ADAPTING TO THE TIMES:

EXPLORING SOCIAL MEDIA USE DECISION-MAKING BY SMALL BUSINESSES

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores decision-making factors regarding social media use by small businesses in the Texas Panhandle. Limited studies have been conducted in the area of small business social media use decision-making. Common studies include large business social media efforts, however, limited research has been done to identify what factors drive small businesses to use social media. This research is important because the number of small businesses that are opting to use social media as their main marketing tool are increasing. Eight participants were selected to participate in this study using purposive sampling. Data included a pre-interview questionnaire and face-to-face in-depth interviews. Each in-depth conversation asked questions about factors that contribute to small business social media use decision-making. Using inductive analysis, themes were established and analyzed. Decision-making theory was used in this study and served as the framework for data analysis. The three themes found are: resources, branding, and return on investment. In addition, sub-themes were identified and assisted in developing dominate themes and resulted in a better understanding of what factors drive small businesses to use social media.

Keywords: social media, decision-making, small business, qualitative

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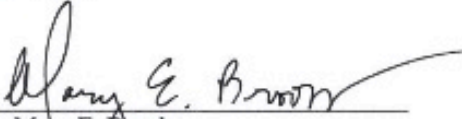
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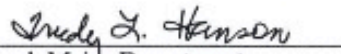
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The various social media channels we come in contact with have influence over our choices as consumer. Social media are means of communication for business owners, consumers and employees. Having social media at the tip of our fingers can help us connect to others instantly and create networks among people with common interests. Social media also make finding business information easy and accessible, as well as connecting the consumers to businesses immediately.

Social media allow consumers to grow a business's online presence. A small business can use consumer interaction as a factor within its decision-making. With development in social media over the past five years, a new position has worked its way into businesses. Commonly known as a social media manager or social media specialist, this position has become a crucial role in social media marketing. In large companies, an entire team might be devoted to operating different social media platforms. Small businesses however, are overlooked for their inventive use of social media to grow their network. Research in the area of social media use influences within small businesses is minimal. This study seeks to explore what factors influence small businesses decisions about social media communication.

Diverse social media platforms have developed over the past two decades. Originally developed strictly social use, these platforms soon took on different roles such as marketing, industry information sharing, and tools for growing consumer networks.

Common platforms used include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Each platform serves a specific purpose for the business and consumer. Existing research indicates using social media is a common marketing strategy for businesses (Brink, 2017). Although many small businesses have a digital presence, Brink (2017) suggests a lack of innovation in social media use challenges small business owners and managers. Social media can be a means for small businesses to market their brand and create conversation between businesses and consumers.

Small businesses are increasingly growing in numbers and will continue to create job opportunities each year in the United States. The Small Business Administration (SBA) defines small businesses as an "independent business having fewer than 500 employees" (2012, p.4), which represents a broad spectrum of businesses to narrow down. This thesis researches small business based in a local community to better understand how small business make social media decisions, and how social media can connect the business to their followers. Many small businesses already utilize social media to market their business.

According to Brink (2017) social media marketing can be considered an important part of a business's return on investment (ROI). Hiring a social media manager to oversee the business's social media platforms might be an important investment for small business owners. Research shows that larger companies employ a team of social media specialists to make decisions for their online communication. Conversely small businesses might not have the economic capability to employ an entire team or one person specifically to run their social media. A lack of information about social media decision-making is the main concern for this research. In addition, "social media application is evolving relatively slowly in business to business (B2B) small-medium

enterprises (SME)" which creates a knowledge gap of understanding the area of social media in small businesses (Brink, 2017, p. 57). The thesis seeks to fill in the gap by exploring small business social media decision-making.

Rationale

Research is emerging concerning the area of small businesses and their social media habits. I am interested in studying social media use growth in small businesses because I have experienced employment where there are fewer than 10 people on staff, yet these people run the day-to-day operations and most hold multiple job titles. Through my experiences working in these multiple roles, social media play a major role in the growth of customer interaction. Social media are in a constant stage of change. What might be popular this month might change the next.

Social media comprise multiple platforms in which consumers interact with or search for information regarding a business's interests, network, and community awareness. It is important that as the next generation of consumers increases its spending in small/local businesses, that business owners understand their consumers both face-to-face, and through digital communication. According to Kristie Spring, small business promoter whose efforts strive to keep small businesses alive, "every $100 spent at a locally owned business, $48 stays in the local economy, enriching the whole community" (Spring, 2018, para. 4). Maintaining interaction with consumer audiences invests in the interest of the business.

Additionally, I am a part of a generation that uses social media to find anything and everything. Millennials are an important factor for future research in this emerging area of social media use by small businesses. According to de Wazeres, (as cited in Alsop, 2008), director of international recruitment for Paris based L'Oreal, millennials are a generation of diversity. De Wazeres claims the millennial generation "will be a gold

mine of talent for L'Oreal because they are such a good fit with our emphasis on innovation, creativity, open-mindedness and entrepreneurial spirit" (p.8). The millennial generation is facing struggles with their roles in the work force. Conflicting with past generational outlooks, millennials tend to feel frustrated that modern trends are being passed over due to businesses not wanting to adapt (Dimock, 2018).

Another consideration is how prominent social media are in the daily lives of community members. While searching through notifications in my current position, similar networks of people are commenting, liking, and tagging their friends on posts and photos. The consumer network lays in the hands of the future generations. A shift towards social media as a prominent channel of communication means adaptation for the success of small business prosperity.

Theory of Decision-Making

The theory of decision-making (Janis & Mann, 1980) first studied in behavioral sciences aims to "rationalize decision making" (Janis & Mann, 1980, p. 202). Decision-making theory (DMT) evaluates the process of factors taken in to consideration and steps taken to rationalize consequences associated with decisions. DMT has been applied to other areas of studies including, "economics, social sciences, ecologists, psychology researchers" and sports medicine (Renfree, Martin, Micklewright, Gibson, 2014, p. 148). There has been limited exploration of hose small businesses use social media leaving a gap in the field.

Research Question

As social media continue to evolve over time, this study aims to research and create discussion about effective social media use decision-making within small businesses. In order to open the door for future studies, there needs to be an

understanding of current viewpoints regarding social media in small businesses, leading me to explore the following research question:

RQ: What factors drive small business decisions to use social media?

Method

To answer the research question, this research study is based on qualitative data collected in the spring of 2019. The study was approved by West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) Institutional Review Board (IRB). For the purpose of collecting demographic data, questionnaires were distributed to small business owners, managers, or social media managers, who agreed to participate in the study. In addition to the questionnaire, participants were asked to take part in a face-to-face interview to respond to open-ended questions about their social media platforms. Participants were business owners, managers or social media specialists at small businesses in the Panhandle area. Participating businesses had a chance at winning an incentive for their participation in the study. At the end of the study, each participant was put in a drawing for a chance to win a WTAMU gift basket valued at $130.

Questionnaire. The researcher contacted small businesses with a pre-interview questionnaire distributed through email with approval from WTAMU IRB. The questionnaire created through Qualtrics, asked demographic questions, business information and basic social media coverage, the pre-interview questionnaire assisted in removing closed-ended questions prior to the interview process.

Interview. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with small business owners, managers, and/or social media managers, to better understand their use of social media. Eight interviews were conducted with participants in various locations. Within the interviews, participants were asked to answer semi-structured, open-ended questions.

These questions were chosen for the purpose of this study because it allowed guidance to frame specific questions in regard to small businesses and learn about their decision-making based on social media trends. The interview consisted of the researcher asking questions regarding social media, what types of content were frequently seen in social media, what information the small business is seeking, and other questions related to the topic. After completing the interviews, the audio device was used to upload files to *TranscribeMe!* an online program used to transcribe audio files. After transcription was complete, the researcher analyzed the data in order to establish emerging themes.

Chapter Summary

Social media have evolved from being strictly a social platform to social network, allowing businesses, political figures, and other recognizable figures to join the conversation. Although small businesses have the support of stakeholders, their traditional views might not be understood as a form of social media marketing. It is important that businesses and community members understand how they can develop using social media marketing. Results from this thesis, will show small businesses decision-making involving social media use and offer results to best answer the research question.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media platforms have been created for the general public as a means of communication. Social media have grown into a worldwide network that connects businesses and consumers alike.

Social media are seen in various forms with notifications constantly flooding our devices so it is inescapable to refrain from being on them. Social media is defined as "a sum of online communication channels based on content sharing for a specific community, interaction, dialogue and collaboration" (Petruca 2016, p. 390). According to Threlfall (2018), Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are the most used platforms worldwide. Although research might identify other social media platforms used, it is useful to review the success of the top three social media platforms and describe each of the platform demographics.

History of Social Media

In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg changed social media forever by creating Facebook and making most predecessors obsolete. As of January 2018, 68% percent of U.S adults are Facebook users (Smith & Anderson, 2018). "By 2006, Facebook and Twitter both became available to users throughout the world. These sites remain some of the most popular social networks on the Internet" (Hendricks, 2013, para. 11). Twitter also sees 335 million daily active users worldwide and increased its character limit in 2017 (Zephoria, 2018). Instagram, another popular social media platform, is mainly mobile-

based allowing users to share information via photo-based content and is most popular among 18-24 age range (Smith & Anderson, 2018). In the early stages social media were used for sharing, interacting, and identifying with friends. It continues to serve this purpose but for most people it acts as a networking and news platform. According to Facebook research, in the third quarter of 2018 there were over two million monthly active users. Facebook is already used by a large majority of Americans from various demographic areas (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Increased exposure to social media is leading to higher rates of younger children and older adults joining social media.

The extent of social media use has spread to a wide variety of consumers with vast demographics enabling many people to browse a business on Facebook. Lapidus (2014) defines social media managers as people who "engage users by personally closing the loop in received communication and then later proactively communicating" (para 12). Although Lapidus was referring to a social media manager for a radio station this also broadly defines the essential position of a social media manager. Although social media managers might not be present in every business, many businesses have social media platforms that someone oversees.

Social Media

Riley Panko (2017) writes about the recent results of a small business survey conducted by Clutch which is a marketing firm for businesses. Their survey included companies with 10 or fewer employees, up to businesses with 500 employees (para. 3). Clutch found, "24% of small businesses have no social media presence, and 90% of small businesses who use social media use Facebook," and half of those companies who are on social media rely on in-house staff for social media marketing (Panko, 2017, para. 4). While social media are used as a communication channel, small businesses initiate the communication between users with creative content.

