THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING ON CONSUMER BRAND PREFERENCES AND CONSUMPTION: A CASE OF ADVERTISERS AND STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON ENERGY DRINKS

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DECLARATION

I, Reitumetse Joyce Jafeta, student number   , hereby declare that this research paper submitted at the Central University of Technology, Free State for MTech Business Administration is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university. I further cede copyright of dissertation in favour of the Central University of Technology, Free state.

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I wish to express my greatest gratitude and favour to God upon the completion of my dissertation. I extol the verse from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus in gratitude and acknowledgement that I am blessed beyond measure through this completion.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and little brother.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM	FULL WORDS
CA	Competitive Advantage
CUT	Central University of Technology
ED	Energy Drinks
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
SM	Social Media
SMA	Social Media Advertising
SME	Social Media Engagement
OMT	Office Management and Technology
WOM	Word-of-Mouth

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ABSTRACT

In spite of the growing literature on social media advertising, little is known about the influence of social media platforms on student preferences and consumption of energy drinks (ED). Moreover, scant academic research exists that examines how advertisers use social media platforms for advertising and communicating about brands consumed by students. This study examines how students navigate such platforms to make informed choices about energy drinks. Drawing on an interpretivist epistemology and qualitative research approach, interview guides for advertisers and students were used to establish the influence of social media advertising on consumer brand preferences. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and four interviews were conducted with advertisers. Although students expressed some negative sentiments about Monster energy drinks, they had positive affirmations of Play energy drinks, which they perceived to boost their energy levels. Advertisers conceived social media advertising as an invaluable tool when seeking to understand how students feel about their products, their preferences and consumption of energy drinks. As such, the results demonstrated that Electronic-Word-of-Mouth (EWOM) via social media platforms (especially via Facebook) influenced student preferences for brands moderately. This study recommends several interventions to improve the growth of social media advertising in order to widen the consumption of energy drink brands amongst the youth. In view of students' moderate use of social media for making informed choices and decisions about brands, advertisers are encouraged to proactively develop and nurture dynamic and persistent relationships with consumers such as students through fostering durable social media interactions. This study provides a crucial point of departure for investigating the motivations for the growing popularity of social media advertising, and for developing effective strategies for fostering lasting bonds between particular brands and consumers.

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1. INTRODUCTION	**1.5. MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION**
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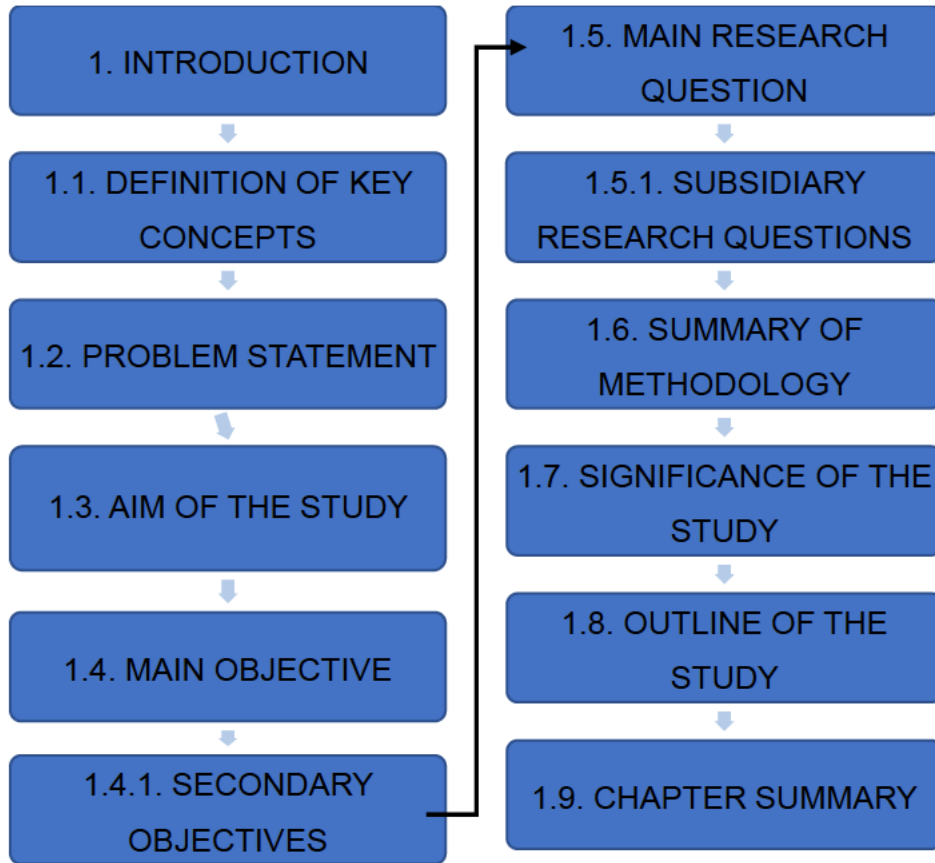
1. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the influence of social media advertising on consumer brand preferences and consumption at the Central University of Technology (CUT), Bloemfontein campus in the Free State province. The CUT, Free State was established in 1981 as "Technikon Free State." On 26th of March 2004, the former Technikon Free State officially exchanged its "technikon" status for a tailor-made identity when its new name was published in the Government Gazette – a name that is a true reflection of what the university stands for, namely Central University of Technology, Free State.

Currently, consumers all over the world contend with the presence of various competing brands and products (Chovanova, Korshunov & Babcanova, 2015). Brands have an impact on people's everyday lives due to the role and effect of the internet platforms on which most are advertised. As a result, brands have an influence on the consumers' decision-making process especially on whether to purchase a product or service or not. The impact of social media advertising and the exponential increase in online networking have resulted in a deep digital consumer penetration, especially when considering that the number of worldwide internet users currently is 4.021 billion (Statista, 2018). Kurtkoti (2016) notes further that the negative word-of-mouth reporting that arises from the negative feelings about a purchased product, especially with energy drink brands, spreads much faster than the positive affirmations of the brand. This is because while consumers tend to talk less about positive experiences, they often warn others against purchasing products via the internet platforms with which they themselves have not been satisfied.

Other, often extant literature is replete with evidence of student consumption of beverages (Chesnut, 2010; Seifert, Schaechter, Hershorin & Lipshultz, 2011; Institut National De Santé Publique Du Québec, 2013; Hossain, Azad, Parveen & Masum, 2014). The 2010-2011 Québec Health Survey reveals that 24.5% of Canadian students drank sweetened beverages such as fruit drinks, carbonated soft drinks, sports drinks, and energy drinks daily (Pica *et al*. 2014). Generally, student food and drink choices may be influenced by individual factors (e.g. taste preferences, self-discipline, time and convenience). However, other factors such as the physical

environment (e.g. availability and accessibility, appeal and prices of food products), students' social networks (e.g. social media, advertising), and lack of control (e.g. from parental, friends and peers) also determine energy drink consumption habits (Deliens *et al.*, 2014). In view of the paucity of parental guidance on healthy dietary requirements, students are increasingly turning to social media advertisements in their search for "quick fixes" for their dietary needs.

Various people all over the globe are using social media in real time to access their preferred brands, with the majority spending almost a quarter of their daily time surfing social networks (Forbes, 2017). In 2009, it was noted that about 53% of the social media users were identified as active social media 'lurkers' and followers instead of active contributors of advertisement content on social media. This phenomenon, however, has changed over time with many users becoming active consumers and active contributors (Ngai *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, energy drink advertisers who are determined to get attention from consumers need to redesign their advertising strategies, use various social media platforms to get the attention of the different consumers, and find means to reduce the negative views on brands such as energy drinks.

1.1. Definitions of key concepts

For the s of this study, the definitions of the following concepts are adopted:

Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) refers to "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media advertising can be defined as a process by which companies create, communicate, and deliver online advertising offerings via social media platforms to build and maintain stakeholder relationships. These relationships enhance stakeholders' value by facilitating interaction and information sharing, offering personalised purchase recommendations, and creating word-of-mouth advertising among stakeholders about existing and trending products and services (Yadav & Rahman, 2017).

Consumer brand preference describes consumer choices of brands that they consider to be congruent with their self-image and identity. However, as part of a larger social group, consumer choices tend to converge to a certain pattern, thus forming the basics of a social identity (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014).

A monster energy drink is a non-alcoholic beverage that often contains ingredients, such as caffeine, taurine, and B-vitamins. People consume energy drinks because they like the taste and the effects of caffeine on reducing sleepiness, improving alertness and concentration (Verster *et al.*, 2014).

1.2. Problem statement

The dichotomy between advertising and marketing regulations raises the question as to how advertising techniques may circumvent consumer regulations and distort the economic behaviour of the consumer (Lindstrom, 2008). It is rare to find a marketer that shares a similar deep passion for advertising as they might for law and regulations. Degrees of polarity exist in the creativity of the right brain attributed to advertisement creativity and the analytical processes of the left brain, often more attributed to the regulatory processes of law (Loftus & Pickrell, 1995; Arkush, 2008). The two tend to be opposing rather than complementary, and rarely do they seek each other out.

Marketers across the globe are increasingly preoccupied with using social media advertising to create brand awareness, brand image and equity (Alhaddad, 2015) in ways that identify consumer preferences and to optimise value for their brands and businesses. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, have changed the way people interact with one another during past decades. The human nature of online interactions shows people's engagement in social activities and the formation of different groups according to their preferences, hobbies and educational levels rather than advertisers' expectations on consumer profiles. For instance, students who come from one university may be connected to one another through belonging to the same school, while people who meet online may share similar interests. As a result, advertisers attempt to deliver advertisements to those people who are interested in their products.

This demanding and evolving nature of consumer brand preferences has created significant changes in consumers' decision-making and purchasing behaviours. Brand content can no longer be shoved down reluctant consumers' throats. For instance, social media platforms constitute consumer-generated media that consumers are actively initiating, creating, using and circulating to educate each other on products, brands, services and personalities and issues (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). However, the fast changing consumer brand preferences, as determined by an analysis of consumer surveys, mean that modern technology such as social media should be exploited to match market goods and align them to consumer brand preferences such as those of students. Consumer preferences for brands seem to be growing with increasing complexity (Schultz, Don & Martin, 2011b). Consumer exposure to vast amounts of information means that marketers can get through consumers' filters by identifying a claim or creating promises about their services or products, which are strongly penetrative (Silverman, 2001:95). One of the ways that marketers used to filter through to consumers is by accessing their preferences for brands through social media advertising. However, limited knowledge exists on the way in which social media advertising influences brand preferences (Jiang, Ni & Srinivasan, 2014:645), especially those of university students.

The problem, therefore, lies in the preferences schism between traditional marketers and consumers such as students. On the one hand, marketers across the globe are increasingly preoccupied with using social media advertising to create brand awareness, brand image and brand equity (Alhaddad, 2015) in ways that seize hold of consumers' preferences and optimise value for their brands and businesses. On the other hand, consumers have exploited the interactive affordances of social media to become more demanding to marketers and service providers, highly individualise their preferences, and caution and educate each other on products (Sheth & Mittal, 2004, Arora and Sharma, 2013). Therefore, customers are exploiting social media platforms to strengthen their search for information, assist with decision-making and to facilitate prudent purchase transactions (Raaij, 1998; Ivanauskas, 2009) in ways that potentially leverage their purchasing power. Since user-generated content is creating a new kind of formidable trust among consumers and enhancing the credibility of content amongst social media users (Freshman Consulting, 2010), one wonders at how university

students appropriate the social media to make choices about the purchase of energy drinks. There also exists Limited research has been conducted to date that focuses on co-creation of value through online communities from a company perspective (Hajli, 2015), hence this study.

To investigate energy drink advertisers and consumers' (i.e. university students) perspectives on the significance of social media (SM) platforms in shaping consumer preferences and consumption of energy drinks.

1.3. Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to articulate knowledge on transformative use of social media advertising. To achieve this aim, advertisers' and university students' perspectives on the influence of social media advertising on student preferences and consumption of brands were investigated in this study. While social media advertising is conceived to provide reliable and cost effective methods to reach out to stakeholders, durable business–customer relations are forged when advertisers profile customers' brand preferences to maximise the competitive advantage of their businesses over their rivals. The new advancement of Web 2.0 and the Semantic Web (often called Web 3.0) provides a chance for consumers and advertisers to interact constructively and meaningfully to the benefit of each other.

1.4. Main objective

In order to achieve the aim of the study, the main objective of the research was to investigate energy drink advertisers and consumers (i.e. university students) perspectives on the significance of social media (SM) platforms in shaping consumer preferences and consumption of energy drinks.

1.4.1. Secondary objectives

The subordinate objectives stated for the study entailed the following:

1. To establish university students' subjective perceptions on the general uses of social media platforms.

2. To document the students' narrative accounts of the different social media platforms they use in their decision-making on brands especially energy drinks.

3. To explore the advertisers' perspectives on the social media platforms they mainly use for advertising brands especially energy drinks.

4. To explore the advertisers' perspectives on the influence of social media on the promotion of brands especially energy drinks.

5. To explore the advertisers' perspectives on the contribution of social media advertising to consumer preferences for brands especially energy drinks.

To guide the research and in order to achieve the objectives the following research questions were formulated. Only if answers could be found to the questions, the aim of the study could be regarded as having been achieved.

1.5. Main research question

The main aim question to be answered to achieve the aim of this study was: What are energy drink advertisers and consumers (i.e. university students) perspectives on the significance of social media platforms in shaping consumer brand (energy drink) preferences?

1.5.1. Subsidiary research questions

1. What are students' subjective perspectives on the general uses of social media platforms?

2. What are these consumer's narrative accounts of the different social media platforms that they use in their decision-making process about brands, especially monster energy drinks?

3. What are the advertisers' perspectives on social media platforms they use for advertising their brands (e.g. energy drinks)?

4. How do the advertisers perceive the influences of social media on the promotion of consumer brands, especially energy drinks?

5. How do the consumers perceive the impact of social media advertising on their preferences for brands, especially energy drinks?

1.6. Summary of the methodology

For this study adopts a qualitative approach was adopted. The target population consisted of 140 students registered for Office Management and technology at the Central University of Technology, Free State main campus in Bloemfontein. The qualitative approach necessitated the use of convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique for the collection of data. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data and thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Details of the methodology are elaborated on in Chapter 3 of this report.

1.7. Significance of the study

The findings of this study are expected to benefit society considering that the social media plays an important role in most consumer's selection of brands in today's media -centred world and the reality that there exists a greater demand exists for goods and yet people lack the time to go and shop for their preferred brands (Perreau, 2014). The ubiquity of social media has increased social media advertising and content sharing possibilities leading to consumers' increased and convenient access to brands. Therefore, the opportunities for multiple connectivity that social media platforms provide tend to increase communication among consumers and promote of brands. As such, the different ways through which social media platforms influence consumers' preference for brands need to be uncovered as advertisers are to promote effective communication and advertising via social media platforms.

Given the obscurity of findings on the effectiveness of social media platforms in promoting brand preferences (Shimp, 2012), this study can serve as a future reference for researchers on this subject. The study can also provide other advertisers with insights into which social media platforms are best suited for advertising and increasing access to consumer preferences for brands, especially energy drinks. This understanding has potential to reduce advertisers' wasteful investment in ineffective social media platforms (Motyka, Marcinkowski 2015; Reissig *et al.* 2009).

1.8. Outline of the study

This study comprises five chapters, namely orientation to the study, social media advertising and consumer brand preferences, methodology, findings and discussion, and the conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 1 – Orientation to the study
This chapter presents an overview of the study, problem statement, the research objectives, significance and limitations to the study.

Chapter 2 – Social media advertising and consumer brand preferences
This chapter provides a broad context for the literature review on social media advertising and consumer brand preferences. It also considers other studies conducted on those variables.

Chapter 3 – Research methodology
This chapter provides a detailed account of how the research was conducted. It provides some insights on the epistemology, research approach, research design, sampling method, data collection techniques and data analysis techniques used in the study.

Chapter 4 – Analysis, Interpretation and discussion of results
All the results generated from the research interviews are presented and interpreted in this chapter.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations
This chapter contains conclusions, recommendations, a recap of the research questions, implications of the findings for future research and research limitations.

1.9. Chapter summary

This overview of the study presented the project statement, the aim of the study, research objectives, research questions and significance of the study. In the following

chapter literature on social media, consumer brand preference and students' decision-making about brands will be discussed in terms of literature review findings.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING, CONSUMER BRAND PREFERENCES AND DECISION MAKING

2. INTRODUCTION

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- 2.1. AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA & CONSUMER-ORIENTATED ENGAGEMENT
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- 2.19. COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA DECISION MAKING

2.20. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.21. CHAPTER SUMMARY

2. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an overview of the influence of social media advertising on consumer brand preferences, and the significance of social media on students' brand preferences. This chapter provides a detailed review of literature on social media advertising, social media brand awareness, students' and advertisers' perspectives on the influence of social media on consumer awareness of brands. The chapter also provides information on energy drinks as examples of brands university students consume and how social media influence such consumption.

2.1. An overview of social media and consumer-oriented engagement

Social media comprise a group of internet-based applications built on the concept of Web 2.0 that encourages user connection, participation, collaboration, and the sharing of content (Musser & O'Reilly, 2007). Social media now clearly have become a part of internet users' daily lives as a quarter of the world's population were using social network sites in 2013 (eMarketer, 2013) and more than one billion users watched videos on YouTube monthly in 2014 (YouTube, 2014). In addition, social networks have become an avenue through which retailers can extend their advertising campaigns to a wider range of consumers in today's technology-mediated driven world (Chi, 2011:46). In short, social media have transformed the nature and practice of online communication into an extensive two-way dialogue among users, which may cover private and social topics, and issues about companies' products, brands and services (Lehmkuhl & Jung, 2013). Networked consumers no longer merely act as passive recipients of brand and firm-related information but are enabled to create, modify and exchange their own personalised content and applications through social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Hollebeek & Brodie, 2016).

With the prevalence of social media networks, the nature and dynamics of interactivity between consumers and organisations continues to evolve at a rapid pace (Ghazali *et al.*, 2016). These interactions are gaining prominence in advertising and customer relationship management, with consumers also gaining increasing influence on brand choices in the online sphere (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; De Vries *et al.*, 2012; Malthouse *et al.*, 2013). It is thus crucial for companies to create a superior consumer

experience, which can be leveraged by fostering enhanced consumer engagement, which in turn generates enhanced customer loyalty (Brodie *et al.*, 2013). Consumers' need for interactive, collaborative, and personalised interactions have been strongly influenced by the rapid proliferation of social media and the new mode of communication and interaction it brings among consumers as well as between consumers and brands (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Sasser *et al.*, 2014).

2.2. Definition of social media advertising

Social media advertising (SMA), a form of internet marketing that utilises various social networking sites in order to achieve marketing communication and branding goals (Wordstream 2015), has risen to prominence. Through their e-commerce-based marketing and advertising efforts, brand companies can draw from the power of social media in order to increase their revenue, reach new customers or communicate with existing ones, improve engagement with customers, establish a base for any future use of products or services and reposition their brands. There are likely to be other ways not yet used or discovered, which focus on how social media advertising can create better and smoother business and personal operations (Fidelman, 2013). Therefore, marketers must always avail themselves of social media platforms and preferably interact in one-on-one conversations with consumers to form durable relationships.

2.3. Dimensions of social media advertising

There are five dimensions of social media advertising (Asa'ad & Anas, 2014). These dimensions facilitate the creation of advertisers' connections with consumers and contribute to the building of traffic on company brands on websites.

2.3.1. Online Communities

The main motivation for social media advertising is to enable advertisers to develop online communities that converge around and consume their brands. A company or business employs social media platforms to build a community around its products/business. Vibrant communities create loyalty for brands and encourage

consumer discussions, which can contribute towards brand exposure and improvements (Taprial, & Kanwar, 2012).

2.3.2. Social interaction

The debate on social media advertising is incomplete without recourse to social interaction. Consumers of particular brands can use their Facebook pages and Twitter accounts to notify, quickly and simultaneously, all their followers about specific subjects (Berselli, Burger & Close, 2012) relating to these brands. In addition, social networking sites also enable greater interaction with the online community through broadcasting up-to-date information about the brands, as well as communicating students' tastes and preferences for particular brands such as energy drinks online.

2.3.3. Sharing of Content

Content sharing is another important dimension of social media advertising. Content sharing is the extent to which an individual exchange, distributes and receives content in a social media setting. University students share with peers the brands they prefer on their social media platforms especially when these brands resonate with a majority of their peers (Babac, 2011).

2.3.4. Accessibility

Increasing accessibility is another important consideration as far as social media advertising is concerned. Through social media advertising consumers easily access brands at no or minimal costs via social media platforms. Social media platforms are easy to use and do not require any special skills or knowledge to use (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). Therefore, social media platforms provide user-friendly content that can be used by both older and younger students.

2.3.5. Credibility

Companies also gain increased credibility when they market their products and services via social media platforms. Credibility relates to clearly delivering messages

to consumers and establishing sincerity through what is said or done, connecting emotionally with the target audience, motivating the buyer and generating loyal customers. The social media provide a good platform for all businesses to network and to reach out to their target audience, connect with them directly and generate trust by listening to what they say (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). Advertisers, therefore, may generate loyal customers by providing a brand image that truly addresses the contents of the brand.

2.4. Platforms for promoting social media advertising

Over 2.7 billion people globally and approximately 40% of the world's population is online (ICT, 2014). Over half of online adults in the USA use two or more social networking sites (Pew Internet, 2014), with sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube commonly used to navigate content on the Web in addition to traditional search engines (Bughin *et al.*, 2011). Social media advertising platforms, with a near 100% penetration on mobile phones worldwide (ICT, 2014), are increasingly accessed and used at all times and places and provide the platform for brand recognition. As a result, companies are proactively engaging in new social media advertising strategies and tactics (Neff, 2014). For example, a study conducted by Social Bakers (2014) demonstrates that the number of social media interactions often contributes to increased visits to the brand's website. Other research findings suggest that social media engagements are ineffective in stimulating brand loyalty and sales (Traphagen, 2015). Nevertheless, there are several popular social media advertising platforms (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) that most advertisers use to promote brands and these sites are described below.

