising 2,442 likes, 78 loves, seven shocked, two angry, six laughing and 79 crying emojis.

There were three consumers who commented with account queries such as could students open an account. Mr Price responded that account holders had to be over 18 years of age and needed to be in permanent employment. The second comment was from two consumers complaining about their Mr Price Money Account, but has been no response made to these consumers by the Mr Price brand. The final comment was a consumer requesting information on how to open an account, Mr Price did not respond to the consumer.

There was one comment about the exchange of items. Mr Price responded that with a tag or a slip the items could be exchanged at any Mr Price store within thirty days of purchase. There were two comments which were career oriented. The first requested the e-mail address for Mr Price recruitment and this was provided by Mr Price. The second comment was by a consumer needing a job and Mr Price provided the link to the job site. There were no comments made about modelling.

There were two comments about promotional sales and garment information. The first one asked where promotional items could be purchased. Mr Price responded stating that all promotional items could be purchased online. Another consumer requested information about an item and Mr Price provided the link to the online store. There were no comments for lay-byes and store information.

The other information heading accumulated 87 comments, which were as follows: many consumers acknowledged the passing of a South African icon, Bra Hugh.

There were 35 comments made by entrants to a competition giving reasons why they thought they should win the competition. Mr Price, did not respond to any of these comments, maybe it was seen as not necessary.

A consumer asked how long gift vouchers were valid and Mr Price responded by stating that they were valid for 36 months, anyone could use them and a link to the online store for purchase of one was provided. There were also eight consumers who complimented the dress that over-seas star Mary J Blige was wearing. Mr Price did not respond to any of these. There were 35 comments from consumers complaining about online purchasing and expressing their experiences. Mr Price responded by asking for their contact details in order to rectify the problem.

A consumer requested the price of a cell phone and Mr Price responded by stating that the consumer should visit the nearest Mr Price store. There was one consumer who tagged another consumer to view the information on the post. Three consumers asked if Mr Price would be open on a public holiday, Mr Price responded no.

The posts in this month showed that there was active engagement between the brand and its consumers. Most of the comments received responses; however it is questionable how informative these responses were as often the consumer was simply directed to the online store for the information that they were seeking.

Fashion brands need to know the importance of adding value to their brand image and online shopping presence by growing their consumer-brand relationship on social media platforms (Siddiqui et al., 2003). Consumers engage with online shopping; webpages allow interaction between consumers and fashion items (McCormick & Livett, 2012). As was seen the online environment allows consumers to give their reactions and experiences. Consumers' attitudes towards online shopping are influenced by its functionality, experience and the social traits (McCormick & Livett, 2012). Through previous identified studies, a brand's website needs to include the ability to zoom and rotate products which are being viewed and there needs to be sufficient information around the product, for example on blogs, digital magazines and pages on social media, all of which contribute to better communication between the brand and its consumers and improve the brand's online branding (McCormick & Livett, 2012).

Table 11: MRP's Facebook Posts, February 2018

February 2018								
Post No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Date of Post	28 Feb 2018	26 Feb 2018	19 Feb 2018	18 Feb 2018	14 Feb 2018	04 Feb 2018	03 Feb 2018	01 Feb 2018
Positive/Negative Comments	-	<p><u>Negative</u> Consumer stated that there were only two styles of kiddies clothing available. Mr Price: link to available clothing online and matter sent to senior management.</p> <p><u>Positive:</u> Love MRP clothing, cannot wait to visit a store.</p>	<p><u>Negative</u> Complaint about black people only being searched at exit of Mr Price store. Mr Price: requested contact details so that area manager could contact her.</p> <p><u>Positive</u> Compliment given to the Mr Price brand. Mr Price: we love hearing from our fans.</p>	<p><u>Negative</u> Online shopping, consumer received two different shoe sizes. Mr Price: requested order number and directed matter to senior manager.</p>	-	-	-	<p><u>Positive</u> @mrp-fashion you are the best.</p> <p>Heart emojis.</p> <p>Mr Price rocks!</p>
Type of Likes	Total - 201196 likes; 4 loves & 1 sad face	Total – 179 179 likes	Total -311 301 likes & 10 loves	Total -272 266 likes; 5 loves & 1 shocked	Total - 270 266 likes; 3 loves & 1 shocked	Total -213 204 likes & 9 loves	Total - 578 567 likes & 11 loves	Total - 512 482 likes; 28 loves; 1 laugh & 1 crying
Account Queries	-	Opening of account. Mr Price: provided information about the requirements and link to online option.	-	Opening of account. Mr Price: provided information about the requirements and link to online option.	-	-	-	Query about payment and credit of account? Mr Price: provided account department details.