The use of mobile devices has increased access to social media worldwide. Facebook, which is the leading social media platform, is in competition with other platforms that appeal to a narrower percentage of the population (Smith & Anderson, 2018). In comparison to Facebook, Instagram has increased their adult users since 2015 as well. However, Instagram continues to increase through the young adult population ages 18-29 partly because of its visual appeal. Twitter also ranks as one of the top platforms as 90% of Facebook users also use Twitter (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Social media allow a two-way communication between businesses and consumers to gather information and build relationships.

Facebook. The number one social media platform used today is Facebook. Facebook is known as a social networking platform which allows users to communicate informally with others and network with people who have similar interests (Office of Public Health Preparedness, 2018). With over one billion user accounts Facebook has expanded its generational use. Smartphones have also exploded in growth over the past decade. With that, applications available for download have increased with "roughly two billion smartphones … in use in the world and 85% of smartphone owners use the Facebook app" (Dogtiev, 2018, para. 3). While Facebook is seeing growth in all age usage the largest percentage of users are between the ages of 18 and 35 years old. According to Dogtiev (2018), the most frequent users are within the millennial age group represented by people 22 to 37 years old. Generation X is represented from ages 38 to 53, Baby Boomers are ages 54-72, and Silent Age is ages 73-90. The newest generation, Generation Z is younger than 21. The average "United States user is spending about 35 minutes on Facebook a day," which does not allow much time for small business profiles to be seen (para. 8).

Facebook is a free service available to any user with access to the Internet which allows small businesses to market to a variety of network groups. Although the app is free, Facebook offers advertising and other services to businesses for a fee. With Facebook being the most commonly used social media platform worldwide, small businesses could benefit from the exposure of their business on this site.

Instagram. Emerging in the top three social media platform, Instagram is known as a photo sharing network where users can share photos either publicly or privately. The application first launched in October of 2010. Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger had met while participating in a Stanford University Mayfield Fellows program which educated students in successful and failed start-ups (Chafkin, 2011).

Instagram is able to link to Facebook and Twitter to share the same photo content which is unlike any other social media platform. Instagram also allows users to create a "story" which acts as a quick snippet for shared information. Quick, easily identifiable information is most popular to millennials; in fact, according to Facebook statistics, "Instagram is dominated by users under the age of 35" and as of June 2018 "has more than one billion monthly active users." Instagram is a mobile driven application. Users can access the platform by personal computer; however, posting is only available on a mobile phone unless posting from a social media software platform. Instagram is best for the ability to posting eye-catching photos with a caption. In addition, businesses can post flyers with minimal information on Instagram to attract interest. The platform allows users to create and attach hashtags within their content which makes for an easy search engine for businesses to gain followers. Although Instagram demographics reflect more users are under the age of 35, many businesses are sharing their photos via Instagram to gain a network of users to follow and like their photos.

Twitter. Twitter launched the short format site in 2006 after much thought and redesign of the social media platform. Former Google employees Evan Williams and Biz Stone worked to develop a short message service (sms) via mobile phone or through personal computers. An average of 36% of Americans ages 18-29 years old are Twitter users and 42% of Twitter users go online every day (Pew Research Center, 2016). Newberry (2018) states that 80% of Twitter users are affluent millennials. Millennials are already using Twitter as a means of communication.

Unlike other social media platforms, Twitter is based on the concept of brevity or micro-blogging. With an original 140-character limit, Twitter posts have to "be concise and enticing to elicit any response from followers" (Dally, 2013, p.79). In 2017, the character limit doubled to 280. Tweeting is compared to posting on Facebook and Instagram but with more emphasis on brevity. The shortened format tweet usually links to a longer news story to provide further information about the topic. Twitter also allows users to search for news stories and recent events using hashtags or the trending page.

Creating and utilizing a hashtag can be used to promote a business's story or recent information. Tweets can also be links to relevant articles or stories about the business industry. Having access to more than one social medium platform allows business to appeal to a variety of target audiences.

Small Business

According to the Census Bureau's *Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs*, in 2016 "there were 5.6 million employer firms in the U.S" (Small Business & Entrepreneurship, 2018, para. 1). The SBA (2012) defines a small business as an "independent business having fewer than 500 employees" (p.4). In addition, the Census Bureau found that "firms with fewer than 20 employees made up 89.0 percent" of jobs in the U.S. (Small Business & Entrepreneurship, 2018, para. 2). The 2018 *Small Business Profile of the*

United States stated that "small businesses created 1.9 million net jobs in 2015" (Small

Business & Entrepreneurship, 2018, para.7). Threlfall (2018) suggests small businesses

are opting to select social media platforms to develop growth in their business. He further

provides criteria in which small businesses select platforms based on their usage. The

criteria include "cost, popularity or reach, audience suitability, features, ease of use and

geographical targeting" (Threlfall, 2018, para.4). Small businesses must also understand

their demographic users to select which platforms work best in their industry. For

example, using the insights feature on social media platforms allows for the account

administrator to decide what time, to whom, and what type of posts their users are

responding to best.

Branding

Branding a business is crucial to the values, morals and principles that relate to

the product(s) being sold. People tend to support businesses that are credible, produce

products from their home countries, and support people's moral values; in other words,

people trust in buying brands (Eggers, O'Dwyer, Kraus, Vallaster, & Güldenberg, 2017).

Small businesses that decide to showcase their brand, via social media, might have a

better business-to-consumer communication channel.

It is a necessity for small businesses to use social media to gain "valuable

feedback" from customers such as reviews, comments, and other interactions (Panko,

2017, para. 16). Feedback will also "improve effectiveness of marketing" and define the

target audience (Panko, 2017, para. 16). Small businesses might decide to use branding to

promote feedback through social media platforms. With current social media tools small

businesses can market their products with ease. For example, on Instagram with a

business profile and paying a small fee, businesses can post a photo of a product and link

the online purchase site directly to the photo and within seconds a consumer can purchase

their product. Another example is hosting a product giveaway using the like, comment, and share capabilities to increase profile activity.

Herbert (2011) acknowledges that branding is not "about design, value proposition or positioning statement, branding occurs when the consumer is in the buying process" (para. 5). Faust and Householder (2009) state that "authentic brands are built from the inside out versus one that panders to the latest trend, fad, or customer segment" (p.47). When speaking with a manager of a local business, their recommendation about business branding is to:

> keep it consistent by producing branding guidelines for all content produced via Photoshop, printing, official paper records. It is easier for people to see a brand once and put a name with it than it will be to rebrand, and people wonder where that business went. (personal communication, August 2017)

Branding efforts on social media platforms can either drive consumers to purchase or cause them to hesitate due to a lack of cohesiveness.

It is important to have a trustworthy brand, a brand that consumers are able to rely on to be consistent with their mission statement (Eggers, O'Dwyer, Kraus, Vallaster, & Güldenberg, 2013). Social media can be an asset to a business using language that promotes trust and honesty from their brand.

Experiential Marketing

Experiential marketing is seen in both business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) networks. Consumers are likely to share experiences amongst close family and friends. Experiential marketing allows the consumer to share their experiences with businesses which hope for positive feedback. The concept of experiential marketing refers to strategies that create offerings for the purpose of facilitating extraordinary customer experiences (Österle, Kuhn, & Henseler, 2018). Experiential marketing can

create a unique experience for the consumer, one in which the consumer feels inclined to share via social media. While experiential marketing is seen as the consumers' experiences during their visit to a business, it can also relate to how consumers communicate their experience on social media platforms. For example, Facebook users can review a business by either recommending or not recommending them which is a recent update in 2019 straying from previous star ratings. On Instagram users can search photos of products or business environments posted by the small business or from previous customers. Twitter allows users to browse the profile and learn about blogs or articles written by the business or relative information using a hashtag search. A consumer experience during a visit to a business can either hurt or help the business if the consumer decided to leave a review on their social media platform.

Social media are encompassed in experiential marketing. Posting, likes, and commenting can indicate a consumer's experience at the business. Poulsson and Kale (2004) define an experience as "a product that does something to you (entertain, educate, or engage), and what you typically walk away with is a memory of the encounter" (p. 271). Social media platforms can sufficiently entertain, educate, and engage consumers enough to drive them to visit the business and purchase products.

Business-to-Business

Business-to-business (B2B) companies are those that serve or target their products to fulfill other businesses in need of products or merchandise (Swayne & Dodds, 2011). B2B is defined as "marketing by a business aimed at other organizations" (Swayne & Dodds, 2011, section B, para 1). B2B companies produce goods for various other businesses and innovations for businesses. It is more difficult to understand the necessity of social media for B2B companies but recently, studies have shown that B2B companies are engaging more in social media to learn about their products, partnership and revenue

needs (Jussila, Karkkainen & Aramo-Immonen, 2013). Pick (2015) defends the

essentialism of social media stating, "social media accounts are like seat belts; they're

only effective if you actually use them" (para. 2). Social media is essential to B2B

companies as a means of marketing. B2B companies produce goods, distribute, and fulfill

the needs for business industries framing communication practices as more direct. B2B

companies often find that the purchase of a product is decided upon based off company

policy, rules and usefulness (Swanye & Dodds, 2011). According to Jussila et al. (2013)

the overall platform for B2B is research and innovation of the products and "more focus

is on the physical performance and personal selling" rather than emphasizing the products

on social media platforms to a smaller sample of the population (p. 607). Although B2B

companies are usually expected to be larger in size, two participants in this study can be

categorized as a B2B rather than B2C.

Business-to-Consumer

Business-to-consumer (B2C) companies are those that directly sell their

product(s) to public consumers (Swayne & Dodds, 2011). B2C vary in size and industries

from fast food to agriculture. Most B2C companies target wide audiences selling

products that are useful to the average person. For example, B2C companies might target

a larger demographic by using social media as a tool to market the product. Friends,

family and influencers may also play a part in the individual's decision to purchase a

certain product (Swayne & Dodds, 2011). While B2C companies sell products to

consumers, they rely on consumer feedback and interaction to spread the message about

the product. Known as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) social media is a hub for

eWOM and B2C companies. Research shows that "users prefer to interact with small

business owners through personal messages" which is a form of eWOM and connects the

consumer directly to the businesses profile (Kwok & Yu, 2013, p. 86).

One of the challenges for a small business B2C company, is the lack of financial resources available to hire an employee to monitor social media platforms. Although social media is trending for small business eWOM, it is a challenge for B2C companies as they are then required to learn, or decide to learn, how to effectively communicate with consumers while maintaining brand language via social media. (Kowk & Yu, 2013). The majority of participants in this study are considered B2C companies and discuss eWOM on social media.

Decision-Making Theory

Decision-making theory has been used by many theorists in diverse areas of research. Decision-making theory provides a framework for this study becuase it creates a connection between business employees and social media.