2.4.1. Facebook

Many industry surveys (Ascend2, 2013; Gerber, 2014) report that promoting engagement on large audience platforms such as Facebook is one of the most important social media advertising goals of marketers targeting consumers of energy drink brands. Social media advertising is increasingly attracting clients' attention by engaging and paying attention to their needs. In the early days of social media advertising, the volume of users who were socially connected to brands were the

primary driving force for engagement. Accordingly, organisations aggressively acquired fans and followers on platforms like Facebook by investing heavily in advertisements on the network. Facebook was considered the most used platform for advertising as it provided easy-to-navigate communication interfaces for advertising energy drinks.

Facebook has become one essential and influential site for marketers and companies to launch social media campaigns. Facebook evolved from a private network into a social network with users from all over the world standing at more than 1.71 billion (Statista, 2016). With regard to its use for business, Facebook is the place where companies build relationships with its current and new customers in the long-term (Facebook, 2016). Mollen and Wilson describe engagement as involvement through "likes" or "sharing" activities on brands (Dahl, 2015: 155). Moreover, social media encourage interactive participation between two parties through its shareable content. According to Ellering (2016), there are effective tactics used to create an active engagement on social media platforms, and these are:

1. Sharing videos or brands most watched or purchased by consumers.
2. Tagging a consumer in relation to content on the brand in question.
3. Sharing a consumer's post, which is valuable to the company or brand.
4. Scheduling posts in recommended effective time to increase engagement.
5. Scheduling and increasing content-related posts on Facebook to generate reach, organic growth and brand awareness.
6. Optimising hashtag usage to double engagement rates.
7. Reposting content that audiences desire.

The use of Facebook advertising can benefit companies by:

1. raising brand awareness;
2. generating leads;
3. increasing sales locally;
4. increasing sales via the website, and
5. promoting current and new applications (Facebook, 2016).

Facebook advertising normally is aimed at a target audience. Literature defines a target audience as a specific group of people within the target market at whom a product or the advertising message of a product is aimed (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014; Boundless, 2016). Meanwhile, Rouhiainen (2016) recommends the targeting of customers with specific segmentation and interest when advertising content, which leads to deeper engagement and more followers for the company. As result, the identification of a target audience enhances the results of Facebook advertising through the alignment of the company's objectives and products to the demographics a company desires for its products.

2.4.2. Twitter

Another popular platform for social media advertising is Twitter. Previous studies claimed that customised advertising on Twitter can be informative, pleasurable and increases a firm's credibility (Coyle, Smith & Platt, 2012; Sreenivasan, Lee & Goh, 2012). However, customised advertising also may decrease irritation of customers because messages would be well personalised to deal with customers' interests and preferences (Lee, Kim & Sundar, 2015). Almost one in five posts on Twitter includes a specific brand name and one-fifth of these posts express positive or negative feelings about that brand (Jansen *et al*., 2009). When the number of tweets sent per day, which is 500 million (Twitter, 2015), is taken into account, the importance of Electronic-word-of-mouth (EWOM) conversations on Twitter can be seen more explicitly as an average of 100 million tweets per day mention specific brands. For this reason, companies desire to interact with customers on Twitter by having exchanging brand messages via consumers' official accounts. Statistics indicate that 77% of Fortune 500 companies use Twitter actively and underscore Twitter as the most used social media platform for advertising products among these companies (Barnes *et al*., 2013).

2.4.3. YouTube

Another interesting social media advertising platform is YouTube. This website allows video makers to monetise content in many ways including through advertisements (YouTube Partner, 2015). Successful YouTubers have huge followings with some

having millions of fans which is essential for business, especially for advertising and promoting brands. YouTube has billions of total views (YouTube, 2016), and houses millions of videos ranging from product reviews of the brands such as energy drinks. Contrary to many companies that have tried and failed to promote their brands on YouTube, YouTubers succeed in producing successful videos that provide content that captures customers' attention (Rich, 2013). YouTube users make money by employing product placement on their videos (Rich, 2013), which means that the audience is being influenced through deliberate and subtle insertion of a product into media entertainment (Perloff, 2010: 291). YouTube has billions of total views (YouTube, 2016), and houses millions of videos ranging from product reviews of the brand under study, energy drinks. It also has become the number one platform to search for information on virtually anything ranging from content of brands, science and technology to other social activities such as learning music and sports.

Furthermore, the young generation ranging from the age of 18 to 34 years, compose two-thirds of the YouTube population and watch YouTube videos more than any cable TV channel (Perrin, 2015). Basically, there are two types of advertisement on YouTube videos and these are in-stream video advertising and in-video advertising. In-stream advertisements let viewers choose to watch brand advertisements or skip it after playing for at least five seconds. Standard in-stream advertising can be a maximum of fifteen seconds. In-video advertisements are the advertisements that usually appear on the lower portion of a company's video. These advertisements typically appear for the fifteen seconds to the viewer and if she/he desires he/she can close or minimise them (Pikas & Sorrentino, 2014). YouTube features a number of video types, which, in principle, could feature the brand more centrally. Nevertheless, a few studies demonstrate that consumers find it hard to recall seeing product-related information on this site, thus showing that brands may often play a more lateral role (Choubtarash & Nourani, 2013, Pikas & Sorrentino, 2014). Therefore, when the consumer views the advertisement it is easy for them to stop it or continue watching it on YouTube. This suggests that whether it is viewed for the first time or is familiar, advertisers must always raise the bar in their advertising and promotion strategies to get the attention of new customers.

2.5. The evolution of social media advertising

Although social media advertising seems to be a new trend, it has been in practice for a while having started a few decades ago. History suggests that technology began to change rapidly during the 20th century with the first social media site having been created in 1997 by Andrew Weinreich (Hendricks 2013). This newly created social media site enabled the registered user to share and upload views on brands and interact with peers on brands of their preference. This led to the popularity of blogging. The explosion of blogging and social media resulted in the establishment of sites such as My Space and LinkedIn during 2000 (Barker, Barker, Bormann, Roberts & Zahay, 2016). Further technological developments led to the creation of Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005 and Twitter in 2006 - social media platforms that became available to users around the world. These sites are recognised as the most popular social networks on the internet. It is also worth noting that various social networking sites can be linked to allow cross posting and brand visiting. It is also very difficult to project what the future of social networking might look like in the coming years or even decades from now but it seems as if it will have its existence until human beings cease to exist on earth (Hendricks 2013). Despite the popularity of social media advertising, an integrated perspective on social media advertising, especially one that considers marketers' and consumers' perspectives on social media-mediated brand awareness and consumption is under-explored in mainstream literature on online advertising - a gap the current research attempts to close.

Social media have become an effective and convenient tool for advertising and communicating with customers and stakeholders inside their organisations. Social media advertising is well established but the most popular social media vary with user demographics and content shared via such platforms. Therefore, it is important to analyse the popular social media by tracking social activities amongst target audiences in an effort to uplift the business and the brand itself (Chaffey, 2017).

Kiráľová and Pavlíčeka (2015) also consider globalisation as changing the nature of consumer needs, attitudes and contributing to an increase in the volume of information about their brands of preference. The rise of Web 2.0, a term attributed to Tim O'Reilly (Lange-Faria & Elliot 2012), has acted as a launch-pad in facilitating conversations

amongst individuals and groups from around the world in real-time using communication technologies that are evolving at a rapid rate (Lorenzon, 2013). Howison *et al.* (2014) also note that consumers now have the power to 'pull' whichever information they want to consume and in that way they decrease the power of the traditional broadcast or 'push' messages.

2.6. Definition of brand awareness

Having discussed social media advertising and its evolution, it is critical to turn attention to brand awareness, as the purpose of social media advertising, among other reasons, is to contribute to an increase in consumer brand awareness. For Malik, Ghafoor, Iqbal and Shahbaz (2013) brand awareness is the probability that consumers are familiar with the availability and accessibility of a company's product and service. It involves the consumers' ability to identify a brand under different conditions as reflected by their brand recognition or recall performance (Kotler & Keller, 2012). It can be argued that social media advertising has the potential to increase brand awareness through its search engine capabilities, crowdsourcing potential and ability to connect multiple audiences via one platform.

Edward and Wang (2015) conceive brand awareness as having a positive impact on a consumer's perception of the nutritional value of a brand and not its perceived physical dangers. In contrast, the brand image tends to invoke negative connotations such as the perceived physical danger of consuming a product, as well as positive affirmations of brand preferences. This means that the projection of a negative image about a brand may have negative implications on the perceptions of the brand. Peers' perceptions of the brand can trigger negative perceptions of such a brand. For instance, Sasmita and Mohd Suki (2015) claim that students consider the brand that they know as first choice and compare it with other products or brands, which results in a lowering of the possible risks to a minimum. Due to students' high exposure to social media and consumption of energy drinks, it can be expected that they would be aware of and can recognise certain brands in comparison with their rival products. They could also be aware of the unique image of a product compared to the other products. Thus, students perceive brand awareness as key to brand purchasing.

2.7. Types of brand awareness

When brand awareness is mentioned, three types of awareness often are emphasised, namely brand promotion, brand loyalty and brand equity. Brand promotion is a very important part of advertising that can increase brand recognition and sales. Brand promotion includes various elements such as organisation, advertising, sales, public relations and promotion of sales of a brand. A promotion strategy covers aspects such as deciding on promotion channels to reach the target audience and the time to promote the brand. It is also important to conduct research on the promotion strategy of the main competitors (Acutt, 2015), to establish and develop an alternative and competitive strategy. The significance of brand promotion, its nature and brand competition, are noted in how growing competition between cities, resorts and countries on the global arena has resulted in events becoming a promotional and branding tool in destination branding (Masjutina, 2016).

Another important type of brand awareness is brand loyalty. Severi and Ling (2012) argue that brand loyalty is an essential element because it can generate profit, which is used when evaluating a brand's value. The behavioural approach is an important element in brand loyalty as it is believed that constant purchasing of one brand over time is a contributor of brand loyalty (Severi & Ling, 2012). Furthermore, brand loyalty also has the power to influence the customer decision to decline or shift to competitors' brands.

The other type of brand awareness is brand equity. It is important for marketers to understand the drivers of brand equity in different markets. Kuhn *et al.* (2008) explain that every brand retains a certain amount of brand equity. There is an agreement among marketers that brand equity is defined in terms of advertising effects uniquely attributable to a brand, and that different advertising outcomes will occur if the product or service is or is not identified by a brand (Keller, 2009). Therefore, advertisers need to keep attracting new customers of energy drinks, more especially young consumers, as they are the majority consumers of energy drinks.

2.8. The evolution of brand awareness

Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) argue that the past decade's rapid evolution of the internet has offered consumers many new opportunities. Besides the obvious use of information searching and communicating without boundaries, it is possible to express feelings and thoughts and to interact with brands on social media. Brand awareness was first conceived to comprise brand recognition and recall performance. Brand recognition is related to consumers' ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when given the name as a cue. Brand recall relates to the consumers' ability to retrieve the brand when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category or some other type of probe or a cue (Dolak, 2003). Therefore, an organisation has to adapt its advertising activities to mix and match the internal advertising mix elements that will reinforce brand awareness in order to enhance competitiveness of brands (Song, Hur & Kim, 2012).

Brands awareness can be raised through advertising communication channels, which notify, remind, and convince customers about their brands, products or services (Shojaee & Azman, 2013). Kelly, King, Chapman, Boyland, Bauman and Baur (2015) note that brand awareness is one of the most commonly cited goals of marketers today, while Saydam (2015) argues that brand awareness has turned into an important variable that affects students' perceptions of a brand. A successful brand management arises from understanding and overseeing a brand image and loyalty correctly so that it creates strong characteristics that impact on consumers when they would be making their decisions. Brands are remembered with external assistance if people remember these brands only after someone has mentioned them, or in some cases when they have been placed somewhere in their notes; but if people search in their mind for some brands, they may not remember them (Koniewski, 2012). In addition, information about a brand may also come from social networks, online forums or discussions. This allows businesses to provide the most important and most relevant content that meets their expectations to consumers. As a result, companies can "create noise" in the Internet space in order to increase their visibility and consumer awareness of their existence. This can be done by creating a viral video or advertising widely throughout cyberspace in order to promote positive public feedback or word-of-mouth (Chan, 2015).

Moisescu (2000) claims that brand awareness manifests in brand recognition (consumers' ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when given the brand as cue) and brand recall (consumers' ability to retrieve the brand when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or some other cues). Koniewski (2012) asserts that brand awareness is a measure of the effectiveness of a company's advertising activity and brand name and spontaneous recall demonstrate the strength of a consumer's emotional link with the brand. Although students may not be heavy spenders as far as brands are concerned, they have the capacity to recall big brands that they purchase frequently, including those recommended by their brand ambassadors and their peer community. Koniewski (2012) regards spontaneous recall as the brands named by the consumer himself/herself. These are the ones among which the consumer chooses when buying the product of a given category. Spontaneous brand recall thus defines the consumer's selection range. Hence, marketers need to adopt different advertising activities that reinforce brand awareness and sustain students' interaction with their brands of preference.

2.9. Students' brand awareness

Student awareness of brands tends to be associated with the use of the Internet in general and social media specifically. A study on brands found that the internet is a very effective tool for increasing brand awareness and brands that utilise online tools effectively can achieve brand awareness easily (Galvez, 2014). In addition, engagement with a brand via social media clearly has a positive impact on brand awareness and can generate affirmative word-of-mouth about the brand (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt & Füller, 2013). Students feel closer to the brand when they can submit feedback about it and feel comfortable to talk about the brand when they know much about it. Goodman and Remaud (2015) found that the students' choices on brand types involved the identification of a segment that might assist in the sustainability of emerging brands if advertisers catered for brand attributes that their target consumers sought. The study concludes with four major results: the brand choice influences the segments in the market rather than traditional demographics; the reasons for store choice depend on identifying three types of brands; retailers can match their offers with their target markets, and the rise in large store format is not necessarily the end of small retail (Goodman & Remaud, 2015).

Holt (2016) notes that students have little interest in the content that brands display on social media and that very few students desire such content in their news feeds. Students often consider it a cluttered brand spam that ruins student experience online. Interacting with a favourable entertainer is different from interacting with a corporate brand and what works for one party may compromise the other (Holt, 2016). While many students do not necessarily subscribe to brands persistently and actively, it is ironic that some brand pages are often constituted by a community of students including customers, brand fans, influencers, employees and other stakeholders who voluntarily subscribe to the brand's updates (Zaglia, 2013; Pereira *et al*., 2014). The reality is that students who like/follow a brand page expose themselves not only to the focal brand's regular communications but also to other students' comments, reactions and fan posts. Brand pages afford multiple interaction tools such as comment, share, leave private and public messages on brand pages, which empower consumers to voice their opinions, express their feelings and share their personal experiences of the brand. These extended opportunities for real-time user interactivity create a lively environment to co-create rich brand experiences (Zaglia, 2013; Tafesse, 2016).

Brand posts are equipped with automatic response options, such as like, comment and share. These affordances for instant interactivity allow consumers such as students to express their feelings, opinions and reactions with respect to individual brand posts (Taecharungroj, 2016). In summary, brand posts play a crucial role of connecting brands with their customers and fans on a regular basis. They are also used to build brand awareness, introduce new products, deliver emotional stories, educate customers and stimulate purchases (Kim *et al*., 2015; Taecharungroj, 2016). Judging from the aforementioned studies, it is apparent that just like other customers, students participate in online engagements and electronic-word-of-mouth influences most decisions they make online. Thus, students would engage with their favorite energy drink brands as they tend to be busy with their work or sporting activities. As such, energy drink brands will give them energy to continue working or playing with limited exhaustion.

2.10. Definition of social media brand awareness

Nowadays, companies use social media sites as a tool to get feedback from their customers and as a means to attract new customers. Companies create groups and accounts in different networks, post news and videos, give discount and do various promotions on official groups and open community social media sites. They employ these channels to make unique group designs that assist in the creation of strong associations with a company or brand (The Marketing donut, 2015).

To stay in the minds of current followers and to attract new ones, clear objectives are required for social media advertising communication (Valtari & Kärkkäinen 2016). Additionally, it is important to understand how social media can influence consumers' awareness of a brand. In Finland, the attitudes towards social media advertising have been somewhat skeptical and the Finnish did not consider social media as serious advertising channels. Even if a few years ago pure presence in social media served as a great possibility for smaller brands to increase global awareness and connect with consumers, with fast-commercialized social media platforms, the situation now has changed dramatically (Grapevine, 2017a). The massive potential social media offer for reaching consumers, increased competition for attention, and the trend towards paid advertising, combined with advertising-critical and empowered social media users also force smaller companies to consider their social media presence and advertising activities more strategically than before (see Valtari & Kärkkäinen, 2016). Shojaee and Azman (2013) indicating that customer engagement in the social media context is the strongest positive factor that affects brand awareness (more than brand exposure and electronic-word-of-mouth.

Weber (2009) argues that social media offers any company the possibility to create a dialogue with the customer and that this may lead to the creation of increased brand awareness through electronic word-of-mouth, as customers recommend the brand to other customers. According to Keller (2009:143), social media platforms can improve both the breadth and strength of brand awareness. This study argues that social media allow specific targeting of potentially difficult-to-reach groups and thus facilitates the creation of strong brand awareness for online customer segments. In terms of salience, one of the advantages of the interactive advertising communication that

social media platforms bring is the ability to reach customers when they seek information through search engines, thus heightening awareness with potential purchase opportunities (Keller, 2009:143). Students can build a sustainable relationship with the Monster energy drink as those who consume and are satisfied with the brand can recommend it to their peers.

2.11. Students perceptions on social media brand awareness

A digital strategy consultant, Meadows-Lue (2008) points out to members of the advertising community that the rise of the Web and the explosive growth of online social networks have consequences that marketers need to understand in order to build vibrant relationships with students. Social media can illuminate consensus and bring all relevant views on an issue to the surface (Elgan, 2009). As a result, brands can persuade their customers to desire a product and join the conversation with fruitful and meaningful exchanges (Meadows-Lue, 2008).

Loretto (2009) reports that the reality that university students have more knowledge and experience with the lines of communication on social media has forced companies to seek students who can help them learn what they need to do to promote their companies and brands via online social media networks. Student experience with online activities comes naturally and as such, it can be a nightmare for professionals trying to keep up with all the benefits of social media (Loretto, 2009). A study conducted by Hyllegard, Ogle, Yan and Reitz (2011) investigated students' motivation for using Facebook and fanning or liking particular brands on the social networking site. The study found that students used this site to establish personal connections with others and used the site to create affiliations with energy drink brands that defined who they were and provided them with energy after hours to complete many tasks (Hyllegard *et al.*, 2011). In addition, Hyllegard *et al.* (2011) found that students "fanned" companies and brands to become market havens that could receive and disseminate information about brands.

Usually, young consumers consider the brand that they know as first choice, can recognise the brand on social media in comparison with rival products, and are also aware of the brand's unique image compared to the other products (Sasmita & Suki,

2015). Venkatesan *et al.* (2015) carried out a study that investigated the reciprocal effects of quality of services and the quality of electronic services on brand equity, as well as the effectiveness of the service environment on the brand equity. The results showed that the consumer's perception of quality of services and the quality of e-services had a positive influence on the brand equity. The research also showed that the quality of online services had more impact on the students' perception of brand equity in comparison with the quality of offline service.

2.12. Students' social media awareness of monster energy drinks

Social media play an important role in students' daily life and in businesses through its promotion of brands (Monster Energy drink). An examination of the vast penetration of social media and the projected number of active users in future suggests that companies will be more involved in the use of social media and the promotion of the energy drink brand as they emphasise what students should have to drink before they start with their daily activities (Kichatov & Mihajlovski, 2010). Advertising communication channels such as social media platforms enable companies to notify, remind and convince students about their brands, such as Monster energy drinks (Kotler & Keller, 2009). However, choosing efficient means to carry the message is a very complex endeavor. Even through the Internet has created new avenues to find customers using social media channels, maintaining these customers is the new challenge for marketers. Therefore, it is very important that the Monster energy drink advertisers provide content that accurately speaks to this brand in ways that make it easy to find and allow the company to retain happy customers.

A comparison between social media and traditional media shows that the former provides an interactive communication channel among customers and brands by allowing them to talk and share information via the web (Carlsson, 2010). The social media allow quick responses to customer service issues as they entertain interactions and the sharing of content (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009) in a fast, widespread, viral and cost-effective way (Stokes, 2008; Miller *et al.*, 2009). Thus, the advent of social media has resulted in a dramatic transformation of the advertising funnel from a simple to a highly complicated form (Haven *et al.*, 2007). The improvement of the level of brand awareness is one of the marketers' challenges as reflected in the complicated

funnel. As a result, dominant brands need to make a strong association with students in order to achieve the different levels of brand awareness, recognition, recall and top of the mind recognition.

2.13. Reasons for student consumption of monster energy

One of the reasons for drinking energy drinks is to provide energy critical for reducing fatigue and exhaustion when studying. Malinauskas *et al.* (2007:5) stated that 67% of the students who participated in their survey mentioned that they used energy drinks to prevent them from falling asleep during private study. Pettit and DeBarr (2011) claim that reducing high levels of stress often explains energy drink consumption among students at universities. Malinauskas *et al.* (2007:5) found that 51% of university students, especially student athletes, consume such products as advertising strategies have been constructed around consumption of energy drinks and high performance in sports. In addition, beverage consumers, especially students, buy more energy drinks such as Monster, Red Bull, 5 Hour Energy and Play energy drink than ever before (Simon & Mosher, 2007).

The high frequency of the advertising of energy drinks also contributes to high consumption of these beverages. When advertising these drinks, manufacturers typically emphasise the consumer's ability to focus and maintain high levels of energy for longer periods as possible benefits of consuming such drinks (Simon & Mosher, 2007). A large majority (86%) of the students, nevertheless, are aware of the "do not consume with alcohol" warning printed on some energy drink labels. This is important in order for students not to overdose high caffeine content, and advertisers are protecting themselves against being blamed for overdosing the public with caffeine (Brache & Stockwell, 2010). Albaum and Duerr (2008) postulate the reasons behind the popularity of energy drinks in African countries such as Ghana. Energy drinks are affordable in Ghana and the distribution chain of energy drinks in Ghana has become relatively less structured, allowing Ghanaians to get them from any street corner. Finally, the cultural and societal connotations relating to a sense of modernity and being perceived as sophisticated are all associated with energy drinks and increase consumption of energy drinks in the Ghanaian society.