Refund/ Return Queries	-	-	-	-	Exchange of items? Mr Price: Tag or slip needs to be available on exchange within 30 days at any Mr Price store.	-	-	-
Career informati on	-	How to apply for jobs at Mr Price Mr Price: provided link to jobs advertised online.	-	How to apply for jobs at Mr Price? Mr Price: provided link to jobs advertised online.	-	-	-	-
Modell- ing Queries	-	Modelling opportunity? Mr Price: models are selected through modelling agencies.	Modelling opportunity? Mr Price: models are selected through modelling agencies.	-	-	-	-	-
Promotio nal Sales & Garment Informati on	-	-	Are there bigger garment sizes? Mr Price: provided link to items online.	Item information requested. Mr Price: provided link to online store. Where can I get promotions advertised? Mr Price: promotional sales can be found online.-	-	-	-	-
Lay-Bye	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Store Information	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Information	No comments on the post.	-	Does Mr Price respond? Mr Price: Yes, and link provided to online clothing.	Can one order from Zambia? Mr Price: Yes, link provided to online store.	-	No comments	Two consumers followed the post. Two people tagged other people to see the post.	Difficulty with delivery notification in the online app. Mr Price: provided info about how to rectify the problem.

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table eleven consists of eight posts from the 1st to the 28th February 2018, out of the eight posts there were three negative comments. These comments addressed the following. On promotional items there were only two styles available out of the five advertised and Mr Price forwarded the query to senior management and provided a link to the online store for available items. The second negative comment was a racial comment where a consumer pointed out that only black people were being searched at Mr Price stores. Mr Price requested contact details so that the area manager could contact the consumer. The third negative comment was a consumer who had received two different size shoes from an order placed online. Mr Price requested the order number and the matter was directed to the senior manager. Mr Price responded to all three of these negative comments. According to Wauters (2011) Facebook was a popular platform on which consumer-brand engagement could occur, as it was a market leader. Mr Price responding to the negative comments acknowledged that the incidents had occurred. This showed that communication could be seen as fairly good at that time.

There were three positive comments made by consumers. Firstly a consumer voiced love for the brand and could not wait to visit a store. However, there was no response from the Mr Price brand. Secondly, a compliment was given to the brand and Mr Price responded by stating that it loved hearing from fans. Finally, Mr Price fashion was tagged and the consumer expressed how the brand was the best, placing emojis. However no response was made by the brand.

From these eight posts there was a total of 2,538 likes. They included 2,461likes; 113 loves; one sad; two shocked; one laughing and one crying. It is evident that the majority of the consumers who interacted in these eight posts were happy with what they saw and engaged positively.

There were three comments made about account queries. Firstly, two of the comments were about how to open a Mr Price account and the brand responded by providing the consumer with the requirements and provided the link to get more information online. The third comment was about payment of an account and the available balance and Mr Price responded by providing the account department details. There was one comment made about the exchange of an item and here Mr Price responded stating that items could be exchanged within thirty days of purchase or if the consumer still had the tag of the item.

There were two comments about how to apply for jobs at Mr Price. Mr Price responded by providing the consumers with the link to the online job site. There were also two comments about modelling opportunities with the Mr Price brand and Mr Price responded stating that models were chosen from modelling agencies. Three comments were made about promotional sales and garment information, one of which asked if the item was available in bigger sizes. Mr Price responded by providing the link to the online store. The second comment requested more information about an item and Mr Price once again provided the consumer with a link to the online store. The third comment was about being able to purchase the promotional items advertised. The consumer was answered by the brand stating that all promotional sales could be found online.