Herbert Simon (1977) reflected on community activities which intrigued Simon to begin the study of decision-making (Pomerol & Adam, 2004). The goal of Simon's research was to "understand organizations and their management as an aggregate of human choices" (Simon as cited in Pomerol & Adam, 2004, p. 648). Simon then began to decipher whether decisions were based on values or facts; discovering that problems cannot be represented as solely factual (Pomerol & Adam, 2004). Values, thus, play a critical role in the decision-making process; many businesses have their own set of values that seeks to best fit their brand.

Simon observed that decision makers can have multiple "contradictory objectives in mind" (Pomerol & Adam, 2004, p. 649). Simon addressed the foundation for decision-making with three laws; identify all the possible alternatives, determine all the possible consequences of alternatives, evaluate all the possible consequences. For example, an alternative could be using one platform more heavily compared to another and a consequence for that alternative is the missed target market. Evaluating the consequence

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can determine how to target the audience missed by not marketing as heavily on one platform. According to Simon attention, information, and stress are factors of cognitive decision-making, which can be seen through the decision-making process (Pomerol & Adam, 2004). Simon further explores distinction between objectives and decisions.

Objectives are evaluated usually by the operating manager as a set relationship of data that can provide means to determine how the objective meets their needs. Decisions can be viewed as "multicriterion and changeable, meaning that it is impossible to spell out an overall utility function for a given choice" (Pomerol & Adam, 2004, p. 650). Decision-making can incorporate both values and facts used to strategize towards a planned goal. Small businesses may find themselves monitoring social media to better "understand what the data gathered mean and making decisions about whether and how and when to respond to online activity" (Parsons & White, 2018, p.82). Since the adoption of social media platform in the business setting, both B2B and B2C depend on this form of communication.

Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga (2010) discuss three elements of effective social media implementation which help determine why small businesses opt to use certain social media platforms. The first is mindful adoption decisions when a business carefully researches platforms and who else is using the platform. Culnan et al. (2010) suggest five elements that are represented in mindful adoption decisions including "making good decision about which platforms to adopt and how they should be used, assigning responsibility for the governance, identifying metrics to measure value, making sure all applications are readily accessible, and manage risks" (p. 247). Being mindful about which social media platform to adopt can reflect small business' attention to target audience.

The second element is community building, or the connection that social media brings to the community and its members. Culnan et al. (2010) recommend that in order to build a community or build a following of people a business needs to provide content: "without a continual supply of compelling content, there is no reason for people to visit an organization's social media site" (p. 247). The decision to build an online community means the addition of content value for the platforms to attract other businesses and members to the page. The third element suggests that social media acts as a means of communication whereas the communication model represents how a message is delivered from the sender to the receiver. The communication model begins with the sender whose role is to plan, encode and transmit a message to the receiver through the communication channel. While the message is being transmitted noise barriers can affect how the message arrives to the receiver. Once the receiver gets the message, their role is to receive, decode, and interpret the message. After the receiver fulfills their role, a message in the form of feedback is sent back to the sender. The entire process can be seen as a never-ending circle of communication. Culnan et al. (2010) suggest businesses should appoint employee(s) to be on the receiving end of the message and make decisions regarding the next step in the communication transaction. An example of a decision is replying to a message: does the sender need to be contacted back and if so, in what manner? In many businesses the employee is directed to respond to the sender and provide assistance or direction for the sender to seek additional information.

As social media marketing is essential to the success for small businesses, it can be challenging without assistance (Parsons & White, 2018). The goal of this thesis is to add to the decision-making theory within the context of small businesses social media use.

Chapter Summary

Education of social media use in small businesses can be beneficial in multiple aspects. However, before education and suggestions can be made, one needs to understand the use of current social media practices within these small businesses. With limited research of social media in small businesses with 50 or fewer employees, understanding is restricted to information collected from large firms. By exploring and analyzing information already understood this research can provide recommendations for small businesses in the area of small business, social media use decision-making. In-depth communication is a great way to understand and provide information regarding perceived knowledge of social media usage. Decision-making theory lay the framework for understanding small business social media use decision-making.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This study explores decision-making in small business in regard to their social media use. Minimal research exists about what factors drive small business decision-making regarding social media use. Although previous research indicates small businesses are, in fact, using social media, it is unknown what choices are considered when implementing social media in a small business setting (e.g., Panko, 2017; Parsons & White, 2018). This study aims to advance decision-making theory through a qualitative approach. It aims to gather in-depth knowledge about decisions made regarding utilizing social media platforms in a small business. This chapter includes the study design, participants, sampling procedure, data analysis, and validation.

Study Design

In order to analyze factors in small business social media, data were gathered from various small businesses. This thesis explores small business decision-making in social media, through voices of those involved in the decision-making process. A qualitative approach was used for data collection within this study: a pre-interview questionnaire and in-depth interviews were conducted. Qualitative methods were used to collect in-depth data about the participant decision-making in regard to social media use. In order to collect data in this field, the research had to be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the beginning of the study (see Appendix A). After the approval, recruitment efforts commenced (see Appendix B) and an informative letter was

written and attached for participant information in the recruitment process (see Appendix C).

Participants

Participants in this study were individuals who worked at a small business in the Panhandle area. The small businesses were represented in the following categories: 62% retail, 12% restaurant/bar, and 12% other which identified as food manufacture and alcohol sales. The participants were employees of small businesses who were either a social media specialist, or business owner or manager who also handled the social media accounts. Participant demographics represented seven females and one male. Of the females, four identified as the owner of the small business and three identified as the social media specialist. The one male identified as an owner of a small business.

The researcher recruited participants by using publicly published information, such as email and phone numbers, to contact the appropriate person regarding their participation in the study. The criteria for participants were the following: work for or own a small business with 50 employees, have basic knowledge of social media, must be able to express how they participate in social media, have interaction with social media on a regular basis, use social media to promote business profiles, and be at least 18 years of age.

Sampling

The researcher purposefully selected small businesses with fewer than 50 employees, were independently owned and were locally operated within the Panhandle area. Participants were recruited through a variety of means including email and phone conversations (see Appendix B & C). In addition, the researcher was awarded a research

grant which allotted funds to be used to purchase a gift basket as an incentive for participant recruitment. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants from small businesses that were selected based on who best fit the criteria listed above (Creswell, 2014). Using purposive sampling allowed the researcher to narrow the recruitment of participants to those from small businesses who best fit the nature of the study.

Procedure

This study was conducted in the spring of 2019 in the Texas Panhandle. Within this section, the process of how the data were collected and analyzed is discussed.

Questionnaire. After gaining approval from IRB, the questionnaire was built using Qualtrics, an online survey forum for researchers. The questionnaire included 11 questions ranging from demographic questions, business type, number of employees, and social media platforms currently used (see Appendix E). Questionnaires were distributed directly to participants using a private email link. Participants were only allowed to take the questionnaire one time. The purpose of the questionnaire was to ask closed-ended, demographic, and business-related questions prior to the interview. These data allowed the researcher to better understand the demographic of the small business.

Interview. For the purpose of this study, a qualitative method was used to understand how small businesses make decisions about social media use. Conducting in-depth interviews allowed for open conversation to better understand how the individual (small business) is making decisions regarding social media use for the small business, and their use of those platforms. The researcher asked participants to provide a statement of how social media are used and then asked follow-up questions to determine their decision-making process.

In-depth interviews were conducted at secure, semi-private locations which included: meeting rooms, personal homes, and business locations. The names, stores, and

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scenarios given during the interviews were anonymized to keep all information confidential. After interview data were collected, audio files were uploaded to an online transcription program to be transcribed and returned to the researcher in a timely manner.

Before interviews began, participants were asked to sign a consent letter in which all participants agreed to being audio recorded and agreed to the terms of the interview (see Appendix G). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants and only one interview was conducted for each participating business (see Appendix H for participant interview schedule). The researcher began the interview with basic questions and progressed into more specific questions about social media and the business. The 11 interview questions were in a semi-structured format to allow participants to elaborate on details of the questions and tell relevant stories to better explain their decision-making.

During interviews the researcher used an audio recording device to allow the researcher to recall information from each interview and for transcription purposes. Each individual agreed to having the audio device used by signing the interview consent form. Once the interviews were completed, audio files were uploaded to the *TranscribeMe!* website for online transcription. Member checking, a validity technique defined by Creswell (2014), was used throughout the interview process. Member checking ensures that the researcher is understanding what the participant is saying by restating the message the participant has answered.

The researcher used *TranscribeMe!*, an online transcription program for the transcription of the recorded audio files. The service for *TranscribeMe!* cost $2 per transcription minute. The researcher had been in communication with a *TranscribeMe!* representative and received an academic promotion to reduce the cost of the transcription minute to $1.30. The researcher applied for, and was awarded, a university funded

research grant, Graduate Student Research Grant. The grant was used for the researcher to commission at most 17 hours of transcription services in addition to fund the gift basket incentive.

The researcher had been in contact with a *TranscribeMe!* representative verifying the cost and application of the service before selecting transcription options. The researcher decided to use the standard option for word accuracy and transcription of two to three speakers per interview. The returned transcription was delivered within the standard two to three business day timeframe.

Data Analysis

This thesis is designed to understand the decision-making in the use of social media in small businesses. Through a qualitative approach, a better understanding of the participants' decision-making thoughts and influences on those decisions, was made. The data analyzed was from the audio transcription and questionnaire results. Within the analysis process the researcher reviewed the interview transcriptions in-depth and noted recurring themes also known as thematic analysis. The researcher coded similar ideas and began to form common themes around the ideas. The themes established in this chapter are based on Creswell's (2014) definition of inductive analysis:

> An inductive process of building from the data to broad themes to a generalized model or theory. The researcher begins by gathering detailed information from participants and then forms this information into categories or themes. These themes are developed into broad patterns, theories, or generalizations that are then compared with personal experiences or with existing literature on the topic.
>
> (Creswell, 2014, p. 99)

After the data collection process was complete and each interview was transcribed, the researcher coded the transcriptions. Common themes emerged from alike ideas that were

later grouped in three dominate themes present within the research. The first transcription was outsourced to a third-party company *TranscribeMe!* for timely transcription (see Appendix I for sample interview transcription). The researcher then listened to the audio recordings and reread each of the interviews for accuracy and familiarity. After rereading and editing errors, the researcher then reread each transcription and began the coding process. During the coding process the researcher highlighted similar ideas and used notes to connect similar thoughts. The researcher established a method for categorizing similar codes into themes. A word document was created, and main ideas were bold listed in the draft, then the highlighted quotes from transcriptions were copied into the document. This method gave the researcher insight for developing better overall themes present in the data. The quotes were then re-read and quotes that didn't fit the study were eliminated to develop themes in Chapter IV.