Caffeine toxicity is believed to occur above 400 mg/day for adults, 100 mg/day for adolescents (12–18 years), and 2.5 mg/kg of body weight for children (Cannon, Cooke & McCarthy). Energy drinks contain potentially large doses of caffeine, herbs, and other substances. Nevertheless, there is lack of consumer and scientific knowledge about the risks to health emanating from the mixture of ingredients, the doses, and frequency of consumption. From meta-analysis, there is a growing body of evidence that excessive energy drink consumption is associated with headaches, digestive issues, unhealthy behaviors, and lack of sleep (Visram, Cheetham, Riby, Crossley & Lake, 2016). Research has connected ingestion of energy drinks and experiencing negative symptoms in the nervous system, digestive system, and circulatory system (Gunja & Brown, 2012). Energy drink consumption was reported to disrupt sleep, elevate blood sugar and blood pressure, and produce digestive disorders (Astorino & Robertson, 2010). A survey of 1,298 patients visiting emergency rooms in San Diego, California found negative health symptoms associated with use of energy drinks. Of those experiencing symptoms of energy drink consumption, 65.2% reported nervousness, 34.9% heart palpitations, 31.7% insomnia, 19.1% stomach pain, and 14.4% experienced headaches (Nordt, Vilke, Clark, Cantrell, Chan & Galinato, 2012). A Mayo Clinic study found that energy drinks abnormally increase blood pressure and heart rhythm compared with caffeine alone (Reuters, 2017). Frequent use of energy drinks was correlated with substance abuse and risky behaviors among the young adult population (Miller 2008).

2.14. Social media and brand decision making

Todri and Adamopoulos (2014) studied factors that influence consumer behaviour in modern social commerce service, and students' decisions to adopt this novel service and make a purchase that will automatically be disclosed to the social media platforms. The study reports that the student social network, which engages in online conversations, affects the decision regarding purchases and engaging in Word-of-Mouth (WOM). The reasons behind such an interest in students' brand communities include the advantages of learning student perceptions of new product offerings and competitive actions; and maximising opportunities to attract and collaborate closely with highly loyal consumers of the brand such as energy drinks (McAlexander, Schouten & Koening, 2002; Franke & Shah, 2003).

In this internet era, social media are one of the best ways that can be used to promote the company's brand awareness as social media are used throughout the world. Indonesia, with 96% of the world's social media users, is one of the countries with the biggest population of social media users (Reed, 2013). A student's buying decision is the most important factor for companies' revenue and it is important for the marketer to understand the factors that influence buying decisions and what the consumers want/prefer so that they can be able to cater for them. The company's research efforts will enable it to understand what the customers will buy, and when, where, and why they buy the products (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010:199). Nevertheless, there are some elements that affect a student's buying decision and these include the consumer's consciousness of a product which makes them want to find more information, the consumer's consideration of many alternative products to choose from, and the process from consciousness and consideration of until purchasing the product (Dave, 2008).

2.15. Student perspectives on decision making about social media platforms

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2.16. Students perspectives on decision making about monster energy drinks

With students' energy drink preferences and buying patterns constantly changing, marketers need to have a comprehensive knowledge of the consumer decision-making process and the entire buying process, rather than just the purchase decision (Schiffman & Kannuk, 2007: 526).

Blythe (2006: 5) categorises the purchasing decision process into six stages. A brief explanation of each follows:

- Need for recognition - during this stage the student recognises a need for a product.
- Search for information - at this stage the student searches for information on the product.
- Pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives - the student considers which of the possible alternatives might be best to fulfil the need.
- Purchase - this is the action stage where the final selection is made and the item is paid for.
- Consumption - the student uses the product for fulfilling a need.
- Post-consumption behavior - the students considers whether the product actually satisfied the need or not and whether there were any problems arising from its purchase and consumption. Therefore, students make rational decisions because they do not have enough income and buy what they can afford or are influenced mostly by word-of-mouth.

It should be noted that the buying process commences long before the actual purchase and continues long after the purchase (Armstrong & Kotler, 2007:142). From the above discussion, it can be inferred that the consumer decision-making process may be represented by five generic steps, which move from the consumer's recognition of an unfulfilled need to the evaluation of a purchase after the event (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff & Terblanche, 2008:68). These steps are need recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives, purchase decisions and post purchase behaviours.

The experience of locality by international students is no longer in singular form but a constant shift from one place to another. Local and transnational media enable this through the collation of simultaneity and connectivity (Martin & Rizvi, 2014). An investigation by Sandel (2014:1), from the perspective of social adjustment and cross-cultural adaptation, considers the way American and international students perceive and interpret social media and its impact on their lives in the United States. Through in-depth interviews with seven American students and sixteen international students, the research suggested that online and mediated communication enhanced the students' experience, and provided help with sociocultural skills, informational needs, relational bonds, and psychological wellbeing.

2.17. Advertisers' experiences of social media platforms

Marketers seeking to market products or services to increase their turnover use the social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to reach a wide range of users, specifically targeting students to promote energy drink brands (Rawee, 2016). Marketers must always consider that there are different factors that influence the consumers' attitude towards a company, brand or product (Huang *et al.*, 2013). For example, students like "warm" brands from non-profit organisations (Bernritter *et al.*, 2016). Marketers should also note that redesigned products generate more online discussion than new products and that high ratings often lead to lower ratings in future (Feng & Papatla, 2012; Hu & Li, 2011), while more reviews are made when the quality of a product is very high or very low (Chen at al., 2011).

Marketers' experiences of social media platforms should contribute to the promotion of content that does not deceive consumers; therefore, the content must be what consumers should expect to experience and get from consuming the brand (Shao and Ross, 2015). The consumers who are already familiar with Facebook may want to follow it for the latest information about their products. As a result, marketers trying to catch their followers on Facebook must also relate with the character of the consumer. Extraversion and openness to experiences are leading to engagement between marketers and consumers (Kabadayi & Price, 2014). Increased consumer knowledge of a product may lead to higher activity on Facebook (Packard & Wooten, 2013). The point is that sharing content on Facebook may influence the behaviour of other consumers to relate to the product as well.

Marketers have also found that consumers often share more content with others when they got it from other consumers and not from brands themselves, which suggests that a student who is happy with a given brand is more likely to share it with others (Chen & Berger, 2016). The sharing of firm, brand and product content on Facebook represents a mixture of brand-promotion and self-promotion (Smith *et al.*, 2012). In addition, vividness of information may influence the online engagement of users with posts that have a high level of vividness receiving many 'likes'. Likes are a sign for customers that they support the message or comment or are satisfied with it (Luarn, Lin & Chiu, 2015). Surprisingly, videos get less likes, probably because one takes a longer time to watch them and use more money/data (Luarn, Lin & Chiu, 2015). Finally, interactivity exerts a strong effect on online engagement, while different posting strategies by marketers can also increase the level of online engagement (Luarn, Lin & Chiu, 2015).

A logical following with positive reviews will make the reader recommend the product to others more than negative reviews (Purnawirawan *et al.*, 2015). In addition, a positive word-of-mouth recommendation has the strongest positive advertising effect for marketers (Baker *et al.*, 2016). Also not very surprisingly is the connection between credible reviews and higher purchase intentions (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013).

2.18. Advertisers' perceptions on social media brand promotion

Australian researchers undertook a comparative analysis of the Twitter accounts of six alcohol companies and six advocates of safe drinking and/or abstinence in May 2011 (Burton, Clark, & Jackson, 2012; Burton, Dadich, & Soboleva, 2013). The advertisers state that it is not easy to get your brand liked by students as they have their own preferences and have already seen brands that in their opinion exceed those of advertisers. However, it is very important to practise truth at all times as students prefer buying the brand that gives truthful content in advertising and which their friends have used, or rather, that which has worked for the others (Ghani & Kakakhel, 2011).

2.19. Definition of competitive advantage

The term competitive advantage (CA) refers to the purpose of a management strategy. It has been defined as "the ability of an organisation to out-perform its competitors" (Campbell, Stonehouse & Houston, 2000: 324). Businesses worldwide are confronted with intensive competition from national and foreign rivals. As a result, businesses that fail to deal with the changes surely lose a considerable share of their market and profit. The term "competitive advantage" also refers, in relation to this study, to a set of capabilities that permanently enable the business to demonstrate better performance than its competitors. For instance, a firm should be able to sell energy drink brands that have not been sold before and sell brands that suit the youth's needs (Bobillo *et al.*, 2010:607). Nonetheless, finding a suitable place in the intensive competitive environment is the key for long-term profitability and survival of a business; a goal which is only attainable through creating and keeping competitive advantages.

Competitive advantage is necessary for satisfied customers who will receive higher value in the delivered higher income products and the owners' request from management, and such requirements can be fulfilled with the organisations of production, higher application and lower production costs (Ranko, Berislav & Antun, 2008). A differentiation strategy is developed around many characteristics such as energy drink brand quality, technology and innovativeness, reliability, brand image, firm reputation, durability, and customer service, and this must make it difficult for rivals to imitate the brand itself (Moses, 2010). In 2001, Michael Porter argued that

discussions on business models had substituted those about strategy and competitive advantage on energy drinks (Porter, 2001). He accused Internet companies, in the context of doing online business, for a misguided approach to competition and for embedding it in the language used to discuss it. Hence, the vague definition and conception of the term "business model" have unfortunate consequences, such as leading to simplistic strategic approaches and failure to harness important competitive advantages on energy drink brands.

Regarding the competitive advantage, the most important factor is the brand. Alpha (2015) explains that people refer to its products as Alpha and not as the actual product. The brand enables different kinds of contents and is applicable in several contexts of social media, which makes the brand and social media together an extremely important asset for Alpha (Alpha, 2015). The differentiation that Alpha is working actively with depends on the country and the target group, but the brand is always there and acts as a major corner stone. Alpha (2015) argues that if social media did not exist in organisations as it is today, organisations would have missed opportunities and this would have had a negative impact. Furthermore, it explains that it would be more difficult to strengthen and establish brand awareness (Alpha, 2015).

Flexlink (2015) argues that its most important competitive advantage is the value that it delivers in all stages of its operations to its customers. The advertising and business strategies that firms are developing differ depending on the task, which reflects differentiation; even though the company has a common strategy framework. Flexlink (2015) utilizes databases to gather general input on potential customers when collecting information from its existing customers and observations from competitors. The databases are especially important when qualifying suspects, every future or existing customer in its target market, into prospects. The prospects are firms that have taken the decision to solve a problem that Flexlink can assist with a simplified delivered value (Flexlink, 2015).

Branding has become one of the most important aspects of business strategy. It is central to creating customer value and a key tool for creating and maintaining competitive advantage (Holt, 2015). Monster energy drink advertisers need to actively and frequently move with the times, must satisfy customers' needs at all times,

diminish all the negative rumours about the brand and interact with consumers on a regular basis.

2.19.1. Porter's sustainable competitive advantage model

When a firm sustains profits that exceed the average for its industry, the firm is said to possess a competitive advantage over its rivals (Moses, 2010). Therefore, the goal of much of business strategy is to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

Michael Porter identified two basic types of competitive advantage:

- cost advantage
- differentiation advantage

A competitive advantage exists when the firm is able to deliver the same benefits as competitors but at a lower cost (cost advantage), or deliver benefits that exceed those of competing products (differentiation advantage) (Porter, 1985). This study argues that firms that employ social media advertising would realise cost advantage relative to their competitors that use traditional websites as social media platforms are easier to develop, maintain and use to retain customer traffic flow compared to other websites. With social media advertising, brand corporations may realise differentiation advantage through target marketing of brands, feedback from customers that improve brand quality and direct customer commentary on products that increases brand value. Thus, a competitive advantage enables the firm to create superior value for its customers and superior profits for itself. Cost and differentiation advantages are positional advantages since they describe the firm's position in the industry as a leader in either cost or differentiation (Porter, 1991).

Another relevant theory to this study is the Resource-based View. A Resource-based View emphasizes that a firm utilises its resources and capabilities to create a competitive advantage that ultimately results in superior value creation (Harris and Ruefli, 2000).

Figure 2.1 - Using Resource based view and advantages to illustrate the concept of competitive advantage
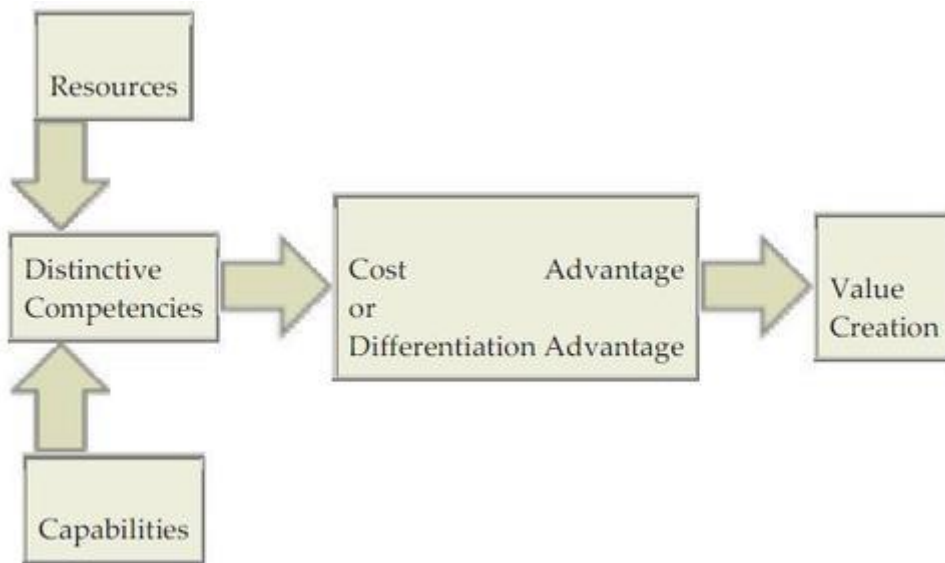
(Source: Porter, 1988)

2.19.1.1. Resources and Capabilities

According to the Resource-based View, the firm must have resources and capabilities that are superior to those of its competitors in order to develop a competitive advantage (Barney 1991; Grant 1991; Penrose 1959; Wernerfelt 1984). Therefore, the strategic and innovative use of social media advertising could be a key source of competitive advantage for brand corporations if such use cannot be emulated by competitors or if it difficult to create substitutes for. Without this superiority, the competitors simply could replicate what the firm is doing and the advantage would disappear quickly (Grant, 1991). Resources are the firm-specific assets useful for creating a cost or differentiation advantage and that few competitors can acquire them easily by Pietersen (2010). Therefore, with all brand corporations moving towards the use of social media for advertising and promoting their brands, competitive advantage may not arise from using social media per se but rather its skilful and creative application to lure existing customers, attract new customers and maintain loyal customers. The following are some examples of such resources:

• Patents and trademarks

- Proprietary know-how

- Installed customer base

- Reputation of the firm

- Brand equity

In the context of social media advertising, the use of social media applications for tracking customer traffic, for predicting sales, and identifying dissatisfied customers could be potential sources of competitive advantage for energy drink brands.

Capabilities refer to the firm's ability to utilise its resources effectively. An example of a capability is the ability to bring a product to market faster than competitors (Day 1994) Such capabilities are embedded in the routines of the organisation, are not easily documented as procedures, and thus are difficult for competitors to replicate. The firm's resources and capabilities together form its distinctive competencies. These competencies enable innovation, efficiency, quality, and customer responsiveness, all of which can be leveraged to create a cost advantage or a differentiation advantage, (Christensen,1997).

2.19.1.2. Cost Advantage and Differentiation Advantage

The use of resources and capabilities to achieve either a lower cost structure or a differentiated product is competitive advantage. A firm positions itself in its industry through its choice of low cost or differentiation. Limiting production costs, costs of advertising, and availing cheaper communicative interactions with customers could be forms of cost advantage. These options are central components of the firm's competitive strategy (Spulber, 2009). Another important decision is how broad or narrow a market segment can a brand advertiser target, (Foedermayr & Diamantopoulos, 2008). Advertisers have choice to target a niche market of celebrities, employ guerrilla tactics in advertising or spread their messages indiscriminately to all consumers as their advertising strategies depending on the size of the market they seek to acquire.

Based on the aforementioned information, Porter formed a matrix using cost advantage, differentiation advantage, and a broad or narrow focus to identify a set of

generic strategies that the firm can pursue to create and sustain a competitive advantage, (Porter, 1987).

2.19.1.3. Value Creation

The firm creates value by performing a series of activities that Porter identified as the value chain. In addition to the firm's own value-creating activities, the firm operates in a value system of vertical activities including those of upstream suppliers and downstream channel members, (Porter, 1988). To achieve a competitive advantage, the firm must perform one or more value creating activities in a way that creates more overall value than do competitors do. Superior value is created through lower costs or superior benefits to the consumer (differentiation) (Porter, 1988).

2.20. Conceptual framework

Figure 2.2 - Illustrates the relationship among antecedent variables, intervening variables and the outcome variables.
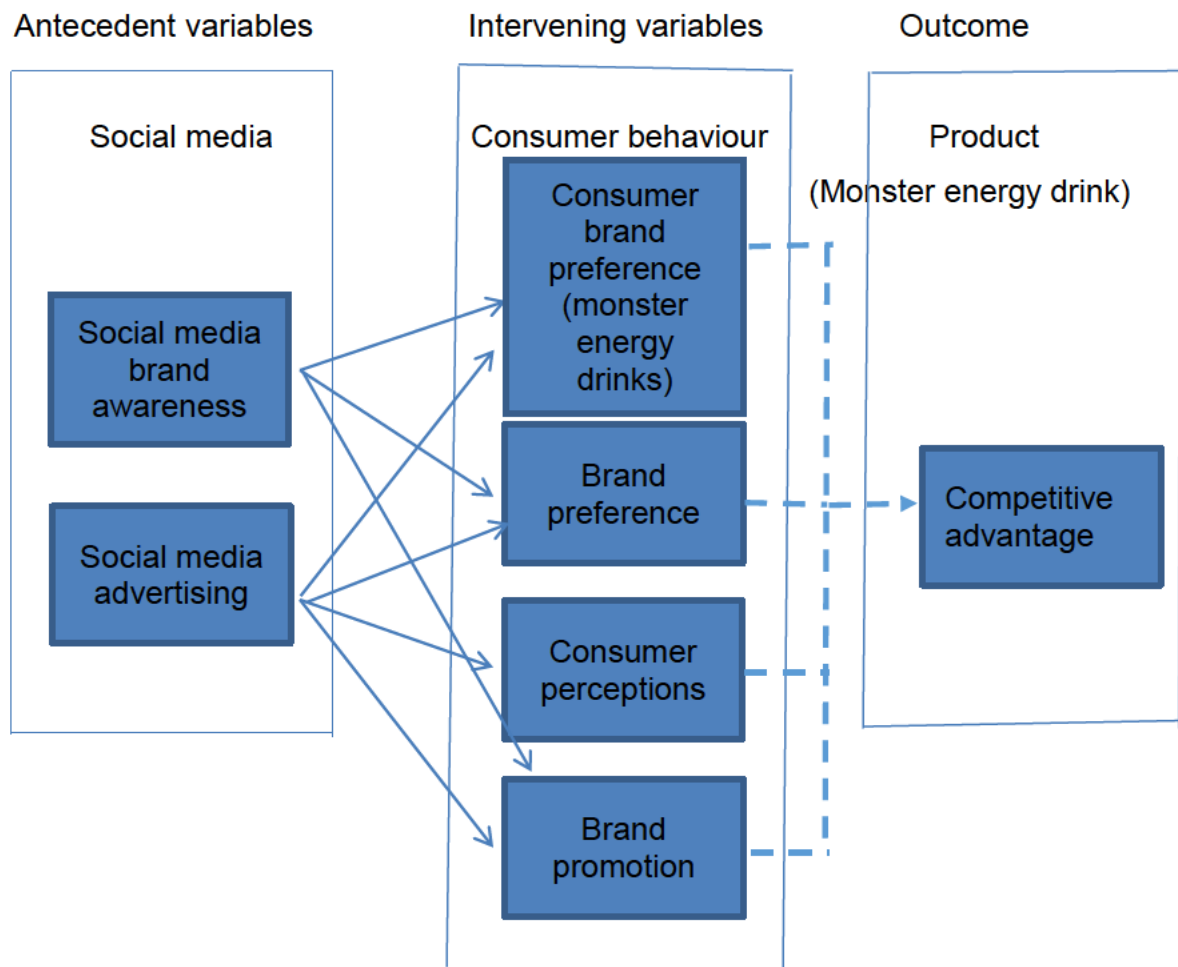
Figure 2.2 - Relationship among antecedent variables, intervening variables and outcome variables

(Source: Author's own work)

Competitive advantage is connecting the intervening variables to outcome variables with broken dotted lines to demonstrate that competitive advantage is not the focus of this study even though appropriate social media mediated advertising strategies may contribute to improve.

2.21. Chapter summary

This chapter provides a discussion of different definitions, components of social media advertising, their effect on consumer brand preferences as well as how consumers engage with brands on those social media platforms. The objective of the study is to provide an overview of student's consumption and its significance in the use of social media advertising in promoting brands. Currently, the popularity of energy drinks has increased exponentially judging from the way students consume them. The next chapter will provide a detailed research methodology for this study, underlining how ethics and methodological issues were considered in addressing research questions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1. METHODOLOGY

3.2. EPISTEMOLOGY

3.3. RESEARCH APPROACH

3.4. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.5. POPULATION

3.5.1. TARGET POPULATION

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3.6.1. SAMPLE TECHNIQUES

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3.9. DEPENDABILITY

3.10. CREDIBILITY

3.11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.12. STUDY LIMITATIONS

3.13. STUDY DELIMITATIONS

3.14. CHAPTER SUMMARY

3. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a detailed elucidation of the methodology that guided this study. The research methodology focuses on the manner in which the research is planned, structured and executed in consistency with established scientific criteria. The chapter first provides the epistemological stance adopted in the study and then discusses the research approach, research design, population and sampling method employed in this study. The instruments used to collect data, techniques implemented to ensure validity and the reliability of the instruments also are outlined. Finally, the data analysis process is described as well as the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

3.1. Methodology

A research methodology describes the underlying philosophy, scientific procedures and processes that used to conduct a credible research to develop new knowledge and information that will benefit society. It is the science of studying how research is carried out systematically to resolve societal challenges (Rajasekar, Philominothan & Chinnathambi, 2013). In this study, the researcher chose to describe the underlying values, scientific procedures and processes of conducting credible research to develop credible findings that illuminate society's understanding of the phenomenon investigated.