There were no comments about lay-byes or store information in these eight posts. However, there were seven comments under the other information heading. Firstly, a consumer asked if Mr Price ever responds to posts and Mr Price responded positively and provided the link to the online store. Secondly, a consumer asked if one could order from Zambia and here again Mr Price responded in the affirmative and provided a link to the online store. Thirdly, two consumers followed the post and another two consumers tagged other people in the post to be able to view the information on the post. Mr Price did not respond to either of these interactions. Finally, a consumer complained about a difficulty with the online notification system

for delivery of items. Mr Price responded by providing the consumer with information on how to rectify the problem.

It was seen that during February there were both positive and negative interactions with the brand. Richins & Bloch (1991) state that consumers search for online word of mouth and often accept what is said, especially if it is negative, this is because other consumers' experiences are seen as viable, considering the lack of information and self-experience with a product or service offered by the brand. Brands need to be conscious that through engagement emotional bonds are developed with the consumer; therefore brands need to consider incorporating word of mouth to encourage active engagement with consumers (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). Active engagement can also be achieved by allowing consumers to engage in user-generated content and influence the overall image of the brand (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012).

Brand image is influenced by positive and negative perceptions about the brand; these perceptions are often shaped by consumers' experiences (Rui, 2008). Hence, both consumer service and personalisation are important aspects in driving brand image whether they are positive or negative perceptions about the brand; these perceptions are often shaped by consumers' experiences (Rui et al., 2008).

Consumers are not easily satisfied; they need to first make the decision to engage and then communicate their intended engagement by using the internet before they can fully satisfy their needs. It is therefore assumed that because of the effort a consumer needs to put in to gain gratification on the internet, compared to that of reading a newspaper or switching on the television, the internet will better gratify the needs of the consumer (Cumming, 2008). The above mentioned claims are well in-line with the first two elements of the Uses and Gratification model (assumption that consumers are active media users and they recognise the medium that best suits their needs) (Blumler & Katz, 1974) which are adopted in this study.

Table 12: Mr Price Facebook Post, March 2018

Post No.	1	2
Date of Post	30 March 2018	17 March 2018
Positive/Negative Comments	<u>Negative</u> : Complaint about the quality of the men's t-shirts. Mr Price: more info to be directed to help@mrp for investigation.	-
Type of Likes	Total - 237 230 likes; 5 shocked & 2 angry	Total -265 259 likes; 5 loves & 1 shocked
Account Queries	-	-
Refund/Return Queries	-	Exchange of item. Mr Price: Tag or slip needs to be available on exchange within 30 days at any Mr Price store.
Career information	How to apply for jobs at Mr Price? Mr Price: provided link to jobs advertised online.	-
Modeling Queries	-	-
Promotional Sales & Garment Information	Exchange of item? Mr Price: Tag or slip needs to be available on exchange.	-
Lay-Bye	-	Can one lay-bye at Mr Price? Mr Price: no lay-bye however Mr Price Money Account can be opened.
Store Information	-	-
Other Information	Store closing time? Mr Price: provided details requested. How to order online? Mr Price: provided step by step instructions.	Store closing time? Mr Price: provided details.

Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table twelve analysed two posts taken between the 17th and 30th March 2018, only two posts were analysed in the selected month. There was one negative comment which was posted and this was in the form of a complaint. A consumer complained about the quality of the Mr Price brand's clothing, specifically men's t-shirts. Mr Price responded by asking the consumer to send more information to the help@mrp email for an investigation to take place.

There was a total of 502 likes for these two posts, consisting of 489 likes, five loves, six shocked and two angry types of likes. Once again the consumers interacted rather positively with the brand. However there were consumers who did not perceive the brand positively. According to the basic argument from the Uses and Gratification theory, consumers use media platforms in order to fulfil a need for information around a specific subject of interest which ultimately leads to gratification (Lariscy et al., 2011). As negative interest was shown towards the brand through insufficient information that consumers received from the brand during the two posts analysed, consumers remained unsatisfied.

There were no account queries in these two posts. There were two queries about the exchange of garments. Mr Price responded to both, stating that items could be exchanged as long as there was a slip or a tag for the item and within thirty days. There was also one comment about how to apply for jobs at Mr Price and a link to the job site was provided. There were no modelling queries and no promotional sales and garment information comments. There was one comment regarding lay-byes and Mr Price responded stating that the brand did not have lay-byes, however a Mr Price Money Account could be opened.