Validation

Background of the researcher. In my current dual employment position as the event planner and social media manager at a local small business I was intrigued with the concept of a social media manager. I had attained this position shortly after I graduated with my undergraduate degree in Corporate Communication. I had experience and used social media in my personal life, yet I was unsure of how to bring together personal and professional social media ties. I grew into the position and began monitoring insights on various platforms; the increase in interaction and feedback sky-rocketed. This is where my academic exploration took hold and I began to question "why did this business not use social media as frequently previous to when I took over?" The operations manager explained that there was not enough time in the day for her to manage and really invest in social media and did not feel as knowledgeable to take over the platform. She also added that there was no staff member that she felt was in the right position to take over and

understand the business' social media activity. I knew then that this is would be the topic of my thesis research. Creswell (2014) advises researchers to exclude their place of work from their research:

> When researchers collect data at their own workplace (or when they are in a superior role to participants), the information may be convenient and easy to collect, but it may not be accurate information and may jeopardize the roles of the researchers and the participants. (p. 237)

In addition to my background as a graduate student researcher, I used thick description and a form of member checking for validation of the data.

Thick description. In this study the researcher includes the "rich, thick description" Creswell (2014) suggests as a form of validation (p. 251). The thick description refers to including actual artifacts, in this case the words of the participants. Various perspectives of the themes, seen in the analysis chapter, offer a more detailed description offered by participants and concerning their social media use choices in small business decision-making. Including thick description as a measure of validity, the reader has a better understanding of who the participants are and the results "become more realistic" (Creswell, 2014, p. 251). The use of thick description captures the reader and brings participant conversations into a real-world perspective.

Member checking. Another form of qualitative validity is member checking. Throughout the interview conversation, the researcher would reflect on the participants comments and reiterate the participants answer back to them for confirmation. This was done as a measure of validity to ensure that the researcher was understanding how each participant was articulating their experiences in response to questions being asked. This is

a form of member checking. This form of qualitative validity ensured accuracy of the thick description in this study.

Chapter Summary

A qualitative approach was used in this study to allow the researcher to better understand the decisions being made regarding small business social media use. The researcher recruited participants using purposive sampling based on specific criteria for the study. A chance at an incentive was also offered as part of the recruitment process. The researcher designed a questionnaire which asked business demographic questions using Qualtrics. The questionnaire was emailed directly to participants to complete and an interview was scheduled with each participant at a secure location. The questions asked during in-depth interviews were framed as open-ended, semi-structured questions for the researcher to gain a better understanding of the topic. These questions allowed for the conversation to expand based on participants' ideas about social media and attain information about their social media decision-making. The in-depth interview process was selected for this study because the researcher was able to develop a sense of understanding and build a relationship with each participant selected which created a more open and honest conversation between the researcher and participant. Chapter IV explores data results and uses thematic analysis to answer the research question.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study is to assess the process of decision-making about social media use in small businesses. Dominant these were identified through the lens of decision-making theory from in-depth interviews with research participants related to small business decisions to use social media.

The themes that emerged through analyzing the data include: resources, branding, and return on investment (ROI). The first theme explores resources that participants mentioned as a factor in their small business decision concerning using social media. The second theme focuses on branding factors that the participants used to promote the small business online. The third theme is ROI which clarifies what participants identified as a social media investment for the small business. Within these sections, thick description is used to discuss participants social media decision-making.

Although all eight participants primarily used Facebook as their go-to platform, they also mentioned Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube as their other social media platforms of choice. Facebook and Instagram were utilized more often based on their capabilities to spread awareness of the small business's existence. Participants also noted that these platforms were the two most understood platforms to operate.

Resources

The dominate theme of resources covers subthemes of limited time, finances, researching and education, and dual position employment. Small businesses often turned

to their current resources to answer their questions about factors that drive their social media habits. Resources that were acquired were researched and learned by attending seminars and conferences regarding social media.

      Time. During in-depth interviews five participants claimed they could not find enough time to dedicate to their social media platforms. Time, being a resource, was a restriction for these participants. Participant X noted "We spend a lot of time in here and we know our product" which results in the assumption participants can quickly tout their product on social media. At least half of the participants claimed that they also work another job outside of their small business, therefore have limited time to create and post material for the platforms during the day. Participant C explained her concern with time being available, "is there a sweet spot in there that is a good investment of time?" Another participant who identified as the social media specialist stated that she sees time as a worthwhile investment because they do have the time to capture the best features of the small business. Participant Q said:

>I rarely use my phone to take photos, unless it is an in the moment thing. Most of the time I take a photo with my big camera, upload it to the computer and schedule it through Hootsuite even if that is ten minutes later.

Although time is seen as limited for participants, they spend a vast majority of it on producing and selling the product of service leaving minimal time for promotion through social media.

      Although only three participants identified as either a social media specialist/manager, these three participants value their positions and believe it saves time

for others to perform their duties. Participant K said, "A social media manager is not cheap, but it is insanely helpful because the owner, manager, store-front employees do not have time or energy to care to think about, oh what should I put on Instagram today?" Participants also save time by linking their social media platforms and having a post on one platform carry over to the next. This was a common statement from half of the participants as they utilized both Facebook and Instagram which are linked platforms.

As a consequence of time being limited for participants their investment in social media often lacks the attention it requires to maintain as a line of communication for these small businesses. "Time is money here, you know. So, a lot of things that we felt like we could do on our own" (Participant T). Participant P explained, "sometimes those [platforms] suffer due to being so busy." Time is a highly valued factor in decision-making and taking the time to thoroughly develop platforms available to the small business is being neglected. As a readily available resource, time is limited for those small businesses whose social media operators are also owners or managers as well. For the three participants who serve as the social media specialist for the small business they often have time to create content for social media platforms and are capable of producing higher-quality content with potential to reach a variety of demographics.

Finances. Social media use was largely a factor of cost-saving measures for the business. Seven of the participants agreed that the decision to use social media is "much more cost effective than print" (Participant O). Participant C was the only person who in addition to social media also used traditional advertising as a part of her marketing plan. "We've spent a lot of money on advertising: radio, television, and print. I think we get a lot more visibility, recognition, and coverage in those forums than we do with social media." Participant T disagreed with using traditional marketing and said it was a waste

of her time to hear from representatives who wanted them to invest in it: "They were doing old school advertising, and they do snail mail and like mail older stuff. They quoted me $600 a month for this advertising, I said we can't afford that and it is a waste of my time." Monetary value was heavily involved in the decision to use social media simply because of the minimal cost factor. For small businesses struggling with financial costs, social media was beneficial in maintaining low budget marketing.

Participant O said they were working to outsource their social media coverage by hiring a company to boost their platforms in a manner that they do not have the capabilities to do themselves. "We have offloaded that because we are not smart enough to do all that. We are paying $750 a month for three months, and we are in our second month now." Even those not using a company have costs associated with using social media as an advertising platform. Three participants used both advertisement and boost feature on Facebook and Instagram platforms to promote their business. "I actually buy an ad on Facebook and we will post it. It will run for three days and it is supposed to hit so many people" (Participant X). The option of purchasing additional advertisements is still available on social media platforms for businesses that seek to increase their natural exposure.

All participants stated the decision to invest in research and education was to better their business marketing. Research data showed participants factored in the time to attend seminars, review online journals and network with other businesses as a means of research. Some participants had previous educational experience in social media either operating an organization platform, becoming certified in specific applications, or worked as an intern. Therefore, they already had significant previous experience operating social media.

Financial obligations were a major theme that all participants mentioned during in-depth interviews. Small businesses are moving towards social media marketing as a way to promote themselves on a much less expensive budget. Although participants decided to reduce costs by using social media, they still wanted their content to be high quality despite paying less for this type of marketing, which is discussed later in the branding theme.

Education and knowledge. All participants mentioned education and researching during the in-depth interview. Participants mentioned that they believed it was important to understand the idea of social media marketing, however, deciding to use social media was a more cost-effective plan than taking the time to learn how to use it effectively. Five of the participants do not have any training in social media. Those five participants mentioned they used prior knowledge and experience to navigate social media. This has resulted in problems as described by Participant Q: "So lately, we've been working on researching how to get sale buttons on specific posts. I'm finding it very difficult to try and find how to tag products on Instagram." Two of the participants mentioned using Google as their base for researching questions about social media. "I'm still trying to figure out the best time to post. I even Googled it. But I wanted to do a Tuesday due to my own schedule, so here is my stubbornness" (Participant P). Although participants are researching methods to improve their platforms, they are restricted by their own limited time.

Participant K identifies as a social media specialist for a small business and one of her educational training tools is to familiarize herself on what others are doing in the area. "In order to flex my creative muscle a little bit, I look at other accounts and see what other people are doing." Participant K adds that in addition to fulfilling her role as the

social media specialist and attaining the knowledge about utilizing social media, it is equally important to explain to the business owner/manager why her role is necessary to the business.

> I think a big responsibility as a social media person is just educating those other people who are in the company, especially the people who make the decisions on why things are important because I'm not the one who's going to make the decision about whether or not we pay a photographer. I can give my two cents, but unless I really take the time to educate this is why it's important, that decision is never going to be made.

Although the social media specialist is knowledgeable in the area of social media, participants felt it was vital to discuss their rationale in decision-making for posts on social media.

> Like Participant K, Participant H follows other local businesses to research what type of attention they are getting from their consumers.

> I went into their social media and I was like, well how often are they posting? How many engagements are they getting? How many followers, likes, retweets, whatever the case may be per social media? And kind of comparing them to what we had currently or beforehand or anything like that just to gauge where we were at in the same sense, just seeing everyone else's social media.

Similar to Participant K, Participant H is the social media specialist for a small business and has education in social media use. The small business decided to hire her as the social media specialist after they launched a new app and business owners were too limited on time to effectively learn and operate the app.

I have almost been working there for a year, but I have just been a cashier. And I

mean I would mention, I was like if you guys ever need help with social media or

anything, just let me know. I don't think they really took me seriously for a while.

And then I was like no, really, I'm getting a degree in it if you need any help. And

then when they were dropping the app they were like, okay yeah.

With social media being a free method of advertisement, it is also used as a direct line of

communication from business to consumer. Social media specialists ensure that the

business is represented best online by learning tools and skills to enhance their social

media presence.

Participant Q, who also identified as a social media specialist, said that most of

her information came as direct word-of-mouth from their manager. "My boss went to

some kind of conference and reported back what she learned for me to better perform my

job." Participant X, who does not have any formal training in social media, gathered

information from a conference to apply to their small business.

I have heard at conferences that eight in the night is a really good time to hit all

social media, because kids are put down and people are on the computer. I mean,

all ages are on the computer and so that is a really good time.