3.2. Epistemology

This study adopts an interpretivist epistemology. An interpretivist epistemology is associated with the philosophical position of empiricism, and is used to group together diverse approaches, including social constructivism, phenomenology and hermeneutics, which are approaches that reject the objectivist view that meaning resides within the world independently of consciousness (Collins, 2010). According to the interpretivist approach, it is important for the researcher as a social actor to appreciate differences among people (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012), which give rise to different and multiple interpretations of social phenomena. In the same vein, while students socially construct multiple social realities of their social media -

mediated brand preferences - advertisers also develop multi-faceted experiences and perspectives of social media advertising based on their individual encounters with the technology and brands. Hence, students' experiences of social media advertising and consumption of energy drinks vary depending on their different brand choices, and exposure to and experiences with technology, which demonstrate that their experiences are subjective and individually informed.

3.3. Research approach

The current study adopted a qualitative approach to unravelling advertisers and student perspectives on social media-based advertising of energy drinks and their influence on student consumption of these beverages. A qualitative research approach provides a rich pool of methodological and technical options that researchers can use to explain human reasoning; advocate for participants' experience; examine the contexts in which services operate; develop new theory, and offer insight into the inner workings of effective or ineffective interventions (Greenhalgh *et al.*, 2016). A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for exploring students' experiences of consuming energy drinks to understand how social media technologies influence selection, decision making about, and consumption of energy drinks. Given the researcher's interest in capturing some detailed subjective narratives about advertisers' and students' perspectives on the influence of social media advertising on students' preferences for energy drinks, a qualitative approach was ideal for such investigation. Although a quantitative approach could have provided a broader perspective on consumption patterns of various energy drinks, the frequency of their consumption and the profiles of age and racial demographics of students that consume these drinks, the researcher was less interested in these statistical representations as they lacked descriptive and analytical depth. Rather, she was more intrigued by the detailed personal narratives on how certain energy drinks were preferred while others were despised, individual accounts on how and why these beverages were consumed and the extent to which student engagement with social media shaped such consumption. Therefore, students' subjective experiences of their mediated preferences of brands are ascertained by considering a qualitative approach that provides for the social construction of their personal narratives of using social media and its influence on their brand preferences.

The target population was first-year students in Office Management and Technology, a group of students who usually struggle with making healthy choices after the transition from high school considering that their parents defined their previous decisions on healthy diets. At the Central University of Technology, this group of students constituted the research participants who illuminated the researcher's understanding of the subjective contribution of social media advertising preferences for brands.

3.4. Research design

A research design typically encompasses methodological and theoretical positions (Tight 2016:320). It provides the researcher with specific directions and procedures to use in the research (Cresswell, 2013:12). This study adopted a qualitative case study design. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident (Yin, 2013:265). Since the conceptual boundary between social media advertising, social media use and brand preferences is hard to define due to the multiplicity of advertisers, diverse social media platforms available and varying student preferences for energy drinks, a case study was most ideal for examining and substantiating individual cases of student decision making about and preferences for energy drinks. To the extent that a qualitative case study may consider individual cases of brand decision making and brand consumption to unravel their complexity, uniqueness and variability, this research approach which considered individual student cases of energy drink preferences, choice making and consumption was deemed ideal for this investigation. As a university of technology which is striving to be a model university in Africa as far as the innovative use of technology is concerned (CUT Annual Report, 2016), CUT was considered the ideal context for unpacking the intersection between social media advertising, student decision making about brands and ultimately student consumption of brands.

3.5. Population

Bush (2005) defines a population as the total number of people or units that the research data used to make inferences. The research population defines those units

for which the findings of the research are generalised. The target population for this study comprised first-year students studying office management and technology in the Faculty of Management Sciences at the Central University of Technology (CUT) in Bloemfontein. The Office Management and Technology (OMT) students amounted to approximately 210 registered students at the Bloemfontein campus. The choice of OMT students was informed by the need to develop a more objective sample size and increase the level of social media interactions on Monster energy drink brands by investigating OMT first-year students' subjective experience as students using energy drinks to keep them active for long hours of studying. The qualitative research approach allows the research to prioritise analytical depth and comprehensiveness over developing broad knowledge by concentrating on a limited number of research participants. As such, the researcher considered individuals selected from the total population of 140 1st year students registered in Bloemfontein Office management and technology.

3.5.1. Target population

A target population refers to "the total group of individuals from which a sample is drawn" (Dzansi, 2014: 28). Therefore, this study's target population consisted of 140 registered first-year students studying Office Management and Technology at the Bloemfontein campus in the Free State Province. The choice of OMT first-year students at the Central University of Technology, Free state in Bloemfontein arose from them having difficulty with adjusting from high school education, which is predominantly educator led to the independent learning-oriented learning at university. The use of energy drinks becomes one of their mechanisms for copying with intensive private study expected of university education. In academia, a target population is often easy to identify as lecturers often use class registers to keep record of students who attend their classes. More so, CUT also has an online system called E-thuto that automatically updates the names of students enrolled for a course. The researcher crosschecked if the students selected to participate in the study appeared on the class register as well as on E-thuto.

3.6. Sample

Sampling, according to Nieuwenhuis (2007:79), refers to the process used to select a portion of the population of study. With the help of the Central University of Technology's research assistants, the researcher targeted first-year students in OMT. Given their difficulties of transitioning from educator dominated high school education to self-regulated learning expected in university education, first years made an ideal sample for the study. Since OMT courses were comparatively more technology-dependent and involved more technology application (i.e. many of these courses involved the practical application of technology for office management and administrative purposes) compared to other management science courses, students enrolled for OMT were considered ideal for this study. Thirty students from OMT where selected for this qualitative study. Since the researcher is a lecturer for OMT at the University, it was convenient for her to obtain data from the students. The students where individually interviewed by the researcher.

3.6.1. Sampling techniques

Convenience sampling was ideal for this research as the participants in this study were registered at the CUT Bloemfontein and the researcher is a lecturer at the same institution. It was convenient for the researcher as the sample was easily accessible at limited cost and in terms of time. As a lecturer, the researcher had multiple commitments, which necessitated her to select a sample that she could readily access to eliminate travel time. The process of convenience sampling involved the selection of students from classes. These students, who voluntarily participated in the study, were invited to participate in the research.

3.6.2. Data collection

Data collection is important as it is a key component of research design and contributes to the generation of valid and reliable data that address the research questions in a conclusive way (Proctor & Doukakis, 2003:268). The researcher designed the in-depth semi-structured interview questions based on the research questions and significant findings discussed in the chapter on the literature review.

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews to collect data as they are regarded as most valuable in qualitative studies. She carried out these interviews in the Office Management and Technology lecture rooms, places that students were more familiar and comfortable with compared to the lecturer's office. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with each of the 30 students. On average, each interview took 30-40 minutes and was audio recorded, using a digital audio recorder. The recorder was not only a data-soliciting device, but also served to augment the memory of the researcher and supplement her diary notes. Conducting the interviews took three (3) months, as some interviews were conducted during holidays when scheduling appointments was easier than during the university semester when it was difficult to get hold of the students.

Semi-structured interviews are desirable as they employ investigative methods of probing to explore underlying motives (Robson & McCartan, 2015). They provide more detail than quantitative techniques in terms of in-depth and detailed responses from participants, and thus have the potential for providing richer and more illuminating material (Robson & McCartan, 2015). Thus, semi-structured interviews were ideal for this investigation as they could bring more understanding of students' meaning making processes of brands as they interact with social media platforms and the advertisers' perspective on social media advertising. Interviews are ideal when the purpose of the researcher is to draw on the subjective experiences of respondents in relation to a particular phenomenon.

A pilot research was conducted with Information Technology students at the University of the Free State to refine the questions to ensure they were unambiguous and clear to all participants. Subsequently, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews to collect complete information on the phenomenon under investigation.

3.7. Interview design

The in-depth semi-structured interview guide was divided into six sections, comprising questions about the demographics and the research questions to students.

3.7.1. Structure of the in-depth interview guide

Section A: In this section, the researcher collected demographic data of students such as their gender, age group, home language, qualifications, current level of education, highest academic qualification, their role in the university activities, years of experience in using energy drinks and years of experience in using social media.

Section B focused on students' subjective experiences regarding social media platforms. The researcher asked questions on how the students viewed their preferred social media platforms.

Section C considered the consumers' narrative accounts of different social media platforms used in their decision making process about brands (e.g. the Monster energy drink).

Section D focused on the advertisers' experiences of the social media platforms they use for advertising their brands (e.g. energy drinks).

Section E: The questions gathered data on how advertisers perceive the influences of social media on the promotion of consumer brands.

Section F: The section considers how consumers perceive the influence of social media advertising on their brand preferences.

3.8. Data analysis

Burns and Grove (2010) define data analysis as a mechanism for reducing and organising data to produce findings that require interpretation by the researcher. This study adopted thematic content analysis for the study. The researcher aimed to collect data on students' and their use of social media advertising. Thus, she carried out thematic content analysis on the background information she gathered from consumers' brand preferences and choices in their decision-making mediated by their adoption of social media advertising. The data extracted from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using Burnard's (1991) thematic content analysis.

The researcher employed Burnard's (1991) stage-by-stage method of data analysis for the analysis of semi-structured interviews. His method postulates that semi-structured interviews should be recorded in full and the whole recording be transcribed. A comprehensive framework was used for a more detailed coding and analysis of transcripts using thematic content analysis. The researcher initially derived categories from the research questions, followed by note taking and close reading of all the transcripts of the interviews. This was followed by a reflection on the reading, and organising data into themes according to a list compiled during the reading and reflection stages. Next came the filling out of categories with themes, based on the analysis and re-organisation of each participant's interview guide. This was followed up with checking the coherence of the themes within the revised categories and organising them in groups. Dendrograms (a tree diagram used to illustrate the arrangement of the clusters produced by hierarchical clustering) were developed of the data gathered, and lastly a final set of categories and dendrograms was put together. Originally, the researcher generated ten themes from the transcriptions during the first level coding. The revisiting and re-emersion of the data and its comparison with the themes led to the further refinement and reduction of the ten themes to six.

3.9. Dependability

Dependability is particularly relevant to ecological and conservation science applications that are in the early stages of testing findings in multiple contexts to increase the confidence in the evidence (Adams *et al.*, 2014). To ensure the dependability of the study findings the researcher followed the following steps in the development of and reporting on the findings. The systematic rigour and depth of the analysis were ensured and in order for the researcher to ensure that the semi-structured interview instrument was reliable, all the areas of the interview guide were used and the all the questions asked to the respondents. The order of the questions was predetermined.

3.10. Credibility

The philosophical and epistemological position of the research is determined by both the problem and the predisposition of the researcher, in terms of their way of categorizing "truth, for example (Moon and Blackman 2014). To ensure the creditability of the research the researcher depended on the amount and type of evidence found to support the interpretations researchers wish to make concerning data they have collected. In this research, the researcher made use of 30 interviews with students, and four interviews with advertisers. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and field notes were written as evidence and to refresh the researcher's memory during the transcription process.

Thus, the researcher wanted to investigate the relationship among social media networks, social media advertising, brand awareness, brand preferences, brand decision making and ultimately, the purchasing of brands. All the questions were appropriate as they all evolved from the phenomenon to be studied (the influence of social media advertising on consumer brand preferences). The researcher also used a peer debriefer in order to ensure credibility. The peer debriefer, who was a colleague, was willing to read all the participants" responses and to come up with his own interpretation thereof. Due to some students who could not understand questions clearly, the researcher had to translate in her home language (Sesotho), which compromised the richness of data as some English words can have different meanings depending on the context of their use. The researcher was aware that students did not consider her as the researcher, but as their lecturer.

3.11. Ethical considerations

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) framework for Research Ethics (2015) considers ethics as the moral principles guiding research from its inception through to completion and the publication of results and beyond. As a result, the purpose of ethical considerations is to protect the privacy and dignity of every individual who participates in a study (Stallworth, 2004).

The fundamental ethical rule of social research is that it must bring no harm to participants (Babbie, 2007:27). The researcher sought and obtained written permission to conduct the research from the Faculty of Management's Research and Innovation Committee (FRIC) at the Central University of Technology, Free State in Bloemfontein. She presented the letter to all participants who participated in this study. Ferreira and van Antwerpen (2012:45) state that any participation in a study should be strictly voluntary. The researcher prevented prejudicing any student by interviewing them at a time convenient to them and in environments they were familiar with. Researchers should protect the identity of research participants at all times (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Participants remained anonymous unless they gave their full consent, and the researcher avoided using students' authentic names in the research report. Kundasami (2007:8) asserts that researchers should not invade the private space of respondents in their data collection process. Participants were thoroughly briefed on the objectives of the research before the commencement of the interview sessions by providing an overview of the study, explaining what the researcher was investigating and informing them why their contribution would be essential for the study.

Beauchamp and Childress (2009) state that the avoidance of harm or hurt, that is, non-maleficence, is the core of ethics. Often in modern times, non-maleficence extends to making sure you are doing no harm in the beneficent act of using technology to extend life or in using previously untested experimental treatments. Individuals should be provided with sufficient and comprehensive information about the research so that they make a voluntary decision to participate in a study (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). In addition, each student availed him/herself at a time he/she had chosen and per appointment for the interview. Finally, the Faculty of Management Sciences approved the study by providing the researcher with an ethical clearance certificate. The interviewees where politely greeted and then the researcher explained to each of them what the interview was about. The participants' anonymity was guaranteed to all participants. Informed consent was required to meet ethical standards and minimised the chances of participants opting out later on in the study (Pearson *et al.*, 2015:3).

3.12. Study limitations

The limitations included the fact that no in-depth stock of quantitative data relating to the extent of use, frequency of use and duration of use of social media for accessing brands was considered as this was a qualitative study. The other limitation is that the richness of the data depended on the comprehensiveness and articulateness of the interviewees, notwithstanding the solicitation of data from the interviewer.

3.13. Study delimitations

Delimitating factors include the choice of objectives, research questions, and theoretical perspectives. The delimitation section of the study clarified the criteria for participating in the study, the geographic region of the study and the organisation involved (Neuman, 2011). The outcomes of the study are limited to the selected student population of Central University of Technology in the Free State province in terms of the influence that social media advertising might have on consumer brand preferences and choices. The findings in this study sample would not be representative of all university student populations and, therefore, the researcher would not be able to generalise the findings to all university students. Rather the results of the study could still be useful for similar studies.

3.14. Chapter summary

The chapter described the full details of the qualitative research methodology adopted for this study. The chapter explained the research approach, research design, and how the data were collected, described the aspects of the instruments used and ethical considerations applied to this investigation. The next chapter describes how data were analysed, and how the results were presented, discussed and interpreted.

CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology applied in this study of energy drink advertisers' and consumers' perspectives on the significance of social media (SM) platforms in shaping energy drink preferences. This chapter presents the results from an analysis of the data solicited from the participants. The data extracted from semi-structured interviews were analysed using Burnard's (1991) thematic content analysis.

A comprehensive framework was used for a more detailed coding and analysis of transcripts using thematic content analysis. Originally, the researcher generated ten (10) themes from the transcriptions during the first level coding. The revisiting and re-emersion of the data and its comparison with the themes led to the further refinement and reduction of the ten themes to six.

The researcher employed Burnard's (1991) stage-by-stage method of data analysis for semi-structured interviews. His method postulates that semi-structured interviews are recorded in full and the whole recording is transcribed. The method is outlined below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 - Qualitative interpretations

QUALITATIVE INTERPRETATION	BURNARD (1991)
Initial categorisation from research questions for start list	
Note taking and close reading	Close reading and note taking (stage one) Open coding (stage two)
Reflection on reading, organising data into themes according to start list, filling out categories with themes, reorganisation	Immersion in the data (stage three) Developing broader categories (stages four and five); words and phrases grouped together (reduced)
Checking coherence of themes within revised categories (Clustering)	Developing broader categories (stages four and five)
Development of dendrograms via data clustering	Guarding against bias (stage six) Establishing categories to cover all aspects of data (stage seven)
Assembly of final set of categories and dendrograms	Recording as necessary (stages eight and nine), individual analysis (stage ten), validity check (stage eleven), organisation and writing up (stages twelve to fourteen)

(Source: Burnard, 1991)

This research sought to examine the current advertising environment to determine how advertisers have incorporated social media platforms into their work.

4.1. Demographic data of the participants

A total number of 30 OMT students who used social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube to access their preferred brands were interviewed at the Central University of Technology, Bloemfontein, in the Free State Province. The demographic characteristics of these students are illustrated in the Table 4.2 below:

Table 4.2 - The demographic characteristics of participating CUT students

Category	Number of participants
Gender:	
Female	19
Male	11
Level of study:	
All first year	30
Age group:	
Below 20	4
20-29 years	26
Home language:	
Sesotho	11
Setswana	7
Isizulu	1
IsiXhosa	10
Rwandese	1
Qualifications:	
Matric and below	15
FET or equivalent	13
University Degree/Diploma	2
Highest academic qualification:	
Matric and below	20
Tertiary certificate	8
Diploma/ Degree	2
Role in university activities:	

Student	22
Mentor	2
Mentee	6
Duration and experience of consuming energy drinks:	
Less than 1 year	18
1-5 years	9
6-10 years	1
11-15 years	2
Experience in social media usage:	
1-5 years	13
6-10 years	17
Total	30

(Source: Author's own work)

As shown in Table 4.2 out of 30 interviewed students, the majority were in the female domain with 19 and the remaining 11 were male. Their age shows the majority of students were aged between 20 to 29 years and the minority were younger than 20 years. In terms of language Sesotho interviewees were in the majority, followed by Isixhoza interviewees. The highest qualifications showed that the majority of interviewees (20) had matric and below, followed by eight who had a tertiary qualification and only two with a national diploma. The demographics also showed a very low participation in university activities other than academic proceedings. A large number of students had less than one year's experience with energy drink brands, followed by a group who had used energy drinks for 1 – 5 years, while a minimum of students had 6 – 10 years' and 11 – 15 years' experience. Lastly, the experience of social media usage showed a maximum of interviewees had been using it between 6 – 10 years, followed by usage of between 1 – 5 years.

Table 4.3 - Demographic characteristics of advertisers

Category	Number of participants
Gender:	
Female	2
Male	3
Age group:	
Below 20	
20-29 years	5
Home language:	
Sesotho	2
Setswana	1
Isizulu	1
IsiXhosa	1
Total	5
Qualifications:	
Matric and below	
FET or equivalent	
University Degree/Diploma	5
Highest academic qualification:	
Matric and below	
Tertiary certificate	
Diploma/ Degree	5
Duration of experience of consuming energy drinks:	
Less than 1 year	

1-5 years	1
6-10 years	4
11-15 years	
Experience in social media usage:	
1-5 years	
6-10 years	5
Total	5

(Source: Author's own work)

As shown in Table 4.3 out of five interviewed advertisers, the majority were in the male domain, namely three and the remaining two were females. They all were in the age group between 20 – 29 years. In terms of their language, most were Sesotho advertisers followed by Setswana, isiZulu and isiXhosa that were least represented. All the participant advertisers had a university degree as highest qualification; the majority of advertisers indicated that they had between six and ten years' experience of using energy drinks, and only one indicated experience of between one and five years. Lastly, advertisers' experience with social media exceeded six to ten years.

4.2. Presentation of themes and categories

The results of this study are presented along with the themes and categories that were derived from the analysis of interviews. The analysis of data led to the identification of the following six themes: Social media application, social media decision making, computer-mediated communication, consumer desires, interactive advertising communication, and brand communication. The names of the interview participants are pseudonyms. Table 4.4 presents the social media applications and the categories that were identified.

Table 4.4 - Social media application and its categories

THEME	CATEGORIES	CODES, EXAMPLES & SHORT TRANSCRIPTS
SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATION	**Socialisation**	***Social presence*** • To connect with people *I am able to share important information on my preferred brands online.* • Staying in touch and reconnecting *I participate in social activities pertaining to brands* (Xoliswa & Thabo, 20 February 2016). ***Social engagement*** • Posting pictures *I like posting with my favourite brand and I want to be knowledgeable about them.* • Charting *Brands trend when reposted and played around with on social media.* • Socialising

		I get most of my brands influences online (Thabiso, Lerato & Xolani, 29 November 2015). ***Deeper Conversations*** • Sharing online conversations *Different conversations with different people on social media create strong brand ties.* • Sharing information on job opportunities and school purposes *Conversations on social media increase and generate positive online metrics, such as increasing brand search.* • Getting informed *Fascinating to have decent conversations with strangers on social media about the brand I prefer (Themba, Natasha & Vuyo, 15 March 2016).*
	Communication	***Immediate communication*** • Instant messaging especially on urgent matters

		Accessing brands has transformed to the new error of communication that is immediate and informed.
		• Communication on preferred brands
		Communication amongst students are mostly about clothing brands and energy drink brands (Zino & Kgosi, 30 February 2016).
		Technology savvy
		• Learn more about technology
		Social media is user friendly and allows me to learn the different technicalities about the most used social media platforms.
		• To keep up to date *I learn quite a lot about energy drink brands via social media platforms*
		• Fitting into conversations
		Facebook has changed my mind set through provision of much cheaper access on brands (Kgotso, Sibongile & Palesa, 30 February 2016).

	Social media appropriation	*Improve productivity*
		• As much as it does destruct at times it is also helpful as you can do your assignment with your peers online while connecting through Facebook medium
		Improves knowledge on diverse brands, information is easily accessible and convenient (Katlego, 20 November 2015).
		Educational tool
		• Exposure on different brands
		I learn quite a lot through an exposure from a variety of brands
		• Can be destructing but provides various interactions of brands
		I feel guilty when going online, as it is sometimes distructive but also provides various interactions of brands (Bathabile & Nomfundo, 24 November 2015).
		Knowledge sharing
		• Get updated on the latest trends
		I enjoy collaborating with friends on socall media platforms as we

		share brands that relate to all of us (youth).
		Interaction with brands
		I interact with different energy drink brands, which is the popular talk at the university (Jankso & Lerato, 30 February 2016).

(Source: Author's own work)

The researcher asked interview participants to describe what they experienced when using social media platforms in order to answer research question 2: *What are the students' subjective experiences on the general uses of social media platforms?* This question elicited data from which the social media application theme was derived. Three main categories are discussed under the social media application theme. The categories are social presence, communication, and appropriation, and these are discussed in subsequent sections.