Two comments were made regarding the opening time of Mr Price stores. Mr Price responded with the time stores open for both comments. There was one final comment under other information, a consumer wanted to know how to order online and Mr Price provided step-by step information to the consumer. These two posts received interaction from the Mr Price brand and there were no posts that were left without a response.

Interaction that occurs between brand and consumer in a virtual space is known to contribute to the shift consumers make from passive to active; this could be because brand and consumers are able to find common interest within the information which

is passed back and forth within these communities (Berthon et al., 2012). Hence, Facebook can be identified as a platform within virtual space, which allows for the formation of a community. The Mr Price brand is found in this virtual space, and is identifiable to the consumer; this allows consumers to share opinions, interests and lifestyle choices around the brand more freely (Miller & Lammas, 2010).

In the 2016 Annual Integrated Report, the Mr Price group Limited stated that it engaged with consumers in order to increase long-term loyalty and enhance the Mr Price brand. Mr Price engaged with its consumers through online interaction, traditional and social media, advertisements and competitions, live chats on e-commerce sites, mystery shopper programmes and feedback from partners in foreign markets.

Through consumers' interaction with the brand, the brand's stories are created, shared and consumed. All the interaction allows other consumers to view the experiences and gain insight into the brand's value. Therefore consumers are a very active factor in the creation of a brand's culture (Holt, 2003a). Consumers interact with the Mr Price brand by commenting and sharing posts. Through this action interaction occurs between brand and consumer, as well as between consumer and consumer who wish to associate themselves with the brand.

Social media allows for interactions, collaborations and sharing of content (Richter & Koch, 2007). Through the interaction created on social media, the traditional roles of brand and consumer have changed (Sashi, 2012). Consumers' views add value to a brand by generating content and being able to influence the purchase decisions of other consumers (Sashi, 2012).

Table 13: Mr Price Facebook Post, April 2018

Post No.	1	2	3	4
Date of Post	20 April 2018	18 April 2018	13 April 2018	03 April 2018
Positive/Negative Comments	-	<u>Positive</u> Mr Price was tagged by a consumer #ootd #mrpf #mrpmystyle.	-	-
Type of Likes	Total - 211 200 likes & 11 loves	Total -211 200 likes & 11 loves	Total -71 65 likes; 4 shocked; 2 loves; 1 excited	Total -246 236 likes; 9 loves & 1 shocked

Account Queries	How to open an account? Mr Price: provided information about requirements and link to online option.	Assistance needed with cancelation of insurance? Mr Price: assisted with contact details of relevant department.	Opening of account. Mr Price: provided information about the requirements and link to online option.	How to pay account? Mr Price: Provided contact details for appropriate person. Opening of account. Mr Price: provided information about the requirements and link to online option.
Refund/Return Queries	-	-	-	Can items be returned if slip has been emailed? Mr Price: Yes, it can be changed at any Mr Price store.
Career information	How to apply for jobs at Mr Price? Mr Price: provided link to jobs advertised online.	-	-	-
Modelling Queries	-	-	-	Modelling opportunity? Mr Price: models are selected through modelling agencies.
Promotional Sales & Garment Information	Where to purchase garment? Mr Price: provided nearest store and provided link to online store.	Where to purchase piece of jewellery? Mr Price: provided link to online store for requested jewellery.	Query for item. Mr Price: provided item number and suggested looking at closest store. Availability of stock for a certain item. Mr Price: no response	Price of items? Mr Price: link provided to online store.
Lay-Bye	Can one lay-bye at Mr Price? Mr Price: no lay-bye however MRP Money Account can be opened.	-	-	-
Store Information	Looking for clear-out store in JHB? Mr Price: provided nearest store location.	-	-	-
Other Information	Query about online store, from consumer	-	-	Joke made about size of Mr Price

	experiencing a problem. Mr Price: forward message to correct department and apologised.			clothing. (China sizes). Mr Price: no response.
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Source: Mr Price Facebook Page, 2018