Participant C had noticed in another small businesses Facebook feed, that they tend to do

a lot of Facebook live videos. "I look and see how many views her feed has to try and

judge how effective they [live videos] are." This participant said she decided to not do

live videos because as it is too much of a fear and privacy factor for her.

Participant P, who identified as an owner of a small business, decided to focus on

Facebook because that is the information she gathered while at a convention. She only

operates on Facebook currently, but said she would like to expand to Instagram if she better understood the concept.

> I went to a couple of seminars. And one of them that really stuck out to me was one of the high-up executives with Whole Foods. They were talking about social media. So based on his information, then that's where I'd put my focus, was into Facebook.

Business owners/managers in this study used their personal previous experiences on social media to adapt to operating their business social media. Although these participants are dedicated to using social media, their limited time and knowledge are reflected on their business profiles.

Based on the information that the participants shared, they value research and education and believe that investing in the time to learn about social media is important. For participants who identified as social media specialists, their knowledge in the field of social media has allowed them to advance their small business's social media platforms more creatively and effectively. Having knowledge in social media allows them to be more creative in their social media skillset which is more effective.

Dual position employment. In the literature, Pomerol & Adam (2004) discuss Herbert Simon's review of decision-making which identifies attention, information, as stress which are factors of cognitive decision-making. These factors played a role in the decision to hire a social media manager for some of small businesses. Three participants identified as the social media specialist manager for the small businesses. During the in-depth interviews, these participants noted that their roles overlap in many cases and they perform essentially two jobs within the organization. Participant K who is a social media specialist said, "social media is only a portion of my job." It is understandable that due to

financial constraints, small businesses cannot hire a single employee designated to only operate the social media platforms. However, investing in an employee who would hold a dual role and assist with organizational duties could be beneficial to the success of the small business.

Participants who are owners often stated they turn to younger people in-house to assist with social media even if that is not a part of their job duties. "It's just about delegation and finding someone that is comfortable with it. Hopefully you have at least one person that feels okay with it [social media]" (Participant O). This creates a situation where one person is fulfilling more than one employment role.

Five participants who identified as owners or managers of the small business agreed that they would not have the financial income to support a person in the single role as a social media specialist. Participants shared they can operate social media platforms with the basic knowledge and experience they do have. Participant O explained "I think hiring a social media person, if that is all they do for the business, you don't need to do that." Participant X stated similarly that she does not have the resources to employ one person to operate their social media. "I just don't have the spot available to employ one person, if that were their only thing, he/she were to do here. But if it was even part of the job description, I would consider that." Participants who were business owners/managers were genuinely interested in hiring a person to operate social media platforms; however, it was a matter of deciding if the business had other roles the employee could fulfill to make the expenditure worthwhile.

Out of the five participants who identified as business owner or manager, only one of those participants seemed to have inadequate information to answer whether they would hire a social media specialist if financially viable. "I thought about that. It's

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probably something I should look into more. I don't even know how much it costs to hire someone just to manage your social media stuff" (Participant C). With limited knowledge on the investment of a social media manager, Participant C was unsure of the decision whether or not they would be willing to create a social media position at their small business.

Participants who hold a dual role at their small business are likely to operate in-house positions such as participants K, Q, and H. Participants who are owners of the small business decided to operate social media platforms themselves due to limited funds, experience on platforms, and privacy.

The limited amount of resources available to participants was one of the dominate themes related to the research question. Although participants chose to utilize social media due to its low cost, owners or managers found themselves unprepared with the resources available to feel confident in their skills. The three participants who identified as a social media specialist seemed to have a better understanding of how to use social media to best promote small businesses. Limited resources and knowledge of social media could affect branding efforts of these small businesses.

Branding

All participants mentioned branding their business on social media was important to them and allowed them to represent their business better via social media platforms. Small business branding focuses on content, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

Content. Content is a decision-making factor when a business decides to brand and determines their target market. Participant K argued that "generation Y doesn't want to know all of the information underneath, they just want to look at the pictures." A variety of target demographics were mentioned by participants based on product(s)

available at the small businesses. Participant O said his business takes a younger stance on content. "With all the music and GIFs that we choose, image filters things like that, it kind of creates a perception about our business and brand in general that it's kind of a younger business and free spirited." Participants stated pictures are important for their product(s). "I want a picture to be visually appealing, that it is going to captivate something. And if it gets your attention, then you're going to take the time to read the content" (Participant P). Participants reflected on who their target demographic is and what they can do to increase their exposure and platform engagement. Participant P explained, "pictures, I think are really critical because I'm a very visual person and most people are. So, it is getting the picture out there." Using their own personal experience participants decided how to present their information on social media. Participants have also taken into consideration who they will be marketing to online.

Although adding content to their platform was seen as necessary, the quality of the content was viewed as important to the participants. Half of the participants mentioned that the content they post or deliver on their social media platforms needs to be high quality. "With Instagram, you have to make sure the picture is good. If the picture is not good, it's not worth the time putting it on there because no one is going to like it or find it aesthetically pleasing" (Participant H). As far as adding content to their platforms, participants were interested in other forms of media besides just photos. "We have been kind of thinking about branching out and doing fun little videos, minute-long videos you can put on Instagram or Facebook" (Participant H). While social media platforms are a means of online communication, using the same content repeatedly might cause more harm than good for small businesses.

On average I post two, maybe three times a week. I don't see doing it, for me

personally at this point, doing a daily post. A couple times a week makes sense to

me where I am right now. I don't have enough content right now, I don't think,

without getting tiresome. (Participant P)

Participant K stated that while content adds to communicating the brand online, it is

important to remember how consumers will perceive your brand. "Good branding and

being able to present yourself to people in a way that shows them, yeah, we really know

what we are doing across all fronts. I think it [branding] helps people take you more

seriously." Branding techniques such as high-quality content can imprint or change the

perception a consumer has of a small business.

Content in the form of videos, photos, graphics or use of emojis and GIFs can

reflect how the business decides to feature itself on social media platforms. Participants

mentioned how using content drives more consumers to pay attention to their social

media platforms. Overall, participants agreed that they wanted to have appealing photos

featured on their platforms. Participants agree that using creative content helps them

establish their brand and improves their platforms. Social media platforms are also a

place for sharing consumer opinions.

Electronic word-of-mouth. All participants stated that social media is a means of

electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and decided to pursue investing more in social media

platforms to better their chance of receiving positive consumer feedback. "I feel like

some people rely strictly on word-of-mouth" (Participant O). Two participants held a

common fear of eWOM in the form of negative reviews or feedback about their

experience at a business; therefore, feedback fears led them to avoid utilizing platforms

as often as they would like.

"Someone can kill you on social media, you have to be really careful" (Participant T). Although these two participants fear negative eWOM about their business, they agreed that if that was the case, they would prefer to assess the situation outside of social media and communicate with the customer directly. "The customer is always right. And if that means eating a few dollars, we can justify that" (Participant T). It is evident participants feared the inability to engage in two-way communication to resolve customer issues using social media.

While there are negative aspects about eWOM, all participants agreed social media helps spread awareness about a small business.

> One of the biggest things that happened to us, a lady used our product for a migraine, and it worked for her, and she posted that and tagged us in it. And because we didn't ask her to do a testimonial, she just did one. But I think people are a little more trusting of somebody they know. It's just kind of cool because I mean she is our customer but then we gained I don't know how many customers, probably 100 off of that one post. (Participant T)

Positive eWOM helps small businesses build trustworthy brand. "I will post it and even if the person who ends up buying it isn't on my Facebook page, they're on somebody else's who sends it on to them" (Participant X). One of the participants who frequently attends tradeshows to sell their product had an experience with a customer that confirmed their belief in eWOM.

> There's a pilot that came to the festival and she came straight for my booth and stocks up on what she wants. And I'm the only person that she comes too. And I know that has to be from social media. (Participant P)

Social media platforms assist small business's brand communication and development of online relations. The value of social media has become more reflective of the community one builds online and how that community promotes a brand. Social media platforms have been used to share alike interests and generate online communication channels.

Social media have advanced the way we communicate with consumers and other businesses. "Social media, the word of mouth, is the way we get around" (Participant X). In today's culture, social media play an important role in networking. Participant H believes that social media have changed the way consumers interact with small businesses. Participant H made a statement based on the increased interaction they have had with their social media platforms.

> Our Facebook messaging has gone up recently. We probably get about two to three messages a week, which is up because we used to get them like one or two a month. So, I think just people seeing that oh, people are actually posting on this and constantly, they're like oh let me just message them to ask a question I've been wanting to ask.

Using social media platforms opens up a channel of communication for all parties. It also breaks down a barrier between consumer hesitation and purchase power.

All participants agreed that eWOM is an important social media factor and can be both a positive and negative reflection of a small business. Branding efforts on social media platforms allow consumers to be more familiar with the business and their products and services. With participants advancing toward a low-cost option for integrated marketing solutions, they want to ensure that consumers are being driven to a call for action on social media through branding practices.

Return on Investment

All participants in the study stated that they decided to use social media partly due to the low-cost option for online marketing. Two sub-themes occurred targeted marketing and secondly, social media platforms used. With all the resources being put into maintaining their social media platforms, participants were unsure exactly how to measure their return on investment (ROI) of resources. Although participants saw their following increase on social media, they did not specifically know if that increase converted to sales. Participant T explained their decision to use Facebook boosting to gain more ticket sales on one of their events.

> Okay so if we spend $15 you know, it costs $30 to come to a class, so that's half a person. So my thought in the beginning was if I boosted it two times, you know, that one person that's free in the class. Is that worth it to fill a class? Yes.

Participant K who identified as a social media specialist, stated the increase in engagements on social media platforms is her confirmation of natural (unpaid) growth and a direct link to investment of resources.

> Of course, this is going to be more natural with more followers- you get more likes, comments, and so I've just seen a lot more engagement on our Instagram. And again, I think a lot of that is just because of the big push that I have had on companies saying I think we need to focus on Instagram. We need to hire a professional photographer.

Small businesses with limited funds are faced with decisions to choose marketing options they feel represent the business best on social media. Weighing out the pros and cons of their decision prior to making one, allows for small businesses to rationalize their ROI.

Only three of the participants identified as a social media specialist; however, the small businesses decided to hire them based on the investment in social media compared

to the alternative of deciding to have the owner/manager operate the platforms and despite their lack of expertise to perform as well as a specialist could actually results in a lower ROI. Relating back to the theory of decision-making, Participant K identified a possible consequence of the alternative of not being on social media. "I think we would miss out on a lot of customers if we were not on social media, especially in the broader sense." Participant C's small business does utilize traditional mass media for marketing; however, she feels as if they are missing out on social media due to the limited resources she has to put forth to better understanding platforms. "I would probably be willing to pay someone to go through with me and teach me how to set it [platform] up." A lack of pursuit in education left participants struggling to know where they can find low-cost assistance to guide small businesses through social media courses.