4.2.1. Socialisation

According to Cole (2018) socialization is the process through which a person from birth through death, is taught the norms, customs, values, and roles of the society in which they live.

4.2.1.1. Social presence

Table 4.4 relates to students' subjective perceptions and experiences of their social activities with peers on social media and the implications of such activities for student brand preferences. Students' pre-occupation with initiating connectivity, generating conversations and familiarising with peers is reflected in Xoliswa's narrative:

I have the tendency of just going on Facebook, luckily finding the right people it's exciting and fun. In our online presence, we share important

information on our preferred brands, we communicate on different brands with our peers and advertisers on one platform. We want to be in environments where we are loved with no negative vibes. Therefore, I have a fantastic time on social media without being judged. I am able to like and comment on different brands that are of interest to me (Xoliswa, 20 February 2016).

Thabo expressed his experience as follows:

I can genuinely relate to various brands and participate in social activities pertaining to those brands. I also use those interactions to form relationships and it is fascinating (Thabo, 20 February 2016).

It is clear from these narratives that social media platforms serve as contexts for the development of social presence. An attractive and engaging social media presence offers large and small brands the chance to listen to the needs of the consumer because the way consumers create social media accounts tells stories about their personality and create conversations about brands (Pozin, 2014). Various theories explain the putative link between social media use and social psychology of youths. Since socialisation is crucial to young people's progression from adolescence to adulthood, the use of social media may have a profound influence on this adjustment (Wood *et al.*, 2016). The evidence on social presence suggests that students learn from one another and enjoy their personal connections on social media platforms. Although there is no evidence of exchange of specific brand information in these excerpts, the narratives point to the architecture of networked communication that advertisers can tap into to maximise their visibility and increase accessibility of their brands.

4.2.1.2. Social media engagement

Other students' interaction on social media platforms shows their interests in social engagement with brands. Questioning students about their subjective experiences of social media engagements yielded the following:

It is easy and very interesting to post on your favourite brand on social media than to always post pictures of ourselves all the time. Brands can trend if advertisers repost and play around with them on social media platforms (Thabiso, 29 November 2015*).*

I like making posts with my friends and engaging with our most loved brands on social media platforms. I want to be knowledgeable about the latest brands. When my friends like and comment on a brand, it is easy for me to follow it and share my posts on it. I really prefer the brand when peers affirm (Lerato, 29 November 2015)*.*

In my social networking environment, I get to interact with the brand itself, I am able to share my views and those of other people on brand pages of social media. I shop through my social media environment and I get my most influences on brands online (Xolani, 29 November 2015).

Posting and sharing of posts are linked to the theory of Social Media Engagement (SME) which predicts that the user experience, encompassing both the social interactions among users and the technical features of the social media platform influence user engagement (Di Gangi & Wask, 2016). The students show some technology-mediated engagements on social media with many students showing some positive appreciation of brands when they interacted with them. In addition, the students' narratives demonstrate the diverse potential of social media as an information-sharing platform for brands. Thus, social media serve as a powerful advertising tool that allows for the exchange of information between consumers and brands which promotes the building of consumer relationships through different engagements that traditional media cannot afford

4.2.1.3. Deeper conversations

Students were also involved in conversations such as mentioning and talking about brands via social media platforms. These conversations are evident in transcribed students' responses below:

It is fascinating to have a decent conversation with people that you do not even know, which in the end will make them your friend on social media. Mostly, these talks are about searching for brands that I prefer (Themba, 15 March 2016).

Different conversations with different people on social media can create strong brand ties. It is easy to follow a brand if it is on my timeline and I can communicate it with my peers (Natasha, 15 March 2016).

When asked about conversations on social media platforms, Vuyo highlighted that:

I literally go on social media platforms to 'like' and see other people's whereabouts, not because I am bored but because it really entertains me. I also go online to gain knowledge of the things that are happening in the world and for playful conversations with peers, and we laugh out loud. Social media are more than just communication channels if used in ways that engage consumers and provide value. They can also generate positive online metrics such as increasing a brand's search engine optimisation and presence on the Internet (Vuyo, 15 March 2015).

Consistent with the aforementioned conversations, Meltwater (2014) highlights the need to convert negative social media conversations into positive publicity by managing social customer care. This means that an early response to social media users' negative reactions and dialogue on brands could result in a good recognition of brands. The consumer conversations constitute messages that advertisers are expected to listen to and react too quickly on social media platforms. This contradicts traditional advertising forms where advertisers used to send a deluge of out-bounding messages to customers who consume it uncritically. Although most consumer messages were affirmative of brands, there is no doubt that different conversations on social media platforms can either promote or be critical of brands. Advertisers' use of strategic plans to entrench a positive brand exposure through consumer conversations can extend affirmative electronic-word-of-mouth of brands.

4.2.2. Communication

Communication may bring a bad experience and a good experience on online behavior. Christofides, Muise, and Desmarais (2012) highlight that postings on Facebook may also lead to feelings of regret if the user experiences negative consequences such as loss of opportunity or punishment and vice versa if good communication is sustained online.

Adoption of social media manifested in immediate communication via social media platforms and technology savviness, which are discussed below.

4.2.2.1. Immediate communication

When asked about the adoption of social media to promote brand preferences, one student bemoaned that:

> *I do not think students' social media messages about brands are changing that much. Students are having the same conversations that they have always been having. The reality is that they are just having these conversations on a different medium that is social media. The most talked about topics on social media are brands such as clothing brands and energy drinks. Such brands are mostly common to us first year students as we adjust to the realities and difficulties of university life* (Zino, 30 February 2016).

When queried about immediate communication, one student affirmed that*:*

> *With regard to accessing brands, one can learn or is left behind as other people are transforming to the new era of communication that is immediate and informative. Social media has become an educational tool where people share a taste of different brands, especially energy drink brands that are most common among us 1st year students* (Kgosi, 30 February 2016).

Social media bring to social relations a mediation of sociability and immediate communications through the morphology of networks and the articulation of pre-existing offline connections and new connections enabled by online immediate mediation (Vissers & Stolle, 2013). Although there was no evidence to support the claim that online interactions originate in offline relationships, it can be inferred from the aforementioned excerpts that a different form of communication architecture and repertoires such as interactants' immediate exchanges and interactions via social media provide a unique opportunity for students to access their different brands. The communication amongst the consumers also facilitates the easy transmission of information. Such communication has potential to create greater value for customers as they interact first-hand with their preferred brands rather than depend on marketers' opinions about brands. Increased sales and promotion of greater utility for customer influence such opinions.

4.2.2.2. Technology savvy

When asked about their usage of social media platforms, the technological savviness of some students became apparent:

Social media platforms are very user-friendly and allow me to learn the different technicalities about the most used social platforms. I can easily access energy drink brands like Monster Energy drink without the help of anyone as they always come with instructions for usage (Palesa, 30 February 2016).

My friend and my friend's friend increased my technological savviness as they had a huge influence on my access to online information. I have learned much about energy drinks through various social media platforms. For instance, I normally use social media platforms such as Facebook to check out the different price lists on energy drinks and lot of potential energy drinks that I can try out (Sibongile, 30 February 2016).

To the extent that we're becoming increasing technologically dependent for making choices about brands, social media platforms such as Facebook

have really changed our mind sets through their provision of cheaper access to brands including energy drink brands. Social media advertising has assisted us with providing that platform where students such as first years can learn about brands while they figure out varsity life (Kgotso, 30 February 2016).

Blaschke's (2014) research affirms that students can benefit from social media advertising during their years at university. For instance, social media advertising can increase student access to their preferred brands and mould them to become competent technology-oriented beings. It should be noted that social media are not the only driving force in students' I techno-savviness, as peer reviews also play a crucial role in nurturing the environment for increasing brand visibility and recognition. What is yet to be established, however, is what is more effective in shaping student opinions about brands - their peers' review of brands or the information advertisers purvey on social media about their brands, as both seem to have some influence on student consumption of brands.

4.2.3. Social media Appropriations

Student appropriation of social media has resulted in improved productivity, social media's conception as educational tools and increased knowledge sharing on such platforms. These sub-categories are discussed in subsequent sections of this study.

4.2.3.1. Improved productivity

With regard to the researcher's enquiry about students' perceptions on the influence of social media on their preference for brands, Katlego, professed that:

I personally feel that social media does improve my knowledge of diverse brands in the end. It has made information access very easy and convenient especially on energy drinks (Katlego, 24 November, 2015).

This shows that social media played an important role in the student's knowledge of diverse brands judging from its significance in increasing accessibility and circulation

of information on energy drinks among students. Despite social media's popularity for personal use and its application in real life settings, researchers know very little about the impact of using social media on students' productivity in their social lives (Tsay, Dabbish, & Herbsleb, 2012).

4.2.3.3. Educational tool

Apart from the social uses of social media platforms, the researcher also explored educational uses of social media. One student alluded to both social and academic use of these platforms:

I learned a lot on social media through exposure to a variety of brands that I can choose. It has become a learning platform, mostly on energy drinks as I participate in some sport activities. I communicate with my lecturer mostly on Facebook but I am not familiar with twitter at all. Facebook helps my peers and myself a lot in preparation for and participation in academic activities (Nomfundo, 20 November 2015).

Another student contradicted Nomfundo's version by confessing that:

I feel guilty when I go on Facebook especially when I am about to write an evaluation. It is so distractive because one feels like they are missing the latest news. Alternatively, there maybe some brands on special, which are trending. This is notwithstanding the reality that social media has provided various interaction platforms for big brands (Thabo, 20 November 2015)*.*

Despite the contradictions of the distractive effects of social media and its educational potential, social media proponents maintain that university students are habituated to a world where social media is the norm. As such, when harnessed as an educational tool, social media enrich students' learning experiences by allowing instructors and students to exchange ideas, foster collaboration and discussions, and engage and interact with educational content using emerging social media platforms (Turckle, 2004; Lederer, 2012). It is clear from these narratives that students accessed social media for different, potentially conflicting reasons, some of which may not be

necessarily educational. Lederer (2012) outlines several benefits that are derived from using social media advertising in education which include increasing student engagements with brands, building communication, increasing student confidence in expressing themselves regarding different brands of preference and providing opportunities to select brands from various options.

4.2.3.4. Knowledge sharing

Engagement on social media was not exclusively social but also educational. These narratives also provided some evidence of student collaboration via social media platforms. One student pointed out that:

> *I enjoy collaborating with my friends and peers on Facebook as it is my intention for participating on social media platforms in the first place. We motivate and share brands that relate to and that youths consume such as energy drinks. For instance, some students consume energy drinks to gain energy and social media platforms can assist in modelling students' choices about the different energy drinks* (Jankso, 30 February, 2016).

Other students emphasised the sharing of information. One interviewee expressed how social media stimulated her mood:

> *Social media usage changes my mood especially when I am bored. I interact with different energy drink brands, which is the popular talk at university. I enjoy sharing information on brands on my social media page and my peers actively interact with me giving their feedback on energy drinks they have consumed* (Lerato, 30 February 2016)*.*

The aforementioned meaningful interaction with brands reported among students gives credence to the reality that social media enables the generation of personal and group knowledge (Razmerita, Kirchner & Nielsen, 2016). In fact, social collaboration among individuals with similar interests has the potential of increasing opportunities for online communal knowledge sharing (Majchrzak, Faraj, Kane & Azad, 2013), communication, and strategic self-presentation (Leonardi & Treem, 2012). The social

media have a multifaceted repertoire of uses such as hedonistic, cognitive and social uses that lead to an increase of student knowledge (Ali-Hassan, Nevo & Wade, 2015). The study demonstrated that hedonistic uses manifested in the use of social media for increasing entertainment and excitement while cognitive use appealed to academic uses of social media for information gathering and sharing. The social dimensions of social media usage related to creating new and maintaining existing social networks and sustaining social presence. However, the finding that successful use of social platforms across different brands requires time to overcome cultural resistance, and to absorb the lessons of early successes and failures (Harrysson, Schoder & Tavakoli, 2016) was not supported by the findings of this study. Knowledge sharing also manifested in collaboration that involves student co-construction and generation of knowledge through group engagements. Social media collaboration also found expression in the users' knowledge sharing.

Therefore, the above excepts demonstrate the multi-purpose character of social media covering educational and social dimensions. Social media has definitely enhanced the need for sharing knowledge amongst social media participants by energising them to select from a variety of energy drink brands they mostly prefer.

4.3 Individual decision making

The responses in Table 4.5 illustrate the categories, codes, and short transcripts emerging from the theme *social media decision making* discussed below.

Table 4.5 - Social media decision making – categories emerging from this theme

THEME	CATEGORY	CODES, EXAMPLES & SHORT TRANSCRIPTS
SOCIAL MEDIA DECISION MAKING	Individual decision making	*Individual values* • Follows a brand when it is followed by a friend *I normally follow brands that my friends follow on Facebook.* • I personally consume energy drinks to give me energy and to perform better *I consume one energy drink every week, it really helps me in performing better but can be addictive at times.* • Individual brand choices depend on what I learn from
	Group decision making	other people experiences of energy drink brands *I use energy drink like any other drink, helps me in adopting in my 1st year pressures* (Thato, Terry & Zodwa, 02 February 2016). ***Engage in content sharing***

		• We learn from other brands by looking at peoples' comments online *I trust peer opinions (friends, celebrities & bloggers) concerning what to purchase.* • *I use different personalities on brands for advice on my preferred brand)* (Lerato & Simphiwe, 25 February 2016). **Electronic-word-of-mouth influences** • Easily identify your target group *Know your target group on energy drinks especially different physiology needs and colour.* • Increase of sales *Promoting on social media has made a significant increase in the sales of energy drink brands.* • Influence of negative word-of-mouth

		Word-of-mouth is free of charge and spreads the message easily but can be a barrier on the brand when it is negative word-of-mouth purchasing the brand (Phahameng, Nakeng & Musi advertisers, 01 September 2017).
		• Communication through word-of-mouth
		I like to communicate through electronic-word-of-mouth as it fosters an exchange of information.
		• Identification of target market
		For a start-up as an emerging entrepreneur, social media allows one to identify their target market easily.
		• Information circulation
		More view on Monster energy drink is available and peer experiences (Natasha, Ntombi & Simphiwe, 23 February 2016).

		Forms of online communities • We become a family that shares information on social media *Online communities are fun; it is a happy place to be with lots of entertainment.* • I am able to ask and communicate with people that use the brand of interest *Advertisers must always try to satisfy our needs based of social media, when used correctly you feel you have a hand it what has been said (*Ntombi & Kgosi, 19 February 2016). • Twitter regarded as the best social media platform to advertise *I use twitter because I feel like it is a good platform for brand recognition.* *Twitter is best because its messages and updates appear in real time* (Nakeng

		& Mvuso, 05 September 2017).

Source: Author's own work)

Social media decision making found expression in-group and individual decision-making. Answering the research question: *What are advertisers' experiences of the social media platforms they use for advertising their brands?* gave rise to data from which the social media decision making theme was derived. Two main categories are discussed under the social media decision-making theme. The categories are individual decision-making and group decision-making, which are discussed in subsequent sections.

4.3.1. Individual decision making

Individual decision-making is the process by which potential courses of action are constructed and initiated as behaviour (Klein, 2008; Newell & Shanks, 2014).

Individual values related to individual choices including the conditions enable and constrain student decision making. The affirmation of friends on Facebook was critical to student decision-making about brands as one student confessed:

> *It is easy for me as a student to follow a brand if I have a friend on Facebook that has already followed it. That is why I never follow energy drink brands as my friends do not follow or share them* (Thato, 02 February 2016*).*

Terry affirms that:

> *Energy drinks are life and I consume one almost every week. They can get very addictive as I am very busy during the week even though they assist in giving me energy and allow me to perform better* (Terry, 02 February 2016).

Zodwa agrees with Terry and elaborates that:

I drink it as a thirst quench and cannot differentiate it from other drinks even though it has that caffeine effect after consumption. It helps quite a lot as I am a student in need of that kind of energy to adapt to my first year pressures (Zodwa, 02 February 2016).

Perhaps the lack of authenticity in these advertisements contributes to the students' reliance on peer networks' opinions and affirmations of brands in the absence of family advice on such brands. In the absence of knowledgeable parents and adults to advise students on balanced diets and proper eating habits, students resort to social media networks and peer networks for advice on good eating behaviours. While student eating could be a consequence of personal tastes, self-discipline, accessibility and cost of such brands, and the (lack of) parental control, friends and peers also shape energy drink consumption habits of students (Deliens *et al.*, 2014). In fact, the challenge for brand managers, marketers and advertisers lies in how to transform social media platforms from cool, laid back entertainment 'rendezvous' to a serious advertising spaces for optimising the expression of preferences of brands by young adults, who constitute heavy users of social media (Rambe & Jafeta, 2017). Peer networks seemed to have more influence on student choices of energy drink brands than advertisers. Following this interpretation, it seems individual values are not original opinions but are derivations from peer networks' judgements about brands. As such, the way students behave in social media-mediated networks provides fragments of both their attitude towards different aspects of brands (e.g. their perceptions of their authenticity) as much as they reflect their individual choices.

4.3.2. Group decision making

Decision-making manifested in engagement in content sharing, word-of-mouth influences and the formation of online communities, which are discussed below.

4.3.2.1. Engaging in content sharing

Students engaged in content sharing with their peers and networked communities. Lerato emphasises that:

I trust the opinions of people in my group chats with regard to what to purchase. These people include friends, bloggers and celebrities. I also like to hear what these people say about brands, especially if I have not used the brand before (Lerato, 25 February 2016).

Simphiwe describes content sharing this way:

While I am not sure whether to characterize it as content sharing, our (i.e. students) reliance on different personalities for advice on brands is symptomatic of the reality that information about brands is widely shared. This is a powerful phenomenon students tap into when making decisions about brands (25 February 2016).

The frequency and time duration that users spend on social networks can contribute to the quality of content that organisations publish on social networks as they draw on such social commentary and opinions. The reality that users such as students, bloggers and celebrities tend to log on several times a day necessitates a best practice where brands post on social networks at least once a day to reach their target audience (Bufferapp, 2015). These brand owners need to exploit content creation, content sharing, and interactivity, the practices which are associated with the prevalence of emerging technologies. However, social media networking is the conduit through which these content production practices are performed and find expression in most young people's lives.

4.3.2.2. Electronic word-of-mouth influences

Word-of-mouth unfolded in the study and manifested through individual student influences on their peer community. The study also evaluated the role word-of-mouth played on social media platforms, and in particular, whether it had negative or positive effects on energy drink brands.

Mvuso (advertiser) states:

It is very important to know your target group on energy drink brands and also cater for people of a different psychology and of different colour. That way you will know what your target market needs by getting in contact with them every now and then. A consumer always seeks our attention, they want to feel wanted and most importantly satisfied and when that happens it is easy for them to spread out the message (Mvuso advertiser, 01 September 2017).

Phahameng (advertiser) states:

Promoting on social media has made a significant increase in sales of energy drink brands all in the name of word-of-mouth. The sales have gone up massively as one is able to interact with different age groups and different personalities. Especially with the youth, advertisers need to see whether it is working for those who need a pick up, people going to the gym or anybody who might be interested in it (Phahameng advertiser, 01 September 2017).

Nakeng (advertiser) elaborates that:

Word-of-mouth is free of charge, message can easily be spread from person to person yet the barrier of this is that there can be negative word-of-mouth. As an advertiser, I need to extensively deal with it in a way that it is going to contribute to my growth other than doing nothing about it (Nakeng advertiser, 01 September 2017).

Mutual conversations, unilateral advice or suggestions can also be considered as forms of word-of mouth (Maisam & Mahsa, 2016), and it have been recognised as an effective medium for dissemination of information (Khan, Ahmed, & Ahmad, 2015). There is clear evidence that electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) can be employed in business. The narratives in the aforementioned excerpts support the view that for advertisers, EWOM is integral to the advertising of brands and establishing lucrative relationships with customers, which includes gaining new customers and keeping current ones (Kotler *et al*., 2013).

One student also emphasised information sharing that unfolds through EWOM:

I am likely to communicate more in consumer-to-consumer information sharing using EWOM. It fosters an exchange of information on the social media platforms, which helps in my decision-making about brands. However, I sometimes think online advertisements are not original and can be easily forged (Simphiwe, 23 February 2016).

In praise of EWOM another student claimed*:*

Where has this social media communication been all my life? What did we use to do when we did not know about it? [Student laughs]. Well it is so great to advance from the past because I love every moment of social media networking. We can now exchange more information on energy drink brands via these platforms (Natasha, 23 February 2016).

Ntombi expressed the ease with which EWOM unfolds:

Electronic word-of-mouth influences are so easy, even with startup businesses. One can easily identify their target market or meet their potential customers on social media platforms. Many students emphasised the use of EWOM for Monster energy drinks (Ntombi, February 2016).

In view of the power of EWOM to source crowds around brands, it is not very surprising that there is a connection between credible reviews of products and higher purchase intentions (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013). The same study found out that provision of detailed information makes reviews more credible and to search for products more meaningful. Reviews of experience with goods are more credible than reviews of search for goods if the reviewer agrees with the original review (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013). Firms and brands on Facebook should note that consumers rely heavily on average ratings from such social media platforms (de Langhe, 2016). Most important for marketers and firms is Hamilton's (2014) study, which shows that user-generated content in the form of reviews can affect the willingness to pay off consumers. Purnawirawan, Eisend, Pelsmacker and Dens (2015) also note that positive reviews

will make the reader recommend the product to others more than negative reviews. An observation that is also confirmed by Baker *et al.* (2016) is that a positive word-of-mouth recommendation has the strongest positive advertising effect. Therefore, marketers keep and grow current customers by increasing satisfaction and projecting the quality of their products or services through increasing their visibility on-line via EWOM and, second, through making assurances about the constitutive quality of brands. However, marketers generally present their products and services via different forms of advertisements in order to acquire new customers.

4.3.2.3. Forms of online communities

Various responses were provided regarding the influence of social media advertising on the promotion of brands, as noted below.

Ntombi expressed her pride in online communities:

> *Online communities are always so happy to share and have a great time online. We get entertained on those social media platforms and have enough fun with people we have not even met in real life* (Ntombi, 20 February 2016).