Table thirteen comprises of four posts taken from the 3rd and 20th of the month were chosen. From these four posts there was one positive comment which was added by a consumer. The positive comment was in the form of a tag in a consumer's post using the hashtag's outfit of the day, MRP fashion and MRP my style. This comment contributed to the brand's user-generated content, meaning that this particular consumer engaged with the brand by advertising the garments which were purchased from the brand (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012). The consumer's engagement with the brand through user-generated content indicates that the consumer is active with communicating with the brand and that he/she is able to express him/herself (Liu-Thompkins & Rogerson, 2012). Consumers who liked the Mr Price Facebook page were able to see this information as well as the friends of this particular consumer. However, the Mr Price brand did not respond to the client.

For these four posts there were 739 likes, consisting of 701 likes, 33 loves, five shocked and one excited. This showed that the consumers in these posts engaged with the content and were satisfied with the information and that consumers interacted with the Mr Price brand on its Facebook page.

There were comments regarding account enquires in all four of the selected posts. The posts required information as to how to open a Mr Price account, how to cancel insurance and why an application to open an account was declined. The Mr Price brand provided consumers with a link to the online store where consumers were able to obtain more information pertaining to the requirements and process of opening an account. This was viewed as active communication between the two entities. However, although the brand provided consumers with information, it could not guarantee that consumers were able to understand the information placed there without an actual person engaging with them.

There was one comment requiring information about a return and the Mr Price brand responded by saying that garments could be returned to any store provided that the sales slip was available. There was also only one comment out of the four selected requiring information about applying for a job and the Mr Price brand responded by providing the consumer with a link to the online job site, where the consumer would be able to browse current job vacancies. There was one comment requesting information about modelling opportunities and here the Mr Price brand responded stating that models were chosen through modelling agencies.

There were comments in all four posts, requesting more information about promotions and garments for sale. These comments included how to purchase specific advertised garments, the availability of a selected garment and the price of an item. Out of the five comments collected from the four posts, the Mr Price brand responded to four of them by providing the link to the Mr Price online store for more information, but one of the posts did not receive a response.

There was one comment which was geared towards being able to lay-by at the Mr Price store. The Mr Price brand responded that they did not do lay-byes, however the consumer could consider opening a Mr Price Money Account which could assist with the purchasing of garments. There was only one comment regarding store information, where the consumer needed details of a clear-out store in Johannesburg. Mr Price responded by providing the details of the nearest store.

The final two comments fell under the other information heading. The first was of a bad experience, where a consumer had experienced a problem with the online store process. The Mr Price brand responded by apologising and forwarding the message to the online store department. Here the Mr Price brand image could be seen as trustworthy, as it assisted a consumer who had had a bad experience with the brand. However, the trustworthiness was questionable when there was no response to the second comment which was made around the sizes of the Mr Price brand not being that of a 'South African' nature.

The overall interaction between brand and consumer in these four posts could be viewed as good. The brand seemed to have attempted to respond to all questions and queries put forward by the consumers.

Conclusion

The Mr Price Facebook page has evidence of active engagement and interaction between the brand and its consumers; this occurs through the daily posts which were placed on the Facebook page. However, there were a number of posts identified by the researcher to which the brand had not, at the time of the research, responded to some of the questions and opinions made by its consumers. Nevertheless brand communication on Facebook was effective in that the advertisements were able to reach consumers more timeously and could reach consumers anywhere in South Africa.

There were complaints about the brand online store, where time and effectiveness were scrutinized; consumers complained about the amount of time deliveries had taken as well as the fact that consumers had experienced receiving the incorrect items or the wrong sizes and often they battled to receive a refund from Mr Price.

However as identified in the four themes of this research, it was evident through theme one that Mr Price does have an effective Facebook page as well as an effective website. Consumers often had their questions or complaints directed to the Mr Price website and from the information found on the site, questions and concerns can be answered.

Theme two showed that there is communication which occurs between the brand and its consumers. Most of the comments were answered by Mr Price. Theme three proved that the use of hashtags increases the engagement between a brand and the consumer. Through the use of #mrpmystle there was content posted by the consumer and as a result there was engagement created through the hashtag.