The five participants who identified as small business owners/managers gathered basic information about their ROI some through social media analytics and some through word-of-mouth. Three of the participants who were already social media specialists, were a direct representation of the small business seeing their social media ROI in action and deciding to invest in the resources to hire a designated social media specialist.

Social media platforms. Participants mentioned using Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and Hootsuite as social media platforms. However, the top two platforms mentioned by all participants were Facebook and Instagram. Twitter was mentioned by all of the participants; however, they did not see a strong connection with their target demographic using Twitter. Only three of the small businesses stated they have a Twitter platform. Participant Q stated that Twitter does not provide an effective means of communication for small businesses. "How can I fit something relevant in 280 characters that's not immediately going to get buried with a hundred other tweets?" With

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the character limit being a negative factor, businesses have decided to pursue other platforms where they can better represent the small business.

All participants indicated that they decided to use Facebook and/or Instagram to promote their small business because of previous personal or professional experience with the platform. Participant C stated her opinion of Facebook claiming, "I think it is extremely accessible, it is popular." Compared to other participants, Participant C identifies more as a B2B company. Participant C does not operate out of a specified unit, but rather produces the product at a local establishment and uses social media to communicate with consumers where they can purchase product. "Ultimately it is helping me, but I'm promoting other businesses as well." The six participants in the study who used both Facebook and Instagram claimed their decision because of the integrated partnership of the two platforms. "We just went with Facebook by default and then Instagram is just part of that package. Now we are posting to Instagram from Facebook" (Participant O). Participant O also agrees that Facebook and Instagram are both necessary for their small business. "You can't do one without the other anymore." Participant X who identified as a business owner/manager operates both Facebook and Instagram platforms for the small business. "Once you figure out one platform you start recognizing what works for each." Having previous personal experience on social media offers basic set-up for business profiles and the knowledge of how to navigate social media language.

Four of the participants invested in giveaways and contests on platforms to use as a means of attracting to consumers. For example, when asked what decisions were made to improve social media coverage, Participant T stated:

> I think videos and giveaways. The only cost we eat is the cost of the product. But
> we figure that cost is minimal compared to the attraction and shares we are

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getting. I think by advertising for giveaways and doing fun contests, which we

have a lot in the works right now.

By using social media platforms as grounds for videos and giveaways more consumers

can view and engage in contests due to platform networking.

Based on the results from the questionnaire a majority of the participants selected

their customer age demographic as ranging between 34 and 41 years old followed by the

ages 42-49. Within these age brackets there are two types of generations being

represented generation X and generation Y. Understanding the age demographic that best

fits the business audience and using that information to decide what platforms work best

to market the product is crucial. In addition to age, participants were asked what gender

represents a majority of their consumers. Over half of the participants answered females

were the main gender of customers based on social media insights and day-to-day

interactions. All of the participants decided to rely on social media platforms as a means

of marketing as it encompasses a vast demographic. Both Participant C and K stated

nearly the same idea about their decision to use both Facebook and Instagram

simultaneously because it's a necessity almost as it targets a broad reach. Using both

Facebook and Instagram gave small businesses the option to target two unique

demographics.

It kind of crosses over generations. They're your grandmothers and are more apt

to being on Facebook, and they are more apt to come to one specific event.

Instagram are more the professional mothers, the young mothers who are also

interested in another program whether it's to send their child or if they can attend

too. (Participant X)

Although small businesses can target their market to a specific demographic, the potential reach of posts is huge.

ROI was evident in various decision-making factors when small businesses chose specific social media platforms to target chosen demographics. Small businesses that factored in social media as a main resource for their marketing prioritized hiring personnel as represented with the three social media specialists in this study. The three dominate themes of resources, branding, and ROI represented the factors motivating small businesses to use social media. The dominate themes led to sub-themes that added additional insights into what each small business valued most in their decision to use social media.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter IV three themes were related to decision-making processes in social media use were established as a result of the data analysis. The analysis identified what factors drive small businesses to make decisions about social media. The three themes that best represent the data are resources, branding, and ROI. The sub-themes which occurred within the three dominate themes explored specific participant's driving factors in social media and what factors were most valued in the small business. Chapter V discusses the relationship between the analysis and small businesses decision to use social media.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results from the data analysis revealed several dominant factors motivating participant decision-making regarding the use of social media. This chapter discusses the findings from the perspective of the research question, and identifies the decisions made by small businesses in their use of social media and explains the limitations of this study as well as offers recommendations on ways this thesis can contribute to the knowledge about the use of social media in small businesses. The results helped answer the research question: What factors drive small business decisions to use social media?

Discussion

After analyzing interview and questionnaire data, results identified factors which motivate participants to utilize social media. Participants expressed throughout the interviews that their decision-making concerning social media use were associated with the factors including cost of time, available finances, education, and assistance in the organization. These factors relate to decision-making theory because they offer alternatives, determine the consequences of the alternatives, and evaluate all possible consequences. The first law is to identify all alternatives.

Alternatives

Almost all of the participants chose to use social media based on the low-cost option it provides for marketing and the opportunity to remain up-to-date with current

business trends. Culnan et al. (2010) indicate there are three elements behind effective social media implementation. The first element is mindful adoption of the platforms in which the participants clearly stated their personal use transferring over to their professional use. The use of social media being an inexpensive option for small businesses was a natural adoption for most of the participants because they had already been using social media platforms for personal reasons, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Low-cost options factored for participants as small businesses have limited expenditures and, therefore, search for the most cost-effective marketing options. One of the participants still utilized traditional forms of media such as television, print and radio in addition to social media platforms. Although the small businesses in question felt as though traditional media was attracted more consumers, it was an expensive option and could not justify as a positive ROI. The base cost to simply attain social media platforms is practically free. The cost of time was valued by participants as a major factor in their decision-making process. Participants' alternative decisions were whether or not they wanted to increase their time on social media for marketing purposes or increase their time elsewhere in other areas of their respective businesses.

The alternative to a business owner/manager being responsible for social media is to invest in the hiring of a designated employee or social media specialist to operate the platforms. The role of a social media specialist/manager was mentioned by participants as one that was often overlooked or was not financially viable. This supports the literature as to possibly why there are limited studies in this area of research. Participants who identified as social media specialists mentioned that there was a strong need for their position and states that their roles are very important at their respective small businesses. They felt as though they represent the "voice" of the business even though they are not

commonly known as highly ranked employees (Participant Q). For participants who identified as owners/managers, the investment of employing a social media specialist/manager was not likely. The alternative methods mentioned by the participants concluded that there is more than one factor that drives small businesses to use social media. The second law in DMT is to determine the consequences of these alternatives.

Consequences of Alternatives

All participants felt eager to learn more about social media to help them become more adaptive and creative with their social media platforms associated with their respective businesses. The common sub-theme of limited education and knowledge was strong throughout the in-depth interviews. A main form of participant research occurred by viewing other small business social media platforms and implementing similar ideas into their marketing plan. Other research included reviewing social media posts to assess how posts performed and how businesses can replicate similar engagement with future marketing using social media tools. All participants concluded that time spent researching and learning to a large extent improved ROI of social media use. With increases in social media activity on business social media platforms, more customers frequently direct messaged small businesses instead of calling to ask about the business or their products which ultimately saves the businesses involved time and money. The subtheme of education and knowledge relate to Kowk and Yu (2013) because participants in B2C companies are required to learn, or choose to learn, how to effectively communicate with consumers while maintaining brand language through social media.

The overwhelming amount of eWOM, both positive and negative, which flows through social media platforms was important for these businesses to invest in the resource of education in social media. The participants who identified as small business

owners/managers stated due to both multiple roles within the organization and jobs outside of the business, they did not have the time to invest in social media education and therefore based their social media decisions on previous experiences. Participants stated they that with more education on what these specialists do, and with the financial means to hire such an employee, they would feel more likely to hire or delegate an employee to operate the social media platforms. Business owners/managers did not state they would delegate time to educate themselves on the position. Small business owners/managers need to find time to educate themselves about social media specialists, so they are better equipped to assess the candidate of their capabilities and knowledge about social media operation.

The second factor of determining the possible consequences of alternatives found that participants would miss out on a vast majority of their target demographic if they did not use social media. Most participants stated that using traditional media was not the best form of resource investment and would not result in a positive ROI. Traditional media does not effectively target a large demographic of consumers and have a much higher cost for marketing plans. Participants decided that traditional media are both an ineffective use of both time and money for their small business. Another consequence was the participants decision to not utilize specific platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and social media management software, Hootsuite. For both targeted marketing purposes and time organization, these platforms would better assist small business participants who have limited time to be more effective with their social media posting.

All participants mentioned they invested in additional funds for their branding such as promotional content. Marketing and advertising as well as consumer

demographics loosely tie together. These two subthemes relate as they both impact the factor of deciding what promotional content to use on business social media platforms. Participants mentioned identifying consumer demographics were used to establish which factors are most important for marketing purposes. Participants understood their customer demographic and what platform their target audience most frequently used. This information allowed participants to best decide what message they wanted to communicate about their brand that would most appeal to their consumer or client. For example, Participant O uses Instagram to target the younger generations and creates messages to attract a specific demographic based on what best fits the business's brand. Some of the participants use more simplistic posting because they decided that their time is more valued with perfecting their product rather than promoting their businesses through social media. Other participants who decided that social media marketing was vital to them decided to hire a specific employee to operate their platforms. Culnan et al. (2010) similarly suggested businesses should appoint employees to be on the receiving end of the messages and make decisions regarding the next step in the communication transaction. By assigning an employee as the designated social media specialist, the businesses will have a clearer communication channel.

Evaluating the Consequences

The third factor is evaluating all the possible consequences. Although this study explores a small portion of small business social media decision-making, there were demonstrated consequences to participant decisions.

The additional cost for social media activity to some participants exceeded their budget and was not viewed as a positive ROI. Participants measured their ROI in multiple forms, including the growth in people liking and following their business

platforms, increases in the number of people who visited businesses after exposure on the business social media platforms, and business investments in creative content like photography and video. Participants who decided to invest in social media platforms based ROI on increased amount of consumer engagement they receive from utilizing social media. Many participants said that with the natural engagement increase on their platforms, they saw corresponding increases in consumer purchasing. In addition, some of these participants decided to pay for social media advertising and experienced some growth in the platforms as well. Participants also stated that because their businesses had social media platforms, it made it easier for consumers to research their store and products. The decision to invest in creative content was a high priority for most participants. Participants who invested in creative content, claimed it had more impact on consumers wanting to purchase the products based on appeal. Participants echoed Culnan et al. (2010), "without a continual supply of compelling content, there is no reason for people to visit an organization's social media site" (p. 247). Participant K made the argument about generation Y only interested in wanting to see photos versus other content but did not have educational support for this claim.