In contradiction to the group mentality articulated in the previous excerpt, Kgosi emphasised that, in as much as group sharing is critical, individual expression of agency is integral to communicating via online communities:

> *The effectiveness of an advertising message relies more on me as a consumer than ever before as I choose the message to pass on. It is important that advertisers satisfy our needs as consumers. The act of group sharing within the groups is one of the key qualities for us students as the social media users. For advertisers, this information sharing is extremely valuable. I'ts effective because it is word-of-mouth advertising but with social media, when used properly, you feel you have a hand in what is being said* (Kgosi, 20 February 2016).

A Nakeng advertiser states that:

> *I use Twitter because I feel like it is a very good platform for the promotion of brands and for brand recognition. I want my messages to appeal to the emotions of people. People need to know about my brand, talk about it and engage in different experiences with brands online. I interact mostly in retweeting and hash tags for many retweets to go around global markets. Again, there can be very difficult customers that really need some clarity before they can even commit to the brand and so that is when physical advertising comes in for me* (Nakeng advertiser, 05 September 2017).

A Mvuso advertiser commented that:

> *I use Twitter because it sends messages and updates in real time. If 'I twitter it' immediately shows and if I twitted something three hours ago then one is less likely to see it on their timeline or maybe it will show that 'in case you have missed this' and then it will only show you that an hour ago. I like Facebook more because it shows updates immediately and it is not real time and more especially because they are people on Facebook who find Twitter very confusing. It becomes sort of like a pop up* (Mvuso advertiser, 05 September 2017).

The group dimensions of social media advertising are about the extent to which each individual can form networked and information-sharing communities and instant communication sub-communities in a technology-mediated setting. The Internet offers a variety of virtual communities for the intrepid wanderer to explore. Faced with this abundance of options, a user may have fleeting relationships with some communities and choose to allocate only a small proportion of her time to each (Tan & Lee 2015). It seems as if advertisers do not have complete control of the distance travelled by their messages because individual consumers who are also producers and critics of content, are integral to the authenticity of the messages conveyed. Nonetheless, as social media communication continues to evolve and build relationships between consumers and brands, it also increases advertisers' capacity to morph and mutate online communications.

4.4. Computer-mediated communication

The responses in Table 4.6 illustrate the categories, codes, and short transcripts emerging from the theme *computer-mediated communication* discussed below.

Table 4.6 - The categories of Computer-mediated communication

THEME	CATEGORIES	CODES, EXAMPLES & SHORT TRANSCRIPTS
COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION	Online/digital transactions	*Online shopping* • It has got its reservations *I tried online shopping but did not continue.* *Nevertheless, I can easily purchase energy drinks at the cafeteria.* • More time for shopping as I do not stand on long queues *Great experiences on online shopping as one is used to standing on queues to purchase brands* (Natasha & Lerato, 30 February 2016).

		Ease of access to information on social media
		• Easy access of information
		Easy access of information on brands social media platforms
		Important to see energy drinks consumed by other academics on social media (Xolani & Joyce, 24 February 2016).
	Online business interactions	Shared experiences
		• It is important to get information from someone who has used the brand before
		Students online re definitely influenced by other student experiences, I have had a good experience on Redbull energy drink brands, a very captivating

		experience (Bofelo & Thando, 30 February 2016). • Brand sharing creates good brand relationships with customers *Student's experiences on social media platforms are very important as it will be easy to spread positive experiences* (Mvuso & Nakeng advertisers, 02 September, 2017).

(Source: Author's own work)

Computer-mediated communication resulted in varied student comments on the impact of social media. Answering research question research question 6, *how do consumers perceive the impact of social media advertising on their brand preference? gave rise to data from which* the computer-mediated theme was derived; three main categories are discussed under the theme. The categories are: Online digital transactions, Online and business transactions.

4.4.1. Online/ digital transactions

Online/digital transactions manifested in online shopping and the easy access to information as discussed below.

4.4.1.1. Online shopping

Natasha points out that:

> *I love shopping online. Well I have done it only once with my father's credit card. It was a great experience and interesting as I am only used to going to the shop and physically purchase brands that are of interest to me* (Natasha, 30 February 2016).

Lerato notes:

> *I have tried shopping online and my application was unsuccessful because I do not have a credit card. Most purchases online require a credit card but as a student it is easy for me to shop on energy drinks as they are available at the cafeteria on campus* (Lerato, 30 February 2016).

The foresaid narratives seem to cohere with Ramanathan, Subramanian and Parrott's (2017) claim that customers place emphasis on measuring post-shopping satisfaction, particularly in today's digital era. The major observation drawn from the responses is that students had mixed experiences of online shopping. Thus, while some students experienced the flexibility and time efficient nature of online shopping, some did not always benefit from it as they did not have credit cards. Finally, although the reported mixed experience of online shopping of energy drinks sold on campus shops cannot be assumed to be universal to all students, measuring the expectations that customers have before shopping and post-purchasing can significantly benefit retailers in improving knowledge about the motives behind customers' buying intentions.

4.4.1.2. Ease of access to information on social media

Social media can also be beneficial when it comes to specific areas of academic engagement and energy drinks, as shown in the responses cited below.

Xolani explains that:

It is easy for me to access information on social media platforms as I select the brands that intrigue me especially on Facebook (Xolani, 24 February 2016).

Joyce also had a view that:

It is very vital to see the different views on energy drinks consumed by academics as it helps them and us in achieving the outmost on those. Facebook has provided a platform for such (Joyce, 24 February 2016).

Although easy access to brands through the Internet allows users to participate in events around the world (Roman, 2014) there was no evidence to support the view that user-generated content encourages scholarly inquiry and academic dialogue among users. Taken as a whole, the results from the participants indicate that students accessed their most wanted brands on social media platforms because the majority use Facebook to access the brands and to track those that peers consumed the most.

4.4.2 Online business transactions

Compared with the traditional payment, online payment transactions are more convenient, fast, efficient and economical. Users can use their own PC or mobile phone with Internet to complete the entire payment process in a very short time (Baike, 2017).

Online business interactions manifested in the shared experiences among students. The experiences are discussed in sections below.

4.4.2.1. Shared experiences

A Mvuso and Nakeng advertiser explains that:

It is influential to share relevant information with consumers as they are yet to purchase what they see. It is very important for them to get the good experiences of specific brands. Then it becomes easy for

them to pass over the message to their peers and employers on social media as it is widely known and has global influence. It international presence means that advertisers can also get foreign investors on the brand (Mvuso advertisers & Nakeng advertisers, 02 September 2017).

While information sharing is commonly related to textual and narrative communicative practices (e.g. blogging, social commenting and writing reviews of brands), the sharing of experiences acknowledges the creation and sharing of (audio)-visual content online. Photographs or short videos sent from mobile phones act as the new postcard (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Hence, when asked about shared experiences on social media Xolani states that:

Online people are definitely influenced by other people's experiences particularly brands and feedback on their preferred brands. Sometimes peers, strangers or people that they know or even sometimes they could meet someone who likes the same thing as them or twin friends on social media (Xolani, 02 March 2016).

Ntombi also noted that:

I had a very good response on Red Bull energy drink. When I went online, all I heard was the captivating experiences of that brand. Most people were saying it really helps with giving energy and I tried and experienced just that. I desire it but it can get very addictive at times (Ntombi, 02 March 2016).

A study conducted by Munar and Ooi (2012) reveals that 40% of Scandinavian tourists regarded helping others as an important reason for sharing experiences online. Moreover, 40% claimed that they contributed content online because they wanted to prevent people from using bad products. These results also confirmed previous studies that indicated tourists' willingness to communicate advice on practical matters relating to the use of products (Munar & Ooi, 2012). As much as peers have some influence on consumers' perceptions of brands, visibility and accessibility of the brand

tend to have an immediate effect on brand purchases. This is because the more people see a brand, the more they want to interact with it and use it in their life. Encountering a brand increases the chances of it registering on the consumer's mind the same way seeing the Monster energy drink in a shop increases the consumer's desire to purchase and taste it.

4.5. Consumer desires

The responses in Table 4.7 illustrate the categories, codes, and short transcripts emerging from the theme *consumer desires* discussed below.

Table 4.7 - Categories of consumer desires

THEMES	CATEGORIES	CODES, EXAMPLES & SHORT TRANSCRIPTS
CONSUMER DESIRES	Social interaction	*Multitasking* • It increases the capacity to function properly *One is able to access many brands at one time.* • It is really a part of my lifestyle *Social media is an inviting platform* • I am coping very well with this technological advance on social media *One is able to interact with different brands in a short time frame*

		(Thabo, Siba & Sibongile 19 February 2016).
	Engagement	***Cultivating relationships***
		• Advertisers must always seek to make customers happy. A happy customer is likely to come back again
		Advertiser participation on brand views is very important.
		• Follow up on consumers' opinions
		Advertisers must make time to form healthy relationships with students on energy drink brands (Lerato & Hloni, 15 February 2016).
		• Significance of relationships
		We form significant relationships with consumers through promotions of energy drinks.
		• Transformation through relationships
		Advertisers must fully be aware of the transformation of social media advertising and get to develop regular content to attain new potential clients.

		• Social media relationships *Social media allows us to communicate misunderstandings on brands.* • Reviews on social media relationships *A negative review spreads more than a positive view so we strive to accomplish positive reviews with brands and consumers (*Mvuso, Nakeng & Phahameng advertisers, 10 September 2017). ***Online behaviour*** • Sometimes we get inappropriate information on social media *Advertisers must always be truthful about their brands on social media platforms.* *Brand image must not lie to the consumers* (Nomfundo & Sibongile, 29 November 2015).
	Energy drink preference	***Play energy drink*** • Advertisements are very interesting when I look at them

		There is nothing wrong with energy drinks as long as you do not overdose them.
		• It has worked a couple of times and generate energy
		Play energy drink works better for me than other energy drink brands
		I consume what works better for me and Play energy drink does it for me as I am able to work longer (Zodwa, Thabo & 10 Other students, 25 November 2015).
		Advertisement reach • Majority preference on social media
		Twitter is a good platform for the brand to go globally
		• It is interesting to know more about social media
		Social media allows content updated to be retrieved.
		• Advertisement consistency

		Advertisers must be consistent and must not only do it for the advertising strategies nor money.
		Advertisers must first focus on the efficiency than the profitability (Phahameng advertiser, Mvuso advertisers, Sekodi advertisers & Nakeng advertisers, 17 September 2017).

(Source: Author's own work)

Consumer desires manifested in various forms such as their desire to interact socially, and cultivating relationships through the selection of brands. Answering research question 1, *What are energy drink advertisers and student perspectives on the significance of social media platforms in shaping student's energy drink preferences?* gave rise to data from which the consumer desires theme was derived. Three main categories are discussed under the consumer desires theme. The categories, Social interactions, Energy drink preferences and engagements are discussed in subsequent sections.

4.5.1. Social interaction

Consumers trigger social interactions by embedding social networking tools on their websites and actively integrating their social activities with marketing actions (Sinan, Dellarocas & Godes, 2013).

Social interactions manifested in dynamic communication modes and multitasking that are elaborated on in subsequent sections.

4.5.1.1. Multitasking

Thabo states that:

"Multi-tasking is my thing. I am able to access a variety of brands of I nterest" (Thabo, 19 February 2016)*.*

Siba notes that:

> *I am a perfectionist when it comes to multi-tasking; It is part of my lifestyle. I interact with different brands on social media in a short time frame* (Siba, 19 February 2016)*.*

Sibongile says that:

> *Social media's greatest strength is that it is an invitation platform. I seek Facebook; I participate on Twitter. As a student, I get permission to speak in the space of energy drinks as I can relate to the brand in question* (Sibongile, 19 February 2016).

Research conducted by Walsh *et al.* (2013) emphasised the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter for listening to music. The study, however, did not provide any vital information on the impact of such use on customers' interaction with different brands.

4.5.2. Engagement platforms

By focussing on the concept of engagement platforms, Breidbach, Frodie and Hollebeek (2014) integrate existing approaches in marketing and service research, and emphasize the crucial role of platforms in facilitating interaction, value co-creation, and engagement amongst actors in service ecosystems.

The engagement on platforms is shown through the cultivation of relationships, increased vulnerability to predators and online behaviours.

4.5.2.1. Cultivating relationships

Advertising online means making lucrative relationships with customers, which includes gaining new customers and keeping current ones (Kotler *et al.*, 2013). In order to keep existing customers and increase the number of new customers, marketers need to increase customers' satisfaction with the quality of their products or services. However, to acquire new customers, marketers generally present their products and services using different advertisements. The respondents' views regarding this matter are shown below.

Hloni acknowledged that:

Advertisers really make us feel at home on social media platforms. They are always there to hear our views even though it takes some time to get their responses on social media platforms (Hloni, 15 February 2016)*.*

Lerato states that:

Social media platforms have not been such an easy way of forming relationships as they are too much in the public domain. However, some advertisers make time to form relationships with consumers on social media platforms by responding to queries on brands on social media (Lerato, 15 February 2016)*.*

A Mvuso advertiser says that:

We form significant relationships with consumers on social media platforms through promoting energy drinks. As advertisers, we are able to meet our target audience with the advent of social media as well as attract new consumers via these platforms (Mvuso advertisers, 10 September 2017)*.*

A Nakeng (advertiser) also points out that:

As advertisers, we are now aware of the transformation on social media advertising but we are yet to develop regular content to attain new and potential clients. Energy drink brands are moving the landscape on social

media platforms. Our level of communication has moved enormously due to young adults' need for consumption at university level (Nakeng advertiser, 10 September 2017).

A Phahameng (advertiser) notes that:

What I saw is that, the responses are crazy. Let us say for instance, I find Red Bull for R10 at Sasol Garage, people will respond that Red Bull is not selling for that price but I am able to communicate that it is on special on my social media platforms. So social media allows you to be interactive, and if people are to say comments such as it is expensive or I do not use it, then I am able to say that no this is how you will benefit from this brand. It will help you with this and that or they are able to go back to my comments (Phahameng advertiser, 10 September 2017).

Sekodi (advertiser) indicate that:

A negative review on brands is very much likely to spread than a positive word-of-mouth. However, if energy drink advertisers always strive to accomplish a positive relationship with consumers on their most preferred brands other than looking at the profits, then it is easy for advertisers and students to formulate immovable relationships (Sekodi advertisers, 11 September 2017).

4.5.2.2. Online behaviour

In addressing the question on the significance of social media platforms in shaping students' energy drink preferences Sibongile warned that:

Images online must not be deceiving. The image must tell me more than the content, which that is what makes consumers loyal to the product (Sibongile, 29 November 2015).

Nomfundo protested that:

My friend sent me a product she bought online for me and when she got the product, it was not the same as it looked on the image. She was very disappointed and ended up saying that she will never buy anything online. Sometimes advertisers are not entirely truthful in what they say about a product (Nomfundo, 29 November 2015).

The prevalence of dishonest advertising seems to undermine the power of advertising in promoting desirable perceptions of brands and successful purchases as it forces students not to trust online advertising, compelling them to be "stuck in the old communication habits". This contradicts popular claims that social media platforms have provided consumers with a renewed online behaviour and have enhanced their perceptions on the quality of their preferred brands (Razmerita, Kirchner, *et al*. 2016).

4.5.3 Energy drink preferences

Energy drinks contain a range of ingredients, which may include caffeine, taurine, carbohydrate (in the form of sugar), artificial sweeteners, vitamins and a variety of herbal ingredients that add to the marketability of the product (Higgins, Tuttle & Higgins, 2010). Energy drink preferences manifested in the conversations around Play energy drink and advertisement reach, which will be discussed in sections below.

4.5.3.1. Play energy drink

Students generally considered Play energy drink advertisements on social media especially on Facebook to be more effective and user-friendly, and enticing them to try out this energy drink.

Zodwa claims that:

I like Play energy drink as I have consumed it before and it works far better than other energy drinks that I have consumed. The advertisements are very appealing and I definitely recommend most of my friends to go try it out (Zodwa, 25 November 2015).

Thabo complemented this statement by saying that:

There is nothing wrong with energy drinks as long as you do not have an overdose of them. When it is exam time, I normally consume a can of Play energy drink and it does help quite a lot (Thabo, 25 November 2015).

Other students note that:

> *Energy drink brands come with preference. I consume what works for me better and Play energy drink works better for me. I am able to work for longer hours than in normal circumstances. Therefore, it assists quite a lot in performing better. Their advertisements on social media platforms are quite appealing as well* (Other students, 25 November 2015).

The perceived visual appeal and content richness of Play energy drinks do not sufficiently counter the indirect interaction between advertisers and students whose only staple form of interaction is via social media advertisements.

4.5.3.2. Advertisement reach

The issue of the advertisers' advertisements reaching students was met with students' complaints about a sense of dishonesty peddled by advertisers. Sibongile's response here confirms this complaint:

> *I do not want to hear advertisers' promises on "six juicy chicken wings" and then get a delivery of four dry wings, because I will most definitely never go back to that brand. Advertisers need to fulfil their advertisements' promises. The same applies to the energy drink brand, they say you will get energy then the next thing you have their drink and want to sleep at your reading table* (Sibongile, 13 February 2016).

Therefore, research about advertising effectiveness will be crucial as there are some indications of how low social media advertising is rated. This negative tone is energy

somewhat inconsistent with the claim that advertising is a key source of income for social media survival and as such proper measures to track advertising must be found (Gold, 2010).

A Phahameng (advertiser) notes that:

I feel Twitter is a very good platform for the promotion of brands and brand recognition. I however, want it to go to the emotions of people. People need to know and talk about brands as retweeting and hash tags spread around the globe. Again, there can be very difficult customers that really need some clarity before they can even commit to the brand. That is when physical advertising comes in (17 September 2017).

Mvuso (advertisers) emphasise that:

What I most like right now on social media platforms is that they provide status updates on what was updated four hours earlier. One can retrieve such postings to the current/new timeline. This can make it a more reachable brand if advertisers communicate it effectively (Mvuso, 25 September 2017).

Nakedi advertisers underscored that:

Most advertisements require consistency and quality. Most advertisers sometimes lubricate the product detail just to get the market strategies or for money and that can make the brand or destroy the brand. Energy drink brands must always be truthful in their contents. They must grow and attain potential clients such as the youth who are the majority users of social media advertising (30 September 2017).

Sekodi advertisers stated that:

If the energy drink advertisers were to first focus on making efficient relationships with consumer before focusing more on the profitability of the

brand, these improved relationships would definitely increase the markets of energy drink brand advertisements (04 October 2016).

At the heart of maintaining advertiser-customer relations on brand pages are brand posts. These are relatively frequent, concise and mostly unpaid updates brands create and sent out to their followers on a daily basis. Therefore, brand posts are a rich form of communication and facilitate a variety of brand meanings and eeriences (Tafesse, 2016).

4.6. Interactive marketing communication

The responses in Table 4.8 illustrate the categories, codes, and short transcripts emerging from the theme *interactive marketing communication* discussed on the next page.

Table 4.8 - Interactive marketing communication – categories emerging from this theme

THEMES	CATEGORIES	CODES, EXAMPLES & SHORT TRANSCRIPTS
INTERACTIVE MARKETING COMMUNICATION	**Enhancing consistency**	***Reaching target markets*** • Advertisement should not be limited to age *I want to feel connected with the brand; no limits to energy drink brands (Kgosi, 12 February 2016).* ***Response to feedback*** • Advertisers respond to opinions and complaints about their brands *I use social media to promote brands and to interact with customers* *I struggle to find the right way to reach to students* *Social media advertising on*

		energy drink brand is the pillar of advertisement these days
		Social media eases the process of proving and receiving feedback (Phahameng advertisers, Sekodi advertisers, Nakeng advertisers & Mvuso advertisers, 25 September 2017).
		Smooth and continuous use
		• I would still use energy drinks except for Monster energy drink
		Facebook and WhatsApp are really growing brands except for Monster energy drink with negative word-of-mouth (Natasha, 12 February 2016).
	Consumer buying behavior	**Durable feelings**
		• I would most definitely go back to

		a brand as long as I feel wanted
		I get to express my deep and lasting feelings on social media on brands that I prefer (Jabulani, 01 August 2018).
		Internal and external factors shape my consumption of Play energy drink (Zodwa and other students, 26 February 2016).
	Brand perspective	***Attitude formation*** • I feel like a brand perspectives are very important for the future of the company especially from young consumers (students) *I compare different brands against each other to make a decision* (Ntombi, 26 November 2015). ***Facebook majority use***

| | | • I mostly use Facebook to access my desired brands because it is cheaper for me as a student

I love Facebook because it costs less than other platforms (Jabulani, 01 August 2016).

• Facebook does not have any age restrictions and it is user friendly

I have seen most brands that I like on Facebook pages mostly than other networks (Lerato, 26 February 2016). |
| --- | --- | --- |

(Source: Author's own work)

Interactive marketing communication resulted in the consistent use of social media platforms to promote and access energy drink brands results in advertisers reaching their target markets. Answering research question, *what are advertisers' experiences of the social media platforms for advertising their brands (energy drink)?* Gave rise to data from which the interactive marketing communication theme was derived, of which the three main categories are discussed under the theme. The categories are: Enhancing consistency, Consumer buying behaviour and Brand perspectives.

4.6.1. Enhancing consistency

Enhancing consistency is the key to developing a follower base that responds to the created content and wants to come back again for the brand. Some social media influencers wish to maintain their specific focus on their channel while others opt to expand and develop different audiences on other existing social media platforms (Mediakix Team, 2017).

4.6.1.1. Reaching target markets

Reaching target markets is all about delivering the brand's message clearly to the consumers, establishing credibility for what the brand says or does, connecting emotionally with the brand's target audience, motivating the buyer to purchase the brand and generating customers who are loyal to the brand (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). While targeting a specific age when advertising a brand was part of reaching target markets, this approach was considered undesirable by other participants:

Kgosi elaborates that:

> As a consumer, I prefer it if the advertisement is not specific to a certain age. I want to feel connected, recognised and wanted by any brand and energy drinks are no exception. I want to share the advert with my peers. Advertisements must not be selective because customers make preferences based on their different personalities (Kgosi, 12 February 2016).

While social media enhance brand exposure, it seems some students were concerned about the selective generational approach adopted by advertisers of energy drinks. These findings seem to contradict the claim that social media provides a good platform for all individual business owners to network and reach out to the target audience, connect with them directly and generate trust by listening to what they have to say on energy drink brands (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012).