Theme four was the heart of this thesis, through critical and comprehensive analysis of the seventy posts; the engagement was unpacked and detailed; in order to prove the effectiveness of using Facebook as a communication tool between a brand and their consumer.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter gives a summary of the research findings, conclusions and recommendations for effective brand communication through social media platforms (i.e. Facebook). This research study analysed seventy posts from the Mr Price Facebook page, over a one year period (01 May 2017 to 30 April 2018). Following the research, the chapter seeks to provide a way forward for effective brand communication on Facebook by considering the challenges that consumers faced during the interaction and engagement on a brand's Facebook page.

Summary of Research Findings

The research study revealed that there was active consumer-brand engagement and interaction on the Mr Price Facebook page. Ultimately, consumers had a good understanding of how to use the Facebook platform towards brand enjoyment. The study further revealed that although Mr Price posted on a daily basis, there was still a lack of responses from the Mr Price brand. There were a few comments questioning whether Mr Price responded or not, so that those consumers were already questioning the value of the brand's image through Facebook.

However, the majority of the posts analysed revealed that Mr Price did respond to consumers' comments, either by commenting (physically providing an answer) or providing a link to their online store or website. Although Mr Price provided consumers with a link, their approach to answering certain questions, opinions or experiences posted by the consumers could improve. An example taken from this study showed that when a comment made by a consumer was negative in nature (i.e. receiving the wrong item when purchasing online or being charged for an insurance policy that the consumer did not agree to) there was often no response from Mr Price. Hence, brands should answer such comments directly, so that the

brand's image on social networks is seen as loyal and responsive. Direct engagement has the potential to add value to a brand's communication thereby increasing brand loyalty and bettering brand equity.

Concluding Remarks

Most of the posts which were evaluated in this study showed that there was interaction between the Mr Price brand and its consumers. However, there was a small minority of consumers who were dissatisfied with their experience with the brand and the manner in which the Mr Price brand approached their comments could be more considered in order for the brand's image to represent brand value and brand loyalty.

The main focus of this research study was to gain an understanding of how brands could use social media platforms to engage and interact with their consumers and how this could better consumer-brand relationships. Identifying challenges during the use of Facebook can give insight into the type of factors brands need to consider when engaging with consumers through social media (i.e. Facebook).

Recommendations

In this research the causes and nature of brand communication on a social media platform (Facebook) and what it implied for the Mr Price brand image was analysed. The brand communication between Mr Price and its consumers cannot be understood if the platform (Facebook) on which the study was completed is not understood. Facebook as a communication tool, used effectively can increase brand value and increase a consumer's loyalty to a brand.

It can therefore be recommended that in order to get a more accurate result the study could be made of the people who received no responses and how this affected the loyalty of those particular consumers.

Conclusion

This research study was about the importance of social media as a communication tool. The literature review presented was in support of branding on social media. The literature also looked at brand communication and brand identity and how the effective use of Facebook as a communication tool could assist in the growth of the consumer-brand relationship. There is one evident conclusion which is drawn from this research study and that is that a brand's presence in terms of responding to the comments (both positive and negative) on their Facebook page shows, in the experience of its consumers, how trustworthy and loyal a brand is. This places a great emphasis on how well a brand's image is perceived not only by its consumers, but to potential consumers as well.

This study took place in digital space where there are no boundaries of language, race or gender. It is crucial that brands treat every interaction (like, share or comment) as crucial. The lack of responses to consumers who take the time to engage with brands on this platform, which is provided to assist in communication, means that brands are not effectively using this tool. It could be because branding on social media is still new and there are no specific jobs catering for this need. Although brand management and social media jobs are available, they are often purely to manage the site and put out the messages, advertisements and information that the brand wishes to disseminate to its consumers. However, Mr Price needs to be aware of what the social media space can mean for the brand, it should turn its focus to new strategies of addressing comments, specifically when they are negative such as wrong garments being delivered from orders placed online.

The Mr Price brand often did not respond to consumers who expressed their disappointments in the brand and because the Mr Price brand did not address these situations head on and be accountable for its actions, it puts doubt into many consumers' minds about how trustworthy the brand is, specifically their e-commerce dealings. Hence, the brand image and overall sales-generated through its e-commerce site could negatively impact the brand.

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