Social media platforms present a place for eWOM to foster both positive and negative comments. A general fear communicated by many participants was that by investing heavily in social media, unhappy consumers will be inclined to leave bad reviews if they had a less than favorable experience at a business. Four participants said one of the reasons they are not as involved on social media is to discourage consumers from leaving bad reviews. Although they do not participate in social media as frequently as other participants did, they understand that someone can still leave a negative comment that could affect their businesses one way or another. On the contrary,

participants felt good when they heard and saw positive eWOM on their social media platforms. eWOM naturally occurs from experiences consumers have during their visits to businesses. If it is a positive experience, consumers are likely to tell their friends and engage in social media communication. Learning how participants make decisions about responding to eWOM is beneficial for future research in the areas of small business and social media communication. This insight can educate other small businesses or social media specialists on how to better communicate on social media to their audience.

According to Smith and Anderson (2018) Facebook is the most frequently used social media platform and has the most active users. Similar to previously mentioned literature, most participants agreed their most popular platform is Facebook based on demographic engagement. Participants who utilized only Facebook due to minimal education limited their possible demographic audience. The sub-theme of choice of social media platforms identified which social media platforms for small businesses were used most often to promote their organizations. Most of the participants agreed that Facebook and Instagram were the top two platforms that provided them with the highest ROI. Participants had various complaints with using Twitter for their small business. Some stated they did not understand the platform and others claimed it was not effective in this region due to the lack of consumer engagement on Twitter. In both situations, participants did not seem to acknowledge their lack of understanding the platform enough to utilize its capabilities.

Differences in participant education and research experiences made some feel more comfortable posting on the platforms while others did not feel comfortable. Some participants decided to use both Facebook and Instagram simply because they are linked and gave participants an option to spend less time when posting. Other participants

indicated they have both Facebook and Instagram but do not post the same content on the same day but rather opted to create two unique profiles on the two platforms. The results align with the literature in that participants said their most used platforms are within the top three most commonly used social media platforms (Smith & Anderson, 2018).

Small businesses made various decisions to promote themselves on social media platforms both reasoned as either as factual or objective, mentioned by Herbert Simon in the literature (as cited in Pomerol & Adam, 2004). Participants stated they utilized social media platforms, marketing and advertisement, generational and regional demographics, and employment positions to promote their business. Although some of the participants did not express their interest in expanding their social media use, they believe it is worth investing in and learning about social media platforms because they are an affordable means of marketing and the best use of communication to a variety of demographics. This research has aligned to explore the process of decision-making factors which drive small business to use social media.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the decision-making process of participants to best address the research question: what factors drive small business decisions to use social media? The study analyzed participant decision-making factors for their small business. The thesis identified three dominate themes that influence small businesses in their decisions concerning social media use. Because of the limited resources available to small businesses, branding, and ROI, five participants decided to operate their social media platforms themselves as owners/managers of the business. Three participants who were hired as a social media specialist have designated resources which allow them to better brand their small businesses and are more valued as an ROI. Results also showed that

social media marketing is an important factor in small businesses as its low-cost platforms allow businesses to connect instantly with consumers through an easy posting process. The data indicated that more small businesses would be willing to hire a social media specialist if they had appropriate funding and the position was dedicated to having a dual role in the business.

Limitations

As with any research study this thesis is not without limitations. The study focused on small businesses in the Texas Panhandle with fewer than 50 employees, which limited the sample size.

Participants for the study were recruited by email and received additional information sheets explaining the study's purpose. Five of the participants were owners/managers with only three employed as social media specialists. Additionally, the three social media specialists were significantly younger in age compared to the five owners/managers. This study could have benefitted from the demographic employment diversity of the sample participants.

Although the researcher felt designating one hour for in-depth interviews was an appropriate amount of time to talk to participants, the interview time could have been increased to gather additional data for more factors to be determined. Allowing more time for the interviews could encourage further elaboration from the participants during their interviews. However, it is important to note that open-ended questions were selected to expand on the topics discussed during the interviews and an overwhelming amount of data was collected for this thesis. The amount of data was vast and forced the researcher to narrow down the scope of the project by focusing on specific themes that best addressed the research question for this thesis.

Lastly, having only eight participants in the study could be considered a limitation. With more participants there could have been an increase in number of different factors that influence decisions by small business concerning social media use. The overall demographic of the small businesses in this study was broken down in three industries including: retail, restaurant/bar and other which were listed as food manufacture and alcohol sales. Having a wider array of small businesses could impact the diversity of factors identified by small businesses concerning their social media use decision-making.

Future Research

This thesis analyzed factors in small business decisions concerning social media use and opens potential areas of future research. Identifying the number of small businesses located in the Texas Panhandle clearly indicates that they are growing in frequency and developing online. This study could be expanded to explore attitudes of social media posts on small business platforms. By exploring attitudes of those who are posting online, a better understanding of consumer perceptions could be identified toward small business could be identified.

Research in the area of what resources are currently available to small businesses could also be explored further after this study. Participants clearly stated they had some background in social media from either personal or professional use. However, participants who based their decision solely on personal experience might not be representing the small business in the best manner. Decision-making theory was applied in this study to better understand how small businesses select specific factors when considering social media platforms. Possible alternative theories such as sensemaking could be applied to learn about backgrounds of participants to better understand their

decisions. Sensemaking theory could be used to analyze the stories behind cognitive decisions concerning social media use.

Recommendations

Reflecting on the entirety of the study there are areas of improvement for small businesses as well as the region including offering more educational opportunities for small businesses. With the findings from this thesis, small business development programs can utilize this information to host future social media discussions/trainings aimed at small businesses. Participants in this study had a general understanding of social media and do not need beginner courses, which is common in initial small business start-ups. The recommendation is for programs to host low-cost progressive courses about social media marketing that focus on three key themes- resources, branding, and ROI. These courses will better explain the development and skills needed to take small business owners/managers to the next level in their marketing using social media platforms. For the three participants who were already social media specialists, they could share their knowledge as speakers for events and provide examples on how to better represent small businesses on social media.

Another recommendation for participants is to invest in resources more often including educational courses, financial skills building, and research and development time. These resources are readily available online and on local university campuses. Recommended for the five participants who are owners/managers is to spend time educating themselves on tools for more efficient social media posting habits. Implementing Hootsuite and other social media management software alternatives could be considered as a better use of time for small businesses to help them schedule posting on various social media platforms they choose to adopt. These tools are cost-effective

ways for owners/managers and social media specialists to decrease their time spent on platforms and organizing posts for specific platforms.

Closing

This study analyzed the decisions made by small businesses to explore what factors participants prioritized in their promotion of the small business. Concluding, this thesis researched participants to better understand how social media is used in small businesses. This study contributes to decision-making theory by analyzing the driving factors which relate to the three laws of cognitive decision-making. The thesis explored the decisions made by participants in order to further their social media communication and advances knowledge in the area of social media in small businesses.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

West Texas A&M University

Academic Research Environmental Health and Safety
WTAMU Box 60217 Canyon, Tx 79016
806.651.2270

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS
Letter of Approval

November 27, 2018

Dr. Mary Liz Brooks:

The West Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, proposal #03-11-18 for your study titled, **"Digital Media Trends in Small Businesses,"** meets the requirements of the WTAMU Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) No. 15.99.05.W1.01AR Institutional Review Board (Human Subject Research). Approval is granted for one calendar year. This approval expires on **November 26, 2019**.

Principal investigators assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed on or before the expiration date if the research project requires more than one year for completion. A Continuing Review form along with required documents must be submitted on or before the stated deadline. Failure to do so will result in study termination and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** At the conclusion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Close out form must be submitted to AR-EHS.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Pursuant to SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.13AR, unanticipated problems and serious adverse events must be reported to AR-EHS.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-Compliance:** Pursuant to SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.05AR, potential non-compliance, including deviations from the protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an Amendment form to AR-EHS for review by the IRB. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented. Amendments do not extend time granted on the initial approval
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form, only the IRB approved form is allowed.
7. **Audit:** Any proposal may be subject to audit by the IRB Administrator during the life of the study. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate records for five years and making them available for inspection upon request.
8. **Recruitment:** All recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB. Recruitment materials distributed to potential participants must use the approved text and include the study's IRB number, approval date, and expiration dates in the following format: WTAMU IRB##-##-## Approved: ##/##/#### Expiration Date: ##/##/####.

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT; EMAIL AND TELEPHONE

Email Script:

*Addressed specifically to owner and/or manager

Hello,

My name is Hannah Ellis and I am a graduate student of the College of Fine Arts and Humanities at West Texas A&M University. I am working on a research project about the decision-making process of social media trends in small businesses. This letter is being sent to you based on the social media presence of your business, which is designed for small businesses within Amarillo and Canyon. If interested, you (and/or business manager and/or social media manager) will be asked to participate in a 45-60-minute interview at your convenience. Questions regarding decision-making and social media will be asked during the interview. I will email a short survey created through Qualtrics, a week prior to the interview. Research participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Any identifying information of your involvement with this research will remain confidential and you will be able to withdraw from the research at any point. Participants will be entered to win a WTAMU gift basket at the completion of the research study.

If you are interested, please contact Hannah Ellis at heellis1@buffs.wtamu.edu or by phone (970) 216-3401or Dr. Mary Liz Brooks by phone (806) 651-2808 or email mbrooks@wtamu.edu to schedule an interview time, date and location. This study is approved by the Institutional Review Board of WTAMU.

Respectfully,
Hannah Ellis
M.A Student
West Texas A&M University
College of Fine Arts and Humanities

Telephone Script:

*Ask specifically for manager and/or owner of business.

Hello, my name is Hannah Ellis and I am a graduate student of the College of Fine Arts and Humanities at West Texas A&M University. I am working on a research project about the decision-making process of social media trends in small businesses. I am contacting you based on the social media presence of your business, which is designed for small businesses within Amarillo and Canyon. If interested, you (and/or business manager and/or social media manager) will be asked to participate in a 45-60-minute interview at your convenience. Questions regarding decision-making and social media will be asked during the interview. I will email a short survey created through Qualtrics, a week prior to the interview. Research participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Any identifying information of your involvement with this research will remain confidential and you will be able to withdraw from the research at any point. I have an information sheet that provides additional material that will be emailed prior to the interview. Participants will be entered to win a WTAMU gift basket at the completion of the research study. Would you (and/or business manager and/or social media manager)

be willing to participate in the study? Please let me know of a time, date and location that fits your schedule.