Overall, personal brand posts seek to deepen the brand's involvement in consumers' daily lives by invoking themes that have personal meaning. The potential disclosure that arises from personal brand posts and the conversations that ensue create an opportunity for the brand and other consumer's communities to know each other better and reinforce their social relationships. This finding reinforces prior observations in the literature which states that brands foster a sense of para-social interaction on social media to cultivate a personal-level connection with consumers (Van Noort, Antheunis & Verlegh, 2014; Walrave, Poels, Antheunis, Van den Broeck & van Noort, 2016).

4.6.1.2. Response to feedback

According to Gronroos (2004), advertisers applying the relationship-marketing concept should show a genuine interest in the needs and value systems of the customers. More so, it should show consumers that advertisers appreciate and utilise their feedback for improving advertisements. Many students expressed their desires as noted in their comments below:

Sibongile explains that:

> *It is so worthy to comment on a brand and receive an answer on social media instantly from an advertiser about a brand of my selection. I feel that I am needed, that again gives a positive word-of-mouth as it is easy for me to also share on Facebook* (Sibongile, 17 November 2015).

Lerato remarked that:

> *It is very interesting to get feedback on energy drinks from a Facebook friend on social media as I share and post my concerns. Social media users should appreciate both negative and positive feedback as it really helps a lot because we learn from one another* (Lerato, 17 November 2015).

As such, the provision of feedback on energy drinks is integral to relationship building. Literature suggests that social commentary is interactive by nature and can affect

relationships as neither party acts entirely independently of the other (Szmigin *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, social media are an ideal platform for the initiation of interaction with consumers and a space where advertisers can respond to and actively apply consumer feedback as noted in the following responses:

I use the social media platform to promote events, for posters, to interact with clients and Twitter polls for client conversations (Phahameng advertiser, 17 September 2017)*.*

A Mvuso advertiser shows the complexity of contemporary advertising:

It is so easy for dissatisfied students to make their voices heard but the struggle for advertisers is to find the right way to reach students, while students are always online (Mvuso advertiser, 20 September 2017)*.*

A Sekodi advertiser affirmed the power of social media in advertising:

Social media advertising on energy drink brands is a pillar of advertisements these days. It has captured many consumers to interact with energy drink brands on social media platforms (Sekodi, 30 September 2017).

A Nakedi advertiser emphasized feedback generated via social media advertising:

Social media marketing eases the process of providing and receiving feedback. It is easy for advertisers to respond within a short period of time (Nakedi advertisers, 02 October 2017)*.*

4.6.1.3. Smooth and continuous use

Since this social media phenomenon is continuing to grow at a fast pace, it is important to understand the effects it has on personal communication. Natasha reported the extension of Facebook communication from socialisation to advertising:

I feel like Facebook and WhatsApp are really growing well from being individual communication platforms to promoting other businesses. I have advertised my business on these platforms and it has grown very well (Natasha, 12 February 2016).

Although there was no compelling evidence of intensive use of Facebook for advertising, this finding has some resonance with literature. Student use Facebook primarily to maintain relationships with individuals and to grow small businesses (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Although Facebook makes it simpler to communicate with many audiences at once, there was no evidence of its use for monitoring the activities of individuals who would not have accessed it in a while (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

4.6.2. Consumer buying behaviour

Consumer buying behaviour is studied as a part of the marketing and its main objective it to learn the way in which individuals, groups or organizations choose, buy use and dispose the goods and factors such as their previous experience, taste, price and branding on which they base their purchasing decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

Customer buying behaviour found expression in durable feelings that will be discussed below.

4.6.2.1. Durable feelings

Zodwa openly confessed:

> *Social media is my life. I just go online and my life changes. I am able to do much on those platforms. I get to express my deep and lasting feelings on brands I prefer most and advertisers always give the platform for information sharing* (Zodwa, 26 February 2017).

Advertisers can co-create online images of brands during interactions in order to develop durable feelings of consumers on brands. This finding resonate with the view

that advertisers that co-create brand images with consumers allow consumers to build a deeper emotional attachment with the brand and provide consumers with the chance to participate in a unique retail experience (Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016). Engaging customers in brand activities and promoting a participatory culture on social media channels makes it easier to influence and predict consumer behaviour. Ind, Iglesias and Schultz (2013) contend that consumers feel more attached, encouraged and resourceful towards brands once they become more involved in the brand's communities. Apart from the aforementioned narrative on the purported symbiotic relationship between advertisers and consumers, there was limited tangible evidence on co-creation of brands by brand owners and consumers.

4.6.3. Brand perspectives

Advertisers' and student perspectives on brands found expression in attitude formation and use of Facebook. The following discussion focuses on these two categories.

4.6.3.1. Attitude formation

Self-connections around brands emerge when brand owners engender strong and favorable brand associations drawn from the consumers' perspectives to satisfy psychological needs, reinforce identity and allow individuals to connect with others (Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). As such, customers' attitudes towards brands are integral to the visibility and strength of brands without which brands are ineffective.

The customers' perceptions and interactions with brands are very important. Whatever their companies' marketing strategies are, the main purpose of their marketing activities is to influence consumers' perception and attitude toward a brand, establish the brand image in consumers' mind, and stimulate consumers' actual purchasing behaviour in terms of the brand in order to increase sales, maximise the market share and develop brand equity (Zhang, 2015). Such comparison of brands requires brand recognition, and sufficient knowledge of the individual qualities of each brand based on the customers' brand memory, which collectively triggers brand perception. Ntombi aptly acknowledges this with reference to high energy brands:

I weigh the functions and benefits of a Play energy drink against those of Monster energy drink. I compare different brands against each other in order to make a decision about a brand (Ntombi, 26 November 2015).

Thus, lack of brand perception will severely undermine the possibilities of consumers' connection to any energy drink brand.

4.6.3.2. Facebook's ease of use

Although Facebook use in education emphasises its capacity to create and maintain social connections and to allow college students to adjust socially in college, the ease of use remains one of the potentialities of this platform. College students' Facebook interactions with on-campus friends facilitates settling in college and satisfaction with college life (Yang & Brown, 2015) and it eases the use and hosting of many brands on this platform.

The researcher asked students about the platform they most frequently visit to access different brands of energy drinks. One student claimed that, "*I use Facebook to access various energy drinks and other brands as it is cheaper and very easy to use* (Phahameng, 09 September 2017). An advertiser who claimed that, "Students like it, again a majority of them use Facebook as it is easy to get connected on that social media platform" (Nakeng advertiser, 26 September 2017) supported this claim. Finally, the reality that Facebook is a low-cost and ubiquitous technology complement the ease of access and communication. Lerato confirmed this quality:

I love Facebook as it costs excessively less than other social media platforms and I receive the attention I seek on Facebook than on other social media platforms (Lerato, 20 February 2016).

Facebook is very user friendly for everyone as advertisers promote brands of my interest (Jabulani, 01 August 2018).

4.7. Brand communication

The responses in Table 4.9 illustrate the categories, codes, and short transcripts emerging from the theme *brand communication* discussed below.

Table 4.9: Brand communication

THEME	CATEGORIES	CODES, EXAMPLES & SHORT TRANSCRIPTS
BRAND COMMUNICATION	**Brand instability**	***Navigating brands in a changing environment*** • Advertisers must adapt to new changes to brands *As consumers, we have become co-constructors of brands and development* *For mutual influence to happen input is very important* *Helps a lot in my new business as I am able to recognized potential clients and brands are easily recognised* (Thabo & 3 other students, 26 February 2016). ***Negative rumours***

		• It can destroy brands reputation *Monster energy drink is band mouthed that is demonic and has negative side effects.* • Competition between brands has increased a lot. It is best advised that brands exceed customers' expectations *Advertisements on Monster energy drink are not truthful. I have consumed it and did not get the energy* (Thabiso & Thabo, 25 February 2016). ***Experiencing side effects of brands*** • Energy drinks make me tired, they have a weakening effect in my body *Lack of advertisement reach especially o Monster energy drink, experienced side*

		effects like restlessness and disruptive sleeping patterns. • Causes sleepless nights and insomnia *Monster is not helpful when consumed immediately, it works sometime after when one needs to rest.* • The only energy drink that has worked is Play energy drink but definitely not Monster energy drink *I am not interested in Monster energy drink brands* (15 students & Zodwa, 20 January 2016).
	Brand content and reputation	***Lack of brand interest on social media*** • Clothing brands are more likely to receive more attention from students than energy drink brands

		*I access brands of interest on social media platforms except Monster energy drink (*Lerato, 20 November 2016).
		• Negative brand content on Monster energy drinks
		I have heard many demonic stories about Monster energy drink that people use it for satanic purposes *(*Thabo & Zodwa, 20 November 2016).
		• Advertisers reach on brand content
		We as advertisers need to take brand seriously, as they are drastically growing.
		Advertisers must utilise on one on one interactions.

		Advertisers must interact more on social media platforms to retain new customers and formulate efficient relatioships (Nakedi advertisers, Mvuso advertisers, Sekodi advertisers & Phahameng advertisers, 25 September 2017).

(Source: Author's own work)

Brand communication resulted in the consistent use of social media platforms to promote and access energy drink brands results in advertisers endeavors to reach their target markets. Answering research question, *what are advertisers' experiences of the social media platforms for advertising their brands (energy drink)?* gave rise to data from which the interactive marketing communication theme was derived, of which the three main categories are discussed under the theme. The categories are: Enhancing consistency, Consumer buying behaviour and brand perspectives which are discusses in subsequent sections.

4.7.1. Brand instability

Brand instability is associated with navigating in a changing environment, negative rumours and negative side effects, which are discussed below.

4.7.1.1. Navigating in a changing environment

Through their empirical study, Zinnbauer and Honer (2011) established that although social currency exists, brands do not rely on it to facilitate brand loyalty among users. The evidence in this study does not support this claim. Instead, Thabo and three other students emphasised that:

Social media platforms have helped a lot in my business start-up. They have enabled me to recognise my potential clients and my brands are *recognised easily on those social media platforms* (Thabo and three other students, 26 February 2016).

Although there was no clear mention of the role of social media use in making decisions about energy drinks, these students exploited social media to increase the recognition of their brands. The integration of a brand into a consumer's daily life enables consumers to connect, interact and benefit from like-minded brand users, and thus the likelihood of consumer-generated advertising of a brand increases (Zinnbauer & Honer 2011). The study argues that social media platforms provide a conduit through which brand integration unfolds in consumers' lives.

4.7.1.2. Negative rumours

Some students complained that:

The messages that advertisers use to promote their brand are sometimes not entirely true. I have consumed Monster energy drink and I did not get much energy as most adverts claim. To the contrary, I mostly get side effects like lack of sleep.

Another student supported the claim by saying:

Monster energy drink is demonic and had negative side effects on me (Thabiso and Thabo, 25 February 2016).

The observed negative effects of caffeine consumption among young people and the link between the use of energy drinks and other negative health behaviours demand that these trends be monitored and further action taken (Doctor's Nova Scotia, 2012; Meier, 2013). The perceived visual appeal and content richness of social media advertisements on energy drinks may not sufficiently counter the negative reports from students. Similarly, such negative vibe may not offset the rhetorical overtone in energy

drinks such as PepsiCo's Mountain Dew, which appeals to and is effective in articulating the masculine risk taking behaviour such as extreme sport and war. . The negativity about Monster energy advertisements among students can be contrasted with the Play energy drink advertisements on social media (especially Facebook), which students generally considered to be more user-friendly and attractively displayed for students to try these drinks out. Therefore, the lack of authenticity of social media messages on energy drinks may contribute to some negative vibes about drinks and contribute to student reluctance to taste energy drinks.

4.7.1.3. Experiencing side effects

Contrary to the highly publicised stimulating effects of energy drinks, some students reported negative experiences and lack of publicity of such drinks. As one student, Zodwa, confessed:

> *There is lack of advertisement reach from advertisers on our most preferred brands, especially on Monster energy drink. We have not seen any advertisement on it. Although I am more interested in clothing brands than energy drinks, I have experienced negative side effects with drinks such as restlessness and disruption of sleeping patterns. (Zodwa, 20 January 2016)*

These claims contradict popular claims that energy drinks are helpful for people who want to work longer hours or study late at night.

Many students complained about energy drinks such as Monster energy emphasising that "*It is not so helpful immediately at the time one consumes it. It only works later when one wants to sleep. Then it is when it becomes active in the body and I don't like that about Monster energy drinks*" (10 students, 20 January 2016). In addition, five students insisted, "*they would never use social media platforms to view any energy drink advertisements as it is not of their interest. They would rather use social media for other things like online shopping of clothing, shoes, make up, food and others that are of their interest".* Hence, it seems students' reluctance to use the social media to articulate such brands can be attributed to the side effects upon the consumption of Monster energy drinks (Five students, 20 January 2016).

Therefore, there should attempts to minimise the potentially harmful effects from energy drink consumption. These attempts could focus on the suggestion of the American Academy of Paediatrics to ban the sale of energy drinks to minors and young people under the age of 19 (Doctor's Nova Scotia, 2012; Meier, 2013). Energy drink (ED) consumption is linked to potential adverse health and behavioural outcomes that may negatively affect adolescent development, health and well-being. Risk behaviours are reported to be prevalent among youth (Poulin & Elliott, 1997, Alamian & Paradis, 2009), and frequent energy drink consumers are clearly at a heightened risk of using alcohol and other substances as well as being more prone to sensation seeking and at the risk of depression.

4.7.2. Brand content and reputation

Brand Content is ideal to addressing mobile messages to patrons as it uses unobtrusive pulling and not merely pushing techniques to attract consumers to brand content (Liu & Huang, 2014).

Brand reputation is discussed under the lack of brand interest on social media provided below.

4.7.2.1. Lack of brand interest

In spite of all the effort, the levels of customer engagement on social media platforms suggest that conventional marketing knowledge lacks the ability to explain and guide the marketers throughout the process (WARC, 2012b). Perhaps this lack of a clear social media strategy explains students' discouraging reports on the social media advertising of energy drinks. As one student, Lerato, professed:

> *I do access brands on social media platforms such as clothing and watches but I have never seen Monster energy drink advertised on my news feed or timeline. However, most of my peers share their experiences of Red bull* (Lerato, 20 November 2016).

Other students, such as Thabo, expressed the power of electronic word-of-mouth by highlighting that:

I will never use Monster energy drink as I have read negative things like it is demonic and people use it for satanic purposes. That is why I do not prefer it at all. I would rather use Play energy drink for that matter as I have seen an advertisement on it and it really did help. I will not even try Monster energy drinks. They do not even have interesting advertisements on Monster and it just discourages one from purchasing it (Thabo, 20 November 2016).

These findings on negative vibes generated by social media advertising could be compromising the credibility of social media platforms and undermining customers' repeated visits to these sites. One practitioner study of the most popular brands on Facebook has discovered that less than 5% of brands were able to attract repeated fan visits to their page within a 30-day period, meaning that under one in 20 fans in a month chose to return to the brand page more than once (WARC, 2012b). In addition, the proportion of Facebook fans who not only visit the fan page but also engage with it was lower. Only 1% of customers observed in another study were found to actually engage with the brand after initially becoming a fan on Facebook (Creamer, 2012). Though not reported in this study, perhaps, advertisers' use of multiple media modes could increase customers' interaction with brands. The interactive capability of brand posts and their ability to support multiple media types (e.g. text, photo, video and website links) offers marketers an unprecedented scope to experiment with a variety of messages (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

The following responses from some students are significant in ascertaining the effectiveness of social media advertising of energy drinks.

Zodwa says that the lack of visibility was another distraction:

I have never seen an advertisement on social media about Monster energy drink. That said, I am not interested at all in that. I have read negative rumours about the energy drink, that it is demonic. There are comments

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from people that it is the worst to use and they will never purchase it. All this information I get from Facebook, it is very important that advertisers ensure quality of the product and never disappoint (Zodwa, 20 November 2016).

Phahameng advertisers note that:

"It is obvious that brands are also judged like human beings. Therefore, advertisers need to take social media advertising serious, as it has drastically grown big. Advertisers need to invest fully in giving customers what they want by listening to their concerns because that makes brands more accessible for new customers (Phahameng advertisers, 19 September 2017)*.*

The Nakedi advertisers' commented that: "*When brands engage on social media platforms, advertisers must utilise the tools given when it comes to one on one interactions with customers"* (Nakedi advertisers, 30 September 2017)*.*

Mvuso advertisers pointed out that: "*Every post on social media gives an opportunity for more interactions, the more posts the better. Well it has worked for me as it has given me more chances to retain new customers"* (Mvuso advertisers, 25 September 2017)*.* The Sekodi advertisers also confirmed that: *"we interact with customers through conversations and feedback from morning till afternoon. This is very important because it formulates efficient relationships".*

4.8. Chapter summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented, interpreted and discussed the data derived from the interviews with the selected participants from the CUT students who used social media and social media-based advertisers of energy drinks. In congruence with the uses and gratifications theory (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005; Rubin, 2009), consumers' motivations for engagement with social media centred on their desires for connectedness, social interaction, relaxation and entertainment. This range of media

experiences resonates with those of Calder, Malthouse and Schaedel (2009) who examined online engagement and advertising effectiveness. According to Curran *et al.* (2011), social media sites such as Facebook are better advertising avenues because they store, information about all users, have global reach and extend the retailers' target markets. Hence, social media sites are a great platform for retailers to create an experience for consumers and improve consumer experience of their brands.

The next chapter outlines the conclusion based on literature and research questions. It also proffers some recommendations and practical implications as well as describes the limitations to the study.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a summary of the research findings that address the research questions posed in Chapter 1. Chapter 1 constituted the orientation to the study, Chapter 2 provided a review of the related literature on social media advertising and consumer brand preferences, while Chapter 3 rendered a detailed narrative of the research methodology adopted for the study. The previous chapter (Chapter 4) presented and discussed the results of the empirical study. Therefore, this chapter concludes the study with the recapping presentation of conclusion and recommendations for practice and further research.

5.1. Conclusion based on literature

Individual student, student-peer, student-academic community engagement and to a limited extent student-advertiser engagement with brands via social media platforms preceded emotional attachment and actual purchase of energy drink brands, leading to customer loyalty. Strong student attitudes towards brands such as energy drinks often were fostered and sustained through consumers' positive word-of-mouth and advertisers' brand promotion using the virtual world (Barhemmati & Ahmad, 2015), such as social media. Anam and Faiz's (2016) study in the Pakistani context also reported similar results, which found that advertisers' efforts at engaging consumers can enhance consumer delight with energy drink brands and contribute to consumer loyalty. In a social media environment consumers learn about brands through information sharing and collaborative exchange of knowledge that may contribute to their greater satisfaction with consumption of brands. Yet the existence of networked communities of consumers such as student online communities can leverage advertisers' potential to tap into such communities when advertising and promoting particular brands. This finding mirrors Barhemmati and Ahmad's (2015) finding that the existence of emotional ties between engaging students offer advertisers immense

prospects of achieving relationship-marketing objectives between such students and advertisers.

Eisingerich *et al* (2015) study considered the differences between transmitting WOM in social media (on Facebook) and offline (in person), and revealed that consumers are less inclined to transmit WOM on social media because of a higher perceived social risk. The results of our study contradicted this finding because students were comfortable to engage and share messages about energy drinks on both social media platforms and offline. Puccinelli, Wilcox and Grewal (2015) examined digital video advertisements that run on sites such as Hulu and YouTube, focusing on how TV show emotions interacted with advertisements on energy levels to affect consumers' responses on energy drinks. They found that affective matching between the show and advertising mattered to the extent that when consumers experience "deactivating" emotions (e.g., negative views on the brand), it is harder to view energy drink brands. This finding seems to cohere with this the finding of the current study that when peer communities purveyed negative comments about a particular energy drink on social media and in offline contexts, this cultivated negative perceptions about that brand and increased student reluctance to purchase the brand. Cascio, Matthew, Joseph, Francis, Tinney and Emily (2015) identified neural correlates of susceptibility to others' opinions in online WOM settings, with susceptibility to social influence being related to brain regions involved with shifting personal preferences and considering others. Although the current study did not involve any neural investigation, the social influence of peers who had used and experienced clothing, food and beverage brands tended to shape student choice of brands, with positive affirmations from peers and availability of brands shaping one's orientation towards, purchase intentions and actual purchase of brands. Ideally, the intention of social media advertisements with energy drinks is to initiate, ignite and steer particular authentic and idealistic perceptions of brands, share previous customers' purchase experiences with other students about certain brand categories, and give recommendations to others. Therefore, while literature suggests that consumers use social media platforms to inform themselves about prior purchasing decisions (Huong, 2015), in the current study they reported using social media platforms to forecast future purchase intentions drawing on peers' previous experiences of purchased brands. There seemed to be no formula for success for increasing consumer utility as students often unwittingly purchased energy drinks

unrealistically hyped by advertisers. Yet, according to participants, there are common principles of effective social media advertising. Participants reported that allocating resources for authentic advertising and creating a long-term advertising strategy on these platforms were important for effective and long-term brand consumption. While this seemed logical, advertisers studied were not taking social media platforms seriously enough to utilise them effectively for increasing greater value for their brands, especially energy drinks. This can be contrasted with several newly incubated small businesses owned by students, which increased their brands' exposure and visibility through social media platforms.

5.2. Conclusion based on research questions

This section provides a summary of responses to the six research questions with a view to render a conclusion on each one of them. These responses were elicited from the responses gave during the in-depth semi-structured interviews that were conducted with university students and advertisers of energy drinks in the research context. The first research questions read as follows:

5.2.1. Research question 1

What are energy drink advertisers and students' perspectives on the significance of social media platforms in shaping students' energy drink preferences?

Findings from the study demonstrated that while students did not conceive social media platforms themselves to play a significant role in shaping their preferences about energy drinks, student peer networks, individual students' past experiences of consumption of energy drinks and positive electronic word-of-mouth via social media networks do shape student preferences for energy drinks. The results of this study indicate that the media (i.e. social media platforms) do not necessarily play a big role in the shaping of brand preferences, rather the way in which advertisers package and transmit authentic brand content efficiently and effectively does play a role to a moderate extent. Table 4.7 provided evidence of advertisers' and consumers' fleeting interconnections and relationships on social media platforms that manifested through conversations around brands such as energy drinks. While advertisers used social

media platforms to shape consumers' (i.e. students') preferences for and access to energy drink brands to a moderate extent, some students did not trust advertiser developed advertisements which they found to be insincere. To the contrary, peer reviews and recommendations via social media platforms had a stronger influence on most students' preferences for and decisions to purchase energy drink brands. To a smaller extent, educators' and celebrities' perspectives and experience of consumption of energy drinks reported via social media also shaped student perspectives on energy drinks.

5.2.2. Research question 2

What are the students' subjective perspectives on the general uses of social media platforms?

This research question sought to identify and evaluate the students' subjective perspectives on the use of social media platforms. The results illustrated in Table 4.4 show that students had generally positive perceptions of social media applications, which they used to share information and knowledge about brands such as clothing, food and other beverages. Their positive subjective perspectives of social media arose from the fact that they could organise and talk about their social activities and brand preferences with peers on these platforms. This involves generating conversations on social media platforms such as social mentioning and talk walking around brands.

5.2.3. Research question 3

What are the consumers' narrative accounts of the different social media platforms that they use in their decision making process about brands (e.g. monster energy drink)?

Most students mentioned Facebook and to a limited extent Twitter as the most effective social media platforms for making decisions about the brands to purchase. For most students the Facebook time line, newsfeeds and brand pages served as the most trafficked application and spaces respectively for sharing experiences about brands and brand reviews, which shaped brand purchase intentions. The retweeting

and tweeter feeds were also common, but less popular advertisers' ways of shaping purchase intentions and making decisions about brands. The results in Table 4.5 show that social media decision making revolved around individual students' decision making, individual values of each student, peer assertions about brands on Facebook, and content shared by advertisers shaping their decision making about brands. Overall, although students strongly affirmed Facebook and to a limited extent Twitter as instrumental in promoting positive EWOM about brands and brand decision making, a few students also felt that negative electronic word-of-mouth damaged a good brand, especially energy drink brands.

5.2.4. Research question 4

What are the advertisers' experiences of the social media platforms they use for advertising their brands (e.g. energy drinks)?

This research question sought to identify and evaluate the advertisers' experiences on the use of social media platforms for advertising their brands. The results and the themes presented in Table 4.8 show that advertisers had strong positive affirmations of Facebook and Twitter as interactive marketing and communication platforms to access energy drink brands. Advertisers conceived interactive marketing and communication via social media platforms, especially Facebook, not only as avenues for attracting potential customers through influencing their psychology, but also as conduits for generating customer feedback for improved promotion and marketing of brands. While advertisers acknowledged that negative comments and feedback on social media could virally spread and undermine the legitimacy and reception of brands, several advertisers were generally affirmative of the power of social media platforms in shaping and influencing consumer decision-making, purchase intentions and actual purchase of brands such as energy drinks.

5.2.5. Research question 5

How do advertisers perceive the influences of social media on the promotion of consumer brands?

The results of this study demonstrated that advertisers conceived social media as the appropriate avenue for promoting viral and instant promotion and advertising of energy drink brands. The findings provided in Table 4.9 support advertisers' use of social media for promoting brand communication. Although advertisers praised social media platforms for increasing brand exposure, brand visibility and brand awareness, there was no specific evidence to demonstrate that they had a coherent strategy for attracting, retaining and forecasting student demand for energy drinks.

5.2.6. Research question 6

How do consumers perceive the impact of social media advertising on their brand preferences?

The responses to this question were summarised in Table 4.6 where students' computer-mediated communication was summarised. There were varied student perspectives on the impact of social media advertising with some students claiming that they had never seen any advertisements on their Facebook time lines or news feeds and hence, advertising did not affect their brand choices. Yet many students claimed that social media advertising indirectly shaped their choices through its affirmation of brands, which their peer networks, educators and celebrities consumed or had recommended. Assuming that such recommended brands were those advertised by advertisers on social media, this researcher can argue that the influence of social media advertising on student brand preferences was indirect and secondary. However, a few students acknowledged the capacity of social media advertising to shape their choices of energy drinks pointing to the strong impact of social media advertising on brand preferences. These students made use of those platforms to formulate conversations with other students about the brand of interest as well as to review brand contents.

5.3. Recommendations

The recommendations of this study comprises policy recommendations and recommendations for practice.

5.3.1. Policy recommendations

The first policy recommendation arises from the realization that although advertisers attempted to advertise via social media networks, student brand preferences were shaped more by their peer networks, celebrities and educators whom these students followed on Twitter and via their Facebook timelines. Advertising policies and strategies, therefore, should not only take cognisance of social influences from influential people via social media networks, but also rather understand their contribution and how it is harnessed to promote social media advertising effectiveness. These findings provide a useful framework for developing social advertising strategies designed to be drawn on, to shape group behaviour or to engage in collective action as not enough is known about the sources of message formats and characteristics that best influence consumer attitudes and intentions (Keller & Lehmann, 2008; McKayNesbitt & Yoon, 2015). The context of this study considered the role of collective action in shaping the behaviours of an out-group of mainly students. This approach could contribute to the social advertising and policy change literature which largely focuses on a research context of in-groups and not subordinate or out-groups (McKay-Nesbitt & Yoon, 2015).

The claim by some students that they had never seen any energy drink advertisements on their Facebook time lines or news feeds and hence, advertising did not affect their brand choices, is a cause for concern. Perhaps the advertising policy and strategies of advertisers should be more robust and aggressive enough to cover sub-groups such as students coming from previously disadvantaged groups and students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds who have social media accounts. Literature suggests that the information provided through social advertising action needs to consider the motivations of both the disadvantaged and the advantaged groups to ensure affirmation of the credibility of various issues. This is in addition to acknowledgement of the advertisers' competence in delivering the message, optimism that there is a realistic and achievable course of action to redress the problem, and the relevance of the medium in which the message is delivered (Goh & Pang, 2016). While social media share some commonalities with traditional media, the environment and overall nature of social media make them a unique vehicle for advertising even though promotion and advertising of products need to be more targeted.

Advertisers seemed to depend more on Facebook advertising compared to other social media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram. The advertising strategies of advertisers should consider broadening social media networks to ensure the broader reach of energy drink promotions and advertisements. This would ensure that as a new channel of communication, social media's value is leveraged and its value is matched to the needs of the consumers. The key is that advertisers must understand students' emotional connections with brands whether they are target consumers or potential consumers. Finally, advertisers need to focus less on the profitability of the brand but more on the open interchange of consumers and listen to the negative feedback as well as respond accordingly. With customers increasingly becoming computer savvy about brands and their selection on social media platforms, advertisers do not seem to understand and strive to meet students' needs satisfactorily. Therefore, advertisers need to develop an understanding of the psychology, personal, social and cultural characters that can influence students' behaviours on the selection of energy drink brands.

Therefore, advertisers need to incorporate consumers' views on their brands and must always be truthful about it in order to satisfy consumer desires. The key is that advertisers must understand consumers' emotional connections with brands whether they are target consumers or potential consumers. Brand owners must be less focused on the profitability of the brand and rather pay more attention to the open dialogue of consumers and respond accordingly. A possible policy recommendation is that advertisers need to simulate and grasp the possible consequences of positive and negative EWOM to if they are to develop and provide appealing content that grabs more young people's attention to brands. The development of a coherent strategy for optimizing student use of brands is needed to increase profitability and create solid relationships with student consumers.

5.3.2. Recommendation for practice

Since, the Facebook time line, newsfeeds and brand pages were the most popular features and spaces respectively for sharing experiences about brands and brand reviews for most students, advertisers need to integrate these applications and pages increasingly into their advertising tactics and activities to increase the advertising value

and shape brand purchase intentions. The seamless integration of personal websites of advertisers and social media platforms would also allow for the easier navigation of both spaces by students who have limited time to visit both spaces independently.

Given that positive electronic word-of-mouth via social media networks in particular through student peer networks and individual students' past experiences of consumption of energy drinks influenced student preferences for energy drinks, the spreading of more authentic and dependable information on energy drinks would ensure the viral spread of energy drinks advertising and shape student intentions to purchase these beverages.

While advertisers acknowledged that negative comments and feedback on social media could virally spread and undermine the legitimacy and reception of a brand, they need to develop productive and creative messages to counter such negative messages. One effective way of countering negative comments is to liaise with manufacturers of energy brands so that they give correct, complete and reliable information about the positive and side effects of consuming energy drinks. This might reduce the negative energy consumers generate about drinks. This would ensure that advertisers formulate relationships that are more flexible with consumers through interaction on social media platforms.

It is recommended that advertisers should consider and incorporate the perspectives of these "significant others" (educators and celebrities) when they devise their social media marketing strategies as they have potential to increase their advertising value. It is recommended that advertisers should track the frequency, direction and dynamics of student interactions with brands and peers on social media to build sustainable relationships with their customers. A possible practical recommendation is that, with the increasing availability of purchase applications that are integrated with social media platforms, advertisers need to select exclusive applications that maximize social appeal, desirability and purchase of brands.

5.3.3. Implications for future research

This study sought to improve students' experiences with brands and the awareness of advertisers to improve the sustainability of businesses in the 21st century. However, the study was limited to advertisers located in Bloemfontein and selected students of the Central University of Technology, Bloemfontein in the Free State. Future studies therefore might look into a diverse population comprising various advertisers who advertise and promote energy drinks via different electronic channels. Studies also might consider brand preferences of students from several universities of technology or make comparisons of the brand preferences of students from traditional universities with those of universities of technology.

Although the study summarised demographic characteristics of students quantitatively, the major part of the study was purely qualitative. Future studies may need to combine the qualitative stance adopted in this study with quantitative elements in one study (i.e. a mixed-methods approach). This would ensure that the diverse representation of diverse socio-economic and cultural groups and the nature of relationships between variables are articulated, as well as the development of an in-depth understanding of the complex issues of brand preferences and their motivations.

The findings show that participants are of the view that advertisements on energy brands, especially the Monster energy drink brands, are not entirely truthful, and the energy drink brands have severe side effects, as well as that there are not as many advertisements on social media as one would have expected. However, the student respondents pointed out that social media provide advertisers with an opportunity to get potential clients and generate information about consumers' attention. The continual consumption of such beverages despite their side effects demonstrates that there are more influences on student consumption of such drinks than advertisements. Such influences on energy drink consumption need further exploration across different universities with different demographic profiles of students. These various factors should be integrated into a diverse mix that shapes social media advertising of energy drink brands.

Future research may compare traditional advertising and advertising through different social media to establish which has the better influence on students.

5.4. Significance of the study

This study contributes to better theoretical and practical understanding of the relationship among social media networks, social media advertising, brand awareness, brand preferences, brand decision making and ultimately purchases of brands. The significance of this study lies in articulating knowledge on transformative uses of social media advertising among a complex heterogeneous group of students coming from diverse socio-economic and cultural groups. This study also expands knowledge on the consumption of globally available energy brands and the development of a contemporary global identity image amongst the youth (students) who consume particular brands.

5.5. Limitations of the study

Every research practice has its inadequacy, and there is always room for improvement. This study was limited to selected OMT students' personal reflections on their engagements on social media, and their decision-making about brands. This implies that the extent of generalisation of such a case study based research is limited. Nevertheless, the credibility and dependability of results are founded on the systematic rigour and depth of the analysis.

Qualitative studies often are criticised for concentrating on developing in-depth understanding at the expense of developing broad knowledge (i.e. breadth). The reality is that each research approach has its own strengths and the strength of qualitative research lies in its capacity to tap into the inter-subjective nature of knowledge by allowing researchers to engage in deep conversations with their own experiences and those of others on social media.

Given the need to extract the view of technology users about specific brands, students enrolled for the Office Management and Technology programme at the Bloemfontein campus of the CUT, were considered ideal for the study compared to other groups.

This means that while the choice of this group was important as these students were more inclined to use social media by virtue of their exposure to technology through the courses for which they were enrolled, this meant that the views of other possible technology users from other programmes were not included in the study. While the inclusion of other departments such as Information Technology would have made the study more comprehensive, the researcher was also mindful of the information overload that would arise from considering many students from multiple departments. It was for this reason that the study was limited to one department.

Convenience sampling meant that the researcher could also not consider students from CUT Welkom campus due to time and financial constraints. The researcher is a junior lecturer in the Office Management and Technology division of the Department of Business Support Studies. The limitation could not be addressed as it was beyond the researcher's control.

5.6. Concluding remarks

This chapter presented the study's conclusion on the influence of social media advertising on consumer brand preferences. The study was a case study of selected first-year students at the Central University of Technology, Free State's preference for and consumption of energy drinks such as Play, Red Bull and Monster energy drinks. The study reached a conclusion based on literature on social media advertising and brand preferences, findings of the empirical study and recommendations for policy and practice, as well as implications for future research. The overall conclusion is that student preferences and decision-making about brands are a function of their own personal experiences, peer-based EWOM based on social media platforms, and celebrities' and educators' perspectives on these brands. Evidence suggests that while positive feedback about brands creates possibilities for increased brand purchase intentions while negative feedback scares students from purchasing particular brands. However, the actual purchase of brands is influenced by multiple factors ranging from brand availability, brand familiarity, peer influences and prior personal experiences with the brand. Advertisers should accommodate consumer's opinions and desires as it would greatly affect and benefit their brand, as social media is evolving and changing the communication on brands.

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ANNEXURE A

SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Reitumetse Joyce Jafeta is a Master of Business Administration student at the Central University of Technology, Free State. She also possesses a Bachelor Degree in Office Management of Technology from the same university. She is currently employed as a part time lecture at the same University. Her research interest lies on Social media advertising on consumer brand preference particularly on Monster Energy drink brands. She has co-authored the following article:

Rambe, P. & Jafeta (2017). Impact of social media advertising on high energy drink preferences and consumption. *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, 14 (4), 678-691.

ANNEXURE B

ACADEMIC PLANNING

Central University of
Technology, Free State

Miss RJ Jafeta

Part-time Lecturer

Faculty of Management Sciences

Department: Business Support Studies

Student nr: 210072776

rjafeta@yahoo.co.za or rjafeta@cut.co.za

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT SURVEY "THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING ON CONSUMER BRAND PREFERENCES: A CASE OF MONSTER ENERGY DRINKS AMONGST SELECTED FIRST YEAR STUDENTS" AT CUT BLOEMFONTEIN CAMPUS

Dear Miss Jafeta

This is to confirm that you have been granted permission to conduct survey for your research for Masters in Business Administration entitled: **"The influence of social media advertising on consumer brand preferences: a Case of monster energy drinks among first year students"** among students of Office Management and Technology (OMT) programme at the CUT Bloemfontein Campus.

The conditions of the permission are:

- The survey will not interrupt any of the official activities at the CUT;

- You will supply us with the copy of your report;

- The cost of all related activities will be covered by yourself;

- Recruitment of participants is the sole responsibility of yourself;

- Voluntary nature of the potential participant's decision to consent to participate should be strictly observed;

- You should not disclose a potential participant's decision to participate or otherwise to any other party;

- Permission does not compel, in any sense, participation of staff members or students in your survey.

DIRECTOR: ACADEMIC PLANNING

DR DM BALIA

16 NOVEMBER 2015

2

ANNEXURE C

INTERVIEW GUIDE: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING ON CONSUMER BRAND PREFERENCES: A CASE OF MONSTER ENERGY DRINKS AMONG SELECTED FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN BLOEMFONTEIN

My name is Reitumetse Joyce Jafeta. I am a Masters student in Business Administration at the Central University of Technology (CUT) in Bloemfontein. I am conducting an interview guide on social media advertising on consumer brand preferences, a case of Monster energy drinks among selected first year students at Central University of Technology in Bloemfontein. At this stage, I am still busy with the designing of an interview guide of my study. Prof Patient Rambe who supervises this study can be contacted on the following contact details:
Prof Patient Rambe (Main supervisor): 051 507 4064 or prambe@cut.ac.za

At this stage, I am conducting my fieldwork on this topic and I would be very pleased if you take time to complete this interview. Your participation in this interview is voluntary and your responses are confidential. The results of this interview will be reported in a comprehensive form to ensure your anonymity. The interview will help establish the influence of social media advertising on the consumer's selection of Monster energy drinks and what could be added to produce effective decision making. This interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. Space is provided at the end of the interview for you to add any additional comments you may have. I greatly appreciate your assistance.

I will be very grateful if you would answer all the questions of the interview as honestly as possible.

Yours faithfully
Reitumetse Jafeta

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA (Advertisers)

1. Gender

1	2
Female	Male

2. Age Group

1	2	3	4	5
Below 20 yrs.	20-29 yrs.	30-39 yrs.	40-50 yrs.	Above 50 yrs.

3. Home language

1	2	3	4	5	6 Other language
English	Afrikaans	IsiSotho	IsiZulu	IsiXhosa	(Specify)…………………..

4. Qualifications

1	2	3	4	5	6
None	Primary schooling	Matric & below	FET Or equivalent	University Degree/ Diploma	Postgraduate

5. Current level education

1	2	3	4	5	6
None	First year	Second year	Third year	Undergraduate	Postgraduate

6. Your highest academic qualification?

1	2	3	4	5	6
None	Primary	Matric & below	Tertiary certificate	Diploma/ degree	postgraduate

7. Your role in the University activities

1	2	3	Other (specify)
Student	Mentor	Mentee	

8. Year of experience in consuming energy drinks

1	2	3	4	5	6
Below 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	Over 20 years

9. Year of experience in Social media usage

1	2	3	4	5	6
Below 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	Over 20 years

SECTION B: ADVERTISERS' EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS THEY USE FOR ADVERTISING THEIR BRANDS (E.G. ENERGY DRINKS)

Question 26a: Have you ever used a social media platform for marketing any brand(s)?

Question26b: Which social media platform(s) were these?

Question 26c: How do you use such social media platform(s)? Detail your answer.

Question 26d: Why do you use such media for this purpose?   Explain in detail

Question 27a: Which social media platforms do you use for advertising your energy drinks?

Question 27b: What are your experiences of the use of such media? Please elaborate each one of them in detail.

Question 28a: Have you ever used social media platforms for advertising Monster energy drinks in particular?

Question 28b: Which social media platforms were this?

Question 29: What are your personal experiences of using these social media platforms for this purpose? Please elaborate your answer.

SECTION C: ADVERTISERS PERCEIVING THE INFLUENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE PROMOTION OF CONSUMER BRANDS

Question 30a: Have you ever used a particular social media platform to promote any brand(s)?

Question 30b: Which social media platforms were these?

Question 30c: Which brand(s) were these?

Question 30d: How did you use these social media platforms to promote these brands?

Question 31a: Have you ever used social media platform to promote any energy drink?

Question 31b: If so, which social media did you use?

Question 31c: Which energy drinks were these?

Question 31d: How did this social media impact the promotion of this brand?

Question 32a: Have you ever used social media for the promotion of the Monster Energy drink in particular?

Question 32b: Which social media platforms were these?

Question 32c: If not, why have you not used it? Elaborate your answer.

Question 32d: How did you go about it?

Question 32e: Based on your use of this social media, what is your perception of the influence of this social media on the promotion of this brand? Elaborate your answer

INTERVIEW GUIDE: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING ON CONSUMER BRAND PREFERENCES: A CASE OF MONSTER ENERGY DRINKS AMONG SELECTED FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN BLOEMFONTEIN

My name is Reitumetse Joyce Jafeta. I am a Masters student in Business Administration at the Central University of Technology (CUT) in Bloemfontein. I am conducting an interview guide on social media advertising on consumer brand preferences, a case of Monster energy drinks among selected first year students at Central University of Technology in Bloemfontein. At this stage, I am still busy with the designing of an interview guide of my study. This study is supervised by Prof Patient Rambe, who can be contacted on the following contact details:
Prof Patient Rambe (Main supervisor): 051 507 4064 or prambe@cut.ac.za

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I will be very grateful if you would answer all the questions of the interview as honestly as possible.

Yours faithfully

Reitumetse Jafeta

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA (Students)

6. Gender

1	2
Female	Male

7. Age Group

1	2	3	4	5
Below 20 yrs.	20-29 yrs.	30-39 yrs.	40-50 yrs.	Above 50 yrs.

8. Home language

1	2	3	4	5	6 Other language
English	Afrikaans	IsiSotho	IsiZulu	IsiXhosa	(Specify)…………………..

9. Qualifications

1	2	3	4	5	6
None	Primary schooling	Matric & below	FET Or equivalent	University Degree/ Diploma	Postgraduate

10. Current level education

1	2	3	4	5	6
None	First year	Second year	Third year	Undergraduate	Postgraduate

6. Your highest academic qualification?

1	2	3	4	5	6

None	Primary	Matric & below	Tertiary certificate	Diploma/ degree	postgraduate

7. Your role in the University activities

1 Student	2 Mentor	3 Mentee	Other (specify)

8. Year of experience in consuming energy drinks

1 Below 1 year	2 1-5 years	3 6-10 years	4 11-15 years	5 16-20 years	6 Over 20 years

9. Year of experience in Social media usage

1 Below 1 year	2 1-5 years	3 6-10 years	4 11-15 years	5 16-20 years	6 Over 20 years

SECTION B: STUDENTS SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF THE GENERAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Question 10: Which social media platform(s) have you used in your social life?

Question 13: What did you use that social media platform for?

Question 14: Which activities (or social practice) did you engage in most on these social media platforms? Elaborate your answer.

Question 15: What is your general perspective/ perception of this social media platform? Explain your answer

SECTION C: CONSUMER'S NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS THEY USE IN THEIR DECISION MAKING PROCESS ABOUT BRANDS (E.G. MONSTER ENERGY DRINK)?

Question 16: Have you ever used a social media network site (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Google ++, Picasa or twitter) as platforms to make choices/ decisions about any brand?

Question 17: Which social media platform(s) were these?

Question 18: Which brand(s) were there?

Question 19: How did you use these social media platform(s) to make choices about these brands in question? Elaborate your answer.

Question 20: Have you ever used a social media platform(s) to make choices about energy drinks?

Question 21: Which social media platform(s) were these?

Question 22: Which energy drink(s) were these?

Question 23: How did you use that social media platform to do that? Explain your answer.

Question 24: Did you ever use social media as a platform for making choices about Monster energy drink?

Question 24b: If so how did you do that?

Question 25: Describe in detail your experience in doing that.

Question 25b: If not, why not?

SECTION D: CONSUMERS PERCEIVING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING ON THEIR BRAND PREFERENCES

Question 33a: What is your preference for energy drink brands?

Question 33b: Has this energy drink been advertised by advertisers via any social media platform(s)?

Question 34a: What role, if any, has social media advertising played in shaping your preferences for these brands?

Question 34b: Do you know of any companies that use social media for advertising energy drinks in particular?

Question 34c: Which are they?

Question 35: In your view how has social media advertising impacted your preferences for energy drink brands?