APPENDIX C: INFORMATION LETTER

Thank you for your interest in the social media trends research study. Below is some information about your involvement in the study.

What is the purpose of the research?
The purposes of the study are to understand the role decision-making within small businesses. This research will also gain information regarding social media trends.
Who can participate?
The research will benefit from gathering data from businesses located in the Amarillo/Canyon area. Small business owners, managers and/or social media managers can participate. All participants must be 18 years or older.
What does the study entail?
The participants will be asked to complete a pre-interview survey and one interview. The participant (business) will be entered into a drawing.
Are any risks involved?
Participants are not expected to be exposed to no more than minimal risks in the study.
What is the time commitment required by participants?
Pre-interview survey should not be expected to take more than three minutes. Interviews should last no more than 60 minutes.
Will participant information remain anonymous?
Yes, participant privacy is guaranteed. Participation is confidential, only the researcher will have access to the interview recording. Audio devices used in interviews will remain in a locked storage container in which only the researcher has access too. Any identifying information in the transcription will be removed from the study. The audio files will be destroyed once the final transcription has been completed. The results of the study will be published in West Texas A&M University student thesis database.
Is participation voluntary?
Yes, participation is completely voluntary. You may decide at any point during the study to withdraw.

Who may I contact with questions?
Co-Investigator West Texas A&M M.A. student, Hannah Ellis and principal investigator, Dr. Brooks, Assistant Professor of Media Communication. Dr. Brooks may be reached by email at mbrooks@wtamu.edu or by phone (806) 651-2808. Hannah Ellis may be contacted at heellis1@buffs.wtamu.edu or by phone (970) 216-3401. Additional information about your rights as a participant can be answered through the Vice president of research and compliance, Dr. Angela Spalding at (806) 651-2732 or aspaulding@wtamu.edu
Are there any benefits from participating?
While there may be no direct benefit for the participants, the business will be entered to win a drawing once the research study is complete.

How can I become a participant?
Contact the co-investigator of this study to schedule an interview, time, date, and location. Please contact Hannah Ellis at heellis1@buffs.wtamu.edu or (970) 216-3401.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Soft opening questions:
- What is a typical day like for you?
- How long has this business been at this location?

General social media questions:
- What draws you to look at a business profile?
- How often, do you pay attention to other businesses social media?
- What are the advantages of having accessibility to social media as a small business?
- What is unique about social media?

Direct questions about businesses social media:
- When did this business first start using social media?
  - What decisions were made to use social media?
- What was the first social media platform used, why?
- What impacted your choice to use these platforms?
- Do you think one platform outweighs another?
  - Strengths/weaknesses of the different platforms?
- Which platform has been the most successful for this business? How did you decide this?
- Which platform do you see the most consumer interaction with?
- How has your business improved using social media over the past year?
  - In what areas?
- What is the businesses biggest challenge on social media? How do you decide to overcome that challenge?
- How do social media platforms market your brand?
- How has social media changed the way consumers contact the business?
- Does this business host frequent events? If so, what type of events?
  - Do you boost the events?
  - How much would you boost an event for?
  - On what platforms do you post your events?

Questions for Social Media Manager or person who manages their social media
- What training do you have in social media?
  - Have you completed social media certification courses?
- What does being a social media manager in a small business mean to you?
- What qualities should a social media manager have in order to perform their job?
- How has the addition of business profiles and insights allowed you to become more aware of the customers searching for this business?

Do you know any other small businesses in the Amarillo/Canyon area that may be a good fit for this study?

APPENDIX E: SURVEY

1. What category is your business associated with? (Select one)
   - Retail
   - Restaurant/Bar
   - Home Service Professionals
   - Financial Professional
   - Consulting
   - Other: Please list
2. How many employees work for this business?
   - Part time & full time
     - 0-4
     - 5-9
     - 10-14
     - 15-19
     - 20+
3. How many social media platforms does the business have?
   - 1-2
   - 3-4
   - 5+
4. Select the social media platforms this business uses. (Select all that apply)
   - Facebook
   - Instagram
   - Twitter
   - LinkedIn
   - Pinterest
   - YouTube
   - Hootsuite
   - Snapchat
   - Tumbler
   - Mail Chimp
   - Flickr
   - Yelp
5. Select the most frequently used platforms (select all that apply)
   - Facebook
   - Instagram
   - Twitter
   - LinkedIn
   - Pinterest
   - YouTube
   - Hootsuite
   - Snapchat
   - Tumbler
   - Mail Chimp
   - Flickr
   - Yelp
6. Who operates your businesses social media platforms?
   - Manager
   - Owner

- Social Media Manager/Specialist
- Employee
- Other

7. What is the age of the person who operates the accounts?
   - 13-18
   - 19-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 36-40
   - 40+

8. What is the education of the person who operates the accounts?
   - High School
   - Some College
   - Associates Degree
   - Bachelor Degree
   - Master Degree
   - Doctoral Degree
   - Specialized certificate

9. What gender does the person who operates the accounts associate as?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Binary
   - None
   - Do not wish to answer

10. Do the social media platforms feature your business brand? (see logo example)
    - Yes
    - Somewhat
    - No

11. Who are your customer demographics?
    A. Age Range
       - 18-25
       - 26-33
       - 34-41
       - 42-49
       - 50-57
       - 58-65
       - 66-73
       - 73+
    B. Gender
       - Female
       - Male
       - Binary
       - None
       - Do not wish to answer

APPENDIX F: SURVEY CONSENT LETTER

Thank you for your interest in this study regarding trends in social media. Participation in this survey is voluntary and your responses will remain completely confidential. This survey will take 1-3 minutes to complete.

In continuation with this survey you are acknowledging that you are 18 years of age or older and wish to participate in this study regarding trends in social media. In this survey you will be asked about your knowledge of current social media uses within the small business and awareness of the impacts of social media.

You understand that you are able to exit the survey at any time and are not obligated to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate in this study, you may opt out by selecting "no" at the bottom of this page. You understand that you could be at risk of uncomfortable feelings due to the nature of these questions however, these risks are no greater than everyday conversation.

The information gathered through this data will be stored on a secure server and only the principal investigator and co-investigator will have access to it. The survey will only be used to gather anonymous information and individual responses will not be identifiable. There are no right or wrong answers for any of the questions asked in the survey. The survey does ask demographic questions including age, gender, and education.

This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at West Texas A&M University. If you have a concern about this study you may contact Dr. Angela Spalding, Vice President for Research and Compliance and Dean of Graduate Studies, (806)-651-2730 or aspaulding@wtamu.edu

Hannah Ellis, Graduate Student, Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities

I have read the statement above and agree to the terms listed

- o **YES,** I agree to participate in this study.

- o **NO,** I do not agree to participate in this study.

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW CONSENT LETTER

Thank you for your interest in this study regarding trends in social media. Participation in this interview is voluntary and your responses will remain completely confidential. This interview will take no longer than 60 minutes. By signing this consent letter, you understand this interview will be recorded on a secure recording device.

In continuation with this interview you are acknowledging that you are 18 years of age or older and wish to participate in this study regarding trends in social media. In this interview you will be asked about your knowledge of current social media uses within the small business and awareness of the impacts of social media.

You understand that you are able to exit the interview at any time and are not obligated to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate in this study, you may opt out by informing the co-investigator you wish to withdraw. You understand that you could be at risk of uncomfortable feelings due to the nature of these questions however, these risks are no greater than everyday conversation.

The information gathered through this data will be stored on a secure recording device and only the principal investigator and co-investigator will have access to it. The interview will only be used to gather anonymous information and individual responses will not be identifiable. There are no right or wrong answers for any of the questions asked in the interview. The information gathered from the interview will be used as further validation to the research study.
This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at West Texas A&M University. If you have a concern about this study you may contact Dr. Angela Spalding, Vice President for Research and Compliance and Dean of Graduate Studies, (806)-651-2730 or aspaulding@wtamu.edu

Hannah Ellis, Graduate Student, Sybil B. Harrington College of Fine Arts and Humanities

I have read the statement above and agree to the terms listed

- o **YES,** I agree to participate in this study.

- o **NO,** I do not agree to participate in this study.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Printed name of Participant

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. January 19, 2019. Interview with participant O

2. January 24, 2019. Interview with participant P

3. January 28, 2019. Interview with participant X

4. February 1, 2019. Interview with participant C

5. February 8, 2019. Interview with participant T

6. February 11, 2019. Interview with participant P

7. February 14, 2019. Interview with participant Q

8. February 19, 2019. Interview with participant H

TranscribeMe!

Transcription details:

Date:	20-Feb-2019
Input sound file:	DS400033.WMA

Transcription results:

S1: 00:01	All right. So first question. What is a typical day like for you guys?
S2: 00:09	So we have a prep guy go in and get the fire hot and get whatever ingredients need to be cycled and prepped for the day. That usually happens about 9:00 AM, and then my dad meets him at 9:30 and picks up the-- take the trailer to wherever they're going for lunch.
S1: 00:30	Okay. Do y'all typically do then-- you have most days you're out somewhere in the community serving?
S2: 00:37	Yeah. We do lunch and dinner Tuesday through Saturday, and lunch and dinner aren't always the same place. So they'll set up there and then sometimes, like a couple of places we can drop the trailer early, and that way when I get off my main job, then I can just drive right to the worksite and unlock the trailer and work.
S1: 00:57	Get starting.
S2: 00:58	Otherwise, I have to go back to the shop, pick up the trailer again, and take it to wherever we're going to work that night.
S1: 01:04	Busy then. Two schedules. Okay. So y'all have been in the community, would you say, how many years?
S2: 01:12	Nine months.
S1: 01:15	Nine months. Okay. Almost a year then.
S2: 01:17	Yeah, almost a year.
S3: 01:17	Yeah. April 13th.
S1: 01:19	April 13th. Okay. What would y'all typically say then is a location that y'all travel to frequently, or does it change often? Y'all said you're you're at different locations, sometimes lunch and dinner. Is there certain places that you travel too often that y'all--?

S2: 01:37	We have kind of a fixed routine so it changes every day, but that day is kind of set. So for instance, Brewery we're doing Tuesdays and Friday nights. We do Coffee every Wednesday for lunch downtown, things like that.
S1: 01:55	Okay. So the next set of questions is just going to be generalized about social media itself. What draws you to look at a business's profile? Is there a particular message that they're sending? Is it the graphics? If you are looking at other businesses' profile, what kind of draws you to look at that?
S2: 02:17	I think mostly if it's a product that-- usually just for targeted marketing. So it's a product that responds to something you've been searching about already [inaudible] Facebook, exactly what you're interested in.